

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת מטות-מסעי

ואם הפך יפר אתם אחרי שמעו ונשא את עונה

“But if he shall revoke them after his having heard, he shall bear her iniquity” (30:16)

Rashi explains the situation referred to in the posuk. If the husband hears his wife's vow and upholds it, he has validated it. If he immediately follows his validation by changing his mind and saying that he nullifies the vow, it has no effect because he cannot change his mind after making his original decision and the vow stands. Should the wife hear his invalid nullification and then break her vow, the husband bears full responsibility for her sin and receives any punishment that should rightfully be given to her for her wrongdoing. This is because one who misleads someone and causes that person to sin is held solely responsible for the misdeed and receives the appropriate punishment.

The Sifri adds that there is a rule that Hashem's kindness is more abundant than his punishment. If a person is punished for causing someone to sin, how much more so is this true of a person who causes someone to do a mitzvah. R' Moshe Sternbach notes that the person is not merely considered as an indirect cause of the mitzvah. If the person who causes a sin receives a punishment as if he had sinned himself, so too one who helps someone do a good deed is considered to have done the mitzvah himself. Such a person will get the same high level of reward as if he had physically done the mitzvah on his own as well.

נקם נקמת בני ישראל מאת המדינים אחר תאסף אל עמך

“Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people” (31:2)

Rashi says that the Jews were to fight Midian but not Moav because, while Moav only agitated the Jews out of fear that they would be conquered, Midian got involved in a conflict in which they had no part. They acted only out of spite and hatred for the Jewish people. Therefore, it was Midian that was targeted by Hashem for destruction rather than Moav.

The sefer Zichron Meir says that getting involved when there is no reason to do so is a sign of sinas chinam. This baseless hatred was the real sin of Midian that earned them destruction at the hands of the Jewish people. Sinas chinam is a very serious problem. Now, during the three weeks, is a time when we should work on eliminating sinas chinam from our midst. The Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of this sin and we are suffering because of it to this very day.

How can we remedy the problem of sinas chinam? Through ahavas chinam, loving other people and having good will toward them for no reason whatsoever other than the fact that they are fellow Jews. In the Shoshanas Yaakov that we recite on Purim, we say that Haman is cursed because he wanted to destroy us while Mordechai is blessed. It is notable that no reason is given for Mordechai's blessing while a reason is given as to why we are cursing Haman. This teaches us that there needs to be a valid reason in order to hate or to give a curse to someone, but love and blessing can and should be bestowed upon others without any reason at all. We should love others without needing to find a reason to do so and see all people in a positive light. This ahavas chinam is the antithesis of sinas chinam and is the best way to rectify the sin that still causes us to suffer in exile.

וידבר משה אל העם לאמר החלצו מאתכם אנשים לצבא ויהיו על מדין לתת נקמת ה' במדין

“Moshe spoke to the people, saying: Arm men from among yourselves for the legion that they may be against Midian to inflict Hashem's vengeance against Midian” (31:3)

R' Levi of Berdichev writes that another meaning of the word "heichaltzu" is "to remove." Moshe told the people to remove from themselves, meaning to take any personal interest out of their minds before going to war. These soldiers would be seeking vengeance against the nation that caused 22,000 of their brothers to die. Moshe told them not to let their emotions take hold of them and to merely act for the sake of fulfilling the command of Hashem. When it comes to communal work and family life, one must remove himself from the equation in order to be successful. One should not focus on personal desires and feelings but, instead, on what Hashem wants. Then he should make Hashem's goals into his own and he will do well. In order to truly act for the sake of Heaven, one must remove personal interests from his mind.

כל דבר אשר יבא באש תעבירו באש וטהר אך במי נדה יתחטא וכל אשר לא יבא באש תעבירו במים

“Everything that comes into fire, you shall pass through the fire and it will be purified; but it must be purified with the water of sprinkling; and everything that would not come in the fire, you shall pass through the water” (31:23)

Why is a mikveh referred to as waters of a niddah? Rashi says that the mikvah is called waters of a niddah to teach that the mikveh used for immersing utensils must have a volume of forty se'ah, the same size as the mikveh used for a niddah. However, the question still remains. Why use niddah as the paradigmatic case of immersion as opposed to any other form of ritual impurity which requires immersion in a mikveh of forty se'ah? R' Moshe Sternbach answers that the Torah specifically intends to draw a parallel between niddah and tevilas keilim. Just as a woman is forbidden to her husband until she goes to the mikveh, use of a utensil is forbidden until it has been immersed in the mikveh.

אלה מסעי בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים לצבאתם ביד משה ואהרן
“These are the journeys of the Children of Israel, who went forth from the land of Egypt according to their legions, under the hand of Moshe and Aharon” (33:1)

Why is it necessary for the Torah to document everywhere that the Jews traveled in the wilderness? Rashi writes that the Torah is teaching us the kindness of Hashem. One might have thought that when Hashem punished the people that they would wander in the desert for forty years, it meant that they were constantly on the move for years and never stopped to rest. However, Hashem lightened their punishment and they did not have to move very much during their stay in the desert. The Torah records that there were only forty-two stops over the duration of the forty years, of which we know that fourteen were in the first year and eight were in the final year. That means that they only traveled twenty times during the thirty-eight years that they were staying in the wilderness waiting for the generation to pass on.

Ramban, quoting the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim, gives another possible reason. Hashem knew that over time, the people would forget the details of the days that the nation spent in the wilderness. They would hear about how they spent forty years in the desert and they would assume that, if they survived all that time in the wilderness, they must have stayed at oases where there were fields and food and water and other areas suited for habitation. They would

forget the miraculous nature of their survival over those forty years and how it was Hashem who provided man from the heavens for food and water from the well of Miriam. They would forget how they were protected by the special clouds and how their clothing and shoes grew with them for all those years. The Torah recorded every single stop along the way as an everlasting reminder that the people were truly in the middle of nowhere and had no means of survival other than Hashem.

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The Sfas Emes writes that each of these journeys were meant to bring them closer to Hashem. Every stop along the way helped them attain a new level of closeness to Hashem, removing the impurity of Egypt and allowing them to reach new spiritual heights. All of these steps are enumerated in order to teach us that a person has to remember his past and remind himself that he may not have always been the way he is now. This helps a person have proper humility and not let his success go to his head. Moshe harkened the people back to their forty years of personal growth to remind them that they were not always so great and to appreciate how Hashem had helped them climb higher. It helps put things in perspective when a person recalls the road that he had to travel on to arrive where he is today.

The Sfas Emes further says that a person is a traveler in life. A person has to constantly go from one level to another. This constant moving is symbolized by the sojourns in the wilderness. Ascending the rungs of the spiritual ladder is a challenge and there are always obstacles along the way. Life is a journey and we have to recognize the challenge that faces us and rise above the obstacles in our path. Each person has to ask himself if he is leading a life of growth and moving forward from one level to the next. A person should never remain satisfied with status quo in his life but should constantly strive to grow higher and higher.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

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