

RABBI'S MESSAGE

What's Your Agenda?

The Holy Bnei Yissaschar mystically points out that the sixty fifth *mitzvah* enumerated in the Torah corresponds to the Name of G-d, א-ד-ג-י (10 + 50 + 4 + 1 = 65 its numerical equivalent)

This Name is rooted in the word אדון *Master*. It emphasizes G-d's "mastery" over the universe, His very מלכות *His kingdom*. מלכות *His kingdom* (סייח)

What is this *mitzvah* that so represents His sovereignty?

כל אלמנה ויתום לא תענון (שמות כב כא), *You shall not cause pain to any widow or orphan.*

Is that it?

No doubt this basic concept, to be sensitive to those most vulnerable, is central to our beliefs, but to the extent that it should represent His total monarchy, leaves us wondering.

Rashi teaches that although this command seemingly relates exclusively to the treatment of the widow and the orphan, the Torah actually calls for our sensitivity to all members of society and merely portrayed the widow and the orphan as the most likely examples of the most defenseless.

There are so many other potential victims of our insensitivity; the impoverished, the infirm, the weak-minded, the uneducated and the list goes on. Why do we strictly accent these two?

Every human being needs an identity and validation, without it we lose our verve to live.

Traditionally a wife's identity is defined by the husband she is married to and the family she raises. Within that construct however what a woman pines for most is to be validated in her role, admired for her unique contribution and character that plays such a significant part. In the course of the many tedious details of daily life in a family, the wife is the one more likely to be taken for granted and unappreciated.

A young child, however, seeks identity more than it does validation. Proudly admiring the achievement of its parents, their standing in the community, the noble values and principles they live by, a child finds inner happiness in that purposeful association.

We are all "widows" and "orphans" at some point in our lives even if we may physically still have parents and spouses. We often want merely to be valued, even in the minor roles we play, in the associations we maintain. We also yearn for identity, something to stand for, to live by, that compels us to thrive proudly in that role, and not to live life merely to exist.

The very first אלמנה *widow*, recorded in the Torah was Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Yehuda.

Twice widowed from the corrupt children of Yehuda she seeks to be valued for her desire to mother royalty and be part of the destiny of Yehuda. In desperate frustration, after Yehuda delays offering his third child Shelah to her, she disguises herself as a harlot, consorts with Yehuda and becomes pregnant. Unbeknownst to Yehuda that he is the father, he observes that she is pregnant and accuses her of harlotry, condemning her to death. When she quietly displays evidence to Yehuda of his involvement with her, he immediately recedes exclaiming, צדקה! *She is right!* לר כו (בראשית, נראשית, לר כו)

Never seeking the limelight all she needed to hear was that she was validated in her motivation.

The first יתום *orphan*, mentioned in the Torah is Yosef Ha Tzaddik.

His mother Rachel dies and he later becomes a "living orphan", being cut-

off from his life-line, his father Yaakov, when he is sold by his brothers down to Egypt.

Rav Chaim Vital, the loyal disciple of the Holy Arizal, writes that the description of Yosef in the household of Potiphar as יפה תואר ויפה מראה (שם לו ט), *handsome of form, handsome of appearance*, has encrypted within the sentiment of his status as an orphan. The first letters of each of these four words spell out the Hebrew word for an orphan, יתום!

As is so often the case when one is distanced from one's healthy identity, one turns to other natural attributes to seek definition. Yosef being virtually orphaned from the inspired environment of his illustrious father's home, dangerously succumbs to his physical distinctiveness in seeking identity. This left him exposed to the temptress wife of Potiphar who sought to catch his attention, but he quickly regains his true self successfully warding off her seduction.

In the blessing of Yaakov Avinu to Yehuda he extols of Yehuda's greatness when he exclaims, מטורף בני עליית (שם מט ט), *from the prey, my son, you elevated yourself.*

Rashi teaches there is a double intention here. He rose above others when he saved Yosef from the pit and suggested that rather than leaving him to die there, the brothers should sell him. He displayed preeminence again when he declared courageously in the face of public humiliation that Tamar was justified.

We all have agendas in life. Too often in the course of our attaining them we ignore and are insensitive to those who do not share the same program. Yehuda understood that although he had another agenda for Tamar's future, he respected her difference of opinion and exclaimed, despite the shame, that she was justified. He was attuned to the sensitivity of the widow who needs that validation so desperately, in the absence of a husband.

The Talmud (סנהדרין ו:) takes to task one who says that Yehuda should be praised for saving Yosef, for since he had gained the attention of the brothers he could have saved him outright and not let him be sold.

What then does Yaakov refer to when he glorifies Yehuda's intervention?

Perhaps it was when Yehuda exclaimed to the brothers in Yosef's presence, וידנו אל תהי בו כי אחינו בשרנו הוא (שם לו כז), *but let our hand not be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.*

Despite his assertion that Yosef is guilty as charged, Yehuda acknowledges Yosef's identity as a "brother" and part of the legacy of Yaakov. He knew that Yosef, upon hearing this, would be empowered to retain the identity he had forged on the lap of his father.

This is the essence of מלכות *royalty*.

One who is attuned to the subtle needs of others, capable of giving validation and a sense of identity to others, not allowing one's own agenda to eclipse one's sensitivity towards others, possesses the character that can accurately reflect and represent the kindness of the Master of the Universe.

If we can achieve this mission, we will bring the notion of G-d's dominion to an insensitive world and the final redemption in its wake!

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