

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת אמר

ויאמר ה' אל משה אמר אל הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת אליהם לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו
“Hashem said to Moshe: Say to the priests, the sons of Aharon, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a soul among his people” (21:1)

Why does it say that the kohen must not become impure from a soul? When a person dies, the tragedy is the loss of his production, which is the purpose of life. This is symbolized by nefesh, the soul that he was given in order to elevate it through this world. That soul departs at death and that is what we mourn when a person passes on. The wording of this posuk teaches us an important lesson about life.

ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי שבת שבתון מקרא קדש כל מלאכה לא תעשו שבת הוא לה' בכל מושבתיכם
“Six days may work be done and on the seventh day, a Sabbath of rest, a holy convocation, no work may be done – it is a Sabbath to Hashem in all your dwelling places” (23:3)

Why is Shabbos part of this section that teaches the laws of the various holidays? Rashi explains that when one keeps Yom Tov, it is as if he kept Shabbos. Meforash Hainyanim answers that Shabbos is a foundation of our belief. In order for a person to believe that the amazing miracles of Egypt were from Hashem, he has to know about Shabbos, believe in it and safeguard it. Once he understands that, then the concepts behind all of the holidays fall into place. Shabbos is the foundation for the Yomim Tovim which mark the various miracles that happen when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness.

ובקצרכם את קציר ארצכם לא תכלה פאת שדך בקצרך ולקט קצירך לא תלקט
לעני ולגר תעזב אתם אני ה' אלקיכם
“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not

gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them; I am Hashem, your G-d” (23:22)

Why is the mitzvah to give certain gifts to the poor found in the middle of the section regarding the Yomim Tovim? The Birkas Ish cites the mishna in Rosh Hashana which says that the world is judged for various things at different times of the year (Pesach – grain, Shavuos – fruit, Sukkos – water, Rosh Hashana – personal conduct). There are special korbanos and tefillos which are offered at these times of judgment. But there is also an additional interpersonal component to these judgments. It is important that we are kind to others so that Hashem is kind to us. Only after we do this will Hashem bless us. That is why there is a lesson among the holidays about being kind to the poor. At these times of year when our prosperity and future hang in the balance, it is important to remember the needy if we wish to procure a favorable judgment.

We read Rus on Shavuos because Rus met Boaz through collecting the gifts for the poor in his field. Since the Torah connects these gifts to Shavuos, we read Megillas Rus at this time of year. The point of the megilla is to show the reward of one who does chesed.

Rav Dovid Feinstein gives another answer to this question. He writes that performing acts of kindness for others is an essential component of a Torah way of life. Immediately after Shavuos, the festival of the giving of the Torah, the posuk mentions a mitzvah of charity. The Torah that one learns must be a Torah that will bring a person to act kindly toward others. Chazal point out that the Torah begins and ends with kind acts from Hashem. In Bereishis, Hashem provided Adam and Chava with clothing and in Vezos Habracha, Hashem buried Moshe Rabbeinu. From start to finish, the Torah has to have an impact of chesed.

ויצא בן אשה ישראלית והוא בן איש מצרי י בתוך בני ישראל וינצו במחנה בן
הישראלית ואיש הישראלי

“The son of an Israelite woman went out - and he was the son of an Egyptian man - among the Children of Israel; they fought in the camp, the son of the Israelite woman and an Israelite man” (24:10)

The Midrash asks: From where did the blasphemer leave? The first answer is that he left his world, which, according to the explanation of the commentary Etz Yosef, means that he lost out on his share in the World to Come. Another explanation of this answer is that each person has his own unique talents and abilities granted to him by Hashem. Because each person is different, each person is a world unto himself. This person failed to use his skills, his “world,” in a proper manner and he sinned grievously. The Mesillas Yesharim uses a similar expression in the title of the book’s opening chapter, “The obligation of a person in his world.” Each person has to make the most of his own world, his own unique character. Rabbeinu Bachya also writes that each person is a small world. The Matnos Kehuna, elaborating on Rabbeinu Bachya’s idea, explains that he was no longer on the level of a human being because of the terrible crime that he committed. He lost his status as a small world.

A second opinion is that the blasphemer left from the previous section in the parsha, which discusses the lechem hapanim. He mocked the fact that the bread was left out for seven days and asked how it was respectful to serve Hashem with “old, stale” bread. When a person is cynical and does not appreciate the sanctity of the Torah, we see that it can even deteriorate to such an unthinkable sin. Because this man had the wrong outlook about the Torah, it led to this blatant misdeed. It is incumbent upon us to imbue others, especially children, with an appreciation for the beauty of Torah and mitzvos so that they will never reach such low levels.

The third opinion is that he left the court of Moshe Rabbeinu. This man was the son of the Egyptian taskmaster killed by Moshe in Egypt and a Jewish woman from the tribe of Dan. He wanted to live among the people of Dan, but Moshe ruled that he could not stay there, as tribal genealogy follows the father’s lineage. The Birkas Ish writes that as long as he thought he could live with Dan, he felt that at least he had a place based on his mother’s lineage. But when he saw that he would have to leave, he was reminded his father’s absence and his sense of loss was stronger. His response was to blaspheme the ineffable name of Hashem, which had been pronounced by Moshe in order to kill his father. This is a possible explanation for why he acted in this manner.

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman/Written by Michael Gutmann