

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת אחרי מות-קדושים

ושמרתם את חקתי ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אתם האדם וחי בהם אני ה'
“You shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live - I am Hashem” (18:5)

The posuk tells us that we should live by the mitzvos. This means that the Torah is not meant to be followed only when convenient or whenever one feels like it. It is a guide for every facet of our lives. We do not merely follow the Torah; we live by the Torah. The Torah guides us as to how Hashem wants us to act in every situation. In Parshas Bechukosai, the Or HaChayim writes that every action which one takes, regardless of the surroundings, must be viewed through the lens of Torah and mitzvos. The posuk in Mishlei says: “בכל דרכך דעהו,” “Know Him in all your ways.” Everything that we do must be with the intention of furthering our service of Hashem. One must go everywhere with Hashem’s decrees. There is an entire Siman in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 231) that is devoted to how one should go through the day with all of his activities dedicated to the service of Hashem. Even the seemingly mundane facets of our life can be raised to a higher, spiritual level if they are approached with the proper mindset. Our religion is not limited to the synagogue or to the home. The Torah encompasses our entire life and everything that we do must be with the Torah in mind.

Another explanation of this posuk, as explained by Rashi, is that one earns life in the next world, as well as in this world, through the Torah. One must understand that there is an eternal life as well. Doing the mitzvos is rewarded with life in this world and the next. Rashbam writes that the the opposite is also true. If one does not follow the mitzvos, then one loses the opportunity for life in the next world. In Maariv, we say "For [the mitzvos] are our lives and the length of our days." The Or HaChayim explains that mitzvos are our source of life in this world and they also lengthen our days, a reference to the World to Come.

דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל ואמרת אלהם קדשים תהיו כי קדוש אני ה' אלקיכם
“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem, your G-d” (19:2)

The command to become holy was given to every member of the Jewish people. Many people mistakenly believe that they are incapable of becoming holy. However, the Torah tells us that every person has this ability. We just have to know ourselves and learn how to tap into that ability. The Rambam writes that everyone is born with the capability to reach the level of Moshe Rabbeinu. It is just a matter of putting in the effort and making the right choices. Hashem does not ask anything of us that we cannot do and so we must work on attaining a level of holiness, each person on his own level.

Chazal tell us that the mitzvos of Parshas Kedoshim were said to all the Jewish people together: men, women and children. This teaches us that we must also train our children for this calling to become holy. The best way is to start early. The Sifsei Kohen writes that this message is conveyed by the next posuk: **איש אמו ואביו תיראו**, "a man should fear his father and mother." This posuk can also be read as "a man, his father and mother should be frightened." This means that parents must recognize that their child will become a man and this should concern them. Children grow into adults very quickly. Parents should not squander the opportunities that they have to educate their children from a young age. There is no such thing as starting too young

because soon enough the children will leave the house and the parents will no longer be able to have the same level of influence in their lives. The parents should take advantage of the time that they have and be concerned that they are not doing enough.

לא תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ויראת מאלקיך אני ה'
“You shall not curse the deaf, and you shall not place a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your G-d - I am Hashem” (19:14)

The Baal HaTurim writes that the lack of a "ו" in the word מכשל indicates that the posuk does not only refer to a literal stumbling block. Giving bad advice or tricking someone into something harmful is also included in this prohibition. In fact, some commentators write that this posuk is not meant to be taken literally at all and to trip a blind man would not be prohibited. The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 232) writes that this prohibition is only not to knowingly lead someone astray and give bad advice.

When a person is asked to provide counsel, it is important to think it through and to guide the person properly. If bad advice is given, a person could inadvertently transgress this commandment. Giving advice is therefore a big responsibility and one should deliberate carefully before advising someone to do something.

ואמר לכם אתם תירשו את אדמתם ואני אתננה לכם לרשת אתה ארץ זבת חלב ודבש אני ה' אלקיכם אשר הבדלתי אתכם מן העמים
“So I said to you: You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to inherit it, a land flowing with milk and honey - I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has separated you from the peoples” (20:24)

The Baal HaTurim writes that there are seventy mitzvos that are mentioned in Parshas Kedoshim, corresponding to the seventy nations of the world. Although the Rambam counts 51 mitzvos in Parshas Kedoshim, there are also 19 mitzvos that are repeated from Acharei Mos. Perhaps the connection between these two points is that the commandments in this parsha fall under the category of becoming holy, which Chazal explain means to become "perushim," to completely separate ourselves from doing wrong. It is these mitzvos that also remind us to remain separate from the other nations of the world.

This concept of separation is very important. Every Motzaei Shabbos, we say havdalah, which literally means "separation." In it we mark the separation between Shabbos and weekdays as well as the separation between Yisrael and the other nations. As we begin the work week and reenter our association with the nations of the world, we remind ourselves that we are really separated from them. As Jews, we have our special task that we must fulfill and we cannot allow the other nations and their influence to interfere with the accomplishment of our goals. That is why there are many Rabbinic decrees which are designed to prevent us from intermingling with gentiles and becoming too involved with them. The last mitzvah in this week's parsha is not to follow the ways of the gentiles. This prohibition bans certain behaviors and forms of dress which were commonly found among the gentiles. The lack of separation has led to terrible intermarriage problems today.

We should take pride in our religion and in our way of life and not be ashamed of who we are. Yosef's behavior in the house of Potiphar is a lesson to us regarding how to act among gentiles. Yosef's conduct teaches us how to act among gentiles. He would constantly remind himself that he was in the house of an Egyptian and he made sure that he did not get comfortable. The story of Yosef teaches us that one should always be sure to keep his distance from gentiles

even while among them and not desire to be like them. Rashi comments on the posuk that says that “Hashem was with him” that Yosef always mentioned the name of Hashem. He never made any attempt to hide his Jewishness.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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