

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת קדושים

איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואת שבתתי תשמרו אני ה' אלקיכם
“Every man: Your mother and your father shall you revere and My Sabbaths shall you observe - I am Hashem, your G-d” (19:3)

What is the connection between the mitzvah to fear parents and the commandment to keep Shabbos? Why are they mentioned together in the same posuk? Rabbi Friedman suggests that these two mitzvos are linked because Shabbos observance is often tied to the relationship that a child has with his parents. A child learns to keep Shabbos at a young age and does so because his parents are doing it. The child naturally respects his parents and follows their example. If children respect their parents, then they will continue to observe the Shabbos. If they do not honor their parents, then their desire to continue keeping Shabbos is in jeopardy.

The Aruch HaShulchan (Yoreh Deah 240:1) describes the importance of the mitzvah of honoring parents: "Honoring one's father and mother and fearing them are positive commandments... They are among the greatest and most weighty mitzvos. How great is the power of this mitzvah! The Torah compares honoring and fearing Hashem to honoring and fearing parents... Just as He commanded us to honor and fear His great name, he also commanded us to honor and fear our parents. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Kidushin 1:7) even says that the mitzvah of honoring parents is greater..."

לא תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ויראת מאלקיך אני ה'
“You shall not curse the deaf, and you shall not place a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your G-d - I am Hashem” (19:14)

The gemara in Bava Metzia 75b says that one who lends money without witnesses to the loan transgresses the prohibition against placing a stumbling block before the blind. He puts the borrower in a situation where he can easily deny that he ever borrowed money as there are no witnesses to contradict him. Since the lender has made it very easy for the borrower to lie, he has sinned by giving his fellow man the ability to sin so easily and placing him in a tempting situation. The Torah tells us that financial agreements should always be very clear so as not to create such a situation. We are instructed to take preventative measures to ensure that nobody can possibly do anything crooked. Contracts that are drawn up should have all the terms clearly spelled out without leaving anything open to interpretation. So many monetary disagreements that come before Beis Din are because of ambiguities in the original agreements. A person should be very exact in his business dealings so that nobody has any room to do anything underhanded.

לא תעשו עול במשפט לא תשא פני דל ולא תהדר פני גדול בצדק תשפט עמיתך. לא תלך רכיל בעמיק לא תעמד על דם רעך אני ה'
“You shall not commit a perversion of justice; you shall not favor the poor and you shall not honor the great; with righteousness shall you judge your fellow. You shall not be a gossipmonger among your people, you shall not stand aside while your fellow's blood is shed - I am Hashem” (19:15-16)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand asks: What is the connection between judging others favorably and gossiping? Why are they juxtaposed in these two pesukim? The answer is that the posuk is teaching us the natural progression of events that lead to slander and how we can stop it from

happening. When one judges someone negatively, he then has the desire to tell derogatory stories about the person. If one always judges his fellow Jew for the good and gives him the benefit of the doubt, he will never go to the next step of telling gossip about the person. The Gemara on Shabbos 127 says that judging others favorably is part of the mitzvah of bringing peace between people. Rashi on this Gemara writes that if someone always assumes that others do not mean him harm or that there were unusual circumstances when they did wrong him, he will be at peace with everyone. The Sefer HaChinuch writes that the purpose of this mitzvah of judging others favorably is so that there will be peace among all people. If one is constantly judgmental, he will have a hard time being at peace with other people. This attitude is essential for maintaining a healthy marriage, as well as for having good relationships with all people.

לא תקם ולא תטר את בני עמך ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני ה'
“You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself - I am Hashem” (19:18)

The Rambam writes (Hilchos Deios 6:3) that as a result of this mitzvah to love other people as ourselves, we are obligated to say praiseworthy things about others. Everybody likes a compliment. If you love your fellow as yourself, you will say a good word about him. Talking positively about others is a very easy mitzvah to do and we have plenty of opportunities to do it. A compliment can always be used and can have far-reaching benefits for the subject of the praise. It may appear to be nothing more than a few words, but it can make a person feel good about himself and help him very much. Perhaps the Rambam makes a point of stressing the importance of complimenting others because it does not always come naturally. We should accustom ourselves to say nice things about other people so that we can fulfill this mitzvah and be kind to others.

וכי יגור אתך גר בארצכם לא תונו אתו
“When a proselyte dwells among you in your land, do not taunt him” (19:33)

The attitude that a person must have toward a convert is reinforced many times in the Torah. The gemara in Bava Metzia 59b teaches that one who taunts a convert transgresses three negative commandments. The Rambam writes (Hilchos Deios 6:4) that one who loves a convert and is nice to him fulfills two positive commandments. The Rambam continues that Hashem is referred to in the Torah as "loving converts." If Hashem is mindful about the respect of the convert, we must also emulate Hashem's ways and take care of the converts among us. We should go out of our way to make sure that they are happy and never say anything mean to them. This is true for all people who have some undesirable deeds in their past. The Mishna in Bava Metzia 4:10 says, "If a person is a ba'al teshuva, do not tell him, 'Remember your previous deeds.' If a person is a son of converts, do not tell him, 'Remember the deeds of your fathers.'" We must be sensitive to people from all different types of backgrounds. It is more than just a nice thing to do. It is a commandment in the Torah that we are obligated to fulfill.

והייתם לי קדשים כי קדוש אני ה' ואבדל אתכם מן העמים להיות לי
“You shall be holy for Me, for I Hashem am holy; and I have separated you from the peoples to be Mine” (20:26)

Rashi quotes the Toras Kohanim on this posuk: "How do we know that a person should not say, 'I find pork disgusting,' or 'It is impossible for me to wear shatnez [a mixture of wool and linen],' but rather, one should say, 'I indeed wish to, but what can I do?' My Father in

heaven has imposed these decrees upon me?' Because the posuk says here, 'And I have separated you from the peoples to be Mine.' Your very distinction from the other peoples must be for My Name, separating yourself from transgression and accepting upon yourself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven." When doing a mitzvah, we must be aware that we are doing so because Hashem commanded it, not because of some other external reason or personal feelings.

The Aruch HaShulchan (Yoreh Deah 240:2-3) writes: "Honoring parents is a logical mitzvah, a practice that is commonplace among all nations. Even those who deny the truth of Torah are careful about it because logic and nature dictate its practice. But we, Hashem's nation, are commanded not to do logical mitzvos because they make sense but because Hashem commanded us to do so in His holy Torah... The same is true of Shabbos. All nations have a day of rest each week. Therefore the Torah tells us to 'guard the Shabbos day to sanctify it as Hashem has commanded you' and not because it makes sense logically."

Sefiras HaOmer

R' Aharon Kotler discusses the meaning of the mourning period during Sefiras HaOmer in his sefer Mishnas Rav Aharon (Chelek 3). We mourn for the death of the 24,000 students of R' Akiva during these weeks because when they died, a great amount of Torah was lost from the world. We are not merely remembering the tragedy of what was once lost and commemorating a historical event. This loss of Torah is felt throughout all generations and affects how we do mitzvos even today. Imagine how many volumes could have been filled with the Torah studied by these 24,000 students. This Torah would have been handed down and expounded upon throughout the ensuing generations. We must recognize how much we have truly lost, even today, as a result of their deaths. Thus, the mourning period of Sefirah also serves as a recognition of the tremendous value of Torah study. The outward expressions of grief over the loss of Torah should inspire to us to strengthen our commitment to Torah in the future.

These students died because they did not respect one another. Even if you do not need honor for yourself, you should accord honor to others. Even so, why was this shortcoming punishable by death? The answer is that these students were destined to be the transmitters of the Torah to the next generation. "Closeness with colleagues" is among the forty-eight prerequisites for the acquisition of Torah. Since they were lacking in this vital characteristic needed to acquire Torah, they were not fit to be a link in the chain of transmitting the Torah. They died because they proved unworthy for the task for which they were chosen. It was specifically during the time of counting toward and preparing for the acceptance of the Torah on Shavuot that they died. Torah does not come automatically. One must work on himself in order to merit the proper study of Torah. This is a lesson to us that is especially appropriate during this time of year. It is upon us to focus on perfecting our character in those areas through which Torah is acquired and to instill in ourselves a heightened awareness of just how important and valuable the Torah is.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Written by Michael Gutmann