

WE DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND OUR OWN MOTIVES WITHOUT WISE COUNSEL FROM OTHERS

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Parshas Behaaloscha

We Don't Even Understand Our Own Motives Without Wise Counsel From Others

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 772 - Shabbos - Is There Such a Thing? Good Shabbos!

Parshas Beha'aloscha contains the Misonenim [the complainers] [Chapter 11]. The Jews wanted to eat meat. They remembered all the good delicacies they ate in Egypt and bemoaned the fact that they were lacking those same foods in the Wilderness. "All we have is this mann". This is another example of "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Jews are always complaining about the food! They longed for the onions and the garlic they ate in Egypt. The pasuk teaches [Bamidbar 11:10] that Moshe heard the people crying to each other (bochim l'mishpachosem) at the opening of his tent. Rashi explains that the expression "bochim l'mishpachosem" means that the people would gather in family groups out in the open to publicize their complaints to one another. It was like a family picnic, but instead it was a family "cry-in". Everyone sat on their stoop or sat on their doorstep and publicly complained about the food situation in the wilderness. Rashi further cites the teaching of the Rabbis that the crying was "concerning the families" - namely they complained about the forbidden sexual relationships that the Torah legislated for the Jewish nation.

According to this Rabbinic tradition, the main complaint was not about onions. This event happened not long after the receipt of the Torah. The Torah prohibited many women from marriage -- the relationships known as the "Arayos" prohibitions. This is what they were crying about. They said "onions" but they meant "Arayos". Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks a simple question: How can we put words into their mouths? The pasuk says they complained about the onions and the cucumbers. Why do the Rabbis interpret this to be something totally different than the simple reading of Scripture (p'shuto shel Mikra)?

In his Sefer, Emes L'Yaakov, Rabbi Kamenetsky points out similar phenomenon many times in

Chumash where Chazal put a far more sinister interpretation on what would otherwise seem to be innocent comments. Another example is in next week's parsha where Moshe charges the Spies to gather intelligence about the nations of Canaan? When the Spies come back and report that the people are "stronger than we are" the Zohar (which is quoted by many of the commentaries as well) claims that the Spies had an agenda. They were afraid that when they go into the Land of Israel they would lose their positions of leadership and honor in the nation. Therefore, they subconsciously sabotaged the plans to take the nation into Eretz Yisrael so that they would not lose their grip on power. Here too, Rav Yaakov asks: How do Chazal know this?

Again, in describing Lot's decision to settle in Sodom following his breakup with Avram, a simple reading of the pasukim would indicate that the decision was made on the very practical grounds that Lot was a shepherd and that the land surrounding Sodom was fertile and bountiful. Here too Chazal attribute sinister motives to Lot: He specifically picked the area because of its reputation for lewdness and immorality. Sodom was "Sin City" of its time and according to the Rabbis (without any apparent support from the Biblical text), that is why Lot went to Sodom. The same question can be asked here. Why can't we take Lot's statement at its face value? Simply say that he wanted to go to Sodom because the land was fertile?

Rav Yaakov answers: Chazal do this because they descend to the depths of man's psyche. They are telling us something very profound about human nature. Everyone has subconscious feelings and forces and desires that perhaps even the person himself is not completely aware of. Something goes on inside a person that is more than meets the eye. Chazal, either through ruach haKodesh or through their sensitive intuition of how human beings function, know that something deeper is going on. When people gather on their front doorsteps and cry out loud so that everyone will hear, they are not just crying about onions! People do not cry about onions. They are crying about something else.

Likewise, there were other lush places in Eretz Yisrael. When Lot specifically picked Sodom - why did he do it? It is because whether he realized it or not there were subconscious motivations occurring within him. This happens in each and every person. A person must always introspect and check his motives.

When people go to psychologists or psychiatrists and tell them their problems, if the professional is keen and he understands human nature, he recognizes that what the person is saying is NOT what he really means. These are the words he is saying, but there is something else that is really going on in his mind. A wise individual or a highly trained professional will be able to detect what is really happening deep within a person's mind.

That is why Chazal repeat this approach over and over in their explanation of the Chumash narrative. How do they know that? They know it because they know and understand people. They are trying to tell us that this happens to each and every one of us. We each have hidden agendas and

subconscious motives. We have what is called 'negius' [personal bias]. We do not really know or understand ourselves fully because we are so subjective about decisions that affect us.

How can we protect ourselves from these blind spots? As we have said at other times, the counsel we must follow is that of the Mishna in Avos [1:6]: Make for yourself a Rav [mentor] and acquire for yourself a Chaver [close friend]. We need to have our actions and our motives reviewed by our peers or by our teachers who can "tell it to us like it is!" Without such advice and guidance, we cannot function.

A person who says "I know I am 'nogeah' [biased], but..." will conclude that sentence by making a statement that he should totally ignore. If one is 'nogeah' he is disqualified from ruling about the matter - period! So who will pasken for him? That is why it is so crucial that everyone have a Rav or a Rebbe or an older advisor and counselor to give him guidance in those matters about himself for which he is disqualified from ruling. That is why Pirkei Avos advises to be "koneh" [literally purchase] a chaver). One needs to make that investment, whatever it takes, to ensure the ability to have honest peer-review of his actions.

Today, relationships are superficial. A 'chaver' is not just someone you say hello to or occasionally schmooze with. A 'chaver' is someone you can open up to and trust. It is someone you can tell things 'as they are' about yourself and he can return the favor for you. Everybody needs that. The reason Chazal spend so much time pointing this out throughout the Chumash is because they are trying to bang this idea into our heads: You cannot trust yourself."

Having a Rebbe and having a Chaver is one of the most precious commodities in life. This is why the Mishna which advises "Make yourself a Rav and acquire for yourself a Chaver" concludes with the words "and judge every man with the benefit of the doubt (l'kaf zechus). Invariably in life, one's Rav or his Chaver will disappoint him. We will be upset with him for not coming to a Simcha or not devoting as much time to us as we expected of him. It is easy to be dismissive under such circumstances: "That is not a Rav; that is not a friend." The Mishna exhorts us "Hevey dan es kal ha'Adam l'kaf zechus" - cut the person some slack; give him the benefit of the doubt! Do not walk away from relationships like that for such petty reasons. Such relations are just too important to abandon so lightly! Even if it means bending over backwards and coming up with crazy explanations for him - do it. It is worth preserving the relationship of a Rav or a Chaver.

The True Test of a Jewish Leader

Moshe complains to the Almighty: "Did I conceive this entire people or did I give birth to it, that You say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a suckling, to the Land that You swore to its forefathers?'" [Bamidbar 11:12]. Rashi says: This is the job of a leader. "Lead them with the understanding that they may even stone you and insult you." The Gemara says [Sanhedrin 8a] "A judge must bear the (aggravation from) the community" and quotes as a proof the text of our pasuk

in Behaloscha "...as the nursemaid bears the suckling baby." A community leader must sometimes look at his flock like little babies. Babies can be so bad one minute and the next minute they can be fine. How can one lose his temper with a one year old? The infant does not know what he is doing. One cannot spank a one year old child! This, the Torah tells the leaders, is how they have to look at the Jewish people. They are like babies who cannot control themselves.

Yirmiyahu is probably the most tragic prophet who ever lived. For years, he told the people that the end was near, that the Beis HaMikdash was going to be destroyed, that they should do Teshuvah. They did not listen to him. They abused him. They threw him in jail, in a pit of mud. He starved. After all they did to him, it turned out that he was right -- the destruction came. After the destruction, the people came to him and asked him to inquire on their behalf of the Almighty whether they should stay in Eretz Yisrael or go to Egypt. They told him they would listen to whatever the L-rd told them. Yirmiyahu asked their question and the answer he was given was that they should stay in the Land of Israel and the Almighty would protect them there. Upon hearing this answer (which was not the answer they wanted to hear), the people accused the prophet of lying once again.

Despite this chutzpah of the people, despite the years of frustration with their abuse, when the people ignored his message and left Eretz Yisrael for Egypt and invited him to follow them - Yirmiyahu followed them to Egypt! As the Medrash states - "If there is no vineyard, why do you need a fence?; If there are no flocks, why do you need a shepherd?"

Yirmiyahu said, "How can I not go with them? They are a flock and I am their shepherd." How would you and I react to such treatment? "You want me to go to Egypt with you? - I'll tell you where you can go! Enough is enough!" But Yirmiyahu goes, because Yirmiyahu was a leader and a leader understands the secret of "like a nursemaid bears the child". He understands that they are a bunch of babies and they have to be dealt with by utilizing the same infinite patience one has when dealing with babies. This is the true test of a Manhig Yisrael.

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