

B”H

REDEMPTION – WHEN ACTION LEADS TO GREATER KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

What did the student say when he was accused of copying off another student on a test?

“There was absolutely no cheating going on here; this was team work ...”

WHICH COMES FIRST, KNOWLEDGE OR ACTION?

This week, we will read parshas Eikev which contains the second paragraph of the Shema known as “V’haya Im Shamo.” last week, at the end of Vaeschanan, we read the parsha of “Shema.” No doubt, these two parshiyos, Shema and V’haya, which comprise (together with the parsha of Tzitzis) the reading of Shema, are the most familiar parshiyos in the Torah. Every religious Jew knows these parshiyos by heart. Even children can recite them without batting an eye.

We are used to looking at these parshiyos as a unit, as a sequence of Torah and tefilla. Few discern the differences between them. Some of the more knowledgeable among us will quote the mishna (Brachos 2,2) which explains that the parsha of Shema is about accepting the yoke of heaven while the parsha of V’haya is about accepting the yoke of mitzvos. Those who study Chassidus will repeat the famous observation that in V’haya the command to love G-d “with all your might” is not repeated (just “with all your hearts and all your souls”).

However, do you know or did you ever notice such a significant difference between these parshiyos that this difference represents the difference between exile and redemption, between this world and the world to come?

This is not about the difference in a word, nor a difference in meaning. It’s a subtle difference, hidden below the surface, so that it’s likely that most readers never noticed it before.

In the parsha of Shema there first appears a command to study Torah (“and teach it to your children and speak in them”) and only then comes the command about doing mitzvos (“and bind them as a sign on your hand and as totafos between your eyes”). In the second parsha, it’s the other way round. First there is “and bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be totafos between your eyes,” and only then, “and teach your children to speak in them.”

The question is why, what’s the reason for the difference? And how does this difference teach us anything about the true and complete Geula?

There’s the famous talmudic debate (Kiddushin 40b) about which is greater, “talmud,” i.e. Torah study or “maaseh,” i.e. action, mitzva fulfillment. Based on this, Chassidus explains the changes in the order of the verses in the two parshiyos of Shema. In the first parsha, talmud precedes maaseh in accordance with the view that “talmud is greater,” that there is something greater about talmud over maaseh. In the second parsha, the order is reversed in accordance with the view that “maaseh gadol.” It sounds like a perfect fit, doesn’t it? Two parshiyos for two views!

The problem is that the Gemara concludes the discussion with the unequivocal, “they held a vote and concluded that talmud is greater for it leads to maaseh.” Then, what about the parsha of V’haya? Why is the order there different than the final verdict?

Chassidus has an answer for that too. This talmudic psak is just for now, but in the future, in the time of the Geula, the verdict will change and then maaseh will be greater!

It turns out then, that the difference between the parsha of Shema and the parsha of V’haya is the difference between the time of exile and the time of Geula. The parsha of Shema is the more expressive of the actual reality in the here and now, because now, “talmud is greater.” The parsha of V’haya represents the time of Geula when “action is greater.” The Mittler Rebbe uses this idea to explain the beginning of the parsha of V’haya. The words, “V’haya Im” (and it will be, when ...) are speaking in a narrative tone; it is not a command or a warning. The Torah is not utilizing authoritarian language here (as in tzav-command or daber-speak). The Torah is merely telling us what will happen. This is actually a quiet prophecy of a time when all of Israel will “*shamoa tishme’u* - surely hear/listen” to the mitzvos and commands of the Torah at the end of days.

MORE TO ACTION THAN MEETS THE EYE

There is a simple question though. How can one do mitzvos before learning? How can one put on tefillin without knowing the laws of tefillin or how can one keep Shabbos without being knowledgeable in the laws of Shabbos?

The Rebbe answers this question with a quote from the Medrash (Medrash Tehillim 73) along with a fantastic mashal. “In this world, when a person goes to pick figs on Shabbos, the fig says nothing, but in the future if a person goes to pick a fig on Shabbos, it will scream: It’s Shabbos today!” Just like a child doesn’t put his hand into fire and even an animal won’t run into flames, that’s how we will be in the era of Geula. The G-dly truth will shine so clearly that we won’t need to think twice. Mitzva fulfillment will be natural, part of our normal way of life. G-d will remove the spirit of impurity from the earth and therefore, committing sins will be out of the question, just like thrusting one’s hand into fire or running toward an oncoming car.

So, we addressed the difference (action before study). We explained the reason for the difference (in the future, action will be greater), and even explained how this difference can be (mitzva fulfillment will become natural or second nature). What still needs to be addressed is the logic behind the difference. Today, before the Geula, logic leads us to decide that talmud is greater because “study leads to action – he ends up with both” (ibid, with Rashi). Talmud/study includes within it and leads to both which is unlike mitzva observance which does not lead to Torah study, which is why it is lacking.

How can we bridge this gap in Yemos HaMoshiach? What will change? Will action lead to study?! If yes, how?

Chassidus explains that mitzva fulfillment is connected with the power of action, the lowest faculty of man, while Torah study is associated with the power of intellect, the highest faculty of man. Nowadays, logic dictates that in order to achieve utter self-nullification and submission to G-d’s will, we must first convince the intellect. This will lead to the emotions and feelings being included too, which will exert influence on the lowest faculty – the power of action.

In the true and complete Geula, on the other hand, the G-dly source of the power of action will be revealed, as per

the well-known Chassidic rule, “the end is wedged in the beginning and the beginning in the end.” That means, that the power of action (“the end”) is sourced in the highest level of the soul (“the beginning” - essence of the soul) and the essence of the soul (“the beginning”) is revealed primarily through action (“the end”), but the root and source is hidden during exile. It is revealed only in the Geula. Therefore, in the future, when the supernal source of action – i.e. the essence of the soul, is revealed, it will contain all the other soul powers including the faculty of intellect!

In light of this, the Rebbe explains that it is very understandable how, in the future, action will also include study, at least on the spiritual plane, because action embodies the essence of the soul which includes within it all soul powers!

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We will end with a few short stories about R' Hillel of Paritch which will illustrate how action includes study. The Tzemach Tzedek said about R' Hillel that there hadn't been a tzaddik like R' Hillel in the realm of actual deed in 300 years. For example, R' Hillel had a practice of being the one to raise the Sefer Torah at mincha on Shabbos. Toward the end of his life, he suffered from a severe hernia. One Shabbos, the hernia ruptured and R' Hillel was confined to bed.

The Chassidim arranged the tefillos of Shabbos around his bedside at home. When it was time for mincha, R' Hillel asked that they bring him closer to the bima where the Torah reading was taking place. The Chassidim mistakenly thought it was because R' Hillel did not hear well. How surprised they were when, at the end of the Torah reading, R' Hillel leaped out of bed, grasped the Sefer Torah, and raised it, a veritable miracle. Mesirus nefesh to fulfill a hiddur and minhag.

R' Hillel was very particular to avoid shaatnez which is why he never wore a woolen garment and never sat on an upholstered chair (in fear of shaatnez). One time, when he had yechidus with the Tzemach Tzedek, a lengthy yechidus nearly an hour and half long, the Tzemach Tzedek offered R' Hillel an upholstered chair. What did R' Hillel do? He seemed to sit but was actually hovering in the air for the entire hour and a half!

When they asked R' Hillel why he was so particular about mitzvos he said: in order to merit to better understand Chassidus!

So we see how fulfilling mitzvos includes Torah study, just as in the Geula!

Good Shabbos!