

As we approach Pesach, we have the four parshiyos: Parshas Shekalim, Zachor, Poroh and Hachodesh.

Parshas Poroh is very interesting. Tosfos has a puzzling shita which says Parshas Poroh is a krias haTorah de'Oraisoh. What is this parsha about and why is it read now? Pesach is coming up and in order to be able to eat the korban Pesach, we must be tahor. We read all about the poroh adumoh, which provides taharoh from tumas meis. But that doesn't explain why we still read Parshas Poroh today – when we have no korbonos.

The answer is that for many people, Moshiach's coming is a very far-away, almost theoretical possibility. It is not a real, potential event in their mind that could happen any day. The posuk in Novi says: וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּח לֵב יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר מִשְׁחֵי מֹשִׁיָּח. It is a mitzvah midivrei kaboloh to anxiously await the arrival of Moshiach. The Rambam says that it is not enough to believe in the eventual coming of Moshiach to be considered a ma'amin. You also have to eagerly anticipate his arrival in order to avoid being a kofer. It means that Moshiach's absence creates a deep void in your daily emotional life which you are desperately eager to fill. It's not just a nice ideal to think about. It is vital to you as a Jew to be able to live in the times of Moshiach.

The Rambam describes a ger as someone who makes a bris between himself and Hashem – parallel to how Klal Yisroel entered the bris at Har Sinai. But the Rambam adds the phrase that a ger must want: "להסתופף תחת כנפי השכינה". Where did the Rambam get this phrase? Boaz used it to refer to Rus' conversion to Yiddishkeit. It means that a person who wants to be Jewish wants to establish a strong and unique connection between himself and Hashem. The way to do this is by accepting the ol Torah and mitzvos upon oneself.

Why do we desperately want Moshiach? Why is it so important to our Yiddishkeit? Because, as the Rambam describes, once Moshiach arrives, all the burdens and distractions of living in golus will be removed, and we will finally be totally free to dedicate our lives to learning Torah and doing mitzvos at the highest level imaginable. It means we will all start understanding Hashem, connecting to Him in a deep and intimate way. Anyone who isn't anxious and eager for this time to arrive, doesn't really appreciate what Yiddishkeit is all about.

This kind of aspiration may not happen automatically. It may take time to work ourselves up to attain that level of anticipation. Many of us are so embedded in our comfortable lives that it holds us back from truly yearning for Moshiach and being capable of leaving all we have in golus behind. But once Moshiach actually arrives and everybody will appreciate the true meaning of why we are here, living a life of ruchniyus will be natural. You won't miss all the materialism you got accustomed to in golus.

As we approach Pesach, we say to ourselves that maybe this year the world will really turn around and Moshiach will come in time for us to bring the korban Pesach! Those feelings of anticipation start to build, and reading Parshas Poroh at this time strengthens those feelings. We are learning exactly what to do if it really happens before Pesach! It is part of the mitzvah of וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּח לֵב יִשְׂרָאֵל.

*

Usually, Parshas Poroh does not overlap with Parshas Vayakhel, but this year it does.

Let us review a central theme of many of these past parshiyos. In

Yisro we had Shabbos in the Aseres Hadibros. In Mishpotim, there is a reference to Shabbos. In Ki Sisoh and Vayakhel, Klal Yisroel are reminded that although there is a mitzvah to build the Mishkon, there is still the mitzvah to keep Shabbos. This is not obvious. The Ramban writes in the beginning of Parshas Terumah that Klal Yisroel experienced a tremendous gilui Shechinoh at Har Sinai. After Matan Torah, that experience ended. We are physical beings with a neshomo, and our physical bodies normally prevent our neshomos from connecting to ruchniyus to the fullest that our neshomo is capable of operating. But temporarily, standing at Har Sinai, those physical limitations were suspended. After ma'amad Har Sinai, Hashem wanted to make that natural ability for neshomos to connect to Him available on an ongoing basis – through the avodas haMishkon. This was the function of the Mishkon being in their midst at all times.

But there is a parallel goal – keeping Shabbos. Hashem wants us to testify about His creating the Universe in six days. We need to mention it verbally every Shabbos and be mindful of this reality of the purely spiritual basis of the entire physical universe at all times. It is a permanent bris that we have to internalize. We have to refrain from melocho activities to demonstrate this bris. One who violates Shabbos publicly, is violating the bris between himself and Hashem. This bris over Shabbos is what makes us Jewish, and one who violates this bris causes us to treat him as a non-Jew in many areas.

A person could have thought that the idea of a mishkon and bringing Hashem's presence into our lives is the most important thing we can do in Yiddishkeit! Certainly, it overrides any other mitzvah! But the pesukim in this parsha say no. Don't get carried away with this ultimate goal of having a mikdosh. It's true that avodas hakorbonos requires doing melocho on Shabbos. But that is only after the Mishkon is built and the Shechinoh is already being maintained in the Mishkon through specific aspects of the avodah. But we may not violate Shabbos in order to build the Mishkon.

This year, Erev Pesach falls out on Shabbos. It is rare and it won't happen again for another 20 years. And the question came up in Torah Sheba'al Peh if bringing the korban Pesach on Shabbos Erev Pesach is allowed to override Shabbos. The answer is that it is allowed – for all sorts of reasons. But building the mikdosh is not allowed. We can never forget the ongoing bris of Shabbos and testifying that Hashem created the world in six days.

While various people have problems reconciling the scientific age of the universe and the Torah's account of creation in six days, we have a totally different perspective of the issue. People should be aware that scientists like to vastly overstate their level of confidence in the theories they promote. The age of the universe in particular has undergone revisions of billions of years over the last few decades. We believe the world was created in six days out of total nothingness.

There is a balance between Shabbos and other mitzvos. Tekias Shofar is a tefilloh so intense that the gemara in Rosh Hashono says it is tantamount to reciting tefillos in the Kodosh haKodoshim! People don't appreciate how special this mitzvah is. But Chazal had a problem – if we allow blowing shofar on Shabbos Rosh Hashono, it may someday lead to someone accidentally carrying it in reshus harabim. So out of that intense concern for chillul Shabbos, Chazal cancelled this special once-a-year tefilloh of tekias shofar on Shabbos for all Klal Yisroel for all Jewish history! Imagine what kind of statement that is making about the preciousness of Shabbos. And the same thing goes for taking Lulav

on Shabbos. These are mitzvos de'Oraishoh!

There are two groups of mitzvos bein odom lemokom which are chayav misoh – Avoda Zoro and Chillul Shabbos. Why? Because breaking Shabbos is breaking the relationship with Hashem.

The important dimension to all this is what you are supposed to do when keeping Shabbos. It is a yom menuchoh and kedushoh. Many people keep Shabbos for the 'menuchoh'. But the ikkar of Shabbos is the 'kedushoh', and this is why Chazal instituted krias haTorah and limud Torah on Shabbos. When the Rambam describes the ideal schedule for one's Shabbos, he says half the day should be spent in tefilloh and learning Torah. Shabbos is a day we refrain from activity to attest that Hashem created the world in six days, and we have a special bris with a unique connection with Hashem.

Unfortunately, although many people technically keep Shabbos, they don't tap into the intense kedushoh of Shabbos. A kedushoh that is so strong that Chazal cancelled mitzvos de'Oraishoh of millions of Jews for thousands of years because they were concerned that some Jew might accidentally violate Shabbos sometime in the future. Once people focus only on menuchoh and forget about kedushoh, they

easily get bored and do all kinds of things to distract themselves until Shabbos is finally over. They shmooze, get drunk, and get involved in all kinds of stupidities. But we have to remember that Hashem makes us kodosh through the activities of Shabbos. We have to tune into that kedushoh through the extra tefillos, the seudos and the zemiros, the krias haTorah and limud haTorah, etc.

Shabbos is the backbone of Yiddishkeit. As long as a Jew keeps Shabbos in the right way, he is strongly connected to Hashem and the rest of the bris. If he violates Shabbos, he severs his connection to Hashem, and his Yiddishkeit will fall apart. This was the tragedy of generations of Jews who came to the western world from Eastern Europe and were lost because of the nisoyon of keeping Shabbos. The ones who passed the nisoyon of Shabbos kept their Yiddishkeit intact.

We have to find a way to tune in to the kedushoh of Shabbos. We need to use all the extra aspects of tosefes shevach to connect to Shabbos in a positive way and appreciate what we have. If you take the sedorim of Shabbos seriously and you don't use it as an opportunity to tune out of ruchniyus, then Shabbos can elevate you for the entire week. Your time in yeshiva is an opportunity to make Shabbos special and infused with ruchniyus for the rest of your life.