

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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PARSHAS KI SAVO

Tail Wagging the Dog?

And Hashem shall make you the head and not the tail; and you shall be above only, and you shall not be beneath... (28:13)

This week's *parsha* discusses the reward for following the Torah or God forbid the punishment for straying. One of the rewards for following the Torah is the promise that Hashem will make us into "the head and not the tail" – leaders and not followers.

Ramban (ad loc) is bothered by the seemingly unnecessary words "and not the tail." The Torah promises that we would become heads; so it would seem obvious that we would not be the tail. Why then is it necessary to explicitly exclude being the tail?

Ramban answers that often a head is also a tail. How so? A nation can be ranked very highly, making them a "head" over those nations. But if there are nations that are ranked above them, then that nation is both a head and a tail: They are a head to the nations below and a tail to the nations above. Ramban explains that this *possuk* promises us that if Bnei Yisroel follows the Torah, then we will be ranked at the absolute top, only a head and not a tail to any other nation in the world.

Perhaps we can utilize Ramban's insight in a slightly different application. In the case of leadership, very often people are both the head and the tail. How? There are different types of leaders; a proper leader is one who has a vision for his agenda and implements it. In other words, he sees the proper path, even if it is unpopular, and courageously directs his followers down that path. That is a true leader – the head of his constituency.

Unfortunately, most of the leaders of our generation are of the other type - both a head and a tail. This is because they don't have a vision of what should be done, they merely observe the prevailing sentiment of popular opinion and draw their agenda based on the constituency's clamoring. Obviously, when a leader does that "his" agenda always ends up following the lowest common denominator: "On what can we all agree?"

In this situation, a head is really a tail because his leadership isn't driven by him; it is driven by those who are supposed to be following his lead – the tail. This is a particularly dangerous situation as the nation's agenda and morality will always be driven by the lowest common denominator. Truth and moral values have no place in such a society. Unfortunately, this is our current global situation. Political correctness is obscuring the reality of many situations because no one will stand up and state the truth. Whether it is a religion gone rogue or an ethnicity that lays the blame of its ills at the feet of others without taking real responsibility, virtually no leader will take a stand deemed to be unpopular.

This *parsha* is telling us that if we follow the Torah we will be true leaders: We will have a real moral compass and a healthy vision for ourselves and the world. But this can only be accomplished if we have an agenda driven by the Torah, and not by the tail of society. When we achieve that we will become the head and not the tail.



Did You Know...

This week's *parsha* discusses the two mountains, *Har Grizim* and *Har Eival*, on which we received the blessings and curses. Shimon, Levi, Yehudah, Yissachar, Yosef, and Benyamin stood on *Har Grizim* and received the *brachos*, while Reuvain, Gad, Asher, Zevulun, Dan, and Naphtali received the *klallos* on *Har Eival*.

But where did this historic event take place? Do we know which mountains these are today? Here are some interesting facts about these mountains:

1. Both of the mountains are still called by their names.
2. They are on either side of what was Shechem, now called Nablus, a city in the northern West Bank, around 30 miles from Jerusalem.
3. *Har Grizim* rises to 2,890 feet above sea level, while *Har Eival's* height is 3,080 feet.
4. In Samaritan tradition, *Har Gerizim* is held to be the highest, oldest, and most central mountain in the world, and continues to be the center of their religion. A Samaritan village (*Kiryat Luza*) and an Israeli settlement (*Har Bracha*) are on the mountain ridge.

(continued on reverse)

Don't Worry, Be Happy

All these curses will come upon you and overtake you [...] because you did not serve Hashem, your God, with joy and a good heart, even though you had an abundance of everything (28:45-47).

This week's *parsha* contains explicit detail of both the rewards for following Hashem's word and the calamitous repercussions for going against it. The Torah commits over fifty verses to detail the depths to which we will fall and the nearly unimaginable suffering we will endure as a result of this (e.g. financial and societal ruin, horrible diseases, starvation to the point of cannibalism of one's own children – need we go into further detail?).

The Torah then makes a remarkable statement – why did all these bad things befall the Jewish people? *"Because you did not serve Hashem, your God, with simcha – joy"* (28:45). This is actually quite astounding. Where in the Torah are we commanded to serve Hashem with joy? What exactly is this failure – not serving with joy – that it would lead to such horrible consequences?

It is well known that Hashem created the world in order to bestow good upon mankind. But in order for man to be able to accept this good and appreciate it, Hashem enacted a system of earning it, instead of just gifting the good. Why? Because receiving good without earning it

is like receiving charity; the resulting effect of the good is severely diminished.

In other words, no one likes the feeling of owing. Shlomo Hamelech says it very clearly: *"A borrower is a servant to the lender"* (*Mishlei* 22:7). The feeling of being in debt to someone is painful to the point of almost feeling that your very identity is lost. A common reaction to receiving a kindness from someone is analyzing what the benefactor has to gain by his action. This is done in order to lessen the feeling of obligation to them.

This is also why when asked how they're doing most people will respond "okay" or "could be worse." You will very seldom hear someone answer "GREAT!" or "Never better!" People respond as such because it is instinctively understood that if everything is great then we must owe someone a deep debt of gratitude and appreciation. Nobody likes the feeling of owing; therefore people will focus on what's negative instead of the overabundance of good in their lives. If one's life is miserable or subpar, then he doesn't owe anything to anyone.

The real sin of Adam Harishon was denying the good that Hashem gave him –

he blamed his sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge on the woman that Hashem gave him (*Talmud Bavli - Avodah Zara* 5b and Rashi ad loc). In essence, he denied the good that Hashem bestowed him, thereby undermining the whole purpose of creation.

This is why not serving Hashem from *simcha* is such a critical failing. In fact, the verse says this explicitly: "you had an abundance of everything" – yet you weren't happy. This describes a lack of appreciation for everything Hashem created; that the very foundation of the world – the bestowal of good – was being rejected in order to avoid a feeling of obligation to Hashem.

In comparison, it is similar to a person not appreciating his good health until he no longer has it. Therefore, the only way for Hashem to correct this issue is by going to the opposite extreme; by causing such pain that we realize our lack of appreciation for when we don't have pain, Hashem shows us how to internalize His amazing kindness. Thus, we learn that we may prevent suffering by appreciating, in the first place, all the amazing things that we have already.

Did You Know...

- Over the years, *Har Gerizim* has had several interesting buildings on it, including a Samaritan temple, a church, a castle (to protect the church), and in Roman times a temple for their god Jupiter.
- Like many other sites in the region, there was a large stone heap found

on *Har Eival*. After an extensive archaeological investigation, they found a large walled structure, seemingly built directly into the bedrock without a doorway or floor, and it had been infilled by layers of stone, ash, and earth. On the southwest were found two paved areas split apart by a wide wall higher at one end than the other and with a surrounding oval wall. Burnt

bones were found at the site, and after analysis were discovered to come from oxen and goats. Interestingly, the archeologist who uncovered these remains believe them to be the *mizbe'ach* made by Yehoshua upon entering land of Israel.



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