



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

Parschas Chukas 5770 פרשת חקת תש"ע

TOILING AND FEASTING

The Torah in this week's *parshah* provides us with the formula for achieving the ultimate in life and happiness: by killing one's self.

Of course, suicide is not only discouraged by the Torah, but it is considered one of the most egregious of transgressions. And so, it behooves us to examine this particular lesson of the *parshah* and attempt to uncover its true meaning.

POLAR OPPOSITES

After speaking at length of the laws of *tumah* (ritual impurity) associated with a corpse (and the purification process), the *passuk* states the following (*Bamidbar 19:14*):

זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל...

"This is the law (lit., the 'Torah'): When a person dies in a tent..."

According to the plain meaning of the verse, the Chumash is opening a discussion of the laws pertaining to *tumas ohel* (impurity contracted by sharing quarters with a corpse). With their *ruach hakodesh* (Divinely inspired knowledge), however, Chazal interpret this phrase to be referring to Torah study. As the Gemara says (*Berachos 63b*): "Lasting achievement in Torah can be attained only by one who kills himself over it, as the verse says, 'This is the Torah (i.e., this is they way to attain it): When a man dies (kills himself) in a tent (the tents of Torah; i.e., a *beis medrash* [study hall])'."

As stated, the qualifications here appear (at first) to be somewhat harsh and baffling. The classic commentators offer numerous explanations to clarify the intent. One very profound approach is offered by the Maharal

לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
הרב אשר זעליג ב"ר אליעזר ראטבערג זצ"ל

(*Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Hatorah, ch. 3*).

The Torah does not want a person to purposefully cause himself physical harm, *chas v'shalom*. What Chazal mean to impart here is the notion of moderation and mitigation of physical pursuits. Since Torah is a spiritual entity, the material properties of a person's body stand as a type of obstacle to achievement in Torah. In other words, an individual steeped in the pursuit of physical pleasures will be unable to truly excel in Torah, as his materialism clashes with the spirituality of the Torah. And so, the more an individual is able to lessen his dependence on and attachment to material and physical pleasures, the more his self can serve as a receptacle to "contain" Torah. If a person "kills himself" – i.e., minimizes his indulgence in worldly matters and pleasures – he has provided fertile ground within himself for Torah growth.

The effort involved is well worth it, as the fruits of this labor are quite substantial. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (*100a*) states: "When an individual "starves himself" for Torah's sake (in this world), Hakadosh Baruch Hu will provide him with satiety in the World to Come." Here, too, the Maharal explains that the intent is not to literally abstain from any and all food; rather, it refers to the reorganization of priorities, where one's emphasis and chief energies should be directed toward spiritual pursuits (as opposed to material indulgence). As spirituality and physicality are inherently opposing forces, they act in a mutually exclusive manner. A decrease in one clears the way for an increase in the other.

THE GRANDEST AFFAIR

Interestingly enough, it almost appears that the end

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אליהו בן זוסמן ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with
no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his neshamah.

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משנת היום

result of a life dedicated to spiritual pursuits is none other than a lavish feast. As the Mishnah in Avos (3:16) seems to suggest:

מְצוּדָה פְּרוּסָה עַל כָּל הַחַיִּים... וְהַדִּין דִּין אֶמֶת, וְהַכֹּל מִתְקַן לְסַעֲוָה.

“A net is cast over all of the living (referring to the eventual and unavoidable end of life awaiting each individual)... the Judgment is a righteous judgment; and all is prepared for the grand feast (in Olam Haba).”

Yet, here again, the Maharal explains the intent as a reference not to a physical *se'udah* (meal) but to a spiritual experience. In the Next World, the worthy individual will merit to bask in the radiance of the Shechinah (Divine Presence), from which he will receive an intense infusion of spirituality, which will allow this soul to achieve perfection (*Derech Hachaim, Avos, ibid.*).

It should be noted, though, that it appears that the physical body itself will not be entirely excluded from the “feast of the future.” The Rabbeinu Bechaye (*Shulchan Shel Arba, ch. 4*) seems relatively adamant in contending and proving that the eventual “Grand *Se'udah*” will in fact contain physical elements.

The Gemara in Bava Basra (75a) speaks of just such a feast. In the future, Hashem will arrange a great *se'udah* for the righteous Torah scholars, who will partake of the flesh of the Livyasan (from the great sea-creatures mentioned in *Bereishis 1:21*). If one thinks that this statement of Chazal is merely a parable, he is mistaken, maintains the Rabbeinu Bechaye. Chazal are very precise in their wording, and when they borrow terminology from the Torah, they use it in the same way intended by the Torah itself. Now, the Torah uses the term “*basar* (flesh),” as when speaking of the prohibited animals, where it states (*Vayikra 11:3*), “Do not eat of their *basar*.” Obviously, the Torah was referring to actual, physical flesh. So, too, when Chazal here speak of feasting on the *basar* of the Livyasan, it means just that – the real thing.

The Rabbeinu Bechaye does not necessarily contradict the sentiments expressed by the Maharal, as he goes on to state that there will be spiritual enjoyments as well. Nor should one be surprised by this arrangement. As the Rabbeinu Bechaye explains, the nature of the future redemption will parallel many aspects of the redemption from Egypt. There, too, the redemption was of both a physical and spiritual nature. The splitting of the sea – which divided into twelve different passageways corresponding to each of the twelve tribes – was a salvation for their physical bodies. And in a spiritual sense, each individual achieved a level of prophecy at that time that surpassed that of even the prophet Yechezkel (*Mechilta, parshas Beshalach*).

The exact nature of these grand celebrations – their physical components, as well as the spiritual stages – are unbeknownst to us at this point. What is clear, however, is that they are something we would not want to miss out on.

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