

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת ויחי

ויברך את יוסף ויאמר האלהים אשר התהלכו אבתי לפניו אברהם ויצחק האלהים
הרעה אתי מעודי עד היום הזה

“He blessed Yosef and he said: Hashem before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked, Hashem who shepherds me from my inception until this day” (48:15)

The gemara in Pesachim 118a says that earning a livelihood is more difficult than bringing the redemption. Yaakov said that "an angel redeemed me from all evil," but for sustenance, it was "Hashem who shepherds me." Redemption can be accomplished through an emissary while parnassa can only be provided by Hashem Himself.

The Torah Temima asks: How does this make sense? If Hashem is omnipotent, how can anything be more or less difficult for Him to do? Additionally, the gemara there also states that it is as difficult to earn a living as the splitting of the Yam Suf. Again, why should anything be difficult for Hashem to accomplish? Also, what is the connection between parnassa and Keriya Yam Suf?

There is a midrash in Parshas Beshalach which says that when the Jews were standing before the Yam Suf, the angels pointed out to Hashem that that the Jews were really no better than the Egyptians. The Jews worshipped idols just like the Egyptians did and were not really deserving of a miraculous salvation. Hashem was hard-pressed to answer their claim because, in truth, the Jews were not necessarily worthy of any miracles due to their sins. While Hashem did eventually intervene and find merit for them, it was certainly difficult to defend them. From this the Torah Temima concludes that what made splitting the Yam Suf difficult for Hashem was not the actual act of splitting the sea. The hard part was finding the merit and justification for doing so.

Parnassa depends on a person's individual merits. In Kiddushin 82b, R' Shimon ben Elazar comments that the animals do not have to work hard for their food. If man serves Hashem, shouldn't he also deserve to have what to eat without suffering? However, since man has corrupted his ways, he must work for his livelihood. This gemara clearly illustrates that it is individual merits that determine parnassa. When Chazal say that parnassa is as difficult as Keriya Yam Suf, it is because the person puts Hashem in the same situation that He faced at the Yam Suf. If the person is not deserving of sustenance, Hashem will find it difficult to justify what He gives him.

This is why parnassa is more difficult than redemption. The ultimate redemption has been promised to us and will happen regardless of whether we deserve it. Of course, it will happen faster and with less troubles if we would earn it through our own merits, but if we do not, Hashem will bring the redemption anyway. However, our livelihood does depend on our actions. This makes it a more difficult task that can only be accomplished with the direct help of Hashem.

With this idea, we can also explain a gemara in Sotah 2a. The gemara famously states that matchmaking is as difficult as splitting the Yam Suf. However, says the gemara, this only applies to second marriages. We can explain that while everyone has a potential marriage partner designated from birth, a person can only find a second one if it is earned through individual merit. Not everyone may be deserving of this. It becomes difficult for Hashem to justify finding another spouse for the person if he does not really deserve it, just as it was difficult to defend the Jewish people at the Yam Suf.

**המלאך הגאל אתי מכל רע יברך את הנערים ויקרא בהם שמי ושם אבתי אברהם ויצחק
וידגו לרב בקרב הארץ**

“May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they proliferate abundantly like fish within the land” (48:16)

The Talmud Yerushalmi Brochos 4:3 asks: Why do we say eighteen blessings in our daily Shemone Esrei? One of the answers given is that the three Avos are mentioned as a group eighteen times in the Torah. However, if you count them, you will find that there are only seventeen such instances! The answer is that the posuk of Hamalach is also counted because Yaakov is referenced next to Avraham and Yitzchak.

When we daven each day, we should realize that we are evoking the merit of our forefathers. We beseech Hashem, not only with our own merits, but also with the greatness of the Avos which protects us. This is why we mention the Avos at the very beginning of the Shemone Esrei. Our history is not just stories, it gives us people and deeds to emulate. As we conclude Sefer Bereishis, we have spent weeks reading about the conduct of our Avos and their great deeds. We have to remember the lessons that we have learned from these parshiyos and remember them throughout the year. Our tefillos and our reflection upon the lives of the Avos should inspire us to actively implement these lessons in our daily lives.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that the word תפלה stems from the root פלל, which is related to the root בלל, meaning to mix an outside element into a substance, as in the בלילה of the Korban Mincha, which involved mixing oil into the flour. Similarly, תפלה is the act of absorbing ideas into ourselves and reminding ourselves of thoughts and emotions that get lost in our daily activities. This is the essence of prayer. If tefilla was a way to express ourselves to Hashem, we could not have fixed times for davening, as it is impossible to demand a person to feel a certain way at a certain given moment. Rather, when we daven, we remind ourselves of our priorities in life and what our goals outside the shul should be. It is nearly impossible to keep these ideas fresh in our minds at every minute. Therefore, three times a day we step away from what we are doing and remind ourselves of our true task in life. [This paragraph is my own and was not seen by Rabbi Friedman - MG]

חכלילי עינים מיון ולבן שנים מחלב

“Red eyed from wine and white toothed from milk” (49:12)

The gemara in Kesuvos 111b interprets this posuk to say that white teeth are better than milk and learns that it is better to give a smile to a friend rather than give him a drink of milk. This is consistent with the teaching of Chazal that it is better to do an act of kindness with yourself rather than with your possessions. Greeting someone warmly can sometimes mean much more than a gift. It is important to greet everyone a smile and to deal with people in a pleasant manner.

יששכר חמר גרם רבץ בין המשפתים

“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey; he rests between the boundaries” (49:14)

The gemara in Bava Kama 17a says that one who involves himself with Torah and acts of kindness inherits the portion of two shevatim: Yosef and Yissachar. Yosef is the epitome of kindness because he supported his whole family during the years of famine. Yissachar represents Torah, as many Torah scholars descended from Yissachar. It is important to note that this reward is not earned by merely "learning" Torah and "performing" acts of kindness. One must be totally involved in the Torah that he learns and the chesed that he does. A superficial action does not

suffice. Business is also referred to as עסק. Just as business is very involving, one should have a serious involvement in chesed and Torah. This is how a person can merit the reward promised by Chazal.

This idea is supported based on our tefillos. On Shabbos, we make a special blessing for those who do communal work. We ask Hashem to repay those who are עוסקים בצרכי ציבור באמונה, involved in communal activities. In Birchas HaTorah, we bless Hashem who commanded us לעסוק בדברי תורה, to be involved in words of Torah. Complete involvement is the ideal way in which to fulfill these two mitzvos.

ותשב באיתן קשתו ויפזו זרעי ידיו מידי אביר יעקב משם רעה אבן ישראל
“His bow was firmly emplaced and his arms were gilded, from the hands of the Mighty Power of Yaakov - from there he shepherded the stone of Yisrael” (49:24)

In Sotah 36b, the gemara says that when Potiphar’s wife grabbed Yosef, his father’s face appeared to him. He said that if he sinned, his name would be removed from the stones on the ephod and the other brothers would have their names there without his name. Upon hearing this, Yosef strengthened himself and refrained from sinning. We do not have this type of revelation today to assist us, but every person has to know that there are many great and beautiful things that are waiting for us in our future. Just like Yosef had the ephod waiting for him in the future, every Jewish man and woman has a reward waiting, either in this world or the next. If a person recognizes this reward and that his sins could erase the great things that would be coming to him, he may think twice before doing something wrong. This is something to contemplate and to really integrate into our minds. The wise person is the one who has foresight. If we realize that our actions dictate how our future will turn out, it will enable us to fight the temptation of sin.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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