

# 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 yours.*

Among the others named in the Mishna are joy, modesty, slowness to anger, 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 #4:  
Loving Rebuke

Few people tolerate rebuke, let alone love it. Yet the Torah says that to grow in learning, we must be open to constant self-improvement through constructive criticism. "Oheiv es hatochachah," love rebuke, the Mishna says. If this seems like a trait reserved for tzaddikim, consider the true story of one ordinary man who put rebuke to work for him.

For many years this man, terrified of being corrected in public, had refused to lead a minyan. Then, his mother passed away. He was required to lead the minyan, and he did, in a quiet, mumbling tone. Inevitably, he mispronounced a word and someone called out a correction. It happened twice more that morning, but to his surprise, the criticism—offered by friends and without malice—didn't shatter him.

So, he decided to turn his worst fear into a game. The next

day, he told his friends he would pay one dollar for every mistake they found. The game helped him focus on perfecting his davening, and over the course of several months, he became an expert baal tefillah. He had turned criticism, his greatest fear, into a powerful tool for self-improvement.

## Inner Excellence

### Anger's Double Jeopardy

*The Second in a Series on Anger*

Chazal place anger at the top of the list of negative personality traits. Not only is it rooted in negatives like haughtiness and insensitivity, but it spawns a whole

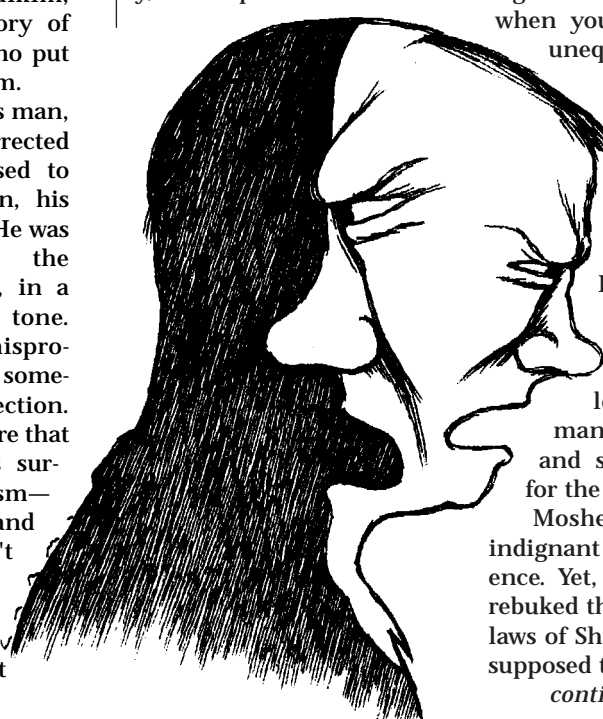
second generation of sins and shortcomings. Among its most damaging effects is that it causes you to lose wisdom and spiritual standing. And this is true even when you are totally and unequivocally right.

The Torah illustrates this point in an instance involving Moshe. In Parshas Beshalach

Dassan and Aviram transgress Hashem's directive to collect each day's manna on that day, and set nothing aside for the next day.

Moshe was rightfully indignant at their disobedience. Yet, when he angrily rebuked them, he forgot the laws of Shabbos that he was supposed to teach Israel.

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## Effective Prayer

### Giving Your All

*Sixth in a Series on Preparing for Prayer*

When we pray to Hashem, the words we speak are just the messengers. The message is the contents of our hearts. The Chovos Halevavos says tefillah spoken without intent and feeling is like a husk without a kernel, a body without a soul. "One must disengage himself from this world and free his mind of any thought which will distract his attention.... One should take to heart seriously that he stands before his Maker..."

When we come to shul to stand before Hashem, we find that sometimes, we reach the ideal and can feel our entire beings ascending in tefillah. But when we come to shul to stand before our neighbor, eager to get through the next tefillah and resume our conversation, our prayer becomes an empty husk. When we talk during davening, our patter drowns out the natural yearning of our souls for Hashem. Rather than ascending to Heaven, our words go no further than our neighbor's ear.

To Do: Challenge yourself—be it for one tefillah, one

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# Spilling the Beans

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

You know a secret about someone. He told it to you in confidence. Lots of people you would be interested in this information. It's not even negative information. Maybe your friend has even divulged his secret to several others. It's eating away at your sense of restraint, dying to work its way into some conversation.

But if it does, you'll be violating a law of Shmiras Haloshon, because informa-

tion given in confidence is forbidden grist for the conversational mill. Except under some circumstances, when the information might prevent harm to someone (a decision for a Rav), a secret must stay a secret.

The logic of this halachah is simple. Imagine the negative feeling that comes from knowing that someone you trust has been discussing you and your life against your wishes. Even if the information never does

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any harm, this sense of betrayal is harm enough to prove that, to preserve shalom, a confidence should remain just that.

**Shabbos Table Discussion:** What gives people the urge to reveal a secret? What can you do to stop yourself?

—CCHF

## Anger

*continued from front*

Torah knowledge is a product of spiritual, not just intellectual stature. When we let anger take hold and reduce our stature, Torah knowledge automatically shrinks as well. In effect, when we become righteously indignant, we punish ourselves—even though we're right—by forfeiting some of our hard-earned spiritual accomplishments.

**Shabbos Table Discussion:**

What are some ways to address the wrongs of others without a display of anger?

*Adapted from "Reb Chaim's Discourses," by Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, with permission from Mesorah Publications*

## Giving

*continued from front*

day, one week—to daven without extraneous conversation. Get a friend to work on this with you.

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

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# Looking Within

*We know that everything on earth, no matter how awesome, is just a fleeting shadow of the Heavenly forces behind Creation. The good we see is but a whisper of Hashem's good. The light we see is but a fragment of Heaven's light. But sometimes, by looking deeper into our immediate world, we can glimpse a spiritual dimension, as this poem illustrates.*

**Thoughts At A Shabbos Table**

The first time our two newly married sons, Our two new daughters-in-law, joined our Shabbos table I was overwhelmed by the sight. I thought, *How could this be? Yesterday, nothing at all. Today, these two married men, bearded, tall. I thought, If in material realms, such things can be, what fruits must grow of mitzvos, here and eternally.*

**Shabbos Table Discussion:** Name a few everyday sights or events that help you comprehend Hashem's presence in the world.

*"Memo to Self," by Ruth Lewis, with permission from Targum Press*

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