TRUE PEACE OF MIND

by Rabbi Dovid Green

We would all agree that the way to accomplish anything worthwhile is at a time when life is peaceful, and there is enough of everything, and needs are taken care of. Then we can totally dedicate ourselves to the important things in life which contribute to personal growth.

The question is then, why wasn't the Torah given to the Jewish people after they entered Israel, when they were settled and secure, and all of their needs were provided for? Why was the Torah given to the Jewish people when they were in the wilderness, unsettled and unstable?

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz answers that just as the Torah itself teaches us, so does the way it was given teach us something about the way we should accept and pursue it.

Indeed, there is a great need for stability and peace of mind to absorb Torah learning. The question is what is the nature of the peace of mind which we need? People generally think that the peace of mind which we need is the result of having sufficient creature comforts. Rabbi Yeruchem explains that it is really just the opposite. When people get used to total comfort, any little thing missing causes havoc in the person's stability, and that thing becomes the priority to the exclusion of spiritual goals. It's like trying to quench one's thirst with salt water. It seems that it is quenching one's thirst in the short run, but it actually makes it worse. One thinks that now that his creature comforts are provided for, then one can dedicate oneself to more important matters. However, it just takes one further away from spirituality.

True peace of mind only comes through having the strength to live independently of superfluous creature comforts. That doesn't mean stoicism; one should not live in deprivation, but rather a self imposed independence from things which drag him away from spirituality. In other words, the body is a servant, not a master. The servant gets its needs, but the needs are not an end in themselves. That lends itself to true stability and peace of mind. That is the backdrop for success in spiritual endeavors.

How do we arrive at such a level? It comes through focusing on one purpose. That is to clarify what our obligations are in this world, and what we need to make our primary goal. Clarity and focus is the key. Many people who lack peace of mind do so because so many things around them are influencing them. Their priorities are torn between many, often contradictory things. They end up living a mixed-up, unfocused existence. On the other hand, someone who doesn't live for every creature comfort, and is not in pursuit of them for their own sake, just the way our forefathers lived in

the wilderness, will not easily be knocked off track.

This is what Yaakov's blessing was to Yisachar in this week's parsha. And he saw peace of mind, that it is good, and he bent his back to carry (Genesis 49:15). He bends his back to carry so that he will not habituate himself to an easy existence. As a result, nothing will distract him from pursuing his goals. He is like a soldier in training who must be placed in situations which simulate the situations of high-tension which he may encounter in battle. If he would train in an easy and pleasant environment, it's guaranteed he would not know hold up in a real combat situation.

Yisachar recognized that the way to find true peace of mind is through a focused approach. He bent his back to carry. He didn't mortgage himself to creature comforts. He kept his mind on his goals, and uncompromisingly pursued them. This is true peace of mind, and this is what the Torah is teaching us by its having been given to us in the wilderness, and not in Israel.

Good Shabbos!

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