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THE ART OF INVISIBLE GROWTH

Have you ever worked hard at something, really hard, poured everything into it, and felt like nothing came of it? Maybe it's a relationship you keep trying to fix. A career that feels like running on a treadmill. Parenting that leaves you feeling like you're failing no matter what you do. No results. No feedback. You may have become a person who stopped believing that anything you built would last.

That was the core of the exile in Egypt.

It is hard for us to fathom what exactly was the slavery, bondage and exile that the Jews were in. When the Jews complained about the desert conditions, they said how good it was for them in Egypt. Bnei Yisrael cry out: "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free... the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic." (*Bamidbar 11:5*) How could free slaves miss slavery?

Egypt was the land referred to as 'גן ה' like G-d's Garden. The Nile was a natural irrigation system. Egypt was beautiful and rich, fertile, comfortable, material plenty, and technologically advanced. ערֹוּת the Land of Physical Pleasure, Impurity, Spiritual Emptiness. What then was the Exile of Egypt about?

Pharaoh's plan of Exile and Slavery was to break the spirits of the Jews, to train them to stop believing that efforts lead anywhere. In Egypt, the Jews built two cities: Pitom and Raamses. Pitom, Pi Tehom, it was built on quicksand and sinkholes.

You'd build and build, and suddenly, Pitom, the ground would collapse, and everything would fall in. Raamses was from the word נִמְסָה, whatever you constructed simply crumbled and dissolved. 210 years, 3 million Jewish male slaves ages 20 to 60 working on building these two cities, and all their building efforts of these two cities were fruitless. Many Jews died building these two cities, it was dangerous to build there, עֲרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת, as in סכנה, danger. The sons, בָּנִים, who are the continuation of a father, would be thrown into the Nile. This was *avodat parech*—crushing labor. Not crushing because it was physically hard, but because it led nowhere.

When Moshe came to tell the Jews the good news that Redemption has finally arrived, they were so broken in spirit, they could not hear words of hope. מִקְצֵר רוּחַ *Kotzer ruach* That was the whole slavery and exile. The numerical value of מִקְצֵר *MiKotzer* is 430, which is the year count that it says the Jews were in Egypt, even though they were only there for 210 years. Because the slavery was about reaching a level of psychological break down.

What is *Kotzer ruach*? *Kotzer ruach* isn't sadness. It's when you feel so helpless and hopeless, that you can't believe change is possible! When Moshe told them, We are leaving! They just did not want to be disappointed!

Even after witnessing the plagues, the Jews were so psychologically constricted, they could not believe,



that there was any point in leaving! Even though they knew they were leaving, they only had enough time to bake Matzah! Why couldn't they bake bread? Moshe told them that they would be leaving any minute!?! Bread requires planning, patience, confidence that what you start will finish. Matzah is the food of people who have lost faith that waiting leads anywhere. Matzah is survival food, no delay, no trust in process. Matzah, was the only bread they knew **הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים**

The commentators explain that Kotzer Ruach, short spiritedness meant, that they were so broken from trying to stop serving idols, they did not believe they can ever stop!!! That was Egypt! Mitzrayim, means, constricted! As much as you try to build, physically, spiritually, everything just collapses!

What is psychological constriction? Here is a famous flea experiment to explain: you put a flea in a jar and you cover the jar with a clear lid, and after enough jumps, and enough head bumps, the flea stops jumping higher than that invisible ceiling. Later, when you remove the lid, the flea won't even try to escape. The flea will jump to exactly the height of the jar, but no higher! Why? Repeated failure trained the nervous system of the flea to stop expecting escape. And once expectation is gone, people don't prepare. They don't pack. They don't plan. Not because they don't want freedom, but because they've learned that pushing higher is pointless.

The commentators teach, that Egypt was not only a physical prison, an emotional and spiritual prison. It was a mystical one, bound by Bilaam's dark sorceries. The Midrash teaches that when Bilaam was Pharaoh's advisor, he had placed black magic upon Egypt's borders. Two massive idols, crafted in the likeness of dogs, stood at the boundaries. Through Bilaam's witchcraft, these stone guardians would burst into deafening barking whenever a Jewish slave attempted to cross beyond Egypt's borders. The supernatural alarm would alert the authorities, and the Jew would be penalized. Bilaam's second spell was worse than the first: a Jew who somehow managed to escape by foot, walking for hours, even days, no matter how far he traveled, no matter which direction he chose, the sorcery would bend every road back toward Egypt.

When a person has lived too long in a Pitom and Raamses mindset, hope is dangerous. When you've learned that nothing lasts, all seems futile. Pharaoh made Egyptian slavery in the spirit, not only in the body. Don't expect better, don't trust growth. Don't believe tomorrow can be different. The hardest part of slavery was not the bricks, it was the mental conditioning. The deepest exile is when: A person no longer feels enslaved, because the exile feels like home. At least there, when we don't try to change, we know what to expect. Nothing. That's why many Jews didn't want to leave.

Viktor Frankl discovered in Auschwitz that people didn't collapse primarily from suffering, but from suffering without meaning. When effort feels endless, when efforts doesn't lead to progress, that is the classic condition for burnout. There's an old story of a man who is imprisoned. One day, the jailer tells him: "If you want food, turn this millstone all day." So the prisoner works, turning, sweating, exhausting himself. Day after day. Year after year. He feels that at least he is doing something meaningful and his efforts bear fruit. Years later, he's released. Only then does he discover the truth: the millstone was never connected to anything. Behind the wall he sees nothing but a rusty chain. No grain. No mill. No purpose. He screams, "All those years! I worked for nothing that had any benefit for anyone!" And that is when he breaks!

Many people today are living in a modern Egypt. We may feel we invested so much, and it does not seem like anything we did, built anything meaningful. We can ask, if G-d does everything for the good, what was the good in this whole constricted slavery of Egyptian Exile we went through for 210 years?

Well, listen to what the guard says to the prisoner who saw fruitlessness to his efforts: "You worked to stay alive. If you hadn't turned the mill, you would not have survived. You needed this to keep you busy in the cell, otherwise, you would have lost your mind! In other words: You weren't grinding grain. You were grinding yourself into someone who could survive. Sometimes, the purpose of what you're doing is not what it produces, but what it produces in you.

The real question is: What kind of people does effort-without-results create? Egypt taught the Jews how to keep going even when they couldn't see meaning. How to follow instructions without understanding. How to act without guarantees. That is what prepared them for *Naaseh v'Nishma*, we will do and we will listen. The Jews in Egypt learnt humility. They learnt empathy to other slaves, empathy to converts and strangers. They learnt to follow orders, even without knowing what the meaning was. We learnt to fight spiritual challenges, even if we feel that we are building on quicksand.

Effort is not measured by what you can see. It is measured by what it makes of you. You can't measure your success by the outcome of your work, but instead, by the person who you have become in times of stress, conflict and adversity. Avraham obeys G-d's command of Lech Lecha, moves, sacrifices for a better future, yet sees famine, exile, setbacks. Yaakov for 20 years in

Lavan's house experienced deception, and endless labor. Moshe Rabbeinu is king for 40 years in Midian, until he was chased from there as well. 40 years of Moshe's life, that go into total disappearance from history. Chazal say these places, although they seemed fruitless, but that is what built Avraham, Yaakov, and Moshe to become the people they were meant to be! Avraham the man of blind faith, Yaakov the man of truth, and Moshe to become a leader of men! Growth often feels invisible, until suddenly, it is revealed all at once. Chana went through years of unanswered tefillot, where all she got was years of silence. The Gemara says her prayers reshaped the *entire halachic structure of tefillah, and from her the nation learned for the rest of time, how one is supposed to pray*. The efforts that bore no fruit, created the person who became eternal.

One day, somehow, Hashem shows a person what they were building all along. Nothing was lost. Not a single effort. Not a single tear.

THE ART OF SEIZING OPPURTUNITIES

The first recorded case of 'Don't just stand there! Do something!' was G-d telling Moshe to stop praying, and instead be like Nike, Just do it! Just walk into the sea until the water reaches your nostrils! Moshe was praying, and G-d said, now is not the time to pray, to rely on Me through prayer. Now is time, to rely on Me through action.

G-d wants us to do our part. Not to do Hishtadlut, as if He needs our help. But through Hishtadlut, you are expressing a higher level of faith, that you are putting your faith into practice, not just praying.

The "Do Your Part" mindset, is the most optimistic mindset. If you pray for a job, but don't send a resume, do you really believe in G-d? If you want G-d to help you find your soulmate, but you're not dating, do you really want a miracle?

Tefillah, tefillin, are imagination machines. The root is shared with the words that Yaakov told Yosef, I never imagined, *פללתי*, I would ever see your face again. When we pray, we are in imagining zone. When we say Kaddish, we are

imagining the Final Redemption. When we wear Tefillin, we are imagining G-d taking us out of Egypt, and becoming His servants. When we pray, we enter the imagination zone—visualizing G-d's Hashgacha Pratit (Divine Providence) and miracles. When we pray and wear Tefillin, we are also locking ourselves into dependency on G-d, as it shares the root with the word *ונתן בפלילים*, *he put him in jail*, that we can't help ourselves without G-d. We can't even move from the place where we are standing, as we stand with our feet together, without G-d.

But just like G-d gives us imagination to dream big, He also gives us two feet to start walking. Only when we pray, our feet should remain together, but after prayer, you got to make your moves. Imagine G-d saying, 'I will split the sea for you, but I need you first to walk through it, with no preview first. I need you to be vulnerable for Me, and I will save you.' If you don't act upon your imagination, you are not dreaming, you are just drooling. Faith is sometimes walking, not just wishing. Faith is not about waiting for a miracle—it's about jumping into the water before it happens.

The Jews are called Ivriim, עבריים. G-d told Moshe to tell Pharaoh, that the G-d of the Ivriim, sent you to him. The word עבריים is spelled with two Yuds, because we are not just the children of Avraham Halvri, who stood alone on one side of the river, alone from the World in his beliefs in a One G-d. We are also עוברים, passers through the Sea. Even before we passed through the Sea, we, in our essence, our believers in blind faith. We will work through the Sea for G-d and that is why G-d will split the Sea for us. We will jump into a fire for Him, and be sacrificed for His Name. This is the way we get into the highest level of connection with G-d, as we are supposed to have in mind when we say the words in Amidah, למען שמו באהבה, we are supposed to imagine ourselves going through the four deaths of Beit Din for Him. G-d does miracles, when we stretch out our hand, to grab His. As we say in our prayers ונתנו ידיים זמירות, G-d saved by the sea, the Jews that are called Yedidim, as in the words יד ביד, hand in hand. G-d saves us when we rely in Him, when we give Him our hand, and depend on Him.

Seizing opportunities is giving G-d your hand. Nachshon be Aminadav was first into the Sea, as he seized the opportunity to sanctify G-d's Name. In that merit, he merited to be the great grandfather of King David. Because that is what a Jewish King does. He puts his hand in G-d's Hand. The Star of David, is made of an arrow going up, with and arrow going down. Because when we go against our nature for G-d, G-d goes against His nature for us.

It is your choice how to look at your world. You could focus on all the things that you can't change, all the difficulties, and annoyances, all the things you don't love. Or, you could look for all the opportunities in your life. They are both there, the question is what you look for.

They once asked Bill Gates how he became so rich. On live TV, he pulled out his checkbook and said, "How much do you want? Name any number." The interviewer hesitated, unsure of what to say. Gates smirked, "That's why I'm rich and you're not. When opportunity knocks, I don't hesitate—I take it."

Bill was right. There is a book called Outliers, an entire book about how the people who were successful in many fields, including Bill, was simply because they were in the right place in the right time, and they adapted to those new circumstances and realities to "create" the opportunities that were put in their lives. Bill Gates had unique access to a computer in the 1960s, allowing him to code endlessly before launching Microsoft. The word Mazal stands for Makom (place), Zman (time) Lashon/Limud (communication/ competence). Many tech billionaires, including Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, were born between 1953-1955, making them the perfect age to take advantage of the 1970s computer revolution. Successful hockey players in Canada are often born in January-March because the cutoff for age-group teams is January 1st. This gives them a physical advantage at a young age, leading to better coaching and more opportunities. Many of the most successful Jewish lawyers in the 20th century were born to immigrant parents who worked in garment factories. This upbringing taught them business skills, work ethic, and adaptability, setting them up for success.

This is one of the most important questions in coaching. In the place where you are, in the time that you are in, the people that you are connected to, and the knowledge you know, what are your opportunities? This can be regarding the opportunities in any area of the circle of life. Education, Spirituality, Relationships, Family, Finance, Health, Personal Growth and Self Care. What are your opportunities? This is where G-d wants you to act upon those opportunities, and rely on Him. You might fail, you may make yourself vulnerable, but if you rely on Him, after you pray to Him, He will pull you through. Somehow.

We have never been in a time with so much opportunity. We live in a time that our ancestors could only dream about. Electric cars, AI, virtual meetings, and the inventions that are becoming reality, like flying across Atlantic in half the time.

Even spiritually, the amount of opportunities to grow in Torah, with the latest technology, are enormous. Every moment you are in your car, you can be learning, about anything you want, from anyone you want. Each moment, is an opportunity

by G-d for you to learn something. Don't lose the opportunity. Time is money. But even more true, Time is Torah.

There was a man, who missed the opportunity, to be King David's grandfather. Most people don't know, that his name was Tov. People know Tov, as Ploni Almoni. Ruth had in her name, her future grandchild, King David. Ruth is from the word, *Shirot* V'Tishbahot, songs and praise, and King David was the source for *Shirot*.

Before Ruth tried marrying Boaz, she first tried marrying a closer relative to her first husband, Ploni Almoni, someone whose name was Tov. Now Tov did not want to marry Ruth because he did not come to the study hall, when they were learning the lesson, the Halacha, that the Torah only forbids marrying a male Moabi, not a Mobit, a female from Moab. So, Tov turned Ruth away. Boaz, who did not miss a day of learning, knew the law, so he married her. This is what the passuk means *כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתי אל תעזבו* *Because I gave you, Tov, a great deal, just don't miss out on another day of learning.* You don't know when you miss a Torah class, when you miss another level of education, what opportunities you are blowing. Skipping Torah learning isn't just missing a shiur—it's missing your destiny. You never know which class, Sefer, or conversation will change your life.

A word of caution. When we focus too much on seizing opportunities, we forget that the purpose of seizing opportunity, of Hishtadlut, is just to express our faith in G-d in practice. Hishtadlut is not meant to be, that the amount you hustle, will be the amount that you will have or achieve.

In this week's Parasha, we learn about the Mannah. G-d commands Moshe that He wants the Mannah to be stored in a jar for eternity, in the Holy Ark, alongside the Tablets. What is the reason, that out of all the miracles that G-d did for the Jews, G-d wants a jar specifically of Mannah to remember the miracle? Why not a jar of blood, a jar of frogs, a jar of locust? And why was Moshe specifically supposed to place the jar in the place of the Holy Ark?

There was a message that G-d wanted us to remember, forever, as the prophet Yirmiyahu once reminded the Nation. The people complained to Yirmiyahu that if they would learn Torah, who would support them, financially? They don't have time to learn Torah, because they are working so hard! Yirmiyahu went into the Holy of Holies, and took out the jar of Mannah. He said, the same G-d who supported the Jews with the Mannah for 40 years in the Desert, is the same G-d who will support you!

Picture this: Moshe would teach Torah in the desert from morning to night. Families were dependent on their fathers to bring home food for the family, for the entire day, and fathers would try to be responsible. Whatever Mannah they collected in the morning, is all the food they would have for the day. Some fathers collected as much as they can, for their large families. Many fathers had adopted a few families, as only 20 percent of the fathers left Egypt. 80 percent of dads died in the plague of darkness. Some fathers adopted up to 5 families, as the passuk says, *זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך*. Each birth in Egypt, was 6 children at a time, so there must have been a lot of Mannah to be collected for each family. But Moshe was starting to teach Torah!! How could you come late to class?

There were some who gathered whatever they could, even if it was not that much, but once class started, they made sure to be there on time! And G-d made His miracle, that the one who gathered more, did not gain any more than the one who gathered less. In the end of the day, the one who learned more, and gathered less, did not lack one bit, from the one who learned less and gathered more! They all had exactly how much they needed!

This test was to be put in a place to be remembered forever, because this is the miracle that goes on forever, as this financial test keeps repeating itself. Which opportunities do you chase, and how hard do you chase them? We must ask our Rabbis and mentors, these questions if we want to know what opportunities, exactly, G-d wants from us to focus on! You don't want to work, when you are supposed to learn, because the money you make, when you are supposed to learn is not money that G-d is giving you. That is money that you are taking, because G-d could have given you that

money in the time that you work, without taking from the time that you learn! The rule is, that money that G-d gives you in your work hours that is balanced and healthy, that money is yours to keep. But the money that you make, when you work unnecessarily on Hol Hamoed, unnecessarily close to Shabbat, off of interest, during times when you are supposed to learn, or during times when you are supposed to spend with family, that is money that you don't want, opportunities you don't

want. That is money that G-d is not giving you. That money, G-d eventually takes away. There is no beracha in it.

Moshe was to put the jar of Mannah next to the Holy Ark, the representation of Torah study, to teach, that the only way to learn Torah, is to practice this belief, and manage your opportunities wisely.

THE ART OF HOLDING ON

What would you do in your life differently if you knew you could not fail? is probably the most important question in coaching. The second most important question What would be the worst case scenario, in case what you would like to do does not work out?

No one is a super man... we are only asked to do the best we can. Troubles, got the feelings scared, and always seem to catch me when I am least prepared... Frozen, when I have to choose, any road I take I got something to lose... Quest, was it meant to be? Are or is this all part of my destiny? You'll never know, just let it go, or what could take you there, but in time you will find you don't have to despair!

Hold on, give it just a little more, Hold on, wait for the other door to open, never give up hope!!!

Appreciation, for what you own, focus on your blessings and how much you've grown... Remember that you never are in this world alone! Trials arise before your eyes, and took you by surprise, got news for you, courage never dies!

Hold on, give it just a little more, Hold on, wait for the other door to open, never give up hope!

This song, from Yaakov Shwekey, is lately my favorite song, and is playing in my headphones, right now, as I am writing this article, blocking out the noise in my Jerusalem apartment, while my wife is holding up the fortress of the family. The printer's dead line, is in just one hour, if I want to get this article out, as I had a crazy week, juggling everything in my life. I won't be able to have the editor edit this, so I am just writing away, hoping I won't fail, and worse case scenario, people will

write me all my typing mistakes... But If I could give just one person a little hope, it is worth to just type away and get the article out...

Living in Israel, is just living in מתח, stress, that you just don't have a minute to just chill. Even in front of my elevator, in my building with 40 apartments, and about 40 people living on each floor of the twelve flights in my building. And between the two elevators, is a sign, that while you wait for the elevator, there is a sign of the Tehillim and prayers to say for the soldiers and for the Jewish Nation. And in the elevator, as you are going up 10 flights from the parking lot, there is a daily dvar Torah on a rotating message, that someone removes each day. So even in the elevator, when you can't check your phone, you have some message, to make sure, your mind is always at edge!

"There was once a man, who went to his Rabbi, asking for help with his life, and his bleak future. The Rabbi blessed him, he thanked the Rabbi, and exited the room. The son of the Rabbi asked this man, what did his father, the Rabbi, tell him, that gave him new hope, that it was worth to come to the Rabbi for? The man said, the Rabbi blessed him, that Hashem Ya'azor! G-d will help!

The son of the Rabbi, asked this man, "What will you do, until Hashem Ya'azor? Until G-d's help?" The man was stumped,... immediately he asked to go back in, to the Rabbi, to ask him, what will I do, until G-d will help me?

The Rabbi smiled, and answered, Until Hashem Ya'azor, Hashem Ya'azor! Until G-d helps, G-d will help!

We try to dream big, we try to hold on, and we are challenged again and again, not knowing how we will survive or thrive. But that is what life is all about! It is one big long test, before the elevator, during the elevator, after the elevator, of G-d asking you, DO YOU STILL SEE ME? DO YOU STILL BELIEVE IN ME? It is so funny, what my mother just sent me last night, while I was sleeping. "I wonder what the part of my brain that used to store people's phone numbers is doing now!" You can sometimes wonder when you are thrown your hardest life tests, how when things were so calm, you thought that you could manage life, all by yourself! You thought you got it all! When things go great, you say, I got this! But when things go wrong, you say, G-d why did you do this? Like Naomi said, אֲנִי מְלֵאָה הֵלְכְתִּי וְרֵיקָם הָשִׁיבָנִי יְהוָה. *When I left Israel, I went so full with blessing. But G-d brought me back empty handed!* One second, Naomi. When things are good, you go alone, but when things are not good, it's all G-d?!! Its pretty hard to love G-d like that, or trust in G-d like that!

If you can't dream big, you gave up on yourself, on your destiny! Of course, worst case scenarios can happen, but usually, the things that go wrong in life, are never the things you dreaded for so long. Every older man I asked told me so! The things that go wrong in life, were never the things you dreaded anyway, so why not dream big? Meaning, G-d takes care of all what you dread, as worst-case scenario!

As we see in this war, as IDF keeps moving forward they are learning how right they were for moving forward, not knowing how important this war is! Not knowing if we can actually get rid of Hamas forever, or if we can ever get our hostages, not knowing how the world will respond, but we need to dream big! We really need every prayer, every moment of Hizuk, every Hessed, to win this war!!!! Last week, we had two soldiers that are Baalei Teshuva eating by us Friday night, one was Duvdani, and the other was Givati. The help they had from donations from America with the gear made all the difference for them! We had the greatest meal together, while they told my children how they asked their superiors, if they can go back to yeshiva to learn, as they can learn the whole day,

and they believe that their Torah and prayer all day, can help more, than being on the fronts at war, because WE NEED MIRACLES!!! We need G-d! And the army and their friends let them back to yeshiva! You should have watched these guys bench Birkat Hamazon, and how they only spoke Torah at the table! We really had angels this last Friday night with us!

This is something we find in the Parasha. וּבְרִיחַ אֶפְיָהּ גָּעְרָמוּ מַיִם נִצְבּוּ כְמוֹגָהּ נִזְלִים קִפְאוּ תַּהֲמֵת בְּלִבָּיָם. *And with the breath of Your nostrils the waters were heaped up; the running water stood erect like a wall; the depths congealed in the heart of the sea.*

What does that mean , that the water congealed in the middle of the sea?!

We know that depth of the Sea, is very deep, much deeper than the ground at the shore. When the sea was split to two, and the floor of the Sea was revealed, there was a great gap in height, from the shore, to the bottom of the Sea! The Jews could have fallen into the depth, and gotten hurt, even if it was all dry! And then they would have to trouble themselves greatly to climb back up, out of the Sea! So G-d made them a miracle, that the water congealed, and they walked on a flat, dry, congealed water, not at the bottom of the Sea! (Daat Zekenim, Baalei Hatosefot)

In the Hagaddah we say on Pesach night, אלו קרע לנו את הים ולא העבירונו בתוכו בהרבה דינו, If G-d would have split the Sea for us, and did not cross us the in the middle of the sea, in the dry land, that would have been enough for us to thank Him!

What? What is there to thank G-d for, if he would split the Sea and not take us across it? We would have been killed by the Egyptians!

No! The meaning is, that G-d not only split the Sea, in front of our eyes, but He also, brought us through the water themselves, not having to go down to the bottom of the Sea and climb back up again! He did not have to do that for us, but He did!

The word שִׁיר not only means Song, it also mean Circle, in the Mishnayot. (Shabbat 5 1) because every song is a circle, where the past note, and the present note, blend with the following note. We are

saddled his horse... You see, each person is made up of two parts, a person is a combination of the spiritual and the animalistic. When something is Assur, it just means it is saddling the animalistic part of you. It is keeping you in track, on the journey of life according to Judaism, which ends in Olam Haba. You might feel like the prohibition is choking you, if you perceive yourself and identity yourself, with the animalistic part of you. But if you identify with the soul, and the animalistic part of you is just a tool for physical survival, then the prohibition is to clarify that you are not an animal, but you are created in the Image of G-d, living life with a purpose that transcends life itself.

The word מותר, Muttar, permitted, shares the same root as the word לתור, to tour, search or stray. וְלֹא־תִתְּנוּ אֶתְכֶם לְבִקְכֶם וְאֶתְכֶם אֲשֶׁר־אַתֶּם זָנִים אֲחֵרִים When something is permitted, a person gets busy with looking outward, not inward. Why are things that are permitted, things that cause people to stray? Because when a person indulges in what is allowed, he eventually transgresses what he is not allowed. קדש עצמך במותר לך. Make yourself holy, in those things that are permitted for you. (Yevamot 20a) Just because it is permitted, you still can't overindulge. The first letters of קדש עצמך

are the same letters of עמלק. Because when you can't tame the beast, you become the beast.

When the Jews questioned if G-d is amongst them, this brought about Amalek. הָיָה יְהוָה בְּקֶרְבָּנוּ אִם־אֵין. Why does Amalek come as a punishment when we question if G-d is amongst us? Because Amalek believes, that we don't have G-d in us! That we are all a bunch of Apes! A bunch of horses! Amalek would cut the Milah of the Jews, and throw it up in the sky, telling G-d, Take who you have chosen! (Eicha R. 3) Why does it bother Amalek so much, that we have a Brit Milah? Because מילה stands for מי יעלה־לנו השמימה Who will take us up to Heaven? (See Tikunei Zohar 70, 131a) Because Amalek believes that a person in a body, is just a body, and is not at all Heavenly.

The Milah is the covenant with G-d, of restraint of physical desires. The restraint of the animalistic, is what allows the soul to express itself, and what allows us to climb to the highest Heaven.

A life without rules and regulations, is like playing soccer on a roof without walls. There is no purpose in the game of life, if there is no structure. With no rules, we are just animals, who roam with no purpose.

THE ART OF KICKSTARTING YOUR DAY

The purpose of all Thinkingaboutme.org articles is to bring self-help from the parasha. I started writing with the belief my Rabbis taught me, when I started learning coaching 12 years ago: there is no such thing as a genuine self-help tool, that the Gentiles teach, that is not written in the Torah, on a deeper level. And after writing an article, each week, for 12 years, I can't believe the infinite self-help wisdom of the Torah: I never, ever, lacked something new to write!

One of the basics of self-help and life coaching is to utilize the hour of power: the morning. The most productive people, who went from zero to hero, in any area of life, made sure to utilize the early morning hours to get into the momentum for peak performance and have tremendous impact on the rest of the day. The morning routines: exercise,

meditation, learning, prayer, family time, a healthy breakfast, getting to work before the hustle and bustle, seem to be the secret of the successful, giving them the confidence, calm and positive attitude needed to be most productive in checking off the boxes of their to do lists. If you win the morning, you win the day. A good morning, physically and emotionally, powers you throughout the day. It does not mean that you should not start your day or leave your house until you have done all these to perfection. It just means that you need to recognize the power of the morning and plan out your early-hour routines in advance, from the night before. Just ten minutes of strategizing your next day's schedule the night before can save you up to three hours of wasted time of execution, the next day. Those who start off the day fresh, with a preplanned routine, start off the day with a

proactive mindset focused on what is “important”, not a reactive one to what is “urgent”, and meaningless tasks. This is the concept of the first time it says **בקר**, morning, in the Torah. **וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר**. According to Judaism, the morning goes after the night before.

R’ Wolbe wanted to write in the intro to his epic book, Alei Shur, that his whole book was written in the morning hours, and that everything he wrote in the later hours of the day, he erased the following day. In the morning, there is a clarity that is just not there during noon and evening. The best surgeons make the hardest surgeries early morning, because the morning has in it the most clarity. A person can learn in one hour in the morning what it would take him 3 hours to learn, later in the day. What is the secret power in the mornings, and where do we see it in the Torah?

Each morning, in Shacharit, we say, **אֲלֵיךָ יְהוָה נִפְשִׁי** *To you, G-d, I lift my soul* (Tehillim 25;1), and *in You I trust* **בְּךָ בִּטְחִיתִי**. What does this mean? It means that although you gave G-d a worn-out Neshama at night, **בְּיָדְךָ אֶפְקֹד רִיחִי** (Tehillim 31;6) every single morning, G-d gives you back a fresh Neshama to kickstart an amazing day, **חֲדָשִׁים לְבָבָי** (Eicha 3;23/ Pesikta) This is what the words mean, **מִוֶּדָּה (מוֹדָה) אָנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מָלֵךְ חַי וְקַיִים**. **שָׁחַחְתָּרַת בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּהַמְלָה**. *That You gave me back my Neshama, with grace, and Your faith is great, רבה אמונתך* in that I give You each night a worn out and tattered Neshama, and I can trust that You will give it back to me, fresh and clean, ready to start life, anew, each day.

The morning is the time when G-d grants His Grace, more than any other time in the day. **וּבֹקֶר** *you will see the honor of G-d, in that He heard your complaints on G-d*. Rashi brings the Mechilta of R’ Shimon Bar Yochai, that explains this Passuk: The reason why the Mannah was brought in the morning is because the Jews were right for asking for the Manna, so G-d gave it in the morning, which is the time G-d shines His Face. In contrast, regarding the Slav, the Jews were in the wrong for asking for meat, G-d gave the Slav at nighttime, the time when G-d’s Face is “dark”. The mornings have in them G-d’s special radiance, something that you can’t get any other time in the day. G-d

gave the Manna specifically in the morning, to express that He is giving them the Manna out of love. As the Zohar explains, the morning is the time of great Chessed in the world, while night is the time of judgement. (Zohar Parashat Haman 404)

The morning is celebrated by the chirping of the birds, and that is why it is called **צִפּוֹרָא**, because chirping birds in Lashon Hakodesh are **צִפּוֹרִים**. (Meshivat Nefesh 1;5) The reason why morning is called **בקר** Boker, is because it is similar to other root words, like **בכר**, which means firstborn. It is similar to **בגר**, which means grown up. And similar to the root **פקר**, which means free. Although morning, firstborns, grown up, and free, don’t seem to have anything to do with each other, they all have a common denominator of freedom and independence. This is the reason why the root of **בקר**, morning, and **בקר**, cattle (cow), have the same root, because the cow is the most independent of all domestic animals. (R’ Shimshon R. Hirsch) If you want freedom and independence in life, don’t hit the SNOOZE button!

The reason why morning is called **בקר**, is from the root **ביקור**, which means to examine. (See commentators on Bereshit 1;5) When someone does **Bikur Cholim**, he is examining the status of the Choleh, the sick, to see if he could help in any way, physically or emotionally. The reason why the morning is called “examine” is because it is the time to reexamine everything in your life. You have 25,000 mornings, on an average, in your adult life, to reexamine how you live and what your life is about. Every single morning, you are being judged, a special judgement of the morning. **וַתִּפְקְדֵנוּ** *לְבָבָי לְבָבָי לְבָבָי* (Iyob 7;18/ Midrash Tehillim Mizmor 72) This is why, there are so many Halachot in Shulchan Aruch of how to start your day.

When Moshe wanted to prove to Korah that Aharon was deserving of the Priesthood, he said **בֹּקֶר יִלְדַּע יְהוָה אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְאֶת־הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְהַקָּרִיב אֵלָיו וְאֵת** *In the morning, and G-d will make known that which is His, and the holy one, He will bring close to Him, and the one He chooses, He will bring close to Him*. Why, specifically, did Moshe mention that in the

morning, בקר, G-d will make it clear? Why didn't Moshe say, מחר, tomorrow, G-d will make it clear?

The answer is that the morning has in it the power of clarity and examination that no other part of the day has. At night, a person has time to sleep on his ideas, first speaking them over with family and friends. But only in the morning, when someone is fresh, after they have “slept on it”, can they actually know, in their gut, which decision they are ready for, to take the next step forward. (See R.Sh.R. Hirsch Bamidbar 16;5) And if G-d proves to Korah and the world that the Priesthood belongs

Selfie steps to an awesome morning:

1. Focus on what you should stop doing, more than focusing on adding new things. Don't check emails, messages, updates, until you **have** to. This will make sure you start off in a proactive zone, not in a reactive zone. Rule your technology. Don't let your technology rule you.
2. Set up as much as you can for the morning, from the night before.
3. Make sure to get sunlight in the morning, upbeat music, stretch, and basic exercise. Learning and reading in the morning, does to the mind and soul, what exercise does for the body.
4. Silence and inactivity is just as important in the morning, as anything else in your morning routine.

THE ART OF VULNERABILITY

The only way to become an amazing writer is through writing. The only way to become an amazing speaker is by speaking. The only way to become a great cook is by cooking. The only way to become amazing at sports is by getting in the game; a game where you can lose, where your honor, and how people perceive you, is at stake. Vulnerability, being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally, is not always a bad thing. Vulnerability and risk can have an upside, when they are also the birthplace of courage, creativity and change.

Vulnerability is the essence of relationships. It is an art, of being the natural you, the uncalculated you, the you who is willing to risk being exposed and potentially look foolish, all for a greater purpose. That greater purpose, in relationships, can be a new level of trust. “This is me. I am willing to expose my flaws, with the hope that you accept me and

to Aharon and his family, specifically in the morning, this shows that G-d is shining His Face on Aharon. Something that Aharon definitely deserved, for being happy in his heart to see his younger brother Moshe as the leader of the Jewish People, instead of himself. וְרָאָה וְשָׂמַח בְּלִבּוֹ (Kli Yakar)

Your morning has in it the power for you to achieve independence, to reexamine your highest priorities, to make a restart and get into the momentum you need, to succeed.

love me for all that I am and all that I am not, my strengths and my weaknesses.”

Judaism is more than a religion; it is a relationship with your Creator, and how vulnerable you are means how close you are. At the essence of love is how much you are willing to give up for it. וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדֶךָ And you should love YKVK your G-d with all of your heart(s), with all of your soul (ready to give up your soul for the sake of the three cardinal sins), with all your “a lot” (ready to give up all of your money not to transgress sins; ready to love Him and accept, no matter what He brings into your life) The greatest men, Avraham, Yitzhak, R' Akiva, the Bet Yosef, lived their lives, ready to give it all up for G-d, waiting to give it all up for G-d.

This is what a Jew is, at his essence, עבריים. When G-d asks Moshe to represent Him to Pharaoh, to Egypt, to the world, He called Himself, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, YKVK the G-d of the Ivriim. (3;18) The Midrash tells us that the extra letter *Yud* in the

word עבריים is to hint to, עברי ים, the Jews who will cross the sea, for Me. Even before the Ten Plagues: G-d refers to us as crossers of the sea. Why?

We say in the Haggadah, when the Jews left Egypt, they needed merit. Even though G-d had promised Avraham that He would redeem the Jews, they did not have any mitzvot that they kept that would merit Redemption; they were spiritually naked, נאֶתָּה וְעָרִיָּה. So, G-d gave them two Mitzvot, *Korban Pesach* and *Brit Milah*. וְאַתָּה עָלֶיךָ וְאַתָּה לְךָ בְּדָמֶיךָ חַיִּי מִתְּבוּסָסֶת בְּדָמֶיךָ וְאָמַר לְךָ בְּדָמֶיךָ חַיִּי וְאָמַר לְךָ בְּדָמֶיךָ חַיִּי (Rashi Shemot 12:6)

If so, in what merit did the sea split for the Jews? הללו עובדי עבודה זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה There were still Jews who possessed idols with them when they passed through the sea! (Sanhedrin 103b) Even if they had the merit of Yosef's coffin with them, even if they had the merit of Avraham with them, they needed their own merit, as well!

The merit that got us across the sea was the special ticket, called ידיד ה'. G-d's friend. "Friendly" is schmoozing, chilling, having fun, sharing experiences. But *real* friends are those who are willing to give up something for that relationship. When you are willing to give up something for G-d, you get this magical ticket, that G-d will do anything and everything you ever ask for, even if you do not deserve it. As we say before beginning our prayers, וְיָדִידִים עָבְרוּ יָם... וְנִתְּנוּ יָדִידִים וְמִירוֹת שִׁירוֹת. This word *Yedid* is huge, because it means, *Yad b'yad*, hand in hand. (Megaleh Amukot, Devarim) Holding someone's hand, willing to put yourself on the line for them is being vulnerable for them.

It is amazing how, when Moshe cries out to G-d to save the people at the sea, G-d tells him not to pray for the people at the sea, G-d tells him not to pray: מִה־תַּצַּעַק אֵלַי דְּבַר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִסְעוּ: Why shouldn't Moshe pray? Since when shouldn't *anyone* pray? The answer is the merit of being a *Yedid Hashem*, is much greater than the merit of prayer. Prayer was not going to save the Jews from the sea. Only being "G-d's friend" would. G-d wanted to see the willingness of the Jews to expose themselves to vulnerability, to be in a relationship with Him, to

give them the merit that would save them. (Maharsha Sota 37a)

When Nachshon ben Aminadav went into the Sea until the water reached his lungs, G-d rewarded him with being the Forefather of King David, Mashiach, Daniel, Chananya, Mishael, Azarya, all of whom deserved the title of עברי ים, all people who were, at any time, ready to give it all up for G-d. They are willing to make themselves vulnerable for G-d, more than any other people are willing to open themselves to harm. Nachshon was going to Har Sinai to accept the Torah, and nothing, not even a raging sea, was going to stop him.

When Moshe blessed the tribe of Binyamin in וְזֶאת לְבִנְיָמִן אָמַר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְבָשָׁה עָלָיו הַבְּרָכָה, he said יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לְבָשָׁה עָלָיו הַבְּרָכָה Binyamin won the *Yedid Hashem* trophy, because he was the first tribe willing to go in after Nachshon Ben Aminadav. The reward for that trophy was that the Bet Hamikdash would be in Binyamin's territory. (Menachot 53b) And because they went into the sea ahead of the tribe of Yehuda, they merited that King Shaul, a descendant of Binyamin, would rule the Jewish people before King David from Yehuda. (See Tehillim 68;28 Metzudat David)

To be a *Yedid Hashem* does not only mean to give up your life for Him. It means to be ready to give up your comfort, your money, your sleep... The wives of the men who stay up late and get up early to learn, and they are willing to give up sleep for their husband's Torah learning, merit the *Yedid Hashem* trophy, the magical ticket that can take them to the highest places in Olam Haba. כִּן יִתֵּן לְיָדוֹ שָׁנָא (Tehillim 127;2, Yoma 77a)

Avraham Avinu was called *Yedid Hashem*, and we are all called *Yedidim* when we show that we are vulnerable and dependent on Him וְיִסְעוּ וְיִתְּנוּ יָדֵינוּ לַיהוָה. In his merit of self-sacrifice, of his vulnerability, we merited that our vulnerability will pull through for us.

Sometimes we fool ourselves into thinking that we are doing things for others, for G-d, for our family, when in reality, we are doing them for ourselves. Avraham Avinu proved that he was G-d-fearing,



only after the test of *Akeidat Yitzhak*. Although he was willing to be thrown into a fire for G-d at *Ur Kasdim*, that did not yet prove that he was willing to give up EVERYTHING for G-d. Giving up *Olam Hazei* for *Olam Haba*, for an ideology, for something that is more important, does not yet mean vulnerability for the relationship with G-d. Avraham was being tested to see if he was willing to give up everything important, his whole religion, his whole ideology, his whole future, for G-d. In the merit of Avraham chopping wood, **וַיִּבְרַק עָצֵי**

עֲלֶה, right away before he set out with Yitzhak to the *Akeida*, (just in case he might not find proper wood to chop when he would reach the place of the *Akeida*.) and shlepping it with him for three days, G-d “chopped” the sea for us. וַיִּכְרְעוּ הַיָּם. We remind ourselves of this vulnerability of Avraham each morning, when we say יְיָנוּ סוּרָה לְהֵם בְּקָרְעָתָהּ.

Every word of our prayers can light the fire of your soul. Everything that you are willing to be vulnerable to G-d for, can turn on your spiritual motivation.

THE ART OF TRUSTING

I know that this sounds ridiculous, but did you ever return G-d a favor? He did, does, and will always do, so much good for you and your family. Or is it just impossible to do G-d a favor, for He does not lack anything and does not need anything?

The Chida says that there is only one favor that you can do for G-d. And when you do this one thing, He will never forget it. פֶּה אָמַר יְקִיָּק וְזָכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבַת כְּלוּלָתֶיךָ לְכַתֹּךְ אַחֲרַי בְּמִדְבָּר בְּאַרְצִי לֵךְ וְרוּעָה: So said YKVK, I remembered for you the *kindness* of your youth, the love of the days you loved Me like a bride, you followed Me into the desert, through a barren land. (Yirmiyahu 2) G-d forever tells His People that He will never forget the kindness that they did for G-d! What was that kindness? They trusted in G-d, when it seemed as if He had no goods to supply. G-d compared this to a bride who out of her love to her husband, she followed him, trusting that he would provide her needs. Trust, belief and faith are the only kindness one can do for G-d. (See Chida in Homat Anach ibid.)

At times, we have nothing to give those who are suffering, who lack, who are down and depressed. But the most significant kindness we can offer them is that we believe in them, that they will figure things out, and make it

work, somehow. The Midrash tells us a fantastic story. There was a time in King Solomon's life when Ashmedai, King of Demons, overpowered him to leave his palace and live in a faraway place, without his royal clothing and entourage. Due to King Solomon's state of poverty, no one recognized him. This situation lasted for quite a while, and one time he met an old friend who was very wealthy, who invited him over for a meal, a meal deserving for kings. During lunch, this old friend opened a discussion. "Remember how things were when you were on top of the world?" These words made King Solomon so sad that he lost his appetite! He could not even swallow the bread, because the tears that drenched his face!

The next day, King Solomon met a poor man who recognized him and invited him over to a pitiful meal, with little to offer. Throughout the meal, however, he consoled King Solomon, saying, “The day will come when you will return to your throne, and everything will turn out for the best! G-d promised your father, David, that royalty would remain with his descendants. Your state is temporary. G-d is just rebuking you, and waiting for you to amend your wrongdoings...” This is the meaning of King Solomon’s words, טוב אֶרְחַת, יֵרֶק וְאֶהְבֶּה שֵׁם מֶשׁוֹר אֲבוֹת וְשִׁנְאוֹהֵבוֹ *Better a meal*

of herbs where there is love, than an Entrecote steak where there is hatred. (Mishlei 15; 17) (Midrash Mishlei 15;17)

What did this man do for King Solomon? He just gave a hungry King Solomon some rabbit food, lettuce and a carrot! True. But he did the greatest kindness. He believed in the poor king.

We are all created in G-d's image, and that means a lot of things. One of the things it means is that a human being needs that people believe in him/her. People want four things. They want to be *understood, respected, and liked*. But more than anything, people want and sometimes need, others to *believe* in them.

Our Rabbis teach that anyone who says the blessing גא'ל ישראל before praying the Amidah prayer is promised great things. Satan will not prosecute him that whole day. According to R' Yochanan, this ensures one to merit Olam Haba!! (Berachot 4b)

Why is it so great to recognize that G-d is the One who redeemed us from Egypt, before our prayers? What is the importance of this? How can this seemingly meaningless order in prayer, promise one *Olam Haba*?

Rabbenu Yonah answers that by recognizing that G-d redeemed us from Egypt before asking G-d our requests, one shows that he trusts in G-d. Recognizing G-d as our Redeemer, is the basis for *Bitachon*, trust in G-d. And *Bitachon* is the basis for fear and faith in Him. Trusting in G-d is what will give you *Olam Haba*! It must be the only favor you can ever do for G-d!

This is the essence of all our prayers and an express, first-class ticket to Olam Haba. It is putting your faith and trust in G-d into practice. The greatest kindness we can do for

G-d is to forever trust His message to us. ***I will answer you. I will be with you. I will not fail you. I will provide for you. I will give you serenity. I will strengthen you. I believe in you. I love you.*** At this very moment, G-d is your personal Redeemer גא'ל ישראל. (See Rashi Megillah 17b אתחלתא)

According to Judaism, G-d does not need our prayers to save us from our challenges, concerns, and issues. According to Judaism, G-d brings us challenges, concerns, and issues *because he wants our prayers*. He wants us to be kind to him, via trusting in Him. He wants us to do Him a favor, through believing in Him that if we would pray, He could save the day.

G-d returns this favor. *He* believes in *us* that we will ace our purpose in this world, so He keeps us around. א'ל אמונה (Devarim 32) When you believe in the people in your life, that they will somehow find their way, you give them infinite strength. Mordechai's trust in Esther, his belief in her, gave her the power to keep the secret of her religion from King Achashverosh. פאש'ר ה'יתה באמונה א'תו (Esther 2, according to one opinion, see Ibn Ezra)

So how do we show others that we believe in them? Here are the selfie steps.

- 1- Tell them how great you vision them in the future, not how low they are at the moment.
- 2- Recognize the G-dliness in them. Even without resources, people have an inner trait called resourcefulness. Resourcefulness is the ability to come up with solutions when it seems that there aren't any.
- 3- Let them know their strengths. Let them know all the good things they have done. And show them how even



their weaknesses, are the blessings of G-d in disguise.

4- Believe in the power of believing. (see Taanit 8a)

KEEP CLIMBING

R' Abraham J Twerski – *“People often ask me, ‘Is it true that you’ve written over fifty books? How did you find time, with your busy schedule, to write so many books?’ I tell them that I did not really write fifty books. I wrote one book, in fifty different ways. Almost everything I write relates in one way or another to the theme of self-esteem. I define self-esteem as a true and accurate awareness of one’s skills, capabilities and limitations.”* (By now, he has authored over 60 books.)

There is so much written on self-esteem. What is the Torah’s approach to self-esteem?

There are two sources of self-esteem; external and internal. Rabbi Noach Weinberg once said, “How great you are is not defined by how high you are on the ladder of success. It is defined by how many rungs you climbed.” Some people built their concept of self-esteem on where they are on the ladder; others measure it by the rungs they have climbed.

Ben Zoma teaches, “Who is wise? One who learns from everyone. Who is mighty? One who overcomes his Inclination. Who is rich? One who is happy with what he has. Who is honorable? One who honors others.” (Avot 4;1) What is the underlying thread tying these three seemingly unrelated lessons together?

Ben Zoma is teaching us that true success is internal. The more one’s success is a product of his own input, the more meaningful it will be. For example. There are two ways to support one’s self. A person can have money

because he worked hard to get a PhD. And he feels self-esteem because of it. The other case is that in which a person never earned his own money. He also has a PhD, but a different type. He is rich because Pappa Has Dough. Who feels better about his financial status? Who has a healthier self-esteem? The one who achieved, or the one who inherited? Ben Zoma teaches that what makes you great is not external achievements, blessings that were simply given to you. Rather, it is internal achievement that makes you great, that builds your self-esteem. How many rungs you climbed. Self-esteem must be earned.

The world does not respect effort without success. Because people only respect something that can be measured. But effort can’t be seen; and people can measure only what they see. The Torah view is different from that of the world. According to the Torah, where you are on the ladder is not as important as how many rungs you have climbed. And this question is the most important question in your life, everyday of your life. *Are you climbing?*

Why is how much you climb more important than where you are on the ladder?

וְהָאֵלֹהִים אֵלֵינוּ **This is my G-d, and I will build Him a Beit Hamikdash.** The word “This” teaches that at the splitting of the sea, each and every Jew pointed to G-d. R’ Chaim Shmulevitz brings out a principle of major importance for spiritual growth. “The maidservant prophesied and saw at the Sea what the prophet Yechezkel never saw his



whole life!” (Mechilta Beshalach 15 2) *Even though she had a prophetic vision, even though she experienced great recognition of G-d's existence, the maidservant stayed a maidservant, while Yechezkel is of the greatest of prophets. Why?*

To become a prophet like Yechezkel requires a great deal of dedicated effort. Very high level of Torah knowledge and perfection of character. The maidservant did not work to achieve this high voltage of recognition of G-d's Might. So, after the experience, she returned to her Maidservant status. At the end of our Parasha, a very short while after the Jewish people experienced the great revelation of G-d at the Sea, they found themselves in the desert with no water to drink. They questioned G-d, הֲיֵשׁ יְקֹנֶה בְּקִרְבֵּנוּ אִם-אֵין, Is G-d amongst us, or not? This caused Amalek to come and attack.

But, wait a second. Didn't they just have a revelation of G-d? One that was like no other revelation ever, before or after?! How could they question G-d????!! The answer is that the maidservant remained a maidservant. She experienced a revelation on a high spiritual level, but because she did not “climb”, herself, to get there, at the end of the revelation, she remained unchanged.

R Chaim Shmulevitz continues...This is how we can understand how Micha took his idol with him from Egypt, through the Red Sea, had it in his backpack at Har Sinai and never got rid of it. Because he never worked on himself. G-d put him on high levels, without his ever investing effort to achieve them, himself. He lacked the effort, so he never became great.

If we get to the top of the mountain without effort, it is much harder to stay on top. מִי־יַעֲלֶה

וּמִי־יָקוּם בְּמָקוֹם קָדְשׁוֹ Who will go up on the Mountain of G-d? But, staying on top is an entirely different question. And who will stand in His holy place? We say this in prayers, the first day after Shabbat, and at the end of our prayers on the High Holidays, when G-d puts us on high levels, even though we have not reached those levels through our own efforts. It is one thing to reach the top of the mountain. Staying on top is something entirely different. What you worked hard for stays with you forever.

The Me'am Loez lists 15 miracles of the Mannah in the desert. It was truly the most amazing thing. Still, the Jews complained about it in parashat Behaalotcha. *We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt, free of charge, the squash, the watermelon, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.* What? Why were they complaining about these foods, if they had the Manna?

The answer is that they never reached, through their own toil and striving, the level that G-d put them on. They were still at the level of an Egyptian slave. G-d wanted them to be ready for Har Sinai and the Giving of the Torah. So, He put them on the top of the ladder. But really, they never acquired that high level through their own effort, so they did not “own” their spiritual status.

The Talmud teaches that the reason why the prayers of the earlier Rabbis were answered much faster than ours is not because they were greater Torah scholars, but because they were Moser Nefesh for their Torah (Berachot 20a). How great you are is not how much you know. How great you are is how much you are willing to give up for what is important...

R Simlai taught that when the baby is in the mother's womb, he is taught the whole entire



Torah. And these days are the best days of the baby's life. And once it comes to the air of the world, the angel comes and slaps him on his mouth, and the child forgets all of the Torah (Niddah 30b).

Why does he forget everything he learns? Wouldn't it be great if we never forgot the Torah? The answer is that you never grew from Torah that you did not work hard to achieve.

But why did G-d make the climb more important than the rung?

The Talmud teaches us that in spirituality, in the world of your soul, there are rules to success. אמר רבי יצחק, אם יאמר לך אדם: יגעת ולא מצאתי – אל תאמן, לא יגעת ומצאתי – אל תאמן, יגעת ומצאתי.. *R Yitzhak said, if a person tells you, I exerted effort and I did not find, do not*

believe it. I exerted no effort at all, and I found – do not believe it. I exerted effort and I found, believe it. (Megillah 6b).

G-d made the climb more important than the rung, because He wants your Emunah. When you are climbing, striving, working hard with your whole heart and soul – that is when you build your Emunah. יגעת ומצאת תאמין. We connect with G-d the most from our efforts and our struggles. And that is how we grow and build self-esteem, from our connection with G-d. If you achieved a goal without working hard for it, you never grew internally. You never built within yourself trust in G-d or in yourself. And if you do not grow internally, you will not make new goals, greater than the old ones you have reached. Because one goal leads to another.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM

Allow me to ask you a question. Is “life” difficult? I pondered this a lot lately, and I realized that the answer to that question is – Yes, and No. Life is a series of problems. That is a great truth that we need to accept, in order for us to look past the problem for the solution. It is up to us: how we deal with those problems will define if life is difficult, or if it is not. Life is only difficult if we believe that life is not supposed to have problems. One can only deal with a problem in a realistic manner, after accepting Reality. Reality is recognizing that everything in our lives is orchestrated by G-d. That is the ultimate reality. Once a person is aware of the fact that G-d is managing every detail of what we experience for our good, the “problem” becomes a challenge – one that has been tailor made for our good. But as long as one has a misconception of what life *should* be, this contradiction of reality can make life seem difficult.

Recently, a game was invented, called *Mah Habayah?* *What's the problem?* The agenda of this game is to see who is the best at solving everyday problems that life gives us, with only five “options” cards. I decided to play this game with my family, instead of Monopoly, which we had played until now. Monopoly teaches the kids that if you have more money than others in your life, you win. As long as you can rub shoulders with the elite (Hotel Owners) in your society, you are still “in the game”, you are still a player. If not, you are just unsuccessful. What a depressing, stressful way to look at life. But *Mah HaBayah* rewards with compliment cards (the first to get 15 cards wins). You receive one each time you come up with a solution for your everyday life problem, with the resources (your option cards) that Luck (G-d) gives you. The game reprograms the brain for the big game called Life. I hope to instill creativity and resourcefulness in my



children. Resourcefulness is the level of character where the answers to life's problem are not dependant on what I have (my resources), but who I am. And it is not just resourcefulness that I would like to instill in them. It is Jewish Resourcefulness.

Life problems are any reality that you want in life and it is not so, and it bothers you. Life problems overshadow a person's creativity; many people freeze, fret, or just get frustrated when faced by such a challenge. The first thing to do in order to get out of the problem is to write it out on paper, without any exclamation marks or emotions. Give the problem boundaries. Then, ask, *What are my options? What can I do in order to get the best, most realistic result or solution?* The problem is only that we are looking at what cannot be done, where there is no option. And the reason why we look at the options that we do not have, is because we believe the problem should not be there. Accepting is the first step to resourcefulness.

There is a famous saying from R. Nachman from Breslev. *Stop telling G-d how big your problems are. Start telling your problems how great G-d is.* Eliyahu Shiri, from Merkaz Koah Hatodeah, has a great coaching tool. Instead of the coach asking the client, who is faced with a life problem, the question, "What are your options?", Shiri asks, "What are G-d's options?" Phrasing the question this way is infinitely more effective. It enables the client to tap into what I call Jewish Resourcefulness. Many times, when faced with life problems, we think "in the box", and in the box there are no options. But when we think what G-d's options are, we can think out of the box, out of the confines of regular thinking, out of our limitations, and out of ourselves. And most importantly, this question is the ultimate,

optimistic question. When you have G-d's options, no problem is permanent.

When the Jewish people were stranded at the Sea, they had two impossible options. Either everyone drowns, or everyone dies at war. Moshe and B'nei Yisrael cried out to G-d, and G-d said, *מה תצעק אלי, Why do you cry out to Me? דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו Speak to the Jews and they shall travel!* Rashi comments that Moshe stood and prayed, and G-d said to him, that now is not a time to make lengthy prayers, when the Jews are in distress. And another explanation. *מה תצעק אלי, עלי הדבר תלוי ולא עליך, Why do you call out to Me? This issue is Mine, not yours.*

The Or Hachayyim asks, aren't we supposed to pray when we find ourselves in distress? What was the meaning of this question, *מה תצעק אלי, Why do you cry out to me in prayer?* The Or Hachayyim explains that the Jewish Nation was not worthy of salvation. They served idols just like the Egyptians, and they had no merit to live through this battle, any more than their opponents. Prayer, here, would not help. But blind faith would. Faith is more powerful than prayer. Nahshon Ben Aminadav's walking into the waters until he nearly drowned provided the merit for the splitting of the Red Sea. When we live with faith, even if we are unworthy, G-d grants us salvation. It was not prayer that G-d wanted; it was faith.

We can answer the question of the Or Hachayyim differently, though. The passuk does not say, *למה תצעק אלי Why do you cry out to Me?* The passuk says, *מה תצעק אלי, What do you cry out to me for?* G-d was telling them, *I do not need you to tell Me that there is nothing "what" we can do, that there are no options. I do not need your options, either drown or fight to death. There is a reason to cry for Me to save you, but there is*



no reason to cry out claiming you have no options, for My options are infinite. I will save you, just do not tell Me that there are no options. For Me, I do not need options because

I do not have problems, for I am Reality. Just tell 600,000 men and their families to walk through the raging sea, and everything will be just fine.

HIDE AND GO SEEK

Things get interesting when you ask questions. Someone I learn with asked me if we could learn together about Emunah and Bitachon (Faith and Trust in G-d). To get a better idea of which sefer would be right for the job, I asked him what he wants to get out of learning Emunah and Bitachon subjects. His reply set me off to write this article. “I want to stop worrying.”

My Rabbi once told me that we do not need to turn to Emunah and Bitachon for many things that we worry about. Although someone who has Emunah and Bitachon will worry a lot less than one who does not, Emunah and Bitachon is not a “quick fix” to stop worries. It is a life perspective. You have to live it, not only think it or read about it. When you live with G-d in your life, one of the “perks” that comes along with it is “worry free” life. Emunah is not a worry buster – it is a religion. A religious person should be learning subjects of faith, even if he is not a “worried person”. On the other hand, when people have a habit of worrying, it is very often a problem in the mindset and the person’s nature; it is not necessarily a religious issue. Having Emunah and Bitachon requires a lot of work and is certainly not the easiest way to stop worrying. You do not have to turn to Emunah to deal with the problem. There are atheists who are not “worried people”. But, if you had had Emunah to begin with, you would not have started to worry. When my rabbi told me this, I was shocked. I realized that something about my own Emunah was off base, if my thinking

was that I’d have to strengthen my Emunah **only** when I was worried.

I thought about this until I formulated my definition of a worry. A worry is a thought about the future – a scary thought about the future: “How will I manage over there?” . Something bad might happen. We can suppose that the bigger the probability that the “something bad” will happen, the more worried people become. There are people, however, who are worried, even if the chances of that bad thing happening are slim. They go into worry mode even though what they dread only *may* happen. But that thought of **anything could happen**– is not a true thought, once Emunah and Bitachon are in the picture. Only exactly what G-d wants to happen will happen.

Do you believe that what happens is what G-d makes happen? Do you believe that even your free choice and the free choice of others, people’s decisions, are greatly affected by G-d? G-d gets down to the most minute of details, even down to what smell you are smelling while reading this article.

The biggest thing that holds most people back from believing that G-d is involved in everything in life is not seeing Him. *A religious Jewish boy was picked on in public school by his anti-Semitic teacher. “There must be no G-d, because if there were – how come we can’t see Him?” The child answered back- “The teacher must have no intelligence in his head, because if he had – how come we can’t see it?”* The way we know someone has wisdom or wit is not by seeing it. Rather, it is



by deducing it. So, the more we can **deduce G-d's presence** in everything that goes on, the more we can “see” Him. If we are not working on this deduction, then we are not “seeing”. Emunah needs to be deduced. All the time. And then, the worries will not only disappear. They won't begin.

Now, there are different parts of our lives in which we can deduce G-d. So I asked the fellow I was learning with, a successful businessman sitting back on his big, high quality, leather office chair, “Can you see G-d in the chair that you are sitting on? Can you see that it is because of G-d that you chose to buy that specific chair? G-d, not you, made the decision to get that chair.” He said, “No. I bought the chair. I picked it out; it was my decision.”

I asked him why he bought that chair. He said, because it was on sale. I asked him why the chair was on sale. “Because it had a defect.” “Why did this specific chair have a defect and not any other? Why did the store carry a defective chair? Why would you want a chair that is defective, just to save a few dollars? Do you buy everything defective, just to save money?” When you ask a person “Why” to everything he says to you – eventually, he will have no answer. (This is partially the reason why people get uneasy when you pose to them a question beginning with – “Why”. They do not have the answer.) That “no answer” is G-d. G-d is in the decision of buying the chair. We don't see Him. But He is there. The more we play these exercises, the less worried we will be.

The last Mishna in Berachot spins a new twist on the words we say each day in Kriat Shema – בכל מאודך , בכל מדה ומדה שהוא מודד לך הוי מודה – You are to thank and love G-d generously for every behavior that he measures

out for you. Everything G-d does is Middah k'negged Middah – measure for measure. Every punishment is measured and every reward is measured. G-d and His Torah are exact. To a tee. We see in our parasha how the Egyptians were killed at Yam Suf in exact accordance to their actions. The Midrashim tell us that the ten plagues and drowning in Yam Suf were all exact punishments directly related to how the Egyptians mistreated the Jews. Rashi, on the Shira of the splitting of the sea, points out the different ways in which the Egyptians died in the water. Some were tossed up and down, suffering a slow death; some died immediately. Still others met death somewhere in between the two extremes. All depending on the level of their evil. G-d didn't just kill them all in one blow. Each one was meted out a measure reciprocal to how he had behaved.

We find that when Yosef was kidnapped by his brothers and sold as a slave, G-d saw to it that the Yishmaeli merchants passing by “happened to be” carrying pleasant smelling spices. Not the usual smelly tar that Yishmaelites habitually carried with them. Do you think that Yosef was focused, at that time, on what type of smell he was experiencing? He had just been kidnapped, on his way down to Egypt to be sold as a slave, separated from his father and brothers at the age 17, betrayed by his own brothers. A bad smell was an insignificant issue in comparison to what Yosef was going through. **But G-d showed Yosef that he cared for him.** Although Yosef had to go through all the trials that came upon him, he did not have to suffer a bad odor, as well. G-d measured out everything that was going on to a tee. And He measures everything that goes on in our lives, as well. Even which smells we encounter.

I got a phone call seven years back informing me that a friend of mine from America with



whom I was very close had lost his nine year old daughter, unexpectedly and tragically, on Erev Shabbat. My friend had to think quickly to prepare a burial spot that he had never dreamed he would have needed. His own mother had passed away when he was a young boy, and she was buried on Har Hamenuhot. Since then, Har Hamenuhot has filled up, and many people are now buried in what they call here in Israel “bunk bed graves”. So, just on a long shot, he called the Har Hamenuhot burial office and asked them if there was *any chance* of burying his daughter next to his mother- if not, he would just bury her in America. They answered him that over the last thirty five years, plots in that area have been completely filled. There can be just no chance at all that anything is still vacant next to his mother. He started making phone calls for burial plans on Saturday night, in a cemetery near home.

Saturday night, immediately after Shabbat, the phone rang. It was the burial office in Har

Hamenuhot. They had stayed up in Israel till very late, until Shabbat ended in Baltimore. “What size plot do you need?” they asked. After a heavy silence, my friend responded: “110 centimeters.” “We took a second look and found that there is a plot available adjacent to your mother’s grave that we have not been able to fill all these years. It is 112 centimeters long. Get on the next plane to Israel.” I heard that story from my friend at the Shiva. My hair stood on end. And every time I retell that story – I feel shivers throughout my body. We forget these stories. But they happen. Many times, without our knowing about them. These things happen silently. G-d acts silently. He acts invisibly. It seems that G-d has this game that He made up and likes to play. “Hide and go seek”. And, if we give up, we have lost the game. The Big Game.

If we truly ask, “Where is G-d?” we will start asking, instead, “Where is He not?”

CONFIDENCE ... *THE REAL THING*

I got a phone call from an old friend last week. “Yosef, you have a minute?” I said yes. “Can you tell me how I can build up self confidence in my 6th grade son who is failing in school?”

Some things just can’t be done in one minute, no matter how good a coach you are. But, I can make my friend think in one minute. So, I rebounded the question to the questioner. “Tell me, how is *your* self confidence as a father? Children learn by example, and if your confidence is low when you are out of a job, how should his confidence be high when he gets a “C” on his report card?” That left him

thinking. In less than one minute. End of phone call.

If you have more than a minute now, you will learn how to improve on self confidence. But first, you must know the importance of confidence. What it is, and what it is not. *If you have confidence, you are more likely to be successful in life. This is the way G-d made the laws of nature.* People are attracted to confident people. They want to hire them and pay them good salaries. They want to marry them. People trust them. They want them as a friend. Confident students learn better than their non- confident peers. And all presidents who were elected during the last forty years



usually sounded more confident and positive than their rivals. (study by M. Seligman)

In the first couple of seconds when someone sees you, he subconsciously perceives you as confident or lacking confidence. On what basis does the subconscious make such decisions? It picks up this feeling from body language, things like the way you stand. If you smile, or not. You communicate to others if you are confident or not in your handshake. If you stand erect, (no matter what your height is,) people will perceive you as confident. If you keep up that stance in your walk, people will think of you as someone with a future, someone who is going somewhere in life. All you have to do is to hang your smile from the sky, as you look straight into the eye of the people you meet.

How can one become confident in such a way that the confidence will automatically affect his body language, as well? First, you need to define confidence. Some people don't see themselves as confident, because they confuse confidence with arrogance. Confidence is not arrogance. (I demonstrated the aforementioned body language techniques in a class I gave in Aish Hatorah, and someone from the back of the class said he did not like them. "It looks like haughtiness and arrogance, to me." I responded, "This does not mean you have to overdo it, puffing up your chest or putting your nose in the air. Just make sure that you are standing straight and not slumping over." Think about it. Even in reading other people's body language, this student confused confidence with arrogance. Sometimes, there is just a fine line between the two.) Confidence is the belief that you *can*... It is belief in yourself. The confident one is a believer. He believes in something, not always knowing exactly what.

קשה פרנסה של אדם כקריעת ים סוף *A person's livelihood is as difficult as splitting the Red Sea.* (Psachim 118b) Rashi explains this. *It is as big a miracle for G-d to give livelihood as it is for Him to split the Sea.* Rashi adds. *To teach you that a person should pray intensely for his livelihood.* We also find this passage in regards to marriage. קשה זיווג כקריעת ים סוף *Pairing up a couple is as hard as splitting the Red Sea.* (Sotah 2a) What is the connection between G-d splitting the sea, G-d working out a livelihood for you, or G-d making your shidduch? Why are they all put in the same category of difficulty? And how do we deal with such a concept, that anything is "hard" for G-d? The Creator of the Universe should have no difficulty in splitting a sea!?!

When it comes to livelihood, people look around at the options they have to make money. And many times, the money comes from the option they considered least promising. In finding a spouse, a person thinks that he has this shadchan, and that friend, and that their close connection will surely bring them the best shidduch... and still, the shidduch comes from the most unexpected venue. This is like the splitting of the sea: the Jews were in a spot where they were closed off on all sides! The farthest thought from their minds was that the sea would split!

Nothing is hard for G-d. *Sometimes, it seems to us that G-d will have a hard time pulling things through.* Where will He bring the salvation from? How will it all come about? When a person thinks that he has his livelihood under control, he should try thinking ten years ahead... Can he be sure that everything will be okay, and the markets will work in his favor? If you think so, Rashi has a message for you. Start praying!! Nothing is solid. *This does not mean that you should not be confident.* How so?



In shidduchim, some people think they have all the reasons to be married early. Money, looks, smarts, prestigious family, connections.... At the end of the day, the shidduch does not come from “good connections”. It comes in the most unexpected way. *“Just happened to meet an old friend who mentioned that he knows of a guy...”* (How I met my wife is a crazy story, not for now...It had nothing to do with friends, whose mothers are shadchanim or principals in girls’ seminaries.) Livelihood and marriage are similar to the splitting of the sea, where salvation came from the most unexpected direction. Of course, nothing is hard for G-d. It was just *so hard for them* to see how He would bring salvation. Does this mean no confidence? Yes, and no. If you believe that you have your livelihood under control for the rest of your life, then *I do not* suggest that you be confident. If you are confident that you have your shidduch and that your shalom bayit will be bliss, just because you are a nice guy, you may have something unexpected in store for you. But, if you believe that G-d knows what you need, and will take care of you in another five years, just as he has taken care of you till now, then you have *“what”* to believe in.

The Chafetz Chaim illustrates this thought with a parable. King David tells us, הַשֵּׁלֶךְ עַל ה' יִהְיֶה וְהוּא יִכְלֹכֶלְךָ (Psalms 55:23) *Throw your burden on G-d, and He will support you.* There was a man schlepping a heavy package on the side of the road. A nice man from the town passed by in a carriage and offered to give him a lift. Taking his seat, the man picked up his heavy bags and put them on his shoulders. The driver asked him why he did not put the bags down. The fellow answered, “It is enough that

you are carrying me. You do not need to carry my bags, as well.” The driver answered him, “It makes no difference if you put the bags on the floor or you carry them on your shoulders. At the end of the day, it all weighs the same for the buggy.”

The workaholic is like that fellow carrying his bags. G-d has been and is always sustaining you. It is silly to worry, just because **you** do not know how things are going to work out. Just as before, everything will work out somehow, *with G-d’s help*. As long as you believe... G-d has been carrying you till now; He does not need you to carry your heavy worries ...

The only way I can describe the type of confidence many people today have in G-d is through an Israeli joke. A respectable-looking fellow was schlepping two suitcases on a main street in Jerusalem. He flagged down a cab... “How much would you charge to take me to the Sheraton hotel?” The cabby answered, “60 shekel!”. “And how much would you charge for my two suitcases?” “Free of charge.” “Fine! Take the bags to the hotel, and I’ll walk. 60 shekel is way over priced!!!” (Ever since, the ICDI , Israeli Cab Driver Intelligence, started charging 5 shekel for each suitcase. Too many people were taking advantage of this trick.)

Some people think that they can fall back on Bitachon *just when life gets hard*. But their everyday life has nothing to do with G-d. They do not want G-d together with them in their life journey. *This is not the real thing*. It is like asking G-d to shlepp your suitcases, while you walk to the hotel...

ELEPHANT IN THE LIVING ROOM

Rabbi Meir the Great, of Premishlan (1703–1773), disciple of the Baal Shem Tov has a

great Hassidic twist on the words we say every day in אִזְּ יִשְׂרָאֵל זֶה אֵלֵינוּ וְאֵינוּ אֵלָיו



וארוממנהו. *This is my G-d and I will glorify Him, the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him.* R' Meir tweaks that a bit. There are two types of relationship with G-d. There is *זה א-לי ואנוהו*, *this is my G-d and I will build Him a dwelling place in my heart*, (נוה also means dwelling place) and there is *אלוקי אבי וארוממנהו*. *The G-d of my father and I will exalt Him.* In other words, you can find G-d in everything, even point to Him, from your awareness alone, and serve Him by making room for Him in your life. Or you can just continue serving Him only because He is the G-d of your father, and only because you were taught to do so, because you are used to doing so, ignoring Him in the present. When you serve G-d this way, you ultimately exalt Him, or keep Him somewhere above you, but not in your life.

What stops us from being able to recognize G-d in the world we live in? Why is it so difficult for so many to bring G-d into their lives?

There is a power in the universe. That power is Amalek. Amalek is a nation whose whole purpose of existence is to take this awareness away from us. He wanted us to *ignore* that awareness, by showing us that in all those miracles in Egypt and at the Sea, nothing really happened. Even when it is clear, that *this is my G-d*, Amalek is able to get us to doubt our acknowledgment of G-d and our connection to Him. Amalek wanted to take away that excitement that made us able to point to G-d and say, *That's the G-d I want in my life*. Amalek wanted to replace that fiery enthusiasm with, *"That is the G-d of my father, but the G-d I never met."* Amalek wants to force us to ignore the "elephant in the living room".

It is Amalek's sworn mission to negate the power that G-d, Himself, created – to give Man the ability to choose to have G-d in life,

or to ignore Him, no matter how obvious His presence is. The reason why G-d made this choice in the universe is a rule in relationships. What is better, a relationship that you want to be in, or a relationship that you have to be in? Of course, a relationship you need to be in, and have to be in, is not as good as a relationship you want to be in. A relationship that you don't want to be in is an unhealthy relationship. And every unhealthy relationship or situation has an expiration date. G-d gives us choice, to want to have Him in our lives, or to be forced to have Him in our lives. And the way we choose between the two is by deciding what we focus on. How so?

I found a certain truism in life. The things that we fear and focus on the most turn out, in the end, not to be that big of a deal to tackle. But many times, the things that we fear the least are the ones that turn out to be the biggest issues we need to deal with in our future. Our health, our children, our Olam Haba. The amount of things we can focus on in life is limited. We tend to concentrate our awareness on things that are more urgent than important. Amalek is that nation that symbolizes the single-minded attempt to divert our focus away from G-d's power to the power of Man. And to ignore the entire Creation that sings *זה א-לי*.

A few years back, I was waiting to speak to R Moshe Shapiro, zt"l. The person before me was someone who approached R' Moshe, his Rebbe, and introduced his new son-in-law, asking for a *beracha*. Then, he said, "Rebbe, I had an idea I wanted to share with you. I want to know if it's true. *שושנת יעקב צהלה ושמחה* *The Rose of Ya'akov was ecstatic and joyous when they beheld, together, how Mordecai was garbed in royal blue.* Why were the Jews happy when they saw Mordechai dressed in T'chelet, the bluish dye that is used for Tzizit? And what is the word



יחד , together, referring to? And we see that the Megillah mentions a second time that Mordechai was dressed in t'chelet: ומרדכי יצא Then Mordechai left the presence of the king in royal robes of blue. Why does the Megillah remind us, again, that Mordechai is wearing T'chellet?

The Talmud teaches us, in Sotah (17a), the reason why T'chellet is the color that G-d commanded us to wear on our Tzitzit. מה נשתנה תכלת מכל מיני צבעונין? מפני שהתכלת דומה לים, וים דומה לרקיע, ורקיע דומה לכסא הכבוד, שנאמר: ויראו את אלקי ישראל ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר וכעצם השמים לטהר, וכתיב: כמראה אבן ספיר דמות כסא. The T'chelet was chosen because the T'chelet blue is similar to the color of the sea, and the sea is a similar color to the sky, and the sky is similar to the Throne of Glory. By wearing blue strings, one is constantly reminded of G-d, just from the associations one makes with that color. Now Mordechai, who was Shaul Hamelech's descendent, inherited the task of disposing of Haman, who was of Amalekite descent. At the end of our Parasha, G-d says כִּי־יֵלֶךְ עַל־כַּסֵּי ה' מִלְחָמָה לִיקְנוֹת בְּעֶמְלֶק מִדֶּרֶךְ דָּר upon which Rashi quotes the Tanchuma to explain,

אין השם שלם ואין הכסא שלם עד שימחה זרעו של The Name of G-d יה - ו - ה is not complete, and G-d's Throne is not complete, until the Name of Amalek is eradicated. (תנחומא) (ס"פ תצא) Now, as mentioned earlier, the Throne of G-d is the color T'chelet. And because Mordechai eradicated Haman through prayer, through bringing the people together, through fasting, through Torah, and through bringing awareness of G-d to the people, he merited this T'chelet, this bluish dye, as he was the one who made the Throne of G-d complete. And he was the one who brought the Name of G-d יה - ו - ה to be whole with G-d's other letters, ו - ה .

R' Moshe responded that this is, of course, the explanation.

G-d's Name is not complete until we pray for its completion. Until we say, זֶה־אֱלֹהִים, seeking and finding G-d in our lives. The words יהא שמיה רבא מברך is the prayer that the Name of G-d that is now only יה - ו - ה become full, become complete, through our prayers. (Machzor Vitri ; Tosefot Berachot 3a)

THE NOISE OF THE IMPULSIVE

For **thirty days** after the Jews left Egypt, they did not have Mannah. During that time, they sustained themselves with the matza that they carried on their backs.(Shemot Rabba 25, 4) After the thirty days had passed, the Jews failed a test: they should have come to Moshe and said that their food had run out. Instead, they started a fight. *We would rather have died in Egypt with good food. Now you, Moshe and Aharon, you took us out to this desert to kill the whole nation by starvation.* (16; 3)

The Midrash writes that *their failure was not the lack of a valid point; rather, it was the way*

they made it. One of the things that separate the successful from

those who fail is knowing the appropriate way of saying what needs to be said.

So many problems in life could be avoided, if we would just think before we say what we feel. There is a certain element of impulsivity in every dispute. It seems that the Hebrew word for an evildoer, "Rasha", has its root in the Hebrew word that shares the same letters – "Raash", noise.



People who are always looking for trouble usually make a lot of noise; it seems that this is either because they do not think before they talk, or because they are looking for attention. When there is trouble and we do not know its origin, we turn to the troublemakers. When someone is causing a dispute, and we do not know who it is, we turn to the people who are always making noise.

And on the Seventh day, people from the nation went out to gather Mannah, and they did not find any. (16:27) The Midrash (Or Va'afela) states that these people were none other than the infamous Datan and Aviram, "...for any evil acts that we can ascribe to the Evildoers – we attribute (the acts) to them.

This is not injustice. This is simply being aware of the consistency of human behavior. Our first experience with Datan and Aviram was when they reported Moshe Rabbeinu to Pharaoh for killing an Egyptian. This resulted in Moshe's nearly being killed and chased out of Egypt.

Datan and Aviram's end came when they joined Korach against Moshe. They were swallowed up by the ground. When the Torah makes mention of the fight against Moshe (Devarim 11,6), it mentions only Datan and Aviram, but not Korach. This can be because *they had nothing to gain* in the quarrel; they argued only for the sake of arguing, while Korach was fighting because he wanted a more significant position. *All Datan and Aviram wanted to do was to make noise.*

Interestingly enough, we find in this week's parasha another mention of Datan and Aviram. *And Pharaoh said (לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) to Bnei Yisrael, they are confused in the desert...(14:3)* Rashi explains that the words here (לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) mean (עַל) *in regard to Bnei*

Yisrael. The Midrash, however, understands this to mean literally *to Bnei Yisrael*. Targum Yonatan writes that the only two Jews who stayed behind in Egypt were Datan and Aviram. They remained close to Pharaoh, for they were the two tale bearers who talked incessantly! The Midrash Aggada writes, as well, "*And Pharaoh said to Datan and Aviram, who remained in Egypt and came with Pharaoh to Yam Suf. Afterwards, when they saw the splitting of the sea for the Jews, they had regret and they joined their brothers and came out of the sea (with them).*" (Midrash Agadda and Targum Yonatan)

This is quite strange. We know that there were 600,000 adult Jewish men who left Egypt. This was only one fifth of the Jews who had lived there. The rest died in the plague of darkness, as they did not want to be redeemed and to leave Egypt. If so, how did Datan and Aviram stay behind alive?

The Edut Biyehosef answers that Moshe asked Pharaoh that Bnei Yisrael be permitted to leave for only three days. The Jews did not want to leave for such a short period of time. They surely did not want to go through the hassle of borrowing utensils and clothes from the Egyptians for only three days.

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Redemption had arrived, they were not liable for death in the plague of darkness.

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opportunities to make noise. This type of noise is often similar to the noise of one who talks without thinking. Both types of noise cause problems. Both types of noise get others and ourselves into trouble.

STIMULATION OF THE SENSES

Generally, pleasure or enjoyment involves stimulation of any one of the five senses, which are where most pleasures are found. We enjoy tasting certain foods and seeing a nice view of nature or a beautiful painting. Usually, the place where we chose to live is because we liked how it looked when we first saw it.

We enjoy listening to music, and we enjoy being in a quiet setting; both are examples of pleasure derived from the sense of sound. We enjoy certain smells. And we are stimulated when we smell a barbecue or an oven full of freshly baked breads. We like the way certain clothes feel more than others. The common denominator of all these pleasures is that when the experience is **new**, we *notice* it. This is strange. We always eat things we like. We generally find ourselves in work, school and even in family life in situations that we chose, because they were pleasing to us. As time goes on, we get used to “enjoyment of the senses”, and their strength starts to wane. *We already know this experience – it has lost the element of surprise.* So, we look for a fresh stimulus. Taste – a new restaurant. Sight – a walk through nature. Sound – a new music album. Enjoyment is felt most keenly the first time it is experienced. It's not that we no longer enjoy things that have become familiar; rather, we tend to ignore our enjoyment, as we have gotten used to it. Whether we realize it or not, we are all subconsciously seeking enjoyment. When we find it, we are calm; when we do not, we are anxious.

Enhancing Enjoyment in Life

We have established that the five senses provide enjoyment. If we want to enjoy life, we do not have to look for new things or travel far. We are constantly enjoying things, even if we do not notice it. We just have to make a point of realizing that we **are** experiencing pleasure. One can enjoy life so much by just paying attention to and making mention of the pleasures that we have, around the clock in our everyday lives. A Jew does this by making his blessings in the morning with concentration, giving serious thought to the words he is saying. Adopting this practice makes life a much more enjoyable experience.

This week's parasha tells of the reaction of the Jews to the manna that fell from heaven. *And they said to one another that this is Mannah, for they did not know what it was.* The Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 1:11) asks, *Why did G-d not tell them what it was called? For, if he would have relayed this to them, then the Jews would have said, “We had this food already on Pharaoh's “table”.* The Jews in the desert did not know the real name of the Mannah. They guessed it. G-d did not tell it to them, so that they would not complain that they had already had it in Egypt once before. End of Midrash.

There may be some difficulty in understanding the question and answer of this Midrash. If there exists no such food, or even substance, in the world, what could possibly be the significance of G-d's telling them *what* this food is called in Heaven, and that it is the food of angels? When the Jews received it for the first time, the Manna was completely



unknown. How would telling them its name make any difference? The answer the Midrash gives is also hard to swallow! Would knowing the name of this “*Mannah*” in heaven make the Jews lie, saying that they had already known it in Egypt, and that it was nothing new?

But this is the way of the human psyche. The real pleasure we have from a stimulus is through the element of surprise: we know neither that it will be nor *what* it will be. For example, often, a “soon-to-be” parent prefers not to know if the child is a boy or a girl, as this knowledge detracts from the excitement of the unknown element in the birth itself.

In order to make it possible for the Jews to regard their sustenance with awe, G-d, in His mercy, did not let the Jews feel that the *Mannah* was any less than unique, special and new. This added to their pleasure in the holy food – the same pleasure experienced by the angels. There is no real name for this celestial nourishment. It has no specific taste. It is always the new taste you wanted it to have. It is always a “first time” sensation. It is always *relishing tasting*, not just eating. If G-d would have told them in advance what this food was it would not have held the excitement of the unknown for them.

We can gain more pleasure in life if we do not say to ourselves – “We know this feeling, taste, view, sound (etc).” We can be conscious of the fact that we not only eat, but we taste! We can be aware of the miracle of sight; everything we see, is a kind of exploring, discovering, and not just an automatic parade of vision before our eyes.

This is the excitement and the drive in life as well. Lack of challenges, life that is purely

routine brings more than just boredom: it’s life without pleasure. One of G-d’s many kindnesses is His giving us challenges and unexpected stimuli, increasing and enhancing our pleasure.

The Adjective “Good”

Until now, we have discussed the pleasures that are dependent upon our senses. Almost every expression in which the adjective “good” appears pertains to the senses. A good steak. A good looking car or piece of art. A good piece of music. Contemplating the concept of “good”, we will find that sensory-based benefits are relative, not absolute. An elegant meal will be less than enticing for someone who is suffering from indigestion. A magnificent painting will have little worth for a person with failing sight, as will a philharmonic concert for a person who is hard of hearing.

There is, however, a different source of pleasure, one which is not dependent upon any outside stimulus – one which carries us to heights that can be equaled by nothing that the senses have to offer.

The ultimate achievement is, of course, our connection with our Father, our Creator, Who designs everything (whether we are aware of it or not) for our ...***good!*** Fine-tuning our senses to recognizing the Good that G-d has prepared for us, we can sing with King David the words of Tehillim ואני קרבת אלקים לי טוב *And for me, relationship with G-d is good.* For the deepest part of me, deeper than the senses, the only thing that is good is my relationship with the Creator. This is the ultimate good that the world has to offer.

Element of Impulsivity – Noise of Evildoers



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THE P3 TREE MODEL OF THE SUCCESSFUL

Tu Bishvat



On Tu B'shvat, we don't say Tachanun; we do not confess our sins, for it is a day of celebration. We celebrate the trees, *הג לאילנות*. It is considered a new year in regard to tithing. Why does the birthday of the tree fall at a time when it is bare of fruit? Why does the birthday of the trees effect *our* saying or not saying Tachanun?

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

Successful people Project. They plan ahead, Projecting into the future. Most people overestimate what they can produce in a year and underestimate what they can produce in 5 years. The successful people project, in great detail, how things *can* look in 5 years from now, and work each day on attaining their new goal. They know what type of "fruits", what type of life they want to have in five years from

now. And in accordance to the dream, the vision, the Product, they know which seeds to plant, when to plant them, and where. They guard their time, like a hawk, to get the most out of every minute to get them where they want to be.

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

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

And, the third P, successful people have Patience. According to Business Expert Brian Tracy, It takes 7 years to establish a successful business. The first

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

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

anywhere”. The tree won’t grow, and he won’t see the fruits of labor.

And, one last analogy from human life to a tree. In Ramat Shlomo, Jerusalem, two weeks ago, the Jerusalem Municipality painted the parts of the trees where the non-productive branches had been removed, with a blue glue/paint. My student asked me why. I responded that in order for the tree to give you its max, it needs every drop of water and energy to go up from the roots to the right places. If we want the tree to grow its best, the non-productive parts of the tree need to be sealed or closed off, so that they do not take away precious energy and materials necessary for growth.

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

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

MY BELOVED, MY HORSE

There is a module I have discovered that is effective for change in any life area. I call it Triple A. Awareness. Acceptance. Action. First, we need to have awareness of the situation. The problem. The challenge. The options. The strengths and weakness. The powers that be. The ideal situation. Then, and only then, can we move on to step two. Acceptance. Accepting who I am, and accepting the other person or persons I am dealing with. Accepting the situation, accepting where G-d does not give us choice, accepting where He gives us choice. Accepting what G-d has given us or taken from us. Accepting the fact that we have not yet arrived at the ideal situation. And then, and only then, taking action. Something that will get us to the desired outcome. The best option for the present

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

circumstance and people involved. You cannot skip stage two to get to stage three.

We have to learn to accept that not everything is picture-perfect. We have to learn to accept our kids the way they are, not how we think we want them to be. And we have to learn to accept the fact that sometimes in life, we don't understand G-d, and that whatever He did, does or will do, is for our best. Somehow. Somewhere. Sometime.

And when we first believe, when we first accept, not only can we then act, but G-d actually changes His Universe for His Children's sake. He lets us run the show, so to speak. לְסִסְתִּי בְּרִכְבִּי פָרְעָה דְּמִיתִּךָ רַעֲיָתִי (Shir Hashirim 1;9) King Solomon, in his Song of Songs, the everlasting love-song between G-d and

His People, mentions how G-d perceives His Beloved, The Jewish Nation. *To My mare (female horse) in the horses of Pharaoh, I compare you, My beloved.*

Why does G-d call his beloved a horse? How would a woman feel if her husband said to her, you are the most amazing thing in my life, honey! To me, you are like a horse! Not any horse, but Pharaoh's horse! What is the meaning behind this?

R' Chaim Volozhin, (NH 1,9) Noam Elimelech, (L Shoshana) and R Levi Y Berditchev all learn that there is something HUGE here in this passuk. The unique horse of Pharaoh is referring to the episode at the Sea. The sea split, and the Jews went right in, through dry land. Behind them, the water came crashing down on the Egyptians who ran after them. So, Pharaoh's army of horseback riders tried with all their might to steer away from the sea. But G-d made it that the horses just went running straight into the sea, taking their riders with them. Usually, the rider guides the horse; but here, the horse guided its rider.

In His eternal love-song, G-d says to His Beloved People, I love you so much! For Me, you are like the horse of Pharaoh, in that sometimes I allow you, as it were – kivayachol – to guide Me, instead of Me guiding you. I am like the Rider of the horse, who sometimes lets the horse take control.

What, in the world, does this mean??!!

As deep as that idea was, there is something even deeper here. The Jews have just gone through an 86 year holocaust of Egyptian slavery. Where was G-d all this time? Why are such bad things happening to good people? And why are good things happening to bad people? How does G-d let it all just go? Sometimes, the greatest praise to G-d is accepting Him without asking WHY. By remaining quiet. Accepting לֵךְ דְּמִיָּה (Tehillim 65;2) To You G-d, silent acceptance is considered praise. Not asking why. Not complaining. At the Sea, there was a tremendous revelation of G-d, and at that time, the Jews reached a level of tremendous emunah.. And in the merit of Emunah, G-d split the Sea. The word דִּמְיִיתִךְ does not only mean that You, My beloved people, are **similar**, root being דְּמִיּוֹן. It also means that you accepted with **silence**, from the root דָּוָם (S. Emet) And with that, with that level of Emunah, G-d allows us to control our fate, He makes things work our way, as if the horse now decides for the rider.

Sometimes in life, we need to accept. You are trying to run your business, but the phone is not ringing! You are trying to find your shidduch, or make your marriage happen, but there is "nobody home". You are trying to stay healthy, lose weight, sleep well, but you find yourself gaining weight and sleeping less. In order for G-d to make miracles for you, He waits for you to accept His

Will, to reach a certain level of serenity, knowing that He is Boss. You may not feel Him, because He is not “bossy”, but He is the BIG BOSS of all bosses.

This idea is so powerful!!! I recently used it in Mir, Jerusalem, when I gave a class. When I got to the room, I realized that it can be extremely useful to have the Sefer of R Chaim Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim, handy, so that I can read word by word from it. The classroom where I was supposed to give my lesson did not have sefarim. So, I said to myself, I accept that whatever is going to happen, whether or not I find the Sefer, I accept that G-d has my best interest in mind. There was a side room there; I walked in, and found no Sefer in the room, other than the Nefesh Hachaim!

The power of acceptance of G-d's Will is the power that got us out of Egypt. Of believing in the dark times that things are beautiful, or can be beautiful, somehow. While the men sang the Shira of Az Yashir, the women followed Miriam, who had a drum in her hand, and sang their Shira as well. Where did the women have these bongos from? Rashi says מובטחות היו צדקניות שבדור שהקדוש ברוך הוא עושה להם נסים והוציאו תופים ממצרים The righteous women were SURE that G-d was going to perform miracles for them, so they took drums with them when they went out of Egypt. While they were in Egypt, they were making drums, in preparation for the time when G-d would make His Miracles. Because they believed, even in the darkest of times, that great things were going to happen.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H