

The Weekly Daf



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Ta'anit 16 - 22

Week of 11 - 17 Elul 5759 / 23 - 29 August 1999

Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Complain to the Manufacturer

"Shalom Aleichem, Rebbe," said the stranger to Rabbi Elazar ben Shimon. Rabbi Elazar was returning home from his studies in Migdal Gedor in an exceedingly good mood because of the vast amount of Torah knowledge he had acquired at the Yeshiva.

The sage was so put off by the exceptional ugliness of his greeter that, instead of returning the greeting, he remarked on the greeter's unpleasant appearance and asked him if all the people where he came from were equally ugly.

"I don't know about that," replied the ugly stranger, "but I suggest that you go to the manufacturer who created me and complain to Him about how ugly His creation is."

When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had deeply hurt the stranger he begged his forgiveness. But the latter was adamant in refusing to forgive him until he "brought his complaint to the manufacturer." All the way home he rode behind the stubborn stranger imploring his forgiveness until they finally reached his city where a crowd came out to welcome him with cries of "Shalom Aleichem, our rabbi and teacher."

Now it was the stranger's turn to embarrass the sage and he related to the townspeople what had transpired between them. They begged him to nevertheless forgive him because of his greatness in Torah, and he consented to do so on the condition that the sage not make such behavior habitual.

The commentaries explain that the mysterious stranger was the Prophet Eliyahu in disguise who appeared in this fashion in order to teach the sage a lesson. Maharsha points out that Rabbi Elazar had assumed that there was something morally corrupt about the man which was reflected in his external appearance, just as wisdom is reflected in the visage of a wise man. Such an assumption did not, however, justify rude behavior, and Eliyahu's response cured him of it.

Ta'anit 20a

Citizens of the World to Come

"Is there anyone in this marketplace of Beilhaft who is a citizen of the World to Come?" This was the question posed by Rabbi Broka of Chozah to someone who was privy to such heavenly secrets — the Prophet Eliyahu.

Although the prophet was at first hard pressed to find someone of such status among the throngs in the busy marketplace, he did eventually point to two brothers who passed before them and identified them as citizens of the World to Come. The sage was curious to know what these two ordinary looking people had done to deserve that title, so he asked them what they were involved in.

"We are happy people who make other people happy," they replied. "When we see someone depressed we cheer him up, and if we see two people quarrelling we make fun of their situation until they make peace."

Rashi explains their peacemaking role as a ticket to the World to Come on the basis of our Sages teaching that one who brings peace between one man and another is rewarded both in this world and in the World to Come.

The connection between cheering up a depressed person and the World to Come, writes Maharsha, can be understood through what our Sages say about Hashem empathizing with the suffering of a sinner executed for his crime by declaring, "How heavy is My head, how heavy is My arm."

Every Jew, say our Sages, has a share in the World to Come. But his connection with it is only in the hereafter. Rabbi Broka was looking for a "citizen" of that world whose life reflected those other-worldly values and who was only a "tourist" in this world. Those two entertainers had that other-worldly perspective of Hashem being unhappy, as it were, if one of His creatures was unhappy. Their sensitivity to Hashem's happiness which motivated them to cheer up a depressed person proved that they were indeed "citizens" of the World to Come even while here on earth.

Ta'anit 22a

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