

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת האזינו

הָאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶדְבְּרָה וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי פִי

“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and may the earth hear the words of my mouth” (32:1)

The opening Midrash of this week’s parsha begins by discussing whether it is permitted to perform a מלאכה to heal a person’s ear on Shabos. The Midrash says that if the illness is life-threatening, or even if there is only a chance of it becoming life-threatening, one is allowed to desecrate the Shabbos in order to cure the person. The only connection between this topic and the rest of the Midrash is that it concerns the ear (based on the opening word of the parsha, האזינו, which means to hear). Why is this specific discussion brought up to begin the Midrash?

R’ Moshe Sternbach answers that there are a number of harsh punishments that are mentioned in the last few parshiyos and again in this week’s parsha. People will be scared of the terrible tragedies described in the Torah and mistakenly think that Hashem wants to harm people and delights in punishing them. Therefore, the Midrash first teaches us that there are times when one may desecrate Shabbos in order to save a life. This illustrates that the Torah is meant for our benefit and it is not meant for our detriment. Hashem never wants to cause us pain or distress. He knows that the ways of the Torah is the best and most enjoyable way to live life and that is why He gave us the Torah as a gift.

אֶסְפֶּה עָלֵימוֹ רְעוֹת חֲצֵי אַכְלָה בָּם

“I shall accumulate evils against them, My arrows shall I use up against them” (32:23)

Rashi says that this promised punishment actually contains a hidden blessing. Hashem will use up all of His arrows against the Jewish people, but when all the arrows are gone and used up, the Jewish people will remain standing. Hashem promises us that we will be able to sustain any punishment and continue to survive as a nation.

R’ Dovid Feinstein elaborates and says that it is because of the arrows of Hashem, the punishments that He metes out, and through them that the Jewish people remain a nation. When we are punished by Hashem, we repent and change our ways. The punishment is designed to help us remain true to the Torah. R’ Feinstein points out that there are 98 curses in Ki Savo, equivalent to the numerical value of צָה, “clean.” Turning the letters of that word around forms the word חָץ, “arrow.” All the punishments that Hashem sends our way, His arrows, are meant to turn us around and cleanse us of our sins.

רָאוּ עֲתָה כִּי אָנִי אֲנִי הוּא וְאִין אֶל הַיָּם עַמְדֵי אָנִי אָמִית וְאֶחֱיָה מְחַצְתִּי וְאָנִי אֶרְפָּא וְאִין מִיַּדִּי
מִצִּיל

“See, now, that I, I am he – and no god is with me; I put to death and I bring life, I struck down and I will heal, and there is no rescuer from My hand” (32:39)

The Gemara in סנהדרין קד states: “A father cannot give merit to a child, as the verse says: ‘There is no rescuer from My hand.’ Not even Avraham can save Yishmael and not even Yitzchak can save Eisav.”

The Torah Temimah explains that a everything that the child does is because of the parent’s training. Without the parent, the child would never do any mitzvos in the first place. Therefore, whenever a person does a good deed, the parents get partial credit. However, this does not work the other way around. The Chofetz Chaim says that parents get credit for what their children do because the parent brought the child into the world and without the parents the child would not exist.

The Torah Temimah continues that a father could help a child gain merits in this world. That is why our tefillos so often invoke the merit of our great ancestors. But these merits can only help us physically, in this world. However, the rewards that await us in the world to come are so special that a person has to earn them on his own merits and his parents’ merits cannot be of any assistance.

However, children help their parents in both worlds by acting in the proper way. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (26:22) writes that a person should instruct his child to be strong in a certain mitzvah so that any time that they do that mitzvah they get credit. This is a greater reward than if they would recite kaddish for the parent and it helps the parent while he is alive in this world and also helps in the parent’s eternal reward.

יום כיפור

One year on Erev Yom Kippur, shortly before Kol Nidrei, R’ Aryeh Levine went to visit the rabbi of Rechavia. Although he was surprised to see him, the rabbi inquired regarding the nature of the visit. R’ Levine told him that there was a family in the neighborhood who had shalom bayis problems and he felt that it was the best time to rectify the situation right before Yom Kippur.

Every Shabbos and Yom Tov, and especially Yom Kippur, is a time for growth and rejuvenation. We should not let these times go by without using them.

What does it mean when we ask Hashem to grant us life “for Your sake”? Chasam Sofer says that we ask Hashem to remember us for life because we are on his team and we are interested in bringing glory to Him and promoting His agenda. Hashem should grant us life so that we can continue to help Him.

The Menoras HaMaor relates the following parable: There was once a boat which became caught up in a storm and temporarily anchored at an island. When they arrived, they saw beautiful fruits, vegetation and scenery. One group of people decided not to disembark off in

case a wind came and the boat wanted to leave. Another group decided that they would go for a short walk and they made it back in time. A third group went to enjoy the beautiful island and stayed until the sailors wanted to leave. They heard the signal for the boat's departure and made it back in time, although their spots were taken by others. The fourth group were lounging around and enjoying themselves so much that they ignored the signal, but when they saw the anchor go up and the boat started to move, they ran as fast as they could and swam to the boat and caught up to it. The fifth group was having such a good time that they completely missed the boat. The winter came, the fruit was gone and survival became difficult and their story did not end happily ever after.

Repentance and good deeds are the boat in this story, while, fruits are worldly pleasures. The first group are the completely righteous people. The second group did teshuva in their youth. The third group of people did teshuva when they were older. The fourth group did teshuva when they were deathly ill. The fifth group never did teshuva. By looking at this parable, we learn from it that we always have to strive for the highest level of teshuva so that we can attain our ultimate reward in the best possible manner.