

away when it is our money, our ego.

It is understandable to be reasonably upset. The nature of a person is that, if you give in a little, he will take more. The boundary between “upset” and “anger” is a very fine line. Then there is the cursing. Many of us have been there – and later regretted it. We become so “upset” that we lose our dignity and begin to wish the worst on the person who now has become the archetypical thief. The Torah says to take him to court. No anger, no cursing. We are Jews – and so is he.

**מפני שיבה תקום והדרת פני זקן**

**In the presence of an old person shall you rise and you shall honor the presence of a sage. (19:32)**

In the *Talmud Kiddushin* 32b, a *Tannaic* dispute is presented concerning a *zakein ashmai*, iniquitous elder, whether if one must honor him or not. *Rashi* is the one who defines *ashmai* as iniquitous. *Tosfos* disputes this, since it is a *mitzvah* not to respect an iniquitous elder. Such a person warrants disrespect. Therefore, *Rabbeinu Tam* explains *ashmai* to mean a boor, an ignoramus, one who is otherwise unworthy of respect. Nonetheless, since when are we enjoined to respect an ignoramus, simply due to his advanced age? One must earn respect, be worthy of the reverence accorded him by others. True, age is a blessing, and one who is blessed deserves respect, but age without character/intellectual spiritual refinement should not warrant respect.

In his *Aznaim LaTorah*, the *Lutzker Rav*, *Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin*, *zl*, quotes the *Kotzker Rebbe*, *zl*, who posits that, as one ages, his *taavos*, physical desires and passions, naturally decrease. He no longer has the physical ability to carry out his passions. As his physical drive diminishes, however, another *taavah*, desire, emerges and begins to rapidly increase: *kavod*, esteem. Yes, as one ages, his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, for *kavod* seems to gain speed almost irrationally. We have all seen it. Individuals who throughout their youth and middle age years never sought public acclaim, always remained in the background, suddenly push their way to center stage. They now want attention, are offended easily, become upset if they are not accorded the respect which they now feel they deserve. Perhaps this is part of the aging process, but it is a desire that is very real – and, in some situations quite overpowering.

*Halachah* states that, if someone was once wealthy and has suffered bankruptcy, such that he is now financially challenged, we must help him to achieve the lifestyle to which he had been accustomed. If he had had a chauffeur-driven car, with a footman, we must provide these for him. That is how far *tzedakah*, charity, extends. We must provide what he is missing. For a wealthy man – survival is insufficient. He is used to luxuries. Thus, for one who requires *kavod*, esteem, for his age-related ego, it is a

sensible request. A *zakein ashmai*, ignorant old man, needs *kavod* – although he is undeserving.

When we reach out to help someone – or vice versa – they reach out to us for help, we must alleviate their pain, even if it is self-imposed. If a person suffers from *mizrach vant* syndrome to the point that, if he is not given a seat on the eastern wall of the *shul*, he will be deeply insulted and hurt – we must give it to him. It does not hurt us, and it certainly helps him – so, why not?

**Va’ani Tefillah**

**סלח לנו אבינו כי חמאנו  
מחל לנו מלכנו כי פשענו**

In his *Shaarei Teshuvah*, *Rabbeinu Yonah* delineates *Perek* 51 of *Sefer Tehillim* as the *Perek HaTeshuvah*, chapter of (the principles of) *teshuvah*. *David Hamelech* expresses his feelings of lament concerning his conduct with *Basheva*. He says: “For I recognize my willful sins (*pesha*), and my error (*cheit*) is before me always.” *David* seems to push his willful sins to the back burner, while he focuses on his inadvertent sins.

In his commentary to the *Shemoneh Esrai*, *Horav Avraham Chaim Feuer*, *Shlita*, quotes a powerful explanation from *Horav Eliyahu Lopian*, *zl*. *David* first addresses his *pesha'im*, by acknowledging them and repenting sincerely. He then puts them aside. His life does not revolve around his sins, because he might be consumed with guilt and fall into depression. A *baal teshuvah*, penitent, who dwells on his past behavior, will be hampered in his spiritual growth, because all of his attention will be directed toward his past missteps. In the case of *chataim*, the opposite is true. There we tend to rationalize and excuse our errant behavior. *David*, thus, emphasized his errors as always being before him. He was acutely aware that disregarding and excusing one’s errors will eventually lead to performing the same willful sins again.

**Dedicated in memory**

of

**משה בן שמואל ז"ל**

**Krivot**

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**Parashas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim**

תשע"ז

פרשת אחרי מות-קדושים

**Acharei Mos**

**אחרי מות שני בני אהרן בקרבנם לפני ד' וימותו  
After the death of Aharon's two sons, when they  
approached before Hashem, and they died. (16:1)**

The *Midrash* (quoted by the *Chida* in *Nachal Kedumim*) relates that when *Iyov* heard of the incident concerning the tragic passing of *Nadav* and *Avihu*, he said, *Af I'zos yecherad libi*, “Even for this my heart trembles.” The *Midrash Rabba* (*Vayikra* 20) elaborates concerning *Iyov's* trembling: (*Iyov* said to himself) “*Titus* the wicked had the audacity to enter the *Kodesh HaKedoshim*, Holy of Holies (a place where only the *Kohen Gadol* entered on the holiest day of the year, *Yom Kippur*), brandishing a sword. He pierced the *Paroches*, Curtain, and his sword emerged blood-soaked. Yet, he went in peacefully (unharmd) and left the same way. Nonetheless, two saintly Priests, such as *Nadav* and *Avihu*, went in and did not fare as well.”

*Iyov* trembled from their death – but why? *Chazal* do not suggest what about their deaths made *Iyov* tremble. Simply, as explained by *Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel*, *zl*, *Iyov* wondered why *Hashem* was punishing him so. After all, he was deeply righteous and pious. What could he possibly have done to incur such punishment? *Iyov* mused, “But *Nadav* and *Avihu* were righteous individuals; yet, tragedy struck them on what was supposed to be the happiest day of their lives.” This indicates that it is “stormy” in *Hashem's* Presence. The greater one is, the closer he is to *Hashem*. With this nearness comes overwhelming responsibility. Thus, *Iyov* felt that since no one is perfect and even such distinguished *Kohanim* as the two sons of *Aharon* were struck down, then he, too, could be subject to punishment.

The *Chida* quotes *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 52a) that, when *Moshe Rabbeinu* and *Aharon HaKohen* were walking, *Nadav* and *Avihu* walked behind them. *Nadav* turned to *Avihu* and asked, “When will these two old men die, and you and I will lead the nation?” Apparently, it was *Nadav* who spoke and *Avihu* who remained silent – not commenting one way or another. Yet, both received equal punishment: *Nadav*, who spoke; *Avihu*, who listened. This taught *Iyov* a powerful lesson: silence can also warrant punishment. Sometimes, one must speak up, regardless of the consequences. This lesson pointed directly at *Iyov*, intimating to him the reason for his suffering: silence.

Three leaders sat with *Pharaoh* to discuss the “Jewish problem.” *Bilaam* advised *Pharaoh* to annihilate the Jews. *Yisro* ran away in protest, as well as to save his life. *Iyov* sat silently, knowing that it was useless to say anything. He was

well aware that *Pharaoh* was not interested in “taking prisoners.” He wanted all of the Jews dead. When *Iyov* saw the punishment that *Avihu* received for his silence, he understood why he was suffering. As the *Brisker Rav* declared, “*Az es tut vei – veint men!* When it hurts – one cries out!”

*Rav Eliyahu Baruch* distinguishes between *Avihu*, who quite possibly could have achieved something by protesting, and *Iyov*, who knew that to protest against *Pharaoh* and *Bilaam* would be futile. We should consider the *Brisker Rav's* comment that, when it hurts, one cries out – regardless of its futility; it should be a natural reaction to pain. When one is silent, it indicates that he is not in pain. We do, however, derive from here the greatness of *Iyov* in not looking for justification to qualify his behavior. He was looking for the reason behind his punishment, because he wanted to know where and how he had erred, rather than a reason to absolve himself.

**אשר יעשה אתם האדם וחי בהם  
Which man shall carry out and by which he shall live. (18:5)**

*V'chai bahem* – “By which he shall live (by them)” is an enjoinder to us that *mitzvos*, commandments, are not to come in contradistinction to life. Thus, if performing a *mitzvah* endangers one’s well-being, his life supersedes the *mitzvah*, except for the three cardinal sins of idolatry, murder and forbidden relationships. Furthermore, if violating a *mitzvah* is under such circumstances which would bring about a *chillul*, desecration, of *Hashem's* Name, his life takes second place to the *mitzvah*. The *Chiddushei HaRim* views the words, *v'chai bahem*, as setting the standard for *mitzvah* performance. We are exhorted to perform *mitzvos* in such a manner that we demonstrate that their performance is our primary source of joy, enthusiasm and *chiyus*, life. We all know special people for whom *mitzvah* observance is the essence of their lives. What about those who otherwise are confronted with difficult challenges – financial, emotional, physical, children, etc.? How are they to accept the challenge of *v'chai bahem*?

Once again, I can cite countless stories of righteous people whose lives of devotion to *Hashem* transcended the pain and privation of their lives, but how did they do it? How were they able to rationalize the joy of serving *Hashem* taking center stage to an otherwise life of misery? What about the fellow who is not a *tzaddik*, righteous individuals, who just happens to be a simple, believing, G-d-fearing Jew (obviously such a person is far from “simple”)? How do we explain to him that his life of misery is to just “disappear” when he serves

Hashem?

*Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*, observes that one of the materials used to build the *Mishkan* was *oros techashim*, hides from the *tachash*. *Rashi* explains that the *tachash* was an animal that is no longer extant, having existed only for a short period of time. The *tachash* was a multicolored animal which was – *sass u'misp' aer b'gavanim shelo*, “rejoiced and was proud of its colors.”

The *Rebbe* notes that the *Mishkan* was a microcosm of the human being (actually of the entire world). Each material represented a different aspect of the human psyche. For instance, the gold metal, which was used in the *Mishkan*, is also found in the human soul. Gold represents fear of Heaven, while silver, which was also used in the *Mishkan*, signifies one's love of Hashem. Thus, if a *tachash* was incorporated in the edifice of the *Mishkan*, a *tachash* element must be in the soul of every Jew. What is it?

In *Pirkei Avos* 4:1, *Chazal* teach: “Who is wealthy? *ha'same'ach b'chelko*, he who rejoices with his lot in life.” *Rashi* explains, “Regardless of the portion that Hashem gave him, whether it is good or bad, a lot or a little – he accepts everything with a good eye.” The *Divrei Yisrael*, quoting a *sefer* that is no longer extant, observes that the letters which comprise *chelko*, comprise *roshei teivos: ches – cham*, hot; *lamed – lach*, wet; *kuf – kar*, cold; *v'yaveish*, and dry. A person should be happy with his portion – regardless of what it is.

The *tachash* is within every Jew. It “rejoiced and was proud of its colors.” It was happy with its lot. Every Jew has the unique potential to be happy with his lot, because an aspect of the *tachash* resides in every Jew. In way of an anecdotal vignette, a young man, a *chasid* of *Horav Shalom Kaminka, zl*, was complaining about the overwhelming *tzaros*, troubles, which seemed to be his lot in life. The *Rebbe* said to him, “As you know, whiskey at first has a bitter, burning taste. Anyone who imbibes, however, is acutely aware of the joy that whiskey makes him feel good and actually increases his level of happiness. I understand that you are living a bitter life, but, if you know how to (learn to) accept life properly, you can find happiness even within life's vicissitudes.”

At the end of the day, outlook and attitude are primary. Does it remove the pain? For some, it actually does. For others, the pain remains, but acceptance sets in because we know it is part of Hashem's Divine plan, and, as such, it becomes tolerable – and, after a while, it becomes acceptable – even something in which we take pride.

The *Rebbe* relates a story which demonstrates a believer's rationalization of Hashem's decree. *Rav Berel Cohen*, a resident of Kiryas Sanz, Netanya, once bought a lottery ticket and won, indicating that an enormous sum of money would be his. He was far from a rich man, and the newly-acquired funds were a lifesaver for his family. Alas, his good fortune lasted but a few days, since the lottery officials discovered that there had been an error, and they had declared the wrong winner. The money was to go to someone else. It is one thing not to win – but to win and be forced to give it up is very difficult. As a result, his wife was heartbroken. She could not stop crying. *Rav Berel* remained stoic, calm and filled with his usual sense of joy – a true *same'ach b'chelko*.

One of his children found it difficult to understand how his father could maintain his present demeanor, despite the ups and downs of his win/loss experience. “How can you remain happy at a time like this?” he asked his father.

In his typical calm and collected manner, *Rav Berel* answered, “Our sages teach us that, when one incurs the penalty of death, Hashem will, at times, relieve that person of his wealth and leave him poor in exchange for his life. The Talmud says, *Ani chashuv k'meis*, “A poor person is like a dead man.” While this may be a workable solution for a rich man, what about one who is poor to begin with? What can he do? He really has nothing to lose. What about me? I have nothing. If I – Heaven-forbid – am destined to die, I have no way out! Hashem was well aware of my “problem.” He, therefore, provided me with an enormous sum of money – for a short time; after which, I lost it all. Now I can live.”

What a meaningful and inspirational way of looking at troubling aspects of life. Shame is a powerful purifying agent. It purges one's sins. He might be miserable, but he is alive to talk about it.

Returning to our original question: How does one live *v'chai bahem*, live a life of joy? It is all in his mind. He understands that Hashem runs the world a certain way. He is not beholden to us. We are beholden to Him. If we maintain a proper frame of mind, our *emunah*, faith in Hashem, will be solid and unshakable. Once we have achieved that plateau, the joy of serving Hashem will be natural.

#### **Kedoshim**

**קדושים תהיו... איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואת שכחותי תשמרו  
אני ד'**

**You shall be holy... every man: your father and mother shall you revere and My Shabbosos shall you observe. I am Hashem. (19:2,3)**

It was 1945 and *Horav Moshe David Tenenbaum, zl*, who was then head of the *Vaad HaYeshivos* in the Holy Land, went for a vacation in a small village in the north. As he was walking one day, a member of a nearby *kibbutz* approached him and asked if he could serve as the tenth man for a *minyan*. At first, he thought the fellow was teasing him, since it was a non-religious *kibbutz* and *tefillah b'tzibur, davening* with a *minyan*, was uncommon (to say the least). How surprised he was when he arrived at the *kibbutz* to meet the other members of the *minyan*. His surprise increased when he discovered that they were not *davening*, but rather, performing a *Bris Milah*, circumcision ceremony. The *mohel*, ritual circumciser, was a fellow in shorts, who did not appear to be observant. Nonetheless, the *mohel* recited the blessings fluently and performed the circumcision flawlessly, with apparent skill.

Immediately following the ceremony, *Rav Moshe David* approached the *mohel* and asked him where he had practiced to become such a specialist in *Bris Milah*. The man explained that he used to be a *Vishnitzer Chasid* and had for years been a *mohel* in Vishnitz. Upon arriving in *Eretz Yisrael*, his relationship with Hashem had waned, and once he joined the *kibbutz*, he had naturally become estranged from Jewish observance. Nonetheless, he still retained his skill as a *mohel*, which he employed when needed.

They finished their conversation, and *Rav Moshe David*

was about to leave when the father of the infant came over and made a request: “We have an elderly grandfather who – due to his failing health – was unable to attend the ceremony. I am sure that it would mean the world to him if you could visit with him a moment and extend a *bircas mazel tov*.” *Rav Moshe David* was only too happy to hearten an elderly Jew. He went to the home and met the grandfather, who was confined to a wheelchair. He sat down next to him and began a conversation. He introduced himself as hailing from Yerushalayim where he was a *chasid* of Karlin. As soon as he mentioned his connection with Karlin, the grandfather's eyes perked up, and he said, “I must tell you a story.”

“I emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* from Germany, where I had lived an assimilated lifestyle (as did many German Jews who had fallen under the influence of the scourge of *Haskalah*, Enlightenment.) One Friday night, my friend informed me that a *Chassidic Rebbe* – *Horav Yisrael Perlow, zl* (known as the *Yenukah* and *Der Frankfurter*, because he was buried in Frankfurt, Germany), had arrived in Germany for health reasons. *Chassidic Rebbes* were not common in Germany and certainly not in Berlin. We felt it would be an interesting sight (a *Rebbe* conducting his *Tish*, festive *Shabbos* meal, surrounded by his *Chassidim* around a large table). I already owned a car, so we drove over to where the *Rebbe* was conducting his *Tish* (on *Shabbos*).

“We entered the large room to see the *Rebbe* about to speak. ‘I rarely speak Torah thoughts at the *Shabbos Tish*,’ the *Rebbe* began. ‘Since I am a guest visiting Berlin, however, I will change my custom and say *divrei Torah*.’ That *Shabbos* was *Parashas Kedoshim*. It has been quite some time, and I have gone through much since that time. Nonetheless, I was so impacted by the holy *Rebbe's* words, I remember them as if they were today. The *Rebbe* began with the opening words of the *parsha, Kedoshim tiheyu*, ‘You shall be holy.’ He then quoted the rest of the *pasuk* and the next; the Torah's enjoinder to revere parents, followed by the commandment to observe *Shabbos*, with the closing words – ‘I am Hashem.’

“What is the relationship between these statements?’ the *Rebbe* asked. ‘It all depends on to whom one is speaking. To my *Chassidim* (G-d-fearing Torah-observant Jews), it is sufficient to simply say to them – “You shall be holy.” However, there are Jews for whom this is almost too much to ask (being that they are no longer religiously-connected with Hashem). To them, the Torah says, “Every man: your father and mother shall you revere.” If you are no longer observant, then at least do what your parents did. Surely, there must have been a semblance of Jewish observance at home. Attempt to maintain old family practices (as a way of holding onto Judaism). As long as one holds on, there is hope. Sadly, there are Jews who have distanced themselves, so that they are not prepared to observe all of the practices that were part of their life growing up at home. To them the Torah admonishes: at least keep My *Shabbos*. That much you do remember.’

“I thought it was over, when, suddenly, the *Rebbe* raised his voice, banged on the table and declared, ‘From you, Jews of Berlin, even that we cannot expect. (You have gravitated away so far, distancing yourselves from ritual observance,

parental customs, even the basics, like *Shabbos*.) You should at least remember, “*Ani Hashem*, I am Hashem! Remember that there is a Creator Who guides this world!”

“The *Rebbe's* pounding on the table set off a pounding in my heart. At that time, I had a daughter who was engaged to marry a gentile (that was Berlin in those days. Sadly, it was not uncommon). I did not need more. The *Rebbe's* pounding continued to pound in my chest. I dropped everything, and within a week, I was on a boat to *Eretz Yisrael*. If you saw today a grandchild of mine receive a *Bris Milah*, it is only because I attended the *Rebbe's Tish*. That night's pounding of *Ani Hashem* has been my conscience throughout these years.”

The casual spectator who sees such a non-observant man does not take the time to wonder if there is another side to the story. He might easily disregard the many grandfathers we all often see. Do we ever stop to think: Why? Why is he like this? What was his background: Who turned him off? Was he ever turned on? What kind of life did he have? I meet such people every week in various settings. Some never had a chance. Some were even raised Orthodox but assimilated when they went off to school. For some it was financial, peer pressure, ignorance, lack of interest, but everyone has a story. We must never forget this. We must never judge – because, who knows, if given similar circumstances, whether we would have acted differently – or even worse?

**לא תלין פענל שכיך אתך עד בקר. לא תקלל חרש  
You shall not withhold a worker's wage with you until morning. You shall not curse the deaf. (19:13,14)**

The *Baal HaTurim* notes the juxtaposition of the prohibition against cursing a deaf person, or anyone for that matter, upon the prohibition against withholding a worker's wages. He explains that, despite one's justification for monetary claim, he may not curse him. He should take him to court to litigate whatever claim he may have against him. The Torah outlines the parameters of dispute for us. Reuven worked for Shimon. It was not easy labor. He put in his time and effort, and now he expects to be paid. He has every right to demand his wages. His children were home waiting for the food that he was to purchase with his wages. It was before *Yom Tov*, the Festival, and his children were counting on something new this year. He came home empty-handed. Can one imagine what coursed through his mind – how he feels, the hurt, the pain, the anger?

Veritably, he was justified – in taking him to court. That is all. Nothing more. The Torah does not permit us to curse someone who has cheated us, despite the justification that we might have (in our mind). There are parameters in Judaism. Hating and cursing cross the line – even when one has every reason in the world to be angry.

One misstep does not invalidate a person. Let me explain. The person who (perhaps) cheated him, or owes him money, is otherwise a decent person. He could even have been his friend for years. After all, he trusted him – so he must be his friend. He must be honest. Sadly, he became caught up in his finances and is now in arrears. Is that a reason to curse him? The Torah does not think so. Unfortunately, we get carried