

Torah Fax: Beha'aloscha

Rabbi Zalmen Marazov

Monday, Sivan 16, 5783 (Hakhel Year) June 5, 2023

Each Shabbat between Pesach (Passover) and Rosh Hashanah, many recite one chapter of the Pirkei Avot (Chapters of our Fathers).

Thus, throughout the summer months we go through these chapters a few times.

After reciting each chapter, we conclude with the saying of Rabbi Chanania son of Akashia; "The Holy one, blessed is He, wished to confer merit upon Israel; therefore, He gave them Torah and mitzvot in abundance."

The Torah commands us to fulfill 613 mitzvot. The Talmud explains that the mitzvot are divided into two general categories. There are 248 positive commandments; and 365 negative commandments (prohibitions).

The 248 positive commandments represent the limbs/organs of a person. The number 365 prohibitions represent the days of the year. The reason for these numbers is that Mitzvot serve to involve and protect a person's whole being and to cover every day of the year.

Our sages explain that G-d gave us Torah and mitzvot in abundance for our benefit. With so many mitzvot, there will be at least one or more mitzvot which each person can perform to perfection.

However, we must be careful not to change the mitzvot to conform to our standards. Rather we must raise ourselves to the standard of the mitzvot.

The following parable of the Magid of Dubna explains this point. A general once toured his training camps to check his soldiers' level of readiness. In one of the camps, the soldiers were shooting arrows at targets. Upon observing closely, he noticed that one of the soldier's arrows were all in the center of the target. The general was very impressed.

"You are a great marksman! How did you manage to get every arrow exactly in the center?" the general asked with amazement.

The soldier replied. "The others first set up their target, then they try to hit it. I, on the other hand, first shoot my arrows, only afterwards do I place the target around them. Thus, all my arrows are on target..."

G-d gave us many mitzvot so that we can aim for perfection at some of them. He even commanded us to perform mitzvot which we would logically do on our own, in order that we may be rewarded for them, because they are G-d's commandments.

It is far better to aim at the Divine targets, even if we miss a few, rather than create our own targets in order to feel satisfied and accomplished all the time, when in reality we accomplish nothing...

Tuesday, Sivan 17, 5783 (Hakhel Year) June 6, 2023

At the end of this week's Parsha, Beha'alotcha, we read how Moshe prayed for his sister, Miriam, that G-d heal her from her affliction when she was punished for speaking against Moshe. Moshe's prayer for Miriam consisted of only three words – "G-d heal her."

Our sages say that G-d hears our prayers at all times. It doesn't matter how long or how short one prays. It is the dedication, feeling and intent which matter.

Prayer is very important in a Jew's life. The three daily prayers originated with our patriarchs. The morning prayer with Abraham; the afternoon prayer with Yitzchak and the evening prayer with Yaakov.

Although it is preferable to pray each of the three daily prayers in synagogue with a minyan (quorum), if this is not possible, one should still pray wherever they are.

One can liken prayer to a pipe and faucet. No matter how much water may be on the other end, if the pipe is not connected or turned on, the water will not flow where it is needed.

The same goes for prayer. On G-d's side there is an abundance of blessings, but to receive them on our end, we have to be connected and turn on the faucet. This is done through prayer, through which we acknowledge that we are totally dependent on G-d.

A group of very wealthy Bedouins, with vast oil resources, decided to have a 10-day convention at one of the prominent hotels in New York. When the

convention was over and they all left for the airport, the rooms were inspected and to the amazement of the hotel manager, they found that in each of the rooms where they stayed, the faucet was missing!

The police were notified, and they caught up with them as they were about to board the airplane. A thorough check of their bags revealed that each one had a faucet carefully packed away in their bag.

"Just name the price. We will pay you as much as you want for the faucets," they said.

"Why do you want these faucets?" the police asked in amazement.

They replied: "We live in the desert where finding water is a tremendous hassle. But in the hotel, we saw this wonderful gadget which just with a simple turn gave as much water as we needed. This is exactly what we need in the desert, and we are willing to pay any price..."

One of the translations for "Tefilah" (prayer) is "connection." Just like water flowing from the faucet has to be connected to the reservoir, so too, in order for G-d's blessings to flow we have to connect to the source of blessings. This is accomplished when we connect to G-d through prayer which keeps G-d's blessings flowing.

May we stay firmly connected and may G-d's blessings to us keep flowing and flowing.

Thursday, Sivan 19, 5783 (Hakhel Year) June 8, 2023

This week's Parsha, Beha'alotcha (Numbers 8-12), begins with the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah (Candelabra) in the Holy Temple. The Torah refers to the lights of the Holy Temple as, "Ner Tamid" - a "constant light".

Although we do not have the Bet Hamikdash, the synagogue is called a "miniature Temple". To remind us of the Menorah in the Holy Temple, the synagogue also has a "Ner Tamid", an eternal light, in front of the ark.

Candles and light play an important symbolic role in the Synagogue as well as in the Jewish home.

Our sages say, "The candle of G-d is the soul of man." Thus, at a Yartzeit, a candle is lit to honor the soul of the deceased. Before Yom Kippur, we light a candle in honor of the souls of our loved ones who have deceased.

At a marriage ceremony, many have the custom that the bride and groom are led to the Chupah (marriage canopy) with candles. The candles represent the two souls which will be united in marriage.

Shabbat and holidays are also ushered in with candles. When one departs this world, we again light candles in honor of the soul which has departed.

Mitzvot are compared to a candle, while the Torah itself is compared to light. For the Torah and mitzvot illuminate and enlighten one's immediate surroundings and the world.

The Midrash explains that while keeping the light of Torah and mitzvot is up to us, maintaining our light, which is our soul, is completely in the hands of G-d

who gives and controls life. Thus, G-d says, "My candle (Torah and mitzvot) is in your hands while your candle (soul) is in My hands. Take good care of My candle and I will take good care of yours!"

"A small amount of light pushes away much darkness," say our sages. In the second chapter of Pirkei Avot, we are told, "Be as careful in the performance of a minor mitzvah as in a major one", for the "light" of even a minor mitzvah is sufficient to dispel much darkness.

Before the days of electricity, Russia's main streets were lit by kerosene lamps. Each night, a city employee would make the rounds and light these lamps to illuminate the street.

"The function of a Jew is to be a lamp-lighter," said Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber of Lubavitch. "It is not enough to feel spiritually enlightened and warmed by the light of one's soul, one must also use their spiritual fire and make an effort to light up the candle/soul of another Jew by bringing them closer to G-d through Torah and Mitzvot."

Friday, Sivan 20, 5783 (Hakhel Year) June 9, 2023

This week's Torah portion is Beha'alotcha. This Shabbat, we recite the second chapter of Pirkei Avot. Amongst the many teachings in this chapter are the following teachings of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi:

"Be as careful in the performance of a [seemingly] minor mitzvah as of a major one, for you do not know the reward given for the various mitzvot. Reflect upon

three things and you will not come to sin: Know what is above you; An Eye that sees, an Ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a Book."

"Know what is above you" - The Hebrew words for, "Know what is above you", are "Da mah l'ma'alah mimcha." This can also be translated as, "Know that what happens above is from you." According to the teaching of our sages, whatever happens in heaven above and the reward in the World-to-Come is directly affected by the good deeds we perform in this world.

"Know what is above you" - The story is told of a group of children who had a contest to see who could climb to the top of a tall ladder. One after the other, the children climbed about halfway, became frightened, and gave up. Only one boy managed to make it to the top.

His grandfather asked him, "How did you accomplish what the others couldn't?"

The boy answered, "The other children kept looking down as they climbed the ladder, thus, realizing how high they were, and they became frightened. I, on the other hand, continuously kept looking up and realized how low I was, so I wanted to go higher and higher. This is why I was able to reach the top."

"Know what is above you," says Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. By "looking up" we will be encouraged and strive to go higher and higher spiritually, thus we will not come to sin.

"An Eye that sees" - A Rabbi paid a wagon driver to take him from one town to another. On the road they passed a field full of hay and the driver decided to

help himself to some bailed hay. He stopped the wagon and jumped to the ground.

"Rabbi, if you notice anyone watching, let me know immediately!" Assured that nobody was watching, and the Rabbi was on guard, he ran toward the field.

No sooner did the wagon driver start gathering the hay, when the Rabbi yelled out, "Someone's watching! Someone's watching!" The driver dropped the hay, ran frantically back to the carriage, and drove away as quickly as he could.

After a while, he turned to the Rabbi and said, "Rabbi, I didn't see anyone! Are you sure someone was watching?" "Definitely!" replied the Rabbi, pointing upward, "G-d was watching!"