

The Greatest Love Is For The Jewish People

The last parsha of the Torah, V'zos Habracha, is read on Simchas Torah, it concludes with telling of the greatness of Moshe, each accolade greater than the previous, culminating with the final words of the Torah "Before the eyes of all of Israel."

Rashi explains that this refers to when Moshe broke the first set of tablets of the Ten Commandments, which he did, "Before the eyes of all of Israel." He continues to say that Hashem agreed to Moshe's action, saying, "Yasher koach sheshibarta," (i.e. Well done that you broke them).

Rashi comes to tell us the simple meaning of the verse, but this doesn't seem like the simple meaning. Rashi was explaining how the last few verses of the Torah are telling of the greatness of Moshe.

"Who knew Hashem face to face," Rashi says, "For he was familiar with Him, speaking with Him at any time he wanted."

"And to all the strong hand," Rashi says, "that he received the Torah on the tablets, with his hands."

"And all the great awe," Rashi says, "miracles and great deeds in the great and awesome desert."

And all of a sudden, Rashi changes his tune, saying one of the worst things, on the final words of the Torah, "before the eyes of all of Israel," Rashi says, "his heart was stirred (literally: he raised his heart) to smash the tablets before their eyes, as it is said, 'and I shattered them before your eyes,' And the Holy One Blessed is He gave His approval, as Scripture states, 'which you broke,' (Hashem said to Moshe) "Well done that you broke them!"

Other commentaries say that the last words, "Before the eyes of all of Israel," are connected to the accolades that precede. In other words, they were done "Before the eyes of all of Israel."

However, Rashi chooses to explain these words as a separate thing, and just after the Torah tells us

the amazing and positive greatness of Moshe, it turns around and concludes with what seems to be a negative thing about Moshe. Therefore, it seems not to be the simple meaning.

The commentaries on Rashi say, that this is why Rashi adds the part about Hashem agreeing with him, to show that it is really to bring out the greatness of Moshe, that Hashem agreed to him.

However, this is difficult to understand, because if it wants to say something positive, why would the Torah say such a negative thing to bring it out? This question becomes stronger, when you realize that Hashem agreed to him on other occasions, that were not negative. Why doesn't it say one of those? And besides, the fact that Hashem agreed to him, is only a side point to the breaking of the tablets. The words that the Torah says, "Before the eyes of all of Israel," hints to the breaking of the tablets, and not to the fact that Hashem agreed with him.

We also have to understand the words of the verse, "Before the eyes of all of Israel," which according to Rashi means that Moshe broke the tablets. That it was done "Before the eyes of all of Israel," seems besides the point. But the fact that the Torah mentions these words, means that it is an important point. What is the significance of him breaking the tablets, "Before the eyes of all of Israel."?

Rashi tells us, "he raised his heart to break the tablets." Why doesn't he simply say that Moshe broke the tablets? Why does he add the words, "he raised his heart"?

Another question. We have a rule that we conclude with something good. Why would the Torah conclude with something negative, the breaking of the tablets? It's not only negative, it is not in the honor of the Torah, which we are concluding. Rashi also concludes his commentary of the Torah with the word "sheshibarta," which means, "that you broke them." Why does he end on a negative note?

With all these questions, we are forced to conclude that according to Rashi, the breaking of the tablets was the best thing that Moshe ever did, and that it

deserves greater praise than the miracles that he did, receiving the Torah and his ability to talk to Hashem whenever he wanted to. Rashi says that Hashem "gave His approval," to prove that it was a good thing. And since it is a good thing, it would make sense to end the Torah on this note. So why is Moshe's breaking of the tablets such a good thing?

When Hashem commanded Moshe to hew new stones for the second set of tablets for the Ten Commandments. On the words, "hew for yourself," Rashi says, "This can be compared to a king who went abroad and left his betrothed with the maidservants. Because of the immoral behavior of the maidservants, she acquired a bad reputation. Her bridesman [the person appointed to defend the bride should any problems arise] arose and tore up her marriage contract. He said, 'If the king decides to kill her, I will say to him, 'She is not yet your wife.'"

The King is Hashem, the betrothed is the Jewish people. The troublesome maidservants are the mixed multitude, which were the non Jews that came out of Egypt with the Jewish people, and were the instigators of all kinds of trouble, including the sin of the golden calf. And the bridesman, who saved the Jewish people by breaking the tablets, is Moshe Rabbeinu.

Moshe, who was the faithful shepherd of the Jewish people, only intention was to save them. Just imagine the sacrifice he made at that moment. He was the one who received the Torah directly from Hashem, and he spoke to Him whenever he wanted to, transmitting the word of Hashem, which is Torah. He was the one who performed the miracles, the content of the Torah, and he was the one who taught the Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah was so very precious to him and he was willing to throw it away to save a relatively small number of Jews who served the golden calf.

Moshe, who taught them to honor the Torah, broke it in front of their eyes, even though it was the greatest sacrilege, to show them the value of a Jewish person, that he or she is more precious than

the Torah, even if he or she sinned a grave sin, he was teaching us how much we must love every Jew. And Hashem agreed with him, He said, "Yasher Koach sheshibarta, well done that you broke them."

This took great strength and love on Moshe's part, he had to raise his love for the Jewish people over his love for the Torah, that is why Rashi says, "he raised his heart." That is the main point.

And that is why the Torah ends with this and Rashi ends with this, because it's the best thing that Moshe ever did.

However we are left with a question. This is the end of the whole Torah, shouldn't it end with the greatness of the Torah? Even though it's positive about Moshe, it seems to be negative about the Torah, the breaking of the Ten Commandments isn't honoring the Torah.

In Tana D'vei Eliyahu Raba it says, "There are two things in the world... Torah and (the Children of) Israel, but I don't know which one was first. I said, 'My son, it's the way of people to say that Torah was first, but I say that (the Children of) Israel were first.'"

Isn't it obvious that the Jewish people were first, the whole Torah is addressing the Jewish people, "command the Children of Israel, speak to the Children of Israel." If there were no Jews, there would be no Torah.

The question that was posed to Eliyahu, was not: Which one was first in time? But: Which is first in importance? And to that Eliyahu said that the Children of Israel is first. The whole Torah is only for the Jewish people, because the Jewish people are more important.

And that is what Rabbi Akiva says that loving your fellow Jew "is a great rule of the Torah," and Hillel says, that is the "whole Torah." In other words, by ending this way, the Torah is saying that the essence of the Torah is that we should love each other.

And that is why we read parshas V'zos Habracha on Shemini Atzeres in Israel and Simchas Torah which is the second day of Shemini Atzeres outside of Israel, because while on Sukkos seventy bulls were offered for the nations of the world, on Shemini Atzeres only one bull was offered for the Jewish people. Shemini Atzeres is all about the Jewish people. And that is why we celebrate Simchas Torah on Shemini Atzeres, because the Torah is all about the Jewish people.

And this is hinted in the words Simchas Torah. On one hand, it means that we are joyous for the Torah, as it's once again completed. On the other hand, Simchas Torah could mean the joy of the Torah, that we make the Torah joyous, we give to the Torah, showing that we are greater, the Children of Israel are first.

By loving our fellow Jew, we complete the Torah, by loving our fellow Jew, we complete the purpose of the Torah, to make this world into a home for Hashem, which means that we bring Moshiach. May he come soon.

How We Succeed

The Haftora for parshas V'zos Habracha, which is read on Shemini Atzeres in Israel and Simchas Torah (which is the second day of Shemini Atzeres) in the Diaspora, is the beginning of the book of Yehoshua, which is the continuation of the events in our parsha. As it begins, "And it was after Moshe died..."

When you delve deeper into the Haftora, you begin to see how it connects with Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, keeping and studying Torah, and doing good deeds, loyalty and brotherhood.

The Haftora records the first communication from Hashem to Yehoshua and the preparation before crossing the Jordan into the promised land.

Hashem tells Yehoshua that they would be crossing the Jordan and that "everywhere that the soles of

(the Jewish people's) feet will tread, I will give to you (the Jewish people)." He continues to tell Yehoshua the borders of Israel, that no man will ever stand up against him and that He will be with him just as He was with Moshe.

Now comes a statement that is repeated over and over again to Yehoshua, "Chazak v'ematz," be strong and have courage. He is told this by Hashem three times. First with regards to leading the Jewish people, then about keeping the Torah, and finally about going to war.

About keeping the Torah, Hashem says, "Just be strong and very courageous to observe and do in accordance with all of the Torah that Moshe My servant has commanded you. Do not stray therefrom right or left, in order that you succeed wherever you go. This book of the Torah shall not leave your mouth; you shall meditate therein day and night, in order that you observe to do all that is written in it, for then will you succeed in all your ways and then will you prosper."

This message said to Yehoshua, is a lesson to each of us, and connects to Simchas Torah, when we conclude the last parsha of the Torah and start reading once again from the beginning.

The Midrash tells us, that from the words, "This book of the Torah shall not leave your mouth," we learn that Yehoshua had a Sefer Torah with him. Rashi tells us that it was the book of Devarim. When he completed the last words, Hashem said, "Chazak v'ematz." From here we have the rule that when someone completes the Torah, we say Chazak.

The Talmud tells us, "four need strengthening, (meaning, that a person has to constantly strengthen himself with all his might to do them, Rashi) and these are they, Torah, good deeds... As it says, 'Just be strong and very courageous to observe and do in accordance with all of the Torah,' be strong in Torah and courageous in doing good deeds..."

"Do not stray therefrom right or left, in order that you succeed wherever you go." Being that Torah is truth and G-dly knowledge, the closer you align yourself to it and the more accurately you follow it, the more you will succeed and find happiness and meaning.

It is not enough to learn and understand it. But, "you shall meditate therein day and night." In other words, you have to take it to a whole new level, each according to his ability, to make it part of who you are, to have a deeper understanding of what Hashem wants, and to know the inner workings of the Torah. "In order that you observe to do all that is written in it," because you will find pleasure in doing it, now that you see the purpose in it.

Hashem continues, "for then will you succeed in all your ways and then will you prosper." A Torah life, is a successful and prosperous life. It is a life of truth and values, it is real and fulfilling. Therefore you will find satisfaction and you won't feel empty.

Now, Yehoshua sends word to prepare to cross the Jordan and he calls on the tribes of Reuvain, Gad and Menashe to keep their promise to join their brothers in battle, although they were already settled on the other side of the Jordan. They wholeheartedly consented and told Yehoshua that they would do whatever he requests of them.

Keeping their promise was an act of brotherhood and unity. And that is the idea of Shemini Atzeres, while on the seven days of Sukkos there were 70 bulls brought as sacrifices for the nations of the world, on Shemini Atzeres only one bull was brought for the Jewish people. It is a time of unity among the Jewish people and between Hashem and the Jewish people. This idea is seen in Simchas Torah as well, as we all dance with the Torah, irrespective of level of scholarship, we dance together as equals, because the Torah is our inheritance, it is equally ours.

Being the last day of our holiday season, it is meant to set the tone for the whole year. That is why we have these themes stressed at this time, because these ideas of keeping and studying Torah, delving

deeply into it, doing good deeds, unity, brotherhood, and loyalty to our Tzadikim, is what fortifies us and enables us to do our mission.

Just as in the Haftora, they prepare to cross the Jordan into the promised land, we will soon complete our mission, go together to our Holy Land, with the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

Be A Mentch

In the last parsha, V'Zos Habracha, we read of Moshe's passing and how the Jewish men mourned his passing for thirty days. "And the Bnei Yisroel, sons of Israel, wept." In contrast, by Aaron's passing, both men and women, "all the House of Israel" wept. Why was Aaron mourned by all? Because he brought peace amongst friends and between husband and wife.

If peace is so special, why didn't Moshe involve himself in peace making as well? Didn't he himself teach that it is acceptable to twist the truth to make peace.

Moshe was the transmitter of Hashem's word, the Torah, the truth. While peace is created by bending the truth, truth is unyielding, it doesn't take feelings into account.

Moshe's main purpose was to accurately teach Hashem's Torah, he had to be a beacon of unyielding truth. This precluded him from truth bending, even with the best of intentions.

This is also why, sometimes, Torah discussions and debates could sound harsh and tactless. Because it is about truth, which just is.

It is the truth of Torah that makes us who we are. It is because of our commitment to the truth that Hashem chose us.

What takes precedence, truth or peace?

When it comes to Torah study, be like Moshe, truth over peace. When counseling people, be like Aaron, peace over truth.

Ultimately, truth is essential to our existence, while peace is a tool, employed by our Torah of truth. Start with truth and pursue peace when it is called for.

Don't be a hard-nosed, tactless person, be a mentch. A mentch knows when to be like Moshe and when to be like Aaron.