6 Einei Yisrael - R. Belsky - 21

Impressions count

Rebbi Yehoshua ben Chananya was a Sage of the highest caliber, and a representative of Klal Yisroel to Rome. The Gemara (*Ta'anis* 7a) mentions how Caesar's daughter once commented on Rebbi Yehoshua's unpleasant countenance, "Can it be? Torah so grand in such an unsightly vessel!" Similar statements are made regarding Shmuel, the *Amora*.

Rebbi Yehoshua himself pointed out, just as wine sours when placed in beautiful vessels of gold and silver, and is best kept in an earthenware jug, the Torah is also best preserved in a simple, though unattractive vessel. Although the princess' comments were mistaken, we cannot avoid the fact that physical appearance, nonetheless, makes an impression.

A Sage has to live up to the status he has in the eyes of others, and this confers upon him a solemn responsibility, which he cannot forget for a moment. He has to engender a feeling of trust and respect in the people among whom he circulates. A Kohen similarly represents *avodas Hashem*, and he must also dress in a manner that will bring honor to the One he serves.

Attention to one's personal appearance is often seen as superficial.

7

We are taught to emphasize the *penimius*, the inner world of *avodas Hashem*, and to downplay the importance of 'image'.

There is a tendency to take this attitude to an extreme, and intentionally ignore the way others perceive us, as if the slightest attention to external matters would automatically detract from our *avodah*. But that is a mistake. It is important that a person consider the effect he has on others. He should therefore seek to present himself in a way that when others see him, they should say, "That is how a *ben Torah* should look." First appearances create an immediate impression, which in turn, deeply affects the long-term impression. Being aware of this is especially important when one is called to perform a mitzvah or communal task, such as leading the congregation in prayer. Carrying out one's duties when properly groomed shows that one understands that he is involved in *meleches Shamayim*, and that all he does, he does for the Ribbono Shel Olam.

8

gentile, to someone who represents the type of achievements that are in direct contrast to what the Torah demands of us.

Every person possesses the attribute of admiration. The Jew is bid to channel his admiration towards those personalities who embody the Torah and the desire to cling to Hashem. Ten Sages were murdered by the Romans, the *Assarah Harugei Malchus*. We eulogize them on Tisha B'Av using the most eloquent language: "ארזי לבנון אדירי התורה בעלי תריסין במשנה ובגמרא – Cedars of Lebanon, mighty ones of Torah, bearers of shields in Mishnah and Gemara." A cedar tree is magnificent and impressive. It is old, graceful and majestic, possessing a certain regal glory, and is used to represent these qualities metaphorically. "כארז בלבנון ישגה – *They rise up as the cedars of Lebanon*" (Tehillim 92:13).

This is why the 'heroes' of Torah are the "cedars of Lebanon." They are *ba'alei traisin* – shield-bearing warriors. What is there about the quality of great Torah scholars that causes this special admiration? What is it that is so heroic about their actions?

Unlike the gentiles, whose legendary heroes are usually those who have distinguished themselves in the various arts of warfare and mass-murder, the Jewish people look towards men of wisdom, compassion and spirit as our role models. The stories told of our Sages make no mention of any cruelty, murder, or prowess in battle. Unlike the gentiles, we see little value in their beloved traits of ruthlessness and destruction.

9

The measure of a man

Shlomo HaMelech writes, "מצרף לכסף וכור לזהב ואיש לפי מהללו – *A refiner for silver and a crucible for gold, and a man according to his praises*" (Mishlei 27:21). One device is used for measuring the purity of silver, and another device for gold, yet how does one measure the purity of a human being?

This can be gauged according to whom he praises. *Ish lefi mehallelo*: The type of person he praises reflects his value system and his image of the world, and emphasizes all that he holds to be noble and valuable. If his praise is for entertainers and sportsmen, who, despite possessing undoubted talents, have the most despicable personal *middos*, then this reveals much about what he holds to be important in this world. On the other hand, if the person whom he admires and praises is an *ish kadosh*, a ben Torah who has good *middos*, who would never harm or embarrass another person, who has respect and regard for every individual instead, devoting his days and nights to Torah, mitzvos, and *maasim tovim*, then this reflects his higher vision of the world and that which is valuable in it. By looking at the one he praises, we know who he is, "*A man according to his praises*."

10

A Torah hero

The system in Klal Yisroel has to be geared to produce individuals who merit our admiration. It must be stressed that we are talking about admiration, and not veneration, which means making a human being into an object of worship. This should never be allowed to happen. Admiration and veneration should not be confused. Admiration means knowing that a person is a mere human being, yet has developed himself to a degree of perfection that inspires praise, and a desire to attempt to emulate his attainments.

A human being who comports himself according to Torah, who has devoted his life to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and represents Him in all that he does, inspires others to likewise reach for greatness. This is similar to what is stated in the Gemara:

11

לעבוד במקדש כאילו לא אירע דבר?! וכי מחשבתו נתונה באותם רגעים לקרבן שבידו? אמנם כה"ג יושב 'שבעה', וכל העם באים לנחמו בביתו ואומרים לו "אנו כפרתך" - אבל אינו יושב על הקרקע, וגם אינו קורע (שם). היינו: התורה מורה שההזדהות שלו עם קרובו שנפטר, תהיה מצומצמת ביותר.

וכל נשכח במי מדובר: בכהן-הגדול שהוא מופת לעם ישראל במעשיו הטובים ובדרכיו הנעימות, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום המצטיין ב"ואהבת לרעך כמוך" - עליו אוסרים לנהוג כבוד אהרון במי שהביאו לחיי העולם הזה והבא!? נר אביו כבה, ויתכן שאף באופן פתאומי וטראגי - והוא עומד, הדור בבגדי זהב, ומדליק את נר מנורת המקדש כאילו לא אירע דבר...

12

יחיד ומיוחד בעולם-הזה

– תשובת הדבר היא, ברצונו העז של אהרן הכהן לדבוק בה' תכלית הדבקות. שאיפה עזה זו רוממה אותו מעלה-מעלה, עד שהפך לאדם רוחני בתכלית שהכניע את טבעו הגשמי (ר' רמב"ן ל"וידם אהרן" - ויק' י', ג). היכולת להעפיל למדרגה עילאית זו, תובן על פי מאמרם (קיד' ל:) "שלושה שותפים הן באדם: הקב"ה ואביו ואמו". חלקם של ההורים בשותפות הוא הגוף, וחלק ה' הוא הנשמה. אהרן עמל כל ימיו כדי שלנשמתו תהיה הבכורה, עד שהיה קרוב יותר לעולם הרוחני מאשר לעולמנו זה.