

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

אלה הם מועדי...ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי שבת שבתון

"These are my special times...You may do work for six days, but the seventh day is a Shabbos solemn rest..." (Vayikra 23:2-3)

The first verse contains an introduction to the *Yamim Tovim*, but instead of a description of the festivals, there follows in the next verse the prohibition against work on *Shabbos*. How can we explain this incongruity? The *Vilna Gaon* offers an ingenious solution to this problem. He explains that the six days mentioned in verse 3 refer to the *Yamim Tovim*, for there are six days of *Yom Tov* specified by the Torah during which all labor related to the preparation of food is permitted. They are the first and last days of *Pesach*, one day of *Shavuot*, one day of *Rosh Hashana*, and the first and last days of *Sukkot*.

Accordingly, the Torah postulates the rule, "*You may do work for six days,*" meaning that during the abovementioned six days of *Yom Tov*, you may perform labor that is related to the preparation of food. But there is one festival, a seventh day, on which this kind of labor is forbidden, i.e. *Yom Kippur*. This is expressed by the words, "*but the seventh day is a Shabbos of solemn rest.*"

(*Vilna Gaon*)

ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר...וערבי נחל

"You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of an *etrog* [lit. a beautiful] tree...and brook willows..." (Vayikra 23:40)

QUESTION: What is the beauty of the *etrog* tree?

ANSWER: Man is compared to a tree of the field (*Devarim* 20:19). Many lessons are learned from trees to guide man in his development. The uniqueness of the *etrog* is that on the bottom it has an *ukatz* – the stem by which it is connected to the tree – and on the top a *pitom* – stem – topped with a *shoshanta* – rosette blossom. Should one of these fall off, the *etrog* is no longer considered beautiful. The lesson of the *etrog* tree is that a beautiful person is one who is connected with the past and who also has accomplishments of his own. A descendant of a fine family, who continues the family tradition, and who does not rest contented with the family's past glories but goes forth to blossom on his own, is indeed a *hadar* – a very beautiful person.

Alternatively, according to the *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 35a) a unique quality of the *etrog* tree is that "*ta'am eitzo upirio shaveh*" – "the wood of the tree and the fruit have the same flavor." Similarly, true splendor for a Jew is achieved when the taste of the tree (parent) and the fruit (child)

is the same. It is the greatest source of pride and feeling of achievement for parents when the children do not merely represent a physical resemblance but are inspired to carry on in the image of the parents spiritually as well. (Vedebarta Bam)

QUESTION: Why is the species which has no taste or aroma (representing the Jew who lacks both Torah study and *mitzvot* called “*aravah*”?

ANSWER: When Hashem offered the Torah to the Jews, each one of us promptly responded, “*na’aseh v’nishma*” – “we will perform and we will listen (study).” Grammatically, it would have been more appropriate for each person to respond, “*a’aseh ve’eshma*” – “I will perform and I will listen.”

The reason for the plural response is that the Jews were in a sense saying not only “Will we perform and listen,” but “We will see to it that *other* Jews do the same.” Thus, at the time of the receiving of the Torah, every Jew became “*areiv*” – a guarantor – for the others. Our Sages tell us that “*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh*” – “All Jews are guarantors and responsible one for another (*Shevuot* 39a). The word “*aravah*” is derived from the root word “*arov*” and thus implies the concept of responsibility and guarantee. Hence, the name “*aravah*” is an explanation and reminder that the “*aravah*” Jew is included because we are guarantors for him. We are obligated to assure that every Jew is fully observant. (Something to Say)

בסכת תשבו שבעת ימים

“You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period.” (*Vayikra* 23:42)

Sukkot is the time of the completion of the *teshuvah* that began in *Elul*. It is a time to develop a deeper understanding of what *teshuvah* really is. The verse says that *Klal Yisrael* should sit, “*teshvu*,” which is a language of *teshuvah*. One dwells in the *Sukkah* for seven days and tries to strengthen the seven *middot* of the *Ribbono Shel Olam* (*chessed, gevurah, tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod, malchut*). It is only after one is pure from his transgressions that he can work on doing complete *teshuvah* and become a true servant of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. (*Tiferes Shlomo*)

בסכת תשבו...למען ידעו דרתיכם

“You shall dwell in sukkot...so that your generations shall know...” (*Vayikra* 23:42-43)

The *Chafetz Chaim* observes that the major purpose in learning the history of our people is to study the actions of our forebears in order to follow the paths that they chartered. The fathers are commanded to sit in their sukkahs and fulfill the obligation of the *mitzvah*. When this is done, the verse tells us: *your generations know*. It is through the fathers’ observance of the *mitzvot* that subsequent generations realize the importance of their heritage. When children see their parents actually fulfilling the *mitzvot* rather than simply talking about the past, the heritage of our nation remains viable. (Vedebarta Bam)

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