

Pulse OF Emunah

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life

LESSONS

SLEEPING BEAUTY

Not long ago, a religious Jew by the name of Isaac Theil became a worldwide sensation as a result of the smallest, simplest act: He was riding home on the subway when the man sitting next to him fell asleep and leaned his head on Theil's shoulder.

Rather than wake his slumbering seatmate, Theil sat quietly and allowed the man to continue sleeping.

An onlooker snapped a picture, which was posted on social media and quickly attracted the attention of over a million people, making a profound impact on thousands.

To create a *kiddush Hashem*, we do not have to be extraordinary people or Torah giants. In this time of overwhelming spiritual darkness, let us do our best to create as many sparks of light as we can, as small as they may be, and we will surely reap the fruits of our efforts. 

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gem

OF THE WEEK

CHOSEN PEOPLE

By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow

Why did Hashem choose Avraham? Not to make him rich and powerful, but to be the founder of a nation charged with a noble mission. Avraham was to instill in his son the guiding principles of the future nation, so that long after he passed away, his children would still live on the basis of these principles.

Their mission: *lishmor derech Hashem laasos tzedakah u'mishpat*. *Lishmor derech Hashem* means to walk before Hashem in holiness and purity, symbolized by the mitzvah of *milah*. *Laasos tzedakah u'mishpat* refers to decency in human relationships, exemplified by Avraham's hospitality. Just as Hashem made *milah* the cornerstone of His people, just as later the Torah will place *chukim* before *mishpatim*, setting limits for the body and only then rules for relationships with each other—so too here it says first *v'shamru derech Hashem*, and only then *laasos tzedakah u'mishpat*. Walking with G-d in moral purity is a precondition for just human relationships. *Mitzvos bein adam lamakom* are the root of *mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro*.

Mishpat, justice, is what a person is entitled to demand. *Tzedakah*,
continued on reverse side

powerful
PRAYER 

HISHAMRU LACHEM:
A FOREIGN DRIVE

In ancient times, the strongest and most tempting *yetzer hara* was the desire to bow to an idol or worship it in some way. To us, nothing could be sillier. Why would someone bow to an idol that he fashioned with his own two hands? Nevertheless, this was the most common *aveirah* throughout the entire era of the Tanach. The reason we cannot understand the temptation is that we no longer have this *yetzer hara*. In the early years of Bayis Sheini, the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah begged Hashem to take it away, because too many people were failing the test. Hashem responded to their *tefillos*, and removed that *yetzer hara*. 

Adapted from Emunah in the Classroom

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THE GREATEST LOSS

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

Everyone knows the story of how Avraham Avinu purchased the cave of Machpela as a burial place for Sara Imeinu. Efron offered it to him for free, as a gift, but Avraham insisted on paying full price. “What is land of four hundred silver shekel between me and you?” Efron asked, and Avraham understood that he was hinting at his asking price. These shekel were different than others mentioned in Tanach; their value was much greater. This price was exorbitant, but Avraham paid it anyway.

The Midrash applies a verse in Mishlei to Efron: “One with an evil eye who is overly anxious for wealth does not know that a loss will come upon him.” Efron saw a chance to get rich at Avraham’s expense. He knew that Avraham would not haggle, so he asked for a fortune. As a result, he suffered a loss—the letter *vav* in his name. The *pasuk* describing the sale leaves it out.

What difference would it make to Efron if his name was spelled with a *vav* or without? Herein lies a valuable lesson.

First, we refer to a famous story told in the Gemara: “Go and learn from what a gentile named Dama ben Nesina did in Ashkelon. When the sages needed a gem for the *efod* of the Kohen Gadol, they offered him a fortune for it. But he refrained from selling the gem because his father was sleeping, and the key to where the jewel was kept lay under his pillow. In the interim, the sages purchased the stone elsewhere. The following year, a *para aduma* was born in his herd, and he profited all he had lost the previous year. This is how far one must go for the honor of parents.” This gentile became a great teacher of *kibbud av v’eim* for all our future generations, and is surely rewarded for it in Olam Haba.

When Efron offered the field to Avraham for free, he could have been cited as the prime example of generosity, a lesson for all time, someone we can all learn from. But he was overly anxious for wealth, and so he suffered a great loss—an eternity as teacher of Klal Yisrael. 

benevolence, is not inherently one’s own. Typically, *mishpat* comes before *tzedakah*; you cannot steal with one hand while giving charity with the other. In this *pasuk*, however, *tzedakah* is first, to protest the policies of Sedom.

Sedom shows us that a pleasure-seeking world, one that values a person only to the extent that he is useful, may twist justice into the double-edged sword of “what’s mine is mine; what’s yours is yours.” Under this philosophy, selfishness is sacred, helplessness is a crime, and offering assistance is foolish. In Sedom, what you are entitled to is dictated by your achievements, not your needs. A wealthy man like Lot, who provides jobs and profit, is granted rights; but those who cannot support themselves are punished, imprisoned, and deported. *Mishpat* without *tzedakah* is deprived of a humane spark and turns to cruelty.

In contrast, Avraham’s descendants place *tzedakah* ahead of *mishpat*. In certain cases, *tzedakah* is a legal obligation! We give Jewish *tzedakah*—not spare change that makes the giver proud and the recipient humiliated, nor public aid designed to insulate the rich from the anger of the poor. We give *tzedakah*, entitling the needy to the rights given to them by G-d. *Tzedakah* helps the poor stand tall, and the rich to realize that they are merely custodians of money that rightfully belongs to the poor.

True *tzedakah* and *mishpat* cannot be practiced in isolation, but are part of a G-dly life. This cannot be legislated by government, nor achieved through a Communist revolution. Only the soul can produce people with a sense of duty and commandment who will transmit Avraham’s testament to generations: *v’shamru derech Hashem laasos tzedakah u’mishpat*. 

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



wonder WORLD

BIG GULP



How much water can a camel drink?

In Parshas Chayei Sarah, Rivka gives water not only to Eliezer, but to all his camels, too. It was a huge chesed, since camels can drink gallons of water at a time—but why?

Hashem built camels to survive in the desert, with bodies that can go days or even weeks without water. Those funny-looking humps are where they store fat, and they can slowly break it down for energy. Camels have wide feet to walk across hot sand without sinking, thick lips to eat thorny desert plants, and long eyelashes and closable nostrils to keep out sand.

When camels do find water, they can drink 20 gallons in 10 minutes! 

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