

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת כי תבוא

והיה כי תבוא אל הארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך נחלה וירשתה וישבת בה
“It will be when you enter the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance and you possess it and dwell in it” (26:1)

In the opening section of this week's parsha, the Torah repeats over and over again that Eretz Yisrael is “the land that Hashem gives to you.” This is meant to reinforce our knowledge of the fact that we do not possess Eretz Yisrael because we are strong and mighty, but only as a gift from Hashem. The retention of this gift is dependent on our continued obedience to the One who gave it to us. That is why this repetition is found specifically in the laws of **ביכורים**, the first fruits. One must dedicate the first fruits of his crop to Hashem and bring them to the **בית המקדש** in recognition of the fact that everything in our possession comes to us as a gift from Hashem.

The Sifri says on this posuk that the connection between the gift of Eretz Yisrael and the mitzvah of **ביכורים** is that in the merit of giving **ביכורים**, the Jewish people would receive the land. The obvious question is that **ביכורים** only apply in Eretz Yisrael. How could they give **ביכורים** prior to entering the land in order to earn entry to it? The Yalkut Maamarim says that it was not necessary to have actually performed the mitzvah of **ביכורים**. The Sifri means to say that they would receive Eretz Yisrael as a reward for accepting to fulfill the mitzvah when it would become applicable. This acceptance was done by internalizing the mitzvah's underlying reason, the understanding that Hashem gives us the land as a gift. The merit of such a commitment is sufficient in order to earn the right to Eretz Yisrael. (See also a similar Rashi in Shemos 12:28.)

We learn from this that when one accepts to fulfill a mitzvah, it is considered as if he already did the mitzvah. Thus, if a person makes a commitment on Rosh Hashana to do certain mitzvos or to improve in certain areas in the coming year, it may be considered as if he has already done those good deeds.

היום הזה ה' אלקיך מצוך לעשות את החקים האלה ואת המשפטים ושמרת ועשית אותם בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך

“This day, Hashem, your G-d, commands you to perform these decrees and the statutes, and you shall observe and perform them with all your heart and with all your soul” (26:16)

Another meaning of the word “nefesh” is “desire” (See Rashi Bereishis 23:8). The ideal way for a person to do mitzvos is with all his desire. When one does a mitzvah with tremendous desire and appreciation for Hashem’s commandments, his mitzvos are transformed to a much higher level. It is important to develop an appreciation of the importance of what mitzvos are all about. When one fulfills mitzvos in this way, it becomes much easier to do more mitzvos.

We find the same concept later in the parsha (28:47), where the Torah says that horrible punishments will befall the Jewish people in the future because they failed to serve Hashem with joy. If people just go through the motions while feeling coerced and uninspired, their service of Hashem is lacking. The proper approach to serving Hashem involves an infusion of excitement and inspiration. It is, of course, a challenge to remain inspired at all times by mitzvos but we must try to take the necessary steps to reach this level.

את ה' האמרת היום להיות לך לאל קים וללכת בדרכיו ולשמר חקיו ומצותיו ומשפטיו ולשמע בקלו

“You have distinguished Hashem today to be a G-d for you and to walk in His ways and to observe His decrees, His commandments and His statutes and to hearken to His voice” (26:17)

The Sefer HaChinuch (611) counts the obligation “to walk in His ways” and a positive commandment. He writes that, in order to fulfill this mitzvah, all of our actions must be carried out with kindness and compassion at all times, as Hashem acts in this way. If any part of our behavior does not live up to this standard, we have transgressed the commandment to walk in Hashem’s ways and to imitate Him. When we act unkindly to others, it is not just impolite. It is a transgression of a Torah commandment. The mitzvah to act with chesed applies constantly and at all times.

ושמרתם את דברי הברית הזאת ועשיתם אתם למען תשכילו את כל אשר תעשו
“You shall observe the words of this covenant and you shall perform them, so that you will succeed in all that you do” (29:8)

Based on this posuk, the Gemara in Sanhedrin 99b says that one who teaches someone else’s child Torah, it is as if he has made the child into his own. “Observing the words of the covenant” refers to the study of Torah because through studying the laws we are able to fulfill the Torah and bring about the ultimate purpose of mankind. “Performing them” can be taken to mean “making them,” i.e. creating the one who is the recipient of your teachings. Since the teacher helped the child grow and shaped him, he is entitled to consider him as his child. A person’s completion is not just through his physical existence. It is through his reaching his purpose in life. If one guides him there, it is as if he created him.

[Perhaps this idea can help us understand a Gemara in Avoda Zara 9a, which describes the first 2,000 of world history as “nothingness,” i.e. devoid of Torah, and the second 2,000 years as an era of Torah. The turning point and the beginning of Torah is when Avraham Avinu was 52 years old. It was at this age, says the Gemara, that Avraham began teaching the world about the existence of Hashem. Incidentally, this is described by the posuk as “the souls that he made” (Bereishis 12:5) and is also mentioned in the previous line of the Gemara in Sanhedrin 99b as one who is considered to have created his students. It is neither Avraham’s birth nor his recognition of a Creator that ushered in the era of Torah, but the moment that he began to share this knowledge with others. Perhaps this teaches us that the study of Torah only fulfills its fullest potential when it is shared with others. – MG]

Many people have the opportunity to teach others Torah. They must realize that teaching others is tantamount to having created them and shaping their souls. This should give teachers a better appreciation for the importance of their work. People who are capable of teaching should look for opportunities to give of themselves and their time to share their knowledge others who need guidance.

*Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann*