

G-d's Will vs. G-d's Wisdom

Category: Bereishis, Vayetzei

The Secret to G-d's will.

Ohio vs. Michigan

Last week, a football game took place in Columbus, Ohio, between two rival college football teams: Ohio State University and the University of Michigan.

One member of our community attended:

His son-in-law, who is a neurologist, is a graduate of the University of Michigan and an ardent fan of the team. One of his patients gave him two tickets to the game, and he was excited to go, but his wife was very concerned about him wearing a blue Michigan shirt to a game in Columbus where most of the attendees are die-hard Ohio State fans, so she begged her father (a very strong man) to join her husband and protect him from the hotheads who might attack him solely because he is a fan of the opposing team.

After she begged and begged, he finally agreed, and the father-in-law and son-in-law headed off to the game together, one wearing a red Ohio State shirt and the other a blue Michigan shirt. Before they even managed to reach the game, his son-in-law was given a 'warm' reception of curses and obscenities from the opposing team's fans, but soon enough, they arrived at the stadium and sat down in excellent seats, very close to the playing field.

During the first half of the game, Ohio State did very well, and the father-in-law enjoyed himself immensely. He had never participated in a game with as much as a hundred thousand people roaring and cheering for their team. Meanwhile, his son-in-law sat there depressed and miserable. During the second half of the game, there was a complete turnaround: Michigan played well, so it was his son-in-law who was shouting and cheering. He was entirely alone — everyone around him was downcast and upset. Luckily for him, he was sitting in an expensive area where the fans were a bit more civilized, so nobody shouted or cursed at him.

By the end of the game, Michigan defeated Ohio State by a huge margin, and

everyone left heartbroken; it seemed as if the thousands of people were returning from a close friend's funeral. What's more is that they had all bet their money that Ohio State would win, so this was also a considerable financial loss as well. The father-in-law told me that it took him two days to recover from the experience. Meanwhile, his daughter reported that her husband has never been in a better mood; he's pleasant to be around, he's been helping around the house — he is euphoric.

Throughout this past week, all the experts have been trying to explain what caused the unexpected upset, but I can speculate that there was something spiritual at play.

From Cradle to Burial

In the last few weeks, we've read about Yaakov and Esav, rivals from their conception in their mother's womb until the final moments of their lives. When their mother Rivkah was pregnant, the Torah says, "the children struggled within her." Confused about her experience, she went to seek out an explanation in the House of Study of Shem, the son of Noach. He said to her that two nations were in her womb; they would always fight with each other, and when one would rise, the other would fall —and this was already playing out in her womb.

This rivalry continues throughout their lives; Esav sold his birthright to Yaakov and Yaakov slyly took Esav's blessings. It lasted all the way to their burial; Rashi says that when they came to bury Yaakov in the cave of Machpelah, Esau suddenly emerged from nowhere and claimed that the plot belonged to him, despite the fact that he had sold his firstborn rights (Vayechi 49:21, Sota 13a). In fact, Rashi says, Yaakov had taken all the riches he had amassed in the house of Laban and given it to Esav as payment for the burial plot. Nonetheless, it was a source of conflict.

The question arises: what was Yaakov's secret that allowed him to always have the upper hand in his rivalry with Esav?

"Katonti" I am small!

One unique element of his character is his humility. At the beginning of our

parsha, when he left his father's house in Be'er Sheva and fled to Charan, he spent the night in Beit E-L. There, he dreamed of the ladder where G-d's angels ascended and descended, and had a vision where G-d promised that "I will be with you, and I will guard you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you" (Vayetze 28:15).

This is the best insurance policy a person can ever hope for. And yet, in Parshat Vayishlach, when we read about Yaakov's return from Charan accompanied by his large family and immense wealth, we are told that he was very worried about meeting Esav, and he turned to G-d and said, "I am unworthy of all your kindness." He did not ask G-d to keep his promise, and he didn't mention it at all. On the contrary, he felt that he deserved nothing, so he simply turned to G-d and asked for mercy. This is clearly a very humble man.

This is also expressed in his name: Yaakov comes from the work Ekev, which means heel. His name symbolizes the lowest part of the human body. At the end of his life, G-d gave him the name Yisrael which includes the word "head," but he always felt small and humble. And this is the secret — a humble person is always successful!

Why is it so?

The Desired Host

The Apta Rav, a famous Chassidic rebbe who lived 200 years ago, once arrived in a certain city. Two of the city's wealthiest individuals invited him to stay in their homes; one of them was scrupulously Torah observant but was also known to be arrogant, while the other was rumored to be involved in all sorts of unsavory matters but was also known to be humble.

The Rebbe chose to stay with the unsavory character. When his disciples asked him why he chose to do so, he answered as follows:

According to the Talmud, G-d says of an arrogant person, "He and I cannot dwell together in the world" (Sota 5a). Arrogance pushes away the Divine; the person is so full of himself that he leaves no room for anyone else, not even for G-d himself.

"If G-d has nothing to look for there," said the Apta Rav, "I have nothing there

either. The other person, on the other hand, is humble. It is true that he may be a sinner, but G-d says about sinners, 'He dwells with them in their impurity' (Vayikra 16:16). If the Almighty is happy to reside with him, I am happy to do so as well. If the Almighty is with you, it is a sure recipe for success."

Chassidism teaches us that everything in the spiritual realms is reflected in our physical world. The secret to a happy marriage, for example, is a little humility. This is also true in any relationship: the less you feel you deserve, the easier it will be for you to get along with others.

This is also the secret to longevity. I've read many interviews with people who lived very long lives, and the common denominator — especially among people who passed the age of one hundred — was that they didn't live with high expectations. They were always satisfied with what they had; they didn't feel that the world owed them anything, and they were therefore always happy and content.

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That fact that humility is a recipe for success is also evident in the story of Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, two famous rival Yeshivahs in the Second Temple period. They had two different methods of studying Torah; Beit Shammai were usually stricter, and Beit Hillel were usually more lenient. The Gemara testifies that "Beit Shammai were sharper than Beit Hillel in their wisdom" (Yevamot 14a), but nevertheless, the Halacha follows Beit Hillel. Why? Because, the Gemara says, "they were easygoing and humble." They weren't obstinate or arrogant about their opinions. When they taught Torah, they would also teach Beit Shammai's opinions, and would even present Beit Shammai's opinions before their own (Eruvin 12b).

Why, indeed, does the Halacha follow Beit Hillel if Beit Shammai had a better understanding of the Torah?

Perhaps it depends on whether they were studying G-d's *wisdom* or G-d's *will*: The Torah is the wisdom of the Almighty; the wiser and more educated one is, the better he will understand the Torah. However, Halacha is the will of the Almighty; it tells us how G-d wants us to behave in practice. This is something else: to know what G-d wants, we need someone who can connect with Him. When one is

humble and has no ego, there is a chance that he will be able to rise above himself and connect with G-d. A tzaddik is not about being smart; it is about possessing a spiritual intuition where he can discern what G-d truly wants.

There are instances when doctors are unable to diagnose a person's disease, and so he goes from doctor to doctor, shlepping to the greatest doctors in the world, to no avail, and suddenly, a doctor who is not famous and not a genius manages to diagnose his illness and treat it.

Why does he succeed where the greatest minds fail? Because they come with preconceived conclusions; they are sure they have already seen everything, and think they immediately know what the patient is suffering from. The ordinary doctor, on the other hand, has no preconceived notions. He listens to the patient, hears the whole story, connects to his pain and precisely because of that, is often able to overcome the problem. Often, the spiritual and mental connection is more important than all the knowledge in the world.

The same is true when we try to discern the will of G-d. Obviously, we need to investigate what the Torah says on any given topic, but to give a halachic ruling, we need something more. We need connection. This is the lesson for each of us: if we will try to be just a little bit humble, we will be able to come a little bit closer to fulfilling the will of G-d.

(Based on Jewish Insights, Vayishlach. 19 Kislev 5715, Toras Menachem vol. 13 pg. 141).