

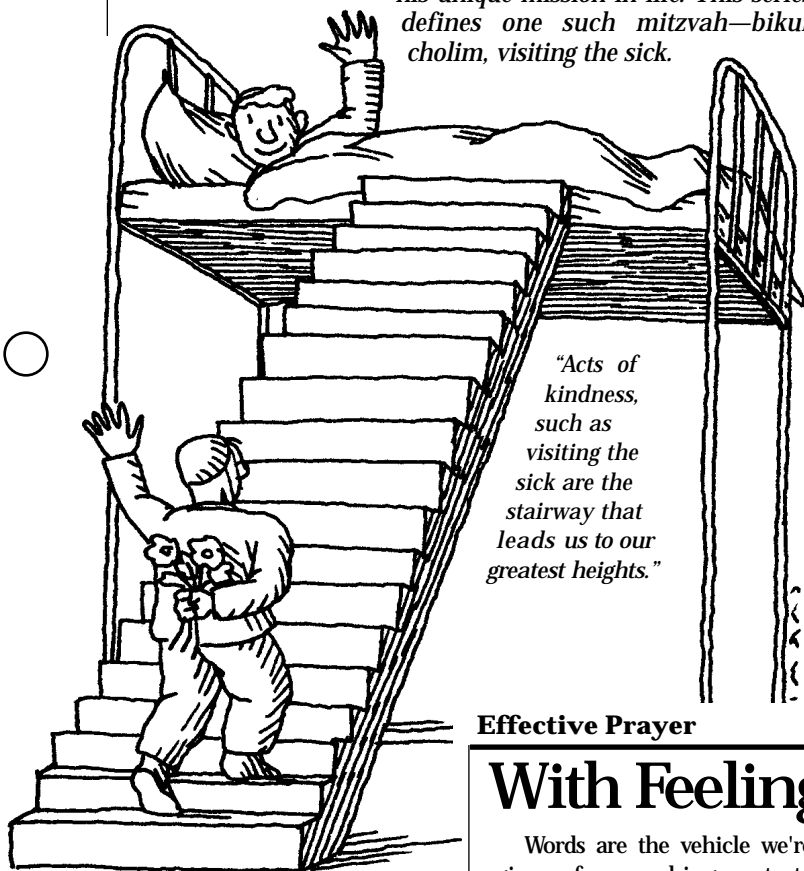
# chosen words

## Personal Growth

### Kindness Personified

*In Pirkei Avos, the world is said to stand upon three pillars: Torah learning, prayer, and acts of kindness. "You shall walk after Hashem, your G-d," (Devarim 13.5) is explained to mean that a person should emulate Hashem's acts of kindness that are found throughout the Torah.*

*In Ahavas Chesed, the Chofetz Chaim defines specific mitzvos of chesed in detail, so that every Jew can understand and fulfill his unique mission in life. This series defines one such mitzvah—bikur cholim, visiting the sick.*



*"Acts of kindness, such as visiting the sick are the stairway that leads us to our greatest heights."*

## Effective Prayer

### With Feeling

Words are the vehicle we're given for reaching out to Hashem. But they are only the vehicle. The essential question is, what does the vehicle carry? If it is filled with our concentration and emotion, it delivers a valuable cargo to Hashem. It brings Him our awe, gratitude, and petitions for our needs. But if it's empty—because our thoughts and emotions are tied up elsewhere—it arrives in Heaven with nothing to deliver.

"When a person prays with his tongue alone, while his mind drifts off to other matters, his prayer is like a body without

## Torah Tools for Personal Growth

### Inspiration

#### ▼ Ideas

#### ▼ Excellence

#### ▼ Success

whoever lacks his own support network—should have Klal Yisrael for support.

This is a mitzvah that has no outer limit. As often as your presence is desired, you can visit. If the person would like more visitors and his condition permits, you can and should encourage others to visit. A personal visit fulfills the mitzvah best, since this is the only way to know for certain what the sick person needs. However, if a visit is impossible, you can still partake in the mitzvah by phoning, sending a card, letter or food.

One who opens his heart to the needs of the sick creates a powerful source of protection for himself; as Tehillim tells us, "Hashem will deliver him in the day of evil."

Shabbos Table Discussion:

Why do people sometimes shy away from bikur cholim?

*Adapted from "Love Your Neighbor," by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, with permission from the author*

## Better Relationships

### The Ebbing Tide

In the old days, Isaac was always in the thick of the local gossip. It almost seemed as if he had his own private investigator who uncovered the cost of the neighbor's new addition (and he recently refused someone a loan); the real story behind the shul board of directors (some people can buy their way in); the dark past of an upstanding community member (expelled from third grade) and so forth.

Then one day, Isaac got a jolt. A dear friend became ill with a dangerous illness, and Isaac desperately wanted to create a merit for him. Unlikely as it seemed, he decided to work on Shmiras Haloshon. At first, it was nearly impossible, because everyone instinctively saved their "dirt" for him. Mightily, he tried to change topics, reject the stories, walk away. At last his friends got the message. They became almost embarrassed to speak loshon hora in front of Isaac, because he never listened.

Gradually, his big "sacrifice" for his friend became his source of joy. His conversations now had an upbeat tone. Hearing less dirt, he found the world a far cleaner and purer place. This, the Chofetz Chaim promises, is the natural outgrowth of blocking loshon hora from our lives. At first it may feel like we're *continued on back*



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#### Part I: Whose Job?

When Avraham was recovering from his bris milah, which he undertook at the age of 99, Hashem appeared to him to alleviate his suffering. From this, the Sages derive the obligation to visit the sick. It's everyone's job; no one is too great to be bothered with it, and no one is too lowly to deserve a visit. In fact, the fewer resources the ill person has, the greater the obligation to care for him. The out-of-towner, the person without family, the poor person—

a soul, a skin without a fruit," *Chovos HaLevavos* explains.

Kavanah, concentration, does not require arriving at a mystical, transcendent state; concentrating on the plain meaning of the text is all that's required. This in itself wields tremendous power. Rav Chaim of Volozhin writes that the words of tefillah, spoken with concentration, "affect all of creation, from the smallest atomic particle to the most enormous galactic mass."

But even the seemingly simple directive to concentrate on the meaning of each word is not always simple. Rav Segal zt"l advises *continued on back*

# Lightening the Load

On Sunday, the carpool driver came late for her son, causing her to be late for an appointment. Later, at the supermarket, the check-out clerk was decidedly rude. When she arrived home in an exhausted, tense frame of mind, her husband offered not succor, but criticism of her moodiness. And that was just Sunday. Each day of the week added its own batch of fresh insults, perpetrated by friends, relatives and strangers. It was hard to sleep at night, for all the grievances running through her head.

For a person who holds onto the slights and insults that are the normal part of most peoples' day, the burden can become unbearable. A bulging pack of grievances

is like an unwieldy piece of luggage that pushes us off course and slows us down. The solution is found in a short prayer recited at bedtime: "Master of the universe, I hereby forgive anyone who angered or antagonized me or who sinned against my body, my property, my honor, or against anything that is mine; whether he did so accidentally, willfully, through speech, deed, thought or notion..."

Drop it, this prayer tells us, no matter who was right or who was wrong. Think of an excuse for the wrongdoer—she was tired, he didn't know better, she had a bad day at work. In all likelihood, one of these is actually true. By dropping it, we lighten our own burden. We can enjoy a tranquil

"For a person who holds onto the slights and insults that are a normal part of most peoples' day, the burden can be unbearable."

sleep and start tomorrow unencumbered. And most importantly, by building in ourselves a forgiving nature, we arouse Hashem's forgiveness for our own mistakes.

Shabbos Table Discussion:  
If we drop all our grievances, how can we right serious wrongs?

*Adapted from "Candlelight," by Avi Shulman, with permission from Mesorah Publications*

## The Ebbing Tide

*continued from front*  
holding back a tidal wave, but soon—within weeks—loshon hora is nothing more than a receding tide, moving ever farther away.

Shabbos Table Discussion:  
Are there people you cannot imagine ever speaking loshon hora? What about them gives you this impression?

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

## With Feeling

*continued from front*  
starting with the first brachah of Shemoneh Esrei. From there, the ability to concentrate will strengthen, until every part of the tefillah ascends to Hashem, endowed with its full power:

*Adapted from "Inspiration and Insight," by Rabbi Yehudah Zev Segal, translated and arranged by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, used with permission from Mesorah Publications.*

## Dedications

לעני  
• הרב נחום בער בן ר' חיים ז"ל  
• שינדל שמחה בת נתן אהרן ע"ה  
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As a זכרה for all the חולים •  
of כלל ישראל

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# Alternative Routes

One day, Rav Avraham Pam, Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Vodaath, was informed that an elderly acquaintance had been hospitalized. Since Rav Pam was a kohen, he did not visit hospitals, where he might inadvertently trespass the kohen's restriction against being in the presence of a dead person.

Yet he wanted to reach out to this gentleman. So, Rav Pam took a few minutes and wrote the man a note wishing him a complete recovery. The man treasured the letter, showing it to all his visitors.

Months later, the gentleman passed away. "Many of us probably didn't know how special this man was," one speaker eulogized. "But Rav Pam himself took the time to write him a letter!" This one letter, dashed off in a few minutes, provided an ill man with great joy, and in his death, added a new coat of gloss to his reputation. All this because Rav Pam, rather than exempting himself from the mitzvah, found another way to fulfill it.

*Adapted from "In the Footsteps of the Maggid," by Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn, with permission from Mesorah Publications*

Index Reference 175



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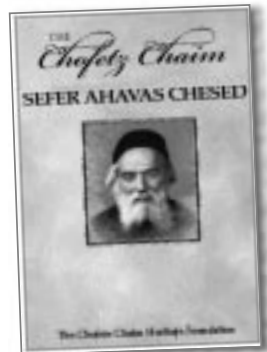
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