

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

by Rabbi Dovid Green

When Pharaoh was giving chase to the Children of Israel the verse uses a singular verb to describe the traveling of the Egyptians. This seems to imply that they were somehow unified in their journey. Rashi apparently lends credence to this approach by describing that they were at that time "with one heart, as one man."

Strangely, Rashi uses a similar expression when the verse uses a singular verb to describe the camping of the Nation of Israel opposite Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. There Rashi says they were "as one man, with one heart". What is the implied difference in these nearly identical statements?

The Mishnah at the end of Tractate Sota offers a portrait of the world just prior to the entry of the final glorious chapter of human history. One of the ideas expressed is that "truth will evaporate". The phrase used to express "evaporate" is a word that refers to flocks. The Talmud is therefore explaining the meaning of the Mishnah as such: "truth will go off in flocks, namely, groups and groups". What does this mean?

Perhaps we can take a simple look at the world around us and ask where is the concept of truth held in high esteem? The process of government is based on public opinion. Small interest groups compete for attention and votes. The need for big money to survive the campaign trail erodes the fairness of the process. Truth seems to be up for a vote, though would never rely on such a process for making medical decisions or deciding the laws of physics.

In a world absent of a reliable moral compass, strange compromises and coalitions unite to meet common political ends. When certain groups get together it is even heralded as some new watershed of human progress on the road to peace. What in fact happens to principles in a world of political expedience? The truth evaporates.

Rashi, with one swipe of the pen, hints to us a subtle distinction between the ambition and unity of Pharaoh and his legions to reach The Children of Israel by the sea and the quality of unity experienced by the Nation of Israel as they camped by Mount Sinai.

Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner in one of his essays about Pesach explains that Pharaoh's army was a coalition of component parts unified by a common goal. They were motivated by the desire to retrieve the monies and riches which were escaping in the rightful possession of the Jews. Wanting it for themselves. That was what united them. They tolerated each other. They even cooperated as a

powerful team. Even as they functioned as a single unit, each one had his separated desires for the spoils. The prime principal was not unity. They happened to share an overlapping interest.

In such cases, when the goal is achieved or the common enemy is vanquished, we can expect the force of entropy to dominate the social structure. To be "with one heart as one man" means not to really be one, but to function temporarily as a single unit.

On the other side, to be "like one man with one heart" is the picture of an organically unified group which is essentially one as a familial unit. There, next to Sinai the hearts of the Jews merged. They were focused singularly on the highest common denominator. It was _true_ unity based on eternal principles which united them. It was and is, an unbreakable bond.

The Jewish People have experienced the force of thousands of years of exile, dispersed and separate. The pressure of powerful cultural forces may have eroded but have not really dented the essential oneness established so long ago. The Jews are like one person, albeit fractured and disturbed as even an individual can be. Unity must continue to be the goal. Not through the force of "groups and groups" but rather, only through connecting to the flow of wisdom from the highest source can a single heart be forged.

Good Shabbos! We would like to thank Rabbi Label Lam for contributing this week's Davar Torah.

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