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**The Mashgiach’s Message**

The yeshiva bochur approached his mashgiach, a famous Torah personality, with a request.

“I’d like to meet with you once a month so you can give me mussar and point out my flaws,” he said.

“You don’t want me to point out your flaws – you want to be able to tell people you have a regular private meeting with me,” the mashgiach replied.

The bochur slunk off, embarrassed, and avoided the mashgiach for the next few months. One day he was walking down the corridor and he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around and found himself face to face with the mashgiach.

“Where have you been?” asked the great man. “I thought you wanted to meet once a month?”

“I … I … I was just so embarrassed; I couldn’t face you.”

“Why were you embarrassed? You asked me to point out your flaws. That’s all I did.”

The Orchos Tzaddikim (sha’ar 2) notes the importance of humility:

כי הענוה שורש העבודה, ומעשה קטן של הענוה מתקבל לפני ה' ברוך הוא, אלף ידות יותר ממעשה גדול של הגאוה

*Humility is the root of all our service to Hashem. One small act with humility is received by HKBH one thousand times more than a great act done with pride.*

The Mashgiach was able to detect even the slightest whiff of arrogance.

Humility - what a beautiful trait. And interestingly, a middah that is highlighted in our parsha, if we examine it carefully.

The Gemoro in Berachos (6b) says:

כל הקובע מקום לתפלתו - אלקי אברהם בעזרו. וכשמת - אומרים לו: אי עניו, אי חסיד, מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו

*Whoever fixes a place to daven, the G-d of Avrohom comes to his assistance. And when the person dies, they say about him: “What a humble person, what a pious person, he was one of the students of Avrohom Avinu.”*

What is the connection between fixing a place to daven and humility?

Picture the following scene. Scenario 1: Exasperated, a teacher returns to the staff room after a particularly challenging class.

“I’ve never seen children like them,” she exclaims. “They’re impossible! Unteachable!”

Alternative scenario 2: The teacher returns to the staff room dejected but thinks to herself, “These kids need something different. I’m not engaging them. Let me consult my colleagues and come up with better classroom management techniques and more effective ways to engage these students.”

What is the difference between the two responses?

The first smacks of arrogance, where the teacher is essentially saying, “I’m a good teacher and the problem is the kids.” The second scenario displays a modesty and willingness to acknowledge that we are not perfect and can improve.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (5,19) contrasts the talmidim of Avraham Ovinu and Bila’am. In short, the talmidim of Bilaam are arrogant and haughty, whereas the talmidim of Avrohom Ovinu are the opposite, displaying humility and self-effacement.

In his Sha’arei Orah, Rav Meir Tzvi Bergman notes that in parshas Balak, Bila’am offers up korbonos in attempt to curse the Jewish people. He does not succeed and tries again at various other locations. Each time he fails he moves to another location. Perhaps, he thinks, Hashem will allow me to curse them from there.

What underlies this behaviour is a sentiment that the problem is not with me; perhaps it is the wrong location, perhaps Hashem prefers me to curse them from somewhere else. I’m ok, my prayers and curses work, it’s the location that’s the problem.

Contrast this with Avrohom Ovinu. Despite pleading on behalf of S’dom and essentially failing to save them, Avrohom returns to the same location and still davens shacharis there the next day. He doesn’t point the finger elsewhere and recognises that he must continue davening and daven even better. This displays a humility. I’m not looking elsewhere but am looking within.

That, says Rav Bergman, is the answer to our question. The connection between fixing a place to daven and humility is that a person who returns to the same location understands that it depends on him and his tefillos and does not blame other factors.

We live in a world where people try to find scapegoats, and all too often point fingers elsewhere. True humility involves looking honestly from within. And that is what the Mashgiach was trying to encourage.

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