

BUILD YOUR OWN COFFIN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 134, Living Above a Shul. Good Shabbos!

The Sequence of Parshiyos: First Mishpatim, Then Teruma

Parshas Teruma follows on the heels of Parshas Mishpatim, but they are really two very different types of parshiyos. Mishpatim is a parsha filled with monetary laws -- virtually all of Bava Kama and Bava Metzia originate from Parshas Mishpatim. Parshas Teruma is a portion dealing with laws between man and G-d. It is the portion dealing with the building of the Beis HaMikdash, a portion dealing with sacrificial offerings. On the surface these would appear to be two totally distinct parshiyos.

Yet, the Pardes Yosef writes, it is for a specific reason that the Torah wrote Parshas Teruma right after Parshas Mishpatim. The Torah wants us to know that when there is a Mitzvah to donate one's money to a Beis HaMikdash or to a shul ("And you shall take for Me an offering..." [Shemos 25:2]) we need to be sure where that money is coming from.

The Torah wants us to know that there is a section called Mishpatim: There is a section dealing with theft and there is a section dealing with the prohibition of taking interest on a loan. The Torah wants us to make sure that the money we are donating comes from sources which are legal and above board (Kosher v'Yosher). The Torah is not interested in a person donating money that was acquired illegally.

There is an interesting Maharsha [Ketubot 67], which decries and criticizes stealing and then giving from that money to charity:

"Many in this generation gather their wealth through measures which are without faith in G-d and which involve the desecration of G-d's name (Chillul HaShem) like by stealing from idolaters. Afterwards, they donate this money (for communal purposes) to get annual honors for themselves so that they will be blessed by the community (get a special "Mi She'Berach"). This is nothing other than a Mitzvah that comes by way of a sin (mitzvah ha'baah b'aveirah). Such money will not last."

This, says Pardes Yosef, is the reason that Parshas Mishpatim comes before Parshas Teruma. We need to know about the prohibitions of theft and corruption, and Ribbis, and stealing from Jew and Gentile alike. Only then can we talk about making a long term pledge to the Beis HaMikdash.

The Dining Room Table -- How One Can Take It With Him

There is a fascinating Rabbeinu Bachaye in this week's parsha. On the section dealing with the Shulchon - Table [Shemos 25:23-30] he goes through the symbolism of the Table and the "Show Breads" that were put on the Table. Then he says -- al derech haMedrash -- that the term Shittim (acacia wood, from which the Table was made) is an acronym for Shalom, Tova, Yeshua, Mechila (Peace, Good, Salvation, Forgiveness). He points out that the Aron and the Altar were likewise made of acacia wood (Shittim) for the same reason.

Rabbeinu Bachaye is saying is that all gifts -- represented by Peace, Good, Salvation, and Forgiveness -- that the Jewish people received during the time of the Temple, came about through the conduit of the vessels of the Temple.

Rabbeinu Bachaye goes on to ask that this is all fine and good while the Temple was standing -- we had all these utensils to provide us with these wonderful blessings -- but what do we have going for us now that we have been in Exile for 2000 years? He quotes a famous Talmudic passage "Now that the Temple is no longer standing a person receives atonement through his table" [Chagiga 27a]. What is our "Table" that atones for us now that we don't have a Temple? Our dining room table.

What a person does with his dining room table -- if he feeds the poor and welcomes in the bride and he does acts of kindness -- that is his altar of atonement. When one sits at his Shabbos table and is surrounded by others with whom he is sharing his bounty, his table becomes his altar of atonement.

Finally, Rabbeinu Bachaye goes on to say an awesome thing: "It is a custom of the pious people in France to use the wood from their dining room table to build their coffins for burial."

Think about the imagery. A man spends many occasions and has many meals with his friend around his dining room table. Then he goes to his friend's funeral and he sees him being buried in the same wood that was his dining room table!

The purpose of this custom -- says Rabbeinu Bachaye -- was to teach that a person will take nothing with him to the World of Truth except for the charity that he gave in his life and the goodness that he shared around his table. The charity, the guests, the widows, the orphans, the Baale Teshuva that one has fed and the influence that one dispenses around his dining room table is all that he takes with him.

Our Rabbis said [Berochos 54b] "One who has a long table (ha'Marich b'shulchano) will have long days and long years". When I was in England I went to see Windsor Castle where the Queen lives on

week- ends. In this palace was the longest dining room table I have ever seen in my life -- seventy-five chairs around it! That is not what the Rabbis were talking about.

What the Rabbis were speaking about was not the length of the table but what one does around it.

Rav Chavel brings in the footnote to Rabbeinu Bachaye a work called Sifsei Kohain who says that the acronym of ShLChaN (table) are Shamur Likevura Chessed Nideevosecha (Saved for your burial are the kindness of your generosity). The table is the altar of atonement for our generation -- only Kindness and Truth accompanies us to the True World.

Personalities & Sources:

MaHaRsha -- Moreinu HaRav Shlomo Eidel's of Ostroh, (1555-1632) Polish Rabbinical figure; authored monumental Halachic and Aggadic commentaries on Talmud.

Rabbeinu Bachaye -- (1263-1340) Student of Rashba, commentary on Chumash contains simple, midrashic, philosophical, and kabbalistic interpretations. A multi-volume annotated edition of his commentary was published in the 1960s by Rabbi Chaim Dov Chavel, z"l, of Far Rockaway, NY.

Glossary

Bava Kama, Bava Metzia -- The First Gate, The Middle Gate; Talmudic tractates dealing with monetary and civil laws.

al derech haMedrash -- by way of (interpreting in) a homiletic fashion

Aron -- box containing the Torah and Ten Commandments in the Temple.

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