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Want It All

There's a story the Lubavitcher Rebbe liked to tell about a five year old child and a 99 year old man. The child was Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneerson, born on the 20th of Cheshvan 5621 (1860), who served as the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe from 1882 until his passing in 1920. The 99-year old man lived 36 centuries earlier; his name was Abraham and he was the first Jew.

The story goes like this:

On the occasion of his fourth or fifth birthday, Rabbi Sholom DovBer visited his grandfather, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch. Upon entering his grandfather's room, the child burst into tears. His teacher in cheder had taught them that week's Torah reading, Vayeira (Genesis 18:1-22:24), which begins "And G-d revealed himself to Abraham..." "Why," wept the child, "doesn't G-d reveal Himself to me?"

Rabbi Menachem Mendel replied: "When a Jew, a tzaddik, realizes at the age of 99 that he must circumcise himself—that he must continue to perfect himself—he is worthy that G-d should reveal Himself to him."

The Rebbe must have told this story dozens of times. The story, followed by a discussion of the manifold meanings and lessons the Rebbe saw in it, was a regular feature of the farbrengens (Chassidic gatherings) he held each year on the anniversary of Rabbi Sholom DovBer's birthday, which often falls on the Shabbat on which Vayeira—which begins with the account of G-d's revealing Himself to Abraham following Abraham's circumcision at age 99—is read.

I think I know why the Rebbe liked this story so much. The child's question and the grandfather's explanation express two extremes, whose contrast and synthesis are a hallmark of the Rebbe's approach to life.

Imagine: a five year old weeping because G-d does not reveal Himself to Him! To "see" G-d—to attain a consummate vision of the Truth of Truths—is the ultimate goal of every spiritual quest. It is a goal that takes the greatest of the great at least a lifetime to achieve. Yet here is a child—a very special child, but one who nonetheless is still at the very beginning of his spiritual journey—who is disturbed, to the point of tears, by the fact that he has not yet attained this goal!

And on the other hand we have a man who has 99 years of the most extraordinary spiritual achievements behind him, who recognizes that he is still not perfect—that he must continue to change, grow and improve himself.

The Rebbe saw these two prototypes not as conflicting visions of life, but as complimentary and indispensable to each other. To strive for the ultimate, yet never feel that one has arrived. To have huge aspirations, yet remain humble and unassuming. To say: I want to, and can, do it all—yet, no matter how much one has done, know that there is still more to do.

By Yanki Tauber; based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe - Chabadonline.com

"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him." (18:19) Rashi comments that the phrase "for I know him" implies love and affection for Abraham. G-d loved Abraham because He knew that Abraham would teach his children to follow in his footsteps. As great and impressive as Abraham's worship of G-d was, more worthy of merit was the fact that he could be counted on to instruct others. (Hayom Yom)

"And the two angels came to Sodom." (19:1) When Abraham was paid a visit by angels, they appeared as human beings. Why, when they presented themselves to Lot, did they appear in their form as angels? Abraham, known as he was for his hospitality, treated everyone he came into contact with in the same equal manner; simple people were honored as much as those more "important." Had Lot, however, seen mere humans at his door, he would have never allowed them to cross the threshold of his home. (Rabbi Leib Sarah's)

"In all that Sarah may say to you—hearken unto her voice." (21:12) The Talmud states: Three tzadikim were given a taste of the World to Come in this world—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the World to Come, the prophecy—"the female will surround and encompass the male," and "a woman of valor is the crown of her husband" (Proverbs) will be fulfilled. Abraham was given a glimpse of this when G-d told him to heed the words of Sarah, who was an even greater prophet than he. (Likutei Torah) www.ascent.org.il

This Tuesday, the 20th of Cheshvan, is the birthday of Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber (1860-1920), the fifth Chabad Lubavitch Rebbe. A beautiful story is told about an important lesson that Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber (known as the "Rebbe Rashab") taught his son, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok, who was later to become his successor.

Once, when Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok set out on a journey, the Rebbe Rashab asked him to try to do a certain favor for one of the chasidim, a businessman, who was in need of help.

When Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok returned he told his father: "I did everything you told me to do, and the favor to that man I did meticulously."

"You err," said the Rebbe Rashab. "You did a favor to yourself, not to him. G-d did a favor to him, by arranging for an emissary, such as yourself, through whom the will of Divine Providence could be realized."

The Rebbe Rashab was teaching us a lesson that permeates the whole of Judaism. When we do a mitzva, especially one which ostensibly allows us to help another person, we are G-d's emissaries. And, more than helping the other person we are, in essence, helping ourselves.

Tzedaka, charity, is a prime example. When we give tzedaka it should be with the knowledge and understanding that G-d has bestowed upon us a privilege—the privilege to administer His money in a righteous manner. Certainly, this is the reason why our Sages teach, "More than charity does for the poor person, it does for the rich person."

This attitude can and should permeate all "favors" we do for others. In addition to being the correct attitude, it stops us from feeling self-righteous! (Rabbi Shmuel Butman L'Chaim 5753,#241)

TIME MUST BE GUARDED.

IT IS URGENT TO "ACCEPT THE YOKE OF TORAH." EVERY BIT OF TIME, EVERY DAY THAT PASSES, IS NOT JUST A DAY BUT A LIFE'S CONCERN. DAYS GO BY; AS THE TALMUD SAYS (YERUSHALMI BERACHOT 1:1), "A DAY ENTERS AND A DAY DEPARTS, A WEEK ENTERS ETC.,.... A MONTH ETC.,.... A YEAR ETC.,...." MY FATHER QUOTED THE ALTER REBBE: "A SUMMER DAY AND A WINTER NIGHT ARE A YEAR. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, CHESHVAN 17)

Any Moment

In every point of time, all of time is there. After all, at every moment, as the previous moment and all its history is cancelled into naught, He must regenerate the entire cosmos anew out of the void. And so He must renew along with this moment all of its past and all of time from its beginning to its end. If so, He has rendered us masters of all of time in a single moment, of the present, of the future, and of the past as well.

Wherever we steer this moment now, there rushes all of time.

Be Within, Stay Above by Tzvi Freeman