

"SMALL FAVORS"

Moshe Rabbeinu recounts in our Parasha how he warned the newly appointed judges to avoid showing any favoritism that might corrupt the result of a case over which they are presiding. "...You shall not show favoritism in judgment, small and great alike shall you hear..." (1:16)

For two thousand years, during the week of Tisha B'Av, we are attempting to suggest ways of correcting the Sinat Chinam problem in our midst and coming up with an Ahavat Chinam solution. So far, no one has succeeded. I once heard from Rav Pam an explanation to a Gemara that might just be the key solution to our problem.

Gemara Kesuvot (105b) teaches that bribes do not necessarily have to come in the form of money. **Even minor exchanges of words, such as saying nice things to a judge can affect the way he sees things, and may be a form of bribery that will cloud his judgment. The Gemara shows specific examples. The Amora Shmuel, was having difficulty crossing a footbridge. Someone reached out and helped him cross the bridge. Shmuel thanked him and asked him what brought him to the bridge and the man answered that he had a Din Torah scheduled in Shmuel's Bet Din. Shmuel immediately disqualified himself from judging the case because of the kindness he had received from this man.**

Similarly, Ameimar was sitting in Bet Din, and a feather flew on his head. Someone came over and removed the feather. When he told Ameimar that he was there to have his case heard, Ameimar disqualified himself.

Rav Shmuel bar Yosi's sharecropper, would usually deliver Rav Shmuel's produce every Friday. One week, the sharecropper had to be in town on Thursday for a personal reason, so he decided to deliver the produce a day early. Rav Shmuel bar Yosi excused himself from presiding over a case of the sharecropper lest he be affected by the favor of having his produce a day early.

Rav Pam wondered-were these great Rabbis so sensitive that the slightest favor could influence their judgment? Would we misjudge a case if someone helped us cross the street or cleaned our hat? Why wouldn't the Rabbis give themselves more credit than to assume they would be biased for such trivial reasons? To which Rav Pam answered, that the Gemara is not focusing on judicial integrity, but it is emphasizing the extend of HAKARAT HATOV (GRATITUDE) we should have for those who do us favors. These Rabbis weren't overly sensitive; what they did do, was to take people's favors more serious than we do.

To us, such minor favors might be so insignificant that they wouldn't even register in our mind. But people, like the above mentioned Rabbis have developed such a keen appreciation for what others do for them that they consider these "minor" acts of kindness as worthy of such gratitude, that it might affect their judgment.

This could be the strategy of solving our Ahavat Chinam problem. Many problems in our society stem from lack of HAKARAT HATOV. Husbands take the daily "small" favors that wives do for them for

granted, and wives do the same for the husband's favors. Everyone expects the other party to do the daily chores because "it's their job". However, If each spouse would take these favors as seriously as the Rabbis did, we would have many more happy, stable marriages, in which everyone would feel appreciated for all they do. The same holds true for employer-employee relationships, friends and neighbors, and virtually all other relationships as well, including parents and children. If people would focus more on what others do for them, even the minor acts of kindness, and GRACIOUSLY RECIPROCATATE WITH WORDS AND ACTS OF KINDNESS –then I think the world would be a better place, and we would be on the way toward Ahavat Chinum, and the rebuilding of our Bet HaMikdash could become a reality in our time.

Shabbat Shalom and a Meaningful Fast to all-
from Yerushalayim-- Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

QUESTIONS ON PARASHAT DEVARIM-

- 1- In 1:5, "Moshe began to explain the Torah", to which Rashi comments, that he translated it into 70 languages.. What need or purpose was there for having the Torah translated into 70 languages??
- 2-Parashat Devarim must always be read just before Tisha B'Av. Why is that so and what is the connection?
- 3- How long of a time span did Moshe use to convey his farewell message in Sefer Devarim?
- 4-Two of the 613 Mitzvot are in this parasha. What are they??
- 5-By what other name is Sefer Devarim known by?
- 6- In this parasha, Moshe expresses his feelings about his being denied going into Eretz Yisrael. What reason did he express?

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