Jewish Tribune – Behar

**On the Shoulders of Giants**

Sir Isaac Newton once said: ”If I have seen further than others, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

L’havdil, the Mabit, the great 16th century Rov of Sefas for over fifty-five years, makes a similar comment in his sefer Beis Elokim, one century earlier. But he does so, to answer an interesting question.

The greats of previous generations all davened fervently for Moshiach to come. Think of all the Amoraim, the great sages of the times of the Gemoro, the Geonim, the Rishonim and Achronim. Think Rashi, Rambam, the Arizal, the Vilna Gaon and Ba’al shem Tov. Scores of Tzaddikim of the past two thousand years have shed countless tears and yet, sadly, Moshiach is not yet here.

And do we think our tefillos are better? How do we muster the audacity to succeed where the greats before us have not succeeded?

The answer says the Mabit, is that we are like midgets standing on the shoulders of giants. Of course, the spiritual stature of those before us is far greater, but we are riding on their coat tails. The sum of all the tefillos is cumulative and we are just building on their work and filling in the final pieces.

The Chofetz Chaim uses a concept from this week’s parsha to explain this idea. A person who sells property has the option of redeeming the land from the buyer. How do you calculate the purchase price?

The total price for which the land was sold is divided by the number of years from the time of purchase until the Yovel year, when the land will anyhow return to its original owner. This gives a “price per year” and you just now need to calculate how many years there are left to Yovel.

So, imagine the property was sold for £100,000 ten years before Yovel, each year has a value of £10,000. If it bought back three years before Yovel, the cost will be £30,000.

The closer you get to the Yovel, the cheaper the property will be and the less money is needed to buy it.

The Chofetz Chaim uses this as an analogy as we approach the end of golus. The closer we get to the arrival of Moshiach, the less merit is needed to bring him. When earlier generations davened for Moshiach to come, the earlier we go back the more merit was needed.

A well-known anecdote is told of the professor who walks in to his class and takes a large glass jar and fills it with rocks to the top. He asks his students if it full. They respond that it is.

He then takes out a bag of pebbles and empties it into the jar. They quickly fill up all the spaces between the rocks to the top of the jar.

He again asks his students if the jar is full. They respond that it is.

He then takes out a bag of sand and pours it in to the jar. And again, the sand finds all the empty spaces and fills the jar.

The professor explains that jar represents our life. The rocks are the important things in our lives, the pebbles represent those less essential aspects and the sand represents everything else, the small stuff.

It is an anecdote often used to convey prioritising what is important in life, but the concept explains what the Mabit is saying. Of course, the tefillos of our earlier generations way surpasses our efforts. And all of those tefillos have been stored away and are the large rocks in the jar. The tefillos of more recent generations are the pebbles, way bigger than the sand that represents our davening.

But it is the sand that will ensure the jar is really full and will IYH bring Moshiach very soon.

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