



Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת and חדוות דעיר אנפין collections of
maamarim
given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Seuda Shlishis and Melave Malka

Melave Malka Parshas Bechukosai 5765

In this week's portion of *Tana D'vei Eliyahu* we learn;

“Regarding a *talmid chacham* and a king, the *talmid chacham* takes precedence, for if the king dies, every Jew could potentially take his place as king. However, when a *talmid chacham* dies and leaves no one who can replace him, it is appropriate for the entire Jewish people to bemoan that loss for all generations.

This is the basis for the statement, ‘If you see a *talmid chacham*, gird him to your hips (like a belt). ‘

The puzzling image of “gird him to your hips” requires clarification. Clearly, Eliyahu Hanavi is addressing someone who isn't a *talmid chacham*. If so, why should the *talmid chacham* have to be girded to the hips of the *am ha'aretz*? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate for Eliyahu Hanavi to instruct the *am ha'aretz* to gird himself to the hips of the *talmid chacham*?

It seems that Eliyahu Hanavi's formulation reveals the “litmus test” by which a person can evaluate the *talmid chacham* who stands before him. Is he truly a *talmid chacham* whose loss Am Yisrael should mourn for all time? Is he a *talmid chacham* that every Jew should want to draw close to?



[1]

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Alternatively, is he the negative *talmid chacham* described by Chazal, “If a *talmid chacham* doesn’t have *daas*, a *neveila* (animal carcass) is better than him.” (ויקרא רבה א:ט"ו)

The litmus test is whether the *talmid chacham* will allow himself to be tied to someone else’s hips to help him, even if that requires him to temporarily descend from his usual lofty *madreiga*. It is a difficult test, for the *talmid chacham* knows Eliyahu Hanavi’s teaching that a *talmid chacham* is more important than a king. That knowledge can lead him to become inflated with arrogance, and to look down on others. He certainly won’t agree to be tied to anyone in order to help them. If anything, he will feel that those who want to build a connection with him should follow him around and serve him, tying themselves to his hips!

A true *talmid chacham* is prepared to descend from his *madreiga* and want those who need him to tie him to themselves like a belt. He is the *talmid chacham* whose significance surpasses that of a king, and whose loss all of *Am Yisrael* will mourn for generations. Each of us must seek out such a *talmid chacham* in order to fulfill Chazal’s instruction **הדבק בחכמים ובתלמידיהם** - connect yourselves to *chachamim* and to their students.

The image of the “belt” reveals another dimension of the true *talmid chacham*’s responsibility. In *halacha*, a belt is sometimes required **בכדי שלא יהא לבו רואה את הערוה** - so that a person’s heart shouldn’t see his nakedness. In other words, to separate his heart from the lower regions of the body and their associated desires. By telling us that a *talmid chacham* must allow himself to be girded to another Jew like a belt, Eliyahu Hanavi teaches us that the *talmid chacham* must extricate a Jew from even the most disgusting behaviors. He will be required to descend from his rarefied environment and to form a bond with even the lowest of the low. His duty is to help that Jew rise up from his degraded state and ensure that he will now travel on a good and straight path.



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I often relate how impressed my grandfather zy”a was with one of the greatest *Admorim* zt”l. One incident prompted my grandfather to declare, “This is someone who deserves to be called *Rebbe*! This is a true leader!”

This was what happened. One year, relatives of the *Admor* had a child who required medical treatment in America. The trip had to take place during the middle of Chanuka. The elderly Rebbe and the child’s parents both agreed that for a variety of reasons (such as the Rebbe’s fluency in English), it would be to the child’s benefit for the Rebbe to accompany the child, rather than one of his parents.

The medical facility wasn’t located in proximity to a vibrant Jewish community. The Rebbe knew that he would have to *daven* and light *Chanuka licht* by himself in a foreign land, without his *kehilla* and *chasidim*. He did his *avoda* quietly in very non-Jewish surroundings.

My grandfather was so impressed by this, that when the Rebbe returned to Eretz Yisrael, my grandfather travelled to the airport to greet him. The Rebbe’s willingness to be “tied to the belt” of a child who needed him moved my grandfather more than the Rebbe’s great *hasmada*, *kedusha*, and *tahara*.

A reliable individual told me that he heard Rav Yisrael of Husyatyn zy”a describe his grandfather, the *Tiferes Yisrael* of Rhizhin’s admiration for Rav Yisrael Salanter, founder of the *Mussar* movement.

Rav Yisrael Salanter earned that admiration by taking a bold step that became well known. In the year תר”ח, A cholera epidemic raged in Vilna. On Erev Yom Kippur, Rav Yisrael announced that no one should fast, because the situation was one of *pikuach nefesh* - life threatening.

However, the *Beis Din* of Vilna disagreed and *paskened* that the Jews of Vilna were obligated to fast. In response, Rav Yisrael stood up on the



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bima of a central shul after *shacharis* on Yom Kippur, made a very loud *bracha* בורא מיני מזונות and, before everyone's eyes, ate on Yom Kippur.

When the *Rhiziner zy*"a heard this story, he lavishly praised this true leader who set aside any fear for his own *nefesh* and ate on Yom Kippur in order to save his fellow Jews.

This lesson of Eliyahu Hanavi also relates to *Parshas Bechukosai*. With the opening words, *אם בְּחֻקֵּי תִלְכוּ*, the Torah implies that even someone who is *Bechukosai* - immersed in studying Hashem's Torah, must sometimes fulfill *תִּלְכוּ*. There are times when he must close the *sefer* and go out to benefit and assist others. That is the ultimate goal of learning Torah, *ללמוד על מנת לעשות* - to learn in order to fulfill the Torah's *mitzvos*.

This applies to all Jews, young and old. Everyone can help someone who is weaker than they are in some area of life.

Im yirtzeh Hashem - when we follow this path of goodness, we will have the *zechus* to become true *talmidei chachamim*.

ולקבל את התורה בשמחה ובטוב לבב, אכי"ר



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