BEING NICE *VS* BEING FRUM

# RABBI YITZCHOK MILLER *BAIS SIVAN 5775-05/21/2015*

Rabbi Miller deals with kiruv and he has found that every non-frum Jew who he has ever dealt with knows about the ‘aseres hadibros’ –the 10 commandments and they all know that they were written on 2 ‘luchos’ 2 tablets. Even most goyim know these 2 facts.

Rabbi Miller posed a few questions:

* Why did Hashem divide the ‘aseres hadibros’ into 2 sections? Why couldn’t they have been written on 1 stone?
* What is the purpose of having 5 and 5?
* The Medrash explains that both sides looked identical in size and shape, which makes sense, but in actuality if one looks at the words on the luchos, one sees that the first section contains 145 words and the second section only contains 45 words. The first 5 has 1/3 more words. So we see Hashem could have arranged them differently.

At the end of the Seder, we sing, “shinayim me yodah” who knows 2? I know 2-the 2 luchos-2 tablets. Shortly thereafter we sing, “asara me yoda” who knows 10? I know 10-the aseres hadibros” the 10 Commandments. Are they now one and the same? By mentioning the 2 luchos, we are in essence of course referring to the 10 commandments. And we cannot say that the only answer for thinking of something that contains 10 are the 10 commandments-we can find other things in the Torah that contain 10. (i.e. the 10 plagues) So we understand that they are not one and the same and if both are mentioned, it means there is a lesson to be learned.

Rabbi Miller posed another question: In Parshas V’arah, Moshe Rabbeinu begins his mission of freeing the Yidden from Mitzraim (Egypt) before the ‘aseres hamokos’ –the 10 plagues begin Hashem tells Moshe to tell Paroh that I will meet you by the Nile River and the River will turn to blood. A few posukim later, we see that Hashem tells Moshe to tell Ahron to take his stick and strike the Nile and turn the water into blood. What happened that initially Moshe was commanded to do so and then Ahron was given the order?

When Moshe heard he was to strike the Nile, he said to Hashem, “How can I strike the Nile, when it was this same water that saved me as an infant? My mother placed me here in a “teva’ and this saved my life because Basya, Paroh’s daughter find me and saved me? This would show a lack of ‘hakoras hatov’, a lack of gratitude to the river.

We know that the tarag mitzvos-the 613 mitzvos comprise of mitzvos ‘bein adom la’mokom’ between man and his creator and ‘bein adom l’chavero’ between man and his friend. Each mitzvah falls into one or the other category and sometimes, they fall into both categories.

But what if a person finds himself in a conflict. He wants to do a mitzvah i.e. a mitzvah ‘bein adom la’mokom’ between him and Hashem but what if doing so will impact his friend negatively. What is he commanded to do in such a situation? Which mitzvah has priority? A frummer person will say, those mitzvahs that are for Hashem have priority, and we need not be so concerned with how it will impact our friend, ‘bein adom l’chavero

A person who is not as religious, or not religious at all, will say, definitely those mitzvos ‘bein adom l’chavero’ between man and his friend take priority and Hashem will surely understand.

Rabbi Miller suggests that both attitudes are correct. But this could be misleading, because it can mean that in any situation where there is a conflict between these 2 attitudes, there are only 2 options to follow –either be true to Hashem or be true to your friend.

But in reality, explains Rabbi Miller there is a 3rd option and this 3rd option is the basis of his shiur. And because this 3rd option exists, that is the reason that the luchos were not on 1 long stone, 1 between the other but rather on 2 identical stones, one next to the other-to teach us that both sides are equal.

When looking at the luchos, we know the first section is bein adom l’mokom’-laws that pertain to man and his creator and the 2nd section pertain to laws that pertain to man and his friend. If we analyze the 6th commandment, “kabade es ovicho v’es yimacho’ honor your father and mother-it would seem it is a mitzvah that is inclusively between man and his friend. It is on the 2nd side, and it pertains solely to individuals. But explains Rabbi Miller, this commandment comes to teach us the fundamentals of Yiddishkeit. We may think that this mitzvah is only between people but within this mitzvah there is also an element of bein adom l’mokom’-of serving Hashem. How is that? Because contained in this mitzvah is the fundamental concept of Yiddishkeit of ‘hakoras hatov” of gratitude. We are to serve our parents, not only because they are our parents and have done so much for us but through appreciating all they have done for us, we will also learn to have hakoras hatov to Hashem, of appreciating all he has done for us.

How do the aseres hadibros start? Not by saying, “I am the G-d who created the world” but rather “onochi Hashem Elokacho Sh’hozazicho Me Mitzraim” I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of Egypt.” Why? Because Hashem created the world for everyone, but for the Yidden, we must also appreciate the fact that he took us out of bondage, out of slavery, he freed us and for that we must also have hakoras hatov to Hashem. And how do we learn that –from the commandment of honoring our parents. So we see here a clear example of one mitzvah that encompasses both sections of the Torah.

And why did Hashem write the luchos on 2 equal sides, not as one long list? To teach us that commandment number 6 is the first commandment on the 2nd side-it is as important as the commandments on the first side. If there would be a long list, the latter commandments would have been thrown to the wayside, chas v’shalom, we would have thought that the ones towards the beginning of the list are more important. So Hashem is showing us that both sides are equally important.

The ‘rotzon of Hashem’ is clear. Hashem wants us to know that both categories co-exist. Neither side is more important than the other side.

So if we have a conflict, we have to immediately understand that we know to do some soul searching and figure out how to keep both sides because both sides are equally important. It is hard to do but as we internalize this message, our thinking will improve in this area and we will be able to do so.

What happened in Parasha V’arah- Hashem tells Moshe to hit the Nile, so it will turn into blood, and Moshe says, “Hashem if I understand the way you created the world, with this middah of gratitude-then how can I hit the river? It seems hard to believe that Moshe is teaching Hashem about hakoras hatov. Hashem is aware of how Moshe is saved, he doesn’t need a lesson in gratitude. How did Moshe have the audacity to speak that way to the Ribbono Shel Olam?

But explains Rabbi Miller that is not what happened. Moshe got the commandment and what he said to Hashem was the following: Hashem if you command me to hit the river, I will do so, but I have a question-if I understand the concept of hakoras hatov , I am not clear as to how my hitting the river fits in with that?

And Hashem answered him, “you are right, Moshe, how can you hit the river? I am going to introduce to you a concept in Yiddishkeit called ‘a sholiach’ a messenger. Make your brother, Ahron a messenger for you, this way it will be as if you are hitting the river but in actuality he is doing the act. This way you are listening to Hashem’s commandment, but yet showing gratitude to the Nile.

So what Hashem is showing us, is that sometimes we have to be creative. It is not always so clear cut, how to keep both sides of the equation, but we are commanded to find a way to meet both criteria, between man and his creator and between man and his fellow man.

Rabbi Miller says if we have the proper mindset and realize the importance of both sides, we will find a way.

When Hashem talks to Moshe in the ‘Sina’ in the burning bush and commands him to go to Paroh and free the nation-after Moshe says he isn’t worthy of doing so, he isn’t capable of doing so etc. and Hashem says to him, you are worthy, you are capable. Moshe says to Hashem, okay I can do it, but I will not do it because my brother Ahron will be upset that I, his younger brother will be the leader of the nation. Here, Moshe wanted to do ‘bein adom l’mokom’-listen to Hashem’s directive but yet did not want to make his brother feel bad and thus Moshe would not be doing ‘bein adom l’chavero’

Hashem says to him, ‘good point Moshe’ you are showing me you understand that both sides of the luchos, both sides of the equation are equal and to do Hashem’s directive but yet hurt a fellow Yid is not what the Torah commands, but I am telling you Moshe, not to worry about it. You will see that when you tell Ahron that you are the leader of the nation-not only will he not feel bad, he will be so happy for you.

The Baal Mussar explain on this: The Jewish nation was suffering horrible in servitude In Egypt. Moshe rabbeinu is giving an opportunity to save the nation, is this the time to worry that his brother will feel bad, won’t feel bad? From here we learn, that if a person wants to do a mitzvah of Hashem, but in doing so, he will hurt another Yid, he has to figure out a way to do both sides of the equation equally and properly.

Rabbi Miller brought many wonderful stories depicting this concept:

* It was erev Rosh Hashanah in Rav Feivel Mendlowitz’s yeshiva. Erev Rosh Hashona, the day itself is awesome, the yeshiva boys are all preparing for the day of judgement-they are learning, davening, saying Tehillim. There is silence in the Bais Medrash as all the boys are totally engrossed in the ‘avoda’ of that day. The Rosh Yeshiva calls over 2 of the best boys and says the following, ‘We have people who have given the yeshiva beautiful donations this year. I would like you to spend the next hour writing them thank you cards for their donations.” And he proceeds to give them some ideas of what they should write in the cards.

The boys were dumbfounded. “Rebbe,’ they said, ‘today of all days, we want us to be busy with such mundane act-of writing thank you cards?”

And listen to what Rav Feivel Mendlowitch answered them, “Specifically, today, I want you to do this. Why? Because to today everyone is focused solely on the first part of the luchos-on the mitzvos of ‘bein adom l’mokom. Especially today, we need to strike a balance, we need to remember to also do something from the 2nd side of the luchos, to do something ‘bein adom l’chavero’ to do something for our friend.

* Rabbi Yisroel Miller explains, why did Avrohom Aveinu offer to wash the feet of the angels. It wasn’t to be hospitable. In reality, there were a group of people in those days who worshipped the dusts on their feet. Avrohom Aveinu did not know these were holy angels, he thought they were regular people and might be from that sect. he definitely did not want them walking into his tent with their idol-worshipping-the dust on their feet. So in essence, he was doing something ,’bein adom l’mokom’ but he was not going to hurt their feelings and say, “please wash your g-d off of your feet’ I don’t want what you perceive as holy, the dust on your feet’ to come into my holy tent.’ Instead he ran over to them, and said, ‘please let me wash the dust off of your feet. You have definitely traveled so far, you are hot and tired, let me was your feet and you will feel much better’

These 2 stories show us **balance.** This is what a Yid needs. We need to maintain our standard of ‘avodas Hashem’ serving Hashem in the best way possible, but not neglecting the other side of the luchos. And the opposite is also true. We can’t just do ‘bein adom l’chavero’ help our fellow Jew and forget to serve Hashem.

As we approach ‘matan Torah’ we need to say ‘naasa v’nishmah’ to both sides of the luchos. And we need to work on achieving balance between both sides. In this way, our keeping of the ‘tarag mitzvos’ our keeping the 613 mitzvos will improve and in this merit, we will be worthy of the coming of Moshiach Tzidkanu b’mahara b’yomeinu.