

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת כי תשא

ויאמר ה' אל משה קח לך סמים נטף ושחלת וחלבנה סמים ולבנה זכה בד בבד יהיה
“Hashem said to Moshe: Take yourself spices - stacte, onycha and galbanum - spices and
pure frankincense; these shall be of equal weight” (30:34)

Rabbeinu Bachya quotes the teaching of Chazal that galbanum was included in the Ketores despite the fact that it had a foul odor. This is meant to teach that even wicked people should join us in our prayers and on our fast days. In fact, Chazal add that any gathering for prayer that does not include these sinners is not considered to be an acceptable gathering. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that we are all responsible for the actions of our fellow Jews. If we do not reach out to those who act incorrectly and include them in our prayers and in our mitzvos, then we are equally responsible for their misdeeds. We will also be held partially responsible because we will have failed to help them. This is why the mitzvah of lulav includes four species representing various types of Jews, including the aravos which, lacking any taste or smell, represent Jews lacking Torah and mitzvos. If one shakes the lulav without the aravos, he has not fulfilled his obligation. Similarly, we must endeavor to include people who sin when we serve Hashem. After all, nobody should feel comfortable that they are righteous and that others are wicked. We should be inclusive and make it part of our mission to reach out to those who are far from Torah and try to bring them closer.

ואני הנה נתתי אתו את אהליאב בן אחיסמך למטה דן ובלב כל חכם לב נתתי חכמה
ועשו את כל אשר צויתך

“And I, behold, I have assigned with him Oholiav son of Achisamach of the tribe of Dan,
and I have endowed the heart of every wise-hearted person with wisdom, and they shall
make all that I have commanded you” (31:6)

Why does the posuk repeat that "I have endowed the heart of every wise person with wisdom"? Obviously, if they are wise, they have been granted wisdom?!

R' Dovid Kviat asks: Chazal say that if a person claims to have toiled in Torah and found Torah, he is to be believed. What does it mean to find Torah, as if he has stumbled upon it? If he has toiled, then he has earned it and worked hard to achieve great wisdom! He answers that even if a person works hard in Torah, it is not automatic that he will understand it. Working hard and making an effort helps one merit the Divine assistance that is still necessary in order to properly understand Torah. It is still "found" and not based on one's own work. Without the gift of wisdom from Hashem, a person could never fully achieve a high level of Torah study.

This can help us understand the posuk. Wisdom does not come from a person's own achievement. It is a blessing from Hashem. Even a person who seems to study hard and has learned a lot has really not gained this wisdom because of what he has done. It is a blessing from Hashem and should be viewed as such. One who has received such a blessing should be careful to use it in the way that Hashem meant it to be used.

ואתה דבר אל בני ישראל לאמר אך את שבתתי תשמרו כי אות הוא ביני וביניכם
לדרתיכם לדעת כי אני ה' מקדשכם

“Now you, speak to the Children of Israel, saying: However, you must observe my
Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations to know that I am
Hashem, Who makes you holy” (31:13)

The Chofetz Chaim writes that if Hashem has called Shabbos a special gift, it must indeed

be special. If people recognized the greatness of Shabbos, they would appreciate it a lot more. A person may have jewels and precious stones, but if he fails to realize that they have value, then they are meaningless to him. People who do not understand the value of Shabbos find it to be a day of limitations which they think is boring and difficult to bear each week. If we can truly understand the greatness of the Shabbos and its value, it makes Shabbos easier and more enjoyable.

ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת לעשות את השבת לדורתם ברית עולם
“The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath an eternal covenant for their generations” (31:16)

The Or HaChaim explains that the word “shamar,” “to observe,” also means “to anticipate.” He writes that everyone should look forward to the coming of Shabbos. We should not be upset by the fact that we cannot work on Shabbos. Instead, we should long for the coming of Shabbos with love. R’ Moshe Feinstein said that a generation of Jews was lost because they felt that Shabbos was a burden and that it was too much of a bother. Had they fully appreciated the beauty of Shabbos, they would never have become lost. The only way to keep Shabbos properly is through anticipating Shabbos. One who looks forward to Shabbos will be driven to learn the laws of Shabbos and will thereby keep it properly.

The Or HaChaim gives another explanation for the word “shamar,” explaining that it means “to guard.” We have a responsibility to guard the Shabbos and ensure that people should keep it. One should guard against transgressing Shabbos unintentionally by keeping the rabbinical decrees that protect us from doing forbidden work. Just as one guards a treasure, we must guard Shabbos. Every tefilla on Shabbos concludes with a request that everyone should keep Shabbos. It is important to do what we can to influence others to make them cognizant of Shabbos and its importance and centrality in the life of a Jew.

The Shabbos has to be kept “for their generations” because parents have to be aware that Shabbos is the continuity of our religion. It is of extreme importance that the next generation continues to keep Shabbos. This is accomplished by making Shabbos beautiful with food, song, and expressing a general love of the Shabbos.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann