

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת לך לך

ויעתק משם ההרה מקדם לבית קל ויט אהלה בית אל מים והעי מקדם ויבן שם מזבח לה' ויקרא בשם ה'

“From there he relocated to the mountain east of Beth-El and pitched his tent, with Beth-El on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to Hashem and invoked Hashem by name” (12:8)

After Avraham entered Eretz Canaan, he began traversing the land and stopping in various places to build altars and to pray. The commentaries explain that Avraham stopped in specific locations where his descendants would suffer tragedies, such as Shechem and Ai, in order to pray for them that they should make it through the difficult times. This idea is based on a gemara (Sanhedrin 44b) that states: "One should always pray before tragedies, for if Avraham had not done so at Ai, the Jewish people would have been completely wiped out in their battle there." (The Battle of Ai was one of the early battles in Yehoshua's conquest of Eretz Yisrael. It was the only defeat of the entire campaign.)

What does the gemara mean that one should daven before problems arise? How are we to know what problems will occur and when they will happen? The Torah Temima explains that one should always daven intensely even if he does not feel that he has any immediate needs. These prayers will be stored for him until a time when they are needed and then they will protect him. Many times, a person may have trouble becoming inspired for davening when he does not feel that he needs assistance. However, at times like this, one should remind himself of this gemara and concentrate on his davening despite his perceived lack of necessity for it. His prayers will protect him in the future, or perhaps even help his children and grandchildren, as Avraham Avinu's prayers did. Prayer can be both a problem solver and a preventative measure. Regardless of the situation, it is important to realize the tremendous power of prayer and to utilize the three times a day that we meet with Hashem to their fullest potential.

ולאברם היטיב בעבורה ויהי לו צאן ובקר וחמרים ועבדים ושפחת ואתנת וגמלים
“And he treated Avram well for her sake, and he acquired sheep, cattle, donkeys, slaves and maidservants, she-donkeys and camels” (12:16)

The gemara in Bava Metzia 59a states: "R' Chelbo said: One should always be careful to respect his wife because blessing only comes to a man's house because of his wife. We see this from Avraham, of whom it is written, 'And he treated Avram well for her sake.' Similarly, Rava said to the people of Mechuza: Honor your wives so that you shall become wealthy."

People are always looking for segulos and other ways of improving their financial success. This gemara clearly describes a proven method to accomplish this goal. One must realize that his wife is the source of blessing in his house and honor her accordingly. Aside from the importance of shalom bayis, one who honors his wife can reap great rewards.

Earlier, the posuk tells us that Avraham pitched his tent (12:8). The word tent is spelled אהלה, which can be read "her tent." Rashi comments that Avraham honored his wife and set up her tent before his own. Perhaps the wealth that he received in Mitzrayim was a direct reward for the honor that he showed his wife shortly before their trip to Egypt.

**ויצו עליו פרעה אנשים וישלחו אתו ואת אשתו ואת כל אשר לו
“Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him and they escorted him and his wife and all that was his” (12:20)**

Chazal struggle to understand why Avraham's descendants deserved to be exiled for 400 years. One answer is based on a gemara in Sotah 46b: "R' Yehoshua ben Levi said: Because of the four steps that Pharaoh accompanied Avraham, he gained dominion over his descendants for 400 years." What does this gemara mean? Why should Avraham's descendants suffer because of a good deed that Pharaoh did? The Torah Temima explains that the Jews deserved to be enslaved for other reasons. Pharaoh's kind act enabled him to be the beneficiary of the Jews' labor.

Pharaoh received an extensive reward for a small act of kindness. This shows us how even the smallest things that we do are important. Every single step that we take is counted. Something that may seem insignificant to us may be very valuable in the eyes of Hashem. We see similar incidents elsewhere in Tanach that reinforce this lesson. Eglon, king of Moav, rose from his throne when he heard that Ehud had a message from Hashem, despite the fact that it was difficult for him to do so. As a reward, he merited that Rus, the ancestress of David HaMelech and the Mashiach, was his descendant (Shoftim 3:20, Rashi ibid). Nevuchadnetzar ran four steps behind a messenger because the letter he was carrying praised King Chizkiyah and Yerushalayim before praising Hashem and he wanted to correct the order. He was rewarded with great honor and a large empire. In fact, the gemara states that Hashem stopped Nevuchadnetzar from running any further, because his reward would have been so great that he would have been granted permission to wipe out the Jewish people (Sanhedrin 96a). If Hashem grants such large rewards in this world to evildoers for seemingly small deeds, one can only imagine what rewards wait in store for those who fulfill Torah and mitzvos.

Additionally, the Torah Temima points out that Pharaoh accompanied Avraham for four steps. This teaches us that one must escort guests out of his house for four amos (approximately eight feet). It is important to remember this final component of the mitzvah to invite guests. It is not enough to give a guest food and drink and then let the guest out of the house on his own. One should walk a short distance outside of the house with the guest as well. Chazal state that the reward for the mitzva of escorting a guest is limitless (Sotah 46b). The gemara there continues that if one escorts his guests for four amos, the guest is protected from harm. The Chofetz Chayim (Ahavas Chesed, Part III, Chapter II, see footnote, based on Maharsha, Sotah 46b) writes that while it is a mitzvah to escort all guests, the main mitzvah is to show a guest the fastest and safest way to his destination.

**וישמע אברם כי נשבה אחיו וירק את חניכיו ילידי ביתו שמנה עשר ושלוש מאות
וירדף עד דן
“When Avram heard that his kinsman was taken captive, he armed his disciples who**

had been born in his house - three hundred and eighteen - and he pursued them as far as Dan” (14:14)

Another possible answer to why Avraham's descendants were enslaved is recorded in the gemara (Nedarim 32a): "R' Avahu said in the name of R' Elazar: Why were Avraham's descendants punished with servitude for 210 years? Because he used Torah scholars for waging war." The study of Torah is more important than anything else. Those who dedicate their lives to Torah should be able to do so at all times and should be exempt from public service if at all possible. Avraham had many servants and could have mobilized troops from elsewhere, but chose to take "his disciples," which Chazal understand as referring to those that he trained in Torah. Because he took them away from their studies, he was punished that his descendants had to work in Egypt.

This gemara teaches us the value of Torah study. It is important to set a time aside for learning and to keep that appointment every day without fail. When a person passes on to the next world, he is not asked if he studied Torah. Instead, he is asked if he set aside a specific time for learning. Just as Avraham should not have taken his Torah students away from their studies, we must be careful never to miss our set time for Torah study unless it is absolutely necessary. One way for a person to ensure that he keeps to his daily appointment for Torah study is to find a study partner or to participate in a class. If one learns on his own, he is likely to find excuses to avoid learning. However, if one learns with others, they will not allow him to miss their appointment without good reason.

ויאמר מלך סדם אל אברם תן לי הנפש והרכש קח לך

“The king of Sodom said to Avram: Give me the people and take the possessions for yourself” (14:21)

Yet another suggestion as to the cause for the slavery in Egypt is suggested in Nedarim 32a: "R' Yochanan said: Why did Avraham's descendants deserve to be enslaved in Egypt? Because he did not allow the people of Sodom to become closer to Hashem when he returned them to the king of Sodom." Avraham could have rightfully maintained sovereignty over the people of Sodom because he had been victorious in battle. He could have been a positive influence on these wicked people and taught them about Hashem. Nevertheless, he willingly allowed the king of Sodom to retake his people. Because of this lost opportunity, his descendants were punished.

We learn from this that a person is held responsible if he has the opportunity to influence someone but does not capitalize on it. In truth, we are all able to influence others in one way or another, whether this is done actively or passively. As Jews, people look at us differently and expect more from us. Often, what we consider to be routine behavior can influence an observer. It is therefore important that we take this lesson seriously. We know that the reward for a good deed is much greater than the punishment for a bad one. If we take advantage of our opportunities to influence those around us, certainly we will receive a tremendous reward.

ואתה תבוא אל אבותיך בשלום תקבר בשיבה טובה

“As for you: you shall come to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age” (15:15)

Hashem told Avraham that he would die before the slavery in Egypt and that he would go to his forefathers "in peace." The Gemara in Brochos 64a says that when a guest departs, one says "go to peace," and when a dead person is taken to his final resting place, one says "go in peace." The Maharal explains that the reason for this is that a living person should always be striving to become complete. He is therefore given a blessing upon his departure to continue reaching toward his goal. Upon the departure of one who has passed on, we do not want to imply that he has not reached this level of completion in his lifetime. We therefore say "go in peace," go now in the state of completion that you have attained.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Rabbi Mayer Friedman.....Magid Shiur

Michael Gutmann.....Editor