Parshas Shemos

Rabbi Avi Metchik

This weeks Parsha begins with a counting of the Jewish people who came to Egypt. The Torah lists each of the twelve brothers by name and then says the total number of people who descended to Egypt was seventy.

Rashi comments on this: "Even though Hashem had already counted them by name during their lifetime, He counted them again after their death to make known how precious they were to Him. The Jewish people are compared to the stars which Hashem brings in and out each day by number and by name, as it says (Yeshaya 40:26): "He who takes out their hosts by number; He calls them all by name."

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l poses an obvious question on Rashi. He asks, what is behind the praise of the Jewish Nation that they are comparable to stars? What is Rashi trying to tell us here with this comparison?

Rav Moshe explains Rashi with a beautiful idea into our Avodas Hashem, into our performance of Torah and Mitzvos. We know that Hashem created this world with the power of bechira, with free will. A person has the option of choosing to go in the way that Hashem desires, or chas ve'shalom going the opposite way. It is an amazing thing to come to a proverbial fork in the road, for a person to think it over and then choose to go down the path of the righteous. However, Rav Moshe writes there is one madreiga, one level up from this. That is when a person is able to say to himself "I know this act is forbidden, therefore there's no choice here at all whether to do it or not. Of course I will not violate the will of my Creator".

This idea is also found in Devarim 12:17 in the laws of ma'aser sheini, the possuk tells us "in your cities you may not eat it". Rashi brings the explanation of Rav Yehoshua ben Karcha who says of course you are able to eat it in your cities, however you are not permitted to do so. The idea here, Rav Moshe says, is that we need to change our psyche to reflect the idea that we cannot do anything Hashem does not want us to do. That is why the Torah uses the language of not being able to eat it.

of the legendary Mirrer Mashgiach Rav Yerucham Levovitz zt"l what it truly means to be mekabel ol malchus shamayim, to truly accept the yoke of heaven upon ourselves. It is a tremendous thing to come to a situation of a test, to deliberate over which path to take and then choose the right path. However, Rav Yerucham says a person can choose to give back their power of free will to Hashem. They can say that for me there are no choices. I only have one path before me, I can only do what Hashem wants from me. Of course we are only human, and as such we will inevitably slip up, however this is the most ideal attitude a person can have.

> " *to truly accept upon ourselves the yoke of heaven* "

This attitude is the key to understanding the comparison to stars that we find in Rashi in our parsha. The stars never question what Hashem tells them. When Hashem says to go they go and when Hashem says to come back they come back. The stars never consider the option of not listening to what Hashem asks of them. So too was the attitude of the 12 holy brothers. They approached their service of Hashem with this attitude, of course they could choose their path but of course they were only going to do what Hashem wanted at that moment. Physically there was a choice but practically there was none.

This concept is also found in the writings of Rav Shimon Schwalb zt"l on Parshas Chukas. He writes in the name

The more we can apply this attitude in our daily lives the more we will grow spiritually. If we can tell ourselves when the alarm clock rings "of course I am getting up to go to shachris, this is what Hashem wants so I must do it", the higher the odds a person will get up. The more a person deliberates over it the more comfortable the pillow will seem. The more a person views his Avodas Hashem as a choice the less likely he will be to always make the right decision. The more a person can view his Avodas Hashem as the only way to go the more they will grow.

Good Shabbos!

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