

LIFE, THE BIGGER PICTURE -- SAY CHEESE!

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Each man, his sanctified offerings, they shall be his. (5:10)

In a literal sense, the above verse teaches us that while each person must separate a percentage of his earnings and produce to be given to the Kohanim, it is his choice to which Kohen they should be given. A Kohen may not come and demand his due, but rather each man's offerings shall be his - to decide to whom they are given. (Rashi)

On a different level, commentaries find in this verse a basic yet essential lesson that we would do well to repeat to ourselves constantly: All we really stand to profit from our short lives upon the earth are the moments of Torah and mitzvos we shrewdly put aside. Although we may expend much time and energy in building our homes, making sure our cars run smoothly, our wardrobes are up to date, and our finances in order, none of that will make much of a difference once the plug is pulled on our feeble existence and we take up eternal residence in our ethereal dwellings. Then, our status won't be determined by our clothing, our cars, our carpets or our condominiums, but by the time we put aside for the "finer points" of life - Torah, mitzvos, and a measure of holiness. Each man, his holy things, those shall be his - forever.

Let us imagine a man with three friends. He would introduce them as follows: One friend is very dear, and they speak regularly. The second friend is a good friend, but they aren't as close and talk on occasion. The third friend is really no more than an acquaintance with whom he meets up from time-to-time; they are on friendly terms, but there is no great love between them. This is the pecking order of his friendships, as he saw it.

Now one day, this man was summoned to come before the king. He was being accused of a crime he didn't commit, although in those days that didn't necessarily make a difference. Once it became known that a person had been issued a summons, he was considered a marked man, and even being seen together with him was risky business. Thus, when he asked his first and best friend to come with him to the royal court to beseech the king to absolve him of the false accusations, it should come as no surprise that friend number one suddenly made himself scarce. "You have to understand," he explained, "I've got a wife and kids to care for... I can't allow myself to become implicated in your affairs."

Friend two was slightly more receptive. "I will accompany you to the palace," he said. "I'm not scared of being seen with you. But that's as far as I go. Once I enter the palace gates, who knows if I'll ever come out?!"

To his utter surprise, it was his third and (he thought) most distant friend who came through in his time of need. "Don't worry," he said, "I'll be there for you, and I'll do what I can. Truth be told, I have met the king before, and my word is a word to him. I think he'll be swayed by my testimony over your innocence." Indeed, it was his last friend - the one he almost forgot he even knew - that came through for him in the end.

The first friend, says the Chafetz Chaim, is our money and worldly possessions. We are fondly attached to them, and invest much time and energy into our relationship. In the end, when the King of Kings summons us to testify before His Heavenly court, they don't accompany us; we leave everything behind.

The second friend is our family and friends. They escort us to our final resting place, but having said the appropriate prayers and consolations, they return home and get on with their lives. We are but a distant memory.

The final friend - the one we give the least consideration and attention - is our spiritual accomplishments; our Torah, our mitzvos, and our ma'asim tovim (deeds of kindness). Ignored and neglected though they might be, they alone will stand with us at our moment of reckoning and do their best to testify on our behalf.

He once said a different parable to express a similar thought: A penniless pauper once travelled to Africa in hopes of earning some money with which to support his undernourished family and marry off his soon-to-be-of-age daughters. After a short while he realized there was a great lack of meat and dairy products; due to the extreme heat the herders had a hard time keeping their livestock well-fed. He began to deal in livestock, and was quite successful. He gained a name for himself as a reliable source of meat and dairy products, and after a few years he had amassed a small fortune. He decided the time had come to return home and share the spoils of success with his family.

But this poor soul had become so enamoured with his precious meats and cheeses that he decided the best thing he could possibly do for his family would be to convert all his wealth into cheese, which he would ship back to Europe on a ship, and sell it there for even greater profits. Standing at the docks overseeing his massive cheese shipment, he was approached by a jewel dealer, who in the mine-laden mountains of Africa were a dime a dozen. "Mister, how about you give me a few bundles of cheese and I give you a nice diamond ring for your wife, and gold- earrings for your children?"

At first he was adamant; he would not give away any of his precious cheese for something so abundant and plentiful as jewels and metals. In the end, he figured he could afford to give away a few blocks of his massive cheese stock, and so he bought the diamond for his wife and the earrings for his daughters.

Of course by the time his ship docked in Europe, the stench from the rotting cheeses had become unbearable. His wife, who had waited years to reap the fruits of her great sacrifice, soon realized there was nothing. Her only consolation: The large stone in her ring, and the heavy, pure gold in the earrings brought enough money to marry off all their daughters to respectable mates.

What a fool this man was! Even had his cheeses stayed good, how could he have thought they would have been worth very much back home? Milks and meats were no great metziah in Europe where there was plenty of water and grass for cattle to feed on. Imagine if he had only taken his profits and invested them in precious stones, which were plentiful in Africa, and scarce back home. Why, he would have been wealthy beyond imagination!

And what fools we all sometimes are, says the Chafetz Chaim. When we finally finish our short stay here on Earth, and ascend on High, we will be forced to give an account of how we spent our precious days here in the material world. Realizing we have invested most of our time and energy in achieving material comfort and financial success, we will be left speechless when we see that our "fortunes" are worth nothing at all. Save for the little "stuff" we may have picked up along the way - a tzedaka here, a chessed, Torah study, mitzvos - the things which we unfortunately gave too little thought when we had the chance.

Of course our hindsight then will be twenty-twenty; but it won't get us anywhere. Luckily, we have gedolim like the Chafetz Chaim who with a touch of biting humour give us a wake up call to get our cheshbonos in order before it's really too late.

Have a good Shabbos.

***** *This week's publication is sponsored by R' Shlomo Eliezer Isaac, in memory of his sisters, Tzipporah and Hadas, daughters of R' Moshe Yehudah a"h, who were killed al kiddush Hashem 14 Sivan 5704. And in memory of their grandfather, R' Eliezer ben R' Chaim who died on 22 Sivan 5697. And in memory of their grandmother, Esther bas R' Yitzchak, who was killed al kiddush Hashem 25 Iyar 5704. And in memory of their grandmother Hadas bas R' Shraga, who passed away 11 Sivan 5697.* ***** Text Copyright © 2004 by [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **Torah.org**