



REFINING ONE'S MIDDOS

THE BIG CHALLENGE OF AVODA: MIDDOS!

Rav Saadia Gaon taught: The main reason man was created in this world was – to break his natural negative *middos*.

(כתר שם טוב סימן כ"ד)

A chossid from Beshenkovitch once asked the Mittlerer Rebbe for a *brocho* to be able to do *avoda*. He added, "I am not exactly sure what *avoda* entails, but since I have a strong desire **not** to do it, I understand that it must be something really good..."

(סה"ש ת"ש ע' 106)

The Frierdiker Rebbe fondly described the elder chossid, Reb Hendel, as a man with a good heart and good *middos* that he had refined by toiling in the *avoda* of *kabbolas ol*. He recounted what Reb Hendel had once said at a *farbrengen*: "As long as a *metzora* still suffered from *tzoraas*, he would not visit the *Beis HaMikdosh*. So, too, a *yungerman* who has not yet been healed of his negative *middos* is not allowed to go to Lubavitch and *chas veshalom* be *metameh* the *heichal HaShem*, where the Rebbe is.

"For ten years," continued Reb Hendel, "I studied *Reishis Chochma*, *Chareidim*, *Shaarei Teshuva* and *Pokeiach Ivrim*. I reviewed *Iggeres HaTeshuva* dozens of times, as well as chapters of *Derech Chayim*, in order to eradicate my negative *middos* and rid myself of the body's natural behaviors. Only then, with the approval of *eltere* chassidim, did I finally make my first trek to Lubavitch."

Relating this, the Frierdiker Rebbe concluded: "Listen, *yungeleit*, to what an *elterer* chossid is telling you about how he became a chossid! For ten years, a *yungerman* toils to attain *middos tovos* and during all that time he does not travel to Lubavitch, to the *Tzemach Tzedek*, because he is embarrassed to have the Rebbe see his *ruchniyusdiker* essence. **That** is a proper preparation to becoming a chossid."

(לקוטי דיבורים ח"ב ע' 696)

The Frierdiker Rebbe once said: When one notices a negative trait in himself, this should bother him seriously, and he must make every effort to correct it. Yet this task should not depress him. On the contrary, it should bring him *simcha*: he should rejoice that he has been granted the opportunity to correct his *middos*.

(סה"ש תרפ"ח ע' 26)

When the Rebbe Rashab observed good *middos* in his chassidim, his *simcha* was visible, and when he noticed a negative trait, this would hurt him to the point of tears. He could have changed things by saying a few firm words, but he wanted the change to result from the *avoda* of the chassidim themselves.

(ספר המאמרים תשי"א ע' 246)

DISCARDING UNWANTED BAGGAGE

The Alter Rebbe writes that before introducing *middos tovos*, one must first remove all negative *middos*. By way of analogy: A king desires to have a beautiful palace built for him. For a start, the selected location must be cleared of all filth, and only then is it possible to begin constructing the palace and decorating it. Similarly, we cannot construct a *dira betachtonim* for *HaShem* unless we first clear ourselves of all negative *middos*.

(לקוטי תורה ע, ג, לקו"ש ח"ב ע' 136)

The *farbrengens* of the esteemed chossid called Reb Peretz Chein were often spiced by his favorite *moshol*:

The chefs in the Czar's royal kitchen once prepared a lavish banquet for the visiting Kaiser William of Germany, the Czar's relative, and the highlight was to be a dish of stuffed and spiced calf intestines. Their efforts were so successful that the Kaiser asked for the recipe so that his own cooks at home would be able to serve him this extraordinary delicacy. The Czar duly ordered the head chef to write a detailed

list of ingredients and instructions, and Kaiser William left Russia a happy man. As soon as he arrived home in Germany he handed the recipe to his chef, but when the kitchen doors opened and the carefully prepared dish was served to the eagerly waiting Kaiser, he cried out, "What a disgusting odor!" – and the platter was quickly removed from the table.

Bitterly disappointed, he wrote to the Czar demanding to know why his chefs could not produce the same delicacy, even though they had carefully followed the recipe. The Czar asked his chef to offer an explanation.

The chef thought for a moment and then burst out laughing: "What?! The German chefs didn't work it out themselves?! There was one step so obvious that I didn't even include it in my instructions: *Before* the intestines are stuffed and spiced, they must first be turned inside out and *washed thoroughly*..."

(רשימות דברים לר"י היטריק)

At a *farbrengen* (1934 / שמוח"ת תרצ"ה), the Frierdiker Rebbe said that nowadays *Chassidus* is not being used for what it was intended; instead, it is being used for tasks that should be tackled before one approaches *Chassidus*. The *avoda* of correcting one's *middos* and refraining from forbidden actions (*sur meira*), as well as the positive actions (*aseh tov*) of good *middos* and *ahavas Yisroel*, does not require the *avoda* of *Chassidus*: it must be done earlier.

(לקוטי דיבורים ח"א ע' קצז)

CONSIDER THIS!

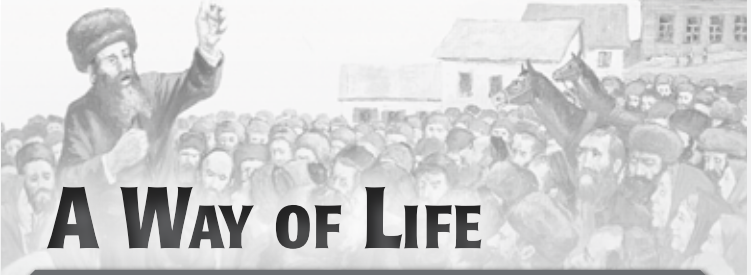
- Why is correcting one's *middos* so important? And why is it so difficult?
- Why can't we just focus on the positive and allow the negative to vanish on its own?

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A WAY OF LIFE

COSMETIC SURGERY

May a person undergo surgery when not medically necessary (to alter their appearance and the like)?

- May a person undergo surgery when not medically necessary (to alter their appearance and the like)?
- The following Halachic concerns pertain to this *shaila*: (a) The Torah (see Devarim 25:3) forbids wounding another person or oneself (*chavala*). (b) Another concern is that one may not willfully put oneself in a dangerous position (*sakana*).
- However, if wounding oneself is done not in a degrading manner (*derech bizoyon*), rather in a beneficial way, it is permitted. In addition it is permitted to wound in order to alleviate pain including psychological pain. Therefore some *poskim* permit such surgery in circumstances of need.
- The issue of danger depends on the degree of danger involved in the specific surgery.
- Others *poskim* forbid it explaining that the Torah's permission to heal (*verapo yerape*) applies only to curing an illness but not to altering one's appearance.
- To summarize: It is the consensus of the *poskim* that it is forbidden to undergo surgery simply for convenience, when there is no great need. Even in a situation of great need there is a dispute among *poskim* whether it is permitted. One who is contemplating such surgery must consult his or her *rov* for a ruling on its permissibility.

ראה שו"ת אג"מ חו"מ ח"ב סי' סו, חלקת יעקב ח"ג סי' יא, ציץ אליעזר ח"א סי' מא, מנחת יצחק ח"ו סי' קה

CURRENT EVENTS

ג' השון

REB YISROEL OF RUZHIN

Reb Yisroel Friedman of Ruzhin, known as the "Ruzhiner," was born on the 3rd of Tishrei, תקנ"ז (1796). He was a grandson of Reb Avraham Hamalach (son of the Mezritcher Maggid) and of Reb Nachum of Chernobyl. At the age of 16, after the passing of his uncle, he became the Rebbe and later relocated to Ruzhin. He was truly loved and respected by the Tzemach Tzeddek, who would call him the "*heiligh Rhuziner*." Reb Yisroel led life a royal lifestyle, but was known to never enjoy any of it. Due to a libel he was accused and imprisoned by the Russian government. He escaped prison and moved to Sadigor in Romania, where he eventually passed away, on the 3rd of Cheshvan, תרי"א (1850).



As a child, the tzaddik learned with his melamed the Gemara concerning one who has forgotten which day is Shabbos. The child had difficulty understanding, and the melamed explained that perhaps one traveled through a desert and forgot on which day he had left. The boy was not convinced and insisted that he did not understand how one could forget. Frustrated, the melamed asked him, "In such a situation, how does one not forget which day is Shabbos?" The boy replied, "On Shabbos the sky looks completely different. You just have to look up at the sky and you will see when it is Shabbos."

(רשימו"ד חדש ע' 224)



One freezing winter night, the tzaddik stood outside to perform *kiddush levana*, his feet warmed with fine fur boots. After a lengthy *avoda*, he turned to go inside, and the ground upon which he had stood had bloody footmarks... The fur boots had no soles.

(רשימו"ד חדש ע' 224)

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A MOMENT WITH THE REBBE

YOU TOO HAVE BEGUN TO WEAR THIS SHMATEH?

Reb Chatzkel Brod, a *chassid* from pre-war Russia, remembers the first *farbrenge* of the Rebbe he attended:

It was *Shavuos* 5711. It was extremely crowded, and I sat on the window sill, with one leg in the room and the other outside, through the window. But I did not feel any discomfort, as I was transfixed to the Rebbe.

At that time, the Rebbe's *farbrenge*s had a family like atmosphere, and the Rebbe would often give individual attention to those present.

During the *farbrenge*, I lifted my cup to say *l'chaim* to the Rebbe. The Rebbe looked at me, and then at the tie on my neck. The Rebbe smiled and asked, "You too have begun to wear this *shmateh*? Remove it!"

Needless to say, I took it off immediately, and ever since, I am not very particular with the American dress code...

לע"נ ר' אפרים ארי' ב"ר אליעזר ע"ה ומרת דבורה בת ר' משה ע"ה

