

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman



פרשת מקץ – שבת חנוכה ב'

ויאמרו איש אל אחיו אבל אשמים אנחנו על אחינו אשר ראינו צרת נפשו בהתחננו אלינו ולא שמענו על כן באה אלינו הצרה הזאת

“They then said to one another: Indeed we are guilty concerning our brother inasmuch as we saw his heartfelt anguish when he pleaded with us and we did not listen; that is why this anguish has come upon us” (42:21)

Rabbeinu Bachya points out in this posuk that we see a big difference between righteous people and wicked people. The brothers admitted the error of their ways, something that righteous people do but is uncommon among the wicked. It is important to be able to recognize where we may have gone wrong and take steps to correct it. If someone is stubborn and refuses to admit his error, he will never be able to improve. In fact, the mishna in Pirkei Avos counts "admitting the truth" as one of the forty-eight characteristics necessary to acquire Torah properly. If a person cannot be honest with himself, it will be difficult for him to work toward self-improvement. In all our relationships in life, it is crucial to be able to say "I was wrong" and to move on and begin to correct the problem. Conversely, Chazal tell us that a wicked person will not repent, even when standing at the entrance to Gehinnom. We must be able to learn from our mistakes and not repeat them. Yosef knew that his brothers would have to admit their guilt in his sale before they could move on. He therefore devised a plan in order to make them regret selling him and to get them to admit their wrongdoing.

וייראו האנשים כי הובאו בית יוסף ויאמרו על דבר הכסף השב באמתחתינו בתחלה אנחנו מובאים להתגלל עלינו ולהתנפל עלינו ולקחת אתנו לעבדים ואת חמרינו

“The men became frightened because they were being brought to Yosef's house, and they said: Because of the money replaced in our sacks in the beginning are we being brought, to bring a charge against us and to cast down upon us and to take us as slaves, along with our donkeys” (43:18)

The Gemara in Shabbos 31a lists the questions that a person is asked following his death, the first of which is whether a person did business honestly. The Vilna Gaon writes that we find a hint to this Gemara in this posuk. The brothers said that they were being punished for the money that they brought "in the beginning." This is a reference to the first question that a person is asked, which is regarding money and honesty.

הם יצאו את העיר לא הרחיקו ויוסף אמר לאשר על ביתו קום רדף אחרי האנשים והשגתם ואמרת אליהם למה שלמתם רעה תחת טובה

“They had left the city, they had not gone far, and Yosef said to the one in charge of his house: Arise, chase after the men; you shall overtake them and say to them: Why do you repay evil for good” (44:4)

The Mincha Belula asks: Why did Yosef tell his messenger "you shall overtake them and say" instead of simply instructing him to pursue them and relay the message? Obviously, the messenger could not speak to them without first catching up to them?! He suggests that Yosef instructed his messenger not to call them thieves and embarrass them in public. He was to wait to accuse them until after he had overtaken them. Yosef did not want to put them to shame by screaming at them through the streets. He said to wait until overtaking them before accusing them so that they should not be shamed. The lesson to be learned from this is that even though we may occasionally have to rebuke people, there is a proper way to do it. Yosef had a whole plan in mind but he made sure to do it in a way in which he minimized the embarrassment of his brothers. Similarly, the Rambam writes that rebuke must be given privately. If we need to criticize another person, we must remember that nobody else needs to know about it. It should remain a private matter.

R' Boruch Epstein, the author of the Torah Temima, points out that, in addition to the usual count of pesukim printed in the chumash at the end of each parsha, there is also a unique count of the words in the parsha included only at the end of Parshas Mikeitz. Many chumashim show a count of 2025 words in Parshas Mikeitz. What is the significance of this number and why are the words only counted for Parshas Mikeitz? He answers that נ, candle, has a numerical value of 250. 250 multiplied by the 8 nights of Chanukah plus 25 for the 25th of Kislev equals 2025. Thus, we see a hint to Chanukah in Parshas Mikeitz, the parsha which is nearly always read on Shabbos Chanukah.

Chanukah

The following Divrei Torah were said at Rabbi Friedman's Chanukah Get-Together this past Tuesday

Rabbi Yechiel London (Rabbi Friedman's father-in-law, Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Heichal HaTorah)

Every holiday in the Jewish calendar has some aspect of reliving a historical experience from our nation's past. What experience are we to relive on Chanukah? The troubles of the story of Chanukah followed two calamities: lack of Torah learning and lack of observance of mitzvos. The Maharal writes that these two aspects represent the forgetting of the Torah and the forgery of the Torah. Not only was the Torah neglected, but there were those who attempted to pass off a new version of the Jewish religion.

Today, there are also those who wish to cause neglect of the Torah and forgery of the Torah. There are many people who are not just uninterested in learning Torah but actively seek to misrepresent the Torah and its ideals. On Chanukah, we relive the historical events by once again committing to combat these forces antithetical to Torah and renewing our belief in Torah study and mitzva observance.

In order to accomplish this, we need more than just Torah learning, but we need an additional feeling of importance of Torah study. The only place in the text of our Siddur where we find an outright appeal for mercy and address Hashem as "Our Father, the Father of mercy" is in the prayer of Ahava Rabba, where we ask for Divine assistance in our Torah study. We also find in Birchas HaTorah that we ask Hashem to "make the Torah sweet in our mouths." This request is not made by any other mitzva. This indicates the priority that we must place on learning Torah. Additionally, the first blessing in Shemone Esrei in which we make requests from Hashem is a request for knowledge, for the ability to succeed in Torah study.

In this quest to achieve a feeling of importance for Torah study, the most important factor is our mindset. One should aim to understand what he is learning. One must understand that saying the words of Torah is not enough, but that the ultimate goal is to understand what he is saying and that is the level that he aims to reach.

The minimum level of fulfilling the mitzvah of menorah is one candle per house per night. This is because one little candle, just one spark, is enough to change a person. The light of the menorah, symbolizing the light of Torah, should inspire us to transform our houses into places of Torah. Our homes should be places where an emphasis is placed not only on the importance of Torah but on the study of Torah and reaching the depths of understanding what we are learning.

Rabbi Mayer Friedman

The Gemara writes that Chanukah is designated to praise Hashem and to give thanks. Rashi comments that we give praise by saying Hallel and we give thanks by saying Al Hanissim. The question is why is lighting the menorah not included in the Gemara as a special part of Chanukah? Where does that factor into the obligations of the day? After all, we make a big deal out of the menorah and publicizing the miracle of Chanukah. We also know that one is required to spend his last pennies in order to buy oil for Chanukah. Why is this mitzva not mentioned?

Rav Dovid Feinstein answers that this Gemara is merely a quote from Megillas Taanis, a list of special days on which fasting and eulogies were once prohibited. The Megillas Taanis is only trying to explain why there is no fasting or eulogizing, for which the designation for praise and thanks is a sufficient answer without getting into a discussion about lighting the menorah. This may explain the Gemara, but the question still stands based on the text of Al Hanissim. We say "they established these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and to praise..." Again, why is lighting the menorah omitted?

The Rambam has a slightly different version of the purpose of Chanukah. He writes that the days of Chanukah are days of rejoicing, praising and lighting the menorah. Where does the Rambam find the idea of rejoicing? Perhaps the Rambam derives the idea of rejoicing from the fact that the Gemara calls Chanukah a Yom Tov. Despite the fact that work is permitted, it is still a Yom Tov in the sense that it is a day of rejoicing. Perhaps we can similarly answer that lighting the menorah represents the other aspect that the Rambam left out, giving thanks. The menorah is a way of showing our thanks for all that Hashem has done for us. The days of Chanukah are a special time to give thanks to Hashem and one of the ways in which we do this is by lighting the menorah. The light of the menorah, which symbolizes the light of Torah, is a way of thanking Hashem for giving us the ability to lead a life of Torah and mitzvos, a lifestyle that was preserved for us through the miracles of Chanukah.

Michael Gutmann

In this week's parsha, the brothers are accused by Yosef of espionage and are imprisoned for three days, after which Yosef tells them that they may not return without Binyamin. The brothers regret having been cruel to Yosef, which is the cause of their problems, while Reuven reminds them that he had advised against the sale of Yosef in the first place.

There is an interesting midrash in Shir HaShirim that compares Reuven's actions to Chanukah. The posuk in Shir HaShirim (7:14) says: "The flowers have given off a fragrance and by every door are all fruits." The midrash says that the flowers refer to Reuven while the fruits refer to the lights of Chanukah. What is their relevance to this posuk and what is the connection between these two?

Rav Shimon Schwab explains that flowers produce a nice smell but then they wilt and die and it is as if they never existed. This refers to Reuven. Reuven "had a nice smell," he had the right ideas and preached the proper course of action. He rebuked his brothers in this week's parsha and he tried to save Yosef in last week's parsha. However, Chazal still fault Reuven for trying to appease his brothers and take care of Yosef later rather than picking Yosef up and carrying him home. When the time came for action, Reuven was too afraid to fight his brothers. His "smell" was nice but it was not very meaningful. The Chashmonaim were exactly the opposite. They told their brethren to protest against the Greek decrees, to continue learning Torah and to stay true to their way of life. When the time came for action, they backed up their words by taking up arms and leading the troops into battle. Because they were willing to sacrifice their lives for the ideals that they preached, Hashem brought about the salvation of the Jewish people through them. Their "smell" bore "fruits," it had a permanence. These fruits are "by every door" in the form of our menorahs, the lights that remind us how self-sacrifice in the name of the proper ideals saved the day.

The Chashmonaim fought for the right to be able to study Torah and observe mitzvos. Thus, the essence of Chanukah is the celebration of and the time to give thanks for our ability to live the lives of Torah-observant Jews. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that in order to properly give thanks for this, we must truly appreciate the Torah and the role that it plays in our life. Without feeling a joy in the Torah, our thanks are insincere and we have missed the true meaning of Chanukah. Chanukah is a time for introspection, a time to take stock of our lives, and gauge whether we truly have this feeling of appreciation for Torah and mitzvos and what we can do to attain it and/or preserve it.

One way to gain a greater appreciation for Torah is by reaching out to others. When one tries to reach out to other Jews, he appreciates his own way of life more by teaching it to his friend. In order to properly convey his teachings, he will have to really believe what he says and really mean it. Therefore, outreach can benefit both the helper and the person being helped.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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