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## Five Stages of Mastering Free Will

We have just finished celebrating Passover, the holiday of freedom. For a week we abstained from eating *chametz*, symbolizing banishing the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination from our midst. How can we hold on to our newfound sense of freedom while transitioning back into eating bread and daily life?

The key is mastering mankind's greatest gift – free will.

Our sages teach us, "Beloved is man, for he was created in God's image; it is indicative of a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in God's image" (*Pirkei Avos* 3:18).

Unlike all other creations, Hashem gave mankind a unique gift, a Divine spark – free will. This gift gives us the ability to emulate God Himself by making independent choices. Used correctly, it gives us the power to create and change the world. If misused, this

awesome power can lead to plundering and destroying the world.

But in order to harness this power, we must be aware that we have it in the first place!

Imagine an incredibly generous benefactor giving one million dollars to a homeless man on skid row. His life is completely transformed! He can live in a comfortable home, buy warm clothes, and purchase healthy food to eat.

But there is only one problem. The benefactor slipped the money into the bottom of the homeless man's bag, and he does not know he has it. He is a rich man schlepping around a million dollars, but he lives in the same state of misery and abject poverty because he doesn't know what he has.

The gift of free will gives each of us enormous power and potential – but only if we realize that we have it. That is the meaning of the Mishnah's statement: "It is indicative of a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in God's image."

Free will is badly under-utilized. Unfortunately, many of us live like that homeless beggar, unaware of the life-transforming power we carry around with us. Defining free will and recognizing its implications will enable us to begin to tap into the awesome potential within ourselves.

## What is Free Will?

Most people define free will as the choice between good and evil. But the Torah frames free will differently. "See – I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil... I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse; and you shall choose life..." (*Devarim* 30:15, 19).

The Torah does not tell us to choose good or to choose blessing, because everyone naturally wants good and blessing. No one wakes up

and says to himself, "Let's see what kind of evil I can do today." Even the most vile, immoral people rationalize their evil choices as good. The Torah instead defines the essence of free will as a battle between life and death, which is why the Torah exhorts us, "Choose life!"

But who chooses death?

Actually, all of us do, to some degree. Hashem made us a composite of a body and a soul, as the Torah says, "Hashem God formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being" (*Bereishis* 2:7). Our lofty soul yearns to connect to its Infinite Source, and our lowly body yearns to go back to its source, back into the ground, dead, escaping all pain, effort, and responsibility.

Choosing death means choosing comfort, choosing to sleep. In the words of Shakespeare:

*To be, or not to be, that is the question—  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles...  
 To die, to sleep...  
 (Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1)*

Our desire to escape from responsibility and challenge is constant. Suicide is the most extreme expression of this desire, but there are less dramatic forms of suicide as well - running away through drugs and alcohol, for instance. At every moment, we have to struggle to choose life - to accept the pain and embrace challenge and growth, to actualize our potential for greatness and change the world; or to choose death - to distract ourselves and avoid pain, to remain a

mediocrity and satiate the *yetzer hara's* endless desires.

Every one of us has a soul that yearns for greatness. Attaining that greatness is dependent upon how well we use our free will to live, to fight, to accomplish, and that begins by mastering the following five stages of free will.

## Stage 1: Self-Awareness

The first step in using free will is to become aware of the choices you are making. Life is a constant stream of decisions. Once you become sensitive to the fact that you are constantly making choices, then you can monitor them and start actively flexing your free will muscles.

Don't let decisions just happen. Realize that you can take control of your decision-making and your actions. Ask yourself: Why am I reading this right now? Am I paying attention to what I am reading? Am I critically thinking about it or just mindlessly reading?

Your decisions shape your life and determine your destiny. Take charge. If you don't, you're just a pedestrian watching life pass you by.

## Stage 2: Don't Be a Puppet of Society Or Your Past Decisions.

Once you are consciously making decisions, evaluate the assumptions that your decisions are built on. Be sure you are independent and not just a puppet of society and a product of its values. Don't accept society's assumptions as your own until you think them through and agree with them. Live for yourself, not for society.

Furthermore, evaluate your past decisions; don't be stuck by the decisions you made five

or ten years ago. Start each day anew. A particular career you chose years ago in college may no longer be the best thing for you today. Make sure you are guiding your decisions, and your past decisions are not guiding you.

### **Stage 3: Be Aware of the Body/Soul Conflict.**

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 11b) tells us that within each of us, there is a fierce battle constantly raging between what our soul wants and what our body desires. The third stage of free will is becoming aware of this conflict.

The alarm clock rings first thing in the morning and the battle begins: do you jump out of bed, or reach for the pillow while hitting the snooze button?

Sometimes we can actually hear ourselves fighting it out. Do you remember the first time you went jogging? Your body screams, "Stop! This is going to kill you!" Your soul says, "Keep going. You can do it! This isn't going to kill you. It's good for you!"

The soul wants you to exercise - it's healthy, there's a purpose. The body says, "Leave me alone. I'd rather sleep." The soul says, "Give up smoking; it's bad for you." The body says, "I can't quit. I'd rather smoke than face my frustrations. Besides, what's the big deal if I die a little earlier?"

This is the constant battle we face. The body wants to be comfortable, to sleep, and ultimately to die. The soul wants to strive for meaning, to do what's right, to grow, to live vibrantly with every fiber of its being.

To win the inner battle, you first have to distinguish between the cravings of the body and the aspirations of the soul. What does the body feel like doing, and what does the soul want to accomplish?

Make a list. What does the body want? Comfort. Sleep. Indulgence. Excuses.

What does the soul want? Greatness. Understanding. Meaning.

Once you clearly see the two sides, you are ready to make a decision and choose life over death. Work on becoming adept at sorting out the difference between what your soul wants and what your body feels like doing.

### **Stage 4: Identify with Your Soul, Not Your Body.**

Who is the real you - your body or your soul?

*The body says: "I'm hungry."*

*The soul says: "My body needs some food."*

*The body says: "I'm tired."*

*The soul says: "My body needs some sleep."*

The Midrash teaches: "The righteous talk to their heart, while evil people let their heart talk to them" (*Esther Rabbah* 10:3). The question is, who's in charge? Who will dictate what you're going to do?

Inner peace is attained only by identifying with your soul and disciplining the body to follow its lead. Use your free will to train the body and coax it to service the needs of the soul - the real you.

Once you realize that you are not your body, you attain some mental distance from the body's incessant drives, and you can begin to deal with them effectively. "My body claims that it's hungry and that if I don't feed it it's going to starve to death. Is that true? When was the last time I ate?"

In order for you to gain control of your body,

you have to be clever. For example, what happens when you are dieting and someone offers you a mouth-watering piece of chocolate cake? Your first reaction is, "No, I shouldn't. I'm on a strict diet." But your body tries to persuade you: "A little piece won't hurt you." Or, "This is the last piece of cake you'll have. You'll start the diet tomorrow."

The body doesn't say, "Forget the diet, it's okay to be fat." It knows you will reject that argument out of hand. So it seduces you by getting you to give in a tiny bit, and then, once you have tasted the first bit of pleasure and your resolve has weakened, it hits you full force. The *yetzer hara* is relentless. If you give it a finger, it will eventually take the whole hand.

To win the war with your body, utilize the same strategies and beat the *yetzer hara* at its own game. Want to start an exercise routine? Don't tell your body, "From now on, every morning, fifty pushups." Tell it, "Just for the next five minutes, we'll exercise. And then we'll have a piece of cake." Want to learn something worthwhile instead of killing time in front of the computer? Tell your body, "Let's learn just for ten minutes. Then we'll check our messages." The body will follow, and it may even be convinced to learn for an hour!

As you gain control over your body, it will become easier and easier to win these battles, and the body will actually learn to appreciate what the soul wants. The first few times you jog your body will scream bloody murder. But if you keep it up, after two months the body will enjoy it as much as the soul does. The exhilaration of a runner's high is the inner peace of the soul and body working together in tandem.

## Stage 5: Make Your Will His Will

The highest stage of free will is when you

transcend the battle between your body and your soul and ask yourself only one question: What is God's will?

When you subjugate your will to Hashem's will, that is the highest form of living. You are using your power of choice to merge with the ultimate power in the universe: the Infinite, transcendental Source of existence. Making God's will your will is the truest fulfillment of the Torah's exhortation to "Choose life."

Pesach is over, but the challenge to be truly free is constant. Master the power of your free will. Don't be a zombie; make decisions actively. Don't be a puppet of society or your past decisions. Be aware of the conflict between your body and soul and then identify with your soul. Finally, make God's will your will.



## The Power of Your Words

If you're looking for a greater purpose in life, here's a *big* one: let's eradicate offensive, hurtful speech. Malicious gossip spreads virally through media platforms, infecting many minds. Harmful speech is pervasive. I'm not implying that you or I contribute to this. On the other hand, each of us should say, "The buck stops here." The transformative results of speaking kindly are positively life-changing. Our Torah Sages describe a wise person as one who foresees the consequences of his action.

Insensitivity toward others has a boomerang effect; it eventually comes back to bring negativity into one's own life. Words can build, but they also can destroy. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

Whereas positive speech strengthens and builds our relationships, disparaging words diminish us and our relationships with others. The aftermath of negative speech can continue, unabated, to adversely impact future generations. Shattered relationships are often the remnants of thoughtless, stinging words. The words spoken might even be truthful and accurate but if they are damaging or hurtful, the impact can be the same. Such speech also must be avoided. Torah study can strengthen one's inner resolve to speak with forethought. It heightens our awareness of consequences that may result from what we do or don't say.

Just as we must be concerned about what goes into our mouths, we must be as concerned and careful about what comes out of our mouths. Just as eating contaminated food can make you sick physically, speaking contaminated words can have harmful consequences spiritually.

In the Torah's description of the malady called *tzaraas*, the spiritual and physical interact. *Tzaraas* was a specific malady, resulting from harmful speech. The Torah tells us that *tzaraas* was not a result of physiological causes. Nevertheless, it was made manifest through physical signs and symptoms.

If someone spread slander or brought about harm through their speech, they were afflicted with *tzaraas* and thus referred to as a *metzora*. The *metzora* would be isolated from the community for an indefinite period. This consequence was meant to heighten the offender's awareness of the divisive effects of their harmful speech. This time of separation was not viewed as punitive but as corrective. The isolation provided the *metzora* time for introspection, in which to examine and correct

their errant behavior.

The Torah instituted effective modes of rehabilitating miscreants long before correctional reforms were adopted by other cultures. Not to be overlooked was the holistic way in which *tzaraas* was treated. Until recent times, Western medicine was reluctant to acknowledge the association between illness and non-physiological influence. The Torah, however, recognized that *tzaraas* was a physical manifestation of a spiritual cause. Today's stressful, often unhealthy lifestyles have been linked to numerous medical conditions. The risk factors associated with a growing list of ailments suggest non-physiological sources. Credence has been given to the connections among mind, body, and soul. Medical fields have come to recommend proactive approaches to help prevent and alleviate negative patient outcomes. Thousands of years ago, the Torah fully utilized what today are known as "alternative healing methods." The Torah's comprehensive treatment of *tzaraas* integrated spiritual modalities to affect a positive outcome. It treated the entire person, not just the illness.

Mainstream medical practice finally is catching up. If only today's practitioners had been aware of the Torah's ancient wisdom sooner. Alas, science was not ready to view the body, mind, and spirit as one. The Torah's approach was way ahead of its time.

A person who noticed certain skin discolorations would seek a Kohen, priest, not a doctor. The Kohen would examine the person to see if the blemish was more than superficial. The source of an illness is deeper than its superficial symptoms alone. A Kohen, not a doctor, would render a "diagnosis" of *tzaraas* and guide the afflicted individual through the recovery process. This attests to the greater understanding of why *tzaraas* was treated spiritually to attain a complete healing of both body and soul. *Rambam*, the twelfth-

century physician and Torah commentator, understood how the mind, body, and soul are intrinsically connected.

He taught that healing is predicated on a patient understanding the integrated factors contributing to an illness. Subsequently, appropriate treatment, including making necessary lifestyle changes, could occur.

The Torah relates that *tzaraas* presented itself in three different ways.

In addition to the skin condition on the body, it could appear on clothes or on dwellings. The Talmud states that *tzaraas* would first appear in a person's home as a warning from God that something was amiss.<sup>129</sup> If this warning was ignored, the *tzaraas* then appeared on his or her clothing. If this sign also went unheeded, the affliction would manifest itself upon his or her body.

The relevance of not ignoring the outward signs of an illness—be they physical, spiritual, or both—is eye-opening. We're taught the importance of being proactive, not just reactive. A diseased mind often will lead to unhealthy actions that ultimately encompass body and soul. The Torah alerts us to be vigilant and to identify and treat the signs so that a state of overall health is restored. These are the lessons that we can learn from the ancient malady of *tzaraas*.

Throughout the annals of history, humanity has been enlightened by advances in pioneering research. Oftentimes, medical research develops so-called cutting-edge breakthroughs that, in reality, have long been practiced in Judaism. Although not previously understood, the Torah already enumerated these ideas and practices. One such concept is the fusion of spiritual and physical.

The Torah's relevance is ongoing. Even though certain cryptic verses are not yet fully comprehended, they allude to a future time in

which we'll be ready and able to perceive their deep significance. The Torah is multifaceted. Regarding the Torah, *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of the Fathers) teaches, "Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it. Reflect on it and grow old and gray with it. Don't turn from it, for nothing is better than it."<sup>130</sup> These ingenious words truly are trailblazing.

The life-affirming benefits of positive speech cannot be overemphasized. Kind words of encouragement, understanding, and appreciation fortify us. By choosing to accentuate the positive traits within ourselves and others, we enrich our environments. The Lubavitcher Rebbe often repeated these Yiddish words, accredited to the *Tzemach Tzedek*: "*Tracht gut, vet zein gut*—Think good, and it will be good." Think positively and the outcome will be good.

By increasing our positive thoughts, we will come to strengthen our resolve to speak positively as well. Avoiding negative speech is the first step. Ridding ourselves of negativity, however, is not enough. A void will remain that must be filled. Replenishing that void with positive thought and speech brings continual goodness in its wake. Every mindful moment can produce victory over negativity.

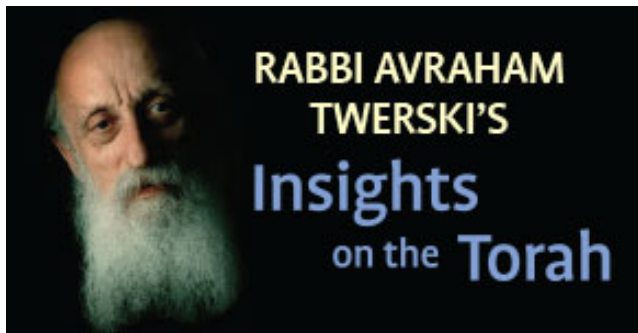
Let's join together in practicing positive speech. Striving to dispel harmful speech starts with each of us. Using kind and positive speech will add value to your life and the lives of those around you. That's a great purpose!

## Making It Relevant

1. Recall examples of how hurtful speech has impacted your life or the lives of others. Resolve to prevent it in the future.
2. (a) Designate one hour a day (no, not 3:00–4:00 a.m.) during which you consciously refrain from speaking and listening to gossip or other negative

speech; (b) once you have mastered this, add an hour to your “no-negativity” regimen; and (c) repeat step b!

3. While striving to practice kind, positive speech, you may some- times falter. If that happens, press the reset button. Be relentless!
4. Recognize the integrated aspects interacting in your spiritual, mental, and physical health. Become mindful of the consequences of your choices on all three of these elements.



## Elixir of Life

*If a person (adam) will have on his skin . . . a tzaraas affliction (Vayikra, 13:2).*

The Talmud is very clear that the affliction of *tzaraas* (the exact nature of which is unknown to us) is a punishment for having spoken *lashon hara*, derogatory speech.

The Hebrew word the Torah uses for “person” in the above verse is *adam*. There are several other Hebrew words for “person”: *enosh, ish, gever*. The ethical writings state that each refers to a level of spirituality, and *adam* represents the highest level. We must understand, therefore, the Torah's choice of the word *adam* for a person afflicted with *tzaraas*.

The Chafetz Chaim said that the juxtaposition

of this portion of the Torah to that of the previous portion dealing with non-kosher animals is to teach us that people who may be meticulously careful about what goes into their mouths should be equally as scrupulous about what comes out of their mouths. There are sins which a Torah observant person would never do, but as for *lashon hara*, it is a rare person who is saved from it (Bava Basra 164b). Hence, even a spiritual person, *adam*, is vulnerable to *lashon hara*.

The Midrash relates that a peddler went through the streets shouting, “Who wishes to buy an elixir of life?” R' Yannai, who was engrossed in his Torah study, asked to see his wares. The peddler said to him, “For you I have nothing.” Upon R' Yannai's insistence, the peddler took out a Book of Psalms and showed him the verse, “Who is the person who desires life and loves days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech” (Psalms 34:13-14). R' Yannai then said, “All my life I have been reciting this psalm, but I never understood it until this peddler pointed it out to me” (Vayikra Rabbah 16:2).

This Midrash has puzzled many Torah scholars. What was in these verses that he had never grasped previously? The words of the psalm could not be any clearer: Guarding one's tongue from *lashon hara* is conducive to long life.

Perhaps we may understand this by examining the Talmudic statement that the remedy for *lashon hara* is the study of Torah (Arachin 15b). A number of commentaries ask, In what way is Torah study a penance for *lashon hara*? The Jewish law is that if you have offended someone, it is essential that you make amends to that person and ask his forgiveness. They answer that it is not the study of Torah per se that constitutes penance. Rather, the study of Torah will enable a person to understand the gravity of *lashon hara* so that he will do what is necessary for penance.

The gravity of lashon hara can be seen in the episode of Joseph and his brothers, which was brought about by his speaking derogatorily about them (Genesis 37:2), and in what happened to the prophetess, Miriam, when she spoke improperly regarding Moses (Numbers 12:1-10). To this very day, we are suffering the consequences of the lashon hara delivered by the spies to Moses (ibid. 13:31-32). This should make one cognizant of how far-reaching the effects of lashon hara can be, and how diligent one must be to do proper teshuvah.

While the mitzvah of studying Torah is extraordinarily great (Shabbos 127a), the Talmud points out that Torah can be a double-edged sword. "If one merits, Torah can be an elixir of life; if one is not virtuous, Torah can be a deadly poison" (Yoma 72b). How penetrating these words are! If used improperly, Torah can be destructive.

The impact of derogatory speech depends on the character of the speaker. If a person who has little credibility makes a negative comment about someone, people are likely to dismiss it as worthless babble. However, if the speaker is a person of stature, a scholar whose opinion carries some weight, the attitude towards his words is, "If he says so, it must be true. He knows what he is talking about." The more learned a person is and the higher he is held in esteem, the more his words are taken seriously.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that every human character trait can be put to good use. But what about vanity? This is so abominable a trait that it repels the Divine Presence (Arachin 15b). How can vanity ever have a positive application?

We can see, however, that even vanity can have a redeeming feature. Before making a negative comment about someone, do not be humble and think of yourself as an insignificant person whose words will not be heeded. This is the time when vanity can

temporarily be put to good use. "I must be careful of what I say. People are not likely to dismiss my words lightly. I am an important person, and my words can have a great impact."

The greater a Torah scholar a person is, the more he must be careful of his speech. The words of an esteemed Torah scholar will be taken seriously. If he speaks negatively about someone, he has allowed his Torah scholarship to become a negative force. The Midrash says that lashon hara destroys three people: the speaker, the listener and the one about whom it is spoken (Devarim Rabbah 5:10). If Torah scholarship gives credibility to one's lashon hara, it indeed becomes "a deadly poison."

The man who was peddling the "elixir of life" was not an unlearned person. He was trying to teach people *mussar*, personal growth. He did not believe that a great Torah scholar like R' Yannai was in need of his teaching. When he told R' Yannai that his teaching about lashon hara was not relevant for Torah scholars, R' Yannai remarked, "I was unaware that people had this mistaken impression. To the contrary, it is those who are Torah scholars who have great need for this elixir of life, because Torah has value only if one is virtuous. Negligence on the part of a Torah scholar, particularly in speaking lashon hara, can seriously distort the value of Torah."

We can be spared from lashon hara if we incorporate the second half of the verse, "loves days that he may see good." In his introductory morning prayer, R' Elimelech of Lizhensk says, "Help us to see the good in our fellows, and not their defects."

If we concentrate on looking for the good in people, we will have no need to make negative comments about anyone.



## Beyond the Surface of Divine Justice

Why does God punish us? This question haunts both believers and skeptics alike. We're taught that God is kind, loving, and compassionate, yet the Torah speaks of severe consequences for disobeying divine will.

This apparent contradiction comes to a head in this week's Torah portion, where we encounter a harsh punishment that conceals a precious gift. Hidden within this mysterious paradox lies a profound truth about God's relationship with His people - one that transforms not just how we understand divine justice, but how we approach discipline and education.

### A Gift in Disguise

In this week's Torah portion we learn that *tzaraat*, the spiritual malady, affects not only one's body and clothing, but also the walls of one's house. As we learned in Parshat Tazria, *tzaraat* primarily strikes those who speak *lashon hara*, derogatory speech, serving as a measure-for-measure consequence: just as the speaker created rifts between others, they now experience a carefully calibrated exile.

The progression moves from outside inward - first afflicting their house and forcing them to leave their home, then spreading to their clothes requiring them to abandon their wardrobe, and finally, if the behavior persists, afflicting their flesh itself. Then they must depart to the outskirts of the community,

where they remain until they've corrected the mindset that led them to speak evil of others.

Yet within this harsh decree lies something extraordinary. The Torah uses striking language when introducing this house-afflicting punishment: "When you come into the Land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, **I shall give you** *tzaraat* upon a house in the land you possess." Give you **tzaraat**? Since when is punishment described as a gift?

The Midrash<sup>1</sup> reveals: The Canaanites, hearing of Israel's approach, hid their treasures within their walls. God's "punishment" of *tzaraat* ensured the fulfillment of His promise to give us "houses filled with all good things"<sup>2</sup>.

This revelation forces us to confront a deeper question: Why would God reward someone who sinned with hidden treasure?

### The Father's Way

According to the Ramchal, God's entire purpose in creating the world was to bestow the greatest good upon us.<sup>3</sup> Even punishment, surprisingly, is part of this master plan for good. How? Because inherent in God's gift of free will is the capacity to err. And when we err, we turn away from the good that God has in store for us. In these moments, like a father correcting his child's behavior, God delivers punishment to keep us on the right path. The Torah teaches this explicitly: "You shall know in your heart, that just as a man chastises his son, so does the Lord, your God, chastise you" (Devarim 8:5). By comparing our relationship with God to father and son, the Torah teaches that every divine correction, even when painful, comes from a place of deep love and desire for our growth.<sup>4</sup>

King Solomon teaches, "My son, despise not God's discipline, and do not abhor His chastening, for God chastens the one He loves,

as a father placates a son."<sup>5</sup> When we experience setbacks or challenges, our natural reaction is to see only the surface-level pain. But just as the owner of the tzaraas-afflicted house discovers treasure beneath the damaged walls, every divine correction contains hidden opportunity for growth and elevation.<sup>6</sup>

## A Golden Opportunity

The Ohr HaChaim<sup>7</sup> adds another profound layer to our understanding of the hidden treasure behind punishment. Beyond the physical riches that might have been hidden in the walls, he suggests that the true treasure lies in God's method of correction itself - beginning with the house, then clothes, and only finally touching the person. This gradual progression represents the greatest gift possible: the opportunity for teshuva—for spiritual return. By starting with our external possessions and moving slowly inward, God provides multiple chances for us to recognize our missteps and correct our path.

The treasure, then, isn't just the physical gold or even the process of spiritual growth - it's the very opportunity that God gives us to return to Him before more severe consequences become necessary.<sup>8</sup>

## The Art of Correction

This understanding transforms not only how we view divine punishment but how we approach education - both of ourselves and others. When we need to correct our own habits or our children's behavior, we can model our approach after God's loving method:

1. **Start from the Outside** - Like the progression of **tzaraat**, begin with gentle, external corrections before moving to more personal consequences. A subtle environmental change often proves more effective

than immediate confrontation.

1. *For Self-Development:* Place a siddur in a visible spot to encourage prayer rather than criticizing your lack of spiritual discipline.
2. *For Parenting:* Create a dedicated, distraction-free study area before lecturing about homework habits.
2. **Give Multiple Chances** - God provides several warnings before the final consequence. Similarly, we should create a pathway of graduated responses that give ample opportunity for growth and change.
3. **Keep the End Goal in Mind** - Just as God's ultimate purpose is to bestow good, every correction we give should aim toward growth and development; never mere punishment.

Remember: True education, like divine punishment, always comes from a place of love and always aims toward growth. When we approach correction with this mindset, we transform discipline into one of the greatest acts of love we can offer.

May we merit to emulate God's loving guidance in all our relationships, especially with ourselves and those in our care.

Shabbat Shalom!  
Avraham

1. Leviticus Rabbah 17:6
2. Deuteronomy 6:11
3. Ramchal - *The Way of God* 1:2:1
4. Why does God choose specifically tzaraas to reveal this profound principle about divine punishment? Perhaps because unlike most consequences for sin, tzaraas plays out in full view of the community. Everyone witnesses not only the affliction itself, but also the discovery of treasure within the destroyed walls. Through this public display, God teaches the entire nation a vital lesson about the true nature of His correction. Just as a wise parent sometimes uses one child's discipline as a teaching moment for their siblings, God uses the tzaraas-afflicted house as a visible demonstration of how His punishments always contain hidden opportunities for growth.
5. Proverbs 3:11-12

6. The Ramchal elaborates in *The Way of God* 2:2:6, explaining that all punishment, both in this life and the afterlife, serves to cleanse the soul of spiritual imperfections created by sin. Only then can the soul fully enjoy the ultimate good, free of any impediments to receiving that divine blessing.
7. The great Rabbi and Kabbalist of 18th century Morocco
8. Ohr HaChaim on Leviticus 14:34