



Shavuot



English version

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## THE SHAVUOT SPICE

One of the greatest gifts G-d gave you in life is your Yetzer Hara. The Midrash teaches us, "וַיֵּרָא": "וַיֵּרָא טוֹב" - "וַיֵּרָא טוֹב מְאֹד" - "וַיֵּרָא טוֹב מְאֹד" And G-d saw all that He made, and it was very good. זה 'וַיֵּרָא טוֹב' 'It was good' - refers to the Yetzer Hatov. And it was very good - this is the Yetzer Hara (Breshit Rabbah). What does this mean? How could the Evil Inclination be very good?

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לְבָבְךָ And you shall love your G-d with all of your heart, both the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara that reside in the heart. (Rashi; Berachot 54a) How does one serve G-d with his Yetzer Hara??

על חטא On Yom Kippur, we ask for forgiveness שחטאנו לפניך ביצר-הרע For the sin that we sinned before You with our Yetzer Hara. What? Aren't all sins committed with our Yetzer Hara?

כך הקב"ה אמר להם לישראל בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו G-d told the Jewish People, My sons! I created the Yetzer Hara, and I created the Torah to be its spice. And if you study Torah, you will not be in his hands... (Kiddushin 30b). The Maggid of Mezritch pointed out the precision of the words used here. Generally, we understand that the Yetzer Hara is like a sickness, and the only cure is the Torah. But the word used is not תרופה, which would mean cure. Rather, the word that is used is the word תבלין, which means spice. It does not say that the Torah can **annul** the Yetzer Hara. No. The Torah

does not undo the Yetzer Hara, for that would not be a good thing. We need our Yetzer Hara, in order to serve G-d with extra oomph.

Before we explain how to serve G-d with your Yetzer Hara, we need to realize that serving G-d with our Yetzer Hara is the pinnacle of the holiday of Shavuot. Shavuot is the only day of the year we are to bring a korban of bread, of wheat flour and yeast, in the Beit Hamikdash. The rest of the year, yeast is not allowed. כָּל-הַמְנִיחָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ לַיהוָה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה חֻמֶּץ כִּי כָל-שֶׂאֵר וְכָל-דָּבָשׁ לֹא-תִקְטְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִשָּׁה לָהּ: (Vayikra 2;11) The Talmud teaches us that yeast and Chametz are symbolic of the Yetzer Hara. (Berachot 17a) The reason for this is because of the parallels in their natures: yeast rises, symbolic of haughtiness. Haughtiness is the root of all anger. Laziness is linked to dough, for dough needs to sit in order for it to rise, and laziness is what holds us back from keeping the positive commandments in the way they are supposed to be kept. Therefore, G-d does not want any bread offerings in His Temple. G-d wants us to rid ourselves of Chametz on Pesach, so that we can free ourselves of our Yetzer Hara. But on Shavuot, when we are accepting the Torah, we want to bring the Yetzer Hara in to this holiday, for we have just the right spice for it. Torah.

The Vilna Gaon explains that one cannot change one's mazal, one's negative nature, one's Yetzer Hara. That would be going against one's grain. The only choice one has is what one does with that



nature. The Talmud teaches us that one who is born with the nature of Maadim will be one who spills blood. R' Ashi teaches, this means either as a Mohel, a butcher or a murderer (Shabbat 156a). Spilling blood is inevitable; the choice, though, is still available where to direct this nature. Tzaddik – Mohel. Beinoni- Butcher. Rasha- Murderer. When Shmuel Hanavi was sent by G-d to appoint the young David to be King of the Jewish People, Shmuel jumped back. He saw that David was Admoni, that he was redheaded, that David was from the Mazal of Maadim. Shmuel feared that this might mean that David has the nature, the Yetzer Hara, to become a killer... Admoni hinting that he has the nature of a bloodthirsty person. Esav was also Admoni... and look how Esav turned out! G-d told Shmuel not to worry – *But he has nice eyes...*(See Shmuel A 16;12 ) The Midrash explains G-d's comment as follows: *Esav killed on his own prerogative. But this (David) will kill from the verdict of the Sanhedrin* (Breshit Rabba Toldot 63; 8). Even a good nature can be used for bad. Shaul was born with the Mazal that had in it the nature of humility. Shaul used his humility in a negative way – he did not stand up against the Nation when they went against the Will of G-d. (See Biur HaGra Mishlei 22; 6) (See Rabbenu Yonah Berachot 54a)

הָיָה עֵז כְּפָנִים, וְקָל כְּפִשָּׁר, וְרִץ כְּצִבִּי, וְגִבּוֹר כְּאַרְיֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת רָצוֹן אָבִיד שְׁבִשְׁמִים (Avot 5;20) If you have chutzpa in your nature , if you are brazen, like a leopard... If you have a nature that you are light, like an eagle, and you don't get stuck on things, if you are as swift as a deer to run after your desires, if you are strong, like a lion, to get what you want... “be who you are, be as G-d created you, and use that nature to do the will of your Father in Heaven.” The Chazon Ish was quoted as saying that kids who are the wildest, (just like the wild animals mentioned in the Mishnah -) only **they** have the potential to become the Gedolei Hador, the leaders of the next generation.

Our strengths and weaknesses are like a seesaw, "package deals", that you can't have one without the other. Torah is the solution to that balance. G-d

does not want us to uproot the seesaw, to throw out the whole package because there are some parts that we don't like. אל תהי בז לכל אדם ואל תהי מפליג לכל דבר שאין לך דבר שאין לו שעה ואין לו דבר שאין לו מקום. *Do not hold any person in contempt, and do not consider anything worthless. For there is no person who does not have his hour. And there is no thing that does not have its place* (Avot 4;3). If not for the Yetzer Hara, people would not get married, have children, build homes, businesses, etc. (See Yoma 69b; Midrash Tehillim 37a).

On Shavuot, we bring the korban of the two breads, to thank G-d for giving us the spice to make our lives the best lives possible. We just need to give the Yetzer Hara the right flavor. The Torah is what makes the Yetzer Hara something we can do great things with. This is why we need to say Viduy, if we do not serve G-d with our Yetzer Hara, because there is a special way to serve G-d, that can be done only with your Yetzer Hara, something that G-d calls Tov Meod, very good.

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Here are the *Selfie Steps*. These Self-Help steps teach you how to take the lemons that G-d gave you in life... and make them into lemonade.

**1. Your Personal Strengths/Weaknesses ID Card.** List all of your strengths and all of your weaknesses. This will be your personal ID card, a card to identify your negative behaviors and tendencies, not as your identity, but as a part of a whole picture. It is just another animal to tame in your zoo of tendencies.

**2. Connect the Dots.** Try to see if there are any connections between your strengths and your weaknesses. Once you realize that your weaknesses and strengths are connected, thank G-d for the inseparable package of strengths and weaknesses. It is easier to appreciate G-d when you realize how the most interesting part of your life is the delicious lemonade you made out of the lemons.

**3. Embrace your weaknesses.** Accept what you cannot change... and take that creation that G-d

made, and uplift it. I.e., If you have fear, bring that fear as a metaphor to your fear of G-d. If you love something, and you can't hold yourself back from it, take this love to be a metaphor for your love of G-d. If you feel that you are angry, take that anger as a metaphor of how G-d can get angry at you, for your inappropriate behaviors... and He does not. (See Rambam on Mishna Berachot 9;5)

**4. Work in Progress.** Set aside time in your life, on a daily/weekly/monthly basis to add the proper spice to these weaknesses. Put it on to your To-do

list by actually taking out time to find the right spice that you need to transform your weaknesses into strengths. Your weaknesses are a work in progress over a span of a lifetime, they are not a devaluation of one's self.

**5. Fresh perspective.** G-d does not create anything bad. Find how your natural strengths can complement your natural weaknesses. Think out of the box. When you look at your weaknesses, find how those weaknesses can be your greatest assets.

## THE BORSALINO BLUFF

At the Shabbat table last week, I played a game with my children. I started off a fill-in-the-blank statement, and they needed to generate more sentences on the same line.

*With money, you can buy a clock, but not time.  
With money, you can buy medicine, but not health.  
With money, you can buy a mansion, but not tranquility at home. With money, you can buy a bed, but not a good night's sleep...Maybe you can add some, yourself.*

My 12 year old son had a great filler. With money, you can buy a streimel, Borsalino black hat or yarmulke, but not Fear of Heaven. His older brother added, "With money, you can buy sefarim, but not Torah knowledge".

At the end of the day, everything valuable has a price, and to achieve your desired life value, you usually need to pay the price in full, and in advance. The price of health is usually proper eating habits, exercise, sleep, doctor visit, and stress management. The price of a tranquil home is making it home for dinner, Triple A (Attention, Affection, and Appreciation), filling your family's needs, and stress management. The price of a good night's sleep is time management, family management, digital addiction management, and you guessed it, stress management. And most of the time, people are more readily willing to pay the price of external things, like money, resources, and

other "things", than they are willing to pay the price of those really personal sacrifices. I.e., letting go of the past, admitting mistakes, adapting patience, ignoring comments, and tapping into the trait of resourcefulness.

But what is the price you need to pay to become a Talmid Chacham? Is it just getting a big fat Oz Vehadar Gemarah, a good study partner, a good seat in the Beit Midrash, and getting into a top shiur?

The ingredients to bake a Talmid Chacham is in the Mishna in the last chapter of Avot,(6;5) that lists the 48 קניינים, or ways to acquire Torah. If you are a yeshiva student, and you do not know that list well and are not working on it, it is like driving your car without any motor oil. You will burn out your engine before you reach your desired destination. If you are learning and not becoming wise, not seeing success, I guarantee you that most probably you are missing at least one of those 48 ingredients. The Talmud teaches that a person can know that he will not be successful in learning, if after five years of learning he did not yet see any positive results (Hullin 24a). But until you keep to those 48 things, you have never really given yourself a chance. You have never started your 5 years.

One of my favorites is Brian Tracy's book "21 Secrets of the Self-made Millionaire". It really spells out in a concise and clear way the main traits

of those who became wealthy. When coaching people for making a livelihood, I know that none of these 21 traits can be missing to attain true financial success. You see, these ingredients are the basic ingredients; if you do not follow them, if you do not enter all of the missing ingredients into your dough, if you did not follow the instructions, you have never really tried to bake your parnassah cake.

If you want to become a Talmid Chacham, you need to view your learning like a business man views his business. People who made money, worked hard to make money. In the Torah world, people are commonly referred to as either a “working guy” or a “learning guy”. This black and white thinking works against us, because the words of our inner lexicon pave the pathways of our thinking, and these two life “situations”, learning or working, are not mutually exclusive. Even if you are a learning guy, your learning will not be fruitful, if you do not relate to your learning as if you are working.

People who made money did not need their money to make their initial money, but their work ethic was their key to success. Many got up at 5 a.m. to maximize their workday, beat traffic and capitalize on those morning hours, when focusing is so much easier. The rule of 40+ hours a week says that you need to spend more time than the average 40 hours a week of work, to be ahead of the business game and attain wealth. You need to work all the time

you work, with a minimum of socializing, as that can be a formidable source of procrastination. The people who are in the really high income brackets of self earned wealth practice frugality, questioning every expenditure. One such wealthy man I personally know, does not allow the secretaries in his office to print on only one side of a piece of paper, just to keep the frugality atmosphere in the office. These are all just a few of the ingredients of the self made millionaire. And the same is true in acquiring Torah.

Successful students come to the study hall on time and leave on time, without wasting a minute in between, just as if they were at work. No socializing. They come earlier than expected and leave after everyone else. They are willing to give up worldly pleasures, practicing frugality, and they are willing to pay the price of the 48 characteristics one needs in order to become a Talmid Chacham.

It is not one specific ingredient of the 48 ingredients that make the Talmid Chacham. It is what Brian Tracy calls the Law of Integrated Complexity. The more strengths, knowledge and resources you integrate into your business model, the greater the sum total of your performance. The total becomes greater than the sum of its individual parts. The more skills a person has – the better and more proficient the all-around successful will be.

The same is true in regards to your performance in learning Torah. The more you acquire of these 48 ingredients, the more unstoppable you become.

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