

MAKE KUGEL NOT WAR

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 226, The Fearless Judge: A Difficult Task. Good Shabbos!

Even When Involved In Community Affairs, Never Forget the Individuals

In the beginning of the Parsha, the Torah says that Yisro took his daughter, Tzipporah (the wife of Moshe) and their two sons. The Torah then repeats the names of their two sons (Gershom and Eliezer) and even repeats the reason why they were given those respective names [Shmos 18: 2-4].

The sefer Bais Av from Rav Elyakim Schlesinger raises a simple question: the names and the reasons for these names were "ancient history." We already know these facts. Why does Yisro feel compelled to repeat this information?

The Bais Av suggests the following interpretation. Yisro knew very well that Moshe Rabbeinu was about to become the leader of the Jewish people. As the leader of the Jewish people, Moshe's days and hours would be dedicated to the needs of the congregation. Yisro was gently and subtly trying to tell his son-in-law "Please do not forget my grandchildren; please do not forget your children."

This means that Yisro was telling Moshe, "In spite of all the distractions and trials and tribulations that you will have in your role as the leader of the Jewish people, do not forget your own children."

One can never minimize the importance of an individual -- even relative to an entire community. As a proof to this axiom, Yisro cited the following: "If not for the fact that G-d took interest in you as an individual, where would you be? "For I was merely a stranger in a foreign country" [the reason for Gershom's name]. Furthermore, if not for the fact that G-d concerned himself with the individual... "For the G-d of my father was my Helper" [the reason for Eliezer's name], there would be no Moshe Rabbeinu.

Thus, in a gentle and subtle fashion, Yisro is trying to remind Moshe never to forget the individual.

The Brisker Rav used to say that before any individual can contemplate trying to have an impact and influence on others, the members of his own family must first be taken care of and be spiritually in

line. Kiruv (spiritual outreach), like charity, begins at home. When a person has internal problems in his own family, he cannot begin the task of straightening out the world.

We learn this concept from Avrohom. In spite of the fact that he was the "influencer par excellence," despite the fact that the doors on four sides of his tent were open to the world, he had to chase Yishmael away from his household. Why? Because as Sarah argued, and as G-d confirmed, Yishmael posed a threat to the integrity of Avrohom's own household. Yishmael's continued presence in that house could undermine Avrohom's entire mission, and ability to influence his own family as well as others.

This too is what Yisro was hinting to Moshe: Do not forget the individuals - - especially those of your own household -- even relative to the needs of the community.

Mitzvos On Opposite Sides of the Luchos Go In Opposite Directions

Parshas Yisro contains the Aseres HaDibbros [Ten Commandments]. According to tradition, the Ten Commandments are divided into two categories. The first five statements are Mitzvos Bain Odom Lamakom [laws between man and G-d] and the second five are Mitzvos Bain Odom Lchavayro [laws between man and his fellow man].

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch makes the following beautiful comment. The Mitzvos between man and G-d begin with Mitzvos that are intellectual concepts, more theory than practice. But although they begin with 'cerebral' commands such as "I am the L-rd your G-d" and "You shall have no other gods before me," they progress to commands that involve concrete actions -- "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" and "Honor thy Parents". If Mitzvos between man and G-d do not ultimately climax in specific actions then we have been remiss in the whole nature of these Mitzvos. They must begin in the brain but end with concrete actions.

On the other hand, the progression of Mitzvos between a man and his fellow man are just the opposite. The first commands in this category require that a person be good in deed - "Do not murder, etc." However, these Mitzvos cannot be mere actions. Ultimately, these Mitzvos must lead us from the world of practice into the world of theory. We cannot merely be content with the fact that we do not harm our fellow man. We must reach a level where we have the proper feelings and thoughts towards our fellow man. These Mitzvos must lead us to the point where we feel close enough to our fellow man that we will not covet what belongs to him or be jealous of him. Regarding Mitzvos between man and his fellow man, it is not sufficient to remain in the realm of (abstinence from) action.

The Mitzvos between man and his fellow man must develop from the world of action to the world of thought and emotion, while the Mitzvos between man and G-d must evolve from the world of thought and emotion to the world of action.

Sources and Personalities

Rav Elyakim Schlesinger -- Author of Sefer Bais Av, Rosh Yeshiva in London, a student of the Brisker Rav.

Brisker Rav -- Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (1886-1959); Brisk, Jerusalem; son of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (1853-1918).

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch -- (1808-1888) Frankfurt-am-main; leader of modern German-Jewish Orthodoxy.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Yisro are provided below:

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