

VESTED INTEREST

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Netzavim-Vayeilech

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Our parsha opens with the renewal of the covenant of our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov with the generation of the wilderness and all of their future generations. Moshe exhorted them once again not to embrace the corrupting philosophies and life-styles of the nations residing in the Land of Canaan, "Perhaps there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart turns away from being with Hashem our G-d to go and serve the gods of those nations." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 29:17) He continued, foretelling the desolation that would come upon the Land when the Jews would be exiled for their misdeeds.

Rashi preempts the question, "How could the masses be punished for the conspiracy of a few rebels?" with the closing verse, "The hidden [sins] are for Hashem our G-d, but the revealed [sins] are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah." (29:28) Rashi explains that they would not be held accountable for the innermost thoughts - the hidden sins - of their neighbors, but the open acts of evil create a public responsibility to uproot and destroy the negative influences in the community. Failure to take the requisite action creates a communal culpability. This chapter is momentous in its establishment of the concept of "kol Yisrael araivim zeh lazeh", the interresponsibility of every Jew to another to bolster their mitzvah observance and assist in avoiding their violation.

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan of Radin; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics and renowned for his saintly qualities) explains that this concept is most commonly utilized to explain why one can perform a mitzvah (Divine commandment) on a friend's behalf - such as reciting kiddush (prayer sanctifying the Sabbath or holiday) or blowing shofar - even if he himself has already fulfilled that mitzvah. But if there are gaps in our friend's observance, mitzvos he could be doing that he is not or acts he should not be doing that he is, and our reminder or encouragement or instruction would make a difference but we fail to act, then we

are held responsible for those lost mitzvah opportunities!

Rabbi Kagan offers a parable to which we can all relate. Someone has some investment capital and he offers it to a friend who is starting a new business venture. In keeping tabs on how the new venture is progressing, the investor discovers his friend is dealing with an irreputable company and stands to lose the new business before it even gets started. The "silent partner" will surely no longer remain silent, as he expends great effort to salvage his investment and make the business successful. We, too, must feel that sense of investment in our friend's spiritual success.

The Chofetz Chaim encourages us to look for actions and exercises that will safeguard us and our communities from misdeeds. But, more so, we must actively invest - our time, our money and our selves - in our Jewish educational institutions and synagogues, for through them our mitzvah observance and spiritual experience are enhanced and strengthened.

Have a good Shabbos!

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