

Behar-Bechukotai 5780, Rabbi James Proops

“So much to do, so little time” is an adage that most of us can relate to. Whether in the realm of work, taking care of our homes, all the places in the world we would like to visit or simply keeping in touch with those people who are dear to us. Now more than ever the amount of things on our ‘To Do List’ is simply overwhelming. Our homes have become our offices, schools and gyms and we have become part-time teachers, hairdressers, cleaners and chefs . You are not alone if you sometimes think that you will never manage to do or complete everything on the list.

When the feeling of being overwhelmed sets in we can find ourselves facing a very real danger. Suddenly the supposed prospect of inevitable failure can lead one to consider giving up altogether. “Why start if I won’t be able to finish?”. “Why begin, why try, if I am surely destined to fail?”. These questions have led many people to be unproductive and settle to fall way behind their potential.

Unfortunately this very same thought process is also commonly found in people’s attitude towards their Judaism, their learning and halakihic observance. The immense commitment that it takes to be a committed Torah Jew, the sheer volume of details that need to be learnt and remembered in order to adhere to Torah law, the seemingly never ending magnitude of Torah scholarship and literature, can be a daunting prospect at the least.

We can imagine that for many of Bnei Yisrael in the midbar, having received the Torah with the enthusiasm of ‘Na’aseh v’Nishma’, now facing the myriad of details that halakha demands of them by too be feeling overwhelmed and filled with doubts as to their individual abilities to adhere to such a mass of rules and regulations. With this in mind we can suggest an understanding as to Moshe’s message to them, just before they leave the Sinai desert to embark on their march to Eretz Yisrael, the promised land.

The parasha of Bechukotai, the last in sefer Vayikra, assures Bnei Yisrael of Hashem's blessings and protection אִם-בְּהִלַּכְתֶּם תֵּלְכוּ "If you walk in My statutes", וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ "and keep my commandments" וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם "and do them". Three words are used in the pasuk "walk", "keep" and "do". Why three words which all seemingly convey similar messages? What does it mean to *walk* in My statutes, *keep* My commandments and *do* them?

It can be understood that Torah is teaching us a fundamental principle that carries with it the secret to success in all areas of life. The message of this pasuk is that to be a 'good Jew', to become a person whose life will merit the blessings of Hashem is a gradual process. One cannot do everything at once. One cannot start off on a journey of growth by doing everything in one go. We are encouraged to start with תֵּלְכוּ, walking slowly in the statutes, so to speak. Become accustomed to walking through life with the pride of a Jew who has been chosen to adhere to the commandments of God. As we walk as a Jew תִּשְׁמְרוּ, we then begin to watch our steps, making sure that nothing on the way detracts from our journey forward. Following that careful guarding of what has become dear to us, וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם we do them, we are bound to them. The ways of a Torah life becomes almost second nature and intrinsic part of who we are. The key to achieving the goal of וַעֲשִׂיתֶם is that we start by walking.

The medrash in Vayikra Rabba (19:2) states "One who is foolish says, "Who can learn the Torah? Nezikin has 30 chapters, Keli'im has 30 chapters....(etc.)" But one who is wise says "I will study 2 halachot today, 2 halachot tomorrow, until I have studied the entire Torah". The key to Jewish growth and achievement is to take it slowly and we will reach great heights.

So too in all areas of life in which we feel overwhelmed. Let the message of בְּהִלַּכְתֶּם תֵּלְכוּ permeate our daily lives so that whatever has now appeared on our 'To Do List' is approached in a manageable way so that not only do we stand a better chance of success but we are able to remain calm, collected and at shalom on the way.

Shabbat Shalom