
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for self study - by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT VA-ETCHANAN

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

REWARD FOR 'SPECIFIC' MITZVOT

1. Review 5:16, noting how the commandment to honor one's parents includes the promise of reward. Note the words that the Torah uses to describe that reward.

Are you familiar with any other specific mitzvot in the Torah that promise reward; if so, what are they, and in what book are they recorded?

In your opinion, is this reward (that the Torah promises) for the individual or for the entire nation?

2. Review the story in 5:20-30, noting how Moshe tells the story of how God first gave him the mitzvot that he is about to teach Bnei Yisrael in his speech. Then, carefully study 5:28-30, noting how Moshe promises reward to the nation, should they keep these laws (that he is about to teach).

How does the wording of this reward (see 5:30) similar to the reward that God promised in 5:16 (in relation to honoring one's parents)?

Review 6:1-3, noting how it relates directly to 5:28-30; then note how the reward that Moshe promises in 6:2-3 is similar to 5:16 and 5:30!

Based on these textual parallels, could one reach the conclusion that the reward promised in 5:16 may relate to keeping ALL of the laws of "brit Sinai", and not just "kibud horim"? If so, can you explain the logic of this conclusion?

3. Review 4:40 (the last line of Moshe Rabeinu's first speech), noting how it relates to 4:1, and to same mitzvot that Moshe discusses in 5:1 and 5:28 and 6:1.

Relate this pasuk (4:40) to your answer to the previous question!

In your opinion, is the reward promised in 4:40 (and 5:30 and 6:2-3) for the individual or for the entire nation. [What does the word "adama" refer to in all of these psukim?]

4. Review Devarim 22:6-7, noting how we find a specific mitzva that appears to promise reward. Note how the Torah's wording of this reward is similar to 5:16, 5:30, and 6:2-3!

Are there any other textual or thematic parallels between 5:16 and 22:6-7? Does it make any sense that specifically this mitzvah includes reward, in contrast to so many others (in Sefer Devarim) that do not?

Finally, note 25:13-16, noting yet another example of the promise of reward.

Could the reward promised in 25:16 and 22:7 be considered reward for all the mitzvot that are included in Moshe Rabeinu's speech, and not necessarily specifically these mitzvot? If so, can you explain why this [general] reward would be mentioned specifically together with these specific mitzvot? [See also the last mishna & gemara of Mesechet Chulin 142!]

5. If indeed the reward mentioned for 'honoring parents' in 5:16 relates to general reward for the entire nation for keeping loyal to "brit Sinai" – why do you think that it would be mentioned at the conclusion of the fifth commandment, and not after the tenth commandment?

What is the thematic connection between honoring one's parents and dedication to God? [What is common to both relationships?] See Ramban on Shmot 20:12 ("kaved...").

A LAW FOR EVERY SITUATION

1. Even though there are many laws in the Torah, it is impossible for any law-code to provide a precise guideline for every situation.

With this in mind, review Devarim 6:16-19, noting especially 6:17-18. In your opinion, how does 6:17 relate to 6:18?

According to 6:18, how is someone supposed to know what is considered "ha'tov v'hayashar" [what is good & straight in the eyes of God]?

Would you consider this pasuk a 'mitzvah' in itself, a 'guideline' in itself, or a 'guideline' for all mitzvot? [In your answer, relate to why God punished the generation of the Flood, even though no laws had been given to man!]

For a very interesting [and important] interpretation of this pasuk, see Ramban on 6:18.

VE-ZOT HA-TORAH & 'HAGBAHA'

1. Review 4:44-45, noting how the pasuk "ve-zot ha-torah..." - the pasuk that we recite each time when the Torah is lifted for 'hagbaha' - is found in this week's Parsha.

In your opinion, what does the word "torah" in this pasuk refer to?

- the entire 5 books of Chumash;
- just Sefer Devarim;
- just the first speech (that just finished /chap. 1-4);
- just the mitzvot of the (upcoming) main speech?
[i.e. chapters 5 thru 26]

As you answer this question, be sure to study 4:44-47 in relation to 5:1 (and the main speech of Sefer Devarim that follows - as discussed in last week's questions/shiur).

See Rashi on 4:44-45. How would Rashi answer the above questions? See also Chizkuni on 4:45.

Now see Seforno on 4:44-45. How would Seforno answer the above questions? Explain the logic behind this commentary.

2. When we recite this pasuk for "hagbaha", are we using it in the same context or a wider one?

Can you explain why we quote this pasuk for "hagbaha"?

Note, that we add a phrase to this pasuk. What phrase do we add, where is it from, and why do you think that we add it?

In your answer, relate to 5:1-5, and the story in 5:20-28, especially 5:5 & 24! [In other words, what is the original source of these laws?]

See Bamidbar 4:37 & 4:45, noting their context. Did you find the 'missing phrase' from "hagbaha"? Attempt to identify a thematic connection between the topic of Bamidbar chapter 4 and the statement of "v'zot ha'torah"?

3. Finally, study Sefer Nechemia 8:1-8, noting especially 8:5.

How do these psukim relate to our custom of raising the Sefer Torah so that everyone will see it?

Based on these psukim in Nechemia, would it make more sense to perform "hagbaha" **before** we read the Sefer Torah in public - or **after** it has been read?

See also Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim siman 134 (#2). Note the two minhagim, and attempt to explain their source.

OR LA-GOYIM

1. Review Devarim 4:5-8, in the context of 4:1-8.

Note how the phrase "chukim u'mishpatim" in 4:5 relates to the identical phrase in 4:1!

Then review 5:1, i.e. the opening sentence of the main speech, noting how this very same phrase - "chukim u'mishpatim" - introduces the laws of the main speech. Also note this same phrase in 26:16, which just so happens to be the summary pasuk of that speech. Note this phrase in 11:31-12:1 as well. [See intro shiur to Devarim www.tanach.org/dvarim/dvarint.txt]

Based on these obvious textual parallels, how does the primary topic of 4:5-8 relate to the laws that Moshe is about to teach to Bnei Yisrael in the main speech?

In your answer, relate to 26:16-19, especially to 26:18-19 and its textual and thematic parallel to Shmot 19:5-6.

2. How do these psukim relate to the biblical theme of God's choice of Am Yisrael's in order that they become an 'or la-goyim' [a light (or model) for other nations]? [Recall that this theme has been discussed numerous times in previous shiurim.]

Relate your answer to Yeshayahu 42:5-6 (which just so happens to be the first two psukim of the Haftara for Parshat Breishit). Review as well Shlomo Ha-melech's prayer when he dedicates the bet ha-mikdash in Melachim Alef 8:41-43, and the visit of the Queen of Sheba in 10:1-9!

See also Tehillim 105:1-12, 72:1-16 and Divrei Ha-yamim Alef 16:8-36, noting especially 16:24-26 and 16:35.

BETWEEN THE DIBROT IN SHMOT & DEVARIM

1. As most everyone is familiar, the wording of the Ten Commandments in Parshat Veetchanan (Devarim 5:6-18) is slightly different than their wording in Parshat Yitro (Shmot 20:1-14). For example, in regard to the commandment of shabbat [the fourth commandment] - one version begins with the word "zachor", while the other begins with the word "shamor".

[As we sing in the "lecha dodi"]

Compare the mitzvah of shabbat in each source, and make sure that you can identify all of the other differences. Relate to both the **laws** of shabbat, as well as to the **reason** that the Torah gives for why we are commanded to keep it - according to each version.

Can you relate the different reasons in each version to the meaning in Hebrew of the words "zachor" and "shamor"?

Be sure to note the reason for Shabbat according to Shmot 23:9-12, and how it relates to reason for shabbat in Devarim.

Note how this relates to the phrase "v'zacharta ki eved hayita..." in Devarim 5:15, in relation to its context in Devarim 16:12 & 24:17-22.

2. In your opinion, do these two 'versions' contradict - or complement - one another? Explain your answer.

Can you relate the different reasons in each version to the concept of "mitzvot bein adam la'Makom / la'chaveiro"?

Assuming that the recording of these two different reasons for shabbat was intentional, can you suggest any underlying thematic message that Torah may be alluding to in this manner of presentation?

3. Another difference between the Dibrot in Yitro vs. Va-etchanan is the additional phrase 'ka-asher tzivcha Hashem Elokecha' (see Devarim 5:12 & 16).

Can you explain the addition of this phrase in Parshat Veetchanan based on the fact that Moshe is quoting the dibrot as part of his speech (as discussed in last week's shiur)?

Why do you think that this phrase is found specifically in the dibrot of Shabbat & 'kibbud av', and not in the others. [Relate to 5:4-5.]?

Relate these two mitzvot as well to Rashi's opinion in regard to which mitzvot that were given at Mara (see Shmot 15:25). Can this information provide a different reason for the use of this phrase specifically in regard to these two mitzvot?

4. Finally, note the slight differences in regard to the wording of the Tenth Commandment ["lo tachmod"]. What lesson do you think one can learn from these differences?

For an interesting discussion, see Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and especially Chizkuni (note his concluding remarks in regard to the reason for the two versions) on Devarim 5:17.

AVODA ZARA LE-SHEM SHAMAYIM

1. Read 4:15-20, noting how these psukim include a very detailed warning against idol worship.

Then, review 4:9-14, noting how these psukim discuss what happened (and what didn't happen) at Har Sinai. Note especially 4:14, noting how this pasuk relates to the main speech of Sefer Devarim/ compare with 4:1, 4:45 & 5:1.

Can you explain how the warnings in 4:15-20 relate to the topic of 4:9-14? In other words, what form of idol worship [an image of 'another god' or an image of the real God] is Moshe Rabeinu worried about, and how does this fear relate to what Bnei Yisrael saw [or didn't see] at Har Sinai?

2. Review 4:15-20 once again, this time noting the various examples of forms of idols that are forbidden. Examine this list carefully, noting the use of the word 'tavnit', and compare this list to the first chapter of Sefer Breishit. Can you identify a pattern?

Can you explain why?

Note the only other use of the word "tavnit" in Chumash is found in Shmot 25:8-9 - in relation to the mishkan! Relate this to the purpose of the Mishkan, i.e. what it represents (see especially Ramban on Shmot 25:1).

In your opinion, does the warning against **avoda zara** in chapter 4 relate to someone with 'good intentions' or 'bad intentions'? Explain your answer, relating to 4:12-16.

3. What is the symbol of God's presence in the mishkan itself? [Relate to Shmot 25:20-22.] Could this relate in any manner to 'keruvim' that are mentioned in Breishit 3:24?

Relate this to your answer to the above question.

=====

PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur)

THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST SPEECH [shiur #1]

1. In last week's introductory shiur, we discussed how chapters 5 thru 26 form the main speech of Sefer Devarim. With the conclusions of that shiur mind, study 4:44-46 carefully.

Note the word 'zot' in 4:44, as well as the word 'eileh' in 4:45. In your opinion, do they refer to what 'was' [in the previous chapter] or to what 'will be' [in the chapter to follow]?

Or in other words, do these psukim relate to the speech that just finished (chapters 1 thru 4), or the one coming up, or both?

See how both Rashi & Chizkuni interpret these words.

[Review 4:45 once again, noting how it supports our conclusion in last week's shiur that the mitzvot of the main speech were first given at Har Sinai.]

2. To appreciate the meaning of the word Torah in 4:44, and how it relates to the main speech, review 27:1-8, paying special attention to the word Torah in 27:3 and 27:8. In your opinion, what does the word Torah refer to in these two psukim?

In your answer, relate once again to the fact that chapters 5 thru 26 form the 'main speech' (of mitzvot) in Sefer Devarim.

How does your conclusion help you understand the meaning of **Torah** in 4:44?

3. Now, note the phrase 'chukim u-mishpatim' in 4:45 as well. Relate it to the same phrase found in 5:1, 5:28, and 6:1.

How does this relate to the same phrase in 4:1 & 4:5?

To verify your answer, see if chapter 4 includes any chukim u-mishpatim that would qualify 4:1 to be their 'header'.

In your opinion, could 4:1 & 5 be understood as an introduction to the chukim u-mishpatim that are found in the main speech? If so, why would this header be in chapter four, and how does it relate to the content of this chapter?

[Note as well 4:14 in its context!]

4. Attempt to summarize the main points that Moshe makes in his speech in chapter 4?

To do so, we suggest the following 'methodology'.

First, attempt to divide the chapter into paragraphs. Then, give each paragraph a short title, and list those titles (vertically) on a sheet of paper. Finally, study your list, and attempt to turn that list into an outline, by grouping together the paragraphs that share a common topic. Give a title to each section of your outline, and if possible, one for the entire outline.

After you have finished, answer the following questions:

5. Considering that chapters 1 thru 4 is one speech, nonetheless, chapter 4 is quite different than chapters 1 thru 3. Attempt to define how these two sections are different.

In your opinion, why does Moshe Rabbeinu include chapter four as part of his first speech, and how does it relate to his explanation of why forty years have passed (in chapters 1) and his 'pep-talk' (in chapters 2-3)?

6. Indeed, we do find certain mitzvot in chapter four. In your opinion, what is special about them, and how do they relate to the mitzvot that will be found in the main speech?

Also, how does that fact that Moshe is about to die (and hence no longer be their leader / see 4:21-24) relate to the content of chapter 4?

THE FIRST TWO PARSHIOT OF KRIYAT SHEMA [shiuir #2]

1. Recall from last week's shiuir how the story in chapter five explained when the mitzvot (that begin in chapter six) were first given. In that context, review once again 5:28 and 6:1, noting how they describe the mitzvot of the main speech. As you study those psukim, note the distinction between the words "**ha-mitzva**" and the "**chukim & mishpatim**". How does the word "**ha-mitzva**" differ from the word "mitzvah"?

Note how (and where) we find similar phrases in earlier introductory psukim - see 4:1, 4:5, and 4:44-45 and 5:1.]

In your opinion, do all of these different words describe the same thing, or does each word describe a different type of commandment? If so, what does each word refer to?

2. It is possible to divide the main speech into two sections based on this distinction between **ha-mitzva** and the **chukim & mishpatim**.

To identify the **ha-mitzva** section, carefully study 6:4-9 in relation to 11:22-25, noting the word "ha' mitzvah". Note as well 8:1 in this context.

Then, study 11:31- 12:1 in relation to 26:16-19, noting how these parallel psukim can help you identify the **chukim & mishpatim** section. Note as well how this parallel relates back to 5:1 and to 5:28 & 6:1.

Next, briefly scan the mitzvot of the main speech (i.e. chapters 6-26), noting the difference in the nature of the mitzvot found in between chapters 6-11 in contrast to the mitzvot found in between chapters 12-26.

[This question may take you a long time to answer, but it is important, for it will be helpful towards understanding the basic structure of the main speech.]

3. Review 6:4-9 & 11:13-21, noting that these are the two parshiot of daily kriyat shema. Pay attention to their respective locations within the main speech of Sefer Devarim, especially in regard to the **ha-mitzva** section, noted above.

Based on the division of the main speech into two sections (as discussed in the questions above), can you suggest a reason why Chazal choose these two parshiot for the daily kriyat shema?

In your answer, relate to the word 've-shinantem' in 6:6. Relate as well to the Mishna in Sota VII:8 in regard to what is read at Hakhel.

SOMETHING OLD, OR SOMETHING NEW?

4. Recall once again that the mitzvot of the main speech were **first** given to Moshe Rabbeinu during his first forty days on Har Sinai, and he had taught them to the people numerous times - and now, in the fortieth year - he is teaching them on last time.

With this in mind, review all of the 'parshiot' between chapters 6 thru 11, and try to determine which sections appear to be 'quotes' from the mitzvot that were first given forty years ago, and which sections of the speech are 'added' by Moshe Rabbeinu now in the fortieth year. In your answer, relate to the fact that some parshiot contain mitzvot, while others contain rebuke.

As you answer this question, pay attention to how the events of the Exodus are described, paying special attention to 6:16, 6:20-23, 7:17-19, & 11:10-12.

In your opinion, would it make sense for Moshe to talk to the people in this manner in the fortieth year?

Note also the opening psukim of chapter 8! Does this appear to be an 'add-on' by Moshe Rabbeinu, or part of the original set of mitzvot? Explain why.

Finally, compare 7:6-9 with 9:4-7. Attempt to explain the reason for what appears to be a contradiction!

5. Review once again 4:44-45, noting how these psukim introduce the main speech that begins in chapter five. Then note how there appears to be a contradiction in 4:45 in regard to when these mitzvot were given - forty years earlier when Am Yisrael left Egypt, or now, in Arvat Moav!

Explain this pasuk based on your answer to the above question!

6. Suggest a reason why it may be meaningful for Moshe to present these laws to the people in the fortieth year, worded in the same manner as they were given when the first generation left Egypt. In your answer, relate to 5:2-3!

[See also "Parshanut" section below.]

====

'HAR AVARIM' & 'TRANSITION' - [for shiuir #3]

1. In the beginning of the Parsha, Moshe pleads with God to allow him to enter Eretz Canaan (see 3:23-29).

In your opinion, does Moshe also want to remain the leader of Bnei Yisrael, or does he just want to enter as regular citizen [what we would call today a 'rabbi emeritus'], while allowing Yehoshua to lead the nation?

In your answer relate to both 3:28 and Bamidbar 20:12 [& our conclusion in regard to this topic in our shiuir on Parshat Chukat].

Does God explain to Moshe why His answer is no? If not, can you explain why He doesn't? Can you suggest a reason for why God does not allow Moshe to enter the land, even though he is no longer their 'official' leader?

2. Note the Torah's use of the 'shoresh' [root] ayin.bet.reish. in 3:25, 3:26 and 3:28. Does this shoresh have the same meaning in each of these psukim, or different meanings? Explain.

Now read Bamidbar 27:12-14 (see also 27:15-23).

In your opinion, is this the same story or a different one?

How do these two accounts complement each other?

See Rashi & Chizkuni on 27:12.

Now, note again the name of the mountain that Moshe is instructed to ascend - 'har ha-avarim'. Note again the shoresh ayin.bet.reish!

What is the 'real name' of this mountain - see Devarim 32:49! Based on the above questions, why do you think that the Torah refers to it as "har ha-avarim" instead of 'Har Nevo'?

Is there a geographical reason as well for this name?

See Ramban 27:12.

[Note also the use of ayin.bet.reish. in Bamidbar 27:6-11! Note also the use of verb 'latet' - to give - both in 27:7 and 27:12! (cute?)]

PART III - PARSHANUT

WHAT DOES 'WHAT' MEAN?

1. Read 6:20 (and ONLY 6:20, i.e. don't read on). Even though this pasuk may sound familiar to you from the Seder [the wise son's question] - read it again, by itself, and attempt to translate it. How did you translate the word "mah" in this pasuk?

Before you read 6:21, how would you answer this question?

2. Now, read from 6:21-25. Based on this answer, what does the word "mah" in 6:20 seem to imply?

See Rasag, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Seforno on 6:20, noting how each commentator offers a slightly different way to translate the word "mah".

Try to identify what how the translation by each commentator of the word "mah" - is affected by a certain point in 6:21-25.

3. Finally, how did you translate the word "tzedaka" in 6:25? Does it mean 'charity', or 'just & upright'? Based on its context in this pasuk, notice how difficult it is to translate.

See Ibn Ezra, noting how offers three interpretations! Relate them to the various classic translations of the word "tzedaka".

Review 4:5-8, noting again how it relates to 5:1 (and the laws of the main speech). How (and why) does Ibn Ezra's third interpretation relate to those psukim?

See Ramban (at the conclusion of his commentary to 6:20-25). Note how he explains why he considers "tzedaka" as reward. [See also Seforno - noting how it is similar.]

Finally, see Chizkuni - noting his two interpretations, and how they relate to 6:20!

A COVENANT FOR ALL GENERATIONS

1. Review 5:1-3, noting what is so problematic about the statement that Moshe makes in 5:3. Then, note how almost every commentator adds a word to 5:3.

[For example, see Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rasag, Chizkuni.]

What is that word and why do you think that everyone agrees that it must be added?

Then see Seforno on 5:3. Does Seforno agree to the addition of this word? In what manner is Seforno's interpretation different than all the others?

Most commentators assume that this 'missing' word is implicit. Nonetheless, would it not have made more sense to say it explicitly? Can you suggest any thematic reason for Moshe Rabeinu to have left this word out, considering that he is speaking to the next generation?

Can you find any other examples in this section of main speech where Moshe speaks to the new generation as though they were the first generation?

If so, can you explain why does this so often?

AZ YAVDIL MOSHE / When & Why?

Recall from last week's shiur, that the end of chapter 4 (4:41-49) is written in 'third person', and serves as a buffer between Moshe's introductory speech (chapters 1-4), and Moshe's main speech - ne'um ha-mitzvot - which begins with chapter 5.

Before continuing, read these nine psukim, noting that they are indeed written in third person, noting how they divide into two distinct sections - 4:41-43 and 4:44-49. Then, try to understand how each section relates to either the previous speech, or to the speech that follows.

Then, pay attention to the first topic - i.e. the setting aside of three cities of refuge in Transjordan (4:41-43).

In your opinion, why is this topic recorded here?

Does it relate in any way to the first speech?

If so, how?

Does it relate in any way to the main speech (which follows)?

If so, how?

How does this parshia relate to Bamidbar 35:9-14?

Does it belong there? If so, why is it here?

Relate also to Devarim 19:1-10, especially 19:8-9!

How does 4:41-43 relate to 19:8-9?

Are these three additional cities (i.e. a total of 9)?!

[see commentaries on 19:8-9]

Finally, how should one translate the first two words of 4:41, in past tense, or future tense? What is the difficulty?

After contemplating these above questions, study the commentaries of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Ramban, Chizkuni, & Sforino on 4:41, and then answer the following questions:

A. Which of the above problems does Rashi deal with?

How does he solve it? What additional 'mussar' does Rashi's commentary teach us?

B. Rashbam's peirush deals with three of the problems listed above. How does he explain them?

[Note how concise & comprehensive his commentary is!]

C. What problem does Ibn Ezra try to solve?

Why does Ramban disagree?

Can you explain their argument based on their respective understandings of this parshia as either a completion of the first speech or an introduction to the main speech?

D. Later in the Ramban, he also quotes the same peirush as Rashi. Attempt to explain why.

Then, Ramban continues by explaining how this section connects to the beginning of the main speech. How does his commentary relate to his opening explanation concerning the nature of the main speech of Sefer Devarim (in 1:1)?

E. Chizkuni clearly connects this parshia to the first speech. Carefully study his commentary - does he suggest that 4:41-43 should be read in first person instead of third person?

If so, can you explain why?

Does the continuation of the parsha support this, or not? How does Chizkuni relate this parshia to Bamidbar chapter 35?

How does he explain the reason for its repetition?

F. What problem in pshat does Seforno deal with? How is his peirush similar to Rashi's? How (and why) is it different?

Would you say that Seforno disagrees with Ramban as well in regard to **when** these cities actually became official (i.e. functional) cities of refuge?

be-hatzlacha,
menachem