



GLOBAL WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN TO LEARN PIRKEI AVOS

לע"נ הרב מנחם מענדל ע"ה בן יבלח"ט הרב ישראל שיחי'

SHIUR #2

פרק ג, משנה ב:

רבי חנינא סגן הכהנים אומר: הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות, שאלמלא מורא, איש את רעהו חיים בלעו.

"Rabbi Chanina, deputy to the kohanim, would say: Pray for the welfare of the government; for were it not for the fear of its authority, a man would swallow his neighbour alive."

HUMILITY WHEN INTERACTING WITH OTHERS

When learning this Mishna we may be surprised;

- Without fear of the government we'd kill each other?!
- פרקי אבות was written for those who are on a higher level, already doing all the mitzvos. Why does it include something so basic?
- And the description of swallowing each other alive is shocking! We'd become cannibals?!?

Let's take a closer look at the words "swallowing someone else alive". Notice that the Mishna doesn't just say "we'd kill each other", Rabbi Chanina is very specific with his choice of words.

To swallow another person alive can also mean to totally overpower them.

You can have a person who is more knowledgeable, learned, talented and successful in comparison to some of the people around her. When she interacts with others it can be in an overpowering way which "swallows" the other person. Even though the other person may have thoughts, perspective and experiences that are different from the "greater" person, many people find it understandable that the one who is more learned will take over the narrative and the conversation and expect that the regular person will submit to her.

Imagine if my son asks me a question about the nutritional value of a specific food while I am talking to a relative who is also a nutritionist. Notwithstanding the fact that my child was talking to me, not to the relative, the relative may jump in and answer his question. She will be effectively "swallowing" me and I will defer to her explanation because of her superior knowledge of the topic.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

How do we prevent ourselves from behaving this way?

Because it is within the normal nature of people to feel superior when they are objectively greater, it is not enough to know it's wrong, but one must also proactively train herself to think differently.

This is done by davening for the welfare of the kingdom!

הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות!

Everything in this world is reflection and a derivative of something from the higher worlds. The fact that we have kingdoms and governments running countries in our world is a derivative from the fact that we have a Kingdom on high which is running and controlling the whole universe and all of creation.

“These words can then be understood to mean that one should daven to the King of all kings, Hashem. One must immerse himself in davening and come to a place of great fear and awe of the vastness and greatness of Hashem.”

Davening is a great equalizer. By davening to Hashem we become cognizant of how small we actually are in comparison to the unlimitedness of Hashem. Not small in a lowly, degrading way, but small in a gentle, humble way.

This leads us to feel no distance or superiority to those around us. We may indeed be more smart or experienced in many ways. However, with the awareness of the greatness of Hashem at the forefront of our lives, we gain a new humility and come to admit that in comparison, we are actually quite tiny. The difference between a spider and an ant is irrelevant to a huge elephant!

SO THIS MISHNA IS SAYING: “DAVEN TO HASHEM, BECAUSE WITHOUT THE FEAR AND AWE OF HASHEM (THAT COMES FROM DAVENING) PEOPLE CAN GET FILLED WITH THEIR OWN EGOS AND MAY SMOTHER THOSE AROUND THEM.”

THE MISHNA CONTINUES

רַבִּי חַנִּינָא בֶן תְּרַדְיוֹן אָמַר: שְׁנַיִם שׂוֹיְשְׁבִין וְיֵשׁ בֵּינֵיהֶם דְּבַרֵּי תוֹרָה, שְׁכִינָה שְׂרוּיָה בֵּינֵיהֶם

“Rabbi Chanina son of Tradyon would say:.... Two who sit and exchange words of Torah, the Divine Presence rests amongst them...”

When two people sit and learn Torah, the Shechina rests between them.

When you work on yourself in this way and are able to make room for another person, it will hopefully lead to the possibility of two very different people being able to sit together and learn as equals. It is davka there that the Shechina truly rests.

THINK AND DISCUSS...

- Why do we find it threatening or difficult to make space for others?
- What are some thoughts that I can have to remind myself of the inherent quality of every yid?
- What can someone who knows less than us add to a conversation?
- Was there a time in the past that I got new insight about something from a surprising place?

HUMILITY IN ACTION: A STORY

It was the waning hours of Shavuot 5754 (1994). My older brother Eli Noson and I were bochurim in Kfar Chabad, Israel. As the sun was about to set, my brother asked me to accompany him to the home of the legendary chassid Reb Mendel Futerfas OBM. Reb Mendel, then a frail man in his late eighties, had spent many years in Soviet labor camps for the crime of assisting many of his fellow chassidim escape the Iron Curtain. In fact, he could have escaped himself too, but he resolved to remain behind to facilitate the escape of even more Jews. After he left Russia in the 1960's, the Rebbe appointed him as the mashpia of Kfar Chabad. Very few chassidim are regarded with more love and admiration than "Reb Mendel."

"Come," my brother urged me. "Reb Mendel will certainly appreciate some guests with whom to *farbreng* in honor of yom tov."

Reb Mendel was delighted at our arrival. We sat down around the table as Reb Mendel's wife produced some l'chaims and cake. Shortly thereafter we were joined by Shlomo "Shlomke" Madanchik, the former mayor of Kfar Chabad, and also a beloved personality. The farbrengen commenced.

Ever the unassuming individual, Reb Mendel turned to us and asked, "Nu, can anyone recount a chassidishe insight or story?" After being prodded several times, Eli Noson agreed to recount a story he had recently heard; a story about Reb Zalman Moshe Yitzchaki, Reb Mendel's mashpia who had passed on some forty years earlier:

"Back in the 1920's, the Friediker Rebbe resided in Leningrad, Russia. Reb Zalman Moshe was known for his humility and candor. When he would attend the Rebbe's farbrengens he always opted to stand on the periphery of the crowd, out of the Rebbe's sight, though his seniority and reputation certainly called for a more prominent seat.

"Once, during the course of a farbrengen the Rebbe summoned Reb Zalman Moshe and silently told him a few words. After he came back to his place, he was surrounded by chassidim who wanted to know what the Rebbe had told him.

"I have no clue what the Rebbe said,' he responded.

"How is that possible? The Rebbe just spoke to you...'

"Believe me, I didn't hear what the Rebbe said. Only one thought consumed me all the while I was standing near the Rebbe — when already will the Rebbe remove his holy eyes from me..."

Reb Mendel was riveted by the story. When my brother finished the story he gave him a big yasher koach and sat in contemplation. After a few moments of silence, Shlomke interjected:

"Reb Mendel, weren't you there at that farbrengen?"

"Yes, indeed," Reb Mendel responded.

"And the story didn't transpire exactly as this young man retold it, correct?"

Reb Mendel begrudgingly agreed to this too.

At Shlomke's request, Reb Mendel then repeated the story as he had witnessed it some seventy years beforehand... (The story as written above is the correct version.)

I don't believe that I've ever seen a more powerful demonstration of selflessness and love. He felt no need to correct. No need to make note of the fact that he had been there. No need to interject himself into the conversation.

All that was important at that moment was to listen to another. To hear him and how he had heard the story and to learn from him.

Despite Reb Mendel's greatness, he was exceptionally humble. He understood that relative to Hashem's greatness we are all the same and he saw no need to interrupt or correct.

(Told by Naftali Silberberg, adapted from chabad.org)

Additional learning to Enhance Shiur

משנה ז

רבי אלעזר איש ברתותא אומר: תן לו משלך, שאתה ושלך שלו. וכן בדוד הוא אומר: כי ממך הכל ומידך נתנו לך.

"Rabbi Elazar of Bartosa would say: Give Him what is His, for you, and whatever is yours, are His. As Dovid says: "For everything comes from You, and from Your own hand we give to You"."

HUMILITY WHEN WE ARE THE BENEFACTOR

The whole world and everything in it was created by Hashem and therefore belongs to Him. The fact that we feel like we have earned our personal possessions, or talents or knowledge is an illusion. There is no place for a person to feel superior or condescending when sharing with others because everything she owns actually belongs to Hashem. One should give with a sense of humility and gratitude, realizing that she really owns nothing and the true Owner has simply chosen her to do the job of sharing her money, knowledge or abilities with someone else.

A MOMENT OF GRATITUDE: THINK AND DISCUSS

- Which gifts has Hashem given me?
- How do I remind myself that they are from Hashem?
- How can I pay it forward to others, with humility?

משנה יב

רבי ישמעאל אומר: הוי קל לראש, ונוח לתשחורת, והוי מקבל את כל האדם בשמחה

"Rabbi Yishamel says: Be flexible with a great person and pleasant with a younger person and greet everyone with joy."

FEEL THE HUMILITY WITH JOY

Rabbi Yishmael, who was a great man- a כהן גדול, would say that you should act kind and respectful to both the young and old. No matter their status, every person should be treated well.

However, one shouldn't only **behave** this way externally because she has been told to. One should actually work on **feeling** a high level of respect for every single person, which will then result in a genuine happiness when greeting people, no matter who they may be.

THINK AND DISCUSS

- Can I think of something I respect about the three most recent people I have met?
- Can the respect manifest itself into genuine happiness for the privilege of meeting them?