

REMEMBERING FROM WHENCE ONE CAME

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Yisro

Remembering from Whence One Came

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 756, The Kosel Video Camera. Good Shabbos!

As an aside to the mention of Yisro's arrival in the camp, the Torah records the names of the two sons of Moshe, and the reasons why they were called by these specific names. Gershom was called Gershom because Moshe declared, "I was a stranger (ger) in a strange land." Eliezer was called Eliezer because Moshe declared, "The G-d of my father helped me (b'Ezri) and saved me from Pharaoh's sword". [Shemos 18:3-4] This seems out of place and superfluous.

The Ramban comments: Even though this is not when they were born (and the Torah already mentioned at least some of this information when they were born [Shemos 2:22]), the Torah mentions it here because Moshe wanted to express gratitude - now that he in effect became the King of Israel - for the earlier kindnesses the Almighty had done for him.

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody, in his sefer Sam Derech, elaborates upon this Ramban. When Moshe was a fugitive and was running away for his life from Egypt and was able to escape to Midyan, get married, and have two sons - at that point - he felt a great deal of gratitude toward the Almighty and named his sons accordingly. However, it is the tendency of human beings to have the attitude, "that was then and this is now". At this point, Moshe is in an entirely different world and in very different circumstances. Then he was an anonymous fugitive, a poor shepherd in a foreign land. Now he is the King of the Jewish nation. Moshe stood up to the most powerful empire in the world, and with G-d's Help, he bested Pharaoh. He brought Pharaoh and the Egyptians to their knees. To top it all off, he led his people through the Yam Suf and they witnessed the total destruction of their enemies. Suddenly, Moshe Rabbeinu became "big stuff". The Torah nevertheless tells us that even when he reached the zenith of his career, he still had the same recognition of gratitude (hakaras hatov) that he had when he was a fugitive.

"I still remember when I was not considered a significant person. I remember back then how G-d saved me from the sword of Pharaoh and how he protected me in a strange land." Moshe constantly

reviewed the names that he gave his children and the reasons for those names so that the gratitude he felt back then would never leave him.

This is a challenge. All too often, we find that someone was down on their luck and then received a job or a big break from a benefactor. At the time, of course, there is great appreciation for that employer. However, as time goes on, as one thing leads to another, and this formerly unemployed worker now becomes the CEO of a multi-million dollar corporation, how likely is it that he will still show gratitude and Hakaras Hatov to that benefactor of so many years ago? Most people forget the people who gave them their first break. They expressed gratitude at that time, but "what have you done for me lately?"

Moshe's greatness was that he did not act like this. It is for this reason that the Torah repeats the reasons for naming his sons at the beginning of Parshas Yisro, the zenith of Moshe's career. He always kept that original gratitude on his lips and in his consciousness. This attribute of "remembering from whence one came" is indeed an attribute worth emulating.

Eishes Chayil" Sheds Light on "Anshei Chayil"

Yisro observed that the people were lined up and seeking counsel from Moshe Rabbeinu from dawn until dusk. Yisro told his son-in-law that it was not a good situation that he should be the sole adjudicator of justice amongst the Jewish people. Therefore, Yisro advised MOSHE to set up a system of courts, so that people had ready access to justice at the "local level" with Moshe being the ultimate arbiter of appeals if they could not be resolved at the "lower levels". Yisro advised Moshe to appoint judges who would have the following characteristics: Anshei Chayil; Yirei Elokim [G-d fearing people]; Anshei Emes [men of truth]; Sonei Batzah [people who despise money, i.e. - people who will not take a bribe]. It is clear what the last 3 terms mean, but what exactly does "Anshei Chayil" represent?

In the Medrash, Rav Elazar HaModai identifies Anshei Chayil with "Baalei Avtacha" [people you can depend on]. Rav Berel Povarski, in his sefer on Chumash, claims that Rav Elazar HaModai's source for this is the well-known pasukim of "Eishes Chayil" [Mishlei 31:10-31], traditionally recited in many homes on Friday night. Apparently, based on the opening lines of this recitation, the attribute of "Chayil" seems to be a rare commodity. "Who can find a woman of 'Chayil'?" Yet there is a contradiction at the end of "Eishes Chayil": "Many daughters have done acts of 'Chayil'. Which is it? Are there many such women or are they hard to find?

Rav Povarski says that we must distinguish between the many daughters who have "DONE Chayil" and a woman who is described as an "Eishes Chayil". Indeed, thousands of women can do wonderful and even heroic acts - occasionally. It is one thing to infrequently rise to the occasion and do a wonderful act of valor. However, the term "Eishes Chayil" defines a person who is a "bale-bosta" [manager] over Chayil -- an entire enterprise of activities of valor. She consistently does acts of valor. It is part of her nature, part of her essence. Finding a person whose essence is defined by such

actions is in fact hard to do. Such a person is a rare commodity.

A woman who is such an "Eishes Chayil" gains the implicit trust of her husband. "Her husband has confidence in her" [batach bah lev ba'alah]. There are very few people about whom we can say, "I trust my life to them." I hope that we can at least confidently say that about our spouses. Through years of acts of valor, our wives have gained our trust to earn the vote of confidence of - batach bah lev ba'alah.

This term, batach bah lev ba'alah, reveals to us Rav Elazar HaModai's source for the term "Ba'alei Avtacha" [people you can depend upon], which in turn explains the term "Anshei Chayil" in Yisro's list of requirements for judges. We need people who have earned not only our respect, but also our trust and confidence as well.

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 is provided below:

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