

Behar Bechukotai

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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, zt"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



Shemittah is one of the Most Severe Mitzvot

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying... the land shall observe a Shabbat rest for Hashem" (Vayikra 25:1-2)

Rashi writes, "Why is Har Sinai mentioned when commanding about the mitzvah of Shemittah, were not all the mitzvot said at Har Sinai? This reference teaches us that just as Shemittah, with all its details and particulars, was said at Sinai, so too the minute details of all the mitzvot, not only the broad outlines were given at Sinai, and so it is taught in the Midrash Vayikra".

However, the question remains. Why did the Torah specifically choose the mitzvah of Shemittah as an example for the other mitzvot? Could not a different mitzvah have been chosen as a reference to Har Sinai? What is special about this mitzvah that it was chosen to represent the giving of all the mitzvot at Sinai?

We can ask a similar question on the previous Parsha, Parshat Emor, where the verse says (ibid 21:1), "Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a [dead] person among his people". The Gemara states (Yevamot 114a), "'Say... and tell them', this apparent redundancy teaches that adult Kohanim were cautioned regarding the children". Why especially here does the Torah stress that the adults have an obligation of educating their children in this command? The mitzvah of educating one's children in mitzvah observance applies to all the Torah commandments?

I would like to suggest, with siyata dishmaya, that the description of 'כהנים', Kohanim, in the above verse is not used as an expression of 'כהונה', 'priesthood', but rather as an expression of authority and greatness. As the verse says (Shemot 19:6), "You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers (כהנים) and a holy nation". Rashi explains the word 'Kohanim' as meaning "Ministers", as we find (Shmuel II, 8:18), "And David's sons were כהנים, senior ministers". It is possible that Hashem needed to address Aharon's remaining sons, Elazar and Itamar, using an expression of affection and honor, so as to elevate their self-regard and lift their spirits. This was because they felt that they were on a lower level of holiness and purity than their holy brothers, Nadav and Avihu, who were burned alive in the Mikdash. They did not feel fitting to take their place and serve in the Mikdash, for they thought that surely compared to them they were poorer in deeds and empty of Torah and mitzvot, for their holy and pure brothers were on an even higher level than Moshe and Aharon. As Rashi tells us on the verse, "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me" (Vayikra 10:3), Moshe said to Aharon, "I knew that the Tabernacle would be sanctified through someone in whom G-d's glory reposes, but I thought it would be one of us. Now I know that they were greater than either of us".

Therefore, Elazar and Itamar did not have the courage to assume a position of greatness and take part in the holy and exalted service of their father Aharon the Kohen Gadol. They wondered and were fearful, saying

to themselves that it cannot be that they are fitting to stand together with him and serve in the Mikdash since their hearts were filled with great modesty and they were not capable of considering themselves as Kohanim, holy servants of G-d.

In order to raise their esteem and inspire them with feelings of elevation, Hashem referred to them with an expression of importance "the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon", Kohanim being an expression of authority, greatness and importance, implying that they were certainly fitting to stand and serve before Hashem in the Mikdash exactly as their brothers were fitting for this. For even the attribute of modesty must sometimes vacate its place for a slight feeling of importance and greatness, since a person must be aware of his greatness and thereby fulfill "His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem". Although it is true that Nadav and Avihu were greater than Moshe and Aharon, now Elazar and Itamar became extremely important in Hashem's eyes and He considered them as Kohanim, elevated above the rest of the nation.

A faithful servant is one who is prepared to fulfill his master's directives with joy, no matter what is imposed on him, and even if he is required to sacrifice his soul to fulfill his will, he does not consider it difficult. Rather he willingly obeys due to his love of his master and his desire to please him.

Now we can understand why especially the mitzvah of Shemittah was said in conjunction with Har Sinai. The reason is that Shemittah is one of the most serious mitzvot in the Torah, for it is no simple matter to command a person to stop all work on his ground and completely abstain from working on his land for an entire year. Not only this, but he is also commanded to hand over his produce to any passers-by. This is something that requires enormous self-sacrifice. Even the angels expressed their amazement at Yisrael for observing this command, by describing them as "the strong warriors who do His bidding" (Tehillim 103:20). The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 1:1) clarifies this: "What is the verse referring to? Rabbi Yitzchak says the verse is referring to those who observe the Shemittah. The normal way of the world is that a mitzvah is performed for one day or one week or one month. But the mitzvah of Shemittah applies for an entire year. Is there any greater warrior than this?!"

Since this mitzvah is most difficult to observe and it is possible that maybe, G-d forbid, a person might be negligent in its fulfillment, the Torah specially put this mitzvah adjacent to Har Sinai, to caution man that he should know that the mitzvah of Shemittah, with all its details, particulars and laws was given on Sinai and he is obligated to fulfill it in its entirety despite the inherent difficulty, for it is a decree from Hashem and one does not have permission to ponder it. And just as this mitzvah was given on Sinai, so too the rest of the mitzvot in their entirety were given on Sinai, and it is incumbent upon us to fulfill them.



Walking in their Ways

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

Spiritual Rectification

A man came to me, all shaken up. His wife had awoken in the night in a fright. In her sleep, she had felt a woman press her eyes very hard. She was extremely traumatized by this experience and asked what she was supposed to do.

I thought long and hard about how to advise this man and his wife especially as I intuitively felt that they were telling the truth. Suddenly, I remembered reading about a similar incident the past Shabbat. A certain tzaddik was approached by people who complained that unfamiliar people had disturbed their sleep. The tzaddik asked whether these Jews had recently uprooted a tree, to which they answered in the affirmative. He then explained that the tree may have contained a gilgul of a previous neshamah and by destroying the tree, the neshamah was prevented from receiving its tikkun. It had now come to scare those responsible.

I told this story to the man who stood before me. I asked whether he or his wife had recently uprooted a tree. He answered yes, and added that recently, a few family members had met their demise.

I sank into thought, and then said, "Listen, I can't be sure, but it may be that the neshamah of one of your family members found refuge in that tree in order to find a tikkun. By chopping down the tree, you caused that neshamah untold pain. This is why it came to disturb your wife's sleep."

I advised the man and his wife to make a tikkun for this neshamah according to a method prescribed in a holy sefer and I hoped that this would lay the matter to rest.

I have no idea whether or not he did as I said. But sadly, I heard that a few days later, one of his family members fell asleep with a lit cigarette in his hand. The cigarette fell upon the blanket next to him, causing a terrible fire and from the smoke, he suffocated and died.

The Haftarah

"Hashem, my Strength, my Stronghold" (Yirmiyahu 16)

The connection to the Parsha: The Haftarah talks about the punishments that Hashem will bring on the Jewish people if they do not follow His decrees and do not observe His mitzvot. This is the message of the rebuke which is mentioned in the Parsha – it is a prophecy of the evil that will befall the Bnei Yisrael if, G-d forbid, they do not observe the Torah laws.

Guard Your Tongue

A Great Failure

A person should be most careful that his household should never hear him talking negatively about others. For if he himself transgresses this prohibition, besides the inherent sin, it also causes immense damage for he will no longer be able to rebuke his household in this matter. On the whole, his family's behavior depends to a great extent on the way he personally conducts himself. Therefore, he himself must be extremely cautious in this matter and will thus be rewarded in this world and the Next.



In Our Father's Path

The Baba Sali Complimented the Tasty Dishes

A significant allusion is brought by Rabbeinu Ya'akov Ba'al HaTurim, on the opening verse in Parshat Behukotai, "If you will follow My decrees". The first letter of each Hebrew word spells 'תבא', fathers, teaching us the important lesson of "following in our father's footsteps".

Rabbi Ezriel Tauber related that when he went to visit the Baba Sali zt"l, the tzaddik said to him: "I want you to join me for lunch tomorrow".

"I did not understand why, but of course I rejoiced at the invitation. The following afternoon I returned to his house in Netivot.

The Rabbanit opened the door and said, 'My husband is waiting for you. You can enter his room.' I went inside and the Baba Sali immediately rose to wash his hands, inviting me to do the same.

The Rabbanit served the first course, spiced with the delicious taste of Moroccan dishes, and her husband the tzaddik, famous for his devout, spiritual conduct, started discussing the food with his wife. He talked about each and every dish, praising its delicate taste, chuckling in Arabic, with his wife joining him, smiling and laughing...

Several minutes passed and the Baba Sali did not stop showing an interest in the different dishes, without uttering even one word of Torah. The most perplexing thing was that he did not talk to me at all; he did not even glance my way.

Taking this in from the side, I could see how delighted the Rabbanit was and how much pleasure she derived from this conversation with her husband the tzaddik.

The second course followed the same pattern as did the rest of the meal. The Rabbanit served each course, the Baba Sali showed his enjoyment and the Rabbanit laughed with delight. I was sitting with them at the table yet the tzaddik did not even look at me.

I did not understand even half a word of the Baba Sali's conversation with his wife since it was all in Arabic, but even more than that, I could not understand why he had invited me to join him.

A whole hour passed and during the entire sixty minutes, all talk around the table revolved around the food. The beautiful presentation, the tasty dishes, the fruit that the Rabbanit served as refreshments at the end of the meal. No other topic was discussed. Although, as I said, I did not understand the conversation, it was obvious that it revolved around the food.

The Baba Sali finished eating, recited the appropriate blessings and bid me goodbye. Only once I left this great and holy house," said Rabbi Tauber, "did I understand why this tzaddik had invited me and what lesson he wished to impart to me during this meal that I spent with him.

The Baba Sali knew that I am involved with spreading marital harmony in Jewish homes throughout the world, therefore he wished to instill in me this important fact, that one of the essential foundations for maintaining marital harmony is to talk to one's wife about things that interest her, namely the subject of food. And not just to talk about it courteously, but to praise one's wife for the tasty food and compliment her for all that she does for him. It is of such importance that the Baba Sali 'wasted' a whole hour on this, and no doubt he did this every day. This is what he wished to demonstrate to me so that I can give over this message to those who seek my advice" finished Rabbi Tauber.



Pearls of the Parsha

Hashem Repays in Place of the Poor

"Do not give him your money for interest, and do not give your food for increase" (Vayikra 25:37)

Shlomo Hamelech said in Mishlei "One who is gracious to the poor has lent to Hashem, and He will pay him his reward" (19:17). This implies that if one is gracious to the poor by giving him charity, it is considered as if he has 'lent' to Hashem and He will repay the loan, and will also reward him for his goodwill, as it says "Test Me, if you will, with this (in this matter of giving charity), says Hashem, Master of Legions, [see] if I do not open up for you the windows of the heavens and pour out upon you blessing without end" (Malachi 3:10).

The question is, since Hashem fulfills the entire Torah, by repaying this act of charity with endless blessing seems to be 'transgressing' the prohibition of paying back with interest.

Rabbi Baruch Yerushalmi zt"l answers this question in his sefer 'Baruch Mibanim'. The verse itself reconciles this question. We are told "Do not give him your money for interest, and do not give your food for increase" rather you should lend to the poor without interest and then this act will be considered a charitable act for which Hashem promises, "I will pour out upon you blessing without end".

If you question this and ask how Hashem can 'transgress' this prohibition of interest, the verse answers that the intention of "one who is gracious to the poor has lent to Hashem" is not that one who lends to the poor is considered as if he lent to Hashem, Hashem is not the 'borrower' who may not return the loan with interest, rather only in terms of Hashem being the One who will repay, is it considered as if one has lent to Hashem. And since the Torah only forbids interest that is paid by the borrower to the lender, and in this case the poor person remains the borrower, if so Hashem can reward the lender with no hesitations of interest.

The end of the verse alludes to this explanation, as it says, "I am Hashem your G-d". I am Hashem, faithful to pay reward and since I pay in place of the poor man, this is not considered interest as is a transaction that involves the borrower and the lender.

Mentioning the Avot Rescinds the Claim

"I will remember My covenant with Ya'akov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember" (Vayikra 26:42)

The reason why the Avot are mentioned in this section that talks about the curses, is explained in the sefer 'Matza Chaim', by Rabbi Chaim Churi zt"l. Chazal tell us (Sanhedrin 38a) that the reason why Adam Harishon was created on his own is that had two people been created, the righteous would say: We are righteous, the sons of a righteous one, and we do not have to distance ourselves from sin for we will not stumble, while the wicked would say: We are wicked ones, son of a wicked one, and we cannot repent since it will not help us for we are descendants of a wicked person. Therefore, Hashem created Adam as a single person so as to reject these claims.

This means to say that had Hashem created two human beings, then the wicked one, son of a wicked one, could claim that repentance will be of no benefit to him since he descends from a wicked person. However, the wicked son of a tzaddik will not have any claim, since if his father was righteous, he too could have chosen to be righteous.

Therefore, mentioning the Avot is a way of intensifying the rebuke. Had your forefathers been wicked, then the Yetzer Hara could have come with a false claim that your repentance has no purpose but since the verse mentions the Avot who were righteous, it invalidates this false claim.

Calculate Household Expenses

"Do not give him your money for interest, and do not give your food for increase" (Vayikra 25:37)

As an allusion, the 'Pardes Yosef' explains: When you give charity or perform acts of kindness, you should do so with a pleasant countenance, and not 'bite' him (the Hebrew word רשן, meaning 'interest' can also be translated as 'to bite') with sharp or harsh words which will stab him like a sword.

He added that some people excuse themselves for lending with interest by saying that their livelihood requires it, therefore the Torah writes "do not give your food for increase", do not spend great sums of money on your food and other household

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya
Pinto, shlita



The Correct Path to Spiritual Growth

The mitzvah of Shemittah was chosen to represent the other mitzvot since it is a mitzvah that is difficult to fulfill and demands great self-sacrifice. Fulfilling this mitzvah is a way of paving a path for oneself to fulfill the other mitzvot since it is so great and powerful that it can be used as the foundation for all the other mitzvot. This is because inherent in the mitzvah of Shemittah is self-negation, whoever wishes may enter one's field undeterred and partake of one's produce. Until now this field was the owner's source of income but now his entire yield is free for all. Through this mitzvah, he also merits doing good to others and giving away his assets to whoever wishes to take. With this, he earns the merit of the mitzvah "you shall love your fellow as yourself" which is a great principle for the entire Torah.

That is why this mitzvah is the foundation and path for all the other mitzvot, and if a person seizes this mitzvah and performs it properly, he fulfills the words of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai who said, "Go out and discern which is the proper way to which a man should cling", through which he merits elevating himself greatly and so paves a path for himself to fulfill the other mitzvot.

But if man does not establish a proper path for himself and instead lives his life without thought and calculation, his descent and deterioration from the correct way of life is not far off.

When a person sits and studies Torah without interruption and keeps going even though his phone is vibrating in his pocket or other matters compete with his attention, he is demonstrating self-sacrifice, which is the way a Kohen Gadol conducts himself. This is also the case when a person gets up in the morning with alacrity to serve Hashem and does not listen to his Evil Inclination who tempts him to continue sleeping in bed. This too is a form of self-sacrifice and is comparable to the behavior of a Kohen Gadol, since he overcame his personal desires for Hashem's sake. With this one merits establishing the correct path for spiritual growth and the service of Hashem.



A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA

There is a famous Rashi on the verse in this Parsha "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them", on which Rashi writes: "If you will follow My decrees" refers to "Engage in intensive Torah study".

Chazal tell us that while Rabbi Akiva was still ignorant of Torah law, he passed by a fountain and noticed a stone in which a hole had been carved out by the water. Rabbi Akiva asked, what is this? How can water create a hole in stone? They replied, Akiva, do you not know that water can erode stone, that water that flows over stone erodes it?

The question is asked, did Akiva not know that water can make a hole in stone? And what did their answer "stones are worn away by water" clarify?

Let us take careful note of the wonderful words of the Maggid, Rabbi Shalom Schwadron zt"l, who sheds light on the matter:

Rabbi Akiva pondered deeply and contemplated, how does water create a hole? For after all, the first drop that falls on the stone certainly does not drill a hole and seemingly makes no impression at all. If the first drop does nothing, then the following second drop is considered like the first and also does not make any impression. If the second drop has no effect, then the third drop is the first, and even the hundredth or thousandth drop can be considered like the first. This being the case, how come we eventually see a hole? They said to him, this is not the case. The resulting hole makes it necessary to say that the first drop also makes some impression in the stone, it is hidden from the eye but something it does! The imprint may be as small as a billionth but it is there.

When they built the Beit Knesset in Sha'arei Chesed, Harav Schwadron relates, the Gabbai asked the architect to construct the floor of the women's section without pillars underneath, so that they would be able to use the underground level for praying. The architect agreed.

In those days it was most uncommon to erect such a large building without pillars. Therefore, when the work was finished, the Gabbai was apprehensive and asked the contractor, "How can you guarantee that the ceiling will not collapse over the years? Maybe in another thirty years it will cave in?"

The architect answered: "You don't have to worry. You see this device?" He took out a special, small device and showed it to him. "I will attach it to the ceiling, the underside of the floor of the women's section, and if over the next hundred years, the floor that we constructed will sink even a tiny bit, this machine can detect it now. Do you understand what this means? Now, today, the machine shows the reaction. It may be only the slightest of the slightest impression, but this change is detectable".

A person goes to study Torah and at the end of the shiur thinks to himself, "The Torah made no impression on me, I studied yet remained the same". The truth is that this is not so. You are not the same, some impression has been made on you!

This is the great exclamation at the beginning of Parshat Behukotai. "If you will follow My decrees – engage in intensive Torah study!". One is obligated to toil in Torah, for this is the gift that was bestowed on us, with which we merit both the Next World and this world.

The Power of Torah Can Change Nature

The Gemara (Baba Basra 16a) says that Iyov wished to exempt the entire world from judgement. What did he say? "Master of the world, you created the ox with split hooves, you created the donkey with closed hooves, You created the righteous, You created the wicked, You created Gan Eden for the righteous, Gehinom for the wicked, who can do anything different than what You want."

In this Chazal lies a great foundation for life. What was Iyov trying to say and what is the implication of his words?

Iyov the tzaddik was a great philosopher. He looked around the entire world and noticed that most people die as they were born, meaning, if for example, a person was born hot-tempered, from the day of his birth until the day he dies he treads on the same path. He was born as a young, hot-tempered baby and dies as an aged, hot-tempered elderly man.

With a sharp, discerning eye one can notice the implication of certain hand and leg movements made by a baby while still in the cradle. This little one is a hot-tempered baby. The child grows up and goes to kindergarten. The teacher hands him a doll, he holds the doll or ball in his hand, and whoever dares approach him is awarded with a kick, everything belongs to him! Nu, he grows a little older, goes to school, whoever touches his pen, woe to him!

"He got up on the left side"... onlookers say to themselves, as if to say, we don't know why, but that's how he is. And as he was born, in that fashion he lives and in that fashion he passes away from the world: angry, angry, angry, until the very last minute. Even as he lies on his death bed he is angry... with the Angel of Death...

If so, says Iyov, if man cannot change his nature, he is no different to an animal. Can an ox, for example, one clear day decide to become a donkey? No! Can a donkey become an ox? No. "You created an ox with split hooves", this is a sign of purity. "You created a donkey with closed hooves", this is a sign of impurity. In the same way, "You created the righteous, You created the wicked". You created people who by nature are good, and conversely, those who by nature are evil, they cannot change.

What did Iyov's friends answer him?

They said, "So too, you have undermined awe" meaning if it is as you say, why did Hashem command man to have fear of G-d if it does not help? The Gemara continues, "Hashem said, I created the Evil Inclination but I created the Torah as an antidote" – for if a person studies Torah it will change his nature.

Rabbi Simcha Zissel, a talmid of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, stresses and explains: Their answer is correct and occurs only with the acquisition of Torah, but without Torah, Iyov is indeed correct, for in the absence of Torah it is impossible to change one's nature, and indeed the majority of people do not study Torah and so they cannot change their nature. A person can study bibliography and typography, zoology and psychology, morphology and synecology, any profession that you wish, yet he will remain as he is- as he was born so he will die. Torah is the only 'vocation' that indeed changes man.