

Kavod — An Instrument to Influence Others

The Gemara relates (*Shabbos* 113a) that Rabbi Yochanan would refer to his clothing as “those who honor me,” which means that his clothing brought him honor. If he wore impressive clothing, he was honored. This begs an explanation. Did Rabbi Yochanan love honor and want others to honor him? This is simply preposterous! He certainly didn’t desire honor or run after it.

I didn’t look into the *mefarshim* now, but it seems that the explanation is as follows: If he would wear shabby, dishonorable clothing, it would be a disgrace and he’d be shamed because of it. Now, it’s not proper to be disgraced. If he’d be disgraced, he wouldn’t have *chashivus*, importance, and the *tzibbur* wouldn’t respect him, so he wouldn’t be able to have an influence over them. A person must have a *hashpaah* on others, and Rabbi Yochanan did influence others. As long as the *tzibbur* respected him and saw that he was an honorable person, he was able to influence them. If, however, they’d see him being disgraced, he wouldn’t be able to influence them anymore. And then he wouldn’t have the opportunity to influence them in Torah, *yiras Shamayim*, and *middos tovos*. It’s impossible to have any form of *hashpaah* if the person is looked down upon.

Bizyonos Cause a Lack of Yishuv HaDaas

Another point: if someone feels humiliated, it’s an extremely discomfiting, unpleasant feeling, and then he doesn’t have the strength to be an influence. He feels unwell and confused, so how can he have an influence? He would have to speak and expound, but if he’s confused and feels degraded, he won’t have *koach* and won’t be able to impact others.

This is what Rabbi Yochanan meant when he referred to his clothing as “those who honor me” — because if a person’s clothes are ripped or shabby, it causes him confusion and makes him feel worthless.

This is probably the explanation of the request in the *Yehi ratzon* prayer after the *berachah* of *HaMaavir sheinah*: “Do not bring us to shame” — we ask to be saved from embarrassment. But why wouldn’t we want embarrassment? *Bizyonos*, pain in this world, decreases a person’s level of Gehinnom, just as all *yissurim* in this world do. So why don’t we want *bizyonos*?

The answer is that while general *yissurim* cleanse and decrease one’s level of Gehinnom — Maran HaRav Shach *zt”l* would say that *yissurim* one already experienced were

“worth millions” for they save a person from lots of Gehinnom and make him *zocheh* to Gan Eden — *bizyonos* are worse. Because when a person feels degraded, he can’t function. He feels worthless and does not have *yishuv hadaas*. Therefore, we ask “Do not bring us to shame.”

A Prayer Not to Feel Degraded

On the other hand, in *Elokai Netzor*, we ask, “And may my soul remain silent to those who curse me.” This is not referring to someone who literally curses me, but to a person who shames me, as David HaMelech said (*Melachim I* 2:8), “And he cursed me a severe curse.”¹ This is why we ask: “to those who curse me” — those who shame me; “may my soul be quiet” — I shouldn’t care, and the *bizyonos* should not affect me; I shouldn’t even notice them.

This is possible — a person is capable of hearing others shame him and ridicule him, and it completely has no effect on him. He stays calm, maintains his *yishuv hadaas*, and it does not harm him. Let them say whatever they want! But this is against human nature and one must daven to attain this level — “And may my soul remain silent to those who curse me!”

Even Amoraim Need to Daven

This is a *chiddush*. The prayer *Elokai Netzor* was composed by the *Amoraim* (see *Berachos* *daf* 17). This *berachah* includes their personal requests: “Hashem, please guard my tongue from speaking evil” — that is, even the *Amoraim* needed a *tefillah* to be saved from *lashon hara*. It’s human nature to be drawn to *lashon hara* — so much so that even the great *Amoraim* needed a *tefillah*; we need special *siyatta d’Shemaya* through *tefillah* to refrain from speaking *lashon hara*.

So too “guard my lips from speaking deceit” — this is a lesser sin than *lashon hara*, as the Chafetz Chaim explains (*Sfas Tamim*, chap. 1) that “deceit” is when one says one thing and thinks the opposite — *echad ba’peh v’echad ba’level*. One needs to daven about this as well, for it is human nature.

As we mentioned, one must also daven for “And may my soul remain silent to those who curse me” because this is

¹ This is Rashi’s explanation on the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 21:23), “For a hanging [corpse] is a blasphemy of G-d (*killelas Elokim*)” — Whenever the word “*klallah*” is used in Scripture, it is a term of “treating lightly and belittling,” as in, “And he cursed me a severe curse.”

against human nature. But it is possible and can be attained through davening.

Feeling Important — Arrogance

It's human nature for a person to want others to respect him and honor him. Usually, when someone has a certain *maalah*, such as talents, brains, or good *middos*, he's happy when others are aware of it. It interests him if others know that I am smart, or that I have good *middos* — it is human nature that a person wants others to know about his *maalos* so that they'll respect him and honor him.

This all stems from the fact that he holds of himself and feels "I am important; I am *chashuv* because I have good *middos*, I have brains, understanding, and all other *maalos*." He wants other to know this too, so they'll respect him and honor him. He wants the honor; he enjoys it — because he believes that he deserves it.

But actually, this is *gaavah*, arrogance. And arrogance leads to craving honor. He feels important and wants the *kavod*. Even if he doesn't take any action and isn't specifically running after honor or doing things to make people respect him and honor him, *b'dieved*, he's happy and enjoys the honor. This too is *gaavah*.

The verse in *Mishlei* (16:5) states: "All haughty ones are an abomination to Hashem." The halachah is that one cannot have more than an eighth of an eighth (one sixty-fourth) of *gaavah* (see *Sotah daf* 5 and Rambam, *Hilchos Deios*, chap. 2) for arrogance is "an abomination to Hashem." In Hashem's eyes, a haughty person is despicable, *Rachmana litzlan*, because he thinks he's important.

Your Maalos Should Make You Happy, Not Haughty

The *Mesillas Yesharim* (chap. 22–23) already spoke at length about the traits of modesty and arrogance. He explains that it's wrong for a person to feel important about anything, because he did not create his importance. All his *maalos* and all his talents are from Hashem — everything is in Heaven's hands. He's like a poor person who receives charity. The poor man doesn't deserve the money; it's just that other people pity him and give him a handout. He must — he is actually obligated to — thank them for it and be happy with what he receives, but there's no reason for him to feel important.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* writes (*Shaar HaKniah*, chap. 9), that if someone has a *maalah*, he should be happy, but he should not be haughty. **There's a fine line between happiness and haughtiness, being happy and not feeling self-important** is a *madreigah*. After all, if a person is happy, he might feel important — and he may not feel important, but he must feel happy!

A Person's Maalos Are Heavenly Gifts

As we said, it's wrong for a person to feel self-important, because he really doesn't deserve a thing. Why should he think he's important — after all, everything he has is

chesed v'rachamim. His talents — and whatever he learned because of his talents — are all from *Shamayim*. Who gave him energy to learn, who gave him the willpower to learn? And what about the power of free choice? Who created it and who gave it to him? It's all from *Shamayim*!

The *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Shaar Avodas Elokim* chap. 5) states that the *nefesh* asks the *seichel* (intelligence) to educate her. But the *seichel* responds, "Don't you know that you are 'pawnd against your Creator's favors'? Meaning, the soul receives so many favors from Hashem and she has to repay them somehow. She has to put up collateral against the loan, so the *nefesh* itself is pawnd and is hanging in Hashem's hands — just as physical collateral is in the lender's hands, and the borrower cannot get it back until he pays up his debt.

Anything a person does is also a favor from his Creator — where does he have the *koach* to do anything? Everything is in *Shamayim*'s hands! The *pasuk* in *Iyov* (41:3) states: "Who preceded me, and I will pay him," and the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 27:2) explains: "*Ruach hakodesh* is saying, 'Who preceded Me and I will pay him. Who praised Me before I gave him a *neshamah*? Who performed a *bris milah* for My sake before I gave him a son? Who put up a fence on his roof for My sake before I gave him a roof? Who affixed a mezuzah for My sake before I gave him a house?'"

When a person performs the mitzvah of mezuzah, he should think about who gave him a house to put a mezuzah on. Of course, it's from Hashem. That's what HaKadosh Baruch Hu is saying, "Who preceded Me? Is there anyone Who gave Me anything that I have to pay for? After all, I give man whatever he has — without the gifts he received from Me, he wouldn't have been able to do anything.

A Lifetime of Heavenly Chessed

Let a person make a *cheshbon* about his entire life, taking his background and history into consideration. Take, for example, the fact that he had parents who raised him on the Torah's path — is this a coincidence? Also, think about the simple fact that he was born — is it a given that he would be born?!

Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:12) mentions this concept: "And he did not remember his Creator Who created him ex-nihilo." Hashem created Man ex-nihilo, *yeish me'ayin*, "And Hashem performed kindness with him and His hand will guide him at every moment." Hashem manages his life at all times, "and creates his soul at every minute," the soul exists constantly through Hashem's will, so "how could he even think of angering Him?"; how could a person do anything against Hashem's will? How could this be?

When a person makes these calculations, looking at his entire history from the day he was born, or from the very fact that he was born, and moving along to everything that he saw, or the very fact that he has eyesight, and he can hear, and he can speak, and he can understand — some

people don't have all these faculties, and he does. It's all *chasadim* from Hashem — and he's really pawned!

The fact that he can learn, and that he has someone to learn with, that he was born with talents and can understand his learning, and that he continues to live and he has food to eat — this is all a great *chesed* from Hashem; he has food, he has parents, and they're still living, and they're being *mechanech* him, and he's growing and continuing to learn, and he has someone to teach him.

Then he gets older, and learns and learns; then he gets married with someone who's just right for him, for after all, Hashem is *mezaveg zivuggim* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 68:4), and everything is from *Shamayim*, so she is surely the right one for him. Then he has a family and children — from *Shamayim*; and he has *talmidim* — from *Shamayim*, and his *talmidim* are good — from *Shamayim*. Everything is in Heaven's hands!

This Is Why You Were Created!

We learned in *Pirkei Avos* (2:8): Rabbi Yochanan says, "If you learned a lot of Torah, don't pride yourself on that fact, because this is what you were created for." That is, if a person learns a lot of Torah, he should think he's so important, because he was created to learn Torah! If he wouldn't learn Torah, he wouldn't have the right to exist. Torah was purpose of his creation, so when he learns, he has the right to live, but if not, he does not. So why does he think he deserves thanks for learning? If he wouldn't learn, he'd be a criminal — not being a criminal is no *maalah*! Of course, one should be happy that he's not a criminal, but he shouldn't feel self-important, as if he deserves something, because this is why he was created!

At the end of *Pirkei Avos* they said, "Whatever Hashem created in his world, He only created it for His own honor, as it says, "Whatever is called by My Name and My Honor, I created it (*Barasiv*), formed it (*Yetzartiv*), and even made it (*Asisiv*).” That is, all the worlds, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*, were all created to promote *kevod Shamayim*, Hashem's honor. This is for our benefit, because by being involved in *kevod Shamayim*, we will merit *Olam HaBa*. This is the purpose of Creation — to increase *kevod Shamayim*! If a person is able to increase *kevod Shamayim*, but doesn't do whatever he can, why does he deserve to remain alive? The entire reason for his being in this world is to bring honor to Hashem, and if there's no *kevod Shamayim*, in what *zechus* does he exist?

Why are there wicked people in the world? What *kevod Shamayim* do they create? I heard from my rebbi HaGaon HaTzaddik Rav E. E. Dessler ז"ל — and it's printed in *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* (see Vol. 3, p. 232) — that the punishments meted out to *reshaim* are the revelation of *kevod Shamayim*. They are punished for failing to bring about *kevod Shamayim*, and this very punishment is an expression of *kevod Shamayim*. While tzaddikim increase *kevod Shamayim* through their good deeds, *reshaim* express *kevod Shamayim* when they are punished.

Remember That Everything Is in Heaven's Hands

Most importantly, we must remember that everything is in Heaven's hands; and this knowledge will affect every practical behavior. As we've already discussed many times, when a person knows that everything is in Hashem's hands, he is happy and has no *k'peidos* against anyone. Even if someone causes him pain, he does not get angry because he understands that everything is from Hashem. He knows he would have received the pain even without the third party, because that's what was decreed on Heaven and it's for his own benefit. It's as Chazal say (*Berachos* 60b), "Whatever the Merciful One does is for the good." Even the pain is for our benefit — it leads us to start thinking about why I received this pain from *Shamayim*; what do they want from me.

Usually, there is a *middah k'neged middah* reason for the pain. Chazal say (*Berachos* 5a), "If a person sees that *yissurim* befall him, he must search his deeds. If he searched and didn't find [a reason], he should attribute it to *bittul Torah*." You would think that *bittul Torah* is a reason, so why is this called "he searched and did not find?" The commentators explain (*Nefesh HaChaim* 4:29) that "search his deeds" means to look for a *middah k'neged middah* reason for his pain, and if he doesn't find a sin that has a connection to his pain, he should attribute it to *bittul Torah*, which is a reason for all types of *yissurim*, *Rachmana litzlan*.

Aside from *bittul Torah*, there could very well be a *middah k'neged middah*. The Gemara (*Berachos* 2b) relates that Rav Huna had a vineyard. Once 400 barrels of wine from his vineyard fermented. The *Rabbanan* told him "to search his deeds" to figure out why this happened, because there was apparently a sin he had to rectify. Rav Huna told them, "I don't know what it is either; maybe you know."

The *Rabbanan* actually did know. They told him about his sharecropper who was supposed to receive a third or a quarter of his vineyard's harvest, and in addition to his portion of wine and fruit, he was also supposed to get a percentage of the dry vine twigs trimmed from the vineyard. "You, Rav Huna, took the twigs for yourself and did not give him his percentage. Therefore, *middah k'neged middah*, barrels of wine from your vineyard fermented."

Rav Huna countered, "My sharecropper steals so much produce from my vineyard, taking much more than his allotted share. He owes me much more than these twigs are worth and I've never demanded that he pay up. So the twigs really belong to me." The *Rabbanan* told him, "Even so, there is a trace of theft in withholding his percentage, and you should act *lifnim meshuras hadin* and give your sharecropper vine twigs."

More Is Expected of a Baal Madreigah

The Gemara relates another story in *Bava Metzia* 83a about Rabbah bar Bar Chanah, who hired porters to carry a barrel of wine from one spot to another. In middle of their job,

they fell and the barrel broke. If a person trips, it's as if he did so intentionally and he must pay for damages, so according to halachah, the porters were liable to pay Rabbah. He wanted to demand payment, but Rav told him that the *pasuk* states, "So that they shall go in the good path" — meaning, he should behave *lifnim meshuras hadin*, beyond the letter of the law, since they didn't harm him purposely. Although it is called an intentional sin since they were not more careful, they were so pitiful so he should give in and not demand they pay him for damages.

Then the porters came and asked him to pay them for their labor. He did not want to pay — not only did they harm him, they didn't even finish their job! But Rav again told him to pay because it says, "And guard the paths of tzaddikim," and even if someone else wouldn't be obligated, since you are a *baal madreigah* — you are an Amora — according to your level you should act *lifnim meshuras hadin*. You shouldn't demand that they pay you, they're pitiful, and you should pay them for their labor.

A Person's Obligations Depend on How Much Others Respect Him

It seems that Rabbah didn't consider himself to be on such a high *madreigah*, so he thought that he was not obligated to go so far. Rav informed him that he was a *baal madreigah* and was obligated to act with greater *vatranus* than others. Rav Huna, as well, did not think he was on such a high *madreigah* that would obligate him to act with such *middas chassidus* and give his sharecropper vine twigs. But the Rabbanan told him that he was on a high *madreigah*, and even if he didn't consider himself so important, others did, and he really was important and had to be more stringent than others.

So sometimes, if a person doesn't consider himself important, he fails to fulfill his obligations, as these stories demonstrate. Therefore, a person must know that his obligations are based on how much others respect him. The level of *lifnim meshuras hadin* that he is obligated to maintain is based on the degree that others respect him. The more he is respected, the more he must behave with *lifnim meshuras hadin*.

Learning Mussar Guides Toward Sheleimus

One needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* for everything. *L'maaseh*, the way to advance toward *sheleimus ha-adam* is to have a steady *mussar* learning session. We've already mentioned what Maran HaRav Shteinman zt"l said at a gathering: If a person learns *Mesillas Yesharim* for five minutes a day — if he is consistent about it, it will have an influence.

I've heard from many family men who've told me that when they started learning *mussar* on a regular basis, they entire atmosphere in their home changed. Now there's a pleasant, happy atmosphere at home, because *mussar sefarim* are *mechanech*, they teach a person how to be a respectable person, to act properly and become a *mushlam*. If a person is *mushlam*, then the atmosphere at home is optimal.

So that's the solution. Learn a little at home every day, learn from *mussar sefarim* for a few minutes. Usually, the *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* has the greatest influence, but each person should learn what interests him. If a certain *sefer* bores him, he should try a different *sefer*, or a different chapter that is more interesting. Each person should follow his personal nature. That's what can be done *l'maaseh*, though of course, one needs *siyatta d'Shemaya* for this. *Yehi ratzon* that we merit *siyatta d'Shemaya*.

לעילוי נשמת הרב משה ז"ל
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