



Parashat Behar



English version

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THE ART OF SEEING THE GOOD

Rashi at the outset of the Parasha writes that Har Sinai is mentioned by the Mitzvah of Shemittah to teach a lesson. Just like Shemittah, has so many details, that the Torah mentions, and all those details, were received by Moshe at Har Sinai... So too, all of the Mitzvoth, all their details, were received by Moshe at Har Sinai.

Another question rises, though. Why was the Mitzvah of Shemitta, out of all the Mitzvoth, chosen, to teach this lesson?

The Hidah answers something amazing. Shemittah is what instills Faith in G-d in a person's heart. A whole year, a man does not work, and G-d makes miracles... and somehow, this man has what to eat, and survive the Shemitta year. *If G-d could support me without working for the seventh year, He could support me for all the six as well, without me working! I only work, because of the curse, to eat bread by the sweat of the brow!*

All of Torah, all of the 613, is to teach the lesson of Faith and dependence on G-d. Every minute of Torah that you learn, and don't work, you are saying, G-d, I have faith in You! All the 613, the positive and negative, are all about the Faith that one has, in order to keep those Mitzvoth... You can just put on Tefillin, wear Tzitzit, respect your parents, do kindness and say Birkat Hamazon, just checking off all the boxes. Or, you can learn the meaning behind these, and how these Mitzvoth build your relationship with your Creator. This lesson of faith, of reliance on G-d to keep His Torah, in its greatest detail, is learnt from the

lesson of Shemitta, of relying on G-d, totally. Even when it almost does not make sense... That is why, the Mitzvah of Shemitta is chosen to teach us this lesson!

The Klei Yakar in this week's parasha tells us something amazing. He asks why taking interest on your loan, when you lend a Jew, is forbidden, while when you lend a gentile, it is allowed. This difference, between lending a Jew and lending a gentile, has been one of the laws of the Torah that has caused a lot of antisemitism over the years. What is the reason for the difference? Also, why is this law of interest, mentioned in middle of the laws of Shemitta, which are laws of Bitahon?

The Kli Yakar answers, that there is an interesting reason for all this. When you lend out with interest, you know how much money you will make on the loan. This certainty in profit causes you to develop a nature, that is independent of G-d! All other forms of businesses, have a risk factor. A person is not sure if he will gain or not. But a person who lends out with interest does not need to rely on G-d, for there is no risk involved.

This is only true regarding lending a Jew. Taking interest from a loan to a gentile is allowed. Why? Because the gentile is generally not going to give your loan back! There is a risk, every time you give the gentile your money, causing you then to rely on G-d, and be dependent on Him! But when you lend a Jew, and the Jew is for sure going to pay back, the money you make in interest, is money that you

know for sure you are going to get, with no risk factor!

G-d wants us to make money by taking calculated risks, and relying on Him! The person who lends out with interest, does not rely on G-d, because he knows for sure he will make money on the deal, and that is why interest is forbidden!

People who have faith, who know G-d, are those who rely on Him. וְאִרְשְׁתִּיהוּ לִי בְּאַמִּוּנָה וְיִרְעַת אֶת־יְיָקֹנֶן, G-d says, He will love us like the love of an engaged couple, in the merit of the Emunah we have in Him, and through that faith, you will know G-d. So let us ask ourselves the question... If interest brings us to be lacking Faith, what brings us Faith?

What brings us faith in G-d, when things look bleak, are the words of the Rabbi of Rabbi Akiva, Nachum Ish Gam Zu. Everything bad that would happen, Nachum would say, Gam Zu L'Tovah, this too, is for the good. The question is asked, why should one say, when something bad happens, Gam Zu Latovah? Just say, Zu LaTova! This is for the good!!

The answer is, that in order for one to be able to praise G-d for the good like the bad, to see the good in the bad, you need first to be a person, who thanks G-d for the good, and sees the good in the good! You need to build up that muscle of recognition and awareness, that G-d is זוּנְנוּ - feeds us, פֶּרְנִסְנוּ - provides our needs, like home and clothing, כִּלְכִּלְנוּ - builds our financials and careers... Most importantly, we need to recognize, that G-d is רֵעֵנוּ He shepherds us, protects us, when we can't protect ourselves. And protects us, even when we protect ourselves.

If you can't thank G-d for the bad, it is because you have not been thanking Him enough for the good! You can't say, this too, is for the best! It is difficult to love G-d when things go wrong, if you have never loved Him when things went right!

A person is sure that he will wake up the next day, and so, he makes plans for tomorrow. An Israeli is

sure that Israel will dismantle Hamas and get rid of Sinwar, otherwise he would not live here. Why is it, that we are sure that these things will happen? Because we rely on G-d, we have Bitahon! So why can't we have Bitahon when G-d says, *I am good to everyone, even to you! I have patience and mercy for everyone, including you!* טוֹב־יְקַנֵּן לְכֹל *I can believe and trust 100 percent that I am waking up tomorrow, and I can't believe that everything that G-d does is for the best?!!*

G-d wants us to trust in Him in every Mitzvah we do. He wants us to trust in Him, to have the most kosher phone that our needs allow us to have, and that is how He tests our Faith! He wants us to live in Israel, and that is how He tests our faith!

Its amazing! The Iran-Israel War lasted 16 minutes. I always wondered. The length of the war of Gog Umagog will be רָגַע, one moment, according to the Vilna Gaon יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּיוֹם בּוֹא גוֹג עַל־אַדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּיוֹם אִמְלָאוֹ דְּבִרְתֵי אַמִּי וְיָקוּמֵנִי בְּאֵשׁ־עֶבְרָתִי וְדִבְרַתִּי אִם־לֹא בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וּבְקִנְיָתִי בְּאֵשׁ־עֶבְרָתִי וְדִבְרַתִּי אִם־לֹא בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְיָקוּמֵנִי בְּאֵשׁ־עֶבְרָתִי וְדִבְרַתִּי אִם־לֹא בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְיָקוּמֵנִי בְּאֵשׁ־עֶבְרָתִי וְדִבְרַתִּי אִם־לֹא בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא *And it will be on that day, in the day that Gog will come onto the land of Israel, says G-d, My wrath will rise in My Nostrils... And in My vengeance, with the fire of My wrath, I spoke, if not, on that day, there will be a great loud noise on the land of Israel.* The first letters of רָגַע spell רַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל עַל, which means, just a moment.

How could any war, be just a moment?! Nobody could understand how this made any sense! But, look at what happened with Iran – Israel war! The whole thing was just 16 minutes, from the time the missiles entered Israel air space, till it was all over!

They told us that they are sending three waves of missiles. What type of missiles did Iran sent? 185 were sent in the first round. Each one of the first set, if it would hit a building, it would blow up the building. The plan was that the Iron Dome and Arrow system should waste all they had on the first 185 missiles. Then they sent 110 ballistic missiles, that not only destroy the building it hits, but all the buildings around it. After that, they sent 36

gained from the difficulty of dwelling 13 years in a cave, he speaks only of his ability to answer questions in learning, his growth in the give and take, the discussion of Torah learning?!?

The main thing that brings all the blessings of the Torah to the world, is dwelling in the back and forth of Talmud, as the passuk says before that all the blessings of the Torah are reserved for those who learn it in such a way. אִם-בְּהִקְטִי תִלְכּוּ Rashi comments, that this means, עֲמִילוֹת בְּתוֹרָה, toiling in Torah, in a way that you will know how to act upon, what really is, the intention of G-d.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai himself said it. “Anyone who places the words of Torah *to heart*, they take away from him 24 harsh things. Thoughts of sin, death from terror and war, difficulties from government, mistakes and foolishness, Yetzer Harah, and overthinking thoughts of work and finance, unnecessary thoughts, etc..” (Tanna Dbe Eliyahu Zuta 16)

What does that mean, to put the words of Torah to your heart??? It means, for you to take your Torah learning seriously enough, that you can carry on a discussion concerning it, asking questions and answering them. Taking your Torah learning personal, as when the Talmud refers to the opinions of the Amoraim, it says, אֵלֵיבֵיהּ, according to, which literally means, on the heart of. This is what differentiates the Torah students from the rest of us. That they take their words of Torah, to heart, as if nothing is more important in the world, because, in truth, nothing is.

R’ Yohanan, the great Amora in the Talmud, exemplifies this. R’ Yohanan had from the most difficult lives. He lost his ten sons in his lifetime, and all the pain and suffering did not budge his ability to stay focused and learn. But when he lost his student Reish Lakish, the student who for 24 questions he had, Reish Lakish had 24 answers, after such a loss, R’ Yohanan could not bear that pain anymore!

But of course, like all things in spirituality, the most important things, are the least popular and in

demand. It is much more in demand, to go to an entertaining Torah class, with a moving story, a great Mashal, some good quotes and a couple of jokes. It is much more interesting and enticing to solve problems spiritually, by going to pray by a Tzaddik’s kever, taking off Ayin Hara with lead, or going to see some Mekubal, than learning Talmud in depth, or supporting Yeshivot, kollelim, and their students.

Every word of Torah you learn or think about, you are creating angels, that defends you and proclaims you merit in Heaven. In just one minute, a person is able to say 200 words. Every word of Torah, is a Mitzvah, and it is a Mitzvah that is so great, that it is worth 613 mitzvot. Every word creates an angel. So, in one minute, a person is able to create 200 angels. (Torat Habayit Chafetz Chaim) If when someone is learning in depth, he says less words as he thinks more, and he may be creating less angels when contemplating the commentators at length, but, even if he creates less angels, the angels he creates, are much, much bigger and greater angels.

Some people think that living on Billionaires Row in Manhattan is a good place to live, or in Chelsea and Kensington in London, where you might get to network more to people who have more or are networked more. I have been lucky enough that my apartment in Bayit Vegan Jerusalem is surrounded by Torah learning. On one side of me, is the Yeshiva of Wolfson, one of the greatest yeshivot in the world, with over 1000 students, where the sound of boys learning could be heard until 2 in the morning. On the other side of me is one of the greatest elementary yeshivot in the world, with over a thousand students. I actually have foot traffic on the sidewalk of my one-way street, when people are on their way to learn Torah or prayer. Every other building next to me, is a yeshiva, a Kollel, a Beit Din. There is a Kollel of every type, Halacha, Gemara, Kabala, and more. Within a 3 minute walk, there is a shul of every custom. French Moroccan, Israeli Moroccan, Israeli Sephardic, Syrian custom from Mexico, Syrian custom from Argentina. Ashkenaz Yeshivish, Ashkenaz Baal Bayit, Hassidic Sephard. Hardal,

Mizrachi, an international minyan factory, and there are a bunch more, that I can't even keep track anymore. This is all not including the minyan in my building on the floor -2. Friday nights, and Shabbat day, after the Shabbat meals, the shuls load up with people, who come to learn till the late hours of the night, all parts of Torah. What the nicest of it all, is, that everyone feels comfortable and accepted, everywhere. My apartment is literally surrounded by angels. There is no greater networking than that.

This reminds me of the story that happened outside R' Moshe Feinstein's home. There was once a frantic knock on the door of R' Moshe's house. A boy got hit by a car and was laying on the floor right outside his home. The one who was knocking, asked R' Moshe if he can call an ambulance. He told R' Moshe that the boy that was hit by the car was a Jewish boy, as the boy who was hit was holding a yarmulke in his hand. R' Moshe let him use his phone, but said, that this boy is not a Jewish boy.

It turned out, that R' Moshe was right. The boy who got hit was not a Jewish boy! It was a non-Jewish kid, who was teasing a Jewish boy! The gentile kid grabbed the yarmulke off the Jewish boy's head, and went running the other way, into the street, where he got hit by the car! They asked R' Moshe how he know that the boy who got hit outside his house, was not a Jewish boy.

THE ART OF DEPENDENCE (2021)

Sometimes we think that we go out of our way for other people. We give our money, our time, our energy, for other people. But in reality, the one who receives the most when giving is the giver. These last two weeks, I went on a fundraising trip for my father-in-law's Yeshiva. A Sephardic yeshiva of 400 boys. If I had been home in Jerusalem, I would have for sure went to Meron for Lag Baomer like I go every year, and I would have for sure taken my children with me. I tried saving the Yeshiva, but in the end, the Yeshiva saved me, and my family. When Ruth spoke about her receiving grain from Boaz, she said, שָׁם הָאִישׁ אֶשֶׁר

His response, legendary. "If the Torah I was learning at the time of the accident could not save the world from bad decrees, it could for sure save us from bad decrees, from right outside my house!"

If you can't make it to Meron this Lag Baomer, there is something that is even greater you can do, than going to Meron on Lab Baomer. You can learn the teachings of R' Shimon, in depth, and this way, you can connect with R' Shimon's wisdom of Torah, which is greater than connecting with R' Shimon's body. And there is a special Heavenly help, to learn His Torah, on the day of his passing. (If he actually did pass on Lag Baomer)

I remember, attending the funeral of R' Wachtfogel zt"l, in Lakewood BMG, when I was a young yeshiva bachur. It was too stuffy inside for me, and I did not understand the yiddishe eulogies. So, I decided to go downstairs, to the library of the yeshiva, and learn something in his merit. As I was tired, hungry, and was just in a stuffy place, where we were all wearing hats and jackets, I was a little wiped out. I asked G-d to help me, that although I left the funeral of the great Rabbi, that the Torah I will be about to learn should be for his merit. Without even looking, I picked any random sefer off the shelf, ... and the Sefer I picked up, was Leket Reshimot, R' Wachtfogels sefer!

עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ הַיּוֹם בְּעֵזֶר: The name of the man that I did with him today, Boaz... Why does it say that Ruth did for Boaz? Didn't Boaz do for Ruth? The Midrash tells us יותר ממה שבעל הבית עושה עם העני - יותר מהעני עושה עם בעל הבית More than what the rich man does for the poor, the poor does for the rich. (Midrash R. Vayikra 34;8)

Every year I would go to Meron and think that it was normal to be so squished. I thought it was safe that you could be in a place where your feet were off the ground, and the only way you could survive being "inside" by R' Shimon bar Yochai was if you

were tall enough to have oxygen and had strong enough elbows. But every year until now was a miracle. As I prayed in a shul in Brooklyn while I was fundraising, I noticed that on the wall was a sign that said, This room can have only 100 people in it. More than that is dangerous.

Sometimes we think that if G-d would send us miracles, if G-d would bless us, He would do so in an unnatural, abnormal way. And that when the everyday is normal, that is the way it is supposed to be. That No news, is just, Good news.

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

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

Emunah does not mean faith. That is a weak English translation of the world. Emunah means reliance. Dependence. The words כַּאֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂא הָאִמּוֹן אֶת־הַיֹּנֵק just as the caretaker lifts the one who suckles, teaches us that Emunah is similar to the dependence of a nursing child. (Bamidbar 11:12) When King David said how he felt about his relationship with G-d, he said, אִם־לֹא שָׁוִיתִיו וְדוּמַמְתִּי נִפְשִׁי בְּגִמְלָה עָלַי אִמּוֹ בְּגִמְלָה עָלַי נִפְשִׁי (Tehillim 131:2) *I swear that I calmed and quieted my soul like a suckling on its mother; like a suckling was my soul*

with me. The calmness of the soul depends on how you view G-d in your life and how dependent on Him you are willing to become. When a child is nursing, it has nothing else it wants, no plans, no aspirations, no calculations, no doubts. It is totally dependent on the mother that is nursing it. Of course, a person needs to plan and execute, but after you did what you could do, you need to enter a state of Emunah, a state of total dependence.

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

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

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

A certain client cried to me the other day how much he suffers from ADHD. He has no breaks to what he says; things that he sometimes feels comes out of his mouth before it reaches his mind. He felt so depressed. I told him that awareness itself, the very fact that he realizes that he has such a problem, is a huge thing. "What is the one thing worse than driving a car that has no breaks?"

Driving a car that has no breaks, and you don't know that it has no breaks".

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

Selfie steps to become more dependent on G-d.

1. Ask yourself before solving any problem four questions: What exactly is the problem. Why does the problem exist. What are all the possible solutions. What is the best solution. When you do only the best solutions, the ones with the highest percentage chance for success, you are

doing proper Hishtadlut. When you are doing all the solutions, even the solutions that are low percentage of success, you are not relying on G-d. When you are trying solutions that are against your values and ethics, you are not relying on G-d.

2. Realize that when you are frozen, when you are stuck, it is because you are depending too much on yourself and not depending on G-d. When we are working for G-d, no dare is too great. As we found when King David faced Goliath. Once Goliath laughed at G-d, King David felt empowered to take him down. Because now it was between G-d and Goliath, not between David and Goliath.

THE ART OF MEANINGFULNESS

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

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

For example, in Parashat Emor, the Torah refers to the wife for whom the Kohen is permitted to become impure, as "She'er". **אִם-לְשָׂאוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו**. Usually, the word sh-er means something that is left over, a remainder. Why in the world is a woman referred to as a "remainder"? That could be the greatest insult for a woman, to feel that she is considered a remainder! (Especially when Mother's Day falls out in the week of Parashat Emor!)

The Ktav Vekabalah (Student of R Akiva Eiger, times of Malbim) wrote that the only way for a man to have a continuation of himself, a reminder of his existence after he passes on, is through his wife. You live on through your descendants. The greatest praise for a woman is that she can bring eternity to her husband. That is what she is "hardwired" to do. She is built physically, psychologically, emotionally, and

spiritually for that purpose. When a woman sees that her child is not going in the way she hoped, the pain is not so much one of guilt for not having been a good mother as it is of feeling that she has not lived up to her true purpose and real role in life. When a man perceives his wife as his ticket to eternity, he respects her far more and expects from her less! Your marriage will take on new meaning if you perceive your wife as the Torah perceives the great importance of a wife.

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

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

Why is he now more your brother than ever before? Because a Jew is not your brother so that you can get something out of him. He is your brother so that you can help him when he needs your help. The Torah calls him your brother when **you** have a mitzvah to give him Tzeddakah. Why?

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

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

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

Here are the selfie steps to find meaning.

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

4. Remind yourself every day to do the right thing, love fully, pursue fascinating experiences, and undertake your most important tasks.

GET OFF MY TRICYCLE!!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What ended up happening was that the boy blushed, and said he was wrong. Once he realized

how low a person he had become, the boy starting improving his behavior, from that Shabbat table on.

Blown away by this idea, of the severity of being brazen faced on practical terms, I realized something amazing. When we say Tachanun, there is a fundamental introduction that is crucial for getting forgiveness from G-d. שאין אנהנו עזי פנים וקשי עורף... Please G-d, ... accept our prayers, for we are not brazenfaced and stiffnecked, to say in front of you we did not sin. Our saving grace, the power behind our plea for forgiveness, is that we are not brazenfaced, at least during Tachanun.

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

The Bet Yosef, in his halachic compilation, writes about the psychology of people, something that is somehow a halacha, not just mussar. The Bet Yosef asks, why is it of such great importance to have brazenness, that it is mentioned before being swift, or being mighty, when doing G-d's Will?

A Lag B'Omer Lesson

I got a call the other day from New York. It was from a girl who was dating, who was confused. "I want to marry a boy that is learning. The boy I am dating wants to learn in Kollel for a few years. But I do not want to take on myself responsibility for the financial department of the family. My parents will support us, and I want to be honest to my future husband about how long I am okay with him staying in learning. My parents are willing to help for a limited amount of time, but then, what? I do not want my husband to expect me to get money from my parents for him to stay in learning longer, if they are not ready to continue their support..." (see Rama EH, 2;1)

(OH 1) The Bet Yosef answers, if you want to be religious, if you want to keep halacha, you need to be brazen to go against the "norm". Why is that so? The Bet Yosef writes, because it is human nature to fear what others think. That is one of your greatest and most powerful drives in life – what people think about you. People *naturally* care more about what people think about them, than they care about what G-d thinks about them. And there is proof to this concept:

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

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

There is no one answer to this question, and the subject is very, very complex. There are many girls who approach this dilemma by somehow saying to the boy they want to marry exactly what the boy would want to hear. And they hope for the best. This girl, though, wanted to be honest, open and fair.

This is what I told her. I hope that it was the right answer. Learning in Kollel, dedicating the first few years of marriage to learning Torah, has great advantages. The learning after marriage is totally different from the learning before marriage, and if one takes it seriously, he will merit to start his



marriage on the right foot. Something that is invaluable.

But this girl was talking about more than just a year or two. So I told her what I learnt from my Rabbi. The Rambam says, “And why did the Tribe of Levi not merit a portion in the Land of Israel along with their brothers? Because the Tribe of Levi was set apart to serve G-d and to teach His straightforward ways to the People, and that is why Levites do not go to war, and G-d is their portion. And not only the Tribe of Levi is such, but each and every man of the world, whose spirit is uplifted, and his intellect is capable of grasping this concept, to stand before G-d and to serve Him, to know G-d,... and he throws off his shoulders the burdens of calculations that people make for themselves; this person becomes sanctified as holy of holies, and G-d will be his portion, and his inheritance, for ever and ever. And he will deserve to have his needs met in this world, just as the needs of the Kohen and Levi’s needs were met by G-d.” (Shmitta Vayobel 13; 12 -13)

Of course, it makes sense that if you can’t pay bills and you do not have a way – a source from which to pay back loans, your husband will have to consider getting a job. If he can swing it, a job in Kodesh would be great, like teaching, or something similar. But the honest answer of how the Kollel person, or the person in Kodesh live, is that he lives without planning. As long as he can make it through the month, he can stay in Kollel. But the essence of a Kollel person, the essence of working in true Kiruv, or in true teaching, is not worrying about where you will have next month’s money from. Of course, live with a plan. But if the plan is taking over the learning, teaching, etc., then this is not the real Shevet Levi. Part of working for G-d is knowing that you will not know how G-d will set up your future. Tell the boy, that you are supportive of having him learn, not supporting him to learn. As long as he is dedicated, and you aren’t borrowing money you can’t pay back, you are willing to live on as tight a budget as you can, while still feeling “normal”.

This is something that we learn from R Shimon Bar Yochai. R’ Ovadia M’Bartenurah, R’ Chaim Vital, the Chidah and Sdei Chemed say that R’ Shimon passed away on Lag B’Omer, and it is a day of celebration. Why do we celebrate Lag B’Omer, the 33rd day of the Omer? If R’ Shimon died on that day, shouldn’t we be sad, not happy? And aren’t we supposed to be sad that the students of R’ Akiva perished?

The Chattam Soffer explains that Lag B’Omer was 33 days after the Jews left Egypt. It took them 30 days to finish the supply of Matza they carried on their back. And, for three days they went without bread. Day 33 was the day they received the Mannah.

R’ Shimon Bar Yochai in the Mechilta (D’Rebbi Yishmael, Parashat Beshalach) writes that the Torah was given only to those who ate the Mannah. The reason why the ones who ate the Manna merited receiving the Torah is because the only way to really learn the Torah well is by not worrying about tomorrow’s bread. If you saved some Mannah for tomorrow, it got wormy. The more engrossed in Torah you became, the more conveniently the Mannah was available to you. This is what kept R Shimon and his son alive in the cave.

The Talmud in Berachot(35b) brings the opinion of R Shimon Bar Yochai, that when someone studies Torah, and does the Will of G-d, their work will be done by other people. Not everyone is cut out for this. But those who take upon themselves responsibility to bring G-dliness to the World have a firm basis to support their decision.

This day of Lag B’Omer is the day that R Akiva taught the Oral Torah and ordained his last five students. (Kaf Hachaim תצג:כו) That was the only link of the chain of the Oral Torah from Har Sinai, to the Torah we have today.(Sanhedrin 86a) In the merit of this day, we have all of the Oral Torah. And on his last day, Lag B’Omer, R Shimon allowed his student R’ Abba to write the Hidden Torah. Being that R Shimon was the greatest of R



Akiva's five students, and being that despite the hardships R' Shimon went through, he died a natural death, Lag Baomer is a day of

celebration. A day to commemorate the light of Torah we have in the world, in the merit of those people who dedicate their lives to Torah learning.

A GOOD HEART

The most important word I learnt since I started coaching is the word resourcefulness. Tony Robbins, the world's leading coach says, *When people fail to achieve, they often say they are missing resources like time, money, people and so on. Yet, the top achievers in the world know that resources are never the problem; the real problem is a lack of resourcefulness.* What is resourcefulness? Resourcefulness is the ability to find quick and clever ways to overcome difficulties. It is a skill or talent for making the most out of what you have, so that you reach your greatest accomplishments.

As a coach, I never gave bad advice. Because a good coach *never* gives advice. The Hebrew word for advice is עצה. Yet the Hebrew word for resourcefulness is תושיה. The job of the coach is to challenge the client with a good, open ended, question so that the client comes up with an answer to a question by being resourceful, tapping into "resourcefulness". The coach is not supposed to be wiser than the client, telling the client what or what not to do. Rather, a coach who is doing his job is a coach who unveils the resourcefulness of his client.

What is this word Tushiah? לְיִצְחָק וְתוֹשִׁיָּהּ: (Mishlei 8) *To me is advice and resourcefulness.* The Torah is called Tushiah. *When G-d created the world, He consulted with the Torah, whose name is Tushiah. And the Torah said, Master of the World, if there is no army, if there is no camp to the King, over what is He King? And if there is no Nation praising the King, where is His honor? The Master of the world heard, and it was sweet to Him. The Torah said, HKBH consulted with me to create the world as it says, לְיִצְחָק וְתוֹשִׁיָּהּ. To me is advice and resourcefulness.* (Pirkei D R Eliezer 3) The Torah did not give advice. It asked G-d a power question.

In Mishlei, we find again that Torah is Tushiah. (2;7) יִצְחָק לְיִשְׂרָאֵל תוֹשִׁיָּהּ. R Eliezer asked R Yehoshua to explain this passuk to him. He said to him, "My son, from the time a person is created in his mother's womb, the Torah that he is going to learn is hidden for him". A person has hidden inside him his portion of Torah, his way of understanding its truth. It just needs to be tapped into. Resourcefulness.

What is the tool that makes it possible to tap into this resourcefulness?

R Yochanan Ben Zakai told five of his students to go out and find the right path a person should choose for himself. R Elazar Ben Arach's answer was, a good heart. And R Elazar unique strength was that he was מַעְיִן הַמַּתְגַּבֵּר a bubbling spring. An endless source of Torah knowledge.

What is a good heart? What is a bad heart? We are obviously not referring to the blood pump in the torso. Rather, a good heart is referring to the spiritual component in the body that is responsible for love, friendship, hate, and cruelty. This spiritual entity is connected to and 'pumps energy' to the whole body, just like the heart pumps blood to the whole body. A good heart is a heart with no negativity, no hatred or harbored resentment or anger, no haughtiness or jealousy. Such a heart is capable of all the resourcefulness in the universe, and is a potential source of endless Torah knowledge.

It is interesting. From the day of Lag BaOmer onward, we cease to mourn R Akiva's 24,000 students. Why? Because day 33 is the day between the words לב and טוב. 32 is the numerical value of Lev – heart. Tov's numerical value is 17, and there are 17 days left to the Omer from day 32 on. 33 is the beginning of a good heart. From this point of the Sefirah onward, the character refinement

focuses on improving one's heart. The Or Hachaim splits the 48 ways to acquire Torah into three groups. The last group, the last 16 are days that are related to the last sixteen of the 48 ways to acquire Torah, and these ways are character refinement. We can notice how when R' Shimon Bar Yochai refers to his students, he calls them Chevraya, friends. This good heart was what empowered R' Shimon to tap into his part of Torah, which ended up becoming the Zohar.

And this was the answer of R Elazar Ben Arach. The way that a person should choose, the path leading to becoming a Torah scholar, is not acquiring more tools. It is to improve one's character. Because when you have a good heart, you have infinite internal capacity for Torah knowledge. Ever wonder how R Akiva, who shared the Alef Bais book with his son in school at the age of 40, was able to outdo all the Rabbis of his generation? How did Rachel, his wife, recognize his potential and know that she believed in him, when he was still a shepherd??

Rachel saw in him the good heart. And once someone's heart is perfect, polished, and pure, the

BIRDFATE

At the end of a thirteen-year cave life, R' Shimon Bar Yochai sat at the entrance to what had been his "home". He saw a hunter who was setting up a bird trap. The hunter scattered some seeds, so that birds would be attracted to the trap, going for the bait. R Shimon noticed that some birds would come close and almost get trapped. At that critical moment for the bird's life, R Shimon heard a Heavenly voice. When he heard "Dimos", "Mercy" the bird's life was saved; if the Voice said "Spekila", "Death," that bird would get caught!

R Shimon learned a great life's lesson from this: If a bird does not die unless there is a decree from Heaven ... surely a human, who does not move his finger down here without it having been decreed from Above, will not die without it having been decreed!

Torah fits right in! It fits like a glove. Of course, with Rabbi Akiva it needed to drip-drop; it needed an uninterrupted 24-year learning streak. But Rabbi Akiva's heart was so good that he was able to tap into his resources and bring out endless Torah knowledge.

There are so many aspects of a good heart. Appreciation. Happiness. Contentment. Humility. Patience. To name just a few. The Talmud teaches why the Torah is called Tushiah. For it weakens (from the word Mateshet) a person's negative desires and perspectives. (Sanhedrin 26b) King Solomon tells us, לְתַאֲוָה יִבְקֹשׁ נַפְרָד בְּכָל־תּוֹשִׁיָּהּ תִּגְלַע, One who seeks desires will become a loner, and in all of his Torah, he will become wrong. When you are not content, when you believe you deserve more, when you are not happy, when you want something and you can't wait for it, your heart is not a good heart. And not only do you lose your friends, but you lose your resourcefulness and learning capacity as well.

That is when R Shimon left the cave. (Yerushalmi Shiviit 9; 1) When he realized that *he is protected. And not because he protected himself.* Not because he was hiding out in some cave.

We are all like those birds. If you are successful, popular, healthy – if your children are doing great, if you are able to grow spiritually, it is because there was a Heavenly voice that called out Dimos – Mercy. If you can't make ends meet, if you are not doing well socially, if there are health problems, if children are not bringing you Nachat, if you are not living up to your spiritual standard, it is because there was a Heavenly voice that called out ...

Shemitta is a whole year dedicated to internalizing *I am protected, and not because I protected myself.* וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מֵה־נֹאכַל בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׂבִיעִית הֵן וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מֵה־נֹאכַל בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׂבִיעִית הֵן וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מֵה־נֹאכַל בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׂבִיעִית הֵן וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מֵה־נֹאכַל בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׂבִיעִית הֵן
And if you will ask, what will we eat in the seventh year, if we are

neither planting nor harvesting our grains?!! We can't plow, we can't tend to our fields and orchards. This year, no one can work in agriculture -one of the main sources of income for the country. A whole year of economic crisis!!

The Netziv asked the obvious question. In the seventh year, the silos are full from the sixth! Why is he crying out from anxiety that he won't have food in the seventh year? I could understand his worry for the eighth year, but why worry for the seventh??

The Netziv answers with an eye-opener. The poor are not worried about their financial state as much as the rich. The poor are used to not having bread for tomorrow, and they are used to having miracles for breakfast, lunch or supper, whenever G-d gives them food.

But the rich, successful farmer who works hard for his bread, got used to the false belief, *I am protected, because I protected myself*. This can be a great cause of anxiety. *This year, I cannot protect myself!! What will I do?* Only after the seventh year, when he sees that he is protected, and *not* because he protected himself, will he not worry about the eighth year... He will not ask, "What will I eat in the eighth?"

We like to feel in control, so our natural instincts would rather that we feel safe, feel protected, *because I protected myself*. This may be the reason why it is easier for us to see this truth in others than to internalize it in ourselves. R Shimon and his son had tried leaving the cave a year earlier, but then, they felt indignation at seeing people busy working for their livelihood instead of spending their time learning Torah. After all, R' Shimon and his son believed that G-d supports those who do His will; their work can be done through gentiles. A burning fire consumed every field they looked at. A Heavenly voice came out and said, "Did you come out to destroy My world?! Go back into your cave!!!" They returned to the cave for another 12 months. R' Shimon practiced his belief regarding others, but when it came to

himself, hiding from the Romans in a cave, he needed to internalize it even more. He needed to learn it from the birds.

This core belief is something we need to learn from the world around us. Below are the selfie steps, the self-help steps that can help one internalize this belief.

SELFIE STEPS

The belief that *I am protected, and not because I protect myself* is something that is difficult to internalize if we cannot conceptualize it. I need to mention a joke that my Rebbi told me many times. We might already know the joke, so it won't sound so funny. But what is funny is that we are the person in the joke, way too often.

A non-religious driver in Tel Aviv has difficulty finding a parking spot. He goes around the block a few times, but every space is taken, even the parking on the sidewalk. He is late for his meeting. He turns to G-d and says, "Master of the world! If you find me a parking spot, I swear to You that I will put on Tefillin today!" As he turns the corner for the fifth time, there it is! An open parking spot! He turns to G-d and says, "Thank you G-d, but no need to find me a parking spot. I managed without You." Try to find all the times in your life that you were similar to that Tel Aviv driver, write them all down, and laugh at yourself.

Sometimes we need concrete tools to internalize a new belief. Here is a tool I adapted from a self-assessment checklist to assist pilots in determining their own physical and mental health before a flight. The *I'M SAFE Checklist* is taught early in-flight training and is used throughout a pilot's professional career to assess their overall readiness for flight when it comes to Illness, Medication, Stress, Alcohol, Fatigue, and Emotion. If we want to fly above the emotional potholes in life, we need to assess our overall readiness for life, with a different *I'M SAFE Checklist*.



I Identify the stressor. What is really bothering you? What are you really anxious about?

M Make a plan and a prayer. If you prepare ahead of time for important events and make plans, you may not have to cope with as much stress later. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If you realize that you are dependent on G-d, it will now be easier for you to connect to Him in your prayers, before you are approaching a stressful situation.

S Stop interacting with the stressor, if possible. Even if it is just to take a few seconds' time out, before dealing with the stressful situation. Taking some deep breaths can be enough to keep you calm.

A Air. Watch how you breathe. Air flows in and out of your body. Even without your deciding to breathe, G-d makes you keep breathing. You can't stop breathing even if you want to, because G-d is constantly breathing life into you, from birth, until your last day. Inhaling and exhaling slowly is a great way to blow the stress out of your body, to become calmer and more relaxed.

F Focus on all the times that things "worked out" for you, in ways that were better than your wildest dreams! On all those "parking spots" that G-d helped you find.

E Exercise. Preferably swimming. If not swimming, brisk walking. 30 minutes of exercise a day will release endorphins, and help you relax. These are great times for you to meditate on mantras like, "I am protected, and not because I protected myself".

I was actually very stressed after I put my thoughts onto paper. I identified the stressor. I needed to give two important Torah classes, and I did not have the time to be as prepared as I usually am. So, in my mind, I quickly made a plan of the ideas that I have been thinking about, and how I could convey those ideas in the most appealing way to my audience. And then, I made my prayer, that whatever happens should be for the best.

I stopped thinking that I do not have enough content, and that I am not ready for the class. I started taking deep breaths and realizing how my breathing and my thinking are in the hands of G-d. I focused on all the classes I have given that came out amazing, even when I was not prepared as much as I believed is important. And I did all this as I was walking to my class.

B'h. The ideas came to me. Those classes ended up being from the best I have ever given. When you knock down the walls of stress, it clears the way for good ideas to flow freely, for it clears the way for the belief "I am protected, and not because I protected myself."

TIGHTROPING BETWEEN HUMBLENESS AND HAUGHTINESS

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

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



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

Humbleness is – “I am nothing without G-d”. Not – “I am nothing”. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. A person who has low self esteem is not cognizant of his strengths and overlooks them. All my strengths, my good habits and capabilities, are bestowed upon me by G-d. Any good decision I make or have made, any good idea I have thought of or will ever come up with has been granted to me by G-d. G-d gave me the confidence to make that decision, and He gave me and gives me the creativity to come up with that brainstorm. Birkot Hashachar is a great workout to help one achieve this mindset. It allows us to start off the day with prayers of thanks to G-d for granting the basics that He has given us.

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

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

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

When I made this card for myself, I found that the very things that are my strengths are the causes of my weaknesses, and my weaknesses are somewhat of a package deal with my strengths. A close friend, who is able to remember almost completely all of his learning, tells me how he suffers tremendously from his memory. He cannot forget



any of the nasty things people have said to him. He remembers all of his mishaps, ever since he was four years old!

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

strengths, your resources. Feel the motivation to use them efficiently. Reach success. Thank G-d.

Now we can understand. Moshe conveyed the fact that there was no success that he attributed to himself. *מה ונחנו* We are nothing without G-d. (Shemot 16; 7) This is our goal in humbleness. To know our strengths and weaknesses, and to thank G-d for my S.W.I.D card.

PRAYING FOR A BRAINSTORM

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

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

The Dancing Bear

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

In a sense, the human brain functions in a similar way: it internalizes a feeling and connects it to the

setting in which the feeling was experienced. (The setting in the brain is composed of various elements, including sensory input, time of day, place, and people connected with the setting.) This is called “internal representation.” Because the brain functions this way, people who have trouble falling asleep, for example, are advised not to do anything in bed except sleep. By reading, talking, or the like, the brain comes to identify the bed as a place of wakefulness, thereby impairing one’s ability to enter the sleep mode.

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

Internal Representations of Holiness

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

This may be understood with the aforementioned concept. By behaving in a reverent manner in a



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

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

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

Repentance and Representations

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

At first glance, the Rabbis seem to be saying that until the penitent withstands the temptation in that same scenario where he had previously failed, he

has not yet proved that he will never repeat the sin. But, we wonder, does one really need to go back into the danger zone to prove that he has changed his ways?

Indeed, the Klei Yakkar (Devarim 30:11) explains that one must **not** go back physically to the scene of the sin in order to prove his regret. True repentance is expressed through a regretful heart and proper Viduy – “בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו.” Through genuine regret, one experiences the very same visual and auditory feelings experienced during the time of the sin. It is almost as if one were really there – reliving that awful experience. However, by actually putting oneself in the place where one has failed before – there is too great a likelihood of a repeat performance.

“Did I Grow or Not?”

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

AN AWESOME THOUGHT

R' Akiva would say, Beloved is Man, for he is created in the Image of G-d.(Avot Ch. 3) What

does this mean? G-d is infinite. Immortal. Immeasurable. The First and the Last. Was, Is and

Will Be. He is in the Past, Present and Future, simultaneously. He is not limited by time or nature. There is nothing about G-d that we can grasp, except his traits and His infiniteness. So, what image are we referring to, when we say that man was created in the image of G-d?

R Akiva learns that we are G-d-like from the words in Breishit, *In the image of G-d, He created him, ...* (Breishit 1; 27) The commentators discuss this at great length. Each and every aspect of the discussion is, in itself, a gem, helping us to understand more fully the greatness of man. To notice aspects of g-dliness in human beings, one has to read between the lines. Humans are G-d-like, for they have a Neshama that is eternal. After death, the soul lives on. Humans are G-d-like in the sense that they have Free Will, ability to overcome their nature and choose good from bad. This power of choice, to decide what you want to be, do and have, is G-dly. G-d has choice, and He always chooses to do Good. Humans, though, don't always choose good.

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

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

through speech. Relationships. Civilizations. To bless and curse.

Man is awe struck when witnessing G-d in this world. The more we see godliness, the closer up we get, the more fascinated we are. The Swiss Alps and Grand Canyon are breathtaking in reality, and so is witnessing the g-dly aspect of man. An original painting is mesmerizing, when you see the G-d-like ability of man to plan an idea and paint it. When someone communicates a deep idea or grasps the attention of an audience through painting a story in his speech, the crowd is spellbound by his capability of communication.

Any new idea or creativity brought into existence is remarkable. Coaching people to overcome their limitations, change their habits, is mindboggling. When godliness of man comes to light in its full glory, I am sitting front row, center aisle.

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

In this week's parasha, we are forbidden to call another person derogatory names, or to act with any other form of belittlement. *V'lo Tono Ish Et Amito, Veyareta Meelokecha.* (25; 17) The passuk

continues to say, *And you shall fear your G-d*. What is the connection?

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

Respect his ability to choose a new way, and change.

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

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

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

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

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

I use the word “stupid”, even though I shouldn’t, because that is the only word that I can use to properly explain this concept. It means not only

that which is simple; it means the things that many of us feel are beneath our dignity to concern ourselves with, for we perceive them as stupid. Stupid really stands for Simple. Tangible. Underestimated. Persistent (planning). Imitating (success). Do-able.

To pray on time, to say every word as it is supposed to be said, you need to be waiting in Shul before everyone starts, something that busy people look at as Stupid. We, the internet generation, are too smart and too busy to wait a few minutes and meditate, before prayer. To say Birkat Hamazon from a “bencher”, to pray with your finger pointing to the words, are all things that people don’t do, because it looks to us “stupid”.

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

When Rav Ovadiah Yosef was asked for his technique to remember word for word the longest Tosefot in Chullin, he said he learnt that Tosefot 500 times. We could venture to say that is what



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JEWISH APPROACH TO EMOTIONAL PAIN

ולא תונו איש את עמיתו (25:17).

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

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

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

G-d’s Wide Shoulders

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

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

Broken Hearts

It is said in the name of the Kotsker Rebbe that there is nothing more whole and pure in the entire world than a broken heart. Like the law regarding purifying earthenware utensils – “שבירתן זו היא”

”טהרתן” (purification is achieved by breaking them) – the heart is purified through being broken. Only then, with his pure and broken heart, will one embrace his relationship with G-d.

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

In connection to this, I’d like to share with you a story I heard about twenty years ago which has had a lasting impact on me. Everyone was in shul awaiting Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur night except for the rabbi. He had been grossly insulted by one of the congregants, and simply could not face the congregation.

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

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

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H

