

# Discipleship—Part 3

## The Private Life of a Disciple

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*Ma'aseh avot siman l'vanim* ("The deeds of the fathers are the portents of the children")  
—Ramban

*Each... person<sup>1</sup> is the foundation for generations of descendants to come; and any flaw, however slight, in that foundation may prove catastrophic for the building after it has been constructed. On the other hand, any positive deed performed enhances the entire structure, strengthening generations to come... Repent now, and your actions will transform future generations as well. —Daily Dose of Torah, Vol. 3, p. 28.*

## Are We Whitewashed Tombs?

In order to be a true disciple of the Master, we need to be faithful in the little things. Torah is not theory, but practice.

### Faithfulness in all areas

Are we scrupulous in our observance of the mitzvot? Are scrupulous in the basics—Shabbat, kosher, etc.? Are we scrupulous in displaying the fruits of the Spirit— love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control? Are we scrupulous in keeping the weightier matters of Torah—loving our neighbor, taking care of the widows & orphans, honoring our parents, providing for brides, escorting the dead, keeping a tight reign on our tongues, etc.?

The sages teach us that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. was a punishment which was the result of the “secret” sin of Joseph’s brothers. Although we may point to the sin of Joseph’s brothers as being their sale of him into slavery, the sages differ in their pinpointing their sin. According to the sages, selling Joseph into slavery was theoretically justified, because the brothers actually believed Joseph to be a threat to their lives, and an usurper of authority. Their action was only a natural response to their perception, and, according to the sages, believed their actions were not only justified, but the will of Hashem. The real sin they say, however, was baseless hatred (*sinat chinam*), which was introduced into the family at this time. From henceforth, the Jewish people would be characterized by *sinat chinam* and disunity from within. It was this very sin of *sinat chinam* that had reached its climax during the years of Yeshua, and was the ultimate sin which lead to the destruction of the Holy Temple and Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans. It was the “hidden” sin of the sons of Israel that became a part of the spiritual DNA of their descendants. Obviously, what we do when no one sees really **does** matter, for us and for future generations.

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<sup>1</sup> The context of this quote says “Each Jewish person.” However, I feel this is completely applicable to non-Jews as well.

The seeds we plant now, in our lives, will yield its fruit at a later time. Our actions in private are those seeds.

There is a story told of the Chofetz Chaim. One day he had hired a buggy driver to take him to some destination. Along the way, the driver noticed some unattended bales of hay. He stopped the buggy, got out and told the Chofetz Chaim to let him know if anyone saw him. As he started to grab the hay, the Chofetz Chaim started yelling, “He sees you! He sees you!” Promptly, the driver jumped into the buggy and they took off as fast as the horses could carry them. When they were a distance away and began to slow down, the driver thanked the Chofetz Chaim for letting him know that he had been spotted. The rabbi, with a big smile across his face, replied, “Hashem *always* sees us!”

Yeshua actually speaks of this himself:

*What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. (Luke 12:3)*

Can we truly and with a clear conscience confess the words of Paul, “Imitate **me** as I imitate Messiah”? Here is a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer—

*“Sleep, food and sensuality deprive us of the joy of communion with God.”<sup>2</sup>*

Wow. Evidently, being in control over our basic impulses is a struggle with which we must continually wrestle. Paul puts it this way:

*I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:27)*

Are we really doing well in the areas in which no one else sees? We need to constantly be aware of our **true** performance as disciples. Often we have an inflated and inaccurate view of ourselves. Wasn’t this Yeshua’s issue with the Pharisees of his day? The issue wasn’t tradition (as the church so loves to claim), but *hypocrisy*. Are we any better?

*A pious Jew is not one who worries about his fellow man’s soul and his own stomach; a pious Jew worries about his own soul and his fellow man’s stomach.”<sup>3</sup>*

*We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are.”<sup>4</sup>*

Yeshua begins his teaching ministry first with **repentance** (*Repent!*) and **kingship** (*for the Kingdom of Heaven—malchut shamayim — is [the issue] at hand*), and then immediately follows with **middot** (character traits) and **mitzvot** (good deeds / proper fulfillment of the commandments). These are the things that were important to him. Therefore, it reasons, they should be of utmost importance to us as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*, The Macmillan Company, 1966, p.190.

<sup>3</sup> A quote from mussar master Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, as it appeared in *Everyday Holiness*, Trumpeter Books, 2007, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Shemuel ben Nachmani, as quoted in the Talmudic tractate Berakhot (55b.)

Are we scrupulous in our observance of the mitzvot? Are we even scrupulous in the basics—Shabbat, kosher, etc.? Are we scrupulous in the weightier matters of Torah—taking care of the widows & orphans, charity, honoring our parents, diligent study, hospitality, visiting the sick, providing for brides, escorting the dead, prayer & communion with Hashem, bringing peace between our fellowman, justice, mercy, faithfulness, etc.? Are our lives exemplified by the fruit of the Spirit of Hashem, or the spirit of our flesh?

The question was asked, if character is so important why isn't it enumerated among the six hundred and thirteen commandments? The answer is that we are neither angels, nor animals (neither of whom need the Torah<sup>5</sup>) and that the whole of the commandments are aimed at transforming man's character into its fullest potential.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, this is why Yeshua (as well as many other rabbis) summed up the Torah as being founded upon two commandments: To love Hashem with all of our being, and to love others as much as we love ourselves. Our entire interaction with Torah revolves around living out our faith in ways that reflect an inner transformation from *faithlessness* to *faithfulness*. John's Gospel recollection cites Yeshua's telling his disciples, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (chapter 13, verse 35). It isn't by our Torah *gnosis* that people will know we are his disciples, but by our genuine love for each other. It is by our actions—specifically, how we treat others. This principle should touch every aspect of our spiritual lives.

Our goal as disciples is to live the committed life just like the Master, not only in public, but more importantly... in private.

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<sup>5</sup> For a full discourse on why angels do not need Torah, see the end of *b.Shabbat* 88b.

<sup>6</sup> Paraphrase from the introduction to *Pirkei Avos and Bircas Hamazon*, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2006, p.3.