

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת תצוה

ואתה תצוה את בני ישראל ויקחו אליך שמן זית זך כתית למאור להעלת נר תמיד
“And you, you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually” (27:20)

The Baal HaTurim records an interesting gematria that is found in this posuk. The word תצוה has the same numerical value as נשים צוה, "He commanded women." The words נר תמיד have the same numerical value as בשבת, "on Shabbos." This is a hint that just as the Kohanim were given a mitzva to light candles in the Mishkan, women were also given a mitzva to light candles for Shabbos.

There are three reasons why we light candles for Shabbos. The first is in honor of Shabbos. Having lights at the Shabbos table gives dignity to the Shabbos meal. A second reason is "Oneg Shabbos," enjoyment of Shabbos. The meal becomes more enjoyable when there are bright lights at the table. A third reason is for "shalom bayis," so that nobody falls in the darkness. This is a mitzvah that was specially assigned to women because it is the women who are generally around the house and are making sure that the house is prepared for Shabbos. (Orach Chaim 263:3) Even if the man wants to light the Shabbos candles, he must allow his wife to light them. However, it is preferable for the husband to prepare the candles for lighting. This is his way of partaking in the mitzvah. (Mishna Berura 263:11-12) This mitzvah is really the obligation of the household as a whole. Therefore, in a house where there are no women, a man must light Shabbos candles. The only difference between a man who lights candles and a woman who lights is that a woman automatically accepts Shabbos when she lights, unless she intentionally stipulates otherwise. If a man lights candles, this automatic acceptance of Shabbos does not apply, but it is best for him to stipulate that this is so. (Orach Chaim 263:10, Mishna Berura 263:42) The gemara says that a woman who lights Shabbos candles will be rewarded with children who will become talmidei chachamim. Therefore, it is appropriate for a woman to pray for children who will be Torah scholars after she lights the candles and makes the bracha. (Mishna Berura 263:2) A man is required to remind his wife to light candles as Shabbos approaches, provided that this reminder is done in a nice way. (Orach Chaim 260:2)

ונתת אל חשן המשפט את האורים ואת התמים והיו על לב אהרן בבאו לפני ה' ונשא אהרן את משפט בני ישראל על לבו לפני ה' תמיד
“Into the breastplate of judgment shall you place the Urim and the Tumim, and they shall be on Aharon's heart when he comes before Hashem; and Aharon shall bear the judgment of the Children of Israel on his heart constantly before Hashem” (28:30)

Rashi explains that the Urim Vetumim was a piece of parchment with the ineffable name of Hashem written on it that was inserted inside the Choshen. This holy parchment would cause the stones of the Choshen to light up in answer to questions that were posed to it by Jewish leaders at times when the people needed direction from Hashem. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 7:3) explains the derivation of the name Urim Vetumim. אורים is related to the word אור, "light." The Urim Vetumim would light up for the Jewish people literally, as well as figuratively illuminating their way. תמים is related to תם, "complete." When the Jews are complete in their trust in Hashem, the Urim Vetumim shows them the path to follow. The Torah Temima explains that if the people are not pure in their ways, the Urim Vetumim will not be effective. The proof to this is from the story of the war between Shevet Binyamin and the rest of

the tribes in the days of the Shoftim. They asked the Urim Vetumim for advice in the war and were misled. (Shoftim 20:17-25) Since they did not act properly, they did not deserve to be guided by the Urim Vetumim.

Today we do not have the Urim Vetumim, but if we totally place our trust in Hashem, He will provide us with direction in other ways. "One who trusts in Hashem, kindness surrounds him." (Tehillim 32:10) The Ramban writes in Parshas Shoftim (Devarim 18:13) that there is a mitzvah to be תמימים. He says that the mitzvah is that one should trust in Hashem instead of trusting superstitions and should express his belief that the future is entirely up to the will of Hashem. One must understand that if he becomes closer to Hashem, Hashem will take care of his future and he has no need to worry. Onkelos translates this mitzvah as "You shall be complete in the fear of Hashem." If our fear of Hashem is complete, then we need not be concerned about what the future will bring. If we take care of our end, Hashem will take care of us.

ועשית את מעיל האפוד כליל תכלת

“You shall make the robe of the ephod entirely of turquoise wool” (28:31)

The Gemara in Arachin 16a says that the me'il, the robe, was worn by the Kohen Gadol as an atonement for the sin of loshon hara. The me'il, which made a sound because of the bells on its hem, served as an atonement for those who sinned through sound. The gemara further says that the ketores, incense, also atoned for the sin of loshon hara. The ketores, which was offered in private inside the sanctuary, atoned for loshon hara, which is told in secrecy. The Gemara asks: Why are there two methods of atonement for loshon hara? The answer is that the me'il and the sound that it produces atones for loshon hara told in public, which has a louder sound and travels farther. The ketores atoned for loshon hara told in private. Loshon hara is defined as anything negative said about a fellow Jew, even if it is true, whether it is said in public or in private.

The Chofetz Chaim says that even though hearing loshon hara can be very enjoyable, one must stop himself from listening to it because it is a terrible sin. One should not underestimate this transgression, even though he is not doing an action and is only passively hearing what is being told to him. To help understand the consequences of hearing loshon hara, he gave the example of a trickster who approached a traveler and offered to show him around town. After a day of touring, he told the traveler that he wanted to take him out for a lavish meal. They went to a fancy restaurant and he encouraged the traveler to eat to his heart's content. As the meal was winding down, the trickster snuck out and the traveler was forced to pay for the entire expensive meal, despite his objections that he had been hoodwinked. The Chofetz Chaim said that one who hears loshon hara may enjoy it and thank his friend for sharing some interesting stories with him, but when he has to provide accounting for his deeds in Heaven, he will realize just how costly that enjoyment was when he finds out what he owes for hearing that enjoyable story.

Oftentimes, one finds himself in a situation where loshon hara is being told and it is hard to extricate himself from the problem in an inconspicuous manner. We have to be creative to divert the conversation to a different topic or to otherwise get out of situations where loshon hara will be said. If this cannot be done, the best solution is to leave the conversation. R' Dovid Feinstein says that even if a person listens but refuses to believe what he hears, the loshon hara still leaves a mark, akin to the writing of a pencil, which leaves a mark even after it has been erased. If a person does end up hearing the loshon hara, he is not permitted to believe what he heard.

והיה על מצח אהרן ונשא אהרן את עון הקדשים אשר יקדישו בני ישראל לכל מתנת קדשיהם והיה על מצחו תמיד לרצון להם לפני ה'
“It shall be on Aharon's forehead so that Aharon shall bring forgiveness for a son regarding the sacred offerings that the Children of Israel consecrate for any gifts of their sacred offerings; and it shall be on his forehead always, to bring them favor before Hashem” (28:38)

The Gemara in Menachos 36b says as follows: “Rabbah bar Rav Huna said: One is obligated to touch his tefillin at all times. This is learned out from a halacha regarding the tzitz which was worn by the Kohen Gadol. The posuk says "it shall be on his forehead always." We learn from this that the Kohen Gadol was never allowed to take his mind off of the tzitz while wearing it. If this is true of the tzitz, upon which the name of Hashem is written only once, certainly one may not allow himself to forget that he is wearing tefillin, which contain the name of Hashem many times.” Having tefillin on one’s head and arm requires constant awareness of their presence because of their tremendous kedusha. The Gemara teaches us to constantly touch our tefillin so that we will repeatedly be reminded of their presence and we will never take our mind off of them.

Similarly, the Rambam, based on this gemara, writes the following in Hilchos Tefillin 4:14, “One is obligated to feel his tefillin whenever he is wearing them so as not to take his mind off of them for even one second. This is because they are even holier than the tzitz. The tzitz only has Hashem’s name inscribed upon it once, but the name of Hashem is written twenty-one times on the parchment inside the Tefillin Shel Rosh and twenty-one times in the Tefillin Shel Yad.”

The Bach in Orach Chaim 28 references this Gemara in Menachos and elaborates on this concept of touching the tefillin. He explains that we should touch the tefillin whenever we think of them to avoid taking our mind off of them. If he does not touch them even when he does remember their presence, he will easily forget about them completely and end up behaving in a light-headed manner or fall asleep for a prolonged period of time. It is important to remember that we are wearing tefillin in order to avoid the inappropriate behavior which is forbidden while wearing them.

The Tur writes in Yoreh Deah 388: “A mourner must be especially careful to concentrate his thoughts on his tefillin so that he will not divert his thoughts from them. However, when eulogies are being said and at other times when the mourner is susceptible to crying, he should not wear the tefillin.” The Aruch HaShulchan points out this halacha mainly applied in times when they wore tefillin all day. In our day, we no longer have to worry about this halacha because we only wear tefillin during davening. The Shaagas Aryeh in Orach Chaim 39 points out that this seems contradictory to what we have said up until now. Even if the mourner is not concentrating directly on the tefillin, his heart may be broken but he is not engaging in any levity or other inappropriate behavior. Why does he have to be concerned about taking his mind off of his tefillin? The Aruch HaShulchan in Orach Chaim 28 answers that when one has tefillin on, he must be in awe of the great sanctity of the tefillin while also feeling joyful in the performance of the mitzvah. When a mourner is broken-hearted and cries, he does not feel the joy of the mitzvah, which is essential to its fulfillment. Therefore, he must concentrate on his tefillin and banish all sad thoughts so that he can feel the joy of the mitzvah. During eulogies, we cannot expect him to do this, so he must remove his tefillin.

We now understand what it means to focus on the tefillin while wearing them. One must feel both awe and joy while wearing the tefillin. However, if one forgets that he has tefillin on,

he will no longer feel these emotions. When he touches the tefillin, he remembers that he is wearing tefillin and immediately is imbued with a sense of awe and the sanctity of Hashem's name that rests upon him, and simultaneously rejoices in the fact that he is able to fulfill this great mitzvah and become closer to Hashem.

ושכנתי בתוך בני ישראל והייתי להם לאלקים

“I shall rest my presence among the Children of Israel, and I shall be their G-d” (29:45)

The Alexander Rebbe said that when he went to visit the Kotzker Rebbe, he had previously heard about the Rebbe and was well aware of his reputation as a special tzadik. However, with every moment that he spent with him, he became more and more amazed by the Rebbe's greatness. This experience can help us understand the posuk. A person may hear stories about how special Hashem's closeness is and he may be impressed by those stories, but he cannot fully comprehend what this means until he has experienced it firsthand. When a person learns Torah and davens, when we let Hashem into our homes and our lives, then we see Hashem and enjoy His presence even more. A person cannot fully appreciate Hashem from afar. The more we connect with Hashem and bring His closeness into our lives, the more we are amazed at His greatness. Thus, only after the Mishkan is built and Hashem dwells among the Bnei Yisrael does he become their G-d. The relationship between the people and Hashem takes on a whole new dimension when they bring Hashem into their lives.

The Chofetz Chaim said that if one brings beautiful silver and gold vessels into a dirty house, they will not make the house look any nicer because it will still be filthy. Only if the person first cleans up the house will the beautiful additions have the intended effect. Similarly, if we want to bring Hashem into our lives, we have to create the right atmosphere within ourselves. If we clean out the evil inclination and prevent him from returning, we allow Hashem's presence to beautify us. When a husband and wife actively create a peaceful home, they allow the presence of Hashem to enter. This cannot happen on its own. Only by first working on ourselves, thus allowing Hashem to have an impact on our lives, can we truly experience the beauty of a life lived according to the Torah.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

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