

Spark of the Week

5756 - #5

Lfi Aniyat Da'ati.

According to the Poverty of My Thought

Rabbi Benjamin Hecht

There seemed to be a time when the works and opinions of the great scholars of Torah began with the words: *Lfi aniyat da'ati*, "According to the poverty of my thought." These words represent an honest humility, a recognition of the immense leap a human being must undertake to dare to voice opinions in the vast realm of Torah. As Rabbi Moshe Feinstein states,¹ one who reaches a heightened level of scholarship must accept the challenge of expressing views within Torah, taking and defending stands - and, yet, who are we to dare to express our opinions in the realm of Divine knowledge. Always, the scholars recognized: *Lfi aniyat da'ati*. We are called upon to boldly express our opinions within Torah - but we must also recognize the immensity of such a task, and our own frailty.

These words, though, do not just express an honest emotion of humility but signify an essential principle of Torah thought. G-d, in His Wisdom, did not present Torah as a linear book of conclusions but, rather, afforded us a body of knowledge and a thought system that demands analysis and the involvement of the human mind in the determination of concepts and applications.² This presentation of Torah is truly a gift for the task given to us is a glorious one. We are called upon by G-d to enter the realm of Divine thought and to voice our convictions, our thoughts and ideas. Yet, simultaneously, as we recognize this supreme faith that G-d has placed in us, we are also called upon to recognize our own limitations.³

¹ **Introduction, Igrot Moshe.**

² See, further, **T.B. Berachot 7b, 47b** and **Sotah 22a.**

³ The presentation and reconciliation of these two poles - on one hand, we are to see ourselves as possessing greatness, on the other hand, we are to see ourselves as lacking

None of us is G-d; our thought processes are bounded. The multitude of opinions on almost every and all Torah subjects only reinforce this reality. How can we possibly believe that we can find the one correct Torah perception when our history, as evidenced by this body of so many conflicting views, has demonstrated otherwise? Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely at this point that we are able to see the true nature of Torah and to enter this holy realm.

The varying opinions, the arguments between Sages, declare to us that Torah is more vast than any human's perspective. *Elu v'elu divrei Elokim Chaim*, "These and those are the words of the Living G-d".⁴ I am in a realm that is greater than me, within a world of thought that swallows me. If I declare my conclusion to be the only view within Torah then I, in fact, limit Torah by the parameters of my own thought system; I render the Divine finite. It is only when I recognize it is my conclusion alone that is so limited, that other views in disagreement are also within the realm of Torah and that I may gain no more than a piece of Torah whose entirety is always beyond -- only then I have the chance to truly be part of the unique genius of Torah; only then do I enter the realm of the Infinite. Paradoxically, it is only when we question our very ability to venture an idea within Torah, that we are able to declare that our thoughts are truly part of Torah. It is only with *lfi aniyat da'ati* that we gain the vision of what Torah ultimately is. Only when we recognize that what we express within Torah is merely our opinion *lfi aniyat da'ati*, do we reach the glory of our opinion, in fact, becoming an actual breathing piece of Torah.

T.B. Eruvin 13b states that the reason the law was codified according to Bet Hillel was because they, in their expression of Torah, always quoted Bet Shammai first. In that simple act, Bet Hillel declared this very concept and, so, established their prominence for the generations. Their recognition of their own human limit did not prevent them from defending their view, for so Torah also demands. Yet, by quoting Bet Shammai first, Bet Hillel understood their full place within Torah. Another's opinion must be heard,

and insignificant - is an important area within Torah thought that I invite the reader to investigate further. See **T.B. Sanhedrin 37a** and **Chullin 88b, 89a**.

⁴ See **T.B. Eruvin 13b**.

recognized and respected - not just as an act of tolerance - for this very process of hearing, recognizing and respecting powerfully changes the actual nature of one's opinion and one's Torah. *Lfi aniyat da'ati* - this is what I think but I know of variant thought and it all lies within the realm of Torah; thus, a recognition of the awesomeness of Torah, of the Divine Wisdom, is born -- and affects what I think. One who is certain that his opinion is absolutely correct and represents the entire allowed spectrum of Torah, ultimately establishes his opinion as outside the realm of Torah for the parameters of this person's Torah are those solely of man; he cannot touch the Divine that extends beyond him.

Ultimately, it is in these three words, *lfi aniyat da'ati*, that I see the greatest tragedy of Prime Minister Rabin's assassination. We live in a world of dogmatism, where many believe their views to be absolutely and solely correct. Where is *lfi aniyat da'ati*? How often does anyone within this world stop to recognize that it is an opinion they express, that Torah is vast and that we are limited? Could Yigal Amir have pulled the trigger if he had first quoted, understood and respected as part of Torah, his "Bet Shammai"?⁵ There are those who will say that I, in turn, should respect his *halachic* opinion. But a Torah view that does not arise out of a recognition of spectrum is not a Torah view. *Lfi aniyat da'ati* is not simply an expression of humility; it is the essence of Torah thought. Yigal Amir's actions were,

⁵ The question can be posed that if Yigal Amir believed his view to be *halachically* correct, even with a recognition of spectrum, would he still not be bound to follow it? Bet Hillel, although quoting Bet Shammai, still followed their own *halachic* conclusions. The question is whether Yigal Amir would have arrived at such a *halachic* conclusion - especially as *halacha l'ma'aseh*, a *halachic* conclusion to be acted upon - if he would have recognized the validity of the spectrum of opinion. Especially in a matter of such gravity, a recognition of spectrum makes a true *posek* question his reasoning, his own ability to arrive at a halachic conclusion and whether he should follow the opinion of a limited minority. Many great *poskim* throughout history, have refrained from following their own opinions, especially in matters of universal concern, because they recognized *lfi aniyat da'ati*. Furthermore, since there were also *halachic* authorities who supported Prime Minister Rabin's initiative, the discussion in **T.B. Yevamot 13a-17a** (concerning how the members of Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai would each assist those of the other school in the fulfilment of Torah according to the other's opinion) would also have to be considered. The desire for *halachic* truth drives one to consider the spectrum; the desire only for a specific conclusion drives one to ignore the variance...and the true picture of Torah. Dogmatism, not any true Torah analysis, led to this assassination. If Amir would have simply said: *Lfi aniyat da'ati*...

perhaps, the most tragic display of this great loss within the world of Torah. Yet, this weakness exists on both sides of the peace issue and beyond - into other issues facing Israel and the entire Jewish and Torah world. Dogmatism has no place within Torah for it is based on a declaration that one's human thought process is absolute. Torah only arises with the recognition of spectrum, with a respect for variant opinions, with humility and a hesitation to declare oneself absolutely right - only then do we recognize Torah's Divine nature. We must again begin to sincerely say: *Lfi aniyat da'ati*.

© Nishma, 2009