

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Good Advice

On the 20th day of the month of Iyar in the second year since the exodus from Egypt, the Jewish nation was poised to enter the Land of Israel within just three days. All the details of precisely how and when they were to encamp and travel were outlined. They now broke camp and began their long anticipated arrival in the Promised Land.

Sandwiched between a description of the exact formation of tribes as they travelled and the narrative accounting the details of how the Holy Ark scouted out the terrain before them, there is a brief discussion between Moshe and his father-in-law Yisro that takes place.

Moshe turns to Yisro, Judaism's first convert, who is addressed for the first and only time in all of Chumash as חֲבֹב, Chovav, and reveals to him that they are now journeying to Eretz Yisrael and Moshe encourages Chovev to join them. According to Rashi's opinion, Yisro first joined them after the giving of the second Tablets, after Yom Kippur of the first year, and had remained at Har Sinai up until this moment. Despite Moshe's status as the "Gadol HaDor" and ultimate "Daas Torah", he doesn't direct or order Yisro, but rather merely "suggests" he join them!

This is perhaps the only episode in all of Chumash where "advice" rather than a command or directive is offered by Moshe Rabbeinu! What was the doubt? This after all was the objective all of creation had been awaiting, the entry of G-d's children to the Holy Land, bringing to fruition the great "master plan" of the universe! Yet surprisingly this "no brainer" wasn't so simple after all and Yisro in fact puts up resistance to Moshe's "suggestion"!

The Torah is obviously teaching us here the "art" of how and when to give and take advice, a very vital lesson we all need to master!

The very first principle we derive is that just because something may seem "obvious" it may not be so. What is elementary to you may not be the case for someone else!

Moshe asserts (במדבר י, כט) *We are journeying unto the place of which G-d said: I will give it to you.* The ספרי זוטא (י, כט) states that the sentiment "לכם", you, is emphasized to imply that only naturally born Jews, members of one of the שבטים, the tribes, are entitled to a plot of land but converts are excluded. Before giving advice make sure you realize what is at stake. Yisro was forfeiting a life of financial success for a "homeless" existence. Make sure the person you are advising knows you are acutely sensitive to his predicament before offering counsel.

Second rule of guidance counseling: make sure you are in a realistic position to offer a solution for physical support as well. When Moshe suggests, לכה אתנו והטבנו (שם) *come with us and we shall treat you well*, he quickly adds, כי ה' דבר טוב על ישראל, *for Hashem has spoken of good for Yisroel*. We have what to "bank" on! Don't suggest an idea that you have no means of assuring support for.

Yisro is unconvinced and responds (שם ט) *I shall not go*. When receiving advice don't be easily swayed from your convictions by simply "going with the flow", deliberate!

Yisro continues (שם ט) *only to my land and my birthplace shall I go*. Rashi interprets ארצתי, my possessions and מולדתי, my family.

The first moral here is that the potential for spiritual gain doesn't automatically dictate sacrifice. On a deeper level the ספרי זוטא adds: Yisro was concerned he would lack self fulfillment insofar as his talents would be paled by the greatness of Moshe and Aharon, "what illumination can a candle offer in the rays of the sun (Moshe) and moon (Aharon)!" He felt he could grow better personally by continuing to influence the people in his hometown of Midyan, even at the expense of not entering Eretz Yisroel and basking in the opportunities there!

Moshe then attempts to request his participation for Klall Yisroel's sake (שם ט) *Please do not forsake us, inasmuch as you know our encampments in the Wilderness, and you have been as eyes to us*. We need you!

Rashi explains there are three intimations here in והיית לנו לעינים, *and you have been as eyes to us*. Firstly, והיית, in the past tense, an expression of appreciation for his good advice in the past, when he guided Moshe to enlist assistants in helping in the adjudicating of the overwhelming inquiries and casework. Secondly, והיית, used often in the future tense as well, that they look forward and value his sound counsel for the future. Most importantly their reference to Yisro as their "eyes", Rashi says, is to emote, חביב עלינו ככלכל עינינו, he is **cherished** as the pupil of our own eyes! Don't call on anyone for help and expect self sacrifice unless you truly appreciate and love them! Make sure they know it!

Moshe finally promises Yisro (שם ט) *And it shall be that if you come with us, then with the goodness with which Hashem benefits us, we will do good to you*. The Sifrei says that this alludes to Moshe promising them a "plush" plot of land in Yericho for their exclusive use. This added gift was in response to Moshe's appeal earlier, אל נא תעזב אתנו, *please do not forsake us*, which the Sifrei alternately explains to mean, that by not coming to the land people may speculate that when Yisro discovered he was not to receive a right in the land he regretted his conversion! If that was the case why then is Moshe now offering him a parcel of land, that defeats his whole argument?! Evidently we are not to rely on "frum cheshbonos", pious calculations, when it comes to "our" responsibility, *cheshbonos* not withstanding!

The Torah leaves unclear as to whether Yisro returned to Midyan or not (see in Parshas Yisro the Ramban and Rashi who argue the outcome). It really isn't important. It is how we approach dilemmas and decisions that is a testament to our relationship with Hashem in our Avodah. The results are in His hands. The investment of thoughtful contemplation in making those decisions is what forges our true inner self.

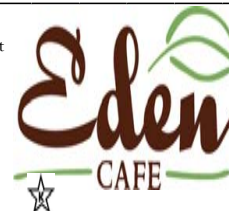
Giving up choice by instinctively following the masses or by reflexively looking for quick fixes from others to answer our quandaries, without first delving honestly into our נשמות, our souls, is forfeiting our greatness.

Perhaps it is in this episode specifically that displays Yisro's identity as חבב. Rashi quoting the Sifrei explains he was called חבב, על שחיבב את התורה..., he *instilled a love* for Torah. The Talmud states (בי"מ לח) *a man prefers one measure of his own efforts than nine measures of others*. Rashi adds because: חביבה עלי על שעמל בהך, *it is beloved to him because he exerted effort!* Yisro taught that only through critical thinking and the effort of choice can one experience the true love of Torah!

We must seek the direction of our Rabbonim but it must be preceded by deep and honest soul searching thus enabling us to make healthy and happy choices!

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Gavriel Ankri
On his Bris
And to his parents
Miriam and Dani Ankri

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Shira & Dov Ocken
On the birth of
~Malke Yaakov~
AKA
"Moli"

צ-ט-י-ת

