

They shall make a Sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell among them. (25:8)

The *Alshich HaKadosh*, *zl*, notes the use of the word, *b'socham*, in them, rather than *b'socho*, in it. This teaches that every Jew must serve as a veritable *Mishkan*, Sanctuary, for Hashem. Every Jew is a *mikdash me'at*, miniature sanctuary. This should be our self-view, and likewise, the way we look at others. While one can accept this idea concerning *gedolei Yisrael*, individuals who truly represent *Kavod Shomayim*, the glory of Heaven, what about the ordinary person? Is the ordinary person also a *mikdash me'at*?

First, the term “ordinary” is too general a term. I refer rather to someone who has allowed himself to stagnate and remain mediocre; an individual who is, for the most part, indifferent and uninspired about achieving his own potential. Anyone who so chooses is able to grow in accordance with his potential. Thus, not achieving one's potential, by simply “settling”, is what may be termed as “ordinary”. We are all born with abilities, talents, acumen, etc. What we make of ourselves defines us in light of the situation we are in and the circumstances with which we must cope. Two students might begin in the same classroom, and one will achieve distinction in life, while the other does not care enough. What happened? Upon being confronted with circumstances that were challenging, one persevered while the other faltered and gave up. The following thesis from *Horav Tzvi Nakar, Shlita*, in his *Emunah Sheleimah*, underscores this idea.

In *Parashas Balak (Bamidbar 24:21)* the Torah records, *Vayaar es Hakeini vayisa meshalo vayomar, eisam moshavecha v'sim basela kinecha*. “He saw the Keini, and proclaimed his parable and said, ‘Strong is your dwelling and set in a rock is your nest.’” *Rashi* explains that the Keini were the family of Yisro, Priest of Midyan, who had left their own people to join the Jewish People. He was also Moshe *Rabbeinu's* father-in-law. Bilaam noted that, despite their geographic proximity to Amalek, the Keini were a rising spiritual people. Amalek, however, would ultimately suffer a well-deserved, ignominious end. Yisro's descendants became an integral part of the Jewish People, having placed their “nest” with the Jews, rather than with their powerful-- but wicked -- neighbors, Amalek. Bilaam also praised Yisro for having given his daughter's hand to Moshe in marriage.

Bilaam and Yisro had been contemporaries in Pharaoh's court. The Egyptian ruler had three advisors: Yisro, Bilaam and Iyov. The *Talmud Sanhedrin* 106A notes that Bilaam had marveled (and was probably quite envious) that Yisro, who was with him in Pharaoh's court, had achieved such distinction. He had conveniently forgotten that his response to the “Jewish question” had been to destroy the Jews, while Yisro expressed his feelings by fleeing Egypt in protest (and also) for self-preservation, since Pharaoh did not take kindly to protest. Iyov, however, remained silent.

Bilaam looked back over the years and ruminated, his jealousy obvious: “How did you do it? Were we not both together in Pharaoh's Court? We both achieved prominence, having *parshios* in the Torah dedicated to us. The difference lies there, with *Parashas Yisro* describing his greatness,

while *Parashas Balak* addresses Bilaam's infamy. Two students: in the same school; same class; similar backgrounds. One makes it, while the other does not. Sadly, it happens more often than we care to admit. Veritably, a multitude of factors play a role, but ultimately, it is hard work, perseverance, focus on proper direction and goals – inspired and nurtured by loving, knowledgeable parents (if they are less than knowledgeable, they should at least be willing to listen to the advice of Torah educators), perseverance and commitment. A good, healthy dose of *Tehillim* recitation is, of course, vital to any form of success in life.

Veritably, Bilaam was the greater of the two. The Torah (ibid 24:16) records that *yodea daas Elyon*, he knew the knowledge of the Supreme One. How did the tables turn on him? How did Yisro surpass Bilaam? At first, it began with little differences, subtle changes in their behavior and reactions. When Pharaoh sought advice concerning the Jews, Yisro felt, "What can I do? I cannot argue against the king. I will remain quiet." Yisro could not tolerate an injustice. He spoke up, even if it would mean that he would have to flee for his life. Bilaam conjectured, "Regardless, Pharaoh will do what he wants. Why should I challenge him? I might as well suggest that the Jews should be destroyed, since this is where he is leaning". Later on, it was Yisro who "heard" about the wonders and miracles that Hashem wrought in Egypt. This catalyzed his decision to leave his home in Midyan, to travel to the wilderness to be with the Jewish People. Bilaam also heard, but, when he was asked by the pagans what the incredible sound that they heard was, whether G-d was going to bring another flood and wipe out the world, Bilaam told them not to worry. G-d had promised never to destroy the world again. Instead, He was giving His treasure to the Jewish People: His Torah.

At a certain moment, the nations "heard" and were inspired. Unfortunately, that is all they did – hear, but did no more. Bilaam could have encouraged them to join. He did not. Now, he was jealous of Yisro.

It is all about the choices we make in life. The right choices set the foundation for success. Poor choices are the beginning of failure: "But we sat in the same row; in the same classroom. What happened? Why is he a Torah leader, and I barely make it to a *shiur*, Torah class?" Now is not the time to ask. You should have thought about this earlier in life: when you decided that the vocation you chose was more exciting than learning Torah; when you felt a badly-needed vacation was more beneficial than spending the summer working in camp, especially with children who probably would not appreciate it anyway. The list goes on. The common denominator is the same: we make choices, and we live by them. It does not help to look back in envy at the fellow who made a better decision than we did. It is never too late to change – or support the fellow who did.

The following story is well-known to many. It is about two students in the same *yeshivah* who both made wise choices. One grew up to be a *gadol* in Torah; the other became a *gadol* in *chesed*. They both chose appropriately, selecting goals that they felt were most compatible with their personality and goals.

Horav Moshe Schneider, zl, was *Rosh Yeshivah* in Frankfurt, Germany until the Nazis closed down the *yeshivah* in 1939. Fortunately, he was able to move his *yeshivah* to London, where he was able to continue inspiring the next generation of Torah scholars. Being that it was wartime, the Jewish community was hard-pressed for funds to support the *yeshivah*. The *Rosh Yeshiva* and his *rebbetzin* did everything to provide for the wellbeing of the students – both spiritually and physically.

A family in Golders Green, the Grodzinskys, who owned a bakery, told the *Rosh Yeshivah* that they would donate to the *yeshivah* all of the rolls and cake that had not been sold after three days. There was one stipulation: they could not deliver. It would mean having a student arise early in the morning, take a bus to the bakery and then haul back a large, heavy bag filled with staples for the *yeshivah*.

A rotation was set up whereby every day another student had the responsibility to pick up and deliver the daily “order”. Understandably, some students did not relish rising early in the morning and making the round trip. One boy, by the name of Moshe, not only never missed his turn, but he often also gladly covered for others. To him, performing *chesed* for others, thereby enabling them to learn Torah better, was an honor and a privilege.

Another student, also by the name of Moshe, also provided a vital daily service for the *yeshiva*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* felt that it was inappropriate for a student to run into *shul* at the last minute and begin *davening*. He, therefore, instituted a *seder*, learning period, one hour before *davening*, during which the students would learn. The problem was waking up the students an hour before *davening*. The other Moshe came to the rescue by accepting upon himself the responsibility of waking up the *yeshivah* students every day. Shortly before 5:00 a.m., the other Moshe would begin his rounds, waking up the students to come to learn.

One day, during the *Rosh Yeshivah's shmuess*, ethical discourse, he declared, “Moshe Reichman, who goes for the bread unfailingly, and Moshe Shternbuch, who arises early every day to see that others should learn, should both be blessed. Moshe Reichman should be blessed with such incredible wealth that the entire world should know of him. Moshe Shternbuch, who enables others to learn, should achieve such distinction in Torah knowledge that the entire world should know of his wisdom.

Two students made good choices and both were blessed for it. Reb Moshe Reichman later in life remarked, “I wish I had been the individual who woke up the students in the morning”. He never regretted his original choice; he just wanted to do more. The choices of these two students greatly benefitted the Jewish People.