

מעשה אבות ... סימן לבנים

ושמרתם את הק"ת ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אתם האדם ודו בהם ... (יה-ה)

Rashi and **Onkelos** explain that “*V’chai bahem*” references *Olam Haba*, that when one lives a life fulfilling the *Dvar Hashem*, it will enable him to live on after he or she has passed from *Olam Hazeih*. In order to live in the next world, we must live, so to speak, in this world, by investing our time in *Limud HaTorah* and *Kiyum Hamitzvos*. The **Shlah Hakadosh ז”ל** adds that it’s not enough to merely live a life replete with *mitzvah* observance. “*V’chai bahem*” means that one must imbue his life of adherence to *mitzvos* with “life” itself. It’s not enough to engage in G-dly behavior by rote. There needs to be feeling, there needs to be excitement, there needs to be enjoyment. His actions must come alive.

When **R’ Yisroel Gustman ז”ל** was only twenty years old, he was appointed a *dayan* on the *beis din* of **R’ Chaim Ozer Grodzensky ז”ל**. R’ Chaim Ozer was the *Rav* of Vilna, and a leader of world Jewry in the years preceding the second world war. R’ Yisroel served as a *dayan* on R’ Chaim Ozer’s *beis din* for twenty-five years. What was the secret to R’ Yisroel Gustman’s greatness? Many stories are told of R’ Gustman’s perseverance and self-sacrifice as he survived and thrived through the horrific years of the Holocaust. R’ Yisroel was a partisan for five years during the war, hiding out in forests together with his wife and daughter, as they fled from the Nazis. He once survived being shot in the head at point blank range. He hid for six months in a pit with his family, living on scraps thrown in by a non-Jewish farmer - and during that time he learned *Meseches Zevachim* from memory twenty times. His entire existence was *Torah* - a life of “*V’chai bahem*.”

After the war, R’ Gustman came to the **Budapester Rav, R’ Yisroel Veltz ז”ל**, and asked him, “Does the *Rebbe* remember the five *shailos* (halachic questions) that he sent to R’ Chaim Ozer a number of years ago?”

The *Budapester Rav* was surprised at this young man before him and replied, “I do remember the *shailos*, but I never received answers, because just at that time, the war broke out.” R’ Gustman continued, “R’ Chaim Ozer gave me the *shailos* and told me to write answers to them, which I did. I could not send them to you because of the war, but I remember the answers quite clearly.” He then proceeded to tell the *Budapester Rav*, by heart, the answers to all five questions, which he had written five years earlier. Each answer was six or seven pages long! After so much pain, after so many troubles, he remembered each complete answer. It was his *Ameilus b’Torah* that protected him through the war and carried him through the rest of his life. He imbued his entire existence with “life” - *Torah* study and *mitzvos*, even during the darkest hours.

When R’ Yisroel came to *Eretz Yisroel* in 1971, he went to see the great **Steipler Gaon ז”ל**. The *Steipler* could not hear well, and his visitors had to write down what they wanted to say. R’ Yisroel asked for a *beracha* and signed the note, “Yisroel Gustman.” Upon reading the signature, the *Steipler* asked him, “Was your father a *dayan* on R’ Chaim Ozer’s *beis din*?”

R’ Gustman replied, “My father? That was me.” The *Steipler* read the words and he looked up in astonishment. “That was you?!” exclaimed the *Steipler*. The elderly *Gaon* could not walk well, and sometimes could not even go to *shul*. When he would walk, he would tread slowly, step by step. Yet, upon hearing who stood before him, the *Steipler* stood up and ran to R’ Yisroel, hugging and kissing him, saying, “You do not know the esteem in which R’ Chaim Ozer held you!”

A short while later, R’ Yisroel went to visit the **Tchebiner Rav ז”ל**, and the same story repeated itself. “Did you have a relative who was a *dayan* on R’ Chaim Ozer’s *beis din* in Vilna?” asked the *Tchebiner Rav*. “That was me,” came the reply.

“That was you?!” The *Tchebiner Rav* stood up, donned his hat, and made a *beracha*, “*Boruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Haolam Shechalak M’chochmaso Li’reiyav*” (the *beracha* recited upon seeing an outstanding *talmid chacham*!) The *Tchebiner Rav* said the complete form of the blessing (with *Hashem’s* name), and did so wearing a hat and jacket, the way he would dress when *davening* to *Hashem*. He did not make this *beracha* for everyone, but R’ Yisroel Gustman was an unusual person - a *talmid chacham* who truly used his life to toil in *Torah*. One who spent his entire life “living” the *Torah*.

הלוא כבני כשיים אתם לי בני ישראל ... (שמות ב-ז)

In this week’s *Haftorah*, **Amos HaNavi** delivers *Hashem’s* declaration, “*To Me, you (Klal Yisroel) are just like the Ethiopians (Kushiyim)*.” *Chazal* explain that the simple implication of Amos’s statement is that *Hashem* was comparing *Klal Yisroel*, who were so steeped in sin, to the Ethiopians who cannot change the pigment of their dark-colored skin. *Klal Yisroel* had gone so far down the path of sin that *Hashem* was beginning to wonder why He should ever refrain from exacting retribution upon them.

R’ Chaim Aryeh Leib ז”ל of **Yadvamba (Shaar Bas Rabim)** offers a different approach to understand this. He explains based on *Shlomo HaMelech* who writes in *Shir HaShirim* (1:5): “*שחורה אני ושחור – I am dark, but comely...*”

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implying that *Klal Yisroel’s* isolation in the world is similar to the uniqueness of the Ethiopian people’s dark skin. The very fact that *Klal Yisroel* is like the “black sheep” of the family in the eyes of the nations of the world, gives us – and only us – an avenue with which to draw closer to *Hashem*. For if we were more admired by the gentile nations, we would try to assimilate with them and then the uniqueness and beauty of the *Am Yisroel* would be forgotten.

So, when *Hashem* declared “הלוא כבני כשיים” – saying that *Klal Yisroel* are like the Ethiopians who are separated from the world due to their dark-colored skin, He intended to say that because of our sequestration in the world, “אתם לי בני ישראל” – that is why *Klal Yisroel* is the chosen nation.

A PENETRATING ANALYSIS OF THE WEEKLY HAFTORAH BY R’ TZVI HIRSCH HOFFMAN

לעלמי נשמת אבנו מורינו הרבנו הרב חיים יוסף בן ר' ישראל אברהם קויפמאן זצ"ל ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני ה' ... (ב-ב)

Much ink has been spilled delving into these words, inspiring many *Yidden* over the generations. We hope our “spilled ink” will inspire as well. The words “אני ה'” need clarification as to why they were used in this context, and what connection they have to the *mitzvah* of לרעך כמוך. And again, there are many explanations and we will choose one.

Humans, unlike animals, possess more of a need to cultivate relationships, acquire friends, and a need to share and interact with others. Human tendency, as described by the **Rambam** in הלכות דעות, is to be influenced by our surroundings, and most assuredly by the company we keep. There is, therefore, a concern that as we do not always have the luxury of carefully selecting our friends, we must be extremely vigilant not to become, חס ושלום, adversely affected by them. Also, even if we have the *siyata dishmaya* to acquire solid friends, something may crop up to challenge our *ruchniyus*. A friend may begin to struggle, and his spiritual issues may, unintentionally, begin pulling others down. Thus, the *Torah* pre-warns us: “אני ה'”. Make sure your friendships are on solid ground, and at all times, abide by the *Torah* and its *mitzvos*. If you do, then *Hashem* promises, “אני ה' - I too will be נאמן לשלם שכר and “will be part” of your friendship. That’s one מחשבה.

Additionally, *Chazal* teach us, “אמר רבי עקיבא זה כלל גדול בתורה”. Rabbi Akiva witnessed the demise of 24,000 of his prized students. Rather than give up, the great *Tanna* started all over with another five students, warning them not to be like the others, who had perished. Hence, there was nobody more qualified than Rabbi Akiva to say “זה כלל ... זה כלל” and גדול בתורה. In order for the *Torah* and its legacy to live on, our *bein adam lachaveiro* must be in tip-top shape.

During these ימי הספירה may we internalize these messages to begin readying ourselves for *Kabbolas Hatorah*.

משל למה הדבר דומה

דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם קדושים תהיו ... (וי-ב)

משל: When the family of **R’ Mattisyahu Salomon שליט** moved from England to Lakewood, they developed a very close friendship with their new neighbors, the Epsteins. The children played with each other and became fast friends. The adults were equally friendly. A *simcha* in the Salomon home instantly became a *simcha* in the Epstein home, and vice versa. They helped one another. One big happy family.

So, when one of the Salomon girls got engaged, the Epsteins were truly thrilled and couldn’t wait to dance at her wedding. To their misfortune, however, this dream did not materialize. Rabbi Epstein passed away a few weeks before the wedding and the Epsteins were plunged into mourning. Obviously, attending the wedding would be out of question.

On the day of the wedding, the Epstein family came home to find a note on the door that read: “To our dear friends, the

Epsteins, please do not prepare dinner this evening. Your dinner will be served to all of you. We will miss you at the wedding, but we wanted you to share in our *simcha*, so the caterer will be at your home with the wedding meal shortly. May we share future *simchos*. The Salomons.”

Presently, a van soon arrived from the wedding hall, bringing with it a full meal, including dessert, for the whole Epstein family. And not only that, the Salomons sent someone over with photos that had just been taken at the *chasunah*, so the entire Epstein family could enjoy the wedding while they ate the wedding feast!

משל: The *Mishna* in *Avos* makes the following remark: “*What is the proper path that a person should choose for himself? A good neighbor!*” The reason is because by properly choosing the right neighbors and friends, a person can be guaranteed to stay on the right path. These are the type of friends one should cherish and love as himself.

לוא תעשו עול במשפט לא תשא פני דל ולא תהדר פני גדול בצדק תשפט עמיתך ... (ש-ט)

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS ON MIDDOS TOVOS FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF R' GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO

דרגה יתירה
Judging favorably is the foundation of getting along with other people because if you never think badly about people, you will not have any negative feelings toward them. This is clear from the *mitzvah* of “*B’tzedek Tishpot Amisecha*.” Even if the positive thoughts you put in your mind about the person are not true, it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t have to be true. As long as you have removed any negativity from your heart, you get the *mitzvah*.

There is another *mitzvah* in the *parsha* that tells us, “*Lo Sina es achicha bilvavecha*.” You are not allowed to hate your brother in your heart. This means that it is forbidden to feel negativity towards any Jew in your heart. A negative feeling is a form of hatred. In *Lashon HaKodesh* there is no word for like or dislike. There is “*Ahava*” and “*Sinah*.” Any form of positive feelings is love, any type of negative feeling is under the category of hatred.

R’ Ephraim Wachsman שליט explained this *mitzvah* as follows. He says that one is not allowed to hate his brother WITH his heart. Since we are all different from one another, we usually love people that we can relate to. People that have similar ideas, goals, personality, and way of thinking are easier to love. That is the meaning of “*K’ish echad b’lev echad* - like one man with one heart” - this is complete unity. People tend to “hate” people who are different from them, and therefore the *Torah* says, “Do Not hate your brother WITH YOUR heart.” Don’t judge people with your heart and hate them because they are not like you. We must love everyone, and accept them even if they are different from us.

By judging people favorably we can turn our daily stress and *Lachatz* into “*Hatzlacha*.” By bringing *Hashem* into the picture we can say to ourselves, “This person was put into my life by *Hashem* and He is testing me to find the good in him.” Ask *Hashem* for *siyata dishmaya* to see the good in every one and turn your stress into success.