

# Dimensions in Chumash

## Parshas Terumah

A Point of Order: The Principle of *Ain Mukdam u'Meuchar baTorah*.

### Background: The Mishkan and the Chet Ha'egel

The final five parshiyos of Chumash Shemos are devoted, in the main, to matters relating to the Mishkan and the *bigdei kehunah* (priestly garments), with the notable exception of the *chet ha'egel* (sin of the Golden Calf), which features in the middle. The basic breakdown is as follows:

- **Parshas Terumah** – Hashem's command regarding the Mishkan and its vessels.
- **Parshas Tetzaveh** – Hashem's command regarding the *bigdei kehunah*
- **Parshas Ki Tisa** – The *chet ha'egel*.
- **Parshas Vayakhel** – The Torah's description of the construction of the Mishkan.
- **Parshas Pekudei** – The Torah's description of the manufacture of the *bigdei kehunah*.

Rashi<sup>1</sup> states that although the *chet ha'egel* is written in the Torah *after* the commands regarding Mishkan etc., it actually occurred beforehand. In stating this, Rashi is invoking the principle of *אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה* – There is no “earlier” or “later” in the Torah. In other words, the order in which events are *written* in the Torah does not necessarily reflect the order in which they *occurred historically*.

Where does this idea come from?

### The Source: Counting Israel, the Korban Pesach – and Chumash Bamidbar

The idea that an event which happened earlier in history can be written later in the Torah is discussed in the Gemara,<sup>2</sup> based on a case where the Torah itself explicitly states that this was the case:

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<sup>1</sup> Shemos 31:18.

<sup>2</sup> Pesachim 6b.

- The **opening chapter** of Chumash Bamidbar deals with the counting of the Bnei Yisrael, which the verse<sup>3</sup> describes as having happened in the **second month** of the second year.
- **Chapter nine** of Bamidbar discusses the korban Pesach that was offered in the Wilderness, specifying that this instruction was given in the **first month** of the second year!<sup>4</sup>

The Gemara cites these two verses and concludes with the formulation: We see from here that there is no “earlier” and “later” in the Torah.

This principle is applied by Rashi several times throughout his commentary on the Torah,<sup>5</sup> with our situation being a classic example: Although the *chet ha’egel* is discussed in the “middle” parsha of Ki Tisa, it occurred *before* the events discussed in the prior parshiyos of Terumah and Tetzaveh.<sup>6</sup>

## Understanding Rashi

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<sup>3</sup> Bamidbar 1:1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 9:1.

<sup>5</sup> Actually, in one respect, Rashi applies the principle even beyond the parameters set forth by the Gemara. The Gemara (Pesachim ibid.) states that the principle of *אין מוקדם ומאוחר* can only be invoked with respect to two sections of the Torah, but not within one section. Rashi, however, does apply this principle even within one section (see e.g. Bereishis 18:3 s.v. *vayomar* and Shemos 4:20 s.v. *vayashav*). In this, Rashi seems to be more basing himself on the Yerushalmi (Shekalim 6:1) which invokes the principle of *אין מוקדם ומאוחר* with regards to the verse in our Parsha (25:21) that describes the placing of the *kapores* (covering) on the lid of the Aron before mentioning the placing of the *luchos* inside, even though the latter would happen beforehand. See also Tosafos Chullin 95b s.v. *ke’Eliezer*.

<sup>6</sup> This is in contrast to the Ramban, who understands that the order these events are written reflects the order in which they occurred:

1) Hashem initially commanded Moshe regarding the Mishkan and *bigdei kehunah* during the forty days he was on Mount Sinai (Terumah and Tetzaveh).

2) While Moshe was on the mountain, the people made the *egel*, at which point the project of constructing the Mishkan was “shelved” until the people had recovered from that sin (Ki Tisa).

3) Once Bnei Yisrael had received atonement for the *egel* (on Yom Kippur) Moshe was then able to tell them about the Mishkan, which they proceeded to build (Vayakhel and Pekudei).

This position reflects the Ramban’s approach generally regarding the principle of *אין מוקדם ומאוחר*, which he sets forth elsewhere in his commentary (Vayikra 8:2 and Bamidbar 16:1), and which is very restricted. According to the Ramban, this principle can only be invoked if *the Torah itself specifies* – either through date or location – that the later event happened earlier. In this regard, Rashi is more liberal in his understanding of the parameters which allow for applying this principle. Interestingly, the most frequent application of *אין מוקדם ומאוחר* is found in the commentary of the Ibn Ezra, see e.g. Bereishis 12:1 and Bamidbar 16:1.

Having seen the basis of the principle, we now proceed to ask: Why did Rashi invoke it *here*? In other words, Rashi must have had reason to conclude that the parshiyos of the Mishkan and the *chet ha'egel* are not in chronological order. What would that reason be?<sup>7</sup>

R' Leib Heyman<sup>8</sup> offers a fascinating suggestion. Rashi notes that prior to the *chet ha'egel*, the *avodah* of korbanos was performed by the *bechorim* (firstborn), while the introduction of Kohanim from the tribe of Levi specifically to perform the *avodah* was a result of the *chet ha'egel*.<sup>9</sup> Having said this, we note that next week's parsha, Tetzaveh, already records the command to initiate Aharon and his sons into the Avodah – an event which did not occur until after the *egel*! This, says R' Heyman, is what led Rashi to conclude that these parshiyos were not written in chronological order.

A thought-provoking point, indeed!

### **Understanding the Principle – General and Specific Approaches**

Having discussed the circumstances which might lead us to invoke the principle of *אין מוקדם ומאוחר*, we come now to consider the principle itself: *Why*, if we may ask, does the Torah not always preserve the chronological sequence in its presentation of events? What is behind this idea?

It is possible to identify two different approaches to this question:

**General Approach** – The Sefer Hachinuch, in his Introduction to Chumash Devarim, writes that in addition to teaching us how to perform mitzvos, the Torah includes and alludes to all forms of wisdom, which can be gleaned from it in many different ways. Moreover, says the Sefer Hachinuch, the inclusion of these other aspects of wisdom can sometimes result in the order of the parshiyos not paralleling the order in which the events occurred, since including those additional forms of wisdom contained within the Torah may take precedence over presenting the chronological order.

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<sup>7</sup> See Commentaries of Mizrachi and Gur Aryeh to Rashi loc. cit. who discuss this question.

<sup>8</sup> Chikrei Lev, Parshas Terumah

<sup>9</sup> See Rashi to Shemos 24:5 and Bamidbar 3:39.

This is a profound and stunning idea.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, we will appreciate that it is one that potentially explains all cases where we see **מִן מִקְדָּם וּמְאַחֵר** in action; whereby in all of those cases we can say that the Torah set aside the chronological order for purposes of teaching some additional point of wisdom which required a different order.

**Specific Approach** – From Rashi, however, we can see that the answer to why a topic may have been presented out of chronological order will rest in a concern *relating to that topic itself*. Thus for example, while discussing the cases in Chumash Bamidbar which are presented out of order (Counting the people before korban Pesach), Rashi raises the question as to why in fact, Korban Pesach was not discussed first, and answers that it is because it reflects negatively on the Bnei Yisrael, since throughout all the forty years they were in the wilderness, they only offered this one korban Pesach.<sup>11</sup>

As such, with regards to our situation, we ask: What is it *about the Mishkan and the Chet Ha'egel* which would lead to them not being discussed in the order in which they occurred?

Now, we could answer simply that it is similar to the Pesach case: We prefer to mention something positive, like the Mishkan, before something negative, like the Chet Ha'egel. However, it appears that there is a deeper point here.

### **Forget Me Not**

The Gemara<sup>12</sup> recounts a most unusual exchange between Hashem and the People of Israel:

*Israel says: Seeing as there is no forgetting before You, perhaps You will not forget the episode with the egel?*

*Hashem responds: I will [nevertheless] forget the Egel.*

*Israel then says: Seeing as You are prepared to forget the Egel, perhaps You will also forget the events of Sinai?*

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<sup>10</sup> See similarly Responsa Radvaz sec. 1,086 and Shelah Hakadosh, Shavuot, Torah Ohr sec. 90.

<sup>11</sup> Rashi to Bamidbar 9:1.

<sup>12</sup> Berachos 32b.

*Hashem responds: I will not forget Sinai.*

What is the meaning of this exchange?

- How are the ideas of Hashem being prepared to forget the *egel* and potentially forgetting Sinai linked to each other?
- More specifically, what is the meaning of Hashem “forgetting” either of those events, seeing as Hashem is All-Knowing and does not forget anything?

The Maharal<sup>13</sup> explains. The Jewish people were concerned that the fact that they could have erred with the *egel* so soon after having received the Torah was indicative of an essential disconnect between them and Hashem. If so, then Hashem would never forget the *egel*, for it would always represent something about their essential makeup. To this, Hashem responded that He *would* “forget” the *egel*, that is to say, He would not associate it with them in an essential manner, for it did not express their true nature. For in truth, the making the Egel was not the product of any such disconnect. Rather, it was a result of the vestiges of Egyptian culture to which they had been exposed for so many years, and from which they had only recently been removed.

At this stage, the concern of the Jewish people now becomes reversed. If their actions with the *egel* during this formative period were not necessarily an expression of their essential nature, perhaps their experiences at Sinai did not reflect their true essence either – and were thus likewise prone to being “forgotten” by Hashem! To this Hashem responds that he would not forget Sinai, as the level attained by Israel at that time really was an expression of their true nature.

### **Between History and Destiny**

With the above in mind, we will appreciate that the order of events as presented by the Torah in these parshiyos can express one of two truths:

1. The truth about the order of events.
2. The truth about the Jewish people.

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<sup>13</sup> Ner Mitzvah.

Now we can understand why the Torah reversed the order of events regarding the Mishkan and the *egel*. Had it presented them in the order they occurred, this may have been accurate regarding the events themselves but would have belied the truth about what they say about the Jewish people. To this end, the Mishkan is presented first, expressing thereby the *fundamental truth* that the Jewish people have an essential connection with the Divine Presence represented by the Mishkan, while they have no such connection with the prior episode of the *egel*. And while it may be true that those who don't learn from history are destined to repeat it, those who *mis*-learn what history says about them risk compromising their destiny itself.

This is the lesson from the Torah's use of **אין מוקדם ומאוחר** in our parsha.