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**The Importance of**

**Being a Mensch**

**By Daniel Keren**



**Rabbi Zev Smith**

 One of the featured speakers at the recent Flatbush Hakhel Event for the legal holiday of Presidents Day was Rabbi Zev Smith, internationally renowned Maggid Shiur who spoke on the topic of “Torah Macht Menschen: Torah Training in Interpersonal Relationships” which offered many practical daily examples of conduct that can help change your life.

 Rabbi Smith began his lecture with a story about a granddaughter of the Chofetz Chaim, zt”l, (Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, 1838-1933) who when an old lady living in Eretz Yisroel (the Land of Israel) told Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zt”l, 1910-2012 that when she was a young woman, she was enrolled in university and became greatly influenced by the non-religious Haskalah (enlightenment movement). Once when visiting the Chofetz Chaim, she challenged her holy grandfather. Why was he avoiding the outside world with all its worthwhile academic and non-Jewish intellectual opportunities that was changing the world for the better.

 The Chofetz Chaim prophetically told his granddaughter that those whom she admired make bombs that destroy people, but the Torah that we study “mach menschen” (makes refined people.) Mensch is a Yiddish word that refers to *someone that one can admire and emulate, a person of noble character.*

 The word “mensch,” unfortunately appears, Rabbi Smith said to be an endangered species. But that [becoming a mensch] is a goal we should all nevertheless aspire to.

 Not too long ago, we read in Parshat Mishpatim that we are not allowed to eat a treifa (non-slaughtered kosher animal) that was either mauled by a lion or other non-kosher predatory beast. Instead, we are commanded by the Torah to give this treifa slain animal to one’s dog. Why? One could sell the meat of the animal to a non-Jew and somewhat recuperate his financial loss.

**Commanded to Reward One’s Negligent Dog**

 But we are commanded to give the slain domestic animal to one’s dog. But, wasn’t it because of that dog’s carelessness that resulted in the Jew’s sheep or goat to be mauled and made into a treifah (non-kosher food)? Yet, the Torah is teaching us that we should not forget that with the exception of that one recent failure, wasn’t this same dog for many years extremely loyal to its master?

 Therefore, the Torah is commanding one to be a makir tov (demonstrate gratitude) and remember all the good that his dog had done for its master over the years. And for that obligation of gratitude, one should reward his dog by giving it the treifa to eat and enjoy.

 Today we might not all have dogs. But the need to be makir tov might happen when our spouse does something wrong that upset us. Should that one mistake justify our forgetting all the years that our spouse did mostly good for us? Shouldn’t we be makir tov for the many benefits that our partner in life is constantly doing in our behalf?

**Tragic Stories of Broken Friendships**

 Rabbi Smith say that there are tragically too many stories of good friends of many years who have allowed one mistake or misunderstanding to break up their friendship and create instead an almost deadly sinful enmity that the Torah strictly forbids us to entertain. This occurs only because one or both friends has forgotten the many years of mutual goodness to each other that once flourished naturally.

 We are commanded to not hate a Mitzri (Egyptian). Why? Because we were once guests+ in their land (Mitzrayim). This sounds very strange, for the Egyptians after the death of Yaakov, Yosef and his brothers, severely mistreated the Bnei Yisroel, including throwing newly born Jewish male babies into the Nile River. Nevertheless, the Torah is commanding us to treat an Egyptian convert decently because we have to still remember how during the years of severe famine, the Mitzrim sold us food that allowed us to survive and thus we still have an obligation of hakoras hatov.

**The Need to Give One’s Parents the Benefit of a Doubt**

 And certainly, if we have a sense of makir tov for an Egyptian whose ancestors had brutally mistreated us, shouldn’t we, Rabbi Smith asked, definitely give a benefit of a doubt to the parents who helped raise us, even if one has complaints on some of their techniques. We should still focus on being makir tov for those good things that our parents have done for us, including the gift of life. We can by doing rachamim (acts of compassion) for others, including our own family transform ourselves into the holy image of Hashem.

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of The Flatbush Jewish Jounal.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**Running from Sin**



 **QUESTION: If the tests that Hashem gives us are necessary to acquire greatness – we need these tests to cause us to prove ourselves and achieve perfection – so why do we pray for Hashem not to test us?**

 **ANSWER:** This is a question that is asked frequently here and so I’ll explain it to you like I always say. And it’s simple.

 If a man finds himself in a burning building, there are two courses.  One course is to get out as fast as he can. A second course is to remain and see how long he can endure it and then escape at the last minute.  Now it could be that someone might say he’s a hero if he could hang around for a while. But as the Chinese always say, “The hero is the one who runs away.”  That’s a hero.  If you run away, you’re a hero.  To save yourself is a first requirement.

**How to React to Perils of Temptation**

 And therefore, when you’re in peril of some temptation, the very best way to pass that test is by running away fast to avoid temptation.  That’s the reaction you should have. That’s how you acquire greatness.

 Now, sometimes a man is confronted with a temptation that he didn’t seek and there’s no escape. Then he’s really put to the test.  And the way he passes that test, that’s his greatness in that situation.

 But never look for tests.  Always stay out of the way of trouble.  And that’s the Jewish attitude, to stay out of places of temptation.  As much as possible הוי בורח מן העבירה כבורח מן האש.  Just like you flee from fire, so you flee from something that smacks of sin.

 A man called me up long distance, a frum man, married, who is working in a certain place.  He says there’s a young lady there that took a fancy to him.  And he’s somewhat perturbed.  What should he do?

 So, I said, “Drop that job immediately!  Don’t report for duty anymore!  It makes no difference!  You’re in great peril!  You can’t afford to flirt with something worse than death!”  People don’t realize that.

**The Italian Bachelor Next Door**

 I had a case once, a woman told me in confidence that the Italian bachelor next door speaks to her every day and she is quite friendly with him.

 So, I said, “Drop everything and take the first plane to Florida and don’t come back anymore.  Let your husband stay here to rearrange all the affairs and when he’s finished, he’ll follow you to Florida. You’re in great danger if you don’t do that!”

 I don’t know what happened; I’m sure she didn’t take my advice but that’s how you deal with danger like that. A sin is perilous and when it comes to peril, you run away. Let’s say, if a mafia man called you up and said, “I’m coming to your house tonight because you didn’t pay me up and I’ll take care of you.  I’ll bring along the cement.  I’ll see that you have a kimono of cement.”

 Are you going to wait for him?  You’ll take the first plane to Mexico and even though you’ll never be able to come back again.

 The same is for a sin!  It’s worse than a mafia man!  And therefore, we don’t seek tests.  הוי בורח מן העבירה!

 I once knew a case where there was a couple that had a sickly child.  And a physician for some reason told them that the child needs the climate of Southern Italy.  That was very many years ago; about sixty years ago.  I remember that.  He needed the climate of Southern Italy.  What did they do?  They moved to Southern Italy, that’s all.  They only had one child.  They couldn’t let his life be lost.  They moved to Southern Italy.  That’s some change!  They have to find a home.  They have to find a new livelihood.  They moved to save the child’s life!

 If you live way out near Bangor let’s say, in some country place in Maine, and you see your child is losing religion, there’s only one thing to do.  Drop everything and come back to Brooklyn.  Nothing to do!  You can’t help yourself.  You can’t put yourself in sakana of losing your life!  You have only one life to live!  And you see people are being lost constantly!  Intermarriage! Constantly people are going lost because they don’t run away from sin.

 And therefore, Jews have to take the most extreme steps to save themselves even if it means becoming a refugee.  A refugee drops everything.  He leaves all his clothing in the house.  He runs out of the house in the middle of the night and he runs down the street as far as he can to get away from home where the peril is threatening. He makes up his mind, “I’ll never come back again to the place of danger.  I don’t want to encounter the mafia man in my house!  If I come back there, my life is over!

 The same way, spiritual peril is much worse!  You have to do everything in your power to save yourself!

*Reprinted from the February 21, 2020 email of Toras Avigdor. Adapted from Tape #659*

**And the Kohen shall don his fitted linen tunic...and he shall remove the ashes (Lev. 6:3)**

When a person sins, he brings a sacrifice and repents, and resolves to be better in the future. It is forbidden to remind a penitent of his past, so removing the ashes from a sacrifice teaches us that a person can start over with no remaining traces of his sin. *(Iturei Torah)*

*Reprinted from the archives of L’Chaim Weekly (Issue 462, Tzav 5757/1997)*

**The Power of Every**

**Jew’s Perpetual Fire**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

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



 In this week's Torah portion, Tzav, we read the verse: "A perpetual fire shall always be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out."

 The priests in the Holy Temple were required to light a fire upon the altar in preparation for the G-dly fire which descended from Above to consume the sacrifices. Without this preparation, the G-dly fire would not come down from heaven.

 The fire that descended from Above came from G-d. Thus, unlike a fire that is kindled by human beings, it was unlimited in nature.

 Human beings, by contrast, are finite creatures; their abilities are likewise limited. Nonetheless, the priests had to first invest their own efforts in order for the G-dly, infinite fire to descend from on high. Thus, we see that the service of limited, finite creations is a necessary condition to attain a level that transcends limitation.

 When a person does all he is capable of doing, G-d grants him additional powers from Above. He becomes a "perpetual fire that burns always," enabling him to transcend his natural limitations.

 Every Jew possesses an inner, spiritual "Holy Temple" in which G-d's Presence dwells, as it states, "I will dwell in their midst." When a Jew invests the maximum amount of effort in kindling his spiritual flame, he merits a G-dly fire to descend from Above -- the bestowal of additional powers and an infinite abundance of blessing.

 What is the spiritual fire that burns in the inner Sanctuary of every Jew? None other than the warmth and enthusiasm he feels in his service of G-d. In the spiritual sense, observing the Torah and its commandments with enthusiasm is the equivalent of lighting a fire in one's inner Sanctuary.

 This vitality must extend to all three dimensions of Torah and mitzvot: the study of Torah, the service of prayer, and the performance of good deeds.

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| **Torah** | Learning Torah at fixed times is not enough if there is no enduring connection to the Torah throughout the day. Torah study must be so intense and vital to the Jew that it permeates his being and surrounds him constantly. |
| **Prayer** | A person mustn't pray by rote or simply out of habit. Indeed, the service of prayer is "the supplication for mercy and entreaty before G-d." |
| **Good deeds** | G-d's commandments are not to be performed merely to discharge our obligation. Rather, we must always endeavor to observe them in the most beautiful manner and to the best of our ability. |

 When a Jew does the above with enthusiasm, the fire he kindles upon his inner altar is whole. Such a person will merit that G-d's fire -- an unlimited fire -- will descend from Above, and he will see G-d's blessing in everything.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Tzav 5757/1997 edition of L’Chaim. Adapted from Likutei Sichot Vol 1.*

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**In the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered shall the sin offering be slaughtered (Lev. 6:18)**

 The Torah states that the two offerings should be slaughtered in the same place. A sin offering is brought for one who violated the Torah, while a burnt offering is brought as a contribution to the Holy Temple. If a person brings both at the same time, an observer won't realize that he sinned, but will think he is simply making a generous contribution. *(Rabbeinu Bachya)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Tzav 5757/1997 edition of L’Chaim Weekly.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein**

**On Parshas Tzav**



 The Torah reading of this week concerns itself with the tasks of the Priests in the Temple, regarding the sacrifices which were the centerpiece of the entire Temple service. The instructions that are given to the Priests are exact and detailed. In fact, the Hebrew word "tzav" which appears at the beginning of the reading and is where the Parsha gets its name, indicates a command.

 The strength of the word is that it is not a matter of negotiation, suggestion, or persuasion. It is simply a command that must be heeded and fulfilled. Part of the problem that always exists regarding religious worship service is that there is little room left for changing times and society that might influence the structure of the command itself.

 To a great extent, for instance, Jewish prayer service, which inherited aspects of the sacrifices in the Temple, has basically remained the same from the time of Ezra to our day. Naturally, it has been tweaked and adjusted, and prayers have been added and deleted as per the custom of the different Jewish communities scattered throughout the exile. However, it is the consistency of the prayer service itself, and the retention of its basic structure by all communities and groups, that Jewish life survived over the long centuries of persecution, and exile.

 It is not that innovation is necessarily contrary to established prayer service. It is, rather, that over the centuries, very few innovations have been able to attract more worshipers or more Jews, to be of true spiritual value and of lasting quality and interest. The problem with innovation, as with all things modern and current and up to date, is that in the society dedicated to the new and to innovation, almost automatically introduces ideas and practices that become obsolete in a very short period of time. They do not have staying power, and Judaism is always built for the long run and not for the short moments of seeming pleasure or current correctness.

 Traditional Jewish prayer has often been accused by the modernists as being too rigid, and without proper flash and excitement. Non-Orthodox movements constantly change their prayer books to reflect current events over the years, and decades that are the here and now of that society. However, any objective observer of these changes can testify that all the innovation: guitars, women cantors, political quotations, and other innovations that are part of modernistic local prayer services, have proven to be unable to attract worshipers to the synagogue and to any form of intense and meaningful prayer.

 Tampering with the old and creating the new has, in effect, destroyed the true concept of Jewish prayer and the spiritual satisfaction that one can gain only with the authentic words of prayer, that have been part of Jewish life for thousands of years. This is the essence of being commanded. It tolerates no major deviations, and by its consistency and historic resonance, creates spiritual connection and the pursuit of holiness. Couple this with the fact that Hebrew as a language does not easily translate into other languages, and that all sense of nuance is usually lost, no matter how good the translation may be, one can, understand why Judaism insists on prayer in its original language and in its original formal form and substance.

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

***And the flesh of the sacrifice of his thanksgiving peace-offerings; on the day of his offering, it shall be eaten (Lev. 7:15)***

 The peace-offering is one of lesser holiness, yet it may be eaten for two days and one night, but the thanksgiving peace-offering is limited to one day and night. The thanksgiving peace-offering is brought in recognition of and thanks for a miracle that G-d has done. Miracles occur on a daily basis, and limiting the time that the offering may be eaten teaches us that each day we should see the miracles that G-d performs on our behalf. *(Reb Avraham Mordechai M'Gur)*

*Reprinted from Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky*

**Remarkable Stories About Tzedakah Giving**



 The Torah commands us to open our hands and hearts to the poor, telling us: “If there will be among you a needy person, from one of your brothers in one of your cities in your land that Hashem is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy brother. Rather, you must open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his needs, which he is lacking.” (Devarim 15:8)

 Indeed, giving tzedakah is one of the traits for which Jews throughout the generations have gone above and beyond. This innate midah of tzedakah remained part of the collective conscience of the Jewish people, and even those who strayed from shemiras hamitzvos still maintain the wonderful quality of tzedakah.

 Just go to any hospital or museum, and you’ll notice that much of the funding for these institutions came from Jewish philanthropists. One of the remarkable things about tzedakah is the willingness – from great gedolim to the simplest of Jews – to invest much time and energy into giving tzedakah and lightning the load of their brethren.

**The Shirt Off His Back**

 “The rebbetzin of the Alter of Novardok,” writes Rav Chaim Zeitchik, “would relate that every erev Shabbos, after her husband would return from the mikvah, he was always missing his shirt. “When she would ask him what had happened, he would give various explanations. Once, it was this, and another time it was that… The bottom line was that he would give his shirt to a destitute person. He literally gave the shirt off his back to the poor every week.”

 Rav Chaim Brisker’s Tzedakah Rav Chaim Brisker is perhaps best known for his unique derech halimud or his unusual yiras chet, but equally incredible was his devotion to tzedakah and chesed. Rav Yechezkel Abramsky, a close talmid, related, “I was once in Rav Chaim’s home when two wealthy residents of Brisk came by and handed him a sealed envelope.

 “What was in the envelope? That week, the two had celebrated the wedding of their children and Rav Chaim had been mesader kiddushin. They came to give him a donation in honor of his efforts, as was customary in those days, whereby rabbonim would receive support as payment for siddur kiddushin.

 While they were there, a poor person entered and asked Rav Chaim for a donation. Without thinking twice and without even looking to see how much money there was inside, Rav Chaim gave the poor person the sealed envelope. The two wealthy individuals observed all of this, mouths open wide!”

**Why Rav Chaim’s Salary Was Given to His Wife**

 Rav Abramsky continued, “Even when a regular beggar would come to Rav Chaim for a donation, he would always give whatever he had. Sometimes it was a gold coin, but when he didn’t have money, it didn’t stop the rov from giving either. He would borrow money and give tzedakah that way!

 Rav Chaim was once asked, ‘You have so many debts from giving tzedakah – how will you pay them back?’ Rav Chaim answered, ‘There are plenty of wealthy Jews in Brisk who can afford to support their poor fellow inhabitants of Brisk.’ “Indeed, it wasn’t uncommon for Rav Chaim’s own family to not have enough money to buy bread. When the heads of the community of Brisk realized that the rov’s family was starving due to Rav Chaim’s seemingly endless tzedakah giving, they decided that from then on, they would give the rov’s salary to the rebbetzin…”

**“My Rebbetzin Collects Money at Weddings”**

 The phenomenal levels of tzedakah and chesed attained by Rav Naftoli Tzvi Halberstam, the Bobover Rebbe, attested to the import he attached to helping others – this, to him, was ruchnius. Before he was rebbe, during a period when Bobover mosdos were millions of dollars in debt, a formerly wealthy man – who was not a Bobover chossid – came crying that he had lost money in a bad deal, and the people to whom he owed massive amounts were giving him no respite. The rebbe told the person that he would call him back shortly.

 The man related, “I never thought I would hear from him again. When you ask someone for money and he says, ‘I’ll call you back,’ you know what that usually means… Forty-eight hours later, there was a knock on my door. A Jew stood there with an envelope containing $40,000 in cash. Astonished, I called the rebbe, explaining that I had only been expecting at most $5,000. How could the rebbe give so much?

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**Rav Naftoli Tzvi Halberstam, the Bobover Rebbe, zt”l**

 The rebbe replied, ‘It is fine. My rebbetzin collects money at weddings, and the funds are designed specifically for cases like these.’” The man felt that it would be appropriate for him to thank the rebbetzin too, and he called her to do so. But the rebbetzin was so astonished that she blurted out, “What?! I don’t collect at weddings! We ourselves are penniless, and I just received a notice in the mail that our electricity is about to be shut off pending payment!”

 The man guiltily called the rebbe back, but Rav Naftoli Tzvi immediately replied, “I have been taught that personal considerations should play no part in preventing one Yid from helping another Yid, if he can.”

 Another time, a chossid got himself into a messy situation, and was left with a choice of coming up with $100,000 immediately or facing serious ramifications. The rebbe could not bear to see the man’s tzoros, but he did not possess such a massive sum of money. Instead, he mortgaged his own house on 15th Avenue in Brooklyn in order to extricate the man from his predicament. (Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum - Yated August 28, 2019 )

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