



Rav Pam: Lessons on Character #1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Rav Pam was a *tzaddik* who exemplified pure *middot*. Rav Pam clearly sensed the responsibility of klal Yisrael on his broad shoulders. In the summer when everyone was anxious to get away, he would say, "People need me; I cannot leave." And in fact so many people came to consult with him that his students found it difficult to talk to him. The yeshiva administration told Rav Pam that some students had volunteered to stand outside and prevent people from coming in. Rav Pam responded, "I cannot agree. People need me."

He had a special fondness for the writings of the Chafetz Chaim. His Mishna Berura was so worn from constant use, that it was buried with him. Like the Chafetz Chaim, Rav Pam would never speak evil of others. He would say that studying the laws of forbidden speech is merely treating the symptoms but not the disease. What one needs is a heart

filled with kindness. *Ahavat chesed*, desiring to help others, is the key to all good attributes.

Rav Pam would point out that if couples would see the good in each other there would be far less *shalom bayit* (marital discord) problems. Learning to give people the benefit of the doubt, and not judging or criticizing others, are critical steps in attaining character perfection.

Rav Pam once found a five dollar bill on the street. In those days five dollars was about equal to fifty dollars today. Clearly Rav Pam could have used the money but he donated it to charity. He couldn't bring himself to derive benefit from the loss of another person.

Rav Pam taught that a person must live up to the Torah's expectations of a ben Torah (Torah scholar), which are far above the level that society demands. A ben Torah must always

conduct himself with the highest degree of integrity, pleasantness, and kindness. If he does not, it is as if he testifies falsely about the Torah.

Before the yeshiva closed for intercession, Rav Pam would remind the boys to make sure to help out at home. He would admonish those going to summer camp not to make fun of the food. "There's a cook who works hard," he would say. He felt it was beneficial for a boy to be a camp counselor as a way of learning responsibility. Good leadership, like all things, requires preparation. Rav Pam's way of preparing meant learning how to interact with others in the most refined, pleasant way.

Parshat Vayechi: Evil Eye

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

In Parshat Vayechi, the verse states concerning Yosef, "A charming son is Yosef, a charming son to the eye." The sages teach us that Yosef and his descendants were *olei ayin* – above *ayin hara* (the evil eye). Yaakov blessed Yosef's children, "*V'yidgu la'rov*." Just as the sea covers the fish so that *ayin hara* doesn't affect them, you will be impervious to the evil eye.

The Maasei Rokem explains that a person is affected by *ayin hara* when another person exclaims in wonderment over what he has accomplished. This creates a reality separate from its source, which in turn causes Hashem to open up the books in heaven to determine if the person really deserves the good he received. However, if the person immediately attributes his gifts to Hashem, *ayin hara* cannot affect him.

Rav Naftali Ropshitzer taught that the whole world is really a shadow of what is above. Our task is to connect everything back to its root, Hashem, and to remember that everything we have is a gift from Him. With constant cognizance of His presence, we can ward off *ayin hara*.

The Massei Rokem notes that Yosef and his children were above *ayin hara* because Yosef had Hashem's name constantly on his lips. He told Paroah, "*Elokim ya'aneh et shalom Paro*." Hashem will respond to your dream. It is not my wisdom. I'm just an emissary. Yosef had the attribute of *bitul* (self-nullification), which evokes the image of fish covered by water. When a person looks at water from above, he only sees water, but no fish. Yosef attributed his successes to G-d, in a sense acting like a fish who is not seen.

Bilam wanted to harm the Jewish people with *ayin hara*. But he saw how they were encamped, how one tent didn't face the other, how each person knew their place and didn't need to look at his neighbor to see what he was missing. Then he was forced to bless them.

Ayin hara has the numerical value of 400. Esav came with 400 people to meet Yaakov. He wanted to destroy all the blessing Yaakov had with *ayin hara*. When he saw Yaakov with his family and possessions, he asked, "Whose are these? How did you deserve all this?" Yaakov answered, "*Asher chanan Elokim et avdecha*." Hashem gave it to me as a free gift.

He immediately attributed credit to the source and Esav could not harm him.

The *mishkan* stood in Shilo in the portion of Yosef for over 300 years. In the area of Shilo one was allowed to eat *kodshim kalim* (sacrifices with a lesser degree of sanctity) wherever one could see the *mishkan*. However, in Yerushalayim these sacrifices had to be within the walls. Rav Abahu explains, "The eye that didn't benefit from what didn't belong to him could now eat and benefit to the extent the eye could see."

Yehuda is blessed that he will have rulership until Shilo comes. He will have that which comes from Yosef, the ability to connect everything back to Hashem.

Rav Levenstein noted that our mission is to strengthen our connection to Hashem. One can do this by learning to always say, *baruch Hashem, bezrat Hashem* while thinking about G-d's help. This is living the life of Yosef.



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Netivot Olam I-Positive Punishment #15

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Hashem interacts with us in accordance with how we act. An awakening from below will affect what will come down from above. Hashem in essence never changes. Rather, His actions towards us changes in accordance with what we do and need. Accordingly, Hashem will sometimes punish us or cause us to suffer.

On an individual level, suffering can come in order to challenge us to grow. It is meant to help us become more transcendental. Suffering can also come as a punishment, as a way to purify us and help us connect to our souls.

On the collective level, suffering causes us to rise again stronger and greater. The Jewish people suffered terribly in Egypt but the Egyptian exile eventually led us to *matan Torah*. Similarly, the Jews went through a significant redefinition after the Babylonian exile.

Why is the parsha of Nitzavim, the parsha of the covenant, placed next to the parsha of the curses? On a collective and individual level we can never reach our full potential without suffering. The curses give us existence. When we suffer, we submit. *Yissurim* take a person out of his imagined reality by removing his attachment to the things that bring him down. When we are at a distance we can understand this, but when the pain of suffering extinguishes everything except the reality of the suffering, there is no recourse but silence. This is how Aharon reacted when he lost his sons. With historical perspective we can see that it was what the Jews needed, what Aharon needed, and what the sons needed. But at the time it was difficult to grasp.

Yissurim purify a person. All of the things that limit us and distance us from Hashem disappear. Our physicality and materialism take second stage and we become transcendental. Sin causes us to move towards that which is limiting. Suffering forces us to call out to Hashem. It moves us to a place where we can become pure. Egypt was called *galut hadibur*, the time when our speech, the ability to connect our inner selves to the outer reality of this world, was exiled. In Egypt, Hashem was distant from us because we distanced ourselves from him and we didn't have the words to reach out.

Pharaoh had three advisors. He asked them what to do with the Jews. One advisor Iyov, one of the advisors, kept silent. He was punished with suffering. The Brisker Rav explains that he deserved punishment because if a person doesn't cry out, it means it doesn't hurt him.

We've suffered so much both collectively and individually that we've become hardened. This was predicted to happen in Mashiach's time. Still we must at least try to discover the place within us where we can cry out.

There are two ways of living *olam habah* in this world. A wealthy person can be tested to see if he will uplift himself and that which he has by giving to the poor. The poor person is tested to see if he will face suffering with love. Iyov's friends comforted him by saying that his situation could have been worse. He could have been poor. A poor person lives with the constant consciousness of not having enough. The mentality of constant neediness is worse than a plague that negatively affects someone

in a specific way. Therefore, we are taught that a poor person who trusts Hashem is rewarded greatly. His children will receive *olam habah* – the future world. A person who has the mentality of abundance, who thinks, "I have, because whatever Hashem gives me is what I need to have," is never poor. When a person suffers real hunger no matter who he wants to be his body reminds him of his neediness and it's difficult to maintain that mentality. If he does succeed, he has moved into *olam habah*.

The worst poverty is poverty of the mind. Someone with knowledge of Hashem and the Torah is responsible to share it with others who don't have it. Otherwise, he will have to account for it the same way a rich man will have to answer for not sharing his money with the poor.

Hashem will save the rich person who helps the poor from the severe judgment of *gehinom*, as it says, "On the day of his evil, (the day of judgment) Hashem will rescue him." The poor person will get twice as much as the rich person. This applies to the ignorant person too. We learn this from Iyov. He suffered in this world and Hashem paid him back twice as much as he deserved. The more a person suffers the more his repayment will be.