

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת ואתחנן

ושמרתם ועשיתם כי הוא חכמתכם ובינתכם לעיני העמים אשר ישמעון את כל החקים האלה ואמרו רק עם חכם ונבון הגוי הגדול הזה
“You shall guard and you shall fulfill, for it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations that hear these laws and say: How wise and understanding is this great nation” (4:6)

Rashi says that guarding means to learn Torah. R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why is guarding called learning? Why doesn't the Torah just command us to learn? He answers that the only way through which a person can keep the Torah properly is to learn Torah and study the mitzvos. Without knowing the laws and studying them, one cannot have a proper understanding of halacha. One guards the Torah and ensures its proper fulfillment by learning.

כי אנכי מת בארץ הזאת אינני עבר את הירדן ואתם עברים וירשתם את הארץ הטובה הזאת
“For I will die in this land, I will not cross the Yarden, and you will cross and inherit this good land” (4:22)

The Meshech Chochma asks: Why does Moshe insert a comment about his impending death in the wilderness in the middle of his warning against idolatry? He answers that Moshe wanted to stress that he was not allowed to go to Eretz Yisrael because the people might worship Moshe after all the miracles that he performed. Hashem was so concerned about idolatry that Moshe's mortality had to be crystal clear to everyone. Moshe mentioned his death to show how important it is to avoid anything that could even lead to idolatry.

כבד את אביך ואת אמך כאשר צוך ה' אלקיך למען יאריך ימך ולמען ייטב לך על האדמה אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך
“Honor your father and your mother, as Hashem, your G-d, has commanded you, that your days may be long and that it may be well with you upon the land that Hashem, your G-d, has given you” (5:15)

The Yerushalmi refers to honoring parents as an "easy mitzva." This is because it is not hard to be motivated to perform the mitzva because it is only right to remunerate parents for all the good things that they do for their children.

Logically, it makes sense to honor one's parents. The Meshech Chochma asks: What if one's parents did not help bring him up? Does such a person still have to honor his parents? That is why the Torah says to honor parents "like Hashem commanded you." This commandment was originally given in the desert, where the parents did not have to work to help their children. The manna fell from heaven and their clothing grew with them for forty years. Nevertheless, Hashem commanded them to honor their parents. This shows that the mitzva is not dependent on how much the parents do for their children. In fact, there are some opinions that hold that one must honor his parents even if he is a rasha who is known to have committed terrible sins. Even according to those who hold that he does not have to honor his wicked father in such a case, he would still be forbidden to cause him pain or harm.

והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך
“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart” (6:6)

The Targum Yonasan translates this posuk, "you should write them on the walls of your heart." This means that the words of the Torah should be immediately accessible to a person at all times. R' Yitzchak Hutner said that there are two ways to remember something. One method is to review the material repeatedly. An even better way to remember something is to develop a love for the subject matter. This explains the sequence of the pesukim. First, the Torah tells us to love Hashem. Then, when one loves Hashem and His Torah, the details become engraved in his memory. Sports fans can remember statistics instantly even without reviewing them because they enjoy following sports so much. If one can develop a similar attitude toward learning and feel that every word of Torah is exciting and enjoyable, he will have an easier time remembering what he has learned.

The Torah has to be treated as if it were given today. This feeling is also a result of an appreciation of the true value of Torah. Yesterday's news is outdated and uninteresting. Torah has to be approached as if it is being learned for the first time. It then becomes a new and exciting experience and one remembers what he learns.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann