



# BE A *MENTSCH*

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## *Stuff!*

## פְּרִשֵׁת וַיְשַׁלַּח

In this week's parsha, we learn an important lesson from Yaakov Avinu about being a *Mentsch* : Never judge ourselves by how much “stuff” we have, but rather by what we do – not with what we have. There will always be people who have more than us and people who have less than us, but what is most important is our behavior and how we act. Our worth comes from the *מְצוּוֹת* and *הַסֵּד* we do. When *יַעֲקֹב* returned to *יִשְׂרָאֵל* and met *עֵשָׂו*, we see this difference between these 2 brothers very clearly. *עֵשָׂו* said “*יֵשׁ לִי רַב*” I have a lot of money, but I still want more. *יַעֲקֹב* said “*יֵשׁ לִי כָל*” I have everything I need - I don't need anything more. My value and worth doesn't come from my “stuff”, it comes from my actions.

There is another point that must be made about our belongings. The night before he met *עֵשָׂו*, *יַעֲקֹב* went back by himself to find some small containers he had left behind on the other side of the Yabok River. He appreciated everything he *did* have and so he went back to get them. All our belongings should be taken care of, whether they are in our bedroom at home or in our locker at school; they should be kept neat, clean and organized. This requires time and effort. Just like Yaakov Avinu was up late at night getting his belongings put away, so too we must spend time being responsible.

Every time we bentsh to ה', we ask Him to bless our family like He blessed all the *אֲבוֹת* with *כָּל*, *בְּכָל*, *מִכָּל*. Let's focus on our behavior and our actions like *יַעֲקֹב* did and treat everything we *do* have - with care!

## *My Son*

While it is quite common for Jews around the world to frequently visit Israel, particularly for Yom Kippur, a number of individuals and families make a special effort to experience the holiest day of the year in the Holy Land. The uplifting day with inspirational prayers and throngs of Jews all around is a most exhilarating scene. As it occurred, there was once a group of men from England who decided they would make the trip to Israel for Yom Kippur. They intended to hear a well-known chazzan lead the davening in a particular Shul whose voice was especially pleasant. As the exciting day arrived, the group gathered together at the airport and boarded the plane in earnest anticipation of a wonderful experience to come.

Of those who were flying from England was Mr. Goldstein. He was heading to the King David Hotel. Comfortably situating himself in his seat, he noticed the man sitting right next to him. Although not wearing a yarmulke, Mr. Goldstein figured that he was a non-affiliated Jew. And so he extended a warm welcome. “Hi, how are you doing? What’s your name?” Hearing the greeting of a fellow Jew, the man replied, “My name is Morris Shechter. How are you doing?” After cordially greeting each other, Mr. Goldstein and Morris began talking. And no sooner than later, the conversation turned to Judaism. “You know,” said Mr. Goldstein, “why don’t you come to my house for Shabbos when we get back to England?” “No, no,” quickly retorted Morris, “I’ve been through Judaism and I’m done.” Rolling up his sleeve, Morris showed Mr. Goldstein an inscription of numbers on his arm. “I went through the Holocaust and survived. I had one son who I so dearly loved. But the Nazis took him away and I have not seen him in over thirty years. I don’t know what happened to him. He must have been killed. But let me reassure you, I will never again keep Shabbos or put on Tefillin. I have given up on G-d and Judaism.” Disheartened by the news, Mr. Goldstein began to think

what to say. "I'm very sorry to hear that. Maybe when we get back to England we can talk again. And if you would ever like, you are welcome to come to my house." Thinking to himself that he would take Morris' home address and phone number when they got off the plane, the two of them continued to relax for the rest of the trip.

As the flight neared its end, the passengers exited the plane and headed to the terminal to pick up their luggage. Morris left the plane and Mr. Goldstein left the plane, but their paths did not cross again. As Mr. Goldstein went to pick up his suitcase, he could not find Morris. Looking all around for him, he was nowhere to be seen. Distressed, Mr. Goldstein thought to himself, "What did I do? I know I should have taken his phone number earlier!" But there was nothing he could do. And so, he headed to the King David Hotel.

Yom Kippur was not for another few days. In the meantime, Mr. Goldstein looked forward to the invigorating davening and inspirational day. And then it finally arrived. Walking to the Shul near the hotel, the Yom Kippur night prayers, as expected, were beautiful. It was now Yom Kippur morning. Making it through Shacharis, the Shul prepared to say Yizkor, the memorial prayer for those who passed away. Being that Mr. Goldstein still had both of his parents alive, however, he decided he would take a short walk outside.

Making his way down the block, he saw a familiar face in the distance. It was a man sitting on a park bench eating a sandwich. Taking a few steps closer, Mr. Goldstein could not believe it. "Morris?" As the man picked up his head, it was clearly Morris. "Goldstein? How are you doing?" "Morris, do you know today is Yom Kippur? Almost everyone fasts on Yom Kippur, even those who have little connection to Judaism." "Didn't I tell you already," Morris said as he took another bite of his sandwich, "I have nothing to do with religion? I used to be a frum Jew, but I gave it all up."

Standing there in a state of shock and disbelief, Mr. Goldstein thought of the best words to say. "Listen, the people in the Shul are saying Yizkor right now. It is a memorial prayer recited for those who have passed away. Why don't you come inside and mention your son. You will be honoring him." But Morris would not budge. "I already told you, I have nothing to do with G-d or Judaism!" Now in a hard pressed situation, Mr. Goldstein knew he needed to respond with a good argument. "Don't do it for yourself; do it for your son." After a moment of silence, Morris said, "But I'm not dressed appropriately to walk inside!" "Don't worry about that," reassured Mr. Goldstein; "just come inside." After much back and forth, Morris finally consented.

Walking into the Shul, those standing around took note of Morris' entry. He clearly stood out of place, but he nevertheless kept on moving slowly to the bima where the chazzan was standing. Approaching the bima, the chazzan turned to Morris and asked, "What's the niftar's (one who passed away) name?" "Yaakov." "And what's your name?" continued the chazzan. "Morris." "No, no," interrupted the chazzan, "what's your Hebrew name? "Moshe." "Okay, Yaakov ben Moshe."

But then the chazzan paused. A few seconds went by and there was silence. Turning back to Morris, the chazzan asked, "And what's your last name?" "My last name?" Morris astounded confusedly. "Why do you need my last name?" "Just tell it to me," repeated the chazzan. "It's Shechter," replied Morris. And then there was dead silence. Amid tears, the chazzan looked straight into Morris' eyes:

"Abba? Is that you? Where were you? I have been looking for you for thirty seven years. After the Holocaust I didn't know where you were. You are my father. I am Yaakov ben Moshe."

By now the entire Shul had filed back inside. Tears were shed not only by Morris and his beloved son, but by just about everyone in the

building. It was a riveting moment in time. Mr. Goldstein too was undoubtedly touched. Yes indeed, he experienced that uplifting day he was looking for.

*Sometimes we can go through life thinking what matters most is our property. And then the fateful day arrives and we awaken to the realization that in fact we were greatly mistaken. For Morris, the greatest shock of his life hit him when he was least expecting it. His most prized possession in life was in fact alive and well. Morris may have given up on Hashem, but Hashem never gave up on him. And unquestionably, Hashem never gives up on His children. No matter how far a Jew may be from Yiddishkeit, the return address to home is just down the block. All it took was a kind, caring person to bring them together!*

Have a Great Shabbos!