

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Temma Golda *bas* Yehoshua *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The Mysterious Trip

PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS – KEDOSHIM 5777

In a *parshah* replete with numerous *mitzvos*, one of the key themes underlying some of these laws is the care one must exhibit in interpersonal relations. Emblematic of this notion is the well-known directive of “*V’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocho* – You shall love your fellow as yourself” (*Vayikra 19:18*).

Evading Embarrassment

Another manifestation in the *parshah* of the premium the Torah places on preserving one’s dignity comes in the form of a prohibition, which states: “*V’lo sisa alav cheit* – You shall not bear sin toward him” (*Ibid. v. 17*). In his classic volume, which is his namesake, the Chafetz Chayim (*Introduction, Prohibitions, § 14*) explains this to include an injunction against causing one’s friend embarrassment and consternation. This applies even in a private setting and certainly in a public one. And the lengths to which one is expected to go to avoid this violation are likewise legendary. Chazal state, for example, that it is preferable to be cast alive into a fiery furnace before causing embarrassment to another (*Sotah 10b*).

Elsewhere, Chazal tell us of the curious method by which Jewish girls would advertise their eligibility for marriage. Here again, the concern for people’s feelings is a prominent factor. As the Mishnah states (*Ta’anis 4:8*):

בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יוֹצְאוֹת בְּכָלֵי לְבוֹן שְׂאוּלִין, שֶׁלֹּא לְבִישׁ אֶת מִי שְׂאִין לוֹ.

“The daughters of Yerushalayim would emerge clad in borrowed white garments – so as not to shame those who did not own one.”

As Rashi explains (*Ta’anis 26b*), the practice was instituted that those participating in this procession would all wear only borrowed clothing – even those wealthy enough to afford their own. The reason, as stated, was to prevent the inevitable embarrassment to those too indigent to procure their own garments.

It is interesting to note the lengths to which the Chafetz Chayim himself, in his personal life, went in order not to inflict embarrassment upon others. The following anecdote illustrates how scrupulous he was in this regard, even when forced to balance other pressing issues.

Abrupt Departure

It once happened that some actions taken by the Chafetz Chayim caused some wonderment among the people. Actually, it was a series of events that had this effect. It began with a sudden departure from his usual activities. The Chafetz Chayim was always interested, of course, in promoting the observance of Torah and *mitzvos*. There were certain causes in whose advancement he was particularly invested. One subject to which he attached supreme importance was *taharas ha’mishpachah* (family purity), the observance of which centered around the availability and maintenance of proper *mikva’os* (ritual baths). Whenever the opportunity to strengthen this institution arose, the Chafetz Chayim was always ready to respond. Many times he would travel to various locations and deliver discourses on the topic in order to ensure the observance of these essential laws.

What was unusual in this case was that a town in close proximity to Radin, the Chafetz's Chayim's own place of residence, was in dire need of just such intervention. The *mikveh* there was in complete disrepair; the observant segment of that town's population beseeched the Chafetz Chayim to visit and encourage the others to contribute to its restoration. And yet, this time the Chafetz Chayim surprisingly withheld his involvement; many weeks passed, and still the sage did not make the trip.

The other unusual happening involved a personal stringency of the Chafetz Chayim. It was well-known that the Chafetz Chayim would not journey forth from his home once Thursday afternoon arrived. This was done from supreme caution out of deference to Shabbos, lest any difficulties arise and jeopardize its observance. One day, however, the townspeople discovered that the Chafetz Chayim had indeed embarked on a journey on Friday morning; and he had travelled to none other than the neighboring town, to finally deliver the long-awaited discourse on fortifying the *mikveh*!

The whole matter was puzzling, of course. Why had the Chafetz Chayim postponed the journey for so long? And when he finally did decide to go, it was on Erev Shabbos, a day on which he normally did not travel!

As it turned out, however, every aspect of this episode had been deliberately and carefully calculated. There were a number of issues involved, first and foremost regarding the *rav* of the nearby community. That *rav* held a position on a certain matter that the Chafetz Chayim felt was incongruous with true Torah outlook. This left the Chafetz Chayim in a bit of a quandary. He felt that to arrive in that town without paying the *rav* a visit would be a slight to his honor. And yet, to pay him a visit was also problematic, as the Chafetz Chayim felt it would constitute a tacit approval of the *rav*'s position in the eyes of the public. Left with no choice, the Chafetz Chayim decided that the best option was to simply stay away. Although this left the pressing matter of the *mikveh* unaddressed, the sage held this to be the lesser of two evils. By keeping his distance, then, the Chafetz Chayim avoided both an overt slight to the *rav*, as well as the granting of any legitimacy to his mistaken policy.

What changed? And why the sudden break from his travel restrictions? Apparently, the Chafetz Chayim had just learned that the *rav* had gone away on vacation! This opened up the perfect opportunity to finally make the visit. For now he could come to the town and still avoid all of the pitfalls. There would be no slight to the *rav* for passing up a visit, for he was anyway not home; and as he would not be paying him this homage, there would likewise be no tacit endorsement of the *rav*'s position. As such, the Chafetz Chayim wasted no time in carrying out his important mission. So great was his care in preserving the feelings of others, he even deviated from his usual practice to take advantage of this one-time opportunity; and so he hastened to the town on Erev Shabbos to deliver his words of encouragement (*R' Moshe Yoshor, Ha'Chafetz Chayim – Chayav u'Pa'alav*).

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