

Pardes Yehuda

← Weekly Torah Journal By Yehuda Z. Klitnick →

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פרשת עקב תשפ"א

The reward for doing a Mitzvah depends on the intention when performing it

וְהָיָה עִקְבֵי תִשְׁמְעוּן אֶת הַמִּצְוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְשָׁמַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ אֶת הַבְּרִית וְאֶת הַחֶסֶד אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם: (ז"ב)

And it will be, because you will heed these ordinances and keep them and perform, that Hashem, will keep for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers. (7:12) The commentaries ask a powerful question: The Posuk begins with a plural statement

תִּשְׁמְעוּן אֶת הַמִּצְוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם "because you will heed these ordinances and keep them and perform," then the Posuk turns into singular

וְשָׁמַר ה' "that Hashem, will keep for you the covenant and the kindness?" Likewise it states

"And you shall worship Hashem, and He will bless your food and your drink." Here again the Posuk begins with a plural statement

"וְעִבַדְתֶּם" "And you shall worship" and then the Posuk turns again into singular

"אֶת לַחֲמֶךָ וְאֶת מִימֶיךָ" "and He will bless your food and your drink?" The answer may be that the Torah is teaching a powerful lesson. We see two people who perform the same Mitzvah. They both purchase the most expensive pair of Tefillin or most beautiful clean Esrog and straight and green Lulav. Both have performed the Mitzvah of putting on Tefillin and Esrog and Lulav. However, the Torah states (Shemos 15:2)

זֶה קְלִי וְאֶנְיֹהוּ "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him" Chazal Gemarra Shabbos 133b interprets the verse: Beautify yourself before Him in

mitzvos. Even if one fulfills the mitzva by performing it simply, it is nonetheless proper to perform the mitzva as beautifully as possible. Make before Him a beautiful sukka, a beautiful lulav, a beautiful shofar, beautiful ritual fringes, beautiful parchment for a Torah scroll, and write in it in His name in beautiful ink, with a beautiful quill by an expert scribe, and wrap the scroll in beautiful silk fabric. From this Gemarra we see that the Posuk is commanding a Yid when doing a Mitzvah, that there are two parts of the Mitzvah. Of course one must perform the Mitzvah as beautifully as possible. But, the main and most important part of the mitzva is to glorify Hashem, and perform the mitzva for His sake, Leshaim Shamayim. Yet some people will perform the mitzva for show off or peer pressure. Hence, when receiving the rewards for mitzvos, each one will merit according to his intention when performing the mitzvah. This is what the Torah says: When performing a mitzvah, it can be plural, as many people are performing the same mitzvah, therefore the Torah states "וְעִבַדְתֶּם" "And you shall worship, and

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(חן טוב לר' טוביה הרופא)

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STORY OF THE WEEK

(By Yehuda Z. Klitnick) (Revised and edited by Duvid Pinchas Rose)

The Frankfurter Rov's mazal did not shield him from harm

There's a folksy saying, almost a proverb (sourced not in the Gemara, as one might think, but in the Holy Zohar) that "heimishe" people often bandy about when it suits a situation *מזל טוב* "mazal", even a Sefer Torah standing in its Aron Kodesh.

When a situation doesn't turn out as one expects and one is at a loss to explain why, this proverb could shed light on the reason. But how, exactly? The unsung hero of our story was a living Sefer Torah whose "mazal" was much like a Torah scroll stuck in a hidden corner of an Aron, never taken out to read for the tzibbur. His glowing middos of humility and self-effacement combined with his scholarship cemented his status as a Godol B'Torah but, still and all, his career serves as an object lesson of our Zohar teaching.

The life of Rav Avrohom Abish Field ztz"l (נ"א תשרי תק"ט) presents a puzzling state of affairs: a revered Godol who was disgraced and subsequently lacked recognition in Torah circles of later generations. The Baal Shem Tov himself testified that he possessed Ruach Hakodesh. He served as chief Rav of Frankfurt after the Pnei Yehushua and major gedolei torah soon

after his time marveled at his perush Birkas Avrohom on Maseches Pesachim and other works of gaonus. However, his name, for no apparent reason, does not seem to be as widely appreciated among modern day circles of Torah scholars as it surely should be, despite his status as a towering Godol B'torah.

"Reb Abish'l" as he was affectionately known, always had the plight of the poor and downtrodden foremost in his mind. In whichever rabbinical post he held, it was a priority for him to solicit funds personally from the local magnates to benefit his known charity cases. Most donors recognized his exalted status and, wishing to spare him prolonged travels, opened their purses very generously. However, in the days before Rav Abish's hachtera / investiture as Rav of Frankfurt, one house presented a problem. This estate-owner had not heard of Reb Abish'l and in any case was not well-disposed to giving tzedaka generously. The servants admitted the Rav to the man's study, where he was immersed in his business records and took no notice of his visitor. The Rav stood silently in abject patience, as if he were a piece of furniture, until finally he felt

the need to clear his throat. The man finally noticed him, but it was not to his advantage. "Who do you think you are, barging in on me like this, you no-account beggar? Can't you see that I'm working hard on my accounts and have no time for the likes of you? If it's a handout you're expecting, just forget about it." He continued to heap abuse on his distinguished visitor, who uttered not a word in his own defense and humbly retreated from the scene -- with full composure but with an empty tzedaka purse.

When this fat-cat rich man finished with his bookkeeping, he set out for his daily "constitutional", a leisurely stroll clutching a valuable antique silver walking stick. But on the very day that Reb Abish had been in his room, the stick was nowhere to be found and this scoundrel connected what he thought were "the dots." "I get it loud and clear: that collector made sure to pay me back for not contributing to his cause, so he absconded with my heirloom stick. I'll fix his wagon. I'll track him down until I find him and will teach him a lesson he won't forget." Such were the wild ravings which seized this man's mind and set him off in pursuit of Reb Abish, going from one wealthy man's mansion to another. Sure enough, Reb Abish was just leaving a donor's home when the deranged man intercepted him on horseback. "You rotten thief! Hand over the walking stick that you took out of my house!" "Excuse me, Sir, but I don't know what you're talking about." "You'll soon find out," was the cruel response and the man took to beating Reb Abish without mercy, landing blow after vicious blow on his innocent back. Tzadik that he was, Abish endured the suffering silently, attributing it to kapparos avonos ("atonement for sins") and yesurin shel ahava ("afflictions of love") from his Father in Heaven. When the miscreant saw that his rage accomplished nothing other than beating a defenseless man to a pulp, and not a whit closer to retrieving his stick, he rode back home disgruntled and frustrated.

Two days later, while strolling around his mansion, what does he spy but a silver handle protruding from beneath a walnut breakfront. His missing walking stick! It had simply rolled under the furniture. At this point he realized that he had accused the collector unjustly and regretted it somewhat -- but a worse revelation was not long in coming. The community officials in the city of Frankfurt convened a community-wide assembly to hear an inspirational drosha from their newly appointed Rav. All businesses had to close and posters around town made sure that no householder was absent. When Rav Abish, their new Rav, ascended the bima, the holdout donor took to beating his chest, let out a bitter scream -- and fainted straight away. When he came to himself, he related the bitter episode to the people around him: not only had he falsely accused an innocent man of theft but had thrashed him for good measure. And not just any man but the new Rav of the city. "How will I ever gain atonement for this sin?" he wailed. "How will he ever forgive me? What punishment lies in store for me?" He was sincerely distraught -- for yes, a stingy miser he

was, but not a confirmed evildoer. His friends assuaged him. "Our new Rov is a one-of a kind Tzadik. Approach him after the drosha and he will set things straight."

The man tried to act on their advice and started to approach Rav Abish. But he didn't get very far, because the Tzadik, in his boundless humility, made a beeline for him and asked his mechila / forgiveness for having been the cause of the aggravation he suffered because of merely thinking that he had lost his treasured walking stick. This humility was unprecedented in Frankfurt or any other place. The man began to wail, "How can I possibly interact with a Tzadik like this? I'm as lowly as the dust." Clearly, true remorse had him in its proper grip and he publicly proclaimed his desire to accept any punishment the Rov would mete out for him, if only it would serve as his atonement. The Rov continued to display a lowliness of spirit, a refusal to exact revenge and a refinement beyond all human measure. "You've nothing to worry about, my good man, because I forgive you wholeheartedly, without the slightest reservation. Your account is cleared. The public embarrassment which you have suffered today will serve as your fitting atonement. I will only direct that in the future, you should never permit any legitimate gabbai tzedaka to leave your house empty-handed." This extraordinary pronouncement delivered in the public forum laid the matter to rest.

When the Baal Shem Hakodosh related these events to his circle of talmidim, known as the chavrayya, he smiled cryptically. Might we imagine that he did so because his ruach hakodesh revealed a glimpse into Rav Abish's "mazal" and the way it was a driving force?

[The "mazal" adhering to this living Sefer Torah was apparently not the sort to shield him from false accusation, undeserved beating and unfulfilled subsequent public legacy. Does this not perfectly exemplify the ma'amar haZohar which opened our discussion?

Knowing that his bad mazal might have lain at the root would be a sobering explanation. If a real Sefer Torah could talk and could be heard to say, "Why do I have to stand on this top shelf in the Aron, out of easy reach, never taken out for the weekly kria and with my gartel tied around my outside, meaning that there was once a question about my kashrus because of a crack in one solitary letter Yud?" we would tell it that its "mazal" determined everything.

"Mazal" does not translate as "luck", which is a trivial, frivolous, alien concept. It is a force affecting human life rooted in Higher Realms whose details are not fully revealed. The word is cognate with "Mazolos" / "Constellations", celestial alignments affecting human affairs, personal and communal. All of this is worlds beyond our scope but is underwritten by Talmudic astrology. When it is said that "Mazal" can affect anything, even a Sefer Torah in its domain," it must be taken seriously. Reb Abish's career is a powerful demonstration of the force of "mazal" at work, may Hashem spare us its deleterious effects.

It has been said that the "mazal" influence extends in subtle and hidden ways, even down to the level of the individual pesukim in the Torah. We see that certain pesukim are popular among meforshim and generate extensive commentaries, whereas others, if not ignored and lying fallow totally, are treated sparsely. And yet we know that each posuk is equally and intrinsically holy. For if the entire Torah is comprised of permutations of Names of HaKodosh Boruch Hu, the only explanation for varying echelons of commentary, if one may say so, is that not only does a Sefer Torah have mazal, but so too do its component pesukim. [DPR]]

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