

THE POWER AND POTENTIAL OF GROUP COLLABORATION

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Bo

The Power and Potential of Group Collaboration

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 754, Cholent on Pessach -- Why Not? Good Shabbos!

Following Moshe's warning to the King of Egypt of the impending plague of Locusts, the pasuk says, "And he turned and went out from Pharaoh" [Shmos 10:6]. The Ramban writes: Moshe knew that following the plague of Hail that the Egyptian agricultural economy was teetering and he was now warning that anything left over from the hail would be consumed by the locusts. Moshe walked out from Pharaoh's presence before the king had a chance to respond one way or the other. The Ramban explains that Moshe left so that the Egyptians would be able to discuss their situation among themselves. This is in fact what happened, as the Torah quotes Pharaoh's advisers telling him "Do you not realize that Egypt is on the verge of destruction?" [Shmos 10:7]

The Ramban then says that Moshe sensed that Pharaoh's advisers believed what he was telling them and left them alone with Pharaoh so that they could propose to the king that they all repent from their evil ways and thus save the country. The Ramban suggests that even though the Torah only describes this scenario by the plague of Locusts, this is in fact what Moshe did each time he came before Pharaoh and his advisors -- he presented the warning and ultimatum and then left to allow them to consider it amongst themselves and hopefully do Teshuva.

Over the last year or two I have quoted many times from the thoughts of Rav Simcha Zissel Brodie in his outstanding volume Sam Derech. Rav Simcha Zissel shares two profound insights regarding this Ramban.

First, Rav Simcha Zissel points out that we see that Moshe made a point to leave so that they could discuss his ultimatum. Moshe carried a staff that contained the acronym Detza"ch Ada"sh B'Ach"av - the acronym that represents the 10 plagues. This staff existed from the Six Days of Creation. Moshe clearly knew that there were going to be a total of 10 plagues before the Jews would be allowed to leave. There was no question at all in his mind as to the result of the "deliberations" that would take

place in Pharaoh's court. What then was the point of his leaving so that "they could discuss it" so that perhaps they would repent?

We see from this Ramban the amazing power of discussion among human beings. When people sit down with each other and say "Listen, let's talk this out" or "Let's think this thing through together," amazing things can happen. Sometimes a person can't necessarily come to the truth by himself. However, when different people sit down with each other and hash it out together (I point out to you where you're wrong and you point out to me where I'm wrong.), the power of discussion among people can literally change their fate.

The power of discussion and group collaboration is so strong that Moshe Rabbeinu held out the hope that if he left them alone to discuss the matter, they could have changed their fate so to speak and come to the recognition that "we better stop this madness before it's too late."

On his own, man may have a tremendous insight to his thoughts and feelings. However, he also has tremendous personal bias ("negius"). The Talmud tells us that a person is his own relative (Adam karov eitzel atzmo) and therefore just as a relative cannot testify about another relative, a person cannot be believed about himself and cannot see the truth about himself.

Once one has a companion to bounce ideas off of and to have a frank interchange of opinions with, one can gain great insight -- far beyond what he could have accomplished on his own, despite prodigious powers of personal intellect.

The second point that Rav Brodie derives from this Ramban is the following: If Moshe saw that they were scared and that his words were penetrating their outer shell of stubbornness and confidence, why did he leave right away? Why did he not stay in the hope that his imposing presence would have the desired effect of having them agree to let the Jews leave immediately?

The answer is that human beings have a tremendous inner resistance to outside opinions. People do not like anyone telling them what to do. This is why Moshe felt his presence there would be detrimental. It would be counter-productive. That is simply how people are. It has to do with the ego of a human being -- the healthy ego. "I am my own operator. I have my own opinions. You do not tell me what to do!"

This brings us to a terrible dilemma. If I cannot see my own faults and foibles and if I cannot see where I am going wrong and if I have a built in resistance to hearing an objective opinion from somebody else, what am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to exist? How do we solve this problem?

The answer is that Hashem created something in this world that helps us resolve this dilemma. He created an institution called "wives" and "husbands". The Master of the Universe had to create someone who is not you but who at the same time is you to resolve this dilemma. She/he is a person who is not you -- does not have your biases and yet is so close to you that you will not view

her/him as an outsider and will not resist his/her sincere advice to you. This institution of "ishto k'gufo" (one's wife is like himself) is how the Almighty expected us to resolve this dilemma.

With this concept, we can understand the interpretation of a Gemara in Yevamos [63a]. Rav Elazar says: "Any Adam [person] who has no wife is not an Adam". It is significant that under the Chupah, as part of Sheva Brochos, we recite the blessing "Yotzer haAdam" [Who has created an Adam]. It would seem more logical to recite that blessing when a child is born or at a bris or even at a Bar Mitzvah. Why do we wait until the young man is 25 years old, standing under the Chuppah to make the blessing "Who has created a man"?

This is what Rabbi Elazar means -- any man who does not have a wife is not an Adam. Only now by the wedding canopy, when man acquires his wife that he is considered an Adam. The reason is because until that point, he has this problem of how to get through life -- on the one hand, he is too biased to see appropriate solutions to his problems, yet on the other hand, he is too stubborn to accept the advice of others. Man needs someone to be there to tell him what is wrong and he needs that person to not be an outsider whose advice he will spurn. Hello wife. You have now made an Adam into an Adam.

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 Bo are provided below:

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