

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Bechukosai

The Nature of the World in Future Times

וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ... וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי חַיָּה רְעָה מִן הָאָרֶץ

*I will provide peace in the land... and I will cause wild beasts to desist from the land.*¹

INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF VE'HISHBATI

The beginning of our parsha describes the blessed state the world will attain when the Jewish people are faithful to the Torah and its commandments. The utopian conditions described in these verses are associated by many commentators with the ultimate rectification of the world in the times of the Mashiach.

With regards our verse specifically, there is a fascinating discussion between the sages of the midrash as to the meaning of the words, “וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי חַיָּה רְעָה מִן הָאָרֶץ” – *I will cause wild beasts to desist from the land.*² The *Toras Kohanim*² relates:

רבי יהודה אומר מעבירים מן העולם. רבי שמעון אומר משביתן שלא יזוקו... ואומר “וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ”

R' Yehuda says, [this means Hashem] will remove them from the world. R' Shimon says, He will cause them to be docile so that they will not damage... and the verse [likewise] states,³ “The wolf will dwell with the sheep and the leopard will lie down with the kid-goat.”

We see that these sages are disputing a fundamental question of whether dangerous animals will be physically removed from the world in future times, or will they remain but have their nature changed to become docile.⁴ We note that R' Shimon enlisted a verse from the prophet which explicitly supports his position that the nature of wild beasts will change in messianic times. How would R' Yehuda respond to this seemingly incontrovertible proof?

1 Vayikra 26:6.

2 Parshas Bechukosai.

3 Yeshayahu 11:6.

4 See Tzofnas Paneach of the Rogatchover Gaon to our verse, who demonstrates that the two opinions in this dispute are consistent with the respective understandings of these two sages regarding the concept of “התיבש” throughout the Torah.

The midrash does not state what R' Yehuda's response would be, but perhaps we can identify it by considering the explanation of that verse as found in the writings of the Rambam.

THE RAMBAM ON WOLVES AND SHEEP

The final two chapters of the Rambam's Mishneh Torah are devoted to matters relating the Mashiach. In the course of that discussion, he writes:

Do not imagine that that in Mashiach's days any aspect of the natural world will cease to be, or that there will be any new law within creation; rather, the world will continue with its natural laws. And that which Yeshayahu says, "The wolf will dwell with the sheep and the leopard will lie down with the kid-goat"⁵ – is to be understood as an allegory and image, the meaning of which is: Israel will dwell in peace and security with the wicked people of the world who are compared to wolves and leopards... The same is likewise true for all similar verses that are written regarding the [times of the] Mashiach – they are allegories.⁶

We see that the Rambam explains the very verse that R' Shimon cited as a proof that the nature of animals will change in future times as not referring to actual animals at all, but rather to wicked people. Accordingly, we may suggest that R' Yehuda would likewise respond to R' Shimon's proof in this way. Indeed, we may say further that the fact R' Yehuda was apparently not swayed by R' Shimon citing this verse *is itself the basis* of the Rambam's figurative approach that it is talking about people and not animals.

BROADENING THE DISCUSSION: ENTER THE RAAVAD

The earliest commentary on the Rambam's Mishneh Torah is known as the *Hasagos* (critical comments) of the Raavad. As is well-known, the Raavad in his commentary is not backwards in coming forward when he feels the Rambam's position is incorrect. In our instance, regarding the Rambam's assertion that the portrayals in the verse regarding the changing nature of animals are to be taken figuratively, the Raavad writes:

But it is written in the Torah: "And I will cause wild animals to desist from the world"!

We see that the Raavad has brought the verse from our parsha into the discussion to demonstrate that the nature of wild animals will indeed change. Yet, we must ask: What does the Raavad hope to prove by citing this verse? Seemingly, having asserted that all such verses are figurative, we can simply add this one to the list! The commentators explain that the Raavad's point lies in his introductory emphasis: *"But it is written in the Torah!"* In other words, the Raavad is saying that whereas it is possible to explain a verse in Neviim and Kesuvim as being figurative in nature, a verse in the Torah must be understood on its *pshat* level. As such, our verse is necessarily talking about actual wild animals and hence, the description of them desisting constitutes a problem for the Rambam's approach.⁷

5 Implying that the nature of the world will change in future times.

6 Hilchos Melachim 12:1. See also Moreh Nevuchim sec. 3 chap. 11.

7 R' Reuven Margolios, Hamikra ve'Hamesora chap. 16.

How would the Rambam respond to this question from our verse? It would appear that the answer lies in the dispute mentioned earlier between the sages in the Toras Kohanim, regarding the meaning of the word “ve’hishbati.” As we have seen, while R’ Shimon understand that this is describing a change in the nature of these animals, R’ Yehuda maintains that they will simply be removed from the world – something which does not reflect a change in nature.⁸ In other words, the positions of R’ Yehuda and the Rambam are in full alignment, with each one providing the answer to the question raised on the other:

- ▷ The answer to R’ Shimon’s question on R’ Yehuda from the verse in Yeshayahu is found in the Rambam, namely, that that verse is allegorically referring to wicked people, not wild animals.
- ▷ The answer to the Raavad’s question on the Rambam from our verse is found in R’ Yehuda’s interpretation that it involves their physical removal from the world, not a change in their nature.

It thus emerges that the full field of discourse regarding this matter and its relevant verse spans many generations, beginning with the Tannaim and culminating with the Rishonim.

RAMBAN: ACQUIRING A NEW NATURE OR RECLAIMING A PRIOR ONE?

In contrast to all the above, the Ramban⁹ appears to adopt the position of R’ Shimon that wild animals will indeed become docile in the times of the Mashiach. However, he further explains that this does not represent them attaining a new nature, but rather, returning to their original nature...

On the day Adam and Chava were created, Hashem said to them:

הִנֵּה נֹתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת כָּל עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת כָּל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ פְּרִי עֵץ זֶרַע זֶרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ. וְלִכְל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ... אֶת כָּל יֵרֶק עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ.

*Behold, I have given to you every plant that yields seed that is on the face of the entire earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit, it shall be yours to eat. And to every beast of the earth... every vegetable plant – to eat.*¹⁰

We see that originally, not only was man meant to eat only fruits and vegetables, but so too was “every beast of the earth.” Apparently, beasts of prey did not exist!

8 Indeed this explanation is found in the Derashos of Rabbeinu Yehoshua Ibn Shuwib, a student of the Rashba (Parshas Bechukosai).

9 Commentary to Vayikra loc. cit. See also Radak to Yeshayahu 11:6.

10 Bereishis 1:29-30.

It was only once Adam sinned that things changed, for his sin had reverberations throughout every sphere of existence, including introducing predatory instincts into certain animals. Having fallen through sin, man is now at risk from elements of nature which prior to that had posed no threat to him – as certain beasts became beasts of prey. Therefore, says the Ramban, in the future when the world achieves rectification from Adam's sin, the nature of animals will revert to how it originally was, as described by R' Shimon.

A most fascinating discussion indeed. May we merit to see how Hashem “*paskens*” on this matter speedily in our days!

חזק חזק ונתחזק



This week's divrei Torah are dedicated

Le'ilui nishmas the forty-five victims of the tragedy in Meron

May their families know no more sorrow

May all the injured have a refuah sheleimah

And may we hear only besoros tovos.

