

Good Shabbos Everyone. It is said that the greatest Tzadikim (righteous Torah leaders) in each generation possess ruach hakodesh, a divine inspiration, that enlightens them with an uncanny understanding of the past and makes them privy to many of mankind's secrets of the future. Using this power, the righteous can give blessings to those who come to them.

We see this concept in this week's parsha Vayechi, in which we read about how Yakov blesses his children. Although the blessings seem somewhat cryptic on the surface, the blessings with which Yakov blesses his children contain some of the deepest mystical secrets of the Torah. We will focus our discussion this week more in general, on the power of the Righteous to give brochos - blessings to people who come to them for such.

There are those who say that the Chofetz Chaim, R' Yisrael Meir Kagan, of Radin, Poland, possessed the noble attribute of ruach hakodesh – a low level of prophecy. The story begins around the time after the First World War in Zhetel, Poland, the birthplace of the Chofetz Chaim.

In that town lived a certain R' Zalman who held a rabbinical position in the early part of his career. A citizen of the town, R' Asher, had a nineteen-year-old son who wished to settle in Eretz Yisroel. Aware of the economic difficulties there, R' Asher decided to teach his son a trade so that he could find work in Eretz Yisroel. He bought his son a car and taught him to drive so that he could be a chauffeur. He would pick up passengers from the railroad station in Zhetel, and take them to their destinations.

Soon enough, he became familiar with the various routes and back roads throughout the major cities of the region. One Friday afternoon, as people were going to shul, they noticed that R' Asher's son was still driving people from the station. It was just moments before Shabbos, and it was quite obvious that the boy, who came from a religious family, would not be home in time for Shabbos.

Although no one actually saw him driving after nightfall, it would have been almost impossible for him to get home before then. In shul, people told R' Zalman what they had seen. After davening, the rav had the young man summoned to his home and reprimanded him. The young man claimed that it was an accident, that he thought he could make it home before Shabbos, but there was traffic, he got lost, and so on. He assured the rav that it would not happen again.

A few weeks later, he was seen driving on Friday night. This time he was caught red-handed, and the witnesses were infuriated. They hurried to R' Zalman's home to tell him the news. Once again the young man was called in, harshly reprimanded and warned that the community would not tolerate his actions much longer.

The father had no control over his now independent son and soon it became common for the boy to be seen driving on Shabbos. The religious people in Zhetel felt outraged and affronted. They had seen this boy grow up and his open defiance was deeply felt by everyone. Additionally, they felt that such flagrant violations of the Sabbath by one of their own could have a harmful influence on the other young people in the community. They pleaded with R' Zalman to convince the father to send his son away from Zhetel at once. R' Zalman agreed to do so.

However, before R' Zalman had an opportunity to speak with him, R' Asher had a stroke and was rushed to the hospital. He lay there for some weeks, and although R' Zalman came to visit him a number of times, he felt that it was an inopportune time to discuss the doings of his wayward son. R' Asher wanted to leave the hospital.

The doctors, however, insisted that he remain. One night, R' Asher's deceased grandmother came to him in a dream. She told him that he was foolish for staying in the hospital and that he should follow her advice and leave at once. "What you need," she said, "is a brochah from the Chofetz Chaim. Go to him and tell him that you are from his hometown of Zhetel. His brochah will do more for you than all the medications the doctors have been giving you for the last six months."

The next morning, R' Asher got out of his hospital bed unobserved, took his crutches and hobbled somewhat unsteadily down the back corridors of the hospital and made his way outside. He went home and began to prepare for his trip to the Chofetz Chaim. In a few days he was ready to begin his journey to Radin.

While R' Asher was traveling on a train to Radin, the Chofetz Chaim himself along with R' Zalman (the Rav from Zhetel who was supposed to encourage R' Asher to send his son away) were traveling home to Radin from a rabbinic conference in Vilna. R' Asher happened to meet up with R' Zalman in the train station. R' Zalman directed R' Asher to the Chofetz Chaim's train car. R' Zalman was hoping to reach the Chofetz Chaim before R' Asher so that he could tell him about R' Asher's son. Perhaps, thought R' Zalman, if the Chofetz Chaim would admonish R' Asher about the matter, R' Asher would then try to influence the wayward young man. They entered the train and walked through the corridors until they came to the car where the Chofetz Chaim had just finished Shacharis and was putting his tefillin away.

Respectfully, they waited at a distance until he finished, and then R' Asher hobbled to the Chofetz Chaim and began talking before R' Zalman had a chance to say anything.

As R' Asher began talking to the Chofetz Chaim he burst into tears, describing his illness and lengthy stay in the hospital. "I am from Zhetel, your hometown," said R' Asher gasping from his exertion. "My grandmother, who was a deeply religious woman, came to me in a dream and told me that I should come to you for a brochah."

The Chofetz Chaim looked up at the man and said, "Yisroel Meir is not a brochah-giver. What can I do? How can I help you?" (The Chofetz Chaim often referred to himself by his first name Yisroel Meir.) The man pleaded and begged.

Finally the Chofetz Chaim said, "We say every Friday night: 'Let us go towards the Shabbos and welcome it, for it is the source of blessing.' If Shabbos, which is the source of blessing is happy with you, then I too can be happy with you."

"What do you mean, Rebbi?" asked R' Asher. "Well," said the Chofetz Chaim, "if Shabbos is observed in your home by the members of your family, then Shabbos will bless you. But if your son drives on Shabbos, and your daughter combs her hair in a manner forbidden on the Shabbos, then Shabbos is not happy with you. If so, what kind of brochah-giver is Yisroel Meir?"

The man was shocked by the insight of the Chofetz Chaim's words and he promised that he would make every effort to see that his children would become true Sabbath observers. How did the Chofetz Chaim know these details about R' Asher's family? (p. 171 Rabbi Paysach Krohn, The Maggid Speaks.)

Our righteous Torah leaders are conduits through which flows the divine goodness from above. By going to a Tzaddik, a righteous Torah leader, we can tap into this conduit and benefit from their blessings.

Let us all be inspired by this week's discussion to seek out our Righteous Torah leaders and flock to them to seek their brochos. Then we will all merit living happy and healthier lives. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**