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Rabbi Chanina and the Rock

Ethics 2:12

Rabbi Yosai said: All your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven. (Avot 2:12)



"As the men lifted the stone, Rabbi Chanina placed his hand under it too."
Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa watched all the people going up to Jerusalem, taking with them fine gifts and offerings for the Temple.

How he longed to go with them, and bring some wonderful gift for G-d. Alas, Rabbi Chanina was very poor. He had nothing he could offer to G-d.

He wandered sadly till he was all alone in a deserted field. Suddenly he saw an interesting stone on the ground. It was very large and beautiful.

“What a splendid idea!” thought Rabbi Chanina. “I will take this stone to the Holy Temple as my gift to G-d!”

Rabbi Chanina ran home to get his tools. He cut the stone, and polished it till its colors shone beautifully.

At last, it was fit to decorate the Holy Temple.

But how would he ever get it there? He looked for someone to help. He would need five strong men to carry it, and they would have to be paid. What was Rabbi Chanina to do? He barely had five gold coins as his whole life’s savings.

Suddenly five men appeared as if out of nowhere. “We will help you carry this stone,” they said. “Can you give us each one gold coin?”

That was exactly how much money Rabbi Chanina could afford.

“Yes,” he agreed at once. “I will give you that much!”

“You must also help us to carry the stone,” the men said.

As the men lifted the stone, Rabbi Chanina placed his hand under it too. It felt miraculously light. Suddenly, he found himself in Jerusalem, standing right there in the Holy Temple. “Here, I’ll pay you,” he said to the men, but they had all vanished!

Rabbi Chanina hurried to speak with the Sages who sat in the Temple. They smiled. “Those men must have been angels sent to help you!” they said. So, Rabbi Chanina gave the money to poor Torah students instead, and thanked G-d for helping him.

Reprinted from the Parshat Pinchas 5782 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.

The Difference Between Intelligence and Good Character Traits

The Baal Shem Tov had numerous students, some were very learned and others were not. The story deals with Reb Nosson of Brod who was very learned and was a successful linen merchant. Whenever he had a free moment he was learning and every night after work, he learned for a few hours. However, in regard to his character traits, he was quite average. Yes, he definitely gave tzedokah, but gave as required by halachah.

The Baal Shem Tov pointed out to Reb Nosson that he should improve his traits; however, he did not change, thinking that he is helping others as dictated by the shulchan aruch.

Only Capable of Learning from Tzeina U'Reina

Another Jew who was connected to the Baal Shem Tov was Reb Avrohom from Belishtzenitzer. Although in learning, Reb Avrohom was very weak, learning Chumash from the *tzeina u'reina* (a translation in Yiddish), yet when it came to his character traits he always strove to improve.

The Baal Shem Tov based a teaching on the possuk in Yeshayahu (1:15) "And when you spread your hands, I will conceal My eyes from you; even if you increase your prayers I shall not hearken for your hands are filled with blood."

He explained, that although the labor of mind and heart in Torah study and prayer is extremely important in one's spiritual service, however, this does not guarantee that one's emotional traits and conduct in worldly affairs are in order; there is the possibility for your hands to be "filled with blood," So even when one gives tzedokah generously if empathy for the person's plight is lacking, the possuk calls it "spilling of blood. So Hashem ignores his action, because the person did not give it to the less fortunate with feelings of warmth and words of encouragement.

Both of the Students Heard of the Baal Shem Tov's Teaching

Both of these two students were present when the Baal Shem Tov taught this teaching. Reb Nosson analyzed this teaching mentally, trying to comprehend the intellectual difference between service of the mind and service of the heart. While Reb Avrohom was horrified, was his behavior considered as if he is spilling blood? He resolved to improve himself and implement these changes in his life.

Some years later, the Baal Shem Tov showed his students the difference of these two people, and how Reb Avrohom who refined himself to new heights, truly surpassed Reb Nosson.

Reprinted from the Parshas Balak 5782 Weekly Story of Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon.

Story #1283

Honoring One's Teacher; Honoring One's Student

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

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The tombstone of the Ohr HaChayim in Yerushalayim

He stood before his great teacher, known as the **Ohr HaChayim - Rabbi Chayim Ben-Attar**, his heart bursting with emotions. It was now several years that **Yinon ben Shlomo** [not his real name] had heard Torah lessons from his master's mouth and poured water upon his hands [i.e. served him as his attendant]. Now he had decided that it was time to emigrate from Morocco, settle in the Holy Land, and there to wholeheartedly serve the Creator by dedicating his life completely to Torah study, sincere prayer and mitzvah fulfillment.

The Ohr HaChayim was pleased with his beloved student's decision, but because of the strong relationship between them, he requested that his disciple remain with him for another several days before making his final departure. Yinon was happy to agree.

It was well he did. During those few days he received from his master secrets of Torah and words of wisdom the depths of which he had never merited to hear before.

The day of parting soon arrived. Before leaving his teacher's home, the Ohr Hachayim asked of him a personal favor. He handed him a signed note and said, "Please, when you arrive in the Holy Land, go to the remnant [i.e., the Western Wall] of our destroyed glorious Temple and place this note in one of the crevices between its holy stones."

Agrees to Fulfill the Teacher's Special Request

Yinon of course agreed to this special request and stuck the note deep into his pocket.

The wearying journey replete with difficulties lasted several months. Finally, he reached the target of his dreams "the holy Land of Israel. Immediately he headed in the direction of Jerusalem, filled with happiness and gratitude to G-d that he would be privileged to establish his residence there.

While still on the way, he made a firm resolution to himself that here in the holy land he would not try to earn a living through his Torah knowledge; rather, he would engage in physical labor in order to support himself.

Upon arrival in the capital, he set out to acquire a horse and wagon. Spending the last of his meager savings gained him a horse that was already old, and a wagon of similar vintage. Still, possessing them enabled him to eke out a bare living, by transporting the merchandise of businessmen from one place to another. After some time, he managed to establish a group of satisfied regular customers.

Spend the Remainder of His Day Engrossed in Torah Study

Each day, as soon as he earned enough money to cover his basic needs, he would enter a certain beit midrash ["House of Study"] of the Sephardim [Mediterranean Jewry] in Jerusalem, and spend the remainder of the day engrossed in Torah study. The Jews who studied there regularly barely paid any attention to the visibly poor young man who tucked himself into a corner of the room and looked into one book or another. Yinon himself made every effort possible to not stick out. Anyone who happened to take interest in who he was and where he came from received a mumbled answer or half-answer that was not at all clear.

And thus, he conducted his quiet modest life for a length of time. But then, one day, tragedy struck. In the midst of pulling its usual heavy load, his loyal aged horse toppled to the ground, dead.

Yinon felt immense sorrow. In a single instant, his ability to support himself had vanished. He certainly had nowhere near the sum required to purchase another

horse. What would he do now? Would he actually have to become dependent on the kindness of others? The thought distressed him greatly.

Yet, even more than worries about his financial situation, what pained him the most was the possible significance of the sudden loss of his horse and his parnossa. He was frightened that perhaps he had committed some sin, and because of that he was being punished from Heaven. For the next several days he closed himself in his house, studied and prayed intensely, all the while undergoing several fasts and other manners of affliction in the hope that he would gain atonement for whatever sin he had done, even though he couldn't figure out what it was.

Found the Note in the Pockets of an Old Garment

One day, he happened to be searching for something in the pockets of some old garments. In one of them he felt a piece of paper, folded. When he extracted the paper from the depth of pocket, his whole body began to shake. It was the note that his teacher, the Ohr Hachayim, had entrusted to him to place in a crack between the stones of the Western Wall.

He couldn't believe what he had done. Nor could he conceive of any possible excuse or justification for his lapse in fulfilling his revered master's personal request. How could he have totally forgotten his promise? It was incomprehensible. He was convinced that it was this unconscionable act of forgetfulness and failing to honor his great teacher that had brought about his current suffering.

He jumped up and hurried as fast as he could to the Kotel, and there inserted the note as deep as he could into a crack between two of the huge stones. After that he felt a bit less disgraced, and that it was permissible for him to return to his usual study location.

All the Eyes Turned Towards Him

When Yinon appeared in the doorway, all eyes turned towards him. Some of the regular attendees rose from their seats and rushed to bid him welcome and shake his hand. They even asked him his name and what he was doing in Jerusalem.

Yinon was so surprised at the attention that he didn't know how to react. The whole lengthy time that he had been sitting and studying in this Beit Midrash, hardly anybody had paid him any attention, and now, all of a sudden, everyone is interested in him?

He asked them, "Ma nishtana hayom hazeh mikol hayomim?" "How does this day differ than all the other days" [parallel to the immortal question at the Passover Seder]? They replied that indeed his face was familiar to them, but now he looked like a completely different person. A special light is shining on your face. Now we are certain that you are not just a regular someone who wandered in from the

marketplace, but a special person who is head and shoulders above all [a biblical expression of superiority -- first used about King Shaul].

At that hour, happened to be sitting in the room was the Chacham Bashi, [1] [the title of the Chief Rabbi of Sephardic Jewry in each region of the Ottoman Empire]. He was among those who had left his seat to go greet the young Yinon, because he too was impressed by the shine of his face. After the other men had dispersed and returned to their seats, he turned again to Yinon and asked him to explain what had he done to merit this special light.

Confessed His Failure to Immediately Carry Out His Mission

Yinon, who was as surprised as everyone else about the matter or even more so! didn't know what to respond. Finally, he related to him about how he had failed in the mission the holy Ohr Hachayim had given him to deliver a note to the Kotel. Apparently his rectification of finally placing the note had led to his dramatic spiritual change of appearance.

As soon as he completed his recital, the chief rabbi expressed his interest in seeing with his own eyes the holy handwriting of the Ohr Hachayim. He asked Yinon to guide him to the spot where he had placed the note into the Kotel.

Yinon was reluctant to agree. He feared that he would again be degrading the honor of his teacher. But when the chief rabbi pleaded with him again and again, he finally felt that he had no choice and he agreed to go with him.

Together they descended to the Western Wall. Yinon indicated the location and the chief rabbi inserted his hand and gingerly removed the note. Just a few words were written on it: "I request that You come to the aid of my holy student at the time of his dire need."

The very next day, HaRav Yinon ben Shlomo was crowned as an official Halachic [Jewish Law] authority and Rabbinical Court judge for the city of Jerusalem and its surroundings.

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Source: Translated and adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "Sichat HaChag" (Shavuot 5719).

Biographical note: **Rabbi Chayim (ben Moshe) Ibn-Attar**, popularly referred to as the **Ohr HaChayim Hakadosh** [of blessed memory: 5456 - 15 Tammuz 5503 (1696 - July 1743)], known as the **Ohr HaChayim Hakadosh** after his acclaimed commentary on the Five Books of Moses, was one of the most prominent rabbis in Morocco. In 1733 he decided to leave his native country and settle in the Holy Land. Enroute he was detained in Livorno by wealthy members of the Jewish community who established a yeshiva for him. It is well-known that the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement, had the utmost esteem for the Ohr HaChayim. His

resting place on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem is the occasion for a large annual pilgrimage on his yahrzeit.

Connection: This Thursday, 15 Tammuz, is the yahrzeit-hilula of the Ohr HaChayim

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[1] There was also primarily a Chacham Bashi over the entire Ottoman Empire. At the time of the above story, this rabbi was Chacham Abraham ben á,ayyim Rosanes, who served from 1720 - 1745.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Balak 5782 email of KabbalahOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.*

# Write On

**By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn**



Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky zt”l, one of the greatest Torah scholars of our generation, reviewed the entire Talmud Babli, Talmud Yerushalmi, Shulhan Aruch, Midrash and Tanach every year! In order to complete Talmud Babli in one year, one must study about seven and a half pages a day, but Reb Chaim studied eight pages, so as not to feel the pressure to rush his studies during the final month. Reb Chaim completed his daily eight pages by sunrise every morning, in time to pray with the sunrise minyan.

In the autumn of 2001, Reb Chaim suffered a stroke. While recuperating in the Mayenei Hayeshua Hospital in Bnei Brak, he began physical therapy. His therapist asked Reb Chaim to write something on a blank sheet of paper, in order to

accustom the great Sage to using his hand and fingers. Reb Chaim is the author of over a dozen sefarim, so writing is an integral part of his life. Slowly and painstakingly, he wrote in Hebrew, “May salvation arise from Heaven” (the opening phrase of the prayer for those who uphold the Torah, recited by Ashkenazim after the Torah reading on Shabbat).

The therapist was impressed by Reb Chaim’s choice of words, which were obviously a prayer for his recovery. But the therapist was surprised, as well. “I have been doing this work for years,” he said to Reb Chaim. “Every single patient that I ever had always wrote his name when I first asked him to write something. This happened every time without fail. Why did the Rav not write his name?”

Reb Chaim looked out at the therapist from under his thick bushy eyebrows and said with simplicity and sincerity, “Haza! (our Sages of blessed memory) teach that a person should not write his name on a blank sheet of paper, lest a dishonest person find it and write above the signature that the undersigned owes him money, and then he would be liable!” (See Ketubot 21a).

Who would have thought of this except for Reb Chaim? (Reflections of the Maggid)

*Reprinted from the Parshat Balak 6782 email of Rabbi David Bibi’s Shabbat Shalom from Cyberspace.*

## The Prediction of the Chazon Ish



The wife of one of the greatest Tzadikim of Yerushalayim once

developed pneumonia. This was not uncommon given the difficult conditions of those days, and the living conditions in the old apartments of Yerushalayim.

Additionally, there was no good medication for this illness yet, as penicillin had not yet been discovered in the early days of the disease.

The situation for this Rebbetzin worsened from day to day, and the doctors who were devotedly treating her, had already given up hope of her chance to recover. They declared with certainty that she had no more than three days to live, R”L. The situation

was very serious, as the whole family relied on her. Some of the Tzadik's students and relatives went to Bnei Brak to consult with the Chazon Ish, zt"l, as Chazal have taught in Bava Basra (116a), that whoever has a sick person in his home, he should go to a Talmid Chacham and request mercy for the sick individual.

When they arrived at his house, they found the Chazon Ish sitting with his many Seforim. They immediately approached and pleaded for the life of the Rebbetzin. They mentioned that the doctors had given up hope, and that they said she had no more than three days to live.

The Chazon Ish remained calm at the news. With a slight smile he asked with wonder, "What is all the commotion about? HaKadosh Baruch Hu created half the world in three days! Is it difficult for Him to find a medicine for the illness in three days???" And so, the Tzadik decreed, and Hashem fulfilled his words!

In exactly the three days that the doctors had set for the Rebbetzin's life, and was also set by the Chazon Ish for her cure, a new and unique medication arrived from the United States, which was specifically indicated for pneumonia. It was the famous penicillin. As soon as the hospital received the medication, they gave it to her in an effort to save her life. It was literally at the last moments! With the help of Hashem, the Healer of all flesh, the Rebbetzin was completely cured and went on to live an additional forty years!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Balak 5782 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah*

# The Power of Encouraging Words

Rav Dovid Ashear writes that words of Chizuk are so powerful. They can take a person who is down and lift him up, and literally give him life. They can change lives and give people hope. Most people don't have the opportunity to physically save a life, but we all have the ability to enable others to live their lives with peace of mind and happiness.

## **Words Can Bring Life**

Our words can accomplish this. Words can bring life. When Hashem gave life to Adam and blew a Neshamah into him, the Targum writes that it was that soul which gave Adam the ability to speak.

Speaking is a Divine characteristic that Hashem gave us, which can be used to do so much good. A few words of encouragement can go so far. Rav Moshe Tuvia

Lieff told a story about a boy named Shlomo who was diagnosed with cancer at the age of eight. He was not given too much hope. He battled the disease for years, and Baruch Hashem, he won. He eventually got married, and at the age of thirty, he was told that he was totally healed.

### **Celebrated with a Seudas Hoda'ah**

He made a Seudas Hoda'ah, a meal of gratitude, for his family and friends. At the Seudah, he got up to speak to thank Hashem publicly. He said, "I also need to thank my pediatric oncologist who is in the audience today, because unbeknownst to him, he played a major role in my recovery, and it was not his treatments or his medications.

"It was during a visit to his office at a time when my health was deteriorating, and my situation was very bleak. I overheard the doctor whispering to the nurse. He said, 'You see that boy, he is a strong boy. He is going to survive. He is going to live. I am telling you. He is a strong boy, and he is going to live!' Every time a situation seemed too difficult to handle, I remember the doctor's words, and I willed myself to survive!"

### **The Doctor's Startling Revelation**

Shlomo then sat down and the doctor, who was not scheduled to speak, asked if he could address the audience. He said, "I have to tell you the truth. The story is not exactly as Shlomo related. I remember that time in the office. However, I did not believe that Shlomo was going to survive.

"When Shlomo was leaving my office, another boy with a similar illness was entering. I told the nurse that that boy was strong and that he was going to live. Shlomo heard me and thought I was referring to him, and that is what gave him the will to fight!"

The words spoken by that doctor, although unintentional, as we know there are no coincidences, literally brought him life. Rav Ashear adds, "Everybody can give encouragement. It doesn't have to be in a speech given to a large audience. Just a few words to a friend, or even a stranger can make all the difference!"

Reprinted from the Parshas Balak 5782 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg's Torah U'Tefilah

# The Endangered Shidduch



A certain student of Rav Elazar Shach, zt”l, was asked about a bochur (yeshiva student) by the father of a prospective Shidduch. The two davened (prayed) in the same Minyan, and the father wanted an honest description of the young man.

The student gave a report full of praise for the Bochur, and the father, duly impressed, agreed that the young man meet his daughter. The two felt that they were right for each other, and they got engaged to be married.

## **Shocking Accusations Against the Chassan**

When the prospective Chasan went to his father-in-law’s house for Shabbos, some trouble began. During davening, a certain member of the Minyan approached the father-in-law to be and said with obvious disappointment, “You mean he is going to be your son-in-law? Whatever possessed you to take him?! Don’t you see that he lacks even the least bit of Yiras Shamayaim??”

Of course, these words made an awful impression on the father-in-law. The moment Shabbos ended, he called the young man over to admonish him for “hiding” his defective nature. Shockingly, the man wanted to break off the Shidduch due to the Lashon Hara he had heard.

The student, heartbroken, immediately went to Rav Shach to ask him how to fix the situation. When Rav Shach heard what had happened, he jumped out of his chair and suggested that they take a bus to the father-in-law’s house, and work to repair this problem immediately.

When the father-in-law heard a knock at his door and went to see who it was, he was astounded to see that it was none other than the Gadol HaDor, Rav Shach! The Rav said to him, “We were passing by the neighborhood, and this young man told me that you are the lucky man who will soon have such an exceptional Chasan for a son-in-law.

### **Had to Wish You a Mazel Tov**

“It would not be right to pass by your house without wishing you a Mazel Tov! You should know that your son-in-law has exceptional good Middos, and he is a Talmid Chacham. His every action is carefully thought out, and he Davens with profound Yiras Shamayim. You are truly lucky! Mazel Tov! Hashem should give you much Nachas!”

The father-in-law was very moved by Rav Shach’s sincere words, and with much Simchah, he allowed the Shidduch to continue!

*Reprinted from the Parshas Balak 5782 email of Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg’s Torah U’Tefilah*

# **The Rosh Hayeshiva And the Shepherd**

**By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser**

R’ Dovid Povarsky, *rosh yeshiva* of Ponevezh Yeshiva (1902-1999) would always come to yeshiva very early. In his later years he required regular assistance. He once asked his companion to come even earlier than usual. When the *gabbai* commented on this, R’ Dovid answered, “It is cloudy outside. If I don’t hurry and leave immediately, then you will tell me that I cannot go out because it’s raining.”

Many years earlier, Bnei Brak was an area with many fields and orchards where shepherds would herd their flocks. One beautiful day, when the great Gaon HaRav Shach was walking through the fields accompanied by his disciples, they happened to pass an elderly shepherd playing a pleasant tune on his flute in the cool breeze as he tended the goats grazing on the grass nearby.

From that day onward, R’ Shach would stop to inquire after the shepherd’s welfare. Everyone in Bnei Brak knew Rav Shach and was aware of

the *tzaddik's* holiness, and the lonely man was overjoyed and touched that so great an individual cared about his wellbeing.



One day Rav Shach did not see the elderly shepherd. When he asked around, he was told that the shepherd had died the night before. The *rosh yeshiva* was deeply pained and asked about the details of the *levaya*, but no one seemed to have any information.

Concerned that the shepherd was in fact a *mes mitzvah* (a dead person with no one to bury him), the *rosh yeshiva*, with great devotion and urgency, began making all the proper arrangements for the shepherd's proper burial.

Rav Povarsky then walked through the entire neighborhood asking people to participate in this important mitzvah. The Gaon's personal attention to detail and his commitment to giving the shepherd his final respects (*kavod acharon*) were a perfect illustration of zealousness to properly perform Hashem's commandments.

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