

A MAN AT 30 DAYS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Bamidbar / Shavuot

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 101, Teaching Torah to Women and Tape #102, Yom Tov Candle Lighting. Good Shabbos!

Torah Takes Root In A Person Who Says, "Change Me"

The Medrash gives a parable in this week's parsha: There was a King who wanted to build a palace and scouted around for an appropriate site. He went into one city after another and in each city the people ran away from him, indicating they did not want the palace in their town. Finally he came to a deserted ghost town and the few people there graciously and gratefully accepted the King's offer to build a palace in their town. The King said, "This is the place where I will build my palace."

The Medrash explains the parable: When G-d wanted to give the Torah, he went to the sea and it ran away, as it is written "The sea saw and fled" [Tehillim 114:3]. G-d then went to the mountains and they ran away, as it is written "The mountains skipped like rams" [114:4]. He then came to a desolate desert (Sinai), which accepted Him with open arms, and G-d gave the Torah in a desert.

What are our Rabbis trying to tell us with this parable?

Why didn't those cities want the King's palace? Because they knew that building the palace in their cities would impact on their lifestyle. They had certain ways of doing things; they had certain customs. They knew that building a palace in their city would mean changes for them. The ghost town knew that it had nothing. They were saying, as it were, "Remake us. We have nothing anyway. We want you. We'll accept you and we'll take with your palace all the changes that accompany it."

If one wants to accept Torah, he must be like a desert -- ready and open with no baggage. Torah takes root in a person who says, "Change me."

Many of us have had the experience of dealing with apparently "religious" brethren and have sometimes come away disappointed. Our reaction invariably is "This is Torah? This is all that Torah can do for a person? I thought Torah was supposed to change a person! Here is a stereotypical guy with 'beard and payos' and he is ripping me off!"

Someone once said, and it is a very important point: "Never judge Judaism by Jews." Judaism is bigger than most any Jew that one will find. If one wants to judge Judaism by a particular Jew, he must look at the Chofetz Chaim or Rav Chaim Ozer or Rav Moshe Feinstein. Why? Because they made themselves like a desert and said, as it were, to G-d, "Change me." They let themselves become desolate and open for the Torah to permeate them.

The rest of us are like those cities. We are not really ready to fully change. If we accept it, we want to accept it on our terms. Therefore the Torah cannot change us, because we are not willing to be changed.

This is what our Sages are hinting at when they tell us that Torah was given in a desert. Torah can only really change someone who is willing to be changed. When a person makes himself like a desert in his acceptance of Torah, that is when he can be changed to the extent that G-d can say, "You are My Servant, Israel, in whom I can be glorified." [Yeshaya 49:3]

When people are not prepared to make themselves like the desert, the Torah can not make them over. The result is that sometimes we find people to be less than we would expect.

Shavuos

A Tale of Two Versions: Whoever Teaches His Friend's Son Torah...

In Parshas Bamidbar the verse states "And these are the children of Aharon and Moshe on the day G-d spoke to Moshe at Mt. Sinai" [3:1]. However, the pasukim continue and enumerate only the descendants of Aharon.

Rash"i raises the obvious question -- why does the Torah refer to the children of Moshe if only Aharon's children are mentioned? Rash"i answers that Nadav, Avihu, Eleazar and Ithamar are considered to be like Moshe's children, because he taught them Torah. "For anyone who teaches his friend's children Torah, is considered as if he gave birth to them" [Sanhedrin 19a].

Another Gemara in Sanhedrin [99b] expresses a similar concept with a slightly different expression: "Anyone, who teaches his friend's child Torah, is considered as if he made him." Rash"i quotes the verse with Avraham "... the souls he made in Charan" [Bereishis 12:5]. Onkelos there translates

"d'shabidu l'oraita" (he subjugated them to the Torah).

We thus see two different ways of formulating the accomplishment of one who teaches his friend's son Torah -- one Chazal says "its like he bore him" and one Chazal says "its like he made him." How are these two versions reconciled?

Rav Schlessinger, a Rosh Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael, suggests that the Chazal are trying to paint for us the Rebbe, par excellence, in Judaism.

We as parents have something going for ourselves in the education of our children that a professional teacher does not have. On the other hand, a professional teacher has something that we as parents do not have.

We as parents have a natural love and a natural sense of compassion for our children. The words of our Sages and the words of our Siddur are replete with expressions such as "as a father has mercy on his children." Such a feeling is necessary in teaching any child. But sometimes those feelings of compassion can be a detriment. Sometimes a person as a father has to mitigate his natural feelings for his children because such feelings are detrimental to the child's education.

In my line of work, sometimes I have the pleasure of meeting with parents of my students. I remember once telling a father what a good student his son was. He replied to me, "Yes. I had no Rachmanus [mercy] on him!"

His philosophy of education was "No Rachmanus." He sounded like a drill sergeant. While I can not agree with him completely that this should be the only theory of education, what he was saying had truth to it. Sometimes parents, because of the natural love they have for their children, do not do what must be done to properly educate the children.

On the other hand, the professional teacher has the advantage of being "like one who has made the student." We see from the verse with Avraham, that there is a concept of bringing a person under the yoke of Torah. Sometimes it is not easy, but it has to be done. The professional teacher always has that advantage. But sometimes he lacks the aspect of "as if he gave birth to him" -- the matter of compassion and personal love that the parent naturally has and that the true educator should have.

These expressions in the Talmud are telling us that in the eyes of the Rabbis, the perfect teacher must have both the sweetness and compassionate traits of a father (as if he bore him) and also the strength of 'subjugating him to Torah' (as if he made him).

One without the other is an incomplete teacher. Moshe Rabbeinu had both aspects. Therefore the verse treated him as if they were his children.

Old Enough To Be Counted at 30 Days

We are taught (Bamidbar 3:15) the command to count all males of the Tribe of Levi from the age of one month. While everyone else in Klal Yisrael was to be counted from the age of 20 years, the members of the Tribe of Levi were counted from the age of 30 days.

The rest of Klal Yisrael was counted from age 20, because that was the age when they were eligible for being drafted into the army. The census was geared to when one's service to the nation began. That was age 20 for the other tribes.

It would therefore seem to follow that the Leviim would be counted from when their service began. The 'tour of duty' of the Leviim (when they were to serve in the Mishkan) however, was from the age of 30 years, not 30 days.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a beautiful thought in his commentary on Chumash on this issue. He says the 'tour of duty' of the Leviim in fact began when they were 30 **Days** old. Even though they did not begin serving in the Mishkan until they were 30 **Years** old, the Leviim also performed a different role in Klal Yisrael.

They were not only the people who took care of and who carried the Mishkan. They were the individuals who were entrusted with the spirituality of the Jewish people. They were charged with the duty of "teaching Your statutes to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel" [Devorim 33:10]. They were the teachers, the poskim, the Rabbis, the Rosh Yeshiva, the Dayanim, the spiritual guardians of the Jewish people.

Part of that duty was to take care of the Mishkan. But their communal duties went far beyond that role. The Gemara [Yoma 26a] states that if one sees a scholar who knows how to pasken he must be either from the Tribe of Levi or the Tribe of Yissachar. They were the spiritual guardians of Klal Yisrael.

To create this spiritual guardian who will be this teacher of Israel, one cannot wait to start raising and training him when he is 3 or 5 or 10. Such an individual, in whose hands the spiritual life of Klal Yisrael will be, must be raised for that job from the time he is 30 days old.

Whenever we hear of someone who has become a great pianist, or a great artist, or a great ball player we do not hear that they started practicing at age 6 or 10. As soon as they could sit next to a piano, they were playing. As soon as they could run, the parents were already training them for the destiny they were supposed to achieve.

When we are trying to raise a son of Levi -- a Jew who will have in his power the spirituality of Klal Yisrael, we should not start when he is six. It must begin when he is an infant. That is how a dayan is created. That is how a teacher is created. That is how a Levi is created.

Since his training begins as an infant, he is already considered as serving in his role as a Levi. He is consequently counted from the age of 30 days, not 30 years.

Personalities & Sources:

Chofetz Chaim -- Rav Yisrael Meir HaKohen of Radin (1838-1933)

Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski -- (1863-1940) Vilna, Lithuania.

Rav Moshe Feinstein -- (1895-1986) New York City.

Rash"i -- (1040-1105) Rav Shlomo ben Yitzchak; France.

(Targum) Onkelos -- Authorized Aramaic translation of the Torah by the proselyte Onkelos (around 90 c.e.).

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch -- (1808-1888) Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz -- (1902-1978) Mir Rosh Yeshiva, Jerusalem.

Glossary

Rachmanus -- compassion

Klal Yisroel -- the nation of Israel

Mishkan -- Tabernacle used as a temporary Temple in the Wilderness and during the period of the Judges and early Monarchy.

Dayanim -- Judges

pasken -- decide a halachic question

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and is available through Project Genesis On-Line Bookstore: <http://books.torah.org/>
