

PARSHAT EKEV

Could it be that the 'People of Israel' don't **deserve** the 'Land of Israel'?

In Parshat Ekev, this seems to be what Moshe Rabeinu is saying when he tells Bnei Yisrael:

"You should know that it is not because of your own righteousness that God is giving you this good land to inherit; for you are a stiff-necked people. (see Devarim 9:6)

So why does God give them the land, nonetheless?

As Parshat Ekev discusses both how 'good' the land is (in chapter 8), and how 'bad' the people are (in chapter 9), this week's shiur will examine one of the reasons for why the **Land** of Israel was chosen for the **People** of Israel.

INTRODUCTION

It should not surprise us that Parshat Ekev discusses the importance of the Land of Israel, for it begins in the middle of Moshe Rabeinu's final speech to Bnei Yisrael, as they prepare to enter that Land – to establish God's special nation.

For example, the Sedra begins as Moshe promises Bnei Yisrael that should they keep God's laws (that he is about to teach them), then God will reciprocate by blessing the land, its produce, and the overall state of the nation (see 7:12-26).

However, Moshe Rabeinu is also quite aware how life in the land of Israel will be very different than life in the desert. Therefore, he continues his speech by ensuring them that just as God had cared for their physical needs – in a **miraculous** manner - during the forty years in the desert (see 8:1-6), He will continue to provide their needs in the land of Israel, but now through **natural** means – but only on the condition that they follow His laws! [See 8:7-20.]

To emphasize the conditional nature of these promises, Moshe Rabeinu then continues (in chapters 9 thru 11) to remind Bnei Yisrael of how God had consistently punished them for their terrible deeds during the last forty years in the desert. However, in between the lines of this harsh rebuke, we find several references to the importance of the land of Israel.

In the following shiur, we will study those references in relation to the theme of covenant in Sefer Devarim – to show how the Land plays a key role in the unfolding relationship between God and His people.

BETWEEN EGYPT & ISRAEL

Towards the beginning of Parshat Ekev, the land of Israel receives what appears to be a very positive assessment:

"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a **good** land... a land of wheat and barley (...the 7 species) ...a land which lacks nothing..." (8:7-9).

Yet, later in the Parsha, the Torah describes the land of Egypt as much better:

"For the land which you are about to conquer is **not like the land of Egypt**, from which you have come, where when you planted your field you watered it with your foot... The Land which you are about to conquer, a land of hills and valleys, receives its water from the rains (**matar**) of the heavens" (11:10-11).

To understand the purpose of this comparison, let's take a closer look at this pasuk (as well as other instances where the Torah compares the Lands of Israel to the Land of Egypt).

THE FIRST 'FAUCET'

We begin our study with the Torah's odd rather description of

how one would water his field in the land of Egypt:

"For [your] land is **not** like the land of Egypt... where you planted your field and **watered it with your foot**" (11:10).

For some reason, Egypt is described as a land that 'you water with your feet'? To appreciate this strange depiction, and how it forms the basis of Egypt's comparison to the land of Israel, we must consider how rivers affected the development of civilizations.

In ancient times, civilizations developed along major rivers, as they provided not only a means of transportation, but also the necessary water for agriculture and consumption.

It was for this reason that Egypt (developing along the Nile) and Mesopotamia (developing along the Tigris and Euphrates) became two of the greatest centers of ancient civilization.

To enhance their agriculture, the Egyptians developed a sophisticated irrigation system by digging ditches from the Nile to their fields. Using this system, an Egyptian could water his field by simply kicking away the dirt [blocking the irrigation ditch] **with his foot**, thus starting the water flow.

Similarly, by using his foot once again to kick the dirt to close the ditch - he could 'turn off' the water supply.

This background explains why the Torah describes Egypt as a land 'watered by your feet' (see 11:10).

NO RAIN, NO FOOD

In contrast to Egypt, the Torah describes the land of Israel as follows:

"The land that you are going now to inherit is a land of **hills & valleys**, which drinks from the **rains of Heaven**" (11:11).

Unlike Egypt, Israel lacks a mighty river such as the Nile to provide it with a consistent supply of water. Instead, the agriculture in the Land of Israel is totally dependent on **rainfall**. Therefore, when it **does** rain, the fields are watered 'automatically'; however, when it does **not** rain, nothing will grow for the crops will dry out.

[It should be noted that even though Israel does have the Jordan River - it really doesn't help because it is located some 300 meters **below** sea level (in the Jordan Valley), and thus not very helpful for watering the fields. In modern times, Israel has basically 'solved' this problem by pumping up the water from the Kineret into a national water carrier.]

Hence, even though the land of Israel may have a slight advantage over Egypt when it does rain [see Rashi 11:10], from an agricultural perspective the land of Egypt has a clear advantage [see Ramban 11:10]. Furthermore, any responsible family provider would obviously prefer the 'secure' option - to establish his home in Egypt, instead of opting for the 'risky' Israeli alternative.

So why is the Torah going out of its way to tell us that Egypt is better than Israel, especially in the same Parsha where the Torah first tells us how Israel is a 'great' land, missing nothing! (See 8:9!)

Furthermore, why would Moshe Rabeinu mention this point to Bnei Yisrael specifically at this time, as they prepare to enter the land? Is he trying to discourage them?

To answer these questions, we must re-examine these psukim in their wider context.

THREE PARSHIOT RELATING TO THE FEAR OF GOD

Using a Tanach Koren (or similar Chumash), take a look at the psukim that we have just quoted (i.e. 11:10-12), noting how these three psukim form their own 'parshia'. Note however how this short 'parshia' begins with the word 'ki' - 'for' or 'because' - which obviously connects it thematically to the previous parshia:10:12->11:9. Therefore, we must first consider the theme of this preceding 'parshia' and then see how it relates to our topic.

Let's begin by taking a quick look at the opening psukim of that 'parshia', noting how it introduces its theme very explicitly:

"And now, O Israel, what is it that God demands of you? It is to **fear** ('yir'a) the Lord your God, to walk in his ways and to love Him... Keep, therefore, this entire 'mitzva'... that you should conquer the Land..." (see 10:12-14).

As you continue to read this parshia (thru 11:9), you'll also

notice how this topic or the 'fear of God' continues, as it is emphasized over and over again.

Hence, the theme of our short 'parshia' (11:10-12), where the Torah compares the land of Israel to Egypt, must somehow be related to the theme of "**yir'at Hashem**" [fearing God]. But what does the water source of a country have to do with the fear of God?

To answer this question, we must read the Torah's conclusion of this comparison (in the final pasuk of our 'parshia'):

"It is a land which the Lord your God **looks after** ('doresh otah'), on which Hashem always keeps His eye, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year" (11:12).

This pasuk informs us that God Himself takes direct control over the rain that falls in the Land of Israel! In contrast to Egypt where the water supply from the Nile is basically **constant**, the water supply in Israel is **sporadic**. Even though one may conclude that the erratic nature of the rainfall is totally by chance, Chumash tells us that God controls it - and hence it becomes a vehicle of God's will.

The realization of this correlation will certainly affect a person's fear of God - for his survival is dependent on rain, and the rain itself is dependent on God's will. This explains the thematic relationship between these two 'parshiot'.

WHO STOPPED THE RAIN?

In this manner, the Land of Israel is not 'better' than Egypt; rather it is **different** - for its agriculture is more clearly dependent on the abundance of rain. A good rainy season will bring plenty, while a lack of rain will yield drought and famine. Hence, living in a land with this type of 'touchy' rainy season, dependent on God's will, should reinforce one's fear of God.

The next 'parshia' [i.e. ve-haya im shamo'a...' (11:13-21), the second parshia of daily 'kriyat shema'] not only supports this theme, it forms its logical conclusion:

"**If you obey** the commandments... I will **grant the rain** (matar) for your land in season... then you shall eat and be satisfied...

Be careful, lest you be lured after other gods... for Hashem will be angry ... and He will shut up the skies and there will be no rain (matar)..." (see 11:13-16).

Thus, according to Sefer Devarim, the "**matar**" that falls in the land of Israel acts not only as a 'barometer' of Am Yisrael's faithfulness to God, but also serves as a vehicle of divine retribution. God will use this matar to 'communicate' with His nation. Rainfall, at the proper time, becomes a sign that is pleased with our 'national behavior', while drought (i.e. holding back the matar) becomes a sign of divine anger - and a reason for self-examination and repentance.

So which land **is** better?

The answer simply depends on what one is looking for in life. An individual striving for a closer relationship with God would obviously prefer the Land of Israel; while an individual wary of such direct dependence upon God would obviously opt for the more secure life in Egypt ['chut la-aretz?'].

To support this interpretation, we will now show how the connection between "matar" and Divine Providence had already emerged as a Biblical theme back in Sefer Breishit.

BACK TO AVRAHAM AVINU

At the onset of our national history, we find a very similar comparison between the lands of Egypt and Israel.

Recall, that when God first chose Avraham Avinu, commanding him to uproot his family from Mesopotamia and travel to the land of Canaan (see 12:1-3), his nephew Lot was consistently mentioned as Avraham's 'travel partner' (see 12:4-6 & 13:1-2). As Avraham was childless and Lot had lost his father, it would only be logical for Avraham to assume that Lot would become his successor.

Nevertheless, after their return from Egypt, a quarrel broke out between them, which ultimately led to Lot's 'rejection' from Avraham's 'chosen family'.

One could suggest that the Torah's description of these events

relates directly to this same Biblical theme of "matar". To show how, let's begin with the Torah's description of that quarrel:

"And Avraham said to Lot, let there not be a quarrel between us... if you go to the **right** [=south], I'll go to the **left** [=north] (& vice versa)..." (see Breishit 13:8-9).

[Note that Avraham suggested that Lot choose either North or South (13:8-9), not East or West as is often assumed! See Targum Unkelos which translate right & left as 'south' or 'north' (see also Seforno). Throughout Chumash 'yemin' always refers to the south, kedem - east, etc.]

In other words, Avraham Avinu, standing in Bet El (see 13:3), is offering Lot a choice between the mountain ranges of 'Yehuda' (to the south) or the hills of the 'Shomron' (to the north). To our surprise, Lot chooses neither option! Instead, Lot prefers to divorce himself from Avraham Avinu altogether, choosing the Jordan Valley instead. Note, however, the connection between Lot's decision to 'go east' and his most recent experience in Egypt:

"Then Lot lifted up his eyes and saw the whole plain of Jordan, for it was all well watered (by the Jordan River)... just like the Garden of the Lord, **like the land of Egypt...**" (13:10-12).

After his brief visit to Egypt (as described at the end of chapter 12), it seems as though Lot could no longer endure the hard life in the 'hills and valleys' of the Land of Israel. Instead, Lot opts for a more secure lifestyle along the banks of the Jordan River, similar to the secure lifestyle in Egypt by the banks of the Nile River.

[Note especially how the Torah (in the above pasuk) connects between this river valley and the 'Garden of the Lord', i.e. Gan Eden (for it was set along four rivers, see Breishit 2:9-14).]

Lot departs towards Sdom for the 'good life', while Avraham Avinu remains in Bet El, at the heart of the Land of Canaan (see 13:14-16, see also previous TSC shiur on Matot / Mas'ei).

Rashi, commenting on Breishit 13:11, quotes a Midrash which arrives at a very similar thematic conclusion:

"Va-yisa Lot mi-kedem... [Lot traveled from **kedem**] - He traveled **away** from He who began the Creation ('kadmono shel olam'), saying, I can no longer endure being with Avraham nor with his God" ("iy efshi, lo be-Avraham, ve-lo be-Elovak").

As Rashi alludes to, this quarrel between Avraham and Lot stemmed from a conflict between two opposite lifestyles:

- * A life striving for a dependence (and hence a relationship) with God (=Avraham Avinu);
- * A life where man prefers to be independent of God (=Lot).

The path chosen by Avraham Avinu leads to 'Bet El' - the house of God, while the path chosen by Lot leads to 'Sdom' - the city of corruption (see 13:12-13).

BACK TO THE CREATION

This Biblical theme of "matar" is so fundamental, that it actually begins at the time of Creation! Recall how the Gan Eden narrative (i.e. Breishit 2:4-3:24) opens with a very peculiar statement in regard to matar:

"These are the generations of Heavens and Earth from their Creation... And no shrub of the field had yet grown in the land and no grains had yet sprouted, because Hashem had not yet sent rain [**matar**] on the land, nor was there **man** to work the field..." (Breishit 2:4-5).

It is rather amazing how this entire account of Creation begins with a statement that nothing could grow without "matar" or man!

Furthermore, this very statement is rather odd, for it appears to contradict what was stated earlier (in the first account of Creation [= 'perek aleph'] which implies that water was just about everywhere (see 1:2,6,9 etc.).

Finally, this very statement that man is needed for vegetation to

grow seems to contradict what we see in nature. As we all know shrubs and trees seem to grow very nicely even without man's help. Yet, according to this opening pasuk of the second account of Creation - nothing could grow without this combination of "**matar**" and **man**.

Nonetheless, Chumash emphasizes in this opening statement that both man and matar are key factors in the forthcoming story of creation. To appreciate why, we must first very briefly review our conclusions in regard to the comparison between the two accounts in Sefer Breishit.

The first account [perek aleph] focused on God's creation of all 'nature' in seven days. God's Name - 'Elokim' - reflected its key point that all **powers** of nature - that appear to stem from the powers of various gods - are truly the Creation of the one God. To remind ourselves of this key point, we are commanded to refrain from all creativity once every seven days. ['olam ha-teva']

In contrast, the second account [perek bet] - focused on the special relationship between man and his Creator, as reflected in its special environment - Gan Eden - created by God, where man would serve Him ["'ovdo u'l'shomro"]. In that environment, man is responsible to follow God's laws, and His Name ['shem Havaya] reflects His presence and involvement ['olam ha-hitgalut'].

[See TSC shiur on Parshat Breishit.]

Therefore, this opening pasuk - emphasizing the relationship between matar and man - must relate in some manner to the special relationship between man and God.

The Midrash (quoted by Rashi), bothered by this peculiarity, offers a very profound interpretation, explaining this connection: "ki lo himtir..." And why had it not yet rained? ... because "adam ayin a'avod et ha-adama", for man had not yet been created to work the field, and thus no one had yet recognized the significance of rain. And when man was created and recognized their importance, **he prayed for rain**. Then the rain fell and the trees and the grass grew..." (see Rashi 2:5).

This interpretation reflects the very same theme that emerged in our discussion of matar in Parshat Ekev. According to this Rashi, God created man towards the purpose that he recognize God and His Creations. From this perspective, **matar** emerges as a vehicle that can facilitate that recognition.

FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH

The reason for this may stem from the very meaning of the word matar. Note that matar does not mean only 'rain'. Rather, the 'shores' - 'lehamtir' - relates to anything that falls from heaven to earth. Rain is the classic example; but even 'bread' or 'fire', when they fall from heaven, are described by the Bible as matar.

[In regard to bread, see Breishit 19:24 re: the story of Sodom, "Ve-Hashem **himtir** al Sedom gofrit va-eish min ha-shamayim". In relation to fire coming from heaven, see Shmot 16:4 re: the manna: "hineni **mamtir** lachem lechem min ha-shamayim").]

When man contemplates Creation, there may appear to be an unbridgeable gap between 'heaven' and 'earth'. Man must overcome that gap, raising his goals from the 'earthly' to the 'heavenly'. In this context, matar - a physical proof that something in heaven can come down to earth - may symbolize man's potential (and purpose) to bridge that gap in the opposite direction, i.e. from 'earthly' to 'heavenly'.

Hence, Biblical matar emerges as more than just a type of water, but more so as a symbol of a potential connection between the heavens and earth, and hence between God and man.

In the special spiritual environment created by the climate of the Land of Israel, as described in Parshat Ekev, matar serves as a vehicle by which Am Yisrael can perfect their relationship with God. Even though others lands may carry a better potential for prosperity, the Land of Israel becomes an 'ideal' environment for the growth of the People of Israel - a nation chosen to serve their Creator.

A SPECIAL LAND FOR A SPECIAL NATION

With this in mind, we can return to our original question.

The fact that Moshe rebukes the nation, telling them that they don't 'deserve' the land - does not mean that they should not inherit the land. Am Yisrael was not chosen to be God's nation - because they were a great people; but rather **in order** to become a great people! [See Devarim 4:5-8.]

Similarly, the land of Israel was not chosen because it had the best climate; rather it was chosen for its special climate could serve as a vehicle that would enhance Am Yisrael's fear of God - and thus enable them to serve Him in a better manner.

Considering the goal of the Jewish people, this 'special land' is precisely what they need to help them achieve their destiny.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN:

A. Relate the famous Midrash Chazal of 'ein mayim ela Torah' [- the true water is really the Torah] to the above shiur.

B. Note how the word matar appears in relation to the Flood in Breishit 7:4-5. Based on the above shiur and our shiur on 'perek aleph & bet' (on Parshat Breishit), attempt to explain why.

C. In the psukim by Lot, the Nile and Jordan rivers are compared to the rivers of Gan Eden.

1. Does this indicate that there may be a positive aspect to the supply of water by a River?
2. Why should a river be appropriate for Gan Eden, while rain is more appropriate for Eretz Yisrael?
3. Relate this to Zecharaya 14:7-9 & Yechezkel 47:1-12!

D. Throughout the time period of the Shoftim, and even during the time period of the First Monarchy, many Israelites worshipped the 'Ba'al' - the Canaanite rain god.

1. Relate the nature of this transgression to the above shiur.
2. Relate this to the mishnayot of Masechet Ta'anit, which requires national fast days should rain not fall in sufficient quantities early in the rainy season.
3. Relate to Kings I 17:1 & 18:21 and context of perek 18!

E. In last week's shiur we noted that the 'mitzva' section of the main speech includes 'mitzvot' given originally during Ma'amad Har Sinai, as well as 'tochachot' added in the 40th year by Moshe Rabbeinu.

1. Show textually why from 8:1 till 10:11 must be an 'addition' of the 40th year, while 6:4-7:26 is most likely 'original!' Prove your answer. Use Shmot 23:20-33 in your proof!
2. 10:12-11:21. Would you say that these parshiot are also 'additions' or originals, or possibly a combination. Support your answer, and relate it to the above shiur!

F. The story of chet ha-egel is repeated in chap 9.

1. In what context is this story now being brought down. Relate to 9:4-6, and especially to 'ki am ksheh oref ata' (9:6). Relate also to 9:7
2. What other examples of this behavior are cited in this perek?
3. Based on this observation, explain why the story about chet ha-egel is broken up in the middle by psukim 9:22-23, and later by 10:6-9.
4. What is the primary theme of this short 'tochacha'?

G. Read 9:25-29 carefully. Is this simply a review of Moshe's request that God invoke His 'midot ha-rachamim' after the incident of chet ha-egel, or do you find a theme from 'chet ha-meraglim' as well? Support your answer by comparing Shmot chapter 34:1-9 and Bamidbar 14:11-25.

Based on the context of chapter 9, can you explain why?