

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת אמר

ויאמר ה' אל משה אמר אל הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת אליהם לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו
“Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a dead person among his people” (21:1)

Rashi, quoting the gemara in Yevamos 114a, asks: Why did Hashem repeat Himself by telling Moshe to "say to the Kohanim... and tell them?" Why was Moshe commanded twice to say these halachos? The answer is that Moshe was to teach these laws to the Kohanim and teach them to tell them over to their children and ensure that their children did not transgress them. R' Moshe Feinstein questions this idea. After all, the posuk contains no apparent reference to children. How do Chazal see a reference to children in this posuk? He answers that the best way to train children is to lead by example. When the parents show children how beautiful the Torah is and how much they cherish it, the children will want to follow suit. If they do mitzvos with a good demeanor and illustrate to the children through their actions that they feel it is very sweet, it will lead to the children developing a similar love for Torah. Parents should be living examples for their children through their enthusiasm for Torah and mitzvos. The adults are commanded regarding the halachos and they are commanded regarding how beloved it should be to them. This aspect of loving the mitzvos is indirectly also a command regarding training the children. It is this enthusiasm that the children will see and be trained by. This is not only true for parents. Every person influences those around him. Whether it is a spouse, a friend or a co-worker, there are always people who we impact through our actions.

ובקצרכם את קציר ארצכם לא תכלה פאת שדך בקצרך ולקט קצירך לא תלקט לעני ולגר תעזב אתם אני ה' אלקיכם

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them; I am Hashem, your G-d” (23:22)

Rashi asks: Why does the Torah digress from the discussion of the Yomim Tovim and their sacrifices and insert the mitzvah of פאה (to leave the corners of a field for the poor) and לקט (to leave fallen stalks of grain for the poor)? He answers with a statement of Chazal that one who gives פאה and לקט properly is considered to have built the Bais HaMikdash and brought sacrifices there. R' Moshe Feinstein explains that tzedaka is the basis for deserving the redemption. The posuk in Yeshaya (1:27) says, "Those that return [will be redeemed] with tzedaka." Even though the nation may not be deserving of the redemption yet, this individual does deserve it because he gave tzedaka. Therefore, Hashem considers it as if he brought sacrifices in the Bais HaMikdash because he truly deserves to be able to do so.

Rav Dovid Feinstein provides another insight on this posuk. He says that performing acts of kindness for others is an essential component of a Torah way of life. Immediately after Shavuos, the festival of the giving of the Torah, the posuk mentions a mitzvah of charity. The Torah that one learns must be a Torah that will bring a person to act kindly toward others. Chazal point out that the Torah begins and ends with kind acts from Hashem. In Bereishis, Hashem provided Adam and Chava with clothing and in Vezos Habracha, Hashem buried Moshe Rabbeinu. From start to finish, the Torah has to have an impact of chesed.

אך בעשור לחדש השביעי הזה יום הכפרים הוא מקרא קדש יהיה לכם ועניתם את נפשתיכם והקרבתם אשה לה'

“But on the tenth day of this month it is the Day of Atonement; there shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall afflict yourselves; you shall offer a fire-offering to Hashem” (23:27)

Rashi on this posuk quotes the gemara on Shavuos 13a which points out that the word אך is always excluding something. One may have thought that Yom Kippur provides an atonement for everyone's sins no matter what. However, the word אך excludes people who do not do teshuva. Yom Kippur is a special opportunity to attain forgiveness for one's sins. However, it only provides the desired result if a person recognizes the power of Yom Kippur and capitalizes on the special time of year by repenting. If a person does not take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the special time of year, then Yom Kippur provides no benefit to him.

Throughout the year, we have opportunities to reassess how we are doing spiritually and take the necessary steps to renew ourselves. Shabbos, Yom Tov and especially Yom Kippur are such times. Timing is everything. When the opportunity presents itself, we cannot let it slip by. We must avail ourselves of those chances to help ourselves and others change our ways and fix problems.

There is a story told about R' Aryeh Levin that illustrates this point. One year, immediately before Yom Kippur, he went to another neighborhood to visit another rabbi, R' Nissan Sacks. He informed him about a quarreling family in the latter's neighborhood and wanted to enlist his help with going to their house to help resolve the tensions right then and there, on Erev Yom Kippur shortly before Kol Nidrei. Even though they were both very busy, he understood that if they wanted to help this family with their problems, they had to use the special influence provided by Yom Kippur and the matter could not wait for another time.

ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר כפת תמרims וענף עץ עבת וערבי נחל ושמחתם לפני ה' אלקיכם שבעת ימים

“You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, the branches date palms, twigs of a plaited tree, and brook willows; and you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for a seven-day period” (23:40)

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.

The Chofetz Chaim told a parable about a simple villager who went to the city to buy a beautiful esrog for his son-in-law. He found a gorgeous esrog and paid top dollar for it. When he returned to the village, he met a neighbor who had no esrog and offered to split the esrog in

half so that they would both have half an esrog. The simple man did not know any better and thought that he was doing a wonderful thing for his neighbor and not losing anything. The neighbor paid for his half and they chopped it into two pieces. When his son-in-law received the esrog, he was upset. He told his father-in-law that a low-class esrog would have been better than half of the most beautiful esrog, which is absolutely worthless.

Similarly, explained the Chofetz Chaim, there are people who beautify the mitzvos but they are not really doing the mitzvos. They put on a dazzling display that seems to be an impressive service of Hashem but is really empty. We have to realize that basic mitzvah observance comes first and foremost. Once we are certain that we are adhering to the basic halachos of the mitzvah, we can then move on to beautifying the mitzvah. Beautifying mitzvos is definitely important, but we must be sure not to mix up our priorities. A mitzvah that is done plainly is better than a beautiful show that does not follow halacha correctly.

ויצא בן אשה ישראלית והוא בן איש מצרי בתוך בני ישראל וינצו במחנה בן הישראלית ואיש הישראלי

“The son of an Israelite woman went out - and he was the son of an Egyptian man - among the Children of Israel; they fought in the camp, the son of the Israelite woman and an Israelite man” (24:10)

The Kli Yakar asks: Why are the names of the protagonists omitted from the story? The answer is that both of them were at fault for what happened. The Jewish man was correct in rebuking the son of the Egyptian for what he did. He was definitely correct. However, he approached him in an antagonistic way which led to a large argument which resulted in the tragedy of cursing Hashem's name. Had he approached him peacefully, perhaps the son of the Egyptian would have been receptive to his words. However, since he started with the intent to pick a fight, nothing good could come out of his words. He is also partly to blame for the curse and he is not worthy of having his name recorded in the Torah.

The Torah records this story in full detail in order to show us how fighting never leads to good results. The way of the Torah is a way of peace. If one approaches a wrongdoer calmly and expresses his concern in a peaceful way, then his words can have a positive effect. The Kli Yakar writes, "Peace can come about as a result of fighting." He continues to say that this explanation helps us understand why this story is followed by the laws regarding one who inflicts physical damage on another person or an animal. When one starts fighting, it will eventually lead to someone or something getting hurt. Even if the fighter has good reasons to be upset and even if he has noble intentions, fighting is not the way to accomplish anything. Speaking peacefully is the only way to accomplish positive change.

The Rambam in Hilchos Chanukah 4:14 writes that the whole Torah was given in order to bring peace into the world. Maharal (Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Shalom) writes that there is a connection between peace and joy. He explains that the word "shalom" is derived from the root שלם, meaning complete. When a person pursues peace, he becomes complete. This leads to joy, as the posuk in Mishlei (12:20) says, "To those who seek peace belongs joy." When we feel that we are missing something, it makes us upset. A man of peace is truly whole and will always be happy. Shalom is one of the names of Hashem because He is complete.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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