

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Avrohom Eliezer *ben Chayim a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Details Matter

PARSHAS VAYEITZEI 5778

There is a well-known teaching of Chazal that highlights the great kindness Hashem has wrought for Yisrael in that He supplies them with abundant opportunity to accrue merit. As the Mishnah states (*Makkos 3:16*):

רבי חנניא בן עקשניא אומר, רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל, לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות, שנאמר ד' חפץ למען צדקו וגדיל תורה ונאדיר.

“R’ Chananyah ben Akashya says: Hashem wanted to make Yisrael meritorious; therefore, He granted them Torah and *mitzvos* in abundance. As it says (*Yeshayah 42:21*): ‘Hashem was desirous of (Yisrael’s) righteousness; He (thus granted them) an expansive and glorious Torah.’”

This is often understood to mean (and so do the commentators explain) that Hashem facilitates the accumulation of a great store of merit by issuing commandments on behaviors one would have adopted in any case. When it comes to choosing what to eat, for example, a person is naturally repulsed by such items as dead snakes, moles or other such creatures. Nonetheless – just to guarantee the Jewish people additional merit – Hashem included prohibitions against the consumption of such things in the Torah. Now, when a Jew avoids eating reptiles and the like, he actually receives eternal reward for his act of avoidance.

As we shall see, there appears to be other aspects of this grand opportunity, further reflecting Hashem’s desire to supply Yisroel with plentiful merit.

Pointing the Way

We are introduced in this week’s *parshah* to the city of Luz בֵּית־אֵל הַהוּא which is the city of Luz וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בֵּית־אֵל – “And (Ya’akov) called the name of that place Beis-El; but Luz was originally the name of the city” (*Bereishis 28:19*). Characterized in the same manner, this city resurfaces in the beginning of Sefer Shoftim, in the context of B’nei Yisrael’s war against the Cana’anite nations to conquer the cities of Eretz Yisrael: וַיִּתְּרוּ בֵּית־יִסְיָסָף בְּבֵית־אֵל וְשֵׁם־הָעִיר לְפָנָיִם לֹזוּ, וַיִּרְאוּ הַשְּׂמָרִים אִישׁ יוֹצֵא מִרְהַעִיר וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ הֲרֵאֵנוּ נָא אֶת־מְבוֹא הָעִיר וְעֵשִׂינוּ עִמָּךְ חֶסֶד, וַיֵּרָאם – “And the Tribe of Yosef reconnoitered around Beis-El; and the name of the city originally had been Luz. And the watchmen saw a man leaving the city, and they said to him: ‘Please show us the entranceway to the city, and we shall act kindly toward you.’ And he showed them the entranceway to the city, and they smote the city by the sword; but they sent away the man and his entire family (to safety)” (*I:23-25*).

The Medrash – which connects these two passages – makes a salient point. It notes that when all is said and done, the action taken by the abovementioned resident of Luz was exceedingly minimal. He didn’t have to exert himself to do any heavy lifting, and in fact, hardly lifted a finger. Actually, that is precisely all that he did – he pointed with his finger to the entrance. And yet, as a reward for this gesture, he and his descendants were granted life for posterity. How much the more so, the Medrash concludes, can a person gain merit by taking real action to perform *mitzvos* and help others (*Bereishis Rabbah 69:8; cf. also Sotah 46b, Tanna D’vei Eliyahu Zuta ch. 16*).

The Ladies' Auxiliary of Vilna

Actually, there are numerous instances in which Chazal illustrate the notion that “*Ein Hakadosh Baruch Hu mekapei’ach schar kol biryah* – Hashem does not withhold the reward of any individual,” no matter how minimal or effortless their deed was (*Devarim Rabbah 1:27*). There is a poignant story in this regard, set in a (relatively) more contemporary period, which R’ Yechezkel Abramsky relates in the name of the Chafetz Chayim.

The incident involved the Rebbetzin of the Vilna Gaon who, together with another of the righteous women of Vilna, served as a collector of funds for the needy. The years went by, and the pair remained loyal to their task, but, of course, their toils and travels became slower and more difficult for them. Nonetheless, they plowed ahead on their fundraising missions, fortifying themselves by discussing how precious this deed must be considered in Heaven. To this end, in fact, they made an intriguing pact of sorts between themselves. They decided that the first one to depart This World – after ascending to the World of Truth and learning of the magnitude of the reward – would appear to the survivor in a dream and relate the magnificent details. They even shook hands on the deal.

It was the partner who passed away first; sure enough, shortly thereafter she appeared in a dream to the Vilna Gaon’s Rebbetzin. As it turned out, she was not authorized to relate to those still in this world the workings of the Upper Realms. However, being that she had committed herself to a deal with a handshake, she had indeed received permission to relate one particular.

She began by zeroing in on a certain soliciting endeavor they had once undertaken together. “Do you remember,” she asked, “when we sought to meet with Mrs. Ploni to solicit a donation? At first we were unable to locate her, for she was not at home when we arrived at her house. But then you saw her walking and pointed to her across the street. We then crossed over to meet her, spoke to her, and indeed received a donation.

“Well,” she continued, “let me tell you how the matter is recorded in Heaven. Regarding the actual securing of the funds – that aspect is credited to both of us. The act of crossing the street is likewise attributed to the two of us. But the lifting of the finger to point out her location – that is inscribed in your name alone” (*Chafetz Chayim Hachadash al Hatorah, parshas Vayeitzei*).

This would seem to be a truly wondrous thought to keep in mind as we go about our daily lives and engage in our *avodas Hashem* (service of Hashem). We are indeed fortunate that there is such a plethora of opportunities to serve Him and to earn abundant merit. And it would seem to be worthwhile to note that every aspect of our efforts – from the large items to the small details – are of tremendous value and consequence in the eyes of Hashem.

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