

Kinder Torah

Parashas Nitzavim/Vayelech

A Mitzvah to Choose

Malka, I am so glad to see you!"
"That's so nice, Tammy. What's doing?"
"I can't wait to tell you what someone just did to me. It is not so complimentary; however, it really does not say anything too bad about the person. I don't think that it is loshon hora. Even if it is, I am sure that it is permissible to talk about this person, because she is not such a big tsadekes anyway. Besides, the story is 100% true. How can it possibly be loshon hora?"

Malka began to get nervous. She had a feeling that Tammy was wrong. Loshon hora is still loshon hora, even if it is true. This story may be loshon hora, or it may not. Should she take the chance? She began to reason. If someone put a piece of meat in front of her and told her that it might not be kosher, would she eat it? If someone put a drink in front of her and said that it might contain poison, would she drink it? Of course not! No one with seichel (common sense) takes chances like that. Loshon hora is no different. The Torah forbids speaking or hearing loshon hora. Therefore, how can she take a chance?

"Tammy, I don't think that you should tell me what happened. It might be loshon hora, which is a very serious aveyra (sin). It is not worthwhile to take such a chance. You have a yetzer hora (evil desire) to say loshon hora. However it is a big mitzvah to overcome that yetzer hora."

"Really? Which mitzvah is it? Is it in the Torah? Is it one of the 613?"

"Yes it is, according to Rabbeinu Yona, exercising your free will to refrain from bad is a positive mitzvah. He cites the source as a verse in this week's parasha."

"Fascinating."

The verse states, 'And you shall choose life' (Devarim 30:19). Rabbeinu Yona explains that each time that a person is confronted with something that is forbidden, or even doubtfully permissible, if he refrains from it, he fulfills a positive commandment. "Choose life." Exercise your free will to stay away from bad. You get a mitzvah."

"I have another question for you, Malka. Why does the verse say, 'choose life?' It could just say, 'choose good,' or 'choose the mitzvah.'"

"That is an excellent question Tammy. The answer is part of the Maariv prayer - 'For they are our life, and they lengthen our days.' What is our life? The Torah. A life without Torah is not a life for a Jew. The Torah gives us everything we need in

life - both in this world and the next. Therefore, when we choose the right path, the path of Torah, we are choosing life."

"Wonderful. You are so inspiring, Malka."

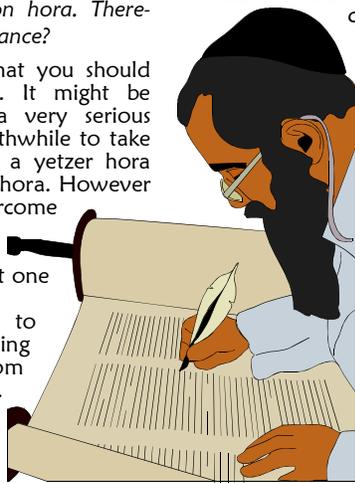
"Thank you Tammy. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to do a mitzvah, and to choose life!"

Kinderlach . . .

Next week is Rosh Hashanah. The books of life and death are open. Everyone is judged and his fate is written down. What can we do? Can we tip the scales in our favor? Yes. The choice is ours. We can choose life. We can use our free will to stay away from aveiros. We accomplish two things. We avoid an aveira, and we get a mitzvah. That is a double zechus (merit) for us. That can really tip the scales. Write yourself in the book of life, kinderlach. Choose life.

A Reason to Celebrate

The sofer took the quill in hand, and dipped it in the ink. He painstakingly filled in the letter "lamed." Cameras clicked. Flashes popped. "Mazel tov!" The Sefer Torah was complete.



This was the culmination of over a year's worth of work. The parchment upon which the letters were written began its life as the skin of a kosher animal. It was tanned by a G-d fearing Jew who performed every step of the process with a singular kavannah (intention) - "li'shaim kedushas (for the sake of the holiness of the) Sefer Torah." It was then cut to the proper size and scored lightly with lines that

would serve as guides for the writing of the letters. The ink was then prepared from the special ingredients which are listed in the Gemara and the Halacha. The sofer took his quill, made from a turkey feather, dipped it into the ink, and began to write. Now he sat, one year later, with a finished Sefer Torah.

The Gabbai closed the Sefer Torah, fastened it, and covered it with its mantle for the first time. He picked it up, held it next to his heart, and carried it down into the street. The gathering that awaited him was beyond belief. Young boys bearing lit torches lined the street, forming a path for the Sefer Torah to pass through. A chuppah (wedding canopy) help by four men stood waiting to escort the Sefer Torah on its journey. A band played

beautiful dancing music. The Gabbai walked under the chuppah, and the Hachnoset Sefer Torah parade began. The streets were full of people, hundreds, even thousands, dancing and rejoicing with the Sefer Torah. Spectators lined the streets, and filled the overlooking windows and balconies. Jews of all ages, origins, and backgrounds danced together in joyous celebration. What happiness! What unity! A new Sefer Torah!

The verse states, "So now, write this song (Sefer Torah) for yourselves" (Devarim 31:19). The Sefer HaChinuch explains that each and every Jew has a mitzvah to write his own Sefer Torah. (For a discussion of the halacha see Shulchan Auruch Yoreh Deah 270) Why is a Sefer Torah so important that everyone must write his own? The Sefer HaChinuch explains that everyone should have one available to learn from it at all times. You may ask, "We have other sefarim to learn, as well as printed Chumashim." True. However, the Sefer Torah has a very high level of kedusha. The sefer Derech Eitz Chaim describes that each letter is a coal, waiting to be fanned into a fire. Our learning down here ignites a spiritual fire in the upper worlds, which sheds the light of kedusha down here. The Sefer Torah represents the Torah itself. One who writes his own Sefer Torah is considered as if he personally received the Torah at Har Sinai! Therefore we must honor it. The Hachnoset Sefer Torah is a massive Kovod HaTorah.

Kinderlach . . .

A Hachnoset Sefer Torah is one of the most beautiful experiences on the face of the earth. Enjoy it! Appreciate it! Understand the deeper meaning behind it. We have a new Sefer Torah in the world. A new kedusha. Something for us to give great honor to! Let it inspire us to learn Torah with a new vitality, a new energy. Light up the world!

Parasha Questions:

- Why will Hashem destroy the Land? (29:24,25)
- To where will He gather us? (30:5)
- What will happen after Moshe dies? (31:29)
- Which year did the Hakel mitzvah take place? (31:10)

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