

תורת

Character Traits

How wonderful and beautiful are good and upright character traits. One who behaves properly is beloved Above, is desired below, and finds favor and good understanding in the eyes of G-d and men. At the opposite extreme, the punishment for bad character traits is very severe, and one who behaves improperly is despised and detested, and is bad in the eyes of Heaven and in they eyes of one's fellow human beings. This is all clarified vividly in the words of our holy Sages in the Talmud, midrashim, holy Zohar, and the works of mussar (moral perfection). Whoever studies them has a taste of the fear of sin. In truth, people's natures are different: There are some people upon whom G-d has bestowed a good nature, outstanding personality traits, and proper ways of thinking from the time of conception and birth. There are others who are exactly the opposite – Heaven should save us! Someone – unto whom G-d has granted intelligence, and it is easy for him to behave properly and to recognize the disgrace of bad character – should give thanks for his portion, and say, “I am diminished by all of these kindnesses.” This ‘good portion’ is better than all of life and the entire life of the World to Come.

However, what should the son do whose personality traits are bad, whose ways of thinking are malevolent, who has wandered astray from the path of prudence, says to “bad” that it is good and to “good” that it is bad, and whose path is upright in his own eyes?

This is an evil sickness that has no cure. Shlomo HaMelech (Mishlei, 26:12) already said, “Have you seen a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him!” However, this is what he must do – perhaps he will be saved: He must pour out his soul before G-d each day – evening, morning, and afternoon during the silent prayer, (shomeneh esrei). (With G-d’s help I will set my hand to this as well and compose a prayer in Beit Tefilati.) His request should be that G-d guide him with good counsel to be outstanding in character, in thinking, and in all aspects of perfection. He should do that which is good and straight in the eyes of G-d and men, unwaveringly study the books of moral improvement, make himself “dusty” at the feet of Torah scholars, and learn from their ways. He must not deviate from their words, even if it appears to him that the sages are calling the left hand, the right hand – he should not rely on his own understanding. This person should negate his own opinion before the will of others, and he should strengthen himself – “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm”, and with great courage and fortitude – to periodically act against his nature or his attitude, until his habit becomes second nature, G-d opens his eyes, and he sees and understands which is the upright path – he will return and be healed. According to one’s pain will be his gain. We have a tradition that one who comes to be purified is given Divine assistance. However, a person cannot exempt himself on the Day of Judgment by saying, “This was my nature and my intellectual understanding. I was not able to control myself and to overcome my thinking and my character!” This approach will not exonerate one from sin, because everything that a man wants he can do. He is totally capable of anything through toil and effort. Our Sages (Megillah 6b) already

said, “... if a person says, ‘I toiled, but I did not find.’ – do not believe him.” A person was born to toil. Fortunate is the individual whose toil is in Torah and provides contentment to his Maker – this is a fundamental principle in Torah, and this is the whole of man!

