

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה

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

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנחם | הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר | רפאל חיים דוב בן בן-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה | שרה בת ר' יחזקאל | ראובן יוסף בן יהושע | דב בעריש בן פסח צבי
לרפואה שלמה יוסף בן מלכה מטל | יעקב אליעזר בן חנה נשא

In this week's Parsha, the Ralbag teaches - "The second benefit is in Middos. To make known the bad nature of the Mitzrim in regards to jealousy and cruelty. Due to their jealousy they were pained when seeing the success of Klal Yisrael in their increase in numbers. With regards to their cruelty, they made Klal Yisrael work - extremely hard labor - forcing them beyond what was appropriate. Their cruelty reached such an extent that Pharaoh wanted to kill the baby boys that were born, for the purpose of wiping out the nation. The Torah mentions this to focus us on the fact that it is appropriate to distance ourselves from these lowly qualities, because the Mitzrim possessed these qualities, and due to these qualities they were punished extensively, which is written later."

The Ralbag is clearly saying that what would distance a person from these lowly Middos of jealousy and cruelty, is focusing on the terrible punishments that the Mitzrim received. One would have thought that if you want to distance a person from these Middos, focus them on the fact that these Middos lead a person to being so corrupt that they would torture and kill even babies. Shouldn't the Ralbag have mentioned this deterrent at least as an additional reason?!

The Ralbag's omission of this reason indicates that when it comes to uprooting the nature of jealousy and cruelty, the logical approach is not enough. Perhaps that approach would work for the passing feeling of jealousy or cruelty. However, to combat and uproot the deeply rooted nature of jealousy and cruelty that the Mitzrim possessed, one needs to focus on the punishments and consequences of these behaviors. Only fear can reach the root of the Middah to uproot it. Although we normally dissuade

focusing on fear in our generation, as it overwhelms a person and causes one to shut down, we see from here that it is a powerful tool that if utilized properly can penetrate to the root of a person's Middos and uproot them. Therefore, if a person finds themselves struggling with a bad nature, this approach should be considered with caution.

We can derive another powerful insight from a Ralbag later in the Parsha. The Ralbag writes, "The first benefit is in Middos. It is appropriate for a person not to separate from someone he is leaving, without his knowledge or permission. Even though it is likely he won't mind. This is derived from the fact that despite Moshe being commanded by Hashem to return to Egypt, he did not want to depart from Yisro without his knowledge and permission."

The importance of Middos can be gleaned from this Ralbag. Moshe is commanded by Hashem to leave Midian. Yet, he feels it would be inappropriate to leave Yisro without his permission, due to the fact that he lived with him. It is one thing if the Ralbag would have indicated that it is out of honor to his father-in-law. However, this act of Derech Eretz is merely because he stayed with him! We see from here that even a commandment from Hashem does not supersede Derech Eretz, as Derech Eretz precedes the Torah.

This idea can be illustrated by a story told about Rabbi Aharon Kotler ZT"l. Rav Aharon once left his home in Boro Park to travel to Lakewood. Around thirty minutes into the trip he asked the driver to turn around and go back to his house, as he had not said goodbye to his wife before they left.