

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM...

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Nachshon, the son of Aminadav of the tribe of Yehudah offered on the first day, He offered one silver dish ... (Bamidbar 7:12-13)

THE REDEMPTION BEGINS on Pesach, but it ends on Shavuot. This is another reason we read Megillas Rus on Shavuot, which documents the origin of Dovid HaMelech, ancestor of Moshiach Ben Dovid. And even though Pesach is called "Zman Cheirusainu," the "Time of our Freedom," it is with respect to the luchos that it says:

The Tablets are the handiwork of God, and the script was God's script engraved—charus—on the Tablets. Do not read "charus," but "cheirus"—freedom. For, you can have no freer person than one who engages in Torah study. (Pirkei Avos 6:2)

Torah, therefore, is our ticket to freedom. Pesach sets it all in motion, but it is Shavuot that "punches the ticket," so-to-speak. Unless a person is involved in Torah, they cannot achieve TRUE freedom.

This means more than just doing mitzvos or learning Torah. A person needs both, and to the extent that they have both, that is the extent to which they are free:

Rebi Yosi said, "Whoever says that he has no [desire to study the] Torah, has no [reward for the study of the] Torah"

Is this not obvious?

[This must be the meaning]: Whoever says that he has only [an interest in the study of the] Torah has only [reward for the study of the] Torah.

This, however, is also obvious!

But [the meaning really is] that he has no [reward] even [for the study of the] Torah.

Why? Rav Papa answered: "The verse says, 'That you may learn them and observe to do them' (Devarim 5:1): whoever is [engaged] in observance is [also regarded as engaged] in study, but whoever is not [engaged] in observance is not [regarded as engaged] in study..." (Yevamos 109b)

Because this year was a leap year, and we only celebrate one day of Yom Tov in Eretz Yisroel, we read Parashas NASO before Shavuot. Diaspora Jews however are a week behind, and will be reading BAMIDBAR before Shavuot, and only see THIS parsha sheet after Shavuot.

In a sense, it doesn't really matter because the message is just as applicable after Shavuot as it is in advance of Shavuot. When it comes to Torah, you have to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. And that does not only mean doing the mitzvot, but doing them as if they REALLY matter to you. Doing the mitzvot habitually is also only called "talking the talk."

This parsha has what to say about this as well. At the end of the parsha, we are presented with the gifts brought by the princes of each tribe in honor of the initiation of the mizbayach—altar. And the interesting thing about it is, that the Torah relates what each prince brought as if each one was different from the others, even though they were EXACTLY alike.

The Torah does not repeat itself unless there is something to learn. It could have easily taught that all the princes brought the same thing, in one paragraph. It would have saved parchment, ink, and reading time, significantly shortening the longest parsha in the ENTIRE Torah.

The Torah repeated each inauguration offering because each one WAS different, not by virtue of WHAT was brought, but by virtue of HOW the offering was brought. It was the SAME offering brought in 12 DIFFERENT ways, making the point that the "same thing" can be different when the person doing it is different.

This is why it never gets old. How many times have we dovened Shacharis, Minchah, Ma'ariv, Mussaf, etc. The text never changes, but the prayer does EACH time, because each time WE are different. We're not the same person we were yesterday, or even this morning. We've changed, if only a little bit.

A person can treat themselves as if they are exactly the same, as if nothing ever changes. They can doven Shacharis today the same way they did yesterday, and Minchah, and Ma'ariv as well. They can treat their relationship with God like a desk job, the kind you show up to day-after-day because you HAVE to. Nothing much changes, and you just do what you have to keep your employer happy enough so that he doesn't fire you.

Not much of a life, which is why so many people, even religious ones, have to find "outside" activities to keep themselves sane. NOT being religious is out of the question for them. Growing in religion is not on their radar. So they just settle in on some level of quasi-Torah observance. Not exactly the idea of freedom the Torah had in mind, or is "engraved" on the luchos.

Pesach pointed us in the direction of freedom. Shavuot teaches us how to achieve it through the learning of Torah. But it won't happen automatically, of course. You can get into a car, but unless you drive, it won't take you ANYWHERE. You have to start the engine, step on the gas, and steer the car. How much more so is this the case with Torah.

Happy—and FREE—is the person who breathes fresh life into every mitzvah they do, and treats it like it is brand new. Then they can HAVE Torah, and the higher reality of life to which it provides access.