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איש הסופר
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והגדת
לבנך
Keeping
Their
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The Zera Emes Project by Rabbi Moshe Hubner was created to honor and share the Torah of over 250 Gedolim who weren't zocheh to descendants of their own. Their legacy lives on through their words of Torah and emunah that continue to inspire and touch countless lives. By bringing their timeless divrei Torah and wisdom to life, we create a powerful connection to the past to help inspire today's generation.

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Let's Talk Elul

We are halfway through Elul – for many that is already a little late for the proper *teshuvah* to be accomplished.

Rav Shlomo Bloch, a *talmid* of the Chofetz Chaim, had a practice to hold a *taanis dibbur* throughout the month of Elul until after Yom Kippur. This was his practice even during the years that he earned a livelihood by selling *Dalet Minim*!

ELUL

Rav Shlomo took Elul very seriously even from his younger days. During his years learning in Eishyshok and Vilna, he returned each year to Radin from the beginning of Elul until after Yom Kipper to be near the Chofetz Chaim (except for the last year, when he went to Novardok).

Rav Aharon Bialystoker related that Rav Shlomo would receive the honor of Maftir Yonah. One year, someone came from America who was childless and came to the Chofetz Chaim to request a *brachah* for children. The Chofetz Chaim demurred at first, for unknown reasons. But since he kept pushing, the Chofetz Chaim answered, "Go to Rav Shlomo and ask him for a *brachah* for healthy children."

GIVE OR TAKE

As we weigh our deeds from the previous



RAV SHLOMO BLOCH

year, we might need to rethink how to think.

Rav Shlomo would often visit the Brisker Rav and share things he had personally seen during his years with the Chofetz Chaim. One day, the Brisker Rav asked him for a story.

Rav Shlomo searched his memory and apologized. Nothing came to mind.

"Something," the Brisker Rav pressed. "Even a simple thing."

Finally, Rav Shlomo remembered a

ר' שלמה זלמן ב"ר אליעזר בלך

R. Shlomo Bloch (1886 - 11 Sivan, 1976) was born in Baranovich. At 15, he enrolled in the Novardok Yeshiva, where he was influenced by its leader R. Yosef Yoizel Horowitz (1850-1919). During this period, R. Shlomo developed a relationship with the Rav of Novardok, R. Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829-1908), the *Aruch HaShulchan*. From Novardok, he went to Radin, becoming a close student of the Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933). After his marriage, in the fall of 1905, to Chana Esther Aronowitz (1882-1967), R. Shlomo continued studying in Radin for four years, followed by a two year stint in the Kollel of Eishyshok, receiving *Semicha* from the town's Rav, R. Yosef Zundel Hutner (1846-1919). From 1911 until 1917, he studied in Vilna, until he was compelled (by the famine conditions in Vilna during WWI) to travel to Kelm. In 1925, the Blochs emigrated to Palestine, where R. Shlomo studied under the Kabbalistic masters of Yerushalayim (for his livelihood, he engaged in the production and sale of *Matzos* and *Daled Minim*). R. Shlomo was well known for his exceptional piety and asceticism, and was often sought after for his *Brachos* and *Tefilos*. In 1989, a volume of his teachings (as well as anecdotes from his life) was published by those in his inner circle, entitled *HaTzadik Rabi Shlomo*.

seemingly insignificant incident.

Once, he had overheard the Chofetz Chaim speaking privately to the Ribbono Shel Olam, thanking Hakadosh Baruch Hu for the kindnesses in his life. Among those kindnesses, the Chofetz Chaim included, “How great is Your kindness to me. You gave me the *Mishnah Berurah*. You gave me the yeshivah in Radin. How can I ever thank You? How can I repay You for all this?” With that, Rav Shlomo concluded.

The Brisker Rav was astonished. “That is not a small story. That is a tremendous story.” Most people, the Brisker Rav explained, might instinctively have seen it the other way around. A man writes the *Mishnah Berurah*. He builds a yeshivah. He spends his life spreading Torah and strengthening *Yiddishkeit*. He might feel, he has done something for the Ribbono Shel Olam! In fact, Hashem owed him – a lot! But the Chofetz Chaim saw none of it that way.

The *Mishnah Berurah* was not something he had given Hashem. It was something Hashem had given him.

The yeshivah in Radin was not his gift to Hashem. It was Hashem’s gift to him. The Chofetz Chaim felt he owed Hashem – a lot!

The Brisker Rav heard in that seemingly small memory the realization that even when a person is privileged to accomplish something for *kavod Shamayim*, the privilege

itself is another *chessed* from Hashem.

HOT AIR

It is not just rethinking, but understanding what is important and valuable.

Once, Rav Shlomo was asked to share something from the Chofetz Chaim that had never been written down.

He thought for a moment.

The Chofetz Chaim, he said, had once explained the words of Shlomo HaMelech, “*Havel havalim*” — vanity of vanities — in a striking way.

A person has a mitzvah to actively make the *havalim* into *hevel*. To look at all the *shtussim* of this world that seem so large, so urgent, so consuming, and recognize what they really are.

The Chofetz Chaim added to the linguistics of these words: Look at the steam (*havel*) rising from a boiling pot. For a moment, it fills the air. It looks substantial. It is hot, almost fierce. And then, just seconds later, there is nothing remaining.

That is the nature of so much of what fills a person’s world. At the moment, it appears enormous. Important. Permanent. And then the moment passes.

Nothing remains.

GRAVE REQUEST

Rav Shlomo purchased a burial plot on Har Zeisim. He would visit the plot

and explain, “I am preparing.” Those who knew questioned if he meant that by him seeing his grave, he awakened himself to do repentance more often and be a better person, or if he were actually preparing the grave for after he would pass away.

PASSING, FUNERAL AND MATZEIVAH

He had left instructions that no titles be used when describing him. The Steipler ruled that they should not use titles like *gaon*, *gadol*, or anything similar. But, *tzaddik*, he said, should be used, because that was his essence, and there is no other way of properly describing him.

The Steipler added with a smile, “For him, there is no reason to study *Mishnah*, because he certainly prepared himself.”

Although Rav Shlomo passed away in Sivan, when it hardly ever rains, thousands saw that as he was being removed from Sharei Tzedek, the Heavens opened up and released a downpour. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 47a) writes that when it rains on an *aron* it is a *siman yaffeh* for the *niftar*. When the *aron* reached the shul Zichron Moshe, a rainbow appeared. It was so unusual that this event was recorded on his *matzeivah*.

השמים קדרו עבים

לאות נראתה קשת בעננים

וברוח עז זלפו על מטתו

כאשר הובא למנוחת עולמים