

# MESHECH CHOCHMAH

## Parshas Re'eh

### Prophecy and the Principle of Chazakah

כי יקום בקרבך נביא או חלם חלום... לאמר גלכה אחר אלהים אחרים... ונעבדם. לא תשמע אל דברי הנביא ההוא או אל חולם החלום ההוא

*If there should arise in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of dreams... saying, "Let us follow gods of others... and worship them." Do not listen to that prophet or to that dreamer of a dream. (13:1-4)*

#### THE CONCEPT AND ITS SOURCE IN THE TORAH

A basic operational principle of halachah which appears countless times throughout the Gemara is that of chazakah. This principle states that if it is not known whether the status of a person or thing has undergone change, we proceed on the assumption that there has been no change, until we discover otherwise. Although this is a Torah principle, we note that nowhere is there a pasuk that states "You shall rely on Chazakah," which means that a source in the Torah for chazakah will come in the form of identifying a case in the Torah which clearly and unmistakably relies on chazakah.

In this regard, the Meshech Chochmah cites the Tosefta in Maseches Gittin,<sup>1</sup> which derives this principle from the halachah of ir miklat (city of refuge), whereby if the accidental killer should leave the ir miklat, the goel hadam (relative of the victim) can kill him. Now, the killer is only required to stay in the ir miklat until the Kohen Gadol dies, after which point he may leave and the goel hadam can no longer kill him. However, that being the case, how can the goel hadam ever kill someone who leaves the ir miklat? Perhaps the Kohen Gadol has died in the meanwhile in which case the killer is free to leave and may not be harmed! Rather, says the Tosefta, we see from here, that the Torah allows the goel hadam to rely on the concept of chazakah which states that the Kohen Gadol is still alive, as he was last known to be.

<sup>1</sup> Perek 2, halachah 13.

## **AN ALTERNATIVE SOURCE – THE FALSE PROPHET?**

The Meshech Chochmah on our pasuk raises a most interesting question in the above-mentioned Tosefta; for, as he proceeds to demonstrate, our pasuk would seem to demonstrate the power of chazakah to an even greater degree, making it an arguably better source! The points which form the basis of this suggestion are as follows:

- ▶ There is a mitzvah to heed the instructions of a prophet who has been verified as such by providing a sign.
- ▶ Once he has been verified as a true prophet, he retains that status and does not need to re-establish his credentials each time he presents a new prophecy or instructions.
- ▶ If someone prophesies in Hashem's name that we should serve avodah zarah, even if he provides a sign, we are to disregard his words, for he is certainly a false prophet.

Based on the above, the question arises:

What if a prophet, whose credentials had already been established issued instructions in Hashem's name and, subsequent to that, became a false prophet? Are we required to continue to heed the instruction he gave in the interim stage? In other words, it is clear that at some stage he underwent a transition from true to false prophet; the question is when did that transition take place, prior to issuing the interim instructions or afterwards?

Commenting on the words "אוּ אֶל חוֹלָם הַחֵלֹם הָהוּא," the Sifrei<sup>2</sup> states: "ולא חשוד למפרע – He is not suspect retroactively." The Vilna Gaon explains this to mean that all instructions that predated this clearly false message are to continue to be heeded. This halachah, says Meshech Chochmah, is very clearly relying on the principle of chazakah, maintaining the established status of the prophet into a questionable time-period. Moreover, this halachah demonstrates the power of chazakah to a greater degree than the case of ir miklat.

- ▶ In the case of the ir miklat, we do not know whether there has been a change in the status of the Kohen Gadol (i.e., of being alive). In that case, chazakah says we assume there has been no change.
- ▶ In our case, we know that there has been a change (from true to false prophet)! However, even here, chazakah says that we are to assume that that change did not occur prior to the time when we became aware of it.

Based on the above, the Meshech Chochmah wonders why our case is not cited as a source for chazakah. Unusually, he leaves this question unanswered.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes,

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<sup>2</sup> Sec. 84.

<sup>3</sup> The question of the source for chazakah is also discussed in the Gemara (Chullin 10b-11a). At the end of his comment, the Meshech Chochmah makes reference to that sugya, noting that R Acha bar Yaakov there rejects the Gemara's proposed source (tzoraas of a house). Although the Gemara does not openly state which source Rav Acha does adopt, the Meshech Chochmah suggests that it

it is fascinating to see how, as R' Meir Simchah goes through the Chumash, he has an eye not only on answering questions that arise, but also on questioning answers that are provided, in the event that a better answer would seem to be forthcoming!

## — The Korban Omer and “The Morrow of the Shabbos” —

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצּוֹת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עֲצֹרֶת לֶה' אֲלֶקְיֹךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה

*For six days you shall eat matzos, and on the seventh day it shall be an assembly for Hashem, your God, you shall not perform any productive labor (16:8)*

### **A “SHABBOS PROHIBITION” ON YOM TOV?**

The Meshech Chochmah’s comment on this pasuk opens with his trademark attention to detail and nuance. Generally throughout Chumash, when dealing with Shabbos, the Torah forbids “melachah,” representing all thirty-nine forms of productive labor, while when referring to Yom Tov it uses the term “melechtes avodah,” which allows for melachos relating to direct preparation of food to be performed. In light of this, it is somewhat unusual that our pasuk, which is dealing with a Yom Tov (the seventh day of Pesach), nonetheless uses the term that relates to Shabbos (“melachah”)!

### **THE GEMARA’S PROOF FROM OUR PASUK REGARDING THE KORBAN OMER**

One of the major points of dispute between the Tziddokim (Sadducees) and the Chachamim related to the date of bringing the korban omer, a date which the Torah refers to as “ממחרת השבת – on the morrow of the Shabbos.”<sup>4</sup> The Oral Tradition informs us that this refers to the second day of Pesach, with the term “Shabbos” referring to the Yom Tov of the first day. The Tziddokim, however, who reject the Oral tradition, translate the word “Shabbos” as referring to the seventh day of the week, so that, according to them, the omer is always be brought on a Sunday.

Among the numerous refutations of this view recorded in the Gemara,<sup>5</sup> one of them comes from our pasuk: Why does it begin by saying that we should eat chametz for six days? Do we not know that Pesach is a seven-day festival? Rather, the six days in question are the days one can eat from the new crop, after offering the korban omer on the morning of the second day of Pesach. According to the Tziddokim, however, who maintain that the omer is offered on the Sunday following the first Shabbos of Pesach, this would rarely leave six days of the new crop within Pesach. Indeed, it could sometimes involve no such days, for example, if the first day of Pesach fell on Sunday.

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is, in fact, from our pasuk.

4 Vayikra 23:15.

5 See Menachos 66a.

### **MESHECH CHOCHMAH: TIME-STAMPING THE PROOF**

The Meshech Chochmah notes that there is a potential response to this refutation, albeit somewhat forced; for perhaps the pasuk is referring specifically to a situation where the first day of Pesach is in fact a Shabbos, with the second day being a Sunday. This would leave the last six days as being able to eat from the new crop even according to the Tziddokim. It is for purposes of negating such a response that the pasuk concludes by forbidding “melachah” on the seventh day, a term which we noted applies to Shabbos. Through this, the pasuk is indicating that it is referring to a situation where the seventh day of Pesach is in fact a Shabbos, which means the first day was a Sunday! In such a situation, to nonetheless also specify that matzah from the new crop may be eaten on the last six days makes it clear that the day on which we are to bring the omer is the second day of Pesach – even though it is not a Sunday!

Once again, having seen how the Gemara illuminates the pasuk, the Meshech Chochmah brings us back to the pasuk, showing how it illuminates the Gemara!