Jewish Tribune – Behaaloscha

**Consistency and Faithfulness**

It was the last day of the school year. A warm day in July, some years ago and I was speaking in the boys’ school assembly, giving a summer holiday message to hundreds of boys who were hot and fidgety and tantalisingly close to several weeks of freedom. And I was the only thing standing in the way of their summer holiday. If Chazal use the analogy of כתינוק הבורח מבית ספר – like a child running away from school - on a regular day, what would they say on a day like this?

This memory comes to mind as we revisit two of the most famous pesukim in the Torah, which appear in our sedra.

**וַיְהִי בִּנְסֹעַ הָאָרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר משֶׁה קוּמָה ה' וְיָפֻצוּ אֹיְבֶיךָ וְיָנֻסוּ מְשַׂנְאֶיךָ מִפָּנֶיךָ**

**וּבְנֻחֹה יֹאמַר שׁוּבָה ה' רִבֲבוֹת אַלְפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**

Whilst these pesukim are very well known, what is less familiar is that these verses appear in the Torah in brackets. Take a look in your Chumash at home and you will see that I am not making it up. These famous words are bracketed on either side by the letter “נ”, reversed. What is the reason for these inverted *nuns*?

According to one opinion in the Gemara (Shabbos 116a), it is to break a *chazokah* of three occasions when the Jewish people sinned.

The first is when the Bnei Yisroel left Har Sinai too quickly, כתינוק הבורח מבית ספר - like children running from school, relieved they were not receiving more mitzvos.

The second is when they travelled without stop for three days and complained about the frantic pace of their journey.

And the third was when Klal Yisroel complained about the *mon* and demanded meat.

We know that a threefold repetition constitutes a pattern in halacha, known as a *chazokah* and these two famous pesukim are cut and pasted to this point to avoid the creation of a negative and indicting *chazokah*.

Rabbi Leff asks an insightful question. I can understand the need to break a threefold repetition but wouldn’t the natural place to do so be between indictments two and three, just before a *chazokah* is established? Why insert these two pesukim between sins one and two?

Rabbi Leff answers and teaches a critical lesson in our avodas Hashem. The key to success in our service to Hashem is consistency.

The Medrash (Tanna d’vei Eliyahu chapter 14), tells of how HKBH once sent Eliyohu HaNavi to chastise a fisherman who was not learning as much Torah as he should.

Eliyohu HaNavi engaged the man in conversation. “Why don’t you learn Torah?” he asked the fisherman. The man told Eliyohu HaNavi that he was not blessed with a strong intellect and learning Torah was beyond him.

With much wisdom, Eliyohu HaNavi did not challenge the fisherman but instead asked him: “Tell me about your work.”

The fisherman began talking … and talking. (Dale Carnegie notes that the key to good conversation is to get a person to talk about things he finds interesting!) The fisherman began by explaining his daily routine, how he prepared for his expeditions, the importance of checking weather patterns and how to do so, the topography of the land, how to tie all various types of knots and other areas of nautical interest.

Eventually, when the fisherman finally finished, Eliyohu HaNavi simply said: “And for this you have a brain and for Torah you don’t?”

The man had shot himself in the foot. A “stirah minei u’beh”. He had shown his own inconsistency.

When the Bnei Yisroel complained about the fast pace of travel, they displayed inconsistency. When it came to running away from Har Sinai you could run, and now you can’t?

The threefold pattern of sin needed to be broken. But better to break it between sins one and two as this involved a display of inconsistency.

The Gemoro in Shabbos (104a) says that the letter **“**נ**”** represents faithfulness and consistency. That is why the two pesukim are bracketed with these inverted letters. It highlights the lack of consistency in the behaviour of Klal Yisroel.

May we all merit to see consistency in our behaviour and ensure that the inverted *nuns* are made straight, as they are the ultimate expression of total devotion -**נעשה ונשמע.**

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