

# ‘Tis better to receive

By: Dr. Leah Adams

At this time of year we are bombarded by advertising convincing us to buy, buy, buy and give, give give. All around us gifts are flying off the shelves of the local vendors and special sales events dot the horizon. Call me the Devil's advocate, but rather than adopting the slogan "‘tis better to give," I counter that with my new slogan "‘Tis better to receive." We have heard that "Olam Chesed Yiboneh," the world is built on Chesed. In the article "You can build the Bayis Shlishi" (check your old issues of the Front Page) we spoke about the emotional and religious benefits that performing Chesed promotes. Chesed, giving, builds character and self-esteem. How, then have I switched my tune? Several weeks ago we spoke about the roles of the Mikabel (receiver) and the Mashpia (giver or influencer). In response one reader wrote to me, "I too want to be the influencer, but I see your point about also being the receiver, something I usually avoid. I can see how the both are important to be a whole human being."

Learning to be a receiver can be a challenge. Sometimes our insecurities make us too frail to be able to receive, we feel threatened by or unworthy to get, the input of others. On the opposite extreme, sometimes we feel so superior to others so as not to feel that we can benefit from anyone's input. At times our inability or unwillingness to receive is emotionally based, and, at times it is intellectually based. Our skepticism gets in the way of our personal growth. Lawrence Kelemen addresses this issue in "Permission to Receive". In it the author posits that in order to accept the Torah's validity, the skeptic must be willing to let his guard down. He must be willing to accept the possibility that an explanation for the world around him exists that is different from his preconceived view. He must be open to a "fresh perspective" as the author states it. Judaism is based on the premise of receiving. Our whole notion of Mesorah is that there are messages that we must accept that have been passed down through the generations. Without this link to the past, to the lessons of others, we are lost. This holds true in relationships as well. All good relationships are based on some form of give and take: husband and wife, teacher and student, boss and employee, parent and child, friend and friend, so we need to be good receptacles. Using our car mashal from the last article, we need to be good car antennae to receive the influential waves of others.

When giving gifts for Chanukah this year, I would suggest that the first gift be "The Perfect Present" by Ruth Beifus. (No, I have no vested interest in this recommendation but you know that I always throw in children's literature as a good learning tool.) In it a little girl learns that it is not our preconceived notion of what a *gift* should be that transforms an object into a gift, it is our capacity to accept the influence of others that is *reflected* in the gift that makes it worth getting. Once your gift getters have read this book, they will hopefully be able to really benefit from whatever they receive after that. There are two different opportunities for personal growth that come from being on the getting end. First of all, our allowing ourselves to be receivers actually makes us "givers". Let's think up examples from our daily lives where these lessons ring true (feel free to e-mail more examples after reading the article, I love to keep learning

from everyone!). Let's start off with simple example involving not two people, but a piece of paper and a person. You get a wedding invitation in the mail. Do you receive this happily with your heart, excited about your friend's simcha, or do you view it almost resentfully because it represents yet another social obligation to add to your already overbooked calendar? If we receive it happily then we have the opportunity to go and enhance our friend's level of simcha just by attending. We receive dinner from someone and we both benefit! We get food and a mitzvah for receiving and, by doing so, we give them added pleasure by our receiving and having joined them! What a great concept!

Here's another example. You go to a lecture. Why, because you want to be the receiver of inspiration. When we do go to a Shiur we are properly impressed by the Rebbe or Morah's ability to quote many sources, many Chachomim. Why, because this shows that the lecturer him/herself is a good receiver. We realize that if they have not received, they wouldn't have much that is too impressive to share. While you might not make it to a lecture on a daily basis, here is another example that probably occurs more frequently. Think of your interactions with your children, nieces, nephews, neighbor's kids, or students when they come to you with a "lovely" homemade gift for Chanukah. You have no use for his item, you cannot even discern what it is, yet, you accept it with a smile. We all know that the manner in which you accept this can affect the child's self-esteem in a profound way. You don't have to have gone to graduate school to realize that "receiving" the gift with a smile and putting it in a special place for others to see will yield boundless happiness in this child. Your gift *to* your child is literally, the meaningful receiving of the gift *from* your child! Too often, when we are dealing with our spouses, older children or friends, we forget this gift of receiving. Too often we respond with a less than interested response. Sometimes, we mean well but the results nevertheless have a negative affect. "Oh you didn't need to do that . . . I saw that on sale . . . what good does that do for me when I really needed such and such . . . So and so has one and it broke right away . . . I have one already . . . By responding in this manner we deflect rather than receive and *both* we and the giver lose out.

The second opportunity for growth as receivers is when we ask ourselves, in every situation, what qualities does this other person possess from which I can gain new insights about myself, my fellow Jew and even my relationship with Hashem? While this sounds like an almost ridiculous amount of seriousness to be placed on our every, mundane interaction, our lives can be made so much richer if we view our interactions in this way. One day I gave a woman a ride. That made me a giver. She and I were coming from the same street and going to the same place and the whole action really didn't require much of me at all. The interaction could have ended with her exiting my car, and seeing myself as a giver. In fact though, the lesson and impact of this action lasted much longer. I'll explain why. A day or two after transporting this woman, I received a candy dish from her! The roles became switched and I was now on the receiving end! The lesson that this receiving taught me about the importance of Hakoras Hatov and fine Midos was much more valuable than the "giving" that I had done. The lesson to appreciate all that others do for me, Kal Vachomer what Hakadush Baruch Hu provides for me, was there for the taking. If, however, I had not been able to focus inward, and was only able to see myself as the outwardly appearing Tzadekes who gives others rides, I would not have been able to ingest her lesson. Here's another example

from another activity popular at this time of year, PTA conferences. If you are a smart parent you go to listen to the teacher's take on your child and don't just go to tell them how you could do a better job managing a class of 28 students. At the end of the conference you say "thank you", possibly without even having thought about this consciously. Why are you thanking the teacher? You are thanking them for having received input from them that will hopefully help you better help your child. You can see from all of these examples how honing in on our receiving skills can help us in so many ways.

In this month of Kislev, let's work on our receptor sites. Let's work on being able to soak up the spirituality emanating from the light of the menorah. Let's work on being more attentive to the needs of others. Let's work on being better listeners to everyone. Let's make sure that our antennae are up and are firmly attached.

Stay tuned to future articles where we can continue to learn from each other.

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