

Parshas Emor – R. Sholom Segal

כ' אייר תשע"ה – 8 May 2015 – שבת פ' אמור

In the closing chapter of this week's Sedra, we learn of the *Megadef*, the one who cursed Hashem. The Torah recounts how they awaited instruction of how to sentence the sinner. Hashem responded that he should be stoned. He then instructs Moshe to teach the Jewish people the laws of the *Megadef* and, as if in the same breath, the subject of not damaging other people and their possessions. The final verse then returns to the story, relating how they carried out the punishment, as instructed.

Why, in the midst of this atrocity, did Hashem see to warn His people of the importance not to mistreat others and their property?

IY"H, on Shavuot, we will read the Megillah of Rus. In the second chapter (verse 4), Boaz returns and greets his workers, "May G-D be with you." The Malbim explains that Boaz had been newly appointed the judge over the Jewish people. As head of the courts, he sought to right the warped outlook of the Jewish nation. The beginning of the Megillah, as explained by the Medrash, tells of the corruption in the judicial system. People were under the misapprehension that, whereas Hashem is personally involved in commandments such as, Shabbos, Tzitzis and all other matters pertaining to man's relationship with G-D, with regard to one's dealings with his fellow Jew, Hashem keeps out of it. In an attempt to correct this misconception, they enacted a new decree, the one with which he now arrived home and put straight into practice.

He greeted his workers with mention of Hashem's name, as if to say that even a mere 'good morning' has everything to do with G-D. On the contrary, such show of unity will be cause for Hashem's Shechina to reside amongst us.

When learning the above story of the *Megadef*, one may be so over-awed by the mere impudence of the individual who blasphemed the Holy Name of Hashem, that he will gloss over and miss the other details of the story. Let us remember that this gross sin was rooted in an argument with his fellow Jew. As explained by Rashi, the strife was over the area in which he sought to pitch his tent. Yes, this was a question of who owned what.

Hashem has just as much relevance to that feud, as to the fact that he blasphemed the Holy name. Yes, it, so-to-speak, causes Hashem just as much pain when two people get caught up in a fight, damaging one another and their property, as that which He feels when one denigrates His own honour.

This lesson is the incredibly powerful teaching that R' Akiva discovered and publicised to the world in the period we are going through now. There is no doubt that the character traits of his students were flawless, but their level of Torah study was even higher than perfect. As explained by R' Moshe Chaim Luzatto, in his magnum opus, *Mesillas Yeshorim*, when one's middos do not match his level of Torah study, the result is a profaning of G-D's name and the very words of Torah that the individual is learning.

The interaction with another human-being is the '*Kelal Gadol BaTorah*', the underpinning of the Torah, and with the weight of Torah that they were to receive at Shavuot, the foundations were simply not strong enough, and thus, they did not make it.

On a more positive note, the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva urges us to never underestimate the power of a relatively minor action. After all, what are five students, when one has just lost 24 thousand? The answer is: all the Torah institutions we have today! After all, the Gemara writes that with the death of all his students, the world was bereft of Torah and was in danger of it being forgotten entirely. R' Akiva's fortitude to start over and impart his Torah to five new students saved the world.

When it comes to greeting or, even just smiling at another, one should realise, it could change their day and thus, their life and the lives of so many others. Stories abound that testify how a few good words saved lives. When walking the streets on Shabbos, don't ignore the fellow passers-by; even if you don't know them. But, definitely do not 'steal from the poor', failing to *return* a greeting. The poor man possesses nothing in the world, but his dignity as a human-being. One who ignores his existence has stolen the last vestige of honour and personal respect. [See Berochos 6b:]

A smile and words cost nothing. But, even when the Chessed is burdensome, realise that the self-sacrifice is well worth it.

A wealthy individual arrived at the home of our venerated leader, HaGaon Harav Aharon Leib Steinman Shlit"a, with a business proposition. He was prepared to donate half a million dollars to a certain institution, with the one request that he would be assured a seat next to the sage in the next world. Harav Aharon Leib asked how much debt the institution had accrued. The philanthropist placed a call to the offices of the institution and reported that they owed some several million dollars. The Gaon then made a counter-offer: If he was prepared to clear the outstanding balance, he would assure him the coveted place in Gan Eden. The businessman said that he could not afford such an amount and withdrew from the contract.

Afterwards, Harav Aharon Leib explained to his students that one has to move out of his comfort zone in order to acquire his portion in the next world. He surmised that half a million dollars was not much self-sacrifice for this particular individual and, therefore, suggested an amount which would demand self-sacrifice.

"But, what if he had agreed?" asked a student. "Then," said the Gaon, with a big grin. "I would have paid to be next to him!"

Wishing you all a "GOOD SHABBOS" ...