

PARSHAS EMOR

תשפ"ה

There is a tremendous amount of material to discuss in these parshiyos and it is sometimes hard to decide what to focus on. There is an important story which people overlook, but there are tremendous lessons to be learned from this story.

וַיָּצֵא בֶן אִשָּׁה יִשְׂרָאֵלִית וְהוּא בֶן אִישׁ מִצְרִי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּנָּצוּ בַּמִּחְנֶה בֶן הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית וְאִישׁ הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִי: וַיִּקֶּבּ בֶּן הָאִשָּׁה הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית אֶת הַשֵּׁם וַיִּקְלַל וַיִּבְיֵאוּ אוֹתוֹ אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְנָשָׂא אִמּוֹ שְׁלֵמִית בֵּת דָּבָרִי לְמִטָּה דָן: וַיִּנְיְחוּהוּ בַּמִּשְׁכָּן לִפְרֹשׁ לָהֶם עַל פִּי ה':

This fellow who cursed Hashem was the product of an act of znus between a Jewish woman and an Egyptian man. The Ramban here introduces the whole topic of what was the status of Klal Yisroel before matan Torah – were they Jews? Were they non-Jews? Non-Jewish lineage follows the father, and Jewish lineage follows the mother. If Klal Yisroel before matan Torah had the status of non-Jews, then this person was a non-Jew. If they had the status of Jews, then this individual was Jewish and he didn't need conversion. Rashi says he converted. So Rashi is assuming he was born a non-Jew even though he had a Jewish mother – because Klal Yisroel had the status of non-Jews.

This individual curses Hashem and he is detained until Moshe figures out what to do.

The Torah says his mother is Shlomis bas Divri from Shevet Dan. He is totally anonymous. Rashi brings the Chazal which gives us the background to this person's Egyptian father.

בן איש מצרי. הוא המצרי שהרגו משה: בתוך בני ישראל. מלמד שנתגייר: וינצו במחנה. על עסקי המחנה: ...ושם אמו שלומית בת דברי. שבחן של ישראל שפרסמה הכתוב לזו לומר, שהיא לבדה היתה זונה: שלמית. דהות פטטה שלם עלך, שלם עלך, שלם עליכון, מפטטת בדברים, שואלת בשלום הכל: בת דברי. דברנית היתה, מדברת עם כל אדם לפיכך קלקלה:

He was the Egyptian taskmaster who Moshe killed after Moshe observed him viciously beating a fellow Jew. Why was this taskmaster trying to kill this Jew? It was because this taskmaster would come to this Jew's home every morning to bring him to work. And this Jew's wife, Shlomis bas Divri, was a very friendly, shmoozy lady who would enthusiastically greet and chat with everyone she encountered – man, woman, Jew, Egyptian – it didn't matter. Shockingly, this including her husband's brutal taskmaster!

The taskmaster thinks this woman is interested in him because of her friendliness. So one day, he takes her husband out to the field to work, and comes back to be with her and she conceives this child who later curses Hashem. The husband comes back from the field and senses his wife was violated by this Egyptian, and the Egyptian starts to beat him mercilessly. That is when Moshe Rabbeinu kills the Egyptian.

This child is either Jewish, or he converted, but he does not have a Jewish father in any event. This means he will not belong to any shevet since the identity of one's shevet is determined only by the father. If he has no Jewish father, he has no shevet. But because of his mother, he wanted to attach himself to shevet Dan. He got into a dispute with people in shevet Dan who said he didn't belong. So he was going to be put in the area of Machane Yisroel which was for geirim and Eirev Rav and anyone who had no shevet. But he realized that when they will eventually come to Eretz Yisroel, he won't be given any portion of land. He will be homeless. He became angry at Hashem for setting up such a system and he cursed Hashem.

What does it mean to curse Hashem? Is Hashem subject to some kind of misfortune? The answer is that those who learn Nefesh HaChaim understand that one of Hashem's major goals for creation is to infuse it with Hashem's brocho. Jews take an active part in bringing Hashem into the world. When we say "Boruch Atoh Hashem" we declare that Hashem is the source of brocho and this declaration itself brings more of Hashem's shefa brocho down into our lives and elevates the world with kedushoh. But this person is saying that he would prefer that Hashem have less of an impact in his world. Hashem's influence in his life – through the laws of the Torah Hashem set up – are causing him misery, so he wishes that Hashem's influence becomes minimal. This is what it means to curse Hashem.

This person is chayov misoh. Why? Because he is openly articulating his wish for Hashem to get out of this world.

Why was it so important for the Torah to tell us who this person is and what dispute led him to curse Hashem? It is because this story highlights the importance of something we learn from a later part of the Chumash – where Klal Yisroel are being counted. The Torah tells us they are all able to be counted based on their father's lineage. It was made clear to everyone that there were no illegitimate children. Despite all their suffering at the hands of the Egyptians, and being under their total control, the women stayed absolutely loyal to their husbands, and the Egyptians could not disrupt the purity of the Jewish family unit.

Shlomis Bas Divri was the only one – out of the entire nation of Jewish women – who deviated from this norm. It was just because she was overly friendly to her husband's master – a slight indiscretion in modesty! She didn't actively try to commit znus! But this slight indiscretion led the Egyptian to believe that she was interested in him and he pursued what he saw as an opportunity that she was offering. Everything was very subtle. This was the only breach in tzniyus from all the years of Klal Yisroel living in Egypt among the most decadent of people.

It is a powerful lesson about the impact of a slight breach in tzniyus. You never know in advance how far it will go. It is also a lesson about Klal Yisroel's incredible fidelity and commitment to family purity. Even when the Egyptians tried to separate the Jewish couples, by sending the husbands away to work overnight, the Jewish women made an extra effort to keep the family unit together and have children. They showed their dedication to the survival of Klal Yisroel and went out to take care of their husband's needs.

In Parshas Pekudei, Hashem told Moshe to accept the copper mirrors of the Jewish women to make the kiyor and the kano. These mirrors were used by the women to beautify themselves for their husbands in Egypt while they were slaves. Moshe thought it was inappropriate to use such items in the service of the yetzer horo for the Mishkon. Hashem said just the opposite. These mirrors were used to ensure they remained faithful, and that Klal Yisroel remained on the highest level of kedushoh and taharoh imaginable under those extreme circumstances of golus Mitzrayim.

On the one hand, these women exercised extreme tzniyus to make sure not a single Egyptian had any impression that they were available for an affair. On the other hand, they made sure they kept themselves attractive to their husbands and continued the survival of the Jewish people with kedushoh. That is what Hashem wants to use for the

Mishkon.

This son of Shlomis bas Divri converted. But it seems like it was a conditional acceptance of Torah and mitzvos. When the halacha produced an outcome that put him at a serious disadvantage in life, he rejected it. But sometimes the Torah doesn't tell you what you want to hear. Sometimes the Torah makes uncomfortable demands, and we can't pick and choose the things we like from the things we don't like. This is what kabbolas ol malchus shomayim and kabbolas ol mitzvos is all about.

On the gemara in Rosh Hashono daf 28 which says מצוות לאו ליהנות, Rashi explains that although we have many inspiring mitzvos in Yiddishkeit – like going through a Pesach seder, which is so uplifting, so elevating – but there are also mitzvos which aren't so inspiring. There are mitzvos which are hard to keep. But we are mekabel ol malchus shomayim and it doesn't matter which kind of mitzvah it is – easy or hard – we obey Hashem's command.

I recently met someone, and we were sharing stories about our family members who were European immigrants to the United States and were not able to hold a steady job because they kept Shabbos. They were routinely fired for not working on Saturday. But that is what kabbolas ol malchus shomayim means.

Today, people sell Torah and mitzvos because they are 'geshmak'. Shabbos is geshmak, learning is geshmak, etc. And it is true! Learning is very enjoyable – the most enjoyable activity I can think of. But not always – sometimes you get stuck and it is difficult! But you work through it anyway, even when it isn't geshmak.

So this Jew, this Ben ish Mitzri said, I know I was misgayer, but I don't want to accept this difficult halacha. He tells Hashem: "stay out of my world." The punishment for such a person is sekiloh.

The parsha really should end there, but it continues to talk about different punishments for damages and murder. When you kill an animal you pay money, but when you kill a human being, you are executed. Why is there a difference? The posuk in Parshas Noach explains:

שָׁפָךְ דָּם הָאָדָם בְּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפָךְ כִּי בְצִלְם אֱלֹקִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם:

The human being is unique because he is endowed with a tzelem Elokim. And when you confront another human being, you have to perceive that he has a tzelem Elokim, just like you – and this requires you to treat him with dignity and respect. If you can't perceive the tzelem Elokim in other people, and you treat them like you would treat an animal, then it indicates that you don't appreciate the fact that you have a tzelem Elokim as well. When a person devalues human life to

the extent that he eliminates another person because he gets in your way, then you have forfeited the value that your own life has, and you deserve to die as well. Human beings are not pets or livestock that are there to serve you. They aren't to be treated as property that you can just do with as you please.

Back to the topic of tzniyus that we started with.

Why is tzniyus such a foundational idea in Yiddishkeit? It is because it contributes to your self-definition. If you view yourself as a neshomo, a tzelem Elokim, then you want other people to relate to you accordingly. You don't want to emphasize your guf to others because then they will relate to you primarily as a guf, and that is not how you identify the core of who you are. This issue is more prominent for women, because men have more of a tendency to be distracted by a woman's outer appearance than vice-versa. If a woman will emphasize her guf, then that is certainly how men will perceive her. Eventually, she will come to identify herself primarily as a guf as well. This is the image she is projecting to the world, and ultimately this is what she will come to believe about herself. If you present yourself as a neshomo to the world, then you will value the neshomo aspect of yourself more and more as well.

This is why tzniyus is so crucial. It is how a Jew defines the most core part of his identity – a neshomo rather than a guf.

This goes for men as well. It is puzzling to me why young men prefer to keep the upper buttons of their shirt open to reveal their chest hair – as if they need to reassure people that they are men? Facial hair isn't enough? Is it some great achievement that Hashem gave you this set of hormones?

Tzniyus needs to dominate the husband-and-wife relationship as well. They are two human beings with a tzelem Elokim, and relate to each other as both guf and neshomo.

This is why this parsha begins with the danger of not keeping gidrei tzniyus, and ends with the difference between human beings and animals. Because without meticulously keeping up gidrei tzniyus, znus becomes much more likely, and devaluating the tzelem Elokim in yourself and people around you is the inevitable result. When you emphasize the guf and project it to the world, you lose the sensitivity to the difference between humans and animals. You never know how far it will take you.

This is why the Torah goes out of its way to give us the background of who this Ben Ish Mitzri was. We need to know what happened to Shlomis bas Divri to appreciate how important the maintaining of gidrei tzniyus is.