

K1: Respecting one's father and mother – Kibud Av V'Eim



- To appreciate the various reasons why should we honour our parents, its importance as a *mitzvah*, and its connection to serving Hashem.
- To learn how someone should honour their parents.
- To understand how fulfilment of mitzvot including Kibbud Horim is not limited to the letter of the law.

Why should we honour our parents?

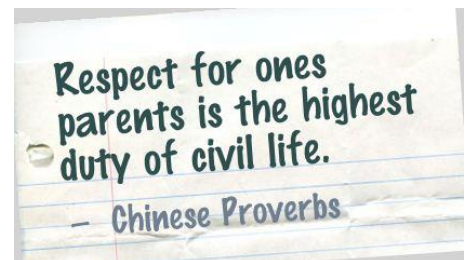
The whole theme of our machane is about Bein Adam L'chaveiro, and it's quite clear that we need to act in a decent, moral way to all individuals. So why does the Torah give us a special commandment to respect our parents? What is unique about our parents when it comes to respect?

Firstly, we have an obligation to be appreciative for what our parents have done for us and we therefore need to *give back to them* by acting with a high level of respect. This is what the Sefer haChinuch says:

A person needs to recognise and bestow kindness to someone who has done good for him, and he shouldn't be a scoundrel... he should take it to his heart that **his father and mother are the source of his existence in the world, and therefore its appropriate to do everything one is able to for them, as they brought you into the world, and they have also put much effort in since he was small.**

If we think about what our parents have done for us, from conception through birth, childhood, to our teenage years we are left breathless! One only needs to see the futility in trying to calculate the effort expended, in time, effort, financially and most importantly love in making us the people we are today.

"I am an extension of my father and mother. I owe my life to them because they have given me life; given me shelter, care, love and support. They have done everything in their life for their family — everything."
Anon, 2007.



However, ultimately we don't respect our parents just because it makes sense; like all Mitzvot, from *Kashrut* and *Para Aduma* to not killing or stealing, we keep them simply because Hashem says so! (Nevertheless, we can still suggest **ideas that emerge from the Mitzvot**, even if we can never really know the **reasons behind the Mitzvot**.) This may have the practical ramification that even if we actually think we have been mistreated by parents for any given reason, we still need to give them respect and interact appropriately with them, following their instructions and fulfilling the other parts of Kibbud Horim.

Hashem and Kibbud Horim

It would appear that Kibbud Horim is a predominantly Bein Adam l'adam (man-to-man) Mitzva. However, we tend to accept the notion that the first 5 of the Aseret HaDibrot are Bein Adam



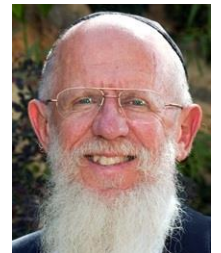
l'Makom (man-to-God), whereas the second 5 are Bein Adam l'Adam; as Kibbud Horim is number 5, it would seem that it's actually a Bein Adam l'Makom Mitzva! But how does this make sense?

On this, the Gemara in Kiddushin (30b) famously explains:

*The Torah says, "You should respect your mother and your father", and it says, "Respect Hashem with your wealth". The Torah equates respecting parents to respecting God. The Torah says, "A person should fear his mother and father" and also says, "You should fear God, your Lord and serve Him." The Torah equates fearing parents to fearing Hashem... **There are three partners in [the creation] of a person: Hashem, the father and the mother.** At the time when a person honours his parents, Hashem says, "I am exalted on you, as if I lived with you and you honoured Me".*

Just as we explained that one reason for Kibbud Horim was appreciation for your parents bringing you into the world and providing EVERYTHING, ultimately Hashem is behind it all. Thus when we honour our parents out of appreciation, they essentially represent Hashem, who partnered with them in our creation and providing sustenance.

Furthermore, as a Rosh Yeshiva of Har Etzion, Rav Yaakov Medan once explained, a major part of Kibbud Horim is carrying on observing mitzvot as our parents educated us to do. Not only does this mean that we can continue respecting our parents when we are not together with them and when they are no longer with us, but it also very much blurs the line between serving Hashem and respecting our parents. You could almost imagine it as though honouring & respecting your parents is a way that a person can 'practise' or 'prepare' a way that they would then honour and serve Hashem.



Why was Esav praised so much for his practice of Kibbud Horim? And how did he manage to get this so right but everything else so wrong?

Honouring and Fearing

Although we have been referring to "respecting" our parents, this is really only half the story. Respect involves feeding and giving drinks to one's parents, clothing them and helping them enter and leave a building i.e. providing for their needs (בְּקִדּוּשׁוֹ 31). Indeed, this fits in very nicely with our explanation above that Kibbud Horim is all about gratitude for what our parents have done for us. Since they did so much for us, we reciprocate as well as we can in our little way.

Similar to L'Yirah is "morah" often translated as fear, but probably more accurately described as "awe". We are instructed not to stand or sit in their place, not to contradict them and not to quote their opinions in the name of others. This perhaps fits in more with the concept of putting our parents on a pedestal throughout our lives. Regardless of what they have or have not done for us, they are our parents and thus automatically deserve reverence.

Once again we can see this link between Kibbud Horim and our relationship with Hashem. Although appearing slightly paradoxical, both with Hashem and our parents we have this duality of on the one hand expressing gratitude for all God/they have done for us, while on the other hand having an untouchable awe or reverence purely based on their position relative to us.

And in case you were wondering, we are nonetheless obligated to honour our parents even if they are evildoers. This says much about the mitzvah...



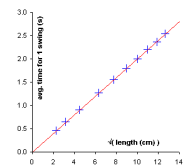
Do we always need to listen to our parents even if they tell us to go against the Torah or not to marry the person you would like to or not to make Aliya?

Becoming Holy

Like many Mitzvot, Kibbud Horim is not so easy for us to fulfil. After all, when did you last go a few days without contradicting one of your parents? However, Hashem expects high standards from us! We must do the best we can to fulfil all the Mitzvot in order to live up to the greatest challenge he set up – “Kedoshim Tihiyu” (“You shall be holy”). (ShaSha’s Bar Mitzvah Parsha).

Whilst Rashi understands this to mean simply being careful in observing Mitzvot, the Ramban suggests that even if you keep ALL the mitzvot of the Torah, it does not make you a good or a “holy” person. Rather he describes what he calls a “navel birshut haTorah”, a scoundrel with the permission of the Torah, whereby someone keeps everything, yet still acts in an inappropriate way such as drinking excessively. There are no laws against these things, rather it’s just an example of how there is more to acting decently than purely keeping the Torah’s mitzvot.

This principle of the רמב"ן explains our conception of the Torah and its laws. The Torah cannot possibly tell us what to do in every situation we find ourselves in throughout our lives. Rather imagine that all the mitzvot are represented by points on a graph. Our task is to take these examples of how to live life and extrapolate the graph (remember Year 8 maths?!).



This applies to all areas of life, not least Kibbud Horim. THE TORAH IS A BLUEPRINT FOR LIFE, WHICH WE MUST EXTEND EVEN WHEN THERE ARE NO EXPLICIT MITZVOT! Remember, “You should do what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord...” (Devarim 6:18)

Reward – Long life and Eretz Yisrael

“Honour your father and your mother in order that your days should be lengthened in the land which Hashem your G-d is giving you.”

Shemot 20:12 (part of the ‘Ten Commandments’)

Kibbud Horim is one of two mitzvot given in the Torah where the reward is specifically mentioned (the other is Shiluach haKen - shooing away the mother-bird) - and the reward for both is long life. Some opinions believe that this refers to long life in this world and some say that it refers to Olam Haba, the world to come, as well. Whichever it is, the general principle here is that if you appreciate the people who literally gave you life,

you'll make the effort to give to others and be able to lengthen their lives. Therefore what you have done will live with them hence your deeds and actions have long life.

Furthermore, the Netziv notes the well-known idea that Mitzvot are ideally performed in Eretz Yisrael. However, you may think this would only be true of Mitzvot Bein Adam l'Makom. Therefore, writes the Netziv, the Torah here is emphasizing the fact that ALL Mitzvot are to be ideally performed in Eretz Yisrael.



Why should this be true?

Summary of K1:

1. Kibbud Av V'em about showing respect to those that brought us into the world, but we do it ultimately because Hashem tells us to!
2. Respecting parents is in a way respecting Hashem.
3. Kibbud Av V'em is about both respect and fear.
4. EVERY Mitzva is ideally performed in Israel.

Extra Chomer – Storytime!

Dama ben Netina and the Ruby: A Story of Kibbud Av v' Em (honoring father and mother)

One summer morning, Dama ben Netina was working in his jewelry store. As he worked he whistled happily but very softly, because he did not want to wake his father, who had fallen fast asleep on a large chest-like box in a corner of the store. Just before noon, three rabbis entered the shop. "Welcome," said Dama. "Would you like to see a silver ring? Or perhaps a lovely diamond?" "Thank you," said one of the rabbis, "but we are here on far more important business. We have heard that you own the largest and most magnificent ruby in the land. We wish to buy it for the crown of our Torah. We are willing to give you three hundred gold coins." Dama looked at the chest in the corner of the store, and then he looked back at his customers. "I am sorry," he said, "but that is impossible." "All right, then," said the rabbi. "We will give you four hundred." Dama ben Netina only smiled sadly, and shook his head. At this his customers began to frown. "I see that you are a man who likes to bargain," said the rabbi, "so we will offer you five hundred, but we will go no higher." "I cannot sell it," said the jeweler. Then the rabbis began to whisper angrily among themselves. "This jeweler wants too much money for the ruby," they muttered. "He wants an outrageous price. Let us offer him six hundred and let's hope that is enough."

When Dama refused to sell the ruby for six hundred, the rabbis grew furious, and began to shout at him.

"You are trying to rob us!" they cried. "How can we pay more than six hundred?" Just about that time, Dama's father awoke from his nap. He got up from the chest where he was resting, and walked towards the front of the store. "What is the trouble?" He mumbled sleepily.

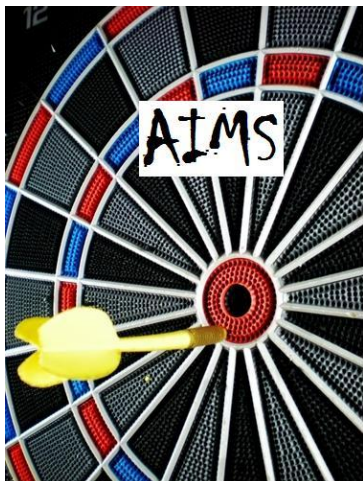
Dama ben Netina began to smile. He went over to the chest, took out the ruby, and gave it to the rabbis. "Now you may have it," he said. "I would not disturb my father in order

to get the jewel and the price is only three hundred gold pieces, since that is a fair price and it was your first offer.”

Smiling happily, the rabbis paid the jeweler, and went back to their house of study to tell the story of Dama ben Netina – who respected his father so much that we would not wake him no matter how much money he was offered.



K2: Tzedakah



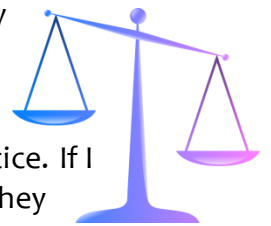
- Understand the fundamentals behind Tzedakah and why it is such an important Mitzvah
- Who is obligated and what is the reward
- Rambam and his view on Tzedaka
- How the Chanichim can give Tzedaka



Charity and Justice?!

Tzedakah is a fundamental part of the Torah way of life, and is far more than just “charity”. “Charity” means giving, giving aid and assistance to needy people. *Tzedakah*, on the other hand, is derived from the Hebrew term - צדק meaning righteous or justice. The performance of *Tzedakah* is not merely viewed as an act of generosity rather it is the performance of a duty, giving the poor their due.

Former Chief Rabbi Sacks notes that in English “charity” and “justice” are opposites. If I give someone £1,000 because I owe him this sum, that is justice. If I give him £1,000 because he needs it, that is charity. In Hebrew, however, they cannot be separated. That is because in Judaism, we believe that what we have, we do not truly own; it’s just on loan from Hashem. One of the conditions of this loan is that we share some of what we have with those in need. So in Judaism *Tzedakah* is more than charity.



The commentaries explain that true happiness is obtained only when we look after the poor and needy; it allows us the joy in what we have and the license to possess it. Indeed, we need to do something worthwhile with our lives, otherwise we feel unfulfilled and unhappy. Vayikra Raba (34:8) states that “Even more than the benefactor does for the poor man, the poor man does for the benefactor”.

The Obligation of Tzedakah

In order to fully understand this Mitzvah we can look at the Biblical rules for farmers particularly as regards fields. The laws are called Ma’aser, Ma’aser Sheni, Ma’aser Oni, Pe’ah, Shichecha and Leket. (Please look at the “extra chomer” at the end of this Kvutseh for a full understanding of each law).



The last 3 gifts are all gifts which allow the poor to do something physically for their own food without having to ask or beg. This process will allow the person to become more self-sufficient, providing self-confidence for the person to believe in themselves and that they can start to look after themselves without being given everything on a plate.

The Importance of Tzedakah



In Gemara Bava Batra (9a) it says “שקולה צדקה כנגד כל המצוות”- “*Tzedakah* is equal to all the other commandments combined”. Similarly in the Talmud Yerushalmi in Peah 1:1 says “*Tzedakah* and acts of kindness are the equivalent of all the Mitzvot of the Torah”.

The Midrash Zutta on Shir Hashirim goes even as far as to say “If only the people who lived in the generation of the Flood and the people of Sodom had given Tzedakah, they would not have perished”.

Rambam on Tzedakah

Whoever gives tzedakah to the poor with a sour expression and in an impolite manner, even if he gives a thousand gold pieces, loses his merit. One should instead give cheerfully and joyfully, and empathise with him in his sorrow. Rambam: Laws of giving gifts, 10:4)



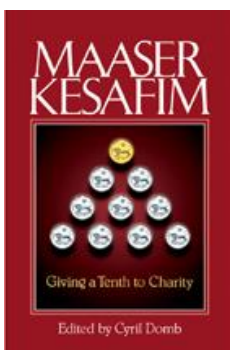
Rambam, one of our greatest thinkers and halachic authorities said that we must be more careful with the mitzvah of Tzedakah than any other positive commandment. Tzedakah has two aspects: one with the hand and one with the heart. Judaism teaches that donors benefit from Tzedakah as much or more than the poor recipients; whereas the poor receive assistance, the donor receives the merit of sharing Hashem’s work. Accordingly, Tzedakah involves giving assistance with the hand and consolation with the mouth so the heart is without embitterment.

Furthermore, he delineates 8 levels of Tzedakah, each one greater than the previous:



8. When donations are given grudgingly.
7. When one gives less than he should, but does so cheerfully.
6. When one gives directly to the poor upon being asked.
5. When one gives directly to the poor without being asked.
4. When the recipient is aware of the donor's identity, but the donor does not know the identity of the recipient.
3. When the donor is aware of the recipient's identity, but the recipient is unaware of the source.
2. When the donor and recipient are unknown to each other.
1. The highest form of charity is to help sustain a person before they become impoverished by offering a substantial gift in a dignified manner, or by extending a suitable loan, or by helping them find employment or establish themselves in business so they are independent.

How much should be given to Tzedaka?



It is an accepted Halacha that 10% of your money should be given to Tzedaka, in Hebrew called “Ma’aser Kesafim”. Some Rabbi’s imply that tithing is a Biblical obligation based Devarim 15:7-110, which speaks about the obligation to not ignore “your needy brother” in Israel.

Other Rabbis, noting that there is no explicit commandment in the Torah to tithe one's assets, consider this mitzvah to be Rabbinical in nature. A third opinion says this commandment was just an ancient practice. For example Ya'akov says in Bereishit 28:22 "And of all that You will give me I will surely give a tenth to You".

Additionally, particularly for the Chanichim, time can be a far more valuable way of giving Tzedaka. Being Chanichim they are not really at the stage where they can give an amount which balances the time they might be able to volunteer.

Who should I give my Tzedaka to?

"Poor Gentiles should be supported along with poor Jews; the Gentile sick should be visited along with the Jewish sick; and their dead should be buried along with the Jewish dead, in order to further peaceful relations." -- Gittin 61a

"The poor of all nations must be supported like poor Israelites, for the sake of peace." -- Kitzur Shulhan Arukh

Although these excerpts might lead one to believe there is an equal obligation to Jew and non-Jew, there is not. Giving charity to a non-Jew is under a completely different category than giving to a Jew, namely, for the purpose of "darkei shalom" (keeping peace with our neighbours). Giving for the purpose of keeping peace with our neighbours became necessary in the Diaspora to prevent persecution by non-Jews. This is not comparable to the Torah obligation requiring saving/helping our brethren. This idea is encapsulated by the well-known phrase "Charity begins/comes from the home", which originates from 1382. In this case the "home" is a metaphor for Jews.



Does this mean that in countries we're not being persecuted we don't have to help non-Jews?!

Lastly, in addition to many private charities that operate, Tzedakah in Israel could be said to take place on a mass level through the State's Social Security Systems. Thus, even if the State isn't run according to Halacha it seems to have internalised some key Jewish values such as Tzedaka

Summary K2:

1. *Tzedakah* is about justly distributing the wealth Hashem has given us.
2. The Rambam lists 8 levels of *Tzedakah*.
3. Rabbis argue if it's a Biblical/Rabbinic commandment or simply a good ancient practice.
4. Charity begins at home.
5. The State of Israel facilitates *Tzedakah* through its Social Security Systems.

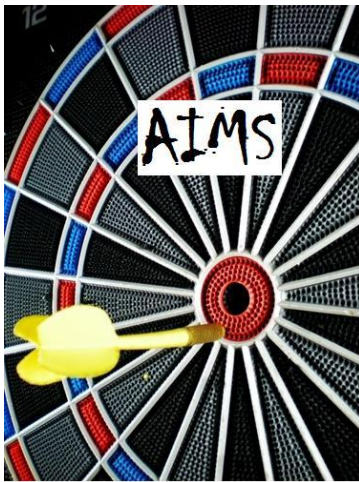
Extra Chomer

1. **Ma'aser**- This is 1/10th of everything which grows in the land, whether it is grain which has grown in the land or fruit which has grown on a tree. It must be set apart and given to Hashem (Vayikra 27:30).

2. **Ma'aser Sheni**- This is 1/10th of the crop which remains after Ma'aser and was taken to eat before Hashem in the Divine dwelling place- the Temple (Devarim 14:23). This was the second tithe.
3. **Ma'aser Oni**- Every 3rd/6th year of the 7 year cycle after the Ma'aser tithe was taken, the 2nd tithe was given to the stranger, orphan and widow (Devarim 26:12) instead of the Ma'aser Sheni. This tithe is for the poor people and is used as a gift to the poor.
4. **Pe'ah**- When harvesting a field or orchard one is obligated to leave over a corner of the field for the poor (Vaykira 23:22). According to the Torah there is no mandatory minimum amount that must be left for the poor, but the Rabbis established that the pe'ah must consist of at least one sixtieth of the field. This Mitzvah allowed the poor to come and do the work to harvest their own food without having to ask for Tzedaka.
5. **Shichecha**- If there are forgotten sheaves in the field where the farmer was harvesting it is an obligation to leave it for the poor (Devarim 24:9).
6. **Leket**- The gleanings - those pieces that fall from the sickle during the reaping or from the hand during the picking - must be left behind for the poor and non-Jew.



K3: The Power of Speech



- Understand the power of speech, which is man's unique gift
- Understand how we use speech in our relationships with God, man, and the world
- Consider Lashon Hara as an example of the Torah teaching us how to use speech

Hashem's Speech

"In the beginning... the earth was unformed and void, and there was darkness on the face of the deep... and God said let *"there be light"*. And there was light."
(Bereishit 1:1-4)



We see from here that Hashem's speech has creative power, bringing light into a dark world, and throughout this first chapter, the Torah repeatedly specifies that God uses speech to create the world. Indeed, Pirkei Avot (5:1) notes that Hashem created the world with 10 utterances.

Choosing the right words

There are three main ways for us to interact in the physical world; thought, speech and action. Just as our actions define who we are as a person, our speech and language play an equally important part. It is both a reflection of who we are and the words imprint themselves both on our mind and those around us. Have you ever met somebody who “looks the part”, and suddenly they open their mouth and what they say drastically changes your opinion on them? The words we choose to say are very important.

Because of this, the Torah goes out of its way to use only “good” terms or speech. You won’t find any swear words, it written in “lashon kodesh” (holy tongue) and so there is no place for bad language in Torah. A perfect example can be found in (Kitzur) Shulchan Aruch, where the text deals with halachot of... well the toilet. All the words used are synonymous, for example “beit hakisa” (throne room... aka toilet) and “mai regalim” (water of the legs... I’ll leave this one for you to translate).

The Ramban explains that the Torah forbade certain actions, but there are equivalents which are freely permissible. For example, the McDonalds is not kosher, but indulging in all you can eat Met Su Yan is a green light!! Or is it? One can keep the letter of the law but still be a glutton, and Ramban calls this type of person a “naval” (lowlife), somebody who has really just missed the point. The same is true with somebody who curses and uses vulgar language.

There’s no prohibition against using bad language, but the Torah in Vayikra tells us “Kedushim Tihyu” (Be holy). The sages explain that “kadosh” means holy, but also separate. The Torah is telling us to keep away from vulgar language and be holy!



Speech in Halacha

In Halacha, simply by saying certain words we can change realities (Halachically speaking). Examples include:

- Making oaths and vows, which bind us to do or refrain from doing something
- Making Shabbat and Chagim holy by saying Kiddush, and ending them with Havdala.
- Getting married! (in addition to witnesses and a ring)



In fact, some of these things – and many others – rely on verbalisation to make them work. If you want to bring out Shabbat, there is no use gathering wine, a candle, and some fragrant spices without actually saying the words of *Havdala*. However, just say the words of *Havdala* without any of this and you’ve successfully brought out Shabbat! The Gemara is also very clear that no obligations in tefilla can be fulfilled without articulating the words, and the Rambam holds that the same is

true of teshuva – feeling guilty about something is no help unless you actually take the next step and say *vidui*, confession.

Clearly, Judaism takes the things that we say very seriously indeed – by saying the right thing (or the wrong thing) we can literally change the world by altering the nature of the day; we can fulfil *mitzvot*, commit *aveirot*, and create new obligations and prohibitions for ourselves.

Speech between people

All social interaction is built on speech. Non-verbal or (where appropriate) physical communication can only ever be supplements to the verbal relationships we have with each other. This is true of our relationships with our parents, our friends, and our *chanichim*, but also with complete strangers. Consider, for example, the power of a political speech to rouse a whole nation to violence or peacefulness.

This potential for good or harm in speech was picked up on by Mishlei, where it says,

“Death and life are in the hands of the tongue” (Mishlei 18:21)

This is true both literally (e.g. when a judge/army general/medieval king issues a death sentence) and figuratively. Through the way we speak we can become truly “living” or, alternatively, “dead,” so to speak. The Talmud (Archin 15b) goes a step further and explains that negative speech is worse than a sword – as it kills many people at once and even over great distances.

Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan became known as the *Chafetz Chayim* (“Desirer of Life”) on account of his famous book of that name which deals with the laws of *lashon hara*. His choice of title for that book helps to illustrate this point. The words come from a chapter of *Tehillim* which we say as part of the *pesukei dezimra* of *Shabbat* and *chagim*:

מִי-הָאִישׁ, הַחֹפֵץ חַיִּים; אֹהֵב יָמִים, לְרִאוֹת טוֹב.

נָצַר לְשׁוֹנֵךְ מַרְעֵ, וּשְׂפָתָיָהּ, מִדְּבַר מַרְמָה.
סוּר מַרְעֵ, וַעֲשֵׂה-טוֹב; בִּקֵּשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרַדְפָּהוּ.

*“who is the man who desires life, loving days and seeing goodness?
Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceitfully.
Flee from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it”*



The advice given to the man who wants to live a full and good life starts with the control of speech. Positive, socially-constructive speech will build bridges and create living worlds of relationship and interaction. The opposite will lead to a bleak social wilderness – to a living death.

The *passuk* is clear that we need to “do good” in this respect, but it first warns us to “flee from evil” – to avoid negative speech. In fact, the Torah has already instructed us in that respect, for example commanding us

וְאַתָּה לֹא-תִלְךָ רֵכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ - You shall not be a talebearer among your people. (*Vaykira* 19:16)

This is the prohibition of **Lashon Hara**, any derogatory or damaging (but true) statement against an individual. In *Hilchot Deot* 7:5, *Rambam* supplies a litmus test for determining whether something is or isn't *Lashon Hara*: “Anything which, if it would be publicised, would



cause the subject physical or monetary damage, or would cause him anguish or fear, is Lashon Hara”.

An untrue statement about another person is known as “**Motzi Shem Ra**” – “putting out a bad name”. With both of these types of speech, the speaker takes away the “victim’s” chance to give an account of themselves and form a relationship with the listener without hindrance; they affect the listener’s perception of a person, changing the way they interact with them.

Perhaps this is why the Gemara (Arachin 15b) says that lashon hara “kills” three people: “the one who spoke it, the one who accepted it, and the one about whom it was told” That is, by telling someone something about a third person, you change the relationship between the two of them, and also change your own relationships with both of them – everyone loses out.



A famous Chassidic tale vividly illustrates the danger of improper speech: A man went about the community telling malicious lies about the rabbi. Later, he realised the wrong he had done, and began to feel remorse. He went to the rabbi and begged his forgiveness, saying he would do anything he could to make amends. The rabbi told the man, "Take a feather pillow, cut it open, and scatter the feathers to the winds." The man thought this was a strange request, but it was a simple enough task, and he did it gladly. When he returned to tell the rabbi that he had done it, the rabbi said, "Now, go and gather the feathers. Because you can no more make amends for the damage your words have done than you can recollect the feathers."

Finally, the Chafetz Chayim notes that some statements are not outright Lashon Hara, but can imply Lashon Hara or cause others to speak it. These statements constitute “Avak Lashon Hara”, traces of Lashon Hara. Some examples:

- Praise: In situations which inevitably provoke someone to contradict the praise, such as in excess, or in front of the subject's enemy, or in public. Or in situations that lead to harm, such as recounting someone's generous character when a listener might take advantage of the subject's good will.
- Suggestive comments: "Who would believe what he used to be like." "Don't ask me about what happened with X."

Summary of K3

1. Hashem created the world through speech.
2. Bad language can effect who we are as a person
3. Speech is very significant in Halacha.
4. You have the power to build or destroy relationships through speech.

Extra Chomer – Who was the Chafetz Chaim?

Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen Kagan is commonly known as the "Chafetz Chaim," the name of his famous work on guarding one's tongue. Born in Zhetel, Poland on February 6, 1838, he was taught until age 10 by his parents and then moved to Vilna to further his Jewish studies. Refusing the pulpit rabbinate, the Chafetz Chaim settled in Radin (Poland) and subsisted on a small grocery store which his wife managed and he did the "bookkeeping" - watching every penny to make sure that no one was cheated. He spent his days learning Torah and disseminating his knowledge to the common people.

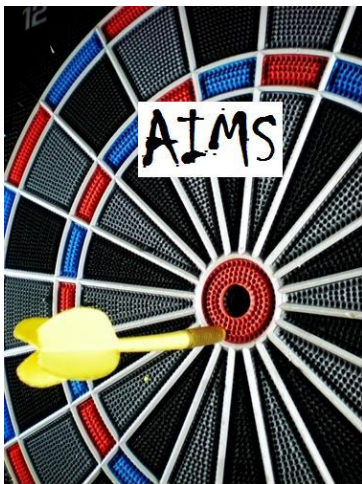


As his reputation grew, students from all over Europe flocked to him and by 1869 his house became known as the Radin Yeshiva. In addition to his Yeshiva, the Chafetz Chaim was very active in Jewish causes. One of the founders of Agudas Yisrael, the religious Jewish organization of Europe and later the world, the Chafetz Chaim was very involved in Jewish affairs and helped many yeshivos survive the financial problems of the interwar period. Exemplifying the verses in Psalms 34:13-14, "Who is the man who desires life...? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit," the Chafetz Chaim passed away in 1933 at the ripe age of 95.

The Chafetz Chaim's greatest legacy is the 21 sefarim (holy books) which he published. His first work, Sefer Chafetz Chaim (1873), is the first attempt to organize and clarify the laws regarding evil talk and gossip. He later wrote other works, including Shmirat HaLashon, which emphasized the importance of guarding one's tongue by quoting our Sages. The Mishnah Brurah (1894-1907), his commentary on the Daily Laws of a Jew (his first series in the Shulchan Aruch), is found in many Jewish homes and is accepted universally to decide Halacha.



K4: Rebuke and embarrassment



- To understand the concept and dangers of rebuking other people
- To explore the concept of embarrassment and its effects
- Stories related to the embarrassment

Rebuking People

The Torah tells us ([Vayikra 19:17](#)): "You should not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely rebuke your friend, and not bear for him a sin." In this verse, we are challenged to do something extremely difficult – tell someone dear to us that they have done something wrong. However, as we will develop here, the commandment to rebuke another Jew is intended not as a means of providing some people with a moral high ground over their neighbours, but rather as a means of pulling people closer together.

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Firstly, the Malbim notes that there is a difference between "Mussar" (how to live one's life) and "Hochacha" (rebuke). The former refers to words said about the future, while the latter deals with the past, with actions already done and sins already committed. It is within this definition that we must appreciate the delicate nature of rebuke. Advising a friend about the benefits of restraining one's anger can be done subtly, and without being personal, because improving in this area is something applicable to everyone. However, to rebuke a friend for not restraining their anger in the past is to refer to an incident unique to the friend in question and will be more likely to result in defensiveness and possibly hostility.

"From where do we derive that one who sees something wrong about his friend should rebuke him? It is said, 'One should surely rebuke.' How do we know that one should continue to rebuke [if his first attempt does not achieve the desired results]? We are taught this from the [emphasis expressed through the] word 'tochiach' (the Hebrew expression is doubled: "hochei'ach tochiach"), [indicating to rebuke] no matter what. To what extent must one rebuke? Rav says, 'Until one is hit;' Shmuel says, 'Until one is cursed;' and Rav Yochanan says, 'Until one is scorned.'

Gemara Arachin- 17b



According to the simple reading of this source, one should continue to rebuke even if there is no possibility that his words will be accepted, even to the extent that he is physically assaulted or cursed. Yet many of you may be thinking that it is not simply the difficulty of the task that would hold you back from rebuking a person in such a manner, but a belief that taking rebuke to such extremes would do more harm than good. Indeed, there is an alternative opinion that says it might not be worth telling off people who are possibly going to sin anyway. Whilst we must rebuke when necessary, we must be wary of where we stand between these two contrasting opinions of how much of a possibility there must be that the person will actually change.

There is another quote a little later in the Gemara which could also add a dimension to the debate. The Gemara says on the same page "that our generation (meaning the time of the Gemara, and certainly in today's society) no longer has anyone who can correctly deliver rebuke".



What issues do you think the gemara is referring to? What potential wrongdoings could arise when a person attempts to rebuke someone?

Having said this, even in a situation where rebuke was not received as it should have been, one is forbidden to embarrass the sinner. According to the Gemara, if there is case where one who embarrasses a sinner while rebuking, s/he transgresses the biblical mitzva, "[You shall surely rebuke your neighbor] and you should not bear sin because of him." [See the Rambam Hilchot De'ot 6:8 and the Sefer Yerei'im 195 and 223.]

Something to consider: The chanichim will often publicly shout at a teammate if they do something wrong in a sporting match of any sort. What do they truly believe is motivating their criticism? Do they genuinely believe that is the best way to rebuke their teammate or might there be other factors behind their rebuke?



Embarrassing People



In Parshat Vayeishev we read how Yehuda, on hearing of her pregnancy, orders his daughter-in-law Tamar to be burned. Yet Tamar refused to tell anyone that it was Yehuda who was the father; she'd rather allow herself to be burned to death than to embarrass and shame Yehuda in public.

If not for the fact that Yehudah had the great courage to admit his guilt, she would have actually been burned at the stake and died an innocent and tragic death, taking her two children with her. No wonder her reward was so great. Kings and prophets descended from her. Only the noblest women in the world could have shown such sensitivity to the shame of others.

The Gemara (Ketubot 67b) therefore learns from this story that a person is required to throw himself into a burning fire rather than put someone to shame in public. Thus, even the simplest person is required to act in such a way.



However, the Meiri (commenting on Gemara Sotah 10b) implies that although the Gemara compares shaming one's friend to killing him and says that one must jump into a furnace rather than embarrass him, it is not intended to be understood literally. Rather, the Gemara is merely emphasizing to us the severity of embarrassing another. According to Meiri, the Gemara might mean that a person should subject himself to discomfort rather than embarrass another person. It is not required, though, to actually give up one's life in order to avoid embarrassing someone. The question of whether it is permitted to give up one's life in order to avoid embarrassing someone, if one is not required to do so, is subject to debate.

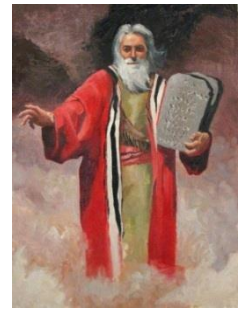
In Pirkei Avot we read that one should "cherish another's honour as one's own." (Avot 2:15) Even more dramatically, a little later in the text, Rabbi Elazar HaModai warns us that someone who shames another in public has no share in the world to come! (Avot 3:15).

Embarrassing people is evidently considered a very serious action in our Halacha. When you embarrass someone else, you are really saying that you have something to offer to the world but the other person has no such worth; embarrassing him in public is a demonstration of this belief. By making the other person feel self-conscious, ill-at-ease

and worthless, you have symbolically testified that the person has no “Tzelem Elokim- (Godly Image)”, and that in effect it is like killing him!

Moshe's Final Speech

The Torah relates that when Moses, the great Jewish leader, knew that his life was drawing to an end, he realized that it was his duty to speak to the Nation of Israel. He wanted to inspire the people he had led for forty years to face what the future would bring as well as to remind them of their past mistakes so that they wouldn't repeat them.

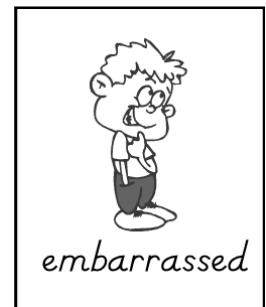


Yet Moses was very careful not to mention any of these mistakes straight out in a way that could embarrass anyone. Rather he tactfully hinted in a way that would get his point across as painlessly as possible.

The Torah is teaching us here how important it is to be sensitive to the feelings of others and do whatever we can never to embarrass anyone. If Hashem's Torah laws deliberately avoid the shaming of others, then we should certainly be careful not to embarrass our fellow man.

Shaming in Private

The Chafetz Chayim (into to Shimirat Halashon) stresses that the prohibition for us not to shame one another is not limited to public humiliation. Even shaming one privately is a violation of a negative commandment. The Torah (Vayikra 19:17) warns us to rebuke our peers with sensitivity, lest we embarrass them, and thus bear sin (based on Gemara Erachin 16b). This prohibition does not distinguish between public or private shaming. In addition, even one who shames someone else in private violates the general imperative of "lo tonu" (Vayikra 25:17), not to cause pain or sorrow to another Jew.



Storytime!

Rabbi Akiva Eiger once invited a poor man to his home on Friday night. At the meal, a beautiful white tablecloth covered the Shabbos table. When the poor man lifted his glass of wine, it slipped out of his hand, and the red liquid spilled over the pure white cloth, leaving an ugly blotch. Seeing the poor man squirm in embarrassment, Rabbi Eiger immediately lifted his own glass of wine, and also "accidentally" spilled it over the tablecloth. As the poor man looked on in great relief, Rabbi Eiger remarked, "it seems as if the table or the floor is shaking, doesn't it?" He had been willing to make himself look careless (and to soil a nice tablecloth) just to spare the shame of another.

One Final Thought...

Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky, explains that in many situations we rationalize things by saying "but it's funny". However, in these situations it is best to overcome



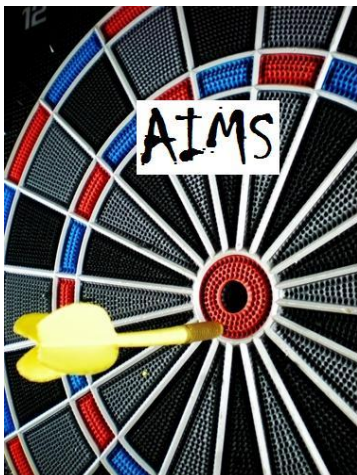
our desire to share this remark and realise that the self-satisfaction of not having hurt someone lasts longer than the giggles. Not only should we not embarrass or hurt others, but also bear in mind that the way we treat others is the way they will treat us in turn.

Summary K4:

1. Rebuking is a dangerous business, so consider (a) how you say it and (b) whether it will be received well or not.
2. Embarrassing people is like killing them, so don't do it!
3. The prohibition of shaming another also applies in private.
4. Be careful that "banter" doesn't become hurtful.



K5: Judging others positively and treating them well



- To internalise the concept that we should always try to judge people favourably, despite what may seem to be the case.
- To understand that there are situations where one does have to be honest about a person.
- To be friendly toward Jews of all descriptions, regardless of our disagreements with them.

Do you judge people fairly?

Sometimes in life we can find ourselves upset or frustrated by the actions of other people. Yet how often do we stop to consider what's *really* going on before getting angry with them? Should we be annoyed at that person, should we give them the benefit of the doubt that they were justified in what they did or said, or should we even assume that what they did was the best possible thing to do? Assuming we refrain from speaking any *lashon hara*, if we really think someone has behaved unacceptably, is it acceptable as a moral individual, guided by the Torah, to think low of someone? Let's consider some examples:

Case 1

You are giving your friend a lift to your best friend's party. You would like to arrive promptly, and you arrive at your friend's house on time to go onto the party. However, your friend is not ready and keeps you waiting for 20 minutes. When s/he finally comes out of their house into your car, although s/he apologizes for keeping you, no explanation is given as to why they are so late. You blank him/her all the way to the party, livid that they have behaved so badly when you were trying to do them a favour by giving them a lift.



Do you assume they were being inconsiderate and didn't care enough to keep track of time, or is it possible that something important came up that they may not want to disclose?

Case 2

It is Shabbat afternoon, and you see some people you know from your shul, who you thought kept Shabbat driving down the road.

Would/Should you jump to the conclusion that they don't keep Shabbat or that they are driving to hospital or something else necessary within the laws of Shabbat?

Well, we are actually told in Pirkei Avot:

יהושע בן פרחיה אומר עשה לך רב וקנה לך חבר והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות:

Yehoshua ben Parchiya would say, "Make for yourself a rabbi, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge every person to good merit".



This seems to indicate that we can very rarely think badly of anyone! In fact, Rashi on this Mishna says exactly this: ***On everything that you hear about him [or her], assume that it is for the good, until you know for sure that it's not so.***

There is another Mishna in Pirkei Avot that can help us interpret the initial Mishna we've been looking at:

"He [the son of Azzai] used to say: Do not be disrespectful of any person and do not be dismissing of anything, for there is no person who does not have his hour, and there is no thing which does not have its place." (Perek 4, Mishna 3)

Whilst the first Mishna teaches us that we should judge another favourably in specific isolated incidents, how can one do this if they are certain they are in the wrong? This Mishna is giving us a deeper insight into the meaning of judging favourably by encouraging us to look at the greater picture. Even when we see someone acting in a way that is certainly wrong, we should still find a way to judge them favourably as a person in an overall sense. After all, 'there is no person who does not have his hour'.

In fact, Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld even extends this Mishna to inanimate objects: **"every object has its place [and] every object will in some way and at some time be used to glorify God's Name."**

So how should we actually view people who seem to be bad?

Reb Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Meharan 282

You should know, that you need to judge everyone for good merit, and even someone who is a really bad person, you need to search and to find something small good in them. Within that small thing, there is no bad, and therefore find something small good, and judge him well, and by doing this, you will truly raise him up to be good, and he will be able to do *teshuva*... And when you find that bit of good, he is not a bad person; it is impossible that there is no good in any particular person because how is it possible that someone has never done a mitzvah or something good in his life? In this way, by finding this good point, you will take the person out of his original place in life and truly make him a good person...

Rav Nachman is telling us to be careful to judge a person's action, as opposed to a person's being.

However, an earlier Mishna in Pirkei Avot would appear to interpret our initial Mishna in a different way:

"Nittai of Arbel said, distance yourself from a bad neighbour, do not befriend a wicked person, and do not despair of punishment." (Perek 1, Mishna 7)

The Rambam takes this perhaps more rational approach to our initial Mishna. He describes how if there is an individual who is usually good or bad, then we judge them according to what they are known to be! Thus next time you see Bob the Bully picking on a Year 7 kid in the school playground, you do not need to try and give him the benefit of the doubt! Face reality!

The term דן also denotes this idea – "dan" is not the part of the judgment when you consider both parties' cases, thinking about whether it was good or bad; rather it is the stage of passing judgment. We are not meant to view all actions through rose-tinted glasses, assuming that they were for good intentions, but when ultimately "passing judgment" over the person – his totality, and essence – we should see him in a favorable light

There is still a problem in terms of the long-term way to deal with an individual we see doing wrong. The first Mishna we looked at implied that one should always see the

potential in others, even in their lowest moments. Practically speaking, this suggests that one should stick by a friend who is doing something wrong based on an awareness that the friend could turn things around.

Yet the next Mishna we quoted told us to distance ourselves from a bad neighbour, from a friend who could be a negative influence on us. How can we reconcile these two Mishnayot?

In order to solve the problem, perhaps we should see the two Mishnayot as teaching us one of the hardest balancing acts in life. Depending on any given situation, we must all decide when it is right to support our friend's actions unconditionally and when supporting a friend's actions could lead to us being influenced negatively. Worse still, could the friend start to think we were encouraging their actions?

Something to consider: A friend of yours is bullying people. You have told them you want them to stop but they are refusing to listen to you and laughing off your words. Do you keep being their friend in the hope that they might change and that in the meantime you can limit the damage or do you avoid the risk of becoming a bully yourself and encouraging your friend's behaviour to continue?

Interactions with others

You probably have friends who do not hold by the same values as we do in Bnei Akiva. We all regularly come across Jews who are not observant and who may even hold views that we consider to be heretical and damaging to religion. The message of **דן את כל האדם** applies equally to how we should interact with other types of Jews and people in general.

This behaviour is exemplified by Rav Kook in his interactions with secular Jewish Zionists before the State of Israel was founded. Many of them rejected religion entirely and tried to distance themselves as far as possible from the religious world they left behind in Europe. There were even former yeshiva boys amongst them, having abandoned their upbringing to create a wholly secular society. Most of the rabbis at the time, both in Europe and Eretz Yisrael, considered these Jews to be the enemy and prohibited contact with them, as they sought to undermine religion. Rav Kook, instead, looked at it in a different way based on three key points:



- They are still Jews, and of course we can't reject them!
- They are doing vitally important work by building up Eretz Yisrael, which is a religious task in of itself.
- They have other wonderful traits we can relate to and appreciate.

He was able to dissociate their negative, anti-religious side from their overall personalities and he would visit their kibbutzim, encouraging them, and engaging with them. Most other Rabbis rejected Rav Kook for these actions and thought he was beyond the pale. Yet he still would not rise to their aggressive behaviour and refused to

let the abuse they were giving him affect his approach. The following story illustrates this beautifully:

One day, Rav Kook was returning from a simcha, accompanied by several important people. While walking back, a bucket of rubbish was thrown all over him by a religious Jew who disagreed with his Zionist opinions. The story reached the British High Commissioner, Herbert Samuel, who contacted Rav Kook and offered to have this troublemaker thrown out of the country. Rav Kook was dismayed and responded to Sir Herbert that he loved that man dearly and on no account should he be punished.

We see a similar idea in the Netziv's introduction to Sefer Bereishit, where he explains why ל"ח called it Sefer HaYashar – the book of the upright. His explanation is that it is because of the way the forefathers behaved. In contrast to the Jews at the time of the destruction of the 2nd Temple, who kept the mitzvot but hated one another for no reason, the Avot were "righteous, kind and loved God as much as possible". He continues, explaining that:

This was because of the way they behaved with the nations of the world even though they were worshippers of real idols. Nevertheless, they behaved with them with love and they were concerned for their good, as they are a form of creation. And we see this with the way Avraham stepped in to pray for Sodom, even though he should have hated them and their king... So to Yitzchak appeased Avimelech...and Ya'akov spoke nicely to Lot...

The key message we can learn from the Avot in the book of Bereishit is to treat all other humans equally. We should be following in their footsteps (ma'aseh avot siman lebanim – the actions of the forefathers are a sign for the descendants), so how much more so should we make an effort to be friendly to others, both Jews and non-Jews. We often get carried away by petty, as well as often important political and religious disagreements, yet we must overcome these barriers and maintain and strengthen our concern for fellow human beings.



How should we practically go about creating Achdut between Jews, and what should our relationship be with the wider non-Jewish world?

Summary of K5:

1. Always assume someone has pure motives until you know otherwise.
2. Rebbe Nachman teaches to love the good aspects of a bad person, whereas the Rambam says there's no obligation to give "known" bad people the benefit of the doubt!
3. Rav Kook famously engaged with the Secular Zionists because they were doing great work for Eretz Yisrael, they had some good traits, and ultimately they were still Jews!