

THE LAWS OF KASHRUS: IS IT TECHNICAL OR SOMETHING DEEPER?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

When Yisro, Moshe's father-in-law, first showed up on the scene, he made a suggestion that altered the course of Jewish history. He meant well, and it really wasn't his fault in the end, but by suggesting that Moshe share the burden of educating the nation with others, he helped to shut the door on redemption until this very day.

The Torah reports that:

The next day Moshe sat to judge the people, who stood by Moshe from morning until evening. When Moshe's father-in-law observed what was happening, he asked, "What are you doing to the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand by you from morning until evening?" (Shemos 18:13-14)

In Parashas Yisro, Moshe answered his father-in-law in the following manner:

"The people come to me to inquire regarding God. When they have a matter to resolve, they come to me, and I judge between them. I also teach them statutes of God, and His laws." (Shemos 18:1-5-16)

It was this response that prompted Yisro to suggest a change in the way Moshe Rabbeinu ran the nation:

"The way you do it is not good. For sure you will wither away, and this people with you. It is too big a burden for you to carry alone. Listen to me; I will give you advice, and God will be with you. You be the one to go to God and bring matters before Him on behalf of the people. You will also be the one to admonish them concerning the statutes and laws, the path they must follow, and what they must do. However, look for men of ability, who fear God, men of truth who despise profit, and appoint them officers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times, and bring to you only matters of great importance. They should judge small matters and share your burden, so it will be easier for you. If you do this, and God accepts it, then you will be able to endure, and all the people will be able to return to their places in peace." (Shemos

18:17-23)

As the Torah reports, Moshe complied with his father-in-law's suggestion, as if everything was in order. It is only in this week's parshah that we hear the truth, the real reason why Yisro had to make his suggestion, and why Moshe Rabbeinu had to comply with it:

You answered me and said, "The thing that you have proposed is good." (Devarim 1:14).

You decided the matter to your benefit. You should have responded, "Our teacher Moshe! From whom is it better to learn, from you or from your student? Is it not better from you since you struggled for Torah." But I was aware of your thoughts. You were saying, "Now many judges will be appointed over us. If [the judge before whom we appear] does not show us favor, we will bring him a gift and he will favor us!" Had I been lax [in appointing judges], you would have said, "Do it quickly!" (Rashi)

So they did an improper thing. But, was there really such a great difference in the end, as long as they learned what they had to learn from whomever they learned it? Was it only a matter of respect, or did Moshe Rabbeinu's teaching mean a lot more to the Jewish people than they might have appreciated at the time?

The level of Moshe Rabbeinu was . . . from the Ohr HaGanuz itself. (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:5:2:12:2)

Apparently, Moshe's soul originated from an extremely high source, which made him a fitting channel for the light of Torah that he was destined to bring down from Heaven for the rest of the nation. Thus, Moshe was:

. . . the channel to the light of the Upper Da'as, which is the level of the Tree of Life . . . the level of Tifferes of Atzilus that the Da'as is inside. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 2, Siman 12, Os 2)

In other words, Moshe Rabbeinu was not just a great teacher. He was a spiritual conduit to realms of Torah and Torah appreciation that no other human being could be. As the Pri Tzaddik points out, when Moshe Rabbeinu taught something, it didn't just go into the head of the willing (emphasis on willing) person, it went into his heart as well.

This is why, perhaps, in Parashas Mattos, Moshe Rabbeinu did not teach the laws of kashrus to the returning Jewish army after the war with Midian. After seeing the Jewish soldiers bringing back Midianite women, who had been the source of the problem in the first place back at the end of Parashas Balak, Moshe was, at first, incredulous, and then angry.

Justified as he may have been, his anger cost him the prophecy that told him what to teach regarding the kashering of the vessels that had been brought back as part of the booty. Instead, these laws were taught by Elazar Kohen Gadol.

The question is, did it really matter who taught these laws, as long as we learned them? The answer is, when it comes to most teachers, the difference might not be that great between one and the other. But, the difference between Moshe Rabbeinu and, for example, Yehoshua bin Nun, the Talmud says, is like the difference between the sun and the moon, something that today, with the help of modern science, we can appreciate somewhat.

For, embedded in the laws of kashrus was information about exile and how to survive it, which means also avoiding tragic endings. Just as heat causes the taste of food to become absorbed in the walls of a vessel, requiring heat to remove it, likewise does heat, that is, passion, cause a Jew to become more deeply absorbed in exile, necessitating heat, or difficult Divine Providence, to extract him from exile. Both in kashrus and exile, the greater the heat, the greater the absorption, and the more severe the processing of kashering.

Taught by anyone else other than Moshe Rabbeinu, all that gets through are the technical laws of kashrus, not the message about exile and how to avoid it, or at least survive it once it happens. Hence, over 3,300 years later, we are still in exile, overly absorbed into our host societies, and in need of a 'kashering' we probably will like to avoid.

With Tisha B'Av just next week, b"H, it is something to recall as we remember all of the 'kashering' we have undergone in exile until this point. And, it wouldn't hurt to take the time, even this late in exile, to contemplate the importance of Moshe Rabbeinu, even after the fact, to the survival of the Jewish people. After all, it is his soul, we are told, that will be in the body of Moshiach to guide us to the Final Redemption and the peace and tranquility of Yemos HaMoshiach.

Text

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