

# **Everything Counts**

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*Little Things  
Mean a Lot*

**Teachings of  
R. Elozor ben Azarya**

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## **Preface**

One of the greatest Sages was offered a leading position to become head of all the Sages because he was most worthy in wisdom, wealth and his unique lineage. However, his wife said, "You do not have white hair yet." (Brochos 28a)

So Hashem made a miracle that 18 rows of white hair grew in his beard on the day he turned 18, and he accepted the position!

Imagine someone who is doing poorly at their job. He may have a good education, dress well, have a pleasant personality and high energy level, but does not have a beard...

He goes to a professional consultant who says, "It seems to me that you need to grow a full beard to attract the customers you are aiming for. When they see you without a beard they may have a sense of discomfort in doing business with you."

The change was made, and his career took off, Boruch Hashem, with great success.

## 1. Talking to Oneself

We learn in Avos 2:1, "Be careful with light mitzvos as with heavier ones, for you do not know the extent of the reward for each mitzvah..."

Similarly, in Avos 4:2, "Be careful to run to perform even a small mitzvah..."

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The day this Sage, R. Elozor ben Azarya started his new career they also removed the guard who would keep out those disciples whose inner motivation did not match their external behavior. Why was this change linked to this new beginning?

The Ben Yehoyada explains that once Hashem made the miracle of having his beard sprout white hair, Hashem was demonstrating that we should accept those who seem to appear sincere, even if we are not sure what their interior is like!

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When you change your outer appearance, you also influence and change your inner attitudes.

## 2. Appearances

The most well known of his teachings is the Mishna, Brochos 12b, which we say on Pesach night in the Haggadah: "We are obligated to thank Hashem every evening for being freed from Egypt. R. Elozor ben Azarya explains even though I look like I am 70 years old, I have not yet been able to convince others to prove this point."

Why does he mention that he looks old? Because we were actually freed at night, but we did not leave Egypt until morning. Thus it did not look like we were freed yet!

We must still thank Hashem because Pharaoh said already, "Please leave quickly!"

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Ben Zoma said, "I have the source for you" - Thank Hashem every day, all day long, even at night when it does not look like we are free yet.

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This fits also with his opinion to finish eating the Pesach offering before midnight, because that is when Hashem killed all of the Egyptian firstborn and the Egyptians said, "Please hurry and leave!"

### **3. Youthful Greatness**

On the one hand, youthfulness has many qualities, such as more energy, enthusiasm and humility. On the other hand, life's ongoing experiences can help a person mature and develop greater awareness and appreciation upon seeing Hashem's kindness to recognize His ways and actions even in the seeming darkness.

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His teachings in Avos 3:21- 22 show his way of balancing the challenges of serving Hashem properly.

In Mishna 21, we are taught four lessons of balance -

- Torah and Derech Eretz,
- Wisdom and fear,
- Knowing and deep understanding,
- Flour and Torah.

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There are four ways to get to a total of 4:

- 2 plus 2 = 4
- 1 plus 3 = 4
- 3 plus 1 = 4
- 4 times 1 = 4

#### 4. An Example

An example of combining wisdom and fear is taught in the first Rashi of Parsha Acharei Mos, Vayikra 16:1. Rashi quotes this Sage which is rare for Rashi to quote a name of a Torah Sage only when it pertains to help us understand the pshat of the verse.

Where do we see a combination of knowing wisdom and motivation? In this moshol, Rashi cites regarding one physician who only gives information, without motivation. The second physician is much better... he adds motivation: "So that you don't die as so and so, who failed to follow the instructions!"

We learn how essential it is to combine wisdom and fear.

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Information and motivation will get us to the right destination.

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## 5. The Names

-Elozor = 'Keil,' G-d's judgment, Ezer - helps us.

-Azarya = help is from 'Koh,' Hashem's name of mercy and compassion.

We need both, to have love and fear of Hashem.

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Hashem helped him in a unique way to concentrate and combine 52 years into his 18, so that he was equal to 70 years of greatness.

This fits with his teaching in Makos 7a that the great Sages of Sanhedrin should be so wise to avoid putting people to death... not more than once in 70 years.

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It was a combination of his growth of a long white beard and his great wisdom that made him succeed and attain his unique position.



## 6. Flour/Torah

Why does Avos 3:21 use the term 'flour?' The wisdom of aging is to appreciate the process of harvesting grain and producing flour, bread, etc. Food produces energy, which leads to Torah study and serving Hashem.

It takes insight and analysis to see the Torah in the 'flour.' "A wise person sees that which will develop." This can be evidenced at a young age also, but it usually is demonstrated at maturity.

This leads us also to his next Mishna, Avos 3:22 which teaches the importance of action over wisdom. A young person may have grand ideas to accomplish in the future, but he has not yet been able to implement them and take action.

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How is it possible to do more action than one's wisdom? If you only learn 10 mitzvos, how can you do 15?

## 7. Taking Action

How can an 18 year old be like a 70 year old, if he is lacking 52 years of active accomplishments?

Rabeinu Yonah, Sharei Teshuva 2:10 explains: "We can change ourselves in one moment from darkness to brilliant light. How? By accepting and committing oneself to listen to our mentors to fulfill the entire Torah of Hashem, we can become transformed now for the future."

You can acquire now, the merits and rewards for all of the mitzvos and mussar that you are serious about committing to practice.

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"On the path one is determined to go, Hashem will lead him," Makos 10b.

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## 8. We Will 'Do!'

This explains why we all accepted the Torah  
with the unique formula of

- We will do, and
- We will listen and learn.

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This is in Shemos 24:7 which hints to the fact  
that we should always think this way 24 hours every  
day and 7 days a week.

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R. Elozor ben Azarya had ingrained and  
internalized this principle of completing all of his  
actions. He visualized himself as a Sage with a long  
white beard and Hashem made it happen  
miraculously!

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## 9. Your Influence Counts

In Shabbos 54b there is a Mishna where R. Elozor ben Azarya is criticized for allowing his cow to venture out on Shabbos with a ribbon between her horns. The Gemara explains it was not his cow... he actually owned thousands of cattle and they were all kept properly.

However, he had a neighbor who had a single cow and he failed somehow to teach his neighbor to be careful about this matter. We learn how we are responsible for each other!

We should invite more and more people to join us in studying Torah and upholding all of the mitzvos with joy and appreciation.

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In Yoma 85b he teaches -

-for a sin between man and Hashem, Yom Kippur can atone,

-for a sin between one person and another, we need to appease each other.

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Forgiveness is a great gift we can give each other, and then Hashem will forgive us!

## 10. Understand Each Other

In Kiddushin 17b R. Elozor ben Azarya says,  
"The Torah speaks in many places the way people  
tend to speak.

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In Erechin 16b he says, "Most people don't  
know how to fulfill the mitzvah to offer rebuke  
properly in a respectful manner.

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In Eiruvim 65a R. Elozor ben Azarya explains  
that we can argue to exempt people from extreme  
judgment by explaining that many people are under  
great pressure...

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