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Weekly Bulletin on the Parshah

Pachad David

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Under the auspices of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

Son of the tzaddik Rabbi Moshe Ahron Pinto, z"l, and grandson of the holy tzaddik and miracle-worker Rabbi Chaim Pinto, zy"l



MASKIL LEDAVID

Weekly talk on the Parshah given by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

Receiving the Torah is in Proportion to One's Preparation

"You shall offer a fire-offering to Hashem, it is an assembly" (Vayikra 23:36)

On this verse, the Ramban z"l writes: "עצרת היא", 'It is an assembly' – I held you back with Me (the word עצרת can also be used as an expression of detaining). Like a king who invited his sons to dine with him for a certain number of days and when the time came for them to depart, he said, 'My sons, I beg of you, stay behind with me just one more day since your parting is difficult for me.' This is Rashi's explanation. According to the Kabbalistic interpretation: It is written 'For in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth' (Shemot 20:11) and the seventh day is Shabbat but unlike the other days that are coupled together, it remains alone and does not have a partner and Knesset Yisrael is its partner, as it says, 'and the earth', and they are number eight. 'עצרת היא', 'It is an assembly', since there (after the count of seven) everything stopped (this is another translation of עצרת). And He commanded concerning the Festival of Matzot (Pesach), seven days that begin and end with holiness (a day of Chag) to show that all of the days are holy and there is a Holy Presence through the entire Chag. Following the first day of the Chag, we were commanded to count forty-nine days which are seven weeks, corresponding to the seven days of creation. He sanctified the eighth day as the eighth day of the festival, and the days that are counted in between are like days of Chol Hamo'ed between the first and eighth day of the Chag, which is Matan Torah when He showed them His great fire and His words were heard from within the fire. Therefore, in every place, our Sages z"l refer to the festival of Shavuot as 'Atzeret', for it is like the eighth day of the Chag, as the verse calls this festival."

In summary, the Ramban is saying that the period of time from Pesach until Atzeret (Shavuot) is considered like one long festival. Chag HaMatzot (Pesach) is like the first festival day of the Chag, while the festival of Shavuot is considered as the concluding festival day. And the forty-nine days in between are like days of Chol Hamo'ed which have a special holiness, and they are days of happiness for Am Yisrael.

The avreichim of my Kollel sheyichyu posed the following difficulty to me: If the Sefirah days are days of happiness and considered like Chol Hamo'ed, why do we observe mourning customs during this time? Even if Rabbi Akiva's talmidim passed away during this time, Chazal already established that one does not practice signs of mourning during a festival?

With siyata dishmaya I will try to explain why nevertheless we mourn. We know that the wisdom of the holy Torah is unlike other superficial wisdoms which do not require any preparation or training before beginning to study them. However, concerning the holy Torah, if a person aspires that it become a soul-acquisition, transforming his essence and making a positive impression on him, sanctifying and purifying him and elevating him spiritually, he must first prepare himself by purifying his thoughts and eradicating all disturbances in his Avodat Hashem, so that his body should be a fitting receptacle for the Torah to dwell inside it. It is his obligation to willingly show self-sacrifice and forgo all worldly

matters in order to study the Torah and fulfill its mitzvot. This is why the Torah was given in the desert, in a place that is cut off from all worldly concerns, to teach a person that if he wishes to merit acquiring Torah, he must cut himself off from all worldly matters.

The extent of one's preparation determines the degree to which one will merit receiving the Torah. As an example of this idea is that if one holds a cup upside down, it will only be able to contain a few drops of water in the hollow underneath the cup. If one holds the cup slightly tilted to the side, it will fill up only partially with water. But if one holds the cup in the right way facing upwards, then it can be filled to the brim. So too with the festival of Shavuot, according to the degree of one's preparation towards the Giving of the Torah, to that same measure will one merit receiving it.

The main focus of our preparation should be in rectifying our middot and improving our interpersonal relationships. We must uproot any negative traits that have become ingrained in us, for example pride, anger, revenge or bearing a grudge, and acquire positive and upright attributes, otherwise the Torah will not be able to dwell inside us.

Now we can understand why we mourn for Rabbi Akiva's talmidim even though these days are considered like Chol Hamo'ed and are essentially days of happiness. Man must remember and internalize the fact that these talmidim passed away only because they did not accord sufficient respect to each other, and for all their immense greatness, Hashem did not desire their Torah and they passed away with difficult deaths, r"l. We must learn from them that as the Festival of Receiving the Torah approaches, it is essential to improve our middot, straighten our ways, and be careful to behave with love, friendship and particular affection towards one's friends and acquaintances since this is a foremost prerequisite for accepting the Torah, as Rabbi Akiva preached, "You shall love your fellow as yourself" is a great principle of the Torah".

If a person did not rectify his middot, he will certainly not merit receiving the Torah and then, without Torah he is considered as dead. For without Torah, what is life worth living for Torah is our life and the length of our days?

Accordingly, improving one's middot is a matter of life and death since without doing this, one will not merit receiving the Torah and without Torah, as we have written, one is not truly living. Just as saving a life takes precedence over Shabbat observance, so too saving a life takes precedence over observing a festival. Although these days between the festivals of Pesach and Shavuot are considered as Chol Hamo'ed and are expected to be days of happiness, nevertheless because there is an aspect of saving our spiritual life, we therefore mourn these holy and pure talmidim to remember why they died, thus internalizing the message to improve one's middot and divest oneself of any bad middot that he may possess. One should undertake from now on, to behave with good manners, showing respect to other people, thereby he will merit receiving the Torah for he has acquired positive attributes.



Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagoan Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

A Tzaddik's Promise for Long Life

Sometimes, a tzaddik will bless a person with longevity. This person who trusts in the power of a tzaddik's blessing, might conclude that since he is guaranteed a long life, there is no rush to do teshuvah. This is a fatal mistake. Hashem can take a person's life whenever He sees fit. The tzaddik's berachah is no promise that Hashem will grant a person a long life.

I once knew a Moroccan Jew who had received a blessing from the tzaddik, the Baba Sali, zya"l, for a long life. The man, indeed, lived long. At some point, he asked for an additional blessing for long life, which he was graciously given.

This man understood that the tzaddik's blessing was effective as long as the tzaddik prayed for him. But as soon as the prayers would stop, his berachah too would cease.

The day the Baba Sali passed away, the Jew set to writing his own will. He truly felt this was his last day on earth. He called his children to him, took his leave of them amidst copious weeping, and while saying Kriyat Shema indeed departed from this world.

This Jew merited that the tzaddik's blessing should be fulfilled and in the merit of the tzaddik's prayers, he merited living to a ripe old age.

But at times, a tzaddik might bless a person with long life, and Hashem, whose calculations we cannot understand, decrees otherwise. Despite the tzaddik's blessing, a person might die young.

The Gemara states (Shabbat 153a), "Rabbi Eliezer said, 'Repent one day before you die.' His disciples asked him, 'Does a person know which day he will die?' He replied, 'Therefore, he should constantly repent, in case he will die the next day.'"

We should always regard each day as our last upon this earth and constantly do teshuvah.

The Haftarah

"But the Kohanim, the Levites, descendants of Tzadok"

(Yechezkel 44)

The connection to the Parsha: The Haftara mentions the laws pertaining to the holiness of the Kohanim, according to the instructions of Yechezkel HaNavi. The Parsha too discusses the holy conduct required of Ahron HaKohen's offspring.

Guard Your Tongue

Habituate Yourself to Reprove

A person should always be accustomed to reprovng his household in matters of guarding one's tongue from speaking gossip and slander. This should be carried out in a gentle manner while reminding them of the great punishment that this brings in the Next World and the greatness of the reward for one who is vigilant. The Gemara states (Shabbat 25b): "Anyone who can protest (about the behavior of) his household and does not do so, is taken to account for (the sins of) his household.



Words of our Sages

What is an Example of Chilul Hashem?

"And they shall not desecrate the Name of their G-d" (Vayikra 21:6)

The exemplary way of life of HaGaon Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of 'Torah Ohr' in Yerushalayim, demonstrated his caution concerning the prohibition of Chilul Hashem, desecrating G-d's Name, as related in the sefer 'Migadluto u'Meromemuto'.

The Rosh Yeshiva was most particular that his deeds and customs should not cause even the slightest trace of Chilul Hashem. The extent of his apprehension not to stumble with this sin was brought to light when he quoted the following Gemara (Yuma 86) in his lectures: "What is an example of Chilul Hashem... Rabbi Yochanan said, an example would be for us Talmidei Chachamim to walk four hundred amot without contemplating Torah and without wearing tefillin". When Rabbi Chaim mentioned this Gemara he would burst into tears! It was a clear demonstration of how anxious he was not to sin in this matter. Even in matters which he was outstanding in his generation, and maybe especially in these things, he was most particular since he was classified as a Talmid Chacham for whom Chilul Hashem is most severe.

Indeed, he was careful that all his ways and actions should be a source of sanctification of G-d's Name and G-d forbid not the opposite. This showed itself even in seemingly minor matters. For example, when he spoke publicly or wrote a letter, he would clarify the correct way of saying a certain word in Lashon Hakodesh or the correct way in which it is spelt, explaining that if it is not pronounced correctly it contains some aspect of Chilul Hashem, for people will say that Torah students speak or write in an unsophisticated manner. When faced with students who spoke incompetently or wrote illegibly, he would point out to them that it is a blemish in the Torah's glory.

His clothes were always clean and respectable. Before he left his house or Yeshiva, he would always check that his clothes were clean and neat and that his shoes were shined and not dirty.

One could assume that it was simply his nature to be organized and tidy, but whenever he would check if his clothes were presentable and not even slightly stained, he would point out that he was doing it so that it shouldn't be a Chilul Hashem. When appearing before the irreligious public he would be especially careful in this area. For example, when he was hospitalized he would ask from time to time if his clothes were clean and respectable so that his appearance should not cause a Chilul Hashem.

He was also particular that the Beit Hamidrash should be clean and organized, similarly the entrance to the Yeshiva's building and also the entire building. Often when he would use the stairwell and notice bits of garbage, he would bend down and pick them up. This was simply amazing to behold since everybody knew how immersed he always was in his learning, yet nevertheless, he noticed this kind of thing because it was important to him that the Yeshiva should not be the cause of any Chilul Hashem.



Pearls of the Parsha

The Shabbat Rest is for Torah study

"The seventh day is a day of complete rest" (Vayikra 23:3)

The sefer 'Bnei Shushan' uses this verse to illustrate the Chazal that Shabbatot were only created for Yisrael for the sake of occupying themselves with Torah on this day.

The words 'וביום השביעי שבת שבתון', 'the seventh day is a day of complete rest', contain a hint for this idea. The first letter of each Hebrew word has the same numerical value ($6+5+300+300 = 611$) as 'תורה', Torah, implying that on the Shabbat day one must study the holy Torah.

Resting on Shabbat as a Heavenly Command

"It is a Shabbat for Hashem in all your dwelling places" (Vayikra 23:3)

What is the meaning of "in all your dwelling places"? Would it occur to us that there are places where it is not necessary to observe the Shabbat?

The 'Ktav Sofer' explains that it is well-known that all the nations chose one day of the week as a day of rest. When Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt, the Midrash tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu tried to get Pharaoh to agree to one day of rest for the Jewish slaves so that they should have strength to work the rest of the week.

So how can we know if a persons' intention when observing Shabbat is for a day of relaxation, or his intention is to fulfill a G-dly command?

The answer is that if this person lives amongst the nations who have fixed a different day for their day of rest, nevertheless he also rests on the Shabbat day, it shows that his intention when resting on Shabbat is to fulfill his Creator's command since he has already enjoyed his 'physical' rest day. This is the intention of the verse, "It is Shabbat for Hashem", meaning that one must fulfill the Shabbat because it is a G-dly command, and when is this clear? If you observe Shabbat "in all your dwelling places", also when living among the nations.

Peace between Body and Soul

"And you shall afflict yourselves; on the ninth of the month in the evening" (Vayikra 23:32)

The Gemara (Berachot 8b) asks, 'Does one actually fast on the ninth, we fast on the tenth? But to tell you that anyone who eats and drinks on the ninth, the verse considers it as if he fasted on the ninth and on the tenth'.

The sefer 'Terachem Tzion', written by Rabbi Refael BenTzion HaKohen zt"l, questions how it can be that a person eats on the ninth yet it is considered as if he fasted?

He quotes the commentaries who explain that we greet each other on Shabbat with "Shabbat Shalom" since on Shabbat there is peace (shalom) between the body and soul. Meaning that during the week the soul opposes bodily desires like eating and drinking, but on Shabbat, all eating and drinking also contain pleasure for the soul for they are considered as mitzvot, therefore on Shabbat one says "Shabbat Shalom" since there is peace between the body and soul.

According to this, it is possible to explain why "and you shall afflict yourselves" is written in the plural (בפשוטיכם, literally 'your souls') for one must afflict both one's physical aspect of the soul and also the spiritual aspect of the soul. The physical soul one afflicts by fasting, whereas the spiritual soul is afflicted conversely by eating and drinking. How is it possible to simultaneously carry out both these types of affliction? On this Chazal say, anyone who eats and drinks on the ninth, which is an affliction for the spiritual soul, and fasts on the tenth, an affliction for the body, is considered as if he fasted on the ninth and on the tenth.

On Occasion, the Gates of Repentance are Closed

The hilula of the holy Tana, Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanesz zya"l, falls at this time of the year.

It is well known that his master and teacher was Elisha ben Avuya (later known as Acher) who left the path of Torah and rebelled against its mitzvot and even murdered young Jewish children. Chazal tell us (Chagigah 15a) that Elisha was riding on a horse on Shabbat and Rabbi Meir was walking behind him so as to learn Torah from him. Elisha said to him, Meir, retrace your steps because with my horse's heels I have measured the distance and you have reached the t'chum Shabbat (2,000 cubits from the edge of town at which point one may walk no further on Shabbat). Rabbi Meir replied, you too should return. Elisha said, did I not already tell you that I already heard behind the Heavenly partition, 'return wayward sons, besides Acher'.

This is a most puzzling Gemara. If Elisha had become so wicked by abandoning the Torah and disregarding the mitzvot, why was he concerned that Rabbi Meir should not go past the t'chum Shabbat? What does he care if his student Rabbi Meir also sins and profanes the Shabbat like him?

It is also hard to understand how a wicked person like him, who personally killed young children, merited hearing a Heavenly voice behind the partition?

The answer is that the Torah that Rabbi Meir learned with him on the way is what elevated Acher and purified his soul for a short time. Acher was influenced positively by Rabbi Meir's Torah, and as Chazal tell us about Rabbi Meir (Eruvin 13b): "His name was not Rabbi Meir, but Rabbi Nehorai. Why was he called Rabbi Meir? For he would light up the eyes of the Sages with Halacha. Rabbi said, the reason why I am sharper than my contemporaries is because I saw Rabbi Meir's back. If I would have seen his front I would be even sharper."

So we see that Rabbi Meir's Torah possessed the power of lighting up the eyes of others and purifying their hearts, and since he learnt Torah with Elisha (Acher) this Torah was able to influence him for the good and implant thoughts of repentance in his heart for a few moments, elevating him from his terrible lowness. This is why he was inspired to save Rabbi Meir from profaning the Shabbat by telling him to turn back. And this is the reason why he merited hearing the Heavenly voice that told him, 'Repent wayward sons'. The goal of the Heavenly voice was to create an opening for him to repent and he should have understood this, but due to the powers of impurity that surrounded him, he mistakenly thought that it was too late for him to rectify his ways and that the gates of Heaven were closed for him.

So we see that all those who study Torah for its own sake, with awe and trepidation and with the proper preparation, merit that the light of their Torah will also positively influence their surroundings. This Torah has the power to kindle the spiritual spark even in the hearts of those who have strayed and are far from the path of Hashem.



A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA

We are obligated to fulfill all the Torah commandments just because they are G-dly commands. At the same time, there is an inherent reason behind each mitzvah, inner perceptions and lofty secrets, profound insights that are deeper than the depths. But every reason also has its simple understanding. The mitzvah of counting the Omer is seemingly an incomprehensible enigma. The Torah commands us to count seven weeks and seven days within each week. But what are we counting and how do we count? And when we count the days, are they good days or bad days? For a day, in its very essence, is a receptacle that can contain anything. Furthermore, what lies behind seven weeks of seven days? And what is the significance of the sum of all these days and weeks?

Harav Shimshon Pincus zt"l addressing this topic in his eloquent style, sheds some light on these questions, quoting the Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzvah 306): "From the root of the mitzvah according to its simple meaning, is that the entire significance of Bnei Yisrael is only the Torah and only because of the Torah, were heaven, earth and the Jewish people created... This is the main reason why the Jewish people were redeemed from Mitzrayim, so that they should receive the Torah at Har Sinai and fulfill it... This is the reason why they were redeemed and it is their ultimate good. It is of great significance to them, more than the freedom from slavery... Due to this, since it is the essence of Yisrael and for which they were redeemed and rose up to all the greatness that they achieved, we were commanded to count from the day following the first day of the festival of Pesach until the day of the Giving of the Torah, to show our soul's great desire for this notable and longed-for day. This is 'like a slave who seeks shade', and will keep counting towards the longed-for

time when he will be set free, for counting shows the person that all his hope and sole desire is to reach this time. This is why we count the Omer, it is as if we are saying that this number of days have passed, and we do not count the days still remaining, for this is what shows our strong desire to arrive at the (longed-awaited) time..."

There is a famous question asked. When counting towards a much-anticipated event, one counts the number of days that remain and not the days that have already passed. For example, a child who is about to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah will count, 'this is the number of days left until my Bar Mitzvah'. So according to the Chinuch's explanation, it would seem appropriate to start counting from the number forty-nine, for there are forty-nine days left until the receiving of the Torah. The following day one should count forty-eight, and so forth!

To resolve this difficulty, we will quote Maran Rabbi Ahron Kotler's zt"l, famous essay concerning Ya'akov who had to wait seven years to marry Rachel, and the Torah tells us "and they seemed to him a few days because of his love for her". Seemingly, this is hard to understand, for we know that human nature is the opposite. The more a person waits and desires something, the longer the days seem to be. One day can feel like a year. So the above verse that tells us how short the period seemed to be for Ya'akov, is by definition a proof that Ya'akov used this time to sanctify and purify himself, preparing himself for the building of Am Yisrael.

The explanation is as follows: It can be compared to someone who desperately needs a million dollars. If he is told that in another hundred days he will receive the money, he will certainly be pleased, but every day of waiting will seem to him like eternity, for the days appear to be distancing him from the longed-for sum. Not so if a person requires a million dollars and he is offered a work opportunity where he will earn ten thousand dollars every day so that by the end of a period of a hundred days, he will have a million dollars in his hands. For this person, the days will pass quickly.

What is the difference? When a person requires a million dollars and he is told to wait a hundred days, these are a hundred days of pure waiting, empty days without content which only serve as a barrier between him and the money. But if these hundred days are not days of waiting but rather an opportunity to earn and procure the money, then these days are not meaningless and an impediment. On the contrary, each day is a day of development and progress towards the longed-for goal, and therefore they pass quickly. Each of the hundred days is a source of happiness for if he skips even one day he will not achieve his goal – the full amount that he requires.

So it was with Ya'akov Avinu. During his seven years of waiting, Ya'akov Avinu was occupied with building himself, therefore he considered each day that passed a day of delight, for it was used as preparation towards building Am Yisrael. Thus automatically "and they seemed to him a few days because of his love for her". For this "love" was Ya'akov Avinu's pure and holy desire for that union with Hashem that would result from his marriage with Rachel, so each day that passed was an additional layer in this building. This is why his seven years of work seemed to him like a few days.

This is also the idea behind the counting of the Omer. If we were simply waiting to receive the Torah and these were just fifty days in the middle, we would certainly count the days still remaining, for we would be waiting for them to pass since they are 'in the way' of our receiving the Torah. But the truth is that these are days of building ourselves in preparation for receiving the Torah. After one day of personal development we become more fitting to receive the Torah; after two days even more fitting, after three days still more, and so forth, until by the end of forty-nine days we have become entirely worthy of receiving the Torah. This then is the simple meaning behind the mitzvah of counting the Omer: We are counting forty-nine days of building ourselves up towards receiving the Torah.