



Kinder Torah

For parents to share with children at the Shabbos table



A Good Heart

"Abba, I'm scared."

"What's the matter, Yehuda?"

"I was reading through the parsha and I came to this list of terrible things: poverty, disease, cruelty, and even death. It's all very scary."

"I know, Yehuda. I am also frightened when I read it."

"Abba, is it true?"

"Yehuda, every word of our Holy Torah is 100% true."

"But did it really happen exactly as the Torah predicted over 3000 years ago?"

"Yehuda, a study of Jewish history reveals everything. Even in the desert, we see that 24,000 Jews died in a plague after they worshipped the idol Baal Peor. It did not stop there. The books of the Prophets are full of incidents where the Jews turned away from Hashem and thousands died. During the destruction of the two Holy Temples untold thousands of Jews died sanctifying Hashem's name. The crusaders, the inquisition, the Cossacks, the Nazis, the Communists and the terrorists have killed millions of Jews throughout the generations. Yes, Yehuda'leh, the curses listed in the *parsha* have been fulfilled."

"Why, Abba? Why have we suffered so much?"

"The Torah itself explains, Yehuda'leh."

"Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d with happiness and with a good heart amongst all of the good" (Devarim 28:47). Hashem is so good to us. He gives us health, food, a family, a home, a nice place to learn and pray, good friends and neighbors. He wants us to be grateful. He wants us to perform his mitzvos with the great *simcha* (happiness) that flows from a good heart. When we don't, bad things happen."

"What is a good heart, Abba, and how do I get one?"

"You already have one, my sweet child. First, you must remember that you are a very special person. As the *parsha* states, 'And Hashem has distinguished you today to be for Him a treasured people . . . to make you supreme over all the nations . . . so that you will be a holy people to Hashem, your G-d' (Devarim 26:18-19). You are a child of the King. Next, pay attention to this Mishna. 'Which is

the straight path that a man should take? Rabbi Elozar says, 'a good heart'" (Pirkei Avos 2:9). Rabbeinu Yona explains that everything about a person flows from the heart. When the heart is good, everything is good."

"What makes a good heart, Abba?"

"Desire, Yehuda'leh"

"Desire for what, Abba?"

"Desire to cleave to Hashem, to do His will. When a person desires Hashem with all of his heart he will do good and only good. He will search and find many ways to get close to Hashem. By learning Torah, performing mitzvos, doing acts of *chesed* (kindness). By being happy, patient, and understanding with people. You can always spot a good heart, Yehuda. You can see it on a person's face. Shining with the glow of love of Hashem."

Kinderlach . . .

"Let's go around the table and list ways that we can get close to Hashem." "Paying attention to the teacher in class." "Excellent, Chani. That shows real *derech eretz*."

"Offering to help Imma with housework." "Sara, you get the mitzvos of honoring parents and *chesed*." "Learning a mishna while waiting for the bus." "Yankel, you really love Hashem's Torah." "Going to sleep without a fuss." "Meir, you keep your body strong and give Imma *nachas*." "Being sympathetic when someone gets hurt." "You have real *rachmonus* (compassion), Esti." *Kinderlach*, the path to Hashem is in your heart. Find new ways to get close to Him, with all the good in your heart.

Pray For Others

"And you will answer and you will say before Hashem your G-d, '[Lavan the] Aramean sought to destroy my father'" (Devarim 26:5). This is the beginning of the declaration made upon bringing the *bikurim* (first fruits) to the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple). Rav Zalman Sorotzkin zt"l points out that the Kohen (who accepts the fruit offering) does not speak on behalf of the one who brought the *bikurim*. Rather, each and every Jew is able to speak directly to the G-d of Heaven and Earth,

without any intermediary. Hashem listens to his prayers.

Rav Sorotzkin continues to explain that with each additional prayer, Hashem brings Himself closer and closer to the worshipper. This concept is reflected in the prayer that we say three times, each time in a different order. "I look towards Your salvation, Hashem." "Towards You, Hashem, I look for Your salvation." "Hashem, I look forward to Your salvation." The first time we say Hashem's name at the end of the prayer, then in the middle of the prayer, and finally at the beginning. Each time, the Divine Presence draws Himself closer to us, and we pronounce His name sooner.

Kinderlach . . .

*Hashem listens to you. Just think about that. The most powerful Being in the universe, the One Who created heaven and earth, listens to every word that you say to Him. What shall we say to Hashem during these days of Elul? Rav Noson Meir Wachtfogel, zt"l, suggests that we pray on behalf of other Jews. Do you know someone who is sick? Pray for his *refuah shelayma* (complete recovery). Pray for the poor man, the widow, and the orphan. All need Hashem's mercy. Praying for someone else accomplishes many things. It helps you love the other person, and feel for him. This increases unity among the Jewish People. These are all things that we are working on during the month of Elul. Pray for others. Strengthen the connection between Hashem and His people.*

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