Pinchas 2016

1.

Everyone has potential

The Chafetz Chaim (al hatorah page 216) points out that the tribe of Binyamin consists of 45,600 people as stated in the pasuk (26, 21). The tribe of Don consists of 64,400 as stated in the pasuk (26, 43). The tribe of Don is approximately one and a half times bigger than the tribe of Binyamin. The Chumash also informs us (Berashis (46, 21)) that Binyamin had ten boys, whereas Don only had one child, Chushim (Berashis (46, 21). Chushim was also deaf as stated in mesechas Sota (13a). What is the significance of this? **Is there any sort of lesson that can be derived from one child eventually having more descendants than ten children? This comes to teach us a fundamental lesson; one who Hashem wants to have success and helps, will be successful even if it is against all odds.**

Why is Safer and parshas Bamidbar always lained very close to Shavuos? Tosefos (Megilah (31b) dibor hamaschil kelalos) answers that this is done in order that the curses that are lained in parshas Bechukosai aren't uttered right before Shavuos. Shavuos is a very important time that we especially want beracha (and for sure no curses) because on Shavuos we get judged for the fruit of the trees as stated in the Mishna (beginning of Mesechas Rosh Hashana). Rav Moshe Feinstein (Drash Moshe chelek aleph page 110) says **we lain Bamidbar near the time of Shavuos for those who think learning isn't for them and those who think they are simple people who don't need to learn. The message of parshas Bamidbar is; learning Torah is for everyone. When the Jews were counted in parshas Bamidbar, the pasuk uses the language of si'eu, elevate. After the Jews were counted, everyone's level increased. Everyone felt more important because they were counted and merited to be counted even amongst the gedolim (great people). They reasoned that this big talmid chacham and I both count as one! Everyone gets counted equally because every simple Jew has the potential to become great.**

The same concept applies regarding being counted for a minyan. Both the Gadol hador (leader of the generation) and simple Jew are counted as one! Even a simple Jew can ascend and reach as great a level as the Gadol hador! (Also just the fact that he is Jewish makes him so important.) The word צבור (congregation) is an acronym for צדיקים, בינונים ורשעים. (Righteous people, average people and wicked people.) The Gemara in Sanhedrin (64a) says there are three acts a person needs to die for rather than to transgress: to kill, commit adultery, or worship idols. Even if you are the Gadol hador and are told to kill a simple Jew, you still need to give your life up! The reason for this is that this simple Jew can rise to an even greater level than the Gadol hador! Who says your blood (aka the blood of the Gadol hador) is redder than his!

The sefer Rivivos v'yovlos (chelek aleph siman 10) explains that one of the main reasons why we were created is in order that we will recognize our strengths and utilize them. We must strive to realize our abilities, in order that we will bring others closer to Torah. A prerequisite to helping others is realizing our own priceless value. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (37a) states 'everyone is obligated to say that the world was created for me.' (כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר בשבילי נברא העולם.) What is the explanation of this seemingly arrogant statement? Rashi explains that we must

imagine that the existence of the entire world depends on us. If we sin, then the world will be destroyed. If we don't sin and perform good deeds then the world will continue to exist. (בשבילי נברא העולם כלומר חשוב אני כעולם מלא לא אטרד את עצמי מן העולם בעבירה אחת וימשוך ממנה.)
We find this concept in many other places as well. For example, Shmuel Hanavi rebuked Saul Hamelech for not killing Agag. Many people tend to incorrectly underestimate their potential. Just because someone isn't a Rabbi it doesn't mean that he can't positively affect many people. One doesn't need a piece of paper that states that he is a Rabbi to spiritually help others. A perfect proof of this point is the life of Shmuel. The Gemara in Bava Metzia (86a) relates that Rebbi Yehuda Hanasi wanted to give semicha (ordain) to Shmuel. Whenever the potential opportunity arrived to give semicha, Rebbi Yehuda Hanasi was unsuccessful for various reasons. The Gemara in mesechas Rosh Hashana (20b) relates that Shmuel innovated and established the Jewish calendar. We see from the above that one can have a very strong spiritual effect even though he isn't a Rabbi. Shmuel never had semicha; nevertheless he impacted virtually every single Jew in his generation and in all subsequent generations as well.

This is precisely the message of the one deaf son of Dan and the ten sons that Binyamin had. Even though all quantitative odds of future generations were on Binyamin's side, nevertheless Dan prevailed. The descendants of Dan were in fact quantitatively greater than Binyamin's. If Hashem wants something to happen, then it will happen. The same applies to us as well; if we want something, we must work on it. The Gemara in Shabbos (104a) relates that one, who attempts to purify himself, will receive heavenly assistance. (בא ליטמא פותחין לו בא ליטהר מסייעים אותו.) Tosfos explains that one who tries to purify himself will receive a special heavenly assistance. One might claim that they can't be great because they don't have good yichus (lineage). This is an unacceptable and illegitimate claim. Good yichus could start from us. We could start a great yichus.

2.

Fasting vs tzedaka

"On the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a holy convocation for you and you shall afflict yourselves; you shall not do any work." (29, 7)

"וּבֶעָשׂוֹר֨ לַחֹ֜דֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִ֗י הַזֶּ֤ה מִקְרָא־קֹ֙דֶשׁ֙ יִהְיֶ֣ה לָכֶ֔ם וְעִנִּיתֶ֖ם אֶת־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶ֑ם כָּל־מְלָאכָ֖ה לֹ֥א תַעֲשֽׂוּ."

The Gemara in Berachos (6b) relates that **the reward for fasting is the tzedaka** (charity). (אמר מר זוטרא אגרא דתעניתא צדקתא.) **What is the explanation of this Gemara? Why is reward for fasting given because of the tzedaka that is given as opposed to the actual fasting? The pasuk doesn't mention the word tzedaka. This being so why is tzedaka emphasized? Furthermore, seemingly tzedaka is an independent mitzvah unrelated to fasting.**

Rashi explains that this **tzedaka should be given at the end of the fast in order that the poor people could afford food with which to break their fast.** (נותנין צדקה לערב לפרנסת העניים שהתענו היום.)

One mehalech (approach) to answer the aforementioned questions is the following. The Marsha explains that **we give tzedaka in order that we won't receive pleasure from the money we saved by fasting.** Food costs money. When we fast then we save money on food expenses.

Hashem doesn't want us to receive financial reward by fasting. Therefore we are encouraged to give money at this juncture in order to use this money for mitzvah purposes and not receive financial pleasure from this money. This demonstrates that the fast was more leshma (for the sake of heaven). This shows that the purpose of fasting wasn't in order to accumulate extra money, rather it was leshma. We fast because we are commanded to do so. We fast because it is the will of Hashem. Giving our extra money to poor people demonstrates that we don't have ulterior motives. (כדי שלא יהא נהנה מתעניתו בממונו שיעור מה שלא אכל ושתה היום לכך יתן שיעור הממון זה שנהנה לצדקה.)

Another mehalech is as follows. The Merumi Sade (Nesiv) explains that the fasting will lead to and cause tzedaka to be given. The fasting causes an automatic ripple effect as stated in the Mishna in Avos (perek daled), one mitzvah causes another mitzvah. (מצוה גוררת מצוה.) According to this, **the fast is the main mitzvah. However, the fasting leads to another mitzvah being performed, tzedaka.**

The Daf al hadaf quotes the shilos and teshuvos Maharam Brisk (chalek beis siman ches) who offers another explanation. The Halacha is; one who drops his tefillin must fast. The question arises; is it permissible for one to give tzedaka rather than fasting? The Mahari Beruna (siman 127) rules that, one must fast because fasting is better than giving tzedaka. However, one who drops his tefillin while they are in his bag may give tzedaka. The Maharam Brisk explains that we clearly see that according to the Mahari Beruna fasting is better than giving tzedaka. Similarly, the Gemara in Berachos (32b) in fact explicitly states that fasting is better than giving tzedaka. The reason for this is; one fasts with his body, whereas one gives tzedaka with his money. (תענית גדול מצדקה שזה בגופו וזה בממונו.) We clearly see from the Mahari Beruna and the Gemara in Berachos (32b) that fasting is better than giving tzedaka. How can we then reconcile the Gemara in Berachos (6b) that seemingly stated that tzedaka is better than fasting? The explanation of the aforementioned Gemara in Berachos (6b) that stated that the reward for fasting is the tzedaka is as follows; **by giving tzedaka, the tachlis (purpose) of the fast will be completed. The reward for one who gives tzedaka will therefore be greater than the reward for one who fasts. But the reality is that the actual fast is greater than the tzedaka. This is why one who directly drops his tefillin must fast; because fasting is better than giving tzedaka. (It seems that fasting is more difficult than giving tzedaka and therefore more powerful. As previously mentioned, fasting physically affects the faster whereas giving tzedaka monetarily affects the giver.)** We can quote another Gemara as a proof of this point. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (35a) states that anyone who fasts and doesn't giving tzedaka it is as if he murdered. (כל תענית שמלינים בו את הצדקה כאילו שופך דמים.) Rashi explains that after the fast the poor people expect to receive tzedaka in order to buy food. When they don't receive tzedaka then they will be unable to buy food and they will subsequently remain hungry. (רגילין היו בלילי תענית לעשות צדקה והיו עיני העניים נשואות לכך, ואם ילינו נמצאו עניים רעבים שנשענו על כך.) We see from this Gemara that the main reward for fasting is giving tzedaka, not fasting. This can be alluded to in the actual word of fasting, תענית. The word תענית consists of the letters תת עני, which means, give poor people. The main reward for fasting will be giving tzedaka to the poor people.

Another mehalech is as follows. The sefer Lekuti Chaver Ben Chaim explains the aforementioned Gemara by quoting another Gemara. The Gemara in Berachos (54) states that some people like their money even more than their body. For these types of people it is easier to

fast than to give money. Therefore in order to have a complete atonement they must additionally give tzedaka. **When one physically and financially sacrifices, then his atonement is complete.**

The Meri explains that **the purpose of fasting is in order that we will properly repent and perform good deeds.** (התעניות כלם נתקנו מפני התשובה ושיתעורר האדם בסבתם לתשובה ומעשים טובים.)
The Gemara in Tanis (16a) states that **Hashem will not answer our prayers because we wore sackcloth and fasted, rather because of our proper repentance and good deeds.** (לא שק ולא תענית גורמים אלא תשובה ומעשים טובים.**)** This is the explanation of the aforementioned Gemara 'the reward for fasting is the tzedaka.' This is the purpose of the fast; to repent and perform good deeds. (הוא שאמרו אגרא דתעניתא צדקתא כלומר שזהו תכלית ענינם והנמשך מהם.)
The reason why Hashem will answer our prayers due to our proper repentance and good deeds as opposed to our fasting is the following. Wearing sackcloth and fasting is external. Whereas repenting and performing good deeds is external and internal. Positively internally changing is more difficult than performing external actions. The Gemara brings a proof of this from the people of Ninvay. When the people of Ninvay repented the pasuk doesn't state that they were answered by Hashem because they wore sackcloth and fasted, rather it was because of their good deeds. (Sefer Yona (perek gimal)
A practical example of a good deed that commonly occurs after fasting is giving the tzedaka that the poor people anticipate. This is a פרט (subcategory) in the כלל (main category). According to this mehalech giving tzedaka is in fact the main aspect of fasting. The day after the fast must be spiritually qualitatively different from the day that preceded the fast. The spiritual momentum of the fast must be positively applied. The repentance, fasting and performance of good deeds, such as giving tzedaka, must cause an automatic positive spiritual ripple effect.

The sefer Lekuti Basar Lekuti offers a similar explanation. He quotes the Kesav Sofer who explains that **one of the goals of fasting is in order to instill proper feelings into the wealthy person. Fasting allows wealthy people to get a taste of what the poor person feels. It allows them to be put in the shoes of the poor person. Even on a regular day many poor people don't eat. This isn't done because of religious reasons; rather it's done because they can't afford food to eat. After fasting everyone understands the difficult situation that the poor person has. Fasting therefore naturally awakens and arouses our sensitivities towards poor people. Fasting will therefore automatically cause us to be more merciful. As a result we will therefore give tzedaka.** Giving tzedaka as mentioned above is a part of repenting and performing good deeds.
Let's explain this fundamental concept by means of an analogy. The Dubno Maggid relates the story of a wealthy individual who heard a knock on his door in the middle of the night when he was sleeping. The constant knock was getting louder. He thought that this was a matter of life and death. He ran downstairs and opened the door. Lu and behold he found out that the banger was a poor person. The poor person said 'please have mercy on me. I didn't eat the entire day. I am starving. Please, hastily give me food.' The wealthy man became furious. He questioned the poor person's practice of coming in the middle of the night. He asked; why didn't you just come at a normal time? He refused to give the poor person anything and closed the door. The next day happened to have been a fast day. Consequently, this wealthy individual didn't eat or drink anything. After the fast he instructed one of his servants to invite the poor person who came to

his house in the middle of the previous night to his house. The servant invited the poor person who subsequently came to the wealthy individual's house. The poor person asked the wealthy individual 'please forgive me my master, but last night when I came, you refused to give me anything. Why are you suddenly sending someone to me to invite me to eat at your house?' The wealthy individual responded 'today is a fast day. Consequently, I didn't eat or drink anything the entire day. Therefore specifically today I realized how you felt. Therefore I wanted to invite you.' The Dubno Maggid explains that **the main reward for the fast isn't given for actually fasting, rather for how we change, how we improve ourselves and our ways. Will we become more sensitive to others? The purpose of fasting is in order that we become better people.**