

A VITAL GIFT

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

"This shall be yours from the most holy..."(18:9)

Shlomo Hamelech states "sonei matanos yichyeh" - "one who rebuffs gifts will have life".¹ A person who accepts handouts loses his sense of vitality, for he can only feel truly vital if he is completely self-supportive. The Chasam Sofer asks the following question: If receiving gifts is unhealthy, why did Chazal establish as one of the primary mitzvos of Purim, Mishlo'ach Manos, gifting food items to one another? He answers that the obligation that each individual has, to give a gift, negates the ill effects of "sonei matanos yichyeh".² One could argue that this would be true if these gifts created a reciprocal obligation; then the loss of vitality would be mitigated. However, since there is no obligation to give specifically to a person from whom we have received, why is receiving gifts on Purim a healthy practice?

In this week's parsha, as a repudiation to the aspersions cast by Korach upon Aharon's right to the Priesthood, the Torah details the twenty-four Priestly gifts that Bnei Yisroel are obligated to give the Kohein.³ The Torah does not define these gifts as "sachar" - "reward" for the Kohein's service, rather as "matanos" - "gifts". How can the Torah encourage giving gifts to the Kohein when Sholomo Hamelech attests to the unhealthy nature of this practice?

The Talmud teaches that although a man is required to give a woman an item of value as part of the marriage ceremony, it is possible for this transaction to be effectuated by the woman giving a valuable item to the man. This occurs when the intended husband is a distinguished person. The honor that she receives through his acceptance of her gift, although intangible, can be quantified as having value.⁴ The willingness to receive a gift occasionally benefits the giver to a greater extent than the recipient. The primary purpose of the twenty-four Priestly gifts is not as a method of supporting the Kohein. Rather, by giving these gifts, the Yisroel is able to connect to the Kohein. Therefore, the Kohein actually benefits the Yisroel by agreeing to accept his gift. This removes the stigma of "sonei matanos yichyeh".

Perhaps we can answer the Chasam Sofer's question in the same manner. The halacha of Mishlo'ach Manos is not to give gifts to those people with whom we already have healthy established relationships, but to those individuals with whom we wish to establish a stronger relationship. Consequently, the recipient's acceptance of the gift benefits the giver, for it signifies the willingness

of the recipient to extend his hand in friendship.

1.Mishlei 15:27 2.Mipi Hashemua 3.18:9 4.Kiddushin 7a

No Visitation Rights

"If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them..."(16:29)

Moshe states that if Korach and his assembly die in a manner which requires that they be visited while on their sick beds, i.e. in a natural manner, Korach will be vindicated. The Talmud derives from Moshe's statement the obligation of "bikur cholim" - visiting the sick.¹ Why does the Talmud not rely upon Hashem visiting Avraham after his circumcision, an earlier occurrence, as the source for the obligation of bikur cholim?² Furthermore, the connection between visiting the sick and the story of Korach's insurrection is unclear. The point that Moshe is making is that if Korach dies a natural death, this justifies his claim that Moshe had been abusing his position. However, there is no need to mention bikur cholim in describing a natural death. Why then does the Torah choose the story of Korach as the vehicle for relaying the requirement of visiting the sick?

There is a different passage in the Talmud which cites an alternative scriptural source for the mitzva of bikur cholim. Commenting upon the verse "vehodatah lahem es haderech yelchu voh" - "and you (Moshe) will make known to them the path they shall follow", the Talmud states that this is the source for bikur cholim.³ Why is it necessary for the Talmud to cite two sources for the same obligation?

In yet another passage in the Talmud, we find the statement that since Hashem visits the sick we are obliged to do the same, "vehalachta bidrachav" - "and you shall follow His path".⁴ The Talmud is teaching us that one aspect of the bikur cholim obligation is derived from our obligation to emulate Hashem. It is this aspect which is portrayed in the story of Avraham, weak from having undergone circumcision, being visited by the Divine Presence. The verse cited by the Talmud which contains the commandment to Moshe to instruct Bnei Yisroel as to the path which they should follow is also accentuating this aspect of bikur cholim; the Maharsha explains that the path refers to the path of emulating Hashem.⁵

In Parshas Korach we are being introduced to a new aspect of bikur cholim, the obligation to empathize with the pain of a fellow human being. A prerequisite to empathy is a person's capacity to focus upon the kindred spirit that we as human beings share. By being able to identify with one another we can share pain and bring each other comfort.

Korach is described by Chazal as a Ba'al Machlokes - a person who is divisive by nature. Such an individual thrives upon focusing on those aspects within people which create conflict; this is the

antithesis of empathy. A person who conducts himself in such a manner does not empathize with others, and as a result, does not receive their empathy either. Korach claims that it is Moshe who is creating divisiveness within Klal Yisroel while Korach himself is the champion of equality and unity. Moshe challenges Korach's assertions by stating that Korach cannot die in a natural manner, i.e. becoming bedridden and visited by others, since it is not possible for him to receive the empathy of others; a Ba'al Machlokes does not show empathy and therefore receives none in return.

It is now apparent why the Talmud cites this new source for bikur cholim; it focuses upon the second aspect of the mitzva, the obligation to empathize with one another. The story of Korach is the ideal setting in which to deliver this message for Korach's behavior belied the sensitivities.

1.Nedarim 29b 2.Bava Metzia 86b 3.Bava Metzia 30b 4.Sotah 14a 5.Bava Metzia 30b
