

# THOSE IN A THANKLESS ROLE DESERVE A THANK-YOU

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 493, Bitul B'Rov. Good Shabbos!

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## Those in a Thankless Role Deserve A Thank-You

The parsha begins with the words "And these are the laws which you shall place before them." [Shemos 21:1] In commenting on this pasuk, the Medrash cites the passage: "Through justice a king establishes a land, but the man of Terumos will destroy it." [Mishlei 29:4]

The Medrash elaborates: If a person will make himself like the Terumah portion which is set aside from the rest of the grain and placed in the corner of the house... In other words, if a person sets himself apart and says: "why should I have to get involved in the problems of the community?" If he takes the attitude, "why do I need this hassle of community involvement?" If he takes the attitude of "I will take care of myself..." Regarding such people, the passage speaks by saying "the man of Terumos will destroy it."

The Medrash then cites an incident involving Rav Assi. When Rav Assi was about to die, his nephew entered and found him crying. Rav Assi's nephew asked him, "Why are you crying? Is there any area of Torah that you have not learned or have not taught? You have many disciples who can testify to the contrary. What are you afraid of? Is there any area of Gemilas Chessed [acts of kindness] that you have not performed? And your greatest praise is that you distanced yourself from rendering judgment -- you did not involve yourself in litigation and dinei Torah and did not sully yourself with messy communal matters. What could be wrong?"

Rav Assi responded, "It is for this very negligence (of not occupying myself with litigation and communal matters) that I am crying. Maybe I will face Heavenly Punishment over the fact that I could have rendered judgments for Israel and abstained from doing so."

Terumah is holier than chullin [non-sacred produce]. It is set aside, on its own. The man of Terumos that the Medrash refers to is the person who considers himself like "Terumah." He feels that he is above the masses that are "chullin". He feels "I don't need all this" and refuses to sully himself with the needs of the common people (hamon am). "Let me do my own thing. Let me be for myself. I

want to be like terumah that is set aside in the corner."

This attitude, the Medrash states, is destructive. The lesson we must take from this Medrash is that not only those who are worthy to be judges must occupy themselves with congregational needs. We are all called upon, on many occasions and under many circumstances to get involved -- to become the chairman, to sit on the committee. Everyone who has sat on a committee or been involved in communal needs knows that it is full of aggravation. It is so easy to take the attitude "I don't need this."

One gets involved in a shul and what does one get for it? Rarely a thank-you, only complaints! Someone was involved in putting out mimeographed divrei Torah for a shul. What did someone comment to him? "You shouldn't have printed it on pink paper!" Is there a 'yasher koach' for doing it? No! The only comment was that someone did not like the color of the paper! This is what one can expect when getting involved -- whether it is the shul or the school or the mikveh. All one can expect from involvement in any communal organization is grief. Guaranteed.

That is why Chazal say that one has to do it. Regarding one who says, "Not me; I will sit in my corner, learn my daf-yomi, and send in my check, but don't get me involved," the Medrash quotes the passage "The man of Terumos will destroy it!"

This is why we recite a "Mi Sheberach" (the traditional communal blessing) very single Shabbos for those "who occupy themselves with the needs of the community faithfully." Such people deserve a "Mi Sheberach"; they deserve a "Yasher Koach".

### **Everyone Can At Least Listen**

Later in the parsha, the verse says, "You shall not cause pain to any widow or orphan." [Shemos 22:21] Rashi cites a teaching of our Sages that the same applies to any person; however the Torah spoke about a common situation. These are the types of people to whom it is very easy to cause grief. When people have already suffered the pain of the loss of a husband or parent, tears are very close to flowing, under any circumstance.

I would like to share an interesting Gemara and an interesting comment of Tosfos, along with a very interesting insight from Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezer.

The Gemara states: Rav Yehudah was sitting in front of (his Rebbi) Shmuel. A certain woman came in and cried before Shmuel, but he (Shmuel) ignored her. Rabbi Yehuda then said to his Rebbi: Does not the Master agree that 'whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry, but shall not be heard?' [Mishlei 21:13] Oh, keen scholar, he replied, "Your superior (will be punished) with cold (water), but your superior's superior (will be punished) with hot. Mar Ukva, the head of the Court (Av Beth Din) is sitting! (In other words, "I am not in charge so I can't adjudicate in this matter - Mar Ukva is in charge.") [Shabbos 55a]

That is the end of this Talmudic passage. We do not know from the Gemara in Shabbos whether Rabbi Yehuda was right in suggesting to his Rebbe that he should have paid more attention to the woman or whether Shmuel's response was appropriate. However, there is a famous Gemara in Bava Basra [10b] that, according to ancient tradition, sheds further light on this incident.

The Gemara in Bava Basra says that one of the Amoraim went up to Heaven and came back down. He was asked what he saw in Heaven and responded, "I saw an upside down world. The ones who are prestigious in this world are lowered in the True World and those who are subservient here sit in more prestigious places in Heaven." Tosfos cites a tradition from the Geonim (the post-Talmudic generation of scholars subsequent to the generation of Amoraim who appear in the Gemara) in the name of Rabbeinu Chananel, that when this Amora went to Heaven, he saw Shmuel sitting subservient to Rav Yehudah his student, because of the latter's correct criticism of his Rebbe in the aforementioned incident. In the True World, Shmuel and Rabbi Yehudah switched places -- Shmuel became the disciple and Rabbi Yehudah became the teacher.

Rav Ezerachi questions this Gemara in Bava Basra. After all, he argues, Shmuel was the one who taught Rabbi Yehudah all his Torah. In fact Shmuel WAS the Rebbe. How can we discount all the years he invested into his disciple and make him now subservient to that student?

It must be, says Rav Ezerachi, that the one lesson Rav Yehudah taught Shmuel (namely that he should have been more considerate of the woman who came crying into his Court) was so important that it outweighed all the Torah that Shmuel taught Rabbi Yehudah.

This critical lesson of 'whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry, but shall not be heard?' -- of how we must view an aggrieved party -- is essential to making a Jew what he is supposed to be and in the True World, was more vital than all the Torah that Shmuel ever taught Rav Yehudah.

That is how careful we must be with widows, with orphans, and with aggrieved parties -- people who are hurting. Sometimes there is nothing we can actually do. We cannot bring back the husband or the father. We cannot write out a check for all that they need. We can not even help to stop the immediate pain. There is one thing, however, that we can all do. We can listen. We can always listen. Whether one is rich or poor, whether one is a Rabbi or a layperson, whether a person is wise or not so wise, powerful or not so powerful, everyone can listen, pay attention and show that at least they care.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Mishpatim are provided below:

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