

Shalom Bayis Newsletter Issue 38

Better than 20/20 Vision PART 2

“Behold, Hashem is passing by and a great and mighty wind that dismantles mountains and demolishes boulders passes before Hashem; not in the wind is Hashem.



“And after the wind, an earthquake; not in the earthquake is Hashem.

“And after the earthquake, a fire; not in the fire is Hashem.

“And after the fire, a thin sound of silence.”

It is there, in that thin sound of silence, Chazal tell us, that Hashem is to be found.

Whereas the absolute black-and-white truth of *middas ha'din* furiously casts indictment with a vociferous, ear-shattering fire and brimstone, *middas ha'rachamim* is the subtle sound of silence.

It is the sound of quiet reflection that allows for nuance, qualifying consideration, and alternative perspective.

Eliyahu ha'navi was being taught that his fire and brimstone approach is not the right way. Not that it is objectively wrong. Of course, very few figures throughout history could claim to grasping, living, and **being** the absolute clarity of truth that Eliyahu ha'navi was.

Yet, he was being told: it is not in the cutting clarity of absolute nuance *middas ha'din* that Hashem is to be found in this world.

Had we remained with the *luchos rishonos*, tell us Chazal and the *mefarshim*, grasping and retaining Torah knowledge and wisdom

would have been without any confusion or difficulty. The accessibility, clarity, and fastidious fusion of Torah knowledge would have been absolute.

Yet, the message that the Torah concludes with is recapping those seminal words that Hashem told Moshe:

“*Yasher koach* that you broke the *luchos!*”

The *luchos shniyos* introduced confusion and difficulty. To arrive at Torah truth now first requires wading through thick darkness. A complex process of struggling and erring. As Chazal put it: “Words of Torah are as difficult to acquire as gold.”

And even once acquired, Chazal add, “they are as easy to lose as it is to break a crystal vessel.”

I believe this confusion and darkness is not a punishment. It is not a bug. It is a feature. It is the power of nuance: the quiet, reflective deliberation of *middas ha'rachamim*.

Just as Hashem determined that the world as a whole simply cannot exist solely on the basis of *middas ha'din* – absolute, black-and-white, wholly unambiguous truth – so too did Hashem determine that the Jewish People will not be able to accept and uphold the Torah without the tempering force of *middas ha'rachamim*.

Yasher koach, Moshe, that you broke the *luchos rishonos*.

For in that absolute realm of cutting clarity, it was indeed the *kallah* who committed adultery. Even if she did not physically do the dastardly deed, she tolerated it. She watched it happen. Said nothing. Perhaps even enjoyed it from the side...

And in the world of *middas ha'din*, of absolute unadulterated no-nuance truth, tolerating the evil is being party to the evil.

Only through the introduction of the *yud-gimmel middos ha'rachamim* and the infinite shades of gray that they bring into the world is it possible to perceive reality differently.

In the world of the *luchos shniyos* – confusion, nuance, and reflective deliberation – it is **not** the *kallah* who committed adultery, it is only her maidservants.

Yes, she tolerated it, perhaps even enjoyed watching it. And for that there must be serious repercussions; as truth and *middas ha'din* are not dissolved by *middas ha'rachamim*, rather tempered by it.

Yes, there will be consequences, but no longer is the *kallah* identified as the adulteress.

In this realm of *luchos shniyos* which exist intrinsically coupled with the *yud-gimmel middos ha'rachamim*, Bnei Yisrael are now no longer held **fully** accountable for the actions of the *eirev rav*. Now, and only now, can the *chassan* choose to continue living with his *kallah*.

Marital contracts are a serious business.

On both husband and wife fall heavy burdens of obligations, both material and moral. Halacha identifies very clear, even rigid rules that govern the behavioral, verbal, and emotional demands by which each party is bound.

Of course, those burdens come with privileges.

The husband has his particular set of weighty duties as well as those things that his wife is obliged to do and be for him; and the wife has her particular set of equally weighty duties as well as those things that her husband is obliged to do and be for her.

It is a fully-binding legal contract. No ifs ands or buts about it.

But...

If a couple wants to have a successful marriage, it would be infinitely helpful if they take note of how Hashem dealt with his own marriage contract with Bnei Yisrael.

He commended destruction of the original draft and its striking 20/20 vision that leaves no room for the mitigating considerations. No room for quiet reflection. No room for nuanced perspective. In its stead, Hashem introduced an updated draft that allows for shades of gray. Far blurrier than the first draft, but ultimately, one that works much better: the subtle sound of silence.

It is precisely in that subtle sound of silence that they will discover Hashem resting his presence in and blessing their marriage forever.

Inevitably, there will be unkind words. Behaviors that do not convey respect, to say the least. There will be fractious friction that inherently should have no place in the Jewish marital contract.

But if the parties to that contract insist on an unwavering, entirely uncompromising fidelity to the straightforward, clear reading of the lines, they may discover that their relationship will simply not be able to withstand that degree of scrutiny and demand.

To succeed in marriage, room must be made for *middas ha'rachamim*. Not just making room, but embracing *middas ha'rachamim* as the guiding force of the relationship. The ability to not react with fire, agitation, and condemnation; and, instead with quiet reflection, contemplation, understanding, empathy, and a desire to see the other in a more positive light.

Yes, this introduces plenty of blurriness into the relationship; but, sometimes, it is precisely the inability to have 20/20 vision that allows us to see most clearly.

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Shalom Bayis, Chinuch, & Personal Safety

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