

This week's parsha is very unique. The gemara says that before Rosh Hashono one must read the brochos and klolos of Mishnah Torah. What does that include – Ki Savo or Nitzovim-Vayelech? To avoid any doubts, we read both. Then we read Ha'azinu between Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur. Why are these parshiyos important? We can see why from the messages we get in these parshiyos.

היום הזה ה' אלקינו מצוה לעשות את החקים האלה ואת המשפטים ושמרת ועשית אותם בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך: את ה' האמרת היום להיות לך לאלקים וללכת בדרכיו ולשמר חקיו ומצותיו ומשפטיו ולשמע בקלו: וה' האמירך היום להיות לו לעם סגלה כאשר דבר לך ולשמר כל מצותיו: ולתתך עליון על כל הגוים אשר עשה לתהלה ולשם ולתפארת ולהיתר עם קדש לה' אלקינו כאשר דבר:

Rashi explains the first posuk:

היום הזה ה' אלקינו מצוה. בכל יום יהיו בעיניך חדשים, כאילו בו ביום נצטו עליהם:

People often slip into a pattern of routine and rote behavior. They are not enthusiastic about the upcoming yomim noraim because it means extra work and effort – selichos, longer davening, fasting, etc. But I can guarantee you that if you were accused of a serious crime and you have to plead your case in court in front of a judge, you wouldn't be complaining about getting up early for a few days in advance in order to prepare your case properly.

The question is simple: how real is the yom hadin to us? The challenge is that we have to make it real. As Rashi says, the mitzvos have to be fresh, they have to be treated like this is the first time we are hearing about the upcoming yom hadin and doing something about it. In U'nesaneh Tokef we see how awesome and fearful the yom hadin is, and we need to respond accordingly. Hashem is sitting and judging every human being on this planet with the middas hadin. We are working our heads off trying to merit the selichos and rachamim that is available to us when we prepare for the din properly. We need to take it seriously because whatever success or failure we will experience this coming year is being determined by the gezeirah on Rosh Hashono. We can't be apathetic or sluggish about it.

Why do we have extra long selichos on Erev Rosh Hashono? Because the next day starts the yom hadin! It is serious business and we better learn to take it seriously. We can't let it become a yearly routine burden.

Next, Rashi talks about our unique status among the nations:

האמרת והאמירך...ולי נראה שהוא לשון הפרשה והבדלה, הבדלתיו לך מאלהי הנכר להיות לך לאלקים, והוא הפרישך אליו מעמי הארץ להיות לו לעם סגולה, ומצאתי להם עד, והוא לשון תפארת, כמו יתאמרו כל פועלי און: כאשר דבר לך. והייתם לי סגולה: ולהיותך עם קדוש כאשר דבר. והייתם לי קדושים:

Hashem has separated us from all the nations of the world. We are different – as much as Jews try to deny it, we cannot escape the reality that Hashem has made us a different people. In order to fulfill our unique role in the world, Hashem gave us a unique neshomo that has a natural desire for kedushoh.

The Rambam in Hilchos Geirushin says a very important halacha. A husband who is required according to the din to divorce his wife, may be forced by the beis din to consent to giving a get – even under torture. And it is considered full, willful consent as the halacha requires! How can this be? The Rambam says that deep in the heart of

every Jew, the fundamental core of his being wants to keep Torah and mitzvos and obey the halacha. But he has all sorts of pressures and superficial desires which obscure this core will to follow the Torah, and it cannot be expressed. So beis din is allowed to beat him up and use a counter-pressure to offset the pressures to disobey the halacha. Then the real will of a person – which always remains pure – will emerge and he will give his full consent to listen to beis din and give his wife a get.

This is a very unique aspect of our personality which is different from all other people. We represent Hashem in this world and we are given special tools and protections to fulfill that mission.

Here is the list of what we are supposed to do:

את ה' האמרת היום להיות לך לאלקים וללכת בדרכיו ולשמר חקיו ומצותיו ומשפטיו ולשמע בקלו:

The first part of our mission is developing middos tovos – walking in the ways of Hashem and following His middos. This is what makes us into a superior human being, worthy of experiencing olom haboh as we explained last week.

Then there is the idea of לשמוע בקולו. Getting the proper message that each mitzvah is communicating to us how to serve Hashem.

All mitzvos are a means of serving Hashem and we have to perform them with the mindset that they are all parts of a multi-faceted program. So when we come into a beis midrash, we need to be conscious that we are entering a sanctuary – a mokom kodosh which requires we dress and conduct ourselves with a certain level of decorum of seriousness. We disrespect the beis midrash when we walk in to it sloppily dressed or not wearing shoes.

Moshe asked how can we imitate Hashem's middos and make a close relationship with Him? Hashem responds with the 13 middos of rachamim. This is how Hashem functions in this world and we use those same middos to establish a relationship. Shabbos is an opportunity to do a unique type of avodas Hashem as a day of kedushoh and menuchoh. It is not a time to simply socialize. These concepts have to be in the forefront of our minds when we go through our day and perform the mitzvos and develop the middos.

When we do all this, we become the עם סגולה – a superior nation.

וה' האמירך היום להיות לו לעם סגלה כאשר דבר לך ולשמר כל מצותיו: ולתתך עליון על כל הגוים אשר עשה לתהלה ולשם ולתפארת ולהיתר עם קדש לה' אלקינו כאשר דבר:

How often do we act in a way which inspires onlookers to have more admiration and respect for Hashem and His Torah? This is how we are always supposed to conduct ourselves. We were given a special neshomo, and we were taught how to uplift ourselves and become superior human beings – to be a role-model for the rest of the world to follow and admire. This is the goal of the bris we made, and it should influence everything we are doing. We can do that when we take our middos seriously, our mitzvos and avodas Hashem seriously, and our Torah learning seriously. We have the capacity to reach the highest levels a human being can possibly reach by putting Hashem before us in our minds at all times.

Then Hashem tells us something else:

When Klal Yisroel come to Eretz Yisroel there will be a significant adjustment period – after living a totally supernatural existence in the

midbor with mon falling on their doorstep, water streaming right in front of them, Moshe Rabbeinu saying a shiur every day, and the amud onon keeping them protected and comfortable and amud aish guiding them. It is an overwhelming experience. Hashem tells Klal Yisroel not to forget it and the lessons they learned as they go into a normal existence in Eretz Yisroel.

Then we have the brochos and kholos. Hashem gave us a unique neshomo which can elevate us beyond any spiritual heights that a non-Jew can reach. But this potential comes with a responsibility and consequences. If you fulfill your mission, there is no limit to the heights you can reach. If you don't, you will suffer the consequences.

The punishment comes because you didn't use the gifts you were given in the ways Hashem allowed and instructed. The mitzvos are a debt to Hashem for what He has given us. By abusing Hashem's gifts and violating His mitzvos, we are not paying the debt that we owe Hashem. Someone who doesn't pay his debts is a rosho. Rabbeinu Avrohom ben HoRambam says we are stealing from Hashem. That is what makes the aveiroh sinful and a sinner a rosho. Hashem takes care of us and gives us everything. But it comes with a debt, and we have to pay Hashem back by using the world He gave us properly.

We have a list of brochos and kholos which concludes with a powerful ending:

אָרוּר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָקִים אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם וְאָמַר כֹּל הָעָם אָמֵן:

Then we are told about all the brochos that are in store if we follow Hashem's instructions. We will lack nothing – wealth, health, children, safety, security, victory over our enemies, etc. Keeping the Torah will never cause us to lose out in the material advantages of this world. There is no down-side to keeping the Torah.

Going back to this final klolo. The Ramban quotes the Yerushalmi:

אשר לא יקים את דברי התורה הזאת... ובורושלמי בסוטה (פ"ז ה"ד) ראיתי אשר לא יקים וכי יש תורה נופלת רבי שמעון בן יקים אומר זה החזן רבי שמעון בן חלפתא אומר זה בית דין של מסן דמר רב יהודה ורב הונא בשם שמואל על הדבר הזה קרע יאשיהו ואמר עלי להקים אמר רבי אסי בשם רבי תנחום בר חייה למד ולימד ושמר ועשה והיה ספק בידו להחזיק ולא החזיק הרי זה בכלל ארוך.

ידרשו בהקמה הזאת בית המלך והנשיאות שבידם להקים את התורה ביד המבטלים אותה ואפילו היה הוא צדיק גמור במעשיו והיה יכול להחזיק התורה ביד הרשעים המבטלים אותה הרי זו ארוך וזה קרוב לענין שפירשנו.

ואמרו על דרך אגדה זה החזן שאינו מקים ספרי התורה להעמידן כתקן שלא יפלו ולי נראה על החזן שאינו מקים ספר תורה על הצבור להראות פני כתיבתו לכל כמו שמפורש במסכת סופרים (יד) שמגביהין אותו ומראה פני כתיבתו לעם העומדים לימינו ולשמאלו ומחזירו לפניו ולאחריו שמצוה לכל אנשים והנשים לראות הכתוב ולכרוע ולומר וזאת התורה אשר שם משה וגו' (לעיל ד מד) וכן נוהגין.

What is so special about the person doing hagboh after kriyas haTorah, that the gemara Megillah says he gets the sechar equivalent to everyone else? He is causing the entire tzibur to testify to the truth of the Torah when he raises it and everyone responds with וזאת התורה אשר שם משה.

The second explanation of this curse is the lesson that King Yoshiyahu

learned from it. It is referring to one who has the capacity to strengthen the Torah and inspire others to keep it and he declines. Before you do anything, you have to project to other people that you are living a superior life because of the Torah.

But this doesn't mean that I'm telling everyone they have to go out to the public and do who-knows-what. The Michtav m'Eliyahu says about the word השפעה that it comes from the root שפע. He explains that the most effective way to make an impact on other people is to fill yourself up with Torah and then it naturally overflows and effects everyone around you. First you have to fill yourself with Torah. Some believe you can influence people towards Torah without knowing what the Torah really is with any depth. This is a dangerous mistake and it leads to people having a very distorted understanding of Yiddishkeit. The only way to have a positive impact on others with Torah is after you fill yourself up with Torah to the point of overflowing.

King Yoshiyahu was a major talmid chochom and he was in a unique position of power as the king to instill the importance of Torah to Klal Yisroel. He turned over many people through his talents and position of influence. If you don't use the talents you have been given by Hashem to promote the interests of Torah, you will be subject to this curse. As a frum Jew, in any situation you find yourself and in any profession, you can have a positive impact on those around you – just by acting as a Ben Torah and living an uplifted and superior lifestyle. Hashem gave us all these tools, talents, and opportunities and we have to take this responsibility very seriously.

This is what Chazal required us to read before Rosh Hashono for the purpose of ending the year and all the troubles that we had. This coming year will be different because we are putting everything in perspective.

To review what I've said previously:

Selichos and long davening do not have to be a burden if you just take the time to prepare what you will be saying in advance. Becoming familiar with the content of these tefillos will help your attitude tremendously. There are very deep, lofty ideas in these tefillos and they will create a deeply meaningful experience. We are approaching a yom hadin and we have to take it seriously. If you don't know what you are saying and what you are reading, of course it will be torture! The solution isn't to make the davening shorter. The best solution is to understand what you are saying and why it makes a critical difference to your din and what happens the rest of the year.

What is the yom hadin about? Understanding that we are Hashem's nation and He has given each and every one of us a task to fulfill – with our lives in general and the year ahead in particular. We have to make ourselves Hashem's representatives in this world and become a superior people. Serving Hashem first and foremost means developing middos tovos. It is on the top of the list. Then we make sure that Hashem is in the forefront of our mind when we perform mitzvos. They are all darkei avodah, and this is how mitzvos become meaningful.

The reality of the yom hadin has to be real for you personally. No-one can make it real for you – you have to put in the time and the effort. The end result is that we become a superior nation which the rest of the world will admire and an am kodosh dedicated to avodas Hashem.