

The Roots of Unbreakable Principles – Middos

We are instructed by the Torah in numerous places to emulate Hashem by refining our character traits. No greater expression can be found regarding the importance of character refinement than the statement of the Vilna Gaon, “If not for character development, why am I alive?” Therefore, it is extremely critical that we constantly seek tools and techniques to aid us with improving our Middos. The Alter of Slabodka tells us (אור הצפון, מידות ודעות) that one can improve his middos through expanding his knowledge and understanding of a middah. This intellectual recognition directly impacts a person’s Middah, which then deepens his understanding even further, resulting in further character improvement. This same concept can be applied to our obligation to emulate אברהם יצחק ויעקב. Through gaining deeper insights into their Middos, our character will be directly impacted.

In this week's Parsha, פרק מה, פסוק יט, Pharaoh tells Yosef, “I am commanding you to send wagons to your family, to bring your father down to Egypt.” The Rabbeinu Bachya addresses the need for Pharaoh to command Yosef to send wagons, as opposed to just giving him permission to take wagons for his family. Pharaoh knew that Yosef was humble and honest, and without a commandment to send the wagons, Yosef would not have sent anything.

“Through gaining deeper insights into the middos of our Avos, our character will be directly impacted.”

This seems puzzling and requires further clarification. Why would Yosef’s middah of honesty and loyalty, prevent him from sending wagons to his father if he was given permission. Where is there a lack of honesty if this was approved by the king?

Pharaoh must have understood from interacting with Yosef, that his loyalty to the kingdom extended to such a degree that he would never use his position for personal benefit. Taking personal benefit would have ever so subtly retroactively expressed a deficiency in his complete devotion to the kingdom, as it would show he was somewhat in it for himself. Pharaoh knew Yosef’s Middah of loyalty and honesty would prevent him from taking anything for his family, even when

he had permission, as this would retroactively contradict the purity of his intentions.

We find a similar idea in the Gemara in Makos that applies the Pasuk of “דובר אמת בלבבו” – “He speaks truth in his heart,” to Rav Safra. While Rav Safra was davening, he was approached by an individual who wished to purchase an item from him. The individual offered a price, but Rav Safra couldn’t answer. However, Rav Safra in his heart intended to sell it for that price. The buyer thought the reason he did not receive a response was because his offer was too low. He then continued to offer a higher amount. After Rav Safra finished davening he only accepted the price he had thought to agree upon in his heart, as taking the higher price would have retroactively made the thought in his heart a lie.

It seems from both Yosef and Rav Safra, that even though originally there was no shortcoming in their integrity, if later on those purest of intentions did not remain, then on their lofty level this would have been an ever-so-slight lack of honesty. We can learn from here a powerful insight into the Middos of the Avos and our Sages. They were so concerned in regards to their middos that their entire being constantly expressed the principles and qualities that they lived by, thereby avoiding any inconsistencies at all costs. May we merit to follow in their ways.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לרפואה שלמה רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה