

This week, we will read Parshas Bechukosai.

The gemara in Megillah says that before Shavuos we are obligated to read this parsha specifically. Why?

Shavuos is not just a remembrance of a kabbolas haTorah that happened 3500 years ago. Rather, every year, Hashem demands of us that we accept the Torah again on Shavuos. At the time of the original kabbolas haTorah, the world was in danger of losing its existence – had Klal Yisroel not accepted the Torah at Har Sinai. So too, the gemara in Shabbos tells us, if Klal Yisroel don't accept the Torah every year on Shavuos, Hashem will say goodbye to the world and it will revert to *tohu va'vohu*.

Kabbolas haTorah is essentially a kabboloh of the ol Torah. It is not just a nice suggestion designed to inspire us and give us geshmak. As the gemara in Rosh Hashono says, *מצוות לאו להנות ניתנו*, to which Rashi comments that reason we fulfill the Torah is not for the enjoyment we get out of it, but rather it is an obligation and hence even when it is a burden. It is hard work and we have to be dedicated to it with *mesiras nefesh* – even when it is difficult and not enjoyable. Nowadays, people learn Torah and keep mitzvos primarily for the geshmak. But that is not kabbolas ol. A ger when he converts to Judaism, doesn't just accept the mitzvos, he accepts the ol of Torah and mitzvos.

There is something else. Torah and mitzvos aren't extraneous to the world. The Ramban gives us a fundamental perspective on the essence of what the world is about. When Hashem put Odom and Chava in Gan Eden and their only focus was to serve Hashem on the highest level, the entire world was in total harmony. There was no friction or discord between man and man, man and animal, man and the earth, and between all the natural processes of the world. No pain, no suffering, and no difficulty. The moment Odom HoRishon ate from the Eitz HaDaas, he introduced disharmony into the world. Disharmony between human beings, between man and animals, between animals themselves, and between man and the soil.

This parsha tells us that when we keep Torah and mitzvos, there will be incredible bounty and prosperity because everything will be in harmony again – human beings and nature, human beings will live in peace without competition, and animals will no longer hunt and kill each other.

The Rambam and the Ramban have a machlokes about how to interpret the posuk in Novi that predicts the wolf will live in harmony with sheep. The Rambam says the problem is the world won't fundamentally change its nature in the times of Moshiach. So either it is a moshol, or it will be limited to the Har Habayis where the intensity of the Shechinoh will even affect the animals living there. The Ramban says the nevuah is to be understood literally. The times of Moshiach will restore the original harmony that pervaded all of the natural world at the time of Odom HoRishon before the sin.

What brings about this harmony? Look in this week's parsha – it is when Klal Yisroel keep Torah and mitzvos on the proper level. This will affect the very nature of the physical world and restore its original elevated state. It is up to Klal Yisroel. *וחיי עולם נטע בתוכנו*. We impact this world through our mitzvos and aveiros. We can bring kedushoh into this world or we can bring tumoh into this world. When we do our job the natural world is in harmony.

As we move up the ladder, we achieve a level of hashro'as haShechinoh.

Before the churbon, Klal Yisroel didn't really believe a churbon habayis could actually happen. Everyone knew that entering the Kodosh haKodoshim was dangerous. If the Kohen Godol altered the avodas Yom Kippur just a little bit, he would die on the spot. So how could non-Jews ever enter the Beis HaMikdosh and not be instantly destroyed? The Zohar says that Nevuchadnezar and Titus didn't really do anything to the Beis HaMikdosh. They were simply re-grinding already ground flour.

The Nefesh HaChaim explains that this refers to the fact that the kedushoh and the intensity of the Shechinoh that exists in the Beis HaMikdosh isn't automatic. It is a reflection of the level of kedushoh that Klal Yisroel generate through their Torah and mitzvos. Just because there is a building that is standing on Har Habayis and korbonos are being brought there, doesn't mean that the kedushoh will automatically be there. It depends on the level of ruchniyus that Klal Yisroel are able to maintain. Hashem is All-powerful, but He decided to run this world by using a set of tools – the olomos elyonos. We give power to those tools with our mitzvos and maasim tovim, or we weaken those tools by our aveiros. So when Klal Yisroel don't keep up their level, the kedushoh of the Beis HaMikdosh is sapped away and the building becomes an empty shell.

The gemara says that any generation in which the Beis HaMikdosh isn't built, it is as if that generation destroyed it. Why? Because the ability for the Beis HaMikdosh to stand depends solely on there being the requisite level of kedushoh generated by Klal Yisroel's Torah and mitzvos. If we would build a structure of the Beis HaMikdosh without first achieving the requisite level of kedushoh, it would immediately collapse. The moment we achieve the requisite level of kedushoh, the Beis HaMikdosh will appear on its own. So the very fact that we don't have a Beis HaMikdosh right now is a direct result of our failing to generate that necessary level of kedushoh to have it – so it is as if we destroyed it ourselves.

As Klal Yisroel move up the ladder, there will be a Beis HaMikdosh and there will be Shechinoh. Hashem will "walk among us". What does that mean? We have a physical body which responds to physical stimuli. We are also spiritual beings who have the capacity to be sensitive to kedushoh and feel it. But because of the orlas halev, most of us have been deadened to this sensitivity. Our neshomos are encrusted by our physicality and we can't feel kedushoh.

But not all of us. Some great tzaddikim can still sense the presence or absence of kedushoh. Hashem didn't tell Avrohom where the Akeidah will be. But when he looked in the direction of Har Habayis, he perceived a cloud hovering over the mountain. Avrohom turns to Yitzchok and asked what he sees, and Yitzchok said he sees a cloud hovering over the mountain. He turns to Yishmoel and Eliezer to ask them, and they say they only see a bunch of hills. So Avrohom tells them to remain behind with the donkey – you are not sensitive to the kedushoh around you, so you have nothing to gain by going to watch the Akeidah. Stay behind with the 'chamor', which symbolizes chumriyus – physicality.

But in the times of Moshiach, we will all be on the level of having sensitivity to ruchniyus once again, and we will "walk together with Hashem". Hashem is predicting that we will feel once again what it means that I am Hashem and you are My people.

There will be tremendous brocho. What brings this brocho? Rashi says

it comes from ameilus in Torah – struggle, work, effort, toil. There are many things that bring kedushoh to the world and bring harmony to the natural world. But the highest thing on that pyramid is ameilus baTorah. It is the most powerful thing a Jew can do to affect the level of ruchniyus in the world – more than any other mitzvah.

But there is a flip-side – אדם בחוקותי תמאסו. People dismiss the value of Torah Shebaal Peh and denigrate those who toil in Torah. Understanding what the Torah is all about is not important to you. There are other things that are more important. If you don't value Torah and it is only a side occupation, this is a form of denigration of the greatness of Torah.

There is an unbelievable machlokes between the Ran and the Rambam about the extent of the mitzvoh of Talmud Torah. The Ran says the chiyuv of limud haTorah is constant. It is obligatory all the time, but with various heterim to take breaks. If you interrupt learning for reasons that aren't justified, it is an aveiroh of bitul Torah every second. The Rambam says the mitzvoh of Talmud Torah is fulfilled just by being koveah a certain amount of time to learn in the morning and at night. But does that mean there is no issur of bitul Torah according to the Rambam? Of course there is.

If a person has an ability to learn and he decides to do something else with his time, he is declaring that this other activity is #1 and learning Torah is #2. This is a serious violation of the posuk – דָּבַר ה' הִזְקֵנוּ. He is denigrating the value of Torah. And this creates a downward spiral. Once you lose the value of Torah in yourself, you will start to denigrate those who do value Torah. You will hate chachomim and try to convince others to not learn Torah.

This is a revolutionary way of looking at the world. We hold the key to prosperity and harmony or tragedy and disharmony in the physical world with our mitzvos and aveiros. But not just any mitzvoh – by ameilus baTorah specifically. Working and toiling to understand Torah Shebaal Peh.

Once we start down that downward spiral of despising ameilus in Torah, we wind up attributing everything to coincidence and random chance. This brings calamities and tragedies. The Rambam says that when a calamity happens to a tzibbur, the tzibbur is obligated to reflect and try to figure out what brought this tzoroh about. If you refuse to reflect and discover the spiritual cause of the tzoroh, you are being cruel. You are preventing the thing that can avoid future calamities – correcting spiritual failings.

There are various levels of cheshbon hanefesh one can do. The gemara gives us a checklist of what to look out for. You first look for any possible aveiros, then you look at the level of kiyum mitzvos, then bitul Torah, etc. And if you do everything you are supposed to do and you still get trouble in your life, this can be yissurim of ahavoh. The Ramban explains that there can be times where you are technically not doing any aveiros, but you can push yourself to keep mitzvos better. So Hashem can bring yissurim to spur a person to push himself to reach higher levels that he didn't think he was capable of.

Klal Yisroel are going through a difficult period now. Here in Eretz Yisroel and abroad. Driving through London this week, I saw Palestinian flags flying everywhere – you would think you are in Gaza! There is a war going on where Jewish soldiers are being killed every day and Israel is being demonized and made into an outcast in the international community. We need to make a cheshbon hanefesh to address the reasons behind this. But who makes this cheshbon hanefesh?

There is a very powerful story which answers this question. On one Yom Kippur afternoon during the break between Mincha and Neiloh, Rav Amrom Blau who was a fierce opponent of Zionism, came to the Brisker Rav to complain to him that the Zionists were destroying the

Yishuv of Eretz Yisroel. The Brisker Rav responded that it isn't the secular Zionists who are responsible but rather it is you! But how could this be? Rav Amrom was a frum Jew! The Brisker Rav explained that this is the lesson that one must come away from after just reading Maftir Yonah. We read that there was a ship full of idol worshippers and the ship is about to capsize from a violent storm. All the non-Jews were shouting and praying to their idols to save them, but the real reason for the storm was the fact that there was one Jew inside the boat who was trying to escape his mission from Hashem. This means that when something happens to Klal Yisroel, we don't blame it on the reshaim and start pointing fingers. We look within ourselves and realize what we are doing wrong and what we have to do to turn things around.

It is interesting to take a look at what is happening in the U.S. and the U.K. The most virulent centers of anti-Semitism that are exploding in the West are the college campuses and the universities. There is a message that is sent to us again and again throughout the golus. When the Jews try to assimilate and become accepted by the non-Jews, the non-Jews resent it and they push us away. They let us know very clearly that they do not want us in their society. The university world is telling Jews – especially frum Jews – that we aren't wanted there. This is not our place. This warning against assimilation goes straight through our history. This is the cheshbon hanefesh we need to make in our current time.

Just remember – 20 years from now, all these college students who are rooting for Hamas and calling for Israel's destruction, will be running the country and the world! And those in the highest position in the universities have the highest levels of anti-Semitism. We are being told that we don't belong there.

Hashem is running a very interesting world. 27 years ago, the U.S. decided to wage a war in Iraq based on a lie sold to the President by the CIA that Sadaam Husein had WMDs. This war caused the entire country of Iraq to collapse, driving millions of Muslims to migrate to the West as refugees. The civil war in Syria also caused millions of Muslims to migrate to the West as refugees. The collapse of Libya and Sudan caused millions of Muslims to migrate to the West as refugees. So by now, something no-one could have predicted 30 years ago – the Muslims are a powerful force in the societies throughout the Western World. This is the source of many of the problems we have today.

Combine this with the riots and massive social unrest caused by the murder of George Floyd and the chaos of the world-wide coronavirus pandemic, and you have a world that is deeply off-balance and has gone insane. And it is telling us that Jews don't belong here.

It is true. Hashem is running the world and He wants us to be separate – to have separate goals and separate ideals. We make ourselves different by our kabbolas haTorah and our kabbolas ol. We are unique and we are not part of the Western World. When we stand on Shavuos morning to be mekabbel the Torah, we look at ourselves and see what we can do through our Torah and mitzvos to restore the right balance and harmony of the world. We don't look outside to see what others are doing wrong.

The Michtav Me'Eliyahu says a very important idea. The word השפעה comes from the word שפיע. The way you have an influence on other people is by filling yourself up to the point of overflowing. When you keep Torah and mitzvos in the best way you can and you focus on increasing the quality of your own avodas Hashem, this has the greatest impact on those around you and the general level of ruchniyus in the world. Every one of us has a great koach to change and affect this world, and ameilus baTorah is the greatest tool we have to make the greatest impact on ourselves, on Klal Yisroel, and the entire world around us.