

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

Pinchas

Using Words Properly

When the daughters of Tz'lofchad appeal to Moshe to redress an inheritance issue, Moshe takes their case to HaShem. Gd responds, "... the daughters of Tzelofchad speak properly (Rashi)" (27:7). Why was it necessary for Gd to compliment these women? Wouldn't it have been sufficient to simply begin by stating the law in their favor?

The Maharal (Gur Aryeh, ad loc) suggests that the daughters were being praised for their wisdom. But what was it exactly that demonstrated "wisdom?" The S'fat Emet makes an important observation. Throughout the sojourn of the People in the desert, there were many complaints. When the People experienced hardship, frustration or fear, they often expressed their displeasure and discontent in unwholesome, disrespectful ways. They grumbled and rebelled. The daughters of Tz'lofchad now had their own grievance. They felt that their father's loss of a share in the Land - and hence theirs - was a grave injustice and they petitioned Moshe to remedy the situation.

Here, though, we have the first case

where people with a complaint wisely chose to make their case with admirable grace and refinement. HaShem therefore added those few words of introduction to testify that these five daughters "were not seeking any personal gain or benefit and had come truly out of honor for their father. Their intentions were sound and their presentation was impeccable ... they came forward with the utmost level of respect and honor for one another and their leaders."

Indeed, knowing how to speak with civility and deference in making a request can make all the difference in how the other will respond. Thinking first about the right words to use and then, the manner in which they should be expressed reflects the respect and regard you have for the dignity of the person before whom you are making the appeal.

There is another fascinating Midrash which makes a similar point. Our Parsha tells us about Serach the daughter of Asher, who is mentioned in the census although she was born in Canaan some 250 years earlier. Rashi tells us she is mentioned here (26:46) to underscore the fact that she was still alive at this time. Targum Yonatan (B'reishit 46:17) explains her longevity. He quotes earlier sources that Serach was one of nine people who entered Gan Eden alive. What exactly did she do to merit such an incredible distinction?

The Targum continues: because she was the one chosen to tell Yaakov that Yosef was still alive in Egypt. All the others were fearful that Yaakov might die from the shock of the report. How did she tell her grandfather the news? Other Midrashim tell us that Serach chose to sing softly a song to Yaakov, and within the lyrics, inserted the phrase, "Yosef is alive." Yaakov understood and was so grateful for this incredible display of sensitivity that he blessed her with immortality.

Again, the context into which words are placed - empathically framing a message - is absolutely critical, both pragmatically and morally.

We now find ourselves during the Three Weeks prior to Tish'a b'Av. The needless hatred which brought about the Second Temple's destruction remains the cardinal sin frustrating and impeding our dream of redemption. If we fail to act and speak wisely, as did the daughters of Tz'lofchad, and neglect to cultivate the extraordinary sensitivity of a Serach bat Asher, then needless hatred becomes endemic and devastating. Let's try to rectify this terrible ill. What we say and how we say it, to our loved ones and frankly to anyone, can do much to hasten our ultimate redemption.

17th of Tamuz

Needless Hatred

This week, we commemorate(d) the 17th of Tammuz. We fasted and the beginning of the Three Weeks of semi-mourning has commenced. Among the reasons for the Fast, the most well-known was the breaching of the walls of the First and Second Temples. The Talmud (Ta'anit 28b), though, raises a rather interesting question. In the Book of Yirmiyahu (39:2, 52:6), we read that the breaching of the walls of the Temple took place on the 9th of Tammuz and not the 17th. The Talmud answers that it was only the breaching of the walls of the Second Temple took place on the 17th. The question, of course, is: why did the Sages choose the 17th and not the 9th upon which to fast?

There are two interesting answers that are given. The first by Tosafot (Rosh HaShana 18b). There, Tosafot, based upon the Yerushalmi makes the remarkable suggestion that the first recorded date in Yirmiyahu was a mistake, and the reason why that mistake was not corrected was to demonstrate the utter confusion and mayhem that marked this terrible event. In the midst of this tragedy, it was simply impossible to remember dates. But was there not significant suffering and turmoil in the wake of the Churban of the Second Temple as well? No doubt, but the trauma of the first Churban was more severe. And that, because the people never imagined that after some 410

years, Gd would allow His Temple to be destroyed. The refrain of the people was, HEICHAL HASHEM, HEICHAL HASHEM - "the Temple of HaShem, the Temple of HaShem" (Yirmiyahu 7:4). Gd's house would be forever! And then, catastrophe struck. The shock was devastating. The Churban completely stunned and disoriented the people, so much so that the true date of the breaching of the walls was not recorded. And Yirmiyahu, who certainly could have corrected the error, chose instead to enshrine the mistake in the Holy Canon and thus remind future generations of the sheer enormity and magnitude of the destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash. Indeed, there is ample reason to mourn!

Ramban (Torat HaAdam, Sha'ar HaAveil) offers another explanation of the apparent discrepancy of dates, one which was adopted by the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 549:2). Ramban asserts that no mistake was made at all, and the reason the 17th was chosen for the fast was because the destruction of the Second Temple was more severe. What does this mean? Some 70 years after the First Temple was destroyed, the Second Temple was built and the exile came to an end. Thus, as tragic as the first Churban was, it was remedied by the reconstruction of the Second Temple. Not so with the Churban of the Second Temple. All of us are still living in the terrible shadow of that event. According to this explanation, the message is equally important. As we surely all know,

the Talmud (Yuma 9b) states that the sin that brought about the destruction of the Second Temple was baseless hatred. And tragically, we, as a people, have still not learned the horrific consequences of such dreadful malice.

The Talmud (Yerushalmi Yoma 1:38) tells us that if a generation did not see the rebuilding of the Third Temple, it is as if it was destroyed again. When we reflect upon what we lost (Tosafot) and why we lost it (Ramban), we should each resolve to do our share to restore our former glory and greatness! 🙌