

ALLOWING US TO LEAVE THE LIGHT ON FOR HIM

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshios Tetzaveh & Purim

Allowing US To Leave The Light On For HIM

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #803, Late For Megillah And Other Purim Issues Good Shabbos!

Parshas Tetzaveh begins with the mitzvah of kindling the Menorah. There is a famous Medrash which teaches: "The Almighty states 'It is not that I need their light for illumination. I am the Light of the World. Rather I am giving you an opportunity to provide light for Me just as I provided light for you.'" This means that when the Jewish people were in the wilderness for 40 years, there was the Pillar of Cloud which provided light for them throughout their travels. The Medrash compares this to a blind person and a person with full sight who were walking together. The person with vision told the blind person "Grab onto me and I will lead you along the way." When they entered the house, the person with vision asked the blind person to turn on the lights for him.

The goal in both situations is so that the recipient of the favor (Klal Yisrael / the blind person) will not feel that they owe a favor to their benefactor. They were provided the opportunity to "return the favor" so to speak: "I took care of you when you could not see; now you turn on the light for me so I can see."

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mirer Mashgiach in his sefer Daas Torah says that the Almighty is teaching us a very important and a very common lesson: When we do someone a favor and he comes to us later and tells us "You did me a tremendous favor, how can I pay you back?" our natural reaction is to respond "Think nothing of it. Do not worry about it." Offhand, we think we are being very nice by giving such a response. However, a greater act of kindness would be to respond, "I will tell you how you can pay me back. Can you do this and that for me?"

This is a great kindness because it removes the sense of indebtedness that will be hanging over the person who received the favor. It is not good to feel beholden to someone. In truth, many people are happy when people feel indebted to them. They like the fact that they "have something on them" and that they can "lord it over on them".

The kindest way to do a favor to someone is to let him pay you back! This is the lesson of lighting the Menorah in the Mishkan, according to the above referenced Medrash.

The Tail of Vashti and the Tale of Truman: G-d's Hand in History

We all know the story. Achashverosh made a grand party. When he was good and "happy," he commanded his wife Queen Vashti to appear before those assembled to show off her beauty. Vashti refused to come. According to the Talmud [Megilla 12], her refusal to come was not based on any sudden sense of modesty on her part, rather the Angel Gavriel came and put a tail on her.

Often, when the Talmud relates an incident of Aggadic nature such as this, the Gemara is not to be taken literally. The Gemara is teaching a message with this story. We do not need to assume that Vashti literally grew a tail. The Chofetz Chaim suggests that the Gemara means something else.

The Talmud teaches [Sanhedrin 96] that Nevuchadnetzar, King of Babylonia, was not born into royalty. How did he become King? The Gemara relates that Chizkiyahu, King of Judea, became very sick and he was miraculously saved. The Almighty wanted to publicize the fact that the King of Judea was miraculously healed so he made a second miracle - namely, the day that King Chizkiyahu was cured lasted 18 hours! That got people's attention! The whole world realized that it was a miraculous day.

The King of Babylonia at that time was a person named Biladan. Biladan said, I need to send congratulatory remarks to the King of Judea. "He is so righteous that the Almighty changed nature for him, I must send him a letter of congratulations and admiration." He ordered his scribe (who at the time was Nevuchadnetzar) to draft the letter for him. However, that day, for whatever reason, Nevuchadnetzar was not there. So, the other scribes went ahead and drafted a letter without the input of the chief scribe, Nevuchadnetzar.

The letter salutation was as follows: "Peace unto you King Chizkiyahu; peace unto Jerusalem; and peace unto the Mighty G-d." Nevuchadnetzar returned from wherever he was and asked to review a copy of the letter. When he saw the salutation he objected that the honor of the Mighty G-d should have been placed first not third in the letter. However the other scribes told him that the original had already been sent off. Nevuchadnetzar ran after the messengers to try to stop them so as not to send the letter with such a "blasphemous" salutation. The Talmud says that he ran 4 steps in the direction of the courier. He wanted to stop him and reverse the salutation by rewriting it according to proper protocol: "Peace to the Almighty G-d; peace to the city of Jerusalem; and peace to King Chizkiyah."

However, the Talmud in Sanhedrin teaches that after he ran those four steps (according to an alternate version in the Yalkut he ran only 3 steps) to stop the letter, Gavriel came and stopped him in his tracks so that he would not be able to run any further. The Talmud comments that had Gavriel

not come and limited the merit Nevuchadnetzar was gaining for himself by showing G-d this honor, "there would not have been left a remnant of the enemies of the Jewish people" (a euphemistic way of saying the Jewish people would have been totally wiped out). The Gemara asks, "So what did Nevuchadnetzar get as reward for his walking the 4 steps?" The Gemara answers that he saw himself and 3 generations after him become royalty. The 4 generations were Nevuchadnetzar, Evil Merodach, BalShezzar, and Vashti. Vashti was a great-granddaughter of Nevuchadnetzar.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that there is actually no dispute between the version that says Nevuchadnetzar ran 4 steps and the version that says he ran 3 steps. He actually ran 3 full steps. In the middle of the fourth step Gavriel came and stopped him before he had a chance to complete the fourth step. It was cut off in the middle.

That is why the Gemara testifies that if he would have taken four whole steps the Jewish people would have been wiped out! The Chofetz Chaim interprets: Since he did not take a complete fourth step, the reign of his fourth descendant (Vashti) was terminated prematurely. Had Vashti remained on the throne, Esther would never have been in a position to save the Jewish people and they would have been wiped out in the time of Haman.

The Chofetz Chaim states further that this is what it means that Gavriel (the same Angel who stopped Nevuchadnetzar from taking that fourth step) came and placed a tail upon Vashti. The term "zanav" (tail) alludes to the fact that it was the tail end of the dynasty of Nevuchadnetzar.

The lesson of this story is that this is how the Almighty runs his world. The incident with Gavriel happened in the time of Chizkiyahu King of Judea - many years before the era of Haman and Achashverosh. Because of what took place then, Klal Yisrael was saved many years later in the time of Purim.

Events happen or do not happen for a myriad of reasons, but behind the supposed motivations of people, the Almighty is manipulating history to carry out His Will. Behind the curtains, the Master of the Universe is pulling the strings.

When I was in Mexico City, I heard a true story (which appears in the historical archives of the Knesset) from Rabbi David Ordman. Rav Shlomo Lorenz (a former Knesset member of Agudas Yisrael) once met Harry S. Truman, President of the United States. President Truman told Rabbi Lorenz, "You should know that when I agreed to recognize the State of Israel, it went against the advice of my advisors and it was against every political instinct that I have. But I will tell you why I did it..."

The conventional wisdom is that Harry Truman recognized the State of Israel in 1948 because he had a Jewish partner in the haberdashery business in Independence Missouri many decades earlier who came to him in the White House and asked him for this favor. This is conventional wisdom. Now you will hear the rest of the story from Harry Truman himself."

President Truman told Rabbi Lorenz "I was a little boy growing up in the United States and every little boy growing up in the United States dreams of becoming president. That was my dream. I'll tell you something else. I was a good Christian boy and I learned my Bible. My hero in the Bible was Cyrus (Koresh, who was a descendant of none other than Queen Esther). This Koresh is the one who let the Jewish people go back to their homeland and build their Temple (Bais HaMikdash). I said, if I ever become President of the United States, I want to imitate my hero and if I ever get the opportunity to let the Jewish people go back to their country and rebuild their Temple that is what I am going to do." "And that", he concluded, "Is why I recognized the State of Israel."

This is the same story: The Hand of G-d at work. Just like with Vashti - we do not know what on earth possessed her to disobey her husband and not come as he ordered. Somehow the Almighty "sent an Angel" and made it happen, so that Klal Yisrael should be saved. So too, Harry Truman had this 'mishugaas' - he wanted to emulate Koresh. There is probably not another person in the world whose main Biblical hero was Koresh, but that was the idiosyncrasy of Harry Truman. Because of that, the rest is history.

A Freilechen Purim!

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 Tetzaveh are provided below:

- Tape # 045 - The Gartel: To Wear or Not to Wear
- Tape # 088 - Parshas Zachor and Other Purim Issues
- Tape # 136 - Purim Costumes: Anything Goes?
- Tape # 183 - Candle Lighting on Friday Night
- Tape # 229 - Purim Issues II
- Tape # 273 - Taanis Esther and the Personal Purim
- Tape # 319 - Conditional Licht Benching
- Tape # 363 - The "Mazik" on Purim
- Tape # 407 - Hesach Ha'daas and Tefillin
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