

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת תצוה

ועשו את האפוד זהב תכלת וארגמן תולעת שני ושש משזר מעשה חשב

“They shall make the ephod of gold, turquoise wool, and purple wool, scarlet wool, and twisted linen, the work of an artist” (28:6)

Rashi writes that he chose to give a full overview of how the Kohen Gadol wore the garments before explaining the individual pesukim so that the reader would be able to run through it and understand it easily. We can learn from Rashi’s method of explanation that the Torah must be taught in a manner that is easy to understand. It has to be well organized and simple. Rashi thus fulfills what he wrote in the beginning of Parshas Mishpatim that Torah must be given over like a table that is set for a meal, well prepared and simply laid out. This places an extra responsibility on a teacher to understand what he is teaching very well so that he can explain it with great clarity.

This is symbolized by the requirement for pure olive oil for lighting the menorah, as mentioned at the beginning of the parsha. The oil was obtained by pressing olives and only the first drop of oil to come out of the olive was used in the menorah because it was the purest. The menorah, which represents wisdom of Torah study, can only have purity and clarity.

The law is that the same amount of oil must be used in the menorah overnight in the summer and winter, even though the nights are much shorter in the summer time and do not require as much fuel. R’ Moshe Feinstein explains that the reason for this is that the short nights of the year represent smart students who can understand things very quickly whereas the long nights represent the students who need more time to gain complete comprehension of a subject. The oil of the menorah teaches us that the bright students require the same amount of attention, the same amount of “oil,” as the regular students. Many times, brighter students need to be challenged or else they will use their spare time for getting into trouble. One cannot ignore the smart students just because they understand the material so quickly.

Rashi explains that the Kohen must hold the flame to the menorah until it can remain lit on its own. This can also teach us a lesson about education. The goal of an educator and a parent must be to teach a child to the point where he can learn on his own. This is the ultimate goal of an education. Even individuals who are no longer in school should strive to reach a level where they can learn well on their own and become self-sufficient in learning.

ושבצת הכתנת שש ועשית מצנפת שש ואבנט תעשה מעשה רקם

“You shall make the tunic of checkered texture, of linen; you shall make a turban of linen and you shall make a belt the work of an embroiderer” (28:39)

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma Chapter 7) teaches that the belt worn by the Kohanim was 32 cubits long, approximately 60 feet. Because the belt was so long, it had to be wound around the waist of the Kohen many times. Why was it necessary for the Kohen to wear such a long belt?

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzva 99) provides an interesting explanation for the mitzva to make special clothing for the Kohanim. He writes that a person's frame of mind is heavily influenced by his actions and his surroundings. When the Kohen is involved in the sacred work of the Bais HaMikdash, it is imperative that he have the proper mindset. Therefore, the Kohen must don special clothing when he begins to serve which cover him from head to toe. These garments are not worn anywhere else so that when the Kohen sees himself covered by these special clothes, he will remember what he is supposed to be doing and what his intentions should be at the time that he performs his tasks. Similarly, we put on tefillin every morning to remind ourselves how to direct our thoughts and actions during the course of the day. The need for this reminder extended so far that the belt was specifically made extra long so that it should be wrapped around him many times. In this way, the belt would not lie flat on his waist because of its length and even when the Kohen was standing around, he would feel the belt with his arms because the belt stuck out a little bit. Thus, the Kohen would be aware of his special garments at all times, even when he was just standing

around, and would never lose sight of the task that he was to perform in the service of the Bais HaMikdash.

וזה אשר תעשה על המזבחה כבשים בני שנה שנים ליום תמיד

“This is what you shall offer upon the altar: sheep within their first year, two each day, continually” (29:38)

What is the connection between the commandment of the Korban Tamid, the daily sacrifice of a sheep every morning and evening, and the preceding pesukim that discuss the induction of the Kohanim and the inauguration of the Mishkan? R' Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that the construction of the Mishkan alone does not fulfill the obligation to build a sanctuary and bring the Divine Presence into the midst of the people. Only with the daily self-dedication to the service of Hashem, the renewal of the commitment to the ideals of the Torah every day, does the Divine Presence rest among us. The Mishkan does not achieve this purpose in its own right. It is only a vehicle to accomplish the end goal. This is the idea represented by the Korban Tamid, the daily sacrifice. It is the unceasing, constant devotion to Hashem and his Torah that bring us closer to Him and it was for the fulfillment of this ideal that Hashem commanded the Jews to erect a Mishkan. The juxtaposition of the inauguration of the Mishkan and the daily sacrifice emphasize that the construction of the Mishkan served one purpose: a means to rededicate our lives to Hashem each and every day.

ונתתה אתו לפני הפרכת אשר על ארן העדת לפני הכפרת אשר על העדת אשר
אועד לך שמה

“You shall put it in front of the curtain that is by the ark of the testimony, in front of the lid that is on the testimony, where I will arrange audience with you” (30:6)

What is the importance of the fact that the Mizbeiach HaKetores, the altar of incense, faced the Aron? Why does the Torah need to tell us this? R' Dovid Feinstein answers that ketores, incense, is an atonement for lashon hara, gossip. The Torah is telling us that in order to take preemptive action and prevent lashon hara, one should learn Torah. When one studies Torah, he becomes a more modest person and he will not want to speak negatively

about other people. Rambam also writes that the study of Torah brings peace to the world. Therefore, when one studies Torah, he begins to treat people with kindness.

Purim

The Gemara on Megillah 12a attempts to determine why the Jews deserved destruction in the times of the Megillah? One answer is that they ate from the feast of Achashveirosh. However, this reason would only apply to the Jews of Shushan. A second reason is that they bowed to Nevuchadnetzar's idol many years earlier. R' Shimon Schwab explains that these sins were especially severe because during the period of the first Bais HaMikdash there were two main weaknesses: idol worship and a desire to be like the nations of the world. Because of these shortcomings, the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed. Now in exile they showed that they still had these same problems. They had not corrected that which they were supposed to be rectifying. Therefore, these sins warranted death.

Why is there a special mitzvah of tzedaka on Purim? A mitzvah of celebration must always be accompanied by charity and kindness. We see a similar mitzvah with regards to the Regalim as well. The sages considered the less fortunate people and made sure that they would also have reason to rejoice at times of national joy. One has to be able to feel for others in order to properly celebrate himself.

Why is there a special mitzvah of mishloach manos on Purim, which we don't find at any other time? On Purim, the Jewish people renewed their acceptance of the Torah. As we know, the initial acceptance of the Torah was preceded by unparalleled unity among the nation. Harmony with one another is a prerequisite for a commitment to the Torah. Therefore, there is a need to express our love for fellow Jews on Purim. There is no better way to celebrate our acceptance of the Torah than to increase harmony among ourselves.

The Purim story teaches us to see Hashem's involvement in every aspect of the world around us. The events of the megillah all occurred in a

natural way, but it is clear to us that Hashem directed those events from behind the scenes. The antagonist in the Purim story is Haman, a descendant of Amalek, the nation that represents the denial of Hashem's involvement in the world. The reason why Amalek attacked the Jews in the wilderness was because the people doubted Hashem's involvement in their lives. Amalek comes when we question Hashem's providence. Hashem will one day blot out what Amalek represents because everyone will clearly see the hand of Hashem in world events.

Achashveirosh really wanted Esther to tell him where she came from and so he started a second competition to choose a wife in order to intimidate her so that she would tell. At that time, Mordechai uncovered the plot of Bigsan and Seresh. Perhaps this happened precisely at that time so that Achashveirosh should be thankful that Esther helped save his life and would no longer care about where she came from. Also, at that time Haman became prime minister. Perhaps this is also related because it was Haman who had given the advice to do away with Vashti. Now that Esther had proven her worth, Haman was rewarded with a prestigious position. Rashi connects these events differently and explains that Hashem made this plot before Haman came to power so that Haman's downfall – Mordechai's unrewarded good deed – would already be prepared.

The language used by the Megillah to describe how the ministers bothered Mordechai each day is very similar to the language the Torah uses to describe the pressure that Potiphar's wife applied to Yosef. We have to realize that wherever we are, when we want to do the right thing and do not want to follow everyone else, we face tremendous pressure from people trying to wear us down so that we conform. We have to strengthen ourselves to be like Yosef and Mordechai and continue to stand up for what is right.

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