



**YESHIVA
TORAS CHAIM
TORAS EMES**

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To the Publishers of the Torah Shmooze,

We have known Rabbi Moshe Gruenstein, שליט"א, since his days in Kollel, more than 40 years ago. He leads his life principled in תורה, with conviction to שמים, and always with exemplary טובות מידות.

As Director of Project Heritage, a kiruv organization he founded that focuses on bringing people onto the דרך התורה with a love and with a commitment that is real and sustainable, Rabbi Gruenstein has created a weekly Mussar Shmooze on the פרשה. In times where the proliferation of weekly newsletters inundate our email inboxes and our shul shtenders and chairs, one would think that another weekly just had no hope for success. Yet, Rabbi Gruenstein's "Shmooze" was nothing short of a national success, with a message that is unique, with deep and profound lessons each and every week. He speaks the truth, uncensored, unabridged, and unedited for political correctness. His message, therefore, resonates. Sometimes painfully, sometimes with humor, sometimes with emotion, but always spot on- a hit that invariably lands in the solar plexus.

He has decided to publish these דברי תורה, but more accurately, they are מוסר essays. His style and use of the written prose, more mimics the way in which he speaks, with dynamite and erudition, rather than journalistic sophistication. Those who read Rabbi Gruenstein's Torah Shmooze are captured and enraptured each and every week and likely feel empty without it.

We highly recommend this sefer for anyone to introduce themselves to true מוסר and to leading a life of Emesseh Yiddishkeit. It will transform your life no matter what stage you are entering; from growing בנילי השיבה to distinguished בני תורה.

We wish Rabbi Gruenstein continued דשמיא in his efforts in bringing כלל ישראל to higher levels and greater understanding of תורה and מוסר.

בברכת התורה,


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Bereishis

COMPLIMENTS—THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

There's an area of life that needs constant *chizuk*, and that's the strengthening of family bonds. It is in that vein that I would like to share the following Torah thought with you. In *Bereishis*, the Torah tells us that Hashem created two large luminaries, and then suddenly, the *pasuk* seems to switch, and instead of two large luminaries, there is one large (the sun) and one small (the moon).¹ What happened? Answers the Gemara, the moon said to Hashem, "Why do we need two large luminaries? One is sufficient. Two kings can't share one crown, so let me be the king." Hashem responded, "You're right. One king is enough, so let the sun be the king and I will cut you, the moon, down to size."² The moon's feelings were hurt, though, so, as *Rashi* tells us from the Midrash from our parashah, God, if you will, tried to assuage the moon's feelings by surrounding it with stars. Comments the Tolna Rebbe, "You see from here that the whole purpose of creating stars in the heavens was just to give *chizuk* to the moon, who was feeling down."

No, this is not a Disney movie. Rather, the Torah, in this Midrashic form, is teaching us a major life lesson about how important it is to give support and encouragement to those who need it, which is, in essence, all of us. Rav Yisrael Salanter, *zt"l*, used to say that when you whittle it down, "the essence of *chinuch* is to revive the spirit of the downtrodden and to resuscitate the hearts of the broken." It's all about giving *chizuk* to *talmidim*. Maybe that's why it says in *Bava Basra* that *rebbeim* of children

1 1:16.

2 *Chullin* 60b.

are compared to the stars that shine forever.³ Why are they compared to stars? Perhaps, based on this *Rashi* in *Bereishis*, because the original function of stars was to appease and give support. That's their essence. So, yes, of course a *rebbe* has to impart Torah knowledge to his students. But first and foremost, he has to articulate it in a way that is *mechazeik* them, such that they walk away feeling uplifted and good about themselves, which is certainly not an easy task.

The *Rama*⁴ in *Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'ezer* states: "Some opinions are that one should get married under the open sky, signifying that their descendants should be like the stars of the heavens"⁵ (alluding to the fact that they should be numerous). Perhaps, though, there is another message in this *Rama*: homiletically speaking, we want the couple to marry under the stars so that they internalize the message that stars represent the idea of giving *chizuk* to others. One of the most important ingredients in creating an emotionally healthy home is to be *mechazeik* our loved ones with kind words, compliments, and high doses of appreciation. Critiques and put-downs outside the home are in abundance; one's home should be a place of refuge, where one's spouse and children hear only uplifting words.

If this sounds like a dream, you are right. It is. But it's a dream to which we should all aspire. There is no question that in these times, what people are starving for more than anything else is not food, water, or even money. What people really hunger for are some good, positive words, because so few give them. A wife will give anything to hear a few complimentary words of appreciation from her husband. A man is desperate for a few encouraging and soothing words from his wife, and children and teenagers, who are, unfortunately, too often deprived of positive and good words, would love to hear a few sincere compliments. It's unfortunate that most of the time, all we hear are corrections and critiques from all sides, which only contributes to a toxic atmosphere in the home. We

3 8b.

4 Rav Moshe Isserles, 1530–1572.

5 61:3.

have to fill our homes with those proverbial stars, which were created for one purpose and one purpose only: to give support and encouragement.

An incredible *Zohar* in *Parashas Tazria* says: “Just as a person is punished with serious consequences for *lashon hara* (negative speech), so too should a person be punished when he has the opportunity to speak *lashon tov* (positive speech) to someone but doesn’t express it.” This is unbelievably perplexing! Why such a severe punishment? He didn’t say anything hurtful or negative! True, but when you could have said encouraging or good words, which might have resuscitated this person and breathed new life into their soul, you instead remained quiet and allowed them to die on the inside. “Come on, Rabbi, you are being too dramatic.” Really? Am I? You have no idea of the power of a good word. It can revive the dead. We all know that stories abound of people who, for whatever reason, were ready to take their own lives, God forbid, and someone came along at the last minute, said some complimentary words—and saved their life. I myself am privy to one such situation.

I recently read an article by Dr. Meir Wikler (a well-known *frum* psychotherapist in the New York area) titled “Compliments for Dummies,” in which he discusses what we have been talking about and how devastating it can be to family life when good words are not heard. At the end of the article, he brings a story of a husband—a child of Holocaust survivors—who never complimented his spouse or children. He loved his wife but found it difficult to express a good word. She became so desperate to hear the words he couldn’t say that one day, she took a drastic step and wrote out “You look beautiful” on the back of a shirt cardboard. To remove all doubt, she added the following in parentheses: “Read out loud.” The wife then waited until they were attending a *simchah* together. Before they left the house, she handed the pre-printed praise to her husband and asked him to say it. He took the cardboard and said, “You look beautiful”—and then naively proceeded to recite the instructions, “Read out loud.” The wife told Dr. Wikler, “Even though my husband just read what I had written for him and then thoughtlessly added the instructions, believe it or not, it still felt good to finally hear that compliment.” Need I say more?

Noach

CLOSE THE WINDOWS—THE WORLD STINKS

In *Parashas Noach*, the *pasuk* describes the animals that went into the ark: “מכל הבהמה הטהורה תקח לך שבעה שבעה איש ואשתו ומן הבהמה” —Of every clean animal, take unto you seven pairs, a man and his wife; and of the animal that is not clean, two, a man and his wife.”¹ Asks the Gemara: Since when do we describe the relationship between a male and female animal as “*ish v’ishto*—husband and wife”?² For Heaven’s sake, they are animals! The Gemara explains that these were the animals that only lived with a partner of their own species and did not stray by having “affairs” with other animals. But Rav Yaakov Galinsky, *zt”l*, points out that this still doesn’t answer the question of how the Torah can give animals the status of *ishus* (matrimony). To answer this, the *Aruch*, on the side of the *daf*, says something amazing: “Because these animals did not have relations with other species of animals, the Torah wanted to give them a title of honor as a compliment for not following the crowd.” So, since they didn’t go along with what the other animals were doing, the Torah crowns them with the title of matrimony—Mr. and Mrs. Cow? Incredible!

Herein lies a great lesson for all of us. We live in a society that has so many seductions to take us away from a Godly way of life; we are surrounded by a cesspool of immorality in which deviant, immoral lifestyles that were, in the past, rejected by even the non-Jewish world are now held up as a standard to be proud of. Yes, I’ll say it: we live in

1 7:2.

2 *Sanhedrin* 108b.

a world that is a veritable garbage can. Yet despite all the deleterious effects of this society, you still have children who go to yeshiva and keep Shabbos—that’s *nissei nissim* (a miracle beyond miracles). This gives new meaning to what the *Arizal*³ once told his famed disciple, Rav Chaim Vital⁴: “In this generation, a simple Jew who does mitzvos is worth more in the eyes of Hashem than *gedolei olam* (great men) who did mitzvos hundreds of years before us.” If that’s what the *Arizal* said in the 1500s, I can’t even imagine what he would say today. When a Jew today goes to *minyán* or comes to the *kollel* for a night of learning, the very heavens sing his praises. And in today’s world, if you don’t bring your cell phone into shul for davening, you are a *gadol hador* in God’s eyes! What we learn here is an incredible point. If the Torah goes out of its way to give *kavod* to animals who resist following the deviant behavior of other animals, giving them the title of husband and wife, then we, who still keep Torah and mitzvos in a world where the pull of the street is so powerful, can’t imagine the title of honor we have in *shamayim*.

However, having acknowledged that yes, we deserve a pat on the back, we must still be on guard against becoming desensitized to the immoral filth that surrounds us. Rav Sholom Schwadron, *zt”l*, offered the following anecdote to highlight what we are talking about. One morning, as he was walking somewhere, he had to pass a crew of workers who were dealing with a sewage problem on the streets of Yerushalayim. The stench was so great that Rav Schwadron had to quickly pass by in order to not gag from the putrid smell. On his way back in the afternoon, he had to pass by the same area. To his astonishment, the workers were taking a lunch break and eating their food amidst that terrible stench. Rav Schwadron wondered, “How is that possible?” The answer is very simple. When you are constantly working in that kind of environment, you get used to the smell, and what may be disgusting for others has no effect on you.

This is our world, my friends. We are living and going about our daily lives surrounded by sewage—immoral lifestyles and philosophies,

3 Rav Yitzchak Luria, 1534–1572.

4 1543–1620.

billboards that advertise things that should infuriate us, the ability, at the click of a button, to see what no Jewish eyes should ever see—a world where there are no wrongs. Not only is everything permissible, but if we stand up and speak against it, *we* are homophobes and hatemongers, and *we* are to be reviled. The world has gone mad, and nobody has the guts to even whisper, “The emperor has no clothes.” I’m afraid to say it, but there are even segments of Orthodox Jewry in which bringing up the topic of deviant, immoral lifestyles is a nonstarter, and I know this from firsthand experience. “Please, Rabbi, we know the Torah says it’s wrong, but let’s live and let live. A person has a right to be happy in life. What’s he or she supposed to do?” etc. Absolutely shocking. But this is the reality on the ground, and we have to shake ourselves out of our stupor and at least scream to ourselves, “No, this is an abomination, and it should sicken us.” If we are not *mechazeik* ourselves, then nothing will shock us anymore. So yes, on the one hand, we deserve a big *yasher ko’ach* for still observing Torah and mitzvos in an environment that has declared war on religion. But at the same time, we have to be constantly on guard not to become desensitized by the spiritual pollution that surrounds us.

Lech Lecha

KIDDUSH CLUBS—A NATIONAL TRAGEDY

As we begin *Parashas Lech Lecha*, we are about to meet the progenitor of the Jewish People, Avraham Avinu. He is also called “Avraham Ha’ivri”; Chazal tell us that the term *ha’ivri* denotes a person who was *leiver echad* (on one side) while the rest of the world was on the other side. In this case, it means that Avraham disseminated the philosophy of monotheism and of Godly living, which was in direct contradiction to the ways of the rest of the world. One can’t even imagine what strength of character and intestinal fortitude it took to stand up to the whole world. But that strength of standing up for the truth—for what’s right—has been passed down from Avraham and implanted into the DNA of every Jew. So I would like to use this as a segue to talk about the importance of using the *middah* of Avraham to stand up for the truth, not against the outside world—we covered that in last week’s parashah—but against negative influences within our own Jewish community.

We are so influenced by the views and opinions of others, whether it’s spending money we don’t have to maintain a certain image or hesitating to do what we know is right because it’s not how the rest of the group does it. People can be such slaves to what their so-called friends might say or think that they will even sacrifice their own children by placing them in yeshivas that are not necessarily in the children’s best interest—because of future *shidduch* considerations or to feed their own status and prestige. Amazingly enough, some people even allow their choice of a spouse to be influenced by how their partner will be seen by their friends: Is he or she a “catch,” or not?

Rav Yaakov Galinsky, *zt"l*, gave a humorous *mashal* about a father and his ten-year-old son who are traveling together. The father is riding on a donkey being led by his young son. They pass by a person who stops them and says, "What's this? A strong man like you, riding on the donkey while your little boy leads you?" The father responds, "You are right," and he gets off and puts his son on the donkey. As they continue their journey, they are stopped by another person who says, "What's going on here? It's unfortunately the sign of our new generation. The father, like a servant, is leading the donkey that his little boy is riding on. What kind of *kibbud av* is this?" The father says, "I hear you," and gets on the donkey with the son. As they continue to travel, they meet someone else who says, "What? Both of you on that poor donkey? That's *tzaar baalei chaim*; you are causing unnecessary pain to the animal!" In response to that, they both get off and walk, leading the donkey. They meet yet another person who says, "What's the point of having a donkey with you if no one is using it?" To this, the father says, "You're right," and they finally pick up the donkey and carry it on their shoulders! Rav Galinsky asked, "How many donkeys will a person carry in life because of what people say?"

There are times when a person may be inspired to grow in his Yiddishkeit, but because of the crowd with which he associates or the type of shul he attends, he finds it very difficult to stand up to the negative peer pressure. He doesn't really want to join the *kiddush* club in the middle of davening. He would really rather not talk at all during the davening and Torah reading. But his friends say, "Oh boy, look at Sam. He's becoming a real *frummie*," and his resolve is gone, because what people say matters to us. But the lesson of Avraham Ha'ivri is that we have that strength within us to stand up to such pressure. True, it's not easy at all, but we do have the ability to say, "I don't care what you think. In fact, maybe you should care about what I think, which is that your behavior is not correct and does not follow the path of a Torah Jew." Yes, it's very difficult to stand up for the truth, and the proof is that so few people do.

I remember the time that a prominent Torah organization held a convention with a panel of *rabbanim* who were being questioned on certain issues affecting the Jewish community. The moderator, a very

distinguished person in his own right, was introducing each prominent *rav* on the panel. When he came to one particular *rav*, this was the moderator's complimentary introduction, and I quote: "One particular Shabbos, I found myself in this *rav's* shul, and someone invited me for a *l'chaim* at a *kiddush* club that was being held in the middle of the haftarah reading. He told me, "The *rav* is not happy about our *kiddush* club, but he told us that if we are going to have it anyway, then we must at least say a *d'var Torah* before we make *Kiddush*." The moderator used this as an example of the *pikchus* (wisdom and sagacity) of the *rav*, that he knew how to handle his *baalebatim*. You have got to be kidding! I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. This is a compliment to a *rav*? It's an embarrassment!

I also read an article, again in a very well-known publication, in which a rabbi commented on the problem of *kiddush* clubs in the middle of davening, saying that the time has come to have a national conversation on this ubiquitous problem. What kind of double-talk is that? What do you mean, "national conversation"? There is no national conversation necessary. Having a *kiddush* club in shul during davening is wrong, disrespectful, an outright disgrace, and a slap in the face to God and His holy sanctuary. "Well, you see, Rabbi, it's not so simple..." Thank you for your deep analysis. I don't care whether it is simple or complicated. It's *assur*, and if you want to have a *kiddush* club in shul, then vote with your feet and make your own shul, but you are not going to have one here. "But Rabbi, we are going to lose membership." What about losing *Olam Haba*? How come that doesn't bother you? Why can't anyone stand up and just say the truth? The answer is that many people are not really interested in hearing the truth and some leaders are afraid to speak the truth. It's as simple and uncomplicated as that.

And there you have it, my friends. It's an *olam sheker* (a world of falsehood) and sometimes that *sheker* seeps in, even into our own communities. Therefore, we must redouble our efforts to fortify ourselves with *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) to stand up for what's right, to be an Avraham Ha'ivri and not waver. In the end, not only will you not lose, but you will be rewarded in spades, both in this world and the next.