

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

Doing Nothing

PARSHAS VAYIKRA 5776

(An exposition on one of the crucial lessons to be gleaned from the Purim story)

Obviously, we wish that every single member of Klal Yisrael should be preserved in good health and remain free from harm or danger.

But imagine for a moment what it would be like if you had the opportunity to save a life. Perhaps someone was trapped in a burning building or drowning in a body of water (Heaven forbid). But you were there and rose to the occasion, engineering a daring and heroic rescue. At the time, your thoughts would surely be focused solely on the urgent matter at hand. In the aftermath, however, when everyone was safe and sound, there would be plenty of accolades and gratitude offered your way – not to mention the tremendous satisfaction of having performed such a noble deed. Your heart would swell with pride over having saved a life – a feeling that most likely would accompany you for the rest of your life.

And deservedly so. This point is brought out by the Mishnah, which states (*Sanhedrin 4:8*):

כָּל הַמְקִיִּים נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, מֵעֵלָה עָלָיו הַפְּתוּב כְּאִלּוּ קִיָּם עוֹלָם מְלֵא.

“(Regarding) one who preserves one Jewish life – the Torah accounts it to him as if he has preserved an entire world.”

The Greatest Heroes

While we might not have thought this way on our own, Chazal reveal further that there is another person who is no less deserving of praise and elevation – on the contrary, even more so. Consider a scenario whereby two people are engaged in Torah study. Suddenly, the call comes that someone nearby is experiencing a medical emergency. One of the learning partners happens to be a trained EMT, and so he rushes – as he is obligated to do, of course – to save the person’s life. The other one (assuming his assistance is not needed) resumes studying alone.

The Chafetz Chayim (*Toras Habayis, ch. 5*) depicts just such a situation. He concludes: Both have acted appropriately and have earned infinite merit. If we had to identify one as the greater “hero,” would we not point to the rescuer? And yet, Chazal tell us differently; as they state: גְּדוּל תַּלְמוּד תּוֹרָה יוֹתֵר מִהַצֵּלַת נַפְשׁוֹת – “Torah study is greater than the saving of lives” (*Megillah 16b*). The rescuer has saved a life, which – as we have seen – is tantamount to having saved the entire world. But the deed performed by the one who resumed his Torah study carries even more weight. If only we would recognize the significance of this act!

This notion is derived from the example of Mordechai, whose intervention was instrumental in saving not only one life, but the entire Klal Yisrael. It is difficult to imagine a greater *zechus* than that! Nonetheless, Chazal make a most noteworthy comment on the final *passuk* of the *Megillah*, which extolls Mordechai’s virtues: כִּי מֵרַבְּכֵי הַיְהוּדִים מְשֻׁנָּה לְמַלְךְ אַחַשְׁוֵירוֹשׁ וְגְדוּל לִיְהוּדִים – “For Mordechai the Jew was second to King Achashveirosh, a great figure to

the Jews and favored by the majority of his brethren.” “Favored by the *majority* of his brethren’,” they infer, “but not *all* of his brethren. This teaches that some of the Sanhedrin members distanced themselves from him” (*Megillah 16b*). Rashi (*ibid.*) explains that the slight diminishment in his stature was due to the *bittul Torah* (neglect of Torah study) that resulted from his rescue efforts. Once again, it should be stressed that Mordechai did exactly as he was obligated to do – rescue the Jewish people! The point of Chazal’s exposition is to inform us of the sheer magnitude that characterizes the act of even a moment of Torah study – it exceeds that of saving the entire Klal Yisrael.

Let it Be

And from his vantage point, it seems that Mordechai himself would have preferred – had he had the option – to permit someone else to perform the rescue work, allowing him to resume his studies. This we see from that classic episode involving Mordechai’s reward vs. Haman’s humiliation. The Megillah relates how Haman approached the king’s palace ready to unveil his grand plan (to hang Mordechai) to the monarch. Lo and behold, at that moment Achashveirosh decided to reward Mordechai for his role in preventing the regicidal conspiracy devised by the traitorous Bigsan and Teresh. Before he had a chance to relate his own plan to the king, Achashveirosh posed the question to Haman: מה-לעשות באיש אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ הִפְּיץ בִּיקְרוֹ – “What should be done with the man whose glorification the king desires?” (*Esther 6:6*). The conceited Haman assumed that he himself was the subject to be honored; as such, he suggested that the individual in question should be clothed in the royal garments, placed on the king’s horse and paraded through the streets to the accompaniment of the declaration: “So shall be done to the man whose glorification the king desires.” “Great!” answered Achashveirosh. “Do this very thing to Mordechai the Jew!” And, as we know, this tremendous turnaround was the beginning of Haman’s swift downfall and end. Mordechai was elevated and celebrated, and Haman was disgraced and strangled.

The point that bears on our discussion involves a statement made at the onset of this incident. Prior to Haman’s arrival, Achashveirosh had been contemplating Mordechai’s deed. He turned to his servants with the question: “What has been done in appreciation of Mordechai?” To which his attendants responded: לא-נעשה עִמּוֹ דָּבָר – “Nothing has been done for him” (*ibid. 6:3*). R’ Chaim Kanievsky questioned the accuracy of their answer. How, indeed, could they have been so certain that absolutely *nothing* had been done for him? Perhaps he did receive some reward – maybe in private or from some other official. Perhaps even the king himself had presented some gift or praise to Mordechai, and they were simply unaware!

Thus, R’ Chaim Kanievsky offers an alternate interpretation to this verse – along the lines of the ideas discussed above. The true intent of their response, he explains, was to offer advice to the king. That is, they weren’t saying that “nothing was done for Mordechai” in past tense. Rather, they were offering advice to Achashveirosh about Mordechai’s true desire. They understood what Mordechai stood for and what his true values were. Thus, they were telling the king: If you’d really like to honor Mordechai and fulfill his deepest wishes, the best idea is to do nothing: “*Lo na’asah imo davar.*” Honor, glory, a whole parade, riches – Mordechai is not interested. He would much rather be left alone – so that he can engage in his true desire and greatest joy: uninterrupted Torah study (*Derech Sichah, vol. I, p. 645*)!