

Kehillah

Chiddushim and Insights for Shabbos | 20 Shvat , 5783 | 8



Hearing the Call: Being a Nation of Priests

Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer

The introduction to the giving of the Torah notes the purpose of why the Jewish People would receive it – to become a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy people” (*Shemos* 19:5). But what does being a “kingdom of priests” actually entail?

According to the Ramban (in his commentary to the Torah, *Shemos* 19:6), the Jewish People, just like the Kohanim of the Temple, are dedicated to the service of Hashem. Thus, we become a “holy people,” a nation that clings to Hashem and experiences His closeness. The Ramban explains later (*Shemos* 25:1) that this renders us worthy of the *Shechinah* dwelling among us.

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While remaining aloof of the tempest, the Yeshiva must be a lighthouse. Its windows cannot be small, serving only to allow light to enter; they need to be huge, overlooking the world outside, seeking to lead and guide, elevate and inspire.

Priests, however, have a second function, too. Not only do they serve in the *Mikdash*, but they also ensure the tradition is passed on, taught to the next generation. The tribe of Levi are teachers: “They shall teach Your statutes to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel” (*Devarim* 33:10). Elsewhere, we are told that “the Kohen’s lips will guard knowledge, and they shall seek Torah from his mouth” (*Malachi* 2:7).

Based on this function of the Kohen, our national role as a “kingdom of priests” is teaching the ways of Hashem to the entire world. This is the interpretation given by the Seforno: “For you shall be a kingdom of priests to cause the entire human race to call the Name of Hashem and serve Him united, which is the purpose of Israel in future times.”

The two functions of the Kohen define two distinct internal motions for the Jewish people. One is a motion

of solitude, as the dramatic picture of the Kohen Gadol in the *Kodesh HaKodashim* at the height of the year’s Temple service. Like him, we are totally alone, solitary: “Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations” (*Bamidbar* 23:9).

The second motion turns outwards. Rather than offering a personal service, we become Hashem’s embassy, transmitting His light to a darkened world like the moon reflects the sun into the night. Our national purpose is thus expressed in the words of the *pasuk*, “This nation I have created for Myself; My glory they shall tell” (*Yeshayahu* 43:21). We work constantly towards the final destiny of “the earth will be filled with knowledge of Hashem as water covering the sea bed” (*Yeshayahu* 11:9).

As a Torah society, it is crucial to keep both of these motions close to our hearts. A Yeshiva cannot be a Noah’s Ark alone – a popular image for the modern Yeshiva institution – keeping its students safe from the secular tempest raging outside. While remaining aloof of the tempest, the Yeshiva must be a lighthouse. Its windows cannot be small, serving only to allow light to enter; they need to be huge, overlooking the world outside, seeking to lead and guide, elevate and inspire.

Dividing the two motions along a historical timeline, it seems that for many centuries, while in the survival mode imposed on us by a harsh exile, our primary motion was the former – serving Hashem in solitude. Glancing around Israel today, it seems clear that much of the Jewish people, and even much of the world, is waiting for us to take the initiative. It will require much labor, much investment, and much taking responsibility. Tough decisions await, with their attendant accountability. Yet, this is not a matter of choice. It is our *raison d’être*.

We have always been a “nation of priests.” Today, however, the call is heard louder than ever. As *Olim*, we have already taken a great step towards answering the call. The next strides await.

Connecting to Hashem at Work Rabbi Tzvi Broker

Those who made the choice to move to *Eretz Yisrael* are often motivated by *ruchnius* considerations – the opportunity to live in a place where the very air is conducive to *avodas Hashem* (*Bava Basra* 158b). Yet as a career coach, I meet people for whom the reality of making a *parnassah* in *Eretz Yisrael* results in their spending more time and energy at work than they did previously. Naturally, this can lead to feelings of disappointment and frustration.

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What does it mean that Torah and melacha (work) were given as a bris?

A teaching in *Avos D'Rav Nosson* (11) about this week's parasha reveals a refreshing perspective on how we can experience this in an empowering way:

“Just as the Torah was given as a *bris*, so too was melacha given as a *bris*”.

This puzzling source leaves us with two questions:

- » What does it mean that Torah and *melacha* (work) were given as a *bris*?
- » What's the reason for the comparison between the Torah and *melacha*?

The answer to both questions can be found by looking into the nature of different types of interactions we encounter through our lives – friendships, business relationships, strategic partnerships, marriage, parenthood. A growing person reflects on the nature of their own relationship with Torah and *mitzvos*. Does it resemble a business transaction with Hashem in which one commits to their responsibilities and expects dividends based on their performance?

The Torah given in the context of a *bris* reveals a deep personal relationship with Hashem. While business relationships based on obligations and benefits are considered healthy, a marriage between husband and wife that's defined by each party's obligations and benefits misses the point of what a marriage relationship is meant to be. Obligations are an essential component of the marriage, but they are not the essence of the relationship.

Hashem entrusted the Torah to us as an expression of His relationship with us. Through learning and keeping the Torah we reciprocate our desire to have a relationship with Him. Although learning Torah and keeping *mitzvos* have challenges, we push forward knowing that this is the way to deepen our connection to Hashem. We appreciate the vital role that the Torah plays in the

purpose of creation. We rejoice in the opportunity with which Hashem entrusted us. While the Torah is full of obligations that Hashem rewards us for fulfilling, we need to be careful not to miss out on the bigger picture.

The comparison between Torah and *melacha* highlights how we are to view our involvement in work. For many, work is experienced as a nuisance required to receive a paycheck. It's a matter of fulfilling our obligation and cashing in on our benefits.

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What's the reason for the comparison between the Torah and melacha?

Yet, the Torah had a different intention. Hashem wants us to appreciate that our involvement in work is part of our connection to Him. As the *Chovos Levavos* writes in *Shaarei Bitachon*:

“And one should have in mind while doing one's work that they are fulfilling the mitzvah of Hashem to be involved in the development of the world such as tending to the land through plowing and planting...By doing this, one is rewarded for their *ruchnius* intention in their heart and mind whether or not they are successful in achieving the outcome of the work itself.”

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Hashem wants us to appreciate that our involvement in work is part of our connection to Him.

The *Chovos Levavos* is teaching us an empowering perspective that our involvement in working is part of our *avodas Hashem*. By having the right intentions we are able to connect with Hashem through our work.

As we go through our (sometimes long) workdays, Hashem wants us to embrace each moment with excitement for the opportunity to connect with Him. By doing so, we are living up to the ideal of experiencing *melacha* in the context of a *bris*, a deep relationship with Hashem.

Rav Tzvi Broker is a Director & Career Coach at Pilzno Work Inspired under the leadership of Rav Yehoshua Gerzi. The organization bridges the gap between parnassah and avodas Hashem. The Pilzno Work Inspired Podcasts, community workshops, and virtual Torah learning programs enable men and women to achieve work fulfillment, work-life balance, and connection to Hashem through finance and the workplace.

What Was Wrong with Yisro's Plan? Rabbi Dr. Avidan Milevsky

The first of many instances throughout Jewish history in which a father-in-law comes to visit unannounced and critiques his son-in-law's dealings takes place in this week's parasha when Yisro joins the Jewish people in the desert and offers his opinion about Moshe's organizational skills.

At face value, Yisro's proposal is sound. Instead of all legal matters being presented to Moshe and overwhelming his docket, a system of courts would deal with most legal matters. Moshe would decide only the most pressing issues. This arrangement would free Moshe to deal with more urgent communal matters. The great biblical commentary the *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh* explains that this episode is described in detail to show the Jewish nation in the desert and all future generations that among the nations of the world there are great thinkers and intellectuals who have much to offer.

However, an analysis of Moshe's reaction to his father-in-law's suggestion, both in our *parasha* and in Moshe's recollection of this episode towards the end of his life in *Parashas Devarim*, reveals two flaws in Yisro's model.

First, when Yisro presents his idea to Moshe, Yisro suggests that "big things," meaning large financial matters, should be presented to him for his adjudication. Smaller financial matters should be arbitrated by the lower courts. However, when the Torah describes how Moshe establishes this model, the Torah records that the "hard matters" will be brought in front of Moshe, while the "little issues" will be adjudicated by lower courts. Moshe's adjustment reflects a uniquely Jewish view that the need for upper courts versus lower courts should not be decided by the amount of money under dispute. Ultimately, the need for higher counsel should be driven by the complexity of the case regardless of financial considerations.

Similarly, Moshe finds a more disturbing feature of Yisro's model. In *Parashas Devarim*, when Moshe recalls this entire episode, he laments the fact that the adoption of Yisro's plan was accepted full-heartedly by the Jewish people. Rashi explains (*Devarim* 1,13) that the people accepted Yisro's ideas only for personal gain. The Jewish people should have responded that they were unwilling to learn from anyone but Moshe, the direct servant of Hashem.

Instead, the Jewish people were gleeful that they could deal with other judges, with a weaker link to Hashem, who could be influenced by favor and bribes. Nonetheless, Moshe was willing to institute this model to appease the masses. We find similar instances in the Torah where human and communal sentiments were considered in informing religious practice (i.e., appointing kings, sending the *meraglim*, *eshes yefas toar*).

However, the message is quite clear. Although the nations of the world can be helpful in offering suggestions for efficiency and professionalism, our primary goal should be finding ways to connect with Hashem.

As the *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh* continues, the fact that Yisro devised this ingenious plan shows that Hashem chose us not because of our superior intellect but rather due to His kindness towards us and His love for our forefathers. As *Olim* who chose to live in *Eretz Yisrael* to strengthen our connection to Hashem, we sometimes fall into the trap of lamenting the loss of Yisro-style efficiency and professionalism. This episode reminds us that although other cultures, nations, and countries may offer great intellect, efficiency, and professionalism, our ultimate goal is to seek a pure and unobstructed relationship with Hashem.

The Akshiva Frum Hotline to Launch Website in English

A team of over 90 Charedi rabbis, counselors, therapists, social workers, and educators have fielded thousands of difficult questions from Charedi men and women since the launch of the Akshiva website (akshiva.co.il) eight years ago. Difficult questions about faith, Jewish philosophy, marriage, shidduchim, mental health, education, and personal challenges of all sorts can be asked anonymously on the website or via email.

We are preparing to launch our English website and looking for native English-speakers who are experienced in their fields, open-minded and non-judgmental. Volunteers receive special training that provides them with tools for handling questions and challenges specific to the Charedi community. Responders sign their responses with their name and e-mail address so those with questions can contact them directly.

If you are inspired to help others or know someone who would want to join the team, please send contact details and a brief resume to: ask-en@akshiva.co.il.

WANT TO HELP OTHERS AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Akshiva (<https://akshiva.co.il/>), the leading Hebrew website that has helped thousands by providing guidance to frum individuals and families who had nowhere to turn to, is launching its English version.



We're looking for

Therapists, counselors, rabbis, and wise men and women who are able and willing to join a talented and dedicated team that provides assistance for those who need it.

Popular issues for questions include relationships, Emunah and hashkafah, parenting, Shidduchim, Torah study, school issues, and so on.



If you're inspired to help others and believe you have what it takes, please send contact details and a brief resume to ask-en@akshiva.co.il.

Making a Deal Under Duress Rabbi Asher Meir

Our *parasha* describes how Moshe directed the Jewish people for its historic encounter with Hashem at Mount Sinai: “Moses led the people out of the camp toward God, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain.” (*Shemos* 19:17) The Hebrew expression can also mean “underneath the mountain.” One interpretation we find in Chazal is that Hashem raised the mountain over their heads and threatened them. (*Shabbos* 88a)

Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said: The verse teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain above the Jews like a tub and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial. Rav Acha bar Yaakov said: From here there is a substantial caveat – a *modaah* – to the obligation to fulfill the Torah. Rava said: Even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written: “The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them” (*Esther* 9:27), and he taught: The Jews ordained what they had already taken upon themselves through coercion at Sinai.

Rav Acha bar Yaakov makes reference to a *modaah* – a legal document that empowers a person to withdraw from a deal due to some compulsion described in the *modaah* document. The need for this *modaah* in order to withdraw from a deal shows clearly that the Torah doctrine of duress is different from that of secular law. In secular law, a deal made under duress is typically not binding; a forced agreement is no agreement at all. In Torah law, duress does not automatically nullify an agreement. An agreement to sell under duress, if payment is given, is considered one kind of informed consent. The Talmudic expression (*Bava Basra* 47b) is “[even if] they hang him and he sells, his sale is a [valid] sale.”

In secular law, a deal made under duress is typically not binding to a forced agreement is no agreement at all. In Torah law, duress does not automatically nullify an agreement.

This approach to compulsion is not restricted to a simple sale. The *Shulchan Aruch* (CM 205:2) rules that a compromise made under compulsion is likewise valid, since each side waives some claims and such a waiver is considered a kind of recompense. In general, the

poskim agree that a deal is valid “even if they hang him” applies in any kind of deal where recompense is given.

This principle is still applied in *beit din* judgments. In recent cases, partners claimed that they were compelled to sell their partnership shares and sought to reacquire these shares. But the *dayanim* pointed out that even if compulsion could be demonstrated, the sale cannot be nullified because recompense was given. (*Piskei Din Rabaniim* XIV:143; *Piskei Din Yerushalaim Mamotot veYuchsin*, 133)

Jewish law is less obsessed with finality. It gives greater scope to retry cases and generally eschews statutes of limitations.

However, *halacha* does empower the compelled party *subsequently* to nullify the agreement if he prepares in advance a *modaah* – notification – explaining the details of the compulsion and expressing the intention of nullifying the agreement as a result. (SA CM 205)

It is easy to see both the fairness and the complications of this option. Secular law attributes immense importance to finality of a judgment, or *res judicata*. Jewish law is less obsessed with finality. It gives greater scope to retry cases and generally eschews statutes of limitations. But it does acknowledge the importance of trying to reach some settled state of legal rights. The ability of one side to pull a *modaah* out of its sleeve years after a deal is made injects much uncertainty into business dealings. Hence, *modaah* is little used nowadays, and its main impact on contemporary Jewish law is that agreements often open with explicit abrogation of any existing *modaah* by each party.

If we turn from *halacha* to *hashkafa*, misunderstanding of this fundamental difference between the Torah and secular law approach to duress also leads to a widespread misunderstanding of Chazal’s message. Under the secular law understanding of duress, Hashem’s threat *detracts from* the extent of *Am Yisrael’s* commitment to the Torah. The covenant was made with compulsion and hence is not fully binding.

According to the Torah understanding, the threat *augments* the extent of our commitment to Torah. Until the time of Mordechai and Esther, the Jewish people had the ability to abrogate it, yet they never did so. For hundreds of years the people of Israel, by waiving their *modaah*, were *de facto* constantly reaffirming their covenant with Hashem.

Marital Frustration and Learning to Receive ?!

Rebbetzin Tamar Pfeffer

Question

My husband constantly needs me to tell him what to do. He doesn't do any household chores of his own accord and neither does he take any initiative with our daughter of six months old. I give endlessly of myself,

and he always says that I don't appreciate him, which is untrue. I do appreciate him, but it annoys me that he turns a blind eye to things. Can you suggest anything to help?

Response

Dear Questioner,

Thanks very much for your question. I will try to focus it, and, *b'ezer*s Hashem, to offer some assistance.

On the one hand, we have your husband, who "constantly needs you to tell him what to do." On the other hand, we have you and your constant giving: "I give endlessly of myself."

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*There is an art to receiving, which is an
 acquired trait that needs refining.*

The answer to your predicament is found in these sentences, as I'll try to explain. When a person wishes to give something to somebody – a gift, assistance, a compliment – the recipient needs to be in the position of a receiver. There is an art to receiving, which is an acquired character trait that needs refining. This is in contrast to taking, which is built into human nature. ("Man is born as a wild donkey." (*Iyov* 11:12.)) To go from taker to receiver, a person has to go through a learning process. A taker demands from the other; a receiver accepts that which the giver wishes to give.

Take, for example, a case in which your mother bought you a birthday gift that you don't need. If you are in the receiving position, you will accept the gift and appreciate the giving itself. If your neighbor baked you a cake for Shabbos, you'll appreciate the gesture even if it's not your favorite cake.

The giver's duty is to expand himself and think about others. The receiver needs to adapt himself to the gift or assistance he received, to receive the giver rather than to receive the gift alone. Some people have more giving power than others and might have difficulty allowing themselves to receive. Others have a stronger receiving muscle. At the end of the day, each one of us needs both. We all give, and we all receive.

It seems to me that you are the giving type. You give a lot. In keeping with this, it's hard to give to you. You ensure

that everything is arranged and organized according to your own plan. You know better than anyone how to run the house and what the baby needs. If your husband gives to you, he needs to do so according to your taste. ("It annoys me that he turns a blind eye to things.")

.....
*You need to constrain yourself to an
 internal motion of receiving. Allow him
 to give as he understands giving and
 accept that this is fine, providing, of
 course, that no harm will be caused to
 the baby.*

A person who wants to give but receives only criticism in return will eventually stop giving. ("He doesn't do any household chores on his own accord.") Your need to tell him what and how to do blocks him from giving.

You need to constrain yourself to an internal motion of receiving. Allow him to give as he understands giving and accept that this is fine, providing, of course, that no harm will be caused to the baby. Your baby has a father and a mother, and it is no coincidence that they are two different people. Everyone has different preferences, different tastes, different sizes. Nobody is perfect.

Of course, you shouldn't discount engaging in a mature conversation with your husband and synchronizing your positions. You can tell him how you prefer him to arrange the room or when to put the baby to bed. But when you allow him to help you – something that will certainly enrich and deepen your relationship – be in a receiving position. Humble yourself. Allow him to do things his way. Trust him, believe in his ability, and compliment and highlight the positive aspects of what he does.

I wish you much progress and growth in the process, and may you find much joy and contentment along the way.

Tamar Pfeffer is a parenting and relationship counselor with years of experience, certified under Mrs. Rachel Arbus. Questions should be submitted to ask-en@akshiva.co.il

The Big Bad Wolf Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

The people who wrote many of our secular children's stories must surely have been psychotic or deranged. Why put a child to bed picturing a grandmother who is really a wolf or who has been eaten by one? Do we want to encourage our children to break in and steal from other people, even if they are bears? Are all stepmothers deathly jealous?

There is one story, though, that does have a useful message: The Three Little Pigs. (I mean, apart from the end when the big bad wolf meets his end in a vat of boiling water, which is a little unnecessary.)

Essentially, what these pigs discover is that the big bad wolf is only as threatening as the weakness of the walls they build. This is a true lesson in the nature of boundaries.

As early as Cain and Hevel, we humans have been looking for someone to blame. It is a tremendous *avodah* to avoid the natural response to a failed situation by asking: Who did this? Who left the milk out? Who forgot to lock the door? Who this? Who that?

Likewise, when we are bothered by a difficult relative or an insensitive teacher, we blame them for the effects they have on our lives. Had my parents allowed me to finish my education, my life would have been different. Had my boss showed more appreciation, I would have performed better at work.

What we may fail to pick up on is that when we assign blame, we are also assigning power. "It's your fault that my life is...", also means that you had the power to make

my life what it is. When I hand you the blame, I hand you the keys. The weaker the internal walls, the stronger the impact of the huff and the puff.

Building healthy boundaries is not about keeping people out. It's about clarifying what's happening inside our boundaries. My boundaries allow me to distinguish between who I am and who someone else is. They protect me from danger and influence, from external disapproval and the attempt of others to guilt me. And the stronger those boundaries are, the clearer I am that the responsibility is mine. I don't throw the blame over the walls of straw and hand them to an adversary. I can observe what's happening outside but distinguish between what's happening there and what's happening inside.

I alone determine what's happening inside my walls. You can disapprove, and I can hear that and even learn from it. But your disapproval doesn't decide my fate. However hard you are trying to impact me, ultimately I consider myself responsible for my own outcome.

As couples, the stronger our relationship, the less we are affected or threatened by the outside world or other relationships. As families, the stronger our sense of identity and clarity of values, the less we are socially cajoled into compromising our standards or maintaining our standards but only for fear of what our neighbors would think and not from our own convictions. And as individuals, the stronger our sense of self, the less we will find that external factors serve as excuses for our failings.

Two Stories of Mesiras Nefesh Rabbi Shmuel Kimche

Since the moment of *Matan Torah*, when Torah descended to *Klal Yisrael* and forever changed the world, we belong to a nation that has sacrificed time and again for *Toras Hashem*. Throughout the ages, we have been *moser nefesh* to keep the flame of Torah alive.

I want to share two short stories that really brought this home to me. One is about a mother's *mesiras nefesh* for Torah. The second is about a boy's *mesiras nefesh* for his friend's honor and self-esteem.

Buckle up and listen!

The Widow's Engagement Ring

The year 2008 was a difficult one. The stock market had crashed, and with it, so many people's fortunes. Hundreds of well-off people had become paupers overnight. This was a very trying time for many people and an especially trying time for schools, shuls, and Jewish institutions that rely on the generosity, funding, and goodwill of *Klal*

Yisrael.

One particular elementary school in New York City was having a very difficult year. Phone call after phone call came in from its main supporters saying that this year they would not be able to fulfill their pledges. "After the crash, we simply cannot give anything right now."

The school's governing committee had to take the step that they never imagined. The notes went out to the teachers that any child who was not up to date with tuition simply would not be allowed back into class until payments had been arranged.

Rabbi Greenblatt was not ready for the note and the letters that he had to hand out to 4 *talmidim* that Thursday morning – especially as one of the boys in his 4th-grade class was sweet Yossi Mandell.

Yossi was no ordinary boy. He was a sweet, quiet boy whom everybody loved. And, as Rabbi Greenblatt knew only too well, Yossi was an orphan. His father died when

Yossi was a young boy of 5. Yossi lived at home with his mother and sisters in a small rented apartment not far from school.

With a heavy heart, Rabbi Greenblatt handed the white envelopes to the five poorest boys in the class. No one understood what it was about, but the look in their rabbi's eyes made the children realize that something sad was happening. "Boys, please put your books in your bags and take these envelopes home to your parents." Rabbi Greenblatt looked sadly out the window as he saw four small figures make their way out of the school yard.

Yet no one was more surprised than Rabbi Greenblatt when the 4th-grade *talmidim* lined up after their lunch recess. At the back of the line stood a nervous Yossi! The boys filed into the class, and Rabbi Greenblatt motioned for Yossi to come over. After all, rules are rules.

"What are you doing here?" whispered the *Rav* to his *talmid*. "Didn't you give the letter to your mother?"

Yossi froze. He couldn't say anything. He pointed to his school bag. The *Rav* picked up Yossi's school bag and tried to move it towards the door when something fell out and rolled on the floor.

The *Rav* heard a *clink* and looked down. Lying on the floor was a widow's engagement ring with a note attached. "I prefer the Torah of Your mouth over thousands in gold and silver. Please accept this ring in place of the tuition that I owe for Yossi for this school year."

Wow! Now that is *mesiras nefesh*. I imagine that today in the Mir there is a young man named Yossi with extraordinary appreciation of Torah learned from his mother. I have no doubt that the school returned the ring, but the message of the mother's willingness to sacrifice for the sake of Torah stayed with the *talmidim*.

The Reason for the Reverse-Hagbah

The second story is also about *mesiras nefesh* but of a different kind.

A few years ago, there was a young man in New York who was an outstanding *talmid chacham*, someone who at a young age was already *paskening*, leading, and showing signs of inner greatness. At a certain point, this young *talmid chacham* was tested by Rav Yochanan Vosner Shlit"á, the Sqverer Dayan and world-renowned *posek*. The young man was beyond exceptional.

Rav Vosner, who is a very perceptive person, felt that there was something special going on. "Could I please meet with your father?"

A few days later, Rav Yochanan Vosner met this young *posek's* father.

"Can I ask you a question?" asked Rav Vosner in the middle of the conversation. "Was your son always like this? Was he always a diligent *masmid*? Did he always have such a clear understanding of the *sugyos*?"

"It is so interesting you ask," the father responded. "The truth is that no, my son was not always so focused, and he didn't always understand."

"So what happened? What made him suddenly take off?" the *Rav* asked.

"About 7 years ago my son was still in *yeshiva*. A big *yeshiva*. He was a wonderful *talmid* but not so special in learning, definitely not in the top of the *shiur*. One Thursday morning he was called up for *hagbah* after *Krias HaTorah*. My son went up and did what is called a "reverse-*hagbah*" – the *hagbah* that we only do on Simchas Torah. Everyone was shocked at first, and then the smiles and snickering began. Very soon, the reverse-*hagbah* became the talk of the *yeshiva*. Hilarious. Another one of his antics.

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"Why did you do it?" the *rosh yeshiva* asked. He was not angry. He was simply bewildered. At first, my son didn't want to tell.
.....

The *rosh yeshiva*, who was also present, asked one of his *gabaim* to call my son after breakfast. My son went into the *rosh yeshiva's* office.

"Why did you do it?" the *rosh yeshiva* asked. He was not angry. He was simply bewildered.

My son looked down at his shoes. At first, he didn't want to tell. But after a few moments, he looked up and simply said, "Does the *Rosh Yeshiva* remember who was called up for *shlishi*? It was Yankele, the boy with a terrible stutter. He took 5 minutes to read the *bracha* before *shlishi* and another 5 minutes for the *bracha* after *shlishi*.

I could see so many *bachurim* trying to hold back frustrations and smiles, and I knew I had to think quickly. I had to find something that would divert everyone's attention so that no one would remember Yankele's *shlishi* and would only remember me.

So I did a reverse *hagbah*. And it worked. No one remembers *shlishi* any longer!"

The *rosh yeshiva* started to cry. My son had shown that he had the sensitivity to be someone who people needed. And from that day on all the wellsprings of wisdom opened up to him.

Chazal teach us that kindness and truth atone for sins, that *mesiras nefesh* of *Klal Yisrael* has to be on both levels – for *limmud HaTorah* and for *Klal Yisrael*.

Hakodesh Baruch Hu looks for our *mesiras nefesh*. Let's try to bring Him *nachas ruach*.



Brachos on Lightning and Thunder Josh and Tammy Kruger

The Story

"Come into the house quickly!"

"It's raining like crazy!"

"It's going to be worse than that storm last week!"

The three girls stamped their wet boots on the front rug and took off their dripping coats to be hung up in the coat cupboard. Suddenly, a flash of light filled the room. The girls gasped. A moment later, they heard a loud clap of thunder.

"Omigoodness! What's the *bracha*? What's the *bracha*?"

"I never remember which one is for which..."

"I have my *siddur* here. Hold on. I'll check!"

"Don't bother. It'll take too long. I don't think you can say the *bracha* so long after you see the lightning and hear the thunder anyway."

"I just said the *bracha* last week, but I really can't remember which one to say."

"I'm not even sure if I really saw the lightning. I think I just saw the reflection in the cupboard mirror. Does that even count?"

The Discussion

Q: What is the connection between our story and the parasha?

A: During the experience of *maamad Har Sinai*, the Jewish people experienced thunder and flames (*Shemos* 20:15).

Q: What *bracha* is said on thunder. What *bracha* is said on lightning?

A: According to the *Mishna Berura*, the *bracha* for lightning is "*Baruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'Olam oseh maaseh bereishis.*" The *bracha* for thunder is "*Baruch...Ha'Olam she'kocho u'gvurato maeleh olam.*" Importantly, the *Mishna Berura* notes that while this is the custom, it is acceptable to say either *bracha* for thunder or lightning but not both (*Mishna Berura* 227:5).

Usually we see the lightning first and then hear the thunder. In that case, we make a *bracha* for each experience. If, however, we hear the thunder at the same moment that we see the lightning, then we make only one *bracha* for both. When making one *bracha*, it's better to say "*Oseh maaseh bereishis.*" But if you say "*She'kocho u'gvurato maeleh olam*" instead, that's also fine (*Mishna Berura* 227:5).

Q: If one of the girls saw the lightning only as a reflection in a mirror, can she still say the *bracha*?

A: This happens quite often during lightning storms.

One may not see the actual sky light up but may notice the room light up. The girl can still say the *bracha* since she noticed that lightning recently occurred even if she didn't directly see the lightning in the sky (*Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer*, Vol. XII, #21; *Sefer VeZos HaBracha*, p.153, in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l).

Q: If the girl with the *siddur* takes a few minutes to locate the *bracha*, is it too late for her to say the *bracha*?

A: Yes. The *bracha* can be said only a few seconds after noticing the lightning or thunder. If she misses it, she will have to wait until the next bout of thunder or lightning and say the *bracha* within a few seconds (*Mishna Berura* 227:5).

Q: Do the *brachos* have to be repeated each time there is lightning or thunder?

A: No. They are only repeated if the sky clears and another storm begins (*Mishna Berura* 227:8), or if the person goes to sleep, awakens, and notices lightning and thunder from the same storm (*Ma'amar Mordechai* quoted in *Kaf HaChaim* 227:14).

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