

Mussar HaTorah

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

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Parashas Vayakhel–Pikudei

“MY SON, EAT HONEY BECAUSE IT IS GOOD AND THE HONEYCOMB BECAUSE IT IS SWEET TO YOUR TASTE. SO TOO IS WISDOM TO YOUR SOUL...” (PROVERBS 24:13-14)

A parable speaks in simple, physical terms to the visceral senses

RABBEINU BECHAYE, in his introduction to *parashas* Vayakhel, explains that human beings are superior to animals in that we have an intellect. Animals are driven only by their natural instincts. Humans, on the other hand, can use their unique intellect to control their physical desires. Rabbeinu Bechaye continues to say that “it is impossible” for the intellect to “rebuke” human nature without the use of *m’shalim* – parables. A parable speaks in simple, physical terms to the visceral senses that comprise our nature and it is the only way to control the animal within us. For example, the intellect may need to describe wisdom and Torah as being sweet as honey so that its physical counterpart, the body, will understand and want to study wisdom. Merely describing Torah as profound and holy will not interest our animalistic body.

It is obvious that parables play an important role in motivating human beings to act appropriately. However, one would think that this is critical for the masses, the common people who lack the sophistication to deal with abstract moral concepts and ethical values of right and wrong. What about a great person, a master of the spiritual realm, who has diligently studied the classical *mussar* works and gleaned from them insights into human nature – wouldn’t such a person be able to use these intellectual insights to address his mundane nature without the assistance of a parable? Why does Rabbeinu Bechaye say that it “is impossible” to control human nature without parables?

Rabbeinu Bechaye did not choose his words lightly

No matter how lofty a person may soar in piety and religious growth, he can never forget that an animal remains an animal, and his body is still unimpressed by *mussar* and spiritual thought. Rabbeinu Bechaye did not choose his words lightly. He is telling us that, in addition to the intellectual processes and arguments that we must use to better ourselves, parables are a required component to effectively control our inner beast.

The *baalei mussar* tell us that the furthest two points in a human body are from our brain to our heart. We may clearly comprehend something intellectually, yet that knowledge will not necessarily reach our hearts to actually bring about a change in our actions. One component that is necessary to bridge that gap is the use of a parable. May we use all the tools available to control our body and its desires, so we can elevate our entire beings to ever higher levels of sanctity, coming closer to our Creator, in our pursuit of spiritual perfection.