

# ניצוצי אור Sparks of Light

בס"ד



פרשת ויקרא (החודש) תשע"ה No. 25

## Refining One's Middos

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger, Editor

### The Big Challenge: Middos!

**Rav Saadia Gaon** taught: The main reason man was created in this world was – to break his natural negative *middos*.

(כתר שם טוב סימן כ"ד)

A *chossid* from Beshenkovitch once asked **Reb Dovber of Lubavitch** for a *brocho* to be able to do *avoda*. He added, "I am not exactly sure what working on *middos* entails, but since I have a strong desire not to do it, I understand that it must be something really good..."

(סה"ש ת"ש ע' 106)

### Discarding Unwanted Baggage

The **Baal HaTanya** writes that before introducing *middos tovos*, one must first remove all negative *middos*. By way of analogy: A king desires to have a beautiful palace built for him. For a start, the selected location must be cleared of all filth, and only then is it possible to begin constructing the palace and decorating it. Similarly, we cannot become a spiritual dwelling place for *HaShem* unless we first clear ourselves of all negative *middos*.

(לקוטי תורה ע, ג, לקו"ש ח"ב ע' 136)

The *farbrengens* of the esteemed *chossid* called **Reb Peretz Chein** were often spiced by his favorite *marshal*:

The chefs in the Czar's royal kitchen once prepared a lavish banquet for the visiting Kaiser William of Germany, the Czar's relative, and the highlight was to be a dish of stuffed and spiced calf intestines. Their efforts were so successful that the Kaiser asked for the recipe so that his own cooks at home would be able to serve him this extraordinary delicacy. The Czar duly ordered the head chef to write a detailed list of ingredients and instructions, and Kaiser William left Russia a happy man. As soon as he arrived home in Germany he handed the recipe to his chef,

but when the kitchen doors opened and the carefully prepared dish was served to the eagerly waiting Kaiser, he cried out, "What a disgusting odor!" – and the platter was quickly removed from the table.

Bitterly disappointed, he wrote to the Czar demanding to know why his chefs could not produce the same delicacy, even though they had carefully followed the recipe. The Czar asked his chef to offer an explanation.

The chef thought for a moment and then burst out laughing: "What?! The German chefs didn't work it out themselves?! There was one step so obvious that I didn't even include it in my instructions: Before the intestines are stuffed and spiced, they must first be turned inside out and washed thoroughly..."

(רשימות דברים לר"י חסריק)

### Transforming One's Middos

One day, after having stayed in **Mezritch** for a while, the **Baal HaTanya** planned to return home. He had intended to go by foot, but the **Maggid** directed that a wagon be hired to take him. When his *chavrusa* – the **Maggid's** son, **Reb Avrohom "HaMaloch"** – accompanied him to his wagon, he told the wagon driver loudly, "Whip the horses until they stop being horses."

Hearing this, the **Baal HaTanya** understood why the **Maggid** had arranged for the wagon. For the **Baal HaTanya**, those brief words opened up a new challenge in *avoda* – transforming the bad *middos* into good ones. And in order to internalize that message, he decided to extend his stay in **Mezritch**.

However, until one reaches this level of transforming one's *middos*, he must at least keep them under control, for he cannot wait until then...

(רשימת היומן ע' רמו, תו"מ ח"ה ע' 137)

When the vintage *chossid*, **Reb Zalman Zezmer**, wanted to arouse his own heart, he would tell the following story:

In his town lived a great *lamdan* who had outstanding *middos*, but he was not acquainted with *Chassidus*. **Reb Zalman** tried to explain to him the effect that *Chassidus* has on a person's *middos*. Later on, this man traveled to the **Baal HaTanya** and asked about this, and the **Baal HaTanya** answered, "Animals also have *middos*, but they are instinctive, part of their nature: the raven is mean and the eagle is kind. By contrast, when *HaShem* created people, He made their *middos* keep step with their *seichel* and not merely be dictated by nature – in order to give them the merit of doing *avoda* and working on themselves."

Hearing this, the man realized that all the *middos tovos* that he had developed were only instinctive, and he fell faint. When he came to, the **Baal HaTanya** showed him how to reach the superior *middos tovos* through *Chassidus*.

(ספר המאמרים תש"י ע' 88)

The **Rayatz of Lubavitch** once said: When one notices a negative trait in himself, this should bother him seriously, and he must make every effort to correct it. Yet this task should not depress him. On the contrary, it should bring him *simcha*: he should rejoice that he has been granted the opportunity to correct his *middos*.

(סה"ש תרפ"ח ע' 26)

## Consider This

Why is correcting one's *middos* so important? And why is it so difficult?

How does one transform his *middos*? And how is it different than controlling them?

## Sparks of Greatness

### ה' ניסן - The Toras Chessed

The *gaon* **Reb Shneur Zalman Fradkin**, known as the "**Gaon of Lublin**" or by the title of his sefer "**Toras Chessed**", was a *chossid* of the **Tzemach Tzedek of Lubavitch**. He was a *Rov* for a while in Lublin and eventually moved to Eretz Yisroel. He had a rare genius mind that was able to completely retain something he read just once. He passed away on the 5th of Nissan, 1902 (תרס"ב) and is buried on *Har Hazeisim*.

The maternal grandfather of the Toras Chessed was a *chossid* of the **Baal HaTanya**. Once when this grandfather was by the Rebbe, mentioning his family members for a *bracha*, he forgot to mention his young daughter. The Baal HaTanya, who felt this, asked him why he had failed to mention her, and the *chossid* offhandedly replied, "She's merely a little girl." The Rebbe said, "And from this little girl will come a son who will illuminate the entire world with his Torah!" The Baal HaTanya then

asked that the child that would eventually be born should be named after him, Schneur Zalman.

Many stories are told of the unparalleled genius of the Toras Chessed:

The Sdei Chemed once visited the Toras Chedes and commented that he, the Toras Chessed, certainly does not read his *seforim*, since it is a contemporary sefer. The *gaon* told him, "I do look in to your *seforim* and I have proof," and he started reciting the sefer "*Sedei Chemed*" verbatim...

The **Toras Chessed** was once traveling on a train from Polotzk to another city. In his car, sat another *talmid chacham*, who noticed that the lips of the *gaon* were constantly moving. He asked the Toras Chessed what he was saying the whole time, and the *gaon* was forced to admit that every month he reviews, by heart, a sefer of one of the *Achronim*, and he was currently reviewing the sefer "*Chavos Yair*"...

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## Halacha Sparks

### Ribbis to Tzedakah

Rabbi Chaim Chazan

Someone pledged to a *shul* for *aliyos* he received and committed to pay them before a certain date. When the date arrived, his financial situation was tight, so he assured the *gabbai* that he would pay up in a few months and add compensation for the late payment. The *gabbai* agreed. Does adding money to the original amount due pose a problem of *ribbis*?

Ordinarily, adding to a sum owed is an outright form of *ribbis* (*ribbis ketzutzah*) which is prohibited *min haTorah*. However, in our situation, the *halacha* depends on how we view the nature of the obligation to fulfill a pledge to *tzedakah*.

When someone promises to give a gift to a friend, no lien is placed on his property, for it is seen as a moral obligation to fulfill one's word, not a monetary obligation. Concerning a pledge to *tzedakah*, the *poskim* debate whether fulfilling one's word should be viewed as a moral obligation or as a more severe monetary obligation, comparable to owing someone money. Thus, if the pledge to *tzedakah* is considered a monetary obligation then the *issur* of *ribbis* would apply, but if it is a moral obligation then there is no *issur* of *ribbis*.

This person is therefore in a in a quandary. According to the *poskim* who rule that *ribbis* does not apply, he is obligated to fulfill his pledge, including the added amount; but according to those who do apply the *issur* of *ribbis*, he is prohibited to give the added amount he had pledged.

The solution therefore is the following: At first, he should only pay the amount of the original pledges. The following day, he should give the added amount he had pledged and stipulate: "If there is no *issur* of *ribbis* then I am paying to fulfill my word; however, if there is an *issur* of *ribbis*, I am now donating this money to *tzedakah*, unrelated to my previous statement." As such, he will be giving the money without any concern.

One may ask: How is this different than giving a gift given after returning a loan, which is forbidden? The answer is: Usually we assume that the gift is being given for the loan, and is therefore a form of *ribbis*. Here, the money is being given due to a *sofek* that he may be obligated to give, and therefore it has no resemblance to *ribbis*.

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