

I cannot transgress the word of Hashem, my G-d, to do anything small or great. (22:18)

In *Kuntres Divrei Sofrim* (24), *Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl*, notes that Bilaam *ha'rashah* said that he would not transgress Hashem's word to him – Hashem's *tzivui*, command. He did not think that he could act in a manner counter-intuitive to Hashem's *ratzon*, will. He was acutely aware that Hashem did not want him to curse *Klal Yisrael*, but, if Hashem had not expressly said so, Bilaam could have gone along his merry way to carry out his evil intentions. The *pasuk* (22:22) relates that Hashem's anger flared because Bilaam was going to Balak. Why was Hashem angry? Did the Almighty not give Bilaam permission to go to Balak? Apparently, Bilaam knew that Hashem's *ratzon* was that he not curse the Jews. Going to Balak was an affront to Hashem. Bilaam did not care. If he did not receive a clear cut "no," as far as he was concerned, it was a "yes." What about Hashem's will? Did Hashem really want him to go? Clearly not, but this did not concern Bilaam.

This, explains *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*, best characterizes Bilaam. He knew Hashem, but did not care. He only listened to what Hashem expressively told him, and, even then, only when he could not avoid complying. He served Hashem because he was compelled to do so. This is unlike *Klal Yisrael* who serve Hashem as a son serves his father. He wants to serve. He wants to carry out his father's will, so that he can make his father happy.

Rav Shternbuch cites the *Ramchal* in *Mesillas Yesharim* (18, *Middah HaChassidus*) who explains that a *chassid*, pious individual, seeks to make his Father in Heaven happy. His love for Hashem is such that he does not aim to absolve himself of his obligations to Him merely by complying with the obligatory minimum of a *mitzvah*. Like a good son, he seeks every opportunity to provide *nachas*, satisfaction, for his Father. *Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita*, offers an example: If a father tells his son that the room is cold, an uncaring son will reply, "So, turn on the heat." A decent son will personally turn the heater on for his father. A loving son will immediately turn on the heater, bring his father a warm blanket or a sweater, and then offer him a hot drink – all out of his love for his father, which impels him to do whatever will make his father feel well.

The term *chassid* in present-day vernacular is not as "generic" as that of *Ramchal*, who translates it as pious. The basic ideas of present-day (last two centuries) *chassidus*, however, do not digress from their focus on piety and closeness to Hashem. *Chassidic* thought stresses: joy; song and dance in *mitzvah* performance, and service to Hashem; the centrality of *davening* and all forms of prayer (*Tehillim*); the appreciation of every *Yid/amcha*, the simple, ordinary Jew who is not a scholar; attachment to a *Rebbe*; and being partial to one's Jewish identity (connecting cumulatively with *Klal Yisrael*) as opposed to focusing on one's selfhood. We are part of the larger family unit of *Am Yisrael*. To encapsulate *Chassidic* thought: *Chassidus* remains focused completely on Hashem (*Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl*). The *Baal HaTanya* would say (in speaking to Hashem), "I want not Your *Gan Eden*; I want not Your *Olam Habba*; I seek only to be

attached to You.”

The *Manchester Rosh Yeshivah*, *Horav Yehudah Zev Segal, zl*, was the consummate *eved Hashem*, servant of Hashem. His life was about performing *mitzvos*: elevating any given situation to determine which *mitzvos* were inherent in it. He would view helping a parent as the fulfillment of both *Kibbud av v'eim* and *gemillas chassadim*. Indeed, he prefaced every *mitzvah* (even *d'Rabbanan*) with a verbal declaration of *Hineni muchan u'mezuman*, expressing his intent to carry out a *mitzvah*. He recognized no degrees or levels of importance in observance. Every *mitzvah* was a *tzivui*, command, from Hashem, and, as such, had supreme significance. Likewise, his devotion to absolute *emes* was his criterion for *mitzvah* observance. In his view, not to execute the *mitzvah* to its fullest with all the *halachic* minutiae indicated a lack of *emes*, spiritual integrity.

While the *Rosh Yeshivah* was very demanding concerning his *avodas HaKodesh*, sacred service; he neither imposed his personal *chumros*, stringencies, on others, nor caused his personal practices to be an inconvenience to others. An example of this sensitivity to others is the following vignette. The *Rosh Yeshivah* visited Bournemouth, England. During the time he spent there, a man offered to drive the *Rosh Yeshivah* to *shul* in the morning and pick him up at the conclusion of *davening*. Aware that this man had to be at work at a certain time and not wanting to take advantage of his kindness, the *Rosh Yeshivah* recited parts of *davening* only after he returned to his place of lodging.

He was once a guest in someone's home and was served *leben* with his breakfast. He was meticulous not to eat anything which he felt was a delicacy. He adhered to a diet of necessities. He recited the appropriate *berachah acharonah*, after-meal blessing, then sat meditating for a moment before making a new blessing on the *leben* and partaking from it. He later explained that he did this in order not to hurt the feelings of the hostess who went out of her way to do everything just right for him. He added, “To eat *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven, is also a *mitzvah*.”

When one serves Hashem as a son should serve his father, he jumps at every single opportunity that presents itself during which he is able to honor his father. Indeed, practices which we might push aside, even ignore, were for him activities of profound love for Hashem. I could fill pages concerning the various *mitzvos* he undertook and the manner in which he performed them. He did something about which we are complacent, and, in many instances, we ignore. What inspired me was his attitude towards kissing the *mezuzah*. Whenever entering a room, he would touch the *mezuzah* and pause long enough to concentrate on love of Hashem and His Oneness. He did this even when hurrying from room to room to answer the phone – pause, concentrate, kiss. How often do we complacently touch the *mezuzah*, give it a peck with our fingers and move on? When one cares – one stops to think what kissing the *mezuzah* represents. After all, Hashem is our Father.