

observant and, often as a result of their newly-found “self-confidence,” neglect to show proper respect to their parents, who have yet to become observant. Obviously, this shows a lack of sensitivity and goes against everything Jewish observance teaches. There is a proper and sensitive manner for addressing all situations – if a person is prepared to listen.

On the flip side, the following vignette is inspiring. A couple who lived in Yerushalayim approached *Horav Shmuel Salant, zl*, with the following question: Their children, who lived in America, were sending them a very significant monthly stipend to cover their needs. Their children were unfortunately no longer observant. Is it appropriate to accept their support?

“What is the *shailah*, question?” he replied. “Your children have only one *mitzvah* left – to honor their parents, and you want to take that away from them as well?!”

**לא תנסו את ד' אלקיכם
You shall not test Hashem. (6:17)**

One does not test Hashem to see whether He will fulfill His promises, because we are clueless as to the workings of the Divine. So many factors are included in the Heavenly calculations of which we are unaware. It is ludicrous to second-guess the Almighty, since we know so little of the true past and even less of the future – all of which are factored into everyone’s reward and punishment. There is one *mitzvah*, however, explains *Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl*, that we are allowed -- nay, encouraged -- to test Hashem: *tzedakah*, *Maaser*/tithes/charity. The *Navi Malachi* (3:10) quotes Hashem as saying, “Bring all the tithes into the storage house, and let it be sustenance in My Temple. Test Me, if you will, with this, says Hashem... (See) if I do not open up for you the windows of the heavens and pour out upon you blessing without end.” We may “test” Hashem by giving *tzedakah* and observing how this act of generosity, in fact, ratchets up one’s relationship with Hashem, the Source of all good.

Rav Pincus explains that, for every other *mitzvah* in the Torah, Hashem promised reward for its successful completion, the actual reward being contingent upon the person’s suitability and worthiness to receive said reward. For instance, one who honors his father and mother is promised longevity. If the son who is so good to his parents happens to be a thief, obviously his unscrupulous activities will preclude him from receiving reward for honoring his parents.

This might be compared to the fellow who visits a doctor to treat a troubling ailment. The doctor prescribes a regimen of medication which will effect a cure in about a week. The patient then decides to drink a glass of poison or take a walk off the roof of the sixth floor. Can one blame the doctor’s prescription for not working? Can one complain to the doctor that his advice did not save the man? Likewise, the Torah

promises *arichas yamim*, longevity, for *Kibbud av v’eim*, but, if he decides to jump off the roof, he is acting against the Torah.

Tzedakah is different. It is much like a respirator that neither heals nor alters the quality of one’s life, but does keep the patient breathing indefinitely. *Tzedakah tatzil mimaves*, charity saves from death – is a verity. Charity sustains a person. Try it; go ahead; test Hashem.

Va’ani Tefillah

**רפאנו ד' ונרפא
Refaeinu Hashem v'neirafei. Heal us
Hashem and we will be healed.**

We ask Hashem to heal us from preexisting illnesses and to see to it that *v'neirafei*, “we will remain healthy” and not contract any future illness. The *Talmud Shabbos* 32b teaches that a person should always pray that his health is maintained and that he does not become ill because, once illness strikes, it requires greater merit to warrant Hashem’s cure.

Rabbeinu Bachya notes that, with regard to healing provided by a human physician, the Torah employs two words *v'rapo yerapei*, “He shall surely heal” (*Shemos* 21:19). In both words, the *fay* has a dot in it, which transforms the sound to *pay* which has a harsher sound. This implies that the medical treatment proffered by a doctor is often painful and harsh tasting. They must use needles, syringes, scalpels. In *Shemoneh Esrai*, we petition Hashem to heal us. We use the easy – on the ears sound of *fay* – *refaeinu*, which signifies that Hashem’s cure is gentle, sensitive and painless.

In loving memory
of
our dear Mother & Bubby,

Mrs. Chana Silberberg

חנה בת משה זאב ע"ה

נפ' כ' אב תש"ס
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Miriam Solomon & Family

Peninim is published weekly by *Peninim Publications* in conjunction with the *Hebrew Academy of Cleveland*, 1860 S. Taylor Rd. Cleveland, Ohio 44118

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Parashas Vaeschanan

תשע"ז

פרשת ואתחנן

**ואתם הדבקים בד' אלקיכם חיים כלכם היום...
ושמרתם ועשייתם כי היא חכמתכם ובינתכם... ככל
התורה הזאת**

**But you who cling to Hashem, your G-d – you are alive
today... you shall safeguard and perform them, for it is
your wisdom and discernment... as this is the Torah.
(4:4,6,8)**

We have been bequeathed an incredible gift: the Torah. It is the source of our wisdom, understanding, character refinement, religious observance; indeed, it is *chaim kulchem hayom*, our life – today – and every day. Without Torah in its entirety we are lost. We may not accept the Torah piecemeal in accordance with our comfort zone. That is not Torah. It is everything – or else it is simply intellectual knowledge. It is a life source only when it is imbibed, seen, studied, understood and observed. What about someone who has had little opportunity to learn or has started late? What about the fellow whose acumen does not tolerate the Torah’s dialectic? Does the person who spends most of his day engrossed in earning a livelihood have less a “life” of Torah, because he has little time to learn?

First, everyone, regardless of his intellectual capacity, should learn. Success is not measured by how much one grasps or by how much one knows. Success is measured by how much effort one expends, how much free time one devotes to Torah study. Everyone should have a set time for studying Torah. Everyone has been gifted with varied intellectual abilities. If Hashem has given one a sharp, analytical mind, he is expected to use his gift to develop a greater and deeper knowledge of Torah. Each person should maximize his potential based upon his ability and time. The working person should devote a set time to learn. The individual who is challenged by the difficulty in grasping Torah should study what comes easier – until he is able to ascend to the next level. No one is excused from studying Torah.

Furthermore, it all depends on what is a person’s primary focus: is it the mundane, the secular, or is it Torah? *Chazal* teach that, attached to the walls of the *Bais Hamikdash*, were several small chambers called *lishkos*. Some were built within the parameters of the *Bais Hamikdash*, while others were built facing the outside of the *Bais Hamikdash*. Interestingly, the location of the room did not determine its sanctity (whether it maintained the same level of *kedushah*, holiness, as the *Bais*

Hamikdash proper). The determining factor was the placement of the doors. *Chazal* (*Mishnayos Maaser Sheini* 3:8) say that, if the door opened into the *Bais Hamikdash*, the chamber was considered holy on the level of the *Bais Hamikdash*. This was true even if the *lishkah* was built outside the confines of the *Azarah* of the *Bais Hamikdash*. Nonetheless, as long as the door opened to the *Bais Hamikdash*, it was holy. If, however, the door opened to the outside, even if the room was built within the parameters of the *Bais Hamikdash*, it was not holy. The door made the difference.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, derives from this *halachah* that the determining factor which decides whether a person is within the confines of *kedushah* is where his thoughts are. One can spend the day in a *bais hamedrash* studying Torah, but his mind is actually elsewhere. He really is not in the *bais hamedrash*. His body may be situated in the study hall, but -- if his thoughts are elsewhere -- he is elsewhere. Conversely, one may spend the majority of his day occupied with the mundane physical reality of earning a living; yet, he makes time early in the morning and late in the evening to study Torah. If these two hours are where his head is focused, if these salvaged hours are the true centerpiece of his day, then this is where he is. After all is said and done, it is not where one is situated that determines whether he is in the sphere of holiness or not – it is where his thoughts, his intentions, his desires are.

Perhaps we might add that, if someone were really situated in the *bais hamedrash*, if his learning were truly absolute, his mind would not wander. One does not entertain thoughts of the mundane unless something is lacking in his learning. Thus, the locus of his holiness is questionable.

כי קל רחום ד' אלקיך לא ירפך ולא ישחתך

For Hashem, your G-d, is a merciful G-d, He will not abandon you nor destroy you. (4:31)

Lo yarpecha, “He will not loosen His hold on you.” *Rashi* adds, “From holding onto you with His Hands... He will not separate you from being next to Him.” Hashem will never let go of us. Great! So, why are so many people lost in a spiritual maze, floundering, alone, without direction, with little to no faith? Is He still holding on? *Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*, derives a frightening lesson from *Rashi*. Hashem holds on to us with both Hands. He never lets go/abandons a Jew. How is it possible for a Jew to disengage from Hashem? Only one way: the Jew breaks

away! He has chosen an alternative route from the one designated by Hashem. Although the Almighty is directing him one way, the Jew decides this path is not to his liking, so, he breaks away. This is no different than the mother who walks down the street holding on to her young child, only to have the energetic child break from her grip and run away. When we run around, we are actually running away from Hashem.

This notion is what Moshe *Rabbeinu* passed on to his flock as he prepared to take leave of them. “Hashem is holding on to your hands; do not fear anyone, because to fear mortals while simultaneously holding on to Hashem’s Hand is a sign that one does not truly believe in Hashem’s power to protect him. Strengthen yourselves in your service; fear no one, for Hashem is with you.”

To conjure up such imagery requires the tenacity of faith which was evinced by Jews of old: Jews of *emunah p’shutah*, simple faith, who (sort of) related to Hashem as a father, who was very real and very much a part of their lives. While it is inappropriate, perhaps even ludicrous, to refer to Hashem in corporeal terms or to have such feelings of closeness, these people felt Hashem; they truly felt that they were holding on to Him. My mother, A.H., survived six years of Nazi persecution with such conviction. She would “talk” to G-d all of the time. Today, due to our technological “advances,” we have lost much of this simple feeling of closeness with the Almighty.

A popular author, a *Chabad shliach*, describes such a scenario which unfolded before his eyes during a hospital visit on *Rosh Hashanah*. It was a somber morning, wet outside and depressing inside, as this young rabbi visited the geriatric ward of the local hospital. A few elderly women (*bubby*, each called herself) had gathered (actually, were wheeled in) to hear the sound of the *Shofar*.

The *shliach* reminisced that this was a yearly project and that every year at least one of the patients would break down in tears when the sound of the *Shofar* blast was heard. (We should be so fortunate to have such sensitivity to the sound of the *Shofar*: it comes with a belief in Hashem that is palpable.) That special year, one *bubby* did not act as if she was that old. She appeared to be with it, actually brimming with excitement at the sight of the *Shofar*. Sharing memories of her childhood with the rabbi, she said that she hailed from a *Chassidic* background, steeped in warmth, soul and song. Even in the cold Pacific Northwest (where this story took place), it had never left her. She still felt she was (a young girl) at home (probably Russia/Ukraine).

The *bubby* recited the blessing, and the rabbi blew the *Shofar* – then the tears began to flow. She cried quietly, as the *Shofar* blasts permeated the room. The rabbi continued blowing until he completed the required blasts. She continued to weep – and then she spoke to Him – to Hashem, *Oy zisseh G-tt! Taierah, zisseh G-tt! Mein zisseh G-tt!*

“Oh sweet G-d! Dear sweet G-d! My sweet G-d!” she cried as if she were holding Hashem in her hands, in the hands of an elderly grandmother, old, wrinkled, discolored, but she “held” Hashem in her hands for dear life. This elderly Jewess

was holding on to an infinite, timeless G-d. She was speaking to Hashem intimately, as one speaks to a husband, a father, a son; as one speaks to someone whom she knows will never leave her. This is the way this woman was raised. She was taught that Hashem is very real, very close – which, of course, He is. It is just that in our politically correct English language, we do not express ourselves with such reality. We neither refer to Hashem as “sweet,” nor do we act as if we are holding His Hand. In *Yiddish*, which was this woman’s native tongue, this was the way she spoke. Furthermore, this is how she felt.

We philosophize; we seek intellectual rationale; we talk about spiritual journeys and mind-blowing experiences, but, when it comes to the reality of Hashem, we are at a loss. This woman “saw” and “felt” Hashem in her presence. She experienced the Revelation on a constant basis. Perhaps if we would theorize less and rely on simple conviction, we, too, would experience Hashem in our lives.

אנכי ד' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt. (5:6)

The *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, the foundation of the entire Torah, begins with these words.. The *Shlah HaKadosh* writes that the *Aseres HaDibros* is comprised of 620 words, of which 613 correspond to the *taryag*, 613, *mitzvos*. And the last seven correspond to the seven *mitzvos d'Rabbanan*, Rabbinic *mitzvos* (*berachos*; *Shabbos candles*; *eiruv*; *netilas yadayim*; *Chanukah*; *Purim*; *Hallel*). *Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*, suggests that the final words, *v'chol asher l'reicha*, “And everything that belongs to your fellow” (regarding the prohibition of, *Lo sachmod*, “Do not covet”), is a summary of the entire Torah. *V'chol asher l'reiecha* means that one is enjoined to care about and perform kindness towards our fellow man.

In his *Agra d'Kallah*, the *Bnei Yissaschar* explains that the last commandment, *Lo sachmod*, (translated) “Do not covet” (but can easily mean do not envy), is, in fact, a review of the entire Torah. The purpose of the Torah is: to imbue one with *emunah*, faith, in Hashem; to realize, acknowledge, and live with the notion that Hashem is the source of everything and that a Jew should believe only in Him. When one sincerely believes that Hashem gives everyone his just portion, he will not be jealous of anyone. A Jew may say, “I want” (if he feels that he does not have “enough”), but a Jew may never say, “I need,” because Hashem provides for all of our needs. If He deems it a necessity, we will have it. If we lack, it is because Hashem does not consider it a necessity.

The Torah is our life. While many people say this, how many really believe this statement? Furthermore, he who claims to believe that the Torah is the source of a Jew’s life-- and without Torah he simply is not “living” -- must demonstrate his belief in the way he educates his children. Would a parent deprive his child of a vital medicine or health supplement? Would he opt for the less expensive product, despite its diminished efficacy? Certainly not. If so, why is our attitude toward Torah *chinuch* so blasé? Why do we subject our children

to a “one size fits all” educational methodology, simply because it is more economical or convenient? Children are individuals, and each individual child deserves that his or her education be specifically designed according to his or her individual needs.

Concerning Moshe *Rabbeinu’s* sons, the Torah writes: *Shem ha'echad Gershom... v'shem ha'echad Eliezer*; “The name of one was Gershom... and the name of one was Eliezer.” (*Shemos* 18:3,4) Rather, it should have said, “And the name of the ‘second’ was Eliezer, similar to what is written concerning the *Korban Tamid*: ‘One sheep sacrifice in the morning, and the ‘second’ sheep sacrifice in the afternoon.’” He explains that a parent must realize that each child is individual and unique, thus requiring an education that is singularly fitting for him. The approach in which all children are bunched together and treated the same tends to limit success.

Furthermore, each child should be treated as if he or she is the only child in the family. Just because one is blessed with a large family does not allow him to lose sight of the individual picture. *The Brisker Rav, zl*, once said, “If you ask a *cheder rebbe* which student is uppermost on his mind, he will probably give you the name of one of his star pupils. Such a pupil lightens the *rebbe’s* teaching load, allowing him to teach the class with greater ease. This student gives him no grief and is truly a pleasure to teach. If, however, one were to ask a parent which one of their children is uppermost on their mind, the reply would invariably be the one who is struggling (either in school or socially, etc.). The *Brisker Rav* then said that a *cheder rebbe* should reserve a special place in his heart for the weaker student. To focus solely on the needs of the good student, while ignoring the needs of the weaker ones, would be a serious error (and probably indicate a previous breach in his commitment as a *rebbe*). A *rebbe* should be like a parent, maintaining a special concern for the weaker student, nurturing him or her to grow spiritually as well as emotionally.

The *Brisker Rav* concludes that this is why the Torah refers to students as *banim*, children: (*V'sheenantam l'vanecha; eilu hatalmidim*, “And you shall teach them thoroughly to your children” (*Devarim* 6:7). This refers (even) to one’s students (*Sifri*). This is a reminder to teachers that their students are like their own children. Just as a parent wants the best from all of their children, so, too, should a *rebbe* want to see all of his students achieve their maximum level of potential.

כבד את אביך ואת ואמך כאשר צוך ד' אלקיך Honor your father and mother, as Hashem, your God, commanded you. (5:16)

One would think that honoring parents is a logical *mitzvah* which requires no specific command from Hashem. It should be the result of overwhelming gratitude to parents for all that they do to nurture and support their children. In his *Haaemek Davar* commentary to the Torah, the *Netziv, zl*, notes that there are circumstances (including difficult children) in which *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, is sadly not a primary focus in life, when a child feels that respecting parents is a stretch beyond which they can tolerate. Let us face it: not all parents

are perfect; neither are all children; not all situations and times are ideal. Thus, one might think the *mitzvah* to honor does not apply. The Torah teaches us otherwise. Hashem commanded – end of story. We must treat the *mitzvah* like a *chok*, a *mitzvah* whose logic defies human rationale.

Uniquely, we find no special injunction to love our parents – as we find concerning loving: Hashem; one’s fellow man; the *ger*, convert. The Torah is cognizant that love is an unconditional term which might conflict with circumstances and personalities. Nonetheless, concerning the respect we are enjoined to give our parents, love plays no role; it is irrelevant. Veritably, it makes sense that the person who loves will render respect with greater ease, but one is not contingent upon another. No one says you must “like” it; just do it. That is life. It is not always about what one likes to do or what one wants to do; it is about what Hashem instructs us to do.

As an aside, I have always felt that parents should also respect their children. It makes for a much closer, more balanced, relationship. As *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, observes, the word *kabeid/kovod* is related to *kaveid*, weight/heavy. In other words, to honor means to add weight, gravity, to one’s parents. Some may view their parent as a “lightweight” (which they quite possibly might be): their achievements lacking; their integrity, both spiritual and ethical, leaving much to be desired. Thus, in the child’s mind, he has little reason to demonstrate respect. The Torah does not think so. Part of respect is to add weight to your opinion of your parents, raise their esteem in your eyes. Nonetheless, this has nothing to do with love. To love one’s parents might be a requisite that, for some, in certain situations, might be difficult – even impossible.

A secular writer decries the fact that in our secular-oriented, contemporary society, parents invariably place greater demand on garnering their children’s love than demanding their respect. Thus, we have the painful consequence of seeing adult children whose relationship with their parents are, at best, tepid to non-existent. Perhaps this is why the Torah focuses on honor, which is an action/behavioral command, rather than love, which is emotion-oriented. By respecting, adding weight to our parents’ esteem, we learn to appreciate, hence to love.

Too many parents focus on the love aspect of the relationship they have with their child – not demanding his respect but his love. As a result, the child grows up spoiled, narcissistic, not only with regard to his parents – but with regard to society, in general. Upon themselves achieving the milestone of parenthood, such children will, due to the model set by their parents, not receive respect from their own children. And there is always the guilt that one experiences when he realizes the messed up life he is living which has resulted in his mistreatment of his parents, who sadly are now either too old, or too gone to understand the difference. At the end of the day, he did not give them respect.

Therefore, it is all about respect. Indeed, one who focuses on love, rather than on respect (as enjoined by the Torah), will probably have neither!

I recently came across an excellent article by a *baalas teshuvah*, who raised the issue of children who become