



# THINKING about ME.org

## WHY ME?

In his book, Learned Optimism, Martin Seligman, the forefather of modern-day positive psychology, breaks down positive thinking to 3 P's. Permanent – *Is the problem/offense/issue at hand one that is permanent?* Pervasive – *Is the problem/offense/issue at hand perceived as bigger than it really is?* Personal - *Is the problem/offense/issue at hand something that should be taken personally?*

Positive people perceive problems as transitory, not permanent. Positive people believe that problems/challenges should not be taken personally. Positive people do not take their challenges as “all-encompassing” – that they are spread over the entire range of their life. Negative people are the opposite. They take things personally, or they believe that the problem/offense/issue is permanent, or they perceive the issue as pervading their entire reality.

When things go wrong in life, a person can ask, ‘Why me?’, as if he feels that G-d has something against him, personally. This is worse than thinking that your problems are permanent, or that your problems are worse than they are.

Mordechai Shapiro recently released a new hit song, called One in a Million. *“I know in my heart, that no one can play my part”*. The “Why me?” question, itself, is always a question that is asked out of self-pity. As Shapiro sings, *I look into the mirror and I ask, what do I gain when I compare and I contrast?* What a mistake to compare one’s

self to others, something that makes one take things in a personal way.

Noach knew this. The people of the world, then, were still suffering from the curse Adam brought to the world by eating the forbidden fruit. There was a folktale at the time that the curse would end, only when a child was born circumcised. Noach was that child. *וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר נֹחַ יִנְחֵנוּ מִמַּעַשְׁבֵּנוּ. וַיִּמְעַצְבֹּן גִּיּוֹנוֹ מִן־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָה יְקוּקָ: Lemech, Noach's father, named him Noach, saying, “This one will bring us relief from our work and from the anguish of our hands, caused by the soil that G-d has cursed” . R' Yehuda Hachasid was quoted saying that Noach was the first freak of humanity. He was born with fingers. Everyone before him had mitted hands, like Lego and Playmobil people. That is why *they* could plow with their hands. But Noach could not plow with his hands. He had fingers. What a weirdo! But Noach knew that comparison is the thief of joy. He knew the mantra that - *When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade*. So, he invented the first manmade machine. The plow. Noach was the greatest inventor of his time; he changed the world forever. Had he compared himself to others, what they have and what he does not, he would have robbed himself and the world of what only he could achieve. (See Rosh Breshit 5)*

Pinchas knew this. He was the only descendant of Aharon who was not a Kohen. He was born before the cutoff time, and was not anointed along with his father, uncles and grandfather (Rashi 25;13). Pinchas ignored the “Why me?” voice,... ”Why



was I left out?" Instead, Pinchas found a deeper, more positive inner voice to listen to. "When you feel depressed or anxious or different, congratulate yourself. You have now joined the club of everyone who has ever made a difference in the world."

And Pinchas found that moment. He was the only one who could face the Angel of Death and save the Jewish Nation from the plague that had already killed 24,000 people. If Pinchas would have become a kohen prior to killing Zimri and Kozbi, he would have been disqualified from bringing a Korban, or from being fit to participate in Birkat Kohanim. (Sh'A OH 128;35) This is why, only after this act of zealousness, G-d made Pinchas a Kohen.

If we look at life in a positive way, as if yesterday, today, and tomorrow are all part of one big story that only G-d can orchestrate, it can shed light on and give meaning to our problems. Pressure is what turns coal into diamonds, and it's what turns lemons into lemonade. Difficulties turn the regular characters of the story into legends. Characters can't develop and grow without hardships, and only after facing hard times, you come out stronger and more confident. You really become "one in a million".

As we begin the period of The Three Weeks, the "Why me?" question is not just a question that is asked by many on a personal scale. It is asked by many on a national level, as well. "Why us?" Why do we, the Jewish Nation, need to go through so many difficulties, hardships, programs, exiles, genocide? Aren't we "The Chosen Nation"?

We cannot justify asking "Why me?", only when things go wrong. We must ask it when things go right, as well. We must look at the world, knowing that difficulties have in them something amazing. Something that we can grow from. Here is yet another amazing Chidush in Dikduk. כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחה *Anyone who mourns over Yerushalayim ... Merits and sees its happiness.* (Taanit 30b) Why is this said in the present tense? Why does it not say, ...*Will merit and see*, in the future tense?

*Any generation in which the Beit Hamikdash is not built, it is considered [as if] it was destroyed in its day.* (Yerushalmi Yoma 1;1) Mourning over Jerusalem is mourning over what we could have been, and were not. If only we could be more. More kind. More loving. More forgiving. More accepting. More humble. More believing. More fiery in our prayers. This is what the Talmud is telling us. If you mourn over what you could have been, and not what you lack, then you will find happiness, in the present. And this is what purifies us. Like the word זוכה, merits, which also connotes, טָהוֹר, pure. Mourning over what we could have been is what polishes our souls, in the present.

Problems and issues are not permanent. It is only our negative thinking that, unfortunately, sometimes stays permanent. Sometimes, people ask, "Why did I have to receive this difficult child? Why Me?" Dan's son, Chushim, was his only child. A deaf child. Binyamin, on the other hand, had 10 children. When the Torah takes a consensus of these two tribes, years later in the desert, G-d makes a point of placing the two extreme numbers one next to the other. Binyamin had the least of all the tribes, 35,400, while Dan had second to the most, after only Yehuda, 62,700.

All the negative Ps are rooted in Shiflut, the feeling of worthlessness. All this negativity is the Avodah Zarah of Pe'or. Pe'or was an idol that was worshiped by degrading it. *This idol must be so powerful, for no matter how much you belittle it, it does not respond!!!* The power of belittlement, the belief that you are worthless, is the sin of the idol of Pe'or. How low can you go? How far can you believe in your worthlessness, and still stay sane? The very opposite of Judaism!!! Judaism tells us that you can never begin to imagine how much G-d appreciates every Amen that you say. Every Amen, Yehe Sheme Rabba. Every word of Torah. Every blessing, each kindness, every feeling of appreciation that you have, every time that you stand strong in your values. Judaism believes that you are really, "one in a million".

So how does one switch from being a negative person to a positive person? Here are the **Selfie Steps**, the practical self-help steps one can take to make the perspective switch, in your relationship with G-d, and your relationship with others.

1. Know your worth. Meditate on how you cannot even fathom how important you are to G-d and how much He loves you. Ask the “Why Me?” question when things are going right in life, when you notice that you are actually blessed.
2. In your interpersonal relationships, when confronted negatively, make believe that you are in the customer service department.

A: Don't take it personally: Understand that most angry customers are not angry with you, but rather with the situation in which they currently find

themselves. It's not about you; it's about them and what they are dealing with.

B: Let them “vent”. Sometimes, people just need to be heard.

3. In our relationship with G-d, instead of taking difficulties personally, have patience. Don't jump to conclusions. Look at the difficulty as part of a much greater script.
4. Fill your calendar. Do not let the problems/ confrontations/ issues of life take a disproportionate amount of your time.

## JUDAISM 50% OFF

In this week's Parasha, the Midrash says אָלְךָ לַמִּטָּה וְאַלְךָ לַמִּטָּה לְכָל מִטּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּשְׁלַח לְצָבָא: When Moshe sent men from the Tribes to fight against Moab, G-d told him *to send out a thousand from each Tribe, a thousand from each Tribe, for all the Tribes of Israel, you should send to the army* (31, 4). The Midrash Rabbah asks why the Torah mentions “a thousand for each tribe” twice. The Midrash answers that for each thousand warriors that were sent, there were a thousand Torah scholars designated to pray for success in battle.

How many people learn Torah in Israel? According to a recent study by Yated Neeman together with Vaad Hayeshivot, in Israel there is a total of 125,000 students learning Torah: 35,000 students in “Yeshiva Gedolah”, 30,000 in “Yeshiva Ketana” and 60,000 in Kollel. The Israeli army in July, 2015, had 176,500 soldiers and 445,000 men in the reserves.

But would it not help if we sent all those yeshiva boys to the army, adding more forces? More numbers? More Hishtadlut? The Rebbe from Tshebin gave an example: A certain wagon driver's load was so heavy that the horses couldn't pull the wagon uphill. The driver started unloading the weight from the wagon piece by piece, but to no avail. Out of despair, the frustrated wagon driver decided to take off the big, heavy steel wheels of the wagon, thinking that by doing so, he'd help the wagon go up hill... Reducing parts of our Tefilla,

removing anything from Torah with the idea that we are increasing hishtadlut, or making things easier, is like taking off the wheels of the wagon...

At times, we feel that our religion is holding us down. Take the Three Weeks, as an example. At times we feel that period of the Three Weeks is somewhat an inconvenience, something we just want to get over with. But this is a HUGE mistake. The Three Weeks, the 21 days, are the essence of our relationship with G-d, where we connect to G-d on a new level, feeling His pain. His being exiled, along with His children, from His Home. This is the seed, the root, the wheels, the catalyst for our joy in the upcoming High Holidays. These days are so great they parallel the 21 days from Rosh Hashanna until Hoshana Rabbah, the days of forgiveness and holiday. (Maharsha Bchorot, 8a). No one would want to “just get over with” the High Holidays.

Thinkingaboutme is strictly a Parasha sheet, written strictly for people who want to improve themselves and live better lives as better Jews. Generally, Thinkingaboutme readers are “allergic” to politics. It's just one of those topics that tends to push people apart, not bring together. But when PM Netanyahu defended Israel's rights to the Ma'arat Hamachpela, he started his speech wearing a black yarmulke, mentioning the pesukim in Chaye Sarah that discuss how Avraham bought the land from the people.

וישמע אברהם אל־עפרון וישקל אברהם לעפרון את־הכסף אשר  
דבר באזני בני־חת ארבע מאות שקל כסף עבר לסחר...  
ואחר־כך קבר אברהם את־שרה אשתו אל־מערת שדה  
המכפלה על־פני ממרא הוא הקרון בארץ כנען: וליקם השדה  
ונהמרה אשר־בו לאברהם לאחוזת־קבר מאת בני־חת

That was beautiful, a true Kiddush Hashem. The nation's leaders bring Psukkim of the Torah to be the first line of defense to the UN, or to the nations of the world, proving that we have the rights to the Land. How sad though, that before PM Netanyahu continued his speech, he took off his yarmulke. I don't understand politics; I am not well versed in the political scene, and I don't want to be. But, it bothered me how our PM quickly switched *conveniently* from being religious to being what is referred to as a "secular" Jew. On a world-public platform...

And then, it bothered me even more, how I feel about myself, with *my* relationship to G-d. How, sometimes, I switch from who I want to be to who I am, and back again, at *my convenience*. But Judaism is just not that type of religion. It is not known for being convenient.

In Judaism, not a single one of the Mitzvoth can be missed or ignored, no matter how inconvenient it may be. And sometimes, it is those inconveniences in our religion that make all the difference. This is something we can all learn from Bilaam's donkey. When the donkey reprimanded Bilaam, he said, "... *and now, you hit me three times.*" However, instead of using the word פעמים for the word "times", the donkey used the word רגלים, or *occasions*. Literally, the word רגל means foot. He hinted to him – you are seeking to uproot a nation that celebrates שלשה רגלים – three festivals, each year! (Rashi 22;28) Why did the donkey mention, out of all the mitzvoth of the Torah, the merit that the Jews have for celebrating the three festivals?

A beautiful answer is given by the *Melo Ha'Omer*. We find in the Midrash that G-d asked Bila'am – "It is your wish to curse and uproot the Jewish nation? Who, then, will keep the Mitzvoth of the Torah, if not the Jews?" Bila'am, may his name be erased, said, "I will".

*This* is what the donkey was telling him, but Bila'am did not understand: Every year, three times a year, the Jews celebrate the festivals and keep the mitzvah of ascending to Jerusalem *by foot*. Now, it is to this fact that the donkey was referring when he exchanged the word "times" with "occasions", hinting at the Three Pilgrimages, known as שלשה רגלים, of the Jewish year. The Halacha is that only a person who can *walk up* the mountain to Har Habayit has the mitzvah of Oleh Laregel. Being that Bilaam was crippled in one leg, he could not take the place of the Jews in keeping the mitzvoth, for he was exempt from this just one of the 613- *walking by foot up the mountain of the Temple three times a year!* If not for this *one* mitzvah, Bila'am could have cursed us and destroyed us. *How ironic that the one Mitzvah that saved us is a Mitzvah that is not exactly convenient! Walking up a steep hill, by foot!*

We do not know what even one mitzvah can do for us, and that is why you can't get the 613 at a discount of 50% off. Judaism is not a cocktail of options in which you can pick and choose what you like, at your convenience. This is because Judaism is a package deal, like any relationship. Sometimes we feel that davening, learning, doing mitzvoth take a toll on our schedule, on our energy, on our finances. But those inconveniences in the religion are the wheels of your relationship with G-d. These are the wheels to get us to where we want to go. Removing them will get us nowhere.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H