

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

The Power Torah Study Has To Improve Our Middos

based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח | הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר | רפאל חיים דוב בן בן-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה | שרה בת ר' יחזקאל | לרפואה שלמה יוסף בן מלכה מטל

In this week's Parsha, the Torah tells us that after Krias Yam Suf, Klal Yisrael journeyed for three days and they could not find water. Finally they found water in Marah, however it was bitter. Klal Yisrael reacted to their current situation as follows, (15:24-25) "The people complained against Moshe saying, 'What shall we drink?' He cried out to Hashem, and Hashem showed him a tree; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There He established for the nation a statute, and a judgement, and there He tested it." Rashi comments: "He tested the people, and saw the stiffness of their neck (קשי ערפו). They did not consult with Moshe using a nice language saying, 'Pray on our behalf that there should be water for us to drink.' Rather, they complained." Rashi in expressing what Klal Yisrael did wrong, that they did not use a nice language, identifies the root cause as being stiff necked. It was this Middah that caused them to ask inappropriately. Rashi in Parsha Ki Sisa (32:9) defines the Middah of being stiff necked as follows, "They turn the hardness of the back of their necks towards those who admonish them, and refuse to listen."

Upon reflection in the above Chazal, Klal Yisrael's reaction to not having water seems bizarre in the context of everything they had experienced. Klal Yisrael just witnessed the miracles of Krias Yam Suf, miracles that resulted in "And they believed in Hashem and Moshe his servant." Our Sages tell us that the revelation of the Shechinah was such that "A lowly maidservant experienced at Krias Yam Suf more than any prophet experienced." After witnessing such miracles, and being infused with such a tangible and deep Emunah, it would seem simple for Klal Yisrael to ask Moshe to pray on their behalf for water, and to speak nicely. Being without water should not have stirred a panic that resulted in this lack of Derech Eretz, even with this Middah of being stiff necked! We must remember that even though their shortcomings were infinitesimally small, on their lofty level they were considered serious and can provide lessons for us.

It must be that we are underestimating the power of this Middah of being stiff necked. Klal Yisrael should have reacted to not having water with a sense of humility and reflection. As our Sages tell us, "If a person faces suffering he should introspect into his own deeds." However, due to this Middah they became defiant in the face of criticism, antagonistic in the face of rebuke, which undermined the most basic Derech Eretz, of asking nicely. This Middah of resisting rebuke was so strong in them that it could not be overpowered by all the miracles that they experienced at Krias Yam Suf.

On the other hand, our Sages expound the Pasuk as follows (Bava Kama 82a), "Water refers to Torah...since they went three days without water (Torah) they weakened. The prophets among them decreed that they should read the Torah on Shabbos, Monday and Thursday in order to ensure that three days would not pass without Torah." We see from our Sages that although the miracles of Krias Yam Suf could not overpower this Middah of being stiff necked, Torah would have been able to prevent them from complaining. If only two days would have passed since they were involved in Torah, the impact of that study of Torah would have improved their Middos and changed their behavior more than experiencing the greatest miracles.

We can learn from here an insight into the power of Torah study. Often people tend to say, "If only I would witness miracles I would be a changed man." We see from here that the power of Torah study has the greatest impact on our behavior. Granted that the power of our Torah study is reduced, as we don't learn Torah with the same passion and connection to Hashem as previous generations, however, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter taught us that through studying the areas of Torah that directly address our specific areas of weakness, our behavior will be changed and improved.



Shir HaShirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me! (Shir HaShirim 2:6)

His left hand is under my head: In the desert. And his right hand embraces me: He traveled a three-days' journey; to search out a rest for them [as in Bamidbar 10: 33], and in the place of the rest, He brought down Manna and quails for them. All this I remember now in my exile, and I am sick for His love. (Rashi)

If all this we remember now in our exile why does the Pasuk say, "His right hand embraces..." - presently, instead of "His right hand embraced..." - using the past tense?

Perhaps we can explain this with the following story: A young man, Zalman, was caught desecrating the Shabbos in his hometown of Radin. In the hopes of inspiring him to return to a Torah-committed life, Zalman was taken into the Chofetz Chaim's room. After just a few minutes, he walked out. He was never Mechalel Shabbos again! What did the Chofetz Chaim tell him that had made such a significant impact? For many years, no one knew until Rabbi Berel Wein retold this story to an audience in Florida. After the speech, an old Jew approached him and said to him: I am Zalman! Rabbi Wein immediately asked, "Nu, so what did the Chofetz Chaim say to you?" Zalman, filled with emotion, replied, "He just took my hand in his, stroking it lovingly and as tears streamed down his eyes he said, 'Shabbos! Shabbos! Shabbos!' Since that day so long ago, there were many times when I faced great challenges keeping Shabbos but I could never violate it for I would immediately feel the warm tears of the Chofetz Chaim on my hands!"

The Pasuk above testifies to us that, despite how low we may fall in our Galus, the supreme love of our Father in Heaven, displayed to us in the Midbar, is still alive in the depths of our hearts. So much so, that we actually feel the warmth of His embrace around our necks, so to speak, as if He is embracing us at this moment. Even when we stray from Him, deep down, it is with a broken heart that we feel compelled to breach the love of the One who loves us so dearly, while His arms are still around our neck in a loving embrace!



ELIEZER INSTITUTE Emunah Highlights

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All who recite Parshas Haman every day are guaranteed that their livelihood will not decrease. (Yerushalmi Brachos)

"It is insufficient to merely recite it, rather one must focus upon it...so that one will believe that his entire livelihood is attained through Hashgachah Pratis, as the Pasuk states, 'He who had gathered a lot had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency.' (Shemos 16:18) This shows that additional Hishtadlus produces no benefit at all." (Mishnah Berurah 1:13)

One may ask: What is the comparison? Regarding the Manna, Hashem said explicitly how much each person was to get. As the Pasuk states, "This is what Hashem has commanded: Gather as much of it as each of you requires to eat, an Omer to a person for as many of you as there are; each of you shall fetch for those in his tent." (Shemos 16:16) This being so, it is readily understood why "he who had gathered a lot had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no deficiency." This being so, how will these Pesukim reinforce within us the knowledge that regarding our own livelihood as well that greater hishtadlus produces no benefit at all?

The answer is that in reality, just as the amount of Manna everyone received was preordained, so too is the exact amount we will earn each year, as the Gemara states, "A person's entire livelihood - all that he is destined to earn - is allocated to him - such and such an amount he will earn this year - during the period from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur." (Beitzah 16a - with Rashi) As long as we fulfill our basic hishtadlus, just as one had to go out to collect the Manna, the outcome of any additional hishtadlus will be just as by the Manna, "He who had gathered a lot had no excess."

How much more of our lives will we waste attempting to stuff extra Manna into our jar?!