

PARSHAS KI SAVO

תשפ"ו

The Seriousness of Torah and Mitzvos

We read Parshas Ki Savo, Nitzovim, and Vayeilech before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Gemara says that before Yom HaDin we read the brochos and k'loles. There are a number of reasons for this.

One reason is that there are three types of frum Jews. There are those who keep everything, but they are very comfortable and simply keep going; they do not take it seriously. This is just the way you do it: you keep Shabbos, you keep kashrus, you daven. There is nothing serious in their lives; it is not the center of their lives. They do it by rote – automatic – without thinking.

There are others who take it seriously, but they become neurotic about it. But that is still not the ideal. Instead, it is those who take it seriously, and it is a serious part of their lives, but they are not neurotic.

Before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, you have to know that Torah and Mitzvos is serious business. There are serious consequences to keeping Torah and Mitzvos, and there are serious consequences to not keeping Torah and Mitzvos. Torah is not just a good idea or just a way of life. It is what life is all about. Everything else we do in life is a means to this end.

The Bris of Arvos Moav

Parshas Ki Savo, Nitzovim, and Vayeilech are connected with the bris that was made with Klal Yisroel in Arvos Moav. Chazal are very interested in why another bris was necessary. There was already a bris at Har Sinai. What was added here?

What was added, they say, is the principle of לזה כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה. Everyone is responsible for everyone else.

Some people like to feel, "I'm an independent person. I don't care about anybody else." But halacha has a very important principle. I am not just an individual. I am part of a group with responsibility to the entire group.

The Ran in Masseches Rosh Hashanah discusses the rule that a person who is obligated in a mitzvah can be motzi somebody else.

For instance, my wife cannot be motzi me with tekias shofar. Why not? Because shofar is מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא. She is not obligated in it, whereas I am obligated. One who is obligated can be motzi somebody else.

There is another halacha: even if I already did the mitzvah, I can still be motzi someone else. If I blow shofar in the morning, I can go to another place and blow shofar again. So the Ran asks: once I blew shofar, I am no longer obligated. How can I be motzi somebody else?

The Ran answers that every mitzvah has two aspects. The first is that you do the mitzvah yourself. The second is the mitzvah of the others – what he calls 'mitzvah al ha'acheirim' – that I have to make sure that anyone else who needs to hear shofar actually hears shofar. That is part of the idea of לזה כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה.

A Jew Is Both an Individual and the End of a Chain

Now we come to an important part of Parshas Ki Savo. We have two interesting mitzvos: Bikkurim and Vidui Maaser.

What does it mean to bring bikkurim? You have an orchard, you have fruit, and you bring the first fruit to the Beis HaMikdash. You put it in a basket and bring it to the kohen, and you say:

הגדתי היום לה' אלקיך כי באתי אל הארץ

Why am I bringing this? This is Eretz Yisroel, the land that was promised to Avrohom Ovinu, and through Avrohom to Yitzchok, and to Yaakov.

And then you say, ארמי אובד אבי. It is amazing. I am standing here in front of the Beis HaMikdash with my basket of grapes, and I say: Do you know why I am standing here? Because I am the end of a long chain. It goes back to my father, my father's father, my father's father's father – for many generations. I am not just an individual. I am the end of a chain.

And You brought us to Eretz Yisroel. And now, because I am the end of that chain, I am bringing this to You. Thank You for everything You have done for me through 3,500 years.

That is one mitzvah. Then there is another mitzvah, and here there is a very important difference. At the end of three years, I say that I fulfilled all the mitzvos of terumos and maaseros. Here it is an individual speaking.

When a Jew does a mitzvah, he does it on two levels. I do a mitzvah because I am me - I am a Jew with Kedushas Yisrael. But on another level, I am a Jew because I go back 3,500 years, generation after generation.

There is an interesting Rashi in Parshas Re'eh. Rashi says that we are an עם קדוש. Every one of us has kedushah because we received it all the way back from our ancestors. But there is also the kedushah that we create for ourselves. That is a whole different dimension.

What does that mean? When I was born I was given tremendous potential, because my mother's mother's mother's mother, all the way back, stood at Har Sinai. But it is up to me to develop that potential. I was born with Kedushas Yisroel. But, because my father's father's father all the way back was from Shevet Levi, so I received an extra bonus. But then it is up to me what to do with it. That is something I have to do myself.

Why do we say ארמי אובד אבי at the Seder? I am projecting myself as part of Klal Yisroel leaving Egypt. Where is that whole idea of going back to Yetzias Mitzrayim and projecting myself there? It is in Parshas Bikkurim.

When Did They Become a Nation?

Then we come to a very interesting posuk: שָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִהְיִיתָ לְעַם. What does it mean הַיּוֹם, "today"? They became a nation forty years ago!

No. Forty years ago they were three million individuals who accepted the Torah at Har Sinai. That is a lot of individuals. When did they become a nation? When they have responsibility one for the other.

That is part of the very idea of a tzibbur: כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה.

What is a nation? A nation is not ten million individuals. A nation is a sense of responsibility. There is something that unifies them and binds them together with a sense of responsibility one for the other.

The Responsibility to Strengthen Torah

And then we have the brochos and k'loles. At the end it says:

אָרוּר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִקִּים אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת, וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן

The Ramban on that posuk quotes a Yerushalmi. It does not say, "who did not fulfill (יְקִיִּים) the words of this Torah"; rather, it says יִקִּים לֹא. The Yerushalmi asks: וכי תורה נופלת היא שצריך להקימה – Is the Torah

falling that you have to pick it up? The Yerushalmi answers: No, this refers to the person who lifts up the Torah for hagbah.

The person who does hagbah – what is he doing? The Gemara in Megillah says that he receives the reward of all the other aliyos – more than the person who gets shlishi, or shishi, or maftir. Whatever honor someone receives, the Gemara says you are missing the point – the biggest reward is for hagbah. Why? What is the purpose of hagbah?

The purpose of hagbah is to get the entire tzibbur to testify: וזאת תעידו את כל ישראל על פי ה' ביד משה. התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל על פי ה' ביד משה. They testify to the emes of the Torah. The Torah is emes.

So if I have a responsibility to the entire tzibbur, then part of my responsibility is that the entire tzibbur should affirm that this is the Torah that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave to Moshe Rabbeinu on Har Sinai, and that it has been passed down for 3,500 years. That gets the biggest reward.

And the Ramban quotes the next part of the Yerushalmi, and it is a frightening Yerushalmi. The Ramban takes it very seriously. What does it say? לָמַד וְלִמַּדְתִּי, I learned and I taught; נִשְׁמַר וְעָשָׂה, I did all the mitzvos; וְהָיָה כִּדְוֹ לְקַיָּים וְלֹא קַיָּים, if I could have made Torah strong, and I did not – then I am among the people cursed in the parsha.

Someone who says: I am a private citizen. I want to grow. I care about myself. הרי זה בכלל ארור.

Chazal tell the story of Yoshiyahu HaMelech. Yoshiyahu became king, and when Yoshiyahu read the posuk יקים לא יקום, he said: It is on me to make Torah strong. If I am the king, I have the ability to make Torah strong because I am ruling the country. And he went and changed the whole country.

This is an example of לזה כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה. It is my mitzvah, but part of my mitzvah is your mitzvah. Part of my limud haTorah is your limud haTorah. Part of my shofar is your shofar. Part of my lulav is your lulav.

It is not a bonus. וְהָיָה כִּדְוֹ לְקַיָּים וְלֹא קַיָּים – if one could have made Torah strong and one did not, הרי זה בכלל ארור, they are cursed.

It means that לזה כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה is a very serious part of the Torah. If I could have influenced you to keep Shabbos, and I said, "I do not want to be bothered. Your problem is your problem; my problem is my problem. I do not care whether you keep Shabbos or not," and I had the ability to influence you, I suffer for it. It is your problem, but it is also my problem. That is what the Ramban takes very seriously.

The Expanding Circle of Responsibility

There is an interesting halacha regarding tzedakah. For tzedakah, you first give to your family. Then you spread out to people in your neighborhood, to the people in your city.

לזה כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה. We are a group of people, and there is an expanding circle. Yes, I have more responsibility for the people in this room than for people in a different yeshiva. I have more responsibility for the English-speaking community than for the French-speaking community. The closer you are to a group, the greater the responsibility. I have a greater responsibility for my family, and so on.

But that is because there is a basic idea: לזה כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה. Anyone who has the ability to influence someone else has to do that. Yoshiyahu HaMelech, as king, had the responsibility for all of Klal Yisroel. He said: "It is up to me to establish it" – and he made an absolute revolution in Klal Yisroel when he took seriously the posuk, ארור אשר לא יקים את, דברי התורה הזאת.

The Brochos and Kholos and Hashgocho Protis

And then the posuk says something very interesting:

וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַע תִּשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם, וְנִתְּנָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ עַל כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ.

Then all the brochos will come to you, and you will be drowned in

brochos.

וְנִתְּנָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַיּוֹם לְפָנֶיךָ, בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶחָד יֵצֵאוּ אֵלֶיךָ וּבְשִׁבְעָה דְרָכִים יָנוּסוּ לְפָנֶיךָ.

It tells us something very simple: there is hashgocho protis in this world. If Klal Yisroel is suffering, there is only one reason according to the principle of the brochos and kholos: Hakodosh Boruch Hu deals with Klal Yisroel on the level of their mitzvos and aveiros.

We say every Thursday: וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַע לִי, יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּדֶרֶךְ יְהוָה, כְּמַעַט. אוֹיְבֵיהֶם אֲכַנֶּיֶע וְעַל צָרֵיהֶם אֲשִׁיב יָדִי. If we, as a nation, would listen and keep the Torah, then we would have less enemies. This is also a part of national defense.

The pesukim tell us how Hakodosh Boruch Hu deals with Klal Yisroel – not in a random way. Hakodosh Boruch Hu is dealing with us in a very specific way on every level: militarily, financially – whatever level it is. Antisemitism, everything. How? Mitzvos and aveiros.

Jewish History and the Meaning of Assimilation

If Klal Yisroel is going through difficult times, Klal Yisroel has to look at themselves. That is what we are supposed to be doing before Rosh Hashanah, when we are supposed to be looking at ourselves. What is the situation of Klal Yisroel right now in the world? Pretty rough.

And do not say, "Well, let us have the sociological explanation for antisemitism." No. Look at the late nineteenth century, when Russian antisemitism was exploding. What were all the Gedolei Ba'alei Machshovo saying? You can see it in the Netziv, in the Beis HaLevi, in the Meshech Chochmah, in the Malbim. It is one message:

When we are acting as a separate nation, מְקִימִים אוֹתָךְ לַעַם קְדוֹשׁ, when we act as a separate nation – not just another nation in the world – when we act as Jews because we are Jews and we fulfill what we are supposed to be, there will not be antisemitism. But the more we try to assimilate and be like the goyim, either individually or nationally, the more the goyim are going to push back.

The Meshech Chochmah wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century that assimilation in Europe was going crazy, and that there would be a reaction of antisemitism. He said: Where is it going to begin? Well, where did the assimilation begin? In Berlin. It is going to come out of Germany, he said, and out of Berlin.

That is exactly what happened.

That is the whole pattern of Jewish history. Were there ever Jews more integrated into society than the Jews in Spain in 1492? No. Were there ever Jews more integrated into the top of society than the Jews of Poland in 1648? No. There was a Jewish king for a day, a week, a month – I do not know how long he was king for, not very long, but he was there. Were there ever Jews more integrated into life than in Germany? No.

There is always a pushback. Hakodosh Boruch Hu does not deal with us as He deals with other nations. He is very exact with us as a nation. Very. You keep Torah, it is good. You do not keep Torah, it is not good.

The Double Cheshbon Before Yom HaDin

As we head to Yom HaDin, there is a double cheshbon that we make: a cheshbon we make as a nation, and a cheshbon we make as individuals.

As individuals, there is a very serious cheshbon. Where are we holding? How seriously are we taking our Yiddishkeit? How seriously are we taking our dikduk b'mitzvos? How seriously are we taking our limud haTorah? How seriously are we taking our davening and everything?

Yiddishkeit is serious business.

And that is why, right before Yom HaDin we read the brochos and kholos – this week and the week after, and then Shabbos Shuvah. As we approach Yom HaDin, we have to be woken up. It is very serious business.