



GROWTH

At The

SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT ACHAREI — KEDOSHIM

Diminishing the Obstacles

In this week's Parsha, the Torah instructs (Lev. 19:4): "Do not turn to the *elilim* / אֱלִילִים," which are certain idols that people would worship in ancient times. Rashi comments that the word "אֱלִילִים" is related to the word "א/ל" – which means "not" – because an idol is completely insignificant and regarded as a non-entity.

R' Yaakov Galinsky raised an interesting point. Why does the Torah present this prohibition in such a manner, telling us, "Don't follow the empty things"? Would this imply that if there indeed would be any substance to them, then it would be permitted? Obviously such isn't the case, so what is the Torah's wording aiming at?

To explain, let us analyze another episode in the Torah. Back in Parshat Vayetze, after Yaakov had been told by G-d to depart from Lavan, the Torah narrates a subsequent lengthy conversation between Yaakov and his wives. Yaakov tells them how Lavan's attitude has changed, describing how Lavan would incessantly attempt to cheat him (in great length and detail), and that Hashem had told him in a dream to return to his native land. Rachel and Leah reassured him that they were on the same page, agreeing that they, too, were seen as strangers in their father's eyes.

R' Yisrael Salanter once asked: what is the point of this conversation? G-d had given Yaakov clear instructions; why didn't he just declare to his household, "G-d said we must leave" and begin packing? What compelled the Torah to record Yaakov relaying this back-story, one that spans an entire 9 verses?

R' Salanter answers that the Torah is communicating a crucial point for life: when G-d gives you a mitzvah, make it as practical, enjoyable, and easy as you can. Get rid of the challenges and diminish any curveball that the *Satan* might throw your way. Doing so allows you to carry out Hashem's will in an ideal manner – with real joy and true *bitachon* that Hashem only wants what is best for you.

Had Yaakov just announced to his family that they all had to start packing their bags, it may have been very difficult for them, especially when they would face setbacks in the road. Yaakov wanted to first have a family discussion, as lengthy and repetitive as it needed to be, to infuse the *emuna* they would need in order to get through the journey. Indeed, there were challenges that came up as they fled from Lavan, but Yaakov and his family didn't start questioning G-d. They knew it was just a test, and G-d was orchestrating everything for the best.

With this concept, R' Galinsky shed light upon our context, as well. The Torah isn't making implications on the permissibility of idol worship based on its substantiality; it's trying to diminish any challenge or *nisayon* one faces in this arena. The Torah calls it "*elilim*" to reassure that such things may disguise themselves as exciting and powerful, but are in essence just foolishness and nothingness.

The world may make it seem that happiness can only come from indulgence in external stimuli, addictive things that come and go. We must never lose sight of the fact that the source of true content and bliss is authentic connection with the Creator, the source of our existence and origin of our soul.

(Based on a d'var Torah shared by R' Rephael Briller)

Oh Brother

Parshat Acharei Mot begins with G-d telling Moshe, following the demise of Aharon's sons: "Tell your brother Aharon that he is not to come at will into the Holy behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die; for I appear in the cloud over the cover" (Lev. 16:2).

Many commentators take note of what appears as a minor superfluity in describing Aharon; would Moshe not have known whom God was referring to had He not specified to tell "*your brother Aharon*"?

The Noam Elimelech gave a profound answer. The Torah is providing a lesson in how to give rebuke to one another. This verse is the source of the halacha that one cannot rebuke someone who will not accept it; to reproach someone, he must be "*your brother*."

This has incredible practical significance. Many times, we find ourselves in situations where we see someone struggling in a certain area, or doing something that could be done somewhat better – and we want to correct them. Maybe we run into a person with deep misconceptions, or lacking direction in life – and we feel compelled to advise them. Maybe it's a child who needs discipline or a friend who needs a serious conversation. Before we utter a word, we need to perform an inner reflection and ask ourselves: *am I speaking from a place of ego, or a place of genuine, selfless love?* Only when the individual is viewed as a fellow brother and the feeling is genuine and mutual can such words make a positive and lasting impact.

There's a famous line attributed to Theodore Roosevelt, and although the exact origin behind it is unclear, it sums everything perfectly: *Nobody cares about how much you know, until they know how much you care.*