

PARSHAS HAAZINU: RAIN, RAIN EVERYWHERE

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

"K'seirim alei deshe v'chirvivim alei esev - like soft raindrops upon vegetation and like [larger] raindrops upon the blades of grass" (Devarim 32:2, according to the translation of the Kli Yakar, see Rashi for another interpretation of the word âseirim')

Moshe Rabbeinu opens the stirring, poetic verses of Parshas Ha'azinu by comparing the Torah's eternal wisdom to life-giving, refreshing raindrops. He asks that the words of the Torah should nourish our neshamos (souls) just like dew and rain, which bring life and sustenance to the crops of the fields.

Different Types of Rain

The Ohr HaChaim quotes a Midrash (Mishlei 10) to explain why Moshe Rabbeinu used more than one type of rainfall to describe the words of the Torah. The Midrash mentions the words of Rebbi Yishmael describing what will transpire when a person faces the Beis Din Shel Ma'aleh (Heavenly Tribunal) after his years on this world.

Rebbi Yishmael says that a person who is fluent in Chumash will be asked why he did not master Mishnah. One who mastered Mishnah will be asked why he did not learn Gemorah, while one who devoted his time to understanding Gemorah will be asked why he did not delve deeply into the most difficult portions of the Gemorah. To sum up, each person will be asked why he or she did not stretch him or herself to reach their fullest potential.

The Ohr HaChaim quotes this Midrash to point out that Hashem judges each person according to his or her ability - no more, and no less. He comments that Hashem will not ask the one who is fluent in Chumash why he did not master the most difficult Gemorah in all of Shas! The Ohr HaChaim points out that this Midrash liberates people by informing them that they will not be judged by standards that are far beyond their ability. At the same time, however, it holds us all to a demanding standard - the very highest spiritual point that we are able to reach with our innate abilities. Din and Cheshbon

My great rebbi, Rabbi Avrohom Pam z'tl connected this thought of the Ohr HaChayim with the words of the Vilna Gaon on a Mishna in Pirkei Avos (3:1). The Mishna quotes Akavya ben M'halel that a person should always keep in mind, "Before Whom he will have to give a âDin V'cheshbon' (judgment and reckoning)."

The Vilna Gaon explained that the two terms reflect diverse approaches to an accounting of one's

actions: Din reflects a judgment of what a person did with his time - mitzvos and avaros (fulfillment of positive commandments and transgression of misdeeds). Cheshbon is a reckoning of a higher standard; what a person could have accomplished with his or her time on this world as opposed to what he or she has actually done.

My Rebbe pointed out that in this week's parsha, Hashem illustrated the concept of din v'cheshbon when He informed Moshe that he would not be able to enter into Eretz Yisroel. A careful reading of the pasuk (Devarim 32:51) shows that Hashem told Moshe, 1) "You trespassed against Me," (this was the element of din), and 2) "You did not sanctify Me," (this was the element of cheshbon - passing up the opportunity for a Kiddush Hashem). Words of Chizuk - and Tochacha - Before Yom Kippur

This theme is congruent with Moshe's opening words in this week's parsha. Moshe informs the Bnei Yisroel that the Torah provides nourishment to each person according to his or her level. Soft, gentle raindrops for budding plants (easier learning topics for those who find difficult limudim above them at this time) and drenching rain for fields of grass (intricate sugyos for advanced learners).

As we approach Yom Kippur and give reckoning for our actions - din and cheshbon - Moshe Rabbeinu reminds us that the Torah is accessible to each and every one of us. We are each obligated to drink from its refreshing waters, nourish our neshamos (souls) and learn its eternal lessons.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

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