

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Eikev

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Simchah Yoel *ben* Feivel *a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Most Favored Nation

In portraying certain attributes of the Almighty, the verse in this week's *parshah* provides the following description: "G-d, the Great, the Mighty, the Awesome, Who does not show favoritism..." (*Devarim 10:17*).

A Celestial Symposium

In an interesting exchange recorded in the Gemara in Berachos (20b), the angels used this verse to pose a query to Hashem:

"The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed is He: 'Master of the Universe! (Concerning You) it is written in Your Torah: (G-d...) *Who does not show favoritism...* But,' (they challenged), 'Do You not show favoritism to Yisrael, as it is written (in the section of the Priestly Blessing), *Hashem will lift up his face toward you* (i.e., show you special favor)?' Hashem said to them: 'Can I avoid showing favoritism to Yisrael? After all, I commanded them in my Torah with the following imperative (*Devarim 8:10*): *And you shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless Hashem your G-d*; and they conduct themselves with extra stringency, (blessing) even on a *k'zayis* (size of an olive) or a *k'beitzah* (size of an egg).'"

Some background information is necessary for a proper understanding of Hashem's response in the above narrative. In His reply, Hashem referred to the verse (also in this week's *parshah*): "*And you shall eat, and be satisfied, and bless Hashem.*" This represents the Biblically mandated mitzvah of *bentching* (Grace after Meals). However, according to the strict parameters of the Biblical Law, there is only a requirement to *bentch* when one eats his fill ("and be satisfied"). According to Torah Law, one who has eaten even a significant amount without satiation need not recite the Grace after Meals.

The Rabbis, however, mandated that *bentching* be recited whenever a particular amount of food is consumed. The exact measurement is a subject of debate in the Mishnah in Berachos (7:2), which states:

עד כַּמָּה מְזַמְּנִין, עַד כְּזַיִת. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אֹמֵר, עַד כְּבֵיצָה.

"How much (must one consume to become Rabbinically obligated to *bentch*? According to the Tanna Kamma [first Tanna], the requisite amount is) a *k'zayis* (olive's worth). R' Yehudah says: a *k'beitzah* (size of an egg [larger than an olive])" (translation based on *Tosafos 49b*).

It was to this *halachic* dispute that Hashem referred in the conclusion of His reply. The basic idea of the response is that Hashem feels compelled to show favoritism to Yisrael. Here it is, that according to the strict letter of the law, when completing a meal, one may simply walk away, regardless of the amount consumed (provided he has not achieved full satiation). Yet, the Jewish people are particular to recite the after-blessings even when not Biblically mandated. Depending on which opinion is followed – the Tanna Kamma or R' Yehudah – any Jew who eats either an olive's worth or egg's worth of food will proceed to *bentch*. As they serve Me beyond the letter of the law – Hashem told the angels – I reciprocate, and shower them with extra favor and

blessing (even beyond what they may actually deserve).

While definitely a moving account, there appears to be somewhat of a problem with this exchange. How, exactly, was the angels' question answered? That is, they presented what seemed to be an inconsistency: You, Hashem, claim not to show favoritism; on the other hand, You do show favoritism to Your people and admit so openly in the verse of the Priestly Blessings! How did Hashem's subsequent response reconcile this apparent contradiction? True, in the area of *bentching*, the Jewish people conduct themselves beyond the letter of the law, which is a good case to likewise treat them favorably. But how does that satisfy the explicit verse? At the end of the day, the Torah still states that Hashem does not show favoritism; how does Hashem's treatment toward Yisrael square with the Torah's own words?

In a rather brilliant exposition, R' Beirush Flahm (disciple of the Dubno Maggid) provides an explanation that casts the Celestial conversation in a whole new light:

No “Delete” Button

What exactly lies behind this dictum of our *parshah* (“Who does not show favoritism...”); what was the Torah's intent with such a declaration? It appears that this statement aims to counteract a potential misimpression. While it is definitely so that Hashem is the ultimate in kindness and mercy, this does not give one license to “cut corners” in the observance of His *mitzvos*. A person may be given to mistaken musings, thinking: “What's the big deal if I miss a mitzvah here or there; Hashem doesn't mind – after all, He is full of kindness!” To banish such notions from the collective consciousness of the Jewish people, Hashem states emphatically in His Torah that He does not show favoritism. There are no free rides, and – as Chazal state – “Whosoever claims that Hashem “forfeits” (i.e., merely ignores violations), that individual's life will become forfeit” (*Bava Kama 50a*).

This idea formed the thrust of Hashem's reply to the angels. The entire purpose of the Torah's statement that Hashem is a G-d “Who does not show favoritism” was to prevent the cultivation of an attitude of laxity toward the observance of *mitzvos*. As such, Hashem was able to assure the angels that His “special treatment” toward Yisrael posed no contradiction to the Torah. After all, look at the Jewish people's performance in the area of *bentching*: Not only do they exhibit no laxity in the fulfillment of this mitzvah, but they have even adopted quite a stringent approach! They do not exempt themselves from this obligation even when partaking of a mere *k'zayis* or *k'beitzah*! As such, they are fully entitled to most favored status. They have demonstrated that – for this nation – there is no danger of adopting laxity in the service of Hashem (*S'fas Hayeriyah to Ohel Ya'akov, parshas Eikev*).