

בשבת

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Living Life Deeper

A PACKAGE DEAL

At the end of *Parshas Shoftim*, *Klal Yisrael* is given a curious commandment. If a body were found between two cities, the elders of the city closest to the body must perform a process known as *Eglah Arufah*.¹ As part of this process, the elders proclaim, "Our hands did not spill this blood!"² This announcement seems bizarre - why would we suspect any of the elders to be murderers?

The Ralbag³ (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, 1288–1344) explains that the elders are charged with teaching Torah, and it is their responsibility to ensure that everyone under their guidance understands the laws of the Torah, and keeps them. The elders must proclaim that they properly taught Torah, and thus absolve themselves of any guilt that they may have had in this murder.

This Ralbag is not easy to understand on the face of it - could the Ralbag possibly mean that the elders needed to teach people not to murder - and if they didn't, they share some responsibility? Isn't the immorality of murder something that people already know and understand?

A careful reading of the Ralbag shows us an incredible insight into the way we think and act. His concern with the elders is not that they should have taught the particular laws of murder. Rather, the Ralbag explains that if the townspeople were faithful to the Torah, they would raise themselves up to be the type of people that an act of murder would be absurd! They may have never learned about the laws of murder, but by developing oneself in one area, one changes to be better person all around.

In our own lives, we may be confronted by many areas that we feel that we could do better. In fact, we may be overwhelmed by the many challenges life throws at us, and we may not know where to start. One should be aware that our inner self is interconnected, and when we develop ourselves in one area, we develop ourselves in all areas.

1 *Devarim* 21:1-9

2 *Devarim* 21:7

3 *ibid.* s.v. התועלת השביעי ויגנו ואמר s.v. see also

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

It sounds like this process of growth is automatic - as long as I'm on an upward trajectory in one area, I'll be improving in all areas. The truth is, though, a lot depends on a person's mindset.

If one is focused on an area of growth, but does not connect his development to anything spiritual, the ensuing results in other areas will be minimal.

For example, if a person decides to not get angry, in order to control their blood pressure, there will be very little impact on whether or not they wake up on time for *Shacharis*.

However, if a person's focus is on Hashem - that they are trying to grow in their relationship with Hashem, then the ensuing results in other areas will flourish. This is because they are "Hashem-minded," - doing things with a focus on Hashem.

Thus, if a person decides to not get angry because of the spiritual implications, their *Shacharis* may very well be positively impacted as well.

It is worthwhile to spend some time to remind oneself why one wants to grow. By connecting our growth to Hashem, we will cause all areas of our life to flourish.



***The heart is the king over all
behavior - if the heart is absent
from Avodas Hashem, the service
of the limbs is sorely lacking.***

- *Mesillas Yesharim*

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UNEXPECTED RETURNS

Rosh Chodesh Elul had arrived, and an inspired Meir Applebaum* had decided to get his life in order. After sitting down for half an hour and going through his daily routine, Meir did not know where to start. "Should I try speaking nicer to my staff? Maybe I should volunteer to help more at the *Shul*?" He was beginning to feel overwhelmed with the realization that he was far from where he wanted to be. "I'll start with *Shacharis* - it's the first thing I come across in my day." Meir made a plan, and was ready to put it into action. The next morning came, and instead of hitting the snooze button, Meir was ready and alert. He arrived at *Shul* a few minutes early, which gave him enough time to put on his *Tallis* and *Tefillin* without having to rush. He mentally reviewed what he had learned the night before, giving him the proper frame of mind to approach *Tefillah*. When it was time for *Shemonah Esrei*, he reminded himself that he has time, and spoke slowly, focusing on the words and their meaning. By the time he finished *Shemonah Esrei*, the *Minyan* was almost done, but Meir didn't care, he was happy and satisfied with what he had done.

"I guess working on *Shacharis* has helped me keep a little perspective!"

The rest of the day went by fast and uneventfully. After the kids were in bed for the night, Meir noticed his wife had a thoughtful look on her face. "Something on your mind?"

"Yes, kind of. Well, I just noticed - you seemed a lot calmer today. Sometimes the kids get you upset, and, well, you blow a fuse. I was just wondering if something was different today?"

Now it was Meir's turn to be thoughtful. "Actually, yes, there was. Like I mentioned to you the other day, I'm trying to work on my *Shacharis*. And part of that is learning about *Tefillah*, which includes recognizing Hashem's presence in our lives. I think that by learning about that, and reminding myself about that, it just helped me feel calmer all around. Earlier tonight, when Naftali refused to go in the bath, I didn't feel like I needed to raise my voice to get him to comply - in fact, I was ok with him not taking a bath. I guess working on *Shacharis* has helped me keep a little perspective!"

Meir's wife smiled. "You told me that you can only focus on one area at a time, but I'd say that you've raised the bar all around!"

**Based on a true story, name has been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Some *Middos* are more interrelated than others. Arrogance is a trait that, by its nature, leads to many other bad *Middos*.¹
- When one works through their anger, they will naturally become humble.²
- The more someone truly feels that Hashem runs the world, the easier all other areas of growth will become.³

1 *Orchos Tzadikim, Sha'ar HaGaivah*

2 *Iggeres HaRamban*

3 *Ma'alos HaMiddos, Ma'aleh 1*