

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

Under the Influence

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-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 Torah (23:8) says, "A Judge is not allowed to take bribes because bribes blind the eyes of insightful people, and corrupt righteous words." Rashi comments on this Pasuk - "One is not allowed to take a bribe even to judge truthfully, and surely to corrupt the judgment because it already says in the Pasuk, do not corrupt the judgment. It blinds the eyes of insightful people, this is even referring to a wise person in Torah, if he takes a bribe his mind will end up confused, he will forget his learning, and it will dim his eyesight. It will corrupt righteous words, meaning righteous judgment."

If we reflect on Rashi's words we can see a simple, yet amazing, insight from here. The parameters of a bribe even include an insignificant amount of money or a slight favor, such as someone removing dirt from the jacket of a judge. We can picture the scene as a judge on the caliber of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein ZT"L, who was given a gift card by one of the litigants to buy a coffee to help him be alert and judge the case truthfully. The Torah tells us that this will cause the judge's Chochmas Hatorah to be completely impacted in three ways: He will become confused and lose his clarity; he will forget his learning; and the illumination of his eyes will be dimmed. We see from here how delicate our thinking process is. Any slight influence on the purity of the thinking process has a devastating effect on a person's Chochmas Hatorah.

We can extrapolate from here to our Middos, which are always impacting our thinking. Our ego, jealousy, anger, and other bad Middos constantly play a role in our judgment. However, we see from the above that it is much worse than just impacting our judgment. When our thinking is influenced, our Chochmas Hatorah is completely destroyed. Therefore, it is critical that we learn Mussar to refine our Middos, and gain a greater awareness of our character traits and tendencies.

The impact of our biases is illustrated clearly in the following Shmooze from the Alter of Slobodka. The Halacha is that the Kohen Gadol is not allowed to sit on the Beis Din to decide a leap year, and make a second Adar. We are concerned that the Kohen Gadol will be biased in his judgment because he has to walk barefoot on the floor of the Azarah. Therefore, he will not want there to be a second Adar because that means Yom Kippur will fall out a month later, and the floor will be colder. This is truly mind boggling! We are referring to the Kohen Gadol whose purity and righteousness was a necessary quality for the position. In addition, the change of temperature is not so significant in Eretz Yisrael in a month's time. Yet we are concerned that this slight difference can completely throw off Kohen Gadol's judgment. Clearly, we are always under the influence of our biases and Middos, and Limud Hamussar is critical for us to be able to think clearly.