



Adapted from the sefer במוצאי שבת a collection of maamarim on  
תנא דבי אליה given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Melave Malka

### Melave Malka Parshas VaYeishev 5772

The Rav of Lemberg, Hagaon Rav Yosef Shaul Natanzon zt”l , author of “Shoel Umeishiv”, decreed that no one would be allowed to deliver a drasha in the city, without first receiving his permission. This would enable him to detect and block darshanim who were connected to the “haskala”, or charlatans who came to raise money under false pretenses.

Once, while the Rav was learning with his talmidim, a darshan entered and requested permission to deliver drashos, in order to raise funds that he needed to marry off his daughter. The Rav asked him to present a sample drasha. The brief sample revealed that the poor man’s elocution and Torah knowledge were both subpar.

The Rav shocked his talmidim by granting the man permission to deliver a drasha in his own beis medrash, and by announcing that he would attend the drasha!

After the man mumbled his drasha and collected the money he sought, the talmidim asked the Rav why he allowed someone with little Torah knowledge and poor speaking ability to darshan in his beis medrash? The Rav answered that the man’s shortcomings were the very reason that he agreed to the request. “If someone is prepared to humiliate himself publicly”, said the Rav, “it’s clear that he genuinely needs money and has no other way to raise the funds.”

The Rav went on to explain that he learned this principle from our Parsha. The Egyptians cried out to Pharaoh that they had no food, and he told them to go to Yosef and do whatever he asked. Rashi brings the Medrash that the Egyptians complained because Yosef had told them to circumcise themselves in order to receive more food.

Why did Yosef demand this of the Egyptians? It can’t be that he wanted to convert them to Yiddishkeit. We don’t missionize. We even discourage potential converts, asking them why they would want to join a nation who suffers perpetual persecution?

Yosef knew that during famine, unscrupulous individuals may try to enrich themselves by acquiring free food under false pretenses and reselling it at high prices. The requirement of Milah, would ensure that only truly needy people would receive the food.

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This idea sheds light on a puzzling Chanuka halacha. The Rambam states that “The mitzva of נר חנוכה is extremely precious... even someone who only has food by receiving tzedakah, must borrow money or sell his clothing so that he can purchase oil for lighting”.

This is surprising! The Gemara in Kesuvos (נ:) says that Chazal decreed that a person should not spend more than a fifth of his funds in order to fulfill a mitzva. The Rambam himself brings this halacha and states that one who spends more than a fifth is not a Chossid, but a fool! Why would Chazal treat the mitzva of נר חנוכה differently?

The answer lies in the roots of the נס. The Seforim Hakedoshim explain that the miracle of Chanuka came in response to Bnei Yisroel’s longing and yearning to light the נרות בטהרה. Their desire was so genuine, and so strong, that Hashem responded with the נס השמן, a miracle that provides light and strength to subsequent generations of Am Yisroel throughout centuries of exile and suffering.

However, in order to receive the light and benefit of Chanuka in our generation, we too must exert ourselves to the utmost for the mitzva of Chanuka! This explains Chazal’s decree that one has to do anything possible for the mitzva of נר חנוכה, even sell his clothes or beg door to door.

These examples express a thought of the Sfas Emes (ליקוטים לתשעה באב ד"ה בנפשו), that I frequently share.

The words in Megilas Eicha לחמנו נביא (with our souls we bring our bread), also apply to our struggle for spiritual sustenance. In golus, says the Sfas Emes, it is impossible to achieve emuna, and true avodas hashem, without mesirus nefesh. This is particularly true for Chanuka, a מועד that came into the world as a result of Am Yisroel’s mesirus nefesh.

This brings me to a precious and powerful story that took place on Purim 5732, when the Gerrer Rebbe the Beis Yisroel zy”a, summoned me in the predawn hours. The Rebbe drew my attention to a situation that concerned him. When I told him that steps had already been taken to improve the matter, he beamed with joy. I decided to take advantage of this opportune moment and was bold enough to make a request.

“Chazal say”, I began, “אין מדקדיקין במעות פורים כל הפושט יד נותנים לו” - On Purim we don’t investigate requests for money, we give to whoever extends his hand”. “Therefore”, I continued, I also put out my hand to request something for myself”.

As soon as I said this, the Rebbe’s face changed and became very serious. “What do you want?” he asked. I replied, “יראת שמים”.

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The Rebbe responded with his characteristic sharpness, "Are you really prepared to beg for it?" he asked. Without waiting for an answer, he sent me on my way.

His holy words helped me understand the principle discussed above. Begging is a difficult and embarrassing act. Only a person who truly feels that his need is essential, will degrade himself and beg from door to door.

The Rebbe zy"ta taught me that willingness to be פושט יד was an essential precondition to the benefit of נותנים לו. If I could not honestly tell the Rebbe that I would beg door to door in order to achieve יראת שמים, I could not stand before him as a פושט יד.

The days of חנוכה are the time to awaken and strengthen this aspect of our avoda. If we strive and sacrifice for רוחניות, or at least aspire to do so, our children will see that our yearning for Torah is truly בנפשנו. Then, נביא לחמנו, we will be זוכה to see נסים ונפלאות ישועות ונחמות בימים הזהם בזמן הזה אכ"ר.