

AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT

by Rabbi Label Lam

The question always percolates in the back of our minds, even if it is not openly expressed, whenever we attempt to live by the Torah's precepts and then our desires are thwarted by a "Torah prohibition". "What's so wrong? Why not!?" There is no answer, because there is no question. The assumption of the query has a false premise.

To understand the fundamental flaw implied in the questioner's paradigm, we must be prepared to revisit the experience of all experiences, the event of all events, "The Giving of The Torah!"

There is an illusion that we tend to live with unless consciously confronted. Imagine, if you please, a young person knocking on the door of a large mansion. After getting no answer he tries the door handle. It yields easily to his overture as if inviting him to enter.

He explores, cautiously at first, and finding nobody there he becomes more and more emboldened. After a short while he has adapted himself quite comfortably to his new environs and has "made himself at home."

After a period of time a gentle knock comes to the door. Busy with his entertainment center, he ignores the ever-growing intensity and urgency of the banging, choosing to turn the music louder and louder instead.

In a moment of anger and frustration he looks out the peephole to see who's being so awfully bothersome. All that can be seen is a knee. When he opens the door to examine the phenomena more closely, there stands a man seven feet tall who declares with a stern voice, "I am the owner of the house!"

In one moment, the youth is outside the threshold of the door and the owner comfortably within. The young man is invited in. He takes one careful step forward. He only eats whatever is offered. He says please and thank you as he eases back into the residence he had once wrongly assumed was his. He receives whatever he needs but never loses a healthy respect for the real owner and remains continuously in a posture of humility and gratitude for each generous allowance.

I remember experiencing a similar "paradigm shift" twenty something years ago at my first real Shabbos experience. I don't know if it was the super sublimity of the Shabbos or the way the Rabbi spoke or my readiness to hear what he had to say or the combination of the all three. He told us, "You intellectuals, you thinkers, G-d is not in your world, you are in G-d's world!"

My universe turned upside down in one moment. I realized the arrogance of the position I had maintained for so many years. If it is His world then it is not up to The Almighty to prove Himself to me, but for me to prove myself to The Almighty. Time is not on our side!

When the entire Nation of Israel stood at Mount Sinai 3314 years ago and heard the pronouncement, "I am Hashem...", a world that that one might be induced into thinking was empty and meaningless became filled with His presence. Any self-respecting parent does not feel compelled to answer the question, "Why not?" when a child's request is denied. The parent predates the existence of the child. It's pure foolishness for a creature so vulnerable and new on the planet to act so presumptuously in the face of "his maker". Nothing is owed!

It's not that we have this "life thing" going on here and then comes "religion", "the rabbis", or "the parental units" with all their rules trying to spoil the fun. Nothing at all is ours! As the Mishnah in Avos says, "Give to Him what's yours, because you and what is yours are His!"

With that simple adjustment one has lost nothing except a little existential anxiety. So having happened once in history on a grand scale already, the mindset is still there in a flash of inspired humility at any given moment.

Good Shabbos, and Good Yom Tov!

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