

The Weekly Farbrenge


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 EDITOR - RABBI SHIMON HELLINGER

SINGING PRAISE (II)

THE WAY TO PRAISE

When one makes a *bracha*, he should contemplate what he is doing: he is thanking *HaShem* for the food or the *mitzvos* that He has given us. A *bracha* should not be recited out of habit. In fact *HaShem* sent Yeshayahu HaNavi to reprimand the Yidden who were making *brachos* for washing their hands or before eating, without thinking of *HaShem*. *HaShem* even withheld wisdom from them.

There was once a man who appeared in a dream to one of his relatives, several years after his passing. The relative asked him, "How are you doing in the other world?" The deceased replied, "Every day I am judged for not having been careful to think about *HaShem* when making *brachos*," and he added that though many years had passed, he was still being cleansed of this fault.

(ס' חסידים אות מ"ו)

When a person says *brachos* properly, with *kavana* and *simcha*, he draws upon himself *HaShem's* kindness. Also, *brachos* should be recited audibly and carefully, because *hakol meorer es hakavana* – voicing words arouses one's devout concentration.

(ראשית חכמה, של"ה, ס' החינוך מצוה תל)

Reb Chaim Vital writes: "My Rebbe, the AriZal, warned me to be very careful about having *kavana* when reciting *brachos*, for doing so refines a person, enabling him to become a vessel for *kedusha*, and it is a major step towards *Ruach HaKodesh*."

(כף החיים ס' קצ"א סק"ו)

HEARTFELT PRAISE

Throughout his entire lifetime, whenever the esteemed chossid Reb Dovid Tzvi Chein (better known as the Radatz) would make a *bracha* over food or drink, he would first place his right hand over his forehead, as people do when they are deep in thought, and only then recite the *bracha*.

The Frierdiker Rebbe related, "When I was a little boy, I asked him the reason for this, and he told me that when he was twelve years old, his father Reb Peretz brought him to Lubavitch to see the *Tzemach Tzedek*. When he went into the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe showed him closeness and affection, and

amongst other things told him, "Listen to me. It's time to stop behaving like a child. When you're about to make a *bracha* over food or drink, and have to say 'Boruch Ata', remember to Whom you are going to say 'Boruch Ata'."

(ס' ש"ש תש"ג ע' 143)

In days gone by, people regarded the very letters of the Torah with respect. This stemmed from their *yiras Shamayim*, which was clearly apparent even among ordinary, unlettered Yidden. When a *bracha* had to be said, they would first wash their hands, or at least clean them with grass or whatever.

Regarding this the Frierdiker Rebbe related: "One day, when I was playing outdoors as a little boy and making a toy ship, I overheard a gardener reciting a *bracha* - *Shehakol*, and from the way he said it, I began to tremble. Today, however, people don't hear the *brachos* they are saying, and the *brachos* don't hear them."

(ס' ש"ש תש"ג ע' 119)

CONSIDER

What is the significance of the general *kavana* of all *brachos* and the unique *kavana* in each *bracha* type?

The Rebbe once explained that when one recites the one hundred daily *brachos*, the emphasis should be on their essence – bringing one to fear, love and remember *HaShem*. When the hundred *brachos* are recited properly, these feelings permeate the entire day.

(ס' ש"ש תש"א ע' 134)

UNDERSTANDING THE BRACHA

The Alter Rebbe writes:

One should be most meticulous about having the proper *kavana* when saying *brachos* and recognizing their basic idea – that he is *bensching HaShem*. One should also keep in mind the subject of his present

bracha, and not think about anything else.

When one says the Name of *HaShem*, he must concentrate on the meaning of the four letters ה-ו-ה-י – that He is the Master of everything and that He always existed, exists in the present, and will always exist. So, too, the Name אלקים reminds him that *HaShem* is all-powerful, above and below.

It is forbidden to do anything while saying a *bracha*, for it would then appear that one is careless and is not regarding it as important. It follows that even an activity which does not require concentration is also prohibited.

(סדר ברכת הנהנין פ"ט ה"ג, שו"ע"ר סי' ה', ס"י קפ"ג סי"ד)

Many *brachos* begin with the words, *Baruch Ata HaShem Elokeinu Melech haolam*. As is explained in *Chassidus*, the very word *beracha* signifies that something is being drawn down from above. The next word, *Ata*, means that that spiritual energy is being drawn down from the essence of *HaShem*, through the successive levels of *Seder Hishtalshelus*. The term *Elokeinu* refers to the sustenance that comes down to the Yidden, and *Melech haolam* refers to the sustenance that then comes down to the rest of the world.

(תו"א בראשיתו א, ד"ה בלילה ההוא ת"ש)

The Alter Rebbe held a number of debates with the *geonim* of Lithuania over the validity of *Chassidus*. On these occasions he would discuss concepts in *halacha* (generally the halachos of *Birkas HaNehenin*), and would conclude with a *ruchniyusdike* lesson.

At the second debate, which took place in Minsk, everyone recognized his outstanding *geonus*, and it deeply impacted the Lithuanian *talmidei chachomim*. At the conclusion of that debate, he taught a lesson from the *Mishna*: "Whoever drinks water out of thirst should say *shehakol niyah bidevaro*." He explained that water symbolizes Torah, and the test of whether one is truly learning Torah properly is whether he recognizes that everything (*shehakol*) is being created by the word of *HaShem* (*niyah bidevaro*). Among those present were many diligent students, *masmidim* who would learn for eighteen to twenty-one hours every day. When they heard this explanation, scores of them were attracted to becoming disciples of the Alter Rebbe.

(ס' ש"ש תש"ד ע' 139)

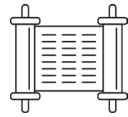

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HOLY IMAGES

Is it acceptable for a teacher to hatch butterflies in the classroom?

Seeing holy images has a positive effect on a person, while negative images have the opposite effect. Eyesight connects a person with the subject being viewed, and is so powerful that an ostrich can hatch its eggs just by looking at them.¹

Chazal list certain things at which one should not gaze, such as the face of an evil person or someone who is angry. One should not look at the moon, except for a moment before Kiddush Levana, nor at a rainbow, except when reciting the *bracha*, for these harm the eyes. Some sources hold that these restrictions apply only to concentrated staring.²

The Gemara relates how things that a woman looks at could have an effect on her offspring.³ Shulchan Aruch mentions the scrupulousness of avoiding the sight of impure animals (e.g. dog or donkey) at certain auspicious times.⁴

The Rebbe spoke of the praiseworthy practice to surround a child with images of *kedusha* and Yiddishkeit, and avoiding even non-kosher animals and weaponry. This is especially important for children, who are so impressionable, and what they see has a life-long effect on them. The Rebbe encouraged everyone to adopt this practice, and added that toys given to an infant should only be kosher animals, and even pictures drawn should be completely holy.⁵

Whenever it comes to teaching Torah, one can and should use non-kosher animals as well if that is the subject matter being discussed. Likewise, taking children to the zoo is also allowed and recommended, and a teacher can bring non-kosher animals and insects to the classroom, since this helps teach the children about the wonders of Hashem's creation. Similarly, many shuls have pictures of a lion to represent the lesson we learn from it in our service of Hashem, i.e., to be strong like a lion.⁶

The Rebbe connected this heightened level of *kedusha* with preparing for the imminent Geula, when all impurity will be removed from the world.

1. ראה ארז"ל ס' הליקוטים פ' קדושים. קב הישר פ"ב.
2. מגילה כח ע"א. מגן אברהם רכ"ה סק"כ. שו"ע או"ח רכ"ט ס"א.
3. ראה ברכות כ ע"א, וראה שערי דורא סוף הל' גדה ס"ג (וראה שם מהמדרש על ריב"א כה"ג).
4. רמ"א יו"ד סו"ס קצ"ח.
5. ליקו"ט תשל"ח ח"ב ע' 140.
6. וועדיעות תשמ"ז ח"ב ע' 647.
7. ראה שלחן מנחם ע"כ הל' ע' 4.

לע"נ מרת ציפא אסתר בת ר' שלום דובער ע"ה

Our Heroes



R. AHARON BELINITCHER

R. Aharon Lifshitz, was the rov of Belinitch, a town in the Mogilev region in Belarus. Originally a chossid of Harav Aharon of Strashele, after the Stashele's passing he became a chossid of the Viledniker Rebbe, Harav Yisrael Dov Ber, and finally a chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek. A great *talmid chacham* and strong personality, R. Aharon had a good relationship with the Russian authorities and worked closely with the Tzemach Tzedek on communal affairs. He was one of the senior Chassidim that the Tzemach Tzedek sent *yungeleit* to learn from.

Around 5602, "*chappers*" began once again snatching young children for the Czar's army. R. Aharon, then a *yungerman*, was sent by the Tzemach Tzedek to instruct all communities in the Mogilev and Vitebsk region – the majority of which were led by chassidim – to remove the "*chappers*" from their community and excommunicate them. Yisroel Yehuda the *chapper* from Bichov informed the Vitebsk governor, and this prompted the Tzemach Tzedek being summoned to Petersburg in 5703, under the guise of a Rabbinic conference.

(התמים חוב' ר' ע' ט)

The Tzemach Tzedek would send groups of *bochurim* or *yungeleit* to various chassidim – such as R. Aizik Homiler and R. Aharon Belinitcher – for guidance (*shimush chachomim*) and for the study of Niglah. Each chossid had a different style of learning and the Tzemach Tzedek would decide who to send where. The

Tzemach Tzedek said about R. Aharon, "He is a master of *psak*, a *lamdan*, and a wise person."

(רשימת היזמן ע' רסב)

The winter of 5619 was particularly cold and heavy, and unable to personally make the trip to Petersburg, the Tzemach Tzedek sent R. Aharon to address a communal matter. R. Aharon was a decisive and courageous *bar daas* who knew how to deal with government officials.

Before he set out, the Tzemach Tzedek instructed him that if he has a dilemma, he should think about it deeply, make a decision, and stick to it. "When I heard this," recalled the Rebbe Maharash, who served as his father's secretary for communal matters, "I thought that he needs to be watched to make the right decisions."

"A little while later, I was learning with my father, when he suddenly said, 'It's a *rachmonus* on R. Aharon who's in a dilemma and doesn't know what to do.' I was surprised since R. Aharon's letter had no indication of a dilemma. But then my father said, 'Aharon is a *bar daas*; he is sticking to his decision very well.' Then I understood that when my father told him to follow his understanding, he meant that R. Aharon will intuitively concur with his – the Tzemach Tzedek's – understanding."

(The Rebbe would mention this story as an illustration of the *nesinas koach* that the Rebbe gives his shluchim to make the right decisions.)

(סה"ש תרצ"ו חדש ע' 153, תר"מ תשמ"ח ח"ב ע' 211)

A Moment with The Rebbe



CHILDREN FIRST

At Nshei Chabad conventions, in public letters, and in private communications, the Rebbe encouraged women to become involved in outreach activities. At the same time, the Rebbe emphasized the woman's primary role as the homemaker and chief educator of her children.

In a conversation with Mr. Peter Kalms of London, the Rebbe discouraged him from getting the local Lubavitch woman more involved in communal work, since they were mothers to young children, therefore "it would be more suitable for them to be active in the home rather than outside."

Mrs. Malka Katz, veteran *shlucha* to New Haven, Connecticut, was once approached by members of the local community with a request that she undertake a new project. She already had many commitments, as well as a house full of children, and couldn't decide whether to take it on.

Mrs. Katz shared her deliberations with the Rebbe, and received a clear response:

"*Vos vet zain mit di kinder* – What will be with the children?"

(Derher Elul 5777; Compass Magazine Issue 18)