

“You will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless Hashem, your G-d.” (8:10)

The following story, related by Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, does not actually address the parsha. Its lesson and message, however, is compelling. It is especially significant in that it conveys to us the far-reaching effect of our behavior. We hope that our actions will all have similar positive consequences as evidenced in this episode.

A young kollel fellow in Yerushalayim went to a Judaica library in search of a certain volume not accessible in the local shuls. Knowing that the library was not located in an area that had a kosher restaurant, he brought along a sandwich for lunch. After a period of time perusing the sefer, the young man decided to wash and eat lunch. He moved to a corner of the library and ate his meal. He then began to bentch with great kavanah, devotion.

As he finished bentching, the librarian came over and asked to speak to him. She remarked that listening to him bentch brought a question to her mind. “We implore Hashem in bentching, Shelo neivosh v’lo nikalem v’lo nikashel, that we not feel inner shame, nor be humiliated, and not stumble/falter. I do not understand why the words v’lo nikashel are included. They do not seem to fit in,” she commented. The young woman added that while she had strayed away from Yiddishkeit and was no longer observant, she still remembered that this question had bothered her when she would bentch.

The young man, who had been used to bentching with this nusach, version, ever since he was a child, was stymied for an answer. He began to search through the various volumes in the library for a source for this version of bentching, but he was not successful. He said that he would go home and find a bentcher which included the phrase, “and not stumble,” in it and send her a copy. He returned home, and after some searching, he located a copy of bentching in an old Haggadah. He made a copy and circled the words, “v’lo nikashel,” and sent it to the librarian. After he did this, he forgot about the incident.

Many months after the episode in the library, the kollel fellow received an invitation to attend a wedding. He stared at the names and was at a loss; he did not recognize either the chossan or the kallah or their families. He assumed that the invitation was some sort of a mistake. It happened “by chance” that on the day of the wedding, he was on the street where the wedding was taking place. His curiosity was aroused, so he figured he would walk in and see who it was that was getting married. Perhaps he could find out why he had been invited.

He entered the hall, and found no one whom he recognized. As he was about to leave he told his wife, who happened to be with him that day, “I guess it must have been a mistake.” At that same moment, someone came over to him and asked his name. When the messenger heard his name, he said, “Please come with me, the kallah would like to speak to you.” Now, his curiosity was truly

piqued.

“Do you not recognize me?” asked the kallah. “I was the librarian who questioned you in regard to the correct version of bentching.” Suddenly, she became very emotional and said, “I want you to know that, in truth, you are the biggest mechutan, relative, at this wedding. Indeed, if not for you, there would be no wedding. It was indirectly because of you that I was inspired to return to a life of Torah observance.”

She began to relate what had transpired since that fateful day that they met in the library. “It happened to be that, tragically, I was engaged to a non-Jew. Yet, I still had doubts. I still had feelings that pulled me back to the faith of my ancestors. I vacillated back and forth, obviously, to the concern and eventual disdain of my fiancé. He gave me an ultimatum: either I said yes by a certain day, or the engagement was off. He could not marry a Jewess who was not prepared to sever all of her ties to her faith. Decision day soon arrived, and I was prepared to give my affirmative answer.

“I arrived at the library a nervous wreck. I was about to renege my religion, the religion of my parents, the religion for which so many had died. I was in love, however, and love conquers all. I walked into my office at the library, and behold, in front of my eyes, laying on top of my desk, was your letter. I cannot remember how this letter was moved “by chance” from room to room, to end up on my desk on that specific day. I opened the envelope and glaring straight at me were the words “v’lo nikashel”, and “not stumble,” circled in red.

“I began to scream at myself. How could you stumble like this? How could you throw everything away? I was ruining my life. I called off my engagement and gradually returned to become a chozeres bi’teshuvah. Shortly afterward, I was blessed to meet a wonderful ben Torah, whom I have wed tonight. Thank you so much for bentching that day with such feeling that I was moved enough to approach you about the nusach of the bentching.”

What a powerful story. What is most significant is the knowledge of the effect we have on those around us. We never know who is watching. We must make sure that what they observe is of a positive nature.