

ELEVATING ACTIONS

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

This week, Moshe teaches us the laws of inheritance. He actually needs Heavenly guidance to teach the laws, as he forgot them. And even though inheritance focuses primarily on male transmission, the laws of inheritance were actually taught because of the request of five women who brought a legitimate complaint to Moshe. The Torah tells us: The daughters of Tzelafchad, son of Hepher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, of the family of Manasseh son of Joseph drew near -- and these are the names of his daughters - Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah and they stood before Moshe, before Elazar the Kohen, and before the leaders and the entire assembly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, saying "Our father died in the Wilderness, but he was not among the assembly that was gathering against Hashem in the assembly of Korach, but he died of his own sin; and he had no son. Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers. And Moshe brought their claim close to Hashem. (Numbers 27:1-5)

Many commentators discuss the expression, And Moshe brought their claim close before Hashem. Noting the fact that Moshe was unable to answer on the spur of the moment, Rashi comments that this was payback of sorts for Moshe's prior announcement (back in Parshas Yisro) to the Children of Israel to bring the small matters to lower judges, while he would adjudicate any difficult questions. In the case of Tzelafchad's daughters' query he was not able to answer on his own, rather he needed a Heavenly consultation.

But the expression, and Moshe brought their claim before Hashem, seems to tell us more. It does not say, and Moshe asked Hashem what to do. In fact, the Torah uses an expression *vayakrev* which means he brought close. And in that vein, what does the Torah mean by saying that Moshe brought their claim close to Hashem.

After the passing of the previous Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitlebaum, his successor the Sigeter Rebbe, came to Monsey to pay his respects to my revered grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, who at the time was the oldest Rosh Yeshiva of the Lithuanian Yeshiva world. Along with the rebbe came a significant group of his Chassidim who clung to the newly appointed seer, and were very curious to experience this first encounter between the Chassidic leader and the renowned Lithuanian sage.

The Chassidim piled into the house and began pushing to the front of the table. My grandfather, who was accustomed to orderly conduct, asked that the Chassidim be seated as well. He mentioned that

there were folding chairs in his basement.

One by one, each of the Chasidim brought up a chair from the basement, unfolded it, and sat down. After watching this scene repeat itself, Rav Yaakov could not contain himself.

When somebody carries a chair from the basement and then sits on it, all he is is a shlepper. But if each of you would bring a chair for someone else, then you become elevated. Instead of shleppers you become ba'alei chessed, kindhearted men who are helping each other! With almost the same action, you are transformed from chair-haulers into holy people who sweat on behalf of their friend! Let us bring our actions away from ourselves and closer to Hashem!

One of the greatest attributes of a spiritual leader is to view the actions of his flock in a holy light. Rav Nachum Yisrael of Lipna explains that Moshe did not view the daughters of Tzelafchad's request as one of mere monetary or territorial request. Instead, he viewed it as a spiritual one. Thus, he brought their claim close to Hashem. Moshe took their actions not as selfish real estate related desires, but rather as a spiritual quest to have their father's inheritance perpetuated through a share in the Holy Land.

And none other than Hashem Himself confirmed his assumption! Hashem confirms the claim, The daughters of Tzelafchad's speak properly (ibid v. 7).

The true sign of a Torah leader is to either see the spirituality in the actions of his flock, or to make the minor adjustments that will ensure that otherwise mundane actions become holy ones.

Good Shabbos

Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Martin Kofman in memory of Esther bas R' Yitzchak - 16 Tamuz R' Elazor ben R' Yehuda 28 Tamuz

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