

TEST OF AFFLUENCE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape # 84, The Mitzvah of Krias HaTorah. Good Shabbos!

Aharon On One Side and Chur On the Other Side

A pasuk [verse] at the end of this week's Parsha says that when the Jewish people did battle with Amalek and Moshe Rabbeinu lifted his hands, the Jewish people were victorious. When it became difficult for Moshe to keep his hands up, we are told that he relied on support from Aharon and Chur -- "...one on this side and one on the other side" [Shmos 17:12].

I saw a very interesting thought from Rav Mordechai Ilan. When we view this symbolically, we see something very significant. Moshe Rabbeinu was the leader of all of Israel. Moshe is our example of a leader par excellence. However, we see that Moshe needed the support of Aharon on one side and Chur on the other side.

If we look at the lives of Aharon and Chur, we see very diverse personalities. Aharon, as we all know, was the lover of peace and pursuer of peace. He was the one who tried to bring harmony between husband and wife. Throughout Tanach and Medrash, we find Aharon as the classic peace-maker. If there is no peace, there is nothing.

The leader of the Jewish people, definitely needs the support, standing by his side, of the philosophy of peace -- loving peace and pursuing it.

On the other hand, Chur was the one who stood up for what was right. When the Jewish people wanted to worship the Golden Calf and said "This Moshe who brought us out from the Land of Egypt, we don't know what happened to him" [32:23], it was Chur who stood up to them, facing the angry mob, and answered them back. Chur was killed by the mob. That is the price, at times, that such a zealot needs to pay.

Sometimes we need this type of zealotry. Sometimes we can't say "if there is no peace there is nothing." Sometimes the price of peace is too high. Sometimes we need a Chur to stand up for what

is right.

This is what the pasuk is telling us by informing us that Aharon supported Moshe from one side and Chur supported him from the other side. Moshe, as the leader, worried about unity and peace in the community. But he also needed a Chur on the other side. Sometimes the price of peace is too high.

Certainly, Shalom Bayis [peace in the home, between husband and wife] is a wonderful thing. We see that G-d allows His Name to be erased, in order to preserve Shalom Bayis. However, sometimes, if the price of Shalom Bayis is that there will be no Bayis worth retaining, we do not strive for "Shalom Bayis at all costs."

Unity among people, among husband and wife, and among community is very, very important. But at what price Shalom? Sometimes we have to say no, not peace at any price.

The Test of Affluence

In the parsha of the Manna, the pasuk says "Behold I shall rain down for you food from heaven..." [16:4].

The Jewish people complain, "When we were in Egypt we had it good, we had what to eat, now you've brought us into the desert to let us starve." G-d responds by saying He would bring down food from heaven "...in order to test you, whether you will follow My Torah or not."

All the commentaries are bothered -- if we were to get bread from heaven, if we were able to go out every morning to our doorstep and pick up our livelihood, lacking nothing, what kind of test could that possibly be? Imagine a life in which one does not have to worry about making a living; a life that is free of 'double-coupons' and the like. A life, literally, with bread from heaven.

Rash"i, the commentary who follows the simple interpretation (pashtan), says that the pasuk refers to the test of fulfilling the commands associated with the manna. There were certain commandments specifically tied to the manna -- one could only take so much per person, one should not go looking for any on Shabbos, one should take twice the amount on Erev Shabbos, etc. According to Rash"i, "In order to test them" means "I'll see if you can keep those Mitzvos."

The Sforno in this week's parsha learns differently than Rash"i and says a principle which, Baruch Hashem, is applicable to most of us in America. The Sforno says the test is to see if the Jews would still follow the Torah when they are able to easily earn their livelihood.

Yes, there is a great test in 'bread from heaven.' When one has a livelihood without difficulty, he has affluence and leisure time. This is the great test of the manna. What will the Jewish people do with their leisure time and with their affluence?

Yes, we are all aware of the test of poverty. We are all aware of the trials and tribulations of being

poor. However, the Seforno says, there are also great temptations that come with affluence. This puts a tremendous responsibility on a person -- determining how he will deal with his disposable income and his free time. This is the test of the Parsha of the manna.

The Maggid from Mezritch once said that if one ever looks at people when they have troubles or sickness, G-d forbid, when there is death, Chas v'Sholom - then, everyone is religious. They all come to shul. Their prayer changes, their recital of Tehillim changes, their Tzedaka changes. That is when they have troubles.

How is it though, when a person has it good, when things are going wonderfully? To think about the Ribbono Shel Olam in times of plenty is a test in and of itself. This is what the Parsha of manna is all about.

Moshe Took the Bones of Yosef With Him

We see at the beginning of the Sedra [Parsha] the way in which the Jewish people dealt with affluence and the way in which Moshe Rabbeinu dealt with affluence. The pasuk at the beginning of the Parsha says, "And Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him" [13:19]. There is a famous Mechilta that Rav Dovid Kronglas, zt"l, always used to quote: "This pasuk tells us of the righteousness and piety of Moshe Rabbeinu, for all the rest of Israel were occupying themselves with the spoils of Egypt and Moshe occupied himself with the Mitzvah of the bones of Yosef." The Mechilta applies to Moshe the pasuk "He who is really wise, will take Mitzvos" [Mishlei 10:8].

Rav Mordechai Ilan says a beautiful interpretation in this Medrash. The pasuk is telling us that Moshe took the bones of Yosef **with him!** The Medrash means that Moshe took it with him to the World to Come. Moshe Rabbeinu, who had the foresight to occupy himself with Mitzvos, when everyone else was occupied with material things, took something "with him."

We all know that "You can't take it with you." True, the spoils from Egypt, one can not take with him to the Next World. Moshe, however, did in fact take this good deed, of occupying himself with the bones of Yosef, along **with him** to Olam HaBah. He took that which is everlasting and Eternal. The others took the spoils of Egypt but they didn't truly take it "with them." That which Moshe took, he took with him... all the way!

The Parable of The Chofetz Chaim: Jewels Lying in the Street

The Chofetz Chaim, zt"l once offered a beautiful parable that brings out this concept:

There was once a very impoverished Jew, who heard about a far off land where there were jewels lying in the street for the taking. It was a treacherous journey and not everyone made it.

Nevertheless, all one had to do was reach this far off land and where the jewels were lying in the street.

After consulting with his family, he decided to take this treacherous journey. He went on the long and dangerous sea voyage. He finally arrived at the far off land and as he walked off the boat the captain told him that the ship would not return for a year.

The Jew got off the boat and, sure enough, there were jewels everywhere. He couldn't believe it. The first day he lined his pockets with jewels. The second day he did likewise. After a while, however, he realized, that he could not eat jewels. In this land, jewels were worthless so he could not even trade the jewels for food.

In this strange place, the commodity that was scarce was animal fat -- schmaltz! The old law of Adam Smith (Economics 101) -- supply and demand. Schmaltz was very valuable in this land of abundant jewels.

He became a fat dealer. He started out small and became bigger and bigger until he became quite a successful schmaltz merchant. He made a fortune in animal fat.

A year passed, the time came to return to his family and show them all the riches he acquired in this land. So what did he do? He went and took all this animal fat and packed it on the boat and sailed for home. It was a terrible journey, going through cold and through hot, but finally he made it.

The boat came to the dock, the family was anxiously waiting to see if he had been successful. He began unloading his bags and all of a sudden there was a terrible odor. We know what happens to schmaltz when it is not refrigerated. The longshoremen kept bringing out these boxes that reeked with the terrible smell. The family looked at each other in bewilderment, wondering why he would bring back schmaltz.

They came to him and asked "Were you successful? Did you find the jewels?" And he responded, "But I brought back all this schmaltz..."

The family figured that he was disoriented from the journey so they took him home and let him rest up. He kept repeating "But I have all this schmaltz!"

They yelled at him, "Schmaltz! What about the jewels?" He was so broken up that he went to bed and cried himself to sleep.

His wife and children threw out the schmaltz and went searching through his clothing. They found a couple of jewels that he had inadvertently left in his pocket. With those jewels the family was able to live happily ever after.

This, says the Chofetz Chaim, is Olam HaZeh, our world. G-d sends us to This World and tells us that there are jewels lying in the street. He tells us to grab the jewels while we are in This World, and show Him, when we return how many jewels we've accumulated. But here in this crazy world,

instead of grabbing jewels, people grab schmaltz! They grab this thing called money. They grab materialism.

We get so involved in grabbing these non-essentials, that we forget why we were sent here. We were sent here for those precious stones. When we leave this world, after 120 years, woe to us if all we have to show for our years in This World are those reeking packages of schmaltz, which we inadvertently became involved in grabbing -- rather than grabbing mitzvos.

About this it is written "The wise person takes Mitzvos." "And Moshe took the bones of Yosef **with him.**" What did Moshe take "with him?" Moshe took the Mitzvah of taking the bones of Yosef. In the final analysis Mitzvos are the only thing that ever last.

Glossary

Shalom Bayis -- Literally, "Peace of House" (marital harmony)

Chas V'Sholom -- Heaven Forbid

Ribbono shel Olam -- Master of the World

Tzedaka -- Charity

Olam HaBa -- The World to Come

Olam HaZeh -- This World

Personalities & Sources:

Rash"i -- Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105). Bible and Talmud commentator par excellence; France.

Rav Ovadiah Sforno -- (1470-1550); Classic Chumash Commentary; Italy.

Maggid from Mezritch -- Rav Dov Ber (1704-1772) Disciple and successor to the Ba'al Shem Tov, in the early period of modern Chassidism. Known as the "Great Maggid."

Chofetz Chaim -- Rav Yisroel Mei HaKohen of Radin (1838-1933). Author of basic works in Jewish law, ethics, and thought.

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