

Parshas Behaalosecha – Dovid Reid

י"ט סיון תשע"ה – 5 June 2015 – שבת פי' בהעלותך

To mark his forthcoming marriage this week to Leora Freedman

This week's Sedra sees the Leviim assuming their new status as the substitutes for the firstborn in serving Hashem and transporting the Mishkan. Their induction to their new jobs is introduced with Moshe summoning them to their charge. Hand in hand with their job at the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdash, the tribe of Levi was summoned to be the Rabbonim and teachers of Klal Yisroel, as Moshe says in his bracha to Shevet Levi, "They shall teach Your ordinances to Yaakov and Your Torah to Yisroel; they shall place incenses before your presence, and burnt offerings on Your Altar". We read how Moshe is instructed to 'take' the Leviim – which the Midrash explains to mean, 'entices them with words'. Explains Rashi; "take them with words by saying 'you are fortunate in that you will be privileged to be שמשים (shamashim) – attendants to Hashem". A shamash is a worker, a 'shlack', a caretaker.

Rav Gifter זצ"ל asked; surely you may have thought that the way to convince the Leviim to step up to their job was to tell about the perks of the job, the benefits; free Ma'aser from the entire nation, the honour they will receive, the Aliyos which they receive ahead of Yisroelim, etc – but the work load? Why does Moshe use that as the selling point to entice them into their new job?

Rav Gifter זצ"ל explained that it is absolutely forbidden to package the Torah [or any mitzva] as something that it is not. To define the job as teaching Torah or the work in the Mishkan as the by-product of the job then you have undermined the essence of what the job is. The Mitzva at hand is not the reward – that may be a helpful, but it is not what the Mitzva is. The Gemara (גמרא) tells us that "always a person should be involved in Torah and Mitzvos even though he has ulterior motive, because from doing it 'shelo lishmo' – not for the Mitzvos sake, one will come to doing things lishmo – for the sake of the Mitzva. But one has to be wary of defining the Torah as the perk.

Rav Gifter זצ"ל brought an example of an organisation which in order to help pull people through its doors advertised Torah as Mysticism. This he claimed was to distort what the תורה is, to misrepresent its essence. In the same vein it is אסור (ossur) to use the Torah as a means for a profession! You can't learn in order to earn – although you can earn in order to learn!!!

Ulterior motives are great as stepping stones to get us started but the goal has got to be to act without the incentive. A young boy may be tempted to learn Torah with licking honey off the 'Aleph Bais' letters, but hopefully a yeshiva student doesn't learn [only] because he will make a barbeque when he makes a siyum! To be constantly interested and obsessed with what I can get out of Yiddishkeit is a particular dangerous ideology as we shall see.

The Chasam Sofer beautifully suggests that the concept that we should strive to do all our Torah and Mitzvos purely lishmo is at the root of the brocha we say at every bris and pideon haben. We say, "Just as he has entered into the bris so too he should enter in Torah and marriage and good deeds". Just as the bris which is painful and the pideon haben which costs money where Mitzvos performed with no ulterior motive other than to perform the Mitzvos of Hashem, so too the child is blessed that his whole life should be full of Avodas Hashem-lishmo!