

# TALES

## of Clean Speech



**A COLLECTION  
OF STORIES ABOUT  
THE IMPACT OF WORDS**

[www.cleanspeech.co.uk](http://www.cleanspeech.co.uk)

Jews love stories. There is something about the precipice that straddles hope, imagination, elements of escapism, peeking into someone else's world and craving for a happy ending that's all very Jewish. Our existence is a story and on Seder Night we are commanded to engage in telling over that story – each chapter of Jewish History forms its own section of our book, with the end always in sight but as yet untold.

I think one of the unspoken allures of a story is that it is the expression of a theme in action or real life. As an educator I can convey a message to my class, but until it is grounded it remains in the realm of theory or 'nice idea.' A well-placed story can turn that idea from theory to practice, from theoretical to action. And words play a similar thematic role. The depth of our 'Divine image' centring around our ability to speak is that words

are creative – they are the way we reflect Hashem's ability to create. Speech takes almost-infinite thoughts and packages them into finite words – bringing theory into practice, much like a story.

The collection of stories in this booklet is about the power of words. They give expression to the lessons the Clean Speech Project UK espouses – words matter, they create impact, and the importance of choosing positive over negative words. The stories are not simply 'one word changed someone's life' tales – people are nuanced and have different experiences with others' words. But each story has its lesson and message. We've kept the stories as accurate and true as we can, as well as personalised and real. We hope you gain from them – **feel free to let us know your Clean Speech Project stories at [info@cleanspeech.co.uk](mailto:info@cleanspeech.co.uk)**

Rabbi Fine  
on behalf of Seed & GIFT



The Clean Speech Project UK is all about the power of words and choosing positive words over negative words. Based on a highly successful initiative started in Colorado, Clean Speech UK is a joint project between Seed & GIFT, sponsored by Wohl Legacy. The Clean Speech Project UK creates resources, programmes and events, in partnership with schools and communities. Last year over 15 schools ran Clean Speech parent-child learning sessions and over 70 schools and communities were involved in programmes and events.

For more information about the project and to sign up to the 30-day videos from top educators, please visit [www.cleanspeech.co.uk](http://www.cleanspeech.co.uk)

# WORDS THAT CHANGED A WORLD - THE FAILED RABBINIC PRANK CALL



I heard the following story from Rabbi Dovid Roberts

There were once two Jewish teenage boys from New York who were not excelling in school. Late one night and looking for a thrill, one of the boys dared his friend to make a prank call. But this would not be any prank call – it would be a call to the great Rav Moshe Feinstein, leading Rabbi of the generation! Accepting the challenge, one of the boys dialed Rav Moshe's number, and asked confidently to speak to the Rabbi. Rav Moshe was already asleep (he routinely went to bed before midnight to get up and learn Torah very early each morning) but, assuming a call at this hour to be a matter of urgency, he was summoned and handed the phone.

One didn't need to be a great Rabbi or diagnostician to realise that this was not a life or death call. Rav Moshe quickly realised that the boy had nothing serious to ask. Yet he saw something deeper – there must have been something beyond the desperate visage of a young man calling so late at night. So, rather than becoming annoyed or hanging up the phone, Rav Moshe saw this as an opportunity. Much to the shock of the boy, Rav Moshe took control of the conversation, asking the boy which Gemara they were learning in high school, then for the exact page – and proceeded to study the page together on the phone for over thirty minutes! Rav Moshe ended the conversation by posing

a question he had on the Gemara and told the boy to ask this question to his school Rabbi the next day.

The next day, as the school Rabbi began teaching his class, he noticed that of the two normally disruptive boys, one was particularly (and uncharacteristically) attentive and well-behaved. When the time came, our hero raised his hand and asked the question he had been told the night before. Stunned by the brilliance of the question, the school Rabbi asked the boy where he had got such a good question from. "Simple", said the boy. "My chavrusa (learning partner) told it to me at around midnight last night". The Rabbi was aghast with joy – this was the last boy in the class he expected to be learning outside of school hours, let alone at midnight! "Who did you learn with last night?" the Rabbi asked. To which the boy beamed, "With Rav Moshe Feinstein!"

Through compassion and a willingness to help – and a few choice words – Rav Moshe helped change a young boy's life and attitude to Torah study.



# WORDS OF COMFORT

**I witnessed this story myself, because I was the person involved.**

As a community Rabbi, there are highs and lows – there are celebrations and bereavements, sometimes on the same day. People are great at coming together to celebrate simchas and also to support each other during sad times. Both are part of our national and communal tapestry. Admittedly, since my role lay primarily in educational programming and working with the youth and young families, I didn't attend many levayahs – the senior Rabbi was tasked with that. I would attend a choice few, for families with whom I was particularly close or felt a need to show my support. The following story happened at one such levayah.

There was a wonderful young woman in the community who sadly passed away, leaving behind a lovely husband and two amazing children – Dylan and Gemma, aged eight and ten. Despite not being a regular levayah attendee, I wanted to show my support and to be there for Dylan and Gemma. I had no idea what I was going to say – what can one say in such circumstances? Nevertheless I went, not really knowing what to expect and unsure if I'd be able to speak to the children. I wasn't sure if Dylan and Gemma would be there for the entire levayah, or if they'd just hear the eulogies at the start and it would be too much for them. I watched as they courageously decided to be there for the entirety of their mother's final journey, all the way to the heart-wrenching burial itself. It was then that I found myself almost alone with Dylan and Gemma. As everyone walked back from the burial to the final part of the levayah ceremony, I found myself walking alongside Dylan and Gemma. I realised I had to try and say something, but I equally understood that nothing I could say would change the fact that these sweet children's mother was no longer with them. And so I froze. I just walked silently, awkwardly, hoping that 'being there' with

Dylan and Gemma would be appreciated, even if I had no words to say.

At that point, Dylan said something that I will never forget. Words that reverberated many times in my heart and mind. I'm not sure if he sensed that I was searching for words, but Dylan turned to me and said something remarkable. "Rabbi," he said, before pausing for a couple of seconds. "It must be so hard for you to go to so many funerals like this." Those were the words. And they struck hard. I'm not even sure if I replied. Here was an eight-year-old boy who had just lost his mother. An eight-year-old boy who had just undergone the most painful and difficult experience of his life (and presumably of many others' lives, too). Yet not only did he manage to recognise someone else's feelings, he even attempted to connect with them and then verbalise it. I went there to give comfort, but I left feeling blown away by the power of some well-placed words, even in the most difficult of times.

*I have since told this story on numerous occasions. It is one of the stories I would often tell when speaking during Neilah on Yom Kippur, sometimes in Dylan's presence (with permission, of course). Just as his words inspired me, they would inspire an entire community each year on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year.*



**WE  
ALL**

**NEED**

**RECOGNITION**

**WE**

*I was told this story by a good friend of mine. The exact details of the story are somewhat difficult to verify, but it teaches a powerful lesson.*

The story took place in Jerusalem in the era before mobile phones. Phone boxes (public payphones) were the norm, and to pay for a phone call one had to purchase a special type of token called an assimon – a smallish coin with a divot in the centre. There was a professional gardener in Jerusalem who used to buy twenty assimon coins from the local makolet (convenience store) every Friday. He would then proceed to use the payphone outside the makolet for an hour or so. This repeated itself week after week, with the store owner growing increasingly curious as to what these regular phone calls were about. Finally, the store owner's curiosity got the better of him, and one Friday he positioned himself within earshot of the payphone so he could listen to the conversation. He discovered that the gardener was making calls to prospective clients offering his services as a gardener. "Hi, I'm just calling to see if you need a gardener". As the store owner continued to listen in, it seemed as though on each occasion the gardener was being rejected – the conversations were

pretty short! Each person would tell him they had no need for a new gardener, that they already had an excellent gardener. But, week after week, the gardener was unperturbed – he continued making calls and continued to suffer rejection each time. Feeling sorry for him, the store owner decided to intervene and try to help the sorry gardener. Approaching his best assimon client, the store owner sheepishly made the gardener an offer: "I have a balcony with a small garden on it – can I employ you to do the gardening there?" Surprisingly, the gardener spurned his offer: "I'm sorry, but I don't have time – I have enough clients and gardens to look after, thank you." The store owner couldn't help but admit he had some 'insider information': "Look, I overheard your conversations each week and I can see you clearly need the business." The response he received was astounding, and teaches a lot about human nature and the need for positive affirmation, recognition and feedback.

"You don't understand," said the gardener. "I am a specialist gardener. I work for the wealthy – those who have lovely, large and beautiful gardens. But I never actually see my clients – I enter through a side door and am paid by the maid or helper. I don't actually know whether they appreciate my work, or whether I'm doing a good job. So each Friday I call my clients, pretending to be a different gardener, and I offer them my services. One by one they refuse, saying that they already have a great gardener. That way, I know I am doing a great job – I must be their great gardener!"



# THE FEEL GOOD SPELL ING TEST

Words can be spoken or written. Ever since the invention of the printing press, as technology has developed, the move from the spoken word to the written word has accelerated. This cute story involves both the spoken and written word.

A nine-year-old girl from Argentina moved country with her family and enrolled in a new school, joining my daughter's class. After a few weeks, the girl approached her teacher all upset. "The other girls get 80-90% every week in their spelling test – I get 25-35%!", the girl exclaimed. The teacher smiled empathetically, offering words of encouragement to the girl and reminding her that she was making progress. Besides that, the girl's first language was Spanish, and the spelling test was in English!

But the teacher went further. I was sitting with my daughter when I spotted that she was struggling over learning the words for the weekly spelling test. Upon closer inspection, it turned out that the words were most unfamiliar! Without telling anyone why, the teacher had set the following week's spelling test for everyone in Spanish. Now all the students in the class would understand how difficult it was to learn a second language, and this one girl would feel better about herself.

# THE SHORT ADDRESS

“Ve’havta  
le’re’acha kamocho”

—  
Love your friend  
as yourself

The famed Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Nossan Zvi Finkel zt”l, ran the Mir Yeshiva despite suffering for many years from the debilitating Parkinson’s disease. Shaking and sometimes struggling to move, Rav Nossan Zvi nevertheless delivered dozens of regular shiurim, counselled boys and was the source of inspiration to thousands of families. I remember the first time I encountered Rav Nossan Zvi, walking into his modest apartment around the corner from the yeshiva; its simplicity contrasted with the Rabbi and Rebbetzin’s utter devotion, depth and holiness, making me break into tears in the corner of the room! Here’s an anecdote that was told over by the Rosh Yeshiva when he was asked to address a large gathering about the topic of Shmiras Halashon – being careful about the way we speak.

There were various Rabbis who addressed the audience that evening, but Rav Nossan Zvi’s address was the most memorable. Slowly and painfully rising to speak, the Rosh Yeshiva said three words and then sat down. Whether that was because he didn’t have the strength to continue, or because he had said all that needed to be said, was somewhat irrelevant – the words had made their mark. What were those three words that cut straight to the point so effectively? Rav Nossan Zvi simply said “Ve’havta le’re’acha kamocho” – love your friend as yourself. Much like the contrast between himself and his humble living quarters, the point was both profound and simple at the same time: if you really care about someone else, how could you want to say anything negative about them?

# ASKING THE KING



One of the most powerful ways we use our speech is through prayer. Whether fixed daily prayer or ad hoc personal prayer and requests, prayer allows us to speak to the King. This can be a powerful tool, as is evident in the following story, as told by Rabbi Marc Levene.

I would like to share one of the most powerful stories that I know. I heard it from Tzvi Sperber, an inspiring tour guide and educator who grew up in Kenton and now lives in Israel. He has guided and inspired hundreds of tour groups.

Several years ago, in the run up to Yom Kippur, Tzvi was listening to an Israeli radio talk show while driving home one evening. The topic was life stories. Mel, an elderly man with a thick European accent, had phoned in, wishing to tell his story. It was so absorbing that Tzvi had to pull over to listen to it.

Mel was a young boy in Germany, when he and his best friend Wolf were tearfully sent by their parents to England on the Kindertransport to escape the coming conflagration. As they waved goodbye, they did not know if or when their parents would follow.

After reaching these shores, Mel and Wolf were placed in an orphanage together. They tried their best to adapt to their new surroundings and culture, which was especially difficult given that Great Britain was soon to be at war with their home country. It was vastly different from where they came from. They spoke

German, the language of the enemy. The unknown fate of their families plagued them with fear and anxiety.

Understandably, the orphanage wanted the children to adjust as well as possible to their new country of residence. One particular day, all the children were told to wear their finest clothes (from the little they had managed to bring) and to make sure to look as presentable as possible. A special treat was in store. They soon found themselves at a local parade on the High Street to honour King George VI and Queen Mary, who would be riding through the parade. Each boy from the orphanage was given a Union Flag to wave as the Royal couple passed by. It is hard to imagine the excitement the boys felt at this rare treat, coupled with a sense of awe at seeing the King and Queen. Finally, the Royal couple came into view and, together with what seemed like the whole town, the boys waved their flags furiously.

Suddenly, squeezing through the hustle and bustle of the crowd, Wolf ran into the street and darted for the Royal carriage. Scrambling around the guards, he jumped onto the running board on the side of the carriage and, for a fleeting moment,



spoke to the King and Queen before some soldiers pulled him off amidst a slight commotion. Realising that this young boy was no threat, the soldiers returned him to the embarrassed orphanage staff who had witnessed this breach of protocol unfold before their very eyes.

Although just a young boy, Wolf, who was now guarded by a teacher to stop any further incidents, knew what he had done. He was far from home with no family to turn to. Even though he tried to enjoy the rest of the parade, he feared the worst kind of punishment. German was still his first language. Sensitive to this and to the plight of these boys, the head of the orphanage asked Wolf to explain this embarrassing incident as best he could. Yet Wolf would not discuss it with anybody, not even his closest friend, Mel. He would not explain himself in any way, it was just too painful. Now he had to wait for the consequences.

A few weeks had passed. Hoping against hope, Wolf had started to feel that the incident had been forgotten, until he was abruptly called into the headmaster's office for an important meeting. Standing intimidated in front of this commanding figure, he was told that as a result of his behaviour at the parade, he was to be expelled from the orphanage. He had no idea where he would go or what he would do. No family or friends in a foreign country at war with his own.

Before dismissing Wolf, the headmaster looked at the small, withdrawn child and asked again what he had said at the Royal carriage. As the question reverberated

in his ears, Wolf realised that this was his last chance, his last card to play. Maybe he could save himself. Overcoming his embarrassment, in a quivering voice, he answered softly. "I just asked the King and Queen to help find my parents and family. I miss them more than I can say, I cry every night for them. Surely the King, the most powerful man in the land, could help me? Surely, he could help them escape to England just as they helped me?"

For a few moments, an eternity for Wolf, the headmaster stood frozen to the spot. Finally, without saying a word, he opened the door to his office. Standing in the doorway were Wolf's parents. The shy, withdrawn child shrieked in joy as he leapt into his parents' embrace.


There was a long silence on the radio, too, as Mel finished his story. Finally, the now-elderly man broke down in heart-rending tears. "I had an opportunity to speak to the King, but I didn't take it." Mel never saw his parents again.

**The story shows the impact of speech, of a genuine heartfelt request. But it also underlines the opportunity that tefillah presents us. We have the opportunity to speak to the King on a daily basis. Let us grab that opportunity.**





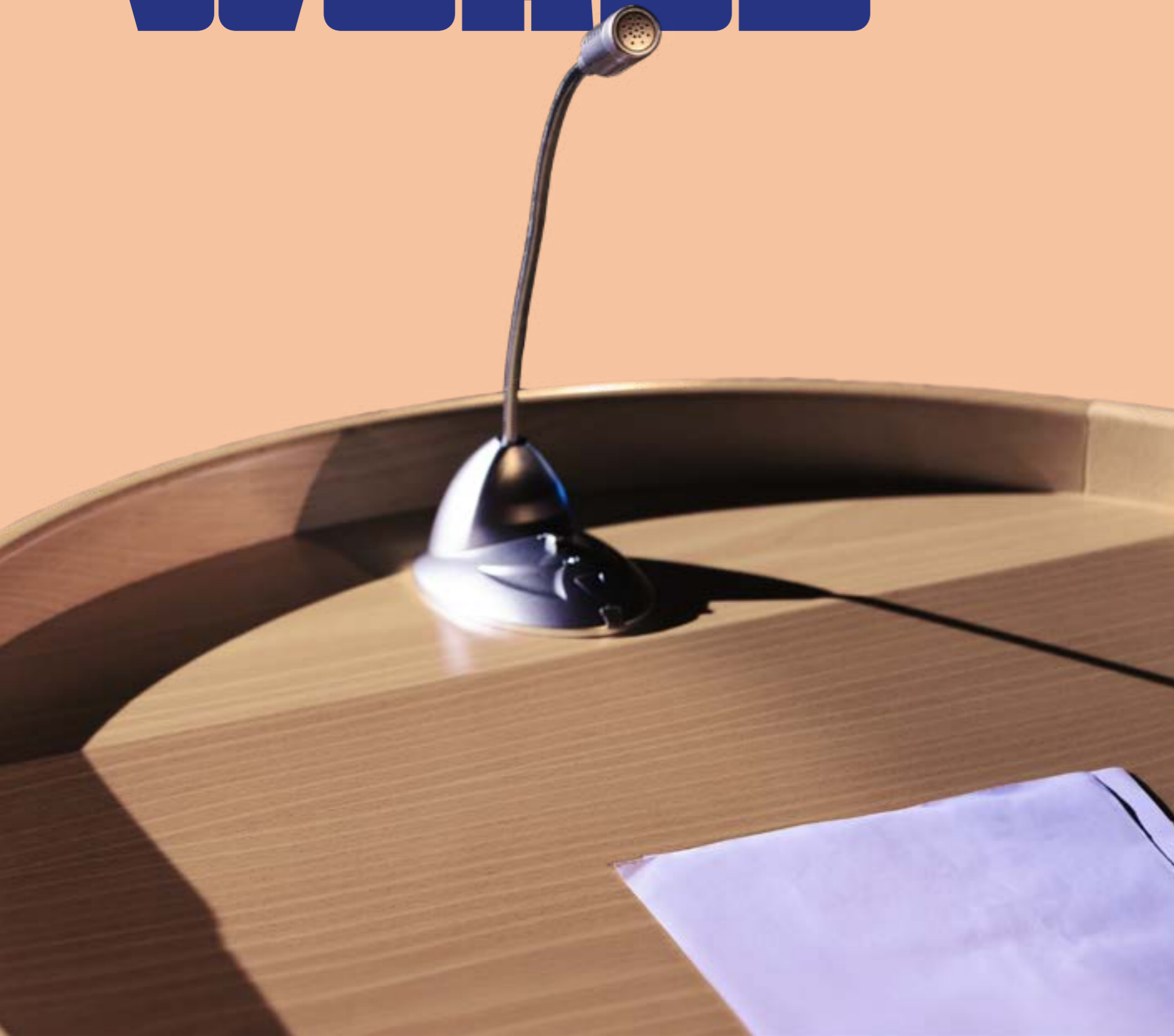
# THE VALUE OF GOOD WISHES



Love your  
neighbour as  
yourself

In the last period of his life, the Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron, Rav Yechezkel Sarna walked very slowly. One Motzei Shabbos he set out from home to the yeshiva to daven Maariv, but it was soon clear that he would not make it in time for davening. Nevertheless, he painfully climbed the steps up to the yeshiva, even though by then Maariv was finishing. One of his attendants pointed this out to the Rosh Yeshiva, asking what point there was in putting himself through pain for a minyan that he has missed. The Rosh Yeshiva replied that a minyan is a Rabbinic obligation, but being able to wish each boy a good week is a Torah obligation of 'loving your neighbour as yourself.' That was something he would not miss out on!

# COUNTING WORDS



Rav Elchonon Wasserman – murdered in World War Two – was a prime student of the Chofetz Chaim. So much so that Rav Elchonon would leave the yeshiva he headed to be with the Chofetz Chaim each year between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. One year, after the Chofetz Chaim addressed the people in Shul on Rosh Hashanah, a student sitting behind Rav Elchonon remarked, “This was the same message he gave last year...the exact same speech!” Rav Elchonon replied “No, it wasn’t the same. This year he added seven more words.”

For Rav Elchonon, words were precious, and if the Chofetz Chaim chose to add a few more words one year, that was something worth recognising and focusing on.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING WELCOMING



*It is important to have role models in all areas of life. Especially in the area of clean speech – to look for people who use their words guardedly and positively. The following story was told to us at the shiva for my late Grandma Enid a”h, and illustrates the power of words of welcome. We often bump into people who are ‘new’ to things: new to Shul, new to school, new to a group. How often do we go out of our way to welcome them? When a Rabbi of mine was new to the Mir Yeshiva, a young man walked over to him and introduced himself as “a member of the Mir Welcoming Committee” and enquired as to how everything was going. It was a lie – there is no official Mir Welcoming Committee; it was just this young man’s way of making someone feel extra welcome and looked after.*

*[Postscript: when I heard the story I tried to do the same. I walked up to someone when I was learning in Mir and told them I was a member of the welcoming committee and welcomed them to the yeshiva. They smiled and told me that they had been in the yeshiva for five years already! Oops! At least I tried!] Anyway, here goes the story about my Grandma.*

A family friend called Shelley told us that years ago she was studying medicine in Cardiff, with her first lecture due to be on the first day of Succos. Yom Tov trumping lectures, this meant Shelley invariably missing the first day of term. She memorised the walk from her uni accommodation to Shul - no small feat or small feat, as it was a good walk. When she finally made it to Shul, a man standing outside spotted her and immediately asked who she was and whether she was a local student, then proceeded to invite her for the Yom Tov meal with his family. Delighted that lunch was sorted and buoyed by the warm welcome she had received, Shelley then walked into Shul and went upstairs to the ladies’ gallery, whereupon a woman came over to her,

asked if she was a student and immediately invited her for a Yom Tov meal. Within a space of a few minutes Shelley had two invites and almost identical conversations! Although she wanted to accept both, Shelley had to be pragmatic and decline this second invitation, since she had already accepted the first one. But after Shul finished and Shelley walked to her new host, she was happy to find out that the male and female who each invited her knew each other. In fact, they were husband and wife. They were my late grandfather and grandmother. Classically hospitable and so typical that they each invited a stranger who came to Shul.

Compare and contrast this to another tale whereby the appointment of a new Rabbi trying out for a Shul position in America was vetoed by the Shul President. Why? Because, as the President vocalised it: “When I was growing up, there was a religious family living next door who looked exactly like this Rabbi. Every year, a few days after Yom Kippur, they used to build this hut in the garden (a Succah) and we could all hear them speaking, singing and enjoying time with each other. I desperately wanted to be invited in to be part of the fun, but I couldn’t invite myself. So year after year I waited for that invitation – an invitation which never came. I know there are different streams and groups in Judaism, but this new Rabbi looks like my neighbours who never invited me, so I can’t agree to his appointment to lead our Shul.”

Welcome others.  
Invite others.  
They will  
appreciate it!

# DANNY AND THE APPRECIATION NOTES



*This story has been told at multiple teacher training days. The angle of the story is normally to emphasise the opportunity that teaching presents to really impact others' lives. But I'd like to gloss over the first part and instead focus on the end of the story: the appreciation factor. Regardless of whether this oft-repeated story is fully accurate or not, we can put ourselves in the position of someone who has done so much to help a particular individual and appreciate how good it feels to be thanked.*

Danny was a child who used to be top of the class, but soon sank towards the bottom. It wasn't his fault. Danny had a difficult family situation and things seemed to be going from bad to worse. Yet, his Grade 4 teacher Mrs Jones refused to give up on him. Putting in extra hours during lunch break to teach and re-teach him, and help him with his homework, Mrs Jones finally brought Danny to the same level as the rest of the class and gave him a platform from which he could push on and succeed. It took a lot of extra work, but as Mrs Jones was clearing out her drawer at the end of the year, she took a moment to proudly reflect on how much progress Danny had made. And then something hit her. Or more accurately, she hit something. In her drawer she spotted an envelope. An unusual finding in her private school drawer, Mrs Jones opened the envelope to find a scribbled note that read, "Thank you Mrs Jones, you are the best teacher ever and Grade 4 was the best year of my life – from Danny." The moment complete, Mrs Jones saved the note and packed up her things, ready for summer vacation.

The next school year Mrs Jones kept rough tabs on Danny, but she also had a new Grade 4 class to teach, and so Danny in Grade 5 was not in her focus. A year flew by and as Mrs Jones was again doing her end-of-year clear-out she found another note. Echoes of last year going through her mind, Mrs Jones read the note: "Dear Mrs Jones, Danny here. Just to let you know that Grade 5 was really good. But you are still the best teacher and Grade 4 was still the best year." A year later Mrs Jones was again clearing out her drawer, now almost expecting a note from Danny. But none was forthcoming. For that she had to wait a couple more years, with a note that read: "Dear Mrs Jones, I am now in my new school and flying – I'm doing really well in the work and exams. But you are still the best teacher." Having nearly forgotten Danny, this was a welcome reminder. But there was one note left to come. Ten years later, Mrs Jones received a final note. "Dear Mrs Jones, I'm now in college studying law in one of the best places in the land. I'm getting married soon and I enclose an invitation to my wedding. Because you are still the best teacher."

We may not all be able to pull off Danny-level appreciation, but everyone likes and deserves to be thanked.



**TEACHERS,  
BE  
CAREFUL**



*This is a difficult story to read, and one that should never happen. But it does go to show the impact of a negative word and how people in positions of authority need to be extra careful in how they speak.*

*[Please note: this story also contains potential safeguarding and data concerns.]*

In his book *Aleinu LeShabeyach*, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein writes the following true and thought-provoking story. There was a teacher in Israel who treated one of his students in a devastating way. The child was not the easiest student to teach and, being young and inexperienced, the teacher would repeatedly embarrass the child and make fun of him in front of the whole class. As you can imagine, this had a severe impact on the child.

Many years later, after a long and fulfilling career in which he had successfully nurtured hundreds of children who had gone on to live productive and fulfilling lives, this teacher met up with some of his old students whom he had previously taught. As they started musing about their school memories, the conversation naturally turned towards this difficult student, and how difficult his life turned out to be.

Sitting and listening to his former students speak of those times from their perspective, the teacher had a sudden realisation as to how terrible his behaviour had been back then. Having received the student's address from the other classmates, he immediately left the group and travelled to this person's home. At first, there was no answer to his knocking, but eventually the door opened slightly and his former student peeked out.

The teacher burst out crying and pleaded for forgiveness for his terrible conduct. The student refused. He had so much internal anger stored up over the disgrace he had endured in that class that even now, more than thirty years later, he was still filled with bitterness. He turned his head away, making it clear that he had no interest in listening to anything else his former tormentor had to say.

Nevertheless, the teacher refused to give up and continued to speak to the back of his head, continuing to apologise and demonstrate genuine remorse. Eventually his words started to get through, and the student said that he would be willing to forgive him, but on one condition: "Since you disgraced me in front of the whole class, you must gather together everyone who was in that classroom and apologise to me in front of them, making it clear that you were completely in the wrong and that you bear full responsibility for what you did to me. Then, and only then, will I forgive you."

With words of thanks, the teacher rushed to the office of the school, got hold of the list of students that were in his class that year, all of whom were already married

with children - some even had a grandchild or two. After getting in touch with as many as he could and doing some further research, he found out that several of them were now living outside of Israel. He made some calculations to include flying in those who lived overseas and realised that, in order to fulfil the condition set by his former student, it would cost him more than \$20,000 - a considerable sum of money, especially for someone whose career was in teaching!

He decided that he should go and consult with one of the leading Rabbis - someone with immense Torah knowledge, life experience and wisdom. He asked, "Am I obligated to pay out such a massive amount of money in order to gain forgiveness?"

The Rabbi replied, "Imagine if you had been driving your car and a terrible thing happened, you lost control of your car and caused a fatal accident, God forbid. The child unfortunately did not survive, and the parents and police summon you to court to stand trial, with the possibility that you could end up in jail for ten years or more. Would you not pay out an amount similar to that, or even more, to hire a competent lawyer to defend you?"

"If so," concluded the Rabbi, "if you want to escape from the Heavenly judgement, you should definitely pay the money to bring everyone over and secure his forgiveness."

**Authority is the  
responsibility to  
assist & inspire  
others**



# THE JUNGLE CONTEST



*Rabbi Hool zt"l used to tell over the following parable, which has a powerful lesson for communicating genuine and authentic values.*

Once upon a time there was a competition in the jungle. The aim? To determine which animal makes the loudest noise. All the animals had turns trying out, with the top three selected for the grand final. After the various heats and trials, three animals were chosen: the monkey, the elephant and the lion. All the animals gathered to watch the grand final, with a special stage put up for the occasion. In order to measure the loudest sound, the judges stationed helpers at staggered intervals from the stage. Their job would be to raise their flag if they heard the sound. One helper stood 20 metres from the stage, one 50 metres, one 100 metres, one 200 metres and so on and so forth. They were measuring whose sound could travel furthest.

Everyone was excited to finally decide who was the loudest in the jungle. First up was the monkey. The monkey took a sharp intake of breath and let out a scream. Up went the flag saying 50 metres – a very good attempt, as the audience clapped in appreciation. After much effort to get onto the stage, the elephant was up next. Swishing its trunk, the elephant let out a huge wail, with the 100 metre flag being reached as a result. Another round of applause. Finally, it was the turn of the king of the jungle: the lion. The lion regally ascended the stage, smiled at the other competitors and almost effortlessly bellowed a gigantic and frightening roar which – apart from making everyone scared – easily surpassed the previous

attempts, as the 200 metre flag went up. The judges clapped as they prepared the trophy and medal for the lion to take home.

But just then, a little bird flew onto the stage. "Can I have a go?" the bird asked meekly. The judges began chuckling, as did the other animals. "You little bird surely can't out-shout the lion", they thought. But since the bird asked, they gave her a turn. The bird puffed its lungs and gave a massive chirp. But though the bird was rocking back and forth and was red in the face, the chirp only managed 20 metres. "Told you so", was the look on all the animals' faces – and some even began chuckling again. But just then, at a distance of 20 metres, another bird heard the chirp and copied it with their own chirp. This second chirp reached a further 20 metres, where a third bird heard it and let out their own chirp. And slowly but steadily, 20 metres by 20 metres, each bird chirped and continued the sound until it reached an enormous 1000 metres at the edge of the jungle. The judges had no choice but to award the bird the medal – after all, her sound had reached the furthest!

*In life there are lots of people who make loud noises. But it's the communication of genuine words and values that stand the test of time and are transmitted from person to person, from generation to generation.*



# DEFINE YOUR TERMS



*Miscommunication can be painful, especially when you have different definitions of the same word, as each person hears the same words but understands them to mean something totally different! A friend of mine witnessed the following scene in Jerusalem.*

There was a young father teaching his six-year-old son to walk to the park by themselves. The park was fifty metres away, and the father was fine with his son going to the park to play – this was a small neighbourhood in which everyone knew each other. But there was one condition: the child had to stay within eyeshot of his father. The father explained the rules to his son and said in no uncertain terms, “No going round corners”; the obvious (albeit unspoken) reason being that a corner will obstruct the father’s line of vision and he won’t be able to see his son. Anyway, the trial-come-experiment-come-parenting-hazard began, and no sooner had the child been given his independence than he rushed round a corner. The father ran after his son, giving him a sterner warning. “I said no going round corners!” (Well, the Hebrew equivalent). So they started again, and again the child ran excitedly round a corner. The father was getting increasingly annoyed. After all, it was only one simple instruction to obey. But the father gave the child one last chance: “Son, I want you to enjoy your park play,

but remember the one rule: no going round corners.” So off they went again. The father was sure that the child was finally going to crack this, simultaneously holding back his pent-up frustration at the previous failed attempts. The child ran and...again went round the corner. This time, the father lost it. “What’s wrong with you? I said one simple thing: no going round corners!” The child looked at his father, with tears in his eyes, and simply remarked “Daddy, what’s a corner?” The father had been so sure of what a corner was, he had totally forgotten that he should have first explained what it meant to his son!

Sometimes we rely on our own understandings of terms and project them onto other people, without realising that others may understand our words differently!

# THE MOST AMAZING SILENCE



Sometimes one can achieve a lot by speaking up. Sometimes one can achieve a lot by knowing when not to say something.


The following remarkable story is told about R' Shabsai Frankel.

R' Frankel was a Holocaust survivor who moved to America and made it his mission in life to provide clarity on key Torah texts to the Jewish People. Thus, he invested a significant sum of money employing a team of Torah scholars who would research and examine the works of the Rambam. This team would examine, compare and cross-reference different versions of the Rambam's works to ensure the end product was the most accurate available, and provide extra sources for further research. Today, the set they published is known colloquially as the Frankel Rambam and is a celebrated monumental contribution to the yeshiva world. Thousands of copies of the Frankel Rambam can be found in yeshivas, shuls and study halls around the world.


At one stage R' Frankel found out that the Cairo Genizah had a rare handwritten section of the Rambam for sale. Agreeing

on a sum of hundreds of thousands of dollars, the sale was confirmed, and the rare old manuscript was sent to R' Frankel in America. It was preserved in a casing, and when it arrived in his office, R' Frankel carefully took it out of the casing for his researchers to examine one-by-one. Each marvelled at the new manuscript, eagerly looking forward to inspecting it at greater length. However, a tragedy unfolded. As one of the researchers was making his way across the room to view the manuscript, he tripped. Ordinarily that would have been fine, but he was holding a cup of coffee at the time, and the coffee spilled all over the new manuscript! The manuscript virtually disintegrated and was now completely useless. The Rabbinic researcher feared the worst – punishment, being sued, publicly embarrassed and everything in between. R' Frankel calmly exited the room and said nothing. He returned a minute later holding a cup of coffee and simply remarked to the embarrassed researcher, "I noticed you spilled your coffee – here is another one".

Years later, when R' Frankel passed away, his team came to pay their respects at the shiva. The researcher who spilled the coffee told this story to the grieving family and was shocked to find that nobody had heard it. Not only did R' Frankel have the self-control to not snap at this researcher for his mistake, he restrained himself from ever telling anyone about the incident – even his own family.

A close-up photograph of a young child with light skin and dark hair, looking down intently at an open book. The child's hands are visible, resting on the pages. The background is dark and out of focus.

# BENEGH MARK WORDS

A yellow speech bubble with a black outline and a tail pointing towards the top right. Inside the bubble, there is text in a black, sans-serif font.

Sometimes a well-placed compliment can lay the groundwork for establishing a positive reputation for years to come.

R' Dovi Coleman told me the following short anecdote.

A seventy-year-old man told me he remembers being told sixty years ago by an older man in shul that he davens well. It has stayed with him and still has an impact. He feels that he has to 'wear the badge' of someone who takes davening seriously.

*Similarly, Rabbi Kelemen tells the story about one of his children who they used to call 'Kadosh' (holy), as a complimentary nickname.*

One year on holiday, the family set off to Netanya by bus, and our little hero Kadosh soon needed the bathroom. With no toilet facilities on the coach, he had to hold it in until the coach reached its destination. As soon as the coach doors opened the family fanned out, looking for the nearest bathroom. One of the older children shouted, "I've found it! They'd found a bar next door to the bus station, with a bathroom for public use. But Kadosh was more curious than toilet-needy at this stage, demanding to know what a bar was before frequenting the institution. Upon being explained what the bar was – including a rudimentary explanation of the dancing and alcohol (not something he'd encountered in his hometown of Jerusalem) – the child sweetly and innocently said, "But I'm Kadosh, I can't go into a place like that."

# THE INVITATION

I heard this celebrated story from Rabbi Shmuel Kimche.



Sometimes we don't realise the impact of a simple interaction – one that can be done regularly, with no effort or preparation. It's just about caring to connect.

There was a young Israeli yeshiva man who was surprised to receive a fancy invitation to a wedding in Switzerland. Opening the envelope, he realised that not only was there an invitation, but two plane tickets for him and his wife. Despite not immediately recognising the names, the couple were nonetheless up for the adventure, and travelled to Zurich for the wedding. As they entered the wedding hall, the father of the groom made a beeline for them. "I'm so glad you came," he said with a beaming smile. "Years ago we were in Ponovezh Yeshiva together, remember? You see, many years ago I was having a tough time in yeshiva. I wasn't learning fantastically and I felt lonely and somewhat sidelined. I had decided to book a plane home, calling time on my yeshiva years. But the day before the flight you approached me and struck up a simple conversation with me, asking how everything was and straightening my jacket, which was out of place. Because of that interaction, I decided to give yeshiva a try for another week, which ultimately turned into a much longer and successful stretch. My family are a testament to that today."

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