



Parashat Vayakhel



English version

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THE ART OF BEING THE ETERNAL NATION

Things don't look that bright for Israel, with Ramadan coming up, but we don't fear. The Holocaust did not happen because we were weak physically as a people, or because we had no army. It did not happen because it made sense it would happen. As a matter of fact, nothing made sense back then. After all, there were at least 42 failed plots to assassinate Hitler, that historians uncovered! If logic would dictate, IDF would have never won the Six Day War, nor the Yom Kippur War. We are a miracle. And a miracle means, G-D.

Seemingly bad things happen only if and when G-d allows them to happen, for a reason we will only know when Eliyahu Hanavi comes with good tidings of Mashiach. For the meantime, though, we have faith, that Am Yisrael Hai, through connecting to G-d, who is **חי העולמים** the Life of the Worlds, as it says, **וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָלִים בִּימְנוּקָא אֶלְקֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם** We rejoice each Purim, for we are part of an indestructible nation. We celebrate the fact that all those who wanted to destroy us, evaporate with the news. We are The Eternal Nation, a nation that is comparable to that sheep that is surrounded by 70 wolves. We are protected, and not because we protect ourselves. G-d protects us, for the Torah we learn, and the Mitzvoth we do. Here are just a few:

What protects us is the Shabbat Table. **וְשָׁמְרוּ בְּיַמֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם:** Making Shabbat, is what gives us **דורות**, generations. If you have no Shabbat Table, even if your kids will stay Jewish, but your grandchildren

probably won't. The Megillah tells us at the outset, that Shabbat is what saved us in Shushan. **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כָּטוֹב לִבְהַמְלֹךְ בְּגִיזָן**. G-d contrasted how we behave at our Shabbat meals when we drink, singing Shabbat songs to G-d, versus the immorality at the party of Achasverosh, when the gentiles get drunk. G-d then punished Vashti with her life on Shabbat, and put Esther in her stead, who eventually saved the day. This was measure for measure, for Vashti forcing Jewish women to work her field on Shabbat, and tend to her garden. **כִּי אֲשַׁמְרָה שַׁבַּת א-ל יִשְׁמְרֵנִי**

What protects us is charity. There are two things that what you take from it, they become bigger. A hole, and fire. You can light a flame from a flame, and the first flame does not get smaller. When G-d wanted to show Moshe the way to get the Jews to give charity of the Mahatzit Hashekel, the way to do that, was by showing Moshe a half coin of fire. Why fire? Moshe had no idea how to get the Jews to give from their money. After all, people believe that money protects them, and giving away money, would mean giving away protection. Money is time, and time is life, which is why money is called **דמים**, blood. How do you expect to get people to give their life to charity? But G-d told Moshe, the way to get them to give is by getting them to believe, that by giving charity, you don't lose. You gain. Just like fire. How so?

The money you have, is the money G-d entrusted you with, to do good things. If you do good with



your money, G-d will give you more of it, because He knows He can trust you with it, He knows you can be His partner. G-d is נותן לחם לכל בשר, He gives food to all, He is הזן את הכל, He supports everything. When you give charity, you are ensuring G-d that He can partner with you in supporting His Creatures. This is also why, giving Tzedaka, is an atonement, and it annuls the Evil Decree, and saves from the Angel of Death. Because giving charity, is pledging allegiance of Faith in G-d.

What protects us is unity. The Sefer Hassidim writes, לא יעשו הערלים רעה אלא א"כ יעשו ישראל תחילה, *The non-Jews can't do us any harm, unless the Jews first cause harm, or are cruel, to each other.* (209) The idea of the Half Shekel, was to show, that we are all incomplete when we stand alone. The reason why the Jew is more successful than the gentile in business is because when one Jew gets rich, six Jews get rich. They work together, they network, with a win-win mindset.

The half shekel, was originally to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. Eventually, it became the fundraiser before Nissan, to unite the People in bringing communal sacrifices in the Temple. A deeper meaning for the Mahatzit Hashekel, is found in the Midrash, that it is an atonement for the brothers selling Yosef וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת-יוֹסֵף לְיִשְׁמָעֵאלִים לְיֹסֵף בְּכֶסֶף. (Esther Rabba 7;20) The amount that each of the ten brothers received, 2 *Kesef*, was the exact amount of Half a Shekel. The only ones who were able to save the Nation from the decree of Haman, was Mordechai and Esther, who were descendants of Binyamin, the brother that was not at all part of the sale of Yosef. The selling of Yosef was from the belief, that we don't need this brother, we could manage without him. A person does not get into a fight with someone he needs. In the end, the brother Yosef, was the brother who supported all of them in the years of the famine, and was the most needed.

The divide in the nation is what got us into the Purim mess. As Haman told Achashverosh, יִשְׁנֶן עַם-אֶחָד מִפְּנֵי וּמִפְּרִדּוֹ *There is this nation that is divided...* And the way to get out of the mess, is to reunite, through Mishloach Manot and Matanot Laevyonim. The Halacha says, כַּשֶּׁם שֶׁנִּכְנַס אֲב מִמַּעֲטִין בַּשְּׂמֵחָה *Just like when the month of Av begins we are to lessen our joy, so too, when the month of Adar begins, we are to add in joy.* Why doesn't the Halacha just say, that we should be happy in Adar, without the comparison to being less happy in Av? The answer is, that just like the destruction of the second Temple was the result from a divide in the Nation, from senseless hate, so too, the redemption of the Nation will be only through unity, as unity always brings salvation. Thus, the introduction to Adar, is the Half Shekel. To remind us, that we are all interdependent.

What protects us is Torah learning. When a defeated Haman came to Mordechai to take him around town on the King's horse, Mordechai was learning Torah. It was the second day of Passover, and he was teaching on that day, when the whole nation was fasting for three days, the laws of bringing the Korban Haomer, for that was the sacrifice of the day. He was teaching the students, how the Kohen does Kemitza, on the Korban Haomer. Haman said to Mordechai, *Your Kemitza of barley flour, outweighed all the silver that I gave to Achashverosh.* What got Haman the most angry, was seeing Mordechai in the Bet Midrash, studying Torah. The passuk says, וַיֵּצֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא שְׂמֵחָה וְטוֹב לֵב וְכִרְאוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-מִרְדֳּכַי בְּשַׁעַר הַמְּלָכָה וְלֹא-יָקָם וְלֹא-יָזַע מִמֶּנּוּ וַיִּמְלֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-מִרְדֳּכַי הַמֶּלֶךְ: When Haman would see Mordechai sitting in the gate of the king, and he did not get up for Haman, this burned Haman with anger. We know, that whenever the Megillah says in it the word Hamelech, it is hinting to the King of the World. If so, when Mordechai was sitting in the Shaar Hamelech, in the gate of the king, he was sitting in the Bet Midrash! What bothered Haman more than anything, was that he could not disturb Mordechai's learning, for even a second!



THE ART OF MANAGING BEAUTY

The Eshet Chayil is not a woman of strength, but of valor. Valor is strength of the mind, the ability to face danger and adversity with firmness, bravery and courage. A woman needs valor and courage to dress nicely but modestly, and that courage comes from a focus on the next world and on the future of her family. עז־וְהִגֵּר לְבוּשָׁה אֲתִשְׁמֵךְ לַיּוֹם אָחֵרָיו (see Akedat Yitzchak Chaye Sarah)

G-d has no interest in monks or nuns; He has plenty of angels in Heaven. He wants humans who make the mundane spiritual, infusing it with meaning and purpose. Separating ourselves from worldly pleasures is not a Jewish definition of holiness. Jewish Holiness is using the worldly pleasures only for spiritual, Torah purposes and to sanctify G-d's Name. Refraining entirely from having any connection to anything material or physical is a sin, as the Nazir needs to bring a sin offering to finish his Nazir status, because he could not enjoy wine, during his Nazir days.

When Moshe fundraised for the Mishkan, the women came running with all their jewelry. With their gold, silver and copper. They brought ornaments such as the כּוּמָז, a women's belt ornament, and they brought their copper mirrors, בְּמִרְיַת הַנְּזָבָאֵת. One reason why women gave in their copper mirrors, נְהִשָּׁה, is to fix the sin of Chava with the נְהִשָּׁה, the snake, as the letters are similar. Moshe was disgusted with these mirrors that women used for beautifying themselves, for he understood that the attention to physical appearance was a ploy of the yetzer hara. But before he rejected the mirror and belt donations, G-d said to Moshe: Take those mirrors and belts!!! They are the most precious to Me, to be used for My Mishkan and my copper כִּיּוֹר, water basin! There is nothing more precious to Me and My Mishkan than the mirrors that were used by these Jewish women in Egypt to beautify themselves for their beaten and broken husbands, and build large families during the 86-year holocaust. Each woman would take her mirror out to the fields and call her husband/slave to eat lunch under the apple tree. And they would look at themselves in the mirror,

together with their husband, ... as the passuk says, יַחְתֵּם הַתְּפִילִּים עִוְרֵי תִידָה. (See Rashi 38;8)

Hormones are not bad or good. They just *are*, and it depends how you use them. When a person uses them in accordance to the Torah, G-d says that there is nothing more holy and precious. When a person gets married, in accordance with Jewish law, this is called Kiddushin. There is nothing else, in Judaism, that is referred to as holiness, other than marriage, itself. Because according to Judaism, holiness is making the mundane spiritual, and there is no greater making the mundane spiritual than marriage.

When a woman uses her strengths to strengthen the man to be holier and greater, there is nothing more spiritual that a woman can do. If we look at all the women who entered the Eshet Chayil hall of fame, it was always because of their having empowered men, not because of something related only to themselves. *Sarah, for making her husband rich from Pharaoh. Rivka, for helping Yitzchak overcome the loss of his mother. Leah, for greeting Yaacov with a cheerful face when he returned from the field, when she purchased that night from Rachel for some mandrakes. Rachel, for going through the embarrassment of having no children, every day, hoping to be a mother of the Tribes. Bitya, daughter of Pharaoh, who converted and dealt with Moshe. Yochebed, for being the mother of Moshe. Miriam, for prophesying that her mother would have the child (Moshe) that would save the Jewish People, for getting slapped on her head over her prophecy by Amram when the slavery got worse instead of the redemption arriving, and when little Moshe was thrown into the Nile, she stayed strong to her prophecy, by waiting on the side of Nile to see what would happen to her brother. Chana, for praying for a son, and in that merit of prayer, to be the mother of Shmuel, who was equal to both Moshe and Aharon. Yael, for not killing Sisra with a sword, so as not to wear something associated with men, but instead, killing him with a tent peg. The widowed woman who gave bread and water to Eliyahu the prophet. Rachav, the harlot, who was willing to help the Jewish*

Spies when the Jews came to destroy Yericho. Bat Sheva, for being the mother of King Shlomo. Michal, for saving King David's life from the hands of her father, King Shaul. Shimshon's mother. Elisheva bat Aminadav, the wife of Aharon, and the mother of all Kohanim. Serah Bat Asher, who saved a whole city of Jews, with her sound advice. The wife of Ovadiah the prophet, who prevented her sons from falling into King Achav's persuasion to worship idols. Shunamit, for feeding the prophet Elisha. Ruth, for converting and embracing the religion in such a way that she merited to be King David's grandmother. (Midrash Mishlei)

In Az Yashir, we mention how, when the Jews left Egypt and they crossed the Sea, the nations of the world were petrified from the Jewish nation. תפֿלַּרְעָהּ עָלֵיהֶם אִימָתָהּ וְנִפְחָדָהּ *Her fear and trepidation will fall upon them.* The word אימָתָהּ, her fear, is strange here. Why doesn't it just say אימה, fear? The answer is, when the nations of the world saw all the little children leaving Egypt, they wondered how the Jews were able to have the strength to have children, while they were in an 86-year holocaust? Every male slave was definitely going through the two greatest causes of depression: hopelessness and helplessness. How were they able to have children?!? The answer has to be that the Jewish nation has SUPERWOMEN!!! Women who know how to give their husbands hope, encouragement and spiritual strength! Women who recognize that

only through building families, can we hope that יִקְנֶהוּ יְיָ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד , that Hashem will rule forever, through descendants. The nations of the world realized that with women like that, the Jewish nation is indestructible!!! And that is who they feared! The incredibly spiritual Jewish women!!!

How does the woman have this power? This עוֹז? The answer is, וְתִשְׁחַק לְיוֹם אַחֲרָיוֹן , she knows how to laugh through the craziness, because in the end, on her last day, she will laugh best. She will give back her soul to her creator, saying, I gave every part of me for You, G-d! She knows how to look into the future, past the slavery. Ever wonder where Miriam and the women had drums and bongos in the desert, to sing at the Yam Suf? The answer is that the women were preparing these bongos while they were in the midst of slavery, knowing that there will be a lot to sing and dance about, when G-d brings about their salvation!

Mirrors, beauty, are creations of G-d, and they are good and beloved to G-d, but only when used in line with the Torah's guidelines. According to the Ibn Ezra, it was the giving in of these mirrors, by these women, that G-d loved so much. These women realized that now that we have a Mishkan, we don't need mirrors as much, because our homes will have tranquility in them, with the husband and wife growing spiritually, through their connection to the Mishkan, which brought G-d into their homes. And those mirrors, G-d wanted more than anything else!

VOICES OF A LEADER

Andrius Caesar, of Rome, once challenged Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Hannanyah, a very wise rabbi who was close to him: "I am better than Moshe, your teacher and leader, for I am alive, and he is dead. And it says in your Torah, in Kohelet כִּי לְכַלֵּב חַי הוּא טוֹב מִן הָאֲרִיָּה הַמֵּת – A live dog is better than a dead lion. (Kohelet 9 ; 4) R' Yehoshua asked the Caesar in return , "If you were to decree that your people light no fire for three days, would they obey?" The Caesar responded – "Yes, of course". And so he decreed.

The first night after his decree , they both climbed up to the rooftop of the Roman castle. They looked

around Rome, as far as the eye could see, and there was no light. Then, suddenly, they saw smoke in the distance. R' Yehoshua asked the Caesar, "What is this smoke coming up out of that chimney in the distance?" The Caesar answered, "The general of the city fell ill, and the doctor went to examine him. The doctor said that this general needs to drink hot water to get better. They lit fire to heat up the water." R' Yehoshua answered the Caesar, "Even while you are still alive, your people do not keep your decrees. They disobey your command even for reasons that are not פִּיקוּחַ נַפְשׁ , not a life and death issue. Even on the first day of your decree, one of your generals has

disobeyed your words. From the time that Moshe, my leader and teacher, taught us in his Torah לא תבערו אש בכל משבתכם ביום השבת "a fire shall not burn in your dwellings on the day of Shabbat", (Shemot 35 ;3) no Jew, during his whole life, lights a fire on Shabbat. Moshe's decree was not annulled. How do you say, then, that you are better than him? (Kohelet Rabbah 9; 3)

Just a few questions here. First, Caesar's argument was based on Kohelet. If he is *alive*, he is better than Moshe, who is *dead*. How did R' Yehoshua refute this? Second, were there no non-observant Jews who did not keep Shabbat over the years and did not listen to Moshe? And finally, why did R' Yehoshua pick this law, specifically, out of all the laws that Moshe gave his people in order to prove his point?

The answers can be understood on two levels. The first level is the basic difference between Moshe and Caesar's roles as leaders. The difference between Moshe's rule and the Caesar's rule is that in addition to Moshe having been our leader, he was also our beloved teacher. Caesar was just a leader in the form of a dictator who gave orders. Moshe's teachings are eternal, he is *still* our leader and teacher, and therefore, he is *still alive in the minds of his people*. The words of Moshe are taken very seriously, and his words still echo in the thoughts of the nation, as they have done for thousands of years, *because Moshe knew how to be the greatest leader ever*. Once a week Moshe's people hear him say, just as he did thousands of years ago; *"A fire shall not burn in your dwellings on the day of Shabbat."* The reason why R' Yehoshua specifically chose this law regarding fire on Shabbat is because this law is one of the most inconvenient laws to live by; it effects our lives the most. For instance, lighting up a dark room, heating our homes in the winter, cooking... . Even today, electricity, the modern day "fire", is forbidden on Shabbat, for it falls under the category of burning an actual fire. Not lighting fire on Shabbat makes it obvious to all the nations of the world that we still adhere to Moshe's teachings. Although not all of the Jews keep all of the laws, it

is about the significant number of Jews who *do* take the "trouble" to keep Shabbat. So, R' Yehoshua explained to the Caesar, *Moshe is still alive: people are still listening to his voice. Your voice, your command, is disobeyed for the slightest inconvenience.*

The deeper answer to the questions asked above is really in the way we understand how one hears the words of a leader. People go through their entire lives "hearing" voices of authority figures, leaders, in their heads, in their subconscious. Voices that they no longer hear in the literal sense, but still feel obligated to obey. These are the voices of our *parents and mentors, those who imprinted in us our morals and values*. It is they who told us *what* is important in life, and how important it is. These voices are so strong that people feel an obligation to heed their words, long after those who first spoke those words are gone.

So, can we say that *all* those who have been in a position of authority over us have this effect on us? Absolutely not. This is where the type of leader plays a crucial role in the degree to which one heeds his words, and for how long. The stronger the trust and love of the leader/parent is for the subject/child, the stronger the impact of the voice, and the stronger the feeling that one must adhere to, or "hear" the words that were spoken.

Now, there are two types of authority figures/parents. There are those who are dictators, and there are those who are leaders. A leader's voice is truly heard: it echoes in those who follow him. Of course, the *greatest leader ever* was Moshe, and that's why his voice keeps echoing in Jewish hearts. If we just pay attention, we can learn all of the qualities that make one a good leader from almost every story we know about Moshe. To mention a few of these qualities; **Trust:** Moshe gave an exact account of funds received, down to the last shekel that he collected, avoiding any distrust amongst his followers. **Open communication:** Moshe was willing to hear and discuss whatever was important to his people; *if it was important to them, it was*



important to him. They felt comfortable talking to Moshe about every last detail. Moshe preferred one-on-one communication, and was easily approachable. (Once he realized that he would become worn out by continuing this way, and it would have a bad effect on his leadership he followed Yitro's advice to delegate certain positions.) On our level, we can understand that leadership requires a person to be **emotionally intelligent**, aware of his own feelings and those of the people around him. This enables us to prepare for expected situations and reactions. (Moshe was sensitive to the fact that his older brother, Aharon, would logically be the one to lead and take the Jews out of Egypt.) **Knowing when and how to give criticism:** Moshe was careful not to criticize the Jewish nation until the end of his life.

Moshe **went out to his people**, to be part of them and be "hands on" when they were still in slavery. Moshe displayed **compassion** by running after the sheep, which was one of the prime reasons he was chosen to be a leader. Immediately, he was appointed by G-d at the Burning Bush. Moshe **defended his people**, and he was able to **understand their feelings...** There is no end to how one can learn leadership qualities from Moshe.

As parents and role models, we must be aware of whether we are leading or dictating. We must learn from Moshe Rabbeinu what needs to be done in order to lead. We must decide whether we want to be heard for a moment, like a dictator, or if we want to be heard for generations, and have our voices echo for years to come, like true leaders.

UNDERSTANDING THE SINNER

At times, we hear very unsettling things about people we know – people who we thought of as good and honest can fall so low. There is a mitzvah to judge people favorably. That, however, is not the topic at hand. Rather, our focus is on understanding people.

It is extremely perplexing to us when we become aware of the fact that someone whom we know sinned: should I try to understand how this happened, or should I just forget about it, saying it doesn't make any difference. Either way is fine, as long as it is not thought about too much. But at times, when the story involved someone close to us, we cannot find peace within ourselves.

There are parts of the Torah which raise complex questions. Now, just because they are complex, it does not mean that there are no answers. There **are** answers. And many of them are lessons for life. Here is one of them.

We know that the Jews rose to the level of angels upon receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai. They heard G-d. They almost *saw* G-d. How could they plunge so deeply and swiftly to the abyss of the Sin of the Calf, a sin of idolatry, just because they

thought that Moshe was a couple of hours late? Even if the Satan tricked them into thinking that Moshe was dead. And, even if it was not the whole nation that was involved... How could anyone fall into idolatry at the foot of Mt. Sinai? And even kill Hur for opposing them?

There are more than a few answers to this question. R' Yaakov Kametzky, zt"l, answered it with a unique twist. He said that the question does not even exist! As many times in life, it becomes a question only when you do not "put yourself in the shoes" of the sinner. The Jews were, at the time, living a life of miracles. A whole nation of more than 3 million people were in the Sinai desert. They were sustained by the Manna that G-d gave them in Moshe's merit. If he had left them, and they would not have Manna, many would die in the dessert from starvation. Their life was dependent upon miracles. Without Moshe, they would be no more than a poor nation without food. Our Rabbis tell us that a poor person is considered dead. They were in a state of mind that defied logic, a state of panic. At that time, idolatry was extremely common in the world. It was natural for people to want to serve something tangible. After our Rabbis

removed the Yetzer Hara for idolatry by giving us prayer, it is, altogether, very hard for us to understand the Sin.

I believe that many times, when we do not understand the reason for a person's downfall, and we are left with a question, it is in actual fact not a question. We are barely able to put ourselves in the

shoes of anyone else, especially in the shoes of those who went through or are going through different traumas, tests or nightmares. We should, however, pray with fervor in our morning prayers- ואל תביאנו לידי ניסיון *and please, do not bring me to a situation where I am tested...*and, if we do ever have to face a test, that we should be strong enough to meet the challenge.

JEWISH REMEDY FOR RELAXATION

“שבת שבתון... שבת השביעי וביום מלאכה וביום השביעי... שבת שבתון” *Six days your work shall be done and on the seventh day...rest*” (Exodus 35:2). In this passuk, there seem to be two commandments: to rest on the seventh day, and to work the other six days. But is there really a *mitzvah* to work six days a week? Also, the words “*your work shall be done,*” are surprisingly passive. It would seem the Torah should have commanded to “do your work” instead.

On Shabbat, many have the custom to eat fish. There is an interesting phenomenon about fish. If one were to open the belly of a large fish shortly after it has consumed a smaller fish, he would find the small fish facing the tail of its predator. Judging from its position, one can deduce that the big fish's “fish-food” was not the one he had chased to near death, but rather another fish, one that swam straight into its mouth. This is the lesson of the Shabbat as we shall soon see.

Rabbeinu Bachye in *Chovot Halevavot* mentions a fundamental concept of Jewish belief that may be confusing at times. *A person must realize that the effort he puts into something is not the cause of his success.* (Bitachon Chap. 4) Success is delivered by G-d, in His infinite, unfathomable ways. It is incumbent upon each man to do his utmost to make a living; G-d does not want us to rely upon miracles. It is for this reason that the *passuk* specifically commands each person “*six days your work shall be done*”. We are commanded to do our part by putting in our effort and working on the other six days of the week. However, we are also expected to realize that, essentially, we are just going through the motions. Ultimately, success

rests in the hands of Hashem alone. This is why our *pasuk* says “*your work shall be done*” as opposed to “*Do your work*”.

Rav Wolbe explains (*Alei Shor* 2; *Bitachon VeHishtadlut*), that this can be a very difficult concept. For example, a farmer is commanded to do all his many, diverse jobs in order to prepare and sow his field, yet he must still believe that his toil was not needed by G-d in order to provide his sustenance. He toils only because that is the manner in which G-d commanded that he behave when He created the world.

The Torah gives us one day a week to change perspective and internalize this belief. The world on Shabbat is a time when money has no value, and no bearing whatsoever on our lives. *Chazal* explain that, on *Rosh Hashana*, each person is allotted a certain amount of money for the whole year, and any Shabbat expenses are separate from that allotment, not diminishing the original year's sum in the least. The fact that our livelihood comes from G-d is clearer to us on Shabbat, but, of course, holds true in the same measure during the week, even though we are required to invest our efforts in work. We demonstrate our recognition of this principle by eating fish on Shabbat: just as the large fish had to toil for its meal by chasing a smaller one, its actual sustenance came from a totally different fish!

One can truly rest on Shabbat only if one feels that ‘his efforts are his responsibility- but his successes are not in his control’. By internalizing this concept, one can experience true relaxation on Shabbat. It is for this reason that there is really no

point in working to an extreme degree. A workaholic, by definition, thinks his level of success is determined through his own efforts, as opposed to being granted by G-d. Tension and stress come when one feels the loss of a control

that he thought he once had. But when we can internalize the fact that G-d was (and is) really in control all the time, then, we can experience a truly restful state.

REFRAMING QUARRELS WITH LOVE

Many couples live under the mistaken impression that *shalom bayit* (tranquility at home) means no fighting. This is very untrue. *Shalom bayit* means knowing *how* to fight. It means knowing how to make up. No two people are identical, and neither are their life perspectives. True love is existent in the new couple after their first disagreement. Until then, they simply did not know each other. Knowing how to disagree, without being degrading or insulting, means that there is mutual respect. Making up and compromising means that the relationship is more important than the topic at hand. Many times, this requires a sense of reframing, a change in the way things are perceived.

Although the Jews sinned with the golden calf right after their commitment to G-d at Mt. Sinai, G-d showed us that He still desired to be among us. He told us that He wanted to be among us in a Mishkan. This was the display of love that was greater than the offense.

Strangely, the Torah writes that it was not so simple. G-d told Moshe **וּבְיוֹם פְּקֻדֵי וּפְקֻדַתִּי עֲלֵהֶם** (32: 34) “And on the day that I make My account, I shall remember their Sin.” Rashi comments here that throughout the generations, when the Jews must suffer, G-d adds to their trials a bit of punishment for the Sin of the calf. If He were to have visited the whole punishment upon us all at once, we would have been annihilated! G-d broke the punishment to a “swallowable bite-size.”

R' Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev was troubled very much by this. *How could the All Merciful G-d write in His Torah that He would never forget our Sin, even after repentance?*

R' Levi Yitzchak, as he always does, was able to reframe even the greatest of sins. He pointed to the Talmud (Berachot 32) that G-d will actually “forget” the Sin following our repentance. Rather, the idea of the passuk is that G-d will never forget the Sin of the calf in the sense that *we had Free Will then*. When someone comes from a pious family and grows up to be pious, no eyebrows are raised. On the other hand, when someone pious comes from a house in which the family members and their ancestors were anything *but* pious- this amazes people. When the Jews accepted the Torah, this did not show anything special about them – for the Jews were the descendants of the Holy Forefathers. What else could we expect from the descendants of such a family? *This was who they were naturally*.

When they sinned with the calf, this displayed that they actually were not pious at the core. It showed that the people who accepted the Torah did so, not only because they followed in their parents’ way; rather, it was because they overcame their desires. They rose to the challenge. When the Jews repent for such a sin, it is through a battle against an inner instinct for evil that all humanity must overcome. It shows that *we were not naturally pious*.

G-d will remember this Sin of the calf on the days of wrath. He will remember the inner power struggle between good and evil: that we decided of our own free will to listen to the Yetzer tov to accept the Torah. That we decided of our own free will to repent from the Sin. With this in mind and with the positive way in which He will look at it, G-d will count this for our merit.

In marital harmony, we can reframe the fights of the past and turn them into signs of love. This is

Detecting Bad Habits

“והנשיאם הביאו את אבני השוהם” – *And the princes brought the shoham stones* (Exodus 35:27)“. Rashi asks the question, why is the letter *yud* missing from the word *vehanisi'im* (והנשיאים)? He explains that while the Jewish nation was donating to the *Mishkan* (tabernacle), instead of bringing their own offerings at the same time, the *Nesi'im* offered to bring whatever would be missing at the end of the collection. To their shock, Bnei Yisrael quickly donated all the necessary materials, leaving the *Nesi'im* with nothing to donate. Disturbed at their plight, they asked how they could still take part in the building of the *Mishkan*. Hashem responded that they could donate the “*avnei shoham*” stones. However, since they had been complacent during the period of donating, the letter *yud* was removed from their name.

Rav Chaim Leib Schmulevitz points out that removing the letter *yud* from their name in the Torah was no simple matter. In fact, Yehoshua was later given this letter by Moshe as a *shemira* (protection) against being part of the plot of the spies. R' Chaim asks – why were they penalized with the loss of a *yud*, if their intentions were good? Weren't they ready to donate however much would be missing?

Rav Chaim explains that it was the trait of laziness that drove the *Nesi'im* to wait until the end. *The element of laziness here was minute, and the Nesi'im themselves were unaware of the presence of this trait within them!* On a similar note, Rav Yisrael Salanter, while expressing the importance of *mussar*, writes that negative traits hide in the deepest recesses of the heart. *Mussar* is like a flashlight that helps one discover and reveal his true self. Still, we may ask ourselves, how could the *Nesi'im* be guilty of laziness, if they offered to make sure all the costs would be covered?

the way of G-d. We are commanded to follow.

At the Sin of the Golden Calf, those involved worked with zeal and alacrity. They told Aaron that they couldn't wait for tomorrow. They killed Hur, who opposed them. They quickly took off their gold rings to ensure that the Calf would be made without delay. Those involved in this sin displayed motivation and ambition in carrying it out.

When one truly desires to do something, it is understood that he puts in much more effort and shows more determination than when he is not really interested. The *Nesi'im's* failure to donate immediately reflected a minute level of indifference stemming from laziness. The *Nesi'im* should have learned from the behavior displayed at the Golden Calf and translated it to worshipping Hashem with that same zeal when fulfilling His Will.

In applying this to ourselves, many times we can observe other people's actions and learn from them the innate strength we have within us. For example, one who has trouble getting up in the morning to go to pray need only look at the millionaire who jumps out of bed with enthusiasm early each morning to earn more money. By seeing his fellow's ability to get up, regardless of his exhaustion, one understands that it is possible, when there is true will, to do the same. Tapping in to the power of hidden energy, one can, with wisdom, direct it toward meaningful goals.

The former Mashgiach of Yeshivas Ponivitch, Rav Yechezkel Levenstien, would act with tremendous strength, even though his physical makeup was frail and weak. When asked about this, he commented how he had learned from the Chinese, while staying in Shanghai during WWII, how it is possible to use extreme physical strength. The frail, old Chinese men would harness themselves and pull heavy wagons, the way horses would, using unusual amounts of strength. Rav Levenstien learnt from their ways and applied this to himself.

I myself once used this method to improve myself. I would always have tremendous difficulty staying up learning on the night of Shavuot, until once I stayed up the entire night on the phone, having a delightful conversation. After hanging up, I made

note of my inner strength which enabled me to carry on – even with lack of sleep – when properly motivated.

I KNOW I CAN

Upon being commanded to build the Mishkan, the Jewish People – who just a short while before had been enslaved in Egypt, accustomed to doing hard, physical labor – somehow did all the skilled work that would normally have required the most experienced artisans. Where did this miraculous ability come from? We find, also, that the Torah uses the words “*Chacham lev*” – “of wise heart” – to describe those who built the *Mishkan*. Isn’t intellect in the brain, not in the heart?

In the very last chapter of Orchos Tzaddikim we learn some interesting things about the human body: specifically, the brain and heart. The Hebrew word *Melech* (king) is a combination of the first letters (ראשי תיבות) of the Hebrew words *mo’ach* (brain), *lev* (heart) and *kaved* (liver). These specific body organs are also referred to in Judaism as the dwelling places for the *neshama*, *ru’ach* and *nefesh*. *Kaved* is the location of one’s *nefesh*. The *nefesh* represents bodily and material desires. The desire to “feel good” comes from the *nefesh*. The *lev* is *ru’ach*, which is one’s ego. This is the desire to “look good” in the eyes of others. Lastly, the *mo’ach* is the seat of one’s *neshama*: it’s a person’s innate desire to “do good.” The *neshama* is supposed to rule over the *ru’ach* and the *nefesh*. It is for this reason that the brain, containing the *neshama*, is in the skull – similar to the fortress of a king. By controlling one’s *lev* and *kaved*, a person will become worthy of the title *Melech*. Thus, it is possible for three people to do the same act, but each with different intentions. One’s intention is to feel good, another is preoccupied with looking good, and the third is simply trying to *do* good.

Interestingly, when you ask a person to point to himself, he points to his heart, the place of *ruach* – ego. He doesn’t point to his head or stomach. The

German word “*ich*”, which means “me”, comes from the Latin word “Ego”. The place of one’s esteem is his heart, where one is conscious of himself. The Masters of *Mussar* (self introspection) write that if you take away all of a person’s honor, he will want to commit suicide. Conversely, positive self esteem, an internal reflection of a person’s confidence in his being capable, is a positive, vital life force. Thomas Edison explained that he invented the light bulb only after having experimented with hundreds of possibilities, failing time and again, until he met with success, at last. He must have needed a great deal of initiative and ambition in order to persist; but, beyond that, he needed to believe in himself.

The *chachmei lev* believed that if G-d had commanded the intricate building of the *Mishkan*, then, without a doubt, someone had to be capable of doing it. They knew that perhaps they would have to persist and keep trying again and again to reach their goal, but they had self-esteem and believed in themselves. That’s being smart at heart!

Self-esteem is very important. A wise rabbi once pointed out that the first step of *tikun hamidot* – fixing bad habits – is recognizing your good ones. Looking solely at one’s faults will only rob him of his self-esteem. A healthy self esteem is needed to give oneself the energy needed for the long path to perfection.

While I was studying as a *bachur* in Jerusalem, I remember hearing that one of my colleagues, who was, at the time, 25, had not spoken *lashon hora* – gossip – from the age of 19. At the age of 19, he simply told his *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) that he would not speak gossip for the rest of his life! That takes a lot of positive *chutzpah* (i.e. high self-

esteem). His old friends were shocked. “How could the same boy who, in elementary school, was the biggest trouble maker of the class, suddenly become so religious on us?”

I hope he keeps it up!

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H

