

Dvar Torah for Parshat Devarim

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Based on Likutey Moharan II, Lesson #8

The Torah tells us:

On the first day of the eleventh month, Moshe spoke to all the Israelites when they were on the far side of the Jordan, in the desert, in the plains, opposite Suf, between Paran and Tofel, Lavan, Chatzeirot and di Zahav (Deuteronomy 1:1).

Rashi tells us that this really means: Moshe subtly reminded all the Israelites that they had behaved badly when they regretted not dying in the desert; when they worshiped Peor in the plains of Moav; when they rebelled on the bank of the Suf; by complaining about the manna, which was lavan (white); with Korach's opposition in Chatzeirot; and by worshiping the Golden Calf because they had too much zahav (gold).

Rebbe Nachman teaches that one has to be careful in offering reproof. Most everyone is so biased—and defensive—that if you try to correct him (or her) directly, the improper behavior, and its underlying cause(s), become further entrenched in the person. One person may despair of improving, another may become antagonistic and “show you!”

Proper reproof, Rebbe Nachman says, not only improves a person by getting him to stop his improper behavior, but by getting him to behave well, to his full potential. But to be able to do that, one has to adopt a certain “voice,” the voice that waters the Garden of Eden. In the Garden grows every type of fragrance and Divine awareness. This special voice is the sound of the Future Song.

The process necessary to achieve such a voice is a long one. We will mention just one step: the care one needs to properly use his compassion. In Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom #23 the Rebbe points out that because the visible pity for those who lack a decent standard of living is so heart-rending, no one wants to be the object of such pity. As a result they pursue the material, often with too much gusto. But, he points out, the pity on the hungry, naked souls who are denied entry to the Next World is much worse.

So one has to be sagacious and foresee the long-term consequences of his choices. While we certainly must take care of our physical needs, we have to carefully consider how much is actually necessary for our physical well-being (and not just survival), and balance that with how much we will need to “feed and clothe” our souls for eternity. The more we properly exercise compassion by properly “reproving” and improving our own selves, the closer we come to being able to compassionately “water” the parched souls of others.

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

