

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Yoel Gold

All It Takes is One

The Mishnah tells us: Hashem desired to bestow merit upon the Jewish people; therefore, He gave them an abundance of Torah and mitzvos" (Makkos 23b).

If you think about it, though, this statement is difficult to understand.

If Hashem wants us to be meritorious, why give us so many mitzvos? It seems counterintuitive. The more mitzvos there are, the more opportunities there are to fail. And the more opportunities there are to fail, the less likely we are to succeed. If Hashem truly wants us to merit Olam Haba (the World to Come), wouldn't it make more sense to give us fewer mitzvos? Give us a few mitzvos. Let us focus on those few and perform them perfectly.

The Rambam offers a remarkable insight.

In truth, a person only needs to perform a single mitzvah perfectly in order to merit Olam Haba. One mitzvah and that is all. If, over the course of a lifetime, a person fulfills one mitzvah purely for the sake of Heaven, without ulterior motives, without personal gain, without honor, recognition, or self-interest, that mitzvah secures his portion in the World to Come.

If so, why did Hashem give us 613 mitzvos?

The answer is that not every mitzvah comes equally natural-

ly to every person. What is easy for one person may be extraordinarily difficult for another. Hashem therefore fills life with opportunities. Six hundred and thirteen opportunities. Six hundred and thirteen chances. If there is one mitzvah among them that you can perform with complete sincerity and purity, then you can become worthy of Olam Haba.

This idea sheds light on a Gemara (Avodah Zarah 18a). The Gemara relates that Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon once asked Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma, "Tell me, will I merit Olam Haba?" Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma asked in turn, "Has any particular good deed come your way?"

Before proceeding, the question is astonishing.

Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon was one of the Asarah Harugei Malchus. He taught Torah publicly despite Roman decrees, and risked his life for Torah and ultimately gave his life for Torah. What did Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma mean when he asked, "Has any deed come your way?" His entire life was a mitzvah!

Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma was asking something else entirely.

Teaching Torah may have been natural for Rabbi Chanina. Public mesirus nefesh (self-sacrifice) may have been the role for which he was destined. Those are the acts that become headlines and the stories recorded in books. Those are the deeds for which generations remember a person.

"But tell me," asked R' Yossi ben

TheTorahAnyTimes is a publication of



Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik

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Kisma, “do you have one mitzvah that was completely private? One mitzvah that existed only between you and Hashem? One act performed with no audience, and no possibility of acclaim?”

Rabbi Chanina replied that once he was carrying money designated for Purim charity. His personal funds became mixed together with the charity funds, and rather than sort

out the difference, he gave the entire amount to tzedakah. Nobody knew. It was simply a pure act between him and Hashem.

Upon hearing this, Rabbi Yose ben Kisma exclaimed, “May my portion be together with yours!” According to the Rambam, that is precisely the point.

Hashem, in His kindness, fills our lives with mitzvos. It is not to make

success harder, but to make it more attainable. He gives us hundreds upon hundreds of opportunities because somewhere among those opportunities may be the one mitzvah that we perform with complete purity of heart.

Hashem wants us to succeed. And therefore, He gives us chance after chance after chance.

All it takes is one.

Rabbi Yisroel Majeski

Look For the Lonely

There was a man in my community named Mr. Markush. He was an Israeli contractor, a simple man in the most beautiful sense of the word. He wasn't impressed by status, appearances, or extravagance. In fact, he had a phrase he would repeat often: “Good is simple.”

A few years ago, he passed away.

After his passing, his son shared something remarkable. He said that whenever there was a kiddush in shul, his father was always the last one to come home. Now, his father was not the type to linger over the food. He wasn't interested in spending hours sampling every dish. That wasn't who he was. Yet somehow, every Shabbos, everyone else would come home, and he would still be at the kiddush.

As the children got older, they finally asked him. “Abba, every week it's the same thing. Everyone leaves, and you're still there. What are you doing?”

Listen to his answer.

“Every Shabbos,” he said, “I go to the kiddush and I do a scouting report. I look around the room and observe the different groups of people talking. I see the friends gathered around the cholent and I see the circles of conversation. And then I look for the person who has nobody.

“There's always someone standing alone. Someone holding a plate with no one to talk to. Someone who doesn't quite fit into any of the groups. And when I find him, I go sit down next to him. I talk to him and I stay with him until everyone else leaves.”

When I heard that story, I thought to myself, “I want to try that.”

The very next Shabbos, I went to a kiddush. While normally, I would gravitate toward friends or familiar faces, this time, I waited and looked around. I tried to see what Mr. Markush saw. And then I noticed someone sitting by himself. Honestly, I had probably seen him many times before, but I had never slowed down and really taken note of his isolation.

I walked over and sat down next to him. He looked genuinely surprised, almost shocked. It was as if he was thinking, “Me? You came to talk to me?” I cannot adequately describe how good the feeling was inside me. It was one of the most meaningful conversations I had that week.

Opportunities for chesed are often hiding in plain sight. The problem is not that they aren't there. The problem is that we're usually not looking for them.

If you're focused only on yourself, you'll never see them. But if

you enter a room asking, “Who needs a friend? Who needs encouragement? Who needs someone to notice them?” suddenly, an entirely different world becomes visible.

That kind of chesed does not happen by accident. You don't just stumble into it; you have to train yourself to look for it. I can't honestly say that I've done it every week since then. But I can tell you this: whenever I am alert, whenever I walk into a room consciously looking for the person on the margins, whenever I am in that mindset of lifting people up, I find those opportunities everywhere. And truthfully, they were there all along.

I just needed to learn how to see them.

Rabbi Chanan Gordon

Bring the Trophy Home

There's a famous quote by Nietzsche, later popularized by Viktor Frankl: "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." If you know why you are here, why you were placed in this world, you can always figure out the how and endure what comes your way.

Every single one of us is going to face serious tests in life. Look at our first forefather, Avraham Avinu. Avraham went through ten tests. The Nesivos Shalom writes that just as Avraham endured ten major tests, so too every Jew, as his progeny, will face significant tests throughout life. We inherited the spiritual DNA of Avraham Avinu. And when life gets difficult, when everything seems to be falling apart, that is the true test of fortitude. That is also when most people break down, because they do not have a why.

I was once speaking to the Yeshiva University basketball team and shared in this vein the following. It is a message that, I believe, applies to us all.

As Jews, we represent something bigger than ourselves. We all know that Purim is a story of hester panim, a story of hiddenness. It is not a story of splitting seas or the Ten Plagues. There are no overt miracles. But there is a message that we must carry for our lives.

Every single person, says the Gemara (Sanhedrin 37a), was hand-picked to be in this world. It is a rough world out there, but we as Jews are diamonds in the rough.

And we're carrying a message.

When you think about the hidden story of Purim, you find no supernatural moments. Just people who stepped forward with courage and clarity when it mattered most. And in life overall too, you'll discover that most of your defining moments won't come with dramatic background music. They come in the quiet discipline of an early-morning routine or late-night chavrusa or careful listening to your mother or father or child. They'll be found doing a charitable, kind deed that no one but you and Hashem know about. Those are the moments when nobody is watching, and yet it is when our character is most formed.

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 3:4) says that every person should view the world as perfectly balanced, and that a single action can tip the scales. Every choice matters. Not just publicly on the court or boardroom, but in how you carry yourself privately as a representative of Torah and the Jewish nation.

For many years, our company represented Kevin Durant, a well-known basketball player. When invited, I have had the opportunity sit courtside and wore a yarmulke. For whatever reason, one day I was sitting there wearing a cap over my yarmulke.

Kevin ran out of the tunnel, saw me, and came over. He took the cap off my head and said, "We like you like this."

I later reflected on this and wondered to myself: "What was he tell-

ing me?" I believe it is as essential to what it means to be Jewish as it can get. Deep down, every generation understands something. Every person who walks this earth knows that the Jewish people are meant to be a light unto the nations. They know that we are held to a different standard.

In my time spent around household NBA players and other celebrities, more than once, after using foul language, they suddenly notice me standing there and immediately say, "Sorry, Rabbi." Why do they do that? The answer is just as above. The world around us is conscious of who we are, and they're watching us how we behave on and off the court of life.

Every single one of us carries that torch.

Most of all, therefore, we are charged to live with the awareness that it is one of the greatest honors in the world to wear two jerseys—one with our name on the front, and the other with the Name above. They represent our name and our family and community's name, and also the Name of Hashem.

So go make you, your family and our nation proud. And equally so, go make a Kiddush Hashem.

Bring that trophy home. It is the trophy that most importantly declares that we, as the Jewish nation, are the ambassadors of Hashem who are here to enlighten all the peoples of the earth toward the recognition of G-d.

Thank you for reading this edition of The TorahAnyTimes Newsletter. If you've enjoyed, please let us know – we'd love to hear from you! Email info@torahanytime.com.

Rabbi Yaakov Vosoghi

Souled For Eternity

There are some things in life which can easily be forgotten.

We can become absorbed by the demands of our careers, chores and other related commitments of daily life. And in the process, we can lose sight of the most fundamental truth of all.

One day, our body will be laid to rest in the earth. But we will not. And that is because we are not our bodies. We are our neshama. And the neshama lives forever.

Forever is a very long time. Can you picture yourself—not as flesh and bone, but as a soul? Deep down, we all believe it. When our loved one passes away, we come to shul to say Kaddish and we make a beracha on food l'ilui nishmas and speak about the “elevation of the neshama.” No one questions it. Every Jew instinctively believes that the neshama continues long after the body is gone.

So picture yourself one day making that journey. Your body will remain behind, but your neshama will continue into eternity. That eternal soul is what resides within every one of us. The body we see in the mirror is only the vessel and container for that soul. But it is not who we truly are.

We have to engrave this truth into our consciousness time and again until it fully sinks in. It is not because Judaism rejects the physical world. We are encouraged to go to work (Avos 2:2) and even teach our children a profession (Kiddushin 29a). So by all means, build a career, work from nine to five, or nine to six, and earn a living. There is nothing wrong with success, and there is certainly nothing wrong with money. Money can accomplish extraordinary things.

But the moment wealth, status, or professional achievement becomes your ultimate purpose, the moment becoming the doctor, the lawyer, the executive, the multimillionaire, or the billionaire becomes your life's mission, you have set yourself on a path toward disappointment. Perhaps you won't feel it at twenty-five or thirty-five. When we're young, life is exciting and there are ambitions to pursue, pleasures to enjoy and goals to achieve. Success itself is exhilarating.

But eventually, the questions arrive. Mortality begins to stare back at us. What was all of this for? Was my entire existence simply about accumulating more? Was it all about working harder, earning more and buying more while we

grow older. And then say goodbye? That cannot be the purpose for which Hashem created us.

The Mesillas Yesharim (Ch. 1) writes that every human being possesses a natural thirst for ruchniyus. It is built into the neshama itself. And when that thirst is ignored, the result is not merely emptiness. It is atzvus, sadness. It is dissatisfaction and in fact depression. A person may have all the comforts or successes they have dreamed of and worked hard to achieve, but they still feel a hollow melancholy within. And the answer is for this reason. They are living beneath the purpose for which they were created.

We were not placed in this world merely to exist physically. We were created to live eternally, and to prepare our neshamos for that eternity.

Such a truth may be one which requires reminding again and again until it becomes the lens through which we see every decision, every ambition and every day of our lives. But at the end of our lives, if we adopt this attitude, we will thank ourselves.

Thank ourselves for eternity.

Rabbi Joey Haber

Talk Less, Say More

The Pasuk tells us: "A false witness will perish, but the one who listens will speak forever" (Mishlei 21:28). At first glance, the contrast is puzzling. Why oppose the liar with the listener? Wouldn't it make more sense to contrast the liar with the truthful speaker?

Words spoken carelessly, even when they contain fragments of truth, have a short lifespan. Words thrown into the world without wisdom eventually fade away. They lose their power.

But ish shome'a, the person who knows how to listen, who resists the urge to react to every provocation

and instead chooses to restrain himself, that person ultimately speaks with far greater authority. When he finally does speak, his words carry weight.

And it is not because he spoke more. But because he spoke less—and listened more.