

# CHANGE OF VOWELS PROVIDES CHASSIDIC INSIGHT

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 449, Is Gambling Permitted. Good Shabbos!

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## Change of Vowels Provides Chassidic Insight

Among the many civil and monetary laws in this week's parsha is the Torah's first mention of the prohibition against taking interest: "When you lend money to My people (ki tilveh es ami), to the poor person who is with you, do not act toward him as a creditor; do not lay interest upon him." [Shemos 22:24]

Homiletically, the Kotzker Rebbe offers an insight into this pasuk [verse] that differs from the p'shuto shel mikra [simple interpretation].

We learn in Pirkei Avos [Ethics of the Fathers]: "When a person dies he is not accompanied by his wealth or by his jewelry or by his precious stones, only by his Torah and his good deeds" [Avos 6:9]. This Mishnah expresses a truth with which we are all familiar -- "You can't take it with you." This idea is one of the recurring themes of the Book of Koheles, which deals at length with the futilities of this world. With that in mind, the Kotzker Rebbe gives a Chassidic insight into this pasuk.

The word 'Tilveh' which means 'lend' can also (by changing the vowels) be read 'Tilaveh' which means escort. The reading then is "If there is any type of money that will escort My people (to the World to Come) it is the money given to the poor person with you (as charity and kindness). That is the only type of money that will accompany a person to the next world.

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## Saying Is Not Believing

The pasuk in this week's parsha teaches that certain "wicked" people are ineligible to be witnesses [Shemos 24:21]. The Gemara [Sanhedrin 29a] discusses the instructions given to witnesses in a monetary trial in order to encourage them to tell the truth. Rabbi Yehudah states that we quote to

them the pasuk from Mishlei, "Like clouds and wind without rain, so is one who lauds himself for a false gift" [25:14]. This means that just as abundant and seasonable rain is promised as a reward for faithfully keeping the commandments, so too rain is withheld as a punishment for people's sins. Thus the witnesses are warned that by their false testimony they may bring drought and famine.

Rava objects that this type of threat will only scare farmers. If the witnesses are accountants, this will not frighten them. Therefore, Rava suggests that we tell the witnesses that for false testimony *dever* [pestilence] comes to the land.

Rav Ashi in turn objects to Rava's threat because the witnesses may take the fatalistic attitude that "when our time is up, we will die," and not be scared by the threat of illness or plague. Rather, Rav Ashi suggests, based on the teaching of Nossan Bar Mar Zutra, we tell them false witnesses are despised even by the people who bought them off, as it is written (quoting Izevel's plan for her husband Achav to hire false witnesses) "Then seat two unscrupulous people (*benei bli'ya-al*) opposite him..." [Melachim I 21:10].

According to the Gemara, this portrayal of being a nothing, even in the eyes of the people who hired them to buy their testimony, is the most inhibiting threat that the Court can use to scare the witnesses into telling the truth. In the first place, people attempting to buy off others as false witnesses are not the most upstanding people in the community. If witnesses who agree to be bought off are perceived as worthless members of society even in the eyes of those who hired them, that is really significant.

This Gemara underscores one of the major themes of the Slabodka school of mussar. The way to appeal to a person, to influence him to improve and to want to be an upright Jew is to appeal to his sense of greatness. "You are a son of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. You are a Jew. How can you allow yourself to be sold, to cheapen yourself even in the eyes of the corrupt members of society?" This concept of '*Gadlus haAdam*' - emphasizing what a person is and what a person can become - is the most effective way of improving a person.

Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi says that if Nossan Bar Mar Zutra's approach is correct -- that their fear of appearing as low-lives in the eyes of their employers makes the witnesses tell the truth -- then how is it ever possible for us to do something wrong? If the L-rd is in front of my eyes constantly, if He is standing 'right here' and He is watching me and He sees what I am doing, how can I ever do something wrong? I certainly would not want the Master of the Universe to think I am a low-life! How could a person talk in the middle of davening? It states "I have set Hashem before me always" [Tehillim 16:8]?

The answer is that "I have set Hashem before me always" is lip service. We say it. We say that we believe it. But it could not be real, because if it was real then the restraining power of G-d thinking we were "base men" would certainly inhibit us from doing any wrong.

Eemunah [belief] is theory, but not practice. This helps us to better understand the Gemara at the end

of Tractate Makkos [24a]. The Germara cites different Tanach personalities who tried to synopsise the Torah, reducing the 613 commandments to their fundamental components. Chabakuk [2:4] finally came and reduced them to a single principle: The righteous person will live through his faith. Every mitzvah and every sin boils down to one thing. If Emunah was real, if the words "I have set Hashem before me always" were real, we would be different people. The further we are from this reality, the further we are from the goal of true Torah observance.

If there is one single concept that a person should try to internalize, it is these words: "I have set Hashem before me always." This determines how real the Almighty is in a person's life. This will make the difference in the type of Jew and the type of person he will be.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Mishpatim are provided below:

1. Tape # 043 - Malpractice
2. Tape # 086 - Withholding Medical Treatment
3. Tape # 134 - Hashovas Aveida: Returning Lost Objects
4. Tape # 181 - Medicine, Shabbos, and the Non-Jew
5. Tape # 227 - Taking Medicine on Shabbos
6. Tape # 271 - Experimental Medical Treatment
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8. Tape # 361 - Bankruptcy
9. Tape # 405 - Litigating in Secular Courts
10. Tape # 449 - Is Gambling Permitted
11. Tape # 493 - Bitul B'Rov
12. Tape # 537 - Losing Your Coat at a Coat Check
13. Tape # 581 - Lending Without Witnesses
14. Tape # 625 - The Kesuba
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