

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת בחקתי

אם בחקתי תלכו ואת מצותי תשמרו ועשיתם אתם

“If you will go in My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them” (26:3)

The Or HaChayim has 42 explanations of this posuk. In one of them, he notes that the parsha does not begin by saying “if you learn my decrees” but “if you go in my decrees.” This teaches us that the Torah must accompany one wherever he goes. Every action that one takes, regardless of the surroundings, must be viewed through the lens of Torah and mitzvos. The posuk in Mishlei says: “בכל דרכיך דעהו,” “know Him in all your ways.” Everything that we do must be with the intention of furthering our service of Hashem. One must go everywhere with Hashem’s decrees. There is an entire Siman in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 231) that is devoted to how one should go through the day with all of his activities dedicated to the service of Hashem. Even the seemingly mundane facets of our life can be raised to a higher, spiritual level if they are approached with the proper mindset. Our religion is not limited to the synagogue or to the home. The Torah encompasses our entire life and everything that we do must be with the Torah in mind.

והתהלכתי בתוכם והייתי לכם לאלקים ואתם תהיו לי לעם

“I will walk among you, I will be G-d unto you and you will be a people unto Me” (26:12)

The Seforno writes that this posuk is a promise that the Divine Presence will not only rest in the Bais HaMikdash, but it will be among everyone, in all places. It will be there with us wherever we are. Every single person has the opportunity to create a type of atmosphere around himself in which the Divine Presence can rest. The Divine Presence is not limited to places of worship but is a part of our daily lives and can accompany us every step of the way. When we do the right things, we will receive special guidance from Hashem and we will be assisted in everything that we do.

Rashi explains this posuk to mean "I will walk with you in Gan Eden." There will be a reward in store for us in the future if we act as we should. These two explanations of the posuk are both true and they are not at all contradictory. If we follow the Torah and mitzvos and act in accordance with Hashem's wishes, we will be rewarded with Hashem's proximity to us in both this world and the next.

וכשלו איש באחיו כמפני חרב ורדף אין ולא תהיה לכם תקומה לפני איביכם

“They will stumble over one another as in flight from the sword, but there is no pursuer; you will not have the power to withstand your foes” (26:37)

The Gemara in Sanhedrin teaches us that this posuk can also mean that each man will stumble because of his brother’s sins. Each Jew is responsible for his brothers and we must watch out for our fellow Jews and make sure that they stay on the right path. If we do not encourage our fellow Jews to keep Torah and mitzvos, we will be held responsible for their misdeeds. Therefore, we cannot remain satisfied with our own commitment and service of Hashem. We must dedicate time to help our brethren who are not as committed as we are. However, it is also important to make sure that those of our brothers who have strayed do not affect us in a bad way and have an evil influence on us.

וזכרתי את בריתי יעקוב ואף את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם אזכר והארץ אזכר
“I will remember My covenant with Yaakov and also My covenant with Yitzchak and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember, and I will remember the land” (26:42)

Why is the remembrance of the Avos inserted in the middle of the punishment? The simple explanation is that even when we are going through troubled times, Hashem remembers the merits of our ancestors and takes care of us. The Shelah answers the question differently. He writes that because our forefathers were such righteous men, we are held to a higher standard. Our sins are held against us to a higher degree and we are even more responsible than those who do not know any better. We must recognize where we come from and strive to live up to the high standards that our ancestors have set for us. Therefore, when Hashem remembers that we came from such illustrious forebears, such as Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, we are subject to even greater accountability than others.

ואם גאל יגאל איש ממעשרו חמשיתו יסף עליו
“If a person shall redeem some of his tithe, he shall add his fifth to it” (27:31)

All maaser sheni must be brought to Yerushalayim and eaten there. However, if a person feels that his produce is too much of a burden to transport to Yerushalayim, the posuk teaches that he is permitted to take money instead but he is required to take an extra 25% in addition to the market value of the produce. For example, if one's maaser sheni produce is worth \$100, he can keep the produce and take money to Yerushalayim, but he must take \$125. Why must one who brings money spend more than if he had brought the actual produce? Perhaps we can say that this extra money is a penalty, a fine, for not wanting to assume the burden of fulfilling a mitzva. The Torah provides a second option, but it costs more money.

A person should live life with the attitude that being a Jew is enjoyable and the best possible way to live. R' Moshe Feinstein said that an entire generation of American Jewry left the path of Torah and mitzvos in the early 20th century because they were brought up with an attitude that it is difficult to be Jewish rather than with an appreciation for Torah and mitzvos. People in those times had difficult lives trying to keep jobs for more than one week at a time. Life was not easy and they attributed this to their Jewishness. The children saw this and rejected their Judaism. We must be careful about our attitude toward Torah and mitzvos and be sure that the next generation learns the proper appreciation for the great gift that Hashem gave us: His Torah.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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