

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Dvarim 5785

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Moshe recounts the travels to Bnei Yisroel.

וְנַעֲבַר מֵאֶת אֶחָיו בְּנֵי-עִשָּׂו הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּשֵׁעִיר מִדֶּרֶךְ הָעֲרָבָה מֵאֵילַת וּמֵעֵצֹן
גִּבֹר {ס} וְנָפְלָו וְנַעֲבַר דֶּרֶךְ מִדְבַּר מוֹאָב:

“And we passed our kin, the Sons of Eisav that dwell in Seir on the road to Arabia--from Eilat and Eitzon-Geber. [Break]. And we turned and we passed on the way to Moav.” (Devarim 2:8).

Why is there a break in the pasuk? Why not just split the pasuk into two parts?

Almost every time in the Torah that there is a break the pasuk and the subject matter end. Even in situations where the subject matter seems to continue, the break indicates a time lapse or difference of status. An example is when the man found to be carrying sticks on Shabbos was brought to Moshe for determination. (Bamidbar 15:32). Moshe asked Hashem and there is a break. (Ibid 15:34). Hashem then responded. (Ibid 15:35). Clearly, there was a time lapse. It could be the person had to live out his life before Hashem gave the sentence.

Our pasuk seems to be talking about the same subject matter. Also, there is a break in middle of the pasuk. The pasuk could have been split into two or the end of the pasuk could have been added to the next one. Obviously, this break is teaching something.

Another pasuk with a break is: “When Yisroel was in his residence in that land, and Reuven went, and he deferred to Bilhah who was the concubine of his father, and Yisroel heard. [Break]. And then they were the sons of Yaakov, twelve of them.” (Bereishis 35:22). It said “Yisroel” resided but then it says sons of “Yaakov.” It says בְּשָׁנָו in his residency, when the usual term is וַיֵּשֶׁב settled. Finally, there is some sort of connection to the twelve sons of Yaakov and what Reuven did.

Yisroel is used when referring to Bnei Yisroel as a nation. Yaakov is used when referring to the people as a group of twelve tribes. Settled is used when the person stops wandering or traveling and decides to stay in a place for a while. After his many wanderings, Yaakov settled in the Land of Canaan. (Ibid 37:1).

The Gemara and maforshim try to deal with what exactly Reuven did. The word used in the pasuk is וַיִּשְׁכַּב. That usually means “and he lied down.” This is found when Yaakov lied down on the way to Charan. (Ibid 28:11). Many take the word as a euphemism. However, its literal translation is to lie down or to defer. When a person lies down, he defers himself to sleep and to the place he is in. Even when the word is used as a euphemism, it does not mean by force. It means that person deferred to the other person. He makes himself vulnerable.

With these translations, the pasuk means: and it was when Yisroel – the father of the nation – made the Land his residence (he earned the Land and was promised it), and Reuven went – he moved himself, given all that happened – and he deferred himself to Bilhah, who was a mere concubine of his father. Reuven realized he was not to be the Bechor of the nation of Yisroel. He can be the head of the tribes, but the nation of Yisroel had a different destiny. Bilhah was given to Rochel. (Ibid 29:29). Reuven was deferring not only to Rochel – to Yosef and Binyamin – but even to Rochel’s handmaiden. Once this was done, the union of Bnei Yisroel was complete. “And there were then the sons of Yaakov, twelve of them.” There were now twelve tribes, in sync, equal, on the same page. The break indicates the change of status.

Another pasuk with a break: “And it was after The Plague. [Break]. And Hashem said to Moshe and to Elazar, the son of Aharon, the Kohen, saying.” (Bamidbar 26:1). The Plague that commenced because of the rebellion by Korach and the Scouts, was now concluded with the plague that resulted from serving the idol. What started 38 years earlier was now concluded and Hashem wanted the people counted. The break indicates the connection between the two plagues and the time lapse.

In the Ten Utterances it says, “You shall not murder. [Break]. You shall not commit adultery. [Break]. You shall not be a violent thief. [Break]. You shall not respond to your friend with false testimony.” (Shmos 20:13). They could all have been in the same pasuk. It could have been four different pesukim. However, the break separates them even as the pasuk combines them. They were four different utterances that are tied together. They are the paradigm of social construct. Taking a life that is not ones to take, or taking a spouse or an object, degrades and deconstructs social contracts of property rights. What is someone’s is theirs and not for another to take by force. Making oneself a false witness for or against a friend is also changing the rights of others through an outward action.

The songs of Az Yashir and Haazinu are beyond the scope of this piece.

Returning to our pasuk, the break serves a purpose to indicate time lapse and change of status. In Bamidbar Moshe used the word “traveled.” (Bamidbar 33:1). He was admiring where they came from. Here, Moshe is giving his final instructions. He is saying that they have to leave all of that travel in the past. Leave the Molten Calf, the complaining about food, the Korach rebellion, all in the past. “And then we passed from our kin Eisav.” Eisav was our kin. However, Edom did not allow Bnei Yisroel to pass through. (Ibid 20:18). Bnei Yisroel offered to pay for food and drink (ibid 20:19) but were again denied harshly (ibid 20:20). Bnei Yisroel passed from being their kin.

After that, Bnei Yisroel arrived at Mount Chor. (Ibid 20:22). That is where Aharon passed away. (Ibid 20:29). That was a great change in Bnei Yisroel. They lost a leader and they lost their friend of peace. They lost their direct spiritual connection to Hashem by losing their Kohen Gadol. He was a teacher of Torah and maker of peace. This was a huge loss for Bnei Yisroel. Soon they would lose Moshe, too. Moving on from Eisav was minor. Losing Aharon was the first step in the process of them becoming their own people, to live in their land under different leaders – some good and some bad. The break indicates the loss of their kin was connected to and triumphed by the loss of their holy Kohen Gadol. It was a bitter loss that they had to learn to live with and move on from.