

chosen words

Personal Growth

Your Father's Son

Saying "I'm sorry" is never easy. But when left unintended, hard feelings and injustices create distance between ourselves and our fellow Jews, and ultimately between ourselves and Hashem, as this story illustrates:

An impoverished man lived with his two sons in a broken-down shack. The three struggled for even the simplest subsistence. Finally, one brother decided to leave home and seek his fortune elsewhere.

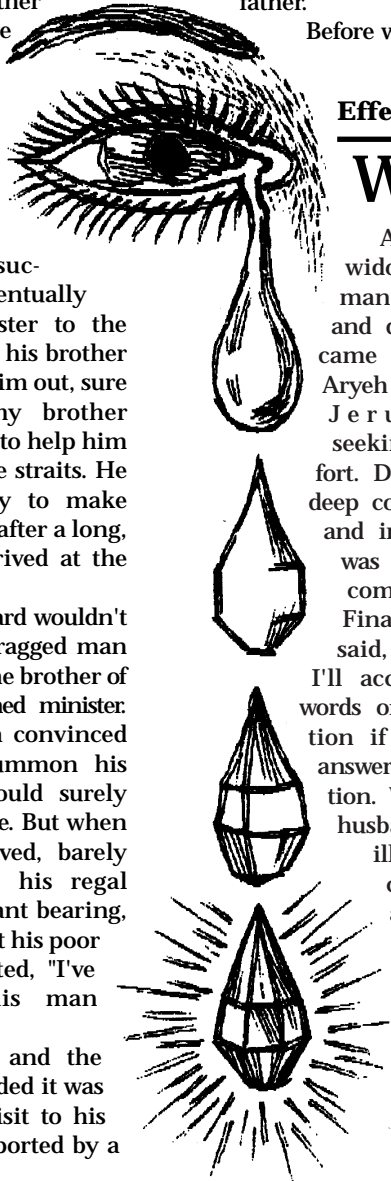
With Hashem's help, he was tremendously successful—so successful that he eventually became a minister to the King. Years later, his brother decided to seek him out, sure that his wealthy brother would be willing to help him rise from his dire straits. He borrowed money to make the journey, and after a long, arduous trip, arrived at the King's palace.

The palace guard wouldn't believe that the ragged man at the door was the brother of the King's esteemed minister. Finally, the man convinced the guard to summon his brother, who would surely extend a welcome. But when his brother arrived, barely recognizable in his regal clothes and elegant bearing, he gazed coldly at his poor relation and stated, "I've never seen this man before."

Years passed, and the wealthy son decided it was time to pay a visit to his old father. Transported by a

royal wagon, he arrived at his childhood home. He knocked on the door, and an old man's slow footsteps could be heard approaching. As his father opened the door, the son's heart filled with love and longing. He stretched out his arms and cried, "Father! It's me!" But his father looked coldly at the elegant stranger. "If my son is not your brother," he said, "then I can't be your father."

Before we come to



Effective Prayer

Where Tears Go

A newly widowed woman, broken and distraught, came to Rav Aryeh Levin of Jerusalem seeking comfort. Despite his deep compassion and insight, he was unable to comfort her. Finally, she said, "Rabbi, I'll accept your words of consolation if you can answer one question. While my husband was ill, I recited chapter after chapter of Tehillim.

I cried thousands of tears. My soul literally flowed into those

tears. Were they wasted?" Rav Aryeh replied that after 120 years, when the woman would ascend to heaven, she would see how Hashem gathered up and treasured each tear like a priceless gem. "You will see that whenever some harsh decree was looming over Israel, one of your tears came and washed it away. Even one sincere tear is a source of salvation."

All tears of tefillah that come sincerely from the heart have the unique power to push open the gates of Heaven, even when they are shut to other prayers. Though it may not bring the specific help we are requesting, no tear is ever wasted.

Adapted from "The Complete Tishah B'Av Service, Overview," by Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer, with permission from Mesorah Publications

Torah Tools for Personal Growth

Inspiration

Ideas

Excellence

Success

Better Relationships

The Price of Peace

Pesach matzos are expensive. So is an esrog. But most of us accept these costs as the price of doing a mitzvah, and pay even more than the minimum in order to fulfill them to a higher degree.

The Chofetz Chaim says we should put aside money for another mitzvah as well—keeping peace. How many disputes have their origins in a minor monetary loss? Items borrowed and broken. Mistaken sales, wrong change, and so forth. But if we set aside an amount of money specifically to pay for these small losses, even when we believe ourselves to be in the right, we can eliminate the cause of much strife. By doing this, the Chofetz Chaim says, we fulfill the words of Tehillim (34:15) "Seek peace and pursue it."

Shabbos Table Discussion: It is the week before Pesach and you have only \$100. You can spend it to buy shmura matzos and wine for the seder or you can use the money to settle a dispute and restore peace. What would you do and why?

[NOTE: For discussion only. Actual halachic decisions should be made by a Rav.]

Adapted from "Chofetz Chaim: A Lesson a Day," by R. Yitzchak Berkowitz and R. Shimon Finkelman with permission from Mesorah Publications



Published by
The Chofetz Chaim
Heritage Foundation

The Good Way

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, in Pirchei Avos, tells his five students to go out into the world and determine "which is the good way to which man should cling." Each was impressed by a different trait which he felt was

the key to one's ability to live a life of Torah and mitzvos. This is the second of a five-part series examining these traits.

Said Rabbi Yehoshua: "A Good Friend"

The quality of "chaver tov" means both being and having a good friend. But what is a good friend? The Torah's definition is a person who helps his fellow in both the physical and the spiritual realms.

Rav Yisroel Salanter defined a friend as one who knows what the other is lacking, and he illustrated the point with a story of two drunks. In the midst of their drunken conversation, one asked the other, "Are you my true friend?" The companion

replied magnanimously, "Sure I am." "Well then," said the first man, "tell me what I'm lacking." The focus on another's needs, even simple physical needs, prevents us from becoming self-centered and trains us to extend ourselves to those around us.

In the spiritual realm, a good friend sees another's flaws and obstacles, and helps him overcome them, opening the way to growth that he could never achieve

Good friends become an integral part of each other's spiritual success.

on his own. Through gentle rebuke, sound advice, learning and growing together, good friends become an integral part of each other's spiritual success. They refine in each other the middos essential for a life of Torah.

Shabbos Table Discussion:

What are some of the middos that strengthen friendship? How can we use them in other areas of life as well?

—CCHF

Caught in the Act

When your child, or student, or employee makes a mistake, you take notice, as you must. But it's equally important to take notice when people do things right. Sentences that start with "I like how you..." "I respect what you did when..." "I really admire..." build a positive relationship and motivation to keep striving.

It's especially important to catch someone improving in a weak area. The child that doesn't like to share hands over his favorite toy. The habitually late employee shows up early. The forgetful student brings his homework. Let them know you notice. You'll find that your acknowledgement builds up their newly formed good habit, until it becomes not only what you expect of them, but what they expect of themselves.

Adapted from "Begin Again Now," with permission from the author, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

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Honest Money

Herschel, an immigrant from Russia who earned his living as a peddler lay upon his deathbed. He instructed his son to open a certain drawer only after his passing.

When the time came, the son opened the drawer and found a bag of silver dollars with the following note: "I received these silver dollars as a result of the mitzvah of pidyon haben. While I always tried to conduct my business honestly, I cannot be certain that I may not have inadvertently overcharged someone. This money, however, is definitely mine because my father was a Kohen and I am a Kohen. Therefore, I wish that my shroud and burial expenses be paid for with this money. Perhaps if I appear before the Heavenly tribunal in garments bought with undoubtedly honest money, they will look upon me with compassion."

Such is the simple faith of a Jew, who looked for no excuses and sought recognition for nothing beyond his honesty.

Shabbos Table Discussion: What can we learn from Herschel's note?

Adapted from "Lights Along the Way," by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., with permission from Mesorah Publications

Index Reference 115



Chosen Words is a biweekly publication of the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation

HaRav Shmuel Kamenetsky, shlita, Chairman Rabbinical Board

Rav Naftoli Jaeger, shlita, Rabbinical Editorial Supervisor

Michael Rothschild, Director

6 Melnick Drive, Monsey, NY 10952

Chosen Words

Editorial Supervisor: S. Appelbaum

Writer: C. Nestlebaum

Graphic Artist: H. Ort

Illustrator: Giora Carmi

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