

## Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

### פרשת בהר-בחקתי

לא תעשו לכם אלילים ופסל ומצבה לא תקימו לכם ואבן משכית לא תתנו בארצכם  
להשתחות עליה כי אני ה' אלקיכם

**“You shall not make idols for yourselves, and you shall not erect for yourselves a statue or a pillar, and in your land you shall not emplace a flooring stone upon which to prostrate oneself – for I am Hashem, your G-d” (26:1)**

Why does the Torah need to repeat the prohibitions against Avoda Zara and Shabbos (in the following posuk) at this point? Rashi cites the Toras Kohanim which says that these laws are repeated here in the context of the previous pesukim regarding a Jew who sells himself as a slave to a gentile. Although the slave might think to worship idols and desecrate Shabbos just as his master does, the Torah warns him to keep these mitzvos and not follow in the ways of his boss.

But why would a Jew even think to copy the behavior of a gentile? Rabbi Friedman suggests that even when a person works for someone who is not Jewish and he sees the way he acts, he will be influenced. He must remember that even though it might be permissible for the gentile to act in this way, such conduct is inappropriate for a Jew. The Torah has to reinforce even such serious commandments as Avoda Zara and Shabbos because the supervisor's influence can be extensive. A person respects his boss and looks to him as a guide and a mentor. It is important to remember where to draw the line because this connection, when allowed to reach a level beyond a working relationship, can become dangerous. A man who goes to work for a gentile needs to be reminded not to be influenced and a warning against Avoda Zara and Shabbos is not entirely unreasonable in such a situation.

This is a very practical lesson in today's day and age, especially when there is such a divide between Torah values and the values of modern society. Whether it is a boss, co-workers, professors or fellow students, we frequently encounter people whose opinions and actions carry weight in our

minds. We must be careful to minimize the influence that these people have on us because it is very easy to slip up and fall very far.

[Ed. Note - There are halachos in place regarding socializing with gentiles that are meant to prevent these things from happening. The Pri Chadash writes in Yoreh Deah Siman 114 that it is forbidden to socialize at a table that is composed of a majority of gentiles. However, this only applies to a social event for fun, but a business lunch is permissible. I personally heard R' Mordechai Willig of YU say that one should not go drinking with colleagues after work under any circumstances. Such an atmosphere is very dangerous for a Jewish person and can easily – and often does – lead to terrible things. He advises people that they should lose their job rather than go out for drinks with colleagues after work.]

את שבתתי תשמרו ומקדשי תיראו אני ה'

**“My Sabbaths shall you observe and My Sanctuary shall you revere – I am Hashem” (26:2)**

We find Shabbos and the Mishkan/Mikdash juxtaposed both here and in Parshas Vayakhel. What is the connection between these two concepts? Rabbi Friedman suggests the following answer: The Bais HaMikdash had a palpable sanctity and we should also feel the same holiness on Shabbos. Imagine the excitement and special feeling that one would have as he ascended Har Habayis and entered the Bais HaMikdash. When we enter Shabbos, we should also feel as though we are entering the Mikdash. We should recognize that we are surrounded by kedusha on Shabbos because of the special nature of the day

אם בחקתי תלכו ואת מצותי תשמרו ועשיתם אתם

**“If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them” (26:3)**

Rashi says that following the decrees of Hashem means to toil in the study of Torah. The Chofetz Chaim writes in Shem Olam (Chapter 7) that there are two focuses to learning Torah. One is to fulfill the mitzvah of Talmud Torah, even in the study of laws that are irrelevant to daily living. The second purpose of Torah study is to be well versed in practical halachos

in order to fulfill the mitzvos. This type of learning takes precedence to all others. This is the toiling in Torah study referred to in this posuk, as we see that to “follow My decrees” leads one to “observe My commandments.” It is common for a person to miss out on the fulfillment of mitzvos when he does not learn about them. The Chofetz Chaim cites the timely recitation of Kerias Shema and the appropriate placement of Tefillin on the arm and head as specific examples of mitzvos that people often do not perform correctly because of a lack of knowledge. (This is important to note in this time of year when Sof Zman Kerias Shema is getting earlier. One who davens at a 9:00 minyan on Shabbos should be sure to say Kerias Shema before davening for the next few weeks.) This is also why Torah education is so important. Without proper knowledge of Torah, one will not be able to fulfill the mitzvos properly.

R’ Moshe Sternbuch says that a person must approach his learning as a quest for the truth rather than supporting his personal opinions. The Gemara tells a story about when Reish Lakish passed away and there was nobody to ask R’ Yochanan questions anymore. This caused R’ Yochanan great pain because not being questioned hindered his ability to clarify his learning and arrive at the truth.

The Gemara in Avoda Zara 5a interprets the phrase “if you will follow My decrees” as a request. Hashem is asking the people to please keep the Torah and mitzvos. We are supposed to follow the Torah and we should want to do it. We are taught in Pirkei Avos, “Make His will as yours.” This is the best way for a person to serve Hashem, by incorporating Hashem’s will into his own mind and making it his personal desire as well.

*Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman*  
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