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## THE ART OF TAKING OFF THE MASK

There's an old story about a doctor who fell on hard times. Unable to find work in his profession, he found that the zoo was hiring, so he asked what jobs were available. The only job left, was something he never thought he would do. The ape had died, and they were not getting any new ape soon. They needed someone to dress up like an ape, and act the role. Surprisingly, the doctor excelled at the role, and actually started enjoying it. Visitors flocked to see this remarkable ape who danced, smoked cigarettes thrown into his cage, and even made fishing rods to fish in the pond in his cage. People came from far to see this ape that displayed uncanny intelligence.

One day, while climbing the walls of his enclosure, the doctor slipped and fell into the lion's den. Terror seized him as the massive lion approached, roaring. In desperation, he cried out the Shema. To his astonishment, the lion whispered back, Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto Leolam Vaed. Then, the bear in the cage over, joined in, Yehi Shem Hashem Mevorach Meatah Vead Olam. All three "animals" suddenly realized the truth: they were all just people in costumes, pretending to be animals, to make a livelihood, to put food on the table for their family. One was a doctor. One was a lawyer, and the other was a Rabbi. All, that could not find a job, but were good as

animals in the zoo, as good as an animal zoo could be.

The zoo visitors who were present during all this drama, approached the zoo office, and demanded refunds, when they discovered how they were deceived. But the zoo office made a profound argument: these performers had acted like animals 99% of the time. Just because they spoke a few human words for the moments of drama, does that negate all the time they spent being animals? The visitors though, did not buy this claim. If an animal speaks even one word, it was never an animal. It was a human all along.

This story carries a deeper truth about identity. This is the question in life, that we subconsciously ask ourselves all the time, and many times, we are confused... Who are we? This is why a Jew can sometimes feel that not going to certain places, not doing certain things, not dressing certain ways, is limiting. This is because he forgot something. He is בֶן־כּוֹרֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל, he is the Son of G-d. She is the Princess of G-d. The Queen of England knows that she is not limited when she needs to dress regal, loyal, fully covered, because that is who she is. What does it mean to be G-d's Firstborn son? What does it mean to be a Yehudi?



There is a reason why the Jews are called Yehudim. The name comes from Yehudah, one of Yaakov's twelve sons. Not Reubenim, after the firstborn. Not Yosefim, despite his greatness. Not from any of the other tribes... Only Yehudim, because of Yehudah. Why?

When Yaakov gathered his sons to bless them before his death, he called them one by one. To Reuben, he rebuked his hastiness. To Shimon and Levi, he addressed their violence, that it was Esav's way. When Yehuda's turn approached, Yehuda stepped backward, afraid of criticism, bracing for harsh words. But Yaakov surprised him: "Yehuda, you are the one your brothers will praise. You are a lion among your enemies. Even when you lie down, even when you fall... You are still like a lion."

This is the essence of Yehudah, and the essence of Yehudim: Even when we are crouched, even when we look like we are lazy, even when we look vulnerable and weak ,... we are really lions inside. What does it mean to be a Yisrael? The word Yisrael comes from the word שָׁרֵית, that Yaakov fought the angel. Not that he won the angel, וְהִנֵּל, but that he fought the angel! If you are a Yisrael, it means you know how to never give up, even in the most difficult moments, no matter how many times you fell, you are a fighter!

These weeks are called Shovavim. Weeks of Teshuva, weeks that got their name, from the acronym of Parashiot Shemot, Vaera, Bo, Beshalach, Yitro, Mishpatim. Why now? And What type of Teshuva? The weeks of Shovavim are weeks that we can do Teshuva on things that we are enslaved to, desires and addictions. It is not only addictions of inappropriate thoughts, content, and behavior. It is time to do Teshuva from all addictions, even emotional eating, scrolling, or anything

that we can't stop. The power of these weeks is that we can do Teshuva, even though we have no merit, nothing at all that we deserve to ask G-d to change. Not even a commitment. We are like the Jews in Egypt that were not any better than the Egyptians, we served idols just like the Egyptians did. The only reason why we were saved was because we were considered G-d's Firstborn son, and we kept that identity, through not changing our Names, Dress code, and Language. That is the power of these weeks, redemption not because of what we do, but because who we are.

Being G-d's Firstborn son is very powerful. How so? Your firstborn son, is not like any other son. Your firstborn son is the only son that made you a Father. It is not what he did, it is not even who he is. It is how having this son, made you Father, that you have a deeper connection with this son. And that is why G-d saved us then, and that is why G-d will save us now. A father who sees their child messing up, even though the child does not deserve to be saved, but the father will save the child, because this child made this father into the father he is.

G-d's Firstborn son, is who you are, even if 99 percent of the time, you don't act like it. During Shovavim, we are asking G-d to pull off the masks, and bring out who we really are. Addiction in Hebrew is התמכרות, meaning, that a person is sold a slave to what he is addicted to. The addict is not free, and with all the addict's justification to his behavior, there is one thing that every addict will admit something they wish they could change. They all wish they were free, that they could choose, but they can't because addiction means sold, sold as a slave. During Shovavim, we turn to G-d to help us, and free us from our bondage, as He is the ultimate אב הרחמן, loving Father, as we refer to Him in Baruch Shaemar. All mercy



a father has to a son, is a mashal, a parable, to G-d's Mercy to us.

Sometimes G-d also looks like He is hiding in a costume, in a costume, in a **הסתור פנים רעה** He seems like He is doing bad, but He is just being a **רוועה**, a Sheperd, that hits the sheep to move, because there are wolves that the sheep can't see.

Sometimes, one thing you do, can define you, even more than 99 percent of the things you do. Our sages teach that after 120 years, when we stand before G-d, who will testify about the life we lived? The walls of our home. Why? Outside, everyone wears masks. Everyone smiles. Everyone helps each other. Everyone appears holy and righteous. But inside our homes, that's where truth lives. How did you speak to your parents? To your spouse? To your kids? That is who you really are.

There's a profound teaching about the confrontation between Moshe and Aharon, and Pharaoh's magicians. When Aharon threw down his staff and it became a serpent, Pharaoh's sorcerers did the same, their staffs also became serpents. But then something remarkable happened: Aharon's staff swallowed all their staffs.

The Gemara in Shabbat points out something extraordinary: there was actually a miracle within a miracle here. First, the serpents transformed back into staffs, and then Aharon's

staff swallowed all the other staffs. Why was this necessary? Why couldn't Aharon's serpent simply swallow the other serpents while they were still in serpent form? Why did they need to transform back into staffs first? Some commentators say, that it would not be as big of a miracle. It is natural for a big serpent to swallow small serpents. But still, isn't this an unnecessary miracle, and G-d does not make unnecessary miracles!

The prophet Yehezkel records that Pharaoh called himself "the great serpent" ... he saw himself as a mighty, fearsome creature. He even wore a snake in his hat! But G-d's response was powerful: "You are not a serpent, and you are not great. You are nothing more than My staff... a stick that I use how I see fit." The transformation back to staffs revealed the truth to Pharaoh: Pharaoh was never a serpent-like power at all, it was just an illusion, a costume, power that wasn't real. He was always just a staff, a tool in God's hands. Whenever someone rises against the Jew, it is the same reality. They are not the Snake, and they are not Big. They are just the Staff, in G-d's Hand.

This is the deepest solution to every problem in life. It is either to take off G-d's mask, take off your mask, take off your wife or kid's mask, or take off the mask of the one you think is controlling you...

## THE ART OF LIVING A LIFE OF TUTIM

Are you ready for goosebumps?!

One of the first soldiers that got wounded in the Oct. 7<sup>th</sup> war, was one of the two, out of all his squad, that survived. All his friends were shot and died. He also got a bullet in his leg,

and not long after he was wounded in combat, he found himself in the hospital, with an amputated leg. In his company were other injured soldiers, with missing limbs. Some without feet, others without hands.



A Dati singer, Hanan ben Ari, came to cheer him up.

Hanan asked him, "What song do you want me to sing for you?" The wounded soldier, looked at Hanan. He then looked at the wounded soldiers with no hands, at those with no feet, that were with him, in the hospital. He told Hanan, that he lost almost all of his friends in his squad ... and he could have been one of them. "What makes me any different than my friends that died? Why did G-d save me? Only G-d knows!"

He said to Hanan, "But you know what, Hanan! We have no rights to complain! אין לנו זכות להתלונן Hanan! Sing us your song, **החיים שלנו תותים**, Our lives are strawberries!!! In what merit am I even alive!? I have nothing to complain about!"

Hanan ben Ari's song, Life is Strawberries, is a humorous song, that talks about all the annoying things of life, especially life in Israel, and how everything is so קשה, is so hard. And then, the high part, is that no matter what, life is beautiful, like strawberries, and we have no right to complain! We have so much to be thankful about! It is a song that puts a smile on any Israeli's face.

Hanan couldn't believe this song request from this soldier! "If you would not have asked me to sing that song, I would not have the guts to even play that song for you! How can I sing such a happy song, seeing all of you soldiers with missing limbs! I don't even know if I would be able to sing such a joyous song, while seeing all you here like this in the hospital! But because you asked me, I will do anything you ask, and I will try to sing it... But you should just know, that I need to disconnect my mind from my emotions! I can't even fathom what you are going through, and that

you can even think of this song, where I sing that הכל סבבה, an Israeli slang word, that means, that everything is awesome!"

The soldier though, did not feel like Hanan thought he felt! The soldier felt, that he was so happy to be alive! A 20-year-old boy, with no leg, but with more years to live! And with the ability to thank G-d on all that he has! This soldier had a choice. He could look at one leg and say, "Why do I deserve this?! My life is messed up!!" Or the soldier can choose to transcend, to be like an angel that looks at his one leg and says, "Thank you G-d! I could have died at combat, just like my friends! I lost my leg for my People, for my land, for G-d!"

The Emunah of Am Yisrael is on fire! Just in time for the Mashiach! This year, תשפ"ז is perfect for Mashiach to come, as it is the same numerical value of פָּקוּד פָּקָדִתִי the secret password that Moshe was told by G-d in the Thornbush, to tell the Nation, that the time for the Redemption has arrived. And in this upcoming month, the month of Shevat, which is the acronym of שֶׁנָּשָׁמָע בִּשְׁוֹרוֹת טְבוּבָה, we should hear good tidings.

Emunah is the key to Redemption. You can choose to ask why all the bad things are happening, **לְאָהָה הַרְעָתָה לְעַם הָהָה**. Or you can choose, if you wish, to say it is all G-d's mercy! When G-d sent Moshe to the people, G-d told Moshe to tell the Nation, the words that answer all of their questions, **וַיֹּדַבֵּר אֱלֹקִים נֶאֱלָמָשָׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְיוֹן אָנִי יְהוָה**, I am G-d! G-d told Moshe, that the first step of Redemption, is to believe that everything that we are going through, is great! It is all G-d!

You can only get out of hard times, through שמחה, through happiness, as the prophet tells us, **קַיִם בְּשָׁמָךְתָּאֹ**. (Yeshayahu 55;12) When G-d wants to save us, he has a process. He



doesn't just save us first. He first takes us out of the stuck mindset, and only then, He saves us! There is an order for the four terms of Redemption. First G-d does **וְהַצָּאתִי** - He takes us out, and only then, does He take step two, **וְהַצְלָתִי**, and save us. Why? Why doesn't G-d first save us, and *then* take us out?

Because when a person is in hard times, there are two things that are hard. There is the pain, which is a reality. And there is suffering, which is a perspective. Pain and suffering are NOT one and the same. So, first G-d wants us to stop suffering. And then He takes the pain away. Only when we stop suffering, only with Emunah, which brings happiness and joy, does G-d save us from hard times.

This is what G-d tells Moshe: My Name Elokim, G-d of Judgement and difficult times, the Name that its numerical value, is 86, is just one number less, than the Name of G-d of Mercy and Redemption. Tell the Jews, that G-d's Name is אֵין יְקֹדֶם, which numerical value is 87. And that just one number, the letter נ, which is numerical value of 1, is the difference between the words נֶלֶה, which means exile, and נֶגֶל, which means Redemption. One thought, one paradigm shift, can stop all your suffering.

In Babylonian exile, Hananya Mishael and Azarya, were challenged: Either they would bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol, or Nebuchadnezzar would challenge their G-d, by burning them alive, to see if their G-d can save them from fire. The prophet told them, that G-d would not save them, if they would be thrown into Nebuchadnezzar's fire, and they had a choice: Either they could run away, or they could make a Kiddush Hashem, and sanctify G-d's Name. They said to themselves, "*Didn't the Frogs in Egypt jump into the ovens, to sanctify G-d's Name, even though G-d never commanded them to give up their lives?*

*for Him? How much more so, we should be willing to abstain from idolatry, if G-d commanded us, and get thrown into a fire, to sanctify G-d's Name! Those frogs could have run away and they didn't! We won't run away either!*

וְשָׁב יְהֹוָה אֶל-תְּבוּתָה וּרְחַמֶּךָ וְקַבָּצֶךָ מִכָּל-הָעָמִים אֲשֶׁר הָפִיצָה יְהֹוָה אֶל-הָעָם שָׁמָה: At the End of Days, G-d will ignite the spiritual spark of His Nation and a massive Teshuva movement will begin. G-d will then have mercy on us, and then G-d will go and collect the Jews from all the Nations of the World that they dispersed to, in the Diaspora. G-d will change the news each day, begging all of Diaspora, that have so much wealth, to leave it all and come back Home. (Malbim: ) After the redemption is over and every Jew, G-d will hold his hand, and bring Him back to Eretz Yisrael. (Rashi: שגדול

יום קבוץ גליות ובקושי, כאלו הוא עצמו צריך להיות אוחז בידיו ממש איש איש ממש (מקומו)

We could look at living in Eretz Yisrael, dying for G-d, or living for G-d, as annoying, and complain. Or we could look at it all, and say, we have no rights to complain! It is all G-d, and all good! No matter if a person is Haredi, Dati, or Hiloni, deep down, the heart of hearts of every Jew, is to make G-d proud! It is in our DNA, *בני אברם יצחק ויעקב*! If G-d is putting us through pain, it is to rekindle our free choice, to have a relationship with Him! We are not forced to serve Him, because that is really what we all want, deep down in our souls, anyway!

Here is a story of faith: Not long ago, there was an 18-year-old Yeshiva student, who was growing in his studies. This boy was accustomed to accountability, and he would leave Yeshiva to take Dirshu tests on Mishna Berurah, once a month, and then immediately return to Yeshiva. The Yeshiva that he learnt in was in the Otzem Moshav in the south, and one night, on his way back from his test, with a Mishne Berurah in his hand, a car ran him over, and the boy died. The boy's name, was Pinhas Weiss. It was so hard for the family to lose their son.

This boy had an older brother, Shraga Weiss, that learned in a yeshiva in Netivot. Two months after the tragedy of his brother, Shraga was returning to Yeshiva from his parents, and he waited for the bus. A car passed, with a driver, who was not religious. The driver stopped and offered to take Shraga, asking where he is headed. Shraga said, that he needs to get to Netivot. The driver responded, that he is headed somewhere near Netivot, and he can drop him off a kilometer away from his Yeshiva. Shraga took the offer.

They opened conversation, and the driver learned that Shraga was on the way to his yeshiva. The driver said, "If that's the case, I will drive you to the door of your yeshiva! I have a great respect for Yeshiva boys!" Shraga thanked the driver, and said, "In the merit of the Mitzvah that you are doing, nothing bad will happen to you! The Rabbis teach, that *שלוחי מצוה אנים נזוקים*! G-d watches over those who do his Mitzvoth!"

The driver though, responded, "Although you say that, it does not always work! There was a yeshiva student, that his name was Pinhas Weiss. He was coming home from a test on his Torah studies, and he was busy with his Mitzvah of learning Torah,... He even had a Sefer in his hand, and suddenly a car came and ran him over, and he died on the spot! You see! This spiritual protection, it does not always work!!"

Shraga answered this non-religious, nice guy, what R' Haim Kanievsky would say. The time for Pinhas to return his soul to his Creator, was after 18 years of life. G-d knows that this boy's soul was on a high level, that he has a lot of Torah and Mitzvoth, and G-d wanted him to die, while he was in middle of doing a Mitzvah, because that is the greatest thing!

The driver than said, "You just explained to me a lot of questions I had!"

They continued their conversation, while Shraga held back from saying that he is Pinhas's brother. He asked the driver how he knows about the tragedy of Pinhas Weiss? After all, there are about 360 car accident deaths in Israel a year. "I am a Zaka member, and I was one of the first at the scene... When I saw Pinhas's face, I saw he had a special shine on his face, something that I never saw before in a dead person's face. Pinchas's face



will never leave my memory, he looked as if he was smiling somewhat. I decided to attend the funeral, and I felt I want to do something to uplift his soul. I took upon myself to wear Tefillin daily. Even though I don't wear a Kippah, but since his passing, a day hasn't passed that I did not don Tefillin."

They reached the Yeshiva, and before getting out of the car and saying goodbye to his new friend, Shraga turned to the driver and said, "Take a good look at me... Do I look

familiar?" The driver said, "Wow! You look like Pinhas Weiss!" Shraga confirmed that he is Pinhas's brother. They hugged each other, and cried!

What a nation! *A gentle people with a faith of steel! A nation that weathered all the storms, that have come and gone, a nation of the unsung heroes of the world! A nation, that is the greatest miracle in the world!* (Avraham Fried- My Fellow Jew)

### PERSONAL MIRACLE WITH R' SHIMON BAADANI

Here is a story of a personal miracle with R' Shimon Baadani A" H.

My father-in-law, David Darwich, was very close to R' Baadani. R' Baadani would come to visit my father-in-law on the holidays. Every Sukkot Hol Hamoed, the family members would get together to greet the Rabbi in my father in law's Sukkah and to receive a blessing. At the time, my sister-in-law, was not having shidduchim suggested to her. Probably because people saw that the older sister, my wife, married an American boy, me, they figured that the second daughter, as well, who also grew up abroad and did Aliyah only as a teenager, wanted a shidduch from abroad, and not the typical Israeli boy. Being that I was married to the older sister, I was very involved, for a full year, in trying to find her shidduch, but nothing was coming up. She asked her father if the Rabbi could bless her to find her shidduch.

The Rabbi asked, "Who decorated this beautiful Succah?" My father-in-law said that it was this daughter, who was waiting for her shidduch. The Rabbi blessed her, saying, "Decorating the Sukkah is a Segulah to get

married/have children. I bless you that you will find your Hattan within the year." Of course, we were all excited to hear that.

The year almost passed, and nothing happened. Not one single guy dated her, and her friends were all getting married before her, one by one.

It was getting close to summer break, and I was going to fly in to New Jersey to spend a month of the summer with my parents. R' Baadani told my father-in-law that it might be a good idea for her to fly to America with us and join us on our visit, to stay at my parents' house. "Something might happen. She might see someone, or someone may see her." It sounded pretty bizarre. But the Rabbi said, so we listened.

When in New Jersey, I approached shadchanim, but they said that it is hard to find a boy from the Syrian community who would want to marry a girl that lives in Israel. The Syrian community is very close knit: many want their married children to stay close by – close to home. They prefer a local shidduch. Shadchanim felt it was a waste of time even to meet her, telling me that there were so many



local girls who were not finding their shidduch here. They felt that they should help those local girls before making an effort to find a boy for my sister-in-law from Israel, who wanted to live in Israel.

I felt awkward getting so many no's, not even getting one meeting. It wasn't easy getting no after no, while I was on my own vacation, spending time with my own family, in New Jersey. We tried to make the best of the trip, to be distracted by going around touring and shopping, which my sister-in-law enjoyed... But nothing was happening for her, regarding her shidduch.

A few nights before flying back to Israel, my younger sister, who is a hairdresser, who at the time was also waiting for her shidduch to come from who-knows-where, said to me, "Yosef, there is a wedding tonight in town. I know that you know the people, even though you are not so close to them. I know that you were not invited. But you should go over there, stop by, show your face, with your wife and sister-in-law,... you might meet someone. It's a long shot, but its minimum Hishtadlut, once you are already here!"

I felt awkward coming to a wedding that I was not invited to, and even *more* awkward, bringing my wife and sister-in-law who were also not invited. As I knew the Hattan as a really nice guy, I was sure that if he knew I was in town, he would be happy if I would just show up at his wedding, especially if we would not sit down or eat anything. We would just show up, and wish a Mazal Tov. My wife thought it sounded crazy. My sister-in-law was, by this time, more than just confused. All these things together – being at my parents' house, going, uninvited to a wedding, was just, so not her. Not exactly sure if this whole thing made any sense, even as hishtadlut... But R'

Baadani said we should try all this for my sister-in-law, so we were trying. Or, more precisely, I was trying.

We showed up at the wedding, uninvited, the three of us. It was definitely awkward. I tried so hard to be the best son-in-law I could be, going over to people that were connected to people, asking if they had any ideas for my sister-in-law.

Nothing.

As we drove back to my parents' house, I apologized to my sister-in-law, saying I know this whole thing is just to listen to the Rabbi. The tickets were not cheap, the efforts were a lot for me, and as much as I tried to make her feel at ease at my parent's house, this whole thing was simply awkward, and we were flying back to Israel two days later, with no results. All because of what R' Baadani told my father-in-law.

We came back to Israel, exhausted. I felt that I was the only one in a position to help her, as I was the only connection for this sister-in-law to a boy from abroad. And everything I tried got us nowhere. Almost two years of trying.

I returned back to learn for the Elul zman. One day, in Aseret Yemei Teshuva, I was not feeling that great. I came back home, plopped down on the couch and opened a Sefer. The first words I saw when I opened the Sefer were from the Rebbe from Pashische. "You have to look at your Yetzer Hara, as if he is standing above you with a sword in his hand, ready to chop if your head. If you can't view the Yetzer Hara like this, it means, he already chopped off your head!"

Wow! Maybe I was not that sick. Maybe it was my Yetzer Hara. I went back to yeshiva.



As I walked in the door to the Yeshiva, in walks an old Chavruta (study partner) who went back to US and got married, but just came to visit Israel for Sukkot, with his wife. He was happy to see me, and I told him I just got back from the states, myself, and I mentioned a little about my trip. He said he was learning in BMG, the Yeshiva of Lakewood. I asked him if he knows of any boys for my sister-in-law. He mentioned, yes, that there is a boy. I said, it is so funny, that you mention that name. That boy is the brother of the one whose wedding we went to, the wedding that I brought my sister-in-law to.

I had brought up the name of my sister-in-law to him already, while he was learning in Israel, but he turned it down, then, saying that he preferred a girl from the community. But the Chavruta said, I know that, but he has been dating in US, for a while, and still nothing worked out for him. I think he will be coming to Israel to visit for Sukkot and taking a break from dating. Maybe he will be willing to give your sister-in-law a try.

The boy came to Israel for Sukkot. He said he would try dating her. He told her that he felt that he wanted someone from the community, someone from nearby. She told him, it is so

funny - I was at your brother's wedding. He was shocked! He told his parents, and they looked for her in the pictures according to what she said that she wore, and this made the boy feel that my sister-in-law is not just an Israeli girl from Israel. She was actually at his brother's wedding! Within a short time, they were engaged and married.

I felt that I gave my Neshama for this sister in law. When a person dies, one of the questions they ask in the Heavenly Courts, is עסקת בפריה ורביה, did you busy yourself with being fruitful. The word עסקת, means busy yourself, because it is not that they will ask you if you had children. They will ask you, Did you try to make a shidduch? Did you deal with making a marriage, did you help build a family?(Shabbat 31a; see Maharasha)

Some of my friends and family, commented, that maybe I was trying too hard to help my sister-in-law, doing too much hishtadlut. I answered, I don't know. But if R' Baadani said to do something, I know that I can rely on him, that this is the proper hishtadlut! And he was right on time! Exactly Sukkot, a year later, and exactly to be in NJ, for the wedding of the brother of her Hatan!

## THE ART OF INTUITIVE INTELLEGENCE

One of the hardest things to understand about the Exodus story is - what was Pharaoh thinking? How did he have the emotional ability not to give in, after suffering such great plagues, each one worse than the next?

The Torah answers that it was *the power of the heart* that did it. וַיַּכְבֹּד לְבָבָ פְּרֻעָה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת-הָעָם And the heart of Pharaoh became heavy, and he did not send away the nation. Up until the sixth plague, the plague of שַׁחַן boils, Pharaoh hardened **his own** heart, as is clear from

Onkelos, וְאַתִּיקָר לְבָא דְפָרָעָה. It was only from the sixth plague on that G-d hardened the heart of Pharaoh. How did Pharaoh change his heart, and what does that even mean?

The Kriyat Shema commands us to be very in tune with our hearts. We are to love G-d with all our heart, take the words to heart, serve with all our hearts, and to watch over that same heart, that it won't go astray. If we are exiled, it is for straying after our hearts, and the only way to get out of exile is by placing these

words on our hearts. Everything is about the heart! The same heart can be a source of connection to G-d, and it can also be the source of distancing ourselves from G-d! The heart is what got us into exile, and it is the heart that will bring our redemption!

What is included in the heart? The Mishna tells us in Avot that “a good heart includes a good eye, a good friend, a good neighbor, and... the ability to see into the future, or know the results of your actions.” **צאו וראו איזוהי דרך ישירה** שידבק בה האדם רבי אליעזר אומר עין טובה רבי יהושע אומר חבר טוב רבי יוסי אומר שכן טוב רבי שמעון אומר הרואה את הנולד רבי אליעזר אומר לב טוב אמר להם רואה אני את דברי אליעזר בן ערך שבכל דבריו בדבריכם (Avot 2:9) A **Good Eye**, means, to be happy to see that others have more than you do, and to be happy with what you have; to live within your means, spending less money than you are making. **Good friend and good neighbor** means to connect to good friends and neighbors, and to be a good friend and neighbor to others. These are all heart-related, all connected to good character.

There is one element of a good heart that is mentioned in the Mishna in Avot which seems unrelated to the heart, but rather to the intellect. **Seeing the results of your actions, and predicting correctly.** But isn't that connected to the intellect? Didn't the Elders of the South tell Alexander the Great, **איזהו חכם הרואה את הנולד** that a wise man is one that sees the result of his actions and predicts correctly? (see Tamid 32a)

The answer is there is something called “Intuition Intelligence”. What is Intuition Intelligence, and how does someone improve it? I.I. is not just a hunch about what is going to happen. It is not the brain analyzing, but it is nonlinear knowledge, listening to both your mind and your gut, and to how you feel “you

know” things are going to turn out, although you can't prove or explain why.

When deciding who you should build relationships with, be in tuned not only to what you see and hear, but how does this person make you feel? Comfortable, or tense? Positive energy or negative energy? Motivated or depleted? Drained or energetic? In order for you to tap into this intuition, you need to take a three-minute mediation/break, time alone to tune out from the opinions and views of other people, so that you can tune into your own intuition. There are many types of intelligence, but the intelligence of intuition is the greatest of them all. It will tell you who to associate with, and it will help you contemplate the future and the results of your actions. Your intuition intelligence is so important that when you make business decisions, relationship decisions, what is on paper, resume, or prospect, is nowhere near as important as how you *feel*, when you actually go into an investment or how you feel when you get to see enough of the person that you want to build a relationship with. Anyone can put down numbers on a paper or make themselves look persuasive, but it is the intuition, that feeling from somewhere deep within one's heart that will make the decision.

Although Pharaoh was one of the smartest gentiles ever, who knew 70 languages (Sotah 36b) and was the head sorcerer of Egypt, (Zohar 2,28) once the plague was over, he totally forgot Who he was dealing with, and what the results of his actions would be, and refused to release the Jews. How was Pharaoh able to continue to act so irrationally?! And what does it have to do with the heart?

The answer is enlightening, and it is the secret to serving G-d. Although the mind makes decisions based on the information it is given,



it is the heart and the gut that present the information to the mind. It is the heart that gathers information from past and present experience and future speculation, that presents the heart what to focus on, for the mind to decide. It is the heart that is the place of intuition, to predict and speculate, because the mind does not see what is not in front of it. It is the heart that imagines reward and punishment, reward for all good behavior, and punishment for all bad. The heart that imagines the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai and how Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov lived their lives. Our Rabbis teach us that no matter how smart a person may be, if the heart is getting some personal gain, it can be easily sidetracked, ignoring all logical ramifications, and come up with some incorrect intuition. Smart people smoke, gamble, get addicted to inappropriate content and browsing and abusive behavior, although there are scientifically proven very negative ramifications to their behavior and actions. Why? How? Because when the heart has something to gain, it can ignore results of one's actions and does not even bring factual ramifications to the mind, to decide, as if this is *not at all a factor*.

This ability to see the reward and punishment of the future, the result of actions, is the secret to being G-d-fearing. In the Shema, we are warned that when life is good, not to forget about the reward and punishment for our actions. **ונתני מטר-ארצכם בעתו יונה ומלוקש ואספה רגניך ותירשך ויצחרא : ונתני עשב בשזך לבחמתך ואכלתך ושבעתך : נשמרו לך יפהה לבבכם...** The reason why people ignore reward and punishment is the same reason why Pharaoh ignored the plagues and the outcome of his actions. It is because the heart gets hyper-focused on the present, enjoying the pleasure of the fleeting moment, forgetting that G-d is

not limited by time, to bring about reward and punishment. Pharaoh said to himself, "For the meantime, everything is fine. Why complicate things?"

This is the lesson of Shemot, from the very beginning. **וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה קְמִילָת אֶת-הָאֱלֹקִים נִיעשֶׁת לְקָרְבָּן בְּתִים**: At the outset of Shemot, when Shifra and Puah, a.k.a. Yochebed and Miriam, ignored Pharaoh's threats to kill the Jewish baby boys and feared G-d instead, ... the passuk says that G-d made them "houses". What are these houses, that Yochebed and Miriam deserved? Houses of Kohanim and Royalty. Yochebed deserved, for her bravery, to be the mother of Aharon, the father of Kohanim, and of Moshe, who brought the Torah down to the Jewish Nation. Miriam, a.k.a. Efrat, deserved to be the matriarch of K. David; and Betzalel, who built the Mishkan, was her grandson. This is from the only places of the Torah, that reward and punishment are blatant. Why? Because the whole Sefer Shemot is the book of reward and punishment. G-d does not get involved, to do His reward/punishment thing, when you expect Him to. He has a LOT of patience, as He is above time. This is a fundamental of faith, and something we need to internalize on a consistent basis, if we want pure, eternal, Yirat HaShem – awe of G-d. **יראת קָרְבָּן טָהוֹרָה עַמְּדָת לְעֵד**. When someone has self-awareness, they have intuition, and they won't behave in ways that are self-detrimental.

What got us into exile was forgetting that G-d has patience, ignoring our intuition, allowing our hearts to be blinded by our desires, greed and passions. One of the reasons why we went into exile was because we did not focus on Shema with all our hearts, morning and night (Yalkut Shimoni Yeshayahu 402) The way to bring back the Mashiach is through tapping into **genuine** spiritual motivation, meditation



and focus, while praying. Tapping into the heart. Rabbenu Bachye writes, that the reason why we are so disconnected from the heart, from Shaar Habechina of the Hovot Halevovot, is because our hearts are busy running after

money, pleasure and material gain. By overcoming these false passions, by reining in these drives, a person can recognize G-d and see how G-d is the World, and fear Him.

## THE ART OF LEARNING LESSONS (Jan. 2021)

The most important of all the lessons of history, is that men do not learn very much from the lessons of history. Covid, as well, has a lesson for everyone. According to YouGov, a research and data analytics firm, only 8 percent of Brits of England want to go back to life as it was before the pandemic. According to The Economist, Covid forced a home-working experiment that is likely to change work life forever, to some virtual/live hybrid model that is more time effective and cost efficient.

The purpose of **יסורים**, of pain and suffering, is at the root of the word. **סור** which means remove, Mussar, etc. There are other Hebrew words that can be used, like **סבל**, **צער**, **כאב**, but our Rabbis use, specifically, the word *Yissurim*, because if you do not remove something, a habit or a behavior, then the whole purpose of the suffering is defeated. As we learn in Berachot 5b, if a person does not “appreciate” the pain and suffering he goes through, if he does not learn something from it, it has no value.

This is the lesson of Passover. The *Marrow* on the Seder plate is to be positioned in the place of the *Sefirah* of *Tifferet*, which represents G-d’s mercy. What? How could *Marrow*, bitterness, be mercy? The answer is hidden in the custom that we eat Romaine lettuce, which is **אָסָר**, which refers to the mercy that G-d had upon us. Because the *Sefirah* of *Tifferet* is truth, long term. Goodness, long term. To have long term goodness, long term truth, one

needs, sometimes, to go through bitter times and accept the things that are difficult to accept. Because, as Judaism teaches, the only path to long-term pleasure is, almost always, through short term pain.

This is the reason why, if a person does not have Matzah on Pesach, only *Marrow*, there is no mitzvah of having *Marrow* alone. (Rambam K. Pesach 8;2, Sefer Hamitzvot Mitzvah Aseh 56) According to most opinions, eating *Marrow* is not counted as one of the 613 Mitzvoth, on its own, because it is part of the Mitzvah of Korban Pesach. Why is that so?

The Mitzvah of Matzah is to remember the hasty Redemption, when there was not enough time for the dough to rise. The Mitzvah of *Marrow* is to remember the bitterness the Egyptians put our ancestors through. And the Mitzvah of the Pesach sacrifice is to remember the disconnect from the Egyptian god and the recommitment with serving our Creator, and how G-d skipped over the doors of the undeserving Jews and punished only the Egyptians. If a person does not have Matzah, just *Marrow*, then there is no Mitzvah in eating it, as there is no purpose in remembering only the bitterness. If, together with the bitterness, you are not reminded of G-d’s strength, if you do not rekindle your connection with Him – it’s pointless. The *passuk* teaches us this concept, as well. **בְּעִבּוּר זֹה עֲשָׂה יְהֹוָה לְיִצְחָקִי אֲמִתְּרִים:** Because of this, for the sake of the Mitzvah of Matzah and *Marrow* for all

generations, G-d took me out of Egypt. (See Rashi Shemot 13:8) It is not that we eat Matzah and *Marrow* because we went through Exile and Exodus. Quite the contrary. We went through Exile and Exodus, because G-d wants us to have this Mitzvah of Matzah and *Marrow*. What? How does that make any sense? What is the purpose in of itself of eating Matzah and *Marrow*?

Eating Matzah and *Marrow* is a reminder of this timeless lesson, that all the pain and suffering we go through has a purpose, a lesson to be learned, a way of life that can be altered, a perspective that can transcend with a paradigm shift. This is the element our Rabbis refer to as *מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח* behind the Hagaddah story, beginning with difficulty and ending with praise. If, at the end, you can't express praise for the difficulty, you have missed the whole purpose.

The lessons learned from self-reflection in the moments of difficulty are the building blocks of the story of our identity. Only these experiences spearhead lasting change. The interventions from Above to of what we thought was "normal," challenge us to rethink our values, which ripple-effect through our thoughts and actions. It forces us to ask ourselves what's most important in life, and what we stand for. It helps us learn which values we can drop, those that do not help us get to where we really want to end up.

The first Mitzvah taught at Har Sinai, was how to treat slaves. Because that was a major lesson learned from the experience of slavery in Egypt, of pain, of degradation, so that we can have empathy for those who are dependent and reliant on us. This lesson is fundamental in the whole Torah, "Don't do to others what you don't want done to you."

But some people live their life not listening to their messages. Some people never learn, never pay attention, never take insight. This was the lesson of the Plagues, and why each one was given in a measure for measure format. Of course, G-d could have just struck the whole of Egypt with one big lightening flash, and called it a day. But G-d allowed the back-and-forth with Pharaoh, his Egyptian nation and the Jewish people, to teach us this lesson of what happens when people do not learn the lessons. When G-d warns that all animals that are left outdoors will die in the Plague of Pestilence, only those who "feared G-d" listened. And those who did not fear G-d, and ignored His word, who left their animals outdoors, lost them to the Plague. What? This is called "G-d fearing?" You have to be a fool to not listen to Moshe's warning, after the first four Plagues! But this is what G-d-fearing means, at its core. It means **not ignoring G-d's messages**. From all the things that were bad about Amalek, the epitome of Amalek's wickedness was וְלֹא יָרַא אֱלֹקִים *And he is not G-d fearing.* (Devarim 25:18) What? Amalek has plenty of things to work on before expecting him to fear G-d. Because G-d-fearing means not ignoring the messages of G-d. And the core of all Amalek's wickedness was ignoring the strength of G-d in the Exodus.

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored, and G-d does not cease to exist because He is ignored. Ignoring G-d's messages has a hefty price tag. If a person ignores G-d's message, לֹא יָרַא אֱלֹהִים *He won't want to forgive the person, ever.* (Devarim 29; 19) G-d's message in the Exodus was בָּעֵבּוּר תִּדְעַ בַּי אֵין כְּמִנִּי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ *So that you will know that there is none like Me in all the land. That there exists no being like G-d – that was the lesson of the first three Plagues,* ְדִצְנָה. No other being or entity is aware of the world



and involved in it as G-d is; this is the lesson of the next three שׁוֹרְךָ פָּגָעָה Plagues. There is no being, no entity with the infinite strength and power that G-d has. That is the message of the Plagues of בָּאָה בָּאָה. (See Kley Yakar)

The world is still scratching its head trying to figure out how the invisible enemy that **Selfie steps for learning life lessons**

1. All humans make mistakes. Not all humans learn from them. To learn lessons from your mistakes, you need to look past your shame, past your failures, ignore feelings of regret... all of which are temporary, while lessons are hopefully permanent. Nothing can empower you for your future like the lessons learned from the mistakes of your past. Unfortunately, some of the best lessons of life can only be taught to us the hard way.
2. The experiences, the people, the adversities, the challenges of your life, are all there to teach you lessons. Nothing was put into your life randomly.
3. Never fail to learn lessons in life from the most unordinary places. Oftentimes, G-d packages lessons in the most ridiculous, unexpected, annoying packages.

## THE ART OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is the key to success in so many life areas. How do we improve our communication skills? Where does one start?

An excellent place to begin is with the Meshech Chochma in this week's Parasha. Moshe claimed to G-d that there is not a chance that Pharoah would listen to Moshe that he is their redeemer, and the time of Exodus had arrived if the Jewish people were not listening to Moshe. Moshe claimed that the reason why the Jews did not listen was that he had halting speech.

G-d ignores Moshe's claims of his difficulty in communicating and commands Moshe to go back and speak to the People and Pharoah. As the Passuk says, וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְיַצְאֵם אֶל־בָּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל־פְּרִזְעָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם לְהַצִּיאָם אֶת־בָּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם: *And YHVH spoke to Moshe and Aharon, and He commanded them*

brought the world to its knees was created. But that, sometimes, is not as important as the lessons that we can learn from this whole mess. If we can learn just some of the lessons that are being sent from Above during Covid, we can change our lives!

*to Bnei Yisrael and to Pharoah the king of Egypt, to take out the Jews from the land of Egypt.*

How did G-d command Moshe to go back and try communicating again, if Moshe had good reasons to believe that he was just not good at communicating the message? It almost seems as if G-d totally ignored Moshe's seemingly legitimate claims of why he was not being effective in communicating the prophesy of G-d!

The Meshech Chochma answers that G-d was not ignoring Moshe's frustration when He told Moshe to go back and tell the Jews and Pharoah that the Jews should exit the land of Egypt. G-d was teaching Moshe, and all of us, the essential tool to communicate effectively.



G-d told Moshe that the reason why the Jews did not listen was because of what Moshe told them. **וְהַבָּאַתִּי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נֶשְׁאַתִּי אֶתְחַנֵּן** *And I will bring you (the Jewish People) to the land that I (G-d) raised My Hand to give it to Avraham, to Yitzhak and Yaakov.* Moshe was promising his People the Land of the Patriarchs, the land flowing milk and honey. But G-d told Moshe that this is the reason why the message was not getting across! The Jews did not even have such dreams of fantasy lands on their radar! They were only interested in stopping their 86 year holocaust. This is what the passuk means when it says **וְלֹא שָׁמַעַנּוּ אֶל-מִשְׁׁהּ רֹם וּמִצְּבָה** *And they did not listen to Moshe because of the short spirit and the hard work.* All they wanted to hear about, all they wanted to talk about or think about or dream about was that the work and misery would end. *Moshe, we do not have time, energy, or even headspace to hear about fantasy lands of flowing milk and honey!*

*G-d was saying, Moshe! If you want to communicate with your people, you need to listen to what it is on their minds! Go and tell them only that they will leave the land of Egypt! Don't mention the Land of Israel and watch how they will listen to you!!!*

If we want to be better communicators, the main way we can improve is by listening to what is going on in the head of the person with whom we are trying to communicate. Most times, we think that the problem is that we are not explaining ourselves well enough. **עַרְלָם שְׁפָתִים** Or that the problem is that they don't understand, trust, or respect the one who is trying to communicate — **הָם לֹא יָמִינוּ בָּי**. But most of the time, that is not the issue!! The issue is that we are not listening to what is going on in their heads.

Before you give a public talk, before you communicate, ask yourself first what the audience wants to hear. The question you should ask yourself when starting to prepare your speech should not be what **you** want to say, but what **they** want to hear. The question should not be, do **you** want to inform, entertain, motivate, inspire, or advise. The question that will make your speech great is, do **they** want to be informed, entertained, motivated, inspired, or advised. It's all about them, not about you.

The key to being an effective communicator is not improving your vocab, or how you say what you say, although those are important. It is not changing your tone of voice, threatening, or complaining, because doing so will not communicate as much as confuse. Effective communication is mostly dependent on how well you actively listen, understand, ask Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How questions, so that you can learn and understand the one with whom you are communicating. Effective communication is dependent on how present you can be with those you communicate with, how much empathy you can have, and how much trust and rapport you can build. Effective communication is about speaking short, clear, and to the point, of what they want to hear. Effective communication is dependent on understanding where the person you are communicating with is at, and where they want to be.

So how do we become better communicators? Here are the selfie steps:

- Engage. Make sure that when you communicate, you are doing 20 percent of the talking, and the one you are talking to is communicating with you 80 percent of the conversation. Ask and see if they understood what you said.



- Know the person you are communicating with at as deep a level as you can.
- Become a good listener by actively listening, showing with your body

## THE WATER IN YOUR STRAW

The best producers, artists and authors know how to give the illusion that something inanimate is actually alive. So, too, G-d created the world with the illusion that it is independent of Him. This is what is meant, in the words of the Talmud, that G-d is the best Producer ever. **אין ציר אין צור** **כאלוקינו** means, **אין ציר אין צור** **כאלוקינו** (Berachot 10a).

There is a principle in writing stories and plays that every element mentioned or used must be an integral part of the plot. "If, in Act I, you have a pistol hanging on the wall, then it must fire by the last act" (Anton Chekhov). No element should be mentioned or appear to make "false promises" by never coming into play. Why do producers keep this rule religiously? Because in the real Movie called Life, where G-d is the Producer, everything has a time and place. **אל תהיו בז לכל אדם ואל תהיו מפליג לכל דבר שאין לך אדם שאין לו שעה ואין שאין לו מקום** (Avot 4:3). Nothing is superfluous.

There is something in the Exodus story that seems superfluous. Moshe's Staff. What was so important about this staff that Moshe's becoming a leader started with it, and it is mentioned over and over throughout his life's story? (Amalek, Korah, hitting the rock) In what way was it so integral?

The Pirkei D'R Eliezer (40) tells us that this was not just another staff. This staff was created at twilight before Shabbat, on the sixth day of Creation, as one of the ten things that were created for the sake of Jewish People

language that you are focused and present on the conversation.

(Avot 5,6). It was given to Adam, who handed it over to Hanoch, and was subsequently handed down to Noach, to Shem, to Avraham, to Yitzhak, to Yaakov, to Yosef. When Yosef died, his property was confiscated and taken to Pharaoh's house. Yitro, who was then one of Pharaoh's sorcerers, saw the staff, the letters on it, and wanted to possess it. He took it with him and planted it in his garden. No one was able to get close to it. And when Moshe came to Yitro's house, he saw the letters that were on it; he felt a desire to have it, and was able to take it. Yitro saw this and realized that Moshe would become the redeemer of the Jews from Egypt, so he gave his daughter, Tzipporah, to him as a wife.

This staff was made out of sapphire. What was written on the staff? **דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב** which is the acronym of the ten plagues (Midrash Rabbah, Yalkut Shimoni). It had G-d's Holy Name of YHVH on it (Y.B. Uziel Beshalach 14, 21). What was the point of these inscriptions? And why, with them, was Moshe to use it as a "prop" to bring about the redemption?

In the beginning of the Parasha, G-d told Moshe that, in contrast to how He revealed Himself to the Forefathers, He reveals Himself with His Name, YHVH, to Moshe at the Exodus. In the Exodus, the great revelation was not only that G-d is in control of Creation, but that the whole of Creation is nothing without G-d! YHVH means that G-d is **מהוּה**, that He makes things happen and exist. And



nothing exists without Him. This is a basic, fundamental principle in Emunah. And the Exodus was the ultimate Emunah Academy.

Why did G-d bring ten plagues? Why did G-d not wipe out the Egyptians with one strong earthquake? The answer is because G-d wanted to show, once and for all, that there is no other power in Creation other than Him. That even Nature, all of Nature, is a Miracle. We know that each plague took a week, and then, there was a break for 3 weeks. The ten plagues took about ten months. Why didn't G-d just bring plague after plague? Why did He give three weeks' time to allow Pharaoh to have a breather?

The answer is because G-d wanted *the Jews* to learn, from the precision and detail of each plague, that He is the Producer. For example. If an Egyptian wanted a bottle of Mei Eden water from a Jew during the Plague of Blood, the Jew could charge \$1000. If the Egyptian did not want to pay and tried to put a straw into the Jew's cup, the Jew continued to drink water, while the water in the Egyptian's straw turned into blood. These are fundamentals in Emunah: whatever you got in life, and whatever you did not get in life, G-d is the Producer. Down to the last drop. (See *שיעור ר' נס וטבע* – *דעת*)

Moshe's Staff was called a Matteh, not a Makel. Why? Because the Matteh was there to *לְהַטּוֹת*, to steer the heart of the People to G-d. (Sfat Emet) That was the Purpose of the Miracles and the staff was to make this point clear. It is a staff that can become a snake, and a snake that can be a staff, because it is all G-d shining differently through the prism. Of course, we all have a Pharaoh inside us, the Yetzer Harah, that tells us not to be impressed. ? *מי יקוק אשר אשמע בקולם?* (5, 2) But it is up to us to realize that when something happens to us,

G-d has a reason for making it happen. To us. Now. And here. And if something that we wanted to happen did not happen, if we felt we deserved something and did not get it, it is because G-d knows that it is not good for us. Because G-d is the Ultimate Producer. The staff was the baton passed on from person to person to bring the responsibility of this revelation to the person who would reveal it to Humanity. And when Mashiach will come, he will come with this staff. (Y Shimon Hukat *תשנת*)

Why do some people have such a hard time believing this? Because they are missing Lesson Two of the Exodus. *בָּנֵי בְּכוֹרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*. Yisrael is my firstborn son. At this point in time, G-d signed the deal in which Esav sold his firstborn rights to Yaakov (See Rashi Shemot 4; 22). And this is the meaning of *דַצְקָנָה* *דִּיצָה* *עֲדָשׁ בָּאָחָב*. *דִּיצָה* means happiness. *עֲדָשׁ* – *בָּאָחָב* (גִּילָה רִנָה דִּיצָה וְחַדּוֹה) (*אָחָחָב* (Mishnat Chasidim)) Your joy in buying the firstborn rights, Milah and Korbanot, freed you from Egypt. *וְאָרָךְ מִתְבּוּסָת בְּדִמְיַחַד*.

What is the big idea about being Firstborn? Because sometimes, the other kids in the family feel as if everything is a hand-me-down life. As if all my parents' life decisions were for the firstborn; and then, we all had to follow suit, as if I am just an additional child, and whatever I got or did not is by default. But no. Every Jew is a Firstborn, and everything in your life was designed specifically for you. G-d, the Producer, has a way of writing the Grand Script in such a way that each person has his own script, one that fits perfectly into the Grand one. The two beliefs, you being G-d's Firstborn and G-d making everything in your life exist, are interdependent beliefs. YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER!



This is the reason why spiritual motivation is down by so many people. Because of the belief that "I am just a second child, and my life is in default to the lives of other people". But this is a HUGE mistake. G-d does not play favorites. You are G-d's only child. What you have was given to you by G-d. And G-d is waiting for

### A LETTER FROM G-D

Read the next few lines, and then close your eyes for a minute. When your eyes are closed, try to picture a letter in an envelope, handed to you by a stranger. The stranger shows you his ID card. Eliyahu Hanavi. He tells you that in this envelope is a letter to you, personally, from G-d. You look up again to see the stranger, but he has disappeared. You are left alone holding the envelope, and in it, a letter from G-d. Now, close your eyes and try to imagine what G-d wants to tell you, a letter from G-d to you.

One day, last month, I got such a letter. It was a photocopy handed to me from a person on the street, someone I don't know, written in Hebrew. I was offered this paper for giving the stranger a hand. As he handed it to me, the stranger said, "Read it once a day, and you will have a life of quality and clarity. Guaranteed." The heading in bold said, **A LETTER FROM G-D. And this is what "G-d" wrote to me.** Read it out loud, and remember: this letter is written to you by G-d, Who knows your whole life story, from before you were born. Here it is:

*My dear, beloved son!!! Do you remember me? Are you living with Me in your life (?), or do you just mention my Name sometimes, (Baruch Hu Baruch Shemo, Be'ezrat Hashem, Im Yirtzeh Hashem) in somewhat a lip service? I want to remind you that I am your Father, and I love you very much. I am always with you, every time and everywhere. I know what*

you to build and activate a relationship with Him on a personal level, just the way He produced your life, on a personal level. And when you are joyous about being G-d's Firstborn, G-d will take you out of your own personal Mitzrayim as well.

### FROM G-D

*is the very best for you. I do everything with your best interest in mind. I am, after all, bringing you closer to your life's destiny. You see only one piece of a gigantic puzzle, and from that one piece, you try to understand the whole, entire picture. But it is simply not in your capability to understand, so let go, relax...*

*Believe Me, I am doing the best possible thing for you. I only put a person through a trial he can overcome or a test he can pass successfully. Rely on Me. Trust Me. Depend on Me. Confide in Me. Pray to Me. Speak to Me. I am right here! With you ! Always!*

*I am the Shadchan. I am the Doctor. I am the Boss at work. I am the Peacemaker. I grant babies to parents. I am in charge of how successfully you raise your children. I, and only I, give you the gift called Life.*

*Always remember that I am the One Who runs the World, and all your life's pain and suffering are given to you with love and abundant mercy. I never make mistakes.*

*It is a pity for you to think, "If only things would be different...", "If I would have done things differently...", "If only I wouldn't have said...". All this is your Evil Inclination speaking inside.*

*Stop blaming people, thinking, "It's his fault. Or, it's her fault..." It's just Me, G-d. I am the One Who Created the Universe, and I*



**watch over you each and every second of the day. I DO EVERYTHING THAT IS DONE IN YOUR LIFE!!! All the people in your life are My messengers !!! Always remember that this test you are going through right now in life, as well as every other test life brings you – it is all My Will.**

*I hope that you will bring Me into your life, ...  
Love you with a passion,  
your Father.*

Each time I read this letter, I get more strength to deal with any upsetting circumstance life brings about. It is probably the only technique that works when the self help techniques of the gentiles fail. Because it is not a technique; it is reality. Most techniques are only needed because there is no Emunah.

This is the message G-d told Moshe to relay to the Jews suffering in slavery. The Jewish Nation was going through the worst holocaust of all time, the longest holocaust. The last 86 years before the Exodus were the hardest of the 210 years in Egypt. And this is the message G-d tells them. *עמו אני בצראה I am with him (the Jewish people) in his pain.* 24/7. G-d appeared to Moshe in a burning bush, hinting to the fact that G-d, too, is to be found with us in the thorns. Not that G-d feels sorry along with us or has empathy for us, but much deeper than that. When we are in pain, He is with us, there in the pain. (At Mt. Sinai, the Jews saw that there was a sapphire brick at “G-d’s feet” . G-d was constantly mindful of the Jewish slavery, their toil with the bricks.) He does not leave us to circumstance. *אהיה אשר אהיה* , Hashem tells Moshe, ‘Go tell the Jews

### PLAN FOR A CHANGE

A few weeks ago, I coached a yeshiva student who was in somewhat of an identity crisis. He decided that he wanted to be what he called “a

that I am with them in the Galut. Literally translated, *I am* or *I will be*. What does this mean, that G-d *is* or that G-d *will be*?

People tend to forget, in their personal pain, G-d’s existence. G-d is in the suffering with you, and this is the beginning of your redemption from your personal Mitzrayim. (Mitzrayim is like the word Meitzar, suffering, or straits, but in the plural form, many sufferings.) *מן המצר קראתי י-ה* From my suffering, I call out to G-d. Because that’s when G-d is so close, despite His hiding so well. Sometimes, the best hiding spot is right in front of your nose. And when G-d hides Himself the most, He, also, hides Himself much closer to you than you could imagine.

When G-d asked Moshe to go down to Egypt and redeem the Jews, Moshe said he was afraid that they would not believe that G-d still had them in mind. G-d considered this as gossip and punished Moshe with leprosy, the plague for speaking gossip. One of the signs Moshe would display, proving that he was the redeemer, was that his hand would come out leprous after he would slide it into his cloak. This proved their ability to believe, even from the depth of their downcast condition. At the time when their condition could not possibly get any worse, at the moment of the greatest suffering and, ostensibly, the point of complete absence of faith, the innate belief of the Jewish people was revealed in full force! G-d knows that *belief* is a core trait of the Jewish people. They have the ability to believe in G-d, even in the darkest of times. And this ability is what gets them out the darkest of times, as well.

### PLAN FOR A CHANGE

Halacha Jew”. He wanted to keep halacha down to the smallest detail. The problem was that this boy was very far from the goal he was

aiming for, which caused him great confusion. As he started learning halacha after halacha, he saw that he was not anywhere near where he wanted to be; he wasn't ready for all that change in life, and he wanted to give up. He felt, somewhat, an identity crisis. "If I can't be a Halacha Jew, than I will be a Jew that doesn't keep halacha. I might as well give up now, before I get more confused."

We reexamined and redefined what a Halacha Jew actually is. "A Halacha Jew is a Jew that decided that everything he does is going to be in accordance with halacha. He will do the best he can to live his life according to halacha from his present level, or to improve his situation, constantly *trying* to reach a greater degree of observance."

The reason why most people do not change in life, even after they realize the value of the goal that they have set for themselves, is because they have not made a firm decision. It is not because they are "not ready for change". People who change, change now, today, not tomorrow, even if they are not ready. It is the ability to decide that makes a difference; the decision to change, and that decision needs to be made immediately after they are fully aware of the value in the change. How, though, is a different story. But when people do not change, the reason they give is usually, "I was not ready for the change. You need to be ready, in order to change." People who wait until they are ready, never get ready. The people who are able to change have a different order of putting things together. The fact that they are not ready is just in the temporary reality of the moment; but in their mind, in their identity, in their belief system, the change has already been made. It is just a matter of time, until the change in the person is actually put into action. Every day, they do what they can to put their planned changes into effect;

they try to get closer to making the change a reality. This is something we can learn from our Parasha, and from R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l.

R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l, adopted this self-help tool in spirituality. He lived for Kavod Shamayim, Kiddush Hashem and Torah learning in quality and quantity to a maximum degree. He knew that his greatest strength was that G-d was behind him. "Of course, I cannot carry out all of my plans for the future Mir. My greatest advantage is that I realize I can't possibly do everything I would like to do. Other people fool themselves into thinking that they can do whatever they want. I am in the hands of Ribono Shel Olam, and I can only try my best."

R' Nosson Tzvi would explain. At the beginning of the Parasha, even before Moshe and Aharon actually followed G-d's directive to go to Pharaoh, the passuk says, *Moshe and Aharon did as Hashem commanded them: so they did* (Shemot 7:6). How could the Torah state, in present tense, that they did what G-d commanded them to do, even before they had done it?

We see from here that when you resolve to do something- even if it is beyond your natural capabilities, G-d considers that you have already done it. But, I believe that R' Nosson Tzvi had another secret. He did not just plan. He planned on paper. He told others to plan their life goals, their spiritual goals, and their learning goals on paper. In February 2003, USA Today reported a study of people who had made New Year's Resolutions the year before. Out of the people who had not made their resolutions in writing, only 4% had followed through. But, of those people who had written down their resolutions, fully 46%



had carried them out. This is a difference in success rates of more than 1100%!

I believe that the greatest human feat, the greatest change, that was performed in the Torah was taking the Jews out of Egypt. How did Moshe do it? He didn't. G-d did. That is why Moshe's name is not mentioned in the Haggadah on Passover. But still, Moshe went

## BEHIND THE BLUEPRINTS

הַלְּתָה ב (קהלת ופניתי אני לראות חכמה והוללות וסכנות כי מה האדם שיבא אחריו המלך את אשר כבר עשו. *And I turned to see wisdom, folly and foolishness, for what is left for a man to do, a man who comes after the King; only that which has already been done.* The Midrash teaches that this comment refers to both King Solomon and Moshe Rabbeinu. Despite their greatness, they each made a grave mistake. King Solomon married one thousand women, foreign princesses, in his attempt to bring the world together to serve G-d. He transgressed one letter of the Torah, לא ירבה לו נשים, *The king may not have many wives.* A Jewish king is not allowed to have more than eighteen wives, for they may make his heart stray away from serving G-d. King Solomon thought that he was too smart for that to happen to him. But the letter 'ו' of the word ירבה leveled his accusation against King Solomon before G-d, and G-d punished King Solomon. The passuk in Kohelet teaches that after G-d has decided how things are supposed to be, it is foolish to think that one can reevaluate or reexamine G-d's decision.

The Midrash continues, saying that Moshe, as well, made this mistake of "outthinking" G-d. G-d told Moshe that He was not going to let Pharaoh send out the Jews. But still, Moshe questioned G-d by asking *למה הרעתה לעם זהה מה שלחתני Why did you cause evil to this nation? Why did you send me on this*

through the motions, being the perfect, ultimate messenger of G-d.

לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל *The job is not up to you to complete. And you are not free to ignore your responsibility to do what needs to be done, to make the job happen.* (Avot 2 16)

## BEHIND THE BLUEPRINTS

mission? (Moshe was punished because of questioning why and he was not allowed to enter the Land of Israel (See Rashi 6, 1). And this is why the Torah uses the word **וידבר** *And G-d spoke to Moshe* **וידבר אל משה** is used when speaking sternly. And then, when G-d saw that Moshe had asked this question out of the pain he felt for his brethren, G-d softened his speech to Moshe, using the word – **ויאמר אליו אני ה** *which is used when G-d speaks gently (Shemot Rabbah 6 A).*

Questioning G-d is something we do all too often without noticing it. And on a level of effectiveness it is the worst thing we can do. The Serenity Prayer is something we must often recite, and we can never repeat it often enough: "G-d , Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." Not always can you choose. Choice is a gift from G-d. You can't choose your past, your parents, or the presents that G-d gives you. You can't choose your genes, your generation, or your gender. You can't change your siblings, your son, or your spouse's nature. But you can change your identity, what you consider important, and your intentions. Basically, Judaism teaches that all you really control in life is your attitude. Most things have already been decided by G-d. And that is a basic fact of life that that even the

greatest of men need to accept consciously, daily.

The Ramban (Bereshit 15; 14) asks the age-old question: Avraham was told about his descendants, that they would need to be enslaved four hundred years, and then G-d will judge the nation that enslaves them. **עבדום וענו** **וזו עליהם** **אותם ארבע מאות שנה** **וגם את הגוי אשר יעבדו** **וזן א נכי**. So, why was Pharaoh punished for enslaving the Jews? Wasn't he doing his job? Wasn't that his destiny?

Several answers are given to resolve this question. Although G-d said that the Jews would have to be slaves, who's to say that Pharaoh had to be the one to enslave them? (Rambam Teshuva 6, 5) Also, even if he had to enslave them, why did he overdo it? Why did he drown baby boys in the Nile?

The third answer is that Pharaoh's intentions were off. His intention was not to act as G-d's messenger in enslaving Avraham's children. Quite the contrary. In his very first response to Moshe's request on G-d's behalf, Pharaoh responded with the disclaimer, **מי ה' אשר אשמע** **בקלו** . *Who is G-d that I need to listen to His voice?* (Shemot 5 2) Pharaoh was very clear about this. He was not in G-d's employ: he was just doing his own thing.

The Rebbe from Pasische would focus on the third answer and tell his Chassidim, "You see from Pharaoh how important it is to say the right **לשם יהוד** the prayer in the Siddurim for the right Kavvanot, to have the right intentions before performing a Mitzvah. The main problem with Pharaoh's behavior was his intention. If Pharaoh had intended to do G-d's will, if he had said the right **לשם יהוד** prayer, everything would have turned out differently. And this is what is meant by the words **וזן א נכי** , G-d will judge the nation that enslaves

Avraham's descendants for their intentions. **כ** **בדבר אשר זדו עליהם** the Egyptians were punished more for plotting against them than they were for the actual enslavement (Shemot 18, 11).

One of the things that my mother always reminds me is that every day that G-d gives us, wherever life takes us, we need to ask ourselves what it is that He wants from us. And sometimes, all he wants from us is our hearts, our good intentions, because at times there is not much more that we can do. Your intentions mean more to your identity than your actions. You can pray, learn, and do mitzvoth, without even once having a feeling of subservience to Hashem. But G-d judges the intentions of our actions, not our actions alone.

The world of productivity can be divided into three kinds of people: Great people create. Ordinary people wait. Foolish people hate. When you look at the world this way, you see it in a new, different light. But even for the great people who create, their biggest problem is that they focus too much on the how, and not enough on the why. The Why is the foundation of whatever you are trying to create in your life. It is your motivation, your driving force, your battery. Don't forget to recharge it. Even G-d, in running His world, is driven by a Why, His Torah, His blueprint, (See Bereshit Rabbah, chapter 12) and G-d is not willing to erase even one letter of His Torah, even a tiny little 'of the word **ירבה** , not even for a great man like King Solomon. Because King Solomon was going up against G-d's intention.

The greater your why, the greater you are. The stronger your why, the stronger you are. And the more subservient you are to G-d and His plan for you in life, the more productive you will be.



## DON'T BE A WHY'S GUY

I recall one of my father's great lessons to my family as we grew up. ! ככה? למה? **Why?** **Because!** In coaching we were taught the power of a question. The greater the questions one asks, the greater the person. The less intelligent the questions one asks, the less intelligent the person. The six questions we ask are : Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why. "Why", however, is different from the others. It is a turbo question. It can stump you, make you feel like a fool, or, if used correctly can be the question that brings you your greatest successes in life.

There is a great Hassidic twist on the words of King David, **למה יאמרו הגויים איה נא אלהיהם**. Why should the gentiles say, " where is their G-d?" Instead, read it, *"Why", is a question the gentiles ask; where are their gods? 'Why' is a gentile question. Use it gently.*

I was taught by Rabbi N. Geisler, my master coach, to use the 'why question' sparingly. It is actually even better to change the tune to, "What is the reason?" Be especially careful when the why question is asking a person about something they did wrong, where they failed, etc. The truth is that if you ask someone a few whys, if you dig deep enough, you will hit rock bottom. There will be no answer. *Why did you come late? Because I slept in. Why did you sleep in? Because I did not set my alarm clock. Why did you not set your alarm clock? Because I forgot. Why did you forget? Because I am an idiot.*

You are not an idiot. You are G-dly. If I would ask 'Why you are an idiot', there would be no answer. The answer is G-d. Play this "Why" game on people you don't want to like you. The Midrash says that asking people "Why did you do this?" gets them angry. The

reason why people can't answer why is because that is where G-d is in their life, an area of confusion for many. I do not ask myself, or the people in my life, Why. Unless I have to. Unless it is focused on the positive. Why did you get such a great mark on your test? Why are you doing the dishes for Mom? Why are you reading this article? Why do you like self-help articles? Why do you learn Torah? Why do you enjoy it? These "Whys" recharge motivation batteries. Self help gurus believe that if you have enough "because" to Why, or reasons for your goal, you are unstoppable.

The only blemish that Moshe had on his life record was – asking why. **למה הרעותה לעם זהה** *Why have you brought evil upon this nation, and why did You send me?* Moshe asked this, of course, to help out His Nation. He put himself on the line for the Jewish People. But because he did, he received his worst punishment. He was not allowed into the Land of Israel (see Rashi 6; 1) . Why the Land of Israel? How was that punishment 'measure for measure'? Because the Land of Israel is given to the Nation that does not ask Why. It is a Land about which the Whys are left unanswered. Why do all the nations fight over it? Why is Israel the Chosen Land? etc.

This week's Parasha starts off, **וידבר אלקים אל משה** . The word Elokim represents G-d's attribute of Judgment, and Moshe was subjected to judgment for having asked this question. G-d told Moshe, "The ancestors **never** asked Me why! I will give **them** the Land of Israel." Our rabbis learn from here (that G-d will give the Land of Israel to our Forefathers) a fundamental precept of our religion. Afterlife and Resurrection. Such a major, fundamental precept of our religion –



where would G-d mention it? In our Parasha, where G-d reveals Himself to His nation, as the One you don't ask Why. In our Parasha, where G-d answers, once and for all, the question of 'why do bad things happen to good people', צדיק ורע לו. The answer is, 'אני ה' I am G-d. You can't know Why. Because I am G-d, and you are human. There are things that we will never understand, till we die. The Arizal taught that sometimes G-d's reason is connected to Gilgulim, Reincarnation. Sometimes, the Why has to do with the previous me: my destiny, the destiny of the world, etc. The scary thing is, that when we ask Why in the wrong place, we could be bringing the Attribute of Judgment on ourselves.

When Moshe came to the people and performed the three signs, changing river water to blood, a healthy hand to one afflicted with leprosy and turning a staff into a snake, that wasn't convincing enough for Serah Bat Asher to accept that the redeemer of the Jews had arrived. When she heard that he said פקוד יפקוד, she exclaimed – "That's the one!! He's got the password!!". The word פקוד has the numerical value of 190, or the numerical value of the word זך (see Baal Haturim). Moshe doubted that the Jews would believe the redemption had arrived, for they had been in Egypt for only 210 years, while Avraham had been told by G-d that they had to be in a stranger's land for 400 years! But פקוד, the 190 years that were left – G-d has them 'written in on the account'.

And if G-d said that He remembers us, with 190 years left, then our time has come!

A simple question. These words, פקוד יפקוד, were the words that Yosef told the brothers, before he died. Moshe's father was the Chief Rabbi of the people at the time, and he probably knew the golden password from home. So why did they believe that he heard these words from G-d? Maybe he heard them at home?

The answer is, the big Why of Moshe's life. Moshe, in his whole life, was never really a part of the B'nei Yisrael in Egypt. He was thrown into the Nile as an infant, brought up in Pharaoh's house, ran away to Kush, to Midian, and now he comes from the burning bush and says the password. During Moshe's life, if you had asked him why G-d gave him such a weird, strange life, he probably would have told you, "G-d has a plan. I do not know the reason." But the only way the suffering Jews in Egypt would buy the idea that Moshe was the redeemer was if he lived this weird, strange life outside the Jewish Community. This was proof that G-d revealed Himself to him and gave him the password. For if he did not hear the password from G-d, where did he hear it?

So Moshe placed himself in this predicament and asked G-d the sinful question. Why. Why did you do evil to this People? The answer to Moshe, and the answer to humanity, is, I am G-d. And you are human. I am G-d, and mortals cannot comprehend. I am G-d, and be careful when asking "Why".

## LESSON FROM A FROG

*Anyone who gets angry is considered as one who practices idolatry.* (Shabbat 105b) Why is it like that? The last time I got angry, I did not feel that I do not believe in G-d. Such a thought did not even cross my mind. As a

matter of fact, when people get angry, they do not forget that they do not like getting angry. They do not "decide" to get angry. There is just a thought that comes to mind that is an angry thought. And then they get angry. What



is the core belief of all angry thoughts? And why is it like idolatry?

The Steipler would explain something interesting about anger. He pointed to “the frog” (וְתַעַל הַצְפְּרָדָע) mentioned by Rashi in the parasha. *There was one frog: they were hitting it, and it would spit out many streams of frogs.* That was it. Just one frog. G-d brought just one frog to the Egyptians in this plague. That one frog got hit by the first Egyptian, who was not happy to see such a thing, and then it spit out more frogs. The Egyptians continued to hit it, and endless streams of frogs jumped out. Had they stopped hitting it and just left it alone, then there would not have been a plague of such enormous proportions; there would not have been so many frogs. If so, why didn’t they stop hitting it? – Because they saw that the frog did not listen. It did not behave the way they wanted it to, so they hit it repeatedly to teach it a lesson. Even if the whole of Egypt would be filled with frogs. They believed that *this frog* is going to learn who is boss. (Angry people never think rationally nor do they notice the outcome of their actions when they are angry). But on an even deeper level, they believed that if there was no such frog yesterday in town, it should not be here now, either.

This is what anger is all about. *I am going to teach reality a lesson.* Not only does it not work, *but reality teaches us a lesson.* And the reason is because reality is G-d. Allow me to go beneath the surface of all thoughts.

80 percent of thoughts are past and future thoughts, thoughts that are not actionable. Thoughts that bring us stress. Man is stressed when he wants a choice that he cannot have. G-d gives us free choice only in the present. We have no choice either in the past or in the future. We cannot change anything that is not

in front of us. What is in front of us is reality. What was just a minute ago was history, a memory. The future is just our imagination or dream, until whatever happens -happens. But man has a tendency to think thoughts that are not actionable.

Only G-d is in the past, present and future at the same time, not man. When G-d presented himself to Moshe, He told him to say to the Jewish People I “א-היה אשר א-היה שלחני אליכם I will be what I will be” *sent me to redeem you.* In the midrash (*Shemot Rabba 3:6*) we find that G-d actually said אני שהייתי, ואני הוא לעתיד לבא. *I am the One who was, I am now, and I am in the future.* This is the way that G-d introduced Himself. This does not mean only that G-d is immortal, for immortality is only a display of G-d’s Eternalness, not His Name. The Name of G-d, קָדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, contains within it the concept of היה הווה ויהה. Was, Is, and Will always Be. That is His Name. Why is this His Name? Because G-d is reality, whenever it is. Everything that we hear, see, smell, taste, and feel is G-d. This is why the best question to ask people who come for advice is many times “What are your options ?” because that question wakes us up out of the past and future and brings us face to face with reality. Once we are in reality, we have choice. Because that is where G-d **gives** us choice.

Now, someone who does not accept reality is not accepting G-d. Such a person believes that *he should have choice.* He is attached to the thought of “should”. This means that he believes that he can have choice over G-d’s choice. And that is a lethal thought.

Imagine a fellow decides, and I have witnessed this, that there should not be a stop sign or red light at this street corner. And he goes against reality. The results? BOOM! Imagine that a



parent decides that his child or spouse should be something or someone else? DOUBLE BOOM! When you go against reality, reality will teach you a lesson.

As long as we think that *the way things should be...*, we are in denial. In denial of the Now. We are either under the impression that the past should be the present, or that our previous

thoughts of the future will create the Now. But the past, present and future, are all G-d.

We feel G-d and notice Him the most in the place where we do not have free choice. And when we do not accept that this is the choice of G-d, we think that our choice can override G-d's choice. And that is something like serving idols.

## THE HARDEST WORKERS OF THE WORLD

The Rambam wrote in a letter to his son, R' Avraham, that Pharaoh is none other than the Evil Inclination. R' M. Shwab writes that if we can learn the story and behaviorisms of Pharaoh, then we can learn the story and behaviorisms of our Evil Inclination. By opening our eyes and doing some soul searching, we can find many of these "inner traits of Pharaoh" on our own. The Messilat Yesharim (ch. 2) writes that the way that Pharaoh ensured that the Jews would not plot against him to rebel or leave was by increasing their slavery. Just by being busy, one does not get a chance to see what the reality is or what his options are. This plot of Pharaoh is the way of the Evil Inclination as well. As we will soon see, we may be able to learn from Pharaoh's own behaviorisms more about our Evil Inclination.

After Moshe's first unsuccessful attempt to free the Jews from slavery, G-d commanded Moshe to return to Pharaoh a second time. Moshe was reluctant. *The Jews did not listen to me* (when I told them that their redemption has come). *How, then, will Pharaoh listen to me, especially as I speak haltingly?* (Shemot 6:12)

The Midrash explains that this is one of the ten "Kal Vachomer", logical deduction methods that are used to understand Torah texts, that are explicit in the Torah. (Breishit Rabba 92:7) *If the Jews who are short spirited and harshly*

*enslaved, and despite all this do not believe me that You sent me, then how can I expect Pharaoh, who benefits by enslaving the Jews, to believe me that You desire to free Your People?*

It is commonly asked if this is, at all, a fair deduction. The Jews, in their difficult slavery, overworked and tortured, did not have the strength to raise their eyes to glimpse the dim ray of light at the end of the tunnel. This is the reason why they did not believe that they would be redeemed. Pharaoh, on the other hand, who was neither enslaved, nor forced to do hard work, might believe that the Redemption has arrived. How, then, can this be considered a fair, logical deduction at all?

The answer R' Yitzchak Ezrachi, shlita, gives is a lesson for life. Pharaoh was also *working very hard*. He was also "enslaved". Being the ruler of the greatest empire in the world, Pharaoh developed a belief that *he was a god*. After Yaakov blessed Pharaoh, each time Pharaoh would go to the Nile, the water would rise toward his feet. Pharaoh used this to support his claim. *"The Nile is mine, and I created it and myself,"* (Yechezkel 29:3) became Pharaoh's new slogan. In order to prove that he was not human, Pharaoh would claim that he does not need to relieve himself in the bathroom. Instead, Pharaoh would go to the Nile every morning and



secretly relieve himself there, refraining himself during the rest of the day. If we stop and imagine all the things that one has to do in order to support a belief that he is not human, we discover that such a project becomes a full-time job! Pharaoh was enslaved by this belief, and so, he was always at work. To prove to himself that he was a god was so tiring. Pharaoh, then, was also too tired to listen to Moshe saying that G-d wanted to free His children. This was Moshe's claim.

This sheds light on those who are, in fact, the hardest workers of the world: *they are none other than those who must prove that they do not make mistakes*. People who deny that they sometimes need help, like all humans do. People who rose to the top, who feel that they have to deny that they were ever at the bottom. These people are enslaved.

We may work hard trying to live up to a picture we painted of ourselves with a tint of haughtiness. The efforts needed for this can be totally exhausting. In actual fact, the hardest workers in the world are those who work

#### MY UNCLE'S FREE WILL

*And Aharon took Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon for a wife etc.* (Shemot 6 ; 23). The Talmud (Bava Batra 110a) asks: what is the importance of mentioning that Nachshon was her brother? Don't we know this already? It was previously mentioned that her father was Aminadav, and we can deduce on our own that Nachshon was her brother.

The Talmud answers that *from here we learn that when one marries a woman, he needs first to see what her brothers are like. Most sons are similar to the brothers of their mother.*

A serious yeshiva student of marriageable age once consulted R' Shach, zt"l, with concerns

against reality. People can overwork themselves trying to live on a standard that is, in reality, above their ability to reach. They can hide their true identity as they gasp for air under the mask of who they wish they were. There is no greater enslavement than this: enslaved to the self-important me.

We might ask ourselves why G-d troubled Himself to bring about ten plagues. He could have just brought the Plague of the First Born, the harshest of them all, and the Jews would have been freed. The answer to this is that G-d does not reveal Himself outright to the arrogant at the outset. He gives man an opportunity to choose to recognize His power and greatness. After each plague, Pharaoh found some excuse for his not having to listen to G-d. This is the way of the Evil Inclination and of the arrogant, as well. When we have something we are arrogant about, we can fight all the way and work so hard as we try to keep up the fabrication. G-d gives the opportunity to choose this behavior, for this is part of the expression of free will.

#### FREE WILL

about a similar matter. He was suggested a great girl from a very respectable family; her father was also a well respected rabbi. Her brother, on the other hand, had stopped being observant. The boy very much wanted to meet the girl and see if it would, indeed, be a suitable match, as it sounded like such a great opportunity. At the same time, he was worried about the advice of the Talmud, and how it might have ramifications for his own sons.

R' Shach answered firmly, " No need to worry! The Chazon Ish has already ruled that the children will be like the brother of their mother **only** in regard to his *middot* (character traits), which are genetic. Regarding the



brother's way of life, however – this is dependent on free will, and there is no need to worry as to the effect of the way of life the brother chose for himself!"

When the boy came home to tell his mother, she had a difficult time accepting this. "*I understand the point. But the amount of suffering that this boy has caused his parents and the disgrace he caused them through his behavior cannot be overlooked. This boy not only chose to leave his parents, but he must have horrible middot as well!*"

The boy went back to R' Shach. "My mother claims that there is no greater proof of bad *middot* than causing so much anguish to the parents who brought him up..."

R' Shach did not accept this, either. "Tell your mother that the enticement of the street is so great, and the pull of the tide (into the depths) is so strong that it is too hard to conclude anything about a boy's *middot*, just because he could not cope with the trials and tests that the street has to offer! The boy's "falling out from religion" does not stem from bad or evil traits. Rather, it stems from the difficulty of coping with the temptations of the street. Do not hesitate. Go out happily with the girl, and may you merit building a home of Torah and Mitzvoth! " And that is exactly what had happened. (Story adapted from *אורחות הבית* compiled by R' Shach's grandson, Asher Bergman).

We can get a lot out of this story. Singles who are searching for a spouse would do better looking into what type of *middot* are in the

family than in finding out how the family utilizes their free will. We can also learn that *middot* are genetic, and *bechira* (free will) is not. And that the world (of prior generations, and so much more so of today) is so full of temptations that despite one's great *middot*, he can still fall to temptation. And that the negative traits we see in our parents and siblings are most likely in us as well.

There is even more to learn. Although people like to believe that fear of G-d is dependent on intellect or character, we see that it has to do with free will. We see in this weeks *parsha* that fearing G-d is a decision one has to make. The decision is not really effected by circumstance, as we see by the plague of *Dever*. Even when there is clear knowledge of certain damage for disobeying His word, the choice to disobey is still open! The Egyptians were told that if they wanted to save their animals during this plague, they had to put them indoors. *And those who feared the word of G-d obeyed, and their animals were saved.* One can know that there is going to be a plague, but still not fear G-d. One can have the greatest traits of kindness and good heartedness and still choose to be a bad person. One can have the greatest wisdom, and still choose not to believe in G-d.

As we are told, "*ha kol b'y'dei shomayim, chutz mi yir'at shomayim*" – everything is in the Hands of Heaven, except Fear (respect, awe) of Heaven". May we merit the wisdom to utilize our free will in order to perfect our *middot* and to become G-d fearing Jews. Amen.

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