Jewish Tribune – Beshalach

**Drains and Radiators**

Many years ago, when I was a teenager growing up in Golders Green, I remember a friend telling me of a certain old lady who lived on their road who was always complaining. She earned the nickname “Mona”.

Everything was terrible. She had many pet peeves and didn’t hold back from sharing these with anyone who was patient enough to listen. One of these pet peeves was actually quite understandable. She lived on a long and steep road and people drove up and down her road, way too fast. “It’s shocking! Why don’t the Council do something about it!” she would say.

Sure enough, with the passage of time, the Council installed road bumps or “sleeping policemen” in this road and soon after, my friend was delighted when he met this old lady on the street. Finally, after all these years, she would surely have something positive to say.

Excitedly, my friend approached her and said: “Well, your wishes have come true, road bumps have been installed. What do you think?”

Looking forward to hear something positive from Mona for the first time ever, she replied: “Terrible!! Not high enough!!”

In this week’s parsha, having come through the Yam Suf, Klal Yisroel arrive in Marah but are unable to drink the bitter water there.

וַיָּבֹאוּ מָרָתָה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לִשְׁתֹּת מַיִם מִמָּרָה, כִּי מָרִים הֵם.

And they came to Marah, but could not drink the water from Marah because it was bitter.

The Kotzker Rebbe famously says that the phrase כִּי מָרִים הֵם – because it was bitter - does not refer to the water, but to those who were complaining. As the saying goes, if there is sour milk on your glasses, everything will look like soured milk.

It is said that the world is made up of two types of people, radiators and drains. Some people infuse energy and radiate positivity, and some people just drain and sap vitality from any situation.

Rav Leizer Shulevitz, a talmid of Rav Yisroel Salanter, and founder of the Lomza yeshiva, once asked the Chafetz Chaim to recommend someone for the position of mashgiach. The Chafetz Chaim told him that a certain man was suitable for the position.

A short time later, Rav Shulevitz received a letter from the Chafetz Chaim, withdrawing his recommendation. Puzzled, Rav Shulevitz asked him why he had withdrawn.

“He came to visit me and complained about his personal problems and circumstances,” the Chafetz Chaim explained. “A complainer cannot be and is not fitting to be *mashpia Torah* and *yiras Shomayim* on talmidim.”

Many readers will remember Reb Moshe Frei. I didn’t have the good fortune to know him well, but those who did recall his positivity and buoyancy. One family member told me that he met Reb Moshe on a rainy day and the miserable weather had clearly not dampened Reb Moshe’s simchas hachaim. In response to the unspoken question, Reb Moshe just said “when it’s raining, you have to walk in between the raindrops!”

There are plenty of things in life to *kvetch* about. Sometimes, the road bumps are not high enough and sometimes the water is bitter. The trick to fulfilment and happiness in life is to find the good, express gratitude and focus on what we have and not what we don’t.

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