



Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת a collection of maamarim on
תנא דבי אליהו given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Melave Malka

Melave Malka Parshas Bo 5760

In this week's portion of *Tana D'vei Eliyahu*, (2/11), we learn about the uniqueness of each person.

“Come and see how many species of animals and birds exist in the world, and how many different types of fish? Do any of them have the identical voice, appearance, behavior or taste?....So the *chachamim* taught in the Mishna, to declare the greatness of *Melech Malchei Ha'mlachim Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. For when a person mints coins, they are all imprinted with the same image. Yet, Hakadosh Baruch Hu creates each person in the form of Adam Harishon, yet no person is exactly the same as another.”

While we can certainly realize that the uniqueness of Hashem's myriad creatures is a wondrous miracle, we know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't perform miracles for no reason. We need to understand why Hashem created his world in a way that no animal, or person, is identical to another.

One way to appreciate this phenomenon is to imagine a world in which all people were identical in appearance, character etc. In such a world, no one would be able to help each other. There would be no point in saying anything to your friend, because he thinks exactly as you do, and would say exactly what you plan to tell him. Only because each of us differs from the other in our intellect, understanding, and emotions can we help each other accomplish our tasks. If we couldn't help each other, there would be no world, because *chesed* is the very foundation of creation, עולם חסד יבנה.



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It is only because our opinions and perspectives differ that we can benefit from others advice, as the *pasuk* says in Mishlei (11/14) תְּשׁוּעָה בְּרֹב יוֹעֵץ (Salvation is achieved by getting advice from many people). A person can only fully understand a situation, and choose the correct path, by listening to different and even conflicting opinions.

Chazal (Sotah 17a) say “אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה, זָכוּ - שְׁכִינָה בִּינֵיהֶן, לֹא זָכוּ - אֵשׁ אוֹכֶלֶתָן” (If a man and a woman are worthy, the *Shechinah* is among them, if they are not worthy, they are consumed by fire.)

In the *Pesikta Zutresa* (Breishis), R. Meir explains that the letter *yud* from the word אִישׁ, and the letter *heh* from the word אִשָּׁה form the name of Hashem, representing the presence of the *shechina* among them. However, without those two letters, אִשׁ and אִשָּׁה become אש and אש. Those two fires unite, and then consume the couple.

The Chafetz Chaim zt”l pointed out that the two letters which the husband and wife have in common, אש, represent the fire that divides and consumes them. It is specifically the letters in which they differ, (*yud* in אִישׁ and *heh* in אִשָּׁה), that enable them to form a lasting connection and bring the *Shechinah* into their home.

In other words, it is specifically the difference between husband and wife that enables them to unite and create *shleimus*, whereas similarity leads to division rather than *shleimus*.

The Gerrer Rebbe, the Pnei Menachem zy”a, always wanted to hear different opinions about any situation he had to deal with. Even after he stated his own opinion, he would ask those present to “פרעג מיר אפ”, to find flaws in his reasoning by proposing a different way of understanding the issue.

The incredible variety of Hashem’s creation is the source, not only of the world’s *shleimus*, but of its beauty. If all birds or mammals were identical, there would be no beauty in the world. The inherent beauty of



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Hashem's world plays a very important role in our lives. Hashem wanted us to enjoy his creation, as we say in ברכת האילנות, the blessing on the trees, "He left nothing out of his world, and he created good *briyos* and good trees, in order to provide human beings with pleasure". Without the contrast and variety of Hashem's creations, there would be no beauty, and people would experience no joy in seeing the world.

Rav Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, in his *Hamaspik l'ovdei Hashem*, describes how necessary it is for an *oveid Hashem* to appreciate and enjoy the beautiful variety of Hashem's world.

"The power of sight is needed to observe Hashem's creations such as the heavens and the stars, enabling us to appreciate His greatness and wisdom. We should use our vision to observe the oceans and the creatures that inhabit them, and to view the mountains and valleys, plants and animals, to the extent that everything we see provides our spirit with food for thought, and enables us to understand more and more about our Creator....

The pleasure associated with the sense of sight, is more subtle than that associated with the sense of smell, and more unique to human beings. Therefore, even the most honored, important, learned people, and even *tzadikim* and *chasidim* experience pleasure when they see grassy fields, beautiful gardens, flowing waters, and other such beautiful sights."

Of course, the most important aspect of variety is the uniqueness of every single Jew. A Jew's mission in his lifetime is to fulfill his unique purpose in Hashem's world. No one can "resign" from that assignment, because no one else can perform his mission in his place. Since each of us is unique, and each of us has a unique mission, even the greatest *Tzadik* can't fulfill the mission of the simplest, lowest Jew. This is one of the *peirushim* of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos, (1/4) אם אני לי מי לי, if I don't perform my task, who can do it for me?



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Nonetheless, even though each person's mission is designed specifically for him, he will not be able to successfully complete his *avodah* without opening his eyes and ears, and seeking advice from others. Each of those advisors has unique abilities that can help him complete his tasks in the optimal manner. This is why the Mishnah continues *וכשאני לעצמי מה אני?* and if I am alone, what am I?

Sometimes, even a wise man isn't open to receiving advice and guidance from others because he is so sure that he is on the right path. He has no interest in hearing different opinions. Such a person will never be able to complete his task in the world. On the other hand, when Jews help each other succeed, that itself is the part of the unique role we are each meant to play in Hashem's plan for the world.

We find this concept in our Parsha. The Torah says that during the plague of *choshech*, *לא ראו איש את אחיו* (no man was able to see his brother). The *Toldos Yaakov Yosef* (פרשת יתרו ד"ה ונראה), explains that because of the darkness, no one saw or cared about the other. Therefore, *לא קמו איש מתחתיו* (No one rose up from where he was), meaning that no one was able to progress from *madreaigah* to *madreigah* because a foolish person is a *chacham* in his own eyes, and always feels that his way is right. Such a person doesn't even see his fellow man, because he feels no need to hear their advice or opinions. According to the *Toldos*, that was the essence of *makas choshech*.

There can be other reasons that cause someone "not to see his brother". Sometimes, a person is so involved with himself and his concerns that he doesn't take a moment to think about anyone else. This is really a terrible illness that can consume any positive aspects of someone's material or spiritual life.

It destroys someone's day to day material life, because a person who is self-centered, and doesn't even notice the needs of others, will never take the time, or make the effort to help anyone in their time of need. Naturally, people will keep their distance from him. If he is ever in need,



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no one will lift a finger to help him, because they all know that he has never done anything to help anyone else. He will find himself alone on the battlefield of life, having distanced even his relatives and immediate family.

The same dynamic applies in *ruchniyus*. Some people think only about their own spiritual advancement, and never think about others, even in their own family, whom they could help progress in their *avodas Hashem*. Those people will also suffer the solitude of *makas choshech*. Their brothers won't notice them in their time of need, because they were always so self-centered that they never saw their brothers.

We must internalize the lessons of the *Tana D'vei Eliyahu* and of our *parsha*. First of all, we must commit ourselves to implementing the instruction in *Pirkei Avos*, אל תהי בז לכל אדם, שאין לך אדם שאין לו שעה. (Never look down on any person, for there is no person who doesn't have his hour). This means that we should willingly listen to, and even accept the opinions of others, even if they are different from ours, and even if we feel that the person expressing the opinion is "beneath us".

We must realize that criticism of our statements and actions actually helps us to achieve that which we desire more than anything else in the world, the successful completion of the mission for which we were created. Even if our critics have no constructive intentions, we should learn to accept true statements, no matter who said them. With that approach, we can gain and grow even from the comments of those who seek to denigrate us.

We must also commit ourselves to always "see our brothers". The ability to do so depends on our avoiding the human tendency to be self-centered, and constantly self-involved. We should aspire to benefit others and to help them fulfill their destiny. By doing so, we accomplish our mission in the world, escaping from the dark existence of selfishness, to a life of great light. We will then experience, as *Bnei Yisrael* did during *makas choshech*, "ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבותם", אכי"ר



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