

Parshat Ki-Tetze.

Chain Reaction

"For every action there is a reaction. Even the most minute movement creates some sort of reaction. When a butterfly flaps its wings, the wind it creates is released into the environment and develops a life of its own. It moves and continues to develop until a century or a millennium later it can develop into a storm, a tornado or a hurricane. Nothing gets lost."

Ilya Prigginne "Order Out of Chaos"

The range and variety of Parshat Ki-Tetze is astounding. I remember even as a ten-year-old studying chumash how I was attracted to this parsha as it lurched from one colourful topic from the next. Our parsha deals with both the mundane and the unusual, with standards of a civil society and with rape, mutilation, crime. We seem to dart from topic to topic: from war to marital breakdown, from housing to clothing, from weights and measures to Amalek, all with breathtaking speed. We have the story of the rebellious son - an adolescent who is sentenced to death - and then the daily law of tzitzit. We have laws of rape alongside the instruction to assist on a roadside breakdown. The diversity is striking. One feels that one is tasting from every far-flung corner of Torah as one traverses the lines of the Parsha.

Which of course leads us to that "structure" question. What is the basis of the order of Ki Teze? How do all the little details link together? What is the master plan?

At the outset, I must confess that I am going to disappoint you. I have - so far - been unsuccessful in finding a master-plan, an overview, or structure that will solve every problem of placing and organisation. In reality we are going to deal with Rashi's midrash-based approach and its theological underpinnings. However, before we look at Rashi, let us first examine an approach suggested by modern thinkers.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AS A MODEL

Rav Menachem Leibtag's in his internet shiur describes the entire structure of Sefer Devarim as relating to the Ten Commandments. (see the shiur [here](#).)

As we all know, the Ten Commandments contain a "God" section (the first 5 commandments) and a "society section" (the last 5). Within this context, R. Leibtag traces the pattern of ideas within Sefer Devarim and sees a correlation between Sefer Devarim and the flow of ideas within the Ten Commandments. In that model, he places Parshat Ki Tetze as parallel to the *Bein Adam Lechavero* laws - Murder, adultery, robbery, false evidence in court and envy - the societal laws which form the last five of the ten commandments.

Rav Leibtag pursues this view rigorously and in his Parsha shiur details the Ten Commandments framework and lists the various mitzvot of the parsha that fit into each "heading". Rav Leibtag's listings attempt to give us the feeling that the

Parsha is indeed organised under fixed headings. However in the final analysis, even Rav Leibtag gets stuck. He asserts

"Not all the mitzvot line up perfectly as toladot of each dibbur in order. Nonetheless almost all of the mitzvot of this Parsha are "toladot" of at least ONE of the last five "dibrot"."

So the method works, but it is a little shaky.

RAV DAVID TZVI HOFFMAN

We encounter the same difficulty when we read the commentary of Rav David Tzvi Hoffman who is a master at organization and structure in Chumash. Rav David Tzvi Hoffman (pg. 413) that whereas Parshat Shoftim dealt with national institutions, Parshat Ki Tetze focuses upon the life of the individual citizen. This is a point worth stressing. There is a definite shift towards the life of the individual, and a move away from the "collective" in this Parsha. Rav Hoffman presents his structure for the parsha:

21:10-23	Laws of family life
22:1-12	Laws of kindness between an individual and other human beings
22:13-23:9	Laws of the sanctity of marriage
23:10-end of ch.24	Laws of holiness and correct conduct
25:1-19	A general group of societal laws.

However, after presenting this general division, Rav Hoffman immediately asserts : "We have no clear guide to the correct order of these mitzvot." Interestingly, Rav Hoffman seems un-bothered by this. He gives two reasons for this:

First, he suggests, Parshat Ki-Tetze contains all the left-overs from the rest of the Torah. Ki Tetze is the last "mitzva" parsha in the Torah and to that end it contains all the mitzvot that Moshe had not yet transmitted or written. R. Hoffman feels that this goes some way to explaining the "disorganised" nature of the Parsha. The opportunity for Moshe Rabbeinu to transmit this varied selection of mitzvot is of the essence and thus the order is not of utmost importance.

This brings us to his second point. According to Rav Hoffman the relationship between the various mitzvot of the parsha need not follow a master plan giving organisation to the entire unit. Rather, the glue of Parshat Ki Tetze should be seen as "associative" - the free association of ideas flowing into one another. Since Moshe is moving from topic to topic, we should not expect a structural blueprint for the Parsha. At most we may look for a local connection between one particular detail and the next.

In this connection, Rav Hoffman quotes the Gemara in Yevamot 4a:

"Even according to the view that we pay no regard to the connections between adjacent parshiot, in Mishne Torah (Sefer Devarim), we do."

ASSOCIATIVE CONNECTIONS

If we abandon the quest to seek a master plan, and we move towards the associative connections, we see that many mepharshim dealt with the discreet junctures between one particular mitzva and the next. Anyone who studies Rashi will be familiar with the classic question formulation: "Lama nismecha ..." – "Why is Parsha X put next to Parsha Y?" This

is a question that is posed wherever Rashi cannot see how a particular detail fits into the general picture. In our parsha the order is so baffling that Rashi is joined by the Ibn Ezra [1] and others in asking this question with great frequency.

Rashi's answer to this question is a Midrash-based approach. Let us examine his opening comments on this topic. (To understand the Rashi's better, you would do well to skim the topics contained within the first section of the parsha - to at least 22:13):

"The Torah gave this mitzva (*Eshet Yefat To'ar*) to counter the Yetzer Hara; if God would not let her marry in a permitted manner, he would take her against the law. But he will end up hating her, as it states afterwards (verse 15) 'When a man has two wives ... one who he hates' and in the end she will bear him a son who will be a rebellious son (ben sorer u'moreh). This is the reason for the order of parshiot here " (Rashi to 21:11)

"When a man is sentenced to death: The order of parshiot here tells us that if his parents have pity upon him, he will end up in a world of crime and will perform acts which will have him sentenced to death." (Rashi 21:22)

"When you build a new house: If you keep the mitzva of sending away the mother bird, you will end up building a home and will fulfill the mitzva of building a railing for the roof of your house, for one mitzva drags another (mitzva gorreret mitzva). You will then come to a stage when you will have a vineyard, a field, nice clothes; hence the ordering of these parshiot." (Rashi 22:8)

These comments by Rashi are based on the Midrash Tanchuma. What is Rashi telling us? He states that the opening passages of our Parsha are organised in the form of a "chain reaction." If you do one bad thing, then that will lead you into another which will in turn lead you in an ongoing downward spiral. And then, we see the system in reverse. In the following verses we see, in contradistinction how one good deed, each mitzva, leads to yet another mitzva. Hence we have a "series" which can go in two directions.

This is the way that Rashi draws the strands of our parsha together. To his mind, we have lists of consequences; processes which are linked together by cause and effect. The strange connections of unrelated mitzvot are indeed deliberate. They are connected not by a common concept, a thematic grouping, but rather as series of links in a chain. Each parsha is the consequence of the previous parsha.

MITZVA GORRERET MITZVA

One of the earliest places in which this principle can be found is in the Mishnayot of Pirkei Avot (4:2):

"Ben Azzai said: Run to do even the slightest mitzva and flee from all sin, for one mitzva will lead to another mitzva and one sin to another sin; for the reward of a mitzva is a mitzva and the recompense of a sin is sin."

Now when I look at this Mishna, I see two clauses, two statements which each would appear to say a different thing,

each would seem to express a very different dynamic. Let me explain.

1. **"One mitzva will lead to another mitzva and one sin to another sin":** The Mishna explains why one should run to a light mitzva and flee from a light transgression. The reason is that one mitzva will lead to another etc. Here the idea would seem to be that the mitzvot organically lead into each other and the reverse for sin. The process here is most natural.

For example, an unaffiliated Jew at University decides to go to the Orthodox student Friday night program and finds that he gets into Jewish group of friends. He soon begins to attend shul regularly and soon finds himself attracted to the range of shiurim there etc. etc. Or, another example: I visit an elderly lady and the experience inspires me to the point whereby I care for her regularly. I end up with a career in caring for the elderly. Or in the reverse; a person tells a lie in a particular situation as a cover up. But then he gets caught in a more and more elaborate set of fabrications in order to continue the "cover up". Or the reverse student situation; a *shomer-Shabbat* Jewish student who seeks the true college experience and finds him or herself socialising with non-jewish friends. Unexpectedly, attending Friday night parties becomes something which is acceptable, and possibly down the line, other "unthinkable" red-lines become new sources of tension etc. etc.

2. But there is a second clause in the Mishna " **the reward of a mitzva is a mitzva and the recompense of a sin is sin.**" Here the process seems more artificial, more mechanical. Here is rewards, not natural consequences. God rewards my mitzva with a chance to do another. It is not my action which causes the next action. My action prompts God to move to the next stage, so to speak.

In the first model the process is organic, free-flowing. My next act of good/bad is an outgrowth, a natural result of the first. The consequences of my actions influence my future in one way or another. The environment that I create will determine a dynamic in my life that has potentially far-reaching effect.

In the second model, the good or bad that I experience is a card dealt to me by God. It is not an organic natural process. God will deliver opportunities to me. If I tend towards bad things, God will give me situations in which I am likely to do bad.

Rashi seems to combine the two approaches somehow. On the one hand, the process he describes of - *eshet yefat to'ar* - > the hated wife -> the rebellious son - would seem to be an organic process. It is a process whereby we can clearly see a natural cause and effect. The story of the *Eshet Yefat To'ar* describes a moment of unbridled passion that causes a man to choose a wife who, in the long run, is unsuited to him and his socio-cultural context. In the run of time he begins to resent her and distance himself from her and her offspring. His son from this marriage develops serious behavioural problems. Makes sense! And here, one thing definitely leads to the next. Here, *aveira gorreret avaira!*

However if we use Rashi's next example from our Parsha: I build a railing on the roof of my house. In response, God rewards me by giving me the wealth to buy a vineyard. If I keep the laws of the vineyard, then God will give me an added prize. He will make me wealthy enough to buy new clothing. Then if I keep sha'atnez etc. In this model, God is moving the person from stage 1 to stage 2. Building a railing for the roof of a house does not in by any natural process

precipitate the acquisition of a vineyard. This "chain" would appear to be the epitome of the model of *s'char mitzva mitzva* - that the reward of a mitzva is a mitzva.

CONSEQUENCES

When you think about it, this whole philosophy is rather frightening. The extent to which our actions will have influence is unnerving. Hirsch comments:

"Should you have an opportunity to perform a mitzva, do not let it pass by; perhaps the Mitzva seems so easy that you might think there would be ample opportunity to do it at other times Yet nothing should deter you from fulfilling it, for you cannot afford to overlook the consequences both seen and unseen of any mitzva. The good that you do will lead to more good, and every act of duty done bears its own reward. The knowledge that you have done the will for your father in heaven will bring you closer to Him; it will enrich your spirit with the happy awareness of having done the right thing, and reinforce your moral capacity for doing good. The reverse is true of sin. Do not underestimate the consequences of even the most trivial wrong." (Commentary to Avot)

Mitzva Gorreret mitzva is the realisation that my actions have consequences. Whether good or bad, my actions are not an isolated incident; here today, gone tomorrow. No! my actions leave an indelible mark upon my personality and upon my environment.

It would seem quite clear that Rashi - again reflecting ChaZal - applies this philosophy to the case of the rebellious son. We say that the rebellious son - the *Ben Sorer U'moreh* - is a kid who is rather wild. He is drinking and partying. So why kill him? He hasn't yet done anything that warrants the death penalty! He has done some petty-robbery from his parents. So lets work on it. Why kill him? Rashi (quoting the Gemara) tells us that he will end up as a hardcore criminal. He is judged in accordance with the (inevitable) end-point of his actions:

"let him die innocent and not guilty." (Rashi on 21:20)

This philosophy would seem to take a rather deterministic stance upon our future. Our future is inexorably fixed based upon our past actions.

ELUL THOUGHTS

In this vein, let us read together some comments from the Rambam's Hilchot Teshuva:

"Every individual has good traits and bad; credits and sins ... A person should view himself at all times as if he is 50:50 : half guilty and half innocent. And the whole world too should be viewed likewise : half guilty and half innocent, balanced with precision. Just one sinful act and that person, indeed the entire world, will be determined as guilty and sentenced to destruction. Just one mitzva and that individual along with the whole world will tip the balance towards the side of innocence , salvation and safety." [3:1,4]

Hmmm! The power of a single act!

Lest we become despondent, lest we feel that we are simply a product of our prior decisions, lest we feel that it is hopeless, that we will never change, the Rambam has something else to say:

"Everyone has the choice, the option. If one wishes to set one's path to good - to become a *tazddik* - the path is open. If one wishes to set ones path to bad - to become evil - that path is open too." [5:1]

We choose. We can, at any moment, re-set our path. But don't forget. Our choices have consequences. Always.

May we all have a productive Elul.

Shabbat shalom.

Footnotes

1. See for example: Ibn Ezra 21:10, 22:6, 22:8, 22:9, 22:12 & 13 . also 23:16, 23:18, 23:22, 23:25 and 24:6 You will see how the Ibn Ezra uses all his creativity to connect between the varied topics dealt with in the Parsha.

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