

Our country has been variously described as the land of "golden opportunities", of "infinite chances", and the land where success lies within the easy reach of everyone. That is an assertion which is, basically, true. Now while we are not prepared to grant the validity of all the details of the Horatio Alger thesis, that absolutely everyone with just a bit of determination can become a Henry Ford or Rockefeller, yet we must unequivocally disagree with those hardened cynics and chronic cranks she'omdim alenu b'chal dor v'dor, who would have us believe that the doors to success in all fields of endeavor are shut in our faces. No, in America, in Israel, in China, in France, everywhere there are opportunities rife for those who would seize them. They exist in greater or lesser degrees - but they exist.

Granted then that there are opportunities available for all of us - whether in business, or in our domestic lives, or in our own education, or in matters of the spirit - the question is that presents itself to each and every one of us is: what are we going to do about these opportunities? When Opportunity knocks on our door, are we going to get up, open the door and invite him in, or are we going to "sit it out" and allow him to pass on to some one else's door? Upon the answer to this question can depend many things - success or failure in business, a happy or an unhappy domestic life, an empty and hollow life or one in which new and sun-bathed vistas open for us.

Our Rabbis, commenting on the very first word of this week's Sidra paint the picture of two individuals who responded differently to the opportunities offered to them. Each chanced upon, or, so to speak, stumbled upon a G-dly message. Each reacted differently.

Vayikra el Moshe, "And G-d called unto Moses". What sort of call was this Vayikra? Our Rabbis say: (see Rashi): Kriah lashon chiba ve'ziruz, lashon she'malachei ha'sharess mishtamshin bo. The word vayikra indicates a call or a calling caused by love and resulting in a dynamic, electrifying, galvanizing effect upon him who is called. When G-d wants to charge Moses with the missions of sacrifice ritual and Temple management, He calls to him in Divine love, with chiba, and Moses responds by an awakening of the soul, by a sudden outburst of new and fresh energies, with alacrity and anxious anticipation, with ziruz. Concerning Moses, then, we read Vayikra, he called. With Bilaam, however, the matter is different. Here we read, Vayikar elokim el Bilaam, G-d was chanced upon by Bilaam - and there the matter ended! It was only, so to speak, a chance-meeting. Our Rabbis characterize the word Vayikar as - l'shon arai, l'shon gnai, l'shon tumah - an expression of casualness, of shame and of impurity. Bilaam is given the opportunity for greatness - but he fails to develop it. Bilaam chances upon G-d - what a glorious opportunity! Here is a clue to the most profound secrets of life itself. But like a mediocre detective, Bilaam does not "follow up" a clue, he wastes it. Bilaam chanced upon G-d; he ended with a friendship with a Balak. He heard the voice of an angel; but he ended in a conversation with a mule. All this because it was only Vayikar, it remained as a casual acquaintance, and so he degraded to shame and impurity, gnai ve'tumah.

And it is precisely in this matter that Moses shows his superiority. For after all, Moses also only "chanced upon" G-d. He was a Jew who was raised as an aristocrat in the royal court of the Egyptian Pharaoh, and who had fallen out of favor with the ruling circles. Travelling, or wandering, in the desert, he happens to notice a sneh boer ba'esh, a burning bush. Only a chance meeting, an inconspicuous opportunity. But Moses, unlike Bilaam, seizes upon it, he follows it up and capitalizes upon it, and so he becomes the great rosh ha'neviim. With Moses it is not vayikar but vayikra. From a chance meeting there develops an intimate relationship with G-d; an "opportunity" develops into a life time occupation. Not the vayikar - l'shon arai vetumah of Bilaam, but vayikra - l'shon chiba ve'ziruz. Moses is activated and dynamized, his life takes on new dimensions and new meaning, his keriah becomes a career.

What is it that enabled Moses to become a Moses, and a Bilaam to become what he was? The answer lies in the difference between the words vayikra, of Moses, and vayikar of Bilaam. The difference is the aleph-zeira, the small aleph which, when added to vayikar changes the word to vayikra. This particular letter aleph is, in this text, written smaller than the usual aleph. The letter aleph, you know, is numerically equivalent to "one". That is, the difference in the entire future of a person is the one small step, the aleph-zeira step he takes towards the opportunities offered to him, and what he does about and with them. If one allows an opportunity of any sort to present itself and he fails to exploit it, to capitalize on it, then it is merely vayikar, it remains casual and he soon degenerates to shame and impurity and obscurity. If, however, when one feels the Divine voice beckoning to him, when he beholds his burning bush, his vision, his opportunity, and he merely takes one small step forward, towards this opportunity, then the chance acquaintance develops into a clarion call, into a vayikra, the challenge of a life-time.

Many of us can recall stories of how a bit of foresight and alertness, how the will to grasp an opportunity, has changed not only individual lives, but those of the world itself. One need but mention the many scientific discoveries that are recorded as "accidental". Actually, they are not accidental completely. The first meeting between scientist and discovery is - but thereafter it is chiba and ziruz, devotion and determination. Let me tell you, as an illustration of our point, the highly interesting story of the discovery of the synthesis of naphthalene. Now this compound, called naphthalene, is one of the "starting-points" in the manufacture of a host of coal tar products, including many or most of our modern wonder-drugs. Without the discovery of this compound, these life-giving drugs could never have been prepared (story chemist with benzene, breaks thermometer, leaves in disgust, next day new smelling stuff, other would neglect the opportunity to search, he finds its naphth., catalyzed by mercury of thermometer). Here, then, is the story of a man who took the aleph-zeira step, the one short step in following up a slim clue- and he changed the face of the world of medicine and chemistry. From a vayikar he expanded his life into vayikra, from an accidental discovery into life-sustaining fame.

Our Halacha presents this very same idea - if we will allow ourself imaginations some freedom - but, of course, in a legal frame. The Mishna in Bava Metzia discusses the problem of metziah, of "finds". You know that one of the mitzvos of the Torah is that one must return what he finds to its rightful owner, if the owner can prove that the find or object is his. If it is unclaimed, or if it cannot be identified, then "finders keepers", he who finds it owns it. The Mishna describes two people travelling. One is rochev al behemah, riding on an animal, and the other walking beside him. The rider sees a metziah, a find. But he makes no overt effort to retrieve it, though he notices it first. The man who walks, however, goes to the find, bends down and picks it up. The rider claims that it belongs to him, for he first saw it. The pedestrian claims it for himself, since he picked it up. What is the decision of Jewish Law? - natlah ve'amar "ani zachisi bah", zacha bah. He who actually picks it up is privileged with its ownership. You see, my friends, there are many metzios on the great avenues of life. Many opportunities present themselves in the course of a life-time. And there are two approaches to them. One can ride by in comfort, taking careful note of these opportunities - but doing nothing about them. By force of habit or laziness he will not "get off his high horse" - literally. This, however, does not establish ownership. The opportunity is lost to him. The man who walks with his feet on the ground, curious and observant and active, he who will bend his back to pick up an opportunity, he owns it, for him to develop and exploit. He who takes the trouble to take a few short steps, the aleph zeira is the one who can make a vayikra out of a vayikar.

The opportunities offered us are immense - opportunities to get closer to our children, opportunities to return to study and education, opportunities to do good or to identify ourselves w. underlying causes. What are we going to do about it? - ride on high and pass them up? - or get down, walk towards it, bend down, pick it up, and begin on new and wonderful careers?

JHL crit. (A23)

1- Actual Delivery:

- a) I shortened the introd'n (12th 2 paraq) considerably, only small introd'n about USA as land of opportunity.
- b) 3rd paraq. I worked as follows:

1. Rebhis on this week's Siara contrast 2 personalities, prophets who were contemporaries, B & M. B is archetype >pl A23, M is A23 par excellence of MK. Both given equal oppts, accidental meeting w. g-d. One stagnates, one grows.
2. B = >pl, remains that way. M = < >pl.
3. Isr on 31.12.1941 / 1.1.1942 etc.
4. 1.1.1942 / 1.1.1942

2- Criticisms: general reactions:

Very good. JHL says they liked novelty of ~~criticisms~~ ^{little bit} ~~to~~ ^{also}.

- 3- Criticism: particulars: JHL commended some of the "cracks", as did others even during talk. Such as: B chanced upon g-d, ended - Babel; began by hearing angel, ended talking to ruler. Also, the 1942-1943 as "won't get off his high horse".

- 4- Criticism: constructive: JHL wanted "go to town" on B-M contrast.

Suggested: B had many oppts, botched them all; thus:

- a) après Isr, he was councillor to > > > - oppty to liberate a people - did nothing.
- b) hired by Babel: - could have straightened him out, didn't.
- c) p'son MK A23: - where are his books of statesmanship? - nothing left of them. where are his prophecies to gentiles - almost nothing

left, & what is left is that which was copied by his contemporary
(M) who did capitalize on an opportunity. Hired to curse Jews -
וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת הַבְּרִית (?) - i.e. man of this kind can
either bless or curse. Dies - וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת הַבְּרִית

However, Moses:

- a) raised in Pharaoh's court & פ' / יְהוֹשֻׁעַ - he intervenes w.
for sinners. Does not kill Jews - tells "no".
Goes to Egypt (as "dilettante") & sees shepherds trying
to wrong Israelites - helps them. i.e. always sees opportunity
Dies - וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת הַבְּרִית

5- Suggested Titles:

- Capitalizing on Life's Accidents (THL)
- Making the Best of your Opposite (")
- Collecting on Life's Accidents: a Religious Insurance Policy (NL)