

Brit, he should merit to go to yeshiva, to marry, and to build his own eternity. Mordechai, not Max. Yosef, not Joe. Shmuel, not Sam. There is no place in the Torah that it says that you can't speak English, Spanish or French. But, is your speech refined in a way, do you communicate in a way, different than from the average American, Mexican, or Frenchie?

The foundation of Judaism, our Orthodox identity, can sometimes carry more weight than the Shulchan Aruch, itself! And identifying with your Judaism is not enforced by the Jewish courts, because your decision as to your identity needs to come from a place of choice, not a place of obligation. Just as a woman needs to accept marriage *לְעוֹלָם לְיָ לְאִשְׁתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם*, *And I have betrothed you to Me forever.* (Hoshea 2,21) Although marital relations with a gentile is not necessarily a punishable sin, it is, in fact, worse than the worse sin! You are giving up your Jewishness! In the times of Bilaam, when there was mass assimilation, we lost 24,000 Jews, much worse than the worst sin, the sin of the Golden Calf, where we lost 3,000!!

The Holocaust started, specifically, from when and where intermarriage was at its worst. Studies from ten years ago showed the following frightening rates of assimilation, where assimilation jumped 200% in just 30 years, until 2010: United States 58% of all Jews, and 71% of non-orthodox Jews (Pew 2013). Australia, Canada and Turkey fluctuate between 25%-30%. A rate of 35%-45% in France, Britain and most of Latin America. Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 65 percent. Russia, with the highest rate of 75%. Mexico, with the lowest, with 15%. The reason why Avraham Avinu will not save the assimilated Jew from Gehinom, is because part of being a Jew, is being *different* in Exile, and part of the covenant between Avraham and G-d is that Avraham's descendants will go through four exiles. When one assimilates, it means he is not willing to be in Exile, to be different, and that means, he is not willing to be Avraham's descendants. A Jew who has marital relations is cut off from the Tent of Yaakov. (Malachi 2;12) The Jewish identity is lost. Ultimately, Avraham will not save him from Gehinom. (Meshech Hochma Ber. 15;17)

The last prophecies we received, in the pessukim at the end of Malachi (a.k.a Ezra HaSofer), G-d warned us one last time before He finished communicating with us through prophecy: To marry only within our nation, to keep our Jewish identity. (See Malachi 2;10- 3;1) These are the last pessukim before the prophecies of the coming of Mashiach, and how the last words of Malachi's prophecy end. *הֲגָה אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַח לְכֶם אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַבְּרִיאָה לְפָנָי*. *בְּיוֹם יִקְרָא הַגְּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא*: We can deduce that before Eliyahu Hanavi is sent to announce that Mashiach will come tomorrow, the Jewish Nation will be at the peak of its struggle with intermarriage.

Eliyahu Hanavi, a.k.a. Pinhas, merited not only to have a covenant of peace, of priesthood, of eternal life, but also, that forever, he would bring atonement to our nation. As the Midrash deduces, the passuk does not say *לכפר על בני ישראל*, but *וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, that he *will* bring atonement to the Jews, until the days of the resurrection of the dead. (Sifri, Pesikta) How?

Every bris you attend, Eliyahu is there too. You stand close up to his chair, and you are forgiven for all your sins. (Bnei Yissaschar brings Midrash) R' Chaim Kanievsky says there is no such Midrash. (Derech Sicha) But all agree that one who attends the Seuda is saved from Gehinom. (Tosefot Pesachim 114a). There are certain things that make it possible for a person to be saved from Gehinom, or that make it possible for a person to have forgiveness for all his sins: when a man gets married, he is forgiven for all sins (Yerushalmi Bikurim 3;3); when one keeps Shabbat (Shabbat 118b). When a person is careful in announcing the words of Kriat Shema, separating between words like *בְּכֹל-לִבְבְּךָ*, and *עֲשֵׂב בְּשִׂדְךָ*, he is promised that Gehinom will be cooled down for him. (Berachot 15b)

It is not clear, though, if the person gets forgiveness, without actually repenting. After all, even on Yom Kippur, according to the Rabbis who dispute with R' Yehuda one needs to repent, in order for the Day of Forgiveness to do its thing. (Shavuot 13a) What is the power, then, of keeping Shabbat, brit Milah, getting married to a woman from a good lineage, or keeping Yom Kippur, according to R' Yehuda, that even without repentance, that your sin is forgiven?

The answer is having the foundation, having a Jewish identity. Shabbat is what makes us Jewish: we received it, in Egypt, as we were formed into a nation. Brit Milah is the covenant, stamping Judaism into our bodies. Marrying the woman that you are allowed to, etc. Yom Kippur, Kol Nidrei, which is the most attended prayer in synagogue. The foundation, the identity, is what can save us from harsh judgement, and bring our redemption, more than anything else. Pinhas merited being the forefather of the Kohanim Gedolim, and the one

who brings about atonement for the Jewish nation, all in the merit, of keeping Jewish identity strong.

Similar to the only two mitzvot we had that got us out of Egypt, the two mitzvot that are kept most by most Jews, are Brit Milah and the Seder night. This is why, Eliyahu Hanavi comes, not only to every Brit Milah, but he comes to every Seder Table on Passover night to drink the fifth cup of wine, which represents the fifth term of Redemption, וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, and I will bring you to the Promised Land.

Selfie steps to keep Jewish identity strong:

1. Stronger communities and social groups. Chabruta systems. A personal connection with a Rabbi. Keeping the norms and the customs of our communities, even if we do not understand some of the behaviors and customs. Introducing Judaism to our youth as something they can easily relate to.
2. Be ready to pay for being different, and help our Jewish School systems! Public schools were invented by Horace Mann, in the 1830's, to make all people equal and the same. Mann's passion for education stemmed from his belief that education was the key to bridging social gaps, and creating a more equal society. For us, as Jews, that is a recipe for assimilation and disaster.
3. Eventually, if the Jews ever get too secure, too accepted, too assimilated, as they dive into the America melting pot, as they achieve the American Dream, as they become more successful than ever before... G-d will separate us, even if He has to use the hard way. If we make Kiddush with the gentile, G-d will make the Havdallah....

EGO ON HOLD

Leaders never became leaders by concentrating on their ego. They served the people in some way and became leaders incidentally, somewhere along the process. It is amazing how far we could go in life, if we would just put our egos on hold and focus on our goals, without involving our self-perspective. This is something we can learn from the "Woe" of the Elders.

ונתתה מהודך עליו – ולא כל הודך, זקנים שבאותו הדור אמרו: פני משה כפני חמה, פני יהושע כפני לבנה, אוי לה לאותה And you (Moshe) shall give of your shine to him (Yehoshua), and not all of your shine... The Elders of that generation said, that the face of Moshe shone like the sun, while the face of Yehoshua shone like the moon. Woe to this embarrassment! Woe to this shame!

This needs an explanation. What was it that caused the Elders such great embarrassment? And what

was so bad about having Yehoshua lead them? What did Yehoshua do that was so embarrassing?

The Chida explains. The Midrash tells us that Yehoshua merited being a leader after Moshe, since he was Moshe's assistant; he would arrange the benches in the study hall for people to sit and learn comfortably. (Rabba Naso 6, 5) The Elders had been embarrassed to do what Yehoshua did; but now, they saw that it was specifically in this merit that Yehoshua became the leader of the Jews. 'Woe to this embarrassment. Woe to this shame' that we were embarrassed to arrange the benches in the study hall. The embarrassment that we felt then has caused us, the elders, to be students of the young Yehoshua.

Imagine how far in life we could get if we were willing to subject ourselves to shame for doing the right thing. If we would be willing to admit our

mistakes. If we would not be afraid of getting a “no.” If we would not be afraid to give a no. If we would be able to accept the fact that we came from nothing, and everything we have is a gift from G-d.

Almost 150 years ago, there lived in Vilna a shoemaker named Zelig. Zelig was a nice guy, a guy who barely made ends meet. One sunny day, Zelig got an inheritance that turned him, in no time, into a very rich fellow. Zelig then became R Zelig, and an important personality in town. When Zelig’s son married the Rabbi’s daughter, it put Zelig in a new light of respect in the eyes of all the townspeople.

Mr. Bitter could not watch the honor, respect and dignity R’ Zelig was now receiving at the wedding. R Zelig, the former shoemaker!?! How did this simple shoemaker “get ahead?” Mr. Bitter came over to Zelig at his son’s wedding, when Zelig was surrounded by all the respectable people in town wishing him Mazal Tov. Mr. Bitter raised his shoe over the heads of the crowd and asked Zelig, above all the voices of the well-wishers, “Is it worth it for me to fix this shoe? How much would it cost to fix?”

Zelig took this insult, this embarrassment, too hard; he turned as white as a ghost. He fainted on the spot. The doctors came to help, but it was too late. Zelig was dead. The wedding was over.

This story went viral. It reached the ears of R’ Yisrael Salanter, who had no rest from the tragic outcome of this despicable behavior. He decided to open the *Mussar* movement. He wanted people to improve their character, so that this would not happen again.

What?! Because of one rare story, of some wicked Mr. Bitter, we need to initiate a *Mussar* Movement for all of Klal Yisrael?! Normal people do not act this way!! Why, because of just one bitter person, does everything need to change?

The answer is that the *Mussar* Movement was not created for the one-in-a-million Mr. Bitter. It was created for all the Zeligs out there. “Zelig. You have money. You have honor. You merited having your son marry the Rabbi’s daughter! Everything is so good for you! Be happy with what you have! Why do you get so shaken up because of what people say to you or about you?!? Why would you faint – or die – from some silly comment?!?”

No. Not for Mr. Bitter. But for all the Zeligs out there who take an insult too much to heart, who don’t know how to deal with embarrassment, who take embarrassment in this world too seriously, while they make light of the embarrassment one might have in the World to Come. R Yisrael Salanter started the *Mussar* movement for people like you and me, who care too much about what people think.

Embarrassment is a tricky *Middah*. One of the signs of the Jewish people is to be shy, embarrassed. (Yevamot 79a) From the Talmud (ibid.) it is clear that Fear of G-d is really just embarrassment from G-d (also see Rambam Moreh Nevuchim, brought in the first Rama Orach HaChaim). G-d has given us so much; how can we not feel embarrassed? After all, we are recipients of things that we have not earned. But all this is the good, positive type of embarrassment. The bad embarrassment is to be embarrassed because of what people think about us, when we are actually doing the right thing. A person needs to know how to manage embarrassment. Embarrassment was created so that people would not be takers. For people to be appreciative.

Many times, in life, you need to pick – Either be embarrassed in this world, or be embarrassed in the next World. We pray not to be embarrassed in this World, but more importantly, not to be embarrassed in the Next World, ולא נברוש לעולם ועד.

THE ART OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is definitely an art. Non-effective communicators don’t ask themselves the

seven questions before communicating. Who is the right person to relay the message? What is the right



thing to say? To whom? With whom? Where is the right place to say it? How is the right way to say it? And why is this message important? (See introduction to *Kodshim Yachin Boaz* כשירצה אדם לברר לעיניו שום דבר יפה, צריך להשיב לעצמו תחילה על שבע שאלות יפה יפה דהיינו: מי מה למי את מי למתי איה איך (ולמה)

A person who hears news that is hard to swallow, about an inevitable life-changer they did not ask for, goes through an emotional cycle. Hard news can concern loss of health, life, financial stability, trust, friendship, or independence. This emotional cycle is a roller-coaster ride of activity and passivity, as the person wriggles and turns, in their desperate efforts to avoid the change.

Our Torah is full of lessons on how to communicate life-changing messages. When G-d calls to Adam, after he ate from the forbidden fruit, G-d calls out, "Where are you?" He doesn't just rebuke. He opens up a discussion. (Rashi) When Yitzhak tells Esav that Yaakov tricked him and took Esav's blessing, Yitzhak does whatever he can to soften the news, and offers a "consolation prize," in the form of a different blessing. When Yaakov's sons let their father know that Yosef was killed by a wild animal, they spoke indirectly, "Is this your son's cloak? Do you recognize it?" When Tamar wanted to communicate to Yehuda that she was pregnant from him, she was exceedingly careful not to embarrass him; she showed him the pledges which he had given her and let him come to the conclusion, on his own. When Yaakov told his wives that he needed to leave and go back to E. Yisrael, he called them to the field, to discuss the matter in a confidential way that would help them accept the inevitable, despite the risk of inciting Lavan's anger. When Yehoshua told Moshe that the Jews sinned with the calf, he just said that something was not right in the camp. When G-d tells Moshe that he will not enter the Promised Land, He first asks Moshe to ascend the mountain and see the Land from above. When Shmuel has to relay to Eli Hakohen the prophecy that Eli's family will be doomed forever, Shmuel is very reluctant to do so. When Queen Esther could not see Achashverosh anymore, Daniel was hesitant to pass on this information to Mordechai. (אין משיבין (על הקלקלה

וְשֵׁם בִּתְאֶשֶׁר שָׂרָה *And the name of the daughter of Asher was Serah.* Rashi explains the reason why this *passuk* is mentioned in Parashat Pinchas: *to tell you that she was still alive.* Serah is one of the most interesting personalities that walked the face of this earth. She was one of the ten who entered Gan Eden alive. Hanoch. Eliyahu. Mashiach. Eliezer. King Hiram. Slave of the Kushi king. Yaavatz. Bitya. Serah bat Asher. R Yehoshua Ben Levi.

Here is the story of how Serah merited immortality. Asher adopted Serah, and she caused Asher to be excommunicated by his brothers for his entire life. When the brothers sold Yosef, they all swore to excommunicate any person who would reveal their secret. Serah knew about the sale from a prophecy, but Asher's brothers accused him of having mentioned it at home. (See Baal Haturim Devarim 33;24)

When the brothers returned from Egypt with the new knowledge that Yosef was alive, they stood outside, discussing how to relay the information to Yaakov. Who would be the right person to tell him? How should they say it? When should they say it? Who should be there? After all, shocking news is what killed their great grandmother, Sarah.

When Avraham was on Mt. Moriah, bringing a Korban instead of Yitzhak, the Satan came to Sarah dressed as an old, simple and humble man. He said to a 127-year-old Sarah, who had only one child when she was at the age of ninety. "Didn't you hear the whole story – that Abraham took Yitzhak, and he built an altar, and he slaughtered him, and he sacrificed him on the *Mizbeach*? And Yitzhak was screaming and crying in front of his father who paid no attention to him. Sarah raised her voice and cried; she screamed a long and bitter scream for the fate of her son. She fell to the ground and put dirt on her head, saying, "My son Yitzhak! My son, I wish I could have died today, instead of you!" She kept crying, saying, *I am so pained! I brought you up, I pampered you, and now, my delight is turned to mourning!* Sarah then got up, walking unsteadily, in the direction of Hevron. She asked every passerby what had happened to her son, but no one knew.

When she reached Hebron, with no new information, she sent her servants out on a search. They checked the Yeshiva of Shem VaEver, but could not find him. They searched the whole land, but to no avail. Suddenly, the Satan came to Sarah in the form of a man, and he said, "I lied. Avraham did not slaughter Yitzhak, and Yitzhak did not die." When Sarah heard this news, she was so happy, that her soul left her. Since Satan's messages came so suddenly, they were bound to be fatal.

The brothers did not know how to let their father hear the news. What questions would he ask? How could they explain Yosef's cloak that was blood stained? And most of all, when Yaakov was going to hear that Yosef, young and handsome beyond description, a youth of unmatched physical beauty, was alone in an immoral Egypt for so long, how would Yaakov contain this message? Yaakov was definitely going to believe that Yosef did not withstand the temptations of Egypt!

ויגידו לו. And they told him. The word ויגידו is missing the letter Yud, because the brothers did not tell Yaakov themselves. The word לאמר, saying, is added, to teach that Serah was the one who relayed the message. (Midrash Sechel Tov)

Serah, though, who knew exactly what the brothers had done to Yosef, understood why the brothers were at a loss at how to relay the news to their frail and broken father, and she was the only one able to deliver the message. She grabbed her harp and ran into the room where Yaakov was praying. She started playing her harp and mumbling to herself, according to the letters of her name רִחַשׁ לְבִי דָּבָר (Tehillim 45; see Pnei David) טוב אמר אני מעשי למלך. And here is what she hummed, עוד יוסף חי, Yosef is still spiritually alive! He did not sin! וְכִי־הוּא מִשָּׁל וְכִי־הוּא מִשָּׁל Even though he became ruler of the

Here are the Selfie Steps to communicating difficult messages.

1. There are seven stages people go through when they hear life changing news. It is important that the communicator helps the person move from stage to stage, and not get stuck on one of the stages. When communicated ineffectively, the message can be harder than the life change itself. Shock stage: Initial paralysis at hearing the news. Denial stage: Trying to avoid the inevitable. Anger stage: Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion. Bargaining stage: Seeking, in vain, for a way out. Depression stage: Final realization of the inevitable. Testing stage: Seeking realistic solutions. Acceptance stage: Finally finding the way forward. A person who has lost their job might still go into the city only to sit on a park bench all day, as if he/she can go backwards in time. People need help adjusting to the new norm.

entire land of Egypt! (Zohar) She asked, as if it was a question, Can it really be that Yosef is in *Mitzrayim*? And that he has two sons born to him, Menashe and Ephraim? (See Midrash Hagadol)

In the merit that she brought life back to Yaakov, Yaakov blessed her that she would never die. (Hadar Zekenim, Seder Olam) And that is what caused her to live forever and enter Gan Eden, alive. Asher knew that Serah would live on until the times of the redemption from Egypt, וְיָרְחֶה הָעוֹלָם (Shemot 26), so he told her the secret password of the true redeemer, Pakod Yifkod. Serah was the only Jew who remained from Yaakov and Yosef's generation, and she confirmed to the Elders in Egypt that Moshe was G-d's messenger to redeem the Jews. She directed Moshe to the place where Yosef's bones were buried.

Serah saved King David and Yoav Ben Seruyah from decimating an entire city, as they were after the rebel, Sheva Ben Bichri. (Shmuel B 20) For this act of wisdom and persuasion, Serah entered the *Eshet Hayil* hall of fame, פִּיהָ פִּתְחָה בַּחֲכָמָה: this is Serah Bat Asher. (Midrash Mishlei 31;45) She appeared in R' Yochanan the Amorah's class, when he was teaching about the miracles of the splitting of the *Yam Suf*. "I was there, and between each tribe who walked through the sea, G-d made see-through walls." (Pesikta Dr Kahana Beshalach 11) This means that Serah was alive for at least 2000 years!!! All in the merit of reviving the spirit of Yaakov, passing on the news in the right way!

May we merit to be bearers of only good news. And may we learn to communicate always, as effectively as we can.

2. Answer the six questions of communication before delivering the message. Who is the right person to relay the message? What is the right thing to say? To whom? With whom? Where is the right place to say it? How is the right way to say it? And why is this message important?

WHY ME?

In his book, Learned Optimism, Martin Seligman, the forefather of modern-day positive psychology, breaks down positive thinking to 3 P's. Permanent – *Is the problem/offense/issue at hand one that is permanent?* Pervasive – *Is the problem/offense/issue at hand perceived as bigger than it really is?* Personal – *Is the problem/offense/issue at hand something that should be taken personally?*

Positive people perceive problems as transitory, not permanent. Positive people believe that problems/challenges should not be taken personally. Positive people do not take their challenges as “all-encompassing” – that they are spread over the entire range of their life. Negative people are the opposite. They take things personally, or they believe that the problem/offense/issue is permanent, or they perceive the issue as pervading their entire reality.

When things go wrong in life, a person can ask, ‘Why me?’, as if he feels that G-d has something against him, personally. This is worse than thinking that your problems are permanent, or that your problems are worse than they are.

Mordechai Shapiro has a hit song, called One in a Million. “*I know in my heart, that no one can play my part*”. The “Why me?” question, itself, is always a question that is asked out of self-pity. As Shapiro sings, *I look into the mirror and I ask, what do I gain when I compare and I contrast?* What a mistake to compare one's self to others, something that makes one take things in a personal way.

Noach knew this. The people of the world, then, were still suffering from the curse Adam brought to the world by eating the forbidden fruit. There was a folktale at the time that the curse would end, only when a child was born circumcised. Noach was that child. ויקרא את-שמו נח לאמר זֶה יִנְחַמְנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ ויקרא למהמך לֵמֶחַךְ וימַעֲבֹדוּ יְדֵינוּ מִיַּד הַיָּדָיִם אֲשֶׁר אָרַרְהָ יְקוּקָ: *Lemech, Noach's father, named him Noach, saying, “This one will bring us relief from our work and from the*

anguish of our hands, caused by the soil that G-d has cursed”. R' Yehuda Hachasid was quoted saying that Noach was the first freak of humanity. He was born with fingers. Everyone before him had mitted hands, like Lego and Playmobil people. That is why *they* could plow with their hands. But Noach could not plow with his hands. He had fingers. What a weirdo! But Noach knew that comparison is the thief of joy. He knew the mantra that – *When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade*. So, he invented the first manmade machine. The plow. Noach was the greatest inventor of his time; he changed the world forever. Had he compared himself to others, what they have and what he does not, he would have robbed himself and the world of what only he could achieve. (See Rosh Breshit 5)

Pinchas knew this. He was the only descendant of Aharon who was not a Kohen. He was born before the cutoff time, and was not anointed along with his father, uncles and grandfather (Rashi 25;13). Pinchas ignored the “Why me?” voice,... “Why was I left out?” Instead, Pinchas found a deeper, more positive inner voice to listen to. “When you feel depressed or anxious or different, congratulate yourself. You have now joined the club of everyone who has ever made a difference in the world.”

And Pinchas found that moment. He was the only one who could face the Angel of Death and save the Jewish Nation from the plague that had already killed 24,000 people. If Pinchas would have become a Kohen prior to killing Zimri and Kozbi, he would have been disqualified from bringing a Korban, or from being fit to participate in Birkat Kohanim. (Sh”A OH 128;35) This is why, only after this act of zealotness, G-d made Pinchas a Kohen.

If we look at life in a positive way, as if yesterday, today, and tomorrow are all part of one big story that only G-d can orchestrate, it can give meaning to our problems. Pressure is what turns coal into

diamonds, and it's what turns lemons into lemonade. Difficulties turn the regular characters of the story into legends. Characters can't develop and grow without hardships, and only after facing hard times, you come out stronger and more confident. You really become "one in a million."

As we begin the period of The Three Weeks, the "Why me?" question is not just a question that is asked by many on a personal scale. It is also asked by many on a national level. "Why us?" Why do we, the Jewish Nation, need to go through so many difficulties, hardships, programs, exiles, genocide? Aren't we "The Chosen Nation?"

We cannot justify asking "Why me?", only when things go wrong. We must ask it when things *go right*, as well. We must look at the world, knowing that difficulties have ~~in them~~ something amazing in them. Something that we can grow from. Here is yet another amazing *Chidush* in *Dikduk*. כל המתאבל על ירושלים זוכה ורואה בשמחה *Anyone who mourns over Yerushalayim ... Merits and sees its happiness.* (Taanit 30b) Why is this said in the present tense? Why does it not say, ... Will merit and see, in the future tense?

Any generation in which the Beit Hamikdash is not built, it is considered it was destroyed in its day.) Yerushalmi Yoma 1;1) Mourning over Jerusalem is mourning over what we could have been, and were not. If only we could be more. More kind. More loving. More forgiving. More accepting. More humble. More believing. More fiery in our prayers. This is what the Talmud is telling us. If you mourn over what you could have been, and not what you

So how does one switch from being a negative person to a positive person? Here are the Selfie Steps, the practical self-help steps one can take to make the perspective switch, in your relationship with G-d, and your relationship with others.

1. Know your worth. Meditate on how you cannot even fathom how important you are to G-d and how much He loves you. Ask the "Why Me?" question when things are going right in life, when you notice that you are actually blessed.
2. In your interpersonal relationships, when confronted negatively, make believe that you are in the customer service department.

A: Don't take it personally: Understand that most angry customers are not angry with you, but rather with the situation in which they currently find themselves. It's not about you; it's about them and what they are dealing with.

lack, then you will find happiness, in the present. And this is what purifies us. Like the word זוכה, merits, which also connotes, טהור, pure. Mourning over what we could have been is what polishes our souls, in the present.

Problems and issues are not permanent. It is only our negative thinking that, unfortunately, sometimes stays permanent. Sometimes, people ask, "Why did I have to receive this difficult child? Why Me?" Dan's son, Chushim, was his only child. A deaf child. Binyamin, on the other hand, had 10 children. When the Torah takes a consensus of these two tribes, years later in the desert, G-d makes a point of placing the two extreme numbers one next to the other. Binyamin had the least of all the tribes, 35,400, while Dan had second to the most, after only Yehuda, 62,700.

All the negative Ps are rooted in *Shiflut*, the feeling of worthlessness. All this negativity is the *Avodah Zarah* of Pe'or. Pe'or was an idol that was worshiped by degrading it. *This idol must be so powerful, for no matter how much you belittle it, it does not respond!!!* The power of belittlement, the belief that you are worthless, is the sin of the idol of Pe'or. How low can you go? How far can you believe in your worthlessness, and still stay sane? The very opposite of Judaism!!! Judaism tells us that you can never begin to imagine how much G-d appreciates every Amen that you say. Every Amen, *Yehe Sheme Rabba*. Every word of Torah. Every blessing, each kindness, every feeling of appreciation that you have, every time that you stand strong in your values. Judaism believes that you are really, "one in a million."

B: Let them “vent.” Sometimes, people just need to be heard.

3. In our relationship with G-d, instead of taking difficulties personally, have patience. Don't jump to conclusions. Look at the difficulty as part of a much greater script.
4. Fill your calendar. Do not let the problems/confrontations/issues of life take a disproportionate amount of your time.

EGO ON HOLD

Leaders never became leaders by concentrating on their ego. They served the people in some way and became leaders incidentally, somewhere along the process. It is amazing how far we could go in life if we would just put our egos on hold and focus on our goals without involving our self-perspective in it. This is something we can learn from the “Woe” of the Elders.

ונתתה מהודך עליו – ולא כל הודך, זקנים שבאותו הדור אמרו:
פני משה כפני חמה, פני יהושע כפני לבנה, אוי לה לאותה
פני משה כפני חמה, אוי לה לאותה כלימה
And you (Moshe) shall give of your shine to him (Yehoshua), and not all of your shine... The Elders of that generation said, that the face of Moshe shone like the sun, while the face of Yehoshua shone like the moon. Woe to this embarrassment! Woe to this shame!

This needs an explanation. What was it that caused the Elders such great embarrassment? And what was so bad about having Yehoshua lead them? What did Yehoshua do that was so embarrassing?

The Chida explains. The Midrash tells us that Yehoshua merited being a leader after Moshe, since he was Moshe's assistant; he would arrange the benches in the study hall for people to sit and learn comfortably. (Rabba Naso 6, 5) The Elders had been embarrassed to do what Yehoshua did; but now, they saw that it was specifically in this merit that Yehoshua became the leader of the Jews. ‘*Woe to this embarrassment. Woe to this shame*’ that we were embarrassed to arrange the benches in the study hall. *The embarrassment that we felt then has caused us, the elders, to be students of the young Yehoshua.*

Imagine how far in life we could get if we were willing to subject ourselves to shame for doing the right thing. If we would be willing to admit our mistakes. If we would not be afraid of getting a

“no”. If we would not be afraid to give a no. If we would be able to accept the fact that we came from nothing, and everything we have is a gift from G-d.

Almost 150 years ago, there lived in Vilna a shoemaker named Zelig. Zelig was a nice guy, and a guy who barely made ends meet. One sunny day, Zelig got an inheritance that turned him, in no time, into a very rich fellow. Zelig then became R Zelig, and an important personality in town. When Zelig's son married the Rabbi's daughter, it put Zelig in a new light of respect in the eyes of all the townspeople.

Mr. Bitter could not watch the honor, respect and dignity R' Zelig was now receiving at the wedding. R Zelig, the former shoemaker!?! How did this simple shoemaker “get ahead”? Mr. Bitter came over to Zelig at his son's wedding, when Zelig was surrounded by all the respectable people in town wishing him Mazal Tov. Mr. Bitter raised his shoe over the heads of the crowd and asked Zelig, above all the voices of the well-wishers, “Is it worth it for me to fix this shoe? How much would it cost to fix?”

Zelig took this insult, this embarrassment, too hard; he turned as white as a ghost. He fainted on the spot. The doctors came to help, but it was too late. Zelig was dead. The wedding was over.

This story went viral. It reached the ears of R' Yisrael Salanter, who had no rest from the tragic outcome of this despicable behavior. He decided to open the Mussar movement. He wanted people to improve their character, so that this would not happen again.

What?! Because of one rare story, of some wicked Mr. Bitter, we need to initiate a Mussar Movement for all of Klal Yisrael?! Normal people do not act

this way!! Why, because of just one bitter person, does everything need to change?

The answer is that the Mussar Movement was not created for the one-in-a-million Mr. Bitter. It was created for all the Zeligs out there. “Zelig. You have money. You have honor. You merited having your son marry the Rabbi’s daughter! Everything is so good for you! Be happy with what you have! Why do you get so shaken up because of what people say to you or about you?!? Why would you faint – or die – from some silly comment?!”

No. Not for Mr. Bitter. But for all the Zeligs out there who take an insult too much to heart, who don’t know how to deal with embarrassment, who take embarrassment in this world too seriously, while they make light of the embarrassment one might have in the World to Come. R Yisrael Salanter started the Mussar movement for people like you and me, who care too much about what people think about us.

RELIGION OR RELATIONSHIP?

Many rabbis are of the opinion that Eliyahu Hanavi was originally Pinchas. The Baal Haturim points to the words in the beginning of this week’s Parasha, לְכֵן אֶמְרָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְךָ וְלְכָל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּיַמֵּי מֶלֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלְכָל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּיַמֵּי מֶלֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלְכָל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּיַמֵּי מֶלֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ and makes note of the small letter Vav in the word שלום . The Vav is mentioned in a Midrash cited by Rashi in Parashat Behukotay, ה' פעמים מצינו יעקב מלא וא"ו ואליהו חסר וא"ו, מפני שנמל יעקב משכון מאליהו שיבא ויבשר הגאולה לבניו. *Yaakov is spelled five times in Tanach with a Vav. Eliyahu's name is spelled five times without a Vav. Yaakov "took" the letter Vav from Eliyahu's name as collateral, pledging that Eliyahu would announce the Final Redemption to his children.* (26; 42) The Baal Haturim explains that the small letter Vav of שלום hints at this “Vav collateral”.

Someone once asked R' Chaim Soleveitchik about a seeming contradiction. We know that Eliyahu Hanavi needs to come a day before Mashiach to announce tomorrow’s good news, because the passuk in Malachi says: הֲגֵה אֲנֹכִי

Embarrassment is a tricky Middah. One of the signs of the Jewish people is to be shy, embarrassed. (Yevamot 79a) From the Talmud (ibid.) it is clear that Fear of G-d is really just embarrassment from G-d (also see Rambam Moreh Nevuchim, brought in the first Rama Orach HaChaim). G-d has given us so much; how can we not feel embarrassed? After all, we are recipients of things that we have not earned. But all this is the good, positive type of embarrassment. The bad embarrassment is to be embarrassed because of what people think about us, when we are actually doing the right thing. A person needs to know how to manage embarrassment. Embarrassment was created so that people would not be takers. For people to be appreciative.

Many times in life, you need to pick – Either be embarrassed in this world, or be embarrassed in the next World. We pray not to be embarrassed in this World, but more importantly, not to be embarrassed in the Next World, ולא נבוש לעולם ועד.

שְׁלַח לְכֶם אֶת אֵלֶיךָ הַנְּבִיא לְפָנַי בְּיוֹם הַהַגְדֹּל וְהַנּוֹרָא *I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the Great and Awesome Day of G-d.* (3:23) On the other hand, we find a contradictory belief. One of the Thirteen Principles of the Rambam, recited each day is, אני מאמין באמונה שלמה בביאת המשיח ואע"פ שיתמהמה עם כל זה אחכה לו בכל יום שיבא. It is not enough for a person to believe that Mashiach is going to come. The Principle is that Mashiach can come *any day*. So the question is, how can I believe that Mashiach can come *today*, if Eliyahu Hanavi did not come yesterday?!? The answer R' Chaim gave is “תיקו”. The acronym used in the Talmud when the answer is unknown: תשבי יתרץ קושיות ואבעיות Eliyahu (HaTishbi) will answer the questions and queries, when Mashiach comes.

There is a different answer though. הַקָּטָן יִהְיֶה לְאֵלֶּיךָ וְהַצָּעִיר לְגֹי עַצוֹם אֲנִי ה' בְּעֵתָהּ אֲחִישְׁנָהּ *The smallest will become a thousand times greater, and the youth will become a mighty nation; I am G-d. In its time, I will hasten it* (Yeshaya

60; 22). The Talmud teaches us that G-d will bring Mashiach in the appointed time, only if the Jews did not merit bringing Mashiach earlier. There is a deadline by which Mashiach has to come. And there is the possibility of bringing him through our merit, even before that deadline (Sanhedrin 98a). With this in mind, we can explain that Eliyahu will announce good tidings *only the day before the deadline*. But if Mashiach comes quickly, he won't need to wait for Eliyahu's announcement. פליתי סי' ק"י בסוף קונטרס בית (הספק)). This is what the song we sing on Saturday night after Havdallah says, במהרה יבא, that we want Eliyahu Hanavi to come quickly to us, *together* with Mashiach. Because when Mashiach comes quickly, Eliyahu Hanavi comes *with* Mashiach. Not before him. (See Rambam Melachim 12; 2)

This explains why Yaakov needed to take a collateral from Eliyahu, the letter Vav, to assure that Eliyahu would bring the good tidings of Mashiach. Eliyahu will come the day before Mashiach, only if Mashiach arrives at the deadline, without the Jews having deserved it. Yaakov was worried about Eliyahu's zealotness: if Yaakov's children would be undeserving, maybe Eliyah wouldn't be interested in having Mashiach come to redeem them. This beautiful concept can be found in Mishneh Sachir, רבי יששכר שלמה ב"ר יצחק (הי"ד, טייכטל, killed in Aushwitz, 1941)

We know that Eliyahu is Pinchas because they were both zealots. Pinchas was zealous in killing Zimri, and Eliyahu was a zealous prophet. When G-d came to visit Pinchas, he found him in a cave in the desert and asked him what he was doing there. *And he said, I avenged Hashem, the G-d of Legions, for the Jews have left Your Brit (Milah), and they broke Your Altars, and they killed Your prophets with a sword, and I alone remain, and they want to take my life.*(Melachim 1, 19,

14). Because of these zealous statements, G-d told Eliyahu to give his title of prophet to his student, Elisha. G-d did not approve of zealotness that complained that the Jewish people did not observe brit milah. לעולם אתה (מקנה?) As rectification, Eliyahu has to come to every milah.)PDRE 29)

What was wrong with Eliyahu's zealotness when he was a prophet in the cave? Why was this any different from Eliyahu's zealotness when he was Pinchas? Why did Pinchas get rewarded and Eliyahu get punished?

Because zealotness for G-d is only respected when it brings peace between G-d and His Children, not when it is just to point out transgressions. *Pinchas held back My wrath from the Jewish people, when he acted out of his zealotness amongst them, and I did not destroy B'nei Yisrael in My zealotness.* The reason why Pinchas was rewarded greatly was not for his being zealous, but for his saving the Jewish people. For bringing the Kapparah, וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, and saving their relationship with G-d. This is very different from the zealotness of Eliyahu, which did not bring any peace between G-d and His People. For this mistake, Eliyahu was asked to pass on the job of being Prophet. And Yaakov, the Father of the Tribes, was worried that Eliyahu might make a mistake about the Final Redemption. Although we may not be deserving of Mashiach at the End of Days, G-d may find a way for us, His children, to renew the depth and warmth of our relationship, even if we are not deserving of it.

A big mistake has crept into "the systems" we live in. Many parents and teachers act according to the idea that we have to perform a "list" of 613 mitzvot, and that they have to perceive the wrongdoings of their children or students as "transgressions". There is an attempt to push conformity – to encourage a kind of "clubhouse" Judaism.

But guiding children is a serious matter. Torah is a guide for creating a *relationship* with G-d; it is not a soulless list of *rules*. If it bothers you that your child is transgressing one of the 613, but it does not bother you that there is a lack of warmth and love in the relationship between G-d and His Child, your efforts to make an improvement will not be effective. If Eliyahu's comment did not bring peace between G-d and His Children, there was no point in making it. Putting your foot down, without the intention of improving the relationship, is unacceptable to G-d. If your zealotry for G-d is expressed by finding fault with His children, you are being an ineffective messenger. This is

THE LAW OF INFLUENCE AND PERSUASION

The most powerful way to persuade and influence is to offer a vehicle that will get the person from his point A to his point B. Everyone has a point A, the place where they are at the moment. And everyone has a point B, the place where they desire to be in life.

If you want to influence or persuade someone to buy something, you need to know what his point A is and what his point B is, and to explain to him how you can get him faster to point B by his buying in to what you have to offer. If you try to motivate someone by telling him he *should* want something else, you are just confusing him. He might end up doing what you told him to, but only because you have manipulated him somehow.

The two most powerful ways to figure out what this "vehicle" is that will persuade or influence is by tapping into the Identity and the Value system of the person in question. Why are identity and value systems so crucial? People's decisions are generally based on these two major factors: Identity, and Value System. Identity is who you are, who you wish to be, who you associate yourself with, etcetera. Clarifying identity makes it *possible* to reach point B. The Value System is why you do what you do; values are the *motivator* to get to

obvious from the allegories mentioned frequently throughout Nach. To G-d, religion and transgressing it is a relationship issue, not a list of rules that may or may not be kept.

If only we can relate to our religion as a relationship, not merely as guidelines and regulations, then we will enjoy our religion much, much more. Tefillin. Shabbat. Tzniut. Learning Torah. Watching out eyes. Raising our children. We can perceive these as to-dos and not to-dos. Or we can perceive these as guidelines for our relationship. Then, our children will recognize the beauty of the religion, and appreciate it.

point B. You can motivate a person to move toward what he wants by clarifying why he wants it.

How does a coach find out what a person's identity is? He asks a lot of "Who" questions. Who do you want to be in a week/month/year/etc. ? Who do you respect? Who do you associate yourself with, and who do you *want* to associate yourself with? Who were you five years ago, and who are you today, and who do you want to be? Who are your parents, and in which way are you similar or different from them?

How does a coach find out a person's value system? He asks a lot of "Why do you..." questions. "Why do you" questions, when asked without an agenda, ("Why do you read ThinkingaboutMe articles?" "Because I value self improvement") will reveal the person's values. This way, if you can learn what the person's point B is, *and you can offer him something that he identifies with, or something he values*, you have succeeded in influencing him or persuading him to accept your suggestion.

This is even more important in influencing and persuading ourselves to get to our own point B.

Knowing our Identity and our Value System. Our value system is *what* we value and respect. Identity, is *who* we value and respect. The people we stand up for are the people that we respect, and the people who we respect are the people who we learn from and follow in our life decisions. With this knowledge of strengthening identity and value system, we can understand a mindboggling concept in Repentance.

In this week's parasha, the passuk recalls the incident of Korah: "*And the land opened its mouth, and it swallowed them (Datan and Aviram), and Korah, ויהיו לנס.*" The last two words of the passuk mean *and it was for a sign*. The word נס has several meanings, but the root refers to the supporting pole that holds up a flag, or sail. Rashi learns that in our passuk, the word is used as something that must be remembered, a warning sign for future generations not to oppose Priesthood.

But the Midrash has a different explanation, more in line with the root word נס and appropriate to the following passuk, *And the sons of Korah did not die*. The Midrash learns that when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed Korah, Datan and Aviram, Korah's sons were right there next to their father. *A great miracle took place within the miracle of the earth opening its mouth. A piece of earth stood tall in the midst of the great opening of earth's mouth. Like a pole, a נס. It stood like a pillar, right under the feet of the sons of Korah, while their father was being swallowed. Another opinion in the Midrash was that there was an even greater miracle. Each of the three sons of Korah stood in a different spot, near their father, Korah. Three pillars stood up for the sons of Korah, each pillar supporting a different son... And the world stands on three pillars, Avraham Yitzhak and Yaakov, or on the three pillars that held up the three sons of Korah.*

The Midrash asks, *What was the merit that saved the sons of Korah? It was because at the time when they were sitting with Korah, their father, they saw Moshe coming, and they were utterly embarrassed. They said, If we stand up out of honor for Moshe, it will be a disgrace to our father, and we have a mitzvah to honor our father. And if we do not stand up for Moshe, we will lose the mitzvah of standing up for a Rabbi. They concluded that it was better to stand up for Moshe, even though it would be a disgrace to their father. At that moment, they whispered in their hearts thoughts of Teshuvah.* It seems that the pillars stood up for them, for they stood up for Moshe. Standing up for Moshe saved the lives of three sons of Korah, in this world and the next.

We learn from here that Teshuva is different from all other Mitzvoth. Just thinking about Teshuvah is already a mitzvah. This concept is substantiated by an interesting law: if a man says to a woman, *'You are betrothed to me, on the condition that I am a Tzaddik', even if he was a Rasha, it is possible that she is, indeed, betrothed to him, and she needs a Get! Why?* Because it could be that at the precise moment when he made his condition, he thought of doing Teshuva. From here, we see the power of a sincere thought. If a person wants to be a Tzaddik, he is one. What is this powerful thought of Teshuva that is mentioned in the case of the sons of Korah and in the Halacha, regarding the Rasha?

In both scenarios, the thoughts of Teshuvah are a paradigm shift – implying becoming a different identity, or embracing a different value system. The sons of Korah stood up for what they respected, despite the paradoxical situation in which they found themselves. When we stand up for someone that we respect, we show reverence for that person and for what he stands for. The Rasha, as well, identified himself as being Tzaddik, and that type of thought is extremely powerful, because

it is at the core of his being, defining his identity. The reason why these thoughts are so powerful is because with them, the person is נהפך לאיש אחר. Through this paradigm shift, the person became a person different from the sinner he used to be. And all of his life

EXTENSIONISM

When asked by a client how many sessions he needs in order to see lasting change, I am always faced with a dilemma. Usually, in the first session alone, my client can see the truth and achieve clarity. Changing perspectives, reframing, calms people down, and they feel after a first session that they are 'good to go'. But, unfortunately, it is not that easy. Coaching is a process, because change is a process. It is not just a switch in the mind. It is a switch in the heart.

It has been said that the greatest distance in the world is between one's heart and one's mind. Between וידעת היום, and והשבות אל לבבך. Our lifelong duty of Middot mastery, refining our character traits, is a persistent, uphill battle. Although we may understand and recognize the truth, that is possibly only an intellectual achievement, not an emotional one. To change on an emotional level, on a behavioral level, to change one's habits, is much more difficult than just changing how you think or what you focus on. It has been said, that it is easier to finish Shas than it is to change one Middah, to improve on one characteristic. Because the deeper the change, the harder.

Let us take jealousy for example. The way out of jealousy is not just belief in G-d. Because jealousy is not an intellectual issue, as much as it is an emotional issue. Even if someone believes in G-d, he may not have the inner strength to control jealousy on the emotional level. This is why great men, even as great as Moshe Rabbenu or King David, were susceptible to jealousy. This is something we can learn from the parasha.

decisions will follow in line with his new identity and new value system. The world stands on these pillars that held up Korah's sons, for these are the pillars that hold up the sincere Baal Teshuva.

The Gemarah, in Sanhedrin 105b, teaches that a person is jealous of everyone except his own son or student. The fact that King David was blessed by the people that his son, Shlomo, would have a greater kingdom than his own, proves that a father is not jealous of his own son. The proof that one is not jealous of his student is from Moshe. When Moshe inaugurated Yehoshua, G-d commanded him to do Semicha with only one hand. But, Moshe gave semicha to Yehoshua, using both hands. (The Maharsha teaches that one hand would be giving Yehoshuah Gevurah, strength, and the use of Moshe's additional hand gave Yehoshua Hochma, wisdom.) Why did Moshe give more than he was commanded? Because he was not jealous of his student, Yehoshua.

Three questions. How could we assume that it would be possible that such great prophets as Moshe and K. David, to even think, even for a minute, that what was given to someone else was not given by G-d? How can we bring proof, from these two giants, that a regular person, like you and me, can control himself and prevent himself from being jealous of a son or student? And how does being a son or student affect the jealousy issue?

The answer to the last question is obvious. A son or student is perceived as an extension of the self. In order for one to deal with jealousy properly, one needs to look at the other person as some sort of extension of oneself. If not, one cannot overcome the emotion of jealousy. Your right hand is never jealous of your left hand. Each one has its functions, and they work together in harmony. If you look at the people in your life as an extension of yourself,

that you are all one, the jealous feeling dissipates. I call it Extensionism.

The only thing that could inspire jealousy in these men was being close to G-d. On an intellectual level, both Moshe and David definitely knew that what was given to Yehoshua and was given to King Solomon was accorded them from G-d; but, on an emotional level, they might have otherwise had an inner struggle. Of course, they would have overcome the jealousy, had they been faced with it, but

ELIJA -PROPHET OF THE BRIT

It is common for a Rabbi to find himself tight-ropeing a fine line. Standing up for what's important, without stepping on people's toes. Values and principles are no less important than people's feelings, causing somewhat of a paradox. Sometimes, the job of the Rabbi is to put his foot down, but even then, to try, as much as possible, not to step on anyone's pride. The way to do this is first to validate the good in the person, and, only then, mention what needs to be altered in his behavior. It takes creativity and wisdom, patience and respect to be that leader standing firm on important principles, while guarding every individual's honor.

In this week's parasha, Pinhas avenged the sanctity of G-d's Name. He put his life on the line. He put himself under the scrutiny of the masses, as he unsheathed his hidden sword and assassinated the great and elderly Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, during Zimri's immoral act. After consulting his rabbi, Moshe Rabbeinu, he avenged the immoral sin, and his zealotness stopped the plague that was taking its toll on the Nation. G-d richly rewarded Pinchas for his action. He became a Kohen, his Evil Inclination was taken from him, he merited immortality and he was given a new name: Eliyahu Hanavi. The Torah packs all these blessings into two words: *Briti Shalom*, a

the Talmud is telling us that they never faced jealousy, because a son or a student is an extension of oneself. A concept that can be applied to all of us.

Imagine how our nation would look, if we felt that we were all "extensions". That we are all responsible for each other, that the love we have for each other is as a father loves his son, or as a Rabbi loves his student. If we did this switch of heart, we could just possibly bring down the Third Temple...

covenant of peace. All this for standing up for what is important, in the proper way.

In the times of the Prophets (Melachim A, 19;10), Eliyahu Hanavi was frustrated from having rebuked the people, but to no avail. He said to G-d, *I avenged your vengeance...., for the Sons of Israel have forsaken your Brit, your covenant...* The midrash tells us that G-d responded: The Jews did not forsake My covenant, my Brit. They circumcise their children. Because you have uttered these words, erroneously standing up and accusing them of having stopped performing a Brit Milah, you will need an atonement. From now on, you will go to every Brit Milah and testify that they keep the Brit. Eliyahu replied that since his nature is to avenge, sitting amongst sinners is too much for him to endure. "Maybe the father of the baby has sinned, and it will be difficult for me to be next to him." G-d answered, "I will cleanse the father's sins." Eliyahu said, "Maybe the Sandak or the Mohel has sinned." G-d answered, "I will cleanse their sins, as well." Eliyahu continued. "Maybe those attending the Brit will be sinners." G-d answered, "I will forgive all those who attend the Brit Milah." For this reason, there is a Kisseh Shel Eliyahu, a chair of Eliyahu, at every Brit. Eliyahu attends every Milah in every generation, to testify to the good things

that even sinners do. And, at every Brit we go to, G-d forgives our sins.

It is important to have the right outlook about wrongdoers. The Talmud tells us that the great Rabbi Abba Hilkyah's wife's prayers for rain during drought were answered before his own. Rabbi Abba Hilkyah explained that he prayed that the sinners perish, while she prayed that they repent. (Ta'anit 23b) Praying for the

sinner to repent makes the righteous even more righteous.

The Talmud teaches that, Eliyahu will merit bringing the good tidings of the Final Redemption the day before it occurs. I believe that Eliyahu was given this great honor because finding the good in the people, while bringing them closer to G-d, is what will bring about the Final Redemption. Speedily in our days, Amen.

THE RIGHT WAY TO REBUKE

Our Parasha starts off in the middle of a story. Last week, at the end of parashat Balak, Pinchas put his life on the line and avenged the immoral act of Zimri ben Salu, the Nasi of the tribe of Shimon, with Kozbi bat Tzur, princess of Midian. By doing so, he stopped the plague that had already taken a toll of 24,000 Jews, from wiping out the rest of the nation. In this week's parasha, Pinchas is rewarded with priesthood and immortality.

The question, of course is, why isn't Pinchas rewarded immediately in the pesukim of last week's parasha?

The answer is one that makes us think. Not every time there is an impulse to give rebuke is it correct to do so. And even if one is to avenge the honor of Torah, there is also a way to do it. Impulsivity can ruin everything. We must pause and hold ourselves. Pinchas' act was justified only because first, he got Moshe's approval. He avenged in accordance with the Torah: first, he asked the Rabbi. The Torah holds us in suspense in order to tell us that the one who makes a *מחאה*, a protest, needs to be checked thoroughly to ascertain exactly what his *intentions and motives* are. Is this person the *suitable person* to make the protest? And, what is the *proper time and way* to make the protest? All these points must be carefully examined before deciding if the person is deserving of praise and reward. This is the

lesson the Torah teaches us by putting the reward on pause. That only after careful examination is rebuke and protest praiseworthy.

R' E. Lopian zt"l draws on a beautiful point in Ashrei, one of which we remind ourselves three times daily. The reason why our Rabbis instituted our saying Ashrei so many times throughout our lives is to remind ourselves of the kindness of the Creator, so that we can follow in His ways. Only at the very end of Ashrei, we say *שומר ה' את כל אוהביו ואת כל ישמיו Hashem watches over all His loved ones, and He will eradicate all the wicked.* This teaches us that first one must be *good to everyone*, *רחמיו על כל* *merciful to all His creation*; *סומך לכל* *supporting all those who are falling... הי רצון* *fulfilling the wants of all the living... צדיק בכל מעשיו* *righteous in all acts, and then, and only then, one can be* *one who fights the wicked...*

It is so much easier for a parent to punish a child than to talk to him. It is much simpler to just kick a kid out of class or school than to deal with him. The right way is to consult a wise, experienced Rabbi who is considered a *Daat Hatorah*, one whose mind is constantly thinking Torah and Halacha. If not, if a teacher or parent does not consult with such an

authority, he will take upon himself part of the responsibility for what this child will go through in life, because of such a “simple mistake”.

There is a Torah. And there are people who are not following in its ways. If we treat them like

people as we teach them the laws, relating to them with respect and dignity, they will be more receptive to what the Torah has to tell them...

LEADERS OF TOMMOROW

People look around, and ask out loud or to themselves – who will become the great leaders of the Jewish people of the next generation? Who will guide and lead the community? Some people look towards those who are sharp tongue or from prominent families. Others look towards those with high I.Q., expecting that from there will come greatness. However, this is rarely the case. As a matter of fact, if we look at the leaders of today as well as of the past we cannot stop and notice that these factors were not what “makes it or breaks it”. The leaders of today, many of them, came from ordinary or even broken homes, poverty, not the “top of the class”, etc. So, what happened? The Midrash defines the sole factor of the true leaders of the future.

G-d said to Moshe: Yehoshua served you a lot and attributed to you great honor. He would get up early and go to sleep late in your house of gathering to set up the benches, to spread the cloths .. he should take his reward ..(Midrash Raba 21,14). This is odd. A great man like Yehoshua, who was extremely studious, never leaving the study hall and putting in all the hours to watch his teacher Moshe and learn from him the ways of Torah and its laws – this was not what accredited to him leadership. But, mopping the floors after class, putting up the benches and folding the table clothes – *that’s* what did it ? *That’s* what made him big? All of the hours he put into the learning did not stand for his credit – just being the Gabbai of Moshe is what did it?

R’ Zeev Getzel shlita, in his sefer Ashira, offers us a new light on the matter. If, for instance, one were to pass by a store at 2 a.m., and notices through the shop window, someone cleaning up and putting things where they belong. One can figure that the fellow inside is not a regular worker. A regular worker does not work at 2 a.m. To set up the shop at this late hour is none other than the owner of the store or someone who loves the owner of the store, and the work itself.

Yehoshua was not *just a janitor*, heaven forbid. He did not *just* set up the tables. He would get up early and go to sleep late setting up the place to make sure that people would love coming to learn in the study hall as much as he did. To him, *it was personal*. And this is a totally different level of learning Torah. “One does not learn Torah with perfection unless he loves G-d with all his heart, with all his soul, and with every part of his being.” (Midrash Tanchuma Noach) Yehoshua’s dedication to the study hall, to his love for Torah, was eminent through his making sure that everyone was comfortable and enjoying Torah as much as he did. This is *why* he became the leader. Not the *amount of hours*. Not anything else. Rather, it was his dedication to the ideal and value.

The leaders of the people in the future, the true leaders, are those who are dedicated to the ideals and values that they are steadfast in...

DESERVING A REWARD

G-d asks us: “Who preceded Me that I must pay him?” – Who praised Me before I gave him a soul? Who circumcised his son before I gave him a son? Who put a mezuzah on his door before I gave him a house? Who built a sukkah before I gave him a place to build one? Who made Me a lulav before I gave him the money to buy one? Who attached tzitzit to his clothes before I gave him clothes to wear?” (VaYikra Rabba 27)

This Midrash seems to suggest that every mitzvah we do is perceived by G-d as merely a necessary and expected expression of appreciation for all the goodness He has bestowed on us. If so, is there any room for doing mitzvot simply out of a desire to serve our beloved Master? Moreover, when we return our souls to G-d after our lifelong journey, how can we hope to be rewarded for living according to the Torah? We shall see that our Parashah provides an answer to these questions. But first, a little background...

Another Midrash makes this comment on Pinchas' zealotry in punishing the two brazen sinners, Zimri and Cazbi: בדין הוא שיטול שכרו – Pinchas deserved his reward – the “Covenant of Peace” (Midrash Rabba 21). This meant that Pinchas merited joining the rest of his family in becoming a Kohen. According to *Targum Yonatan*, this meant that G-d made Pinchas immortal, and will give him the privilege of announcing the Final Redemption and the coming of Mashiach. But how can we understand this concept of rightful reward in light of the previous Midrash, which suggests that no reward is due us for performing mitzvot, which are our duty and obligation to G-d?

There is a well-known saying from Kotzk which can give us a handle on this paradox: “A person is not measured by how many mitzvot he has done, but rather, by *how much of his heart he put into his mitzvot* – even just one.”

There are relatively few Torah-mandated mitzvot (*mitzvot d'oraita*) that we encounter on a daily basis. In fact, Rav Wolbe, zt"l, reckoned that there are only nine (out of 248) such positive Commandments: * Reciting Shema * Wearing tzitzit * Putting on tefillin * Praying * Learning Torah * Making a blessing after eating bread * Giving charity * Respecting and standing up for elders and parents * Resting on Shabbat. How well we serve G-d is more or less determined by this small group of mitzvot. The key to observing these mitzvot *well*, however, is qualitative, depending upon how much thought we put into them. (Devoting thought is more easily said than done, since proper concentration is difficult when mitzvot are encountered frequently.)

Rabbi Yehudah Tzadkah zt"l writes that if a person does a mitzvah out of sincere *ahavat HaShem* (love of G-d) and not only out of *yirat shamayim* (fear of G-d), he can legitimately ask G-d for reward. This is because a mitzvah done with *ahavat HaShem* goes beyond what we are commanded. Doing a mitzvah out of love of G-d expresses one's inner desire to fulfill G-d's Will. This is also true when one does something with *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice). Ultimately, the quality of and dedication to the mitzvah justify G-d's rewarding us.

Pinchas is an excellent example of going beyond what one is commanded to do – הלכה ואין מורין כן. He acted out of the pain he felt in witnessing desecration of G-d's Name and great disrespect for Moshe. In punishing Zimri and Cazbi, he put his life on the line, and therefore merited immortality.

We can apply this concept of improving *the quality of our actions* to many aspects of life as well: family, relationships, work – to name just a few. This means putting the emphasis on quality over quantity, and putting our thoughts into what we do. The fact is that the daily

schedules of a wide spectrum of people, are very similar. But those who make an effort to ensure quality in each and every one of their

activities and engagements generally succeed in life much, much more than those who do not.

Appreciating Diversity

The Midrash tells us that Moshe was not sure about who should succeed him after his passing (*Midrash Rabbah* 21:2). Hence, he turned to G-d to appoint a suitable successor to lead the Jewish People: *Master of the Universe, You know the opinions of each and every one of them, and the differences between them. I beg of You that when I depart from them, appoint a leader to replace me who can appreciate each one of their opinions.* Thus, Moshe said, *יפקוד אלקים אלקי הרוחות* (*May G-d of the spirits appoint...*)

Apropos of the mention of human diversity, the Midrash (as well as the Gemara) notes that upon seeing a vast gathering of people (600,000), one is to make the blessing, *ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם חכם הרזים* (Blessed are You, G-d ... the Wise One of the secrets). The Midrash explains that “just as human faces are different from one another, so, too, their opinions are different from one other.” Now, let us consider this unique blessing for a moment. It is the only blessing where we refer to G-d as *The Wise One*. Although the world is full of so many creatures and creations that testify to G-d’s infinite wisdom, only when we see overwhelming *human* diversity do we bless G-d as *The Wise One*. Why?

We can appreciate the answer to this question through the following exercise. Imagine for a moment that you walk into a large waiting room where there are another fifty people of your gender. As you look around to see if there is anyone you know, the first face that meets your eye has a striking resemblance to none other than...yourself! Now, as you continue to survey the faces to see if there is anyone you can tell that you just discovered your double, you notice that everyone else in the room has

the very same face!! The shivers going down your spine intensify as you slowly realize that they all have the same voice, mannerisms, and opinions as you. Only their names and background separate your identity from theirs.

As we shake ourselves out of this nightmare, we can’t help but thank G-d for creating a world of diversity for us. It is a world in which everyone can feel special – and rightly so. As our Rabbis tell us, *לעולם יאמר אדם בשבילי נברא העולם* (A person should always say that for me alone it was worthwhile for G-d to create the world). And the uniqueness in each of our features, voice, opinions, and fingerprints constantly remind us of this.

In a sense, the greatest good that G-d bestowed on human beings is their unique and individualized consciousness and capacity to think. (See beginning of Introduction to *Chovot Halevovot*). G-d could have created us as robots – or beings that do not have a consciousness to think differently or perceive from different perspectives. Realizing the wisdom of G-d in people’s diverse outlooks and opinions can help us appreciate these differences much more. And once we do, we will be able to interact with them much more successfully. It is no accident that people we consider “wise” are generally those who respect and validate the perspective of others. And this is also the beauty of Jewish prayer in a *minyan* (quorum of ten). Each person is saying the same words, but concurrently intending those words in a unique, personalized way.

In closing, let us take another look at the statement of our Sages cited above: “Just as human faces are different from one another, so,

too, their opinions are different from one other” (כשם שאין פרצופיהם דומין זה לזה כך אין דעתן) (שוין זה לזה) One insightful individual explained, with a smile, why the Sages specifically compare different *faces* and different outlooks: Just as it does not bother us in the least when someone else has a face different from ours, so it should not bother us when someone has an opinion different from ours!

THE PLEASURE OF BEING RIGHTEOUS

When we mention great rabbis and other righteous people who have passed away, we are accustomed to take note of their righteousness by adding, *zecher tzaddik livracha* (May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed). These words originate from King Solomon’s Book of Proverbs (*Mishlei* 10:7): זכר צדיק לברכה ושם רשעים ירקב (May the memory of the righteous be blessed, and the names of the wicked rot). Similarly, in our *parashah*, the Torah publicizes the punishment Zimri received for his actions as well as the reward Pinchas received for his bravery and zealotry.

The common understanding of why we say “*zecher tzaddik librachah*” is to bless the name and memory of the tzaddik. The Dubno Maggid, however, offers an alternative explanation which enriches our understanding of the custom. He writes that when one mentions the tzaddik and how he is remembered for blessing, he internalizes the pleasure of being a tzaddik. Indeed, in certain Chassidic circles, it is said that just by mentioning the names of the tzaddikim, one can be saved from sin. At first glance, this is hard to understand, but in light of the Dubno Maggid’s explanation, it is readily understandable.

The fact is that people’s actions are usually motivated by the desire for some sort of

This, in essence, is what Moshe requested of G-d – a successor who could appreciate the people’s differences of opinion and perspective. This quality is desirable not only for the leader of the Nation, but for each and every one of us as well.

pleasure. And, of course, people will usually refrain from doing something when pain is related to this action – or sometimes even just lack of pleasure. A person who is addicted to cigarettes, for example, will refrain from smoking when his cough gets bad enough. An adolescent who is addicted to chocolate will overcome his addiction (at least partially) if his dermatologist insists that chocolate is ruining his complexion. On the other hand, a person will often transgress certain cherished values when the pleasure “payoff” is high enough.

On occasion, we may find ourselves facing the well-known dilemma: the pleasure of sin or the pain of the aftermath. More frequently, the dilemma is something of this nature: the pleasure of sleeping in another few minutes or the pain of missing the bus and being reprimanded by the boss for coming in late for work (again).

At times like these, the more we associate righteousness and responsibility with pleasure, and wickedness and irresponsibility with pain, the better off we will be. To accomplish this, we would do well to meditate on the verse with which we opened: זכר צדיק לברכה ושם רשעים ירקב – *May the memory of the righteous be blessed, and the names of the wicked rot.*

KEEPING OUR MOTIVES PURE

G-d rewarded Pinchas with a “Covenant of Peace” ((בריתי שלום)) for his zealotry in executing the renegades Zimri and Cazbi. As Rabbi Yehuda Tzadka *zt”l* notes, this episode raises a provocative question. We know that G-d rewards the righteous on a measure-for-measure basis (*middah k’negged middah*). The reason for this is to enable us to connect the deed with the reward, and recognize the Giver of the reward. Through this ingenious system, we also learn which actions should be repeated. Now, in light of G-d’s measure-for-measure approach, how are we to understand the reward of “Peace” given to Pinchas for an act of “violence” more characteristic of war?

In a nutshell, Rabbi Tzadka’s answer is that while the same action can be performed by different people, their motivation may be entirely different. An act of zealotry, for example – like that of Pinchas – can be performed for a variety of reasons. Examples of the wrong reasons would be the desire for honor or the desire to cut down the other party. Neither of these motives were in the least bit behind Pinchas’ deed. He acted purely out of recognition of the right thing to do.

The verse describing the response of Pinchas to the sacrilegious actions of Zimri and Cazbi hints at the purity of his motivation: *וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר* (He took a spear). The commentators deduce from this that Pinchas was very different from the many zealots whose motivation is not pure. They walk around – literally or figuratively – with some sort of spear looking for someone to stick it into. Pinchas, in contrast, went against his nature and *had to take a spear*. He was thus the perfect candidate to act out of zealotry.

CONNECTING WITH OUR PAST

There are 21 days on the Jewish calendar when we are supposed to mourn the destruction of our Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The *Three Weeks* – beginning on the fast of the

seventeenth of Tamuz and ending on Tishah b’Av – is a period of national mourning in which Jewish Law limits pleasures such as listening to music, taking haircuts, and making

What he did was nothing less than an act of self-sacrifice for the truth. Moshe communicated that this was a moment that called for zealotry, and Pinchas promptly followed through. His “war-like” action served the cause of ultimate peace because it restored the peace between G-d and the Jewish People. G-d testified to this by giving Pinchas His “Covenant of Peace” – the ultimate reward.

Purity and clarity of motive is something we should be seeking in all life areas. This is especially true when the actions or behaviors of others seem wrong to us and we feel motivated to fight for the truth. How can we check on what is really motivating us? One way is by asking ourselves penetrating questions, and verbalizing the answers. For example:

- * “Do you want to be the one involved, or would you be at peace if this injustice is stopped by someone else as well?”
- * “If you were not connected with the insult, would you still be so gung-ho about silencing or getting revenge against the perpetrator?”
- * “If the one who did this evil was a relative or a loved one, would you still try to set things straight at their expense?”

Rabbi Tzadka concludes his discussion with the warning that the would-be “zealot” must first consult with the sages before taking action. This is an excellent way for him to double-check his motives. By overlooking this safeguard, he risks losing his portion in the next world – and his portion in this world as well!

seventeenth of Tamuz and ending on Tishah b’Av – is a period of national mourning in which Jewish Law limits pleasures such as listening to music, taking haircuts, and making

weddings. The mourning customs and conduct intensify until they reach a climax on Tisha b'Av. But it would be a mistake to limit our mourning for the Temple to external actions. According to Jewish Law (משנה ברורה, תקנא סק' (ק"ג בשם האר"י), we are to take out time each day during these three weeks (specifically at midnight or midday) to mourn and cry over the destruction of the Temple. Ideally we are supposed to focus on our loss and project these feelings externally. Perhaps the following parable, which some of you may have heard, can help us better appreciate both the challenge and the importance of identifying with the tragic loss of our Holy Temple.

There was a couple who loved each other dearly, but, unfortunately, had not been blessed with children. They comforted each other by saying that the day will come when they will be “ready” as parents, and they will be able to hold their future in their hands. They prayed together, went for blessings from great rabbis together, and went for treatments together. On her way home from work, the woman used to pass a certain park where she would observe children playing and mothers rocking their baby strollers and talking about parenting. This “wannabe mother” would look at the sky, and ask G-d to bless her, too, with a child.

The difficult waiting period dragged on year after year – for twenty years. The woman cried bitterly to her husband, and began to despair. But her loyal husband kept encouraging her – and himself. One night, he looked at her tear-stained face and suggested that they try still another series of treatments. To their utter joy – the woman became pregnant, and the two of them were catapulted beyond “Cloud Nine.” They would often stay up late discussing what they would name their baby if a boy or if a girl. They talked about what neighborhood would be ideal to live in, and about details of good parenting that they had never before gone

into. They laughed together for nine months – the best nine months of their married life.

As the woman was rolled into the delivery room, she began to feel horrible pains which were unrelated to the regular birth pangs that she had been experiencing for the previous several hours. A doctor was rushed in, an ultrasound was done, and the unexpected cause became clear: the baby was not in the right position, and its umbilical cord was wrapped tightly around its neck. The complications were getting worse by the minute, and the lives of both mother and baby were in jeopardy. The doctor put the hard facts on the table in the form of an ultimatum: either the mother or the baby! There was not enough time to ask a Rabbi about what Jewish Law dictates in this case, and the poor woman acted on emotion: She turned to her husband and said, “Call him Nachum, and tell him how I gave up my life for him. And make sure he says *Kaddish* for me with all his heart!”

The father held his son on his knees at the *bris*, and everyone cried bitterly when he called out the name. Every year, Nachum would celebrate his birthday on the *Yahrzeit* of his mother. He would say *Kaddish* in shul from the first time he went. And on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, his father asked him to go visit the mother’s grave and say *Kaddish* fervently for the one who gave up her very life for him. To the father’s dismay, however, the boy said the *Kaddish* nonchalantly, without a tear in his eye. The father was devastated. “Nachum,” he asked “don’t you have any feeling for your mother who gave up her life for you?”

Nachum gazed at the floor and tried to explain himself: “But I never met her. I really don’t have a feel for the person everyone has been telling me to cry for.”

How We Survived

In a certain sense, we are all Nachum. We have difficulty mourning the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple), something that we never had the privilege of experiencing. But let's stop and think for a minute. The prophet Yermiyahu tells us that G-d poured out his wrath on "sticks and stones" – the Holy Temple – instead of destroying the Jewish People for the sins they committed (*Eicha*, Ch. 4). We only survived because the Temple was destroyed. To fully understand what we lost, however, we must learn about the major differences between the era of the Temple and the present. The Temple was so much more than just a mere building of sticks and stones. It was the place where all Jewish hearts connected. And it was the only place in the entire galaxy where the glory of G-d's Presence could be experienced. Only by destroying this marvelous place was G-d able to wake us up from our spiritual slumber and sinful lives.

Mourning Our Former Greatness

The Talmud emphasizes that the descendants of Jacob and Esau have a seesaw-like relationship: when one People rises, the other falls. They cannot prosper and succeed simultaneously. When ancient Jerusalem was at its peak, our nation was the leading world power intellectually, economically, and physically. The ethics and morals of our nation

were of such high caliber that all the other nations praised them. To get an inkling of what we lost when our Temple was destroyed and our nation exiled, we need only think about the steep ethical decline modern Western society has experienced in the last couple of generations. In the time of the Temple, we Jews were a nation of spiritual greats who worked on building character and sensitivity to one another. During these three weeks, we are supposed to take out time to meditate on who we were, and what we lost.

Mourning and Depression

I was recently asked to elaborate on the difference between mourning and depression. In short, depression is a state of unhappiness characterized by feelings of dejection and hopelessness. Mourning, in contrast, is characterized by a feeling of deep sadness following the death of a dear one or a great loss of some other type. The mourning period is a time where a person deepens his understanding of what he has lost, and connects emotionally with what he once had. It has the opposite effect of depression. It helps the mourner better understand the importance of life, and how to use his time more wisely. It motivates, and provides a new perspective on how one should be living his life. Let us try to make these next three weeks such a period.

JUDAISM 50% OFF

In this week's Parasha, the Midrash says לְמֹשֶׁה אָלְף לַמִּטָּה לְכָל מִטּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּשְׁלְחוּ לַצָּבָא: When Moshe sent men from the Tribes to fight against Moab, G-d told him *to send out a thousand from each Tribe, a thousand from each Tribe, for all the Tribes of Israel, you should send to the army* (31, 4). The Midrash Rabbah asks why the Torah mentions "a thousand for each tribe" twice. The Midrash answers that for each thousand warriors that were sent, there were a thousand Torah

scholars designated to pray for success in battle.

How many people learn Torah in Israel? According to a recent study by Yated Neeman together with Vaad Hayeshivot, in Israel there is a total of 125,000 students learning Torah: 35,000 students in "Yeshiva Gedolah", 30,000 in "Yeshiva Ketana" and 60,000 in Kollel. The Israeli army in July, 2015, had 176,500 soldiers and 445,000 men in the reserves.

But would it not help if we sent all those yeshiva boys to the army, adding more forces? More numbers? More Hishtadlut? The Rebbe from Tshebin gave an example: A certain wagon driver's load was so heavy that the horses couldn't pull the wagon uphill. The driver started unloading the weight from the wagon piece by piece, but to no avail. Out of despair, the frustrated wagon driver decided to take off the big, heavy steel wheels of the wagon, thinking that by doing so, he'd help the wagon go up hill... Reducing parts of our Tefilla, removing anything from Torah with the idea that we are increasing hishtadlut, or making things easier, is like taking off the wheels of the wagon...

At times, we feel that our religion is holding us down. Take the Three Weeks, as an example. At times we feel that period of the Three Weeks is somewhat an inconvenience, something we just want to get over with. But this is a HUGE mistake. The Three Weeks, the 21 days, are the essence of our relationship with G-d, where we connect to G-d on a new level, feeling His pain. His being exiled, along with His children, from His Home. This is the seed, the root, the wheels, the catalyst for our joy in the upcoming High Holidays. These days are so great they parallel the 21 days from Rosh Hashanna until Hoshana Rabbah, the days of forgiveness and holiday. (Maharsha Bchorot, 8a). No one would want to "just get over with" the High Holidays.

Thinkingaboutme is strictly a Parasha sheet, written strictly for people who want to improve themselves and live better lives as better Jews. Generally, Thinkingaboutme readers are "allergic" to politics. It's just one of those topics that tends to push people apart, not bring together. But there is something this week in the news that, to me, was a big piece of Mussar, something for introspection. Just a week ago, when PM Netanyahu defended Israel's rights to the Ma'arat Hamachpela, he

started his speech wearing a black yarmulke, mentioning the pesukim in Chaye Sarah that discuss how Avraham bought the land from the people.

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם אֶל-עֶפְרוֹן וַיִּשְׁקַל אַבְרָהָם לְעֶפְרוֹן אֶת-הַכֶּסֶף
 אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר בְּאָזְנוֹ בְּגִי'תָת אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל כֶּסֶף עֹבֵר
 לְפָנָיו... וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן קָבַר אַבְרָהָם אֶת-שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל-מְעָרַת
 שְׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה עַל-פְּנֵי מְמָרָא הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: וַיָּקָם
 הַשָּׂדֵה וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-כֵּן לְאַבְרָהָם לְאַחֲזֹת-קֶבֶר מֵאֵת
 בְּגִי'תָת:

That was beautiful, a true Kiddush Hashem. The nation's leaders bring Psukkim of the Torah to be the first line of defense to the UN, or to the nations of the world, proving that we have the rights to the Land. How sad though, that before PM Netanyahu continued his speech, he took off his yarmulke. I don't understand politics; I am not well versed in the political scene, and I don't want to be. But, it bothered me how our PM quickly switched *conveniently* from being religious to being what is referred to as a "secular" Jew. On a world-public platform.

And then, it bothered me even more, how I feel about myself, with *my* relationship to G-d. How, sometimes, I switch from who I want to be to who I am, and back again, at *my convenience*. But Judaism is just not that type of religion. It is not known for being convenient.

In Judaism, not a single one of the Mitzvoth can be missed or ignored, no matter how inconvenient it may be. And sometimes, it is those inconveniences in our religion that make all the difference. This is something we can all learn from Bilaam's donkey. When the donkey reprimanded Bilaam, he said, "... *and now, you hit me three times.*" However, instead of using the word פעמים for the word "times", the donkey used the word רגלים, or *occasions*. Literally, the word רגל means foot. He hinted to him – you are seeking to uproot a nation that celebrates שלשה רגלים – three festivals, each

year! (Rashi 22;28) Why did the donkey mention, out of all the mitzvot of the Torah, the merit that the Jews have for celebrating the three festivals?

A beautiful answer is given by the *Melo Ha'Omer*. We find in the Midrash that G-d asked Bila'am – "It is your wish to curse and uproot the Jewish nation? Who, then, will keep the Mitzvot of the Torah, if not the Jews?" Bila'am, may his name be erased, said, "**I** will".

This is what the donkey was telling him, but Bila'am did not understand: Every year, three times a year, the Jews celebrate the festivals and keep the mitzvah of ascending to Jerusalem *by foot*. Now, it is to this fact that the donkey was referring when he exchanged the word "times" with "occasions", hinting at the Three Pilgrimages, known as שְׁלֹשָׁה רִגְלִים, of the Jewish year. The Halacha is that only a person who can *walk up* the mountain to Har Habayit has the mitzvah of Oleh Laregel. Being that Bilaam was crippled in one leg, he

JUST ONE MORE PRAYER

A central theme of our daily prayers is the Final Redemption. Eight Berachot, three times a day, revolve around this subject. Reeh Nah, Teka B'shofar, Hashiva Shoftenu, Laminim Valamalshinim, Al Hatzadikim, Tishkon Betoach, Et Tzemach and Retzeh. We implore G-d for mercy on Jerusalem each time we have a sandwich or doughnut, in the grace after the meal, and we even stress our agony over the loss of Jerusalem in Birkat Hamazon on Shabbat, despite the tranquility that Shabbat requires. Ignoring Jerusalem, the Temple, or the Mashiach is ignoring a central part of the prayers and a major theme of Judaism.

When Mashiach comes, and the Temple will be rebuilt, not everyone will be allowed inside. Only those whose thoughts were centered around Jerusalem, those who mourned, get an entrance pass. The first thing upon

could not take the place of the Jews in keeping the mitzvot, for he was exempt from this just one of the 613- *walking by foot up the mountain of the Temple three times a year!* If not for this *one* mitzvah, Bila'am could have cursed us and destroyed us. *How ironic that the one Mitzvah that saved us is a Mitzvah that is not exactly convenient! Walking up a steep hill, by foot!*

We do not know what even one mitzvah can do for us, and that is why you can't get the 613 at a discount of 50% off. Judaism is not a cocktail of options in which you can pick and choose what you like, at your convenience. This is because Judaism is a package deal, like any relationship. Sometimes we feel that davening, learning, doing mitzvot take a toll on our schedule, on our energy, on our finances. But those inconveniences in the religion are the wheels of your relationship with G-d. These are the wheels to get us to where we want to go. Removing them will get us nowhere.

approaching the Heavenly Court each Jew is asked, *Did you anticipate the Final Redemption?* If not, you cannot get into Paradise. Why are our prayers and anticipation of the rebuilding of the Temple so central in Judaism?

The answer is that each prayer, of each person, is another step closer to the way things are meant to be. A King without a castle, a King without a throne, is a King with a kingdom that is incomplete. As dedicated and loyal servants to G-d, this should be unsettling. The job of the Jew in this world is to build that kingdom of G-d. How? Just by sincerely asking G-d to allow the Final Redemption to happen. Each time we say Amen Yehei Shemei Rabba, *May the Great Name of G-d be blessed forever and ever*, we are pledging allegiance to that Kingdom. And each time we say those words

by Kaddish in synagogue, G-d cries and wails, “Woe is to Me, that I allowed the gentiles to destroy the Temple, and exiled My Nation from the Land.”

We do not have the Temple, we do not have Mashiach – for one of two reasons. Either because we don’t really want the Final Redemption, or because we do not believe that our prayers can make it happen. Noach was held responsible for the Flood,(the” flood of Noah”) because he did not pray to G-d to annul the decree. Why did he not pray? Because he did not believe that his prayers would have any

effect. And, our Rabbis teach us, that every generation in which the Temple was **not** rebuilt is considered a generation in which the Temple was destroyed. We are held responsible.

If we pray for the Mashiah, with the belief that our prayers can bring him faster, and because we really want the Final Redemption, it will happen! Any minute. Especially during these three weeks, let us at least try to have more concentration when we pray for Jerusalem.

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