


**Parashat Behar
Behukatay**

English version

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THE ART OF DEPENDENCE

Sometimes we think that we go out of our way for other people. We give our money, our time, our energy, for other people. But in reality, the one who receives the most when giving is the giver. These last two weeks, I went on a fundraising trip for my father-in-law's Yeshiva. A Sephardic yeshiva of 400 boys. If I had been home in Jerusalem, I would have for sure went to Meron for Lag Baomer like I go every year, and I would have for sure taken my children with me. I tried saving the Yeshiva, but in the end, the Yeshiva saved me, and my family. When Ruth spoke about her receiving grain from Boaz, she said, **שָׁם הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ הַיּוֹם בְּעֵזְרֵי**: The name of the man that I did with him today, Boaz... Why does it say that Ruth did for Boaz? Didn't Boaz do for Ruth? The Midrash tells us **יותר ממה שבעל הבית עושה עם העני - יותר העני עושה עם בעל הבית** More than what the rich man does for the poor, the poor does for the rich. (Midrash R. Vayikra 34;8)

Every year I would go to Meron and think that it was normal to be so squished. I thought it was safe that you could be in a place where your feet were off the ground, and the only way you could survive being "inside" by R' Shimon bar Yochai was if you were tall enough to have oxygen and had strong enough elbows. But every year until now was a miracle. As I prayed in a shul in Brooklyn while I was fundraising, I noticed that on the wall was a sign that said, This room can have only 100 people in it. More than that is dangerous.

Sometimes we think that if G-d would send us miracles, if G-d would bless us, He would do so in

an unnatural, abnormal way. And that when the everyday is normal, that is the way it is supposed to be. That No news, is just, Good news.

When we read the blessings and curses of the Torah we will notice that it is not that way. The majority of the blessings are simple blessings: that things are natural, normal, and functioning. Rain falling when it is supposed to, land producing grain like it is supposed to, trees bearing fruit like they are supposed to,... And the curses in the Parasha as well, many of them are just when things don't go as expected.

The Aleph Bet of everything in Judaism is **אמונה** and **בטחון**. As the Ramban tells us in Shemot, "A person does not have a portion in Moshe Rabbenu's Torah until he believes that all the things that happen to us, it is all miracles, and there is no such thing as nature at all." There is no such thing as nature. G-d himself, is Nature, as the words **אלוקים** and **טבע** have the same numerical value. When rain falls on time, when there is produce, the minimum expectations we have in life, are all considered blessings and abundance. The most important lesson we can take as we leave Covid behind is, **לְהַגְדִּילָהּ הַגְּדִילָהּ**. We need to praise G-d for the very basic, for being able to breathe. (Bereshit R. 14)

Emunah does not mean faith. That is a weak English translation of the world. Emunah means reliance. Dependence. The words **כְּאִשֶּׁר יִשָּׂא הָאֵמֶן כְּאִשֶּׁר יִשָּׂא הָאֵמֶן** *just as the caretaker lifts the one who suckles*, teaches us that Emunah is similar to the



dependence of a nursing child. (Bamidbar 11;12) When King David said how he felt about his relationship with G-d, he said, אִם-לֹא שָׁיִתִּין וְדוֹמְמֵתִי אֶמְלֵךְ עָלַי כַּגִּמְלָה עָלַי נִפְשִׁי (Tehillim 131;2) *I swear that I calmed and quieted my soul like a suckling on its mother; like a suckling was my soul with me.* The calmness of the soul depends on how you view G-d in your life and how dependent on Him you are willing to become. When a child is nursing, it has nothing else it wants, no plans, no aspirations, no calculations, no doubts. It is totally dependent on the mother that is nursing it. Of course, a person needs to plan and execute, but after you did what you could do, you need to enter a state of Emunah, a state of total dependence.

Naturally, though, the Yetzer Hara gets the best of us. As we grew from being babies into independent people, we were taught that the more independent of others and things we become, the healthier we are. This leads us to think that all independence is a good thing, including independence from G-d. We try harder, think harder, than effective, because we fall under the mistake that our efforts and planning are god. But the prophet Hoshea taught us that the first step to Teshuva is , וְלֹא-נֶאֱמַר עוֹד אֶלְהֵינוּ לְמַעֲשֶׂה , יְדִינוּ And we won't say anymore, that the work of our hands, is G-d. (Hoshea 14;4)

When Jews learn G-d's Torah and keep G-d's Mitzvoh, there is a beautiful blessing that we can get. אֲנִי יְקוֹק רִפְאָךְ . I am YKVK, your Doctor. When one is healthy, it is because G-d is constantly blessing you, "Stay Healthy". There are so many things that can go wrong. But G-d keeps curing you. This is the work that we need to work on in the month of אֵייר , the month that stands for אֵי י ר'פאיך .

In the 49 days of the Omer, a person is working through his spiritual sicknesses. חוּלָה is the numerical value of 49. The more a person works on his character, the more he realizes how emotionally sick he is, how many weaknesses he has. The 49 days are days of judgment, and the power to cure ourselves spiritually and emotionally are found in these days.

A certain client cried to me the other day how much he suffers from ADHD. He has no breaks to what he says; things that he sometimes feels comes out of his mouth before it reaches his mind. He felt so depressed. I told him that awareness itself, the very fact that he realizes that he has such a problem, is a huge thing. "What is the one thing worse than driving a car that has no breaks? Driving a car that has no breaks, and you don't know that it has no breaks".

So many times, we need to realize that we have a problem and that we can do the best we can do to solve it. But at the end of the day, we rely on G-d to cure us, save us, and bring us a salvation.

Selfie steps to become more dependent on G-d.

1. Ask yourself before solving any problem four questions: What exactly is the problem. Why does the problem exist. What are all the possible solutions. What is the best solution. When you do only the best solutions, the ones with the highest percentage chance for success, you are doing proper Hishtadlut. When you are doing all the solutions, even the solutions that are low percentage of success, you are not relying on G-d. When you are trying solutions that are against your values and ethics, you are not relying on G-d.
2. Realize that when you are frozen, when you are stuck, it is because you are depending too much on yourself and not depending on G-d. When we are working for G-d, no dare is too great. As we found when King David faced Goliath. Once Goliath laughed at G-d, King David felt empowered to take him down. Because now it was between G-d and Goliath, not between David and Goliath.

THE ART OF MEANINGFULNESS

The wisest of men taught us that there is always a deeper meaning to things than the way we experience them on a superficial level. As King Solomon taught **הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הֵינָהּ** And the following passuk states **מִי יוֹדֵעַ רוּחַ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הֵעֲלָה הִיא לְמַעַלְהָ וְרוּחַ הַבְּהֵמָה הֵיגֵרֶתתָּ הִיא לְמַטָּה לְאַרְצָא (קהלת ג' כ"א)**. G-d created human beings who stand erect, while animals go on all four – because human beings possess a soul that supports and uplifts them. The very proof that the soul is G-dly, that it is from the Heavens, and after death, the soul will live on, is derived from this principle of finding deeper meaning in what seems as just incidental. The final blessing that G-d blesses us for following His Mitzvoth in this week's Parasha is **וְאֵלֶיךָ אֲתַכֶּם קוֹמְמִיּוֹת**. That Hashem will have us stand tall, as proud Jews. To stand tall because we live a life of meaning, of purpose, of allowing our soul to govern our lives. (Da'at Torah Vayikra 281; Sefer Hayashar)

Man is always on a search for meaning. Only you can choose what that meaning is. It is very important to give the right meaning because the way you interpret things will determine the type of life you live, the relationships you have, and how happy or miserable you will be. This search for meaning is challenging, because who is to say that the meaning you give to an event, experience, or relationship is objectively the true meaning. Luckily, the Torah is the lighthouse that shines the beacon of meaning to guide us away from danger and toward the place we want to go. The Torah gives us the meaning, and sometimes it does so by using a seemingly random word to describe something.

For example, in Parashat Emor, the Torah refers to the wife for whom the Kohen is permitted to become impure, as “She’er”. **כִּי אִם־לְשֹׂאֲרוֹ הַקֹּהֵן** Usually, the word sh-er means something that is left over, a remainder. Why in the world is a woman referred to as a “remainder”? That could be the greatest insult for a woman, to feel that she is considered a remainder! (Especially when

Mother’s Day falls out in the week of Parashat Emor!)

The Ktav Vekabalah (Student of R Akiva Eiger, times of Malbim) wrote that the only way for a man to have a continuation of himself, a reminder of his existence after he passes on, is through his wife. You live on through your descendants. The greatest praise for a woman is that she can bring eternity to her husband. That is what she is “hardwired” to do. She is built physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually for that purpose. When a woman sees that her child is not going in the way she hoped, the pain is not so much one of guilt for not having been a good mother as it is of feeling that she has not lived up to her true purpose and real role in life. When a man perceives his wife as his ticket to eternity, he respects her far more and expects from her less! Your marriage will take on new meaning if you perceive your wife as the Torah perceives the great importance of a wife.

If you view life as having a deeper meaning, that it is just a hallway leading to the big banquet hall of Olam Haba, your life will look different. In our Parasha, the Torah commands us to give Tzeddaka, but the choice of words is so interesting. **וְכִי־יָמִיד וְעָנִי** *When your brother becomes poor with you...* Why is the poor man referred to, specifically, as your brother?

When someone is rich, everyone is his family. Everyone who knows him feels like a brother to him. But when someone becomes poor, no one feels like a brother – not even his own family. Even his own relatives behave with a certain distance. But the Torah says, NO! Now that this guy is bankrupt, we all have a mitzvah to be his brother! We all have a mitzvah to feel his pain, to have empathy! When he is poor, you have a mitzvah to feel *with* him!

Why is he now more your brother than ever before? Because a Jew is not your brother so that you can get something out of him. He is your



brother so that you can help him when he needs your help. The Torah calls him your brother when **you** have a mitzvah to give him Tzeddakah. Why?

This question Tornusruphus the Rasha asked R' Akiva : If your G-d loves the poor, why does He not support them? R' Akiva answered: In order to save us from Gehinom, when we support him! (Bava Batra 10a)

This poor guy needs to live 100 years of hell, so that you do not have to go to hell?!? Why does that make any sense? The answer is because this world is just the hallway. The next world is the banquet. A hundred years is minuscule compared to the eternity of Olam Haba. And yes, because he is your brother, it is worth it for him to live a life of poverty to save you. No one else can save you from Gehinom like he can.

The Torah commands us to remind ourselves every seven years to give the proper meaning to our careers and our businesses. We must keep the Shemitta laws, and give up our ownership of our fields, our livelihood, for the Shemitta year. Why? To remind us that, in fact, we own nothing! We are not the owners of what we own. We do not live off of our businesses. We live off of G-d's blessing.

Here are the selfie steps to find meaning.

A TORAH EDUCATION

...ונתתי גשמים בעתם... אם בחקתי תלכו... *If you follow my statutes...I will provide you with rain at the appropriate time...* Rashi explains that this verse teaches us about "toiling in Torah study" (שתהיי ק"א ה"א ס) (עמלים בתורה). Indeed, as the Chazon Ish (י"ב) points out, all the brachot in the following verses are reserved for those who exert themselves in studying Torah. This concept of toiling in Torah – known in Hebrew as amal ba'Torah – refers to more than intellectual exertion alone, as we shall soon see.

One sign of truly fulfilling the injunction to be a person who is ameil ba'Torah is one's total absorption in Torah learning. It is possible to

1. Learn Torah. Get yourself access to the Rabbi you can relate to the most.
2. Spend time with nature. Stay away from artificial light- smartphones, computers, screens, stores, and offices with artificial light. At least 90 percent of our time is indoors. Find the right balance. Go for a walk. Take in all the colors of nature and ask yourself what it all means. Stay away from motion, traffic, vibration. This exercise can help us develop the ability to see both the forest and the trees.
3. Meaning in life, happiness, cannot be pursued. As long as you are looking for it, you are not going to find it. Happiness, success, are a choice of perspective and are a side-effect of you pursuing your goals and connecting to a cause greater than yourself.
4. Remind yourself every day to do the right thing, love fully, pursue fascinating experiences, and undertake your most important tasks.

witness this in a serious beit midrash, where study partners often voice their opinions in booming voices without disturbing those studying right next to them. Compare this with the library or study hall in the secular world, where it is accepted that people need silence in order to concentrate.

This is just one of the many differences between the approach to learning in the yeshiva world and the approach just about everywhere else. Indeed, many yeshiva students are unaware of the many significant differences which they simply take for granted. A few years ago, a non-religious Israeli professor visited Yeshivat Mir in Jerusalem – host



to almost 6,000 students – and recorded the differences he observed:

- The Talmudic scholar studies and explains his point of view using his hands.
- He often sways while studying.

- He usually studies with a partner.

- When he asks the teacher a question, he gets up and goes over to the teacher. Out of respect, he usually remains standing while the teacher continues sitting. This is different from the secular classroom, where the student usually raises his hand, and the teacher address the question while the student remains seated . . .

- In Talmudic study, the student is expected to manage relatively long periods of concentration – at times, even four and a half hours. This is very different from the secular educational systems, where focused learning times or class periods tend to be no more than an hour.

- The study halls of yeshivot thunder with noise, and it does not seem to bother anyone. Instead of learning by reading with the eyes alone, the students insist on verbalizing, considerably slowing the reading.

- A question-and-answer format is very widely used.

- No cell phones are allowed in the beit midrash.

After thinking about these differences, the professor reached the conclusion that the learning in the yeshiva beit midrash is education at its best. “Education” comes from the Latin word “educor” – to pull out or extract. And this is just what yeshiva learning is all about. Let us elaborate.

Upon being asked a question by a teacher, a student will extract the information from his own mind, on his own. This is far superior to being spoon-fed by a teacher. Real education involves drawing conclusions through outside guidance. This results in recall far superior to that of the student who is responsible only for swallowing information. When studying in pairs, the students are expected to verbalize the information they have

gleaned and express ideas in their own words while relaying it. By learning in pairs, each partner stimulates the other’s intellect for maximum results.

Verbalizing the information and ideas with excitement (even if sometimes a bit artificial), helps one focus and contributes to long-term memory. Studies have proven that students absorb information in noisy classes better than in silent ones. The commonly used technique of starting off in a low tone of voice and gradually increasing the volume adds to the listener’s excitement about the information and ideas being discussed.

The swaying while learning affects body heat and helps blood circulation, sending oxygen to the brain, which contributes to clear thought and focus. The rhythm caused by swaying enhances concentration as well. This is why it is more effective to study while standing, pacing or walking. (It is not surprising that the theory of relativity was conceived while walking!) Body movement keeps the mind awake and energetic, and brings emotion into learning.

Although the professor’s observations are revealing, there are many things that he could not possibly be aware of. Behind the scenes, the first conscious decision the true yeshiva student must make is at what level he wants Torah study to be in his hierarchy of values. For the serious student, a good resource for the proper way to learn Torah can be found in the end of Pirkei Avot (6:5), where the 48 traits and techniques needed to succeed in acquiring Torah are listed. All the blessings attributed to one who toils in Torah are for learning through these 48 “ways.” The first on the list is learning with continuity. We see this clearly from the Chafetz Chaim’s characterization of a proper Torah study session: It must be uninterrupted Torah learning, unless something comes up that must be taken care of specifically by the learner and immediately (Mishna Berura, Shaar HaTziona 250:9). The ultimate example of continuous learning (besides Moshe Rabbenu) was that of Rabbi Akiva.



Rabbi Akiva was encouraged by his wife, Rachel, to maximize his potential by learning Torah away from home for twelve years. Rabbi Akiva grew in his studies and became Rosh Yeshiva for 12,000 students. When the twelve years had passed, Rabbi Akiva returned home with his students, all the while expressing the gratitude he felt towards his wife. All of our Torah learning is in her merit, he told them. Before entering his home, he overheard his wife saying to a friend that if it were up to her, she would be delighted if her husband would continue learning for an additional twelve years. Upon hearing this, Rabbi Akiva returned to his yeshiva to complete a total of twenty four years of uninterrupted Torah study. (Ketubot 63b)

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz asks the obvious question: Why didn't Rabbi Akiva enter his home for a few minutes and have a cup of tea with his wife, before returning to learn for an additional twelve years? His answer is legendary: In this context, twelve plus twelve does not equal twenty four!

But, we might ask, doesn't the question remain? If R. Akiva had already left yeshiva to come home to his wife, had he not already broken his continuity?

The answer to this question provides us an important rule of thumb. As long as Rabbi Akiva was doing what the Torah expected of him – such as visiting home for family obligations – he was still in the same flow of continuity in Torah learning by living according to its obligations. But once he overheard his wife saying that she would rather he continue learning another twelve years, entering his home for his own reasons would break his 24-year learning streak.

Anything that will interrupt continuity, such as the use of cell phones, is a breach in the spirit of a proper study session. I remember a more subtle application of this important principle. In one yeshiva where I studied, there were no cups for the students to drink from the water fountain. Wanting to offer students the option of drinking in a more comfortable way, I set up a “cup fund.” But when the Rosh Yeshiva found out about it, he

approached me and asked if he could donate all the cups. He wanted to keep his yeshiva a place where nothing is “going on” except for learning – not even cup funds.

During this time of year, especially – the period of Sefirat HaOmer – we should remind ourselves that the proper approach to Torah study goes all the way back to Matan Torah and the Mishkan. The Ba'al HaTurim writes that the two Cherubim facing each other on top of the Holy Ark symbolized (among other things) two students learning together, asking questions and answering one other (Sh'mot 25:18). Furthermore, the way we accepted the Torah at Mt.Sinai – with thunder, lightning and fire – is the way it must be passed on through the generations. Practically speaking, this means that whatever excitement or “fire” that can be instilled into our Torah learning is **essential for re-living Matan Torah**. Unity and mutual responsibility – like all the 48 requirements listed in Pirkei Avot – are absolutely necessary for Torah learning. These, too, were a crucial part of accepting the Torah at Mt.Sinai (כאיש אחד בלב אחד). This is the way we accepted the Torah – and the only way it can be passed on is in its original form. These qualities are so crucial that all 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva perished because they did not possess them to the extent they should have. Thus, despite their superior learning, they were prevented from being the ones to transmit Torah to future generations.

Students of Torah sheh-Ba'al Peh know that the Gemara repeatedly uses a question-and-answer format. Indeed, it never hesitates to question even basic assumptions. And this is a technique we can use effectively in our own lives as well. The way a question is asked is going to affect what type of answer the brain will come up with. A great question can give birth to a new approach; it can even change humanity.

One powerful question that a Jew should ask himself is the one asked by Rabbi Akiva, then a shepherd, when he noticed that steady stream of drops of water had cut through rocks. Must a rock always remain a rock, or can small, constant



change as consistent and gentle as dripping water make a major revolution – either to a seemingly rock-hard assumption or even to person set in his ways? In our terms: Can I get more out of life than

I am at the moment; can I change significantly for the better and realize my full potential?

GET OFF MY TRICYCLE!!

I remember the first time I decided to help out teenage kids at risk. A certain teenage boy from a religious family, who was “on his way out” of religion, came into my life. I wanted to know whether or not I was wasting my time trying to help him. I sat with someone with many years of experience and success in the field, hoping that he would teach me how to know if I was doing something worthwhile by investing my efforts with him. He taught me how to recognize “the red line”. I can never forget what he told me.

יהודה בן תימא אומר הוי עז כנמר וקל כנשר ורץ כצבי וגבור כארי לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים הוא היה אומר עז פנים כארי לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים הוא היה אומר עז פנים לגיהנם ובשת פנים לגן עדן *Yehuda Ben Tema says, be brazen like a leopard, light like an eagle, swift like a deer, strong like a lion, to do the Will of Your Father in Heaven. He would say, the brazen-faced goes to Hell, and the embarrassed one goes to Gan Eden.*(Avot 5; 20)

It is a waste of your time to talk to a boy who has brazenness, an “עז פנים”, because it says, עז פנים לגיהנם “Brazen-faced go to Gehinom”. Once a boy has this type of brazenness, you cannot work with him, because he is going in the opposite direction. You are working against the tide. I’ll give you an example of what I mean. Once, I had some yeshiva boys from the Yeshiva I worked in over for a Shabbat meal. The boys stood outside on the porch, while I was helping my wife get things ready to start the meal. One of the boys on the porch sat down on my kid’s tricycle, something that he could break. I did not feel that because I was having over boys who were struggling with religion that my child needed to suffer and have his trike broken. So, I went outside and asked him nicely, please don’t sit on my son’s bike. You can break it. He got up and apologized. I went upstairs to continue helping my wife with the kids, and from the upstairs window, I saw that the same boy sat down again on the same tricycle. I came down, I called

him over to the side, and told him that I am not interested in having him at my meal, if he couldn’t respect my son’s possessions. If he was so brazen to come to my house, eat my food, and not respect a simple request not to sit on my son’s tricycle, there was no hope of achieving anything by working with this boy.

I asked this Rabbi how he knew he could speak like that to the boy at risk. Weren’t you afraid you could lose him? He told me that a boy who is brazen, is already off anyway, for brazen-faced go to Hell. “At the moment, he is a lost case, a waste of time. His problem is mostly a psychological one of basic respect and decency, and his problem is much more than a religious one.

I asked him, “Maybe he is just not respecting you, as a person, but he does respect G-d.”

The rabbi told me that it is not so. The Midrash teaches, כל הכופר בטובתו של חברו סופו שיכפור בטובתו של הקב”ה Anyone who denies the good that his friend does for him will end up denying the good that G-d does for him. Something we learn from Pharaoh, who first denied the good that Yosef did to him, אשר לא ידע את יוסף and then denied the good and the existence of G-d, לא ידעתי את ה (Tanchuma Shemot 5). If he has no sense of embarrassment and respect for his host, he has no respect for G-d, the Host of the World. He knows of G-d, and he is not embarrassed from Him.

What ended up happening was that the boy blushed, and said he was wrong. Once he realized how low a person he had become, the boy starting improving his behavior, from that Shabbat table on.

Blown away by this idea, of the severity of being brazen faced on practical terms, I realized something amazing. When we say Tachanun, there is a fundamental introduction that is crucial for

getting forgiveness from G-d. שאין אנהנו עזי פנים וקשי עורף... Please G-d, ... accept our prayers, for we are not brazenfaced and stiffnecked, to say in front of you we did not sin. Our saving grace, the power behind our plea for forgiveness, is that we are not brazenfaced, at least during Tachanun.

From the Mishna it seems that brazenness is the make it or break it factor, for Gan Eden or Gehinom. To go to Gan Eden, we need to have some type of embarrassment from G-d, that we owe Him so much, and whatever we do for His Sake, can never be enough. On the other hand, when doing the will of G-d, we need to tap into and internal brazenness, and *be brazen like a leopard*. Why is this juggle of emotions so important? Either you are brazen, or not brazen!?

The Bet Yosef, in his halachic compilation, writes about the psychology of people, something that is somehow a halacha, not just mussar. The Bet Yosef asks, why is it of such great importance to have brazenness, that it is mentioned before being swift, or being mighty, when doing G-d's Will? (OH 1) The Bet Yosef answers, if you want to be religious, if you want to keep halacha, you need to be brazen to go against the "norm". Why is that so?

TORAH LISHMAH – OUT OF THIS WORLD

The first Mishna in the sixth perek of Avot reads. כל העוסק בתורה לשמה זוכה לדברים הרבה ולא עוד אלא שכל העולם כולו כדי הוא לו. נקרא רע, אהוב וכו' *Anyone who learns Torah Lishmah, will merit many things. Not only that, but the entire Universe was worth creating and keeping spinning for his sake. He can be called a friend of G-d, loved by G-d, etc.*

What exactly is Torah Lishmah, for its own sake? And what are the "many things" that the Mishna promises him that he will merit?

The common denominator of these two, Torah Lishmah and its reward, is that they are both "out of this world". Both are on a level far beyond anything in our human experience, far beyond the grasp of the human mind.

The Bet Yosef writes, because it is human nature to fear what others think. That is one of your greatest and most powerful drives in life – what people think about you. People *naturally* care more about what people think about them, than they care about what G-d thinks about them. And there is proof to this concept:

R Yochanan Ben Zakai blessed his students with his last breath, יהי רצון שתהא מורא שמים עליכם כמורא דבשר ודם *May it be the Will (of G-d) that you have the fear of Heaven on you, as you have fear of people.* אמרו לו תלמידיו: עד כאן? *His students asked him, that's it? (Fear of G-d should only be up to the degree of fear of people?)* – אמר להם: ולוא! *He said to them, I wish! Know this, when a person does sin, he says (to himself), I hope no one is watching!* (Berachot 28b)

It was said in the name of R' Meir, Why did G-d give the Torah to the Jewish People? Because they are עזין, they are brazen. (Betzah 25b) If you want to bring up your kids to keep halacha, you need to teach them to be brazen, in the right place and the right time. To swim against the current, and be different, if that is what G-d's will is.

For example, try explaining how chocolate tastes to someone who never tasted chocolate. You can explain what it is not. But to explain what it is, is impossible. "Is it sour?" No. "Is it salty?" No. "Is it sweet?" Yes. "Oh. So it tastes like sugar!" No. Sugar is just sweet. This has a richness to it, a blend of smoothness and bitterness. *You just cannot know how it tastes unless you taste it! It just can't be described!*

Torah Lishmah and its reward are the same. You can explain what they are not, but you cannot explain what they are. You cannot explain the experience of learning Torah Lishmah. It is too abstract. It is not learning because you want a rabbinical position. It is not about learning to become smarter. It is not about learning to get a good shidduch. So, what is it? It is learning for the sake of learning, to connect to G-d, to understand



His Word and to live by it. *To totally disregard myself, and place G-d in the center of my thoughts.* To be willing to change everything about me, to become a G-d-like human.

And then, what do you get for learning Torah, the real way? “Lots of stuff”. Why doesn’t the Mishna tell us what one will merit? The answer is that no words can describe the benefit of being G-d like, for it is the greatest reward, in and of itself. That reward, fulfilling your life’s purpose and the purpose of the world through learning Torah, is the apex of human experience.

G-d implanted in every human being a need to fulfill a purpose, and when that need is not fulfilled, the person feels emptiness. Nothing can cure that emptiness, unless the person fills it with his own, special purpose. And the purpose of every Jew is none other than learning Torah Lishmah.

Learning Lishma is something like taking off in an airplane: you soar aloft, and the earth below becomes a miniature village, with tiny houses and thread-like highways. Life takes on totally different proportions when viewed from above the

clouds. The problems of life, jealousy, happenstances, worries of making a living, whatever else, just become so small, because you are being G-dly. There are no words that can explain this, for no words can describe something that is literally out of this world. G-dliness. It is so out of this world, so out of focusing on human interests, and so much about focusing on G-d’s interests.

And that is דברים הרבה, *a lot of things*. Being G-dly. A person becomes so G-dly through learning Torah Lishmah that G-d listens to him and runs the world according to his requests. The Or Hachaim has a beautiful twist on the words of our Rabbis, השותה מים לצמא מברכים עליו שהכל נהיה בדברו. Literally meaning, *Someone who drinks water out of thirst, makes the Shehakol blessing*. But the Ohr Hachaim gives the words of this halacha a new twist: Our Rabbis teach that Torah is comparable to Water. With that in mind, we can reinterpret the statement mentioned above – *Someone who learns Torah solely to quench his thirst for Torah – G-d blesses him that whatever he says will come true*.

Can you become more G-dly than that?

LIFESTYLES

One of the biggest problems facing the Orthodox Jew is the belief that a Jew can keep “the 613” while living the lifestyle of “keeping up with the gentiles”. Who is setting the standard of what we want and what we *don’t* want in life? The way we live, the path of behavior we take, will affect our fate more than anything else. In order for us to understand how to solve this problem we need to understand where it comes from, and find the tools to defeat it.

The very first thing that Ruth told her mother-in-law, Naomi, when she was certain that she wanted to convert to Judaism was באשר תלכי אלך. *Wherever you go, I will go*. The Middrash Rabbah explains this. “Naomi said to Ruth: My daughter, it is not the way of a Jewish girl to go to the theatres

of the goyim.” Naomi told Ruth that to become a Jewess, one cannot follow the celebrities of the goyim and associate with them. Their way is not our way.

Why was this the most important, first message Naomi gave to her daughter-in-law who was about to convert, even before mentioning the 613 Mitzvoth? And why did Naomi need to hear Ruth say, *Wherever you go, I will go*, that she would stop going to the theatres, before Naomi was willing to convert her?

Because the path that you are going in life, the lifestyle you follow, is the expression of your ultimate decision as to what type of Jew you will be. There is a huge difference between an Orthodox Jew and a Torah Jew. What is the



difference? Orthodoxy means keeping 613. Not being ‘reform’ or ‘conservative’. *As long as I do not alter even one commandment, I am still Orthodox. But, how I live my life, what car I drive, what type of wedding I make, my lifestyle – as long as it does not transgress the 613, I still fly under the radar of Orthodoxy.* A Torah Jew is something else. The word Torah has a similar root to the word Morah, which means teacher, guide, someone who shows the way. A Torah Jew, then, is a Jew who lives his lifestyle in line with the spirit of Torah. He constantly asks himself, *What is the Torah lifestyle that I can adopt? What is the Torah’s path?* Naomi wanted to make sure that Ruth was going to be a Torah Jew. Not just an Orthodox one.

We sometimes forget how to enjoy the beauty of a Torah lifestyle and focus on the deeper truth of life. And once we forget, the glamour of the celebrity lifestyle flashes at us from every billboard, in every advertisement. It makes it so easy to lose track. There are only two tracks in life, and they are mutually exclusive. We are always going on one of these two tracks. It’s just a matter of which one we choose. Allow me to explain.

What is an angel? The word ‘anglos’ in old Greek means messenger. The angel does not have thoughts of his own, nor does he have free choice. He is but a robot. He does whatever you program him to do. The human being is the opposite. No matter how you program him/her, you can never know if they are going to follow your directions. The difference between angels, who do not have free choice, and us is that angels are always referred to as עומדים, standing still, while Humans are always referred to as הולכים, always going. This concept of going is the purpose of your life. The uniqueness of the Human. All of your life, you are going from point A to point B. *You chose* your point B. You can be getting closer to the life of the celebrities, the life of the gentiles, more Olam HazeH. Or, you can be getting closer to your Neshama, your purpose in this world. The first mitzvah commanded to the first Jew was לך לך, “Go to you”. What does it mean – to go to you? G-d told Avraham to go towards himself, to advance towards his purpose, towards his

Neshama. Every Jew comes down to this world with that same command: לך לך. Go toward your purpose. That is the Torah’s path.

What is the Gentile’s path? Probably one of the most crucial moments in the whole Tanach is the moment when Bitya is at the Nile River to immerse for conversion, and she sees little Moshe in a basket. *וַתֵּרֶד בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לָרְחֹץ עַל־הַיָּאֵר וַיִּנְעֲרֶתֶיהָ הַלֵּלֶת עַל־יָדָהּ: הַיָּאֵר וַתֵּרֶא אֶת־הַמָּבֵבָה בַּתּוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אֶמְתָּהּ וַתִּקְחָהּ: Bitya decides to reach out to baby Moshe and save his life. The Talmud points to the words וַיִּנְעֲרֶתֶיהָ and her maidservants were walking. Where were they going? Weren’t they supposed to be next to the princess Bitya?*

R Yochanan answers the question. The word halicha, here, means death, as we see in the words of Esav, Behold, I am going to die. The maidservants said to Bitya, “Are you crazy? If no one else is obeying Pharaoh’s command to kill the Jewish boys, wouldn’t it make sense that at least his own daughter would listen to him?!” When the maidservants spoke with those words, the angel Gavriel came and struck them dead!! (See Sotah 12b, Torah Temimah Shemot 2; 5)

Although Esav was busy hunting food, occupying himself with idolatry and women, always “on the move”, he was moving towards death. הנה אנכי הולך. That was his direction. The life of a celebrity, here and now. If they do not have Olam Haba, they might as well have Olam HazeH.

Yaakov, on the other hand, was an איש תם יושב, a simple man sitting in the study hall. Although he was not moving physically, but he was steadily advancing in the direction of the Torah learning that would lead him to Olam HaBa. All of us have these same two options in life: to live Esav’s celebrity life, a life that ends up as a הולך למות, or to live a life of purpose, in the image of G-d. But whatever you do, you are a הולך. You, a human being, are moving in a direction.

Our Rabbis learn the words of the beginning of the Parasha תלכו בהוקותי בתורה... אם בהוקותי תלכו בתורה If you follow My statutes, to mean that you

shall *toil* in Torah, learn it in depth. All of the blessings of the Torah are reserved for one who learns Torah in depth. Why does “following in G-d’s statutes” refer to toil in learning? Maybe it just means to live an Orthodox life of 613?

When the Parasha tells us “*to go* in My statutes”, it doesn’t mean externally. It means internally. It means to go into your heart. It means going towards a deeper truth and making it part of your real self. Because that is the way of a Torah Jew.

BH, I have been living in Yerushalayim for 18 years. The greatest damage western culture had on me was to make me believe that “the easier the better”, and “the faster the better”. The Torah is teaching us that, No! אִם-בְּהִקְלֵי תֵלְכוּ I want you to *toil* in Torah. If someone offers you a chip to put in your brain that will give you the knowledge of a doctor, a lawyer or a psychologist, why not? Many things in modern times are instant! But it is not so regarding Torah knowledge. G-d wants us to toil to achieve it. Although an unborn baby has learnt the entire Torah, we do not stand up, in respect, for that baby. Why not? R Chaim Shmulevitz says

because that child did not toil for his Torah! This is true in regard to all self-development, and in all aspects of *lech lecha*, going to your life’s purpose. All of the 48 ways to acquire Torah require really hard work and toil. In stark contrast to the requirements for priesthood or royalty, those requirements are presents, not things you need to work on.

The second untruth marketed by western culture is ‘the faster the better’. That is not the case regarding self refinement. The greatest enemy to change is speed. אֶת-מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ: If you go in My statutes and you **watch** My Mitzvoth... The Torah does not say to keep the Mitzvoth, לִקְיִים. It says to watch the Mitzvoth, to wait anxiously for an opportunity to observe them. Not to get them over with, when the time comes. But to anticipate them. To count 49 days to wait for the Torah. To count the days toward Shabbat.

Patience. Hard work. Striving for Truth. Real Truth. Living with purpose. Mastering contentment. This is a Torah lifestyle.

TIGHTROPING BETWEEN HUMBLENESS AND HAUGHTINESS

In Pirkei Avot, we are taught to be very, very humble (4, 4). Generally speaking, the golden rule that our Sages suggest is in the middle of two extremes. Not too flamboyant and not too sparing. Not too courageous and not too cowardly. (Rambam Deot 1; 4) Humility is an exception to that rule. Our sages recommend that we be extremely humble. What is humbleness, and why do our sages recommend adopting it to extreme?

There is a widespread misconception about humbleness. Moshe was the most humble of men. It was through this great degree of humility that he merited being the greatest of all prophets. Moshe taught the entire Torah to the nation, including the words Moshe was the most humble of all men. (Bamidbar 12; 3) He taught these words with all the interpretations and commentaries. Imagine someone standing in front of a whole nation,

explaining how he is the most humble person that ever existed and that will ever exist! Humbleness is, obviously, misunderstood by many. Humbleness should not be confused with low self esteem. Moshe, who was most humble, did not lack self esteem. Humbleness should not be confused with shyness, the fear of what people might think or say about me. Humbleness is a level that can be achieved only after one attains a healthy self esteem, after achieving success. Only then, can one work on humbleness. Allow me to explain.

Humbleness is – “I am nothing without G-d”. Not – “I am nothing”. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. A person who has low self esteem is not cognizant of his strengths and overlooks them. All my strengths, my good habits and capabilities, are bestowed upon me by G-d. Any good decision I make or have made, any good idea I have thought



of or will ever come up with has been granted to me by G-d. G-d gave me the confidence to make that decision, and He gave me and gives me the creativity to come up with that brainstorm. Birkot Hashachar is a great workout to help one achieve this mindset. It allows us to start off the day with prayers of thanks to G-d for granting the basics that He has given us.

Haughtiness is rooted in the belief that I did it, or I can do it all on my own. "I thought of the idea with my brain." Who gave you the creativity? Who gave you the intellect? G-d says, "I cannot live in the same world with the haughty person." (Sotah 5a) What does the Talmud mean by that? Once a person takes all the praise for himself, without a deep recognition of G-d's help, then he has pushed G-d out of his world. There is a great e-book called *The 21 Secrets of the Self Made Millionaire*. Brian Tracey researched some of the secrets, the effective behaviors and habits of those who achieved financial success on their own. The book is great, but the title has a heretical tone to it. No millionaire is self made, having attained his wealth without G-d. If you follow those secrets in the book, chances that G-d will allow you financial success are very high. But you can't do anything by yourself, without G-d. You can't even move a finger without Him.

This week, the parasha lists all the curses that will befall the Nation if they do not heed the Torah. Then their hearts will be humbled, and then their sins will be atoned. (Vayikra 26; 41) After the curses, this is how it will all finish. A humbled Nation. It seems that the purpose of all the curses is to humble the Nation. After being humbled, there is no point in more curses. (Our Sages teach us that one can infer from here that humbleness is the best *segulah* to stop pain and suffering.) G-d loves us so much, and yet He is willing to stand by and watch us be plagued by all the curses for the sake of acquiring humbleness. Because humbleness is not what we think it is. It is about making us aware of how much we are dependent upon G-d for everything we do in life. The purpose of all the curses is to eradicate haughtiness, to change the

way in which we are accustomed to think that we, alone, deserve all the credit for our successes.

There needs to be a delicate balance in life, to remember that you are important, but not more important than others. It is wise to keep the S.W.I.D. card with you at all times, to keep the correct perspective. It is your personal Strengths / Weaknesses IDentification card. G-d packs everyone a suitcase of strengths and weaknesses before He sends us on our journey through life. Write all of your strengths on one side of the card. All your weaknesses go on side two. Whenever you are feeling haughty, that you are the address for all the praise of your success, that you are great for your achievements, glance at the weakness side of your ID card, and remember that you are a human that sometimes makes mistakes. And when you are down, consumed with thoughts of low self esteem and negative emotions, take a peek at your strengths. This card is the most personal card you have. It *is* you.

When I made this card for myself, I found that the very things that are my strengths are the causes of my weaknesses, and my weaknesses are somewhat of a package deal with my strengths. A close friend, who is able to remember almost completely all of his learning, tells me how he suffers tremendously from his memory. He cannot forget any of the nasty things people have said to him. He remembers all of his mishaps, ever since he was four years old!

The more one focuses on thinking that everything one has is from G-d, the more only good will befall him. But the ball does not start rolling until one knows and recognizes his strengths, for only after one reaches success does the test of haughtiness or humbleness arise. This is the cycle. Learn your strengths, your resources. Feel the motivation to use them efficiently. Reach success. Thank G-d.

Now we can understand. Moshe conveyed the fact that there was no success that he attributed to himself. וְהִזְכֵּנוּ מֵה' We are nothing without G-d. (Shemot 16; 7) This is our goal in humbleness. To



know our strengths and weaknesses, and to thank G-d for my S.W.I.D card.

PRAYING FOR A BRAINSTORM

Many people wonder why their minds drift during prayers. Why on earth does the imagination start running on turbo at these particular times? The sad joke is: When you need a real brainstorm, just start your prayers. Can something be done in order to assure that our minds be under our control, allowing us to feel that we are actually standing in front of the Almighty?

People used to have what was called a “thinking spot”, a specific place in which to think things through and brainstorm. This practice was based on the fact that one’s surroundings affect where one’s mind is focused. Please bear with me and allow me to explain.

The Dancing Bear

Have you ever seen a dancing bear at a circus? The bear stands on his hind legs, picks up his forelegs, and dances to the music. The way they train that bear to put on his act can teach us an important lesson about how our own brain works. When training the bear, they put hot coals under its feet while simultaneously playing music. The poor bear comes to connect the music with the hot floor. The result: when the music is played at the circus, the bear tries to keep his legs on the floor as little as possible – which looks to us like dancing.

In a sense, the human brain functions in a similar way: it internalizes a feeling and connects it to the setting in which the feeling was experienced. (The setting in the brain is composed of various elements, including sensory input, time of day, place, and people connected with the setting.) This is called “internal representation.” Because the brain functions this way, people who have trouble falling asleep, for example, are advised not to do anything in bed except sleep. By reading, talking, or the like, the brain comes to identify the bed as a

place of wakefulness, thereby impairing one’s ability to enter the sleep mode.

This concept of “internal representation” can be useful in many areas of life. Being cognizant of it can help us to control our desires and impulses. In this week’s parasha, we find a mitzvah connected to this concept.

Internal Representations of Holiness

At the end of our parasha (26:2), G-d commands us to fear and revere His sanctuary: ומקדשי תיראו. The Talmud (Yevamot 6a) explains that the intention of this Commandment is to fear G-d, Who is present in the Beit Knesset, not to fear the shul itself. However, the Torah sees fit to communicate this by telling us to “Fear Sanctuary.” The obvious question is: Why didn’t the Torah speak straight to the point?

This may be understood with the aforementioned concept. By behaving in a reverent manner in a shul setting even not during prayer, we will feel reverence and fear of G-d during our prayers in the Beit Knesset as well. If, on the other hand, we speak about anything and everything in shul, this may cause us to internalize the wrong kind of connection and representation. The shul setting may then trigger our mind during prayer to think about the various topics our tongue is used to discussing (or willing to discuss) in this specific environment.

I myself have witnessed great rabbis showing extra reverence towards the sanctuary. When exiting, they bow and walk out facing the shul. They do not give voice to anything else in shul besides prayer and Torah. This was the custom of the Arizal, as well. Indeed, the Zohar (1:255a) teaches that by talking in shul, one causes G-d’s Presence to leave,



delays the Final Redemption and puts the talker in the category of a heretic.

To have clarity during prayer, one must associate feelings of reverence with the place and time of prayer. That is why the Sages teach us that we should have both a set place and a set time for prayer – as opposed to praying whenever it can be squeezed into our schedule. It is almost impossible to feel that one is actually talking to G-d while awaiting an e-mail or running to catch a bus.

Repentance and Representations

The concept we are developing throws new light on the Rabbis' teaching (Yoma 86b): What is a Baal Teshuva (true penitent)? One who goes through the same temptation after having previously succumbed, and now succeeds in overcoming his desires. Rav Yehuda explains that the three parts of the temptation include: the place, time, and people involved in the sin.

At first glance, the Rabbis seem to be saying that until the penitent withstands the temptation in that same scenario where he had previously failed, he has not yet proved that he will never repeat the sin. But, we wonder, does one really need to go back into the danger zone to prove that he has changed his ways?

Indeed, the Klei Yakkar (Devarim 30:11) explains that one must *not* go back physically to the scene of the sin in order to prove his regret. True

repentance is expressed through a regretful heart and proper Viduy – “בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו.” Through genuine regret, one experiences the very same visual and auditory feelings experienced during the time of the sin. It is almost as if one were really there – reliving that awful experience. However, by actually putting oneself in the place where one has failed before – there is too great a likelihood of a repeat performance.

“Did I Grow or Not?”

It is important to recognize that the impact of feelings connected with a given setting can be powerfully negative as well as positive. This is why, for example, maturing dorm students who have largely succeeded in overcoming adolescent or childhood problems in their present growing environment are confronted with the very same ניסיונות (tests and trials) they believed they had overcome when they return home for a vacation. The problem might have been arguing with parents or sibling rivalry. It might have been hanging around with the wrong friends or in the wrong places. Some may even start to doubt themselves, to wonder how much they've really matured since leaving home. But the truth is that they never actually grew up or overcame a negative trait in that negative setting of the past. Indeed, they might never be able to come anywhere near realizing their potential either in that setting. It might take some more time to really get out of that mode in a healthy setting before returning to face a negative past.

AN AWESOME THOUGHT

R' Akiva would say, Beloved is Man, for he is created in the Image of G-d.(Avot Ch. 3) What does this mean? G-d is infinite. Immortal. Immeasurable. The First and the Last. Was, Is and Will Be. He is in the Past, Present and Future, simultaneously. He is not limited by time or nature. There is nothing about G-d that we can grasp, except his traits and His infiniteness. So, what image are we referring to, when we say that man was created in the image of G-d?

R Akiva learns that we are G-d-like from the words in Breishit, *In the image of G-d, He created him, ...* (Breishit 1; 27) The commentators discuss this at great length. Each and every aspect of the discussion is, in itself, a gem, helping us to understand more fully the greatness of man. To notice aspects of g-dliness in human beings, one has to read between the lines. Humans are G-d-like, for they have a Neshama that is eternal. After death, the soul lives on. Humans are G-d-like in the sense that they have Free Will, ability to overcome their nature and choose good from bad. This power



of choice, to decide what you want to be, do and have, is G-dly. G-d has choice, and He always chooses to do Good. Humans, though, don't always choose good.

While coaching, I witness, firsthand, the G-d-like characteristics of those that I coach. The power of choice. The gift of creativity. The human capability of having awareness, discovering the problem and creating the solution. Humans are G-d-like, for humans have this inborn trait of resourcefulness. If the person really, really wants something, he can figure out how to get it. G-d gave us the power to control and overcome, when necessary, our impulses, our habits. He gave us the G-d-like power to forgive.

And He blew into his (Adam's) nostrils a neshama, and he gave him the ability to speak. (Breishit 2; 7) The unique human ability to speak should not be taken at its simplest level, for a parrot, also, can speak. Rather, G-d gave humans the distinctive capability to communicate. To transport an idea between the two parties of the discussion. The human species can make plans and execute them: Sof Maaseh, Bemachshava Techila. Humans can be creative. G-d created the world through speech, and He gave us the power to create and destroy through speech. Relationships. Civilizations. To bless and curse.

Man is awe struck when witnessing G-d in this world. The more we see godliness, the closer up we get, the more fascinated we are. The Swiss Alps and Grand Canyon are breathtaking in reality, and so is witnessing the G-dly aspect of man. An original painting is mesmerizing, when you see the G-d-like ability of man to plan an idea and paint it. When someone communicates a deep idea or grasps the attention of an audience through painting a story in his speech, the crowd is spellbound by his capability of communication. Any new idea or creativity brought into existence is remarkable. Coaching people to overcome their limitations, change their habits, is mindboggling. When godliness of man comes to light in its full glory, I am sitting front row, center aisle.

The more I coach, the more I learn about this godliness. And, I discovered that I can connect to anyone, from any race, sect, social group or nationality, by looking for their godliness and honoring it. Because the greatest honor you can give a person is honoring his godliness. Respecting his opinions, his choices and ideas is respecting his godliness. You can make anyone your friend, if you listen to him and show him that you understand what he has communicated, for by doing so, you have respected the godly trait of communication that he possesses. Asking for forgiveness is respecting the godliness of the person, admitting that he can find in his heart the G-dly power to forgive. When someone is entrenched in some kind of a problem, if you plan out the solution too fast, not giving that person the time and chance to tap into his own creativity, to figure it out himself, you have robbed him of his godliness. This godliness is the root of all self esteem. It is the most important part of his *self-image*.

In this week's parasha, we are forbidden to call another person derogatory names, or to act with any other form of belittlement. *V'lo Tono Ish Et Amito, Veyareta Meelokecha.* (25; 17) The passuk continues to say, *And you shall fear your G-d.* What is the connection?

When you call your friend unintelligent, weird, boring, you are not "fearing" the godliness in that person. His ability to create new habits, his ability to change. The Baal Shem Tov would say, if you want to talk to G-d, you will find Him standing on your enemy's shoulder. Go ahead and respect your enemy's G-dly ability to forgive, and his G-d-like ability to be aware of what he has done wrong. Respect his ability to choose a new way, and change.

R Akiva's 24,000 students died, for they did not respect each other. We cannot fathom their greatness, but we are told that it was their lack of respect for one another on *their* level that brought about their deaths. So, R' Akiva's mantra in Avot, his message to us all is never to forget, even for a



minute of your life, that Man is G-d-like. How awesome.

S.T.U.P.I.D.

רבי לויטס איש יבנה אומר מאד מאד הוי שפל רוח שתקות רמה Rabbi Levitas, from Yavneh, says, “Be very, very, humble, for the Tikva, hope, of humans is the worm (Avot 4 ;4). On a simplistic level, this means that if you make sure to be acutely aware of the fact that your end is the grave, a place of worms and maggots, your haughtiness dissipates. It seems that here, Rabbi Levitas is teaching a technique for humbling oneself. Think of death, think of worms, think of maggots, and you will become humble. This version does not use the usual translation of ‘tikva’, which is hope, but prefers an interpretive one: “end”. Your end is the grave. A humbling thought.

I have a problem with this choice of words. Why did the Sage use the word תקווה, which literally means hope? Just say סוף אנוש רמה, the *end* of Man is worms and maggots.

In this statement of R Levitas lies the universal secret to human success. This is a concept that changed my life. People who are successful in all their activities and human relationships possess the ability to do those simple things that assure their success. Being successful depends upon the degree of humility you are willing to assume to do simple things, and to be persistent in busying yourself with simple actions – actions which the unsuccessful perceive as “stupid”.

I use the word “stupid”, even though I shouldn’t, because that is the only word that I can use to properly explain this concept. It means not only that which is simple; it means the things that many of us feel are beneath our dignity to concern ourselves with, for we perceive them as stupid. Stupid really stands for Simple. Tangible. Underestimated. Persistent (planning). Imitating (success). Do-able.

To pray on time, to say every word as it is supposed to be said, you need to be waiting in Shul before everyone starts, something that busy people

look at as Stupid. We, the internet generation, are too smart and too busy to wait a few minutes and meditate, before prayer. To say Birkat Hamazon from a “bencher”, to pray with your finger pointing to the words, are all things that people don’t do, because it looks to us “stupid”.

To be a good father for your children, you need to tell them stories they can relate to. You need to connect to what they connect to. Fathers that are not doing their job as fathers are too busy being busy; they can’t “lower themselves” to take out the time for plain and simple, quality family time. When they do try to connect to their family, it is not at the point of real connection, because for them, that is below their level or not suitable for their stature. The fathers who are successful at being fathers are those who do those things that the unsuccessful father perceives as Stupid.

When Rav Ovadiah Yosef was asked for his technique to remember word for word the longest Tosefot in Chullin, he said he learnt that Tosefot 500 times. We could venture to say that is what made Rav Ovadia who he was, it was his ability to learn the same Tosefot 500 times. I am sure he understood it the first or second time; so, if I were he, I would not learn the Tosefot again. Because I would look at that next review as something Stupid. I would opt to see the next page, or some commentaries... and that is the main reason why I did not become Rav Ovadia Yosef. Rav Ovadia Yosef was able to build the Shas party, and was able to connect to so many people by telling stories that ‘Rav Ovadiah Yosef wannabes’ would call Stupid. The best public speakers, the ones that are the most sought after, are willing to tell stories and elaborate on them, or polish up their jokes to get the audience to laugh, or talk about the simple things that everyone relates to – things that others would refer to as Stupid.

I have been coaching yeshiva students to help them improve their learning, taking their learning



performance from average or below to the next level. 90 percent of the time, what holds back the student is that he is not willing to focus on understanding or grasping the basics, before getting to the second level. The yeshiva student wants to match up to the high level of his peers and understand the commentaries, or the challenging level class of his rabbi, without first knowing the simple and basic back-and-forth of the Talmud. In the beginning, they say to me, “Why are we spending time on knowing the basics? I did not hire you for that!” But the truth of the matter is that all great Torah luminaries were willing to master the basics, and from doing that, they became great. Rav Ovadia Yosef would learn the same Tosefot 500 times. Rav Elchanan Wasserman, before seeing any Tosefot in the Tractate, would make sure he had mastered the whole Tractate with Rashi, on the simple level, cold, before even seeing the first Tosefot. My Rebbi, a rabbi who is known for his genius in learning, told me that until I learn a section of Talmud 4 times, I have never learnt it once. Only the fifth time would be considered review. So, why don't unsuccessful students review their learning so many times? Because they feel that reviewing what you already know, clarifying, is stupid.

One out of seven yeshiva boys that I sit with, ages 18- 22, among them proud yeshiva students, who come from respected rabbinical homes, cannot say the Hebrew Alef Bet from beginning to end. How could it be that a boy who went to yeshiva his whole life does not know Alef Bet from beginning to end by heart? I am not asking who is responsible for this, I am just supporting my ‘Stupid’ theory that people who grow first master those things that the unsuccessful perceive as Stupid. And unsuccessful students are usually missing a certain basic level, and that is why they cannot grasp the next level. Once the boy knows the basics, whether it is understanding the Alef Bet, or understanding basic Talmud, the next step is always less complicated. The reason the boy did not make an effort to learn Alef Bet until I helped him, the reason why the yeshiva student did not want to get the Talmud clear first, is because they regarded

learning Alef Bet or mastering the basic Talmud as stupid. Below him. Beneath him.

Brian Tracy wrote the following, in Getting Rich Your Own Way. “Fully 99% of self-made millionaires in America come from these four categories: 1. self-owned businesses, 74 percent 2. senior executive positions, 10 percent 3. doctors, lawyers and other professionals, 10 percent 4. salespeople and sales consultants, five percent. The final one percent of self-made millionaires includes all the people who have made their money in the stock market, with inventions, in show business, through the authorship of books and songs, as lottery winners, and all other sources.”

You have a better chance of becoming a millionaire if you have your own business, selling something, than if you are giving a service that it took you over 10 years of college to learn. And usually the distributor makes more money than the manufacturer. Who is smarter? Usually, not the one who is richer. Richard Branson, Edmond Safra, and so many other philanthropists were failures at school, but still were able to make a lot more money than the A students in their class. Maybe because they were willing to do what the A students looked at as stupid.

I asked my father, the rabbi of a Sephardic synagogue where many congregants are rich, “Abba, how many of the rich people in the shul are doctors, lawyers, or academic people?” He said, “None”. Of course there are doctors, lawyers, psychologists and smart people who made nice money on their services, but they comprise only 10 percent of the millionaires.

I have a student who became successful at commercial real estate in NYC on simple commissions that other real estate agents would not waste their time on. He said, “Rabbi, I see how true the studies are, that 80 percent of startup businesses fail, especially in the food business. I am also noticing that the restaurants that fail are usually the restaurants that have the complicated concepts. The restaurants who are making it are selling good and simple fast food basics. Hotdog and hamburger



stands, pizza shops, ice cream stores, and coffee shops. I told him that the same is true in Israel. Cofix became Israel's latest fast food craze, because they were the first to sell a good iced coffee for 5 shekel, and everything else in the store at a flat, low rate. It is amazing how you can build a whole franchise from a competitive cup of ice coffee. A simple solution to a simple problem. All Starbucks does is add some good customer service to a great coffee, charge you double the price, and

they have become one of the most successful businesses.

So the Sage is teaching us that the only *hope* for success is to be lowly, like a worm. Do the things that you feel are the simple steps to the success that you really value, no matter how Stupid those things may seem.

JEWISH APPROACH TO EMOTIONAL PAIN

ולא תונו איש את עמיתו (25:17).

This verse teaches us that it is forbidden to use *ona'at devarim*, offensive and insulting speech. The Sefer Hachinuch points out that this does not pertain to the offended one prohibiting him from responding to the offense. Although one who remains silent upon being offended is considered a *chassid* and is loved by G-d, however, the Torah here does not command him to retain his silence. Human nature makes that nearly impossible.

The Talmud relates a perplexing statement regarding the offended. "Since the destruction of the Temple, all the gates of prayer are closed except for the gates of *ona'ah* and tears" (Bava Metziah 59a). We might have expected these heavenly gates to be open – first and foremost – to the prayers of the needy or the righteous.

Rabbeinu Bachye explains: "Since someone who was offended feels so hurt, so degraded and humbled by his pain, that he prays from his worried heart with fervor – and is heard."

G-d's Wide Shoulders

Indeed, pain caused by hurtful words can be worse than physical pain or monetary loss. An offended person feels "emotionally alone," and when he turns to G-d for support, G-d will be there for him. Intellectual or rational consolation usually does not heal an emotional wound. What's needed is emotional support and acceptance. G-d, in His kindness, will provide this if the offended really believes that He is there.

The power of a genuinely tearful prayer is unmatched. The Rebbe of Pashische asked a provocative question about the Gemara we are discussing: If the gates of *ona'ah* and of tears are never closed, why have gates at all? The gates are there – the Rebbe explained – for those *tefillot* where the tears are not genuine, shed by a person who doesn't really believe that the Creator is the only true address for all support.

Broken Hearts

It is said in the name of the Kotsker Rebbe that there is nothing more whole and pure in the entire world than a broken heart. Like the law regarding purifying earthenware utensils – "שבירתן זו היא" (או אז יכנע לבבם הערל) (purification is achieved by breaking them) – the heart is purified through being broken. Only then, with his pure and broken heart, will one embrace his relationship with G-d.

In Parashat Bechukotay (26:41), the Torah itself explains that all the *klallot* – the frightening curses addressed to the sinner – are intended to break the stubborn sinner's heart (או אז יכנע לבבם הערל). The Almighty wants our relationship with Him so much that He is willing to do whatever it takes to re-establish it. But if we instill humility into our heart on our own, we will not need any of these *klallot*.

In connection to this, I'd like to share with you a story I heard about twenty years ago which has had a lasting impact on me. Everyone was in *shul* awaiting *Kol Nidrei* on Yom Kippur night except for the rabbi. He had been grossly insulted by one



of the congregants, and simply could not face the congregation.

Into the rabbi's office walked one of the shul's dedicated and wealthy members. Seeing the rabbi with his face in his hands, he realized that the rabbi had been insulted. The bright fellow offered the rabbi \$5,000 to buy the insults and the tears we all need before Yom Kippur. Understandably, the rabbi refused.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky sh'lita told a couple who were childless for twenty years that he was unable

to offer them segulot or brachot. Not willing to accept their lot, the tearful husband and wife pleaded with him that this should not be their fate. Rav Chaim responded that the most powerful prayer on earth is that of one who did not respond to humiliation. The prayer of such a person has more power than even the blessings of the greatest rabbis. Indeed, the couple was given this "opportunity" shortly afterwards, and merited a son within the year!

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לע"נ החבר ר' משה ב"ר נחום הלוי ז"ל

