

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת האזינו

יערף כמטר לקחי תזל כטל אמרתי כשעירם עלי דשא וכרביבים עלי עשב
“May my teaching drop like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew; like the storm winds upon vegetation and like raindrops upon blades of grass” (32:2)

Why does the posuk use both rain and dew as metaphors for Torah? R' Moshe Feinstein says that they each have a certain quality that the other one does not possess. Rain causes plants, trees and other vegetation to grow, although some people do not like rain because it disrupts their travels. Everyone likes dew even though it does not help make anything grow. The Torah should combine the qualities of rain and dew. It should help people grow as they study it and fulfill its precepts and be a tremendous influence on their lives. It should also be sweet to everyone who is involved with it. A teacher should always be cognizant of how sweet the Torah is and should transmit that sweetness to his students. When learning and observing the Torah, both quality and quantity are important.

וישמן ישרון ויבעט שמנת עבית כשית ויטש אלוה עשהו וינבל צור ישעתו
“Yeshurun became fat and kicked, you became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent - and it deserted Hashem its Maker and was contemptuous of the Rock of its salvation” (32:15)

The Torah warns that when the Jewish people become successful and wealthy, there is a greater tendency for them to forget Hashem and abandon the ways of the Torah. Along these lines, the Gemara on Chagiga 9b says, "Hashem considered all of the good characteristics that He could give to Bnei Yisrael and found none better than poverty... This is what people say: Poverty is fitting for the Jews as a red strap on a white horse." The Maharsha explains that a white horse is beautiful by itself and does not need any additional adornments. A simple red strap is all that it needs and it looks quite handsome. Similarly, the Jewish people have an intrinsic beauty because of the Torah that they study and follow. Any attempt to become more attractive through the possession of wealth is unnecessary and only spoils the natural beauty.

The Chofetz Chaim told the following parable: Two sisters got married, one to a rich man and one to a poor man. They lived in different places and did not see each other very much. After a few years, the poor sister went to visit her rich sister at her estate. As she approached the house, a servant greeted her and announced her arrival. She walked into the house and saw all the furnishings and finery. Her sister was wearing the finest clothing and jewelry. As they talked, she noticed that her sister looked a little depressed. She said to her, "I don't understand. You have all the best things in the world. Why are you sad?" Her sister responded, "Yes, it is true that I have all the riches, but my husband doesn't consider my opinions about anything. He wines and dines me but he has no interest in hearing anything that I say. I feel like a nobody because he doesn't pay attention to what I want. I sometimes wonder if I would be better off being like you. You are happy and content and your husband cares about what you say. He honors you and wants to hear

what you have to say. Yes, you're poor, but you have so much."

The Chofetz Chaim continued: Some people have the most beautiful accessories to their service of Hashem but they do not really follow the Torah as they should. They make a big show out of their "worship," but it is really just a sham because there is only external. The Torah would much rather that we follow the way of the poor people who do not have the gold and silver to adorn the Torah but they pay it the utmost respect and uphold every law contained in it. It is not the expensive crowns that matter. Of course, beautifying mitzvos is important but we should not think that it is the only thing that matters. Sometimes affluence causes people to show honor in an exterior fashion but on the inside they have no interest in hearing what the Torah really has to say.

וירא ה' וינאץ מכעס בניו ובנותיו

“Hashem will see and be provoked by the anger of His sons and daughters” (32:19)

R' Nissan Alpert has an original interpretation of this posuk. Hashem becomes angry at his children when they get angry at Him and do not recognize His hand in their lives. When a person does not appreciate Hashem's kindnesses and fails to see the big picture, Hashem is upset with him. A person has to recognize that Hashem is always merciful, no matter what hand life deals him. It is not always easy to see this in difficult situations, but one should never be angry with Hashem. One should always accept that Hashem knows what is best and everything that happens to us is for our benefit, even if we have trouble seeing it at the present moment.

Sukkos

This year, the year following Shemitta, is the year in which הקהל would be performed on Sukkos in the time of the Bais HaMikdash. Why is הקהל performed on Sukkos and not at any other time of the year? In order to answer this question, R' Moshe Feinstein asks a different question about the mitzvah of sukkah. He mentions the dispute in the Gemara regarding whether the mitzvah to sit in a sukkah for seven days commemorates the ענני הכבוד, the special clouds of protection in the desert, or the actual huts that the Jews lived in during their sojourn in the wilderness. He says that it makes sense to say that we are commemorating the clouds because then we are celebrating a miracle, but if we are commemorating the actual huts, what is so special about them that they deserve a holiday? Why do we have to relive their way of life in the desert? He also questions the “הנני מוכן ומזומן” prayer that some people say before sitting in the sukkah which states that all of the 613 mitzvos are tied to the mitzvah of sukkah. How is this so? He answers that the sukkah must be a temporary dwelling because the Jewish dwellings in the desert were temporary as they were always on the go. This helped them understand that this world is a transient one. This idea tends to get lost in the permanence of our lives. To bring it back, we spend a week in the sukkah to relive their temporary lifestyle. This helps us remember that we are only passing through this world for a short period of time. This is the reason why all of the 613 mitzvos are tied to the mitzvah of sukkah because if we understand that the world is fleeting, it is automatic that one will try to do all of the mitzvos as soon as possible. This is why הקהל had to be done on Sukkos. It is only

fitting that the renewal of the commitment to Torah and mitzvos be done at a time of year when we remind ourselves of the need to do all the mitzvos we can.

In his sefer Zera Kodesh, R' Naftali Tzvi Horowitz of Ropshitz asks: Chazal teach us that the Torah requires all four species to be "hadar," beautiful. If this is so, why does the Torah only refer to the esrog as beautiful and not the other species? He answers that the four species are shaped like and represent different parts of the body. The esrog is shaped like the heart, the hadas like the eyes, the aravos like the lips and the lulav like the spine. It is the heart that is the most important organ in the body. It symbolically controls a person's thoughts and desires. Chazal say, "Rachmana liba ba'i," "Hashem wants the heart." Hashem desires our sincere thoughts and intentions above all else. It is our heart that must be beautiful before anything else. Even if we cannot have the most beautiful arba minim, if we do the mitzvos properly and follow the halachos with a pure heart and the proper intentions, Hashem is happy with our mitzvah. This is why Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai extolled the virtues of a good heart above all others and said that it incorporates all other good middos (Avos 2:13). When a person has a good heart, everything else will fall into place. It is a beautiful heart that Hashem desires above all else.

In Kiddush, we thank Hashem for giving us "mo'adim lesimcha," "holidays for rejoicing." R' Eliyahu Dessler explains that this is the key to the meaning of the holiday. Yomim Tovim were given to us to rejoice and to be happy. Not only that, but part of the mitzvah to be happy on Yom Tov is to make sure that other people, one's family and the poor, are happy as well. Without including others in our happiness, our rejoicing is incomplete. The Rambam adds that the mitzvah of rejoicing applies to all eight days of Sukkos, or nine, as the case may be outside of Eretz Yisrael.

It is also important to recognize the importance and holiness of the Yom Tov and Chol HaMoed. One should make an effort to dress accordingly on Chol HaMoed and treat the holiday with honor and respect.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Written by Michael Gutmann

parshashiur.googlepages.com