

K1 – Respecting One's Parents Kibud Av Va'Em



AIMS :

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Why should we honour our parents?

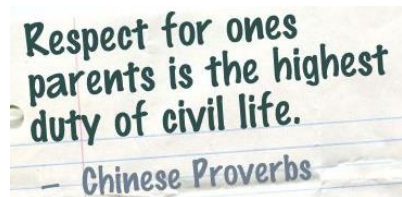
1. Appreciation

"A person needs to recognise and bestow kindness to someone who has done good for them... **their father and mother are the source of their existence in the world, and therefore it is appropriate to do everything one is able to for them, as they brought them into the world, and they have also put much effort in since they were small.**" – Sefer Hachinuch

If we think about what our parents have done for us, from birth through childhood and on to our teenage years, we can't help but be left breathless! One need only see the futility in trying to calculate the effort expended in time, effort, finances and, most importantly, love in making us the people we are today.

Hashem and Kibbud Horim

- 📖 We keep mitzvot even when they are not sensible to us.
- 📖 Practically, even if we actually think we have been mistreated by parents or disagree with them, we still need to give them respect and interact appropriately with them, following their instructions and honouring them.
- 📖 The first five of the ten commandments are *bein adam lamakom*, so why does honouring parents appear in those five?
- 📖 SOURCE: **Kiddushin 30b:**
 - *The Torah says, "You should respect your mother and your father", and it says, "Respect Hashem ..."* 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..."* 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 their parents, Hashem says, "I am exalted on you, as if I lived with you and you honoured Me".
- 📖 Honouring parents because of all they have provided you leads to the realisation that Hashem ultimately provides everything and should be honoured.





SOURCE: Rav Ya'akov Meidan: for some, performing the *mitzvot* as their parents taught them is a way of honouring them. Thus serving Hashem = serving parents.

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



Honouring and Fearing

- 📖 Not only respect, but 'fear' is also required
- 📖 Honour: providing food, clothing them and helping them enter and leave a building – i.e. providing for their needs (**Kiddushin 31b**).
 - Gratitude to parents leads to us reciprocating
- 📖 *Yirah*, 'fear' of parents is better translated as 'awe'
- 📖 Awe: We are instructed not to stand or sit in their place, not to contradict them and not to quote their opinions without giving them credit (ibid.)
 - Viewing parents as above us, automatically deserving of respect
- 📖 This is another similarity between parents and God – both have the duality of us expressing gratitude and also revering them.



Discussion point: 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 love, or not to make Aliya? At what point, if any, does personal autonomy overrule what your parents want?

Becoming Holy

- 📖 Fulfilling these obligations is not easy – when did you last contradict your parents, or even shout at them? Nonetheless, Hashem expects us to live up to the expectation of 'kedoshim tiyu' – 'you shall be holy'.

SOURCE: Ramban on the words 'Kedoshim tiyu':

- Even if you keep ALL the mitzvot of the Torah, it does not make you a good or a 'holy' person.
- You could be a "*naval birshut haTorah*" – a scoundrel with the permission of the Torah
- This is where you adhere to the letter of the law, yet still act in a generally inappropriate way (like Rosh Katan, the opposite of Rosh Gadol).
- Although there are technically no laws against what you're doing, there is more to acting decently than purely keeping the Torah's mitzvot.



- 📖 This idea helps us understand the Torah: The Torah cannot possibly tell each of us exactly what to do in every situation we face throughout our lives. Rather, it uses the mitzvot as reference points; our task is to take these examples and to extrapolate to fill the spaces.
- 📖 SOURCE: **Devarim 6:18**: 'And you shall do the good and upright in the eyes of the Lord.'

A Mitzvah and its Reward

"Honour your father and your mother in order that your days should be lengthened in the land which Hashem your God is giving you."

(*Shemot 20:12 – 'Ten Commandments'*)

- 📖 Honouring parents is one of two mitzvot for which one receives long life, the other being *shiluach haken*
- 📖 Having a 'long life', i.e. maximising your time and using it wisely, is the greatest way to show appreciation for your parents. They literally gave you your life, and so you should take advantage of that.
- 📖 Some people live long lives in a short time, and some people spend a long time doing nothing.

Concrete Concepts:

1. Kibbud Horim is 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 Horim has a counterpart in *yir'ah*, badly translated as fear.
4. A long life can mean maximising the time you have.

Peula ideas:

- 📖 Going above and beyond: To illustrate the Ramban's point, ask *chanichim* to perform an activity, perhaps designing a poster with the content you've discussed on it. You should also prepare a poster, but one that has just lines of text on it. Compare the difference between a poster that goes 'above and beyond' the task to display it in an aesthetic way.
- 📖 Compare the lives of people who have lived meaningful lives and people who have not. You could use a few different methods, but choose one that allows the *chanichim* to work out for themselves that meaningful is better.

K2 - Tzedaka



Aims

1. Understand the fundamentals behind Tzedaka and why it is such an important Mitzvah
2. Understand who is obligated and what is the reward
3. Learn about Rambam and his view on Tzedaka
4. Think about how the Chanichim can give Tzedaka

Charity and Justice?!

Tzedaka 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. Tzedaka, on the other hand, is derived from the Hebrew term 'Tzedek' – צדק – meaning righteousness or justice. The performance of Tzedaka is not merely viewed as an act of generosity rather it is the performance of a duty.



Former Chief Rabbi Sacks notes that in English 'charity' and 'justice' are opposites. If I give someone £1,000 because I owe them that sum, then that is justice. If I give them £1,000 because they need it, that is charity. In Hebrew, however, these have the same word, reflecting how our faith views the concepts of repaying a loan and helping the needy.

In Judaism, we believe that what we have, we do not truly own; it is on loan from Hashem. So, in Judaism Tzedaka is more than charity, it is an obligation placed upon us by having a loan from Hashem! One of the conditions of this loan is that we share some of what we have with those in need.

The commentaries explain that true happiness is obtained only when we look after the poor and needy; it allows us to take joy in what we have and gives legitimacy to our possession of material wealth. We need to do something worthwhile with our lives, otherwise we feel unfulfilled and unhappy. The Midrash (**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 Tzedaka

In order to fully understand this Mitzvah, we can look at the biblical laws which farmers were obligated in. The laws are called *Ma'aser*, *Ma'aser Sheni*, *Ma'aser Oni*, *Pe'ah*, *Shichecha* and *Leket* (see the extra chomer at the end of this Kvutsa for a full understanding of each law).



Leket, Shichecha and Peah are all gifts which allow the poor to do something physically for their own food without having to ask or beg. This process allows a person to become more self-sufficient, providing self-confidence for the person to believe in themselves, enabling them to start to look after themselves without being given everything on a plate. Their independence and self-reliance are maintained.

The Importance of Tzedaka

The Gemara (**Bava Batra 9a**) tells us – "שקולה צדקה כנגד כל המצוות" – "The value of Tzedaka is equal to all the other commandments combined". Similarly, in the Talmud Yerushalmi (**Peah 1:1**) says "Tzedaka 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 Tzedaka, they would not have perished".

Rambam on Tzedaka

"Whoever gives Tzedaka 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 them in their sorrow."

(Rambam: laws of giving gifts, 10:4)

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

Furthermore, Rambam delineates eight levels of Tzedaka, each one greater than the previous:

8. When donations are given grudgingly.
7. When one gives less than they 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 Halachic practice that 10% of your income (even before you have paid off living expenses) should be given to Tzedaka. In Hebrew this is called "Ma'aser Kesafim" (Ma'aser comes from the Hebrew עשר – ten. To tithe means to take 10%). Some Rabbis imply that this comes from a Biblical obligation based Devarim (15:7-11), which speaks about the obligation to not ignore "your needy brother".



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, we see that even before the Torah was given Ya'akov says (**Bereshit 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 which they might be able to spend volunteering.

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 Shulchan Aruch**)

Although these excerpts might lead one to believe that 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 "*darchei 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 at home". Here, "at home" means within our people.



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

Tzedaka in Israel

Lastly, in addition to many private charities that operate, Tzedaka in Israel could be said to take place on a mass level through the State's social security systems (taxes to support public health and benefits). Thus, even if the State isn't run according to Halacha it seems to have internalised some key Jewish values such as Tzedaka.

Concrete Concepts:

1. Tzedaka is about justly distributing the wealth Hashem has given us.
2. The Rambam lists eight levels of Tzedaka.
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 Tzedaka, even if not from a Halachic standpoint.

K3 – The Power of Speech



Aims

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

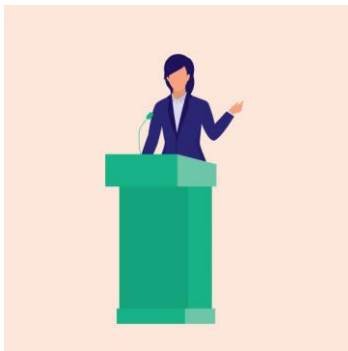
Hashem's Speech

"In the beginning of God's creation of Heaven and Earth, the earth was unformed and void, and there was darkness on the face of the deep, and the spirit of God rested upon the waters. And God said, "Let there be light!". And there was light." (Bereshit 1:1-4)



From the opening verses of the Torah we see that Hashem's speech has creative power, bringing light into a dark world. Throughout this first chapter, the Torah repeatedly specifies that God uses speech to create the different elements of our universe and our world. Pirkei Avot (5:1) records 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. While they are a reflection of who we really are on the inside, the words imprint themselves both on our mind and on 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 thoughts about 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 hakodesh" (holy language) and there is no place for bad language. Perfect examples can be found in delicate areas of Halacha. For example, the Shulchan Aruch refers to the toilet as "beit hakisa" (the throne room) and refers to urine as "mai raglaim" (water of the legs).

Ramban explains that the Torah forbade certain actions, but there are equivalents which are freely permissible. For example, McDonalds is not kosher, but indulging in all you can eat Met Su Yan is fine! 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 (look back at K1 pages 4-5). The same is true with somebody who curses and uses vulgar language.

There is no explicit prohibition against using bad language, but the Torah in Vayikra commands us "Kedoshim Tihiyu" (Be holy!). The sages explain that the true meaning of "kadosh" – holy, is separate or distinct (e.g. we make Shabbat 'holy' with Kiddush, an act of distinction from the rest of the week). While there may not be specific Mitzvah of taking care in what we say, by commanding as in general to be "Kaddoshim", we are expected to be different, a cut above, the Torah is telling us to keep away from vulgar language and present ourselves respectably!

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 bringing them in with Kiddush and ending them with Havdala.
- Getting married! (in addition to witnesses and a ring)



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. But technically you can just say the words of Havdala without any of the physical elements 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. 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 (Mishlei 18:21), where it says, "Death and life are in the hands of the tongue".



While this can clearly be seen as true in a literal sense (e.g. when a judge/army general/medieval king issues a death sentence), it can also be figurative. Through the way we speak we can become truly "living" or, alternatively, "dead," and cause the same for others. The

Talmud (Archin 15b) 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:

"מי האיש הקפץ חיים, אהב ימים לראות טוב? נצר לשונך מרע ושפתך מדבר מרמה. סור מרע ועשה טוב, בקש שלום ורדפהו." (תהלים לד:יג-טו)
"Who is the one who desires life, who loves the days and sees goodness? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceitfully. Flee from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it" (Tehillim 34:13-15)



The advice given to the one 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 pasuk 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 instructs us along these lines several times, to not bear false witness and to not tell tales. For example (Vaykira 19:16) – "לא תלה רכיל בעמך" – "You shall not be a talebearer among your people."



This is the prohibition of **Lashon Hara**, any derogatory or damaging (but true) statement against an individual. Rambam (Hilchot Deot 7:5) 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 them 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 include:

- **Praise** – situations which inevitably provoke someone to contradict the praise, such as if it is stated in excess, or stated 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 so-and-so used to be like" or "Don't ask me about what happened with so-and-so."

Summary of K3

1. Hashem created the world through speech.
2. Bad language can affect 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.

K4 – Rebuke and Embarrassment



Aims

1. To understand the concept and dangers of rebuking other people
2. To explore the concept of embarrassment and its effects
3. To know some stories related to embarrassment

Rebuking People

The Torah tells us (Vayikra 19:17): *"You should not hate your brother in your heart, rather 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.



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? The Passuk says, '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. But is this really so? What if you believed that your rebuke would just not be listened to, and 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. (This opens up a broader topic of whether there is a difference between doing something wrong if they know it is wrong, as opposed to if they are ignorant. If they will do the action anyway, but through you telling them there will be an added element of religious rebellion, should you still try to tell them?) 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.

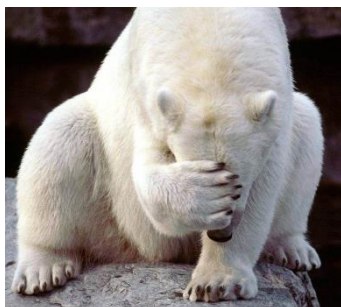
There is another quote a little later in the Gemara which could also add a dimension to the debate. The Gemara says on the same page that *"our generation (meaning the time of the Gemara, and certainly in today's society) no longer has anyone who can correctly deliver rebuke"*.



In the view of the Gemara, what has stopped us being able to rebuke properly? 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 one embarrasses a sinner while rebuking them, the rebuker transgresses the biblical mitzva, *"[You shall surely rebuke your neighbour] 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 any form of team competition. What is truly motivating their criticism? Do they genuinely believe that this is the best way to improve them and to give constructive rebuke? Might there be other factors behind that form of rebuke?



Embarrassing People

In Parshat Vayeishev we read the (complicated) story of Yehuda and Tamar. On hearing that his (currently unmarried) daughter-in-law Tamar is pregnant, Yehuda orders her to be killed by burning for (supposedly) prostituting herself. Tamar refused to tell anyone that it was really Yehuda who was (unknowingly) 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 Yehuda had the great courage to publicly admit his guilt, she would have actually been burned at the stake and died an innocent and tragic death, taking her two unborn 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 someone is required to throw themselves into a burning fire rather than put another to shame in public. However, the Meiri (commenting on Gemara Sotah 10b) implies that although the Gemara compares shaming one's friend to killing them and says that one must jump into a furnace rather than cause embarrassment, it is not intended to be understood literally. Rather, the Gemara is merely emphasizing to us the severity of embarrassing

another. According to the Meiri, the Gemara might mean that a person should subject themselves to discomfort rather than embarrass another person.

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 Halacha. When you embarrass someone else, you are really saying that they have nothing to offer creation. By making another person feel self-conscious, ill-at-ease and worthless, you have symbolically testified that they have no "Tzelem Elokim" (Godly Image), no purpose and no value.



Moshe's Final Speech

The Torah relates that when Moshe knew that his life was drawing to an end, he realised that it was his duty to speak to the Children of Israel. He wanted to inspire the people he had led for forty years to face the future, as well as to remind them of their past mistakes so that they wouldn't repeat them.

Yet Moshe 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 to never embarrass anyone. If Hashem's Torah deliberately avoid the shaming of others, then we should certainly be careful not to embarrass our fellow man.

Shaming in Private

The Chafetz Chayim (see Shimirat Halashon) stresses that the prohibition for us not to shame one another is not limited to public humiliation. Even shaming someone in a private setting 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 Shabbat 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 rationalise things by saying "but it's funny" or "it's just banter". However, in these situations it is best to face the struggle and 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.



Concrete Concepts

1. Rebuking is a dangerous business, so consider:
 - a. How you say it
 - 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



Aims

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

JUDGED



best possible thing to do?

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 or should we give them the benefit of the doubt? Are they being malicious, or should we assume that what they did was the

If we really think someone has behaved inappropriately, is it ever acceptable as a moral individual, guided by the Torah, to think badly of them? 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 they finally get into your car, although they apologise for keeping you, no explanation is given as to why they are so late. You blank them 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, feel able to, or be comfortable 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.

Should you jump to the conclusion that they don't keep Shabbat, or would you try to 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 said, "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 someone assume that it is for the good, until you know for sure that it is not so.*

There is another Mishna in Pirkei Avot that can help us interpret the first:

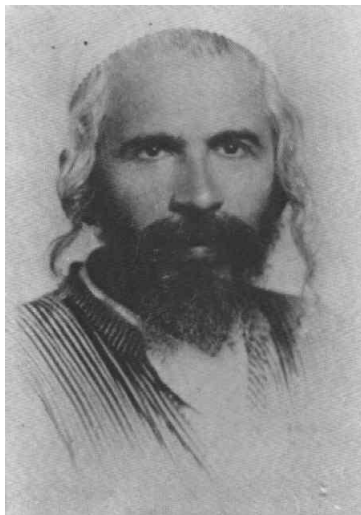
'הוא הִיָּה אומר, "אל תהי בָּז לְכָל אָדָם, וְאל תהי מְפַלֵּיג לְכָל דָּבָר, שְׂאִין לְךָ אָדָם שְׂאִין לוֹ שְׂעָה וְאִין לְךָ דָּבָר שְׂאִין לוֹ מְקוֹם."

[Ben Azzai] used to say: "Do not be disrespectful of any person and do not be dismissive of anything, for there is no person who does not have their hour, and there is no thing which does not have its place." (Avot 4:3)

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 their 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."*

How should we actually view people who seem to be bad?



"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 find something good in them on which you can judge them well. By doing this, you will truly raise them up to be good, and he will be able to do teshuva ... And when you find that bit of good, they are 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 their life? In this way, by finding this good point, you will take the person out of their original place in life ..." (Rebbi Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Meharan 282)

Rebbi Nachman is telling us to be careful to judge a person's action, as opposed to the 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." (Avot 1:7)

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 seven 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 each individual action through rose-tinted glasses, assuming that they were carried out with good intentions in mind. But when ultimately “passing judgment” over the person – their totality, and essence – we should view them in a favorable light



There is still the problem 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 unfriend them, avoiding 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 may across Jews who are not observant and who may even hold views that we consider to be heretical and damaging to our faith. The message of – דן את כל האדם – לך זכות – to judge every individual favourably – applies equally to how we should interact with other Jews and people in general.



This behaviour was 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 and upbringing they left behind in Europe. 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 would often visit their kibbutzim, encouraging them, and engaging with them. Other Rabbis rejected Rav Kook for these actions and denounced his writings, but he 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, Sir 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 Bereshit, where he explains why the sages referred to it as '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 Second 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:

"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. 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 Lavan..."

The key message we can learn from the Avot in the book of Bereshit is to treat all other humans equally. We should be following in the footsteps of the Avot, as Ramban comments several times throughout Bereshit, "*ma'aseh avot siman lebanim*" – "the actions of the forefathers are an instruction for their descendants". 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 both important political and religious disagreements, as well as petty squabbles. We must fight to overcome these barriers and maintain and strengthen our concern for fellow human beings.



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

Concrete Concepts

1. Always assume someone has pure motives until you know otherwise.
2. Rebbi 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!

K1-5 - Additional Chomer



To serve as a supplement to the educational material provided in the Chomer for Aleph Winter Machane

K1 – Kibbud Horim

Storytime

Dama ben Netina – A Story of *Kibbud Av v' Em*

The Talmud relates the following tale (Avoda Zara 24a):

Rabbi Eliezer was asked: How far does one have to respect parents? He said: "Learn from what Dama Ben Netina, a non-Jew in Ashkelon, did for his father."

The Rabbis wanted to buy from Dama a jewel of extraordinary worth and beauty to replace missing stones on the High Priest's breastplate. The price was 600,000 gold coins. Dama's jewels were kept in a locked chest. The key to the chest was resting under the head of Dama's father, who was fast asleep. Dama would not disturb his sleeping father, and so he lost the sale.

A year later, God rewarded him. A red cow was born in Dama's herd. (This type of totally red-haired cow was extremely rare. The Jewish people in the time of the Holy Temple used a red cow for spiritual purification rites and would pay a princely sum to acquire it.) The Rabbis came to Dama to buy it from him. He told them: "I know you would pay me whatever amount I ask. But I will only ask you for the amount I lost (on the jewellery deal) because I respected my father."

Elisha Ben Abuya (Acher) – By Shlomo Chaim

Kesselman, chabad.org

*(Read through the story of Elisha Ben Abuya and see if you can spot the relevance to Kibbud Horim and the dangers of looking for, and relying on, the reasons behind Mitzvot. **Hint: It might be the bold bit...**)*

Elisha Ben Abuyah was a Mishnaic sage turned heretic. Born into a prestigious Jerusalem family (Jerusalem Talmud, Chagigah 2:1), Elisha was described by the Talmud as an extraordinary scholar who delved deep into the secrets of the Torah. Ultimately, though, Elisha threw off his Torah observance and committed terrible sins.

Who Was Elisha?

Elisha, son of Abuyah, a wealthy Jerusalemite, was one of the great sages of the Mishnah. He was a colleague of Rabbi Akiva, and the teacher of Rabbi Meir, one of the greatest and most prolific contributors to the Mishnah.

How Elisha Was Disillusioned

Once, he saw a pig dragging in its mouth the tongue of the famous sage Rabbi Yehudah. He became so disturbed at the sight that he exclaimed, "From this tongue, pearls of purest light used to come forth all his days. Is this Torah, and is this its reward?"

Another time, he saw a person ascend a tree and take the mother bird together with her eggs, an act prohibited by the Torah (which requires that one first send away the mother bird before taking her eggs). The next day, he saw another person climb a tree, send away the mother bird and take the eggs. On the way down, a snake bit him and the man died. Elishah thought to himself, "The Torah promises that one who sends away the mother bird will live long. Yet the man who acted in accordance with G-d's commandment had his life cut short, whereas the sinner was unharmed."

Thus, he stopped believing in Torah. (See Jerusalem Talmud, ad loc)

His Heresy and Sins

Once, Elisha desecrated the holy day of Yom Kippur by riding a horse in front of the Holy of Holies. As he was passing, he heard a heavenly voice emerge from the Holy of Holies and declare, "Return My sons—except for Elisha ben Abuyah, for he knew My power and yet rebelled against Me." (Jerusalem Talmud, Chagigah 2:1)

Some traditions record that when Elisha heard the voice, he thought, "Since I have been banished from that world [i.e., the World to Come], let me go out and enjoy this world." (Babylonian Talmud, Chagigah 15b -16a)

Rabbi Meir

One of the most fascinating elements of the Acher saga was his unique relationship with his disciple, Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Meir was among the greatest of all the *tanna'im*, and it is said about him that the other sages could not comprehend the depth of his wisdom. In fact, Rabbi Meir's rulings were so widely accepted and held in such high esteem that his opinions are often quoted without any attribution, presented simply as the law. Even after Acher went astray, Rabbi Meir continued to learn from him. The other sages said of him that "Rabbi Meir ate a half-ripe date and threw the peel away." In other words, he was able to extract the kernel of truth and wisdom from Acher's words and discard the excess.

His End

According to some, Acher repented before he died. On his deathbed, Rabbi Meir visited him and inspired him to repent. (Jerusalem Talmud, Chagigah 2:1)

But according to others, Acher died a sinner, (Babylonian Talmud, Chagigah 15b -16a) and when his soul ascended, the Heavenly Court deemed him unfit for both Heaven and Hell. He could not be sentenced to Hell, as his Torah learning protected him, but he could not be sent to Heaven either since he was a sinner. Therefore, he was placed in an uncomfortable in-between state, and his soul could find no respite.

Rabbi Meir understood what had happened and said, "When I die, I will petition to have Acher sentenced to Hell, for it is better that he be judged and pay the price for his misdeeds, and then ultimately be forgiven and sent to Heaven." Sure enough, after Rabbi Meir died, smoke began to rise from Acher's grave.

When another sage, Rabbi Yochanan, heard this, he was upset. "Is it a mighty deed to burn one's teacher?" he asked. "When I die, I will petition to have Acher released from Hell and brought to Heaven." And when Rabbi Yochanan died, the rising smoke from Acher's grave ceased.

What the Story of Acher Means for Us

A person, no matter how brilliant, needs to recognize the limits of human intelligence, otherwise, he can fall into a spiritual abyss. The greater one's abilities and intelligence and potential for greatness, the lower he falls if he is corrupted. In that sense, the story of Acher is a cautionary tale of what happens to one who places too much stock in his own intellectual prowess.

Yet, there is also a thread of grace that runs through the story. Even Acher was brought back (either during his lifetime or after) because no matter how low we fall, the Divine soul that we each have will find its way back to its source, deep within G-d.

K2 – Tzedaka

The obligations on farmers in Israel

1. **Teruma** – 1/50th of the grain, wine and oil harvest was given over to the Kohanim
2. **Ma'aser Rishon** – This is 1/10th of everything left after Teruma, and 1/10th of produce from which no Teruma needed to be taken (e.g. fruit and veg). This was given to the Leviim.
 - a. **Terumat Maaser** – The Levi was the required to give 1/10th of the Ma'aser Rishon they received to the Kohen, this was their version of Teruma.
3. **Ma'aser Sheni** – This is 1/10th of the crop which remains after Ma'aser and was taken to eat before Hashem in Jerusalem. For those who lived too far away, they could sell their Ma'aser Sheni and take the money and buy produce to consume within the city walls. This was done on the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the seven-year Shemitta cycle.
4. **Ma'aser Oni** – Every third and sixth year of the seven-year cycle the second 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.
5. **Pe'ah** – When harvesting a field or orchard one is obligated to leave over the corners of the field for the poor (Vaykira 23:22). This Mitzvah allowed the poor to come and do the work to harvest their own food without having to ask for Tzedaka. 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 1/60th of the field.
6. **Shichecha** – If there are forgotten sheaves in the field where the farmer was harvesting it is an obligation to leave it for the poor to collect (Devarim 24:9).
7. **Leket** – The gleanings – those pieces that fall from the sickle during the reaping or from the hand during the picking – must also be left behind for the poor and non-Jew.

K3 – The Power of Speech

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 the age of 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. 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 organisation of Europe and later the world, the Chafetz Chaim was very involved in Jewish affairs and helped many yeshivot survive the financial problems of the interwar period.

After a life spent exemplifying the verses which, through his book, gave him his name (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 age of 95.

The Chafetz Chaim's greatest legacy is the 21 Sefarim which he published. His first work, Sefer Chafetz Chaim (1873), was 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.