

DEFINITION OF 'CHAREIDI' / IMPORTANCE OF BEING GOOD

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: CD #1035 – Davening that the Suffering Patient Should Die – Permitted or Not? Good Shabbos!

The Definition of the Term 'Chareidi'

In Parshas Beha'aloscha, we are introduced to the laws of *Pesach Shen*i (the "Second Passover"). There were certain individuals who were unable to bring the Pesach offering in its proper time (on the 14th of Nissan) for very legitimate reasons. They were *Tameh Meis* (impure by virtue of contact with a dead body). They approached Moshe Rabbeinu with the famous words, "Why should we miss out (on the opportunity to bring the Korban Pesach)?" (Bamidbar 9:7)

At this point in time, the *Ribono shel Olam* told Moshe about the mitzvah of *Pesach Shen*i. This is a rare exception in Torah where people have a "make-up opportunity" to compensate for having missed fulfilling a given commandment in its proper time. The Sifrei notes here that this shows that these individuals were upright and righteous individuals (*tzadikim* and *kesheirim*) who trembled (*chareidim*) to do the mitzvos.

In America, Jews who are exceptionally "*frum*" are often labeled "ultra-Orthodox." Whether we know it or not, the vast majority of us are "ultra-Orthodox" in the eyes of most American Jews and the general public at large. In *Eretz Yisrael*, the popular terminology for describing such "ultra-Orthodox" individuals is "*Chareidi*." I always wondered where that expression came from. I have my doubts about the theory that it came from the Sifrei in Parshas Beha'aloscha.

Chareidi is actually a curious title. *Chareidi* really means a person who trembles. Why was this adjective chosen to describe someone who is '*frum*'? Perhaps there is a different twist to what the word *Chareidi* really means.

I would like to explain this by citing an incident I saw in one of the sefarim of Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein. A few days before Yom Kippur, a Jew came to Rav Zilberstein and told him that he would not be able to fast on Yom Kippur. Many times, for various medical reasons, a person must eat on Yom Kippur. If a person is well enough to abide by such a protocol, the specified halachic dispensation for

eating on Yom Kippur is a process known as *pachos, pachos, m'k'shiur* (consuming less than the amount for which a person is culpable for breaking his fast — pausing a certain length of time — and then again eating less than the specified amount). In this way, the person is able to get the nutrients he needs without having been in strict violation of the mitzvah of fasting. This process can be a bit complex -- how many ounces one consumes at a time, how long he waits between each eating, etc.

Rav Zilberstein sat down with the fellow and explained to him in detail how much to eat and how much to drink, and how to pause appropriately between the various food intakes, and what further leniencies are allowed if he is feeling exceptionally weak, etc. The fellow thanked Rav Zilberstein for the information and went home. However, he came back the next day and said, "I forgot what you told me, could you go over it with me again?" Rav Zilberstein went through the entire set of halachos again with him. Rav Zilberstein asked him if he now had it clear in his mind. The fellow confirmed he had it, and went home. The third day, the entire process repeated itself. This happened four or five times.

Finally, the person who had the query admitted to Rav Zilberstein, "I am nervous about this matter." In other words, he was not an imbecile, but rather the tension caused by the thought of eating on Yom Kippur was so great, that it made him keep forgetting exactly how he was supposed to do it. He was so upset about not being able to fast, that he kept needing reassurance that what he needed to do was okay. Rav Zilberstein wanted to console him so he told him, "It is a wonderful thing that you are so nervous."

In this connection, Rav Zilberstein referenced a Rashi at the end of the Torah. On the last day of Moshe's life, he told the Jewish people, "And Hashem did not grant you a heart to understand and eyes to see and ears to hear until this day" (Devarim 29:3). In other words, finally today -- on the last day of my life -- you have been given the capability to understand my message to you. Rashi comments: What happened "on that day?" Rashi explains that Moshe Rabbeinu gave a *Sefer Torah* that he wrote to the Tribe of Levi, and then representatives of all the other tribes came before him to complain. "Why should only the Sons of Levi receive a *Sefer Torah*? What about the rest of us? We too stood on Sinai and were given the Torah. We too deserve our own copies of this holy scroll!" They were afraid that maybe in a year or two, the descendants of the Tribe of Levi would say that it was only their tribe who received the Torah at Sinai.

Rashi says that Moshe rejoiced when he heard this complaint. Concerning this request, Moshe told them, "On this very day you have become a nation" (Devarim 27:9). "It is today that I realize that you appreciate and cling to the Omnipresent." Their complaint demonstrated their passion for the Torah. For the previous 39 or 40 years, they kept the *mitzvos* that they were supposed to keep, but Moshe Rabbeinu never witnessed to what extent it went to their whole being. The opportunity to perform *mitzvos* was always there for them, so they never had the opportunity to demonstrate this passion: What do you mean, we do not get to have our own *Sefer Torah*!? This was a gut level reaction that Moshe now witnessed and appreciated for the first time.

Rav Zilberstein explained that when a person is so upset about eating on Yom Kippur that he cannot remember the instructions from one day to the next, it does not say anything about his mental capabilities. It says something about the importance he attaches to proper *mitzvah* performance, and how much the lack of the ability to perform them bothers him.

We see this regularly when people spend hours picking out an Esrog. People buy a beautiful Esrog, paying a fortune for it, and then taking it to a *posek* (i.e. – a person with halachic expertise in being able to rate the quality of the Four Species) to ask him -- is this *mehudar* ("exceptionally beautiful")? The posek looks at it for three seconds and proclaims it "*mehudar*." The fellow comes back a day later and asks the same *posek*, "But, did you see this little 'pimple' over here...?" The posek looks at it again and says, "It's fine. It's *mehudar*." The person comes back on the third day and says, "But, you missed this..."

What is going on with such people? The word to describe such people is *chareidim*. *Chareidim* are not "tremblers." *Chareidim* are people who are passionate. They are passionate about their Yiddishkeit (Judaism). They are passionate about their performance of *mitzvos*. They feel deprived when they cannot do a *mitzvah*. "Why should we be left out?" The Sifrei says these people are *chareidim*. That is the real meaning of the term. A *chareidi* is a person to whom it makes a difference, who cares about his Divine Service.

"Goodness" is a Quality Which Counts when Picking Judges for the Sanhedrin

In the *sefer* Zahav MiShvah from Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro (1917-2006), the author (a disciple of the Brisker Rav) comments on the *pasuk* "...Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and its officers; take them to the Tent of Meeting and have them stand there with you" (Bamidbar 11:16). This event marked the formation of the first Sanhedrin (Supreme High Court) in Israel.

Rashi notes the qualifications which granted these individuals eligibility to become members of this distinguished judicial body: They had been appointed as guards over the Israelites in Egypt during the "crushing labor." They would take pity on them, and be beaten by the Egyptians because of them, as it says, "The guards of the Children of Israel were beaten" (Shemos 5:14). Rather than smite the Jews to do the work of the Egyptians, they allowed themselves to absorb the Egyptian lashes. Rashi continues: "Now let them be reappointed to positions of authority in Israel's state of greatness, just as they suffered in Israel's time of distress." The Medrash says that from here we see that whoever sacrifices for Israel's welfare merits honor, greatness, and that the Divine Spirit should rest upon them.

Rav Moshe Shapiro asks: This is all well and good that one who sacrifices for Israel in their time of distress should be rewarded. However, it seems odd that this should qualify them for the Sanhedrin. A person needs to know something to be eligible for appointment to the High Court. If the sole criteria for appointment to the Sanhedrin would be empathy, then they would certainly qualify. But clearly there was an intellectual requirement for membership in the Sanhedrin as well. Furthermore, the Gemara says that members of the Sanhedrin must understand all seventy languages (so they can hear any testimony without having to rely on interpreters). Beyond that, the Yalkut lists other requirements such as "they never spoke idle speech in their lives and their entire conversation always consisted of matters of Torah."

No one questions the righteousness of the Jewish guards in Egypt, but that per se does not make them into *Gedolei Torah* (outstanding Torah authorities). How, suddenly, did they become worthy of being members of the Sanhedrin?

The answer is that one of the 48 qualities that the Mishna (Avos 6:6) lists as necessary to acquire Torah is "carrying his friend's burden" (*nosei b'ol im chaveiro*). This attribute is a path through which a person acquires Torah knowledge. The Talmud says (Menachos 53b), "Let one who is good come and receive that which is good; from He who is Good to good ones." The Gemara then parses the implication of this teaching: "**Let one who is good come**" refers to Moshe, about who it is written, "And she saw him, that he was good" (Shemos 2:2). "**And receive that which is good**" refers to Torah, about which is written "for a good teaching I have given to you" (Mishlei 4:2). "**From He who is Good**" refers to the Holy One Blessed Be He, about whom it is written, "Hashem is Good to all and has Mercy over all his creatures" (Tehillim 145:9). "**To good ones**" refers to Israel, as it is written, "Hashem does good things for those who are good..." (Tehillim 125:4).

In order to be a member of the Sanhedrin and to merit the type of Torah needed to be a member, a person needs to be a 'Tov' (good person). In Yiddish, this is what we call "a *gu'tir*." A good person is someone who cares about other people. He cares about people to the extent that he is willing to be hit on their behalf. When someone becomes that "Tov," he will receive "Tov" (i.e., Torah) from the One who is *Tov* (*Hashem*) for the sake of the "*Tovim*" (i.e., *Yisrael*).

There are many examples thereof, but Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapira cites his Rebbe, the Brisker Rav (Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (1886-1959)). There was an incident involving Jewish children from Teheran at the time of the founding of the State of Israel. The Government wanted to put the children into situations which would cause them to abandon their adherence to traditional Jewish religious practice. The Brisker Rav raised a ruckus. He moved mountains in his attempts to save these children. Rav Shapira writes that the Brisker Rav once called a meeting of *Gedolei Yisrael* and insisted that something be done about these youngsters from Teheran. When the meeting was over, everyone went back home to their regular lives. Rav Soloveitchik told Rav Shapira "How can anyone just go back home to their regular life? What will be with these children?" The Brisker Rav cared for them so much that he was willing to move mountains for them.

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapira cites another example of a Rav Noach Shimanowitz, who was on one of the boats that tried to run the British blockade around Palestine in the pre-State period. The British interred him in one of their internment camps on Cyprus. Again, the Brisker Rav left no stone unturned in order to try to gain the freedom of another Jew. This is the idea of *noseh b'ol im chaveiro*. This is the "goodness" of character that brings a person to have Divine Help in becoming a receptacle of Torah wisdom. Such a person is appropriate to sit on the Sanhedrin.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Beha'aloscha is provided below:

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