



Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת and חמין דזעיר אנפין collections of maamarim given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Seuda Shlishis and Melave Malka

### Melave Malka Parshas Vaeira 5768

In *Sefer Shmuel*, (ש"א פרק ו'), the Plishtim, who had captured the *Aron*, realized that they were being punished, and decided to return the *Aron* to Am Yisrael. They asked the priests of *avodah zara* to instruct them how to return the *Aron*. They told the Plishtim that if you send the *Aron* of *Elokei Yisrael*, don't send it empty. After instructing them, they say, ולמה תכבדו את לבבם - Why should you harden your hearts as Mitzrayim and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? The Plishtim immediately filled it with silver and gold and put it on the wagon.

The *Tana D'vei Eliyahu* explains.

“Even though those priests served *avodah zara*, they nonetheless had *Derech Eretz* (as we see from their instructions.)”

We can learn a great and powerful *chidush* from the words of the *Tana D'vei Eliyahu* that helps us understand our *parsha*, Parshas Va'eira. Eliyahu Hanavi reveals to us that if Pharaoh and his servants had the *midah* of *derech erez*, they wouldn't have hardened their hearts, and wouldn't have needed to undergo ten *makos*. That lack of *derech erez* was the critical difference between the Plishtim and the Mitzrim.

We are all familiar with the saying, *Derech Eretz Kadma La'Torah*. The source of that idea is found in the first perek of *Tana D'vei Eliyahu* which explains the להט החרב המתהפכת לשמור דרך עץ החיים - the sword of flickering flame that protected the way to the *Eitz Ha'chaim* after Adam and Chava were sent out of Gan Eden. Eliyahu Hanavi explains that דרך refers to *derech erez* and עץ החיים is the Torah.

מלמד שדרך ארץ קדמה לתורה - this teaches us that *derech erez* precedes Torah.



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(There are many more sources that present *derech erez* as a fundamental *midah* that every Jew must develop in order to progress in Torah and *avodas Hashem*.)

The *midah* of *derech erez* is multifaceted. One aspect of *derech erez* is polite, proper behavior when interacting with other people, and in our interactions with Hashem. As the *Shelah Hakadosh* writes,

“The matter of *derech erez* includes righteous behavior, great *tznius*, all elevated *midos* and everything precious. It means loving Hashem’s creations, and being beloved by them. One who has *Derech Eretz* is a person of *Shalom* and he is also *shalem* - complete. He maintains the world in general and in every specific aspect, whether in heavenly matters or worldly matters.

*Derech Eretz* applies to three areas of a person’s life.

1. *Shleimus* - completeness in the way that a person behaves by himself.
2. *Shleimus* in his behavior in his home.
3. *Shleimus* in his interactions with other people.

In each of these three areas, there must be three types of *shleimus*. A person must have *shleimus hamamon* - in his finances, *shleimus haguf* - in his body, and *shleimus hanefesh* - in his soul...”

We must understand that true *derech erez* can only be attained by developing *shleimus* in all of those areas. You can find a person who is very polite and has excellent table manners, yet is truly a wicked, arrogant, fool. It is well known that the descendants of Amalek, the Nazis **ימח שם**, prided themselves on their politeness and manners. Nonetheless, no nation was more evil or cruel than the Germans.

This is why it is vital to remember that someone who wants to acquire the *midah* of *derech erez* must do so in all of its aspects. A person with *derech erez* knows how to behave normally. He thanks those who have helped him, and admits mistakes he has made. This was the *derech erez* of the Plishtim, who admitted their wrongdoing.



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Pharaoh was a *kafuy tovah*, one who refuses to acknowledge the good that others have done for him. His lack of *derech erez* was so extreme that not only did he refuse to acknowledge that Yosef enabled him and his nation to survive the famine, he ignored the fact that Yosef made him wealthy by acquiring all the gold and silver in Egypt for the royal coffers. Even worse, he utilized the wealth and power that Yosef brought him to oppress Yosef's descendants.

He did the same with the *bracha* he received from Yaakov that the waters of the Nile should rise up when he approached. Instead of being grateful to Yaakov and descendants, he used the *bracha* to present himself as a god whose decrees against Yaakov's children must be followed.

If Pharaoh had even a miniscule amount of *derech erez*, it may not have been enough to get him to repay Am Yisrael for the benefits he received from Yaakov and Yosef. However, it would have prevented him from repaying good with evil, and kindness with cruelty.

This *parsha* demonstrates the far-reaching power of *derech erez*. Even someone who learns Torah must first acquire the *midah* of *derech erez* that preceded Torah. It isn't sufficient to avoid being a *kafuy tovah*. Someone with *derech erez* must acknowledge the benefits he receives from others and express his thanks for each and every *tovah* he has received.

For example, *avreichim* who learn in a *Kollel* receive many benefits such as food, drink and more. They must express their gratitude to the Rosh Kollel who travels from place to place all year, raising funds on their behalf. So often, they ignore and deny the good that he does for them by pointing out that he also collects money for his own salary on those trips. Even if that is true, it doesn't exempt them from their obligation of *hakaras hatov*. If they don't express their thanks, they are כפויי טובה. This applies to yeshiva *bochrim*, friends, and spouses. Everyone must recognize and acknowledge the good that others do for them, and do anything possible in order to repay their benefactors.



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I remember something that happened in the time of the Gerrer Rebbe, the *Beis Yisrael zy”a*. At that time, the *Lev Simcha zy”a* was the *nasi* of Yeshivas Chidushei Ha’Rim. One day, he saw a talmid damage yeshiva property. He immediately sent him home. When the boy came to apologize, the *Lev Simcha* told him that aside from the transgression of *bal tashchis* (destroying and wasting), he transgressed something even more serious, *kefiyus tovah* - denying the benefits he received from the Yeshiva he learns in. Destroying the property of your benefactor is far worse than destroying a random person’s property.

There was another story about a *bachur* who learned in Yeshivas Sfas Emes. He habitually arrived late for everything. Once, he came late to lunch and as he was sitting and eating, the woman who was in charge of cleaning the dining room arrived. The boy noticed that she had entered the room, and berated her for her *chutzpah* and the *pritzus* of entering a room when a man was present (all in the name of *chasidus* of course). When the *Pnei Menachem zy”a* heard about this he expelled him from the yeshiva. Then the *Pnei Menachem* himself called the cleaning woman and apologized to her.

Afterwards he told me, that if that *bachur* had even a little *hakaras hatov* for that woman who worked so hard on his behalf every day, he never would have behaved that way. He added that when someone doesn’t behave with *derech erez*, his Torah is corrupted and his *chasidus* is not *chasidus*.

It is known that *tzadikim* used to value even inanimate objects that they benefitted from. The *sefer Emes Ve’emunah* relates,

“The Rebbe of Sochatchov zt”l (the *Avnei Nezer*), said that one should not treat disrespectfully a garment that he has worn. For the *Kotzker Rebbe zt”l* used to wear a garment whose sleeves were ripped, and tried to cover the torn areas with his hands. He even wore this garment on Shabbos. He told the story of a handkerchief that someone once lost in Pshischa. The owner spent a lot of time searching for it. The *Kotzker* asked the Rebbe Rav Bunim of Pshischa, “this handkerchief is only worth

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a few pennies, why is he investing so much effort searching for it.” Rav Bunim explained that the man was correct. The fact that he used the handkerchief and benefitted from it, should make it precious in his eyes.

He said that we can learn this principle from the *neshamah*. A year after a person’s death, the *neshamah* visits his body. The *neshamah* honors the body even after death, because it needed the body during its time in this world.”

I sometimes accompanied the *Pnei Menachem zy”a* when he had appointments in the hospital. I remember occasions when, before the appointment, he requested that gifts be purchased for the medical staff. In the hospital, he repeatedly thanked each member of the staff for their efforts on his behalf. It is important to note that he went to such lengths to express his gratitude, even though they were simply doing their job, and were paid for their work. His expressions of gratitude emanated from his *shleimus* in the *midah of derech erez*.

Now on Motzaei Shabbos, as we sit at the seudah of David Hamelech a”h, who personified the *midah of hakaras hatov* by saying *Mizmor L’todah* every day, thanking Hashem for everything, we must strengthen our *midah of derech erez*. Then we will merit the fulfillment of Chazal’s statement, *וכל מי שהוא זהיר בדרך ארץ זוכה לראות בנחמה* - whoever is careful with the *midah of derech erez*, will have the *zechus* to see the consolation. בעגלא דידן ובזמן קריב אכי”ר



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