

PARSHAS BEHAALOSCHA

תשפ"ה

There is an important connection between the parshas Sotah and parshas Nozir.

Chazal say that anyone who sees a Sotah's corruption should become a nozir and abstain from drinking wine. Why?

A person comes to the Beis Hamikdash with all the right intentions. He is bringing korbanos and is trying to get closer to Hashem. At the same time, there happens to be the proceeding of a Sotah going on. It means a husband saw improper behavior of his wife with a certain man. He warned his wife not to violate the issur yichud with this man, and she went ahead and was meyached with him anyway. She put herself under suspicion of znus.

She has the option of saying: "you don't trust me that I am faithful, so I want a divorce." She can abort the whole proceedings of Sotah anytime she wants. The husband is suspicious and it has to be dealt with. So she is brought to the Beis Hamikdash and she is given something to drink – which is totally harmless from a natural perspective. If it turns out she committed adultery, then disaster happens to her. If not, she walks out without harm and Hashem blesses her with increased fertility.

But the moment someone in the Beis Hamikdash sees all this, it creates a possibility of znus in his mind. Even though he knows what happened to her as a result of znus, he will say to himself that she was stupid and got caught, and I'll be smarter and not get caught! The moment these thoughts start going through a person's mind, Chazal say you have to go to the opposite extreme and stay away from any situation which might bring you to znus.

This is a very powerful message for all of us who live in a world which is consumed with arayos. People think this is a modern approach to human behavior. In reality, the yetzer horo is thousands of years old.

Why is a nozir called a kodosh? He is a person who realizes that he is in danger of sliding down a slippery slope into arayos, and he is taking concrete precautions to go to the other extreme and make sure it doesn't happen.

The next parsha has the Birkas Kohanim. It comes right after the parsha of Nozir.

The halacha is that when the kohanim make the brocho, it has to be made with ahavoh to those in the minyan. The kohen has to genuinely want the brocho to come to the people he is blessing. The midrash says the zechus of the ahavoh that one Jew has for another, when Jews come together and a kohen has ahavoh for the people he blesses – this zechus is what brings down the blessings to Klal Yisroel. The achdus and lack of sinoh among us is crucial for receiving brocho.

The minhag that developed among Klal Yisroel in Chutz Lo'oretz not to do birkas kohanim every day is very difficult to understand. The poskim say that in Chutz Lo'oretz society is built around making a parnossoh and there is a lot of competition and resentment. So kohanim can't bless with the sufficient ahavoh. Coming to Eretz Yisroel, where there is less emphasis on gashmiyus and more emphasis on ruchniyus, that sense of competition isn't there and there was enough ahavoh for the kohanim to bless the tzibbur every single day.

Another idea is that the kohanim are placing the Shem of Hashem on Klal Yisroel – and this is necessary for the brochos to come to fruition. Klal Yisroel have to be conscious of the fact that Hashem is in control and He is bestowing the parnossoh and sholom in their lives.

Another major topic of the parsha is the korbanos of the Nesi'im for

the chanukas haMizbeach. Every day, another nosi brought his korban – which was really serving as the chanukas haMishkon overall. Then we immediately have Parshas Behaaloscha and the hadlokas haMenorah. What is the connection between these two parshiyos?

Chazal explain that each shevet brought their korban for the chanukas haMizbeach/chanukas haMishkon except for Shevet Levi. Aharon was disheartened that he didn't take part in this special event. Hashem reassured Aharon that his function of lighting the menorah is more valuable than the korbanos brought by the Nesi'im.

The Ramban explains this consolation to Aharon. He says that in the future, there will be another chanukas haMikdash, and it will be exclusively through Aharon's descendants by relighting the menorah.

The gemara in Avodo Zoro says that the Yevonim desecrated the mizbeach by putting avodo zoro there, so it required a new dedication. But even though the mizbeach also needed a chanukah, the central component of the chanukah was the menorah. In the midbor, the central component of the Mishkon was the mizbeach, and the menorah played a secondary role.

Hashem was telling Aharon that in future generations, the menorah will become a more central avodo for Klal Yisroel than the mizbeach. What changed between the period of the midbor and the period of the Chashmona'im? The period of the midbor was one of constant open nissim and a total supernatural existence. There are the ananei kovod and aish, the mon and the water, and the Shechinoh was always present. The keilim in the Mishkon paralleled the furniture in one's house and the message is that Hashem's presence has to be felt even in your mundane home environment – where you eat and where you sleep. This was the central message of the Mishkon while the Jews were in the midbor.

The Menorah symbolized chochmoh – the light through which you perceive the events of the world around you. This function of the menorah wasn't the primary focus of the dor hamidbor. They were completely isolated from civilization and Hashem was open and apparent in their everyday lives and they weren't struggling with an opposing point-of-view.

By the time of golus Yovon, the Jews were engaged in a serious ideological battle with Greek philosophy – what is the right way to view the world? Do you view the world as a Greek or as a Jew? So the central focus had to be shifted to the Menorah – how to integrate the chochmas haTorah and train yourself to view the world through the outlook of the light of the Torah. Those involved in spreading this chochmas haTorah were Shevet Levi.

Hashem was telling Aharon that He wanted the victory over the Greeks to be by the kohanim and Shevet Levi – the ones who immersed themselves in the chochmas haTorah. It was their immersion in the chochmas haTorah which let the light of the Torah prevail over the philosophy of Greek culture. This is why the menorah symbolized the victory over the Greeks – the light of the Torah once again became the way Jews looked at the world instead of Greek philosophy.

When you look at an event that happens in the world, or any issue that comes up in society, there are many different ways to understand it and appreciate its relevance in history and in our lives. When we as Jews confront any issue, we need to perceive what is happening through the unique perspective of the Torah. We look to those who have immersed themselves in chochmas HaTorah and have adopted

the Torah's way of looking at everything to know what our outlook should be. The Torah has something vital to say about every situation and every social issue because the Torah encompasses everything in the world. This was the time for the Menorah to take a central place.

In the midbor, the emphasis was on being tahor and kodosh and bringing Hashem's presence into every aspect of living normal life. Because there were no external threats or foreign philosophies that the Jews in the midbor had to deal with. But when you are confronted by the ideas of the world, you have to evaluate them through the lens of the Torah. This has always been a challenge that Klal Yisroel have struggled with – in every golus.

When Jews came to America, they needed guidance from talmidei chachomim to draw the lines on the battlefield to know where the fight can be won and where to invest time and resources. The struggles that Klal Yisroel faced in the shtetels of Russia and Poland weren't the struggles that we face in America and western culture. Talmidei chachomim needed to evaluate what is important and what is not important. We need someone who sees the world through the lens of the Torah to determine the right direction. This is what Hashem told Aharon: your chelek is much bigger than the Nesi'im in the chanukas haMishkon.

Now we move to the middle of Parshas Behaaloscha. Moshe tells Yisro that we are finally moving towards Eretz Yisroel with the Mishkon and the Shechinoh. Come with us!

They left Har Sinai to travel for three days. And then we have two brackets. Chazal say it is a separate Chumash. Klal Yisroel begin spiraling down until the meraglim in Parshas Shlach.

There is the incident of the mis'onenim. People are complaining – after Hashem is giving them everything on a silver platter. There is a big yetzer horo to want everything and have no restrictions.

The posuk in Mishlei says: אוהב כסף לא ישבע כסף. The point is pretty self-explanatory.

But Rashi, who is constantly telling us that he is giving us pshat, explains that this refers to mitzvos! Why does Rashi deviate from the simple meaning of the posuk? Rashi is implying that it is totally irrational for a human being to not be satisfied with billions and billions, and with enormous power and influence all over the world. It makes no sense. There must be some deeper purpose that this insatiable drive for more must be serving. It must be that Hashem wants us to have an insatiable drive to do more mitzvos and constantly grow in our avodas Hashem.

If I know ten mesechtos, I want to know 11 mesechtos. People outside of Torah divert this drive to gashmiyus achievements. When they can't have more, they complain.

Why were these people complaining? It was because Hashem was rushing them to arrive in Eretz Yisroel and they wanted to be more relaxed. You can be sure, that if Hashem would have been gentler and made them travel more slowly, they would have complained: "Why aren't we there yet?" People who are focused on themselves and their gashmiyus will always have something to complain about and not appreciate what they are given.

Then we have the Asafusuf – the Eirev Rav who complain about the mon. Who are the Eirev Rav and why do they consistently cause problems for Klal Yisroel?

Hashem told Avrohom Ovinu at the Bris bein habesorim that his descendants will be exiled and enslaved. They will be going through very hard times for generations before they are redeemed. But the Eirev Rav never had any shibbud. They saw the geuloh and were inspired to join without going through any kind of hardship. They didn't make any investment of hard work. It is like the frum advertisements you see where someone promises you can finish shas in a year by learning for one hour a day instead of seven! Instant talmid chochom! People want this and sign up for it! Some people want everything without paying

the price.

The posuk says: הִתְאוּ תְּאוֹה. They wanted taivoh – what does that mean? The mon had not just the taste, but all the properties of any food you imagined. But there are five foods that the mon couldn't taste like – for the benefit of pregnant women. So because the mon couldn't taste like these five things, they made a whole protest. Like campers in a dining room protesting for more watermelon! They could think about any food besides these five, and they couldn't tolerate it!

The gemara asks: where is the remez in the Torah for Homon? The answer is the posuk in Bereishis that talks about the Eitz Hadaas: הֵן הָעֵץ. But what does the Eitz Hadaas have to do with Homon?

The answer is that in Gan Eden, Odom and Chavah had everything you could ask for. They were living in a literal paradise! They could eat from any tree in the Gan, except for one tree! But Odom HoRishon wanted everything. He couldn't stand being restricted – even a little bit. So he ate from the Eitz Hadaas and lost everything.

Similarly, Homon was elevated to the highest position in the Persian empire. He had wealth, power, sons, honor – everything you could want. But it was all ruined for him because there was one Jew who wouldn't bow down to him and give him kovod. Because he couldn't live with the fact that one person wasn't giving him kovod, he tried to wipe out the entire Jewish people and lost everything as a result.

And here with the Eirev Rav, they complain about the mon – spelled הֵן. You want everything, you end up with nothing.

The posuk says Klal Yisroel cried by the families. What does that refer to? Rashi explains that after all they experienced – Har Sinai, Luchos, Mishkon, hashro'as haShechinoh – they wanted to eat real meat. They want to go back to the free lifestyle of before matan Torah without the issur of arayos. What does one have to do with the other? The answer is that once you release the restrictions in one area, you start to become hefker in every area. The Torah is providing a structure where we can enjoy this world in the context of limitations. If you can't live with limitations, you self-destruct. This is what happened to the dor hamabul.

So Hashem listens to their complaints and gave them their request and it destroyed them. You are allowed to enjoy physical pleasures. But don't make it everything you are about. Don't make it the definition of who you are. We live in a world of extreme materialism. People identify their essential self with their taivos instead of their neshomos. You lose connection to Torah, to Hashem, and to everything ruchni.

Towards the end of the parsha we see the Sanhedrin die and are replaced. Why did this happen? Because at Ma'amad Har Sinai, these zekeinim were occupied with eating and drinking and didn't appreciate the gilui Shechinoh they were privileged to experience.

This relates to us on a very practical level.

Our generation has experienced tremendous material blessings. It is so easy to sit and learn and do avodas Hashem with so much ease and comfort. It was never this easy. We have to appreciate this gift. 50-60 years ago, only the people who were willing to be moser nefesh lived this way. You had to really want it. But today, there is an ability for most people to learn Torah full time to a degree never seen in our history.

Israeli bochurim who face the Israeli draft are now being asked to be moser nefesh in order to sit and learn. I often think about how my great-grandfather chopped off his trigger finger to avoid the draft. He was afraid that he would lose his Yiddishkeit by going into the Russian army. This was his mesirus nefesh for living like a Jew.

We have to appreciate the opportunity Hashem gave our generation, instead of being distracted and complaining about the small things we lack. You show your appreciation by taking advantage of these opportunities to the maximum and not take anything for granted. That is the most important lesson of the parsha.