

Pursuit of Purpose

פרשת
וישלח

VOL 176

a project of



Achieving Clarity of Thought

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

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח | הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר | רפאל חיים דוב בן בן-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה
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In this week's Parsha, פרשת וישלח, the Ralbag derives the following lesson from how Yaakov reacted to Dinah being raped by Shechem. "The fifth lesson is in Middos; it is appropriate for a person to act with the trait of patience as much as possible, and not be quick to show his anger over what was done against him. However, he should wait until the appropriate time. This is illustrated by Yaakov, despite the intense reaction that was appropriate after what Shechem did, Yaakov was silent until his children came. This was for the purpose of devising a strategy between them on how to react to this."

We can glean an important lesson from this Ralbag. The Ralbag is pointing out that what allowed Yaakov to devise a proper strategy in this situation, is not because he waited to take revenge until his sons arrived so they would be able to work on a plan together. Rather it is due to the fact that he kept quiet. He remained silent and did not even allow himself to express how fuming mad he was at this terrible atrocity that had occurred. This is what allowed him to have the clearest judgement in dealing with the situation. Any expression of anger would have deepened his feeling of anger, and this increased anger would have interfered with his judgement.

The current trend in psychology is to encourage people to just let it all out. We see from here that this approach can be detrimental at times. It can cause us to lose objectivity due to our biases which are reinforced through expression.

This idea has far reaching ramifications as it highlights how a subtle shift in our Middos can totally sway our judgement. Yaakov just experienced his daughter being mistreated and

assaulted, a father's worst nightmare, and was furious. Yet expressing it would have increased his anger, blurring his judgement.

An Israeli Chief Justice once said, "We never allow our political values to influence our judgement." This chief justice didn't understand the first thing about the power of Negiah (bias). The Chazon Ish was once told by someone who was defending a person, "He is an Adam Gadol, but he loses himself when he has a Negiah." The Chazon Ish responded, "If that is the case, he is a lost soul, as we are blinded by our Negiah's 24/7."

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. The importance of working on Middos is captured by the Gra in Mishlei who says, "If not for Tikkun Hammidos why am I alive?!"

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Shir Hashirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

The Roar of a Lion, Cry of a Dove

“Woe to the sons because of who's sins I destroyed My house, burned My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world.”

The Gemara (Brachos 3a) states, that the above words are expressed by our Father in Heaven three times each night, the depth of their expression described as “Hashem roaring like a lion,” while saying them. In contrast, later in this very same Gemara, Chazal relate that R' Yose recounted hearing a Bas Kol – a heavenly voice – “Crying like a dove” and saying the very same statement, “Woe to the sons etc.”

How can we understand these seemingly diametrically opposed expressions of Hashem's statement? Does Hashem “roar like a lion” or does He in fact “cry like a dov” as He expresses these words?

Rashi in Maseches Sota (33a) describes a Bas Kol as an angel who is sent to convey the words of Hashem. Based on this, perhaps we can understand the words of the above Gemara.

Hashem Himself, so to speak, in fact “roars like a lion” in expression of His great pain over the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. However, this can be understood in two diametrically opposed manners. Either He “roars like a lion” in expression of His ultimate anger towards us for “because of who's sins I destroyed My house...” or He “roars like a lion” in expression of His ultimate pain for His children “due to whose sins I (was forced) to destroy My house and exile them among the nations.” Therefore, the Bas Kol sent to convey the true meaning of Hashem's roar, describes it as the “crying of a dove.” This conveys the message to Klal Yisroel that rather than Hashem “roaring” in an ultimate expression of anger at us, He is “roaring” in an ultimate expression of crying for us, that our sins have brought such pain upon us.

Perhaps we can also explain why Hashem's “roar” is described as a “dove” crying. Our eternal bond with our Father in Heaven is described in Shir HaShirim (1:15, Rashi), “As a dove, who upon recognizing his mate will never part from her to allow her to mate with another.” Therefore, as Hashem expresses His ultimate pain over having been forced to temporarily send us away from Him so to speak, He conveys His eternal bond with us.



Emunah Highlights

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The Fear of Chillul Hashem

In this week's Parshah, Yaakov, upon hearing of the approach of Eisav and his armies, cries out to Hashem: “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav; for, I fear, he may come and strike me down, mothers and children alike. And You have said, ‘I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count.’”

This raises a question: If Hashem promised to “deal bountifully” with Yaakov, why was he afraid of Eisav? Chazal explain that Yaakov feared he might have sinned, potentially compromising Hashem's promise. Yet if this were the case, why did Yaakov reference the promise in his prayer? If the promise still stood, there was no room for fear. If it didn't, why mention it?

Furthermore, we know that nothing stands in the way of Bitachon. Why did Yaakov not simply rely on Bitachon, even if he feared he had sinned? And if Yaakov was on the highest level of Bitachon, where anything Hashem decreed would be equally good in his eyes, what was he worried about at all?

The Medrash (Yalkut) provides an additional Tefillah by Yaakov: “Master of the world! You wrote in Your Torah: ‘An ox or a sheep, he and his child you shall not slaughter on the same day.’ If this Rasha comes and kills my children and their mother together, the Sefer Torah that You are destined to give at Har Sinai—who will read it?” Here lies a similar question. If the Torah's prohibition truly precludes such an event, why was Yaakov concerned? And if it doesn't, why would Eisav's actions prevent the Torah from being read?

The answer lies in Yaakov's concern for how events might be perceived. Though Yaakov trusted fully in Hashem and knew nothing could contradict His promises, he feared people might misunderstand the situation. If his family were harmed, others could misconstrue it as a breach of Hashem's promise, leading to a desecration of Hashem's name. Similarly, in the case of the Medrash, Yaakov feared that people might view the Torah as contradictory if Eisav's actions seemed to violate its commandments. Thus, Yaakov's prayer expressed not personal fear but a profound concern for Hashem's honor. He pleaded: “I fear people will misinterpret my family's death as a violation of Your promise, causing a Chilul Hashem, G-d forbid!”