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PARSHA

ENCOUNTERS

15 Sivan 5770 / May 28, 2010

Parshas Behaloscha - Rabbi Shimon Zehnwirth

A Lesson in Sensitivity

“And he [Moshe] said [to Yisro], please don't leave us ... and you can be eyes for us.” (Bamidbar 10:31)

The Ibn Ezra and Rabbeinu Bechaya explain that Moshe asked Yisro to travel along with B'nei Yisrael as their guide to direct them through the desert.

The question arises: Did the B'nei Yisrael need a guide? They were led by a pillar of cloud which indicated the path during the day, and a pillar of fire that illuminated their way at night. There were clouds of glory that even flattened the hills and mountains, and raised up the valleys, so the Jews would have a level, smoothly “paved” surface to travel upon. These clouds surrounded them on all sides and protected them from the sun's scorching heat, from poisonous snakes and scorpions and from enemy attack. With such miraculous protection and guidance, asks Rabbeinu Bechaya, why did B'nei Yisrael need Yisro?

Rabbeinu Bechaya answers that there were members of B'nei Yisrael who lacked the proper level of faith in Hashem and a human guide would console them and give them strength.

Every member of B'nei Yisrael saw the ten plagues, the splitting of the sea and the revelation on Har Sinai. They certainly would have followed the cloud and Moshe Rabbeinu even without Yisro. In fact, they had already shown their faith when they relied on Hashem as they left Egypt to go out into the barren, dangerous, uncharted desert before Yisro had ever appeared. What difference would it make now having Yisro there to direct them?

Apparently, Moshe felt that there were some members of the nation that may have felt a bit uneasy or even somewhat fearful without a human guide who was familiar with the desert to calm

them. This is why Moshe went out of his way to try – unsuccessfully – to convince Yisro to stay. Certainly Yisro's presence would have only added a tiny bit of extra chizuk for a very small percentage of the nation. This would seem to be a negligible difference. Yet, Moshe's example teaches us the importance of extending ourselves to meet the emotional needs of even a handful of our fellow Jews, and to alleviate their slightest feelings of insecurity.

We often have difficulty empathizing with the feelings of others, especially in the areas of doubts and worry. When our fellow Jew is anxious about a concern which doesn't affect us, it's easy to brush it away by saying, “Don't worry, have bitachon, Hashem will help!” Our neighbor who lost his job and still hasn't found decent parnasah for several months – do we really feel what he's going through? The young (or not-so-young) person next to us in shul who is still not yet married – can we truly sense the worry and suffering of not knowing when and if they ever will find their bashert? If a couple has not been blessed with children yet, or has children but is experiencing challenges in raising them, it is difficult to know what they have to endure every day in dealing with these issues.

Let us learn from our great teacher Moshe Rabbeinu to reach out to these individuals with sensitivity and understanding, to empathize with their worry and pain, and to offer them solace and reassurance in a meaningful way. Even if it helps only a slight bit, it is worth the effort we have exerted to make that small but important difference in the well-being and happiness of a fellow Jew.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Havineinu

Rabbi Hensch Plotnik

The Gemara in *Berachos* (34a) relates the following incident:

A student who led the *davening* in front of Rabbi Eliezer was particularly brief in his *tefillah*. The other students commented in wonder: "How short is his *tefillah*!" Their Rebbe responded, "Is he any more brief than Moshe Rabbeinu, who *davened* a mere five words on behalf of Miriam, as written at the end of this week's *parsha* "kel na refah na la?"

According to the Meiri, the Gemara is referring to additions to the *tefillah* beyond the standard *nusach*, the *talmid* was not detracting from the actual accepted text. Moshe's supplication on behalf of his sister was so brief because Miriam's plight was her personal affliction, whereas his plea after the *chet ha'egel* was exceedingly long due to its public nature (*Maharsha*).

Under normal circumstances, the regular *nusach* is never meant to be compromised. However, we do find in the Gemara (*Berachos* 29a) a brief version of the *davening*, known as *Havineinu*. The Mishna quotes the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua that a person may daven "may'ain *shemona esrei*," something similar to *shemoneh esrei*. Shmuel interprets his words as a reference to a single long *berachah* in place of the middle 13 of the standard *nusach*, beginning with *Havineinu* and ending with "boruch ato... *shomey'a tefillah*." This is in addition to the standard three *berachos* in the beginning and end of the *shemoneh esrei*. The Gemara immediately quotes Abaye, who would condemn anyone who uses the *Havineinu nusach*, whereas Rav Nachman only disallowed it for *motza'ei* Shabbos and Yom Tov, due to issues concerning the proper insertion of *havdalah*. Tosfos *paskens* like Abaya, although they also mention a text in the Gemara that only forbids usage of *Havineinu* at home, while permitting it when traveling.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*O.C.* 110:1) permits the recitation of *Havineinu* in a *sha'as hadchak* (emergency) such as when traveling or in a place where it is too difficult to concentrate for fear of interruption. The *Shulchan Aruch* also sanctions *Havineinu* for employees whose employer is particular about their taking too much time off for *davening*. The *Mishnah Berurah* quotes a disagreement amongst the *poskim* regarding whether or not someone fulfills his obligation if he said *Havineinu* under normal circumstances. The *Mishnah Berurah*, based on the *Magen Avraham*, does allow for its recitation if one sees he is about to miss

zeman tefillah. (The *Aruch HaShulchan* is of the opinion that as long as one begins before *zeman tefillah*, it make no difference when he finishes. If so, just as he manages to say the complete *Havineinu*, he could at least begin the regular *nusach* even if he completes it after the *zeman*.)

In *Bi'ur Halachah*, the Chofetz Chaim writes that nowadays we do not say *Havineinu* even under extreme circumstances. He offers various reasons why this is so. One explanation is that if distraction is considered a factor, nobody will ever daven a whole *shemoneh esrei* anymore due to our lack of ability to concentrate. Interestingly, the Chayei Odom suggests a variation to *Havineinu*, and that is a brief version of each of the middle *berachos* (see the entire *nusach* in *klal* 24) which can be utilized in emergencies.

Other reasons were proposed to explain why we do not utilize the *Havineinu nusach*. According to the *Aruch HaShulchan*, our recitation of *Havineinu* wouldn't result in increased *kavana*; unfortunately, it will probably lack proper *kavana* as well. The *Kaf HaChaim* suggests that because the *nusach* of *Havineinu* is itself not agreed upon in the *rishonim*, we have abandoned its use altogether. It is worth noting, however, the opinion of the Geshet HaChaim (Vol. 1; Ch. 1), that despite all of the above opposition to its recitation, a very ill person may indeed daven *Havineinu*.

Rav Meir Bransdorfer *zt"l* (*T'shuvas K'nei Bosem*) suggests yet another use for *Havineinu*. Suppose someone realizes that he didn't have proper *kavana* in the middle *berachos* of *shemoneh esrei* and wants to recoup his loss. He may utilize *Havineinu* by inserting it in *Shema Koleinu* and having *kavana* there, thereby elevating his *tefilla* to one of total *kavana*. Of course this would not compensate for missed *kavana* in the first three *berachos*, because *Havineinu* only covers the middle 13. Rav Bransdorfer feels that this is no worse than inserting any other personal request in *Shema Koleinu*, which is definitely sanctioned by *halacha*.

In circumstances when someone knows he will absolutely have no time to daven, there are other solutions discussed in *poskim* (see *Ishei Yisroel* Ch 7:4). This is of special concern to soldiers, and therefore a topic of discussion amongst the *poskim* in Eretz Yisroel where military duty is a way of life for many; even in other countries, an observant Jew may find himself on the front lines in service of his country. *Bli neder*, this will be the subject of another article.

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