



Rav Pam: Lessons on Character Perspectives on Lifestyles #5 Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Rav Pam, the beloved rosh yeshiva of Torah V'daath, was renowned for his remarkable character, kindness, and meticulous observance of Jewish law. Streams of people would come to him for advice and his guidance was always carefully tailored to benefit each person. He was particular never to say a *kitrug* (condemning word) about any Jew. Whenever he would hear something negative he would be quick to find something meritorious. He would not speak about how things used to be in Europe. He felt it would be somewhat of an indictment of American yeshiva students and it would also give them hopes they might not be able to fulfill. Instead he would speak about the great contemporary leaders such as Rav Shisgal, Rav Moshe Feinstein son-in-law, to show that on the shores of America, greatness could also be achieved.

Chazal say, "*Al tiyhe birchat hediot kallah*

b'einacha,"-Don't let the blessing of a simple person seem insignificant. For one never knows the power of a blessing. Rav Pam would say, "*Al tiyhe birchat ohev kalah b'eineicha*,"- Don't let the blessing of someone who loves you be light in your eyes. He would advise people not to flaunt their wealth because the wheel can turn and situations can reverse themselves. He would tell them not to wear expensive clothing because it could harm them. Furthermore he would say, if you make a wedding that's extremely gaudy, other people will try to mimic you and will be forced to borrow money. If they can't repay, you'll be the cause for their stealing. Rav Pam also spoke against spending excess money on one's home. He felt it could be much better spent on Torah, charity, kind deeds, and sanctifying the name of Hashem. It presupposes that if you own something you can do what you want with it. But the true Jewish perspective is that we're granted trusteeship over money to spend within the guidelines of

the Torah.

Rav Pam said that the solution to keeping away from *lashon hara* (forbidden speech) is to not just learn the *halachot* (laws) but to deal with the cause. One who is careful in the *mitzvah* of *V'ahavta l'reiacha komocha*- loving one's fellow Jew will never come to say a bad word about another. Furthermore refining one's character is not such a great feat if you bear this *mitzvah* in mind. Rav Pam would decry the petty arguments of *mechutanim* (families of the bride and groom) over differing customs and tradition. He would say, "Look at what my children are complaining about." The most important thing is to give in to the other side. When Rav Pam was old and ill, he would still make an effort to attend his students' wedding. He said, "For me it's every night. For the groom and bride it's once in a lifetime." That was the perspective of Rav Pam, a giant in Torah and *middot*.