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## Report on the thesis of Judith R. Beiner:

### Sefer Maalot Hamiddot: A Model for Jewish Character Education

It is time for a new approach to Jewish ethical education. Socially, sin has proliferated and become more evident in the Jewish community. Worse, it is increasing acceptable. Intellectually, the ethical consensus which once made it almost unnecessary to teach ethics directly has disappeared; so has the intellectual foundations which gave it a firm foundation. Since this is an American phenomenon Christian thinkers, most notably Stanley Hauerwas, have suggested that the struggle to resurrect philosophic or theological ethics, should be accompanied by the classic from of Christian ethical education, the inculcation of virtues.

Ms. Beiner's devotes itself to the two significant aspects of this suggestion: first, the classic Jewish concern with virtues, and, second, how we, utilizing this material, might carry on Jewish virtue education today. For each, she wisely limits herself to a significant sample worked with in some depth.

Her investigation of classic Jewish teaching on virtues is taken from Sefer Maalot Hamiddot by Yehiel ben Yekutiel Anav of Rome, the earliest known Jewish work devoted to the Jewish virtues. Its author indicates that his primary purpose is educational and his tone and content point toward this. Moreover, this is an anthology of prior writings (to his own time), one enriched by his also treating the vices which oppose the virtues. Both are made more relevant by his interweaving of his own realistic understanding.

Ms. Beiner has translated three chapters of this work, p73 "Generosity," "Humility," and "A Good Name," providing each with a running commentary explaining her reactions to and struggles with the text. For more synoptic topics, she adds a general commentary after each chapter. This is followed by a brief survey of the contemporary attitude toward "character education" giving particular attention to Stanley Hauerwas, an ethician, and to the few Jewish educators who have dealt with this topic. She then provides an adult or high school sample lesson plan for each chapter, complete with the textual selections she proposes utilizing in each. These are essentially free standing lessons rather than part of a course.

The translations show a good feel for the ambiguous, often elliptical Hebrew and convey much of the tone as well as the content of the material. The two commentaries are thoughtful, honest and confront some of the realities faced in living with these virtues. The lessons show the professionalism of some years of experience teaching and give every promise being successful in the hands of a variety of teachers. There is much promise in this project and I hope that Ms. Beiner continues her intelligent, thoughtful, creative work in this area. When she does some minor problems require attention. (Ms. Beiner's thesis was done in absentia preventing prior correction.) The date of 1407 for this volume (without source attribution) is unlikely, Yehiel dating his scribal manuscripts in the late 13th century. Occasionally, too,

the work speaks of Yekutiel as the author though he is Yehiel's father. It would be helpful, too, to give some attention to the problem that people often know what is p73 considered virtuous yet act otherwise. Some education on temptation and a given virtue seems desirable.

These small matters aside, I am pleased to be able to recommend Ms. Beiner's thesis for acceptance.

Eugene B. Borowitz

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A Model for Jewish Character Education

Judith R. Beiner  
Rabbinic Thesis  
Dr. E. Borowitz, Advisor  
March 1, 1993

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## Introduction

Judaism has a system of ethics whose foundation is found in the Torah. These ethics include guidelines for all aspects of our lives; our relationships with people, our daily conduct, and our relationship to God. The particulars of this ethical system can be called values, or for the purposes of this work, virtues. Virtues or values are those elements of proper conduct which each of us is to strive for, and are seen as being necessary above and beyond matters of religious behaviors. The strength of our community depends upon the existence of members who demonstrate our unique virtues.

Throughout Jewish history, there have been a number of attempts to create and codify virtues, based on those found in the Bible, Talmud and Midrash. These attempts, beginning in the medieval world and continuing into the early 20th century became known as works of Ethical Literature. They were written to assist Jews in attaining spiritual and moral perfection. Works of Ethical Literature took on many different forms. For example, Classical Ethical Literature refers to those writings in book form, divided according to the component parts of the ideal way of life. (The subject of this thesis, Sefer Maalot HaMiddot is a work of Classical Ethical Literature). Other forms include Ethical Wills and Poetry, and Homiletical Literature. The ideas found in works of Ethical Literature parallel distinct ideological and theological movements in medieval Judaism, and resulted in four different types of literature. 1) Philosophical-Ethical Literature which began in the 9th century Spain struggled with the spiritual problems of the day. 2) Rabbinical-ethical Literature of the 13th century developed in Spain, Provence and Italy, and applied traditional Jewish ethics to the Medieval world. (Sefer Maalot HaMiddot is a work of Rabbinic-Ethical Literature.) 3) Ashkenazic-Hasidic Literature of the 12th and 13th centuries in Germany sought to define the spiritual essence of religious and moral behavior. 4) Kabbalistic-Ethical Literature developed in 16th century Safed, using the Zohar and other earlier works to teach mystical reasoning. Works of Ethical Literature continued to develop into the 19th and 20th centuries,

giving rise to the Musar movement, which introduced the study of major ethical works into the yeshivot and taught that moral behavior was man's greatest aspiration.<sup>1</sup>

Sefer Maalot HaMiddot is a particularly useful model for a study of virtues today. As a work designed to educate for character, its goal is to instruct readers in religious and moral behavior. Written in 1407 by Jehiel b. Jekuthiel of Rome, Sefer Maalot HaMiddot has 24 chapters, each of which describes a virtue in its positive and negative aspects. The justification for acting morally is, according to this work, to serve God. Each chapter stresses that the positive should be emphasized, and the negative avoided. Proof texts are drawn from Bible, Talmud, Midrash and other works of Ethical Literature. In studying this work today, the reader is struck by how 'on target' Jekuthiel's assessments of virtues are for us. While many of the circumstances of life have changed from his time to our own, we see that the same virtues and vices still operate today.

The construction of Sefer Maalot HaMiddot also gives us some insights into the purpose and method of Character Education. The book itself is tightly organized, with each chapter containing similar elements. A chapter begins with a discussion of the positive aspect of the virtue, noting its praiseworthiness. In the middle, there is a set paragraph which marks the transition in the discussion from the positive aspect of the virtue to its negative vice. The second half of the chapter always deals with that which is to be avoided. The author also discusses the excesses of each virtue, advocating the median behavior. Throughout each chapter, Jekuthiel defines the virtue or vice in as many ways as he can think of, a few of which are not easily understood. It is clear that he experiments with the Hebrew language, and in some cases creates new meanings. The structured nature of the book is itself a lesson about ethical or virtuous behavior. The message is that if one is to behave in an appropriate manner, he or she then must follow

continued on 1973 Hebrew-English Dictionary, Vol. 6, For references to the Midrash.

<sup>1</sup>Encyclopedia Judaica Vol. 6 "Ethical Literature" by Joseph Dan

certain patterns. Just as each chapter of Sefer Maalot HaMiddot is predictable, so too should be one's virtuous behavior. The book is organized much like a recipe: A recipe is always organized so that the ingredients are listed in the order that they are needed. When a cook goes to use a new recipe, he or she already knows the form, and only must absorb the details. So too with Jekuthiel's book: After reading one or two chapters, we know the form and what to look for: We only need to learn the particularities of each chapter. When it comes to acting with regard to a particular virtue, the form and the details ascertained from Sefer Maalot HaMiddot can help establish patterns in one's life.

This project has focused on several aspects of Character Education, based on Sefer Maalot HaMiddot as a model. Part One contains translations and commentaries of three chapters from Sefer Maalot HaMiddot. Each translation includes explanations of particular word usages, meanings and questions and comments. Following each translation is a commentary in which I have discussed the virtues in light of our contemporary understanding. I have also discussed aspects of the virtue found in Rabbinic Literature, not dealt with by Jekuthiel. In many cases, I found striking comparisons with contemporary situations. In each case, the commentaries are meant to explore and expand the various issues, and put them into a modern perspective. Part One ends with a discussion of definitions of virtues and character, and their relevance to a contemporary religious community. In Part Two, I have explored the question as to how to educate for character today. Using the material from Sefer Maalot HaMiddot, I have created three different lessons designed to explore the virtues of generosity, humility and a good name.

### **Notes on Translation**

1. English translations of the Biblical material are based on, but not exclusively taken from the 1985 JPS version of the Tanach. In translating the Talmudic references, I consulted the 1971 Hebrew-English Soncino version. For references to the Midrash



Rabbah, the 1993 English Soncino edition was my guide. Pirke Avot translations are from Siddur Sim Shalom, ed. Rabbi Jules Harlow, 1985.

2. Jekuthiel quotes extensively from two other works of Ethical Literature by Ibn Gabirol: Choices of Pearls (Mivhar HaPenimim) and the Improvement of the Moral Qualities (Tikkun Middot haNefesh 1045). I consulted a translation of "The Improvement" by Wise, 1902.<sup>4</sup>

3. One of the difficulties in the translations was how to best handle the words Maalah/Maalot and Middah/Middot. Middah/Middot was the easier one, and it made most sense to translate it as 'virtue' or virtues throughout. Yet, I translated maalah and maalot in several different ways, depending on the context. Maalah or maalot can be virtue of virtues, or it can also mean level or measure. The phrase Maalot haMiddot is most easily understood, as levels of virtues, or in the singular "maat Middah. . ." as "measure of the virtue" . . . Throughout the translations, I have made an attempt to footnote explanations of the translations.

## Part One

### Chapter 1: The Virtue of Generosity

#### Sefer Maalot HaMiddot Chapter 12

My children, come and I will teach you the virtue<sup>2</sup> of generosity. Know my children that the virtue of generosity is one of the important and distinguished virtues, found only in important people, and beloved by God. For the world was not built until He included in it a virtue of generosity as it is said, "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created. When God made the heaven and the earth." (Gen. 2:4)<sup>3</sup> How do we know that the virtue of mercy is a part of the virtue of generosity? It is said, "The generous man is blessed<sup>4</sup>, for he gives of his bread to the poor." (Proverbs 22:9) And not only this, but through the virtue of generosity, man acquires life in this world, and in the world to come, as it is said: "A man's gift eases his way and leads him before the great," (Proverbs 18:16). "A man's gift eases his way," in this world; that he will be honored and important before kings and rulers and ministers of the state. "And leads him before the great"; that God directed him to the world to come with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who were called great. How do we know that they were called great? About Abraham it is written, "The great man among the Anakites." (Joshua 14:14) And about Isaac it is written, "And the man grew greater and greater until he was very great." (Genesis 26: 13) And about Jacob it is written, "The boys became great, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed in camp." (Genesis 25:27) Because Esau went astray and he sold his birthright to Jacob, it is said about him, "I will make you least among nations, you shall

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<sup>2</sup> Maalah and Midah are often interchangeable. In this case, it makes sense to translate 'maalah' as virtue.

<sup>3</sup> It is not clear how this verse explains the inclusion of generosity in the world according to the previous line.

<sup>4</sup> Tov ayin means kind or generous. Here it means generous.

be most despised." (Obadiah 1:2) Thus the name of greatness was taken from him and it fell upon Jacob. And not just this, when someone gives some of his wealth in acts of charity<sup>5</sup> and lovingkindness they, (the acts) will precede him to the day of judgement and testify on his behalf as it says: "Your charity shall march before you" (Isaiah 58:8).

Great is the virtue of generosity which is ascribed to Abraham our father, peace be upon him, as it says, "For I have singled him out that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing charity and justice" (Genesis 18:19). And it says, "The generous of the peoples are gathered together, the retinue of Abraham's God" (Psalms 47:10). And he is called generous because he possessed a charitable nature and lovingkindness. The sages said, may their memory be a blessing: "Anyone who possesses these three good things, is one of the disciples of Abraham our father: Kindness<sup>6</sup>, modesty, and a humble spirit." These (qualities) are (possessed by) the disciples of Abraham our father. "Kindness" how do we know? It is written, "Let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on - seeing that you have come your servant's way." They replied, "Do as you have said" Abraham hastened to the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three measures of choice flour! Knead and make cakes! Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it" (Genesis 18:5-7). Thus we already learned that he was kind, which is a part of the virtue of generosity. And so too David, peace be upon him, asked from God to sustain him with the virtue of generosity, because it is an important virtue, as it is said: "Let me again rejoice in your help, let a spirit of generosity sustain me" (Psalm 51:14).

<sup>5</sup>Tzedakah is translated here and throughout the work as charity. Charity is a marker of generosity.

<sup>6</sup>Here Tov ayin is translated as kindness

My children, if you have a request for anyone, ask it of the generous man, for he will rejoice in your request and will try to fulfill it with generosity.<sup>7</sup> And don't make a request of one who is stingy<sup>8</sup>, for he will be saddened by your request and will turn his back on you. They asked the sage, "What kind of wound has no cure?" (Choice of Pearls 47:3). He said, "When the generous has need of the fool<sup>9</sup>, but holds back from him." A sage used to pray to God saying, "O my God, don't make me need the wicked among men. And if you make me need one of your creatures, may it be one of the best of them, the most generous soul among them, and the sweetest tongue among them, and the one among them who will not remind me of his favor" (Choice of Pearls, 47:6).<sup>10</sup> A generous man was saying to his friend, "When you need something from me, don't ask me face to face, because I don't want to see you, only the question. Write me your request in a note"<sup>11</sup> (Choice of Pearls, 47:17).

My children, come and learn generosity from the rooster. Look and see what this rooster is doing. When any food comes before him, he calls the hens to come eat with him and from time to time he gathers and lays the food before them. So too you my children, if you have a pleasing meal, don't eat it by yourselves. Instead, invite the poor or neighbors and loved ones to eat with you, or send it to them in their homes, for this is a path of generosity. Go out and see that there is not, in all of the virtues one as good as generosity.<sup>12</sup> Even if a man performs all of the commandments in the Torah but does not do them with generosity, they will not be considered in the accounting of mitzvot. If he

<sup>7</sup>Tov, ayin=generous

<sup>8</sup>The word kilai means greedy or stingy.

<sup>9</sup>The word nevel means scoundrel or fool. The meaning of this sentence is not clear.

<sup>10</sup>The person who is known to be generous only wants to have dealings with other people of quality. He wants to limit his interaction with people who are greedy and stingy, so as not to tarnish his own reputation.

<sup>11</sup>The generous man wishes to save the one who is making the request from any embarrassment.

<sup>12</sup>Ayin tova =generosity

was feeding a poor man fattened calves and great delicacies and he was miserly<sup>13</sup> towards him, it would have been better not to feed him, as it is said, "Better a meal of vegetables where there is love, than a fattened ox where there is hate" (Proverbs 15:17).<sup>14</sup> And if he gave him food generously, he is blessed as it is said, "The generous man is blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor" (Proverbs 22:9). And not only this, he is exalted and greatened like the flowing spring that becomes stronger and never ceases, as it says, "With his bread given and his water assured" (Isaiah 33:16).<sup>15</sup>

Great is the virtue of generosity, for Moses our teacher, peace be upon him maintained the virtue of generosity and kindness.<sup>16</sup> How can we say this? It is said: "Single out Joshua son of Nun, an inspired man and lay your hand upon him" (Numbers 27:18).<sup>17</sup> "One Hand" (Numbers Rabba 21:16). But he (Moses) behaved towards him (Joshua) with generosity and kindness as it is said, "And he laid his hands upon him" (Numbers 27:23). That is, two hands.<sup>18</sup> And thus we find that God blessed Israel with kindness and generosity as it is said, "May the Lord the God of your fathers increase your numbers like them a thousand times and bless you as He promised you" (Deuteronomy 1:11). The sages said, may their memory be blessed in the Aggadah, "Come and see how far the blessings of Moses extend, from one end of the world to the other". "One thousand" is not written here, rather "one thousand times". And what is "like them" (kachem)? Israel could have said: "Our teacher Moses, are we guilty of any one (of the sins) with which you charge us? And yet we accept your rebuke." But they were silent.

<sup>13</sup>Tsar ayin is translated here as miserly. The image is of one who acts with clenched fists.

<sup>14</sup>The point here is that if a person cannot give or serve food generously, than it is better not to give at all. Generosity is more than an act, it must also be done with the proper intentions.

<sup>15</sup>The Isaiah text emphasizes the point that rewards will come to those who are properly generous.

<sup>16</sup>Ayin tova when written with nedivut makes more sense if translated as kindness

<sup>17</sup>God commanded Moses to lay his hands upon Joshua.

<sup>18</sup>Despite the initial command to Moses that he lay one hand on Joshua in Numb. 27:18, we find in Numb 27:23 that Moses used two hands, indicating his great generosity.

Therefore, Moses said: "The Holy one Blessed be He, will raise up among you righteous people even as you are "like them" (kachem) who accept rebuke in silence" (Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:13).<sup>19</sup>

And what is generosity? That a man will forego some of his wealth to do with it acts of charity and lovingkindness, that he will do business with his fellow men in faithfulness, and will give to them from his own, and not take anything of theirs. As the sages said regarding Job: "Job was generous with his wealth, that he used to leave a pruta (small change) with his merchant, and paid his bills as required, and gives to whom it is fitting to give, and withholds from whom it is fitting to withhold, and spends his money for God's sake, and hates deceitful dealing, oppression and robbery" (Baba Batra 15b).<sup>20</sup> And if a commandment came to his hand, he extends his hand to do it with generosity, and in a modest way, so as not to receive his reward for it out of pridefulness of heart and self-aggrandizement among men. And the wealth of his friend will be as dear to him as his own.<sup>21</sup> For it is known that no one who respects the wealth of his friend as his own will come to rob, steal or cheat. And anyone who respects his friend's wealth, is truly one of the generous and kind. And as such, he is content with what he has, whether great or little, and finds satisfaction and pleasure for his soul, because he is happy with his portion which the creator bestowed upon him.

One sage said, "A generous one is not one who is generous to one who was generous to him, or one who draws near to one who draws near to him, for this is just repayment."<sup>22</sup> Rather the generous one is one who is generous towards one who was not generous to him, or draws near the one who pushed him away" (Choice of Pearls 28:14).

And he said, "The one who is freely generous will be master. And whoever is greedy, he

<sup>19</sup>Jekuthiel paraphrases the Midrash. Even after having looked at a translation, the meaning is not clear.

<sup>20</sup>Jekuthiel takes great liberties with the gemarra text, but the gist of the two texts is similar.

<sup>21</sup>This is from Avot 2:17, yet not noted by our editor.

<sup>22</sup>This sentence refers to a tit for tat situation.

will be contemptible" (Choice of Pearls, 38:7). And they said, "Once a generous man entered the presence of one of the kings. The king said to him, 'Tell me a little about your generosity.'" The generous man said to him, "It is better that you hear this story from someone else rather than from me." The king said to him, "I decree that you speak." He said to him, "Never has a man sat with me while I flaunted my wealth before him."<sup>23</sup> He said to him, "And why?" He said to him, "Lest he see that I exceed him in status."<sup>24</sup> I have never recompensed with evil one who has ever harmed me." He said to him, "And why?" He said to him, "Because if a man was important, it is appropriate, and I am required to pardon an important man. But if he be a scoundrel, I will not defile myself with him lest the scoundrel speak to me. And never has a man requested from me anything for which I didn't fulfill his request. And I saw his face fall as a result of what I gave to him even if I exempted it (what I gave him) from all my rights of possession." The king said to him, "It is right for you to be master among your people and over others" (Choice of Pearls 38:14-end of paragraph).<sup>25</sup>

So too acceptance of an apology is one of the ways of generosity. As a sage said, "When a loved one apologizes to you with a plausible reason, or a confession, don't seize him but pardon him, as 'pardon' is a part of the virtue of generosity" (Choice of Pearls, 27:4). And another said "Accept an apology from whoever comes to apologize before you, whether it be the truth or a lie. For whoever likes you openly, respects you. And whoever is rebellious towards you, honors you in secret (Choice of Pearls 27:8). And it is said "One man apologized to his loved one." And his loved one said to him, "Indeed the

<sup>23</sup>The meaning of the hebrew phrase "pashattie raglai" here means to flaunt wealth.

<sup>24</sup>Given this context, the word 'maalah' means status, related to the meaning of 'maalah' as level.

<sup>25</sup>This man was generous because he did not flaunt his wealth, did not harm someone who harmed him, pardoned an important man, and fulfilled requests. Only the last element is not clear. Perhaps it means that this generous man also was able to renounce any claim to things that he gave away.

Creator did not require you to apologize, as we judged you innocent, nor had we need to think evil about you because of our love of you" (Choice of Pearls 27:5).

Know my children that generosity is a median behavior.<sup>26</sup> It is a praiseworthy and honorable virtue. People gather around the generous and praise him for his generosity and the gifts of his hand, as it is said: "Many court the favor of a great man, and all are the friends of a dispenser of gifts" (Proverbs 19:6).

And everyone who accustoms himself to this praiseworthy virtue and gives when it is fitting to give and to whom it is fitting to give, his generosity is like a hidden treasure, which cannot be exhausted and will not perish even over a long time. And thus Solomon commanded about the virtue of generosity as it is said, "Send your bread forth upon the waters, for after many days you will find it" (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Thus said David about the virtue of generosity, "He gives freely to the poor, his charity lasts forever, his horn is exalted in honor" (Psalms 112:9).

And know my children that generosity is indicative of distinction and piety.<sup>27</sup> Just as avarice is indicative of baseness, inferiority and the wicked. One sage said: He whom the Creator favored with a good soul, he is among the children of the world to come. And they said, What is the greatest distinction? He said: Acts of lovingkindness towards people.

Generosity also includes the one who speaks out of modesty and conciliation and contentment and good will, and all of his interests and his advice are in the path of generosity, as it is said, "The generous advises generously" (Isaiah 32:8). And not only this, but he exists in the world because of his generosity as it says: "And he is constant in his generosity" (Isaiah 32:8).

And know my children, that generosity is a virtue that comes to a man joyfully from his heart, that he is happy in his heart when he gives from his wealth to

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<sup>26</sup>Extreme behaviors are not the ideal.

<sup>27</sup>There is a connection between the virtues.



respectable people and with a whole heart generously does charity and acts of lovingkindness as it is said, "You shall take gifts for me from every person whose heart makes him generous" (Exodus 25:2). And it says, "Everyone generous of heart shall bring them . . ." (Exodus 35:5).

So too generosity includes the man who is merciful and is merciful towards all mankind. And if he perceives that a man needs to ask for something from him, he should precede him and give him (that which he needs) before the request.<sup>28</sup>

My children, even though I cautioned you about the virtue of generosity, I will warn you not to overdo this and go beyond the boundaries of generosity to squandering and irresponsibility. Rather, (remain) on the median path and give according to your ability to do acts of lovingkindness, and be generous to people from that which the Creator has bestowed upon you, so that you do not come to impoverishment and penury on account of excessive generosity. This is the virtue of generosity through which a man comes to merit and a good name. But for a man to squander his money irresponsibly, to give to someone who does not need it and to give from his wealth where it is not suitable, giving from his money expansively, more than what is fitting, even more than what his means allow. It is not enough that this is not accounted to him as the virtue of generosity, but also it is considered his shame and disgrace, and people will speak disrespectfully about him and talk about him behind his back. And more than anything, he will become impoverished and have need of other men and he will be humiliated.

Have you not heard my children, what happened to a generous one who was an artisan, and was so generous that he would do his work for all who came to him without taking his wages from them. He did this regularly so that when people came to him for work, when he finished their work they did not say to him, "How much is the fee for the work you did for me?" Instead, they took his work and said to him, "It is beautiful!"<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup>This is to avoid any embarrassment on the part of the one making the request.

<sup>29</sup>This expression is found in Zechariah 4:7 as statements of the angels.

and they went away with their craft. And he became accustomed to this manner until he became helpless and impoverished. Nevertheless, he was embarrassed to ask people for his fees, for he was used to doing the work for them out of generosity. Now what did this poor one do? He took a dog and tied it to the legs of the bench that he was sitting on to do his craft. And when someone came as before to take his work and say to him, "It is beautiful", he would say to him, "Throw down before this dog this benefit of enjoyment that you give to me."<sup>30</sup> And he did not feed this dog anything until it died. And when the dog died, people were coming as before to take his work without money saying to him, "It is beautiful". He would say to them, "Hold your compliments! Pay me my wage, for my dog has already died from the benefit that you gave to me; that you threw down before him. And just as my dog was not sustained from the benefit that you threw down before him, so too a man is not sustained from the benefit that people give to him without another benefit." And the people answered, "Certainly, take money according to your will." And after that, they paid him for his work.

Therefore my children, be careful not to exceed the boundary of generosity to squandering and irresponsibility. Just as generosity is praised by the sages, so are squandering and irresponsibility loathed by the sages and all ordinary men. And it is said<sup>31</sup>, "The generous is rich even if he is poor. And the squanderer poor, even if he is a rich king." And it is said "The miserly one is better than the one who squanders. For the one who squanders will find favor in the eyes of the people as long as his hand is open to give to them. And when he withholds his hand from them, they will become his enemies. And the generous one who is cautious is master over them." And it is said, "Generosity is a pleasant virtue and found among pious sages." And squandering and irresponsibility, are not a created trait or virtue, but rather a crazy and foolish spirit that comes to the

<sup>30</sup>Obviously a sarcastic remark. The artisan is asking his patrons to give the dog the "payment" which they give to him, or become poor out of their own irresponsibility.

<sup>31</sup>We are not given references for the following statements of the sages.

man who squanders his money. And avarice is found in a man of little heart who fears he will lose his money and does not trust the One who graciously bestowed it upon him.<sup>32</sup>

My children, be careful of the vice<sup>33</sup> of squandering and irresponsibility, and don't expend your money without purpose, but rather for things that cannot be avoided, like matters of eating and drinking and clothing and all the rest of the things you need, but only enough for sufficiency; not in the way of irresponsibility, but enough to supply whatever is lacking. And when you earn two coins, spend one and hide one away, so that you will always have a sum of coins in your hands. As the makers of parables say, "The value of a man is according to what he has". And if he has nothing he is not considered important. <sup>34</sup>

Do you not see my children, how the poor are despised in the eyes of some of the rich, and how low they are in their eyes, even so as not to think anything of their wisdom. Solomon said, "A poor man's wisdom is scorned, and his words are not heeded" (Ecclesiastes 9:16). And moreover, the brothers and relatives of the poor man hate him and, all the more so, his friends and loved ones distance themselves from him as it is said, "All the brothers of a poor man despise him; How much more is he shunned by his friends" (Proverbs 19:7). And even more so, that they bring up false charges and well-known reasons so that he will not benefit from their money at all. As it is said "He who pursues words, they are of no avail" (Proverbs 19:7).<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, my sons, be careful about this praiseworthy virtue of generosity and accustom yourselves to it, and keep yourselves from squandering and irresponsibility and gifts. For all who accustom themselves to squandering and

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<sup>32</sup>In this paragraph we are given the extremes of generosity, squandering and irresponsibility and its opposite, avariciousness. These negative qualities are all to be avoided.

<sup>33</sup>The negative of midah.

<sup>34</sup>According to this, if a man is poor, he is financially and socially worthless. It must be because it is assumed that a person became poor out of their own irresponsibility.

<sup>35</sup>There is not sympathy for the poor in this context.

irresponsibility, come in the end into poverty, despoilment and basedness, and there is no escape for them.

May our God in his mercy open his wide and ample hand toward us. "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in the generous" (Psalms 118:9).

And after we have reached this point speaking in praise of the virtue of generosity and those who possess it, let us speak about the detestability of the vice of avarice and its adherents, in order to habituate them in doing the praiseworthy virtue of generosity with the help of the Almighty.<sup>36</sup>

Know my children that the vice of avarice and stinginess<sup>37</sup> is a very detestable vice, and there is not, in all of the detestable vices one more inferior and detestable than it. And it is fitting for every important man to distance himself from this detestable vice, for the sages all agreed and they said: There is no importance with avariciousness and no faith with greed. And everyone who accustoms himself to this inferior vice, will not be mentioned among important people, as it says, "No more shall a villain be called generous nor shall 'gentleman' be said of an avaricious one" (Isaiah 32:5) And one sage said, "Avarice is an inferiority, and decisiveness<sup>38</sup> is a loss and haste is a mistake" (Choice of Pearls 47:9).

And know my children that the avaricious one is like the dog. Surely you will see a dog stand on the corpse of a beast which could sustain several (dogs). But if another dog comes to eat with him, he challenges him and sends him away, because he does not think he would be able to satisfy his soul. And thus it says, "The dogs are greedy; they never know satiety" (Isaiah 56:11).

The avaricious and stingy are so detested that the avaricious man is expelled from this world and from the world to come. Thus said the sages, may their memory be

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<sup>36</sup>This paragraph is Jekuthiel's transition from the positive to the negative. It is found in every chapter of his book.

<sup>37</sup>Here tsar ayin, the opposite of tov ayin. Tsar ayin and kilai are often synonymous.

<sup>38</sup>The meaning of this word in this context was not clear.

blessed, "A man will go out from the world because of the evil eye, the evil inclination and hate of one's fellow men" (Avot 2:11). And about this Solomon cried out and said: "Do not eat of a greedy man's food; do not crave his dainties. He is like one keeping accounts; Eat and drink he says to you, but he does not really mean it" (Proverbs 23:6,7).

Thus the sages said, may their memory be a blessing, Whoever accepts the hospitality of stingy men transgresses two negative commands: "Don't eat, and don't lust"(Sota 38b). And when it says, "Don't eat the bread of the stingy", why does it say, "And don't lust after his dainties"? To say to you, when you know that he is stingy, you are not permitted to enter his house. Even if he lays out before you several kinds of delicacies and several delicious foods. And why? He is like the one who keeps an account. Because he is stingy, he stands and thinks to himself about what you are eating and drinking.<sup>39</sup> Because of this there is not a blessing for what is in your belly, for his evil eye devours it, even inside your belly as it is said, "The morsel you eat you will vomit" (Proverbs 23:8). It is not digested in your belly. And not only this, anyone who eats and drinks from the bread of the stingy, is as if he eats and drinks poison. There is no enjoyment in it, rather it injures him as it is said, "His food in his bowels turns into asps venom within him" (Job 20:14). And one sage said, "The avaricious innkeeper will not fear from nausea, and will not need a druggist" (Choice of Pearls 47:13). And one said, "The guest of the avaricious, his beasts will be afflicted, and he does not need to leave."<sup>40</sup>

My children, come and see how harsh are the ones who practice restraint and stinginess. One whose eyes are evil<sup>41</sup>, is like one who spills blood. Thus said the sages, may their memory be a blessing, "The necessity for the red heifer is needed only on

<sup>39</sup>The gifts, or here foods, of the stingy are spoiled.

<sup>40</sup>The understanding here is that this guest will "check in" yet will not need to "check out", for he will be poisoned by his association with the avaricious.

<sup>41</sup>Ayin harah is used as a synonym for tsar ayin.

account of greed".<sup>42</sup> It is said, "And they shall make this declaration : Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done" (Deuteronomy 21:7). Is it possible that the elders of the bet din were murderers? But we couldn't help, and we turned him away without food, and didn't see him, and left him without an escort"(Sotah 38b).<sup>43</sup> Moreover, even birds of the heavens recognize a greedy one, about this said the sages, may their memory be a blessing in the Aggadah, "How do we know that even the birds of the heavens recognize him as a greedy one?" It is said, "In the eyes of every winged creature the outspread net means nothing. But they lie in ambush for their own blood. These are the greedy ones" (Proverbs 1:17,18).<sup>44</sup> And one who is avaricious and greedy with his money and loves it too much and does not do with it charity and deeds of lovingkindness, in the end his money will be diminished and vanish as it is said, "A man with an evil eye runs after wealth. He does not realize that loss will overtake it" (Proverbs 28:22).

Know my children, that the one who is crazy about money and covets it too much, in the end his desire for it brings him to robbery, stealing and violence, doing business with men without good faith, defrauding them and scheming against them taking their money every chance that he can. His desire and his longing for money prevents him from acts of charity and from lovingkindness and from commandments, because his greed causes him to disbelieve that money will be enough for him, even if he is very rich. And the money of others, even if it is a little, will appear to be a lot in his eyes, and he attaches the evil eye to it covets it. The one who is greedy, it is not enough that he removes his trust from God; instead he places his trust in money. I quote to him this text, "Gods of silver and Gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves" (Exodus 20:20).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup>To atone for a murder whose perpetrator is unknown. This reference is from Deut 21.

<sup>43</sup>The meaning of the Sotah passage is not clear in this context.

<sup>44</sup>Birds recognize greed because they too exhibit this trait.

<sup>45</sup>Overzealousness towards money is likened to idol worship.

My children, don't make a request of the avaricious, for it is not enough that he will withhold it from you but also, he will hate you. And one sage said, "The one who asks a question of the avaricious is inferior to him (the avaricious one)" (Choice of Pearls 47:12).<sup>46</sup> And another said, "The one who makes a request from the avaricious is like the one who requests fish in the desert."<sup>47</sup> It is said, "For the avaricious, it is not enough for him that he is greedy of his money, but he also hates the generous and the honorable, and speaks behind their backs with his contemporaries." And if you want to recognize the avaricious man, examine his deeds and see: If a man vows something to another but delays his vow and finds schemes and reasons not to fulfill the vow, and even if he fulfills it after a time, think of him as villainous and avaricious. Like one sage said, "The vow of the generous is the speedy gift. And the vow of the avaricious is delay and the parched ear."<sup>48</sup> And so, there are three types of greed: You have a man who is greedy for himself and indulgent to the members of his household. And there is the one who is indulgent for himself and greedy towards the members of his household, and all the more so to the rest of people. And there is the one who is greedy for himself and towards all people.<sup>49</sup>

And I praise the greedy in one thing, for he will withhold his hand from the villainous just as he withholds his hand from the generous and honored.<sup>50</sup> Indeed I saw a majority of the people who practice restraint bestowing their inheritance on their children; wealth gathered from greed and restraint. And their children rose up after them and wasted it by means of squandering and irresponsibility. I have already

<sup>46</sup>An avaricious person was obviously known, and could therefore be avoided. If one intentionally has contact with him, this is looked upon unfavorably.

<sup>47</sup>It is impossible for the request to be fulfilled.

<sup>48</sup>With this reference to vows, we can see that avariciousness has to do with intention as well as action.

<sup>49</sup>The nature of greed is that it can effect all people who deal with a greedy person, regardless of their relationship.

<sup>50</sup>Here, the fact that a greedy person is not selective is seen in a positive light.

weighed all the people on a scale and I have not found anyone lighter than the avaricious one himself, and the lightest of the light is the one who wastes and squanders his money.<sup>51</sup>

All who are passionate about money are not satisfied from it as it is said, "Sheol and Abaddon cannot be satisfied, nor can the eyes of man be satisfied" (Proverbs 27:20). And it is said, "A lover of money will never be satisfied from money" (Ecclesiastes 5:9). Moreover, it causes him to lose his soul, as it is said, "I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun, for it is an evil matter<sup>52</sup>, which God gave men to be concerned with" (Ecclesiastes 1:13). And the sages, may their memory be a blessing, said in the Aggadah, "This is the judgment concerning money" (Ecclesiastes Rabba 3:12).<sup>53</sup> If he is worthy and uses his money for charity and deeds of lovingkindness, he can answer for it, that is he can call to the Holy One Blessed be He and He will answer. If he is not worthy, it will accuse him (acts of unworthiness) as it is said, "It answers with evil testimony against him" (Deut. 19:16). Furthermore, everyone who is avaricious and greedy with his money and doesn't distribute it in acts of charity and acts of lovingkindness, divine justice brings charges against him, and causes his soul and his money to perish. About this the scriptures say, "And those riches perish by evil disposition." (Ecclesiastes 6:13). And our sages said, may their memory be a blessing in the Aggadah, "The rich man answered the poor man in an evil disposition saying to him: Look at those thighs! Look at those legs, that fat body. Why don't you go out and get work to eat! Said the Holy One, Blessed be He: "It is not enough that you have not given him anything of your own, but must you set an evil eye upon that which I have

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<sup>51</sup>Squandering is certainly seen on the same level as greed in that they are equally undesirable.

<sup>52</sup>Meaning greed in the context of a discussion of how the poor are treated by the rich.

<sup>53</sup>An interesting textual note: In the introduction to the 1983 Soncino Edition of the Midrash Rabba, the author notes that there is no commentary to Eccl. 3:12 in the extant version! (The money is more important than fearing God.)



given him?" (Leviticus Rabba 34:7). Consequently, "If he begets a son, he has nothing in hand" (Ecclesiastes 5:13).<sup>54</sup>

Woe to the miserly and the greedy, who cause their money to perish in this world and expel their souls from life in the world to come. So too we find, in the people of Sodom that would not have been lost from the world were it not that they were greedy with their money. They were very rich and they did not allow others to benefit from what was theirs. Thus our sages said, may their memory be for a blessing, "The people of Sodom prospered from the good and fertile earth. They settled upon it, and every need in this world came forth from it. Gold came forth from it as it says, "And dust of gold are his" (Job 28:6) What is "and dust of gold are his?" One of them says to his slave, go to the garden and get for me an issar's worth of green vegetables. And he went to get it and found gold in the earth under them" (Leviticus Rabba, 4:1, 5, 2, Pirke d'Rebbe Eliezar 25). Silver was coming forth from it. It is said, "There is a mine for silver" (Job 28:1). Precious stones and pearls go forth from it as it says, "Its rocks are a source of sapphires" (Job 28:6). Bread came forth from it as it says, "Earth out of which bread came forth" (Job 28:5). And they did not trust in the shadow of their Creator, rather in the protection of their riches, for wealth overrides fear of the heavens in its owner as it is said, "Men who trust in their riches, are boastful of their great wealth" (Psalms 49:7).<sup>55</sup> And even more so that they didn't trust the honor of their God to purchase food for the guest and the stranger, as it is said, "A river burst forth far from where men live, forgotten by wayfarers, destitute of men far removed" (Job 28:4). They even harvested the fruits of their trees from above, so that there will not be

<sup>54</sup>This Midrash is in the context of a discussion of how the poor sometimes try to solicit money and sympathy. The words here are the response of a greedy rich man, obviously disgusted with the poor. The meaning of this last quote from Ecclesiastes is unclear.

<sup>55</sup>Chasing after money is more important than fearing God.

enjoyment from Sodom, for the bird of the heaven as it is said, "No bird of prey knows the path to it; the falcon's eye has not gazed upon it" (Job 28:7).<sup>56</sup>

My children, see what the one who practices restraint and greed does. Suppose a commandment comes upon him, such as sukkah and lulav and tsitsit and the like. He will be greedy with his money, saying to himself, "Why loose my money and take from what I have for the sake of this commandment, when I can fulfill my obligation with that belonging to others?" The attribute of Divine justice brings charges against him before God and says to him, "Master of the universe, this one is honoring you with another's money." It is just that you distribute his wealth among others. And because of this his wealth disappears and is diminished. What is the cause of this? That he looked at his possessions with an evil eye. And thus if he were required to do a commandment, he would be meticulous in doing with the least little bit of money and would not trouble to do it nicely and say, "I am fulfilling my obligation in this just as if I had done it with 1000 zuz. Why should I spend my money for nothing, only to do a commandment in the best way!" The attribute of Divine justice brings charges against him before God that he scorns the mitzvah, that he doesn't do it in the best way or spend on it, in order to make himself pleasing before God in good commandments. Because of this his money is lost and his riches destroyed.<sup>57</sup>

Avarice and greed are very detestable vices. Each time one's eyes are narrow<sup>58</sup> towards his fellow men, the Holy One Blessed be He gives him failing eyes - measure for measure. Thus we found in Bilaam the wicked, that because he requested that the evil eye

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<sup>56</sup>The people of Sodom were so greedy that they denied needs of strangers and the birds. In other words, they went out of their way to be greedy!

<sup>57</sup>The implication here is that by doing the commandments in the best way possible, one pleases God. The one who is greedy and has inappropriate intentions towards the mitzvot will be punished in the end.

<sup>58</sup>Here ayno tsara is translated literally to clarify the analogy.

to be brought over Israel, one of his eyes was closed up as it says, "Word of Bilaam, son of Beor, word of the man whose eye is closed" <sup>59</sup> (Numbers 24:3).

The evil eye is a harsh thing, that it is weighed against all of the sicknesses together as it is said, "The Lord will ward off from you all sickness" (Deuteronomy 7:15). And the sages say, may their memory be a blessing, "This is the evil eye" (Baba Metziah 107b). They said, "99 died from the evil eye and one from natural causes" (Baba Metziah 107b). Every time that the eye rules over him, it consumes us. And lest you say the evil eye is not harsh, except when it is directed towards other people. But the evil eye that a man directs towards himself and towards his property, does not consume him and is not damaged, the text says, "My eyes devour my soul from all the maidens of my city" (Lamentations 3:51). As if to say, my evil eye (towards myself) consumed me more than the evil eye of others consumed me.<sup>60</sup>

And because the evil eye is such a very harsh thing and consumes every place that it enters into, accordingly, the Holy One, Blessed be He commanded to Moses and said to him, "When you want to preside over the census of Israel, don't count yourselves (the people). Because every time that there is a census, there will be a plague because of the evil eye that consumes it (the people). Instead, collect shekels to atone for them, and you count the shekels and preside over census" (Yoma 22b).<sup>61</sup>

Accordingly, everyone who directs the evil eye towards his fellow, it is considered as if he killed him. And whoever does not have an evil eye towards fellow men, no evil eye will rule over him. From where do we learn this? From Joseph the righteous who did not cast his eye towards something that was not his, to look at the wife

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<sup>59</sup>This text uses a play on words: Satam with a samech, and satam with a sin.

<sup>60</sup>This text is a bit confusing, but the gist of it seems to be that the evil eye is self-destructive and destructive towards other.

<sup>61</sup>God is directing Moses to use a more surreptitious method to count the census, so that the evil eye will avoid them. Previously, it made sense to equate the evil eye with greed. Yet in this case, the connection to greed is not clear.

of Potiphar.<sup>62</sup> According to this, the evil eye did not rule over him or his descendants as it is said, "Joseph is a wild ass, a wild ass by a spring" (Genesis 49:22). He was wild and wet from the spring, and there was no eye causing damage to him.<sup>63</sup> And lest you say, "Was he not greedy (were his eyes not narrow towards) with his own money?" The text says, "Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's palace" (Genesis 47:14). He was a faithful treasurer and didn't steal anything.<sup>64</sup>

Those who are greedy never see a sign of blessing. Thus said our sages, may their memory be a blessing, "Traders in market stands and those who raise thin beasts, and those who cut down beautiful trees and those who cast their eyes at the better portion; they never see a sign of blessing." (Pesachim 50b)<sup>65</sup>

And everyone who is generous with his money and gives from it to charity and acts of lovingkindness and feeds bread to the poor and satisfies them; He is prosperous and is himself sated from everything good. As it is said, "A generous soul enjoys prosperity and he who satisfies others shall also be sated" (Proverbs 11:25).

Therefore my children, be careful that you do not accustom yourselves to the vice of greed and avarice. In order that you be blessed from the mouth of God and from the mouths of fellow men. And our God that is in the heavens will save us from this detestable vice, and will cause us to succeed in loftier virtues. But by God's mercy, a spirit of generosity will sustain us.

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<sup>62</sup>Joseph did not let himself be enticed by Potiphar.

<sup>63</sup>This sentence turns the verse into a word play: Ayin means spring or eye, and the phrase parah veraveh is taken to mean pru urvu. With the word play, the meaning is that because of the eye/well, he was able to procreate. The evil eye that Joseph avoided previously actually served him well!

<sup>64</sup>Joseph was not greedy, despite all of the temptations surrounding him.

<sup>65</sup>Today, we could add many examples of those who are greedy and undeserving of God's blessings.

## Commentary

According to the author, being generous is among those virtues which are important for people to follow. Not only does it lead to respect and favor while one is alive, but it also will grant a person life in the world to come. The focus in this chapter is on the effects of being generous with regard to one's fellow man. We have models for this virtue in the Patriarchs. Abraham, Moses, David and Joseph all exemplify a particular aspect of generosity. Being generous includes not only the typical acts of unsolicited charity, but in addition, giving anonymous donations, welcoming others into our homes, accepting apologies and performing mitzvot out of one's generosity. The way in which one is generous reveals a person's intentions. If one is generous, then he can be considered benevolent as well. Generosity also includes a number of different qualities including piety, modesty, hospitality, good will towards others and a merciful attitude towards the creatures.

The point is stressed that generosity comes from the heart. From this we understand that it is not a rational quality; instead it is an emotional virtue that must be internalized. We certainly can learn about being generous, particularly by example. Yet it is not a quality which all people demonstrate. Some are simply more generous than others. We probably learn about it best from the people we live with, and we develop our inclinations as a result of their influence.

This work emphasizes that one must find a balance when it comes to being generous. A person should give only that which they are able, and never give so much that they will then suffer because of it. We are not to let others take advantage of us, nor are we permitted to put ourselves into the poor house. It is difficult to imagine today that we would be excessively generous with our money to the point that we would suffer. Yet people do allow themselves to be taken advantage of in other ways. Some people cannot say 'no' to others when it comes to doing favors, or being hospitable to the point

on the sacred system was correct by the time of our work. Yet there is an important

that they can become overwhelmed and resentful. Balancing one's own needs in light of others requests is the key.

The opposite of generosity, greed or avarice leads to a number of unpleasant consequences. The greedy are expelled from this world and the world to come, and the one who is a miser will in the end lose his money. Association with the greedy is also frowned upon, most likely because it would rub off on us! Greed also prevents us from doing mitzvot with the proper intention. Avarice is also a form of idol worship, for the one who loves his money too much will not be devoted to God.

One element of generosity found in the Talmudic literature not covered in Sefer Maalot HaMiddot where the focus is on a different angle of the relationship between man and God. There are references which deal with the details of the sacrificial process. A nadiv or a nidvah refers to a free will offering, one which is not legally binding, done out of generosity. This is different from a neder, a vow which is considered a legally binding oral contract. The following discussion is based on Deuteronomy 23:24, "You must fulfill what has crossed your lips and perform what you have vowed voluntarily (nadarta l'adonai elohecha nedava) to the Lord your God, having made the promise with your own mouth." Zevachim 2b states, "Surely it is a free will vow? (nidvah neder). The meaning is this: If you have acted in accordance with your vow, let it be the fulfillment of your vow. But if not, let it count as a free-will offering (nidvah). Now as a free will offering, is it permitted to make a change in it?" The distinction between the two is discussed. A vow is when one says, "I undertake to bring a sacrifice." A free-will offering is indicated when one says, "This animal is for a sacrifice." In the former, if one subsequently dedicates an animal in pursuance of his vow and it is lost before it is sacrificed, he must bring another. In the latter case, if the animal becomes unfit or lost, his obligation is over. It is clear why our author did not use this or any other reference to sacrifice; as the sacrificial system was defunct by the time of our work. Yet there is an important

principle in this selection: The notion of liability or being bound to an act (of generosity). There is a wonderful contemporary illustration in the method by which our Federations raise money. One is solicited either by telephone or in person and requested to make a pledge. Are we committed to donating this sum of money and can we be held liable for it? Since someone technically asked us for it, is it considered a free-will donation or a vow? Yet if we sign a pledge card, is this considered a binding contract? Depending on who's perspective, it is both. The solicitor could make a case for it being both a vow/pledge and hold the giver to his promise. The giver, from the point of view of his or her tax return certainly will consider it a charitable (free-will) donation.

The reason for the free-will offering was to expiate one from sin. In Nedarim 10b it states, "The early Hasidim were eager to bring a sin offering, because the Holy One, Blessed be He never caused them to stumble: What did they do? They rose and made a free-will vow (mitnadvim nezirot) to the Omnipresent." Our author addressed this subject only indirectly, in that association with greed and greed itself leads one to sin. But he doesn't discuss that generosity exempts or expiates one from sin. This is a difficult concept for modernity, but there is a parallel. We don't give of our time or our money today because it will absolve us from sin. Yet we do give, because we feel guilty if we do not. For some reason, perhaps just our human nature, we need to participate in good acts. Who can look a girl scout in the eye and say no without feeling a pang of guilt? If we don't give from our hearts, then we often give to relieve our conscience.

This material's discussion of the treatment of the poor is interesting in that it details a specific method by which one becomes poor: By squandering one's wealth. If one becomes impoverished in this manner, he is to be despised and considered unworthy. We might like to think that the Rabbis reacted with sympathy towards "legitimately" poor people. It is difficult to imagine that our ancestors did not feel this way about most poor people, regardless of how they came to be impoverished. To this day, we still look down upon those of meager means, whether they be homeless waifs rejected by the

system or just poor schleppers. It is very difficult to be revered and influential without any wealth or means at all. This attitude prevails simply because this is how the world works! It is a good thing that Western Religions contain doctrines as to how to help the poor, and that these ethics can serve as a balance for the unfortunate existing sentiment.

Another element of generosity which was not discussed in Sefer Maalot HaMiddot is that of volunteerism. In addition to or in place of money, people often volunteer their time for various causes. This is a very important virtue, particularly for the Jewish community at all levels, which could not function without volunteers. Volunteering one's time not only assists in getting a particular task completed, it also helps to create community as people come together to work. The motivation for volunteering can be to champion a cause, to strengthen an organization, or to help those in need. Regardless of the reason or cause, the one who volunteers is exemplifying an act of generosity.

The virtue of generosity is certainly relevant for us today. In all sectors of society, the notion of giving freely of one's time, money or talents operates in such a way that it is not considered to be a luxury, but a necessity. The challenge lies in instilling within people a sense of duty or obligation to give. As Jews, our tradition obligates us to perform generous acts.

[illegible][illegible]

1949-50 season, because of the unusually early start of the season, the amount of work done was not as much as in 1948-49. The amount of work done was not as much as in 1948-49.

\*The Slabow here. Followed by *propaganda* with postscript.

Virginia had a reputation for being one of the best in the land. The best example of this was the fact that the Governor, Sir John Berkeley, was a member of the House of Commons.

\*Note that even in cases of the possession of one's self.

"These words in Latin are not in" our standard edition of our Constitution. They add emphasis to the point of the message. One may be forgiven if he or she shows pathos or humanity and does not repeat the sinful deeds. S



## Chapter 2: The Virtue of Humility

### Sefer Maalot HaMiddot Chapter 10

My children, come and I will teach you the virtue<sup>66</sup> of humility<sup>67</sup>. Know, my children that a measure of the virtue of humility is a very important measure, that the one who is humble is saved from sinning and transgression. As it is said, "Moses said to the people, "Be not afraid, for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of him may be ever with you, so that you do not sin" (Exodus 20:17). And our sages said may their memory be a blessing, "In order that there will be fear of him on their faces", this is humility. "So that you do not sin" teaches that humility brings one towards fear of sin. From this they said, "It is a good sign if a man is humble" (Nedarim 20a).<sup>68</sup>

One sage said, "The sign of proper sons is the humility that appears on their faces" (Tikkun Midot haNefesh). A measure of this virtue is only found in the pious and those who fear sin as the sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "No man who experiences humility<sup>69</sup> will easily sin. And as for one who has no humility; it is certain that his ancestors were not present at Mt. Sinai" (Nedarim 20a).<sup>70</sup>

My children, come and see how great is the virtue of shamefacedness before God. "If a man commits several sins and is ashamed<sup>71</sup> of them *and does not repeat them*,<sup>72</sup> God

<sup>66</sup>Maalah here translated as virtue.

<sup>67</sup>For the word boshet or boshet panim, I have tried to stick to the translation of 'humble or humility. However, in several places the words, humility, embarrassment, shame, shamefacedness or humiliation have been used. As Jekuthiel defines the virtue, he uses the word in many different situations, so that the translation is adjusted for terms that we can understand.

<sup>68</sup>Fearing God is an attribute of humility, the demonstration of which indicates that one is less likely to sin.

<sup>69</sup>The Hebrew here, hitbayesh is synonymous with boshet panim.

<sup>70</sup>Again here humility and avoiding sin go hand in hand. The last sentence indicates that the one who has no humility is not a member of the Jewish people.

<sup>71</sup>Here hitbayesh means to be ashamed of oneself.

<sup>72</sup>These words in italics are not in our standard edition of our Gemarrah. They add emphasis to the point of the passage: One may be forgiven if he or she shows penitence or humility and does not repeat the sinful deeds.

pardons him for all of his transgressions" (Brachot 12b). As it is said, 'Thus you shall remember and be humbled, and you shall be too abashed to open your mouth again, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done, declares the Lord God' (Ezekiel 16:63).<sup>73</sup>

For we find in Saul, when Samuel was brought up by the woman, the necromancer, and said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me and brought me up?" And Saul answered, "I am in great trouble. The Philistines are attacking me and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or in dreams. So I have called you to tell me what to do" (1 Samuel 28:15). But he was embarrassed to mention the Urim and Thummim, because he killed the priests in Nov. And God pardoned him, as it is said, "And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me under my protection" (1 Samuel 28:19).<sup>74</sup> And our sages said may their memory be a blessing, "Whoever commits a sin and feels sorry for it is forgiven" (Hagigah 5a). As it is said, "But I will step forward in judgement against you and I will act quickly as a witness against those who practice sorcery, commit adultery, swear falsely, and cheat the widow and the orphan of their hire, and who subvert the stranger, who do not fear me (Malachi 3:5). But those that fear me are forgiven. And thus it says, "He who confesses and gives them up (his faults) will find mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).<sup>75</sup>

One sage said, "Be careful regarding this virtue of humility, because humility is indicative of the generous" (Choice of Pearls 12:1).<sup>76</sup> And it says, "He whom the Creator clothes in a coat of humility, his defects will be concealed from man" (Choices of Pearls 12:2).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>The idea here is that one should learn a lesson by being ashamed of oneself, and for this one will be forgiven.

<sup>74</sup>The discussion up to this point is found in Brachot 12:b. Its meaning here is not clear.

<sup>75</sup>Confession and fear are portrayed as aspects of humility.

<sup>76</sup>As we have found in other chapters, the virtues are connected.

<sup>77</sup>If a person is properly humble, only their good side will be presented.

Great is the virtue of humility, in that because of it man merits good deeds. And not only this, he merits the Garden of Eden. Thus our sages may their memory be a blessing, said "Those who are insolent go to Gehenom, and those who are humble to the garden of Eden" (Avot 5:20).<sup>78</sup> And one sage said, "Humility and faith are attached. When one withdraws, its partner withdraws" (Choice of Pearls 12:3).<sup>79</sup>

What is shamefacedness?<sup>80</sup> A man will be shamed from his soul and from his deeds by himself, and he will be shamed also by others. And he will be modest in all his ways and all his matters and be meticulous in them so that nothing bringing reproach and things of disgrace will be engendered, so that if others see or hear after him, he cannot be shamed by them. And at the beginning of something he will look before doing it, so that he try to do it so that shame will not come upon him. And he will be modest in his eating and drinking, so that he will not be disgraced and shamed and degraded before his fellow men. "And he will refrain from shameful deeds and their like" (Hullin 44b). The general principle is he will be shamefaced before the Creator, and thus the virtue of shamefacedness will be completed in its wholeness. As one sage said, "When you do something inside your house, you will be shamed by the people in your house. And when you do something in the market, you will be shamed by the people. And if not, you will be ashamed of yourself. And if you will not be ashamed of yourself, you will be shamed by your soul. And if you will not be shamed by your soul, you will be shamed from the moment the Creator sees you."<sup>81</sup>

My children, be careful in this virtue of humility, for when a man may be humbled before people, he is careful about all reprehensible and ugly things, and will

<sup>78</sup>Humility will get you life in the world to come, while insolence will prevent you from this future bliss and commit you to the underworld.

<sup>79</sup>The virtues are dependent upon one another and are a "total package." The rest of the

<sup>80</sup>In this paragraph, how one comes to shame is discussed. The opening word boshet must be connected to mitbayesh; thus the translation shamefacedness is used to make the proper connection to shame.

<sup>81</sup>Ultimately if you are not ashamed of yourself, or shamed by those around you, you are shamed before God.

not be ensnared by them. And all the moreso if he is humbled before the Creator, then he will be ensnared by transgression and sin.<sup>82</sup>

"And the one who is not humble, the Torah is already nullified in his eyes" (Derech Eretz Zuta). As one sage said, "When you are not abashed (when you have no humility), you will do what you wish concerning everything we have received through prophecy".<sup>83</sup> And he said, "Suspicion will not touch the humble one, just as the call of robbery and stealing will not touch the faithful" And they asked the sage, "What is humility?" He said "intelligence". And they said to him, "And what is intelligence?" He said, "Humility." Another said, "Humility is the way of long life" . . . And one said, "People live many years by virtue of faith and fear and afterwards, live in the virtue of humility and meekness and abashedness"<sup>84</sup> (Tikkun Middot HaNefesh 1:13, 19).<sup>85</sup>

My children, be careful not to humiliate<sup>86</sup> your friends, even if it is only between you and them. And all the moreso, take care not to humiliate them in public, because this is among the gravest transgressions of the Torah. Thus said our sages may their memory be a blessing, "He who publicly humiliates<sup>87</sup> his neighbor, it is as though he shed blood" (Baba Metzia 58b).<sup>88</sup> "I have seen it, the redness coming and the whiteness leaving." (Baba Metzia 58b).<sup>89</sup> And further they said, "The one who humiliates his friend, in the end he will be humiliated (Kallah). And not only this, the ministering angels will knock him down and show his disgrace to all human beings.

<sup>82</sup>The idea here is that after having once been humbled or shamed, one should have learned a lesson and be careful to avoid being shamed again.

<sup>83</sup>The meaning of this passage is not clear.

<sup>84</sup>Boshet, anavah and shifloot are all synonyms here.

<sup>85</sup>The one who demonstrates humility has within him at least one trait which will serve him well in life.

<sup>86</sup>Levayesh here must mean humiliate. The same translation is used in the rest of the verse for the word mitbayesh.

<sup>87</sup>Literally "whitens the face of" . . .

<sup>88</sup>This person who publicly shames his neighbor also has no part in the world to come. (Baba Metzia 59a).

<sup>89</sup>This is the graphic description of bloodshed.

Furthermore they said, "All who descend into Gehennom descend and reascend, except for three that descend and don't ascend. And they are: he who commits adultery with a married woman, fastens an evil epithet (nickname) upon his neighbor and the one who publicly humiliates his neighbor" (Baba Metzia 58:b). You know that because they humiliated<sup>90</sup> Bar Kamza in public, God assisted him in (revenge which led to the) destruction of the Temple" (Gittin 55b, 56a).

Although I cautioned you about the virtue of humility, I will warn you that if you err in any way, don't be embarrassed<sup>91</sup> to go back and confess the truth. For anyone who is embarrassed to go back and confess the truth, is called impudent without a doubt. And if you sin, whether unintentionally or on purpose in any part of the Torah and the mitzvot, don't be embarrassed to confess it before God. Thus when you have doubts concerning words of Torah or tradition, or about any commandment, don't be embarrassed to ask about it even from someone lesser than you in the virtue or rank or year. And don't be embarrassed to say about something that you don't know, "We don't know" and about what you didn't hear to say, "We didn't hear" or if you heard and you forgot and you don't remember it to say, "We heard and we forgot." For Moses our teacher, peace be upon him gives thanks and is not ashamed to say, "I didn't hear", as it is said, "And when Moses heard this, he approved" (Leviticus 10:20).<sup>92</sup>

Our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "The shamefaced one cannot learn, and the strict cannot teach" (Avot 2:5). In Tanna Debe Eliyahu it says, A man will ask the verse even though all will laugh at him, and about the halacha even though all laugh at him. A man should bring himself into the text of Torah even if he is not proficient in the law at all. As it says, "If you have been villainous in boasting and if you are ashamed to ask a question, to follow from the teaching of the sages, you will be ashamed of having been so arrogant to ask a question."

<sup>90</sup>Literally 'whitened the face of' . . . phrase used in every chapter of the Mishnah.  
<sup>91</sup>Hitbayesh here is embarrassed  
<sup>92</sup>From this passage we understand that the ability to admit wrongdoing and request a repetition of something for one's own benefit demonstrate humility. Here we are told not to be embarrassed to ask a question!

you have been a schemer, put your hand to your mouth" (Proverbs 30:32). Don't be ashamed<sup>93</sup> to caution your fellow and lead him in a good path, because this matter is not from among the ways of complete people in their virtues. And this type of shamefacedness, is more evil than insolence.<sup>94</sup>

Therefore my children, be careful regarding this virtue of humility in order that a fear of God will always be on your faces so that you will not sin. May God in his great mercy cause us to succeed in it.

And after we have arrived here in praise of the virtue of humility and those who possess it, we will speak about the evil of insolence and those who possess it, in order to lead you to the virtue of humility, with the help of God.<sup>95</sup>

Know my children that the vice of insolence is a vice hated in the eyes of God because it is like idol worship. And not only this, "That because of insolence the heavens are stopped from lowering dew and rain" (Ta'anit 7:2). As it is said, "And when the showers were withheld and the late rains did not come, you had the brazenness of a prostitute; you refused to be ashamed" (Jeremiah 3:3).<sup>96</sup> And our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "Jerusalem was not destroyed only because they were not ashamed, of one another" (Shabbat 119b).<sup>97</sup> As it says, "Yet they do not feel shame, they cannot be insulted" (Jeremiah 8:12). And this detestable vice is not found in the righteous and people of deeds, only in the wicked as it is said about them, "They made their faces harder than rock, they refused to turn back" (Jeremiah 5:3). And our sages said may their memory be a blessing, "Every man that is insolent, it is acceptable to call him evil to his face" (Ta'anit 7b). It says, "The wicked man is insolent" (Proverbs 1:29). And

<sup>93</sup>Here titbayshu is translated as ashamed, to follow from the opening quote.

<sup>94</sup>Not exhibiting the proper degree of humility is equivalent to an evil.

<sup>95</sup>This is the author's transition paragraph used in every chapter. It indicates a change in the discussion from the positive virtue to the negative vice.

<sup>96</sup>The word metzach or brazenness is a form of insolence.

<sup>97</sup>The hebrew is boshet panim. They were not ashamed of having committed and seen, as abominations. and ignored of being influenced.

furthermore, it is a commandment to hate him as it says, "And the strength of his face will be dissembled" (Ecclesiastes 8:1). Don't read "will be dissembled" (yeshuneh), instead, "will be hated (yesuneh)."<sup>98</sup> He who is insolent, his end is to break and to fall. In Tanna Debe Eliyahu it says, "The powerful and the haughty, and the insolent and hoodlums". About him the scriptures say, "For the arms of the wicked shall be broken"(Psalms 37:7).<sup>99</sup>

My children, come and see how harsh is the vice of insolence, that when a man is insolent he approaches evil as it is said, "The wicked man is insolent" (Proverbs 21:29). Furthermore, "Anyone who is insolent, knowingly stumbles into sin (Ta'anit 7:2, Yalkut Shimon Part B 268). As it is said, "And you had the brazenness of a prostitute" (Jeremiah 3:3). It doesn't say "you will have", rather, "you already had."<sup>100</sup>

And our sages may their memory be a blessing, said in the Aggadah, "Four are called wicked, and these are they :<sup>101</sup> 1) The one who stretches out his hand to his neighbor to hit him. Even though he doesn't hit him, he is called evil as it says, "And he said to the wicked one, why do you hit your fellow?" (Exodus 2:13). It doesn't say "you hit him", instead, "hit" (as a command). 2) The one who lends and doesn't repay as it says, "A wicked man borrows and doesn't repay (Psalms 37:21). And 3) the one who is insolent as it says, "The wicked man is insolent" (Proverbs 21:29). 4) The one who is argumentative as it says, "Move away from the tents of these wicked men" (Numbers 16:26).<sup>102</sup> Two of them (the characteristics) were in Dotan and Aviram - insolence

<sup>98</sup>A play on words here. It's a stretch!

<sup>99</sup>Insolence not only prevents needed natural phenomena from occurring, it is also seen as an evil. The ones who possess this trait will in the end be punished.

<sup>100</sup>Insolence is a trait that one must know he or she has, thus it must also be preventable.

<sup>101</sup>The four types are from Numbers Rabbah 18:10.

<sup>102</sup>People were being urged to move away from Dotan and Aviram, two insolent men, so that they not be endangered of being influenced.

and argumentativeness. And you are not insolent if you don't have a blemish of descent.<sup>103</sup> Thus our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "Insolence." Rabbi Eleazar says: "bastard." Rabbi Joshua says: "Son of the menstruant." Rabbi Akiva says: "Bastard and son of the menstruant" (Kallah Rabbati 2).<sup>104</sup>

And what is insolence? The one who commits a sin before his fellow men and is not shamed<sup>105</sup> before them is called insolent. The one who commits a sin and does it again.<sup>106</sup> The one who goes proudly and in insolence and is not shamed by others. The one who is insolent and is not shamed, he is like the one who worships idols as it is said, "They have acted shamefully, they have done abhorrent things. Yet they do not feel shame, and they cannot be made to blush. Assuredly they shall fall among the falling. They shall stumble at the time when I punish them -said the Lord" (Jeremiah 6:15). It says, the end of insolence is argumentativeness. And the end of argumentativeness is contrition. And it says, "The one who is insolent has a grave disease. And his cure is (to meet) an insolent one like him."<sup>107</sup>

Surely, to stand in insolence against the wicked and the ones who abandon the Torah, in order to admonish them and to remonstrate them, this is a very good thing. As it is said, "I make you this day, a fortified city and an iron pillar and bronze walls" (Jeremiah 1:18).<sup>108</sup> And about this Solomon commanded and said, "Answer a fool in accord with his folly" (Proverbs 26:5).<sup>109</sup>

Therefore my children, be careful about this detestable vice and distance yourselves from it. Don't participate in it, in the event that you will not be able to

<sup>103</sup>The meaning of this phrase is not clear.

<sup>104</sup>All of these characteristics are taken to be forms of insolence.

<sup>105</sup>The hebrew is hitbayesh.

<sup>106</sup>One who clearly has no fear of punishment.

<sup>107</sup>The one who is insolent has no remorse, and will only be able to understand his or her actions when someone treats them in the same way.

<sup>108</sup>Here God speaks to Jeremiah telling him that the wicked will not overcome the prophet and his people.

<sup>109</sup>Or, do unto others as they have done to you.



conquer it. For all who have in them this detestable vice, these people will distance themselves from us, and they will be admonished on account of it.

May God save us from this detestable and deprecating vice. With His great mercy and benevolence, let us rise to the loftiest virtues.

### **Commentary**

The notion of humility has many different facets according to this chapter. As a positive virtue, humility is depicted as an attitude which affects one's behavior. The one who is humble exhibits moderate behavior, will not sin, will be forgiven and will display a reverence for God. Humility also means that one should never be embarrassed to ask a question or to admit the truth. The negative aspect of humility to be embarrassed or shamed. The reader is instructed not to shame his fellow in public, as this is among the gravest of all transgressions, compared to bloodshed. Despite that the author discussed the concept of humility in both its positive and negative aspects, he also included an opposite of this concept of humility; insolence. Insolence in this chapter is defined in terms of idol worship, and evil nature and wicked deeds.

The notion of humility as a display of a fear of or reverence for God is an interesting one, whose relevance is somewhat questionable today. Many today do not have a deep sense of reverence for God. For Jews, reverence for God is demonstrated in a commitment to a life of Torah, indicating a way of acting and thinking. This is a commitment which most Jews today do not or cannot make for lack of knowledge or desire. But it seems that this notion of reverence for God is an important one in this world. It is a model of respect. If we can have a deep sense of reverence for God, so much the more so can we respect our fellow human beings. The one who reveres God as a being greater and even more powerful than oneself does not think of humans as being omniscient or omnipotent. A reverence for God also indicates that we can allow ourselves to believe in a system of divine retribution. If there is some intangible and unexplainable reason to behave properly; then a reward exists which we cannot see or

imagine. A reverence for God is an understanding that our lives serve some higher purpose. The well known verse from Micah: "Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8) gives us a summary of what we as Jews should do. The first two, are given emphasis in our lives by stressing the importance of the deeds that we do and the manner in which they are done. However, the third element, walking humbly with God dictates an ideal for which we must strive.

Sefer Maalot HaMiddot emphasizes that the one who is humble will be forgiven by God. This aspect of humility indicates an ability to apologize for wrongdoings, and to have an appropriate sense of one's own limitations and abilities. Yom Kippur is one time in which we consider God's forgiveness necessary and take stock of our doings and our faults. Other than this day, we usually apply the notion of being forgiven to our relationships with people. We do not relish the idea of another holding a grudge against us, whether it be professional or personal, so we often make a point of covering our tracks and apologizing for what we have done. Those who are not concerned with being forgiven, no matter what they have done are considered arrogant and unfeeling. In many instances, it takes a great deal of courage to confess, but in most cases, the reward is great. A sense of the need to be forgiven by God could perhaps help one to avoid wrongdoing in the first place, by imposing a 'watchdog' over each of us.

The notion of humiliating another in public deserves some discussion, for it is one that is unfortunately not often considered in our society. One would think that a deep respect for humankind is what drove the rabbis to emphasize this trait, and develop such harsh punishment for those who commit this act. Today, in many ways it is evident that people no longer have such respect for one another. Consider the recent Presidential campaign. The most prevalent campaign strategy was to try to dig up as much dirt on the opponent in an effort to humiliate and discredit him before the voting public. What kind of example is this for our country? The media in our society models for us a lack of respect for the private lives of people, and in doing so causes many a great deal of undue

shame. Somehow, we have been led to believe that we are entitled to know and see everything, regardless of the price. On a different level, how many of us have seen a parent publicly reprimand a child, or a teacher reprimand a pupil in front of his or her fellow students? Most of us have probably been a victim of this at one time or another, and we know how it feels to be publicly humiliated, whether it be for a small or great infraction. When we are violated, an element of our humanness is somehow lost. The crux of this issue is that we must keep in mind a sense of respect for one another as humans, and an understanding that public humiliation is not something that can be taken lightly, for some never recover from it.

There are a few aspects of humility which our author omitted that are discussed elsewhere in Rabbinic literature that will add some more important insights. This concept of humility was so important for the Rabbis that it was included in a number of blessings. In the blessing that a guest says for his host, "May it be God's will that our host should never be ashamed in this world nor disgraced in the next world" (Brachot 46:1). And another, "May it be thy will, O Lord our God, to look upon our shame and behold our evil plight, that we don't sin or bring upon ourselves shame or disgrace before our fathers" (Brachot 16:2). These prayers are irrelevant to those who do not pray, but for those who do, they can certainly be quite meaningful. The constant repetition of these words hopefully can instill the proper attitudes and behaviors within the person who recites them. Additionally, it is written, "Why was it instituted that the prayer should be recited softly? So as not to put transgressors to shame" (Sotah 32b). When a person confesses to a transgression, they are to be given complete privacy.

Another aspect brought out in the Talmud is that a person should not be shamed because of that which he does not have. "The daughters of Jerusalem used to walk out in white garments which they borrowed in order not to put to shame anyone who had none" (Taanit 26b). Also, "Formerly, they served drinks in a house of mourning; the rich in

white glass vessels and the poor in colored glass and the poor felt shamed. They instituted that all should serve drinks in colored glass, out of deference to the poor" (Moed Katan 27b). This is then, an issue of uniformity, as distinctions are erased between the rich and the poor. Our contemporary understanding of this issue can be seen through the Jewish practice of burial in a plain pine box: At the time of death, all are equal. Additionally, school uniforms also serve the purpose of eliminating any distinctions between the rich and the poor. All too often today we are so focused on flaunting that which we do have, that we fail to consider those who are not as fortunate, and in the process we are likely to cause others shame, albeit intentional or unintentional.

The notion of openly giving charity to a poor person and thereby causing him shame was not explicitly stated in this chapter, but one given attention by the Rabbis. "R. Jannai once saw a man give a zuz to a poor person publicly, so he said to him "It would have been better had you not given him, than not that you have given him publicly and put to shame" (Hagigah 5a). Maimonides extended this notion of anonymity in his ladder of Tzedakah. One of the "rungs" notes that the person getting the gift does not know who gave it, and the giver does not know the receiver. With complete anonymity, the receiver of the charity in no way will be subjected to shame. Today, we get around this whole issue by giving to causes and institutions rather than individuals. This is certainly not the main reason that we give money to organizations, yet it is one which we certainly should consider. The only problem with this ethic of giving is that it doesn't account for the one who openly asks for money; the beggar. It is impossible to give to everyone who asks, particularly today when there are so many who are openly in need. Yet the lesson to be learned is that regardless of how poor one is and how he receives charity, they are to be treated with dignity and respect.

Humility also has relevance for the Rabbis over academic matters. "What was it that entitled Beth Hillel to have the Halacha fixed in agreement with their rulings?

Because they were kindly and humble and they studied their own rulings and those of Bet Shammai" (Eruvin 13b). Here the word 'aluvim' is synonymous with our concept of 'bushah'. This is certainly relevant for us. Learning to consider another's arguments and work is a mark of our own humility, and can lead to mutual respect and understanding. The Rabbis also caution us against shaming a scholar in public by questioning him about something which he or she does not know: "Do you interrogate me in the house of study on a matter about which the ancients gave no reason, in order to shame me?" (Baba Batra 81b). An expert on one subject is to be given the due respect for the knowledge of his subject, and should not be challenged in other areas so that he will give the appearance of being ignorant. Sadly enough, people do this in all kinds of situations. Young students often challenge teachers, not out of a great interest in a subject, but because they hope to catch a teacher off guard and embarrass him or her. Adults also do this, often for purposes of self-aggrandizement. By making a scholar or their opponent look bad, they hope to look better! Respect is also the key here in that the one who respects another for what they know and what they think will not be confrontational.

One other aspect of our concept of humility that indicates the timelessness of these texts is that shame is a sexist issue. "The shame of a woman is greater than that of a man" (Ketubot 67b). The context of this comment is in a situation where a girl orphan is to be married before a boy. Women were then and are still now held to different standards. One of the best contemporary illustrations of this issue is the Hill/Thomas hearings. It was assumed that Anita Hill was wrong and Clarence Thomas was in the right. Instead of his credentials being marred, her integrity was compromised and she was put to shame before the public, by a Senate committee of men. Women are always judged more harshly, because society sees us as being out of place when we reach positions of power and authority. The higher we go, the harder we will fall!

This notion of being humble is an important guideline by which we should all live. We must learn to balance our own sense of self worth along with our limitations. In doing so, we can be satisfied with the best that we are capable of, and feel positive about our actions without needing to degrade another in the process. Through this virtue, a person can cultivate and demonstrate a sense of respect for our fellow.

The word "humble" is used in the Talmud, and in the Mishnah. The word is used in the Talmud to describe a person who is not proud of his own achievements, but who is aware of his limitations. The word is also used in the Mishnah to describe a person who is not proud of his own achievements, but who is aware of his limitations.

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### Chapter 3: The Virtue of a Good Name

#### Sefer Maalot HaMiddot Chapter 15

My children, come and I will teach you the virtue<sup>110</sup> of a good name. Know my children that the virtue of a good name, which proceeds from a man through an act of devotion to God is a special virtue. It is found only in the righteous and people of deeds and those who fear God, whose good names through their service to God, spreads out to distant lands. Even God himself goes around to acquire a good name in his world as it is said, "Whom God went to redeem unto himself for a people, and to make him a name" (2 Samuel 7:23). And our sages said may their memory be a blessing in the Aggadah, "We found that God went around 500 years to acquire for himself a good name in his world." (Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:2).<sup>111</sup> It is said, "Whom God went to redeem unto himself . ." (2 Samuel 7:23). All the moreso from the land to the heavens, he went around 500 years.<sup>112</sup>

My children, be careful to acquire the virtue of a good name in devotion to God and in good deeds, because it is one of the loftiest virtues of all. And thus Solomon in his wisdom praised it, as it is said, "A good name is better than fragrant oil" (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

And our sages, may their memory be blessed, said in the Aggadah, "Fragrant oil is for an hour, and a good name is forever" (Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:1). As it is said, "May his name be eternal" (Psalms 72:17). Fragrant oil ceases to exist, and a good name is sustained, as it is said, "And I will give to them in my house and in my walls a monument and a name, better than sons or daughters, I will give them an everlasting name which

Hebrew: "Yad yachad" for an hour, compared by contrasting the goodly by name which and may to get his phrase about it. However, in the paragraph, the emphasis is on the eternal part of the verse, emphasizing that a (good) name will not perish.

<sup>110</sup>The word Maalah here is used as a synonym of Middah.

<sup>111</sup>According to the Rabbis, the distance between heaven and earth is 500 years.

<sup>112</sup>We then are to emulate God in our quest for a good name.

shall not perish" (Isaiah 56:5).<sup>113</sup> Fragrant oil is bought and a good name is free. Fragrant oil descends and a good name ascends. Fragrant oil is put on the backs of the dead and becomes putrid as it is said, "The flies of the dead turn the perfumers ointment fetid and putrid" (Ecclesiastes 10:1). A good name falls on the dead and doesn't putrify as it is said, "And he placed himself on the child; he warmed the flesh of the child" (2 Kings 4:34). Fragrant oil, for life, and a good name, for life and death. Fragrant oil is for the rich and a good name is for the poor and for the rich.<sup>114</sup> Fragrant oil descends into water and is erased. A good name, descends into the water and is not erased. Thus we find in Jonah who was sent into the sea and ascended. Fragrant oil descends into the fire and is burned. A good name descends into the fire and is not burned. Thus we found in Hananiah Mishael and Azaria that ascended from the furnace of fire. Fragrant oil, how far can its-smell go? From the bedroom to the drawing room. But a good name can be perceived from one end of the world to the other, as it is said, "The Lord was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout the land" (Joshua 7:27). It says, "For Mordechai was great in the house of the king, and his fame spread throughout the kingdom" (Esther 9:4):<sup>115</sup>

My children, come and see how great is the virtue of a good name. Thus our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "Possessors of fragrant oil" entered a place of life and came out burned. And who were they? Nadav and Abihu. And those who possess a good name, they entered a place of death and came out alive. And who are they? Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah" (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 6:1).<sup>116</sup>

<sup>113</sup>Jekuthiel uses this passage twice in this chapter. He (purposely) misreads the Hebrew "Yad veshem tov mi banim omibano" by eliminating the comma between shem and tov to get his phrase shem tov. However, in this paragraph, the emphasis is on the second half of the verse, emphasizing that a (good) name will not perish.

<sup>114</sup>Every person, regardless of his or her status has the potential to acquire a good name.

<sup>115</sup>The images here clearly present the case for a good name.

<sup>116</sup>Obviously a good name has the power to resurrect.



Our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "There are three crowns: A crown of priesthood, and a crown of prophecy, and a crown of kingship. A crown of priesthood was merited by Aaron and he took it. A crown of prophecy was merited by Moses and he took it. A crown of kingship was merited by David and he took it. A crown of a good name is left aside. To say, anyone who merits it, I will consider it as if the three of them were set before him and he was worthy of all of them. And for someone who does not deserve it, I will consider it as if the three of them are before him and he is not worthy of any one of them. <sup>117</sup>

Greater is the virtue of a good name, than all the silver and gold that is in the world as it is said, "A good name is choicer than great wealth; Grace is better than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1).

My children, try to acquire a good name in the world in which you stand, through fear of the heavens and in devotion to God and love of fellow men. For the good name will testify for you in this world and in the world to come. The good name is the greatest of distinctions as one sage said, "The greatest of distinctions: the good name" (Choice of Pearls 14:1).<sup>118</sup> Nothing shuts off lust like the closing of the eyes.<sup>119</sup> Another said, "It is an honor to the soul that man will have mercy on his memory and that he will acquire a good name and trust in God, this is complete faith" (Choice of Pearls 14:3).

Beloved is the virtue of a good name, most of all on the day of death as it is said, "A good name is better than fragrant oil and the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). And our sages, may their memory be a blessing, said in the Aggadah,

They established that he who is good in the world to come

<sup>117</sup>Jekuthiel has paraphrased this from Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:2. In the Midrash, the three crowns are kingship, priesthood and Torah. In this chapter, both prophecy and a good name are used instead of Torah. In both cases, it makes sense that Torah and a good name are those things left for us. Our task is to be worthy of both.

<sup>118</sup>People are distinguished by their good name, both in this world and the world to come.

<sup>119</sup>Discretion is also an attribute of a good name.

"A man is called by three names, one that his father and mother called him, and one that he calls himself, and one that the Holy one Blessed be He calls him in the book of generations"<sup>120</sup> (Midrash Samuel 25:7 and Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:3,4). It is said, "This is the book of the generations of man . . ." (Genesis 5:1). And what is he called? Man. But you do not know which among them is beloved. Solomon came and explained, "A good name which is on the day of death, is better than the day of birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). "When the Holy one Blessed be He said to Moses: Appoint for me a High priest. Moses said to him: From what tribe shall I appoint him?. He said to him: From the tribe of Levi. At the same time, Moses was happy and said: How beloved is my tribe! The Holy One, Blessed be He said to him: The names of the tribes are beloved by me than the anointing oil by which the great priest is anointed by.<sup>121</sup> For the High Priest worship is not acceptable, and he does not enter to atone, unless the names of the tribes are placed upon his heart.<sup>122</sup> And even if they were lacking one letter or one dot, the priest wouldn't enter to atone" (Midrash Shmuel 23:4, Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:2). It is said, "Six of their names on one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in order of their birth" (Exodus 28:10). So that their names will be pure. When they were living, they did not merit to hear this, and at the time that they died, it is written, "Six of their names" (Exodus 28:10).

And thus our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "More beloved is the death of Saul than the hour of his birth" (Midrash Samuel 23:4). At the time of his birth, it was not announced that he had a part in the world to come. But at the hour of his death they announced, "And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me" (1Samuel 28:19). They announced that he had a part in the world to come.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup>This refers to the name which one gains as a result of one's conduct in life.

<sup>121</sup>This is another comparison of shem tov to shemen tov.

<sup>122</sup>This refers to the breastplate.

<sup>123</sup>One only merits life in the world to come after having lived and created a good name for oneself. It is being that one good deed begets another.

Furthermore they said, " More beloved are the deaths of the righteous than the hour of their births" (Ecclesiastes Rabba 7). For at the time of their births, none of God's creatures care about them, but at the hour of their death, everyone cares. At the time Samuel was born, no one sensed it. But at the time that he died, it is written, "And Samuel died" (1 Samuel 28:3). And so you may say, "And better the day of death than the day of his birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1).<sup>124</sup>

Happy is the one who grows up with a good name and dies with a good name. What does mankind say about it? Happy is so and so, who grew up with a good name, and who busied himself with Torah and commandments and with good deeds all of his days, and was righteous, pious and God fearing, loving God and his fellow, loves righteousness and justice. Just as when mankind testifies for him so too, the Holy One, Blessed be He receives him with kindness and pardons him for all of his transgressions. Thus our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "Which man has earned the world to come?" (Shabbat 153a). As is said, "And your ears will hear the command from behind you"<sup>125</sup> saying . . ." (Isaiah 30:21). Furthermore they said, "From the funeral eulogy pronounced over a man it may be known whether the world to come is his"(Shabbat 153a). And about this Solomon said in his wisdom, "A good name is better than fragrant oil and the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1).<sup>126</sup>

If a man has merited the acquisition of a good name in this world by a deed of divine worship, and because he is involved with his fellow man and is not boastful over them, he will try to add to the levels of virtues additional virtues in order that his good name will ascend higher until the day of his death.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>124</sup>The idea in this paragraph is that the impact of the birth of a baby, even one who will be a tsaddik, is not comparable to the impact of the death of a tsaddik.

<sup>125</sup>The connection of this verse to the preceding question is not clear.

<sup>126</sup>One's good deeds are summed up in a eulogy, thus indicating one's suitability for the world to come.

<sup>127</sup>Here the idea being that one good deed begets another.

My children, be desirous of a good name in devotion to God and love of fellow men in honor of heaven, not for self-honor and not for the sake of worldly authority.<sup>128</sup> When the fools did lustful things to acquire a good name in this world, to honoring themselves in vain pleasures, they did not honor heaven.

My children, if a good name goes to you for a virtue you do not have, do not become excited in your hearts, and do not be boastful about yourselves as if you had this virtue, and don't wrap yourselves in it. Instead, try to acquire in any way that virtue for which you are praised, in order to glorify the Name and magnify it.

Thus one sage said, "When men praise you, for what you do not have, worry and don't rejoice" (Choice of Pearls 43:34). It says, "When you see (hear) a man speak about good that is not within you, do not trust him" (Choices of Pearls, 43:34).<sup>129</sup>

Therefore my children, be very careful in this important virtue, to conduct yourselves in it (the virtue) in devotion to God, in order that the Holy One, Blessed be He will give to you, "In my house and in my walls, a hand and a name, better than sons or daughters" (Isaiah 56:5).<sup>130</sup>

May God in his great mercy cause us to succeed in it.

And after we have arrived here to speak in praise of the virtue of a good name, which comes to a man from devotion, we will speak in denigration of the good name which comes to a man from the vanities of the world, when he is honored and gloried in it. In order to accustom to the complete virtue of the good name, with God's help, for the sake of Heaven.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>One should want a good name for the right reasons, to benefit and please others.

<sup>129</sup>If you don't really possess a trait that people think you have, the idea is to try to acquire it at all costs, quietly!

<sup>130</sup>The author reads the masoretic text without a taam mafsik between the words shem and tov in order to use this verse as a proof-text. However, it is understood from this verse that a name inscribed on a monument is meant to be eternal.

<sup>131</sup>This is the obligatory transition passage, where we move from the positive virtue to the negative vice.

Know my children, that the good name which comes to a man, by means of vain pleasures when he honors himself and is boastful about it; it is not enough that this is not accounted to him as a good name and a good trait.<sup>132</sup> Instead, it is accounted to him in the name of disgrace and shame, and drives him away from life in this world and from life in the world to come. Thus our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "Jealousy and desire and honor release the man from the world" (Avot 4:28). Go and learn from the first man, that because God sent him out from this world, that he named all the creatures of the world in his wisdom, he was boastful and arrogant about it. He sought a lofty virtue for which he wasn't suitable. And because of this, the ministering angels were jealous of him and they drove him from the world. Thus our sages, may their memory be a blessing, said in the Aggadah, "When the Holy One Blessed Be He came to create man, the ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed Be He, "Master of the Universe" (Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer 13). "What is man that you should care about him?" (Psalms 144:3). "Man is like a breath" (Psalms 144:4). He is compared with none other than the dust. The Holy One Blessed Be He said, Just as all of you sanctify me in the upper worlds, so too he singles me out in the lower world. And not only this, surely you are able to stand and to name all of my creatures that I created. And they stood and they weren't able (to do it.). Immediately the first man stood and named all of the creatures as it is said, "And Adam gave names to all the beasts . . ." (Genesis 2:20). And he was boastful and arrogant about it.<sup>133</sup> When the ministering angels saw this, the ministering angels said, "If we don't advise the first man that he has sinned before his creator, we are not able to endure. And it was Samael, a great minister in the heavens. Whereas the animals and angels were with six wings, Samael was with 12 wings. What did he do? He took his group and went down and saw all of the creatures that the Holy One

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<sup>132</sup>Here Maalah seems to be sort of a subset of a virtue, a trait

<sup>133</sup>There is a sort of a pun here, with Adam giving *names* to all of the animals. The name or reputation that he earned was a result of doing a good thing in a negative way.

Blessed Be He had created and didn't find one who was cunning to do harm like the snake, as it is said, "The serpent was the most cunning of all wild beasts" (Genesis 3:1). And his form (the serpent's) was like a camel, and he (Samael) went up and rode on it. And the Torah cried out and said: Samael: Now the world is created, and now is a time to revolt against God, like the time "On high she will soar" (Job 39:18). Master of the Universe, "You scorn the horse and its rider" (Job 39:18).<sup>134</sup> A snake made a rule between him (Samael) and between himself and said, "If you speak to Adam: I know that he won't listen to me because man is always harsh. So I shall speak to the woman, for women listen to everything, "Folly and not knowing anything" (Proverbs 9:13). The snake went and spoke to the woman: You are also accustomed to the fruit of this tree? She said to him: yes, "And from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. . . ." (Genesis 3:3) From Eve's words he found an doorway to enter it.<sup>135</sup> He said to her: This command is not anything except the evil eye. Because when you eat from it, you will be like God. Just as he created the world, so will be able to create. Just as he causes death and brings life, so you are able to cause death and bring life as it is said, "But God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God who knows good and evil (Genesis 3:5). Eve immediately perceived the words of the snake and she was pleased with them. Accordingly it is said, "And you will be like God who knows good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). According to this, "And she took from its fruit and she ate of it and gave some to her husband and he ate" (Genesis 3:6). They were desirous of another higher virtue, and this took them out of the world. The scriptures say, "A man's pride will humiliate him" (Proverbs 29:23). When he gave names to all the creatures and brought forth his name (reputation), he was proud of himself and ate from the tree and asked to be like God. And because of this, he caused his death and that of all

<sup>134</sup> Both Adam and Eve were too eager to imitate God. They were proud of their reputation and they had achieved it. Adam's selfish desires not only caused him a bad reputation, they prevented him from life in Paradise. His exemplifies an behavior which we are not to follow.

<sup>135</sup> Here the snake has figured out how to make Eve commit a sin, a punishment.

<sup>134</sup>The meaning of these references to Job is not clear.

<sup>135</sup>Here the snake has figured out how to make Eve commit a sin, a punishment.

his creatures<sup>136</sup> as it is said, "I had said you are divine beings and sons of the most high, all of you" (Psalms 82:6). "But you shall die as men do" (Psalms 82:7).<sup>137</sup>

And since Adam is passionate for honor and authority in the world, he is not sensitive to honor God. He sins easily in God's eyes, and does not consider in his heart from where he came and where he is going, and before whom he will be in the future to give an account. And because of this, his soul was driven out from life in the world to come.<sup>138</sup>

My children, know that every time a man intends to glorify his own name in the world, his name becomes smaller and it perishes. Thus said our sages, may their memory be a blessing, "He who seeks his reputation loses his reputation" (Avot 1:13).<sup>139</sup> And about this, Solomon in his wisdom said, "The wise shall obtain honor, but fools get disgrace as their portion" (Proverbs 3:35). Elevation of the fools is a disgrace. Why? Because they exalt themselves and they make themselves great. As it is said, "Pride goes before ruin, arrogance before failure" (Proverbs 16:18). And this negative virtue is found in the wicked as it is said, "On every side the wicked roam, when baseness is exalted among men" (Psalms 12:9). These wicked ones, when they get a reputation concerning the vanities of this world, they exalt themselves and boast about themselves. They parade around and want to show off to their fellow men their exaltation and honor. In the end the Holy One Blessed Be He humbles them and derides them before men.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup>Here briot could mean creatures as well as men.

<sup>137</sup>Both Adam and Eve were too eager to achieve the next step. They were punished because of the reputations they had achieved.

<sup>138</sup>Adam's selfish desires not only earned him a bad reputation, they prevented him from life in Paradise. He exemplifies the behavior which we are not to follow.

<sup>139</sup>These are the words of Hillel. The meaning is that one cannot pursue a good reputation intentionally, just for the sake of achieving it.

<sup>140</sup>This type of behavior is considered wicked, and will only bring one punishment.

Go and learn from Bilaam the wicked, on account of the reputation that he had in the world as a prophet, he was proud of himself and pursued honor and authority and was expelled from the world. And how do we know that he was proud of himself and would pursue honor and authority? Because when God said to him "Who are these people with you?" (Numbers 22:9). He answered him, "Balak king of Moav sent for me" in the words of authority and vulgarity (Rashi Numbers 22). As if to say that he is a man honored and important in the eyes royalty. Likewise he answered in authority and vulgarity to the messengers of Balak and said to them, "For the Lord will not let me go with you" (Numbers 22:13). As if to say it is not honorable for him to go with inferior people like them. What did the Holy One, Blessed Be He do? He showed everyone that he (Bilaam) was not under his control and said, "That which God puts in my mouth I will speak faithfully" (Numbers 23:12). And he said, "If Balak were to give to me his house full of silver and gold I could not do anything against the word of God" (Numbers 22:18). What happened in the end? Balak was angry at him (Bilaam) (Rashi Numbers 22) and said to him, "Back with you at once to your own place! I was going to reward you richly, but God has denied you the reward" (Numbers 24:11).<sup>141</sup>

Any student of the sages that has merited a good name because of his Torah and is proud of it and is authoritative over his fellow man, thus he profanes the Name of the heavens and profanes the Torah and its students. It might be more comfortable for him to not study Torah. Even more so, he is taking away his life from the world (to come). Thus said our sages may their memory be a blessing, "He that makes unworthy use of the crown<sup>142</sup> shall perish" (Avot 1:13). When a man makes unworthy use of the crown of Torah, he has already received his reward from it, because he honors himself and derides the Torah. The one who interprets Torah in order to honor himself with it and to take a crown for himself, doesn't interpret it for the Name of heaven and for the honor

<sup>141</sup>In the end God punishes Bilaam. We should not look well upon someone who is not

<sup>142</sup>The crown of learning. A man's behavior is the basis



of the Torah or in order to reprove and to rebuke the masses. Instead to honor himself and to exalt his own reputation in order that he be called a good darshan,<sup>143</sup> I call to him, "I gave them laws that were not good and rules by which they could not live." (Ezekiel 20:25) And about this our sages said may their memory be a blessing, "He who treats the judicial process lightly is a fool, wicked and arrogant" (Avot 4:9). Further they said, "Whoever honors the Torah will himself be honored by others . Whoever dishonors Torah will himself be dishonored by others"(Avot 4:8).<sup>144</sup>

Instead, this is the way of wise students who are modest with their Torah : To honor God and his Torah in their good virtues, and direct all their ways and all their interests towards devotion to God for the sake of his great name. Not in order to acquire a virtue in this world and to increase his name.<sup>145</sup> Anyone who honors God by means of the honor which God gave to him, the Holy One Blessed Be He himself increases his virtue and honor. It is said "For I honor those who honor me" (1Samuel 2:30).

It is a great disgrace for the student of the sages to boast about himself and to praise himself before his fellow men. Solomon rebuked in his wisdom and said, "Let the mouth of another praise you, not your mouth; The lips of a stranger, not yours" (Proverbs 27:2). Every time that a man glorifies and praises himself, he degrades himself. And every time a man degrades and belittles himself, he exalts himself.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>143</sup>Darshan-one who interprets the Torah.

<sup>144</sup>The reward for the study of Torah is study itself. One who tries to make use of the study of Torah for other means, particularly to use for self aggrandizement is a dishonor to the Torah and all who study it.

<sup>145</sup>One should study Torah for its own sake and to honor God, not in order to increase one's own reputation.

<sup>146</sup>Self-aggrandizement only leads to disgrace. But it is not certain that if a man degrades himself, he exalts himself. We tend not to look well upon someone who is self-defacing. Obviously, the median behavior is the best!

Therefore my children, don't ask for greatness and don't desire honor. If you are worthy of this and you honor God in all your ways, in the end honor will come to you.<sup>147</sup>

And God will save us from the inferior virtues, and in his great mercy he will cause us to succeed in a good name and good deeds.

### Commentary

This chapter is concerned with the rewards and effects of a good name and how one can come to lose their good name. One earns a good name by devoting himself to God and by doing good deeds. One loses a good name by being boastful and chasing after vain pleasures. The rewards which come to the one with a good name are emphasized.

Several of the ideas in this chapter bear further discussion. But first, it is important to define the concept of a good name in modern terms. We understand this concept as that of a good reputation. The person who has a good reputation is one who is known to be kind, fair, honest, considerate, generous etc. The qualities vary depending on the person and the situation. There is no question that having a good reputation is important for us today; it simply makes our lives more pleasant and also in some cases more profitable. One with a good reputation in business has an easier time making the proper contacts, and one who has a good reputation in other areas can be well-liked as well as respected, and enjoy the benefits of having loyal friends and colleagues.

Reputation can also apply to institutions and organizations. A university can have a reputation for academic excellence. A political organization can have a good reputation for championing a worthwhile cause, and a synagogue can have a good reputation for being a warm and caring community. Consumer products and services also have reputations which are emphasized through advertisements. The notion of reputation is relevant at many levels of our society.

<sup>147</sup> Further confirmation that we will all in the end get what we deserve.

The author of Sefer Maalot HaMiddot sets the tone by telling the reader that even God had to work to acquire his good name. From this we learn that one is not just given a good name. A good name is earned. The lengthy comparison of a good name to fragrant oil points to the eternality of a good name. In life and in death a good name is not tarnished, and both the poor and the rich can earn a good name. A good name transcends time, and status. A good name is connected to a life devoted to Torah, righteousness and good deeds. Having a good name also means not boasting about oneself. Disgrace of a good comes about through self-aggrandizement. The fall of Adam and Eve is used to demonstrate how the quest to be all knowing can lead to disgrace. As with the other virtues, the one who possesses a good name will be granted life in the world to come.

Sefer Maalot HaMiddot brings up the idea that a person has three names in his lifetime. The first one given by his parents, the one that he calls himself, and the third one given by God. This is to say that depending on the perspective of others, we indeed have more than one reputation. Our parents, who know us for the longest period of time have a certain view of us and a perception of a reputation which they pass on to others. We also describe ourselves in our own words and have a sense of our reputation based on how we perceive our capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. The third perspective, that of God, we can understand as our reputation as a result of our deeds in this world. Certainly we are known by others first and foremost for what and how we do things. Every child and every adult has a reputation which is formed at a very early age. Our reputation certainly changes as we grow older and are subject to different situations. The results of our actions live on, and attest to our intentions and reputation in life.

The reference in the text to the eulogy as something which indicates a man's chances for life in the world to come is an important one for us. At its best, a eulogy describes all of the contributions one has made, and attests to the kind of person the deceased was throughout his or her life. At death, it is proper only to speak well of a person (at least insofar as a eulogy is concerned), so that he or she is honored. Thoughts

of a person's good reputation at the time of their death should be a comfort to mourners. This also attests to our understanding that someone who is deceased is treated with the utmost respect. Even if a person was disliked and had a poor reputation while alive, at the time of death, everyone merits at least one chance at being seen in a positive light. For us, the idea that the content of the eulogy determines whether or not the deceased inherits the world to come does not necessarily focus on the concept of eternal life. We look upon this to mean simply that the extent and type of a person's deeds in life determines how they are remembered after they die.

Also in relation to death, this text mentions the importance of a tombstone, with the passage from Isaiah 56. The verse from Isaiah mentioning "Yad veShem" is particularly meaningful in light of the Holocaust and the meaning that this verse has taken on. Judaism prohibits cremation on the grounds that our bodies belong to God, and also that we are to be buried in the earth so that we may be resurrected when the Messiah comes. Because so many of our brethren were incinerated during the Holocaust, there is no trace left of them. The importance of the institution Yad Veshem in Israel is that with this monument, these people, and their names have been granted an eternity.

Additional Rabbinic texts on this subject not found in Sefer Maalot HaMiddot do not add anything new to our understanding of the concept of a good name, yet a few texts do reiterate some of the chapter's themes. Brachot 17 states: "Happy is he who was brought up in the Torah and who has given pleasure to his Creator and who grew up with a good name and departed the world with a good name." This comments on the relationship to a life of Torah to a good name. One who follows the commandments will have a good name, at least in the eyes of the Rabbis, and probably God as well! In Tanchuma Vayakel this point is also discussed: "Each time a man increases in his commandments, he acquires a good name for himself. Bezalel, because he acquired a good name was worthy in doing work for the Tabernacle." Here is an example of one whose deeds and reputation brought him honor. *of these organizations have good or bad*

Our text's discussion about how one comes to lose a good name is also relevant. Great emphasis is placed on the negative effects of being arrogant, selfish and boastful. It is probably a safe bet that if we were asked to characterize a person who had a bad reputation, these traits would be mentioned. The discussion of vanities is also significant. Many do indeed chase after frivolous things, rather than spend their money and time in more worthwhile pursuits. We live in a society which promotes this selfishness, as there is always something new and better to acquire, and we have grown accustomed to thinking only about ourselves and how the world affects us. The one who is selfish certainly is not looked upon as having a good reputation.

A person can spend his or her whole lifetime working to develop a good reputation, yet it can be lost in a second. People who are not criminals, yet who have one incident from their private lives revealed, can immediately be toppled. The world of politics provides a number of examples. Anita Hill and Zoe Baird suffered a loss of their good names as a result of the publicity surrounding them. In time they will regain their reputations, but it is devastating to think about how these two prominent women came to be disgraced. This fall in Denver, a physician was accused of fondling a child under anesthesia in the hospital. The doctor was eventually cleared of all charges, but there is no doubt that suspicion will remain with him for a very long time. Hypothetically, a student could jokingly make an accusation against a teacher. Regardless of the truth, when suspicions are aroused, the teacher's reputation will be endangered. The list of examples could go on, yet the point is that no matter how long or hard one works to develop a good reputation, it is tenuous. Sometimes a person's good fortune is the only explanation for sustaining their good name.

Another aspect worthy of some thought is the notion that organizations have reputations. For anyone involved in Jewish communal life, this is relevant. How many of us could say that we joined a particular synagogue because it has a reputation for one thing or another. Additionally, we know that these organizations have good or bad

reputations based in large part on their leadership. One person can make or break the reputation in any organization. Consider the synagogue whose Rabbi is let go because he was accused of having an extramarital affair. His actions tarnish the reputation of that particular community. In another example, a local Bureau of Jewish Education replaced their director who was not well liked. The activities of the agency continued to be the same, yet with new leadership, the agency's reputation suddenly soared in the community, simply because of the presence of a new director. Conversely, a well established and well liked synagogue educator left his job to move on to another position. The reputation of this man was so highly built up and indelibly fixed in the congregation's mind that nobody who followed was perceived as being able to fill his shoes, and subsequent talented educators failed. The reputation of the school, once very highly thought of plummeted as a result. Just as an individual's reputation can be tenuous, the same is true for an organization.

We are all concerned in some way with having a good reputation, for it goes hand in hand with being liked and respected. It is no less important for us than for the Rabbis. The key difference in our concern is that we may not believe that a good reputation will help us earn a portion in the world to come. However, what we can learn from the perspective of Sefer Maalot HaMiddot is that it is important to contribute to this world, in order to make it better for generations to come.

...and we are to strive to be like the great men of our nation, who were able to create any system of virtues which is proper, and to be able to do so in the direction of the virtues.

...However, as we have seen, virtues are not defined in a specific manner, but rather they are defined in a general manner, and are subject to the individual's judgment. As noted previously, virtues are subjective, with both individuals and

<sup>148</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) p. 112.

#### Chapter 4: A Look at Virtues and Character with Stanley Hauerwas

In order to make use of the previous material dealing with virtues and character, it is important to further clarify these terms, and the context in which they operate. Stanley Hauerwas, a contemporary Christian thinker defines virtues and character according to the values of a religious system, for those living within the context of a faith community. These views provide us with some useful insights which illuminate the usefulness of Sefer Maalot HaMiddot.

Webster's Dictionary defines a virtue as: General moral excellence; right action and thinking; or a specific moral quality which is looked upon as good or meritorious. The virtues discussed in the previous chapters certainly fit this description: They are actions, intentions and predispositions which are looked upon favorably. Hauerwas notes that this simplistic definition of virtues is short-sighted, as it leads one to believe that the fulfillment of virtues has only to do with human nature. It does not take into account the political (communal) context. Society determine those virtues which are beneficial and desirable. Religious communities determine the merit of a virtue according to their tenets. This perspective includes a conception of God. The outcome of being virtuous, then has to do with the existence of a greater being, to whom we answer for our actions. We act justly not only because we know that it is the right thing to do, but because we believe that God wants us to be virtuous. God is the paragon of virtue, and we are to strive to be like God in all of our actions. It is therefore critical to define any system of virtues within its proper context, for this impacts on the purpose and direction of the virtues. Hauerwas sees virtues as a subset of morality, as specific acts or qualities which are easily defined or recognized. Virtues themselves embody immediate judgement or praise.<sup>148</sup> As noted previously, virtues are subjective, with both individuals and

<sup>148</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) p. 112.



society determining their worth. A person of virtue is a bit more ambiguous, for this involves an analysis of the individual. The totality of a person's behavior and demeanor is judged when determining whether or not a person can be called virtuous. This is easily illustrated in Jewish terms. We would call a person of virtue a "mentsch". This is one of those words which we all use correctly, but might be hard-pressed to define precisely. We all know a "mentsch" when we see one: someone who demonstrates many positive virtues, and is considered to be a good person. Sefer Maalot HaMiddot indeed tries to instill "mentschlike" behavior within its reader.

Hauerwas defines character as, "Moral strength: The capacity of the person to speak for himself, to determine beforehand his future conduct not yet under his control, and therefore to guarantee for himself beyond the present moment."<sup>149</sup> This notion of character has, if you will, past, present and future elements. Rather than transcending time, our character depends on it. We must be conscious of our actions prior to doing them and, understand our ability to look back and assess our deeds. According to this view, the responsibility for character lays entirely on the individual. Our character is not completely a result of environment, for we do have the capacity to make changes, and rise above adverse conditions. Thus writes Hauerwas, "Our character is our deliberate disposition to use a certain range of reasons for our actions rather than others, for it is by having reasons and forming our actions accordingly that our character is at once revealed and molded."<sup>150</sup> Through the process of choosing from among a range of reasons, our character develops. Turning back to our Middot, we can see Hauerwas applied. Jekuthiel's intentions are to instruct and inculcate certain behaviors. In his descriptions of both the positive and negative aspects of a virtue, he reveals moral choices, and gives reasons for which a person should choose the positive path. His work

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<sup>149</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection (Notre Dame: Fides Publishing, 1974) p. 53.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid. p. 59.



creates a certain moral climate from which individuals, of their own accord choose. The goal of his system is character development.

For Hauerwas, it is a given that these notions of virtue and character are geared for and formulated within a faith community. The creation of virtuous people depends on individuals who live in accordance with the community's history. Western religions provide a structure of morality by which individuals are to follow, for the benefit of the community. People who are faithful subjects contribute to their community by making the proper moral decisions. As a support system, any religious community notes and rewards those who are virtuous, and provides the reason for which we should act in a virtuous manner. Sefer Maalot HaMiddot, as a sort of "handbook" of virtues was written at a time when Jews did not live under their own rule. It was designed to give individuals the tools for strengthening themselves and their community. It indicates quite clearly rewards and punishments, and the reasons one should act virtuous.

Hauerwas believes that virtuous behavior can be learned. "To be a person of virtue involves acquiring the linguistic, emotional, and rational skills that give us the strength to make our decisions and our life our own."<sup>151</sup> Virtues themselves are skills, which must be learned and incorporated into one's life. Our Middot certainly are meant to be learned, and practiced. As Jews, our commitment to study and action gives us the foundation for learning virtues.

Virtues are also important for the future: "An ethic of virtue is committed to the existence of communities convinced that their future depends on the development of and trust in persons of virtue."<sup>152</sup> Our Middot are an example of how the Jewish community seeks to develop certain virtues and character. These Middot are a part of a greater value system, which is meant not only to sustain the current generation, but to

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<sup>151</sup>Idem, A Community of Character, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). p. 115.

<sup>152</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). p. 116



## Part II

### Chapter 5: Character Education and Jewish Education Today

Contemporary Jewish education in the United States is, in large part geared towards children who attend supplementary schools. Jewish educators face difficult choices when constructing a curriculum, for there is never enough time to teach all that is really necessary or desirable. The subjects which are covered on some level are: Hebrew, History, Holidays, Bible, Life Cycle, and Israel. So concerned are we in teaching students the basics about Judaism that we often forgo studies of Rabbinic Literature, Philosophy, and Ethics. Even at the elementary and supplementary levels of Jewish Education, attention to Jewish ethics is of vital importance. Learning to be a good Jew also means learning to be a good person.

The part of Jewish ethics which is of most concern here is Character Education. Barry Chazan writes that Character Education is, "Education for the good life; for the life of Torah and Jewish citizenship."<sup>153</sup> For Jews, Character Education means study and involvement in a life according to Torah. Our particular texts give us a standard of behavior that we are to follow, by which we build Jewish Character. Further Chazan writes, "Character Education involves a concern for doing good; internalizing it and understanding it as part of one's being."<sup>154</sup> Character Education goes beyond learning texts, ethical maxims and history. As a result of our studies, a fundamental change in our disposition towards the world and other people is to occur. We are to move beyond knowing good; our actions must be good.

It does not seem plausible that this definition of Character Education will work for our Jewish Community today. The biggest hurdle is that we are a divided people, without strong communal ties. We are certainly one people, but we are not one.

<sup>153</sup> Barry Chazan, "Jewish Education and Moral Development", Moral Development, Moral Education and Kohlberg, Ed. Brenda Munsey (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1980), p. 304.

<sup>154</sup> ibid.



an integral part, in that children adopt those behaviors which they see played out at home. Parents are the primary role models.

They must be educated to demonstrate good character in order to influence their children. Herein lies the case for Family Education, which is just beginning to take hold in our communities. In addition to the family, the community also must model virtues for people to emulate. The community can be instrumental in influencing families and individuals to participate in virtuous behavior, by providing adequate support and examples.

To be fair, it must be noted that ethics or virtues are not completely absent in Jewish Education today. Students do study and practice certain mitzvot; i.e. tzedakah, bikkur cholim, and other kind acts. However, that these are all virtues, or elements designed to build character in individual students is only implied; it is not explicitly stated. Any attempt to truly build or instill character, and bring about the kind of transformation discussed above must include an explicit statement of the goals and methods to be followed.

With these many challenges, the chance of success with Character Education seems unlikely. Yet this is not the case. Education is possible, whenever the educator is willing to begin with the student where he is. The key to Character Education is making it applicable to society today. Some of our best models for Character Education come from classic Jewish texts: Bible, Talmud, Midrash and Musar Literature. These works contain many aphorisms, ethical stories, and legal material all of which teach something about character development. By studying these texts, one can build a firm foundation in classical virtues which can then be improved and expanded to suit our day.

Sefer Mavo HaMiddot is a good work to use for contemporary Character Education. It is a compilation of virtues which quotes widely from many Rabbinic sources. It is well ordered and predictable (making it relatively easy to study), and its classic virtues can be updated. The author's choices of virtues in the book also gives us a

good basis for the virtues which we deem important today (.e. generosity, modesty, humility, mercy, and a good name). After reading only a few chapters of HaMiddot , one discovers the timelessness of the many texts quoted. The Rabbinic texts cited by the author give the reader a good background as to how these virtues were viewed by our predecessors, and the author's own words give us a notion as to the importance of the virtues in his day. The challenge for the contemporary educator is to glean from the chapters of "HaMiddot" those virtues which seem most relevant today, pull out the clearest and most applicable texts and situations, and then place them in a modern context which can be understood by the student.

The following three lessons are an attempt to answer this challenge. They each deal with one particular virtue from Sefer Maalot HaMiddot, using the texts as a jumping off point and providing a basis for discussions and activities that will hopefully relate to the lives of the participants. Ideally, these lessons would be included in a whole curriculum on virtues or character, geared for a particular age group and type of school. The lessons presented here are directed to High School and adult students, as the nature of the material from HaMiddot is most appropriate for the upper level.

## Chapter 6: A Lesson on the Virtue of Generosity

### Rationale

The concept of generosity is an important one for our times. Not only is it proper for us to act generously but in addition, our Jewish community depends on the generosity of individuals for its survival. Rabbinic texts on the subject give us a perspective on generosity, which when adapted to modern society can be of great significance. As with any other virtue, the ultimate goal in understanding the virtue of generosity is action. Knowing and understanding the breadth of the virtue of generosity, we should be able to act.

### Goals and Objectives

Through the study and discussion of Rabbinic and Wisdom texts on the topic of generosity, each participant will have the opportunity to expand and analyze his or her own perspective of generosity, and think about how to transmit this virtue to future generations. With this broader outlook, participants will make a 'generosity pledge' for the coming year.

### Audience and setting

This lesson is geared for Jewish adults. It can be used in a synagogue adult education class as a part of the regular curriculum, particularly if the course includes a section on Jewish ethics. This exercise can also be used with a lay or professional committee seeking to deepen an understanding of their tasks. One and a half to two hours are needed.

### Materials

Paper and pencils, a chalkboard or poster paper, copies of Rabbinic quotes.

### Lesson

**Introduction and warm up:** All participants are directed to make a list of all of the acts of generosity which they have done in the past year. The facilitator must be careful not to define generosity, for this will take place as the lesson progresses.

After the class has made their lists, individuals will share their actions and the facilitator will list the acts on a chalkboard or poster paper. Using this list, the class will categorize and label types of generosity (i.e. financial, volunteerism, hospitality).

**Discussion of Rabbinic and Wisdom Texts:** The class will read and discuss the following on generosity, answering questions about each one: 1) What aspect of generosity is being discussed? and 2) How is this portrayed today? 3) Are there any new aspects of Generosity being discussed here that we did not already list? The instructor should add the new categories and contemporary examples. The final list of categories should include: financial, volunteering, hospitality, selflessness, anonymity and good will.

### **Transmitting the Virtue of Generosity Across the Generations:**

1. For each category, participants will write down an example of how to teach that aspect of generosity to one's children, or how it was taught to them. (For example, for the category of volunteerism, parents can include their children when they do volunteer work.) Everyone should share their answers.

2. For each category, participants will make suggestions as to how the community can model each of these aspects of generosity. Share answers.



**Conclusion and Wrap-up:** Participants will make 2 pledges of generosity for the coming year and share their answers with the group.

1. The results of the study are presented in the following table. The data are based on the results of the study of the effect of the concentration of the solution on the rate of the reaction. The results show that the rate of the reaction increases with the concentration of the solution. The results also show that the rate of the reaction decreases with the concentration of the solution. The results are consistent with the theory of the reaction.

1. *Chlorophyll content* was determined by the method of Arar and Cook (1987) using a spectrophotometer.

[illegible]

14. On 1 April 1992, the respondent was interviewed with a plainclothes officer of the respondent's local police department. The officer advised that the respondent had been arrested on 1 April 1992, and was held in custody until 1 April 1992.

The following includes the names of all persons who have been identified as having been involved in the activities of the group during the period from January 1968 to December 1970.



## Texts on the Virtue of Generosity

1. "The generous man is blessed for he gives of his bread to the poor"(Proverbs 22:9)
2. "Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on-seeing that you have come your servant's way. . . Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick, three measures of choice flour! Knead and make cakes! Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy who hastened to prepare it" (Genesis 4-7).
3. "One generous person said to his friend, "When you need something from me, don't ask me face to face because I don't want to see you, only the question. Write me your question in a note"(Choice of Pearls 47:17).
4. The generous one is one who is generous towards one who was not generous to him (Choice of Pearls 28:14).
5. Generosity is when a man will renounce his wealth to do with it acts of charity and lovingkindness. He will do business with his fellow men in faithfulness and will give to them from his own, and not take anything of theirs"(Sefer Maalot HaMiddot).
6. When a loved one apologizes to you with a plausible reason or a confession, don't seize him but pardon him. "Pardon is a part of the virtue of generosity" (Choice of Pearls 27:4).
7. Generosity includes the one who speaks out of modesty and conciliation and contentment and good will, and all of his interests and advice are in the path of generosity" (Sefer Maalot ha Middot).

**Warm-up:** The teacher asks students to define "generosity" and to share an experience, in a few minutes of discussion with their group, by to come up with a definition of generosity.

**Creating Skits or Stories:** Divide the class into groups, and hand out copies of their quotes. Students will be assigned a quote and asked to create a skit or write a story based on that quote. The story or skit should end with the quote itself. Allow approximately 10 minutes to complete this task. Students will then present their skits or read their stories to the group.

**Worksheet:** Students fill in the worksheet on the Virtue of Generosity and share their answers.

**Conclusion:** Based on the discussion and outcome of the plays skits, students will create a North Code of Conduct dealing with the issue of generosity. Be sure to include the various aspects of this virtue.

## Chapter 7: A Lesson on the Virtue of Humility

### Rationale

The virtue of Humility as discussed in Sefer Maalot HaMiddot has many facets. It includes being humble, not being embarrassed to ask questions, not publicly shaming a friend, and feeling sorry for wrongdoings. This lesson is designed for teens. As a result of their normally intense periods of growth, teens are subject to great pressures from their peers and parents, and are also plagued by their own self doubts and fears. The different aspects of humility that to be discussed and demonstrated in the following lesson will give students the opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences with this virtue.

### Goals and Objectives

Based on quotations from Rabbinic texts, students will create and present stories or skits based on views of humility. Students will have the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences with the different aspects of this virtue with a written worksheet. Through group discussions and individual sharing of personal experiences, participants will see how this virtue operates within their lives. The class will create a Moral Code of Conduct for the virtue of humility.

### Setting

This lesson is geared for High School students in a Supplementary School, Confirmation Program or Day School. Ideally this could be used as a part of a course on Jewish Ethics. Two hours are needed for this lesson.

### Materials

Each student will need copy of the quotes on humility and the worksheet.

### Lesson

**Warm-up:** The teacher asks the class to define: humility, shame, embarrassment. In a few minutes of discussion with the group, try to come to a general consensus of definitions.

**Creating Skits or Stories:** Divide the class into groups, and hand out copies of the quotes. Students will be assigned a quote and asked to create a skit or write a story based on that quote. The story or skit should end with the quote itself. Allow approximately 10 minutes to complete this task. Students will then present their skits or read their stories to the group.

**Worksheet:** Students fill in the worksheet on the Virtue of Humility and share their answers.

**Conclusion:** Based on the discussion and outcome of the class activities, students will create a Moral Code of Conduct dealing with the issue of humility. Be sure to include the various aspects of this virtue.

## Worksheet on the Virtue of Humility

Complete the following with as much detail as possible, and write down the Rabbinic quote that best relates to the situation.

1. Something I regret having done . . .

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Quote:-----  
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2. When I did \_\_\_\_\_ I was made to feel ashamed by the people I live with.

When I did \_\_\_\_\_ I was made to feel ashamed in public.

I was ashamed of myself when

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When I did \_\_\_\_\_, I should have felt ashamed although only  
God saw me.

Quote:-----  
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3. I was embarrassed in public when

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Quote:-----  
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4. I embarrassed someone else in public when

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Quote:-----  
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5. Discuss at least two situations in which you were embarrassed to ask a question.

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Quote:-----  
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## Quotes on Humility

1. If a person commits several sins and is ashamed of them, God pardons him for all of his transgressions (Brachot 12b).
2. When you do something inside your house, you will be shamed by the people in your house. And when you do something in the market, you will be shamed by the people. And if not, you will be ashamed of yourself. And if you are not ashamed of yourself, you will be shamed by your soul. And if you will not be shamed by your soul, you will be shamed from the moment the Creator sees you (Sefer Maalot HaMiddot).
3. He who publicly shames his neighbor, it is as though he shed blood (Baba Metzia 58:b).
4. The one who shames his friend, in the end he will be humiliated (Kallah).
5. When you have doubts concerning words of Torah or tradition, about any commandment, don't be embarrassed to ask about it even from someone lesser than you in rank or years (Sefer Maalot HaMiddot).

## Chapter 8: A Lesson on the Virtue of a Good Name

### Rationale

A good name, or reputation as we would call it is something that most of us strive for in this world. We wish to be well thought of by our friends, family and colleagues, and we do things to facilitate this. We focus on the means of acquiring a good name, and how this will benefit us. But we don't always think about why this is important on a more grandiose level; that there are benefits to be reaped from a good name after we die. The ultimate reward of a good name for the Rabbis is life in the World to Come. We can understand this to mean that the fruits of our good name; our deeds and contributions to the world, will live on after we die, carrying on the name that we have worked to create. As with the study of any virtue, the goal is for participants to increase their awareness of the presence or lack of the virtue in their lives, and enhance their ability to live an ethical life. The particular texts and activities were chosen because together, they give an historical and modern perspective of the virtue of a good name.

### Goals and Objectives

Through the study and discussion of Rabbinic texts and modern Hebrew Poetry on the subject of a good name, participants will be able to deepen their understanding of this important virtue. By writing an Ethical Will, individuals will have the opportunity to express to a loved one their own views about how to live one's life in the pursuit of a good name.

### Audience and Setting

This lesson is geared for Jewish adults. It can be used in an adult education course as an independent lesson, or as a part of a course of studies on ethics. This lesson could also be adapted for use with lay or professional groups of Jewish organizations and agencies, as there are many parallels which can be drawn between the Good Name of an individual and the Good Name of an organization. Two hours are needed for this lesson.

### Materials

Each student will need copies of the selection from Sefer Maalot HaMiddot, the poem Each of Us Has a Name; paper and pen.

### Lesson

**Introduction:** The instructor will give an overview of the lesson.

**Text Study:** Participants will divide into groups and read different sections of Chapter 15, "A Good Name" from Sefer Maalot HaMiddot. As they read, each group will list the quotes and statements which define an aspect of the virtue of a good name. The lists will be shared and discussed.

**Study of Poem:** Read and discuss "Each of Us has a Name" by Zelda.

Questions for discussion about the poem:

1. This poem does not specifically note that our "name" is good or bad. Why do you think this is so?
2. How is Zelda's view different or similar to the Rabbinic view we previously discussed?

3. Is there a particular mood set with this poem? If so, what is it, and how does it relate to the subject?

4. Is there anything that you would add to this "list" about how a person acquires a name?

**Ethical Wills:** Participants are instructed to write an ethical will to a child, grandchild or loved one as to how to acquire a good-name.

For information on Ethical Wills, see:

1. Ethical Wills: A Modern Jewish Treasury, Jack Reimer and Nathaniel Stampfer eds. Schocken Books, 1983.

2. "Ethical Literature" by Yosef Dan Encyclopedia Judaica Vol.6.

**Conclusion:** Participants will share parts of their Ethical Wills with the class.

### Each of Us Has a Name

Each of us has a name  
given by God  
and given by our parents

Each of us has a name  
given by our stature and our smile  
and given by what we wear

Each of us has a name  
given by the mountains  
and given by our walls

Each of us has a name  
given by the stars  
and given by our neighbors

Each of us has a name  
given by our sins  
and given by our longing

Each of us has a name  
given by our enemies  
and given by our love

Each of us has a name  
given by our celebrations  
and given by our work

Each of us has a name  
given by the seasons  
and given by our blindness

Each of us has a name  
given by the sea  
and given by our death.

--Zelda

(This translation was taken from Kol Haneshamah Wyancote: Reconstructionist Press, 1989.)

"Kol Haneshamah" is a Hebrew phrase. It means "a good name" or "a good name for a good name".

The word Menahem here is used as a synonym of comfort.

According to the Rabbinic tradition, the distance between heaven and earth is 500 years.

We then turn to comfort God in our quest for a good name.

100. Akutzel uses this passage twice in the chapter. He (purposely) misreads the Hebrew "Yed vashem" as "yod vashem" by eliminating the comma between them.

### Sefer Maalot HaMiddot Chapter 15

My children, come and I will teach you the virtue<sup>156</sup> of a good name. Know my children that the virtue of a good name, which proceeds from a man through an act of devotion to God is a special virtue. It is found only in the righteous and people of deeds and those who fear God, whose good names through their service to God, spreads out to distant lands. Even God himself goes around to acquire a good name in his world as it is said, "Whom God went to redeem unto himself for a people, and to make him a name" (2 Samuel 7:23). And our sages said may their memory be a blessing in the Aggadah, "We found that God went around 500 years to acquire for himself a good name in his world." (Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:2).<sup>157</sup> It is said, "Whom God went to redeem unto himself . ." (2 Samuel 7:23). All the moreso from the land to the heavens, he went around 500 years.<sup>158</sup>

My children, be careful to acquire the virtue of a good name in devotion to God and in good deeds, because it is one of the loftiest virtues of all. And thus Solomon in his wisdom praised it, as it is said, "A good name is better than fragrant oil" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). And our sages, may their memory be blessed, said in the Aggadah, "Fragrant oil is for an hour, and a good name is forever" (Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:1). As it is said, "May his name be eternal" (Psalms 72:17). Fragrant oil ceases to exist, and a good name is sustained, as it is said, "And I will give to them in my house and in my walls a monument and a name, better than sons or daughters, I will give them an everlasting name which shall not perish" (Isaiah 56:5).<sup>159</sup> Fragrant oil is bought and a good name is free.

<sup>156</sup>The word Maalah here is used as a synonym of Middah.

<sup>157</sup>According to the Rabbis, the distance between heaven and earth is 500 years.

<sup>158</sup>We then are to emulate God in our quest for a good name.

<sup>159</sup>Jekuthiel uses this passage twice in this chapter. He (purposely) misreads the Hebrew "Yad veshem tov mi banim omibanot" by eliminating the comma between shem



Fragrant oil descends and a good name ascends. Fragrant oil is put on the backs of the dead and becomes putrid as it is said, "The flies of the dead turn the perfumers ointment fetid and putrid" (Ecclesiastes 10:1). A good name falls on the dead and doesn't putrify as it is said, "And he placed himself on the child; he warmed the flesh of the child" (2 Kings 4:34). Fragrant oil, for life, and a good name, for life and death. Fragrant oil is for the rich and a good name is for the poor and for the rich.<sup>160</sup> Fragrant oil descends into water and is erased. A good name, descends into the water and is not erased. Thus we find in Jonah who was sent into the sea and ascended. Fragrant oil descends into the fire and is burned. A good name descends into the fire and is not burned. Thus we found in Hananiah Mishaël and Azaria that ascended from the furnace of fire. Fragrant oil, how far can its smell go? From the bedroom to the drawing room. But a good name can be perceived from one end of the world to the other, as it is said, "The Lord was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout the land" (Joshua 7:27). It says, "For Mordechai was great in the house of the king, and his fame spread throughout the kingdom" (Esther 9:4).<sup>161</sup>

My children, come and see how great is the virtue of a good name. Thus our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "Possessors of fragrant oil entered a place of life and came out burned. And who were they? Nadav and Abihu. And those who possess a good name, they entered a place of death and came out alive. And who are they? Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah" (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 6:1).<sup>162</sup>

Our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "There are three crowns: A crown of priesthood, and a crown of prophecy, and a crown of kingship. A crown of priesthood was merited by Aaron and he took it. A crown of prophecy was merited by [and] to get his phrase shem tov. However, in this paragraph, the emphasis is on the second half of the verse, emphasizing that a (good) name will not perish.

<sup>160</sup>Every person, regardless of his or her status has the potential to acquire a good name.

<sup>161</sup>The images here clearly present the case for a good name.

<sup>162</sup>Obviously a good name has the power to resurrect. [of one's conduct in life]

Moses and he took it. A crown of kingship was merited by David and he took it. A crown of a good name is left aside. To say, anyone who merits it, I will consider it as if the three of them were set before him and he was worthy of all of them. And for someone who does not deserve it, I will consider it as if the three of them are before him and he is not worthy of any one of them. <sup>163</sup>

Greater is the virtue of a good name, than all the silver and gold that is in the world as it is said, "A good name is choicer than great wealth; Grace is better than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1).

My children, try to acquire a good name in the world in which you stand, through fear of the heavens and in devotion to God and love of fellow men. For the good name will testify for you in this world and in the world to come. The good name is the greatest of distinctions as one sage said, "The greatest of distinctions: the good name" (Choice of Pearls 14:1).<sup>164</sup> Nothing shuts off lust like the closing of the eyes.<sup>165</sup> Another said, "It is an honor to the soul that man will have mercy on his memory and that he will acquire a good name and trust in God, this is complete faith" (Choice of Pearls 14:3).

Beloved is the virtue of a good name, most of all on the day of death as it is said, "A good name is better than fragrant oil and the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). And our sages, may their memory be a blessing, said in the Aggadah, "A man is called by three names, one that his father and mother called him, and one that he calls himself, and one that the Holy one Blessed be He calls him in the book of generations"<sup>166</sup> (Midrash Samuel 25:7 and Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:3,4). It is said, "This

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<sup>163</sup>Jekuthiel has paraphrased this from Ecclesiastes Rabba 7:2. In the Midrash, the three crowns are kingship, priesthood and Torah. In this chapter, both prophecy and a good name are used instead of Torah. In both cases, it makes sense that Torah and a good name are those things left for us. Our task is to be worthy of both.

<sup>164</sup>People are distinguished by their good name, both in this world and the world to come.

<sup>165</sup>Discretion is also an attribute of a good name.

<sup>166</sup>This refers to the name which one gains as a result of one's conduct in life.

is the book of the generations of man . . . " (Genesis 5:1). And what is he called? Man. But you do not know which among them is beloved. Solomon came and explained, "A good name which is on the day of death, is better than the day of birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). "When the Holy one Blessed be He said to Moses: Appoint for me a High priest. Moses said to him: From what tribe shall I appoint him?. He said to him: From the tribe of Levi. At the same time, Moses was happy and said: How beloved is my tribe! The Holy One, Blessed be He said to him: The names of the tribes are beloved by me than the anointing oil by which the great priest is anointed by.<sup>167</sup> For the High Priest worship is not acceptable, and he does not enter to atone, unless the names of the tribes are placed upon his heart.<sup>168</sup> And even if they were lacking one letter or one dot, the priest wouldn't enter to atone" (Midrash Shmuel 23:4, Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:2). It is said, "Six of their names on one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in order of their birth" (Exodus 28:10). So that their names will be pure. When they were living, they did not merit to hear this, and at the time that they died, it is written, "Six of their names" (Exodus 28:10).

And thus our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "More beloved is the death of Saul than the hour of his birth" (Midrash Samuel 23:4). At the time of his birth, it was not announced that he had a part in the world to come. But at the hour of his death they announced, "And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me" (1 Samuel 28:19). They announced that he had a part in the world to come.<sup>169</sup>

Furthermore they said, "More beloved are the deaths of the righteous than the hour of their births" (Ecclesiastes Rabba 7). For at the time of their births, none of God's creatures care about them, but at the hour of their death, everyone cares. At the time Samuel was born, no one sensed it. But at the time that he died, it is written, "And

<sup>167</sup>This is another comparison of shem tov to shemen tov.

<sup>168</sup>This refers to the breastplate.

<sup>169</sup>One only merits life in the world to come after having lived and created a good name for oneself. One must have a good name for the right reasons, for benefit and please others.

Samuel died" (1 Samuel 28:3). And so you may say, "And better the day of death than the day of his birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1).<sup>170</sup>

Happy is the one who grows up with a good name and dies with a good name. What does mankind say about it? Happy is so and so, who grew up with a good name, and who busied himself with Torah and commandments and with good deeds all of his days, and was righteous, pious and God fearing, loving God and his fellow, loves righteousness and justice. Just as when mankind testifies for him so too, the Holy One, Blessed be He receives him with kindness and pardons him for all of his transgressions. Thus our sages said, may their memory be a blessing, "Which man has earned the world to come?" (Shabbat 153a). As is said, "And your ears will hear the command from behind you"<sup>171</sup> saying . . ." (Isaiah 30:21) Furthermore they said, "From the funeral eulogy pronounced over a man it may be known whether the world to come is his" (Shabbat 153a). And about this Solomon said in his wisdom, "A good name is better than fragrant oil and the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1).<sup>172</sup>

If a man has merited the acquisition of a good name in this world by a deed of divine worship, and because he is involved with his fellow man and is not boastful over them, he will try to add to the levels of virtues additional virtues in order that his good name will ascend higher until the day of his death.<sup>173</sup>

My children, be desirous of a good name in devotion to God and love of fellow men in honor of heaven, not for self-honor and not for the sake of worldly authority.<sup>174</sup> When the fools did lustful things to acquire a good name in this world, to honoring themselves in vain pleasures, they did not honor heaven.

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<sup>170</sup>The idea in this paragraph is that the impact of the birth of a baby, even one who will be a tsaddik, is not comparable to the impact of the death of a tsaddik.

<sup>171</sup>The connection of this verse to the preceding question is not clear.

<sup>172</sup>One's good deeds are summed up in a eulogy, thus indicating one's suitability for the world to come.

<sup>173</sup>Here the idea being that one good deed begets another.

<sup>174</sup>One should want a good name for the right reasons, to benefit and please others.

My children, if a good name goes to you for a virtue you do not have, do not become excited in your hearts, and do not be boastful about yourselves as if you had this virtue, and don't wrap yourselves in it. Instead, try to acquire in any way that virtue for which you are praised, in order to glorify the Name and magnify it.

Thus one sage said, "When men praise you, for what you do not have, worry and don't rejoice" (Choice of Pearls 43:34). It says, "When you see (hear) a man speak about good that is not within you, do not trust him" (Choices of Pearls, 43:34).<sup>175</sup>

Therefore my children, be very careful in this important virtue, to conduct yourselves in it (the virtue) in devotion to God, in order that the Holy One, Blessed be He will give to you, "In my house and in my walls, a hand and a name, better than sons or daughters" (Isaiah 56:5).<sup>176</sup>

May God in his great mercy cause us to succeed in it.

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<sup>175</sup>If you don't really possess a trait that people think you have, the idea is to try to acquire it at all costs, quietly!

<sup>176</sup>The author reads the masoretic text without a taam mafsik between the words shem and tov in order to use this verse as a proof-text. However, it is understood from this verse that a name inscribed on a monument is meant to be eternal.

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