

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת אמר

וקדשתו כי את לחם אלקיך הוא מקריב קדש יהיה לך כי קדוש אני ה' מקדשכם
“You shall sanctify him, for he offers the food of your G-d; he shall be holy to you, for holy am I, Haehm, Who sanctifies you” (21:8)

This posuk teaches us the mitzvah to honor Kohanim and treat them with respect. The Ksav Sofer writes that the Torah instituted this mitzvah because when a person is dependent on others, those supporting him tend to look down on him. However, even though the Kohanim are completely dependent on the rest of the Jewish people for sustenance because they have no land, we must treat the Kohanim with the respect due to Torah leaders. This goes against natural instinct and is a feeling that has to be worked on. When supporting Kohanim or Torah scholars, today's version of the Kohanim, we have to realize that they increase the level of sanctity among the Jewish people through their dedication to serving Hashem. Additionally, Chazal tell us to realize that, when we give tzedaka, the poor are doing more for us than we are doing for the poor. When a poor man comes to ask for money, he provides the wealthy man with an opportunity to do a mitzvah, which lasts forever.

ובקצרכם את קציר ארצכם לא תכלה פאת שדך בקצרך ולקט קצירך לא תלקט לעני ולגר תעזב אתם אני ה' אלקיכם
“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them; I am Hashem, your G-d” (23:22)

Rav Dovid Feinstein asks: Why does the Torah digress from the discussion of the Yomim Tovim and add in the mitzvah of פאה (to leave the corners of a field for the poor) and לקט (to leave fallen stalks of grain for the poor)? He answers that performing acts of kindness for others is an essential component of a Torah way of life. Immediately after Shavuos, the festival of the giving of the Torah, the posuk mentions a mitzvah of charity. The Torah that one learns must be a Torah that will bring a person to act kindly toward others. Chazal point out that the Torah begins and ends with kind acts from Hashem. In Bereishis, Hashem provided Adam and Chava with clothing and in Vezos Habracha, Hashem buried Moshe Rabbeinu. From start to finish, the Torah has to have an impact of chesed.

This is also a possible reason why we read Megillas Rus on Shavuos. The megillah is full of kindness. Rus worked hard in order to support Naomi and Boaz married Rus even though it was controversial. The message we are to take home from the reading of Megillas Rus when we celebrate the Torah is that Torah is not complete without the acts of kindness that must go along with it.

The Gemara in Chagiga 27a writes that today, when we no longer have an altar to serve as our atonement, our tables serve as an atonement for us, just as the altar in the Bais HaMikdash once did. Rashi explains that the atonement of the table is attained by inviting guests to his table. When one invites guests who are less fortunate, one gives of his own freely to others. This is the equivalent of bringing a sacrifice and giving it to Hashem. This Gemara should bring about a greater recognition of the importance of the mitzvah to invite

guests.

When describing the specific details of the mitzvah of rejoicing on Yom Tov, the Sefer HaChinuch (מצוה תפ"ח) writes that without including widows and orphans and poor people in the rejoicing of the holiday, one's celebration of the Yom Tov is deficient. We must understand that giving to the poor for the holidays is not just a nice gesture. It is an obligation. Without doing so, our obligation of happiness on the Yom Tov is not fulfilled. It is also not sufficient to give the money on the holiday itself, but one must be sure to give beforehand so that the person can have the means to prepare for the holiday. We must make certain that these people are happy on the holiday, and if they do not have money beforehand to prepare, it is very difficult for them to feel glad. Another way of doing the mitzva is to invite these people to your house for a meal on the holiday. In this way, you are not merely giving them the means to be happy, but you are including them in the rejoicing of your family. This idea is something to keep in mind as the Yom Tov of Shavuot approaches.

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The Meshech Chochma asks: Why do we thank Hashem for both the mitzvos that are counterintuitive and for the logical mitzvos? After all, some mitzvos are basic moral principles that men could have intuitively established. He answers that if there is no faith or fear of Hashem, human beings can lose all sense of morality and justice. Therefore, we need the seemingly obvious moral acts to be commanded by Hashem. Even the mitzvos that we could have understood based on our own logic are only kept because Hashem commanded us to do them. Why do we have to give to the poor? Because "I am Hashem." Rav Moshe Feinstein also writes that morality is not something that is automatic but has its roots in a fear of a higher power. He proves this point from Avraham Avinu who feared that the Pelishtim would kill him and take Sarah because they had no fear of Hashem. Without fear of Hashem, there are no restraints.

צו את בני ישראל ויקחו אליך שמן זית זך כתית למאור להעלת נר תמיד
“Command the Children of Israel that they take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually” (24:2)

Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that one must always be careful to act in a way that avoids any possible hint of a wrongdoing. Even if one is acting properly, he should make sure that his behavior cannot be misinterpreted by others. When it comes to Torah leadership, one must lead in a manner in which everything that he does is clearly correct. This is symbolized by the fact that the olives for the menorah's oil are just pressed once to remove oil and may not be crushed. The light had to be of the purest quality, without any concern that some sediments might be mixed in. The menorah is symbolic of Torah. Our actions, which light the way of a Torah life for others, must also be of the highest quality and purity without any room for doubt that it is a mixture of good and bad. We must do things in a way that is clear that what is being done is right. One must avoid anything that looks to be not entirely proper. One should

not have to be hard-pressed to explain himself.

In a similar vein, Rav Moshe Feinstein asks: Why do we ask in davening that we should be able “lilmod ulelameid,” “to learn and to teach,” if not everybody is a teacher? He answers that we are all teachers based on our actions. People learn from us based on our actions, whether we are aware of it or not. We pray that we should be able to set good examples for all people at all times through our behavior.

ויקב בן האשה הישראלית את השם ויקלל ויביאו אתו אל משה ושם אמו שלמית בת דברי למטה דן

“The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the name and cursed - so they brought him to Moshe; the name of his mother was Shlomis daughter of Divri, of the tribe of Dan” (24:11)

How is it that a person could sink to the level of cursing the holy Name of Hashem, something so basic and logical that it is one of the seven commandments that apply to gentiles? Rabbi Friedman suggests an answer based on Rashi’s explanation of this posuk. Rashi comments that this man’s mother was called “Shlomis” because she would inquire after every man’s business and would say “shalom” to every man that she saw. She was also called “bas Divri” because she was a “dabranis,” a woman who frequently engaged in chatter with men. This lack of modesty caused an Egyptian to take a liking to her and to take her by force. This child, who was the only Jewish child in Egypt born to an Egyptian father, mimicked the traits of his mother. Just as the mother sinned through speech, the child also sinned through speech and cursed Hashem. A child always picks up the traits that he sees in his house. Because words were cheap in his house, he also felt that words contained no holiness and had no problem cursing Hashem. This teaches us how important it is for parents to show children the sanctity of speech, as well as to set good examples for their children in all aspects of mitzvos so that they will also adopt these same tendencies.

ל"ג בעומר

The Rema writes that when ל"ג בעומר falls out on Sunday, as in this year, Ashkenazim have the custom to shave and get haircuts on the Friday before. The reason for this is to honor Shabbos. To look unkempt on Shabbos and then to shave immediately thereafter would be a disgrace to the Shabbos.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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