

The Most Important Aliya!

Category: Holidays, Simchas Torah

On Simchas Torah, we conclude the Torah and then begin it once more. Which element is more important?

What's More Important?

“Chasan Torah” or “Chasan Bereishis”?

On Simchas Torah, we read the final parsha, “Vezos Habracha,” which marks the conclusion of the Torah. Right after that, we start reading the Torah from the beginning again, beginning with the first Aliyah of Bereishis, where the story of creation is told - how G-d created the world in six days, culminating in the reading of “*Vayechulu hashamayim ve'ha'aretz vechol tzva'am,*” which we also know from the Friday night Kiddush.

The person who is called up to the Torah to finish “Vezos Habracha” is called the “Chasan Torah,” and the one who is called up to start the Torah again from the beginning is called the “Chasan Breishis.” (If there is a Chasan, a bridegroom, there is certainly a Kallah, a bride as well: the Torah itself is the bride of the Jewish people.)

The question therefore arises: which is more important, being the “Chasan Torah” or the “Chasan Breishis”?

A similar question is relevant every Shabbos when we read seven Aliyos plus the Maftir: which Aliyah is the most important one? When an important guest comes to the synagogue and we want to honor them with the most significant Aliyah, which one stands out as the most important?

Maftir

Children celebrating their Bar Mitzvah usually receive “Maftir.” This Aliyah might therefore be seen as the most important Aliyah, but there is another reason: The Rebbe explains that one of the reasons Maftir is given to Bar Mitzvah boys is because it is sometimes unclear whether the child has actually reached adulthood

according to Jewish law, and Maftir is the only Aliyah permitted to a child who hasn't reached the age of Bar Mitzvah. Hence, the custom developed for the Bar Mitzvah boy to get Maftir.

However, the Rebbe himself received Maftir each Shabbat, and that establishes that it is indeed the most important Aliyah. The question is, why?

100 Blessings

Some explain it like this: During King David's time, a plague struck Jerusalem, taking the lives of a hundred people each day. They didn't know the cause of this calamity, so King David, with divine guidance, discovered that the plague could be stopped by instituting a practice of saying "one hundred blessings" each day (Tur Orach Chaim 46).

This practice obliges a person to recite at least one hundred blessings daily. It might sound like a lot, but when you break it down, it's easily achievable. There are three daily prayer services, and each Amidah contains 19 blessings. That's not counting the morning blessings, which add another 20. You eat several times a day, each meal accompanied by blessings, so it easily adds up to one hundred blessings.

On Shabbos and holidays, however, it's a bit more complicated, because the Shabbos Amidah has only seven blessings. So, in order to reach one hundred blessings, it's important to be called up for Maftir, and recite the Haftarah, thus having the opportunity to recite its five blessings, in addition to the two blessings recited during the Aliya. Some say that the specialty of Maftir lies in this role, of achieving the goal of one hundred blessings.

There's also a spiritual explanation for the significance of Maftir. The Rebbe pointed out that the custom of Haftarah came about during a time of oppression, when the Greek rulers forbade Jews from reading the Torah. In response, the sages instituted the practice of reading a portion from the Prophets that related to the weekly Torah portion. For example, the Haftarah of Vezos Habracha begins with the words "*Vayehi achar mos Moshe eved Hashem,*" (And it was after the death of Moses,) which is a direct continuation of what we read in the Torah portion about the death of Moses.

When the ban on reading the Torah was lifted, the practice of reading from the Prophets was not abolished but transformed. It was decided that after the Torah reading, another person would be called up to recite the final three verses of the Torah portion and then proceed with the Haftarah (Toras Menachem 5747 vol. 2 pg. 148 fn. 72).

The Rebbe therefore explained that even though the Haftarah was initially instituted as a substitute during oppression and is not essential to the service, it carries a profound spiritual significance. It is specifically during times of adversity, when challenges are the most difficult, that a person's innermost essence is awakened and we feel connected to G-d on a deeper level. The haftarah is the greatest expression of the *neshama*, your soul, and therefore the Rebbes of Chabad always received Maftir (Toras Menachem v. 13 pg. 54).

Starting or Finishing

Now that we've learned about which Shabbos Aliya is more important, let's return to the initial question: which of the two Aliyos, "Chasan Torah" and "Chasan Bereishis," is preferable?

Most people believe that "Chasan Torah" is the more important one because it marks the completion of the entire Torah. It's considered a great honor to be the one who finishes the Torah reading, and some holy books declare it a *segulah*, a good omen for success in one's personal Torah study.

However, the Rebbe argued that the most important Aliyah is actually "Chasan Bereishis," because it tells the story of Creation. The whole purpose of the Torah, often referred to as the "Torah of Life," is to have an impact on G-d's world. Our duty is not just to study the Torah but to live it in everyday life, to integrate its teachings into business dealings, personal conduct, and so on (see Toras Menachem v. 66 p. 156). It's not enough to merely learn and finish the Torah; one must live according to its principles.

Therefore, the Rebbe's custom was to be called up for "Chasan Bereishis," underscoring the idea that it's essential to bring the Torah's teachings into the world and live by them in our daily lives.

Holiness

The reading of “Chasan Bereishis” is about the story of creation. It tells us what G-d created on each day, starting with the very first words, “Let there be light,” which brought illumination to the world. This pattern continues for each day, with the phrase “And G-d saw that it was good” appearing, indicating G-d’s satisfaction with His creation. On the third day, it says, “and it was good” twice, and by the sixth day, when G-d created Adam and Eve, it says, “And G-d saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was *very good*” — the highest praise for creation.

The reading concludes with “*Vayechulu hashamayim,*” a passage we recite during the Friday night Kiddush. In this passage, we encounter the words “And G-d blessed the seventh day and *sanctified* it,” marking the first time in the Torah that the concept of sanctity, or “kedushah,” is introduced.

We’re familiar with this word, “kodesh” (holy), from the fact that the Land of Israel is referred to as “The Holy Land” in English. The Jewish people are called a “holy nation,” and the Torah is known as the “Holy Torah.” Similarly, Biblical Hebrew is often referred to as the “Holy Tongue.” The Torah is placed in a “Holy Ark.” But what exactly did G-d do on the seventh day to sanctify it?

In Hebrew, “kodesh” (holy) is a term closely related to separation. Something that is “kadosh” is set apart and elevated from the mundane and ordinary. When we say “Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh” in our prayers, we are referring to G-d, who is holy and set apart. Shabbos is holy; it is more elevated and spiritual than the rest of the week—and the goal is to infuse the holiness of Shabbos into all our daily activities throughout the week.

On Shabbos, it’s easier to feel connected to G-d. We spend more time in prayer, and when we’re not praying, we engage in meaningful family time and other spiritual activities. The challenge is to maintain that connection to holiness throughout the workweek, to create a holy world even on ordinary days.

We are about to recite Yizkor, where we remember and pray for the souls of our departed loved ones.

In truth, those who have moved on to a better world also have the ability to pray for us. However, they have a limitation. They cannot build a new world; they

cannot be the Chasan Bereishis. It is up to each of us to build a new world, to make this world a holier place, to infuse our lives with sanctity, and to bring the atmosphere of Shabbos Kodesh into every day of our lives.