

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת מטות-מסעי

איש כי ידר נדר לה' או השבע שבעה לאסר אסר על נפשו לא יחל דברו ככל היצא מפיו יעשה

“If a man takes a vow to Hashem or swears a oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth he shall do” (30:3)

The parsha begins with a discussion of the laws regarding vows. The Torah attaches a great significance to the words that a person speaks. Even something completely permissible can become prohibited to a person if he merely declares that he wishes it to be so. This teaches us the power of speech. Today, many people are very free with their speech and they do not realize its importance. Talking should not just be done for the sake of talking because it causes us to forget how special and powerful our speech is.

We can also use this power of speech to do many good things. A person should never feel that his prayers are worthless because the speech of every person has the potential to do great things. We can also compliment people and praise them. The Rambam writes that when one praises his friend, he fulfills the mitzva of Ve'ahavta Lerei'acha Kamocha, to love his fellow as himself. Cheering up a depressed person is also a form of the mitzva of tzedaka. It is important to recognize the importance of speech and remember to be careful about the way in which we express ourselves. There is an entire tractate of Gemara that deals with the laws of vows because the laws change depending on the language a person uses when making a vow. It is important to think about what we say and make sure that we are saying it in a proper manner.

וישלח אתם משה אלף למטה לצבא אתם ואת פינחס בן אלעזר הכהן לצבא וכלי הקדש וחצצרות התרועה בידו

“Moshe sent them - a thousand men from each tribe for the legion - them and Pinchas son of Elazar the Kohen to the legion, and the sacred vessels and the trumpets for sounding in his hand” (31:6)

The Yalkut Shimoni asks: If Hashem told Moshe to take revenge on Midian, why did he not go to battle himself? After all, Chazal tell us that it is better for a person to do a mitzva himself than to send a messenger to do the mitzva. He answers that Moshe did not go out to battle because he felt that he owed a debt of gratitude to Midian for being his place of refuge from Pharaoh for many years. He had lived and raised a family in Midian while he was a fugitive. Therefore, he did not want to personally take part in the destruction of Midian. Moshe understood that Hashem

would not command him to harm someone who had been kind to him. He interpreted Hashem's command to mean that he should send someone to carry out the job, not that he should do it himself.

This is a great lesson for us. Even though the country of Midian did not do anything so great for Moshe, he was still grateful and appreciative of what they had done for him and would not hurt them. We too should be sure to appreciate, not only the individuals who are kind to us, but also the country in which we live and the kindness that it does for us and the liberties that it grants us. This is why many shuls have the custom to recite a prayer for the welfare of their government and their country's leader every Shabbos. As the Jews went into their first exile in Bavel, Hashem instructed them to "seek out the peace of the city that you dwell in." It is important to pray on behalf of the countries that shelter us in our exile and recognize how much we owe to them.

**הן הנה היו לבני ישראל בדבר בלעם למסר מעל בה' על דבר פעור ותהי
המגפה בעדת ה'**

“Behold - it was they who caused the Children of Israel, by the word of Bilam, to commit a trespass against Hashem regarding the matter of Peor, and the plague occurred in the assembly of Hashem ” (31:16)

Why did the soldiers allow the women to live? Wouldn't it seem obvious that they should have been the first to be killed? The soldiers felt that the women were merely following the orders of the men when they seduced the Jewish men. Moshe said that, even so, they were the ones who committed the actions. They are still held responsible for what they did wrong.

The lesson to be learned from this episode is that even when something seems to be obvious, one should make sure to communicate it clearly so as not to leave any room for error. What was obvious to Moshe was not clear to the others. One should never take the obvious for granted. This principle is important in everyday life, but especially true for a teacher. When giving a class or a lecture, one can never assume that people already understand something and it does not need explanation. It is always best to review it anyway, even if some people will find it obvious.

**ויאמר אלעזר הכהן אל אנשי הצבא הבאים למלחמה זאת חקת התורה אשר
צוה ה' את משה**

“Elazar the Kohen said to the men of the legion who came to the battle: This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded Moshe” (31:21)

Why was it Elazar, and not Moshe, who instructed the soldiers regarding the laws of purifying utensils? Rashi writes that Moshe forgot to instruct the soldiers about these laws because of his anger. Chazal explain that when a person becomes angry he becomes a different person. This causes him to become forgetful and

illogical. This is not just a reaction, it is a natural extension of anger. This is what caused Moshe to fail to remember the Torah that he had learned.

Anger is really only good if the person shows it on the outside but does not feel it on the inside. This is very important for parents and teachers. If one feels the anger, it can cause a person to lose control and act irrationally. Merely showing anger without feeling it can also accomplish the same results.

ויסעו מרפידם ויחנו במדבר סיני

“They journeyed from Refidim and encamped in the Wilderness of Sinai” (33:15)

When listing the places where the Jews camped in the wilderness, the Torah pauses to mention significant events that occurred along the way. Why doesn't the posuk mention that the Torah was given in Midbar Sinai? R' Moshe Feinstein answers that the Torah has to be new in our eyes every day. The Torah is not a historical event that happened once and is now in the past. It is by no means an "old testament." Rather, it continues to renew itself every day. Similarly, the Torah never mentions the date of the giving of the Torah. Shavuot, the holiday of the giving of the Torah, does not have a set date. A person should view the Torah as if it has been given anew every single day and treat it in the same way that one treats a gift that a person has just received. This is the attitude one should take in his Torah learning and in his performance of mitzvos. As Chazal tell us, "Every day, they should be like new in your eyes."

ואהרן בן שלש ועשרים ומאת שנה במתו בהר ההר

“Aharon was one hundred and twenty-three years old at his death on Hor Hahar” (33:39)

R' Nissan Alpert asks: Why is there a break in the Sefer Torah after the death of Aharon in the middle of the listing of the travels in the wilderness? With the death of Aharon was the end of an era. The Jews were led by Moshe and Aharon together and when Aharon died, the leadership changed. There is a similar explanation given by R' Michel Berenbaum with regard to the break in the Sefer Torah at the beginning of Parshas Vayechi. He writes there that the Torah is signifying the close of the era of the Avos. There were only three Avos and they were on a level of their own. Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov were on a level that has never been matched. With the death of Yaakov, people the likes of the Avos ceased to walk the earth. The same can be said of Aharon, who was a very special tzadik. His death signified the beginning of a new time for the Jewish people.

**כי בעיר מקלטו ישב עד מות הכהן הגדל ואחרי מות הכהן הגדל ישוב הרצח
אל ארץ אחזתו**

“For he must dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest, and after the death of the high priest the murderer shall return to the land of his possession” (35:28)

Why does the murderer stay in the city of refuge until the death of the Kohen Gadol? The Abarbanel explains that when the Kohen Gadol dies, the relative of the victim sees that death comes to everyone, from the highest people to the lowest. He realizes that the victim would have died anyway and will be calmed down. Only then can the murderer leave the city without being concerned for the vengeance of the victim's relative as he will finally be at peace with what happened.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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