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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Bamidbar ✍️ Rabbi Shimon Zehnwirth

Unconditional Love

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai..." (Bamidbar 1:1)

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 1:2) tells us that the Jews in the time of the prophet Yirmiyahu had sinned greatly. The nation felt that they had created such a wide chasm between themselves and Hashem that it was impossible for them to ever do *teshuva*. Yirmiyahu prophetically gave Hashem's answer, "Have I been a desert to B'nei Yisrael? A land of darkness? Why do My people say, 'We have been separated from You, we will come no more to You?'" (Yirmiyahu 2:32) The Midrash explains Hashem's response: He was telling the Jewish people that they are still beloved. By using the example of a desert, Hashem was reminding them that when they were a fledgling people in the Wilderness of Sinai they could not even tell they were actually in a forbidding desert. Hashem provided them with manna to eat; the Clouds of Glory shaded them, killed the snakes and scorpions and smoothed out the path before them by flattening the mountains and raising up the valleys. Hashem was in essence telling Yirmiyahu's generation, "I have shown you how much I love you - you are close to Me and *teshuva* is certainly possible."

The miracles Hashem performed for B'nei Yisrael in the desert were outstanding indicators of Hashem's love for the generation He saved from slavery in Egypt. How, though, did those wonders prove that Hashem's love and closeness would still exist so many years and a myriad of sins later? The Jews of Yirmiyahu's time knew quite well the story of the Exodus from Egypt, yet they felt that their generation was far less worthy than the generation that stood at Sinai. Yirmiyahu's contemporaries despaired that the closeness Hashem once felt for them had disappeared due to their sins. How did Hashem's statement convince them that His love would still allow them to return to Him?

The people of Yirmiyahu's generation originally felt that Hashem's love for the Jewish people is dependent upon our national level of religiosity and righteousness. They looked in their mirror, saw their low spiritual state of affairs, and became despondent. When Hashem reminded them of His kindness to our forefathers in the desert, He was showing them that His abundant *chesed* far surpassed even what these great people deserved. The message: Hashem's love for the Jewish people is uncon-

ditional - like that of a father to a son. His love for us never wanes and is not dependent on our spiritual level. Just as a father loves his child under any circumstances, so too, Hashem loves us beyond what we deserve, and even when we are mired in the depths of sin. As the Chovos HaLevavos states in Shaar HaBitachon (chap. 3, first principle) The sixth (condition to have trust in Hashem) is that one should be aware of Hashem's overwhelming goodness to him, and that due to His great kindness and beneficence, Hashem bestowed good upon him from his very beginning, not because the person deserved it, and not because Hashem had any need to do so, but rather out of generosity, goodness and kindness..."

Many times we find ourselves in a time of difficulty, perhaps faced with an illness, loss of a job or any type of suffering. A caring friend reminds us to trust in Hashem, to have *bitachon* that Hashem will save us in any circumstance. When we try to focus on that message of hope, our vision often becomes blurred by feelings of despair: "What if I don't deserve Hashem's kindness? I have committed so many sins, why would He want to save me?" At these times of hopelessness we must remind ourselves of Hashem's unconditional love. It would be very shortsighted and even naive to believe that the kindness Hashem has shown us throughout our lives has been only what we deserved and not well beyond. No one can look into themselves and honestly think that they have been so righteous that Hashem owes them health and happiness. Rather, just as our parents' love for us is unqualified and constant, so too, Hashem's love is absolute, and we can rely on His salvation under any circumstances.

At the same time we can apply Yirmiyahu's *pasuk*, and message, to ourselves. We shouldn't let our past mistakes discourage us from attempting to change and improve ourselves. We are never separated from Hashem. No matter how far or how low we have fallen, He is always waiting for us, like a patient, loving father, to turn back to Him in sincere *teshuva*. If we internalize this message of Hashem's eternal, unconditional love, we will feel, in turn, feelings of love towards Hashem, which will provide a powerful motivation to begin the first steps of genuine repentance.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

B'rich Shmei

Rabbi Ari Friedman

The Yom Tov of Shavuot is when we reaffirm our acceptance of the Torah. We hope that in this merit Hashem will supply us with all that we need to observe His Torah and study it diligently. What is not so commonly known is that we experience a Kabalas HaTorah of sorts many more times throughout the year.

The Zohar tells us that when the Torah is read in shul we should imagine ourselves at that moment to be standing at Har Sinai to accept the Torah. The Zohar goes on to say that when the Torah is removed from the aron to be read, the gates of heavenly mercy are opened and Hashem's love is aroused. One should therefore recite the following prayer: "B'rich Shmei D'morei alma...". This tefillah, found in our siddurim, is a prayer in which we state our complete faith in Hashem and ask of Him that He grant us success in many areas.

Unfortunately, this beautiful tefillah written in Aramaic is understood by few and often mumbled. If we would take some time to learn the meaning of its text, we would most definitely enhance our appreciation for this special prayer.

When?

There are some kehillos, particularly amongst the Sefardim, who based on an understanding of the Zohar recite B'rich Shmei only on Shabbos and Yom Tov (see Magen Avraham 282). There are those amongst Kehillos Ashkenaz who as a response to the Shabtzei Tzvi movement which based itself on distorted kabbalistic teachings, refrained from including any texts from Zohar in their liturgy. B'rich Shmei, which is a passage from Zohar was therefore omitted. However the minhag in most kehillos is to recite B'rich Shmei every time the Torah is read. (M.B. 134-123)

There are different minhagim as to precisely when B'rich Shmei is recited. Some open the aron, recite B'rich Shmei, and then remove the Torah. Some remove the Torah and recite B'rich Shmei while standing in front of an open aron,

while others close the aron and continue saying B'rich Shmei. Which one of these is the proper minhag? Hagoan R' Moshe Feinstein Z"tl writes (O.C. 4-70-9) that since this matter is not discussed in the Rishonim, one cannot protest a particular custom. However, the language of the Zohar seems to indicate that B'rich Shmei is recited after the removal of the sefer Torah. Therefore, if someone were to ask which custom is preferable, he is to be told to recite B'rich Shmei after the Torah is removed. The Tshuvos Az Nidberu (8-58) adds that just as by Birchas HaChodesh the chazzan holds the Sefer Torah to add a special segulah to the prayer, so too, with B'rich Shmei it is preferable that the chazzan hold the Torah while reciting the tefillah. The Aron Hakodesh need not be left open, especially if it is completely empty after the removal of the Torah. It should be mentioned, that according to the siddurim of the mekuballim, namely the Ramak and R' Chaim Vital, the auspicious moment to recite B'rich Shmei is when the Aron Hakodesh is opened.

Once one has begun reciting B'rich Shmei, he may continue to do so until the Torah is opened to be read. He should however, pause to recite Shma Yisrael with the tzibbur on Shabbos and Yom Tov (M.B. 134-13 Eshei Yisrael 38-5). One who is still in the middle of saying tachnun or V'hu rachum need not interrupt himself to recite B'rich Shmei. (Eshei Yisrael 25-48)

One who does not intend to be yotzei with krias hatorah at that time and is present during the removal of the Sefer Torah, does not have to say B'rich Shmei, especially if he is learning at that time. (Piskei Teshuvos).

Towards the end of B'rich Shmei it says: "V'sehiv li bnin dichren d'avden reusach". This line is found in the Zohar's text of B'rich Shmei but is often omitted in our siddurim, or it is found in parentheses. It is a tefilla asking for sons who perform the will of Hashem and may even be recited with grandchildren in mind, according to R' Chaim Kanievsky Shlita.

Rabbi Friedman learns full-time at the kollel.