

Weekly Parsha

A Deficiency In Middos May Reveal More Than We Think

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

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In this week's Parsha, the Torah tells us the story of the Meraglim, the spies that were sent to Eretz Yisroel. The spies' report of Eretz Yisroel evoked panic and fear, as they said (13:28), "The nation that lives there is strong, and the cities are very fortified, and we also saw the children of the giants there." This led to the Jewish people going as far as saying (14:4), "And they said one man to another, let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."

The Ralbag says, "This shows us the bad heart of this generation, that despite everything Hashem did to prevent them from saying 'Let's return to Egypt' upon encountering war, nevertheless they said, 'Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.'" (It is important to realize that anytime we talk about a deficiency in this generation, it is a microscopic defect that was referred to in Slobodka as דק מן הדק עד אין נבדק, an ever so slight defect. This was a generation of Tzadikim who witnessed miracles and Hashem's involvement in their daily lives in the clearest manner. We can't begin to fathom the lofty heights they achieved. However, since Hashem wished for us to be able to learn from them, He thus magnified their sins to what they were equated to on their level, so that we would be able to derive lessons from them.)

Upon initial analysis, this Ralbag is difficult to understand. We are discussing a generation that committed the sin of making the golden calf. In addition, by sending the spies they showed a lack of Emunah, as Hashem promised them they would inherit Eretz Yisroel. Yet these errors did not indicate

that they possessed evil hearts. The testimony to their "bad hearts" was that they expressed, "Let's appoint a leader and return to Egypt," after Hashem did so much to prevent this. Why was this more reflective of them having a "bad heart" than the other seemingly worse sins that they did? In addition, this sin only resulted from their lack of Bitachon, which triggered a panic to return to Egypt, as they couldn't stay in the wilderness.

We can derive from here that a slight deficiency in the Middah of Hakaras Hatov, gratitude for the kindness bestowed upon you, is more reflective of a "bad heart" than seemingly greater sins. The fact that they can say, "Let's return to Egypt", after Hashem did so much for them to ensure that they would not react this way, is considered one of the worst errors. We know Hashem wants our purity of heart, as the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (2:13) tells us that the most all-encompassing Middah is a "good heart". If the Jewish People would have had a "good heart," then despite their lack of Emunah they would not have been able to express this after all Hashem had done for them.

We live in a generation in which Limud Hatorah and Shemiras Hamitzvos are emphasized and reinforced constantly. However, Middos and Mussar don't garner the same attention and focus. We see from the above how a deficiency in Middos can reflect an apathetic heart even more than a seemingly greater sin, and therefore Middos refinement requires at least equal attention. As the Vilna Gaon says, "If not for character refinement, what is the purpose of life?"



Shir HaShirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

In this week's Parsha (15:30,31) we read: "But the person, be he citizen or stranger, who acts defiantly, Hashem he curses; that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of Hashem and violated His commandment, that person shall be cut off—he bears his guilt."

It is understandable that one who curses Hashem is considered to have despised Him, however, Chazal include in this category someone who does something seemingly benign as well: The Gemara (*Sanhedrin 99a*) states: "Anyone for whom it is possible to engage in Torah study and who nevertheless does not engage in its study is included in the category of: 'Because he has despised the word of Hashem.'" How can we understand that one who simply does not learn Torah whenever possible despises Hashem and his punishment equals that of one who curses Him R"L?

With a true understanding of the nature of Torah study, the answer becomes clear. The Pasuk states: "Kiss me, from the kisses of Your mouth for Your love (*the words of the Oral Torah*) is better than wine (*the Written Torah*)."

 (Shir HaShirim 1:2, with *Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zara*)

The Zohar explains further: "Shlomo HaMelech... began the praise of love between them with, 'Kiss me' ... For clinging love, spirit to spirit, is through kissing, and kissing is by way of the mouth for it is the entrance way of the spirit and it's exit. When they kiss each other the spirits cling to one another becoming one..." (*Zohar Teruma 371*)

The Torah is Hashem's thought. When we learn Torah, Hashem places the understanding of His thoughts into our minds and it is as if he is kissing us on the mouth and becoming one with us in a sense.

Regarding one who is studying Torah, the Tana D'Bei Eliyahu (*Chap. 18*) states: "What is the meaning of the Pasuk, 'Pour you heart out like water opposite the face of Hashem'? From here they learned that any Talmid Chacham who sits and reads and studies and delves into the Torah, the Holy One blessed be He sits opposite him and reads and studies with him..." Once we understand that when one studies Torah, Hashem is kissing him this can be readily understood, for when one kisses someone on the mouth he must be opposite him.

One who turns down the priceless opportunity and honor of the most personal and intimate meeting with a mighty king shows the highest level of disrespect. How much more so is this true regarding the King of the Universe?!



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In the Teffilah of Nishmas we say: "Were our mouths as full of song as the sea, and our tongue as full of joyous song as its multitude of waves, and our lips as full of praise as the breadth of the heavens... we still could not thank You sufficiently... Therefore the organs that you set within us and the spirit and soul that you breathed into our nostrils, and the tongue that you placed in our mouth - all of them shall thank and bless and praise... and declare the sovereignty of Your Name, our King... as it is written: 'All my bones shall say, Hashem who is like You?'"

The Meforshim ask: There seems to be a contradiction, first we say that even if our mouths were as full of song as the sea... we would never be able to properly express our thanks to Hashem for His endless kindnesses etc. But then we continue: Therefore the organs that you set within us and the spirit and soul that you breathed into our nostrils... they themselves shall thank and bless and praise and glorify Your name... How is the fact that no amount of praise can suffice to thank Hashem for what He has done for us be the reason why, "Therefore the organs that you set within us... they themselves shall thank... Your name?"

What is different about the nature of the praise of our organs?

All of our organs, other than our tongues, cannot give thanks to anyone, especially to Hashem. However, they can give praise through the fulfillment of all the Mitzvos. In the Torah there are 248 negative Mitzvos and 365 positive Mitzvos corresponding to the 248 limbs and 365 sinews in a person. What is the point of all these Mitzvos? The Ramban (*Avos 2:1*), answers this question: "'Be careful with a light commandment as with a weighty one,' since they are all very desirable and beloved - as through them a person gives thanks to his G-d all the time. And the intention of all the commandments is that we believe in our G-d and give thanks to Him that He is our Creator. And that is the intention of all of Creation..."

We see from the Ramban that the performance of every Mitzvah is actually an act of giving thanks to Hashem and this is the purpose of all of Creation.

This explains what we say in Nishmas: ***Were our mouths as full of song as the sea... we still could not thank You sufficiently...*** for mere words can never describe how indebted we are to Hashem. In that case, how can we properly praise Him thereby fulfilling the purpose of Creation? ***Therefore, the organs that you set within us etc....*** they themselves - not merely the words they may express, for limbs other than the tongue cannot talk, but by performing the Mitzvos - ***will thank and bless and praise...***