

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת כי תשא

כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו לה' בפקד אתם ולא יהיה בהם נגף בפקד אתם
“When you will take a census of the Children of Israel according to their counts, every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul when counting them, and there will be no plague among them when counting them” (30:12)

The parsha begins with the commandment to take a half-shekel from each person who is counted. The Alshich offers a homiletic interpretation of the posuk, based upon a narrow literal translation of the words. "When you lift up a head of the Bnei Yisrael," when a leader is appointed, "he shall give an atonement for his soul," he should be a person who is willing to sacrifice himself for the people. A good leader is ready to give himself to the people. The leader also has to be a person willing to give up his life for the people. He must be selfless and willing to do anything and everything in his capacity as a representative of the people. Moshe was such a leader. He was willing to give of himself for the benefit of the people. Later in the parsha, we see how he protested Hashem's intended punishment of the people for their sin of the golden calf. Moshe told Hashem to forgive them "and if not, erase me from Your book." Moshe was willing to give up being mentioned in the Torah. Even though Hashem wanted to begin a new chosen nation through Moshe, he refused to allow this to happen without vigorously complaining. Moshe wanted no glory for himself, only what was best for his people.

ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת לעשות את השבת לדרתם ברית עולם
“The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath an eternal covenant for their generations” (31:16)

The Or HaChaim explains that the word “shamar,” “to observe,” also means “to anticipate.” He writes that everyone should look forward to the coming of Shabbos. We should not be upset by the fact that we cannot work on Shabbos. Instead, we should long for the coming of Shabbos with love. R' Moshe Feinstein said that a generation of Jews was lost because they felt that Shabbos was a burden and that it was too much of a bother. Had they fully appreciated the beauty of Shabbos, they would never have become lost. The only way to keep Shabbos properly is through anticipating Shabbos. One who looks forward to Shabbos will be driven to learn the laws of Shabbos and will thereby keep it properly.

The Shabbos has to be kept “for their generations” because parents have to be aware that Shabbos is the continuity of our religion. It is of extreme importance that the next generation continues to keep Shabbos. This is accomplished by making Shabbos beautiful with food, song, and expressing a general love of the Shabbos.

ויתן אל משה ככלתו לדבר אתו בהר סיני שני לחת העדת לחת אבן כתבים באצבע אלקים
“He gave to Moshe, when He finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two Tablets of the Testimony, stone tablets inscribed by the finger of Hashem” (31:18)

Rashi explains that the word “luchos” is spelled without a “vov” so that it could be read "luchas," in singular form, meaning one tablet. This teaches us that they were both the same size and appeared like one. R' Dovid Kviat, in his sefer Sukkas Dovid, asks: What is the importance of telling us that the two tablets were like one? He answers that the first tablet deals with conduct between man and Hashem while the second deals with conduct between man and his fellow man. Both these areas are of equal importance. To treat people well while ignoring Hashem, or to serve Hashem properly while not treating other people nicely is lacking in value.

The Baal HaTurim quotes the midrash that compares the two luchos to a bride and groom. R' Dovid Kviat extends his answer to this midrash. A chasan and a kallah are of equal importance. Just like the luchos, while they each have their own roles, no single role is greater than the other, the same applies to the roles of a husband and wife in a marriage.

Rashi also points out that the word “kechaloso” is also missing a “vov” so that the word “kallah” can be read in it. This teaches us that just as a kallah wears 24 types of adornments (as listed in Yeshaya 3:18-24), a talmid chacham must be well versed in all 24 books of Tanach. What is the connection between these two points? The answer is that the 24 adornments is not just an arbitrary number. A Jewish girl would intentionally wear 24 adornments to make a statement that the point of the marriage was to become her husband's helpmate to help him excel and grow and acquire the 24 books of Tanach. Chazal tell us that without a wife, one is lacking completion in Torah.

Two of the seven blessings that we recite at Sheva Brochos have similar conclusions. The fourth blessing, "Sameach Tesamach," ends "Mesameach chassan v'kallah," "Who gladdens the groom and bride." The sixth blessing, "Asher Bara Sasson V'simcha," ends "Mesameach chassan im kallah," "Who gladdens the groom with the bride." What is the reason for this difference? Rashi in Kesubos 8a explains that these two blessings are indeed completely different. Rashi writes: "In the happiness of the earlier blessing we do not refer to the joy of the wedding. That is a prayer in which we pray that they will be happy and successful for their whole lives...Therefore, we end the blessing that He should gladden the two of them [individually] with sustenance and all other good. The latter blessing is a praise in which we praise Hashem Who created weddings, the joining of man and wife in happiness and joy. Therefore, we end that blessing with 'Who gladdens the groom with the bride' which is a language that refers to a joy that a man feels for his wife." The earlier blessing is a prayer for the two of them as individuals and so we end with "the groom and bride," as individuals. The latter blessing is a praise of Hashem for creating the institution of marriage, for creating a life in which a man joins with a woman and share their lives and goals. We thank Hashem "Who gladdens the groom with the bride," together as one.

The third blessing, "Sos Tasis," does not really fit in with the other blessings, as it has nothing to do with a wedding per se. Rather, Rashi explains that it serves as a remembrance of the destruction of Yerushalayim, thus fulfilling the words of the posuk, "Let my tongue adhere to its palate, if I fail to recall you, if I fail to elevate Yerushalayim above my foremost joy" (Tehillim 137:6). One must remember the desolation of our holy city and the lack of a Beis HaMikdash during the times of our greatest happiness. This is also why we break a glass at the conclusion of the chupa. We should be mindful not to perform these acts without thinking. It is important to think about why we recite a blessing about Eretz Yisrael and why we break a glass and really think about how our joy remains incomplete until the true joy of the final redemption.

Another law based on this idea is that when one builds a new house, he should leave a small area unpainted and unplastered as a reminder of the destruction of Yerushalayim. There are few greater occasions of happiness than when one completes a new house. Therefore one must leave the house somewhat incomplete to fulfill the precept of remembering Yerushalayim at our times of joy. Again, we must not merely go through the motions, we must think about the message behind our actions as well.

ויהי כאשר קרב אל המחנה וירא את העגל ומחלת ויחר אף משה וישלך מידו את הלחת וישבר אתם תחת ההר
"It happened as he drew near the camp and he saw the calf and the dances, that Moshe's anger burned, he threw down the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the bottom of the mountain" (32:19)

Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu that the people had made a golden calf. However, Moshe did not break the luchos until he actually saw the revelry with his own eyes. The Seforno explains that Moshe only broke the luchos upon seeing "the calf and the dances." Moshe thought that he could come down and inspire the people to repent and the luchos could be kept intact. But when he saw how happy they were and how much they were enjoying their sin, he recognized that they were in deep trouble and that the luchos were lost. Only then did he throw the luchos down and smash them. When a person sins, he must feel bad about it. This regret cannot be a false feeling and simple words. He must truly be upset about what he did and resolve to fix it. As long as a person is upset in his heart about his actions, there is an opportunity to correct his behavior. However, if a person knows that he sins and does not care, it becomes extremely difficult for him to change his ways.

Rashi comments that "tachas hahar," literally meaning "under the mountain," really means "at the foot of the mountain." If this is so, why was it necessary to use a strange language of "under the mountain?" R' Dovid Feinstein explains that the word "under" is a reference to the Midrash in Parshas Yisro which teaches that Hashem held Har Sinai over the Jewish people and said "If you accept My Torah, all is good. If not, here shall be your burial place." Thus, the people literally stood under the mountain at the time that they accepted the Torah. Moshe had this event in mind when he broke the luchos. He was still trying to defend the Jews by saying that they had been forced to accept the Torah in the first place so they could not be blamed so heavily. Moshe broke the luchos in a way that he defended the Jewish people simultaneously. This is the greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu as a leader. Even in the worst of times, he still managed to find the good in the people. We can learn from this how to deal with people in our own lives. When criticism is necessary, a person should try to sugarcoat it and say that it really may not be so bad or that it is understandable why the person acted in such a way, even though it needs to be corrected. If a person is criticized in a nice and pleasant manner, he will be more likely to take the rebuke to heart and correct what he has done wrong.

It is still difficult to understand how Hashem could force the Jews to accept the Torah. Also, Chazal say, "Until Purim, the Jews had an excuse against the Torah [namely, their coercion]. After Purim, they accepted it of their own

free will." What does this mean? We can answer that this duress was not really a literal, physical coercion. When they saw all of the open miracles on display when Hashem gave the Torah, they had no choice but to accept. How could they refuse after seeing clear evidence of Hashem's presence and hearing His voice? There really was no room for free choice. But on Purim, the miracles of Hashem were hidden. They could have chosen to ignore them and attribute the events to coincidence. Nevertheless, they chose to see the hand of Hashem and to recognize His presence and providence on their own accord. Once they willingly recognized Hashem, they gladly accepted His Torah on their own as well. Unlike by Matan Torah, they had the choice to see Hashem and they did so on their own. This second acceptance of the Torah was thus even greater than the first.

Parshas Parah

Parshas Parah is read two weeks before Rosh Chodesh Nisan because this was the time when the people would make plans to become purified before bringing the Korban Pesach. The Mishna Berura (685:1) writes that this reading is also a prayer that we should merit to put the laws of the Parah Adumah into practice this year. Should the Bais HaMikdash be rebuilt before Pesach, we need to be ready for the purification from the ashes of the Parah Adumah. This is an exercise in "yearning for the salvation," one of the first questions which a person is asked upon arrival in heaven. In davening, we have a special blessing in the Shemone Esrei that asks for a return to Yerushalayim. We must always express our hopefulness for the salvation and that it will occur speedily in our times.

There is an opinion that the reading of Parshas Parah is a biblical commandment, just like Parshas Zachor, and that one is biblically obligated to hear every word of Parshas Parah from a Sefer Torah. The Aruch HaShulchan (685:7) suggests that this is learned from a seemingly extra verse that states "it shall be for them as a law forever." This teaches us that in all generations we must recall the law of the Parah Adumah by reading it publicly every year. The custom of the Arba Parshiyos that we read each year dates back to the times of the Mishna and are meant to remind of us of the important events that surround both Purim and Pesach.

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