

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Daniel Glatstein

Your Rebbe

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (1:6) begins by telling us that we should “make for ourselves” a rebbe. What does this mean? Isn’t the individual already a rabbi? What does it mean that I should make for myself a “rebbe”? The Mishna then continues that a person should “acquire a friend.”

The Rabbeinu Yona explains that we should make for ourselves a rebbe, even if he knows just as much as we know. The reason is because we remember what others tell us more than what we learn ourselves. Therefore, even though the other person doesn’t know more than us, by humbling ourselves to them, we will be guided to the right decision and learn what we should do.

I remember hearing from one of my rebbeim, R’ Binyomin Luban, that when R’ Itzele Peterburg and R’ Naftoli Amsterdam came to Eretz Yisroel, they sought after a rebbe. Since they didn’t have their Rebbe, R’ Yisroel Salanter zt”l, around anymore, even though they themselves were advanced in years, they wanted to identify someone else they could confer with. Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt”l too, one of the great baalei mussar, used to go to R’ Yonasan David.

The first reason to make a rebbe is because what you learn from a rebbe is remembered longer. Secondly, oftentimes, the rebbe does understand the matter better and he will teach you something. Even

though you are on par with him in wisdom and he is not greater than you are, both of these aspects are true.

In addition, in certain ways, you will remember things better that you learn from another even more than what you taught to others yourself. Many times someone who listened to you share a Torah thought or the like will come to you years later and remind you of what you said, when you yourself may not have as great a recollection as they do.

The Mishna also states that you should “buy” a friend. Why do you need a friend? For three things, says the Rabbeinu Yona. The first reason is to learn Torah together with. Secondly, a friend will keep us in check to do mitzvos and help us stay away from sinning. A friend will help us stay on track. The third reason to have a friend is for advice and someone who we can confide in about anything.

Why though must we “buy” our friend? It’s because if you can’t acquire a friend without money, then do so with money. Or alternatively, persuade someone to become this confidant to you.

Moreover, if a friend insults you or does something that wrongs you, don’t write them off. Human nature is to err and if it happens, it’s important to be mindful that mistakes are bound to happen. In order to therefore maintain and keep the friendship with a friend or the relationship with the rebbe, it’s import-

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ant to adhere to the following words, “And judge everyone favorably.” This, explained R’ Avigdor Miller zt”l, is the key to ensure that relationships can withstand any hiccups. When we judge the actions of our friend or rebbe in a way that grants them the benefit of doubt, understanding that they are doing what they see best, then we will be able to maintain the relationship even with bumps along the way.

This is what Shlomo Hamelech meant when he said, “One who covers up infractions seeks love.” Someone who can overlook fault seeks goodwill. This refers to a scenario where you can overlook what a friend has done to you, and nonetheless maintain the relationship.

This latter fact is true of all relationships. People, especially those closest to us, will often hurt us the most. It is that much more important in the realm of these relation-

ships to be mindful of how we react to what was said or done toward us. It’s noteworthy that when it comes to Torah learning, it can be easy to forget what we learned just the other day, and yet when it comes to relationships, we can remember what was said to us for days, if not months, and sometimes even years. However, as underscored by the Orchos Tzadikim, remembering (zechira) is a character trait, as is forgetfulness. It’s not simply something built into our nature as people, but something that we can control and exercise power over. It’s therefore a good route to remember what we’ve learned and forget the hurt that was placed against us, the result being that we can maintain relationships into the future.

Along these lines, the Mishna later on (1:16) adds dimension to the importance of a rebbe.

R’ Gamliel remarked that we should

make for ourselves a rav, and extricate ourselves from doubt, and do not estimate to take off ma’aser (tithes). What do these statements have to do with one another? The Rabbeinu Yona explains that accepting a rebbe for ourselves helps remove doubt from our life. We might have a question or are unsure what to do. Sometimes we are doubtful, and should we make a decision in one way, it will cause others harm. Therefore, making someone else our rav will clarify our doubts. Our rav does not need to be greater in wisdom, but can help clarify things for ourselves.

Rebbetzin Chaya Sora Gertzulin

My Ticket

The sun is shining and the outdoors is calling. Yet, it is precisely at this time, during the longer Shabbos afternoons, that we take time out to study Pirkei Avos, the Book of Ethics.

Six chapters for the six Shabbosos between Pesach and Shavuos. The greatest preparation that we can do for Shavuos isn’t thinking about cheese cake and blintzes (which certainly enhance our Shavuos meals), but delving into the words of our Torah, and the teachings of Ethics.

Derech Eretz kadmah laTorah, to be a mentch—a genuinely honest, ethical, good individual—is a prerequisite to living a Torah life. We prepare for our n’asseh

v’nishmah—we will do and we will listen moment through the study of Ethics.

We repeat the cycle again and again throughout the summer, as a preparation for Rosh Hashanah, our Day of Judgment. The Yom Tov when we stand before HaShem, hopefully being able to say that I worked on myself, this year was a year of self-improvement.

There are so many “how to” books out there. Guides to having better relationships with spouses, parents, children, friends, even with one’s self. You name it, someone wrote a book about it. Unfortunately, we often neglect studying our own Book. My mother a”h would say how tragic it is that the Children of the Book

turn to every book but their own.

As Ben Bag-Bag says, “Hafoch bah, v’hafoch bah, d’kolah bah, Turn the pages, turn the pages, for it is all there”. It’s all there. We only have to open it. (Pirkei Avos, 5:26)

Pirkei Avos, Chapters of our Fathers. Who are the fathers of Ethics?

Avos has multiple meanings. When we say avos, fathers, the first thing that comes to mind are our patriarchs. The Bnei Yissocher writes that indeed we are referring to Avrohom, Yitzchak and Yaakov. We learn their story in Bereishis, also known as Sefer HaYashar, the Book of the Upright, the righteous ones. The love and compassion exemplified by our avos is our best guide for leading an ethical life.

We are Bnei Yisroel. Each letter

of the word Yisroel, spelled yud, shin, reish, aleph, lamed, is an acronym for our patriarchs and matriarchs. Yud – Yitzchak and Yaakov. Shin – Sarah. Reish – Rivkah and Rochel. Aleph – Avraham. Lamed – Leah. Their teachings are us. We are one with them.

Avos – our teachers, advisors and mentors. Mishlei teaches “Shema b’ni mussar avicha, v’al titosh toras imecha, Listen my child to the words of your father, and do not forsake the teachings of your mother.” Anyone who gives over knowledge, passes down a mesorah, a way of living, becomes a spiritual parent. (Mishlei, 1:8)

A Midrash is told of a neshamah that appeared before the heavenly court. “You have merit for three children”, a voice called out. “But I had ten” the soul protested. “You may have had ten, but some you ignored, and others you were short-tempered with, and yet another you didn’t even want.”

Another soul stood before the heavenly court. “You have merit for two-hundred-and-fifty children” “Two-hundred-and-fifty? But I didn’t have any.” “Yes, but you taught so many. You shared your knowledge. For others, you supported their education. You married some off. You showed kindness to so many. You gave spiritual life.”

Avos, the birth parents and grandparents. Every Friday night following candle lighting, it is customary to say a prayer beseeching HaShem to be granted the privilege of raising children and grandchildren who are wise and understanding, who love and

are attached to HaShem, and will light up the world through their Torah and good deeds.

A beautiful prayer. Every parent’s dream. To have children living a Torah life. The life of Pirkei Avos.

Memories. My father, HaRav Meshulem ben HaRav Asher Anshel HaLevi zt’l, was ailing. My mother was in the hospital room with him as we children waited in the hallway. Ima came out crying. “Abba said ‘Raise them well’. I told Abba that we raised them together. Boruch HaShem, they are all married. Abba then said, ‘You are never done’ ”.

Parenting is for life.

Every chapter of Ethics opens with the same introduction. “All of Yisroel has a share in the World to Come.” Why was this passage selected to open each chapter? It imparts to us the importance of goals. To focus one’s life on the ultimate prize – a share in the World to Come. While each of us goes through life pursuing various goals, some big, some small, we should strive for the eternal goal, the one that really counts.

As we go through our day, we must ask ourselves, where are my actions taking me, what am I accomplishing, where am I going? In fact, a closer reading of this passage shows that the Hebrew words read l’Olam Habbah – towards the World to Come. The message is clear. One has to earn his portion in the World to Come. There is no “Admit Free” card for anyone. HaShem gives us the opportunities, it’s up to each of us to realize our potential.

Just as every chapter begins with the same introduction, so too, does it close with the same words. “HaShem wished to confer mer-

it upon Bnei Yisroel. Therefore He gave them Torah and mitzvos in abundance...” Opportunities to earn our admission to the World to Come.

In the Talmud it is written “Rav Nachman said, may I be rewarded for observing three meals on Shabbos. Rav Yehudah said, may I be rewarded for my devotion in prayer. Rav Huna said, may I be rewarded for never walking four steps bare-headed. Rav Sheishes said, may I be rewarded for fulfilling the mitzvah of Tefillin.” (Shabbos 118b) The Maharal learns from this that while we should endeavor to fulfill as many mitzvos as possible, a person should focus on at least one mitzvah to observe scrupulously. Pick one that you will be able to keep meticulously, conscientiously, and stick to it. That one mitzvah will bring you closer to HaShem. That one mitzvah could just be your ticket to Gan Eden, the World to Come.

As Shavuot approaches, let’s keep in mind that HaShem gifted us many mitzvos. Make one your special mitzvah.

Thank you for reading this edition of The TorahAnyTimes Newsletter. If you’ve enjoyed, please let us know – we’d love to hear from you! Email info@torahanytime.com.

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser

You Have the Power

It's one of the most often-quoted phrases in Jewish circles, "Hashem doesn't give you more than you can handle." If you are going through a rough patch, a testing time in your life, whether it be spiritually, physically or emotionally, with a friend, a family member or even yourself, you can handle it. You can stand strong and weather through it.

Many a time, we don't want to believe we have the strength. "I can't," we let out with a sigh. But undeniably, the truth is and always has been... you can. You have the power and you have the stamina. Now, where can you find this strength?

Deep within. It's not always readily at the surface. It's like water

which lies miles deep underground, and only after tireless digging and excavating, does it appear.

Dig and discover the inner reservoir of strength within you. Reach deep inside.

We all have an inner voice that tells us, "You don't have what it takes! You're weak!" But why is that voice any more accurate than the other voice which says, "You do have what it takes!" Tell the voice that puts you down – "Goodbye and good riddance. I'm not listening to you."

That voice, that whispering, that demeaning inclination doesn't like to be disagreed with. Telling it this over and over will get rid of it. Eventually, it'll get the message: you're not backing down, you're not giving in.

So it will either continue listening to you telling yourself that you can do it, or leave.

And most of the time, it leaves. And when it returns, you've got just the trick to get rid of it once again.

Rabbi Tzvi Sytner

Small Miracles

There is no such thing as a small miracle. A miracle is a miracle, period. Indiscriminate of its magnitude, if something happened beyond the realm of the ordinary, extended above the sphere of the expected, it is miraculous.

Who's to say that you should have woken up today able to see with your eyes, hear with your ears or walk with your feet? No one. If you are, G-d handed you a present. He handed you a miracle. Is it the size of the Splitting of Sea? You might say that it isn't. But think of it differently. A miracle is a miracle, no matter the shape or size

If you have a family, a job or

a home, it's not because that's how life is meant to be. You could have exactly the opposite – no family, no job and no home, and just the same, it can be said, "That's how life is meant to be." It's not nature that's organically running your life. It's a symphony of people and places being set up for you, an orchestrated harmony of parts and pieces being designed for you. By G-d to you and for you.

That's what we call a miracle.

Human tendency is to notice the outliers, to be in awe of the colorful supernatural. But that tendency is born out of desensitization to what we see any day, every day. And we do see people breathing, walking and talking every day. That

daily scene grows on us and dulls our sensitivity to the ordinary.

But that doesn't take away from the miracle that we call life.

Big or small, it's the same G-d, giving you the same result – a miracle, a blessing. It's His love, and it knows no bounds.

That's all there is to it. A bona fide miracle.

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