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A Glowing Letter of Recommendation



Someone once took it upon himself to write a scathing “review” of a volume of Rav Moshe Feinstein’s classic Halachic work, Igros Moshe. In this article, the author subjected Rav Moshe to personal criticism and humiliation that was unbefitting any Talmid Chacham, let alone the Gadol HaDor. He thought this would somehow advance himself in the Torah world, but instead of being accepted in Torah circles, the man lost whatever little credibility he had, and he lost his job as well.

A few months later, he astonishingly showed up at Rav Moshe’s door, and asked for a letter of recommendation. Rav Moshe quickly took out a pen and a piece of paper, and wrote the man a glowing letter.

A member of the family and a close Talmid who were present when this happened, later strongly objected to Rav Moshe’s kindness. They said, “Rebbe, how could you write such a letter for a person who criticized you so horribly?”

Rav Moshe calmly smiled and said, “Since that happened a few months ago, a Yom Kippur has passed, and he surely did Teshuvah for his Aveirah, so I must forgive him!”

Reprinted from the Parshas Nitzavim 5783 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah.

The Unusual Teshuva for the Wealthy Miser

There was once a wealthy Jew who lived on the outskirts of town, having intentionally built his mansion there so the poorer villagers would not disturb him. His attitude was instilled in his family, and they too shunned their less fortunate brethren.

At the same time, the wealthy miser had a great love for Torah study. To indulge his love of learning, he built a beautiful study hall on his property, and every day would mingle with the Torah scholars who came to study there.

One day a scraggly-looking stranger appeared in the study hall. It was obvious that he was learned, but what no one knew was that he had once been rich himself. After losing his fortune he had begun wandering from town to town, with one cardinal rule: he would never ask for food. If someone offered him a meal he would accept it, but he would never be the one to initiate the request.

Three Days and Nights without Any Food Passing His Lips

The wanderer was very weak when he entered the study hall. Three days and nights had already elapsed without food passing his lips. Surely someone would invite him home and feed him...

The stranger joined a group in the midst of a lively Talmudic discussion. Everyone was astounded by his erudition, especially the miser, who enjoyed conversing with intelligent people. The hours passed, and soon it was time for lunch. By the time the poor man was invited to the home of the miser to continue their discussion, he was almost delirious from the prospect of eating.

The miser went to wash his hands but did not ask the poor man to join him. A sumptuous meal was served, but only a single portion. The stranger was shocked. After taking a bite of bread and eating a slice of succulent roast, the miser returned to their previous conversation. "Now, what were we discussing?" he asked, oblivious to his guest's discomfort.

By that time the stranger was having difficulty not fainting. He was about to break his pledge and ask for food when with his last ounce of strength, he stood up, apologized, and stumbled outside.

When a few minutes passed and he did not return the miser went to the window, and was surprised to see a large crowd gathered in front of his house. "What happened?" he asked. "What's going on?"

He Seems to Have Starved to Death!

"A pauper just died in the street," he was told. "From the looks of it, he seems to have starved to death."

The miser was stricken to the core. Only now did he realize how base and cruel he had been. Overcome with remorse, he closed himself in his room and wept till he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

In a dream, the pauper appeared to him and said, "Know that because you caused my death, it was decreed that you should pass away immediately. But because I pleaded for mercy on your behalf, I have been permitted to reveal to you how you can make amends." The miser agreed to do whatever he was told.

"Tomorrow you must tell your family that you are leaving on a business trip for one year. After you have left town you must change your appearance, dress in rags, and return to your own study hall. There you must stay for an entire year, learning Torah, praying and doing teshuva, repenting, for your misdeeds. When you need to eat, you may only appeal to your own household. But you must never reveal to them your true identity."

Looking at Life from the Other Side of the Fence

The miser was thankful for the reprieve and did exactly as he was told.

Funny how one's perspective was different on the other side of the fence... When the miser knocked on the door of the mansion and asked for a crust of bread he was sent away. He knocked again, only to be beaten and cursed. It wasn't until he announced that he would not leave the premises that they relented, and handed him some crumbs of bread.

The miser rejoiced over this meager offering as if he found a great treasure, and two days later returned for more. As time passed the family came to regard him as a harmless lunatic. The children looked forward to his visits so they could pull his beard and pour water over his head. The miser suffered these indignities in silence, aware that he alone was to blame for his children's mischief.

At the end of the year the former miser put on the same clothes he had been wearing when he left and returned home. The first thing he did was to arrange a feast for all the important personages in town, and he expressly invited all the poor people to participate. In front of everyone he related the story of what had happened to him,

and with tears in his eyes announced that henceforth his home would be open to all. Every day, he would feed as many poor people as showed up on his doorstep.

That night he had another dream in which the dead pauper appeared to him, but this time he was smiling. "Happy is your lot for having achieved a complete repentance," he informed him. "And you should know that you have also brought rest and repose to my soul."

Reprinted from the Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5760/2000 edition of L'Chaim Weekly.

In a London Hospital, on Yom Kippur Eve, a Prayer Before Dying

By Batya Schochet Lisker



Art by Rivka Korf Studio

Sitting in the back of the black taxi he had snagged as it dropped off a passenger in front of the historic Goring Hotel, he calculated the distance to his destination. He was fortunate that this taxi accepted credit cards, a service which

eluded most London cabs—a huge problem for a tourist without English currency who was pressed for time. It was a windblown late Friday afternoon, and a misty rain obscured the view of Big Ben and the Thames River as the cab hurtled through the teeming London traffic, passing from the upscale Central London neighborhood of Belgravia to Westminster.

Just Two Hours Before Yom Kippur Would Start

It was Sept. 13, 2013, two hours before the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, would begin. Yom Kippur Eve is arguably one of the busiest days of the year, rich with traditions and replete with multiple rituals. My son, Rabbi Doobie Lisker, then a rabbinical student, was in London assisting Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzin Chana Kalmenson, Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries to Belgravia, in expanding their High Holiday and Sukkot activities.

While partaking in the second of the two meals eaten on that day, my son received an unexpected text from a childhood friend, Danny Illulian. Doobie had bumped into Danny purely by “chance” as he hurriedly wheeled his suitcase a few blocks down Albany Avenue in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, N.Y., to catch his ride to the airport. Last-minute changes to the West Indies Labor Day parade barred traffic from his original pick-up location.

In passing, Doobie mentioned his upcoming plans to Danny. Danny said that his father, a prestigious rabbi in Los Angeles, knew of an elderly Iranian Jew in London who was in poor health. He suggested that the man could benefit from a visit and some inspiration if my son had the time, but he had not provided any further information until now, just hours before Yom Kippur. Danny messaged that unfortunately, the man had taken a turn for the worse, and so sent the man’s contact information and the name of the hospital where he was a patient.

A 40-Minute Car Ride to the Hospital

Googling the address, my son determined that the hospital was a 40-minute car ride from him. He made a cerebral flipping of the coin and decided to head there immediately, taking with him only a Yom Kippur *machzor* and *tefillin*. At the hospital, he easily located the man’s room with the instructions he was given at the patient information area.

A nurse stood at the bedside adjusting the drip of IV. Gathered around the withered, elderly man were his loving family members, treasuring his remaining time on this earth. They were surprised but grateful to see Doobie, telling him how meaningful his visit was at such an auspicious time. Doobie approached to wrap *tefillin* on the man, but his daughter tilted her head away from her father and whispered, “He’s fading before us. His pain has increased. Regrettably, he is not up to it.”

Instead, Doobie wrapped *tefillin* on the man's two sons as he looked on, eyes glistening with tears. The room was charged as the man tightly grasped Doobie's hand as he recited the Shema with the family. Unsure as to exactly why, Doobie then opened his *machzor* and continued to pray the *vidui* prayer, word for word. He then quickly took his leave of the man and his appreciative family, returning to Belgravia just as the *chazzan* was beginning to chant Kol Nidrei.

The Gift of the End-of-Life Prayers

The next few days leading up to Sukkot were jam-packed with preparations. Even with the best intentions, Doobie did not find a minute to follow through and text Danny. But on the eve of Sukkot, he received another text from Danny apprising him that the man had passed away early Yom Kippur morning, only a few hours after Doobie had recited *vidui* with him. It was the first time since the man had left Iran, more than 30 years ago, that he had participated in a religious service. He had suffered horrific religious persecution during the Islamic Revolution. Although he had battled bravely, the devastation left its mark. Precisely when the healing of his body was no longer a possibility, the end-of-life prayers offered him a healing of the spirit that had been stolen from him.

A random event? Fate? Serendipity? I think not. Each of us are emissaries of G-d put here to accomplish something specific, a sacred task.¹ A soul may descend to this world and live 70 or 80 years in order to do a Jew a material favor, and certainly a spiritual one.²

The domino effect of tiny, seemingly inconsequential decisions and events, and the incomprehensible way in which they intertwine, is Divine Providence bringing about circumstances to lead us exactly where we need to be.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Hayom Yom*, Cheshvan 1.
2. The Baal Shem Tov.

Ben Adam Lechavero

We learn from Rambam's *Hilchos Teshuvah* that, “*Teshuvah and Yom Kippur only atone for sins between man and God.*” Meaning, *Yom Kippur* will only allow us to atone for sins between man and Hashem like eating unkosher or not keeping *Shabbat*. So, it is crucial to acknowledge the sins between man and man before the Day of Judgement. We must make sure that we clear up any disputes that we may have with our fellow Jews. For example, if you injured someone, or stole,

or if you embarrassed your friend in public, *Yom Kippur* prayers will not help your case. A person will not be forgiven for those sins until he takes care of his error with the person he wronged. He must apologize, or appease his friend, or pay back his debt.

Chacham Ovadia A'h, quoted a *chazal* that says, “*If a person doesn't satisfy and appease his friend if he had sinned against him, then Hashem may not accept his atonement between man and Hashem on Yom Kippur!*” That's a very strong statement! It shows us just how important it is to get along with our neighbor and fellow Jew.

A Visit to Chacham Ovadia

Rabbi Benoliel related a story about a man who went to visit Chacham Ovadia A'h complaining that he wasn't feeling well. He had been to many doctors, but no one was able to figure out exactly what the cause of his ailments were. Chacham Ovadia looked at the man and asked him, “Did you ever hurt someone or embarrass anyone and fail to ask for forgiveness?”

The man could not immediately recall, but after a few minutes of thinking through his whole life about who he may have wronged, he remembered a young boy in school. “When I was a little boy in school, there was a kid in my class who used to come to school with torn shoes and tattered clothing. I teased him and made fun of him. But how can I ask for forgiveness? I don't remember who he was! I think Yosef was part of his name.” Chacham Ovadia said, “That boy was me, and you are forgiven.” It is extremely important to settle any disputes, disagreements, or wrongs between two friends. Once the man profusely apologized for his behavior, his illness was healed.

The Benefit of Not Judging Others

It says in *Masechet Rosh Hashanah*, “*Kol hamaveir al medotav, maavereyn lo kol pashav – Anyone who relinquishes his measures of retribution (tolerantly drops a disputed matter – Rashi), the Heavenly courts will relinquish all his sins for him (17a).*” In other words, “*If one doesn't judge others and is able to walk away, Hashem will also judge him favorably!*”

The very fact that the chance to do *teshuvah* was gifted to us by Hashem teaches us to take advantage of that opportunity. Over the next few days, please take an opportunity. Pick up the phone and make the call to a family member, a neighbor, an old friend who might have been hurt by something you said or did, I guarantee you will feel it is the right thing to do. It will also help bring out all the blessings Hashem has in store for you this coming year.

Reprinted from the 5782 Parshas Vayelech/Shabbat Teshuvab 5783 email of Jack E. Rahmey as based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.

The \$1.37 Purchase

Rabbi Yehoshua Nissan told an amazing story about a jewelry store owner who had some interesting customers come into his store one day. The owner was behind the counter when three small children walked in. Their heads barely reached the counter as they stood on their tiptoes, pointed to the case, and said, “We would like this necklace, please. How much is it?” The jewelry store had hundreds of thousands of dollars in inventory, and the necklace was over \$3,000.

The store owner looked at the children with their piggy banks at the ready, and said, “Who are you buying this beautiful necklace for?” The oldest child said, “Our mother is very very sick. She’s been in the hospital for a long time, and she’s not able to take care of us. But our older sister has been like our Mommy, and she’s taking us to school and making us dinner and tucking us into bed at night. We would really really like to buy her something very special. We took all our money that we saved and put it together so we can buy her a present.”

“Just the Right Amount!”

The jewelry store owner, so touched, took the piggy banks from the children, and counted \$1.37. He wrapped up the necklace, and said, “This is perfect, it’s just the right amount. Please give this to your sister.” The kids were overjoyed, giggling excitedly when they left the store.

Sure enough, a few hours later, a teenage girl walked into the jewelry store with a bag in hand. She said to the owner, “Hi, my young siblings were in here earlier. Obviously, there’s been a mistake. I’m so sorry. Please take this necklace back.” The owner of the store said, “Nope! That necklace was paid in full. I can’t take it back.” The girl did not understand, and she protested, “This piece costs thousands of dollars! There’s no way they had that kind of money. Please take it back; we don’t need charity. Thank you.”

“Paid in Full”

The owner said again, “That necklace was paid in full. They paid \$1.37 in cash, and \$3,000 in heart. That’s \$3,000 of actions and sentiment, \$3,000 of love for their sister. I refuse to take it back. Please enjoy it.”

On *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, we approach Hashem with our measly \$1.37. We say, “Please Hashem, I have \$1.37, what can I get with this?” And Hashem looks to see if we scrounged for that \$1.37, if we searched high and low with good intentions. And He accepts it as \$1 million of effort, of heart, of dedication to Hashem.

May we all appreciate the amazing gift of *Yom Kippur* and *teshuvah* that Hashem gave to us. May we take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to get closer to Hashem and our fellow Jew and make a complete atonement for all our sins. And may we bring on all the beautiful blessings of health, happiness, success for all of *B’nei Yisrael*! Amen!

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