

פרשת קרח includes a number of vitally important topics, two of which are the מתנת כהונה and the מתנת לוייה in the latter part of the פרשה. In the section of מתנת כהונה, Hashem tells משה רבינו to instruct אהרן about the critical importance of doing the עבודה of the כהנים in the בית המקדש. So much so that (18:7) עֲבַדְתָּ מִתְּנָה אֲתָן. Their job was twofold: A) to perform the עבודה in the בית המקדש, and B) to protect ישראל כלל from coming too close to the משכן, which could, חס ושלום, result in the tragic תקלה of וְהָזַר הַקָּרֵב יוֹמָת.

In the sefer of R' Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, there's an interesting שאלה: how can we give a gift to the Almighty? What does it mean to give הקדוש ברוך הוא a gift? Serving הקדוש ברוך הוא cannot be a gift because it's a מצוה to serve הוא הקדוש. So when Hashem characterizes the מתנה as עֲבַדְתָּ מִתְּנָה, a service of giving, what could that possibly mean? I heard a beautiful דבר תורה from R' Akiva Grunblatt, the ראש of Yeshivas Chafetz Chaim here in Queens, about the beauty and responsibility of leadership. Every member of ישראל כלל has a responsibility to be a leader - whether in our homes, our communities, or the broader world. He brings down a fascinating story about R' Aharon Leib Shteinman.

There was a family in בני ברק who were completely frum, but they had one child who נבך went off the דרך. First, he left the home, then became מחלל שבת, and eventually, he announced plans to marry a Gentile woman. Before he went through with it, he asked someone for advice: "Do you think this is a good idea?" That person said, "Why don't you go home to your parents for one Shabbos?" He called up his parents and said, "I'd like to come back for one Shabbos, but only on one condition: that you don't tell me what to do. No instructions, no expectations, just let me come on my own terms." They said fine, come on over. So he came to the house for Shabbos, and he's there, and it was time for קבלת שבת. The father asked the wayward son, "Would you like to come to shul?" "No." "Okay". The father went to shul alone and then came back home. They had the סעודה, and in the middle the son asked to step outside. The father said "Go right ahead." The son went out, smoked a cigarette, and then came back. The next morning: "Would you like to come to shachris?" "No." "Okay." Again, the father went alone. At lunch, same thing - the son went out, smoked, came back. When it came time for שלש סעודות, the father asked his son, "R' Aharon Leib Shteinman is going to be at shul for שלש סעודות. Would you like to come?" To his surprise, the son said, "Yes.", and they went together. After שלש סעודות, the father asked the son, "Would you like to get a bracha from R' Aharon Leib?" To his father's astonishment, the son said yes,

He approached R' Aharon Leib for a ברכה. The father explained that his son was about to make a very serious decision about marrying someone outside the faith. R' Aharon Leib turned to the son and asked, "Would you be willing to speak with me a bit?" He agreed. After Shabbos, they spoke for an hour. When he returned, he said he would call the prospective bride and put the wedding on hold, he needed to think about things, and that was the last time the wedding was mentioned.

Later, the father asked, "Can I ask you something? I invited you to shul Friday night and you said no. I invited you Shabbos morning and you said no. But when I invited you to see R' Aharon Leib, you said yes. Why?" The son answered, "I'll tell you why. When I was in second or third grade, maybe fourth, I don't remember exactly, they announced that R' Aharon Leib would come in to give us a little בחינה. He went around the room asking each of the kinderlach a question, and if you answered correctly, he gave you a candy. "When it was my turn, he asked a question, but I didn't know the answer. He asked a second, an even easier one, I didn't know that either. He asked a third question, and again, I didn't know. Obviously, I hadn't paid attention in class.

"Then he said, 'Would you mind waiting outside until everyone leaves? I'd like to speak with you.' I thought, 'Now I'm going to get it.'



When everybody had left, R' Aharon Leib sat down with me and said Do you know the difference between the goyim and the Yidden? When a goy does something, he gets paid for the results. If he gets something done, he gets paid for the action that he did. By us, we don't pay for that. We don't pay for what we accomplish; we pay for the effort that was put in. It's not what we did, it's how we tried. Your friends got a question and they got an answer, they got one candy. But I asked you three questions and I saw you put an effort in, I'm going to give you three candies."

"I never forgot that," the son said. "And because of that, I was willing to listen to him."

The bottom line of the story is if we give people the respect that they deserve, then we will be leaders. The leader is not the one who deals with the winner. The leader is the one who can deal with everyone, particularly those who can't make the grade, what we generically call a loser.

What was מתנת הכהונה? What purpose was served when הקדוש ברוך הוא said that you're giving me a present? R' Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev זכותו יגן עלינו explained that when we do עבודה, the ניצוצות in the entire world, the sparks around the entire globe of the world are elevated. And that קדושה which is strewn around the world, particularly amongst non-Jews, is elevated. And that's what causes a non-Jew to want to become a Jew. That spark within them has been raised to such a point that that is his response. The service of כהנים was called עבודת מתנה because the כהנים are giving הקדוש ברוך הוא a present by raising those ניצוצות, those sparks all around the world, not by us, but by the גרים, the people in the world that want to join ישראל כלל. What we would have called people who are not up to our level. That is a great מתנה to הקדוש ברוך הוא, and that is what הקדוש ברוך הוא is considering to be עבודת מתנה, that we are giving הקדוש ברוך הוא a gift.

We all have that possibility, not just the כהנים. We all have that potential to give הקדוש ברוך הוא a gift with the quality and the intensity of our עבודה. If we do our עבודה, Hashem will say thank you, because that is our gift to Hashem, Hashem looks at us as giving him a gift, and that is a tremendous זכות.

