

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת ואתחנן

אתה הראת לדעת כי ה' הוא האלקים אין עוד מלבדו

“You have been shown in order to know that Hashem, He is the G-d; there is none beside him” (4:35)

Rashi says that when Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai, all seven heavens were opened up and the people saw clearly that Hashem is the one and only supreme power in the world. The unity of Hashem is one of the basic foundations of our faith. When a person is in a difficult situation, he should recognize that only Hashem can help him and nothing else.

A story is told about a rabbi who decided to go to Eretz Yisrael with his two children. As they approached the shore, a great storm hit and sank the boat, forcing all the passengers overboard into the water. The rabbi put his children on his back and began swimming toward land. After a few minutes, the two children became too heavy and he could not go on any longer. He knew that if he tried to take both children, they would all drown. He had to let one child go in order so that he and the other child, at the very least, would survive. When the child was let go, he began crying and begged the father to save him. The father knew that he had to ignore the child, as difficult as it was for him to do so, and keep moving on. As a last attempt, the abandoned child cried out, “But father, I have no other to father to save me!” Upon hearing that, the father suddenly had a rush of adrenaline and a newfound strength. He went back to get the abandoned child and, with his newfound strength, they all made it to shore safely. Afterwards, he explained to his child that it was this plea which gave him strength and told him that in all future situations, he should call out to Hashem that He is the only Father and that there is no other source of salvation. When Hashem hears this cry, His mercy will be aroused and He will help us.

We refer to Hashem as our Father. Even the month of tragedies is called Av, which means "father." All the tragic events that have befallen our nation have come from our Father who loves us. Even when Hashem destroyed the Bais HaMikdash, he acted mercifully by destroying wood and stone and not the Jewish people. Hashem is always doing what is in our best interests, even if we do not always understand it. On the Yomim Noraim, we address Hashem as Avinu foremost and only afterwards as Malkeinu. If we look to Hashem as our Father and place all of our trust in Him alone, He will take care of us.

וזכרת כי עבד היית בארץ מצרים ויצאך ה' אלקיך משם ביד חזקה ובזרע נטויה על כן צוך ה' אלקיך לעשות את יום השבת

“And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and Hashem, your G-d, has taken you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you to make the Sabbath day” (5:15)

Why are we required to refrain from work on Shabbos? The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 32) writes that refraining from work is a reminder of Yetzias Mitzrayim. As slaves in Egypt, we were unable to rest whenever we wanted. When Hashem took us out of Egypt, He commanded us to rest on Shabbos to remind us how he took us out of slavery. When we refrain from work on Shabbos, we are reminded of the kindness that Hashem did for us and that we owe everything to Him.

Another reason given by the Chinuch is that Hashem wants us to refrain from work and all

other activities so that we can focus on the fact that Hashem created the world. Because this principle is so important and so basic, it is important to remind ourselves once a week that Hashem created the world in six days and stopped on the seventh day. By mimicking the actions of Hashem in resting on the seventh day, we remember and internalize the fact that Hashem created the world from nothing.

לא תנסו את ה' אלקיכם כאשר נסיתם במסה

“You shall not test Hashem, your G-d, as you tested him at Massah” (6:16)

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 424) writes that one of the concepts referred to in this posuk is that one may not test Hashem by doing a mitzvah in exchange for a certain reward. One may not ask Hashem for something in exchange for performance of a mitzvah. This is because the main reward for mitzvahs is not given in this world but in the next world. One cannot expect Hashem to do something for him in this world just because he does a certain mitzvah.

The sole exception to this rule is the mitzvah of tzedaka. There is a posuk which clearly says that one who gives tzedaka will receive a special blessing in everything else that he has. Since this is part of the promised reward, one is permitted to test Hashem with tzedaka. However, this is only true if the person gives the tzedaka with the intent to do the mitzvah whether or not Hashem does what he asks. One should not regret doing a mitzvah after he has already done it because that takes away from what he has done. This is one of the meanings of the line in Hashkiveinu which says “And remove Satan from before us and from behind us.” One explanation for this is that Hashem should prevent Satan from dissuading us to do a mitzvah while we plan to do it and also from causing us to regret a mitzvah after we have done it. The mitzvah should be done wholeheartedly from beginning to end, regardless of the result.

ועשית הישר והטוב בעיני ה' למען ייטב לך ובאת וירשת את הארץ הטבה אשר נשבע ה' לאבותיך

“You shall do what is fair and good in the eyes of Hashem, so that it will be good for you, and you shall come and possess the good land that Hashem swore to your forefathers” (6:18)

The Ramban writes that while the previous posuk says that we should fulfill all of Hashem's commandments, this posuk adds that we must be sure to act in an ethical manner at all times. This posuk is needed because it is impossible for the Torah to cover every single activity that is a part of life. Many times, there are situations that arise where we are faced with a decision whose answer might not be found explicitly mentioned in the Torah. The Torah wants us to ask ourselves in whatever we do whether we are acting in accordance with the will of Hashem. In addition to the obligation to observe the mitzvahs, there is an additional, more general requirement to ensure that all our actions are "fair and good" and in compliance with the way that Hashem wants us to conduct ourselves.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

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