

PARASHAT EKEV

God's Covenant with Israel

By Rav Elchanan Samet

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(2) "And you shall know this day

that it is not with your children, who have not known and have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, His greatness and His strong hand and outstretched arm,

(3) and His signs and HIS DEEDS which HE DID in Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to all of his land,

(4) and which HE DID to the armies of Egypt, to their horses and to their chariots, when He poured down the waters of the Red Sea upon them when they pursued after you, and God destroyed them until this day.

(5) And what HE DID for you in the desert until you reached this place,

(6) and what HE DID to Datan and Aviram, sons of Eliav ben Reuven, when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households and their tents and whatever was at their feet, in the midst of all of Israel.

(7) Rather, it is your eyes that have seen all of great DEEDS of God which He DID."

a. Structure

In these verses, the Israelites who left Egypt and who have wandered for forty years in the desert are being told to take to heart all the miracles that God has performed for them from Egypt and until this point - miracles that they have seen with their own eyes. The root "a-s-h" (to do) appears seven times in this unit, serving as the "keyword." It appears five times in the form of a verb and twice as a noun, and all seven times the reference is to God. The unit is composed in "hammering" style - the repetition of a certain expression is pounded into the ears of the listener time after time, establishing a rhythm that highlights the central subject: "that He did..."

that He did... when He poured... that He did... that He did... when the earth opened... that He did..."

An examination of the appearances of the keyword reveals that the unit is constructed in chiasmic fashion, and that the parallel between the parts contains a certain development:

1-2 HIS DEEDS that HE DID in Egypt [your sons... did not see]

3 that HE DID to the army of Egypt...

when He poured... God destroyed them...

4 that HE DID for you in the desert

5 that HE DID to Datan and Aviram...

when the earth opened ... among all of Israel

6-7 All of God's great DEEDS that HE DID [Your eyes...]

The parallel between appearances 1-2 and 6-7 is syntactical: both speak of the DEEDS that God DID. Moreover, in both places the reference is not to a one-time act, like those mentioned in appearances 3 and 5, but rather to several acts. Furthermore, God's deeds in appearances 1-2 relate back to what was said previously - "His greatness" (verse 2), thereby corresponding to what we read in appearances 6-7 - "God's GREAT DEEDS that He did."

But there is also a development that takes place between these two pairs of verses. Appearances 6-7 contain a summarizing phrase that includes EVERYTHING that has been said thus far - "ALL of God's great deeds that He did." This includes both the deeds concerning Egypt (1-3) and those concerning Israel (4-5). In addition, appearances 6-7 are the only ones that relate to the positive clause of this lengthy statement: "Rather, it is your eyes that have seen...", while all the previous appearances relate to the preceding negative clause: "Your children, who have not known and have not seen...."

The parallel between appearances 3 and 5 is obvious: these two miracles were punishments that were meted out to wicked people. There is something similar in the nature of the punishment, too - disappearance into the depths. In 3, the Egyptians disappear under the crashing waves of the sea, while in 5, Datan and Aviram disappear into the depths of the earth. This similarity also explains why, of all miracles punishing sinners, the text chooses to record specifically the miracle of the earth swallowing Datan and Aviram.

The difference between these two appearances is likewise clear: 3 belongs to the group of miracles that took place in Egypt, while 5 belongs to the group that were performed for and among Israel.

At the center - appearance 4 - we find the verse, "which He did for you in the desert until you reached this place." Clearly, the reference here is to the ongoing miracles of the desert - the manna and the clouds of glory - by virtue of which the Israelites could live in the desert for forty years until reaching habitation. This deed of God is at the center, at the focus of all the deeds mentioned, for it is unique in two senses. Firstly, it is the only deed among those mentioned that expresses only God's lovingkindness and mercy. (Though the plagues in Egypt and the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea were certainly a kindness performed for Israel, they represented strict judgment for the Egyptians.) Secondly, the reference here is not to a one-time deed (such as those mentioned in appearances 3 and 5), nor to a string of miraculous deeds (as in appearances 1-2). Rather, it refers to miraculous deeds that went on for years and years, which made it possible for Bnei Yisrael to continue to exist in the impossible desert conditions.

b. Are God's deeds meant for this generation only? And was the covenant at Chorev made only with future generations?

The most obvious difficulty presented by this unit is the fact that it contradicts what we generally understand from the Torah. Here we are told that the Divine demand is aimed specifically at the generation that left Egypt and that is wandering in the desert, since "it is your eyes that have seen all of God's great deeds that He did" (as detailed in the preceding verses). However, the next generation, "who have not known and have not seen" God's deeds, are therefore not included in this demand. As Rashi explains, completing in his commentary the words missing from the text:

"'For it is not with your children' - that I am speaking now. For they could claim, 'We did not know or see all of this.'"

This is the opposite of what we are told in other places, namely, that the Divine command is addressed equally to all generations. What happened to the fathers is relevant to their children and grandchildren by virtue of the commandment that the fathers transmit what they witnessed, so that the history will be "acquired" by future generations as well. This is the foundation of the mitzva of "telling to one's children," which is repeated several times in the Torah (see especially 6:20-25), as well as the motif of the Haggada of Pesach: "In every generation one should regard himself as though he personally left Egypt."

It is not only in relation to the Exodus that we find the demand to transmit the historical experience from generation to generation, in order that future generations will identify with the event as though they themselves experienced it. We find the same idea with regard to the journey through the desert. The Torah explains the reason for the mitzva of sukka thus: "In order that your generations will know that I made Bnei Yisrael dwell in sukkot when I took them out of the land of Egypt" (Vayikra 23:43). Likewise, every Jew in future generations should regard

himself as having been part of the historical process as a whole, from Egyptian slavery until entering the land. This is expressed in the recitation made by every Israelite when he brings his first fruits as an offering to the Temple:

"I declare this day to God... that I HAVE COME to the land... and the Egyptians did evil to US... and WE cried out... and He took US out ... and He brought US to this place, and gave US this land...." (26:3-9)

One of the great historical events that the Torah commands us to transmit from generation to generation is the revelation at Sinai:

"But watch yourselves and guard your souls well, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen... AND YOU SHALL LET THEM BE KNOWN TO YOUR CHILDREN AND YOUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN - the day when you stood before the Lord your God at Chorev, when God told me, 'Gather all the nation to Me, that I may make them hear My words, that they shall learn to fear Me all the days... THAT THEY SHALL TEACH THEIR CHILDREN.'" (4:9-10)

In the introductory verses of the Ten Commandments, we find verses (5:2-3) establishing the relevance of the covenant at Sinai to future generations. This is formulated in such extreme form that our question turns entirely around:

"The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Chorev.

It is not with our fathers that God made this covenant, but with us - we, who are here today - all of us alive."

The expression, "with us, we who are here... all of us" seems to refer not only to Moshe's audience at that time - the generation that is about to enter the land - but also to future generations, whose feet never stood at Sinai. This must be so, for even many of Moshe's listeners at that time were not physically present at Sinai, but rather were born in the desert later on; many others were children at the time of the revelation. Therefore, this generation may be regarded as an example for all future generations.

The emphasis on the covenant belonging to all future generations is understandable, and we find a similar motif in another covenant - the covenant of the Plains of Moav:

"It is not with you alone that I make this covenant and this oath, but with those who are here with us, standing today before the Lord our God, as well as those who are not here today." (29:13-14)

What is the meaning of the words, "It is not with our fathers that God made this covenant?" How can the covenant of Sinai be denied to the fathers who left Egypt?

c. THE MEANING OF "ki im"

I would like to propose a single solution for the two contradictory difficulties presented above. First, let us turn our attention to a linguistic phenomenon commonly found in Tanakh, which is not sufficiently well known.

Several non-Jewish philologists have pointed out that "the Scriptures recognize an idiom... whereby if a negative sentence is followed by a contrasting positive statement, then the negation is not absolute, but rather only relative. Algebraically expressed: 'Not A but B' often means, in biblical language, 'not so much A as B'" (A. Vacari, *Biblica* 14, 1933; see also H. Kruse, *Vetus Testamentum* IV, 1954). This linguistic phenomenon was noted earlier by Chazal. The beraita (Berakhot 12b-13a; cf. Tosefta Berakhot 1:12) addresses a debate between Ben-Zoma and the Sages concerning the proper interpretation of the verse, "In order that you will remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life" (16:3). The Sages (in the Mishna, *ibid.*) explain:

"[If the text had merely said,] 'The days of your life,' [it would have referred only to] this world. 'All' [means] - including the messianic age."

Concerning this, the baraita teaches:

"Ben Zoma said to the Sages: Will the Exodus from Egypt then be remembered in the messianic age? Is it not already written, 'Behold, days will come, promises God, when people will no longer say, "Long live God Who brought Bnei Yisrael up from the land of Egypt," but rather ('ki im'), "Long live God Who raised up and brought the seed of the house of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands where I banished them" (Yirmiyahu 23:7-8)?

They answered him: [This means] not that the Exodus from Egypt will be uprooted from its place [in their consciousness], BUT RATHER THAT THE [redemption from] SUBJUGATION TO FOREIGN RULE WILL BE GREATER [in their eyes], WHILE THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT WILL BE SECONDARY TO IT. Likewise we learn, 'Your name will no longer be called Yaakov, but rather ("ki im") your name will be Yisrael' (Bereishit 35:10) - THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT [the name] 'YAAKOV' WILL BE UPROOTED, BUT RATHER THAT 'YISRAEL' WILL BE MORE IMPORTANT, AND 'YAAKOV' SECONDARY TO IT."

In responding to Ben Zoma, the Sages point out that the idiom, "not (or 'no longer') A, but rather (now) B," does not imply an absolute nullification of 'A' (as Ben Zoma had maintained), but rather implies that it will be SECONDARY to 'B'. The proof-text in Sefer Bereishit quoted by the Sages is an additional example of the idiom "not A but B" in this sense. In that instance, it can only be understood in the way suggested by the Sages, for the name Yaakov continues to be used in the Torah after this episode.

Later in the same sugya (13a), the following bariata appears:

"Bar Kappara taught: Anyone who calls Avraham 'Avram' transgresses a positive command, as it is written: 'Your name will be Avraham' (Bereishit 17:5).

Rabbi Eliezer taught: He transgresses a negative command, as it is written, 'Your name will no longer be called Avram' (ibid.)."

In what way is the change of Yaakov's name (containing no negative or positive command) different from the change of Avraham's name? The answer is that they differ in the nature of the linguistic connection between the negative and positive clauses of the sentence:

Yaakov:

(negative) "Your name shall no longer be called Yaakov

(positive) BUT RATHER ('ki im') Yisrael will be your name."

Avraham:

(negative) "And your name will no longer be called Avram;

(positive) your name will be (ve-haya) Avraham."

We learn from the above that the expression "ki im" (which indeed exists in BOTH of the verses quoted by the Sages in their debate against Ben Zoma) is the source of the Sages' interpretation of this idiom.

It would seem that Chazal's reading of this idiom differs from that of Vacari and Kruse. Kruse made no attempt to propose a logical linguistic explanation for the phenomenon that he noted. On the contrary, in the introduction to his article he insists that there is no need to subject any Hebrew expression to the disciplined logical analysis of Greco-Latin classicism:

"The Semite languages, with their paucity of forms, are comprised much more of psychological motifs than of logical motifs, and to understand them one requires much more intuitive empathy than analytical intellect."

Indeed, in the course of his article he addresses this idiom from a psychological perspective, and therefore fails to clarify the nature of the linguistic connection between the negative and positive clause.

From Chazal's teaching, it would seem that the idiom, "not A but ('ki im') B" is simply a conditional sentence: A is not true if B is not fulfilled. "Ki im" therefore means "ela im" - "unless." The purpose of the negative formulation of the first part of the sentence ('not A') is to highlight the necessity of making A conditional upon B: under no circumstances can A exist if B does not. Clearly, then, this expression is not meant to uproot A, but rather to lend prime importance to B. B is the main point, and A is conditional upon it and SECONDARY to it in importance.

All of the above is formulated quite clearly by the Malbim in his book of linguistic principles, "Ayelet Ha-Shachar," principles 229-230:

"Anywhere that we find a condition created by a negation of the precedent, the condition is indicated by the words 'ki im' (e.g., 'I shall not send you unless [ki im] you bless me')... For whenever a condition negates its precedent, such that the thing is not fulfilled unless this is true, we find the words, 'ki im.' For the word 'im' serves as the conditional. In most cases we may interpret it as meaning, 'This thing will not be so, unless this condition is fulfilled.' For instance, 'He shall not eat of the kodshim, unless (ki im) he has washed his flesh with water.' Even where this is not stated clearly, it is implicit. 'You will not be inherited by this one; rather (ki im) one who will emerge from your loins' (Bereishit 15:4) means that the inheritance will not be created in any other way."

d. Not a but ('ki') b

According to the above, an idiom in the form of 'not A but ('ki') B,' with the word 'im' missing, should be interpreted as an absolute negation of A in favor of B. The word 'ki' is usually translated in the sense of 'but' (rather); this is not a condition but a regular negation. Indeed, an examination of several examples confirms this. The Malbim, too, writes (ibid., principle 230):

"There is a difference between the word 'ki' (used in the sense of 'but rather') and the expression 'ki im' (and here he says what we quoted above, explaining the conditional use of 'ki im')... but the word 'ki' is noconnected to what precedes it (in a conditional connection; rather, it represents a negation of what precedes it)."

However, in several verses the idiom "not A but ('ki') B" appears in a context that demands an interpretation in accordance with Kruse and his predecessors: as a relative negation. Here are some examples:

Bereishit 45:8 - "It is not you who sent me here but ('ki') God."

Shemot 16:8 - "It is not we against whom you complain but ('ki') against God."

Shmuel I 8:7 - "For it is not you that they have rejected but ('ki') Me that they have rejected as king over them" (cf. the following verse: ... "They do this also to you.")

Tehillim 44:4 - "For it is not by their sword that they possessed the land, nor did their own arm save them, but ('ki') Your right hand and arm and the light of Your face, for You desired them."

Devarim 8:3 - "For man lives not by bread alone, but ('ki') by all that comes from God's mouth shall man live."

Shemuel I 18:25 - "The king desires no dowry but for ('ki') a hundred foreskins of the Pelishtim."

Tehillim 115:1 - "Not to us, God, not to us but ('ki') to Your Name give glory."

Divrei Ha-Yamim II 19:6 - "For it is not for man that you judge, but ('ki') for God."

Nevertheless, most often a "not A but ('ki') B" sentence should be interpreted as negating 'A' completely. We must therefore conclude that such a construction sometimes serves as a conditional - as though it were written in "ki im" form, and sometimes as a regular, complete negation. We distinguish between these two forms in accordance with the subject or with the context.

e. God's deeds AND His covenant with Israel

We can now return to the verses at the center of our discussion. Both belong to the contrasting form, "not A but ('ki') B," and in both cases it is difficult to regard the negation of 'A' as absolute, for the reasons already noted. Hence, I propose that both be considered to belong to the group of those verses that are to be interpreted as being conditional - "not A but [mainly or because of] ('ki im') B."

Let me now clarify the meaning of these verses (Devarim 5:2-3) in accordance with this hypothesis. The covenant of Sinai was made, FUNDAMENTALLY, with all generations, with the fathers simply representing all future generations. The meaning of the verse is therefore: the covenant was admittedly made with our fathers, but only as representatives of the (invisible) participants of all generations. The drawing up of the covenant with the fathers as a historical event is secondary to the essence of the covenant, which is made with all generations.

Now let us move to the unit in parashat Ekev (11:2-7). "It is not with your children..." means: I AM INDEED addressing your children, who did not see and have not known all of God's deeds, but I do this ONLY BECAUSE "your eyes have seen all of God's deeds...." In other words, "Not with your children... 'ki (im)' - unless - your eyes have seen." The fact that your eyes have seen God's deeds is the main point; since you have seen with your own eyes, it becomes possible to demand

also of your children. The list of God's deeds here is meaningful to the children only by virtue of the fathers, who witnessed it all first-hand and then transmitted their experiences onwards.

In this sense, the "covenant" discussed in parashat Vaetchanan is different from the "deeds of God" discussed in parashat Ekev. The covenant is essentially a super-historical event; the fact that it occurred in a certain generation is secondary to its primary significance. But God's deeds and miracles - in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the desert - are historical; the crux of their importance is for the generation in which they were performed, and only BY VIRTUE OF THAT GENERATION do they become an inheritance also for all future generations.

Thus, the two sections we have discussed come to obligate future generations in the same measure as the first generation, the only difference between them being their relative weight - which is more important and which is secondary. The reversal of the verses in this regard (i.e., the reversal of which is more important and which secondary) is a necessary conclusion based on the nature of the subjects discussed in each source.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish.

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