



THE "RIGHT" APPROACH

Curses and blessings in the Torah – which one comes first? A guide to healthy relationships and positive influence.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India



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In this week's Torah reading, we read about the blessings and curses given on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival (Source 1), as well as Moses' words of rebuke to the Jews (Source 2). In both cases, we see that the blessings were uttered before the curses and rebuke.

The Rebbe asks: This order seems to contradict the language of the Talmud, which says: "The left hand must always push away and the right hand must always draw close," where the left is mentioned first (Source 3). How can these be reconciled?

B. The Right Comes Before the Left.....4

Maimonides details the process of teaching a young child: at first, one promises them prizes and sweets, and later, when they mature, they will understand how to learn "for its own sake" (Sources 4–5). From here, we learn that one must begin with an approach of the "right hand drawing near," in order to eventually lead to the result of studying Torah and serving G-d with the proper motivation.

Similarly, the Talmud notes that one should open a Torah class with a joke and joy, for the Divine Presence rests only amid joy. Only afterward should the serious part of the class begin (Source 6). The Rebbe emphasizes that even though it is not strictly required that the teacher be the one telling the joke, our sages chose to do so themselves in order to build a closer relationship with their students.

This approach of the right hand drawing near is also seen in Moses' words to the Jewish people at the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy. Before rebuking them, he first struck down Sihon and Og on their behalf, opening the way to conquer the land. Only after that great favorable act did he proceed to rebuke them (Source 7).

C. The Order in the Talmud.....12

Now we can understand why the Talmud phrases it specifically in this order: first "the left pushes away," and afterwards "the right draws near."

There, the discussion is about two specific stories—Gechazi, the attendant of Elisha the prophet, and Yeshu, the student of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya. When reading these

stories, we see that Elisha and Rabbi Yehoshua already had very close relationships with their disciples, Gechazi and Yeshu. Certainly, then, the “right hand drawing near” was already present. But because of their severe misconduct, the rabbis had to “push away.” And regarding this the Talmud teaches: even when there is a need to act with rejection, it must be done with the left hand—the weaker hand—and immediately followed by the right hand drawing near, so as not to ruin the relationship and the chance to have an influence (Source 7).

Introduction

Schools are now going back into session after the summer break, and we wish everyone a great year. In this class, we will explore the Torah's approach to education, both for children and for life. The key principle we will learn is drawing close, with warmth and love, and only afterward setting boundaries and discipline. Through various Torah sources, we will demonstrate that this approach guarantees success, both at home and at school.

השיעור לפרשת כי תבא

משיחת אור לראש חודש אלול, תשל"ו, הנחה בלתי מוגה

A. Blessings and Curses

In this week's reading, we learn about two important and fascinating events: the blessings and curses pronounced when the tribes were positioned on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival, and the blessings and rebuke of Moses.

Blessings on Gerizim, Curses on Eival

Moses reminds the Jewish people that G-d has chosen them to be His treasured nation. He commands them that when they cross the Jordan, enter the Promised Land, and arrive at Mount Eival, they are to build an altar of stones and bring sacrifices there before G-d.

After the altar is built, a ceremony of blessings and curses will take place: the tribes of Shimon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin will stand on Mount Gerizim, while the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naftali will stand on Mount Eival.

The priests and Levites will stand between the two mountains. When they pronounce the blessings, they will face Mount Gerizim; when they proclaim the curses, they will turn toward Mount Eival. Whoever observes the prohibitions will be blessed, and whoever transgresses them will be cursed.

Source 1 Deuteronomy 27:11-14

Student's
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Moses commanded the people on that day, to say:

"The following will stand to bless the people on Mount Gerizim, upon your crossing the Jordan river: Simeon and Levi and Judah, and Issachar and Joseph and Benjamin.

And the following will stand for the curse at Mount Eival: Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naftali.

The Levites are to respond and say to every man of Israel aloud.

וַיִּצְוּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת הָעָם בְּיוֹם
הַהוּא לֵאמֹר:

"אֵלֶּה יַעֲמִדוּ לְבָרֵךְ
אֶת הָעָם עַל הַר גְּרִזִּים
בְּעֹבְרְכֶם אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן:
שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי וְיְהוּדָה,
וַיִּשָּׂשכֶר וַיֹּסֶף וּבִנְיָמִן.

וְאֵלֶּה יַעֲמִדוּ עַל הַקְּלָלָה
בְּהָרַיִם: רְעוּבֵן גָּד
וְאַשֶּׁר, וְזִבְּלֹן דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי.

וְעָנוּ הַלְוִיִּם וַאֲמָרוּ אֶל כָּל
אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל קוֹל רֶם."

To bless the people. Six tribes ascended the summit of Mount Gerizim, and six the summit of Mount Eival, with the kohanim, the Levites, and the ark below in the center. The Levites directed their faces toward Mount Gerizim and began the blessing: "Blessed is the man who does not make a sculpture or molten idol, etc." The people on both sides answered Amen.

They then turned, directed their faces toward Mount Eival, and began the curse, saying: "Cursed is the man who makes a sculpture, etc." ... In this way, they continued with all of them, until the final statement: "Cursed is whoever does not uphold...".

לְבָרֵךְ אֶת הָעָם - שְׁשָׁה שְׁבָטִים עָלוּ לְרֹאשׁ הָהָר גְּרִיזִים וְשְׁשָׁה לְרֹאשׁ הָהָר עֵיבָל, וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם וְהָאָרוֹן לְמִטָּה בְּאֶמְצַע, הִפְכוּ לְוַיִּים פְּנֵיהֶם כָּלִפִּי הָהָר גְּרִיזִים וּפְתָחוּ בְּבִרְכָּה: "כָּרוּךְ הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה פֶסֶל וּמַסֵּכָה וְגו'", וְאָלוֹ וְאֵלֹהֵי עוֹנִין אָמֵן.

חֲזְרוּ וְהִפְכוּ פְנֵיהֶם כָּלִפִּי הָהָר עֵיבָל וּפְתָחוּ בְּקִלְלָה, וְאוֹמְרִים: "אָרוּר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה פֶסֶל וְגו'", וְכֵן כָּלֵם עַד "אָרוּר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִקִּים".

Blessings and Rebuke

The reading continues by blessing those who obey the word of G-d: they will be blessed in the field and in the city; their families and possessions will be blessed; and they will be blessed in their comings and goings.

In contrast, a person who transgresses the commandments of the Torah will be punished with many afflictions. The section that details these punishments for those who violate the commandments is called "the rebuke."

Source 2 Deuteronomy 28:1-3; 15-16

When you hearken and obey G-d, to be sure to perform all of His commandments that I am commanding you today, G-d will place you above all the nations of the earth.

All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you, when you obey G-d.

Blessed are you in the city, and blessed are you in the field.

"וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, לְשָׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּךָ הַיּוֹם, וַיְנַתְּנֶךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ עַל כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ.

וּבָאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּהְיֶיךָ, כִּי תִשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה בָּעִיר וּבְרוּךְ אַתָּה בַּשָּׂדֶה.

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But if you do not obey G-d, to guard and perform all His commandments and His statutes that I am commanding you today, then all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.

Cursed are you in the city, and cursed are you in the field.

וְהָיָה אִם לֹא תִשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, לְשָׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּךָ הַיּוֹם, וּבָאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהִשְׁיגוּךָ.

אָרוּר אַתָּה בְּעִיר וְאָרוּר אַתָּה בְּשָׂדֶה.

We see something interesting here. On Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival, the blessings were pronounced first, and only afterward were the curses spoken. Similarly, when Moses urges the people to remember and observe the commandments of the Torah, he first reminds them of the blessings that will come upon them if they follow them, and only afterward mentions the curses if they do not.

>> The Rebbe

What comes first?

Student's
pg. 2

At the previous gathering it was explained that we must first employ "the right hand brings close" and then "the left hand pushes away." Furthermore, it was explained that the time to use "the left hand pushes away" is only after we know for a fact that we already "brought close with the right" sufficiently.

An obvious question arises: in the Talmud (and likewise in the Zohar and in the Midrash), the order of the sages' teaching states first "the left hand pushes away," and only afterwards "the right hand draws close"?

בהתוועדות הקודמת (כ"ף אב) נאמר שתחילה צריכה להיות "ימין מקרבת" ואחר כך "שמאל דוחה", ובהוספה בזה, שהזמן לעבור ל"שמאל דוחה" הוא כשיודע בוודאות שכבר קירב בימין כדי הצורך.

אך לכאורה מתעוררת מיד שאלה "פשוטה": הרי סדר הדברים בגמרא² (ועל דרך זה בזהר³ ובמדרש⁴) הוא שתחילה נאמר "שמאל דוחה", ולאחרי זה נאמר "וימין מקרבת"!!

Source 3 Talmud, Sotah 47a

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The sages taught: The left hand must always push away and the right hand must always draw close."

תנו רבנן: לְעוֹלָם תִּהְיֶה שְׂמָאל דּוּחָה וַיְמִין מְקַרְבָּת.

3. ח"ב קיט, סע"ב.
4. יל"ש מלכים-ב רמז רל.

1. שיחת כ"ף מנ"א סל"ו (לעיל ע' 201). וש"נ.
2. סוטה מז, א. וש"נ.

B. The Right Comes Before the Left

>> The Rebbe

Student's pg. 4 However, it can be demonstrated that the Talmud isn't specifying the sequence in time—that the time for the approach of “the right hand draws close” begins only after “the left hand pushes away.” For there is a verse with Rashi's commentary to the contrary, and also a passage in Tractate Shabbat with Maimonides' commentary to the contrary.

אבל באמת⁵ יש להוכיח, שבגמרא לא מדובר אודות סדר הזמנים - שהענין של “ימין מקרבת” מתחיל לאחר “שמאל דוחה” - שהרי יש פסוק עם פירוש רש”י להיפך, וכן גמרא במסכת שבת ופירוש המשניות לרמב”ם להיפך (כדלקמן).

In education, the carrot comes before the stick

Student's pg. 4 There is a rule in the Talmud that the best proof for a matter of law is the actual conduct of a great authority.

ובהקדים - שיש כלל בגמרא⁶ שהראיה הטובה ביותר לענין של הלכה הוא “מעשה רב”.

In his commentary to the Mishnah, Maimonides explains at length how we should teach children. He doesn't advise using “the left hand pushes away” first. Rather, he emphasizes that in order to get a child to sit and study, one first promises incentives, such as sweets, shoes, honor, money, and the like. Only later, when the child matures, will they learn for its own sake. Maimonides connects this with the ruling that “a person should always study the Torah and perform mitzvot even if not for their own sake. For, from initially doing them not for their own sake, one will come to do them for their own sake.”

ובפירוש המשניות לרמב”ם⁷ מבואר בארוכה אופן הלימוד עם תינוק - שלא מתחילים עם “שמאל דוחה”, אלא כפי שמדגיש, שכדי שהתינוק ישב ללמוד, מבטיחים ונותנים לו דברים שבאמת אין להם ממשות, כמו: ממתקים, נעליים, כבוד, ממון וכו', ורק לאחר כן, כשיבוא לשלימותו, אזי ילמד לשמה; וכפי שמקשר זאת עם פסק הדין “לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ומצוות אף על פי שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה”⁸.

7. סנהדרין ר”פ חלק.
8. פסחים נ, ב. וש”נ.

5. בהבא לקמן - ראה גם לקו”ש חו”צ ע”ז 73 ואילך.
6. שבת כא, א. וש”נ.

Source 4 Maimonides' Mishnah commentary, introduction to Sanhedrin, ch. 10

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Consider: a small child brought to a teacher to study Torah ... due to their young age and limited intellectual capacity, they do not understand the value of Torah study ... Therefore, the teacher, who does understand this, must motivate the child with things they like, saying, "Study, and I will give you nuts or dates, or some honey." Like this, the child will read and apply themselves.

שים בדעתך כי נער קטן הביאוהו אצל המלמד ללמוד תורה, וזהו הטוב הגדול לו לענין מה שישיג מן השלמות. אלא שהוא, למעוט שניו וחלשת שכלו – אינו מבין מעלת אותו הטוב, ולא מה שיגיעהו בשבילו מן השלמות. ולפיכך בהכרח יצטרך המלמד, שהוא יותר שלם ממנו, שיזרו אותו על הלמוד בדברים שהם אהובים אצלו לקטנות שניו. ויאמר לו: "קרא ואתן לך אגוזים או תאנים, או אתן לך מעט דבש". ויבזה הוא קורא ומשתדל.

>> The Rebbe

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We see, then, that Maimonides teaches that the order of introducing a child to the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvot needs to begin with "the right hand draws close." Moreover, Maimonides teaches that in order to do so, one must even give the child things that don't possess true value. Not only are they not valuable—to a person of mature intellect such things are undesirable, because really one should not be motivated by honor, love of money, and so forth.

In addition to what Maimonides writes in his commentary to the Mishnah—which is not strictly a book of legal rulings (though many rulings are derived from it)—he also has an extended discussion of this topic at the end of his Laws of Repentance. In the Laws of Repentance Maimonides explains the sages teaching that "a person should always study Torah even if not for its own sake, for from doing it not for its own sake they will come to do it for its own sake." Maimonides applies

ונמצא שהרמב"ם מדגיש בנוגע לסדר הכנסת התינוק ללימוד התורה וקיום המצוות וכו', שלא זו בלבד שצריכה להיות "מין מקרבת" בהתחלה, אלא יתירה מזה, שבשביל זה צריך ליתן לו אפילו ענינים שמצד עצמם אין בהם תוכן, ואדרבה: אצל גדול בשכל הרי זה דבר בלתי-רצוי, שהרי באמת לא צריך להיות לא כבוד ולא אהבת הממון וכו' וכו'.

ונוסף על מה שכתב הרמב"ם בפירוש המשניות, שאינו ספר פסקי הלכות (אף על פי שגם מפירוש המשניות למדים כמה פסקי דינים) - יש אריכות גדולה ברמב"ם הלכות תשובה בסופן, ששם מבאר מה ש"אמרו חכמים לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ואפילו שלא לשמה, שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה", בנוגע לקטנים וכלל עמי הארץ, והיינו,

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this to children and to uneducated people in general, explaining that their study and Divine service begins with elements of “the right hand draws close,” through being promised material rewards and other forms of “not for its own sake.” Even the concept of the World to Come is still considered “not for its own sake” compared with the definition of true Divine service. The complete form of Divine service for its own sake is reached only when one attains the level of “Abraham our forefather, whom G-d called His beloved”—“Abraham, My beloved.”

שאופן הלימוד ועבודת ה' שלהם מתחיל עם ענינים של “ימין מקרבת”, על ידי זה שמבטיחים יעודים גשמיים וכל הענינים שנכללים ב”שלא לשמה”, ועד שאפילו הענין של עולם הבא הוא גם “שלא לשמה” בערך אמיתית העבודה; ואילו סדר העבודה “לשמה” בשלימות הוא רק כשמגיעים ל”מעלת אברהם אבינו שקראו הקב”ה אוהבו”¹⁰ - “אברהם אוהבי”¹¹.

Source 5 Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 10:5

Student's
pg. 6

Our Sages declared: A person should always study Torah even when it is not for the sake of G-d, for from service that begins not for His sake, one will come to serve for His sake.

Therefore, when teaching children or those who are just beginning, one should guide them to serve out of awe and with the expectation of reward.

As their knowledge and wisdom grow, this deeper truth should be revealed gradually, little by little, until they internalize it, understand it, and begin serving G-d out of love.

ואמרו חכמים לעולם יעסק אדם בתורה ואפילו שלא לשמה שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה.

לפיכך כשמלמדין את הקטנים... וכלל עמי הארץ אין מלמדין אותן אלא לעבד... כדי לקבל שכר,

עד שתתקנה דעתן ויתחכמו חכמה יתרה מגלים להם רז זה מעט מעט ומרגילין אותן לענין זה בנחת עד שישגיגוהו וידעוהו ויעבדוהו מאהבה.

>> The Rebbe

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From here we see that the starting point is in the manner of “the right hand draws close”—even with regard to things done for the lowest level of ulterior motives. And even in the ultimate state of Divine service, the level of Abraham our forefather, the emphasis is still on love, the quality of the “right hand.”

ומכאן רואים שתחילת העבודה היא באופן של “ימין מקרבת” - אפילו בנוגע לענינים שהם “שלא לשמה” בדרגה הכי נמוכה; ואפילו בשלימות העבודה, שזוהי מעלת אברהם אבינו - מודגש ענין האהבה, שזהו הענין של “ימין”.

10. שם ה”ב.
11. ישע”י מא, ח.

For adults too

Student's
pg. 7

In addition to the general teaching cited above, we find a similar idea applying to regular study. As the Talmud in Tractate Shabbat teaches:

ונוסף על ההוראה הכללית הנ"ל, מצינו על דרך זה בנוגע לכל פעם ופעם. וכפי שמובא בגמרא במסכת שבת¹²:

Source 6 Talmud, Shabbat 30b

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The Divine Presence does not rest upon a person in an atmosphere of sadness, laziness, laughter, frivolity, idle conversation, or empty chatter, but rather in an atmosphere filled with the joy of a mitzvah. As we find with regard to Elisha, that after he became angry at the king of Israel, his prophetic spirit departed from him until he requested, "Now bring me a minstrel." And when the minstrel played, "the hand of G-d came upon him" (II Kings 3:15).

Rav Yehuda said: So too, one should be joyful before teaching a matter of Torah.

The Gemara asks: Is that so—that Torah should be introduced joyfully? But didn't Rav Gidel say in the name of Rav: Any Torah scholar who sits before their teacher and whose lips are not dripping with myrrh out of fear of their teacher, those lips shall be burned?

The Gemara answers: there is no contradiction here. When it is taught that one should introduce Torah joyfully, it refers to the teacher. When it is taught that lips must be full of bitterness, it refers to the student, who must listen with reverence. Alternatively: say instead that both apply to the teacher, and still there is no contradiction. Before teaching

אין השכינה שורה לא מתוך עצבות, ולא מתוך עצלות, ולא מתוך שחוק, ולא מתוך קלות ראש, ולא מתוך שיחה סתם, ולא מתוך דברים בטלים, אלא מתוך דבר שמחה של מצוה. וכפי שנאמר באלישע, שלאחר שבעס על מלך ישראל לא שרתה עליו הנבואה, אלא לאחר שבקש "ועתה קחו לי מנגן והיה כנגן המנגן ותהי עליו יד ה'".

אמר רב יהודה: וכן הוא, שיש להקדים דברי בדיחות ושמחה לפני אמירת דבר הלכה...

ושואלים: וכי פן היא שיש לפתח לפני אמירת הלכה בדבר שמחה? והרי אמר רב גידל אמר רב: כל תלמיד חכם שישב לפני רבו ואין שפתותיו נוטפות מרירות מחמת אימת רבו, תכנינה שפתים אלה?...?

ומסבירים: ... זה ששנינו שצריך להיות בשמחה, הרי זה לפני שיפתח הרב בשעורו, ואלו זה ששנינו שצריך להיות מלא מרירות מאימת רבו, הרי זה לאחר שכבר פתח

12. ל. ב. וש"נ.

Student's pg. 8 Torah, one should create a joyful atmosphere, but once the teaching has begun, it must be conveyed with seriousness and awe. This follows the example of Rabba, who before teaching Torah would share something humorous to gladden the Sages, and then, once they were uplifted, he would sit in awe and begin to teach.

הרב בדברי הלכה. כמנהג שנהג רבה, שלפני שפתח להם לחכמים בדבר הלכה, היה אומר דברי בדיחה והיו מתבדחים החכמים, ולבסוף היה יושב באימה והיה פותח בהלכה.

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Student's pg. 8 Even though Rabba's students had already been with him for a long time, nevertheless, every time he sat down to study with them he needed to first employ an element of "the right hand draws close," and only afterward came the element of "his lips dripping with bitter myrrh," which represents "the left hand pushes away."

והיינו, שאף על פי שכבר היו תלמידיו משך זמן רב, הנה בכל פעם שהיה צריך לישב ללמוד עם התלמידים, הוצרך להיות ענין מיוחד של "ימין מקרבת", ורק לאחר זה היה הענין של "שפתותיו נוטפות מר" (שזהו ענין של "שמאל דוחה").

Closeness between teacher and students

Student's pg. 8 There is another point to note here:

The element of joy as a preparation for the study of Torah—since "the Divine Presence rests only in the midst of the joy of a mitzvah, and so too for a matter of law"—would seem to be a separate matter. For this, it is not strictly necessary that Rabbah himself be the one to say the humorous remark; it should make no difference who says it, so long as the students are put into a joyful frame of mind.

Therefore, we can explain that when Rabbah made the humorous remark himself, beyond bringing joy to the students, it was also in order to create a sense of closeness between him and his students.

ויש להוסיף עוד דיוק בזה:

ענין השמחה בהקדמה ללימוד התורה - כיון ש"אין שכינה שורה... אלא מתוך דבר שמחה של מצוה, וכן לדבר הלכה"¹³ - הוא לכאורה ענין בפני עצמו, אבל בשביל זה אין הכרח שרבה בעצמו יאמר את ה"מילתא דבדיחותא"; לכאורה אין נפקא מינה מי יאמר את ה"מילתא דבדיחותא", ובלבד שהתלמידים יהיו בשמחה.

ועל פי זה: כאשר רבה בעצמו אמר את ה"מילתא דבדיחותא", הנה נוסף לכך שגורם שמחה אצל התלמידים, היה בזה גם ענין של קירוב כפשוטו.

13. ראה הערה קודמת.

First kindness, then reproof

Student's
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The reason why, at the previous gathering, we did not elaborate further on the idea of the necessity to completely fulfill "the right hand draws close" is because it was already explained at length in the past, in connection with Rashi's commentary at the beginning of the book of Deuteronomy. The fact that it appears in Rashi is evidence that this principle also applies to the straightforward study of Scripture with a beginner student.

ובנוגע להכרח על המדובר בארוכה בהתוועדות של כ"ף אב שצריכה להיות "ימין מקרבת" בשלימותה - הנה הסיבה לכך שלא הוארך בזה היא בגלל שכמדומה שכבר דובר פעם על זה בארוכה¹⁴ בקשר עם פירוש רש"י בהתחלת ספר דברים, שמזה מובן שזהו ענין ששייך גם ללימוד פשוטו של מקרא עם בן חמש למקרא:

Source 7 Deuteronomy 1:1; 3-4

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These are the words that Moses addressed to all of Israel across the Jordan river in the desert ... with every detail that G-d had commanded him to say to them. After he had smitten Sihon, King of the Emorites, who was living in Cheshbon; and Og, King of the Boshon, who was living in Ashtarot, in Edrei.

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּמִדְבָּר... כָּל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ אֵלֵיהֶם. אַחֲרֵי הִכְתּוּ אֶת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָעַמּוּרִי אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן, וְאֶת עוֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבּוֹשָׁן אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּעַשְׁתָּרֹת בְּאֶדְרֵי.

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Rashi explains why the words of reproof that Moses spoke to the Israelites about the terrible matter of the Golden Calf etc. were given only "after he struck down Sihon and Og." He writes: "Moses said: "If I admonish them before they come into at least part of the land, they could say, "What claim does he have on us? What good has he done for us? He has come only to harass us and to find an excuse for leaving us in the wilderness, for he has no power to bring us into the land.

בביאור הטעם שדברי המוסר של משה רבינו לבני ישראל על הענינים המבהילים של מעשה העגל וכו' נאמרו "אחרי הכותו את סיחון גו' ואת עוג גו"¹⁵ - מפרש רש"י: "אמר משה, אם אני מוכיחם קודם שיכנסו לקצת הארץ, יאמרו, מה לזה עלינו, מה הטיב לנו, אינו בא עלינו אלא לקנתר ולמצוא עילה שאין בו כח להכניסנו לארץ, לפיכך המתין עד שהפיל סיחון

14. ראה גם ת"מ חמ"ה ע' 354. וש"נ.
15. א, ד.

Therefore he waited until he crushed Sihon and Og before them and had given them possession of their land, and only then he admonished them. “

There is a simple lesson here: the element of “the left hand pushes away”—expressed in words of reproof for the sin of the Golden Calf—can only come after employing “the right hand draws close,” shown here through the favor of conquering Sihon and Og. By conquering these kings Moses showed the people that they had been able to defeat even the kings who were regarded as the guardians of all thirty-one kings.

Isn't manna also a benefit?

Here a question arises:

In these very verses, Rashi mentions that the Jewish people complained about the manna, which was itself something Moses had given to them. In addition, there were the clouds of glory and all the miracles performed for our ancestors in the desert, up to and including the victory over the Canaanite king of Arad.

If so, why was it necessary to wait until after the defeat of Sihon and Og in order to speak words of reproof? On the morning of that very day—“in the eleventh month, on the first of the month”—they had already received benefit through Moses with the falling of the manna!

ועוג לפניהם והורישם את ארצם, ואחר כך הוכיחם.”.

והרי זוהי הוראה פשוטה - שאי אפשר הענין של “שמאל דוחה”, על ידי אמירת מוסר אפילו על חטא העגל שהוא שורש כל החטאים, אלא אם כן ישנו תחילה ענין של “ימין מקרבת”, לעשות טובה לבני ישראל על ידי כיבוש סיחון ועוג, שבכך הראה להם שיכולים לכבוש את המלכים שהיו אמורים להיות השומרים של כל שלושים ואחד המלכים.¹⁶

אך כאן יש להקשות:

בפסוקים אלו עצמם מביא רש”י¹⁷ ש”תפלו על המן”, שזהו ענין שנתן משה לבני ישראל. וכמו כן היה את הענין של “ענני הכבוד”, וכל הניסים שנעשו לאבותינו במדבר, עד לנצחון על הכנעני מלך ערד וכו’ וכו’.

ואם כן, מה היה הצורך להמתין עד שהפיל את סיחון ועוג כו’ כדי לומר להם דברי מוסר - בה בשעה שבבוקרו של יום זה עצמו - “בעשתי עשר חודש באחד לחודש”¹⁸, קיבלו על ידי משה רבינו את הטובה של ירידת המן?!

16. ראה תנחומא חוקת כג. פרש”י ר”פ בלק.

17. שם, א.

18. שם, ג.

The answer must be that an ordinary benefit suffices to allow for ordinary words of reproof. But when there is a need to intensify "the left hand pushes away," there must first be an added measure of benefit. Therefore it was only "after he struck down Sihon and Og" that Moses could offer words of reproof concerning something as grave as the sin of the Golden Calf.

ועל כן צריך לומר, שסתם טובה מספיקה עבור אמירת דברי מוסר סתם; אבל בשעה שעומדים להוסיף ב"שמאל דוחה", צריך להוסיף תחילה בעשיית הטובה, ולכן רק "אחרי הכותו את סיחון וגו'", היה יכול לומר דברי מוסר אפילו על ענין כמו חטא העגל.

C. The Order in the Talmud

>> The Rebbe

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The reason the Talmud presents the order as “the left hand pushes away” and then “the right hand draws close” is that the passage there is not speaking about the beginning of the process, but about its middle stage.

The Talmud states: “A person should always push away with the left hand and draw close with the right hand—not like Elisha, who pushed Gehazi away with both hands, nor like Yehoshua ben Perachyah, who pushed away one of his students [referring to the founder of Christianity] with both hands.”

(It should be noted that in some editions of the Talmud the second example is not printed due to censorship, but the single example that appears in all editions is itself sufficient.)

והטעם שבגמרא נאמר הסדר
”שמאל דוחה (ואחר כך) וימין
מקרבת” - הרי זה לפי שבגמרא
שם לא מדובר אודות התחלת
הענין, אלא אודות אמצע הענין:

בגמרא שם נאמר “לעולם תהא
שמאל דוחה וימין מקרבת, לא
כאלישע שדחפו לגיחזי בשתי
ידיו, ולא כיהושע בן פרחיה
שדחפו לאחד מתלמידיו (אותו
האיש) בשתי ידיו”

[ולהעיר שיש מהדורות בגמרא
שבהן לא נדפסה הדוגמא השניה,
בגלל השמטת הצנזור, אבל
די גם בדוגמא שהובאה בכל
המהדורות].

Gechazi's Story

Source 8 Talmud, Sotah 47a

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The Sages taught: It should always be the left, weaker, hand that pushes another away and the right, stronger, hand that draws them near. This is not like Elisha, who pushed Gehazi away with both hands.

תנו רבנן: לעולם תהא
שמאל דוחה וימין מקרבת,
לא כאלישע שדחפו לגיחזי
בשתי ידיו.

Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram, was stricken with leprosy. During one of Aram's raids on the kingdom of Israel, a young girl was taken captive, and she came to serve Naaman's wife. The girl told her mistress that in Israel there was a prophet named Elisha who could surely heal Naaman of his leprosy.

Naaman went to Elisha, and Elisha instructed him to immerse himself in the Jordan River seven times, after which he would be healed. Naaman became very angry: "Are there no rivers and springs in Aram?!" But his servants persuaded him to try the prophet's words. Naaman immersed in the Jordan as Elisha had said, and he was healed of his leprosy.

Naaman returned to the prophet Elisha and wished to give him a gift, but Elisha refused to accept it, even after Naaman urged him repeatedly. Naaman then resolved to believe in the G-d of Israel and took with him earth from the land of Israel, upon which he would offer sacrifices in Aram.

After Naaman left Elisha's house, Gehazi—Elisha's disciple and attendant—ran after him. He told Naaman that Elisha had sent him to request aid for two disciples of the prophets who were in need, and he asked for a talent of silver and two garments.

Student's
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Rabbi Yitzchak said: At that time, Elisha was studying the topic of the eight impure insects. He said to Gehazi: Wicked one, it is time for you to receive now, in this temporal world, the reward for studying the topic of the eight impure insects. "The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you and to your descendants forever" (II Kings 5:27).

אמר רבי יצחק: באותה שעה
היה אלישע עוסק בשמנה
שרצים, אמר לו, "רשע, הגיע
עת ליטול שכר שמנה שרצים.
וצרעת נעמן תדבק בך ובזרעך
לעולם".

Elisha punished him, and Naaman's leprosy clung to Gehazi. Gehazi became a leper, and therefore had to leave the camp. He could not bear the shame and the humiliation, and so he abandoned the path of Torah and the commandments. He went to Damascus, where he led many others into sin.

When Elisha learned what had happened as a result of the punishment he had placed upon Gehazi, he himself went to Damascus to persuade him to repent. But by then it was already too late...

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The verse states: "And Elisha came to Damascus" (II Kings 8:7). For what purpose did he go there? Rabbi Yochanan said: He went to help Gehazi repent, but Gehazi would not agree to repent from his evil ways. Elisha said to him: Return from your sins. Gehazi replied: This is the tradition I received from you: Whoever sins and causes the masses to sin is not given the opportunity to repent.

"ויבא אלישע דמשק". למה
הלך? אמר רבי יוחנן: שיהלך
להחזירו לגיחזי בתשובה, ולא
חזר [בתשובה]. אמר לו, "חזור
בך". אמר לו, "כך מקובלני
ממה, כל מי שחטא והחטיא
את הרבים — אין מספיקין
בידו לעשות תשובה".

The Story of Yeshu

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya set out on a journey, taking with him his student, Yeshu. The Gemara relates:

Source 9 Talmud, Sanhedrin 107b

Student's He arose and came, and by chance arrived at a
pg. 13 certain inn. They treated him with great honor.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya said: "How beautiful is this innkeeper!"

Yeshu, his student, said to him: "Rabbi, the eyes of the innkeeper's wife are narrow."

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya said to him: "Wicked one! Do you involve yourself with such matters, the appearance of a married woman?" He produced four hundred shofars and ostracized him.

עָמַד וּבָא וּנְדָמָן לֹו
פְּנִיקָא אֶחָד. עָשׂוּ לֹו
כְּבוֹד גָּדוֹל.

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ: "כַּמָּה
נָאָה אֶכְסֵינָא זֶו!"

אָמַר לֹו יֵשׁוּ: "רַבִּי,
עֵינֶיהָ טְרוּטוֹת."

אָמַר לֹו רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ:
"רָשָׁע, כִּכָּךְ אֵתָה
עוֹסֵק?" הוֹצִיא אַרְבַּע
מֵאוֹת שׁוֹפְרוֹת וְנִגְדָהוּ.

(Rabbi Yehoshua meant to praise the innkeeper's conduct, while his student praised her physical appearance. His teacher was outraged and ostracized him.)

Student's Yeshu would come to his teacher daily and ask:
pg. 13 "Accept my repentance." Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya paid him no attention.

One day, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya was reciting Shema and Yeshu came before him. This time Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya intended to accept him, so he signaled with his hand to Yeshu to wait until the prayer was complete. Yeshu misunderstood the gesture and thought: "He is driving me away." He went, stood a brick upright to serve as an idol, and bowed to it.

כָּל יוֹם בָּא לְפָנָיו וְאָמַר
לֹו: "קַבְּלֵנִי." לֹא הִשְׁמָעוֹ
בֹו.

יוֹם אֶחָד הָיָה קוֹרֵא
שְׁמַע וּבָא לְפָנָיו, וְאָמַר
בְּדַעְתּוֹ לְקַבְּלוֹ. הִרְאָה לֹו
כַּיָּד. כְּסָבוֹר יֵשׁוּ שֶׁהוּא
דוֹחֶהוּ. הֵלֵךְ וְנָקַף לְבִנְיָה
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוָה לָהּ.

אָמַר לֹו: "חֲזֹר כָּךְ."

Student's Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya said to Yeshu: "Repent."
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Yeshu replied: "This is the tradition I received from you: Whoever sins and causes the masses to sin is not given the opportunity to repent."

Mar said: Yeshu practiced sorcery, incited Jews to engage in idolatry, and led Israel astray. Had Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya not caused him to despair of atonement, he would not have taken the path of evil.

אָמַר לֹו: "כָּךְ מְקַבְּלֵנִי
מִמָּדָה — כָּל הַחוּטָא
וּמִחֲטִיאָא אֵת הָרַבִּים אֵין
מִסְפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת
תְּשׁוּבָה."

וְאָמַר מַר: יֵשׁוּ כִשְׁפָה
וְהִסְתִּיחַ וְהִדְיָח אֵת
יִשְׂרָאֵל.

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 14

Gechazi had been a student of Elisha for several years. Elisha had entrusted him with responsibility for instructing the other students, as is clear from the story in the Talmud. He was Elisha's attendant—not a mere servant, but one to whom Elisha entrusted his staff, through which the miracle with the Shunammite woman's son was carried out, as the full account in Scripture relates.

ובכן, גיחזי היה תלמיד של אלישע במשך כמה שנים, ואילו מסר אלישע את ההנהגה עם כל שאר התלמידים (כמובן מסיפור הגמרא שם), והיה משרתו של אלישע, ולא סתם משרת, אלא משרת שמסר לו את "משענתו", שעל ידו תבצע השליחות עם בן השונמית, ככל אריכות הסיפור בתנ"ך¹⁹.

The Shunammite woman was a prominent woman from a place called Shunam. She hosted the prophet Elisha in her home, and went so far as to build him a small upper room, so that he could stay there comfortably whenever he visited the town. In reward for her kindness, Elisha blessed her with a son. Indeed, after years of barrenness, a child was born to her, and the joy was great.

Unfortunately, after some time, the child fell ill and suddenly died. The Shunammite woman did not give up, but immediately went up to Mount Carmel to seek Elisha's help.

Elisha, the prophet, needed to perform a resurrection to restore the child to life. What did he do? He gave his personal, holy staff to his disciple and chief attendant, Gechazi, and commanded him to lay the staff upon the boy's face, thereby bringing him back to life.

Gechazi's mission did not succeed, because he did not carry it out exactly as Elisha had commanded. Then Elisha himself came, prayed with all his strength, and the child returned to life.

From this story, we learn how close Gechazi was to the woman, and how close Elisha was to him, that he entrusted him with performing a resurrection.

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We find the same with regard to Yehoshua ben Perachyah and Yeshu. From the story in the Talmud it appears that he was the one accompanying Yehoshua ben Perachyah, and it was to him that Yehoshua ben Perachyah spoke in praise of the inn. Yehoshua ben Perachyah would not have engaged in casual conversation with a random person, and certainly not to praise an inn to them.

ועל דרך זה בנוגע ליהושע בן פרחיה עם "אותו האיש" - שמסיפור הגמרא שם משמע שהוא זה שהלך עם יהושע בן פרחיה, ועמו דיבר יהושע בן פרחיה בשבח האכסניא, והרי יהושע בן פרחיה לא היה משוחח עם סתם אנשים, ובפרט לשבח בפניהם את האכסניא וכו'.

The very fact that, out of all the students, Rabbi Yehoshua specifically chose him to accompany him, and during the journey spoke with him directly and openly about the experience, demonstrates how close he was to him.

19. מלכים-ב ד, יב ואילך.

Student's Therefore, the Talmud had no need to say,
pg. 14 "One should always draw close with the right hand." That is not a novelty, for Scripture itself already spells this out at length.

Pushing away with the weaker hand

Student's The novel point the Talmud is teaching is this:
pg. 15 even when there was a need to reject Gechazi because of the incident with Naaman, the rejection should have been only with the left hand—"the left hand pushes away." And not only should the rejection have been only with the left hand, but later there should also have been use of the right hand to draw him close—"the right hand draws close."

It is therefore clear that there is no contradiction between the Talmud and what we said at the previous gathering, that first "the right hand should be used to draw close", and only afterwards "the left hand used to push away". Moreover, the Talmud itself provides proof for this. The Talmud shows that the element of "the left hand pushes away" came only after there was a pre-existing special closeness between Elisha and Gechazi. And even then, when there needed to be some form of rejection, it should have been only with the "left hand," and it should have been followed by the "right hand" drawing close.

וכיון שכן, אין צורך לומר בגמרא "לעולם תהא ימין מקרבת" - שהרי אין זה חידוש, כיון שמפורש הדבר בתנ"ך בארוכה;

החידוש בגמרא הוא - שאפילו כשהיה צריך להיות ענין של דחייה ביחס לגיחזי בגלל המאורע עם נעמן²⁰, היתה צריכה להיות הדחייה רק ביד שמאל ("שמאל דוחה"), ועוד זאת, שלא תהיה רק דחייה בשמאל (ללא פעולה בימין), אלא לאחר זה היה צריך גם להשתמש ביד ימין כדי לקרבו ("ימין מקרבת").

ומכל זה מובן, שלא זו בלבד שאין סתירה מדברי הגמרא על הנאמר בהתוועדות שתחילה צריכה להיות ימין מקרבת ואחר כך שמאל דוחה, אלא מדברי הגמרא עצמה יש הוכחה שהענין של "שמאל דוחה" היה לאחר שכבר היה יחס של קירוב מיוחד בין אלישע לגיחזי, ועל זה אמרו שבשעה שהוצרך להיות ענין של דחייה, היה הדבר צריך להיות רק באופן של "שמאל דוחה", ולא עוד אלא שגם לאחר זה היתה צריכה להיות "ימין מקרבת" וכו'.

משיחת אור לראש חודש אלול, תשל"ו,
הנחה בלתי מוגה

20. שם ה, כ ואילך.

Source 10

In a talk on the final day of Passover 1956, the Rebbe spoke about how the path of Chassidus is to focus on the positive and to emphasize and elaborate on how good G-dliness is, unlike like the path of Mussar, which focuses on dealing with negative thoughts and on restraining the evil inclination through fasting and self-affliction.

Following this, the Rebbe said:

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Based on this we can also understand the view that the mitzvah of educating children applies only to the positive commandments they are instructed to do, and not to the prohibitions they are instructed to avoid. At first glance this seems puzzling, for if we must educate children to conduct themselves properly, how much more so do we need to hold them back from transgression.

על־פי זה תובן גם הדעה
הסוברת שהענין דחינוך
קטן הוא רק במצוות עשה,
"ועשה טוב", ולא במצוות
לא תעשה, "סור מרע",
אע"פ שלכאורה כיון שצריך
לחנכו, כל שכן שצריך
להפרישו מאיסורא.

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The explanation is that the primary element in education is training positive action, refining and elevating the child. As a result, when the child reaches the stage of personal obligation in the mitzvot, they will naturally also be careful in the matter of avoiding negative conduct.

כיון שעיקר העבודה
שצריכים לעשות היא
"ועשה טוב", לזכור
ולתעלותו, ועי"ז, הנה
כשנעשה מחוייב במצוות,
יהי' במילא זהיר בהענין
ד"סור מרע".

Regarding this point the Rebbe references a passage in Tosafot where he writes: "The mitzvah of education applies only to urging one to perform and fulfill a commandment, but warning someone not to transgress is not considered part of the mitzvah of education." The Rebbe explains that according to the approach of Chassidus—focusing on doing good and understanding its purpose by emphasizing positive action, one naturally turns away from evil. This perspective makes even the opinion of Tosafot more understandable.

All of this further emphasizes the general point of today's lesson: one must always begin on the right, with closeness and warmth. This is the essential principle.

Key Points:

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• In this week's portion, we see the principle that one should prioritize the "right hand brings close" before the "left hand rejects": the blessings were pronounced before the curses, and Moses' rebukes to the Jewish people were given only after he reminded them of blessings and goodness.

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- Maimonides rules that one should adopt the approach of the “right hand draws close” when teaching children (and in serving G-d in general): begin with incentives and rewards, so that eventually they will come to study Torah “for its own sake.”

- The Talmud teaches that a Torah lesson should begin with a lighthearted remark, and only after that comes the stage where one listens to the teacher’s words with deep seriousness.

- Even Moses, before rebuking Israel, first secured them a victory over Sihon and Og, so that his moral instruction would be received with an open heart.

- The Rebbe asks: If one always prioritizes the “right of closeness,” why does the Gemara say, “The left repels, and the right draws near”? (The left comes first.)

- The explanation: The Gemara refers to two specific cases, where normally the “right of closeness” would precede. But due to a serious misdeed by the students—Gechazi and Yeshu—their teachers were required to act with some measure of rejection. Even then, the Gemara emphasizes that the rejection should be only with the left hand, and immediately afterward, one must return to the “right of closeness.”