

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

Rav Elazar HaKapar said "Jealousy, lust and the pursuit of honor remove a person from the world" (Avot 4:28).

Parshat B'reishit provided us with a vivid picture of the realization of this educational contention (at least in regards to the first two of these negative character traits: jealousy and lust). After all, wasn't unbridled jealousy the root cause of the first homicide in human history - Kayin's killing of his brother Hevel? Kayin had witnessed how his younger brother's offering was accepted while his own was not. As we can see from G-d's remarks, this left Kayin deeply despondent: "Why has your face fallen?", G-d asks, "If you can improve on your offerings next time you can atone" - although a fit of jealousy can seem overpowering, G-d reminds us that we have the ability within us to overcome such negative emotions - to rule over our Yetzer Hara!

The negative effects of the second trait - lust - are manifest in Chava's tragic inability to refrain from partaking from Etz Hada'at, the tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat" (B'reishit 3:6). This tree was a real sight to behold - a Ta'ava La'einayim, delight to the eyes, and it awakened her senses. Chava was attracted to the tree, she lusted for its fruit. This momentary lapse of moral

judgement was destined to shape the future course of humanity as we were banished from the Garden of Eden.

These two episodes from Parshat B'reishit, are joined by a third formative episode found in this week's Parsha. The Torah tells us of the city, and the tower, of Babel: "And they said: 'Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name (Na'aseh Lanu Sheim), lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (B'reishit 11:4). This pasuk indicates that the main motivation behind this grandiose project was the intention to establish their own reputation, and to cement their name for posterity. They wanted to be seen and to be noticed by all - by those nearby as well as by those far away. This is a perfect example of how the pursuit of honor (kavod) directly led to their downfall, dispersion, and fragmentization.

In order to achieve their goal they all agreed to be concentrated in one place, consolidating their efforts and closing their ranks, disallowing any deviation from the accepted mode of thinking (Netziv 11:1)

As the S'forno writes that the purpose of building the city and tower was to crown Nimrod as the ruler of all mankind. This kind of totalitarian regime would have surely plastered the walls with the visage and sayings of their supreme leader. Once Nimrod would be considered to be the god of gods, and all would come to pay him homage at this site, their joint power would be multiplied. Thus, the S'forno says that the word "Sheim" is a code word for 'idolatry' as they planned to put a monument or idol at the top of the tower. In order to prevent the world from sliding towards this terrible form of

Avoda Zara, G-d dispersed the people dismantling this destructive society. A multitude of different languages would now be spoken, as opposed to the one language previously known to all: "Therefore was the name of it called Babel because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth and from there did the Lord scatter (disperse) them abroad upon the face of the earth" (B'reishit 11:10). This generation was indeed remembered - infamously - as the "Dor HaP'laga", the generation of fragmentation and dispersion.

In Israel today, one can hear a BABEL of languages, as Jews coming together from all corners of the world, bring their mother tongue and culture here with them. Spending years working in Absorption Centers throughout the Land, I remember hearing a plethora of languages spoken, while the directors would invariably try to convince the Olim to prioritize spending time in Hebrew Ulpan, so that all Olim could share a common language. At the same time, however, we have never demanded that all think alike, or dedicate their abilities to one unified goal. Celebrating diversification, Israel has successfully harnessed all the know-how, and the diverse skill-sets Olim have brought with them. As the Jerusalem Talmud says, the Mashiach will arrive upon a multi-colored donkey - representing the ingathering of the manifold human assets found around the world.

Encouraging individual creativity and originality we have become known as the 'Start-up Nation' - a contemporary world leader in fields as far afield as cyber security, agriculture and health research.

We have not tried to construct a

modern-day tower reaching to the Heavens, from which to 'wage war with the Almighty', but rather have hoped to become an Ohr LaGoyim - shining a bright light of blessing upon the nations of the world.

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Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness, Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh