

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Paysach Krohn

The Healing Gemara

In the aftermath of the war, Rabbi Aharon Paperman, a former army chaplain, studied in the Telz yeshiva along with serving as a rabbi in Springfield, Massachusetts. When news arrived that many Displaced Persons (DP) camps were being set up throughout Europe, Rabbi Paperman approached Rav Elya Meir Bloch zt"l, the venerable Rosh Yeshiva of Telz, and asked if he should leave his rabbinical position and travel to one of the DP camps and help the Jews there.

Rav Bloch replied, "Rabbi Paperman, if I was young enough, I would stop being the Rosh Yeshiva and leave to go and support those Jews in these camps. Of course you should go."

Rabbi Paperman followed Rav Bloch's advice and headed to a DP camp outside Italy. He put together a makeshift office, and to some Jews, he provided medication, to others clothing, and still to others, some financial support and regards from lost family members.

Then one day, in walked a man by the name of Yitzchak Sieger. "What can I do for you?" asked Rabbi Paperman, dressed in his neatly pressed army uniform. "Sir, could you please get me a Gemara, Tractate Bava Kama?" "What?" asked Rabbi Paperman, visibly confused. "Are you familiar with the Gemara, Tractate Bava Kama?" reiterated Yitzchak Sieger. "I am; I am a student of the Telz yeshiva," said Rabbi

Paperman. "But tell me, why do you need it right now in the DP camp?"

"Four years ago, I was in Hungary, sitting in the middle of a kitchen and learning the Gemara Bava Kama, when suddenly, the Nazis barged in and took me away. I haven't opened up a Gemara since then, and it deeply pains me. I so miss it. I miss the Gemara. Can you please find me a Gemara so I can nurse myself back to health?"

Rabbi Paperman immediately closed the office, and headed straightaway to a library that was not far, though had been ransacked. Fortunately, it had not been burned completely.

Rabbi Paperman shortly thereafter walked out of the dilapidated library with a tattered volume of Bava Kama. He handed the Gemara to Yitzchak, whose eyes moistened with tears and hands quivered as he took hold of the precious Gemara. He could not contain the emotions he felt there, at that moment, as he held onto nothing less than life itself, in his hands and in his heart.

That Gemara brought Yitzchak Sieger back to life, and he eventually moved to New York and started a family, from which children and grandchildren grew on.

How did this happen? What made Yitzchak ask for a Gemara?

It comes back to one of the songs we sing on Simchas Torah: "Toras Hashem temimah meshivas nafesh – The Torah of G-d is perfect, re-

The TorahAnyTimes is a publication of



Compiled and Edited by Elan Perchik

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plenishing the soul.” Torah is calming tranquility for the soul.

We live amidst difficult times and we are worried about many things. Where do find serenity amidst it all? In a shul, in a beis midrash, within our Torah books and Torah classes.

When we take in words of Torah, it breathes new life into us.

Whether you learn Chumash, halacha, Tanach, Gemara or anything else, your soul is ignited and you feel more alive than any other human experience.

Indeed, as the saying goes, when you pray, you are talking to G-d; when you learn, G-d is talking to you.

Yitzchak Sieger knew what that meant.

Rabbi YY Jacobson

It's Not You

Sit back for a moment and read the following. Allow your heart and mind to soak in a deep truth about yourself.

When things come up, don't be afraid of any of your feelings. You're bigger than any of your emotions. You can contain anything that is happening in your brain. Your soul is Divine and infinite. Anything that arises in your mind – any thought, any sensation – whether pain, sadness, anger or despair, don't be afraid.

Look at the thought, study the emotion and observe it, but don't define yourself by it. Take

in a deep breath and let it out, and be compassionate towards yourself and calm within yourself. Study the problem, but recognize that you are not it.

You are not your thoughts, your skeletons, your stress, your depression, your trauma, your anxiety, your hatred. Allow yourself to respect these emotions, but don't define yourself by it. It will teach you where to grow, but don't let it determine the trajectory of your life and patterns of your behavior.

Let it be, give it its space.

The great sages call thoughts, “Levushim,” garments. Thoughts are

clothing you put on and take off. But they are not you. Your shirt may be dirty, stained or too big or too small, but you can take it off. Sometimes it looks like you, because it's on you, but it still is not you.

Who are you?

You are Divine, you are love, you are infinity, you are the light of Hashem in this world.

Never label your soul. Never limit yourself. The power you have within, the infinite energy you hold ... that can never be extinguished.

Rabbi Reuven Epstein

The Anytime Secret

After one speech I gave, a fellow came up to me and said, “Rabbi, I want to share with you my story.” “Let me hear it,” I said, revved up for what he was about to say.

“I was struggling in shidduchim and really feeling low and down on my luck. I was in yeshiva and dabbling in real estate. One day, I closed a deal. It was my first, and a relatively good-sized deal for me. The commission was \$35,000. While I wasn't feeling

great about my life overall, this newest deal certainly cheered me up. For the time being, knowing I'd get my check in a couple days, I felt on top of the world.

Hours later, my phone rang and I saw that it was my rebbe from high school calling me. Odd, I thought to myself. I wasn't speaking to him regularly, and a call out of the blue was certainly unexpected. “Hi rebbe, how are you?” “Shlomi, would you be able to come over to my house? I want

to talk to you.” “Sure,” I responded. “What's going on?” “It's not a phone conversation. If you're able to come on over, that would be most appreciated.” So there I was, now heading to my previous rebbe's home.

I showed up and my rebbe offered me a seat. “Shlomi, you remember this boy who used to be in your class?” “Of course, I do,” I said. “He fell into really hard times and he's gotten into credit card debt, and I'm reaching out to some people who used to know him and see if they can give him a hand. Is there any way you can help, perhaps committing to

\$500 or \$1,000?”

I looked back at my rebbe, taking in everything he had to say. “How much is the credit card debt, rebbe? How much are you trying to raise?” “It’s not a lot of money, but it’s not a small amount, either. It’s \$35,000.”

I paused for just a moment. “Rebbe,” I said, “your campaign is over. I’m going to send you \$35,000.” My rebbe was very surprised. “You’re going to send me \$35,000?” “Don’t worry,” I said. “Hashem orchestrat-

ed for this man to get out of debt. \$35,000 is coming your way.”

I immediately called my boss and said, “You know that deal we just closed? For the \$35,000 owed to me, wire it to the following Tzedakah organization.”

“Within a few weeks,” Shlomi continued, “I had met the woman who would become my future wife.”

There is a secret. But it’s not a secret, says R’ Eliyah Lopian, that is saved for any one person in particu-

lar. It’s a secret that any person can access any time they want.

The secret is: don’t live in accordance with your nature. Bend your nature.

Rabbi Yaakov Mizrahi

Can't Sign

He had come from the old country and now life abroad, in America, wasn’t the same for Velvel, especially financially. Until one day he came across a shul and they were looking for a new gabbai, who would take care of the shul in every way.

Calling the phone number advertised, Velvel got in touch with the shul’s president, who asked if he and Velvel could sit down one night and talk.

Sure enough, there was Velvel and the president discussing the responsibilities of the job – scrolling the Sefer Torah, placing the tablecloths on the tables, arranging tea to be ready for the morning minyan, organizing the siddurim – at the pay rate of \$10 an hour. Velvel agreed on all accounts, after which the president took out a piece of paper, which was to be the contract, and hand-

ed it to Velvel.

“Sign over here,” the president told Velvel. “You have my word,” Velvel replied. “Just sign here,” asked the president again. “You can sign for me,” Velvel countered. “I need your signature,” emphasized the president, growing impatient.

At this point, Velvel didn’t know what to say but the truth. “To be honest, I don’t know how to write my name.” “You want to be the gabbai of the shul and you don’t know how to write your name? I’m sorry, but I don’t want to hire someone who can’t read or write. This job is no longer available to you.”

Velvel couldn’t understand. He was able to do everything required. Being able to write wasn’t one of the primary, daily tasks of the gabbai, and here he was being rejected the offer on that account. True, as the president explained, he’d need to keep account of the incoming inventory, but Velvel would find a way to make it work,

even with his inability to read or write. The president, though, had already made up his mind, and Velvel didn’t have any power with which to argue.

With that, Velvel walked home, down and dejected. Even a gabbai of a shul wasn’t a job he could obtain. So Velvel resorted to buying a pushcart and circulating around the city selling fruits and vegetables.

Soon, though, Velvel had earned enough income to buy another pushcart and sell fabrics and garments. Fortunately, Velvel’s hard efforts carried him forward and he was able to lease a small storefront and sell these items to the local residents. But Velvel didn’t stop there, and nor did his customers. His business burgeoned into several storefronts, and from there to a warehouse, where he owned pallets and pallets of various clothing. At this point, he was a well-respected executive and wealthy businessman.

Years later, the day came for Velvel

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to make a multi-million dollar deal. Top attorneys and business executives sat around his mahogany table in his plush office, their cushioned seats making them revel in their financial status. The attorneys had looked through the documents, affirming its legitimacy and beneficial terms and agreements. Now, all that was left was for Velvel to sign the dotted line. Velvel knew who to turn to. Joe, his right-hand assistant. "Joe, please come into my office," Velvel spoke into his desk phone.

Joe entered the office, and came right to Velvel's side. "Please sign here," Velvel said, as he motioned to the spot at the bottom of the page. "Wait, wait," shot up the oth-

er businessman. "This is a bona fide contract, and sir, you must sign this yourself." "Joe is my power of attorney, and has been invested with the full rights to sign on my behalf," reassured Velvel. So Joe signed it.

The businessmen closed the deal, shaking Velvel's hand and wishing each other well on the new joint venture.

Now sitting back and enjoying the success of the day, one of the businessmen piped up. "Velvel, tell us, are you that rich that you have somebody else sign your name for you? What was that about?" "I'll tell you the truth," he said. "I don't know how to sign my own name." The executives were shocked. "What do you mean?

That's hard to believe. Look how rich you are and you don't know how to sign your name! Imagine how much richer you would be if you did know how to sign your name!"

"You got it all wrong," replied Velvel, calming their excitement. "If I knew how to sign my name, I'd be making \$10 an hour."

We often think that we know exactly what will get us far in life. But, in truth, we might be very wrong. It has little to do with us. Hashem runs the world, and He helps us with everything.

Even if you don't know how to sign your name, with your earnest effort, G-d will make sure you are taken care of.

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

Full Control

How often do we think we are living without choices? Something happens and we feel helpless. We feel victimized. It's beyond us. It's true that many times we cannot control what people do to us. However, we can always control one thing: our response.

Steven Covey notes that the word Responsibility is made up of two words: Response and Ability. You have the ability to decide how you will respond. True responsibility is when you don't fall prey to just leav-

ing things as is. You don't assume that what was supposed to or expected to happen, actually needs to happen. You can be proactive and change the course of something.

When a person has a bad temper, it can be easy to claim, "I just have a bad temper," and leave it at that. But if this thought locks you into fully believing that you cannot change, then you are rejecting control over your life. You might even blame others for how your temperament and disposition is. You now

have a scripted way of responding to life's stimuli.

But if you want to be a responsible person, you won't fall to the above notions. You have the ability to control your reactions. Something happens, and yet with it all, you have the choice to choose your next action.

That is true responsibility.

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