

HUMBLE FROM BEGINNING TO END

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Today's Learning:

Nazir 8:1-2

Orach Chaim 445:1-3

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 12

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Avodah Zarah 35

There is an old custom that one who completes a unit of Torah study demonstrates the unity of Torah by seeking a thematic connection between the beginning and end of that unit. R' Shlomo Mehr z"l (1850-?; rabbi of Brailov, Romania) offers the following connection between the end of the Book of Vayikra, which we read this week, and its beginning:

Both the beginning and end of Vayikra teach us the value that G-d places on humility. When the first word of this book, "Vayikra," is written in the Torah scroll, the letter "aleph" is written smaller than the other letters. The commentaries explain that this is an indication of Moshe Rabbenu's humility, i.e., Moshe considered himself to be less than the smallest entity. [Also, the word "Vayiker," i.e., "Vayikra" without the letter "aleph," means, "He happened upon." In other words, by obscuring the letter aleph, Hashem and Moshe implied that Hashem spoke to Moshe by chance, not because Moshe was worthy.]

The last verse in the Book of Vayikra states: "These are the commandments that Hashem commanded Moshe to [tell] Bnei Yisrael on Mount Sinai." The gemara (Megillah 29a) teaches: Why was Har Sinai chosen as the site of Matan Torah / the Giving of the Torah? Because of its simplicity. Mount Sinai is neither the highest mountain nor the most lush with vegetation, yet it was chosen for the Giving of the Torah in order to teach us the importance of humility.

Pirkei Avot, which we study between Pesach and Shavuot - the same weeks when the Book of Vayikra is read - reinforces this idea. There we learn: "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai." What enabled Moshe to be the one who received the Torah? The trait that he shared with Mount Sinai - humility. (Divrei Shlomo)

"If a man will have no redeemer, but his means suffice [literally, 'his hand reaches'], and he acquires enough for his redemption . . ." (25:26)

Contextually, this verse is part of the law that one may redeem, i.e., buy back, an ancestral field that he has sold. The "redeemer" referred to is a relative who contributes money for the field's redemption.

R' Moshe Yehuda Leib Rabinowitz shlita (the "Munkatcher Rebbe") offers the following additional interpretation: The Sages say that performing acts of charity draws the ultimate redemption closer. If one sees that he has no redeemer, for mashiach has not come, let him reach out with his hand, and then he will acquire the redemption. (Quoted in Otzar Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

"If you will follow My decrees . . ." (26:3)

Rashi writes: This refers to toiling over the study of Torah.

R' Shmuel Felkinfeld z"l (Poland; 1737-1806) elaborates on our obligation to toil over Torah study, as follows:

We read in the Book of Iyov (5:7), "Man was born to toil." However, says the gemara (Sanhedrin 99b), we would not know whether this refers to toiling over physical labor or toiling with one's mouth if not for another verse (see Mishlei 16:26), which teaches that man was created to toil with his mouth. Still, says the gemara, I would not know whether this refers to toiling over Torah study or simply engaging in idle chatter if not for another verse (Yehoshua 1:8), "This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth." This teaches that man was created to toil over Torah study.

How are we understand this? asks R' Felkinfeld. Could anyone think that man was created to toil over physical labor or to engage in idle chatter? Why would Hashem have bothered to create man for such a purpose?

He explains based on three teachings of Chazal: First, we learn in Pirkei Avot (2:2), "Torah study is good together with an occupation, for the exertion of both of them causes sin to be forgotten." A person who devotes part of his day to work and part to Torah study will have no time or energy to sin. Second, we learn in Pirkei Avot (3:5) that if a person accepts the yoke of Torah study, Hashem will relieve him of having to work. Finally, we learn in Tractate Kiddushin (39b) that if a person sits idly and does not sin, he is rewarded as if he had performed a mitzvah.

Based on these three teachings, one could conclude that man was created to toil over physical labor. After all, if a person is busy with his labors, he will not sin. And, if he does not sin, he is rewarded as if he had performed a mitzvah. Therefore we must be taught that this is not the case; one who actually toils over Torah study is greater than one who earns his Divine reward passively.

Similarly, we might think that man was created to engage in idle chatter in order to confront the sin of lashon hara. Perhaps it is considered meritorious to speak idly and not say any lashon hara. Nevertheless, the gemara teaches, studying Torah is even greater. (Bet Shmuel Acharon: Parashat Behar)

Pirkei Avot

Yehuda ben Tema said: Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven. (Chapter 5, mishnah 23)

R' Yaakov Ba'al Ha'Turim z"l (approx. 1275-1340) begins his halachic code by quoting this mishnah, and elaborates as follows:

The mishnah singles out four aspects of serving Hashem. It begins, "Be bold as a leopard," for this is an important rule in the service of the Creator. Sometimes a person wishes to perform a mitzvah, but he refrains because others ridicule him. Accordingly, the mishnah instructs us to be bold in the face of those who ridicule us and not to refrain from performing mitzvot.

The Talmudic sage Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai gave his students a similar message when he said: "May it be His Will that your fear of Heaven be as great as your fear of man." Sometimes a person is more embarrassed to act in the face of humans than in the face of G-d, but the mishnah teaches that one must act boldly in the face of man. King David likewise said (Tehilim 119:46), "I will speak of Your testimonies before kings, and I will not be ashamed."

The mishnah continues, "[Be] light as an eagle." This alludes to man's vision, which is likened to an eagle because it roams freely and quickly. Man must use the eyes' ability to move freely and quickly in order to turn away from sinful sights. One must restrain the freedom of his eyesight, for the Sages teach, "The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body completes [the sin]."

"[Be] strong as a lion" refers to the heart, for the strength that one must use to serve Hashem resides

in the heart. [As just noted, the second step that leads to sin is that "the heart desires." One who is strong controls his heart's desires. (Bet Yosef)]

"[Be] swift as a deer" refers to one's legs, which should run to do good. [This is in contrast to the third step in sinning - "the body completes." (Bet Yosef)] (Tur Orach Chaim, chapter 1)

The Shulchan Aruch, R' Yosef Karo's abridgement of the Tur, mentions only one of the four qualities discussed above. Specifically, the first sentence of the Shulchan Aruch begins: "One should be strong as a lion to arise in the morning . . ." Why?

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Palestine) offers the following explanation: The Tur states that being strong as a lion refers to the heart. And, we are taught (Pirkei Avot 2:13) that having a "good heart" includes all other good traits. Accordingly, R' Karo could capture all four traits by focusing on the trait of being strong as a lion, i.e., having a good heart.

R' Kook adds: What is added by the injunction to be strong "as a lion"? The mishnah is teaching that just as a lion's strength is innate, so one must make strength a part of his character, not merely a way of acting. (Mitzvat Re'iyah 1:1)

R' Chaim Elazar Shapiro z"l (the "Munkatcher Rebbe"; died 2 Sivan 1937) writes that the above mishnah is an injunction to approach Torah and mitzvot like a young person. One must not think that he is already a seasoned servant of Hashem who has completed his work. (Sha'ar Yissachar: Ma'amar Yom Ha'kadosh para. 16)

Selected Laws of Shemittah

(From Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hil. Shemittah Ve'yovel, ch. 4)

[Ed. note: This year is a shemittah year, and, from time-to- time, we are presenting excerpts from the laws of shemittah. As with any halachic issue addressed in Hamaayan, our goal is to increase awareness of the subject, not to provide practical halachic guidance. For such advice, consult a competent rabbi.]

22. Fruits which grow on a tree during the seventh year should not be gathered in the way that one ordinarily gathers fruits, as it is written [in this week's parashah -- 25:5], "The grapes you had set aside for yourself [i.e., that you did not let others pick] you shall not pick." If one picked the fruit for the good of the tree or he picked fruit in the ordinary way, he is liable for lashes.

23. What should one do? The figs of the seventh year should not be harvested and placed in the muktzeh / the yard where figs are usually dried. Rather one dries them in some other dry place. [Also, one should not harvest them with the usual tool, also called a muktzeh. (Radvaz)] One should not press grapes in a press, but rather in a basket. One should not crush olives in the regular olive press, but rather in a smaller press. Similarly with other produce, whatever change one can make from the usual procedures should be made.

24. It is an affirmative commandment of the Torah that one renounce all that the Land [of Israel] produces in the seventh year, as it is written (Shmot 23:11), "In the seventh, you shall leave it untended and unharvested." Anyone who locks his vineyard or fences his field in the seventh year has neglected this mitzvah. The same is true if one has gathered his fruits into his house. Rather, one should declare everything to be hefker / free-for-all, and everyone has the same rights to it, as it is written (ibid.), "And the destitute of your people shall eat." One should bring a little bit into his own house as one brings from hefker, i.e., five barrels of oil and 15 barrels of wine. If one brought more than this, he is permitted to use it [even though he has acted inappropriately].

[R' Yosef Korkos z"l (late 15th century) elaborates in his commentary to Mishneh Torah: One should not say, "I will gather all of the produce into my house and distribute it to the poor from there." Indeed, according to the letter of Torah law, the poor may break down fences to enter fields during the shemittah year. However, for the sake of tikkun olam (loosely translated: "law and order"), the Sages decreed that the poor may not break down fences. Nevertheless, one who builds fences during the seventh year transgresses Torah law even if he plans to declare the fruits ownerless later.]

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