

WHAT YICHUS!

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

One of the most beautiful expressions of G-d's love for us is found in this week's Parsha. (14:1) You are children of G-d, your G-d

To be considered as G-d's children is to revel in the dependency and freedom that every child should feel in relation to his parents. WE are G-d's children! What yichus! (lineage!) We are the sons and daughters of the King of all Kings, the creator, the Almighty, the Divine etc.! We are princes and princesses, the most royal of all royalty, the most noble of all nobility! However, this majestic designation as the "children of G-d" is only the preamble to a "therefore".

The Pasuk continues, "therefore, do not cut yourself and do not put a bald spot between your eyes (as a sign of mourning) for a dead person." What a let down! I would have imagined that Moshe's next words would have been, "therefore do not intermarry; or do not worship idols; or, keep the Shabbos; keep the laws of Kashrus; protect the sanctity of the Land; or, cherish the orphaned and the widowed who are also the children of G-d!" What is so important about not imitating the self-mutilating mourning practices of the Ammorites (Rashi) that it should be introduced with our designation as "the children of G-d?"

As a generation, we have become very psychologically sophisticated. Terms such as: psychotic, neurotic, depressed, suicidal, anxious, and Freudian color our expressions lending them distinct meanings. Often, following a tragedy or a loss, we find ourselves depressed, anxious, and unfocused. A close friend or loved one passes away and we loose sight of our goals and ambitions. Our daily responsibilities and commitments assume gargantuan proportions as we flounder in a sea of questions, misery and pain. Often there is the feeling that life isn't worth living.

Associated with the feelings of depression is a loss of a sense of security. Most of us do not live our lives, "as if this was the last day of our life." We fully expect to wake up each day and build toward a dream and a goal. When confronted with the frailties of life, we are caught unaware and are then forced to reassess our expectations. This often adds to our feelings of insignificance and "what's it all worth anyway?"

As the Bnai Yisroel were poised to enter the Promised Land, Moshe Rabbeinu forewarned them to always remember the source of their success and security. No one person or group can guarantee the future. Their trust should be directed to G-d, and G-d alone. Everyone eventually dies.

Grandparents, parents, children, loved ones, friends etc. all live and die. Fortunes are made and lost, and there is supposed to be a cosmic balance between success and failure. However, G-d is constant. G-d never changes. G-d is always there.

In many cultures, there is a tremendous emphasis placed upon the contributions of a single individual. Leaders, both political and religious, often become the focus of our dreams and aspirations. We invest them with a divine quality that seemingly transcends the limits of mortality. We too, as a people, place enormous significance on the presence of our teachers and leaders. With their passing, the nation and the individual are often gripped by a feeling of depression, and a loss of a sense of self. These feelings are to be expected, and they are to be embraced. Chazal, in their infinite wisdom, ordained the periods of Shiva, Shloshim, and the twelve months to allow those feelings to run their natural courses. However, the Torah condemns any overt mourning practices that defile our physical selves in a manner that suggests that we are less of a person because we have lost a significant other.

At the height of our pain and at the very depths of our depression we may very well feel that we are insignificant, without rhyme, reason or hope in life. However, the Torah comes along and says, "'How dare you! You are the children of Hashem! How can you think of yourselves as irrelevant or without hope? Therefore, this prohibition against the mourning practices of the Ammorites was intended, "to preserve the respect that every individual should have for himself because of his awareness that he is bound directly to G-d... Such an unjustifiable loss of self-esteem would be implied by our inflicting permanent injuries or bald spots upon our bodies." (Rav Hirsch 14:1)

There are other equally obvious ways in which we express our loss of self and trust in G-d. The pagan rites of the Ammorites have transcended time and place. Body piercing, trends in haircuts and fashion, and the manner of our speech reflect a growing disdain for the value and uniqueness of self. We are commanded to always remember who and what we are. We are the children of G-d! Everything we do and say should reflect that unique designation and status. Royalty exists for the people. We are royalty, and our subjects are the other nations of the world. We must be certain that they see us as different because we are more dignified, different because we value ourselves, and therefore them, far more than they value themselves.

When was the last time that we gave real thought to the meaning of fashion and style. As we all know, most contemporary fashion is intended to entice and reveal, not simply provide utility or comfort. Does that enhance our dignity or debase our having been "created in the image of G-d?"

Moshe Rabbeinu identified us as "the children of G-d." It is incumbent upon us to embrace that designation and yichus with responsibility and invest ourselves and our children with a greater sense of trust in G-d and self-worth.

Good Shabbos.

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