

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת דברים

אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל בעבר הירדן במדבר בערבה מול סוף בין פארן ובין תפל ולבן וחצרת ודי זהב
“These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel, on the other side of the Jordan, concerning the wilderness, concerning the Arava, opposite the swampland, between Paran and Tofel, and Lavan, and Chatzeros, and Di Zahav” (1:1)

Rashi explains that each of the locations that Moshe Rabbeinu mentioned were hints at sins that they had committed along the way in the wilderness. R' Chaim Shmuelevitz writes that even though Moshe was rebuking them for sins that were known to everyone, he still only hinted to them and did not describe them outright. This teaches us that we must have respect for all of our fellow human beings. Causing a person to be ashamed or embarrassed is wrong, no matter who the person is. If a person is embarrassed and cries out to Hashem, his prayers will always be heard and the person who made him feel bad will be punished. The gemara on Gittin 57 illustrates how powerful embarrassment can be. The gemara relates the story of Bar Kamtza, who was embarrassed by his nemesis, whose meal he was accidentally invited to, when he was unceremoniously escorted from the host's premises in front of many leaders of the Jewish people. His embarrassment led him to devise a plan to bring evil upon the Jews and eventually the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed because this host did not have respect for a fellow man. If the shame of a wicked slanderer such as Bar Kamtza pierces the heavens to the point that his evil plans were successful, how much more so will Hashem pay attention to the shame of a righteous person. We should be sensitive in our dealings with other people and be extremely careful never to hurt another person.

בעבר הירדן בארץ מואב הואיל משה באר את התורה הזאת לאמר
“On the other side of the Jordan in the land of Moav, Moshe began explaining this Torah, saying” (1:5)

Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma which says that Moshe explained the Torah in all seventy languages. The Ksav Vehakabala asks: Why did they need to understand the Torah in all the different languages? Was it not their use of the Hebrew language which kept them distinct from Egypt even in exile? What benefit was there from learning the Torah in foreign languages? He explains that the Midrash refers to the fact that there are seventy explanations and facets to each part of the Torah. Moshe explained each different interpretation and understanding of every section. We should recognize that there are always multiple ways of understanding the Torah. Some explanations are only understood by those who have attained a certain spiritual level. There are simplistic understandings and more complex understandings. Sometimes two people see two different ways of understanding a certain point and both can be correct. However, no posuk should ever lose its basic meaning, its "peshat." The straightforward understanding should be the main

focus of our learning and it is not always necessary to understand the hidden meanings of the Torah.

הבו לכם אנשים חכמים ונבנים וידעים לשבטיכם ואשימם בראשיכם
“Provide for yourselves distinguished men who are wise, understanding and well known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads” (1:13)

R' Yaakov Kamenetzky notes that the plural of "ish" becomes "anashim." Why does the word change completely? Should the plural of "ish" not be "ishim"? He answers that when there is a group of people, it is more than just a collection of individuals. It is a new entity in itself and is on a higher level. A group can accomplish much more and therefore must be described with a different word. Being part of a tzibur is important because a group of people has special strength. This is why it is important to daven in a large group and to learn with a group of others. It is easier to grow spiritually in a group setting because each person drives the others to succeed. "Pilpul hatalmidim," "discussion among the students," is one of the essential characteristics necessary for Torah study. We should always try to surround ourselves with a group of people that will be a positive influence on us and push us to constantly improve ourselves and achieve more.

ויאמר ה' אלי אמר להם לא תעלו ולא תלחמו כי אינני בקרבכם ולא תנגפו לפני איביכם

“Hashem said to me: Tell them, do not ascend and do not do battle, for I am not among you; so that you not be struck down before your enemies” (1:42)

Why did Hashem not accept the confession of the Bnei Yisrael in the previous posuk and continue to forbid them to enter Eretz Yisrael? R' Shlomo Kluger writes that Hashem did not accept their confession because it was not earnest. The posuk that contains their confession says that they went to Moshe and confessed but they did not actually say it to Hashem. It was an insincere repentance that was devoid of meaning. Hashem recognized that their words were nothing more than talking and refused to accept their confession. A person cannot just say that he is sorry if he does not mean it. He must think about what he has done, truly feel remorse for his wrongdoing and honestly resolve never to do it again. Only then, when these feelings are real and come from the heart rather than from the mouth, will Hashem accept his teshuva and forgive his sins.

אל תתגרו בהם כי לא אתן לכם מארצם עד מדרך כף רגל כי ירשה לעשו נתתי את הר שעיר

“You shall not provoke them, for I shall not give you of their land even the right to set foot, for as an inheritance to Esav have I given Mount Seir” (2:5)

Why were the Jews forbidden to fight with Edom? Rabbeinu Bachya explains that Edom earned immunity from battle against Bnei Yisrael because Esav honored his father. We see how important the mitzvah of Kibud Av Ve'eim is from this story. Even hundreds of years later, Esav's descendants were reaping the reward from his great mitzvah.

The Chofetz Chaim quotes a Yalkut Shimoni which says that the one should not try

to fight against Esav when he attempts to start up. The Ramban writes in Vayishlach that when Yaakov planned for war with Esav, he planned for a defensive fight, but would not have fought an offensive battle in exile. This should be our attitude in golus. Even when gentiles look for a fight, we should avoid the clash. We should also instruct our children to avoid conflict. When a gentile makes a remark or tries to pick a fight, it is always best to ignore and walk away and resist the urge to respond. We should remember that we are in exile and that we are not in any position to fight with gentiles.

ולא אבה סיחון מלך חשבון העברנו בו כי הקשה ה' אלקיך את רוחו ואמץ את לבבו למען תתן בידך כיום הזה

“But Sichon king of Cheshbon was not willing to let us pass through it, for Hashem, your G-d, hardened his spirit and made his heart stubborn, in order to give him into your hand, like this very day” (2:30)

Rabbeinu Bachya asks: Why did Hashem harden Sichon's heart? Why did He remove his ability to have free choice and to do teshuva? When a person sins and is so wicked, he loses his ability to repent. Hashem has provided mankind with a tremendous gift in teshuva. Sometimes, when a person acts so wrongly, he can lose his entitlement to that gift. It is important to use this special gift that Hashem has given us so that we not lose it.

The gemara on Yoma 9 says that when the first Bais HaMikdash was destroyed, since their sins were revealed, the time of their redemption was revealed. When the second Bais HaMikdash was destroyed, since their sins were not revealed, the time of their redemption was not revealed. What does this mean? R' Eliyahu Lopian explains that the sin that was chiefly responsible for the second Churban was sinas chinam, baseless hatred. This is a sin that is often done in private and is usually not recognizable, even to the person who harbors this hatred. When the aveira is not so clear-cut, such as sinas chinam, it is harder to do teshuva without serious introspection to diagnose the sinas chinam. This is the meaning of the gemara. Since the aveiros that they did were not easily recognizable, it was difficult to do teshuva and therefore the redemption was not revealed to them and, indeed, we still wait for it to this very day. In order to overcome this obstacle to our redemption, we have to be honest with ourselves and look inside ourselves to assess our true feelings about others and root out the bad feelings that we may have toward other people. This is how we can do teshuva and reveal the time of our final redemption, which will hopefully occur very soon.

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