

Mussar HaTorah

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Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Bamidbar

“AND YEHONASAN SAID TO DOVID, TOMORROW IS ROSH CHODESH...” (SHMUEL 1 20:18)

He neglected to bring food for Dovid

SHAUL HAMELECH PERCEIVED Dovid as a threat to his throne and was trying to kill him. This week's *haftora* tells how Shaul's son Yehonasan came to tell Dovid that he must flee. Although Yehonasan knew he was coming to bid him farewell, he neglected to bring food for Dovid to take on his journey. As a result, Dovid was forced to ask the residents of Nov, a city of *kohanim*, for food, and they fed him. Doeg HaAdomi, a person of great Torah stature, and yet wicked character traits, informed Shaul of the “crime” committed by the *kohanim*. Shaul decreed that they be put to death. When Shaul's generals refused to kill the innocent *kohanim*, Doeg followed through and massacred eighty-five *kohanim* and the entire city of Nov, including women, children and even livestock.

Due to this *loshon hara*, Doeg is listed (Sanhedrin 90a) as one of the people who have no part in the *Olam Haba*. Nevertheless, Doeg was an accomplished *talmid chacham* (Chagiga 15b). So much so, that the Gemara (Sanhedrin 106b, Maharsha *ibid.*) tells us that Hashem said to Doeg, “You are mighty in Torah, it is not befitting you to be involved in *loshon hara*; My *chesed* is stretched out to you to accept your *teshuva*.” Hashem's pleas fell on deaf ears and Doeg met a tragic end: Three angels of destruction afflicted him – one made him forget his Torah knowledge, one burned his *neshama* and one scattered his ashes in the shuls and study halls (*ibid.*).

Wouldn't it have been more effective for Hashem to use the strongest, harshest medicine possible?

It certainly was the nicer approach for Hashem to appeal to Doeg in a positive framework by mentioning his Torah prowess and urging him to do *teshuva*. However the stakes were frighteningly high. Doeg's refusal to do *teshuva* meant that this great scholar forfeits *Olam Haba* for eternity, forgets all his learning and suffers excruciatingly painful punishments after death. When a patient is deathly ill, the doctors have to pull out all of the stops. The consideration is no longer which medicine is sweeter or more pleasant, but rather what is the most potent and effective drug that will save his life. In this case, wouldn't it have been more effective for Hashem to use the strongest, harshest medicine possible – to paint a picture of the dire punishments awaiting Doeg for his sins? Wouldn't a frank appraisal of Doeg's wickedness have provided a greater motivation for him to do *teshuva*?

Hashem showed us the best way to try to reach a sinner

The most bitter pill is not necessarily the most effective pill. As our Creator, Hashem has the most perfect knowledge of the human psyche. He created us to aspire to growth and to emulate His positive traits of kindness and goodness. Hashem chose a positive approach, because He knows that appealing to our *gadlus ha'adam* – our self worth – in a constructive fashion, is the most effective approach to bring us to do *teshuva*. In the end, Doeg chose not to accept Hashem's overtures, but Hashem showed us the best way to try to reach a sinner.

In guiding and correcting our family members, co-workers or students, it can be tempting to scold them when they err. If we truly want to be successful in our rebuke, however, we should learn from our Creator's example and use a positive approach to help them improve. The most effective medicine is the one that is swallowed properly; let us make sure that our message will inspire the listener to reach higher by appealing to his true nature – a reflection of Hashem's perfection.