

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת ראה

ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה

“See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse” (11:26)

Moshe commands every individual to "see," in the singular form. R' Moshe Sternbuch says that this is written this way to teach us that a person should look only at himself and not at those around him. A person should aim to the highest level that he can reach according to his ability, regardless of those around him. He should not compare himself to others because a person is not judged on whether he was as good as his neighbors. He is judged on whether he lived up to his own capabilities.

את הברכה אשר תשמעו אל מצות ה' אלקיכם אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום

“The blessing, that you listen to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, that I command you today” (11:27)

The language of this posuk, "the blessing, that you listen to the commandments of Hashem," seems to be unclear. Rashi explains that the word "אשר" in this posuk means "on condition that." The posuk tells us that the potential blessings that we can receive from Hashem come on the condition that we listen to His mitzvos. If this is what the posuk means, why does it not just say so clearly, as it did with reference to the curses in the next posuk, which says "and the curse, if you do not listen...?" R' Moshe Feinstein answers that based on the seemingly ambiguous literal reading, the posuk can be understood to mean that the blessing is the fulfillment of the commandments themselves. The material blessing from Hashem is not the only reward that a person gets for doing a mitzva. The performance of the mitzva and conducting oneself in accordance with the Torah is a blessing in itself. Torah and mitzvos give a purpose to life and because of that we feel content. This is a blessing on its own, aside from any other added rewards. Even if a person has financial difficulties or troubles of a different nature, the blessing is the mere fact that the person listens to the word of Hashem and lives a life of Torah and mitzvos. If a person does not follow the Torah, even if he lives a life of luxury and it looks as if he is on top of the world, that does not mean that he has blessing. This is really a curse because this person will have used up all his merit in this next world.

Rabbi Friedman adds: The word "אשר" can also mean lucky, as in the word "אשרי". The people who listen to the Torah are lucky and praiseworthy. We say twice a day in davening "אשרי יושבי ביתך", "praiseworthy are those who sit in your house." Those who devote their lives to Hashem's service are indeed praiseworthy and lucky because it is those people who feel a sense of purpose and direction in their lives and are never at a loss with regard to their task in this world. This sense of self-worth and purpose is quite admirable.

**כי אם אל המקום אשר יבחר ה' אלקיכם מכל שבטיכם לשום את שמו שם לשכנו
תדרשו ובאת שמה**

“Rather, only at the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose from among all your tribes to place His name shall you seek out His presence and come there” (12:5)

R' Dovid Feinstein shows that there are many characteristics of the Bais HaMikdash which are hinted at by the word "yivchar" and its anagrams. The letters of the word "yivchar" can spell "yecherav," "it will be destroyed." This hints to the fact that if the Jews would not act appropriately and do not follow in the ways of the Torah, the Bais HaMikdash would be destroyed. It can also spell "yerachev," "it will widen." This hints to the special miracle that occurred in the Bais HaMikdash when it was very crowded. Even when the people would be tightly packed into the courtyard, there was still ample room for each individual to prostrate himself before Hashem. Finally, it can also spell "yechaber," "he will attach." When a person visited the Bais HaMikdash, he would become closer and more attached to Hashem.

**כי ירחק ממך המקום אשר יבחר ה' אלקיך לשום שמו שם וזבחת מבקרך ומצאנך
אשר נתן ה' לך כאשר צויתך ואכלת בשעריך בכל אות נפשך**

“If the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose to place His name will be far from you, you may slaughter from your cattle and your flocks that Hashem has given you, as I have commanded you, and you may eat in your cities according to your heart's entire desire” (12:21)

The Torah says that we should slaughter animals "as I have commanded you." The Gemara on Chulin 28 says that this is an indication that all the laws regarding slaughtering animals and birds were transmitted as part of the Oral Law. This is the only explicit reference to the Oral Law that we find in the Torah. Why does the Torah specifically mention the Oral Law in reference to slaughtering animals? R' Moshe Feinstein answers that this is a mitzvah regarding food, which is something that one encounters on a regular basis. The Torah wanted the Oral Law to be in the forefront of a person's mind at all times in order to remember that the laws contained in it are a vital part of every mitzvah. This is accomplished by making it such an integral part of a daily mitzvah that we do all the time. It is important to remember that the Written Law and Oral Law go hand in hand. They are one and inseparable. No mitzvah can be fulfilled without knowing the detailed halachos that were transmitted orally throughout the generations.

**כי יהיה בך אביון מאחד אחיך באחד שעריך בארצך אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך לא
תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפץ את ידך מאחיק האביון**

“If there shall be a destitute person among you, any of your brethren in any of your cities, in the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother” (15:7)

The Vilna Gaon has a unique interpretation of the Torah's command not to close one's hand toward the poor person. Despite the fact that each finger on a person's hand is a different length, when one closes his hand, all his fingers appear to be the same length.

The Torah is commanding us not to treat poor people like the fingers of a closed hands. We are not to treat everyone equally. Every pauper has to be supported according to his individual needs and we should not "close our hands" to poor people and assume that they can all live on a certain standard. The halacha dictates that one is required to give a poor person enough so that he can return to the type of lifestyle that he was used to before he was reduced to begging. Regardless, a beggar should never be left empty-handed. Obviously one should be careful regarding to whom he gives, but it is not proper to launch a full-scale investigation. If one waits to investigate before giving, he may lose the opportunity to do the mitzvah. Being generous also benefits us in the long run because Hashem treats us the way that we treat others. When we are generous to others without looking into all their personal details, Hashem will be kind to us without looking into our less desirable qualities.

כי לא יחדל אביון מקרב הארץ על כן אנכי מצוך לאמר פתח תפתח את ידך לאחיק לעניך ולאבינך בארצך

“For destitute people will not cease to exist within the land; therefore I command you, saying: You shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your destitute in your land” (15:11)

The word "mitzavecha" is written in singular form. The command of tzedaka is given to each individual. Every person should feel that it is up to him to make a difference and he cannot assume that the poor person can get enough money from others without him chipping in. It is important to feel this responsibility toward the poor person.

The word "laimor" means to tell others. The Torah commands us to encourage others to give tzedaka in addition to our own giving. Chazal tell us, "One who causes others to do is greater than one who does himself." This is true of any mitzva, but especially of tzedaka, where a person may have limited means. If one is unable to give much tzedaka on his own, he should generate money for tzedaka through other people by asking and encouraging them to help with worthy causes.

לא יקשה בעיניך בשלחך אתו חפשי מעמך כי משנה שכר שכיר עבדך שש שנים וברכך ה' אלקיך בכל אשר תעשה

“It shall not be difficult in your eyes when you send him away free from you, for twice as much as a hired hand, six years, has he served you, and Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all that you do” (15:18)

Rabbi Friedman offers an interesting interpretation of the blessing that a person receives for performing acts of kindness. The blessing is "in all that you do," that Hashem gives him the ability to accomplish. To be able to make a difference is a special quality. People often underestimate themselves and fail to recognize their own capabilities and that they can be difference makers. Each one of us has the ability to lead meaningful lives and be important people. We should note our accomplishments and be proud of them. We should also recognize that the ability to achieve is a gift from Hashem. When a person

makes a siyum, he reads the Hadran. At the end of the Hadran, the person thanks Hashem for the ability to have finished the tractate and asks Hashem for the merit to complete many more tractates. This is the attitude that we should have toward any big accomplishments that we have.

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