

Shavuos (Day 1) - G-d's Undercover Agents

Are obstacles real? When G-d goes undercover...

Intelligence agencies around the world often use undercover agents to achieve their goals. But the FBI is not the only one who uses planted informants—G-d does too.

Let's take a look at how G-d uses informants, by first looking at the holiday of Shavuos.

Besides being the holiday of the Giving of the Torah, Shavuos is also the *yahrzeit* of the Baal Shem Tov.

The Awful Guest

The story is told that the Baal Shem Tov's parents were well-to-do people who lived in a little village—but who were not blessed with children.

Rabbi Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov's father, would only spend a little bit of his money on his own needs, splurging the rest on *Hachnosas Orchim*, the *mitzvah* of hosting guests.

Every Shabbos, 20 to 30 guests would be seated at his table—not the relatives or friends you would typically invite over for a meal and some good company, but the poor and the lonely who had nowhere and nothing to eat.

Now, it so happened that one Friday night, a guest appeared in

Rabbi Eliezer's door. Even though it was strange how he showed up on Shabbos in such a little village, no one asked him any questions about who he was or where he came from. On the contrary—he was invited in and given a place at the table and an invitation to make Kiddush.

However, this guest was not exactly the most civilized gentleman. He ate and drank with less than good manners. The other guests couldn't take it—they complained to their host, "How can you host a person who acts like such a slob?!"

And the story goes that they bothered and harassed Rabbi Eliezer so much that he finally stepped into a side room and burst into tears. But then he immediately remembered that he had left the unwanted guest alone to the mercies of the other guests who didn't exactly like him. So he quickly came back in to the dining room and actually treated this guest with more respect than before. And so, the unhappy Shabbos passed.

Rabbi Eliezer had the custom of allowing his guests to sleep over until Sunday morning, at which point he would personally see them off on their way. And, of course, he did the same thing with our slovenly guest: Sunday afternoon, he personally walked with him from his home to the village's main road.

Suddenly, the guest turned to Rabbi Eliezer and said: "You should know that I am Eliyahu HaNavi."

The guest continued: "Heaven sent me to test you whether you would accept me as a guest. You withstood the test. Because of your hospitality, you will merit to have a son."

Not too long later, Rabbi Eliezer had his only son—a special little boy who grew up to be the Baal Shem Tov.

This story shows us that G-d Himself used his “plant,” Eliyahu HaNavi, in the form of an unpleasant guest to test how much Rabbi Eliezer was prepared to sacrifice to do the mitzvah of Hachnosas Orchim.

The County Prosecutor

A similar story is found in the Midrash about Avraham Avinu. When Abraham went to the Akeida to offer his son Isaac upon an altar—G-d didn’t actually want him to sacrifice Isaac but was only testing Avraham’s loyalty. The Satan, the angel that serves as the “County Prosecutor” of Heaven, couldn’t bear the thought that Avraham might actually pass this tough test.

So the Satan pulled all sorts of stunts to hinder Avraham from actually getting to the altar, which was on top of Mt. Moriah, where the Holy Temples were later built.

Now, the Midrash tells us that the Satan created a mighty river in Avraham’s path—but that Avraham merely waded in and started crossing. The water came up to his neck, at which point Avraham lifted his eyes to Heaven and prayed. G-d then rebuked the river, and it miraculously dried up, leaving Avraham standing on dry land (Tanchuma Vayera 22).

From this we learn that a test is not something that is actually capable of stopping you from doing the right thing—it only seems like it. Your Yetzer Hara (Evil inclination) may come up with a good excuse to not do what G-d wants you to do. As the

Rebbe writes concerning tests: “When one stands with all his strength against his yetzer hara, it automatically is neutralized, and then, even your physical eyes see that the temptation had no substance to it and was nothing more than a test” (Igros v. 4 pg. 75).

For example, you may want to go to a Torah class—and you’ll conveniently remember that the car is locked up in the garage and you don’t feel like dragging it out. Or the phone will suddenly ring or the baby will start crying. Or both! No matter what good thing you may want to do, there’s always an endless number of excuses to not do it.

So when Avraham saw a river in front of him, he didn’t give up—he just went straight into the river up to his neck—and all it took was one second for the whole river to disappear as if it were never there in the first place.

Obstacles

A person will always have tests. But most of the time, these tests are not real. They may look like raging rivers that are about to drown you, but they’re not real.

For example, one may think that if he starts eating kosher, everyone will get angry at him. Or, one may fear that the family won’t like it when he starts going to synagogue regularly—so he prepares a whole list of explanations and excuses, but when he finally does go, he’s left with nothing but a sackful of excuses that never needed to be used because no one got angry and no one questioned it.

Ultimately, one needs to see life as one big test that needs to be overcome. Then, and only then, the truth comes out that we're looking at nothing more than a river that really isn't there.

This message is especially appropriate at Shavuot, the holiday marking the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. When G-d gave the Torah on Mt. Sinai, He pulled back the curtains of time, space, matter and energy, showing not just to the Jewish Nation but to the entire universe that all of existence is really not real—that only He is real.