

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES RABBI SHLOMO SOROKA



“If you do someone a favor, give him a small pebble so that when he throws it back in your face, it won’t be a big rock.” - A Wise Man

I would not be alive today if not for the heroism of a Japanese couple, Chiune and Yukiko Sugihara. The Sugiharas saved my grandfather’s life, along with over 6,000 Jews whose descendants are estimated to exceed 40,000 people. Chiune was the Vice-Council for the Japanese Empire in Lithuania during WWII. Thousands of Jewish refugees who escaped Nazi-occupied Poland sought refuge in Lithuania, but the Soviets, who were occupying Lithuania by mid-June of 1940, would only allow the refugees to travel east with destination visas. No country was willing to grant visas to these refugees. It was only a matter of time before the Nazis would invade Lithuania and annihilate its Jewish population. A student of the Mirrer Yeshiva, where my grandfather was also a student, discovered that a miniscule Caribbean Island called Curacao did not require entrance visas. When the word spread, the Soviet consul was asked for permission to allow the Jewish refugees passage through Russia to get to Curacao. He responded that a valid transit visa was required. It was now the end of July and the Japanese consulate was the only foreign presence still in Lithuania. Throngs of desperate people surrounded Sugihara’s building, begging for transit visas. Japan emphatically and repeatedly denied Sugihara’s request to grant the visas. Chiune Sugihara was torn. He knew that thousands of innocent lives were at stake, but defying his superiors was not only against the Japanese culture of discipline and blind obedience (think Kamikazes), but would cost him his career, his money, and endanger the lives of his family. After discussing the matter with Yukiko, they decided to save lives and ignore the consequences. For the entire month of August, they wrote hundreds of visas a day, working 20 consecutive hours without breaking for food or rest. On September 1, the Sugiharas were forced out of Lithuania, but even as his train pulled away, Chiune kept signing blank visas and tossing them out the window of the rail car into the desperate crowd. My grandfather along with

his entire Yeshiva and thousands of others escaped through Russia to Kobe, Japan, and from there to Shanghai, China. Eventually, they made it to American shores. The Yeshiva was re-established in New York and Jerusalem. I had the privilege of attending both.

But what ever happened to Chuine Sugihara and his family? He was arrested by the Soviets in 1944 and was held as a POW for 18 months. Upon his release, the Japanese government forced him to resign for his insubordination. The once-rising star in Japanese foreign diplomacy could only find a job with a Japanese export company that needed a manager in Moscow, forcing him to live away from his beloved family for two decades in total obscurity. By the time his beneficiaries located him, Chuine was old and frail. When Israel ceremoniously awarded him title “Righteous Among the Nations” and included him in the Yad Vashem memorial, he was too ill to travel and his wife and son had to accept the honor on his behalf. He died the following year and only received posthumous acclaim in his own country.

You have to wonder how Sugihara felt during the post-war years. He risked everything for the sake of others but was seemingly left abandoned in his own time of need. All he got in return for his selfless deeds was hardship. But in an interview the year before his passing, he never expressed disappointment. He felt he did what had to be done and was happy that he found the courage to do the right thing. That was all he felt he needed. But even if Chuine Sugihara never sought recognition, there’s no question in my mind that G-d is giving his soul great reward. As sure as I am that Hitler is burning in Hell, Sugihara is delighting in heaven.

At the end of last week’s Torah portion, a Jewish tribal leader named Zimri encouraged the masses to cohabit with Midianite women, publicly mocked Moses, and fornicated with a Midianite princess. This aroused the wrath of G-d who inflicted a massive plague upon the Jews. Pinchas risked his life by killing Zimri for desecrating G-d’s name and violating the sanctity of the Jewish people. As a result of his actions,



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HARMONIOUS HOME

RABBI GIDON NITSUN
STAN JACOBS CHAIR OF SENIOR KOLLEL LEARNING



We are all aware of the immense importance of showing gratitude towards our spouse. Here is a simple way that will greatly enhance our showing of appreciation. Personalize compliments. Instead of saying “the food is great”, you can say “You are an excellent cook.” Even better, you can say “It’s just like you to serve such a delicious meal.” Let’s examine the following scenario: A husband brings home a little gift for his wife. The wife can react in several ways:

- 1 “What a lovely gift!”
- 2 “You have great taste!”
- 3 “That’s so nice of you.”
- 4 You are so thoughtful, you have a heart of gold.”

The first response deals with the gift, the second relates to the husband, but in an area of lesser importance, his taste. In the third example, she acknowledges a positive virtue in her husband. Finally in the fourth, the wife zeroes in on her husband’s thoughtfulness and good heart.

Which one do you think strengthens their relationship more?

The motto of a good spouse should be: When praising - speak of the person, when disapproving speak of the act, there should never be an implication that the person is bad, ignorant or even wrong; it was only the act that was out of place. (*Adapted from Fulfillment in Marriage*).

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

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the plague stopped and the nation was spared. In the aftermath, this selfless hero was vilified by the very people he had just saved. He was accused of being a disingenuous self-righteous zealot who appointed himself as judge, jury, and executioner of a great Jewish leader while he was the grandson of a pagan priest. This week, we read how G-d rewards Pinchas and proclaims his righteousness. No good deed goes unrewarded.

It’s one of our 13 principles of faith. But when in the middle of a story, we usually finish it. Here we are left to think for a whole week that Pinchas got nothing but repudiation and a tarnished reputation.

Perhaps there’s a lesson here. We’ve all been in a situation where we did some kindness for another and got no recognition or even worse; we were hurt by the person we helped. In the day-to-day of life it seems no good deed goes unpunished. But don’t stop doing good things. Maybe brace for the punishment. Try to embrace the punishment. Eventually it all works out.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!



RABBI SHLOMO EISENBERG

Q. *The three weeks are here and I forgot to shave my mustache. It is getting really long and bothering me. Is it permissible for me to shave?*

A. One is prohibited from getting a haircut or shaving during the three weeks as this is considered a time of mourning (Rema 551:6). If one’s mustache is getting so long that it inhibits eating, it would be permissible to shave.

Q. *My boss said he would fire me if I come to work with facial hair. Is this financial loss considered a valid reason for me to shave during the three weeks?*

A. In an instance where not getting a haircut/shaving is likely to cost someone money, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim IV:120) allows one to shave during the three weeks. This is based on the fact that the prohibition of haircuts during the three weeks is only a minhag, custom. (The laws of the nine days are more stringent, and a shaila should be asked) If one just feels uncomfortable going in public with an unshaven face, it would be prohibited to shave. (Rabbi Feinstein)

Please contact your Rav for final ruling.

To contact Rabbi Eisenberg email seisenberg@stlkollel.com.



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