

Rabbi Lauren Tuchman Webinar Series Week 1

When Our Basic Values Aren't So Basic Anymore

matan 

Source 1: Perkei Avot 4:1

מִכָּל מְלַמְדֵי הַשְּׂכָלֶתִי כִי עֵדוּתֶיךָ שִׁיחָה לִי. אֵיזְהוּ גִבּוֹר, הַכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת (תהלים קיט) שְׁנֵאמַר
טוֹב אֶרֶךְ אַפִּים מִגִּבּוֹר וּמִשֵּׁל בְּרוּחוֹ מִלֵּכֵד עִיר. אֵיזְהוּ עָשִׂיר, (משלי טז) יִצְרוּ, שְׁנֵאמַר
יִגִיעַ כְּפִיךָ כִי תֹאכֵל אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ. אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ, (תהלים קכח) הַשְּׂמִיחַ בְּחֻלְקוֹ, שְׁנֵאמַר
שְׂמוּאֵל (בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. וְטוֹב לָךְ, לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. אֵיזְהוּ מְכַבֵּד, הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת, שְׁנֵאמַר
כִּי מְכַבְּדֵי אֶכְבֵּד וּבִזֵּי יִקְלוּ (א ב)

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? He who learns from every man, as it is said:
“From all who taught me have I gained understanding” (Psalms 119:99).

Who is mighty? He who subdues his [evil] inclination, as it is said: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city” (Proverbs 16:3). Who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot, as it is said: “You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors, you shall be happy and you shall prosper” (Psalms 128:2) “You shall be happy” in this world, “and you shall prosper” in the world to come. Who is he that is honored? He who honors his fellow human beings as it is said: “For I honor those that honor Me, but those who spurn Me shall be dishonored” (I Samuel 2:30).

Source 2: R. Shalom Noach Barzofsky: The Slonimer Rebbe, passed away in 2000.

(I thank my teacher, Rabbi David Jaffe for first teaching me this source).

When the Mishnah asks, “Who is dignified?” it does not mean, “Who is made dignified by other people,” as is the common understanding. What value is there in being dependent on other people giving you dignity? Rather, “Who is dignified? One who gives dignity to all people” is teaching that the gaze of one person to another is like glancing in the mirror – if his face is dirty he will see in the mirror a dirty face. So it is the same when a person looks at the other – the amount that he is pure and refined internally, so he will look more generously upon the other and see good attributes. On the other hand, if he is infected with bad attributes and behaviors, so he will see bad attributes in everyone else. Therefore, the truly dignified person is the one who treats all people with dignity, who appreciates all people. This behavior is the true sign that he is dignified himself.

Source 3: Midrash Shmuel on Avot 4:15:7-8

Commentary of Rabbi Samuel ben Isaac de Uzeda on Perkei Avot

אמר הוי מקדים שלום לכל אדם שלא תאמר די לי להיות משיב שלום למי שישאל (ז)
בשלומי אלא הוי מקדים שלום לכל אדם, ואמר לכל הכוונה אפי' למי שהוא בעיניך גרוע
...ממך תקדים לו שלום

ואפשר עוד לפרש שאמר הוי מקדים שלום לכל אדם כלומר אפי' אם תחשבהו (ח)
לאויב לך הקדם לו שלום ועליו אמר דוד המע"ה בקש שלום ורדפהו כלומר אפי' אם
השלום בורח ממך אתה רדוף אחריו ותשיגהו

He said, "Be the first to greet every person": That you should not say that it is enough to merely return a greeting to someone who asks how you are, but rather you should be the first to greet every person. And further, he meant that even for someone who in your eyes is lesser than you, you should be the first to greet him.

It is also possible to explain that what he means is even if you consider someone your enemy, nonetheless greet him first. About this King David said, "Seek out peace and pursue it", meaning even if peace flees from you, chase after it and you will attain it.