

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Joey Haber

Show Them

Rabbi Yehudah Jacobs zt"l was a beloved rebbe. Serving as the Mashgiach Ruchani, guide and mentor, to thousands of students at the Lakewood Yeshiva, his name was synonymous with Tatty, father, to so many. At the age of eighty-seven, he returned his soul to Heaven, amidst the global pandemic. But with his life, he left a legacy of what it means to show sensitivity for the ages.

Rav Jacobs would sit in a room during the day and learn with a chavruta (study partner). Often, as it would occur, the chavruta would get up to locate a certain sefer, during which time, other students would quickly grab the open seat opposite Rav Jacobs and present a certain question or dilemma they had. Everyone loved getting his advice; he was a wise man with a brilliant blend of Torah knowledge and sophisticated, worldly insight.

And so, one day, Rav Jacobs' chavruta got up to look for a sefer, and in came a student just moments later, pulling in the seat and preparing himself to talk. "Now's not a good time," Rav Jacobs said immediately, even before the boy got out a word. "Please come to me later, after this seder (learning session)." The student didn't say a word, but simply nodded in acknowledgement, stood up and walked back to his seat. It was odd, as he had never before seen Rav Jacobs do this, but he assumed that he'd eventually

have the opportunity to speak with him.

An hour later, the chavruta stood up again, this time to leave the Beis Midrash completely, perhaps to go to the restroom. The student figured that now there would be ample time for him and Rav Jacobs to talk, so he approached him and motioned if now was a good time. But again, Rav Jacobs stuck out his hand, as if to indicate that they'd speak later, privately, at his home.

Finally, a half-hour before the end of seder, the chavruta closed his Gemara and stood up, clearly ready to leave for the day. "Now will be a good time," knew the student; "his chavruta won't be coming back." "Rebbe, can we talk now?" he asked, as he shot over to Rav Jacobs' side. "Not right now. Please come to my house and we'll talk then."

Thirty minutes later, in walked the student to Rav Jacobs' home. Before the student even began saying anything, Rav Jacobs began, "I know you're curious about what was going on for the past hours that I didn't talk to you. Let me explain. There was someone who came over to me earlier today who was involved in a big public scandal and needed some advice. A short while after that, another man came to me who is also involved in this scandal and he's also going through a messy divorce. When you came to me after these two men had spoken to me, I knew that if we'd begin talking,

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people would think that you too were part of the scandal. That would taint your reputation. I didn't want people to think that you had anything to do

with it. That's why I insisted that you come here, to my house, to speak where no one else can see." That is a Kiddush Hashem. That is a

man who is thinking about others in ways that they can't even imagine, and shows them that he is.

Mr. Charlie Harary

The Choice

If you wake up in the morning and realize that Hashem chose you for greatness, then your life will never again be mediocre. Hashem didn't choose you to be His ambassador to the world and be 'just alright' or 'semi-good.'

We live in a world with competing responsibilities, and it is a challenge to be great spiritually. We're busy and there's a lot going on. There's a lot of noise surrounding us. But we have a choice; we always have a choice.

We can either get lost in the tumult and check the news dozens of times a day. We can circulate messages and newsfeeds to others and update statuses as they unfold on the hour. But when this happens,

deep down, we are still relying on the way of the world. We are falling into the routine and rhythm of everyday life that keeps us moving, but not progressing.

The other choice is to internalize that Hashem has chosen us for a mission, both on a national scale and a personal one. G-d has big aspirations for us. He has great experiences and accomplishments lined up for us, if we only step into those roles. To do so, we must block out the noise and contemplate who we want to be in a year from now.

Next year, what kind of Jew do you want to be? What kind of spouse, parent and person do you want to develop into?

As soon as we take this truth to

heart, we must look up and set big goals for ourselves. While the whole world spins in chaos, we must lock in and get to work. Walk through the desert of your life and grow into the person you can become. Fix your relationships. Pray what you must. Study that which inspires your spirit. Become the person that you deep-down know you could be, and rise above the distractions of the world.

Choose greatness over comfort and develop an action plan. When you wake up in the morning and you know you are working towards that greatness, you feel the fire within.

Life may be uncomfortable. Between Egypt and the Promised Land is a desert. But if you are willing to put in the hard work, you will arrive. You will.

Rebbetzin Chaya Sora Gertzulin

My Pillow

It was the mid-1940s, and the horrific days of the Holocaust had come to a close, yet the cruel acts of Nazi Germany left its mark. It was time to pick up the remnants of our nation, it was a time to rebuild and start anew.

There was a group of young orphaned boys. Boys who were left without mothers or fathers. Boys who were totally alone in the world.

Plans were made for them to

go to Eretz Yisroel, but who would care for them? Who would be there to give them a helping hand, a kind word, and offer encouragement during their time of healing?

Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, zt"l, the Rav of the Ponovezh Yeshiva, accepted the responsibility. The Rav arranged for an empty municipal building in his community in Bnei Brak to be transformed into a dorm for the boys. He raised funds to purchase beds, tables and chairs, sparing no effort to make the boys as

comfortable as possible.

Rav Kahaneman had everything ready – almost. The funds he collected were exhausted, and he wasn't able to purchase pillows and blankets.

It was a Friday afternoon, Erev Shabbos. The boys were to arrive on Sunday. What was the Rav to do? Even if he were able to obtain the extra funds, proper bedding was "a luxury" in Israel in those days, exceedingly hard to come by.

The Rav came up with a plan.

Rav Kahaneman spread the word in his community that he had an important message to deliver, and would be speaking in his shul on

Shabbos afternoon. Of course, when the Rav would speak, not only would his immediate community attend, but people from throughout Bnei Brak would come out in masse to hear his words.

On Shabbos afternoon the shul was full. Rav Kahaneman began speaking about the laws of an “eved Ivri”, a Jewish servant. Laws that are found in Parshas Mishpatim.

At first the people couldn't understand – it wasn't even Parshas Mishpatim that week. Why was the Rav speaking that particular Shabbos about the subject of eved Ivri?

Rav Kahaneman related the teachings of the Talmud of how one must treat his servant. The servant's physical comfort is of such importance, that if a master has only one pillow, he must forgo his own comfort and provide it to the servant.

Rav Kahaneman continued, telling his listeners that it is difficult to understand why a servant would receive priority over the master? After all, doesn't the master deserve a good night's sleep?

The Rav rhetorically asked, how can one sleep knowing that a fellow Jew is not resting peacefully?

Rav Kahaneman spoke from the depth of his heart. He shared that he tried his utmost to make everything comfortable for the soon-to-be-arriving group of young war orphans. Yet, despite his efforts, he was unable to obtain proper bedding. With much emotion, he cried out to the audience. “How can any of us sleep comfortably tonight knowing that the arriving children have no pillows or blankets?”

Devarim hayotzim min halev, nichnasim el halev, Words which em-

anate from one heart enter another.

The Rav's words were heartfelt and poignant. They touched all who were in attendance. That night, soon after Shabbos ended, there was a rush of people in Bnei Brak bringing pillows and blankets to Rav Kahaneman.

When the boys arrived on Sunday, their rooms were ready and comfortable.

Parshas Mishpatim shares with us many laws bein adam lechaveiro, between man and his fellow. Ethical, moral and civil laws. Mitzvos teaching us kindness and compassion. Amongst them are how careful we must be not to cause pain to widows and orphans. To be sensitive to a convert's feelings. Not to speak falsehoods and be a rumor monger. Not to fall into the trap of bribery. All of these are mitzvos that speak to our neshamah. Yet, the parsha opens with the laws of an eved Ivri, a Jewish servant. Why?

One way an individual becomes an eved Irvi is if he stole and was unable to repay his victim. He becomes a servant, with the proceeds paid by his master used to compensate those whom he victimized. Even though he is a thief, the Torah has laws to protect his honor and dignity. For instance, he should not be ordered to perform menial tasks, he is offered the same quality food and drink as his master, and must be given sleeping accommodations comparable to what his master and family enjoy. And yes, even if there is only that one pillow, it goes to the servant.

In our modern-day world, a convicted criminal ends up doing jail time. However, in Talmudic times, a thief would join a loving family. A family that can give him a second

chance. Instead of jail time, he is given rehab time. An opportunity to observe and a experience a meaningful and productive way of living, thereby giving him a new lease on life.

The question remains as to why the parsha opens with the discussion of an eved Ivri. The Torah is giving us a valuable lesson. Each one of us is created betzelem Elokim, in the image of HaShem, implanting within us a Divine spark. Sometimes, we may stumble, we may even fall and make serious mistakes. But despite it all, that inner Divine spark never disappears. It may become diminished at times, but it is never extinguished, and with sincere effort it can once again become a roaring flame.

Each and every individual is worthy of honor and respect, if only to recognize and honor the chelek Elokah, that part of HaShem within.

Just consider, if even a thief is afforded dignity and humane treatment, how much more are we obligated to treat family, neighbors, friends and business associates with respect, courtesy and consideration.

This Shabbos we recite Birchas HaChodesh, the Blessing of the New Moon, for the month of Adar. The month of Purim, followed closely by the Yom Tov of Pesach. Two opportunities to learn from the wonderful chesed example of Rav Kahaneman. As we hope to enjoy these Yomim Tovim with our families and dear ones, let's not forget that it's not just “my pillow”, but a time to share our good for-

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Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro

Bend Your Ego

One of the great miracles taking place in the Beis Hamikdash is described as follows: when the Jewish people stood still, it was extremely crowded, and yet when they bent and bowed down, there was ample room (Avos 5:7). This is an astounding miracle, because we would certainly assume that if it's packed when standing erect, it will certainly be that way, if not

even more, when bending.

My father zt"l liked to homiletically expound from this Mishnah the fundamental requisites of a strong relationship between husband and wife.

If you are always going to "stand" your ground, and be rigid in spirit, never capitulating and always bringing your ego into the relationship, it will feel crowded. The relationship will be uncomfortable, if not miser-

able.

But if you are willing to "bend" down and listen to what the other person is saying, putting your ego out of the equation, there will be room. Abundant room. And that's because there will be harmony and peace, and both husband and wife will feel its blessed effect.

Rabbi Uri Lati

Don't be Blinded

Nachum Ish Gamzu, the teacher of R' Akiva, was known by this title because he would always remark, "Gam zu l'tovah – This too is for the good." But Nachum Ish Gamzu did not have just any ordinary life.

He was, aside from other ailments, blind in both eyes. How can it be that he embraced such an optimistic attitude? What was it that enabled him to be so grounded in his faith and believe that everything, no matter how dismal it was, emanated from G-d?

The sefer Chaim V'Shalom remarks that Nachum Ish Gamzu was someone who, mirroring his blindness in both eyes, had firmly embedded in his heart that even if he cannot understand something at all – he would be 'blinded in both eyes' – it was still for his best.

Even when we don't see anything going our way, not at all, we still know that there is a conductor in Heaven Who is orchestrating everything.

The gematria (numerical value) of Anochi, I, a reference to the first of the Ten Commandments, contains

the same value as the word for trust in G-d, bitachon.

When you have full trust in G-d, you are able to choose a life of firm belief in Anochi, in G-d's Oneness and master plan, and experience the blessing accompanying it.

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