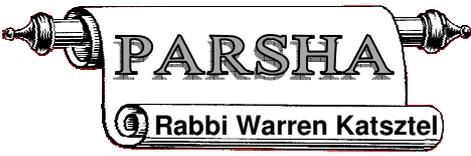




TORAT HAR SHIMUEL



PARSHA

Rabbi Warren Katszel

ON BARNs AND CHILDREN

In Parashas Matos, there is a heated exchange between

Moshe Rabbeinu and the tribes of Reuven & Gad. Due to the rich pasture land, these two tribes desired to remain on the opposite side of the Jordan while the remaining tribes occupy Eretz Yisroel proper. When the leadership of these two tribes approach Moshe Rabbeinu to seek permission to remain there, Moshe expresses great fear that this will end badly as did the incident with the spies. Therefore, he was strongly opposed to the arrangement. The tribes reach an agreement with Moshe Rabbeinu. They will set up barns for their animals and houses for their children at present. They will then follow the rest of the people and actively participate in conquering the land and settling it, (events totaling fourteen years). Only after that process is completed will they return to Transjordan and join their families. Moshe agrees to this, and the text of the Torah serves as a blueprint regarding how conditional arrangements are to be worded.

In the process of finalizing the agreement, there is an interesting change that Moshe makes. When making their request, the two tribes first express that they will build barns for their livestock and then establish cities for their children. When Moshe confirms this, he reverses the order and says (first) build cities for your children and then barns for the livestock. Chazal take note of the order presented by Reuven and Gad followed by Moshe's reversal, and are strong in the mussar they provide regarding the priorities of the two tribes. Take care of your children first and then provide shelter for the animals. The tribes appear to have their priorities backwards.

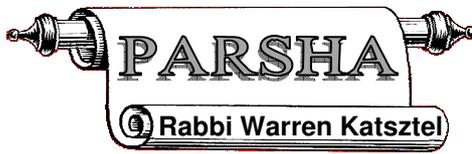
There is a very logical and yet overlooked question one can ask on this. We're talking about our ancestors!! These people experienced daily miracles throughout their stay in the desert. They knew Hashem in a way that no generation since then has ever experienced. Moshe Rabbeinu was their Rebbi. Is it logical to assume that they would ever build barns for their animals prior to making sure their families had shelter?? Absolutely not!! So what's going on here?? How are we to understand the exchange above??

The Bais Yosef asks this question and provides a brilliant an-

swer. If you take a look at today's political situation, when Israel is forced to enter Gaza to wipe out the terrorist element, they have to move, at great risk, from one house to the next, uncovering terrorists hiding in closets. Entire neighborhoods have been leveled because of the hand to hand combat fought under these circumstances. When Bnai Yisroel fought Og and the nation of Bashan as well as Sichon & the Amorites, a miracle took place. The entire population, men, women & children came to the front line in the hope of wiping out Bnai Yisroel. Baruch Hashem, G-d handed them over to us and we were victorious. The consequence of their strategy was that entire cities were left totally intact since the war was fought with everyone's participation. The battle was waged away from where they lived. The reason the tribes of Reuven and Gad were able to build barns for their animals was because the houses previously occupied by our enemies were furnished and ready to move into. Nothing needed to be done!! Just bring your belongings and make yourself comfortable.

Moshe was conveying a very important message to the tribes. They may have had houses to move into, but they were not homes. Their first priority before settling the animals was to make sure that the "house" to "home" transformation was completed. All the avoda zara had to be removed. They had to set up a Shul, a Bais Midrash and Yeshiva, a Kollel, and make sure proper mikvaos were built. What was lacking was the Jewish infrastructure that transforms houses into homes, a secular neighborhood into a Jewish community. From the perspective of priorities, all this had to precede the building of barns and stables.

Permit me please to add a huge mussar haskil that we can learn from this. Back in the 1950s, the Jewish Theological Seminary and the conservative movement determined it was better for a Jew to drive to Shul on Shabbos and daven with a minyan than to daven by oneself at home. One was only allowed to drive to and from Shul – no shopping, no entertainment, only there and back. They thought they were being generous, and the compromise would precipitate greater attendance in their Synagogues. The consequences of their decision were destructive to our people for one very simple reason. Until this time, most Jewish families, even those not observant, first found the Shul they wanted to affiliate with, and then a home within walking distance. It was this philosophy and lifestyle that secured the viability and positive influence of Jewish neighborhoods. Once this decision was rendered, it was no long-



er necessary to live in a Jewish neighborhood. One could live amongst the well to do goyim because it was OK to

drive to Shul on Shabbos. Without the infrastructure of the Jewish neighborhood in place, large scale assimilation amongst our people rose dramatically in the United States. Within a short period of time, complete chilul Shabbos was the norm. The Jewish home, and by extension the neighborhood said home was located in, has always been viewed as the center of Jewish observance – not the Synagogue. It's the Jewish infrastructure that Moshe Rabbeinu recognized then that secured the religious viability of Reuven and Gad, and continues to secure our Jewish identity today.

The exchange between the Reuven Gad union and Moshe Rabbeinu speaks about priorities. I find it interesting that when the concept is introduced by the tribes, they don't speak about their families but about their "tapaynu", their little ones. Only at the end of the exchange are their wives brought into the equation. Raising our children is deemed successful if we transmit to them our Mesorah in living, breathing color. The entire concept of Mesorah is defined as handing down to the next generation that which has throughout our history defined the essence of who we are. The word "tapaynu" clearly defines for us when this process of transference is to begin: A moment after our children are born!! I say "for us" purposefully, because it's the first opportunity for parents to begin raising their child. The fact is that at that moment, we are inheriting a responsibility that was already completed. Our children learn everything, Kol HaTorah Kulo, with a precious angel while in their mother's womb, only to forget it when they are born. HaRav Yosef Soloveichik asks why the unborn child goes through this entire process if he/she is destined to forget everything?? The Rov's answer shines a "Yom Echad" light on the kindness Hashem bestows upon His people. It's easier to grasp Torah knowledge the second time around since it's a matter of recall, which is easier than learning anew. Understanding the *entire* blessing that comes with a newborn child is an integral part of establishing the priorities discussed in Parashas Matos. A Jewish child is born as a "Kleeh Kodosh", a living holy vessel programmed to re-receive the word of Hashem Yisborach.

It's interesting to note how the first paragraph of Shema is laid out. How one loves HKB'H and carries that love upon their heart is unique to each individual. The first objective, action based concept appearing in the Shema is to teach our children Torah. There are two concepts that we have to imbue in our children: Avodas Hashem and Ahavas Hashem. When it comes to Ahavas Hashem, we concretize the emotional commitment by looking back and recognizing Hashem's constant love and presence in our history, both personal and national. To only look back is not enough. We're challenged to simultaneously identify with past and present, to be both here and there within the framework of time. That famous line directly from the Pesach Haggada calls upon every person throughout the generations to view them self as if they were part of Yetzias Mitzrayim, the Exodus. This simultaneously defines our love and concretizes our present and future commitment to all that our heritage stands for.

Avodas Hashem is very different. It calls upon us to observe Mitzvos for one reason. Because we were commanded to by Hashem

Yisborach. We are permitted to intellectualize the process and discover reasons why we do what we do. But at the end of the day, Avodas Hashem is just that: Serving Hashem Yisborach "lishma" as we were commanded to. Within this framework, there is nothing simple, "poshut" in being a "poshoto Yid" – a simple Jew. Working through Shas calls upon us to concertize our Avodah through learning the intricacies, the finest details of what each letter of the Torah comes to convey. And yet, with all that knowledge, what makes our love for Hashem real is because we can set this entire educational, knowledge based process aside and do what we do, live as we live, simply because Hashem Yisborach told us to.

Indeed, if we examine the myriad of Gedolay Torah that have lived throughout the generations, as much as we respect them for what they know, our greater love and Kavod for them is because of who they are. The entire educational process we call "limud Ha'Torah" refines everyone's character. And for Gedolay Torah, it's the combination of their intellectual Torah knowledge, both in quantity and quality, combined with the shine of their Neshamos in their Avodas Hashem that makes them worthy of the communal respect they enjoy.

Jewish vision is remarkably unique. Why does history repeat itself? Because in the secular world, the greater focus is on this moment and the future. When the Jew looks to build his/her future, we bring our entire heritage from the past in designing a plan that will both sanctify that moment we call the present and chart a time tested course moving forward. We spend years teaching our children about our past, our heritage before we permit them to take up their place as adults and begin the process of building their personal and our national future. Our necks are not stiff from looking back. The fact that this formula has worked for thousands of years proves that we're doing something right.

Reuven and Gad may have had their priorities reversed, but we have to credit them for knowing what those priorities should be. Get the barns built so that the women and children can take care of the animals with the least amount of difficulty possible. But first, as per Moshe Rabbeinu, make sure all the Klay Kodosh are in place so that the children, who will be called upon to spend fourteen years without their fathers at home, will have every opportunity to grow into responsible Jewish adults. The reason half of the tribe of Menashe was added to those who settled on the other side of the Jordan was to insure that the proper education would be provided. They were responsible for setting the highest standard possible of Ahavas Hashem and Avodas Hashem Yisborach combined with limud Ha'Torah. Without fathers present, the children needed the best of everything made available to them.

May Hashem Yisborach bless all of us with the tools and the capability to raise our children in a manner that permits us to see them be M'Kadesh Shaim Shamayim in their everyday lives. Indeed, in this zechus may all of us be zoche to enjoy the Geulah *this year, before tisha b'Av*.

