

WORDS OF EXHORTATION

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 # 338, Relying On A Goral. Good Shabbos!

Dedicated this year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov
In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand

The Following Words of Exhortation Apply to YOU!

In this week's Parsha we learn of the Command to appoint a King [Devarim 14:15-20]. This is one of 3 mitzvos that became incumbent upon the Jewish people when they entered the Land of Israel. The pasukim [verses] state: "You shall surely appoint upon yourself a King whom the L-rd your G-d will choose... only he should not accumulate a multitude of horses ...and he should not have too many wives in order that they not cause his heart to go astray; and he should not have too much silver and gold..."

The Medrash in Shmos Rabbah states that Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon] rationalized regarding these laws. He tried to "outsmart" G-d, so to speak, in the application of these laws. Shlomo HaMelech asked himself, "Why did G-d command that a King should not have too many wives? Is it not because the Torah is concerned that they might cause his heart to go astray?" (After all, this is one of the few times where the Torah explicitly states the reason for a command.) "For me, however, this will not be a problem. I can marry many wives, without being affected. I can handle it!" Shlomo HaMelech, in fact, married 1000 wives.

The Medrash says that at that moment, the letter yud (which is the first letter in the word Yarbeh) came before G-d and asked, "Is it not true that You said that not even one letter of the Torah will ever be nullified, and here Shlomo has voided an entire verse!" ("Lo Yarbeh" is the phrase that means that the king should not marry too many wives. The word "lo" merely means no or not.)

G-d responded to the letter yud as follows: "Shlomo and a thousand others like him will become null

and void but even the small point in your shape I will not allow to become nullified. You, letter Yud, and all of Torah is Eternal; the great King Shlomo and a thousand like him will be nullified."

In fact Shlomo's wives did lead him astray. They did end up having a detrimental effect upon him.

Regarding this Medrash, one might ask why the letter 'Yud' raised the issue. Why not the 'Reish'? Why not the whole word 'Yarbeh'? Why just the 'Yud'?

Rav Shimon Schwab zt"l (1980-1995) offers a beautiful insight into this Medrash. The grammatical translation of the expression "Lo Yarbeh lo nashim" is "HE should not have too many wives". Had the pasuk [verse] been written in the second person it would have said "Lo Sarbeh lecha nahsim" (YOU should not have too many wives).

Shlomo jumped at the fact that the pasuk was written in third person, and argued, "Yes. HE should not have too many wives. The other fellow - Dovid, Rechavam, etc. But ME? Shlomo argued that the pasuk did not apply to him. So specifically the Yud (indicating third person) came and complained that Shlomo's rationalization was a personal attack. By manipulating this 'Yud', so to speak, Shlomo twisted the simple meaning of the pasuk that applied to all Kings and claimed that it only applied to OTHER kings.

As we enter the Elul season and the entire period of the Yamim Noraim [High Holidays], we will be hearing words of moral chastisement from our Rabbis. We will be hearing about how to improve OUR lives. We must recognize that the Rabbis are talking to us as well, not only to others. There was once a billboard that read "This Means YOU!" That is what mussar [ethical exhortation] is all about. It means YOU and ME and everyone else.

The Homiletic Meaning of the Two Torah Scrolls

The Torah teaches concerning Jewish Kings, "And it will be when he sits on the royal throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah on a scroll before the Kohanim, the Levites" [Devarim 17:18]. Although this verse is telling us the command that the King must write a Sefer Torah, the law in fact is that every Jew is obligated to write a Sefer Torah. The Talmud [Sanhedrin 21a] tells us that the King writes two Torah scrolls, one that travels with him and one that remains permanently at home.

Rav Shlomo Kluger (1785-1869) offers the following insight into these two Sefer Torahs. The pasuk describing the appointment of the King uses the double language of Som Ta'sim - You shall surely place upon yourselves. The Rabbis infer from here that the fear of the King must be upon the people. We no longer have the ability to relate to this concept. We have not experienced an absolute monarchy in modern times. But when there was an absolute monarchy, if one looked at the king in the wrong way the result could be "Off with his head!" It was actually a mitzvah to appoint a king that the people would be afraid of. A king is not a friend or a pal. He is the ruler, with all the trappings of majesty.

On the other hand, at the end of the section dealing with the monarchy, the Torah emphasizes concern "That his heart not become haughty over his brethren and that he not turn from the commandment right or left" [17:20]. This almost seems to contradict the earlier language.

When the President of the United States goes anywhere to speak, the band plays "Hail to the Chief". Everyone snaps to attention. His every proclamation is accompanied by "Hail to the Chief". After a while, this can go to his head.

Certainly such treatment could also go to the head of a Jewish King, who by law is obligated to act in a manner that should inspire fear in his subjects. This can undoubtedly lead to lack of humility.

Therefore, the pasuk "Lest his heart become lifted above his brethren" serves as a counterbalance. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The Jewish Monarch must act like a king when he is in front of the people, but he is not allowed to let his heart get carried away. He must remember who he is and remember who the Only King [G-d] is.

Rav Shlomo Kluger says that this is what is meant by the fact that the King writes two Torah scrolls for himself - one with which he goes out and one which remains at home. When he goes out he has to wear the Torah of "You shall surely place upon yourselves a King" - he must act like a King and instill awe like a King. But when he returns home and settles down into the privacy of his own abode, he must be aware of the Torah that is hidden away at home. That is the Torah of "Lest his heart be lifted above that of his brethren". The lesson is that power corrupts.

In the prayer announcing Rosh Chodesh [the beginning of the new Jewish month] which we said last Shabbos, we ask at the beginning for "life that contains Fear of Heaven" and then again at the end we repeat a request for "a life containing Fear of Heaven". What is the reason for the repetition? The answer given by many is that immediately preceding the second request for Fear of Heaven is a request for a life of wealth and honor. When we earn a little money or receive a little honor -- all too often "Fear of Heaven" falls by the wayside.

The first request is for the "Fear of Heaven" that everyone should have when they are humble. The second request for "Fear of Heaven" serves a different purpose: Even after we have earned some money or received honor, we must not forget the source of all of our wealth and honor.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter

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