



Igniting Inspiration

A man named Avi who was in prison once complained to R' Avraham Twerski upon his visit there how low he had sunk since he was in jail for many years for stealing even small amounts. R' Twerski told him that before a diamond is made beautiful, it is covered in dirt. With some work removing the dirt, the hidden exquisite diamond within the mud is revealed. Likewise, we say נשמה היא שנתת בי טהורה היא, the soul you placed within me is pure. For many, this precious diamond is covered in the dirt of sin. This analogy invigorated Avi as he then went for therapy and later to a halfway house. When he was released, he joined the moving business. One day he was asked to move furniture to the halfway house since an elderly woman had left an inheritance for them. As he began to move the couch, an envelope containing 10,000 Shekel fell out. Although he was alone, he didn't take the money. (The children of the deceased decided to donate the money to the halfway house in memory of their mother. The story ends that when Avi went to the halfway house he put up a sign "The Center for Polishing Diamonds.") R' Twerski later told Avi upon hearing what happened, "I know many respectable people that were never in prison, who would have pocketed the money in such a situation. Didn't I tell you that we would find a diamond?!" As an aside, to this we can apply "you don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great."

A mother whose son passed away at age 45 related the following to his 5th grade teacher. The teacher once told his students to write a positive trait of each of the 25 boys in the class. After all the

boys finished the assignment, the teacher organized the list of traits of each child as per what the other students wrote about him. He then proceeded to give it to each child. The mother said that since the day he received this paper, her son carried it around with him and looked at it countless times to inspire him.

After the Holocaust, the Satmar Rebbe, R' Yoel Teitelbaum (1887-1979), started a gemara shiur for Holocaust survivors. At the onset of the shiur, the Rebbe inquired about each of their lives. By the time he was finished, there wasn't much time left to learn. The following week, the same thing took place. At the beginning of the shiur, the Rebbe asked each person, "How are you doing? Have you found a job? Is your apartment comfortable?" Again, not too much time for learning remained by the time he was done. This continued for a third week and then a fourth. Finally, an attendee said, "Rebbe, with all due respect, we came here to learn. When can we start learning?" The Rebbe replied that the gemara begins on Daf Beis. That was Daf Alef. That is, Daf Alef is happiness. The survivors were depressed and broken. The Satmar Rebbe's Daf Alef was to ensure that the attendees felt like someone cared about them."

An old tzadik once told R' Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) that in his younger years he was all alone with no one taking an interest in him. He said, "Had someone encouraged me during those years, I would have been a different person. I could have accomplished ten times more in my lifetime."

The great R' Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz (1913-2011), who was a Rosh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak for over 50 years, once advised a boy to speak to someone a little older than him every so often in order to get chizuk. The boy told R' Michel Yehuda that he doesn't need chizuk. R' Michel Yehuda retorted, "I am in my 90s. And when I give a shiur and a 16-year-old boy tells me it was a great shiur, I feel uplifted. And you, who are only 16 don't need chizuk?!"

Many years ago, R' Moshe Wolfson wrote a letter of encouragement to a woman who suffered a miscarriage. At a later period R' Wolfson asked R' Shimon Finkelman to translate it from Yiddish to English. After it appeared in the Binah magazine, the magazine published a letter to the editor in which a woman wrote that R' Wolfson's letter finally brought her a measure of solace after the loss she suffered. When R' Finkelman reported this to R' Wolfson, R' Wolfson responded that giving encouragement to a Jew is something big. Then he thanked R' Finkelman for informing him about the woman's letter and proceeded to relate the following anecdote. The Klausenberger Rebbe delivered a famous chumash shiur every Thursday night. One week, following the shiur, a chassid told the Rebbe, "The Rebbe's shiur tonight was remarkable." A chassid that overheard this comment reprimanded the first chassid, "The Rebbe doesn't need your approval." The Rebbe spoke up: "What's wrong? One can't give a Rebbe a compliment?" R' Wolfson was implying that he too appreciated hearing what his letter had accomplished.

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