



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

Melave Malka Parshas Bechukosai 5765

In the Tana Dvei Eliyahu (17:10) we learn:

"תלמיד חכם ומלך, תלמיד חכם קודם למלך, לפי שאם המלך מת, כל ישראל ראויין
למלכות, ר"ש אומר כל ישראל בני מלכים הן. אבל ת"ח שמת ולא הניח תמורתו ראוי לכל
ישראל להתאנח עליו לעולם ולעולמי עולמים. מכאן אמרו, אם ראית ת"ח, חגרהו על
מתניך."

"A *talmid chacham* and a King, the *talmid chacham* takes precedence,
for if the King dies, every Jew is fit to serve as King. R. Shimon says, 'All
Yisrael are *bnei melachim*.' However, if a *talmid chacham* dies and
leaves no one fit to replace him, all Yisrael should bemoan the loss
forever. Therefore, they said, "If you see a *talmid chacham*, gird him to
you as someone girds his waist with a belt."

The unusual phrase "gird him to you", requires explanation. Eliyahu
Hanavi is addressing someone who isn't a *talmid chacham*. Why does the
talmid chacham need to be tied around the waist of the *am haaretz*? On
the contrary, we would expect Eliyahu Hanavi to tell the *am Haaretz* to
tie himself to the *talmid chacham*.

It seems that Eliyahu Hanavi is revealing the test that enables us to
differentiate between a *talmid chacham* whose loss Am Yisrael should
bemoan for all time, and one about whom Chazal said, (*Vayikra Rabba*
1:15) - כל תלמיד חכם שאין בו דעת, נבילה טובה הימנה (Any *talmid chacham*
who doesn't have *daas* - carrion is better than him).



[1]

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The litmus test is whether the *talmid chacham* is prepared to tie himself to someone else, even if it means that he may have to temporarily descend from his high *madreigah*. One who is willing to do so, is a true *talmid chacham* and we should draw close to him, fulfilling Chazal's instruction, (Sifrei - Ekev 49) הדבק בחכמים ובתלמידיהם (cleave to *chachamim* and to their students).

A true *talmid chacham* surely knows Eliyahu Hanavi's lesson that a *talmid chacham* is more important than a King. He should therefore be aware that he is constantly in danger of becoming arrogant, and looking down on others.

An arrogant *talmid chacham* won't allow himself to be tied to the waist of those who need him. Instead, he will tell others that if they want to benefit from his presence, they should tie themselves to him, and serve him. Only a *talmid chacham* who is willing to descend from his lofty *madreiga* and allow himself to be tied to others and serve them, is considered more important than a King.

The image of the belt hints to another message. The *halacha* (Beis Yosef 46:1) instructs someone wearing a robe to put on a belt before reciting *brachos* or *tefilla* so as to create a separation between the heart and the lower parts of the body. The *talmid chacham* has to be prepared to serve as the "belt" of an *am Haaretz*, in order to extricate his heart from places that are disgusting in the eyes of the Torah. A *talmid chacham* who is willing to tie himself to a Jew who is submerged in *tumah* in order to extricate him and elevate him, takes precedence over a king.

I often share something that I heard from my grandfather zy"a. He once told me about how amazed he was by something that one of the great *Admorim* zt"l did. He said that the *Admor's* action demonstrated the characteristics of a leader who is truly worthy of the title "Rebbe".

Once, when a child was born to one of the *Admor's* family members, it became clear that the newborn suffered from a condition that could only



[2]

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be treated by undergoing a medical procedure in *chutz la'aretz*. It was in the middle of Chanukah, and speed was of the essence. The Rebbe, who was an elderly man, suggested that for a variety of reasons, it would be preferable for him to accompany the child instead of the child's parents. He certainly understood that he would spend the rest of Chanukah far from his family and *chasidim*, in a city without a Jewish community. He would have to *daven* and light *neiros* Chanukah by himself, surrounded by non-Jews.

My grandfather was so impressed by the Rebbe's self-sacrifice, that he went to greet him when he returned to *Eretz Yisrael*. My grandfather declared, "Fortunate are the *chasidim* who have such a Rebbe!". Even though my grandfather knew that Rebbe's greatness in Torah and *avodas Hashem b'kedusha u'btahahara*, he was most impressed by the Rebbes willingness to be "tied like a belt" to those who needed him.

A reliable person once told me in the name of Rav Yisrael of Hushatin zy"a, that his grandfather, Rav Yisrael of Rizhin zy"a had great admiration for Rav Yisrael Salanter zt"l, the founder of the *mussar* movement. The Rizhiner Rebbe, heard that when a cholera epidemic spread through Vilna, Rav Yisrael Salanter decreed that people should not fast because it could be life-threatening. The *Beis Din* of Vilna disagreed, and issued a *psak* that, despite the plague, people were obligated to fast.

When Rav Yisrael Salanter discovered this, he went up to the *bima* after *shacharis* of Yom Kippur, recited a *bracha* at the top of his voice, and ate. When the Rizhiner Rebbe heard of this incident, he praised the leadership of Rav Yisrael who didn't hesitate, or fear for his own *nefesh*. Instead, he courageously ate in public on Yom Kippur, out of concern for the *nefashos* of his fellow Jews.

This lesson can also be found in our *parsha*, *Bechukosai* which begins תלכו אחריו (If you walk in my laws). The *pasuk* applies to a scenario where someone is involved in the study of *chukosai*, the laws of the



[3]

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Torah. Nonetheless, sometimes he has to implement the instruction, *teilechu*, to get up from his *sefer* and to go help and benefit others. This is the ultimate purpose of learning, ללמוד על מנת לעשות ולקיים, to learn in order to implement and uphold the Torah he learns.

Every Jew, great or small, can help someone who is weaker than they are in one area or another. *Im yirtzeh Hashem* if we follow this path, we will achieve the level of true *talmidei chachamim* and receive the Torah
בשמחה ובטוב לבב אכי"ר



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