



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת תצוה תש"ע 5770 Parshas Tetzaveh

THE ULTIMATE SHTELLER (POSITION)

Often, the Torah serves to correct our vision. We may form our own opinions about a particular issue; when we turn to the Torah for guidance, however, it casts the matter in its true light.

A stark example of this notion comes in the personage of Mordechai. As is well known, this *tzaddik* (righteous individual) played a pivotal role in the Purim affair, as together with Queen Esther he served as the agent to effect a wondrous salvation for the Jewish people from the designs of the wicked Haman. He rose to great prominence, even securing the influential post of viceroy to King Achashveirosh (*Esther 10:3*).

DOUBLE IDENTITY

What may not be as familiar is the fact that this was not the final stop in Mordechai's career. Not only did he change positions, but he even had another identity, as illustrated by the Mishnah in Shekalim (5:1):

אלו הן הממנין שהיו במקדש, יוחנן בן פנחס על החותמות, אחיה על הנסכים, מתתיה בן שמואל על הפיסות, פתחיה על הקנין. פתחיה, זה מרדכי. למה נקרא שמו פתחיה. שהיה פותח בדברים ודורשן, ויודע שבאים לשון.

"The following were the appointees in the Beis Hamikdash: Yochanan ben Pinchas was in charge of the receipts; Achiyah was in charge of the libations; Matisyah ben Shmuel oversaw the lotteries (to determine who participated in the Service); and Pesachyah oversaw the bird offerings. Pesachyah is really Mordechai. Why was he referred to as "Pesachyah"? Because he would 'open up' (*'posei'ach*, the root of the name 'Pesachyah')

matters and expound them, and he was fluent in seventy languages."

Apparently, following the Purim episode, Mordechai did not stay on too long in Persia. Rather, he vacated his royal position and took up residence by the Temple in Jerusalem. His other name "Pesachyah" reflects the new profession he adopted there, as he utilized

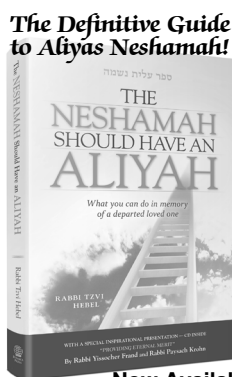
his considerable erudition to clarify issues arising in the arena of bird offerings, known as a particularly complex subject (see *Avos 3:18*).

At first glance, such a move may appear perplexing. Following the wondrous events of the Purim saga, Mordechai sat literally on top of the world. Here was a Jew who had risen to the ultimate heights in the Persian Empire, serving as second-in-command to Achashveirosh, whose dominion stretched basically over the entire civilized world.

Imagine the incredible good Mordechai was able to achieve for his Jewish brethren throughout the world in that position! He could wield substantial influence over the monarch to protect the Jews from any further deleterious decrees and to advance the cause of his people.

And yet he gave up all of that, in order to do what? Basically, to establish a *kollel* in Yerushalayim for the study of *hilchos kinnim* (laws of pigeon-offerings)! Could this possibly be considered a fair trade-off and a good career move for himself and for world Jewry?

The answer, explains R' Zilbershtein (*Tuvcha Yabi'u, parshas Lech Lecha*), is unequivocally *yes*, despite what we might guess. By highlighting Mordechai's newfound profession, the Mishnah is revealing to us a fundamental tenet: the power of *talmud Torah*



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(Torah study) is not to be underestimated. Had we been advising Mordechai, we most probably would have urged him to retain his position of royal viceroy, as the benefit he could bring to his brethren in this position was astronomical. But the Torah felt otherwise, as evidenced by Mordechai's choice to switch careers.

What the Torah is teaching through this episode essentially boils down to this: By engaging in the pursuit of Torah study, a Jew can do more good for his nation than he would achieve as viceroy, vice president, or even president of the United States.

Of course, there have been Jews throughout history who have occupied important and influential positions. Many of them were, in fact, able to accomplish much in the way of improving the lives of their brethren; and for this, their merit is truly great (see *Avos* 2:2). What Mordechai/Pesachyah demonstrated, explains R' Zilbershtein, is that through Torah study, one accomplishes even more.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

One of the manifestations of R' Chatzkel Abramsky's humility was his curious practice of referring to himself simply by his last name: "Abramsky." He once related certain personal musings of his to a visitor:

"What does Abramsky do already? He sits and he learns; for decades he's been just sitting and learning. He learns Gemara, reviews it a number of times, goes over and clarifies Rashi's opinion and Tosafos' approach; then he looks in the Rambam. If the Rambam appears to square with the Gemara, then Abramsky is happy. If there seems to be something incongruous, then he is bothered and becomes quite occupied, seeking a resolution. This can take a few days; sometimes a few weeks. If a solution is found, then he's happy again, and he writes and publishes the resolution. And so it goes.

"But sometimes I notice the following: I see people outside, working. Construction workers and builders, building massive buildings, whole cities... and then I begin to think: 'Here are these people, doing great things, producing wonderful and tangible accomplishments. And what is Abramsky doing in comparison? Nothing, it would seem: just sitting with my Gemara.'

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"Before disappointment can set in, though, I remember a great truth. There are two different things in the world. There is quantity, but then there is quality.

"I am reminded of the Mishnah in *Avos* (2:8), which makes a puzzling statement. The Mishnah states that if all of the Wise Men were on one side of a giant scale, and the famed sage R' Elazar ben Arach was on the other side, he would outweigh them all.

"And then Abramsky thinks to himself: What does the Mishnah mean to tell us? Is it just keeping score amongst the Tannaim? And I realize that the Mishnah is reinforcing this essential idea: that it is *quality* that outweighs *quantity*.

"Then my happiness returns. For I realize that the supreme quality and potency that resides in a single page of Gemara far outweighs everything in the entire world," (*P'nei Rabeinu Ha'avi Ezri* 113).

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