

The end of last week's parsha, Vayelech, we read that Moshe made Heaven and Earth his witnesses. And this week, Moshe addresses them. What does that mean that Heaven and Earth are witnesses? It means that Heaven and Earth put into effect the decrees of Hashem to deliver reward and punishment in this world.

יַעֲרֵף כַּמְטֵר לַקְּחֵי תֵזֶל כֶּטֶל אֶמְרָתִי כְשֶׁעִירָם עָלָי דְשָׂא וְכִרְבִּיבִים עָלָי עֲשׂוּבָה:

Moshe says his words are like dew and rain. Rashi explains that Torah brings life to the world. There are different attitudes people have to Torah and mitzvos. Some consider it a huge burden – learning, Shabbos, kashrus, etc. So many restrictions! Rashi tells us no. It is true life in this world. Nowadays we see the world descending into total insanity and chaos. Torah – with all the rules and restraints – keeps us sane and gives us life. Rashi says everyone is happy with the Torah. But wait, is that true? Aren't people always complaining about the Torah and grumbling about how hard it is to run a business according to Choshen Mishpot?

Rashi is telling us a fundamental idea. Keeping the Torah is the formula for leading a happy life in this world. This is the introduction to the tochocho.

כִּי שָׁם ה' אֶקְרָא הַבּוֹ גִּדְל לְאֵלֵינוּ:

This verse is the source for the view that birkas haTorah is a brocho de'oraisoh because the Torah is full of the Names of Hashem. You may think the Torah is a burden, but it is the only way to live a normal, happy life in this world. So the moment you start to learn Torah, you have to express your appreciation for the great gift Hashem has given us.

The Torah is not just a collection of wonderful ideas and philosophies. We have to keep it. Hashem made a bris – there are consequences of keeping and not keeping it.

הַצּוֹר תִּמְחִים פָּעֵלוּ כִּי כָל דְרָכָיו מִשְׁפָּט אֵל אֲמוֹנָה וְאִין עוֹל צְדִיק וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא:

This next verse tells us that even though the consequences of violating the Torah are horrible, all punishments are given with precision and perfect justice. Hashem doesn't just lash out in a fit of anger.

Rashi explains: How is there justice if we see tzaddikim suffer? The answer is that Hashem has infinite time to give each person exactly what he deserves. There is no outstanding debts at the end. Everything is planned out perfectly – all mitzvos are rewarded and all aveiros are punished – even if we can't see the justice in front of us now.

This connects to the verse at the end of Parshas Vo'eschanon. Wicked people have no place in olom haboh. But they can't have their mitzvos go unrewarded. That would be unjust. So these people will be given all their reward in this world, and all the punishment is saved for the next.

There is a famous story of Rav Aharon Kotler during the Second World War. He was fanatic about saving as many Jewish lives from the Nazis as he could. He found out that the Italian government was planning to hand over a number of Jews to the Nazis to be killed. He found out that the head of the Italian mafia in New York had great influence over the Italian government who might be able to help rescue the Jews. He set up a meeting with the crime boss and Rav Aharon tried to explain how he must help save those Jews. The boss wanted to know what he is going to get out of the favor. He wanted a blessing. He

told his translator to tell him exactly what the famous rabbi's blessing is. What can you bless a mafia boss with? That he will be successful in his robberies and murders? Rav Aharon blessed him that he will die a natural death in his own bed at home. The crime boss was so relieved to receive such a blessing. He didn't have to worry that he'll be gunned down in the street or be killed in prison! He made the deal and arranged to save the Jews in Italy.

The insight Rav Aharon had about the situation is clear. He knew this mafia boss was not going to get any place in olom haboh with all the evil that he was involved in. Yet, this evil person was going to perform a tremendous mitzvah of saving a few hundred Jewish lives and he must be rewarded appropriately. So Rav Aharon figured out the best way to be rewarded in this world for this great mitzvah.

For the people who don't belong in olom haboh, there is no way they can be rewarded for the good things they do in the next world. They need to be rewarded in this world. Everything is worked out to the finest detail.

שָׁחַת לוֹ לֹא בָּנִיו מוֹסֵם דּוֹר עֲקֹשׁ וּפְתִילֵת: הַלֵּה' תִּגְמְלוּ אֶת עַם נֶכֶד וְלֹא חָכֵם

If you think Hashem is unjustly punishing people, you should know that it is deserved – you are bringing tragedy on to yourself. Hashem is giving you a Torah and making a bris with you. He is giving you the keys to living a happy and fulfilled life in this world with infinite reward in the next, but you are not appreciating what you were given. This not wise. It is foolish.

הוּא אֲבִיךָ קִנְךָ הוּא עֲשֶׂךָ וְלִכְנֹךָ:

Hashem is your father. He acquired you. Rashi explains this verse to refer to Klal Yisroel. He made you a nation and gave you all kinds of excellent qualities.

The Sifri interprets this verse to refer to all human beings. Hashem and His beis din deliberated about every aspect of the human body. He built the body of a human being in the most perfect and efficient way. The Rambam gives an example of how precise the human body is. Hair on your head keeps growing and needs to be cut from time to time. But eyebrows are a different type of hair and have their specific function of stopping sweat. Eyelashes are different and have their specific function of blocking dust.

Hashem designed the human being in the best way down to the finest detail. He gave us a Torah in order to live the best life. According to the Sifri, you benefit from the absolute precision of the human body, and He gave you a way to live your life in the most fulfilling way.

Moshe Rabbeinu is saying Hashem created a perfect system, and the Heavens and Earth were created to enforce this system. They either cause prosperity or famine.

זָכַר יְמוֹת עוֹלָם בִּינֵי שְׁנוֹת דֹּר וָדֹר שָׂאֵל אֲבִיךָ וַיִּגְדֶּךָ זְקֵנִיךָ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָךְ:

What does it mean that Hashem acquired us? The posuk tells us to look at our long history. We have a mesorah. Ancient historians admitted Klal Yisroel were very precise with their history and their lineage. Other nations were very sloppy with theirs. Why? The idea of mesorah is very important to us. We cherish our history – who we are and where we came from.

I once tried to illustrate this amazing value we have for mesorah to a non-Jewish woman. I challenged her to name her grandparents' grandparents. I knew she couldn't. But I could rattle off the last ten generations of my ancestry without hesitation. She was dumbfounded. The whole nature of our mesorah is that we value who we are and how we became who we are. We know who are the kohanim and who are levi'im. I have a talmid who has a document tracing his lineage 2,500 years back to Ezra Hasofer. We know clearly where we come from.

בְּהַנְחִיל עָלֵינוּ גוֹיִם בְּהַפְרִיזוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם יִצְבּ גְּבֻלַת עַמִּים לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

The next posuk says the nations parallel the Jewish people. Hashem set down laws and rules as to how each nation functions. The Jews have a separate set of rules for how we function. Non-Jewish nations have culture and language and territory. But we only have the Torah. Hashem brought us into the desert and made us into a nation through kabbolas haTorah. Nothing else connects the Jewish people as a nation. Hashem is the only one who guides us and brings us through history.

וּמִצְאָהוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְבָּר וּבְתֵהוּ יֵלֵךְ יִשְׁמֹן יִסְבְּכָנְהוּ וּבִכּוֹנְהוּ יִצְרְנְהוּ כְּאִישׁוֹן עֵינוּ.  
כְּנֶשֶׁר יַעִיר קִנּוּ עַל גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחַף יִפְרֵשׁ כְּנֶפְיָיו יִקְהֶהוּ יִשְׁאַהוּ עַל אֲבָרְתּוֹ ה' כְּדָד  
יִנְחֶנּוּ וְאִין עִמּוֹ אֵל נֶכֶר.

Why did Hashem bring us to the desert and not any civilized land? Because then people might be led to think the Torah reflects a certain culture of a certain place. But the Torah is its own culture. It is not borrowing anything from any other land and culture. It is the only set of rules that Klal Yisroel live by.

וַיִּשְׁמֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבְעֹט שְׂמֹנֶת עֲבִיבֵת כְּשֵׁית וַיִּטֵּשׁ אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה וַיִּנְבֵּל צוּר יִשְׁעָתוֹ:

Then the posuk says Hashem took care of Klal Yisroel and made them successful. But in return, Klal Yisroel took credit for their success and removed Hashem from the picture. They started to worship idols and non-powerful gods. We fool ourselves into thinking these forces control the world. In response, Hashem troubles us with a non-nation.

הֵם קִנְאוּנֵי בְּלֹא אֵל כְּעִסוּנֵי בְּהַכְלִיָּהֶם וְאֵנִי אֲקִנְיָאִים בְּלֹא עִם בְּגוֹי נֶכֶל  
אֲכַעִיסֵם:

Hashem gave Klal Yisroel a tremendous gift of modern Eretz Yisroel. We succeeded in building a country which defied everyone's predictions. No-one could believe the odds we overcame in fighting war after war, and how much we accomplished in modernizing the country. But today, we can't even maintain control over small areas of territory and a handful of primitive Arabs. Why? Because when we were successful, we didn't recognize that Hashem was behind all our success. Israel has the most advanced weaponry and the best trained army. But we can't fight off arson attacks with balloons! It makes no sense. Our success at the beginning made no sense and our failures today make no sense. Hashem has sent us the Palestinian people who are not really a people to bring us all these difficulties.

Reading these pesukim before the Yom Hadin is very frightening. Seeing how they so accurately describe our world today – it is being turned upside-down. Iran is threatening our existence here in Eretz Yisroel with an atom bomb. Israeli intelligence predicts they might get one in 6-7 weeks. Who knows what will happen then? Coronavirus goes away and comes back with a vengeance. We have no clue what the near-future will bring.

The verse says someday Hashem will judge us and then comfort His people. At what point will this happen? When their incredible accomplishments are all collapsing and Klal Yisroel will finally wake up and realize there is nothing you can rely on. Not your economy, not your military, not your technology. The Mishna in Sotah says, when you finally give up on everything, and you finally rely on Hashem to save you, He will bring the geuloh.

Chazal tell us – and the Rambam paskens this opinion – that Klal Yisroel must first do teshuvoh before Moshiach can come. And if they don't do teshuvoh, Hashem will bring a king with such harsh decrees that we will have no choice but to do teshuvoh. Then Hashem will destroy all the nations who persecuted Klal Yisroel.

You don't have to add anything to the parsha. It says it all quite clearly. Hashem took this people out of Egypt and brought them into the desert and made them His special nation. They don't function like any other nation. They have no rules and no culture other than the Torah. But this gives us a great, happy life. It is the only sustainable way to function normally in this world and be happy.

People are very confused about what true happiness is.

Happiness isn't getting drunk at a bar. Happiness is having a deep sense of satisfaction with your life. Celebrities and super wealthy people are miserable. They have no stable family life. They have no friends or spouses who they can really trust. They try to escape the emptiness in their lives with drugs and alcohol. Some eventually commit suicide.

Hashem gave us a wonderful Torah, but to access its beauty, you have to keep it. It is not a theoretical system that will give life and happiness. Hashem runs our history around our keeping or not keeping the Torah. He takes care of us and makes us successful but then if we take credit for our success and forget Hashem, then Hashem pulls back. He will show us He is the only power in the world by taking away all the other sources of security that we make for ourselves. This forces us to wake up to the reality and then Moshiach comes.

This parsha ends with Moshe Rabbeinu warning Klal Yisroel to pay close attention to every single thing written in the Torah. There is nothing empty or frivolous about it. Hashem put so much value in learning and keeping the Torah. It is the key to life. Your life is not about sports or rock music or being fabulously wealthy. Torah is your life. Through learning you will grow old and prosper in Eretz Yisroel. When people demand that we stop learning in Yeshivos and go to the army to defend the country, they skip over this posuk. The reward for learning Torah is sustaining the ability to remain in this country.

Then the Torah finishes with Moshe giving his brochos to the shevatim and his death.

After describing all the ups and downs of Klal Yisroel's history with reward and punishment, this is the final message before Moshe's death: The necessity to learn the Torah with all its depth, to earn the most reward – make it the focus of your life, in order to remain in Eretz Yisroel.

Just go through the parsha with Rashi and a few statements of Chazal and you will understand who we are as a nation. It will help you be well prepared for the Yom Hadin. All these important ideas are right on the surface. We are a different nation of a different culture. He takes care of us and gave us a Torah which provides us with a stable, satisfying life here in Eretz Yisroel.