



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת בחקתי תשס"ח • Parshas Bechukosai 5768

JOINT ENDEAVORS

Consider the following scenario which commonly occurs at a wedding: In the midst of jubilant *simchas chosson v'kallah*, the *chosson's* friends hoist him up on a chair. As the *chosson* is being bounced up and down by his boisterous buddies, along comes another fellow who tries to get in on the action. Reaching into the fray, he barely manages to touch the chair; yet he continues to maintain his pinky-grip on it, as if his assistance is invaluable to the entire endeavor.

Despite the apparent futility of this fellow's 'assistance,' from *Chazal's* point of view, it appears that this 'helper' is rewarded for his efforts, as much as those who are shouldering the bulk of the burden.

A FIFTH WHEEL

The Mishnah in Makkos 1:7 discusses the ramifications for false witnesses. When a group of witnesses is exposed as false, every witness in the group is held culpable, despite the fact that some of them may have been totally extraneous. The Torah grants full credibility to a pair of witnesses; even if two are pitted against one hundred, the case ends in a stalemate. Therefore, if a group of three, for example, testifies falsely against someone, an argument could be made to acquit the third guy; after all, his participation was superfluous. Nevertheless, according to the Mishnah, he is not spared the penalty. Having cast his lot with the others, he shares their fate.

On the flip side, the same is true of *mitzvah*-doers, as the Mishnah concludes:

וְאִם כֵּן עֲנֵשׁ הַפְּתוּב לְנִטְפָּל לְעוֹבְרֵי עֲבֵרָה כְּעוֹבְרֵי עֲבֵרָה, עַל אַחַת כְּמָה וְכְמָה יִשְׁלַם שְׂכָר לְנִטְפָּל לְעוֹשֵׂי מִצְוָה כְּעוֹשֵׂי מִצְוָה :

"If the Torah punishes someone who is inherently superfluous to a crime, how much the more so will it reward someone who participates--albeit extraneously--in a *mitzvah*."

This notion begs explanation. Why should the Torah reward someone whose participation in a *mitzvah* is unnecessary for its fulfillment?

Perhaps the answer lies in an apparent mathematical discrepancy that arises in this week's *parshah*.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Before delineating the retributions of the *tochachah* (admonition), the Torah promises a wealth of blessing to the *Yidden* if they will follow Hashem's laws. Included is a guarantee of fantastic victories over their enemies:

"Five of you shall give chase to one hundred of them..." (*Vayikra* 26:8).

From this *possuk* we learn that the military prowess of a single Jewish soldier is twenty-fold that of his opponents; hence, five Jews can cause 100 enemy soldiers to flee. Applying this 1:20 ratio, if 100 Jewish soldiers confront their counterparts, they should cause a flight of 2,000 combatants. Yet the above verse concludes:

"...And one hundred of you shall pursue 10,000." (*ibid.*).

It would appear that something doesn't add up.

לד"נ ר' ברוך שלום ב"ר מרדכי ע"ה

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
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Rashi (*ibid.*), quoting Chazal, explains that the *possuk* is imparting to us an important concept: "A situation where a small number of people fulfills the Torah is *incomparable* to a situation where a larger number participates." When it comes to its fulfillment, the Torah places a premium on a large turnout. Apparently, the benefits increase exponentially.

CHAZAK, CHAZAK, V'NISCHAZEK

To illustrate this idea, R' Boruch Sorotzkin (*Habinah V'haberachah, p.240*) provides the example of learning Torah. Suppose someone rises early to learn by himself; truly splendid. Yet, if two people decide to do the same, an entirely new dynamic comes into play. Not only are they learning, but they benefit from each other's presence. If one of them were to slack off in the coming days, it would probably be only a matter of time before the other one follows suit. Consequently, by merely being there, each one provides automatic 'chizzuk' for his friend's learning. In this way, each of them has a share in the other's *mitzvah*, since the presence of one facilitates the learning of the other.

In other words, in a group setting, the merit of the individual increases exponentially, *because of his mere presence*. When one hundred people learn Torah together, this endeavor contains more than just one hundred collective *mitzvos*. Each individual is fulfilling his personal *mitzvah* of *talmud* Torah; additionally, he is 'causing' the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* by the other 99 participants. This means that each individual is fulfilling one hundred *mitzvos* apiece; the group is actually producing 10,000 (100 X 100) *mitzvos*.

Perhaps we can understand the Mishnah in Makkos in this vein as well. The Mishnah had been referring to a scenario where a *mitzvah* was

carried out together with people whose participation was unnecessary; yet they are guaranteed equal reward. In light of R' Sorotzkin's explanation, we can perceive a real benefit to their involvement. True, without them, the *mitzvah* could have been accomplished. Yet, as we have seen, their very presence lends encouragement to the endeavor. In this sense, they are 'aiding and abetting' those whose actions were truly essential for the project. As such, they share a stake in fulfillment of the *mitzvah*.

So the next time you're at a wedding, don't look askance at the guy who's also trying to get a piece of the action. Who knows; without his pinky-sized contribution, the other friends might have petered out and dropped the chair. That wouldn't have made the *chosson* and *kallah* too happy!

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