


**Parashat  
Vayakhel/Pekudeh**

**English version**

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## STOP OVERTHINKING IT!

Overthinking usually starts from something legitimate, but then it loses boundaries. It is so common for people to overthink in so many areas. Was I guilty? Why did I make such a mistake? Why did others act the way they did, or not even apologize when they realized they were wrong? People overthink what others think about them. Or overthink if something, or someone, or myself, is normal.

In so many problems in life, the real problem is not as great as the problem of overthinking it. Nothing can help us like our own thinking, and nothing can hurt us like our own thinking. Focusing has become a hot topic in self-help. But the main problem is not focusing; it is the lack of tools to stop overthinking.

The Torah tells us about the Mitzvah of the Red Heifer, a cow that is completely red, one that never bore a yoke - to slaughter it, burn it, take its ashes and sprinkle them with water on people who became impure because of their contact with dead. Rashi tells us that this Mitzvah is a Hok, a mitzvah that has no logic to it. Then, ironically, Rashi brings R Moshe Hadarshan to explain that the idea behind the Red Heifer is for it to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. The Red Cow is the mother that needs to clean up after the mess made by its child, the Golden Calf.

Why does Rashi say that this is a Hok, and then, he brings an explanation for it from R Moshe Hadarshan? And, how does the Heifer clean up after the Golden Calf? (See Beit Halevi on Ki Tisa)

The Talmud tells us that in the merit of Avraham having said, humbly, **ואנכי עפר ואפר**, And I am dust and ashes, he earned for his children the mitzvah of the Red Heifer and its ashes. (Hullin 88b) What is the connection between Avraham's humility and the Red Heifer? Ashes for ashes? Also, the Midrash tells us that because of Avraham's "being simple" **התהלך לפני והיה תמים**, when he got water to wash the feet of his guests, he merited the waters of the Red Heifer, ... (Pesikta 14 Parah) What is the connection between being simple, not questioning G-d, and the Mitzvah of the Red Heifer?

Let us first focus on the sin of the Golden Calf. At Har Sinai, when our ancestors said **ונעשה ונשמע**, We will do, and then we will listen, we will accept whatever G-d says without asking questions, they went up to the level of Adam before the sin, pre "death" zone. When the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf, they went back to the level of Adam "after" sin. Adam's sin was that he wanted to be like G-d, **והייתם כאלהים**, to be in control, to know things he might otherwise not be able to know, so that he can serve G-d on a higher level than what he was on. He had only one mitzvah, the mitzvah of not knowing, and he blew it.

The sin of the Golden Calf came about because the Jews of that time *wanted to know* how they were to serve G-d, without a Moshe. Aharon tried to stop this overthinking by buying time, by pushing things off, but Micha, threw the piece of paper with G-d's Name on it into the burning gold, which turned the gold into a walking, talking golden calf. Where did Micha come from? He was a product of



Moshe's overthinking! In Egypt, Moshe asked why G-d was allowing Jewish children to be brutally killed, so G-d allowed Moshe to let one of them live. He saved a child who became Micha (See Hadar Zekenim Ki Tisa, Alshich Mishlei 24).

Now, we can understand the Rashi. The Red Heifer, which we merited due to Avraham's humility, due to his accepting G-d without knowing, is a Tikun for the sin of the Golden Calf. This Red Heifer is a Hok, and therefore, it can rectify the sin of the Golden Calf and clean up the mess of our overthinking.

You see, the reason why we sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe told us on his last day, is not because we had a question that had no answer. "Where is Moshe? How do we serve G-d now?" It is because we had too much gold. וְרַי זָהָב. (Devarim 1;1) When you don't have to work hard, when you have extra time or money on your plate, you overthink. And when you overthink, even if it is coming from a good source, it can turn into a catastrophe. (This is the danger of Bein Hazmanim. Too much spare time. Too much overthinking.)

People suffer from overthinking on all levels. How will I make enough money to marry off my children? How will I retire? When you *overthink* these, it can take over your life. It can ruin your life. Because the life you live is made up of three things. Your actions. Your conversations. And your thoughts. מעשה דיבור מהשבה. These three are all that you can actually manage. As nice as time management sounds, it is just wishful thinking. You can never control or manage time. You can only manage your actions, conversations and

### JEWISH REMEDY FOR RELAXATION

"ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי... שבת שבתון *Six days [a week] your work shall be done and on the seventh day...rest*" (Exodus 35:2). In this passuk, there seem to be two commandments: to rest on the seventh day, and to work the other six days. But is there really a *mitzvah* to work six days a week? Also, the words "*your work shall be done,*" are surprisingly passive. It would seem the Torah

thoughts, by making them measurable through time. You can decide how long or how short a time you can spend on each of them, and you can decide when and where you want to do any one of the three.

Overthinking is only destructive when you think off the clock. When you do not set aside a time and a place for it. When you don't limit it. We must decide, in advance, how much time to devote to a subject - when and where to think about it. And leave the rest for G-d. It is amazing how our most effective and creative thinking is done when we give it an allotted time. Because the brain works like a muscle: you can't make it think the whole day. It will wear out. When we schedule our thinking time, our thinking becomes super productive.

In almost everything in life, we need a healthy balance. Not too much and not too little. And just like we need to eat with a healthy balance, we need to think with a balance. Not too much, and not too little. Some people underthink things, out of laziness. And some people overthink things, because they feel they can control the world outside of their actions, conversations, or thoughts. You need to think hard, but not when it is not helping you live a more functioning or successful life. When you are aware that it is hurting you more than helping you, you need to stop. To have the humility to leave it up to G-d. You need to take the "Simplistic mindset" of Avraham, our Forefather. And when you take this lesson of the Red Heifer, you will be ready for Nissan, for your own, personal redemption.

should have commanded to "do your work" instead.

On Shabbat, many have the custom to eat fish. There is an interesting phenomenon about fish. If one were to open the belly of a large fish shortly after it has consumed a smaller fish, he would find the small fish facing the tail of its predator. Judging from its position, one can deduce that the big fish's



“fish-food” was not the one he had chased to near death, but rather another fish, one that swam straight into its mouth. This is the lesson of the Shabbat as we shall soon see.

Rabbeinu Bachye in *Chovot Halevavot* mentions a fundamental concept of Jewish belief that may be confusing at times. *A person must realize that the effort he puts into something is not the cause of his success.* (Bitachon Chap. 4) Success is delivered by G-d, in His infinite, unfathomable ways. It is incumbent upon each man to do his utmost to make a living; G-d does not want us to rely upon miracles. It is for this reason that the *pasuk* specifically commands each person “*six days your work shall be done*”. We are commanded to do our part by putting in our effort and working on the other six days of the week. However, we are also expected to realize that, essentially, we are just going through the motions. Ultimately, success rests in the hands of Hashem alone. This is why our *pasuk* says “*your work shall be done*” as opposed to “*Do your work*”.

Rav Wolbe explains (*Alei Shor 2; Bitachon VeHishtadlut*), that this can be a very difficult concept. For example, a farmer is commanded to do all his many, diverse jobs in order to prepare and sow his field, yet he must still believe that his toil was not needed by G-d in order to provide his sustenance. He toils only because that is the manner in which G-d commanded that he behave when He created the world.

The Torah gives us one day a week to change perspective and internalize this belief. The world on Shabbat is a time when money has no value, and no bearing whatsoever on our lives. *Chazal* explain that, on *Rosh Hashana*, each person is allotted a certain amount of money for the whole year, and any Shabbat expenses are separate from that allotment, not diminishing the original year's sum in the least. The fact that our livelihood comes from G-d is clearer to us on Shabbat, but, of course, holds true in the same measure during the week, even though we are required to invest our efforts in work. We demonstrate our recognition of this principle by eating fish on Shabbat: just as the large fish had to toil for its meal by chasing a smaller one, its actual sustenance came from a totally different fish!

One can truly rest on Shabbat only if one feels that ‘his efforts are his responsibility- but his successes are not in his control’. By internalizing this concept, one can experience true relaxation on Shabbat. It is for this reason that there is really no point in working to an extreme degree. A workaholic, by definition, thinks his level of success is determined through his own efforts, as opposed to being granted by G-d. Tension and stress come when one feels the loss of a control that he thought he once had. But when we can internalize the fact that G-d was (and is) really in control all the time, then, we can experience a truly restful state.

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