

PRIORITIES CONFUSED

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 166, The Childless Couple in Halacha. Good Shabbos!

The Closing Will Be With Avrohom

This week's parsha contains the pasuk [verse] "And I will make you into a great nation. And I will bless you. And I will make your name great. And you will be a blessing." [Bereishis 12:2].

In the Talmud [Pesachim 117b], Resh Lakish tells us that "And I will make you into a great nation" is a reference to that which we say (in Shmoneh Esrei) "Elokai Avrohom - the G-d of Abraham". "And I will bless you" refers to that which we say "Elokai Yitzchak - the G-d of Isaac". "And I will make your name great" is a reference to that which we say "Elokai Yaakov - the G-d of Jacob".

The Talmud concludes, "You might think to finish (the first blessing of Shmoneh Esrei) with all of them (Avrohom, Yitzchak and Yaakov). Therefore, the pasuk says 'And you will be a blessing' implying that the blessing (Magen Avrohom) concludes with you, Avrohom, and not with them (Yitzchak and Yaakov)."

The Talmud cannot mean that Avrohom Avinu is worried about sharing the spotlight with his son and grandson. That type of thought would be unworthy for any of us to think; and certainly regarding our Patriarch, Avrohom.

The Bnei Yissoschar interprets this Gemara homiletically as follows: You might think that the closing -- i.e. -- the final generation -- will be a generation that is infused with the characteristics of each of the Patriarchs. However, the verse clarifies that "with you will be the closing" (becha chosmin). The last generation will have the imprint of Avrohom, and not the imprint of Yitzchak and Yaakov.

At the time when the Talmud was written, it was inconceivable that there would be a generation that did not have the imprint of Avrohom -- represented by Chessed (Kindness); the imprint of Yitzchak -- represented by Avodah (Divine Service); and the imprint of Yaakov -- represented by Torah (Jewish Learning).

But they did not witness our generation. Unfortunately, in our generation, only a small portion of the Jewish nation is involved in Torah, Avodah and Gemilus Chassadim.

The Jewish people as a whole today are sorely lacking Torah. There are some people who have never heard of the Talmud. There are some people who do not know what an Aleph looks like. This is a generation devoid of Torah and devoid of Service -- not only the Service of Sacrifices, but even the Service of Prayers. All too many Jews do not even know the meaning of Service of G-d through prayer.

However, our Sages tell us, "with you will be the conclusion". Even in the last generation, after all the bitter Exile, there will still be one thing that the Jewish people hold on to: the attribute of Chessed. As much as the Exile has affected us and stripped us of what it means to be a Jew, there is one area where it has not been successful. We are still doers of kindness (gomlei chassodim). We still give charity way beyond our means.

The charity and Chessed done by the children of Avrohom are completely disproportionate to that of the world around us. The IRS cannot believe Jewish tax returns, because "no one gives that much charity." As much as we complain that the Federations sometimes do not have their priorities straight, they still raise millions of dollars for charity. Why? Because "with you they will close" -- the end of the generations will still have the imprint of Avrohom. Chessed will never be taken away from the Jewish people.

Recently Rabbi Nosson Scherman made a very true observation. This summer (1989) Colonel Higgins, a Marine in Lebanon, was tragically killed. There was a group in Texas that started a nation-wide scholarship fund for Colonel Higgin's daughter. "The man gave his life for his country, let us do something for his daughter." Unfortunately, after four weeks, the scholarship fund had only raised \$3,000.

My friends, we could raise \$3,000 here before Ma'ariv [Evening Prayers], without batting an eyelash. Because "In you they will close" -- the last of the generations will still possess the attribute of Chessed that we learned from Avrohom.

I saw in the Shemen HaTov that this is the interpretation of the blessing "Magen Avrohom" (Shield of Abraham). G-d protects Avrohom and promises him that He will protect Avrohom's attribute of Chessed for all future Jewish generations.

We may not look like Jews anymore. We may not think like Jews anymore. We may not talk like Jews anymore. But Magen Avrohom -- G-d will protect Avrohom's attribute -- we will still give charity like Jews; we will still do acts of kindness like Jews.

Don't Forget Why We Are In This In The First Place

Lot was captured. Avrohom gathered an army of 318 men to rescue him. The Talmud [Nedarim 32a] analyzes the Torah's expression "VaYarek es Chanichav" (and he "armed" those who he had taught

Torah) [Bereishis 14:14]. Rav interprets "armed" to mean that before the battle Avrohom infused (showered) them with Torah. Shmuel interprets "armed" to mean that Avrohom showered them with money.

Rav's interpretation is easy to understand. Prior to going to battle, Avrohom strengthened their commitment to G-d and Torah. However, how do we understand Shmuel's interpretation? Why did Avrohom shower them with money?

Tosfos in Chullin [47b] explains Avrohom's reasoning. Avrohom showered them with money -- lest they become involved in the battle and start looking for booty and forget to rescue the souls. Avrohom wanted to tell them, "Don't worry about the booty -- I will give you money beforehand, so you need not preoccupy yourself with monetary pursuits."

Who are we dealing with over here? According to one opinion the 318 men were actually one person: Eliezer. According to another opinion they were 318 individuals. But, they must have been 318 righteous people because Avrohom was gathering them to go to battle against the Allied Forces -- the Kings who were just victorious in the "world war" between the four kings and five kings. Who would put their lives on the line -- 318 men against this allied force? Obviously it could only be Tzadikim, only people solely motivated by saving lives.

So, if they were motivated by saving lives, why does Avrohom Avinu have to worry about giving them money so that they won't become involved in collecting booty and forget about rescuing souls?

I saw a very true insight on this from Rav Henschel Leibowitz. Rav Henschel Leibowitz explains that often times when people get involved in something, they forget what they are in it for. One can start an endeavor motivated by a noble cause, but become so preoccupied in the means of it, that one forgets what he is doing there in the first place.

It would be quite a common phenomenon that they could start the war ultimately to rescue souls and save lives. But, once they become involved in war and start killing and shooting and going through all that war entails, they might forget the whole purpose (tachlis) of their involvement.

This happens to us so often. We get so involved in the means that the ultimate purpose is forgotten. We unfortunately see a classic example of this all too often with 'chiyuvim' [see Glossary] who daven before the amud in shul.

When a 'chiyuv' leads the prayers, he wants to make a Kiddush HaShem for the merit of the deceased. It is a Kiddush HaShem when he says the words of Kaddish or he says a Brocho and people answer "Amen". So the goal of davening before the amud is Kiddush HaShem.

However, how many of us have witnessed the following type of scenario? There are two 'chiyuvim' on the same day. The first fellow says, "I have precedence". The second man says "No way. It is my

turn to daven." Before you know it they are almost ready to strike each other. Why? Because each one wants to make a Kiddush HaShem. Here they are in shul yelling at each other, almost fighting. They are making a Chillul HaShem!

What happened here? The whole purpose of leading the prayers was to have a Kiddush HaShem. Instead, they are making a Chillul HaShem.

People become so involved in the means that they forget the goal. One can become so involved in war that he forgets what the war is all about. The war is about saving lives, but, instead, they are grabbing money.

That is human nature. People are so involved in getting there, that they forget where they are going in the first place.

Our Sages tell us that many of the Children of Kehas died while serving in the Wilderness as the transporters of the Ark. How did this happen? They had arguments: "I want to carry the Ark" "No, you go carry the Menorah. I'll carry the Ark!" They became so agitated in the details of who would get to carry it, that when the time came to actually transport it, they did not have the proper spiritual level of awe and reverence necessary to carry the Ark.

Again, what is happening here? Are they interested in Service of G-d or are they not interested in Service of G-d? They get so involved in who should do this and who should do that, that the whole goal is forgotten.

The purpose is supposed to be Divine Service and Sanctification of G-d's name, not arguments over who should carry what.

This is what Avrohom Avinu understood. He knew that people can easily forget the main goal. So he paid them the money up front, so that the booty and spoils would not distract them.

When we engage ourselves in a noble cause, we must always remember not to forget why we are engaged in the cause in the first place.

Glossary

Shmoneh Esrei -- Amidah, Silent Prayer

chiyuv -- one (chiyuvim - plural) who has an "obligation" to serve as the prayer leader (by virtue of the custom that a mourner or one observing the anniversary of the death of a parent serves as the prayer leader).

daven before the amud -- lead the prayer quorum in prayers.

Kiddush (Chillul) HaShem--Sanctification (Desecration) of G-d's Name.

Sources and Personalities

Rabbi Nosson Scherman-- General Editor Art Scroll Series of Publications

Shemen HaTov -- Rabbi Dov Weinberger - contemporary author, Rabbi in Brooklyn, NY.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#166). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: The Childless Couple in Halacha. The other halachic portions for Parshas Lech Lecha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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