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ל' שבט תשפ"א

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Soulo

There are those who will just follow a routine path and become a “regular” person while there are others that will go against the grain,¹ rising to become the greatest they can² be.³ They overcome their fear of rejection of others.⁴ They may say to themselves, “Who cares what others say? Others come and go but I live with myself 24/7!” Living with someone else’s approval may bring temporary pleasure but having your own approval leads to everlasting joy and well-being. “Strive to be who Hashem wants you to be, not what others want to see.”

They live with the saying, “Let the world be against you but don’t betray what you are here for.” What would be if Avraham followed everyone else and didn’t rise up and be who became who he was? We all need to follow that example and be like אברהם העברי—standing on one side while the rest of the world stood on the other.⁶ There is an expression “You are not here to fit in. You are here to stand out.”

¹ Someone once said, “The really dangerous thing about existence is that it is not a question of sink or swim but that it is possible to float.”

² For some this may entail going out of the “orthobox.”

³ There is an expression, “Don’t live the same year 75 times and call it life.”

⁴ There is a quote that reads, “A true friend accepts who you are, but also helps you become who you should be.”

⁵ Breishis 14:13. See Breishis Rabba 42:8. See also R’ Shamshon Rafael Hirsch to Shemos 3:18. It has been said, “Some of the world’s greatest deeds have been accomplished by two types of men: those who were smart enough to know it could be done and those too dumb to know it couldn’t.”

⁶ The Degel Machane Efraim (Mattos, s.v. ההלצו) comments on ואיש לא (Shemos 34:3) that when one wants to truly serve

Bronnie Ware was a palliative nurse. She would be with those diagnosed with terminal illnesses that were sent home to die because doctors gave up hope. She was with them until they passed away. At the end of her nearly 30-year career, she published a book called *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* where she shared the top deathbed regrets expressed by people she served. The number one most common regret shared by people nearing death was, “I wish I would have had the courage to live a life true to⁷ myself,⁸ not the life others expected of me.”⁹

Criticism of others may stop one from acting.¹⁰ They should bear in mind, “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, criticize.”¹¹ There is a saying, “If it were not for the doers, the critics would soon be out of business.” Someone once commented, “To avoid criticism, do nothing, say nothing, be nothing.”¹² Some people never make a mistake, nor do they ever make anything else.¹³

There are those who accomplish much in their life.¹⁴ They don’t measure success by what others haven’t done.¹⁵ While some people dream of worthy accomplishments, others stay awake and do them.¹⁶ The truth is that “Within each and every soul is a God size hole that only God can fill.” (That is, money and the pleasures of this world won’t fill this need, only spirituality will.)

There was a man, Yaakov, that was in perilous circumstances. A wealthy fellow, Shimon, came to the rescue and saved his life. Yaakov asked Shimon how he could possibly pay him back for what he did as Shimon

Hashem he must imagine as if he is alone in the world and he shouldn’t be moved by any person. Very often when we “climb the mountain” we are alone since we need to go against the crowd.

⁷ There is a saying, “You can never cross the ocean until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

⁸ The Pasuk says יהיה כנגן המנגן ותהי יד ה', it happened that as the musician played, the hand of Hashem came upon him (Melachim 2, 3:15). It is said from the Maggid of Mezerich that everyone has their own tune, a beat that appeals to them specifically. When the player is harmonious with his tune, then יהיה עילוי יד ה'.

⁹ The others were the following: 2) I wish I hadn’t worked so hard. 3) I wish I would have had the courage to express my feelings. 4) I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends. 5) I wish that I had let myself be happier.

¹⁰ A motivational speaker once remarked that people in life, in general, tell what you can’t do not what you can do.

¹¹ Someone once commented that there has never been a statue to honor a critic (so just ignore people like that).

¹² R’ Moshe Ibn Ezra once said that to find favor in the eyes of every one is a goal that can never be reached and to avoid all criticism is an aim that can never be achieved (Shiras Yisrael, p. 117).

¹³ We should keep in mind, “No matter how many mistakes you make or how slowly you progress, you are still way ahead of everyone who isn’t trying.”

¹⁴ We need to keep in mind, “Don’t ask, can I? Ask, should I?”

¹⁵ “Don’t measure yourself by what you have accomplished rather by what you should have accomplished with your ability.” Another quote is, “It is better to have little ability and use it well than to have much ability and make poor use of it.”

¹⁶ There is a saying, “Good intentions die unless they are executed.”

clearly didn't need money. Shimon told him, *just make sure you live a life worth saving!*¹⁷

So, remember: "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. I will not refuse to do the something I can do."

Instant Distant

The Pasuk states ¹⁸מדבר שקר תרחק. Why does the term ¹⁹תרחק, to distance oneself, appear only by lying? Why can it just say "don't lie"?

Chazal say that the seal of Hashem is אמת.¹⁹ For this, reason, אמת is sealed at the outset of the Torah—בראשית ברא—as the end letters spell אמת.²⁰ In addition to this, Hashem is called אמת as in אלהים אמת.²¹ R' Moshe Margolis in his commentary to Yerushalmi, Pnei Moshe,²³ informs us that it is an acronym of מלך תמיד אלהים.

In the א-ב there are 13 letters preceding מ and 13 after, giving a total of 26, the same as אמת. אמת is also symbolic of Hashem as in ²⁴אשׁוּר וְאֵת אֲחֵרִים... א is the first letter of the א-ב whereas ת is the last. The מ refers to מלך.

In light of this, we can grasp that when one speaks falsehood, he distances himself from Hashem. On a deeper level this is what is meant in מדבר שקר תרחק: when one speaks falsehood, he distances himself from Hashem.

Blessings of the Righteous

A chassid who was childless came to the Avnei Neizer for a bracha to have children. He refused to give a bracha saying that the child may grow up to become a priest. Although this Chassid didn't receive a bracha for children from the Avnei Neizer, he did receive it from his son, the famed Shem Mishmuel (1855-1926). What was the outcome? This Chassid had five children. Four were killed in the Holocaust and one survived by disguising himself as a priest!

R' Schneur Kotler had a son, R' Meir (1953-1979), the brother of R' Malkiel Kotler, who had great potential waiting to emerge from him. However, soon after he became engaged, he was diagnosed with cancer, with a slim chance of survival. R' Schneur, the kalla and others traveled to R' Moshe Feinstein seeking his guidance as to whether the shiduch should be broken. R' Moshe told the kalla, "when there is a connection in this world, then there is a connection in the upper world. It would be a shame to miss out on being connected to such an exalted individual." He advised that they should get married. At the chupa, R' Moshe gave the couple a bracha to have children. Nine months later, they had a baby boy. R' Meir then reasoned

that since R' Moshe's bracha was to have children (plural), he should delay 15 years to have another child, until the end of the childbearing years. In this way he would add years to his life. R' Moshe told him that this wouldn't be allowed because one must live according to the Torah and the Torah commands us to have children, without delay. They followed R' Moshe's instruction and nine months later they had another child. Soon after, R' Meir Kotler passed away. His widow remarried to a widower who also had children. After five years of marriage without children, they consulted a fertility expert. After seeking his advice he told them that it was impossible for her to ever have children. The only children she had were her two from R' Meir.

When the Rambam (1135-1204) was a little child, his father brought him to the Ri Migash²⁵ (1077-1141), who was on the verge of death, to receive a bracha. Later in life, the Rambam remarked that his wisdom came from that bracha.

For many years, the parents of the Ben Ish Chai had no children. In the year 1832, his mother traveled to Morocco to receive a bracha from R' Yaakov Abuchatzera. He told her, "you will have a son that will light up the eyes of the Jewish people in righteousness." The following year the Ben Ish Chai was born.

Where do tzadikim get this power²⁶ from (that their brachos come to fruition)?²⁷ To understand this let us give the following analogy. Although one may be a top surgeon, surgery will not be successful unless he has clean utensils. The same applies here as if one has a clean mouth then his words can be effective. Since a tzadik has a pure mouth, his brachos can have special power.²⁸

In this way we can explain לא יחל דברו ככל היצא מפיו יעשה,²⁹ he shall not desecrate his words, according to whatever comes from his mouth he shall do. Another interpretation is: when one doesn't profane his words (לא יחל דברו), then whatever comes from his mouth comes true (ככל היצא מפיו יעשה). Accordingly, the brachos of tzadikim are effective.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. 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.

²⁵ At the age of 12, he went to study under the renowned Rif for fourteen years. Shortly before his death, the Rif ordained the Ri Migash as his successor as Rosh Yeshiva, passing over his own son, then 26. He held this position for 38 years. The Rambam writes about the Ri Migash: "the Talmudic learning of this man amazes everyone who understands his words and the depth of his speculative spirit, so that it might almost be said of him that his equal has never existed." The Ri Migash wrote a commentary on Gemara. Most of the manuscripts were lost during the centuries of turmoil and persecution in Spain.

²⁶ The Magid of Mezerich interpreted כל יציר אדון עולם אשר מלך בטרם כל יציר, Master of the universe Who reigned before any form was created as referring to only in the past. That is to say, Hashem ruled before anything was created because once the world was created a tzadik decrees and Hashem fulfills it.

²⁷ When a tzadik davens for someone, one reason that it helps is because through the tzadik being pained in the troubles of others, Hashem has mercy (Shu"t Maharam Shik, Orach Chaim 293).

²⁸ The Gemara (Brachos 7a) states שלא תהא ברכת הדיוט קלה בעיניך the bracha given by an ordinary person should never be unimportant in your eyes. Another interpretation offered: even if the bracha is given in a hedyot, ordinary type of way, it shouldn't be light in your eyes (see Likutai Harim, Brachos 7a, s.v. shelo). The Netziv (Meromei Sadeh, Megila 15a, s.v. l'olam) writes that "the bracha given by an ordinary person should never be unimportant in your eyes," refers to the bracha of a non-Jew. However, the bracha of a Jew is not called a birchas hedyot. Even the nations of the world know that the bracha of a Jew is a bracha as the Gemara (Yoma 54b) relates... ישראל הללו שברכתו ברכה.

²⁹ Bamidbar 30:3.

¹⁷ We are compared to the stars (Breishis 15:5, 22:17, Shemos 32:13). Stars appear small since they are at a far distance but up-close they are enormously bigger. Similarly, we may look at another Jew and he seems quite small to us. However, when we take an up-close look, we realize how great they are—when we see all the struggles and troubles they have been through in their life and how much they have accomplished and the like.

¹⁸ 23:7. A woman from Brooklyn, New York who was flying to Eretz Yisrael was concerned about not saying the truth when she would be asked at the airport if she received any packages from anyone. She therefore obtained cookies that her daughter had baked. When she arrived at the airport and was if she received anything from anyone she responded, "yes, chocolate chip cookies that my daughter made me."

¹⁹ Shabbos 55a.

²⁰ This is also in line with אמת מארץ תצמח, truth will sprout from earth (Tehillim 85:12).

²¹ This is just as an artist signs his name on his art. Similarly, Hashem did with His Torah.

²² Yirmiya 10:10.

²³ Yerushalmi Brachos 1:5, s.v. וכתיב.

²⁴ Yeshaya 41:4.