

The פרשה begins with the verse: וְאַתָּה אֵל אַבְרָהָם אֵל יִצְחָק וְאֵל יַעֲקֹב בָּאֵל שָׁקִי וְשָׁמִי ה' לֹא נִוְדַעְתִּי לָהֶם. What does this mean?

The sefer בראשית רבה in דברי חז"ל by R' Simcha Sheps brings a fascinating idea from שְׁקִי קָל שָׁקִי. What does the name שְׁקִי signify? When the הקדוש ברוך הוא created the world, it was expanding and had the potential to expand infinitely. But Hashem said, די - enough! There are limits to עולם הזה. The name שְׁקִי represents the הקדוש ברוך הוא halting the process of העולם at a certain point. How is this relevant to us? Why do we need to know about such a supernatural and esoteric concept?

The answer is very simple. In פרשת בראשית, the נחש was punished. What was his punishment? The Torah says (3:14): וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ - "You will eat dust all the days of your life." That's a punishment? It seems like a ברכה - you'll never starve! But, as we all know from the famous vort, this was precisely the קללה. Hashem was saying to the נחש, "I'm giving you everything you need. Don't ever come back to Me. You don't need Me, and I don't need you." The ultimate קללה is being cut off from any relationship with Hashem. When Hashem said to the world, די, He meant, "This is the point up until which I, הקדוש ברוך הוא, perfect the world. From here on, it's up to you, ישראל. You, tiny little בשר ודם, have the job of achieving שלמות, of continuing the process of בריאת העולם by constantly improving yourselves." By striving for שלמות, we continue the מעשה בראשית that הוא stopped when He said די. This is what Hashem wants from us. This is also what יצחק, אברהם, and יעקב did. That's what the פסוק means when it says וְאַתָּה אֵל אַבְרָהָם אֵל יִצְחָק וְאֵל יַעֲקֹב בָּאֵל שָׁקִי. That the אבות understood the message. Their עבודת ה' was the ultimate perfection, the שלמות, of their time, prior to התורה.

Rabbi Oelbaum שליט"א often shares a powerful vort that I've quoted many times. We all know the saying: הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים. His unique explanation of this concept is profound. When we ask Hashem for הצלחה in הבורא, עבודת הבורא, פרנסה, נחת, גזונט, or anything else, שמים has בחירה. They can say yes or חס and no. If we daven hard enough, we might get what we request, but שמים still retains the choice. However, there is one exception: יראת שמים. If we ask for יראת שמים, שמים must say yes - they have no בחירה in this matter. When I first heard this idea, I was so taken by it, that every single day since then, I daven for יראת שמים.

But what does יראת שמים mean? This week's פרשה provides an answer. During the מכה of ברד, the Torah states (9:20): וְהָיָה אֵת דְּבַר ה' מַעֲבָדֵי פְרַעָה הַנִּיס אֶת עַבְדָּיו וְאֶת מִקְנֵהוּ אֵל הַבָּתִּים - those who feared the word of Hashem brought their servants and livestock inside. And what about the others? (9:21): וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא שָׂם לְבֹו אֵל וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא שָׂם לְבֹו אֵל - they left their servants and livestock in the field, and they perished. Here, the Torah describes two types of people. Some יראת שמים had מצריים, while others lacked it. But what does יראת שמים really mean? And when we daven for יראת שמים, what are we asking for?

R' Zev of Strickov explains the פסוק (19:10): וְיָרָאתָ ה' טְהוֹרָה עוֹמֶדֶת לְעַד. There are two levels of יראת שמים. The עבדי פרעה had a temporary יראה - they feared the immediate danger and took precautions. But as soon as the danger passed, their יראה disappeared. In contrast, ה' טְהוֹרָה refers to a pure, enduring יראת שמים that remains permanent. R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld points out a subtle lesson in the פסוקים. The Torah doesn't say the second group lacked יראת שמים; it says they didn't take Hashem's word to heart: וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא שָׂם לְבֹו אֵל דְּבַר ה'. This teaches us that even if we are technically fulfilling the דבר ה', we must internalize it. Our עבודת ה' cannot become routine or apathetic. Instead, it must permeate our hearts and inspire us with התלהבות and passion.

When we daven for יראת שמים, we are asking not only to fear Hashem but to internalize His word and elevate ourselves daily. By doing so, we emulate the גדולים, although they were perfect from the beginning, but us, small fry, we have to improve ourselves each and every day. And that constant improvement will lead us Im Yirtzeh Hashem, עד ביאת גואל צדק. Good Shabbos!

