

Act Fast When it Comes to Mitzvot

A member of a distinguished Yerushalmi family once had occasion to spend Shabbos in a hotel. Shortly after the Shabbos meal, he noticed an Israeli soldier writing. When the soldier became aware of the man staring at him, he said, "You are surprised that I am writing on Shabbos? Well, let me tell you what led to this."

The soldier began, "I would like you to know that I believe in Hashem just as you do. Let me explain to you why I do not observe Shabbos. My parents were not observant. As a result, I grew up with no knowledge of Judaism. My sole exposure to Judaism was being called 'dirty Jew' by the Polish peasants. I was drafted into the army at the beginning of World War I and sent to the front. During an exceptionally heavy military attack, I noticed a group of Jewish soldiers taking out a Sefer Tehillim from their pockets and beginning to pray fervently to Hashem. I was heartbroken to see that I, also a Jew, had nothing. I was not accepted by the gentiles, but neither did I know how to act as a Jew.

"At that moment, I looked up at Heaven and said to Hashem, 'You know that I have no way of knowing of Your existence. I entreat You that You demonstrate Your existence to me by having a piece of shrapnel puncture my finger, so that I will no longer be able to shoot.' The moment I finished speaking, a piece of shrapnel hit my finger and wounded me to the point that till this very day I cannot bend that finger. I was released from the army and decided that I would enter the bais hamedrash on that very day and begin to study about my religion.

"Regrettably, I pushed off my visit to the bais hamedrash until after the war. Then, I was already enrolled in school with three months left to graduation. One thing led to another, and by the time I found my way to the bais hamedrash, my heart that had originally been so turned on, had turned into stone. Nothing could penetrate it. The motivation and enthusiasm that had reigned months earlier had cooled. I had waited too long. The mind understood, but the emotion was no longer there."

If the opportunity for mitzvah performance appears, do not waste it. Act immediately. A split second decision to act correctly, to follow up on a positive experience, can spell the difference between success or failure.