

A DRASHA FOR PARSHAS SHOFTIM

The Danger of “Maod”

when more becomes too much

וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא יִרְבֶּה לוֹ מְאֹד

(Devarim 17:17)

“He shall not accumulate excessive silver and gold.”

In Parshas Shoftim the Torah presents three restrictions placed on a Jewish king: he may not acquire too many horses, too many wives, or too much wealth. Yet when we examine the pesukim closely, the Torah explains the reason behind the first two prohibitions — but not the third.

The king may not acquire too many horses, the Torah tells us, because:

וְלֹא יָשִׁיב אֶת הָעָם מִצִּיּוֹן

“He may end up sending the Jewish people back to Egypt.”

And he may not marry too many wives, because:

כִּי יִסּוּר לְבָבוֹ

“They may cause his heart to stray” — distracting him from his responsibilities as leader of Klal Yisrael.

But when it comes to wealth, the Torah simply says he may not accumulate an excessive amount of silver and gold — with no explanation given. So why the difference?

I once came across a powerful idea: the answer lies in the word *maod*. The word means “very,” as in *tov maod*, “very good.” It represents something extreme — something that goes way beyond moderation. And that, itself, is the danger. No further reason is needed, because the excess is the problem.

When a person becomes consumed by an endless pursuit of wealth — when everything in life revolves around money, when he is constantly thinking about the next deal, the next investment, the next million — there is no longer time or tranquility left for Avodas Hashem. The Torah is warning the king: don't allow your pursuit of wealth to become *maod*, to become extreme and obsessive.

Shlomo HaMelech says in Koheles:

אִהָּב כֶּסֶף לֹא יִשְׂבַּע כֶּסֶף

“Whoever loves money will never be satisfied with money.”

Why not? Because — *yesh lo manah, rotzeh masayim* — a person has one hundred and wants two hundred. Once he has two hundred, he wants four hundred. Rarely does a person say, “I have enough, I’ll close my business and go back to kollel.” When someone earns his first \$100,000, he begins dreaming of his first million. Once he reaches a million, the goal becomes \$10 million. And once he reaches \$10 million, there is always a higher number. The more a person has, the more he wants.

***“True wealth isn’t having everything you want.
True wealth is appreciating everything you have.”***

In order to remain devoted to Hashem, we have to resist this pull toward *maod* — the insatiable appetite for more — and learn instead to appreciate and be satisfied with what Hashem has given us. The Mishnah in Maseches Avos teaches:

אִיזְהוּ עֲשִׁירִי? הַשֶּׁמֶחַ בְּחֻלְקוֹ

“Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot.”

Or as they say: who is truly wealthy? Not the one who has the most, but the one who needs the least. Someone constantly chasing *maod* will never experience true peace. But someone who is content, who recognizes the blessings Hashem has already given him, is truly rich.

Perhaps this is why we say in Shema: *V’ahavta es Hashem Elokecha b’chol levavcha u’vchol nafshecha* — love Hashem with all your heart and all your soul —

וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ

“...and with all your *me’odecha*.”

B’chol me’odecha is usually translated as “with all your wealth, with all your resources.” But if that’s the intent, the Torah could simply have written *u’vchol mamonecha* — your money. Why *me’odecha* instead?

Rav Shimon Schwab offers a powerful answer. We translate *u’vchol me’odecha* as loving Hashem with all our wealth. But literally, *me’odecha* comes from the word *maod* — “very,” as in *tov maod*. Says Rav Schwab: if a person loves something very much — a strong desire to travel somewhere on vacation, a craving for a certain steak or a particular scotch — the Torah is telling him: *u’vchol me’odecha*, love Hashem with all your “very’s,” with all your strongest desires. Sacrifice them for Hashem, and don’t simply indulge.

If a desire can’t be avoided entirely, then at least don’t finish it completely. If you’re eating something so delicious, so *geshmak*, leave over the last piece. This too is a fulfillment of *u’vchol me’odecha*. This practice is known as the *Ta’anis HaRavid*: rather than indulging fully, leave something over on the plate.

This brings to mind a striking idea from Rav Baruch of Mezhibizh. In Parshas Eikev we read the well-known pasuk: “*V’atah Yisrael, mah Hashem Elokecha sho’el mei’imach, ki im l’yirah es Hashem*” — what does Hashem ask of you, only to fear Him? Rav Baruch puts an incredible homiletic twist on this

pasuk: *Va'atah Yisrael, mah Hashem Elokecha* — and now, Yisrael, in what way is Hashem *your* G-d? What are you doing to build a personal relationship with Him? That is the question *sho'el mei'imach* will ask of you: in what way is Hashem your personal G-d?

Because if you are in a healthy, loving relationship with someone, you are willing to sacrifice for that relationship. So the question becomes: what am I sacrificing? What am I giving up for Hashem? What am I doing — or not doing — because I have this special relationship with Him?

Are you willing to put down your phone for an hour so you can be present for your family, or for someone who needs you? Are you willing to bite your tongue instead of saying something hurtful? Are you sacrificing an hour a week to learn with a chavrusa, or to visit someone in the hospital? Are you getting up an hour earlier to do chesed, or to learn Torah? And if the answer is that you're not sacrificing anything — then in what sense is Hashem truly your G-d?

So the question we each need to ask ourselves is: what am I willing to give up for Hashem? What desire can I set aside? What “*maod*” can I put down, because my relationship with Him matters more?

וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ
— *with all your maod*

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