

You shall not desecrate My holy Name, rather I should be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael; I am Hashem Who sanctifies you. (22:32)

The Torah exhorts us to strive to be holy. Some make it – others do not. Some make the attempt – others do not even bother. One might think that the barrier to achieving success in *ruchniyos*, spirituality, is a lack of aptitude, a deficiency of talent, or whatever excuses we might advance to justify our own lack of trying. In an inspiring exposition on the *Midrash* related to this *pasuk*, *Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita*, explains the real reason that many fail to achieve the mark of greatness.

The *Tanchuma (Emor 2)* relates that, in desperation, Shaul *Hamelech* went to a sorceress who employed an *ove* (form of sorcery) to raise Shmuel *HaNavi* from the dead, so that Shmuel could consult with him (concerning the war). When Shmuel appeared, he was wearing the coat that his mother, Chanah, had made for him when he was a little child. Obviously, Shmuel *HaNavi's* mode of dress was significant. What was so significant about this coat that it must be mentioned in the *Navi (Shmuel I 2:19)*, underscoring the fact that it was the same coat that his mother had made for him? Was Shaul concerned about going to war or not? He was unable to consult through the *Urim v'Tumim*, so he called up Shmuel. What role did the coat play?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that from the mere fact that Shmuel was laid to rest wearing this coat (regardless whether it was the very same coat that his mother had made for him and it grew with him, or it was a replica of the original), we see that this coat was much more than a covering for his body. It was, in fact, a part of his essence. The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes that a material/physical object that plays a critical role in someone's life can become an essential part of him. For example, the *Rogatchover Gaon, zl*, instructed the *Chevra Kaddisha* of Dvinsk to bury *Horav Meir Simchah*, author of the *Or Sameach* and *Meshech Chochmah*, with the wood of his *shtender*, since it was essentially a part of him (as he was always learning over it).

Both the *Radak* and the *Malbim* emphasize that the purpose of this coat was not to keep the young Shmuel warm. Despite the fact that it had been sewn for a three-year-old boy, it was designed to resemble the coat of the *Kohen Gadol!* Chanah was intimating a powerful message to her son: You must strive for greatness. Never settle. Mediocrity is unacceptable. This coat conveyed to Shmuel not to measure his personal achievement by the barometer of the average person, but to strive for unparalleled, unprecedented greatness. He must yearn for – and work towards – becoming the *gadol hador*, the leader of the generation.

This is why the coat was considered to be a part of Shmuel's essence. It encouraged Shmuel's constant striving for greater achievement, thus reflecting his constant desire to grow spiritually in every way. Indeed, as the *Rosh Yeshivah* notes, when *Chazal* compare Shmuel with Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:8)*, they point to the coat as the reason for Shmuel's unprecedented spiritual achievement. Every time Shmuel donned that coat, he

understood that it represented his chance to become great.

The primary deterrent to our achieving greatness is our lack of awareness of our full potential. If we would only be able to acknowledge our skills, talents, qualities and capabilities, and apply our genuine and sincere willpower toward utilizing them completely – we would maximize our potential and achieve greatness.

There is a well-known story that occurred concerning *Horav Zushe, zl, m'Annipole*, as he lay on his deathbed. He suddenly began to weep uncontrollably. His students who stood around his bed wondered why he was so emotional. He replied that he feared his Heavenly judgment. His students were really surprised. They were acutely aware of their revered *Rebbe's* saintliness. He explained, "When I arrive in Heaven, I know that Hashem will not question me why I did not become as great as Moshe *Rabbeinu* or David *Hamelech*. When He asks me, however, 'Why did you not become more like Zushe?' – what will I say?" We are not asked to be like Moshe, but we are asked to be "ourselves" – to maximize "our" own potential.

Our devoted mentors are charged with taking note and cultivating that potential. They must also help us to see and realize it. Some are more successful than others. Some either care more, or are more talented in noticing a student's potential and acting upon it. One thing is for certain: one who ignores a student's potential, because it is not his area of concern, is doing his student a great disservice by depriving him of his G-d-given function in life. *Gedolei Yisrael* made great demands on those charged with educating Jewish children, enjoining them to focus on the full potential of each student. There are times, however, when carrying out this objective is difficult. For example, when a student, for whatever reason, lacks motivation or presents serious discipline issues or other impediments to learning, this escalates the challenge for the mentor. How the mentor reacts determines his mettle and plays a critical role in the future success of that student. The following two vignettes present us with the perspective of our *gedolim*, Torah leader's, concerning how not to react, how not to respond.

A *menahel*, principal of a *yeshivah*, came to *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*, complaining that he had a student in his school that had broken every rule, had been impossible to teach, and had disrupted the class on a regular basis. He had decided that it was time to ask the student to leave the school. What did the *Rosh Yeshivah* think about this? *Rav Shteinman* asked the *menahel* if he had exhausted every possible avenue of discipline, both punitive and therapeutic. The *menahel* confirmed that he had tried everything. "Did you pray for him?" *Rav Shteinman* asked. "Not really," was the *menahel's* reply. "Tell me his mother's name, and I will pray for him," *Rav Shteinman* said. "I do not know his mother's name," the *menahel* responded. "What?! You are prepared to eject a student from *yeshivah* – and you do not even know his mother's name? You have failed this student." (Obviously, he did not receive *Rav Shteinman's* permission to remove the student from school).

The second case took place at 1:00 am when a broken-hearted father knocked on the door of the

home of the *Tolner Rebbe, zl*. One o'clock in the morning is late, but this father was distraught, since his son – who was, in his father's mind and words, a wonderful, sweet boy who just needed understanding – had been asked to leave his *yeshivah*. The father felt that the *menahel* was unjustified in ejecting his son from *yeshivah*. The *Rebbe* listened to the father and said, "Quick, let me get my coat. We will go visit the *menahel*." The fact that it was essentially in middle of the night did not seem to concern the *Rebbe*.

They went to the *menahel's* home and knocked on the door long enough until the *menahel* came to the door in his pajamas. The *Rebbe* looked at him incredulously: "You were in bed? I assumed that since you had adjudicated a life/death situation today (concerning sending the boy out of *yeshivah*), you would be unable to sleep." (In other words, if you were so cold, so dispassionate, concerning a boy's life then you have no business being a *menahel*).