

Your Full Attention

"This meal was just wonderful. Everything was cooked perfectly, spiced just right, and the portions were generous. In short, a meal fit for a king. Now, let us pay the bill and be on our way."

"I have a treat for you. I am paying for the whole meal."

The man pauses for a minute. He is very pleasantly surprised.

"I am overwhelmed! That is so nice and generous of you!"

"It is my pleasure."

"Please, allow me to give you a blessing, as a small gesture of my *hacoras hatov* (gratitude). May Hashem bless you with success..."

Just then, a friend of the man walks into the restaurant. He motions to him to come over. Meanwhile he continues his blessing.

"...health, many children..."

The man's friend comes over. They shake hands warmly. He continues his blessing.

"May you merit to learn much Torah and keep many mitzvos..."

He continues to carry on a conversation in sign language with his friend while he is blessing his generous benefactor. They conclude a business deal and he signs a contract. He does not even look at the benefactor; rather he just repeats the words of the blessing by heart. His mind is not thinking about the blessing at all.

"And may we see Mashiach speedily in our days, amen."

"Amen. Thank you for the blessing. I suppose I appreciate the words. They are beautiful. However, were you thinking about me at all? Did you realize what you were saying? During the entire blessing, you were making motions with your hands. In the end, you signed a contract. It is hard to imagine that you were sincere about what you were saying."

The man's face fell. He knew that he was wrong. He looked sheepishly at the generous man and began to speak.

"I am truly sorry. I see that I was totally wrong. What can I do to correct my mistake?"

"Your apology is enough for me. However, do not do this to anyone else. When you are speaking with them - especially when thanking or blessing them - look at them and concentrate on what you are saying. Give them your full attention. That is the greatest expression of gratitude."

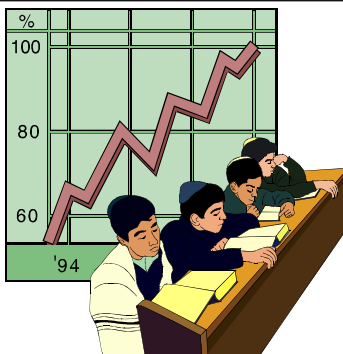
"Thank you for correcting me."

This parable is based upon a Halacha in chapter 191 of Shulchan Auruch Orach Chaim. "It is forbidden to do work while saying *Bircas Ha'mazone* (blessing Hashem after eating a bread meal)." The Mishnah Breurah elaborates. It appears that he just happens to be saying the blessing as an afterthought. However, he is really working on something else. Even the smallest job (such as drying the hands) is forbidden; how much more so a job that requires thought. The Taz adds that one may not even read a Torah book while saying *Bircas Ha'mazone*. This prohibition applies to all blessings and prayers. One who transgresses, violates a verse in this week's parasha. "If you behave

casually with Me..." (Vayikra 26:21). Rashi explains that "casually" means that he only performs the mitzvos if they happen to present themselves. The Torah goes on to list terrible consequences for one who puts his mitzvos so low down on the priority list. The man in our story felt that his business deal was more important than his grateful blessing. His mouth spoke the words, but his mind and his hands were occupied with something "more important". May Hashem have mercy and save us from such a fate.

Kinderlach...

Pay attention to what you are doing and to Whom you are speaking. Hashem provided you with a meal. Thank Him sincerely, by reciting Bircas Ha'mazone with kavannah (proper concentration). Here are a few tips to help you. Give yourself enough time. Rushing always leads to daydreaming. Use a "bentscher". Seeing the words in print helps you concentrate. Clear, big print is a bigger help. Study the payrushim (explanation and meaning of the words), to increase your knowledge and appreciation of what you are saying. You can also use these tips to help your tefillah. Get to the Beit HaKnesset early, sit down in your seat, and keep your eyes glued to the siddur. Kinderlach, may all of your blessings and prayers have great kavannah, and may Hashem accept them with favor.



The Profits are Sky High

"Come, Dovie, let's go into this bookstore. Maybe we will find a gift for the cousins back home in America."

The man and his son entered the bookstore. Among the customers was a man who looked familiar. He decided to approach him.

"Excuse me, you look a bit familiar. Do I know you from somewhere?"

The other man recognized his old friend instantly.

"Avremeleh!!! It has been thirty-five years since we were roommates in Yeshiva! How are you?"

"Pinny!!! How could I forget that smile!"

The two old friends hugged warmly.

"What are you doing with yourself these days, Pinny?"

"I have a business, Avremeleh."

"Are you doing well? I hear that times are tough here in Eretz Yisrael."

"My business is fantastic. The profits are sky high - many times the investment."

Avremeleh's eyes opened wide.

"Do you have a couple of hours, Avremeleh? I will take you to see my business."

Avremeleh turned to his son.

"Do you want to go Dovie?"

"Sure, Abba."

"We're all yours, Pinny."

And so, they set out in the car, headed north. On the way, they passed beautiful wheat fields.

"My business produced these crops."

"You've really got our curiosity going, Pinny. What type of business do you have?"

"You'll see when we get there."

"I have another question. You were always the hardest working *talmid* (student) in the class. I thought you were destined to become a Rosh Yeshiva, not a businessman."

"I will answer that question in a few minutes. We have arrived."

The three got out of the car and walked toward a big building. Pinny put on his long coat, homburg, and walked in the front door. They entered a huge Beis HaMedrash, and everyone stood up for the Rosh Yeshiva.

"Pinny! You always had a sense of humor! You really did become a Rosh Yeshiva. Mazel tov. This is fantastic. But tell me something - why did you say that you have a business?"

"Look in the beginning of parashas Bechukosai, Avremeleh. 'If you follow my decrees...' (Vayikra 26:3). Rashi explains that following Hashem's decrees means *omul* (toiling) in Torah, like these *talmidim* (students). The Torah then goes on to list the great material blessings that come from *omul biTorah*. We usually understand that the blessings are a reward for the effort. The Meshech Chochma has a different look. The *omul biTorah* is what guides the laws of nature. The words of Torah that these *talmidim* are learning cause the sun to shine and the rain to fall. Blessing and prosperity come down to the world as a direct result of *omul biTorah*."

"I see. Therefore, these *bochurim* in your Yeshiva produce hundreds of millions of tons of crops each year. Their *omul biTorah* brings billions of dollars of profits."

"Exactly."

"Rav Pinny, you are a brilliant businessman! I want to invest in your Yeshiva. I want a share in the great profits."

"Thank you Avremeleh. May Hashem bless you will all good things."

"Amen."

Kinderlach...

There are those who think that talmidim who learn Torah are unproductive, eating up resources and not giving anything in return. "Let them go to work and support themselves," they say. If they only knew the truth. Torah learners are THE MOST productive members of society. Their omul biTorah gives everyone parnassa (livelihood). They are the world's best investment. May their numbers increase!

Parasha Questions:

- How do we fulfill the verse, "Im bechukosai talachu"? (Rashi 26:3)
- What is wealth worth without peace? (Rashi 26:6 and Sifsei Chachomim)
- How do we know that observing the Torah gives people power out of proportion to their numbers? (Rashi 26:8)