

STORY

See Only The Good In Others

A renowned Maggid (traveling preacher) arrived one day at the hometown of Reb Shmuel Munkes, a noted disciple of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who was a deeply pious man with an incredible sense of humor. After reading his letter of approbation, lauding him as a tzaddik who went to wander from town to town for the sole purpose of inspiring fellow Jews, the townspeople—who were simple, G-d fearing, innocent Jews—invited him to preach.

Throughout his sermon the Maggid berated his fine audience, chastising them for “dreadful sins.” He rebuked them for being such terrible, lowly and horrendous Jews, evoking G-d’s wrath. He proceeded to describe in vivid detail the severe punishment that awaited them as a result of their evil ways.

As he was concluding his sermon, a man walked into his room. It was Reb Shmuel himself. Reb Shmuel took out a long knife and a sharpening stone entered his room. He proceeded to sharpen his knife.

After a few tense and wordless moments, the Maggid broke the silence. “What’s this all about?” he asked with a look of astonishment. His eyes still trained on the sharpening stone, Rabbi Shmuel Munkes replied in mock sincerity: “As the honorable Maggid knows, we simple folk never had the merit of having a righteous scholar in our midst. Who knows, perhaps it is because of our wanton sins you just described.” Bemused as to where this was heading, the Maggid replied, “Yes, yes, but what does any of this have to do with the knife you are sharpening?”

“Well,” retorted Reb Shmuel, “We were taught by our parents that before Rosh Hashanah one should pray at the gravesites of the righteous. And sadly, we never had in our cemetery the grave of a righteous man. All of our residents—as you have eloquently described us—have been utterly wicked.” “Of course, of course, nodded the Maggid. But why the knife!?”

“It’s rather simple,” explained Reb Shmuel calmly. “The nearest burial site of a tzaddik is very far from our town. It is extremely cumbersome for the townsfolk to make the yearly trek. We decided that we finally need to have a righteous man buried in our midst. “After hearing your speech,” Reb Shmuel continued in a straight face, “I know there is no one more holy and righteous than you in our entire region. So I decided to... slaughter you and bury you right here in our very own cemetery. Finally, before Rosh Hashanah, we will be able to come pray at your sacred grave site.”

As the grim reality began to set in, the Maggid adeptly switched

course. “Come to think of it,” he stammered, “I am not all that righteous after all. I have committed some small sins here and there; they were obviously all inadvertent.”

Reb Shmuel dismissed the Maggid’s confession: “Honored Maggid! You are still very righteous and learned. As for the transgressions? They are so minor; who would even know that these were sins. Your humility is nothing but proof of your exceptional righteousness. Besides, relative to our heinous sins—which you have just described in your sermon—you are, trust me, a complete tzadik! You are the man we need buried here.”

By now, Reb Shmuel was done with the sharpening of the knife. The “holy preacher” began to panic. “On second thought,” stuttered the Maggid, “Some of my transgressions were a bit more serious, such as...” He went on to share some immoral things he has done in his life, which disqualified him from being a tzaddik. Rabbi Shmuel quickly dismissed these as well: “To us you are still a great Tzaddik. You are far better than anything we have.”

Finally the Maggid confessed to some rather ugly and embarrassing transgressions. He admitted that in truth he was far from the great tzaddik that he portrayed himself to be. He was actually a disgraceful low life. Now, it was Rabbi Shmuel’s turn to preach: “How dare you admonish these beautiful, innocent and pure Jews, when you yourself are a despicable, immoral charlatan! How dare you cause such fine, lovely, well-intended Jews so much anguish?! It is you who needs to transform his life; it is you who needs to repent for all of his transgressions.

The Maggid got the message. He left the town in deep shame and never again rebuked his audiences with stern, harsh words.

How did Reb Shmuel know that this guy was really playing the part and that he was far from holy?

The answer is simple: When you are pure and holy, you see innocence and purity in others. When you have a genuine relationship with G-d then your appreciation of the G-dliness within every person is far more palpable. When you don’t suffer from an inflated ego or from terrible insecurity, you will truly appreciate the goodness in others.

To be sure, there are skeletons in the closet of almost every human person; that is what makes us human. But when that is the only thing you see, it means that you are a non-kosher person and need your own cleansing. But when you are in touch with your own soul, you sense the beauty of the soul in others.

Tailor-made program

In this week's Parsha we learn about the animals, fish, insects, and birds that we may not eat. The Torah describes them as "Toeiva" - an abomination. We are taught that by eating these things we are destroying our Neshamos, and the damage is very great. Why is it that these things are so dangerous, and if they are, why do they only affect us, and not people from other nationalities?

The answer is simple. Just as a child would not be able to eat certain foods that are difficult for their sensitive stomachs to digest, while that same food is Ok and maybe even beneficial for an adult who's stomach can handle more, so too with a Yid versus a Goy. The Kedusha of a Yid is so great that these types of abominable foods can throw the system out of whack. But by a Goy, being that his level is significantly lower, he will not be affected at all by their consumption.

Here on GYE, there are many things that we may not be able to do, while regular people may not have a hard time with them. For example, there may be a job or a store that is not bad in general, and maybe even a good place to be, but because of our sensitivities, it would be advisable to stay away.

In short, everything is relative. Just as one food may affect one person more than another, so too, certain actions may be more dangerous for one person over another. As responsible people, it would be wise for us to pay attention to our specific tendencies, and cater a program of avoidance especially for ourselves

Sheva Yipol Tzadik

We know "sheva yipol tzaddik v'kum". To fall seven times you have to have been up in between. The posuk tells us, don't worry you will eventually stand without falling. But what about someone who remains down the whole time. For where does he know that there is hope for him to keep on trying. How many times can he try without success and still expect to see relief?

This week's parsha tells us to never give up trying. For seven days Moshe put the mishkan up and no shechina came. The Bnei Yisroel said, what was the point in building the mishkan, we are doomed. The cheit hegel was too great. Moshe told them not to despair. And then Aharon did the avodah. Still no fire from Hashem. Moshe said don't despair. Ultimately, they davened and lo and behold the Shechina comes. When? On the 8th day. Why only on the 8th day? I was thinking that perhaps the message is. It's true under natural circumstances there was no hope. But teshuva is supernatural. Hashem can do anything, even in an otherwise hopeless situation.

And the message also was, "Don't try it alone". Moshe on his

own was unsuccessful. Ahron on his own was unsuccessful. But together with Klal Yisrael, the Shechina came down.

Thank you Hashem, for GYE - a place where together we can achieve the supernatural.

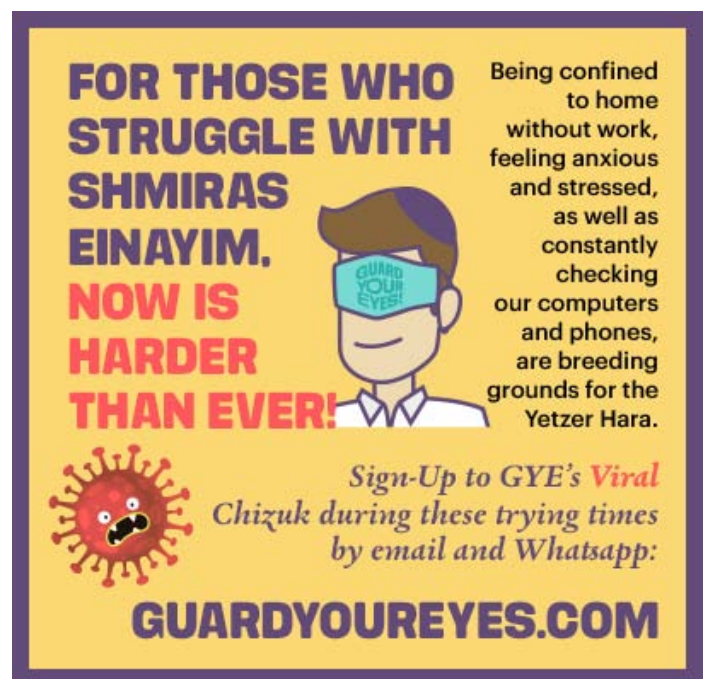
Shemini: Thy Will, not mine, be done

The Torah relates that the two sons of Aaron died when they introduced "an alien fire" to the altar. Rebbe Yishmael says that they died because they were intoxicated with wine when they did the service.

How does Rebbe Yishmael dare to contradict the Torah that clearly states the reason for their death is that they introduced an alien fire in the sanctuary?

Rebbe Yishmael is saying that the "alien fire" is figurative. The sons of Aaron felt that they could intensify the spiritual experience of the Divine service if their spirits were lifted with wine. But this was a defiance of G-d's will. One's spiritual experience is not enhanced artificially by mind-altering chemicals.

Some people mistakenly thought that they attained a spiritual mood with hallucinogens. Others might imagine that giving in to their addictive desires would make them happy or free them of the obsession for a while so they can serve Hashem better, at least for the time being. This is an "alien fire," inimical to G-d. G-d desires that one achieve spirituality by observing His will as expressed in the Torah.



FOR THOSE WHO STRUGGLE WITH SHMIRAS EINAYIM. NOW IS HARDER THAN EVER!

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