

PUTTING PIZAZZ INTO OUR MITZVOS

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Special Sefarim and Delayed Deliveries - Putting Pizazz Into Our Mitzvos

A most interesting she'ila (halachic query) was recently asked of Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein Shlita, Rav of Ramat Elchanan in Israel: A Lev Le- Achim activist (Lev Le-Achim works with "not-yet-observant" Jews in Eretz Yisrael) had become involved with a family in which the mother had a sincere interest in furthering her Judaism, and had indeed already commenced mitzvah observance to the best of her abilities, while her husband refused to take any part in her religious journey. Their not seeing eye-to-eye was putting a strain on their marriage, and the young rabbi who had been "assigned their case" was trying diligently to bridge the gap, yet to no avail.

One day he received a phone call from her husband: After a long discussion with his wife, he had agreed to begin putting on tefilin. He had no tefilin of course, and could not afford to purchase them on his own, so he was calling the rabbi in order that he arrange for a pair of tefilin to be given or loaned to him. The rabbi was elated - this was the moment he had been waiting for! Now that the father had opened up a small space in his heart, perhaps the mitzvah of tefilin could serve as an impetus which would propel him towards a greater appreciation for Torah and mitzvos, and maybe even eventually become a full-fledged Torah Jew! There was no doubt that this was an opportunity not to be missed!

In order to maximize on the occasion, a small "tefilin ceremony" would have to be arranged, in which the father would be presented with his very-own tefilin, speeches would be made, and hopefully a dialogue would evolve. The quandary: Although the tefilin were ready now, due to previous commitments it was not possible for the case-rabbi to set up a meeting for another few days. This would mean, however, that the father, who was ostensibly ready to begin laying tefilin today, would miss yet another few days of this beautiful and important mitzvah. Perhaps it would be better to just deliver the tefilin now, even though this would likely mean forgoing the "ceremony" and a lost opportunity. This was the question that the case-rabbi put before Rabbi Zilberstein.

Rabbi Zilberstein told him of a different question that had also come up recently: A young man in Cholon had arranged with a small group of boys from non-observant homes who had shown interest in learning more about their Judaism to learn Mishnayos a few times a week. In order to really pique their interest, he had arranged for each boy to receive his very own Mishnayos, with accompanying pictures and explanations. However, it would take a few days for the Mishnayos to

arrive. The boys were willing to begin already - but that would mean starting their shiur with borrowed books, and no pictures. The teacher felt that the impression of receiving their own Mishnayos - with pictures - would be most impactful if it were done right from the beginning, and asked whether it was wrong to postpone their learning for another few days, even though they were ready to start now, in order to begin in a more meaningful way.

In order to answer their insightful queries, R' Zilberstein made reference to this week's sidrah. In answer to B'nei Yisrael's complaints about there being "nothing to eat in the desert," Hashem promises them that Manna will fall daily from heaven. Each day they would get up in the morning, and the Manna would be waiting there on their front lawns, laying lightly on top of the morning dew. On Friday, there was a surprise: Each person had received a "double portion" - two times as much as they had been getting every other day. They approached Moshe in regard to their discovery. Rashi takes up the commentary at this point:

They asked Moshe, "Why is today different than all other days?" From here we can see that Moshe had not yet taught them the laws of Shabbos (with regard to the Manna), although he had already been told them by Hashem at an earlier time. Now that the opportunity arose, and they asked, he gave over what Hashem had told him (i.e. that the double portion on Friday was due to the Manna not falling on Shabbos, in honour of the day's sanctity).

Why indeed didn't Moshe teach them the rules of Manna on Shabbos right away - was he too busy? Moshe felt, says the Rashbam, that the Jews would appreciate his lesson far more if it were taught to them after having wondered and been amazed by Friday's double portion than they would have if it were just told to them straight off the bat. He could teach them about Shabbos in an abstract way - or he could let them experience it. Moshe felt that by letting them puzzle on their own, and only then revealing his lesson, it would have a more lasting and meaningful impact.

It thus appears, said R' Zilberstein, that it is sometimes preferable to push off a mitzvah for a short time, if one feels that by doing so its impact could in some way be increased (he does address why Hashem was seemingly critical of Moshe for doing so in this case). He thus advised that the teacher wait for the Mishnayos, and the activist delay delivering the tefilin until he could do it in a more meaningful way.

What we see from these questions, and R' Zilberstein's insightful answer, is that not only is there nothing wrong with making Torah and mitzvos exciting and arousing - it's actually the correct way to do things! We live in an era where there is an abundance of fun, excitement, and media- overload to be found outside the walls of the Yeshivos and Battei Midrash. It's there - and our youth are exposed to it (to varying degrees). If we don't succeed in bringing that same (or more!) excitement, enthusiasm, and yes - fun - into Torah and mitzvos, is there any question as to who's going to win the battle?

There are those who bemoan today's way of doing things: "Who ever heard of giving prizes for

reviewing Mishnayos or Gemara; of masmidim programs with raffles and refreshments; of rewards for middos tovos and derech eretz? Why, when we were kids, we learned without any incentives - and we learned better than today's kids, too!" It's probably true - but that was then and this is now. Moshe Rabbeinu already taught us this lesson - if you want your words of Torah to have a lasting impact, you've got to deliver their message in an impactful manner.

Have a good Shabbos.

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