

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת אחרי מות-קדושים

בזאת יבא אהרן אל הקדש בפר בן בקר לחטאת ואיל לעלה
“With this shall Aharon come into the Sanctuary: with a young bull for a sin-offering and a ram for an elevation-offering” (16:3)

The Midrash notes that the gematria of "bezos" is 410, the number of years that the first Bais HaMikdash stood. With this word, Hashem was hinting to Aharon that he would serve as Kohen Gadol and perform the service on Yom Kippur for 410 years. The Midrash asks: How can this be? We know that Aharon did not live that long?! The answer is that the office of Kohen Gadol remained in Aharon's family and was passed down from father to son for 410 years. As long as his children were faithfully executing the duties of the Kohen Gadol, it was as if Aharon himself were still serving in that capacity.

Similarly, Chazal teach that "As long as the student is alive, the teacher is alive." Teachers live on through their students and fathers live on through their sons. The idea of succeeding generations assuming the role of their forebears is a central theme of our tefillos. We begin every Shemone Esrei by invoking "zechus avos," the merit of our forefathers: Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. We ask Hashem to remember these great people and remember that we are their descendants and have taken their places. In their merit, we ask Hashem to be kind to us. In fact, the Midrash continues that the different animals which were sacrificed on Yom Kippur also represented the three Avos. The cow represents Avraham, who ran to the cattle in order to serve the angels. The ram represents Yitzchak, who had a ram sacrificed in his stead at the Akeida. The goat represents Yaakov, who received the blessings from his father after serving him to goats. On the most important day of the year, we seek Hashem's mercy and forgiveness by reminding Hashem of our illustrious ancestors.

Our status as descendants of the Avos, the chosen ones of Hashem, comes with great responsibility as well. We should remember that we have taken their place and are responsible for executing the task that Hashem assigned to them in this world. If we remain conscious of this and follow Hashem's commandments, we will truly be deserve to be protected by "zechus avos."

לא תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ויראת מאלקיך אני ה'
“You shall not curse the deaf, and you shall not place a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your G-d - I am Hashem” (19:14)

The Gemara in Moed Katan 5a says that the prohibition against creating a stumbling block hints to the communal responsibility to mark off graves so that Kohanim do not become impure. The Torah Temimah writes that this teaches us the extent of this prohibition. Not only is one forbidden to actively cause a person to stumble, but one must remove a stumbling block if someone will trip over it. From this we learn that each individual has the responsibility to prevent his fellow from sinning. Obviously, this obligation must be approached in a sensible manner, but the Torah warns that we cannot just turn a blind eye if we see someone engaging in a forbidden activity.

לא תקם ולא תטר את בני עמך ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני ה'
“You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself - I am Hashem” (19:18)

Why are the prohibitions of revenge and bearing a grudge connected to the mitzvah to love

one's fellow as himself? With the connection of these two ideas, the Torah tells us how to overcome the urge for revenge. If one has the desire to take revenge, he should remind himself of how he would want to be treated himself. Just as he would want to be given a second chance, he must do the same for others. Although it can be difficult to control one's emotions, this thought process can help a person avoid taking revenge and/or bearing a grudge any time he is slighted.

The Sefer HaChinuch writes that the prohibition against holding a grudge applies even when a person was clearly wronged. The Torah desires that there should be peace among us and that can only be accomplished if we are forgiving toward those who have hurt us. Every person should ask himself if he is fulfilling this mitzvah. If he finds that he is bearing a grudge against another person, regardless of what the other person did, he should be aware that he is transgressing this mitzvah. Because a person instinctively reacts this way, this mitzvah can be challenging. It is a tall order that is asked of every Jew, but keeping this mitzvah will prevent many arguments.

לא תאכלו על הדם לא תנחשו ולא תעוננו

“You shall not eat over the blood; you shall not indulge in sorcery and you shall not believe in lucky times” (19:26)

The Gemara in Berachos 10b explains the prohibition against "eating over blood" to mean that one may not eat before davening for his own blood (his life). The Torah Temimah explains that our tefillos take the place of korbanos. Just as eating from a korban is forbidden before the blood is sprinkled, so too one cannot eat until he has taken care of his own blood by davening to Hashem.

It is important to remember that our prayers are the equivalent of a sacrifice. If we realized the importance of our tefillos, we would take them much more seriously. Many of the laws of davening reflect the laws of korbanos. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 98:4) writes that one must have proper kavana during davening just like proper intent was necessary for a sacrifice. One must stand for davening just as standing is a requirement while bringing a korban. One must have a set place where he stands during davening just as each korban was sacrificed in a specific location. One must wear nice clothes when he davens just as the Kohanim wore special clothing during their service. These halachos are meant to remind us that our tefillos are just like korbanos and that we should treat them accordingly.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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