



Parashat Bo



English version

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THE ART OF BEING A NATION

This is the story going around this week, from Rabbi Shner Guata, a true story, with a bittersweet ending. A Jew named Avi, a good-hearted, traditional, responsible, and kind Jew, would occasionally have dealings with mafia, or problematic individuals. Avi owned several *bastas* in Tel Aviv, where he also sold fruits and vegetables. (A basta is a stand at a market, like the stands in Machane Yehuda) One day, as Avi was arranging his tomatoes and cucumbers at one of his *bastas*, he noticed something unusual—a half-broken "Salkal" (a baby carrier). Inside was a crying baby, wrapped in a tattered cloth. Concerned, Avi began asking people around him, "Is this your baby?" but no one claimed the child. After waiting several minutes with no one coming forward, he noticed a woman with a scarf nearby, going through the garbage, picking out old produce that was still somewhat edible.

Avi asked her, "Do you know anything about this baby?"

The woman hesitated before admitting that the baby was hers. Ashamed, she explained that she was in desperate need, struggling to provide even basic necessities. Moved by her plight, Avi made an extraordinary offer: "Every week, come to my stand and take all the fruits and vegetables you need for your household." Additionally, Avi gave her money every month, a bank transfer, to support her and the baby girl. The woman, overwhelmed with gratitude, began to cry. She thanked Avi profusely, calling him a Tzaddik, an angel of G-d.

For over 20 years, Avi continued this act of kindness, providing food and financial support without ever seeking recognition. The baby girl, who had been abandoned in desperate circumstances, grew into a young woman.

One day, Avi received a phone call. "Hello, Avi," the caller said. "You don't know me, but I have two things to tell you." The caller introduced himself as Shimon, the groom of the young woman Avi had helped raise. Shimon explained that the girl, now grown up, was about to get married. He said, "I want to thank you for everything you did. You are an angel, a righteous man. When I asked this young woman about her past, I learned about you. She said that you not only saved her life but also gave her dignity and hope."

Avi, overwhelmed, responded, "I'm no angel, and I'm not righteous. I just did what I could." Shimon reassured him, saying that the girl was marrying into a stable family now, and he could take care of her going forward. However, Avi was reluctant to stop his support. "I've taken care of her all these years," he said. "Please let me continue."

Avi shared his own side of the story: years ago, he had been caught in a dangerous situation involving a gang in Tel Aviv. He narrowly escaped being shot and went to a prominent rabbi for guidance. "Should I move to United States? Maybe Miami?" The rabbi advised him, "You can't run away from problems in life. You need to deal with them. Avi, you need merit. If G-d is protecting you, no one can hurt you. We know that G-d's ways, is that, He pays back measure for measure. If you give life to



someone else, G-d will give life to you. Look for someone to help in a way that brings life.” The very next day after speaking to the Rabbi Avi found the baby girl at the basta. He recognized the moment as Hashgacha Pratit, Divine Providence, and took it upon himself to care for the child and her mother. He concluded by saying, “For over 20 years, I gave them life, and G-d, in turn, gave me life. Please don’t take away from me the opportunity of giving. My life is on the line.”

Avi and Shimon agreed that they should think it over, and decide how to go forward, over the following three days.

By day three, Avi was shot by the mafia.

Avi was able to live for 20 more years, from the first time he was shot, until the second time that he was shot, because he gave life to another person.

Before his death, Yaakov commanded his sons, **קְהַלְתֶּם** Gather. He emphasizes the importance of unity, teaching them that when they are united, they will have the strength to achieve victory in any challenge or battle. When we care for each other, when we are one, no one can hurt us. How so?

There was once an old man who, before his death, called his ten children to his bed. He asked each of them to bring a thin branch from a tree. When they all brought their twigs, he gathered the twigs together, and tried breaking all the ten thin branches at once. But in a bundle, the thin branches, the twigs, were impossible for him to break. None of his children could break the bundle of thin branches, either. One by one, they tried, but none of them succeeded.

The old man then put down the bundle on the table. He picked up branch by branch, and cracked in half, one after the next. He gave each child his broken branch. Then he explained, “You see, it’s not a problem to break each branch, when each branch stands alone. But when the branches are bundled together, no one can break the branches. You’ve just learned an important lesson: when you

are united, no one can defeat you. Alone, it’s much harder to succeed.”

In Egypt, we became an Am. The letters that spell Am, **אמ**, are the exact same letters that spell Im, **עם**. Nation, and With, have the same letters, because a nation is as strong as the glue that holds the individual parts together. The shared experiences, shared goals, shared beliefs, shared lessons learned, shared space, the help through thick and thin, that’s the glue that keeps people together as a people. When Moshe saw that Datan and Aviram speak slander, he said, **אָכֵן נִגְדַע הַדְּבָר**. Now I know why the Jews are still in Egyptian slavery. G-d wanted the Jews to go through Egypt, only that they can emerge a nation. **לָבוֹא לְקַהֵל לְךָ גוֹיִם מִקֶּרֶב גּוֹיִם** If they speak slander, lashon hara, gossip, then they are not one, they are not a nation. And G-d will not redeem us, until we can all get along.

G-d himself is sensitive, and he expects us to be sensitive as well, even with the evilest of men. The Chatam Sofer interprets the verse, **"And He commanded them regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt"** (Exodus 6:13), as follows. Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon are being commanded by G-d to approach Pharaoh.

Rashi explains that this teaches two lessons, how to treat the Jews, and how to treat Pharaoh. Rashi says that Moshe and Aaron were commanded to treat Pharaoh with respect. Even though they were about to bring upon him ten plagues that would make him regret his existence, they were still required to speak to him respectfully.

The question arises: Why show respect to Pharaoh? Wouldn’t it make more sense to humiliate him, given his wickedness? Why is it important that Pharaoh be treated with respect? He was corrupt from head to toe! The Midrash tells us that he suffered from leprosy and would bathe in the blood of 300 children daily—150 in the morning and 150 in the evening. He was a ruler who didn’t acknowledge all that Yosef did for his empire, the man who had elevated Egypt to great heights. Respect this wicked man? This is odd.

The Chatam Sofer explains, that Moshe and Aaron had to treat Pharaoh respectfully despite his extreme wickedness, because their lack of respect could absolve Pharaoh of his sins, and then the plagues that he deserves would not come upon him. If Moshe and Aaron were to humiliate Pharaoh, it would lead to his sins being forgiven. By treating him with respect, the punishment would come upon him in full measure. Even though Pharaoh was responsible for unimaginable atrocities, Moshe and Aaron, had to maintain dignity in their dealings with him.

It is not only that the Torah teaches us to have feelings for others. When we feel another's pain, G-d considers it as if we went through that pain ourselves, and He atones our sins. This is why, when Miriam and Aharon spoke about Moshe, only Miriam was struck with leprosy. Aharon was not. Why? Because Aharon felt Miriam's pain, G-d considered it as if Aharon received his punishment of leprosy as well. **וְהָיָה מִרְיָם מְצֻרָעַת כַּשֶּׁלֵּג וַיִּכּוּ אֶתֶרְוֹ אֶל־מִרְיָם וְהָיָה מִצְרָעַת:** Aharon then asked G-d to forgive Miriam. When we visit the sick, and we pray for the sick, we are like Aharon. And G-d considers it as if we went through their pain and suffering, and G-d forgives our sins!!!!

The Torah describes the ninth plague that struck Egypt—the plague of darkness: "And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Stretch out your hand toward the heavens, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.' And Moshe stretched out his hand toward the heavens, and darkness covered all of Egypt for three days. No one could see their brother, nor could anyone rise from their place for three days. But for all the children of Israel, there was light in their dwellings." (Shemot/Exodus 10:21-23)

The Torah tells us that this darkness was not ordinary; it was so thick and overwhelming that people were unable to move. But we have to ask ourselves, if the plagues increased in severity, leading up to the tenth and most devastating plague—the death of the firstborn—why was darkness placed so close to the final blow, the Plague of Firstborn? Unlike other plagues,

darkness did not cause physical harm or financial loss, so why was it considered such a severe punishment?

The Midrash provides a profound answer: the plague of darkness was not only for the Egyptians—it was a judgment upon certain Jews as well. Throughout the first eight plagues, the Jews had witnessed G-d's power. They saw miracles, signs, and wonders. But during the plague of darkness, a great clarification (birur) took place. Many among the Jews had become comfortable in Egypt. They held positions of power, enjoyed wealth and status, and did not want to leave Egypt at all. These individuals were so deeply attached to Egyptian life that they rejected the idea of redemption. G-d, however, did not want the Egyptians to witness the Jews that were dying during the plagues, as this could have led to a desecration of G-d's name—the Egyptians might have said: "Just as we were punished, so too were they!" Therefore, G-d orchestrated the plague of darkness as a way to quietly remove four-fifths (80%) of the Jewish population—those who did not want to leave Egypt. While darkness covered the land, their bodies were buried out of sight. When the plague ended, only one-fifth of the nation remained—those who were ready for redemption.

The Midrash describes the thickness of the darkness using an unusual measurement: "The thickness of the darkness was like the thickness of a gold coin (dinar)." The Chidushei HaRim, asks, why was the darkness measured in money? Why not use a more common measurement like Kazayit, Kebeitzah? He explains, because wealth and materialism can blind a person. The Jews who refused to leave Egypt were blinded by their success and comfort. Even though they saw G-d's miracles with their own eyes, even though they experienced firsthand how He struck Egypt while protecting Israel, they still chose to cling to their familiar lives. Their hearts were enslaved to Egypt, and so they were left behind. The Torah says: "No one could see his brother during the plague of darkness." The Chidushei HaRim explains that this wasn't only a physical reality—it was also a

spiritual message. The punishment of Darkness, was on those Jews who adapted Egyptian culture, and did not see the suffering of their fellow Jews, their own brothers!!!

The Final Redemption will come when people care about one another. **ציון במשפט תפדה ושביה בצדקה**. The Talmud discusses a debate about when the time for saying Shema in the morning begins. After the darkness of the night, one needs to wait till there is enough light, that one can see his friend within four

THE ART OF PARENTING TROUBLED TEENS

One of the hard things to understand about the Egyptian exile is that the numbers don't match. In this week's Parasha, the Torah tells us that the Jews were in Egypt for 430 years. This contradicts the number of years that the Rabbis tell us they were actually in Egypt - 210 years – equal to the numerical value of the word, **רדו**. As Yaakov told his sons the first time to go down to Egypt. **ויאמר הגה שמעתי כי יששכר במצרים רדו-שמה ושרו-לנו משם ונתתה ולא נמות**:

To reconcile this, we can say, that the 430 years of being a stranger in a foreign land would include the years Avraham Avinu, Yitzhak, and Yaakov lived in the Land of Israel, but did not settle there. Whenever it says that they *lived* in Israel, the Torah uses the word **גר**, lived *temporarily*. When the Torah uses the words **וישב** with our forefathers, implying that they tempted to live in a *settled* fashion, it is usually the beginning of some trouble, just to make sure that they don't actually feel settled in the Land, so that can count for the 400 years decree. **ויסע משם אברהם ארצה הנגב וישב בין-קדש ויאר אברהם אל-שרה ויבין שור ויגר בגרר**: And then, **אשתו אתהי הוא וישלח אבימלך מלך גרר ויקח את-שרה**: In other words, when Avraham tried to settle, Avimelech took his wife Sarah. **ויצחק בגרר וישב וישאלו אנשי המקום לאשתו ויאמר אתהי הוא כי ירא לאמר אשתי פרי-הרגני אנשי המקום על-רבקה כייטובת מרצאה הוא**: In other words, when Yitzhak tried to settle, he had a run-in with Avimelech, who wanted his wife, and the Plishtim fought with him over the wells he dug. Yaakov, as well, when he tried to dwell in the Land, Yosef was taken from him. **וישב**

Amot. (Berachot 9b) The Shema is a present experience of the future redemption, when G-d will be One and His Name will be One. **והיה ה' למלך על-כל-הארץ ביום ההוא יהיה ה' אחד ושמו אחד**. (see Rashi Devarim 6,4) The end of the night, is the end of the Exile. The morning, the time of Redemption, is the time that we see each other, and the suffering of those around us. Why does someone seem distant, sad, or troubled? Why is that family in pain? Then, and only then, do we break free from darkness, and we will be freed from Exile.

אֵלֶּה תְּלֻדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן-שָׁבַע-עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה הָיָה רָעָה אֶת-אֶחָיו וְהוּא נָעַר אֶת-בְּנֵי בְלָעָה וְאֶת-בְּנֵי זַלְפָּה גַּם אֶבְיֹן יוֹסֵף וְעַד-דָּבַרְתֶּם רָעָה אֶל-אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם: Since our Forefathers never dwelled in the Land, it was considered part of the 430, for they lived there as foreigners. (See Rashi Bereshit 15 13)

The problem though, is that the Passuk says in our Parasha, that the Jews were in Egypt for 430 years, which is totally not true! There is another answer, though, to reconcile the two numbers of the years the Jews were in Egypt. Rashi got to the number of 210 by adding up the years of the lives of three generations: Kehat (son of Levi), Amram, Moshe, and then subtracting the years that the three overlap. Rashi says, that if we add up the lives of these three, until the Exodus when Moshe was 80, we will get a total of 350... But if we look at the number a bit differently, we will receive a different number. Kehat lived 133, Amram lived 137, Moshe was 80 at Exodus, a total of 350, even though Moshe's 80 years were lived while Amram was still alive. If we consider the lives of Moshe, Amram, Kehat and Levi, counting all the years that each and every one lived in Egypt, we will receive a total of 430 years, exactly, even if they overlap! (Levi died at 137, he went down to Egypt at the age 45 and went down to Egypt at the age 92. Pirke Dr' Eliezer)

Why does the Torah count the numbers of years of the Jews in Egypt, without subtracting the years that they overlap? Why not make our reckoning in chronological order?

The answer is amazing: G-d looks at years differently from how we do! Each and every person is living his own life, is in his own world; and the worlds can be happening at the same time, but one has nothing to do with the other! They just happen to be in the same world, at the same time! Each person is living his own life, with his own story, his own version of reality, his own challenges, his own tests! No one can do what you can do in your world! In your world, there is just you and G-d!

This is extremely relevant to parenting troubled teens, or children who don't follow our path. One of the hardest things in parenting troubling teens is when a parent brings his own life into his child's mishaps. A parent may bring guilt from his/her own past, and the child's dysfunctionality is just a trigger to remind the parent's past. Or, a parent's anxiety over the parent's own future can be aggravated from the dysfunctionality of the teen.

All this troubled teen needs is space, trust, love, acceptance, and patience for his teen-traumas to cure, or for his prefrontal cortex to heal. Some teens have a chemical imbalance in the brain that most commonly effects one of three functions: long term perspective thinking, values related to justice and perception of consequence. The parent or teacher tries to talk sense, and the teenager just stares at the parent, like a fish looks through a fish tank. No communication. Trying to get these teens educated is harder than nailing Jello to a tree. Anything that makes sense that you want to tell your troubled teen, DON'T SAY! If it makes sense, and they are not getting it, telling them that just makes them feel more confused.

As a parent, you need to stay sane, even if you have no sleep. The first step is to realize that this child's dysfunctionality needs a loving home, a loving and patient parent. A parent who can look at his/her dysfunctional teen as an inhouse patient that needs to heal - something which can take a minimum of two years. Teenage brains can go through this, from 15-25. Human brains, different from animal brains, start off with only a fraction of the brain size of their parents. At birth, the brain is 25% of its future adult size; by 1 year of age, the

brain is 75% of its adult size, and by 3 years of age, the brain is 80% of its adult size. By 7 years of age, the brain is 90% of its adult size, but there is something through teenage years that grows, and that you need to have patience with. This is a time where the child needs the parent's love and acceptance more than ever. Although Marijuana, or any drug that you take into your body is not good for you, specifically at these ages from 15-25, such substances will cause irreversible damage to the brain cells and to the emotional intelligence that are being constructed and completed at this time of one's life.

But you have to let them be, without having your own life involved, as long as they are not really putting themselves in danger. This child, this soul is on its own path, and has its own Tefkud. And as much as they make themselves look macho, they need their parents' love, hugs and home, more than ever before.

Here is a bittersweet story that I heard this week from Rabbi Zaid, a well-known speaker in Israel. He went to speak to the dislocated families in the North. "I spoke two weeks ago in the Leonardo Club in Tiveria. They had their displaced citizens. It is not normal when someone needs to live so long in a hotel, away from home. Exile is one of the hardest things in life. It looks nice that they are in a hotel, but they want more than anything to go back home, and back to their private lives.

I spoke there, giving them Hizuk, some Emunah, trying what I could. I told them, guys, I love you... There was a young girl there, who sat in the front rows, that raised her hand. I said, yes, Tzaddek. She said, "Rabbi, all of us here,... we love you too!"

Wow! This girl spoke to my heart. I spoke to the father of this child. I asked the father, How did you merit having such a girl?

He said, Rabbi, you tell a lot of stories. I will tell you a story that in your life you never heard. He said an incredible story. "I am Bucharian. I live in Kiryat Shemoneh. Rabbi, 25 years I did not have children. More than that, after 22 years, I found



out, with my wife, that we have no chance of having kids. It was a very hard year to accept this, but after we accepted it, we got used to it, to live without kids. The Hazon Ish did not have kids. His students were his children. What can we do?...

I had a neighbor that lived nearby, a man who has a son and daughter. Yosef and Dinah. How nice. I was good friends with this neighbor. His son Yosef eventually went off the beaten path of religion, as a rebellious teen. He also started using all types of drugs, going to all types of bad places, and Dinah was following in his path. My neighbor came to me and said, "You don't have kids; I do have kids, but it is like I am living without kids, for they are not going in my path. What is life worth having kids like this? Maybe it is better not to have kids at all! Who says that life is worse without kids?"

This was so painful to hear. I told him, your kids are like my kids. I said, I will take care of your kids.

He went to Yosef and said, "Tell me what type of car you want. Any car. I will buy it for you." Yosef said, are you serious? I said, yes. I had money saved up, because I never had to support any kids. I told him, I will buy you a convertible Porsche, I will give you whatever you want, even a card for unlimited gas. (Cars in Israel are much more expensive to buy than USA. Partially because the taxes are high, to pay for the tolls. In USA, you pay for tolls when you drive, but here you pay for tolls, in the taxes of the original purchase. Also, gas here is much more expensive.) I just want you to stop doing all your craziness, using drugs and visiting inappropriate places. Deal?"

The boy stopped all the things he was doing and started learning with this childless man. He brought Yosef back, he had the time to deal with him. Not only did Yosef start praying and keeping Shabbat, the boy also started learning every day a little bit of Gemarah, G-d's holy Torah. After about a year, they finished together Massechet Taanit. He said, we are going to do a Siyum Massechet, and your parents will come, to give them some Nahat. In the

meantime, because of this, Dinah also started coming back.

The siyum Massechet they did in Chazor Haglilit, next to Kiryat Shemoneh. They took a small hall, and Yosef got up to speak. He said, "I want to tell everyone here that I am now asking from my parents' forgiveness for causing them so much pain." He cried. He asked forgiveness from Hashem, for doing what he did. He thanked this childless neighbor for trusting in him, for buying him all that he bought him. It was very emotional, and when he finished speaking they all danced with him.

The next day, Yosef was driving his Porsche, and a truck ran over him and killed him. Decrees of Heaven, we just don't understand. Just like we don't understand how a country with the highest intelligence in the world, can't figure out where 180 hostages are for 100 days?!? The highest-ranking people in Israel security are saying nothing is making sense; it is all G-d's Hand. Simhat Torah taught us the biggest lesson: **that everything is G-d.**

The father of Yosef sat Shivah, and also, the spiritual father, this childless man, also sat shivah and did Kriah, as if he was an adopting father. At the end of the Shiva, the two fathers went up to the Keiver. At the Keiver, the real father cried and said kaddish, and said, Master of the World, you took my son from me! One request I have from you! Take that Neshama and give it to my friend, give him a child! A year and a month later, after 26 years of childness, miraculously, this man had a child, and he called him Yosef.

It was a very emotional Brit. And the father of Yosef came to get a blessing from this new father, as he was the Sandak. The father of Yosef said, "You not only deserve a Yosef, for saving my son Yosef, you also deserve a Dinah, because my Dinah returned to religion because of your helping Yosef. You should merit to have a daughter as well, and fulfill the Mitzvah of Pru Urbu, to be multiplying and fruitful." A year and a half later, they had a girl and called her Dinah.



After telling me his story, he said to me, “These are Yosef and Dinah that you see here. These two kids are very high Neshamot! They sit in the front row of every class, and Dinah prays in the Ezrat Nashim while Yosef is praying beautifully in the men’s section.”

Sometimes, you need to separate yourself emotionally from your child to help them, in the sense that you have to look at your child as if he were the neighbor’s child. Your child is living his own world, and his Neshama is on its own path, nothing to do with you. Almost every great man in history had trouble with his kids. Adam, Noach, Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, King David, King Solomon, Eli Hakohen, Shmuel, Hizkiyahu, Shimon Hatzaddik... Even Moshe Rabbeinu, who

promised his father-in-law Yitro that he would allow his oldest son to be a priest for Avodah Zarah (there are two opinions of who the child that wasn’t circumcised in the hotel on the way down to Egypt was. One opinion is that it was Eliezer, the younger, just-born son. The other opinion is that it was Gershom, about whom Moshe gave his word to Yitro that he would allow him to become a priest to Avodah Zarah, *and he could come to recognizing G-d on his own*. In the end, because of this deal, Gershom’s son became the priest to Pesel Micha Avodah Zarah).

We all have different mountains to climb in our life. Sometimes, people fall and tumble down. But as a parent, you need to stay climbing on your own mountain. Your child is on his/her own mountain.

THE ART OF PHYSIOLOGY OVER PSYCHOLOGY

One of my favorite Sefarim is the Sefer Hachinuch. The Sefer Hachinuch gives a reason for each and every positive and negative commandment. There are so many Mitzvot on the night of the Seder. The mitzvot of the night have, mostly, to do with living like kings, princes and free men. For example, in Temple times, one was not allowed to take his portion of the Korban Pesach and eat it away from his group. If he did, punishment would be 39 lashes. Why? Because kings and wealthy men don’t eat alone. Only poor people and mourners, eat alone. You can’t leave over the meat of the Korban Pesach for the next day, and whatever remains, you burn: because kings don’t eat leftovers. The night that we became free from Egypt, we merited great heights and royal status. You can’t break a bone from the Korban Pesach, to eat the meat that is inside the bone, because it is not suitable for princes’ status to break the bones of meat, like dogs and poor, hungry people.

One of my favorite portions from the Sefer Hachinuch is right here, on the law of not breaking the bone of Pesach. The Sefer Hachinuch asks, why do we need so many reminders of our being free on the night of the Seder, and becoming royalty?

Couldn’t just one reminder suffice for us and our descendants?

To this, the Sefer Hachinuch says that we can derive from here a big life lesson. “The way a person behaves makes a big impression upon him: his heart and thoughts follow his actions, for better or for worse. Even a wicked man with a wicked heart, with an Evil Intention who advises evil all day - if he will try to put effort in learning Torah and doing Mitzvot, even for personal gain of fame or pleasure, immediately he will become good, and his intentions will be directed toward G-d’s will, and, through his actions, he will kill his Evil Inclination. The heart follows the action! And even if the person is a full-fledged Tzaddik with a complete heart who desires Torah and Mitzvot, if he will always busy himself with bad entertainment, or he allows himself to be forced into doing negative acts, eventually, his pure heart will be turned around, and he will become a full-fledged wicked person.

This is the intention of the words, רבי חנניה בן עקשיא אומר רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות *G-d wanted to give merit to Yisrael; therefore, He gave them Torah and many Mitzvot.*



What? Wouldn't it be easier to be a good Jew, with more merit, with much less than 613 Mitzvoth? But that is the point! By having so many Mitzvoth and busying ourselves with them, our minds and desires will be such that in the end, G-d will give us so much good, so much Olam Haba. As our Rabbis say, 'Anyone who has a Mezuza on his door and Tzizit on his garment and Tefillin on his head... he can be sure that he won't sin!' (Menachot 43b) Because these Mitzvot are continuous, and they leave an impression on the person who performs them.

This is why you must never rely on your internal faith alone, but you need to focus, also, on your actions and deeds. It is never enough to say, I am *frum* at heart! I totally believe in G-d! What is so bad if I sometimes enjoy the enjoyments of life? Why can't I just hang out, chill with the townsfolk, enjoy their entertainment and laugh at their jokes? Nothing bad will happen, if I just do what they do, act as they act, because on the inside, I know what's right! I know the truth about the world, about G-d, about Olam Haba!

No!!!! Many have made this mistake! Don't fall into this trap! Many have drunk from this cup of poison! But you need to save your soul! Don't let the many Mitzvoth of remembering the Exodus bother you! On the contrary! Learn from them lessons for life!"

This lesson from the Sefer Hachinuch has so many ramifications. If you have trouble with your teenager, student, congregants, etc... don't get into discussions of proving your side over theirs. Instead, keep them busy with doing the things you believe are right and, eventually, they will identify with their behavior, and they will come up with their own reasons to explain their behavior! It works like magic!

When Avraham Avinu did kiruv, he did not try to "prove" G-d's existence! He just put people into a position where either they were going to say birkat Hamazon for the food he offered them, or he would charge them for an expensive meal in the middle of crossroads of the desert, with the prices of an

airport. That is all he did to make people serve G-d! He opened a free catering service, and got them to say their "after" blessings!

Physiology affects psychology. It is not only that the body language never lies about the person's mindset. It is that if you want to change your mindset, you need to change your body language/performance/behavior! If you stand tall and smile, you will feel that you can succeed! If you stand with slumped shoulders, if you have deeply furrowed eyebrows, you become Mister Serious, and unapproachable.

After paying much attention to this, I can literally "read" a person, how he is in relationships, from just his handshake! How did I learn this? Simple. I learned the steps to making the best handshake, and anything that is different than those steps is *screaming out* to me, a sign from the person's subconscious.

1. Smile, showing your upper teeth.
2. Head up high, as high as possible, as erect as possible, not overdoing it.
3. Look at the person in the eye.
4. Try remembering his eye color as you shake the person's hand.
5. The handshake should be in the middle between the two parties involved, not pulled closer to either of the two sides.
6. Pump the handshake 2-3 times.
7. Hand should be straight, not either hand on top or bottom.
8. Handshake should be web of one hand to the web of the other.
9. The hand should circle around and support the other person's hand, supportive and firm, but not a tight squeeze.
10. Use a particular, specific, custom-tailored, "It's a pleasure to meet you!"

If someone does anything different, if the person gives me a dead-fish handshake, a weak hand with no energy in the pump, I know this person has no energy in relationships. If the person is too firm in the handshake, the person will be too firm in relationships. If the person does not look me in the eye, I know he can't have an eye-to-eye conversation. If the person shakes my hand more than 2-3 times, this person does not know how to "let go" of the other person in relationships. If the person is pulling my hand to his side, it means he



wants the relationship on his terms. If the handshake is sweaty, I know this person has social anxiety. If the handshake is cool, it means he likes to be cool and not so formal. If the person also holds my arm, as he shakes my hand, it means, he wants my donation, or my vote, or something. If the person puts his hand on top as he shakes hands, it means he wants to be the giver, the provider, the decider. If the person puts his hand on the bottom, it means he wants to be receiving, or accepting.

What is funny about all of this is - if you change your handshake, you will change in personality. You will change how you are in relationships. This is not only true for relationships. This is true for other areas of performance, such as reading. If a person reads like a genius, he will become a genius. I taught hundreds of people to speed read, up to speeds of 1,350 words-per-minute, with comprehension. But you have to fake it till you make it. You need to sit up straight, with your back off the chair, moving your finger across the text at

10 percent faster than your comfortable reading pace, and the feet need to be straight, like in the Abraham Lincoln Memorial. You can't put your head on your hand. Look at pictures of the Gedolim learning: they all learn the same, with the same body language. At least 50 percent of your reading performance is dependent on your body language.

If I dress you in a certain color, you will be feeling like that color. Red: love, passion, danger, anger. Orange: happiness, energy, vitality, activity. Yellow: cheerfulness, joy, intellect, mental clarity. Green: abundance, nature, new beginnings, wealth. Blue: loyalty, honesty, reliability, communication. Purple: royalty, creativity, mystery, spirituality.

There is so much more to be said on this topic. But what I can't get over is that the Sefer Hachinuch, which was written in the thirteenth century, brings out so much psychology from the Torah, way before any psychologist wrote any findings in psychology.

THE ART OF CHANGING YOUR MAZAL

Mazal is something that, Judaism believes, has a big impact on your life. The root of the word "mazal" is "nozel", which implies that your fate flows from Above, through the Mazalot. (Zohar; Radak) Your Mazal will determine how long you will live. It will decide your financial status; if you will have children, how many and what type of children you will have. (Moed Kattan 28a) The Ibn Ezra wrote in one of his songs about how bad his Mazal was: If I decided to sell grave clothes, people would stop dying. If I decided to sell candles, the sun wouldn't set until I died. As the Talmud tells us, the poor people have "poverty" running after them. (B. Batra 174b) No matter what type of work a person pursues, if G-d wants you to succeed, nothing can stop you; If He doesn't want you to succeed, nothing and no one can help you.

The Jewish custom is to wish each other Mazal Tov, at family occasions. This derives from the other root of Mazal, לָזַח, *continue to go*, blessing them that their good fortune continue with them, in

life. The Zohar tells us that even the Sefer Torah that is in the Heichal needs Mazal, to be chosen to be read. (Zohar Naso, 134 a) Parts of Torah, like Tosefta, are less known, for they have less Mazal. (R' Ch. Abramski) There are Rabbis whose Torah is not being learned, because of lack of Mazal.

Mazal is, also, some sort of angel that is appointed for each and every creation. (See Rashi Shabbat 53b) Each blade of grass has a mazal/angel, who taps it to make it grow. (Bereshit Rabbah, 10;6) This is the reason why the month we are in is called Shvat: this is the month that the trees are "hit" with Shevet, the staff, of the angel that G-d appointed over them. And, wait! There is one more explanation of the word Mazal: it is your Da'at, your intuition - that eerie feeling that something might go wrong. (see Rashi B. Kama 2b; see Megilah 3a)

In addition to the already confusing concept of Mazal, R' Yochanan teaches that instead of the



Jewish people being under Mazal, they are directly under Hashem's supervision. (see Shabbat 156a) The source is where G-d told Avraham that according to the Mazalot, constellations, Avraham would be childless, but that he need not be concerned about that, for the Jewish people are not subject to the "mazalot". Tosefot points to the contradiction whether the Jewish people are dependent on the Mazal or not and answers that sometimes yes, and sometimes no. (Moed Katan 48a) R' Dessler explains that the Mazal of the Jew can be changed, through prayer, good deeds and Torah learning, regarding *how one reaches* their purpose in the world. But the Mazal of a person, when it defines the person's purpose in the world, cannot be changed. (See Taanit 25a story of R' Elazar Ben Pedat) Once the Mazal of a person's life purpose is set, nothing can change it. (Michtav Me'Eliyahu 4:99)

As Jewish people, we are supposed to live recognizing that we are directly under G-d's supervision, protection, and care; we have a direct line to Him, with no Mazal in between, especially when living in Eretz Yisrael. **כִּי תֵלֵךְ יִקְנֶה עִמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב** : **תִּקְבַּל נַחֲלָתוֹ** : And it says,

אָרְזוּ אֶשְׂרֵי-יִקְנֶה אֶלְקִיָּה דְרַשׁ אֹתָהּ תַּמִּיד עֵינֵי יִקְנֶה אֶלְהִיָּה בָּהּ : **מְרַשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרֵית שָׁנָה** : As Chana prayed, **יִקְנֶה** : **מִמֵּית וּמִתְנָה מוֹרִיד שְׂאוֹל וְיַעֲלֶה** : It is in G-d's Hands how long a person lives, and G-d can revive anyone at any moment. **יִקְנֶה מוֹרִישׁ וּמַעֲשִׂיר מִשְׁפִּיל אֲרִי-מְרוֹמָם** : It is in His Hands to make rich people poor, and make poor people rich.

The Talmud (Shabbat 156b) continues to relay that doing kindness can save anyone from the Mazal of death. It brings the story of R' Akiva. Stargazers told him that his daughter would die on her wedding day, from a snake bite. R' Akiva was worried. On the night after her wedding, his daughter pushed her golden hairpin into a crack in the wall, and, unknowingly, stuck the pin into the poisonous snake's eye. In the morning, she pulled out the dead snake with her pin. R' Akiva asked her in what merit she was saved from the snake?! She said that a poor man had come to the wedding, asking for food. "No one paid attention to him, so I

gave him my portion that you gave me." R' Akiva told her that her act of Tzeddaka had saved her! The Talmud continues to prove that Mazal does not affect Yisrael, from the story of the mother of R' Nachman Bar Yitzchak. The astrologers told her that her son would become a thief. So, from that day on, his mother insisted that he always wear a kippa: she would say, "Cover your head, so that you will be G-d-fearing; Pray that your Yetzer Hara not control you!" R' Nachman had no idea why his mother said this. One day, he was learning under a date tree, and his head covering fell off. He lifted his eyes and he saw the date tree; his Inclination got the better of him. He climbed the tree and cut a cluster of dates, with his teeth: this was, obviously, stealing. Although he stole that one time, he never became a thief.

We see that although the Mazal has influence, the question is, how can it be altered? G-d can at any moment, change the Mazalot for us, like he did by the war of Amalek. (Rashi Shemot 17:12) Before the plague of locusts, Pharaoh refused, for the 8th time, to send away the Jews; this time, he gave a pretty good reason *why* he refused. **רָאוּ כִּי רָעָה נִגְדָה** : Rashi explains, according to the Midrash Aggadah, "There is one star called Raah, Evil. Pharaoh, a great astrologer, told Moshe and Aharon, he saw that this star, representing blood and death, rising to greet the Jews in the desert. When the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf and G-d wanted to annihilate them, Moshe prayed to G-d, "Why should Mitzrayim say that in the Mazal of Raah, G-d took the Jews out of Egypt, to kill them in the desert?!" **לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר בְּרָעָה הוֹצִיאָם** : **לְהַרְגֵם אֲתֵם בְּהָרִים וְלִכְלֹתָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה שׁוֹב מִחֲרוֹן אַפָּיְךָ** : **וַיַּחַם יְקֹנֶה עַל-הָרָעָה לַעֲמֹדָה** : To which G-d answered Moshe, **וַיִּנָּחֵם יְקֹנֶה עַל-הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לַעֲמֹדָה** : And YKVK retracted the Evil that He spoke to do to His people. G-d turned the Blood sign that Pharaoh foresaw into the blood of the Milah, that Yehoshua circumcised the Nation at the threshold of Eretz Yisrael. The Baal Haturim brilliantly tells us, that the last letters of the words **וְיִגְדֵם רָעָה נִגְדָה** spell **הַדָּם**, the blood.

In other words, Pharaoh's astrology was right!!! But, he was wrong!!! The Jewish people were going to die in the desert, just that Moshe's prayers turned things around! The "blood sign" was true, but its interpretation, was in limbo.

The Talmud teaches if someone is born with the Mazal of Mars, of blood, he should try to use this for serving G-d and become a Mohel; but, if he can't, he should be a Shochet. Because if he does not develop this nature of dealing with blood in a positive way, he will naturally use this nature for bad things, becoming a thief or a murderer. (Shabbat 156b) The Mazal of Maadim, of Mars, is not, in itself, bad; you could use it for good, as well, if you accept your Mazal, and try to make the best of it, with proper guidance. When Shmuel saw that David was Admoni, red headed, he feared that he would be a mass murderer, like Esav; but, when he saw that his eyes were blue, he understood that he would not spill blood, without the "eyes" of Sanhedrin, and with their guidance. (See Biur HaGra Mishlei 22:6) A person born with a certain Mazal cannot change it, but he can choose to use it either for good or for bad. There is no nature that is bad, because G-d doesn't make garbage. Every nature, can be used for good, when following guidance from the Torah. This is why, in chinuch, we are not supposed to try to change people, but rather work with them. הַנְּהַר לְנַעַר עַל פִּי דְרָכָו גַּם כִּי יִקְיֵן

לֹא יָסוּר מִמֶּנָּה (Mishlei 22:6) Pharaoh could not see the good, though, in the Mazal of Maadim.

Pharaoh's prediction seemed so right! In less than 45 years, so many Jews died!!! Only one fifth of the Jews left Egypt. That would mean a total of 12 million Jews, who were not ready to leave Egypt with Moshe, died and were buried, in the first three days of the plague of darkness. Only 3 million actually left. 3,000 died by the Golden Calf. 24,000 died in the episode of the daughters of Midian, Bilaam's plot. 14,7000 died in the plague during the Korach episode. All the Jews from ages 20 to 60 died by the time they were ready to enter the Land of Israel. Pharaoh knew all of this, as the Baal Haturim takes it a step farther: Pharaoh not only predicted that they wouldn't enter Israel, he even predicted the only two Jews who were going to enter! מִי וּמִי הֵהֱלִיכִים "Who and who is going?" is the same numerical value of כָּלֵב וְבִנְיָמִן Kalev and Yehoshua Ben Nun! (This explains why הֵהֱלִיכִים is missing a Vav!) To which Moshe answered, בְּנֵעָרֵינוּ וְבִזְקֵנֵינוּ נִגְדֶּה ! You're right, Pharaoh! But we will leave Egypt anyway, even if it is just for the youth, under 20, and the elderly, over 60! (B Batra 121b) If the Mazal is against us, even if it is the Mazal of blood, it can be changed to the Mazal of Brit Milah that Yehoshua will perform, before they enter the Land. We will not be totally annihilated like your predict! We are leaving, no matter what, because G-d said so!

Selfie Steps to altering your Mazal

- 1: Prayer. Torah learning. Chessed. Mitzvoth. Living in Israel. All make you above your Mazal.
- 2: I once saw, that Mazal stands for m'akom z'man l'imud, or l'ashon. The place that you are in, the time you are in, the amount of knowledge and experience you have, and your ability to communicate: are all part of your Mazal. Make sure you are constantly aware of this, when trying to make a change.
- 3: On your birthday, and your birth month, your Mazal is stronger. (Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana 3;8. Sefer Shtem Esreh Mazalot)
- 4: Chovot Halevovot (Bitachon 3) teaches that a person should work and busy himself with what they are naturally good at and have a natural tendency for. That is your mazal, so work with it, not against it. Work in the field you love, with your eye focused on the bottom dollar and on serving your clients, not on your pride and prestige, and you will never need a vacation.



THE ART OF HOLDING BACK THE BARK

The best investment in a volatile place like Covidland is saying Perek Shira each day. Perek Shira, a compilation of praise from the elements of creation, is one of the most amazing segulot, with the greatest perks. A promise of longevity, financial stability, Olam Haba. A promise that you will learn, keep and teach Torah, be saved from your Evil Inclination, from Gehinom and bad occurrences. It brings your prayers up to the highest Heavens, brings you great goodness, protects you from sickness, and will give you a life as good as it will be in the times of Mashiach.

The end praise of all the creatures mentioned in Perek Shira, is that of the dogs. **קְלָבִים אוֹמְרִים בְּאוֹ** *The dogs, say, Come! Let us prostrate ourselves, bow our heads, bend our knees in front of YKVK, the One who makes us great.* This is so interesting, for a couple of reasons. 1. The only living creature mentioned in Perek Shira in plural form is the dogs. All other creatures are referred to in singular form, Snake, Rooster, Dove, Elephant, Lion, etc. 2. Why is it that all the praises of the Universe end, specifically, with the praise of the dogs? 3. Snake says, **סוֹמֵךְ יִקְנֶה לְכָל־הַנְּפֹלִים וְזוֹלָה לְכָל־הַכְּפוּפִים** *G-d supports all the fallen ones and makes those who are bowed down, erect.* This is appropriate for Snake, to be hopeful for his future. Wolf speaks of wrongdoing appropriate to its species, **עַל־כָּל־דְּבַר־פֶּשַׁע**. But why should the dogs be the “tzadikim” that call out to all others to come and praise G-d? This bothered “R’ Yeshaya”, a student of R Hanina Ben Dosa, so much, he fasted 85 fasts, equal to the numerical value of פה, Mouth. “How could it be that the dogs, that are considered brazen (Yeshaya 56;11), merit saying such praise?”

An angel told R’ Yeshaya that this secret was not to be revealed, but there would be an exception for him. It is not what the dogs did; it is what they did **not** do. During the Firstborn Plague, the dogs did not bark like they usually do when they see the Angel of Death in town. They did not disturb the Jews, who were rushing to pack their bags for the Exodus. They would be rewarded for their silence,

וּבִשְׂרָר בְּשִׂדָּה טְרֵפָה לֹא תֹאכְלוּ לְכָל־בְּשָׂרֵי אֲתוֹ *All unkosher meat – should be given to the dogs.* They are to be rewarded by having the parchments for Torah scrolls, Tefillin, and Mezuzah made from skins, processed in dog’s excrement. And they are to be rewarded with being the ones to end Perek Shira, praising and calling others to give praise. In the merit of the dogs going against their nature, keeping quiet for just that one night, they merited these HUGE, eternal rewards.

This explains a lot. All other creatures are referred to in the singular, for that is the original form of creation. But the Dogs were rewarded for what the Egyptian dogs **didn’t** do that night of the Egyptian plague. Of course, it is not the same dogs that get rewarded with the non-kosher meat for what was done that night. It is not the same dogs’ excrement being used for making the holy parchments. But this is to teach *us* the lesson from this brazen species that went against their nature that night and held themselves back: **how golden holding silence is.** As the angel finished, by saying **שֹׁמֵר פִּי וּלְשׁוֹנוֹ** *one who guards his mouth and tongue, guards himself from all harm.*

There is no greater praise to G-d than holding our tongue. **לֵךְ גְּמִיָּה תְהִלָּה**. The most significant praise to G-d is silence, acceptance, holding back “the bark”. The dogs merited for their silence, measure for measure, being the ones to sing and praise G-d, and calling others to join them. A person who holds his tongue to listen, who avoids speaking when it has no purpose or avoids adding that tactless comment – such a person is promised immeasurable reward. The reward for that one moment of silence is unfathomable, even to the greatest angels. (Vilna Gaon)

Holding your tongue when you are supposed to be rewarded, even more than passing all the ten tests of Avraham Avinu, and here is proof: when the Jews sinned and needed to be exiled, the transgressions were so great that they deserved never to come back to the Holy Land. Avraham Avinu attempts to defend the nation with the merits



of all the tests he passed; Yitzhak and Yaakov try to defend the nation... but nothing is strong enough to nullify the decree. But then, Rachel Imenu turns to G-d. In the merit of her silence, her not revealing that Leah was the bride – she won the case and saved the entire nation from the worst decrees!

Many tests that we go through are just tests of our ability to hold our tongue in disguise. Even the tests of Avraham were, to some degree, to see if he had enough faith to hold his tongue. He did not have much choice whether or not to sacrifice his son Yitzhak. If G-d wanted to take Yitzhak's life, there was nothing that Avraham could do. But the test was to see if Avraham would ask G-d about the apparent contradiction to G-d's previous words, that Avraham's offspring would be from Yitzhak. The test of going to the Promised Land and finding famine there was, also, a test to see if Avraham would say anything. When Eliezer made a deal with G-d that the girl that offers to give his camels to drink would be the girl for Yitzhak, and Rivka offered this service, Eliezer still waited until after she finished. Why? Eliezer wanted to see if Rivka would ask for something, even just a thank you, in return for her services. But when Rivka finished

giving the camels to drink, she turned around and started walking home, happy to be a nice, kind person. That is when Eliezer proposed Yitzhak to Rivka, after her silence! (Seforno)

Why is silence the strongest merit in the Universe? The answer is so profound. We constantly remind ourselves, in the Mitzvot we perform, that G-d took us out of Egypt. What is the purpose of this constant reminder of Exodus, which, if not understood, can even seem redundant? It is to constantly remind us that each Jew is G-d's Firstborn Son, and G-d cares while we suffer, even if He is "silent". And that G-d has a plan to reveal, soon, why He was silent for so long. As the Jews realized this at the splitting of the Sea, they sang *מי כמוכה בא-לים ה'* *Who can be compared to You among the gods, YKVK. R' Yishmael teaches, that this should be read, with a twist. מי כמוכה באלמים. Who is comparable to You G-d, amongst the mutes? No one can keep silent for so long, as G-d does. (Gittin 56b) And, all for a purpose, at the end. When G-d reveals Himself, He does so, in silence, קוֹל דְּמַמָּה דַּקָּה. (Melachim A:19,11-12) We have a Mitzvah to go in G-d's way, וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָיו, and part of this lifelong mission is mastering silence. (Hullin 89a)*

Selfie steps to master golden silence and hold back your bark:

1. Silence does not mean being a social outcast, anti-conversationalist, subject of abuse, never speaking up, or passive. Silence is the golden balance in People Skills called assertiveness, an art of standing up for your rights without stepping on anyone else's toes. Assertiveness is a delicate balance between the two ineffective extremes. Aggressiveness: Offensive, personal, judgmental, insulting, obnoxiously opinionated, over-responding. And Passiveness: Defensive: victimized, abused, mistreated, used, ignored, being withdrawn. Silence is speaking with C4 power: Constructive, Concise, Clarity and self-Control.
2. Patience is the key to master the art of speaking only what is effective and important. Holding the bark is the greatest challenge in life. But it is the key to focusing, humility, and fear of Heaven. One of the reasons why, at times, our prayers are not answered, is because we speak words without meaning and purpose. (See P. Yoetz שיחה)
3. Realize that G-d created His world with the most advanced, precise, built-in, voice to text speech recognition that writes every word ever said. After 120, Heaven reads you the sets and sets of unedited encyclopedias written from your speech. What a shame to see useless books of nonsense,



meaningless talk at the end of a lifetime. (Vayikra R. 26;7) Make sure that you speak words of meaning.

4. Judaism has a unique definition of a good conversationalist and a guideline to precisely what is effective schmoozing. Differentiate between rambling, which is negative, and rumbling, which is positive. Rambling is diverting from the original topic, purpose, or meaning of the conversation. Rumbling, literally means a continuous, deep, low sound. In People Skills, though, “rumbling” is an art of conversing with a continuous thought, with meaningful depth, and in a soft tone of voice. Rumbling is opening up an openminded conversation, even if it is a challenging conversation over a “messy topic” that makes you vulnerable. Rumbling is making conversation with the potential for some purposeful breakthrough, identifying a problem and solving it, or making someone feel good.

THE ART OF EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Martin Seligman, the author of Learned Optimism and founder of modern-day Positive Psychology, writes that successful people are usually positive people. Positive people are masters at the three Ps. They believe that 1. Problems are not **permanent**. 2. Problems are not worse than they are; they are not **pervasive**. 3. Positive people don't take things **personally**.

How does one who is disliked not take it personal? “My Rebbi/ teacher/ friend/boss/ in-laws doesn't like me anymore!” “No one wants to date my daughter/ son!” “Nobody likes Baalei Teshuva” “Nobody likes Sephardim” “Nobody likes Ashkenazim” “Nobody likes Jews” The thought that you are not wanted or liked, by family, by society or by the community, can scar. How do we train ourselves and others to cope with not being liked?

Judaism teaches us that if someone does not like us, it is because G-d does not want them to like us. And if someone does like us, it is because G-d allowed it. It is not that the person decided not to like you. It is that G-d does not want that person to be fond of you, for some reason. It has little to do with that person, and a lot to do with G-d, something that we learn from this week's parashah.

G-d could have taken us out of Egypt with one Plague. Instead, G-d preferred ten plagues to show humanity once and for all, that all of nature is subservient to Him. Exodus is a glimpse of how much G-d is involved in every part of our everyday

lives. When G-d introduced Himself at Mt. Sinai, He presented Himself as the G-d that took us out of Egypt, not as the G-d who created the Universe. Because G-d wants us to recognize Him as forever alive in our every breath, thought, and reality.

R Friedlander points to something that I felt that every Jew who feels disliked deserves to know. When G-d kept His promise to Avraham that his descendants would leave their slavery with great wealth, He did so in such an unusual way. G-d asked Moshe to tell the Jews to *borrow* goods from the Egyptians so that they leave with the not returned goods. The Egyptian neighbor, who until now was only disgusted from the Jew, was now ironically pleased to lend their best utensils and possessions to the Jews.

Why did G-d make this seemingly superfluous miracle? G-d could have forced the Egyptians to give up their possessions, even against their will! Why did G-d specifically want the Jew to borrow, and depend on the Egyptian being nice to him? Dependent on the Egyptian liking the Jew?

The answer is because G-d wanted the Jew to know that the antisemitism was only possible because He allowed it. Once G-d wanted it to stop, the Egyptians were happy to do favors for the Jew! All of a sudden, all the gentiles liked the Jews! G-d was showing the world, once and for all, that G-d is in charge if people will like you or dislike you!



Why did G-d want that the Egyptians should not like the Jews until the Exodus? Our Rabbis tell us that there was a reason for this. During the years of the Egyptian exile, the Jew would attempt to blend and be as Egyptian as possible. G-d did not want us to lose our Jewish identity in Egypt, so He caused the Egyptians to hate us. But now, that the Jews were at the Exodus, G-d wanted to show the Jew, that it was G-d who caused the Egyptian not to like the Jew! G-d preferred that the Jew borrows from the Egyptian, to show, that He is in control of who likes who.

The secret to emotional resilience is to bring G-d into the equation. If you are disliked, and you have no control over it, it is because G-d for whatever reason wills that this person dislikes you.

If you want to do great things and become great, you need to do what is right and ignore what people might say. You cannot anchor yourself on what people think is "normal." After all, there is no one "normal." "Normal" is only a setting on washing machines and dryers. If you follow the Torah's way and you are disliked, then G-d does not want you to be liked for some amazing but unknown reason. It is only to help you, not to hurt you. If you are being the best person you can be, and still you are not liked, G-d has His plan. Only by living this way, we can become emotionally resilient, and our child follow.

One of the most excellent questions to ask someone who is feeling not liked, not accepted, is, "Aside from G-d, which three or four people do you care what they think about what you do or what type of person you are?" If you cared about what everyone thought about you, you would become a slave to society!

I care what my Rebbi thinks about me. I care about what my Rabbi-mentor feels about me. I care what my wife, mother, and father think about me. That's it! From the moment that I embraced this new mindset, I felt like I free man. A real, personal, emotional Exodus!

I began meditating on not caring if others like me, so long I am doing the right thing. What a powerful

emotional exercise! Here are some of the thoughts that I came up with; some of them are empowering, and some are just funny!

I don't care if you tell me no when I ask you for a favor. I don't care if you don't want to donate to the causes that I feel important enough to get involved in and collect for. I don't care if you don't like my Sephardic accent, or the fact that I am a Jew. I don't care if no one responds to my ads of Effective Learning Specialist. I don't care if you don't like this article or the way I write.

Wow! That felt so good! That felt awesome to *think* that and *write* that! Can you feel the power in meditating on all the things that you really could not care about? Do you realize how emotionally liberating this can be? If G-d wants me to be disliked, and I am doing the right thing, it means that He has a reason for it!

Social media taught us that people could become addicted to checking if they are liked, and for the dumbest of things. How many hearts were broken because of the lack of a "like"? Whatsapp groups and status, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat have shown us how much people need to feel liked, by anyone, for anything. But what if it is all G-d? What if, for some reason, G-d does not want you to be popular in this area at the moment?

If you are liked or not, it is not "them"; it is G-d. That is what G-d wants. It could be a test, and it could be a blessing. Whatever it is, it is because that is what G-d decided.

So what are the Selfie Steps to cope with not being liked?

- Stop overthinking what you have no control over. Recognize that G-d can switch things around faster than you can blink! He changes people's hearts all the time.
- Meditate often on all the things you do not care about.



- Carefully choose the three or four people that you care what they think about your

decisions and behavior.

EMOTIONAL OXYGEN TUBES

At the beginning of the Parasha, before the plague of the locust, G-d tells Moshe, לָמַעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי-בְנֵי. I will bring these plagues on Pharaoh, in order for you to tell of it in the ears of your children and grandchildren. What was so special about the plague of the locust that only here, not in reference to any other plague, G-d said that we are to tell our children and grandchildren?

It is interesting. Each plague was a month. A week of plague and three weeks' break. That means that the plague of Firstborn was Nissan, Darkness was Adar, (ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר), And Locust was Shevat. Even before this plague of Locusts, in the beginning of Shevat, Pharaoh had tried to bargain. Let only the men go now. The children stay in Egypt. Only the men need to go to serve G-d, not the kids. Moshe said, nothing doing. We are not leaving anyone behind. So Pharaoh refused, and opted for the plague.

In essence, if we wanted to worry about our own spirituality, alone, we could have just left the children behind, for the meantime, while we go to Har Sinai and accept the Torah. But, by staying for another three months, until Pharaoh gave in, by slowing down our own spirituality for the sake of the spirituality of the children, we merited וְלָמַעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי-בְנֵי. The power of connection, that our children will be willing to listen to religion, and to trust in it enough, to pass it down to their own children. Because the only way we can affect our children, to keep them religious, is to slow down for them.

Slowing down does not mean lowering our own level of observance, for their sake. It means having patience with them; it means taking interest in their seemingly simple values. It means recognizing that they are not moving at our pace, and it requires us to learn what is on their mind. To be emotionally present with them.

There is a power-question I use when trying to connect with people. *What do you do in your spare time?* This question helps me find the values of the person I am trying to connect with. And in order for me to coach someone successfully, I need to build rapport. And rapport is dependent on how well you connect. It is a mistake to think, "I am too much above this", "My Shabbat table should be only Divrei Torah". If you want to influence, you need trust. If you want trust, you need rapport. If you want rapport, you need to slow down.

When R Moshe Feinstein came to test yeshiva bachurim on the Perek they learnt, R Moshe did not end up testing them. He asked them, What do you do in your spare time? They said, "We play basketball". R Moshe opened up the conversation: "In what ways can you play basketball like a Jew, differently from a Gentile?" Because R Moshe knew that to influence, you need rapport, you need to bond. To be Mekarev effectively, you cannot use the "Join Us" method. That one does not work. Effective Kiruv is about getting a person from his own point A to his own point B. From the Jew he is, to the Jew he wants to be. **ON THEIR TERMS.** Because *the only way you can connect*, is on their terms.

This reminds me of a story from Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. There was once a prince who went through an identity crisis and came to the conclusion that he was really a turkey and not a human being. The king was ready to do anything to cure his son. The finest doctors and psychiatrists tried to cure the prince, all to no avail. The king was at a loss, until a gentle-looking, wise man came to the palace. He offered his help, which the king and queen were ready to accept.

The following day, the prince had company under the table. It was the wise man. "What are you doing here?" asked the turkey prince. "Why are you here?" "I am a turkey" "Well, I am also a turkey," The wise man began to gobble like a



turkey and peck at the crumbs on the floor. The prince was convinced. A few days passed in this fashion.

One morning, the wise man signaled to the king to bring him a shirt. He said to the prince, "I don't see any reason a turkey can't wear a shirt." The prince thought about it and agreed, and soon the two of them were wearing shirts. The wise man asked to be brought a pair of pants. He said to the prince, "Is it forbidden for turkeys to wear pants? Of course not!" The prince thought it over and agreed, and soon the two of them were wearing pants.

The process continued. The wise man convinced the prince that it was not forbidden for turkeys to eat human food, which surely tasted better. Then came sitting at the table and enjoying human conversation. Within a short time, the turkey prince, although still maintaining that he was a turkey, began conducting himself exactly like a regular person.

So many times, we can't help others because we are so busy with our own spirituality, projects, or just busy being busy. Rabbi YY Jacobson said, in the name of his Rebbi, something very powerful. We know that Reuven saved Yosef from his brothers, by putting him in the pit. Then, the brothers sat down to eat lunch, and during lunch, Shimon and Levi decided to kill Yosef. Yehuda saved Yosef by selling him. Reuven came back to the pit, and Yosef was gone. Reuven tore his clothes, and asked his brothers what they had done. And, now, how was he to face his father?

Rashi asks, where was Reuven at the time of the sale? Why did he disappear when his brothers sat down for lunch? Because Reuven went to do his fasting, sackcloth and ashes, for his hasty act of moving his father's bed next to his mother, Leah's, so many years earlier.

THE P3 TREE MODEL OF THE SUCCESSFUL

On Tu B'shvat, we don't say Tachanun; we do not confess our sins, for it is a day of celebration. We celebrate the trees, חג לאילנות. It is considered a

But Reuven! You could have saved us all from 210 years of slavery in Egypt, if you would have just stayed there at the pit and watched over your brother! If you would not have been busy doing Teshuva, but instead, had kept your eyes on your brother in the pit, you could have gotten forgiveness for your mistake from your father, just by being responsible and saving your brother Yosef's life!!

How many times do we not notice our "brother in the pit", because we are too busy with our own lofty levels of spirituality? How many times in life could we have just said the right thing, or just done the right thing, if we would have not been so busy with our own selves??!!

This reminds me of a sad Mashal. Chaim had been a faithful Jew and was in the hospital, breathing his last. The family called their rabbi and asked him to be with them. As the rabbi stood next to the bed, old Chaim's condition appeared to deteriorate, and he motioned frantically for something to write on. The rabbi lovingly handed him a pen and a piece of paper, and Chaim used his last bit of energy to scribble a note before he died. The rabbi thought it best not to look at the note at that time, so he placed it in his jacket pocket.

At the funeral, as he was finishing his eulogy, he realized that he was wearing the same jacket that he had been wearing when Chaim died. He said, to himself and the crowd, "You know, Chaim handed me a note just before he died. I haven't looked at it, but knowing Chaim, I'm sure there's a word of inspiration there for us all." He opened the note, and read, "Hey, you're standing on my oxygen tube!"

How many times do we not realize that because we are so busy with our own growth, or with our "status", that we are stepping on the emotional oxygen tubes of our loved ones?

new year in regard to tithing. Why does the birthday of the tree fall at a time when it is bare of



fruit? Why does the birthday of the trees effect *our* saying or not saying Tachanun?

The Torah compares Man to a tree, כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה, for *The Man is a tree of the field* (Devarim 20; 19). Why? What is the parallel between a man and a tree? The secrets of life success can be learned from a tree. There are certain things in life that we can't understand without an analogy. The Torah uses the power of parable to explain the essence of life to Man. There are a few types of trees, as there are a few types of people. There are those who produce beautiful fruit, there are those who produce regular fruit, and there are those who do not produce at all. The secret of successful living is to learn from the life cycle of the tree, to bring out the best of oneself in life. It is broken down to P 3.

Successful people Project. They plan ahead, Projecting into the future. Most people overestimate what they can produce in a year and underestimate what they can produce in 5 years. The successful people project, in great detail, how things *can* look in 5 years from now, and work each day on attaining their new goal. They know what type of “fruits”, what type of life they want to have in five years from now. And in accordance to the dream, the vision, the Product, they know which seeds to plant, when to plant them, and where. They guard their time, like a hawk, to get the most out of every minute to get them where they want to be.

Successful people are aware of their Potential. The first Man was called Adam, because that expressed his essence. That he came from the Adamah, the earth, dirt. Sounds insulting? Yes, and no. If you do not see your potential, then you will return to the ground as earth. But earth has, also, a flip side. With earth, one can create so many amazing things. The parallel of Man to dirt is potential. There's another meaning concealed in the name “Adam”: man has a lofty potential of “*adameh*“, I will be similar to G-d; I will try to emulate Him.

This is the idea of being Tree-like. Successful people see if they have the right seeds, the right

strengths, to do what it takes. They have enough self-awareness to know clearly if they have the Potential to make these fruits develop. Now, once they see the potential, they celebrate. Because once you catch a glimpse of your potential, passion is born. The idea of Tu Bishvat is celebrating the potential.

And, the third P, successful people have Patience. According to Business Expert Brian Tracy, It takes 7 years to establish a successful business. The first two years, you lose money and time as you learn the new business. The next two years, you have enough experience to know what your Unique Selling Proposition is, and you start breaking even. The next three years, you are living comfortably, as you pay back your debt. Once you are seven years in the business, you have the experience you need to reach the top 10 percent of your field. Once you reach that, you will be earning 20 to 30 percent more than the average worker in your field. Any business that can be successfully built in a year or two will be met with a flooded market of competition. And you will always be under threat of strong competition, until you are able to become one of the top 10 percent experts of your field. So, you need patience, in order to build any healthy business.

We live in a Microwave generation, a Smartphone “scatterbrain” generation, and it has become extremely difficult to simply wait patiently for anything good, no matter how important. Whether it is Torah learning, business, Shalom Bayit, or raising wonderful children. But the trees that grow slowly, but steadily, tended with patience and care, bear the best fruit. A tree has a whole root system, beginning with very thin, hair-like roots and developing into thick ones. A Talmud scholar will not find himself rooted in Torah learning, if he keeps ripping out the tree from the ground to check if he is “getting anywhere”. The tree won't grow, and he won't see the fruits of labor.

And, one last analogy from human life to a tree. In Ramat Shlomo, Jerusalem, two weeks ago, the Jerusalem Municipality painted the parts of the trees where the non-productive branches had been



removed, with a blue glue/paint. My student asked me why. I responded that in order for the tree to give you its max, it needs every drop of water and energy to go up from the roots to the right places. If we want the tree to grow its best, the non-productive parts of the tree need to be sealed or closed off, so that they do not take away precious energy and materials necessary for growth.

In order for a person to grow, he has to be careful not to waste his time or energy. Now, generally speaking, no one “wastes” time. But people *spend* their time on actions that don’t give them high return, or actions that are not necessarily in line with what is important to them in life. Even when a person realizes the importance of using his time more effectively, often, he is unwilling to give up those time-wasters; he is hesitant to part with the “low-return” activities and exchange them for high-value tasks. In order for you to grow in the best way possible, for you to use your potential to the fullest, you need to invest your time only in those activities that bring you closer to your goal. According to Time Management specialist Michael Fortino, over an average lifetime, you will

A WORDLESS THOUGHT

There is one thing you can do to your child that is worse than smacking him in the face. There is one thing that will drive your spouse to distraction, even more than getting into a fight. This one thing is probably the most powerful relationship-tool you have. It can also build relationships, trust, and make you look wise. *It is so powerful that most of us do not know how and when to use it.* And, it is sometimes very difficult to implement it. **Silence.** It can be your most powerful position in a conversation. At times, it can be deafening. At times, it can be golden. Silence has an energy all of its own. It can force people to think. It can force people to act. You can attain this power now... Just read ahead.

The Chafetz Chaim says that silence is something which human beings must strive to master. It does not come easily. The Talmud (Megilla 18a) says: *מלה בסלע שתיקתא בתרי*, *a word is worth one gold coin. Silence is worth two.* There is

spend *seven* years in the bathroom. You will spend *six* years eating. You will spend *five* years waiting in lines. You will spend *four* years cleaning your house. You will spend *three* years in meetings. You will spend *one* year searching for things. You will spend *eight months* opening junk mail. You will spend *six months* sitting at red lights. You will spend *120 days* brushing your teeth. Whether you believe Michael or not, you can see how much time slips through our fingers without our realizing it. And on the weirdest of things.

So, I believe that, yes, a man is a tree. If you can see your whole life collectively like this, you might find the internal motivation to take control of your tree, to make it bear the best possible fruit. You will be able to see the process with one collective picture in your mind. And, you won’t need to say Tachanun, to focus on your shortcomings, because you will be focusing on the possible new you. You will be able to have the patience to cultivate your self-growth, as you celebrate your potential, even if you do not yet bear any fruit.

great power in the spoken word, but there is a far greater power in silence. This should not be taken to mean that a person should strive to be always quiet. It means knowing *when you are supposed to be silent.* A student once asked the Chazon Ish, “According to this piece of Talmud, if I am quiet the whole day, I get only two coins. But, if I talk the whole day, I get one for every word!?” The Chazon Ish answered, “You get two coins for *each time you keep silent when you have something that you want to say but do not need to say, or should not say.*”

It is hard to keep quiet, when you have something you want to desperately say, and you know that it will get you nowhere. We see an astounding thought in the parasha. The dogs did not bark when the Jews left Egypt, so as not to scare them. Also, the dogs did not bark in the Jewish neighborhoods during the plague of the first born. For this silence, they were rewarded in Parashat Mishpatim. **בשר**



Meat of an animal that is a treifah (A treifah is an animal that is slaughtered properly, but the animal was not able to live much longer due to a blemish, such as a hole in the lungs etc.) you may not eat. You should throw it to the dogs... Why the dogs? The midrashim tell us that they are forever rewarded for not barking during the exodus from Egypt. *For remaining silent...*

But what about the frogs? The frogs jumped into burning ovens in the second plague. And the Torah does not reward them for that! How can the dogs get rewarded for just remaining silent, while the frogs did not get anything, despite their having been ready to die? The answer is, *sometimes it is easier to jump into a fire than to stay quiet*. It is easier to be burned than it is to hold back your bark...

I sat with a young grandmother who was reminiscing about her earlier years of parenting. She sipped her coffee as she recalled, out loud, her experiences of raising one of her difficult children. This specific son had so much energy, wit, and brazenness. He got sent home from school more than he was sent to school from home. I asked the mother, a woman with patience and wisdom, if she was ever successful in getting this child to listen to her. "Never", she said, as she looked into her coffee. She was silent for a minute, as her eyes drifted. And then, she said, "Just once. Nothing was working. Even when my husband hit him. Even when we threatened him that he won't come on trips with us. And then, I gave him the silent treatment. I did not look at him, or answer him. I pretended he was not there. It went on for a few days... and then I got a phone call from his teacher. She said that my son is going crazy. He cried to the teacher like a little baby. He will do anything so that I will speak with him again. He just did not want to lose his mother... I put down some rules, which he kept for a little while. Ever since, he knew the score. Ever since, I was able to talk to him calmly, and somehow, he got passed those difficult years..."

In public speaking, or while teaching students, knowing how to use silence can be the deciding factor in your success. It is the instinctive knowledge when to pause while talking, while getting the audience into an emotional state that brings power to the communicated concept. Just standing there, confidently and silently, in front of them will magically cause all the people in your audience to quiet down and shift their focus in your direction. Just because you have the guts to stand there and face them all, silently.

Silence is even more powerful when you *stare* confidently. It can fend off verbal abuse more than almost anything you can answer back. One of my students used this technique of silently staring with a blank face when he needed a haircut on Erev Shavuot. The barber shop was fuller than full. The barber told him that none of the three barbers would be able to take him before Yom Tov. The barber was pushing off people that he could say "no" to. This student just stood there, silently, looking at the barber, who continued working. After four minutes, the barber said, "O K, I'll stick you in today. Just stop standing there, looking at me..."

Silence is the secret of powerful negotiators. They know when to be quiet, when to listen. They use quiet to get the other person to *feel uncomfortable* and to come up with a better offer, or to take action. You know what is the greatest thing you can do on a date, interview, negotiation, meeting, etc...? Get the other person to talk as much as possible, by asking them an open ended question (one to which they cannot give a short answer, like "yes" or "no"), and then just listen quietly and respectfully. The more you get the other person talking *while you sit there listening*, the more he or she, with whom you are trying to build a relationship, will find you interesting and smart. While coaching, I found that the greatest sessions are when I get the person I am coaching to do most of the talking. Something like 80/20.

One of my favorite coaching sessions went like this: The 20-year-old yeshiva boy had great difficulty talking to anyone in the world, except his



parents. He was down about himself, and also, he did not want to be pushed by his parents or teachers to start opening up to people. When we sat down together, I asked him to write on a piece of paper what bothers him the most in the world. He looked at me, looked around the room, not making a sound. *This silence went on for fifteen minutes!* I just sat there waiting. *If there is quiet, then there is thinking.* I hoped... (When it got hard to stay quiet like that, I started mumbling Tehillim very quietly – quietly enough so that he would not hear – just not to say anything!) After fifteen minutes, he picked up his pen to write something. He wrote, “I want people to stop running my life.” I said, “Now, change it into a positive statement... Try to state what you *do* want...” Again, fifteen minutes of

silence, and thinking. Suddenly, I heard him mumble, “I realized that no one is pushing me to do anything...” He was now smiling. He was in a much better mood. I did not say anything. I just asked the right question, and then remained quiet. End of session.

In marriage, some couples find it hard when there is quiet. They find it uncomfortable. The Kotzker once said, “Silence is the nicest sound.” Today, in the younger generation, people are not comfortable with silence, for they have no inner peace. For everyone, the most relaxing thing is silence. Even those who need to make noise also love silence. *They are just making noise to quiet down their inner noise.*

YOU MAY NOT KNOW

There is a joke that the kids say here in Israel.- *Father and son were going on a long walk together. The son asked his father, “Dad, why does fire rise upward?” His father answered, “I do not know, dear son.” A couple of minutes later, the son asked his father, “Dad, why is the sun yellow and not red?” The father answered, “I do not know, my dear son”. A little while later, the son asked his father a third question . “Dad, why is the sky blue?” “I don’t know, son”. The son was quiet for a couple of minutes. He then looked up to his father and asked, “Dad, does it bother you when I ask you questions?” The father answered him – “Son, if you do not ask, you will never know”.*

for you might make up something inaccurate, and you will be caught as a liar..” Rashi explains this behavior of Moshe, “If I say that the plague will begin precisely at midnight, the people who do not know exactly when midnight is might think that I was off by a couple of seconds, casting doubt on the accuracy of the prophecy . They might say that it was not an act of G-d. Better that I say that *I do not know* the exact split second when the plague will be, so that people will not make such a mistake.”

The Rebbe R’ Zusha brings out an important lesson from this weeks parasha, *a lesson for life*. G-d told Moshe in Egypt that at midnight, (בַּחצוֹת) *exactly at midnight*, will be the plague of the first born. Now, it is nearly impossible to know exactly when that is – the split, split second of it. On the other hand, when Moshe relayed the prophecy of the tenth plague, he did not say “at midnight”, but rather “approximately midnight” (כִּהְצֹת). This change needs explanation.

R’ Zusha was asked by his students: But Moshe *did know* when exactly the plague would begin. Why, then, did he say to them. “I don’t know”, if he really did know?

R’ Zusha answered his students that Moshe said “*I don’t know*” with all honesty. *He really did not know how to answer them in such a way that they would make no mistake about what he said.* A person may know *what* to say, but if he does not know how to say it so that the person he’s speaking to will understand him, it may just be better to say, “I don’t know”.

The Talmud in Berachot (4a) says that Moshe himself *did* know exactly when midnight is. Still, our rabbis tell us, למד לשונך לומר איני יודע שמה תבדה , ותאזר , *Get into the habit of saying “I don’t know,*

I have seen this happen all the time. People who are approached for advice in all areas of life – spiritual, physical, mental health, finance, child rearing and more answer questions without being



sure about what they are saying. They might sound smarter if they say first, “*I don’t know, but I believe...*” – If you are not sure, just say so. People will respect you more, not less. Not only that- when you are not sure that the person will be able to understand what you mean to say, you should also say, *I don’t know*.

I recently experienced this myself. A boy that I was coaching was in a life dilemma. He was pushing me for an answer to help him make his decision, but I answered him that this is not a “one liner”. In the meantime, I went to my rabbi and brought up the client’s question to the best of my understanding. The rabbi answered me, “I don’t know; I was never in the type of situations that this boy is dealing with, so I don’t know what to tell you.” We spoke about the problem for a while, and we came up with something that I could tell the boy. Then my Rabbi told me, “I know that this is the answer, but I don’t know how to say it to the person in such a way that he will understand what I am saying. And if he misunderstands me here, chances are that he will make the wrong decision,

A LESSON FROM AN OLD EGYPTIAN WOMAN

The human mind’s ability to believe whatever it wants against all odds is fascinating.

The Midrash Hagadol writes the following story: *Moshe prophesied in Egypt about the coming plague of the Firstborn. He mentioned that there will be a great outcry in all the land of Egypt, that there had never been anything like it until then and that there would never be anything like it again.*(Shemot 11;6) *An old Egyptian women approached Moshe and said: “Moshe, you are a false prophet! I am an old woman, and I do not have a father, brother, sister, son or daughter. I do not have anyone to cry for. When you said that all the land of Egypt will cry and scream, you lied. I will not cry. I will not scream.”*

Moshe answered her – “I swear – you will be the first to scream.”

The common practice in Egypt at that time was to sculpt the likeness of a deceased firstborn out of clay or dough to serve as a remembrance. This

under the mistaken impression that this is what I told him to do.”

What makes someone smart is not only what he knows; it is also “knowing what he doesn’t know”. I find this to be one of the greatest tools for learning. When there is something that you don’t understand, instead of just thinking about it or rehashing it in an attempt to figure it out, it is worth clarifying what you know about the subject first, and pinpointing exactly what you don’t know. Then, sometimes the brain just does wonders, and things start making sense. The problem is when we don’t understand – say, 25% of the information – and exaggerate, saying that we don’t understand the whole thing. Then we shut off our “learning engine” in despair and start “spacing out”, losing focus. But if we clarify first what we know, and see exactly what we don’t understand, things sometimes just start making sense. Then eventually, one can get up to 100% comprehension. This is a great learning tool. Try it. It works.

woman had had one son, a firstborn, who had died earlier. Every day, after she would eat and drink, this woman would stand and dance before the sculpture of her deceased son. (Egyptians revered their firstborn as gods.) She took her son’s sculpture upstairs to the roof, so that it would not be touched by the plague. She understood the words “for there was no house that did not have a dead person in it” (Shemot 12; 30) literally. She believed that Moshe’s prophecy did not include the firstborn that were outdoors in this plague. She thought that if she would bring her sculpture upstairs and place it on the roof, it would remain unharmed.

Sure enough, at the outset of the night of the plague, dogs came and dragged the bust of her firstborn around and then ate it up! She cried; she shrieked; she wailed. Her cries were heard all over the land of Egypt...(Midrash Hagadol). She was, indeed, the first to scream.



This is quite strange. What exactly was this woman's claim? She *did not have* a live firstborn. How could she have the audacity to approach Moshe and call him a liar? And who cares what this woman had to say, anyway, especially after Moshe's proven credibility due to the previous ten plagues that he had accurately predicted? Also, how did this woman's cry over her sculpture outweigh all the cries of all the Egyptian mothers who cried for the loss of their real live firstborn sons on that night?

I believe the answer is that this woman was in denial. She did not want to believe that G-d of the Universe was against the Egyptians. When someone is in denial, what is perceived by them as even a small question which casts doubt on the truth is enough to make them feel that they have validated their position. This old Egyptian woman found something in the words of Moshe that enabled her to prove, or at least, so she believed, that he was a false prophet. Once she found something seemingly inaccurate on which to focus, she would claim that the whole prophecy was bogus. When she saw that she was wrong, she cried louder than anyone else. This cry, the cry of one who realizes that he was in denial all along, is greater than the cry of one who has lost his firstborn.

We find that Moshe was extremely cautious not to leave any doubt or ambiguity in the words he

QUESTIONS OF THE COURAGEOUS

G-d asked of Moshe the following: *Please speak in the ears of the nation and they shall ask (borrow), a man from his friend and a woman from her friend, utensils of silver and of gold*(11;2). The Ibn Ezra (Shemot 12;35) writes that each person would ask for items according to his level of character(כפי מעלתו). He points out that we find, later, that the Nesiim (tribe leaders/representatives) asked to borrow special things that no one else was able to ask for. We see how they alone brought the *precious stones and the perfume and the oil in the preparation of the Mishkan*. They got these special items from the

prophesied. Although Moshe heard from G-d that the plague of the firstborn would take place exactly at midnight, Moshe did not convey the message that way. Instead, Moshe said "approximately midnight". This was because he feared that the Egyptians would deny his prophecy, saying that the plague was not midnight exactly. They would not be able to know precisely when midnight was, and they would say, instead, that Moshe was a phony.(Rashi 11;4)

There is no greater believer than the atheist. He believes – against all odds – that there is no G-d. He has no proof – just a handful of questions to challenge the opposite belief. The fact that there are many more questions challenging his own belief does not bother him in the slightest. That is what he chooses to believe.

So many times, we are in a position of preferring not to believe something that is hard (or inconvenient) for us to believe. We do not accept truisms that add to our responsibility. This is a shortcut to nowhere. In the end, when we see so clearly that we cannot possibly deny that we have made a mistake, the cry will be earth-shattering, like the cry of the woman who clung to her belief against all odds. It is so much healthier to face reality and to live with it. After all, that is all that is left. Reality.

Egyptians by asking them for it. No one else asked to "borrow" these special things.

The question here is, what privilege did the Nesiim have that they alone were able to ask for these special items? Couldn't *anyone* ask the Egyptians for such things? Did someone have to be on a high level of character even in order to ask to borrow these expensive commodities?

R' Chaim Chechik, zt"l, answers this question with a beautiful thought. The Jewish slave needed to muster up an enormous amount of courage to approach the Egyptians and to ask to borrow expensive things. After 210 years of slavery and

belittlement, humiliation and disgrace, the Egyptian Jewish slave, wearing his ripped and dirty blood-stained clothing was asked by G-d to simply walk up to the luxurious home of his masters and ask to borrow their most expensive household items. Many could not face what seemed to them to be an impossible assignment! Instead of asking to borrow the most expensive things in the house, they sufficed with asking for a simple pin or a salt shaker cover.

This low self image of the Egyptian Jew was exactly what Pharaoh had planned for: as evidenced in their difficulty to obey G-d's command and ask the Egyptians for their valuable possessions, many of the Egyptian Jews had lost their self esteem. Even idol worship was rampant among the Jews in Egypt. However, there were certain things that the Egyptian Jew would never give up. A Jewish name, the Jewish language and way of speech, and the Jewish way of dress. This is all the Jew had left.

But there were some Jews who were able to stand proudly, fully aware of who they really were. They had no problem asking for the most expensive item in their master's house. This required a great deal of courage from the Jew after the physical and emotional holocaust he had gone through. This is exactly what G-d wanted from before the Redemption. We find that in the original prophecy to Moshe by the burning bush, when G-d saw all the pain the Jews were enduring, he told Moshe, *"And a woman will borrow from her neighbor and from the one who resides with her utensils of silver and gold and clothes, and they will put it on your sons and daughters"* (Shemot 4:22). One may ask, although G-d was fulfilling his promise to Avraham that the Jews would leave Egypt with great wealth, why did He want it to be acquired specifically in this way, by the Jew having to ask his master to borrow his household items? And – who cares, in middle of such a holocaust, about such material things? Who is even thinking about

it? But, no. G-d wanted the Jew to muster up courage and even ask to borrow the favorite dress of his Master's wife. And, of course, we must take a closer look at these words. *And a woman will borrow from her neighbor... clothes and ... put it on your sons and daughters.* This is quite strange. How could the clothes of the Egyptian women be put on the Jewish children? Why not on the Jewish mothers?

I once heard a clever answer from a great Chassidic master: *This is because the clothes of the Egyptian mothers were not modest: short skirts and short sleeves.* This was not the style of the clothes of the Jewish women. But on their little daughters, such clothing fit, as on the children the skirts were long, and on little girls, the sleeve length was just right, modest enough for the righteous Jews of Egypt! Modest dress is what got us out of Egypt. Being proud of our modest identity. Being able to muster up courage to ask for that favorite dress, knowing that after the Egyptian woman lent it to her neighbor, she would see little Jewish girls wearing it. What determined the level of a Jew's greatness was the amount of courage and self pride he had *as a Jew*, despite all the Egyptian oppression. The Nesiim were able to stay proud enough to go right up to the richest and most powerful Egyptians and ask for the most expensive diamonds and rare stones of Egypt. And, of course, they got them. And this is because when a Jew believes in who he is despite what he has gone through or was put through, he can get very far. This courage and self-pride is probably what separated the Nesiim from all the rest. Courage. Jewish courage.

If only we could look into ourselves and ask the questions of the courageous. We have to ask ourselves to pull out the diamonds from within. We have to ask ourselves to reveal the beautiful personality that we have inside. The middot. The happiness of being a Jew. We have to insist upon our own recognition of the pride we have in our nation's past.

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