

Light Insight

Planting Seeds

“These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel, on the other side of the Jordan, concerning the Wilderness, concerning the Aravah, opposite the Sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tophel and Lavan, and Chatzeros and Di Zahav.” (Deuteronomy 1:1)

When you want to convey some constructive criticism to someone, the worst way you can do it is by direct confrontation. The listener will immediately respond to the perceived attack with all manner of self-justifications: “I couldn’t help it”, “You think you could have done better?!”

Better by far is to allude to the matter at hand, subtly planting an

inference into the subconscious mind of the listener. In this way, his front-line early-warning defenses aren’t triggered, and the idea lodges in his subconscious to grow like a seed.

This is what Moses did in the opening lines of the Book of Deuteronomy. This last of the five Books of the Torah relates what Moses told the Jewish People during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan into the Land of Israel.

The place-names that are mentioned here are locations of various sins and rebellions of the Jewish People: “concerning the wilderness” — i.e., their desire to return to the sensuality of Egypt; “concerning the Aravah” — their

immorality with the daughters of Moab; “opposite the Sea of Reeds” — their lack of trust in G-d at the crossing of the sea; “between Paran and Tophel and Lavan” — their complaints about the miraculous food, the Manna; “and Chatzeros” — Korach’s rebellion, “and Di-Zahav” — the sin of the golden calf.

Moses is addressing the Jewish People in the last weeks of his life. He wants to leave them a strong and lasting message — to beware of the inherent tendencies that have already brought them into confrontation with G-d.

Rather than tackle them directly and risk rejection, Moses subtly plants the seeds of self-examination into the collective psyche of the Jewish People, so that long after his departure, they will still bear fruit.

Response Line

Gloria Weber wrote:

I am making a needlepoint cover case for a mezuzah and there are two inserts available. One is hand-written, the other one is reproduced. Is there a religious difference, or just a price difference?

Dear Gloria,

The insert is the actual *mezuzah*,

and it must be handwritten.

The laws of *mezuzah* are precise and complex.

For example, the *mezuzah* must be written by a knowledgeable, qualified Jewish scribe; it must be written with special ink upon animal parchment set aside expressly for this purpose. Only certain erasures are allowed.

All these conditions and more make a valid *mezuzah* considerably more expensive than an invalid one.

This, in addition to the lack of knowledge of many Jewish consumers, has opened the *mezuzah* market to a flood of fake *mezuzot*. A recent study found upwards of 90 percent of all *mezuzot* were invalid. Any “Judaica” dealer who sells photocopied “*mezuzot*” is either totally ignorant about *mezuzot* or is simply dishonest. Either way, any *mezuzah* he sells, even a handwritten one, is certainly not going to be valid. The only way to get a valid *mezuzah* is to buy it from a qualified, knowledgeable scribe or retailer.

LOVE of the LAND

*Selections from classical Torah sources which
express the special relationship between
the People of Israel and the Land of Israel*

Why Cry?

A Tale of Two Cities

How can a Jew weep on the Ninth of Av for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple which took place thousands of years ago, when he sees how beautifully Jerusalem has been rebuilt in our days?

Perhaps we can learn a lesson from Rabbi Gershon Kitover, brother-in-law of the Ba'al Shem Tov, who arrived in Jerusalem two and a half centuries ago with the first group of Chassidim to settle in the Holy Land. He looked around at a city which sported foreign legations and all the signs of a serene community restored, in sharp contrast to the desolation described by Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides) in his famous letter describing his visit to the city some five centuries earlier.

Rabbi Gershon broke into tears. Now, he said, I fully understand the words of the prayer that Jews say at the end of the final service on Yom Kippur, when the gates of Heaven are about to close. As they stand at this dramatic moment, weakened in body from a long day of fasting and strengthened in spirit from prayer and repentance, they strive to send

one more prayer heavenward, invoking the 13 attributes of Divine mercy. The opening lines, sounding more

like a Ninth of Av lamentation than a Yom Kippur prayer, cry out: "I recall, O G-d, and I am overcome by emotion, as I see every city solidly built on its foundation, while the City of G-d is reduced to the depth of the grave. Nevertheless, we are with G-d and our eyes are turned to G-d."

Until Rabbi Gershon saw the rebuilt Jerusalem of his day, he assumed — as we all do — that the above lament contrasts a desolate Holy City with the mighty capitals of the world, Rome, Paris, London and Berlin. But when he saw the beginnings of a rebuilt Jerusalem and contrasted it with the ruins of the Holy Temple he sensed a deeper meaning in those words:

'Every city' — said Rabbi Gershon — refers to the Jerusalem of Below, the city of brick and mortar; while the 'City of G-d' refers to the Jerusalem of Above, the Heavenly City characterized by the Holy Temple.

It is certainly painful to contrast these ruins with the prosperity of foreign cities. But the pain is indescribably greater when one sees the contrast between material prosperity and spiritual ruin before his very eyes. Small wonder that this great man of spirit, who finally realized his lifelong dream of reaching Jerusalem, was moved to tears when he sensed

the awful contrast.

The above account of Rabbi Gershon Kitover's experience and observation is recorded by one of the great halachic authorities, Rabbi Yosef Tumim, who served as rabbi of Frankfurt, Germany two centuries ago. In his classic commentary on the Code of Jewish Law, *Pri Megadim*, he quotes his father as the source for this moving story about Rabbi Gershon Kitover.

A footnote to this is the sentiment expressed in the last line of the above mentioned prayer — "Nevertheless, we are with G-d and our eyes are turned to G-d." This sense of hope amidst mourning reminds us of the story of a father who took his young son to the Western Wall for the first time. It was the Ninth of Av, and the youngster asked his father why grown men were weeping.

"Here," said the father, "our Holy Temple once stood. The Temple Mount on which it stood was surrounded by four large walls. Now the Holy Temple is destroyed, as well as the walls around the Temple Mount. All we have left of all our sacred glory is this one wall where you see people praying. Is it any wonder that they cry when they remember what once stood here?"

"But Father," responded the son, "isn't it true that the Messiah will soon come to redeem us, rebuild the Holy Temple and the four walls around the Temple Mount? We should take comfort in the fact that one of those walls is already standing, and there are only three more to go!"