

1 – Topic – Thoughts from the Trip to Eretz Yisrael

As we prepare for Chodesh Elul, for the Yomim Noraim, for Rosh Hashana, for Yom Kippur and of course for Shabbos Parshas Shoftim. How appropriate, Shoftim means judges, what a way to start the month of Elul. As you know, I just returned from Eretz Yisrael, it is a bit on my mind. I also know that many of you are learning Masechtas Kesubos with the Daf Yomi. Let me share with you a thought regarding Masechtas Kesubos.

I had seen that the Chasam Sofer asked his Rebbi the Hafla the following question when the Yeshiva learned Kesubos. He said to him the 5th Perek is (אף על פי). He asked, how could Chazal start a Perek with the word Af. Chazal say elsewhere that (שלשה פתחו באף), there are three times that we find that somebody started with the word Af and each of them ended up disastrous. One was the Nachash who said to Chava in Beraishis 3:1 (לא תאכלו מכל עץ הגן), even though Hashem said... still. The second one was Korach who also used the word Af (Ed. Note: perhaps this is Bamidbar 16:14 (אף לא הביאתנו אל-אֶרֶץ זְבֹת חָלֶב וּדְבַשׁ, הַבִּיאתנו Sar Ha'ofim in Beraishis 40:16 (אף-אני בחלומי, והנה שלשה סלי חרי על-ראשי) and the third one was Haman in Esther 5:12 (אף לא-הביאה אסתר המלכה עם-המלך אל-המשתה אשר-עשתה). Af that Esther didn't invite anyone except for me. When you start Pesukim with the word Af it ends with Af, it ends with anger. So the Chasam Sofer asked his Rebbi the Baal Hafla why is there a Perek in Kesubos that begins with Af?

The Hafla answered him that Kesubos is of course a Masechta that talks about a man's obligation to his wife. The Ribbono Shel Olam Kavayochel looks at Klal Yisrael as Kimsos Chosson Al Kallah, He looks at Klal Yisrael like his Kallah. Masechtas Kesubos is HKB"H's Kesuba to Klal Yisrael.

There are 13 Perakim in Kesubos and they represent the 13 Middos of (ר'. ר'. קל רחום וחנון) Hashem Hashem Keil Rachum V'chanun which is the mainstay of our request for Rachamim during the Yomim Noraim, during Selichos and during Neilah. Those Yud Gimmel Middos are represented by the 13 Perakim of Masechtas Kesubos, and since one of the Middos is (אָרְךָ אַפִּים) there is a Perek Kenegdo (אף על פי) which is talking not about anger but it is talking about Erech Apaim, about HKB"H delaying Kavayochel His anger, and therefore, there is a Perek that begins with Af. Ad Kan Divrei Ha'Hafla.

So first of all you should know that you are learning Kesubos, this is the Ribbono Shel Olam's contract with Klal Yisrael. This is what it is. But more, with this I came to understand, Meforshim wonder, the Sugyos in Shas about Eretz Yisrael are Sugyos that are found in the last Perek of Masechtas Kesubos. What does Yishuv Eretz Yisrael have to do with Kesubos? I understand it works its way in because there is a Halacha regarding Kesubos which is mentioned there. That is not the point. The point is what is it doing in Kesubos?

According to this it is very Geshmak. First of all Kesubos is HKB"H's gift to Klal Yisrael. Of course a Chosson has to have a place for his Kallah to come. But more, the last Midda of the 13 Middos is (וְנִקְרָה) and as it says in Devarim 32:43 (וְנִכְפַּר אֲדָמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ). Eretz Yisrael brings Kapparah. That is why we bury people there. Don't think that it is only burying people there, it is also living people who have Kapparah

there. Therefore, Eretz Yisrael is part of the Kesubah and it represents (וְנִקְּהָ), the ability to go to Eretz Yisrael as an opportunity to be cleansed.

I must tell you that my stay in Eretz Yisrael was extraordinary. I am inspired. Yesterday I received an email from a young man who I met in Ohr Somayach. He himself just met Yiddishkeit there. A fellow who has got two Jewish last names and one not known to be Jewish first name. His name is Raino (that is his first name) Greenwald-Cohen. Very Jewish last names which means that he has got the Yichus, he comes from Klal Yisrael and Raino. What kind of name is Raino? He says it is a German name as his family comes from Germany. Incredible thing that this person who sent me a picture of the two of us in an email from there in Ohr Somayach, it is just absolutely incredible. V'nakei, Eretz Yisrael has the ability to cleanse people. People come there and they connect.

It is a shame that some of us are so busy with other things in Eretz Yisrael that we don't connect. You got to connect, you have to look to connect. Take it from Raino, you are going to see. You see his picture, he is dressed the way he came to Eretz Yisrael. A white Kippah, a red shirt. Next summer I will send you a picture of him dressed like a Ben Torah. More important than dressed like a Ben Torah, knowing like a Ben Torah. Wonderful! V'nakei, Raino taught me that Eretz Yisrael is V'nakei. You can look at him and you see it. Bein Haz'manim, looking to learn, looking to Shteig.

2 – Topic – A Thought on the Parsha

Of course the Parsha begins 16:18 (שְׁפֹטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים, תִּתֶּן-לָךְ בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ). Put judges and officers in your gates. The word Lecha is extra. Rav Moshe brings in the Darash Moshe (first Cheilek page 154 which was also discussed in 5780 Ayin Sham) from the Baalei Hamachshava that (שְׁפֹטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים, תִּתֶּן-לָךְ), you should also put onto yourself. A person has to judge himself, a person has to look at what he does, analyze what he does and see what he does and make sure what he does is done properly.

Zagt Rav Moshe, it is not just the Shoftim, you have to have Shotrim too. What is a Shoteir? A Shoteir is a policeman. What are the Shotrim that you have to put on yourself? Zagt Rav Moshe, you have to be Mekabeil things on yourself. The Gemara says in Nedarim 8 that the purpose of Nedarim, of a Neder is as it says in Tehillim 119:106 (נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי וְאִקְיִימָהּ לִשְׁמוֹר מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדָקָךָ). To be Mekabeil things on yourself. In that way to be able to become close to the Borei Olam.

Zagt Rav Moshe, Shoftim V'shotrim Titein Lecha. The usual Teitch of Shoftim that you have to judge yourself, you got to look at your Ruchnios of yourself. But more than that, (שְׁפֹטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים, תִּתֶּן-לָךְ), (בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ).

I will tell you an interesting Machlokes. We are afraid to make Kabbaos B'lashon Neder, we are afraid of Nedarim. Even though the Gemara says you can make Nedarim for that purpose. What happens if you make a Neder and you say Bli Neder. I am Mekabeil on myself from now until Yom Kippur not to look at any news on the internet, nothing. It is a big Batala, you all know that. It is not just one minute. You are afraid to make such a Kabbala so you say Bli Neder. What happens? Is it a Kabbala?

There is a letter in the Kovetz Teshuvos from Rav Elyashiv to Rav Chaim Kanievsky. Apparently they disagreed on this. Rav Chaim held it has a Din Kabbalah and Rav Elyashiv says I don't understand, what kind of Kabbalah is that? That is a Kabbalah? It is a Kabbalah Bli Neder. It is a Kabbalah but you are not going to keep it? Rav Chaim holds Af Al Pi Kein that it has a Din of a Kabbalah because a person is committing to keeping it.

In the Chiddushei Rav Reuven in Nedarim at the end of Siman Aleph, he is Tol'e this question in a Machlokes Rishonim. Aich She'iyeh, we are afraid to make Nedarim. A Bli Neder, Neder that we can do. We are going to try to do it.

As we approach the Yomim Noraim, what is a Kabbalah? A Kabbalah is between you and yourself. You have to know, we grow up with Bein Adam L'chaveiro, Bein Adam Lamakom. There is Bein Adam L'atzmo too. A person being honest with himself. It is a uniquely Ehrlecha Yid Middah to be honest with yourself. Shoftim V'shotrim Titein Lecha.

I remember that I was in Camp Waunakee during the Covid summer of 2020. The Mesiras Nefesh of Camp Waunakee was incredible. Camp Agudah in Waunakee there were 11 married families with 470 people, trying to run a camp. There was a tremendous Ruach and an extraordinary Siyata Dish'maya. There were Goyim there who had never seen Frum Yidden before, never. They were the people there in the camp.

One day, it was Shiva Asar B'tammuz, and I was riding the cruiser, the cruiser is the ferry boat that took us across. Half the camp was on an island and half on the mainland. The driver of the cruiser was one of these non-Jews who had never seen Frum Jews. He said to me, I hear that the boys are fasting today. They are not eating until nightfall. I said yes. He looks at me and he says do you really believe that? You really think in private that they are not going in and eating something? You don't think they close the door to the bathroom and they take a drink in the bathroom, really? You think they are fasting the whole day? To him he was incredulous, it was impossible. Why would they do it?

Then there are boys asking me in the afternoon should they break their fast because they have a headache. Go explain to him that we don't take drinks in the bathroom anyway. He won't even understand why. That is Bein Adam L'atzmo. Klal Yisrael we are honest with ourselves. It is a relationship with the Borei Olam where we control our own Middos, our own Hanhagos to become better people. That is with which we need to approach the upcoming days B'ezras Hashem. May HKB"H give you and I Hatzlocha. Don't wait to Neilah. Now, at the beginning of Elul take a Kabbalah Bli Neder. Take a Kabbalah and restrict from some of your pleasures, restrict some of the things that you do. Be Mekabeil. At least a Mishnah a day. Tell yourself, Maseches Yoma it would be wonderful before Yom Hakkipurim. At least a Mishnah a day. Once you start a Mishnah a day you will do a few Mishnayos. When it comes a Shabbos you will do a few more. It will come on Yom Kippur that you will be finishing it. You should have a lot of Hatzlocha. IY"H may HKB"H grant you all the wisdom, the strength to be able to approach the Yomim Noraim B'derech Aliya as Raino certainly is doing. A Gutten Shabbos to one and all!