



“To share, to care. To make the world a better place....”

Parsha favorites of **Moreinu HaRav Avraham Chaim Tanzer zt'l**. Including his uplifting and edifying teachings. Ideas and values with which he raised and educated 4 generations, including lessons gleaned from his great character. Compiled and elucidated by Rav Dov Tanzer *le'iluy nishmas* Abba Mari hk'm.

Please share at your table as an *Aliyas Neshama*

GREATNESS LIES IN THE DETAILS

וְהָיָה עֵקֶב תִּשְׁמָעוּן אֶת הַמִּצְוֹת

And when you with listen to the laws...

Rashi famously comments that although the simple sense of the Pasuk means that there will be rewards in exchange for listening and obeying the Mitzvos; here the Torah is saying additionally that if you will heed the small *Mitzvos* of the Torah – ‘Eikev’ – meaning heel. Rashi continues to explain that the ‘minor’ *mitzvos* are those which people casually trample upon with his heel.

This implies that whilst all Mitzvos bear reward, there is indeed a special reward for heeding the ‘small’ mitzvos – those that people are generally too busy and too stressed to pay attention to.

Abba used to bring the words of Rav Aharon Kotler, Rosh Yeshiva and founder of the Lakewood Yeshiva, who explained that really you can only tell the nature of a person by how he responds to the ‘minor’ opportunities and responsibilities. Because, everyone will be in Shul for *Kol Nidrei* and for *Ne'ilah*, but during the grind of daily survival and strain, many people will forget to say a proper Thank you to their spouse for a good meal, or forget to look for opportunity to help out.

Both David *Hamelech* and Moshe *Rabbenu* were both tested by Hashem before being vaulted to their positions of historic leadership. They were both tested by how they looked after the sheep when no-one was watching.

Rav Aharon queries: how can the sheep-tending indicate a fellow's worthiness for the highest office in the land, which is after all, fraught with high politics and stresses which are completely alien to the simple and quiet life of the rural shepherd?

He answers that the essence of the leader is the attention to the needs of an individual, whilst tending to the crowd. If a person manages the sheep corral

well, he has the most essential fundamental awareness and organisational skills to attend to Hashem's people. All other skills can be outsourced or learned. The heart of the leader could already be seen in the pasture.



Abba reflected that sort of true leadership; he set a direction for the tzibbur, but was ever mindful of the pain, discomfort and indeed the joys and victories of each and every individual – regardless of rank and station.

He never forgot or overlooked the feelings of every person in every situation. If a person went through a transition at work, he would call them on the first day to touch base, to recognise, to let them know he was with them. He put people's feelings first. He didn't believe that communal good justifies trampling individual's dignity. Yet, he maintained focus on the direction and the tides and winds of the communal enterprise.



FORSAKEN BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

וְהָיָה אִם שָׁכַח תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ

Behold, if you forget Hashem... (8, 19).

Our Sages (Temura 14) commented: ‘Better that the Torah be broken than it be forgotten’. In what way is it worse to simply neglect Torah than to ‘break’ Torah.

Abba z'l, was fond of relating that the *Chafetz Chaim* was troubled by this question. He explained that in some ways it's preferable when enemies of Torah seek to fight and undermine the Halachos and Mitzvos of Torah. This is because when anyone attempts to undermine Torah ch'v, there will be at least an equal and opposite response from the people who remain faithful to Torah; they will fight back harder. They will endeavour to build Torah ever greater. The net sum of this equation might well be

positive. We often see in such circumstance a more invigorated Torah emerging from the struggle against those who would undermine her.

However, continued the *Chafetz Chaim*, when no one actively seeks to destroy Torah *ch'v*, it's simply left in a state of neglect, it could continue in that lethargic fashion until it's almost forgotten. In this situation, there are no apparent 'nasties' to wage war against, it simply follows the pattern of inertia – without anyone to rise up to raise the banner of Torah, because there isn't a clear enemy.



In South Africa 60-80 years ago, there wasn't any war against Torah, it was simply being left to sleep. Thus, there was no one to fight for it, because there was no-one to fight against.

It was not a state of *Chillul Shabbos*, Abba repeated, as much as a state of *Bitul Shabbos* – Shabbos and Mitzvos and certainly Talmud Torah were simply not relevant.

Since there was no anti – Torah campaign, there was also very little to be done to arouse the people from their spiritual torpor.

Abba used to quote the Ponevizher Rav, Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahanaman, who declared that since the South African Jewish Community were mostly *Litvaks*, there *Litvishe* origins would bring them back.

The Rav knew many of the South African families from *der heim* – many of them came from Ponivezh, where he had officiated at many of their Simchas. Thus, he knew the mettle of the *Litvisher Yidden*. He knew that they might not at that time keep everything, but they didn't give it away either.



Abba used to explain this statement of the Ponevizher Rav, by citing another remark of the Chafetz Chaim. The Chafetz Chaim was once asked by a certain man to define a 'good Jew'. He answered that a man who likes to drink prefers schnapps that is 100% proof. If he can't get the perfect brand, and he finds only 80% proof, he will drink that also. He knows that it's 20% water, but it is still good. And supposing that it's only 60% or 40%? It's still schnapps, though it is weak. When it reaches a point where it's 96% water or 98%, it tastes like spoiled

water, then he might prefer not to drink it at all. The Chafetz Chaim thus answered: 'Ideally a good Jew keeps everything. But an 80% Jew or even a 30% Jew may be a weak Jew, but he is a Jew nevertheless. When it becomes 95% *vasserdik*, then it's tasteless, it lacks all *Yiddishe Gishmak*!



Abba explained that as long as the Jew hasn't forgotten the entire Torah, he knows what he should be doing, and he does what is able to, the Torah will yet return him. Once however, he 'forgets' the Torah, he feels that authentic traditional Torah has no claim on him at all, such a Jew loses his chance of survival.

Abba often pointed out that this was the key difference in the development of the South African Torah regeneration. In South Africa, although many people unfortunately didn't 'keep everything', nevertheless, they never 'unsubscribed' from their holy traditions, they simply failed to uphold them all. But they maintained their allegiance to traditional heimish Yiddishkeit. They never exchanged it for a cheap substitute. Thus, their Torah brought them back, as the Rav predicted that it would.

Abba used to explain that this attitude isn't hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is an ugly fraud, but that's only when you don't believe in the truth of what you are claiming or preaching. But if you sincerely believe, but currently your best is still not 100% proof – it's still a form of a good Jew.



There was time in South Africa, Rabbi Yitzchak Kossowski, the erstwhile Chief Rabbi wrote, where the greatest expectation of a Bar Mitzvah boy, was that he would memorise his Maftir and Haftarah by rote – because reading the original Hebrew was certainly beyond societal expectation, and his reading in shul could be the last time he came to shul for many years. There wasn't an actual war against Torah, but it had been shunted aside by the pressure to 'succeed' – it was simply neglected...

But it was never forgotten. The *Yidden* still knew that Torah has a claim on them. They just could not practice it. They could never subscribe to a Reform philosophy – that would be forgetting. Thus, the day came, where the spark was fanned, and they returned in hundreds and thousands.

