

The Wonders of Your Torah

Choice Excerpts from the Teachings of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh Shlit"א

Perceptive counseling

Seven traits of perception for a good counselor

In this week's Torah portion, we learn how Moses sought wise, perceptive and well-known men to be judges over the Jewish people. From the prayer that we say three times a day, "Return our judges as they were initially and our counselors as they were at first,"¹ we see that there is a definite connection between judges and counselors. This suggests that a counselor should possess similar qualities to a judge.

To be able to function at an optimal level, both of these community workers require both traits but each has a different emphasis. Whereas the characteristic of wisdom is the essential point for a judge, who needs to be well-versed in the Torah's laws, the vital trait of a counselor lies in her powers of perception. Both need to be accepted in the community as caring individuals.

The power of perception, which stems from the higher level of understanding (בינה) as explained in the previous post, has many different aspects. We will now proceed to define the different qualities of perception as they correspond to the ten *sefirot*.

The crown

The first aspect of perception corresponds to the *sefirah* of the super-conscious crown. This is the ability to see the bigger picture that lies beyond the subjective version of the story that the client relates. Although we cannot expect from the average counselor to see their clients' previous incarnations, as the Arizal did, this level of perception allows us to generalize their story to reveal the psychological complex that lies behind their sorrow and the relevant archetypal Biblical story that represents it.²

Wisdom

The next *sefirah*, the wisdom of perception, corresponds to the tribe of Issachar's special sense of

time. With their unique perception of time, the sages of Issachar understood the principle behind the Jewish calendar and taught it to the Jewish people. This is called the secret of "impregnation" (עיבור) because it requires that seven out of every 19 years be "pregnant" with an additional month (Second Adar).

The purpose of Torah wisdom is to impregnate and inspire us with its light, but without proper timing its Divine wisdom may flow over our heads. The perception needed by a counselor in this case is to know when his wise advice will be best integrated by his advisee. Even if

the counselor immediately recognizes her client's problem (usually self-conscious pride!), it is prudent practice for her to bide her time until her client feels comfortable enough in her presence to accept her advice on how to correct it. Perception of timing also translates into sensing the best opportunity for the client to carry out the advice.

Short and Tweet

- On 9th of Av the Jews wept when they heard the spies' bad report of the land of Israel. We can repair their sin with our love of the land.
- God set Tisha B'Av as a day of weeping but in the future Tisha B'Av will become a day of joy.
- We pray that God will forgive us for our sins and that Mashiach will be revealed speedily, in our days.
- Isaiah said, "The Lebanon [the Temple] shall fall" but the next verse is, "A shoot will come out of the stem of Jesse [i.e. Mashiach]."
- The Temple was destroyed because of pointless hatred. It will be rebuilt with superfluous love.

Understanding

Some commentaries explain that the adjective "perceptive" (נבונים) relates to repentance and a return to God. In Kabbalah, the ability to return to God is associated with the *sefirah* of understanding

¹ The *Amidah* prayer.

² See our book, *Otzar Hanefesh*, part 1, p. 199-200.

(בינה). A counselor should constantly feel the need to return to God, i.e., to do *teshuvah*. The Lubavitcher Rebbe writes³ that if there was but one person truly returning to God, the redemption would come. This relates to Mashiach who is a “wondrous counselor,” who will teach even the righteous how to return to God.

Knowledge

The *sefirah* of knowledge of perception is knowing how to give good advice. The *Zohar* explains that the difference between a wise person and a perceptive individual is that the wise person knows how to integrate his wisdom for his own use, whereas the perceptive person knows how to share his wisdom with others, empathizing with their problem through his own experience. When someone shares their problem with their counselor, the counselor should try to discover the same problem in miniature within his own psyche. The more perceptive the counselor is, the more empathetic he or she will be. Nonetheless, it is a mistake to offer one’s client exactly the same advice as one needs oneself. The counselor must step out of his own space to reach the other and offer them advice that is most suitable for them.

Short and Tweet

“Perception” (תבונה) equals “grandmother” (סבתא) Grandma’s insights often make good advice.

Perception means understanding one thing from another. “One thing from another” (דבר מתוך דבר) equals Mashiach (מם שיין יוד חית).

Mashiach is the ultimately perceptive person. He’s waiting for the right moment when we will be ready to accept him.

The emotive powers

According to the *Radak*, the three-lettered root of “understanding” (בינה) is “between” (ביין), corresponding to the power of understanding to differentiate between different components. At the same time, recognizing differences is required to perceive the possible connection between two separate entities, an important ability for making matches. The quality of matchmaking corresponds to the emotive powers of perception. Many of the problems a counselor faces are related to couplehood. Offering good advice in this area

requires the ability to see the complementarity between souls and to perceive how to turn them around so that they reconnect face-to-face. Because of the relationship between perception of differences and the emotive powers of the soul, it is with this aspect of perception that the therapist can measure the love that a person received in childhood or the warmth that flows between a couple or between potential marriage partners.

The behavioral powers

The behavioral powers of perception represent the talent to explain one’s meaning. Like a teacher in a classroom, this is the counselor’s ability to offer his or her advice with clarity and with all sincerity so that the words have an impact on the listener.

Kingdom

Finally, the level of kingdom of perception represents good public relations. This refers to an ability to sense the politics within a group, such as when counseling a family or any other group. Being able to correctly read the map of relationships and to recognize the dynamics and interplay between the various members of the group is invaluable when it comes to group therapy. Only once the psychological powers at play have been correctly mapped out should one begin to plan the correct tactics of giving good advice.

Above the crown

Before stating that those selected as judges should be “wise, perceptive, and well-known,” the Torah states that they should be “men” (אנשים). This is the level of “polite conduct precedes the Torah” (דרך ארץ), which precedes even the level of perception that corresponds to the crown. Before one can be a good, wise and perceptive counselor, one must first be a *mentsch*, an upright, righteous person who cares for those seeking his advice and for his community.

From Harav Ginsburgh’s class, 3rd Av 5772

Distributed by Gal Einai

Live shiur every Monday night 8:30pm (Israel time)

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³ Dibur hamatchil Ve'atah Tetzaveh 5741.