

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת בהר

דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת להם כי תבאו אל הארץ אשר אני נתן לכם ושבתה הארץ
שבת לה'

“Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem” (25:2)

What is the connection regarding the laws that conclude the previous parsha, regarding payment for personal damages, and the laws that begin this parsha, the laws of Shemittah? The Tzror HaMor writes that just as we are obligated to honor other people, we are obligated to honor Eretz Yisrael. We have an overarching obligation to honor Hashem and included in this requirement is the honor of our fellow Jews and of Eretz Yisrael. This is one explanation for the ancient custom of writing Hashem's name as three yuds, rather than two as is done today. The three yuds serve as a reminder of the three types of respect that that we must always remember, each of which begins with a yud: Hashem, Yisrael, Yerushalayim.

אל תקח מאתו נשך ותרבית ויראת מאלקיך וחי אחיך עמך
“Do not take from him interest or increase; and you shall fear your G-d - and let your brother live with you” (25:36)

Why is it prohibited to charge interest even when lending to a rich man who will not be affected if he pays a little extra? The Kli Yakar suggests that the reason for the prohibition against collecting interest is because one should always believe in Hashem and rely on Him for his financial success. Interest, by nature, removes that need to trust in Hashem because there is no risk involved. The lender can be certain that he will make a profit. When a person makes a living out of lending with interest, his faith in Hashem is affected. Because of this, one who borrows with interest is also culpable because he causes the lender to not rely on Hashem. In fact, writes the Kli Yakar, we find that most lenders and loan sharks are not scrupulous people, having little faith in Hashem. This is not the path that the Torah wants us to follow. Therefore, charging interest to a fellow Jew is prohibited at all times, regardless of the borrower's financial means.

לא תעשו לכם אילים ופסל ומצבה לא תקימו לכם ואבן משכית לא תתנו בארצכם
להשתחות עליה כי אני ה' אלקיכם

“You shall not make idols for yourselves, and you shall not erect for yourselves a statue or a pillar, and in your land you shall not place a flooring stone upon which to prostrate oneself - for I am Hashem, your G-d” (26:1)

Rashi on this posuk quotes the Toras Kohanim: "These pesukim are addressed to one who sells himself as a slave to a gentile. He should not say: Since my master serves idols and engages in illicit relationships, I too will act like him. Since my master desecrates Shabbos, I too will act like him. Therefore, these pesukim were written."

The Torah goes out of its way to tell us that when one find himself in a difficult situation, he should not give in to temptation. The Torah acknowledges the human mentality to feel this way but warns us against falling into this trap. The Chofetz Chaim says that if regarding someone who is forced to sell himself and put himself in a tough position where it will be difficult to keep Torah and mitzvos due to poverty, the Torah tells us that he must be careful to

do so anyway, certainly, we cannot use a difficult situation which we place ourselves in voluntarily as an excuse to take mitzvos lightly.

There is another lesson that we can learn from this midrash. The fact that people stumble in certain areas of Torah observance should not cause them to feel that they can just throw in the towel completely and give everything up. Such a person should realize that he will be rewarded for that which he does do and recognize that he has the ability to use what he does do as a springboard to fix what he does wrong and to do teshuva. It is not good to have an all-or-nothing approach to Torah and mitzvos. Even if a person does a little bit at a time, it will eventually add up and he can grow slowly.

את שבתתי תשמרו ומקדשי תיראו אני ה'

“My Sabbaths shall you observe and My Sanctuary shall you revere, I am Hashem” (26:2)

Why are the commandments regarding Shabbos and respecting the Mikdash repeated? Furthermore, what is the connection between these mitzvos and the rest of the parsha? Many commentators address these points and provide various answers.

The Seforno writes that the commandments are repeated here to teach us that they apply even when we are in exile. Since the previous section had been speaking about a Jew who sells himself to a gentile as a slave, the Torah continues to discuss a situation where Jews do not have their own freedom. Even though we are not independent in exile and Shabbos commemorates our liberation from Egypt (זכר ליציאת מצרים), we must still keep Shabbos despite our lack of freedom. How does the mitzvah to respect the Bais HaMikdash apply when it is destroyed? The Seforno explains that in exile we are commanded to show respect for the synagogues and the halls of Torah study. Today, the shul functions as our miniature Bais HaMikdash and the laws regarding how to act respectfully in our sacred places apply there.

The sanctity of our shuls is very important. In fact, the Seforno seems to say that it is a commandment in the Torah. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch elaborates on this point in his Chovev (§703): "Mikdash should thus be the heart of the people, from which the life of the spirit, heart and deed should stream forth into Israel, and where that which has been lost will once again renew itself... To revere the Sanctuary means to revere the holy designation that it bears and above all, to revere Him Who dedicated it for such a purpose. It means that we should always regard it as the anchor and the cable that hold us and educate us towards God. We should not numb this feeling of reverence in our hearts by means of levity, for thereby would the capacity of the Sanctuary to educate us towards the holy disappear."

The Daas Zekainim explains this posuk in a similar fashion, except that he understands the posuk to be referring to the actual Bais HaMikdash. Even when we are in exile and the Bais HaMikdash is no longer standing, we are still commanded to respect the location where the Bais HaMikdash stood, the Har Habayis. Even today, one is not permitted to ascend the mountain in a state of impurity and all the laws regarding the respect of the site of the Mikdash still apply.

Rav Moshe Feinstein says that the lesson of the posuk is that we should not try to learn how to serve Hashem from the gentiles. They serve their deities in their houses of worship and that is where their worship ends. When they leave the confines of the church or temple, they leave their religion there as well. In their activities outside the house of prayer, they feel free to act as they please. When a religion is practiced in this manner, the house of worship becomes a sacred object in its own right because it is the home of all religious devotion. We, on the other hand, guard the sanctity of the Mikdash because of the closeness to the Divine Presence that it provides. We recognize that our service of Hashem is not restricted to our shuls and to davening

because Hashem is with us everywhere. Serving Hashem plays a prominent role in everything that we do. All of our activities are governed by the principles of the Torah. The gemara in Yevamos 6a explains: Just as our respect for Shabbos is not out of respect for that day but for the One who bestowed that day with a special sanctity, the same is true of the Mikdash. It is not the physical edifice that we revere, but He who commanded us to worship there. The main place where we serve Hashem is everywhere in our lives outside the Mikdash: our homes, where we eat, where we conduct business, etc. We have lived 2,000 years without the Mikdash as a Jewish nation because our existence is dependent on Hashem and His Torah, not on the physical structure of the Bais HaMikdash.

The Or Hachaim says that Shabbos here refers to the Shabbos of the land - Shemittah. The Torah teaches that the existence of the Mikdash is dependent on the keeping of Shemittah. Hashem warns that only if Shemittah is kept will the Bais HaMikdash continue to exist. However, if the Jewish people should falter in their observance of Shemittah, the Bais HaMikdash will be taken away from them. In fact, as the posuk in next week's parsha foretells, the first Bais HaMikdash was indeed destroyed because the people failed to keep Shemittah correctly. Thus, this posuk is a fitting conclusion to the parsha because it sums up the ideas that were mentioned previously at its beginning.

As this year is a Shemittah year, we should bear this idea in mind and be careful regarding the laws concerning the consumption of Shemittah produce that was grown in Eretz Yisrael. Obviously, this is much easier to do in America than in Eretz Yisrael. Even so, we should still bear in mind that this is a special year and pray that in the merit of our adherence to the laws of Shemittah, Hashem will once again restore the Bais HaMikdash.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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