

EVERY GENERATION HAS ITS OWN TEST

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Mishpatim

Every Generation Has Its Own Test

The Torah teaches: "Do not say cruel things to a stranger (v'ger lo soneh) nor oppress him for you were strangers in the land of Egypt". [Shmos 22:20]. Rashi comments on the words v'ger lo soneh: because the stranger can tease you back and say that you too were once strangers. "Don't taunt your friend with a blemish that you yourself possess." The modern equivalent of this maxim is that "people who live in glass houses should not throw stones."

Rashi adds that the word 'ger' in this pasuk is not only referring to a convert to Judaism (as the word often implies), but it refers to any stranger who is new to a community and has no friends.

But let us consider something. The Torah tells us why we should not taunt a stranger: "Because we were strangers in the land of Egypt." Now what would the law be if we had never been strangers in Egypt? Would it then have been permissible for us to taunt a stranger? It is difficult to say that were not vulnerable to a retort back from the stranger then it would have been permissible to be cruel to the 'ger'. The reason we must be nice to him is because the Torah teaches us compassion. We should be nice to him because that is the proper way to behave!

The following interpretation was suggested for the words "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt": Psychologically, people who have been through difficult circumstances sometimes want others to experience what they had to experience. When they see someone else who is in the same situation that they were in, there is a tendency to say "Listen, I had to go through a lot to get where I am today and now you have to suffer a little also. It is good for you. Adversity builds character."

Someone who studied Holocaust survivors records the story of a fellow who was a young teenager during the Holocaust. Somehow he managed to escape the round-ups and never went to the concentration camps. Instead, he became a partisan. He lived with the non-Jewish partisans for four years. He maintained his Judaism and remained observant. He survived the war, got out of Europe, and came to America. He made an honest and successful living, married, and had a son.

Years later, this man purposely sent his son to a college in which there were virtually no other Jews

on campus. Today, it is possible to find colleges where there are minyanim for Shachris, Mincha, and Ma'ariv, plus a daf yomi. Other colleges may not have a single Jew enrolled. This holocaust survivor sent his son to the latter type of school. Why? "Because I retained my Judaism and my moral values despite the fact that I had to live with non-Jews for four years. I want you to do the same thing. It will be a good experience for you." The father insisted on this, with very disastrous results for the son.

"For you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

"I did it. You can do it also. I had it tough. You can have it tough also."

This is what the Torah is saying: "Don't oppress the stranger." Don't try to impose your trials and tribulations upon the stranger. Every person and every generation have their own tests (nisyonos).

We heard from our parents: "You have it hard? We had it hard! I came to this country, there was a depression, we did not have two nickels to rub together. You have it easy."

Now, 50-60 years later, we say the same thing to our kids: "Today you have it easy. You have everything. You have Chalav Yisrael, you have Kosher Chinese Restaurants, you have Jewish music, Jewish books, etc. For you it is easy! Tough it out a little."

Today's generation has their own tests. We had our nisayonos they have theirs. We should not become the arbiter of which test belongs to a person.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik Plays Role of Horse, But Not Role of Creditor

In this week's parsha, The Torah teaches the great mitzvah of free loans: "When you will lend money to my people, to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor (lo tiheyeh lo k'noshe); do not place interest upon him." [Shmos 22:24]

I recently read the following incident involving Rav Chaim Soloveitchik: Rav Chaim lent money to a Jew. It was a loan for a certain period of time. The time came and the borrower did not repay Rav Chaim. Rav Chaim did not say anything. A week passed, two weeks passed, a month passed. Rav Chaim still did not say anything. Finally, the borrower met Rav Chaim Soloveitchik and said: "You are a batlan [careless person]. You lent me the money and you forgot all about it and that's why you haven't asked me for it. You don't have your act together."

Rav Chaim explained to the borrower that he most definitely did have his act together. The Rav of Brisk told him that he always used to take the shortcut between his own home and the shul that passed right in front of the borrower's house. Ever since he lent the money to the fellow, he did not take this shortcut. He did not want to perhaps transgress the prohibition of "becoming like a creditor" (lo tiheyeh lo k'noshe). "Not only did I not walk by your house before the loan was due, even now, after the loan is due why do you think I still go out of my way to avoid your house? It is for the same

reason. So, please don't tell me that I am a batlan and I forgot about the loan!"

When reading the story, I had to ask myself, "What kind of fellow goes to Rav Chaim Soloveitchik and tells him he is a batlan?" It is reminiscent of the definition of Chutzpah being someone who kills his parents and then claims mercy from the court because he is an orphan. Here is a fellow who has the nerve to ask the Rav of Brisk for a personal loan; does not promptly repay the loan; and then insults the Rav for not having demanded prompt payment!"

I believe we can infer from this story the reason why this fellow had to borrow money from Rav Chaim Soloveitchik. There was no one else in town willing to lend money to such a person! Rav Chaim was such a kind person that he would even lend money to such a person.

Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff in his work "The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik" records many stories Rabbi Soloveitchik used to tell about Brisk and about the Rabbinic personalities in his family. He contrasts the Beis HaLevi (Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik's namesake and great-grandfather) with Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (son of the Beis HaLevi).

The Beis HaLevi was an aristocrat. People who saw him walking down the street saw monarchy. He was a regal figure. Rav Chaim was the nicest man one could ever want to meet. The first accolade on his tombstone is "Rav haChessed" [the kind Rabbi]. The characteristic of their great father that the family was most proud of was that he was a man of extreme chessed [benevolence]. That is why he lent money to such a crude individual who had the chutzpah to chastise him for not pestering him to pay back the loan.

In the above referenced volume, the following -- hard for me to believe -- incident is recorded ["The Rav" Volume 2, Page 41]:

Rav Chaim once came out of his house and saw little kids having an argument. He inquired as to what the problem was and was told that they were "playing horse" but none of them wanted to be the horse. One kid wanted to be the driver, one kid wanted to be the passenger, but no one wanted to be the horse. Rav Chaim said "I'll be the horse."

The kids put the rope around Rav Chaim and he was the horse. The story does not end there. The kids tied "their horse" to the tree. Then they became hungry, so they went home to have a snack, leaving Rav Chaim tied to the tree. The Gabbai came out and saw Rav Chaim tied to the tree. The Gabbai took out a pocket knife and was about to cut the rope. Rav Chaim told him not to do that because it would sadden the kids. Instead, Rav Chaim advised the Gabbai to go get the children and ask them to untie their horse.

This is an example of a "Rav Chessed" par excellence.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter

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