

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

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A Torah Approach to the Adage of No Pain No Gain

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

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנח | 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
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In this week's Parsha, the Torah instructs Klal Yisrael the amount of Manna that they should take, and shares what would happen if someone took more or less than that amount. As the Pasuk says (16:15-19), "The one who took more did not gain and the one who took less did not lose." The Ralbag derives the following lesson from here, "It is not proper for a person to afflict himself and hold back from eating the food that he needs, and it is also not proper for a person to eat more than he needs to maintain his body. It was for this reason that Hashem commanded Klal Yisrael to gather an Omer Legulgoles, as was mentioned. Hashem miraculously orchestrated that when they measured the amount that they took, each one found the proper measure. Hashem's intention was that they should have the exact amount, not less or more. This was for the purpose of habituating them in the character trait of being satisfied with what they had, and distancing them from the practices of other nations to cause pain to themselves in serving Hashem."

An important insight into the Middah of being satisfied with what you have can be derived from this Ralbag. Hashem did a miracle of sending them Manna everyday for 40 years, all for the purpose of developing within them this Middah. The miracle of the Manna is considered by Rav Saadia Gaon to be the greatest of all the miracles because it was constant. The fact that Hashem went to such an extent to instill within them this Middah of not needing more and being satisfied with their needs being taken care of, highlights the value and importance of this Middah.

We can derive an additional insight from the lesson he learns from the fact that those that took less still ended up with the proper measure. Upon initial analysis this lesson seems unnecessary. Wouldn't people be naturally resistant to afflict themselves? Why would Hashem need to habituate a person not to connect to Hashem in this way? Furthermore, why is it necessary to habituate a person not to serve Hashem through pain, just teach him that this is not what Hashem wants? The fact that a person needs to be distanced from this perspective clearly shows that a person has a strong sense that

experiencing pain connects him to the spiritual world. He might feel that the pleasure and benefits of the material world are antithetical to spirituality. This deeply rooted feeling that pain causes closeness can only be uprooted through 40 years of miracles that sent the message that Hashem wants us to have our needs met. It is important to be aware of the attraction to this perspective and realize that this approach is not Daas Torah, and Hashem does not want us to be in pain. On the contrary, Hashem want us to enjoy the world to the greatest extent possible as it says in the Gemara Yerushalmi (Kiddushin 4:12), "R' Chizkiah R' Cohn in the name of Rav: In the future one will be judged for all that his eyes saw and he didn't eat. R' Lazer worried about this opinion and set aside money to eat from every kind once a year."

This idea is further illustrated by a Ralbag on the following Pasuk (14:10), "They were very scared, and the Bnei Yisrael cried out to Hashem." - "It is proper for a person who is in pain to Daven to Hashem. This is demonstrated by the fact that Klal Yisrael davened to Hashem when they were in pain." This Ralbag is perplexing, why would we need to derive this from the Pesukim. Firstly, there is a Mitzvah to Daven, secondly, isn't it human nature and automatic to call out to Hashem when one is in pain?

It must be that the Ralbag thought that without this lesson it would be appropriate for a person to accept the pain that he is in as a decree from Heaven. Since everything Hashem does is for the good, the correct response to suffering is acceptance. Perhaps, Davening to remove the suffering is a rejection of Hashem's decree, and one should rather develop the attitude of "I am supposed to suffer." Therefore, the Ralbag sees from here that it is in fact appropriate to Daven to remove the suffering, as this is what the Klal Yisrael did by the Yam Suf.

This further illustrates that Hashem does not want us to suffer, as the correct response to suffering is Davening. Hashem wants us to remove it through Tefillah. As it may be the very purpose of the suffering is to bring a person to Tefillah.