

Psychological Space

Category: Bamidbar, Korach

People these days seem to think that our main focus should be on our own self-growth. What does the Torah have to say on the topic?

Accepting Yourself

“Psychological Space” is a word that I’ve been hearing a lot lately; it means, apparently, that a person needs to learn to not be ashamed of their flaws and embrace who they are, and ultimately, that approach will also give them the ability to accept others as well.

The Rebbe indeed always emphasized the importance of refraining from speaking ill of oneself. Being overly self-critical means that one is biased and lacks the ability to judge himself fairly. In truth, a person should listen to others who can provide an honest evaluation of their character and help bring out their positive qualities. (See Igros Kodesh, Vol. 19, Letter 7359: “As the famous saying of the [Previous] Rebbe goes, ‘Just as one needs to know their own shortcomings, one must know their own virtues.’”)

However, Judaism ultimately focuses far more on creating a “psychological space” for others — to learn to accept others and to even prioritize them over ourselves.

One interesting example of this approach is expressed in the unique distinction in the Torah’s references to the cherubim.

Who Goes First?

The cherubim were two golden “angels,” with childlike faces, fashioned atop the Ark of the Covenant. When G-d gave the instructions for their creation in the Torah portion of Terumah, He said that He would speak to Moses from that exact point: “I will speak with you from upon the cover, from between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant” (Terumah 25:22).

These cherubim are also mentioned at the end of the Torah portion of Naso: “And

when Moses came to the Tent of Meeting... he would hear the voice speaking to him from above the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, from between the cherubim" (Naso 7:89).

Interestingly, the first passage mentions the cherubim before the Ark, while the second reverses the order. Why the difference?

The Rebbe once cited the Zohar's explanation: The cherubim — with their childlike faces — represent the Jewish people, since they are faces of children, while the Ark, which contains the two tablets fashioned by G-d, represents the Divine presence. The first passage speaks from G-d's perspective ("I will speak..."), so the Jewish people are prioritized, while the second passage speaks from the perspective of Moses ("And when Moses... would hear"), so it prioritizes the Divine presence.

In the words of the Zohar, " G-d prioritizes the honor of the Jewish people over His own, and Moses did the reverse — he prioritized the honor of G-d over our own" (Zohar v. 3 p. 375. Shelach 5735, *Toras Menachem* vol. 80 pg. 355). In other words, Judaism teaches us that we need to prioritize the other over ourselves.

The Zohar continues to point out that the same sequence appears in the story of the Exodus:

When G-d commands Moses to have blood dabbed on the doorposts, it says, "put it on the two sides of the doorposts and on the lintel (the upper section of the doorpost)" (Shemos 12:7), but when Moses speaks to the people, he says, "Put it on the lintel and on the two sides of the doorposts."

Commentaries explain that the lintel represents G-d, and the two doorposts represent Moses and Aaron (See *Moshav Zkeinim*). Therefore, G-d prioritizes the doorposts while Moses prioritizes the lintel. We see the same distinction here; each side seeks to prioritize the other.

The Proposed School Merger

The following story reflects this message:

In the 1960s, the community leaders of São Paulo, Brazil, suggested to bring all the Jewish schools in the city into one building and under one administration, the

simple and practical reason being that the schools did not have enough students and faced closure for lack of funds; by merging the schools, they could save a significant amount of expenses.

The administrator of one of the schools was the Rebbe's Shliach in São Paulo. He informed the school leaders that he needed to consult with the Rebbe before agreeing to the merger; if the Rebbe would advise against it, he would not be able to cooperate, and would instead resign.

The Rebbe's response wasn't long in coming: the Rebbe opposed the idea.

The shliach conveyed the Rebbe's answer to the community leaders and informed them that he was prepared to resign. But they weren't ready to accept his resignation; recognizing his success with the children, they wanted him to continue leading the school, so the merger didn't end up happening. However, the community leaders expressed their dismay with the Rebbe's directive.

Several months later, the shliach visited 770 and had a private audience with the Rebbe. In the course of the meeting, he asked for an explanation. "As a Chassid, I have no questions, and I followed the Rebbe's instructions. But what should I tell the community leaders who are not yet Chassidim?"

"Often," the Rebbe explained, "parents are dissatisfied with their child's school, and at the end of the year, they withdraw the child and transfer them to a school that suits them better. Currently, if a Jew in São Paulo decides to withdraw their child from one Jewish school, they will send them to another Jewish school. However, if all the Jewish schools were to merge and operate under one administration, what would a mother do if she had a disagreement with the principal? If there are no alternative Jewish schools, she will send her child to a public school. There must be a variety of Jewish schools available in the city to prevent such a possibility." (Rabbi Moshe Grylak, Mishpacha Magazine).

This is a perfect example of how to prioritize others over oneself. True, there may be financial struggles for the schools, but it is all worth it in order not to lose even one Jewish child.

What Was Korach's Problem

Korach is a very popular Torah portion. It's an interesting story, and it would make for a good movie. What's the story on one foot?

Korach thought only about himself. He wanted to be the leader, and for that, he was willing to fight Moses and Aaron and ruin everything they had achieved — as long as he would be in charge.

But Judaism teaches us that the definition of leadership is to prioritize others over ourselves. Our first priority — taking an example from the Almighty — is the cherubim, the little children, to ensure that Jewish children receive a Jewish education. And precisely from there — from between the two cherubim — we will hear the voice of G-d emanate.