

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Eikev 5783

D. Mordechai Schlachter

Moshe continues to caution Bnei Yisroel on keeping Hashem's Torah.

וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת-כָּל-הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא-תַחֲוֶס עֵינֶיךָ עֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹד אֶת-
אֱלֹהֵיהֶם כִּי-מוֹקֵשׁ הוּא לְךָ:

“And you shall eat of all the nations that Hashem, your Lord, gives to you. Do not allow your eyes to pity them and you shall not serve their deities, because they are pitfalls for you.” (Devarim 7:16).

This pasuk uses a different phrase for destroy or consume. “And you shall consume” refers always to eating. There is not a single other place in Tanach where it means to devour in a conquering way. In English the term can be used to devour or to consumer. Then those words are synonyms with destroy and defeat. However, in the Torah's Hebrew אָכַל means to eat. If it means to eat, what does the pasuk mean? How can one eat a nation? Also, if it says to consume/destroy/devour the enemies then what is the rest of the pasuk about not taking pity on them and not serving their idols referring to? Surely, their idols will be destroyed because serving an idol is acting subservient to it but Bnei Yisroel is already told to destroy the enemy and be dominant. Further, regarding not taking pity, the pasuk said “you will devour them.” Devouring them means taking no pity. Why then does the pasuk say not to take pity on something that is already a foregone conclusion?

The pasuk uses the word וְאָכַלְתָּ which means to eat. There are better words to use if the pasuk meant destroy and devour. Just a few pesukim later Moshe says, וְנָתַן מַלְכֵיהֶם בְּיָדְךָ וְהָאֲבֹדֹת אֶת-שְׁמֵם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא-יִתְיַצֵּב אִישׁ בְּפָנֶיךָ עַד הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲתָם: “And Hashem will give you their kings in your hand, and you will destroy their names from under the heavens. No man shall stand before you, until you have wiped them out.” (Ibid 7:24). Here, the pasuk uses the words destroy and wipe out which are much more in line with physical conquering. Contrastingly, the word וְאָכַלְתָּ means to consume food. As Moshe says in this very same parsha, וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וְגִבְרַתְךָ, “And you will eat and be satisfied and you shall bless.” (Ibid 8:10). Earlier, too, וְיִתִּים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-הֻצְבְּתָם בְּרָמִים, “And the houses will be filled with good things that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant, and you will eat and be satisfied.” (Ibid 6:11).

Accordingly, the word does not mean to destroy an enemy, at least not literally. The wording may conjure up the image of Bnei Yisroel being a big monster eating up all its enemies. However, the Torah is not talking in metaphor here. When Bnei Yisroel will follow the Torah then it will be successful against its enemies. Therefore, this wording is not imagery but it is literal. How does one eat all the nations that Hashem gives it?

אֲכָל always qualifies a noun. It is not talking about eating the actual people. It means to eat up what the nation produces. Therefore, this pasuk is saying that Bnei Yisroel will eat them out of house and home. Eat their food and control them. This is exactly how Yoseph made Mitzrayim powerful. During the years of plenty he bought up all the food from Mitzrayim and the surrounding countries. (Bereishis 41:49). When the famine years set in only Mitzrayim had food and Yoseph controlled that distribution. (Ibid 41:57). The people ended up selling all their possessions and themselves to Mitzrayim for food. (Ibid 47:23). He controlled all the land. (Ibid 47:20). He also was able to remove and relocate the populace. (Ibid 47:21). As Moshe said, Bnei Yisroel will benefit from much food and water that it did not work for, plant, or harvest. (Devarim 6:11). Controlling the food is controlling the lands and the people. Hashem, here, was promising that Bnei Yisroel would control all the food. This is a much easier way to conquer a territory.

Since our pasuk does not mean to destroy the enemy, the Torah had to add that Hashem will have to bring a plague upon them. (Ibid 7:20). The plague is necessary to destroy them because our pasuk is not referring to physical annihilation. Lest Bnei Yisroel fear the nation still existing, albeit under their control, the Torah says that Bnei Yisroel should remember what Hashem did to Pharaoh and the Land of Mitzrayim. (Ibid 7:18). Hashem already gave one nation the ability to control the surrounding countries by controlling the food – Mitzrayim. Hashem also did wonders and brought destruction to even the most powerful of countries so Bnei Yisroel need not worry. Hashem will take care of their enemies. Bnei Yisroel only needs to concern itself with following the Torah.

In this context read our pasuk. “And you will eat up all the nations.” You will control their food supply. Also, to the extend the food is kosher, you will eat of their foods. You will learn their cuisine and eat their delicacies. You will eat their grain, drink of their vineyards, anoint with their olives, eat their cattle.

“That Hashem, your Lord, gives to you.” It is Hashem giving it to you. All belongs to Hashem so Hashem is now giving the possession to Bnei Yisroel.

“Do not allow your eyes to pity them.” They will not be devoured and still be around. They will be your neighbors and they may live among you, until Hashem utterly destroys them. For that time period do not pity them. Stay in control, stay dominant, and keep taxing them of their possessions. Own them like a victor.

“Do not serve their deities.” Elokim also means judges. Do not serve their idols, obviously. Also, do not engage them in business or follow their laws. Do not go to their courts. Owning them means you shall make them comply with the Torah’s laws. Bnei Yisroel should not patronize their businesses on their terms or follow their legal standards or proceedings. There are no fairer laws then in the Torah.

“Because it is a pitfall to you.” Once Bnei Yisroel lets loose their position of dominance and control – by taking pity or even following or adapting foreign laws, even being tolerant – that is when they can lose their grip on the Torah. It appears to be the ‘liberal’ or nice thing or neighborly thing to do. However, such tolerance will only lead to forsaking the Torah.