

לזכות משפחת קארנפעלד
בורביינק, קאליפורניא

AN ANCHOR OF KINDNESS

*Adapted from the Sicha to Nshei
Chabad, Chof Daled Elul 5748.¹*

THE KING IS SMILING – ARE YOU?

The month of Elul evokes the Alter Rebbe's well-known *mashal* of *Melech Basadeh*—the King in the field, teaching us that Hashem is accessible to all in the lead-up to Rosh Hashanah.

An important detail of the *mashal* is that the King shows *panim sochakos*—a smiling face—and grants the requests of all His subjects with joy.

For the Jewish woman, this is a particularly meaningful message. The woman is the “smiling face” of the home, raising her children with warmth and love, while the role of the men is often more about instilling a sense of *kavod* and discipline.

The King's joy in granting requests during Elul makes this the ideal time to ask Hashem for help in our core mission of being the *akeres habayis*, the foundation of the home, and to build Jewish life on the solid ground of Torah and *mitzvos*. Hashem surely grants this heartfelt request.

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THE MISSION – JEWISH UNITY AND EDUCATION

“*Atem Nitzavim Hayom Kulchem*... You are all standing today before Hashem... the heads of your *shevatim*... your young children, your women...”, we read in Parshas Nitzavim.

The lesson for us is that standing together before Hashem is the great equalizer and brings true *achdus* among us, especially crucial as we prepare for the new year. It also emphasizes the importance of *nitzavim*—standing strong and proud in our Yiddishkeit.

The Torah emphasizes that *tapchem*—“your children”—are included as well. Jewish women and girls are at the forefront of educating the youngest members of the family and play a crucial role in building the Jewish home.

While the mother is the main educator, unmarried girls also contribute meaningfully: assisting in keeping the house clean and creating an atmosphere of Yiddishkeit, and directly participating in educating their younger siblings.

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

A Jewish woman's influence is not confined to her own home and family members. In this year of 5748 – *Tismach* – we must influence – *T'samach* – whoever we can reach. Make phone calls, send letters, use any available means. Your sphere of influence is the entire world!

THE SETTING – THE KITCHEN

What is the primary setting for a woman's influence in the home?

When we picture the heart of Yiddishkeit in the home, we may think of the rooms used for *davening* and

learning, or the dining room where guests are hosted and *kiddush* is made. In these settings, the responsibilities are divided between men and women.

Yet all activities in the home are fueled by nutrition: healthy Kosher meals, prepared by the woman in the home's kitchen. A kitchen might not seem to be the center of attention, but without it, nothing else can happen.

The man of the house filling the home with the sound of Torah study? It's the food he ate that gives him *chayus*. The child sweetly saying his *tefilos*? His healthy body is thanks to a nourishing meal his mother prepared. And the *rav* sitting in the study answering a complex *shaila* in *halacha* is also not possible without his wife graciously keeping him fed.

Food for our bodies not only sustains life, but also shapes it, dictating how we live. Food in a Jewish home is not just a means to keep our bodies and souls connected. The Jewish attributes of *bayshanim*, *rachamanim*, and *gomlei chasadim*—being bashful, merciful, and doing acts of kindness, which the *Gemara* tells us are the classic Jewish characteristics, are dependent on what the Jew eats. If the food one eats is kosher, prepared with distinction and effort to ensure all the rules of *kashrus* are carefully adhered to, the *middos* of the person will also be proper and precise.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

While eating Kosher should be primarily done because Hashem commanded us to do so, we are also privy to one of its explanations. The food we eat directly impacts our actions. When one consumes a *chaya torefes*, a predatory animal, for example, it can negatively affect their *middos*, causing them to become more cruel or unrefined, reflecting the nature of the animal.

It is the Jewish woman who has the responsibility to keep her family well-fed, and thus is accountable for the *kashrus* of her kitchen. While the laws of kosher are intricate, the woman's word is final when it comes to the *kashrus* of the food. The yeshiva-educated husband or community *rav* need not ask any questions before eating. Rather, we rely on the Jewish woman, who might have been educated only by her mother, grandmother, and older sisters.

The kitchen, then, is not just another function in the home, a place to cook. It is the nerve center of a Jewish family and shapes how we act to fulfill all that Hashem wants from us.

THE METHOD — A PERMANENT REMINDER

With the kitchen so integral to the home's atmosphere, how is the woman to ensure it remains the source of the household's inspiration? How can she merit Hashem's assistance, which is clearly essential, in fulfilling the great responsibility of maintaining the *kashrus* of her food and kitchen?

The answer is surprisingly simple. One item, hanging on the wall, can facilitate this special *bracha* from Hashem in her home.

That simple object comes in the form of a *tzedakah pushka*, prominently displayed in the kitchen for all to see, and of course, make use of.

Why the big deal about a *pushka*? Picture this. While the woman is deep in preparation, carefully creating her tasteful and kosher meals, she needs a reminder of the mitzvah that will enable her to keep her house *glatt-kosher*: *tzedakah*. Amidst the detail and rhythm of cooking, the *pushka* speaks silently but clearly. The *Shulchan Aruch* might not be open in front of her, but the *pushka* is right there, in eyesight, reminding her of the centrality of others' needs, saying, "Hashem is right here in your kitchen. It is He who provides the food you are preparing. And caring for others while providing for your family is essential."

A *pushka* doesn't necessarily need a fixed spot, and perhaps it's better this way—if someone wants to give *tzedakah*, we should be able to bring the *pushka* to them. But such an important fixture of the home should also be, literally, a *fixture*. A family can have many *pushkas*, but the kitchen, the spiritual nerve center, should

have one that is firmly fastened to the wall, part of the home's permanent makeup.

This should be done in a way that the *Shulchan Aruch* considers attached: fastened in a manner that is considered building in the context of *Hilchos Shabbos*. In this way, the influence of the *pushka* becomes a real foundation of the home.

While pots, pans, and ingredients are necessary to prepare meals, a *pushka* is just as important. Giving *tzedakah* before cooking reminds us that as we nourish our own families, we must also care for others.

When we undertake our special mission of feeding a Jewish family, Heavenly assistance is essential to ensure that everything remains kosher as it should be. The mitzvah of *tzedakah* brings extra merit to the woman and helps her maintain the highest standards of *kashrus*. And when *kashrus* is strengthened, the food's

HASHEM SEES IT TOO!

As we act with others, Hashem acts with us. When we place the needs of others at the center of our thoughts and actions, giving *tzedakah* even to people we've never met, Hashem responds with kindness.

It's not only the physical inhabitants of the home who are influenced by the presence of the *pushka*. Hashem too, so to speak, "sees" the symbol of *tzedakah* and is reminded that this is a family that cares for others. And so, He in turn cares for them.

taste is elevated too.

The influence of the *pushka* goes further, beyond the home's inhabitants. When a neighbor comes over, it's often to exchange a recipe, share a cooking tip, or borrow an ingredient. A friendly chat between two

THE REBBE STANDS IN THE KITCHEN OF HIS HOME, 5749. NOTE THE GREEN TZEDAKA PUSHKA AFFIXED TO THE WALL.



akaros habayis will inevitably take place in the kitchen. When guests and visitors see the *pushka*, they too will be reminded of the importance of tzedakah, and prompted to give on their own as well.

Children have friends over, too, and children ask questions. “What’s that on the wall?” “What’s a *pushka*, and what do I do with it?” Questions lead to explanations, and explanations lead to action. Children may empty their pockets of coins, eager to join in. And the *pushka*, by its very placement, leaves an imprint on their young minds that taking care of others is just as important as taking care of ourselves.

In this way, the entire home becomes a home of tzedakah. The *pushka* isn’t just attached to the wall—it becomes attached to the *neschama*. It becomes a part of the family’s *avoda*, something fixed and inseparable, never to be overlooked.

The Mishnah teaches us that the world stands on three pillars: Torah, *avoda*, and *gemilus chassadim*.

Our homes, miniature worlds, should reflect the same. Torah becomes part of the home when shelves are filled with *seforim* and attached firmly to the wall. The same is true of *siddurim* and *tefillah*. And Tzedakah, the third pillar, deserves the same treatment. A *pushka*, fixed in place, holds up the very spiritual structure of the Jewish home.

Even on Shabbos and Yom Tov, when the mitzvah of giving cannot be performed, the *pushka* continues to fulfill its purpose. Its presence alone reminds us of what we value, what our home is built around, and Who truly sustains us.

Continuing on the theme of strengthening the three pillars of Torah, avodah, and gemilus chassadim, the Rebbe concluded this sicha by giving three dollars for Tzedakah to representatives, to be passed on to each of the women present. 1

1. Hisvaaduyos 5748 vol. 4, p. 339ff.