

PREPAREDNESS, READINESS FOR MITZVOHS

Sidra Shemini, Parshas Poroh

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Parshas Poroh, the third of the four special portions, coinciding with Sidra Shemini, occurs only once in several years, as in the current year. It should thus be of interest to explore the meaning of this simultaneousness.

In order to be uplifted in observing a mitzvah, our teachers tell us, proper preparation is a requisite. The Bracha recital before fulfilling a mitzvah, ASHER KIDSHONU, Who sanctified us with His mitzvohs, proves that by performing a mitzvah one reaches new spiritual heights.

It is no wonder that prior to the execution of a mitzvah one finds in the siddur a special prayer, YEHI ROTZON, which puts the performer in the proper frame of mind. Jumping into a mitzvah without prior adjustment of the mind and every fiber in body lacks the conditions to feel personally sanctified by its observance.

The paragraph Uvo Letzion includes two passages following one another. The first from Chronicles (29:18) ... and may You (help) prepare their hearts to You. Immediately after this passage follows a second passage from Tehilim (78:38) "He, the merciful One, forgives iniquity..." The connection of the above two passages from two different sources is deemed appropriate because the iniquity referred to here is the lack of preparedness, thus appealing for divine help to "prepare their hearts to You".

The Mishna (Brochos 30b) informs us about the early Chasidim that they spent three hours in their daily prayer, one hour before the actual prayer (in preparation), one hour in prayer itself, and one hour following prayer. Commentators are wondering why the need for that third hour. They respond that since they were well prepared, mind and soul, they remained so attached in their high level of ecstasy and spiritual rapture, that it took an hour to slowly descend to their normal selves.

This, they further explain, was the cause of Moshe's six hour delay in descending from Sinai with the Tablets. Would the Israelites have

understood this position they wouldn't have fallen into the trap of the golden calf.

This basic concept is applicable to every mitzvah. Prior adjustment, gathering of all faculties of mind and soul, raises the level of performance to the desired heights. This brings us to the Parsha.

The name of this week's Sidra speaks volumes. The day was Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the first day of the first month in the calendar, the divinely designated day, in which to erect the mishkan (Shemos 40:2). The Midrash elaborately explains the reason why this day was chosen, although the Mishkan complex was completed months earlier. Yet, when this august day was reached, the Torah calls it "Shemini", the eighth day. It is obvious that with this designation the Torah seeks to draw our attention to the fact that there were seven days of practice, "MILUIM", prior to this "eighth day". This "Shemini" was indeed the day of such focus because Moshe and Aaron and the Kohanim were well prepared, by being secluded inside the Mishkan for seven days, laboring in preparation, body and soul, to this illustrious day, the erection of the Mishkan.

The requirement of preparedness is found elsewhere as well. The date of Yom Tov Succos, on the fifteenth of Tishrei, five days after Yom Kippur, affords the opportunity to prepare for the upcoming holiday, building the Succah and purchasing the Lulav and Esrog. There is a Yiddish expression for one who is ill prepared for a mitzvah, "he fell in as a Yovon in the Succah".

Yom Tov Shevuos is preceded with three days of Hagbolah. The day of erecting the Mishkan, the place from which Hashem speaks to Israel, requires not three, but seven days of preparation. The higher the reach, the harder the climb, the more energy is to be assembled beforehand. The very name of that day, Shemini, thus, accords credit to the seven days of preparedness.

The previous Sidra, Tzav, concludes with the seven days of preparation, "miluim", being a model for two more Avodos to be preceded with seven days of practice. a) the Avodah of Poroh Aduma, for purifying someone who became contaminated by a corpse, and b) the Avodah of

Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is clearly a day that culminates a period of days and weeks of previous climbing “from strength to strength” (Tehilim 84:8). Starting with Rosh Chodesh Elul, the second period of Slichos, then Rosh Hashana, Ten Days of Repentance, and finally Yom Kippur. The seven days of the kohanim’s seclusion before Yom Kippur is part of that ascendancy from rung to rung.

Poroh Aduma, too, requiring seven days of prior seclusion for preparation, apparently, is an achievement of tremendous proportions. The process itself, purification on the third day, and again on the seventh day (Bamidbor 19:12) manifests a GROWING quality of Tahara. And so is, in addition, the seven-day seclusion "before" the process, a time of utmost concentration and thoughtfulness. It possesses, furthermore, a Yom Kippur quality, as can be gleaned from the fact that both, seclusion for Yom Kippur and seclusion for Poroh, are mentioned together in Parshas Tzav (ibid).

It remains to ponder the connection to Rosh Chodesh Nissan (Shemini) and Parshas Tzav. The law of seclusion before Yom Kippur could have been given in Parshas Acharai Mos (Vayikro 16) together with the other laws of Yom Kippur. The laws of seclusion before the Poroh Adumah process could have been given in Parshas Chukas (Bamidbar 19) together with the other laws of Poroh Aduma. Why are they given here (Parshas Tzav) in the context of the Mishkan erection and the prior seven day seclusion?

The answer, one suggests, is that it emphasizes the new beginning, a new lease on life. Just as the Mishkan erection represents a new beginning, a sacred place where Hashem is in contact with Israel. The same applies to Yom Kippur following the seven day seclusion. The same applies also to Poroh Aduma, for a life of purity, Tahara, after coming in touch with a corpse, beginning the emphasis on life.

The MAFTIR of Parshas Poroh is, thus, a welcome addition to Parshas Shemini, both inspiring meaningful preparation before performance of a mitzvah.

