

Bamidbar

by Benjamin Gee - Wednesday, June 05, 2019

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It is our responsibility to act is if we are teachers to the world...

Our comments on social media can make or break people.

A reflection on the impact that we have on others is given by our sages based on a passage on parashat Bamidbar. At the beginning of chapter three the headline states “These are the generations of Aharon and Moshe”, and then the Torah goes on to say ‘v’eileh shemot b’nei Aharon’, and these are the children of Aharon, and then their names are given. Where are the names of the generations of Moshe? They don’t appear in this passage. So then why does the opening statement say ‘these are the generations of Aharon and Moshe’?

Therefore the Gemara in masechet Sanhedrin tells us ‘kol ha’melamed ben chevero torah ma’aleh eilav hakatuv k’eilu yelado’, ‘if you teach the children of somebody else Torah it is attributed to you as if you gave birth to them’ – because the children of Aharon are presented to us here as being part of the generations of Moshe. In the event that you have educated somebody, you have fashioned their lives - you have made them into what they are, it is as if you have given birth to that child.

The Gemara, later on, in Masechet Sanhedrin actually goes further, and says “kol ha’melamed ben chaveiro torah m’alah eilav hakatuv k’eilu asa’o”, ‘If you teach somebody else’s children Torah it is attributed to you as if you made that person, as if you fashioned that person, created that person – meaning it is as if you are God! The scriptural source for that comes from Sefer Bereishit, where we are taught about the impact that Avraham and Sara had on their environment ‘et ha’nefesh asher asu b’Charan’ ‘all their followers are called the souls that they made in Charan’ – they made those people into the people they became. Therefore, it is as if they are like Almighty God Himself.

Now of course, an influence of this magnitude, has the potential to not only be used positively but also God forbid, negatively. If you have inspired a person to direct his or her life in an inappropriate direction, you too are responsible for their deeds. You have given birth to that person and to those deeds, you have made that individual who he or she is! This does not only refer to somebody who stands up in a classroom to teach in a formal capacity – actually, just about everybody is a teacher in some way because you are interacting with people, you are conveying messages to them.

On social media you are publishing something for the world to read, and those who internalise what they have read that message, who take notice of it and then who act upon it – one is responsible for that action.

There is therefore no limit to the extent of the impact we have on others. God forbid, it is possible through our words to break someone, but thankfully we can be just like God, to make someone into the great person that he or she can be.

Shabbat Shalom

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