

Devarim.2017

1.

Don't be showy

“Hashem said to me, saying: Enough of your circling this mountain; turn yourselves northward.”
(2, 2-3)

"ויאמר יקוק אלי לאמר. רב לכם סב את ההר הזה פנו לכם צפונה."

The word צפנה means northward. The word צפון can also mean hidden. See the writing on the Seder on צפון. This is one of the reasons why we hide the afikoman. The Kli Yakar (2, 3) explains that **those who have financial success should hide their success. If they show it off, then the goyim will get jealous etc.** Unfortunately many Jews flaunt their wealth. We must be careful not to dress too fancily and build such big houses. In the long run, this will cause us much anguish.

וענין הצפנה זו נראה לי שאם ימצא האיש הישראלי בגלות החל הזה איזו הצלחה זעיר שם אז יטמינו ויצפינו הכל בפני עשו כי אין לך אומה שמתקנאת בישראל כמו עשו, כי לדעתם הכל גזולה בידם מהם מן ברכת יעקב אבינו שלקח ברכותיו של עשו במרמה, וכן יעקב צוה לבניו למה תתראו (בראשית מב א) פירש רש"י בפני בני ישמעאל ועשו כאילו אתם שבעים כי שניהם סוברים שיצחק גזל הצלחת ישמעאל, ויעקב גזל הצלחת עשו על ידי השתדלות, על כן צוה דוקא על עשו פנו לכם צפונה שלא יתקנא בכם, וזה היפך ממה שישראל עושין בדורות הללו בארצות אויביהם כי מי שיש לו מנה הוא מראה את עצמו במלבושי כבוד ובתים ספונים וחשובים כאילו היו לו כמה אלפים ומגרים האומות בעצמם ועוברים על מה שנאמר פנו לכם צפונה. ומנהג זה הוא The Pela Yoetz (Erech Galus) explains that **we must be low key. Others can easily get jealous. We shouldn't built houses that look big on the outside. It is much better to build houses that look small on the outside, but are really big on the inside than the opposite. We should make sure not to cause other Jews to be jealous as well.** The Pela Yoetz (Erech Ayin hara) elaborates and explains that **we should make sure not to show off our wisdom as well.**

A woman once asked if she should put on make-up. Rabbi Avigdor Miller said yes. Put on a lot of make-up inside your house for your husband. The message of houses and make up is the same; don't show off to others. Our houses and make up that women put on is for us, not for others.

The Gemara in Mesechas Kesubos (8b) relates the history of the process of burial and their expenses. The Gemara says that originally the burial expenses were more difficult for the family members than the actual death. Therefore, they used to leave the corpse in the street and run away. Rashi explains that they used to bury the deceased in very fine clothing such as silk. The Gemara says this changed once Rebbi Gamliel came along. He instructed others to bury him in flax which is cheap. Subsequently everyone followed him. (Rebbi Gamliel was the leader; therefore everybody else followed his lead.) The Marsha explains that those who were wealthy were buried in fancy clothing. Out of embarrassment, those who were poor followed their lead. This occurred until it became too financially difficult to the extent that they would leave their deceased unburied. Meaning, **the social pressures were so great that people were actually spending money that they didn't have. They literally accrued so much debt that they would leave their dead loved ones on the floor. This is what setting high standards can unfortunately lead to.** We find a similar problem even regarding attending Shul. Going to Shul is not a fashion show. When the Gra set out to go to Israel, he wrote his wife and family a letter provided them with encouragement and guidance in his absence. One of the recommendations he

wrote was as follows. ‘It is advisable that your daughter should not go to shul, because she will see beautiful cloths there, become jealous, and talk about it at home. This will lead to lashon hara etc.’

Nowadays many of the simchas that Baruch Hashem commonly occur are blown out of proportion. Bar Mitzvas, engagement parties and weddings are just a few of the examples. The expenses are unprecedented. These expensive simchas cause great problems for those who cannot afford them. Tremendous social pressure is being placed on individuals who can’t afford such extravagant simchas. Many people complain and discourage this practice. They themselves say they will try to put a stop to it. They say that if it was in their power they would put an end to it. But then they themselves make an extravagant simcha. They themselves try to outdo the previous simcha. If we want to try to outdo people then let’s try to learn and perform mitzvos better than others. Let’s try to do more chessed (kindness) than others. Let’s try to visit sick and elderly people more than others. Spending \$20,000 on flowers is definitely unnecessary and inappropriate. Realistically this is unaffordable for many. **True, at least their money is being spent on these permissible and mitzvah matters rather than on other items. However, it is still incumbent upon us to have the realization, awareness and sensitivity towards others.** Just because many people can afford such luxurious simchas, it doesn’t mean that others can. **This puts an indirect pressure on many who can’t afford this lifestyle. These high standards must be lowered.**

There is unfortunately a lot of competition that exists in many schools and yeshivas. People compete and try to outdo the clothing of their fellow peers. Why does a moose or a guy on a horse make the clothing more chashuv (important)? If anything, having an animal should decrease the value of the garment. Who even decides what is considered cool or not? The problem with this expensive clothing is the same problem that exists with these elaborate simchas. These kids might additionally come home and complain to their parents that it’s not fair that they receive less allowance than their fellow classmates. **This is one of the reasons why many schools have chosen to wear matching uniforms. When a school decides to have uniforms there is less competition, pressure and jealousy. At the same time there is more unity. Wealth shouldn’t be flaunted in any way in order that there shouldn’t be any indirect pressure towards others who can’t afford it. For example, if someone went on a fancy vacation he shouldn’t show off about it by telling everyone. Many others aren’t able to afford such a luxurious vacation.**

Similarly, the Gemara in Tanis (31a) relates that on Tu B’Av (15th of the month of Av), the non-married Jewish females would go out and attempt to find their shidduch (spouse). The minhag (custom) was that they would borrow clothing regardless of their socioeconomic status in order to eliminate any potential embarrassment to those who couldn’t afford nice clothing. (כל ישראל שואלין זה מזה כדי שלא לבייש את מי שאין לו.) Since everyone would be borrowing clothing, it was unrecognizable who was borrowing clothing because they needed it or because of the enactment.

This applies to going on vacations as well. We must realize that many cannot afford to go on vacation. Therefore when returning from vacation we must be sensitive and not discuss the details of our exciting vacation that they cannot afford.

Based on the aforementioned information we can definitively conclude that **we need to strive to avoid causing even a potential for jealousy to enter and exist amongst the Jewish people.** All of the aforementioned examples teach the same message; **simplicity, conformity and unity.** The classic phrase regarding history that is commonly uttered is history tends to repeat itself. Based on the Gemara in Kesubos and Tanis, we clearly see **the potential concern of jealousy, competition and putting people in a potential negative unaffordable escalation. If these holy people were concerned about this then surely we (because of yeridas hadoros (decline with every following generation)) must be cautious and concerned.**

2.

Is it possible to cling to Hashem?

“But you who cling to Hashem, your God – you are all alive today.” (4, 4)

"ואתם הדבקים ביקוק אלהיכם חיים כלכם היום."

The Or Hachaim explains that life comes from the source of life, Hashem. The Kedushas Levi (parshas Shelach 14, 21) explains that when we chose to do good instead of bad and Hashem's will instead of ours then we attach ourselves to Hashem. The Gemara in Berachos (18) says that tzaddikim are called alive even when they are dead. This is so is because they attach themselves to the source of life, Hashem by performing mitzvos. The Gemara explains that the opposite applies to reshaim, who are called dead even when they are alive. This is so because they attach themselves to the source of death by sinning. The Or Hachaim explains that one who doesn't learn Torah and perform mitzvos isn't called alive. Even though he is eating, drinking and moving, he isn't living a true life without Torah and mitzvos. The Or Hachaim (Berachis 1, 1 os 20) writes that all physical aspects of a tzadik turn into spiritual. Conversely, all spiritual aspects of a rasha's life turn into physical. This is another reason why tzaddikim are called alive even when they are dead and reshaim are called dead even when they are alive.

What is the explanation of the word “today”, when the pasuk says “you are all alive today?” Someone can unfortunately sway from the proper path. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (2, 5) quotes Hillel who says ‘do not believe in yourself until the day you die.’ The Gemara in Berachos (29a) relates that Yochanan served as a Kohen Gadol for eighty years and yet became a Saduke toward the end of his life.

How is it possible for us to attach ourselves to Hashem, He is an all-consuming fire? The Gemara in Kesubos (111b) explains that this pasuk means that we should attach ourselves to talmiday chachamim. ("ואתם הדבקים בה' אלהיכם חיים כולכם היום" - וכי אפשר לדבוקי בשכינה? והכתיב: כי) ה' אלהיך אש אוכלת! אלא, כל המשיא בתו לתלמיד חכם, והעושה פרקמטיא לתלמידי חכמים, והמהנה תלמידי חכמים (מנכסיו, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מדבק בשכינה.) How does this answer the question? How is it possible for them to attach themselves to Hashem? As mentioned above one who attaches themselves to the source of life has life. **The talmedai chachamim attach themselves to the source of life. By others attaching themselves to the tamid chacham they are thus able to attach themselves to Hashem.**

The Pnei Yehoshua explains that **the words of Torah that come out of the talmid chacham's mouth produce fire. The Torah is compared to fire as stated in Yirmiyah (23). Those who help enable to talmid chacham to learn also have a portion in the talmid chacham's fire.**

They are all thus able to attach themselves to Hashem. (נראה פירוש דודאי אף על גב דכתיב בשכינה כי)

ה' אלקיך אש אוכלת אפ"ה אפשר דמי שהוא ת"ח מדבק בשכינה ע"י הבל התורה שיוציא מפיו ונקרא ג"כ אש שנאמר הלא כה דברי כאש ובכמה דוכתי אשכחן שנעשו שותפין לו להקב"ה ממש והיינו דדרשינן את ה' אלהיך לרבות ת"ח אלא דאכתי מקשה הכא שפיר אהא דכתיב ואתם הדבקים חיים כולכם היום דלאו כל אדם זוכה לזה להיות ת"ח גמור אף באותו דור דיעה שהיו במדבר נמצאו בהם כמה וכמה שלא היו ת"ח גמורים כדמשמע קרא דאתם נצבים כולכם מש"ה דריש לה שפיר דכל המשיא בתו (לת"ח והעושה פרקמטיא נמי אפשר לדבק בשכינה ע"י שיש לו חלק באותו הבל פיו של הת"ח כיון שהוא הגורם, כן נראה לי