

Kinder Torah

בס"ד

Parashas Nasso

מוקדש לע"נ רות בת יעקב ע"ה ❖ במלואת י"ח שנים לפטירתה

The Thirsty Fish

“Avi, are you still looking at those fish?”

“Yes, Imma. I can watch the fish tank for hours.”

“Did you ever notice that the fish are always opening and closing their mouths, swallowing the water?”

“Yes I did Imma. Why is that?”

“Rav Simcha Wasserman zt”l learned an important lesson from the fish, Avi. Although they live in the water, they are still swallowing water all of the time. Don’t they ever have enough? No. Hashem’s holy Torah is often compared to water. Just as water flows to the lowest place, so to Torah goes to the lowest people – those who humble themselves. The Jewish people are like fish when it comes to the ‘water’ of Torah. Although they are immersed in Torah learning, nonetheless, they can never get enough of it. They continue learning on the bus, while waiting in line at the bank, early morning, late at night. They are always looking for another *shiur*, another opportunity to be inspired.”

“Imma, that’s great! I want to be like Rav Wasserman’s fish, and ‘drink in’ all of the Torah that I can!”

Kinderlach . . .

Shavuus is coming; our celebration of the giving of the Torah. This is your chance to show yourself and Hashem how “thirsty” you are to hear His words. “Drink in” all of the Torah that you can this Shavuus. Hashem is ready to give you a whole “ocean” of Torah. If you are thirsty enough, you can drink the whole thing.

Bircas Kriyas Shema

“Look Avi! A gem! A perfect diamond! It sparkle lights up the whole room! It is awesome! It is magnificent!”

“Where is it, Abba? I don’t see it. Is it on the table? The floor? Is it in this room or outside the window? I want to see it and behold its beauty. Please tell me where it is.”

“It is right there in your Siddur, Avi.”

“In my Siddur? I see the white pages with words printed in black ink. Where is the sparkling gem? I don’t see it.”

“Which words are written on the page, Avi?”

“*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echod.*”

“You’ve got it, Avi! That is the gem – *Kriyas Shema.*”

“Ahhh. You are referring to the beauty of the mitzvah of *Kriyas Shema*, Abba. I know that it is an important mitzvah, Abba, but why do you describe it as a sparking gem?”

“**T**here are several reasons, Avi. Firstly, it is one of the 613 mitzvos commanded explicitly in the Torah. The source is in parashas Voeschanan, ‘And these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart. You shall teach them thoroughly to your children and you shall discuss them when you sit in your home, and when you travel on the road, **and when you lie down, and when you rise**’ (Devarim 6:6,7). Which words should we discuss when we lie down and when we rise?”

“The words of *Kriyas Shema.*”

“Precisely, Avi. These words are essentially *yichud Hashem* – the unification of Hashem (that He and only He is the sole Ruler of everything and everyone) – and



kaballas ole malchus Shomayim – an acceptance of the yoke of Heavenly rule. The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 420) explains that the Almighty gives us the privilege of unifying Him and accepting His rule twice each day, in the morning and in the evening. This protects us from being drawn into the clutches of *aveyra* (sin) as we go about our daily activities.”

“What an honor, Abba! Why did the *Anshei Kineses HaGedola* place the *Kriyas Shema* at precisely this point in the morning *tefillos*?”

“Excellent question, Avi. We have to remember that we are on our way to an audience with the King. We will have the opportunity to request anything that we want or need. Until now we have thanked Him for giving us another day of life and providing us with our needs. We have verbally offered up sacrifices, and praised Him for His wondrous deeds. However, we are lacking a basic point. How can we make pleas from someone who is not capable of fulfilling them? How can we ask someone who does not rule over us to help us?”

“That would be an exercise in futility.”

“It certainly would, Avi. Therefore, it is

precisely at this point, when we are on the threshold of entering the Almighty’s throne room (so to speak), that we recognize His singular and absolute rule over the universe, and we accept it upon ourselves.¹ ‘Hashem is King of the universe! He is my King and I accept His rule.’ This proclamation comes from the King Himself, and must be read with trepidation, awe, and *kavannah*.²

“But Abba, we do not say *Kriyas Shema* just yet. We make two blessings before the mitzvah, and one afterwards.”

“**C**orrect, Avi. Before we read the King’s decree, it is fitting to publicize Who the King is. The first *bracha*, *Yotzer Ohr*, describes His mastery over the universe. It then speaks about how the angels praise Him and sanctify His Name. The second *beracha*, *Ahavah Rabba*, expresses the paramount importance of the Torah. It is necessary to make this known because we are about to read the King’s proclamation, whose subject is fulfilling the commandments of this Torah. We then add that Hashem’s gave us this Torah out of love, and not obligation. We then beseech Him to help us understand His Torah and fulfill His mitzvos. The *bracha* concludes with a plea for the final salvation.”

“May we see it speedily in our days.”

“Amen. Therefore, say these *brachos* with great *kavannah* Avi, and prepare yourself to accept Hashem’s sovereignty today and in the days of *Moshiach*.”

Kinderlach . . .

Kriyas Shema is a gem. It is a mitzvah di’orayssa, one of the 613, which we have the privilege of fulfilling twice daily. We unify the Almighty’s rule over the universe and accept it upon ourselves. This shields us from aveiros during the course of the day and night. It also prepares us for our upcoming audience with the King of kings, by focusing us upon Whom we are about to meet. In order to properly prepare ourselves for this great mitzvah, the Anshei Kineses HaGedola gave us two berachos – Yotzer Ohr, and Ahavah Rabba. They articulate Hashem’s rule over the universe, the praises He receives, the importance of Torah, and His great love for Klal Yisrael. Lastly is a request for Divine assistance in the study of Torah, fulfillment of mitzvos, and final redemption. Kinderlach, add the gem of Kriyas Shema to your treasure chest of mitzvos. Bask in its holy shine today, and every day of your life.

¹ Siddur Otzer HaTefillos

² טור או"ח סימן ט"א