

# PARSHAS KI SAVO

תש"פ

Parshas Ki Savo and Nitzavim-Vayelech are always read before Rosh Hashono. For most years, Haazinu is read between Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur.

The gemara in Megillah says that before Rosh Hashono, one must read the brochos and kholos of Mishneh Torah. In our annual reading cycle, everything is pre-arranged for this to happen automatically without altering the schedule. But there were minhogim which read the entire Torah over a three-year cycle. For those minhogim, they had to disrupt their regularly scheduled reading in order to read Parshas Ki Savo before Rosh Hashono. Why is it so important for this parsha to be read at this time?

We are approaching yom hadin and it is a time when people have to confront themselves. We have to understand what din means. Specifically, we need to ask ourselves how seriously we take the Torah. From these parshiyos, we see how seriously the Torah is meant to be taken.

Before Shavuos we read the brochos and kholos of parshas Bechukosai. Before we re-accept the Torah every Shavuos, we have to appreciate the gravity of what exactly we are accepting. It has to be total commitment to the absolute demands of the Torah. We aren't getting a list of suggestions to follow if we want or when we are in the mood. Yes, there are wonderful brochos if we keep the Torah. But there are also dire consequences if we don't keep the Torah.

We accept the fact that the world does not run on automatic pilot. Everything and anything that happens in this world is the result of hashgochah protis – of Hashem running the world hands-on in a detailed manner. Hashem arranges for various events to happen in the world – great and small – based on our mitzvos and aveiros. This is what is implicit in the brochos and kholos. We must take this very seriously – all our actions have great consequence – for good or for bad.

As we approach the yom hadin, we review these ideas. Yom hadin is very straightforward. We can enjoy the most idyllic life, or experience times filled with tragedy and misfortune. This is detailed in the brochos and kholos.

In the long mussaf davening on Rosh Hashono, we recite the extra brochos and pesukim of malchuyos, zichronos and shoforos. Malchuyos is about Hashem's malchus over the world. Zichronos is about the din that is passed on the world. In the brocho of zichronos, we mention the fact that at this moment, Hashem is deciding and making decrees about all the nations of the world – decreeing which nations will have prosperity and peace, and which will have calamity and chaos.

It means that on last Rosh Hashono, Hashem already decided that there will be an economic disaster this year. The economists can follow all the trends and make all the predictions they like. But, as we have seen time and time again, everything can change in an instant. Only Hashem decides what the world will look like in the coming year.

The same is true with the weather. The global warning alarmists claim the planet is headed for imminent disaster if we don't take drastic measures to avoid it. They claim to have the future all figured out. But we say no. Hashem is running the world. He is in charge of the future. We say this every day in Shema. Hashem is in charge of rain and weather patterns. The gemara in Taanis says there are three things which human beings have no way of predicting in advance. There

have been predictions about rainfall which have never come true, and there are surprises about rainfall in this region which no-one would have anticipated. It caused all sorts of unpredictable consequences. The rains in Africa this year produced unbelievable locust swarms that will cause mass starvation to millions of people. Hashem controls the world.

It is all the result of our mitzvos and aveiros and how they are calculated on Rosh Hashono.

Looking at the parsha in detail, we find many different ideas. One posuk which stands out as one of the most frightening, is: "Cursed is the one who does not uphold this Torah". It doesn't say "who does not fulfill the Torah". What does this mean? The Ramban quotes the Yerushalmi which explains that even if one kept mitzvos and kept away from aveiros, and even taught Torah, it is not enough. He will be cursed if he was capable of strengthening the fulfillment of Torah of others in his community, and failed to do so.

If we want to be honest with ourselves, we need to ask the following question: What is our core motivation in keeping Torah and mitzvos? Is it because it is the will of Hashem? Or is it because it is comfortable and fashionable in our current frum society? This is a serious question to confront.

Hashem has given people various talents and abilities to be used in their service of Him. If one was given the ability to strengthen people's commitment to Torah and he declined, he is cursed! Some have the gift of generating wealth, others have the gift of high intelligence, yet others have been given power. Some have the gift of music. There are all kinds of talents which Hashem gave you for a reason. The posuk in Mishlei instructs us to see to it that all our paths, all our pursuits, should contribute to our avodas Hashem. "B'chol d'rochecho do'ayhu". For everything you do in life, ask yourself a simple question. Is it increasing my avodas Hashem or not? If a person keeps this calculation in the forefront of his mind, then he will be sure to use the unique talents and gifts Hashem gave him for the proper ends.

The Mishna in Avos says "kol maasechoh yihyu leShem shomayim." All of your activities should be for the purpose of furthering your avodas Hashem. Everything – what house are you buying? Don't just focus on the physical qualities of the house to see if they suit your needs and your taste. You also have to look at the neighborhood: are the neighbors around you good influences or bad influences? Are the shuls and mosdos chinuch in the area going to raise your level of yiddishkeit or lower them? This isn't coming from a mussar sefer. This is a Mishnah. I checked and didn't see any machlokes about it either.

What does "leShem shomayim" really mean? It means I have to have one purpose in any undertaking. It applies to all aspects of life – all my choices, where I live, what career I choose, etc. Everything is calculated around your avodas Hashem.

The drive to make Torah strong for as many people as possible is a consequence of Ahavas Hashem. What is ahavas Hashem? Ahava – genuine love – inspires a yearning to share that love with others. This is why Avrohom was called an ohev. He was so taken with his love for Hashem that he felt compelled to run around and tell people about it. To argue and convince people that avodo zoro is nonsense and Hashem should be followed instead. The Rambam uses this example when he explains ahavas Hashem.

So if you really love Hashem and His Torah, you naturally want to make the Torah a greater priority in other people's lives. This love has to break down all barriers. You don't just relegate your love of Hashem to one area of life – or to affecting a select group of people.

If you were given a position of power and influence in your community, you need to use it to the best of your ability to strengthen avodas Hashem to the greatest extent possible. This was the realization Yoshiyahu Hamelech had when he read from the Sefer Torah. He tore his clothes and realized that if he was chosen by Hashem to be the king, he has a tremendous obligation to use the wealth and power of a king to make sure the entire Jewish nation would become free of avodo zoro and would keep the Torah.

The Ramban adds another thing. This refers to the one who gets hagboh in shul. The gemara Megillah talks about the importance of hagboh. It is the greatest kibud you can get in shul. You don't say anything. No-one hears your voice. You just pick up the sefer and then the entire tzibbur testifies to the truth of the Torah. This is the biggest mitzvah in kriyas haTorah – greater than saying 'borchu'. Getting people to testify to the truth of the Torah is the most important part of kriyas haTorah.

The audience here is young. But you should already be thinking about where you are going in life. You should have the mishna in Avos in your mind – kol maasechov yihyu leShem shomayim. Are you planning your life in a way that will maximize your avodas Hashem? For years to come?

Mesillas Yesharim in the beginning talks about a person who says I am a simple Jew. He doesn't want to trouble himself more than necessary. He wants to take it easy. He is happy to simply get some modest portion in olom haboh. He doesn't take avodas Hashem too seriously. He is satisfied with just doing the basics.

But the Ramchal challenges that this same person would never be satisfied with a mediocre position in this world. If he was given the opportunity to really get ahead financially and become fantastically wealthy, he would jump at it! No-one would pass it up – even if it would take trouble and effort! A person who says he is a simple Jew and will be satisfied with the minimum is really trying to ignore what he is capable of achieving in Torah.

Hashem gave each one of us unique talents and opportunities that no-one else was given. The question is; how are we going to use those unique talents and abilities? Dovid Hamelech had unbelievable musical talent – and he used it to produce the sefer Tehilim! Others have great musical talent and squander it. Betzalel had an incredible artistic talent and craftsmanship. He used it to build the beautiful mishkon and its keilim.

The greatest curse is when Hashem gives you talents and abilities and you take them for granted – as if you don't owe anything back. They

weren't given to you for inflating your ego. It was given to make the Torah stronger. This is the demand every one of us has to accept – just as King Yoshiyahu did when he read the kolos in this parsha. He said, the power and influence I have been given is a gift from Hashem, and it has to be directed to eliminate avodo zoro.

As we approach yom hadin, we realize it is a time of cheshbon hanefesh. The years one spends in yeshiva are a very special time. It is a time to focus – not only on the Torah material you are learning and mastering, but on yourself as well. What are my strengths and talents and how can I use them to make the Torah stronger?

People have a distorted notion that Torah is peripheral to life. You go for a year in Israel, put in your hours for learning, go to the daily shiur, and then you get on with the rest of life. But the Torah didn't view itself this way. Torah is life – not on the periphery. Everything else in life is a means to the Torah's ends. Yes, we need parnosoh to exist, but why do I exist in the first place? What meaning does it have? Go back to the first Rashi in Bereishis – the world was created for the Torah which is reishis. It only has meaning if I use it for what Hashem wanted it for. Hashem gave me gifts to make the Torah stronger. Squandering them for selfish goals is simply not an option.

We read brochos and kolos to put ourselves in the proper mental framework in approaching the yom hadin. Torah isn't only a very important thing. It is the only thing. Everything else is secondary. Those who learned Pirkei Avos with me last year should remember the last vaadim of the year on this topic. Take it very seriously.

We have all been investing tremendous mesiras nefesh to be in this far-off place in order to learn properly this zman in a serious framework. Let us internalize this mesiras nefesh and take to heart the central role Torah should play in our day-to-day lives, and the overall direction our lives will take. These are the themes which will help us adequately prepare for the yom hadin.

We should use Elul to understand the davening of the yomim noraim. These tefillos and the siddur in general are the best sifrei mussar I know. Davening in Hebrew is 'lehispallel'; it is the reflexive of 'pilel' which means to judge. To be 'mispallel' is to judge one's self. Before we ask in davening for all the things on our long list, we need to first ask ourselves what right we have to ask for these things if we haven't fulfilled our obligations? Have we truly given ourselves over to Hashem and dedicated our lives to avodas Hashem?

We have to judge ourselves in tefilloh and put our own houses in order before we make requests. We have to be brutally honest when confronting the words of the tefilloh we are saying. This, along with reading the brochos and kolos, and appreciating how serious keeping the Torah is, will put us in the right frame of mind for coming to the yom hadin – after all the mesiras nefesh we have put in to be here together.