

לעילו נשמת: פייגה בת הרב אהרן ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

לזכות רפואה שלמה: מלכה בת רחל, מיכאל בן שולמית, יעקב משה בן דבורה שירה, ואברהם יהודה בן שרה רבקה.

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita

Tazria - Metzora



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Torah Wellsprings

Tazria - Metzora

Good Speech and Bad Speech

Rashi (14:4) writes, "Tzaraas comes from *lashon hara*, an act of chattering (מעשה פטפוטי דברים). Birds are needed for the purification because birds are always chatting and whistling...."

The chattering birds atone for his talking *lashon hara*.

One talking, whistling bird atones for *lashon hara*, but why was there a second bird? What does the second bird represent?

To answer this question, Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* (*Leket Imrei Kodesh* p.51) tells us to study the following line from the *Zohar* (*Tazria* 46:): כמה דעונשא דהאי בר נש בגין מלה בישא כך עונשיה בגין מלה טבא דקאתי לידיה ויכיל למללא, ולא מליל, "Just as one is punished for speaking *lashon hara*, so is one

punished for the good words that came to his mind and he could have said them, but he refrained."

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz explains that one bird atones for *lashon hara*, and the other bird atones for the kind words he could have said, but he refrained and didn't say them.

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz explains that the bird that is *shechted* – and thereby silenced – alludes to the atonement he needs for speaking *lashon hara*. The other bird, dipped into the water and blood mixture and then used to sprinkle on the *metzora*, was set free. This bird continues chirping and singing, and it represents that we should speak many kind words to help our fellow man.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l* adds to his father's

lesson that there are two unique aspects of the *korban* the *metzora* brought. First of all, there was *nesachim*, wine poured on the *mizbeiach*. This is unusual, as the Gemara (*Menachos* 91.) teaches, "The *korbanos* חטאת and נסכים don't have חטאת, except for the *korban* חטאת and נסכים of the *metzora* that do have נסכים."

As the Rambam (*Hilchos Maaseh Hakorbanos* 2:2) writes, "The only *korbanos* that need נסכין, wine poured on the *mizbeiach*, are the *korban olah* (when it is made from cattle) and the *korban shlamim*... However, sacrifices of birds, and also the *korbanos* of חטאת and נסכים don't have *nesachim*. The exceptions are the *chatas* and *asham* of the *metzora*, as their *nesachim* are spelled out in the Torah."

Another unique feature of the *metzora* is that oil

was used as part of the *korban asham*. The oil was sprinkled seven times towards the *kodesh kadoshim*, and then it was placed on the earlobe, thumb, and big toe of the *metzora*.

What is unique about the *metzora* that he has to offer a wine and oil sacrifice?

Oil represents silence (see *Zohar* vol.3, 177:), and wine represents speaking loudly.¹ As we explained, the *metzora* transgressed two sins: He spoke *lashon hara*, and didn't speak kind words, which would have helped his fellow man. Therefore, he has wine and oil in his sacrifice. The wine implies that he should get accustomed to speaking kind words to others, and the oil suggests that he must remain silent when it comes to *lashon hara*.

1. As Chazal (*Brachos* 35.) say, "One sings songs to Hashem over wine..." אין אומרים שירה אלא על היין,

Speech is very powerful. When it is used for *lashon hara*, it is one of the worst *aveiros* of the Torah. Additionally, as we know, *lashon hara* causes *machlokes* and devastation.² In contrast, when one uses his speech to help others, it does wonders. It is incredible how much good can be accomplished by saying a kind word.

The Midrash (*Vayikra* 33:1) teaches:

Reb Shimon ben Gamliel said to his slave, Tevi, "Go to the marketplace and buy me the best piece of meat."

Tevi returned with a tongue.

The next day, Reb Shimon ben Gamliel said to Tevi, "Today, buy me the worst cut of meat."

Tevi returned with tongue, again.

Reb Shimon ben Gamliel asked for an explanation. "Is tongue the best or the worst meat?"

Tevi explained, "The tongue can be the best, and it can be the worst; it all depends on how one uses it."

The Shevet Mussar *zt'l* once met someone who was very sad. The Shevet Mussar wanted to cheer him up, so he spoke with him for a long time. Some days later, this person told the Shevet Mussar that he had been so depressed; he was ready to commit suicide. The Shevet Mussar's kind words saved his life. Therefore, the Shevet Mussar urges us to speak a lot to people who are sad and need *chizuk*.

2. There were shidduchim that didn't happen, all because of unwarranted *lashon hara*. There are families that are in dispute, also because of *lashon hara*. And there are people who lose their jobs because of *lashon hara*. One must be cautious.

He calls these conversations "tzedakah that doesn't cost money."

The Gemara (*Tanis* 21.) teaches:

Rav Broka Chazoah asked Eliyahu HaNavi, "Is there anyone in this marketplace which is a בן עולם הבא?"³

Eliyahu told him that there wasn't.

The next day, Eliyahu told Rav Broka about two people in the marketplace that were Bnei Olam HaBa.

Rav Broka rushed over to them, wanting to know their good deeds which made them worthy of Olam HaBa.

They said, "We are happy people, and with our humor and happiness, we make sad people happy.⁴ Also, when we

3. What does בן עולם הבא mean? Isn't every Yid a בן עולם הבא, as we say, "כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא", "All Yidden have a portion in Olam HaBa"? The Toras Chaim (*Sanhedrin* 88: ד"ה שלחו מתם) explains that generally, one will have to endure punishments in Gehinom and חיבוט הקבר (punishments in the grave) before he is pure and ready to go to Olam HaBa. A בן עולם הבא is someone who is fitting to go to Olam HaBa as he is now. He doesn't need any punishments and purifications. In this story, the happy people were worthy to go directly to Olam HaBa because they made others happy (as the Gemara explains). That merit made them worthy of Olam HaBa, immediately.

4. Rashi writes describes these people that they were שמחים ומשמחים בני אדם, "Happy people, who made people happy." The words בני אדם in Rashi seem extra. We can explain that with their humor and joy, they helped people feel that they are בני אדם, human beings. Because sometimes, when people feel down, they hardly feel that they have a right to be called human. The joy that these people gave them helped them recognize their self-worth.

find people in a dispute, we work with them until peace is restored."

So, put a smile on your face and say kind words to people. You can never know how much you helped them. Perhaps they were going through a hard time, and your cheer helped them see the world in a brighter light.

It is as the Shevet Mussar said: This is like giving charity that doesn't cost money. When a poor person gets money, he is relieved, and his heart is filled with hope for his future. Sometimes, it is even more so when someone tells him kind and encouraging words.

The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 9:) states, "Whoever gives a *prutah* to the poor receives six *brachos*. When he appeases him, he is blessed with eleven *brachos*."

The Maharal (*Agados*, *ibid.*) explains, "When you give a *prutah* to a poor

person, it revives his soul for a short time. Because after he buys food and satisfies his hunger, the enjoyment is over. However, when you say kind words to the poor, this encouragement will remain with him a very long time."

Reb Issar Zalman Meltzer *zt'l* was a *rosh yeshiva* in Yerushalayim, and he was very generous with the praises he gave his students. Someone once asked him why he does so, and this is what he answered:

"When I was a *bachur*, my parents sent me to study in Volozhin. I had to travel by foot, without proper, warm clothing, because my parents couldn't afford anything better. My shoes tore midway, and it was extremely difficult to travel in the snow and sleet all the way to Volozhin.

"When I arrived, people showed me my dormitory

room. Reb Zelig Reuvan Bengis *zt'l* (who later became the *rav* of Yerushalayim) was my roommate (Reb Issar Zalman was extremely close to him). Once, Reb Bengis noticed I was feeling down, and he said to me, 'Why are you sad? Yesterday, the *rosh yeshiva* said a *chiddush* in your name!'

"When I heard that compliment, it blew a new spirit of encouragement into me, and it banished all my sadness. That's when I discovered the power of a kind word and encouragement, so I also always praise my students."

Reb Chaim Brim *zt'l* relates that there was once a *bachur* in Reb Issar Zalman's *shiur* who thought he couldn't succeed in Torah. Once, during a *shiur*, this *bachur* asked a question, and Reb Issar Zalman praised the question immensely. Reb Issar Zalman said, "For such a good question, we should bring a *l'chayim* to the *beis medresh*..."

The encouragement helped this *bachur* feel good about himself, and for the next half a year he studied with *hasmadah*, all because of this compliment.

The Chofetz Chaim is renowned for his caution from speaking *lashon hara*. But it is known that the Chofetz Chaim was very talkative, always discussing *mussar* and *yiras Shamayim*. This is another example of the good that one can do with words.

In contrast, the tongue can cause so much havoc and distress. Therefore, we understand why Tevi called tongue the best and the worst piece of meat.

The Midrash tells that a person once saw two birds fighting, and one of the birds died in battle. The other bird flew away and returned with a blade of grass, which it placed on the beak of the dead bird. The dead bird was immediately resurrected and flew away. The man

was astounded; he saw with his own eyes how a blade of grass caused *techiyas hameisim* (resurrection).

He picked up the blade of grass, and as he walked, he thought of all the wonderful things he can do with it. He came across a dead lion. He placed the grass on the lion, the lion woke up, resurrected, and devoured the man.

The Midrash explains that this describes the power of speech. Kind words can resurrect people when they are feeling down. But words can also cause death. החיים והמוות ביד הלשון, "life and death is in the hands of speech," and therefore we must be cautious about speaking correctly.

The Severity of Speaking *Lashon Hara*

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh (14:9) writes, אין לך, דבר שמרחיק אדם מן קונו כלשון הרע, "Nothing distances a

person from Hashem like lashon hara."

Similarly, it states (Bamidbar 9:20) על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה', יסעו, and tzaddikim explain that this means ה' Hashem resides with Yidden, or ה' יסעו, Hashem leaves them, chalilah, and it is all dependent on על פי, what people speak.

If they say holy words of Torah, tefillah, and chesed, Hashem resides with them. Lashon hara causes that Hashem leaves us, chalilah.

In these generations, tzaraas doesn't show up as a white mark on the body or as a red mark on one's clothes or home, but that doesn't mean tzaraas doesn't exist anymore. Reb Chaim Vital zt'l teaches that the primary tzaraas is on the neshamah, and that aspect of tzaraas is in all generations. The Chofetz Chaim adds that it manifests today in poverty, r'l. The punishment for

speaking lashon hara today is poverty.

When one sees tzaraas in his home, the Torah obligates him to say to the kohen (14:35) כִּנְגַע נִרְאָה לִי בְּבֵיתִי, "I saw something like tzaraas..." Rashi writes, אפילו תלמיד חכם שיודע שהוא נגע ודאי לא יפסוק דבר ברור לומר נגע נראה לי, אלא "Even if he is a talmid chacham and he knows with certainty that it is tzaraas, he musn't say that he saw tzaraas. He must say that he saw something like tzaraas (כִּנְגַע נִרְאָה לִי)."

Reb Chaim Vital explains that this is because

the primary tzaraas is on the neshamah, where no one can see it. We only see the external outbreak, but the internal tzaraas can't be seen with human eyes.

The Vilna Gaon writes in a letter to his family, "Throughout one's life, one must afflict himself. Not by fasting or other kinds of afflictions, rather just by controlling one's mouth and one's desires... This accomplishes more than all fasts and afflictions. Each moment one closes his mouth, he merits the concealed light, that no malach or creation can imagine."⁵

5. As the Vilna Gaon writes, וכל רגע ורגע שאדם חוסם פיו זוכה לאור הגנוז שאין מלאך ובריה יכולים לשער.

A student of the Chofetz Chaim zt'l said to his great rebbe:

"Recently, I gave a drashah for two hours, and I tried to rouse the community to teshuvah, but I know that my words didn't have an effect. What purpose is there in giving drashos, if they don't achieve results?"

The Chofetz Chaim told him that the Vilna Gaon says that for each moment that people refrain from speaking, they merit the or haganuz, which no malach or creation can imagine. "You stopped

The Even Shlomo (from the Vilna Gaon) adds that by speaking forbidden words כל תשוקתו לדבר מצוה מתבטל על ידי זה, "His desire for performing mitzvos is lost."

It states (Mishlei 13:3) שומר פיו נוצר נפשו. The Vilna Gaon zt'l explains, "The pasuk is saying that we must guard our mouths against saying something forbidden, and then we will be kadosh and tahor, and protected from all aveiros."

The Gemara teaches, לית דעניא מכלבא ולית דעתיר מכלבא, "There isn't poorer than a dog and there isn't wealthier than a חזיר." (Shabbos 155:).⁶ Why does the Gemara mention this, and what is the intention?

The Vilna Gaon zt'l explains that every mitzvah

has a mazal, and the Gemara is telling us which mitzvos have a good mazal, and many people keep it, and which mitzvos have a bad mazal.

The wealthiest and best-kept mitzvah is the prohibition of eating חזיר. There isn't any other sin in the Torah that is upheld as well as this one is. (Even non-religious Yidden often refrain from eating *chazir*.)

The poorest is the dog, which represents the prohibition of speaking *lashon hara*, as the Gemara says, "Whoever speaks *lashon hara*, it would be proper to throw him to the dogs."

But it isn't because it isn't severe, but that is the mazal of this mitzvah. But

an entire community from speaking for two hours! Imagine how great will be your reward! May my portion be with yours..."

6. Rashi explains, "Nothing is wealthier than a pig because it can eat all types of foods. It finds food on its own, and also people feed it a lot." A dog however is poor. Rashi explains, "No one has compassion on a dog to give it a lot of food."

the wise will be cautious, and it will be good for them in this world and the next world.⁷

Ahavas Yisrael

Many years ago, there lived two wealthy business partners in Brisk. Earning money seemed easy for them, and all their business ventures prospered. But becoming wealthy wasn't their main occupation. Primarily, they wanted to make money so they could help the poor.

There are *baalei tzedakah* who tithe their money, and some give a fifth. But these two *baalei tzedakah* gave most of their earnings to tzedakah.

But, the wheel of fortune turned, and they lost their wealth.

The *beis din* of Brisk summoned the business partners, as they wanted to find the *aveirah* that caused their change of fate. After asking them many questions, the *beis din* didn't uncover any theft, *ribbis*, or

7. The Beis HaLevi zt'l would often open his *tabak pushkah* (snuffbox) and then immediately close it. One of his students was curious about this, so when he had the opportunity, he opened the snuff box, and he found the letters, שפ"ו שמ"נ written inside. He asked the Beis HaLevi about this. The Beis HaLevi replied that they are *roshei teivos* for *שומר מצוות נפשו*, "Someone who guards his tongue is protecting himself from troubles."

The Beis HaLevi would open his snuffbox, read the message, and remember to be careful with his speech.

Rebbe Uri of Strelisk zy'a said, "When one desires to say something forbidden, and he holds back, it's as though he fasted eighty-four days. Rebbe Ahron of Belz zy'a added, "And I say, *nach un nach, un nach*," which means that it's like fasting for eighty-four days, and much, much more than that.

any other *aveirah* that might be the cause of their financial fall.

The *beis din* said to the *baalei tzedakah*, "We find your financial decline peculiar. After all, the Torah (*Devarim* 4:22) says, עֵשֶׂר, and Chazal (see *Shabbos* 119.) explain, עֵשֶׂר בְּשָׁבִיל, שתתעשר, if you give *tzedakah*, you will become wealthy. You are *baalei tzedakah*, so how did this happen to you? We thought that perhaps an *aveirah* is blocking the pathway of your bounty, but after checking your deeds, we know that you are *ehrich*, and you aren't guilty of such deeds.

"The only explanation we came up with is that

you transgressed the Chazal (*Kesubos* 50.), באושה התקינו המבזבז אל יבזבז יותר מחומש... שמה, יצטרך לבריות 'The Sanhedrin in Usha decreed that you mustn't give more than a fifth of your money to *tzedakah*. This is to prevent you from becoming poor and needing to ask others for financial help.' You have to be tighter with your money. Don't give away more than a fifth of your annual profits to *tzedakah*, and *be'ezras Hashem* you will be wealthy again."⁸

The businessmen accepted the *beis din's psak*, although it felt like a punishment for them. Their greatest joy was to help the poor, and when they

8. There are exceptions to this rule, because sometimes it is permitted to give more than a fifth to *tzedakah*. One example is when one gives *tzedakah* as an atonement for his *aveiros*. The Tanya (*Igeres HaTeshuvah* 3) writes, "He doesn't have to be concerned that he is giving more than a fifth, because he is [giving *tzedakah*] instead of having to fast and/or undergo afflictions. It isn't any different than when one must pay doctor fees or any other expense..."

couldn't, it was painful for them, literally.

The poor kept coming to their door. When they received a small donation, they would cry, "But you always give us so much more!" Their cries broke the hearts of the partners, but what could they do?

They came up with a solution. They said to one another, "Beis din said we can't give away more than a fifth of our *profits*, but they didn't say anything about our assets. We can sell those and help the poor."

Excited and relieved that they found a solution, they started selling their assets, and they were able to help the poor like before.

When all their assets were sold, they started selling the precious items that were in their homes.

Once, two people came to the door at the same time, both of them asking for tzedakah. All that was

left in their home was a silver spoon. One silver spoon and two poor people at the door; what should they do?

They broke the spoon in half, and they gave the round part to one and the handle to the other.

People heard the story of the spoon, and they realized how important it was for them to give tzedakah. Therefore, the people of Brisk davened for them, and they became wealthy again.

When these *baalei tzedakah* were *niftar*, the inscription on one of the tombstones was כפה פרשה לעני, and on the other gravestone was written וידיה שלחה לאביון, which is a *pasuk* (Mishlei 31:20) that discusses the praises of *baalei tzedakah*.

Years later, the Beis HaLevi *zt'l* was in the *beis hachaim* of Brisk, and he came across these two graves. Intrigued by their unusual inscriptions, he

checked the chevrah Kadisha's ledgers, and found the story of these two wealthy *baalei tzedakah*. The headstones were telling the story of the silver spoon: כפה, the round end of the spoon, פרשה לעני, was given to the poor. וידיה, the handle, שלחה לאביון, was given to the poor person.

We learn *ahavas Yisrael* from these business partners. *Ahavas Yisrael* means to be concerned with the plight of others and to help when possible. This was the way of the two business partners. They didn't have respite, as long as they knew that there were poor people who don't have all their needs.

Reb Yitzchak was a chassid of Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin zt'l. Reb Yitzchak was very poor, and his *rebbeztin* urged him to ask his Rebbe for a *brachah* for *parnassah*.

Reb Yitzchak promised he would do so, and Reb

Yitzchak traveled to Kobrin for Shabbos. Reb Yitzchak planned to tell the Rebbe about his financial problems on Motzei Shabbos, and until then, he would forget about his problems and enjoy an uplifting Shabbos with his holy Rebbe.

Indeed, he enjoyed the Shabbos immensely. The energetic tefillos, the zemiros at the Rebbe's tish, and the inspirational divrei Torah that the Rebbe said all warmed his heart with a fire of hislahavos to Hashem.

Motzei Shabbos, when he went to say goodbye to the Rebbe, he totally forgot to ask for a *brachah* for *parnassah*. The subject was long forgotten from his memory.

When he came home and saw his children's hungry eyes, he remembered. He traveled back to Kobrin and spoke with the Rebbe about his financial problems.

The Rebbe gave him two coins and said, "Buy good foods: meat, fish, etc., enough for two meals – but ONLY for yourself. Eat the two meals in your home, in the presence of your wife and children. Don't give them anything from these meals. Eat the meals all by yourself, and then come back to me, and I will give you a brachah for wealth."

Reb Yitzchak followed the instructions. His children stood by the table as he ate. They stared at the food, they watched him swallow each bite, but he didn't give them anything from his meals. His wife was also so hungry, but he didn't give her anything, either. That was the Rebbe's condition, and as a chassid, he knew he must keep the rules set for him. But it was extremely difficult for him and them.

He returned to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe blessed him with wealth, but there was a condition. The Rebbe said, "Whenever

you eat, you must remember these two meals that you ate in front of the hungry eyes of your wife and children. Think about your poor neighbors and ask yourself, 'How can I enjoy this meal, when there are hungry Yidden who don't have anything to eat?'"

Reb Yitzchak said, "It was very painful for me to eat those two meals in front of my hungry family. If I have to endure this terrible feeling every time I eat, I prefer to remain poor."

Reb Yitzchak returned home, and he told his wife what he decided. She quickly traveled to Kobrin and told the Rebbe that despite her husband's reservations, it is vital that they should have parnassah.

The Rebbe promised her that they would become wealthy... and that is what occurred.

Reb Yitzchak kept the terms the Rebbe laid down.

He ate his meals at the hachnasas orchim kitchen, where many poor people ate their meals, so he could remember what the poor are enduring. He wouldn't eat and enjoy a meal while forgetting the poor. The only times he ate at home was when he made a chasunah for his children because he invited the poor to the meal, and they ate together with him.

He learned from his Rebbe that ahavas Yisrael means that when things are going good for you, you still must remember, with compassion, those who have less than you.

Reb Dovid Shechter zt'l (father of Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter shlita) had a stack of money in his home that he was saving up for his child's upcoming chasunah, and he gave it all away to a poor person who was

also about to make a chasunah. Reb Dovid found this poor person crying copiously at the Kosel Maaravi. When he asked him what was bothering him, and he heard that it was because he didn't have money for the chasunah, he compassionately offered him the money that he saved up for his own children's chasunah.

(Later that day, Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiller zt'l asked Reb Dovid Shechter, "You have an aura of holiness. Your face is shining with holiness. What mitzvah did you do?" and Reb Dovid told him the mitzvah he performed.)

Chazal (Bava Metzia 62.) say, חייך קודמין, which means, your own needs – and the needs of your immediate family – takes precedence over other people's needs.⁹ Therefore, it isn't always

9. The Gemara is referring to two people who were traveling, and they needed water. One of them has a pitcher of water, but it is

possible to help others as much as we would like to. In fact, it is wrong to help others if this means neglecting the needs of those closest to you. Nevertheless, when one truly loves and cares about his fellow man, he can often find ways to help others.¹⁰

them home. The question is, which one should he take? The discussion is when one of the items that he found is his own. He had lost it previously, and now he found it. The other item he found belongs to someone he knows. Which one should he take back with him?

Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 33.) discuss a scenario of a person who finds two lost objects (two oxen and the like), and can only bring one of

If he takes his own, he won't endure a financial loss. But if he takes the other item, he earns the mitzvah of *ahavas Yisrael*

sufficient, solely for one person. If he shares the water with his partner, they will both die from thirst. Reb Akiva taught, חייך קודמין "Your life comes before your fellow man's life." Your needs take precedence.

10. Chazal (*Gittin* 7:) say, "Even a poor person who receives tzedakah should also give tzedakah." And when he does, he won't be poor forever. In the merit of his tzedakah his mazal will change and he will have money on his own.

The Chasam Sofer says that this is hinted at in the beginning of this week's *parashah* (12:2), אשה כי תזריע וילדה זכר. It is known that אשה a woman, alludes to the poor, the receiver, and זכר represents the wealthy, the *mashpia* (giver). תזריע represents tzedakah, as it states (*Hosheia* 10:12), זרעו לכם לצדקה. So, the *pasuk* is saying, אשה כי תזריע when a poor person gives tzedakah, וילדה זכר he will become wealthy and self-supporting, and he will be able to support the poor.

and *hashavas aveidah*. So, which item should he bring home?

The Mishnah replies, אבידתו קודמת, he should bring his own item home. The Gemara explains that this is because it states (*Devarim* 15:4), "אפס כי לא יהיה בך אביון," "Be cautious that you don't become poor." The Torah obligates people to be cautious with their money so they don't become poor and need to ask others for financial aid.

your needs, חייך קודמין, and your money has precedence.

But then the Gemara throws in a disclaimer and declares, כל המקיים בעצמו כך סוף, "Whoever is always cautious that he shouldn't become poor, in the end,

he will become poor." This Gemara teaches that sometimes you should help your friend, even when you might lose from it.

As Rashi explains, "The Torah doesn't obligate him [to help his fellow man], nevertheless, he should go beyond the letter of the law. He shouldn't always say שלי קודם, my needs come first, unless בהפסד מוכיח, when he will certainly be losing money. Because if he will always be overly cautious, פורק מעליו עול גמילות חסדים וצדקה, he is throwing off his responsibility to do *chesed* and *tzedakah* [because he will never help anyone], and in the end [he will be poor and] he will need to ask people for financial help."¹¹

11. The Maharal (*Bava Metzia* 33) explains the reason he will become poor:

"When you are afraid of poverty, you are enabling poverty to come to you. As it states (*Iyov* 3:25), 'כי פחד פחדתי ויאתני ואשר יגרתי יבא לי,' 'I was afraid, and it happened. What I was afraid of, occurred.'

These matters need to be studied carefully to get the proper guidelines, but we see that there are certainly times when one should express his *ahavas Yisrael* and care for others, even when this might cause a personal loss. And, at the

very least, when we aren't able to actually help our fellow man, it should at least bother us immensely. Our heart and our desire should be to help our fellow man.¹²

Reb Mordechai
Greenfeld and Reb Engel

Because when you are afraid of something, that means you subjugate yourself to this matter, and then that matter can affect you..."

The Maharal elaborates: "Lay a wooden beam, high across a river, reaching from one side of the river to the next, and try to walk over it. You will probably fall off. But if this plank is on the ground, you can walk on it, and you won't fall off. This is because when you think about falling [the fear causes it to happen]... Similarly, when one is afraid of becoming poor, the thoughts create an affect and he will become poor. Understand this."

Rebbe Mendel of Vitebsk *zt'l* would annually receive a letter from his chassidim of a certain town, and they were always complaining about their financial hardships. One year, they didn't mention their financial woes. Rebbe Mendel of Vitebsk wrote, "I'm certain that this year they will have *parnassah* because they aren't worried about it."

12. The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz *zt'l*, who renowned for his tzedakah, said, "When I don't have money to give a poor person, I feel like my flesh is falling off me (פאלט פון מיר שטיקער פלייש)." He was visibly upset when he wasn't able to help the poor.

Interestingly, he said he wasn't born with this nature. He was stingy by nature, but he worked on himself until he felt the plight of others as though it was his own.

were friends since their youth, and they found themselves together again in a DP camp following the Holocaust. They both applied for a Canadian visa.

Reb Mordechai received a visa, but Engel didn't because he had typhus.

When Reb Mordechai traveled to the port to sail to Canada, his friend, Engel, came along to say goodbye. These were emotionally charged moments for both of them: Engel felt devastated that he must remain behind in the camp, and Reb Mordechai Greenfeld felt sorry for his friend.

Moments before the boat left, Engel said, "I fear I will remain in this country forever. Even if I recuperate fully from the typhus, there isn't a country in the world that will accept me since I once had typhus. And, I'm afraid I'll never marry and never build a *bayis neeman b'Yisrael...*"

Reb Mordechai said, "Take my visa and board the boat. Make a life for yourself in Canada. I will yet get to Canada, somehow. Remember, from now on, your name isn't Engel. Your name is Greenfeld."

Engel didn't refuse the offer.

Reb Mordechai returned to the DP camp, happy he could do this great mitzvah, but worried about his future.

There was a Mr. Weinberger in the DP camp who received a visa to Canada, but he was *niftar* before he could use it. Reb Mordechai took Weinberger's visa, traveled to Montreal, Canada with his new identity card, and met up with his childhood friend.

Hashem granted him financial success – תורה וגדולה – במקום אחד (both Torah and wealth were his portion).

Reb Mordechai (now called Reb Mordechai Weinberger) asked his Rebbe, the Imrei Chaim of Viznitz *zt'l*, whether he should change his name back to Greenfeld. The Rebbe replied, "Whenever someone says your name, 'Reb Mordechai Weinberger,' it reminds Heaven of when you had *mesiras nefesh* to help another Yid. Why would you want to lose that?"

There is no better time to improve in the trait of *ahavas Yisrael* than the present because we are now in the days when we mourn the deaths of Reb

Akiva's 24,000 students, who were punished for not honoring one another.

The Gemara (Yevamos 62:) teaches:

"Reb Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students, and they all lived between Givas and Antifras, and they all died at the same time because they didn't honor one another... They died in the days between Pesach and Shavuos. They died an excruciating death, called *askara* (a disease that causes choking).¹³

Therefore, this is the season to fix their *aveirah*, and we correct their sins

13. The Gemara concludes, "The world was desolate until Reb Akiva came to the scholars in the south and he taught Torah to Reb Meir, Reb Yehuda, Reb Yosi, Reb Shimon, and to Reb Elazar ben Shamo. These are the scholars who established Torah."

Reb Akiva said, "If you taught Torah and you founded students in your younger years, continue doing so in your later years" because you never know which student will be most successful.

Reb Akiva did so, because even after the devastating loss of 24,000 students, he continued teaching Torah to his five new students. All the Torah that we have today comes from those five students.

by honoring and loving
our fellow man.

derech eretz comes before
the Torah."¹⁴

Good Middos

The Mishnah (Avos 6) tells us the 48 middos, attributes, that one needs to acquire Torah. The 48 days of sefiras ha'omer correspond to these 48 attributes, and the 49th day is when we review all of them again so we can acquire the Torah on Shavuot. As Chazal (Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Rabba 1:1) say, דרך, "having
ארץ קדמה לתורה,

To generalize matters, we can describe good middos as being compassionate towards others – in our heart and with our deeds.

We say in the tefillah, לעולם יהא אדם ירא שמים, and tzaddikim explain, לעולם יהא אדם, one must first be an אדם, a gentleman, a person with good middos, and then he can be a yirei shamayim.¹⁵

14. The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:3) teaches, "Don't say that *teshuvah* is solely for the *aveiros* that one commits by deed, such as adultery and theft. Rather, as one must do *teshuvah* for those [deeds], similarly, one must search his bad *middos* and do *teshuvah* for them. He must repent for his anger, hatred, jealousy, mockery, his passionate pursuit for money, honor, or for food, and so on. One must do *teshuvah* on all of these matters. It is harder to do *teshuvah* for these matters than the *aveiros* performed with deeds, because when one becomes accustomed to these habits it is very hard to leave them. As it states (*Yeshayah* 55:7), יעזוב רשע דרכו, the *rasha* must leave his path..."

15. One woman said, "My husband is *mamash* a *malach*." The other replied, "Yes, my husband is also *mamash* not a *mentch*." Because first one needs to be a *mentch*, a gentleman, someone who cares about others; someone who helps others; and then he has potential to reach higher levels.

Reb Chaim Vital zy'a explains that good middos aren't written in the Torah because they are the foundation of the Torah. As it states (Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Rabba 1:1), דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה, "having derech eretz comes before the Torah." It is the foundation upon which Torah stands.

Reb Eliyahu Lopian zt'l expressed this with a mashal:

When people want to build a house, they meet with an architect; they tell him exactly how they want the house to look, down to the most minor details. But

there is one topic that isn't ever discussed, and that is the foundation. People don't ask the architect, "How deep will the foundations be?" "What type of cement will you use?" and so on. They don't ask these questions because it is obvious that the foundations must be good, solid, and firm. Without the foundation, there is nothing.

Similarly, the Torah doesn't discuss good middos because they are the foundation. Without good middos, nothing begins.¹⁶

16. Discussing foundations, let us also appreciate the great gift of life, because that is the foundation upon which we can accomplish so much.

There was a tzaddik (a student of the Baal Shem Tov zt'l) whose custom was that he wouldn't sleep alone in the *succah*. He always wanted that someone else should be there, with him. Once, this tzaddik sought someone to join him in the *succah*, but he couldn't find anyone. One person said, "I'll sleep in your *succah* if you promise me that I will be with you in Gan Eden."

The tzaddik couldn't find anyone else, and he wanted to keep his custom, so he agreed to this request, although it was a hard request to fulfill.

Reb Elyah Lopian told another mashal:

The Russian police caught two people dealing with counterfeit money. One of them had a thousand rubles of counterfeit money in his possession, and the judge sentenced him to one year in prison.

No counterfeit money was found with the second offender, however, a printing press was found in his home, set to print counterfeit bills. The judge sentenced him to seven years.

The man complained, "Not one counterfeit bill was found in my possession! The other man had a

Soon afterwards that man (who slept in the tzaddik's succah) fell ill. The tzaddik visited him and said, "If you absolve me from my promise, and if you don't require me to bring you to my place in Gan Eden, you will live. And, I will also give you a *brachah*. You can ask for longevity, wealth, or good children. But if you don't relieve me from my promise, you will die..."

The man replied, "I want all three blessings: longevity, wealth, and good children, and then I absolve you from your promise."

The tzaddik agreed to his request and offered him his blessings.

Rebbe Chunah of Kalishitz *zt'l* told this story at a *tisch* and asked one of his great chassidim, "What's your opinion? Did this man choose wisely or foolishly?"

The chassid replied, "In my opinion, he chose foolishly. He had the opportunity to be together with this tzaddik in Gan Eden, and he gave it away."

Rebbe Chunah disagreed. "I think he chose wisely. Because life is the greatest gift. As long as a person is alive, he can do mitzvos and he can reach the heights of the holy *avos*. But after one's passing the opportunity is lost."

thousand counterfeit rubles in his possession, and you gave him one year of jail. I deserve an even lesser punishment than that."

The judge explained to him that since he has the printing press in his home, set to print counterfeit currency, he can print millions of counterfeit bills. Therefore, his crime is far worse.

Reb Elyah Lopian explained that this mashal helps us understand the severity of having bad middos. Perhaps actual aveiros are worse than bad middos, but in a way, bad middos are worse, as they create a foundation that can result in endless corruption and terrible aveiros. Therefore, it can be said that bad middos is the worst aveirah of all.

Guard Your Eyes

Reb Avraham Estralensky zt'l once complained to the Beis Yisrael of Gur, zt'l, that he

misses the holiness that he remembers in "der alter heim" when they lived in Poland. He spoke about the tzaddikim and Torah scholars he remembered studying Torah in beis medresh, all hours of the day and night. He concluded, "Things are different here in Yerushalayim."

It is hard to say such things about the holy city Yerushalayim, but he had a point. The Holocaust didn't only kill six-million-Yidden; it also destroyed the atmosphere of holiness and Torah, which is hard to bring back.

The Beis Yisrael replied, "I say that when a Yid walks on Yaffo Street, and he guards his eyes, he's greater than the tzaddikim who you remember studying Torah all night long..."

The Beis Yisrael explained to him that our generation's tests are so great, we can be considered

greater than the tzaddikim of the past when we pass these difficult tests.

It states (Kohelos 7:10), אל תאמר מה היה שהימים הרשאים היו טובים מאלה כי לא מחכמה שאלת על זה, "Don't say, 'What happened? Why were the days in the past better than today?' [Don't ask this] because you are not asking wisely."

Why isn't it a wise question? Shouldn't someone wonder why the generations are descending and why we don't have tzaddikim today as in the past?

The Beis Avraham of Slonim zy'a spoke about this pasuk at his tisch, one Friday night, when he was visiting Teveria. He explained, with immense hislahavos, "It's wrong to say that there used to be tzaddikim and today there are no tzaddikim, because when a Yid walks on the street, and he guards his eyes he is almost like the tzaddikim of the past."

After saying this explanation, the Beis Avraham was deep in thought.

A few minutes later, the Rebbe repeated his explanation, and this time he said, "Those who guard their eyes are just like the tzaddikim of the past."

A few minutes later, the Rebbe repeated this idea a third time. With holy fervor, he hollered, "In this generation, when one walks on the street and he guards his eyes, he is greater than the tzaddikim of the past."

Shame

As Rebbe Boruch'l of Mezhibuz zt'l approached the outskirts of Zitomer, the people of Zitomer came out to greet him. A simple man also came along with the throngs of Yidden to greet Rebbe Boruch'l. This simple person came from a non-prestigious family, and there was also an old lashon hara on him, so

people didn't respect him, although he had become wealthy.

Rebbe Boruch'l sat in his wagon greeting the people of Zitomer. When the simple man gave his hand in greeting, Rebbe Boruch'l invited him to join him in his wagon, and they traveled the rest of the way to Zitomer together.

The people of Zitomer were shocked. Several respected people were present, among them very wealthy people and prominent Torah scholars. Why did the Rebbe choose to honor that person whom they degraded? But they didn't say anything.

As they traveled, Rebbe Boruch'l asked the simple person whether he could stay at his home. The simple person was delighted at this merit. The people of Zitomer were upset about that too, because from all the prominent people of the city, why should the Rebbe

be hosted specifically in his home? Of course, they didn't say anything out of respect for Rebbe Boruch'l.

Shabbos was very uplifting and inspirational for the entire city. Sunday, people thronged to the Rebbe for a brachah. The simple host also came for a brachah. The Rebbe asked him, "Do you have children in shidduchim?"

The man replied, "Yes, I have a daughter of marriageable age, and that's why I came to the Rebbe, to ask for a brachah..."

The Rebbe said, "I have a son..." and the Rebbe asked whether he agrees to be meshadech together. The simple man couldn't believe his good fortune. The Rebbe shook his hand, "Mazal Tov! Mazal Tov!"

The news of the shidduch spread quickly, and the people of Zitomer were shocked. Why would Rebbe Boruch'l, a grandson

of the Baal Shem Tov zy'a, take a simple mechutan? Their main concern was because of the man's reputation. Twenty years earlier, that man was accused of severe sins, and was harassed and humiliated in public so that others shouldn't follow his example. Was it fitting for him to be the Rebbe's mechutan?

Until then, the people of Zitomer didn't think it was necessary to tell Rebbe Boruch'l about that man's history, but now, that Reb Boruch'l was being meshadach with him, they felt they had to speak up for the Rebbe's honor, and for the honor of the Baal Shem Tov.

They told the Rebbe their concerns. "He committed grave sins twenty years ago, and who knows what's happening now..."

The Rebbe moaned, "When I first saw him in the outskirts of Zitomer, I

felt a strong desire to be his mechutan. That's why I asked him if I could stay at his home. When he came to me on Sunday, I once again desired immensely to be mechutanim. It seemed to me that it was destined from heaven. And now that I hear your concerns, I will think it over... I don't know what I'll do."

Rebbe Boruch'l went to visit the almanah of the Or HaMeir, who lived in Zitomer, in order to honor her. She said, "Yesterday I found out that you are a true tzaddik and a gadol hador." Pointing to a window, she said, "My husband and I stood near this window twenty years ago when they were pulling your mechutan through the streets of Zitomer to embarrass him. They were shouting, ככה יעשה לאיש אשר יעשה גבלה בישראל, 'So shall be the punishment for those who do disgraceful things in Yisrael.' My husband, zt'l said, 'Look how

everyone is running after this tzaddik, who's totally clean from sin. I hope that I will be as clean from sins when I am brought to the court in heaven, after my lifetime. In the merit of his humiliation, he will merit being a mechutan with one of the tzaddikei hador.' That is what my late husband told me. So when I heard that you made a shidduch with him, I knew that you are a tzaddik hador..."

The almanah's words quickly spread through the Jewish community. Everyone rejoiced. They immediately went to the simple man's home and wrote the tena'im with joy and happiness.

This story is an example of the immense benefits one earns by remaining silent when humiliated.

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil zt'l was near the Kosel, sitting among the poor people (as he would do at times), and somebody came

by and gave a small coin to everybody sitting there. This man didn't know who Rebbe Shlomke was, and he figured that he was a poor like all the others, so he gave Rebbe Shlomke a small coin too.

When the man left, Rebbe Shlomke gave his coin to the man sitting next to him.

"Why didn't you tell him that you aren't poor?" the man asked.

Rebbe Shlomke replied, "I didn't want to lose out on the opportunity to get some shame."

Once, Rebbe Shlomke's granddaughter came to him and told him how she and her family were suffering immense poverty. They almost didn't have bread to eat. Rebbe Shlomke advised her to daven at the Kosel.

She went there and poured her heart out, with piercing sobs and loud tefillos. In that era, the

Kosel plaza was just a small area, and her shouts disturbed one of the women standing near her. "Sha! Sha!" The lady shouted at her, but to no avail. Rebbe Shlomke's granddaughter continued crying out all of her pain in her tefillos.

When she left the Kosel, the lady asked her, "What do you think? The entire Kosel is yours? Why can't you daven silently? There are other people around who have their own tefillos they want to say. They don't want to hear yours..." And she disgraced her in this manner.

Rebbe Shlomke's granddaughter bore the shame in silence and didn't answer back. On the way home, she found a Napoleon coin, which could support her family for the next half a year. She came to Rebbe Shlomke and said, "Baruch Hashem, Hashem heard my tefillos and sent me the money. But why did I have to undergo all that shame?"

Rebbe Shlomke explained, "Hashem heard your prayers, and therefore, Hashem sent someone to shame you. That was the beginning of your salvation because shame removes all types of troubles and hardships from you and your family. And after the matter was rectified, you found the money."

A prestigious, rabbinic family had an embarrassing secret, which they tried to conceal, but at times, it became known.

Their son was in yeshiva, and at lunchtime, one of the bachurim revealed the secret in front of all the other bachurim. The son was very embarrassed, but he didn't answer back. Instead, he said, "I forgive you," and left the lunchroom. He knew that he now has the power to give brachos (because when one is shamed and he doesn't answer back, he has the power to give brachos) and sought whom he could bless. His first thought was to bless

an older cousin who learned in a yeshiva nearby and needed a shidduch. He went to the cousin's yeshiva, but the cousin wasn't there.

The bachur quickly went home, and he said to his sister, "Within a month, you will be a kalah."

Shocked, she asked, "How do you know?"

"I have the power of brachos, and I'm telling you that within a month, you will be engaged."

Within a week, she was engaged.

The Rema'k teaches, "From all types of atonement, the most ideal is to endure shame and embarrassment. Afflictions [such as fasting] cause bitul Torah, and perhaps he will be considered a sinner [for

weakening himself, thus lessening his ability to study Torah, as stated in Orach Chaim 571]. But when one suffers shame, he eats and drinks and his sins are forgiven.... If one will be asked, 'How do you prefer to attain your atonement? By money loss, death of your children, or that Hashem smite you with disease and fever, death and Gehinom?' He doesn't want any of these. He will shout chas veshalom! Rachmana litzlan! Save me! [But if he doesn't have any yesurim], how will he have atonement for his sins? There is only one solution: יתן למכרו לחי ישבע חרפה, 'put your cheek out to the person who wants to smack you' (Eichah 3:30). This means to accept your shame in silence. And then you can eat and drink and you won't need to fast..."



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