

## **The Postmodern Piety of Rav Shagar (session 3)**

### **Covenantal Faith**

#### **1. Rav Shagar, Panecha Avakesh, 27-28**

In this parsha there is an additional matter- “to enter into the brit of the Lord your God.” It is necessary to remember that we have a brit with God. When we think about this, it is an astonishing idea: we made a brit with God. What is a brit? What is the meaning of making a brit? If we take the brit of marriage as an example, according to the Admor HaZaken, the two sides are joined together and this is what it means to make a brit:

“Two who are beloved to each other make a brit between them so their love will not come to an end, for if that which the love was dependent on would be forever, there would be no need to make a brit between them. Rather, it is because they fear that maybe that which is the cause of their love will end and so too will their love... Through making a brit their love will be eternal and never falter and no internal or external obstacle will separate them.

Because they make between themselves such a strong and mighty connection, they become inextricably connected in their love by a wondrous connection that transcends reason and logic, for even though reason and logic may dictate that their love should end or turn into hatred, even so, because of the brit they have made, their love must exist forever. Therefore this love and mighty connection covers all sins. Why is this the case? Because they have come together in brit and connection, it is as if they have become one flesh, and just as one is not able to stop loving themselves, so too they cannot stop loving their beloved.

Therefore, the Torah uses a language of “cutting a brit” as is written: “He cut the calf... and he passed between the parts.” It was as if to say that the two of them have passed through one body to become a unity.” (Likkutei Torah, Netzavim 2)

#### **2. Rav Shagar, Be-Torato Yehege: Limud Torah ke-Bakashat Elokim, 25-27**

The Torah as brit: Approach and Form of Learning

God only made a brit with Israel over those matters that were oral. (i.e. the Oral Torah)

The study of Torah is not a practice of attaining knowledge. The study of Torah is a way of life for the Jewish people, and more than this, it is the framework of the brit between the Holy One blessed be He and the Jew. Our fundamental assumption is that the Torah is the “book of the brit” and this brit means that the central function of the Torah for us is attachment, the intimacy that a Jew experiences in their relationship to God when studying Torah. If so, the study of Torah and engaging with it is basic condition of Judaism...

The oral Torah that is in the language of the rabbis “mystery” is the intimacy between God and the Jewish people, and it is not for nothing that the rabbis expressed in many midrashim their love of Torah in the metaphors taken from marital life...

In the marital context, the couple feels that they are not able to focus their vision on each other. Rather, they glance all the time here and there due to foreign stimulation. The grass of the neighbor always appears greener. In extreme circumstances, the alienation causes a lack of ability to connect at all. This kind of focus is an essential condition for the study of Torah. “The one who betrays a woman lacks a heart.” Reish Lakish says: This is one who only studies Torah occasionally. The inability to persist (le-hatmid), to dedicate oneself to the study of Torah often expresses a multi-dimensional problem that will appear in other areas.

### 3. Rav Shagar, Be-Torato Yehege, 44

I once asked Rabbi Aryeh Bina, head of the Nativ Meir yeshiva and a student of the Mir yeshiva, until when should one study in the yeshiva, and he answered: until that stage when it is impossible without studying, until studying becomes an essential and necessary part of the learner's reality like food and sleep. As a young man, his answer caused me disappointment, which came from a misunderstanding of his answer. I was expecting something much greater. Was it possible? To study like eating and sleeping? That's all? After that I realized that this is indeed the goal - making the Torah part of the primary natural fabric of our lives, our culture, our spiritual existence; to our natural interest. In this deep assimilation of the Torah into natural existence lies the secret of infinite dedication and personal involvement... Like faith, Torah study of this kind also fades in the face of a demand for external reflection. Its strength lies in its unconscious flow, in its self-evidentness

### 4. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 61b

The Sages taught: One time, after the bar Kokhba rebellion, the evil empire of Rome decreed that Israel may not engage in the study and practice of Torah. Pappos ben Yehuda came and found Rabbi Akiva, who was convening assemblies in public and engaging in Torah study. Pappos said to him: Akiva, are you not afraid of the empire? Rabbi Akiva answered him: I will relate a parable. To what can this be compared? It is like a fox walking along a riverbank when he sees fish gathering and fleeing from place to place. The fox said to them: From what are you fleeing? They said to him: We are fleeing from the nets that people cast upon us. He said to them: Do you wish to come up onto dry land, and we will reside together just as my ancestors resided with your ancestors? The fish said to him: You are the one of whom they say, he is the cleverest of animals? You are not clever; you are a fool. If we are afraid in the water, our natural habitat which gives us life, then in a habitat that causes our death, all the more so. The moral is: So too, we Jews, now that we sit and engage in Torah study, about which it is written: "For that is your life, and the length of your days" (Deuteronomy 30:20), we fear the empire to this extent; if we proceed to sit idle from its study, as its abandonment is the habitat that causes our death, all the more so will we fear the empire.

### 5. Rav Shagar, Faith Shattered and Restored, 53, 55-56

It follows that the difference between the various approaches will relate to the difficult point: the compulsiveness and neurosis that, as noted, create the halakhic taboo and are internalized by halakha itself. Only by positing this difficult point can halakha impart belief in a Torah from heaven that does not remain in heaven, implying the absoluteness of halakha. That is the mystical aspect of it... The test is the totality of one's dedication.

ה [ג] וכיצד היא האהבה הראויה: הוא שיצא את ה' אהבה גדולה יתרה רבה, ענה עד מאוד, עד שתהא נפשו קשורה באהבת ה', ונמצא שוגה בה תמיד--כאלו חולי האהבה, שאין דעתם פנויה מאהבת אותה אשה שוהה בה תמיד, בין בשכבו בין בקומו, בין בשעה שהוא אוכל ושותה. יתר מזה תהיה אהבת ה' בלב אהביו, ושוגים בה תמיד, כמו שצוננו, "ככל-לכבד ובכל-נפשו" (דברים ו, דברים י, יב; דברים ל, ו). והוא ששלמה אומר דרך משל, "כי-חולת אהבה, אני" (שיר השירים ב, ה); וכל שיר השירים משל הוא לענין זה.

### 6. Rambam, Laws of Teshuvah, 10:3

What is the proper [degree] of love? That a person should love God with a very great and exceeding love until his soul is bound up in the love of God. Thus, he will always be obsessed with this love as if he is lovesick. [A lovesick person's] thoughts are never diverted from the love of that woman. He is always obsessed with her; when he sits down, when he gets up, when he eats and drinks. With an even greater [love], the love for God should be [implanted] in the hearts of those who love Him and are obsessed with Him at all times as we are commanded [Deuteronomy 6:5: "Love God...] with all your heart and with all soul." This concept was implied by Solomon [Song of Songs 2:5] when he stated, as a metaphor: "I am lovesick." [Indeed,] the totality of the Song of Songs is a parable describing [this love].

**7. Zohar, Vayechi 245a**

“Passion is as mighty as Sheol” (Song of Songs 8:6). If one loves, but without passion, the love is not real love. Only if one has passion can the love be complete. From here, we learn that a man must be passionate for his wife in order that he can connect to her with complete love, and because of this he will not place his eyes on another woman.

**8. Rav Shagar, Bayom Hahu, 107-108**

I admit and confess, I assume there are those whose spiritual level is greater than mine and they do not get stuck in the shadow and in the questions. But faith, in my eyes, cannot be derived from the repression and removal of questions, rather “I delight to sit in his shade” (Shir HaShirim 2:3). As it says in the midrash:

“Like an apple tree among trees of the forest,” (Shir HaShirim 2:3). R’ Huna and R’ Acha in the name of R’ Yossi ben Zimra said: With the apple tree, in which everyone flees from it in the time of heat, why is this? Because it has no shade to sit in. So too the nations of the world flee from dwelling in the shade of Holy One Blessed Be He on the day of the giving of the Torah. Is this true also about Israel? The Torah says: “I delight to sit in his shade.” I delight in it and dwell in it. It is I who delight in it and not the nations.”

Just as the apple tree does not provide shade, so too it is with the Holy One Blessed Be He.