

בשבת

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NO SAFE NEEDED FOR MITZVOS

Sandwiched between the laws of the *nazir* and the final consecration of the *Mishkan*, we find perhaps some of the most well-known *pesukim* in the entire *Chumash*. These are the “Priestly Blessings,” the three *pesukim* that lay out what *Kohanim* should say when they *bentch Klal Yisrael*. These are also the words parents use when they bless their children on Friday night; “May Hashem bless you and watch over you. May Hashem illuminate His countenance towards you and be gracious to you. May Hashem lift His countenance to you and establish peace for you.”¹

What is the nature of this *brachah*? The Torah Temimah² (R’ Baruch Epstein, 1860–1941) quotes multiple sources who explain that the first verse is in connection to material wealth, and the second is in reference to spiritual abundance. Effectively, the blessing is that Hashem should bless his people with wealth, spirituality, and peace.

Why does the blessing regarding material wealth end with, “And [Hashem] should watch over you,” while the one about spirituality does not?

This can be answered with a short story.³ A *talmid chochom* was once on a boat with other merchants. Each merchant boasted about their wares, but laughed when the sage stated that his wares were more valuable. As they travelled, though, a storm tossed the ship about, and all the merchants were forced to throw their merchandise overboard. The only one unaffected was the *talmid chochom*.

Now we can understand the *brachah* — when it comes to the material, we need two blessings, one for the prosperity itself, and one to preserve it.⁴ When it comes to the spiritual, we only need to ask for it, it needs no additional safeguards.

A person may feel that they are ‘in-between,’ that is, that since they’ve done both *mitzvos* and *aveiros*, they are in no-man’s land. This couldn’t be further from the truth. When a person engages in *mitzvos* or Torah, no one can take that away. The Torah we learn, the *mitzvos* and *chessed* we do, is eternal. We benefit from the personal growth in this world, and we are rewarded for doing these actions in the next.

1 *Bamidbar* 6:24-26

2 *ibid*.

3 *Medrash Tanchuma, Terumah* 2

4 *Rashi on Bamidbar* 6:24, s.v. וישמרך

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

A common misperception is that our spiritual accomplishments might be ‘balanced out’ by our failings. We sometimes put in great effort to attain great heights, and then fall back down again. What was it worth?

This, however, is not the way of Hashem. Every *mitzvah*, every word of Torah, every spiritual action is recorded, stored away, and will be compensated when the time comes.¹

When we internalize this idea, it can galvanize us to serve Hashem with the best of our ability, and simultaneously inspire us when we may feel down after a particularly difficult challenge.

How do we internalize this? One idea is to use the power of imagination.² Close your eyes, and imagine every good deed going into a treasure chest, which is then closed and locked. Then imagine *aveiros* as mud, splattering the outside of the chest. Yes, it will take work to remove the mud, but the *mitzvos* inside will be ready for us, pristine as ever.

Doing this exercise will help concretize the idea that our *mitzvos* and Torah are ours forever.

1 *Mesillas Yesharim* Chap. 4

2 *Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 2

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The fact is, that everyone must study Mussar. Even simplistic Mussar study stirs our hearts, while we are guaranteed to access even more profound inspiration and clarity by studying Mussar in a reflective setting, with a heartfelt tune.
- Telzer Rov, R’ Yosef Leib Bloch zt”l, *Shiurei Da’as* vol. 2 pg.199

AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER

The well-known speaker and *kiruv* personality, Rabbi Chezky Levi*, would often repeat an amusing story with a clear lesson.

When Rabbi Levi was in *yeshiva* in Eretz Yisrael, he was known as a clear and deep thinker, an astounding *masmid*, and an exceptional person of character. Thus, it came as no shock that many families sought him as a son-in-law.

At the time he was more focused on his learning, but a particular young lady's name, Tovah Cohen, came up. She came from a prestigious family, but more importantly, she had a sterling reputation of a great *baalas middos*, a sensitive person with a clear understanding of our purpose in life. Everything appeared wonderful; there was only one slight problem. She only spoke Hebrew, he only spoke English. Nevertheless, despite the language barrier, Rabbi Levi figured he'll see how it goes, with both of them speaking in broken English and Hebrew.

The first time they met, they made small talk as best as they could. At one point, Rabbi Levi asked, "What is it that you want out of life?" Without hesitation, Tovah responded, "להיות מאושר" - "to be happy."

Rabbi Levi was beside himself. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. Confusion set in; was this the young lady that everyone said had her head on straight, was a deep thinker, and was focused on *avodas Hashem*? Nevertheless, he pleasantly continued the conversation, and headed back to the *yeshiva* dorm once the evening was over.

Walking in to the *yeshiva*, he ran into a *rebbe* of his who was on the way out. Rabbi Simanowitz immediately noticed something was wrong, as Chezky Levi did not have his regular beaming smile on his face. Rabbi Simanowitz stood in Chezky's way. "Chezky, is everything alright?"

Chezky looked up. "No, actually! Rabbi, you know who I just went out with, as you were instrumental in putting this together. But there must have been some sort of mistake! She's definitely is not what I'm looking for, and I'm sure she's not looking for someone like me! I asked her what she wants in life, and she stated, 'to be rich!'"

Rabbi Simanowitz furrowed his brow. "Are you sure? That certainly doesn't sound like her. What exactly did she say?"

"Yes, I'm sure. The exact words were, 'להיות מעושר.'" Rabbi Simanowitz thought for half a second, and then, to Chezky Levi's absolute surprise, burst into laughter. "Chezky, I think you might have been mistaken. *Lehiyot M'Ushar* spelled with an *ayin* may mean 'to be rich.' But spell it with an *aleph*, and it means, 'to be happy.'"

"Oh. Wow. That does indeed mean something different! Just one small change, and the difference is as grand as a life focused on the material, or on the spiritual."

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

DID YOU KNOW?

- There are different ways to understand the spiritual blessing of the second *passuk*. The *Seforno* explains the spiritual blessing is that one will see the beauty of Hashem's Torah and ways, even after becoming wealthy.¹
- The *Ha'amek Davar* explains the spiritual blessing as referring to the fact that everyone will recognize that your success comes from Hashem, thus creating a *Kiddush Hashem*. Additionally, your *tefillos* will be answered, even prayers said for others.²

1 *Seforno Bamidbar* 6:25 s.v. יאר

2 *Ha'amek Davar ibid.*

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