

When you listen to these ordinances. (7:12)

Rashi explains that the Torah uses the word, *eikav*, which also means heel, to allude to the sort of *mitzvos* that people regard as relatively unimportant. Thus, they tend to “tread upon them with their heels” figuratively. The Torah assures the nation that rewards will be in store for making an effort to observe *mitzvos* – especially those which, on the surface, appear insignificant. Do we have a concept of a *mitzvah* that is on the lower rung of significance? I think if we view the *mitzvos* from their Source – they are all from Hashem. This alone renders each of them significant – beyond any barometer we might have. *Chazal* (*Pirkei Avos* 2:1) teach, “Be as scrupulous in performing a ‘minor’ *mitzvah* as in a ‘major’ one, for you do not know the reward given for respective *mitzvos*.” We can distinguish between the gravity of various prohibitive *mitzvos* by simply looking at -- and delving into -- the punishment meted for transgression.

We do not, however, really know the various echelons of positive *mitzvos*. Performing *mitzvos* is a multi-faceted experience in the sense that, yes, some *mitzvos* carry more weight than others. If we would only observe the “weighty” ones, we would have dysfunctional spirituality. One must carry out all *mitzvos*, because together they fuse a perfect and harmonious spiritual entity. It is like suggesting that one focus on the head and ignore the extremities; or address only the needs of the heart and neglect the other organs. We can predict the result of such a foolish enterprise. *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*, would give a *shekel* a day in memory of the six million *kedoshim* murdered in the Holocaust. Someone expressed bewilderment at such an insignificant sum covering six million Jews. If one divides a *shekel* by six million, the money set away for each *neshamah* is beyond insignificant. He explained that it is not the *shekel* which the six million are sharing, but rather, the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* which can easily be split into six million parts.

Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, explains that the concept of a minor *mitzvah* can also mean a *mitzvah* that one performs for ulterior motives. Balak tried to take *Klal Yisrael* down by offering *korbanos*, sacrifices to Hashem. His motives were categorically wrong, but, as a result of his effort, Rus, matriarch of the Davidic dynasty, descended from him.

Horav Pinchas Cohen, Shlita (*Rav* of Nesivos, as related by *Horav Yechiel Tzucker, Shlita*), related the following story which underscores the extraordinary reward which can be garnered from a “minor” *mitzvah*. It also shows us what a simple, positive activity can achieve, when performed with sincerity. The *Rav* was summoned to Ramat Gan to address a *Sephardic* family who had suffered a tragedy – a young member of their family passed away at a young age. *Eidus HaMizrach* (*Sephardic* tradition families, all (mourners, anyone related to the deceased) sit in a separate tent set aside for this purpose. They partake in a large, collective meal. In this instance, when the *Rav* entered the tent, the people present expected him to speak. The family was mostly *chiloni*, non-observant, but traditional in adhering to some *Sephardic* customs. *Rav* Cohen began with the following admonition: “You should know that the wonderful meal which you are all enjoying as part of your customary mourning does absolutely nothing for the *neshamah*, soul, of the *niftar*, deceased. He is in a different world where he is facing the Heavenly Tribunal. He can use all of

the help that you can give him. Eating a meal does not help him. Performing *mitzvos* and carrying out acts of lovingkindness in his memory will help him in his moment of truth. If you care about him, you will accept upon yourselves to perform a *mitzvah*, regardless of its spiritual significance and subsequent reward. Just do something!"

A short while later, as he was about to leave, a young woman dressed inappropriately (according to Torah standards) came over and introduced herself. The deceased was her husband's brother, and they were heartbroken over his passing. Could the *Rav* suggest a simple *mitzvah*, something meaningful but not difficult, to execute. He suggested washing their hands upon rising in the morning and also prior to partaking of a meal consisting of bread. She agreed. He demonstrated the *halachic* procedure for *netillas yadaim*, handwashing. She thanked him and she said she would convince her husband to do the same.

Fast forward eighteen months. *Rav* Cohen was leaving his *shul* when a young woman, dressed in attire becoming a scrupulously observant woman, walked up to him and asked, "Does the *Rav* recognize me?" He said, "I am sorry to say that I do not." "I am the woman whom you instructed to wash hands in memory of my brother-in-law. Well, it began with handwashing, and, as a result of a near tragedy, our faith was affirmed, and we became observant."

She then related the story. They had been deeply committed to observing the one *mitzvah* – albeit very simple, and they never missed an opportunity which required handwashing, to perform their *mitzvah*. At one point, they decided to go for a vacation; hiking in the mountains of India. They took along some bread and water and started their climb. When they did not reach the designated campsite, they quickly understood that they had missed some of the landmarks that served to guide them. While they were not helplessly lost, they were out of water. As they looked around for some edible vegetation, they came upon a bed of mushrooms. They had bread and mushrooms. What more could a person ask for when he is lost? They checked the mushrooms, and they "seemed" to be the healthy type. The wrong mushrooms can be toxic and cause death. The problem was that they had no water left with which to wash. The wife would not eat. She had given her word. The husband was famished and apparently not as strongly committed as his wife. He ate. Thirty minutes later, he was miserable. His wife called on the radio for any hikers in the area to help them and to pass the word on for emergency medical help. Meanwhile, her husband went into shock, his breathing labored. It took an hour for a medical team to reach them, administer emergency help and drive him to the nearest hospital. For a few days, it was touch and go, but he recovered.

Shortly after the ordeal, the husband woke up to the reality that he had become dangerously ill because he had reneged upon his commitment to one single *mitzvah*. His wife did not eat, because she had no water with which to wash her hands. He turned to her and said, "Why are we playing games with Hashem? If one simple *mitzvah* could achieve so much, how much more so does it behoove us to transform our lives and become observant. That will be a true *iluy neshamah*, perpetuation of my brother's soul." They attended Arachim seminars, studied the

Judaism which, due to their upbringing, had been hidden to them – and they returned as bonafide Torah Jews. All due to the power of one simple *mitzvah*.