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## THE ART OF BELIEVING IN YOURSELF

One of the many life lessons we can learn from Yosef is to believe in your talents, even when the world tries to bury them. His ability to interpret dreams was not just a skill but an act of belief. Think about it: Yosef's own dreams, the ones that caused his brothers to hate him, were still unfulfilled. Yet, even after being sold into slavery and thrown into prison, Yosef trusted that his dreams—and his interpretations of others' dreams—were correct. When Pharaoh's butler and baker mentioned to him their troubling dreams, Yosef didn't hesitate to step into the role of interpreter. What? Yosef! You saw that your dreams and your interpretations of your dreams are false!! Give up this dream interpretation career!

Why did Yosef still interpret the dreams of the butler and the baker? Because he believed in himself. He believed that his abilities were G-d-given and that his struggles were part of a larger plan.

If there is one thing, we can learn from President Donald Trump is to be your own No. 1 fan, no matter if the world thinks of you as a lunatic. No matter what you are going through. Your struggles aren't here to break you; they're here to make you. This article is written, to strengthen just one belief. That the only limit to your impact is your imagination and commitment.

To believe in yourself, in your values, in the strengths G-d gave you, isn't arrogance; it's faith. Faith that the challenges you face are part of your unique story. Faith that your talents, experiences,

and struggles are all tools G-d gave you to fulfill your mission. From the pit of despair to the palace of Egypt, Yosef's belief in G-d's plan allowed him to rise above every challenge. It is all a question of focus. Focus on your mission, not your critics. Yosef's brothers doubted him, Potiphar's wife tried to destroy him, and no one trusted him that he was of moral character. Yet, Yosef stayed focused on his purpose. He knew he was meant to serve and protect. He knew how to build up people, as he supported the brothers from Bilha and Zilpah. He knew that G-d cared about him, and was with him, from the good smelling perfumes that the Yishmaelim who took him down to Egypt were carrying, not the usual tar that they transported. He knew that he had potential to lead, and that your potential isn't dependent on others' opinions; it's dependent on your actions.

Many have difficulty in believing in themselves when faced with adversity. Sometimes we need others to believe in us, and that will help us be the person we are meant to be. Rachel, wife of R' Akiva, believed in him, when no one else believed in him. All the Oral Torah, we have is in the merit of Rachel believing in R' Akiva, whose students wrote all the Mishna, Tosefta, Midrash, Zohar, etc. Rachel did not just see Akiva the shepherd, that everyone else saw. She saw the pillar of the Torah Shbaal Peh, Oral Torah.

We have Reish Lakish, because R' Yochanan believed in him. R' Yochanan did not just see Reish Lakish as the head of bandits. He saw the one who had the strength to challenge him in



learning, and become the pillar of challenging thought of the Talmud. Yosef, though, had no one to believe in him. All he had, was, that when his father heard his dreams, his father made a note of them. But Yosef knew, that your greatest breakthroughs come from your greatest breakdowns. The times when you've felt most alone, when you pushed your limits, are the times you grow the most.

What then, is holding us back from seeing our strengths, our talents? How did Yosef stick to his dream interpretations, stick to his good character, stick to believing in himself? He had a different approach to adversity in life than we do. Yosef went with the flow of life, not against it. Here is the mantra. Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. When you accept this, when you accept that life is not in our control, and everything that happens is part of making you the greatest you can become, that is when your strengths can come to light.

The Talmud tells us, in the story of R' Eliezer Ben R' Shimon, that he once insulted a man for his appearance. The man responded, "Go tell the Craftsman who made me". (Taanit 20 a-b) This lesson teaches us, that if you ever don't believe in yourself, in the talents and skills and strengths G-d has given you, go tell the Craftsman who made you. G-d crafted you, and G-d is only good. Don't let the thought, G-d has favorites, and I am not one of them, ever get into your head. Each and every person, is a portion of G-d-לך מן ה' , and has tremendous strengths. If you don't recognize this, it is because you don't believe in G-d, or you don't believe G-d is good to all, or you don't believe that G-d knows what he is doing. Sometimes, we need to shift our thinking to see this truism.

In career coaching, we learn about helping people find their strengths and develop those strengths. When we're faced with life's crossroads, the temptation to choose the easiest path can be overwhelming. It feels safe, predictable, and familiar—like stepping into a family business because it's "what's always been done." But is the easiest path always the best?

Stepping into the family business or following the easiest track in life might seem logical, but it often

limits growth. Studies on family businesses reveal that while the first generation builds, the second often struggles to sustain, and the third may undo the legacy entirely. Why? Because true success is rooted in passion, talent, and a willingness to innovate—not just inheritance. But people get into the trap of familiarity. And then they get stuck there, for too long. As the saying goes, Family is easy to hire, and hard to fire. We choose the easier option, the one that is familiar. But the easy track can keep you locked in mediocrity, ignoring your unique strengths and the potential for something greater. This reminds me of the words of Warren Buffett. "Chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken."

Yosef stepped out of the family business. He never reached his father to tell him that he is okay, because he knew that if G-d was not telling Yaakov through Ruach Hakodesh, then Yaakov was intended to go through not knowing where Yosef was for all those years. This was a Kaparah for Yaakov not doing the Mitzvah of Kibbud Av Vaem, for the exact amount of years that Yosef was away from his own father. Yosef looked at life, that the way things are, are the way things are supposed to be. So why tell Abba?

When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he told them twice, "I am Yosef." Why did he repeat himself? According to the Sfat Emet, Yosef wanted to reassure his brothers. They were overcome with guilt, thinking, "If Yosef is so great now, how much greater could he have been if we hadn't sold him?" But Yosef countered this by saying, "No, I am Yosef because of what I've been through. The pit, the slavery, the false accusations—those aren't detours from my greatness; they're the reasons for it."

The obstacle is the way. Teach this to your children and students, and show them that you believe in them no matter what. Many grow up disconnected from their true selves, unsure of their unique contributions to the world. This creates a cycle of frustration: we label people as "failing" or "not fitting in," when the real issue is that we've forced a circular soul into a square system. As Sir Ken Robinson famously said, "We are educating people out of their creativity." : Embrace the differences that make people stand out. One of my favorite



quotes by Albert Einstein is, “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid.”

Education systems and communities often operate like assembly lines, focusing on conformity rather than individuality. They prioritize the needs of the institution, the leaders, or the "status quo" over the unique voices and talents of the individuals within them. Education is not about filling a bucket but lighting a flame. Each person's flame burns differently, and it's the educator's role to help ignite it.

Sometimes, the road less traveled, is less traveled for a reason. Pioneers get shot, while settlers survive. It is scary to be out there, in the wildness of innovation alone on your journey. But just because you are alone on your journey, alone on your road less traveled, it does not mean you are wrong. Don't be afraid to follow your dreams, as long as you are connected with your strengths and talents. The reason why most people did not travel on your road, is either they did not have your strengths and talents, or they were afraid, or they were lazy,... but not because they failed. Fear kills more dreams than failure ever will.

Imagine. Commit. Believe.

### THE ART OF DISCONNECTING FROM YOUR NARRATIVE

Living like a Jew means living with a constant smile. Every Friday Night in Shul, the Hazan refers to the Jewish people, as עַם מְרֻשָּׁנִי עֲנֵנִי, a nation that is fattened with pleasure. Knowing that your Father has everything or can create everything you need, and can give it to you...knowing that He loves you more than anything in the world...knowing that He has only good in store for you is the message of the whole Torah. The three most important words in the Torah are בְּנֵי בְרָכִי יִשְׂרָאֵל. My first-born son is Yisrael! The whole Torah is one big build-up to tell you that you have an Abba, a Father, a Daddy, a Tatty Who is running the world- and you are His Firstborn Son!!!

This is your biggest battle in life as a Jew: to be able to smile no matter what you are going through, because everything is עֲנֵנִי, everything is pleasure! The life you live depends on the voice in your head. Here are the voices, the affirmations, that I try to adapt when going through hard times: “I trust the journey of my life and believe that everything is happening for my highest good. I am constantly growing and evolving, becoming the best version of myself. I am at ease with uncertainty and embrace change as an opportunity for growth. I forgive myself and others, letting go of the past to embrace the present. I am resilient, and I bounce back from setbacks stronger and wiser. I am in control of my thoughts and emotions, and I choose to focus on the positive. I

am confident, capable and ready to overcome any challenge that comes my way.”

These voices, these affirmations, need constant maintenance. As a Jew, you need to find hope, even when it does not look like there is any. As Avraham told his son who was on the way to being offered as a sacrifice, אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה-לְךָ הַעֲשֵׂה לְעֵלָּה, *Son! G-d will show us a sheep to offer as a sacrifice instead of you!* This is despite the fact that G-d told him to slaughter his son, and he was on the way to fulfill G-d's command! Avraham named the mountain, after that hope, יִקְנֶהוּ יְרָאָה, YKVK will show us. (See Radak) This hope is based on the fact that we know, that אין דבר רע יורד מן השמים, nothing bad comes from Heaven. (Midrashim) We don't question what G-d does, because He is our Father – and a child does not question what his father does.

After hearing that Yosef was spiritually okay, Yaakov said, רַב עוֹד-יוֹסֵף בְּנֵי הָיָי. These words are hard to explain in English. Simply, they may mean, “Enough! My son Joseph is still alive.” But the Midrash tells us something else. רַב כְּחוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף בְּנֵי שְׁכֵמָה צָרוֹת הִגִּיעוּהוּ וְעוֹדוֹנָו עוֹמֵד בְּצַדִּיקוֹ הִרְבָּה מִמֶּנִּי שְׁחַטְאֵתִי שֶׁאִמַּרְתִּי נִסְתָּרָה דְרָכֵי מֶה (Bereshit Rabba 94:3) “Yosef's power was great! So many hardships befell him, and he still stood in his righteousness, much more than I did, that I said, my ways are hidden from me.”



When Yosef sent a message to Yaakov that he was alive, he knew that in the first words he sent, he needed to let his father know that he was also spiritually alive. If Yaakov would hear that his son was alive, in Egypt, he might die of a heart attack, thinking that his son Yosef had fallen in his spirituality. So, Yosef told his brothers to tell their father, *כְּלִדְבָרֵי יוֹסֵף*, specifically his words: *אָנֹכִי יוֹסֵף הֲעוֹד אָבִי חַי*. Literally this means, “I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?” But this was actually three messages in one sentence: 1. I am Yosef. I am not Tzafnat Paneach. Despite all I went through, I kept my Jewish identity. 2. *הֲעוֹד* - I was given an additional letter to my name by the angel, Gavriel, *עֲדוּתוֹ בְּיְהוֹסֵף שְׁמוֹ בְּצִאתוֹ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שִׁפְתָּהּ לֹא־יִדְבַּעַת אֲשַׁמְעַ*. The night before I was rushed out of prison to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams, the angel Gavriel taught me 70 languages. I couldn’t grasp the languages, so the angel added a letter *ה* to my name, he called me *יהוסף*, Yehosef, and I could grasp the languages and face Pharaoh. *ה* – *עוֹד*, the letter Heh was added to my name by the angel. 3. *חַי* - Yaakov, my father is still alive. There are two opinions as to how King David, who was meant to be a stillborn, merited his 70 years. Either he received them from Adam, who lived 930 instead of 1000 years; or, he received them from three people. 5 years from Avraham, who lived 175 and not 180, like Yitzhak, 28 from Yaakov, who lived 33 years less than Yitzhak, 147 instead of 180, and 37 years from Yosef, who lived 110 instead of 147, like his father Yaakov. Yosef told his father the fact that *חַי*, the fact that Yaakov is still alive, and King David did not need to take from his life, is because King David will take from my life. This is to show my father that I am still spiritually safe - all in one sentence.

Tell my father that I am not an Egyptian Jew – Tzafnat Paneach, an American Jew - Joe, an Israeli Jew - Yossi, or even a Cool Jew – Jo Jo. I am a Jew that was in the worst places, and I did not budge from the way you brought me up.

Tell my father that all along, I was connected to angels; Gavriel was with me in jail! I did not fall into depression.

Tell my father that I look at my life, at the years I live and the years that are taken away from me: are all good. Even if I die before all my brothers, it is

all good. G-d took some years from my life to use for a greater plan, to give from my years to King David, the last 37 years of Yosef’s life.

When Yaakov heard this, he said, my son, is such a Tzaddik, GREATER THAN ME! I could not see G-d’s hand in my sorrows. I could not be connected to angels in hard times. I could not stay on the level of Yisrael; my name for the 22 years that my son was away was “downgraded” to Yaakov. And more than the amount of my years that I can offer to King David, my son Yosef can give! My son Yosef is greater than me!

So, when Yaakov was told by G-d to go down to Egypt to be with Yosef, G-d said, *וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמֵרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּקֶב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּבּוֹר*: He said Yaakov, Yaakov! Rashi says, that G-d was telling Yaakov, I love you so much, Dear Yaakov, Yaakov! The double usage of Yaakov’s name was the way that G-d told Yaakov “I loved you, all along!!!”

The pain and suffering that you went through was all to help you, to make your son king, to provide you food in the years of famine and to bring you and your family down to Egypt in a respectful fashion, and not in chains, as slaves! For 22 years, you may have felt that you were being punished that you had Yosef taken from you, and you may have thought that it was because you did not perform the mitzvah of Kibud Av Va-em to your parents Yitzhak and Rivka for 22 years. No! It was not a punishment! It was for your good!!!!

Yosef could have thought that all he went through was a punishment for slandering his brothers to his father. It could have appeared that there was punishment for Yosef and for Yaakov, but under the surface, it was all G-d’s greatest goodness!

When Yaakov met Pharaoh, Yaakov appeared so old that Pharaoh asked his age. Yaakov replied, saying that his life had been hard. For every word that Yaakov answered Pharaoh, he lost a year of life. To top that off, Yaakov even lost a year of life for every word that Pharaoh used when he brought up the fact that Yaakov looked old. A total of 33 years short of what he was supposed to live! The Midrash says that G-d held Yaakov accountable for

having a hard life, and for it even being *noticeable* on him that he had a hard life. “I saved you from Esav, from Lavan; I gave you back Dinah, and also Yosef - and you are complaining that you had a hard life?!?” (Bereshit Rabah 95)

If you are a Jew, and you are living the way a Jew is supposed to live, realizing that G-d is ***only good***, you smile throughout your entire life! The test of life is the test of Emunah. Even Avraham Avinu, who discovered G-d at the age of 3, knew G-d only at the age of 40, (Rambam Avodah Zara 1 3) and

only when he was 75, at the Brit Ben Habetarim, G-d found that he trusted in Him . וּמַצְאֵתָ אֶת־לִבְבִי . וְנֶאֱמָר לְפָנָיו וְכָרוֹת עִמּוֹ הַבְּרִית Emunah is a life long challenge.

The most important message we tell our children is the blessing that Yaakov gave his grandsons: הַמְלֵאךְ הַזֶּה אֲנִי מְפַלְגֶה I now realize, that ***G-d saves me from ALL EVIL, from ALL BAD***. Nothing bad will happen to you! Just smile, and see that you are עם מְרוֹשְׁנֵי עוֹנֵה, that you are a nation that is satiated with pleasure!!!!

## THE ART OF POWER

Important notice: Please read this article to yourself before reading this at the Shabbat table to the family!

Power can be good, and power can be bad. It depends on how you use it, and on what you use it. One of the popular self-help books of today, with both great reviews and horrible reviews, is a book called The 48 Laws of POWER. The book is a guide that shows the laws, of how to rise to power, how not to lose power, and what the causes were, for others, to rise to power, or to lose the power they had.

The first rule of power, is the rule, *Never outshine the Master*. Greene writes: *Always make those above you feel comfortably superior. In your desire to please or impress them, do not go too far in displaying your talents or you might accomplish the opposite – inspire fear and insecurity. Make your masters appear more brilliant than they are and you will attain the heights of power. Everyone has insecurities. When you show yourself in the world and display your talents, you naturally stir up all kinds of resentment, envy, and other manifestations of insecurity. This is to be expected. Although you cannot spend your life worrying about the petty feelings of others, with those above you, however, you must take a different approach: When it comes to power, outshining the master is perhaps the worst mistake of all.*

This rule of power, is so true in so many life areas. I did not read on to the other 48 rules in the book, after the first rule. I realized how true just this first

rule is, as I reflected on my own life. I actually lost my first job, because I disobeyed this rule. I outshined my boss, so I got fired. I was TOO good at my job, and I became too popular, way too fast.

In parenting for example, there comes a time, when your kids will teach you, who is boss. The Hebrew word for teenage, is נוער. And the Hebrew word for shaking something off, is also, נוער. Teenage is a time, when children shake their parents’ dominance and control off their backs, and they start to learn their own identity, as they become the masters of their own life decisions. This is a natural occurrence, and could be one of the most important steps of their development, as they learn independence. THEY will decide what they want and believe, who they respect and who their friends are, NOT you! Of course, you, the parent, can try and manipulate, you can try and guide, but in the end of the day, the teenager is the Master of what he/she believes, and who he/she associates themselves with. As important as the rule that “there are no secrets from parents” is, they are the Master of their secrets, NOT you! Even if you force a secret out of a child, eventually, the child will just learn how to be better at hiding secrets from you. If you, the parent, want that there should be no secrets from you, you must build that trust! You need to realize this truth and surrender: You are not your child’s boss. You are your child’s host for 20 years.

How depressing! How powerless! Are we all hopeless and helpless, doomed to the sad story of The Fiddler on The Roof?



The answer is, of course not. If you don't outshine the master, the master gives you power. If you show the teenager that you want their independence, but they need to build trust, for you to be lighter on the reigns... you are in a better position of power over the child. The more you give choice to the child, safe choice, the more you empower your child in a safe way, the more the child will turn to you for guidance. Because you served the real Master over their choice, which is your child, you served his need to make his/her own life decisions. The sad thing, is, that some parents don't pick up on the signs of נער , of the child's need for becoming more independent, and they don't realize that their child has reached the age, that they need to be trusted, as long as they are not hurting themselves physically, spiritually or emotionally.

Where do we find this rule of power in the Torah, never to outshine the Master? In the story of Yosef. The Talmud teaches, Megillah 16b, תעלא בעידיה, Which means, *When fox becomes king, you need to bow to it, serve it, and buckle under it.* The Talmud teaches this regarding the brothers bowing to Yosef. More precisely, the Talmud tells us, that this is referring to Yaakov, the "lion" who bowed to Yosef, the "fox", when Yosef came to visit Yaakov when Yaakov was on his deathbed. Yaakov needed his son Yosef, to promise him that he would bring his body back to the Holy Land, and bury him in Maarat Hamachpela. Yosef had that power, he was the master, and so, Yaakov bowed to Yosef.

The Midrash teaches, *What has G-d been doing since Creation? He has been flipping ladders!* הקדוש ברוך הוא יושב ועושה סולמות משפיל לזה ומרים לזה ומוריד לזה ומעלה לזה, הוי אומר (תהלים עה) אלקים שופט זה וזה ירים (Bereshit Rabbah Vayetze 68 4) In life, people who are on the "top of the ladder", eventually fall to the bottom, and the people that are on the bottom end up being flipped to the top. The banana boats of the Syrian Community, became the Luxury Liners. אין לך אדם שאין לו שעה. There is no person, who doesn't have his time of power.(Avot 4;3) This means that if one feels powerless in any situation, look for the one who has power in the present, and buckle down under that power, and you will gain some power back.

That person who has the power, is not always clearly identifiable. The masters keep changing, the ladders keep flipping. In fundraising for example, I was taught in fundraising school, to respect with utmost respect, the donor's secretary. One Rabbi in Israel, complained to me that he could not get into a certain donor, because the secretary acted to him in such a nasty way. "That secretary is such a dog!" I told him, next time you go to that office, pet that dog, give that dog respect, understand the dog, bring the dog a present... He came back to Israel with a 100,000 dollar donation. I asked him what he did. He said, he became that dog's best friend!

The biggest lesson of history, is that people do not learn lessons from history. Antisemitism has repeated itself, throughout the generations, especially in places where Jews outshined their hosts, the gentiles of the countries they were guests in, on their journey throughout the ages of Exile. When we have fancier cars, houses, clothing, vacations, restaurants, we are outshining our masters, our hosts, and the power of the Jews is eventually overthrown. The Peleh Yoetz quotes the Abarbanel, who takes responsibility for the Spanish Inquisition. "The Spanish Inquisition, of 1492,... it was all my fault!" The Abarbanel was the treasurer of Spain. He was very close to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. The Abarbanel was richer than the King and Queen, and his wife's ring had on it the Abarbanel stone, that was more valuable than the stone of the Queen, herself! This jealousy is what took over Queen Isabella, who pushed for the Inquisition. "If only I had lived more modestly, the whole Inquisition would never have happened."

This is what Yaakov told his sons, when they went down to Egypt, וַיִּרְא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יִשְׁכַּר בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר, When Yaakov sent his children down to Egypt, he warned them, not to show off that they are satiated and full, while everyone else is hungry. This is the lesson for all of us in Exile. Yaakov's lesson to his children going into Exile is just this: Don't show off, when the gentiles don't have. (see Peleh Yoetz -Galut)

The Talmud in Bava Batra 73b, gives the Mashal to this. *Rabbah Bar Hanna said, when out at sea, we saw a big fish, that stood in one place for a long time... It stood for so long, until sand and dirt piled up on its back, and grass grew upon it. We thought*



*it was dry land, and we went up on its back. We baked and cooked on its back, and when the heat from the fires we made was too much on its back, the fish turned over, and we all fell into the water... If there was not a nearby boat, we would have all drowned.* This is the story of the Jews throughout exile. We get too comfortable in our foreign lands, we outshine our masters, until we get thrown out into the sea. According to the first Belzhe Rebbe, this is why we stamp our feat in Shul, when we hear Haman and Amalek. To teach our children, always be ready to run in exile, always have your passports ready, so that when Haman and Amalek arise, you will just leave everything behind.

Grandpa Gary, my mother's father, was an 8 year old boy, in Bonn, Germany, on the night of Kristallnacht. He was coming home from Mincha-Maariv with his father, Great Grandpa Will, when it all happened. That night, Great Grandma Roselle (Sarah), realized they needed to go into hiding from the Nazis, until they got the necessary papers to leave. She was the head manager of a chain of shoe stores, and she always treated the people who worked under her, with respect and dignity. One of the employees, the head cashier, told her, if you ever want to hide from the Nazis, you can't stay by me, because the Nazis are probably going to check me as I am a potential suspect because I worked under you... but you can stay by my uncle's cellar, Uncle Fritz." They stayed there, from Kristallnacht, from Nov 10<sup>th</sup> until May, for 6 months. They did not see the light of day, until they got their passes to leave. (Grandpa Will already applied for those papers before Kristallnacht, as papers to England

and United States were possible for domestic workers. Although Grandma Roselle did not think that it was so important to apply for papers, she did not think that things would spiral downward in Germany so badly and so fast, but Grandpa Will already applied for them, anyway.) My Great Grandma knew, who is the real Master, and always treated her German workers, as if, they are the master. The result: the life of her family was saved, and I am here to write this article.

The biggest mistake that managers make, is that they think that when you are boss, you don't have a boss! They don't realize, that their boss, is the customer! The customer is your Master. What built up Amazon to the mammoth retailer it became, was probably this approach. Customer is King. Exceed the client's expectations, with customer service and support. This made Amazon king of commerce, by realizing who the real master is, and serving the master better than everyone else. The second boss the boss has, is the team that works under boss! As Andrew Carnegie said, *Burn down my factories, and I will just build another factory across the street. But if you take away my workers, my factories will grow weeds!* When a manager outshines those they delegate to, and does not empower those under them, or when a manager does not listen to the issues and concerns of the team he or she hired, and does not want to hear their feedback, they can bring down their entire company or organization. *Not* everyone is replaceable, and those who are dedicated to the mission, are *not* just cogs on a wheel.

## THE ART OF OVERCOMING

Parashat Vayigash is probably the most emotionally intense parasha in the whole Torah. And, I learnt about the most intense moment, only this year. At the climax of the story, Yehuda explains to his brother Yosef, who appears to be an intransigent Egyptian leader, how hard it will be for his father Yaakov, to lose Binyamin. He says something that blows my mind. וַיֹּאמֶר עֲבָדְךָ אֲבִי אֵלַינִי וַיֹּאמֶר עֲבָדְךָ אֲבִי אֵלַינִי “And your servant, my father (Yaakov), said to us, ‘You know, that my wife bore to me two children.’”

Why didn't Yaakov say to his sons, ‘You know that Rachel gave birth to two children?’ Why did Yaakov say, My wife bore me only two children?! As if Yaakov's other wife, Leah, was not really his wife?! As if Leah's children were not his children?! The Ramban, Rabbeinu Bachye, Malbim, all explain that Yehuda told this Egyptian leader that their father had said that Rachel was Yaakov's only “real” wife, the only one that he had chosen. Yosef and Binyamin were Yaakov's only *real* children. Yaakov was *tricked* into marrying Leah.



How hurtful for Yehuda and the rest of the brothers to feel, that their mother Leah was never really wanted? And that they were considered on the same level as the children of the handmaids? Wasn't this exactly what they feared and what caused them to sell Yosef?! How can it be that Yehuda stills love his father and calls him, *my father*?!! And if that wasn't painful enough for Yehuda, Yehuda was telling this tough Egyptian leader that he was willing to give up his life to save the life of Binyamin, ... and Yaakov had actually given his consent and agreed to this, as if Binyamin's blood is redder than Yehuda's?!?! How much more pain and insult does Yehuda need to take from his father Yaakov?

Let us set things straight. Chas Veshalom to think that Yaakov did not love Leah, or did not love the other ten tribes! After all, he gave them beautiful berachot before he died, giving royalty to Yehuda, priesthood and leadership to Levi - (וְאֶפְרַיִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל - (וְאֶפְרַיִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל - (וְאֶפְרַיִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל) Leah clearly told Rachel ותאמר לה המעט קחתה את אישי וקחתת גם את דודאי בני (וְאֶפְרַיִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל) meaning, that Leah perceived, after she married Yaakov, that it was a sign from G-d that she was able to change her fate, and that Yaakov *became* her intended. When Lavan switched Rachel for Leah, Rachel never told Leah that she was giving her the “simanim”, the signs Yaakov made up with her. The “signs” were the laws of Jewish family purity, and Rachel just taught her sister Leah the laws, without telling her that she was giving her the signs. (Rav Shwadron) Yaakov loved all of his children equally. The only “big” parenting mistake Yaakov ever made was just a few threads that Yaakov added to the cloak of Yosef, more than was added to the cloak of the brothers. The result of this was that our forefathers went down to Egypt and suffered the bitter 210 years of slavery there. (Shabbat 10b) But other than that, Yaakov was the best father and husband ever!!!! So what did Yaakov actually mean, when he said something so insulting?

Yaakov did not want to take Leah, as he did not want to take anything from Esav. The only wife that was meant for Yaakov was Rachel. If Esav would live up to his spiritual part, he was supposed

to split with Yaakov, 6 tribes for Yaakov, and 6 for Esav.

Yaakov held all his children accountable for each other, always. When Shimon and Levi annihilated all the males in the city of Shechem on their Bar Mitzvah, acting as “brothers”, so that ‘their sister’ Dinah should not be treated like a harlot, Yaakov held them accountable on his deathbed: Why couldn't they act like a brother for Yosef, as well, when he was crying for help in the pit?? That is what Yaakov meant, שמעון ולוי אחים, Shimon and Levi, you are brothers only to Leah's children, not to Rachel's children?!?

But that is not how Yehuda felt. He understood his father to be saying that his only wife was Rachel, and it was painful, until Yehuda turned everything around, inside, something that made him deserving of royalty.

In my “people skills” course, I teach that there are three needs that all people have. They are called URL. People need to feel Understood. They need to feel Respected. And they need to feel Loved. The way to supply these three is through Triple A. Attention, Appreciation, Affection. Attention – will make someone feel Understood. Appreciation will make them feel Respected. Affection will make them feel Loved. The way to “win friends and influence people” is by trying to give these A's as much as you can, and take them from others, only sparingly. (See Orchot Tzaddikim; Ahava; ובאיזה דרך)

But what are we supposed to do when the people we expected to love us, appreciate us, or understand us, don't? What if your father, mother, family, or teacher did not love you, appreciate you, or understand you? You have a basic emotional need that was not met. Yehuda, here, is teaching all of us a lesson. Being loved as a child, being loved by your father, is a basic emotional need. Despite that, when someone grows up with a lack of love, this does not have to break them. On the contrary: it could actually be a catalyst to build them.

Psychologists and studies tell us that people who grew up feeling unloved, not appreciated and not





understood, have a lot to overcome. As they approach adulthood, they can feel not good enough, unwanted, unsafe, untrusting, rejected, neglected, abandoned, criticized, codependent and seeking 'comfortably uncomfortable' relationships, or living alone. If the love they received was conditional, they can suffer from fear of failure and insecurity.

The Torah teaches, though, that man is created in G-d's Image, and a broken child can recreate himself. The grown-up, unloved child has a choice. The unloved child can choose to begin to learn how much each and every human is loved by G-d, more than all the love from any other source in the world. And everyone deserves self-love, self-care and self-confidence.

Although it is challenging, a person can choose to use the painful past to empower them for the future. For example, since love is something they are still trying to figure out, they don't have only one language of love; they can understand and be sensitive, give love to others, while being in tune to the fact that everyone has their own "love language". Verbally, (I love you), virtually (presents), touch (hugs and kisses), taste (restaurant, treats, helping out in the kitchen, making desired dishes), time (quality time alone, listening) and effort (errands, helping in and out of the house.)

They don't want any one treated the way they were treated, as nobody deserves to go through what they went through. And they know that it takes a long time to build trust that one is loved. They know that children need love, especially when they have done nothing to actually earn it, and that children who need love the most will always ask for it in the most unloving ways. They know better than anyone else that a child needs someone to be their protector, friend, confidant, proud of them, and to be their fan. Those who were deprived from the time that they were dependent upon their parents know that the way you spell love is T I M E, and the greatest gifts you can give your children are love, attention, and confidence.

It was very painful for Yehuda. But now, from his own experience with Tamar, Yehuda understood, clearly, that G-d is the One Who will decide who you marry and who will be the mother of your children, not you. Yehuda now chose not to look for love, but to *give* love, to protect and be loyal to those from whom he did not receive it. He was ready to ignore the "fact" that he was never really wanted by his own father, and put himself on the line for those who had never put themselves on the line for him. He was even willing to give up his own life for the life of Binyamin, as if Binyamin's blood was more valuable than his own!

The fact that you were not loved can be what will make you weak, or what will make you strong! You can learn to look past it all. Something that made Yehuda regal, and empowered his descendant, David Hamelech, to be royal.

Until he was 28, King David's own father and brothers assumed that he was a Mamzer, an illegitimate child. מִזְרֵם הָיִיתִי לְאִמִּי וְנִכְרִי לְבִנִי אִמִּי (Tehillim 69; see Yosef Tehilot) David's mother, Nitzbat bat Adiel, was a great woman, and Yishai, David's father separated from her for three years, because he was concerned that his grandmother Ruth, a Moabite, was not actually permitted to marry his grandfather Boaz. If that were true, it would have made it impossible for Yishai to stay married to Nitzbat. But the maidservant of Yishai did not feel comfortable taking Nitzbat's husband, so she planned with Nitzbat that the latter would become pregnant from Yishai, instead of herself, something known to no one. (Nitzbat bat Adiel was such a holy woman that there is a segulah, to have G-d answer your prayers, to say her name 17 times. (Pachad Yitzchak 87) David was sent to the fields by his brothers to shepherd the family flock, in the most dangerous places, surrounded by lions and bears. But he did not break. Why??? כִּי־אָבִי וְאִמִּי עָזְבוּנִי וְיִקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמִי (Tehillim 27) If no one loves me, G-d will lift me up and take care of me!!!! Shmuel appointed him king, while prophesizing that he was a legitimate son Yishai, only at the age 28! (See Me'am Lo'ez Shmuel A,16, 11) For the first 28 years of his life, King David felt that the only one who loved him in the world was G-d, and he used



this to empower him to become the person he became.

### The Art of J.O.M.O. (2020)

Sometimes I wonder if I am the only person in Israel who is not planning a trip to Dubai. I was brought up in a culture that feeds the FOMO fear. Fear of missing out. If you could go somewhere cool, why not? If you could have something cool, why not? Even if you do not need to go there, or have that item. Just because everyone else is doing or having.

Recently, a book has been published, the "Joy of Missing Out," written by a Danish professor, discounting the belief of many Americans - that more is better. This book is a cold-water shower on the Western mindset that has brought us to the brink of disasters on global levels (like global warming, hoarding, depletion of ecosystems, etc.) and has already caused personal disasters (divorce, family feuds, stress, jealousy, guilt, fear, conformity, etc.). Western culture has created a lifestyle where "winning isn't the only thing: it is everything." This book claims that from childhood, America teaches us to want all the wrong things - a house in the suburbs with a three-car garage, a Mercedes or Lexus, perhaps both, exotic vacations... Why is this so bad? We lost the validation of quiet, of singularity, of living the life "I" love, and have become accustomed to looking outside of ourselves to find meaning in life and in things we want: if others have it, it probably has a purpose. We look outside ourselves to meet standards and expectations in every area of human achievement. If we can't keep up with the Joneses and their pursuit of materialistic happiness, no matter how successful we are in our unique own way, we label ourselves as a failure. How dumb.

This is almost as dumb as the forty-year-old bridge that was just taken down in the Ramat Eshkol neighborhood, on Karl Neter Street. The Municipality built the bridge the wrong way! The bridge was supposed to be a crosswalk for pedestrians over the busy Levi Eshkol Blvd. for school children, crossing from Ramat Eshkol to their school in Maalot Dafna. There were many accidents in the area, and the pedestrian bridge

was, and is, badly needed. Instead, the bridge was built to cross over a side street in Ramat Eshkol, which is of no help to anyone, in any way, whatsoever. This Karl Netter bridge teaches us that people can spend 40 years of their lives building bridges, and at 120, they realize that they were built the wrong way, in the wrong place, and those bridges got them to where they never needed to go, or led them to live a life they never really loved. If I do not have something, and someone else has it, good for him... and better for me! G-d wants us to live in that mindset that, if I don't have something, or I can't go somewhere, *Hakol Beseder!* i.e., everything in life has a *Seder*, an order. G-d is in control of everything.

When Pharaoh said to Yosef, I heard that you know how to interpret dreams, Yosef responded, "It is not me; it is G-d." What? Yosef, are you crazy?!? You are in jail for life. Now is your time, your only chance! Show Pharaoh how smart you are, or, at least, credit G-d *after* you get out of your mess!

Yosef introduced self-restraint to the world, the first mention of restraint, *איפוק* in the Torah, is in reference to Yosef. Yosef used restraint in according due credit to G-d. Even if it may seem that doing so was not for his own good, Yosef was faithful to the Big Boss. This actually brought Pharaoh to trust in Yosef to work for him and to be the one who would teach both Pharaoh and the Egyptian people how to use the restraint that was needed, to help them through the years of famine. To be *לְאֵב לְפָרְעֹה וּלְאֶדֹן לְכָל-בְּיֹתוֹ וּמִשְׁלַבְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם*: a teacher to Pharaoh, and a master to his whole house, and a ruler in all of the land of Egypt. Yosef told his brothers to relay this message, of his standing in Egypt, to his father Yaakov. Why would Yaakov care that his son, who was his top student, had become Ruler of Egypt! Phew! That was not an achievement for Yosef, in Yaakov's eyes! But Yosef was telling his father, *I did not only rule over Egypt, I ruled over the WHOLE of*



*Egypt, i.e., I ruled over myself. I taught the whole Egypt self-restraint.*

The Midrash tells us exactly why G-d gave Yosef this power and success. It was all in the merit of his restraint with Potiphar's wife. (Y. Shimoni Miketz 50;1) Yosef did not get this position from Heaven, gratis. He earned it. If Yosef could practice self-restraint with Potiphar's wife, he would be the perfect candidate to lead Egypt to live 7 years of self-restraint during the 7 years of plenty. Yaakov knew deep down, that all along Yosef was alive (see 44;28); he even wrote down Yosef's dream, knowing that it would come true. (37;11) He just did not think he would ever see him as *G-d fearing* again. (48;11) Yaakov was worried sick that Yosef was not *spiritually* alive. Yaakov's spirit was revived, when he said, רַב עוֹד־יִסְתָּר בְּנֵי הָאֵל. This *passuk* means that Yosef's power was great in staying a Tzaddik, despite the difficulties he went through. (B. Rabba) Yosef is *spiritually alive!* Yosef lives with G-d in his life, a life of *Hakol Beseder*, and this empowered Yosef to practice self-restraint. When Yosef finally has a chance to take revenge on his brothers, he promises them not to worry, because **G-d** sent me to Egypt; it wasn't you! Living with G-d is the secret to self-restraint, not to take revenge, and to master J.O.M.O. This is the secret of our Forefathers and what made them so great: that "*Hakol Beseder*" - G-d has a plan for everything. When Yaakov met Yosef for the first time, after so many years of absence, the joy was so great that Yaakov wanted to restrain that precious moment to connect with G-d, to live the moment with Him. This concept of living with G-d is the whole idea of *Tefillah, prayer*. If you do not have this in mind when you are praying, it is as if you did not pray. (R' Chaim Halevi H. *Tefillah*)

This "*Hakol Beseder*" mindset empowered Yosef to have אִיפּוּק, restraint. He exercised restraint, in general, and in many instances it is recorded in the parasha. Instead of revealing himself to the brothers immediately, he awaited the moment when his brothers would master the trait of caring

for each other. (If there is unity, brotherhood, G-d has mercy, even on idol worshippers. See Rashi 11;9) In contrast, if Yosef did not have אִיפּוּק, he could not bear seeing his brothers embarrassed in front of the Egyptians when he revealed himself to them. In order for there to be brotherhood, the brothers needed to practice self-restraint. There is just one other time in Tanach that this word, אִיפּוּק, restraint, is used, and our Rabbis tell us to compare and contrast between the two. וַיִּתְאַפֵּק הָמָן. And Haman held himself back from killing Mordechai.

Haman was the antithesis of the *Hakol Beseder* mindset. How long did Haman hold himself back from implementing his plan to kill Mordechai? Just a couple of hours. From after his first meal with King Achashverosh and Queen Esther, until he started to build the tree to hang Mordechai; and when he finished, he headed straight to King Achashverosh for permission to proceed with the hanging, at 1 a.m.! Haman, why can't you wait until the morning? Every minute that Mordechai existed drove Haman mad! Haman could not go to sleep, or wait until tomorrow! If Haman had just a little patience, he would not have been around when Achashverosh was looking for advice on how to reward Mordechai. He would not have to parade Mordechai around on Achashverosh's horse! He would not have built the gallows, which he did not have permission to build, those very gallows that would now be ready for Haman to be hung upon!

In the merit of Yosef's restraint with Potiphar's wife, וַיִּגְדַּם הַקְּוִצָּה, we were able to cross the Yam Suf. הַיָּם רָאָה וַיִּגְדַּם. Punishment for extramarital relationships is חֲנֹק, choking, so in the merit of Yosef's restraint, measure for measure, we were saved from drowning at sea, which is a form of choking. (See Kli Yakar Breshit 39;12) Yosef taught us that the way to save yourself emotionally and spiritually, to save your brotherhood, to save your future, and the future of your nation, is through self-restraint, and through the joy of missing out.

**Selfie steps to master the art of J.O.M.O.**



1. Adapt the “*Hakol Beseder*” mindset. If for whatever reason, they are going and you're not, if they have and you don't, it is best for you. Nothing could be better for you, and be genuinely happy for them!
2. When you can't have something that others have, pause and become aware. Ask yourself if you actually need it, or if you just want it, and if it is good for you.
3. The world around us is increasingly encouraging greed and devaluing restraint. Connect with G-d. Bring G-d into your life. Enjoy your relationship with Him when you pray, when you serve Him, and empower yourself to say no to what you don't need or does not serve you any purpose.
4. Look inward, to find your unique version of success, and build your bridges to get you to the life you love.

### THE POWER OF N.A.G.

Self-help that the Torah offers is always more effective and genuine than the self-help ideas of the Gentiles. It is always an octave above. That is the idea of eight nights of Chanukah, and it is the concept that we fought the Greeks about. We fought for being on a different octave, a different level of a person, a *ישראל-ל*.

The only way we can actualize this higher spiritual level, is through the key element called happiness. In the Jewish religion, one is punished for not serving G-d with joy (see Devarim 28; 47), for not being cognizant that it is an honor, a precious gift, to have a relationship with the Almighty G-d. If your religion is down, not vibrant, not full of excitement, it is not authentic Judaism. Because when you are down, your connection is down. Even a man as great as Yaakov Avinu, who was on the level of an angel, when he was down about losing Yosef, he lost his *Ruach Hakodesh*, his high-level connection.

למנצח מזמור לדוד בבה אליו נתן הנביא (Psalm 51) When David Hamelech was reprimanded by Natan Hanavi for his act with Bat Sheva, he composed a *Mizmor* for his own *Teshuvah* and for all those who will repent in future generations. Why does David call it a *Mizmor*? Why isn't it a קינה, a lamentation? The answer is that even to do *Teshuvah*, you need to get into a positive state. King David knew that you can't change if you are down.

Rav Wolbe ztz'l writes that the challenge of learning *mussar* is that when you realize how wrong you were, how you lied to yourself for so long, and in such a bad way, it is hard not to feel

guilty, down and depressed (AleI Shur 2 161). And when someone takes *mussar* as a “guilt trip,” instead of using it to bring him to awareness, he can't change. One of the greatest challenges for the coach is to help the client see his shortcomings, while keeping him positive. A big enough, strong enough person, faces his biggest mistakes, his biggest lies and says “I am happy I realize how wrong I was, because I am big enough to take responsibility, to leave the past, and make a new beginning.” This mindset is fundamental to learning *mussar*.

The Baal Shem Tov (צוואת הריב"ש) would teach that sometimes the *Yetzer Hara* dresses up as your Rebbe, Mashgiach, *Yetzer haTov*, etc., and makes you feel bad – that you could be greater, holier, more religious - that you should be on a higher level than you are. Why does the *Yetzer Hara* do this? Because when he gets you feeling down about your spiritual level, he can get you to give up much more than you are willing to bargain for, otherwise. The *Yetzer Hara* knows that although depression is not a sin, it can bring you to the worst sins. So, how do I know if the spiritual drive to do “extra” inside me is a my *Yetzer Tov* or a my *Yetzer Hara*? It depends where it is taking you. If it brings you to serving G-d with more happiness and love, with more motivation and alacrity, it is your *Yetzer Tov*. If it prevents you from serving with love, with passion, from keeping the *Shulchan Aruch*, it is your *Yetzer Hara*. And he is pushing you, so that you fall flat on your face.

How do we stay happy serving G-d, no matter what? How do we turn on that fire, and reignite the



soul? Let us step back for a moment, and take a drone's-eye view. So many people in the world are depressed – more than 350 million people (World Health Organization). David Burns, author of Feeling Good, talks about depression and how to cure it. “Depression has been called the world’s number one public health problem. In fact, depression is so widespread, it is considered the common cold of psychiatric disturbances. But there is a grim difference between depression and a cold. Depression can kill you.” A quick Google search will tell you what the world offers to fight depression.

But what I found amazing is that the Torah is giving us another octave, a new dimension of self-help that is way ahead of everything the gentiles offer. And that is the Power of N. A. G. It is the secret the Yosef shared with his brothers. וַעֲתָהּ אֶל-תַּעֲצְבוּ וְאֶל-יִחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי-מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי הַגֵּה כִּי לִמְחֹלָה שָׁלַחַנִּי אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם (ה) וַעֲתָה לֹא-אַתֶּם שָׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הַגֵּה כִּי הֵאֲלֵהֶם. *And now, be not depressed and do not be angry in your eyes for selling me here, for I was sent by G-d, before you, to be a sustenance (a provider). And now, you did not send me here, for it was G-d...*”

What type of solution was this? How could it prevent them from feeling down about the biggest and only mistake of their lives, about the lie they lived for 22 years? How did the fact that Yosef would be the sustainer of the family help them to not be down about their terrible mistake, that caused their father so much pain? And, why "Now?"

In these words, Yosef revealed to his brothers the three powers of staying positive. The first answer is the Power of Now. Yosef kept saying the word עֵתָה, now. Most people get down and suffer from stress, worries, guilt, etc., because they are not in the Now. They are living in the past or the future. My favorite question as coach is, what are your

options? Because that is the best question to take them out of past/future thinking and bring them back into the now. Anything that is actionable, is in the now. G-d's present to you is the present, and only the present. Only He is in the past/present/future at the same time. You have no control over the past or future, so let go of it. The word וַעֲתָה is usually referring to *Teshuvah* (Breshit Rabbah 21; 6), because *Teshuvah* is not about living in the past, living in regret. *Teshuvah* is about living in the Now, recognizing the sin as something that you despise and find disgusting, to disconnect from, so that in the Now you will learn new habits and behaviors. *Teshuvah* is not about feeling bad about “you.” It is realizing how bad the action, decision, or behavior was.

The second power is the Power of Anyway. Yosef told his brothers, I was, anyway, going to come down to Egypt. G-d sent me here before you sent me here. לפניכם. Had I known how things were going to turn out, I would have paid to go to Egypt. You sold me, but I would have gone anyway. The power of Anyway is the power that keeps people positive. It gives us the power to deal with the past.

And the third power is the Power of Give. Yosef told his brothers not to be down, because he was put in this situation to be a giver, כי למחיה שלחני for I am a sustainer. The Baal Shem Tov taught that depression and being down comes from wanting, valuing, and according too much importance to this World and its desires. When a person becomes a Giver, and despises taking from this world, from the honor, fame, and desires, the Baal Shem Tov promises, he will not get down. (צוואת הריב"ש)

These three Powers, that the gentiles don't list, are most powerful tools in helping a person stay clear of negative thoughts. And with them, we can self-actualize and reach the next octave, because these lead us to serving G-d with joy.

## THE ART OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is definitely an art. Non-effective communicators don't ask themselves the

seven questions before communicating. Who is the right person to relay the message? What is the right



thing to say? To whom? With whom? Where is the right place to say it? How is the right way to say it? And why is this message important? (See introduction to Kodshim Yachin Boaz כשירצה אדם לברר לעיניו שום דבר יפה, צריך להשיב לעצמו תחילה על שבע שאלות יפה יפה דהיינו: מי מה למי את מי למתי איה איך (ולמה)

A person who hears news that is hard to swallow, about an inevitable life-changer they did not ask for, goes through an emotional cycle. Hard news can concern loss of health, life, financial stability, trust, friendship and independence. This emotional cycle is a roller-coaster ride of activity and passivity, as the person wriggles and turns in their desperate efforts to avoid the change.

Our Torah is full of lessons on how to communicate lifechanging messages. When G-d calls to Adam, after he ate from the forbidden fruit, G-d calls out, “Where are you?” He doesn’t just rebuke. He opens up a discussion. (Rashi) When Yitzhak tells Esav that Yaakov tricked him and took Esav’s blessing, Yitzhak does whatever he can to soften the news, and offers a “consolation prize”, in the form of a different blessing. When Yaakov’s sons let their father know that Yosef was killed by a wild animal, they spoke indirectly, “Is this your son’s cloak? Do you recognize it?” When Tamar wanted to communicate to Yehuda that she was pregnant from him, she was exceedingly careful not to embarrass him:, she showed him the pledges which he had given her and let him come to the conclusion, on his own. When Yaakov told his wives that he needed to leave and go back to E. Yisrael, he called them to the field, to discuss the matter in a confidential way that would help them to be able to accept the inevitable despite the risk of inciting Lavan’s anger. When Yehoshua told Moshe that the Jews sinned with the calf, he just said that something was not right in the camp. When G-d tells Moshe that he will not enter the Promised Land, He first asks Moshe to ascend the mountain and see the Land from above. When Shmuel has to relay to Eli Hakohen the prophecy that Eli’s family will be doomed forever, Shmuel is very reluctant to do so. When Q. Esther could not see Achashverosh anymore, Daniel was hesitant to

pass on this information to Mordechai. ( אין משיבין ( על הקלקלה

וְשֵׁם בַת־אֲשֵׁר שָׂרָה *And the name of the daughter of Asher was Serah.* Rashi explains the reason why this passuk is mentioned in Parashat Pinchas: *to tell you that she was still alive.* Serah is one of the most interesting personalities that walked the face of this earth. She was one of the ten who entered Gan Eden alive. Hanoch. Eliyahu. Mashiach. Eliezer . King Hiram . Slave of the Kushi king. Yaavatz. Bitya. Serah bat Asher. R Yehushua Ben Levi.

Here is the story of how Serah merited immortality. Asher adopted Serah, and she caused Asher to be excommunicated by his brothers for his entire life. When the brothers sold Yosef, they all swore to excommunicate any person who would reveal their secret. Serah knew about the sale from a prophecy, but Asher’s brothers accused him of having mentioned it at home. (See Baal Haturim Devarim 33;24)

When the brothers returned from Egypt with the new knowledge that Yosef was alive, they stood outside, discussing how to relay the information to Yaakov. Who would be the right person to tell him? How should they say it? When should they say it? Who should be there? After all, shocking news is what killed their great grandmother, Sarah.

When Avraham was on Mt. Moriah, bringing a Korban instead of Yitzhak, the Satan came to Sarah dressed as an old, simple and humble man. He said to a 127-year-old Sarah, who had only one child at the age of ninety. “Didn’t you hear the whole story – that Abraham took Yitzhak, and he built an altar, and he slaughtered him, and he sacrificed him on the Mizbeach? And Yitzhak was screaming and crying in front of his father who paid no attention to him. Sarah raised her voice and cried; she screamed a long and bitter scream on the fate of her son. She fell to the ground and put dirt on her head, saying, “My son Yitzhak! My son, I wish I could have died today, instead of you!” She kept crying, saying, *I am so pained! I brought you up, I pampered you, and now, my delight is turned to mourning!* Sarah then got up, walking unsteadily,



in the direction of Hebron. She asked every passerby what had happened to her son, but no one knew.

When she reached Hebron, with no new information, she sent her servants out on a search. They checked the Yeshiva of Shem VaEver, but could not find him. They searched the whole land, but to no avail. Suddenly, the Satan came to Sarah in the form of a man, and he said, I lied. Avraham did not slaughter Yitzhak, and Yitzhak did not die. When Sarah heard this news, she was so happy, her soul left her. Satan's messages came so suddenly, that they were bound to be fatal.

The brothers did not know how to let their father hear the news. What questions would he ask? How could they explain Yosef's cloak that was blood stained? And most of all, when Yaakov was going to hear that Yosef, young and handsome beyond description, a youth of unmatched physical beauty, was alone in an immoral Egypt for so long, how would Yaakov contain this message? Yaakov was definitely going to believe that Yosef did not withstand the temptations of Egypt!

ויגידו לו. And they told him. The word ויגידו is missing the letter Yud, because the brothers did not tell Yaakov themselves. The word לאמר, saying, is added, to teach that Serah was the one who relayed the message. (Midrash Sechel Tov)

Serah, though, who knew exactly what the brothers had done to Yosef, understood why the brothers were at a loss at how to relay the news to their frail and broken father, and she was the only one able to deliver the message. She grabbed her harp and ran into the room where Yaakov was praying. She started playing her harp and mumbling to herself, according to the letters of her name רָחֵשׁ לְבִי לְדָרַךְ. טוב אמר אגני מעשי למלך. (Tehillim 45; see Pnei David)

Here are the Selfie Steps to communicating difficult messages.

1. There are seven stages people go through when they hear life changing news. It is important that the communicator helps the person move from stage to stage, and not get stuck on one of the stages. When communicated ineffectively, the message can be harder than the life change itself. Shock stage: Initial paralysis at hearing the news. Denial stage: Trying to avoid the inevitable. Anger stage: Frustrated outpouring of bottled-up emotion. Bargaining stage: Seeking, in vain, for a way out. Depression stage: Final realization of the inevitable. Testing stage: Seeking realistic

And here is what she hummed, עוד יוקף טי, Yosef is still spiritually alive! He did not sin! וכי-הוא משל. Even though he became ruler of the entire land of Egypt! (Zohar) She asked, as if it was a question, Can it really be that Yosef is in Mitzrayim? And that he has two sons born to him, Menashe and Ephraim? (See Midrash Hagadol)

In the merit that she brought life back to Yaakov, Yaakov blessed her that she would never die. (Hadar Zekenim, Seder Olam) And that is what caused her to live forever and enter Gan Eden, alive. Asher knew that Serah would live on until the times of the redemption from Egypt, וְכָרְחָה הָעוֹלָם (Shemot 26), so he told her the secret password of the true redeemer, Pakod Yifkod. Serah was the only Jew who remained from Yaakov and Yosef's generation, and she confirmed to the Elders in Egypt that Moshe was G-d's messenger to redeem the Jews. She directed Moshe to the place where Yosef's bones were buried.

Serah saved King David and Yoav Ben Seruyah from decimating an entire city, as they were after the rebel, Sheva Ben Bichri. (Shmuel B 20) For this act of wisdom and persuasion, Serah entered the Eshet Hayil hall of fame, פיה פתחה בחכמה: this is Serah Bat Asher. (Midrash Mishlei 31;45) She appeared in R' Yochanan the Amora's class, when he was teaching about the miracles of the splitting of the Yam Suf. "I was there, and between each tribe who walked through the sea, G-d made see-through walls." (Pesikta Dr Kahana Beshalach 11) This means that Serah was alive for at least 2000 years!!! All in the merit of reviving the spirit of Yaakov, passing on the news in the right way!

May we merit to be bearers of only good news. And may we learn to communicate always, as effectively as we can.



solutions. Acceptance stage: Finally finding the way forward. A person who has lost their job might still go into the city only to sit on a park bench all day, as if he/she can go backwards in time. People need help adjusting to the new norm.

2. Answer the six questions of communication before delivering the message. Who is the right person to relay the message? What is the right thing to say? To whom? With whom? Where is the right place to say it? How is the right way to say it? And why is this message important?

## A JEW COVERED IN FISH GOOK

One of the greatest psychological challenges we all deal with throughout life is defining who we are and discovering our value. G-d made Man with a need to feel he has value. This is why when Man cannot find an intrinsic value within himself, he searches for an external solution. This is why people “need” brand name clothing, luxury cars and houses and exotic vacations. Fame and fortune. In great contrast, animals, as long as they have enough food for the day, do not become stressed. Because they were not created with the drive to find self-importance, self-value, they are not subject to the stress that keeps after human beings.

The Mishna in Avot brings to light this essence of Man. The Mishna relates directly to a person’s worth, and tells you how much value you have. אֲנִי אֵינְי אֲנִי לִי מִי לִי? וְכִשְׂאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי מִה אֲנִי. *If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am concerned only with myself, what am I?*

The first part of the Mishna is teaching the first step in appreciating your worth. When you feel that no one cares about you, when you feel like a shmatta, a rag, it is usually because you do not accord yourself enough importance to devote time to taking care of yourself. You do not take out time for yourself; you do not spend money on yourself. You neglect your physical health, emotional health, spiritual health or your financial “health”. When you do not take care of yourself, you are sending messages to those in your life that you don’t value yourself, and neither should they.

The second part of the Mishna is giving us the secret to valuing ourselves; but notice the peculiar choice of words: אֲנִי אֵינְי לִי מִי לִי? *If I am concerned only with myself, what am I?* The word

מה, *What*, in this context, is so strange. The appropriate word here should be, מִי אֲנִי, Who am I? “Who” is generally used for people, and “what” is used for things!?

But that’s the whole idea that the Mishna is teaching us. If you are worried only about yourself, you are like an animal, and you have no value as a human being! You have only as much value as the value you bring to others. Of course, you need to take care of yourself first. But if that’s all you are worried about, then you have no more value than an animal. You are just a “what”, not even a “who”. It’s the healthy balance of both taking care of yourself first and then being responsible for others that makes man the great Man he was intended to be.

Holocaust survivors said that this is the only thing that kept them sane. The Nazis hated the Jews, because the Aryans believed that they were the Chosen people, and that there could not be another Chosen people; the Jewish People were a contradiction to that idea. So the solution was to treat the Jews like animals and break them psychologically. To take away all their feelings of self-value, and to reduce them to the status of animals in their own eyes; or to completely annihilate them. The Nazis tattooed numbers on our arms, just as cows are branded with numbers. The Nazis transported us in cattle cars, to make us feel like cattle. But Holocaust survivors who wanted to retain their humanity and not fall into this psychological trap, say that there was only one thing that helped them avoid it: caring for each other and taking responsibility for each other. They had nothing else. They possessed nothing except





the G-dliness they had inside. Caring for others preserved the spark of humanity within them. It preserved the G-dly feeling that every Jew has inside.

There is a word in the beginning of the Parasha that teaches us the power of responsibility. ויגש אליו , יהודה ויאמר בי אדני (Yosef) and said to him, *please my master...* Yehuda approaches Yosef to speak to him, at the climax of the drama. When Yosef really had “all the cards on his side”, and Binyamin was to go to jail, for he had been caught “red handed”. At this point, what right did Yehuda have to ask Yosef to free Binyamin?

Yehuda started his claim with the words, בי אדני. The word בי is translated by the Targum as ‘please’. But the word בי has another explanation. It means, according to the Baal Haturim, that Yehuda was telling Yosef, if you want to take Binyamin as a slave, take me, instead. I took responsibility for him. I am holding myself responsible.

On a deeper level, the word בי is really referring to “יב” , the number 12 . Yehuda was telling Yosef, “I am not coming to stand up for myself. I am not standing up for Binyamin. I am standing up for the 12 Shevatim. I am going to do whatever I need to do to get Binyamin back and to get Yosef back. You are tampering with the destiny of the twelve Shevatim, and I am willing to take you on. Because I am responsible. And that gives me the right to speak. When Yosef saw that Yehuda had learnt the lesson of responsibility, he broke down, crying. Because now Yosef wanted to be a part of them again. The more responsible you are, the greater you are. Because the more responsible you are, the more G-dly you are.

But there is an even deeper explanation. בי אדני , according to the Arizal, Yehuda was saying, G-d is in me (בי אדני). Because Yehuda has, in his name, the Name of G-d, יהודה. And every Jew has a piece of G-d inside him, חלק אלוהים ממעל, and this is why we are called יהודים. Yehuda was saying, You are not dealing with me. You are dealing with my G-d.

This reminds me of a story that I heard from Rabbi David Pinto. He recalled how when he was a thirteen- year-old in Morocco, he would go to the market place on Friday morning to collect money for the poor, money that his father would later distribute. “I remember a man from Morocco. His name was R’ Mordechai. He was a Jew typical of those times – a hardworking, G-d-fearing man. Not a great Rabbi or Mekkubal, but a man who had to struggle for his parnassah. One Friday, I saw him at the market place, next to the fish stand. The Arab who was selling and cutting up fresh fish had a bucket of fish heads. People don’t buy fish heads, as there is little meat on them. But R’ Mordechai was struggling financially, and he desperately wanted fish for Shabbat. So he offered the Arab a couple of coins and said, “Please. I can’t afford fish for Shabbat. If you could let me buy the fish heads from you with the change I have left, I will pick out the meat from there.” Rav Pinto watched from the side to see how this was going to turn out.

At first, the Arab ignored him. But R’ Mordechai was persistent. “Please. All I want is to taste some fish on Shabbat! It’s all I got!” The Arab looked at him and screamed, “Get out of here, you filthy Jew!” But R’ Mordechai was not going home without some fish for Shabbat. He just stood there, contemplating what to do next. The Arab blew it. “I told you, GET OUT OF HERE, YOU FILTHY JEW!” And with that, the Arab took some fish intestines, and threw them in R’ Mordechai’s face. There was silence in the marketplace. Everyone was watching to see what would happen next.

Then, R’ Pinto relates, the most amazing thing happened. Rav Mordechai removed the fish gook from his face and looked the Arab in the eye, and said, “I can forgive you for embarrassing me in front of everyone. But I will not forgive you for embarrassing a Jew, and disgracing my G-d.” With those words, on the spot, in front of everyone in the marketplace, the Arab dropped dead.

All of these explanations of בי, each on its own level of פרדס, blend with each other. Because if you want to find the G-dliness inside yourself, you need to take on responsibility for Klal Yisrael. When



you look at the G-dliness in yourself, you will see a greater you than the you that you see in the mirror. Amazing things happen when we tap into that piece of G-d inside of us. When we stand up for

### PAIN IN THE NECK

When the goblet of Yosef was found in Binyamin's bag, all the brothers of the Tribe started to hit Binyamin on his neck saying, "Thief! Son of a thief! Just as your mother stole the idols from her father Lavan's house, you, too, followed in her footsteps and stole the goblet that the man (Yosef) uses for his witchcraft." But Binaymin did not respond. (תנחומא מקץ')

Binyamin was hit hard on his neck, and for those blows that he was hit on his shoulders, he is called 'ייד ה', "G-d's friend", and he merited having G-d's Glory, the Holy Temple, situated in the portion of his tribe. Binyamin's tribe was blessed, ובין כתפיו, *He (the Shecinah) shall dwell between his shoulders (territory of Binyamin).*

After 22 years, Binyamin and Yosef hug for the first time. They cry on each other's shoulders. Our Rabbis tell us what these tears were about. Not about being separated for 22 years. But for the destruction of the Mishkan in Shiloh, in Yosef's territory. And for the two Temples that will be destroyed in the territory of Binyamin. Hence, it says, Binyamin cried on the shoulder (singular) of Yosef, and Yosef cried on the shoulders (plural) of Binyamin.

What is the idea of the neck or the shoulder? The neck is the connection between the body and the Neshama, the physical and spiritual. The Temple is the connection between the materialistic world and the spiritual world. The Temple was a place of peace. Peace between G-d and His People, peace between the Worlds, Peace between the nations. How did Binyamin merit having this in his territory? How did Yosef merit having this in his territory? Because of their necks. Allow me to explain. But first, a bit of coaching tools.

There are a lot of people in your world that may be difficult for you to get along with, including yourself. How do we deal with the person who is

that part of G-d inside of us. And when we take on responsibility for Klal Yisrael.

inconsiderate, accusing, impolite, egoistic, annoying, haughty, etc.? How do we deal with our own shortcomings, mishaps, weaknesses, mistakes?

There is only one way. Seeing G-d in our relationships. Seeing G-d in ourselves and others. The Baal Shem's teaching is that שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד, *I place G-d in front of me always*, can be given a Hassidic twist. The word "Lenegdi" means "opposite me", but also means by my opposition, over the shoulder of the one who opposes me. You want to say 'hello' to G-d? Say hello to an ex-friend. G-d is right there. Bring G-d into your relationships. Realize that He put you in the family you are in, He made you your shidduch, He gave you this difficult child. He made that guy your roommate, your sibling, your teacher or your boss. But this "G-d in Relationships" goes much deeper than that. G-d is not only in the vacuum *between* "me and you". *He is in Me and You.*

There is a song from Abie Rottenberg that I remember from my childhood. I might have heard it only a few times, but for over twenty years, I can't get the beautiful tune, or the beautiful words, out of my head. *There is a small piece of Heaven, in everyone's heart, a glorious gift from above. It will sparkle and shine, if we each do our part, to reach out and touch it with love.* As I learn more about coaching people, I realize that this is all I am doing, and this is what coaching is all about. Touching a piece of Heaven inside a G-d-like being and letting it sparkle and shine.

You see, the worst thing a person can do to himself, or to others, is to stereotype, or label. Shy, Loud, Dumb, Lazy, Not serious, Perfectionist, Addict, ADD, ADHD, OCD, DVD, etc. It is important to be aware of our tendencies, of our shortcomings, but not to look at the Person as being defined by those shortcomings – as limited



or disabled. Awareness is a good thing; labeling can be the worst. The pessimistic nature of many people who are stuck gives them a negative filter: they notice and remember only weaknesses, shortcomings, mishaps and bad times, while ignoring all the good. Or, they insist on believing that “the childhood” is “the destiny”. The only way to coach them is by touching their G-dliness, by relating to the positive aspects of their negativity. For example, the way to help someone who gets angry is not by calling him a hothead, but by respecting the fact that he has things that are important to him that he is getting angry about. The only way to help someone who is shy is by complimenting him for being gentle. The only way to help someone who is a perfectionist is by complimenting his perfectionism, his nature to strive for the best. Even the pessimist can be praised as an optimist with experience. Or the Lazy, for being laid back. Find that good part of every trait, of every human, and you have touched his G-dliness, for G-d makes no mistakes. With nobody. If we look only at the down side of the trait, if we cannot respect the good side of the bad trait and value it, then we have just made the person small, labeling him and putting him into a

box. You took a Tzelem Elokim, a G-d-like being, and reduced it to something lowly.

When Yosef and Binyamin cried, they cried about baseless hatred. They saw our quarrels, the ones that we have had now in 2014, and they cried, for they knew that we will continue living in Exile, until we learn how to love. Until we learn how to see G-dliness in ourselves and others, until we see G-d in our relationships. Our Rabbis tell us that the brothers did not do something wrong in their sale of Yosef. They did do something wrong when they were unable to say hello to him. ולא יכלו דברו לשלם (see תנ"י וישב ז')

So the next time you have someone who is being a pain in your neck, know that you can build the Temple by accepting him and dealing with him. This is the shared secret of Yosef and Binyamin. Acknowledging G-d in their lives, acknowledging G-d in their relationships, and acknowledging G-d in others. With this trait, the ability to accept your brother, no matter what he has done to you, because you see G-d there, you can rebuild any relationship. You can even rebuild the Holy Temple.

### NEVER, EVER, ALONE

Yaakov was afraid of going down to Egypt. וַיִּאָמֶר אֲנֹכִי הֵאֱלָל אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי אֶל-תִּירָא מִרְדֹּתַי מִצְרַיִם כִּי-לֹגִי גְדוֹל אֲשֶׁמְךָ שָׁמַיִם: *And G-d said, I am the G-d of your father. Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there.* אֲנֹכִי אֲרַד עִמָּךְ: *I will go down with you to Egypt and I will take you up as well, and Yosef will place his hand on your eyes.*

The Or HaChaim asks a few questions. *What was Ya'akov's great fear in going down to Egypt? Was he afraid of being enslaved? Yaakov was not afraid of anything! He believed in the power of a ישראל; he used this power to fight angels! So, what was he afraid of? Also, how did G-d console him? After*

*all, they did go down to Exile, and they were enslaved!*

The Netivot Shalom continues this train of thought. We find another time when the Jews went into Exile. וְעַל נְהִיֹתוֹ כָּל־נֶשְׁמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל גַּם-בְּכַיְנוֹ בָּזְכְּרוּנוּ: *On the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, and we also wept, when we remembered Tzion.* (Tehillim 137) What were they crying about? Were the Jews afraid of the Babylonian Exile? A Jewish soul is strong enough to go through the worst conditions. So, what were they afraid of?

The Zohar tells us how Yechezkel consoled those weeping Jews. *G-d called out to all of His angels, to His ministering angels, to His multitudes, and to*



all of the hosts of the Heavens, and He said to them, What are you doing here? My Children are in exile, and you are here? Get up, all of you, and go down to Bavel, and I am coming with you. When the prophet Yechezkel said to them that G-d would be with them in Bavel, it consoled them. Because that was all that they wanted to hear (Zohar Shemot B).

And this was Ya'akov's fear. That he would be alone, that G-d would not be there with him, or with his children. But G-d said, יעקב אל תירא עבדי *Yaakov, my servant, do not fear.* I will come down with you; I will be there with you. In the Shmutz of Egypt. Down till the lowest level of impurity. And if you become too deeply caught up in the impurity of Egypt, I will save you, before you reach the point of no return.

No matter what you are up against. No matter *who* you are up against, G-d is there. When Moshe had to face Pharaoh, what was he worried about? How could Pharaoh be so, so far from G-d? After experiencing seven plagues, how could his heart still be as rigid and immovable as a stone? How did G-d calm Moshe down? בא אל-פרעה קיי-אני *Come* to Pharaoh- I am already there waiting for you; for I have hardened his heart. It is all ME! I am in his heart, and that is why it is so hardened! (Shem Mishmuel)

The Baal Shem Tov would teach that there is no person on earth who does not have his own, custom-fit exile. קרבה אלי-נפשי גאולה (Tehillim 69). There is a beautiful prayer that many Jews say before Kiddush on Friday night. שתרחמני עוד בגלותי. לגאלני. *May You, Hashem, have mercy on me, even in my exile, to redeem me.* No two people's problems are alike. Each one has his/her own darkness. How does one deal with his/her own exile?

The Brisker Rav would teach the trick – King David said it best: שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעֲנֶנְךָ הִמָּה יְנַחֲמֵנִי: G-d, Your שִׁבְטְךָ Your rod that You rebuke with, and Your walking stick (that one leans on), will console me (Psalms 23). What? I can understand how the cane on which one leans can be a consolation. But how

can the stick that one is struck by be a consolation? The answer is that if it is G-d behind the stick, if it is one's own Father who is delivering the blows only out of love, that, itself, is a consolation. For it means that G-d is there with you the whole time.

The Shem Mishmuel writes, that in the perspective of Judaism, **all the problems in your life are because you do not feel that you have G-d in your life.** As the passuk says, וְתָרָה אִפְי כּוּ בַיּוֹם-הַהוּא וְעֹזְבֹתַיִם וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פְנֵי מַהֵם וְהָיָה לְאֹכַל וּמִצָּאָהוּ רַעוּת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְאָמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא הֲלֹא עָלַי קִי-אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְקַרְבִּי מִצָּאוּנֵי וְצָרוֹת הָרַעוּת הָאֵלֶּה *And I will be angry on that day, and I will leave them, and I will hide My Face from them, and they will be devoured and many evils and tragedies will befall them. And they will say on that day, it is because there is no G-d in my midst that these evils have been visited upon me.* וְאָנֹכִי הִסְתַּר אִסְתַּר פְּנֵי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא עַל כָּל-הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָנָה הַסְתַּר אִסְתַּר אֶל-אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים *And I will hide My face on that day, from all the evil that is done, for they turned to other gods.* (Devarim 31; 17)

How do these pesukim make sense? How could it be that the fellow who realizes the cause of his pain and suffering and even says Viduy that it is because G-d is not in his midst... that G-d will continue to punish him with the worst punishment-that G-d will hide His face from him?

The Shem Mishmuel answers that this is the reason why this fellow is suffering and will continue to suffer. *Because he believes that G-d is not with him in the darkness.* And that is why G-d will continue to hide His face! Because the person does not recognize that this difficulty, this darkness, has G-d behind it. Judaism explains that darkness is not the absence of light. Darkness is *also* G-d's creation. Darkness means that G-d is **causing** lack of light. G-d gives a person difficulties to enable him to grow. And just like the Jews needed the Egyptian exile to become a great nation, so, too, each person has his own exile, because He wants to enable a great G-dliness to shine through it into the world. So, when a person does not recognize that whatever "goes wrong" in his life is being orchestrated by G-d – for a very good reason – G-d hides Himself even further. He



brings darkness, then more darkness...until the intensity of the darkness is so great, that it could not have been caused by anything other than Almighty G-d. Once the one who is in suffering realizes this, the amazing happens: The darkness vanishes, in a blink.

The Zohar tells us the story of Chananya, Mishael and Azarya. Nebuchadnezzar threatened to throw them into the raging flames of a huge furnace, if they would not bow down to the idol. When they were tied up to be thrown in, each one raised his voice, in front of all the nations, kings and ministers that were gathered there to bow down. Chananya said, *מה יִעָשֶׂה לִי אֱדָם: G-d is for me; I will not fear. What can man do to me? בְּעֲזָרַי יְהוָה אֲרָאָה בְּשֹׁנְאָי: G-d is with me through my helpers, therefore, I can face my foes.* Mishael opened his mouth and said, *וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: And you, do not fear, my servant Yaakov, said G-d... For I am with you, to save you...* When the gentiles present heard that these youths still trusted G-d's

promise to be with Yaakov and his descendants in Exile, they burst out laughing. Azarya cried out - Shema Yisrael... And at that moment, HKBH said to His Throne, to the Shechina, "Tell me, in the merit of which of these three statements should I save these three Tzaddikim?" And the Shechina answered, in the merit of the statement that was laughed at, the mention of Your promise to be with Yaakov and his descendants in Exile". So, G-d saved the three tzaddikim in that merit, and all those who laughed were burnt to death, instead of these three (Zohar Acharei Mot 57a).

How does one bring G-d into his own exile? How does one see that G-d is with him, no matter what? One needs wide screen, panoramic, full high-definition awareness for this. One needs time, alone. To think in quiet. As Rabbenu Bachye explains, the reason why so many of our leaders were first shepherds was to give them an opportunity to do *התבודדות*, to have time with G-d. And when we spend time alone with G-d, only then do we realize how we are never, ever alone.

### Yehuda = Honesty, Nobility and Responsibility

The inner strength of Yehuda during stressful times got him very far. Many of us know that the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was situated in the portions of Yehuda and Binyamin. The reason for the Temple being located in Binyamin's lot was for something he *did not* do. All the tribes, excluding Binyamin, bowed to Esav. Binyamin had not yet been born. Yehuda, however, merited his share of the Temple by actively choosing to take responsibility for returning his brother, Binyamin, to his father. Yehuda also merited being the direct forefather of King David and the royal family, including Mashiach. He won these significant honors for having confessed his intimacy with Tamar.

Yehuda's descendant, Nachshon Ben Aminadav, preceded the Nesiim of all other tribes in bringing the inaugural sacrifice of the Mishkan. Yehuda merited this by humbling himself in front of Yosef in their heated discussion in this week's parasha.

#### *Yehuda Humbles Himself*

In the Midrashim, we see the extent of Yehuda's efforts and exactly how he humbled himself. In Yehuda's defense for freeing Binyamin, Yehuda attempted to accuse Yosef of wanting to enslave Binyamin for no just reason. *A thief who has money to compensate the stolen goods should be able to pay and not be punished by enslavement.* Yosef replied that the magical goblet that Binyamin had stolen was priceless, and no amount of money could possibly be sufficient to free Binyamin for such a theft. Yehuda reinforced his claim by saying that all the brothers were willing to be enslaved in Binyamin's stead. Yehuda made this offer in an attempt to check if their lot was punishment meted out to the brothers by G-d for selling Yosef. Binyamin did not take part in the sale of Yosef. If he were to be the only one enslaved, this would prove that the predicament the brothers were put in was not a Divine punishment.



Rather, this would be an expression of the wickedness of the Egyptian leader they faced. Had he reached such a conclusion, Yehuda would have led the tribes in a war against Egypt. With the help of G-d, he thought, they would release their brothers Binyamin and Shimon and search Egypt for Yosef. This was Yehuda's line of reasoning in the dispute.

Yosef, however, replied that he saw in his magical cup that Reuven and Levi were Yehuda's elders. "Why are you, Yehuda, speaking before your elders, Reuven and Levi?" To this, Yehuda replied that it was because he had taken upon himself the responsibility to return Binyamin to his father. Yosef then remarked that he saw in his cup that Yehuda had once sold a brother Yosef (that Yehuda claimed, in his story, was dead) for 20 silver coins as a slave and told his father that Yosef was torn to pieces by an animal. Yehuda heard this, and he cried out an earth-shattering cry. "How can I return home after all that I have done and see my father's face?"

Yehuda, at this point, recognized and outwardly admitted his grief for selling his brother. This realization prompted him originally to offer to take responsibility for Binyamin. Confession was followed by assuming responsibility, and therefore, Yehuda was rewarded with kingship. We find that this trait was hereditary as well. *King Shaul sinned once by not annihilating Amalek (sparing King Agag) and he was not pardoned. King David sinned twice (both in the episode with Uriah and through counting the people) and was pardoned.* (Yoma 22b) David was pardoned because he immediately confessed to the Prophet Natan. Shaul, on the other hand, first denied his sin to the prophet Shmuel. *It seems that confession and successful kingship go together.*

#### *Lionhearted*

We may ask why the combination of confession and responsibility was rewarded so highly. We may wonder why Yehuda merited such great things for his actions. The Yalkut states, concerning Yehuda (on the passuk, יהודה אתה יודוך אחיך), One

*who overpowers his Yetzer and admits his misdeeds – he merits the World to Come.* R' Dessler deduces that one can *truly admit his shortcomings only if he first overpowers his Yetzer.*

What are the ramifications of this statement? Many confessions are made. Few are made out of an understanding of the severity of the transgression and out of an inner will to respect justice. This purity of motivation was reflected by Yehuda, who did not *have to* admit his deed to Tamar. No one else knew what had happened. His confession was an act of answering his own inner truth, and was not affected by any external considerations.

He did not *have to* take responsibility for Binyamin. He *wanted to*. Yehuda realized that his life went downhill following his having arranged the sale of Yosef. His sons, Er and Onan, married Tamar and lived lives with unacceptable behavior before G-d. He lost his sons as punishment for having taken away Yaakov's son from him. When Yehuda confessed **to himself** what he had done, *he wanted to take responsibility for his actions.* This is *the trait of a lion*, a symbol that Yehuda so much deserved. The strength of a lion is that he does not care what any other animal thinks. He eats large quantities of meat, sleeps most of the day and lives the way he wants. What he does and how he acts is dictated by what he feels. To overcome the yetzer and do a genuine form of Teshuva, one's actions must come from a feeling that *I am not doing this in order to impress others. I am going to do what is **right** and take responsibility for my actions, because that is what I really want to do.*

This is the greatest and deepest aspect of the rebuke of the End of Time mentioned in the Midrash (Rabba 93:10). The Midrash compares Yosef's rebuke of his brothers to the rebuke of G-d to humanity. *G-d will come and reprove each and every person according to who he is.* R'S. Pincus explains that the most frightening judgment we will endure at that time is hypothetical judgment. Suppose that the negative acts we refrained from would have been accepted socially: would we still have refrained from them? This judgment will



reveal the true self, not that which was dictated by social mores. Let us take murder for instance. How different is a person who did not commit murder because it was not accepted in his social circles from a person who refrained from such an act in obedience to G-d's commandment. If, for example, killing would be socially acceptable, as it was in Nazi Germany, many people would "go along" with what was then the "norm", without examining their actions against any absolute concept of right or wrong. If, for some reason, the doctors in a hospital were on strike, and it was accepted that doctors were at present off duty, would a particular doctor still keep his hands in his pockets, refraining from treating patients who could be healed? The judgment of the End of Days reveals if we are who we are because that's who we **want** to be, or because we are the product of social pressure. We will be tested to see if we would have passed the test, even if no one would ever know our mark.

#### *Noble Intentions*

This nobility in the act of Yehuda shined forth in a very unique way. We know that Reuven, also, took responsibility for his brother, Yosef. He convinced his brothers not to kill Yosef, but instead, to throw him into the pit. We do not see that Reuven was rewarded for this. In what way was his act different from that of Yehuda?

To pursue the question further: there is a Midrash (Mechilta Beshalach ch. 5) that offers a second reason as to why Yehuda merited royal descendants. While the brothers wanted to kill Yosef, Yehuda saved him by persuading his brothers to sell him as a slave. This act afforded Yehuda with great merit. (see Rashi 49:9) Although we saw in other Midrashim that Yehuda lost his children as punishment for causing his father to lose *his* children. Also, Yehuda was excommunicated by his brothers for selling Yosef (וירד יהודה), after they saw that their father, Yaakov, could not be consoled. Still, it remains to Yehuda's credit that Yosef was not killed. Reuven, for the same act, was not rewarded at all.

The Siftei Chachamim (37, 40) states that Reuven's motivation was partially due to the fact that he was worried that his father would blame him. He had already angered his father once (by moving Yaakov's bed from Bilha's tent to Leah's), and he wanted to avoid doing so again. Reuven was more concerned with keeping his good name than he was with taking responsibility to save Yosef's life. Yehuda, on the other hand, was credited for saving Yosef's life by selling him because he did not care what anyone would say. He knew that this was the only way he could save his brother and he knew that he might be excommunicated for it. He merited having the Holy Temple in his territory, for he had taken responsibility for Binyamin out of his sense of duty alone. He did not act in order to exonerate himself from Yaakov's suspicion that he had had a hand in the sale of Yosef. His father would not look at him in a bad light if he did not take responsibility, for Yaakov did not know that Yehuda was a main character in the selling of Yosef. And still, Yehuda felt that *he wanted* to take responsibility.

We find this nobility of dedication to doing what is right in the testimony of the Torah in regard to Yosef. When Yosef kept his distance from his master Potiphar's wife, he told her that his reason for restraining himself was וְחָטָאתִי לְאֵלֵקִים and (*by being with you*) *I would sin to G-d*. Not because the master would find out his action. Not because Yosef's family would find out. Not because of social status. Rather, because such an act is forbidden by G-d. This inner strength was unique in Yosef. It was also unique in Yehuda, expressed through his confession. This is the inner strength we find in Yehuda. For Yehuda to become a real *baal teshuva* from his actions with Tamar and in selling his brother, he had to be honest with himself and overcome all self-justification.

#### *Battling Evil Inclination /Recognizing G-d*

R' Simcha Zissel would say in the name of the Ibn Ezra: "However well a person recognizes his Yetzer (יצר), that is how well he recognizes his Creator (יוצר)". The reason we do not see the Creator in the world is because the Yetzer does not



let us see Him. The more we realize that we are in the dark, the more we can appreciate the light.

This is the greatness of Yehuda. Yehuda was able to get up and recognize his Yetzer. The root of the name Yehuda is both “confession” and “thanks”. The natural tendency of the human psyche is to deny gratitude for a favor. This is the root of being ungrateful. The Yetzer makes a person egocentric. Confessing means realizing one’s shortcomings and shortsightedness. And it also means taking responsibility for showing gratitude or rectifying wrongdoings.

We can learn from Yehuda responsibility for our family. We can learn responsibility to the truth and to justice. We can learn to do good things just because they are good. Nothing to do with how it makes us look. And we can learn the traits of the lion and humble ourselves and relinquish our honor for things that are more important. This behavior is fit for kings. These royal traits can be found in each and every one of us. *All Jews are princes. (Shabbat 111a)*

Transcendence is a uniquely Jewish trait: it means rising above ourselves, above petty considerations, and doing what is ultimately right.

### HOW ABOUT NOW

We find something in this week’s parasha that blows my mind every time I think about it. והנה עיניכם ראות ועיני אחי בנימין כי פי המדבר אליכם . Rashi tells us here, in accordance with the Talmud in Megillah 16, *Yosef told his brothers – just as I do not have anything against my brother Binyamin, who was not involved in selling me, so, too, I do not have anything against you* . How was Yosef able to accomplish this? To put the years of jail, degradation being sold as slave and separation from his father all behind him? Not only did Yosef forget about what they did to him, he even called his son Menashe, כי נשני אלקים את כל עמלי . Yosef named his son after his ability to forget all of his troubles from the past. How did Yosef master this astounding ability to forget and forgive? What was the trick that Yosef had that allowed him to “let go” of the past? So much of human psychology today is focused on helping people who are entangled in their past emotions to break free of them. What did Yosef do, without the assistance of a psychologist, to get over things?

Yosef told his brothers his secret... ועתה אל תעצבו ואל יחר בעיניכם כי מכרתם אותי הנה כי למחיה שלחני אלקים ועתה לא אתם שלחתם אתי הנה כי... לפניכם... האלקים... *And now, do not be sad, do not get angry at your having sold me to this place, because G-d sent me out before you to sustain you... And now, you did not send me here, but rather G-*

*d...* What was Yosef repeating to them with the word ועתה, Now? Just skip the word “Now!”

The answer is the secret that preserved Yosef’s true identity. ועתה , Now. Yosef did not try to forget about the past. He just lived in the present, the present being whatever G-d had made his reality , and the past was automatically forgotten.

This is extremely difficult to explain. But it is very easy to understand. There are different levels of Now. Anything that we can see, hear, smell, feel, or taste is in the Now. Anything that is actionable is in the Now. Anything and everything else is past or future. All the sadness, anger and stress that we humans just can’t let go of are thoughts of the past or future, not thoughts of Now. We cannot do anything about the past or the future, and that is why thoughts about the past and future (about 80 percent of average human thoughts are past / future thoughts) are so stressful. I will repeat that. The reason why thoughts from the past are so stressful is because we cannot do anything about them; they are not actionable. Even when we try talking to others about these thoughts of past and future, they can never fully see, feel, hear what we mean, just the way it is in our mind. So, we remain alone in our thought. The thought does not exist anywhere else in the world except in the mind of the person suffering from it. Most people, by now, may think





that I am exaggerating when I say 80 percent of “thoughts” are past and future. But I will prove this to you. Next time you notice that your mind was not focused while you were praying, try to remember the thoughts to which your mind drifted – they were either past or future. If it had been thoughts of the present, the Now, then you would have been focused in your prayers. Any other thought is not actionable during prayers, because you were standing with your feet together, just in middle of praying. At that time you could not do anything else, so they could not have been thoughts of Now or actionable thoughts.

I once saw that someone wrote, “Any thought that you think about more than once is a stressful thought. If it is actionable, then, just do it. If it is not, then it is just slowing you down, so forget about it.” This is what Yosef said – ועתה אל תעצבו. Now- in the Now, after your repentance, there is nothing to be sad about. Don’t start digging up the past, regretting that you sold me. The Chasam Sofer actually points this out. The Midrash ( ב”ר , פכ”א ) tells us that the word, ועתה is a word that connotes Teshuva. Whenever we see that word, there is something that relates to repentance. The reason is that Teshuva is bringing a person into the Now. The person repenting makes the most out of the Now. The penitent leaves the past behind him. In the Now, he is a new person. Teshuva is not about ripping out the past. That is impossible for us humans to do. Only G-d can do that for us. When a person wants to go to the past and change things, he is making an unrealistic request; that is not Teshuva. When a person wants to make the best out of the Now, to assure that whatever it is that he regrets will never happen again, that is Teshuva. Once he does that, he gets closer to G-d. And connecting to G-d uproots all evil, including the evil of the past. The person that he was before his proper repentance no longer exists. It is just a

thought. And this is what Yosef told his brothers, as well. I love you now, because the brothers that I see in front of me have repented and do not want to be the same as they were in the past. Now that you did Teshuva out of love, your past action is nullified. My being sold as a slave was solely an act of G-d. ( חתם סופר על התורה )

A step further. There is no greater tool to bring one success than his own mind. And, conversely, there is no greater tool for self-destruction than one’s own mind. We all have thoughts, all the time. This does not mean that we are thinking. “Thinking” is facilitation thoughts that are actionable in the present, in the Now. No one ever got hurt from thinking. People get hurt only from thoughts. Thoughts are past and future. “Thinking” is in the present. When we get into the present we are connecting with reality, not just theoretical thoughts, and if there is something to do, there is no stress.

The “Now” is not only a concept of time. It is a concept of *bechira*, of remaining in the field of free choice presented to me by G-d, where I can be the most “actionable.” Not only past and future thoughts bring stress, stopping one from being in the Now, and doing the most effective, actionable thing that can be done. When we look around us, feeling that we are competing with others and not with “our self of yesterday”, this is another cause for stress that removes us from the Now. Yosef told his brothers אל תרגזו בדרך , *Don’t get angry on the way*. The Rebbe from Kretchenif ( תורת חיים ) (ואמונה) has a great Chassidic take on this passuk. Yosef told the tribes that each one has his own unique way of getting close to G-d; each *shevet* has *his* way of being *mekadesh shem shamayim* in the world. Don’t start fighting which way is the right way. When we do that, we are missing “our way”. We are missing the Now.

### THE MOST NOBLE OF ALL

Many of us know that the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was situated in the portions of Yehuda and Binyamin. The reason for the Temple being

located in Binyamin’s lot was for something he *did not* do. All the tribes, excluding Binyamin, bowed to Esav. Binyamin had not yet been born. Yehuda,



however, merited his share of the Temple by actively choosing to take responsibility for returning his brother, Binyamin, to his father. Yehuda also merited being the direct forefather of King David and the royal family, including Mashiach. He won these significant honors for having confessed his intimacy with Tamar.

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We can learn from Yehuda responsibility for our family. We can learn responsibility to the truth and to justice. We can learn to do good things, just because they are good. Nothing to do with how it makes us look. And we can learn the traits of the lion and humble ourselves and relinquish our honor for things that are more important. This behavior is fit for kings. These royal traits can be found in each and every one of us. *All Jews are princes. (Shabbat 111a)*

## HACHAM OVADIA'S SECRET MEMORY TECHNIQUE

What is the earliest memory you have of your life? I'll bet that the first memory you have from your childhood has to do with some emotion. Some kids not letting you play with their blocks. Or getting upset that it rained on Purim, and your Purim costume got ruined. Most early memories are connected to, *associated with*, an *emotion*. Sad, happy, frightened, etc. It seems that we all have good memories; we can remember things from way back. If so, how is it that some remember things better than others? The difference between those who have a good memory and those who don't has much more to do with how they remember things, how they store information, how they associate

things, and how they retrieve their memory, than it has with having a plain old "blessing of good memory". Those who have a "good memory" are merely using it more efficiently. They are born knowing how to use the right techniques. It is obvious to them that this is the way to think and remember. If others would also use those same techniques, they would get much better results and remember things more efficiently. I studied this topic of improving memory for a while, and I found that it not only helps me improve my own memory, but enables me to help others improve their memory, as well. Instantly. There is no magic.



It all has to do with sharpening the tried and proven techniques.

A Torah scholar once asked Hacham Ovadia Yossef, zt"l, for some memory tips. Hacham Ovadia asked the young man what masechet (tractate from Talmud Bavli) he was learning. Hacham Ovadia took out that volume from the Talmud and handed it over to the fellow. Hacham O. asked him to open to the longest Tosefot in the Massechet. R' Ovadia started to say the Tosefot word for word, by heart, while the student followed along with his finger. R' Ovadia explained that this amazing recall is not from any reading technique or learning technique. **It is from learning that Tosefot 200 times!!!**

This story is unique, for it tells us that the geniuses, the Torah giants, had a system. It was not just good memory. Why don't most Torah scholars learn a Tosefot 200 times, whereas Hacham Ovadia did? Tune into the Hespel heard in a eulogy by his son, Harav David Yossef.

*As a yeshiva boy, before getting married, I would learn every night with my father, at a set time. After I got married, a set time was not possible. Each night, my father would take out his personal phone book and look up my home phone number to call me and set a time when it would work out for both of us. After a while, with the Rabbi always asking Rabbanit Margalit to bring the phone book, she wondered out loud to him, "How can it be that the Rav, who knows so many sefarim by heart, does not yet know the phone number by heart? You store so much information in your head, so much Torah; is it so hard to remember your son's phone number, as well?" So, the Rav told her that he would try to memorize his son's home phone number. He said R' David's number over and over to himself, ten times, but he could not remember it!! He explained to his wife, "It seems that I remember the things that are important to me. Torah, I can remember, because **it is so important to me**. A phone number, a couple of digits, even if it is my son's number, just slips my mind!!! I can always just look it up..."*

Rav David explained this with something R' Ovadia said from our parasha. Yaakov had not seen his son Yosef for 22 years, and thought that he was dead. Yaakov's spirits were greatly dampened by this. The Midrash tells us. *His children feared to inform him suddenly that Yosef was indeed alive; their father's soul might depart from him at receiving such a great shock. Serah, daughter of Asher, waited for an opportunity when Yaakov would be in the middle of his prayer.* (Serah knew that during prayer, her grandfather, Yaakov, had the greatest control over his emotions. This might have been the reason why she picked such a time to reveal the exciting news!) *Then, she wondered out loud, near Yaakov, while he was praying, "Is Yosef still alive? Did he have two boys, Menashe and Efraim?" Yaakov heard this and his heart melted, while he stood in prayer. Once he had finished praying, he looked out the window.* (Yaakov did not stop his prayers to see if this was true, or to look out the window, despite this having been the greatest shock of his life!! Some people today just feel a vibration in their pocket in the middle of the Amidah, and they can't help but take a quick peek!) *And he saw the Agalot, the wagons* (this was Yosef's way of alluding to the law of Eglah Arufa, the last law which he had learned together with his father before their separation. The word "egla" – calf – sounds like the word "wagon" – agalah – in Hebrew.) Yaakov understood, immediately, the clever allusion to the law that he had last learned together with Yosef.

The Midrash tells us the story. *Yosef told his brothers, If Yaakov, our father, will believe you that I am still alive, great. If not, ask him the following. Wasn't it the Parasha of Eglah Arufah that I was learning with him, before I left? ... This is why the passuk says, וירא את העגלות ותחי רוח יעקב, And he saw the carriages, and the spirit of Yaakov was refreshed, And Yaakov said (I am blessed with) **much** (joy)! My son Yosef is still alive!!*

The question that needs to be answered is, why did Yosef think of bringing their having learned this law together as proof that he was alive, rather than



any other proof? Why was it this that revived his father's spirit, and not anything else?

R' Ovadia would explain. Yosef knew that even if his father would find out that he was alive, he would have been worried that Yosef, who was only 17 years old the last time he saw him, had fallen from the lofty spiritual stature of the Tribes. The good news would not yet be very fulfilling and happy, until his father heard that his dear son still loved to learn Torah, *and felt connected to it*. Once Yaakov realized the fact that his son still remembered his learning, this showed Yaakov that despite everything that Yosef had gone through, *he still felt close to Torah; it was still important to him. When something is very important to you, you will remember it*. And this is what Yaakov needed to know, so that his spirit would be revived.

If something is very important to you, if it is personal, you will associate it with yourself, and memory works mostly on associations. If you associate and identify yourself with being a sports fan of a certain team, you will find it easier to remember the stats of the players. Memory has a lot to do with what is important, and thus, relevant and meaningful, to you. With your identity. With what you are all about. We see in this parasha, over and over, what the family of Yaakov Avinu was all about. Torah, Torah and more Torah. Before Yaakov went down with his family to Egypt, he sent his son Yehuda ahead to make a Beit Midrash

where they could learn the laws of the Torah. After Yosef revealed himself to his brothers and asked them to go back home to bring Yaakov to Egypt, he warned them **אל תרגזו בדרך**, do not get angry on the way. Our rabbis tell us, according to one interpretation, that Yosef feared that they might get so deeply involved in a disagreement on the way home *that they might lose their way*. What was it that worried Yosef? After having had such a profound shock, finding out that Yosef was alive and king of Egypt, what could they have a disagreement about? Not about who was to blame for their mistake in selling Yosef, **but he feared that they might get involved in a deep discussion of Torah !!!**

When Yaakov first met Yosef after 22 years, Yosef cried a lot on the shoulder of his father, but Yaakov did not cry. He did not kiss his son. Why not? *Yaakov was too busy for that, at the time*. Our Rabbis tell us Yaakov was reciting Kriat Shema!! At such an *exciting* moment in his life, at a time when he felt *his whole soul*, Yaakov wanted to dedicate this moment to and **associate it** with his love of G-d. **Because that is of the utmost importance to Yaakov**. That this *love for his son* can be linked to his *love for G-d*. And, to take on himself at this time, when he realized how everything had worked out for the best, a new level of obligation to serve G-d. Yaakov wanted to forever remember his gratitude to G-d, so **he linked it** to the happiest moment of his life.

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**Leilui Nishmat Natan Ben Rahel Nathan Marcus A'h**

