

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

Chaos, Despair, Crushed

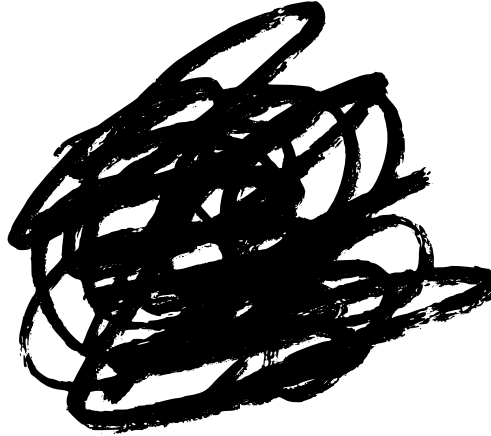
by Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

Rabbi Akiva says: If one studied Torah in his youth he should study more Torah in his old age; if he had students in his youth he should have additional students in his old age, as it is stated: "In the morning sow your seed, etc." They said by way of example that Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of students in an area of land that stretched from Gevat to Antipatris in Judea, and they all died in one period of time, because they did not treat each other with respect.

And the world was desolate of Torah until Rabbi Akiva came to our Rabbis in the South and taught his Torah to them. This second group of disciples consisted of Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua. And these are the very ones who upheld the study of Torah at that time. Although Rabbi Akiva's earlier students did not survive, his later disciples were able to transmit the Torah to future generations. (Talmud, Yevamos 62b).

In a state of despair, crushed from feeling that he had accomplished nothing, a school teacher wrote to the Lubavitcher Rebbe for guidance. The teacher was feeling that his classroom efforts had yielded nothing more than chaos.

Although the readers of this column may or may not be teachers, I am sharing my adaptation of the Rebbe's response with you, as I feel that it contains sagacious advice that may be of benefit to all of us.



Regarding the main point, namely, that a teacher may feel that he has invested so much into their class and the students are nevertheless being swept away by the tides of secularism -- we are assured that endeavors and toil for the purposes of Yiddishkeit, in a spirit of wise consultation and comradely openness, will not be expended in vain.

This is the case even when one doesn't succeed according to the measures that they have set for themselves.

Moreover, sometimes the results of one's efforts are only seen after the passing of time -- for various reasons -- and sometimes the impact is only felt after the students themselves grow up and start their own families. At such a time, when they are in a more stable place in life, they may take into account teachings they learned in your classroom, realizing that at this time they are able to integrate and accept what they have learned from you; this may tip the scales for them to make good decisions.

Additionally, the story of Rabbi Akiva is well known. For 40 years, Rabbi Akiva taught and guided his 24,000 students; they were not just students in name, but students of the caliber who needed a teacher as great as Rabbi Akiva. Tragically, they died in a plague, leaving the world of Jewish scholarship, tradition and wisdom in a precarious place. What would be of the future of Torah?

Yet Rabbi Akiva found five disciples. Five. And they sustained the entire Oral Torah, disseminating her teachings far and wide, from generation to generation, all the way down to us, today, and forever.

The Torah does not tell stories for the sake of telling stories, rather, each story serves as an instruction for life. This is the meaning of the word Torah: instruction.

The story of Rabbi Akiva guides us to utilize our talents to their fullest extent; no matter what may happen that seems to derail our efforts, this should not cause us to be downcast. Even in a case such as the one you describe, namely, that you have toiled in vain for so many years -- or so it may seem to human eyes -- you should continue your efforts with vigor and joy.

In the end you will definitely succeed. Even if you do not succeed with the majority of your students (or so it may seem), nevertheless, tremendous success may come from a small number of people, as seen in the story of Rabbi Akiva.

Plant lots of seeds; you don't know which ones will grow.

This must be coupled with a sense of bitterness over not having reached some of your students. Even if they stray for only a few days, and even if it's only in minor matters -- for every moment is precious.

But these feelings of bitterness should lead you to conclude that you must be even more bold in your efforts. Nothing can stand in the way of your strong will, including even those students who you have not yet been able to reach.

Just as it is forbidden to give up hope on any student, so too, the teacher may not weaken his grip on his holy work, even if he doesn't see success. At the end of the day, words that come from the heart, enter the heart, and will indeed bear fruits over time.

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Donations to The Mishkan

Not Your Neighbor's Potential

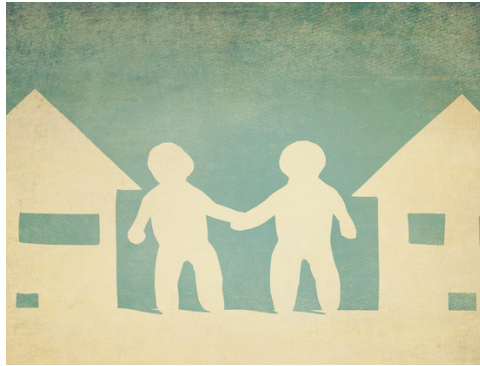
by Tzipah Wertheimer

The Jewish people gave different types of donations to help build the mishkan in the desert. Every single person, rich or poor gave a half shekel towards the mishkan which was used for the foundational beams and sockets of the structure. On the other hand donations toward the materials and vessels of the mishkan were of varied amounts determined by the individual benefactor.

The foundational sockets of the mishkan are the basic support of the structure. Supporting beams and sockets are purely utilitarian they are not meant to be fancy or stylish. When admiring an impressive structure one tends to notice the fine details and delicate workmanship – not the beams and sockets. While they are of utmost importance, beams and sockets are meant to stay in background.

The beams and sockets are a metaphor for humility – indistinguishable from one another and hardly noticeable. With this in mind it makes perfect sense that, rich or poor, everyone gave the same half shekel towards their construction. No individual donation was noted, no one stood out.

As the sockets and beams were the first phase of construction we can take a lesson that we must begin each day with a foundational sense of humility. The first words a Jew is meant to utter upon arising in the morning are; Modeh Ani... which means, I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great. One is literally thanking G-d for restoring our very life – taking nothing for granted. I am here because of You and Your kindness. This is the first order of business.



Individual skills, abilities and talents need to be grounded in humility. The artist is drawn to the canvass, the musician to the instrument, the academic to the books and so on. Humility allows a person's talents to shine devoid of arrogance.

The donations toward the materials and vessels of the mishkan were given according to the means and will of the donor (individual capacity). Each one of us has our unique personality and individualistic way and it's precisely in that very customized and special capacity that we are meant to connect with our creator.

Regarding an individual's potential, the great Tzadik known as Reb Zushia of Annipoli who led a life of piety and sincere devotion to G-d, was asked on his deathbed if he was scared that in the heavenly courtrooms he'd be asked; Why weren't you more like Avraham Avinu? Reb Zushia replied, "I'm not afraid to answer why I wasn't like Avraham Avinu – I'm scared that I will be asked why I wasn't like Zushia."

Strive to live up to your potential – not your neighbor's potential.



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Now, we need help from Heaven in all areas of our lives, and this is certainly true in the field of Jewish education. So in addition to all your efforts in the classroom itself, you should strive for personal growth in a tangible, day-to-day manner, in keeping with our Torah. Not only will this not contradict your efforts with your students, each one will help the other. I have strong hopes that in a short amount of time, you will see fruits from your labors.

Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov said this was a remarkable lambskin, but it looks quite plain to me. It is not even large enough to make a fur coat!"

"Didn't everything the Baal Shem Tov say happen exactly as he said?" said his wife. "Who are we to question this holy man? Bring the lambskin as a birthday gift to the Count!"

When the day arrived, people from all over began arriving for the party. Observing the steady flow of people and their gifts, Moshe became discouraged.

He nevertheless set out for the castle, lambskin in hand. When he arrived, a guard said, "Moshe, you brought a gift?! Let's see what it is!" Upon seeing the lambskin, the guard grabbed it from Moshe's hands, and instructed Moshe to wait.

Bringing the lambskin to the Count, the guard said, "This is a birthday gift from Moshe the Inkeeper!"

"What a shameless gift from this miserable Jew!" said the Count. Embarrassed in front of his guests, he told the guard to throw Moshe into the cellar, to be dealt with later.

Some of the Count's guests – having already had a few drinks of alcohol – began to mock him. One of the guests was looking closely at the lambskin and suddenly proclaimed, "Remarkable!"

Gathering around him, the guests took a closer look, and they saw the most amazing thing: In the middle of the lambskin, there was a beautiful pattern which spelled out the Count's name, his father's name, his date of birth and his family coat-of-arms.

"Incredible!" one of them said. "I've never seen anything like it!" said another.

After gazing at the wondrous lambskin, the Count ordered that they bring Moshe before him. Not knowing what they had discovered, Moshe was petrified of what the Count had in store for him.

(To be continued in next week's QF)

leiluy nishmat

Zaghi bat Yechezkel

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Refuah Shleimah

Monir Malka bat Zaghi