

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Eikev



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Yiras Shamayim

It states in this week's parashah (10:12), ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקינו שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ה' "Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem request from you? Only to fear Hashem..."¹

From these words the Gemara learns, הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים, "Everything is in Hashem's hand except for *yiras Shamayim*." Fear of Heaven is up to each individual to attain.²

The Chasam Sofer writes, "*yiras Shamayim* is in Hashem's hands. Without Hashem's help, one wouldn't attain even a 1/1000th of the fear of Heaven he has. (Except for the very great tzaddikim, like the *avos* and Moshe Rabbeinu, who didn't need assistance to attain their fear of Heaven)... Man has free will to yearn for and to pray for *yiras shamayim* because desire isn't given from Above. It is something that one must attain on his own..."³

There are four kinds of *shomrim* (guardians who watch over another person's object): שומר חנם, שומר שכר, שוכר, שאול

free, for pay, a renter, and a borrower. The *shomer* who has the most stringent halachos and who is almost always obligated to pay if the item he's watching gets lost or ruined is the שואל, the borrower. Rebbe Boruch of Mezhibuz says that we can explain the *pasuk*, ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה as follows:

If you want Hashem to be your שואל, a Guardian who is obligated to protect you and to take care of you under all circumstances, the counsel is כי אם ליראה, to fear Hashem. If you fear Hashem, Hashem will always take care of you.

Additionally, fearing Hashem is *mesugal* for attaining bounty. The Noam Elimelech explains it with a *mashal*: Someone once wanted to send wine to his friend, but he didn't have a container to send it in. So, He asked his friend (the recipient of the gift) to lend him a silver flask, and then he returned the silver flask filled with the wine.

The Noam Elimelech explains that a person is himself is the vessel that Hashem

1. This pasuk is the first pasuk of (11:9- 10:12 היראה) which is a *segulah* for *yiras Shamayim* (*Sefer Yerei'im*).

Rebbe Boruch of Mezhibuzh *zt'l* taught: ועתה ישראל teaches us a lesson in *teshuvah*. One should think, ועתה, from now on, ישראל I will act as a Yisrael should.

Every Yid intrinsically has *yiras Shamayim*. All he has to do is to bring it forth. A hint to this concept is found in the words שואל מעמך and it doesn't state שואל ממך. This means, you already have fear of Heaven, it is עמך, with you. Hashem asks that you bring it forth.

2. The Rebbe of Kotzk explained: הכל בידי שמים חוץ מיראת שמים means whenever one davens, it is בידי שמים, in Hashem's hands to decide whether to answer the *tefillos* or not. For example, when one prays for wealth, Heaven may decide that it isn't good for him and therefore withhold from giving it to him. חוץ מיראת שמים, the exception is when one davens for *yiras Shamayim*. *Yiras Shamayim* (and success in Torah and mitzvos) is certainly good for him, and therefore, Heaven will certainly answer his *tefillos* and give it to him.

3. Reb Elimelech Ashkanazi *zt'l* said that once, on a weekday, he heard Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zt'l* say *birchas hashachar*. When the Rebbe came to the words, אל תביאנו לא לידי חטא ולא לידי עבירה ועון, "Don't bring me to sin..." he cried like a child pleading before his father to be saved from sin.

borrow, to be able to send him back bounty and goodness. As the *pasuk* says, מה ה' אלקיך, שואל מעמך, "When does Hashem borrow you, to use you as a vessel to give you bounty? כי אם ליראה, it is only when you fear Hashem... Because fear of Heaven makes you a fitting vessel to receive Hashem's bounty.⁴

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* said that there are three different types of fearing Hashem, and each one prevents a person from committing *aveiros*. They are יראת ה', יראת המא, שמים, ויראת המא. The translation of יראת ה' is to think that he is standing before Hashem (שוית), (ה' לנגדי תמיד), so how can he sin before Him? יראת שמים is to remember that Hashem is always bestowing His kindness from Heaven, and one must be afraid that he shouldn't sin and prevent the bounty from coming down from Heaven. יראת המא is to think about the lowliness of sin and to be fearful of the sin itself.

Shemiras Einayim

A basis for *yiras Shamayim* is to be cautious with what you see. This can explain why the fear of Heaven is called יראת שמים. The word יראת, fear, also means to see. If you are cautious with your eyes, you will fear Hashem.

One Succos, the *gabai* of Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zt'l* served the Rebbe soup. After tasting it, Rebbe Yissachar Dov asked his *gabai* why the soup was so cold. The *gabai* answered that he brought it in from the outdoors, and it cooled off. The Rebbe said,

"If soup gets cold by going through the city streets, what happens to a *Yid* who goes through the city streets?"

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* once said to a *Yid* from Warsaw, "To be in Warsaw, and to not be there, is to invest in Olam HaBa."

Reb Shmuel Wosner *zt'l* writes, "I heard from someone who heard it directly from the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l*, "To hold back, even just once, from walking in the streets of a big city, is a *keren* (capital fund) for Olam HaBa."

Reb Yochanan would bless his students, יהא מורא שמים עליכם כמורא בשר ודם, "You shall fear Heaven as much as you fear people made of flesh and blood."⁵

The Ben Ish Chai *zt'l* explained that fear of *בשר ודם*, flesh and blood, hints to a person's fear of their health. People are very concerned about their health. They wouldn't go to a place where there is a slight chance that they may catch a disease or become deathly ill, *chalilah*. We should act similarly when it comes to *yiras Shamayim*. We shouldn't go to impure places, or be careless with our eyes, which can jeopardize our *yiras shamayim*.⁶

Reb Meir of Permishlan *zt'l* said that the name of the *parashah*, עקב is *roshei teivos* for אות ברית קדוש, which means to have *kedushah*, and to guard one's eyes and thoughts.

Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin *zt'l* explained why the עי"ן of עקב is exchanged for an אל"ף (in the above *roshei teivos*). It is because the

4. It states (*Tehillim* 34:10), יראו את ה' קדושו כי אין מחסור ליראיו. The Beis Aharon *zt'l* explains, "Fear Hashem, because those who fear Him lack nothing - not in *ruchniyus* and not in *gashmiyus*!"

5. His students asked, "That's all? Shouldn't we fear Hashem more than we fear people?"

Reb Yochanan replied, "Halevay you should reach that level of fear! The proof is: When one commits an *aveirah* he says, 'I hope no one sees me.'"

6. Reb Zalman Brizel *zt'l* once fell into a manhole. Since then whenever he walked down a street he always looked ahead, to make sure there were no manholes in the road. If there was, he crossed the street. That one time that he fell made him cautious for the rest of his life. Similarly, we should be cautious from all spiritual pitfalls that can harm us as we go along the road of life.

foundation of *kedushah* is to give our עיני, eyes, to the אלוהי של עולם, to Hashem.

The Rishonim tell us that Rav Yosef and Rav Sheshes were Rav's students, and when Rav was *niftar*, they took upon themselves to follow the way of Rav. This meant not looking out of their four *amos*. When they saw that they couldn't be so cautious, they blinded themselves. They preferred to be blind than to see forbidden things. Some Rishonim say that they prayed to become blind, and that's what happened to them. (See *Shaarei Teshuvah* 168, and the Ramban and Ran on *Kiddushin* 31:). The Saraf of Strelisk *zt'l* said that this was also Dovid HaMelech's prayer (*Tehillim* 119:37), העבר עיני מראות שוא. He prayed that העבר עיני, that he should be blind rather than to see things he shouldn't be seeing.

Chazal say that the happiest *yom tov* of the year is the 15th of Av, because the girls would dance in the vineyard, and they would say, בחור שא נא עיניך, "*Bachur* raise your eyes..." and choose a *shidduch*. Reb Mordechai Chaim of Slonim *zt'l* noted that the great joy was that they had to tell the boys שא נא עיניך, to raise their eyes, because all the *bachurim* were guarding their eyes and keeping their eyes down. The *kedushah* of these young men was a reason for celebration.

Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zt'l* once needed to undergo surgery on his eyes, and he told the doctor that he didn't want to lie on his back. He wanted the operation to be performed while he was in a sitting position. (An aspect of *kedushah* is not to lie on one's back - only on the side - as discussed in the holy *sefarim*.) The doctor told him that he doesn't have experience operating when the patient is in a sitting position, and he cannot guarantee the results. But the Rebbe insisted, and this is how the operation was performed.

The Midrash (*Koheles Rabba* 3) writes that Reb Shimon ben Chalafta attended a *bris milah*, and when he came outside, he saw the Malach HaMaves smiling. Reb Shimon asked him why he was so happy. The Malach HaMaves replied, "I heard the father of the boy say that the leftovers from the *bris* will

be used for the boy's *chasunah*. He doesn't know that the boy will die in thirty days from now."

Reb Shimon ben Chalafta asked him how he knows that. The Malach HaMaves answered, "We have a book that tells when everyone will die."

Reb Shimon ben Chalafta asked, "When will I die?"

The Malach HaMaves replied, "The fate of people like you we have no way of knowing. Because it states (*Mishlei* 10:27), יראת ה' תוסיף ימים 'Fear of Hashem adds days.' Guarding your eyes just once, or overcoming the *yetzer hara* only once, can grant you life."

Birchas HaMazon

This week's *parashah* discusses the mitzvah of *birchas hamazon*, as it states (8:10), ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלקיך, "You will eat, be satiated, and bless Hashem your G-d."

The Magid of Mezritz *zy'a* said that we should be more cautious about saying *birchas hamazon* with *kavanah* than *Shemonah Esrei* with *kavanah*, because *Shemonah Esrei* is *derabanan*. In contrast, *birchas hamazon* is a mitzvah from the Torah!

The Yaavatz writes that every mitzvah has its *mazal*. Examples of mitzvos that have a good *mazal*, he writes, are the prohibitions of eating *chametz* on Pesach, *basar be'chalav*, and the mitzvos of Purim. He writes that these mitzvos have a good *mazal*, and no one considers transgressing them. But when it comes to *birchas hamazon*, people become lax. They mumble the words and say them without *kavanah*...even though it is a mitzvah from the Torah.

Birchas hamazon has many *segulos*. Some of them include:

1) Good Children

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zy'a* taught that saying *birchas hamazon* from a *siddur* (or *bencher*) with *kavanah* is *mesugal* for having

children and grandchildren who fear Hashem and are *talmidei chachamim*.⁷

2) Parnassah

The Chinuch (*Mitzvah* 430) writes, "I learned from my teachers...that whoever is careful with *birchas hamazon* will earn an honorable *parnassah* his entire life."

3) Protection

The Be'er Heitev writes (in the name of the Ba'ch) that there are no פ's in *birchas hamazon*, because the פ represents שַׁעַף קֶזֶף חֶרֶן אֶף (wrath and punishment) and whoever is careful with *birchas hamazon* will be protected from wrath and punishment.

4) Protection in the Grave

Shach al HaTorah (a student of the Arizal) says that whoever is cautious to say *birchas hamazon* with *kavanah* will not be eaten by worms and insects in his grave. The *blessings* of *birchas hamazon* will counter the curse of the worms.

He explains that ברוך is *gematriya* כ"ו (announcement). There is an announcement in Heaven that warns the worms not to harm this person who was careful with *birchas hamazon*.

We wrote that saying *birchas hamazon* with *kavanah* is *mesugal* for *parnassah* and for being protected against all forms of wrath and punishment. The following true story illustrates this:

Reb Shimon (an elderly Yid from Yerushalayim) lived in Lublin in his youth, shortly before the Holocaust. Reb Meir Shapiro *zt'l* once came to his cheder to test the students. After the test, Reb Meir Shapiro said to the students, "Generally, I give gifts or sweets to the children after a test, but this time, I don't have anything with me to give you. So, I will tell you about a *segulah*, and that

will be my gift to you. If you follow this *segulah*, you will always be successful, and you will lead tranquil lives."

Reb Meir Shapiro told them to be cautious with *birchas hamazon*. He said to them that the Ba'ch says that *birchas hamazon* is a *segulah* for protection, and he told them that the Chinuch says *birchas hamazon* is *mesugal* for *parnassah b'kavod*. He also said to them that the Be'er Heitev writes, "Those who are cautious will always say *birchas hamazon* from a siddur, and not by heart."

Reb Meir Shapiro *zt'l* quoted these sources and concluded, "This is my present to you."

Reb Shimon drank in the *segulah* - which was Reb Meir Shapiro's gift to them - and he decided right then and there that he would always be careful with *birchas hamazon*.

In cheder, his friends would *bench* quickly and go out to play, while he lingered, because it was important to him to *bench* properly.

A few years later, the Nazis invaded Poland. Soon, Reb Shimon found himself standing in line for a 'selektzia.' Whoever was short was being sent to the left for execution, and Reb Shimon was short! He prayed that he be saved from 'wrath and punishment' (שַׁעַף קֶזֶף חֶרֶן אֶף) in the merit of *birchas hamazon*. When it was his turn, he stood on his toes to appear higher. The Nazi signaled to the right.

Soon, Reb Shimon found himself standing in line once again. This time, each person had to tell the Nazi what he could do for *parnassah*. Reb Shimon didn't know what to say. He was only a teenager, taken away from yeshiva to this cursed place. As he waited in line, he prayed, "In the merit of

7. Someone told the Yismach Yisrael *zt'l* of Alexander that his son isn't cautious with *birchas hamazon*. The Yismach Yisrael told the father, "You be cautious with *birchas hamazon*, to say it from a siddur and with *kavanah*, and you will see that your son will do the same."

birchas hamazon, which is *mesugal* for *parnassah*, Hashem, please support me..."

Then, the person behind him tapped him on the shoulder, "Say you're a cook and that I'm your helper."

He said this, and they were both sent to work in the kitchen. As the Chinuch promised, since he was careful with *birchas hamazon*, he had enough food.

In the camps, Reb Shimon continued to be careful with *birchas hamazon*. For example, if he realized that he wouldn't have enough time to say the *birchas hamazon* properly, he wouldn't eat bread at that meal.

Once, a Nazi saw Reb Shimon working in the kitchen, and he said, "What are you doing here? You look like a young child."

"I work here," Shimon explained. "I'm the cook."

The Nazi took Reb Shimon outside and showed him a stony area, just outside the kitchen. "You have two hours to finish digging a two-meter ditch, or you will be buried in it." He gave him a tiny shovel.

At that time, the Nazis were digging trenches to hide in, in case the Russians would attack them. But this time, the task was impossible. The ground was covered with heavy stones, he was given a small shovel to work with, and the chore had to be finished in two hours!

Reb Shimon raised his eyes to Heaven and said, "I say *birchas hamazon* with *kavanah*. This is *mesugal* to save me from 'wrath and punishment.' I was saved before. Please save me again, in this merit."

A few moments later, a jeep filled with Nazis drove by and saw this young lad trying to dig a ditch with a small shovel. To tease him, they threw tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, and other vegetables at him. Reb Shimon thought, wryly, "I see that in the merit of *birchas hamazon*, I once again received the *brachah* for abundance. Now I need the

blessings for protection from wrath and punishment, too."

Shortly afterward, a jeep with Russian POWs (prisoners of war) showed up. When they saw all the vegetables around Shimon, they stopped and asked for them. (They were hungry because the Nazis didn't feed these prisoners, either.) With an authoritative voice, Shimon told the Russians, "When there is a pit two meters deep here, I will give you the vegetables."

The Russians had the right tools for digging. They took them out of their jeep and began digging the trench. There were several Russian soldiers, and the job was completed in half an hour.

The Nazi who gave Shimon two hours to dig the trench returned, and he saw that the task was completed. He said, "I always knew that G-d takes care of you. I just didn't realize to what extent." Reb Shimon was saved once again, in the merit of *birchas hamazon*.

When he came to Eretz Yisrael after the war was over, he continued to enjoy many blessings. He always had *parnassah*, and he married off all of his children honorably. He said that it was all in the merit of *birchas hamazon*.

Eating Properly

The Sefer Chassidim (46) writes, "Someone died young, several years before his time. After twelve months, he appeared to his relative in a dream. The relative asked him, 'How are things for you in the next world?'

"I am being judged daily because I wasn't careful to say *birchas hamazon* and *brachos* over foods with *kavanah*. They tell me that I was eating only for my own pleasure."

"But isn't the judgment in Heaven for only twelve months? You were *niftar* more than a year ago. Why are they still judging you?"

He replied, "The punishments of the first twelve months were more severe."

Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* writes, "My teacher, the Arizal, told me that attaining *ruach hakodesh* is dependent on how much *kavanah* one has when one says *brachos* on food. When *brachos* are said with *kavanah* they destroy the *kelipos* (impurities that are in the food), which makes the food pure to receive holiness. The Arizal warned me about this a lot."

Reb Chaim Vital adds, "A person must be extremely careful with *ברכת נהנין*, because the person... becomes holy from these *brachos*, as it says, *והתורה בתוך מעי*, your Torah is in my stomach, and a divine spirit comes to the person."

Reb Hillel Kolemaia *zt'l* was once visiting Rebbe Avraham Yaakov of Sadigura *zt'l*. When Reb Hillel Kolemaia was about to leave, the Sadigura Rebbe said to him, "Reb Hillel, you are renowned for your inspirational *mussar drashos*. Please tell me some *mussar*."

Reb Hillel replied, "I see that the Rebbe doesn't give *mussar* to his chassidim, and that isn't correct. Why don't you give them *mussar*?"

The Rebbe replied, "I teach my chassidim to eat properly - as a Yid should. If they will follow this lesson, everything else will fall into place. They don't need any other *mussar* other than that."

Halachah states, *אין קידוש אלא במקום סעודה*. The Pachad Yitzchak of Boyan *zt'l* said that this could be translated, *אין קידוש*, the only way to

attain *kedushah*, *אלא במקום סעודה*, is through eating a meal. Because when one eats a meal with proper *derech erez*, etc., he will achieve a lot of *kedushah*.⁸

We only say the words *kedushah* and *taharah* in *Al haMichyah* (*ונוברך עליה בקדושה ובטהרה*). We don't say these words in *birchas hamazon*.

Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zy'a* explains that when one eats bread, the meal begins with washing one's hands. He eats sitting down. He dips the bread in salt, etc. The entire meal has an atmosphere of *kedushah* and *taharah*, so he doesn't need to be reminded to eat properly. But when it comes to eating cake and other forms of *mezonos*, one doesn't wash his hands, and people often eat "on the go" without sitting down, without *kedushah* and *taharah*. Therefore, specifically in the *al hamachiyah* we are reminded to eat with holiness. We should say the *brachos* properly and eat with *derech erez* when eating cake, too.

There was a country whose residents had questions in *emunah*. They wrote to the Rambam, "Although the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 96) proves from *pesukim* that the dead will be resurrected in the future (*techiyas hameisim*), the *pesukim* that the Gemara brings to prove that can be understood differently."

The Rambam didn't want to answer them himself, so he asked his student, Reb Shmuel ibn Tibon, to reply. Reb Shmuel's letter is written in *Degel Machaneh Efraim (Eikev)*, as he received it from the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l*. Reb Shmuel ibn Tibon wrote the following to the people of that country:

8. At the *chasunah* of one of the Pachad Yitzchak's children, a halachic question arose. The waiters hadn't yet served dessert, and it was already morning. The question was whether they could serve the dessert before *Shacharis*. The *talmidei chachamim* who were present at the wedding debated the matter, and the Pachad Yitzchak told someone to go to Reb Dovidya Ortinberg (author of *Tehilah l'David*) to ask him.

While they were waiting for the messenger to return with Reb Dovidya's ruling, someone said, "We're allowed to rely on the opinions that it's permitted to eat the dessert."

The Pachad Yitzchak replied, "How would we appear if we would do everything that's permitted?"

"...When one is careful and doesn't eat non-kosher foods, ...he will have a pure heart and a clear mind to grasp the Source of all life – Hashem – Who created the entire world. When one is even more careful, and he eats with *kedushah* – according to the ways of the Torah – his mind and all of his 248 limbs will be holy and pure. The opposite, *chas veshalom*, also occurs. Because [when one isn't careful with what and with how he eats, he will have] a rusty mind, filled with foreign thoughts... He will not be aware that Hashem is the source of all life. He is impure, and he thinks foreign and heretic thoughts. The *tanaim* and the *Amoraim* were careful not to become impure by eating the bread of the *yetzer hara* or the *yetzer hara's* wine. Therefore their minds were bright, had *ruach hakodesh* and were able to explain every concealed phrase of the holy Torah. The spirit of G-d was with them... But these people [who question the veracity of *techiyas hameisim*] are certainly impure, and their blood is impure... This is why they are thinking heretic thoughts, and they cannot perceive the sweetness of the Torah, which is the wisdom of the G-d of the world, the great King."

Reb Shmuel Ibn Tibon concludes, "Since they had so much chutzpah and left the Jewish camp, a murderer will soon come on them and destroy them and everything they own."

The Baal Shem Tov concludes that that is what happened: "A few days later, a great king came, and killed them and took away all their money."

The Degel Machaneh Efraim *zt'l* uses these ideas to explain a *pasuk* in this week's *parashah*. It states (10:16), *ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם, וערפכם לא תקשו עוד*, "Circumcise your hearts, and your necks won't be hard anymore." This is referring to someone cautious with kashrus and with eating with *derech erez*, according to the ways of the Torah. This circumcises his heart. Because food creates blood, and due to his caution to eat appropriately, he has good, pure blood flowing to his heart.

The *ערף*, neck, represents rebellion. *וערפכם לא תקשו עוד*, he won't be rebellious, instead he will have pure *emunah* in Hashem.

Chinuch

There are times when parents feel that they need to rebuke their children to direct them on the right path. Sometimes this is necessary. However, parents should be careful to do so in the right way, because if they aren't cautious, they can cause more harm than good. Here are a few guidelines:

The rebuke should be given (1) without anger, (2) without jumping to conclusions, (3) with a focus on the child's good side, (4) and often, add words of encouragement.

We will elaborate, and we begin with the first rule:

1) Without Anger

A father and child were once walking through a park. Someone was walking towards them. That person noticed that the child was misbehaving, and the father was shouting, "Yaakov, calm down! Yaakov, calm down!"

When they came closer, the man realized that the misbehaving child was a girl. He couldn't contain his curiosity, so he asked the father, "Why do you call your daughter Yaakov?"

The father replied, "My daughter's name is Shira. I wasn't speaking to her. I was speaking to myself, and my name is Yaakov. Shira was misbehaving, and I was on the verge of getting angry. So, I told myself, 'Yaakov, calm down! Yaakov, calm down!'..." Because one can't discipline children when he is angry.

A father once got very angry at his child because his child was speaking during davening. The Chazon Ish *zt'l* told him, "You taught your child two things: That he shouldn't speak during davening, and that it is o.k. to get angry. The lesson that he shouldn't speak during davening was taught

with words, and that one can get angry was taught by actions, and a lesson that is expressed in actions makes a deeper impression." So instead of teaching his child to refrain from speaking during davening, he may have taught his child the bad attribute of becoming angry.

One Shabbos morning, someone said to the *gabbai* of a shul: "You can give me *shlishi* or *shishi* or *maftir*. Either one is good enough for me." With this short conversation, he was telling the *gabbai* that he wants honor, and he shouldn't consider giving him an *aliyah* that isn't from the most respected *aliyos*.

The *gabai* didn't respond, and by *kriyas haTorah*, he didn't give him any *aliyah*. Shortly before the *tefillah* was over, this man went onto the *bimah* and publicly insulted the *gabai* for not giving him an *aliyah*. He shouted: "Everyone knows that this *gabai* is a fool, an imbecile, an idiot..."

The *gabbai* complained to the rav: "I did nothing wrong. I'm not obligated to honor everyone who decides that he deserves the greatest honors. Why did he embarrass me like that?"

The Rav sent his *gabai* to summon the imprudent man. When he arrived, the Rav said, "You can't humiliate people like that in public. You must ask *mechilah* from the *gabbai*. Next Shabbos, I want you to go to the *bimah* once again, and in front of everyone announce, "In regards to what I said last week (that the *gabai* is a fool, an imbecile, etc.) it isn't true..."

The man promised to do precisely as the Rav commanded.

On the next Shabbos, shortly before the end of the *tefillah*, this man went onto the *bimah*, banged on the *bimah* to catch everyone's attention and said, "About what I said last week (that the *gabai* is a fool and imbecile, etc.) it isn't true?"

He said exactly what the Rav told him to say, only in a rhetoric tone. He was implying, once again, that the *gabai* was indeed a fool.

Once again, the *gabbai* complained to the Rav, and the Rav called for this man and rebuked him. "But what did I do wrong?" the man asked the Rav. "I said exactly what the Rav told me to say. I indeed said it in a slightly different tune. I didn't know that the Rav is such a stickler about tunes. I didn't realize that the tune means so much to you..."⁹

This story reminds us that the tone a person uses can change the entire meaning of his words. The very same words, when said with anger, contempt, or disrespect, will be understood differently. When rebuking or reprimanding your child, make sure that the tone is pleasant, so the child is willing to listen and to accept.

2) Don't Jump to Conclusions

Before offering criticism, make sure you have all the information. Maybe you misunderstood what occurred, and the child doesn't deserve any rebuke at all.

A rebbe once came late to class, and one of his young students was pointing to his

9. A similar story is told about a father who didn't know how to read, and his son wrote him a letter, asking for money. The father asked his friend to read the letter to him. The man read the letter in an impatient tone, and by the way this man read it, the father heard that his son is demanding money. The father was very upset that his son wasn't asking with humility and respect. But later, someone else read the letter to him in a patient, pleading voice. "Father, please send me money..." Expressed that way, the father was willing to send money to his son.

This *mashal* was told by tzaddikim to express how the very same words take on different meaning, depending on how they are spoken.

watch, with a big smile on his face. The intention was obvious. He was rebuking the Rebbe for coming late, which is chutzpah. The Rebbe decided to push off reprimanding the child until the break. Throughout the entire lesson, the child kept looking at his watch and playing with it. The Rebbe understood this to be chutzpah, but he decided he wouldn't make an issue of it until the break. At the break, the child immediately ran over to the Rebbe and said, "Look at my new watch! My father bought it for me!"

The child just wanted to share his excitement over his new watch with his Rebbe. There was no chutzpah.

Similarly, it often happens that we only know half the story, and we jump to conclusions, and the rebuke is misplaced. Therefore, before offering rebuke, it is always worthwhile to clarify the details.

3) Don't see the Bad; Focus on the Good

Consider the following story:

Rebbe Dovid Lelover *zt'l* was once in someone's home to collect *tzedakah*, and it took him a very long time until he came out. When he came out, his partner on this *tzedakah* campaign, the Yid HaKadosh of Peshischa *zt'l*, asked him what took so long.

Rebbe Dovid replied, "I saw so much *yiras Shamayim* in that home, I simply felt that I couldn't leave. I wanted to be there, in a place of a *yiras Shamayim*."

"What did you see?"

"In this home, the father and son worked together. The son was angry at his father for not doing the work correctly, and he said, 'If I didn't fear Hashem, I would kill you!' I saw that he fears Hashem. I was so impressed; I couldn't leave home."

In this story, Rebbe Dovid of Lelov didn't hear the bad side of the son's words. He only heard the good. This is an approach that should often be followed: See the good

in your children, and don't even recognize the bad that's there.

Someone with *shalom bayis* issues once came to Reb Ben Tzion Abba Shaul *zt'l* and told the Rav about the many faults he saw in his wife. Reb Ben Tzion Abba Shaul listened patiently.

When he finished, Reb Ben Tzion Abba Shaul said, "What you tell me reminds me of a person who comes to someone's home, sticks his nose in the garbage can and shouts, 'It smells terribly in this house.' The homeowner replied, 'Take your nose out of the garbage, and you will discover that the house doesn't smell bad. You can enjoy the wonderful smells of fresh-baked foods that are in this home.' You reminded me of this story because I see you are only focusing on the bad. Focus on the good, and you will see how good your spouse is."

In *chinuch habanim*, we also advise parents not to harp on the faults. Focus on the good of your child, and the bad won't be so prominent anymore. You may still decide that you must rebuke your child to direct him on the right path, but when you are aware of the child's goodness, it will be said in a much kinder tone. And your focus on the good will help your children become even better.

(4) Offer Encouragement

Children can reach very high levels, but they need support. They need to hear that they are on the right path and that they can succeed.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov *zt'l* said that if he had received encouragement in his younger years, he would have reached higher levels.

The Leshem *zt'l* (the grandfather of Reb Eliashiv *zt'l*) wrote a *sefer* on kabbalah, and years later he heard that when his *sefer* arrived in Bagdad, the Ben Ish Chai *zt'l* wore Shabbos clothing for three days as he celebrated and studied this new *sefer*. The

Leshem said, "Had I known about this then, I would have written more *sefarim*."

People need encouragement, to be aware of the good they are achieving.

The Alter of Slobadka *zt'l* would tell his advanced students: "You can become like Reb Akiva Eiger" and he showered them with similar compliments because he understood that these words could bring his students to the highest levels.

The Arizal used to pour compliments onto his primary disciple, Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l*. At times, he even compared him to the *tana'im*. This confused Reb Chaim Vital, as he said to the Arizal, "I know my level. I don't come close to the heels of those great *tzaddikim*. Why does the Rebbe praise me so much?"

The Arizal answered him that due to the *tumah* that is in the world in their generation, it is extremely difficult to serve Hashem. Therefore, every small deed performed in their time was comparable to many great deeds of the past, in the era of the *tana'im*.

The Arizal taught this approximately 450 years ago. Today, each good deed is certainly of even greater value, for the world has since then become even more impure.¹⁰

Why did the Arizal tell his student about his exceptional levels? It is because he knew that the encouragement would help Reb Chaim Vital reach his potential. Similarly, everyone can grow immensely with encouragement. If we can provide it – especially for children – it will help them reach their potential.

Reb M. Y. Horowitz *shlita*, *av beis din* of Linsk, Boro Park, wanted to call someone, but he accidentally called someone else with a similar name. (He searched for the name in his contacts list, and, as it often happens, he accidentally pressed "call" on the wrong number.)

He immediately recognized his error but decided to let the call go through. It would be good to hear how this man, whom he called by accident, was faring.

This man was a divorcee who davened in his *beis medresh*. At the time of this phone call, he was in Europe for a summer vacation.

Reb Horowitz greeted him warmly and asked how he was. The man was startled. "It can't be that you called just to ask me how I am." Reb Horowitz insisted that he just wanted to hear how he was doing.

The next time they met in their *beis medresh* in Boro Park, the man said to Reb Horowitz, "You can't imagine how much you helped me with your phone call. As you

10. The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* was once in Alik for Shabbos. Around Minchah time, his host was listening to a mussar *drashah* from a visiting *baal darshan*. The Baal Shem Tov heard that this *baal darshan* speaks negatively on the Jewish nation, speaking about their sins and faults, and this upset the Baal Shem Tov. He went to the *drashah* and told his host to leave, which he did. Others saw this and also left, until few people remained and the *baal darshan* stopped speaking.

Sunday, the *baal darshan* came to the Baal Shem Tov and asked him why he stopped his *drashah*. The Baal Shem Tov began to cry, "Do you speak about the bad of the Jewish nation? Know that when a Yid spends the entire day in the marketplace, and when it gets late he jumps up and says, 'Oy, I almost missed Minchah,' and then he goes to a side room and he davens Minchah, and he doesn't know what he is saying...the *malachim* in heaven are afraid of him!" (*Shivchei Baal Shem Tov* 132).

The Trisker Magid (*Magen Avraham*) tells that his father, Rebbe Mordechai of Chernobyl *zt'l*, repeated this lesson in the name of the Baal Shem Tov. He added that the Baal Shem Tov said, "This Yid *krechted* and moaned when he remembered that he spent the entire day in the workplace, almost forgetting Hashem, and almost forgetting to daven Minchah. And then he goes off to a side and he davens Minchah without *kavanah*. His *krechzt* tore through all the heavens."

know, I'm all alone in the world, and I'm on a very low level, spiritually. When you called, I was in a hotel in Italy, at the gateway to Gehinom, ready to commit an *aveirah*. And then you called, just to ask how I was doing. I saw that someone cares about me. This protected me from sinning..."

Today, this man has remarried and is building a *bayis ne'eman beYisrael*.

Let us learn from this story the following points:

(a) Those involved in *kiruv* shouldn't feel they aren't successful. Sometimes, a simple phone call can save a person's life. Remember: One can be accomplishing a lot even when he isn't aware of it.

(b) Hashem strives to save even those who have fallen very low. Even at the gateway of Gehinom, Hashem sought to save him.

(c) Hakadosh Baruch Hu leads the world with *hashgachah pratis*. The man received the call just when he needed it.

(d) This story is a reminder of the power of a kind gesture – how much it does for a person.

Similarly, let us recognize the power of encouragement, how much it means to people, and to what levels they can reach when they receive it.

Therefore, we must be cautious when rebuking children, not to destroy their spirit. We mustn't lose sight of their goodness, and we must believe in their potential. Then they will reach levels they, and their parents, didn't know were possible.¹¹

Good Friends

Another primary lesson in *chinuch habanim* is to be cautious that your children have good friends, who will have a positive influence on them.

A father complained to Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zt'l* that his son used to study diligently, but lately, he was showing signs of disinterest, and it seems that he was going through a spiritual decline. The Belzer Rav replied, "Check out who his friends are."

The father called the entire staff of the yeshiva: the *rosh yeshiva*, the *mashgiach*, the *magid shiur*, and they all told him that his

11. The Navi (*Yechezkel 37*) tells that in a prophetic vision, Hashem brought the *navi* Yechezkel to a valley filled with many dry bones, and Yechezkel saw them turn to life. The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (פסח תקס"ד ד"ה בהפמרה רסח) explains that these bones represent people who have many sins. Hashem asked Yechezkel, התחייה העצמות האלה, "Can these bones ever live?" In other words, "Can these sinners ever do *teshuvah*?"

Yechezkel replied, ה' אלקים אתה יודע, "Hashem, You know." But Yechezkel wasn't certain. It seemed that they sinned so much, they can never do *teshuvah*.

Hashem showed Yechezkel that they can do *teshuvah* and come back to life, again. As the Chasam Sofer writes, "Hashem told the *navi* the following great principle: Even the greatest *rasha*, if you guarantee him that he will become close to Hashem, he will willingly endure the bitterness of upholding the yoke of Torah with all its details. What prevents him from doing *teshuvah* is that he thinks he can never keep the Torah... Hashem encourages those bones, those sinners, and Hashem tells them, אני מביא רוח וחייהם, 'you will live. You will improve your ways.' With that awareness and encouragement, they will certainly [do *teshuvah*]..."

Similarly, the Or HaChaim (*Bamidbar 23:10*) writes, "I met *resha'im* who told me clearly that if they could do *teshuvah* and die immediately, they would do *teshuvah*. Only they know [that they won't die immediately, and they know] that they aren't able to remain on the path of *teshuvah* for long, because they feel obligated to obey the decrees of the מלך זקן וכסיל, the foolish old king, [the *yetzer hara*]..."

But, as Hashem told Yechezkel, with encouragement, they can succeed in *teshuvah*. And with encouragement, everyone can reach the highest levels.

son has good friends. "There are no bad *bachurim* in the yeshiva," they assured him.

The father returned to the Belzer Rebbe and told him what he heard. Once again, the Rebbe replied, "Check out who his friends are."

The father realized that he was foolish for not relying on what the Belzer Rav told him. If the Rebbe said to check the friends, that was indeed the problem. So, this time, the father dug deeper. There was one boy in yeshiva, who was a close friend to his son, who seemed to have *yiras Shamayim*, but after some inquiries, the father discovered that he was a bad influence. The father told his son to keep away from that boy, which he did. Soon afterward, his son's learning and *yiras Shamayim* returned to their previous levels.

The father told the Belzer Rebbe about the improvement. The Belzer Rebbe replied, "It isn't surprising. Twice in *birchas hashachar* we daven to be saved from a bad friend: והרחיקני... מאדם רע ומחבר רע... שתצילינו מאדם רע ומחבר רע. This underscores just how hazardous a bad friend can be."¹²

The Shlah taught, if your *חבר*, friend, is a *חרב*, a dangerous sword, *ברח* run away from him. But if he is *בחר* which means chosen/elite, for he has *yiras Shamayim* and does good deeds, then be his *חבר*.

Rebbe Ben Tzion of Bobov *zt'l* asked a *bachur* of his yeshiva, "In *Shemonah Esrei* we say, והודים מהרה תעקר ותשבר ותמגר ותכלם ותשפילם ותכניעם, במהרה בימינו 'and the *resha'im* should soon be uprooted, destroyed...humbled, subjugated, speedily in our days.' The meaning of most of these words are known, but what does *ותמגר* mean?"

The *bachur* said he didn't know. The Rebbe replied, "I also don't know. But I can tell by its neighbors that it isn't something good." The Rebbe was hinting that one's friends indicate who you are. Therefore one must be extremely careful with his choice of friends.

Lessons from Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zt'l*

Those who are fortunate to have good children should be wise and not tell others. Why tell people about your good children, and bring an *ayin hara* onto them *ch"v*? Furthermore, Rebbe Aharon of Belz *zt'l* said that perhaps the person you are speaking to doesn't have such good children, and when you tell them about yours, they will be jealous and feel bad.

The Belzer Rav (his *yahrtzeit* is on the 21st of Av) was always cautious with the feelings of others. For example, the Belzer Rav would never wake up another Yid (except for *kriyas Shema*, because the Zohar states that if one misses saying the *Shema*, he is in *niduy*, a ban, in heaven

12. Someone was offered a job. There weren't any halachic problems with this job. No theft, *chilul Shabbos*, etc., was involved. The problem was that he would have to work among *goyim* and non-religious *Yidden*. He asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l* whether he should take the job, explaining that he feared he may be influenced by his co-workers, and that might result with *kaltkeit* (coldness, disinterest) in his *yiras Shamayim*.

The Chazon Ish replied, "Kaltkeit in *yiras Shamayim* is יהרג ואל יעבור." Better to be killed, than to become cold and disinterested in *avodas Hashem*.

A boy joined the Mizrachi movement, and the father was upset about that. The son said to his father, "Let's go to the Belzer Rav (Rebbe Aharon *zt'l*). The Rebbe always sees good in *Yidden*. I'm certain he will tell you it isn't so bad that I joined the Mizrachi movement."

They went to the Belzer Rebbe, but the Rebbe didn't support the boy's affiliation. The boy said, "But Rebbe! The Mizrachi are also *Yidden*."

The Rebbe replied, "Yes. The Mizrachi are also *Yidden*. But Chazal say that the *Shechinah* is in *Maariv*, in the west, and Mizrachi is in the East..."

for the entire day. The gaba'im tell that if one of the gaba'im accidentally missed saying Shema, he would be afraid to come in to the Rebbe that day.)

Once, erev Shabbos, Rebbe Aharon asked his gabbai to prepare hot coffee and cake for him. The gabbai was surprised by this request, because Rebbe Aharon never asked for something like that before (and in general, Rebbe Aharon hardly ate). When the gabbai brought in the coffee and cake, the Rebbe said, "Go to the beis medresh and find Mr. So-and-So. I was just in the mikvah, and I heard him say, 'After a warm mikvah like this one, all that is needed is a hot coffee and cake...'" The Rebbe wanted to give this Yid the pleasure that he sought. This is an example of the Rebbe's good nature and desire to do kindness to others.

It is known that the Shinover Rav zt'l became Rebbe when his father, the Tzanzer Rav zt'l, was still alive, and there were signs that his father wasn't happy about it. Someone was telling the Tzanzer Rav about how special his son is, and that he is fitting to be a Rebbe. He told him about the Shinover Rav's hasmadah and erudition in Torah, but his father replied, "That makes him a good rav, but that still doesn't make him a 'Rebbe.' The man told the Tzanzer Rav about a time that the Shinover Rav gave away his own coat to a poor person who couldn't afford one. The Tzanzer Rav replied, "If so, it is fitting for him to be a Rebbe!"

On this note, it is told that as a child, the Belzer Rebbe would give away his buttered sandwich every day in exchange for a poor child's bread without butter. He explained to the poor child, "I don't like butter."

Rebbe Aharon of Belz was cautious with the attribute of hakaras hatov. Once, he himself went to thank someone who helped him. His gabbaim asked him, "You ask us to do so many things for you. Why do you have to thank this man by yourself? We can do it for you?"

He replied, "In chazaras hashatz everyone says modim. This is because when it comes

to expressing gratitude, one can't rely on others to thank for him. One must express his gratitude himself. Therefore, I want to thank him personally."

Once, he needed a place to sleep in Lizensk (after he davened at the tzion of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk) and the room he was shown wasn't to his liking (because he sensed with his ruach hakodesh that it was beneath a girl's room, and due to his extreme spiritual sensitivities, it wasn't fitting for him to sleep there). One of the sons of the family offered his room to the Rebbe. The Rebbe asked him, "But where will you sleep?"

"I can go to relatives" he replied.

The Rebbe slept there for two nights. Years later, this boy, who gave his room to the Rebbe, was childless and he came to Rebbe Aharon of Belz for a brachah. The Rebbe recognized him (although when they first met, he was only a child) and said, "Two nights, two children" and he had two children. The story demonstrates how the Belzer Rav never forgot a favor and he had hakaras hatov to pay back when he could.

As a chasan, the Rachmestrivka Rebbe shlita (of America) went to the Belzer Rav for a brachah and for hadrachah (advice for his upcoming marriage). The Belzer Rav told him, "In this generation, people are weak, emotionally, and therefore one must be cautious never to disregard another person's opinion. Even if you disagree, say, 'I understand what you're saying, but I think things should be done this way.' Don't totally disregard what they say." The Belzer Rav also told him that at the chasunah he should be kind to the broken-hearted guests and to serve them cake, etc.

Rebbe Uri of Strelisk zt'l said that when one has something to retort to someone who insulted him, but he refrains from saying it, it is equivalent to fasting 84 days. Rebbe Aharon of Belz zt'l added, "And I say אין נאך אין נאך it is worth much more than 84 fast days."

Once, when Rebbe Aharon of Belz zt'l was bending down to enter a taxi, he said, "If you want to get someplace in this world, you have to bend your head." Be humble, let others have their way, and you can succeed in life.

A story is told of a deer that wasn't able to run freely through the forest, because its horns were constantly getting caught in the branches. The deer started knocking down the trees, so it could run freely. A wise animal said to the deer, "You will never knock down all the trees. Instead, cut off your horns, and you will be able to run freely through the forest." Similarly, when one wants matters to go solely his way, he will always be frustrated and disappointed. But when one lets others have their way, he can run freely through life.

When Rebbe Aharon of Belz zt'l became Rebbe, one of his principles, that he would follow rigorously, was to uphold all the customs and traditions of his father, who was the Belzer Rebbe before him. There was another principle that the Belzer Rebbe lived by: *א איד טאר נישט אויס פירן*, "A Yid mustn't insist that things go his way." Others have their own opinions about how things should be done, and one must take their view into account. Not everything has to be the way he sees it.

These two ideals were sometimes conflicting, because sometimes other people's needs and views contrasted a tradition that he received from his father. At those times, the Belzer Rebbe had to choose one principle over the other.

One motzei Yom Kippur, one of his chassidim received a telegram that his wife was in labor. This chassid didn't want to go home without receiving a brachah from the Rebbe. Especially, now that his wife was in labor, he wanted a brachah for an easy childbirth. But he knew the Rebbe doesn't give brachos until after the motzei Yom Kipur-Hamavdil tish. That was the Rebbe's tradition, which he received from his father, and a tradition the Rebbe didn't want to change.

The chasid didn't know what he should do. Should he wait until after the Hamavdil tish? But his wife was in labor! Should he ask the rebbe for a brachah before the tish? But that wasn't the Rebbe's custom.

The chassid told his dilemma to Rebbe Moshe hy'd, the Rebbe's son. Rebbe Moshe replied, "The Rebbe will be coming down in a couple of minutes. Stand next to the stairway, and when the Rebbe comes down, ask him."

The chassid did that. He told the Rebbe about the telegram, and that he desires to receive the Rebbe's blessing before heading home.

The Rebbe replied, half to himself and half to the chassid, "My father never wished people a good year before the Hamavdil tish, but a Yid tor nisht ois firen" (a Yid mustn't insist to always have his way). He repeated these two sides of his dilemma several times, and then he said, "but a Yid tor nisht ois firen," and he gave his hand, and wished him a good year and an easy childbirth.

May the Belzer Rav's merits protect us and all of Klal Yisrael, amen.