

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת בשלח

ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף עמו כי השבע השביע את בני ישראל לאמר פקד יפקד אלקים אתכם והעליתם את עצמתי מזה אתכם

“Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him, for he had made the Children of Israel swear, saying: God will surely remember you, and you shall bring my bones up from here with you” (13:19)

"The wise of heart will seize good deeds" (Mishlei 10:8). Chazal tell us in Sotah 13a that this posuk refers to Moshe Rabbeinu, who occupied himself with the mitzva of finding Yosef's remains at a time when all the other Jews were busy collecting money from the Egyptians. The Kli Yakar explains the expression that Moshe took the remains "with him." This mitzvah was "with him" forever, because when a person leaves this world, he takes only mitzvos with him. Unlike the money that the other Jews took with them, Moshe took something with him that would last forever.

Wisdom usually refers to book knowledge, but here, in the posuk in Mishlei, it seems to mean having a good heart. The truth is that fearing Hashem and using those feelings to make the right decisions, is also called wisdom, an area of study. This is because fear of Hashem is an acquired skill that requires effort to learn. The Mesilas Yesharim, in his introduction, writes that fear of Hashem is the only true wisdom. This posuk from Mishlei serves as proof of his statement. When one fears Hashem, his heart, the seat of decision making, will become wise and direct him to do more mitzvos in its wisdom. It is incumbent upon all of us to aspire to this level of having a wise heart. In order to accomplish this, we should try to spend some time learning mussar sefarim to improve our behavior. One sefer suited to this purpose is Chovos Halevovos, by Rabbeinu Bachya, which discusses the duties of the heart.

There is a story told that a man once approached R' Yisrael Salanter, the originator of the mussar movement, to ask for advice. "I only have half an hour a day to study Torah," said the man. "What should I learn?" R' Yisrael Salanter replied, "Study mussar. Then you will find more time to learn Torah."

ופרעה הקריב וישאו בני ישראל את עיניהם והנה מצרים נסע אחריהם ויראו מאד ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה'

“Pharaoh approached; the Children of Israel raised their eyes and behold! - Egypt is marching after them, and they were very frightened; the Children of Israel cried out to Hashem” (14:10)

The midrash comments that, technically speaking, “hikriv” means to bring someone else close. This can be explained to mean that through his pursuit of the Bnei Yisrael, Pharaoh brought them close to Hashem because they were frightened by him. R' Meir Yechiel of Ostrov comments: “Woe to us that we need an enemy to bring us close to Hashem.” We always ask Hashem in Shemone Esrei to bring us close to Him through teshuva, so that we should not need events such as Pharaoh chasing us to force us to become closer to Hashem.

ה' ילחם לכם ואתם תחרשון

“Hashem will do battle for you, and you shall remain silent” (14:14)

The Mechilta writes that Moshe was telling the people that Hashem would fight on their behalf at this time and also in the future. The Meshech Chochma explains that even though now they might have been able to ascribe Hashem's salvation to the fact that He would not have brought them out of Egypt for naught, Hashem would assist them even when that would not be the case. Even when "you shall remain silent," when there will be no reason for the Bnei Yisrael to deserve Hashem's salvation, Hashem will always be there. This is the meaning of the posuk, "To You, Hashem, is the righteousness, and to us is the shamefacedness" (Daniel 9:7).

Mark Twain wrote an essay about the phenomenon of the continued survival of the Jewish race,

entitled "Concerning the Jews." He wrote: "To conclude. - If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one per cent. of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star-dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvellous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

The answer to Mark Twain's question lies in this Chazal.

(For the full text of "Concerning the Jews," by Mark Twain, go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1898twain-jews.html>)

ובני ישראל הלכו ביבשה בתוך הים והמים להם חמה מימינם ומשמאלם

“The Children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea; the water was a wall for them, on their right and on their left” (14:29)

“Choma,” “wall,” is spelled once with a “vov” and once without, which can be read as “cheima,” “anger.” This refers to the fact that the water was angry that it had to split, saying that the Jews were no more worthy of being protected through a miracle than the Egyptians because they both worshipped avoda zara. Why is it spelled differently in these two places? The answer is that when the posuk says “and they crossed the sea on dry land,” it says “choma” because these were the people who first went into the sea before it became dry land. They crossed while it was still a sea because they had faith in Hashem that the sea would split. For these people who trusted in Hashem, the sea was more than happy to split. However, the second posuk says “and they crossed on dry land in the sea.” This refers to those who lingered in the back and lacked trust, waiting for the sea to actually split before venturing forward. For these people, the water was “cheima.” The water only split begrudgingly for these people who did not have bitachon and waited for the sea to split before crossing.

עזי וזמרת קה ויהי לי לישועה זה קלי ואנוהו אלקי אבי וארממנהו

“Hashem is my strength and praise, He has been a salvation to me; this is my God and I will beautify Him, the God of my father and I will exalt him” (15:2)

What is the meaning of the word ואנוהו? The Gemara Shabbos 133b cites two explanations. The first opinion relates the word to the root נאה, beauty. It is important to beautify our performance of mitzvos, to make the extra effort to wear nice tzitzis, to acquire a beautiful sukkah, esrog and shofar, to write beautiful Sifrei Torah, and to perform all mitzvos in the most beautiful way possible.

The second opinion states that the word is a compound of אני ורוא, I and he. This teaches us that we should try to imitate the characteristics of Hashem. Just as he is merciful, we should have mercy on our fellow human beings. Just as Hashem is kind, we should treat other people kindly.

The Targum Onkelos traces the word to the root נוה, a dwelling place. Thus, the Targum explains it as a vow on the part of the Jewish people to build the Bais HaMikdash, a dwelling place for Hashem.

R' Samson Raphael Hirsch builds on the Targum, but with an added twist. The posuk does not refer to constructing a physical dwelling place for Hashem, but rather to the commitment to create a

Mikdash within oneself. The most desirable sanctuary that a person can make is his own self. When Hashem commanded the construction of the Mishkan, He said, "And I will dwell within them" (Shemos 25:8). Ideally, every person is to become a Mikdash to themselves, a receptacle for the Divine Presence. By following the Torah and mitzvos, by living life as Hashem intended, each individual becomes a manifestation of Hashem's will on earth. This is the ultimate goal in life, to transform oneself and one's home into a miniature sanctuary. Therefore, a person has to constantly reassess himself and see if he is truly making himself into a receptacle for the Divine Presence. Hashem desires to dwell within us, if only we will allow him to enter.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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