



Parashat Vayikra



English version

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THE ART OF FAITH

“Why do we drink four cups of wine on the Seder Night?” is a question to which most people have only one answer. The answer most people know is that the cups are correspondent to the four terms of redemption G-d promised Moshe. והוצאתי והצלתי וגאלתי ולקחתי (Shemot 6. Midrash R) This year, I bought a Sefer called Ki Yishalcha, that asks every possible question I can think of and gives all the possible answers, in short. For this question, alone, the author offers 12 answers, with sources!

One of the twelve answers is a Midrash that counts the word כוס, cup, mentioned four times by the Butler, when describing his dream to Yosef. (Bereshit Raba) What in the world is the connection between Pharaoh's כוס, his cup, to our drinking four cups of wine on Seder night?!?

10 years ago, my neighbor told me the most amazing Dvar Torah. But first, he asked me four questions. 1. Why, in the butler's dream, did Pharaoh have only a כוס, a cup, not a גביע, a goblet? Didn't Yosef, who was *second* to the king, have a goblet? (Bereshit 44:2) 2. If all dreams go after the way you interpret them, (Berachot 52b) why did Yosef interpret the dream of the Butler for good and the Baker for bad? Yosef could have interpreted the dreams the other way around! 3. When Avraham was told the news at the Brit Bein Habetarim that his descendants would be enslaved for four hundred years, (Bereshit 15:13) Rashi says, there, that the count was only 210 years, because the 400 started from when Yitzhak was born. But why does the passuk say that the Jews were in Egypt for 430 years? (Shemot 12:40) 4.

Why do we drink only four cups, if there is not four terminologies of redemption G-d used when speaking to Moshe, but seemingly five? Isn't there, also, another terminology of redemption, והבאתי?

The answer is that Yosef, who was destined to be responsible for his brothers in Egypt, was worried about one thing, until he heard the dream of the Butler. How could the Jews survive the 400 years, stay with a Jewish identity and not fall to the 50th level of impurity, a point of no return? 400 years is too much to endure! Yosef knew he was not just randomly in an Egyptian jail for a crime he didn't commit, but on a mission for something greater than himself, to provide and bring his brothers to endure the 400 years G-d told Avraham about, and he knew that there was a Seder, a sequence of events that would lead to his redemption. When Yosef heard the dream of the butler, in which he did not use the word גביע, goblet, for Pharaoh, but instead used the word כוס, cup, Yosef got the hint! The numerical value of כוס, is 86. 86 is not only the amount of wine (86cc) that is a Reviit, the required measurement. It is also the numerical value of G-d's Name Elokim, the Attribute of Judgement. Yosef figured, that G-d was telling him not to worry. There would be 86 years of harsh and bitter slavery, in order to speed up the redemption date, and we would not need the four hundred to be redeemed. (Miriam was named her name for the bitterness of the exile that began in her day, וימררו את חייהם, and she was 86 years old when she left Egypt.) We would be freed from Egypt, after just 210 years.



Now, if we do the math, we will be blown away. Because we left Egypt *before* the 400 years were up, we needed a total of 430 years to fulfill the decree on Avraham. We did only 86 years in Egypt, but we would need to do another 4 כוס, 4 times 86, to achieve 344, the numerical value of שמד. Every time the Jews go through difficult times, it is called שמד, because we are finishing up the 344-year quota. We did one of the five כוס in Egypt, and 86 times 5 is 430. The reason why we do not drink five cups of wine of redemption, but instead only four, is because we did the first 86 years in Egypt! We drink the four cups, so that G-d will consider that the exile that we are going through is going to cover the other four cups of wine as well. (See Torat Chaim Chullin 92a)

A lot of times in life, we ask questions; we want to know the Seder of events, we want to understand. But this world is the place of lack of understanding, Olam from the root of העלם, hidden. Avraham asked G-d a question, 'How will I know that I will be given the Land of Israel?', and we are still dealing with the 400-year decree till today. When Avraham was asked to offer up his son on the Altar, Avraham asked, which son? I have two sons, Yitzhak and Yishmael. G-d told him, your only son, and Avraham answered, both sons are the only son to their mother. And then, G-d said, the son you love, to which Avraham answered, I love both sons. Finally, G-d told him, Yitzhak! If Avraham had not asked questions, he would just have brought Yishmael up as a sacrifice, and we would never have heard from the Arabs again!

The Jews refer to this holiday as Pesach, but G-d refers to it as the Holiday of Matzot. Why? Because Matzah is symbolic of our faith in G-d, in not asking questions, relying on G-d as we enter a barren desert, eating the Matzah as slaves in Egypt. It is what G-d celebrates, each year on Pesach: our faith in Him. On the other hand, *we* call the holiday Pesach, because we celebrate the fact that G-d believes in us, even when we do not have enough merit. He skipped over the unworthy Jewish homes and punished only the Egyptians. And he skipped over the 400 years, to redeem us at year 210 instead. Why?

It is so interesting. Even if out of four children, only one is a Chacham, only one is wise enough to have an intelligent conversation about the Pesach story, we say, ברוך המקום ברוך הוא. We bless G-d for the children we have. One of G-d's praises is that He is שמח בחלקו, He is happy with His lot. (Tanna D' Eliyahu R. 1) But how does that make any sense, if G-d could create anything He wishes? The answer is that חלקו, G-d's portion, is His People. כִּי תִלְקַח יְלִדְךָ עִמָּו (Devarim 32:9) G-d loves every Jew as he is, and He hopes each and every Jew finds his way to reconnect to Him. We are all on this journey of reconnection, and there is always a Seder in the path to an end that we may not understand. Yet. The answer we give to the smart son, when he asks for the laws of Pesach, is the very last law of the night. אין מפטירין אחר הפסח -אפיקומן The last thing you eat Seder night is the Korban Pesach, or Afikoman. Why specifically the last law of the night, out of all the laws? Because we tell the smart son who has questions, have patience till the end, and everything will make sense.

One of the reasons we have the four cups is correspondent to the four mothers, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. 1st cup, Sarah, אשר בחר בנו מכל עם Kiddush, G-d chose our Nation, because Sarah converted the women. 2nd cup, Maggid, corresponding Rivka – ארמי אבד אבי – the battle with Lavan, Rivka's brother. 3rd cup, Rachel - Birkat Hamazon for Yosef, who provided food for Egyptians and his brothers. 4th cup, Leah – Hallel - she was the first to say thank You to G-d, calling her son Yehuda. (Shlah) Although women are not obligated to sit in the Succah, because they are not commanded to do Mitzvoth that are time-bound, women are still to drink the four cups of wine? Why? Because the four cups are to commemorate the faith of the greatest women of our people.

There is something about Leah's praise that can blow your mind. Leah had six boys, and in her seventh pregnancy, she prayed that this pregnancy would not take away from her barren sister Rachel's chance to have her portion of at least 2 tribes. So, G-d gave Leah a daughter, Dina, instead of a son Yosef, who was given to Rachel. Leah

thought, hey, at least I can get a son-in-law who is a Talmid Chacham to marry Dina.

Instead, Dina was raped by Shechem, and Dina came home to her mother Leah, embarrassed and... pregnant. Dina's child Osnat was sent away by the Tribes, and G-d sent an angel to take Osnat down

Selfie steps to faith, patience, and positivity

1. Hopefulness is the key to positivity, and the key to hopefulness is looking past the present and into the future. Focusing on the solutions, options, strengths, potential, and not on the problem, where things are stuck, and the weaknesses. Stop telling G-d how big your problems are. Start telling your problems how great G-d is.
2. Focus on the purpose of it all, and find the inspiration in it. You are only Pharaoh's slave, or the slave to your problems, if you don't see G-d behind the problems. It is your choice. Are you Pharaoh's slave? Or are you serving G-d who put this Pharaoh that you need to deal with, in your life?
3. Stop reading the news, or anything that focuses on the bad, on the negative, on information that does not help you personally, in any way, shape or form. Surround yourself with positive people, people who can bring you closer to your goals.
4. Focus on what G-d gave you choice to actually change, and accept and ignore what He did not give you choice or options of changing. Being active in changing what you can, and active in looking for options and opportunities, empowers you to stay positive and patient, and ironically, helps your faith.

WANTS IN SPRING BLOSSOM

In the month of Nissan, we have a beautiful blessing: the unique blessing on the blossoming of the trees. This blessing is unique not only because it comes only once a year, but because of what it is that we are praising in this blessing. *שלא חיסר בעולמו כלום וברא בו בריות טובות ואילנות טובות ליהנות בהם בני אדם* *Blessed are You, HaShem, our G-d King of the universe, Who has left nothing missing from His Universe and has created in it good beings and good trees through which to bring pleasure to Mankind.*

This is the only blessing in which we praise G-d for giving us pleasure – *ליהנות בהם בני אדם*. After giving this some thought, we can realize that herein lies a deep message about life and its pleasures. In our blessings over bread or water, we do not mention that G-d gives us pleasure. These are basic

to Egypt, and in the end... she married Yosef... and from that marriage, two more Tribes, Menashe and Ephraim, came into being! Leah did not see the end of it; she died a year or two before Yosef was sold (Sefer Hadorot/ Sefer Hayashar). But she praised G-d knowing, that all along, there is a Seder to every redemption!

needs for survival. We do not feel the same kind of pleasure in receiving our vital *needs* as we do in being given the “*wants*” we feel in life. The fact that there is fruit on a tree shows us that G-d wants us to have pleasure, to enjoy His Goodness, to recognize His love for us, and not just to get by in life with the food groups that are basic for survival. He wants us to ascend far beyond the level of existing into the much higher realm of acknowledging appreciation. The fruit trees are here in the Universe to bring color and enjoyment to life. This displays G-d's love for us. That G-d wants us to be happy. He wants us to have our “*wants*”.

We might ask ourselves how it's possible to say that having wants brings about pleasure? Are there not plenty of people in the world who have all the



money they want and, even so, are living lives devoid of happiness? But this is precisely the point. The high level of happiness, the happiness that we feel when we have or we get what we want, lasts only for a few moments. After getting or seeing that we are getting our wants, the feelings and sensations of pleasure shrink to less than a minute fraction of those we experienced at the outset. In stark contrast, the blessing thanking G-d for His creations can be made only once a year, *unlike many other blessings of praise that can be made every thirty days*. The blessing for the trees is our expression of the happiness we have from seeing them, our first experience with fruit trees each year. How, then, is this such a great pleasure, the pleasure of getting our wants? And why is it specifically in Nissan?

The Hebrew months of the year are actually not Hebrew! In the Torah, the months are referred to through numbers: the First month (Nissan), Second month (Iyar) Third month (Sivan) ...and so on. Similarly, in Hebrew, the days of the week are numbers and not names, such as Sunday and Monday... Rabbeinu Bachye (Parashat Bo) writes that the days are given numbers in relation to Shabbat, reminding us how many days we are before or after Shabbat. The Hebrew months in the Torah, also, are counted from the first month of Nissan, the month of our Redemption from Egypt. This, as well serves to remind ourselves each month of the Redemption. This is the reason why the Torah did not give names to the months.

When the Jewish Nation came up from Bavel to rebuild the Second Temple, they brought along with them names for the months. Nissan, Iyar... these names are not Hebrew names. They came from Bavel and Paras/Maday. However, there is a message behind the name Nissan.

Nissan is always the month of spring. The first month (Nissan) is referred to as the **חֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב** (month of spring) in the Torah. Spring, in Hebrew, is **אֲבִיב** which can be broken up into **א' ב' י'** father of 12 (months). The word **נִיסָן** is very similar to the word in Shir Hashirim **נִרְאָה בְּאֶרֶץ הַנִּיצָנִים** the blossoms were seen in the land. This is the month

of blossoming, and the beginning of new life – a twelve-month life. All the months are led by this month. How?

The whole winter long, a tree looks like a piece of dead wood. The appearance of a blossom tells us that there is and was life inside. It was just waiting for the proper timing to come out. This feeling of resurrection that we get from the trees each spring shows us that there is a time when a person, also, feels revival and renewal. At different times in people's lives, they undergo change. This change is always fathered by a feeling of hope. And hope is the result of a realization that one has a choice to follow his will and grow to meet lifetime goals. That is what happened to the Jews in the month of Nissan. They were given hope and free will. That was their freedom. And that is why Nissan is the first month. That is why it is in spring.

This feeling of freedom of choice is why “wants” are just so sweet. The wants remind us of our choice. The apple on the tree is not something that we must eat for survival. It is what we want to eat. We can see and appreciate G-d through our wants and appreciate His having given us free will. And this is where all the pleasure is. It is not in the apple itself. It is not in the fancy cars and beautiful houses. After having all that, somehow the pleasure dwindles to a bare minimum. The real beauty is in the gift of choice and freedom to make it.

The Seforno says **הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֵן** this *month is yours* means that this month you are not a “slave to time”. So many people are just that: a slave to time. They are not free to do what they wish with their time. Their time does what **it** wants to do with them. In Nissan, we can practice our free will to serve G-d by actively choosing to *want* to serve Him. At times we say that we just “cannot find the time” to do things that we purport to want to do, such as praying slowly and intently and doing chesed. But in this month, we do not have to “serve time”. The person who wants to grow can find salvation in this month. Nissan **נִיסָן** is also from the word **נִיִּסִּים**, miracles. The ability to become something that we always wanted to be, the ability



to attain our spiritual desires can blossom in this month. Let it.

DECIDING BETWEEN TWO GIRLS

The morning that we heard about R' C. P. Shienberg's passing, the sun did not shine. After the morning prayers in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem, I approached a prominent figure in Jewish literature as we both took off our Tefillin. He had not yet heard the sad news. But when he did, he told me the following personal experiences he had with the Torah giant we lost.

“Let me tell you a bit about R' Sheinberg. Whenever I or anyone else would call and ask the Rebbetzin to speak to the Rabbi, his peculiar behavior was pretty noticeable. He would not immediately pick up the phone and talk. Rather, he would hold the phone to his heart for a little less than a minute, and only then would he say hello. I later realized why he did this. – When you speak to someone on the phone, you feel that something is different from when you speak in person. You feel that you did not get the whole person on the other line. You feel that you did not get all the attention. Maybe he was busy doing something, maybe he was in middle of a meeting. When R' Sheinberg answered the phone, he would wait to put all the focus away from his surroundings and direct focus on the feelings and emotions on the other end of the line. This may have been one of his secrets for having been happily married for 80 years. He would give all of his attention to one thing at a time.

30+ years back, when I was here learning as a bachur in Jerusalem, I had some crazy thing going on in my life. I was in shidduchim and for some reason that I cannot explain, I was seriously dating two girls at one time. This obviously caused me stress and confusion and my study partner told me that two girls at one time is just something that is ridiculous. But I did not know what to do. I had to pick one of the girls, and they were both excellent. I had a hard time comparing. (Writer's note: This sounds strange to us today – to date two girls. As a

*matter of fact, so many singles actually subconsciously date many of the opposite gender simultaneously. The reason why we are supposed to date one at a time is not just that we should not get confused. Rather, it is because when dating for marriage, we only need one that meets our needs. We just need one that we can work together with. The fact that there may be so many others that might be better is irrelevant. If it works, it's fine. **The problem is when a boy or girl starts to believe that he or she could have done better.**) So I was sent to speak to R Sheinberg.*

R' Sheinberg asked me for the first names of each one and had me describe them in order to help me make my decision. They were both quality girls. One of the girls was more intelligent, while the other's good qualities were her strong point. After going through the details, R' Sheinberg told me – one should be looking for a “gutteh” (good personality traits). I was still confused. I told him that when I was a bachur learning in Brooklyn, I attended a shiur by R' Pam, zt"l, from Torah Vadaat in Brooklyn, and he said in his Vaad on P' Chaye Sarah (R' Pam would give a special vaad for boys who were dating on that parasha) that one should look for a gutteh (good) and a klugeh (smart). This is why I am confused. One is smarter, while the other is higher in character.

R' Sheinberg answered me and said – if she is good, then she must be smart.

We see this in the Haggada . כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה . תורה אחד חכם אחד רשע... The Torah spoke in regard to answering four types of sons. One, who is smart, one, who is wicked... The question here is obvious. Why is the antonym of smart wicked? Would it not be more proper for the Haggada to write one who is righteous and one who is wicked?

The answer is that in order for someone to be good, to be righteous, he must first be smart and wise.

AN ONLY CHILD



The Haggadah sings every year on the Seder night : כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה : אחד חכם אחד רשע אחד תם : ואחד שאינו יודע לשאול . *The Torah referred to telling the story of the Exodus to four sons. One, the wise son. One, the evil son. One, the simple son. And one who doesn't know how to ask the four questions of the Seder night by himself...* Why does the Haggadah say one, one, one, one. Just say smart, evil, simple and one who does not know how to ask? Another question. The Haggadah says that since this evil son *makes it sound as if the whole story of the Exodus has nothing to do with him, knock out his teeth*. If we do that, we may risk losing the son. He will never come back to the Seder for another year. And, despite our having knocked out his teeth, every year he still comes back, and every year he gets another few teeth knocked out. (He has probably learnt to come with fake teeth by now.) Why are we not afraid to lose him? And why does he keep coming back?

The answer is a lesson for parenting. A father can be either a biological father, who is technically a father, without the emotional traits expected of him. He just happens to be the kid's father. Or, he can be a father with the character traits appropriate to a parent. Fathers who are successful have secrets that make them successful . One secret that makes a father successful is that he looks at each child *as his only child*. Not just that the child is part of a group of kids. Or that the child must fit into a mold of the "Family's Way". Each child has his own way. Each child is writing his own life biography. If a father can be like this, respecting each child as if he is his own entity, with his own successes in life, his own opinions in life... then such a child *will never leave his father*. And this is the secret of the Haggadah in parenting . *One, One , One , One*. And even if, at times, the parent sees that his evil son needs to be punished, and the boy *is* severely punished, he *will be* back next year. For he knows that in his father's eyes, no one can replace him.

We are taught (Shabbat 10b) that *a person should never act differently (and show favor) to one child over the other. For just a few threads that Yaakov added to the cloak of Yosef, more than was added*

to the cloak of the brothers, they envied him to no end. The result of this was that our forefathers went down to Egypt and suffered the bitter 210 years of slavery there....

Tosefot asks, how can the Talmud blame the whole slavery in Egypt on this parenting mistake of Yaakov? Weren't we supposed to go down to Egypt anyway, and be enslaved because of the 400 years decreed on Avraham at the Brit Ben Habetarim וענו אותם ועבדום ... (Breishit 15)? Was there not a decree on Avraham, establishing a period of 400 years during which his sons would not be able to live in the Land of Israel? Tosefot answers that the decree could have been fulfilled through his descendants, in that they were constantly on the go. *גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם*. From the time of Yitzchak, although our Forefather's were given the Holy Land, they were not accepted by its inhabitants. This alone could have been a fulfillment of the decree. And the 400 years actually *did* start with the birth of Yitzchak. Still, the Talmud teaches us that all the *bitter exile of having to go down and be slaves in Egypt* was due to a parenting mistake of Yaakov. He favored one son over the other.

It has been said that the reason why we bring the karpas to the seder table is because it is a reminder of the פסים (פס cloth stripe) that Yaakov added to his son Yosef. (see Rashi on the passuk ועשה לו כתונת פסים . Rashi refers to the words כרפס ותכלת from M. Esther.) We dip it in the חרוסת to remind us of the ten tribes dipping Yosef's cloak in the goat's blood. This was the cause of our slavery.

Now, Yaakov Avinu, of course, was not the type of father that makes parenting mistakes. (Even Leah, who was called שנואה in comparison to Rachel, felt Yaakov's favoritism for her sister only through Ruach Hakodesh. Not from Yaakov.) Our Rabbis tell us that Yaakov made ketonot (cloaks) for the rest of his sons, as well. He made them stripes with the same material of Argaman. The only difference was that for Yosef, this material of Argaman (purple dyed wool) went all the way down to the end of the sleeve (cuff) of the cloak.(see Rashi on

Shabbat 10b ; B. Rabbah) It was just a difference of 20 סלעים, a minute difference. And, Yosef, who was smarter than his brothers and to whom Yaakov taught all the Torah that he had learnt at Yeshivat Shem VaEver, created a unique relationship with his father. They were very close, much closer than the other brothers were to Yaakov. Yosef *did* lose his mother. And the brothers of Yosef were greater tzaddikim than any we had ever known. Yaakov must have believed that there were enough variables here that Yosef's brothers would not take this personally. Still, just giving one child more, a drop more, a few more purple strings that went down to the sleeve, was enough to be considered THE parenting mistake of our nation. This caused the other brothers to feel, at the time, that they were just "the brothers"...

Avraham Avinu, the father of our nation, displayed this fatherliness trait as well. When G-d asked him to offer his beloved, special son up on the altar, את יצחק – בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת, את יצחק he asked G-d which beloved son. Which special, unique son, Yitzchak or Yishmael. Until finally, G-d had to tell him that He was referring to his son, Yitzchak. This is after the Torah said that Yishmael had sinned the three cardinal sins. ותרא שרה את בן הגר המצרית אשר ילדה לאברהם מצחק There is supposed to

be a special place in the heart of a father for each and every child. No matter what path the child takes, each child is an only child in his own way.

I always wondered why Rachel Imeinu got the title of being the mother of the Jewish Nation, more than Leah. I heard this idea in the name of R' Pam. קול ברמה נשמע..מאנה להנחם על בניה כי...אינו... *Mother Rachel cries in the Heavens, not willing to be consoled over her children that are not at home, Eretz Yisroel, physically and spiritually...* Let us get down to the singular/plural rule of the Hebrew language. מאנה להנחם על בניה כי *She refuses to be consoled over her sons (plural) for he(singular) is not there.* Why the switch?

The reason why Rachel is the mother of the Jewish nation is that although she cries for the Jewish Nation *as a whole*, for their being in a physical and spiritual exile, *she sheds a special tear for each and every one of her children.* This is the way we hold on to *our* children. By letting them feel that we love each and every one of them with a unique love for who they are. Each one has his own purpose in life. And just as it is ridiculous to love one finger more than the other fingers of the hand, for each has its own purpose, it is senseless to love one child more than the other.

LONG TERM MEMORY

Everybody knows at least some of the mitzvot of Passover: clearing out the chametz from one's home, eating matzah, and reciting the haggadah are mitzvot even some of the most assimilated Jews keep on some level. Less known, however, is the *reason* we perform all of these mitzvot: *zecher leyitziat mitzrayim* (remembering the miracles G-d did for our ancestors when He redeemed them from Egypt).

The Torah provides us with *mitzvot* in order to "joggle our memories." *But should we really need such assistance?* True, the exodus happened 3,325 years ago – but could any Jew ever forget such a monumental part of our history?

For many of us, in 2013, it is difficult to relate to the emancipation of an Egyptian slave on a personal level. *The freedom our ancestors felt at that moment has been forgotten over generations of persecution and trial.* Still, we are obligated by the Torah to find a way to *relate to that feeling of freedom*, making it eminently relevant for *us*, so that it will stay emblazoned on our hearts and stay in our memory forever.

Even if one has a bad memory, who could ever forget his wedding day, or the moment one of his children was born? This is because we remember things which are personal and important to us. Apparently, especially in our high-speed generation, we need to put in effort to make this



ancient memory relevant. We need a way to make this feeling of freedom personal.

There is another factor which makes our task of feeling the redemption from Egypt even harder. At the moment of the exodus, we were a nation in the desert without a homeland. It wasn't until 40 years later that the Jewish Nation miraculously captured the land of Canaan and drove out the seven nations who lived there. *There is no religious Jewish holiday to commemorate the miraculous victory and inheritance of the land of Israel, our national homeland.* On Passover, then, we are celebrating the fact that we went *from being slaves to being a homeless People in the desert!* How is this supposed to elicit feelings of freedom?

The answer is deep. G-d created man with the ability to choose, a deep desire for freedom of choice. Although we are *commanded* to do good, still, G-d gave man the gift of freewill and choice. Since this is part of the fabric of how we were created, people who do not have freedom of choice feel miserable. Today, Fortune 400 business advisors suggests that employers give options to their employees instead of only giving orders, because a person thrives when given the opportunity to use this freedom of choice. When a parent gives a child different positive options from which to choose, the child is less likely to feel animosity toward the parent. People who have been denied the opportunity to exercise free will are rebelling against their governments. Many would rather die for a belief or lifestyle which they choose than live without freedom of choice.

Passover is a holiday of free choice. The Jews in Egypt were denied the freedom of choice, robbing them of the ability to serve G-d. This was the most difficult part of their servitude. On the 15th of Nissan, each Egyptian Jew took his wife and

children and left Egypt, walking into a barren desert on foot, with just one set of clothes and no plan for procuring food and water, while the burning sun beat down on him. Still, his joy knew no bounds. Finally, he could do what he wanted to do; every Jew, deep down, wants to serve his Creator and serve his purpose in this world. We were ready to choose and accept the Torah at Mount Sinai. On that day, we didn't even care if we had a land to go to. We were happy just to be ourselves, and we understood the importance of our freedom of choice. This joy can be celebrated by a Jew, even in exile. Even if he is not at his homeland, he can still choose who he wants to serve.

It might be difficult for a citizen in Western culture to relate to concepts of slavery or dictatorship. From the signing of the Declaration of Independence in the United States in 1776, a new era began. The success of America was its discovery of the power that free choice gives. Control techniques of other nations simply went out of style. Many of us forgot what slavery looks or feels like. However, even in the 21st Century, people serve all different "masters" and addictions such as materialism and digitalism. Digital addiction and cell phones fog up family time. Many people can't free themselves from these addictions. We must realize this and get back our free choice or at least a feeling of freedom, on the holiday of Passover.

There is an Armani perfume advertisement which says, "It's not about being noticed; it's about being remembered." This Passover, instead of us just "noticing" an event in ancient Jewish history, we can merit "remembering" our freedom of choice as a Jew and relive the experience. Remember that we can make a choice as to how to live, and that we are free to choose to live a life of serving G-d.

ENERGETIC BLOOD AND LETHARGIC FAT

Mr. Levy sells merchandise and signs contracts out of his home office. When things are quiet, he spends his time learning in the synagogue down the block. One day, a client came, wanting to place a substantial order. Upon answering the door, the

family told this fellow that their father was not available at the moment. The serious client left and found himself another salesman with whom to make the big deal. When daddy came home and learned what had happened, he was more than



upset about the excellent transaction that had passed him by. Mr. Levy, in a loud tone of voice, asked his family members why no one had even entertained the thought of calling him home from his study session to meet the man.

The next day, while Mr. Levy was out learning, Little Levy came into the study hall, huffing and puffing. “Dad, I told the man waiting at the door not to leave, and that you will be home in less than a minute.” Mr. Levy hurried home and was far less than happy to find that it was none other than a tax agent, who was patiently awaiting his return. A couple of hours and many headaches later, Mr. Levy plopped himself down on the living room couch. Out of frustration, he addressed his family: “Fools! When a business man comes, no one hurries me home – but when a tax agent is at the door, you can’t say I am not available?!”

This allegory can teach us a lesson for life. We all have preprogrammed traits of enthusiasm and laziness. At times, we can use laziness to our benefit, and at times, we should look for the energy and enthusiasm within ourselves. We are commanded by G-d to observe both positive and negative commandments. The productive way of life is to use each trait at its proper time: energy and enthusiasm are appropriately used when performing the mitzvot, whereas lethargy and a kind of indifferent laziness should be summoned when confronted with the possibility of committing the Aveirot. The problem comes about when we are lazy when we are supposed to be enthusiastic, and we are energetic when we are supposed to be lazy.

There are people who describe themselves as lazy people. If they really *are* lazy people, where does the energy come from when it comes to sin? The ideal situation would be if we could use the trait of laziness that we have in ourselves in situations where we are supposed to refrain from sinning, and enlist our energy and enthusiasm for the mitzvot that we are supposed to be doing.

We can learn this lesson from the sacrifices discussed in our parasha. The parts of the animal that were sacrificed on the altar in the Beit Hamikdash were mainly the blood and the fat. This parallels what we mentioned earlier: the blood symbolizes energy; the fat, laziness. The sacrifices came as atonement for not having used these characteristics in the proper time and place.

Many people believe that who they are is defined by how they behave. This is far from the truth. A person is his wants, ambitions and free choice. The middot (character traits) one has are not the person himself. *Middot are just tools that serve us or hurt us.* (See Chovot Halevovot, end of Shaar Avodat HaElokim) Allow me to elaborate.

At times, we feel “down” – upset – when we see someone else who is more energetic and successful than we are. But this is like a singer comparing the recording of another singer, made in a professional studio, to his own recording, made on his mp3 player. The results depend on the tools that were used in the recording just as much as they depend on the voice of the singer. If you do not have the same middot as the “successful” people, you cannot compare yourself to them. But this does not mean that the game is over. Our rabbis teach us that you have to get up and get busy acquiring those middot of the successful. Become energetic for the mitzvot. Get lazy when it comes to sin. Learn how to become more focused, so you can learn more efficiently. This does not mean to encourage looking around at others and comparing ourselves to them. Quite the contrary: it is impossible to compare different people’s successes, because some people were born with these middot, or tools, and G-d wants everyone else to make an active effort to acquire them. Middot *can* be acquired. They can also be adapted and put to use in appropriate situations.



THE ART OF LEARNING LESSONS

The most important of all the lessons of history, is that men do not learn very much from the lessons of history. Covid, as well, has a lesson for everyone. According to YouGov, a research and data analytics firm, only 8 percent of Brits of England want to go back to life as it was before the pandemic. According to *The Economist*, Covid forced a home-working experiment that is likely to change work life forever, to some virtual/live hybrid model that is more time effective and cost efficient.

The purpose of יסורים, of pain and suffering, is at the root of the word. סור which means remove, Mussar, etc. There are other Hebrew words that can be used, like סבל, צער, but our Rabbis use, specifically, the word Yissurim, because if you do not remove something, some habit or some behavior, then the whole purpose of the suffering is defeated. As we learn in Berachot 5b, that if a person does not “appreciate” the pain and suffering he/she goes through, if a person does not learn something from it, it has no value.

This is the lesson of Passover. The Marror on the Seder plate is to be positioned in the place of the Sefirah of Tifferet, which represents G-d’s mercy. What? How could Marror, bitterness, be mercy? The answer is hidden in the custom that we eat Romaine lettuce, which is חסה, which refers to the mercy that G-d had upon us. Because the Sefirah of Tifferet is truth, long term. Goodness, long term. To have long term goodness, long term truth, one needs, sometimes, to go through bitter times and accept the things that are difficult to accept. Because, as Judasim teaches, the only path to long-term pleasure is, almost always, through short term pain.

This is the reason why, if a person does not have Matzah on Pesach, only Marror, there is no mitzvah of having Marror alone. (Rambam K. Pesach 8;2, Sefer Hamitzvot Mitzvah Aseh 56) According to most opinions, eating Marror is not counted as one of the 613 Mitzvoth, on its own,

because it is part of the Mitzvah of Korban Pesach. Why is that so?

The Mitzvah of Matzah is to remember the hasty Redemption, when there was not enough time for the dough to rise. The Mitzvah of Marror is to remember the bitterness the Egyptians put our ancestors through. And the Mitzvah of the Pesach sacrifice is to remember the disconnect from the Egyptian god and the recommitment with serving our Creator, and how G-d skipped over the doors of the undeserving Jews and punished only the Egyptians. If a person does not have Matzah, just Marror, then there is no Mitzvah in eating it, as there is no purpose in remembering only the bitterness. If, together with the bitterness, you are not reminded of G-d’s strength, if you do not rekindle your connection with Him – it’s pointless. The Passuk teaches us this concept, as well. בַּעֲבוּרֵי עֵשָׂה יִקְנֶה לִּי בְּצִאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם: Because of this, for the sake of the Mitzvah of Matzah and Marror for all generations, G-d took me out of Egypt. (See Rashi Shemot 13;8) It is not that we eat Matzah and Marror because we went through Exile and Exodus. Quite the contrary. We went through Exile and Exodus, because G-d wants us to have this Mitzvah of Matzah and Marror. What? How does that make any sense? What is the purpose in of itself of eating Matzah and Marror?

Eating Matzah and Marror is a reminder of this timeless lesson, that all the pain and suffering we go through has a purpose, a lesson to be learnt, a way of life that can be altered, a perspective that can transcend with a paradigm shift. This is the element our Rabbis refer to as מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח behind the Hagaddah story, beginning with difficulty and ending with praise. If, at the end, you can’t express praise for the difficulty, you have missed the whole purpose.

The lessons learnt from self-reflection in the moments of difficulty are the building blocks of the story of our identity. Only these experiences spearhead lasting change. The interventions from Above to what we thought was “normal” challenge



us to rethink our values, which ripple-effect through our thoughts and actions. It forces us to ask ourselves what's most important in life, and what we stand for. It helps us learn which values we can drop, and the values that do not help us get to where we really want to end up.

The first Mitzvah taught at Har Sinai, was how to treat slaves. Because that was a major lesson learnt from the experience of slavery in Egypt, of pain, of degradation, so that we can have empathy for those who are dependent and reliant on us. This lesson is fundamental in the whole Torah, "Don't do to others what you don't want done to you."

But, some people live their life not listening to their messages. Some people never learn, never pay attention, never take insight. This was the lesson of the Plagues, and why each one was given in a measure for measure format. Of course, G-d could have just struck the whole of Egypt with one big lightning flash, and called it a day. But G-d allowed the back-and-forth with Pharaoh, his Egyptian nation and the Jewish people, to teach us this lesson of what happens when people do not learn the lessons. When G-d warns that all animals that are left outdoors will die in the Plague of Pestilence, only those who "feared G-d" listened. And those who did not fear G-d, and ignored His word, who left their animals outdoors, lost them to the Plague. What? This is called "G-d fearing"? You have to be a fool to not listen to Moshe's warning, after the first four Plagues! But this is what G-d-fearing means, at its core. It means **not ignoring G-d's messages**. From all the things that were bad about Amalek, the epitome of Amalek's wickedness was *וְרָא אֱלֹקִים וְלֹא יָרָא* *And he is not G-d fearing.* (Devarim 25;18) What? Amalek has plenty of things to work on before expecting from them fear of G-d. Because G-d-fearing means not ignoring the messages of G-d. And the core of all Amalek's wickedness was ignoring the strength of G-d in the Exodus.

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored, and G-d does not cease to exist because He is ignored. Ignoring G-d's messages has a hefty

price tag. If a person ignores G-d's message, *לֹא-יִיאָבֶה יְקוֹנֶה סִלְחָה לֹא* G-d won't want to forgive the person, ever. (Devarim 29; 19) G-d's message in the Exodus was *בְּעֵבֶר תִּדַע כִּי אֵין כָּמֹנִי בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ* So that you will know that there is none like Me in all the land. That there exists no being like G-d – that was the lesson of the first three Plagues, *דַּע*. No other being or entity is aware of the world and involved in it as G-d is; this is the lesson of the next three *עַד* Plagues. There is no being, no entity with the infinite strength and power that G-d has. That is the message of the Plagues of *בְּאֵה"ב*. (See Kley Yakar)

The world is still scratching its head trying to figure out how the invisible enemy that brought the world to its knees was created. But that, sometimes, is not as important as the lessons that we can learn from this whole mess. If we can learn just some of the lessons that are being sent from Above during Covid, we can change our lives!

Selfie steps for learning life lessons

1. All humans make mistakes. Not all humans learn from them. To learn lessons from your mistakes, you need to look past your shame, past your failures, ignore feelings of regret... all of which are temporary, while lessons are hopefully permanent. Nothing can empower you for your future like the lessons learnt from the mistakes of your past. Unfortunately, some of the best lessons of life can only be taught to us the hard way.
2. The experiences, the people, the adversities, the challenges of your life, are all there to teach you lessons. Nothing was put into your life randomly.
3. Never fail to learn lessons in life from the most unordinary places. Oftentimes, G-d packages lessons in the most ridiculous, unexpected, annoying, packages.

JUST A THOUGHT

This week we discuss the Mitzvah of bringing offerings in the *Beit HaMikdash* to atone for sin. Why are we commanded to bring a sin-offering – קרבן חטאת – for (certain types of) sins committed unintentionally, but not for sins committed intentionally? Why can't intentional sins also be atoned for by sacrificing an animal?

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 95) explains why the sin-offering is appropriate only for the unintentional sinner. He notes that the body of a person is similar to the body of an animal in many ways. The main difference between humans and animals is that humans have intellect and a superior level of consciousness. When a person sins against G-d unintentionally, he is essentially abandoning his intellect, and acting like an animal. When he brings an animal sacrifice for atonement, he realizes that he deserves to be put on the altar – if not for G-d's mercy – for failing to use his intellect, and, essentially, acting like an animal. In this way, he internalizes the importance of rectifying his unintentional behavior. He resolves to act in a more self-aware and self-critical way in the future. This is part of the *teshuvah* process which cleanses one from sin. The intentional sinner (מזיד), in contrast, cannot receive atonement in this way, for he sinned with his intellect. The conceptual framework we have been discussing does not apply to him, for although he may have sinned out of passion or desire, he decided consciously to sin. He put his thought into it.

The Ben Ish Chai takes this a step further. A thought is something that has tremendous power, for good as much as bad. The reason for this is because our thoughts are spiritual, and our actions are only physical. In the upper worlds, spirituality has much more weight than physicality. Our Rabbis teach us הרהורי עבירה קשים מעבירה מעבירה - thoughts of sinning are a more serious violation than the sin itself (Yoma 29a.). The Shulchan Aruch rules that Mitzvoth need כוונה, intent, focus and thought. (Orach Chaim 4) Without thought, the mitzvah will not make its mark in the uppermost worlds (עולם המחשבה).

There are other places in the Torah that show us about the power of thought. We find a thought-provoking law concerning עדים זוממים, plotting witnesses. ועשייתם לו כאשר זמם לעשות לאחיו (דברים), "And you should do to him as he plotted to do to his brother." The plotting witnesses are to be punished by death, having to make a monetary payment or lashes— depending on what they had plotted to do. The words mentioned are כאשר זמם *as he plotted* and not כאשר עשה *as he did*. The Talmud derives from here that when these plotting witnesses are caught *after* the Jewish court carried out the decree, the plotting witnesses will not get punished. This of course is seemingly incomprehensible. How can the witnesses who carried out the plot go free, whereas the one who actually was caught before court carried out the decree be punished?

There is a very deep Maharal on this concept. The Maharal (Be'er Hagolah be'er 2) writes that the explanation for this is that as long as the plot or thought is in existence, it has a certain power. Once the plot has already come to fruition, the power of the *thought* is used up. It is not a thought anymore; rather it is classified as an act. However, as long as the plot was left in the realm of the abstract and not carried out, the Jewish court will use that plot against the plotting witness. The Maharal compares the *thought* to a ball that is thrown against a wall: the ball bounces back at the person who threw it, according to the velocity of the throw. This is true only for the power of a *thought*. However, if the thought was translated into action, this plotting witness who got caught will not be punished by death, because he did not do any *physical* damage. Rather, the damage was the outcome brought about by the court.

One of the first tractates that a Yeshiva student is taught is Massechet Makkot. I always wondered why it is such a common Tractate for young students. The Chida, in his sefer Dvash L'fi, writes that he heard from an ancient *mekubal* (one who studies mystic works) that it is very good to study the tractate of Makkot, for it stops one from evil thoughts. The *mekubal* said that the *gematria*, or numerical value of the word מכות, is the same as



the Hebrew word for *thoughts*466 – הרהורים. Therefore, writes the Chida, the *minhag* of the Yeshiva system for generations has been to teach this tractate, specifically, first, preferring it over all other tractates.

I once heard the following concept in the name of the Maharal. The reason that Yaakov loved and cherished his son Yosef and gave him more than he gave to the other Tribes(K'tonet Passim, Sh'chem and deserving of two tribes- Menashe and Efraim) was because Yosef had, in a way, the title of firstborn. Although Reuven was the first one that Yaakov fathered, Yaakov thought, on the night of the wedding, that he was marrying Rachel, when it was actually Leah. *Being that this was the thought*

of Yaakov, he felt closeness to Yosef, who was, in fact, Rachel's first born, as a father feels towards a firstborn son.

The Ben Ish Chai brings from the Midrash a story of a certain white-skinned king and queen who gave birth to a black-skinned child. When they looked into the reason for this surprising phenomenon, they came to the conclusion that it was because of the paintings of black people in the palace: the queen would look at these paintings, and since her thoughts were absorbed by the paintings and their black images, her offspring was born black.

Our thoughts do a lot. A lot more than we think!

THE GOOD SIDE OF THE EVIL INCLINATION

It has become the “in thing” for many Jewish mothers to go to a hotel for Passover. Even though this was not the practice of their *own* mothers, going to a hotel instead of cleaning is becoming the widespread custom for many who can afford – and even for those who cannot afford – such luxury. I was in a small toy store in Jerusalem, and I heard the following comment from a religious, female employee to her friend. “I work all year long just so that I can afford the hotel and not have to clean my house for Pesach!!”

Let us take a reality check. What, exactly, are we inspecting in “bedikat chametz”? While reviewing the laws of checking the house for chametz, The Halachic authority mentioned that although the house should be cleaned before one checks, one must be careful, particularly in this stressful hour of checking for chametz, not to get angry at his spouse. The implication is that anger is to the soul what chametz is to kosher Pesah food. In the *Yehi Ratzon* prayer which we recite when ridding the house of chametz, we say that our intention is also to **check and cleanse our hearts** for the spiritual chametz that is there. This spiritual chametz is “The evil side of the evil inclination”. And one who is free from spiritual chametz should certainly not be getting angry.

Now, let us direct our focus to an interesting Jewish law about Matza. The only Matza with which one can fulfill his obligation on Seder night is matza made from ingredients that can become Chametz. Matza that is made out of rice and “*dochan*” is not valid for fulfilling the mitzvah of eating matzah on the night of the Seder. We learn this from the psukkim. We need flour that **can** become chametz – allegorically, flour that has the possibility of becoming “evil” – it is up to us to make sure that we get only the good out of it. We are meant to find the good existing within the evil inclination. Paralleling the good and not good components of dough – the elements we catch before they have a chance to become chametz – there are elements in our personalities which must be “caught” and directed to constructive purposes. How is this to be done? The following insight was introduced to me this last week by R' Aharon Feldman, sh'lita.

The Torah teaches that expression is a human need. Ruach, Nefesh and Neshama are our “spokesmen”. Ideally, the Neshama should be the source of our expression, as the Neshama strives only toward good. (Ruach is the root of the ego-how one perceives himself; Nefesh is the internal drive for earthly needs and wants. In simple terms: The Neshama wants to do *what is purely good*. The Ruach wants to do *what looks good*. And the



Nefesh wants to do *what feels good*.) Within Ruach and Nefesh, there are, as it were, “ulterior motives” – goals that are self-serving, goals that pull us down. Ruach, the ego, can be healthy self esteem, or – in its chametz aspect – a drive to make an impression on others by flaunting wealth or intelligence. Nefesh, relating to material needs, is healthy when taking care of necessities: its negative side is pursuing luxury and excesses.

When the negative side of these soul components takes over, the Neshama is clouded. Positive expressions stem from the Neshama. Expressions of Ruach and Nefesh must ideally be filtered through the Neshama, which is “an integral part of our Creator, on high” חלק אלוהים ממעל. Thus, sifting through the expressions of Ruach and Nefesh empower the Neshama to shine forth. Just by negating and discrediting the irrational thoughts of running after honor and fame, or pleasures and dreams, we help the desire of the Neshama to express itself. אלקי- נשמה שנתת בי טהורה היא. “*HaShem! The soul which You have given me is pure....*” The purity of good will is lucid and even powerful.

Let us examine the filtering process in regard to self esteem. There are two ways to tap into the healthy self esteem within us. One is by reinforcing it: recognizing the areas in life in which we were and are successful. The second possibility is to recognize the senselessness of the irrational, self-defeating thoughts that make us look at ourselves as failures. Positive, healthy self esteem that we all have in us, even without reconstructing it, is one of the aspects of our Neshama and Ruach. We can see that when we remove the evil from the yetzer hara, from our Ruach and Nefesh, from the expression of negative actions and behaviors, there remains a positive essence.

How does all this affect our relationship with G-d?

A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

And-ויקרא אל משה וידבר ה' אליו מאהל מועד לאמר (Hashem) called out to Moshe and Hashem spoke to him from the ohel mo'ed, saying...(Vayikra 1:1) The Midrash Rabbah (1:15) learns from this pasuk

We are commanded to love G-d and fear Him. How can we understand being commanded to have a particular emotion? We either have the emotion, or we do not – we naturally feel a certain way, or we don't.

The answer is that deep down we all have a place in us where we love G-d. This feeling and expression is that of the Neshama, coming through the Nefesh. The reason why sometimes we do not feel our love for Him is because of our irrational thoughts and expectations. Or our passion for worldly things that clouds the feeling of love toward G-d. When we remove these worldly passions and desires, our love for and belief in Him are revealed. This happens at special, memorable moments in everyone's life. It is simply the Neshama expressing itself through the Nefesh. It happens even in the lives of people who seem to be the most distant from spirituality.

R' Yehuda Tzadka, zt"l, related a story about a close friend of his to his students. The friend had wanted to increase merit for Jewish neighbors who did not have a mezuzah by offering them to write and put up a mezuzah on their door – all costs covered. At one of the doors that he knocked on, a woman opened, and, hearing his request, declined the offer. She said, “Thank you, Rabbi, but I am a non – believer”.

Just at that moment, her daughter popped out of one of the bedrooms and said to her mother- “Mom – do not lie. Last week when I had a 39-degree fever, you said a prayer to G-d. The G-d who you prayed to when you needed Him is the same one who asked you to put a mezuzah on the door.” And she did.

Deep down, we are all believers. All we must do is to clear away the fog. To get rid of the chametz.

that even a dead animal is better than a Talmid Chacham who lacks da'at. This is implied from that which Moshe waited for Hashem to invite him to enter the Mishkan. Although Moshe built the

entire Mishkan, he nevertheless held himself back from entering until invited.

It is definitely inappropriate to enter someone's home uninvited, but how could doing so have rendered someone of Moshe's caliber guilty of lacking the fundamental quality of da'at? Also, what does the Midrash mean to tell us when it states that a Talmid Chacham who doesn't act with da'at is on a lower level than a dead animal?

Whenever we speak about knowledge, we find three words used to describe it: Chachma, Bina and Da'at. Chachma refers to knowing information, and Bina is the ability to construct concepts off of previous knowledge. Da'at, however, has not been achieved until one internalizes the information in a way that its applicable. Rav Avigdor Miller teaches that this is a level of clarity to the senses that is so live and vivid that it can't be forgotten.

For example, a parent can tell a small child that he should not play with fire because it can burn them. The child has gained a piece of information (chachma). Then the parent can teach the child how to distinguish between something hot and something that isn't (bina). But until the child actually makes the mistake of touching something hot – and experiences the pain of a burn first-hand, he will not gain a true understanding of what it means to touch something hot. Only after this

happens will the child develop an instinct to run away from fire because he now has it internalized (Da'at).

If a Talmid Chacham doesn't internalize information in a way that he will act upon his information refining his beliefs, principles and proper habits, than his knowledge and efforts are for naught. He is more useless than an animal carcass; at least a carcass has bones that can still serve a purpose. Without Da'at, one's knowledge is unrealized potential, because it has not been internalized in a usable fashion. (For this reason, the Rambam in his Mishna Torah calls the section on middot "Hilchot De'ot").

Some people live life without ever thinking about what their principles and beliefs are. They act on the spur of the moment. When one lives this way, life can get very confusing. It becomes full of contradictions and sometimes one sees how others perceive him, and he is shocked. One finds himself wondering, "I don't think this way, so why did I act this way?"

Take out time to jot down what your principles, beliefs and life-values are. Then weigh them out against each other, and review it periodically, asking yourself, "Is this the way I behave?" There is no better way to see your true reflection.

It's a Matter of Principle

Vayikra el Moshe vayedaber Hashem eilov mei'ohel mo'ed leimor"- And (Hashem) called out to Moshe and Hashem spoke to him from the ohel mo'ed, saying..." (Vayikra 1:1)

The Midrash Rabbah (1:15) learns from this pasuk that even a dead animal is better than a Talmid Chacham who lacks da'at. This is implied from that which Moshe waited for Hashem to invite him to enter the Mishkan. Although Moshe built the entire Mishkan, he nevertheless held himself back from entering until invited.

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The Realization of Realization

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The actualization of realization

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A B C of manners

Defining boundaries

As mentioned earlier, da'at is a level of clarity which makes ideas so clear that they won't be fogged up. Attaining this level of clarity allows one to differentiate; it is for this reason that havdalla is said in the bracha of "chonen hada'at."

Although Moshe built the Holy of Holies in the Mishkan, he did not walk in without being called. This demonstrated his appreciation that where there is a door separating between two people or places, there is an opportunity to recognize that a world exists outside oneself. Moshe didn't just say that if G-d exists everywhere, surely I, as a representative of G-d's nation, can just walk in!

The Resented Critic

The word "bikoret" means criticism. This word shares a root with the word "bikur," which means

"visit." Rebbitzin Neudstadt explained that the connection between these words can be understood with the following mashal (parable):

A new neighbor arrives in the apartment building. Mrs. Cohen befriends her in a welcoming way. One day, while Mrs. Cohen is in the privacy of her own home doing dishes in the kitchen, she turns around and is surprised to find her new neighbor standing right there looking at her.

"What are you doing here?" asks Mrs. Cohen, nearly dropping the dishes in shock.

"I just thought I'd stop in for a visit!" answers the new neighbor.

Mrs. Cohen says to her new neighbor, "I appreciate your visit, and you're welcome to visit anytime. However, there is a door for a reason! Next time, please knock and I will gladly invite you in!"

The same way that even if a person invites a visitor, they expect the visitor to knock before entering, one who is giving criticism to a spouse, friend or acquaintance must first ensure that the other person is ready to hear what he has to say. It is sometimes important and constructive to help another improve himself through positive criticism, but we must make sure before we criticize someone that we have earned his trust and that the other person is welcoming us into his heart. Otherwise, it can be an offense of the first degree, despite the good intentions of the critic.

Obnoxious Line Cutters with Filthy Fingers

This is the common denominator between many etiquette rules and manner guidelines— the recognition that a world exists outside one's self and act accordingly. Recently I stood in a line and a few rushing people tried cutting. I looked at them

with disgust. My friend then asked me why I look at them so lowly – they didn't transgress any Halachic or Local law! They didn't really steal anything.

There are some people who don't understand why it is so important for everyone to eat with a fork. They say, "If G-d gave us fingers that serve the same purpose of a fork (if not better), then we should use them! They just use the fork not to be strange and not to dirty their fingers.

However, as discussed earlier, part of da'at is to realize and internalize that if there is a line, than it is for everyone's best interest, in order to create peace and tranquility. If there exists a fork in order that a person should not be grossed out by the one sitting on the opposite side of the table – use it. This is the basics of da'at. Derech erez kadma latorah!

Quest for Honor

The Honor Crutch

The first word in the pasuk discussed above, "Vayikra" is spelled with a small letter 'alef'. Moshe was not instructed by Hashem to make this letter smaller than the others – he did so out of his own humility, as he felt unworthy to be summoned by G-d for a private meeting in the Holy of Holies.

This word 'vayikra' with a small letter 'alef' reminds us of another variant spelling of the word vayikra. When Hashem summoned Bilaam, the non-Jewish prophet, the word vayikra has no alef in it altogether. Despite the fact that Moshe was a much greater person than Bilaam, we see that in Moshe's eyes, he was no more deserving of the honor of speaking with Hashem.

The Medrash Tanchuma states, "kol haboreiach min hasheroro, hasheroro boreiach acharov" – "One who runs away from honor, honor runs after him." The opposite is also true – one who runs after honor, the honor runs away from him. This

truism has been proven many times over. How can we understand this?

People often chase honor because they suffer from low self-esteem, and therefore need others to validate them in order to provide them with a sense of self-worth. When someone runs from honor, others notice that he is a person who is self-confident and comfortable with himself, and respect him much more. This is the only way to becoming deserving of real honor. (Real Power by David Lieberman Ph.D page 79)

What Ticked off Haman

In the Purim story, Haman managed to pass legislation requiring everyone in Achashverosh's kingdom to bow down to him, and the people obediently did so – except for one. Mordechai refused to bow down to Haman. This led Haman to complain that everything he had accomplished was worthless in his eyes as long as there was one person who didn't bow down to him.



Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, in his sefer *Sichos Mussar*, explains Haman's particular frustration in seeing that Mordechai did not share this quest for honor. "Kol zeh einenu shaveh li bchol et asher ani roeh et mordechai hayehudi yoshev bshaar hamelech" (5:13) – "All of this is not worth anything to me, as long as I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the gate of the King!" R' Chaim asked: why did Haman get so upset from just one person out of the whole kingdom?

His answer is powerful. Someone who chases after honor is never at rest. As long as there is more honor to be chased after – and there always is – he will have no peace until he has "conquered" that honor. All the other honor is not enough.

Honor's Correct Address

Credit Where Credit is Due

The Mishna in *Pirkei Avos* (6:6) says *HaOmer davar b'shem omro meivi geula l'olam* – One who repeats something he heard from another, and attributes the saying to the one who said it, brings redemption to the World. This is learned from Esther, who told Achashverosh that it was Mordechai who discovered Bigsan and Seresh's plot to kill the king.

The Maharal asks two questions on this Mishna. First, we know that reward is always proportionate to the deed which was done (*Middah K'neged Middah*, "measure for measure"). Why was redemption an appropriate reward for Esther's willingness to give the credit to Mordechai?

Second, many people throughout history have attributed their statements appropriately, yet they did not bring redemption!

He answers that since the redemption was to come through hidden miracles, G-d wanted it to come about through someone who was herself willing to remain "hidden" and not take any credit for herself. Esther "gave credit where credit was due." The name "Esther" means "hidden" – because this was the character trait that made Esther the right one for the job.

By contrast, Mordechai sat and learned Torah all day, completely disinterested in what others thought of him. As a result, he was not the slightest bit impressed with the worldwide recognition and honor that Haman was receiving. When one knows he is doing the right thing, as Mordechai did as he sat and learned Torah, he feels an inner peace that cannot be challenged by others. This healthy mindset of Mordechai gave him the power to stand up against all the ridicule he received for protesting against the seuda of Achashverosh.

This inner peace is completely unattainable to someone who chases honor.

The Maharal understands that this Mishna does not mean that every time someone attributes a statement it brings redemption. Rather, it means that when redemption comes, it will always come through someone who is willing to hide himself and not take the credit for the redemption.

Stop Searching for Yeshuot (Redemption)

The *Chovot HaLevavot* (*Shaar HaBitachon*, *Perek 5*) writes that a true "Baal Bitachon" attributes all of his successes to G-d. If one would do this more often, as opposed to only blaming G-d for his failures, he would feel more love for G-d, and G-d would be more willing to send salvation through his hands.

Imagine standing on top of a 20-story building, and feeling that because one is so high up that makes him tall. This is the foolishness of attributing our successes to ourselves, rather than realizing we are just midgets on a giant's shoulders – Hashem is creating our successes!

There is another benefit to attributing one's successes to G-d. The *Sfat Emet* explains that when others see someone attributing his successes to Hashem rather than taking all the honor for himself, they actually feel more comfortable around that person – and people are "turned off" by



those who take credit for their own like'.
accomplishments and make themselves out to 'G-d

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