



Parashat Vayechi



English version

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HOW TO SOLVE EVERYONE'S PROBLEMS

Unfortunately, we can't solve most of the problems of most of the people in our lives. Unfortunately, there is only a certain amount of charity we can give, only a certain amount of extra time and energy we have. Unfortunately, there is only a certain amount of care and heart that we can slice into so many small pieces.

R Yohanan taught us something that can change that. *It is greater to give someone a bright white smile, more than giving him a cup of milk.* The source for this is from the words in the passuk in this week's parasha. וּלְכֹרֶן שִׁנַּיִם מִהֶלֶב (Bereshit 49). R Yohanan teaches not to take these words only literally, but to learn the following lesson. אל תקרי "ולכן שנים אלא וליבון שיניים (כתובות קיא. ב.)" *Read in this passuk, that "whitening teeth," smiling, is greater than giving a cup of milk.*

Three questions. Why is greeting someone with a smile greater than giving specifically a cup of milk? Why did R Yohanan use milk to express his point, why not chocolate chip cookies? Why specifically milk?

Another question. Imagine two people standing at Metlife stadium at the outset of Siyum Hashas. They are competing who could be a bigger Baal Chessed, who can be more altruistic. One pays money to hand out cups of warm, Cholov Yisrael milk to 97,000 people. And the other stands at the entrance, smiling and greeting 97,000 people. Who did more Chessed? R' Yohanan says it's not the one who gave the milk. It's the one who smiled! How does that make sense?

We know that the Torah compares a human being to a tree. וְכִי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׁדֶה. What is the meaning of this comparison? In what way is a human similar to a tree?

A tree will die without sunshine, without warmth. Love, care, and warmth are human emotional needs; they are oxygen to the ego. If you smile to your children, students, spouses, in-laws, employers, employees, neighbors, siblings, to the people you meet each day, you are giving them their emotional oxygen.

In ancient medicine, when someone got sick, it is usually because the person is worried, angry, or stressed. These negative emotions cause the person to become heated up, and heating the system makes it sick. The way to cool down the system was to drink milk. R' Yohanan is teaching us that a better way to help someone angry or stressed or worried is by smiling to him with a broad, genuine smile. By being as optimistic as you can be with them, this can cure them more than the best medicine. This is greater than solving their problems for them. Because lack of emotional oxygen is the root of so many issues. R Yohanan chose specifically milk to teach us that a smile can cure what medicine can't. (Ein Yitzhak)

A smile tells its receiver – "I respect you. I accept you. You are important." Milk does not do that. Milk, even if it has a physical cure to it, it is only a physical cure. A smile is an emotional cure. According to a study done at Uppsala University in Sweden in 2014, it is tough for one to stay angry

and worried, with a worried or angry face, while looking at a person who is smiling with a genuine smile on his face.

Everyone knows that the best Abbas and Imas, are the smiley Abbas and Imas. The best Rebbeim, teachers, and tutors are the smiley ones. The best employers, best employees, are the smiley ones. I made a big mistake a few years back Erev Rosh Hashana. I wanted to take on myself something small that would have an overall impact on my whole performance as a Jew. I decided to take upon myself to smile to everyone I meet and become an overall more smiley person. Unfortunately, it did not work. New Year's resolutions need to be simple. Changing a middah, is not simple. It is easier to finish Shas, and not because finishing Shas is easy.

What is the secret of those who are able to smile to everyone? Are they mentally strong, or are they emotionally tough? People who can smile "whatever the weather" have a particular formula. They schedule time to worry, label their emotions, accept what they can't change, and they take on the problems they can. They know how to cheer themselves up when the going gets rough.

Last two weeks, I did not write. I had a hard time to smile. I have a bill of 7000 shekel from the printer for printing parashah sheets, and I can't continue without more financial aid. But then I realized I couldn't afford to stop writing. Writing my ideas, helping people with my self-reflectiveness, cheers me up more than anything else.

So how does one solve as many problems for as many people as possible? Here are the Selfie steps!

1. Donate to my parashah sheets.
2. Keep donating to my parasha sheets — five dollars a month, for a year.
3. Tell everyone you know who has a Leiluy Nishmat or Refua Shelema of a loved one, everyone who you know that enjoyed my parasha sheets, to donate so that there will be more parasha sheets.

I am just kidding. Here are the Selfie Steps to access the emotional energy you need to smile a genuine smile to as many people as you can.

1. Slow down and enjoy the moment. Take a deep breath. Inhale and exhale, slowly, focusing on enjoying the moment that G-d has given you. Just for a moment, try and let go of the past and future, and things you have no control over.
2. Practice smiling first thing in the morning. Make it a conscious decision first thing in the morning that you will smile to as many people as you could, as this is the best and only thing you can probably do to help them.
3. Smile, not because other people expect you to, (which can have a negative effect) but because you have so much to smile about. G-d has blessed you with so much good!!! Smile inwards, towards yourself, as you deserve a boost in positivity, and you will smile outwardly. And then, watch how your smile spreads positivity like magic!
4. Stop trying to solve everyone else's problems.
5. Think happy thoughts, happy memories. Meditating on gratitude is a sure smiley solution.
6. Know what cheers you up, and what calms you down. Torah. Music. Good food. Nature. Gym. Volunteer work. Take a break from digital devices and spend more time with those you love.
7. Believe that G-d is with you, that G-d loves you, that G-d believes in you, that G-d is Infinite, and He has infinite solutions.

THE ETERNAL INTERNAL CONFLICT

When you think of all your inner conflicts and put them out there on paper, you will notice how many there are. *Should I stay later at the party, or should I get up early to pray like a mensch? Should I protect my best friend, or should I be honest when asked information regarding a shidduch? Should I work harder or be calmer? Am I who I was, or am I who I want to be?*

Who are you, anyway? The you that wants to be slim and fit, or the you who wants to eat *sufganiyot*? *Life seems to consist of struggle between short-sighted self and long-sighted self; balancing these two is an art* (Daniel Kahneman). In the course of the day, a person is said to average between 12,000 and 70,000 thoughts (National Science Foundation). That is quite a range. Even at the lower end, is it possible that all 12,000 thoughts are really you? So, how do I know who the real me is?

One music composer complained to his psychologist, *the tune in my head keeps interfering with the song in my heart*. It seems that everyone has the *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* syndrome, and *Man is truly not one, but truly two*. G-d created man with this syndrome. וַיִּצְרֵם יְקִיָּק אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם. Why are there two “yuds” in the Hebrew word, “and He created”? R’ Shimon Ben Pazi teaches אוֹי לי מִיִּצְרֵי וְאוֹי לי מִיִּצְרֵי. That man’s life is the balance between *Woe is to me from my G-d*, versus *Woe is to me from my Inclinations*. (Berachot 61a) The internal conflict between my G-d and my Inclination is an eternal one.

This is true for all humanity as a whole, but no being on the planet is more *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* than the Jew. Rabbeinu Bachye learns all this from our Parasha. Why does the Torah sometimes refer to Yaakov as Yaakov וַיִּקְרָב וַיִּשְׁקֹב and sometimes refer to him as Yisrael לְמִוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל? Didn’t the angel already say that Yaakov’s name should be changed to Yisrael וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יִשְׁקֹב יִצְחָק עוֹד שְׁמֶךָ בִּי אָם-יִשְׂרָאֵל?

The answer is that Yaakov is the sub-name. While Yisrael is the name of glory. And it is not a contradiction. And every time Yaakov is called Yaakov, and not Yisrael, it was intentional. The

name Yaakov is for the body, when busy with bodily, physical, materialistic, Olam Haze, exile, or death. And the name Yisrael is used in connection with G-dliness, Olam Haba, living in E Yisrael... And also we find that Yisrael refers to men, while Yaakov refers to the women, כָּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל. For the woman’s role is to make the home a place from which the spirituality of the man that lives there can soar.

It is impossible for man to be only spiritual, to be only Yisrael and to disregard Yaakov. One cannot live without the material, the physical – in short, without Olam Haze. As the Talmud teaches, in contrast to the name change of Avraham and Sarah, the name of Yisrael does not nullify the name of Yaakov. (Berachot 13) Rather, a person should consider the G-dly component of himself as the main one, and the physical body as secondary. And when a person allows himself to be enticed by bodily indulgences, he is Yaakov and not Yisrael... (See R Bachye)

When Yaakov heard that Yosef was alive and he rejoiced in his heart once again, Ruach Hakodesh returned to Yaakov. And right then, the name Yisrael returned to him. וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עוֹד-יוֹסֵף בְּנִי הָיָה. The last time before this that Yaakov was called Yisrael was the last time he saw Yosef, before he was sent to look for his brothers. When Yaakov is told to go down to the Egyptian exile, or told of death or of losing his Ruach Hakodesh, he is, again, referred to as Yaakov.

It is so strange how sometimes, within the same episode, or even in the same passuk, Yaakov can be both Yaakov and Yisrael. When G-d revealed Himself to Yaakov to tell him that he should go down to Egypt, the passuk says. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׁקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּבִּי: *And Elokim said to Yisrael in the visions of the night, and He said, Yaakov, Yaakov, and he (Yaakov) said, here I am (I am ready).* How do we reconcile the use of two names in the same passuk?

The Baal Haturim always has phenomenal insights. *The letter ש of the name Yisrael here in the Torah scroll has 7 “crowns”. This is because*

we know that a Tzaddik falls 7 seven times in his life and arises (Mishlei 24 16). For Yaakov, at this point, had encountered 7 challenges, and he was saved from all of them. Esav, Lavan, the Angel, Dinah, Yosef, Shimon, and Binyamin (See Tanchum Miketz 10, BR 79a).

So, a Jew has ups and downs. A Jew has emotions. A Jew has tests in life. And no matter what test you are going through, G-d prefers you more than anything else in His Universe. *כִּי־יֵצֵאֲכֶם בְּתֶרֶן לִי יְהוָה לְשׂוֹרְאֵל לְסִגְלָתוֹ*: For G-d has chosen Yaakov for Himself (Tehillim 135; see Malbim) You are G-d's favorite, even when you can't stand yourself.

It is impossible to eradicate emotion; it is only possible to ignore it, or to question its truth. Emotions come and emotions go, but the values you respect define who you really are. The person you are is the person you fight to stand up to become. You are the person you pray to G-d that He let you be. Yaakov reached the point of deserving seven crowns for having met seven major challenges in his life and "getting up" after each one. This ability to get up again is the glorious Yisrael, even if he is on his way down to exile.

This problem of not tapping into the Yisrael we are inside is the reason why we don't have the Beit Hamikdash today. As the Messilat Yesharim writes in chapter 19, *"And if a person says, who am I? And what have I, hidden inside me, that I can pray for the end of the exile, for Jerusalem, etc... Can my prayers gather in the exiles? And sprout a redemption? The answer is like we learnt (Sanhedrin 38): For this, a person is created alone, in order that each person can say, "For me, the world was created", and this brings G-d pleasure, that his sons pray for the Beit Hamikdash. And even if his prayers are not answered immediately, for the time has not yet come, or for some other reason, still, he has done his part, and G-d is happy with this..."* The reason why the Temple is not rebuilt, the reason why Mashiach is not here, is because we do not believe in ourselves; we do not recognize that our prayers can make a difference. We do not realize that the world that each and every one of us finds himself in, is the world that was created for that person. This is the belief of the Yisrael. Only by realizing that even when we are in the Yaakov mode G-d loves us more than anything, will the Yisrael in each one of us shine.

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