

HE KNOWS BETTER

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"So she (Sarah) said to Abraham, 'Drive out this slave woman with her son, for the son of that slave woman shall not inherit with my son with Yitzhak'" [Beresheet 21:10]

One of the tests of Abraham concerned the expulsion of his son Yishmael. After the birth of Yishak, Sarah became very sensitive to the evil ways of Hagar's son Yishmael and feared his bad influence on her son. Her feelings, of course, were not, Heaven forbid, ones that we could understand, since her thoughts were always motivated by the spiritual future of the people of Israel and not the jealousies and desires of common folk. Abraham, a man of kindness had difficulty with the ultimate decision to expel his flesh and blood out into the desert with minimal provisions but he passed the test and listened to Sarah as G-d commanded.

Rabbi Hirsch Zt'l says that Abraham also saw the bad behavior of Yishmael but was concerned that if the bad influences were able to affect him while living in the house of Abraham and Sarah then the effect of being raised in another environment with Hagar would certainly seal his fate to a life of wickedness. The Hafetz Haim teaches from this chapter a valuable lesson in regard to bringing people closer to Torah and misvot. How far does one go to make contact with those who are non-observant in an attempt to bring them back into the fold and show them the beauty of a Torah-observant life? Certainly, living with Yitzhak would have a positive influence on Yishmael. But, on the other hand, Yishak would not be immune to the negative influences of his 1/2 brother. Sarah ruled the danger outweighed the benefit. Very often one who goes out to mingle with the non-observant in hopes of showing them the way, results in a cooling of the well-intentioned persons Torah values. Rabbi Elhonon Wasserman Hy'd used to say that the Torah warns the Jew not to associate with those who are not observant. He quotes the wisdom of King Solomon who said, "Do not be overly righteous" i.e. "don't be smarter than the Torah" -- heed its warnings!

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter expressed the same idea with a parable. A king once sent one of loyal officers on a diplomatic mission to another monarch. Before he left, the king gave final instructions. "The people there are very wily. Do not wager with them under any circumstances". He agreed and left to do his king's bidding.

He spent a few days in the kingdom working out all of the details of his master's policy with the neighboring monarch. On the day he was to leave one of the officers of the court began to poke fun. "Look at what kind of man the King sent to us--he is a hunchback." The others in attendance began to laugh and jest also. The emissary objected, "I am not a hunchback nor have I ever been one," The

court officer said, "I will wager 1,000,000 rubles that this man is a hunchback."

Remembering his king's instructions the emissary was ready to leave the palace in shame but he thought that this was not really a wager that he could lose and he could come back with 1,000,000 rubles to add to the royal treasury. He accepted the bet. The king said, "Take off his shirt and we will see the truth once and for all." The man rushed to remove his shirt in order to prove that he was indeed the one who was correct and collect the huge sum at stake. Of course his bare back proved that he was in perfect physical shape and was not at all hunchback. Shortly thereafter he returned happily to his country.

As soon as he came before the king he reported with great pride the 1,000,000-ruble victory. To his dismay the king's face turned to one of anger. "How could you violate my command? Didn't I personally command you not to wager with those people?" "Yes", replied the surprised messenger. "Well, what you did not know was that I had bet the king that my messenger would never take off his shirt in the royal court. My wager was for 100 times the amount of your meager bet --100,000,000 rubles. Your disobedience has cost the royal treasury 99,000,000 rubles!"

The comparison is clear. Very often a person may feel that they know how to protect themselves in spite of the warnings of the Torah. Unfortunately, instead of being influenced they often end up to be the influenced. It is very, very important that the observant Jews reach out to help those who have lost their way. It is also important, however, that they follow a path as directed by our spiritual leaders who know the Torah method for recognizing and dealing with the inherent spiritual dangers of interacting with those who are far from a life of Torah and mitzvot. Also, we all must inspect the environment in which we raise our children to see that it complies with the directives of our contemporary Rabbis who know best how to discern the dangers. We must not feel that on our own we can determine and protect against the dangers that society throws at our children.

Shabbat Shalom.

DID YOU KNOW THAT one is not permitted to wash dishes on Shabbat unless there is a possibility that one will need them again on the same day?

However, one does not have to count precisely how many pieces of cutlery etc. one will need for the rest of the day and one may wash several pieces of the same kind of utensil [e.g. knife, fork etc.] despite the fact that one needs only one of them. One may stand dishes in water to prevent insects from being attracted to them or to prevent the food from drying to a hard crust that will be more difficult to clean after Shabbat. [Source Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilkheta chapter 12:1,2]

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