



Parashat Shemot



English version

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THE ART OF REDIRECTING YOUR NATURE

The Tur rules the Halacha: *You can do the mitzvah of circumcision with whatever utensil you want... even with a sharp stone, with glass, or with anything that can cut. But it is a special mitzvah to use an iron utensil, ברזל.* (YD 264) The Perisha comments, quoting the Midrash: When young King David took five stones and wanted to shoot them with his slingshot at Goliath's face, there was a slight problem: Goliath's iron armor entirely covered Goliath's face and body! The Angel of Iron did not want to allow the stone to break through it, as this would defy the laws of nature, that iron is stronger than rock. But G-d promised the Angel of Iron, that in the merit of the Iron allowing the stones to pierce through it, the Jewish people would circumcise with iron, and no longer with a sharp stone. Until that time, the Jews circumcised with stone, as proven from two sources: In our Parasha, we see that Tzipporah, Moshe's wife, circumcised her son, Gershom, in the inn on the way down to Egypt, and saved Moshe from the snake that came to kill him. ותקח צפרה צר ותכרת את-עַרְלַת בְּנֵהּ ומגַע לרגְליו ותאמַר כִּי יִבְעַת הֵיאָ אִמֶּר יִקְנֹךְ אֱלֹהֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל: It is clear that she used a צור, which is a sharp stone. We see that Yehoshua also used a צור, a stone, to circumcise the Jewish people before entering the Holy Land. יבְעַת הֵיאָ אִמֶּר יִקְנֹךְ אֱלֹהֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל: This exception to nature, that rock could pierce the iron/steel, was super-important at that time. It was a time when the Jews were being oppressed and controlled by the Pelishtim. The Pelishtim had captured the Holy Ark and killed Eli Hakohen's two sons, Hofni and Pinhas, a while back. The

Pelishtim did not allow the Jewish people to have any iron/steel, as they were concerned about the possibility of a revolution. This agreement between the Angel of Rock with the Angel of Iron is what saved the Jewish People at that time. Therefore, it is a special mitzvah to circumcise with iron.

But what does circumcision have to do with David's victory over Goliath? What is the measure for measure that the iron is getting paid back, for allowing the stone to pierce it?

Goliath was referred to by David as הפְּלִשְׁתִּי הָעֵרֶל "this uncircumcised Pelishti". This was not just a fight between David and Goliath. In the bleachers, in the stands, there were two important spectators: Ruth and Orpah, the two Moabite princesses that married Naomi's sons. Ruth converted and joined Naomi, while Orpah left her mother-in-law, and slept with many non-Jewish men on the night that she parted from Naomi. (Sotah 42b) Ruth was King David's grandmother, and Orpah was Goliath's mother. In the merit that Orpah cried four tears when she left her mother-in-law Naomi and kissed her, Orpah was blessed by G-d with four giant sons; the strongest of them all was Goliath! Goliath was referred to by David as the עֵרֶל, the uncircumcised, for not only his audacity to curse G-d and His People כִּי חָרַף מְעַרְבוֹת אֱלֹקִים חַיִּים, but for his mother's belief that Goliath adopted, that there was no G-d fear, and live life with the most materialistic pleasure possible!



But still, what is the connection of specifically using the iron/steel for the circumcision?

The circumcision is to make us unnatural. To change the way that G-d created Man. We are created with material desires, passions, and we make the treaty with G-d: We promise that we are going to act in a holy way, we are going to have marital relations only after Kiddushin, we will break our natural desires and passions and use them only for the purpose of building families, in permissible marital relationships. The iron went against its nature, and allowed rock to penetrate it. G-d, we promise you that we will go against our nature, and only use our desires for a greater purpose than indulgence!

This is what Yirat Shamayim means! Literally, this means Fear of Heaven. Why do we fear Heaven? Wouldn't it be more correct to say, fear of G-d in heaven!? The Ben Ish Hai tells us that this is not what Yirat Shamayim means. Rashi tells us, in the very beginning of Bereshit, that one of the three reasons why Shamayim is the Hebrew word for heaven is because heaven is a mix of אש ומים. Fire and Water, in heaven, live together, against their nature, to do G-d's Will. So too, we are to have Yirat Shamayim. We are to fear G-d in such a way that we are going against our nature, to serve Him. This is what the Brit Milah is about. To be a fighter for spirituality! So, we prefer to use the iron that went against its nature and allowed the stone to pierce through it, to serve G-d, to bring G-dliness to the world!

The Sefer Ateret Paz, though, has another point as to why we prefer to use iron for the Brit Milah, and not the stone. We know that a person's Mazal has a great effect on his life. If a person is born in the Mazal of מאדים, Mars, the red star, this is symbolic of blood. This person's Mazal will bring him in his life's choices to be one of three things: If he is a Rasha, he will be a murderer. If he is a Benoni, an average person, he will become a Shochet, a butcher. If he is a Tzaddik, he will become a Mohel. All three will deal with blood; the question is just in which way. (Shabbat 156a) When we

parent our children, we need to have this in mind. Each child has his Mazal, and you, the parent, can't break that. (I remember sitting next to the owner of Mr. Broadway Restaurant on the plane from Israel to NY. He told me that since he was a child, he loved working in the kitchen. During his whole childhood, his family would laugh at him, that he would never be able to make a parnasah, if he loved just working in the kitchen and making food!) It is our job as parents to find what our kids' strengths and weaknesses are naturally, and always bring them to be the best in the natural way that G-d made them. (Vilna Gaon Mishle 22 6. הַנֶּהֱלֵךְ לְעֵצֶר) Therefore, when a person born under the Mazal of Mars has a nature of being, of "blood", for this person to become a Mohel is making the best of his nature. It is keeping him from becoming a murderer, a thief, and using it, instead, for something that is the best possible thing, while using his nature of working with blood! This is the reason why we prefer to use iron! It is not for the sake of the mitzvah of the baby who is being circumcised! It is to *correct the nature of Mohel!* That he should use the knife, for the Mitzvah, and not for killing!

We find this fighter mindset in the Messilat Yesharim, when he talks about being active in serving G-d. ותראה כי טבע האדם כבד מאד, כי עפריות ומי החמריות גם, על כן לא יחפוץ האדם בטורח ומלאכה. ומי שרוצה לזכות לעבודת הבורא יתברך, צריך שיתגבר נגד טבעו עצמו ויתגבר ויזדוץ, שאם הוא מניח עצמו ביד כבודותו, ודאי הוא שלא יצליח. והוא מה שאמר התנא (אבות פרק ד): הוי עז כנמר, וקל כנשר, ורץ כצבי, וגבור כארי לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים. וכן מנו חכמים ז"ל (ברכות לב): בדברים הצריכים חיזוק, תורה ומעשים טובים. ומקרא מלא הוא (יהושע א): חזק ואמץ מאד לשמר לעשות ככל - התורה אשר צוך משה עבדי, כי חיזוק גדול צריך למי שרוצה לכפות הטבע אל הפכו.

A person is naturally materialistic, and this weighs down on him, not letting him get to work and be spiritually productive. But someone who wants so much to serve G-d needs to fight his nature, to fight complacency, laziness and procrastination. You have to be brazen like leopard, light like an eagle, swift like a deer, mighty like a lion to do the Will

of your Father in Heaven! This is what is meant when we bless someone to be Hazak!

One word of caution though. To be strong, to overcome our nature is never at the scene of the crime. It is always a step before. Making sure you never get to the scene of the crime, if you don't have to. Being strong means knowing our triggers and how our triggers can be stronger than we are and avoiding them. ותפארתו יגדל תמיד .

When Yosef ran out of the room of Zelikah, the wife of Potiphar, he left his cloak in her hand. ותתפשטהו בבגדו לאמר שכבה עמי ויעזוב בגדו בידה ויגס ויצא הקוצה: When she saw that she had his cloak, and he ran out... She called out to the people and accused Yosef of starting up with her. ותקרא לאנשי ביתה ותאמר להם. לאמר ראו הביא לנו איש עברי לצחק בנו כא אלי לשקב עמי ויצאה הקוצה: And she used this cloak as the

proof to her story! ויהי כשמעו כיהרמתי קולי וצקרא ויעזוב בגדו אצלי ויגס ויצא הקוצה And she held on to that cloak, as evidence, until her husband came home! : ותגה בגדו אצלה עד רבא אדניו אל ביתו

Couldn't Yosef quickly go back in the room where Potiphar's wife was, before anyone came home, and fight to get back his cloak? Didn't he realize what would happen, if he would leave the cloak in her hands, especially if she actually grabbed the cloak from him, to prove her accusation against him?

Yosef knew what going back into that room meant! He would be putting himself back into the test, to be with her! Yosef said, I am not willing to get near that trigger, even if it means I will be proven guilty to her fabricated story, and I will get thrown in jail for ten years!

THE ART OF THE SLOW MESSAGE

There is a lesson from this Parasha about lessons and communicating new ideas.

וירא מלאך And he (Moshe) came to the Mountain of G-d (Har Sinai) to Horeb. ויקח אליו בלבת-אש מתוך הסנה וירא והנה הסנה בער באש ויקח אליו בלבת-אש מתוך הסנה וירא והנה הסנה בער באש And the angel of G-d (Gavriel, angel of fire, or Michael, the greatest of angels) appeared to him (Moshe) in the flame of a fire, (the flame was the light of the Sechina) from inside the thornbush, and he saw, and behold the thornbush was burning in fire, and the thornbush was not being consumed.

The Me'am Loez brings, that the reason why G-d first appeared to Moshe, now, in the flame, was so that he will be ready in the future, when he comes back to Har Sinai, to a much bigger exposure of and revelation of G-d. This way, his senses won't be blown away, when he sees the greatest lights at Har Sinai, lights that were never before. This is why, G-d first sent an angel to appear to Moshe, before G-d reveals Himself. This is why, first Moshe sees a strange sight, a bush that is on fire

but is not being consumed, which brought Moshe closer to check out what he is seeing. "Maybe this is a different type of fire? Or maybe a different type of wood, that fire can't consume?" Then he saw the angel in the bush. And only then did he notice, that the Shechina was inside it.

The Me'am Loez compares this to a person who is in a very dark room for a long time, and you suddenly bring this person out to the bright sun. Of course he eyes will go dark! The same is true when it comes to knowledge. A person cannot contain and fathom a lot of wonders at one time.

This was the punishment of Aharon and Miriam for comparing themselves to the level of prophecy of Moshe and questioning his decision to live separately from his wife Tzipporah. ויאמר יקחם פתאם אל-משה ואלי-אהרן ואלי-מרים ויאמר להם צאו שלשתכם אל-אהל מועד (Bamidbar 12 4) And G-d said suddenly to Moshe, and to Aharon, and to Miriam, the three of you shall exit to the Ohel Moed. What is the significance of the word, suddenly? It is because Moshe became used to prophecy on an occasional

level, so G-d would come to him suddenly. This is exactly why, Moshe needed to separate from Tziporah, his wife. But Aharon and Miriam were not used to this sudden revelation of G-d, so for them, it was a shock! The Ran writes that each time Aaron and Miriam prophesied, they had to undergo a transformation, a kind of personality change. Prophecy was not their nature; they were not always primed for it. They needed preparation, and that is why, when G-d came to rebuke them, He came suddenly to speak with them. For Moshe, this suddenness presented no difficulty, for he was always ready for prophecy.

This precisely is the lesson for all lessons. Don't reveal the revelation, lesson, innovation, too fast. Reveal the revelation, gradually, slowly, with patience. Introducing something new, needs to be done in steps. Revealing bad news, too fast, killed our Great Grandmother, Sarah. Sarah Bat Asher revealing the good news about Yosef to Yaakov, slowly, saved our Great Grandfather. The path of the Messilat Yesharim to spiritual perfection, is in steps.

This is true regarding any lesson in the world, even when it comes to dollars and cents. In marketing, for example, there is a concept I learnt from the classic, called, Crossing the Chasm. If you have something new you want the herd to adopt to, you can't educate all the people at once to your new technology/innovation. First educate/persuade/influence by targeting a specific, niche market, the innovators and early adapters, before you go after the masses. Secure that specific niche group first, by positioning yourself as a market leader in your niche, through making a strong claim, and building trust with that smaller market. And then, the larger market, the majority of the masses, will follow. Trust spreads. But you have to have the patience for trust to move your message from your smaller niche market, to the wider market of the masses. There is a tremendous discrepancy between the demands of your early adopters and the needs of the next group, the early majority.

In music for example, there are singers that sing songs today in the Jewish Music arena, that would never have gotten the traction they got, say, 20 or 30 years ago. For a song to pick up, and become part of the new trend, you need to offer something similar to what is already currently trending, and add some nice updated twist. If you come up with something that is totally new, it won't pick up traction, because it is too big of a revelation that people are not used to. The same is true for fashion clothing and trending designs. If you come up with something totally new, totally different, it doesn't pick up.

Before international food brand products are brought into the Israeli market, they need to tweak the product before letting it to the Israeli public. Fortunes are spent to learn the Israeli palate, and to make the product taste as close as it can, to what is already being sold here in the supermarkets, what the Israeli palate is already used to.

When enforcing regulations/rules/guidelines in any structure, whether it is the structure of family, school, or workplace, this rule applies as well. If the rules weren't enforced for a while, and all of a sudden you come and start applying these rules, in full force, without first talking about the importance of the rules, educating the people of the rules,... you are going to have too much pushback. This was a mistake that happened in the Israeli political arena as well. When the far-left government made high taxes on disposable goods because of the extremely high level of pollution and litter that Israel has been suffering from, all at once, people with larger families were really angry. When the far left government made very high taxes on sweet drinks because of the high level of health issues that Israel is suffering in these areas, relatively high compared to other countries,... people got really mad.

The new right wing government, cares about the religious public, and knows how much these rules were insensitive to the religious public. So the new government immediately removed these high taxes. The problems, though, still exist. Israel needs to



slow down on the disposable goods. They need to take it easy on sugar intake.

The new government is now in a position, that they need to take responsibility to educate the public with much more awareness and responsibility. But because the far left government came down, too hard and strong, too fast, the religious took this

personal, which empowered the religious, the ones who make family Shabbat and Holiday meals, and use a lot of disposables and sweet drinks, to get out there and vote in an unprecedented capacity, which ultimately brought way for the most religious government we ever had. Thank you Avigdor Lieberman and Yair Lapid!

THE ART OF BEING A NOBODY

Modesty is something that many praise, but few focus on. What a shame, because modesty is one of the main ingredients in being calm. Western culture teaches, and Hollywood preaches, to despise modesty. They teach that modesty and success are antonyms, while modesty and failure are synonyms. In western culture, you are either wildly successful, displaying luxury and extravagance, or a catastrophic failure, just background scenery. There is no calm, middle ground. These ideas have infiltrated into our systems as well. You have to be either a Rosh Yeshiva or a Gvir to be successful and sane, or to even be considered normal. The biggest confusion that Hollywood causes for the Torah Jew is that the greater and bigger you become, externally, the more successful you are. Judaism teaches how to proudly be a nobody, and that being unobtrusive is being G-dly. וְהִצַּגְתָּ לְכֶתֶב עַם-אֱלֹהִים (Micha 6:8)

Most modesty is false and fake, and it can be spotted from across the room. Modesty without humility is false. Modesty doesn't mean being a wimp; it means being soft spoken. It means not to be overwhelmed by your own self-importance, not to show off the good things you do. It means you shine the spotlight on others, and allow them to have the lion's share of the talking when being social, because you know that the person speaking is the person having a good time. It means being under the radar, far from the fanfare.

G-d does His thing, modestly. He brings salvation from the stars he pulls out of the sewer, and from

the people who are the biggest nobodies in society, He makes our nation's biggest heroes. G-d picks for his all-star team people like Avraham, Moshe, David - the humblest of men. Since beginning of Creation, G-d is busy doing just two things: making shidduchim and flipping ladders, lowering the haughty and raising the humble. (Yalkut Shimoni) He is הַמְגַבִּיהַי, הַמְשַׁפִּילַי, מְקוּמַי, לְהוֹשִׁיבַי, הַהִפְכֵי מוֹשִׁיבַי, the Yud at the end pointing to the fact that that is what He always does, lifting the humble and humbling the haughty, and that is what He does, better than what anyone else can do. We see the message of the Yud ending in G-d's everlasting empathy towards us in Galut, that He always resides in the thornbush, to feel our pain וְרָצוֹן שֶׁכֶּנֶן קִנְיָה.

G-d specifically picked someone who looked at himself as a "nobody" to be His messenger. As Moshe referred to himself as a nobody, וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-שְׁמוֹ מִיָּדָי, even after he brought the Ten Plagues on the Egyptians and split the sea. When G-d asked Moshe to take the role of leadership of the nation, Moshe said, "Every single person in the nation is more worthy than I". שְׂלֹחַ-נְדָא בְּיַד-תְּשַׁלְּחָה (See Ramban) Moshe was a nobody for the first 80 years of his life, David was a nobody for the first 28 years of his life, and they tried to stay a nobody, while changing the world, standing up for G-d and saving His people. Rachel knew, when she thought to marry R' Akiva, that although now he was a simpleton, he had two things that would make him great: צְנִיעַ וּמַעֲלֵי, modesty and good character. וַיִּלְדָּ מִשָּׁה וַיִּשְׁבּוּ אֶל-יַתֵּר הָתָנוּ וַיֵּאמֶר לֹא (Ketubot 62b)

אַלְכָה נָא וְאֶשׁוּבָה אֶל־אֹתִי אֲשֶׁר־בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶרְאֶה הַעֲוֹנָם חַגִּים
 אֶלְכָה נָא וְאֶשׁוּבָה אֶל־אֹתִי וְיִאמָר יִתְרוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה לֵּךְ לְשָׁלוֹם
 When Moshe wanted to tell his father-in-law that he was going down to Egypt, he did not tell him that he was going to be the savior of the Jews and take them out of slavery! He just told him he wanted to go check on his brothers in Egypt. Why? Because G-d brings the redemption from things that are hidden and from people who hide themselves. When Tamar wanted to bring children from Yehuda, she needed to hide her identity. K. David was born and bred in the most hidden way. Why? Because eternity, redemption and anything G-dly are all reached through modesty.

This is why the Torah hides the names of Moshe's parents. וְיִלְךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לְגִי וַיְקַח אֶת־בַּת־לְוִי We all know that Moshe's father was Amram, a Gadol Hador, and his mother was Yochebed, one of the greatest women of all time. Why hide their names? Because the greatest spiritual salvations happen in secret. The greatest Yeshivot, the greatest kollelim that built the greatest people were built without bringing attention to themselves. The reason why the first set of tablets of Ten Commandments did not last was because they were given with great fanfare, thunder and lightning; the whole world knew that G-d was giving His Torah to His people. וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה יְקֻנָּה עָלֵינוּ לְעַמּוּ יִתֵּן (Zevachim 116a) Only the second tablets that were given in secret lasted forever. (see Rashi 34:3; M Tanhuma Ki Tisa 31)

When Moshe saw that Datan and Aviram could not keep the secret and told Pharaoh that Moshe had killed an Egyptian, using the Name of G-d, he said, אַכְּנֹה נֹדַע הַדְּבָר. Now, I know why we are still in exile, and we are not yet redeemed. (See Rashi) It is because we can't keep a secret.

But, what is so bad if the Jews can't keep a secret? The answer is that the way of Judaism is *inner* beauty, *internal* success, not external beauty, external success. The successful Jew, who is rich, smart, famous, or strong reached internal success. שמה בחלקו, כובש את יצרו, לומד מכל אדם, מכבד את הבריות. The truly rich man is happy with what he has; he is not happy because he has more than

others. The truly strong man is one who is stronger than himself, not stronger than others. The truly wise man is the one who is always ready to learn. And the truly respectful man is the one who doesn't need to be respected at all. All internal traits. Nothing external. A Jew who can't tap into the beauty of the internal has never begun to practice Judaism, and he is living in a self-imposed Galut. He is not worth being redeemed. This is why we hide the Afikomen. Because the Afikomen represents the Korban Pesach, which is symbolic of the Redemption; and G-d always brings about redemption from the most hidden areas, from the things that don't make sense to us. (Sfat Emet)

One who repeats something he heard from another and attributes the saying to the one who said it, brings redemption to the World. This is learned from Esther, who told Achashverosh that it was Mordechai who discovered Bigsan and Seresh's plot to kill the king. (Avot 6;6) The Maharal asks two questions on this Mishna. First, we know that reward is always proportionate to the deed which was done, measure for measure. Why was redemption an appropriate reward for Esther's willingness to give the credit to Mordechai? Second, many people throughout history have attributed their statements appropriately, yet they did not bring redemption!

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

It is amazing how G-d brings salvation from the hidden, and it is amazing how G-d brings down the haughty from, specifically, the things they are haughty about. ח"ר חמשה נבראו מעין דוגמא של מעלה וכולן לקו בהן שמשון בכחו שאול בצוארו אבשלום בשערו צדקיה בעיניו אסא ברגליו Five were created with some G-dly part to them, and they all fell -specifically - in those things. Shimshon, in his strength; Shaul, in

his neck; Avshalom, in his hair, Tzidkiyahu, in his eyes; Asa, in his legs. (Sotah 10a) Avshalom's downfall was specifically in what he was haughty about. Avshalom, rebellious son of King David, and a Nazir, had the most beautiful hair, ever. When he was running away on his horse from David's warriors and Yoav B. Seruyah, his hair got caught in the branches of a tree, and he was suspended in the air, while his horse ran out from beneath him.

The greatest Reshaim, from Haman to Hitler, were brought to their downfall, from their very pride and haughtiness. Haman was hung on the same gallows he built to hang Mordechai and save his pride. Hitler, also, was brought down because of his obsession with "Heil Hitler". In 1938, writer Erika Mann published a book called *School for Barbarians: Education Under the Nazis*. In it she writes, "Every child says "Heil Hitler!" from 50 to 150 times a day. The formula is required by law; if you meet a friend on the way to school, you say it; study periods are opened and closed with "Heil Hitler!"; "Heil Hitler!" says the postman, the street-car conductor, the girl who sells you notebooks at the stationery store; and if your parents' first words when you came home for lunch were not "Heil Hitler!", they were guilty of a punishable offense and could be denounced.

This is how the Brits won the war. Alan Turing and his mathematicians and cryptographers were attempting to break the Enigma Code, the code that was used to encrypt highly classified messages,

which were then transmitted over thousands of miles to the Nazi forces at the front, using Morse code. The Enigma Code was seemingly 'uncrackable', because you would have to go through more than almost 15 million, million, million possibilities to arrive at the correctly deciphered code! How did they actually crack the Enigma Code, which was considered one of the most ironclad, impossible-to-crack codes in history?

Turing identified a weak spot in the Nazi encrypted messages! Suppose you wanted to encrypt a message that contained a total of 3 words. 'MODEST IS AWESOME', the encrypted output might have looked something like 'ZKSQER PO QAPEKRQ', or something entirely different. Every letter was encrypted as a letter that was different than itself. Never once did it happen that a letter was encrypted as itself. When you type 'S', it could be encrypted as any letter out of the 26 letters, but not S. Therefore, an 'S' would never be encrypted as an 'S'. Now, read the encryption of 'MODEST IS AWESOME' again and see if that holds true. This was the single flaw in the Enigma code. All Turing needed was a word (or a group of words) that he was positive the Germans would use in each of their Enigma-encrypted messages. What was that word, or rather, that phrase? 'Heil Hitler': Germans put the phrase 'Heil Hitler' at the end of every encrypted message. This seemingly small mistake eventually contributed to their ultimate defeat.

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Q. Hi Rabbi! I really appreciate your articles. Last week, you wrote tools for focusing in your QA. Is it possible you can give us some tools on focusing in prayer? I feel like after I finish praying, I realized that I had no focus throughout. Thank you!!!

Anonymous

A: Sure! First, know that focusing in prayer, is considered work. It is internal work, work of the heart. עבודה שבליב. You need to be connecting to your inner self, working on it, before you connect to G-d. And this is the work of a lifetime. There is actually a book I once picked up, called, Daven Your Age!, that argues that most people pray with the intellectual awareness of a fifth grader, unless they work on learning about what they are saying, and why they are saying it.



The first mistake people make about focusing in prayer, is that the whole amount of time, you need to be focused for, in order to be focused in prayer, is six minutes: the time it takes to actually say the Amida. This is a big mistake. In order for you to become focused, you need to silence everything external, something that can take time. חסידים הראשונים היו שוהים שעה אחת ומתפללים כדי שיכוונו את ליבם. (Berachot 5a) The four letters that spell pray are T I M E. Prayer is something that you need to look forward to in order to do right. You need to think about G-d all day.

The way to become more focused in prayer, is by preparing this communication with G-d, learning the sefarim that talk about Tefillah in general,(Macro) and Tefillah in detail,(Micro) explaining each and every word. שפתחי היים- רינת היים, הארת התפילה, and many more. For example, just the word of BeChochma in the Asher Yatzar prayer, has at least four meanings.(See Haarat Hatefilah) You could focus on just one word of prayer, forever. Just the word, אתה, You, that we say in every beracha, internalizing that G-d is standing in front of us, waiting for us to communicate with Him, all day, can make you faint. Tefillah is a personal relationship, meditating on, and internalizing that, A. G-d knows everything that you are going through, B. G-d cares about you more than anyone in the world and only has your best interest in mind, C. G-d can do anything in the world, nothing can stop Him. D. G-d is everything E. G-d only does good.

Your biggest enemy of focusing in prayer, are thoughts from past and future. To pray with fire, you need to be totally present, as you display with your feet together, and your hands folded, and your eyes closed or fixed on the siddur, as if to say, “I am not going anywhere without G-d allowing”. This is the intro to our every prayer, that I can’t even open my lips without G-d allowing it. Thoughts of past and future, take over 80 percent of our thoughts. Those are all the thoughts that we have during our prayers. If you were focused, that means, that you were totally present, in your communication to G-d.

Most people have a hard time to pray a focused prayer, because they want to pray in order to get on to the next thing in their schedule. This is a shame, because the truth of the matter is, you could pray in order to live, or you could live in order to pray. You can make a beracha in order to eat, or you can eat in order to make a beracha. A Jew’s mission in this world is to make the physical into spiritual, to connect Earth with Heaven. Judaism teaches, that G-d puts in front of us obstacles in life, as a way of opening up conversation, in order that we turn to Him. יונאי בחגני הסלע בסתר המדרגה הראיני את-מראיך השמיעיני את-קולך
כייקולך ערב ומראיך נאנה

I hope that this helps, to get you to be more focused in your prayers. It is just one of many tools, to get into focusing in prayer. With Hashem’s help, we will add more tools on focusing in prayer, in upcoming articles and QAs.

THE ART OF BEING A PLAYER (2020)

The greatest danger ahead of us in 2021 is not a split U.S.A. It is unprecedented Global Fear, Frustration, and Failure. The F3 emotional pandemic is worse than the pandemic itself. People are afraid that normal life will never come back; they are frustrated with waiting for what seems like forever, for the good times to start. With seeing that as much as we have shut down our systems, we fail to fight this war against the invisible

enemy. The F3 emotions, like all emotions, spread faster than the English mutation. If my client yawns across the globe during a zoom meeting, I yawn in my 6th floor Bayit Vegan apartment in Yerushalayim. I caught his yawn, his tiredness, from across the Atlantic, through walls, within seconds. Jews, throughout the ages, wandered through much more difficult lands than Covidland. As in all crises, the weak may just manage to



survive, while the strong-minded, those who find meaning in the mess, thrive.

As you may already know, I write while listening to music, to block out the sounds in my apartment. Playing now is my new favorite, “Off the Record,” by Baruch Levine, an album that is a compilation of the greatest all-time songs of Exile and Exodus. During Covid, G-d also has a song playing in the background, the Song of Songs, the story of Exile and Exodus, G-d’s favorite. It is a mistake to think that Exile, difficulties, stress and mess, are not normal. Confusion, crises, the unexpected are all default of G-d’s blueprint of the world. If you ever think that we have already gotten this world under control, that things make sense, or things are as they should be, before Mashiach comes, you are always proven wrong, somehow.

Exile is not necessarily a punishment, as it was “blue-printed” before sin. וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תוֹהוֹ And the land was confusion – this is the exile of Babylon. וְיָדְהוּ and nothingness – this is the exile of Media, Haman’s decrees וְהָשְׁקָה and darkness – this is the Greek rule over the Jews, in which they darkened the vision of the People עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם over the depth – this is the exile we are in now, that feels like there is no security of the future, seemingly endless confusion. וַיְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵף עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם And the spirit of *Elokim*, hovering over the face of the water - these are the times of Mashiach. (B. Rabbi 2) Even if our sins brought us into exile, into confusion, into darkness, nonetheless, since the beginning of Day 1 of Creation, G-d had Exile jotted down on His calendar. The Sh’lah asks, on the Midrash of that *passuk*, aren’t we at the beginning of the creation of the world? Why would destruction, confusion, chaos be brought into the second sentence of the first chapter of creation, and the beginning of the story of G-d’s goodness?

And there are even more disturbing questions. When Avraham Avinu was told by G-d at the *Brit Bein Habetarim* that his descendants are headed for a 400-year Exile, why didn’t he pray to G-d to prevent it? Didn’t Avraham pray for Sodom, to save the wicked people? Why, then would he not pray to prevent the Egyptian Holocaust, where Pharaoh slaughtered 150 Jewish baby boys in the morning and 150 at night, to bathe in their blood,

to cure his leprosy? What about all the Jewish boys who were used as bricks for building in Egypt?

And when G-d told Avraham at that covenant of the four exiles, וְהָיְתָה אִימָה חֹשֶׁקָה גְדֹלָה נִכְלָת עָלָיו *And a big fear, darkness, fell upon him.* אִימָה Babylon, חֹשֶׁקָה Media - Haman, גְדֹלָה Greek, נִכְלָת עָלָיו Rome. (B. Rabba 44 17) Four thousand years have already passed since we became a nation, during which there have been mostly Exiles, and rarely have things been the way they are “supposed to be.” Why, at the moment of the most important covenant, the one that each year we sing שְׁעֵמֶדָה וְהִיא about, at the night of the Seder, proclaiming that our promised bond, our connection with G-d is inseparable, eternal, and the strongest thing in the Universe - why, at this time does G-d make mention to Avraham of all the messes that we will have to go through? It is like the groom telling the bride, under the Chuppah, the forecast of all the rainy days in their relationship ahead!

The answer is that, as nice as the sunny days are, only the rain forces you to come together, to share the umbrella with your loved ones. Only the rainy days bring us closer and make the relationship stronger. Although G-d created the Universe to bring goodness, goodness is not necessarily sunny days, not necessarily the American Dream. (See Rashi Devarim 1;1 וְדִי זֶהב) The greatest components of all goodness are things like self-actualization and making legends out of ordinary people. The legends are those who tap into their courage to overcome adversities and rise above challenges - and the arena for these legends to come into existence is in the mess of Exile. No biography of any legend, of any kind, is a sunshine story. All stories of legends are success stories *despite* adversity, stories where heroes danced through raindrops of difficulties, making meaning out of the mess and the mud. Comeback stories are always the best stories. The ultimate goodness that G-d has in His world blueprint is to enjoy a relationship with G-d, something that happens when you ask Him to be your umbrella. Only through destruction, through difficulty and adversity, can you create a world of meaning, purpose, and a relationship with G-d. This is the meaning of the three things that the Midrash tells us were the things that G-d created and classified

as טוב מאוד, very good. Death, Pain and suffering, and the Yetzer Hara. (Bereshit Rabah 9,5)

So, what is the secret way out of Exile to Redemption, the belief of those who thrive and become heroes? G-d tells Moshe, in his first words, something He never says again. של-נְעַלְיָךָ מַעַל רַגְלֶיךָ. *Take off your shoes, because the place upon which you are standing, is holy.* Listen closely, because the difference between those who find meaning in the mess and thrive, and those who just survive, is hidden in this message. Do you believe G-d brought about this mess, because He wants you to find meaning in it and, somehow, make the best out of the options at hand? That the sand that is under your feet was put there by G-d, and the time that you and I, and everyone else, were handpicked by G-d to exist, is 2021? Those who don't thrive are those who feel this was all a mistake, a leak from a Chinese lab out in Wuhan, and we just have to be spectators and wait for "something to happen." No!! G-d wants us to be the players in the game, not the spectators of the game. The heroes of the past, Amram, Yocheved, Miriam, Aharon, Moshe, Yehoshua, Yitro, Nachshon, Serah, Bitya, Kalev, Hur, Pinhas, were the players in the game; all the other "characters" in the play were spectators. And each one got eternal reward for rising to their challenges! Because they all knew that the place where they stood was holy ground, exactly the arena that G-d put them in, to win the game!

The problem we have is that we think that G-d made a mistake, He put us in the wrong arena, the wrong field, the wrong court, the wrong game! We have F3 emotions about the game we are in, afraid that we won't win, frustrated that we are not figuring it all out and our expectations are not being met, and feeling as if we were set up, at the outset of this test, for failure. That is what the Jews

felt, in Egypt. They thought that G-d would not redeem them, for His Name YKVK means that He was, is and will be. *He knows that we are and were serving idols, so why would He want to redeem us?* But G-d tells Moshe, tell them that they got it all wrong. Tell them אָקַיְהָ שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם, the Name of G-d Ekyeh, sent me to you! What difference does it make, which Name sent? And what does this Name even mean? Ekyeh means, **I will be**. It doesn't make a difference what you've done wrong in Egypt, or what you are doing wrong presently, because Egypt was the כְּבוֹר הַבְּרִזָּל, the place where G-d, the Alchemist, transforms you from just an ordinary piece of metal, to the purest gold, even if you became strong enough to just keep a Jewish Identity. (Melachim 1;8;51) I am redeeming because I am looking into the future of our relationship, and into who this Nation can become. As in all exiles, difficulties, messes, G-d's approach is to create a new you, the you who thrives and transforms. The Jews thought they would have to be in Egypt longer; they thought they needed 10xYKVK, one for each of the 10 tribes who sold Yosef, which has the numerical value of 260 years. But G-d was telling them, you need only 10xEkyeh, which is only 210 years in Egypt. Ekyeh is the Name of reason why, G-d has Exile in the world's blueprint, it is for the sake of the relationship that will become between Knesset Yisrael and G-d, because of the growth during the hard times.

G-d is closest to us in the hard times, and when there is a wall between us, He comes even closer to peak through the cracks. הַנְּהַיְתָה עוֹמֵל אַתָּר כְּתִלְנוּ מִשְׁגִּיחַ: *Before we go into Exile, He hugs us, as Titus saw in the Kerubim that were on the Parochet, at the height of the destruction, and at the outset of Exile. This is all part of the relationship, and the relationship is the purpose of the Creation.*

THE ART OF EMPATHY

וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת-צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתְנוֹ כִּתְּנוּ מִדְּבַר וַיְנַהֵג אֶת-הַצֹּאן וְאֶת-הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֵא אֶל-יִתְרוֹ הָאֵלֶּהִים חֹרֵבָה: *And Moshe was shepherding his father in law Yitro's flock, and he led the flock after the desert, and he came to the mountain of G-d in Horeb.* (Shemot 3;1)

The part of the Torah which describes the episode of Moshe being appointed by G-d to be the Jewish leader, begins with: "Moshe was shepherding the flock." The Midrash tells us that Moshe's

shepherding was why G-d chose Moshe to be the Jewish Leader. Here is the Midrash, word for word.

Our Rabbis said: When Moshe Rabbenu was shepherding Yitro's flock, a young goat fled. Moshe ran after it, and he reached the goat when the goat stopped running. The goat had reached a pool of water and had stopped to drink. When Moshe came close, he said, "I did not know that you were running because you were thirsty! You must not only be thirsty. You are probably now tired as well." Moshe carried the goat on his shoulder as he began his walk back to the flock. HKBH said: You have mercy to shepherd the flock of flesh and blood (Yitro). You will shepherd my sheep, the Jewish people. (Shemot Rabbah 2;2)

It seems that Moshe's upgrade was because of his empathy for a goat! Why is empathy the essential trait of a leader? There are so many qualities that are important character strengths of a leader. Communication, Integrity, Accountability, Humility, Resilience, Vision, Influence, Positivity, Delegation, and Confidence, to name just a few. I am sure that Moshe had some amazing characteristics that could have made him worthy of the job. But the deciding trait to give Moshe the baton of leadership was his empathy. Why empathy? What is empathy anyway, and why is it so important?

Empathy means putting others ahead of yourself. It is the experience of understanding another person's thoughts, feelings, and state, from his or her point of view, rather than from one's own. Empathy shows that you care, value, and understand. It means listening attentively, putting your complete focus on the person in front of you, without becoming distracted. It means you are present to allow others to have their moment, showing them that they are heard and that they matter. Empathy is seeing the world through someone else's eyes, entering into their feelings. It means you are patient to listen, understand, assist, and support - not to advise or fix or reply. Sometimes to empathize is to merely "be."

When G-d revealed Himself to Moshe in a burning bush, He chose specifically a thorn bush. Rashi explains that G-d chose a thorn bush, to demonstrate, עִמּוֹ אֲנֹכִי בְצָרָה. *I am with him* (the Jewish nation) *in pain*. The Midrash teaches that the reason why G-d chose a thorn bush is to show that there is no place that He is absent. He is found even in thorns, even in the pain and suffering and challenges.

When G-d told Moshe to tell the Jews that He sent him, He told Moshe to relay to the Jewish leaders the message *Pakod Pakadti*. After Moshe revealed these words to the leaders and did some magic tricks, the Jewish leaders consulted with Serah Bat Asher, the oldest Jew in Egypt, asking her if she felt that he was the true redeemer. The tricks did not impress Serah. But when she heard that Moshe used the words *Pakod Pakadti*, Serah jumped up and said, "He is the redeemer!" Those are the words that Yosef told the brothers *Pakod Yifkod!* That is the secret password!

What does the word *Pakod* mean, anyway? I was taught that the meaning of those words is that G-d remembered. But the word to remember is not *Pakod*, it is *Zocher!*

R' Shimshon R. Hirsh explains *Pakod* to mean something much more profound. The word *Pakod* means when circumstances are set up in a way for a person to reach their life purpose, their responsibility, their *Tafkid*. (See R"Sh'R'H' here and Bereshit 33;3) The word at its root is closer to meaning inspection than remember. The word פָּקַד sounds like the word בָּגַד, clothes. This is because G-d is tailoring your *Tafkid* for you, via your struggles and challenges. When you feel that you do not want your difficulties in life, that you absolutely would never choose your struggles... G-d is tailoring your purpose on the planet. He is so close, literally like a tailor, custom tailoring your difficulties to measure up with your life purpose, custom fit to your very own soul! This is because G-d understands you better than anyone else, even better than yourself.



The Midrash tells us another reason why G-d revealed Himself in a thorn bush. The Jews in Exile are compared to thorns. The Klei Yakar explains this to mean that the reason why the Jews are in exile is their thorn-like behavior, when they do not feel for each other.

The reason why Yosef and his brothers ended up in Egypt was because the lack of empathy for each other. The brothers did not see Yosef's side of the story. And Yosef was not seeing the side of his brothers. Moshe was the leader of empathy. He could be the one to take the Jews out of Egypt, *Mitzrayim*, which comes from the word *Meitzar*, a narrow-minded look at the people in your life. Gossip, slander and not accepting other people, are the cause for the Jews to be in Exile. אכן נודע הדבר (see Rashi Shemot 2;14)

People confuse empathy with sympathy. There is a huge difference between the two. Sympathy is when you share the feelings of another; empathy is when you *understand* the feelings of another but do not necessarily share them. The art of empathy is the art of understanding. People in pain want to feel understood, more than they want people to share in their grief. "Just knowing that someone else knows what I am going through is the greatest

relief." Most times, you cannot share in the pain of the person, you are not going through what he is going through. But you can try your best to understand.

G-d is the Master of empathy. בְּכָל-צָרָתָם לֹא יָצָר In all of their suffering (of the Jews), the suffering is to Him. (Yeshayahu 63;9) G-d knows of what we suffer, for He is custom tailoring something amazing.

So how do we bring about the *Geulah*, the final redemption? Here are the selfie steps to master the art of empathy and bring the *Geulah*:

- Recognize that empathy is not easy. It is understanding and seeing the world from someone else's eyes.
- Be patient in trying to understand. Don't try to fix the problem.
- Focus on the other. Forget about yourself for the moment. Pause your judgment.
- Practice empathy, even in the smallest of issues. Moshe merited being a leader for having empathy over a tired, young goat.

BEATING THE SYSTEM

There is a sad joke that goes around the yeshiva world each year at this time. *Ben Hazmanim* (semester break for Yeshivot) usually starts right after with a fast: *Tisha B'Av*, Yom Kippur, *Taanit Esther*. And Sof Zman, the beginning of the end, the decline of momentum for the weaker boys, is from the fast before that. *Shiva Assar B'Tamuz*, *Tzom Gedalia*, *Assarah B'tevet*.

If you drive on Menachem Begin Highway at 95 kmph where the speed limit is 80, you fly under the speed cameras without getting a ticket. To get through the Yeshiva system and be a "good boy" and fly under the radar of keeping *sedarim*, you are still "on time" for seder, even if you get there half an hour late. You can leave half an hour early and

still consider that you were there till the end. If you come to *Shacharit* right on time for *Barachu* and leave as you say *Aleinu* at the Minyan Factory, then you might even be able to spend less time on *Shacharit* than you do on *Maariv*. Then you *really* "beat the system." When you "trim all the fat" off your learning, off your davening, there isn't that much "meat" left to your spirituality or your connection with G-d. I am sure that girls also have their way of "beating the system," if they want to, in their *tzniut*, davening, or devoting their time and effort to building families.

Anti-system articles always draw the most attention. What I will write sounds in some way anti-system although it really isn't. The problem



with the Yeshiva system is that **as an academic one**, it is a failure. It was always a failure. It was meant to be a failure. As Rashi says, in *Kohelet*, 7:28, בְּנוֹהֵג שֶׁבְעוֹלָם אֶלֶף נִכְנָסִים לְמִקְרָא אֵין יוֹצֵאִים מֵהֶם, להצליח שראויים למשנה אלא מאה ואותם מאה שנכנסו למשנה אין יוצאים מהם לגמרא אלא עשרה ואותן עשרה שנכנסין לגמרא אין מצליח מהם אלא אחד להוראה הרי אחד מאלף: A thousand people come to learn in the system, and only one comes out who knows how to be *Posek Halacha*, a true Rabbi. This can be very depressing. A great turnoff. As an academic system, if you have a medical school in which 1000 enter to learn to be a doctor, and only one actually becomes a doctor, the school would close down. But our system exists and will continue to exist. Because our system is only a failure in terms of being an academic one, for preparing people with a plan for the future; for something to **do** in life. How many jobs are there in Kodesh anyway? How many Kodesh jobs will help you support your family, long term? Our system is good at only one thing. For building people what to **be** in life. To rewire your B3, your **beliefs**, your **behaviors** and what and who you **belong** to. **At that, our system is the best system in the world.**

Our system is not to build nice, good boys who aren't troublemakers, either. It is to build leaders. To build people who have a connection with G-d. Allow me to explain. Hold on, and get ready for the most fundamental, unknown lesson of Torah *Chinuch*.

The Rama (Y"D 81;7) writes the Halacha, "The milk of an Egyptian woman is like the milk of a Jewess. And still, do not give a child to drink from an Egyptian woman, if it is possible from a Jewess. Because the milk of a gentile blocks the heart and creates a bad nature." The Vilna Gaon brings the Rashba, that this is sourced from 3-month-old baby Moshe Rabbenu, who was not willing to nurse from the Egyptian women, because he would eventually speak to the *Shechinah*.

R' Yaakov Kamenetzky z'tzl asks how we can learn this halacha from Moshe, having it pertain to every Jewish child. The whole reason for Moshe's insistence on nursing from a Jewess was because he was, in the future, going to speak to the *Shechinah*! Will every child speak to the *Shechinah*? And R' Yaakov writes, in Emet

L'Yaakov, that real *Chinuch* is to ensure that our upbringing of the child is such that it will be possible to speak to the *Shechinah*! **That is the fundamental of real Chinuch.**

When Yosef was about to sin with Potifar's wife, he jumped back and said something to her that can blow your mind. *G-d regularly comes and chooses from the members of my family, from the best of them, someone to be brought up as an Olah sacrifice (Yitzhak). He regularly comes and reveals Himself in prophesy in the middle of the night. If I listen to you and sleep with you, G-d might come to me in the middle of the night and find me impure* (M Rabbah). That is how Yaakov brought up his children, ready at any minute to speak to the *Shechinah*! G-d can suddenly "appear" in your life and expect you to perform your *Tafkid*, your mission in this world. And if you had a good *Chinuch*, you will be extremely successful.

When I was in eighth grade, I noticed a 6th grader not saying *Aleinu*. I told him that when he says *Aleinu*, all of the angels in Heaven stop to listen (See Yalkut Yosef Tefillah 132; 17 in the name of the student of the Maharashal). The boy suddenly opened his Siddur and said every word. It took him almost 5 minutes! I remember the time I gave more *tzedakah* than usual to a recently widowed woman to pay for her sons' camp. The middleman called me, "Yosef!! You brought tears to her eyes!! She was so thankful, grateful to G-d that she can have a breather!! Yosef, the skies are open for you now! Ask anything you want from G-d, and I am sure He will grant your greatest wishes!!!" I did pray, but I realized, then, how many times in life we do have that time to turn to G-d with a request or with thanks, how many times in life we have the Heavens open, and we let the opportunity go by, without taking advantage of it? But isn't that what we were brought up to do, to speak to the *Shechinah*?

When you pray, you are talking to G-d. When you learn, G-d is talking to you. How many times we can say Amen, *Yehe Sheme Rabba*? How many times can we come to learn Torah in the study hall and G-d is waiting for us? This is what we are here for. This is why we bring kids to the world, so that we can raise them in such a way. The reason why sometimes we do not raise them with this in mind,

is because we do not look at ourselves as “speaking to the *Shechinah*.” What a shame!

The whole academic part of our system is not an end in itself. It is not about effective learning, not about memory, competition, homework or report cards. It is not about how many *Siyumim* you make, how good you are at listening to a *shiur* or able to say a *shiur*, or how well you did on your *Semicha* test. It is how you are able to use those great concepts that you've learned, in order to connect more and more to the *Shechinah*, and be ready to bring the *Shechinah* into your life. There were people who were geniuses in Torah who did not excel in their *Yirat Shamayim* or in righteous behavior, despite the fact that they were academic heroes. The problem why people burn out in the

system, feel abused by it or simply don't “make it” is because they do not understand this fundamental principle of *Chinuch*. Or their teachers or parents did not understand this. The answer to all *Chinuch* issues, the fundamental that needs to be addressed, is not about the *Mechanech*, (the teacher) or the one who is on the receiving end of the *Chinuch*. It is about the relationship with the *Shechinah*, and making the connection to the *Shechinah* possible and... staying clear of anything that can weaken that connection.

Those who “beat” the system misunderstand it. It is built to help you, just as the speed limit is there to save you from hurting yourself. It is the easiest system to beat. But the only one who you beat is yourself.

MEMOIRS OF GRATITUDE

Moshe was reluctant to take the position of leading the Jews out of Egypt. He justified his reticence to G-d by saying: *I am not a man of words ... for I have a heavy mouth (my speech is halting) and a heavy tongue (the words I speak are not clear)*. Moshe was referring to the lisp that he had from having burned his tongue as a child. The Midrash (Rabba 1, 26) writes *How did Moshe develop a lisp? Paraoh's daughter (Batya who drew Moshe out of the water and adopted him) would kiss and hug little Moshe as if he were her son, and she would not let him leave Paraoh's palace. And because he was good looking, everyone wanted to see him. Whoever saw him would not leave him alone. Paraoh, also, would hug and kiss him. Little Moshe took the crown off of Paraoh's head and put it on his own. The magicians of Egypt said that they feared that this child would overthrow Paraoh one day and take the throne. Some said, kill him. Others said, burn him. Yithro, at that time an advisor to Paraoh, was present, and interrupted this train of thought. “This child is too young to have wit. We can test him by*

bringing a bowl of gold and another, of coals. If he reaches out for the gold-it is a sign that he has wit, and we shall kill him. And if he sends his hand toward the coals, it will show that he has no wit, and he should not be killed. They followed Yithro's advice, and Moshe stretched out his hand for the gold. The angel Gavriel came and pushed Moshe's hand away from the gold, guiding it toward the coals. Moshe put the coal into his mouth, burning his tongue and causing permanent damage. From this incident, Moshe had a “heavy tongue” and a “heavy mouth”.

G-d denied Moshe's refusal to be a leader...*Who gave man a mouth, and who makes one deaf and dumb? Is it not I, G-d? And now, go, and I will be with your mouth...* There is a question here that we must ask ourselves. Why did Moshe not ask G-d to cure his lisp instead of denying G-d's request? Was it not self-evident that this is what G-d would answer Moshe?

The answer here reveals an important aspect of Moshe's personality. Moshe wanted a constant

reminder of the miracle G-d had performed for him when he was but a child. He did not want ever to forget his burnt tongue and the appreciation he had to G-d for sending the angel Gavriel to save his life. If G-d would cure Moshe's tongue, then his gratefulness to G-d for the miracle of his youth could conceivably be forgotten at times.

Moshe feared man's natural tendency toward ingratitude: the human psyche tends to forget kindness bestowed upon it by others. One can be easily persuaded to forget, for forgetting takes away the responsibility to respond with appreciation. Moshe was aware of this human shortcoming and wanted to have a constant reminder that he could never ignore. This was so important to Moshe that although he knew that if he did not take the Jews out of Egypt, then no one else would, he could not bring himself to pray to G-d to cure his tongue, a request which would ultimately cause him to forget the miracle.

How many people would react as Moshe did? If such an incident were to happen to them, instead of recognizing it as a miracle, most people would spend their whole life blaming G-d for having given them the burn and lisp. They would prefer to find something to be upset about, and someone to blame. All this bitterness is just in order to free one's self of responsibility.

I once attended a class in which the rabbi mentioned how he had convinced a woman not to make an abortion. The woman cried and said that she did not want to bring a child into a world where there is no love. I gave this much thought. Is there no love in this world? I do not think that she was right. Our rabbis and mentors love us. They dedicate their lives to teaching us. Our parents and spouses love us. We quickly forget the thought and effort that

goes into preparing meals and doing household chores. Subconsciously, we'd rather forget to show appreciation for these things, as it frees us from the responsibility of acknowledging being beholden to others. Perhaps, if we look more deeply into this very human trait, we will find that in giving thanks to another person, we are recognizing the fact that we are not totally in control: "thanks" means that we were in the position of receiving something from another person.

Once, someone pointed out something quite ironic to me. Our parents made us birthday parties in our earlier stages of life. This was to give us a feeling that we were appreciated, and that we were noticed. One might then assume that as the "birthday boy" grows, he should make a birthday party on his birthday for his own parents, out of gratitude for having brought him into the world, having diapered him, fed him, stayed up with him at nights etc. etc. But no one makes such a birthday party.

We must never forget to be grateful. Even if one has no other *human* in the world that loves him, G-d loves him. The human psyche likes to forget all the good things G-d has done for us from the minute we were born. This is an unusual phenomenon. People are surrounded by so much love – but they would rather ignore it. *We would rather believe that we are alone, and that no one cares for us. All this just in order to avoid feeling responsible for acknowledging our gratefulness and appreciation...*

*

It seems as if in our present day and age, it is impossible to emulate the willpower Moshe displayed for doing the right thing. 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 *lashon hara* (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 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.

ME IN THE MUD

In a conversation with a fellow rabbi, I discovered that the two of us shared a common feeling: students that we are asked to learn with and to care for show us how much they would like us to be there for them. They expect us to attend to their needs – even at the expense of our time and money. They expect us to answer every phone call or e-mail. The rabbi, from his part, puts so much into assisting the student in every way. It is “understood” – from the rabbi's point of view, anyway, that such great personal investment will create a bond of trust and a mutually warm relationship.

The phenomenon that we discussed is this: when the situation is reversed and the Rabbi needs or expects something from the student, he discovers a void. There is nothing there – no relationship, no dedication, no reciprocity. Since I was acquainted with one of the students with whom the Rabbi was frustrated, I decided to approach him on the subject. I told him that it could be that his rabbi is disappointed in the fact that, although he had given considerable time and effort – and even money – toward creating a special relationship between the two of them, his student doesn't even return the Rabbi's phone calls. The reply



I received needs no comment: it speaks for itself. “It’s his fault,” said the young man. “He chose to be a rabbi.”

I have seen this with businessmen who were put on their feet by a kind, successful friend. Not long after things were going well for the newly established fellow, all ties were cut off, in some cases, with the relationship being far less friendly than it had been before – for no justifiable or comprehensible reason. Many times, *shadchanim* feel the same way after they have made a great shidduch. The lucky person who has met his match will often not even mention the name of his benefactor. For a while, I pondered this way of men. This is not something new. It goes all the way back to ancient Egypt.

And a new king who did not know Yosef rose to power over Egypt. (Shemot 1:8) Rashi comments that Pharaoh *made himself* as if he did not know Yosef. This is amazing. Yosef and his family brought so much blessing to Egypt. Yosef built Egypt up to the point that it was **the** major world power. How could the Egyptians, then, be so cruel to the Jews and hold them in such bitter enslavement?

The answer is that when a person either rises to power or “gets out of the mud” of a dysfunctional state through a certain benefactor, the human tendency is not to want to see that person ever again. One explanation for this is because when one sees the benefactor, he is reminded of his former situation, of a negative identity. He does not

want to be reminded of his inferior status before having attained success. The Egyptians wanted to forget that without Yosef’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream and his plan for saving the economy of Egypt, they would have been no different from the people of the rest of the world. They enslaved the Jews bitterly in order to forget.

It is said about the Chatam Sofer that after he did someone a favor, he would give him a bag of small stones. The person would ask why the rabbi did this. His answer was that the way of the world is that it is customary for a beneficiary to throw stones at his benefactor. The Chatam Sofer’s message was, “Please throw these small stones and not big ones!”

Sometimes, painful reminders of times when we were “in the mud” act as catalysts for finding complaints about those who cared for and loved us. Whenever we have complaints about someone who did us a favor, we must always keep this in mind. It might just be the tendency to ignore our past by finding fault with the other person. Looking more deeply into ourselves, we may discover that at the root of such ingratitude lies a lack of self-respect. If we could only learn to respect ourselves as human beings, recognizing that past mistakes can be corrected. If only we could remember that we are only human – and humans sometimes need help – then we would be able to sincerely appreciate all the good and kindness that others do and did for us. This is one of the keys to leading a fruitful and happy life!

WHAT, THEN HOW

Do you know what is the most important thing that G-d gave you, possibly your greatest resource for success? It is something that can

get you out of most of life’s problems, something that can bring you the success that you are looking for in life, something that is



probably the most fascinating thing in the creation. Do you know what it is? It is the ability to think. We sometimes forget to thank G-d for giving us this capability, for it is difficult to remember to be appreciative for something that is invisible. It can only be noticed when someone says something smart or does something smart. In the introductory chapter to *Hovot Halevovot*, Rabbeinu Bachye writes that the first thing a human being should be thankful to the Almighty for is the ability to think. This is why our opening thanks to G-d in the Amidah, as well as the first thing we pray for is – אתה הונן לאדם דעת, *You grant man wisdom...* וחננו מאתך חכמה בינה ודעת. *And grant us from You, wisdom, understanding and knowledge...*

People get stuck in life, many times, not because they are not thinking, but *because they are not thinking effectively*. People blame G-d for their lack of success. The thought that “*G-d has favorites, and I am not one of them,*” is probably one of the most destructive thoughts a person can have. There is nothing farther from the truth. One has no choice in the Past and Future, but in the Now, G-d gives you the opportunity to make decisions. G-d gives people free choice, and waits for Hishtadlut. And the most important part of hishtadlut is thinking effectively. G-d, Who runs the Universe in accordance with rules called “nature”, allows people to become successful if they take a certain route, the one that will make people naturally successful. If a person has never tried the route of the successful, he will never know what G-d had cut out for him in life.

Studies prove that successful people have a certain way of thinking. Once I realized this, I dedicated a big part of my life to studying the thinking patterns of people successful in being happy, in achieving speed reading, in engaging

in public speaking, in stopping smoking, losing weight and building healthy, long-lasting, real relationships. I always ask the question, *What is their secret recipe to success?* I studied how people generate creativity, and never stopped being fascinated by this field. I always believed that if a person knew how the successful think, there would be a greater chance that G-d would allow him to be successful. I have helped a lot of people live better lives, just by showing them new ways to think or generate effective thinking. I will soon give you just one of these tools. It may change your life.

The way to get anyone, including yourself, to think is by asking a question. Any effective question will do. If you need a way to generate questions, just use the tool of the Boaz in his introduction to *Mishnayot Kodshim*. Ask any question connected to the six words, Who/ What /When/ Where/ Why and How. Five “Wh”s and one “Hw”. Now, the majority of successful people in life think in the following manner. They **first** ask the “What” question. What do I want? What does G-d want? What does my family want? What do my customers want? What do my students want? What do I consider successful? What do the successful people in this area do, think, believe, feel etc... They jot down on a piece of paper, or in their mind, ten things that they want. They first ask and figure out in the greatest detail the answer to the **what** question, AND DO NOT ASK THE “HOW” ‘TIL THEY HAVE FIGURED OUT ALL THE “WHAT’S. They will leave that for step two. The mind may come up with “how” on its own, only later. Only after focusing on exactly what you want, can your mind come up with the answer to “how”. G-d does this for you. Many times, G-d will perform miracles and help the person to figure out the how. (I never thought how I



would come up with so many thinkingaboutme.org articles. I just wrote out a plan of what exactly I wanted and started writing. The ability to come up with a new idea every week is, clearly, a miracle.) This is one of the places in the world where we can see G-d in His Creation. All you need to do is know, to the best of your capabilities, the answer to “What”.

Batya, Pharaoh’s princess, was strolling down the bank of the Nile River, with a group of her attendants. She was going to the mikveh for conversion. (Rashi Sota 12) Imagine that! Hitler’s daughter going to convert to Judaism! How was she going to do it?!? She saw little Moshe in the Nile, and she had mercy on him. She wanted to save him, but her maids warned her that this would be going against her father, Pharaoh’s decree to kill all Jewish baby boys. At the time, Pharaoh was, by far, the most powerful man on earth. How was she going to do it?!? Moshe, floating in his little casket, started to cry, arousing Batya’s mercy and compassion. The baby was too far for her to reach, at a distance of “many Amot”. She stretched out her hand, and her arm extended, miraculously. What was she thinking? She knew how far she could reach, and that, under the circumstances, there was no way she could reach it! How was she going to do it?!?

The Chafetz Chaim answers that when it comes to saving someone else, a person needs to do whatever is in his power, not worrying “how” he can do what seems out of reach. G-d will make a miracle, and the rest will happen “somehow”. Miracles happen in such a way; they compensate for what a person could not do on his/her own. ***The same is true for one to help himself in life.*** Our job in life is somehow to figure out what we want, what G-d wants, what our loved ones want. We are not to let the “How” get in the way. Then, we try to do

whatever is in our reach. Many people I know who succeeded in various areas of life did not know how things were going to turn out. They just knew what they wanted and did what they could to point themselves in the right direction. Somehow, (through G-d) things worked themselves out. Because G-d makes miracles in such a way.

Miriam, Moshe’s older sister, was a prophetess at the age five. She was already saving the Jewish newborns with her mother. She prophesied that her mother would give birth to the redeemer of Bnei Yisrael. And when Moshe was born, he was born circumcised, and the house shone with the light of the *Shechinah*. Amram kissed his daughter, Miriam, praising her for her correct prophecy that her mother, Yocheved, would give birth to the redeemer of the Jews. But on the day when Yocheved had to throw Moshe into the Nile, Amram hit Miriam on the head, asking “Where is your prophecy now?”. But Miriam knew that her younger brother was going to save the people. She knew *what* was going to happen, she just did not know *how*. She was curious to see how things were going to turn out (G-d). So, she went to the river to observe. (And she learned, that G-d has the most ironic ways for bringing about the “How”. G-d made it, that the same Pharaoh who killed so many Jewish baby boys and Egyptian baby boys, with the intention of killing the redeemer of the Jews, *that same Pharaoh will be the one to bring up the redeemer of the Jews in his own house!*) The Jewish women in Egypt had this trait as well. They believed in the Redemption, despite all the seeming impossibilities. And, in this merit, we were redeemed.

Many people get stuck on the how before they know the what. They think ahead of the game. They want it all to work out before it even starts. This is not the way of most successful



people. You need G-d to become successful. You need Him to help you figure out the “How” for you.

And one last point about “Whats.” One of the reasons why people cannot achieve success is because people do not know what they want, *or they cannot judge which “want” is the most important between conflicting issues.* The Shem Mishmuel on parashat Vayeshev writes that this is the *המתהפכת*

that holds people back from getting to the Eitz Hachaim, to *Yishuv hada'at*. *להט* has another definition aside from *sword*. It also can be referring to the *emotion* when someone has a great desire, all intent about something. Having strong, unclear desires is what keeps one from getting to the *עץ הים*. When the wants contradict, when they are wishy-washy, or *מתהפכת*, a person loses all serenity and ability for creativity.

AN INVISIBLE STAR

In 1973, in the summer, I was sitting, on my porch, on vacation, in Miami Beach. Looking up, at the beautiful sky, so many beautiful stars, and Hashem gave me an idea for a song. That the reason why we do not see some of the stars, is because we are not close enough to them. Had we been closer, we would definitely see the beautiful stars, the *Yiddishe Neshamos*. All we need, is a little love, and a little closeness. (Mordechai Ben David, intro to Hashamayim Meleim Ananim)

The first Rashi of Galut, the first Rashi of Shemot says *ואלה שמות בני ישראל – אף על פי שמנאן בחייהן בשמותן, חזר ומנאן במיתתן, להודיע חבתן שנמשלו לכוכבים, שמוציאן ומכניסן במספר ובשמותם, שנאמר (ישעיהו מ כו) המוציא במספר צבאם: לכולם בשם יקרא* *The reason why now, after their death, the Tribes are counted again, although they were already counted while they were alive, is because they are like stars.*

In what way are they like stars? The Kley Yakar answers, that just like the star that you cannot see in the light of day, although it is there, so too, some of the greatest Jews are only recognized at their eulogy. While someone is alive, there are not that many times

that people say stories about their greatness. A *Sheva Berachot*, a *Seudat Preidah*, a *Levaya*. Other than that, we don't get a glimpse of people's greatness. But after one is not here anymore, after we are left in the dark, only then does one's star shine.

MBD gave me another explanation why now, after their death, there was a recount. Because in the lifetime of the people around us, we don't see how great they are, *because they are like stars*. And the reason why we don't see some of the stars is not because they are not stars, but because we are not close enough to them. And this is the reason why we are still in Exile, because we are not close enough to see the stars of each Neshama. When Yaakov wanted to reveal the date of redemption to his sons on his deathbed, he first told them to gather. *ויקרא יעקב אל־בניו ויאמר האספו ואגידה לכם את אשר־יקרא אתכם באחרית הימים. הקבצו ושמעו בני יעקב* : And Yaakov called out to his sons and he said to them, **gather**, and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of time. **Gather** and listen sons of Yaakov...

How did we get out of Egypt? By acts of closeness. By a Yochebed who was called



Shifra. The Baal Haturim tells us why she is called Shifra. Because the way of a midwife is that sometimes, when the baby dies, the midwife takes the Shefoferet, this pipe or tube, of reed, and puts it into the stomach of the child, and blows into it, and this brings back the child to life. (Baal Haturim- Shemot Rabbah 1; 13)

Moshe was named by Batyah when she pulled him out of the water. The Midrash Rabbah asks, why out of all the ten names that Moshe had, did G-d call Moshe the name Moshe? Also, one can ask, grammatically correct, the name should have been משיתיהו, That I pulled him out... How did the name Moshe stick?

The Torah is teaching us, that this name Moshe stuck to show the great merit of Bitya's kindness. (Shemot Rabbah 1;31) Selfless love. And this is what Bitya told Moshe when she saved him from the Nile. Just like I pulled you out of the Nile, you will pull the Jewish people out of Dead Sea. (Seforno) When one does kindness to another, although not always does the kindness boomerang, and give you back, but sometimes it can have tremendous effects on all of humanity. Look how far an act of kindness, an act of getting close can do. Just a little TLC. Tender. Loving. Care.

The first thing G-d told Moshe at the Burning Bush was to take his shoes off. Why was Moshe asked to take off his shoes? Because

when your shoes are off in the desert, you feel every grain of sand that is under your feet. G-d wanted Moshe to feel the pain of each and every Jew. And that would be the only way he could lead them out of Egypt. If you are going to lead them, you need to love them. *If you love someone, you know what bothers them.*

How often do we try to feel out what bothers our spouses, family members, community members, neighbors, the Jewish Nation, or even G-d? But G-d feels the pain of each and every one of us. You know something, it is so interesting. We are all called *Ivrim*, Jews. The word Ivri came from Avraham Avinu, Avraham Haivri, for he came from the other side of the river to the Land of Canaan. There is also a deeper explanation why Avraham was called Ivri. כל העולם כולו מעבר אחד והוא מעבר כל העולם כולו מעבר אחד, ולכן נקרא עברי *The whole world was on one side while he was on the other.* The power of one Jew is endless, that is why we are all singled out as Ivrim. In this week's parasha, when G-d asks Moshe to relay a message to Pharaoh, He prefers to be referred to as אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִיִּים. (Shemot 3 18) The G-d of the Ivrim. Why is there two Yud letters in the word Ivrim? The answer is, because G-d sees Himself as the G-d of each and every Yid. Each and every Jew, G-d feels, and G-d loves, because He is so close to each and every one of us. (R Shimshon R Hirsh) Because each and every one of us has this power to shine, if only we were a little closer to each other...

“WANNABES”

When R' Chaim Shmulevitz was eulogizing the Brisker Rav, he just cried as he was unable to speak, choked for words. He said that telling the stories of a person's deeds is the way that people usually give an idea of who that person was. But when we're talking about

the Rav, stories of his actions would not suffice to express his greatness. R' Chaim explained this as follows:

Our rabbis tell us of the great reward that Miriam received in the desert when she was a



leper. The *entire Jewish Nation* waited for her for *seven days*, until she became pure. This was the honor accorded her for an act that she did, as we are told in our parasha, when she was only a little girl, about six years old. She waited, for just a couple of hours, to see what would happen to her baby brother Moshe after she placed him in a floating basket in the Nile. A small act that many people might have done. We see that Avraham Avinu was rewarded with amazing miracles for his descendants, because of the way he invited and hosted guests. Since then, a lot of people have invited in guests, and a lot of people have cared and waited to see what would happen to their younger siblings when they were kids. So, why were Avraham and Miriam so richly rewarded for actions that other people do and for which they see no reward?

The answer is that it was not only the action that was done. It was the *type of person* who did that action. The act of kindness of an Avraham and the act of caring of a Miriam were different from similar actions done by other people. Not because the quantity. And not because the quality. But because the person who did it. One cannot get a picture of the Brisker Rav by hearing the stories about him. By his actions. Because the actions do not describe the Rav. The Rav describes his actions.

I have difficulty in explaining this concept, even though I do not think it is hard to understand. If, for example, someone would try to imitate the Brisker Rav's actions, it would be just humorous, because what he did was special because of the way the Rav felt about life. An external act, without the matching intent, without being on the same level of character as the person whom one is copying, is just making a fool out of oneself – something like being a monkey.

The same action can be done by two different people. Significance and meaning of an act is, to a great extent, determined by *who the person is* who is doing it. When we see a picture of R Elyashiv lighting a Chanuka Menorah, we say *wow, that's R' Elyashiv lighting the Menorah*. When we see an old man with a beard and Meah Shearim garb lighting the menorah, we do not say, *wow, that was an old man with a beard and Meah Shearim garb lighting a menorah*. What is the difference? The difference is in the person doing the action. If a friend bumps into you, or someone with whom you are not on particularly good terms bumps into you, you could be totally forgiving in the first case, and quite annoyed in the second.

Now you might ask, what can I do with this piece of information? *The person can decide what he wants to be, and then what he does will take on a new light*. If a person decides that he wants to be a person in whose eyes the ultimate goal of his life is *not* money, fame, happiness, raising a family etc., but rather to sanctify G-d's Name, then when I see this fellow going to work, I see an Eved Hashem going to work. When I see him bringing his child to school, I see the King's servant bringing his child to school. The person describes the action. *Let us take this a step further*.

There are three wants that a person has going through his head, whether he is conscious of them or not. *What do I want to be? What do I want to have? What do I want to do?* – A person can think that what he does, i.e., his livelihood, is what he is. He is a barber. A lawyer. A doctor. But this is not the real truth. *A person can decide who we wants to be – a nice person, a calm person, an accepting person, a worshipper of G-d...* Once someone makes this decision, *that is what he is*. It is one



of the most amazing aspects of the subconscious mind – *The subconscious mind does not know the difference between pretending and reality*. If, for example, a person pretends that he is a happy person, changing his facial and body muscles and their expressions to that of a happy person, he will be happy, as long as he pretends. (Usually, that happens until the unhappy thoughts come back; then, he forgets to pretend to be happy

and express a happy physiognomy. And then he is unhappy again.)

Just for curiosity's sake, what would happen if for a day, an entire day, you would pretend to be a person for whom the only success in life is to serve G-d and sanctify his Name? You would then be, maybe just for a day, a true servant of G-d. And then everything you do will take on an entirely different meaning.

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 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. אשר ברא אלוקים לעשות. *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 ב"ש in ש"פ, exchanging the letters for the letter that appears in their place when counting from the opposite end of the alphabet, you get the letters גל 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 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 וענו 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 בכרי 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, Korban. 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.

YOUER THAN YOU

One of the secrets of motivation is hidden in this week's Midrash.

וירא בסבלותם *And Moshe saw their burden. What did he see? R' Elazar the son of R' Yossi said, He saw a small load on the big Jew, and he saw a big load on the small Jew. A man's burden on a woman, and the woman's, on a man. The load of an elder on a youth, and the load of the youth on the elder. Moshe put aside his royalty, and he got permission from Pharaoh to put on each one the burden that was appropriate for each individual Jew. He presented it as if he were helping Pharaoh, for he claimed to Pharaoh that the slaves would*

die prematurely if each one continued to carry the other's load. (Shemot Rabbah 1; 27) The Midrash continues: G-d then told Moshe, You left your position and you went to see the pain of the Jews; you cared for them as brothers do. I, too, will leave the upper worlds and the lower worlds, and I will speak to you. This is what it means in the Passuk, at the thorn bush, וירא ה' כי סר לראות *And G-d saw that Moshe veered away from his path to see.* In other words, the Holy One, Blessed be He, saw that Moshe left whatever he was busy with to observe the burdens of the Jews. Therefore,



G-d called to Moshe from within the thorn bush.)

Why did Pharaoh distribute the burdens so inequitably? He would get far greater productivity if he let each one do what was appropriate for him! And why, out of all the hardships of Egyptian slavery – the long hours, the impossible conditions – was it this particular aspect of their suffering that Moshe singled out to focus on? Why did the Torah choose to call this particular detail, the unfair and illogical distribution of loads, “their burden”, and why was Moshe so greatly rewarded for bringing it to Pharaoh’s attention?

Pharaoh knew what Dr. Seuss knew. “Today, you are you! That is truer than true! There is no one alive who is you-er than you!” A person who works in something that he identifies with, in something he enjoys, can work endless hours and not feel like a slave. Pharaoh wanted to break the Jews; he wanted to make them slaves, to deprive them of any feeling of self. How can someone break you? By not letting you be you. The greatest load you can carry in life, the greatest slavery, is to be someone you are not. To spend the most precious thing you have, time, the essence of your life, doing what you do not really want to do, being who you do not really want to be, is, in essence, real slavery.

As I write this article, I am finishing up putting together a course on the secrets of motivation. How to motivate yourself, and how to motivate others. One of the most important secrets of motivated people, of motivation, is identity. Doing what you do because you want to do it, because you are being you.

You see, the whole world is full of people who work 9 to 5. And the world is full of people

who work for their money, not for themselves. They need the check at the end of the month, and that is what motivates them. So they come into work, out of fear that if they do not, they will not be able to pay the heating bill, the electric bill, the phone bill or whatever. In most cases, the employee’s life can be defined as such: he works just hard enough not to get fired, and the employer pays him just enough that he won’t quit. This type of work is motivated by fear, not by identity, and it is only a matter of time until burn-out kicks in.

There are people out there, not that many, who work for their own sake, because they love what they do. The successful pizza guy loves making pizza, giving people the food they want at the speed they want it. He loves what he does so much he would do it for free, but he just needs to make money to continue doing what he loves doing – giving more good pizza to more people. The successful barber gives haircuts, because he loves talking to people while he cuts their hair and loves seeing the customer glance in the mirror appreciatively, as he pays and walks out, feeling that he looks more presentable than he did when he came in. Those people have found their identity. They would work for free, but they need money to keep doing what they are doing. If the drive is money, if that is the sole motivator and there is no drive to do what is being done for its own sake, the customer can feel it. He can taste it in the pizza. This is the way G-d programmed human beings, each one with his own interest, profession and nature. (Berachot 43b) G-d, out of his mercy for mankind, created garbage men, plumbers, etc. He made these people with that identity, so that they could enjoy what they do, and we won’t have sanitary problems. Even though, for most people, such jobs would be torture, these people have it in them from G-d, to



actually enjoy their “profession”. This is an incredible concept.

מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקיים שהחזרת בי נשמתי I am thankful, before You, Ever-living King, that

You returned me *my* Neshama, with great compassion... We all have a different, unique soul, a different and unique identity. And we thank G-d for making me, exactly who He made me.

PSYCHO-ARCHAEOLOGY

There is a quote from Menachem Medel from Kotsk: **“I do not want followers who are righteous; rather, I want followers who are so busy doing good that they don’t have time to do bad.”** Some problems in life don’t have solutions. Some tendencies can’t be uprooted. Call it Habit. Call it Nature. Whatever it is, whether it is an eating addiction, smoking addiction, depression, or Whatsap addiction, there is only a certain extent to which you can help fix the problem by talking about it, or digging it up, or hashing over the problem. Continuous hashing over the problem is something like grinding water. After a while, grinding the problem is grinding water. This is because dealing with the problem on a surface level of logic and theoretical treatment, isn’t as effective as dealing with it on a different plane, on a plane of altering habits and behaviors . As important as it is for people who are depressed to go to therapy, take medicine if prescribed, etc., it is equally important for them to go to the gym. Studies have shown that people who exercise have less chance of getting depressed than those who don’t. Just going for a run gets the mind running as well.; it prevents one from being stuck on the negative thoughts that hold one down, and pushes a person on to other things in life.

If you have an eating problem, the solution is not only cognitive. If you rely on your mind alone to be your mouth’s police guard, it won’t work. You need to surround yourself with

people who are conscious of good nutrition. You need to get some quick , easy-to-make salad recipes. When you fill up on healthy food, you are in a better position for change in the mirror. Smoking, drinking, digital addictions – all need to be dealt with the Kotsker’s approach of ” too busy doing good to have any time left to do bad.”

Many psychologists are archeologists; they dig around till they find some ancient connection from your life story to your problem in life. Then they “undo” that, somehow, if they can. And then, the problem may be solved. It may not be. In my house, I give the kids a lot of responsibilities. Even if they break a dish while doing the dishes, they are so busy doing good, that they do not have time to do bad. If they are bored, they can start to fight, and then, who knows? They might end up throwing dishes at each other. Sometimes, when they fight, instead of judging who is wrong and who is right, I give them something positive to do, like clean up their rooms. Read a book. The fight just disappears, *because people do the worst things either when they are bored, or used to doing things by rote, automatically, without any active thought.* The Talmud teaches that a man who is extremely rich and has many maids and marries a young girl, needs to give her pets, so that she won’t be bored. בטלה מביאה לידי שיעמום , *Boredom breeds craziness.* (Ketubot 59b, 61b)



We can learn this from Pharaoh. The Messilat Yesharim writes that the Evil Inclination is likened to Pharaoh in the sense that the way the Evil Inclination leads us to transgression is by getting us to do our everyday routines by rote, without thinking. This is similar to Pharaoh, who said תכבד העבודה על האנשים *Give the people a heavy workload*, so that they won't have time to think. The Evil Inclination, also, gets us so occupied in our routine that we forget to pray when we pray, learn when we learn, and be genuinely nice when we are being nice to people.

The reason why we get caught up in jealousy, anger, depression, addictions is because we are not so preoccupied with doing good stuff that we have no time for the bad. Being constantly

busy with constructive, positive activity is like doing Judo on the Evil Inclination, using his own technique, his own strength against himself. If you feel that you have failed in something, don't "chew on it". Find something amazing that you like doing, and concentrate your energies toward that. You can chew on the problem later. Just get back to work. Get back to doing what you know is right. **Get so busy doing good that you don't have time to do bad.**

So, if you feel you have fallen, make a life goal. Start growing, and most of the time, the problem will fall by the wayside.

PRAYING HYSTERICALLY

The Talmud in Berachot (24b) states: *someone who raises his voice in prayer is from those who lack faith in G-d*. The simple explanation is according to Rashi. *Why does the worshipper have to raise his voice if G-d is found all over? Doesn't G-d hear us even when we whisper?* By this worshipper screaming his prayer, it is as if he does not believe that G-d's Presence is everywhere, and he doubts G-d's ability to hear even the slightest of sounds.

The Kotzker asks a question that most people would not ask. *What is so bad if this person "invented" for himself a way to arouse his emotions in prayer, by raising his voice in order to awaken his focus? Why is he considered, for doing such a thing, מקטני האמונה, from those who lack faith in G-d?*

The Kotsker answers, that this method to "get into it" is wrong. *Why did he only try to get into the focusing now, when he was in middle of prayer? A person should get himself into the*

"mode of prayer" before prayer! And for this, for coming into prayers *not* in focus, a person shows that he does not *really believe* that his prayer is going to "make it or break it." If he did, the approach would be an entirely different one. One should even make a prayer, before prayer, that he have proper concentration while praying. This is what is meant when it says, (Berachot 30b) הסידים הראשונים היו שוהין שעה א' ומתפללים כדי שיכוונו לבם לאביהם שבשמים *The original pious men would wait one hour before praying, so that their prayers would be focused to their Father in Heaven*. The Kotzker points out that it should have said ואחר כך מתפללים 'שוהין שעה א' they would wait one hour and then pray. From this we can understand that in the "hour wait" before prayer, *they would offer supplication, asking to have concentration in their prayers.*

In this week's parasha, we find different terminologies for the prayers of the Jewish Nation in Egypt, when they were at the peak of their suffering. ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וימת מלך

מצרים ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבדה ויזעקו ותעל שועתם אל האלקים מן העבדה. (ב' כג') ... ויאמר ה' ראה ראיתי את עני עמי אשר במצרים *And it was, in those many days, and the king of Egypt died, and the Jews groaned from the slavery, and they cried out, and their cries went up to G-d from their slavery... And G-d said, I saw the neediness of my nation in Egypt, and I heard their cries (shouts)...*

The Zohar states that this type of prayer, זעקה, crying out, is a prayer that does not get turned away empty handed. R' Shimshon Pincus describes this זעקה, this type of prayer. It is a *hysterical* prayer. When a person is hysterical about what he needs, when he calls out to G-d from genuine hysteria, that is the most powerful prayer. The reason why this prayer is called זעקה is because it is a prayer out of pain, and a realization that screaming out to G-d is the only option. And, R' Shimshon Pincus would say that the only reason we don't pray a "hysterical prayer" is because we do not realize **what is at stake** in what we are praying for. If we would come to prayers with the understanding that it is not only for the actual "bread and water" that we pray that we should have, but we are actually

praying that we not suffer the "state of mind of the poor people"- When we pray for peace, if only we would think about the big fights that go on in some families, the worst wars that could be, we would be hysterical, for we would realize what is at stake- When we pray for children to grow up in the path of the Torah- *we are praying for our only future* – were we to realize the import of our requests, our prayers would be a lot different. They would be more pure. They would be from the deepest parts of our souls. And they would be answered.

Someone who enters to visit a sick man on Shabbat should say היא מלזעוק ורפואה קרובה לבוא. (Shabbat 12b) It is Shabbat (we are to refrain) from "crying out", and the cure is close by. There is a saying from the Kotsker that when someone has something to cry out for, and he wants to cry out but cannot, this is the greatest cry of all. And this is why refraining to "cry out" on Shabbat is so great, and the cure is close by. Because "crying out" is not necessarily how much noise you make. Crying out is the deepest emotions and feelings of the soul expressing themselves in tears. If only we would pray like that...

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