

Living Mitzvos

"Shalom Imma, I'm home!"
 "Shalom, Chaim! How are you?"
 "Hungry. What's for breakfast?"
 "French toast and honey. *Bi'teavon* (have a good appetite). Chaim dear, may I ask you a personal question?"
 "Yes, Imma."
 "How did you get home from the *Beit Kineset* so quickly? You left the house less than half an hour ago. How did you manage to walk there, pray all of the *shacharis* (morning) prayers and walk back in such a short time?"
 "That's easy Imma. I began praying while I was walking. I got there in the middle of the service, and I prayed super-speed to catch up. I left before the end, and finished my prayers while I was walking home."
 "How can you have *kavannah* (proper concentration) when you pray like that?"
 "Oh, I did not have any *kavannah*, Imma."

Chaim's mother's face fell. She looked very sad.

"Oy vey. What a tragedy."
 "What happened Imma?"
 "Something horrible. A loss of life."
 "Oh no. More bad news. I don't know if I can take it. Was it anybody that I know?"
 "No."
 "Was it one of our leaders?"
 "No. It was not even a person."
 "Oh no. Don't tell me. Do we have a dead animal in our back yard?"
 "No, Chaim."
 "Are we infested with dead bugs in the cellar?"
 "Thank G-d we're not."
 "Please tell me Imma! I'm plotting! What was the loss of life?"
 "Chaim, a mitzvah just died."
 "What do you mean, Imma? How can a mitzvah die? Was it ever alive?"

"Let me explain, Chaim dear. The Arizal compares a mitzvah to a person. Just as a person has a *guf* (body) and a *neshamah* (soul), so too, a mitzvah has a *guf* and a *neshamah*. The *guf* of the mitzvah is the deed - the actions required to perform the mitzvah. The *neshamah* of the mitzvah is the *kavannah*. Therefore, a mitzvah performed without *kavannah* is like a *guf* without a *neshamah*. And, as we all know, a body without a soul is dead. Therefore..."
 "A mitzvah performed without *kavannah* is dead."
 "Exactly, Chaim. The Arizal darshens this from a verse in this week's parasha. "All of the mitzvah which I command you today, guard it..." (Devarim 8:1). "The entire mitzvah, *b'shelaymuso* (in its completeness), with its *kavannah* and its life force...In order that you shall live." This is *middah kineged middah* (measure for measure). Just as you put life into your mitzvos, so too, I (Hashem) will enrich your life."
 "How?"
 "With blessings in this world, and *schar*

(reward) in the next world."
 "I see what you mean, Imma. *Kavannah* changes the mitzvah from just a routine ritual into real live *Avodas* (Service to) Hashem. Let's begin eating, so I can make my blessings over the food with real *kavannah*."

"Here is your French toast, Chaim."

Chaim washes his hands, and makes the blessings with great kavannah.

"Boruch attah Ad-noi, El-heynu Melech haolam, hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz!"
 "Amen!"

*Kinderlach . . .
 There is nothing more beautiful than a vibrant, living mitzvah. A bracha said with full kavannah. A gift of charity given with a warm heart. Honor given to a parent with the utmost respect. Learning Torah with great effort and happiness. Praying with complete devotion. Settling a quarrel with your whole heart. Kinderlach, may all your mitzvos be full of life, and may they give you much reward and blessing.*



ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם,
המוציא לחם מן הארץ.

Your Credit is Good

"How much is the bill Bernice?"
 "Three hundred and fifty seven shekels, Mrs. Meshulem."
 "Please put it on my tab."
 "With pleasure, Mrs. Meshulem."
 Mrs. Meshulem picks up four huge sacks full of groceries and begins leaving the store. An *olah chadasha* (newcomer to the Land of Israel) looks on, wide-eyed with disbelief. She approaches Mrs. Meshulem.
 "I am new in this country. Do you mind if I ask you something?"
 "Not at all. But first let me welcome you to the Holy Land."
 "Thank you very much. Is this shopkeeper really letting you walk out of here without paying for all of these groceries?"
 "Yes. She lets me shop on credit."
 "What stops you from running away and not paying your bill?"
 Mrs. Meshulem thinks for a moment and then answers.
 "Three things. Number one, not paying constitutes stealing, which is a very serious sin. Number two, when I pay my bill, the shopkeeper learns to trust me. Therefore, she will give me credit the next time that I shop here. Number three, the shopkeeper can now confidently order more supplies, knowing that the customers will pay. This keeps the store going, which is a great service for all of us."

This is a parable from Rav Yaakov Krantz, who is known to us as the Dubner Maggid. The verse in this week's parasha states, "And you will eat and you will be

satisfied, and you will bless Hashem your G-d for the good land that He gave you" (Devarim 8:10). To whom does this good land belong? The verse states, "The land and its fullness is Hashem's" (Tehillim 24:1). However, a different verse seemingly contradicts. "The heavens are Hashem's and the land He has given to man" (Tehillim 115:16). The Gemora (Berachos 35a) resolves this contradiction. Before the *bracha* (blessing), the land and its fruits belong to Hashem. After the blessing, it belongs to us; therefore, we may eat the fruits. This concept goes so far, that one who takes pleasure from this world without blessing Hashem is considered stealing from Him and from the Jewish people. How do we explain this?
 The answer gives us a fascinating insight into the deep meaning of *brachot*. The Shela explains that each *bracha* has a tremendous influence in the Heavenly realm and in our world. A *bracha* has an effect in Heaven, which translates to a blessing of abundance of that type of fruit in the coming year. Therefore, a person who eats with no *bracha*, or makes the wrong *bracha*, steals from others by preventing the blessings of sustenance from coming down to this world. He also steals from Hashem by not allowing Him (so to speak) to shower the world with His kindness.

Hashem is like the storekeeper, who extends us credit, by giving us food to eat. On one condition - that we pay by blessing Him. When we pay our bill, He can continue to provide us with an abundant food supply.

*Kinderlach . . .
 We all know that one of the purposes of a bracha is to thank Hashem for the food that He gives us. That is simple derech erez, to thank the One Who provides for you. Now we see that berachos have a deeper meaning. They reach to the very Heavens, bringing Hashem's kindness down to this world. Make your berachos carefully and deliberately, kinderlach. They bring good things to Hashem, others, and you.*

Parasha Questions:

- What was the *tseira* and what did it do? (7:20 and Rashi)
- What were the dates of the middle 40-day period on Har Sinai? Was Hashem happy with Klal Yisrael then? (Rashi 9:18)
- How do we serve Hashem with our hearts? (Rashi 11:13)
- When is the proper time for rain? (Rashi 11:14)

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