

The Loyal Messenger

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There was once a king who wished to send secret messages to a fellow monarch, but the only route passed through a hostile neighboring kingdom. The enemy king was always on guard, fearing a conspiracy between his allied neighbors.

The king's first messenger was exceedingly wise. He passed through the enemy kingdom and never blew his cover; no one suspected a thing. The second messenger was less adept. He was questioned and almost arrested. Only his great physical prowess enabled him to escape captivity and certain torture. Unfortunately, the third messenger was neither wise nor strong, and he was apprehended.

It wasn't long before they began torturing him to extract what they suspected he knew. They promised him great reward if he would only divulge the message he had memorized.

Despite the excruciating pain and their tempting offers, he held his tongue. The only thing they heard from him was that he was innocent, that he couldn't tell them what he didn't know. He was so immovable that his captors eventually decided he really must be innocent and let him go. He went on to deliver his message to his king's ally, and returned home.

The king and his court discussed which of these messengers deserved the greatest reward. Some said the first messenger was the most worthy, since he was so wise that he had eluded detection altogether. Others felt that the second man was the most commendable since, even after being captured, he had managed to escape.

But the king had a different view. "The third messenger is clearly the most deserving. He endured torture, knowing full well that any time he wished he could end it and be rewarded, yet he held fast. He is the one who will be most richly rewarded."

Rebbe Nachman taught that steadfastness is a more praiseworthy quality than natural wisdom and native strength. Both of the latter capacities are gifts; either you have them or you don't. But holding on in trying circumstances out of loyalty to the King is purely an act of will. And, as Reb Noson taught, "Your will is free." What you do with your will really proves who and what you are.

Based on Maggid Sichos, p. 9