



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Attentiveness Attuned

“*Vehaya ekev tishme’un et hamishpatim ha’eleh* – It shall come to pass **because** you will heed these laws...” (*Devarim 7:12*) The word *ekev* is an interesting choice to use in this verse. Rashi, drawing from Chazal, links *ekev* to another similar sounding word, *akev*, heel, to teach us that if one is careful to uphold ‘small’ mitzvot, meaning mitzvot that people generally ignore or disregard, even *trample on with their heel*, then Hashem will keep His promise to honor His covenant. Let us see how we can make this relevant and applicable to everyday living. Rav Scheinerman in *Ohel Moshe* highlights the grave danger that one risks when he acts carelessly. One who dismisses what seems to be an ‘easy’ mitzvah will ultimately grow lax or negligent with more ‘serious’ mitzvot. Human nature is such that once apathy enters the picture it will affect everything one does.

As Yeshayahu Hanavi bemoans, “this people has come near; with their mouth and with their lips they honor Me, but their heart they draw far away from Me, and their fear of Me has become a command of people [habitual], which has been taught.” (*Yeshayahu 29:13*) Simply going through the motions with no emotion will ultimately lead to observing even the most fundamental mitzvot, such as fearing Hashem, devoid of meaning.

The story is told of the Chofetz Chaim ztz”l who once offered a novel proposal at a Rabbinic conference in Lithuania. He suggested that every Rav and Rosh Yeshiva should sign a document stating that they would be mindful of their speech and refrain from speaking loshon hara with the same gravity as not eating pork. Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzhinsky ztz”l responded with a smile on his lips, and said that although the Chafetz Chaim was right, people were so used to speaking this way that it would be too hard to stop. He was also concerned that by associating speech with forbidden food, instead of being more careful, people would treat eating pork with a similar nonchalance that they took toward their speech.

Rav Yerucham ztz”l in *Ma’amarei Hamashgiach* notes that people “trample” on weighty matters as well. The great challenge we have is to live with mindfulness, to truly pay

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attention to everything we do. We tend to make light of brachot without realizing the severity of uttering Hashem's name in vain. In fact, there are no 'small mitzvot' and we must treat every mitzvah that comes our way with the intention it deserves. Speaking with a friend encompasses numerous aspects of *kavod habriot*, opening a siddur to daven requires concentrating on the *halachot* of tefillah.

Rav Yisrael Salanter *ztz"l* taught that everyone will especially be taken to account for how they treat the 'small' things. If we would take this into account, we would notice that it is not so difficult and we could succeed in making small changes with ease.

Let us strive to be more attentive, as we move closer to the month of Elul we can think big about small deeds. ■

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