

Parshas Shelach 5772 IMPACT

THE EFFECTS OF TORAH ON THE WORLD AT LARGE

This week's *parshah* relates the episode of the Shabbos desecrator known as the *mekosheish eitzim* (wood-gatherer). The depiction of this event includes a general critique, which, at first glance, may appear somewhat harsh. The introductory verse of this narrative states: "And B'nei Yisrael were in the desert, and they found a man gathering wood on the Shabbos Day" (*Bamidbar 15:32*). One curious fact about this phrase is the special mention made at the outset, of the entirety of Klal Yisrael — "And B'nei Yisrael were in the desert" — even though the event really involved only one person. Rashi explains that herein lays a criticism of the nation: "The verse was speaking unfavorably of Yisrael, intimating that they were only able to keep the first Shabbos, when along came this violator and desecrated the second Shabbos."

This state of affairs seems to require some explanation. After all, as mentioned, it was really only a lone individual who did anything wrong; why does the Torah seem to drag the millions of uninvolved people (who were faithful to the Shabbos) into the equation?

A further difficulty is raised by R' Shimon Schwab (*Ma'ayan Beis Hashoeivah*). Throughout the Torah, different terms are applied when referring to the Jewish people, terms which carry varying implications. When referring to the lower elements, the term **עַם** (nation) is generally used. "B'nei Yisrael" is reserved for the worthier members. Why, then, when delivering this critique, did the Torah use the praiseworthy and seemingly incongruous title of "B'nei Yisrael"?

Dedicated in loving memory of
מינדל פעסיל בת ר' משה ע"ה

FAR-REACHING INFLUENCE

R' Yeruchem Olshin clarifies the issue by referring to another, similar instance, whereby the people are accorded a prestigious title in the midst of a critique. The verse in parshas Ha'azinu states: "Yeshurun... you grew fat, thick, and clouded; and he forsook G-d" (*32:15*). The S'forno points out that "Yeshurun" refers to the elite of the nation, the Torah leaders and adherents immersed in intense scholarship. The Torah refers to a time when this lofty group veered somewhat off course. They did not initially perpetrate any outright wrongdoing, but simply gravitated toward a more materialistic lifestyle. However, this involvement in physical pursuits set off a most unfortunate chain of events. They "grew fat", which thickened and clouded their vision and grasp; as a result, the quality of their Torah study suffered. No longer were they able to attain the utmost clarity in their learning. The end result for the entire nation was tragic: "He (the nation) forsook G-d" entirely.

The sentiment contained in the S'forno's words thus sheds much light on the matter of the *mekosheish*. Indeed, Klal Yisrael was not involved in Shabbos desecration; but what fault lay with "B'nei Yisrael," the worthy people who seem to be accorded some blame here? As the S'forno made clear, the level of commitment of the devoted ones has a trickle-effect on the others. A weakening in Torah study or observance — however slight — can have the effect that others will "forsake their G-d." The fact that it was even possible for an overt act of Shabbos desecration to be perpetrated pointed to the fact that there must have been some type of decline at the top.

A visitor to the Volozhin Yeshivah observed the Rosh Yeshivah, R' Chaim Volozhiner, at "work." He was amazed at his interaction with his students and the incredible brilliance and clarity with which he presented his teachings.

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
בנימין בן יצחק ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no
relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his neshamah.

Approaching the Rosh Yeshivah, the visitor remarked that it was almost a shame that R' Chaim was “tucked away” in this somewhat backwoods and sheltered environment of Volozhin. “You should circulate in the big cities amongst the general population,” he said. “This way, you could apply your remarkable abilities of explanation and clarity towards influencing the secular and assimilated Jews.”

R' Chaim told the visitor that there was a crucial point he was missing. “You don’t understand, however,” he said. “When the quality of learning is enhanced in Volozhin, less people will desecrate Shabbos in Paris.”

REACHING SOULS

This is not the forum or place to fully address the age-old question regarding the balance between active outreach and personal involvement in Torah study and self-development. The assumption is made that each individual will consult with his appropriate *moreh derech* (spiritual advisor), who will guide the questioner on the proper path of best fulfilling the Will of Hashem in this world.


There is, however, a critical *yesod* (principle), which definitely deserves mentioning and consideration. The idea, expressed by R' Elchanan Wasserman (*Kovetz Ma'amarim, Biurei Agados Al Derech Hapshat*), is based on the following Mishnah in Pe'ah (1:1):

אֵלּוּ דְּבָרִים שֶׁאָדָם אוֹכֵל פְּרוּתֵיהֶן בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְהִקְרָו קִיּוּמָת לֹו לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. כְּבוֹד אָב וְאִם, וּגְמִילוּת חֲסָדִים, וְהַבָּאָת שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ וְתִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה כְּנֶגְד כָּלֶם.

“The following items contain a ‘double-reward’ quality. One who performs them enjoys the ‘fruits’ (dividends) of the mitzvah in this world, while the principle reward remains untouched and designated for the World to Come. They include the following: Honoring parents, acts of kindness, bringing peace between man and his fellow and — greatest of all — Torah study.”

The Gemara in Kiddushin (40a) states that the items listed here share a common denominator: they are all considered to be pleasing to Hashem and beneficial to one’s fellow man. This quality is clearly present in most of these items: honoring parents, acts of kindness, and spreading peace. But the matter of Torah study poses somewhat of a puzzle; while certainly a worthy endeavor, in what way is one’s

This
Yahrtzeit
make a
Siyum
GIVE AN EVERLASTING GIFT



Mishnah and Gemara study services... on time

732.364.7029 | ChevrahLomdeiMishnah.org

personal immersion in private study deemed beneficial to one’s fellow man?

R' Elchanan explained that, in fact, studying Torah is perhaps the single greatest act one can do for the welfare of his fellow man. This idea is better understood in light of the astronomical effects Torah has on the entire universe. As expounded at length by R' Chaim Volozhiner (*cf. Nefesh Hachaim 4:11*), Torah is considered the “heartbeat” and life-force for the entire world. If there would be a time when, even for a moment, no one was studying Torah, the universe would come to an abrupt and spontaneous end. As such, one who learns Torah is contributing directly to the maintenance of the entire world. He is aiding everyone and everything in it. And as demonstrated above, the effects of his Torah learning are not limited to mere physical wellbeing, but contribute astronomically to the spiritual health of his brothers, as well.