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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Vayechi  Rabbi Meir Leib Mandelbaum

Peace of Mind

“Vayare menucha ki tov... vayet shichmo lisbol - And [Yissochar] saw tranquility that it was good, and he lowered his shoulder to bear the weight [of work]”. (Bereishis 49:14)

Many Meforshim point out the two seemingly contradictory ideas expressed in this possuk. Shevet Yissochar, chazal teach, were the Bnei Torah of Klal Yisroel and expended all their available time and resources in the pursuit of Torah study. To this end, Yissochar recognized the value and importance of peace of mind and tranquility. Why, then, did they strive to bear the weight of hard work? Wouldn't peace of mind be better achieved through rest and minimizing hardships and labor?

Rav Yerucham Levovitz expounds on this point. True tranquility is acquired in the exact opposite way than conventional wisdom would dictate. One who seeks and accustoms himself to specific physical standards that satisfy his needs for peace of mind, only sets himself up for disaster should these “basics” be lacking in a different set of circumstances. Tzaddikim achieve constant “menucha”-peace, in the exact opposite way. They achieve menucha by training themselves to remain focused on their true goals and priorities. Then, despite other distractions, be they peaceful or tumultuous, this sense of focus allows them to maintain their equilibrium in all stages of life. This is the true inner peace and tranquility.

Soldiers at war need to be on constant alert. They are required to make life and death decisions on a moment's notice, with little regard for their own safety or comfort. How much presence of mind is required from them! It can take months of preparation to be capable of this. How are

they trained? By being well rested and well fed? Quite the contrary! They are pressed to their absolute limits, deprived of food and sleep. Only in this way can they learn to focus on their mission alone, without other distractions. Consequently, in face of great danger, when others would lose their minds from fright, these soldiers can carry out their mission with exacting detail.

One of the kinyanim, means of acquiring Torah, is Yishuv Hadaas- peace of mind. Torah requires concentration to plumb its depths. Our minds must be clear of all distractions in order to be able to immerse ourselves completely. This is why it says “Vayet shichmo lisbol”. The Bnei Yissochar trained themselves to endure extenuating circumstances **in order** to fine tune their peace of mind! This is what we learn in Pirkei Avos, “kach he darkah shel Torah, pas b'melach tochal, etc.” Some Meforshim explain that this does not mean that it is absolutely necessary to live a life of hardships in order to achieve excellence in learning (although without question it is conducive to it). Rather, one needs to be able to apply himself to the study of Torah effectively in any situation, even great poverty.

This also can be learned from our receiving of the Torah in the desert. The Torah testifies about those years, “Vayanacho vayarovecho, - He afflicted you and let you hunger” (Devarim 8:3), because only on such a foundation can Torah excellence endure.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Ayin Hara

Rabbi Dovid Greenberg

The Meforshim explain the words of Yosefs' brocha, "Ben poras aley ayin", to mean that the tribe of Yosef is to be immune from "Ayin Hora"- the evil eye. We find that Sara Imeinu caused the miscarriage of Hagar's first child and Yishmael's illness through the power of Ayin Hara. Bilam Harasha tried to destroy the Jewish people with his evil eye. The gemora states that ayin hara was the direct cause for the demise of Chananya, Mishael and Azarya (Sanhedrin 93.) and that ninety-nine percent of those interred in the cemetery are there due to its influence (Bava Metzia 107b). What exactly is ayin hara, how we can avoid it and some halachic ramifications are to be the subject of this discussion.

What is Ayin Hara?

The Chazon Ish (Likutim C.M.S. 21) explains that it is a natural phenomenon that one's thoughts can affect physical objects. Therefore, when one gazes in amazement at any particular trait or possession of his friend, he is putting that person in imminent danger. This thought is further developed in the Sefer Zera Kodesh, though in a kabbalistic fashion. The ability for anyone to acquire any talent, trait, or possession that raises them a notch above their peers is only due to a direct connection to Hashem's benevolence. When others are amazed at one's bounty instead of attributing it to Hashem's generosity, which should not raise any eyebrows due to His unending goodness, they are cutting off the gift from its source. Even if the spectator bears no ill feelings towards the other party, his misconstrued gazing and gawking has a debilitating affect. To protect oneself from this danger, one would be wise to try and conceal his good fortune as much as possible. Indeed, many of the following halachos are based on this strategy. Furthermore, if the recipient of the ayin hora has the clear perspective that all his bounty is just a gift from the ever flowing goodness of Hashem, that alone can maintain the connection to the Source of his blessings. When Paroah expressed amazement over Yosef by stating, "I've heard that you are an unparalleled dream interpreter", Yosef was quick to respond that it was only through Hashem that he has this talent. Hence, Yosef protected himself from the ayin hora by declaring his own belief in the Source of his powers. Similarly, the common custom to add the words "Bli Ayin Hara" upon commenting on another's good fortune, is only effective if its recitation is accompanied with the realization that all good is but a gift from Hashem (Partially based on an address by Rabbi D. Neustadt).

Halachic Ramifications

One is forbidden to stand on someone else's field when the crop

is ripe and fully grown due to the chance that one may cause damage to the field through his gazing at it. (C.M. 378:5)

When one finds a lost garment, one must take proper care of it as part of his obligation to return it. Therefore, one must periodically shake out the garment to avoid mold and other problems. However, one may not take out the lost garment in front of guests due to the danger that their ayin hara might ruin it. (B M. 30a)

We do not give consecutive Aliyos to the Torah to a father and son or to two brothers, due to the risk of ayin hara (O.C. 141:6). If this situation occurred mistakenly, the person should not go up to the bima. Instead, someone else should go in his place. If the person had already ascended to the bima, he shouldn't leave. Instead, his relative should return to his seat immediately. Some apply this halacha to a grandfather and paternal grandson as well. When there are two sifrei Torah being used, and kaddish is recited between the readings (i.e. Shabbos Rosh Chodesh) one relative may be called up for Shivii and one for Maftir. If no names are called out for the Magbia and Gollel, a father-son team may be used for hagba and gelila. However, if the names are called out, or a misheberach is recited for them, one should avoid a father-son team.

The Magen Avraham (156:2) states that one is prohibited to count the Jewish people even for the purpose of a mitzvah. Instead, everyone being counted should extend a finger, and you may count the fingers. There are those that even argue about using this method due to fears of ayin hara. The more common custom is to count using the possuk of "Hoshia Es Amecha" which contains ten words, to establish the presence of a minyan.

The Mishna Berura in s.583 discusses the custom to recite Tashlich by a body of water containing fish. One of the reasons for this is that we pray to be spared from Ayin hara the same way that fish are, due to their concealment under the water.

The Debrecener Rav in his Tshuvos "Beer Moshe" (vol 6 s. 36) states that the wearing of red bracelets to ward off the ayin hara is a legitimate, age old Jewish custom. Though the reason is not known to us, its usage should not be scorned.

In conclusion, let us try not to flaunt our blessings and to constantly acknowledge their true Source. Trough this may we be zoche to the fulfillment of the verse "V'heiseer Hashem Kol Choli" that Hashem will remove **all** illnesses which according to the gemara (BM 107b) refers to the effects of ayin hara.

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