



There is no Beit Midrash which does not contribute creatively to Torah. But sometimes divrei Torah function like music, so that creativity exists not only at the moment of composition, but through interpretation each time the composition is played.

Here is an example. 2 Samuel 21:1 tells that a three-year famine occurred in the time of King David, “year after year”. David asks G-d for its cause, and is told that it is because he has not satisfied the blood-debt owed by the House of Shaul to the Giv’onim. David negotiates with the Giv’onim, and when they will not accept any other compensation, he surrenders seven descendants of Shaul to them to be killed. The text reminds us prior to the negotiations that the Giv’onim were “not from B’nei Yisroel”, but rather Amorites whom Joshua had sworn nonaggression with under the misimpression that they were from away.

The “composition” is: David asks G-d why He is willing to afflict His nation for the sake of the Giv’onim and is told that “If you distance the distant, you will eventually distance the near”.

In Midrash Shmuel 28:5, the story ends there. In Bamidbar Rabbah 8:4, however, the story continues with David permanently distancing the Giv’onim for their cruelty in being unwilling to accept financial compensation for Shaul’s wrongdoing.

On the other hand, Bamidbar Rabbah states explicitly that the Giv’onim were converts “not for the sake” of Heaven, and even they get every chance to prove their worth, because “If you distance the distant, you will eventually distance the near”. Midrash Shmuel apparently treats them as standard converts.

Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 6:7 simply mentions that David distanced the Giv’onim, without any prior agonizing.

Each of these are *retellings* of the same devar Torah, and yet each of them presents a different point of view. In the Yerushalmi it seems that there is no cost to distancing the unworthy; in Bamidbar Rabbah we learn that there is a cost to doing so, even when the unworthy became part of us by trickery, and perhaps that we are willing to pay that cost only for the unworthy who joined us under false pretenses; and perhaps in Midrash Shmuel we are unwilling to pay that cost at all.

A Bar Ilan search, astonishingly at least to me, shows no post-Chazal citations of the phrase “סופך לרחק את הקרובים”. Perhaps I have missed something. Whether I have or have not, it

seems to me that this is a devar Torah that bears retelling in our day – but would you need to describe the Giv'onim as insincere converts?, and where would you end the story?

Shabbat Shalom!
Aryeh Klapper