



THINKING about ME.org

AN 18 YEAR OLD SHAWARMA

Coaching yeshiva students is my life's passion. Usually, students fall out of "ben Torah performance" because of two factors: lack of academic achievement and lack of social blending. If one of these two is still in force, the academic or social factor, then the boy is somehow able to stay afloat. This being the case, I have invested a lot of time learning about social acceptance. And there are two types of students. Those who, when they come, people say to themselves, Wow! Baruch Hashem, he came! And those who, when they leave, people say, Wow! Baruch Hashem, he left! What is the difference between the two?

So many coaching sessions boil down to the question, "How do I get the guys to like me?". Well, ancient Jewish wisdom teaches that if you want to be honored, honor others. This is the secret to being liked. Give, don't take. This is such a pivotal thought. It is so simple that too often, we tend to forget it. Why?

The reason seems to be, because many times we focus on giving, but with ulterior motives. When Lavan heard what Rivka said about Eliezer, when he saw her jewelry, וירץ לבן אל האיש החוצה אל העין, *Lavan went running outside towards the man, to the spring.* Why does it say, העין, the spring, and not באר *the well*, mentioned earlier (passuk 11)? The reason is because the word עין also means eye. All of Lavan's efforts to make room at home for Eliezer were for the sake of finding a way, looking how to get money from him. (Lekah Tov) His name was לבן, white, because after the meal any

guest that ate by him, Lavan would ask afterwards for payment, and make the guest's face turn white. At his own daughter's wedding, he did not return the coats to his guests, until they paid for their portion. (Hemdat Hayamim)

If you want to get people to like you, you need to have a giving mindset, no strings attached. If you are approaching a situation with another person, or persons, and you come looking to receive attention, affection, appreciation, or any other benefit, even if it is down the road, then you fall under the category of a taker; and if you abuse your ability and/or right to take, people get sick of you. Allow me to mention two people that I love very much, until today, and everyone I know that knows them, loves them. And this story will tell you why.

I remember, 18 years ago, when I first came to Mikdash Melech in Bayit Vegan, a few days before the z'man started, Rabbi Rafael Ashkenazi, (then nicknamed Ryan Ash) greeted me in the empty building, right when I came in from the airport. He greeted me with a smile, and before I could say "Who...", he took my two heavy suitcases up three flights to the room he thought was mine. When I finally caught up to him, I told him, no, I was told that I am not in that shiur. I was told my Rebbi will be Rabbi Lamet. He said, "Wow! Chashuv!" And without blinking an eye, took my two suitcases down two flights, to that part of the dorm. Then, Rabbi "Gil" Attar saw me, and said, within the first minute of meeting me, "Can I have the honor of taking you out and buying you your very first



shawarma? You can't turn down such an offer; it's on the house!" I can never forget the acts of kindness they both did for me. It's already eighteen years later, and the memory is so fresh in my mind. There is so much chessed we can do, if we just get into that mindset. Become a giver. It is not an action, it is a mindset. You either have it, or you don't. If you don't, it takes time and effort to acquire it.

Some people have the feeling that they are being used. Of worrying that if they focus on how to give in their relationships, they will not get what they need. This is where Emunah kicks in. If you have Emunah, if you know that Hashem is going to provide whatever you need, that Hashem gives you attention, appreciation, and affection, financial aid, honor and help, and if you understand that you do not need to take from the other person in the relationship, you will find favor in their eyes, and you will be perceived as a giver. Because if you believe you have everything you need, and trust that Hashem is taking care of you, you are not worried about giving without getting. People who are loved by all are givers. Of course, we all need to take from some people, some time in our life. But the focus is always on being the one who is ready to give, not to be the one who is looking to take. So the first issue that I work on in social performance is the desire to contribute, to give. The more your mindset is one of giving, the more people will be drawn to you. You will not become well-liked by the people in your life just because you "exist". You will become liked because you have something to offer in the relationship.

The Orchot Tzaddikim lists what you need, in order to be appreciated by people. And the main focus of all the list is to help others as much as you can, with your soul and your money. This includes, 1. Lending (safely) 2. Giving presents (even to the rich) 3. Helping 4. Forgiving 5. Behaving with honesty 6. Giving of your time, patience and/or empathy 7. Not being a taker 8. Speaking calmly 9. Not revenging your disgrace, or mistakes of others 10. Being responsible for others 11. Not expecting

others to be responsible for you 12. Not being argumentative. 13. Greeting people with a pleasant face, showing that you are happy to see them 14. Caring and sincerely asking others how they are doing 15. Offering consolation to others for their frustrations and fears 16. Keeping confidential matters to yourself 17. Not speaking badly about others 18. Judging favorably 19. Not being haughty, and 20. Do whatever you do, with intention of serving G-d. (Orchot Tzaddikim; Ahava; ובאיזה דרך)

I have not met anyone who keeps all these 20 and still feels that he/she is not appreciated, loved, or respected. No one really cares for you because you have money, good looks, or strength. They might want your money, looks or strength, but they do not care for you because of what you have. People care for you if you are a giver.

When Eliezer was searching for the most suitable mate for his master's son, it made no impression on him that Rivka was the best-looking girl "on the market". והנערה (ה) טבת מראה מאד. He did not care that she did not need to bend down in order to draw water. All he cared about was that she was a giver. Even Yitzhak was happy with Rivka only when he saw that she had the giving character of his mother, Sarah. And that was despite all the miracles that Eliezer said happened on the way.

The Seforno points to an interesting question. Why did Eliezer wait for Rivka to finish giving all the water in the bucket to the camel, before giving her the jewelry and making the proposal? Once Rivka offered to give water to both Eliezer and all of his camels, didn't she fit the bill? A match made by Heaven? What was Eliezer waiting for?

The Seforno answers, he wanted to see if Rivka would ask for any sort of payment for her good deeds. He wanted to see if, perhaps, she was looking for a compliment. But after finishing, Rivka turned around and started out on her way home. That was when Eliezer went running after her!! When she was a total giver, without expecting anything in return!



SARAH'S RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

State of mind is probably the most crucial element for peak performance in all life areas. In business, playing sports, and wherever else performance makes a difference, state of mind can be "the make it or break it" factor. Especially in serving G-d, state of mind is a key component. *Yehuda Ben Temah said, be brazen like a leopard, light like an eagle, swift like a deer, and mighty like a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven.* To do the Will of G-d, to learn, to pray, to do kindness, to be superb as a spouse/parent at home, you can't "just do it" to do it right. You need just the right emotion. Human beings have many built in features - moods, states of mind, emotions. Each state of mind can make a person into a different being, a different "animal". You need swiftness, might, to be brazen and light; you need to tap into the right emotion that you have already built up in your personality, in order for the Will of G-d to be achieved.

A teacher in an Israeli classroom found written on the board one morning, *"Our teacher wants us to wake up in the morning like roosters, to jump out of bed like lions, to schlepp our schoolbags like donkeys, to copy from the chalkboard like monkeys, to remember word for word what we are taught like parrots, to be quiet and still in class like fish... and then, the teacher complains to the principal that we are like a bunch of animals!"* The truth is, the teacher is right. The way to successful living is to find in ourselves the appropriate state of mind for each situation life brings us, in each situation asking ourselves the following question: "Which mood or state of mind can I tap into to help me perform my best in accomplishing the Will of my Father in Heaven?"

And this is what we can learn from G-d's eulogy on Sarah, in the first passuk in our Parasha. G-d encapsulated Sarah's life into one sentence. *Sarah's life was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years; the years of Sarah's life.* (Breshit 23 1) Rashi explains that all the years of Sarah's life were equal in goodness.

My Rabbi added some spice to Rashi's explanation. Life is split into three stages, childhood, parenthood and grandparenthood. The child, with his youthful attitude towards life, has this sort of optimism, creativity, purity and "out of the box" thinking. Adulthood comes with the sense of responsibility, working hard and beginning projects. Grandparenthood brings wisdom, understanding and acceptance, with (hopefully) feelings of accomplishment. If you can't laugh in life, it is because you can't tap into youthfulness. If you keep making foolish mistakes, it is because you are not tapping into that 100-year-old you. And if you are not taking responsibility for your life's dreams, you're missing the twenty-year-old you. Each day, Sarah found inside herself youthfulness, responsibility and wisdom, simultaneously. Even when she was still a 7-year-old, she had wisdom of a hundred year old, and the sense of responsibility of a 20-year-old. And she was full of youthfulness, even at the age of a grandmother. This is the way to an amazing life: 100 years old, 20 years old and 7 years, all at once. From nursery school till nursing home.

I would like to add my own twist to the Rashi, but first a fairytale. There is a story told (heard from Eliyahu Shiri) about a man with no luck. He had no money, no wife, and no happiness. A friend told him to walk in a certain distant desert for three days, in a particular direction. He would then reach a specific spot, that G-d would not refuse to answer his prayer, to change his Mazal. Desperate, he set out on his journey.

The first day, he met a tree. The tree was crying. "Dear tree, why do you cry?" The sobbing tree responded, "I am so thirsty. There is a pond of water, just near my roots. But I can't reach it!!!" The man responded, "Don't cry. I am on my way to ask G-d to change my Mazal. I will pray for you, as well. I'll be back soon." He continued on his journey, and he found a fair, young lady wandering in the desert, sobbing. "I came all the



way here to pray for my shidduch, my match, but I can't find the right place. I'll never merit having a family." "Don't cry, fair lady. I am on my way to ask G-d to change my luck, and I will ask Him to help you find your mate, as well. I'll be back in a jiffy." And with that, he tilted his hat and was on his way. The morning of day three, he spotted a weeping lion. "Dear lion, why do you weep so?" "I am so hungry! I haven't eaten for a few days." "Don't worry, lion dear. I am on my way to ask G-d to change my luck, and I will pray that He send you prey in no time."

He hurried on, and soon after, he arrived at the place of prayer. "G-d, I came all the way here to ask You to change my Mazal, my luck. I have no parnassah, no wife, and no happiness. Please, G-d, change my Mazal. And also, G-d, please help the tree's roots reach the water, send the fair, young lady a groom, and feed the lion."

Suddenly, he heard a booming, Heavenly voice. "I will change your Mazal, son. But you need to recognize the opportunities that I send you in life and grab them. Here are three envelopes, one for the tree, one for the fair lady, and one for the lion. Tell them I have answered their prayers as well."

Full of expectation, the man set back home. On his way, he reached the Tree. He handed over the envelope, and the tree read aloud." Dear Tree. Find someone to do you a favor and remove the treasure chest full of precious gems blocking your roots." The tree begged the man with new luck to

help it and take the hidden treasure from its roots, so it could have water from the pond. "Sorry, tree, I have helped you enough. I am on my way to my fame and fortune with my new luck. Find someone else." With that, he continued on, soon after, noticing the fair, young lady. He delivered her the envelope from G-d. "Marry the first man you meet upon receiving this letter. You will live happily ever after, with lives full of plenty." She turned to the man and asked him for a date. "Sorry, I am on my way, fair lady, to my new mazal. Ask someone else." And with that, he continued on his way and saw that hungry lion. He handed over the letter from G-d. "If this Shlumazal manages to bring you this letter, eat him for lunch! He was too foolish to take advantage of the first two opportunities I sent him. He is a waste of a life!"

So many people get stuck in life, waiting for that Mazal of the next stage. Childhood has its beauty, adulthood has its great times, and the golden age of grandparenthood has its bliss, as well. But you have to grab the opportunity when it presents itself, not wait for the next stage, or wish you were in a previous one.

When we make the most of each stage in life, we can live a life of fulfillment, like Sarah, who lived 100 and 20 and 7. We can then say that each and every year was the best year of our life. Because the only way that a part of life is great is if we make it so .

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