

RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Matos-Masei for your Shabbos Table

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Sponsored by Eli & Sara Malka Neger lilui nishmos Esther Tehila bas R' Gavriel Pinchas & Yitzchok Moshe ben Aaron Yaakov Yehoshua.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Opening the Pipelines of Blessing

Parshas Matos tells about the war which *Benei Yisrael* waged against the nation of Midyan. Moshe instructed the people to mobilize an army consisting of one thousand men from each tribe: *אלף למטה, אלף למטה, לכל מסות ישראל תשלחו לצבא* – “One thousand per tribe; one thousand per tribe; for all the tribes of Israel shall you send to the army” (31:4).

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (3) and *Midrash Rabba* (22:2) explain this repetitious *pasuk* to mean that three thousand men were recruited from each tribe: one thousand to fight the war, one thousand to stand guard, and one thousand to *daven* for the campaign's success.

The *Otzar Pela'os Ha'Torah* notes the significance of the fact that *tefilos* were necessary despite the fact that Hashem specifically commanded *Benei Yisrael* to wage this battle. In truth, whenever *Benei Yisrael* went out to war in ancient times, this was done with Hashem's authorization – after consulting with the *urim ve'tumim*, the part of the *kohen gadol's* garments which would prophetically respond to questions posed to it. We might have assumed that once *Benei Yisrael* received Hashem's clear authorization to fight, victory was guaranteed. After all, if He told them to go to war, then He would certainly assure their success. And yet, nevertheless, *tefilos* were still necessary. No matter how confident we are of success, the *Otzar Pela'os Ha'Torah* explains, we still need to pour our hearts before God in prayer and beg for His assistance, because *tefila* is an indispensable prerequisite for *beracha*.

We might draw an analogy to a person with a winning lottery ticket. As long as the ticket remains in his pocket, not a penny of the millions of dollars that he won will go into his bank account. He is no better off after the winning number was announced than he was previously, if he doesn't bother to go to the lottery office and show his ticket.

The same is true of *tefila*. We all have the winning ticket. Hashem has an abundance of blessing with which to shower each and every one of us. But we need to cash it in, and this is done through sincere, heartfelt prayer. We cannot access the *beracha* without *davening* for it. The blessings are there,

but our *tefilos* create the pipelines through which they can descend from the heavens into our lives.

During one of Israel's recent military campaigns, Rav Simcha Kook zt"l of Rechovot arranged a program whereby people signed up to receive the name of an Israeli soldier for whom they would *daven*. There is no excuse for those who are not participating in Israel's struggles against its enemies to not at least *daven* on behalf of those who are. *Tefila* is the pipeline that brings our nation success, protection and prosperity, and we must all take part in the effort to build this pipeline.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

Everyone is an “Influencer”

The tribes of Reuven and Gad approached Moshe and requested the right to permanently settle the region of *Eiver Ha'Yardein*, east of the Jordan River, the land which *Benei Yisrael* had captured from the kingdoms of Sichon and Og. Moshe reacted very angrily, accusing these two tribes of repeating *חטא המרגלים*, the sin of the spies, by refusing to proceed into *Eretz Yisrael*, and preferring to remain permanently outside the land. Reuven and Gad clarified that the men would build houses for their families and corrals for their livestock, and then join the other tribes in the wars to conquer *Eretz Yisrael* across the river. Moshe agreed to allow these tribes to permanently settle *Eiver Ha'Yardein* on condition that they fulfill this promise and participate in the battles along with the rest of *Benei Yisrael*.

In his initial response to Reuven and Gad, Moshe accuses, *והנה תלמידי אש תרבות אנשים חסאים* – “And now you have arisen in your forefathers' place, a culture of sinful people...” (32:14). Just as the previous generation sinned by refusing to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, the people of Reuven and Gad have likewise decided to remain permanently outside the land.

Targum Onkelos translates the words *אנשים חסאים* as *תלמידי אש* – “the students of sinful people.” According to this translation, Moshe describes the people of Reuven and Gad as the “students” of the people who committed *חטא המרגלים*.

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro pointed out that, quite clearly, the people of Reuven and Gad did not sit in a classroom learning from the people who had committed *חטא המרגלים*

nearly 40 years earlier. But they are nevertheless considered those people's "students" because, in Moshe's eyes, they were influenced by them and were now following their example.

What this shows, Rav Shapiro commented, is that we are all "teachers." We all have "students." Everything we say and everything we do has some impact upon the people around us. People are always watching us and listening to us. Even if we have no formal educational position, we are "teachers" in that people are observing us and being influenced by our conduct.

This concept is expressed also by the Mishna in *Pirkei Avos* (5:19) which lists the qualities that characterize תלמידיו של אברהם – the students of Avraham – and the opposite qualities, which characterize תלמידיו של בלעם הרשע – the students of Bilam. One becomes a "student" not only by attending formal classes, but also by observing and emulating somebody's behavior.

Many people today strive to be "influencers," to have their voices heard, to have a strong social media presence with thousands of "followers" and "subscribers." But the truth is that we're all influencers. In our homes, in our shuls, at work, at the gym, in the supermarket, driving on the roads – our behavior has a subtle influence. Our influence cannot be measured and quantified by "likes" and "followers," but it is real. We all have countless "students" who have, in some way, been affected by the way we speak and act.

Of course, this is especially true of children. The most important means of influencing children is through modeling, not through the spoken word. Parents affect and guide their children primarily through the example that they set.

Author Mary Korzan expressed this concept in a famous poem entitled, *When You Thought I Wasn't Looking*:

*When you thought I wasn't looking
You hung my first painting on the refrigerator
And I wanted to paint another.*

*When you thought I wasn't looking
You fed a stray cat
And I thought it was good to be kind to animals.*

*When you thought I wasn't looking
You baked a birthday cake just for me
And I knew that little things were special things.*

*When you thought I wasn't looking
You said a prayer
And I believed there was a God that I could always talk to.*

*When you thought I wasn't looking
You kissed me goodnight
And I felt loved.*

*When you thought I wasn't looking
I saw tears come from your eyes
And I learned that sometimes things hurt
But that it's all right to cry.*

*When you thought I wasn't looking
You smiled
And it made me want to look that pretty too.*

*When you thought I wasn't looking
You cared
And I wanted to be everything I could be.*

*When you thought I wasn't looking
I looked
And I wanted to say thanks
For all the things you did
When you thought I wasn't looking.*

Our children – and others – are always looking at us and being affected by us. And so all of us, without exception, are influencers.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

Being Above Suspicion

Moshe expressed his consent to the tribes of Reuven and Gad, emphasizing that they must uphold their commitment by joining the other tribes in the battles to conquer *Eretz Yisrael*. If they fulfilled this promise, Moshe said, then והייתם נקיים מה' ומישראל – "you shall be innocent before God and before Israel" (32:22).

The Mishna in *Maseches Shekalim* (3:2) cites this *pasuk* in reference to a *halacha* requiring the treasurers of the *Beis Ha'mikdash* to avoid all suspicion. When the appointed official would enter the treasury to remove the money donated by *Benei Yisrael* to purchase animals for the *korbanos*, he was not allowed to walk in with anything in which he could hide coins, in order to avoid suspicion of stealing public funds. The Mishna teaches, שאדם צריך לצאת ידי המקום – a person has to not only fulfill his obligations to Hashem, but also ensure his innocence in the eyes of other people. We must not only act honestly, but make it clear that we act honestly, so that people recognize our integrity. This is derived from Moshe's pronouncement to Reuven and Gad, ומישראל – that they must be "innocent" not only before Hashem, but also in the eyes of their fellow Jews.

I recall that a member of our shul's executive board would say during board meetings that the board must not do anything that they wouldn't do in the presence of the entire congregation. If it is even slightly questionable, to the extent that it would need to be hidden from the membership, then it should be avoided. This board member gave the example of marriage: doing anything that one would not do in the presence of his or her spouse is cheating. A spouse should not be visiting any website he wouldn't visit if the other spouse was beside him, or speak to a member of the opposite gender in a manner in which he or she would not speak if the other spouse were present. By the same token, a shul board should not do anything behind closed doors that they wouldn't do in front of the people they represent.

I tell my accountant the same thing: "Save me as much money as you can, but don't do anything you wouldn't do if there was IRS agent standing right next to you watching."

We need to be נקיים in every sense of the word, both in the eyes of Hashem, who sees and knows everything we do, and also in the eyes of other people, ensuring to not even appear to do something morally objectionable.