



## Bringing Torah To Life #12 Helping Children Make The Right Choices

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Heller

In this class we will explore how to teach children the power of free choice. Very young children from ages three to six don't have real *bechira chofshit*. They are the prisoners of their upbringing, fears, instincts, and desire for love. Therefore, don't expect too much from them. Give them opportunities to make good choices and when they do, be sure to tell them how wonderful they are. Sometimes you will have to point out that they made a bad choice. They need to be aware that their choices have consequences and that this is a power that only people have. You can illustrate by saying, "This flower will be red whether you water it or not, because flowers can't make choices." If your child is sophisticated enough, you can explain this concept with animals too, "This dog is barking because he is a dog. He can't choose not to bark."

Children from ages six to ten can comprehend much more. Show them their options. Make it clear to them that all of their good choices will bring positive results, and other choices will bring other consequences. So when Yanky makes a loud *bracha* with *kavana*, tell him, "What an incredible *bracha*. I bet all the *malachim* in heaven answered amen. That was a good choice." You could tell Chani, "Remember yesterday, when you made a beautiful *bracha* on

the lollipop? That was a good choice. Maybe think about doing it again now."

The more you make your child aware that they have the choice to be good, the more empowered they'll feel and the less resentful they'll be towards you. Show your child that bad choices have consequences and that they have the power to fight against the consequences by making good choices and avoiding bad decisions. There's a huge difference, even for an adult, between being pressured or forced to make a good choice, and making the choice yourself of your own volition. At this age it is not a good idea to make your child your buddy, but you can solicit his opinion on small matters. Asking your ten year old, "What do you think I should do?" makes him realize that there are choices and consequences and that you are making the effort to choose the best option.

Teach children negotiation skills. Perfect negotiation is when both parties end up feeling that they got more or less what they wanted. These techniques are crucial for maintaining shalom in life. It comes with wanting the other person to be happy while at the same time seeing that there are choices. Many times even with negotiation there is a winner and a loser. In such a situation you can say, "This time we'll do it this way, and next time we'll do it that way."

If the child persists and says, "No I want it this way now," you should ask him why, and try to work out a compromise.

Tell children that they can choose how they want things to be. Tell them stories to drive this point home. For example, "Estie was really looking forward to the family picnic. Every day she would pack some more things into the hamper to take along. Finally when the great day arrived, it rained. What are her choices now?" Draw scenarios. "Estie can say, 'Hashem didn't think it was a picnic day today. Maybe it can be a dollhouse, cutout, or painting day.' Or Estie can mope around the house and complain, 'I don't want to do anything. I just want a picnic.' Which choice will make her happier?"

Teach your children to color in the outlines of life. Talk with them about the child who is willing to make choices and the child who chooses to ignore that other possibilities exist. Tell them that Hashem expects maximum *hishtadlut*, effort, from us, but the end results are always in His hands. If things don't turn out the way we want them, we should think of other options. This can be life transforming and will serve them well in the future.

## Achieving Balance: Class #8

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

### Question:

I constantly hear women asking how to keep inspired on Shabbat and Yom Tov when they have to meet the physical demands of marriage and a young family. I know so many single women, myself included, who would love to be married. We have ample free time to learn and daven but Yiddishkeit is built around the family. It is heartbreaking to be alone at these times. Even if I do get invited out, it's still not my own family no matter how nice the hosts are. I know we have to have *bitachon* and accept that this is what Hashem wants at this time. Can you offer any other words of inspiration or encouragement?

### Answer:

When someone complains about something you personally don't have, it's like a dagger in your heart. When a childless woman hears a

mother griping about her baby, or when a man who is unemployed listens to people complaining about the crowding on commuter trains, or when someone who is breaking his head over *gemara* and is just not getting it, hears people discussing the cons of an exclusive *yeshiva* or *kollel*, it's not easy.

However, the problem here is really *kinah*, emotional dishonesty. Nobody knows what their purpose is in life is and what the moment holds. Someone else's tools will not get you closer to your mission in life. If you're single and Divine Providence led you to live far away from your family, then accept this as Hashem's will and use the opportunity to develop yourself inwardly. Attaining a higher level of *bitachon* may be your entire purpose of living. Of course you can counter that your situation is unsatisfactory. Your feelings are completely natural, but call it

by its right name, which is *kinah*. Accept that life is a process and it takes a long time to get past this *midda*. In fact, many people never succeed. How do you begin? The *Ibn Ezra* tells a parable about a country yokel who went to the big city one day and caught sight of the princess during a parade. Would the yokel ever consider the princess his *bashert*? Of course not, because she lives in an entirely different world than he does. The *Ibn Ezra* says each person is a complete universe unto himself. No one else's world has anything to do with your world. Look at your own universe and see what it offers. Open your eyes to the courage, self sufficiency, and *deveikut* that you could potentially develop and realize that for the moment this indeed is where you should be going.

# Parshat Behalotcha: Personal Enlightenment

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

The parsha opens with the command to light the Menora, "*Behaalotcha et haneirot.*" *Behaloscha* means when you raise the lights. Rashi explains that the kohen was commanded to hold his fire to the wick until the flames of the Menora rose up. It can be interpreted to mean when you rise up to the Menora. There were stairs in front of the Menora upon which the kohen would stand and prepare the wicks. What is the significance of the stairs and why does the parsha write about preparing the wicks instead of lighting them?

The Be'er Yosef explains that stairs represent preparation before we can light the Menora. They also signify wisdom and Torah learning. Although the manager of a property may know the property better than its owner, he is still not the owner. Similarly, a person can have knowledge of Torah, but if he does not have proper *middot*, he does not have the qualities necessary to own Torah.

The three steps of the Menora symbolize three critical *middot* that we need to develop in ourselves. The mishna in Avot says, "One who has a good eye, a humble temperament, and a lowly spirit is a disciple of Avraham." The Be'er Yosef notes, based on the Shelah, that these three *middot* parallel the three evil traits that take a person out of this world: jealousy, lust, and honor. Aharon Hakohen embodied the three good *middot*. When Moshe attained the leadership position that he was in line for, he was happy in his heart, and displayed no jealousy. He humbled himself

to make peace between people. A lowly spirit refers to curbing desire. When the anointing oil was poured on Aharon, he did not benefit from it but rather understood that his position was given to him by Hashem. So on a symbolic level, when the kohen ascended the steps of the menora, he was teaching us that if one wants to attain Torah and *chochma* one must first work on becoming a *baal middot*.

We can also find these three models in the parsha. The first group of *zekeinim* (elders) was decimated because of *gaava*. When they saw a vision of Hashem they turned it into an egotistical experience and utilized it for self aggrandizement. In contrast, the new second group of *zekeinim* was the former Jewish taskmasters in Egypt who refused to beat their fellow Jews and instead took the beatings upon themselves. Greatness stems from feeling the pain of others, and they personified the *nefesh shefeila*, humble spirit. Therefore they merited that the Divine spirit rested upon them.

*Ayin yafah* is the converse of envy. Eldad and Meidad excelled in this *midda*. Hashem commanded seventy two elders to come to the Mishkan. A lottery would determine which of them would join the new group of seventy *zekeinim*. Eldad and Meidad decided to step out on their own to save their fellow counterparts from humiliation. Hashem rewarded them with prophecy in the camp, while the other *zekeinim* only received prophecy near the Mishkan.

How does one reach this level of taking

pleasure in other person's happiness and rejoicing in their success? Rabbi Twersky explains that just as Hashem is absolute unity, all *neshamot* are one. We are separate only because we are physical. To the extent that we give priority to the spiritual aspect of our being, we become one with others.

Moshe Rabbeinu represents the *ruach nemucha*. Most people view themselves as an entity, but if they would come in contact with Hashem as Moshe did, they would realize that they were nothing compared to the enormity and immenseness of their Creator. *Gaava* is distorted self perception where a person craves honor to assure himself that he is a worthwhile person. This desire can never be fulfilled. A person must realize that he possesses a soul that is a vehicle of holiness. Humility says, I am great but I can become even greater. *Gaava* says, this is what I've accomplished. I am finished.

The three steps of the menora represent the three major steps in life. The candles symbolize the soul of man. Their preparation corresponds to working on ourselves to become spiritual beings. Our challenge is to stop for a moment and look at ourselves as that candle. Life is about working on our *middot*. We have to ask ourselves, are we working on preparing the candles, are we advancing up the three steps of having a lowly spirit, running away from honor, and being sensitive to others? If indeed we are, than we are accomplishing what Hashem meant us to achieve when he placed us on this earth.

## Class Spotlight: Meaningful Prayer #2 Prayers of Our Forefathers

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Herschel Reichman

*Meaningful Prayer is an exciting new series of short classes by Rabbi Herschel Reichman on the meaning and depth of the Shemoneh Esrai prayer. With extra focus on the simple translation of the words, as well as the intent one should have while praying, this course is sure to transform your tefila experience.*

Prayer dates back to time immemorial. If we examine the lives of the avot, we find many instances where they davened to Hashem. Avraham begged Hashem to save Sedom, Yitzchak and Rivkah prayed for children, and Yaakov asked Hashem to return him to Eretz Yisrael safe and sound. Although the three prayers we know today were only formally instituted as a rabbinic commandment during the Second Temple era, the custom is ancient and stems from our forefathers.

When we wake up in the morning we should be overwhelmed by the amount of *chesed* Hashem put into our world. Weather, gravity, botany, and the human

body are all wonders of His creation. It is fitting, therefore, that Avraham, the pillar of *chesed*, instituted Shachrit, the morning prayer.

Yitzchak represents the concept of *kviut*, unwavering commitment to Hashem. He is the pillar of *avoda* service. He instituted Mincha, the afternoon prayer, to teach us that although we may be harried and involved in our everyday affairs during the afternoon, we need to step back and focus on our Creator.

The prayer of Yaakov is in times of distress. He communed with Hashem on his perilous journey to Lavan and again when he was about to face Esav, who wanted to kill him.

The darkness of night evokes feelings of fright. Yaakov, who instituted Maariv, the evening prayer, teaches us to turn to Hashem in our hour of need.

In a sense, Avraham and Yaakov represent two opposite extremes while Yitzchak is in the middle. Avraham teaches us to thank Hashem when life is full of bountiful goodness and *chesed*, Yaakov exhorts us to pray when we are drowning in pain and suffering, and Yitzchak tells us that no matter what the situation is, whether good or bad, we must always remain dedicated and loyal to Hashem.