

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Tzav

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
 Yehoshua *ben* Tzvi Hirsch HaKohen *a"h*
 a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

You Never Know...

The Mishnah in Avos (4:3) provides the following exhortation:

אל תהי בז לקל אדם, ואל תהי מפליג לקל דבר, שאין לה אדם שאין לו שעה ואין לה דבר שאין לו מקום.

“Do not disparage any man, nor discount any entity; for every man will at some point reveal his importance, and everything likewise has its place.”

The Mishnah’s somewhat terse message is open to diverse interpretation, as the commentators do in fact perceive various meanings in these words. One dominant strand they advance (*cf. Tiferes Yisrael, Otzar Avos, etc.*) is reflected in the translation above. Discounting any individual is a grave mistake for numerous reasons. This is an essential piece of advice, even from a narrow standpoint of self-interest: who knows what pivotal role that person may play in the future? One disregards him at his own peril.

There is an interesting incident in which this notion is manifest in a vivid way. As the episode is based on a particularly moving Medrash related to the Purim story, we first cite the passage here (*Esther Rabbah 7:18*):

Blood... or Mud?

At the instigation of the Satan, a decree of extermination was prepared and signed by the Almighty. The promulgation of this edict caused a great stir in the celestial spheres. For his part, Eliyahu Hanavi was galvanized to action, desperately seeking an avenue by which to avert the decree.

Eliyahu approached the souls of the forefathers – Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov – informing them of the developments and pleading for their intervention. But they asserted that it was beyond their power to help. “If Yisrael has incurred such a punishment for violating Hashem’s command (by attending Achashveirosh’s feast), there is nothing we can do to have the decree rescinded.”

Not giving up, Eliyahu approached another figure, who had many times successfully interceded on the nation’s behalf – Moshe Rabbeinu. The venerated leader wanted to know if there were any worthy individuals to be found amongst the populace. “Yes,” Eliyahu replied. “There is Mordechai.” Moshe counseled that together – he (Moshe) from his celestial station and Mordechai below – they should pray for the nation’s welfare.

Eliyahu, however, was somewhat hesitant; he feared it could be too late. “Faithful shepherd,” he remarked to Moshe, “the decree for extermination has already been written (in Heaven)!”

Moshe sought to clarify one detail; everything would hinge on the signature. “If the decree was signed with earth, it could be annulled through our prayers. However, if signed in blood, it may not be rescinded.”

“The decree was signed with earth!” Eliyahu exclaimed. Their prayers could be effective after all! Moshe

immediately dispatched Eliyahu to inform Mordechai of the developments. Thus, “Mordechai knew all that transpired... and called out with a great cry...” (*Esther 4:1*).

The incident referred to above involved R’ Chaim Volozhiner, who gained some fascinating insight into this Medrash. And the way he acquired this information is noteworthy in its own right.

Purim Masquerade

It was in the course of one Purim that the events unfolded. R’ Chaim was tending to a number of paupers, fulfilling one of the day’s rites by dispensing charity. He obliged each of his petitioners with a monetary gift. Lo and behold, one of them – after pocketing what he received – returned for “seconds”! Unabashedly, he held out his hand before the sage for yet another solicitation!

A man of much lesser stature would have responded to such chutzpah in kind, showing him the door. But R’ Chaim responded differently, perhaps bearing in mind the Mishnah’s exhortation not to dismiss any person, no matter how seemingly disdainful or outrageous. “I will give you more,” he told his persistent visitor, “but you must earn your extra share by first telling me a ‘vort’ on the *Megillah* (an insight concerning the Purim story).”

The pauper obliged, referring to the aforementioned passage. “The Medrash asserts that Eliyahu informed Mordechai that the decree was not irrevocable, as it was signed with earth and not blood. What is the scriptural source for this idea?”

Without waiting for a response, the pauper launched right into the answer. “I will tell you. In connection to Haman’s suggestion of the idea to Achashveirosh, the verse states (*Esther 3:9*): “אִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יִכְתֹּב לְאַבְדֵם” “If it should please ‘the king,’ let it be inscribed ‘to exterminate them.’” The ‘king’ can actually refer to the Heavenly King. Now read the verse, but merely break up that last word. “If it should please the King (to spare the Jews), it (the Heavenly decree) should be written לְאַבְדֵם (not with blood, but with earth instead)!”

R’ Chaim thought that there was something to this creative interpretation – so much so, that he later related it to his esteemed *rebbe*, the Vilna Gaon. It was then that R’ Chaim discovered how very fortunate he was not to have simply dismissed the erstwhile pauper.

With his highly attuned spiritual sensitivities, the Gaon realized something about his disciple’s encounter. “Do you know,” he addressed R’ Chaim, “who it was that shared this *d’var* Torah with you? It was none other than the very protagonist of the Medrash! The same individual who informed Mordechai about the earthen signature – Eliyahu Hanavi – *he* is the one who informed you, as well, that it was ‘written *not with blood*!’”

The full import of what had happened dawned on R’ Chaim. It turned out that there was a lot more lurking beneath his visitor’s veneer; he was not just some simple, quirky solicitor.

Imagine if he would have just shown him the door... (*Tuvcha Yabiyu, parshas Eikev*).