

INFLUENCING OTHERS

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Ki Savo. It begins with two commandments applicable to when Bnei Yisroel will dwell in the Land of Israel. The first mitzva, bikurim, is that the first fruits are to be brought to the Beis Hamikdash [Temple] and given to the Kohen. The second mitzva is called viduy maaser. On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and the seventh years of the seven-year cycle of maaser [tithes], a person recites a viduy [confession] that he has distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner.

Moshe also commands Bnei Yisroel what to do when they'll cross the Yarden, entering Eretz Yisroel. "Elah ya'amdu l'varech es ha'am ol Har Grizim... v'elah ya'amdu ol ha'k'lala b'Har Aival [These (tribes) will stand on Mount Grizim to bless the nation ... and these will stand on Mount Aival for the curse][27:12-13]." Rashi quotes the Talmud [Sotah 32A] which elucidates the exact proceeding which took place. Six tribes ascended Har Grizim and six ascended Har Aival. The Kohanim, Levi'im and the Holy Ark were assembled in the middle. The Levi'im turned toward Har Grizim and began with the first blessing: Blessed is the person who will not make a molten image etc. Both groups answered: Amein. They then turned toward Har Aival and pronounced the curse: Cursed is the person who will make a molten image etc. Again, both groups answered: Amein. This was the procedure for each of the eleven blessings and curses.

The final blessing was: "Blessed is the person who upholds the words of this Torah to fulfill them [27:26]." Rashi explains that this encompasses the fulfillment of the entire Torah. The Ramban quotes the Talmud Yerushalmi which explains differently. This commandment, according to the Yerushalmi, applies to the king and the other leaders in power. They are commanded to use this power to make sure the Torah is upheld and fulfilled.

The Chofetz Chaim carries this concept a step further. This obligation doesn't apply just to the national leaders but to every person who can influence others...

In truth, there isn't a person in the world who can't influence others to a certain degree. Every person, using their abilities within their circle of relatives/friends/co-workers/acquaintances can have a profound impact. Very often we'll procrastinate with a certain endeavor until a little push, coming from left field, will finally impel us to begin. We then realize how our procrastinating caused us to miss out, both on the aforementioned blessing and on the wonderful sense of gratification gained by touching others in a meaningful way.

I teach at a Yeshiva called Neveh Zion. For quite a while, the person running our web-site had been asking me to write something on the weekly parsha. Not wanting to have the responsibility of turning something out each week, I repeatedly refused. Many months later, during a trip to the States, one of my talmidim [students] related to me that he and others would enjoy reading some thoughts from me each week. I agreed to write some divrei [words of] Torah and send them out. Upon returning to Eretz Yisroel, I informed our web-master that I'd be writing weekly and that he could post it on our web-site. For me, that little push opened up a whole new world.

People run to different tzaddikim and mekubalim [kabbalists] to receive their blessings. Imagine how we'd jump at an opportunity to receive a blessing from all of the Kohanim and Levi'im, in the presence of the Aron [the Holy Ark], with the entire nation answering 'amein'. That opportunity to 'plug-in' to this resounding blessing given by Har Grizim and Har Aival is available to us constantly.

The Chofetz Chaim lived by this concept. Family purity was a cause that the Chofetz Chaim constantly sought to promote. When he would hear that a town was not maintaining proper mikvah facilities, he would tirelessly travel there to speak to the townspeople and urge them to correct the situation. If it was a town that was close to his hometown of Radin, he felt an even stronger sense of responsibility to impress upon them the importance of this mitzva.

The Rav of Lida asked the Chofetz Chaim to come speak to his people about the importance of family purity. He was hoping to raise the necessary funds to rebuild the mikvah which had fallen into a state of disrepair. The Chofetz Chaim asked his son-in-law, Rav Zvi, to accompany him but the trip kept getting delayed.

A few weeks later, during the month of Elul, the Chofetz Chaim suddenly confronted Rav Zvi. "The High Holy Days are approaching and I have nothing to show for myself when I'll be judged. Let's travel to Lida and try to convince them about the mikvah." They went but were unsuccessful in their bid.

One freezing cold day, in the middle of the winter, the Chofetz Chaim informed his family that he had decided to travel back to Lida. "Wait until the weather warms up," they urged. The Chofetz Chaim's pointed response was that when they'll ask him in heaven why he didn't try again at Lida, the excuse that it was too cold would certainly not be very well received. Again the Chofetz Chaim tried to convince them and again he was unsuccessful.

When the Chofetz Chaim was preparing to move to Eretz Yisroel, he traveled to bid farewell to his neighboring towns. He arrived at Lida and summoned the community leaders. "You know how much effort I've expended to convince you to renew the mikvah. You also know that I didn't succeed. I'm not blaming anyone because I don't know who is to blame. However, I am asking you to do me a favor. I am already an old man and will soon be entering the World of Truth. They will demand of me: 'Yisroel Meir! You lived near Lida! How were you silent when you knew that they didn't have a proper mikvah?' I'm asking you to write and sign that I was not at fault... Please write that I asked, I

pleaded, I begged but my words were not adhered to."

The community leaders sat in shocked silence. Such a request shook them to their very core. Finally, one leader began to speak. "Rebbe, don't say we didn't listen -- it's not too late!" Right there, sufficient sums of money were pledged to renew the mikvah.

We may not exactly be 'Chofetz Chaims', however, every person can have a positive influence on their surroundings.

Every person -- their impact... Every person -- those blessings...

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

This week's parsha-insights is dedicated in mazel tov to Howie HersHKovich and Martha Vays in honor of their upcoming wedding. May they be zocheh to much happiness together and to build a bayis ne'eman b'Yisroel.

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