

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLVII: Re'eh (Deut. 11:26–16:17)

Essay 10. A gift suited to his means

"אִישׁ כַּמְתַּנֵּת יָדוֹ כְּבִרְכַת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ" וְכוּ'. יֵשׁ לְדַקְדַּק אֲמַאי אֵיזְטָרִיךְ מֵלֶת "אִישׁ", וּמַהוּ הַכֶּפֶל שֶׁל "כַּמְתַּנֵּת יָדוֹ כְּבִרְכַת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ". וְעוֹד לָמָּה הִתְחִיל בִּלְשׁוֹן גִּטְרָא וְאַחַר כֵּן בִּלְשׁוֹן גַּמְצָא?

“Three times a year—on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths—all your males shall appear before the L-rd your G-d in the place that He will choose. No one shall not appear before the L-rd empty-handed, *[each] man with a gift suited to his means, according to the blessing of the L-rd your G-d that He has bestowed upon you.*” (Deut. 16:16–17). **We should scrutinize why the word “man” was necessary. Also, why is there the repetition of “with a gift suited to his means, according to the blessing of the L-rd your G-d, as we understand that one’s means are all determined by G-d”? Also, why did the verse begin with the third person, i.e., “man,” but afterward use the second person, i.e., you?**

וַיֵּשׁ לֹאמַר לְפִי שֵׁשׁ בְּעוֹלָם שְׁתֵּי מִיָּנִי אֲנָשִׁים. יֵשׁ מִי שֶׁמְזַלּוֹ גָּרַם לוֹ שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לוֹ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם עוֹשֶׁר וּנְכֹסִים וְכָבוֹד יוֹתֵר מִהֶצְרִיךְ לוֹ לְמַחְזִיתוֹ וּלְמַחְזִית אֲנָשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ, וְזֶה נִקְרָא לְזֶה מִן הַמְּקוֹם, שֶׁהָרִי גִתְּחִיב לְמְקוֹם מִמֶּה שֶׁנּוֹתֵן לוֹ יוֹתֵר מִצְרָכֵי. וַיֵּשׁ מִן אַחַר שֶׁל אֲנָשִׁים שֶׁלֹּא נִתְּנוּ לָהֶם הַקַּב"ה רַק מְעַט מְזַעַר כְּדֵי חַיּוֹתָם בְּצִמְצוּמָם, וְזֶה לֹא נִקְרָא כֹּל כֵּן חַיִּיב וּמְשׁוּעָבֵד בְּשִׁבְלֵי מְמוֹנוֹ לְמְקוֹם, שֶׁהָרִי אֲדַרְבָּא כְּכֹר גִּתְּחִיב הַמְּקוֹם לִיתֵן לוֹ דֵּי מַחְזִיתוֹ דְּכִתִּיב "נָתַן לָהֶם לְכָל-בְּשָׂר" וְכִתִּיב "וּמְשַׁבֵּיעַ לְכָל-חַי" וְכוּ'.

It can be said that there are two types of people. There is one whose luck causes him to be given wealth and property and honor from Heaven, more than he needs for his life and the lives of the members of his household, and this type of person is called a borrower from the Omnipresent, for he is indebted to the Omnipresent from what has been given to him in excess of his needs. And there is a second type of people who the Holy One, Blessed be He, gives them only a very small amount,¹ so that their lives are constricted, and he is not considered to be so indebted and in servitude to the Omnipresent because of his money, for to the contrary, the Omnipresent is already obliged to give him enough for his life, as it is written, “Who gives food to all flesh” (Ps. 136:25), and it is written, “satiating every creature” (Ps. 145:16).

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¹ The term, “מְעַט מְזַעַר,” each word meaning “a little,” appears in Isaiah 10:25, 16:14, and 29:17.

וּבְנֵי הַמֵּין הַשֵּׁנִי אָמַר "אִישׁ כְּמִתְנַת יְדוֹ" לְפִי שְׁנִקְרָא "אִישׁ" דְּהֵיִנוּ גְבִיר וְאֲדוֹן, כְּמוֹ "אִישׁ נְעָמִי", שֶׁהָרִי אֵין לוֹ רַק כְּדֵי מְהִיִּתּוֹ וְסִיפּוֹקוֹ וְאֵינוֹ לְוָה וְנִכְסָיו אֵינָם מְשׁוּעָבְדִים, וְזֶה יִתֵּן כְּפִי "מִתְנַת יְדוֹ" וְלֹא כְּפִי נִכְסָיו שֶׁהָרִי לֹא נִתְחַיֵּיבוֹ, אֲמָנָם כְּנִגְדֵי הַמֵּין הַרְאִשׁוֹן שְׁנִקְרָא לְוָה וְנִכְסָיו נִתְחַיֵּיבוֹ, עַל זֶה אָמַר "כְּבִרְפַת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ".

For the second type of person, it says, “[each] man shall give as he is able,” because he’s referred to in the third person as “man,” which is a master and ruler, like “the husband of Naomi” (Ruth 1:3), for he only has enough for his life and sufficiency, and he is not a borrower, and his property is not indebted to G-d.

That is, we may at first think that a rich man would be more likely to be called a “master” than a poor man. But according to the Zera Shimshon’s explanation, the rich man is overly indebted to G-d. He is really in servitude to G-d, and thus he is not considered a “master” and “ruler” of himself. In contrast, the poor man only has enough for his means, so he is not indebted to G-d. He is not in servitude, and can be viewed as a free man, a “master” and “ruler” of himself.

This [second] one gives in accordance with “a gift suited to his means,” and not according to his property, for he is not indebted. This is contrary to the first type of person, who is called a borrower and whose property is indebted. Therefore [the verse] says, “according to the blessing of the L-rd your G-d,” to emphasize that one who is rich should bring a more valuable offering not simply because he can afford it, but because he is indebted to G-d.

וְאָמַר בְּלִשׁוֹן נִמְצָא מִפְּנֵי שְׁמֵי שְׁלֵנָה מִתְּבִירוֹ, הַמְּלִנָּה כּוֹתְבוֹ עַל פְּנִיקְסוֹ, וְנִיכָר וְיִדּוּעַ וְעַל זֶה אָמַר "כְּבִרְפַת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ", מֶה שְׂאִין כֵּן הַמֵּין הַשֵּׁנִי שְׂאִין לוֹ שֵׁם לְפִי שְׂאִינוֹ כְּתוּב בְּסִפָּר שֶׁל הַמְּלִנָּה, וְכֵן הִיא הָאֲמִת שֶׁהַעֲשִׂירִים נוֹדַע שְׁמֵם בְּשַׁעֲרֵים מֶה שְׂאִין כֵּן הַעֲנִיִּים, דְּאֵבֵב חֲנוּתָא נְפִישִׁי אַחֵי וּמְרַחֲמֵי וְכוּ'.

[The end of the verse] speaks in the second tense, i.e., “you,” because for one who borrows from his fellow, the lender “wrote him in his ledger,”² and it is recognized and known that he is a borrower. Therefore, about this it says, “according to the blessing of the L-rd your G-d that He has bestowed upon you.” I.e., the verse ends with the second-person term “לְךָ” [“you”], which refers to the first type of person. As the first type of person receives wealth, property, and honor, he becomes indebted to G-d, and his name is recorded in a ledger and he becomes known, and so he is referred to directly as “you.”

That [denomination of “you”] is something that is not the case with the second type of person, who has no name of borrower, because he is not written in the ledger of the lender. Therefore, the verse described him with the third-person term “אִישׁ” [“man”], for he is unknown and anonymous.

Thus, it’s true that the names of the wealthy are known in the gates, which is not true of the poor. “Rav Pappa said: **At the entrance to the stores** [during a time of prosperity], **brothers and loved ones abound.** [I.e., when a person is prospering financially, everyone acts like his brother or friend.] But at the gate of disgrace [i.e., for one who is impoverished], he has no brothers and no loved ones.” (Shabbat 32a).

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² The term, “וְכָתַב עַל פְּנִיקְסוֹ” [“and he wrote in his ledger”] appears in Shabbat 12b.