

Shoftim 5779

BS"D Parashat Shoftim 5779

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Are you Effecting Change for Positive or Negative Outcome?

Devarim 16:19

לֹא-תִפְּשֹׁט דִּינִי וְלֹא-תִשָּׂא פָנֶיךָ לְדָן. וְלֹא-תִקַּח שֹׁחַב לְדָן. כִּי-שֹׁחַב בְּלִמְעַיִן עֵינַיִם וְתִטְוֶה דְבַר צְדִיק.

Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.

One need not make a big splash in order to effect change. Subtle movements can often bring about great changes for happy times or for chaotic results, just as the flutter of a butterfly's wings at a certain time and a certain place can create devastation in the opposite hemisphere.

A certain smile; the dropping of the eyes; a twitch of the nose; the clearing of one's throat – any one of these when done at an appropriate or inappropriate time can wreck havoc or bring salvation.

The Gemara (Sota 46b) relates that the tribe of Yosef (Efrayim and Menashe) laid siege to the town of Bet El but were unable

to find the entrance to the city. When a local man appeared the Soldiers asked him where the entrance was. He disclosed it and was sumptuously rewarded by HaShem for all time.

The rabbis debated what this goy did to show them the town's entrance. Chizkaya said he twitched his mouth in the direction of the entrance, and Rabbi Yochanan said he pointed his finger at the place.

No long lectures or complex instruction – just subtle moves of the lips or a finger and the man earned an undescribable reward.

Chazal were very sensitive to the subtleties of human behavior. Especially when done to influence men of great learning or righteous Jews who are often not aware or prepared for the deceitful ways of the world.

The Gemara (Ketubot 105b) records instances where rabbis invalidated themselves from serving in judgement because of subtle acts on the part of one of the litigants which could be construed as bribery.

The great Amora Shmuel was helped across a river by someone who later came to his court, and Shmuel invalidated himself. The same self introspection was conducted by Amaymar, Mar Ukva, R. Yishmael son of R. Yosi and many other rabbis-judges who disqualified themselves for fear that their impartiality had been compromised even though the acts which performed for their benefit were seemingly inconsequential.

From here we learn how careful a religious leader who has influence over a community, yeshiva or bet kneset must be before he makes his decisions or recommendations, as the pasuk says 'blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.'

The reality of our generation is so clear. The galut is wasting away with intermarriage over 70% nationwide in the USA

and worse in other places, while the holy land of Eretz Yisrael is being built bigger and better every day, with over half the world's Jews already here.

A rational, objective, connected Jew with an eye for history can only stand in befuddlement at religious leaders in the galut who never mention the holy land of Israel in their sermons, and some who even attempt to persuade people to remain in the cesspool of the galut.

What happens to clever, erudite individuals to blind their eyes to the light of HaShem shining more bright than ever in the last 2000 years of our history?

Lets take the parasha at its most literary sense. Wise and righteous people, even those who attained the status of judge can be compromised by their surroundings.

When a rabbi looks out at his congregation on Shabbat morning after turning away the request of a speaker who wishes to bring the message of aliya to the congregation, is he ideologically opposed to establishing a Jewish state before the Mashiach comes, or is he afraid to cut down the happy limb he is sitting on? And I am referring to more than one specific incident.

Is the Chassidic rabbi who urges his young chassidim not to study in Eretz Yisrael really afraid that the pull of Jewish nationalism will drag them to volunteer for the most dangerous units of Tzahal, or is he worried that his "clientele" might dwindle?

How pleasant it is to be honored and admired by congregants who stand up when the rabbi enters; or the thoughts of the rabbi or rosh yeshiva while sitting on the elevated bima looking out at a packed shul or yeshiva, when the alternative is to be in Israel where the rabbi's erudition would be lacking when compared to the standards required here for rabbis.

How can an innocent congregant know what is in the heart of his religious mentor?

It is a given that the lifestyle of a rav should be modest, even touching on the humble. To be the top stone on a pyramid is a very lonely task; and the top stone on the pyramid of a Jewish community should be a humbling, non-ostentatious lifestyle.

If the goal of a galut rabbi is to aggrandize his community with a bigger more elaborate synagogue, mikva, gym, wedding hall, etc., maintaining its physical status quo rather than devoting his energies to encourage his congregants to return home – the entire congregation is prolonging the galut and they have a problem which might soon turn into a calamity.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5779/2019 Nachman Kahana