

RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Behaalosecha for your Shabbos Table

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DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Torah and Tefila

Parshas Behaaloscha begins with the *mitzva* of the kindling of the *menorah*. Hashem told Moshe to instruct Aharon, the *kohen gadol*, בהעלותך את הנרות, אל מול פני המנורה יאירו שבעת הנרות.

The work *Shulchan Ha'Shabbos Im Rabbi Nachman* suggests an explanation of this *pasuk* based on Rav Nachman of Breslav's comments in the first chapter of *Likutei Moharan*, regarding the critical importance of Torah learning.

Rav Nachman there writes that our *tefilos* are accepted through the merit of our Torah study. He cites the *pasuk* in Sefer Mishlei (28:9) – מסיר אזנו משמע תורה גם תפלתו תועבה, "He who turns his ear away from listening to Torah, even his prayer is an abomination." If a person "turns his ear away from Torah," showing disinterest in learning, walking out when the rabbi gets up to speak, or looking at his phone during a *shiur* instead of eagerly seizing another opportunity to learn, then not only does he forfeit the precious *mitzva* of Torah learning, but his prayer is a תועבה, an "abomination." The explanation, I believe, is that we have no right to speak to Hashem, to communicate to Him our needs and wishes, if we show no interest in hearing what He has to say to us. I often advise singles that an important factor to consider when dating is whether one's date spends the evening talking about himself or herself, or shows interest in the other person, inquiring about his or her life, aspirations and ideas. In order to build a relationship, one must not only talk, but also listen with interest and attentiveness. This is true of our relationship with Hashem, as well. We cannot build a relationship with Him only by speaking to Him, by sharing with Him our concerns, needs and wishes, telling Him what we want. We must also listen to what He has to say to us, which is done through learning Torah. When we learn, we in essence hear Hashem speaking to us, explaining to us what He wants and expects of us. Only if we show interest in what He has to say to us can we then come before Him to express our needs. Otherwise, our prayers are a תועבה.

Due to the particular importance of Torah learning, Rav

Nachman writes, the *yetzer ha'ra* makes it very difficult for us to learn. Even people who eagerly perform other *mitzvos* often find it hard to devote time to study. This is a challenge which we must struggle to overcome, because, as mentioned, Torah is critical for Jewish living.

The *Shulchan Ha'Shabbos Im Rabbi Nachman* suggests explaining on this basis the *pasuk* at the beginning of our *parsha*. The Torah turns to the "*kohen gadol*," to the spiritual guides and teachers, and tells them, בהעלותך את הנרות – if they want to uplift the "candles," the souls of the people, which are likened to candles (נר ה' נשמת אדם – Mishlei 20:27), then אל מול פני המנורה יאירו – they should direct the people's hearts toward Torah. Our souls cannot be ignited and uplifted without Torah learning. Studying Torah is a prerequisite for having our *tefilos* answered, and an indispensable component of the effort to "kindle" our souls and ignite spiritual passion within ourselves.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

Raising Servants of Hashem

We read in Parshas Behaaloscha of the designation of the *Leviyim* for the role of serving in the *Mishkan*. The Torah explains (8:16-18) that the firstborns of *Benei Yisrael* were initially designated for this role, as they were spared by Hashem from the deadly plague that struck all the firstborn in Egypt. But then the firstborns were replaced by the *Leviyim*, and the story of their formal consecration is told here in our *parsha*.

The conventional explanation for why the *Leviyim* were chosen to serve in place of the *bechorim* (firstborn) is because of חטא העגל, the sin of the golden calf. Levi was the only one of the tribes that did not participate in the worship of the calf, and so they were selected for the role of God's special servants, in place of the *bechorim*, who worshipped the עגל.

The Chizkuni, however, gives a different reason. He writes that if the *bechorim* had been assigned this role, then there would have been servants in the *Mishkan* whose fathers did not serve in this capacity. Quite obviously, not every

bechor's father is a *bechor*. Therefore, there would be many servants in the *Mishkan* who were not raised and educated by somebody who had served. This privilege was thus given to a tribe, so that all those who served will have been raised by fathers who served. Every Levi's father is, of course, a Levi, and so the servants in the *Mishkan* will all have grown in the home of a Levi and shown an example of how Hashem's special servants are to conduct themselves.

The most important component of *chinuch* is teaching by personal example. Our children learn from our behavior far more than from our words. We cannot teach our children *emuna* if they see us anxious and worried instead of trusting in Hashem. We cannot teach our children about the importance of Torah learning if we do not make a point of setting aside time to learn. We cannot teach our children about the importance of *tefila* if they do not see us *davening* properly.

This past Shabbos (Shabbos Parshas Naso), we read as the *haftara* the story of Manoach and his wife, the parents of Shimshon (Shoftim 13). They were unable to have children for many years, until an angel appeared to Manoach's wife and informed her that she would soon conceive and have a son, who was to be raised as a *nazir*. The angel proceeded to outline the special restrictions that the boy would need to observe throughout his life. The woman told her husband, Manoach, about this encounter, and Manoach prayed that the angel should appear once again. Sure enough, the angel reappeared, and Manoach asked *מה יהיה משפט הנער* – which laws his son would need to observe. The angel replied, *מכל אשר אמרתי אל האשה תשמר* – “Observe all that I said to the woman,” and proceeded to repeat the instructions that were given to Manoach's wife during the angel's initial revelation.

What was this all about? Why did Manoach want the angel to reappear? Did he not believe his wife?

Rav Shimon Schwab explained that Manoach wanted to know how he and his wife were to raise their son for his mission. They learned that he was destined for greatness – and so Manoach wanted the angel to explain to him how they should prepare him.

The angel replied, *מכל אשר אמרתי אל האשה תשמר*, which Rav Schwab understands to mean that Manoach was to himself abide by the restrictions to which their son would be bound. The only way for Manoach to train his son to be a *nazir* was for he himself to be a *nazir*. The most powerful education we provide for our children is the personal example that we set for them.

If we want to raise our children to be “*Leviyim*,” to be loyal servants of Hashem, then we must ourselves live as His faithful servants and show our children a model of sincere *עבודת ה'*.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

Complaints vs. Complainers

ויהי העם כמתאוננים, רע באזני ה' (11:1).

The Torah tells that after *Benei Yisrael* left Mount Sinai, they began complaining – מתאוננים – and Hashem severely punished them, sending a deadly fire.

The word מתאוננים is written in the התפעל verb form, which is generally reflexive, referring to an action done toward oneself. The Torah here is telling us not that the people **complained**, but rather that they **became complainers**. Indeed, this *pasuk* does not even specify what they complained about – because the significant point is not the particular complaint, but rather their turning themselves into complainers.

There is a critical difference between complaining and being a complainer. There is nothing wrong with voicing a legitimate complaint for a constructive purpose. If a person wants to criticize a shul, a school, a politician, or any other institution or person, and it is done substantively and for a constructive purpose, then this is certainly legitimate, and even welcome. It is important that we have people come forward to point out deficiencies that need to be addressed. But the problem arises when people become complainers, when they go into a situation, an event or a room looking to complain about something.

What is so wrong about chronic complaining? Why is this something for us to stay away from?

The *Maor Va'shemesh* comments that the root of the word מתאוננים is אונן – the term used in reference to a person who had just lost a family member. Chronic complainers unnecessarily turn themselves into mourners. They make themselves miserable. Always on the lookout for something to complain about, they deny themselves happiness. They are אוננים, mourners, every day.

In a recent article, I wrote about, and reflected on, an experience I had during a flight to New York:

I was recently flying to New York when the woman sitting next to me grew increasingly frustrated that her television screen wasn't working. She was forcefully pushing every button and practically slapping the screen trying to revive it.

The woman stopped a flight attendant walking by throwing her arms in the air, and with great exasperation announced, “Nothing is working!” The flight attendant stopped, looked at her, took a deep breath and said, “Nothing is working?! Ma'am, we are 33,000 feet in the air, flying in a metal box with wings that will get us to our destination in just a couple of hours. The plane is working just fine and isn't that the main thing?” With that, she turned to continue the beverage and snack service but her words kept ringing in my ears.

We all have things in our lives that aren't “working.” For this woman, it was the TV screen. For some of us, it's the WiFi. Or maybe some appliance in our house. Maybe the tuna salad at the shul *shalosh seudos* isn't the way we want it. Or the thermostat isn't set to the right temperature. But the main thing is that our heart is still beating, our lungs are still working, our eyes still see, and our ears still hear. Why make ourselves miserable by always worrying about what's not working, instead of appreciating what is working?

Let's stop turning ourselves into mourners. Let's stop making ourselves miserable. By all means, if there's a problem that needs to be addressed, we should call attention to it in an appropriate and constructive manner. But let's never turn ourselves into אוננים by constantly complaining.