

# IT JUST ISN'T SO

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

Many years ago, the first Bobover Rebbe zt"l found himself in Vienna, in order to undergo an ear operation. Accompanying him on the trip was his son, the previous Rebbe zt"l. The hospital was outside the city, and they took a room in a hotel near to the hospital. For Shabbos, their plans were to be in Vienna-proper, seeing as where they were, outside the city, there was no kosher food, nor a mikvah (ritual bath) in which to tovel (immerse) before Shabbos, nor a minyan (prayer-quorum).

As sometimes happens, things did not quite go as planned. As the saying goes, "mentsch tract, G-t lacht - man thinks and G-d laughs." The procedure took longer than expected, and they were forced to spend Shabbos in their hotel room; no mikvah, no minyan, and no Shabbos meals (they did however still have some bread and dairy products).

The Rebbe noticed that his son was quite distressed over their predicament. "My son," he said, "I understand that you are upset because this is the first time you are ever experiencing such a Shabbos. So much seems to be missing; no mikvah, no minyan, and no Shabbos foods. Let me offer you a word of advice: Do not miss out on this unusual opportunity to experience kedushas Shabbos (Shabbos sanctity) in other ways. Shabbos is still holy - in spite of our lacking the customary comforts with which we normally honour it. Know, my son, that even the walls of our hotel room proclaim, 'Today is Shabbos for Hashem!' You must only be willing to hear them." [Kedushas Tzion, parshas Be-Shalach, footnote to page 109]

Sometimes, we grow accustomed to serving Hashem in a certain way. Some people never miss a day without going to mikvah. Others never miss their daf-yomi shiur. Some always daven (pray) early - others pray late, learning for an hour or two before davening. While such customs are certainly praiseworthy, we must be careful not to attach too much importance to serving Hashem in a certain way. It doesn't always have to be just so. Life doesn't always take the straight path - different situations and circumstances arise. We must remember that there are many other ways to serve Hashem [within the boundaries of accepted halacha (Torah law).] Indeed, there are infinite ways to serve Hashem - in every situation and in every scenario; our task is to find them.

I once heard of a poor fellow who was the last one to go to mikvah before Yom Kippur - and somehow became locked-in. Though he pounded and banged, it was to no avail. He realized that since the mikvah was not used on Yom Kippur, he would likely not be discovered until after Yom Tov. It is prohibited to pray or learn in a mikvah, which meant his spending his entire Yom Kippur alone with his thoughts. "Hashem," he said, "normally I serve You on Yom Kippur with tearful prayers.

Today, I will serve you with silence."

Schedule and order are invaluable aids to Torah observance. Indeed, the Ba'al ha-Tanya is said to have told his grandson, the Tzemach Tzedek, "Structure and organization are the keys to serving Hashem - they will take you everywhere. Lack of them will stunt your spiritual growth, and prevent you from accomplishing to the fullest of your abilities." The organized person is a pleasure to behold - he seems to accomplish so much more with his time.

But even the most organized and structured individual must bear in mind - it doesn't always have to be "just so." When structure evolves into rigidity, it becomes dangerous and detrimental. Ultimately, we must serve Hashem in the way that He sees fit - even if it doesn't fit into our normal scheme of things. When life is "off-schedule" - when things just don't go as planned - we must seek new, creative ways to serve G-d, instead of letting ourselves become discouraged and aggravated.

The choice is ours: We can be rigid and tense - or we can be flexible, and allow ourselves to yield and adapt to the different and diverse situations life offers us. The true servant of Hashem recognizes every situation as an opportunity to serve Hashem, sometimes in ways he never even imagined. One who, when things don't go as planned, finds himself disoriented and despondent, upset that he is unable to serve Hashem the way he likes to, should perhaps consider if it is Hashem Whom he serves - or is he, so to speak, "serving his service."

In parshas Re'eh the Torah writes [12:4], "*You shall not do 'so' to Hashem, your G-d.*" In Chassidic thought [see Noam Megadim, parshas Ki Sisa, quoting Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak (the "Choize") of Lublin zt"l], this pasuk is seen to intimate the above concept. Do not allow your service of Hashem to become overly uncompromising and rigid - to be just 'so'. For one must ultimately remember that it is Hashem we are to serve, not serving His service.

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