

כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא

Rav Yaakov Galinsky, a noted talmid chacham, was an energetic young boy who was sent from one cheder to another cheder, never lasting very long in any one place. His parents were understandably concerned about his future in Torah! After his bar mitzva, his father decided to send him to study in the great Yeshiva of Novarodok. He thought that maybe there, his child would be influenced by the special intensity of Novarodok's study of Torah and mussar.

After traveling by train to the yeshiva which was in Bialystok, in Poland, he went to the Mashgiach and announced that his father sent him to the yeshiva to learn.

The Mashgiach looked at him and understood that this boy had some concerning attitude... so the Mashgiach said to him, "I'm sorry, but this is not the way someone comes to learn here. There is a procedure! First, you must learn some mussar, and only then can you come back and ask to be admitted here."

"Where should I learn mussar?" this young man asked.

"Down the block - there is a shul. Go in there, take a mussar sefer, and learn for a while. Then, come back here and we'll talk!"

It was already night, and there were not many people outside as the boy walked alone down the block, searching for the shul. On the corner, he noticed a small entryway. He walked through it but it was black inside. There was no light, and he could hardly see where he was walking!

Yaakov paused for a moment - and then heard a voice! He strained to locate the source of the voice, and after a few moments, he realized that it was coming from the front of the shul. Quietly, he took a few steps and noticed a candle lit on the front table. There, sat a young man hunched over a sefer, repeating a Chazal over and over and over, his words echoing from the walls of the small shul. It was eerie and frightening, but young Yaakov stood and listened.

The man seated up front seemed to be learning, davening and crying all at the same time. His voice rang out,

אמר ליה שמואל לרב יהודה שינא חטוף ואכול חטוף ואישתי, דעלמא דאזלינן מיניה כהלולא דמי

Shmuel said to Rav Yehuda... Grab and eat, grab and eat, grab, grab, grab and drink... Because this world, from which we will all depart - is like a wedding hall...

The young man in the front of the shul was singing this Gemara as though he was begging, imploring his physical being to accept what his Neshama knew to be truth! Sometimes we KNOW something, but it takes us time to internalize the message and make it real and part of ourselves! So this man is learning, davening and crying these words.

... This world is like a wedding hall... grab and eat, grab and eat, grab, grab, grab and drink...!

Yaakov who was listening to this had heard this Chazal before, but now he understood what it meant.

A wedding does not last forever - it only takes a few hours. Therefore, a guest who is lucky and fortunate to be there, should take advantage of his opportunity. He should make the most of his time there!

So too, all of us who are fortunate to be in this world should make the most of our time by grabbing opportunities to do mitzvos, to learn Torah, to do acts of chessed, to daven... because none of us will be here forever...

The young boy stayed a while longer to hear the message again. He went back to the Mashgiach and said very politely, "I'm ready. I think I heard the mussar I was supposed to hear."

R' Yaakov Galinsky was accepted into the yeshiva and became one of the outstanding and distinguished students of Novaradok.

...And who was the man who had sat and recited that Chazal over and over? Who had such a powerful influence on the youngster in the back of the darkened shul? It was R' Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky (1899-1985) - famously renowned as the Steipler Gaon, the father of R' Chaim Kanievsky, a great Torah giant in Eretz Yisrael.

Questions:

1. What is mussar? Why did the Mashgiach of the Novaradok Yeshiva feel it important to tell R' Yaakov Galinsky to first study mussar before coming to his yeshiva?

2. What was the message that R' Yaakov heard and internalized in the quiet and dark shul?

3. Why was the man in shul repeating the words of the Gemara over and over again?

4. What is the greatest and ultimate pleasure which one can experience in both this world and the next?
