

*The  
"Daf HaShavua"  
Parsha Paper  
Yisro, 5781*



*TIMES for NY  
February 5, 2021  
Candles: 4:59 PM  
Shabbat Ends: 6:02 PM*

**Issue # 776**

In Memory of Shalom Tzvi ben Husni, Malkiel ben ImaShalom, Esther bat Sara, Penina bat Devorah, Aharon ben Esther, Moshe HaCohen Ben Burcho



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## "THE DELICATE BALANCE"

*One of the greatest English seforim I have read in the last few years was Mind Over Man, a collection of discourses from Rav Yechiel Perr, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Derech Eisan in Far Rockaway, NY. The book is full of poignant and candid insights into human nature and contains timeless lessons for growth in contemporary society.*

Rav Perr discusses the need for a person to question his motivations, even when doing positive actions. If a positive action is performed with negative intent, it can have a negative effect.

To demonstrate this point, he relates the following story:

"One time when I was a youngster in yeshiva, a fight broke out. It escalated to such a point that the cook quit and walked out close to Shabbos. We were a bunch of teenage boys in a dormitory, with no cooked meals and only hours before Kabbolas Shabbos. But we had a kitchen and a pantry full of raw materials, so three other boys and I decided to cook for Shabbos. You can imagine the scene – four of us sweating in the kitchen, with the other boys sitting around, joking and giving sage cooking advice. The food actually came out very good; until this day I'm proud of it.

"At one point, the Rosh Yeshiva came in to see how we were doing. I complained that everyone was issuing opinions and jokes without bothering to help. He responded with a great vort, although I doubt he remembers it. He said: If you can't do it right, just walk out and don't do it at all!

"It took me a long time to appreciate his words. Obviously, sometimes action must be taken, in cases of *pikuach nefesh*<sup>[2]</sup> or the like. But back in that hot kitchen decades ago, what would have happened if only three boys did the cooking? Maybe there wouldn't have been kugel or chicken, or the soup would have come out wrong. But no one would have starved. In some situations, doing nothing is better than doing a mitzvah incorrectly. Although you are accomplishing a great thing, providing Shabbos for the public, there is a poisonous edge to your actions: resentment, negativity self-righteousness. These aspects of your actions impact on you, dragging you down. You are better off not doing it at all.

"Often people volunteer, but cannot handle that others are abandoning them to do it by themselves. If so, do not volunteer. If you tear your heart out, does it matter that it was full of kindness and empathy? Do it right with simcha and a positive outlook, or not at all. By stewing in your cynicism and bitterness, you lose all that you stood to gain from your generosity."

Rav Perr continues that it is vital for a person to know his limits. Often people take on too much and it affects them personally or their family life. When one overextends himself, the negative impact it has outweighs the good he is accomplishing. With time he loses his desire to accomplish for others.

He notes that this is demonstrated in Yisro's message to Moshe Rabbeinu. When Yisro saw throngs of people line up to pose their halachic inquiries to Moshe, he declared, "*navol tibol*"<sup>[3]</sup>, you are wearing yourself out. The truth is that we have abilities beyond what we realize. A person gets married and has much greater responsibilities than when he was single. Then he has a child and his responsibilities increase exponentially. As his family grows, and life becomes busier, he has to shoulder much more than he thought possible. If responsibility has been thrust upon him he has no choice but to embrace it. If G-d sent it his way, that means he has the means to meet that challenge. However, a person must be honest with himself to know when he needs to step back and ease up from what he is volunteering for. This idea poses a very delicate challenge, because while it's true that we don't want to damage ourselves by taking on too much, we also have to make sure we aren't ignoring opportunities.

The Zohar<sup>[4]</sup> relates that Avrohom Avinu understood that it was necessary for him to purchase Mearas Hamachpeilah from Ephron: "If Ephron had seen in the cave what Avrohom saw in it, he never would have sold it to him. Surely then he didn't see anything, because the light of something is only revealed to its owner. Therefore, to Avrohom was revealed (a spiritual light), but not to Ephron."

The Tzeidah Laderech utilizes this idea to explain why Yisro was the one who suggested the hierarchy system of judges which was implemented for the entire nation. Moshe himself would never have suggested that there be such a system with the hardest questions being brought to him, because of his extreme humility. For anyone in the nation to have suggested that it was too much for Moshe to answer everything himself was disrespectful to Moshe. Yisro therefore realized that he was the only one who could appropriately offer the suggestion.

Just as Avrohom realized it was his mission to purchase the cave, so did Yisro realize that it was incumbent upon him to suggest a revamping of the system. "The light of something is only revealed to its owner."

Yisro rose to the occasion. Not only was his suggestion accepted, it is recorded in the Torah for posterity.

It is a stark reminder that when an opportunity arises when we recognize that we can make a difference and that we are in a position to accomplish, we have to take advantage of the moment.

The challenge is finding the delicate balance between knowing our calling and not burning ourselves out. It cannot be coincidental that these two diverse ideas appear together. On the one hand, the Torah records that Moshe had to hand over some of the reigns so that he and the nation did not become weary and overburdened. At the same time, Yisro recognized that he was the one who had to step into the limelight and offer advice. This despite the fact that it must have been uncomfortable for him to do so, after having arrived on the scene as a stranger not much earlier.

The three days prior to Shavuot are called "*shloshes yimei hagbalah* – the three days of boundaries". Before Kabbolas HaTorah, Hashem instructed Moshe three times to warn the nation not to traverse the boundaries set before them at the foot of Har Sinai. They were repeatedly warned that if they would so much as touch the mountain, they would instantly die.

Regarding spiritual growth, one cannot 'rush up the mountain'. If we try to take on too much too quickly it can destroy us. On the other hand, we must make sure we are standing at the foot of the mountain poised to accept what we can. Like everything else in life, finding that perfect balance is vital and yet challenging. One must know his limits, and yet ensure that he isn't selling himself short.

"You will wear out – also you and also this nation that is with you"

"The light of something is only revealed to its owner"

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**Rabbi Dani Staum**

<sup>[1]</sup> The following is the lecture I delivered at Kehillat New Hempstead, Parshas Yisro 5778<sup>[2]</sup> Life in danger<sup>[3]</sup> Shemos 18:18

<sup>[4]</sup> Bereishis 127:1-2





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