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**Rabbi Yechiel Perr’s Advice on**

**How to Improve Oneself Spiritually**

**By Daniel Keren**



The third speaker at the recent Flatbush Labor Day Hakhel Yarchei Kallah was Rabbi Yechiel Perr, the founder and Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshiva Derech Ayson (Yeshiva of Far Rockaway). He began by recalling an incident that occurred in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942. People were hiding in basements. The German Nazis (yemach shemom) had closed down all of the mikvahs. There was a house next to a closed down mikvah and rumor was that the wall of that house next to the mikvah had been secretly broken, allowing access to the mikva. Hundreds of people risked their lives to sneak in during the dark in order to toivel, immerse themselves in the mikva because they wanted to prepare and purify themselves for the Yom Hakodesh (holy day.)

Today we see the Arabs walking arrogantly around on the Temple Mount where the Beis Hamikdosh once stood in all its glory, acting up against the Jews with impunity. How could Hakodesh Baruch Hu have tolerated it when His children were being gassed in the concentration camps and today when the Har Habayis is being desecrated by our enemies?

**Klal Yisroel’s Survival is Nothing Short of Awesome**

It is nothing short of awesome how Klal Yisroel has managed to survive the various painful tribulations throughout our long history. And it continues to be a Nora, fearful reality to the goyim around us.

Scientists estimate that one end of the universe to the other end is 13.5 billion light years away. Imagine that you are driving a car at 60 miles per hour. Gas is not a problem and you don’t need to stop for food or sleep. If you drive for 12,000 years continuously you will have driven for only a million light years. Who are we and what are we in the eyes of Hakodesh Baruch Hu?

Yet Hashem makes it possible for us to have a connection with Him. This is a mora diga chessed. Can you image the incredible chasodim (kindness) that Hashem does for you every day? Sometimes you only understand of those kindnesses 20 years later or sometimes only after one’s lifetime [in the Olam Haemes, the World of Truth.]

That is why we are baruch Hashem (thank G-d) crowded in this Beis Hamidrash [study hall at the Agudath Israel of Madison] which is better than having to be crowded in the basements of the Warsaw Ghetto.

**Wasting One’s Life on What They Can’t Be**

People waste their lives trying to be what they once were and trying to be what they can’t be. Someone who wishes to learn Gemorah the way he once did when he was much younger, but either doesn’t have the strength he once had or has more complications in his life [than he did when he was younger] should rather try first to learn Chumash with the Ramban or the Mishna with Kehati.

If one has a bad mida (character trait) he should attempt to eliminate it in short incremental steps such as deciding not to speak lashon hora on Shabbos. On the other hand if one has a treif kitchen, you can’t solve the problem by koshering incrementally one pot at a time. All the keilim (vessels) must be purified at the same time.

A father once went to his son’s school for a parent’s meeting with his child’s teacher. His son’s rebbe said “your son is not learning up to his potential and I don’t think he ever will because he comes from a television house.”

That father shaken by the truth of his son’s rebbi’s comment, returned to his house and despite the great difficulty in convincing his wife and his distraught daughters, took all four televisions sets that night from the house and put it out on the curb. Within 10 minutes they were all grabbed by passer-byes. But more importantly, his son is a successful rebbi teaching many talmidim (pupils) in a yeshiva today.

Reprinted from the September 12, 2019 edition of The Flatbush Jewish Journal.

**The Shmuz onParshas Ki Savo**

**Powerful Forces of Growth**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheShmuz.com**



“*And it shall be if you listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to keep and to perform all of His commandments that I command you this day… Blessed are you in your coming and blessed shall you be in your going*.” — Devarim 28:1–6

**The destiny of the Jewish people**

In this moving address, Moshe Rabbeinu, our teacher, once again defines the path of the Jewish people. “If you will listen to the ways of the Torah, all the blessings will come to you...”

The Targum defines “if you will listen,” as “if you will accept,” meaning, if you accept the word of Hashem to guard His mitzvos, commandments, and do them, then everything else will follow. You will blessed in the city and blessed in the field. You will have children, livestock, healthy crops, and abundance. And finally, “You will be blessed in your coming and your going.” Rashi explains this last phrase to mean that you will leave the world as clean of sin as you were when you came into the world.

This Rashi is difficult to understand. A man who leaves this earth as clean of sin as when he entered is a complete tsaddik, righteous person — a level that is difficult to even envision. How can Rashi say that all we need to do in order to reach that lofty level is to fully accept Hashem’s mitzvos, commandments?

The answer to this can best be understood with a mashal, parable.

**A change in perspective**

Imagine we take a man from the sixteenth century and bring him into our world — into your living room on the day that you are moving. He watches as a team of men moves the contents of your house into a truck parked in the driveway. First he sees them carry out the heavy furniture: the dressers, the beds, the dining room table, and the breakfront. Next come boxes and boxes of clothing and dishes, pots and pans, toys and books.

He stands watching, his mouth agape. In his life he hasn’t seen this much abundance, certainly not as the possessions of one family. After the whole house is emptied out, the movers enter the truck, and one gets behind the wheel. At that point, the man can no longer contain himself. “How do you intend to move this huge wagon with everything in it?” he cries out. “It will take a team of four, maybe six horses!”

Likely, you would find great difficulty in explaining to him that one man, by pressing his foot on the accelerator, will harness the power of the engine with a power output of hundreds of horses. In his world, he has never seen anything like this, and he has no basis for comparison.

**Upper world systems**

This seems to be the answer to our question.

Hashem created the physical world with systems and laws governing them. So, too, He created the spiritual world with rules and procedures that control it. And as in the physical world, there are powerful engines that can accomplish what hundreds of men can’t. In the spiritual world, there are techniques and structures that can achieve astonishing results.

The Targum is revealing to us one of the powerful systems of the upper worlds. When a person resolves with all of his heart and soul to serve Hashem, he puts into operation powerful forces that catapult him forward toward the completion of that acceptance. These forces now drive him toward spiritual perfection. He can veer off and he can resist the pull, but that force has been put into place, and assuming that he doesn’t negate it, he will be pulled to reach that lofty level. If he allows these influences to do what they have been created to do, he will reach dizzying heights, leaving this earth without sin.

This concept is very applicable, as we often find ourselves looking at the levels of greatness outlined in the Torah and wonder how we can even aspire to reach such heights. This Rashi teaches us that all we need to do is start the process. Our job is to completely and totally accept the mitzvos before and beyond everything else. When we do so, Hashem helps, and powerful forces propel us on a path toward perfection.

*Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [Shmuz on the Parsha book](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).*

**The Obligation of Each Jew to**

**Give G-d His Best First Fruits**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**

This week's Torah portion, Tavo, contains the commandment of bikurim, first fruits.

"And it shall be, when you come into the land...and you shall take of all the fruit of the earth...and put it in a basket...and you shall go to the priest...and the priest shall take the basket from your hand, and set it down before the altar of the L-rd your G-d."

The mitzva of first fruits applies only to the "seven kinds by which the land of Israel is praised" -- grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates, wheat and barley.

Whoever cultivated these special fruits on his portion of land was obligated to bring the very first of his harvest to G-d's representative on earth -- the priest who served in the Holy Temple -- thereby thanking G-d for His bounty and joyfully acknowledging the Creator of all things.

A mitzva may be performed in one of two ways: with a minimum of involvement and effort, merely in order to fulfill the requirement, or out of a sense of love and joy, demonstrated by one's desire to observe the mitzva in the most beautiful way possible, utilizing the very best of whatever one possesses.

This principle is best expressed in the mitzva of bikurim, for which the farmer must go against his natural inclination to retain for himself the very best of the fruits of his labor, and hand them over to the priest in Jerusalem.

As we stand now on the very threshold of the Messianic Era, when we will once again be obligated to perform this mitzva, it is fitting that we prepare ourselves for its renewed observance, at least in the spiritual sense.

How?



By thinking of ourselves as the "first fruit" of G-d: every action we take, every thought we have and every word that comes out of our mouths must be not only "for the sake of Heaven," but must be our absolute best, the most choice and select we are capable of producing.

Furthermore, this principle should be applied not only to the realm of religious observance, but to the myriad details of our everyday, mundane lives, elevating even our business transactions to the level of "first fruits," as our Sages said, "All of your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven."

Until Moshiach comes, when we will be able to perform the mitzva of first fruits in the physical sense, every Jew must picture himself at all times as if he is standing in the Holy Temple, about to hand over his basket of offerings to the priest.. .

May our efforts to refine ourselves in this manner bring the Final Redemption speedily in our day, and with it, the opportunity to observe the mitzva of bikurim in the literal sense as well.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Ki Tavo 5754/1994 edition of L’Chaim Weekly (Issue #331), a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**The Most Important Guest**

**At Your Wedding**



**QUESTION:** What should a person think when he's under the *chuppah?*

**ANSWER:** He should think about Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Because the *gemara* says that when a man and woman are married, a third party descends and participates in that union. איש ואשה, when a husband and his wife are married, then שכינה ביניהם, the *Shechina* is there too.

You don't see Him, but He's more real than you are — more real than your bride too. He's more real than all the guests. Don't let the number of people present at the wedding make you forget about Hashem. They're only dreams; shadows that pass in the night. Sooner or later everybody disappears.

And just like the hall will empty out — at 3 o’clock at night, if you visit the hall, it's dark and quiet. That's how this world is — everybody disappears eventually. The only One that remains is Hashem.

And so, you and your wife are now joining in a contract with Hashem: "We're going to be loyal to Him forever and ever. Together we'll serve Hashem."

That's what marriage is for. You'll make it your business that you and your wife will try to please each other like Hashem wants. And you'll live according to that principle and you'll live forever. Your union will be not only in this world; when your time is up you'll go together in the World to Come forever and ever. Because anybody who's connected with Hakodosh Boruch Hu is eternal. Like the woman said to Dovid when she blessed him:  והיתה נפש אדוני צרורה בצרור החיים עם השם אלוקיך - *The soul of my master Dovid should be bound up in the bond of life forever with Hashem.* And so, if you'll think about Hakodosh Boruch Hu then you're going to be forever.

*Reprinted from the September 10, 2019 email of Toras Avigdor, based on Tape #555.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parashat Ki Tavo**

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**Rabbi Berel Wein**

Saying thank you is one of the basic courtesies of human interaction. Though elementary and straightforward, it is often forgotten or neglected. In saying thank you, we are acknowledging that we are dependent upon the goodness and consideration of others and that we are not completely in control over events and even of our own decisions in life.

In traditional homes, both Jewish and general, some of the first words that children are taught are “thank you,” “please” and “ may I.” In fact, these words are the building blocks of civilized behavior and of being able to get along peacefully and gently in this world. But because of our egotististical nature, as children and later in life as adults, we resent the necessity of having to use these words and to thereby acknowledge our dependence upon others.

It is always ironic that we expect expressions of gratitude from others but are very sparing in granting them ourselves. If this be true, as I feel it is in families and among other relationships, it is also true regarding our relationship to our Creator. The Torah refers to the lack of gratitude as a cardinal sin of personality. It is based in arrogance and a false assessment of one’s place in the world. Therefore, Judaism stresses humility, for only in humility can one expect to find expressions of gratitude.

The Torah reading of this week begins with the necessity for expressions of gratitude for the blessings of a bountiful harvest and the first fruits of the agricultural year. These fruits were to be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering to the priests serving there and as an acknowledgment of appreciation to G-d for having provided this bounty to the farmer.

There is no question that the farmer invested a great deal of effort, sweat and toil in bringing his crops to fruition. Because of this effort and the investment on the part of the farmer, there is a temptation that he will view these new fruits as an entitlement. For after all, he was the one who devoted the time and effort necessary to produce them. There is a danger that he will forget that there really are no entitlements in life and that one has to say thank you for everything that is achieved, though ostensibly we have labored to achieve this much desired goal.

Rather, it is incumbent upon the farmer to thank his Creator for the land and the natural miracles that occurred daily in the production of food, grain and fruit. As the old year winds down, we should all remember to say thank you for life, goodness and family, and pray that the new year will bring us more of the same.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Are Our Prayers Repulsive?**

**By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss**



We interrupt our series on tefilah for a timely discussion about Elul.

About 45 years ago, I was a student in the Yeshiva of Staten Island. One Rosh HaShanah, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt”l, zy”a, was together with us. When everyone went to a nearby water source to say tashlich, I decided to stay in the building so that someone would be there for the Rosh Yeshiva.

The only problem was that I couldn’t find him. He wasn’t in his room and he wasn’t in the Beis Medrash. Finally, I located him in the library and found him learning Mesilas Yesharim with the Alteh Rebbetzin, zt”l, zy”a.

This is a wonderful maaseh rav, an actual rabbinic story revealing to us that it is good to learn mussar with one’s spouse.

My wife Shoshy, tichye, and I study Mesilas Yesharim by Rab Moshe Chaim Luzzato, zt”l, zy”a, with the wonderful commentary of Rav Avigdor Miller, zt”l, zy”a.

In the preface to his sefer, Rav Luzzato, writes a very startling and demanding statement. He declares that if one’s service of Hashem is not sincere, pure and clean, it is nimeses u’m’soeves, repulsive and abominable.

Rav Miller recalls in his commentary that when he was young and learning Mesilas Yesharim in Slabodka, when he got to this line he underlined it heavily. To me, this statement was indeed perplexing for it implies that if one prays without focus and without concentration, not only is it not a quality prayer, it is not even a parve prayer. Rather, it is disgusting.

This seems to run contrary to something we say in Shemone Esrei where it says, “Ki Attah [Hashem] shomei’ah tefilas kol peh am’cha Yisroel b’rachamim – Because You [the Almighty] listen to the prayers of all mouths of His people Yisroel with mercy.”

The Mabit, in his monumental sefer on prayer, Beis Elokim, deduces from the fact that it emphasizes the prayers of every mouth, that even if the prayers stem only from the mouth and are without thought or feelings, Hashem nevertheless still mercifully listens.

My good friend, Rabbi Brackenroth, told me that there is a Chassidishe saying that although Hashem listens, it is considered tefilas feh, a prayer that is considered feh (nauseating). At first glance, this troubled me. After all, the person is making the effort to daven. Why should it be considered repulsive?

The day after learning this stitch, I went to the bank in Monticello to make a deposit. While I was waiting in line, there was a person, very obviously a Jew, standing by the teller at the window. Sadly, he was behaving rather unwisely. While dealing with the teller, he was chatting on his cellphone, not even glancing or looking at the teller. I watched as the teller was obviously not appreciating his lack of etiquette. I also saw that all the people in line were looking at him with distaste as well.

It was then that I realized what the Mesilas Yesharim meant. Thus, if we take three steps forward to stand before Hashem and we don’t even think about Him or what we are saying, it is very insulting to the Melech Malchei HaM’lochim, the King who appoints all kings.

This is a true task of Elul. As we all know, Elul stands for Ani l’Dodi v’Dodi li – I am to my Beloved (Hashem) and my Beloved is to me.” In direct proportion to how we intensify our focus on Hashem during this month, that’s how much Hashem will step-up His attention and love to us.

At the very least, we need to train ourselves to wipe the slate of our minds clean of all distractions when we embark on saying the Shemone Esrei. When we take those three steps forward, our attention should be only and exclusively focused on conversing with our Creator.

In that merit, may Hashem answer our prayers and bless us with long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

*Reprinted from the Parshas Ki Seitzei 5779 email of the Jewish VUES.*

**Thanking G-d,**

**Thanking People**

**By Rabbi Eli J. Mansour**

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Parashat Ki-Tavo begins with the Misva of Bikkurim, the requirement to bring one’s first fruits to the Kohen in the Bet Hamikdash.  A farmer who grew any of the seven special species would tie a thread around the first fruits that ripened, and then bring them to the Mikdash.

Before giving the basket of fruit to the Kohen, the farmer would recite a special declaration, called Mikra Bikkurim, in which he recalled how Laban tried to destroy Yaakob, and how Beneh Yisrael were subjugated in Egypt and were ultimately rescued by G-d. It is only in the final verse of Mikra Bikkurim that the farmer made mention of the fruits which G-d had given him.

The question arises, why does the Torah require a farmer to recall the history of Am Yisrael, dating back to the time of Yaakov Abinu?  It is understandable that one should be required to bring a gift and express his gratitude for a successful yield.  But why does the Torah require him on this occasion to contemplate the ancient history of the Jewish people?

The answer, it would seem, is that the Torah here seeks to convey an important lesson regarding gratitude.  When something good happens to us, we must seize the opportunity to thank Hashem for all that He does for us – and not only for the immediate source of joy, or the success we have just achieved.  As the farmer proudly stands in the Temple with the first produce of his field, he must thank G-d not only for this year’s yield, but for everything Go- has done for him and for the Jewish people, already from the earliest times.

People are not naturally inclined to feel or express gratitude, because feeling grateful means feeling dependant.  We want to feel independent and self-sufficient, and thus we naturally seek to avoid feeling indebted.  For this reason, the Torah imposed upon the farmer the requirement to thank G-d for everything, to break this natural tendency and to emphasize the importance of gratitude.

But gratitude to God can only come after one feels gratitude toward other people. I once observed a young married man reciting Birkat Hamazon with intense emotion. When he finally finished his very lengthy and animated recitation, I asked him a simple question: “So, why don’t you say, ‘Thank you’?”

“What?” the man said.  “I just recited Birkat Hamazon; I thanked Hashem.”

“Yes, but what about thanking your wife, who prepared and served a nice meal?”

“Thank my wife?!” the man asked.  “I just thanked G-d. Why do I need to thank my wife?”

At that moment, I realized that the man’s outward piety was insincere. A person who cannot feel gratitude for something that was done for him right before his eyes cannot possibly feel genuinely grateful to G-d, whom he does not see. We cannot reach the lofty level of feeling grateful for G-d for all He does for us until we have achieved the more basic level of recognizing and feeling grateful for the kindness we receive from the people around us. If we fail to show gratitude to a devoted wife, to a hard-working husband, to a loving parent, to a diligent employee, or to helpful neighbors, then how can we possibly show gratitude to G-d?

The Misva of Bikkurim reminds us of the need to feel genuinely grateful to G-d for all He has done for us and for our nation since its inception. But we must not forget our more basic responsibility to feel grateful to all those people in our lives who deserve our appreciation.

It’s easy to say “Thank you” to the supermarket clerk or the mailman, toward whom we don’t really feel any true gratitude. But it’s more difficult to feel and express gratitude to those who really deserve it, such as our spouses and parents. Let us remember our obligation of “Hakarat Hatob” (gratitude) toward the people in our lives who deserve our appreciation, and we will then be able to feel grateful to the Almighty for all He has done for us.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of the Edmund J. Safra Synagogue in Brooklyn,*

**Diet Eman, the Dutch Resistance Fighter Who Helped Jews Escape**

**The Nazis, Has Died at 99**

**By Brigit Katz**



It was 1944, and the Gestapo was after Diet Eman. The young Dutch resistance fighter, who had helped provide shelter to Jews, downed Allied pilots and other targets of Nazi persecution, was now a fugitive herself. She spent months on the run, frequently changing locations and her name, with the help of fake identification cards. But one day, while she was transporting illegal documents under her shirt, six Gestapo officers caught up to her.

They had pinpointed Eman’s ID as a fake, but weren’t aware of the illicit trove hidden beneath her clothing. Eman was terrified that she would be executed immediately if she were found out—and then came a twist of fate that she would later [describe](https://fox17online.com/2017/12/19/holocaust-survivor-shares-her-story-of-survival/) as being an act “from G-d.”

One of the officers had a new raincoat made from plastic, a rare material in those days, and started to show off his digs to his colleagues. Taking advantage of the distraction, Eman tossed the bundle of documents away.

For many years after the war, Eman stayed silent about that story and other remarkable details of her past. “Terrible things happened in my life,” she [said](https://fox17online.com/2017/12/19/holocaust-survivor-shares-her-story-of-survival/) in 2017. “My fiancé was killed, and all my friends from the resistance … It really breaks your heart.”

But Eman ultimately did speak out about her wartime experiences—and upon her death on September 3 at the age of 99, she was [remembered](https://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/?p=30695) as a woman who “bravely fought to save the lives of Jewish people who were being persecuted by Adolph Hitler.”

According to Harrison Smith of the [*Washington Post*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/diet-eman-dutch-resistance-hero-who-saved-jews-during-world-war-ii-dies-at-99/2019/09/05/65faf2be-cfe7-11e9-8c1c-7c8ee785b855_story.html), Eman was born in The Hague in 1920, the third of four children. Her father ran an interior decorating business, which started out successful until it suffered a blow during the Depression. Money was sometimes scarce, but Eman nevertheless remembered her childhood as one that was happy and free.

“[W]herever I went, my hair was always a mess. I loved climbing trees and having adventures out in the country,” she [wrote](http://www.lighthousetrails.com/twcchapter1.pdf) in her memoir, [*Things We Couldn’t Say*](https://www.amazon.ca/Things-Couldnt-Say-Diet-Eman-ebook/dp/B001ECQKIO). “My brother Albert and I and our friends used to pedal our bikes outside The Hague to little villages and farms, out to where we found pastures with sloten, those little brooks and moats that are still there today.”

In 1937, a young man named Hein Sietsma, who had gotten a job in The Hague and needed a place to stay, came to live with Eman’s family. Eman and Sietsma eventually fell in love—and after the Germans invaded the Netherlands in 1940, they became partners in hiding Jews who faced near-certain death at the hands of the Nazis.

The first person they saved was a violinist named Herman, who had worked with Eman at a bank. Eman and Sietsma found farmers outside the city who were willing to take him in—and then also found safe havens for his sister, his fiance and her mother. Within two weeks, Smith reports, they were organizing shelter for 60 people.

Sietsma and his brother Henk formed an underground resistance organization called [Group Hein](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/henk-hein-sietsma). Eman was active in the movement, typing out BBC broadcasts that the Nazis declared forbidden, transporting supplies and papers to safe houses, and even orchestrating missions to steal government ration cards.

It was perilous work. In April 1944, Sietsma was arrested and deported to Dachau. A month later, Eman was apprehended with her bundle of illegal documents. She avoided execution, but was sent to a prison in The Hague, then to a concentration camp in Vught, in the southern Netherlands. While awaiting her interrogation, she was forced to wash the bloody clothes of prisoners who had been killed.

“The men who had been executed—usually every night at sunset, we could hear the machine guns—would be lying somewhere for hours before they died,” she [wrote](https://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/?p=30695). “I was absolutely heartbroken. And I was heartbroken for another reason: I suspected that any one of those men being taken out and shot in the stomach and left to die could be my Hein.”

Eman pretended to be a maid named Willie Laarman, going over her alias’ story constantly so she would not slip up during her hearing. The cover ultimately worked, and Eman was released. She immediately rejoined the resistance.

Sietsma never came back from Dachau. But a note that he wrote to Eman, scribbled on toilet paper and thrown out of a train car window, did make its way to her. “Even if we won’t see each other on earth again,” the letter read, according to Smith, “we will never be sorry for what we did, and that we took this stand.”

After the war, Eman worked as a nurse, and later got a job with the Shell oil company in Venezuela. She married an American, Egon Erlich, and settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, after they divorced.

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel has [recognized](http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4014752) Eman as a Righteous Among the Nations, an honorific bestowed upon non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. In 2015, the Dutch King Willem-Alexander called her one of his country’s “[national heroes](https://www.hollandsentinel.com/news/20190906/dutch-woman-who-helped-jews-during-wwii-dies-in-michigan).”

As a result of all the horrors she had witnessed during the war, Eman struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder, [*Fox17*](https://fox17online.com/2017/12/19/holocaust-survivor-shares-her-story-of-survival/) reported in 2017. A devout Christian, she often looked to her faith for guidance and support. It was, in fact, a pastor who finally convinced Eman to tell her story publicly.

“The pastor said, ‘If something unusual happened in your life, and G-d is involved, you have to tell it,’” Eman [recalled](https://fox17online.com/2017/12/19/holocaust-survivor-shares-her-story-of-survival/). “And I thought, ‘Yeah, it was unusual, and G-d was involved, because we wanted to obey G-d to help the Jewish people.”

*Reprinted from the September 9, 2019 email of Smithsonian.com Based on* [*Women Heroes of World War II: 32 Stories of Espionage, Sabotage, Resistance, and Rescue*](https://tinyurl.com/y67g5umf/)*.*

**Zedakah: How Small Change Can Make a Big Change**

**By Rabbi Yosef Farhi**



During my early days in Israel, a roommate and I were approached by a poor man as we were strolling down Meah Shearim Streetin Jerusalem. The man stuck out a cup, which contained a few coins, and said, “Shabbos Koidesh.”

He meant that he was collecting funds to purchase Shabbat food for himself and his family. I handed the fellow a shekel as my friend searched his pockets. All he could come up with, though, was a ten-agurot coin which he promptly dropped into the cup. But before we could move on, the man said, “Wait a minute!” and placed 50 agurot in the hand of my friend.

“It looks like you need the money more than me, he explained.” Without further ado, he turned and walked away, leaving us in a mild state of shock.

Before offering a Torah perspective on responding to an outstretched arm and open palm (or cup), permit me to share several additional encounters with poor beggars in Israel.

I will never forget a gentleman in his late sixties who would circulate in the study hall of the Mir Yeshiva in a black baseball cap with the word SHVIGGER (mother-in-law) embossed in large gold letters.

Then there was the fellow who came around the yeshivah with a sign over his chest proclaiming in English – a language which he apparently did not understand – that he is “deaf, dead, and dumb.” I myself could only testify to his being deaf and dumb.

A third fellow tells you jokes, and a fourth first tries to convince you to take a 250-shekel massage (as he shows you his degree), and then asks if you can at least spare a shekel to help him pay his psychologist.

At one point, I started to ignore these people because of the nuisance they frequently caused. Each encounter involved having to stop learning to search for a coin. But I began feeling uneasy about this approach, especially regarding those people who came around every week. After all, they were really only asking for half a shekel.

Furthermore, I kept thinking of the classical image of one Jew putting a coin into the pushke at the end of the outstretched arm of a fellow Jew. Even worse, I knew that there is a Torah prohibition concerning not giving anything at .לא תוכל להתעלם (דברים כ“ב:א-ג) :all An insight in this week’s parashah helped me rectify my actions and, ultimately, my perspective.

The Torah tells us: Give to him, and let not your heart turn...evil The Kli Chemdah points to the doubling of the verb Give in the verse (תתן נתן ,(and explains it to mean that if one has trouble giving, he should give a little to the first one who asks, and another small amount to the next poor person… Eventually, he will be able to change his habit and give more generously.

Indeed, this approach can help us become more generous and compassionate in other life areas as well. Besides the benefit of “small change” ultimately leading to big change, there are other significant benefits hidden in the mitzvah of tzedakah.

For one thing, the poor man gives the giver a change in perspective. The Torah tells us that there will always be poor people in the world. Why? Rabbeinu Bachye answers that a world with only rich people in it would fall apart economically:

If an individual needed something from someone else, no-one would ever feel a need to sell, and the result would be that money would lose its value. Therefore, there must always be poor people. (Chovat HaLevavot, Shaar HaBechinah, Ch.5).

On the surface, this is a bit perplexing. Rabbeinu Bachye seems to be saying that the poor must suffer their entire life to facilitate a healthy economy for the rich.

Indeed we find a similarly perplexing statement in the Talmud concerning poverty: Rabbi Akiva said that although G-d loves the poor, He allows them to suffer from poverty so that the rich should be saved from Hell when giving charity. (Bava Batra 10a)

How can G-d allow the poor to live a life of suffering just to save the rich from suffering in the next world? Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler zt”l explains that we do not appreciate just how great the merit of benefiting another human being actually is – and the poor person receives this merit!

It is told that when a poor man would knock on the door of Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer zt’’l, he would jump up and run to get some money so that the poor man would not need to waste an unnecessary second. His students offered to do the mitzvah for the Gadol HaDor, or at least open the door and let the poor person in. Rabbi Isser Zalman declined, however, explaining that he owes a tremendous debt to the poor.

In light of the fact that the existence of poor people is a Heavenly decree, he commented: “If not for this person being poor, then I might have to take his place. He is doing me a favor by filling that position in my stead.” (See Devarim 15:11.) When we meet a poor person, we sometimes hear a voice inside us saying: “Why doesn’t he go to work and make money?!” or, “Surely, there are better causes than this…”

Before listening to this voice, we would do much better to learn the laws of Tzedakah in detail and learn (or re-learn) all that Chazal have written about this mitzvah. It saves us from death, evil decrees, poverty, and Gehinom; and it brings us salvation, makes us better people, and unites us. And, as the prophet Yeshaya declared, Jerusalem will be rebuilt through charity (כז‘,א ישעיה.(‘ Besides, it often only costs a shekel!

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