



Light Lines

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Light Insight

Helping Daddy

*“By avenging My vengeance...” (25:11)
‘He expressed the anger that was
Mine to show.’ — Rashi*

When you ask your three-year old son to help you set the table for Shabbos dinner, and he manfully steers a plate or a cup all the way to the table, you get a tremendous feeling of *nachas* (parental pleasure). You don’t really gain anything from his help other than that singular pleasure, however. You could just as easily have done what he did when you brought in the rest of the plates and the cutlery. Instead you gave him a job all

his own!
When Pinchas acted on G-d’s wrath and executed Zimri for his grievous public sin, the Torah says “*he avenged My vengeance.*” Rashi, perhaps the best known biblical commentator in the last thousand years, explains the Torah’s meaning: “*He expressed the anger that was Mine to show.*” Pinchas acted on anger that was G-d’s to avenge. Only because Pinchas did something that was really incumbent upon G-d to do, did he merit such a great reward — receiving G-d’s ‘Covenant of Peace.’

The same idea applies to *tzedaka*, or charity. The Talmud records that Turnus Rufus once asked Rabbi Akiva, “If G-d loves the poor why doesn’t He feed them?” Rabbi Akiva answered

that the poor give us more than we give them — for through the *tzedaka* that we give them, they save us from purgatory. In the great merit of giving *tzedaka* we are forgiven from sins that we might otherwise have been punished for in purgatory.

Rabbi Akiva meant that while it is certainly G-d’s ‘job’ to feed the poor, He allows us to feed them instead. By doing ‘G-d’s job for Him,’ we earn an incredible reward, and bring great pleasure to our Father above. We are like the little boy setting the table for Shabbos. Of course G-d can feed the poor Himself, but He gives the job to us, even though we’re really not ‘helping’ Him at all.

*• Based on the words
of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein o.b.m.*

LOVE of the LAND

*Selections from classical Torah sources which
express the special relationship between
the People of Israel and the Land of Israel*

Other Worldly Experiences

“Whoever resides in the Land of Israel, recites the *Shema* in the morning and evening, and speaks the sacred Hebrew tongue is considered a member of the World to Come.”

This statement by Rabbi Meir, made almost two thousand years ago, does not relate to inheriting the World to Come, because we have already been taught by the Talmud that “All of Israel have a share in the World to Come,” not only those who perform these particular acts. Rather, Rabbi Meir is referring to how one can live a ‘World to Come’ existence in this world. The Jew who lives in the Holy Land, pledges his allegiance to G-d morning and evening, and speaks in the language with which G-d created the world and wrote the Torah, is experiencing something of the intimacy with G-d which the World to Come offers in its fullness. He is like a citizen of that infinite world on a temporary visit to this finite world.

Light Update

Top University Grads in Ohr Somayach for Summer

Over one hundred graduates and top students of Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Penn, Cornell, Duke and dozens of other universities throughout North America and the United Kingdom are participating in the 1998 Summer Jewish Learning Exchange (JLE) Program at the Central Campus of Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem today.

Since the beginning of the Jewish Learning Exchange programs in the eighties over 3,000 students from the United States, Canada, South America, Europe, South Africa and Australia have traveled to Israel with the Jewish Learning Exchange to study and tour the land of their forefathers.

The Other SIDE of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Judging favorably means finding excuses for questionable behavior, excuses which make sense to us and leave us with a positive feeling towards the person in question. When we find ourselves suspecting others, we must ask ourselves: Are there any redeeming factors? Did I miss something? Did I jump to the wrong conclusion? For instance, take the case of the...

Verbal Eyes

“If people come to my lecture on a cold, rainy winter’s night, why don’t they at least listen?”

That’s what I was thinking as I gave my emergency first-aid lecture. About ten minutes into my lecture, two women walked in, sat down in the back row and promptly started talking! It was extremely distracting to know that they had so little interest in my speech that they couldn’t even stop gabbing for a minute!

About an hour later, I finished.

And so, finally, did they. Gathering my notes and preparing to leave, I noticed the pair approaching me. At least they have the decency to come and apologize, I thought. But their apology was far from the one I expected.

“Thank you so much, Mrs. Frankel. We really enjoyed your talk,” one said.

What? I thought. She’s got to be kidding!

“I’d like to introduce myself and my sister,” she continued. “Sorry we came late. We usually try to sit in the front row. But because of the rain, we had to drive slowly. You probably didn’t notice, but as you were speaking, I was repeating what you were saying. My sister is hearing impaired, but she reads lips very well....”

Response Line

Back of My Hand

Ben-Judah wrote:

Is there a Jewish custom to kissing the hand? If so, what is it? Is it in the Torah, and what does it mean? Thank you very much.

Dear Ben-Judah,

Rabbi Akiva said: “There are three things I really like about the people from Medea: When they cut meat, they do so only upon a table; when they kiss, they do so only upon the hand; and when they speak privately, they do so only out in a field.”

These can be explained as follows:

Cutting meat on a table is safer, than holding the meat in your hand while you cut it. Kissing the hand is more respectable than kissing the lips because of saliva emitted. Private matters are best discussed in a field because — as the Rabbis wrote 900 years ago — “the walls have ears.” Or, to paraphrase Proverbs (circa 500 BCE) “A little bird told me.”

Today, some Chassidic and Sefardic Jews kiss the hands of great Torah scholars out of respect.

A friend once asked me: “Why does the Talmud have to point out the danger of cutting meat while holding it in your hand? Isn’t that obvious?” I had no answer until someone sent me an article from the Detroit Jewish News. According to the article, hospitals across the country have identified a new malady called Sunday-Morning

Bagelitis. (Seriously, this is not a joke!) Every Sunday morning, emergency rooms in major Jewish population centers report an increase of people with serious hand wounds. To what do they attribute this increase? To Jews cutting their hands while slicing bagels, especially frozen bagels, which are hard, slippery and pose quite a danger!

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