

Therefore, he was making a vow that, if Hashem were to grant him life, he would support this man on a Yissachar/Zevulun basis, whereby one brother, Zevulun, supported Yissachar's learning.

When the woman read her husband's note, she immediately decided to fulfill his wish: she would support this man as he devoted himself to Torah and *avodas Hashem*, serving G-d. When she related this story to the man in question, he was shocked that anything was extraordinary about the way he *davened* or learned. He said that he had supported his family with the proceeds earned from a small grocery store that he had owned for the past thirty years. Lately, business had slacked off considerably, to the point that he did not know how he would support his family. Now, thanks to the deceased's meticulous writing and the widow's extraordinary devotion to her husband's memory, his problem was resolved. We can learn and benefit so much from this story. For now, we will focus on the "writing."

Dear Readers,

A person is defined by his ability to acknowledge, appreciate and pay gratitude to those who benefit him. It is the one value that one must possess if he is to be considered to be in the running as a *mentch*. It is the one character trait that cannot be overdone. When performing the same activity day in and day out for years, one runs the occupational hazards of: A) becoming complacent in his approach to the endeavor, thereby risking the loss of the emotion and vivacity that guided him from the onset; B) losing sight of his responsibility not to take things for granted, so that he maintains the same sense of gratitude years down the road as during its commencement.

Having concluded my twenty-seventh year of writing *Peninim*, I pray that: the drive and passion to produce *divrei Torah* that have inspired thousands throughout the world continue unabated; and I never forget to thank all those who allow me to enjoy the fruits of this endeavor. I have been blessed with extraordinary *Siyata diShmaya* and am humbled by it.

First and foremost I am privileged to have had the support of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, an institution which, from its very inception, 75 years ago, has had as its guiding mission statement, to reach out to all Jews all over, all of the time.

There are individuals without whose patience and devotion *Peninim* would not be a reality. Mrs. Sharon Weimer and Mrs. Tova Scheinerman prepare the weekly manuscript with extreme patience and, at times, creative ingenuity to decipher my illegible scrawl. It is difficult to always determine what I mean, especially when words are missing. Likewise, Mrs. Marilyn Berger successfully navigates my ambiguous writing and unravels what it is I mean to say. She allows for *Peninim* to be presentable – and acceptable – to the wider spectrum of the world Jewish community, transforming hopsack into velvet.

Over the years, *Peninim* has developed its own network of distribution. While the constraints of space do not permit me to mention each and every person who sees to it that *Peninim* is distributed in his or her individual community, I will highlight a few. It all started with Baruch Berger of Brooklyn,

New York, who came to me, requesting that he be able to distribute *Peninim* in his community. He later became ill, hindering his ability to continue his *avodas ha'kodesh*. As his illness progressed, Baruch was forced to halt his activities, but the *z'chus* is all his. Four years ago, shortly before Rosh Hashanah, Baruch's pure *neshamah* returned to its rightful place *b'ginzei meromim*. May the *limud haTorah* which he initiated be an eternal *z'chus* for him.

Peninim on the Torah can be obtained electronically via the Hebrew Academy's website. A number of years ago, Eliyahu Goldberg of Yerushalayim began a "World" edition. Through his efforts, *Peninim* has received extensive coverage in England, France, Switzerland, South Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Malta, Italy, Thailand, Hong Kong, South America and Australia. Eliyahu went so far as to anglicize the text to make it more readable in the United Kingdom. Sadly, last summer Eliyahu's life came to an untimely end. It was a shock to me and to his many friends all over the world. His widow, Angela, together with Ashley Leboff has been shouldering the responsibility of keeping Eliyahu's legacy of *harbotzas Torah* alive. Rabbi Moshe Peleg, Rav of Shaarei Zedek Medical Center, prints and distributes *Peninim* throughout the English-speaking communities in *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe Davidovici of Antwerp/Yerushalayim, includes *Peninim* in his internet edition of *divrei Torah*. There are well-meaning *baalei chesed* throughout the world Jewish community who distribute *Peninim*, many who I do not even know by name. May the *mitzvah of harbotzas Torah* serve as a *z'chus* for them to be blessed *b'chol mili d'meitav*.

My wife, Neny, has been supportive in many ways. Sharing with me all of the agonies and ecstasies of writing, her support and encouragement, as well as her constructive critiques, have played a vital role in *Peninim's* success. Somehow, she always finds areas that require correction. After carefully reading the manuscript, she offers her constructive suggestions, and, with her keen eye, enhances the manuscript's readability. She is literally the last word before the weekly edition is printed. Without her, *Peninim*, like everything else in our lives, would be deficient. As a result, and for so many other considerations too numerous to mention, I offer her my heartfelt gratitude. I pray that we: both be blessed with good health; merit that Torah and *chesed* continue to be the hallmarks of our home; and continue to derive much Torah *nachas* from our children and grandchildren, *kein yirbu*.

Rabbi A. L. Scheinbaum

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Parashas V'Zos Habrachah

תשע"ה

פרשת וזאת הברכה

וזאת הברכה אשר ברח משה איש האלקים את בני ישראל לפני מותו

And this is the blessing that Moshe, the man of G-d, bestowed upon Bnei Yisrael before his death. (33:1)

The *Midrash Tanchuma (Va'eschanan 6)* relates that the *Melachim*, Angels, came to Moshe *Rabbeinu* and informed him, *Higia shah she'atah niftar min ha'olam*, "The time has come for you to leave the world." Moshe responded, *Hamtinu li*; "Wait for me until I bless the nation. They did not have a pleasant experience with me in this world, due to the many admonishments and rebuke that I administered to them." Moshe was concerned lest the Jewish People erroneously think that he was angry with them. He had delivered one reproach after another. They were a nation in the making, a diamond in the rough that required direction and guidance. Every time that they veered off the correct path, he was compelled to bring it to their attention. This does not always lead to a loving relationship – unless the student is acutely aware that his mentor is rebuking him out of love and for his own good. Concerned that *Klal Yisrael* might have derived the wrong message, Moshe asked to be allowed to bless them before he took leave of this world. He wanted them to know how much he loved them.

Moshe devoted the last forty years of his life to *Klal Yisrael*. He took nothing for himself. Regardless of their sins, he stood up for them, pleading time and again that Hashem forgive them. Yet, if he did not bless them before he died, they might feel that he did not care! This was the apparent situation, but was it that important for Moshe to devote the final moments of his life acquiescing to the would-be concerns of his flock? Was it so important to him to prove himself to them? He was about to take leave of this world; his earthly existence was coming to an end. One would think that his thoughts would be focused on more lofty and sublime issues than making sure that *Klal Yisrael* was aware that he loved them, and that they understood that everything that he had done during his tenure as their leader was purely out of love.

Horav A. Henschel Leibowitz, zl, explains that the purpose of Moshe's life was to teach *Klal Yisrael* that they should cling to the Torah. *Klal Yisrael's deveikus*, adherence/loyalty/devotion to Torah was dependent upon – and consistent with – the level of understanding they had of Moshe's level of love for them! A student listens to a *rebbe* whom the student knows loves him. The student's devotion and commitment to his studies is commensurate with the *rebbe's* love for the student and the student's awareness of this love. Therefore, the most important thing for Moshe to do at the end of his life was to ensure that all of his teachings would find their mark and be concretized in the minds and hearts of *Klal Yisrael*.

This could only occur if they knew that he loved them.

We have all had teachers throughout our years of growth. Some we remember because they had a special impact upon us. There is a concept of a life-altering teacher, someone who has impressed the student, so that it made a difference in his life's trajectory. Ask any student, and he will reply that the teacher that had the greatest impact on him was the one who showed love – be it through large or even small acts of kindness. It showed the student that the teacher cared.

Kindness expressed to a student can be delivered in various packages. One *rebbe* stayed after school to help the student who just did not pick up the lesson in class. Another student had no one at home with whom he could review the lesson, so the *rebbe* became that person. One boy moved around a lot and could not tolerate how long it took each teacher to pronounce his name correctly – until he met the *rebbe* who was his life's game changer, the *rebbe* who made a point on the very first day of school to pronounce his name correctly. The *rebbe* cared about the student's feelings. When a student is fortunate enough to find that special life-altering teacher/*rebbe/morah*, the benefits of that experience last a lifetime.

How does one become such a *rebbe*? How does one become a "game-changer"? I think it comes with self-confidence. The *rebbe* must believe in himself, but even more, he must believe in his mission and in his ability to transform the life of his student. A *rebbe* who understands that in his hands are the keys to someone's future will teach like a "game-changer." In a meaningful tribute to an extraordinary *rebbe*, Rabbi Yechiel Spero (*Touched By Their Faith*) writes about *Horav Gad'L Eisner*, who, upon being appointed *Mashgiach* in *Yeshivas Chidushei HaRim* of Tel Aviv, was asked (by a friend) to define his position. His reply is classic, "I am still not sure. It all depends upon the needs of the students. If they need me to be a *mashgiach*, ethical supervisor, I will be a *mashgiach*. If I am needed to teach a class, I will be a *rebbe*. If they need me to serve food in the kitchen, I will do that. Most important, if the students need me to be their friend, I will be their friend."

These words (in my opinion) encapsulate a *rebbe's* mission: Be the student's friend. Earn the student's trust, admiration, but, most important, his love. While I am certain that some *rebbeim* might not agree with this approach, well...Rabbi Spero writes about the dormitory supervisor in a *yeshiva* (far from being an easy or appreciated job) who, due to his frustration with the behavior and lack of appreciation evinced by his charges, decided that enough was enough. He was moving on. There must be easier, more rewarding jobs than this. Approaching the *rosh yeshiva* with his resignation, the *rosh yeshiva* asked him what other means of livelihood he would assume. He replied that his grandfather was a *sofer*, scribe. He would study the *halachos*,

laws, and skill needed, and subsequently follow in his grandfather's footsteps.

The *rosh yeshivah* intimated that it was a good choice, a *melachah nekiah*, "clean" work, that required meticulous devotion. As an "aside," the *rosh yeshivah* pointed out the difference between the two jobs: dormitory supervisor; and scribe. A scribe, even if he were fortunate to write a *Sefer Torah*, writes on parchment, the skin of a dead animal. A *rebbe/teacher* writes on the hearts of Jewish children. He inscribes Hashem's word on their souls. This imprint will last forever. The young fellow kept his job and went on to become an exceptional *rebbe*.

Horav Yaakov Meir Schechter, Shlita, quotes the *Rmak Horav Moshe Cordovero, zl*, who writes that had Adam *HaRishon* not erred, *Shlomo Hamelech*, who wrote *Shir HaShirim* which describes the extraordinary love between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*, instead of using the analogy of the love of a husband and wife, for the simile of love would have used the analogy of a *rebbe* and his *talmid*, student, for no greater love exists.

יִמַת שָׁם מֹשֶׁה לְבַד ד'

So Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there. (34:5)

V'zos Ha'Brachah records the passing of Moshe *Rabbeinu* from this world. Our quintessential leader, *Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael*, Teacher of Torah to all of *Klal Yisrael*, was human, a mortal who had achieved the apex of spiritual achievement. It was through him that Hashem rained plague after plague on Egypt, plagues which became the precursors of the Exodus. The plagues were followed by the Splitting of the Red Sea, accompanied by the drowning of the Egyptians. Moshe led the nation and put up with all of its troubles during the forty year trek in the desolate wilderness. These were no simple occurrences. These were seminal events, miracles which cemented our relationship with Hashem, based upon the principles of *emunah*, faith, and *bitachon*, trust. Having said this, we wonder: What was Moshe's greatest endeavor, his legacy which defines him for all time?

Simply, one would say that *eved* Hashem, servant of Hashem, tells it all. There is no question that this epitaph is a remarkable tribute which defines Moshe's total devotion to serving the Almighty. He abrogated himself to the point that he relinquished his entire being to Hashem. He had no selfhood. He was an *eved*. Is this, however, his legacy? Clearly, it is a tribute to our leader, who sets an example to which every Jew should aspire to emulate. This is what he was, but what is it that he did which we should attempt to emulate?

The *Talmud Sotah* 13b quotes Hashem eulogizing (so to speak) Moshe. Among the tributes, Hashem bemoans the loss of *Safra Rabba*, the Great Scribe/ the Great Scholar. This same appellation is quoted in *Midrash*, granting Moshe the title of *Safra Rabba*. *Maharsha* explains that *Safra Rabba* (with regard to Moshe) can be translated as either great scribe, since he wrote the Torah, or great calculator (who counts, computes) since he twice counted the nation. I would like to elaborate on this term, its translation and its relationship to us.

We will begin with Moshe as the great scribe who: (A.) Wrote the Torah, (B.) Inscribed it on the hearts and minds of the Jewish People. In his *Pele Yoetz*, *Horav Eliezer Papo, zl*, writes about the overriding significance of *kesivah*, writing, committing thoughts to paper, using clear, lucid verbiage that records one's ideas and novellae for posterity. He cites *Sefer*

Chassidim 530, who writes: "A person will one day (before the Heavenly Tribune) be asked to give an accounting for his not recording the *Chidushei Torah*, novellae, Torah thoughts, which were revealed to him from Heaven. (In other words, a *chidush* is Heavenly ordained.) One who writes his *chidushei Torah* is considered as if he offered *korbanos*, sacrifices. (When he writes) it is likened to lecturing in public to thousands of people. (This is especially true today with the advent of electronic media.) Furthermore, there will come a time that "his lips will speak from the grave..." If he is worthy that his words find the correct mark (his words of rebuke inspire someone to alter his life's trajectory), even if it is one among a thousand, how fortunate is he. Even for this alone it was worth it for him to have been brought down to this world (only for this achievement). Last, the author notes that, by putting words on paper, he ensures that it will be recorded and remembered.

The *Tur Yoreh Deah* 270 writes that, in our times (when there is no dearth of *Sifrei Torah*), one should focus on writing commentary on *Chumash*, *Mishnah*, and *Talmud* and on studying the written word. This is a component of the *mitzvah* of *kesivas Sefer Torah*. When the Torah (*Devarim* 31:19) says, "So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to *Bnei Yisrael*," it is speaking about writing a *Sefer Torah*. In our time, however, when *Sifrei Torah* are numerous, one should write commentary on *Torah She Ba'al Peh*, the Oral Law (*Horav Avraham Mordechai, zl, m'Gur*).

In the preface to his *Shibolei HaLeket*, the author writes, "I went through a very difficult period in my life when I was at death's door. In His great mercy, Hashem caused me to suffer great pain, but I did not die. I am certain that this was in the merit of my holy forebears. In one of my pain-wracked moments, I had a vision of a man standing before me with a lit candle in his hand. He extinguished it and then immediately rekindled the flame. I pleaded with him to explain to me the meaning of this vision. He explained that the candle signified my *neshamah*, soul, whose allotted time on this world had concluded. The immediate return of the flame was a sign that my life could, within seconds, be returned to me. My life had been in the balance, and Hashem had granted me added time on this world, so that I be *mezakeh es harabim*, bring merit to the multitudes. He told me that, in three days' time, I would be completely healed and rejuvenated. This vision occurred three days prior to *Shavuos*. On the first day of *Shavuos*, I walked into *shul* as healthy as if I had never been ill. It was at that moment that I accepted upon myself to write a commentary on *Tanach*, which I called *Shibolei HaLeket*, 'Ears of Gleaning,' as a remembrance of this vision (and as gratitude for my added years of life)."

In the preface to the *Pe'as HaShulchan*, *Horav Yisrael Shklov, zl*, writes about a similar occurrence which happened to him. He expressed his gratitude for being spared by writing the *Pe'as HaShulchan*, which illuminates the laws pertaining to living in *Eretz Yisrael*. A devastating plague struck Tzfas in 1814. Consequently, a number of Jews attempted to flee to *Yerushalayim*. *Rav Yisrael* and his family, who were recent emigres, also tried to escape. Nonetheless, tragedy struck, as members of his family succumbed to the disease. *Rav Yisrael* also became deathly ill, and, in what might have been his last moments, made a vow that if he were to be spared, he would author a *sefer*, Torah volume, on the laws pertaining to *Eretz Yisrael*. It would be a supplement to the *Shulchan Aruch*, which did not include these laws in its compendium. He fell asleep and, as he writes in the preface to his *Pe'as HaShulchan*,

"Someone approached me and touched my shoulder, arousing me like awakening one from sleep. Then he said to me, 'Afflicted and tortured one be healed!' From that moment on, Hashem began to reveal His kindness to me." *Rav Yisrael* and one daughter recovered and later returned to Tzfas, when the plague had dissipated.

Rav Yisrael was an exemplary Torah leader, a *manhig* who dedicated his life to his people and to building *Eretz Yisrael*. Alas, his *sefer*/his vow, had yet to be completed. He never stopped learning; he never stopped teaching, but his *sefer* had not yet been printed. In 1825, the challenges and suffering continued, this time in the form of devastating winds and floods. Many people lost their homes, including *Rav Yisrael* and his family. (He had remarried, and his wife bore him a new family.) *Rav Yisrael* survived this latest tragedy, but felt that his suffering was due to his neglecting to fulfill his vow. His *sefer*, for which he had made a vow eleven years earlier, had not yet been printed.

It took *Rav Yisrael* nine years to write the *Pe'as Ha Shulchan*, due to his numerous duties and his limited time. Fortunately, a printing press had opened up in Tzfas in 1832, much to the joy and relief of *Rav Yisrael*. Otherwise, he would have had to print his volume in Europe. In 1834, as he was about to go to print, another calamity, in the guise of the Druze rebellion, struck Tzfas. These Arabs, who were joined by the local fellaheen, Arab peasants, rebelled against the governor of Egypt who ruled over Palestine/*Eretz Yisrael* at the time. As has occurred throughout history, gentile fights gentile and the Jew is the hapless victim. Thirty-three days of rioting ensued, during which the Druze vented their anger at the governor or the closest entity in their midst, the Jews and their property. The rioting rained destruction on human life, homes and shuls – and the printing press. Miraculously, the *Pe'as HaShulchan* was spared and eventually printed in 1836, when the printing house was rebuilt.

I recorded the lengthy story (which is all in the author's preface) to demonstrate the significance of the written word. It is our connection to the future. It is our posterity – our game-changer – and, most important, can be a *z'chus*, merit, for the present.

Why is the word for scribe the same as for one who counts? Perhaps, the factor in determining a good writer is his proper use of words. If he writes too much, he is verbose. If he writes too little, his message will not be properly understood, his ideas will not be correctly received. A good writer literally must "count" his words and know which ones to use and which to ignore. A truly great scholar (other form of *Safra Rabba*) counts his every move. Nothing is done without *aforethought*. *Horav Mordechai Feivush Friedman, zl*, son and heir to *Horav Yisrael, zl, m'Rizhyn*, and father of the *Rav* of Hosziatin, was well-known for his paucity in speech. He rarely spoke, and, when he did, it was always to the point. He would sit for hours, surrounded by his disciples, and never once open his mouth. He explained his taciturnity: "Silence is that which encloses wisdom, as it says in *Pirkei Avos* 3:13, *Siyag lachochmah shtekah*; 'A fence around wisdom is silence.' Our sages have said (as interpreted by the *Rebbe*), 'A fence is that which surrounds and protects what is inside its perimeter. If wisdom is on the inside, then its fence is silence.'"

According to a second explanation rendered by the *Maharsha*, *Safra Rabba* means great scholar. The aspect of counting is likewise significant – especially if the scholar has a following to whom he serves as mentor and inspiration. A leader

must think of each individual in his community, literally counting each and every one in his own right – and not bunched together as part of the collective group.

Moshe *Rabbeinu's* first act of leadership was when he saw an Egyptian striking a Jew: *Vayaar ki ein ish*, "And (he) saw that there was no man" (*Shemos* 2:12). Moshe was about to strike the Egyptian who was harassing and beating a Jewish brother. First, however, he stopped to look around – and not because he was afraid of who might catch him in the act, but because (as the *Midrash*, cited by *Rashi* explains) he wanted to be certain that no proselyte would descend from this Egyptian. To kill this Egyptian at the expense of a future Jew was not a course of action Moshe was prepared to take. He was concerned about the future, about future generations of Jews and how they would be affected by his present actions. A great leader counts not only what he sees before him in the present, but he counts the future, as well. If his decisions in the present will adversely affect the future, then his present decision must be altered. He counts/considers all Jews.

The *Pele Yoetz* concludes that the written word carries great significance - even if it is not for a Torah-related purpose. Recording one's thoughts on paper daily is important. When we think about it: writing allows us to be heard without using our voice. It is a powerful tool that will continue to be accessible after our ability to speak and inspire orally will have come to an end. Writing is an expression of the heart, which has coursed through the mind and flows from the pen. Writing allows us to think, helping us to understand how we feel. Finally, writing allows one to keep a record of the past. It is our space for keeping track of ideas, concretizing them, and storing them for the future.

The following story is related in the *Oseh Pele*, commentary to the *Pele Yoetz*. "Through writing, one is able to record those things that he either needs to remember or to relate" (*Pele Yoetz*). A young father passed away suddenly in the prime of his life, leaving his young widow, mother to a large family whose eldest child was about to become *bar mitzvah*. The boy's name was Pinchas. The widow's father, himself not very old, stepped in to assist his daughter with the *bar mitzvah* preparations. Among the many things that he did was to go with his grandson to select a *Tefillin* bag to the boy's liking. (The days of purchasing a standard bag are over.) They selected a nice bag and then confronted the real issue: how to spell the boy's name. Is it Pinchas with a *yud* (after the *pay*), as it is spelled in the Torah, or is it Pinchas without the *yud*, as it is commonly spelled in *Chazal*?

The boy's mother did not remember how her late husband had spelled the boy's name. She did remember that her husband's custom was to write their children's name, birthdate and any pertinent information inside the cover of a *sefer*. Her problem was that she did not remember in which *sefer* he had written the information. Her only clue was that it included the name Yehoshua. She searched and found the information recorded in the first volume of the *Pnei Yehoshua*.

Great! The problem was resolved. Time to move on. Things, however, do not always go that way. There is always a "but" with which to involve ourselves. The dilemma resurfaced when, upon perusing the *sefer Pnei Yehoshua*, she discovered a note in her husband's script concerning a man in his (the deceased's) shul whose *davening* and learning greatly inspired him. He wrote that his life was greatly impacted by this man, especially during the bleakest moments of his illness, when he received succor and comfort simply from this man's demeanor.