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Rabbi Shraga Kallus

An Understated Virtue

The Midrash (see intro. to Ein Yaakov) records a fascinating debate regarding the most important Pasuk in the Torah.

Ben Zoma says it is, "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad" (Devarim 6:4). Ben Nanas argues that it is, "V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha— Love your fellow as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18). One emphasizes our relationship with Hashem; the other, our relationship with one another. Then comes a third opinion, offered by Shimon ben Pazi. It is, "The daily offering, brought every morning and every afternoon" (Bamidbar 28:4).

The Midrash concludes: we rule like Ben Pazi.

At first glance, this is astonishing. How could the most important Pasuk in the Torah not be Shema Yisrael? Not V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha? How could it be a technical instruction about daily korbanos?

I remember attending the leviya of Rav Dovid Povarsky zt"l and one of the stories told there left a lasting impression on me. His father, Rav Avraham Povarsky, had a fixed practice. Every single day he would arrive at the beis medrash around 1:30 in the morning to learn.

One winter night, the generator in Ponevezh malfunctioned and the beis medrash went completely dark. Yet Rav Avraham came any-

way. There he sat, in total darkness, reviewing Mishnayos and Gemara by heart.

People later asked him, "Why did you come? There was no light. You could have stayed home." His answer was unforgettable. "It wasn't for today," he said. "It was for tomorrow." If he allowed himself to stay home today, then tomorrow would become easier to stay home too. And the day after that easier still. The habit of going to the beis midrash would break. For him, showing up mattered more than the circumstances.

Rav Dovid related that he once tried persuading his father to be more lenient with himself. "It's not healthy," he argued. "You're getting older. You cough and you need rest." What was Rav Avraham's response? The next day he came even earlier. If the yetzer hara challenged him, he challenged it back. If it told him to come later, he came earlier. Eventually, the yetzer hara stopped arguing. You do not negotiate with that kind of consistency.

Perhaps this is the meaning of Ben Pazi's statement.

The greatness of Torah life is not found only in moments of inspiration. It is found in repetition. Morning and afternoon. Again and again, day after day. The Korban Tamid represents reliability and steadfastness. It reflects showing up and doing what must be done even when nobody is watching. Without that consistency, even the loftiest ideals

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remain unrealized.

A person may speak beautifully about Shema Yisrael and be inspired by V'havta l'reiacha kamocha. But if he lacks consistent commitment, those ideals never become part of who he is.

Today, commitments are often

treated as suggestions. But reliability is an understated virtue. A husband and wife must be reliable, a father and mother must be reliable and a friend must be reliable. People must know that your word means something. If you say you will be there, you will be there. If you undertake

a responsibility, it will get done.

The Korban Tamid embodies precisely the entirety of Torah because it is what ensures that it is fulfilled and there is no slack or lapse. It is the premiere quality to hold onto to because it is how a Jew builds out a successful Torah life.

Rebbetzin Elana Mizrahi

The Language of When

I was speaking with a woman recently, and throughout our conversation she kept saying things like, "If I ever get married... If I ever have children... If I ever get a job... If things ever work out..." And I found myself thinking: Why "if"? Why not "When, b'ezras Hashem (with G-d's help)"?

Then I realized something. She wasn't speaking from a place of faithlessness. She was speaking from a place of exhaustion. She was tired. Tired of hoping and dreaming and watching those hopes and dreams fall apart. She no longer had the strength to say "when." All she could manage was "if." Hearing that brought me back to a difficult period in my own life.

Several years ago, I became ill with COVID, and during that time, my father passed away. I was in quarantine and I could not attend the funeral. I sat shiva alone. I remember feeling as though something inside me had shut down. I had lost my drive to do anything. There was no "when." Only "if." "If I feel better... If I find my strength again... If things improve."

But I realized that what I needed was not a quick fix. I needed to recover something much deeper. I needed to recover my desire. But before I could desire again, I had to take one small step. I had

to want to want.

So I began there. I asked Hashem, "Please help me want to want." And something remarkable happened. The moment I wanted to want, desire slowly returned. And with desire came hope. And with hope came movement. And with movement came blessing. Life began moving forward again because I had moved from "if" back to "when."

Perhaps that is the message of this week's Parsha.

The daughters of Tzelofchad faced every reason to give up. Their father had died and they had no brother. According to the existing laws of inheritance, it appeared they would lose their family's portion in Eretz Yisrael. Most people would have accepted the situation. Most people would have said, "It is what it is." But not these women. They came before Moshe and declared, "We want a portion in the Land." They do not complain or despair. Their yearning was so genuine that Moshe himself did not know the answer. So he brought their case before Hashem, and Hashem responded, "The daughters of Tzelofchad speak correctly."

Their greatness was that they refused to let disappointment extinguish desire. They still wanted and they still dreamed. They still believed there was a place for them. The Sages (Sanhedrin 91a) teach that every Jew has a portion in Olam Haba. Just as every Jew

has a portion Above, every Jew also has a portion below: a place, a mission and a destiny. The daughters of Tzelofchad believed that. And because they believed it, they pursued it.

There are moments in life when logic says, "It's over. There is no path forward. Stop hoping." And perhaps there are times when the intellect alone cannot carry us. At those moments, something else is needed: the courage to keep wanting. Not because we control the outcome. Hashem controls the outcome. But we control whether we continue to pray, hope and dream.

That is why one of the most dangerous words in the human vocabulary is "if." "If things work out. If life gets better. If Hashem helps me." The daughters of Tzelofchad teach us another language. The language of "when." It is the language of yearning and of possibility. And if you find yourself unable to say "when" right now, then begin one step earlier. Want to want. Ask Hashem for the desire to desire.

Because the moment a person begins wanting again, the neshama begins to awaken. And once the soul awakens, the journey has already begun.

Rabbi Michael Kaplan

Of Fingers and Ears

In this week's Parsha, we encounter a curious name in the census of the shevatim: "L'Ozni mishpachas ha'Ozni— The family of Ozni" (Bamidbar 26:16). Rashi is puzzled and comments: "This is the family of Etzbon, but I do not know why they are not called by his name."

It is a striking observation. Why the mystery? Why abandon the original name, Etzbon, and rename the family Ozni? The Shelah Hakadosh opens a breathtaking window into the meaning behind this change.

He points to a remarkable Gemara (Kesubos 5b). The Gemara asks: why are our fingers shaped the way they are, like a peg? The answer is unexpected.

So that if a person hears some-

thing inappropriate, he can place his fingers in his ears and block it out.

The Ribbono Shel Olam fashioned the human hand so that it could serve as a guardian of the soul. Our fingers were created to protect our ears. With this in mind, suddenly, the name Etzbon takes on new meaning. The Shelah explains that Etzbon is related to etzba, a finger. Shevet Gad, descendants of Etzbon, lived in dangerous spiritual territory. They were surrounded by tribes that produced some of the most destructive figures in the midbar. To one side were Dasan and Aviram and to another were the two hundred and fifty men who challenged Moshe, as related in Parshas Korach. Later came Zimri and the devastating plague that followed. They

had every excuse to be influenced and every reason to fall. Yet they remained faithful. Why? Because they knew how to use their fingers. They knew when to close their ears. They were Etzbon, the tribe that understood that kedusha begins with guarding what one hears.

Years later, though, after the noise had faded and the influences of rebellion had passed, the Torah no longer calls them Etzbon. Now they are called Ozni, from the word ozen, ear.

Because the ultimate goal is not merely to block out evil. The ultimate goal is to hear good. To hear words of Torah. First comes the finger, and then comes the ear. First we learn what not to listen to, and then we become worthy of hearing what truly matters.

And once we do so, what we hear will internalize and catalyze us to higher and higher plateaus of spiritual excellence.

Rabbi Yitzchok Botton

The Jewish Package

I was in my mid-twenties when I first entered yeshiva. I hadn't gone through the traditional system of Jewish education, instead spending my childhood and teenage years in public school.

By the time I was twenty-five, however, I found myself searching. I was searching for something deeper than what I had known until then, and before I knew it, it turned out to be a five-year spiritual journey. Looking back, I often think of it as my own version of Lech Lecha. In fact, many years later I discovered that my bar mitzvah Parsha was Lech Lecha.

Providentially, I felt a deep connection to that realization. After all, every Jew in some way takes the journey of Avraham Avinu, leaving behind what is familiar and trying to discover who they really are and why they were placed in this world.

So there I was, walking into yeshiva for the first time. Everything felt foreign. The language, the dress, the white shirts and black jackets. And, for some reason, the peyot especially stood out to me. At that point I certainly didn't have peyot. In fact, I had one of those fashionable hairstyles where the front of the hair was carefully spiked upward. I still

remember spending twenty minutes every morning trying to make my hair look perfectly messy.

One day, while sitting in yeshiva, I picked up a Jewish magazine and began flipping through the pages. There was a photograph from the Holocaust that immediately caught my attention. The picture showed a group of German soldiers who looked exactly as one might imagine: tall, strong, confident, blond-haired, blue-eyed, and perfectly groomed. They stood around a lone Chassidic Jew.

The man in the middle was physically unimpressive. He was short and thin and wore a long coat. His beard was dark and his peyot curled down the sides of his face.

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At first glance, it looked almost absurd. Everyone around him appeared strong and he appeared weak. Everyone around him seemed to represent strength, confidence, and success and he looked vulnerable and out of place. I remember staring at that image for a long time, until a thought entered my mind.

If you had been standing there at that moment, as one of the German soldiers or even as a bystander, you probably would have assumed that the man in the middle was the fool. He was the odd one out because he looked different. But then I asked myself a different question.

From Hashem's perspective, who were the clowns and who was the man? Who possessed real strength? Who possessed real dignity? The answer is obvious. It was not the Germans. It was the Jew. That lone Chassid standing there with his beard and peyot, refusing

to surrender who he was despite everything being thrown against him—that was strength. That was courage.

I can honestly say that when I first entered yeshiva, I never imagined that I would one day look anything like that man. Yet something about that photograph stayed with me. Looking at that picture changed me. It was at that moment that I made the decision to grow peyot. It was not because I felt obligated, but because I suddenly understood what they represented. Over time, I grew them out and eventually found the length that felt right for me. Most people probably don't even notice them today, but I have kept peyot ever since. And I can trace that decision back to that photograph.

Beyond the technical halacha, peyot are a symbol. They remind us that we are different. It is not that we are better than anyone

else, but that we are different because we have a unique mission in the world. What I learned from that photograph was that it is beautiful to be Jewish. It is beautiful to be who Hashem created you to be. It is beautiful when a person's neshama shines through the way they live and the values they carry.

Real beauty comes from within. It comes from the heart. And when a person gives his heart to Hashem, that is what truly matters. Of course, every gift comes in a package. When you give someone a present, you place it in a box. The box is not the gift itself, but it carries something precious inside.

Our neshama is the gift, and the Jewish identity through which that neshama is expressed is the box. What I learned that day was to appreciate both: to treasure the soul within, and to be proud of the beautiful Jewish package in which Hashem chose to place it.

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Relief For You

Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum zt"l was renowned as a fearless defender of Torah and Jewish values. What is perhaps less widely known, however, was the extraordinary tenderness of his heart. He possessed a boundless compassion for those in need and found it difficult to turn away anyone who came seeking help.

One day, a well-known concert artist managed to secure a private audience with the Rebbe. The man sat down and began pouring out a heartbreaking tale of suffering.

"My wife is gravely ill," he said. "She is constantly in and out of hospitals. My son has nowhere to live. We have no money. We were just evicted from our apartment." One tragedy followed another. The story was so moving

that tears began streaming down the Rebbe's face. Unable to bear the man's suffering, the Rebbe reached into his pockets, removed all the money he had on him, and handed it over. "Take it," he said. "Go make sure your wife receives proper care and find your son a place to live. May Hashem help you."

He then blessed him warmly and sent him on his way. As the man hurried out the door, the Rebbetzin happened to be walking in. She caught a glimpse of the visitor and immediately recognized him. "Who was that?" she asked.

The Rebbe proceeded to recount the terrible story he had just heard—the sick wife, the homeless son, the crushing poverty. The Rebbetzin looked at him in disbelief. "Rebbe," she said, "that man is a fraud! He

isn't even married. The entire story is fabricated. None of it is true."

The Rebbe paused for a moment. Then a smile spread across his face. "Baruch Hashem," he said. "Baruch Hashem." The Rebbetzin was puzzled. "Baruch Hashem? Why are you saying Baruch Hashem?" "Because if none of it is true," replied the Rebbe, "then that means there is no sick wife, there is no homeless son and there is no family suffering through all those troubles." For a moment, he did not think about the money he had lost. He thought only about the possibility that another Jew's pain might not be real after all.

That is Ahavas Yisrael.

To feel another person's suffering so deeply that your first reaction upon discovering it was false is relief—not for yourself, but for them.