



Looking for Partners

Why is Bris important? What meaning is there to something that G-d could have created in the first place?

The Actor

Last week, a famous Israeli actor and comedian named Yehudah Barkan passed away. Over his career, he directed and starred in some thirty movies which were very famous throughout Israel.

His parents were Romanian immigrants who spoke primarily Yiddish. As a child, he wasn't a valedictorian — to be polite — but at home, he was treated like a star pupil.

Yehudah explained how it worked. When his report card would be issued, he would bring it to his father at the coffee shop he owned. Having a weak command of Hebrew, his father would ask a friend to interpret. "Yoske, *vus shteit duh*, what does it say?"

Yoske would read the grades. "Reading — *maspik*. Math — *maspik*."

"What does *maspik* mean?"

"It means 'enough' (satisfactory) That was the lowest grade on the Israeli report card.

"If it's enough," Yehuda's father would say, "that's enough for me."

The Impact of Greed

As an adult, Yehudah became a successful actor, starring in many

films that were box office hits. For each movie, he would find investors for the film and they would all split the profit.

Whenever a new movie would come out, he would call the movie theaters to find out how many tickets had been sold. Usually, the answers were uniform. "Yehuda, we are totally sold out."

After several films, he decided to go on his own. Why should he split the profit if the money could all be his? For his next film, he invested all of his own money, leaving the others out of it.

But after the release of this film, the movie theaters responses were perplexing. "We sold 12 tickets." "Only 18 tickets were purchased." These were movie theaters with five hundred seats. Yehudah was shocked. He couldn't understand why this movie failed to inspire people to come see it.

He related the story in an interview just one month ago, and he said that he still has no insight into what made that movie fail — aside for his greed to take all the profit for himself.

The movie was a major loss and he fell into hard times. It came to the point that his bank manager called him for a meeting and informed him that his account had become a "limited account" — meaning that he could not make any withdrawals at all.

Shocked, he ran out of the bank. It suddenly dawned on him that he had nothing left. If his child would ask him to buy him a small candy he wouldn't be able to do so. Needless to say, he was very anxious and depressed and thoughts of suicide even entered his mind.

Suddenly, he remembered that he had scheduled a lecture for that day. He arrived at the location where informed by a teacher that he would be performing in front of a group of *yeladim mugbalim*, children with limited capacities.

Standing in front of those children, the comparison jarred him. Here was a group of children that no doubt went through terrible difficulties being *limited* in their mental and physical capacities, yet he was anxious about his *limited* bank account! Suddenly, he saw his situation in a different context.

The Impact of Saddam Hussein

In his later years, Barkan became observant. He began to put on Tefillin, study Torah, keep Shabbos, and so on. When he was asked what caused him to change his lifestyle, he gave a surprising answer: “Saddam Hussein.”

In 1990, the Gulf War broke out and Saddam Hussein attacked Israel with scud missiles. Yehuda Barkan was in the middle of filming a movie at the time. One day, as the entire team drove to a location, the siren went off. They all raced to take cover in a sealed room and put on their gas masks that would protect them from the feared chemical warheads.

Barkan said that there he noticed an interesting phenomenon. The Israeli “hollywood crowd” had always claimed to be strictly atheist with no belief in G-d. But suddenly, hiding in a sealed room with gas masks on their faces awaiting the falling missiles, they all silently prayed. He saw the truth to the saying, “there are no atheists in the foxhole.”

During the war, his sister shared that her Chabadnik boss had said in the Rebbe’s name that the war would end on Purim. Obviously, he was skeptical; how in the world could the Rebbe know that?

But the war did end on Purim — and there were minimal casualties. As he walked the streets of Tel Aviv after the war ended, he met two Chabadniks talking. He asked them, “Could you explain this miracle?”

They pointed to heaven and said, “Everything is orchestrated by the

Boss in Heaven.”

“Where could I speak with the Boss?” he asked them.

“Put on Tefillin,” they said to him, “and make a connection.”

That marked the beginning of his journey to Judaism.

However, the seeds to his return to Judaism were planted even earlier. In 1987, he visited New York to attend the screening of his film at an Israel film festival. As he left the event, he was met by a few Chabadniks that invited him to visit 770. He asked if he would have the opportunity to speak to the Rebbe. They said they couldn't promise him a conversation, but on Sunday the Rebbe would distribute dollars and he was invited to stand in the room and watch the entire proceedings.

He came to 770 and watched the Rebbe give out dollars for close to two hours. He was fascinated to see how the Rebbe gives each person individual attention. He also noticed how people “shrunk” as they reached the Rebbe's presence. The Rebbe would occasionally glance at him, and he said, “the Rebbe's eyes pierced me with ‘golden arrows.’” That was where his journey to Judaism began, he said.

The Bris

Some of Barkan's movies were prank-films. Pranks were an old hobby of his, and nobody was immune.

One day, as he sat in his office, his brother-in-law came in to share good news. His wife — Yehuda's sister — gave birth to a baby boy. The trouble-maker in him woke up and he convinced his brother to go along with a prank. They approached the family mohel, Mr. Mendelovitch, and asked him to arrive at the bris an hour late. They borrowed his mohel suit and attache case and gave it to a fellow prankster. On the day of the bris, he showed up at the location with

the 'mohel apparel' and approached the grandfather.

"Are you the Sandek?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"I'm the Mohel."

"But Mendelovitch was supposed to come..."

"I'm his assistant. He isn't feeling well, so I'll be taking over."

Gently, the grandfather asked,

"Forgive me for asking, but have you done this before?"

"No," the prankster replied. "This will be my first time..."

He instructed the sandek to have a seat and took out his 'circumcision tools': an ax, large pruning scissors and an electric saw. He plugged in the saw, and as it started spinning, he demonstrated his 'bris talents' on a cucumber. The parents stood there in shock, but the most amazing thing, Yehuda recalled, was that nobody said a word. Three hundred people watched, and nobody got up to protest. It was a perfect case of herd mentality.

Finally, Yehudah got up and said, "I apologize, this was a prank. Mr. Mendelovitch is coming in a half-hour..." His sister tried to slap him but he escaped in the nick of time.

Why Fix It?

In this week's parsha, we read about the mitzvah of bris milah. The Rebbe would often quote the Midrash about a philosopher who asked, "If G-d likes circumcision, why didn't he create Adam circumcised?" He was answered, "Everything in G-d's world needs enhancement. Even a human being needs to be 'corrected.'"

In our reality, nothing is automatic. Bread doesn't grow on trees. Everything needs to be accomplished through preparation and hard work; you must first plant, reap, and so on and so forth, before you have a final product — bread — in your hand.

Why indeed did Hashem create a world which needs to be fixed? The Rebbe explained that Hashem wants a Jew to be a partner in creation. G-d purposely created an unfinished world to give us the opportunity to fix it and 'partner' with him, so to speak.

But why is it important for us to be his partners? What is wrong with being His workers? The Rebbe added a fascinating point: As partners, we gain the right to convey our opinion in running the world.

A worker doesn't have a say in the business. He isn't asked for an opinion, and if he offers it, he will quickly be reminded about his position. But the moment you become a partner, you earn the right to give opinions. Your ideas must be contended with. G-d makes us His partners, so that we will have the right to 'mix in' to His decisions.

Now, if you hold five percent of a company's stock, you may be given the opportunity to give advice, but at the end of the day, they don't hold the strings. But as you enlarge your portion, you also enlarge your influence. Therefore, righteous people who dedicate their entire lives to G-d's enterprise wield real power over the company and G-d contends with their opinion. They hold large stakes, so to speak.

The point is: the more we add to our portion, the more we have a right to speak up — and then, G-d will listen to our prayers and grant us the greatest wish of all — the true and ultimate redemption.