

THE PATH IN WHICH THEY SHOULD GO...

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: #1106 Must You Treat Your Father-in-Law Like Your Father? Good Shabbos!

At the beginning of our parsha, Yisro advises his son-in-law, Moshe Rabbeinu, to establish a court system: "You shall caution them regarding the decrees and the teachings, and you shall make known to them the path in which they should go and the deeds that they should do." [Shemos 18:20]

I saw an insight in the *sefer* Tiferes Shlomo by Rav Shlomo HaKohen Rabinowitz, the first Rebbe of the Radomsk Chassidic dynasty in 19th century Poland. The Tiferes Shlomo wonders -- Yisro already said, "You shall caution them regarding the decrees and the teaching." This seems to be an all-inclusive statement. So what is added by this extra phrase "and you shall make known to them the path in which they should go"?

The Tiferes Shlomo writes that there is a lot more to being an *Erliche Yid* (literally 'an honest Jew') than merely keeping the *chukim* and *mishpatim* [the decrees and the teachings]. There is another concept called "the path by which they should go" – meaning, every person has a certain path in which he should serve the *Ribono shel Olam*. The *tefilin* that I wear and the *tefilin* that you wear are exactly the same. The *shofar* that I hear and the *shofar* that you hear is exactly the same *mitzvah*. However, that does not necessarily mean that my approach to *Avodas Hashem* [Divine Service] is right for you, or that your approach to *Avodas Hashem* is right for me.

People's personalities are varied. Every person must find his own niche in *Avodas Hashem*. A person must become aware of how he can apply his unique personality traits to excel in his personal *Avodas Hashem*. Of course, Yisro advised Moshe, you must advise them regarding the decrees and the teachings that apply uniformly across the board – but that is not sufficient. You also need to inform them of the parameters of the appropriate paths that each person should seek out for himself as appropriate to their unique personalities.

This is not only the Chiddush of the Tiferes Shlomo. The Vilna Gaon expresses the same idea in his commentary to Mishlei. The Gaon writes it explicitly: "Every person has a (spiritual) path on which he should travel, because people's inner thoughts and personalities are different from one another. Just as no two people look alike, no two people think alike. Their natures and reaction to various

situations differ." The Gaon explains that in the time of the *Neviim*, people consulted with prophets to seek out the customized spiritual tasks they should undertake or not undertake in order to get closer with *Hashem*.

People have these *shaylos* [questions] all the time. "How should I prioritize my efforts? Shall I take on this project or not? Shall I get involved in this activity or in another activity?" In prophetic times, such questions could be presented to the *Navi* who would determine a person's inner nature and his natural inclinations, and prophetically give him the appropriate personalized recipe for his *Avodas Hashem* based on the root essence of his soul (*shoresh nishmaso*) and the nature of his body (*teva gufo*). "This is who you are. This is what you need to do."

We do not fully appreciate the tragedy that confronts us spiritually today because we lack a Beis HaMikdash and we lack prophets and prophecy. We walk around confused because we do not know which way to go. There is no one to give us the customized spiritual direction we seek and we need.

The Gaon also writes a similar idea on the *pasuk* in Mishlei, "Educate a child according to his way; also when he grows old he will not depart from it." [Mishlei 22:6]. Parents and teachers need to look at every child and try to figure out and ascertain the child's essence. Curriculum instruction should be customized to individualized needs. Only such *Chinuch* [education] will be lasting and effective.

The Gaon continues in his Mishlei commentary: "However, when you force him to study in a way which is opposite to his nature, when he is young he will listen to you out of fear, but later when your yoke is removed from his neck, he will reject your teaching, for it is impossible to go against his inborn nature (*mazalo*).

This is a lesson both in *Chinuch* and in *Avodas Hashem*. A person needs to figure out who he is, determine an approach that is appropriate to his nature, and follow that approach. Thus far, I have been citing the words of the Tiferes Shlomo on our parsha and the words of the Vilna Gaon in Mishlei.

I also saw a related thought from the Rebbe Reb Bunim in the sefer *Bei Chiya* written by Rav Elisha Horowitz (son-in-law of the Noveminsker Rebbe).

The Gemara in *Maseches Gittin* [58a] relates that following the destruction of the Second Bais Hamikdash, Rav Yehoshua ben Chananya travelled to the great city of Rome where he saw a beautiful child, a Jewish captive from the Destruction of Jerusalem, who was being held in prison. Rav Yehoshua ben Chanaya stood outside the prison wall and when he saw this poor beautiful Jewish child, quoted to him the first half of a *pasuk* from Sefer Yeshaya [42:24] "Who delivered Jacob to plunder and Israel to looters?" The young child replied by quoting the end of that *pasuk*: "Was it not *Hashem*, He against Whom we have sinned? They did not wish to go in His ways and did not listen to His Torah."

The Gemara then says that Rav Yehoshua ben Chananya proclaimed, "I am confident that this child will grow up to become a great Rabbinic personality in Israel." He then took an oath "I will not move from here until I ransom him for whatever amount his captors demand for him." In fact, the Gemara relates he did not leave there until he ransomed him for a tremendous sum. As he predicted, within a few short years, the child grew up to become a great Rabbinic personality (*moreh hora'ah b'Yisrael*) – Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha.

The question must be asked – granted that the child knew Sefer Yeshaya, by heart. He knew how to finish a *pasuk*. However, why did the child's ability to finish a *pasuk* (which may even have been standard among children in those days) cause Rav Yehoshua ben Chananya to become so confident that the child would become a great leader? What motivated him to raise huge sums of money to ransom this particular little child?

The Rebbe Reb Bunim in the *sefer* Sod Siach Sarfei Kodesh writes an amazing thing. He says it was not because the boy finished the *pasuk*. This is what happened here: In the time of the *Churban*, one of the problems was that people were spiritually confused -- they did not know which path to take. Everyone copied each other and Judaism became a one size fits all religion.

People were so confused about what path to take that whatever someone else did, the attitude was "I need to do that as well." The end of the *pasuk*, the child's quote was -- "Was it not *Hashem*, He against Whom we have sinned? They did not wish to go in His ways and did not listen to His Torah." The child was saying to Rav Yehoshua ben Chananya, "Your mission at this point in time is not to sit there and cry; your mission at this point is to write a check. You are wealthy. Stop crying and get me out of here."

The child was not merely finishing a *pasuk*; he had the perception to look at Rav Yehoshua ben Chananya and to give him *mussar* based on a deeper explanation of this *pasuk*. The child was able to tell him that, in effect, by just moaning about the situation, "You are barking up the wrong tree". This is not the time and place and this is not your spiritual challenge to merely pray at this moment, you must become an activist and do something. This is the time and place to use the riches that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* gave you and to use them for this purpose.

This is why the Gemara said that Rav Yehoshua ben Chananya not only concluded that the child would be a great personage, but that he will be a *Moreh HoRa'ah b'Yisrael* – a person who gives spiritual direction and halachic guidance in Israel. A *Moreh HoRa'ah* is not just a person who can *pasken* a *shaylah*, it is a person who shows the way, who directs someone on the proper path he should take in life at any given time. That was the greatness of this child and this is what impressed Rav Yehoshua ben Chananya about him.

Because of the multitude of our sins, we are unworthy nowadays to have prophets amongst us; but Israel is not totally orphaned. Every generation has its *Moray HoRa'ah*, those people qualified to point us in the proper paths and show us the proper road to take. We need to go to people who

know these things, who are perceptive, who can look at us and tell us what individual direction is correct for each of us.

This is part of the job of a *Dayan*. He is not only supposed to guide us in application of the "laws and the decrees" (*es haChukim v'es haToros*), he is also charged with "showing them the path on which they shall walk." They must realize that just as our faces are not like one another, so too our spiritual DNA is not like one another and each of us needs to be properly directed on the spiritual path that is most suited to our nature.

Just to imitate what everyone else does is NOT the correct approach, we must each find our own spiritual niche and worship the *Ribono shel Olam* in that fashion.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Yisro is provided below:

- # 042 Kiddush: To Sit or Not to Sit
- # 085 Christianity in Halacha
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- # 888 What Should It Be - Hello or Shalom?
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