

Pulse OF Emunah

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life

LESSONS


THE POWER OF KINDNESS

Rabbi Eliezer Sorotzkin, the director of Lev L'Achim, told me a fascinating story. A secular *kibbutznik* had visited the Kosel and been inspired by a group of Lev L'Achim students singing and dancing. He decided to seek a connection to Torah. A *yungerman* from Lev L'Achim was sent to the *kibbutz* to learn with him.

When he arrived, the entrance gate was locked, and the security guard ignored him. He knocked on the window. The guard barked, "You don't belong here!" The *yungerman* took out his cell phone, called his learning partner, and handed the phone to the guard.

A fierce argument ensued. The *kibbutz* resident demanded that his visitor be admitted. The guard refused: "We don't want these people here!" Finally, a compromise was reached: The *yungerman* could enter if his learning partner drove to the gate to pick him up. This became the regular arrangement.

Over the course of more than a year, the *yungerman* came to the *kibbutz* every week, called his learning partner, and waited for him to pick him up. While waiting, he would make small talk with the guard. In spite of the guard's behavior, he never allowed himself to become angry or indignant.

Today, the same *yungerman* delivers a *shiur* to a group of 18 residents, and there is a *minyan* on the *kibbutz*. That same security guard is the organizer of the *shiur*! Rather than responding to insults with insults, the *yungerman* remained kind and pleasant, using the Torah as his guide, and the results were remarkable. 

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gem

OF THE WEEK

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow

In creating man, Hashem tells us to be a miniature likeness of G-d, granting us the freedom and the power to master the forces of nature. We are to use that freedom and power to master our own impulses, subordinating them to His laws.

Implicit in the concept of freedom, however, is the possibility of opposing G-d's will. Without the ability to sin, man ceases to be man. His dignity is contingent upon it. If desire were not attractive, if man could not resist God's will, if all evil were bitter to him, and all good were sweet; if he could not resist God's will, as he can resist the urges of his senses; then, he, too, would be subject to compulsion, like nature. Nature never deviates from its assigned task. Nature cannot sin, but neither does it have morals.


We are all faced with the decision between Hashem and Azazel. We all stand at the entrance to the Beis Hamikdash, choosing between God and the power of our senses. Inside, in the Kodesh Hakedashim, rests the Torah. With our eyes on the Torah, we make our decision.

continued on reverse side

powerful
PRAYER

YOTZER OHR:
VISION OF HEAVEN



There were two *neviim* who were shown visions of the *malachim* singing in Heaven: Yeshaya and Yechezkel. While Yeshaya lived in Yerushalayim, during the first Beis Hamikdash, the visions of Yechezkel were shown to him in *galus Bavel*, shortly before the Churban. Yeshaya heard the *malachim* call to one another and praise Hashem in unison, saying "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh, mal'ah Haaretz kevodo.*" Hashem is holy in the Heavens above and on earth, where we can see His deeds. Yechezkel heard the *malachim* saying "*Baruch kevod Hashem mimkomo.*" We cannot understand much about Hashem, for He is far beyond our grasp. 

Adapted from Emunah in the Classroom



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OUR BEST FRIEND

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation


The Gemara relates a fascinating story about a non-Jew who decided to play a prank on the Jewish leaders of his time. He went to Shammai and said, “Please convert me to Judaism while I am standing on one foot.” Shammai was not going to waste his time with a scoffer; he showed him the door. But the fellow was not done yet. He proceeded to Hillel’s home, where he repeated the silly request. How surprised he must have been when Hillel agreed!

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend,” Hillel said. “That is the whole Torah—the rest is merely explanation.” Rashi comments that this axiom is the essence of all the laws *bein adam lachaveiro*.

There are many questions that can be raised regarding this story. Among them is the fact that the actual *pasuk* is “You shall love your friend as yourself.” Hillel instead phrased it in the negative—what you do not like, do not do to your friend. There is a vast difference between these statements. Hillel was essentially saying “Do not harm or damage someone. Don’t insult him or embarrass him.”

What the Torah commands is many times greater. As the Ramban explains, it is not reasonable to insist that a person love his friend as much as himself—it is against human nature. A person naturally loves himself more than anything else. What the Torah means is that one should wish for his friend to have everything that he wishes for himself, both materially and emotionally. In Hillel’s time, the gentile world had no such code of behavior. The non-Jew would not be able to appreciate it. Therefore, Hillel switched it around to a concept that he could understand: don’t damage his property, don’t call him names.

Rashi offers another explanation—the “friend” in the Torah refers to Hashem, our very best Friend, who does endless kindness for us and asks for relatively little in return. How would we feel if the friend for whom we do so much refused to return a small favor? That is the love we should have for Hashem, based on our appreciation for all He does for us.


In this sense, “Love your Friend as yourself,” showing *hakaras hatov* to Hashem, actually is the basis for every mitzvah in the entire Torah. 

We can decide *laHashem*, in favor of G-d. We can muster all our power of resistance to become like Him, fulfilling His will. With a sharp knife of *kedusha*, we renounce the animalistic side of life. In doing so, we draw near to Hashem even in our physical life by doing His Will on earth.

On the other hand, a person can decide *laAzazel*. Confronted by the demands of the Torah, he can use his power of resistance to defy Hashem’s will. He can refuse to surrender the animal within to his own knife. But in doing so, he surrenders to Azazel, to the power of uncontrolled sensuality.

Such a person has no place in the Sanctuary, no place in the sphere of human or national life. That life can flourish only in the light of the Torah. His place is in the wilderness. There, the earthy world is not elevated into the sphere of freedom through the actions of moral man.

This choice is up to us. It is not determined by physical appearance, social standing, financial status—none of our circumstances determine our decision. Great or humble, rich or poor, today or tomorrow, no matter the extent of one’s powers or possessions, at any time—anyone can become *laHashem* or *laAzazel*.

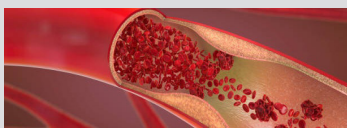
One’s decision to choose Hashem has meaning only if he could have chosen otherwise, and the opposite is also true. Without temptation, he cannot become a free man and servant of God. Desire was given to man not to control him, but in order that he control it. 

Based on the commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt”l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.




wonder WORLD

THICKER THAN WATER



How does blood keep you alive?

In Parshas Acharei Mos, we are commanded not to eat blood, because blood is equivalent to life. Blood is what keeps every part of our bodies alive. It carries oxygen from the lungs to the brain, heart, and muscles. It brings nutrients to the cells and carries away waste. Blood even helps fight off sickness by carrying white cells. If you get too hot, blood rushes to your skin to release heat. If you get cold, it moves inward to keep your organs warm. And if you get a cut, your blood clots to stop the bleeding and protect you while you heal.

So next time you feel your pulse or see a tiny scratch, remember: blood is doing its job, every second, keeping you alive, just like the Torah says. 

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