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"Taking Responsibility for Torah"

REVEALING THE CONCEALED BLESSINGS: EXPLORING ONE OF RAV CHAIM KANIEVSKY'S SEFORIM

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Yeshayah 23 offers a vision of the destruction of the city of Tyre, described as a harlot, and its renaissance after seventy years, still a harlot. Somehow the valence of "harlot" becomes positive in the interim.

וְהָיָה מִקֵּץ שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה
יִפְקֹד יְקֹנֶן אֶת־צָר
וְשִׁבָּה לְאַתְנָנָה
וְנָתַתָּה אֶת־כָּל־מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה:
וְהָיָה סֶחְרָה וְאַתְנָנָה קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה
לֹא יִאָצֵר וְלֹא יִחָסֵן
כִּי לַיִּשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי יְקֹנֶן יִהְיֶה סֶחְרָה
לְאָכֹל לְשִׂבְעָה
וּלְמִכְסָּה עֲתִיק:

*It will be at the end of seventy years -
Hashem will remember/redeem Tyre,
and she will return to her harlot's hire,
and she will seduce-as-a-harlot all the kingdoms
of the land on the face of the earth
her wares and her hire will be sacred to Hashem;
it will not be hoarded or stored;
rather, her wares will be for those who sit before
Hashem,
to eat until satiety
velimkhaseh atik.*

"and she will seduce-as-a-harlot all the kingdoms of the land on the face of the earth" is interpreted as a blessing of productive commerce. Therefore, it makes sense that the best merchandise will be reserved for those "who sit before Hashem to eat until satiety". The standard commentaries understand *velimkhaseh atik* to mean "as a sturdy (or precious) covering". In other words, Tyre will provide clothing and food to the righteous.

However, Pesachim 119a records an apparently anonymous interpretation which translates *velimkhaseh* not as "as a covering" but rather as "to one who covers", in other words as referring to a beneficiary rather than to a benefit of Tyre's wares.

מאי למכסה עתיק?
זה המכסה דברים שביסה עתיק יומין.
ומאי בינה? סתרי תורה.
ואיכא דאמרי:
זה המגלה דברים שביסה עתיק יומין.
מאי בינה? טעמי תורה.

What is the meaning of "limkhaseh atik"?

This refers to one who covers over matters that were covered over by the Ancient of Days. And what are those matters? The hidden things of Torah.

There are those who say:

This refers to one who reveals matters that were covered over by the Ancient of Days.

What are those matters? The taamei Torah.

I am baffled by how the last interpretation can be derived from the verse, which so far as I can tell makes no reference to revealing anything. I'd love to hear your suggestions in that regard. But this essay will stipulate that the literary problem can be resolved, and focus on the theological. What are the *taamim* of Torah that the Ancient of Days deliberately concealed and nonetheless wants revealed? Why conceal them if the goal is for them to be revealed?

Maharsha raises an apparent contradiction with a statement on Sanhedrin 21b.

ואמר רבי יצחק:
מפני מה לא נתגלו טעמי תורה?
שהרי שתי מקראות נתגלו טעמן - נכשל בהן גדול
העולם.
כתיב לא ירבה לו נשים -
אמר שלמה:
אני ארבה ולא אסור;
וכתיב ויהי לעת זקנת שלמה נשיו הטו את לבבו;
וכתיב לא ירבה לו סוסים,
ואמר שלמה: 'אני ארבה ולא אשיב',
וכתיב ותצא מרכבה ממצרים בשש וגו'.

And Rabbi Yitzchak said:

Why were the *taamei Torah* not revealed?

Because two verses has their *taam* revealed – and the greatest of the world stumbled regarding them.

Scripture writes (*The king*) must not multiply wives for himself (and his heart will not stray) – Solomon said: I will multiply and I will not stray, but Scripture writes *It happened at the time of Solomon becoming old that his wives tilted his heart*;

Scripture writes (*The king*) must not multiply horses for himself (lest he return the nation to Egypt)

But Solomon said: I will multiply and I will not return,
But Scripture writes *and a chariot came up from Egypt etc.*

The Talmudic text perhaps consciously truncates each imperative verse before reaching the rationale it provides. For Maharsha, the key points are that *taamei Torah* refer to rationales for Biblical laws, and that revealing them even to the greatest people leads to disaster. So why does Sanhedrin 119 provide a reward for those who reveal them? Maharsha's first answer is fascinating:

דבר שהתורה גילה טעמן - מביא לידי מכשול
אבל דבר שמכוסה טעמו בתורה,
גם אם חכמים נותנים בו טעם - לא יבא לידי מכשול
ועוד י"ל ולחלק בין טעמי התורה דהכא ובין טעמי
מצות התורה דהתם:

A matter for which the Torah reveals the
rationale – that causes stumbling
But a matter whose rationale is covered over in
the Torah,
even if the Sages provide a rationale for it – this
does not cause stumbling.

I suggest that Maharsha means that rationales for mitzvot become dangerous in the way that they caused Solomon to stumble, namely by suggesting that one can violate the rule in cases where its rationale does not apply, only when is certain that the rationale is correct and exclusive. That kind of certainty can only be provided by the text itself. Synthetic rationales can only be produced by putting ourselves in G-d's place and thinking about why we would have made such a rule, and therefore ought never to produce certainty, since "My thoughts are not your thoughts".

I would add that certainty about rationales can also cause dangerous broadenings of the law. Also, my sense is that forty years ago, halakhic conservatives tended to raise the banner of *lo darshinan taama dikra* (even though the Beit Yosef held *darshinan*), that all rationales should be viewed with suspicion and prevented from influencing halakhah. See for example the Rav's preference for the Mishneh Torah over the Moreh Nevukhim. The reason for this was clear: many past rationales offered for Torah laws now seemed obsolete, and we did not want those laws to be judged obsolete as well. Halakhic progressives, by contrast, argued that the laws needed to be understood and applied in terms of their rationales. For various reasons, those positions are now at least partially reversed, especially with regard to laws associated with sex and gender, with progressives insisting that some laws must be treated as pure *chukim* and conservatives strongly critiquing that approach. I plan to address this phenomenon at length in the next few months in an essay integrating several of my past reflections on "chokification".

For this essay, however, my focus is on Maharsha's second answer, which distinguishes between *taamei hamitzvot* = rationales for mitzvot and other sorts of *taamei Torah*. Rav Chaim Kanievsky

of blessed memory offers what I think is a wonderfully idiosyncratic identification of those "other sorts" in the introduction to his work titled *Limkhaseh Atik*; it refers to those places where the Torah leaves things *stumim*, walled-in, unexplicated, such as verses where the speaker is unidentified, or an action is described vaguely. He further explains that his work is not intended to reveal what the Torah covers over in such verses based on independent reasoning, or even based on the reasoning of the greatest commentators, but only to point to answers given by Chazal, because we can have certainty that even conflicting answers given by Chazal are each *divrei E-lohim Chayyim*. This is a sorting criterion that deserves further discussion.

In Parashat Shemini, one of the facts which the Torah "covers over" is the content of the blessings given by Aharon in 9:22, and by Moshe and Aharon jointly in 9:23.

וַיִּשָּׂא אֶהָרֶן אֶת־יָדָיו אֶל־הָעָם וַיְבָרֶכֶם
וַיֵּרֶד מֵעֲשֵׂת הַחֻטָּאת וְהַעֲלָה וְהַשְׁלָמִים:
וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד
וַיִּצְאוּ וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת־הָעָם
וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד־יְיָ אֶל־כָּל־הָעָם:

Aharon raised his hands toward the people and
blessed them

He descended from doing the chatat and the
olah and the shelamim.

Mosheh and Aharon came into Ohel Moed

They exited and blessed the people

The Glory of Hashem appeared to all the people.

Rabbi Kanievsky cites the Midrash HaGadol as identifying the joint blessing as

יהי רצון שיפתח לבבכם לתלמוד תורה

May it be (God's) Will that He open your hearts
to the study of Torah.

This is a possibility that so far as I can tell is not raised by any other commentary. The standard approaches are that Birkat Kohanim was repeated twice (whether or not it was already commanded), or that this refers to the blessing recorded as given by Mosheh at the conclusion of the Mishnah's construction (which is itself not specified, but which is often identified with *ויהי נעם*, and/or with a situationally appropriate blessing "May it be (God's) Will that the Divine Presence rest on the works of your hands".

Rabbi Kanievsky presumably cited only the Midrash HaGadol because he considers it to be a work that directly reports Chazal, whereas the other suggestions are the product of human reasoning. In other words, not because he found it literarily or thematically more appropriate. To my mind, that creates a new mystery: Why would this blessing, which I have not so far found in any other context, be assigned to Mosheh here? I'd love to hear your answers, or relevant sources.

Shabbat Shalom!

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