

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Meyer Bodner

Covered Your Bill

Spending his days as part of a Kollel in Miami was a fellow named Shimon. Learning was a true labor of love, and Shimon couldn't get enough of it. In addition, however, to his regular schedule, he'd learn with a man from the community—Michael—every night. Michael had been blessed with financial success, having ventured into real estate, though a sure highlight of his day above all else was learning with Shimon.

Now, Michael had a secret. Whenever he bumped into Shimon in a restaurant—Miami was a small place back then, especially in those days—he would always pay Shimon's bill without fail. "Shimon, my kollel yungerman," he'd say, "is not going to pay for his restaurant bill." And he would cover Shimon's tab every single time.

One week, it was the bar mitzvah for Michael's son. And so, as planned, he hired one of the finest caterers in Miami at the time, expecting a large showing for his son's milestone. Michael and the caterer were good friends too. But then, things went south. An argument arose as to how many people actually attended the event versus how many plates were ordered, with the result being that the caterer charged him extra. Or so Michael claimed. Michael felt it was unfair. "Look," Michael said, "the food was already made, so if extra people came, why charge more?"

Their discussion turned into a full-on verbal dispute, and at the end of it all, Michael wound up paying the extra \$1,500.

Now, \$1,500 wasn't a lot of money for either of them. But after paying, Michael told the caterer, "I'm paying you, but I'm never talking to you again in my life. I don't want to have anything to do with you."

Fast forward weeks later to one Motzei Shabbos.

Shimon and his wife went out for a quick bite. And though they hoped to run into Michael, they held onto no expectations, and instead simply headed out, intent on having a nice time. Suddenly, Michael walked in. "Great," thought Shimon, "Michael's here!" Shimon gave a brief wave, accompanied by a quick, "How are you?" to which Michael returned in kind. But then Michael left.

That's where it got interesting.

After Michael left, the waitress came over with the bill. There must be a mistake, Shimon immediately thought. After all, wasn't Michael supposed to pay as usual? He looked over the bill, confused, and wondered what had changed this time around. Maybe Michael was upset, or maybe he just didn't want to cover the charge all the time. So Shimon paid the bill and left.

The next day, after their time learning, Michael casually asked Shimon. "So how was the meal last night?" Caught off guard and uncomfortable, Shimon shrugged, trying to play it

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IN THIS ISSUE

Rabbi Meyer Bodner

Covered Your Bill

Rabbi Yaakov Rahimi

The Right Kind of Judgement

Rabbi Ephraim Eliyahu Shapiro

Come Home

Rabbi Label Lam

The Same Driveway

DEDICATIONS

L'iluy Nishmat

R' Elchonon Yaakov z"l ben R' Shmuel
Pinchos

Manish ben Esther

Meir Eliyahu ben Yaakov Dov

Bechor ben Rivkah

Shlomo Zalman ben
R' Mordechai Yisroel Tzvi

Esther bat
haRav Avraham Halevi zt"l

Moshe Simcha ben Doniel Dov Ber

Miriam bat Yeshayahu

Malka Bracha bat Shimon Chaim

R' Zechariah Shimon ben Yitzchok

L'refuah Sheleima

Deena bat Shoshana

Chaya Raizel bat Dena

Yerachmiel Eliyahu Ben Esther Riva

Reuven ben Rochel

easy. "The meal was pretty good. It was nice." But Michael seemed a bit perplexed, almost fishing for a thank you. "You mean, if it wasn't so good, I shouldn't have paid for it?" Shimon, now even more confused, stood still. "What do you mean? I paid for it." Michael was taken aback. "What do you mean? I pointed to your table to pay for it!" Shimon verbally walked back, recounting the sequence of events. "The waitress came over, and I paid the bill. I even have the credit card receipt." Michael, though, remained puzzled. "I believe you, but it's strange. I thought I pointed to your table. They must have given me the wrong bill. That's why I was there; you saw me, right? I wasn't there to eat; I was there to pay the bill. I saw \$110, and I thought, 'How

much does pizza cost already?' A pie, a salad... I didn't even look closely. I thought maybe you ordered a lot of different dishes—desserts, wines—I don't know. But I was happy to pay it, even though it seemed a bit much."

And that was that.

Two weeks before Purim, Michael received a huge delivery. It was a beautiful Mishloach Manos, filled with wines, fruits, the works, and inside was a note. Michael opened the envelope and saw it was from none other than his archenemy—the caterer. And inside was a check for \$1,500, along with a heartfelt note. "You have no idea how much it meant to me that you paid for our meal. Thank you very much. I'm so sorry for what happened last year. Please accept my apologies."

Making amends and mending back together a friendship is worth every bit. It will always require overcoming fears, doubts, hesitations, grudges or a host of other thoughts and feelings in between. But there's also another ingredient that helps a great deal.

Hashem. Hashem wants us to make peace. And sometimes, because it's just that important, He will set the stage and pull the strings to help make that happen. Just be sure to be ready and willing to seize the opportunity when it arrives.

Because, in time, it will. And when it does, the chance for healing, for harmony, for love is a boundless treasure.

Rabbi Yaakov Rahimi

The Right Kind of Judgement

Allow me to share three stories all revolving around the same theme—dan l'kaf zechus, judging others favorably.

Rabbi Chaim Zaid was once driving to a lecture, and upon arriving near his destination, parked by a gas station. As he got out of his car, he noticed a non-religious Israeli Jew nearby. Now, this man saw that Rabbi Zaid was wearing the full rabbinical attire—the long jacket, the hat, the white shirt, the whole look.

The non-religious Jew turned to Rabbi Zaid and said, "Oh, you religious guys, you just want money from the government. You don't do anything. You don't go to the army. You don't do this, you don't do that." He started hurling a number of harsh words.

Now, usually, the reaction would be to grow irritated if not enraged

in turn, but Rabbi Zaid decided to practice "Ahavat Chinam," or unconditional love. Instead of responding with anger, he said to the man, "I hear everything you're saying, but I love you. We're brothers. What are you talking about? Let's calm down."

He then invited the man into the store at the gas station and asked him, "What do you want to buy?" The man said he wanted ice cream. "No problem," said Rabbi, "I'll get you the ice cream." He bought him ice cream, got him a drink, and more.

They walked outside together, and before parting ways, exchanged phone numbers. The unaffiliated Jew then said to Rabbi Zaid, "You know, I always thought you religious Jews were full of hate, that you were selfish and only cared about yourselves. But now I see that you really do have love, and you really do care about me."

This encounter led the man to make a big decision. They stayed in touch, and the man eventually started keeping Shabbat.

How often, throughout the week, do we find ourselves facing a little conflict, a bit of discomfort, because someone throws out a bad word or a harsh comment? The way we respond makes a difference. Are we going to respond with more Ahavat Chinam, with extra love, even when it's hard? Are we going to step beyond our comfort zone and offer more love, more compliments, and in doing so, rebuild a better world?

That's what Ahavat Chinam is about—not fighting back, but instead bringing others closer and becoming more friendly, even when they try to put us down. Complimenting someone who has just bashed you is an incredible form of Kiddush Hashem. It's a powerful example of what it

means to practice Ahavat Chinam, and it's something we should strive to do all year round.

This can apply anywhere—in the home between a husband and wife, with coworkers, at schools, with in-laws, with brothers-in-law, with friends—wherever you are. How we react in such situations can help us build and bring more love into the world.

Here's another story.

Recently, I was at an event in Deal, New Jersey, and afterward, Rabbi Moshe Malka shared an unbelievable story with me. His daughter, who now lives in Israel, told him about something that happened in her neighborhood.

There was an unaffiliated Jew who decided to daven Mincha, though it was far from his daily routine. As he walked down the main street, he noticed a synagogue, and decided to go inside to see if they were praying Mincha.

When he knocked and found the door open, he saw a religious man standing there. The unaffiliated Jew asked, "Is there Mincha? Are you praying now?"

But instead of welcoming him, the man in the shul gave him attitude. "What do you mean, Mincha? This shul doesn't have a Minyan. We only pray here on Shabbat. Where are you from? Who are you?"

Now, the unaffiliated Jew, who just wanted to pray, was a very good person. Every Jew is a good Jew. But this situation required him to respond with grace. So he turned to the religious man and said, "Listen, I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt. Maybe you were the guy I saw when I parked my car. Maybe you had just come out of the den-

tist's office next door. And I'd like to assume that the dentist told you that you have a few cavities, a few root canals, and that it's going to cost you 10,000 shekels, 20,000 shekels, maybe even 30,000 shekels. That's almost \$10,000! Maybe you're upset about that, and I was just the first person you saw, so you're taking it out on me?"

The religious man was so impressed by this response. He realized what had happened and said, "You know what? This is what Hashem wants from us; you are what Hashem wants from us. Hashem wants us to give others the benefit of the doubt, to judge favorably." The two became friends, and now they learn Torah together every day.

This is another example of what Hashem is looking for from us. It's easier said than done, especially when you're mad, or when something happens that upsets you. It takes courage, strength, and patience to give someone the benefit of the doubt, but that's what Hashem wants.

Think about it: this man saw the man coming out of the dentist's office, and instead of taking the harsh words personally, he created a whole scenario in his mind to justify the man's anger. "You're mad because of the dentist? No problem, I'm not taking it personally." This is what Hashem is looking for—people who build bridges and show love.

Let me share one last story that happened to a friend of mine, a story that taught me a tremendous lesson about this idea of judging others favorably. It happened on Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days of the year. My friend was davening in Lakewood, at a particular shul, during Shacharis.

Hours later, as the davening was

winding down, a man walked in. My friend couldn't believe it. How dare someone walk in so late on Rosh Hashanah? It's not just a regular morning, not just Shabbat—it's Rosh Hashanah! He kept thinking, "How can this person walk in so late? In front of everyone, toward the end of the prayers?" It ruined his concentration for the rest of the service. His mind was consumed with judgment.

But after davening, he found out the truth. The man he had judged had a son at home who was not well, a child in a wheelchair, connected to several machines. That morning, on Rosh Hashanah, the child was having a difficult time, and this man had to make a choice: Should he stay home and help his wife, or should he say, "No, I have to go pray; you deal with this chaos alone!"

He made the right decision. Even though it was Rosh Hashanah, even though he knew people might wonder about him, he stayed home to help his wife. Only when things calmed down did he finally come to shul.

When my friend learned this, he was overcome with regret. There he was, sitting in judgment, thinking, "How dare you come in late?" Meanwhile, the man he was judging was a true Tzaddik, a righteous person. He had sacrificed his own time at shul to do the right thing and help his wife. Instead of thinking ill of him, my friend realized that this man was a hero, a righteous individual who had acted out of love and responsibility.

We never know the whole story. How can we judge someone when we don't know the facts? Only



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Hashem knows what's really going on in someone's life. That's why we should always give others the

benefit of the doubt. That's how we build more love in the world, how we bring more goodness into the

world.

And it's always worth it.

Rabbi Ephraim Eliyahu Shapiro

Come Home

About fifteen years ago, a friend of mine was traveling with some others, some by bus and some by car, to attend two weddings—one in Ottawa and one in Toronto. By Friday morning, after spending Thursday night driving back, all his friends were just about home in New York. My friend, however, decided he wanted to fly back, thinking it would be less crowded. So he found himself at the Toronto airport that Friday morning, ready to fly home.

As he was checking in at the kiosk, entering his information, he realized with a sinking feeling that he didn't have his passport. He had left it in the luggage with his friends who were driving back. Here he was, about to fly internationally, and he didn't have his passport with him. Panicking, he quickly called his friends, who confirmed that they indeed had his passport. He asked them to read out the passport number, which he then entered into the machine. Fortunately, it allowed him to get his boarding pass, and he thought he was in the clear.

But when he got to the security checkpoint, he encountered a very

unpleasant woman. She looked at him with disdain and said, "Are you crazy? You think you can fly internationally without a passport?" She even went so far as to suggest that he shouldn't even be in the airport. She made him feel like he had done something terribly wrong.

Dejected, he went from person to person, trying to figure out what to do. He needed to get home to New York, but it seemed impossible without his passport. As he was about to leave the airport in defeat, a man sitting on a bench called out to him. The man, who wore sandals, high socks, and a large traveler's hat, asked, "Young man, you look dejected. Are you okay?"

My friend explained the situation, and the man responded calmly, "You can always go home."

"What do you mean by that?" my friend asked.

The man explained. "The rule is that while you can't travel internationally without a passport, if you're going home and you have some form of ID, like a driver's license and your passport number, you can always go home."

Skeptical but hopeful, my friend got back in line and, when stopped

by security again, confidently stated what the man had told him: "The law is that I can always go home, even if I don't have my passport, as long as I have my ID and passport number." The security officer checked with a supervisor, and after a nerve-wracking 20-minute wait, the supervisor returned, spoke to him in a condescending manner, but ultimately confirmed, "You're right, you can always go home."

And so, my friend made his flight and returned home. When he told me this story, it struck me deeply. This experience is so much like what we're going through now. Sometimes, we lose our identity—not just physically, but spiritually. We get so caught up in the material world, in the distractions and noise of everyday life, that we lose sight of who we are and where we belong. It's like traveling through life without our spiritual passport.

But this story is a powerful reminder that Hashem is always telling us, "You can always come home." No matter how lost we feel, no matter how far we've strayed, we can always return. Even if we've lost our spiritual identity, even if we've become unrecognizable to our rabbis, our spouses, or our children—no matter what, Hashem is always waiting for us to come home.

Always.

Rabbi Label Lam

The Same Driveway

Here is an incredible arrangement that requires precise coordination and cooperation. And probably most people are walking around with an unawareness that it's even taking

place, like two beautiful houses that are sharing a common driveway. The windpipe and the foodpipe. The windpipe leading to the lungs, and the foodpipe leading to the digestive system both sharing the same mouth

and throat. And when the windpipe is open, the foodpipe remains closed so we can speak and breathe. And when the foodpipe is open, the windpipe remains closed so we don't choke. It's no joke.

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 11 Av)

עידן בן דלית (שתיי)	דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)	אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור)
עמרי בן אסתר ורוניקה (מירן)	דורון בת סימונה שרה (שטיינברכר)	אביתר בן גליה (דוד)
יצחק בן דבורה (עידן)	דניאלה בת אורלי (גלבוע)	אברהם גלעד בן אמונה (מונדר)
קית' שמואל בן גלדיס חוה (סיגל)	הירש בן פערל חנה (גולדברג)	אגם בת מירב (ברגר)
קרינה בת אירנה (ארייב)	פולין) זיו בן טליה (ברמן)	אוהד בן אסתר (בן עמי)
רום בן תמר נועה (ברסלבסקי)	טל בן ניצה (שוהם קורנגולד)	אוהד בן קרן (יהלומי)
רומי בת מירב (גונן)	יאיר בן רות אידית (הורן)	אור בן גאולה (לוי) אורי בן עינב
שגב בן גלית (כלפון)	יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה)	אפרת (דנינו) איתן בן רות אדית
שגי' בן נעמית (חן דקל)	יצחק בן אנטה חנה (אלגרט)	(הורן) איתן אברהם בן
שרי בת מרגיט (ביבס)	ירדן בן פנינה (ביבס)	אפרת (מור) אלון בן עידית
שלמה בן מרסל (מנצור)	כפיר בן שרי (ביבס)	(אהל) אליה בן סיגלית
תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)	כרמל בת כנרת (גת)	(כהן) אליהו בן חנה
	לירי בת שירה (אלבג)	(שרעבי) אלכסנדר בן
	מקסים בן טלה (הרקין)	אוקסנה (לובנוב) אלכסנדר סשה בן
	מתן בן ענת (אנגרסט)	ילנה לאה (טרופנוב)
	מתן בן ירדנה עינב (צנגאוקר)	אלמוג בן נירה (סרוסי)
	נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן)	אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט)
	נעמה בת איילת (לוי)	אמילי תהילה בת אמנדה פרנסיס
	עדן בת שרית (ירושלמי)	(דמארי) ארבל בת יעל
	עודד בן בלהה (ליפשיץ)	(יהוד) אריאל בן סילביה
	עומר בן ניבה (ונקרט)	מוניקה (קוניו) אריאל בן שירי
	עומר בן שלי (שם טוב)	(ביבס) בר אברהם בן
	עומר מקסים בן אורנה אסתר	ג'וליה (קופרשטיין) גד משה בן שרה
	(נאוטרה) עופר בן כוכבה	(מוזס) גיא בן מירב
	(קלדרון) עידן בן יעל	(גלבוע דלאל) גלי בן טליה
	(אלכסנדר)	(ברמן)

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 11 Av)

Eden bat Shirit (Yerushalmi)	Bar Avraham ben Julia (Cooperstein)	Avinatan ben Ditza Tirtza (Ohr)
Oded ben Bilhah (Lifschitz)	Gad Moshe ben Sarah (Mozes)	Evyatar ben Galya (David)
Omer ben Niva (Venkrat)	Guy ben Meirav (Gilboa Dalal)	Avraham Gilad ben Emunah (Mondar)
Omer ben Shelly (Shemtov)	Gali ben Talya (Berman)	Agam bat Meirav (Berger)
Omer Maxim ben Orna Esther (Neutra)	David ben Sylvia Monika (Konyo)	Ohad ben Esther (Ben- Ami)
Ofer ben Cochava (Kalderon)	Doron bat Simona Sarah (Steinbrecher)	Ohad ben Keren (Yahalomi)
Idan ben Yael (Alexander)	Daniella bat Orli (Gilboa)	Ohr ben Geula (Levi)
Idan ben Dalit (Shtivi)	Hirsch ben Perel Chana (Goldberg-Polin)	Ori ben Einav Efrat (Danino)
Omri ben Esther Veronica (Miran)	Ziv ben Talya (Berman)	Eitan ben Ruth Idit (Horen)
Yitzchak ben Devorah (Idan)	Tal ben Nitza (Shoham- Corngold)	Eitan Avraham ben Efrat (Mor)
Kieth Shmuel ben Gladis	Yair ben Ruth Idit (Horen)	Alon ben Idit (Ohel)
Chava (Segal)	Yosef Chaim ben Miriam (Ochana)	Eliya ben Sigalit (Cohen)
Karina bat Irena (Ariav)	ben Miriam (Ochana)	Eliyahu ben Chana (Sharabi)
Rom ben Tamar Noa (Brasalevsky)	Yitzchak ben Aneta Chana (Elgarat)	Alexander ben Oksana (Lubanov)
Romi bat Meirav (Gonen)	Yarden ben Penina (Bibas)	Alexander Sasha ben Yelena Leah (Tropanov)
Segev ben Galit (Chalfon)	Kfir ben Shiri (Bibas)	Almog ben Nira (Sarusi)
Sagi ben Naamit (Chen- Dekel)	Carmel bat Kineret (Gat)	Elkana ben Ruchama (Buchbut)
Shiri bat Margit (Bibas)	Liri bat Shira (Elbag)	Emily Tehilla bat Amanda Francis (Damari)
Shlomo ben Marcelle (Mansour)	Maxim ben Talleh (Herkin)	Arbel bat Yael (Yehud)
Tamir ben Cheirut (Nimrodi)	Matan ben Anat (Angrest)	Ariel ben Sylvia Monika (Konyo)
	Matan ben Yardena Einav (Tzangauker)	Ariel ben Shiri (Bibas)
	Nimrod ben Viki (Cohen)	
	Naama bat Ayelet (Levi)	