

Sparks of Light Torah Portion Emor

Lesson delivered on Tuesday on the fourth of Eiyar

Explanation of the Gamora in Tractate Shabbos 86b-88a

[See footnote for an introduction to the lesson. The letters in bold are an excerpt from the Gamora.]¹ Then, [on the third day of Sivan] He [G-d] commanded them [the Jewish Nation] **the commandment of distancing [themselves from Mount Sinai]**. On the fourth of Sivan, [G-d commanded them;] refrain yourselves [from having relations with your wives]. One must separate himself from his wife. This is Reb Yosi's opinion; that the first day of the month was Sunday, Monday was the second of Sivan, Tuesday was the third of Sivan, and Wednesday was the fourth of Sivan.

According to the Sages, the first of Sivan was on Monday, the second of Sivan was on Tuesday, and the third of Sivan was on Wednesday. **On the second day of the week, the month was set**; Rosh Chodesh was on Monday; the first of Sivan. Eiyar was thirty days and they left Egypt on a Thursday; thirty days of Eiyar and thirty days of Nissan.² **On Monday, He didn't tell them anything**; they then reached Mount Sinai [and they were exhausted from traveling]. "Upon this day they reached the Sinai Desert (Shmos 19:1)." They were exhausted from traveling. [Although] they travelled with the Clouds of Honor [that flattened the path for the Jews]; however, it is [still] exhausting. Even with the Clouds of Honor, it is exhausting with babies; every person had ten babies. They needed to watch over them; to stop them from leaving the Cloud. **On Tuesday**; He told them, "And you will all be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy Nation (Shmos 19:6)." **On Wednesday, He commanded them to distance themselves [from Mount Sinai]. And on Thursday, [G-d commanded] to separate yourselves [from your wives]."**

[The Gemara poses a] **question** [on Reb Yosi's opinion]. [G-d commanded the Jews] "**And you shall sanctify yourselves tomorrow.**" [This implies that the commandment to separate from wives was for two days (today and *tomorrow*); **Thursday and Friday. This is a question on Reb Yosi's [opinion].**³ **Reb Yosi would answer** that Moshe added another day on his own

¹ The Gamora in Shabbos mentions a dispute between the Sages and Reb Yossi as to which day of the month of Sivan, the Nation of Israel received the Torah. The Sages opinion is that it took place on the sixth of Sivan, whereas Reb Yosi's opinion is that it took place on the seventh on Sivan. Rava (a Talmudic Sage) explains that the Sages and Reb Yosi agree that it took place on Shabbos. Their dispute is only as to which day in the month of Sivan it took place. According to Reb Yosi, Rosh Chodesh (the first day of the month of Sivan) was Sunday. On that day, G-d did not command the Nation of Israel to prepare for the receiving of the Torah since they were exhausted from traveling. On Monday, Moshe told the Nation of Israel; "You all saw that which I did to Egypt... and You will all be for Me a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation (Shmos 19:4-6)."

² A Jewish month is either 30 or 29 days. According to the sages, both Eiyar and Nissan were thirty days long. Therefore, if the fifteenth of Nissan was on a Thursday, the first of Sivan would be on a Monday.

³ As explained in the first footnote, according to Reb Yosi, the Jews arrived at Mount Sinai on Sunday. On Monday, G-d told the Jews that "if you will keep My Torah etc." and on Tuesday, G-d commanded them to distance themselves from the mountain. On Wednesday, the Jews were commanded to sanctify themselves today and tomorrow, i.e. to refrain from having relations with their wives on Wednesday and Thursday. They would then be ready to receive the Torah on Friday; and yet they received it on Shabbos. Seemingly, the verse proves the Sages opinion that they only arrived at Mount Sinai on Monday. They were therefore only ready to receive the Torah on Shabbos.

accord.⁴ [However,] they [still] should have received the Torah on Friday; a portion of the day [should be sufficient]? Since a portion of the day is considered like the entire day.⁵ However, Moshe wanted to receive the Torah on Shabbos. And then, he received the Torah on Shabbos at nine o'clock in the morning; not during Sunrise. Since during Sunrise, everyone went to immerse. Reason being that they were still dripping; so they went to immerse.⁶ [The Gamora poses a] **question, “And you will sanctify yourselves today and tomorrow;”** only on Thursday and Friday [and according to Reb Yosi, this commandment was on Wednesday]; **a difficulty on Reb Yosi.**

“Reb Yosi would answer that Moshe added one day on his own accord. As we see in the *Braisa* that there were three things Moshe did on his own accord, and the Holy One Blessed Be He agreed with him. He added a day [to receive the Torah on Shabbos and not on Friday], [ever since receiving the Torah,] he refrained from [having relations with] his wife, [and he broke the tablets].” He did this on his own accord; he made a [Talmudic argument called a] *kal vachomer*.⁷ The main thing is to separate oneself from his wife. When one gets married, he must know that it is not for lusts and not for the evil inclination. We get married in order to continue the generations [and] in order to be a complete person.⁸ It is written that G-d does not receive one's prayers when he is unmarried. He must get married; to get engaged at the age of seventeen, and at the age of seventeen and a half, to get married. By the time he is eighteen and a half, he should already have children; by the time he's nineteen, he should already have children. By the time he is thirty, he should already have ten children. When his generations will continue, by the time he's fifty, he will already have had grandchildren. By the time he's seventy, he will already have had great-grandchildren. He will already have had a thousand great-grandchildren. He will have had ten children, a hundred grandchildren, and a thousand great-grandchildren. “He added a day on his own accord.” He understood this [that G-d's true will is to give the Torah on Shabbos] on his own; if children are brought about with holiness, they are born on their own.⁹

Just like Elisha, the son of Avuyah.¹⁰ Reb Meir (Akiva) asked him how did this happen to you [that you became wicked] (see Tosfos in Tractate Chagigah 15a)?! In [Tractate] Chagigah (14a); [The Gamora speaks of the sages who entered into the “Orchard”] you were the greatest;

⁴ The Gamora explains that according to Reb Yosi, Moshe understood from the verse that G-d's true intention was to wait three days.

⁵ From my limited knowledge, this Gamora does not mention this idea. Perhaps, the Rav is preempting a question on the Gamora's explanation for Reb Yosi. Although Moshe understood that there should be three days and not just two, the Jews could have still received the Torah on Friday? Reason being that there is a general Talmudic rule that a portion of a day is considered like a full day. Friday could therefore be considered the third day and also be the day of the receiving of the Torah? The Rav answers that Moshe intentionally postponed the receiving of the Torah until Shabbos, since he wanted the Torah to be received on Shabbos.

⁶ The source of this idea is unknown to me.

⁷ The Jewish Nation had to refrain themselves from their wives for three days before their being spoken to by the Divine Presence to receive of the Torah. Although, this was only a momentous occasion, and there was a set date for them to prepare themselves, they were still forbidden from having relations with their wives. All the more so that I who am constantly spoken to by the Divine Presence with no set time, must refrain from having relations with my wife.

⁸ A husband and his wife share the same soul. When they get married, their souls unite making them “complete.”

⁹ The relevance of this idea to adding one day on his own accord is unclear to me.

¹⁰ Alisha, the son of Avuyah was originally a great sage who later on became wicked.

you were in the “Orchard”!¹¹ You were greater than everyone else! Writes that he was greater than all of them; greater than Reb Akiva, greater than Ben Azai etc. He [Elisha, the son of Avuyah] said since I was not born with holiness. He [Elisha] told him that during his Bris, fire spread from Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua [who attended the Bris and were learning Torah]. Suddenly, everything ascended in flames; the house ascended in flames; Everything! They brought a super tank from America [to extinguish the fire]; eighty tons of water every five minutes! This was in Tevaria [which borders the Kineret]. He [Avuyah] went down to the Kineret and brought eighty tons [of water to extinguish the fire]; within a hundred shifts, there was already no water left in the Kineret.¹²

Avuyah went down to search; maybe this [the fire] is was from the Plata or the cholent pot. Somebody wasn't careful; maybe a circuit broke in the Plata. This was exactly on the first day after the holy Shabbos. He saw a fire spreading from the cellar. He went down to the cellar; he sees Rabbi Eliezer and Reb Yehoshua learning [the Torah Portion of] of “After the death of [two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu who were burned] while offering [an offering] before G-d.” They [Nadav and Avihu] were burned [to death]. By a miracle, they [the attendants of the Bris] didn't burn [to death]. Avuyah told them; you came to burn down my house?! You're burning my hose?! I don't understand; this is [proper] behavior; this is how one behaves?! They said, no; we're simply studying the Torah Portion. “After the death of two of Aaron's sons when they offered an offering before G-d and died (Vayikra 16:1).” It is written that they were burned before G-d. There was a fire here [at the Bris] as well. He [Avuyah] said; if so, I want my son to learn Torah.

All of this, Elisha, the son of Avuyah retells. Tosfos in [Tractate] Chagigah mentions this on 15a. He [Elisha] explains to Reb Meir (Akiva) that my father wanted me to be a merchant; he didn't want me to become a sage. In the end, he saw the fire coming from Reb Eliezer and Reb Yehoshua. He said; if so, that when one studies Torah a fire spreads [from him], I want my son to also have fire spread from him.

And he [Elisha, the son of Avuyah, after becoming wicked] would burn Sages. Fire would spread from his eyes and the moment he saw a sage he would burn them.¹³ He entered Yeshivas and he removed the students. He told them, go work; be a shoe repairer! You, be a sewer! You, be a shoe repairer! You could be a shoe repairer and make a million! One person made tissues and he profited a million. Everyone buys his tissue; he profits a million a day. For every tissue, even if he [only] profits one cent, [after selling] a hundred million tissues, he will have made a million dollars a day.

A person came to the world in order that when he brings a child to the world, his intention should be that [the child should indulge in] Torah study; that he [the child] should study Torah. That he should pray day and night; he shouldn't stop praying. During Elisha, the son of Avuyah's Bris, fire spread forth and it burned the entire house. The entire house ascended in flames and everyone fled. And everything [all of the fire] took place in the middle of the Bris.

¹¹ The Gamora teaches that four sages entered the “Orchard” (the “Orchard” is an elucidation to the deep secrets of the Torah); Reb Akiva, Ben Azai, Ben Zoma, and Elisha, the son of Avuyah. Reb Akiva “entered safely and exited safely,” Ben Zoma became crazy, Ben Azai died, and Elisha, the son of Avuyah became a heretic.

¹² His attempt to extinguish the fire is not mentioned in Tosfos and is seemingly being said rhetorically.

¹³ Seemingly, he possessed the quality of fire due to his father's prayers. However, since his father's intention was impure, the quality of fire personified itself in Elisha evilly.

They [the sages who attended the Bris] managed to sing “A day to the shore,”¹⁴ and everything turned into fire. The moment they finished singing “A day to the shore,” the whirlpools flipped around. When the fire began, everyone fled. They brought firefighters; they brought airplanes from Russia, from Greece, from Turkey, and from the entire area. Nothing helped. Until they brought a super tank; eighty tons [of water] every five minutes. They emptied the Kineret [to put out the fire].

When a person learns [Torah], fire spreads from him! Just like Devorah the Prophetess; when she studied Torah, fire spread forth. The Ralbag writes that fire spread forth [from her]. The Ralbag was a grandson of the Ramban. Therefore, she was called [the wife of] Lapidous [which means torches; alluding to the fire that would spread forth from her]. Since fire was seen upon her; everything was torches of fire. The Zohar says; how will it be known who is the Mashiach; maybe he’s simply dreaming [that he’s the Mashiach]? The Zohar says no; a pillar of fire will be seen upon him; a pillar of fire will be seen upon his head. How will it be known that a person is Mashiach? When there is a pillar of fire upon his head.

[Moshe] refrained from [having relations with] his wife. This is the most valuable thing; that a person should have no relations with his wife. The Rebbe only had [relations with his wife] eight [times] corresponding to the number of children he had. He had eight children. Eight times, not more. There is no reason to have any [physical] connection. **He [Moshe] refrained from [having relations with] his wife.** There is a question; if this was a commandment from G-d [for Moshe to refrain from his wife], why [does the verse testify about [Miriam], “And Miriam spoke badly to her brother Aaron about Moshe (Bamidbar 12:1)” [regarding Moshe’s separating himself from his wife]? Rather, the Rebbe (Rabbi Nachman) says in [Sefer Hamidos] branch 13, that when a husband refrains [from having relations with his wife] and he causes her anguish, he is obligated the death penalty. It must be done with no anguish.¹⁵

¹⁴ A melody which is customary to sing during a Bris.

¹⁵ Although ideally, one should completely refrain from having physical relations with his wife, this must be done only with one’s wife willing consent. Miriam and Aaron felt that although G-d alluded to Moshe to refrain from having relations with his wife, it was still forbidden for him to do so! Reason being that they understood from Zipporah, Moshe’s wife that she was anguished by Moshe’s separating himself from her.

[An excerpt from a different lesson pertinent to this discussion:] “For this reason, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moshe; they thought that Zipporah was suffering. [However] they didn’t know that she did not at all suffer. [Miriam and Aaron understood that Zipporah was suffering] when Eldad and Meidad were prophesizing, Zipporah said [in front of Miriam]; woe to their wives [that they will no longer have relations with their husbands just like me]! They [Miriam and Aaron] thought [Zipporah’s] intention was that just like she is suffering ever since Moshe separated from her in order to prophesize, their [the wives of Eldad and Meidad] will suffer as well. However, this was not the intention of that righteous woman [Zipporah]. Rather, she said; I don’t have any problem. However, who says that it’s going to be easy for their wives just like me?”