



IT'S IN THE SMALL PRINT

HARAV Y. REUVEN RUBIN SHLITA

I was recently reminded of the oft told stories of the holy Berditchever Rebbe, Rebbe Levi Yitchok. Renowned for his love for the Bnei Yisroel he saw their inert goodness and holiness despite appearances that may seem to the contrary.

Once when he saw a wagon-driver, wearing tallis and tefillin whilst oiling the wheels of his wagon, Rebbe Levi Yitzchak exclaimed, "What a holy people is Israel! Even when they oil the wheels of their wagons, they are mindful of Hashem!"

At another time, when he heard a thief boasting to his confederates about the night's haul, he said, "It is still a long time to Yom Kippur, yet the man has already begun to confess his sins!"

What sparked these remembrances at this particular time?

We have all been stricken by the events that took place in Meron on Lag Be'omer, many have lost sleep, others feel anxious and broken. Amidst all this, the finger pointing, and suppositions, the claims and counter claims, we have also witnessed another phenomenon. A groundswell of yearning from sweet Yieden to undertake an extra degree of mitzvos in order to bring a greater degree of merit to the neshomos of those who have tragically been taken from us. This is called "taking upon oneself a Kabbalah to do a particular mitzvah with extra dedication" and is something chazal tells us to do in times of great challenges. Anonymous lists of such "Kabolos" have been making the rounds and just scanning them reveals how holy a people we



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are. Hundreds of Yieden have undertaken to accept upon themselves to be ever more diligent in their daily activities, and to do so as a merit for the souls of young people most have never met. Things like:

‘Bli Neder, I won’t touch my phone upon awakening without first saying modah ani and washing my hands.’

‘Bli Neder, I won’t read emails till I say blessings of the morning.’

‘Bli Neder, I will say Asher yotzar from a siddur’

the lists go on and on. Simple everyday tasks made even more holy in honour of lost souls. In seeing one such list I was impressed that it didn’t contain heroic yet implausible undertakings such as fasting, or learning all night. It seems to be just plain sweet Yieden, looking into their well-trodden lives and hoping to bring new levels of awareness into them.

Some years ago, I shared a story about just such a simple mitzvah that took on tremendous value, allow me to share it.

I once met a Rov who told me a fascinating story.

In the late 1950s there were few places where aspiring ba’alei teshuva could find support. In fact, there were few youngsters even interested in such a major lifestyle change.

One thirteen-year-old boy in New York City found himself drawn toward becoming a true Torah adherent. His parents were a typical American couple who were well off and totally secular. The last thing they wanted was a yeshiva bachur for a son. How this lad found his way to Torah is another story. Suffice it to say that at an early age he found himself battling for every mitzva. Shabbos, davening - all were cause for problems at home. The hardest mitzva of all was kashrus. His parents, desperate to find a cure for their son’s madness, decided that as a bar mitzva present they would send their son to a Jewish non-kosher high-class summer camp. Hopefully there he would see other Jewish kids enjoying the good life, and he would stop his craziness.

Off the boy went, and, unbeknownst to anyone else, he took with him a supply of kosher salami. This little fellow sat in this environment for eight weeks, never once eating treif food.

A friendly rabbi back home kept him supplied with salami, and with this meagre diet our hero survived. He later related to others that the most difficult day was Tisha B’Av. It seems that the camp managers arranged a huge cookout for that particular day. I am certain these fellows had no idea what Tisha B’Av meant or how it was supposed to be observed. This youngster was obviously fasting, without telling anyone what he was doing. Just imagine it. It’s five o’clock in the afternoon on a sweltering summer day. Everyone has gone for a swim, and this young boy excuses himself. “No thank you. I have a bit of a cold.” Then comes a huge campfire. The delicious smell of hot dogs cooking on the open flames’ wafts through the air. “Come on, have one.” The poor kid was the only one fasting - the only

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Torah Yid mourning the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. He was only thirteen, and the food smelled so good. "I tell you," he recalled, "I cried that day. I was so very lonely. Yes, I stuck it out and fasted, I wouldn't give in, but boy was I tempted!" That was the sin for that little fellow - and he rose to the test. I asked the Rov who told me the story what ever happened to that young boy. He looked at me sheepishly.

"Come on, tell me, where did he end up?" I inquired "Promise me you won't tell anyone else," he insisted.

"Of course. It's just that I'm curious how far such a neshoma ended up rising," I replied. "Well, he hasn't risen as much as he should have. That youngster is me - and I would love to be able to grow as much as I did then."

It is in the little things where we can shine forth. We often slide into a Yiddishkeit of auto pilot wherein yes, we do follow the rules, but fail to ignite our inner selves. Our connection with the Eibishter is in the small print of our lives, and just like the wagon driver in Barditchov, the many sweet neshomos who have undertaken kabolos since Lag Be'omer, or that little bar mitzvah boy alone on a summer day, we all have it in our grasp to shine.

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