

Parsha Story

Stories and Parables from
the famed Maggid of Dubno
by Rabbi Chanan Morrison

The Mistake of the Elders

MISHPATIM

The Art of Saying the Wrong Thing

Jake, a kind, if not particularly bright fellow, was married to a woman whose glare could curdle milk at twenty paces. Still, despite her many faults, Jake loved his wife.

She passed away unexpectedly, leaving Jake – who missed her greatly – to carry on alone.

Time marched on and Jake remarried. This time, his choice was markedly better: a woman of grace, warmth, and kindness – a vast improvement in every conceivable way. Jacob respected her and truly loved her.

One fine day, overcome with affection for his new wife, Jake took her hand. “My dear”, he said warmly, “when I gaze upon your beautiful face, it’s as if my first wife has risen from the grave and is standing before me!”

You don’t have to be a marriage counselor (though, frankly, Jake

probably needed one) to know that this wasn’t exactly a home run. His second wife was understandably less than thrilled.

Oh, Jake”, she said with a wry smile, “how romantic. But if your first wife is so vividly ingrained in your memory, why on earth would you say that I remind you of her? We both know my personality is nothing like hers!”

The Mistake of the Elders

During the greatest event in Jewish history – Matan Torah, the Revelation at Mount Sinai – the elders of Israel experienced “a vision of the Divine, and they ate and drank” (Sh’mot 24:11). This account raises a question that has puzzled scholars throughout the ages: What exactly was this meal about? What could it mean that, in the presence of God, the elders indulged in earthly pleasures like eating and drinking?

The scene is staggering. The elders witnessed an extraordinary prophetic vision, with mystical images of sapphire stone and the pure essence of heaven. They experienced the incomparable sweetness of closeness to God and Divine revelation.

And yet, at that great moment of awe, they were pulled back to something far more mundane, familiar, and human. “And they ate and drank.” This otherworldly experi-

ence somehow reminded them of worldly pleasures.

Clearly, there is something terribly wrong with this comparison. Despite the glorious gift of prophetic vision, the elders failed to attain true awe and love of God. They deserved to be punished for this error, but “God did not send forth His hand against the leaders of the Israelites” (ibid). Their punishment was postponed for a more opportune time.

Adapted from Mishlei Yaakov, pp. 129-130