



Parashat Ki Tisa



English version

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## THE ART OF PATIENCE

The episode of the Golden Calf is one of the hardest episodes to understand, when reading the text as is, without the help from the Oral Torah and commentaries. Only after learning the story in depth, can we understand Aharon's behavior; we can understand that it was not the Jews who sinned with the Calf, but the Erev Rav, the Egyptian converts who joined the nation. It was they who murdered Chur and who did witchcraft to hurry up the process that Aharon tried slowing down. The Jews, themselves, had patience to wait another 6 hours for Moshe to return; they had already waited 210 years to be redeemed. The sin of the Jews, though, was that they did not stand up against the idol worshippers, so they needed to take responsibility for what happened. Instead of G-d destroying the nation, He spread the punishment of the Sin of the Calf over the generations. We are paying the price for that sin until today, because we still have traces of the behavior that caused the Sin of the Calf.

I was asked the other day, what is the difference between Emunah, which is Faith in G-d, and Bitachon, which is Trust in G-d. In general, Emunah, *knowledge* that G-d exists, cares and is involved from the past until the present, is the basis for Bitachon, the *feeling* that you can trust Him to exist, care, and be involved, in your *future*. Emunah is the same root of וַיְהִי אֱמוּנָתְהוֹדוֹתָהּ הָיָא כְּאֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂא הָאֱמוּנָה and אֶסְתַּר בְּתַדְדוֹ כִּי אִין לָהּ אֵב וְאָם אֶת־הַיִּלָּק which refer to the way you were brought up, and how you were nurtured, because Emunah is

recognizing that G-d brought you up, and nurtured you, from the very beginning.

Just because you have Emunah, it does not mean you took it to the next level, the level of Bitachon. Lack of patience, anxiety, worry, are all by-products of a lack of Bitachon, not relying on G-d.

Patience, according to Judaim, is rooted in humility, as we find how Rashi describes the word Humble in the following Passuk וְהָאִישׁ מִשָּׂה עָנָו וְהָאִישׁ מִשָּׂה עָנָו Rashi explains that humble means patient because real patience is relying on G-d, trusting in Him, because you know that until now, He exists, cares and is involved. Acquisition of humility is the direct result of internalizing faith.

Studies have shown that people who internalize faith and trust in G-d behave differently than those who do not. In a study published in January 2012 in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, researchers found that religious participants had extra abilities to resist the temptation of junk food. (The bad news is that those who frequently attend religious parties, i.e., Kiddush, Bar or Bat Mitzvahs, weddings and other events, are 50 percent more likely to be obese by middle age, than those who don't attend religious events.) Religious people tend to live longer. They tend to be happier and are better at dealing with setbacks, better at recovering from depression and dealing with the anxiety associated with making mistakes. And religious people tend to be healthier and have lower blood pressure, all dependent on



how much they internalize that all is for the best, and that G-d is supervising every aspect of our lives.

In business, there is a saying: Just because you know how to bake, does not mean that you can be a baker. And just because you can be a baker, it does not mean you can run a bakery. The same is true in Judaism. Just because you were born a religious Jew and you went to Jewish schools, it doesn't mean that your lifestyle is Jewish. And just because you live a Jewish lifestyle, it does not mean that you are actually practicing Judaism. To practice Judaism is defined not only by what you do, not only by what you say, but also by how you think and feel.

The funny thing in dealing with anxiety over what the future will bring is that positive thinking does not help. When a client comes to me to be coached out of anxiety, I know that they tried thinking positive, but it won't work. So, I take a different approach: Every emotion G-d created has a purpose. Anxiety and stress are good, when they are purposeful and act as a propeller and bring you to perform, to mobilize yourself, to hustle, reach a deadline, make an important decision, take a worthwhile risk. But they are not good when they block relationships, cause inactivity, or a sense of feeling frozen in your tracks.

Instead of trying to help them think positive, I ask the client to imagine how they would behave and feel if they stopped feeling anxious. Without anxiety, do you have more time to solve another problem, exercise regularly, connect through joy, give love, focus on career, complete projects, connect with family?

But the most powerful way of helping the client is by bringing him to a recognition that G-d is waiting for them to rely on Him. This is why, when I have the opportunity to take my clients for a drive and talk, I offer a drive of 10 minutes to Kever Rachel, to pray at one of the holiest places in the world.

People who live with anxiety don't realize it, and people who live with anxiety-ridden people don't

notice how much it effects the normalcy and calm of life. It is like sitting in a boiling hot jacuzzi: eventually, you don't feel that the temperature is boiling, and it is not supposed to be this way! It is only from a place of calm that you can give out positive energy and positive vibes to the people you meet and live with. And only from a point of serenity that it is enjoyable to spend time with you, do you become a person that is easy for others to love you.

The rest of the Jews were held accountable for not having stopped the Egyptian converts. Why didn't they stop them? Because anxiety, like all emotion, is a super-spreader. The Erev Rav could not wait for just 6 more hours. *נִרְאָה הָעָם כִּי־בָעֵשׂ מֵעֵשָׂה*. All humans have this impatience, this anxiety. It was one of the roots of Adam's sin; he could not wait a few more hours until Shabbat, when he would be allowed to eat the Forbidden fruit. (Zohar) G-d even created Adam on Friday, so that it would not be so hard to wait. But Adam failed this test, and so do we. Aharon knew that the secret to fight the Yetzer Hara, is *מָחָר*, waiting for tomorrow, pushing the Yetzer Hara off to later. Push him off for a few minutes. And then, a few minutes later, push him off for just another few minutes, until he is completely gone. Because the secret weapon of the Yetzer Hara is the excitement of the moment. The anxiety, the uncomfortableness and uneasiness of the Now.

The emotion of anxiety, the need to get things done, the inner voice that doesn't stop saying ***Do it Now!*** is a very Jewish emotion. Jews are known to be the first ones to stand up when the plane lands, to come up with solutions, to try new ideas. The Talmud tells us that the Gentile calls us *עַמָּא פּוֹזִיזָא*, a nation that acts without thinking, for we accepted the Torah not knowing what it contained, when we said *נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע*. (Shabbat 88a) But at the same time, G-d wants us to follow in His ways, and to be *אֲרֻךְ אַפַּיִם*, to be masters of patience. On the High Holiday prayer of *וּנְתַנֶּה תוֹקֵף*, we praise G-d that *וְעַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תַּחֲכֶּה לוֹ*, that G-d waits for a person to do Teshuva, until his last day.

When G-d asked us to build His Mishkan, it was referred to as משכן העדות, the Tabernacle of Testimony, as it was testimony to the Jews that G-d forgave them the sin of the Golden Calf. Although the Jews built the Mishkan with lightning speed and utmost precision from Sukkot until the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev, G-d asked Moshe to fold it all up and put it away and wait until Rosh Hodesh Nissan, three months later, to set it up again. Why? To teach them patience, which lack of which was the root of the sin of the Golden Calf. What was special about Rosh Hodesh Nissan, though? Rosh Hodesh Nissan was the birthday of Yitzhak, the master of self-sacrifice. The only way to become patient is by acting with self-sacrifice, going against our hasty nature.

Selfie steps to patience and trusting G-d.

1. So many problems in life have no other cure than patience. Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet. Great things take time to evolve naturally.

2. In order to be patient with the world, you need to be patient with yourself, first. Understand how patience is the key to getting along with people. People need time to figure things out, to put words to their thoughts.

3. Patience does not mean inactivity. Patience is also a form of action. Here is the Triple A model. Become **Aware** of the situation of the setback and *stuckness*, and all the people involved. **Accept** the situation and where you are. And only then, take **Action**. Once you have made an honest assessment of the situation, of what you have control over and what you don't, your actions will be more effective.

4. When G-d puts you in the Waiting Place, take that opportunity to patiently reevaluate your life, to engage in retrospection, and learn some humility.

## Question of the week

**Q: Rabbi Farhi, I need your help. I am at the end of the Zman, the end of the winter semester. My learning partner is not into learning these days. I have a hard time motivating myself, when the system that usually keeps me in the zone, fell apart. Please help me that I don't fall out of the learning zone.**

**Tzvi K.**

A: Tzvi, it is great to see that you are motivated to reach out and be vulnerable that you are human and not always able to perform your best. The first step to greatness is to learn your weaknesses so that you can avoid them.

Systems are important for growth in all life areas. SYSTEMS stand for Save Yourself Stress Time Energy Money. This way you move beyond the Just Surviving state. This is an important lesson you learn for life, how dependent we are on structure in order for us to perform our best. And many times in life, we find ourselves without structure, and it is up to us to build the structure for ourselves.

Learn to reach out to others, for help. I know this from my own personal experience, from coaching others and being coached. I don't have a job, a boss, a structure, but I have a coaching business where I have to perform. The definition of a business is creating clients and maintaining them. To be on top of my game, I need to be on top of my calendar. I pay more than one coach, in full, and in advance, to make sure that I have who to answer up to, someone to be accountable to.

There were Yeshiva students that reached out to me during Covid, that had no structure. They would burn their day on screens, computer games, and other time wasters. They reached out to me, and I coached



them into becoming speed readers, speed typers, ironman achievers, time management pros, masters at people skills, or to break through addictions, to become a Baal Koreh, just to name a few. These clients say that the amount they grew during Covid, was more than they grew at any other time in life, and all because they had no structure to hold them down, by being coached, they were able to maximize their time to reach their personal goals.

I will never forget how my learning partner in Mir told me the warning sign to know when you will be faced with no structure in the Yeshiva world. All Bein Hazmanim start with a fast. Yom Kippur, Tisha Bav, and Taanit Esther. And the Sof Zman, the time when people start falling out of structure before it is over, is the fast before. Tzom Gedalyah, Shiva Asar BTamuz, and Assarah BTevet. But not always in life are you prepared and warned ahead of time, that you are about to be not busy, or to have no structure.

In life, in general, it is important to think ahead and write down ideas of what you wish you can do, even when you are busy in structure and the present structure does not allow it, but to at least write the ideas you want to do with your time, when you have a little time extra. For example, I have a few ideas, a few movements I wish to put in motion. I am passionate of teaching Lashon Hakodesh mastery and why and how it is so important. I am going through the Siddur, making the pointers of how mastering the language brings you to greater connection and communication with G-d. I am also passionate about teaching my Effective Learning Course. I also have a movement I am working on called Character King, a 40 week structure of self-improvement through a process of steps to implement to make your character strong. But I wait till I have some extra time in my schedule, to make these passions and dreams come into a reality. If you have down time, ask yourself what things you really wanted to achieve during the zman or semester, and make sure to get those things done, before you get busy again.

The way for you to bring structure to yourself, is to first and foremost, have two lists. List 1: What are you SMART goals, the accomplishments that would make you feel amazing that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time measured goals, for over the time that you have no structure. Then, you need to mark all those goals, which one is most important A B C D, and what is most urgent, 1234. Then, on list 2, you have a calendar, where you see how you can fit all those things that are amazing if you would achieve, onto your calendar. Make sure that you take care of most important things, first. And, make sure that your calendar is with you, at all times. The only way you will feel any structure is by following the schedule your designed, so that you won't live your down days by default. And if your phone calendar can ring to remind you of upcoming events, those reminders are extremely precious.

## REFRAMING QUARRELS WITH LOVE

Many couples live under the mistaken impression that *shalom bayit* (tranquility at home) means no fighting. This is very untrue. *Shalom bayit* means knowing *how* to fight. It means knowing how to make up. No two people are identical, and neither are their life perspectives. True love is existent in the new couple after their first disagreement. Until then, they simply did not know each other. Knowing how to disagree, without being degrading or insulting, means that there is mutual respect.

Making up and compromising means that the relationship is more important than the topic at hand. Many times, this requires a sense of reframing, a change in the way things are perceived.

Although the Jews sinned with the golden calf right after their commitment to G-d at Mt. Sinai, G-d showed us that He still desired to be among us. He told us that He wanted to be among us in a



Mishkan. This was the display of love that was greater than the offense.

Strangely, the Torah writes that it was not so simple. G-d told Moshe **וּבְיוֹם פְּקֻדֵי וּפְקֻדַתִּי עֲלֵהֶם** (32: 34) “And on the day that I make My account, I shall remember their Sin.” Rashi comments here that throughout the generations, when the Jews must suffer, G-d adds to their trials a bit of punishment for the Sin of the calf. If He were to have visited the whole punishment upon us all at once, we would have been annihilated! G-d broke the punishment to a “swallowable bite-size.”

R' Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev was troubled very much by this. *How could the All Merciful G-d write in His Torah that He would never forget our Sin, even after repentance?*

R' Levi Yitzchak, as he always does, was able to reframe even the greatest of sins. He pointed to the Talmud (Berachot 32) that G-d will actually “forget” the Sin following our repentance. Rather, the idea of the passuk is that G-d will never forget the Sin of the calf in the sense that *we had Free Will then*. When someone comes from a pious family and grows up to be pious, no eyebrows are raised. On the other hand, when someone pious comes from a house in which the family members

and their ancestors were anything *but* pious- this amazes people. When the Jews accepted the Torah, this did not show anything special about them – for the Jews were the descendants of the Holy Forefathers. What else could we expect from the descendants of such a family? *This was who they were naturally.*

When they sinned with the calf, this displayed that they actually were not pious at the core. It showed that the people who accepted the Torah did so, not only because they followed in their parents’ way; rather, it was because they overcame their desires. They rose to the challenge. When the Jews repent for such a sin, it is through a battle against an inner instinct for evil that all humanity must overcome. It shows that *we were not naturally pious.*

G-d will remember this Sin of the calf on the days of wrath. He will remember the inner power struggle between good and evil: that we decided of our own free will to listen to the Yetzer tov to accept the Torah. That we decided of our own free will to repent from the Sin. With this in mind and with the positive way in which He will look at it, G-d will count this for our merit.

In marital harmony, we can reframe the fights of the past and turn them into signs of love. This is the way of G-d. We are commanded to follow.

### A G-D Like I.D.

Some husbands believe that if they were richer, their wife would respect them more. If they could outsmart people, outdo her siblings or her friend’s husband, then their wife might love them more. There is no greater mistake a husband can make. A woman wants *one thing* from her husband. Sometimes she, herself, does not know what it is. Listen closely to a conversation of our ancestors. Here is the secret.

When our childless Matriarch, Rachel, desperately wanted a child, to be a Mother of the Tribes of G-d, she said to Yaakov, *Give me sons, and if not, I am dead.* Yaakov’s angry response was, *Am I in the position of G-d, that I held back children from you?!* R Y Davis zt”l, Rosh Hayeshiva of

Mountaindale Yeshiva asked, “What is going on in this conversation? Why is she addressing him *as if* he were G-d, and why is Yaakov answering that he is not? It sounds ridiculous, definitely not a conversation suitable for our Ancestors. The answer is, every woman looks to her husband for *support*, emotional, physical and financial, *as if he were G-d*. If he gives her that support, she will love him. If not, she will belittle him. The secret of husbands who get their wife to *genuinely* love and respect them is that they are G-d-like. Anything *resembling G-d* will do. Yaakov was the most G-d-like a husband can be. He was even given a name from Heaven with G-d’s name in it. **Yisrael**. Rachel, out of her tremendous pain, poured out her anguish to Yaakov. And Yaakov



answered, “I may be G-d-like, but I am not G-d. I can’t give you a child.”

What does it mean, to be G-d-like? How on earth are we husbands supposed to know?

I found that there are certain “things” that make people feel cool. This is a central concern in marketing. Steve Jobs knew math. *People want to feel cool. Innovative and Creative is cool. Different is cool. An Identity is cool. Not caring what other people think is cool. Infinite information at your finger tips is cool.* All this equals iPhone, iPod and iPad. They look different and work different. “*i*” is innovative; it’s identity. Steve got people wearing *white* headphones (free advertising for Steve), using different formats, accessing unique concepts (all, Apple products). If you are Apple, **you** are operating on a different OS. That’s cool. Steve knew what people identify with. And he sold them their identity. People will pay all the money they have for identity. And people like innovativeness. So, cool is creative, independent, and different. Steve knew that “no competition” is cool, and his products were uncompetitive. Does “no competition” sound G-d-like to you? Is there any being more creative than the Creator? Is there any being more independent or “different” than G-d? Does anyone have *information* available as G-d does? It seems as if Steve knew the elements of being cool, but he might not have known *why* these things as “cool”. And, Steve knew how to give an iPhone identity to an *unidentified generation*.

We live in a UFO generation. UFO –unidentified floating objects. People float till you slap an identity sticker on their back. Is your identity your career? Or maybe it’s the Sport team you are a fan of? Or is it the school you are in? Ever heard “It’s just not me. I can’t see myself doing it”? Well, who are **you**, anyway? It is amazing how people do not even think about something so personal and crucial in decision making as establishing consciously who they are. Or maybe people gave up guessing. *A woman likes to see in her husband an anchor. An identity.* And the supreme identity is a G-d like identity.

There is actually a mitzvah to be G-d-like. Rambam (De’ot 1;6) tells us that it is a mitzvah to emulate G-d’s ways והלכת בדרכיו. (Devarim 28; 9) ללכת בכל דרכיו. (Devarim 10; 12) *To go in His ways.* “What are the ways of G-d? רחום והנון... G-d is loving. He is merciful. He acts with grace. He does kindness to people, without payment. “מה הוא אף *Just as He is, so should you be...*” (Sifri Devarim 14)” Anything associated with G-dly behavior is something we should try our best to emulate. And be G-d-like. זה א-לי ואנוהו. This is my G-d and אנוהו. The Talmud explains this to mean אני והוא , *I am like Him.* I will be like Him. (Shabbat 133a) The Thirteen Attributes in this week’s parasha is a good place to start learning how to be G-d-like.

–ה’ ה’ *He loves you after your sin just as before.* Does someone who is cool take things personally, change his relationship with you after you slighted him? Not stressed is cool. Is G-d stressed? He is slow to anger. *Generally speaking, people who take things easy are people with identity.* They know where they are coming from. And they know where they are going. They have a goal and a purpose. *Their identity is not a brand name, a phone, the car they drive.* Their success is not measured *relative* to the success or failures of others. These are people of *truth*, not caring how their truth is perceived by others. *Real men.* Beware of counterfeits. Some people confuse being G-d-like with being G-d. They can’t lose an argument. Can’t get emotional. Can’t admit a mistake. “My way or the highway”.

We say in our prayers, *אתה גבור לעולם ה’.* *You are mighty forever, G-d.* A man, in our Holy Tongue, is called *גבר*. Some husbands think this means that their wife wants someone *mighty*. Someone who is *stronger than others*. No one can put him down. That is not what we are referring to in Amidah when we refer to G-d as *גבור*. The *Might*, there, is referring to G-d’s ability to watch over one sheep, the Jewish nation, amongst 70 wolves, the nations of the world. How have we survived, all this time? One of the wonders of the world. We have a Father who watches his Children, and takes responsibility for them.(Yoma 69b) Does a woman want someone

who will be responsible for watching her children?  
Or does she want a *hero*, a counterfeit G-d?

King Solomon, wisest of men, told us, טוב ארך אפים מלכד עיר *Better one who has slow to anger than the mighty warrior, and better one who rules his spirit than one who captures a city.* (Mishlei 16 32) Why did King Solomon call him “capturer of city”, and not “mighty” or a “warrior”? Because there are three types of גבור, three types of “mighty”. The lowest level is *relative*: he is stronger than someone else. The other person was weak, so he overcame him. Competitive sports – baseball, basketball, tennis, etc., -taught us that in order to “win”, you need to outdo someone else. It’s only a game, but it teaches the subconscious rules for life. Is your success in life standing on the loser’s shoulders? How am I supposed to know if I am successful, if I am not beating someone else? Where should I get my self-worth from, if I don’t win, if I am not the best, if I don’t get the highest mark, if I am not in first place? This is counterfeit might. It isn’t the real גבור; it is just a capturer. The truly mighty person, the warrior גבור, is the second level. He is mighty, not relatively, but in essence.

And then, there is the elite גבור. The כובש את יצרו, who captures his inclinations, temptations and emotions, to do what he knows he’s supposed to do. He rules his emotions and does not allow them to make him stray from his goals. He is the strongest, having no need to feel successful relative to others, because he has purpose and identity. His values are clear and in order of importance. He knows what is important in life, and he is in his life’s journey. He can overlook an insult, because he knows *who* he is. The insult is just a rock in the road, along his journey to what’s important. He doesn’t need confirmation in order to go on; so when he doesn’t get it, but gets an insult, it just rolls off his back. He’s got places to go, and is unstoppable.

If G-d prays, what does He pray for? יהי רצון מלפני שיכבשו רחמי את כעסי ויגולו רחמי על מדותי ואתנהג עם בני במדת רחמים ואכנס להם לפני משורת הדין *May it be the Will before Me, that My Mercy will overcome My Wrath, and My Mercy will supersede my Attributes of Justice and that I behave with My sons with*

*Mercy...* (Berachot 7a) When G-d wins this “inner” battle, He is the Mighty. This is the Might that G-d wants us to copy. Those who come early enough ask, in Shacharit, that G-d have mercy on us just as Avraham overcame his inner battle to bring his son on the altar. כמו שכבש אברהם אבינו את רחמיו לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם Overcoming his inner battle carries more merit than bringing his son on the altar. Because it is more G-d-like to overcome emotion, for a greater purpose.

BE DO HAVE – continuation from A G-dlike I.D.

Life decisions are complex. It is not the surrounding circumstances that make these life decisions complex. It is defining identity that is complex. For many people, the biggest life decision is marriage. Before any life decision one makes, one must know who he is, in order to be certain that his choices are, indeed, the right and suitable ones. Identity. After you read this article, you will know how to clarify your identity. After clarifying identity, you are ready for decision making. Making a difficult decision, weighing the options, mostly boils down to finding out who “I” in the decision is. A large percentage of the *shidduch crisis* of today is really nothing more than an identity crisis that has been brought to light. Today, to be a good shadchan, you need to be a good coach. To help people figure themselves out. To ask the right questions.

There are three big, loaded questions that get people thinking. What do you want to *have*? What do you want to *do*? What do you want to *be*? The last question cracks the combination to the identity vault. Once we understand these three, *have*, *do* and *be*, we will understand identity, and what people who have none use as their quasi identities.

What do you want to *have* in a week, month, year? “Have” includes any possessions you might want. It includes anything that people say they have. A nice marriage. A good relationship with a child. An ability to do something. “Have” goes two ways. It does not imply only ownership. It implies responsibility. *What things do you want to serve and be served by.* If you want to *have* children, a husband, or a wife, *you have to take*

*responsibility.* If you don't, if you want them to serve your needs while you disregard their needs, you won't have them anymore... Being a father or a husband is not your identity. It is your responsibility.

Question 2. What do you want to **do** this week, month, year? Profession. Career. Rabbi, doctor, lawyer, etc. Occupation. Hobbies. How do you want your schedule to look? This is what you enjoy doing, how you enjoy spending your time. **These two, what you have and what you do, are not your identity.** People who have no identity use them to identify themselves.

The golden question, the identity question is, "Who do you want to **be**?" You've got to know your **Bees**, all 3 **Bees**. How do you **Behave** at present? How do you envision your **Behavior**? Appreciative, courteous, calm and collected, egocentric or altruistic, intelligent, haughty or humble, passionate, respectful, straightforward and honest, etc. How do you react to various circumstances? For this **Be**, we have a Heavenly guideline. *מה הוא אף אתה*, the mitzvah to emulate G-d's ways. To be *בצר חסד*, keeping in mind the kindness done to you, to be constantly appreciative. *אמה*, to be honest and true. *ארך אפיים*, slow to wrath. Etc.

**Second Be. Beliefs. What do you believe has the greatest value out of the things that you value in life?** Spirituality or material physicality? Family responsibilities, family relationships or financial success? Kollel life or financial independence? Security or adventure? Most people go for a little of this and a little of that. And they get nowhere. Neither here nor there. Our Matriarch Rivkah, was confused during pregnancy. When she passed the Synagogue and study halls, she felt her baby kicking, as if he wanted to jump out to run to spirituality. When she passed the house of idol worship, she again felt the baby kicking as if he wanted to jump out and run towards idol worship. When she was told by the prophet that she had twins, one a tzaddik and one a rasha, *she was calm.* Her greatest fear was to have a child who is a little of this and a little of that. Half-half. Vanilla / Chocolate. Tzaddik / Rasha. In last week's haftarah, Eliyahu challenged the people of his

generation, Shomer Shabbat people who would serve idols after eating Chulent/Hamin. *Serve either G-d or your idol. Why jump on both sides?* I always wondered how Eliyahu Hanavi could make idols an option. The answer is when a person serves G-d **and** idols, he doesn't realize he is doing anything wrong. Serving idols *alone*, he might realize that this is not who he wants to be.

Do you value the next world, or this world? Most of the time, you can't have both. And when people go for both things they value, they usually end up with neither. Because your value is your motivation, the engine in your car. When you have opposing values, your car is going in opposite directions.

Third **Be.** *To whom and to which circles do you **Belong**?* With whom and what we associate ourselves is one of the most powerful influences on our identity. Such factors affect our decisions, giving us the impression that we didn't even have a choice. "*That's how it is*". Know this. A person is the sum total of his friends and the books he reads. People go a whole life not believing that their friends and associates will affect them. Just give it some time. It works like osmosis; values are contagious. Your identity will be formed by people with whom you associate. Others think that they don't belong to anyone. These people end up defining themselves through the things they have or the things they do. Because most people have an inner drive to belong to something, somewhere, or somebody. Something bigger than oneself. And most people have more than one thing, place, group, job, value, etc., that they belong to.

Having two contradictory communities, groups of friends, nationalities, can create somewhat of a dichotomy (especially for someone who is in the beginning stages of defining his identity). These identity questions are big and tough. Ask your Rabbi or mentor to help you decide. Part of being religious is having a Rabbi. **Deciding** who your Rabbi is. Another identity issue that we are suffering from tremendously. In our generation, there are so many religious orthodox who don't have a Rabbi. Only in our unidentified generation, because we can't decide.



R Yossi Ben Kisma said, Once I was going along the road, and a man approached me. He greeted me. And I greeted him in return. He said, “Rabbi, where are you from?” I told him “ מעיר גדולה של חכמים ושל סופרים אני, *From a big city of wise Rabbis and Torah scribes, am I.*” He said to me, “Rabbi, do you want to live in our place, and I will give you many gold coins, precious stones and diamonds?” I answered, “My son, if you give me all the money, gold coins, precious stones and diamonds in the world, I will live only in a place of Torah. For when a person dies, money stays behind. And only the Torah one acquires and good deeds a person does escort him to the next world.”(Avot 6;9)

The P’nei Shmuel points out that there is an extra word here. When asked from where he came, he could have said, “From a place of great Torah scholars and scribes”. Why did he add אני, *AM I*?

The answer is an identity issue. R Yossi said to this man, “Where I come from is not just a place or an environment. *It defines me.* I am the yeshiva. I am the Beit Midrash. *I am a Ben Torah.* I belong to Torah, and I represent Torah. Even if my Kollel years come to an end, even if I go to work, I am a Ben Torah. I have no interest in associating with communities where money has prime importance,

### WHAT PEOPLE SAY

The Avtinas family had a family secret. They were the only ones who knew how to make the Ketoret, the Temple Incense, in such a way that when it was brought on the Altar, the smoke would rise straight as a beam, and when it hit the ceiling, it would spread evenly over the ceiling and down the walls of the Temple. Majestically. This was due to their secret formula, one that was passed down from father to son. A formula that they would swear to each other not to reveal to a soul, one made from a herb known only to the family, called מעלה עשן, literally, *smoke raiser*. Now, they also hiked up the price for their incense preparation services, and when the Rabbis tried to cut costs on the Temple expenses, they brought in incense experts from Alexandria to make the Ketoret, for a lower price. But the Alexandrian’s Ketoret just did not have that majestic effect. The Rabbis wanted the Avtinas family to teach them the secret Ketoret recipe. The

because that is not my identity.” The identity of a Ben Torah is beyond physicality and materialistic considerations.

Identity is the cornerstone of all thoughts and relevant to the deepest, most crucial parts of all life decisions. Even the Evil Inclination know this, and in order to control you, he goes for your identity. After sin, he persuades you that you’re not the same, + sin; *you are a sinner.* This is the way he breaks you. Making a person give up his Ben Torah identity is the greatest victory for the Evil Inclination. He redefines you.(נפש ההיים)

Most people think backwards. When they have to make a decision, they think *Have, Do, Be.* They want to have something, and they don’t know why they don’t. They want to do some things, but they end up doing other things. The secret recipe to success is to *define the questions in the right order... Be, then Do and Have.* Decide your identity, with what and whom you associate, what your order of values is: *now*, start working in the direction of your ambitions and goals. And then you can have the life that you really want. If you can’t get what you want, or you aren’t doing what you want to do, it doesn’t mean that you can’t do it or you can’t have it. It just means that you are “out of order”.

Avtinas refused, claiming that they had a family tradition that one day the Temple would be destroyed. If they were to reveal the secret, idol worshippers would eventually gain access to it, and they would serve their gods with our majestic Ketoret. Our Rabbis frowned on their decision.

Now, the family had a beautiful, praiseworthy custom. No woman from the Avtinas family would ever, ever, wear perfume. And, if a woman wanted to marry into the family, the marriage was on condition that she would never, ever wear perfume. Just so that, the people wouldn’t say that they used the Temple incense for themselves. והייתם נקיים מה’ ומישראל, *And you will keep your (name) blameless with G-d and the Jewish people.* (Bamidbar 32; 22) (Yoma 38a)

Moshe cited the aforementioned passuk to the Tribes that wanted to take possession of land on the other side of the Jordan River. Moshe told them that they could have that land, on condition that they go in to the Land of Israel with the rest of the Tribes, to fight and capture the territory. Moshe was telling them that they had to guard their good name, not giving people the suspicion that they were avoiding battle because of fear. This passuk is the basis for the laws of מראית העין, the law that one needs to avoid casting any impression that his behavior is not in line with the Torah. This concept has almost limitless ramifications in Jewish law. Including laws of using parve milk, fundraising, fish blood, hanging up clothes that got wet on Shabbat, eating kosher food in a non-kosher restaurant, women wearing wigs that are not recognizable by other women as being wigs, etc. All these are subjects that need to be dealt with according to Halacha.

King Solomon, the wisest of men, said וּמִצָּא חָן וְשֵׂכֶל טוֹב בְּעֵינֵי אֱלֹהִים וְאָדָם (Mishlei 3;4) *And he found grace, and good sense, in the eyes of G-d and the eyes of people.* K. Solomon, here, is teaching the secret of grace and charm. In the previous passuk, he says, הִסְדּוּ וְאָמַת אֶל יַעֲזֹבֶהָ, קִשְׁרָם עַל גְּרִדְוֹתֶיהָ, פְּתַבְּבָם עַל לִבָּהּ לִיָּהּ לְבָרָהּ, *May loving kindness and truth not forsake you. Bind it as a reminder around your neck, write it on the tablet of your heart.* If you constantly, forever remember the kindness G-d and people did for you, you will be gifted with grace and charm. People will like you. People will think of you as a person with common sense. It works like magic. (Try it! It works!) The Talmud Yerushalmi derives from these words of King Solomon that it is important to find favor in the eyes of people (Shekalim 3;2). And, the way to do this is to make sure that *people do not suspect you* of being a person who is not appreciative.

But why? Why does the Torah direct us to be so careful about what people think? Why do I have to care? Why can't I just 'do my own thing'? Isn't caring what people think about me a mistaken outlook? If something I do is totally legal, why do I have to go the extra mile and be concerned about

what others think about me or my behavior? Isn't it their responsibility to judge me favorably?

Even if we are not aware of it, every one has an internal drive and sensitivity called in Hebrew "Mah Yagidu", *What people will say*. That means that we are motivated, to a degree, by what people say or will say, about us and our behavior. Even people who say they don't care what others think are usually just desperate to have people think they don't care what people think. It seems that G-d hardwired our subconscious to care about what other people think about us. This is why people take loans they can't pay back, to make a wedding on a standard that they wish they were on. A four hour wedding can put them into two to three years of debt, something that makes no sense. Just because they care so much what people might say, lest they discover their true financial status.

We all have this emotional need to feel accepted, loved and approved of. This lies at the core of self-esteem. Your attitude toward yourself is determined largely by the attitudes that you think other people have toward you. When you believe that other people think highly of you, your level of self-acceptance and self-esteem goes straight up. However, if you believe, rightly or wrongly, that other people think poorly of you, your level of self-acceptance will plummet. One yeshiva student I was coaching told me something interesting about his own behavior. If he prayed at a very late Minyan, he would hide his Tefillin when he was walking home from Shul. But when he would pray at an early Minyan and stay late to learn after prayer, he did not even notice that he was holding his Tefillin, without hiding it, at 11 a.m. on his way back home!

The name that you make for yourself, the identity that you project to others, is going to eventually be your identity. You see, we all live up to a standard, the standard we chose for ourselves, or whatever standard others expect from us. The first step toward growth is to hold yourself to a higher standard. Make the decision, now, of the standard you want to make yours. And then, project that to the world.

“*What makes Lashon Hakodesh holy?*” When I asked my seven-year-old son this question, he suggested that lashon hakodesh is the language Hashem uses. Hashem is kadosh, He is Holy, and so His Language must be a holy language. I was delighted to see this explanation mentioned in the Ramban in this week’s parasha (Shemot 30;13) . He explains that the holiness of Lashon Hakodesh stems from the fact that Hashem Himself uses this language. He created the world with it, His holy Names are in this language and He spoke to the Jewish Nation in this language at Mount Sinai.

The Rambam, in Moreh Nevuchim, gives an entirely different explanation. Lashon Hakodesh is holy because it is a “clean language”, without any immoral words in its lexicon. If the Torah has to discuss an impure topic or subject, it will use “hint words” and not harsh or blunt language . For example, when describing a non-kosher animal, the Torah avoids usage of the word “טמא” and instead describes the animal as “אינה טהורה” (not clean or not pure). The absence of unrefined or impure terminology is what makes the rest of the language holy. How can we understand this?

Allow me to ask you a question. If we tested two fathers who are dealing with misbehavior of a child and one father says to the child, “You get me so angry” or “I’m fuming” when his child misbehaves, and the other chooses to say, “I’m not happy about this” or “I’m disappointed with your behavior”, which one of the two will be more difficult to calm down ? There is no question that the one with the more dramatic and abrasive statements will need to work a lot harder than the other father to overcome his wrath. By simply substituting the words “angry” and “fuming” with lighter words, one’s entire state is changed from ‘angry’ to ‘disapproving’. One’s lexicon is what defines his mental and emotional state.

This is not a new concept. The Ramban, in Igeret HaRamban, advises: “תתנהג תמיד לדבר כל דבריך בנחת” , to speak calmly always in order to be saved from inner feelings of anger. Speaking calmly has two components: tone and lexicon. Speaking calmly creates a relaxed state that will affect our inner feelings. If one were to try and control his anger by eliminating the factors that cause him to

become angry, he wouldn’t succeed. There are simply too many triggers, and many are beyond control. The Ramban’s method is, actually, a shortcut to relaxation of the mind and spirit. When one feels himself becoming agitated, the first thing he should do is stop and think how to begin speaking calmly. Calm speech helps one’s whole being to maintain its cool. It is important to note that this method is effective only when done on a consistent basis. As mentioned earlier, the Ramban in his letter stressed – “תתנהג תמיד לדבר כל דבריך בנחת” – “One should accustom himself to speak calmly always.” Get into the constant habit ..

We have determined, so far, that using a more refined lexicon leads to moral thoughts, and the body follows suit. Implementing purity of speech leads not only to purity of our state of mind, but also extends even further to purity in “mundane”, external behaviors . Once one becomes accustomed to speaking in a pure way and thinking in a pure way, his actions also become influenced in this manner. One of my rabbis would occasionally remind us that the conduct of dressing modestly, even in the most private of rooms, will affect one’s thoughts to be more pure. One thing leads to the next.

We read each day in the Ketoret ממנה הדק ( Shemot 30; 36) : while the kohen was grinding the **incense offering**, he would crush it and say, “very thin, very thin”, *because his voice had a positive effect on the fineness of the incense* . In contrast, when preparing the wine offerings on the Mizbe’ach (Menahot 87), the kohen must be silent. Why this contrast in behavior? If speaking helped in improving the incense, why was it not used with the preparation of the wine?

To answer this question, we must look at the incense and wine metaphorically as a spiritual matter versus a material matter. It is explained that the aroma of the incense was for the benefit of the soul, not the body, making this a spiritual matter. Regarding growth in spiritual matters, *constantly speaking of holy things* and holy topics is an effective way to improve our progress in attaining an ever higher level. Therefore, just as the more *talking* the kohen did about refinement the more the outcome of the ketoret was enhanced, the

more *talking* we do about our spiritual goals and ambitions, the more we will improve our spiritual “scent”. Wine, on the other hand, is a drink enjoyed by the body. Regarding bodily and worldly pleasures, it is best to stay silent. Minimizing speech in mundane areas ensures that the mind will remain holier. This is the reason why the Kohen must be silent while preparing wine.

Most people don’t think about these slight nuances in the correct timing and content of their

### 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, **וְאָנֹכִי עֹפָר וָאֵפֶר**, And I am dust

conversations. Most times, it is precisely those nuances that make the difference between the holy and the impure, between the people who stay calm and those who just keep losing themselves in their anger. It is the topics of discussion that we choose and those in which we find interest that will determine who and what we are, inside and out, and the effect we choose to have on those around us.

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” **וְהָיָה תָמִים לִפְנֵי הוֹיָא**, 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 **וְנַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע**, 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, **וְהָיִיתֶם כְּאֱלֹהִים**, 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. וְדִי 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 מחשבה. 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 thoughts, by making them measurable through

## UNDERSTANDING THE SINNER

At times, we hear very unsettling things about people we know – people who we thought of as good and honest can fall so low. There is a mitzvah to judge people favorably. That, however, is not the topic at hand. Rather, our focus is on understanding people.

It is extremely perplexing to us when we become aware of the fact that someone whom we know sinned: should I try to understand how this happened, or should I just forget about it, saying it

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.

doesn't make any difference. Either way is fine, as long as it is not thought about too much. But at times, when the story involved someone close to us, we cannot find peace within ourselves.

There are parts of the Torah which raise complex questions. Now, just because they are complex, it does not mean that there are no answers. There *are* answers. And many of them are lessons for life. Here is one of them.



We know that the Jews rose to the level of angels upon receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai. They heard G-d. They almost *saw* G-d. How could they plunge so deeply and swiftly to the abyss of the Sin of the Calf, a sin of idolatry, just because they thought that Moshe was a couple of hours late? Even if the Satan tricked them into thinking that Moshe was dead. And, even if it was not the whole nation that was involved... How could anyone fall into idolatry at the foot of Mt. Sinai? And even kill Hur for opposing them?

There are more than a few answers to this question. R' Yaakov Kametzky, zt"l, answered it with a unique twist. He said that the question does not even exist! As many times in life, it becomes a question only when you do not "put yourself in the shoes" of the sinner. The Jews were, at the time, living a life of miracles. A whole nation of more than 3 million people were in the Sinai desert. They were sustained by the Manna that G-d gave them in Moshe's merit. If he had left them, and they would not have Manna, many would die in the desert from starvation. Their life was dependent upon miracles. Without Moshe, they would be no more than a poor nation without food. Our Rabbis tell us that a poor person is considered dead. They were in a state of mind that defied logic, a state of panic. At that time, idolatry was extremely common in the world. It was natural for people to want to serve something tangible. After our Rabbis removed the Yetzer Hara for idolatry by giving us

prayer, it is, altogether, very hard for us to understand the Sin.

I believe that many times, when we do not understand the reason for a person's downfall, and we are left with a question, it is in actual fact not a question. We are barely able to put ourselves in the shoes of anyone else, especially in the shoes of those who went through or are going through different traumas, tests or nightmares. We should, however, pray with fervor in our morning prayers- ואל תביאנו לידי ניסיון *and please, do not bring me to a situation where I am tested...* and, if we do ever have to face a test, that we should be strong enough to meet the challenge.

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I always wondered if anyone ever tried this out or made a study on it. Do the things we say really have such an effect on the people and things around us? R' Zamir Cohen in his book "המהפך" introduced me to Dr. Masaru Emoto. Dr. Masaru claims that it has been scientifically proven that talking nicely to flowers makes them grow better, and the way we speak in the presence of water that is undergoing a freezing process affects its crystallization; ice crystals of water exposed to angry tones look different under a microscope from those that were exposed to calm ones. (Messages from Water by Dr. Masaru Emoto)

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