


**Shabbat HaGadol/
Metzorah/ Pesach**

English version

THINKING about ME.org

THE ART OF EXPERIENCING SHABBAT HAGADOL

The Shulhan Aruch (430 O”H) rules that this week is called Shabbat Hagadol, probably hinting that when we bless each other Shabbat Shalom this week, we should be saying Shabbat Hagadol Shalom. There are a number of reasons why this Shabbat is called Shabbat Hagadol, and if we pay close attention, each reason has a gem of inspiration in it. (I know that many have learned the reasons of why it is called Shabbat Hagadol, and many other Pesach concepts, in kindergarten. But some of the most important messages in life, are hidden in things we were taught in kindergarten. Like ‘learning is fun when you explore new things’, and ‘It’s okay to admit you were wrong and apologize’, and that ‘mistakes are good when we learn from them’. We learnt back then about sharing, being kind to each other, cleaning up after yourself, not to hit, and to only play fair. It is just we were too young to understand, to be aware of the value of those life lessons. The lessons of the Pesach and the Hagaddah, that we were taught growing up, can and should be reexamined as you grow and mature, as well.)

That year, the Shabbat before they left Egypt, turned out on the tenth of Nissan. Each Jew took a sheep, tied it to their bedpost with a knot, in a way that was not considered desecrating the Shabbat. For four days, they

were to examine it, to verify that it was clean from any blemishes, and they could bring the sheep as a Pesach sacrifice on the 14th day of Nissan, to be eaten that night, at the beginning of the 15th. After slaughtering, they were to take the blood of the Pesach sacrifice and mark the doorposts of their front door, to differentiate between the Jewish homes and the Egyptian ones. The Egyptians would ask the Jew, what do you think you are doing to our god, the father Mazal of all the 12 Mazalot, the Taurus, tying it to your bedpost? The Jewish slave answered his bully master, without even the slightest intimidation, “I am going to slaughter your god, your strength, like my G-d commanded me! And then, I am going to take the blood and mark my doorpost, so that when G-d will kill the Firstborn of the Egyptians, He will skip over the Jewish homes and save the Jewish Firstborn.”

Killing the Egyptian god was not merely like sanctions on Russia. It meant to the Egyptians, that we wanted to wage war! הָיוּ נִזְבְּחָה אֶת־תּוֹעֵבֹת הָיָה מִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִסְקְלוּהוּ: The Egyptians prepared their swords, and were ready to annihilate the Jewish people. But G-d made all the Egyptian warriors sick, and mute! They could not do anything or say anything to His people, nor where they able to untie their god from the bedposts! The frightened Egyptian



Firstborn begged their fathers and Pharaoh to free the Jew slaves, but the Pharaoh and their fathers did not heed the Firstborns' request. The Firstborns started a civil war, and many Egyptians died in that civil war, as it says, לְמַכָּה מִצְרַיִם בְּכֹכְרֵיהֶם (See Mahazit Hashekel on Sh"A 430)

The question is asked, if this Shabbat happened on the tenth of Nissan, why do we commemorate this miracle on the Shabbat before Pesah and not on the tenth of Nissan?

One answer is because on that date in the Jewish calendar, Miriam died, and on that date we celebrate the split of the Yarden. (M. Avraham) Another answer is from Hacham Yaakov Haddad (1872-1949). This Shabbat was very critical for the redemption of the Jews. As we know, the Jews in Egypt were idol worshippers, (M. Rabba Shir Hashirim) and did not deserve to be redeemed. So, G-d asked them specifically on Shabbat, to separate themselves from the Egyptian sheep. Why? Because anyone who keeps Shabbat according to the finest details of Halacha, G-D WILL FORGIVE THEIR EVERY SIN, EVEN THE SIN OF IDOL WORSHIP. כל השומר שבת כדת מוחלין לו מחללו Do not read it מחללו וקחו Pull and take, The Targum Yonatan says, means to pull back from Avodah Zara, and to take the sheep for the Korban Pesach. (Baal Haturim says משכו is numerical value of מן העבירה) The Shabbat, together with separating themselves from their idols, was the key to their forgiveness, and it is what readied them from redemption. This is why, the Shabbat itself is the big deal, it is the Shabbat HaGadol.

Let us take this a step further. We commemorate the Shabbat because on that Shabbat in Egypt we realized how powerful Shabbat is. Not only did G-d create the world

in six days, but He also has total control of nature, which He stunningly displayed throughout the ten plagues, specifically in the plague of the Firstborn. The Jews realized on that Shabbat when they were empowered to tie and slaughter the sheep, the father of the 12 mazalot, that G-d is behind all the Mazalot and can change them at any time. Despite the fact that the Mazal, the destiny drips (Nozel) from Heaven, but G-d can change the Mazal at any moment, as the Mazal itself has no power.

Another reason why it is called Shabbat Hagadol, is because that Shabbat had in it the power to generate a great redemption in that week, so the Shabbat itself is called Gadol. (Maharal Biur Hagadah) What does this mean? The Or Hachaim teaches, not only does a person get a second Neshama for the duration of the Shabbat as hidden in the word וינפש, but the keeping the Shabbat, is the soul, the battery of the entire Creation. In other words, G-d only created the world with a six-day battery. Shabbat is the recharge for the Creation, for the next six days of the week. This explains the Talmud that says that when a person keeps Shabbat, and says Vaychulu in Kiddush, he is actually, literally, a partner with G-d in the Creation. (Shabbat 119b; See O"H Breshit 2;3)

One of the reasons why this Shabbat is called Shabbat Hagadol, is because we read in the Haftarah of Shabbat Hagadol the last passuk from Malachi, the last passuk from Tanach, about the day of Mashiach, as the day of G-d, the day that will be "Gadol", literally big, and that will "Norah", literally awesome. הַגָּדוֹל אֲנֹכִי שֶׁלֹּם לְכֶם אֵת אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיא לְפָנָי בּוֹא יוֹם יִקְרָא הַגָּדוֹל עֲוֹנוֹתָם וְהַנְּבִיא Ever wonder, what it means when we say in Shemoneh Esreh, the Amidah, that G-d is Gadol, literally big, and Norah, literally awesome? Big as big in size, can't refer to G-d, because G-d is infinite, and has no size!! Gadol means in Judaism, not big in size, but

big as in משפיע, influencing, leading, providing, responsible and giving. The sun is considered in Bereshit the luminary that is gadol, while the moon is the luminary that is kattan, because the sun provides the light, while the moon just receives and reflects, but does not give of itself. G-d's being Gadol, refers to G-d's great goodness and kindness, in how G-d made the entire Creation, billions of creatures, to be kind to all of them, and provide them all, each one its own sustenance. There is nothing that is more Gadol than G-d, as there is no provider greater than He. Norah means, awesome, that G-d can change the course of creation, at any moment, and that behind all the powers of nature, there is a One G-d. On the day of Mashiach, the great kindnesses of G-d, and His awesome Oneness and Sovereignty, will become fully clear. Nissan is the time when we were redeemed, and when G-d is going to redeem us. (Rosh Hashana 11b) This is another reason why this Shabbat is called Shabbat Hagadol. The word Chag, comes from the word Chug, which means ring or circle. The holidays, the Jewish calendar, do not go in a straight line, but more like a spiral staircase, and the holidays, have in them the

same power and "spiritual lights" of the original day in history that we are celebrating. This week, this Shabbat, has in it the massive power to generate the Final Redemption, just as it generated the Exodus.

And one more point. This Shabbat is also called the Shabbat Gadol, because the Gadol, the Rabbi who has the influence of the people, would give a big, long class, to a big crowd. In the class, he is to discuss the laws of the holiday, and the meaning of the Mitzvot we are about to do. He is meant to inspire us, and bring us to do Teshuva. And like every week, before Shabbat Minha, he is supposed to end off his speech with encouragement to greet the Mashiach. For this reason we say וּבֹא לְצִיּוֹן וְגֹאֲלֵנוּ, we mention the coming of Mashiach, by Minha Shabbat, because in the Rabbi's speech before Minha, he would finish the Shabbat class to the masses by giving hope to the simple people who came to hear the class, about the coming of Mashiach. (Avudraham)

May we recognize G-d's greatness and kindness, and may Hashem forgive us this Shabbat, and bring upon us The Day, that is Gadol and Norah.

THE ART OF THIRD PERSON PERSPECTIVE

In the ability to adapt to changes and bounce back from challenges, there are two lessons from this week's Parashiot. One from Parashat Tazriah- the art of self-reflection. The other from Parashat Metzorah- the art of hope and reframing luck. The two skills work together to elevate one from a state of anxiety to a state of enthusiasm. When studying life coaching, I realized the following truism. In every sport, and in the game of life itself, those that survive are not the most intelligent, the strongest, or the fastest, but the ones who are most

responsive to change. The skill of every game is adapting to the new normal, new competition, or the everchanging circumstances and not getting stuck on habitual thinking. When we perceive life as a "game," there are so many insights we get.

Let's take the sport of basketball as an example. One of the interesting things about basketball is that there are two ways to play defense. One-on-one. And zone. When does the basketball coach decide which way to set



up his players in defense, one-on-one, or zone? It all depends on the offense. If the offense has a strong inside game, the defense is better playing “zone.” When the offense has a better outside game, the defense is best by playing man on man.

How do the players who are in the game pay attention to these changes and adapt accordingly? It is hard to notice the changes in the competition while you are in the game. That is why you need a basketball coach, sports coach, or a life coach, to be your thinking partner who stands on the sidelines while you are in the heat of the game. Because when you are in the game, you have too many blind spots, too many emotions.

In life changes as well, you need to continually be aware of yourself and the changes in the environment around you. How? Humans have the ability to self-reflect, to see themselves from outside of themselves. To achieve this external, objective perspective one needs Hitbodedut, or meditation.

We learn this concept from the Metzarah. When the Kohen classifies the Gossiper that he is a carrier of the spiritual Tzaraat, he must go about Social distancing, letting others know he is impure and to distance from him. אָמַרְתָּ אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ יִקְרָא׃ The Shlah teaches that this is the Metzarah’s punishment for referring to others as “impure” and speaking badly about them. This is because of the Talmudic rule in psychology, that the faults you see in others, is something that you yourself have to work on. כל הפוסל במומו פוסל (Kiddushin 70b) If someone frequently calls others a “Mamzer,” illegitimate child, we check to see if he is a Mamzer himself. (Rambam I. Biah 19;17)

The honest to goodness town’s milkman was once summoned to court by the town baker.

The baker would buy dairy products each morning from the milkman, and one morning noticed that the kilo of butter weighed less than a kilo. The baker started weighing the kilo of the milkman each day, seeing that the kilo of butter was always just short of a kilo. He brought this to the town’s court, “I can’t keep silent, knowing that he is stealing from the whole town!”

The judge opened the case, saying to the milkman. “I assume that you have a precise scale in your dairy factory.” The milkman replied, “Yes, sir. I have a scale, the old type, where I weigh against weights. I don’t have money for the kilo weight, though. Each morning, I use the kilo loaf of the baker on my scale as my kilo weight. If my kilo butter is less than a kilo, it is because the baker’s kilo of bread is less than a kilo. The judge clarified the matter, and nonetheless, it was the baker who was unintentionally not measuring his kilo, before selling it to others.

R Yisrael Salanter would say that the reason why the Gossiper needs to exit the three camps and live with social distancing, is because people don’t see their flaws on themselves. They only see their flaws in others. We are all bakers blind to our shortcomings and negative beliefs. By social distancing, one can see himself from outside himself, in third-person view, and notice his faults so that he can fix them instead of projecting them on others.

The way to detach from our blind spots and negative emotions is through Self Distancing. Adapters to change know that they need to practice the Self Distancing strategy frequently, assuming a third-person perspective to psychologically remove themselves from the events that happen to them. They need to see circumstances, markets, and environments that are changing



so fast, from the perspective of an observer or from the vantage point of a “fly on the wall”, to be able to recommend themselves what to do.

There is another lesson from this week’s Parasha that can help in bouncing back and adapting to change. To always ask yourself the question, “How could this seemingly bad luck be good luck?” Not getting stuck on past emotions of fear, frustration, or failure, but by looking at the new normal, as a new world.

When one has Tzaraat on the walls of his house, he must break the stones, cement and wood, and deport everything to an impure place on the outskirts of the city. Rashi mentions that when the Jews of the times of Tzaraat would break their walls, they would find gold and treasures, hidden by the fearful inhabitants of the Land of Canaan during the forty years the Jews wandered in the desert. But why did G-d bless the Metzora with treasures in his wall in such a way? Why through the difficulty of Tzaraat?

G-d is teaching us all a lesson, that good luck or bad luck is dependent on perspective. When a person is going through a rough time, times of punishment and pain, he should believe that good things hide in bad times, and look for it, because treasures always hide somewhere in the mess.

The reason why one speaks Lashon Hara is something called by psychologists as “splitting”, or all or nothing thinking, or black and white thinking, when one can only see the bad in the bad traits in others and not the good in the bad traits of others. But there is very little black and white in people, in things or in life events. Lucky or unlucky events can be seen as isolated, black or white events, or they can be perceived as part of a bigger circle of

life. As FDR once said, *I think we consider too much the luck of the early bird and not enough the bad luck of the early worm.* People and their traits are not black and white; even seemingly negative traits have a time and a place. G-d wants us to retrain our thinking and find treasures in the negative circumstance and environments we are in. To constantly ask ourselves the question, “How can this seemingly bad thing have good hidden in it?” After all, you never know what worse luck your bad luck has saved you from.

It is hard to find the treasures in the game of life when we are in F3 mode (Fear, Frustration, Failure). An interesting story happened in my house this year, the first year I hid the Afikoman. Seventy shekalim for the finder, and I hid it inside the zipper on the bottom of the couch pillow. Ten minutes in, my oldest daughter stepped up on the couch to get a higher view of the room, and CRUNCH! She looked at me, not knowing what that was, and then she quickly unzipped the pillow and claimed her prize. All others were crying, wanting another chance. OK. Round two. Sixty shekalim for the finder, and I hid the crunched Afikoman in the fridge. Kids asked for hints, maybe if I can play with them “hot/cold.” I agreed to give hints, so I said “Cold” as if I was shivering. They thought I was telling them that they were far from the Afikoman, and every hint, saying “Cold,” as if I was shivering, they kept running around in circles in the house, until they cried out of frustration and despair. Only when my ten-year-old reached a game over mindset, he said, “Oh, the fridge!” and went running to pull it out! Only when he was able to step back from the situation and rethink the hint I kept repeating from a “Game Over” perspective, did he pick up on it.



Here are the Selfie Steps for Self Reflection and becoming a lucky person when faced with challenge and change:

1. When angry or upset at someone, self reflect. Ask yourself how and where you yourself need improvement in this area.
2. Meet with your destiny. Picture an extraordinary version of yourself in a day/week/month/year/ 5 year/10 year/20 year/Olam Haba. Date that future you, and ask him how he became so extraordinary. Now what advice is that future you advising the present you?
3. For Self Reflection exercises, Go to <https://positivepsychology.com/introspection-self-reflection/> Go to <https://blog.iqmatrix.com/self-reflection> Go to <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/reflective-practice.html>
4. Become a lucky person by doing the following: Find and create opportunities. Create self-fulfilling prophecies through positive expectations. Adopt a resilient attitude that helps to transform bad luck into good.

THOU SHALT LOVE THY COMPETITOR

Rava said: When a person dies and is brought in for his final judgement, he is asked: were you faithful in your business dealings?" (Shabbat 31a) The test of business ethic is the biggest test on a Jew's fear of G-d. It has been said, "The bigger the merchant, the smaller the Jew!" What a shame! After all those years of Torah study, why is it so hard for the Jew to stick to the values and beliefs he was taught?

In his brilliant work, *Emunah and Bitachon*, the Chazon Ish describes the character of the faithful Jew. לא יחת אם רעהו פותח חנות, ישתדל עוד לעזור לרעהו, לתקנו בעצה טובה, לעשות עבורו, ולשקוד על תקנתו.... *He will not fret if his friend opens a competitive store. He will even apply effort in helping his "friend" by giving advice, helping with errands and making sure his competition does not make mistakes.* וכמה מן הקדושה מוסיף בעולם לראות איש עושה חסד עם המתעתד להתחרות עמו, ומוסיף תהילה ליריאו יתברך אשריו *And how much holiness does this man bring to the world?! To see a man doing kindness with his future competitor! And he*

adds praise to those who fear Him. Lucky is this man! And lucky is his generation!

What is the secret of tapping into this mindset and achieving this high level of faith that every G-d-fearing Jew covets? How does one achieve financial serenity?

My son said this Dvar Torah last week at the table, and it really hit home. *And the purifying one (the leper) shall wash his clothes and shave all of his hair* (14; 8). The Ben Ish Chai asks, why does the Torah want the leper to shave all of his hair? The Ben Ish Chai answers with the following story from the Midrash Tanchuma (Tazriah 6).

A certain Kohen who would check Tzaraat for community members lost his wealth and had difficulty supporting his wife and children. He heard about a place outside E. Yisrael where business was a breeze, and decided to travel there and test his luck.



The Kohen told his wife about his decision. He taught her how to check Tzaraat for community members while he was gone, for he was the only one in town who knew the laws.

“Remember. Every hair has its root, and the hair reveals information about its root source. If you see that the hair has become dried out and colorless, know that the Tzaraat at the root is very strong. But, if the hair is healthy, the Tzaraat at the root is healed.”

His wife then asked him, What if there are two hairs in one root?

Confidently, the Kohen answered his wife. “No such thing! Each hair has its own root, and no two hairs are sustained from the same root. If one hair would take from the root of another hair, a person would lose his eyesight! (see Niddah 52b)”

The woman then said to her husband, “Listen to your own words! If G-d created a source of sustenance for every hair, He has certainly created sustenance for all of *your* hairs, and all your children’s hairs. And if G-d is responsible for sustaining your hair, is He not responsible for sustaining *you, yourself*? Why do you need to leave Eretz Yisrael to find your “financial root”? Why worry about tomorrow’s bread? G-d supports even lice eggs; won’t He support you?

This is what is meant in the words of Ben Azzai : A person does not touch what is prepared for his friend, even a hairsbreadth. (Yoma 38a,b) Why does Ben Azzai use a hairsbreadth as the measure? The Midrash’s story is the answer. Because every hair has its root. And every person has his root, his source. No one can ever take anything from you. Why worry about your competition?

This is a huge lesson and in so many life areas. Parnassah. Shidduchim. Jealousy. Serenity. No one can take anything from you. The reason why a person speaks Lashon Hara is because he views his friend as a threat, invading his territory. When he shaves his head bald, he reveals that although before his haircut, it looked as if the hairs were fighting over the same root, after the haircut, it becomes clear that G-d created a root for each hair.

How does one get this “no competition/ no threat/ no stepping on my toes” mindset engrained in his bones, have it flowing through his veins and encompassing his whole existence? The answer is hidden in the words of Ben Azzai prior to the lesson earlier. ומשלך יתנו לך *And from what is yours, they gave you.* What do these words mean?

Rashi explains. כלומר: לא משלהם הוא מתנה, אלא מזונות קצובים לך מן השמים. All that you get, your paycheck, your allowance, your food in yeshiva or seminary, etc., is not a present from your boss, your parents, or school office. They were just G-d’s messengers. The food you eat was already set aside for you by Heaven. When you realize this, competition ceases to be reality. It is just a mirage.

In his Bitachon Boot Camp, R Efraim Stauber uses this awesome power tool he coined “Give it back!” The Talmud teaches that one who has pleasure from this world without thanking G-d for it is like a thief. (Berachot 35a) In a meditative way, give back to G-d what you stole from Him, or what you benefited from without praying for it or blessing G-d for it. Now, imagine how it would be without what you thought you were entitled to. Like your ability to breathe. The people you love. The house you live in. The money you have. (Even Bill Gates thought about this! He said what he would do if he would lose all of his money,



\$76 billion!) Then pray to G-d, beg for what you thought you were entitled to. When we undo our entitlement thinking, gratitude starts to fill our being, and the Neshama begins to soar.

The Evil Inclination's way of convincing us of entitlement is through the lie of whatever you had until now, you are entitled to. How does one remain spiritually grounded and focused, continuously grateful and appreciative to G-d without feelings of entitlement?

Recognizing that the present is not bound to the past, and that anything can change at any moment, is the key to tapping into focused prayer. In the second blessing of the Amidah, Mechayeh Metim, resurrection of the dead is mentioned no less than 5 times. Why the

THE GOSSIP EXTINGUISHER

Usually, people gossip, not because they want to cause harm to other people, but because they need a topic of conversation. Nothing is juicier than gossip. Listening to gossip has the same severity as engaging in it. People often listen because they do not know how to stop the "gossiper". It may be considered rude to say, "That's loshon horah", so, out of an uncomfortable politeness, a person just sits and listens. After reading this article, you will be a pro at schmoozing, without needing to gossip. And you will know how to ward off a gossiper, before he has a chance to begin.

Leading an interesting conversation with others is a skill. Although the Hafetz Chaim was very careful about the purity of his speech, he was a great conversationalist. What did he have to talk about? Being a great conversationalist has almost nothing to do with what you say; it has much more to do with how you listen. Did you ever sit, one on one, with someone who rambled on and on about

repetition? In his Olam HaTefillot, R' E. Munk explains that these five correspond the 5 senses. Every day, three times a day, we give back our eyesight to G-d, our hearing to G-d, our speech to G-d, our taste and touch, and we ask G-d to revive the dead. Why do we believe that we are entitled to these gifts? That is ridiculous! Why do we trust G-d that if we have had our senses and our life until now, we will always have them? How silly!!!

If we do this exercise enough, we can begin to truly trust G-d, even when the going gets rough. This is why we mention, specifically, in this blessing, our trust in G-d, ונאמן אתה, and מקיים אמונתו..., because giving back what you did not pray for is where all Bitachon begins.

all different subjects ... Did you enjoy that conversation? I'll bet you did not. Everyone likes being asked to express his opinion. It gives satisfaction to feel that you have made clever comments in your conversation. That's one reason to be in the listening mode when approaching a conversation. By putting the other person in the spotlight, you make him feel that you consider him an interesting person to have in your life. When you show interest in what the other person has to say, he walks away from the conversation saying to himself, "That guy is so interesting to talk to." Even though you did not say anything; you just "mirrored" interests.

So, how do you get an interesting conversation up and running? There are five topics that powerhouse a conversation with another person: 1 – his life. 2 – his opinions. 3- worldly items that interest him. 4 – peoples that interest him. 5- your life and interests. You can mix and match. Don't speak about



what interests you if it does not interest him, unless he shows you interest. The order goes in accordance with the other person's preferences, from top to bottom. To keep the conversation flowing, you can change the order or ask the other person a "why" question out of pure curiosity on one of his opinions. Why do you like living in Alaska. Once you ask a question, the other person starts talking, and you show them that you are listening. Concentrate on and relate to his areas of interest. Stay away from yes or no questions, or those with a one word answer. Open-ended questions draw a person's interest like a magnet. They give the person an opportunity to express himself, to open up. Those are the questions that make the person think, that stimulate and vitalize the conversation.

When a person starts to speak about someone else, mentioning things that may cause that third party emotional, physical or monetary damage, you may not be sure how to stop him.

THE TRUE LIE

Our parasha discusses the leper, the Metzora. Although our Rabbis teach that the cause of leprosy is speaking לשון הרע, gossip, this is not mentioned specifically in the two parshiot that discuss the leper and his purity. Our Rabbis teach that this name "metzora" is a shortened version of the words מוציא שם רע, one who slanders and spreads rumors about others. Generally speaking, *loshon hara* refers to saying negative truths about others. *Motzi Shem Ra*, in contrast, is spreading negative non-truths about others.

Most of the time when we say something negative about others, we are not fabricating. If so, why is the main title here *motzi shem ra* – which refers to telling a lie?

In general, people do not like to be quieted. Usually, the person will start to justify himself with all kinds of explanations. You don't want to sound "holier than thou". Instead of mentioning the word gossip, just say that you always refrain from discussing a person who is not present. "I try to live by the 'golden rule', avoiding doing to someone else something that would be unpleasant for me. I don't mind continuing this conversation, but let us first get the other person on the phone".

Conversation is a great thing. It is the only way to build healthy, long lasting, two-way relationships. Probably the best tool you can develop is effective communication. Not knowing how to communicate effectively is sometimes a bigger problem than speaking gossip. This is a unique approach for refraining from speaking gossip. This article does not tell you to stop what you are doing, but to exchange it for something far more effective.

The answer lies in a Rashi in Parashat Shlach. When the spies came and spoke negatively about the Land of Canaan, Rashi comments "Any lie not preceded by a small truth will not be believed". First, the spies mentioned the truth – the power of the Land and its people, the magnificent fruit. Only after having cited praises of the Land, did they lie and say "We cannot capture the Land." Here, Rashi is quoting the Midrash almost word for word. However, the Midrash says, "Any *loshon hara* that is not preceded by a small truth will not be believed". How can we understand Rashi's change of terminology?

I believe the answer is that ultimately, *loshon hora* is **always** false, even though it conveys accurate information. If, for example, you witness someone shoplifting and relate what



you have seen to a friend, probably, the friend will perceive this person as a “shoplifter”. But this is often far from the truth! The would-be “shoplifter” might have given in to a sudden impulse that he now bitterly regrets. In other words, the “true” information that was passed on has created a false impression. Rashi may well be hinting at this in his substituting the word lie for lashon hora.

There are many reasons why a negative story, although it may not be fabricated, is still considered a lie or is included under the main title of Motzi shem ra. There are so many things that our Rabbis teach us that have a parallel in different forms of the media. G-d gives us such parables, so to speak, in our daily lives and experience so that we can better understand the messages of the mishnayot. Our rabbis teach us that when someone speaks gossip, an angel comes and records, inscribes

every single word! This may be why G-d allowed mankind to invent recording devices.

Though there are not a lot of good things we can learn from lawyers, this one is an exception. If someone would pay you 10,000 dollars to find some way to justify a theft, you might just come up with a valid-sounding argument. It may be that your point is not a hundred percent true, but you would possibly be able to see the “thief” in a new light. This is exactly what the person who speaks negatively does, but in the reverse. He somehow manages to put the person spoken about in a bad light. He makes the one who sinned look like much more than just a person who sinned: now, he is labeled as a sinner, implying that with him, sin is habitual. There is no greater damage that can be done to a person than categorizing him as a habitual wrong-doer because of a negative action that he has done.

THE VOICELESS MAN

Just three years ago, I attended a Saturday night funeral in Jerusalem of an elderly friend *I thought* I had known. The deceased had had his vocal box removed as a medical precaution twelve years prior to his death. He could barely be understood when he talked, as he tried to whisper blessings loudly to those who knew him. People would sometimes walk away or try to end the conversation with him, not understanding what he was saying as he continued giving his blessings. He had a hole in his throat in the place where the voice box was removed, making it even more difficult to look at him while he tried to whisper his blessings as loud as he could. He asked, before his death, to be buried before midnight. This gave us time for only one quick eulogy. The one story that was told left everyone shocked and tearful for having underestimated the greatness of the deceased.

Two years after the voice box was removed, this man’s family was informed by the doctors that it would be possible for him to regain his voice by undergoing an inexpensive, surgical procedure, necessitating being in the hospital for only one day with no risk involved. The man’s family believed that he would receive the offer happily. Instead, the man rejected it. He explained that now that he was obliged to speak sparingly and with great effort, and even so was understood by no one, he had not spoken *loshon hora* (gossip) for the last two years. Forced to remain silent while others spoke, he also realized how much people gossip, and he preferred not to be able to speak again, so as not to find himself once again in the test in which so many people fail. He lived another ten years of his life choosing not to speak, just because of his fear of speaking slander and other evil talk. He found



contentment in doing the right thing. Ironically, the people at the funeral were left speechless. The few people who were at the funeral felt that if only they had known of his greatness, they would have wanted to get just one more blessing from this great man. It was

HUMBLING THE HUMBLE

When I was coaching a boy on improving memory skills, he asked me if I could help him to remember not to get angry in situations which provoked such a reaction. I responded that when he got angry, he did not forget that doing so was against his values. When he got angry, he *did* remember, either consciously or subconsciously, that he was doing something wrong. Anger is an emotion that comes as a response when one feels that his/her ego has been violated or damaged; it is an overflow of negative expression. This emotion will cause a person to exhibit uncontrollable behavior, ignoring his true principles and disapproval of getting angry. Anger, like any other emotion, is triggered by a thought, even a subconscious one. This “automatic” thought, (i.e., not necessarily consciously validated) despite its irrationality, will often surface when the ego is challenged. The surfacing of automatic thoughts is a kind of reflex, generated by some underlying core belief. If we challenge the core belief, these thoughts will be more rational. This is what is meant in the Iggeret Haramban that the strategy for avoiding anger is always to speak calmly to whomever we meet. There is no effective strategy for stopping anger once one has already entered such an emotional state and is, by definition, out of control. The only effective way to deal with anger and correct it is by preventing its onset through altering our core beliefs about our expectations from the world around us. When training ourselves to speak in a low tone of voice, we are stabilizing our ego as well as expressing

already too late. Such great people do exist. We just have to open our eyes and recognize who they are and learn from them before they are gone.

our recognition that *I am not greater than my surroundings*. Then, the ego is generally balanced enough that it is not so vulnerable to the *stepped-on* feeling. When the *All-Important-I* thoughts are not present, we can stay within our anti-anger boundaries. Memory, however, is neither the issue nor the solution.

This method is valid in dealing with gossip and slander, as well. We all *remember* that this talk is forbidden. However, in certain situations, where an automatic negative thought arises against another person, we *do* indulge in this kind of talk. This thought triggers an emotion that overcomes us, and we cannot keep the thought to ourselves. The way that we can control our emotions is by controlling our core beliefs – those which generate the automatic thoughts. We control our core beliefs by recognizing them and questioning them. And, the Torah tells us exactly what core beliefs cause a person to speak gossip or slander.

Our parsha discusses the slanderer, who has become a *metzora*, a leper. After his repentance, he had to go through a purification procedure involving a Kohen who took from the leper two kosher birds, a piece of cedar wood, a string of red wool and an ezob (hyssop) grass. One bird was to be slaughtered over a cup of water, and the other live bird, together with the cedar and wool string, would be dipped into the cup of blood and water and sprinkled on the Metzora.



Our rabbis tell us the meaning behind the components of the ritual. The birds were to remind the slanderer that he had done a birdlike act of nonstop ‘chirping’. The piece of wood was there to remind him that the cedar, being the tallest tree, represents the core belief of arrogance in the person who is speaking gossip or slander. This is a primary cause of all gossip. The reason for involvement of the Ezob, or hyssop, is that it is the lowest of all trees. Rashi writes here that the lesson is to tell the Metzora that in order for him to be cured of his unacceptable behavior, first he had to come down from his arrogance and self pride, resembling the lowly Ezob and Tolaat (worm).

The Avnei Nezer presents a question: The Metzora, at this stage of purification, had already repented and was currently looking at himself in a more humble manner. How, then, could the Torah tell him that he had to lower his self image in order to be cured? Wasn't he already humbled?

The Avnei Nezer answers that the humbling feeling that the Metzora feels may not be a level of absolute humbleness – it might be only temporary and external. If it results from pain or suffering that befalls him in life, this humility may disappear along with the pain

and suffering when they go away. In G-d's Mercy, this level of humbling is accepted as repentance. However, a lasting humility is not achieved until one arrives at the recognition of the Greatness of G-d and the minuteness of Man. This humbling feeling is a far greater one, as it is not dependent on circumstance. It will remain even after the pain subsides. This deeper humbleness will help the leper not to speak forbidden talk in the future, even after he passes this degrading stage of impurity and isolation. So says the Avnei Nezer.

The difference between these two types of humbling is that one is transient, while the other is lasting. Being humbled through pain and suffering is not related to how one looks at his surroundings and at other human beings. In contrast, when one looks at himself as being minute before G-d, he realizes that all human beings are minute before G-d. We are all only human, and humans make mistakes. At his utmost core belief, the slanderer can realize that although he feels flawless in comparison to his fellow, when he compares himself to G-d, he sees that he is filled with flaws, no less than his friend. When one works on this type of humbling, he may find it easier for himself to overcome his “habit” of speaking in a way that he himself disapproves of.

WANTS IN SPRING BLOSSOM

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

beings and good trees through which to bring pleasure to Mankind.

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



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

We might ask ourselves how it’s possible to say that having wants brings about pleasure? Are there not plenty of people in the world who have all the money they want and, even so, are living lives devoid of happiness? But this is precisely the point. The high level of happiness, the happiness that we feel when we have or we get what we want, lasts only for a few moments. After getting or seeing that we are getting our wants, the feelings and sensations of pleasure shrink to less than a minute fraction of those we experienced at the outset. In stark contrast, the blessing thanking G-d for His creations can be made only once a year, *unlike many other blessings of praise that can be made every thirty days*. The blessing for the trees is our expression of the happiness we have from seeing them, our first experience with fruit trees each year. How, then, is this such a great pleasure, the pleasure of getting our wants? And why is it specifically in Nissan?

The Hebrew months of the year are actually not Hebrew! In the Torah, the months are referred to through numbers: the First month (Nissan), Second month (Iyar) Third month (Sivan) ...and so on. Similarly, in Hebrew, the days of the week are numbers and not names,

such as Sunday and Monday... Rabbeinu Bachye (Parashat Bo) writes that the days are given numbers in relation to Shabbat, reminding us how many days we are before or after Shabbat. The Hebrew months in the Torah, also, are counted from the first month of Nissan, the month of our Redemption from Egypt. This, as well serves to remind ourselves each month of the Redemption. This is the reason why the Torah did not give names to the months.

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

Nissan is always the month of spring. The first month (Nissan) is referred to as the *חדש האביב* (month of spring) in the Torah. Spring, in Hebrew, is *אביב* which can be broken up into *ב אב י* father of 12 (months). The word *ניסן* is very similar to the word in Shir Hashirim *נראו בארץ הניצנים* *the blossoms were seen in the land*. This is the month of blossoming, and the beginning of new life – a twelve month life. All the months are lead by this month. How?

The whole winter long, a tree looks like a piece of dead wood. The appearance of a blossom tells us that there is and was life inside. It was just waiting for the proper timing to come out. This feeling of resurrection that we get from the trees each spring shows us that there is a time when a person, also, feels revival and renewal. At different times in people’s lives, they undergo change. This change is always fathered by a feeling of hope. And hope is the result of a realization that one has a choice to follow his will and grow to



meet lifetime goals. That is what happened to the Jews in the month of Nissan. They were given hope and free will. That was their freedom. And that is why Nissan is the first month. That is why it is in spring.

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

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

USELESS COMPUTERS

The Kotsker was quoted saying the following: We say in the Haggadah – “הכם מה הוא אומר” “the wise son, what does he say?... Why doesn't the Haggadah just say,” הכם אומר, “the wise son says...”? The Kotsker answered, “You know that a person is a הכם, wise, by the things he says. I would like to tweak that a bit. You know that a person is wise by the questions he asks. All of the four sons were asking questions, not just talking.

People walk around all day asking themselves questions. Questions that they do not know they are asking. This sounds very strange, but it is more true than strange. People are in one of two states, the thinking state or the “thoughts” state. When someone is thinking, he is answering a question. As long as a person has questions in his head, he is still thinking. All thinking is – is answering questions. The better the question he has in his head, the more effectively that person will be thinking. This is

the greatest tool that G-d gave humans. They have the intellectual ability to ask a question. Pablo Picasso once said, “Computers are useless. They can only give you answers.” How does this make sense? (That itself is a question that makes you think.) A smart athlete asks himself, “Where will the ball be in the next five seconds?” The not thinking athlete doesn't ask; he just runs after the ball, wherever it is at the moment. The smart businessman asks, “How can I best serve my customers?” The smart Torah scholar asks, “What is the most efficient plan to accomplish the most learning, quality and quantity?”

Although everyone is asking questions of themselves, not everyone is asking good questions. What is a good question? This is hidden in the Haggadah as well. The difference between the simple son and the smart son is the way he asks the question. What is the difference between the two? The smart son



מה העדות והחוקים והמשפטים אשר צוה ה' אתכם.. אלוקינו אתכם. What are the testimonies (the reasons behind the symbols that testify to the Exodus. Matza, marror and korban Pesach), of both the laws that we understand and the laws that we do not understand. The simple son asks מה זאת – What is this? What is the difference between the two questions, and why does that difference make one of them smart and one of them simple?

The difference is that the smart son sees at the Seder table a lot of detail, so he asks a question in a way that requires a lot of detail to answer it. The simple son just points to one thing that he does not understand and says, “What’s that?” He saw a lot of things going on, and he asks for a question that can be answered by

THE GOOD SIDE OF THE EVIL INCLINATION

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

Let us take a reality check. What, exactly, are we inspecting in “bedikat chametz”? While reviewing the laws of checking the house for chametz, The Halachic authority mentioned that although the house should be cleaned before one checks, one must be careful, particularly in this stressful hour of checking for chametz, not to get angry at his spouse. The implication is that anger is to the soul what chametz is to kosher Pesach food. In the *Yehi Ratzon* prayer which we recite when ridding

saying that G-d took us out of Egypt with an outstretched hand... The way the person asks determines the type of answer they are going to get.

When a person asks himself, “okay, do I have everything I need for the Seder night ?” he will get a general answer. When he asks a question like “How can I read and explain the whole account of the Haggadah in such a way that each child will want to hear it?” That is a more detailed question than the first, and it will bring the focus to something more specific and precise. It will invite a more informative answer.

People constantly come up with questions. The smarter the questions, the smarter the person.

the house of chametz, we say that our intention is also to ***check and cleanse our hearts*** for the spiritual chametz that is there. This spiritual chametz is “The evil side of the evil inclination”. And one who is free from spiritual chametz should certainly not be getting angry.

Now, let us direct our focus to an interesting Jewish law about Matza. The only Matza with which one can fulfill his obligation on Seder night is matza made from ingredients that can become Chametz. Matza that is made out of rice and “*dochan*” is not valid for fulfilling the mitzvah of eating matzah on the night of the Seder. We learn this from the psukkim. We need flour that ***can*** become chametz – allegorically, flour that has the possibility of becoming “evil” – it is up to us to make sure that we get only the good out of it. We are meant to find the good existing within the evil inclination. Paralleling the good and not good components of dough – the elements we catch before they have a chance to become chametz



– there are elements in our personalities which must be “caught” and directed to constructive purposes. How is this to be done? The following insight was introduced to me this last week by R’ Aharon Feldman, sh’lita.

The Torah teaches that expression is a human need. Ruach, Nefesh and Neshama are our “spokesmen”. Ideally, the Neshama should be the source of our expression, as the Neshama strives only toward good. (Ruach is the root of the ego- how one perceives himself; Nefesh is the internal drive for earthly needs and wants. In simple terms: The Neshama wants to do *what is purely good*. The Ruach wants to do *what looks good*. And the Nefesh wants to do *what feels good*.) Within Ruach and Nefesh, there are, as it were, “ulterior motives” – goals that are self-serving, goals that pull us down. Ruach, the ego, can be healthy self esteem, or – in its chametz aspect – a drive to make an impression on others by flaunting wealth or intelligence. Nefesh, relating to material needs, is healthy when taking care of necessities: its negative side is pursuing luxury and excesses.

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

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

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

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

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

R’ Yehuda Tzadka, zt”l, related a story about a close friend of his to his students. The friend had wanted to increase merit for Jewish



neighbors who did not have a mezuzah by offering them to write and put up a mezuzah on their door – all costs covered . At one of the doors that he knocked on, a woman opened, and, hearing his request, declined the offer. She said, “Thank you, Rabbi, but I am a non – believer”.

Just at that moment, her daughter popped out of one of the bedrooms and said to her mother-

AN ONLY CHILD

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

The answer is a lesson for parenting. A father can be either a biological father, who is technically a father, without the emotional traits expected of him. He just happens to be the kid's father. Or, he can be a father with the character traits appropriate to a parent. Fathers who are successful have secrets that make them successful . One secret that makes a father successful is that he looks at each

“Mom – do not lie. Last week when I had a 39-degree fever, you said a prayer to G-d. The G-d who you prayed to when you needed Him is the same One who asked you to put a mezuzah on the door.” And she did.

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

child *as his only child*. Not just that the child is part of a group of kids. Or that the child must fit into a mold of the “Family's Way”. Each child has his own way. Each child is writing his own life biography. If a father can be like this, respecting each child as if he is his own entity, with his own successes in life, his own opinions in life... then such a child *will never leave his father*. And this is the secret of the Haggadah in parenting . *One, One , One , One*. And even if, at times, the parent sees that his evil son needs to be punished, and the boy *is severely punished*, he *will be back* next year. For he knows that in his father's eyes, no one can replace him.

We are taught (Shabbat 10b) that *a person should never act differently (and show favor) to one child over the other. For just a few threads that Yaakov added to the cloak of Yosef, more than was added to the cloak of the brothers, they envied him to no end. The result of this was that our forefathers went down to Egypt and suffered the bitter 210 years of slavery there....*

Tosefot asks, how can the Talmud blame the whole slavery in Egypt on this parenting mistake of Yaakov? Weren't we supposed to go down to Egypt anyway, and be enslaved because of the 400 years decreed on Avraham at the Brit Ben Habetarim ועבדותם וענו אותם אבותם ...



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

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

Now, Yaakov Avinu, of course, was not the type of father that makes parenting mistakes. (Even Leah, who was called שנואה in comparison to Rachel, felt Yaakov's favoritism for her sister only through Ruach Hakodesh. Not from Yaakov.) Our Rabbis tell us that Yaakov made ketonot (cloaks) for the rest of his sons, as well. He made them stripes with the same material of Argaman. The only difference was that for Yosef, this material of Argaman (purple dyed wool) went all the way down to the end of the sleeve (cuff) of the cloak.(see Rashi on Shabbat 10b ; B. Rabbah) It was just a difference of 220 סלעים, a minute difference. And, Yosef, who was smarter than his brothers and to whom

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

Avraham Avinu, the father of our nation, displayed this fatherliness trait as well. When G-d asked him to offer his beloved, special son up on the altar, את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת, את יצחק – he asked G-d *which* beloved son. *Which* special, unique son, Yitzchak or Yishmael. Until finally, G-d had to tell him that He was referring to his son, Yitzchak. This is after the Torah said that Yishmael had sinned the three cardinal sins. ותרא שרה את בן הגר המצרית אשר ילדה לאברהם מצחק There is supposed to be a special place in the heart of a father for each and every child. No matter what path the child takes, each child is an only child in his own way.

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



The reason why Rachel is the mother of the Jewish nation is that although she cries for the Jewish Nation *as a whole*, for their being in a physical and spiritual exile, *she sheds a special tear for each and every one of her children*. This is the way we hold on to *our* children. By letting them feel that we

love each and every one of them with a unique love for who they are. Each one has his own purpose in life. And just as it is ridiculous to love one finger more than the other fingers of the hand, for each has its own purpose, it is senseless to love one child more than the other.

LONG TERM MEMORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

The answer is deep. G-d created man with the ability to choose, a deep desire for freedom of choice. Although we are *commanded* to do good, still, G-d gave man the gift of freewill and choice. Since this is part of the fabric of how we were created, people who do not have freedom of choice feel miserable. Today, Fortune 400 business advisors suggests that employers give options to their employees instead of only giving orders, because a person thrives when given the opportunity to use this freedom of choice. When a parent gives a child different positive options from which to choose, the child is less likely to feel animosity



toward the parent. People who have been denied the opportunity to exercise free will are rebelling against their governments. Many would rather die for a belief or lifestyle which they choose than live without freedom of choice.

Passover is a holiday of free choice. The Jews in Egypt were denied the freedom of choice, robbing them of the ability to serve G-d. This was the most difficult part of their servitude. On the 15th of Nissan, each Egyptian Jew took his wife and children and left Egypt, walking into a barren desert on foot, with just one set of clothes and no plan for procuring food and water, while the burning sun beat down on him. Still, his joy knew no bounds. Finally, he could do what he wanted to do; every Jew, deep down, wants to serve his Creator and serve his purpose in this world. We were ready to choose and accept the Torah at Mount Sinai. On that day, we didn't even care if we had a land to go to. We were happy just to be ourselves, and we understood the importance of our freedom of choice. This joy can be celebrated by a Jew, even in exile. Even if he is not at his homeland, he can still choose who he wants to serve.

THE ART OF VULNERABILITY

The only way to become an amazing writer is through writing. The only way to become an amazing speaker is by speaking. The only way to become a great cook is by cooking. The only way to become amazing at sports is by getting in the game. The game where you can lose, where your honor, and how people perceive you, is at stake. Vulnerability, being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally, is not always a bad thing. Vulnerability and risk can have an upside, when they are also the birthplace of courage, creativity and change.

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

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

Vulnerability is the essence of relationships. It is an art, of being the natural you, the uncalculated you, the you who is willing to risk being exposed and potentially look foolish, all for a greater purpose. That greater purpose, in relationships, can be a new level of trust. "This is me. I am willing to expose my flaws, with the hope that you accept me and love me for all that I am and all that I am not, my strengths and my weaknesses."

Judaism is more than a religion; it is a relationship with your Creator, and how vulnerable you are means how close you are.



At the essence of love is how much you are willing to give up for it. וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ. *And you should love YKVK your G-d with all of your heart(s), with all of your soul* (ready to give up your soul for the sake of the three cardinal sins), *with all your “a lot”* (ready to give up all of your money not to transgress sins; ready to love Him and accept, no matter what He brings into your life) The greatest men, Avraham, Yitzhak, R’ Akiva, the Bet Yosef, lived their lives, ready to give it all up for G-d, waiting to give it all up for G-d.

This is what a Jew is, at his essence, עבריים. When G-d asks Moshe to represent Him to Pharaoh, to Egypt, to the world, He called Himself, יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִיִּים YKVK the G-d of the Ivriim. (3;18) The Midrash tells us that the extra letter Yud in the word עבריים is to hint to, עברי ים, the Jews who will cross the Sea, for Me. Even before the Ten Plagues: G-d refers to us as crossers of the Sea. How so?

We say in the Haggadah, when the Jews left Egypt, they needed merit. Even though G-d had promised Avraham that He would redeem the Jews, they did not have any mitzvot that they kept that would merit Redemption; they were spiritually naked, וְאָתָּה עָרִם וְעָרִיָּה. So, G-d gave them two Mitzvot, Korban Pesach and Brit Milah. וְאָעֲבָר עִלְיֶיךָ וְאָרְאֶה מִתְּבוֹסֶסֶת בְּדַמְיֶיךָ וְאָמַר לְךָ בְּדַמְיֶיךָ תָּגִי. (see Rashi Shemot 12:6)

If so, in what merit did the Sea split for the Jews? הללו עובדי עבודה זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה. There were still Jews who possessed idols with them when they passed through the sea! (Sanhedrin 103b) Even if they had the merit of Yosef’s coffin with them, even if they had the merit of Avraham with them, they needed their own merit, as well!

The merit that got us across the sea was the special ticket, called יְדִיד ה'. G-d’s friend. “Friendly” is schmoozing, chilling, having fun, sharing experiences. But *real* friends are those who are willing to give up something for that relationship. When you are willing to give up something for G-d, you get this magical ticket, that G-d will do anything and everything you ever ask for, even if you do not deserve it. As we say before beginning our prayers, וְיָדִידִים עָבְרוּ יָם... וְנָתַנוּ יְדִידִים זְמִירוֹת וְשִׁירוֹת וְתַשְׁבְּחוֹת...: This word Yedid is huge, because it means, Yad b’yad, hand in hand. (Megaleh Amukot, Devarim) Holding someone’s hand, willing to put yourself on the line for them and being vulnerable for them.

It is amazing how, when Moshe cries out to G-d to save the people at the sea, G-d tells him not to pray מִהֲתַצַּעַק אֵלַי דְּבַר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִסְעוּ: Why shouldn’t Moshe pray? Since when shouldn’t *anyone* pray? The answer is the merit of being a Yedid Hashem, is much greater than the merit of prayer. Prayer was not going to save the Jews from the Sea. Only being “G-d’s friend” would. G-d wanted to see the willingness of the Jews to expose themselves to vulnerability, to be in a relationship with Him, to give them the merit that would save them. (see Maharsha Sota 37a)

When Nachshon ben Aminadav went into the Sea until the water reached his lungs, G-d rewarded him with being the Forefather of King David, Mashiach, Daniel, Chananya, Mishael, Azarya, all of whom deserved the title of עברי ים, all people who were, at any time, ready to give it all up for G-d. They are willing to make themselves vulnerable for G-d, more than any other people are willing to open themselves to harm. Nachshon was going to Har Sinai to accept the Torah, and nothing, not even a raging sea, was going to stop him.

When Moshe blessed the tribe of Binyamin in וזאת הברכה, he said לְבִנְיָמִן אָמַר יְיָ יִקְרָא יִשְׁכֵּן לְבֵטֶחַ Binyamin won the Yedid Hashem trophy, because he was the first tribe willing to go in after Nachshon Ben Aminadav. The reward for that trophy was that the Bet Hamikdash would be in Binyamin's territory. (Menachot 53b) And because they went into the sea ahead of the tribe of Yehuda, they merited that King Shaul, a descendant of Binyamin, would rule the Jewish people before King David from Yehuda. (See Tehillin 68;28 Metzudat David)

To be a Yedid Hashem does not only mean to give up your life for Him. It means to be ready to give up your comfort, your money, your sleep... The wives of the men who stay up late and get up early to learn, and they are willing to give up sleep for their husband's Torah learning, merit the Yedid Hashem trophy, the magical ticket that can take them to the highest places in Olam Haba. בְּנֵי יִתְדֵיךָ שָׂגָא (Tehillin 127;2, Yoma 77a)

Avraham Avinu was called Yedid Hashem, and we are all called Yedidim when we show that we are vulnerable and dependent on Him לְמַעַן יִחַלְצֵנוּ יְיָ יִדְדֵינוּ. In his merit of self-sacrifice, of his vulnerability, we merited that our vulnerability will pull through for us.

BEING G-D'S FIRSTBORN

The hardest question to answer as a religious Jew is, if G-d is everything, and G-d is good, then why is the world so messed up? Why is there so much bad in the world? Couldn't G-d create a world in which things would just make more sense?

The answer gives a whole new perspective on Judaism. G-d did not finish creating the world. He left it up to mankind to finish creating it. Or more precisely, he left it up to us Jews to finish

Sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking that we are doing things for others, for G-d, for our family, when in reality, we are doing them for ourselves. Avraham Avinu proved that he was G-d-fearing, only after the test of Akedat Yitzhak. Although he was willing to be thrown into a fire for G-d at Ur Kasdim, that did not yet prove that he was willing to give up EVERYTHING for G-d. Giving up Olam Hazeh for Olam Haba, for an ideology, for something that is more important, does not yet mean vulnerability for the relationship with G-d. Avraham was being tested to see if he was willing to give up everything important, his whole religion, his whole ideology, his whole future, for G-d. In the merit of Avraham chopping wood, וַיִּבְרַקֵּל עֲצָי עֵלֶּה, right away before he set out with Yitzhak to the Akeida, (just in case he might not find proper wood to chop when he would reach the place of the Akeida,) and shlepping it with him for three days, G-d "chopped" the sea for us. וַיִּבְרַקֵּנוּ הַיָּם וַיִּמְחֵם יְיָ סוּף לָהֶם בְּקִשְׁתּוֹ. We remind ourselves of this vulnerability of Avraham each morning, when we say

Every word of our prayers can light the fire of your soul. Everything that you are willing to be vulnerable to G-d for, can turn on your spiritual motivation.

creating it. Or, even more precisely yet, he left it up to you to finish creating it. And if G-dliness is not felt in our lives and in the world we live, then we know that we are not doing our job well enough.

Every Friday night, when we make Kiddush, we say that we join G-d in creating His world, by bringing spirituality into it. אֲשֶׁר בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת. *That G-d created the world, to make.* What does that mean, that G-d created a

world “to make”? The answer is that G-d wants us to put the finishing touches on the world He created. He wants us to bring the message of Shabbat to the world. Shabbat is the meaning behind all Creation, the spirituality behind all matter and everything material. Shabbat is the Creation of meaning behind the Creation. How so?

Shabbat is number seven. All significant subjects in Judaism relate to the number seven. Both Pesach and Sukkot are festivals lasting seven days. Shavuoth, following the counting of the Omer for 49 days, is also the culmination of the seven-week period beginning with Pesach. Shmittah is the seventh agricultural year, and Yovel is the seventh shmittah, marking a total of 49 years, or seven times seven. There are three Patriarchs and four Matriarchs, together equaling seven. There are seven holidays from the Torah, Pesach, Shavuoth, Sukkot, Rosh Hashannah, Yom Kippur, Shmini Atseret, and the last Moed is Tisha B'Av, קרא עלי מועד, a day that will be a holiday in the times of Mashiach. Why are all significant themes in Judaism related to number seven? Because six defines the dimensions of the physical world: in a three-dimensional cube, there is width, length and depth. Each measurement is defined by two points. The seventh dot is the inside. The meaning. Why the physical object exists.

The power that drives the universe is the power of meaning. If you lack motivation in any specific area, it is usually because one of three reasons: You do not *believe* in yourself in that area; You do not know *how* to do something that needs to be done in that area; You are not conscious of *why* that area has importance. “Can?”, “How?” and “Why?” Shabbat is a chance to meditate over the Why

of the World, and to be a living sign of the purpose of Creation, to the entire Universe.

When did we get this gift of Shabbat? After experiencing suffering in Egypt. The Midrash tells us, ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך, *the Egyptians forced B'nei Yisrael to do backbreaking labor*. The word פרך in ב"ש, exchanging the letters for the letter that appears in their place when counting from the opposite end of the alphabet, you get the letters גג which has the numerical value of 39 – the thirty-nine categories of work that are forbidden on Shabbat. Why is Shabbat something that we merited in Egypt, in slavery?

If you go through the parasha and you don't pick up the clues, you can be missing the whole inside story. When G-d asks Moshe to warn Pharaoh that if he does not release the Jews, He will bring upon him the Plague of the Firstborn, G-d tells Moshe to mention the following introduction, and the reason why G-d is going to kill the Egyptians' firstborn, measure for measure. 'ואמרת אל פרעה כה אמר ה' בני בכרי ישראל, *And you shall tell Pharaoh, 'Thus says G-d: Yisrael is My firstborn son'* (4;22) Rashi writes that at this point, G-d signed the deal that Yaakov bought the firstborn rights from Esav.

What is the connection between the sale of firstborn rights by Esav to Yaakov to this point in time, when the Jews are in slavery, and they are about to be redeemed, and they need to go out of Egypt to serve G-d and bring Him sacrifices?

The answer is the story and heartbeat of the Jewish people. It is a long story, an old story, and a story that is not yet over. The story is a story of sacrifice. A heritage of sacrifice. At times, animal sacrifices in our Temple, and



other times, sacrificing our bodies, our lives, our dreams, all for the love of G-d. The whole Amidah, the whole Shemonah Esreh, is a build-up of requests that lead to the ultimate request, that G-d accept our sacrifices. ואשי ישראל-ל ותפילתם מהרה באהבה תקבל ברצון ותהי לרצון תמיד עבודת ישראל עמך.

Yaakov wanted the firstborn rights from Esav, because he wanted the rights to bring the sacrifices. He wanted to be the continuation of the Brit bein Habetarim, the treaty of sacrifices between G-d and the Jewish people, passed from Avraham to Yitzhak. And he knew that if he would merit to be the continuation of G-d's firstborn, not only to gain firstborn rights, but to shoulder responsibility, the torch, the banner of bringing spirituality to the world would be passed on to him. He wanted to be the firstborn who would be responsible for adding the finishing touches to the world, signing G-d's signature on Creation. And that takes sacrifice. If Yaakov wanted those firstborn rights, his family needed to go through Egyptian bondage, exile and Exodus, for they needed to go through what G-d told Avraham, ידע תדע כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם, ועבדום ושנה אתם ארבע מאות שנה. *You must surely know that your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will be put to hard labor and subjected to suffering for four hundred years.* It was in the decadence and the obscurity of Egypt that we merited to be בני בכוּרי ישראל, G-d's firstborn.

This is why, even though Esav gave up his portion by selling his firstborn rights for a pot of lentils, G-d did not call Ya'akov His firstborn, until this much-later point of the Jewish story. This is why Esav asked for the right to be buried in Me'arat Hamachpela, next to Leah, in Yaakov's place, for he claimed that although he had given up his firstborn rights, Yaakov did not yet deserve them, and would

not have earned them until he went through 400 years of slavery.

This is why G-d told Pharaoh, "If you prevent My children from exercising their right to sacrifice to Me, I will smite your firstborn, measure for measure." The Jews merited the title of G-d's firstborn; the Jews are about sacrifice, about bringing G-dliness to the world, no matter how steeped in materialism the world may be. The word for sacrifice is קרבן, Karban. The root of that word is קרב, Karov, getting close. We bring G-dliness into the world through sacrificing material possessions and benefits for spiritual values.

I always wondered why the law is that a gentile who keeps Shabbat is punished by death. (Sanhedrin 58b) The Talmud quotes the passuk ויום ולילה לא ישבותו *And day and night shall not rest* (Bresheit 8;22) What does the passuk that is referring to Creation not stopping have any connection to the gentile keeping Shabbat? The answer is because the Jews merited the present of Shabbat, a time when we get a special closeness to G-d, for being His firstborn. This is why it is called נחלה יעקב, an inheritance for Yaakov. Only because we went through the pain and suffering of Egypt did we merit Shabbat, the gift of refraining from working the world, in order to infuse it with spirituality. Because only a Jewish Nation is willing to go through hard times, bringing G-dliness to the world, even in a place of immorality. Although there are gentiles who are spiritualistic, but their spirituality has nothing to do with Jewish spirituality. Judaism is the only religion where spirituality means elevating something material to something spiritual. For the gentiles, spirituality is the opposite of materialism. But Judaism is about partnering with G-d in making the World – even the material world – into a spiritual one.



Judaism is about living a Torah life, a G-dly life. Bringing G-dliness into life, and bringing

spirituality into the material world and into the Mitzrayim that we find ourselves in.

Striving to Serve

So many Mitzvot are Zecher Leyitziat Mizrayim. Kiddush, Sukkot, Pesach, Tefillin, Bechor, Petter Chamor, Kriat Shema, etc. The list of reminders doesn't end. Why do we keep reminding ourselves of the Exodus from Mitzrayim? And why is it so important?

The Sifri writes why so many Mitzvot of the Torah are reminders of the Exodus. אָנִי יְקֹנֵן אֶלְהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם *I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt from your being their Slaves.* (Bamidbar 15; 41) It is similar to a king whose beloved son was captured. When he took him out of captivity, he did not free him to be his son again. Instead, he made him a royal slave. So that when the son would not want to listen to his father the King, the King would take out the contract showing that he had bought this son as a slave, and say, "You are my slave". That is why Hashem took us out of Egypt, so that we would serve Him, even when we are not in the mood. Even when it is hard. This is the reason why we have so many Mitzvot to remind us of the Exodus. Because the Exodus was part of the plan to make us G-d's servants.) Sifri Shlach on the passuk)

In his master work Sichot Mussar, R Chaim Shmulevitz has not one essay written on being an Eved Hashem – but three!!! In the first edition, R Chaim summed it up as following: If a person can say, "I really love to eat pork, but what can I do – G-d said no!", that is the ultimate servant of G-d. When a person puts his passion on pause, when a person downplays his desires in order to listen to G-d and His 613, that person is the quintessential Servant of G-d. (עבד ה' 3) To be G-d's servant means not to have your own opinion, if G-d

has one. This is very different from being a son. A son can "not be in the mood". But a servant must always be in the mood. G-d reminds you of the Exodus in order to remind you that you need to always be in the mood for the 613. A son has choice. A servant has no choice.

The weeks from Shemot until Terumah – Tetzaveh, that were given the acronym of Shovavim, the "wild" weeks, have a special power hidden in them. These are the weeks when G-d calls you His son, His Firstborn. בני בכורי ישראל. These are the weeks when you become an עבד ה', G-d's servant. כי לי בני-ישראל עבדים. (Vayikra 25; 55) Becoming G-d's servant, serving G-d, is the recurring message. G-d told Pharaoh שליח את עמי ועבדוני *Send My nation and they will serve Me.*

We say in the Shema every day, that if we listen to G-d and His Mitzvot, to love Him and to serve Him, with all of our hearts and all of our souls, we will merit all the blessings of the Torah. On the flip side, the biggest punishments we get are not because we misbehaved. But because we were not *happy servants*. תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' The first words in Mishpatim that G-d told Moshe to tell the People at Har Sinai are – that you guys are My slaves, and not slaves to slaves! The Zohar teaches that the passuk that says כי לי בני-ישראל עבדים, Your being G-d's servant, is not just a revelation. It is a Mitzvah. There is a Mitzvah to be a servant of Hashem, specifically in prayer. According to the Rambam, we have a Mitzvah to pray from the words ועבדתם את ה' אלוהיכם, and we learn this from the words we

say in Shema ולעבדו בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם
(Rambam Tefillah1;1)

The Mishna in Avot teaches that a servant of G-d is the most free person in the world. והמכתב מכתב אלוקים חרות על הלוחות” (שמות ל”ב) “אל תקרא חרות אלא חרות שאין לך בן חורין, אלא מי ששוסק בתורה” The only person who is truly free is the one who lives a life of Torah (Avot 6:2). Only by following the חרות of the Tablets can one become a free man. This is what King David said in his Psalms, and something we chant along with him, in Hallel. אָנְּהָ יְקוֹנֵם בְּיַאֲנֵי. *Please G-d, because I am your servant, I am servant the son of your maidservant. You have released my bonds.*

How does this make any sense? Isn't the person who is free to do whatever he wants more “free” than the person who is confined to a lifestyle of 613? How can it be that the way to freedom is through slavery?

The truth is that serving G-d, being G-d's slave, is different from slavery. A free life without a moral compass is a life of misery, for G-d is inside you. וַיְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ (Bereshit 1:27). When you serve G-d, when you follow His Torah, you live with moral conscience; you live with your goals. You have inner peace, between the opposing drives inside you, between your basic instincts and the standards you wish you were on. The 613 is this sort of map, with a lot of restrictions, rules and regulation, that will take you to your life's purpose, in the most direct and the fastest way possible. And then, you are free to become who you really can become.

The first man to become G-d's servant was Moshe. Then, Yehoshua and Kalev. We needed to go through Egypt to become G-d's

servant. Going through difficulties is the fundamental element in the whole process.

Whenever you have a hard time in life serving G-d, it is part of G-d's plan to remind you that you are just His servant. Our Rabbis teach that one should make no interruption between Redemption to Prayers. (Berachot 4b) Our prayers, our Avodah, our service, is connected to our redemption. Both the Redemption of Exodus ישראל, and the Redemption that each and every one of us go through in the present גואל ישראל. When G-d frees you from your troubles, you owe Him so much, you feel such gratitude, that you are willing to be his slave.

Why is prayer the pinnacle of serving G-d? There are three parts to prayer. 1. Praise. 2. Requesting. 3. Thanks. I could understand how the first and last part of prayer are serving G-d. But what about the requesting part? Is that also serving? When we pray for health, financial assistance, wisdom, that G-d answer our prayers... is all this asking also serving?

The Maharal (Netiv HaAvoda1) says that asking is a tremendous form of serving. There is no greater serving G-d than showing Him how you recognize that you are dependent upon Him. That he holds the keys. He has the medicine. He controls all of the markets and exactly how many cents you have or don't have in your bank account. He is your doctor, and He is your “hard drive”. When you recognize that He is the boss, you are ready to give up all for the Boss. And once we become G-d's servant, once we accept Him as the Ultimate Power in the Universe, He answers all of our prayers. If your prayers have not been answered yet, it is probably because you are not ready to be called G-d's Servant (See Berachot 34b).

So, this morning, I woke up and asked myself – Yosef! Are you ready to serve? It was a different morning. I put on my Tefillin, to display that all of our senses are subservient to G-d. Four boxes on the head, for the four senses up there, Sight, Sound, Smell and Taste. One box on the arm, for the sense of Feeling. Just as we say in the Leshem Yichud, wearing Tefillin is proclaiming that we are making all

THE ART OF ADAPTING TO CHANGE

We all like Seder, order. But life is not Seder. It never was and never will be. When life has no Seder, we are forced to think hard and make an internal Seder. I.e., we are forced to answer the hardest questions in life. “What is important?” “What is more important?” “What are my long-term, 5, 10, 20-year goals? Olam Haba’s goals?” “How is my busying myself with my short-term goals preventing me from achieving my long-term goals?”

There is a powerful Segulah from the Mekubalim to save one from pandemics. The Segulah is to read the 42 travels of the Jewish Nation in the desert, and then to read how before each journey, the Jews were not sure where the next trip would take them. Reading this, experiencing this uncertainty of “no order,” of no idea where I will be tomorrow, is the Tikun, the rectification of pandemics. Accepting powerlessness with faith, and adapting to the new circumstances, seems to be a trait that G-d wants us all to develop.

How do we survive change we did not ask for, when things are out of order? How do we tap into the correct inner voices and know which voices to ignore? As usual, life’s answers hide in the weekly Torah portion. (see Esther R 7 17)

In this week’s Parasha, Aharon experienced the loss of his two childless elder sons, the

of our senses subservient to G-d. And although the Tefillin of the head has four compartments, we put on the Tefillin of the arm first, to proclaim the ultimate subservience, *נעשה ונשמע*. We will do, and then we will listen. Even if we have no idea why G-d wants us to serve Him in the way He chooses, we don’t ask any questions.

future Gedolei Hador. Moshe consoled his brother Aharon that the death of these holy giants was for a higher purpose of showing the world not to meddle with the holiness of G-d’s Temple, no matter how holy you are. Aharon’s response was legendary. *וידם אהרן*. Aharon stayed silent. The passuk uses the word *דום*. Not *שתק*, which is the classic word for silence. Why?

Another question. We see that the rewards that Aharon received for this silence were that G-d spoke to him, (Berachot 6b) and, in the merit of his silence, Aharon and his descendants merited the eternal Birkat Kohanim. (*וידם* is numerical value of 60, the amount of the words in Birkat Kohanim. Midrash A.) How are these two rewards “measure for measure”?

The word *דום* is more than silent. It means to hold something that is in motion in place *שָׁמַר מִיָּדָיו*. (*Yehoshua 10 12*) To freeze your inner emotions. Aharon had so much to say, so many questions, so many tears to cry, so many shattered dreams... But Aharon stopped. He adapted to the situation. When you understand that change has taken place, when G-d does not give you options, we can only accept G-d. When change challenges us, we can only look back. We can never go back. M.J. Ryan, in *How to survive change you did not ask for*, helps us adapt to the new realities we did not choose by adapting seven truths.



1. Change is guaranteed to happen, sometime, somehow. Always embrace yourself for it. 2. It's not personal. You are not the only one. 3. What's comfortable, your habitual thoughts and behaviors, are not your friends. Learn objectivity. Learn to take a new, fresh look at the world that is present, as the first time you realize reality. 4. Change is not the enemy. Fear is. Time to remember your accomplishments and blessings. 5. Adapting emotionally to change is a cycle. Denial. Anger. Bargaining. Depression. Acceptance. 6. You're more resilient than you think. 7. G-d packed inside your soul's suitcase for life, the bedrock of strengths and values that make you unique. Learn what is inside your 120-year bag. Take this suitcase with you to your next stage of life.

Aharon knew that being a Jew means being ready to accept change as fast as it comes. No use in hanging on to the past, wondering what happened, how it happened or why it happened. The way to do this is to silence fear, denial, anger, bargaining, depression. *G-d is everything. And G-d is only good.* In the merit of silencing his inner voices, and listening to the new reality G-d made for him, Aharon merited to hear G-d speak to him. And in the merit of accepting it all, he was gifted with the eternal Birkat Kohanim, the blessing that tells us, that no matter what happens, G-d is blessing us and watching over us. That there is always good hidden in the darkest of times.

One person in Israel was quick on his feet. The first thing he did after Purim, was to close his business, and get the Misrad Habriut, Health Ministry, to OK his new, home-made 70% alcohol hand sanitizers, within 20 hours! He did not waste time reading more news, watching or sending WhatsApp clips that were irrelevant to him personally. He was not going to ponder the situation, hemming and hawing

why it is like it is, whose fault it is, or speculate how long it will take. He was not getting stuck in denial. He did not accept the belief that "there is nothing I can do." Instead, he focused on solutions, and on what new things he was willing to learn despite that it takes extra effort. He embraced the situation, knew what he needed to do, and he accomplished it. He was not going to wait for someone or something to come along to rescue him from having to change i.e., government grants. Instead, he identified new needs and how to use what's happening to align even more with the market. He was able to say fast enough, *OK, that's over, now what?*

Life is nothing more than adapting to circumstances in which we exist. This perspective is the secret to health, happiness, and serenity. King David took this concept of acceptance and adapting to a whole new level *למען יזמרך בְּבוֹד וְלֹא יִגַּם יְקַנְךָ אֲלֵקֵי לְעוֹלָם אֲנִידָךְ* *So that Kavod (my soul) will praise you, and it will not silence. YKVK, my G-d, no matter what, I will always praise you* (Tehillim 30, 13) I will use the situation, no matter what it is, and find ways how to thank Hashem for it.

We were all forced to learn new skills we never realized we could be good at. Haircuts, storytelling, cleaning for Pesach, running a Seder on our own, and learning how to use the internet to better our learning, businesses, connecting with people, and saving time. We are all forced to question what we have been so busy with outside of our houses and families. And we all began to wonder where we were so busy running to and why we need fancy cars or overpriced brand-name clothing. We begin to wonder why we need to make over-attended and extravagant Semachot. And as painful as it is, the circumstance forces us to rethink why



we attend our synagogues and how much we miss Minyan.

Probably the best thing I did to regain my sanity was to make a list of things I have no control over, and a list of things I do have control over. One of the things that helped me a lot was the realization of so many things I took for granted that I now have to thank G-d for. One of them, of course, is that I could be thankful for every breath I take. **כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהִלָּל** For every breath, **עַל כָּל נְשִׁימָה וְנְשִׁימָה**, we need to thank G-d. (Bereshit R 14 9) This passuk is at the very end of Tehillim, and the passuk that is relevant to the end of times, something that is so pertinent to specifically our times. This passuk, we say before Vayebarech David, which represents King David's blessing G-d for his accumulation of funds to build the Temple. May we merit in our days.

Here are the Selfie Steps to adapt and survive change you didn't ask for.

1. *This is not that.* People compare change to other change. 2020 is not 2008. 2020 is not 9/11. 2020 is not Pearl Harbor. 2020 is 2020. America is not Italy or China or Israel. And we should look at each country, with a new and fresh 20/20 look. Compare only to learn what to embrace for.
2. What is working now? Let us do more of that. What is not working now? Let us do less of that.

3. When there is a lot of change look for “game changers”. Don't settle with just improving something that could be *so* much better. Steve Jobs taught us that a better “Palm Pilot” is selling yourself short.
4. Don't make a five-foot wave into a tsunami. Don't make things worse than they actually are.
5. More often than not, the things we fear most don't end up happening, and the things we fear least, can metamorphosis into our biggest crisis. Always think of worst-case scenarios and embrace yourself for any change that may come.
6. Stay positive, no matter what. G-d allows us to confine ourselves to our own beliefs. Don't make your situation worse than it has to be, via negative thinking.
7. Learn how to silence emotions so that you can hear your rational inner voice. Feelings come and feelings go, but logic and rational stay forever. The only way to silence emotions and hear rational is by turning your head into a GemaraKup. **תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבָת יִקְנֶה תְּהִלָּתוֹ וְיִקְנֶה יְקָרָתוֹ וְיִקְנֶה מִחֲפִימַת פְּתִי:**

THE ART OF LEARNING LESSONS

The most important of all the lessons of history, is that men do not learn very much from the lessons of history. Covid, as well, has a lesson for everyone. According to YouGov, a research and data analytics firm, only 8 percent

of Brits of England want to go back to life as it was before the pandemic. According to *The Economist*, Covid forced a home-working experiment that is likely to change work life



forever, to some virtual/live hybrid model that is more time effective and cost efficient.

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

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

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

The Mitzvah of Matzah is to remember the hasty Redemption, when there was not enough time for the dough to rise. The Mitzvah of

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

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

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

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

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

But, some people live their life not listening to their messages. Some people never learn, never pay attention, never take insight. This was the lesson of the Plagues, and why each one was given in a measure for measure format. Of course, G-d could have just struck the whole of Egypt with one big lightening flash, and called it a day. But G-d allowed the back-and-forth with Pharaoh, his Egyptian nation and the Jewish people, to teach us this lesson of what happens when people do not learn the lessons. When G-d warns that all animals that are left outdoors will die in the Plague of Pestilence, only those who “feared G-d” listened. And those who did not fear G-d, and ignored His word, who left their animals outdoors, lost them to the Plague. What? This is called “G-d fearing”? You have to be a fool to not listen to Moshe’s warning, after the first four Plagues! But this is what G-d-fearing means, at its core. It means **not ignoring G-d’s** Selfie steps for learning life lessons

messages. From all the things that were bad about Amalek, the epitome of Amalek’s wickedness was **וְלֹא יִרְאֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים** *And he is not G-d fearing.* (Devarim 25;18) What? Amalek has plenty of things to work on before expecting from them fear of G-d. Because G-d-fearing means not ignoring the messages of G-d. And the core of all Amalek’s wickedness was ignoring the strength of G-d in the Exodus.

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored, and G-d does not cease to exist because He is ignored. Ignoring G-d’s messages has a hefty price tag. If a person ignores G-d’s message, **לֹא יִשְׁכַּח אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** G-d won’t want to forgive the person, ever. (Devarim 29; 19) G-d’s message in the Exodus was **וְיָדַעְתָּ כִּי אֵין כָּמוֹנִי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ** So that you will know that there is none like Me in all the land. That there exists no being like G-d – that was the lesson of the first three Plagues, **דַּע”ך**. No other being or entity is aware of the world and involved in it as G-d is; this is the lesson of the next three **עַד”ש** Plagues. There is no being, no entity with the infinite strength and power that G-d has. That is the message of the Plagues of **בְּאֵה”ב**. (See Kley Yakar)

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

1. All humans make mistakes. Not all humans learn from them. To learn lessons from your mistakes, you need to look past your shame, past your failures, ignore feelings of regret... all of which are temporary, while lessons are hopefully permanent. Nothing can empower

you for your future like the lessons learnt from the mistakes of your past. Unfortunately, some of the best lessons of life can only be taught to us the hard way.

2. The experiences, the people, the adversities, the challenges of your life, are all there to teach you lessons. Nothing was put into your life randomly.
3. Never fail to learn lessons in life from the most unordinary places. Oftentimes, G-d packages lessons in the most ridiculous, unexpected, annoying, packages.

THE ART OF FIGHTING YOUR YETZER HARA

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

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

The answer is the original Chametz. The first year that the Jews had to leave Egypt, they had no time to wait. If they had waited just another minute for the dough to rise, they would not

have been able to leave Egypt! So many times in life, the reason we are not performing our best is because we are not jumping to the opportunity. We procrastinate. This is the way the Yetzer Hara gets us: he finds something small for us to busy ourselves with first, before the most important things, and this prevents us from getting around to the most important things. Similar to the word *הימור*, missing an opportunity, or, letting something good go sour, as you did not take advantage of it when it had its greatest value. The Passover holiday is the holiday of freedom, and the only way to be free of the Yetzer Hara is by recognizing what it is and staying far, far away from it.

Each year at the Seder, the Chatam Sofer would tell his family that there were two ways, then, that the Yetzer Hara tested the Jews in Egypt before the Redemption, and these two tests will repeat themselves before the Final Redemption. The first test was running after money. During the plague of darkness, the Jews saw the houses of their Egyptian enemies and their immense wealth, and their hearts burned with the desire to take advantage of the opportunity to take as much money as they could, partially out of revenge for their slavery and oppression. The second test was the test of fear, because on the night of Passover, the Jews were hidden away in their homes, and they heard the most horrific cries anyone has



ever heard. The Jews were not sure if it was only the cries of the Egyptians over their first born, or if it was more Jews who were dying. (During the plague of darkness, 12 million Jews, the Jews who were not ready to leave, died in Egypt. Only one fifth, three million Jews, left Egypt.) But the Jews believed in Moshe and stayed indoors, and waited for instructions. The same test will be in the times of Mashiach. People will be tested in the End of Days with a tremendous passion to chase after opportunities to amass wealth, and there will be tremendous fear. And in the times of Mashiach, we will be saved, only in the merit of listening to our great Rabbis. (Michtav Sofer, Ch. S. Parashat Beshalach, ורחמישים)

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

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

creeps up on you. You give him a finger, and he swallows you up.

The Yetzer Hara tries, first and foremost, to get us to become haughty, to have an inflated ego, similar to the rising element of Chametz. This is how he gets us angry. And just like there is a very fine line, a delicate balance, between a healthy self-esteem and an inflated ego, there is only a small difference, a “fine line” between the words חמץ and מצה. The Yetzer Hara never convinces us to do things we don’t *really* want to do. Instead, he convinces us to do the most minute wrong thing and continue transgressing the “fine letters” of our Rabbis, until it convinces us to transgress the worst. (Shabbat 105b) The Yetzer Hara is paralleled to Chametz in the sense that Chametz rises quietly and unnoticed, and it slowly doubles and triples its original size when you just leave it on its own: so too does the Evil Inclination function, imperceptibly multiplying and magnifying our negative habits and tendencies.

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

We don’t have Chametz in our homes for only seven days. But in the Beit Hamikdash, Chametz was not allowed all year. אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ לֵה' לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה חֻמֵּץ כִּי כֹל-שֶׂאֵר וְכֹל-דֶבֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְטְרוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אֵשָׁה לֵה'. Chametz is something that we are not allowed to bring a sacrifice from. Except twice. We are allowed to bring Chametz in a sacrifice on Shavuot, in the Two Breads. And when a person brings the Todah



sacrifice, for having been saved from ה'י'י'ם which stands for חבוס captivity, ייסורים sickness of affliction, ים sea, מדבר desert. וכל ההיים יודוך סלה.

Why are these the two exceptions for bringing Chametz? Because there are two places where the Yetzer Hara has no influence. On a person who is thankful to G-d, who realizes how we are totally dependent on Him. And on a person who is in the Bet HaMidrash learning Torah, which Shavuot is all about. As the Talmud teaches, if you meet the Yetzer Hara, bring Selfie steps to fight the Yetzer Hara

him to the Beit Hamidrash, because the involvement and immersion in Torah will melt him away. (Maharal Tifferet Yisrael; Succah 52b; Kiddushin 30b)

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

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



suggestions for self-improvement it uses second person (You shouldn't be eating another slice of pizza). 2. Therefore, the Yetzer Hara always says what it wants, while the Yetzer Tov always says what you should, or should not, do. Notice the *should* thought and notice the *you*. This is why, it helps to repeat to yourself, again and again, positive commands, in first person, and in present tense. (I want, now, to stay healthy, and only eat nutritious food).

THE ART OF FAITH

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

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

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

there, that the count was only 210 years, because the 400 started from when Yitzhak was born. But why does the passuk say that the Jews were in Egypt for 430 years? (Shemot 12;40) 4. Why do we drink only four cups, if there is not four terminologies of redemption G-d used when speaking to Moshe, but seemingly five? Isn't there, also, another terminology of redemption, והבאתי?

The answer is that Yosef, who was destined to be responsible for his brothers in Egypt, was worried about one thing, until he heard the dream of the Butler. How could the Jews survive the 400 years, stay with a Jewish identity and not fall to the 50th level of impurity, a point of no return? 400 years is too much to endure! Yosef knew he was not just randomly in an Egyptian jail for a crime he didn't commit, but on a mission for something greater than himself, to provide and bring his brothers to endure the 400 years G-d told Avraham about, and he knew that there was a Seder, a sequence of events that would lead to his redemption. When Yosef heard the dream of the butler, in which he did not use the word גביע, goblet, for Pharaoh, but instead used the word כוס, cup, Yosef got the hint! The numerical value of כוס, is 86. 86 is not only the amount of wine (86cc) that is a Reviit, the required measurement. It is also the numerical value of G-d's Name Elokim, the Attribute of Judgement. Yosef figured, that G-d was telling



him not to worry. There would be 86 years of harsh and bitter slavery, in order to speed up the redemption date, and we would not need the four hundred to be redeemed. (Miriam was named her name for the bitterness of the exile that began in her day, וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיִּיהֶם, and she was 86 years old when she left Egypt.) We would be freed from Egypt, after just 210 years.

Now, if we do the math, we will be blown away. Because we left Egypt *before* the 400 years were up, we needed a total of 430 years to fulfill the decree on Avraham. We did only 86 years in Egypt, but we would need to do another 44 times 86, to achieve 344, the numerical value of שמד. Every time the Jews go through difficult times, it is called שמד, because we are finishing up the 344-year quota. We did one of the five כּוֹס in Egypt, and 86 times 5 is 430. The reason why we do not drink five cups of wine of redemption, but instead only four, is because we did the first 86 years in Egypt! We drink the four cups, so that G-d will consider that the exile that we are going through is going to cover the other four cups of wine as well. (See Torat Chaim Chullin 92a)

A lot of times in life, we ask questions; we want to know the Seder of events, we want to understand. But this world is the place of lack of understanding, Olam from the root of העלם, hidden. Avraham asked G-d a question, 'How will I know that I will be given the Land of Israel?', and we are still dealing with the 400-year decree till today. When Avraham was asked to offer up his son on the Altar, Avraham asked, which son? I have two sons, Yitzhak and Yishmael. G-d told him, your only son, and Avraham answered, both sons are the only son to their mother. And then, G-d said, the son you love, to which Avraham answered, I love both sons. Finally, G-d told him,

Yitzhak! If Avraham had not asked questions, he would just have brought Yishmael up as a sacrifice, and we would never have heard from the Arabs again!

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

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



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

There is something about Leah’s praise that can blow your mind. Leah had six boys, and in her seventh pregnancy, she prayed that this Selfie steps to faith, patience, and positivity

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

pregnancy would not take away from her barren sister Rachel’s chance to have her portion of at least 2 tribes. So, G-d gave Leah a daughter, Dina, instead of a son Yosef, who was given to Rachel. Leah thought, hey, at least I can get a son-in-law who is a Talmid Chacham to marry Dina.

Instead, Dina was raped by Shechem, and Dina came home to her mother Leah, embarrassed and... pregnant. Dina’s child Osnat was sent away by the Tribes, and G-d sent an angel to take Osnat down to Egypt, and in the end... she married Yosef... and from that marriage, two more Tribes, Menashe and Ephraim, came into being! Leah did not see the end of it; she died a year or two before Yosef was sold (Sefer Hadorot/ Sefer Hayashar). But she praised G-d knowing, that all along, there is a Seder to every redemption!

THE ART OF OVERCOMING THE BEAST WITHIN



It has been said, that when you pray, you are talking to G-d, and when you learn Torah, G-d is talking to you. I would like to add to that. When you are praying, you are contemplating how great G-d is. But when you are learning Torah, you are contemplating how great YOU can become. How G-dly, how holy, how connected to G-d and to the truth of His word you can be.

Darwinians have an agenda in tracking humans to apes, and gentiles are busy with animal “rights”, as if the more we compare ourselves to animals, the less responsible we are for our animalistic natures; it’s a disclaimer, of sorts. The Torah tells you that you can be an animal, if you choose. But G-d directs us to become G-dly, and expects that from us.

This is the whole concept of Sefirat Ha’omer: disconnecting from the animal side of the human, soaring with the soul. This is why we bring the Korban Omer at the outset of the counting, a korban of barley, of animal food. The only other barley korban is that of the Sotah, who acted upon her animalistic nature. (See Sotah 14a) We count 49 days, and then, on Shavuot, we bring the Korban of Two Breads, a wheat Korban, human food. This is because, through Tikkun Hamiddot, the character improvement we learn in Massechet Avot during Sefirat Haomer, we are disconnecting from our animalistic side, so that we can ready ourselves to accept the Torah and be G-dly. Each day of the Omer we count upwards, from 1 – 49 and not downward out of anticipation for the Torah from 49-1, because each day we are moving *away* from the animalistic part of ourselves, **מה** , “what is in it for me”, to **אדם**, which is from the root of **אדמה**, *Adameh*, I will be like Him.

We can live our whole life focusing on ourselves, on our passions and pleasures, on

our instincts, the essence of an animal, focusing only on what is in it for me, ignoring others, ignoring G-d, even ignoring the soul. Or, we can concentrate on the purpose we were actually created for, to have a relationship with G-d, to be connected to Him, through prayer and through Torah learning, and to be like Him. **זֶה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֲנִי וְהוּא** : *This is my G-d and I can be like Him.*)Shabbat 133b)

All sin is the result of not controlling the animal component in our personality. G-d wants us to fight this and beware of our instincts, **הוּו זְהִירִים בְּרִשׁוֹת** Beware of indulging in things that are permitted, because when a person allows indulgence, that brings him to sin, every time, and the source for life’s problems. Indulgence brings upon us Amalek and is the power of **עַמְלֶק** – to get us to forget what his acronym stands for: **ק’דש ע’צמך במ’ותר** : ל’ך. Being G-dly means to sanctify ourselves even in what is allowed. When the Jews indulged in the party of Achashverosh, **נְהוּ** , **בסעודתו**, the indulgence is what brought upon themselves Haman, the power of Amalek.

When King David says that he will give you advice how to live, this is what he says, **אֲשַׁקְלֶיךָ וְאוֹרָךְ בְּדַרְדְּרוֹתַי חֲלָה אֵינְעָה עָלֶיךָ עֵינַי** : “Don’t be like a horse, like a mule, with no knowledge!” The best advice you can get is: stay away from the animalistic component of your nature! King David goes on to explain what he means. Animals don’t understand that some painful things in life are for the best. Animals won’t let you get close to them, even if you want to help them, if the help you give them pains them. Humans can understand that things that don’t seem to be for our good are, actually, the best thing possible for us.

This takes us back to the creation of Man. Psychology’s claim that man’s nature includes

an “animal” component, is true. After all, man is created מן האדמה dirt from the earth. But, we know that G-d created Man with a Neshama: וַיִּפֶּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגַגֶּשׁ תְּחִלָּה. G-d breathed into Man, a “breath” from Himself, G-d blew from Himself into Man. Man has a combination in him of Heaven and Earth, and if he becomes G-dly, he can rise to the level of angels, and even higher. וְנִמְתְּי לָהֶם מְהֵרָה (Zecharia 3;7) But if Man does not rise to the Heavenly challenge and becomes haughty from obtaining possessions and unbridled passions, G-d tells him to humble himself, recognizing that even the creation of the mosquito was before that of Man. (Sanhedrin 38a)

With this in mind, we can better appreciate the Rashi at the outset of Parashat Tazriah, the parasha that begins discussing the laws of purity and impurity of humans, immediately after discussing in Parashat Shemini the laws of impurity of animals. We understand this comment in a new light. An animal is always stationary. It is either a pure animal, if it has split hooves and chews its cud, or it is impure. It is a kosher fish if it has fins and scales, or it is rendered unkosher if it does not. But humans are dynamic: they can be impure or pure, depending upon circumstance and upon their behavior. A lifeless human body is the most impure of all impurities, even more impure than the most impure animal. Why? Man was created last of all creations, and is called אָדָם, that he comes from the אדמה, from the ground, because it has influence of all the animals in it, as all the animals are from the ground. וְנִעֲשֶׂה אָדָם, “Let us create Man”, according to the

Zohar, means that all the creatures infused a part of themselves into the creation of Man. This is why a dead body is the greatest impurity on earth, because a body contains a part of all the animals in it.

It is true. Animals are linked to Apes, but in the opposite direction. The reason we recite the blessing משנה הבריות, *Who changed the creatures*, when we see a monkey and an elephant (Berachot 58b) is because the monkeys and elephants came from Man, when G-d punished the builders of the Babylonian Tower. This is why monkeys and elephants are the only creatures, other than humans, that recognize themselves in the mirror. There are other similarities between monkey and elephants and humans. (Monkeys address inequality: if one monkey is rewarded less, they all go on strike. Only elephants grieve their dead: when elephants pass remains of its kind, they stop to give it attention, smelling and touching, and repeatedly passing by the corpse.) Because they were once humans, who became animals. (See Sanhedrin 109a)

Psychologists are wrong when they claim that a person is incapable of change, and he is a victim to his nature. Because they relate only to the animalistic component of the human being. Sefirat Haomer is a special time of the year: the Kadmonim teach that the way one behaves in these days can impact his behavior, for the entire year. By working to improve our middot during this period, we can refine our character – elevating even the “animal” component that we all have.

Selfie steps to overcome the beast within:

1. Positivity. Like King David taught above, to be positive, optimistic, even when things look bleak. Optimism is not just a self-help trick. It is the real truth. The animalistic part of you is responsible for the fight or flight reflex, and this is the root of pessimism, to



protect you from a future negative experience. It makes it seem that the winter will never turn to spring. R Akiva is such a fundamental character in Sefirat Haomer, because he is the forefather of positive thinking. The final letters of the words 'אור' זרע' לצדיק' וְלִישְׂרָיִלְב' שְׁמֵהָה spell עקיבה. All the stories of R' Akiva are stories of positive thinking and חביבין יסורין. He is also the one who taught that Man is lucky, for he was created in G-d's Image, not just another animal.

2. You become more G-dly when you think thoughts outside of yourself, like the unique ability of Man to be able to recognize himself in the mirror. You can make the world a better place. But when you can't see outside yourself, מה אני – וכשאני לעצמי. When I am only for myself, and involved with only myself, what am I? I am not even a “Who”. I am only a “What”, an animal.
3. The reason why we sin, is not because we want to sin. As the Chafetz Chaim teaches in Shaarei Tvuna, the reason why people sin is because the animalistic component in their nature took over their character. The acronym is כל גיהנום, all of Hell, and it stands for כ'עס, ל'יצנות, ג'אנה, י'אוש, ה'פקר, נ'רגנות, אומר מ'תר. Anger, Making light of important things, Haughtiness, Despair, Lack of boundaries, Complaining, being Uneducated, all together spell “All of Gehinom”.

IF YOU ARE ENJOYING THESE ARTICLES FREE EACH WEEK, PLEASE HELP SUPPORT THIS PUBLICATION!

SPECIAL OFFER! Take upon yourself to spread the papers/emails and receive free coaching sessions with Rabbi Y. Farhi! Send an email to rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com for details.

One week's sponsor to cover all costs is \$100.

These articles are being distributed to over 20 thousand readers each week!

To support this publication, or receive it by e-mail, please email me at rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H

Refuah Shelema Yaakov Mordechai ben Malka and Rachel Malka bas Liba

