



Parashat Emor



English version

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THE ART OF BEING CHOSEN

Rabbi Yehuda Teriki said the following, wild story. There was a couple that lived in London. They brought up their only child with love. When their son became of marriageable age, they set him up with the greatest, sweetest, girl. The couple, together, bought a home and settled down.

A year passed, and then another, and another, ... and the young couple still were not able to bear a child. Ten years passed, and they still did not merit to be parents. The couple loved each other very much, and they decided that they would never separate, even if they would not have children. But the pressure from some family members was too much for them to bear, and they went for a divorce. Their pain was enormous. Their friends and families supported them through the difficult procedure, consoling them that the day will come when they will both be parents, each one building their own home.

Suddenly, the great, bittersweet news came. A mere few weeks after the divorce, the wife discovered that she was pregnant! As sweet as the news was, it was so, so bitter! The husband was a Kohen, and a Kohen cannot marry a divorced woman, under any circumstances! He could not take his divorced wife back as a wife! The husband was so broken, as he said, repeatedly, "Life would better, if it would be over!"

He went to Israel, to get away, to maybe clear his mind. He went to the Kotel. He stood by the big stones, and he cried out, "Tatte! Tatte! Why?!? Why?!?"

There was a fellow Jew there at the Wall, that heard the cries, and approached him. He tried to calm this broken man, and offered his help. The husband replied, "No one can help me!" The man said, "I head you cry out Tatte, Father! Where is your father? What does *he* say about your situation?"

The broken new father-Kohen said, "My father is very sick, he is hospitalized in a hospital in London, on his death bed. I did not want to involve him in my pain and my choices. I was afraid the pain might kill him. I never told my father what I am going through..."

The man at the Wall told him, "But how can you not visit your dying father??"

The divorced husband thought to himself, that maybe this is a sign from Heaven. "Hashem brought this man in order to give me the message, that the right thing, is to visit my father! Better I should visit him before he dies..."

When he got back to London, that was the first thing he did. He entered the hospital room of his dying father, and hugged him, as he burst out into bitter tears. The father patted his son on the cheek, and said, "Son, don't cry!"

The son said, "How can I not cry, if my whole world is falling apart?!?"

The father asked what the son was talking about... The son could not hold back, and he told his father all that had happened... "My wife finally became pregnant, but this news is bitter as much as it is



The Midrash explains that G-d always seeks those who are being chased, as we find that Kayin chased Hevel, and G-d accepted Hevel's sacrifice. Noach was chased by the people of his generation, Avraham was chased by Nimrod, Yitzhak was chased by the Pelishtim, Yaakov was chased by Esav, Yosef was chased by his brothers, Moshe was chased by Pharoah, David was chased by Shaul, AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE ARE CHASED BY THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD!!!

Being chased and being chosen, according to Judaism, are one and the same, something we can learn from the Rambam. The Rambam in his letter of Iggeret Teiman, addresses the suffering and resilience of the oppressed Jewish People of Yemen and of the oppressed Jews in general. *The Torah compares the Jews to the Dust of the Earth.* וְהָיָה וְרַעְדָה בְּעַפְרֵי הָאֲרָצִים This metaphor suggests, that the although the Jews are as low as the Dust, as we are trampled upon by all the nations, in the end, the Jews will persevere and overpower. Just like the Dust, in the end of one's life, is put on top of those who trampled on it, at burial! The Jewish people will always be "successfully" picked on and persecuted by the Gentiles! But in the end, G-d will always cure their pain and save them, and lift them above their enemies... (Iggeret Teiman) Just like G-

d choses the animals that are chased to serve Him, so too, G-d chooses the Jews who are chased, to be His people, and He will always bring us out on top, in the end.

I had a crazy idea though. We are all being chased by our Yetzer Hara, our Evil Inclination. Too often, the Y. Hara is able to get us to fail our spiritual tests. There are three types of sin. חטא is a sin that a person is not aware that he is doing something wrong. עבירה is a sin where a person knows that he is doing something wrong, but he can't stop himself from transgressing. עון is when someone sins intentionally.

Whenever G-d wants to bestow goodness on someone, the שטן, Satan, says to G-d, *Are you going to give him all this goodness for nothing special he did? Test him first! And the Satan goes, taking with him the keys of temptation, and he seduces this person into spiritually self-destructive behavior. That is why he is called השטן המושחת* (Rokeach) In the end, though, just as fast as the illusioned Kohen realized that he was just lacking some information, to solve his problem, so too, we will realize the same. Whether we are chased physically or spiritually, G-d will always help us, in the end, to come out on top, and it will all seem so simple in the End, with a happy ending.

THE ART OF BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WORLD

One of the biggest questions the gentiles have about Judaism is why bad things happen to good people, to Tzaddikim, and good things happen to bad people, to the Reshaim. This question will last only until the days of Mashiach. We pray for those days when that the whole world will see the good that is reserved for the Tzaddik and the bad that is reserved for the Rasha.

Hacham Yom Tov Yedid explains that this is the meaning in the Mizmor of שִׁיר. לְמַנְצְחָהּ בְּנִגְיֹת מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר. We ask Elokim to bestow favor upon us and bless us, and shine His face upon us, for eternity. Why? Not for our own sake! But לְדַעַת בְּאֲרָץ דְּרָבָה בְּכָל-אֲוִיָּם יְשׁוּעָתְךָ: So that

Your way will be known in the Land, and amongst all the gentiles, Your salvation will be known. Once the gentiles see the goodness that the Jews are accorded for serving Him, they will know G-d. And then, יוֹדוּךָ עַמִּים אֱלֹקִים יוֹדוּךָ עַמִּים כָּלָם The Nations will praise You, Elokim; all the nations will praise You. And so on.

One of the answers to the question why good is happening to bad people is that this world, with its worldly pleasures, does not have enough reward to pay for the mitzvot and the good that the good people, the Tzaddikim, do. But still, the fact that good was done brings great goodness to this world, and that goodness has got to go somewhere. So, the

not-so-worthy, the in-between Benoni and Reshaim, are awarded some of that goodness, here in this world, in the world that they desire and to which they aspire, for the good deeds they have done. They receive some of the goodness that was brought down to the world through the good deeds of the Tzaddik.

This is what is meant in regards to R' Hanina Ben Dosa. בכל יום ויום בת קול יוצאת מהר חורב ואומרת: כל העולם כולו נזונין בשביל חנינא בני, וחנינא בני - די לו בקב (Berachot 17b) *Every day, a Heavenly voice goes out from Mt. Horeb, and it says, 'The whole, entire world is sustained because of Hanina, my son; and for Hanina, my son, a small measurement of Carobs, which is all he eats from Erev Shabbat to Erev Shabbat, is enough.'*

The Shlah explains the word here, בשביל, which means literally, for the sake of, with a twist. The word שביל means, also, a path, as in שביל הרבים or שביל היחיד or, a pipe. In other words, all the goodness of the world would come from Heaven to Earth, via R' Hanina's pipe. This is why, when someone is learning Torah, just by learning Torah alone, he is doing tremendous kindness to the whole world. Because he is bringing down to the world from Heaven, through his "pipeline", all the blessing that everyone else is enjoying, even though the Torah scholar, himself, may not be benefitting from any of that goodness that is coming to the world via his pipeline from Heaven.

This is one of the reasons why, on the top of every block of text in the Sefer Torah scroll, there is a letter VAV, which means, literally, "and"; it actually connects between two things, like as expressed in the structure of the letter: it's like a pipe. The Vav at the top of every page of Torah is there to teach us that the Torah is the connection between Heaven and Earth. The Torah is the pipeline of the blessing and goodness from G-d to His Creation.

This can explain a puzzling concept we know, from the Mishna in Sanhedrin, לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר, בשבילי נברא העולם, *therefore* (since each person has different facial and body features, despite the fact

that G-d created Adam in just one image), *each and every person must say, the world was created for me.* (Mishna Sanhedrin 4;5)

What does that mean, that, since a person is unique, he should say, G-d created the world for him? Does that not bring to haughtiness?

It can, but it also brings a person to a sense of responsibility. The same word שביל, here, is being used, which means pipe, path. Every person should say, "the whole world needs me, is dependent on me, and it is my responsibility to bring down the goodness from Heaven to Earth, through my pipeline. The blessings and goodness of the whole world are all dependent on my learning, my praying, my kindness and my winning over my Yetzer Hara. G-d allows the Yetzer Hara to test me, so that when I pass the test, a tremendous amount of blessing will be brought down to Earth. The blessings of the whole world are waiting for your spiritual performance, to descend from Above. My prayers are like this sort of "Smart House", that anything I say in my prayers, that was arranged by the Great Assembly, the אנשי כנסת הגדולה, pushes buttons in Heaven, and makes things happen, without us even knowing, if only we invest our heart and mind into the words we express with our lips.

The problem is that we don't take our prayer seriously; we pray as if we were still in 5th grade. We don't realize that the tests we have are the greatest empowering opportunities we can ever have.

And we don't take our opinion in learning seriously. The Torah is supposed to be learned in such a way that you build a view and opinion of the Torah you understand from your Rabbi, and you fight for your understanding as if it *really* matters, as if you are fighting for your life. As the Mishna in Avot says, והוי מתאבק בעפר רגליהם (1 ; 4) R' Chaim Volozhin learns this to be the same root as וַיִּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ. "And a man *fought* with him", the word used when the angel quarreled with Yaakov.



But, unfortunately, people learn Torah as if their opinion does not matter.

But in truth, the way that the Talmud describes learning Torah is that it is a war, מלחמתה של תורה. (see Sanhedrin 111b) To learn Torah correctly means to learn it as if it is your tube of air, your שביל, connected to the oxygen tank, Above. We learn Torah, and we are not thirsty for it, והוי שותה. In צמא את דבריהם. Torah is compared to water, on which you make a blessing of Shehakol only if you are thirsty, because, unlike all other drinks, water is enjoyed only if you are thirsty. So, too, Torah is only enjoyed, it only makes its impact, if you are thirsty for it. The reason why some are not thirsty for Torah is because they do not understand that Torah is what brings all the goodness to the world. The world without Torah will cease to exist. (Pesachim 68b) If you want to save the world, if you want to save your community, to save your family, or to save yourself, there is no greater investment than learning Torah, or helping others learn Torah. If the Jews would not have accepted the Torah on the 6th day of Sivan, Shavuot, the world would have ceased to exist, as we say every

Friday night as we begin Kiddush, יום השישי, The Sixth day. (See Rashi Bereshit 1;31)

This is the balance of the Talmid Hacham, to balance his responsibility and his haughtiness. A Talmid Hacham needs to be the same on the outside as he is on the inside, as he is compared to the Aron, the Holy Ark, that was gold on the outside, gold on the inside and wood in the middle. (See Yoma 72b) What does that mean? The Ark also had wood on the inside, so how is being the same on the outside, like in the inside, learned from the Ark?!?

On the outside, a Talmid Hacham needs to be gold, to dress presentably, respectfully and with dignity, as he is representing the Torah. But inside, he needs to be like wood, he needs to have humility, to recognize how lucky and undeserving he is to have the merit to learn Torah and teach it. But beneath all the humility, he needs to be gold again, realizing the greatness of his responsibility to Torah learning, and that בשבילי נברא העולם, the whole world is dependent on his spirituality.

SHABBAT – A DIFFERENT WORLD

ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי שבת שבתון מקרא קדש כל מלאכה לא תעשו שבת הוא לה' בכל מושבתכם (ויקרא כג ג)

Not long after the Beit Halevi, the Rav of Brisk came home from Shabbat morning prayers, loud knocking was heard on his door. The Rav opened the door and found one of the community members there, completely out of breath, with a face reflecting anguish and extreme stress. “How can I help you?” “My daughter has already been in labor for three days... The doctors say that both mother and child are at risk... life and death...Please, pray for them!”

The Rav just looked at him calmly. “Did you make Kiddush yet?” “No, I have no appetite” the man answered. “First, let us make Kiddush.” After Kiddush, the Rav turned to this unexpected guest: “Now, you must not have eaten your Shabbat meal

yet. Come and join us for a Shabbat meal.” The man did not ask any questions. With faith in his rabbi, he obeyed. At the end of the meal, the Rav asked, “So, did you enjoy your meal?” “Yes, I enjoyed the meal.” “Fine, now it is time to say Birkat Hamazon.” After they had finished their blessings, the Rav sent the man to go and see how his daughter was faring. The man came back an hour later to thank the Rav. Everything was in order; she had given birth to a baby boy! “But, I do not understand why the Rav did not just pray for her? Why was it so important to the Rav that I had my Shabbat meal?” The Rav answered him quoting the passuk והתענג על ה' ויתן לך משאלות לבך *and when you rejoice in your connection with G-d, He will fulfill all your heart's requests...* Our rabbis learn from this passuk that you are supposed to enjoy your relationship with G-d by *making a Shabbat meal. And then G-d will fulfill all your*



heart's requests... "We do not have to make our requests to G-d verbally on Shabbat through prayer. We just need to enjoy the Shabbat meals. He knows what we want in our hearts, and He will take care of our needs."

In line with this, the Rav explained the Talmud that says) Shabbat 118b) כל המענג את השבת נותנין לו לב *A person who delights in the Shabbat, he is granted the requests of his heart.* It does not say the requests of his mouth, for on Shabbat, one is forbidden to talk about his weekday, physical needs that involve doing Melacha (forbidden acts which are considered work) on Shabbat. We learn this from the words ודבר דבר. However, on Shabbat, one is allowed to think about his weekday physical needs. (כמוצא שלל רב ברכת המזון וזמירות שבת) עמ' שכ"ב)

On Friday night, we change the נוסח of our prayers. All week long we say *... שומר את עמו ישראל לעד* *He who watches His nation Israel forever*— on Friday night we say instead *... הפורס סוכת שלום עלינו* *He who spreads over us a Sukkah of peace.* The switch is because on Shabbat, we get close to Hashem in such a way that we do not need to ask for a שמירה, a protection. We are so close that we are *automatically being protected*. It would be silly for a person talking to the king in his palace to ask him to watch over him.. On Shabbat, as well, we do not have to ask for protection. We are just so close.

When we study Jewish history, we will learn that in all the places in exile where the Jewish communities kept Shabbat, the rate of intermarriage was very low. In all the places where the Jews did *not* keep Shabbat, intermarriage was so strong that Jewish identity faded, and the Jewish community disappeared. There is a saying attributed to one of the founders of Zionism, " *אחד העם* : יותר ממה שהיהודים שמרו את השבת, השבת שמרה את היהודים *More than the Jews kept Shabbat, the Shabbat kept (protected) the Jews.*

A study was done in Globus, the economy newspaper in Israel, to find out the number one,

most common "superstition" of the fifty most successful business owners in Israel. The non observant business owners will not, under any circumstance, sign a business contract on Shabbat. Those Shabbat deals all went bad. On Shabbat, Hashem shows the world how things are supposed to be. G-d does not need us to work in order to give us sustenance. All the other creatures of the universe do not need to work, Hashem is זן ומפרנס *...sustains everything, from the eggs of lice to the huge horns of the Reem,* an animal of gigantic proportions. Only humans need to work: it is a קנס, a punishment for Adam for eating from the Eitz Hadaat. A Jew who works, or even talks about business on Shabbat, nothing good will come out of it. To remind us that G-d made the universe in six days, and He does not need us to work for a living. The Zohar says *וביום השביעי שבת וינפש* that G-d gave Shabbat a soul. G-d put into Creation only enough power to last for six days. The battery does not last more than that. After that, the battery is dead. On Shabbat, G-d recharges the world with a new soul, that lasts for another six days. It is a day of recharge, not a day of work. G-d is our Manufacturer, and this is what it says in his instruction manual. On Shabbat, we realize that G-d runs the world in a way different from how it appears to us. Work is a punishment. Not what G-d needs from us in order to sustain us.

There was once a man, a religious Jew, on a boat trip for business. He was asked by another traveler on the boat, a friendly gentile, to tell a little bit about his religion and his G-d. The Jew started to say that his G-d is all-powerful and sustains all the living creatures, and his G-d is the King of the Universe who *יסמך* *מקרני ראמים עד ביצי כינים*... He can sustain anyone, anytime, anywhere,.. .. The gentile asked the Jew, "*If you believe that your G-d can give you sustenance anywhere, why are you out on this business trip? Why did you not trust Him that He can give you livelihood near home?*" The Jew realized this, and returned home on the next boat. He tried harder to make an "in-town business". (Chovot Halevavot)



Just because we believe something, we may not be living by it. On Shabbat, we live on a different level. I heard something interesting last Shabbat at the Shabbat table. The words מקבל שבת mean “accept Shabbat”. We not only start Shabbat mode

ore welcome Shabbat. Shabbat is a present from G-d. We accept this present of perspective. We accept this present of closeness.

THE RESPONSIBLE PARENT

One bad way to parent children is to ignore them. Another bad way to parent children is to be over obsessive about them. There is a long list of what not to do. But there is no *one* right way to be a parent. The reason for this is, as King Solomon said, הנוך לנער על פי דרכו, *Bring up a child according to his way (his nature)*. The right way to parent varies with each and every child and the strengths and weaknesses of each and every parent. It is also dependent upon significant factors in each particular situation. People are not machines, programmed for standard behavior. Just as it is hard for us to figure ourselves out, it is hard for us to figure out how our children perceive us; however, we must invest effort in doing so and guide them accordingly.

Even after doing their very best at bringing up their children, many parents are beside themselves when the child does not develop as they had expected. Although we can easily understand and sympathize with such parents, there is, nevertheless, a grave mistake in their way of thinking. A parent has the responsibility to do his best – the best he can at a given time with his given abilities. That’s it.

I have spent time talking with more than a few teens who did not like the “way” of their parents. They felt either their parent (or parents) ignored them or was (were) too obsessive about them. So instead, they found their “own way”.

This “new way” upon which the child has set out causes parents to become self-critical or even to assume a self-defeating attitude toward themselves. It’s sad to see parents accusing themselves and blaming themselves for their children’s failures and mistakes. This is one of the greatest causes for depression: taking responsibility for another person’s negative behavior when you actually have

no control over it. After spending time with children “at risk” and getting to know them well, I often have parents ask me, guiltily, – “*So, what was it that I did wrong?*”

I hate that question. It puts me on the spot. And the truth is – how can I know? There are so many factors causing the child to want to be distanced from his parents at this age: a desire for independence, teenage syndrome, not having the greatest of friends, wanting to find his own way, social immaturity, peak of hormonal changes, etcetera, etc. More often than not, this is just a passing phase. The child can be given guidance by someone he/she chooses, when he/she is open to counseling. The right person can help him/her navigate through this unsettling time and come out of it successfully. There is no way any human can judge whether parents were good or not. Many times, what was right for one child is not suitable for another. So instead of taking responsibility for a question I can’t possibly answer, I turn the tables and ask the parents, “What do *you* think?” And then they pause and *they answer me*, “I hate that question.”

The Torah solves the issue for us this week. It tells us how a parent can know if a problem was connected to bad parenting, or if it was something that developed over time, due to circumstances. It can even pinpoint the inception of the problem for us.

ובת איש כהן כי תחל לזנות את אביה היא מחללת באש תשרף
“*The daughter of a Kohen who started to behave like a harlot – she disgraces her father, she shall be burnt in fire.*” (21 – 9) Rashi comments that this girl was engaged or married. She causes disgrace to her father. Because of her, people now say *about him* “Cursed is he for giving birth to



such (a person). Cursed is he who brought up such (a person).” (Rashi learns the word תחל as disgracing herself. This is not the same explanation as that of many other commentators, as brought down by the Ibn Ezra. The word תחל means start, and the word תחלל means disgrace. Rashi did not want to interpret the word as “start”, because this can imply that only if she is at the beginning stage of harlotry can she get punished. And this is not the case. So Rashi, and many others, interprets it to mean disgrace, despite the missing ל. Either way, the passuk in its simple form is sending us a message.) Harlotry at the start of her married life is what causes her father’s name to be disgraced; that puts the blame on him. How and why?

The answer given by the Imrei Shefer is preceded with the words of our Sages. *“The way of the Evil Inclination is that today, he tells you do this small sin. Then, tomorrow, he tells you do a different little sin. Finally, he gets you to a level where he tells you- Go and serve idols!”*. On the basis of these comments, we can make the following observation: *if a child rebels gradually, stage by stage, we can attribute the cause to the child’s evil inclination, not to some deficiency or mistake made by the parents.* Gradual changes are usually an expression of the child’s free choice. However, if the unacceptable behavior was something sudden, it was a result of something deeply rooted in the child’s past, dating back to the time and way he was parented.

The fact that the daughter of the Kohen suddenly started to do something so grave as being with another man during her own marriage, without any prior sign of gradual spiritual decline or other examples of extroverted behavior, points the finger of blame at the parents. Had her actions been due to her evil inclination, such behavior would have come about more gradually.

And still, believe it or not, even when the father is pointed at for faulty parenting or for having been a bad example, the Torah holds the daughter of the Kohen responsible for her actions. She is to be burnt, while the parents stand by and watch. I hate

these sad endings, but it all points to and exposes the anti – Torah psychological approach that children are not responsible for the way they act if they were brought up with mistakes. The Torah tells us that the child is *still* responsible.

We see this at the end of our parasha as well. The Ben Mitzri – the son of an Egyptian father and Jewish mother – failed in his attempt to integrate into his mother’s tribe of Dan. Since tribal affiliation is established through the father, Moshe’s court ruled that this son of an Egyptian father could not qualify for membership in any tribe. Out of frustration, the rejected fellow committed the grave sin of cursing the Name of G-d (which he had heard at Mt. Sinai). For this, he was sentenced to stoning. His executioners were to be the very people who heard him utter the curse.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 45b) states that one who curses G-d is considered a kofer (heretic). In light of this, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz asks the following thought-provoking question: How could a Jew who witnessed G-d’s revelation at Mt. Sinai, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the miraculous redemption from Egypt, suddenly fall from such a high level and act in a manner befitting an atheist?

To understand how the Ben Mizri fell so far and so fast, we must examine the factors which coincided, bringing him to his demise. First, since he had an Egyptian father, the Ben Mitzri inherited a tendency to belittle G-d. We find this tendency in the terminology used by Pharaoh in his exchanges with Moshe (See Baalei Hatosofot). From his mother, he picked up another tendency which contributed to his undoing. Indeed, her name – Shlomit bat Divri – vividly reflected her actions. Shlomit: She would say Shalom to all passers-by, including unfamiliar men. Bat Divri: she was always chattering, and thereby projecting a flirtatious image of herself. Through her unconventional behavior, she called attention to herself, and the Egyptians perceived her as a harlot. Shlomit’s extroverted behavior must have been a reflection of a deep thirst for social recognition and acceptance. This tendency or trait was picked up by



her son who, like his mother, felt a strong need to connect and “belong” – not being able to “stand on his own two feet.” Upon hearing the verdict of Moshe’s court, he now felt rejected and dejected as never before.

Putting this all together, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains the abrupt fall to the lowest of low. When the Ben Mitzri felt rejected by society – he lost himself and acted upon his deep-seated tendency to belittle G-d. This grave sin *was not excused* in light of his upbringing and circumstances. *Quite the contrary, he was to be reminded before being stoned to death: “You are liable for your actions!”* (Rashi).

THE WORLD’S GREATEST ARTIST

I heard the most beautiful idea from my neighbor, Dan Gordon, one of the best landscapers in Jerusalem and a Shemitta specialist. This idea is an idea that one can meditate on for hours. Chana praised G-d, saying: **אין קדוש כה' כי אין בלתי, ואין** *There is none that is holy like G-d, for there is no one else except You... and there is no Rock like our G-d.* The Talmud asks **מאי “אין צור” – אין ציר כאלקינו** *What does it mean, that there is no rock like our G-d? It can be interpreted as saying, “there is no – tzayyar-, there is no artist like our G-d* (Berachot 10a). The Talmud gives an explanation as to what that means.

Dan shared his own twist to this, a brilliant concept. Every artist in the world attaches his signature to his work – otherwise, you can’t know who the artist is. But G-d is different. He does not put His signature on anything. *Because everything is His signature.* I felt that this is a great intro to the following life lesson.

Rachel, daughter of the philanthropist Kalba Sabua, knew she was doing the right thing by marrying Akiva, the shepherd. How did she know not to listen her father, that she should reject all the great rabbis she could have married, and, instead, give her hand to the divorced, 40-year-old shepherd who worked for her father?

This concept is more applicable on a personal level than on a parenting one. Although many of us go through life convinced that our negative traits and tendencies are not in our control – that is actually a subconscious decision we made or a belief that was drummed into us. Indeed, this faulty perception is nothing less than any other mistake that the *Merciful* G-d holds us accountable for, because He gave us a way to overcome our deficiencies. The key is to use the tool of *bechira chofsheet* (freedom of choice) which He entrusted to us. A Tzelem Elokim – one created in G-d’s image – is never doomed to be a victim if he exercises his freedom of choice. Is there a more empowering concept than this? Ignorance of it may well be the biggest blunder of our generation.

The Talmud tells us. She saw that he was modest. (Ketubot 62b) The Pele Yoetz writes that the first thing a girl dating should look for in a husband is modesty. After modesty, see if he is a Talmid Chacham (Pesachim 49a). And next, see that he has a Rabbi he listens to. The Pele Yoetz goes on to warn that a woman should *never* marry a boy because of money, and she should not turn down a boy because of lack of money. Money comes, and money goes. But the boy she marries will stay with her forever (Pele Yoetz 109:2).

Modesty and humility are very different, although they are interconnected. Modesty is the reluctance to flaunt oneself, to put oneself on display or to attract attention. Humility is about how you perceive your strengths and your G-d-given gifts.

As Dan beautifully illustrated, G-d is the most modest artist, and He commands us to be modest along with Him. **וְהִצַּנֵּעַ לְכַת עַם אֲלֵקִיָּהּ**. Micha the prophet taught that Modesty is one of three fundamental principles of our religion (Makkot 24a). Why is modesty so crucial? Why is the virtue of modesty the key to all other virtues and spiritual success?

Avoiding external honor is one of the basic tenets of Judaism. Bear with me, as I take you for a ride.



The ride of your life. This is the soul of each and every Jew. Literally.

We sing each day in our prayers, לְמַעַן וְזָמְרָה כְבוֹד לְמַעַן וְזָמְרָה לְךָ יְיָ. *So that Kavod (honor) will sing to You and will not be silent.* All of the commentators explain that Kavod, honor, in this context, refers to the soul. The Nefesh. Why is your soul “honor”? What is the connection? עוֹרָה כְבוֹדֵי עוֹרָה הַנִּבְּל וְכִנּוּר אֶעֱיֶרָה. *Again. The word honor is used in reference to the soul. Why is the soul called honor? And why did G-d create the concept of honor, anyway? How many lives were ruined because of it? How many people were not able to achieve their life’s destiny, for they lived their lives with their eyes on the rear-view mirror, worried about what people might say about them, if they drove on to reach it? Each day in Shacharit, we say טוב יֵצֵר כְבוֹד לְשִׁמּוֹ Good He created, honor for His Name. What does this mean? In what way did G-d create honor for His Name?*

One of the most fundamental questions of Judaism is the question R Yosef Kairo asked the Maggid-angel who taught him. If the soul came from such a high place, from under G-d’s throne, and the soul received there great pleasure from being close to G-d... Why did G-d send the soul down to this world, into a body, to do Mitzvot? If anyway, in the end, if the soul accomplished its mission on Earth, it will return to the place of the souls, next to G-d’s throne?

The Maggid answered R’ Yosef Kairo that there is a concept called Nahama D’kisufa. Embarrassed bread. Nahama D’kisufa is a parable of a poor man that got bread from a rich man. Despite the fact that he enjoyed his meal, he is embarrassed that he is eating “bread of kindness”. A man who works for his bread, who paid for his meal with the sweat of his brow, does not feel embarrassed about the bread he eats. The lesson is that reward without effort, as in the case of the soul being close to G-d’s throne, is “embarrassed bread”. G-d therefore sends the soul down and commands it to keep the Torah and

Mitzvot. By fulfilling G-d’s commands, the Heavenly reward for one’s spiritual toil will be much greater than the original pleasure of the soul, for it will no longer have the component of feeling embarrassment.

Now, we can understand why G-d made the emotion called honor. In His infinite mercy and endless goodness, He wants the souls of mankind to have the ability to enjoy the ultimate pleasure of a deserved closeness to G-d. The purpose of honor is to enable you to enjoy your closeness to G-d in the next world at a whole new level, a more honorable level, a level of respect. This emotion of honor is the fundamental reason for which your soul came down to this world. Therefore, the soul is referred to as Honor.

Your choice in life is which honor you pursue. There are two types of honor in this world. There is the pursuit of internal, eternal honor, where a person focuses on a life of value, virtues and victory over the Evil Inclination. And there is temporary, external honor, i.e., looking to draw attention, to flaunt oneself, or to put oneself on display. The two types of honor are diametrically opposed and work like a seesaw. If a person lives with purpose, he does not need external honor. Modesty is the way to tap into your soul. Into eternity. Into a life of values, virtue, and victory over inclinations.

All of life’s blessings flourish when they don’t attract attention (Bava Metziah 42a). If you want to flourish, you need to pick the type of honor you want. A healthy ego is an ego that does not get its nourishment from external sources. A healthy ego does not need to take credit, in order to feel accomplished. Quite the contrary. A healthy ego gives credit and honor to others, as R Akiva taught his students, *שלי ושלכם שלה. All of my learning, and all of my student’s learning, is all in the credit of my wife Rachel.*

Be G-dlike. Stay modest.



THE REAL ANSWER TO LIFE'S PROBLEMS

Ben Zoma said, “Who is wise? One who learns from all people. Who is mighty? One who overcomes his own Inclination. Who is rich? One who is happy with what he has. Who is honorable? One who honors others.” The commentators explain that Ben Zoma was asking who is praiseworthy for his being wise, mighty, rich, and honorable.

What is the common denominator of all four of these lessons from Ben Zoma?

The common denominator of the four values and aspirations of humanity, Wisdom, Wealth, Might, and Honor is that, despite the misunderstanding that many people have, not one of the four is an external factor. As a matter of fact, dependence on external ‘ingredients’ to ‘bake’ your success story in these four areas, is a sign of your weakness.

The Alter from Kelm would tell the following story. There was once a philosopher who went to his master philosophers to learn a lot of wisdom. He wrote it all down, and on his way home, a group of bandits jumped on him. He begged them, *Take whatever you want; but one request I beg of you. My writings, my notes – don't take!* The bandits asked what the writings were about. The philosopher responded that this was all the wisdom that he had worked on acquiring over the last five years.

The bandits responded. “What value does your wisdom have, if someone can rob you of it?”

Real wisdom is not external, but internal. If your wisdom is not part of you, it is not the real thing. It is not praiseworthy wisdom. Saying the Gemarah over in your own words, by heart, is a different level of understanding. Being a teacher is a greater level of learning than being a student. One who has good learning habits is wiser than one who has ineffective learning habits, even if the latter gathered more information. Rabbis have coined an expression for this phenomenon: *המור נושא ספרים*, A donkey who is carrying books. The more internal, the more praiseworthy. We can now understand a quote from Socrates, ‘When a person says he

knows everything – it is a sign that he knows nothing.

Not everyone who is rich can be considered among the “praiseworthy” rich. Real wealth is not defined by how much you have – which is an external factor, one subject to change – but, rather, how content you are with what you have at the moment.

I once sat at a breakfast table with a whole group of millionaires. There was one person, though, who was sitting with a Sefer. I opened a discussion with him, afterwards. This is what he taught me. *I worked hard until the age of 55. I gave up family time, health, etc., to build my business. I served my business until now, and now I want it to serve me. I made enough to spend the rest of my life on quality family time, exercise, and learning Torah. I helped out my kids financially. I taught them to live with modest expenditures and a low maintenance lifestyle, so I can afford this stress-free lifestyle, which will give me added longevity. I live on a low budget, and I tried convincing my rich friends to take on this life plan. But they can't afford it. They never have enough.*

He may have had the smallest bank account at the breakfast table, but he is definitely the Wisest, Mightiest, most Honorable, and Wealthiest of them all.

Might is not measured against other people's strength, nor is it relative to how others perceive it: it is up to the individual, himself, to feel that he is mighty. A person is mighty when he can overpower his Inclination. And the one who is honorable is not honorable due to external factors, such as relying on others to treat him with honor. Quite the contrary. He is honorable because he shines the spotlight of his life on his family and friends.

In coaching, I have found that people who are stuck in life are looking for external solutions. Coaching is about bringing the person back to internal solutions, to look within himself. To give the person back the reins of responsibility, to help him “self-help”.

For example. Here is one of the tools that I use in creative problem solving, in brain storming. *If you can't solve a problem, then there is an easier problem you can't solve: find it!* That's a quote from one of my favorite books, *The 5 Elements of Effective Thinking*, and it is one of the greatest pieces of advice to have packed in your bag for your life's journey. The book explains this tool. "When the going gets rough, creative problem solvers create an easier, simpler problem that they *can* solve. They resolve that easier issue thoroughly and then study that simple scenario with laser focus. Those insights often point the way to a resolution of the original difficult problem."

Successful people in all life areas live by this secret tool. They don't get stuck. Why? Because they take responsibility to figure out the solution that will keep them up at the top 10 percent of their field. They take responsibility, instead of leaving it to others. The more they take responsibility to reach their goals, the faster they can reach them. It is all internal. From inside out, and not from outside in. I

THE ART OF ALTRUISM

Rashi points out that right in the middle of the Torah's detailed discussion of all the Jewish yearly Holidays and their respective laws and sacrifices, there is a law that seems to be unrelated to the subject. After speaking of the cutting of the barley used for the Omer sacrifice, the Torah commands that one leave the corner of the field, as well as the bundles of grain that had dropped, for the poor and for converts. What is the reason for citing this Mitzvah here, in a seemingly unrelated context? Rashi answers: this is to teach you that anyone who gives gifts to the poor, the Torah considers it as if he had built the Beit Hamikdash and brought sacrifices! It is as if he had gone up on the Three Festivals to rejoice in the Beit Hamikdash!

It seems like a mitzvah of relatively minor importance. But in its merit, we have King David and the royal lineage of our people. Ruth met Boaz, only because of this Mitzvah. From that relationship, David's ancestor was born. It is incredible to see how far an act of chessed can go. And it is amazing how, when we give to the

read that when successful people, in all fields, were asked what was the turning point of their success, the answer was always the same. "I started taking myself seriously". Internal power, not external.

One client made himself a goal. Serenity. We discovered, together, through the coaching, how we could stop saying that the things that were causing him stress were external. It was up to him to communicate that difficult conversation to his wife, to break the pattern of his teenager who was manipulating him, and to keep the schedule of just having his own time. Once he realized how he could take responsibility for his own serenity, he solved his whole life puzzle. The problem with his problems was the small problem that he *could* solve. He needed to learn a certain tool in communication, and that put him in a better position to take the responsibility he needed to reach his serenity goal.

The problem that is solvable, is making the problem an internal one.

unfortunate and needy, we can be the catalyst for them to achieve the greatest things.

In Tannaic times, the period immediately after the destruction of the second Temple, the Romans murdered many great Rabbis for teaching Torah. In those dangerous times, R Hanina ben Tradyon, who would teach Torah in public while holding a Torah scroll, came to visit R' Yossi Ben Kisma, when R' Yossi was sick. R Yossi warned him that if he continued to teach, the Romans would eventually burn him alive, wrapped in a Sefer Torah. R' Hanina asked R Yossi if R' Hanina would deserve Olam Haba. R' Yossi asked R Hanina if he had ever had a test while doing a good deed. R' Hanina replied that he was tested once, when he mixed up his own money with Tzeddaka money, and he did not pay himself back from his mistake with Tzeddaka money. R' Yossi said, "If so, I wish that my portion in Olam Haba would be like your portion!" (Avodah Zarah 18a)

The Sefer Meir Derech asks how it could be that for R Hanina's teaching Torah in public in hard times, with dedication and devotion, was not

enough to reward him with Olam Haba?! Just for that one act of doing Tzeddaka without paying himself back, in this merit, R' Hanina deserves an Olam Haba that R' Yossi is now jealous of?

The answer is amazing. We all know the famous teaching: *R' Hanina ben Akashya said, G-d wanted that we should get reward (in Olam Haba), so he gave us a lot of Torah and Mitzvoth.*

The Rambam (End of Mishna Makkot) writes that for one to get Olam Haba, he needs to do a Mitzvah with no ulterior motives. *לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה הַמִּצְוָה לְמַעַן צְדָקָה*: *Hashem wills for His merit, not for ours. That Torah will become great in quantity, and in quality.* (גדול is quantity. אדיר is quality.) No honor and fame, no pleasure, no material gain in return. The ticket to Olam Haba is a Mitzvah, even if it is just one of quality, that is done out of pure love of G-d and His commandments. That is why G-d gave us so many Mitzvoth, so that at least one of them, at least once in our lives, would be done with the right intentions. Without thinking of how we can make ourselves great, but how we can bring about G-d's greatness. As great as it is to gather people and teach them Torah, teaching in public is still a public act! On the other hand, no one knew of the good deed that R Hanina did with that Tzeddaka money, for everyone thought that it wasn't his own!

The reason why it is so great to give Tzeddaka from the corner of the field, or from the bundles that dropped is that no one thinks it is something special! You cannot drop a bundle on purpose, and the corner of a field is not something that you have much choice about, so you can't claim any fame for it! Most mitzvoth a person performs are

mitzvoth that people can get to know about. But the mitzvah that no one knows, that is your ticket to Olam Haba!

During Coronavirus times, people are disappointed. People expected that Mashiach was going to be here before Pesach. During Hol Hamoed, before the month of Nissan was up. But Mashiach did not come. Mashiach does not come because we want life to go back to normal. Mashiach does not come for us to make us great. He comes to bring clarity to the age-old question as to Divine justice: "Why do bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people?" He comes to make the world recognize that G-d is One. Religion is not about living a better life, although that is one of its perks. It is about making this world a place where all the souls can play their own, special soul-songs to G-d. If that is not what we want, then we do not really want Mashiach. And that is why he is not here yet.

Selfie Steps to altruism:

1. Through Emunah and Bitachon, find space and serenity. Stress and anxiety prevent altruistic thoughts, beliefs and behaviors. When people are stressed, they tend to think more about their own safety and wellbeing, and not notice the wellbeing of others.
2. Read about the lives of altruistic people.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H