

RABBI'S MESSAGE:

Choosing the Right Friends

The transmitting of Kedoshim, a portion that contains within in a representation of the majority of the full body of Torah and its principles, was particularly done in the presence of a large assembly of people because of the vital message it conveys.

At the conclusion of this special reading there is one verse that sums up the objective of these many diverse commands.

You shall be holy for Me, for I G-d an holy; and I have separated you from the peoples to be Mine.

Rashi quotes the Sifra that asserts that only if we differentiate ourselves from the other nations will we be G-d's, otherwise 'we will belong to Nebuchadnezzar and his cohorts'.

This 'allegiance' with Nebuchadnezzar specifically, were we to fail in keeping ourselves apart from the other nations seems odd. Was then Nebuchadnezzar the only one among the stellar cast of all-time villains who sought our utter destruction? What of Pharaoh, the kings of the Greek and Roman empires; Antiochus and Titus, and the long list of oppressors throughout our history who sought our physical and spiritual ruin?

An amazing discovery was made by a highly esteemed nineteenth century scholar, Rav Azriel Yechiel Rubin, a Dayan in the town of Mihalevich.

There is a mystical tradition that each verse in the Torah corresponds to its respective year from creation. On the three thousandth, three hundred and thirty eighth day from creation the Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. This verse, and I have separated you from the peoples to be Mine, and its implication that we belong to Nebuchadnezzar if we fail to distinguish ourselves from the other nations, is the 3,338th verse in the Torah! (שדה העיר סוף (קידושין)

Evidently there is something integral to Nebuchadnezzar and his cohorts in this imperative to stay away from their influences. Adding to this mystery is the precise identity of these 'cohorts'. Who might they be?

Maimonides in his Mishneh Torah, in the section that deals with the laws of idolatry and specifically the prohibitions of following in their statutes and resembling them in their style, dress or hairstyle, makes the following statement:

...יהיה הישראל מובדל מהם וידוע במלבושו ובשאר מעשיו כמו שהוא מובדל מן המצרים ובדעותיו וכן הוא אומר ואבדיל אתכם מן העמים...

...the Jews should be separate from them and distinct in their dress and in their deeds, as they are in their ideals and character traits, as the verse states: "I have separated you from the nations to be Mine..."

Where did the Rambam derive this expression to be distinct 'בדעותיו' which we have translated as 'ideals and character traits'? Alternately it may be rendered, 'insight and knowledge' or perhaps, 'the sciences and intellect' nevertheless we must seek to understand this equation and its deeper message.

Truth be told this combination of 'דעה' and 'מדע', appears only once in all of Tanach.

At the beginning of the Book of Daniel it reports how after Nebuchadnezzar conquers Jerusalem he seeks to enlist from the ranks of the wise and inspired Jewish youth worthy individuals who could serve among his cadre of wise advisors and officers.

ילדים אשר אין בהם כל מאום וטובי מראה ומשכלים בכל חכמה וידע דעת ומכובני מדע אשר כח בהם לעמו בהכל (דניאל א ד) ... Youths in whom was no blemish, but fair to look on, and skillful in all wisdom, and skillful in knowledge, and discerning in thought, and such as had ability to stand in the king's palace...

The 'youths' mentioned here were none other than 'דניאל וחבריו' Daniel and his cohorts, Chananya, Mishoel and Azaryah, who valiantly adhered to their religious principles, eating only kosher and nobly defying Nebuchadnezzar wishes for them to worship his idols.

It was clearly their knowledge and wisdom that gave them the strength of character to stand proudly and defiantly even in the midst of much temptation, promised rewards or frighteningly dire threats and consequences.

So here we have it, the proverbial 'drawing of the line in the sand', that separated the mighty and idealistic youth of the Jewish nation from the powerful despot and glutton Nebuchadnezzar, in the epic portrayal of 'ואבדיל אתכם מן העמים להיות לי' and I have separated you from the peoples to be Mine!

This is then the Rambam's intent is when he calls on us to be distinct in our dress and behavior just as we are unique in our principles and attitudes. Only when the external displays of separation are predicated on a much deeper consciousness and understanding of what we are all about, can these divisions be meaningful and effective.

The verse says they also possessed an ability to stand in the king's palace... Rashi elucidates that this refers to an unusual inner strength to not react while standing in the presence of the king even in the face of hilarious laughter or contagious chatter and the ability to even ward off sleep and their very bodily functions lest they interfere with their roles.

This was clearly the direct result of a moral fiber that was forged through the power of Torah and its values. Only with the discipline that one gains by subscribing to the directions and lessons of our holy Torah can one achieve such superlative qualities of self-control.

In contrast stood Nebuchadnezzar, the mightiest ruler on earth, yet unable to contain his urges and powerful instincts. The Talmud relates how the king Tzidkiyahu once chanced upon Nebuchadnezzar as he was devouring a live rabbit. Ashamed of his compulsiveness, Nebuchadnezzar makes Tzidkiyahu swear he will never reveal this shameful secret. (ברכות סה)

This is what ultimately divides us from the rest of the world.

Nebuchadnezzar was from a select group of 'cohorts'. The Talmud teaches that there were only three individuals who ruled over the entire civilized world; Achav, Nebuchadnezzar and Achashveirosh. (מגילה יא)

The Sainly Ben Ish Chai asks why is this fact so significant for us to know?

He suggests that each one of these evildoers exhibited a flash of recognition for that which is truly worthy, in that merit they ruled over the entire globe.

Achav was willing to relinquish all his possessions including his wives to the conquering king of Aram but refused to give up his Sefer Torah. Nebuchadnezzar once ran four steps to retrieve a message that was sent by the king of Bavel to King Chizkiyahu so he may rewrite it correctly and give due respect in addressing the great G-d of Israel first before addressing the king. By cleaving and attending to the greatly righteous Esther, Achashveirosh merited as well to rule the entire world.

Look how great of a consequence can result from a simple flash of elevated consciousness of the true values of Torah, respect for G-d and the cherishing of the righteous. This, the Ben Ish Chai relates is what the Talmud wants to teach us. It is these principles that gives the world credence to exist and for that reason they merited to control it totally. (בן יהודע ג (מגילה יא)

The ultimate lesson however lies in realizing that unless we are consistent in distinguishing ourselves from the behaviors of the nations, we will be subject to the whims of these and other evil kings and their stated desire to destroy us.

When we vacillate between inspired loyalty and lapsed devotion we are no better than these 'cohorts' who were also capable of fleeting commitment.

Unless we emulate the profound message of the מדע and דעה, the consciousness and idealism of Daniel and his cohorts, despite the difference in our external appearances from the nations of the world, we are destined to belong to 'Nebuchadnezzar and his cohorts'!

May we rise to this challenge by distinguishing ourselves from within and from without and regain the Honor of Heaven that the world so desperately needs.

באהבה,
צבי טייכמן



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This info is provided by YOU through the member database. Please be sure to update so we can celebrate and commemorate important dates with you!

The community is invited to attend a Siyum and gathering of Family & Friends in memory of Benjamin Insel.

Sunday May 10th, 12:30pm
Beth Abraham Congregation
6208 Wallis Ave.

PLEASE NOTE: THE BUILDING IS ALARMED NIGHTLY!
If you are the last one out at any time please lock all windows and doors, and if its after the last Maariv please arm the alarm using the keypad at the side door. Instructions posted. Please do not enter the Shul late at night or before the 1st Shacharis if you don't know the alarm code. See Naftali Miller, Chaim Meister or Rabbi Teichman if you are often first to arrive and need the code.

MAZAL TOV!
Binyamin Friedman & Esther Topas
On your engagement!
Mazal Tov as well to Murray & Lisa and the entire Friedman family!

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