

Kindert Torah

Parashas Devarim

Praise and Bless

"**S**halom, Chaim! How was school today?"

"Wonderful, Abba! I got a 100 on my test in hilchos Shabbos."

"That is fantastic, Chaim! You are a very smart boy. Hashem should bless you with many, many more excellent grades in your examinations."

"Thank you, Abba, for the beautiful praise and bracha (blessing)."

"My pleasure, Chaim. I learned a lesson from Moshe Rabbeinu."

"In what way, Abba?"

"Let's look at the parasha, Chaim. 'Hashem, your G-d has multiplied you and behold, you are like the stars of heaven in abundance! May Hashem, the G-d of your forefathers increase you one thousand times, and may He bless you as He told you'" (Devarim 1:10,11).

"What a beautiful bracha, Abba!"

"Yes, Chaim. The sefer, 'Yesod V'Shoreh Ha'Avodah' (Shaar 1, Chapter 7) cites the Zohar. He separates this blessing into two parts. The first part is praise. Moshe Rabbeinu praised the phenomenal growth of Klal Yisrael. Then he proceeded to bless them - they should multiply even more! The Zohar teaches us that one who praises his friend - his children or his possessions - should also bless him."

"That is beautiful, Abba."

"Wait, Chaim. There is even more. If a person praises and blesses his friend, he himself will be blessed. However, if he only praises him, without the blessing . . . oy va voy! How should the blessing be given? With an *ayin tovah* (good eye - i.e. generously)."

"I see, Abba."

"Praising and blessing people is one of the foundations of 'bein adam li'chaveiro' (interpersonal relationships). Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l advises us to look for the good points in our fellow Jews, and praise them. Not only individuals, but even groups, and even all of Klal Yisrael! Follow up this praise with a huge generous blessing, given with an *ayin tov*. Then wait to see how people react. They will love you! Guess what? You will love them too. The Zohar promises another benefit. You will be blessed *min HaShamayim* (from Heaven)."

"I'm ready, Abba. Thank you for sharing that wisdom with me. You always take the time to teach me good things. May Hashem bless you with all the wisdom to continue teaching more and more."

Kinderlach . . .

Is your brother a generous person? Praise his generosity! And bless him that he will have enough *parnassa* (income) to be able to continue giving. Does your neighbor have a big library of *sefarim*? Praise his dedication and self-sacrifice in collecting *sifrei kodesh* (holy books). Bless him that his library should continue to grow. Did your sister help you with the *Shabbos* preparations? Praise her for her *chesed* (kindness), and bless her that she should be able to do many, many more acts of *chesed*. Praise and bless. Praise and bless. That is the formula for success.

Only These Words

"**S**halom Aleichem D.B.! How are you?"

"My good friend Yaakov! It is so good to see you! It must be years since we've been together. You look great! How are the wife and family? Do you still have the same job? I just got back from a fabulous vacation. Let me tell you all about it."

And so, D.B. told his friend Yaakov all about his vacation. He went into great details about the hotel, the food, the scenery, and the tour guide. He rambled on for about ten minutes. There was only one thing that he forgot to say. He did not ask Yaakov if he was interested in hearing about his vacation. Finally, he finished.

"What do you think of that Yaakov?"

"I am very impressed. You asked me about my job, D.B..."

Without hesitation, D.B. interrupted Yaakov.

"Job? I have a fantastic job! Let me tell you all about it. I work for a man who is so kind and generous..."



D.B. proceeded to talk all about his job, his co-workers, the company, and its products. Yaakov stood by, listening quietly and patiently. After ten minutes, D.B. finished.

"It's great to have a great job, isn't it Yaakov?"

By now, Yaakov was a bit afraid to say anything. He may trigger off another ten minute talking spurt. He thought carefully and replied with a seemingly harmless response.

"Yes, D.B."

"The only thing better than a good job is good health. Let me tell you all about my doctor and my health plan..."

And so, it happened again. D.B. spoke for fifteen minutes about the health plan, the doctors, the clinics, and the various ailments of each one of his family members. Yaakov was treated to a real test of his patience and listening ability. Finally, it was over.

"I really must go now, D.B. It has been great chatting with you. May I just ask you one question before we part?"

"Sure, Yaakov."

"What do your initials D.B. stand for?"

"Devarim Bitalim" (useless words).

"**T**hese are the words which Moshe spoke to all Yisrael..." (Devarim 1:1). The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh relates that this verse hints to the Gemora - Yuma 19b. "One who speaks ordinary (non-Torah) words transgresses a positive mitzvah, as the verse states (Devarim 6:7), 'And you will speak of them [words of Torah]' - and not other words." This Gemora teaches us that we have permission to speak only words of Torah and *Yiras Shamayim* (Fear of Heaven). Any other words are forbidden. The verse informs us that THESE words, Sefer Devarim, were the only words that Moshe Rabbeinu spoke from his own initiative all the days of his life. All of his other speeches and conversations were words that Hashem commanded him to say. What is the content of these words (Sefer Devarim)? They are all *Divrei Torah*, wisdom, and mussar. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu fulfilled the directive, "vi'dibarta bam," speak only them (*Divrei Torah*), and not *devarim bitalim*.

Kinderlach . . .

Proper speech is a skill. Like any other skill, it takes time and practice to acquire. What should we say, and what should we not say? Try opening the conversation with an interesting halacha, or an inspiring story about our Gedolim. See how the other person reacts. You can cheer up a person who is down. Almost everyone appreciates words of *chizuk*. Some people need to be listened to. Let them do the talking. Others prefer silence. A nod or a smile is enough for them. It all depends on the person and the situation. What should you never do? Speak *devarim bitalim*. What are *devarim bitalim*? Words with no purpose. One who speaks *devarim bitalim* is wasting the most precious gift that Hashem gave him - the gift of speech. Every word is more valuable than a precious gem. Spend them carefully, as you would money. Which words are not *devarim bitalim*? *Divrei mitzvah*. If something is troubling you, it is a mitzvah to tell your parents, teacher, or Rabbi. If you have a problem, a difficult situation, or need advice, it is a mitzvah to talk it over with someone who can help you. If you are down, it is a mitzvah to unburden your soul to someone who cares about you. These are not *devarim bitalim* at all, rather they are *divrei mitzvah*. Which words should you speak? Only THESE words - Torah, mussar, *chizuk*, *divrei mitzvah*, and *Yiras Shamayim*.

Parasha Questions:

- Which lands did Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe receive? On what condition? (3:8-20)
- Did any of Sichon's nation survive the war with Klal Yisrael? (2:34)
- Who received the land of the Bnei Ammon as an inheritance? (2:9,19)
- What happened when Klal Yisrael tried to make war with the Emorie after the Chet HaMeraglim? (2:43-45)

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