



Rabbi Alan Lewis

Yeshurun Federation and Beis Din Registrar

The author can be contacted at rabbi.lewis@federation.org.uk



FEDERATION

THE ELIXIR FOR LIFE

Parshah

The famous story is told in the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah) about a pedlar who travelled around the neighbourhood of Tzippori, offering for sale the elixir of life. From his study, Rabbi Yanai heard the pedlar proclaiming: מאן בעי סם חיים “who wants the potion for eternal life? Rabbi Yanai asked him for a sample. The pedlar refused saying “People like you do not need it”. After much importuning however, he consented to show it R’Yannai. He took out a book of Psalms and, opening it, pointed to the text:

מי האיש החפץ חיים ... נצור לשונך מרע ... סור מרע וגו'

“Who is the man who desires life?... guard your tongue from evil...” on seeing this R’Yannai exclaimed:

כל ימי הייתי קורא פסוק זה ולא הייתי יודע היכן הוא פשוט עד שבא רוכל זה והודיני מי האיש החפץ חיים

“All my years I have read this verse without knowing the simple explanation of the words, and now this pedlar has shown me their meaning.”

Rabbi Shimon Schwab zt”l asks, what new insight did the pedlar give Rabbi Yanai that he didn’t already know? Did Rabbi Yanai not know the rest of the verse ‘guard your tongue from evil’?

Also how do we explain R’ Yanai’s words ‘I didn’t know how simple it is’?

Rav Schwab explains that one cannot compare a pedlar to a shopkeeper since the shopkeeper can be a creditor and sometimes the purchaser is willing to give the money upfront on the proviso that the shopkeeper will find him the merchandise at some later time. However, the pedlar could never be a creditor, for as soon as the buyer gives the pedlar his money for the goods the pedlar passes on the goods immediately to the purchaser.

In this situation the pedlar in our story goes around selling his merchandise without giving any credit – the sale takes place immediately.

Initially Rabbi Yanai thought the pedlar was selling the elixir for life but when the pedlar said ‘my elixir has no application to life in this world rather it was a potion for life in the world to come and for the likes of you Rabbi Yannai it was never intended, Rabbi Yanai was astounded. Therefore, when the pedlar showed Rabbi Yanai the verse in his book of Tehillim, It was at this point Rabbi Yanai gained a tremendous new understanding into the words of this *possuk*, this new insight was the realisation that at the moment a person guards, stops his tongue from gossiping, there is an immediate reward (recorded in the verse), that a person can merit eternal life.

We can now discern a new true interpretation of the *possuk* as follows; ‘who is the man who desires life – *everlasting life*?’

Why does he desire this life of eternity? Because he ‘loves days’, *one who loves days where there are no limits to time (that is to say the world to come); ‘to see only good in a world that is completely good.’* How can such a world be found?

‘Guard your tongue from evil’ *and the moment you do so, you become a person who belongs to Olom Haboh (the world to come).* This is just like the pedlar who gives his goods to the purchaser immediately on payment without taking credit to deliver the merchandise at a later time.

It is upon this fact that Rabbi Yanai said ‘throughout all my days I would read this verse and I didn’t comprehend how simple and easy it was to achieve eternity until this pedlar came and demonstrated it to me’.

Holding back your tongue has an instant impact on your personal world to come.



A Quick Vort:

Ma'ayanah shel Torah

BY YISROEL AVROHOM KAYE

The pasuk (Vayikra 12:2) says "If a woman conceives and gives birth to a male then she shall be unclean for seven days"

On this pasuk the medresh says that if a man is worthy of it, they shall say of him "You come before all the works of creation, but if he is not worthy, they shall say of him "even the gnat comes before you".

The Ksav Sofer questions why the laws regarding kashrus, dealing with ritually unclean animals precede those that relate the ritually unclean humans.

By nature, man has many physical disadvantages to animals. Animals can feed themselves with little or no preparation and effort, nor do they need clothing. Irrespective of this, man is higher and more important than all other living things because only man has been given the task of serving Hashem and studying Torah.

However, the Ksav Sofer explains, man can lose this position of importance by not fulfilling his mission. If man does not occupy himself with the service of Hashem, he has to concern himself with all of the burdens that not even animals need worry about.

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2. What is the understanding that the final verdict to the appearance of tzara'as must be said only by a Kohen?