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נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
 רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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 Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel MORDECHAI MALKA, Founder & President of Institutions "Or Hamelech"



עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Parashat Naso

Man's Main Torah Wisdom is Dependent On Shavuot

Questions:

- 1- This week's *parashah* begins with an instruction to count the sons of Gershon [4:21]. Yet we find that the sons of Kehat were already counted in the previous *parashah*. This is odd, asks the *Kli Yakar*, because Gershon was the first-born son of Levi [see *Bamidbar* 3:17], and therefore he should have been counted first.

Ezra Enacted that the *Tochachot* (Rebukes) be Read Before Shavuot

Additionally, our Sages state [*Megillah* 31b], "Rebbi Shimon ben Elazer said: Ezra enacted that the Jews should read the curses in *Torat Kohanim* before Shavuot, and in *Mishnah Torah* before Rosh Hashanah. What is the reason for this? Said Abaye and some say Reis Lakish: In order that the year should end as well as its curses. This is understandable regarding *Mishnah Torah* ... but by *Torat Kohanim* – is Shavuot the start of a new year? Yes. Shavuot is also a new year, as the Mishnah states that Shavuot is the Rosh Hashanah of fruits." The Rambam [*Hilchot Tefillah ve'Nesiat Kapayim* 13:2] rules accordingly as well as the *Shulchan Aruch* [*Orach Chayim, Hilchot Rosh Chodesh* 428:4].

Why was This Enacted Prior to Shavuot and Not Before Sukkot and Pesach?

- 2- The Mishnah in *Masechet Rosh Hashanah* [1:2] states that on Pesach the world is judged on the wheat supply for the upcoming year; on Shavuot, the fruit supply; on Rosh Hashanah each individual is judged; on Sukkot the world's water supply is judged. **Therefore it begs to be asked: Since the world is judged on four separate occasions, why are the *tochachot* read specifically before Rosh Hashanah and Shavuot?**
- 3- Furthermore, there is no doubt that water is more vital to the world than fruit, and it would therefore seem more logical to read the *tochachot* before Sukkot. Perhaps you will suggest that since the *tochachot* were read prior to Rosh Hashanah, to read them again before Sukkot would be unnecessary. In that case, instead of reading them before Shavuot they should be read before Pesach, as wheat is more vital to the world than fruit.

Priorities in Life

It appears that the Torah is teaching us about the lack of proper priorities in man's life. Usually, man concerns himself, first and foremost, with worrying over his physical needs such as food, clothing, and the like. He is therefore willing to sacrifice much in order to attain these things. His Torah, however, is of secondary importance, and he studies it when he has an opportunity to do so. However, he is making a critical mistake in life. The Torah teaches us about the greatness of Torah study and how the Torah is more important than anything else. It is the crown above all other crowns, and without it, life is meaningless. Our Sages have taught this to us in *Masechet Nedarim* [41a], "Said Abaye: There is no pauper except for the one who lacks knowledge. In the west they say: If he has this he has everything. If he does not have this what does he have? If he has acquired this what does he lack? If he has not acquired it what has he acquired?" [Also see *Kohelet Rabbah* 7]. Rav Saadiah Gaon [*Sefer Ha'emunot veDeot maamar* 3] writes that it is the Torah which makes us into a nation, for without the Torah there is no difference between the Jewish Nation and the rest of the nations of the world. Therefore our Sages are teaching us about the significance of the festival of Shavuot, because all of man's Torah wisdom is dependent upon it.

Answer of the *Kli Yakar* – Greatness of the Torah

The *Kli Yakar* explains that since Hashem wished to bequeath the greatness of the Torah to the Jewish Nation, He chose Kehat, the younger son, to carry the Aron. He was therefore counted first, so that it would be understood that the honor of Torah takes precedence above all else. If Hashem would have given the task of carrying the Aron to Gershon, we would not learn about the importance of the Torah; one might think that he was allotted the task because he was the first-born, and not because of the greatness of the Torah. Perhaps I can add that since



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Moshe, who received the Torah and transmitted it to the Jews, descended from Kehat, the Torah counts Kehat first.

Greatness of Torah According to Pirkei Avot

In *Avot* [6:6] it states: Torah is greater than *kehunah* [priesthood] or *malchut* [royalty]. For *malchut* is acquired along with thirty benefits and the *kehunah* with twenty four. Yet the Torah is acquired with forty eight traits ...” We see therefore that because of the Torah’s greatness one needs forty eight traits to acquire it, unlike the *kehunah* and *malchut*.

Shavuot is the Day of Judgment for the Torah Wisdom One Gains Over the Course of the Year

After having discussed the greatness of Torah, we will now discuss the significance of Shavuot and explain the statement of our Sages that was mentioned above. It appears that when our Sages stated that Shavuot is the day of judgment for the fruits of the tree they were alluding to something deeper. We find that the tree symbolizes man, as the *pasuk* states, “Man is a tree of the field.” In other words, it is not only the actual fruit that is being judged, but also man himself. You might therefore ask why man is judged twice, both on Rosh Hashanah and Shavuot. The answer is that on Rosh Hashanah man is judged over his physical existence, whether he will live or die, for example. However, on Shavuot man is judged over his spirituality – will he merit the Torah or not?

Without the Torah it is Considered Like Death

It states in *Masechet Makkot* [10a] that a student who kills accidentally and goes to the protective city, the *Ir Miklat*, goes together with his *rebbe*. This is as the *pasuk* states [*Devarim* 19:5, 4:42], “[He should go to the city] and live,” on which our Sages expound, “Do for him that which he needs to live.” The Rambam [*Hilchot Rotzeach ve’Shemirat Ha’nefesh* 7:1] rules accordingly and writes, “And live;’- [For] wise individuals and those who pursue wisdom, without Torah learning they are considered as dead.” Similarly, a *rav* who is exiled is accompanied by his *yeshivah*.

One Who Causes Another to Sin is Worse Than Having Killed Him

You therefore see that a decree on man’s wisdom is truly a matter of life and death. On the contrary, our Sages have taught us in the Midrash [*Bamidbar Rabbah, Parashat Pinchas* 21:4], R’ Shimon says: From where do we know that one who causes another to sin is worse than having killed him? For one who kills, kills only in this world, but the victim still has a portion in the coming world. However, one who causes another to sin, kills him both in this world as well as in the coming world.” Therefore it is a great and awesome day of judgment for all those who study Torah.

Words of the Arizal

This idea takes on even greater meaning according to what the Arizal explains in the *Shaar Hakavanot* [*Drush Rishon Le’Shavuot*]. He teaches that all of man’s achievements in Torah are dependent on the night of Shavuot. Therefore it has an importance which exceeds Sukkot on which there is judgment over the water, or Pesach, when there is judgment over the wheat. For even though they are more vital when it comes to sustaining the body, however, they are only physical items. Shavuot, on the other hand, pertains to the soul. This is why Ezra enacted reading the *tochachot* in *Parashat Bechukotai* before Shavuot, to arouse man to pray and take advantage of this great day, thereby meriting the Torah.

The Connection Between the Tochachot and the Festival of Matan Torah

According to this we can understand well the enactment to read the *tochachot* of *Parashat Bechukotai* before *matan Torah*. This is because the *tochachot* of *Parashat Bechukotai* are connected to toiling in Torah. This is as our Sages expounded on the first *pasuk* in *Parashat Bechukotai*, “If you will follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them.” The fulfillment of mitzvot has already been stated, so “My statutes,” explain the Sages, refers to toiling in Torah. By toiling in Torah they will merit all of the blessings. But if they “reject My statutes,” then the opposite is true, and all the curses come to fruition. We see then that the entire *tochachot* revolves primarily around toiling in Torah study. Therefore it is totally appropriate to read these *tochachot* before



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Shavuot, the *chag* of *matan Torah* and the day of judgment, when man's wisdom for the upcoming year is decreed.

Behavior of Torah Greats as Shavuot Drew Near

It is related about R' Yisrael Salanter *zt"l* that he looked somewhat tense before Shavuot. When he was asked the reason for this, he replied that the day of judgment for the Torah world is soon to arrive. It is similarly related about Rav Shach *zt"l*, that he was also noticed to be very tense before Shavuot. He explained that he heard from R' Isser Zalman Meltzer *zt"l*, who heard in the name of the Netziv *zt"l*, that Shavuot is the day of judgment for the amount of Torah wisdom one will gain that year.

Why One Must Remain Awake the Entire Night

According to this one can understand the importance of learning Torah on this night, more than on any other night. This is because this night is one of judgment over one's Torah achievements. Therefore how can an individual sleep knowing that his life which is dependent on this hangs in the balance? This is as we cited previously from the Arizal and as the Rambam stated, that without Torah life is meaningless. The more we delve into the greatness of toiling in Torah, the more we will merit understanding the importance of this great night. It is similar to the night of Hoshanah Rabbah when the decree of man's physical existence is sealed. This is why one must stay awake all night, for if one sleeps, it could awaken a Heavenly prosecution against him, *chas ve'shalom*. A *fortiori* can be drawn about an individual who must stand trial and is likely to be found guilty. He would certainly be unable to sleep on account of his fear over what might be done to him. If this is so with a monetary matter or some other fleeting issue, how much more so should it apply when an individual's Torah wisdom and life hang in the balance?

The Maharsha

In order to illustrate the great toil in Torah study demonstrated by the Torah greats, we will cite several examples: The Maharsha used to grow his hair long so that he could tie it to the ceiling. This way, he would not fall asleep and could continue to learn.

Great Exertion of the Maharsham

In his sefer *Darkei Shalom*, Rav Shwadron *zt"l* writes about his grandfather, the Maharsham *zt"l*, In his youth. When he would be learning when the nights were longer, he was concerned lest he fall asleep. After he fought off sleep for several nights, he devised a clever plan. He banged a nail into the ceiling of the house where he studied Torah. He then tied one end of a rope to the nail and the other to his *peyot*. When sleep began to overtake him and his head would drop, the rope would jerk his *peyot*, and he would wake up. He was accustomed to doing so for years until he got used to staying up throughout the night.

The Chazon Ish Slept Sparingly

The Chazon Ish used to study Torah with great diligence until he had used up every last ounce of strength. After concluding to learn one time, he went to his room to retire for the night. But suddenly, his household heard a loud thud. They entered the Chazon Ish's room and saw him lying on the floor, and he lacked the strength to rise. They obviously lifted him up, and he apologized for having burdened them. He explained that he always studies Torah until he has used up all of his physical strength, leaving just enough strength to walk to his bed. However this time he miscalculated and learned slightly more than usual. He therefore was unable to make it to his bed.

Words of Mussar

We have learned from the *parashah* and the teachings of our Sages to what extent an individual must take advantage of the great day of Shavuot. This is because it's the day of *matan Torah* and man's Torah wisdom is dependent on it. One must prepare well for the all-night learning on the night of Shavuot in order to merit all of the bounty of Torah wisdom. For the Torah is *Torat Chayim*, the Torah of Life, and by learning it one merits many things, as the Tanna states in *Pirkei Avot*.

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Sameach*,
Rav Mordechai Malka



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