

Parenting in the Parsha

פרשת בהעלתך

What's on Your Mind? (Really)

וְהַאֲסִפְסֹף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ הַתְּאוֹה וַיִּשְׁבוּ וַיִּבְלוּ גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי יֵאָכְלוּ בָּשָׂר:

The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, "If only we had meat to eat!

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם בֹּכֶה לְמִשְׁפּוּחֹתָיו אִישׁ לְפִתְחֵי אֹהֶלוֹ וַיֵּצֵא אֶת־הָאֵף ה' מֵאֵלָיו וַיִּבְעִיג מֹשֶׁה רַע:

Moses heard the people weeping by family each person at the entrance of his tent. Hashem was very angry, and Moses was distressed.

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה אֶת הָעָם בּוֹכֵה לְמִשְׁפּוּחֹתָיו עַל עִסְקֵי מִשְׁפּוּחֹתָיו שֶׁנֶּאֱסָרוּ לָהֶם לִשְׁכַּב אִצְלָם

And Moses heard the people weeping for their families" They cried with regard to the issue of their families, because now it became prohibited for them to cohabit with them

- Yoma 75a

There are two things a person should never be angry at, what they can help, and what they cannot.

- Plato

It couldn't be stated any more clearly. The *Bnei Yisroel* complain in the *midbar*. They are fed up, quite literally, with the *mon* that has been their diet for the past year. They want meat. They pine for the fresh fruits and vegetables that they enjoyed in Egypt. Their complaint is spelled out clearly and completely in the *posuk*. Yet, the *gemara* asserts that this was not their complaint at all. Rather, they were really complaining about certain family relations that were now forbidden after *matan Torah*. What might prompt the *gemara* to deviate from the clear, unequivocal statement of the *posuk* itself?

The *gemara*, here, is teaching us a profound lesson about people and interpersonal relationships. Often, a person will be upset and angry and will express that anger about a particular issue or direct that anger towards a particular person. Very often, that is not at all what or who they are angry about. Understanding the complexity of people and their emotional state is key to relationships.

The *bnei Yisroel* complained about the *mon*. It made no sense to complain about the *mon*. It was the superfood of its day, low in calories, high in all essential nutrients, and tailored to any desired flavor. What were they complaining about? Moshe, an astute, intelligent leader, understood that it wasn't about the *mon*. That's not what was really bothering them. It couldn't be. Moshe also knew that the magic of the *mon* presented a potential problem for would be adulterers, as the *mon* would fall outside of each man's tent with the correct number of portions for members of his family. If a child in the tent was actually the offspring of another father, the additional portion of *mon* would fall outside the real father's tent, thus exposing the adulterer. That made the *mon*, for all its magic, a real problem for those who would otherwise ignore the Torah imposed rules governing relationships. That would lead someone to not like the *mon*.

Moshe understood, perhaps more than the *bnei Yisroel* themselves understood, what was really bothering them. He listened to what they were saying, but he heard their true complaint about family issues, and understood what was really behind their protest. They didn't like the *mon*, but not for the reason they thought.

What are the lessons for parents? The first one is about how to listen to your child's complaints and fears. Don't just listen to what he is saying. Think about how much the complaint does or doesn't make sense. Think about the bigger picture of your child's life and all the things going on it. What is really on his mind? If you address the specific point the child is complaining about without really addressing the true underlying issue you haven't really done anything to help the child.

The second point may be even more important. Think about your own agitation or anger. What is really bothering you? Are you upset at your child for not picking up after himself or are you really frustrated with yourself for not maintaining your home in the standard of neatness you would like? Are you upset with your child for something he did or didn't do, or are you really bothered by an incident at work? Pausing to listen to yourself, to stop and consider whether your level of agitation makes sense for the situation can help you to recognize where your anger really lies.

Knowing what is really bothering your child can help you effectively solve his problems. Knowing what is really bothering you can be even more effective in solving your child's problems!

Good Shabbos,

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