

You shall be to Me a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Bnei Yisrael. (19:6)

The significance of this *pasuk* is inspiring. It not only underscores the inherent qualities found within each and every Jew, the amazing potential available to those who seek to maximize it; it also focuses on the future, intimating that our past, regardless how sordid or mediocre, should not hold us back from achieving greatness. In his *Sefer Nitzotzos*, **Horav Yitzchok Herskowitz, Shlita**, relates the story of a *Kollel* fellow, a scholar of note, who would serve as a *bochein*, tester, in various *yeshivos*. A few times during the year he would visit various schools and test their students. He was very impressed with one young teenager whose replies to his questions bespoke a penetrating knowledge of the subject matter. The speed and brilliance with which he rendered a response was equally impressive. It thus struck him as unusual when he came in the middle of the year to test the class and discovered that his prize student, Moishe'le, no longer attended the school.

When he asked for his whereabouts and reason for leaving, everyone from the *rebbe* to the principal hemmed and hawed with evasive answers. Finally, after continuing to push, he was told that Moishe'le was asked to leave the school. Apparently, Moishe'le befriended a boy from a different school, whose adherence to Torah and *mitzvos* was, at best, lackadaisical. The relationship regrettably grew, whereby the two teenagers were involved in a house break-in on *Yom Kippur*, at a time when they knew the inhabitants of the house would be attending *shul*. They were caught red-handed by the police. Due to their young age, and being first-time offenders, they were given probation. Moishele was too embarrassed to return to his original school. The principal cared about Moishe'le and saw to it that he be accepted in a dormitory school a ways from his home, so that he could start over. Everyone deserved a second chance.

The *bochein* asked for the address of the school and proceeded to draft a letter to Moishe'le. He wrote: "Dear Moishe'le, I visited your school and was dismayed to learn that you no longer attend there. I miss your brilliant replies, your well-thought-out questions and your all-around wonderful demeanor. I hope that you will achieve your potential in your new school. With your superior mind, I am certain that you are destined to become a great Torah scholar. Please write me about your studies, and include a special question, or *chiddush*, original idea, which you had. I am including one hundred *shekalim* for you to spend as you wish."

Moishe'le received the letter and upon reading it, immediately burst into tears. If the *bochein* had such confidence in him, it must be that he was not yet aware of his shame. Someone still believed in him. Someone still cared. He would not let him down. The teenager, who up until this moment had sunk into a state of deep depression, made up his mind to reverse himself and attempt a comeback. So began an exchange of monthly letters between Moishe'le and the *bochein*. Every letter from the *bochein* included, as promised, one hundred *shekalim* in exchange for

Moishe'le's *chiddush*. The teenager grew into a fine *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, married and raised a beautiful family. He himself became a pedagogue par excellence, having learned the most important lesson in education: give the student a sense of self-confidence. Tell him he can do it. Give him hope.

Rav Hershkowitz explains that this idea may be derived from the Torah's use of the future tense in enjoining us to become a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation. The Jewish People had just been liberated from a country whose moral turpitude had negatively influenced them, causing them to descend to the forty-ninth level of spiritual impurity. Yet, they were told that they were Hashem's treasure from amongst the nations of the world and admonished to become a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation. This meant they could do it. After all, Hashem believed in them. The past was ignored. Now was the time to look to the future.

This is the Torah way, generating a sense of confidence and hope within a person. This will serve as the catalyst for achieving greatness. One of the preeminent *Mashgichim*, ethical supervisors, was asked for the key to his incredible success with students. He explained that he believed in his students – and told them so. Every student who entered the *yeshivah* was special and capable of becoming a Torah luminary. He treated them this way – and it showed.

In order to maintain this wonderful attitude towards each student, the *Mashgiach* eschewed playing an active role in the enrollment process, refusing to know anything about a potential student's past. He wanted to believe in every student. Negativity was shunned. He would reinforce this feeling in the hearts and minds of his students by focusing on the idea of *mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh*. Every student could aspire to become a Moshe *Rabbeinu*, an Aharon *HaKohen*. It was up to them. He raised the bar for each individual student, never settling for mediocrity or even complacency. Everyone had to produce, because everyone could produce. Throwing in the towel was unacceptable. It went against their individual potential. He not only believed in them; he taught them to believe in themselves.