

Fascinating INSIGHTS

י"ח תמוז תש"פ

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Appreciating Absence

One who was given a blank sheet of paper with one black dot on it was asked what he saw? He replied that he saw a black dot. So, although most of the sheet was white (blank), he just saw the black dot. Many of us in life do the same.

After our personal gratitude in the words מזמור לתודה¹ (literally: a psalm of thanksgiving), which we recite at Shacharis, we say הריעו לה' כל הארץ, call out to Hashem, everyone on earth. Why does everyone need to call out to thank Hashem just because you are thanking Hashem? R' Chaim Kanievsky explained this with a story. In one of the Shuls in Bnei Brak, after Shacharis, one of the people put out cake and a L'chaim explaining that the day before he was crossing the street and was hit by a car. Yet, he was barely injured. The next day another person in the Shul came with cake and a L'chaim. He explained that yesterday when he heard this person crossed the street and was hit by a car, he realized he crossed the same street for the last 20 years and didn't get hit by a car. As a result, he came to thank Hashem. So the second person was aroused to give thanks when he heard what happened to the first person. This is why we say הריעו לה' כל הארץ, call out to Hashem, everyone on earth.²

Chassidim who attended their Rebbe's סעודת הוודאה were bewildered since they didn't know of any real

¹ During the times of the Beis Hamikdash a person would bring a thanksgiving-offering (Karbon Todah) whenever he survived that which was life-threatening such as a serious sickness, captivity and so on. The 100th chapter of Tehillim—מזמור לתודה—was recited during the service.

² Indeed, as a daily reminder we say מזמור לתודה at Shacharis, since every human being goes through any number of potential dangers in the course of his life, many of which he is often unaware of.

reason he was making it. Their answer was found when the Rebbe spoke and said “a few weeks prior to this I was embarrassed. This was the cause for this Seuda as I am so thankful to Hashem that He gave me this suffering since this is the easiest form of pain. There were no setbacks, health problems, financial issues, trouble with the family or the like. What could be an easier form of pain?!”

The Chidushai Harim (1799-1866) had 13 children who all died during his lifetime. When the last one died he comforted his wife by saying “our great suffering will serve as a partial consolation for other people who may lose a child. They will comfort themselves by saying we have lost 13 children and their loss is not as tragic as ours.”³

We must appreciate that which doesn't happen to us.⁴ Humans are susceptible to all types of diseases and accidents. Many things can harm a person. One can walk properly and break a limb with a slip. One can choke on food. How many times have we had pain that we don't have now? This may include dental work such as a root canal, health issues,⁵ problems with bureaucracy, being in debt and so on. Do we appreciate when we don't have these issues?

Hammer—Harmful or Helpful?

The Written Torah begins with a בראשית—ב whereas the Oral Torah starts with a מציאתי—מ. These two letters spell במ, alluding to the Gemara of במ ודברת במ, speak in the words of Torah but not other matters.⁷

Mishnayos begins with a מציאתי—מ as we mentioned. How does it end? With a מ בשלום—מ.⁸ What is unique about a מ? When one pronounces the מ, his lips are initially closed. Then it opens followed by it closing again when one finishes saying the מ. This is telling us to only speak in Torah. There are two types of מ: an open מ and a closed מ—סופית—מ. Mishnayos starts off with an open מ telling us to talk Torah but it ends with a closed מ to tell us that when we finish speaking, it should also be in Torah.⁹ Don't leave an opening for דברים בטלים.¹⁰

Speech can be used in a positive way or negative way. The letter פ represents a mouth as when it is spelled out, it is פה, mouth. The letter פ is half open and half

³ Siach Sarfei Kodesh, 3, p. 78.

⁴ The saying goes “a person was sad he had no shoes until he saw a man with no feet.”

⁵ At the age of seven, the Ben Ish Chai (1832-1909) fell into a deep pit in the courtyard of his home while playing with his sister. He was eventually saved by a miracle. In gratitude to Hashem, he decided to devote his life to the study of Torah.

⁶ Brachos 2a.

⁷ Devarim 6:7. Yoma 19a. הגר"א.

⁸ Uktzin 3:12.

⁹ See Zera Kodesh, Vaera.

¹⁰ When one speaks דברים בטלים that is when the יצר gets in. This is represented by מצרים as it begins and ends with a מ but the middle letters spell יצר.

closed (on the left side) since one must know when to open his mouth and when to close it.¹¹ With this we can grasp a deeper meaning in *הקל קול יעקב והידיים ידי עשו*¹² as one's words can be *קול יעקב*, Torah, Tefila and giving encouragement to others or *ידי עשו*¹³, where it can hurt others. The saying goes, "Your mouth is like a hammer.¹⁴ You can use it to destroy or to build."¹⁵

The Pasuk *משפחת השופטים להופים משפחת החופים* written in the census when it speaks of the sons of Binyamin according to their families contains seven פס.¹⁶ This alludes to the seven people of Binyamin who had the ability to speak and yet were quiet. Who are they? Binyamin knew of the sale of Yosef and was quiet. Rochel with the Simanim for Leah. Esther and Mordechai in the story of the Megilla—*מרדכי... עמה*—, Esther still told nothing of her kindred or her people as Mordechai had instructed her.¹⁷ Shaul Hamelech when he became king—*ואת דבר המלוכה לא הגיד לו*—, he didn't tell him about the matter of kingship.¹⁸ Michal, the daughter of Shaul, didn't disclose where Dovid was when Shaul wanted to kill Dovid.¹⁹ Similarly, Yehonasan didn't tell Shaul where Dovid was when he was trying to kill Dovid.²⁰ What is the name of Binyamin's stone on the *ישפה*? *זשן*.²¹ That is a contraction of *יש פה*, one who has the ability to speak but doesn't. Remaining quiet.

Torah Technology

It has been said that one can fulfill *תלמודו בידו*²² with the Torah he types with his fingers on the computer.

¹¹ Someone once said, "I don't speak because I have the power to speak, I speak because I don't have the power to remain silent." A similar saying goes like this: "Speak only when you feel that your words are better than your silence."

¹² Breishis 27:22. In this way we can understand *צהר תעשה לתבה* (Breishis 6:16) as we should make our words (*תעשה לתבה*) be light (*צהר*) to the world.

¹³ The story is told of a husband who was verbally abusing his wife. His wife went to seek counsel from a Rav who advised that every time he insults, she should bang a nail with a hammer into wood since this would alleviate her frustration and anger. After a few days of hearing the banging noise, the husband asked his wife about it. She explained that after each insult, this is what she does. After seeing the many nails, he was so moved to improve, as he didn't realize the severity of his damage. He then told her that for each compliment he gives her, she must remove a nail. After a few days, she told him that all the nails are out, to which he responded that he fixed it all up and now has a clean slate. She replied that the holes are still in the piece of wood. We learn from this that the damage we cause with our words still linger on as even if the nails are removed, the holes (damage) still remain.

¹⁴ A wise man said, "No one whose respect matters, respects those who speak badly of others."

¹⁵ It is said from the Beis Avraham that *מחיה מתים במאמר*, who resuscitates the dead with His utterance (*Maariv on Shabbos*) can be interpreted as one can revive and give life to another life through his words (a compliment, encouragement and the like).

¹⁶ Bamidbar 26:39. Our one mouth and two ears indicate that we should hear twice before we talk.

¹⁷ Esther 2:20.

¹⁸ Shmuel 1, 10:16.

¹⁹ Shmuel 1, 19:14.

²⁰ Shmuel 1, 20.

²¹ Shemos 28:20. See Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeitzei, 6.

²² Baba Basra 10b. Literally, this means his learning is in his hand, meaning he remembers what he learned. The Maharsha (s.v.

Much Torah has spread with the advent of the computer. In this light, a Chassid explained *המלמד תורה בכל כלי שיר*²³ who teaches Torah accompanied by every sort of instrument, as Torah can be taught in many more ways today due to technology. There are recordings of thousands of great Shiurim. One can access tons of Torah literature and Sefarim that can be hard to find. One can have a Chavrusa in a different country not only by phone but even on the computer, with actually seeing him! Much Torah has been learned during this period of the coronavirus because of technology that wouldn't have happened otherwise.

Although since the 1960's, R' Dovid Kviat's²⁴ (1920-2009) hands would shake, he overcame this physical impediment and continued to write his chiddushim. However, soon very few were able to decipher his handwriting, and therefore others were unable to type them up. Undeterred, R' Kviat was able to locate someone in Yerushalayim who could still read his writing. However, a few years before he died, R' Kviat's handwriting deteriorated further. Now, no one could decipher his handwriting—not even R' Kviat himself. Undaunted, he continued to write, because writing helped him crystallize his Torah thoughts. It helped him further his understanding of the *sugya*. Then someone suggested that he learn how to type on a computer. His initial reaction was that he was too old to learn a skill. He was almost eighty and the shaking in his hands was significant, in addition to his eyesight being poor. Nevertheless, he tried and in a matter of days, he was typing a few thousand words a day. A few months and a few Seforim later, he called the person who taught him how to type and said, "I want a laptop!"

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander Tzt"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the *Sefer, Fascinating Insights: Torah Perspectives On Unique Topics*. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

יהיו interprets *תלמודו בידו* as referring to the original insights and explanations a Torah scholar commits to writing, as that is *תלמודו בידו*—Torah that was penned by his hand.

²³ In the Hoshanos we say on Hoshana Rabba in the paragraph *למען תמים*.

²⁴ He was a Rosh Yeshiva in the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn and the Rabbi of the Agudas Yisrael Synagogue of 18th Avenue. He survived the hands of the Nazis by fleeing with the entire Yeshiva through Siberia to Kobe, Japan, through the efforts of Chiune Sugihara, and on to Shanghai, China. His father was R' Avraham Eliezer Kviat, a student of both the Slabodka Yeshiva and the Novadok Yeshiva in Europe, although he was a Slonimer Chassid. The Kviat family was extremely poor as were most residents of Białystok at the time. We know that on Friday nights if one doesn't have wine, Kiddush is to be recited over bread. R' Dovid Kviat vividly recalled how his father would only make wine once per year out of raisins so that they would have the four cups for Pesach. At the age of three, R' Dovid's mother died. His two older brothers continued after Mesivta in the Slonimer Yeshiva called Toras Chessed. For some reason, R' Dovid chose to go to the Mir—a Lithuanian Yeshiva—instead of the Slonimer Yeshiva. R' Dovid Kviat is most famous for his works on Gemara entitled *Sukkas Dovid*.