


**Vayakhel Pekudei**

**English version**

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## THE ART OF FIGHTING YOUR YETZER HARA

Each year before Passover, there are so many things about Chametz I have a hard time understanding. Our Rabbis teach that the Chametz is what prevents us from serving G-d. (Berachot 17a) The Zohar writes in numerous places that the Chametz is symbolic of the Yetzer Hara, and that if one is careful not to have Chametz in his possession, his body will be protected from the Yetzer Hara down below, and his soul will be protected on high. The Arizal promised that one who is careful from even a drop of Chametz on Pesach will not sin all year long. (Beer Heteb 447;1) Only once a year, we have an opportunity to physically search, destroy and burn our Yetzer Hara.

What is the connection between Chametz and Yetzer Hara? Why, and in which way, is Chametz symbolic and iconic of the Yetzer Hara? And, how does getting rid of the Chametz, in any way, shape or form, help us rid ourselves of the Yetzer Hara? What *is* the Yetzer Hara, anyway, and how does one know where or what it is, to battle it? And, if Chametz is so bad, why is it allowed the rest of the year?!

The answer is the original Chametz. The first year that the Jews had to leave Egypt, they had no time to wait. If they had waited just another minute for the dough to rise, they would not have been able to leave Egypt! So many times in life, the reason we are not performing our best is because we are not jumping to the opportunity. We procrastinate. This is the way the Yetzer Hara gets us: he finds

something small for us to busy ourselves with first, before the most important things, and this prevents us from getting around to the most important things. Similar to the word *חימוץ*, missing an opportunity, or, letting something good go sour, as you did not take advantage of it when it had its greatest value. The Passover holiday is the holiday of freedom, and the only way to be free of the Yetzer Hara is by recognizing what it is and staying far, far away from it.

Each year at the Seder, the Chatam Sofer would tell his family that there were two ways, then, that the Yetzer Hara tested the Jews in Egypt before the Redemption, and these two tests will repeat themselves before the Final Redemption. The first test was running after money. During the plague of darkness, the Jews saw the houses of their Egyptian enemies and their immense wealth, and their hearts burned with the desire to take advantage of the opportunity to take as much money as they could, partially out of revenge for their slavery and oppression. The second test was the test of fear, because on the night of Passover, the Jews were hidden away in their homes, and they heard the most horrific cries anyone has ever heard. The Jews were not sure if it was only the cries of the Egyptians over their first born, or if it was more Jews who were dying. (During the plague of darkness, 12 million Jews, the Jews who were not ready to leave, died in Egypt. Only one fifth, three million Jews, left Egypt.) But the Jews believed in Moshe and stayed indoors, and waited for instructions. The same test will be in the times of



Mashiach. People will be tested in the End of Days with a tremendous passion to chase after opportunities to amass wealth, and there will be tremendous fear. And in the times of Mashiach, we will be saved, only in the merit of listening to our great Rabbis. (Michtav Sofer, Ch. S. Parashat Beshalach, והמושים)

It is so interesting. There is a parallel between the three types of Chametz and the three types of Yetzer Hara. Type 1: Chametz that is Kazayit, the size of a matchbox, that you see. Type 2: Chametz flavor that is “in the walls” of our eating utensils. Type 3: Chametz that is less than a Kazayit, that you do not see, and you are not aware of; you are not obligated to search it and get rid of it, but we do try to rid ourselves of it in any way we can, as we are accustomed to doing.

There are also three Yetzer Hara types. There is the Yetzer Hara we are aware of, for example: anger, lashon hara, etc. But, there is a Yetzer Hara that is more complicated, more subtle, more complex – the one that is imperceptible, but which hides “in the walls” of the human psyche. Even though you do not see this inclination, you know that it is there and is triggered under certain circumstances. Also, at times, our Yetzer Hara can drive us to do “Mitzvot” with “hidden” objectives, such as honor, jealousy or negativity. Then, there is Type 3 Yetzer Hara, the one that is so, so, small. Bad friends, bad places, bad internet filters. You don’t realize how this Yetzer creeps up on you. You give him a finger, and he swallows you up.

The Yetzer Hara tries, first and foremost, to get us to become haughty, to have an inflated ego, similar to the rising element of Chametz. This is how he gets us angry. And just like there is a very fine line, a delicate balance, between a healthy self-esteem and an inflated ego, there is only a small difference, a “fine line” between the words המצ and מצה. The Yetzer Hara never convinces us to do things we don’t *really* want to do. Instead, he convinces us to do the most minute wrong thing and continue transgressing the “fine letters” of our Rabbis, until it convinces us to transgress the

worst. (Shabbat 105b) The Yetzer Hara is paralleled to Chametz in the sense that Chametz rises quietly and unnoticed, and it slowly doubles and triples its original size when you just leave it on its own: so too does the Evil Inclination function, imperceptibly multiplying and magnifying our negative habits and tendencies.

This explains why Chametz on Pesach is the only food item that is not only forbidden for us to eat, but it is even forbidden to derive any pleasure from, forbidden to have in our possession, and forbidden in its smallest form, even if it is just an invisible flavor that is hidden in the walls of our utensils. Because the Yetzer Hara is something that creeps up on us, in the smallest forms.

We don’t have Chametz in our homes for only seven days. But in the Beit Hamikdash, Chametz was not allowed all year. כְּלִי-הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ לַה' לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה. מִעֲשֵׂה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כִּי כָל-שְׂאֵר וְכָל-דְּבַשׁ לֹא-תִקְטְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִשָּׁה לַה'. Chametz is something that we are not allowed to bring a sacrifice from. Except twice. We are allowed to bring Chametz in a sacrifice on Shavuot, in the Two Breads. And when a person brings the Todah sacrifice, for having been saved from חִי'י'ם which stands for חבוס captivity, ים sickness of affliction, ים sea, מדבר desert. וכל ההיים יודוך סלה.

Why are these the two exceptions for bringing Chametz? Because there are two places where the Yetzer Hara has no influence. On a person who is thankful to G-d, who realizes how we are totally dependent on Him. And on a person who is in the Bet HaMidrash learning Torah, which Shavuot is all about. As the Talmud teaches, if you meet the Yetzer Hara, bring him to the Beit Hamidrash, because the involvement and immersion in Torah will melt him away. (Maharal Tifferet Yisrael; Succah 52b; Kiddushin 30b)

The Yetzer Hara challenges us on three fronts, in מעשה, דיבור, מהשבה. Our thinking, our words and in our actions. So, before Pesach, we are to rid ourselves of him by annulling all Chametz in our minds (ביטול), we are to give up ownership (הפקר), and we are to burn the Chametz, physically.

## Selfie steps to fight the Yetzer Hara

1. Stay away from bad influences, people and places. (Tehillim 1;1)
2. By keeping busy at work, and staying connected to Torah learning. (Maharal- Derech Chaim 2;2)
3. Torah immersion, prayer, Teshuva, and humility. The Yetzer Hara cannot enter the Bet Midrash. לפתח הטאת רובץ (Midrash Shochar Tov) He waits at the door of the study hall.
4. Visit the sick. (Nedarim 32b)
5. קדש עצמך במותר לך. Don't overindulge. (See Kohelet 9, Gittin 70a) Eat only what is healthy and nutritious, sleep only the amount you need. (Orchot Tzaddikim, Gra) מרעיבו שבע (Sanhedrin 107a) ואכלת ושבעת. השמר. *And you will eat and become satiated... Watch over yourselves, not to stray...*
6. The earlier in your life you get used to fighting him, the easier it is to fight him as you advance in age. (Baal Haturim Bereshit 8;21)
7. When an Aveirah opportunity arises, push it off till later. And when a Mitzvah opportunity arises, do it immediately.
8. Remember, every day, that no one is here forever. ואתה עתיד ליטלה ממני
9. Kosher Tefillin, Tallit/tzitzit, and Mezuzah. (Menachot 43b)
10. When the Yetzer Hara takes over, the Yetzer Tov is not even heard. (Nedarim 32b) It is so interesting. The first step to battle the Yetzer Hara is to **disidentify** from the sin, to realize that your Yetzer Hara is not you, it is external, like Chametz. It only entered into you from the time of the sin of the Forbidden fruit, so it talks in first person, but you are much bigger than it is. (See Nefesh Hachaim) Naturally, a person's inner lexicon uses 1. First person when suggesting indulgences (I want another slice of pizza) and when suggestions for self-improvement it uses second person (You shouldn't be eating another slice of pizza). 2. Therefore, the Yetzer Hara always says what it wants, while the Yetzer Tov always says what you should, or should not, do. Notice the **should** thought and notice the **you**. This is why, it helps to repeat to yourself, again and again, positive commands, in first person, and in present tense. (I want, now, to stay healthy, and only eat nutritious food).

## 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 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 dessert 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.

## VOICES OF A LEADER

*Andrius Caesar, of Rome, once challenged Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Hannanyah, a very wise rabbi who was close to him: "I am better than Moshe, your teacher and leader, for I am alive, and he is dead. And it says in your Torah, in Kohelet כי לכלב חי הוא טוב מן האריה המת – A live dog is better than a dead lion. (Kohelet 9 ; 4) R' Yehoshua asked the Caesar in return , "If you were to decree that your people light no fire for three days, would they obey?" The Caesar responded – "Yes, of course". And so he decreed.*

*The first night after his decree , they both climbed up to the rooftop of the Roman castle. They looked around Rome, as far as the eye could see, and there was no light. Then, suddenly, they saw smoke in the distance. R' Yehoshua asked the Caesar, "What is this smoke coming up out of that chimney*

*in the distance?" The Caesar answered, "The general of the city fell ill, and the doctor went to examine him. The doctor said that this general needs to drink hot water to get better. They lit fire to heat up the water." R' Yehoshua answered the Caesar, "Even while you are still alive, your people do not keep your decrees. They disobey your command even for reasons that are not פיקוח נפש , not a life and death issue. Even on the first day of your decree, one of your generals has disobeyed your words. From the time that Moshe, my leader and teacher, taught us in his Torah לא תבערו אש בכל משבתכם ביום השבת "a fire shall not burn in your dwellings on the day of Shabbat", (Shemot 35 ;3) no Jew, during his whole life, lights a fire on Shabbat. Moshe's decree was not annulled. How do you say, then, that you are better than him? (Kohelet Rabbah 9; 3)*



Just a few questions here. First, Caesar's argument was based on Kohelet. If he is *alive*, he is better than Moshe, who is *dead*. How did R' Yehoshua refute this? Second, were there no non-observant Jews who did not keep Shabbat over the years and did not listen to Moshe? And finally, why did R' Yehoshua pick this law, specifically, out of all the laws that Moshe gave his people in order to prove his point?

The answers can be understood on two levels. The first level is the basic difference between Moshe and Caesar's roles as leaders. The difference between Moshe's rule and the Caesar's rule is that in addition to Moshe having been our leader, he was also our beloved teacher. Caesar was just a leader in the form of a dictator who gave orders. Moshe's teachings are eternal, he is *still* our leader and teacher, and therefore, he is still *alive in the minds of his people*. The words of Moshe are taken very seriously, and his words still echo in the thoughts of the nation, as they have done for thousands of years, *because Moshe knew how to be the greatest leader ever*. Once a week Moshe's people hear him say, just as he did thousands of years ago; *"A fire shall not burn in your dwellings on the day of Shabbat."* The reason why R' Yehoshua specifically chose this law regarding fire on Shabbat is because this law is one of the most inconvenient laws to live by; it effects our lives the most. For instance, lighting up a dark room, heating our homes in the winter, cooking... . Even today, electricity, the modern day "fire", is forbidden on Shabbat, for it falls under the category of burning an actual fire. Not lighting fire on Shabbat makes it obvious to all the nations of the world that we still adhere to Moshe's teachings. Although not all of the Jews keep all of the laws, it is about the significant number of Jews who *do* take the "trouble" to keep Shabbat. So, R' Yehoshua explained to the Caesar, *Moshe is still alive: people are still listening to his voice. Your voice, your command, is disobeyed for the slightest inconvenience*.

The deeper answer to the questions asked above is really in the way we understand how one hears the words of a leader. People go through their entire

lives "hearing" voices of authority figures, leaders, in their heads, in their subconscious. Voices that they no longer hear in the literal sense, but still feel obligated to obey. These are the voices of our *parents and mentors, those who imprinted in us our morals and values*. It is they who told us *what* is important in life, and how important it is. These voices are so strong that people feel an obligation to heed their words, long after those who first spoke those words are gone.

So, can we say that *all* those who have been in a position of authority over us have this effect on us? Absolutely not. This is where the type of leader plays a crucial role in the degree to which one heeds his words, and for how long. The stronger the trust and love of the leader/parent is for the subject/child, the stronger the impact of the voice, and the stronger the feeling that one must adhere to, or "hear" the words that were spoken.

Now, there are two types of authority figures/parents. There are those who are dictators, and there are those who are leaders. A leader's voice is truly heard: it echoes in those who follow him. Of course, the *greatest leader ever* was Moshe, and that's why his voice keeps echoing in Jewish hearts. If we just pay attention, we can learn all of the qualities that make one a good leader from almost every story we know about Moshe. To mention a few of these qualities; **Trust:** Moshe gave an exact account of funds received, down to the last shekel that he collected, avoiding any distrust amongst his followers. **Open communication:** Moshe was willing to hear and discuss whatever was important to his people; *if it was important to them, it was important to him*. They felt comfortable talking to Moshe about every last detail. Moshe preferred one-on-one communication, and was easily approachable. (Once he realized that he would become worn out by continuing this way, and it would have a bad effect on his leadership he followed Yitro's advice to delegate certain positions.) On our level, we can understand that leadership requires a person to be **emotionally intelligent**, aware of his own feelings and those of the people around him. This enables us to prepare



for expected situations and reactions. (Moshe was sensitive to the fact that his older brother, Aharon, would logically be the one to lead and take the Jews out of Egypt.) **Knowing when and how to give criticism:** Moshe was careful not to criticize the Jewish nation until the end of his life. Moshe **went out to his people**, to be part of them and be “hands on” when they were still in slavery. Moshe displayed **compassion** by running after the sheep, which was one of the prime reasons he was chosen to be a leader. Immediately, he was appointed by G-d at the Burning Bush.

Moshe **defended his people**, and he was able to **understand their feelings**... There is no end to how one can learn leadership qualities from Moshe.

As parents and role models, we must be aware of whether we are leading or dictating. We must learn from Moshe Rabbeinu what needs to be done in order to lead. We must decide whether we want to be heard for a moment, like a dictator, or if we want to be heard for generations, and have our voices echo for years to come, like true leaders.

### JEWISH REMEDY FOR RELAXATION

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

On Shabbat, many have the custom to eat fish. There is an interesting phenomenon about fish. If one were to open the belly of a large fish shortly after it has consumed a smaller fish, he would find the small fish facing the tail of its predator. Judging from its position, one can deduce that the big fish’s “fish-food” was not the one he had chased to near death, but rather another fish, one that swam straight into its mouth. This is the lesson of the Shabbat as we shall soon see.

Rabbeinu Bachye in *Chovot Halevavot* mentions a fundamental concept of Jewish belief that may be confusing at times. *A person must realize that the effort he puts into something is not the cause of his success.* (Bitachon Chap. 4) Success is delivered by G-d, in His infinite, unfathomable ways. It is incumbent upon each man to do his utmost to make a living; G-d does not want us to rely upon miracles. It is for this reason that the *passuk* specifically commands each person “*six*

*days your work shall be done*”. We are commanded to do our part by putting in our effort and working on the other six days of the week. However, we are also expected to realize that, essentially, we are just going through the motions. Ultimately, success rests in the hands of Hashem alone. This is why our *pasuk* says “*your work shall be done*” as opposed to “*Do your work*”.

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

The Torah gives us one day a week to change perspective and internalize this belief. The world on Shabbat is a time when money has no value, and no bearing whatsoever on our lives. *Chazal* explain that, on *Rosh Hashana*, each person is allotted a certain amount of money for the whole year, and any Shabbat expenses are separate from that allotment, not diminishing the original year’s sum in the least. The fact that our livelihood comes from G-d is clearer to us on Shabbat, but, of course, holds true in the same measure during the week, even though we are required to invest our efforts in work. We demonstrate our recognition of



this principle by eating fish on Shabbat: just as the large fish had to toil for its meal by chasing a smaller one, its actual sustenance came from a totally different fish!

One can truly rest on Shabbat only if one feels that 'his efforts are his responsibility- but his successes are not in his control'. By internalizing this concept, one can experience true relaxation on Shabbat. It is for this reason that there is really no

point in working to an extreme degree. A workaholic, by definition, thinks his level of success is determined through his own efforts, as opposed to being granted by G-d. Tension and stress come when one feels the loss of a control that he thought he once had. But when we can internalize the fact that G-d was (and is) really in control all the time, then, we can experience a truly restful state.

## BUILDING TRUST

“אלה פקודי המשכן משכן העדות אשר פוקד על פי משה”... – These are the calculations of the Mishkan...which were accounted for by the command of Moshe. (Shemot 38:21)

In this week's parsha, the Torah makes an accounting of where all the gold and silver that Klal Yisrael donated for the building of the Mishkan went. Why did Moshe feel the need to make this calculation and report to Klal Yisrael about how he had used these donations?

The Midrash explains that after the construction of the Mishkan, Moshe overheard a fellow Jew poking fun at his wide neck and knees, suggesting that Moshe was gaining weight – possibly because he'd been dining a bit more lately.

A second “ mocker” joined in and said, “What do you expect? I'm sure the man who took charge of building the Mishkan pocketed some of the donations for himself!”

Upon hearing this, Moshe told them, “I promise you, when we finish the Mishkan I will give you a detailed summary of every last penny!” And so he did, in this week's parsha.

Why was Moshe so concerned with what these “mockers” thought? And if they were interested in finding flaws in their leader, wouldn't they soon find something else to complain about even if Moshe appeased them now? After Moshe had been Hashem's messenger to bring the ten plagues, bring the Jews out of Egypt and split the sea,

hadn't he already established himself as a man of integrity who kept his word?

The answer to these questions is simple, yet powerful. We are all familiar with how our bank account works – if you want to take money out, you need to first put money in. In any relationship, we must consider a different type of bank account – our “emotional bank account.” Relationships are built on honesty, kindness and integrity; for a relationship to succeed, one's “bank account” must be filled with actions which demonstrate these traits. If you make a deposit in the emotional bank account through honesty, kindness and integrity, you build up your credit, and trust is built.

Conversely, when one shows dishonesty, ignores others or acts selfishly, he is making “withdrawals” from this account, and eventually the emotional account is overdrawn.

Every relationship has its rocky moments – these moments are like applying for a loan. If one invested enough into his account, at these moments he can use the credit from this account to save the relationship. If the account is empty and one is in “debt,” however, his dubious credit history makes fixing the relationship difficult.

The sad reality is that while it might take a lot of time and effort to build this credit, it is very easy to overdraw the account with a few careless mistakes.

Consider parenting, for example. Parents who show their children that they are concerned with



the children's best interests will have "credit" available when their children grow into teenagers. If the parents did not inculcate this feeling into the children, however, when the teenage years arrive the children probably will not consult with their parents even if the parents plead and promise the children that now they are interested in the children's well-being.

Moshe Rabbeinu knew the importance of building trust. Moshe knew that someday, these "mockers" would rear their heads again and question Moshe and the Torah, and he would need credit in the bank. Additionally, Moshe knew that building trust would help ensure that when he said something, Klal Yisrael would know that Moshe was saying it for their best interests, not his own.

Trust between parents and children is especially important in Torah families. One of our strongest

resources for emunah – faith in G-d – is the mesora that is passed down from parent to child. Judaism is unique in its claim that over 600,000 witnesses experienced G-d speaking to His nation at Mount Sinai. This testimony has been passed from parent to child ever since then. A child is naturally receptive to this testimony and believes his parents, and is sure that a parent would never lie about such a central life issue.

Unfortunately, sometimes children lose faith in their parents, and the child is 'at risk'. Throughout childhood, a parent must treat his or her child with the respect due to a person, as opposed to the respect one shows to an e-mail that he can ignore until he is interested at looking at and dealing with it.

## 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 *ביום פקדי ופקדתי עליהם חטאתם* (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 descendents 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.

## Detecting Bad Habits

“והנשואם הביאו את אבני השוהם– *And the princes brought the shoham stones*(Exodus 35:27)“. Rashi asks the question, why is the letter *yud* missing from the word *vehanisi'im* (והנשיאים)? He explains that while the Jewish nation was donating to the *Mishkan* (tabernacle), instead of bringing their own offerings at the same time, the *Nesi'im* offered to bring whatever would be missing at the end of the collection. To their shock, Bnei Yisrael quickly donated all the necessary materials, leaving the *Nesi'im* with nothing to donate. Disturbed at their plight, they asked how they could still take part in the building of the *Mishkan*. Hashem responded that they could donate the “*avnei shoham*” stones. However, since they had been complacent during the period of donating, the letter *yud* was removed from their name.

Rav Chaim Leib Schmulevitz points out that removing the letter *yud* from their name in the Torah was no simple matter. In fact, Yehoshua was later given this letter by Moshe as a *shemira* (protection) against being part of the plot of the spies. R' Chaim asks – why were they penalized with the loss of a *yud*, if their intentions were good? Weren't they ready to donate however much would be missing?

Rav Chaim explains that it was the trait of laziness that drove the *Nesi'im* to wait until the end. *The element of laziness here was minute, and the Nesi'im themselves were unaware of the presence of this trait within them!* On a similar note, Rav Yisrael Salanter, while expressing the importance of *mussar*, writes that negative traits hide in the deepest recesses of the heart. *Mussar* is like a flashlight that helps one discover and reveal his true self. Still, we may ask ourselves, how could the *Nesi'im* be guilty of laziness, if they offered to make sure all the costs would be covered?

At the Sin of the Golden Calf, those involved worked with zeal and alacrity. They told Aaron that they couldn't wait for tomorrow. They killed Hur, who opposed them. They quickly took off their gold rings to ensure that the Calf would be made without delay. Those involved in this sin displayed motivation and ambition in carrying it out.

When one truly desires to do something, it is understood that he puts in much more effort and shows more determination than when he is not really interested. The *Nesi'im's* failure to donate immediately reflected a minute level of indifference stemming from laziness.



The *Nesi'im* should have learned from the behavior displayed at the Golden Calf and translated it to worshipping Hashem with that same zeal when fulfilling His Will.

In applying this to ourselves, many times we can observe other people's actions and learn from them the innate strength we have within us. For example, one who has trouble getting up in the morning to go to pray need only look at the millionaire who jumps out of bed with enthusiasm early each morning to earn more money. By seeing his fellow's ability to get up, regardless of his exhaustion, one understands that it is possible, when there is true will, to do the same. Tapping in to the power of hidden energy, one can, with wisdom, direct it toward meaningful goals.

The former Mashgiach of Yeshivas Ponivitch, Rav Yechezkel Levenstien, would act with tremendous

strength, even though his physical makeup was frail and weak. When asked about this, he commented how he had learned from the Chinese, while staying in Shanghai during WWII, how it is possible to use extreme physical strength. The frail, old Chinese men would harness themselves and pull heavy wagons, the way horses would, using unusual amounts of strength. Rav Levenstien learnt from their ways and applied this to himself.

I myself once used this method to improve myself. I would always have tremendous difficulty staying up learning on the night of Shavuot, until once I stayed up the entire night on the phone, having a delightful conversation. After hanging up, I made note of my inner strength which enabled me to carry on – even with lack of sleep – when properly motivated.

## I KNOW I CAN

Upon being commanded to build the Mishkan, the Jewish People – who just a short while before had been enslaved in Egypt, accustomed to doing hard, physical labor – somehow did all the skilled work that would normally have required the most experienced artisans. Where did this miraculous ability come from? We find, also, that the Torah uses the words "*Chacham lev*" – "*of wise heart*" – to describe those who built the *Mishkan*. Isn't intellect in the brain, not in the heart?

**In the very last chapter of Orchot Tzaddikim we learn some interesting things about the human body: specifically, the brain and heart.** The Hebrew word *Melech* (king) is a combination of the first letters (ראשי תיבות) of the Hebrew words *mo'ach* (brain), *lev* (heart) and *kaved* (liver). These specific body organs are also referred to in Judaism as the dwelling places for the *neshama*, *ru'ach* and *nefesh*. *Kaved* is the location of one's *nefesh*. The *nefesh* represents bodily and material desires. The desire to "feel good" comes from the *nefesh*. The *lev* is *ru'ach*, which is one's ego. This is the desire to "look good" in the eyes of others. Lastly, the *mo'ach* is the seat of one's *neshama*: it's a person's innate

desire to "do good." The *neshama* is supposed to rule over the *ru'ach* and the *nefesh*. It is for this reason that the brain, containing the *neshama*, is in the skull – similar to the fortress of a king. By controlling one's *lev* and *kaved*, a person will become worthy of the title *Melech*. Thus, it is possible for three people to do the same act, but each with different intentions. One's intention is to feel good, another is preoccupied with looking good, and the third is simply trying to **do** good.

Interestingly, when you ask a person to point to himself, he points to his heart, the place of *ruach* – ego. He doesn't point to his head or stomach. The German word "ich", which means "me", comes from the Latin word "Ego". The place of one's esteem is his heart, where one is conscious of himself. The Masters of *Mussar* (self introspection) write that if you take away all of a person's honor, he will want to commit suicide. Conversely, positive self esteem, an internal reflection of a person's confidence in his being capable, is a positive, vital life force. Thomas Edison explained that he invented the light bulb only after having experimented with hundreds of possibilities, failing time and again, until he met with success, at last.



He must have needed a great deal of initiative and ambition in order to persist; but, beyond that, he needed to believe in himself.

The *chachmei lev* believed that if G-d had commanded the intricate building of the *Mishkan*, then, without a doubt, someone had to be capable of doing it. They knew that perhaps they would have to persist and keep trying again and again to reach their goal, but they had self-esteem and believed in themselves. That's being smart at heart!

Self-esteem is very important. A wise rabbi once pointed out that the first step of *tikun hamidot* – fixing bad habits – is recognizing your good ones. Looking solely at one's faults will only rob him of

his self-esteem. A healthy self esteem is needed to give oneself the energy needed for the long path to perfection.

While I was studying as a *bachur* in Jerusalem, I remember hearing that one of my colleagues, who was, at the time, 25, had not spoken *lashon hora* – gossip – from the age of 19. At the age of 19, he simply told his *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) that he would not speak gossip for the rest of his life! That takes a lot of positive chutzpah (i.e. high self-esteem). His old friends were shocked. "How could the same boy who, in elementary school, was the biggest trouble maker of the class, suddenly become so religious on us?"

I hope he keeps it up!

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