

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת שופטים

כי יפלא ממך דבר למשפט בין דם לדם בין דין לדין ובין נגע לנגע דברי
ריבת בשעריך וקמת ועלית אל המקום אשר יבחר ה' אלקיך בו
“If a matter of judgment will be hidden from you, between blood and
blood, between verdict and verdict, or between affliction and affliction,
matters of dispute in your cities - you shall rise and ascend to the place that
Hashem, your G-d, shall choose” (17:8)

The Alter of Kelm interpreted this posuk homiletically. Why do we find that Jews have their blood spilled more than other nations? Why are more inflammatory decrees made against the Jews than any other nation? Why have more afflictions befallen the Jews than any other nation? This posuk answers the puzzle. "If a matter of judgment is hidden for you," if it is hard to understand matters of blood, verdicts and afflictions, the answer lies in the "matters of dispute in your cities." It is because of the quarreling within Jewish neighborhoods that all these troubles occur. Hatred and infighting are the sources of our troubles. As a result, other nations are granted the power to harm the Jews. If we would only get along with each other, we would also be able to enjoy peace from those around us.

על פי התורה אשר יורוך ועל המשפט אשר יאמרו לך תעשה לא תסור מן
הדבר אשר יגידו לך ימין ושמאל
“According to the teaching that they will teach you and according to the
judgment that they will say to you shall you do; you shall not turn from the
word that they will tell you, right or left” (17:11)

What does the posuk mean that we should not deviate from the words of the Sages to the right or left? Rashi says even if the Sanhedrin say your left hand is actually your right hand and vice versa, you must listen to them. What is Rashi trying to teach us with this explanation?

Ramban explains that even if something seems obvious, as simple as the difference between right and left, but the Sages say otherwise, we must listen to them. Our clarity should not lead us to believe that we are correct. The Sanhedrin have the final say regarding all matters of Torah law and one must follow their decision, no matter how illogical they appear to be. The Ramban continues that the reason why there has to be one final authority on all matters is to prevent the creation many different versions of Torah law. When there is one

absolute authority and their version is considered the bottom line, there will be no confusion. Hashem gave the Torah with the understanding that it would be followed in accordance with the interpretation of the Sages. Chazal tell us that Hashem does not allow the righteous to make mistakes. We should be confident that the Sanhedrin has interpreted Torah law correctly and act in accordance with their decision.

The Sifsei Chachamim interpret Rashi to mean that if the Sanhedrin say something that seems counterintuitive, you should feel that you are the one making the mistake, not them. This obligation applies even today when there is no Sanhedrin. A rabbi is considered a Torah authority and his decisions must be accorded the proper respect. We must train ourselves to feel that our limited knowledge has led us to err in something that the rabbi knows better. One should not go shopping around for a decision that suits his interests. He should treat the decision that he receives as the final authority and follow it, even if it inconveniences him.

תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך

“You shall be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d” (18:13)

Rashi explains that the posuk is describing a cause and effect. If one accepts his lot in life wholeheartedly, then he will be with Hashem and will be rewarded. The Ramban explains the connection between this posuk and the preceding pesukim regarding the prohibition against witchcraft and divination. Even if someone volunteers to tell your future for you, you should follow Hashem completely. One must believe that the future is in the hands of Hashem and is not set in stone based on these predictions. Hashem can change the alignment of the stars on which the astrologers base their forecasts. Man can write his own future. One must believe that he controls his own destiny and that what will happen to him in the future depends solely on how he serves Hashem. In fact, the Ramban counts the obligation to believe that Hashem alone determines the future as one of the 613 commandments (Mitzva 8 in the appendix listing the mitzvos that the Ramban counts and the Rambam does not following the Mitzvos Asei in the Sefer HaMitzvos)

ככל אשר שאלת מעם ה' אלקיך בחרב ביום הקהל לאמר לא אסף לשמע את קול ה' אלקי ואת האש הגדלה הזאת לא אראה עוד ולא אמות
“According to all that you asked of Hashem, your G-d, in Chorev on the day of the congregation, saying: I can no longer hear the voice of Hashem, my G-d, and this great fire I can no longer see, so that I shall not

die” (18:16)

Why is the day on which the Torah was given referred to as "the day of the congregation?" Is that the most notable characteristic of Matan Torah? In truth, the unity of the Jewish people on that day is indeed the most important event of that day. That is why the section describing Matan Torah begins with the statement that the Jews camped around Har Sinai together, in complete harmony. This was a prerequisite for receiving the Torah and it is that fact that characterizes the historic event.

Rabbi Friedman has an original thought on this posuk. The Torah refers to Har Sinai as Chorev. The numerical value of the name Chorev is 210, the number of years that the Jews spent in Egypt. This signifies that the 210 years of exile in Mitzrayim served only as a means to reach Chorev. The years of exile achieved their purpose when the Torah was given. The Torah describes the Jewish experience in Egypt as a purifying furnace that cleansed the nation of all its impurities so that they could become the nation of Hashem. Thus, the years of Egypt were meant to prepare the Jews to receive the Torah.

לא תסיג גבול רעך אשר גבלו ראשנים בנחלתך אשר תנחל בארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך לרשתה
“You shall not move back the boundary of your fellow, which the early ones marked out, in your inheritance that you shall not inherit, in the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you to possess it” (19:14)

What is the connection between the laws regarding murder and the prohibition to infringe upon the boundaries of a neighbor? The Baal HaTurim explains that even though we the life of a murderer is forfeit, we have no right to take his money. His possessions still pass to his descendants and nobody has the right to overstep this boundary.

Rabbi Friedman suggests another answer. One of the interpretations of this commandment is that one is not allowed to interfere with another person's livelihood. The Torah instructs us to have the same concern for a person's property as we would for his life. When one causes financial harm to another person, he decrease his fellow's quality of life. This prohibition should not be treated lightly. In fact, Chazal say that a pauper is considered as if he is dead. One needs a livelihood to survive and one may not infringe upon this necessity. By juxtaposing these two sets of laws, the Torah teaches us the attitude that one should have toward other people's property.

והורדו זקני העיר ההוא את העגלה אל נחל איתן אשר לא יעבד בו ולא
יזרע וערפו שם את העגלה בנחל

“The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a harsh valley, which cannot be worked and cannot be sown, and they shall axe the back of its neck in the valley” (21:4)

Rashi quotes the Gemara in Sotah 46a that the procedure of beheading the calf was done in a land that had never been planted because a calf that has not produced should be killed in a location that has not produced fruits to atone for the death of a man who was not allowed the opportunity to produce fruits. The Sifsei Chachamim explains that this means that the person was unable to perform mitzvos.

Not only must the location of the procedure be one that was never planted, but it is forbidden to plant in that area ever again, even after the ceremony. This is because this tragedy is so severe that it must be remembered forever. This shows us the value that the Torah places on a human life. According to the explanation of the Sifsei Chachamim, we see the value of mitzvos. The mitzvos that a person does are everlasting. If someone was robbed of the chance to do mitzvos, an everlasting remembrance must be instituted to replace them.

From this, we can learn how important every mitzva is. We should never let the opportunity to do a mitzva go by. We must never choose to avoid a chance to perform a mitzva. We must also realize the tragedy of all the Jewish people today who do not do mitzvos. This sad fact should bother us to the point where we should want to help them. If being robbed of the chance to do mitzvos through death is so terrible, how much worse to consciously make this choice? Many people do not know better and we should feel the desire and the responsibility to help them recognize the beauty of Torah and mitzvos and show them the path to a productive and meaningful life.

Chodesh Elul

אני לדודי ודודי לי - "I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me"

The first words of this posuk from Shir HaShirim spell the word Elul. This signifies the fact that the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people is even closer than usual during the month of Elul. It is noteworthy that "I am to my beloved" precedes "my beloved is to me." If we do our part and prepare ourselves for Rosh Hashana, Hashem will be there for us and we can be confident that we will succeed in our appearance before the Heavenly Court. Just as a lawyer's success hinges on his preparation for the court case, our

success depends on how we utilize the preparatory days of Elul. If we use them wisely and enter Rosh Hashana ready for our case, Hashem will be there for us and grant us with a year of blessing and prosperity.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann