

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS
MISHPATIM

בשבת

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RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

SHARED SORROW

At the end of *Parshas Mishpatim*, the Torah repeats part of the narrative of the *Aseres Hadibros*. At this point we find that not only did Moshe and Aharon ascend *Har Sinai*, but Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders also stood on the mountain (though at a lower point).¹

A puzzling verse then follows, stating that through *nevuah* they saw a brick of sapphire positioned under Hashem's 'feet'.² What an odd sight! What is the significance of this brick that Hashem had at His feet?

Rashi³ explains that this brick was symbolic of Hashem's feelings towards Klal Yisrael during their terrible subjugation in Egypt. Hashem was expressing the idea of feeling another's pain - while the Jewish nation was busy building with bricks, Hashem, too, had a brick as a constant 'reminder' of His people's suffering. And though Hashem obviously does not need a reminder, He used this brick to show the people the importance of feeling another's pain.

Feeling another's pain, empathy, has two important values. One is for the person who is suffering - simply listening and empathizing with someone else helps alleviate their pain, both physical and mental. Additionally, your kind words will have greater impact, and you can anticipate their needs and respond accordingly.

Another value is for the person themselves - when you can truly put yourself in someone else's mental state, you become a greater person. You fulfill the *mitzvah* of "ואהבת לרעך כמוך," loving your friend like yourself, and you keep yourself from becoming desensitized, cold to another person's plight.

Empathy is a key ingredient in our *avodas Hashem*! Without it, almost all of the *mitzvos* done between us and others will be cold, robotic and formulaic. But with it, our *mitzvos* will change us, helping us come closer to others, and to Hashem.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

How does one work on empathy? We all understand that we shouldn't dismiss another's difficulties, but is there a way to put ourselves in someone else's situation?

The following two ideas might be helpful. Our thoughts follow our words. If we accustom ourselves to use certain words, our thoughts will follow.

When someone tells us about a difficulty that they are facing, we are sometimes tempted to immediately find a solution, or to dig deep into details. For instance, someone says that the teacher was picking on them - "Well, did you speak to the teacher about it?" or, "Maybe you did something to cause that?" Instead of these questions, a simple, "I see," or even, "Wow, that must be hard for you," can be a pathway to starting to understand another person's pain.

Another idea is to take a moment before responding and think, "What would I want someone to say to me in this situation?" Try drawing on parallel situations that you yourself might have been in, and remind yourself of your feelings and thoughts at that time. Doing so will put you in a much better mindset to truly understand what your friend may be going through.

1 *Shemos* 24:1-10

2 Hashem obviously does not have feet - the term is used for us to better understand.

(See *Rambam Hilchos Yesodai Hatorah* 1:8-9)

3 *Shemos* 24:10 s.v. לִבְנֵי הַסִּפֵּיר

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People seem to think that Mussar study is some sort of extra act of piety. This is wholly incorrect. All the poskim rule that Mussar study is a basic obligation!

- R' Gershon Edelstein, *Ponevezh Rosh Yeshiva, Holchei Nesivos* pg. 203

FORESIGHT AND INSIGHT

The city of Vilna was no stranger to frigid winter weather. Yet that winter day was exceptionally biting as the aged sage, R' Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, slowly returned home from his *beis medrash*. He was surrounded by students ignoring the icy chill, eager to hear more of their great Rebbi's teachings. A boy who was not a student anxiously fidgeted alongside the group, clearly hoping to be acknowledged. R' Chaim Ozer noticed the child, and smiled at him. Perhaps the boy had an urgent *halachic* problem to discuss?

"Um...D..D...Does..th..th..the...R...R...Rav...kn...kno....know..whe...whe...where....P..Po..Pot...Potlova...L..La..Lane is?" the child stuttered.

"Certainly" answered R' Chaim Ozer cheerfully. "I know it well. Let's go together."

The group began a lengthy detour through Vilna's most obscure alleys and side streets. When they reached their destination, R' Chaim Ozer wished the beaming boy well and began the long trek back home. Through chattering teeth the students questioned their Rebbi's actions. Wouldn't simple directions have sufficed? Why did R' Chaim Ozer act as the boy's personal tour guide?

R' Chaim Ozer explained. "Surely you all noticed the young man's stutter. If he would have had to remember the directions, he would have gotten lost. Then he would have to summon new courage to ask more people for directions, suffering embarrassment each time. Look at the discomfort we spared him by taking him there ourselves! Wasn't that worth a bit of cold?"

"Look at the discomfort we spared him by taking him there ourselves! Wasn't that worth a bit of cold?"

Adapted from Touched by a Story by Rabbi Yechiel Spero

DID YOU KNOW?

- When one has a headache or a toothache, Hashem Himself says, "My head hurts, My tooth hurts!"¹
- When R' Aryeh Levine accompanied his wife to the doctor, he explained his wife's condition by saying, "My wife's foot is hurting us..."²
- Feeling another's pain is one of the characteristics which a person needs in order to grow in their Torah learning.³

¹ *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 6:5

² *A Tzaddik in our Time*, p. 150

³ *Avos* 6:6