



August 1, 1997

כ"ז תמוז תשנ"ז

מטות-מסעי Shabbat Parshat

Volume XXII Issue 5

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Lynn Weiss G-17
Lisi Stahler G-1
Nina Anziska G-8
Edith Koslowe G-7
El Moses B-13
Abigail Pick G-3
Daniel Feiner Counselor of B-7
Binyamin Weinstein B-16
Alanna Apfel G-2
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Tamar Lifschitz G-18
Moriah Bardani G-9

*Mazel Tov On Your
Bar Mitzvah
Simi Siegel B-8*

Friday night speaker
Rabbi Yitzchak
Rosenbaum
10:30 P.M. -Pargod
Hope to see you there!

**Shabbat Times:
Latest
Candlelighting:
7:00 P.M.
Kabbalat
Shabbat:
7:00 P.M.**

**Welcome all
campers who
have joined us
for August!**

MIDAH OF THE WEEK-תורה

The skill of judging favorably is many-faceted. Taking note of its diverse dimensions helps us appreciate the value of acquiring this essential skill.

It's a mitzvah

Some people think that judging favorably is an elevated behavior expected only of the extremely pious, one which only a "tzaddik" is capable of achieving. But the fact that the injunctive to judge favorably is included amongst the 613 mitzvos given to all Jews for all generations proves it is not the purview only of the elite. This is confirmation that not only a select few, but all of us, are obligated in its fulfillment. In addition, since we know that any mitzvah given to all of us must also be within the capacity of each one of us to fulfill, we know, therefore, that every person is capable of judging others favorably.

The Torah requires every Jew, from the most intellectual to the least intellectual, from the most sensitive to the least sensitive, to work towards spiritual improvement. Bettering our relationships with others is a great part of attaining this spiritual self-enhancement. Judging favorably contributes crucially to our ability to get along with others.

This is an obligation commanded and demanded by Hashem. It is what distinguishes us and contributes to our uniqueness as a nation.

It's pivotal

"This positive commandment," says the *Mitzvos Halebnaos*, "leads to the fulfillment of all the commandments between man and his friend. It is the pillar on which all other mitzvos affecting man's interpersonal relationships stand."

When we find some redeeming factor which explains another person's disturbing behavior, we surely have a better feeling towards him. Suspicion is a roadblock forcing us to detour into resentment, grudge-bearing, anger, gossip and slander, and sometimes even hatred and disputes. Remove the roadblock and you can go straight through to caring, kindness and peace — all the productive and constructive ways of interacting with others.

It creates peace

Sefer HaChinuch tells us that the main purpose of the mitzvah of judging favorably is to help create a peaceful society. Fulfillment of this mitzvah — removal of one man's false suspicions of another through fair and deliberate judgment — is essential for harmonious living.²

Our Sages give us a list of mitzvos whose reward is especially great. One of them is the mitzvah of judging favorably. The Gemara says this list corresponds to another list mentioned in

Mishnah Peah. When we look at this second list, though, we see that the mitzvah of judging favorably does not appear; instead, the mitzvah of promoting peace between man and his fellow man does.³ Rashi explains: Judging favorably is bringing peace between man and man.

Usually when we think of making peace between two people we see it as helping two "other" people solve their problems. No less important, however, is making peace between ourselves and others. If I am willing to give the other person the benefit of the doubt and say, "Maybe what he did to me really wasn't wrong," or, "Maybe it was beyond his control," or, "He did it for my benefit," I can restore the peace between us.⁴

From the Vilna Gaon we learn more about the role that judging favorably plays in creating peace. If you have an enemy, there is a proven and tested method of reversing his animosity. If you judge him favorably — if you understand him sufficiently to consider him completely virtuous — your attitude will affect his, and his enmity will dissipate.⁵ We are told in *Mishlei* (27:19): As water reflects the face shown to it, so too the heart of one man [is reflected] to another. The Gaon explains: Just as water reflects the face of a man peering into it, so one man's heart reflects another's feelings. We sense what others feel towards us, even if those sentiments remain unexpressed.⁶ Feelings are felt... and returned. If we develop positive feelings towards someone who is angry with us, by judging him favorably, our adversary will pick up those positive feelings and his heart will be swayed.

It's a midah

Judging favorably is both a mitzvah and a *midah*, a character trait, one which we have inherited from our forefathers. Our Sages teach us that when the people of Sodom sinned, Hashem revealed this to Avraham because He knew that Avraham would come to their defense.⁷ In *Tehillim* (45:8) we

read: "You love righteousness and hate wickedness, therefore Hashem, your G-d, anointed you with oil of rejoicing above your friends." The *midrash* tells us that these words were said by Hashem to Avraham, and explain the words to mean: You love righteousness — You love to find righteousness in My creations; and hate wickedness — you refrain from faulting them. Therefore I chose you and I raised you above your friends — the ten generations from Noah to Avraham. I rejected all of the ten generations and chose you, Avraham, because of this *midah*.⁸

When R' Chaim Volozhin tells us about the greatness of Avraham he notes: When a *tzaddik* struggles to perfect himself, his children are blessed. They will be drawn towards those same character traits and can acquire them with less effort. Because Avraham excelled in the trait of looking for good in his fellow man, this path has been made easier for us to tread, if we will but make the effort.⁹

Rabbeinu Yonah describes this *midah* based on a verse in *Mishlei* (14:9): "Fools heap condemnation, but for the upright there is satisfaction." "Fools, he explains, always want to find people's weaknesses. They are happy to make them look guilty. But the upright take pleasure in noticing people's strengths, and come to their defense when their weaknesses show."¹⁰

From the above, we learn that we have two levels to strive towards:

- not wanting to make people look bad, and
- taking pleasure in making people look good.

1. Not wanting to make people look bad

When Noach was lying inebriated, he became uncovered. His son Cham saw him lying in disgrace and ran to tell his two brothers. When Shem and Yefes heard, they took a garment and, turning their heads aside so as not to see their father's shame, covered Noach. What is the *midah* we see exemplified by Shem and Yefes here? The desire to cover over peoples' faults and embarrassing deeds when there is no benefit in revealing them.¹¹

2. Taking pleasure in making people look good

A virtuous man was walking with his students and they chanced upon the dead carcass of an animal. The students said, "What a foul odor is coming from this carcass!" The virtuous man said, "How white are its teeth!"

Which was true? Which was more obvious?

Both observations were true. Even though the white teeth were much less obvious and easy to overlook in the face of the offensive, overpowering odor of a dead carcass, the virtuous man found something nice to see and to say. He chose to concentrate on the positive. If this can be said concerning a dead animal, how much more so should we try to find the good in a human being.

The Chofetz Chaim reiterates this idea: "A person should try to perfect his character so that he can be counted amongst the worthy, and not the unworthy. What are the traits of the worthy? They help others whenever they are able; they conceal other people's weaknesses, as they would their own. And if they see a person angry at another, they try to calm him, by giving him an understanding of the other person's position...."

"The unworthy do the opposite. They harm others and are happy when others fail. They reveal their faults, and if a person makes a mistake, they interpret it as intentional wickedness. They cause fights and incite one person against his friend and think they are clever for all this!"

The Chofetz Chaim goes on to ask: What is considered true wisdom and strength? A person who sees his friend at the edge of a roof and gives him a push, or one who sees his friend falling and tries to catch him? One who finds his friend down and kicks him, or one who finds his friend already in the pit and tries to pull him out?

This is the essence of judging favorably. It means that if we find our friend in a situation where it seems he has already "fallen," when suspicions of guilt surround him, we use our mental resources to lift him out of that mess, both in our own mind and in the minds of others. This is what finding *zechus* is about. This is the *midah* to which we are asked to aspire.¹²

Explaining Rather Than Complaining

אור דוד לזכרון אבינו זצ"ל
Light is sown for the righteous and for the upright
of heart, gladness (Tehillim 97:11).

Most people in this world seek happiness in some form or other — but where exactly does one turn in order to find this elusive state? King David tells us that if one seeks simcha, gladness, he should join the ranks of the *gishrei lev*, the upright of heart. Who are these happy and fortunate people?

R' Yitzchok Hutner, late rosh yeshiva of Yeshivas R' Chaim Berlin, observed that the Targum translates זָרָרָא as זָרָרָא כָּזָבָא, which literally means "those whose hearts are full of *זָרָרָא*, explanations."

The heart of an unhappy person is filled with strong questions on everyone and everything. Such a person is critical and nipping, finding fault everywhere and voicing his bitter complaints about everything. "Why did he say that to me? How could she do such a thing? Where was G-d when I needed Him?" Naturally this negative attitude fills him with discontent; joy and gladness are banished from his heart.

The secret of perpetual gladness, says R' Hutner, is to develop a positive attitude whereby you find *זָרָרָא*, explanations, which justify the actions of the people you encounter. In other words, it is better to explain than to complain.

This message is implied in the first half of the verse as well: *פְּרָקַי יְרֵא יְהוָה*, light is sown for the righteous, i.e. the righteous know that the justification for an action or event is often not readily apparent. One must dig beneath the surface to discover the "light" which is "sown" and concealed within. The righteous ones are those contented and happy people who have learned the art of unearthing the "light" in everything.¹⁵

It's the antidote to lashon hara

Fulfillment of this mitzvah offers us another benefit: It counteracts the evil of *lashon hara*.

Lashon hara, literally "evil talk," refers to a statement which belittles others or causes them damage or embarrassment and serves no constructive purpose even though it may be true. The mitzvah of judging favorably is directly followed in the Torah by a warning concerning *lashon hara*, to teach us that judging favorably and refraining from speaking *lashon hara* are closely connected.¹⁶

The Chofetz Chaim tells us: The more we judge favorably, the less *lashon hara* we will speak.¹⁷

If we don't think negatively about others in the first place, then we are not in danger of such thoughts ever being expressed. When we are constantly battling with negative thoughts, there is always the possibility that they will prevail and be articulated. If we can obliterate or at least neutralize suspicions as they arise, by judging favorably, then there remain no negative thoughts lurking in our mind waiting for a chance to escape in the form of *lashon hara*.

TORAH THOUGHTS

Following the attempts by Midian to lead Bnei Yisrael astray, G-d commands Bnei Yisrael to take vengeance against the nation of Midian. Bnei Yisrael accede to G-d's demand, crushing the Midianites, and are left with plentiful spoils. The riches are boundless, including hundreds of thousands of sheep, donkeys, and cattle as well as jewelry and utensils.

While most of the booty was immediately available for use, Elazar informed Bnei Yisrael that the utensils could not be used right away. "כֹּלֵי כֶסֶף וְכֹלֵי זָהָב וְכֹלֵי בְרֹזֶזֶת וְכֹלֵי בַרְזֶל וְכֹלֵי חַדְוָה וְכֹלֵי חַדְוָה וְכֹלֵי חַדְוָה" (Bamidbar 31:22-23) "But of the gold, silver, bronze, steel, iron, tin, and lead, that which was used in fire you must now bring through the fire, and it will be pure, though it must be purified in water. That which was used in water, you must now bring through the water."

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 75B) derives two halachot from this verse. First, the pasuk teaches that non-kosher utensils must be purified with boiling water or fire depending on their use. Second, the additional requirement of "אֵשׁ וְיָדָא" teaches the requirement to immerse in a mikveh vessels purchased from a non-Jew.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Avoda Zara 5:15) quotes Rav Yirmiya's explanation that the immersion serves to raise the vessels to *לִאֲשֵׁר*, that is to prepare them for the sanctity of the Jewish home.

In this mitzvah of *לִאֲשֵׁר*, the purification of captured vessels, we have an important lesson. Everything we bring into the Jewish home, must meet two requirements. First it must be halachically acceptable, free from any lack of "kashrut". Additionally, the contents of our homes must meet the standards of *לִאֲשֵׁר*, the holiness of a Jewish home.