

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת נשא

נשא את ראש בני גרשון גם הם לבית אבתם למשפחתם
“Take a census of the sons of Gershon, as well, according to their fathers' household, according to their families” (4:22)

Why did Hashem stress that Moshe should also count the families of Gershon? Why would he not count Gershon if he was counting Kehas? R' Moshe Feinstein answers that people have a tendency not to bother with something if they cannot be the best at it. The people of Gershon may have felt unimportant because they were not assigned the most important task of carrying the vessels of the Mishkan. Therefore, it was especially important to count Gershon, more so than Kehas, in order so that they would understand that their role was just as essential as that of Kehas. When someone is counted, it shows them that they are valuable. Their job was an important task too, even if it was not the most important. Every person has their role and their task in life. Every person possesses unique talents and abilities that are different from those of other people. Every single individual and his role are all equally important, whatever that role might be. Therefore, we must respect every single person and object as an integral part of Hashem's plan for the world. This idea is encapsulated in a statement in Pirkei Avos 4:3 by Ben Azai: "Do not be scornful of any person and do not be disdainful of anything, for you have no person without his hour and no thing without its place."

דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם איש איש כי תשטה אשתו ומעלה בו מעל
“Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Any man whose wife shall go astray and commit treachery against him” (5:12)

Why is the word "ish" repeated? Rashi, quoting the Midrash Tanchuma, explains that the posuk teaches that her sin is in fact double. She has sinned against both her husband and Hashem. This is because whenever a person sins against a fellow man, he also sins against Hashem. After all, it is Hashem who commands us how to act toward our fellow men and when we hurt other people, not only are we wronging them but we sin against Hashem simultaneously. If a person talks negatively about another person, not only must he ask forgiveness from the subject of his wrongdoing, but he must also ask forgiveness from Hashem.

והשביע הכהן את האשה בשבעת האלה ואמר הכהן לאשה יתן ה' אותך לאלה ולשבעה בתוך עמך בתת ה' את ירכך נפלת ואת בטנך צבה
“The Kohen shall adjure the woman with the oath of the curse, and the Kohen shall say to the woman: May Hashem render you as a curse and as an oath amid your people, when Hashem causes your thigh to collapse and your stomach to distend” (5:21)

The Ramban comments that no other law in the Torah is dependent on the occurrence of a miracle besides this law of the unfaithful wife. The reason why this is so

important is because adultery, and the resultant birth of illegitimate children, is more common among other nations and can provide a strong temptation. Therefore, Hashem deemed it worthwhile to provide for the occurrence of a miracle as a deterrent to adultery. The reason why eliminating illegitimate children is of utmost importance to the Jewish people is so that they will be able to have the Divine Presence rest among them. This is why the sotah procedure was only effective so long as adultery was not prevalent in Jewish society. The Gemara in Sotah 47 teaches that when adultery became more commonplace, the sotah procedure stopped working. This is not because adultery became permissible, but because they were no longer worthy of the special miracle that was provided for their honor and for the preservation of their status as a holy nation. When they failed to appreciate this benefit, they were no longer able to have it. This is also why the procedure only worked if the woman's husband had not sinned himself. If he had also committed adultery, Hashem did not enable him to benefit from this mitzvah.

וּכְתַב אֶת הָאֵלֶּת הָאֵלֶּה הַכֹּהֵן בְּסֵפֶר וּמַחֵה אֶל מִי הַמְרִים

**“The Kohen shall inscribe these curses on a scroll and erase it into the bitter waters”
(5:23)**

R' Eliyahu Lopian, in his sefer Lev Eliyahu quotes the midrash on this posuk: R' Meir was giving a drasha one Friday night and ended very late. A woman who had attended the lecture came home so late that the lights in her house were already out. Her husband was so upset at her that he told her not to come home until she had spit in R' Meir's face. R' Meir found out that the woman could not go home because of him and wanted to help her. He announced that he had an illness in his eye and needed a skilled woman to spit in his eye in order for it to heal. Despite her hesitancy to treat a great scholar inappropriately, she was convinced to go see R' Meir and she complied with his request. She was thereby able to go back home. Afterwards, R' Meir's students asked him why he degraded himself rather than just disciplining the husband and coercing him into letting her back home. He explained to them that he did not see himself as being any greater than Hashem. Hashem allows His name be erased to bring peace between husband and wife. If Hashem is willing to forego His honor for the sake of peace, then R' Meir felt that he was required to do the same.

R' Lopian goes on to explain that even when there are other means to achieve peace, Hashem still wants His name erased anyway in order to illustrate just how important peace is. As we are obligated to emulate Hashem's ways, we must also be willing to do things that might decrease our honor for the purpose of bringing peace between others. If the Master of the world treats peace as more important than His honor, we should certainly follow His example.

וַעֲשֵׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶחָד לַחֲטָאת וְאֶחָד לַעֲלָה וּכְפַר עָלָיו מֵאֲשֶׁר חָטָא עַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ וּקְדַשׁ אֶת רֵאשׁוֹ בְּיוֹם הַהוּא

“The Kohen shall make one as a sin-offering and one as a elevation-offering, and he shall provide him atonement for having sinned regarding the person; and he shall

sanctify his head on that day” (6:11)

What sin did the nazir commit that requires atonement? Rashi quotes the opinion of R' Elazar Hakapar in Nedarim 10a that he sinned by causing himself pain through his separation from wine. The Sifsei Chachamim asks: How can this be a sin? The Gemara (Sotah 2a) explains the connection between the adjoining sections of sotah and nazir by teaching that one who sees the degradation of a sotah should learn the lesson that alcohol leads to immorality and vow to become a nazir and abstain from wine. Thus, we see that it is a mitzvah not to have any wine. He answers that even though it is a mitzvah, it is also still a small aveira because he causes himself pain through the mitzvah that he is doing. Also, the mitzvah only applies to intoxicating wine, the type of beverage that leads to immorality. However, he vowed to abstain from all grape products. This extra pain that he unnecessarily caused himself is a sin.

The Mincha Belula provides another answer to the question of the Sifsei Chachamim. He writes that Chazal did not mean for a person who sees a sotah to abstain completely from wine. Rather, they meant that he should limit his alcohol consumption and resolve to drink less. He took this to the extreme and vowed not to drink wine at all. This extremism is sinful. A person is allowed to drink wine and there is no reason for a person to completely refrain from drinking. The Torah does not ask such extreme behavior from a person. If one tries to be overly righteous by doing something extreme, he acts incorrectly, to the point where the Torah obligates him to bring a sin-offering.

Based on this idea of Rav Elazar Hakapar that causing oneself pain through abstention from pleasure is a sin, the Rambam (Hilchos Deios 3:1) developed his famous idea that one is forbidden to abstain entirely from satisfying his physical needs. He should not refrain from eating meat and drinking wine, from marrying and living in a nice house and buying nice clothes. To intentionally live a life of asceticism is not the Torah way and is sinful. Regarding such a person, Chazal say (Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:1), "What the Torah forbade you is not enough that you need to forbid permissible things?" However, a person should not indulge himself in these physical pleasures to the opposite extreme. Instead, one must seek to strike the right balance between abstention and excessiveness. This is the healthy way to live, as well as the best way through which to serve Hashem.

ויאמר ה' אל משה נשיא אחד ליום נשיא אחד ליום יקריבו את קרבנם לחנכת המזבח

“Hashem said to Moshe: One leader each day, one leader each day shall they bring their offering for the dedication of the Altar” (7:11)

Why are the sacrifices of each nasi repeated in their entirety? Since they all brought identical sacrifices, would it not have been enough to list what they brought and write that they each brought the same thing? The answer is that each nasi had different intentions when he brought his sacrifices. The special donation meant something different to each one. Even though they all brought the same thing, they each had different approach. The Torah teaches us the importance of the thoughts and intentions behind mitzvos. The Torah repeats the korbanos twelve times because each sacrifice was indeed completely different

because of their disparate intentions. Many people can do the same mitzvah, but they can be doing different things because they have different thoughts. At the end of the day, though, if we have the proper intentions when doing a mitzvah, even if we all have different intentions, we will all end up at the same place and we will be successful. There is no one correct way and no singular proper thought to have when it comes to mitzvos. Every person has their own approach. The twelve different approaches of the twelve tribes together form a united Jewish nation, a diverse nation with different groups of people with their own ways of arriving at a common goal. Today, there are many types of Jews who have unique customs and different ways of serving Hashem. Each path has its own value and is important in its own right. The Jewish people can be compared to an impressionist painting. When one looks at it up close, he sees contrasting colors that do not seem to form any shape. But when one steps back and looks at the complete picture, he sees that what seemed to be completely different colors actually blends together to form a beautiful picture. So, too, different groups of Jews seem to do completely different things. But when one looks at the big picture, it is clear that each group complements the others and they all blend together as a single nation in the service of Hashem.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Written by Michael Gutmann

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