

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת עקב

ויענך וירעבך ויאכלך את המן אשר לא ידעת ולא ידעון אבתיך למען הודיעך כי לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם כי על כל מוצא פי ה' יחיה האדם
“He afflicted you and let you hunger, then He fed you the manna that you did not know, nor did your forefathers know, in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live” (8:3)

Moshe Rabbeinu used the manna as a clear demonstration of how Hashem provides for everyone and that we can rely only on Hashem for our continued survival. Rabbi Friedman points out that the Bnei Yisrael had just enough manna to last them until the day that they brought their first Korban Omer in Eretz Yisrael, after which they could subsist from the produce of the land. Not only did Hashem take care of their need for food even after they entered Eretz Yisrael, Hashem arranged that they should have precisely the amount that they needed, not a day more and not a day less. Even afterwards and to this day, Hashem takes care of people through different, more natural means. The manna of the desert serves as our reminder for all time that Hashem is always looking out for us. The miracles that our forefathers experienced clearly illustrates how it is Hashem alone who provides for us. Our survival is not dependent on the bread that we can acquire through natural means, but based on Hashem providing that bread to us.

ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקיך שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ה' אלקיך ללכת בכל דרכיו ולאהבה אתו ולעבד את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך
“Now, O Israel, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d, to go in all his ways and to love Him, and to serve Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul” (10:12)

Shlomo HaMelech concluded Koheles, the book that chronicles his attempt to discover the purpose of man in this world, by stressing that fear of heaven is the very essence of man's life. He writes (Koheles 12:13), "The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: Fear Hashem and keep His commandments, for that is man's whole duty." Fear of Hashem is what defines a person and is what gives value to his life in this world.

How could Moshe begin by saying that fearing Hashem is the only thing that is asked of the Bnei Yisrael, and then go on to say that we also must love Him and serve Him? The answer is that the fear of Hashem is the catalyst that causes everything else to fall into place. If one works on his level of fear, he will begin to improve in his service of Hashem and his love of Hashem. The only thing we really have to do is work on our fear of Hashem and everything else that is required of us will take care of itself. When one works on his Yiras Shamayim, he enables himself to improve in many other areas as well.

It is important for each person to focus on how to deepen his feelings of awe at the

greatness of Hashem. It is very simple to theoretically agree that Hashem is great and that we must follow his commandments. It is much more difficult to innately feel it. This is the level that every person should constantly strive to achieve. Learning mussar is a very good way to get closer to this ultimate goal. This is especially true as we approach Chodesh Elul and the Yemei HaDin.

The Orchos Tzadikim also concludes with the Gate of the Fear of Heaven. In this section, he writes: "There is nothing in the world comparable to fear of Hashem - neither possessions, nor pearls, nor silver, nor gold, nor precious stones, nor gems, nor all manner of treasure. They are all as nothing compared to fear of the Holy One Blessed be He, for fear of Hashem is the Blessed One's treasure (Berachos 33b). Therefore, one should make haste to store up in the recesses of his heart that which is the treasure of the Holy One Blessed be He, his Creator. One should learn from this world that everyone tries to store up as much as he can, and that one who can gather as much treasure as kings will certainly do so. Who, then, will not store up the treasure of the King of kings, the Holy One Blessed be He Himself, Who enthrones kings!"

לשמר את מצות ה' ואת חקתיו אשר אנכי מצוך היום לטוב לך
“To observe the commandments of Hashem and his decrees, which I command you today, for your benefit” (10:13)

The Meshech Chochma emphasizes the idea in this posuk that everything which the Torah tells us to do is in order to make our lives as good as possible. Hashem created the world. Who could possibly know more about the most pleasurable way to live than Hashem? Hashem had given us the Torah and mitzvos and has advised us that it is for our own benefit. Anything that we feel benefits us but which contradicts the Torah is not so. If we properly understand the Torah and analyze it, we can see this clearly. The Torah does not ask anything of us that will be too difficult or which will hurt us. In fact, the Rabbis annulled their own protective decrees in situations where they realized that the people could not follow them. This thought should encourage us to strengthen our commitment to Torah and mitzvos. We can do what we are supposed to do and we will be better off for it. When we trust that Hashem has a much better understanding of this world than we do, it reassures us and enables us to grow more in our service of Hashem.

ארץ אשר ה' אלקיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני ה' אלקיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה

“A land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the year's end” (11:12)

Sefer Apiryon tells an anecdote about the Ramban's arrival in Eretz Yisrael. He looked around and saw that the land was overgrown with wild vegetation and appeared uncared for. At this sight, the Ramban commented that the comfort of Eretz Yisrael was readily apparent. He gave an example to explain this. When a woman is expecting a child, her body produces milk and continues to do so after the child is born. If there is no longer a child who needs the milk, the body ceases to produce it. The Ramban said that

the continued growth of vegetation in Eretz Yisrael is a sign that her children will yet return. As long as the land is still growing, then we can be assured that it has a future. This is the meaning of the posuk (Yeshaya 51:3), "For Hashem will comfort Tzion, He will comfort all its ruins; He will make her wilderness like Eden and her wasteland like a garden of Hashem." When we see Eretz Yisrael growing constantly in our time, it should encourage us that the final consolation of Yerushalayim is near.

**ולמדתם אתם את בניכם לדבר במ בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך
"You shall teach them to your children to discuss them, while you sit in your home,
while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise" (11:19)**

Chofetz Chaim notes that the word "osam" can also be read as "atem," "you." While a person is obligated to teach his children Torah and ensure that they are provided with the best possible Torah education, he is never exempt from studying Torah on his own. That is a separate obligation which is equally important. A person should not feel that he has done his duty because his children are learning Torah. He must also learn himself to whatever degree he is capable.

**למען ירבו ימיכם וימי בניכם על האדמה אשר נשבע ה' לאבותיכם לתת להם כימי
השמים על הארץ
"In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the land that
Hashem has sworn to your forefathers to give them, like the days of the heaven over
the earth" (11:21)**

The Gemara on Berachos 8a says that when R' Yochanan heard that there were old people in Bavel, he was surprised. After all, the posuk says that Hashem will "prolong your days... upon the land." How could people live long if they were living outside of Eretz Yisrael? When he heard that people in Bavel were careful regarding getting up early and staying up late to daven in shul, he said that this was what gave them the merit to have long life.

R' Nisan Alpert asks: Why is this mitzvah so special that it is rewarded with long life? Perhaps this is because the person gives of his time for Hashem's purposes. As a commensurate reward, Hashem gives the time back to him. If one gives the time, Hashem will return it to him and add many years to his life.

**כי אם שמר תשמרון את כל המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם לעשתה
לאהבה את ה' אלקיכם ללכת בכל דרכיו ולדבקה בו
"For if you will observe this entire commandment that I command you, to perform it,
to love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in all His ways and to cleave to him" (11:22)**

The Torah commands us to cleave to Hashem and to develop a close relationship with Him. The Chofetz Chaim writes that we should recognize that we have the ability to attach ourselves to Hashem very easily in this world. We can call out to Hashem and gain easy access to Him. In the next world, we cannot get any closer than the level which we have attained in our lives. Therefore, a person should capitalize on the time that Hashem

has given him, which is limited.

To illustrate this, the Chofetz Chaim tells a story. There was once an innkeeper whose enemies made false criminal allegations against him which he could not prove to be lies. He knew that his only hope was to obtain a pardon from the king. Meanwhile, the king was traveling through his land undercover and, at some point on his journey, happened to pass through this innkeeper's town and take lodging at his inn. Only afterwards did the innkeeper find out that the king had once been his guest a few weeks prior. When he discovered this, he bemoaned the fact that he had had the opportunity to reach out to the king but he lost his chance because he didn't recognize it. The ability to have his plea heard by the king was right there for him, but he let it go and now it was too late. The king was too far away to be reached.

The same is true of us. The time that we have in this world is like a valuable commodity which we should cherish and make the most of it. If we do not use our time wisely, we will regret wasting it because every day that passes is gone and will never come back again. The ability to grow will never be at our fingertips the way that it is right now in this world.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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