

Kinder Torah

Parashas Shoftim

It's Very Simple

"Oy, I wish I was rich. My life would be so much easier and less complicated."
"I can make you rich in one day - no problem."

"Really? How?"

"It is actually very simple. Just bring me a copy of tomorrow's Wall Street Journal. We will see which stocks will go up in value tomorrow. We will then borrow all the money that we can, buy those stocks, and watch them go up. Tomorrow we will sell them, rake in a huge profit, return the borrowed money, and be rich."

"That is a brilliant plan. There is only one problem."

"What is it?"

"They do not publish tomorrow's Wall Street Journal today. Nobody knows the future."

"Yes, that is a very big problem."

"Please allow me to correct myself. There is One Who does know the future - Hashem. However, He does not share it with us. In fact, He commands us to refrain from looking into the future. It is a verse in this week's parasha - 'You shall be wholehearted with Hashem, your G-d' (Devarim 18:13). Rashi explains that we should not attempt to look into the future to find out what The Creator has in store for us. Rather, we should be wholehearted with Him. Trust Him, and accept whatever He does wholeheartedly. If we trust Him, then He will be with us."

"I see."

"The Malbim has an even deeper explanation. The name, 'Elokecha' denotes Hashem's *hashgacha pratis* (individual supervision) upon every Jew. The verse informs us that we shall conduct ourselves wholeheartedly with the Almighty, and not attempt to find out what He has in store for us. Rather we shall accept whatever He does, knowing that it is for our own good, for He knows better than we do. Then He will be close to us, and personally supervise the events in our lives. To sum it up, 'If we act wholeheartedly, then Hashem Elokim will be with us.' The Sifrei says it so poetically, 'When you are wholehearted, your lot is with Hashem, your G-d.'"

"Do you realize how rich you truly are? You are rich in Torah knowledge. You do not need tomorrow's Wall Street Journal. You have possessions much more valuable than money."

"You are right. Hashem has been very kind to me. I must be equally kind to Him and accept His decrees unconditionally."

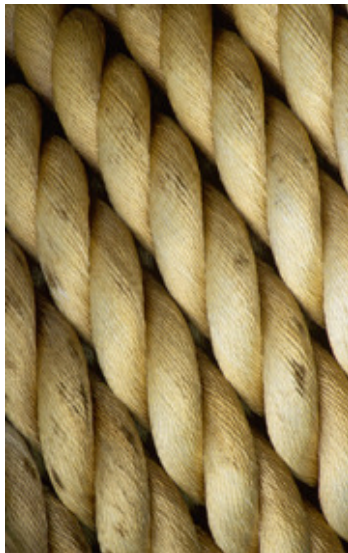
Kinderlach . . .

What will be in the future? Will you be rich or poor? Will you be healthy or sickly? Where will you live? Whom will you marry? How long will you learn? How long will you live? Only Hashem knows. If you trust Him and accept everything that He does, knowing that it is good for you, then it will truly be good. You will see the good, know it, and appreciate it. You will not worry about the future because you will know that you are safely and securely in the hands of Hashem. It is all very simple. Be wholesome with Hashem.

Break the Ropes

"Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house" (Devarim 20:8). Such a man cannot fight in the Jewish army. What is he afraid of? Rebbe Yossie HaGlili says that he is afraid of the *aveyros* that he has committed. A soldier needs special *Siyata Di'Shmaya* (Heavenly Assistance) to survive a war. One with *aveyros* does not merit this *Siyata Di'Shmaya* (Gemora Sota 44a). What magnitude of *aveyra* strikes fear into ones heart? The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh gives a startling answer - speaking unnecessary words between "Yishtabach" and "Yotzer Ohr" in the morning tefillos. Such a seemingly small *aveyra* can cause a soldier to be killed in war.

The Chovos HaLevavos in Shaar HaTeshuva, chapter seven, illuminates another aspect of small *aveyros*. Any *aveyra*, no



matter how small, if repeated often enough, will become a big *aveyra*. The repetition itself causes the *aveyra* to become a habit. Habits, especially bad ones, are very hard to break. The Chovos HaLevavos compares them to rope, as the following story illustrates.

"What are those little white oval balls, Chaim?"

"They are silkworm cocoons, Avi."

"What is a silkworm cocoon, Chaim?"

"There is a little bug called a silkworm inside each cocoon. His saliva comes out in a very fine stream and hardens into a thread. He winds that thread around and around himself until he forms this egg-shaped cocoon."

"That is fascinating, Chaim. What do you plan to do with all of these cocoons?"

"I am going to unwind the silk and spin it into thread. I then plan to wind the threads together into twine. I have a machine that combines the twines into rope. Finally, I want to weave the rope into thick cable to use on my neighbor's boat."

"Boat cable is over three centimeters thick,

Chaim! It is the strongest rope that exists. Is it really made from this frail thread?"

"Yes it is, Avi. The secret is to keep doubling the thread over and over and over again until it becomes very thick and strong."

"Chaim, did you know that the Chovos HaLevavos compares small *aveyros* to silk thread? In its raw form, it is among the weakest things in the world - the saliva of a worm. So too, a single small *aveyra* by itself is very weak and easy to correct. The problem comes when you repeat it. Just as the silk cord becomes stronger and harder to break the thicker that you wind it, so too the *aveyra* becomes stronger and harder to correct the more that you repeat it. It becomes an ingrained habit."

"Oy vey, Avi. What can we do about our small *aveyros* that have become big habits?"

"The Chovos HaLevavos has an answer for you, Chaim. The boat cable will fray, become weak, and eventually break over time. So too, if you ignore a habitual *aveyra* and do *teshuvah*, it will gradually weaken and eventually break completely."

"How encouraging!"

"Yes. You just have to look at it as a long-term project. Keep plugging away and don't give up. You will eventually break the rope of that *aveyra* that has trapped you in its clutches."

"How poetic! I am going to start today."

"May Hashem grant you success."

Kinderlach . . .

Habits are very powerful, like strong rope. They begin as small threads, but over time, they wind themselves into big, thick ropes. Develop good habits, kinderlach - mitzvah habits. Make getting up on time in the morning a habit. Your whole day will start off right. Be kind and helpful to people over, and over, and over again until it becomes second nature. Put all of your mental energy into learning Torah. That will become your derech in learning. Kinderlach, stay far away from aveyros. When you do mistakenly do an aveyra, even a small one, do not repeat it. Do not allow it to become a bad habit. It will "tie you up" in a thick rope that is very difficult to break. However, if you find yourself trapped in its clutches, do not despair. You can break that rope. It just takes time and patience. Now is the time to take that time, kinderlach. We are at the beginning of the month of Elul. Hashem is very close to us during this month. He is ready to accept our teshuva. You will receive extra Siyata Di'Shmaya (Heavenly Assistance) if you try to break those aveyra habits now, kinderlach. Take advantage of this time to get close to Hashem. Break the ropes and get out of the aveyros.

Parasha Questions:

- Which trees may and may not be cut down during a siege? (20:19-20)
- What statement did the elders of the city make on the eglah arufah and why? (21:7 and Rashi)
- What punishment do the plotting witnesses receive? (19:19)
- What happens to an intentional murderer who flees to Ir Miklat? (19:11-13)

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