

D'var Torah by Rabbi M. Jaroslawicz for Parshas Ki Seitze 5775 (2015)

This week's Parsha, Ki Taitzai, is jam-packed with halachos, many of which have complete tractates in the Gemara written about them. Maseches Nazir, Sotah and Nedarim are just a few, demonstrating the intensity of the content in this week's Parsha.

I believe that there is a communal theme that permeates many of these halachos. On Rosh Hashanah, we bless each other by saying, "Sheht'chadesh aleinu shanah tovah u' mesukah [It should be renewed for us a 'good and sweet' year.]"

Is it necessary to say both "good" AND "sweet"? Is it not almost redundant? What exactly is the difference between the two?

The obvious answer is that there are many things in life that, even though they may ultimately be good for you, they are not necessarily sweet. For example, medication may be good for you, but sweet? Anybody would rather NOT have to take medication if that was an option.

Similarly, we can all imagine our own desires --which may appear "sweet" to us at the moment – but, in reality, are far from good for us.

The blessing that we give each other on Rosh Hashanah is that ALL of our "good" should be sweet, and that ALL of our "sweet" should be good as well.

Not everything that G-d allows us to do is necessarily "good" for us just because He allows it. We are obligated to make our own choices from what is permissible, and hopefully pick the right ones.

The first Mitzvah in this week's Parsha is "Aishes Y'fas To'ar." If you go to war and desire a female captive, the Torah goes through an extensive order of rules that you must follow before you are allowed to live with her.

Rashi explains that Hashem permitted us to have relations with a woman captured in battle because, in His infinite wisdom, He realized that human nature and sexual desire would ultimately cause man to transgress any law forbidding it. However, since He really does NOT condone this behavior, He set up a lengthy series of procedures to go through first, hoping to discourage you one step at a time and affording you every opportunity to act in the correct and moral way.

Just because it is ultimately permissible and appears to be "sweet," does not necessarily mean it is actually "good" for you and for your Neshamah.

I believe that, if one were to look deeply into the laws in this week's Parsha, you will find many of them concerning things that may be permitted under certain circumstances, but are not per se both "good and sweet."

There is a sentence we say three times on weekdays, four times on Shabbos and Yom Tov, and five times on Yom Kippur. The sentence I refer to is said just BEFORE we begin the Amidah.

"Ado-nai sefasai tiftach, u'fee yagid tehilasecha. [My Master open my lips, so that my mouth can declare your praises]."

What exactly is the meaning of this sentence? Do I not know how to open my lips on my own? Why did Chazal institute this one-line request just when I am about to begin the Amidah, and not at any other part of the day?

Of course we realize that Hashem has given us the ability to speak, to open and close our lips as we wish, without having to make a specific request before doing so. Simply put, G-d allows us to speak. The problem lies with what we have chosen to do with that magnificent power, the power of speech. Just because we CAN say anything we want, does not mean that we SHOULD say everything that we want. With all of the gibberish, curse words, Lashon Horah and who-knows-what-else comes out of our mouths, it is amazing that G-d would even consider listening to anything we had to say to Him that passed through those same lips. So, we begin with a prayer of "Ado-nai sefasai tiftach, u'fee yagid tehilasecha. [My Master open my lips, so that my mouth can declare your praises]."

If nothing else, at least we acknowledge that we know that we do not always make the right choices. But, please G-d, at least now, when I am trying to make the right choice of how to use my speech, at least now open my lips and allow me to sing your praises.

Interestingly, if you rearrange the first letters of the words "Aishes Y'fas," Aleph, Shin, Tof, Yud, Peh and Tof, you have the first letters of the words:

"Ado-nai sefasai tiftach, fee yagid tehilasecha."

Each of us has to determine on our own how strong we choose to be in our observance of Torah and Mitzvos. Nobody has a right to impose upon anyone else what they "should" or "should not" be doing. However, when making those personal, individual choices, just remember that not everything that is permitted to you is necessarily "Good" for you as well. Choose wisely, grasshopper, and be blessed with a "shanah tovah u' mesukah."

Good Shabbos