

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS  
MISHPATIM

# בשבת

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT  
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS  
RABBI AVICHAÏ BENSOUSSAN



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

## ALL ABOUT THE STRUGGLE

**P**arshas *Mishpatim* is full of laws, guidance, and wisdom. Of the many *mitzvos* therein, we find a specific commandment to help one's enemy if they are struggling with an overburdened pack animal.<sup>1</sup> The Gemara<sup>2</sup> elaborates that if one is faced with a choice — either helping a dear friend with an overburdened animal, or helping an enemy with loading up a beast of burden, one should help one's enemy, in order to overcome one's bad *middos*.

But what if causing pain to an animal is a Torah prohibition? Shouldn't one, then, help the overburdened animal? To this, the Gemara specifically states that it is still more important to help the animal of one's enemy, in order to overcome one's bad *middos*.

Reb Aharon Kotler<sup>3</sup> (1892–1962) makes a very deep and profound point based on this Gemara. He states that one might be tempted to explain that working on one's *middos* 'wins' as opposed to adhering to a specific Torah prohibition is because of the future, that is, by changing one's *middos*, one will be able to more properly keep the Torah in the future.

He rejects this out of hand, as we would not allow one to negate a commandment for a possible positive outcome. Rather, the charge to grow in one's *middos* must be a Torah commandment itself — and important enough that it will trump other *mitzvos*.

While it goes without saying that a person cannot willy-nilly ignore Hashem's Torah for the sake of 'personal growth,' we find in this seemingly simple verse a very deep concept. Working on oneself is not just for the future growth, but for the here-and-now. It is a specific and powerful *mitzvah* in and of itself.

Armed with this knowledge, we can reinvigorate ourselves in our quest to become *ovdei Hashem*. There are times one may feel down — I've worked so hard, and for so long, and I haven't changed! Yes, it is indeed frustrating. But keep your chin up — the struggle itself, the attempts towards growth are themselves a profound way of serving Hashem.

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is not just for the  
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### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Growth is important, and learning from a *mussar sefer* is an excellent way to grow. What is the best practice in order to gain the most from learning from a *mussar sefer*?

Here are a couple of ideas.<sup>1</sup>

1. Make a commitment to a specific time when one will learn *mussar*. An even better idea would be to tie it to an event — right before bed, immediately after *Shacharis*, and the like.

2. Have a quick review of what you learned the day before.

3. Keep to the same *sefer*, don't jump from one to the next, or even from one topic to another.

4. First read that day's segment like you are learning Gemara. These words were written by *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*!

5. Learn the words again, but this time with feeling, getting into the spirit of the words.

6. If a particular sentence or paragraph strikes you, it is worthwhile to review that segment multiple times.

7. Lastly, if there is a small practical thing you can do based on what you learned, try to see if you can do it.

<sup>1</sup> Based on *Alei Shur*, Vol II, pg. 175

<sup>1</sup> *Shemos* 23:5

<sup>2</sup> *Bava Metzia* 32b

<sup>3</sup> *Mishnas Reb Aharon Al HaTorah*, pg. 131

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**It's so important for us to  
strengthen our commitment to  
studying Mussar, for Mussar is Torah!  
It's the distilled and specialized "Torah  
sugya" of each and every middah.**

- *Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Shmuel  
Berenbaum zt"l, Bekor'ei Shemo - Shemos  
pg.98*

# APOLOGY ACCEPTED

"Have a good night," Shmuel\* whispered, as he passed Chananya in the dorm hallway. Chananya was in his pajamas, sitting on the floor, with a *siddur* open in front of him. It wasn't uncommon to see someone sitting on the floor outside their room like this. The lights in one's dorm room were off, and if one wanted to say *krias shema al hamita*, the *tefillah* said before retiring for the night, they had to go out to the hallway. And there were no chairs in the hallway, thus, sitting on the floor.

Shmuel headed to the washroom, where he brushed his teeth. Then he showered, got into his pajamas, and headed back to his room. As he neared his room, there was Chananya, sitting in the same position as he was almost a half-hour ago!

"Hey, Chananya, did you fall asleep?" Shmuel quipped.

Chananya looked up, and Shmuel wasn't sure if he saw a tear in the corner of Chananya's eye. "Everything ok?" Shmuel asked his friend.

Chananya nodded, a thoughtful expression on his face. "Yes, thanks, I'm just... thinking."

Now Shmuel was intrigued. "Mind if I join you?" Shmuel said, and sat down without waiting for a response. "Is there something you want to talk about?"

Again Chananya looked thoughtful, then sighed. "Sure. I'll tell you what's going on, maybe you can help. Earlier today, someone said something that really hurt my feelings. I don't think they meant it as much as it hurt me, but either way, it really cut deep.

"Anyway, here I am, about to say *krias shema al hamita*, and the first part is this paragraph here, where I tell Hashem that I forgive all those who have hurt me. And, well, I'm having a hard time!"

"So skip it! What's the big deal?" asked Shmuel.

Chananya looked incredulous. "But I want to forgive him! I don't want to hold on to a grudge — and that's why I'm sitting here. I'm working through the interaction, so when I say these words, they are truly genuine."

Shmuel smiled. This was very like Chananya, indeed. Chananya was a special person, who went above and beyond. "Chananya, you're something else. I wish I can help you, but I'll tell you, you certainly taught me something."

**"But I want to forgive him! I don't want to hold on to a grudge — and that's why I'm sitting here."**

*\*Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The purpose of life is to grow in our *middos*.<sup>1</sup>
- Learning *mussar* when one is young is essential, even if they don't feel life's challenges at that point.<sup>2</sup>
- The more one learns *mussar*, the greater their abilities will be when learning Gemara.<sup>3</sup>

1 *Gr"a* on *Mishlei* 4:13

2 *Chochmos Shlomo*, R' Shlomo Feiga, pg. 125

3 *Tenuas Hamussar*, Vol II, pg. 218