

Parshas Emor

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Parshas Emor is known as the parsha of the yomim tovim as it contains detailed descriptions of all the biblical holidays that dot the Jewish calendar. Oftentimes the Torah reading on yom tov will be taken from this parsha. The Torah describes the yomim tovim of pesach, then shavuot and then goes on to describe rosh hashana, yom kippur and sukkos.

However, right after the portion for shavuot we find a possuk that does not seem to fit the pattern. The Torah tells us (Vayikra 23:22) "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte you shall leave them; I am Hashem your G-d". What is the reasoning behind this insertion? Why immediately after Shavuot does the Torah deem it necessary to write about the mitzvah of taking care of the poor in our community?

Rashi on this possuk brings this question in the name of the Sifra. He says that the Sifra answers in the name of Rav Avdimi ben Rav Yose that the Torah is teaching us here that if someone treats the poor correctly, and leaves the corners of his field untended, Hashem will regard him as if he had built the Beis Hamikdash and offered all the korbanos for the yom tov. This is the power of properly taking care of the poor in our community.

The Meshech Chochmah brings an alternative explanation to this question. He says that the cause for celebration on the yom tov of shavuot is that we were fortunate to receive the Torah of Hashem and we rejoice in

that. We know that the Torah contains many mitzvos and that mitzvos can be broken down into two categories. Some mitzvos fall into the category of chukkim while the others are in the category of mishpatim. Mishpatim are mitzvos which make sense and we most probably would have performed them even if the Torah had not instructed us to do so. Chukkim are the mitzvos which we would never have thought of performing if not for the explicit commandment from Hashem.

For example, we are all familiar with the mitzvah to honor our parents, and the prohibition against murder. Even people

forbid murder would I really shoot dead my neighbor who blocked my driveway with his car?

He explains that the lesson here is that the only values that have ever lasting capabilities are the ones demanded by the Torah. Everything else is subject to change, depending on the times and the circumstances. We can see with our own eyes how radically societal norms have shifted from ten, twenty and even fifty years ago. Only Torah values have the power to last forever, and remain relevant, no matter the situation or circumstances. Even the thinking pro-

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who have no connection to Torah, or people who are not even Jewish will agree that these make sense and most decent human beings will perform these actions whether the Torah demands it or not. These are examples of mishpatim.

However, let's look at the mitzvah of eating kosher food. Would we have known this intuitively without the Torah? Most probably we would not have been abstaining from consuming this type of animal or that specific fish without the explicit instructions of the Torah. The Meshech Chochmah says this is an example of the chukkim category, which are mitzvos we would not have intuitively performed without the Torah.

He goes on to say that there is a very fundamental question that begs to be asked. Why did the Torah need to instruct us with regards to things we already know intuitively? If the Torah didn't

cess, and certainly the values of a nation can change over time. Therefore, the Torah writes things which may seem intuitive at the time, in case there may come a time when it will no longer be that way.

The Meshech Chochmah explains when we are celebrating the receiving of the Torah we must remember both parts. Therefore, the Torah specifically puts this mitzvah right after talking about shavuot. As soon as we speak about the giving of the Torah, we receive an instruction about the necessary attitude towards the mishpatim. Don't perform this mitzvah just because as a compassionate human being it makes sense right now in your mind to take care of the poor and leave him the corner of the field. Rather you must do it because the Torah has instructed you to do so, and to do it for all time going forward. ♦

Good Shabbos!