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THE ART OF WHAT NOW

We often resist life's challenges because we believe we shouldn't be there. This week's Parsha is a masterclass in adaptability. Yosef doesn't spend his time brooding over how he got into the pit or blaming others for his circumstances. Yosef had every reason to be bitter. After all, he was sold out by family. If you were thrown in a pit, you'd probably shout, *"You had ONE job, Hashem!"* Picture Yosef sitting in that pit, fresh off betrayal by his brothers. He had every right to stew in anger—at G-d, his father, or himself. Yet, years later, when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he said something extraordinary: *Just as I have no animosity toward Binyamin, I have nothing against my brothers who threw me into the pit. (Rashi Bereishit 45:12).*

I always wondered what I would think if my brothers threw me into a pit and sold me as a slave. Yosef simply accepts: *This is where I am. Now how do I make the most of it?* Instead of asking *"Why me?"* Yosef teaches us the art of asking *"What now?"*

Yosef accepted that he was meant to be in the pit. This is the art of *ה' בְּקִלְ-דֶּרֶךְיָיִן*. G-d is righteous in all His ways! If a cat eats the mouse, Hashem is still a Tzaddik. The time of Mouse was expired anyway, why should Cat miss out on a good meal? If I am in the pit, who cares how I got here or who threw me in,... I am supposed to be here! Sometimes, what makes a person a Tzaddik, or a Rasha, is dependent on how the person perceives G-d. Is G-d a Tzaddik, or is G-d, Chas Veshalom, the opposite. All sin stems from not realizing that

G-d is always, always, always, the Tzaddik. *ואתה צדיק על כל הבא עלינו*. This mindset is what made Yosef into Yosef Hatzaddik, that he made G-d always Tzaddik.

Picture this. A car slows down next to you, the driver rolls down the window, and asks you how to get to another city. You ask him, How did you get here???. He tells you, he does not know, but what difference does that make? All I want to know is, How do I get to Point B? Does it really matter how I ended up at Point A? (Unless you are trying to point out to him that he should turn on Waze.)

This is the secret to success, to be Matzliach. Yosef was the first person to be Matzliach, to be successful. That is a headscratcher, right there. How can being a slave be considered successful?

Yosef didn't wait for his circumstances to improve—he succeeded *as a slave*. Success isn't about your position. It's about your attitude. It means embracing your current reality with all you've got. Yosef didn't say, "I'm better than this!" He said, *"If I'm here, I'll shine here."* If you're stuck being a "slave," be the *best slave* you can be. If you are a prisoner in jail, be the best prisoner in the cell. Instead of lamenting *"This isn't how it's supposed to be,"* ask, *"What can I do with where I am right now?"*

On Friday nights, we bless our children to be like Ephraim and Menashe—not Avraham, Yitzchak, or Yaakov. When blessing our daughters we bless them to be like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. So



why don't we bless our children to be like the Patriarchs as well? Why bless them to be like Ephraim and Menashe?

Because Ephraim and Menashe grew up in Egypt, surrounded by spiritual impurity, yet they stayed strong. How? What parenting tool do we need to learn from Yosef, their father? Yosef's secret to raising resilient children was his ability to adapt to his reality. Of course, you need to always try to create the best environment to bring up your kids in, but Yosef's secret was, that if this is where I am right now in life, I will bring up the best children I can, given the circumstances. I can be a perfect parent, even if I am in an imperfect environment! I won't just feel, that if I had things better, I would be able to bring up better children. This is where I am, so What Now?

Where did Yosef get the power of עתה, the power of now, that he taught his brothers in Parashat Vayigash, when he revealed himself to them by repeating ועתה again and again? He got it from his mother Rachel! How so?

The power of now, is what empowered Rachel to give Leah the secret signs under the chuppah! Rachel didn't worry about losing her future with Yaakov; she saw her sister's pain in the *present*. But what about being the future Matriarch of the Jewish Nation??!! What about the dreaded possibility of marrying Esav??!!

Hashem doesn't ask us to change the world, or be the Mother of the Jewish Nation—He asks us to be a Mensch! He asks us to do what's right *right now*. If your "right now" is helping your sister avoid humiliation, that she should not be turned down at her own Chuppah, in her white Kallah Gown, then you roll up your sleeves and do it, and forget about everything else. Being a Mensch, is expected of you. Being the Matriarch, changing the world, is just extra credit.

This article, believe it or not, no one wrote. It was written by a team of robots. TranscribeMe and Chat Gpt. I record voice notes into TranscribeMe app on Whatsapp. It writes everything I record. I take the text, and put into ChatGpt to properly write the ideas that were transcribed. All I do is think of ideas, and edit what ChatGpt wrote. I

believe in adapting to times, and this is the future. As one comedian said, I look to the future because that's where I'm going to spend the rest of my life.

Sometimes though, I ask Chat Gpt for ideas, or for Chat Gpt to create stories that are emotional. But the emotions of a robot, are always off. "I once wrote a love story that made me feel emotions. Yep, me, a large language model with no heart or brain! Here's what happened: Someone asked me to write a story about two time travelers—one who could only go into the past and the other who could only move forward into the future. They met in a fleeting moment, in a forgotten ruin where time didn't flow quite right. A present moment that never ended..."

That is how Yosef was born! From a point where past meets future! Rachel wanted to call Yosef אָסֵף אֶלְקִים אֶת־הַרְפָּהּ. *Hashem gathered my shame!* But in the end, she called him something for the future! וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לְאֹמֶר יִסְף ה' לִי בֶן אֶחָד. And she called his name Yosef, saying, Hashem should add me another child! This is what infused Yosef with the Power of Now! Only through accepting and maximizing the present moment, can we fix the past, and effect the future! It is all about adapting to now!

This week, a single mom of five "difficult" children asked me advice how she can handle her children that were driving her nuts. I gently asked her if she wanted advice on how to handle them, or how to respond to them. There is a difference. With difficult children, you can't handle them. You can only handle yourself, how you respond to them. This was the moment she began to heal. The secret is not trying to control the uncontrollable. It's learning to adapt your *response* to the chaos. Adaptation is where transformation begins. It's the art of What Now?.

The Rambam tells us in the laws of prayer the first step of Shacharit, Minha, Arvit, is to sit down—*just sit*. This is the meaning of אֲשֶׁר יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתָךְ *lucky are those who sit in your home*. Why? Because prayer demands presence in thought, not to be in the past or future. You can't ask Hashem for help while mentally multitasking through your to-do list. Settle into the now. True tefillah happens when we settle into where we are, pains and all,



and pray from *that* place. Prayers that come from your present reality, from the pain, fears, anxieties that you are going through at the present moment, have unmatched power. That is the original prayer, to pray בעת צרה, in times of duress.

The Hovot Halevovot teaches, that there is no such thing as relying on G-d, and relying on something else, simultaneously. Yosef spent two extra years in prison for asking the butler to help him twice. Was it wrong to try to improve his situation? For us, no. But Yosef's essence was *accepting his reality*. He knew his journey—pit to palace—was divinely orchestrated. Asking the butler twice suggested he forgot that, if only for a moment. If Yosef wanted out, he was expected to ask G-d again, not to ask the butler twice!

This is why Reuven lost all leadership. Although he shined in trying to protect his brother Yosef in

the story, but at the time when they sold Yosef, Reuven was not around! He was busy repenting in sackcloth and ashes somewhere, fixing his past, doing Teshuva for moving around the beds after Rachel died! *But Reuven, in the present, your brother is in the pit!* The Yetzer Hara loves it when we get caught up in Teshuva, in regret, and not in being responsible for the present moment! You could be doing Teshuva for the past, miss the Now, and mess up on doing the Mitzvot you currently have, with joy. You could lose everything, just like that. This was the sad story of Reuven at the Pit.

These three parashiot about Yosef are not just a story with a hero. They are a timeless lesson of how to deal with life's pits. 1. Accept where you are. 2. Adapt to the challenge. 3. Make the *most* of the moment.

THE ART OF BEING GRATEFUL FOR BEING GRATEFUL

When we light the Hanuka candles, we are lighting the candles of our souls. King David said, כִּי־אֶתֶּה תִּפְאֵר נָרִי יִקְנֶה אֱלֹהִי נִגִּיָה תִּשְׁכְּנֵנִי *for You light up my candle, YKVK my G-d will light up my darkness.* (Tehillim 18;29) A soul is comparable to a candle. נֵר יִקְנֶה נִשְׁמַת אָדָם. *A candle of YKVK is a man's soul.* (Mishlei 20; 27) One of the reasons why a Jew shakes during his Amidah prayer, something that is not found in the prayer of any other religion, is because the flame of the Jewish soul is flickering when he is talking to G-d.

Why is a soul compared to a candle? And how do we light up our soul and cause it to flicker?

There are two types of light and darkness. There is the light and darkness that we are familiar with, that comes from the sun and the lack of it. That light is the secondary light that G-d created on Day 4 of Creation. On day one of Creation, G-d created a light that He decided to hide for the Tzadikkim till the End of Time. אֵינֶנּוּ נִרְאֵה לְצַדִּיקִים (Tehillim 97;11. See Rashi in Bereshit) That light is also found in the Torah, and in the Hanuka candle light. This type of a light is a light of awareness, that a person can “see” from one end of the world to the other. (Hagigah 12a) The word חֹשֶׁךְ, darkness, at its

deepest meaning means held back, or unaware. וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּח אֶת־בְּנֵהוּ אֶת־יְהוָה מִמְּנוֹנֵי G-d asked Abraham, not to hold back his son Yitzhak from him. And that is what all prayer is about. Awareness. Opening up your eyes, letting the soul free, to connect to Him and to express authentic gratitude to him.

That is why we “flicker”, when we shake while we pray. When we light the Hanuka candles, it is as if we are making a prayer to G-d, *Master of the Universe! Light up my darkness! If I don't see how You are ruling my world, and I don't thank You for every detail that I owe You gratitude for, my life is not a life, my 'candle' is not lit, my soul is in the dark, as I am disconnected from the source of life, חִי הַעוֹלָמִים. Only through gratitude and thanks can I be connected to You, can I see the light, can I be aware! Please G-d! Give me that awareness! Don't hold me back from seeing how much You are there for me!*

This is the hidden light that is found in Hanuka candles. Thanking G-d for the ability and the awareness to thank Him. As we say in Modim Drabanan, the Modim that the Minyan says, while the Hazzan is saying the Modim of Shemoneh 'Esreh. עַל שְׂאֵנֵהֶנּוּ מוֹדִים לְךָ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הוֹדָאוֹת On the



very fact that we are able thank You, we are thanking You! Being grateful, that I can have gratitude in my heart, is on a Jewish thing, built into our religion and every day service.

It is so strange. The whole repetition prayer of the Hazan, we say Amen just to *his* prayer, and it is considered that he is our messenger for a public prayer, a Tefilat Tzibur. (Which is why it is so severe to talk during the Chazara, the repetition prayer, because it is the communal prayer, that we are all expressing through the Hazzan. Speaking in the middle of the Repetition, is like speaking in middle of Shemoneh 'Esreh, and is the only thing the Halacha says to scold someone for. לא ישיח שיחת חולין בשעה שהשליח צבור חוזר התפלה, ואם שח הרי לא ישיח. (O"H 124;7) But in the repetition, when we say our *own* Modim, we don't rely on the Modim of the Hazan! A Baal Teshuva I teach prayer to asked me the following two questions last week: If it is important to thank G-d for our ability to thank Him, why don't we thank him so, in the original Modim? And second question, why can't we have the Hazan to be our messenger for this Modim, as well?

The answer is hidden in the meanings of the word Modim. The word Modim, has in it three different levels. On the simple level, it means thanks. On a deeper level, it means that *I admit*. הודאת בעל דין. *I admit that I am not independent, I could not manage without You, but I am so very dependent on You.* On a deeper level, it means, I am aware. וידוי. This is because, gratitude is rooted in awareness. There are a lot of levels of awareness. If I have a messenger saying that I am aware of something for me, it does not mean, yet, that I am actually aware. If I have someone saying for me that I am dependent, that is not the same as an admission that I am dependent, as if I say it myself. Therefore, we need to express our gratitude, our thanks, from our own mouths, and not have someone say our thanks for us. This is why the Minyan needs to make their own Modim, and not rely on the Hazzan. And this is why we take this personal moment of gratitude during the Repetition prayer, to express that we are grateful for being able to be grateful. *I am grateful that I am grateful. Aware that I am unentitled.* This brings a person to admittance that he is indebted. That admittance

needs to be from the each and every member of the Minyan, something that the Hazan can't cover for. The indebted feeling is what motivates one and gives him the emotional energy to actually be grateful and thankful. It's a three-step process, to being grateful. Awareness. Admitting. Appreciation. And all three are found in the roots of הודאה, מודה, and וידוי.

We say in the Al Hanissim prayer something that is so strange. While we are telling G-d thank you, we mention something unrelated to the thanks itself. וְקִבְּעוּ שְׂמוֹנֶת יְמֵי תְּנֻכָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ. להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול. We mention to G-d a piece of history: that the Rabbis of the Hanuka days set up eight days of Hanuka, dedicated to praise. Why do we mention this, something that G-d already knows?

The answer is that the very fact that we were able to realize that we needed to take out 8 days each year to praise G-d - for that awareness alone, we are thanking G-d. Including the repetition prayer, we say Al Hanissim 5 to 7 times a day, for all 8 days of Hanuka, not including Al Hanisim of Birkat Hamazon. That is around 50 times! It gets pretty repetitious. It can even feel like "rambling". If you are not aware of the importance of what you are saying, your prayer is not genuine, not authentic – you miss out on the power and meaning of your Al Hanisms! You can either accept or make a different change.

The light of the soul, the light of first day of Creation, the light of Hanuka candles are all lights of awareness. Every extra effort you put into your gratitude brings it up a level. Each level of awareness you are mindful of is another level of soul lit up. The fact that you are grateful to be grateful. The fact that you can express it yourself. The fact that you can publicize it. And the more people we publicize it to. How so?

Ever wonder why we have a special Hanuaka candle lighting in the Shul, with blessings, even though the person who lights in the shul will be making the blessings, when he lights later at home? This is because in dangerous times of antisemitism, when it was unsafe to light in our windows, and we could not publicize our gratitude for the passersby, the only kind of publicizing that could be done in those days was to the people indoors, to one's own



household. So, the Rabbis found another level of publicizing the miracle in times of antisemitism! They inaugurated lighting for the people that gather in the synagogue! And we make a special, extra blessing, just for that extra publicizing!

Although, one can say, if it is dangerous times, and I can't light in my window because of antisemitism, why do I have to find other ways of publicizing the miracle? If it is dangerous, if it is risky, aren't I patur and exempt!?

No! Even if I am patur and exempt, I go out of my way to thank, because I am indebted. Even though I can rely on the Hazan, I go out of my way to make a special personal thank you with my Modim D'rabanan! Even though the Hashmonaim did not have to light with pure oil, because they had a loophole of *טומאה הותרה בציבור*, they wanted to go the extra mile and find the best way, the ideal way, to light the menorah! Why?

Because what I want to do, I don't find excuses not to do, I don't try to get out of it! It is so interesting, what the Rambam says about the mitzvah of Hanukah! He calls it a *מאד מצוה הכיבה עד* (Rambam 4 12) The most precious of all the Mitzvoth! How could that make sense?! Hanukah is a mitzvah from the Rabbis, while Tzitzit, Tefillin, Shabbat, are from the Torah! How can it be that the Rambam calls no other mitzvah so precious?!

The answer is because this is the Mitzvah, the holiday, that G-d did not ask of us! *We* did it, because we wanted to! We made this holiday, without any prophets, just with our awareness alone! Whenever the Talmud mentions something that a Rabbi learned on his own, it says, *הכיבה ליה*, it is precious to him! This is our holiday of awareness. That we are thankful, that we can be thankful. Because once I realize, once I am grateful to be grateful, there is nothing more *הכיב*, nothing more precious than that!

THE ART OF SEEING THE LIGHT

Ever noticed how all of the parashiot of Sefer Bereshit, from Lech Lecha, the time G-d promised Avraham that his descendants would be going down to Egypt, until it actually happened - all begin with the letter Vav? (Except three). *וירא, ויצא, וישלח, וישב, ויגש, ויחי*. Nowhere else in the Torah are there so many parashiot, in a row, that begin with the letter Vav. The only three of Bereshit, that do not start with the letter Vav are the parashiot *חיי מקץ, שרה, תולדות*. The initial letters of these parashiot spell *חתם*, which means "sealed". G-d "sealed" the plan for the Jews to go down to Egypt, to fulfill His Word to Avraham. The whole Sefer Bereshit, from the covenant of the 400 years of being a stranger in a strange land, until the very end of Sefer Bereshit, were all to fulfill that prophecy, in a mindboggling way.

Yitzhak's birth, his life, and Yaakov's life, were the beginning of the 400 years of living as a stranger in a foreign land. From the point of the Brit Ben Habetarim onward, by Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov and the tribes, they lived as a *גר*, a stranger. *ויגר אברהם, גור בארץ הזאת, ויעקב גר בארץ חם*. (See Rashi 15;13) The lengthy mention of Esav's family "dwelling" was to

illustrate that he wasn't willing to go through the 400 years of being a stranger in a foreign land. (Rashi 36;7) (And the episode of Akeidat Yitzhak was to clarify, that Yitzhak was the true inheritor of Avraham and not Yishmael.) Every time the Torah mentions Yitzhak or Yaakov settling, being *וישב* in their lives, something very *unsettling* happened: with Avimelech, the dispute over the wells, Yaakov losing Yosef.

All the episodes in Bereshit were either a fulfillment of the prophecy of being a stranger in a foreign land, or of a domino effect of the Jewish family descending to Egypt. Yitzhak needed to marry Rivka, sister of Lavan, and specifically to have twins, one, Yaakov, and the other, Esav - the child that came from Lavan's gene. (Mention of Lavan is important for the fact that most sons resemble, in their nature, the mother's brother.) (B. Batra 110a) And it was important that Yaakov was born second, not Esav, so that Esav would want to kill Yaakov for stealing the blessings that "belonged" to him. This was important, to make Yaakov run away from home and come, empty-handed, to Lavan's house. Yaakov coming empty-handed gave Lavan the leverage to trick Yaakov



into marrying Leah, and not Rachel. This forced Yaakov to have 6 children from Leah and two from Rachel, which caused politics within the twelve brothers. Rachel needed to die early, so that Reuven would tamper with the beds and be downgraded from firstborn, adding to the politics. Rachel's death also caused Yaakov to give Yosef more TLC (tender loving care), which brought about even more politics, making the brothers to think that Yosef was a Yaakov's favorite, and that Yosef wanted to be considered the only continuation of Jewish lineage and push his brothers out of the picture. This caused them to sell Yosef in bondage to Egypt, (See Rashi 37,14) which brought about Yosef's becoming the ruler of Egypt, which caused the Jewish family of Yaakov to come down to Egypt.

All this explains why Dina needed to be raped by Shechem, so that she would bear Osnat, who Yaakov sent down to Egypt, with a Kamiah on her neck, which she threw into Yosef's chariot, so that he would find a Jewish girl to marry while in Egypt, who would bear Menashe and Efraim. (Pirkei DR Eliezer 38; Yalkut Shimoni)

G-d sealed - סתם - and hid, the destiny of the first Jewish family! All the parashiot begin with Vav, which means **and**, because they are all a continuation, they are all connected and lined up in perfect order, so that in the end, G-d's Word is fulfilled, in entirety!!

What? So nobody really made a decision, everything was preplanned?!? They were all just puppets, to a much greater plan?!?! Nothing actually *happened* - מקרה. It was all ה' רקם, the letters flip around to say, G-d was weaving the tapestry. Why a tapestry?

After the Holocaust, people turned to Hazon Ish to explain G-d's plan. He explained that their question could be compared to the question of a child, seeing his grandmother knitting. From the child's view of all the strands of wool, which are so disorganized – a tangled mixture of many colors – it is no more than a hopeless mess. But, when the child climbs up on a table, and sees the product coming out of the needles his grandmother is so deftly using, it looks very beautiful. As G-d says, כִּי

לֹא מִחֻשְׁבוֹתַי מִחֻשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם (Yeshaya 55:8) For *My* perspective is not *your* perspective.

When we are busy, G-d is busy, as well, pulling strings, weaving destiny. The passuk says that after Yehuda directed the brothers to sell Yosef, and their father Yaakov continued grieving over the loss of his son, Yehuda “went down” from his brothers. The Midrash tells us something amazing on that passuk from Yirmiyahu, כִּי אֲנֹכִי לְרַעְתִּי אֶת־הַמְחַשְׁבֹּת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי חָשַׁב עֲלֵיכֶם נִאֲמַר יְקֻנֶּה מִחֻשְׁבוֹת שְׁלוֹמֶם וְלֹא לְרַעְיָה לְתַת לָכֶם אֶת־רִית וְתִקְוָה: Yirmiyahu consoles the people before their descent to Babylon for seventy years, with this powerful passuk: *For I know the thoughts that I think about you, says YKVK, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope: Rabbi Shmuel B' Nachman said, the tribes were busy selling Yosef, Yosef was busy with his sackcloth and fasting, Reuven was busy with his sackcloth and fasting for not bringing Yosef back home to Yaakov, Yaakov was busy with his sackcloth and fasting, and Yehuda was busy finding a wife, and G-d was dealing with creating the light of the king Mashiach!*”

The only parts of the story of Bereshit, from the time of the prophecy to Avraham at the Brit Ben Habatarim, that are not part of the domino effect of descending the Jewish family down to Egypt, or the Brit Ben Habetarim, are the stories of Lot being saved from the destruction of Sedom and the story of Yehuda and Tamar. These stories, unrelated to the Jews going down to Egypt, are the two stories about G-d being busy, creating Mashiach. Out of Lot came Ruth, David's grandmother; and out of Yehuda, came Boaz, son of Nachshon, David's grandfather!

When you think that G-d has forgotten about you, that is when He is thinking about you! When you think you are alone, He is closer than ever! You think G-d had “bad intentions”, with all these crazy things happening, but it was all happening for G-d to bring you an אהרית ותקוה, a happy ending!

In the whole Chanuka story, G-d is pulling the strings, for an entirely different story from the one we know. For a thousand years, G-d wanted an eight-day holiday, starting on the 25th of Kislev, before the Maccabees were even born! How so?



After the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jews came running to donate materials for the erection of the Mishkan. The Mishkan was completed on the 25th of Kislev...but G-d told Moshe to dedicate it on the birthday of Yitzhak, on the first of Nissan. The inauguration celebration lasted 8 days, which is the Torah reading for the 8 days of Chanukka, days which were to have begun on the 25th of Kislev. The whole Chanuka story had to happen, in order to celebrate, the Menorah, the Mizbeach, and the closeness, because a thousand years earlier, the Jews were swift in creating something spiritual about of something physical, which we commemorate through making fire out of oil.

We light the Chanuka candles in the darkest time of the year. Because in the darkest darkness, G-d lights the brightest lights. When nothing makes sense, it is because G-d is doing His thing. When Yaakov, Yosef, Reuven are crying, G-d is weaving His tapestry. Before Mashiach comes, there will be a lot of darkness, because only in darkness, G-d performs. That is His way of being modest, He never brings attention to Himself. No one knows it was He, until after the fact. Just like a **חתם**, a signet ring, that is illegible, until after the stamp. Only then can it be recognized, that it was G-d, all along.

P.s. This is why, when people get engaged, they make an engagement party. A “vort”. Even though there is no religious, halachic, reason to celebrate. There is no Kiddushin then, **הרי את מקודשת לי** is not said. So why do we make a party?

Since G-d created the world, what is He busy doing? He is busy doing two things. He is making shidduchim, and He is flipping ladders, (lowering the haughty, and lifting the humble). (Yalkut Shimoni) But why does it take so long for G-d to make Shidduchim?!

Forty days before a baby boy is formed, there is a Heavenly voice that goes out, and says, **בת פלוני לפלוני**. The daughter of so-and-so will go to so-and-so. (Sotah 2a) From that point on, everything that happens in the life of that boy and girl, all has to happen in order for them to meet and get engaged. The custom of making an engagement party is to celebrate that G-d’s work, of making this shidduch come together, has come to fruition. Everyone thought that they were busy doing what they were doing, but G-d was bringing two people together, all along.

I did not get along in Yeshiva, where I learnt in America. So I left to Mikdash Melech, then in Bayit Vegan. The first day I prayed in Israel, I prayed in the Amshinov minyan factory, and I left my watch in shul, after putting on my Tefillin. I came back, and there was a sign on the wall, WATCH FOUND- come get it with the simanim, the signs that prove it is yours. I claimed my watch from the Israeli kids that had found it and wanted to do the mitzvah of returning lost items. I was invited to eat by them for Shabbat meals, and before going back to America, they asked me if I was interested in dating. They knew an English-speaking girl, who lived in the neighborhood. I dated the girl, and in two weeks we were engaged. I never thought, in a million years, that the reason why I had to go through a hard time in Yeshiva in America, was so that I would be able to be happily-ever-after married. **לָתֵת לָכֶם אַחֲרַיִת וְתִקְוָה**

Selfie steps to live with G-d’s plan.

1.G-d’s business is not your business. As Yeshayahu told Chizkiyahu about his decision not to have children, so as not to bring Menashe to the world: **בהדי כבשי דרחמנא למה לך? מאי דמפקדת איבעי לך למעבד!** (See Berachot 10a) We are not supposed to ponder or depend on what we believe is G-d’s plan; we have to make the decisions that are most rational for us, knowing, all along, that G-d has His own plans, and only His plan will play out. (R Wolbe from Hovot Halevavot) Yosef felt that something bad was going to happen to him, after leaving his father to check on his brothers who hated him. After all, the last thing he learnt with his father was the laws of Eglar Arufah, of someone who was sent out on the road alone, and his blood was spilled. He knew that he had a bad omen hovering over him, but he listened to his father,



anyway, and fulfilled his command. What was going to happen to him was G-d's business. Yosef just needed to listen to his father. He needed to do what made sense, what was rational.

2. Do the best you can, but stay balanced, calm and collective. No matter how many self-help tools you know, or how much hishtadlut you apply, it is all up to G-d whether or not you will be successful, and how much. It is all predetermined from Rosh Hashana.

3. Stay positive. You are just a puppet. You might as well be, a positive puppet.

THE ART OF SPIRITUAL COMEBACK (2020)

Covid has taken a toll on the spirituality of the system. During Covid, 30 percent of Yeshiva students in Israel did not return to Yeshiva. Some, because they dropped out. Some, because they didn't fit in, to begin with. Some, because they were on the verge of outgrowing the system or because their families feared someone catching Corona. Out of 80,000 yeshiva students in Israel, 24,000 were out on the streets.

Covid has taken a toll on the spirituality of the individual. Corona did not only cause inactivity in the gym and in the arena of exercise, shopping, or getting out. It caused us to be inactive spiritually as well. If a person has an excuse not to pray with a minyan, not to recite *Shema* on time, Corona makes it all the harder to do what we're supposed to do.

People want to be spiritually motivated again. People want the tools to motivate others spiritually. Chanuka is a time for a spiritual comeback. That is what Chanuka is all about, to look for whatever spiritual motivation you have and light it up. Make something out of the little that you have, no matter how small it is. How so? There is a fundamental difference between Purim, where we have a mitzvah to make a meal, and Chanuka, when we don't. On Purim, we celebrate that our lives have been spared from the decree that came because we participated in Achashverosh's party. We contrast that to Chanuka, when we celebrate that our spirituality was spared from the decrees that came because we blended with Hellenistic culture. On Chanuka, we commemorate our spirituality's reignition and that we got a chance to serve G-d and do His Mitzvoth again, with the highest level of adherence.

It is so interesting. We celebrate the miracles of the miraculous jug of oil. We had good excuses back

then, either not to light the Menorah, or to light with impure oil because of the rule *טומאה הותרה בציבור*. But still. We celebrate that we found the one jug and had the 8-day miracle. We rejoice that, despite the circumstances, we were still able to serve G-d in the best way possible. The Chanuka miracle that we celebrate was that we did the best we could, with the little we had, and G-d took care of the rest. As the *Al Hanissim* prayer on Chanuka dictates, the war that we won was for the sake of preserving our spiritual level. Chanuka is the message of spiritual motivation, to gravitate towards G-d, like the candle's oil, that gravitates towards the flame.

Judaism teaches us that the things you notice least, the things you take for granted most, are the things you should thank G-d for first. Through these things, one connects to G-d, no matter where the person is, spiritually. Like the ability to breathe, to exist, to have a soul, and... the ability to think and differentiate. Each morning, after blessing G-d for your body, for your soul, the first blessing is *הַבּוֹתֵן לְשֹׁכְנֵי בֵּיתָהּ, לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה*: *The one who gives the rooster (Rashi), or the heart (Rosh), the understanding, to distinguish and differentiate between day and night*. Both in the blessings in the morning (Sephardic version) and in the Amidah prayer, the prayer for being able to understand and differentiate, is immediately after the blessing of holiness and the blessing of the soul, and for a good reason. G-d gave us the wisdom to be able to differentiate between day and night and between anything else that is symbolic to day and night. Between truth and false, good and bad, what is important and what is not as important. Between Mitzvah and Sin, a Talmid Hacham and a simpleton, a Jew and a Gentile, between *Olam Haze* and *Olam Haba*.



Chanuka teaches us the first step to a spiritual comeback. Chanuka is the holiday of differentiation, of how oil is different from water, how a Jew is different from a gentile, and how the spiritual realm is different from the material one. With Aristotle's mathematical philosophy, the Greeks challenged the Jewish philosophies of spirituality with mathematical logic. **Prove** that Shabbat is holier than Sunday, **prove** that a circumcised man is holier than a man without circumcision, and **prove** that a spiritual Rabbi has the authority to control the calendar and determine Rosh Hodesh. Prove that the G-d you can't see exists. The Greeks are referred to by the Torah as Dark, חשך זה יון, because they challenged us to differentiate between holidays, holiness, holy people, and those that are not. Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, and Brit Milah. The letters that spell חודש... שבת כורת. The acronym of which is חשך, darkness... The Greeks took anything that was spiritual and made it dark.

The first step to reigniting spiritual motivation is to shine the light through the darkness and differentiate between what is spiritual and what is not, what is important and what is not. To differentiate what are the main things in life, and what is secondary. Our answer to the Greeks, is, that we don't have all the answers, but G-d does. G-d tells us the realities that we don't see, and that is how we differentiate. Shabbat is holy because G-d made it so. Circumcised men are holier, because G-d said so. Rabbis have the authority to establish the calendar because G-d empowered them. G-d tells us, לא בשמים היא, the Torah is given to Man, and the greatest Rabbis are the ones who have the authority to differentiate what is right and what is wrong. (B. Metziah 59b) This is the lesson of Chanuka. It is not always easy to differentiate between people. Between who is good to be in a relationship with, and who is not. When Yosef got lost while looking for his brothers, וימצאם איש... Selfie Steps for a spiritual comeback:

1. There are six elements of persuasion and influence, for oneself and for others: The first is **Reciprocity**. People are influenced by favors and encouraged to return favors done for them. REALIZE how you don't realize how much G-d has given you, is giving you, and will give you, and sing Hallel to Him.
2. **Scarcity**. When a person realizes how there is no one else like him in the world; that today will never come again; there is no place other than here - this will motivate him.

וישאלהו האיש *And a man found him, and the Man asked him.* Rashi says this "Man" was the Angel Gabriel. The question is, how does Rashi know that this Man was Gavriel? Earlier, Rashi says that when Yaakov went back for some jugs, he fought with the איש, the Man, ... that Man was the Angel of Esav. How do we know that the previous איש is the Angel of Esav, and the איש here is the Angel Gavriel? The answer is because the way a Man responds to a situation tells us who he is. A "Man" who comes to help is a good angel. But a Man who, when you ask him to bless you, says, I have no time; I have to sing to G-d - this Angel is the Angel of Esav. If a person makes helping other people part of his serving G-d, that makes him G-dly. The way you know how holy or spiritual a man is - is according to how he *responds* to adversity, disturbances, difficulties, and expenses. (see Eiruvim 65b)

It is not always easy to differentiate between who has a future and who does not. Yosef knew that the dream follows the interpretations. Why did Yosef interpret the dream of the wine butler that he would come out of jail and release him? Why not interpret the dream of the baker for good? The answer is, Yosef differentiated between what they said they saw in the dream. In the wine butler's dream, the butler was active in pressing the grapes and serving Pharaoh. While in the dream of the baker, the baker was passive. The ones who are active, have a future. The ones who are passive, do not.

Chanuka has in it the power to make us active again. If only we would spin ourselves around, we could bring the Mashiach. The letters on the Dreidel, נ'ג'ה'ש' have the same numerical value as משיח. The words מדליקים שמונת ימי הנוכה begin with the letters of Mashiach. One should run to see a king of the Gentiles to differentiate between their kings and our kings when Mashiach comes. (Berachot 9b)



3. **Authority.** Often, we can't differentiate between what is important in life and what is less important. G-d differentiates for us, and He gives us Rabbis to guide us.
4. **Consistency.** People are influenced to do what they are already doing. Get out of the inactive zone by forcing yourself into activity; people tend to need routine, to do what they are already doing.
5. **Liking.** People are influenced by the people they like. Make friends with spiritually motivated people, and you will become spiritually motivated.
6. **Consensus.** People are influenced to do what they see others doing. Get into a Yeshiva, a Kollel, a learning program, even if it is just on Zoom or Phone Conference.

THE ART OF BEING HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Honesty is a huge part of self-improvement. To be honest with yourself means to examine your personal narrative. Subconsciously, people tell themselves stories about themselves. Some stories are true, and some are not. Our stories came from different places, from things our parents, teachers, siblings, or friends told us. Stories form in our minds from what our spouses say and from how we compare ourselves to others. Stories form in our minds from what our ego tells us we should be, do or have.

Self-improvement begins when you step back from yourself, and stop the running story of your version of life that is going through your head, your personal narrative. Only then can you ask yourself the four questions. *Is my story true? Is there anything truer? What do I gain by keeping my story? Where would I be in life without my story?*

Being honest with yourself, is the trademark of the Jew, of the Yehudi. On Yaakov's last day, he made it clear to his sons, through the way he rebuked them and blessed them, that Yehuda was the only son worthy of having Kingship stay in his family. *לֹא-יִסּוּר עֲבֹט מִיְהוּדָה. The staff (of royalty) should not be moved away from Yehuda (Bereshit 49.)* Why did Yehuda deserve to have Kingship stay in his family, more than in the families of Reuven, Shimon, Levy and Yosef? The Onkelos explains the words, *יהודה את אודיתא ולא בהיתתא, Yehuda, you admitted (your blunder with Tamar) and you were not embarrassed.* Rashi comments on the words *מִטָּרַף כְּגַי עֲלִיתָ You rose from killing, my son.*

Yehuda's ability to admit is what made Yehuda's gene the only one worthy of royalty.

The royal, priestly, Hashmonai-Maccabee dynasty needed to go extinct, because they were descendants of Levi, and royalty is reserved to Yehuda's descendants, alone. Why is it so important that royalty remain by Yehuda? It seems that being honest with yourself is the heavyweight trait that deserves royalty, as King David admitted immediately that he sinned with Bat Sheva. If you don't have this gene, if honesty is not your second nature, you can't be royalty.

But why did the Hashmonai dynasty need to go extinct? Why is being honest with yourself the most important condition for royalty? Why not the ability to learn Torah with uninterrupted study (Yissachar), or the ability to manage big businesses (Zevulun), or the ability to judge alone (Dan)?

And, another question. The Torah commands *וְשָׂם מֶלֶךְ עָלֶיךָ מִלְּךָ. You shall place a king over you (Devarim 17,15).* Isn't Hashem our King? Aren't we supposed to listen to our prophets and rabbis, who tell us the word of G-d? Why did Yaakov even think to bless Yehuda with royalty?

The answer is that the job of the Jewish King is to be a human representative of G-d's Kingship. Although the king is powerful, he has someone who he has to answer up to: G-d. This is so deep. The story on the outside, is that the Jewish King is king, but the story on the inside, behind closed doors, the ideal Jewish King knows that he has his own King to answer up to, the King of all kings.



The ideal Jewish king knows that he is nothing without the King of Kings. As King David said כִּי מִמְּךָ הַכֹּל וּמִיָּדְךָ נִתְּנוּ לָךְ "Because everything is from You ... (Divrei Hayamim 1, 29;14). To be a Jewish King, the deciding trait, the trait upon which kingship depends, is to be honest with yourself. To admit the truth, that above you is an Almighty G-d, and you are nothing without Him. The Hasmonaean royal family needed to go extinct, because they did not have this trait in their gene.

We are all called Yehudim, for we all have an aspect of Yehuda in our identity, of being able to be honest with ourselves and admit. The first thing we do as a Yehudi each morning is say Modeh Ani, we admit. The word Modeh has two meanings. To thank and to admit. How do we know which it is? If it says מוֹדֵה שׁ, then it means "I admit that..." When it says מוֹדֵה עַל, then it means "thanks for..." When you get up in the morning, the first feeling you have, the message from your subconscious is, your personal narrative is, I am because I am. So, we need to admit that this core belief, this story, is so wrong. I admit, that I am, **because You put a soul in me today.** מוֹדֵה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ ... שֶׁהַחֲזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי. Every night, before you go to bed, you give your soul back to your Creator. בִּידֶךָ אֶפְקֵיד רוּחִי. *In Your Hands, I put my soul for safe-keeping.* While I sleep, I am no more than a body without a soul. And when I awake, I admit that it is G-d Who put my *neshama* back in me.

Ever wonder why it says, שֶׁהַחֲזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי I admit that you put back *in* me, my *neshama* - and not שֶׁהַחֲזַרְתָּ לִּי נִשְׁמָתִי that you returned *to* me my *neshama*? The answer is that before I wake up, my body is just a lifeless box. A box that G-d, in His kindness, puts a soul in each morning. There is no me that G-d returns something to, without the *neshama*. I, me, only exists because of the soul that G-d gave me, this morning. There is no greater admittance to the truth, there is nothing you could be more wrong about in your personal narrative, than the belief that you exist today, without G-d having given you back your *neshama*, today. Today is the day that G-d gave you. This is a very different Modeh Ani, different from a Modeh Ani of thanks. All because of a *didkuk* rule, of מוֹדֵה שׁ as opposed to מוֹדֵה עַל.

Ever wonder why we bless G-d every day of our lives for the way He made us: שְׁלֹא עֲשֵׂנִי גוֹי, שְׁלֹא עֲשֵׂנִי כְרִצּוֹנוֹ? עֶבֶד, שְׁלֹא עֲשֵׂנִי אִשָּׁה, שְׁעֲשֵׂנִי כְרִצּוֹנוֹ? *That He did not make a gentile, that He did not make me a slave, that He did not make me a woman, that He made me as He willed?* Wouldn't it suffice to bless this blessing just once in a lifetime? The answer is, because each day, G-d recreated you, because He knows you have more to learn, and you still have a deeper truth in life left to discover.

According to Judaism, admitting the truth, saying I was wrong, is not only a royal trait. It brings you up to a more elevated level as a person. מִטְרַף בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹת. Admitting is the only way to becoming human and real. People are afraid to admit that they were wrong, out of fear that it might make them vulnerable or look dumb. Kingship is reserved for the bravest of all. There is nothing braver than admitting you were wrong. There is nothing smarter that you could ever do. One of the signs of a wise man is that "on what he doesn't know, he says, I don't know, and that he admits to his mistake." (Avot, 5;7) Why is that such a fundamental part of being wise? The Mishna continues to say that if someone lacks these traits, he is a fool! Why is that so?

A wise man is wise, because he knows that there is still much more in life to learn, improve and achieve. There are deeper levels of truth we can achieve each day. If G-d put my soul back inside me today, it means that there is much more for me to achieve. The wise have this motto: *instead of crying, I keep on trying.* It is fine that I don't know something, it is fine that I made a mistake, I can keep trying to improve my performance, my thinking, my knowledge... The wise man prefers to cut his losses and admit his mistakes, so that he can take advantage of the new day and renewed *neshama* that Hashem has given him.

Here are the Selfie-Steps to aid us in recognizing what causes us to be dishonest with ourselves.

- 1- **Ignorance is bliss.** Not knowing the Halacha does not mean that you are keeping it. Not knowing how you make people feel, does not mean you are a nice person.



- 2- **Reality denial.** Not accepting the way events have turned out, does not mean that your world did not change. Not accepting that you have fallen spiritually, does not mean that you haven't.
- 3- **Overconfidence.** 90 percent of all drivers think they are above average drivers. Macho thinking. Unrealistic optimism.
- 4- **Self-handicapping.** Under-confident. Believing that you can't succeed in an area where you really can.
- 5- **Filtering.** People embrace information that supports their beliefs and stories, and reject information that contradict the beliefs they wish were true.

LEADERSHIP WAZE

Most people think that the qualities necessary to become a leader are virtues such as honesty, integrity, the ability to be committed and passionate, communication skills, decision-making capabilities, accountability, delegation, creativity, etc. etc. Those are all important, but they are not the key virtue.

According to President Eisenhower, *Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.* The difference between a leader and a manager is that a leader is able to set a vision for someone else and inspire him to reach that vision. A manager just manages, but does not lead. The traits listed above may be important for managing, but not as crucial for leading.

People ask others to lead them, in all areas of life. It could be not such important decisions, such as choosing the right dish in a restaurant. My wife does not like it when I ask the waiter what is the most common dish in the restaurant. She says that I should just order what I want, not what most people want. But I like my food fresh, and usually the freshest is the item that sells the most. Or, it could be bigger life decisions, like what type of partner in life is most suitable, what type of career to choose, or how to bring up children and direct students. And it is up to you to decide if you want to help those people do what you want them to do *because they want to do it.* So, the golden question is, how do we genuinely lead others?

Rav Yeshaya from Krastir, a.k.a the "Rat Rabbi" (famous for his picture that repels rats, ridding infested areas of them), was among the most humble of Hassidic Rebbes. Someone approached Rav Yeshaya and confided in him. "Rabbi, I want

to commit suicide." "How do you want to do it?" "I want to jump out of the window of my fourth-floor apartment."

The Rabbi responded, "Oh. What a shame. Such a respectable man. To die in such a fashion. Eyes here, nose there. Arms and Legs scattered on the floor. Isn't there a better way to do this?" The man thought a bit. "Okay, Rabbi. So, I'll jump into the raging river." "Oh. What a shame. Such a nice, sweet guy like you, not to have even a proper burial! Isn't there another way?"... Until the person realized his worth. Until he realized that someone accepts him, someone respects him, and someone loves him. He finally found a person who would admire him for who he is, and not judge him for who he is not. This is an example of subtly leading a person to the choice that he subconsciously wants to make. The R Yeshaya was able to help this suicidal character by treating him like a person, a friend, not like a "character".

Ever wonder how, when Yaakov came to Charan with nothing but a walking stick, the first thing he did was to rebuke the local shepherds at the well? הָן עוֹד הַיּוֹם גְּדוּל לֹא-צֵאת הָאֶסְרָה הַמִּקְנֶה הַשֶּׁקֶן הַצֵּאֵן וּלְכוּ רָעוּ: *The day is still long; it is not yet time to gather in the flocks; water the sheep, and let them graze ...* Why would they listen to him? Would you listen to a homeless foreigner who told you what to do or what not to do?

The answer is simple. Yaakov did not *first* give rebuke. Before he gave rebuke, he said... אַחֵי מֵאַיִן אַתֶּם. *My brothers, where are you from?* He first showed Affection, by calling them "my brothers." And then, Attention, by asking *where they are from.*



It is so interesting to watch Yosef's life unfold. What got him into trouble was telling his brothers his prophetic dreams. The Malbim helps us understand the conversation between Yosef and the brothers. After Yosef tells them the first dream of the sheaves, that his bundle of grain will rise amongst his brothers' bundles, and the brothers' bundles would surround the bundle of Yosef and bow down to it; the brothers' response was *הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם-מִשׁוֹל תִּמְשָׁל בָּנוּ* *Will you be king over us? If you will rule over us?* What was the double talk? And why aren't the words in both cases parallel? Why, in the Hebrew, does the word "if" appear?

The Malbim writes that there is a difference between a מלך and a מושל. A מלך is someone who is appointed out of the will of the people, a leader (the word מלך is similar to the word מוליך), while a מושל is a ruler that rose to power by force. So, the Malbim continues... The brothers were challenging Yosef's prophecy by bringing his attention to the contradiction that the dream entailed. *וְהִגְדָה קִטְמָה אֶלְמִתִּי וְגַם-נִצָּבָה וְהִגְדָה תִּסְבִּינָה אֶלְמִתְּיָכֶם* *And behold – my bundle arose (amongst the bundles), and it also stood strong. While your bundles surrounded my bundle...The first part of the dream connotes that Yosef would rule his brothers against their will. And behold – my bundle arose. But then, the dream says, while your bundles surrounded my bundle, and bowed to it, which seems to indicate that the brothers willingly accepted Yosef as their ruler...*

This is the meaning of the two-part question; *Will you be king over us (a leader), if you are a ruler over us?* Yosef, once you try ruling, you can't lead! Being above, managing, is contradictory to leading. The same person cannot be both a leader and a ruler! (Ultimately the prophetic dream turned into a reality. Yosef actually started off as a ruler to his brothers, but eventually they accepted his leadership.)

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF COULD

Anyone who blesses Yehuda is disgusting to G-d. (Sanhedrin 6b) If Yehuda had the power to persuade his brothers to sell Yosef, he had the power to bring Yosef back to his father, as well. (Rashi *ibid.*) And because he did not take

So, Yosef burnt his relationships with his brothers by telling them of his dreams - that he would be above them and by giving them the feeling that he wanted to rule over them; by giving them the feeling that he did not care if they wanted his guidance or not. And once the damage was done, no matter how much Yosef wanted to restore the feeling of brotherhood, *אֶת־אֶתִּי אֲנֹכִי מִבְּקֶשׁ*, it was too late. No one wanted Yosef as a brother anymore.

Fast-forward 12 years. Yosef finds himself in jail, as a slave who was accused for immoral behavior with his master's wife. What got him out of his mess? What got the ball rolling, to take him from the bottom of civilization to becoming the leader of the world? Listen closely to his first words, when he met the Butler and the Baker in prison. When he saw them looking confused in the morning after their dreams, he asked them *מָדוּעַ פְּנִיכֶם רָעִים הַיּוֹם* *why do you look so sad today?* From there, Yosef became known as the interpreter of dreams, and was brought to Pharaoh... and the rest is history.

Real leadership is not taking over the steering wheel. It is more like being the Waze for the driver. It is about putting your will aside, so that the will of others will shine. It has been said that the Hebrew word *רשע*, is an acronym of the words *רצון של עצמי*. Concentrating on one's own desires negates one's ability to recognize the needs of others. And it negates one's ability to recognize the Will of G-d. Without the awareness of the will of others, one can never be a true leader.

So, if you want to lead those you love, instead of asking yourself what *you* need in the relationship, ask what *they* need in the relationship. Instead of asking yourself what is bothering *you*, ask yourself what is bothering *them*. Instead of thinking of how you wished your dream spouse/ child/ parent/ boss would be, think of what *their dreams of you* would be... Then, and only then, will you be able to lead.

responsibility when he had the power to do so and did not finish the Mitzvah, he was punished by losing his wife and two children. (See Sotah 13b) For if he had the power to start, he had the power to finish. This is so true in our own lives, not only



as a halacha (Haye Adam 1; 68), but also as an axiom of productivity.

People who start things and finish them are fueled by an inner sense of responsibility. Not taking responsibility for our given abilities brings us great stress. David Allen, the stress-free productivity guru, once said, *much of the stress that people feel doesn't come from having too much to do. It comes from not finishing what they've started.* Why is that so? Because if you have the power to start, you have the power to finish. Potential that goes undeveloped is a great cause for stress. I have found this to be true when helping teenagers find themselves. Instead of focusing on all the things that are negative in their lives, I focus on self-development on each person's terms. Voice lessons, speed reading, sports, music, karate, art, dancing, etc. This is why coaching is one of the best therapies. It builds self-esteem, while focusing on potential and responsibility. It is amazing how the stress level of my clients drops, just when we discover together their potential, power and responsibility. Planning together an awesome life plan of productivity, of actualizing potential, helps so many clients and teenagers who feel that part of them has been left undeveloped. Why? Because they had difficulty with just that. Actualizing. Finishing. Achieving "coulds."

Nobody ever wrote down a plan to be broke, fat, lazy, or stupid. Those things generally result either from not having a plan of "coulds" or not taking responsibility to reach your goal.

Why do many people with power not take commensurate responsibility for it? There are various reasons; we will mention four, below. The main reason is lack of belief that "with great power comes great responsibility." If you can do something, you do not have the option do it when you feel like it, *when you are in the mood*. It means you are held responsible to do whatever you are able to do. R Chaim Shmulevitz expounded on this at length, especially regarding one's level of spirituality and consistency in learning Torah. Despite R' Akiva's lofty Torah learning, he was punished with an extremely painful death for not learning another level of Torah from R' Eliezer.

Let's take this a step further. Why aren't people aware of the fact that responsibility comes along with power? I believe that the answer is that they feel that if they do nothing wrong or bad in life, they are good. Flying under the radar. This can be the greatest mistake of your life. G-d holds it against you, if you are not striving to be the best YOU that you can be. Yehuda, after all, did a good thing by selling his brother Yosef. Yet, he was punished for not doing more. Esther was held responsible for doing her "thing" in the palace, and not staying complacent, quiet or comfortable. וַיֹּאמֶר מְרִדְכַי לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־יְהוָה לְהַמְלִיט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכְּלִי־הַיְּהוּדִים. כִּי אִם־הִתְחַרַּשׁ תְּחַרִּישׁי בְּעַת הַזֹּאת רְנוּחַ וְהִצְלִיחַ יַעֲמֹד לַיְּהוּדִים מִמְּקוֹם אַחֵר וְאֵת וּבֵית־אֲבִיהָ תֹאבְדוּ וְגַם יוֹדֵעַ אֶם־לָעַת כָּזֹאת הִגַּעְתָּ לַמְּלָכוֹת. (Esther 4:13,14) All this teaches that if you are in the position to do something great, and you don't, you are held accountable. As the Yerushalmi teaches, *Any generation in which the Temple was not built in its day, it is considered that it was destroyed in its day.* (Yoma Chapter1),

One of my favorite things is to meditate on all the things I could do in life. This gives me hope, power, and motivation. I realize that I could be on time for Shacharit; so, as a servant of G-d, אני עבדך, בן אמתך, it is my responsibility to be there on time. Not just "If I want to, I could." I could sleep on Shabbat and still find X amount of time to learn. So, it is my responsibility to make sure that I am woken up with ample time to learn. This thought gave me motivation. Because all motivation is dependent on three questions, which are the three tools in the motivation tool box... Why? (Why is it important? And why is *that* reason important?) How? (How can this be achieved? How did others achieve this goal?) Can? (Can I reach this goal? Do I believe in myself?)

What stops us from taking responsibility for our "coulds," from reaching the clouds?

1. We do not tap into our inner power because F3 – Fear, Frustration and Failure-takes over and weakens us. As Rabbenu Bachye says, שהדאגה והיראה מחלישין כח האדם, Worry and fear naturally weaken the power of man, and bring closer his death (R Bachye Ki Tisa 30, Intro.)



2. We do not have a clear perception of what we really can or cannot do. We see what others are doing, or not doing, and learn from them. It has been said, *The No. 1 reason people fail in life is because they listen to their friends, family, and neighbors.* (Napolean Hill) *Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.* (Mark Twain) Do you have a Rebbe? He is the only person you should be listening to. That was the power of the Maccabees: they listened to their Rebbe, their father Mattityahu, and they did not listen to or look at anyone else. And this was the reason Yehuda failed the test with selling Yosef, because he did not have his father, his Rav, to ask for advice.
3. The everlasting lie that obsessively controls our thinking, is that we can live forever and that we are not time-bound. This saps our potential. Our Rabbis teach, אל תאמר לכשאפנה אשנה שמא לא תפנה (Avot 2;4) Put off until tomorrow only what you are willing to die having left undone. (Pablo Picasso)
4. We doubt that we have the ability to do something that is, actually, within our

reach. Yirmiyah did not believe in himself, saying that he was but a lad, and G-d told him not to say that again. וַיֹּאמֶר יְקִיָּוֶה אֵלַי אֶל-תֹּאמַר גֹּעַר אֲנִי כִּי עַל-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁלַחְךָ תֵּלֶךְ וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה תִּדְבָּר ה' אֶל-תִּירָא מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְכִי-אֶתְּנֶה אֲנִי לְהַצִּלְךָ נְאֻם-יְקִיָּוֶה: *And Hashem said to me, don't say "I am a lad," for wherever I send you, you will go, and whatever I command you, you will speak. Do not fear them, for I am with you, to save you, the word of G-d.* (Yirmiyah 1; 7,8)

The Chida asks, in Chomat Anach, if Yirmiyah was a lad, a *na'ar*, why did G-d tell him not to say that? The answer is huge. G-d was telling Yirmiyah, who was about to face the world alone, you are not just YOU! You are MY MESSENGER!

You are much more than you! You are the mission that G-d brought you down to the world to accomplish!! Each and every Jew is a Yisrael, with the power to fight angels. Or to fight our Yetzer Harah, which is also an angel. The two most empowering days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why. When you do find out, and you take responsibility for it, you become unstoppable!

THE SECRET OF SELF-DISCIPLINE

Yosef, one of the most handsome men ever, was tested by Potifar's wife in a way that we cannot begin to fathom. The seduction was obsessive. This wicked woman threatened to kill Yosef, to defame him causing him harm. It would have been so much easier for him just to sin and get it over with. Whoever learns the Midrashim, cannot believe the trials that this woman put him through. What gave Yosef the strength to avoid being with this seductive, married woman?

R' Zacharia Wallerstein draws a beautiful concept from here, a concept that he teaches all teachers, the secret to being the successful mentor. "Never give up belief in your students that they can turn around and become successful! Once you stop believing in the student, you have lost him!" As a

coach, I know that the only way a coach can be successful is if he internalizes the following mantra: "There is an invisible sign hanging on everyone's neck, that reads, 'Please! I beg of you! Believe in me!'"

When Yosef was at the threshold of sin, he "saw" the reflection of his father's face in the bedroom, and that gave him the power to run out. What did he "see" that gave him this superhuman strength? The passuk says וַיִּמָּאן, *And Yosef refused* the seduction. The *Taamim*, the *Trup*, the tune for that word, is *Shalsholet*. The *Shalsholet* looks like a chain, and it is linked to the previous word וַיִּמָּאן that is written in the Parasha earlier. When Yaakov was told by his sons that Yosef was dead, וַיִּמָּאן, *he refused to accept consolation*. We know



that it is inappropriate to mourn for a longer period than is allowed by Torah law. So, why did Yaakov refuse to be consoled as long as he lived? The answer is because he just could not believe the news; he could not accept that his son, in whom he had invested so much, in whom he had placed so much hope, who was the source of his power to stand up against Esav, was actually dead. He believed in Yosef, and he refused to give up on him. "Until I am shown his corpse, I will continue to believe that Yosef lives."

Yosef felt that! He felt that his father believed in him, long distance! He felt that his father did not give up on him, no matter where he would find himself! Egypt, the point of lowest morality on Earth, was not a place where Yosef would be weakened. Even in the face of almost irresistible temptation, Yosef knew that his father believed in him, and that he would remain the one and only, Yosef Hatzaddik! He is the only one with the title Tzaddik, for he is the only one who was able to remain righteous in a test like that, *where no one else believed in him!* No one else, except his own

THE GREATEST SPIN ON YOUR LIFE

The Beit Yosef asks, "why do we celebrate the miracle of the candles for eight days?" There was no miracle on the first day, for all candles burn, naturally. So why don't we celebrate only seven days?

The answer of Rav Tzadok is a great lesson: when the miracle of the candles occurred, they realized that the very fact that candles burn is a miracle. (פרי חנוכה – צדיק) Because all of nature is a miracle. The Ramban, in Parashat Bo, (13;16) teaches that the reason why we mention the Exodus in so many mitzvot that we perform, (Kiddush, Sukkot, Pesach, Shema recital, Tefillin, tzitzit, Mezuzah, etc.) is because that is a sign that G-d rules every part of nature. G-d could have brought one plague and finished with the Egyptians. But G-d wanted to show the world, ONCE AND FOR ALL, that He controls all ten aspects of nature that He subjected to plagues (S. HaChinuch 21). Rav Chazkel recommends to learn this Ramban once every thirty days, because it is so easy to forget.

R Tzaddok continues. Why is the "miracle of nature" embedded within the Chanukah miracle?

father! *If my father did not give up on me, how can I give up on myself?*

The greatest present you can give your son (or anyone), the biggest favor you can do for your disciple is to honestly, sincerely, believe in him. Express it in whatever way you can. Believe that he can make it, believe that he can turn around! That is what your son needs from you, more than anything else you can give him! I know; I've coached orphans, and the only thing that gives them the strength to face life challenges on their own is knowing that their deceased father believes in them, long distance!

Until our last moment, G-d does not give up on us, either. עד יום מותו תחכה לו, G-d waits for a person to do Teshuva, until the last day, until the last breath, until there is a lifeless body! This is the greatest motivator for all of us to do Teshuva. For as long as G-d keeps us alive, that means He still believes that we can become who we need to become.

Why, specifically on Chanukah, do we need to remember this lesson that the laws of nature are nothing more than G-d's Will? The answer to this question is the underlying message of Chanukah, and what Yehuda HaMaccabee and his brothers put their lives on the line for: To fight the Greek philosophy that there is an independent concept of Science and Nature in the Universe, not related to G-d.

The Greek culture had its roots in the teachings of Aristotle. Aristotle was not only a philosopher. He was a forefather of education in all areas. He encouraged Alexander the Great to capture the world, in order to make it an educated one, instead of a barbaric one. Aristotle introduced the concept of logic to the secular world. Deduction. Math. Science. If you can't prove it, it does not exist. If you cannot prove that a *bris* makes someone holier, or that the Rabbis can rule nature by deciding when the new moon is, or that the seventh day is any holier than the sixth – if you cannot prove these things, *chas veshalom*, they do not exist. Aristotle taught his disciples to challenge and question everything. This makes Aristotle's teachings



problematic; in that they advocate questioning the existence of G-d. *מה למעלה ומה לאחור*. (Tamid 32a)

Out of all the games possible, the children studying Torah in the caves on Chanukah pulled these dreidels out to play with. This always bothered me, especially because the letters *נְסִי גְדוּלָה הֵיא שֵׁם* were not yet applicable. But the meaning is now clear. The message of the Dreidel was the idea that the problem with Aristotle's "science" and Greek Culture is: what exactly makes the science a science? What makes the world spin, fire burn, or heat rise? What is the difference, scientifically, between a live body and a dead one; if all the parts are there, what made it stop working? Who is making the heart pump, or the mind think? The world of science definitely does not have all the answers. The world is being sustained by G-d's Will. People are breathed by G-d! If G-d wants a sea to split, fire not to burn, the dead to live ... science is not an issue. Whether it makes sense according to scientific laws or not, His Will rules.

And this is the lesson of the Dreidel. When you do not spin the Dreidel "from above," it lies, lifeless, on the table. The fact that it is spinning, means that someone has made it spin! The world that we see is the greatest proof that it did not "happen on its own." And that is the miracle of nature, the miracle of the first candle and... the lesson of the additional night.

In last week's article I mentioned a quote from Napoleon Hill, author of "Think and Grow Rich", the forefather of modern-day self-help books. I got an email complaint, asking how I could have cited wisdom from a man who himself was not successful in making money other than by teaching others how to. Why take the advice and the wisdom from someone who, himself, was not successful?

I replied that the fact that he did not make money in his lifetime, does not mean that he had no wisdom. *לא לחכמים להם*. *Bread does not belong to the Wise*. (Kohelet 9 11) This common irony, that those people who write best-selling books on self help and advice, were not successful in those areas, exists because G-d wants to show the world that success is up to Him, not up to your wisdom. For success is not a science. If G-d does not spin your

Dreidel, no matter how good your plan and efforts are, your Dreidel will not spin. If G-d wants something to happen, it will happen. G-d wanted Bill Gates to become rich, so He made him the owner of Microsoft. It is not that because Bill Gates owned Microsoft, he became wealthy. There were others who could have done it or may have tried to do it as well, but G-d did not want them to become wealthy, so they failed. "Results" are not due to science that is independent of G-d. So, even if Napoleon Hill was right about the secrets of success, if G-d does not put His seal of approval on those methods, it just won't happen.

It was almost certain, and completely logical, that the butler would have remembered Yosef earlier. Every time he went to tell Pharaoh, as he entered the palace, he forgot. When he left the palace, he remembered, and when he reentered, he forgot, again and again. Everyday. For two years. Because when G-d does not want something to happen, He simply does not spin the Dreidel. Even the Dreidel of your knowledge. Aristotle once asked R' Yossi, "What is a wise person?" According to Judaism, G-d is the one who spins the Dreidel of success and knowledge. Who is wise? Is the amount that I was able to come up with through "logic" also dependent on G-d? And if according to Judaism, G-d is in control of what I remember and what I forget, and when, so who then is considered wise? To that R' Yossi answered, being considered a wise person is not determined by how much you know or how much you use your logic. Your wisdom is determined by your willingness to live according to the principles of truth that you have learned. Because the only success that we are in control of, is becoming a better person. (בראשית 189 רבתי פרשת מקץ) (Aristotle was caught behaving differently than some of his moral teachings.)

The Talmud mentions a conversation between Aristotle's student, Alexander the Great, and the Sages. Alexander asked, who is wise? The Rabbis answered... One who can foresee the outcome. ...Who is strong?... One who overcomes his inclination... Who is rich?... One who is happy with his lot... (Tamid 32a)

Alexander wanted to hear the Torah perspective of self-help and productivity. He wanted to learn a fresh outlook on what is considered success.



Because if G-d is in charge of results, then who is considered a successful businessman? It could be that the successful businessman ends up being a poor person, who never made a dollar! The victor could be the weaker of two combatants, just because G-d wanted him to win! So, who is really the Mighty? The Rabbis answered, that “your”

THE MAGICAL DREIDEL

An incredibly interesting question was asked by R' Zacharia Wallerstein. The letters on the Dreidel, on the סביבון, are the letters ש' ג' ה' נ', that are an acronym of נס גדול היה שם, *a great miracle happened there*. Now, the legend goes, that at the time of the Greek oppression, the Greeks outlawed Torah learning. The Torah students went into hiding to learn Torah. And when the Greek soldiers discovered them in the caves or other hiding places, the students hid their Holy books and started playing Dreidel, so that they would not be caught learning Torah.

Asks R' Zacharia, what in the world was written on the Dreidel that they played with? It can't be just a Dreidel without letters, for then it is not a game, it is just a spinning device. And the meaning of the letters ש' ג' ה' נ', *a great miracle happened there*, had not yet happened! They were still under Greek oppression!

The answer R' Zacharia brings from the Seforim Hakedoshim is even better than the question. The letters on the Dreidel were the same then as they are today. The letters stood for גשנה. Goshen was the town where Yehuda and Yosef built the Yeshiva for the Jews to learn in in the dark times of the Egyptian exile.

Some Jews believed that in this dark time of the Greek oppression, if it is forbidden to learn Torah, then the Yeshivot will have to close, and Torah learning will be only by individuals, without a structure of people getting together. But then, there were those who believed that in order for Torah to be learnt properly, especially in Exile, we would need Yeshivot; we would need another Goshen. We would need to follow in the way of Yosef and Yehuda! The people in the Egyptian oppression survived spiritually in the merit of Goshen. So, they invented the Goshen game, or the Dreidel that we know. And then, the most amazing thing

success is not defined by external results, which are in the hands of G-d, but on how you better your nature, and by working on becoming a better person.

happened. G-d spun this Dreidel, and turned the letters from ג' ש' נ' ה', Goshna, to נס גדול היה שם, *A great miracle happened there!* The merit of the Torah spun for us the miracle that we call Hanukah.

When we hear of terrorist attacks in Israel, we tend to miss the miracles that happen at the attack. A onetime attack in France, in California, a plane of Russians that was blown up – and the numbers are terribly tragic. But in Israel, for some reason, the attacks have far less casualties, if any. Ask the people that were in the upstairs shul at the Har Nof Massacre; they will tell you. As sad and tragic as it was, it could have been much worse. We see miracles in the dark. And as important as the IDF is, as important as the police force is, there are just some things they cannot control. Even the Iron Dome can stop only certain types of missiles. So, what do we have to rely on? We can rely only on Miracles. On נס גדול היה שם. And the way we get G-d to spin those miracles for us is by having גשנה.

This is not just a nice little Dvar Torah. This is life. If you want to learn, go to the Beit Midrash. Stay in Yeshiva. Join a learning program. Get a study partner that you won't miss for anything, even if you have to pay him. This is the secret for staying in learning. Structure, Goshen. One student told me that his goal for learning in Israel for the year is to be able to learn on his own, to be self-motivated when he goes back to America and starts “real life”. He wants to develop self-discipline; he wants to be able to read Gemara, on his own. “Rabbi, teach me how!”

The answer is structure. Goshna. Get a Beit Midrash you can fall in love with. Get a learning program you can fall in love with. You are in Yeshiva, not to become a Rosh Yeshiva, but because being in Yeshiva gives you the structure that makes it easier to learn, here, than not to learn.



You are not learning in Yeshiva so that you can get ready to learn for life. That is just a side gain. Yeshiva is where the real, genuine, authentic learning is.

Yeshiva students' parents often get disappointed at the Yeshiva their son is in, when the student does not end up learning in his Bein Hazmanim time at home. They feel as if he wasted his time in Yeshiva, and they wasted their hard-earned money. As if he did not "grow". What is so shocking? No structure, no chance! At home, it is easier for you not to learn than it is to learn, whereas in Yeshiva it is easier to learn than not to learn. Distractions at home are dumbfounding, literally.

Yeshiva's structure keeps the Torah pumping through us. And every minute that we learn, there is nothing, nothing in the whole wide world that is more precious. Over Chanukah, My father taught me a beautiful concept. Torah learning is what keeps the world spinning. How so? Our Rabbis teach that if there would ever be a time without Torah learning, the world would have nothing to stand on. This is why the world was created round, so that when Yeshivot in Israel are sleeping, the Yeshivot in America are learning. And when America is asleep, you have Torah learning in Israel. From his small cave, R' Shimon Bar Yochai

knew that the world was round, and he wrote this in the Zohar(זוהר כרך ג (ויקרא) פרשת ויקרא דף י עמוד א,) way before Columbus discovered America! It had to be so; otherwise, the world would not have merit to exist for 24 hour periods! There has to be a place that is light when it is dark in Israel! R' Shimon knew that there would be Yeshivot in those dark places in the future. So, there is nothing more appropriate to write Goshen on than on a toy that spins! For that is what keeps the world spinning!!

Greek wisdom taught that anything that could not be seen or measured, anything that was not a science, did not exist. So all spirituality, they claimed, was nonexistent. They believed that if one cannot see that Shabbat is holier than Sunday, if one cannot prove that a circumcised child is holier than one who is not circumcised, if the calendar needs Rabbis to decide what day of the month it is, then it was all a hoax! Aristotle, also, knew the world was round. His deduction was made from the way the moon reflects the sun's light when the moon is not full. But, all the science in the world cannot reveal what is the force that is making the world revolve! Ask any kid who learnt in Yeshiva! He knows! We all know that the world, like the Dreidel, spins on Yeshiva learning!

THE MAN IN THE WINDOW

Six years back, I was walking out of the Argentinian Shabbat minyan in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem, after the morning prayers, when I heard my name called out in a strong Spanish accent. I turned around to see someone running after me, someone whom I had never made acquaintance. I kept on walking, but more slowly. This fellow caught up to me, and asked, "Are you related to Yosef Shabtai Farhi?" I told him that I had no idea, though my father once told me that most Farhis are related. This fellow, about twenty eight years old, was a collector of old books. He had found a book written by Yosef Shabtai Farhi in a rare ancient book sale in Buenos Aires. The book was (and looked) about 100 years old, and bore the name תקפו של יוסף. This book was written in a time where in Sephardic countries, the European Enlightenment, Reform and Conservative thinking,

started to be the "in thing". The author writes the entire story of Yosef according to all the midrashim, with all the emotions in story style, all in a beautiful rhyme. I read it with passion; it moved me to tears. In the introduction, the author writes that the reason he wrote such a book was for the teens of his generation that were faced with the new temptations of intermarriage. They, and I believe all of us as well, should learn from Yosef how to stand strong in the face of the trials and challenges the "new era exile" may bring. When we want to know how we can stand strong in the face of temptation, we can learn from Yosef, who provided us with the perfect model. Each word is a gold mine.

In the Talmud Sotah (36b), we find the following quote: "At that moment (when Yosef was at the



height of his test with the wife of Potifar and about to sin), Yosef's father's "reflection" appeared in the **window**. He (the visage) said to him, **Yosef!** Soon, your brothers will be written on the garments of the High Priest and your name will be among them. Do you want your name to be erased to be called an "agent of harlots"?"

We must ask ourselves, who cares where in the bedroom of his master's wife in Egypt Yosef saw his father's reflection? What difference does it make if it was seen at the top of the bed or in the window?

The answer is amazing. Our rabbis tell us that Yosef had the exact facial appearance of his father, Yaakov. We can feel safe to say, then, that Yosef *did not* see his father's face: **he saw his own reflection in the mirror!** He saw himself as he would be in the future. He saw what he could become. He saw that he could become like his father. He saw that his name could be written on

SUCCESSFUL DEAD

I know that this title will catch people's attention. But that is not why I chose it. I chose it because there are many ways that people understand what success is. When everyone in the shul says in Hallel, **אנא ה' הושיעה נא , אנא ה' הצליחה נא** "Please, G-d, give us salvation quickly; please, G-d, make us successful quickly," there are different things going through the different minds of the worshipers. Some people, of course, are not even thinking about what they are saying. But even the ones who are, have different definitions of success.

There was a *Kollel Avreich* that I was coaching who found himself successful in a certain business field. He felt that if he was making money, then this must have been what G-d wanted him to do with his life. When people are making money, or when they are becoming famous, it is common for them to feel that this is G-d's will. After all, they reason, had He not desired this outcome, they would not have achieved their success. But this is very wrong. The Hovot Halevavot makes this very clear. In many instances where G-d makes a person rich, his wealth is not a blessing. It is a test. So it turns out that from a Torah perspective, making money is not at all the definition of being successful. Some hope that they can "make it",

the holy breastplate – and *this* is what G-d showed him in the window.

The reason why Yosef merited this "wake up call" was not without a firm base. The Midrash Rabba tells us that the following is how Yosef refused Potifar's wife: "*G-d regularly comes and chooses from the members of my family, from the best of them, someone to be brought up as an Olah sacrifice (Yitzhak). He regularly comes and reveals Himself in prophesy in the middle of the night. If I listen to you and sleep with you, G-d might come to me in the middle of the night and find me impure.*"

This is the way, and the only way, a person can endure temptation. He must look ahead at what he could be, and see that this temptation will stop him from getting to his rightful destination. This lesson can be learnt from just one word that jumps out at us here in the Midrash. Every word is a gold mine. And every one of us is a gold mine, as well.

"get to the Hall of Fame"; but this is similar to the case of the rich: that they are not being "successful", but, rather, being put to the test. If you notice, in all the prayers we make, we almost never ask G-d to make us rich and famous. Such a request can be made only in a personal, voluntary prayer that we may add in **שמע קולנו**. This is because, for most people, being rich and being famous are not always blessings – or even at all good for them. On the contrary, it takes them away from what our religion considers to be real success. There is only one success in our religion: sanctifying G-d's Name at all times. To "be" – to live and to die **על קידוש השם**. It is easy to forget this all-important goal when thinking about "making it big". And the only time it *is* acceptable to ask to become rich, to ask G-d that we become well-known or acclaimed, is when we want to use that wealth or fame to make us attain a greater degree in being **מקדש שם שמים**. And, the intent behind the person's prayer becomes very clear through his expression of thanks, if his prayers are answered. What does he say? "I was successful," or "G-d granted me success"?

This reminds me of a personal story that I had with my Rosh Yeshiva, R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel , zt"l.



This story actually sheds light on R' Nosson Tzvi, what he was all about, and how he ran the Yeshivas Mir, the biggest yeshiva in the world. It was about six years ago when I heard of a prominent community member, also a family friend, who got into big financial trouble. As this person donated appreciable sums to important funds in Israel, I asked if the Yeshiva could say Tehillim for his success – specifically for his *ישועה*. The Rosh Yeshiva told me, “We do not know how things will turn out. We should daven only that Kiddush Hashem be the result, and not *הס ושלום*, a Chillul Hashem.” At the time, I did not realize what he meant. Now, I do. I realize that all of our Tefillot are in essence not for what *we* consider success or salvation. Not that the sick feel better. Not that the poor have sustenance. Not even that we learn Torah with more fervor. Even though this is what we actually ask in our prayers, still, that is not the *essence of prayer*. Money comes, and money goes. People come, and people go. But the *כבוד שמים* is always at stake, either a Kiddush Hashem or a Chillul Hashem. The essence of prayer, all prayer, is to be, *מקדש שם שמים* and in all our supplications, we are actually asking that there be a Kiddush Hashem. We ask for specific things, for when Hashem hears our Tefillot, when He answers our prayers, there is a Kiddush Hashem, because we prayed to Him, and then He granted our requests. And then, we attribute the “success” to Him. This is how we end the first blessing of the Amidah. *למען שמו באהבה* – not for us, but for Him. *We are even willing to die for Him*, (one of the *כוונות* that we are supposed to have in saying those words) *and that would be our success*, because that is what we are all about. Although we might know this, we tend *not* to lead our lives according to this principle.

The Talmud in Sotah (10) says, Yosef that *sanctified G-d's Name* in private, by

withstanding his test with Potifar's wife, merited having the letter *ה'* from G-d's Name added to his – *עדות ביהוסף שמו*. Yehuda, who *sanctified G-d's Name* in public, merited having his whole name the Name of G-d. Since he admitted that Tamar became pregnant from him, the Heavenly Voice said, “You saved Tamar and her two boys; I will save *מישאל ועזריה* from the fire of Nebuchadnezzar.” We see from here that the way to be *מקדש שם שמים* is by doing everything we do and living our lives the way G-d asks of us. And there is a difference as to whether our actions are in public or in private. We forget that living the way we are supposed to, with every challenge we face, is in essence putting *שם שמים* on the table. Our every act is either *קידוש ה'* or *הילול ה'*. And we find that Yosef, was the only one in the Torah to be called successful, *וַיְהִי ה' אֵת יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מַצְלִיחַ* – *When? When he was in the house of Potifar, working as a slave. Why? Because וַיְהִי ה' אֵת יוֹסֵף* G-d was with Yosef. Yosef was able to make a Kiddush Hashem, despite the unenviable position in which he found himself. The position was irrelevant to success; the end result – sanctification of G-d's Name – defined it!

The Tzafnat Paneach writes that the mitzvah of lighting the Chanuka candles is a double mitzvah. There is a commemoration of the miracle of the oil. And, we light the candles outside, in public, to commemorate the miraculous victory. This *פרסומי ניסא*, lighting outside, is taken very seriously in the Charedi homes in Israel and is to be done in the best possible way. People are particular as to when to light and where to light. This is not being fanatic. This is the whole mitzvah of Chanuka. It is showing that the victory was not just a victory at war. It was a victory of sanctifying His Name. *וואתה עשית שם גדול וקדוש בעולמך...*

LIVING IN THE PRESENT

Many of us, at some point in our lives, feel despair and sorry for ourselves over situations in which we find ourselves. We may imagine that if we would have been in so-and-so's shoes or possessed someone else's *mazal* then we would be more successful and content. These feelings may be felt

as one struggles in their learning in yeshivah or seminary but rationalizes failure: *if only I would have been in a different school or environment before I came here, I would have been much better off*. Similar regrets may be harbored by one who watches friends getting married, starting families,



as one feels “left behind”. A person may blame business or life partners, relatives, friends, teachers or religious and other authorities for “ruining my life,” “messing me up.” However, these attitudes and reactions handicap and hamper the fulfillment of one’s potential. They greatly affect the decisions one makes for his/her future, especially if the response is to sit around and wait for the good times to start.

I would like to draw on an observation about the mindset of Yosef in similar circumstances. The Midrash relates how Yosef’s master, Potifar, noticed how Yosef would constantly whisper to himself while executing household chores. Potifar suspected that the Jewish boy was casting spells on his home and family. The master confronted Yosef about his peculiar behavior. Yosef replied that a request to G-d was always on his lips: *My constant prayer is that every action I do will find favor in my master’s eyes.*

One may wonder why Yosef cared so much to find favor in his master’s eyes. After all, he did not owe anything to his master, Potifar. Yosef, a mere teenager at age 17, had been kidnapped, *messed over* and sold as a slave by his own brothers. We would expect him neither to exert himself nor be particularly productive while thinking about his bitter state. Apart from G-d, Yosef was alone in the world. We would not be surprised if Yosef had lost all trust in his family and religion. After all, his older brothers were great and holy men. How could such people treat him so abominably and unjustly? Yet, despite the circumstances, Yosef did not let these thoughts take him away from acting properly and effectively. Yosef lived in the present. If G-d doomed him to be a slave, then he will not only perform his best; he will constantly pray to G-d that he finds favor in the eyes of his master *since*

that is the best thing he can do in his present situation.

Rebbe Simcha Bunim of Peshischa would say: a person who denies that the dirt under his feet was put there by G-d for a purpose is a *kofer* (non-believer) in regards to *hashgacha pratit* (divine providence). Where we are is exactly where G-d wants us to prove ourselves to ourselves. So many successful people are not necessarily successful because they had resources of money, good family, emotional support, friends and contacts, high IQ, etc. that brought them to success. More often it is because they employ a character trait we may call resourcefulness. They choose from what they can do. They look around, noting how they can achieve the most they can with what they have and where they are – *and do it*. It is even *strange* how frequently people blame things upon reasons which they believe cause them to be stuck. This prevents them from moving forward in their lives. There are so many decisions one can make and actions one can perform where free will can be exercised and many of our dreams may be attained. G-d gives everyone a lot of room for this.

On a final note, Rebbe Tzadok HaKohen, in *Tzidkat Hatzaddik*, deduces that if G-d invests so much in each and every one of us it is because he believes in each and every one of us. It is as important to believe in ourselves as it is to believe in G-d. This is what we mean when we say *Ani Maamin* (I believe). א-ל אמונה ואין עוול ... means that G-d put His belief in His Creation that it will reach Its purpose. He believes in each and every one of us as well. We first have to believe in the *Ani*. Only then can we be a *Maamin*. May we learn from Yosef’s belief in himself. And, maybe, then we can learn from his belief in G-d.

THE INNOCENCE OF CHEESE

There is a custom on Chanukah that women refrain from doing work while the candles of the Menorah are burning. This custom commemorates the miraculous routing of Syrian Greek troops by Yehudit, daughter of Mattityahu (Maccabee), the

Kohen Gadol. Yehudit’s victory took place on her wedding day in that terrible period when all Jewish brides were forced to be with the Greek general just before starting their marital life.



On that fateful day, Yehudit approached the general with a bag containing a flask of wine and a block of cheese. Once in seclusion with him, Yehudit opened her bag and offered the general a taste of enticing cheese. The general could not resist, and ate the salty cheese – which made him thirsty. Yehudit then made her next move: she offered the general the wine she had brought along so that he could quench his thirst. As she had hoped, the wine got the better of the general, who fell into a deep slumber. When the Greek soldiers were shown that their leader had been assassinated, they fled for their lives. This well-known episode is also the source of the custom to eat dairy products during the eight day holiday of Chanukah.

Although this custom and story are well known, the deeper meaning is not. *Why do we commemorate the cheese, but not the wine? If Yehudit's plan was to get the general to sleep, then the main ingredient of her plot was wine. The cheese was just a means to the end of getting the general to thirst for wine. Why, then, do we ignore the wine, and make a big deal about the cheese?*

The answer is inspiring. Every general knows not to drink wine in wartime. Cheese, however, is not

necessarily on the radar screen of a general at war. If Yehudit would have brought only wine, then her plot would not have gotten off the ground. The only way to have gotten the general to drink wine was to first give him some cheese that would make him thirsty. The failure of the general was in thinking that he could eat cheese, but not get thirsty enough to need a flask of wine to quench his thirst. This is why we commemorate the cheese, but not the wine.

We are all 'generals' in a battle to be better, more G-d fearing, observant Jews. Often we are confronted with temptations that could cause us to make mistakes. The obvious sin is more easily avoided. No one is ordering 'bacon and eggs', but sometimes we could fall into a trap of something (metaphorically, 'the cheese'). We may say to ourselves, 'There is nothing really wrong with this' or 'Only this one time' or rationalize to ourselves 'I know my limits, I won't go too far'. These and other similar situations cross the minds of many 'generals' in the battle for Torah values.

It is not the "wine" that we have to fear. "Cheese" is much more of a threat because it is, we tell ourselves, "only cheese."

DOOMED TO ORDINARINESS

The same changes that even the greatest Tzaddikim cannot achieve during the moments of Neilah on Yom Kippur, any simple Jew can achieve with the power of a prayer and a tear that he sheds next to the candles of the eighth day of Chanukah. (Rebbe from Ruzhin. One of the greatest Hassidic Rebbes of all time.)

What? How does that make sense?? What is the power of the candles? And what is there in this time of the year that gives even a simple Jew the power to achieve more than what the greatest men of our people can achieve?

Adam Harishon saw that the days (of the winter months of his first year) were getting shorter and shorter. And he said, "Woe is to me! Maybe because I sinned, the world will become dark for

me and return to emptiness and nothingness!? Maybe this is what G-d meant when He said that death will be my punishment from Heaven?!" He spent eight days in fasting and prayer... Once he realized that this was just the month of Tevet, and he saw how the days started getting longer again, he said, "This (seasonal change) is the way of the world". He went and made eight days of holiday. The next year, he made both series of eight days into holidays. He made these days holy days, for Hashem's sake, while the gentiles make these days (of cold and lack of sunlight) holidays for their religions (Avodah Zarah 8a).

One second. This means that Chanukkah is a holiday that Adam Harishon kept?! What are we supposed to learn from Adam's Chanukkah?



Adam thought that his sin was going to destroy G-d's world. He fasted and prayed, **and then realized that he had no control over the world.** He realized that a person is just a cog in G-d's huge machinery of all time. This is the way Hashem wanted His world to be, to have seasons. To have some sort of death, whether the death of mankind, or the death of winter. *G-d created death and called it טוב מאוד, very good* (Bereshit Rabbah 9;5).

There is a divine plan, and we are all part of it. Even the sins that we have committed are sins that G-d was well aware that we would commit. מביט לסוף דבר בקדמותו (Adon Olam) – It is up to us, though, to recognize that our past is part of our destiny, our unique story of bringing out G-dliness in the World in our own way. Similar to a flame. A flame needs something to burn for its combustion. So too, sometimes we need to go through difficulties, through failure, through some sort of ordinary life, in order for something extraordinary to shine.

This is the concept of the Minhag of the Dreidel game, where, in contrast to the Grogger – noisemaker – of Purim held from underneath, you need to spin the Dreidel from above. To show that the miracle of Hannukah was a manifestation of the One Above spinning our world, our life, our destiny. The Jews could not get together and pray to G-d to annul the Greek decrees, for they were hiding in caves. But G-d, on His own, even without our prayers, spun the events and brought about our miracles. We are puppets in His divine plan, or better yet, we are all just Dreidels being spun by G-d, for 120 years.

Let us take Reuven's life-story, for example. His story was one of the saddest stories of Tanach. We know of only four episodes of his life, and in all four, he tried to be a good, responsible firstborn, but all his efforts resulted in somewhat of a whiplash. He was born as Firstborn, but Yaakov felt that he had really intended that night of his wedding to be with Rachel, so Firstborn rights of double inheritance portion go to Yosef, instead. Reuven saw that his mother really wanted as many children as possible, and when he saw the

mandrakes in the field, the flowers known to be auspicious in enabling one to have children, he brought them home to his mother, Leah. This brought about some sort of dispute between his mother and his aunt. When Rachel saw what Reuven brought home, she asked her sister Leah for them, and Leah said to her, *Is it not enough that you take my husband from me, you also want to take my son's mandrakes?*

After Rachel died, Yaakov placed his bed next to that of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant. Reuven could not see what he saw as something shaming his mother, Leah. *How could Rachel's maidservant have precedence over my mother Leah?* When Reuven moved the beds around, the Torah intentionally uses exaggerated terms, to stress the severity of meddling with one's father's personal matters. "And Reuven slept with his father's maidservant." And, on his deathbed, his father rebuked him for tampering with the placement of his couch.

Reuven saved Yosef from being killed by the Tribes. He threw him into the pit so that they would not make a hasty decision (See Seforno). But, when he came back to the pit with a rope to rescue Yosef, Yosef was not there. The brothers wanted to kill Yosef when Reuven was absent. But Yehuda got them to sell Yosef as a slave, instead. In the blessings of Yaakov on his last day, Yaakov said that for Yehuda's having saved Yosef's life, royalty would go to Yehuda – מִטְּרַף קָנִי עֲלֶיךָ. *Reuven would need to lose out on royalty.*

The Maharshal explains why. Reuven was not only concerned with saving his brother Yosef for Yosef's sake. He was worried, because he would not know how to come back home to his father Yaakov, not having taken responsibility for his brother Yosef. . וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּלְדִּי אֵינְנוּ נֹאמְרֵי אֶתְּךָ אֶתְּךָ אֶתְּךָ . Royalty cannot be given to someone who has side-agendas (Sifte Hachamim). And then, in this week's Parasha, when the Tribes needed to persuade Yaakov to let them take Binyamin down to Egypt, Reuven offers to take responsibility for Binyamin. *If I do not bring back Binyamin, two of my sons will die.* Yaakov refuses Reuven's



proposal chastising him , *Foolish Firstborn!!! Your sons are only your sons, and not also my sons?!* (Rashi)

As much as Reuven tried to be a responsible firstborn, he was doomed to be ordinary. But, hidden in his ordinariness, G-d had a much bigger plan that He was spinning.

הַדְּרָאִים הַנְּגוּרִים וְעַל-פִּתְחֵינוּ כָּל-מְגִלִּים תְּדַשִּׁים גַּם-יִשְׁגְּגוּם
דְּרָאִי צְפַנְתִּי לָךְ *The Mandrakes gave their scent, and on our doorways, all types of delights – new ones and also old ones, My beloved, I have stored away for you* (Shir Hashirim 7). The Midrash tells us on this passuk of Shir Hashirim, *To whom do the “mandrakes” refer? This is Reuven, who saved Yosef. “And on our doorways – all types of delights” – This is the candle of Chanukah. What is the connection?*

The Rebbe from Liska explains this Midrash, in line with the teachings of the Alshich... The Tribes suspected Yosef of being a Rasha, and they felt that it was a Mitzvah to kill him. Reuven saved Yosef, because he felt that from Heaven, he had a part in the birth of Yosef, because it was the

mandrakes that he brought home to his mother Leah, that brought about Rachel giving birth to Yosef. He felt that it was not for nothing that he had this feeling, this emotion, that he was a part of Yosef's existence. And he felt that this was from Heaven that he was to be there at just the right moment to discourage his brothers from killing Yosef. On Chanukah, each person needs to understand which direction he needs to take in life, according to how he or she is guided from Heaven. Those things that seem to be unplanned and unexpected in life, the miracles that are from Heaven, your past, are G-d guiding you, to your mission in life. Your Tafkaid. (Mishneh Sachir. Killed in Aushwitz) This is the continuation of the Passuk... *New ones and also old ones, My beloved, I stored for you.*

Everything that we went through and go through is the fuel that needs to be combusted in order for our light to shine. Once we understand that we are ordinary puppets in a divine script, we won't be so ordinary anymore, and our deepest prayers will be answered.

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