

Everyone Is Reachable

פרשת כי תשא

Often when we encounter people who have strayed and are set in their ways, we react with despair. We can't imagine change emanating from a person who seems to reject our constant, sincere guidance and instruction. We begin to believe he is unreachable and thus lose hope. In this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu teaches us that everyone is reachable.

After Klal Yisroel sinned with the Egel Hazahav, Hashem tells Moshe (32:9), "And behold this is a stiff-necked nation." The Seforno explains that Hashem was communicating to Moshe that there is no hope of them doing teshuva, as they are extremely stubborn, and they will not even turn to listen to a righteous teacher. Yet, later the Seforno comments (32:15) on Moshe bringing down the Luchos, that Moshe thought the Jewish People would do Teshuva when they saw him and realized their mistake in calculating the time of his return. Moshe further planned that if seeing him didn't achieve this desired result, he would break the Luchos to shock them, and thereby cause them to do Teshuva. At first glance Moshe's optimism seems misplaced. He was told by Hashem that they are hopeless, and can't change. How can he remain hopeful in the face of Hashem telling him there is

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no hope? We see from here that it is a leader's responsibility to reject the belief that someone is beyond hope, even when this message is being delivered by Hashem.

The story continues, and Moshe begins his trek down the mountain anticipating Klal Yisroel doing Teshuva upon seeing him. As he approaches the camp, he sees Klal Yisroel rejoicing with the Egel Hazahav. Upon seeing this, Moshe is angered and throws down the Luchos. The Seforno comments (32:19), that upon seeing this, Moshe gave up hope of them being able to correct their mistake. He felt that they would not be able to return to their previous purity, and would remain undeserving of the Luchos. We can extrapolate from here a powerful insight into the dynamics of change. As long as Klal Yisrael did not celebrate and rejoice over their corruption, Moshe felt they were capable of a complete turn around, despite them being so stubborn that Hashem said they were hopeless. We see from here how careful we have to be not to rejoice over our sins, as this emotion causes more damage than the actual sin itself in impacting our character.

Based on the above, one would think that Moshe lost all hope in Klal Yisrael. They had just corrupted their character to such a degree that they would never be worthy of the Luchos. Yet the Seforno says that Moshe reacted by davening and begging Hashem for more compassion. In addition, he only despaired on them reaching their original purity, but he didn't give up hope on them doing Teshuva. We can learn from Moshe that everyone is reachable. Although a person may seem stubborn and so entrenched in his lifestyle, he is still reachable. It is possible that he may not be able to reach his original purity, but change is always within reach.

In our generation we often see people rejoicing in their lifestyle and values that are not in sync with Torah values. We may be quick to apply this Seforno and think they cannot reach their original purity. However, we need to be careful in this application, as often these positive emotions we are seeing are a facade to cover up deep feelings of emptiness and void. It may not be joy at all, but rather a distraction from inner pain, that will not hinder reaching a complete Teshuva.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לרפואה שלמה רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה