



THE LIGHT, LIFE & LEGACY OF R' MICHOEL FORSHLAGER ZT"L



Issue 8

Parshas Shoftim

אגודת אבותינו ת"ק אורחיים מ"ח

The Light

In this week's Torah portion, we read the commandment to have a Jewish King. **"You shall place upon you a king who shall be chosen by God"** (Devarim 17:15). The Rambam writes that there is a requirement for the Jews to accord great honor, fear, and awe to a king. We see that in the words of **'you shall place upon you'** i.e., his fear should be upon you. The Rambam further shares that while his subjects are commanded to fear the king, The king himself is commanded to be humble, treat everyone - regardless of their status, with mercy and care. (Rambam Laws of Kings 2:1 and 2:5).

This dichotomy of the king being awe inspiring but also humble was first seen by King David. On the one hand he was a fearless warrior who fought valiantly against enemies of the Jewish nation. An example of that being that he did not hesitate to kill Goliath on the battlefield. On the other hand, he was a merciful and kind shepherd who would feed the young lambs first so that they could eat the young tender grass, and only then would he feed the older sheep the tougher grass.

This is a clear directive of how to live one's own life. One must have both; the traits of being a fearless warrior to utilize when it comes to defending what's right. And at the same time ensuring that one does not allow for that trait to present in a hardened and cruel manner. Instead, one must have humility and compassion when dealing with people.

The Zohar writes that all Jewish kings must descend from David. The reason for this being that he descended from Ruth who was a convert from the Moabite nation. The Moabite's were known to be a cruel and merciless nation and in that way all kings will have a side of them that is merciless and a side that is kind (from the Jewish side). This is a fascinating concept as usually one would say that if one has a cruel side, they should work on not expressing it. Here, however we see that it is a requirement for a king to have a cruel and merciless side. The reason for this being as aforementioned - traits or tools to be used in specific circumstances where one needs to advocate for what's right and even then, making sure to do so with the right measure.

Translated and adapted by R' Pinchas Kreizel from תורת מיכאל - ויקרא במדבר דברים

The Life

Rav Forshlager embodied the dichotomy of the Jewish king. On the one hand, he fought valiantly to defend Torah values the way that he had absorbed them throughout his lifetime of learning. On the other hand, he lived a life of kindness and humility amongst those in his surroundings. One episode in particular brings this dichotomy into sharp focus. When a shul that he taught Torah in introduced mixed seating he resigned from his position and broke off ties with the shul. The way he went about it shows his great humility and kindness but also his fiery adherence to the traditions of Judaism. In his resignation letter to the board, he writes his letter with respect and humility. He explains to the board members that he is incredibly pained that he needs to take this step and he had hoped to live out his days with the shul. He shows no ill will to them for making this decision. On the other hand, when he



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introduces this in his writings, he writes incredibly fiery words against those rabbis who supported and endorsed this decision as they ignored both the customs of old and the spiritual underpinnings of this time-honored tradition.

Being able to simultaneously respect and show kindness to the people of the shul while not budging from his values is the true mark of a Jewish leader. Rav Forshlager surely excelled in that area. We are all able to learn from him and to hold this sometimes-seeming contradiction. We need to be strong in our beliefs and not be afraid of being different than others. However, that does not mean that we shouldn't be compassionate and humble in our interpersonal dealings with people.

Based on information from מיכאל באחת - ר' בן ציון בערגמאן

Kedushas Michoel-A Fortress of Holiness

In 1948 the shul that Rav Forshlager taught Torah for many years voted to remove their mechitzah and introduce mixed seating of men and women during services. This marked a break with Orthodoxy and a change to the Conservative movement. Rav Forshlager, a strict adherent to Orthodox halachah broke off all his ties to the shul. He also wrote a long and detailed response dealing with this change. Because this piece of writing is currently being prepared for publication, we will examine this chapter in Rav Forshlager's life and analyze it in the context of American Judaism. Due to its lengthy nature this will be written in several installments.

As we have shared in previous weeks, Rav Forshlager earned his modest living through teaching Torah in two shuls in Baltimore: Chizzuk Emunah and B'nai Israel. In 1948, there was an event that would profoundly change his relationship with Chizzuk Emunah.

The earliest Jewish inhabitants of Baltimore were German Jews who would come via merchant ships upon their return from delivering tobacco to Germany. The first shul in Baltimore was called Baltimore Hebrew Congregation and was established in 1830. The members of Baltimore Hebrew were traditional German Jews who guarded carefully against any attempt to reform. However, 35 years later the congregation was indeed leaning towards Reform Judaism. In 1870, the shul passed a resolution to have a mixed male and female choir. Soon after this passed, a group of traditional members filed a lawsuit against the board for violating Orthodox German customs.

The orthodox members of the congregation resigned at the end of that year and formed a new congregation they named Chizzuk Emunah - Strengthening the Faith. This new congregation intended to do just that: strengthen the Orthodox customs and faith. For many years after Chizzuk Emunah was founded they indeed kept strongly to their traditional customs and maintained their faith in the face of advances to reform Judaism in America.

While for many years the strength of the Orthodox customs was upheld in the shul, things took a turn in the early 1900's when there began to be some concern about the future. From 1920 to 1940 a proliferation of shuls and congregations began to be established in Baltimore. There were now diverse and versatile (in customs) shuls in different locations. The concern was that shuls were now a 'buyer's market.' If someone didn't like the customs of a certain shul, they could just choose a new one. This led the shul to examine their customs and decide if changes needed to be made.

This was the beginning of the path that would eventually lead them to break with their traditional customs and ultimately break with Orthodoxy.

To be continued

Source: Schein, Jan Bernhardt. *On Three Pillars: The History of Chizuk Amuno Congregation, 1871-1996*. Chizuk Amuno Congregation, 2000.

The Legacy

A Tzadik - righteous man, has a special power to effect miracles in this world. It is written that a Tzadik decrees and God fulfills. This is true for any Tzaddik, but it is especially true for a Tzaddik such as Rav Forshlager who lived in almost complete obscurity in his lifetime and for decades since his passing.

As he has become more well known in the last few years (thanks to the dedication of R' Bentzion Bergman who is the publisher of his works) so too have stories of miraculous salvation started to proliferate.

From the many accounts there has emerged a common thread. The method or Segulah is to visit his kever (or sends a messenger) express ones needs and asks that it get answered by a certain date. The most important part is that one commits, bli neder, that if it happens by the specified date, they will do something to elevate Rav Forshlager's soul. There are many ways to do that such as supporting the publishing of his vast collection of Torah, support the improvement of his kever to make it a welcoming space for the many visitors coming to his resting place. People have also made melava malkas in his honor where his Torah and holiness have been shared. Even just learning some of his Torah is a tremendous honor for his neshama.

One story that has come to our attention recently is regarding a shidduch/match. There was a boy who had been searching unsuccessfully for many years to find his bashert-his destined match. A friend of this young man suggested he go to the Kever of Rav Forshlager where stories of miracles have been told. Being that he was anxious to find his match already, requested that he find his match in an unreasonably short time. For context, normally the process that this boy had to go through was to first vet the family and the proposed match and then after calling references/gaining the necessary information would start dating. This process can often take months or more and yet he requested that it happen within the next month.

Not long after his request, this young man got an unexpected phone call that a girl he had dated in the past called back and was interested in giving it another chance. They dated for a short time - and you may have guessed it by now – were happily engaged by the day specified!

Miracles do happen. At times they are shrouded behind normal occurrences making the miracle hard to distinguish. In this story it was unnatural for him to have requested a date by the kever so soon and was somehow engaged by the date requested. There was no natural way for it to happen, and yet this event was orchestrated perfectly – getting a second chance from someone he had dated in the past and wanted a future with. Through the merits of Rav Forshlager and this young man's faith in miracles the course of nature changed.

If you would like to send in a name or have a personal Yeshuah to share, please reach out to RabbiForshlagerFoundation@gmail.com or call/text R' Pinchas Kreizel 845-263-0781



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