

# chosen words

## Personal Growth

### The 48 Essential Qualities for Learning

*If you want to acquire Torah, all you have to do is study. Right? Surprisingly, Pirkei Avos tells us that study is just one of 48 qualities that are necessary to successfully acquire Torah, to truly make it*

Among the other essential traits named in the Mishna in Avos are joy, modesty, hearing, a good heart, and closeness with peers. According to Rav Chaim Volozhiner, you attain Torah in direct proportion to your efforts in developing these traits. Without them, Torah can't be fully grasped.

#### Essential Quality #2 - Hearing

If hearing, *shmias haozen*, is a prerequisite to learning, then it would seem that anyone blessed with the normal ability to hear already possesses this quality. The sound of Torah learning reaches his ears, and he learns.

But to grasp the essence of this essential quality, *what one hears must spur him to action*. The perfect example of this is Yisro, the father-in-law of Moshe, who shows us the full depth of *shmias haozen*, "real" hearing. The Torah says "*vayishma Yisro*" {Shemos [Exodus] 18:1} that Yisro "heard" of the events surrounding the Jews' departure from Egypt and he ran to join them. The Torah also tells us that the whole world heard of these events—the parting of the Red Sea, the giving of the Torah, and the victory against Amalek. Yet, only Yisro responded.

The Gemara proposes that the war with Amalek was his real motivation to act. Why? Because during that one-day battle, whenever Moshe

raised his hands, Israel prevailed. When he lowered his hands, they lost ground. But Moshe's arms were only reflecting the hearts of the people. When they devoted their hearts to Hashem, Moshe could hold up his arms. But even then, they repeatedly faltered and lost their fervor.

#### Effective Prayer

### Coming Closer

*Third in a Series on Preparing for Prayer*

Before reciting Shmoneh Esrei, it's customary to take three steps back and then three steps forward. Most people do this without thinking much about it. But by understanding the meaning behind these six small steps, you can walk into Shmoneh Esrei with a greatly enhanced sense of Hashem's love.

#### Torah Tools for Personal Growth

##### Inspiration

##### Ideas

##### Excellence

##### Success

Yisro saw from this that even with a spiritual awakening of this intensity, people back-slide. The only way to seize the momentum is to act on it immediately. He knew that if he didn't act on the awe for Hashem that "hearing" had awakened in him, it would soon fade into the background. So he ran to join the B'nei Yisrael.

*continued on back*

## Better Relationships

### Moving Away from Loshon Hora

*Second in a Series on Loshon Hora-Free Living*

Anyone who has ever opened a business knows that the three keys to success are location, location and location. The same can be said, too, for the business of living our lives, because if we frequent places that are conducive to *loshon hora*, we watch our entire investment—our Torah learning and mitzvos—lose value every day.

Sometimes the answer is to change locations. Examine your daily routines and identify those places in which *loshon hora* most often arises. By staying away from those places, or at least minimizing the amount of time you spend there, you can drastically reduce the amount of *loshon hora* you are tempted to speak or forced to hear.

What does this mean in concrete terms? Perhaps it means getting to your children's bus stop a little later and leaving as soon as the bus departs. Perhaps it means staying away from the office water cooler or the group of nice guys at the back of the shul.

It may seem a bit radical to rearrange your day to avoid places where the temptation for *loshon hora* is strong. It may seem difficult. But it is vital to the

*continued on back*



**Think About It:** The next time you take three steps back, remember that Hashem, in His love for us, is beckoning us forward. Then take those three steps forward, toward the loving Father who so dearly wants us close to Him.

*Adapted from Shmoneh Esrei, by Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, with permission from Mesorah Publications*



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