

DOING WHATEVER WE CAN'T

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Moshe would speak, and G-d would answer him with His voice. (19:19)

The first letters of the words of this pasuk (verse) contain a fascinating letter combination. The Gemara teaches (Shabbos 12a):

Tanu Rabanan - the Rabbis taught: One who comes to visit the sick on Shabbos (does not bless him with the usual 're'fuah she'leimah' but rather) says, "Shabbos hi mi-lizok ve-refuah k'rovah lavo/Shabbos prevents(me) from crying out (in prayer), but your remedy is soon on its way!"

This is based on the fact that it is forbidden to pray for individual needs on Shabbos. In lieu of a prayer, we offer the sick our assurances that in the merit of Shabbos, his remedy will surely be dispatched from the Heavenly source of all healing.

The above pasuk reads: Moshe yi-daber ve-ha-Elokim ya-anenu ve-kol. The letters of Moshe (mem shin heh) form the words: Shabbos hi mi-lizok. The letters of ve-kol (bais kuf lamed) form the words: ve-refuah k'rovah lavo!

Why is it that on Shabbos, when we offer no prayer, we express such certainty that the refuah is forthcoming, while during a regular weekday visit, where we do pray, we offer the sick no such assurances?

The Bobover Rebbe shlita explains this anomaly with the following story:

One time on Erev Shabbos the Holy Rebbe R' Menachem Mendel of Rimanov zt"l set out to immerse himself in the mikvah, as he always did, in honour of the Shabbos. This time, however, there were some problems, and the mikvah had been emptied prematurely. This week there would be no tevilah. Surprisingly, instead of becoming upset and dejected, he actually seemed happy and upbeat. Turning to his Shammash (beadle), he said, "Today my immersion was more complete than any other time in my life. You see, normally, when we do a mitzvah, we try our best to purify and sanctify our thoughts at the time, in order to do the mitzvah for one reason only: To give Hashem pleasure; not to satisfy some personal need or agenda. Still, who can say, 'My heart is pure,' and state that he has immersed himself with all the proper thoughts and intentions?

But Chazal (our Sages) teach that when a person truly tries to perform a mitzvah, but is unable, then the Torah considers it as if he has performed the mitzvah. So today, since due to circumstances completely beyond my control I was unable to immerse, the Torah 'steps in' for me - and one can be

sure that even if I can't possibly keep in mind all the right thoughts and intentions, "the Torah" certainly can! That's why I say that today more than any other, my tevilah was a truly perfect immersion!"

The Gemara (Ta'anis 25a) tells the story of R' Chanina ben Dosa and his wife. R' Chanina, it is said, made do with so little, that from one Shabbos to the next all he ate was a small measure of carob. Once his wife complained about their extreme poverty. "How long are you going to make us suffer like this," she asked. Rabbi Chanina prayed, and a golden table-leg was given to him. That night, his wife had a dream in which she saw all the righteous in Gan Eden sitting at tables with three legs, while R' Chanina and his wife had a table with only two. "If that's the case," she said, "I don't need it; I'd rather suffer than to diminish our Olam Ha-ba!" He prayed again, and the golden leg was taken back. The Rabbis taught: The second miracle (the revoking of the leg) was greater than the first, for normally things may be granted from Heaven, but they are never taken back!

R' Yonason Eibshitz zt"l (Ya'aros Devash, derush 4) asks: What is the meaning and significance of a bed with two or three legs? And why is it greater for Heaven to revoke than to grant in the first place?

We may rest assured, he says, the R' Chanina's wife wasn't suddenly overcome by the desire for riches and material bliss. If that were the case, it is not likely that R' Chanina would have acceded so easily to her desires. Rather, her desire, and his, was to keep the Torah as best they could. We know that there are three "pillars (amudim)" which support the world: Torah, avodah (sacrificial service/prayer), and gemilus chasadim (deeds of kindness - see Avos 1:2). Now one could certainly imagine that R' Chanina and his wife would hardly be lacking in the first two amudim. But the pillar of gemilus chasadim, specifically tzedaka (charity), depends very much on one's financial wherewithal. Even the best intentioned and purest of heart can not donate what he doesn't have... It was for this reason alone that his wife asked, "How long do you intend to make us suffer like this," for in our present state of poverty, we are sorely unable to use our nonexistent funds to support Torah scholars and the impoverished! R' Chanina felt she had a point: It was one thing to make-do with the bare minimum, but why should the poor suffer as a result of his asceticism? He asked for wealth, and his wish was granted.

The three-legged tables at which the righteous sit are reserved for those who upheld all three pillars of the world: Torah, avodah and gemilus chasadim. To her utter surprise, R' Chanina's wife was shown them sitting at a table of only two legs. This was the exact opposite of what she had expected! It seems that not only had they not furthered their mitzvah performance with their new-found wealth; they had actually diminished it!

One who has not been blessed with the gift of extreme wealth, or suffers himself from poverty, seldom has the possibility to support others with his own meagre funds. If, however, upon seeing the poor, his mercy is truly aroused, and he wishes with all his heart there were something more he

could do than to offer his paltry donation, then in fact, "The Torah considers it as if he had." As we mentioned before, when the Torah does a mitzvah for you, you can rest assured that the mitzvah is "done" with the purest of intentions. Now that they had been given true wealth, a great responsibility rested on their shoulders; many poor people may be depending on their donation for their next meal, and how can one be sure he'll never give too little, misjudge, give begrudgingly, etc.? She realized it was better before, when they truly desired to do the mitzvah of gemilus chasadim yet couldn't, than now where they could never truly do as much as they should. This was the missing third-leg from their table.

She asked for the gift to be taken back, and it was, which is a greater miracle than the first, for now that they had asked, and had been entrusted with wealth that so many others likely depended on, how could it be taken back? Who would support the poor that may have needed that money. Of course Hashem could likely find some other person to accept the wealth and its responsibilities (would you?), but for Him to take it back says a tremendous amount about the purity and altruism of R' Chanina and his wife.

This, says the Rebbe shlita, is why on Shabbos, when we can't offer a prayer, we assure the sick person that his cure must be just around the corner. If we were to pray, who's to say we'd have the merit of having our prayers accepted. But if Hashem prays for us, then the infirm may indeed rest peacefully.

Often we think that as long as we're in control, things will be okay. "Give me what I need, Hashem, and I'll take care of the rest." In truth we see that sometimes the best thing of all is not being in control, and having the composure and poise to hand over the reins to the Higher Authorities.

Have a good Shabbos.

This week's publication was sponsored in memory of Rabbi Shlomo Langner, son of the holy Admor R' Moshe of Stretin, zt"l.