

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Re'eh

“You are Children to Hashem, your God”

Concept: The Role of Chumash Devarim

in our Relationship with Hashem

בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לֹא תִתְגַּדְדוּ... לְמֵת

You are children to Hashem, your God, you shall not wound yourselves... over a dead body.¹

INTRODUCTION: THE VERSE IN PSHAT AND DRASH

The simple meaning of the above verse is as presented in the translation – that we are forbidden to inflict wounds in our flesh as an expression of mourning. Alongside this, there is a well-known midrashic exposition of these words that is recorded in the Talmud:²

לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ אִגּוּדוֹת אִגּוּדוֹת

Do not make yourselves into separate groups.

As we have seen many times, pshat and drash have distinct methodologies resulting in different interpretations of the same word or words. Nevertheless, when considering these two interpretations of our verse, it is worthwhile pondering if they intersect on any level, or does each simply follow its own path, yielding its own interpretation, and “never the twain shall meet”?

THE THEME OF CHUMASH DEVARIM

By way of preface to answering this question, let us refer to a profound idea that we have discussed in an earlier parsha, based on the writings of R' Leib Mintzberg zt"l, relating to the division of the Torah into five chumashim. We noted that this is not simply the breaking up of a long sefer into five parts for purposes of convenience. Our relationship with Hashem is multi-faceted. He is our Creator, our Savior, our God, our King and our Father. Each of the Chumashim focusses on a different aspect of that relationship, harmonizing together with all the other aspects into our fulfilment of His will as expressed in the Torah:

¹ Devarim 14:1.

² See e.g. Yevamos 13b.

CHUMASH BEREISHIS – the Book of Creation, focusses on Hashem as Creator of the world.

CHUMASH SHEMOS – the Book of Redemption, focusses on Hashem as Savior of the Jewish people, discussing their Exodus and initiation into their historic role as His people.

Once we have received the Torah and become Hashem’s people, the following three Chumashim develop the three core aspects of our relationship with Him:

CHUMASH VAYIKRA – the Book of *Avodah* (Divine Service), is devoted to matters of sanctity generally and the Divine service of korbanos specifically. This highlights our relationship with Hashem as our God, the Infinite Spiritual Being, Whose ways we are looking to emulate and Whose closeness we are seeking to rise above the mundane in order to attain.

CHUMASH BAMIDBAR – the Book of Royalty. The theme of this Chumash is Hashem’s presence among us as our King. It is in this Chumash that Hashem is first described with this term, as Bilaam proclaims, “וּתְרוּעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ” – *the friendship of the King [Hashem] is with him [Israel].*³

All of this brings us to the final Chumash:

CHUMASH DEVARIM – emphasizes the theme of Hashem as our Father, as the verse therein proclaims, “הֲלוֹא הוּא אָבִיךָ” – *is He not your Father?*⁴ Likewise, our verse opens with the words, “בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם” – *You are children to Hashem, your God.*⁵

NEW PERSPECTIVES

The theme of Hashem as our Father which characterizes Chumash Devarim expresses itself throughout its parshiyos. In this Chumash, we are introduced to a new element in our relationship with Hashem – love. From our side, this finds expression in the mitzvah for us to love Hashem – “וְאַהֲבַת אֵת ה’ אֱלֹהֶיךָ” – as mentioned in Chapter 6,⁶ and which we recite daily in the first paragraph of the Shema. Paralleling this, the next chapter describes Hashem’s love for the Jewish people:

לֹא מֵרַבְּכֶם מִכָּל הָעַמִּים חָשַׁק ה’ בְּכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בְּכֶם... כִּי מֵאַהֲבַת ה’ אֶתְכֶם

*It is not because you are more numerous than the nations that Hashem desired and chose you... rather, it is because of Hashem’s love for you.*⁷

This element in our relationship likewise gives new perspective on the major themes mentioned in Devarim. Much of the Chumash is devoted to exhortations to keep the mitzvos and the calamity that will befall the people if they should neglect their obligations. However, within the course of his exhortations to the people, Moshe adds the following key point of perspective regarding these experiences:

וַיִּדְעַתָּ עִם לְבָבְךָ כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר יִסֵּר אֵת בְּנוֹ ה’ אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִסִּרְךָ

You should know in your heart that just as a father chastises his son, so Hashem,

3 Ibid. 23:21.

4 Devarim 32:6.

5 Ibid. 14:1.

6 Verse 5.

7 7:7-8.

*your God, chastises you.*⁸

A similar development occurs with regards to the keeping of the mitzvos themselves. Until now, the mitzvos have been simply presented as obligations – in keeping with our status as Hashem’s servants (Vayikra) and His subjects (Bamidbar) – which of course they are. However, in Chumash Devarim, Moshe underlines an additional element within the mitzvos:

וַיִּצְוֵנוּ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה... לְטוֹב לָנוּ כָּל הַיָּמִים לְחַיֵּינוּ כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

*Hashem commanded us to perform all these decrees... for our good all the days, to give us life as this very day.*⁹

As our Father, Hashem seeks to inform us that the mitzvos are not only commands which we must perform, but they are things that are for our ultimate benefit.

CHILDREN – AND SIBLINGS

With the above in mind, we return to our verse which – in keeping with the theme of Chumash Devarim – opens with the words, “You are children to Hashem your God.” The commentators point out, that these words are not merely a statement of fact; rather, they serve as the background to the mitzvah which follows of not inflicting a wound over a dead person. The Seforno explains that wounding oneself as a sign of excessive mourning expresses the feeling that one has lost everyone and is utterly alone. However, Hashem informs us that this is never the case, for He is always our Father. Therefore, although it is appropriate to mourn the loss of a relative, at the same time, we cannot lose sight of our relationship with Hashem as His children for whom He will always be there.

And this brings us back to the drash explanation of the verse – not to split into separate factions. Once we understand the background to the pshat of the verse, we will see how it is *also the background to the drash*. For if Hashem is our Father and we are all His children, then we are all, by definition, brothers and sisters with each other. As such, while as siblings we may each have our distinct character, we can never allow ourselves to form into factions that are categorically separate and detached from one another. This is the overarching theme of Chumash Devarim: If Hashem is your Father, then your fellow-Jew is your brother!

“DEVARIM DETAILS” WITHIN MITZVOS – HASHAVAS AVEIDAH

Taking this idea one stage further, this will help us understand another phenomenon within Chumash Devarim. There are numerous mitzvos that have already been mentioned in earlier chumashim but which then have additional details presented in Devarim. Why are not all the details of the mitzvah mentioned at once? Based on our discussion, the answer is that these details reflect the “family element” within the Jewish people, and hence are introduced in the Chumash that is devoted to this theme. Let us see some examples:

The mitzvah to return a lost object appears for the first time in Parshas Mishpatim of Chumash Shemos.¹⁰ There, the Torah commands that if you see the lost object of your fellow, you should return it to him. This represents what we could call the basic aspect of the mitzvah. Chumash Devarim then adds a completely new dimension to the mitzvah: “*If your brother [the owner] is*

8 8:5.

9 6:24.

10 23:4.

not near you and you do not know him, then gather [the lost object] inside your house, and it shall remain with you until your brother inquires after it.”¹¹ This aspect of the mitzvah can certainly be characterized as “going the extra mile,” to return the object. After all, I am fully prepared to return it, but I don’t know who to! In this situation, what more can be asked of me? The Torah’s answer is: “For your fellowman – perhaps nothing; but *for your brother* – do more. Take it home with you, and hopefully he will come looking for it.”

EVED IVRI

Another mitzvah that is reiterated in Devarim along with further details is that of *Eved Ivri* – a Jew who is sold into servitude in order to pay off his debts. In this case, the mitzvah has already been presented in two prior chumashim: in Chumash Shemos¹² and in Chumash Vayikra.¹³ However, in Chumash Devarim, we find an additional element within this mitzvah that pertains when his term of servitude is up: “*But when you send him away... do not send him away empty-handed. [Rather,] give him gifts from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your wine press.*”¹⁴

What is the meaning of this mitzvah spread out over three Chumashim?

- ▷ Chumash Shemos which establishes the Torah’s obligations for a free and fair society presents the basic idea that this individual needs to be sold in order to work off his debts.
- ▷ Chumash Vayikra, which deals with our obligations towards Hashem as His servants, discusses how this impacts on our relationship with our own Hebrew servants, as discussed there: 1) The servant cannot be given demeaning or unduly hard work 2) He cannot be sold permanently, but must be released at the Yovel. As the verse there states in explanation of all this: “*For they are My servants whom I took out of Egypt.*”
- ▷ Chumash Devarim reminds us that there is yet more to it than that: Even when the servant finishes working for you, you cannot just say goodbye and send him on his way, congratulating yourself for having treated him fairly and kindly. He is your brother, he is family,¹⁵ and he is about to begin making his way in the outside world. As such, you are obligated to give him something for the way to help him make a new start.

SHEMITAH

Another example of a mitzvah that has been discussed in two Chumashim prior to being mentioned in Chumash Devarim is that of shemitah – the sabbatical year.¹⁶ In this case, too, each Chumash contains the elements of the mitzvah which relate to that Chumash:

Chumash Shemos mentions only the obligation to leave the produce of the fields in the seventh year for the poor, as part of the general societal obligation to care for their wellbeing.

Chumash Vayikra, the Chumash of Divine service and sanctity, introduces the idea the seventh year is holy for Hashem, similar to the day of Shabbos, and that the produce of that year is likewise holy and cannot be bought and sold on the normal commercial manner, nor be allowed to go to waste.

11 22:2.

12 21:2-6

13 25-39-44.

14 15:13-14.

15 Ibid. verse 12.

16 See Shemos 23:11 and Vayikra 25:1-7.

Chumash Devarim once again introduces the aspect of the mitzvah that pertains to brotherhood and family, informing us that in addition to the laws relating to the land, all monetary debts are cancelled by the shemita year. We note that this aspect of shemita has nothing to do with resting from the land whatsoever, for the debts that are cancelled are simply those incurred by money that was loaned! Yet, the Torah says, “The shemita year represents the end of a term of years, and ushers in a new start. Give your brother a break as well. Cancel any debts he has incurred with you and let him make a fresh start.”

These examples should encourage us to approach Chumash Devarim with a new and profound appreciation regarding its distinct role within the totality of the Torah – as a Chumash that fills in the aspect of our relationship, both with Hashem as our Father, and with the Jewish people as our brothers and sisters.¹⁷

17 R' Leib Mintzberg, *Ben Melech, Introductory Chapters to Commentary on the Torah, chap. 4.*