

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת האזינו

יערף כמטר לקחי תזל כטל אמרתי כשעירם עלי דשא וכרביבים עלי עשב
“May my teaching drop like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew; like storm upon vegetation and like droplets upon the grass” (32:2)

Moshe compared the Torah to rain. There are two possible understandings of this analogy. The first is that just as the world cannot function properly without rain, the study of Torah and its fulfillment are also vital for the world's survival. Chazal tell us that the Torah was the blueprint for this world. Without Torah, the world cannot continue. That is why Chazal refer to the first 2000 years of world history, before Avraham Avinu, as תוהו, emptiness. Until Avraham came and was the first to recognize Hashem on his own, the world was deficient.

R' Bunim of Peshischa gives a second explanation of the comparison of Torah to rain. Just as the benefit of rain is not immediately noticeable but eventually becomes apparent as the crops grow, the benefit of Torah study does not show itself in the short term. One can learn Torah for a few hours and feel as if he has not accomplished much. But just like rain, it makes that impact and, over time, it will bear fruit. If a person continues to make an effort in his Avodas Hashem, he may not see an immediate difference in himself. But if he looks back and compares himself to the way he was a year ago, he will see a different person.

A similar idea is reiterated at the end of the parsha. The posuk (32:47) says that Torah "is not an empty thing from you." Rashi explains that the study and fulfillment of the Torah do not go unrewarded. It may not be noticeable and sometimes it may not even come in this world, but there is a reward waiting for every time a person follows the Torah. That is why the posuk continues that the Torah is "your life." Torah provides life to those who fulfill it and this reward is guaranteed.

As we approach Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we prepare for our court date. One way of succeeding in this case is to take advantage of the opportunities that are available to us to learn Torah. There are shiurim everywhere, even in the universities. One can receive daily emails containing halachos, parsha shiurim and other divrei Torah. One can listen to audio shiurim on the internet. There are tapes, CDs and sefarim translated into English. We are lucky to live in a time when Torah is so easily accessible and very close to us. We should try to avail ourselves of as many of these opportunities as we can.

שחת לו לא בניו מומם דור עקש ופתלתל
“Corruption is not His; the blemish is His children's, a perverse and twisted generation” (32:5)

The Avnei Azel gives an allegorical explanation of this posuk. He interprets the posuk to mean, "If he has gone bad, the blemish will show in his children." He explains that many times someone looks like a good person on the outside, but it is

difficult to assess where he stands in his commitment to Judaism. The posuk hints to us that the way to find out more is to look at the education that he provides his children with. A person who cares about Torah and about its future will be sure that his children get a first-rate education. If a person does not place value in this, then it is clear that he does not value Torah himself.

On the first day of Rosh Hashana, we read about Yitzchak's birth because Sarah was remembered on Rosh Hashana. There is an additional lesson to learn from the reading of this portion on Rosh Hashana. Jewish education is always a top priority, especially in our times, and is important for Jewish continuity. On the first day of Rosh Hashana, we read about a child being born to Avraham and Sarah and not being brought up in an ideal situation because Yishmael was a negative influence on him. Sarah was upset by Yishmael's presence and prevailed upon Avraham to send him out of the house. On the first day of the year, we are first faced with the challenge of how to bring up our children and prevent them from being in bad situations. We must ensure that our children are surrounded by the right types of people so that they are not adversely influenced by their friends.

צור ילדך תשי ותשכח קל מחללך

“You ignored the Rock Who gave birth to you, and forgot Hashem Who brought you forth” (32:18)

The Or HaChayim comments that the literal translation of the posuk is "You weakened Hashem Who gave birth to you." He explains that this refers to a midrash that describes what transpired when Hashem decided to create man. The angels asked Hashem why He wanted to create man. He explained that man would do good deeds and improve the world. Thus, if a person does not act properly, he weakens Hashem's argument for the creation of man and removes the entire purpose behind his creation.

In Mussaf on Rosh Hashana, we say "Today is the birthday of the world." Adam was created on Rosh Hashana, but the world itself was in fact brought into existence six days earlier on the 25th of Elul. Why, then, do we commemorate the birthday of the world on Rosh Hashana? R' Gedalia Schorr answers that man fulfills the purpose of creation. The world was finished on Rosh Hashana when Adam was brought to life. The world is directly connected to the behavior of mankind. Therefore, we can truly say that today, Rosh Hashana, is really the birthday of the world. It is important for us to realize the true greatness of man. This whole beautiful world was created for us. In fact, the Mesillas Yesharim writes that when man serves Hashem, the whole world and all of nature is elevated. We must use the world to serve Hashem and not waste even a minute of our time on it.

ראש השנה

ותשובה ותפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזירה

"Repentance, prayer and charity annul the evil decree." (Mussaf, Rosh Hashana)

Repentance

A person once came to the Gerrer Rebbe on Erev Rosh Hashana and told him that he had not been a good person during the past year. The Rebbe told him that as long as the year is not yet finished, one can still correct what he has done wrong. Teshuva can be accomplished even in a short amount of time. We must recognize how much a person can accomplish in a few moments. Even on Erev Rosh Hashana at Mincha we still say "Barech Aleinu... Es Hashana Hazos" and ask Hashem to bless this year, even though there are only a few minutes left in the year. Those few minutes still have tremendous potential and can be utilized for teshuva.

Prayer

It is important realize that the power of prayer comes from praying wholeheartedly with full concentration. Having kavana (concentration) during davening is something that everyone needs to work on. Someone once asked R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach what he had accepted upon himself as a merit for the new year. He replied that he was trying to say the first blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei with more kavana. This story shows us that every individual can work on improving concentration during davening.

Charity

One concept regarding tzedaka that is often overlooked is that fact that it is an obligation and not just something nice to do. If this is so, why does fulfilling an obligation have the special power to annul a harsh decree? When a person gives of his money, he is giving part of his livelihood. It is hard-earned money that he spent time working for. In effect, one is giving of his time, which is his life, to help the poor person and he gives life to the person by helping him put food on the table. When Hashem sees a person giving of his own life in order to help another person live, he grants the person life himself. The way Hashem treats us mirrors the way that we act toward other people. Similarly, Chazal tell us that if one is not adamant about his own honor and forgives others for what they do to him, then Hashem will, in turn, forgive the person for his own misdeeds.

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