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AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בשבת



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
BEHAR-BECHUKOSAI

BY RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN
RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
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BACK ON THEIR FEET

Sandwiched between the laws of ancestral lands and the laws of servitude, we find a *passuk* describing the paupers of *Klal Yisrael*. The verse states, "If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter, you shall strengthen him..."¹ Simply understood, it is incumbent upon the friends and neighbors to see to it that no person falls into financial hardship, and if one were to witness such an event, one should do what they can to help their fellow man. This comes as no surprise — who can stand by when they witness a struggling family, parents who cannot keep a roof over their heads, and children going to sleep hungry?

However, the Ohr HaChaim² (R' Chaim ibn Attar, 1696–1743) sees a deeper meaning hidden in this simple directive. He explains that the *passuk* is not only speaking of one in economic peril, but also refers to one in spiritual decline. After all, he asserts, what greater paucity is there than one who is spiritually deficient?

The Ohr HaChaim's statement, though logical, is also eye-opening. The feelings evoked when seeing a family going through difficult times are natural. But do we feel the same when we see someone struggling to understand the *halacha*, or worse, someone who is indifferent to wrong and right? The emotional response should be the same; care, concern, and a desire to be helpful.

Though we may not be stirred in the same way, we are still charged with this great responsibility. And when we have the chance to help and teach others, we can approach the opportunity with the same sensitivity and dedication we would have when helping out others financially.

Who can stand by when they witness a struggling family, and children going to sleep hungry?

Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

"But it's not my place," or "I might make things worse!" or simply, "I'm just not in the mood."

All of these are reasons why a person might feel uncomfortable or otherwise restrained from reaching out and helping others grow. And these reasons are not without merit, it is indeed exceedingly difficult to properly inspire others to grow in their *avodas Hashem*.¹

A good, and even fundamental practice, though, is to remember that this *mitzvah* is not like any other *mitzvah*. There is a real live person one is interacting with, with thoughts and feelings. The first step, then, is to focus on *ahavas habriyos* — loving one's fellow man.² If a person were to first focus on their feelings towards their peers and friends, doing what they can to improve those feelings, the next stage will be much more natural.

Once you love someone, you truly want to help them. And when you do, it won't be done because they are different or bothersome, rather, it will be clear that it is done out of love.

1 *Arachin* 16b

2 *Drashos U'Pirushei Rabbeinu Yonah, Lech Lecha*

1 *Vayikra* 25:35

2 *ibid.*, s.v. וכי ימוך

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Torah can only dwell within a person who is empty of negative middos, and who, instead, is permeated with good middos. - *The Chassid Ya'avetz, Introduction to Pirkei Avos, Chap. 6*

ALWAYS AN EDUCATOR

Mr. David Kook* sat deep in thought, his brow furrowed. "I got it!" he exclaimed, startling his son who was sitting nearby.

"Got what?" asked Nachman.

David smiled. "You'll see. I have to make a phone call."

Nachman's interest was piqued. His father was somewhat recently retired, having left behind a desk job and over forty years of the nine-to-five grind. Though Nachman was in *yeshiva* for most of the day, it was still an adjustment having his father around all the time. David, for his part, had a difficult time adjusting to his new schedule. He had imagined he would enjoy his retirement, and he did, but he still felt like he was wasting too much time. There's only so much time a person can spend on crossword puzzles!

After driving Nachman to *yeshiva* one day, David decided to stick around. To his pleasant surprise, the hours in the *beis medrash* flew by, and by that evening David already knew what he would be doing with his days. Over the next few weeks, David fell into a comfortable routine. He would drive Nachman to *yeshiva*, stay until lunch, head home, and take care of the various projects that he had put off for decades.

Mr. Kook was quite happy with this arrangement, so it came as a surprise to Nachman when his father came back from his phone call and said, "Tomorrow, after I drop you off, I won't be sticking around."

"Oh, did something come up?"

"Yes, and if it works out, I won't be coming to the *beis medrash* anymore."

"What? That's a good thing?"

"Yes," Mr. Kook answered with a smile. "Don't worry, I'll tell you all about it tonight."

That evening, Nachman came home from *yeshiva*, and was greeted with his father who was sitting in the arm chair. "Ok, Tatty. What's going on, I was wondering all day!"

Mr. Kook laughed. "Remember Dr. Thomas?" Nachman certainly did, as Dr. Sholom Thomas was an old family friend.

"Well, he grew up with a less-than-stellar Jewish education. He once commented to me that he feels his younger years did him a disservice, and he wished that he could study, but he never found the time. I always wanted to help him, and I realized yesterday that I could. I called him and asked if I could come to his office to learn with him. He was so taken by my offer, he agreed. And it worked out so well, we agreed to continue."

Nachman blinked, not sure what to say. Finally, "Well, that was unexpected! But what about his patients?"

"Dr. Thomas already started scheduling them for a different time. He said that if his growth was so important to me, it was certainly important to him as well."

"Wow. Who would have thought that in retirement, you'd turn into a teacher!"

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Because *Avraham Avinu* had a chance to influence evildoers but chose not to, his children were enslaved in *Mitzrayim* for two hundred and ten years.¹
- When exhorting others, one should also have oneself in mind.²

¹ *Nedarim* 32a

² *Sefer HaYashar*, Gate 13

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