

Mussar HaTorah

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

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Parashas Beha'aloscha

“AND HE [MOSHE] SAID [TO YISRO], PLEASE DON'T LEAVE US ... AND YOU CAN BE EYES FOR US.” (BAMIDBAR 10:31)

Did the B'nei Yisrael need a guide?

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?

This is why Moshe went out of his way

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.

Reach out to these individuals with sensitivity and understanding

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.