

Shabbos Emor 5780 - Pirkei Avos, Chapter Four

The entire world is experiencing a transformation. The realization of the fragility of life and of our lack of any control over it, has prodded the masses of humanity to rethink their priorities and to consider anew the common bond between all of mankind.

In one of my favorite masterpieces from the renowned and beloved Mashgiach, Rav Shlomo Wolbe, he presents his marvelous thesis entitled: A World of Friendship.

This has not only revolutionized my view of all my fellow Jews, but has also influenced my attitude towards all folk.

I hope you will be inspired as I was by his theory and by a very touching story that highlights this important idea.

*B'Ahava,
Zvi Yehuda Teichman*

A World of Friendship

Ben Azzai taught in Avos, אל תהי בז לכל אדם ואל תהי מפליג לכל דבר שאין לך אדם שאין לו שעה ואין לך דבר שאין לו מקום (אבות ד ג) *do not be scornful of any person and do not be disdainful of anything, for you have no person without his hour and nothing without its place.*

Could the Mishna simply be teaching us that one should be wary of whom you write off because you never know when his moment will come?

The author of this Mishna, Ben Azzai, attests elsewhere that although the famed principle of Rabbi Akiva, to love your neighbor as yourself is termed a 'major rule', there is an even greater one. He avers that the verse where the Torah begins to delineate the descendants of Adam that states, זה ספר תולדת אדם (בראשית ה א) *this is the account of the descendants of Adam*, is of even greater import.

In what way is this verse more significant?

The Chasid Yaavetz interprets the Mishna as a summons to man to absorb the world around him and all its experiences with a positive attitude. G-d gazed into His Torah and created the world, if so then everything that follows from that moment is to be considered an integral part of Torah. He adds, that just as a Torah if it is missing one small detail is deemed disqualified, similarly man must consider and weigh the significance of every man and every experience of this cosmic expression of G-d's will.

One who scorns, ignores, or shuns the possibilities of discovering this manifestation of G-d in every facet of life is in a sense denying G-d.

In expanding this idea, a bit further, the notable Baal Mussar, Rav Shlomo Wolbe, describes

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what he refers to as 'Olam HaYedidus', a 'World of Friendship'.

The whole of creation is unified and bonded. Aren't we all children of one Father? All of creation is close to one another, one great family. Us humans have an kinship to earth, after all that's where we were created from; a closeness to the strata of vegetation, for we too grow; the connection to animal life even more apparent, and it goes without saying the affinity we share for humanity and all races. The ancient nations despised the stranger for they accepted not the notion of our common ancestry, a common Father. For a Jew however, there is no alienation in the world, on the contrary we are commanded to love the 'sojourner', the convert.

Elsewhere he writes:

*A great closeness predominates between Israel and G-d. The Jew does not approach God with celebration like to a god who is a rare, exalted guest, but like a son who approaches his loving and devoted father. This closeness is pervasive in all areas of life and even gratifies one's physical life. The closeness between Israel and the Holy One establishes a yedidus and 'closeness' between a person and the world. It establishes a remarkably close bond with each Jew, behavior in accord with the ways of peace with all people, caution against causing pain to any living being, and a positive relationship toward everything in the Holy One's world. **This finds expression in the maxim, 'Despise no one and disdain nothing, for there is no person who does not have his moment and there is nothing that does not have its place.'** When we enter the world of Torah, we find ourselves in the world of yedidus. This yedidus is not an abstract theory. The Torah speaks in the language of action, it gives us commandments. They are what establish the connections between a person and his Creator, between a person and his peers, and between a person and himself. Here there is not merely a religious ritual but a lifestyle that encompasses all aspects of life.*

Might it be that when Ben Azzai speaks of the 'account of Adam' he means to address this very notion? The 'story' of man unravels with each positive reaction we have with those people and events that are all integral to that marvelous and continuous story that began with the advent of Man. He thus emphasizes in Avos the value of being attuned to this world of *yedidus* that finds its full expression in the positive manner that we approach each manifestation of His presence in this wonderful tale called life.

Esav is the very antithesis of this notion. In his myopic view of the world he sees only himself and his needs, incapable of seeing an inviting world of *yedidus* that beckons us to warm ourselves in His world of friendship. The negativity towards anyone or anything that cannot serve his expectations is ultimately his denial of G-d's presence in this world.

The very first individual to display scorn in the face of unprecedented opportunity was Esav when he opted to placate his hunger by forfeiting his right to the *Bechora*, the birthright.

(בראשית כה לד) **ויבז** עשו את הבכורה (בראשית כה לד), *Esav spurned the birthright.*

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It is this contrast to the pessimism of Esav that Ben Azzai challenges us to view the world with an optimism that will not only enlighten all whom we encounter, but most importantly - ourselves.

A recent story was told regarding a husband and wife from Los Angeles, long time teachers, who traveled to the recent Torah Umesorah convention that took place in the Poconos. They rented a car when they arrived at the airport in Philadelphia for the weekend. They were rushing to the airport after the convention to make their flight back home. They arrived at the car return site and were greeted by Kelly a friendly agent handling their return.

After greeting her kindly and presenting the rental agreement she pointed out that they failed to refill the tank which would now cost them ten dollars a gallon. After suggesting they were free to find a gas station to fill-up, they thanked her but told her they would incur the expense fearing they might miss their flight.

She then inquired if they were Jewish to which they obviously responded they were indeed. She wondered aloud about the overwhelming number of orthodox Jews who were frequenting the airport that day. The couple informed her about the teacher convention and the thousand or so participants who travelled there from the throughout the United States and beyond.

Having by now fully processed their papers she surprisingly took the document and proceeded to rip it up telling them she would reprocess them without the exorbitant surcharge for gas.

Bewildered, they listened to her express a most poignant sentiment. She told them that just three days earlier her beloved brother had died. Being in no mood to go to work and face the daily pressures and challenges with customers she nevertheless had no choice - due to financial realities - but to go to work. She admitted that before setting out she prayed silently to G-d that she would not have to face the usual collection of tired, worn, and crabby travelers, otherwise she would surely blow a fuse. To her utter delight, most of the people she had dealt with that day were inspired orthodox Jews, whose pleasant manners and kind and thankful attitude had brightened her day allowing her to survive her inner emotional turmoil. (Ami Living Magazine, Issue 323, Aha moments; Rabbi Yoel Gold)

The moral of the story is not that it pays to be nice because you never know when it will save you a couple of bucks. Neither is the lesson that one should always behave nicely since one never knows when their actions will affect a *Kiddush Hashem*, a sanctification of G-d's name. It is though about living in a world of *yedidus*. When we live attuned to the people and experiences around us, knowing that with a positive, optimistic and happy outlook we can draw from the wellsprings of 'friendship' that G-d threaded into every patch of life, not only will we live more peacefully but we will avail the planet of G-d's warm embrace that is ever present for those who are willing to open their eyes.

There are people who focus on the negative, who refuse to see the positive light that emanates from every person despite their shortcomings. They deprive themselves of the happiness that awaits those who are simply willing to discover the good.

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שעה לך אדם שאין לו שעה, *for you have no person without his hour.*

The Hebrew word שעה, translated here as hour or moment, more accurately means to 'turn one's attention to' as when the Torah records, וישע, how G-d, **turned** favorably in acceptance of Hevel's offering and not Kayin's.

What the Mishna is affirming is every man's value before G-d, for each of us has a quality that G-d sees favorably.

As with Esav's torchbearer - Edom, when we were shunned by them, the Torah reports how ויט ישראל מעליו, *and Israel turned away from near him*, so too must we not allow other's negativity to infect our soul, and we must forge ahead with absolute optimism.

The numerical value of ויט, and Israel *turned away*, is exactly that of ויבו, and he *rejected*, the negative credo of Esav.

We must always take the 'high road', the path of our King, our Father in Heaven, Who desperately seeks our closeness waiting for us to access it in discovering a world of *yedidus*. We must never wallow in antagonism and deprecation. We must always aspire to see the bright side in life for in that quality lays our success in living inspired by His presence.