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MEAL # 1 - INTRODUCTION

Presented by the Robkin Family

A TORAH THOUGHT

The second mishnah in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers) is very appropriate to learn about on Shavuos, the holiday which celebrates the giving of the Torah. Here is what it teaches:

“Shimon the Righteous was among the last surviving members of the Great assembly. He would say: The world stands on three things: Torah, the service of G-d, and deeds of kindness.”

Shimon is teaching that just as G-d created the world, He continues to keep it going. Each day Hashem chooses for the world to continue. But, Hashem isn't interested in just any kind of world. It's important that the world be filled with worthwhile endeavors. Which endeavors? Shimon teaches us that they are: Torah study, service of Hashem and acts of kindness.

If you think about it, you can see how we have three different relationships as human beings that require nurturing. Our relationship with others, our relationship with Hashem and our relationship with ourselves.

Torah study improves who we are as human beings and as Jews. The Torah gives us personal goals to meet and gives us tools to improve our character traits. The Torah, which holds up the world, represents our relationship with ourselves.

And acts of kindness help us improve our relationship with others.

By learning Torah, serving Hashem with our hearts and helping

others, Hashem looks down and sees a world worthy of existence. These three pursuits keep the world going!!

If these three undertakings keep the world going, can you imagine how terrible it would be if we didn't do them? Or, imagine something worse. Imagine if we did the exact opposite of these good deeds?

What do you think the opposite of Service of Hashem would be?

The answer is idolatry.

What is the opposite of acts of kindness?

The answer is the furthest thing from helping someone - murder!

And what is the opposite of Torah study?

Well, if Torah study helps us develop ourselves as holy people, the thing which makes us more like animals is immorality, or adultery.

If Torah, Service of Hashem and acts of kindness hold up the world, these three sins tear the world down! They make Hashem reconsider the worthiness of creation.

That's why although a Jew is allowed to break any of the laws of the Torah to save a human life, a Jew must give up his or her life in order to not murder, serve idolatry or commit adultery.



TABLE DISCUSSION

- 1.What stories do you hope people will say about you?
- 2.If you could choose any character trait to have, which one would you choose?
- 3.What is the best trait?
- 4.What is the worst?
- 5.What is the purpose of prayer?
- 6.What would you be willing to give up to do a mitzvah?
- 7.What is something you do, or can do, that shows honor for the Torah?

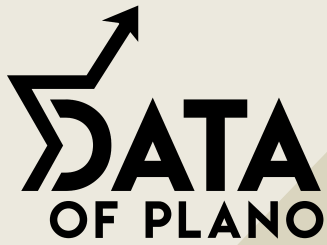


STORY TIME

If someone were to steal something from you what would your reaction be? What would you say to them?

There's a famous story told about the Chafetz Chaim, Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan (1838-1933), the Talmudic and rabbinic scholar, ethical and religious teacher, venerated by Jews all over the world for his saintliness and learning. The Chafetz Chaim was called once to testify in court, and the lawyer wanted to explain to the court what an honest man the Rabbi was. He said that once the Chafetz Chaim caught a thief stealing property from his small home. So as not to have the thief be guilty of so heinous a crime condemned in the Ten Commandments, he pursued the thief, shouting, "It's yours! I forgive you!" The judge looked at the lawyer and asked if he truly believed this amazing tale. "I'm not certain, your honor," said the lawyer, "but I do know that they do not tell such stories about you and me."

The life of the Chofetz Chaim exemplifies what life looks like when it is filled with Torah, service of Hashem and acts of kindness. His main concern was not his possession which was being taken from him. He could have yelled or cursed the man. The Chofetz Chaim's main concern was for the thief himself and that Hashem's Torah not be violated. Out of an act of kindness he gave the item to the thief and forgave him rather than allow for the Torah commandments of stealing, hating a Jew in your heart be violated.



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MEAL # 2 - TORAH

Presented by the Zakon Family

A TORAH THOUGHT

The Gemara tells us that before Hashem gave Klal Yisroel the Torah first He Asked the other nations if they wanted it. They all responded with a very reasonable question "What is written in the Torah?" The Jews though when asked responded by saying Naaseh Vinishma. This means we are committing ourselves unconditionally! The Medrash extols the greatness of this immediate acceptance. Seemingly the other nations were being much more pragmatic than us. Why then are we the ones so lavishly praised? Explains the Shem Mishmuel that with our saying yes we were exercising a very important Middah (character trait) known as Gaavah Dekidusha, holy confidence. The truth is this more than mere confidence it almost borders on arrogance. It is saying I know I'm that good!! We believe that Hashem does not make junk! If Hashem gave us a Neshama (soul) it must be capable of greatness. Don't question your capabilities but rather run with them. The next time you are given the opportunity to do a Mitzva, study a difficult idea in Torah and help another person seize the opportunity! YOU are that good!!

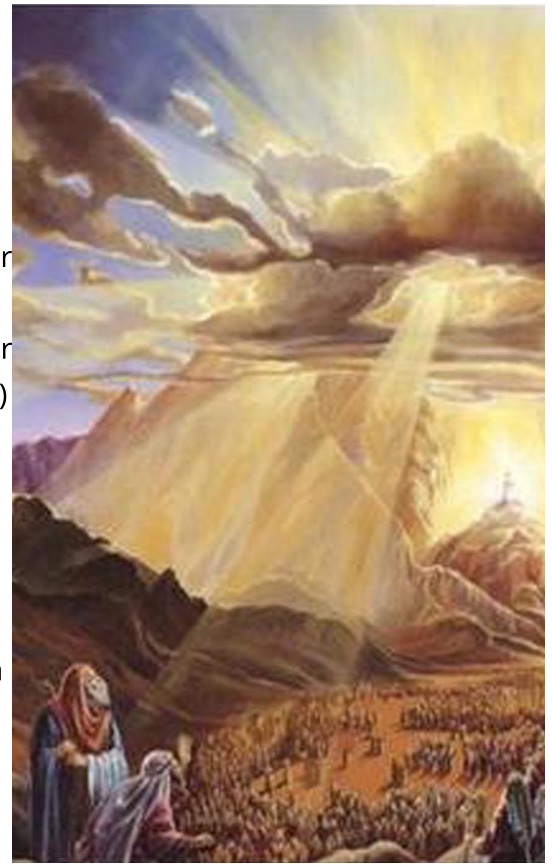


TABLE DISCUSSION

1. If you were able to meet anyone person from the Torah who would it be?
2. Would you rather be the best player on the worst team or the worst player on the best team? Why?
3. If you could experience any of the miracles in the Torah which one would you pick?



Story Time

Young Meir Shapiro was a child prodigy. His father hoping to see Torah greatness from him hired a Melamad, a tutor, to teach him privately. After a short while the Melamad sent a message to his parents that the boy had out-paced him and he no longer had what to teach him. Meir's dad went to the Rabbi of their town, Shatz and asked him to teach Meir. Rav Moskowitz, the communal Rabbi agreed to teach him together with his own sons. These boy were 18 and 19 respectively and Meir had to struggle to keep up. Keep up did he ever and Meir truly shteiged (grew) to great heights in Torah.

Being the young child he was Meir would tell of his childish dreams. One of those dreams was that he would start a movement of people studying a Daf a

day (double shaded page) of Gemara daily. This would unite Jews worldwide through Torah study. The other kids laughed at him and told him to give up his childhood fantasies.

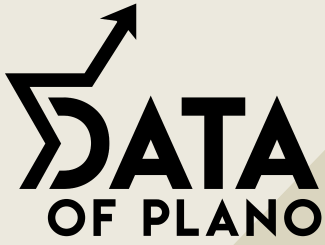
Meir persevered and is well known for introducing this concept at the great Rabbinical conference Of the Agudath Israel In 1923. Now world respected as Rav Meir Shapiro, the great Talmud Chochom (Torah scholar) his suggestion was accepted and so began the transformational Torah study program known as Daf Yomi!

Rav Shapiro was once at a train station and a man came over to him and introduced himself as the son in law of the Rav of Shatz who tutored him when he was a child. This man said his wife re-

membered him and was so happy to hear the difference he was making in the world. Rav Shapiro said " I would like to speak to your wife. " when she came over Rav Meir said "Do you remember how you and your siblings would poke fun at me for my dream of planning to start the Daf Yomi study program? Imagine had I listened to you? The world would be missing this great program! Never belittle the dreams of children for they can change the world!

Holy boys and girls! YOU have the potential to bring so much Torah and goodness to the world! Dream and think big and you will succeed!

*Based on a story in the book
Touched By Their Faith.*



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MEAL # 3 - AVODAH

Presented by the Sonnenblick Family

A TORAH THOUGHT

Avodah really refers to Karbanos, but because we don't have a Bais hamikdash, Hashem gave us Tefillah instead.

Tefillah is known as Avodah shebalev. Work of the heart. Praying is hard work!

The Shemonah Esrah has 3 different sections- praise, request, and gratitude.

When we praise Hashem, it's not because He needs us to- it's for us to realize how Awesome He is.

Then we can ask for everything! It's our way of building a relationship with Him!

Lastly, we must always thank Hashem!



PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Learn the meaning of the prayers in a language you are comfortable with.
- Start with a small step. Pick one prayer or even one line of prayer and have kavanah (concentration) and then work your way up each week (or month!)
- Have a designated time and place to pray
- Focus on 1 need you have or someone you care about needs, and pray for that.
- Keep a prayer journal where you can write about what you are asking Hashem/ G-d for, also write down the blessing in life and what you're grateful for - so you can thank Hashem for that too.
- Lastly, remember that Tefillah is for us! Hashem doesn't have any needs! As we work on Praying, we become closer to Hashem- and that benefits us more than anything else in the world!

TABLE DISCUSSION

- Do you think it's easier to Daven to Hashem when things in your life are going good in your life? Or when you're in the middle of a challenge?
- Fun Question: Which is your favorite room in your house? And why?



STORY TIME

There was once a man looking through the classifieds to find a job.

One ad piqued his interest- it said "Job Available: At the beginning of the day, you walk up a flight of stairs, sit up in the office for a few hours (bring whatever you'd like along to entertain yourself) and then, at the end of the day, walk down the flight of stairs. Amazing Pay"

The man immediately applied for the job. The boss called him for an interview and repeated the ad and offered the man the job. The man quickly accepted- and the boss cautioned "make sure to walk up each and every step on your way up & and on the way down" thrilled at this easy, great paying job, the man nodded enthusiastically.

The next morning the man carefully walked up each step- enjoyed a few hours of freedom with the entertainment he brought along, and at the end of the day, he walked down each step. This went on for months. But after a few months, here and there, the man would skip a step. Shortly after that, the man would see how many steps he could skip on this way up and down.

One day, his boss showed up very angry and said "What's going on?!?" The man was confused. He was more or less on time, got to the top of the steps- chilled for a few hours- and then left the office.

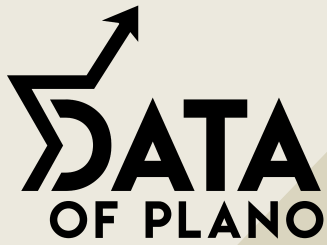
"Everything is great!" The man responded. The boss replied "have you been skipping steps on your way up and down?!"

Mortified, the man admitted that he had, and asked the boss how he knew.

The boss replied that by walking up each step, the man had been turning on machinery in his factory each day- and by going down each evening, the factory was shut down. However, since the man had been skipping steps, the mass production was dysfunctional.

The Mashal is as follows: Our Rabbis set up prayers for us. And each word holds tremendous power that we can not comprehend in the spiritual factory of Hashem. So by us saying each word carefully, we are mass producing incredible products whether or not we understand.

It is obviously better for us to know the meaning of what we are saying- and it's important to learn- but this Mashal teaches us, that until we learn, the words themselves have power.



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MEAL # 4 - CHESSED

Presented by the Nissel Family

A TORAH THOUGHT

It is not a secret that one of the trademarks of the Jewish people is the performance of chessed. Of the three forefathers that gave birth to our national identity, Avraham, who represented chessed, came first. So integral to our character is the performance of kindness that it was necessary to ingrain it into us even before the thought of learning Torah or prayer.

Chessed, however, is a value that is universal. Of course, as Hashem's representatives in this world, it is upon us to exemplify this trait no less than anyone else, but is there anything unique about the Jewish value of chessed? Or are we just like the rest of the world in this regard?

I believe that the answer lies in a shift of perspective on how we view our obligation to perform acts of chessed.

When the classic Jewish sources mention a Jew's obligation to perform chessed, interesting verbiage is used. Instead of merely encouraging us to perform chessed, the call to action is slightly more dramatic than that. The pesukim use wordings such as "ohev chessed" (a lover of chessed) and "rodeif chessed" (one who pursues chessed). The subtle difference in wording shines a vastly different light on a Jew's perspective of chessed. But what does this entail? What does it mean to be a rodeif chessed, or an ohev chessed?

Imagine you're coming home from a long day at work (back when there was something called a commute to work). You pull up in front of your house, and before you exit the car, you see a bedraggled beggar ringing your doorbell, attempting to collect alms. Nobody else is home, and after a while, the beggar gives up and moves on to the next house. What do you do? Any normal

person would feel a certain sense of relief, wait until the beggar moves on, and peacefully enter the house. And there is nothing wrong with that sentiment.

But not the ohev chessed. Someone who gets an adrenaline rush out of performing kindness, someone to whom bestowing good onto others is at the core of their existence, would see an opportunity slipping away. He would rush out of the car before the beggar has a chance to leave and see how he could help. To him, the beggar is not representative of an important, albeit slightly annoying, mitzvah, but it is an exciting opportunity to better himself, become more G-dly and help someone get back on his feet while doing so.

A venerated Torah scholar once visited a successful businessman for a fundraising appointment on behalf of his yeshiva. It was a rainy and muddy evening, and the rosh yeshiva happened to know that the fellow's front hallway was bedecked with an expensive oriental rug. He circled around back and knocked on the back door, where the mudroom was. As the donor answered the door, the rabbi noticed a perceptible frown on his face. After pleasantries, he inquired of the businessman as to the sour face. "Honored rabbi," the fellow answered, "I have young children at home in whom I am attempting to inculcate the value of chessed and giving. I am pained by the fact that you used the back door and didn't muddy my front hallway. I would have preferred that my children learn the lesson that giving tzedaka and supporting Torah is far more important than an expensive rug."

Similar to most areas in life, one becomes better at something through practice. If we can seize opportunities to creatively perform chessed and give forethought to what others might need, it will go a long way in making us lovers of chessed.

TABLE DISCUSSION

- What type of chessed is the easiest to perform? What type is the hardest? Why might that be?
- Who is one person who has had a profound impact on your life? What is one character trait of that person that you admire?



STORY TIME

Ruby Cohen was a chessed man. He was known in the community as the man to turn to for any need. Not a man of substantial means, he nevertheless used his creativity and sheer willpower to move mountains in order to help another Jew. The smile on his face when he was able to help someone was infectious.

There was just one type of chessed that Ruby had never performed - honoring the dead. The Talmud teaches that burying the dead and accompanying someone to his or her final resting place is one of the highest forms of chessed, since it can never be repaid. Being a cohen, Ruby was forbidden to participate in any part of the burial process, something which bugged him. He felt that his passionate drive to perform chessed was tempered by the fact that he was never able to help in this area.

All of that changed once cold day in January. Ruby received information that a new Jewish cemetery was being established in his city. He feverishly made calls to find out more details, and formulated his plan.

Bright and early the next morning, Ruby loaded up his car with shovels and picks and drove out to the field where the new cemetery would be built. Working for hours in the biting cold, Ruby dug a few graves. Since there were not yet any dead bodies there, it did not yet technically have the halachik status of a cemetery, and he was allowed to be there. He was euphoric at the opportunity to dig graves for the as-of-yet undetermined people who would eventually be buried there.

Ruby's chessed felt complete.

