



דרכים בפרשה

שפטים



רק לא ירבה לו סוסים ולא ישיב את העם מצרימה

Only, he may not acquire many horses for himself, so that he will not bring the people back to Mitzrayim (17:16)

In this week's parsha we find something that is uncharacteristic of the Torah. As a rule, the Torah does not typically express the reasoning behind the mitzvos. The gemara in Massechet Sanhedrin quotes in the name of Rav Yitzchak that the reason why the *tamei hamitzvos* (reason for a mitzvah) are not mentioned is because there were two mitzvos that the Torah said its reason and as a result, the wisest of all men stumbled.

The Torah tells us **רק לא ירבה לו סוסים ולא ישיב** - *Only, he may not acquire many horses for himself, so that he will not bring the people back to Mitzrayim*. Shlomo Hamelech thought to himself that for him it does not apply; "I can acquire as many horses as I want and I will not go back". In the end, he ends up going back to Mitzrayim and even marrying the daughter of Pharaoh.

The Torah tells us, **ולא ירבה לו נשים ולא יסור** - *And he shall not take many wives for himself, and his heart must not turn away*. Shlomo Hamelech felt that there was no way that his wives would cause him to stray from the Torah. Lacking the Torah's reason, he went ahead and married more than the 18 wives that were permitted. Sure enough, later in his life, the wives led him astray. (The Maharsha explains that these two cases were exceptions because the reasons themselves, i.e. returning to Mitzrayim and going astray from the ways of the Torah were actual aveiros, therefore, the reason itself would always apply.)

But how in fact did the wisest of all men come to err? The Torah writes in the parsha of the "Parah Adumah" (red heifer), **זאת חקת התורה** - *this is the statute of the Torah*. A "chok" is a statute; something that is set in stone and has no reason. Although the Torah was discussing the mitzvah of the parah adumah, the possuk referred to the entire corpus of the Torah, to teach us that the entire Torah must be viewed as a "chok". This means that whether or not we understand a mitzvah, we must keep it. Even if we cannot comprehend why HaShem would "ask us" or even "care" if we performed something that seems so archaic etc., we must still perform it because the mitzvah is a "chok" that is set in stone without an expiration date or a reason. We don't keep kosher because it is a healthy diet, but rather, because HaShem told us to. And so it is with all the mitzvos.

The moment one starts to give reasons, one exposes him/herself to a very dangerous slippery slope. As a result of Shlomo Hamelech looking at the reasons and deciding that they did not apply to him, he stumbled.

The gemara expounds on the possuk, (Tehillim 36:7) **אדם ובהמה תושיע ה'** - *Man and animal, You save, HaShem* - this refers to people with great intellect that when approaching the mitzvos, they put aside their wisdom and approach it like an animal, i.e. without using their heads. When it comes to mitzvos, our heads should be used only to make sure we are cognizant of Whom we are

doing the mitzvah for and perhaps to figure out the best way to fulfill the mitzvah. However, with regards to the reasoning behind it, that is not for us to contemplate.

My Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Gifter z'l would often say that when the Sefer Hachinuch writes the words *miTaamei Hamitzva*- (lit. from the reasons of the mitzvah) we must keep in mind that *taam* has a double meaning. It means "reason" but it also means "taste". There is nothing wrong with getting a taste of the mitzvah, but ultimately, the reason we perform them is because HaShem commanded us to.

Similarly, the mishna in Maseches Shabbos relates that on Shabbos it is forbidden to read by the light of the candle. The gemara (12b) relates: אמר רבא אם אדם חשוב הוא מותר מיתבי לא יקרא לאור הנר שמא יטה אמר רבי ישמעאל בן אלישע אני אקרא ולא אטה פעם אחת קרא ובקש להטות אמר כמה גדולים דברי חכמים שהיו אומרים לא יקרא לאור הנר רבי נתן אומר קרא והטה וכתב על פנקסו אני ישמעאל בן אלישע קריתי והטיתי נר בשבת לכשיבנה בית המקדש אביא חטאת שמנה אמר רבי אבא שאני רבי ישמעאל בן אלישע הואיל ומשים עצמו על דברי תורה *Rava said*: Even though they prohibited reading by candlelight due to a decree lest they adjust the wick, *if he is an important person, it is permitted*, as even on weekdays he is not accustomed to adjust a candle that is dirty with oil. The Gemara asks from a Tosefta: *One may not read on Shabbos by the light of the candle, lest he adjust it.* The Tosefta relates that *Rabi Yishmael ben Elisha said: I will read and will not adjust*, as I will certainly not forget that it is Shabbos. However, *once he read a book by candlelight and he sought to adjust the wick. He said: How great are the words of the Chachamim, who would say that one may not read by candlelight*, as even a person like me sought to adjust the wick. *Rabi Nassan says*: That was not the way it happened. Rather, *he read and*

actually adjusted the wick, and he wrote afterward in his notebook [pinkas]: I, Yishmael ben Elisha, read and adjusted a candle on Shabbos. When the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt I will bring a fat korban chattas as atonement for this sin. This proves that even an important person like Rabi Yishmael ben Elisha is liable to adjust the wick. *Rabi Abba said: Rabi Yishmael ben Elisha is different, since with regard to the study of Torah, he comports himself like a simple man with no air of importance*, but generally, an important person would not dirty his hands and adjust the wick.

The Vilna Gaon explains Rabi Yishmael's words as follows: Looking at the Mishna, we note that no reason was given. All it says is that it is forbidden to read by candle light. The gemara then went along and gave a reason. כמה גדולים דברי חכמים שהיו אומרים לא יקרא לאור הנר - Rabi Yishmael said, "The Chachamim in the Mishna were brilliant in not giving a reason because they did not want someone to do what I did. All they said was "do not read". But I did hear a reason and suddenly I calculated that the reason does not apply to me, which ultimately caused me to sin."

Finally, Dovid Hamelech writes (Tehillim 119) - טוב טעם ודעת למדני כי במצותיך האמנתי, HaShem, You've taught me the reasons, but there is no risk because my trust is in the mitzvah itself and *not* its reasoning.

Let us keep in mind that when it comes to serving HaShem, we must put aside our own intellect. Our job is to serve HaShem not because we understand what we are doing or because it makes us feel good, but rather because HaShem told us to. In truth, there is no greater reason than that!

Good Shabbos, מרדכי אפפֿעל

