



cause him harm; deliberately giving bad business advice in order to procure personal gain. All these are considered by the Siphra as placing a stumbling block before a blind person. Interestingly enough, the use of our verse to prevent deceit in *Shidukhim* can be found already in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (#4Q271 – about 2 centuries before the compilation of the Mishna): “And if [a man gives his daughter to betro]th, he shall tell him all about her defects, lest he bring upon himself the judgment of [the curse, which says] ‘he who leads the blind astray on the road’ ”.

The examples are not limited to questions of marriage and money. The following Talmudic anecdote (Moed Katan 17a) incorporates *Liphne Ivver* into education and parental guidance. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi’s handmaid (who is portrayed in several Talmudic stories as being very learned and well-versed) saw a man beating his teenage son. She retorted by saying that this father should be placed under ban (*Shamta*) since beating a grown son is precisely what the Torah meant by the prohibition of *Liphne Ivver*. Rashi explains that beating the son leads him to rebel against the father and go astray, thus depriving the child of his deserved good Jewish education and steering the child towards a life of sin.

Whether the use of the blind man as a metaphor is the intended Peshat of the Torah or whether it is a broadening of the Biblical meaning on the part of the Rabbis, the fact that this blind man cannot be left as is tells us something about Judaism in general. When one uses a parable or a metaphor to teach about something else, that means the parable or the metaphor itself is a given and needs no further explanation. The Judaism that sees the blind man as a metaphor is a Judaism that does not need to be told that exploitation of blindness is abominable and therefore it seeks to expand the verse’s meaning and include other social wrongdoings. It is a Judaism that strives to find measures of protection against all forms of deceit, whether in business, in family life or in education. It is a Judaism that knows that honesty on all levels is part of society’s fundamental backbone and is therefore included in the nation’s formative ceremony in our Parasha.

A very surprising metaphoric understanding of the blind man is found in Midrash Tehillim on Ps 146:8 “YHWH restores sight to the blind”. The Midrash tells us that God placed a curse [in our Parasha] on one who wrongs a blind man because He knows the blind man’s suffering. “And when He shall cure the whole world, the first to be

cured shall be the blind. Who are the blind? These generations, they that obey the Torah like blind men. They all read [the Torah] but know not what they read, they repeat [the Torah] but know not what they repeat. But in the future ‘the eyes of the blind shall be opened’ (Is 35:5)”.

This explosive critique of *Lomdei Torah* cannot be narrowed down to the time of the Midrash alone. Can we honestly say that our generation’s *Lomdei Torah* are any better than those in the Midrash’s times? The growth in the number of *Lomdei Torah* in our generation may be unprecedented. But do these Torah disciples even entertain the notion that they may read but know not what they read, that they are in fact blind to the essence and meaning of the very Torah that they devote their life to? More often than not, we meet individuals and groups that, on the contrary, give the feeling that they think they know even that which they haven’t read yet. And if there is anyone who is blind and knows not what he reads, it’s the other person, or better yet, the other group.

If we are to take this Midrash seriously, the most important lesson we must learn from it is the acceptance of other *Lomdei Torah*. In an age where we find so much religious hubris, where groups build their self-pride and definition on the denigration of others and the “poor” quality of their learning and observance, it might do us some good to air out this Midrash and let its lesson resound. Yes, I am convinced that my way of learning and observing the Torah is best, but let it never be said that it’s either my way or “the highway”. The slight chance that we are all no different than blind men, that we read but know not what we read, should teach us tolerance towards other individuals and groups that share the goal of learning and upholding the Torah. Yes, perhaps they’ve got it all wrong. But only the long, patient path of history will be able to answer that for certain. Till then, we should all enjoy the benefit of the doubt.

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