



THINKINGaboutME.org

THE ART OF BEING BSIMCHA

There's a saying from Sweden: *those who choose to sing will always find a song*. Those who choose to be happy, will always find what to be happy about. Allow me to explain this, because nobody wakes up in the morning and says, You know what, today I'm going to aim for misery. Everyone wants to be happy, but when life is complicated, hard, or painful, not everyone is able to figure out, how to find what to be happy about.

Mishenichnas Adar marbin b'simcha, when Adar enters, halacha dictates that we are to increase in joy. Increase. As in, do more of it. Joy is not merely a mood that appears when life is easy. It's something active. Something you can grow. So what exactly is simcha? Simcha is not a smile. It's not a burst of emotion. It's not something you wait around hoping to feel. Simcha is WILLINGNESS. How so?

Imagine a parent woken at three in the morning by a crying child. They get up. Not dancing, not thrilled, not glowing with excitement, just tired. But inside there is no resentment. No inner resistance. Because they love this child. Because they chose this life. Because they want to be there. In Israel, the word we use to describe this state of mind is, B'simcha. When someone asks you for something, and you want to say, I will do it willingly, you say, I will do it, Bsimcha. That inner "yes", that wholeness with the situation, is simcha.

You can be exhausted and still be b'simcha. You can be overwhelmed and still be b'simcha. Because simcha isn't about how energized you feel. It's

about whether your heart is aligned with where you are. And you know what? It goes further than that. Sometimes the will is there, but the body isn't cooperating. You want to show up, but you're drained, distracted, cold, tense, or discouraged. So what do you do? You remove the obstacle. You make coffee so you can stay awake. You put on a sweater so you can stay warm. You take a walk to clear your head. You turn on music to shift the atmosphere. These are not indulgences. They are tools to help you do what you want to do, willingly. You want to live with purpose, but you're stuck in stress, pressure, confusion, or fatigue. Simcha doesn't only mean doing something willingly. It means doing whatever is necessary to create the conditions that allow your willingness to function.

Simcha is not a feeling that arrives when everything is perfect. Simcha is the decision to be whole with where you are, and it includes all the efforts you need to make that wholeness possible. When we are to serve G-d Bsimcha, with happiness, it is more about the willingness to serve, than a smile pasted on the face. Simcha, willingness, is difficult. We drag our feet too often in life, saying, Ok, Ok, Ok, I'll do it, and just get over with it, just stop bothering me...

Why is it hard to live life fully, with willingness? Because inside every person there is tension. Ancient wisdom described it as the struggle between BODY and SOUL, a war going on inside every single person. Modern **אוֹ לִי מִצְרֵי אֹוֹ לִי מִזְרֵחַ**



psychology uses a similar image: a rider on an elephant. The rider is the rational mind, making plans and setting direction. The elephant is the emotional, instinctive system... powerful, sensitive, and not always interested in the rider's agenda. If the elephant decides to move, the rider is coming along whether he likes it or not. When there is an addiction, or when there is trauma, the elephant is not listening to the rider.

The reason why people who choose happiness are still not happy, and still not able to take on life willingly, is because they don't understand that there are these two brains inside them. There is the brain of the rider, the Neshama. And there is the brain of the elephant, the Nefesh (Guf). Choosing happiness means, choosing to see the way of the Neshama, of the rider, and not of the elephant. The brain of the rider, is calm, optimistic, living for purpose, meaning and truth, and focused on what is IMPORTANT. The brain of the Elephant is animalistic, hard wired for survival and survival of the specie, fight or flight reactive, constantly scanning for problems, wired to detect danger. It amplifies negative information because, from a survival standpoint, threats matter more than comforts. It insists, that all that it is worried about, passionate about, scared about, is URGENT.

When life is tough, when you feel like it is hard to be happy, and you are losing willingness to do the things that are important in life, it is because with all the difficulties you're going through, your elephant brain is on high alert, and one worry can overshadow ten blessings. Why? Because the inner voice of Elephant brain is LOUDER than the inner voice of the brain of the rider, and this is because the Neshama rider's voice is quiet and soft. It does not shout. It requires you to meditate, to be calm, to hear it. Just like criticism hits you harder than praise, so too, the voice of the Elephant hits you harder than the voice of the Rider.

This is also why good things fade into the background, but difficult things take over your life. A person can receive enormous blessings, success, relationships, stability, even win the lottery, and still feel dissatisfied months later. This is because the Elephant mind has already moved on, searching for the next problem to solve. As long as you are in

problem solving mode, you are still in your Elephant mind, and you become an expert at noticing what's missing, and what problems need to be solved, but amateur at noticing what's present, what's good, and what prayers G-d already answered.

To explain this concept of happiness, and Elephant psychology, we can focus just a second on the Segulah from R' Shtern, Mashgiach of Kamenitz. A man comes home from work, sits down, and starts complaining. Everything is wrong. Life is hard. Nothing is working. What should the wife do, with her complaining husband?

She should listen, not argue, not try to reason with him or fix his thinking. And then, she should quietly get up and set the table. Then the magic happens. The husband sees the food, something in him settles. The elephant calms down. The noise in his head gets quieter. And now, suddenly, she can have a conversation where she can reach him and talk him through it. Why? Because when the Elephant sees food, the Elephant becomes calm, and she can talk to the Rider again. When you address the body, when you calm the Elephant, you can communicate with the Rider.

So what does it mean to *choose* happiness? It means to choose the voice of the Rider over the voice of the Elephant. How does one do that, when the Elephant is so LOUD and the Rider is so quiet?

In this week's Parasha, we learn that Moshe used the skin of an animal called Tachash, to cover the Mishkan. That Tachash was a unique creature that existed briefly just for this sacred purpose. It was stunning, covered in extraordinary colors, dazzling in its appearance. It was so dazzling, that its name was translated in Targum as sasgona, "one who rejoices in its colors." Sas means to be joyful, as we say about the Brit Milah, *שׁ אָנֹכִי עַל אָמְרַתְךָ*, and Gavna means colors.

The Talmud tells us, that with all its beauty, it also had a single flaw: it had an ugly horn on its forehead that disrupted its beauty. Think about that. Hashem creates this magnificent creature, gives it every color imaginable, and then puts a horn right in the center of its face that ruins the whole picture. Why? And more importantly, the tachash

REJOICED. It celebrated its colors. It didn't stare at the horn. It lived in full awareness of its beauty, carried its flaw with dignity, and went on to become part of something holy, the main beauty of the Mishkan in its entirety! G-d had many animal skins to choose from, but G-d specifically choose the beautiful Tachash, because it was happy with its colors, even though it had a horn right in the middle of its face!

What do most of us do in life? Because of our Elephant brain, we zoom all the way in on the one thing that's wrong, and blur out the hundred things that are right. We have health, family, religion, truth, abilities, relationships, opportunities, moments of meaning, a life of how kings lived, clothing, and as Temu put it, we shop like billionaires. But because of the Elephant brain, we spend 90% of our mental energy zooming in on the one thing that's wrong, the unresolved problem, the unmet expectation, the area of pain, and blur out everything else.

Simcha means choosing a different lens. Not denying the horn. Not pretending life is flawless. But refusing to let the horn on your forehead erase your beautiful colors. Simcha, and life full of willingness, is the decision to be whole with where you are, not because everything is perfect or wonderful, but because this is the life that G-d gave me, the life that G-d willed, so I am willing to live it to the fullest. Joy begins when you stop waiting for life to be without problems, or waiting for life to become easy. Joy begins when you start living life fully, just the way life is.

G-d, wherever You put me, I'll make sure there's a good vibe here. I'll play some music to cheer me up. I'll put on a sweater when it's too cold. Drink coffee when I am too tired. If you want me HERE, G-d, Your Will is my will! I will live it fully. Alive. Present. B'Simcha!

THE ART OF FAITH IN THE LONG HAUL

"Yaakov Avinu foresaw that his descendants would one day build a Mishkan (Tabernacle) in the desert. Therefore, he brought cedar trees to Egypt, planted them there, and instructed his children to take them along when they left Egypt." (Rashi from Midrash Tanchuma)

From the time Yaakov brought the acacia trees to Egypt until his descendants used them for the construction of the Mishkan, more than 200 years had passed. Enormous changes had taken place during these years. Yaakov Avinu passed away, followed by the passing of all his children, the Twelve Tribes. The Jews endured harsh slavery, spiritually declining to the point that they were described as being deeply immersed in idol worship—"These worship idols, and those worship idols." They were entrenched in the 49 levels of impurity. Who, at that time, would have thought about Yaakov's acacia trees?

Hashem sends Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen to redeem the Jews from Egypt. The nation witnessed the great miracles of the Ten

Plagues that Hashem brought upon the Egyptians. During the Plague of Darkness, four-fifths of the Israelite population perished, and the nation was struck with fear—what if, G-d forbid, they would not be redeemed? In such a time, their minds were not focused on acacia wood! Then came the Splitting of the Sea, the spoils from the sea, and later, the sin of the Golden Calf. Was anyone thinking about acacia trees?

Yet suddenly, when the time came to build the Mishkan, the Jews had exactly what they needed, right there with them, in middle of the desert—acacia wood! More than 200 years had passed since Yaakov planted those trees. The world had undergone upheavals and transformations, yet the spiritual preparation that Yaakov made for the construction of the Mishkan remained intact. In what merit?

The holiest part of the Mishkan, of the Temple, was the Holy Ark. The Holy Ark was made with three layers, two of gold, and one of the wood, of Yaakov Avinu. The two layers of gold of the Ark,

was just a coating of the layer of wood that Yaakov planted! Why was Yaakov's wood so important to G-d?

Each day, we mention, that when King David won all the wars against the surrounding enemies, the Jews were ready to finally build the Temple. David collected the funds from the people, he built the foundations, and he blessed G-d in front of the entire nation. **וַיֹּאמֶר קַדְמָה קָדְמָה לְעֵינֵינוּ כָּל-הַקָּדְשָׁל יַיְהֵר** He said, blessed are you G-d, the G-d of Yisrael (Yaakov) our Forefather, from This World, until the Next World...

Why, out of all the forefathers, does David mention Yaakov? Because Yaakov swore at the mountain of Har Hamorah, that if G-d will protect him, he will build a House of G-d on this mountain! **וַיֹּאמֶר יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְשָׁמְרֵנוּ עַל-זֶה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי** If G-d will give me food to eat and clothing to wear... **וְהִיא כִּי תָּמַתְּנִי מִצְבָּה** and this stone that I placed will be a House of G-d. Yaakov never got around to building the House of G-d on Mt. Moriah.

739 years later, though, King David will fulfil his grandfather's pledge! Blessed are You, G-d, that You helped Yaakov's descendants, after all that we have been through, we are able to fulfil Yaakov's pledge! All that we have been through, was all that needed to go through, so that we can get to this time and place!

You might think that what you are going through, you are going through it all alone. You might think

that it is all hopeless and helpless. But if you can't achieve or fill your dreams, at least plant the seeds. At least make your tambourine!

After the splitting of the Sea, Miriam and the women took out the tambourines they made in Egypt, and sang to G-d. **וְתַהַת מִרְמִים כְּנָבָאָה אֲחֹתָה אָהָרָן אֶת-הַתְּפִלָּה בְּגַדָּה וְתַאֲגִזָּה כָּל-הַנְּשָׁמָנִים אֶת-רִיחָה בְּתַפִּים וּבְמַחְלָתָה:** How did the women have tambourines? Why would they create tambourines in Egypt? Because they believed that miracles would come. **מוּבְטָחוֹת הָיו שֶׁבְּדוּר שְׁהַקְדּוּשָׁה בָּרוּךְ הוּא עֹשֶׂה לָהּ נְסִים וּהֹזִיאוֹ** (Rashi) In the merit of the women's faith in G-d we were saved from Egypt, and in the merit of their faith, we will be redeemed in the times of Mashiach. What was special of the faith in Egypt? That they did not just believe. They acted upon the belief. They made the tambourines. **בְּזָכוֹת נְשִׁים צְדָקָנִיות שָׁהֵו בָּאוֹתוֹ הָדוֹר נְגָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל מִצְרָיִם ... וּבְזָכוֹתָן עַתִּידֵין לְהַגָּאֵל** (Yalkut Shimoni) The women of the time, would be willing to bring children to the world, in middle of the 86 year Holocaust. Why? Because the believed in world that could be better. G-d is kind to us, in accordance to the level of belief we have in Him. **יְהִי-חֶסֶד יְקּוּן עַל-נוּ - פָּאַשֵּׁר לְאַלְפָיִם**

We might not always see the fruits of our labor, immediately, but if we keep believing, keep planting the seeds, and keep acting on our faith, we are setting the stage for something great in the future. This faith, is so dear to G-d, He desires the expressions of it, at the peak moments of Shirah. He allows this faith to survive through the worst, to be in the holiest place, in between the layers of gold, of His Holy Ark.

THE ART OF BEING SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED

Here is one of the reasons why it is so hard for a Jew to be spiritual, but first, a famous joke. There was a group of researchers that were looking for someone to fly to outer space, to be their astronaut on their test launch. They asked an Arab, "How much do you need - what will it cost us to send you on a test flight to outer space?"

The Arab said, 20 dollars. The price of cigarettes, and some Turkish coffee.

They asked an American how much it would cost them to send him in their trial launch. He said, 40 dollars. The price of a cheeseburger, a hotdog, and some beer.

They asked a Jew. "It will cost you 2,000 dollars. 1,000 for me, and 1,000 for the one who will fly instead of me."

The Jews are the greatest delegators of the world, in one way or another. This is why it is so hard for us to be spiritual! You can't delegate spirituality! You need to pray yourself; you need to learn yourself; you need to make Shabbat yourself, clean Pesach yourself, build your own Sukkah, raise your own kids. Of course, there are plenty who try and delegate those mitzvoth, but there is only a certain amount you can delegate, without it taking its toll. Even if you "buy" a whole Shabbat, you can't have someone else eat the Shabbat meals for you, or keep Shabbat for you.

Of course, there are Mitzvoth that you can have others do, and you can be a partner in those Mitzvoth. For example, you can support Torah, and it is considered as if you learned it yourself. All the Torah that is learned by others, that was generated by you, goes to your merit.

I learned with a philanthropist, a great man, for almost ten years, every day on Skype. A great man, Albert Chehebar, a"h. Of course, my rates for teaching are the same for the wealthy and not-so-wealthy, I always charge as cheap as I can, 30 dollars for a half hour session, as *בטלה* בטלה. Bero would always give me double what I charged him.

My father-in-law has a yeshiva of 400 students in Telz-stone that he supports, Yeshivat Be'er Yitzhak. He asked me, when the Yeshiva grew too much for him to support alone, for help with fundraising. It was hard for me to ask Bero for a donation, as I was warned by people who I trust and respect, other personal Rabbis who fundraise, that many wealthy people don't like being asked by the people they learn with for donations. Soliciting from your learning partner can compromise your relationship. I might risk, by asking Bero for a donation, that he would stop learning with me, and then I am not sure if he would be learning, himself, anymore.

So, I asked my Rabbi what to do, especially because, these "advisors" said, that taking such a risk, would only make sense, if you would be risking your relationship for your own organization or yeshiva. "This is not your Yeshiva."

My Rabbi responded that my father-in-law's yeshiva is a great yeshiva, with no percentages

taken, so it is everyone's yeshiva and responsibility to support. My father-in-law's responsibility to fundraise, is not greater than my own. Regarding the fear that Bero would stop learning with me, my Rabbi said that the money he would give to support the students is such a great merit that it would outweigh the value of him learning himself. So if he would stop learning Torah because of this, his donation would have greater merit! I was shocked to hear that. But here is why, it makes sense:

One of the interesting laws of the Holy Ark was that it was forbidden to ever remove the poles that were used to support it. בְּטֻבְעַת הָאָרֶן יְהִי נְבָקָדִים לֹא בְּלָרָו. This is to teach the concept that those who support the Torah, are symbolized by the poles that carry the Ark. The Torah was found in the Holy Ark, and the meaning of not removing the poles, was to symbolize that the supporters of Torah learning, will never be separated from the Torah, even in the next world. Just as Yosef was taught by the Angel Gavriel 70 languages the night before meeting with Pharoah, so too, before the supporter of Torah goes to the Next World, he is taught all the Torah he supported, as the Torah he supported never leaves him. I would be getting the merit of all the Torah that I would fundraise for.

My Rabbi told me, "Yosef, you can't know if what you do for yourself will stay with you. But what you do for others, no one can take away from you."

Well, Bero not only gave a generous donation, but his family continues his pledge, until today. And Bero kept learning with me until his health deteriorated, and he could not anymore. I still learn with two of his sons, and with one of his grandchildren.

We sometimes feel that our Torah learning is not so important to G-d, like the learning of those who are the Torah scholars, with many hours of intense Torah study. But it is not that way! What is most important to G-d is the *desire* to learn, more than the learning itself! As we see that on top of the Holy Ark there were the Cherubim, two angels with baby-faces, that looked toward each other, as the Torah is learned in pairs, with a learning partner, a Habruta. (Baal Haturim) But what is so interesting is that the representation of the Torah

scholar, studying, in not an elderly Gadol Hador, or someone who is in Kollel, or a Beit Midrash student...it is specifically a child, looking upward, desiring a connection with G-d! The symbol of these Cherubim, is of the desire to want to know, what G-d wants from us to know. Yearning, trying to understand, trying to grasp. That is the dearest, and most precious to G-d. Yearning for Torah is not something you can delegate.

Bero would tell me that there are two things that money can't buy. Health and family. Those two were the most important to him. Well, we had a discussion about being able to buy Olam Haba, which of course, to a certain extent, you can, with paper, with money. But the desire, the yearning to connect, that can't be done through anyone else. It can't be delegated.

The time has come for the prophecy of Amos to be fulfilled. *הַנָּהוּ יְמִים בָּאָמֵן אֶלְגִּי יְקֹוָק וְהַשְׁלָחָנִי רַעַב בָּאָרֶץ לְאַרְעָב לְלַעַת וְלַאֲצֹאָה לְפָנִים כִּי אֶמְלַשְׁמָעָה אֵת דָבָרִי:* There will be a day, in the End of Days, when there will be a tremendous thirst for Torah. We are seeing that prophecy come to fruition. Just last week, I learned with someone from Hollywood, who wanted me to give him a class on why and how being Jewish and practicing Judaism will make the world a better place. That was his first class. I told him the idea of The Art of Being a Light to The Nations, from just two weeks ago. He is hooked.

The Talmud teaches that only those who learn Torah, or support Torah will merit having the Dew of Torah, the Dew that is needed to resurrect the dead, in Techiyat Hametim, in the End of Days. (Ketubot 111b) Torah learning is so important, the learning of each and every student, that the reason why the Jews needed to serve 210 years in Egypt was because when Avraham fought against the kings, he drafted 318 students to help his military efforts – *318 students that could have stayed behind and learned!* (Nedarim 32a) The war did not last that long, but every moment of Torah learning, of every student, is so important, that it took its toll.

So how do we begin to learn Torah, when we have been out of it for so long? The answer is, start with

the smallest amount. Take your learning goal, split it in half, and then split that, in another half. That quarter, is what you should do. Start small, as small as possible. The Ark's measurements were all half measurements, to teach you this.

Here is a story from Rabbi Zaid this week. The law of the IDF, is that they won't allow a single child fight in combat. There was this soldier, an only son, that so badly wanted to fight in this Gazan war. He got his parents to sign the IDF documents, that his parents would confirm him to fight this war, and enter Gaza. These non-religious parents were torn, but their son was adamant, so they signed for him, and hoped for the best.

Things did not turn out well. The mother could not sleep at night, as she could not reach her son, because they could not take their phones into Gaza. She would toss and turn in bed, and just could not sleep at night. Every car that would pass, she imagined that the IDF was coming to tell her something happened to her son. One night, with all this anxiety, and not sleeping anyway, she decided to go for a walk, past midnight. She threw off her blanket, and in the still of the night, she passed a synagogue, that the light was on. She never before entered a synagogue, but since she had no one who she could talk to, she decided to talk to G-d! There was someone inside, saying Tehillim, after Tikkun Hatzot. She asked this elderly religious man, what would G-d want from her to do, as a Segulah for the safety of her son, Leor?

The man said, I am not a Rabbi. Let us open a siddur, and see what page G-d will allow us to open up to. They opened up to Zemirot Shabbat! *כִּי אַשְׁמָרָה שְׁבַת אֶל יִשְׁמָרַנִי*, Because I will keep Shabbat, Almighty G-d will protect me!

He said to her, Dear mother! Keep Shabbat, and G-d will protect you!

She turned to G-d and said, I will do anything. She went over to the Aron Hakodesh, made her prayers for Leor, and left!

She found out what it meant to keep Shabbat. No phones, no TV, no turning on/off lights and air conditioner, no elevator, no preparing food, no cigarettes, and there are problems with opening and

closing the refrigerator. This was too hard for her and her husband to keep! All we are supposed to do, is talk with each other, for 24 hours?! She was only able to get her husband to keep from 5 until 8 pm, Friday night. She agreed, that she would light the candles, she would make the Kiddush, and she would make the Havdalah. Havdalah would be, at 8 pm, Friday night!

These three hours did not turn out so easy for the husband. After two hours, at 7pm, he went for the remote of the TV, and the remote of the A/C. The mother, stopped him. "This is for G-d to protect our only son! Please be respectful! Just one more hour!" He put down the remotes, and plopped

down in frustration on the couch. At 8 pm, the mother made Havdallah.

That Shabbat, the first Shabbat they entered Gaza, and RPG hit their son's tank, and each and every person in their son's tank, 7 soldiers lost their lives. The only one who survived, without a scratch, was Leor! The sergeant wrote that this was a miracle that Leor survived!

Leor sat with his parents and told them his story. What was amazing, was that the time that the RPG hit the tank, was exactly at 7 pm, Friday night, when his father struggled with the remote! From then on, the mother keeps Shabbat, from beginning till the end, with Rabbeinu Tam!

THE ART OF BEING ANGELIC

If you want to bring up your kids to be angels and not monsters, the only way, is through connection to Torah. Not to force the Torah, but to somehow get them interested in the discussion of Torah topics. The difference between engaging and preaching, is if you are opening Torah discussions on their terms, and things that connect to their world: their beliefs, their version of success, their needs, desires, wounds, interests, role models, and what they are proud of. We need to engage our children in Torah discussion, as best as we can. At the Shabbat table, on vacation, and when out and about. We need to bring them up by putting them in an environment, that the Torah's way of thinking, is the normal way of thinking.

The passuk tells us about the Cherubim that need to be on top of the Aron Hakodesh. The Cherubim are faces of angels, angelic faces that resemble young lads. (Sukkah 5b) The question is, we find another time that the word Cherubim is used. When Adam was sent out of Gan Eden. וַיַּגְּרַשׁ אֱתֹה אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיַּשְׁפִּנּוּ מִקְדָּם. לֹא־שָׁׁנָן אֶת־הַכְּרָבִים וְאֶת־לְשָׁטָן הַמְּהֻנָּה לְשָׁמֶר: When Adam was sent out of Gan Eden, G-d put at the entrance of Gan Eden the Cherubim, and the sharp bladed sword that would spin, to protect the way to the Tree of Life. Rashi there, explains that the Cherubim are not just angels, with a youth's face. Rashi explains there,

that the Cherub is an angel that is a monstrous angel, **מלָאֵיכִי חַבָּלָה**.

One second. Is the Cherub an angel that is a youth face, like it is referred to upon the Aron, or is it a monstrous angel, like it is at the entrance of Gan Eden??

The answer is, what type of Cherub you will get, depends on where you put the Cherub. Put a Cherub on the top of the Aron, connect it to Torah, it will have a baby face, a pure face. Put a Cherub outside Gan Eden, out in the open, and it will grow up to be a monster, a **מְלָאֵךְ חַבָּלָה**.

Nothing will keep you or your children frum, nothing will keep them Orthodox, like being connected to Torah. The Midrash Eicha teaches, **הַלֹּאִי אָתֵי עַזְבוּ וְתֹרְתִּי שָׁמָרוּ, מִתּוֹךְ שַׁהֲיוּ מִתְּעַסְּקִין בָּה** **הַמְּאֹור שֶׁבָּה הַהְמָזְרִין לְמוֹטֵב** G-d says, I wish that they left Me, but they still keep My Torah! Because when dealing with Torah, the light of the Torah will bring them back to being good.

What an interesting way for G-d to speak! I wish they leave Me, just they should keep learning My Torah? Why does G-d speak this way? Isn't learning Torah a way of connecting to G-d? So why does G-d say, that I wish they leave Me?

Many people justify, not going to the Bet Midrash, not going to learn Torah or to hear Torah classes, alone or with a study partner. You ask them, Why can't you come to learn Torah? Why can't you make time for Torah? And the answer is, because I am too busy, and I believe in G-d that I will stay religious, and my family will stay religious, because I am busy doing things that are important. I believe in G-d that me and my family will stay strong, at work, at school, when on vacation, even without keeping my Torah study.

G-d says, I wish you would not trust in Me that everything will be okay, without Torah! Stop believing in Me that you can just ignore My Torah, and just stay Frum, stay Orthodox. There is no such thing as an Orthodox Jew. Either the Jew is a Torah Jew, A Ben Torah, or not a Torah Jew. Orthodoxy, without Torah study, eventually goes stale. They eventually will see the results, of not being connected, the purity will eventually leave their face, or the face of their children.

So how does one get back into learning Torah? How does one get others, to get back into learning Torah?

Here are the six steps to explore your desire to learn and to strike the spiritual match, before you actually get into the zone. Step 1. Decide what you want to learn. What interests you. There are so

many options. 1. Look at all the options, and then decide which one speaks to you most. 2. After you see all the options, then you need to ask another question. How much time do you have available to learn what you want to learn? And what do you need to learn from all the things that you want to learn? 3. Decide how much information you want to cover, and how in depth you want to go. 4. Decide who you want to learn with. In a group setting? Or on a one on one? Or maybe to learn alone, while listening to a certain recorded daily shiur? Someone who understands you, and relates to you, someone who you appreciate their style. 5. Set up a place that is most convenient for you to learn, and a place that is most conducive for you to focus and disconnect from all distractions of learning. This should be a place where you can learn daily. 6. Find a time in the day that is most conducive for you to learn every day at that hour. Try to have it "Stacked", or linked, to another habit that you do every day. Like right after prayer, or right after gym, or when on the way to work.

But don't make the mistake, of waiting until all 6 steps are complete, in order for you to start! You need to just start, and eventually look how you can fill these. It is so hard, to restart learning, when none of these are in check. And the reward for learning, without these in check, just because you are trying to get back into it, is tremendous!

THE ART OF BEING A SQUARE

G-d created a breathtaking world of patterns, symmetry, colors and shapes. Crown shapes can be found in a water splash, and stunning symmetry can be found in zebras, tigers, starfish and a zoomed-in image of a snowflake. The Nile is so snakelike; sand dunes have beautiful crescent shapes, and the shape of waves are awe inspiring. Circles and spirals, seem to be from the most common natural patterns. Tree trunks and tree branches, fruit and body shapes – an endless list....

R' Shimon Ben Gamliel, tells us in Talmud Yerushalmi that there is a shape that G-d did not make in His Creation. Squares! (Maasrot 5;3, Nedarim 3;2, Shavuot 3;8 and p. 52, Nedarim 3, p. 37) The planets themselves, the sun, moon, and

stars are all round! There is no such thing as a natural, perfect square!!

Round is not as perfect a shape as a square. If you put a lot of circles next to each other, you lose a lot of space, because of the empty area between the circles. But when you put a lot of squares together, all the space is full. You can't build a building with circle bricks, because a circle can't hold the weight of what is above it, like a square can. The square is a much stronger shape than the circle. These pluses of square over circle are found in the introduction to Sefer Halkrim. G-d made a world that is incomplete, because He created Man to complete it. As we say Friday night, *אֲשֶׁר־בָּרוּא אֱלֹקִים לְעֶשֶׂת אָלָקִים לְעֶשֶׂת*. That Elokim created *לְעֶשֶׂת* - "to do". What does

that mean, to do? G-d created a world, an incomplete world, that He expects us to complete for Him. To make His ‘circle’ world, into a ‘square’ world.

G-d asks us to make square Tefillin, square Tallit, square Sukkah, square letters and parchments in our Torah, Tefillin, and Mezuzas. The greatest sin of humanity, after eating from the forbidden(round) fruit, was the Golden calf, the עגל, which has a striking resemblance to the word עיגול, circle. And the way to fix the sin of the Golden Calf, the עגל, the round, was to make ... squares!!! A square Mishkan, square Aron, square Shulchan, square Mizbeachs, the Choshen and its stones, the beams, ...even the breads of the Lechem Hapanim were square! What?! Why???

G-d told Moshe at the outset of making a Mishkan, ועֲשָׂו לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכְנָה בְּתוֹכָם, *And they shall build Me a Mikdash, and I will dwell amongst them.* The question is asked, why does it say, בְּתוֹכָם, amongst them? It should say, בְּתוֹכוּ, inside it!? The answer of the Midrash is, that by building the Mishkan, G-d dwells in the heart of every Jew. But there can be a deeper answer. The letter מ, Mem Sofit, “them”, is the only square letter! G-d dwells in the squares!!! (Etz Hadaat Tov, Terumah)

G-d made the world on the first day of Nissan, with all its round shapes. This is why the first day of the Mishkan was on the first day of Nissan, to fix the world, and make it a place where G-d’s Presence can dwell. Of course, the reason why the Tefillin are square, and the Mishkan and its utensils were square, are all because G-d said so, and we can never really know the reasons of G-d’s commandments. Even Matzah and Maror, the real reason to eat them on the night of the seder existed 974 generations before the world was even created, which is long before the Exodus story. But there seems to be something that G-d wants, when He wants us to create squares. These ideas, are of course abstract, and way above our comprehension. But they exist, and I think we can learn something applicable to our lives.

In graphology, there is a very big difference between circles and squares. Circles and curves, are symbolic of natural response, emotion, etc..

Square and corners are symbolic of rational response, logic and structure. (Note the corners in the direction arrows in England, a place that respected structure, and thinking only “in the box”, closed mindedness, and boundaries. Compare that to the rounded direction arrows of Israel, and other countries, where people don’t want boundaries, and prefer openminded thinking.) A square means, that human thought made lines and structures, when there were none. This is why people perceive and portray a thought as a bubble, or a circle, while a statement, which was communicated, which consists of words used to communicate it and ultimately confine the thought to the words used to express it, is generally in a square. R' Shimshon R' Hirsh, writes that the idea of a square is symbolic of the human freedom of the rational, the ability, freedom and power to confine and give guidelines / structure, lines and corners. Square is the human power to rule nature and the circle that represents it. (Terumah 27,8)

The Mizbeach, in particular, needs to be square, רבוע וקלה האזבַּח, to teach man a lesson: that he has the control to shape himself. You can rise above sin, you can rise above your laziness, and rise above your nature. The strictly square Mizbeach needs to be on the ground, on the earth, אדמה, to teach that your whole purpose in life is to take the earthly, the mundane and make it spiritual and heavenly.

It is so interesting. The creation of the Mishkan, the work that was involved in making it, is what classifies work that is considered Melacha on Shabbat. Why, specifically, the creation of the Mishkan? Because the Mishkan is the only creation man ever made. When man makes something, he makes something from something, i.e., other raw materials. But when the Jews made the Mishkan, they made something, spiritual, from “nothing”, i.e. physical objects, which are considered nothing in regard to spiritual. Therefore, the only acts that can be defined as a Melacha, and an act that G-d rested from on the seventh day, are acts of creating something from nothing. Therefore, the 39 acts of the Mishkan are the only ones that are considered not resting on Shabbat. All the Mishkan structure, was building a place for the Shechina, building squares.

I would like to suggest, that this is the reason, why humans grow best in structure, or in squares. Not that all structures are right and just and good; and structures that work for some, don't always work for others. But if the structure that exists, is not getting you closer to where you need to go, then you need to find the structure, the box, that works for you. But structure is always needed, even if it needs to be custom fit. The Shechina is found in structure. In Shul, in Yeshivot, in Minyan, in 613 Mitzvoth, and in the **אמות של הלכה** 7, the four Amot of Halacha.

Another lesson we can learn from this, is our responsibility in the world to complete what needs to be fixed. To find spiritual in all physical. The instruction manual to infuse spirituality into the

world is the Torah. This is a reason, why, the first letter at the top right of every block of text of the Sefer Torah, is the letter Vav. The letter Vav, is the letter that connects. And the Torah connects Earth to Heaven, physical to spiritual.

And a third lesson from the importance of squares, over circles. As mentioned earlier, the plus of square over circle is that when squares are placed on the floor, there is no wasted space. Naturally, (circles) people waste things that are most important. Time, energy, resources, headspace. The habit of highly effective humans is to be able to manage these different factors for purposes of the highest importance.

THE ART OF FUTURISTIC THINKING

One of the most important skills to survive Covidland is the ability to see past the insanity, the uncertain and the unknown.

While I write, Benny Friedman's beautiful song plays in the background, *Who can ever make sense of tomorrow, when our dreams keep crashing to the ground. Though it seems like the answer is worlds away... We've got enough, just enough, to keep us going - holding on to unbroken, simple faith! Cause a Yid never breaks, and a Yid never bends, and a Yid never gives up in the night; a Yid perseveres, through the deepest despairs; his Emunah strengthens him for the fight! And a Yid understands, that Hashem has a plan, and that's all it takes to make it through! His Tatteh loves him, that's what a Yid holds on to!*

There is no better song to play in our minds than this one, as we get ready for *Parashat Zachor*, Purim, and the eradication of Amalek. There is an unbelievable word that repeats itself, each and every time the erasing of Amalek is mentioned. The word **מחר**, tomorrow. Esther did not reveal her secret Jewish identity, nor her request to protect her nation, at the first party with Achashverosh and Haman. Instead, she asked, **ומחר אעשָׂה פָּקָר נָקָר** *and tomorrow I will do as the request of the king.* Why tomorrow? Because Amalek, or Haman who

was the Amalek of the day, always falls in the "tomorrow". As Moshe mentioned to Yehoshua in the original battle with Amalek, **וְאֵת הַלְّהֵם בְּעַמְלָק מַחְרָה** *וְאֵת הַלְّהֵם בְּעַמְלָק מַחְרָה* **אָנֹכִי נִצְבֵּא עַל־גַּת הַגְּבֻשָּׁה** *And, go out to fight Amalek, tomorrow, I will be positioned on the top of the hill.* We find the word **מחר**, tomorrow, in King David's war with Amalek, **וַיָּמָת מִהְנָשֵׁף וְעַד־הַעֲרָב לְמַהְרָתָם** *Why tomorrow?*

וַיָּצַא הַמֶּן בֵּין הַהָּוֹא שְׁמַעַת וְטוּב לְבָב *When Haman left the first party with the King and Queen, with the invitation to come to the second party, he was very happy "on that day," until he spotted Mordechai sitting at the Palace gate. That was the last day of Haman's happiness. Haman went from the happiest day of his life to the saddest day of his life, *in that one moment!* The moment he saw an unrespectful Mordechai, he reached the pinnacle of all depressing thoughts, **וְכָל־הָהָר אִיְגָנָה שְׂנָה לִי**, "All I have is worth nothing to me!" How could everything change in just one moment for Haman?*

For Haman, for Amalek, happiness and sadness are dependent on the present moment. He can't see into what the future may hold, just like his Grandpa Esav, who gives up his whole future of serving G-d, his firstborn rights and the resurrection of the dead, for a bowl of red lentils, because NOW he is hungry. This is why Esav is symbolized by the

color red, for the urgency of the moment; because all you get in life, according to Esav and Amalek, is what you see right before your eyes. Haman had no patience for things to work out the way he wished, that EVERYONE bow to him. Because to Haman, the present is everything, and if the present is not working out, then everything is GAME OVER. Because Amalek has no hold on the future, or *Olam Haba*; he has a hold only on the present, or *Olam Hazeh*.

This is why, when Yaakov told Esav that he would meet him again, *אֶל-אָדָם שְׁנִירָה עַד אֲשֶׁר-אָכְלָה עַשְׂרֵה*, he said, “until I reach my master, to Seir (Esav’s place).” Yaakov never went to Mt. Seir, Esav’s place, for the rest of his life. But Yaakov was telling Esav that he would meet him again, in the End of Days, *וְעַלֹּו מִזְשָׁעִים בְּהַר צִיּוֹן לְשָׁטָט אֶת-הַר עָשָׂו וְהַיִתָּה לִיְקָם הַמְלֹכָה*. Why? Because Amalek always meets his end, with the passage of time. All Amalek is, is what you see in the present.

When people start feeling down because of the present, this is Amalek. The root of all depression is Amalek: hopelessness and helplessness, and the feeling of loneliness in your relationship with G-d. This comes from concentrating only on the present, without recognizing the reality that time passes and things change. Futureless thinking is the greatest thing that holds people back from growth.

For those who focus only on the moment and not on the hope of the future, on *Olam Haba*, ... there comes a time of the ultimate humiliation, like Haman’s last day. To be reminded of his past, of being a barber for 22 years before becoming one of the richest people in world, when he found the hidden treasures of the Holy of Holies of the Temple and the treasures of King David’s royal family. To give Mordechai a haircut, wash him and bathe him, bend over and offer him his back, so that Mordechai could mount Achashverosh’s horse, have sewage dumped on his head by his daughter, who, soon after, committed suicide, and to be hung on the gallows he had built for his archenemy. He had to transfer all his possessions to Mordechai, including the king’s signet ring! Because a person

who lives only for this world, only in the present, goes through the greatest humiliation, in the end.

It is so interesting. When Mordechai and Esther wanted the Megillah to be included in the Torah, they needed to find a Torah source to base it on. They based it on the erasing of Amalek. Rabbenu Bachye points out that both in accepting the Torah in the desert and reaccepting it in the days of Purim, *קָרְבָּן וּקְרָבָלִי*, both instances of accepting the Torah were connected to the eradication of Amalek. Why is erasing Amalek always linked with accepting the Torah?

After the first exile, the Jews felt, why should we keep the Torah, if in the present, G-d sold us as slaves to another nation? If, in the present, He is not in a relationship with us or interested in us? This emotion, *הַיִשְׁיָקְבָּנָה אַמְּדָנוּ בְּקָרְבָּנוּ אַזְּנָנוּ*, the questioning of G-d being amongst us, is the root of what brings Amalek upon us, and it drains us from the spiritual motivation we need to keep His Torah. The whole Torah, all the 613, are there to internalize in us that G-d is interested in us, is amongst us, and involved with us; something we may only realize in the future.

The Talmud teaches the reason why we read the Megillah at night and then, again, in the day *לְמַעַן זְאַרְךָ גָּבֹוד וְלֹא יָלַמְךָ לְעֹלָם אַזְּנָךָ*. *In order that Kavod, the Neshama, will praise You, (at night) and not be silent (in the day). YKVK my G-d! I will always praise you!* This is why Esther is prophetically referred to by David, in Psalms, as *אִילָת הַשְׁמָר*, the doe of the early morning, because she was swift to light up the world, while it was still very dark. She was able to trust in Him during the times of Haman, which were from the darkest times for the Jewish people, when no one else could see the light at the end of the tunnel. (*הַנֶּה אִימָה תְּשַׁכָּה גָּדְלָה נְפָלָת עָלָיו*: G-d hinted to Avraham the four exiles, and *חַשִּׁיכָה*, darkness, referred to the days of Haman.) In order to persuade Achashverosh, Haman convinced him that the Jewish G-d is sleeping, and at that moment, G-d fumed on Haman. “I don’t ever sleep! *הַנֶּה לֹא-יִשְׁנֶה שָׁמֶר יִשְׁרָאֵל*, I am always watching over

Yisrael! I promise you Haman, that I will “wake up” on you Haman, and remove you forever from the world! **בְּלִילָה הַתֹּאַגְּדָה שָׁוֹת הַעֲלָקָה**

The secret to fighting Amalek, is being the Yid in Benny Friedman's song. Mordechai merited to *Tchelet Mordechai*, to be the icon of the blue dye, that we are to wear in our Tzitzit strings. Why? Because the blue of the strings is what reminds us of the blue sea, which reminds us of the blue sky, which reminds us of G-d's throne... which is missing a part of it until Amalek is eradicated. **קָיִלְלָה עַל־קָסְתָּה** Mordechai, won Amalek by seeing past the present, never crumbling to pressure of the moment, so he merited the power of *Tchelet*. Ever wonder why blue? What is the common denominator of the blue sea and the blue sky, and seeing past the present mindset of Amalek? It is that what you see is only the surface, but beyond

the blue of the sea and sky, and beyond the present, there is so much more than meets the eye.

When the Jews saw that G-d was with us throughout the whole Purim story, even in the darkest of times, and that He is always interested in us, always in a relationship with us, they were, for the first time, ready to accept the Torah, willingly. Because to accept the Torah, you need to be a person who can see past the present, and will sometimes “sacrifice” the present, for what the future holds. The secret to greatness is sacrifice. Your willingness to sacrifice the right things in the present, directly determines your level of success in the future. Judaism is a religion of love, and love is dependent on sacrifice. **אֶת יָלְנָהּ יְרִיכָה וְאֶת־הַבָּתָה בְּכָל־לִבְבָךְ וּבְכָל־גִּבְשָׁךְ וּבְכָל־מִזְרָחֶךָ**: G-d expects us to sacrifice the 6 Ps for Him: Passions, pleasures, perspectives, present, pride, and personality.

Selfie steps to master the art of long-term perspective:

1. Know what to sacrifice for what. Things like “chilling”, options, expectations, comforts, security, immediate pleasure, desires, digital dizziness, ego and pride are generally good sacrifices to achieve greater purpose, productivity, and performance in the future.
2. Be careful that when you work on being a hero in one life area, you don't sacrifice becoming a zero in another area of life. Health, sanity, family stability, financial stability, emotional stability and spirituality, are generally not good sacrifices.
3. One of my favorite coaching questions, after a person tells me about their goals that they have not been able to achieve, is: “How many of the five Ss are you willing to sacrifice for the sake of your goal?” Are you willing to sacrifice a part of your Social life, of your life Story, of your State of mind, of your Structure, of your Security, for the sake of your goals?
4. Most important, when sacrificing present for future, don't forget! Successful people are willing to sacrifice the present for the future, without *dependence* on the future to live a life of balance, and a life of calm. They know how to enjoy the journey, even though they did not yet arrive at the destination.

Question of the week

Q: I have a hard time following along with my learning partner. After a few minutes, I can't follow his train of thought. I feel that this has lowered my learning self-esteem, and I don't think I can find anyone better to learn with. Should I just give up, and learn myself? Chaim P.



A: Chaim, that was a great question to ask this week, because the Baal Haturim mentions that upon the Aron, which is the icon for Torah, sat the *Cherubim*, angelic baby faces, facing each other, like the way Torah learning passes on through the generations, through learning with a study partner, accepting G-d's yoke, one from another. **ובכלם מתקבלים שמיים על מלכות זה מזה**

But can I answer your question with a question? What is the purpose of a learning partner? If the answer is, to take turns reading to each other, then this is an ineffective way of learning. For the most part, it is much easier to stay focused in your learning when you are active, doing the talking and explaining, than it is to be focused for more than a couple of minutes while being inactive, when you are in the listening position. This is why Torah called itself a *Shira*, song, **וְעַתָּה כִּתְבוּ לְכֶם אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלֹא-הָאֵת אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל** even though King David was punished for calling the Torah a song, **בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל חָמָרָת נָגָע**. Because just like music, the one who plays the music, enjoys the music more than the one who listens to it, so too, in Torah. The one who teaches enjoys it more than the one who is listening. This is something my Rebbi taught me at the outset of my career as an effective learning specialist; to put the person I am helping on center stage and play the music, while I listen.

So, Chaim, what percentage of the learning experience are you the one talking, teaching, or saying over the new insight, and what percentage are you listening? The reason why it is defeating to learn with your study partner, is not necessarily because you are not as fast as him, but because you are not keeping your learning engine warm and running, which causes you to lose your focus, which causes you to allow him to keep talking, while you lag behind.

First recommendation, is to make sure that you read, explain, ask, and be proactive just as much as your study partner, if not more. Learning partners are most effective when there is a give and take, like a game of intellectual ping pong.

Second, make sure that your mind is warmed up, prepared for learning this subject by going through the KWL module: Know what you Know related to the subject you are about to learn prior to learning, know what you Want to know by learning this subject, know what you have Learned after you have learned it.

Third, understand the purpose of a learning partner. Learning partners are not there for you to read and translate for each other . A learning partner is there so that you can DISCUSS the KWL, which is the most fun part, and not just to read and translate, reading the text for the first time. There is nothing wrong coming into learning, after you read the text and know it, so that you can discuss it. It is not "cheating" on your partner, especially if you let him know that, so that he can do the same.

LOVE OF "WANTS"

The *Mishkan* and Shabbat have a lot in common. We learn all the 39 forbidden categories of "work" (things that are not to be done) on Shabbat from the 39 kinds of labor that were done in order to erect the *Mishkan*. We are taught about Shabbat also in *Parashat Ki Tisa*, right after *Teruma* and *Tetzaveh*;

Teruma and *Tetzaveh* discuss the making of the *Mishkan* and the garments of the Kohanim worn during their service there. Then, we find in *Parashat Vayakhel*, before the Torah relays the actual building of the *Mishkan*, Shabbat is mentioned once again. The Beit Halevi asks why the order is reversed. First, the *Mishkan* is



mentioned, and then, Shabbat – but in *Vayakhel*, first Shabbat is mentioned, and then, the *Mishkan*. What is the reason for the switch?

The Beit Halevi answers with a psychological approach. He brings the following allegory. *How does a groom know if his rich father-in-law loves him? If the rich father of the soon-to-be bride buys the extra fancy watch first, before buying the basic presents, then this shows that he really loves his son-in-law. These extra things display his love. However, if he pushes the extras off to the last, and first takes care of the things that he has to, this shows that the fancy watch was not bought with great enthusiasm, ultimately, showing that the love for this son-in-law is not the greatest, either.*

The Mitzvah of Shabbat and the Mitzvah of building the *Mishkan* were both given to the Jewish Nation as their “wedding present” upon becoming G-d’s nation. The Mitzvah of Shabbat is a Mitzvah that we *need* as the Jewish Nation, a mitzvah that we have taken with us through all the exiles. The Jewish Nation needs the Shabbat, and it loses its identity without it. In contrast, the Mitzvah of the *Mishkan* and the sacrifices are mitzvoth which express the love in our relationship with G-d and show that He is among us. This is not something that is crucial for the nation’s survival. We do not need it *as much as we want it*. We could say that the *Mishkan, lehavdil*, was like the fancy watch that the rich father-in-law either *has to* or *wants to* buy for his son-in-law to be.

Before the sin of the golden calf, G-d wanted to give the laws of the *Mishkan* *first*, for this was the glory of the Jewish nation, and the present that openly displayed G-d’s love. However, after the sin, G-d gave us the *Mishkan* only as the present for becoming his nation, but not with the same enthusiasm. The

love and excitement had calmed down a little. G-d first gave us the Shabbat – something that we need, and then the *Mishkan*, something that is an extra. So, said the Beit Halevi.

This illustrates something that we can notice within ourselves. When we would like to express our love to spouses or to children, it makes a big difference if the present we give is something special, or something from the regular shopping list! An item given out of the perception of a need gives a far weaker message than one perceived as being given solely for the other person’s enjoyment. If a husband buys something out of the usual from the supermarket, something not on the basic list, like a chocolate bar, and leaves it in the kitchen for his wife as a present, she will appreciate that. She will not appreciate it in the same way if he puts the milk or margarine down on the table and says – “I thought about you in the supermarket, dear.” This is because the chocolate is an extra, a want, and the milk and margarine are basic needs.

It is the same with our relationship with G-d. It is more difficult for us, psychologically, to feel gratitude to G-d for things that we *need*, like air and sunshine, than it is to feel gratitude to G-d for winning the Lotto. Naturally, we appreciate the fulfillment of our desires more than we appreciate the fulfillment of our needs, although we should certainly be appreciative of both. Needs aren’t noticed; the wants and extras *are*. Receiving a “need” is never like receiving a “want.”

Distinguishing between existential needs and “extras.” and the different feelings evoked by each type of “gift.” can shed much light on parent – child relationships. A healthy family is one where children are not brought up feeling that they had a utilitarian, existential **need** for their parents. The bond between children and their parents in such families greatly surpasses that in the families

where the parents feel and support the belief that their children are not capable of managing on their own. In the healthier relationships, the children are willing to do anything and everything to take care of their parents when their parents get older, for the relationship was built on wanting such a relationship, as opposed to merely needing it. This relationship with the parent is perceived as a desire, and not as a necessity. For many people I know, the relationship with their parents is perceived as being practical: it is based on need, not on love. In some cases, parents encourage this feeling, purposely giving their children the impression that they need their parents in order to survive. This kind of a relationship is neither as strong nor as lasting as a relationship built on the recognition that there is a deep, basic desire to care for each other. The bond is emotional, as opposed to being technical. By realizing that they do not need one another for utilitarian, existential purposes, they can remove a barrier from between each other and relate to the person, the heart, the soul and build a true and meaningful relationship. Parents and children should *want* this closeness to the extent that they *need* (emotionally) each other.

Someone told me, once, that he never really respected his parents or loved them, until he realized that he did not need them. Then, he just loved them for who they were. This is true in marriage, as well. When love is utilitarian, based on needing each other in order to manage, it is not as great as the love of appreciating one another.

This difference between need and want is a major factor affecting our enthusiasm for everything we do. When we come to pray with a feeling that we *want* to pray, our prayer is different from a prayer recited because we feel we *have* to pray, or one recited by rote. There is a great difference between our thanking Him because we feel obligated to do so – and between thanking Him because we really want to. That is thanks on an entirely different level. It is just a change of perspective. We should be coming to prayer, either way. We should be respecting and loving our parents, either way. The difference is just in the enthusiasm. And the enthusiasm is dependent on the way in which we perceive the “want.” Imagine waking up in the morning and saying – Today I am going to do only what I want to do. And then, do everything that you are doing anyway. What a different life. That is actually the “real me.” anyway.

HEY – YOU NEVER KNOW...

A few years back, my son asked me the most obvious question about Purim. It is so obvious that no one even asks it. Why is the holiday Purim called Purim and not *Goral*? The word *Pur* means *goral* or lottery. And the word *goral* is the more commonly used word (used in the Torah) for a lottery than the word *Pur*. The Megillah, itself, defines the word *Pur* by saying הַפִּיל פּוֹר הָוּ גּוֹרָל *threw the Pur, which is the lottery.* (Esther 3/7) So why don’t we just call the day *Goral*?

The answer is brilliant. The Torah uses the term *goral* as a lottery used by the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur. The High Priest would have two goats, one standing on his right, and the other on his left. He would put his hands into the wooden box next to him, in which there were two slabs of wood. On one was written the word לִשְׁמָה to G-d, and on the other, עַזָּזֵל – to be pushed off the steep, rocky Azazel mountain. These slabs of wood decided the fate of each of the two goats. This was the

regular *goral*. The *goral* that Haman used on Purim was a *Pur*, somewhat like dice, with signs on each of the six sides; something that would indicate to Haman which day of which month to kill the Jews was inscribed on each side of the *pur*. Now, what is the meaning behind the dice?

The whole Purim story has a common thread going through it. Those who were on the very top plummeted suddenly to the bottom, and the ones who were at the very bottom suddenly rose to the top. Like rolling dice, what is on the top or bottom turns and turns: each of the six sides changing places with the others. Haman rose from being just a barber to being the most powerful man in the world. He then fell from the height of power to the depths of shame and then death, in one day. Mordechai went from a state of mourning, sackcloth and ashes, to holding the highest position in Shushan under the King himself, also, in just one day. The Jews went from being under a dreaded decree of annihilation to being the most prestigious nation on Earth. Esther, an orphan girl, rose to power when she was taken to be King Achashverosh's new Queen. Achashverosh went from being just a rich man, to becoming the most powerful king in the world. The message of the dice is *what goes around comes around*. This message could not be relayed through a *Goral*. Only through dice, a *Pur*.

Things in life are constantly changing. According to the *Messilat Yesharim*, recognition of this constant change helps bring about humility in a person. When one gets into the true perspective of the world, he realizes that just as his riches, honor, power, fame etc., came to him through G-d, they can just as easily be taken from him by G-d. One is never really "settled" in life, until he has a foot in the grave. What a humbling thought. Everything we have is given to us by G-d. If we take a deeper look into the word *מקרה* *happenstance*,

(and a deeper look into life), even here, we see the words רַק מֵה only from G-d. And, as much as this concept may be humbling to the rich and famous, it is a source of comfort to the destitute and depressed. You never know when and how things can get better, but they will. Ben Azai in the Mishna in Avot (chapter 4) teaches us אל תהי בז לכל אדם שאין לך אדם שאין לו שעה Do not belittle any person...because there is no person that does not have his hour of greatness and success... So "chin up," because you may be next up in line, at any moment.

G-d has His ways of spinning things around and making the most unexpected things happen. And it just may be those things that haunt us in our lives that will bring about our salvation. This is another lesson from the Megillah. We are taught that Achashverosh hated the Jews no less than Haman. (The Midrash says that when Esther was asked by Achashverosh who was the enemy of her People, she stretched out her hand to point to Achashverosh, but an angel came and pushed it to point to Haman.) If Achashverosh hated the Jews as much as Haman did, what happened to make him forget about all his hatred of the Jewish People, once he found out that his wife was a Jewess?

R' Yehonatan Eibshitz answers this brilliantly. The Midrash tells us that when Achashverosh first rose to power, he heard from the astrologers and sorcerers that the one who would take the royal throne from him would be a Jew. Achashverosh was very nervous about this, and he assumed that if he would get rid of the Jews, he would not be overthrown. This is actually why he hated the Jews. But when Esther told him that she was Jewish, it meant that her son from Achashverosh would be Jewish, as well. (And, their Jewish son Daryavesh, actually did take the throne after Achashverosh.) Once Achashverosh realized

that he had no need to worry, he stopped hating the Jews.

Sometimes, the things that we are worrying about, the things that look as if they are going wrong are the very things that pave the way for the best possible things to happen for us. Even Haman, referred to as Memuchan at the beginning of the Megillah, tried to get Achashverosh to marry his daughter by

advising him to get rid of Queen Vashti. This scheme as it turns out, was instrumental in having Esther become Queen. The reason that Haman was called Memuchan, literally, *prepared*, was because he was *prepared* and preparing to cause any problem he could. But now, we can understand that this word is also telling us that *G-d was preparing* the cure before the blow. And He always does...

HEARTBEAT OF THE JEWISH NATION

It is hard to keep your head up high when your hand is stretched out. I can attest to this. I once tried collecting money for a Yeshiva of the highest caliber in Israel, when I was visiting America a few years back. I did this voluntarily, just to lend a hand, literally. I did raise a small sum, *a very small sum*. But I got this feeling that I did not want to do *that* ever again. I love learning. I love Torah. But to collect for it, in order to keep others in the Beit Midrash, was something that was just too difficult for me.

One day, on the bus ride home in Jerusalem, I relayed this feeling to a friend. The fellow sitting in front of us turned around and asked me if he could interrupt; “If you believed that you had the cure for cancer, but you needed 60 million dollars to make it happen, to get the cure up and running, would you feel bad walking up to Bill Gates and asking him for a donation? And let’s say you do ask him, and he slams the door in your face shouting; “*Get out of here and leave me alone!*” (I don’t think he would do that), would you feel ashamed? Would you feel defeated and resolve never to approach anyone else to aid you in your cause again? Would you conclude that it is not worth the bother, because it is not worth it to Bill? Would you stop your mission to save the world?! Of course not! You would feel that Bill lost out on the opportunity of his life.”

“My friend, you gotta believe that Torah is going to save the world. That is the outlook you need in order to learn Torah the right way. That is the outlook you need if you expect to convince *other* people to donate toward its cause. That very outlook is why *they will* give their hard-earned money for this purpose. However, if *you* don’t believe in the power of Torah, neither will they!”

The only thing in the world that the Chafetz Chaim (Biur Halacha S. 231) says is worth staying supported for is learning and teaching Torah. “*One’s reason for leaving Torah study to go to work should not be to avoid needing to accept charity. And even the Rambam, who believed in going to work and being self-supported along with learning, will agree that in our generation, where it is nearly impossible to work, learn and teach all at the same time, scholars should take money for staying in the Beit Midrash...*

” Torah is the only thing that one should stay supported for, because Torah supports those who support it. *אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה חוקות שמים וארץ לא שמתה If not for the study of Torah day and night, the world would collapse.* Torah holds up the world.

We learn this concept from the *Aron Hakodesh*, as well. One time, when King David was transporting the *Aron* on a wagon, it

slipped off. As it was falling, Uzah, dived in to catch and save the *Aron* from falling to the ground. He died immediately after touching the *Aron*. What did he do wrong? He only followed his instincts? The answer is because Uzah must have thought that the *Aron* needed to be supported, and if not, it would fall. This was a grave mistake, a *Chillul Hashem* and desecration of the holiness of the *Aron*. The Levites who held the *Aron* would fly in the air while carrying it, for it was *נושאי את נושאי* – would *carry those who carried it* (Sotah 35a). So, too, is the power of Torah study. The Shulchan Aruch and Rambam both refer to the Sefer Torah this way as well, in addition to the *Aron*; “*הרוואה ספר תורה מהלך...* One who sees a Sefer Torah walking.” This is how we refer to a Sefer Torah in transit. It is not transported. It walks.

The *Torah* supports *its* donors, the *Torah* holds *itself* up. Those who donate to the study of *Torah* should not think that if they lose their money, the *Yeshivot* will close down. It is the opportunities to merit participating in the learning of the *Torah*, which keep *us* afloat.

There are thousands of families, large families, in which the father sits and learns *Torah*. These families live on a monthly paycheck of peanuts. There is no logical explanation as to how they manage, and yet somehow, they do. The *Torah* holds *itself* up. Somehow. Just like the *Aron*.

Torah is the pulse of the Jewish Nation. The innermost pulse of all the spirituality of our nation was there, in the Holy of Holies. When learning *Torah* one on one, with a partner is like the two *Cherubim* that were facing each other on top of the *Aron* (see Baal Haturim on the *Cherubim*). I remember Rav P. Sheinberg zt”l saying to us, when we first came to Israel to learn *Torah*, that there is more holiness behind the *shtender* in the study hall than there is at the Western Wall! Even someone who cannot make it to the study hall – his

spirituality, like that of the *Aron*, is what keeps him physically and mentally alive; it holds him up. It keeps him going.

In the Midrash Esther, we find that Haman entered the yeshiva of Mordechai to ask him to don the royal clothes and parade with the royal horse down the streets of Shushan. He saw that Mordechai was teaching the students in the Yeshiva how to bring the *Minchat Haomer*, how to do the *kemitza*. This was the day of *ט”ט ניסן*, the second day of Passover, the day that in Temple times, Jews would bring the *Omer* sacrifice. Haman asked Mordechai what this *Omer* consisted of – gold, silver or maybe wheat flour? Mordechai answered that it was barley flour. Haman groaned and said, “Your *kemitza* (fistful) of barley flour outweighs the 10,000 bars of silver that I paid Achashverosh to annihilate the Jews.” How do we understand the connection between the *kemitza* and the decree against the Jews?

During the time of Mordechai and Haman, when all of the newspapers were reporting the end of the Jewish Nation, Haman was expecting to see Mordechai and his students learning about the merit of martyrdom and how to die for Kiddush Hashem, the laws of the cardinal sins that a Jew must give up his life for. Didn’t Mordechai read the papers, the latest news? Didn’t he know that there would be no *Beit Hamikdash* next year, no *Omer*? No. Mordechai was learning the Halacha of the day, as usual. Why? Because *Torah* is eternal. *Torah* does not care what the news has to say. *Torah* writes history. When Haman saw the power of the Jewish Nation, their ability to stay steadfast in their *Torah* learning, despite whatever decrees they faced, he knew that such a nation could not be destroyed. They are eternal. And despite Haman’s best efforts and impeccable planning and scheming, the Jews cannot be destroyed. As long as they are studying *Torah*.

Torah keeps the world alive. It keeps the Jews alive. Even if there is just a handful of students

being “supported” (by the Torah of course) in the study hall.

HOW TO BECOME RICH AND FAMOUS – GUARANTEED!

The Megillah ends with a lesson to take with us throughout the year. But first, a bit of coaching.

Here is a “gentile” definition of success, from one of the best master-coaches in the world. *“Success is the ability to live your life the way you want to live it, doing what you most enjoy, surrounded by people who you admire and respect.”*

As I have learnt my life values from the Torah, I have a totally different definition of success. My Rabbi taught me that the definition of success of a Torah observant Jew is a far more realistic definition. *“Success is the ability to live a life of Torah observance, in the life that G-d makes your reality. Success is the ability to enjoy and appreciate your Reality as is, while making the best out of your Reality. Success is to be G-dly, and to bring out the G-dliness in yourself, your family, and in those around you.”*

“Being surrounded by people you admire and respect” is not something “actionable”. It is a default. Try flipping it: Respect and admire the people around you, and then successful people will gravitate toward you, for people gravitate towards positive people, who look for the good side in the people around them.

Gentile success is usually defined as “rich and famous”. That is the first on the list of definitions for most people. This is not the Torah’s view of success, at all. Quite the contrary. The famous of the “Rich and famous” is usually rich *and then* famous, for people naturally gravitate towards wealth. If

you have money, you will become famous, for people do whatever they can to get their share of your money. They are even willing to respect you. That is faking being famous, for your fame is your money, not you. Haman was surrounded by such fame, even, the Megillah coins his family, אָוֹהָבָיו, the people who loved him; but after they learnt that he was on his way down, they were no longer אָוֹהָבָיו. The Megillah then refers to them as יְוָעָצִים, his advisors (Esther 6; 13). They loved him as long as they could get something out of him.

This is the fear – the nightmare – of many rich people. That their friends and those who ‘respect them’ love just their money and not them. If their business goes bad, they lose their money. But much worse than that, they lose their identity, and all those who they thought loved them. They fear that no one will ask their advice anymore, for they are considered smart only as long as they have their money. They fear that once they lose their cash, they are just like everyone else, if not looked at as more foolish, for once they had money, and they could not hold onto it.

If you want to know how to become famous, I will tell you the secret. I discovered it one day in the Makot, and I was taught it by that 23 year old boy, who just finished Army, who was stacking the shelves. He saw me, on his first day on the job, and said, with a huge smile, “Shalom!! How are you doing today?” This was at seven in the morning, right after Shacharit. This went on for about a week. I told him that his smile was worth a million dollars, but, to be truthful, I did not remember

who he was. He asked me, “What?! You don’t remember me? About five years ago, when I was a yeshiva bachur, I did not have any friends, and you would come pray in the Yeshiva for Shacharit. You would sit next to me, and I would bring you a siddur. You would smile to me and would ask how I was doing. I did not get along in yeshiva, so I went to the army; but I never forgot how you smiled at me. I always smiled to people, reflecting to others your smile and how you said Hello. I just finished the army, and this is the first job that I got, for the meantime.” I gave him some Hizuk, telling him that with his smile, he can get really far.

A year later, I came late to a packed wedding, and the waiters all told me that there were no portions left. Then, out of nowhere, this fellow comes up to me and brings me a plate, with that same smile.”Shalom, good to see you. I saw you did not have a plate, and I am the head waiter here now. If you want doubles, just let me know!” The next wedding I attended at that fancy wedding hall, he was already the manager of the place.

If only I would have known how much a smile can do! So, here is the million-dollar trick. Smile to people as if they are worth a million dollars to you, and you will be worth a million dollars! Try it! It works! Guaranteed! People will never forget you. Just one condition: it has to be real. If you fake it, then all you will get back is fake friends, and fake respect.

So, what made Mordechai the famous, popular Rabbi that everyone admired and respected? The Megillah leaves us with his secret. He was always the first one to say Hello, the quickest smile in Shushan. **דורש טוב לעמו ודובר שלום לכל**

... . *He would seek out the good of his People, and speak Shalom to all of his descendants.* (Esther 10:3) It does not say **משיב שלום**, that he would return Shalom. It says **דובר שלום**, that he would be the initiator.

And there is another condition, to become rich and famous. Mordechai worked from inside out and not outside in. He first cared and respected his family, **זרען**, Esther, and his family, and then, he became the one who cared for Klal Yisrael. The first step to becoming famous is in your own home, among your own friends. Because if you work from the outside in, you are faking it.

The Talmud made a study on the Rabbis who merited longevity. (Megillah 27b-28a) “What did you do that gave you long life?” Each one said something different, a trait that accompanied him throughout his life. Today, when I was waiting for someone, I reviewed this piece of Talmud, and I realized something of huge significance, a common denominator in all the “longevity tips” mentioned. All of the traits that those rabbis mentioned had to do with respect. Respecting others, respecting G-d, respecting Shabbat, respecting G-dliness ... Even King David wrote, .. **מי האיש החפץ חיים נצור לשונך מרע וشفתיך מדבר מרמה** (Psalms 34). Who wants life? *Watch the way you speak*, treating people with respect. How is respect the secret to good life?

People who are happy tend to live longer than people who are bitter or down. People who are happy are people with good relationships. This is the way to having longevity, enjoying and respecting the people in your life, which will improve your relationships.

UNITED I STAND

Hashem commanded Moshe to take the consensus of the Jewish nation by having every Jew – rich and poor – give exactly half a

shekel. The reason for this seemingly strange method of counting was because it is forbidden to count Jews directly. We are taught that

doing so can bring a plague. Also, by donating half a shekel to the Mishkan, the Jews would achieve atonement. One may wonder why this atonement was necessary.

One explanation is that this atonement was to counterbalance the coins that Haman would, generations later, give to King Achashverosh. The Ba'al Haturim learns this from the last letters of the words in Parashat Shekalim, “**מן עשרים שנה**”, which spell “Haman”, backwards. It seems that there is a connection between the half shekel in the time of the Mishkan and the miraculous salvation which took place on Purim, centuries later.

There is another question that is commonly asked: why were the Jewish people commanded to give only a half a shekel, and not a whole one? The Noam Elimelech explains that the half shekel leads a person to be aware of the fact that he always has plenty of room for further growth – he's not yet “whole”. The Chida suggests, in the name of Rav Shlomo Alcabetz, that one must realize that he always needs others in order to work toward his own perfection.

We must first understand why counting Jews leads to a plague. *When one counts Jews, each one has to be counted individually, in order to make a total sum.* One standing alone is not a good thing. When we are together, we are considered a unit; all the mitzvoth of all the individuals are accredited to the group as a whole; a person standing by himself has his merit, alone, to speak for him. That was the power of Haman's words to Achashverosh, “**ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפורה** ...” – “*There is one nation, scattered and separate...*” To counteract this, on Purim we do mitzvoth that bring us together – giving Mishloach Manot and Matanot La'evyonim.

A lack of unity is not a problem in its own right: it's a symptom. Disunity results from

individuals being egocentric and self-centered. Only when a person realizes that he is no more than a half can he consider others as part of his life. Egocentricity is an obstacle not only to unity, but also to happiness. This is the connection between Parashat Shekalim, which stresses our need for others in order to realize our full potential, and the community mitzvoth in the month of Adar, on Purim.

In Mishlei, Shlomo Hamelech writes “**לٿאוה ב'קש נפרד**” – Disunity is brought about by physical desires. This was the case in the beginning of the Megilla, when Jews went to Achashverosh's elaborate, ostentatious party. By indulging themselves in physical pleasures, they became ready candidates for divisiveness and estrangement from one another. This constituted an invitation for Haman to make such a tragically accurate statement about Jewish disunity. Haman knew all too well that as long as one focuses on requiting his desires, he can't see anyone other than himself, and unity becomes unattainable.

When someone has problems in his relationships with others, the cause is, usually, something within himself. By learning to respect others, one can stop focusing on himself. This is why even after the Torah commands everyone to bring half a shekel, it repeats that even a rich man should not give more than this. When a rich man gives a big check to charity, he can easily be led to feel that he is “worth” more than those who donate much smaller sums, if anything at all. By requiring each and every person to give precisely the same sum, the Torah teaches us that we have a common denominator, a level at which we are all exactly the same. When a person recognizes that even he is just one number out of the sum total, he will learn to focus on others as much as on himself.

May this year's Parshat Shekalim find us all appreciating, valuing and respecting all the

members of Klal Yisrael. That is the golden

path which leads to the Final Redemption!

YOUR BIGGEST LIE

There is a mysterious personality in the Purim Story. Hatach. A.k.a. Daniel, the Prophet. He was sent back and forth from Esther to Mordechai, to relay messages. Suddenly, Hatach disappears. Where did he go?

According to the Midrash, Haman saw Hatach going back and forth, and he suspected that something fishy was going on. Haman was afraid that Daniel was up to something that might ruin his plans to annihilate the Jews. So, Haman walked over to Hatach and kicked him. From the kick, Hatach died. G-d then said that from now on, Esther would have Ruach Hakodesh (Yalkut Shimoni).

It is amazing how Esther's Ruach Hakodesh came right on time, when it was needed most. Hatach was now gone, and he was one of the only people that Esther and Mordechai could trust. What would they do without him? But when G-d has a plan, the solution is never dependent on things or people. If Esther needed to know something and she could not contact Mordechai, from now on, G-d, Himself, would let Esther know the right thing to do. Haman's killing Daniel would not prevent G-d from doing His thing.

It is so interesting how we fall into the trap of relying on people and things. Imagine what would have happened if Esther had relied on Daniel for her means of communication with Mordechai, and if she had fallen into despair when Daniel was killed!

Since third grade, every day of my life, I said the words *אל תבטחו בנדיבים בגין אדם שאין לו תשועה* in my prayers without knowing what the words really mean. "Do not rely on benefactors, on a human being who, cannot save himself". Despite the fact that in order to fulfill one's obligation to pray, one needs to know the

meaning of every word in the first blessing of Amidah, most people misinterpret one of the words, which changes the entire meaning. *ומביא גואל לבני בניהם* And G-d *is bringing* a redeemer for their (the Patriarchs') descendants. Many people disregard the laws of Dikduk, and understand the words to mean that G-d *will* bring a Redeemer, in the future. That is a terrible mistake. In Judaism we believe that G-d is always in the process, right now, of bringing our Redeemer. If one makes this mistake, I am not sure if he fulfills his obligation of prayer.

I remember it like yesterday. I was on the yeshiva bus from Bayit Vegan to Mir. And there was a Sefardic-American yeshiva boy who sat next to me on the bus. He was well dressed, and was good looking. He was listening to shiurim on his headphones. After getting to know each other from the bus rides, I learnt that he was starting shiduchim. He wanted a girl who would live in Israel. He had no money; his parents would not help him to stay in learning for a few years of kollel, and he did not want "to marry a girl for money", either. I asked him how he planned on managing in kollel. Especially if he is an American and a few years behind in learning (he became religious in beginning of high school), which Kollel would want him? How could he support himself? I suggested that he rethink this, to maybe rethink his plan on staying in Israel, or to rethink if he really wanted a girl without support. But he was full of positivity. He turned to me, and with a shocked look on his face, said to me, "Did you ever hear of G-d?!" He knew his values, and he was going to stick to them. No matter what. He said that he would not go into debt. He would make each decision in life as it came, and that G-d would help him. If he needed to

take side jobs, he would do that as well, if that was what G-d put in his path.

As it turns out, he got what he wanted. He married an amazing girl with no money. At the wedding, his parents took all the checks or money presents that his family gave, despite the fact that he paid for more than half of the expenses through loans. One of his wife's best friends came over and gave her an envelope of exactly the money that he borrowed to pay for the wedding, money that she collected from all of the girls in seminary. And a little extra remained. They found a beautiful apartment for rent for a year, in the location they wanted, for almost half the market price. And his parents still had Aliyah benefits for electric appliances, which they did not need. They brought their appliances with them from abroad. His parents ended up using the money from the presents they took to buy all the furniture and appliances the young couple needed, using their Aliyah benefits. His wife got a great job, and he got a great job working with bachurim. Every time I see him, he looks great! He is loving his learning, his life and his relationship with G-d.

I can't forget that face he made me, when he asked me, "Did you ever hear about G-d?" The Chovot Halevovot writes that one of the worst sins one can make is to openly lie to G-d, each morning, when he says in the blessing Al Hatzaddikim in the Amidah, *כי בר בטחנו ועל חסוך הגדול באמת נשענו*, "For in You alone we trust, and on Your great kindness we rely". Don't you think that G-d knows if you really believe in Him, alone, or you *also* believe in someone or something else?

When people are in a crisis, they rely on money. Money is not something that we can rely upon. People rely on their businesses. You cannot rely on your business. According to statistics, even the average millionaire files bankruptcy 3.5 times in his lifetime. People

rely on their natural strengths, looks, wisdom, talent. But you cannot rely on these. You can only rely on G-d Who gave you the business, the looks, wisdom and talent. Esther decided to fast before speaking to Achashverosh, and by doing so, jeopardize her appearance. Because she knew that fasting was more important, for she needed to rely on G-d to give her her charm, more than she could rely on her looks.

The number one fear in America today is the fear of retirement. How will we manage when we are older and can't bring in our own money? Who will take care of us, when we can't take care of ourselves? This thought pops the balloon of the "American dream". A frightening thought, if you don't believe in G-d.

How does the religious family bring so many children to the world? How can they take on so much responsibility? Isn't there a rule, *אין סומcin על הנס*, we do not rely on miracles? The answer is that we do not rely on miracles when there is common danger. R Aharon Lev Shteinman, may he have a Refuah Shelemah, would say that in this scenario when miracles are common, we rely on miracles. Like building families and taking reasonable loans, with a reasonable payment plan, to marry off kids on reasonable standards. Think about it. You, yourself, are a miracle. You are breathing and thinking, and you do that without even deciding to do it. Because G-d is "breathing" you, and "thinking" you. After my accident, I realized that every time we get in the car, arrive at our destination and get out again, it is a miracle.

You will need to turn to G-d, anyway, so why ignore the fact? Why do we pray in a fashion that seems that we are just accustomed to going through the motions, but don't really need G-d? Even if you have the looks, you need the charm. Even if you have the money, you need to know how to invest it safely and

manage it properly. Even if you have the strength, you can't fight things like cyber warfare, or bio terrorism. According to Bill Gates, "a genetically engineered virus is easier to make and could kill more people than

A JEW'S SEARCH FOR SPIRITUALITY

I learnt the following truism from coaching Yeshiva Bachurim and frum people. The Torah Jew is concerned more about finding spirituality in the mundane than he is by anything else. This is an area left uncovered by the psychologists of the world.

No matter where the Bachur is holding, no matter how far he has fallen. Inappropriate behaviors, drugs, hurting himself, suicide attempt. Somehow, when I ask what he really wants, it always boils down to the issue that he wants – needs – to know one thing: What does it mean to believe that I can connect to G-d and bring Him into my life? What does it mean to pray, and know that G-d is right there in front of me? No matter how low a frum girl has fallen, she wants to know what it means for her to build a home into which she can bring G-dliness. The Torah Jew cannot live the carousel life of the Gentile and stay spiritually stable. Work to make money, make money to buy food, eat food to have energy, energy to go to work, etc... He needs to find, in every step of the way, not just a purpose, but a spiritual purpose.

One of the difficulties in understanding Shabbat is understanding how, specifically the 39 acts of building the Mishkan make up the acts that are forbidden on Shabbat. If we are supposed to rest on Shabbat, how does it make sense that removing a black seed from a watermelon, tying a knot in a certain way, putting on makeup, can be considered desecrating the Shabbat, for similar acts were used in the making of the Mishkan, whereas there are so many tiring acts that a person might do on Shabbat that are not considered desecrating the Shabbat? Why should it make a difference if I cook with fire or with any other element? Why are the categories of "work" used to build the Mishkan the foundation and the definition of what is classified "not resting" on Shabbat?

nuclear weapons – and yet no country on earth is ready for the threat."

We need G-d. And too frequently, we forget how much.

A JEW'S SEARCH FOR SPIRITUALITY

In order to explain this, we need to understand a discussion between G-d and the Angels, in the beginning of Creation. G-d relayed to the angels that Man is smarter than the Angels, for Man knows how to name things according to their essence. Regarding himself, man called himself Adam for he was taken from the earth, the Adamah. What does this mean? Why is Man's being created from earth his essence?

The answer is that the whole essence of man is to take the earth, the physical, the mundane, and make it holy. Finding spirituality in the physical. When Moshe wanted to take the Torah, and the angels argued that it was theirs – **תנה הוֹדָך עַל־הַשְׁמָמִים** – Moshe won the argument. He told them that the Torah can show man how to make the mundane holy – to take something physical and elevate it to a level of holiness. Angels are not expected to do such things. (Shabbat 88b)

That is why, out of all actions that can be considered work, it is those involved in the making of the Mishkan that define work that has importance to it, that is the foundation for all actions forbidden on Shabbat. Because the building of the Mishkan was unique, in that human beings created something spiritual from something physical. Any other type of manmade creation is taking something physical and reshaping it – into something that is also physical. (See Siftei Chaim Terumah) This is the uniqueness of man. An angel cannot take something physical and make it spiritual. But man is made with this intent in mind (Messilat Yesharim Chapter 1, Yalkut Yosef Hil. K. Shema 64/6/footnote 6).

It is much more difficult to live a life of balance than it is to live a life of extremism. It is easier not to speak than it is to communicate without gossiping. It is easier to stay in Yeshiva or Kollel and learn, than it is to learn while you are working or in Ben Hazemanim. G-d does not want us to rid

ourselves of the Yetzer Hara, but to love Him with it. **ואהבת את ה' אלוקיך בכל לבך**. Love G-d with both, your Yetzer Hatov and your Yetzer Hara. This is the whole life of a Jew. Facilitating peace between these two extremes is a constant challenge we all have to struggle with. It is such a serious challenge that we need to pray for success in it. 3 times a day. **עושה שלום במרומייו.. עשה שלום עליינו ועל כל עמו ישראאל** Throughout the day, we ask G-d to grant us peace and to grant peace for all of His nation. What is the repetition? The first mention is about our coming to peace between the physical and the spiritual that we all have inside us. And when we do, G-d brings peace on all of His Nation.

This has ramifications to every minute of our lives. It is a mistake to say that life is time and time is life. Because time is just a way to measure life. All of life is really a combination of three things. **מחשבה מעשה דיבור**. Thought, action, and speech. We need to make these as holy as possible. Making our thought, action and speech, holy.

To love G-d with your Yetzer Hara means to love Him even when you are down, because He always believes in you. It means to love Him, even if you have sinned, because He knows that you are human, and you needed some time to figure yourself out, and He understands you. It means to make Shabbat the most enjoyable day of the week, while keeping all the enjoyment very spiritual. If one needs to leave learning, that means that G-d wants him to bring G-dliness to the physical, materialistic and mundane, that he finds in his life. If someone needs internet access to live, G-d wants him to make it holy with the filters that keep him holy. This is the project of the month of Adar. Adar

A LESSON FOR ALL LESSONS

And the king removed the ring from his hand, and he gave it to Haman, the enemy of the Jews. (Esther 3:10) Our Rabbis teach that this act, the removing of Ahashverosh's ring, was the catalyst that made the Jews repent. Despite the fact that the threat of annihilation would not be realized for another year, it was so powerful, it exceeded the power of the prophecy of the 48 prophets, who were not able to bring the Jews to repent! (Megillah 14a)

stands for **אלוף של עולם** 'דָר', or **אלף דָר**, recognizing how the Master of the World lives among us.

This is one of the deepest, most fundamental principles of Judaism. Judaism is a religion of balance. Of harmony between physical, material and mundane with spiritual, meaningful and moral. This equilibrium has its ramifications in all life areas of a Jew. Jewish males start off their lives differentiating themselves from the people of the world by making a covenant with G-d, specifically on the part of the body that is so physical, because the uniqueness of the Jew is sanctifying the mundane. Women live *their whole lives* taking the physical and making it spiritual. Changing diapers 24/ 7, setting the table, clearing the table, etc. Making home a place for the spirituality of the man that lives there to soar, to open a Sefer, to bless G-d for the deliciousness of Shabbat, and to enjoy spending quality time with his own wife, alone. Men are **איש**, while women are **אשה**. The man is about the letter **ה**, or Olam Haba, and the woman is about taking the letter **ה** which is Olam Hazeh, and making it holy. **כי ביה ה צור עולמים** **כ**, with the letter **ה**, G-d made Olam Haba, and with the letter **ה** G-d made Olam Hazeh (See Menachot 29b).

So, ladies, change your child's diapers with love, because you are emulating G-d who cleans us of our sins with love. Find G-dliness in the laundry, for you are dressing up your family to become the representatives of G-d to the world. Clean the dishes, set the table, make the best food you can, because you are making your home into your very own Mishkan.

A LESSON FOR ALL LESSONS

Isn't that simple? Of course, when people are faced by a tragedy, or find themselves up against a brick wall, they will be much more certain to change than they will be just from a warning!

The answer is the lesson of all lessons!

One of the secrets of successful authors is, "Show, don't tell!" Describe what you see with richly descriptive words, and don't just give a dry report of a sequence of events. Use color, sensory language, smear the account with emotion. Paint

them a vivid picture of what is in your mind, using words. Don't just relay an idea. The stronger the picture, the more power the message.

In talking about chinuch, Israelis say,” **חינוך לא אומרים. חינוך עושים** ” You can't teach people how much to love G-d, if you don't live your teaching. I have a good friend who is a great psychologist. And he is pioneering a whole theory, that the therapist can help others to correct their behavior only to the point that the therapist, himself, models that correct behavior. I know this, as a coach. When I find that the person needs coaching in an area that I, myself, need to work on, I need to change, to be a live example, in order to help *him* change. I believe that this principle is also true in parenting. Stop preaching! Start being! What your kids see in your behavior has a much greater impact on their upbringing than what they hear you preaching.

The Chazon Ish was asked about a kindergarten that was opening up in a new Yishuv, in Israel. The kindergarten was a combination of both religious and non-religious children. They concluded that there were two areas in which religion was expressed in a kindergarten. 1. The choice of a teacher 2. the appearance of the classroom. “If we get a religious kindergarten teacher, the decorations, the pictures on the walls and the tone or atmosphere in the Gan will be anti-religious, secular Zionist. But, if we put pictures of Rabbis on the walls, and decorate the classroom with themes of Jewish holidays and subjects, the teacher will be irreligious.” Ironically, the Hazon Ish ruled that they should “Go for the decorations on the walls, for the spirit of the kindergarten. That is what the kids see. That will affect them the most.”

If you would like to get your point across to your children, to your employees, to your spouse or to your students, showing is not on the same plane as preaching. You can tell your students from today until tomorrow how much their cell phones fuzz their focus, but until they see a clear example of the damage done, until they *feel* how much it hurts them, they will not change. They do not internalize the lesson.

The Rabbis were teaching a lesson even deeper than this. It is not that the audience is not listening. It is not that smokers do not care when they read the warnings on the cigarette box. It is that they do not have strong enough motivation to overcome their negative habits; the lesson is not yet strong enough, or vivid. Change is hard, and not only the person's intellect is needed to be on board for the change, but also his feelings. The magical formula goes like this. SEE – FEEL – CHANGE.

I have a close friend whose life was being ruined by his smoking. His career, his personality. He smoked a pack and a half a day. He knew that if he wanted to keep his job, he needed to quit smoking, but he just could not. Until his sister, in Israel, a doctor, begged him to come visit her at a certain office. He walked in and saw a team of doctors waiting for him; he saw an exhibit, showing the difference between the lungs of the smoker and the non-smoker, the graphs visually representing the harm caused to the delicate tissue in the lungs, etc. He saw what he was doing to himself – he felt the pain his addiction was causing him, and he never took another cig...

Our Rabbis teach us, here, that it is not that people do not want to change. People wish they could change, but they need to rev up their ‘motivation engines’ in order to be able to overcome their past habits. They need to get a “jump-start”, the feeling, to get into it.

Car dealerships will not talk to you on the phone about what they have to offer. They know that it is far more persuasive for you to see the car than it is for you to listen to the description of its luxury and features on the phone. Just imagine the difference between learning at home and learning in the Beit Midrash. When you are learning at home, you just “know” how important learning is. But when you are in the Beit Midrash, and you see how the place is vibrating with the voices of people learning, it keeps your adrenalin flowing until the end of the seder.

A LESSON FROM A MEKUBAL

I like this story, and not only because I am Sefardi. A certain X-Kollel guy went to a Mekubal. He was down about his spirituality, for although he was still learning Daf Hayomi and reviewing what he had learnt from his Yeshiva and Kollel years in his spare time, he felt that he was a failure. He had not fulfilled his life-dream, his greatest aspiration – to become a lifelong learner. His dream was to be what the Rambam calls *Shevet Levi*, that G-d will find sustenance for him and his family in a miraculous way, as He does for other Kollel men. But, it did not work out for him. *הרבה עשו כרבי ולא עלה בידם* The Talmud teaches that many tried to live a life-long lifestyle of “learning without working”, and they could not manage (Berachot 35b). He consulted his Rav, who told him that he needed to make some money to support his wife and kids. He was down about this, and he felt as if his fire- his love for learning and religion – was at a low. He needed Hizuk.

This was the Mekubal’s response. In Kabbalah, there is something called *Shoresh Nishmatto*. The “root” of the Neshamah. Of course, we all want to be at the highest level of holiness, of closeness to G-d. The highest level is to be like the Aron Hakodesh, the Holy Ark that is in the Holy of Holies, front row, center aisle to the Master of the World. The Holy Ark has the Tablets in it, the Ark representing the Torah scholars who carry the Torah within them. (see Yoma 72b) Therefore, the container of Manna was together with the Ark, showing that in order to learn Torah properly, one needs to be like the generation of the Jews who accepted the Torah, the generation that did not worry about their livelihood, for they were nourished by the Manna. (Yermiyahu 2 31) And it is a tremendous merit for those who connect to that “Holy Ark” zone, to live a life of breathing Torah. A person who is totally engrossed in learning merits special, Divine assistance. Just as G-d supported the Ark and made it possible for the Ark to carry those who carried it, G-d gives the Kollel man the special miracle of the Manna and the Ark.

And the Mekubal went on... The Ark was the first on the list of items to be built for the Mishkan, for it is the most central point, and the place where the Shechina dwells. But the Mishkan was not only about the Ark. The Mishkan had in it the Shulchan,

the Menorah, the two Altars, the “Kior”, washing basin,... If the Menorah had wanted to be the Aron, we would have no Menorah, and we would not have a Mishkan, for the Mishkan is not a Mishkan without all of its parts.

The world needs learning people, who are similar to the Ark. They fulfill G-d’s purpose in creating the world. They are not to be involved with going out into the world to do Kiruv or serve the communities; rather, it is their job to sit in the Study Hall and to do nothing else but learn and teach high-level learning. But the world also needs learning people who are similar to the Menorah, who can take the Torah that they have learnt in the Bet Midrash, the study hall, and spread it to the world. To show the world that G-d rests amongst His people, and that we can be a light to people. We can teach the world how to behave. What modesty in an office is supposed to look like. What it means to have guidelines; what it means to do business with honesty and trust. What etiquette and manners are all about. And how to live a modest lifestyle. We can bring Torah classes to work, and disseminate Torah learning while in transit. The Jewish nation needs working people, like the Shulhan, that can supply the world with sustenance, while supporting the Yeshivas. And Mashiach will come when two millionaires can close a big business deal, and then sit down and discuss how each one answers the Raavad’s question on the Rambam. (R’. M’. Gifter’s Ben Hazmanim Shmuess.)

R’ Baruch Ber L’ in Birkat Shmuel writes that a father is to bring up his son to be the best possible in learning. This is the highest aim, the goal of each and every Jew. To be an Aron. Those who merit being lifelong *Shevet Levi*, do so because that is their *Shoresh Neshama*, to be Ark-like. Of course, one does not know if he can be or cannot be Ark-like until he gives it all he’s got. It is easy for one to just say, “Learning is not for me. I’ll go for the Menorah, or for the Shulchan. I’ll leave the Ark for someone else.” If one takes that approach, he ends up not a Menorah, not a Shulchan and not a Mizbeach. One can’t be a Menorah, Shulchan or Mizbeach, until one has done his best to reach being an Ark. If you have already tried, **and your Rabbi said that it is not for you**, then find the

spot that is best for you – the one that can give full expression to your own, unique Shoresh Neshama. Are you a Menorah? Are you a Shulchan? An Altar, who gives up his job, his parnassah, not to transgress even one transgression, etc..? And, be who you are. Accept who you are. For that is how G-d made you. That is your Shoresh Neshama, and you can learn better if you look at yourself

honestly, and if you accept yourself as you really are.

There are two types of working people. One “went out” to work. And the other worked to stay alive. One became an X- Kollel guy. He got rid of his yeshiva dress-code the first minute possible. And the other one just “dresses up” to go to work. There is a world of a difference between the two.

THE MASKED YOU

Everybody knows there is a minhag (custom) to dress in costumes on Purim. This minhag is not just a playful, childish activity : there is deep significance behind the masks and costumes we wear on Purim.

A mask or costume hides one’s identity. This theme of hiding one’s identity is one we find often in Megillat Esther. The most obvious example of this is Queen Esther herself, who hid her identity in the palace of King Achashverosh. Another example is Harvona, whom we remember for good (“zachur latov”) due to his suggestion to King Achashverosh to hang Haman on the very same tree he had designed for Mordechai. Our Rabbis tell us that this was actually Eliyahu Hanavi, who had come disguised as Harvona, a close friend and adviser of Haman, and made the suggestion to the king.

We find in the Purim story that while Haman was leading Mordechai on the King’s horse, Haman’s own daughter mistook her father for Mordechai, and publicly humiliated Haman. According to one explanation, the reason she made this mistake was because Haman had asked Mordechai for permission to don his sackcloth while he led the horse, in order to disguise himself and avoid embarrassment.

There is yet another who hid His identity throughout the Megilla – Hashem himself! Hashem’s name is never actually mentioned in the Megillah. However, the Vilna Gaon explained that every time the Megillah says the word “HaMelech” (the King), even though it seems to be referring to King Achashverosh, it is a veiled reference to the “King of kings”, who orchestrated all the events of the Megillah, while hiding Himself behind the scenes. It is for this reason the Talmud says that when the Torah says “*And I will hide my face on*

that day” – (Devarim, 31:17), it is referring to Purim.

The Jewish people also donned a “mask” throughout the Purim story. The Talmud explains that Haman was given the power to destroy the Jewish people as a punishment for the Jews’ attendance at Achashverosh’s feast. Even though, according to many opinions, the food at the feast was 100% kosher and no halachot were transgressed, the Jews were guilty of trying to hide their Jewish identity and blend in with the gentiles. In order to repent, Esther asked them to fast for three days in order to “remove the food of Achashverosh’s party” from themselves and stop hiding their true identity.

The rabbis instruct us that on Purim, “**כל הפושט יד נוותנים לו**” – anyone who outstretches his hand, we give to him”. Simply speaking, this refers to giving charity on this day, but these words have a secondary message as well – anyone who asks from Heaven on Purim will be answered. The word **כל** (“everyone”) – includes even someone who appears before us whose status as a poor man may be questionable. Similarly, even if our outer self might sometimes contradict our inner self, G-d still accepts us and will answer our prayers even more on Purim than He usually does.

The Arizal teaches that one reason the Torah calls Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, “Yom HaKippurim,” is because Yom Kippur is “K’Purim” (like Purim). By calling Yom Kippur “like Purim,” the Torah implies that even the great holiness of Yom Kippur doesn’t reach the holiness of Purim. How can Purim – with its costumes, feasting and drinking – possibly be holier than Yom Kippur?

Purim is a time where we are given the opportunity to remove our “personal masks” and reveal who we really are. On this holy day, one can connect to his deepest, purest intentions for repentance in a more elevated way than he can on Yom Kippur itself. It is for this reason that we have the custom to get drunk on Purim; when a person drinks, he lets go of all of his inhibitions and reveals his true self. The Talmud teaches – *wine enters and the secrets come out*.

The Hebrew word for costume is תחפושת tachposet, the root of which is the word חיפוש chipus – “search”. Throughout the year, we all behave in many ways which do not reflect who we really are. The word פנים panim, face, literally means “aspects” – because there are many aspects to the “face” we put forward, and many aspects to

who we really are. On Purim, we must “search” beneath the costume in which we hide our true selves and see through the masks behind which G-d and our fellow Jew hide. We must search for the “understanding of G-d”, Who is currently hiding behind the mask of galut (exile), and, simultaneously, search for our “true selves” – who we really are and who we really want to be, rather than just accepting things as they are and carrying on in the way we normally behave. We must also reveal the essence of other people, working to accept others by finding the good and positive in them. Let us learn from the masks of Purim that, in reality, it is on this day that we truly reveal ourselves – *we were masked all year round!*

Purim and the Ancient Happiness Theory

As Purim approaches, many of us are filled with a feeling of anticipation and excitement, looking forward to the *simcha* (happiness) this special day can bring. However, after Purim, many often experience disappointment, feeling that *simcha* somehow passed them by. There is tremendous potential in Purim day, and if utilized correctly, Purim can be a source of happiness that lasts all year long. As the Yiddish song goes, “*A gans yohr freilich*” – “joyous, all year round!!” We need to understand, then – how do I get the most out of Purim this year?

If we study the four mitzvoth of Purim we may be able to tap into the *Ancient Happiness Theory: our happiness is determined by our relationships*. Nothing brings a person more happiness than having healthy, thriving relationships. On the other hand, a person who is suffering from failing relationships feels miserable, making happiness an unattainable dream. There are three types of relationships: with oneself, with others, and with G-d. Our Rabbis gave us the four mitzvoth of Purim to tap into and enhance these relationships: reading Megillat Esther, making a *seuda*, sending *mishloach manot* and giving *matanot l'evyonim*. Through the Megillah, we are able to rediscover our personal relationship with G-d; *mishloach manot* and *matanot l'evyonim* allow us to build our relationships with others; finally,

the *seudah* provides an opportunity for us to reconnect with ourselves. The more one works on improving each of these three relationships all year long, and on Purim in particular, the higher the happiness meter rises. The potential is infinite – the sky's the limit!

Let us first explore our relationship with G-d from the Megilla's point of view. Megillat Esther is actually the story of our relationship with G-d, then as much as now. The word *megillah* comes from the Hebrew verb *לגלות* – *to reveal*. Esther means “hidden.” Megillat Esther is the *revelation of G-d's hiddenness*. G-d stands behind the scenes, and at any given moment may bring about the most ironic and unexpected scenario. Just as G-d was right behind the curtain, caring and loving every one of us during the entire story of Megillat Esther, He is always here. He never leaves our side, even during the bleakest of hours.

Did you ever stop to wonder why we whisper our prayers? Perhaps, the reason teaches a profound lesson, which we impress upon ourselves day in and day out. The world is filled with clatter, loud noises and confusion. There are so many people with so many needs. If you have ever been shopping in *Shuk Machane Yehuda*, you'll understand what I mean. If you want to be heard, if you want to be served there (and in this world), *you've gotta scream*. Otherwise, you won't

be noticed, and you'll return home empty handed. Not so when we turn to G-d: He is right by my side. He is right by your side. He hears *my* whispers, and He hears yours, too. Amidst all the clatter and confusion, He's right there!

Many people have a misconception that G-d "plays favorites." When things don't go as they expected or hoped they would, they feel forgotten and forsaken. "If G-d exists, why did He turn His back on me?" they ask. Life can be so bleak from this perspective. When a person has such a worldview, even the light at the end of the tunnel seems to him to be a train coming to run him over! If a person feels that G-d is "out to get him," he may experience grief and hopelessness. More precisely, unnecessary grief and hopelessness.

This year, instead of just listening to and learning the Megillah – *live it!* Feel G-d "producing your life movie." Our relationship with G-d can be improved by applying the Megillah's concept – changing our perspective and realizing that G-d is always with us, even when we don't see His love and concern. Just internalizing the fact that G-d cares for us brings tremendous happiness. Imagine the happiness of someone who feels G-d holding his hand throughout his whole life. The mitzvah of reading Megillat Esther is to internalize this Truth and develop a closeness to G-d that lasts all year.

Let us focus now on Mishloach Manot and Matanot L'evyonim and explore how they may enhance our interpersonal relationships. There are two types of interpersonal relationships: there are relationships in which both people give to and receive from one another, and there are relationships in which one is the giver, and the other, the taker. Relationships in which each person gives and receives are usually the ones that last. If we look around at most relationships around us we will notice that the long lasting relationships are those where there is a give and take. Subconsciously, people would rather be in relationships where there is both giving and taking.

With the *mitzvot* of *mishloach manot*, our Rabbis gave us an opportunity to both give and take. Even a poor man is required to give. Even a rich man is expected to receive. This leaves everyone feeling

they've had the opportunity to show their appreciation to others, at the same time, not feeling they've been taken advantage of.

The mitzvah of *Matanot Laevyonim* is where unconditional giving takes place. People who give of what they have are usually happy people. Rabbi Noach Weinberg would say that when a person becomes a giver, he is acting like a happy person; and when one *acts* like a happy person, he *becomes* a happy person.

Another reason it feels so good to give is because there is nothing more "G-d-like" than giving. Being G-d-like brings eternal happiness, since a person who emulates the actions of his Creator knows he is fulfilling the purpose for which he was created. The giving and unconditional love shown on Purim puts people in a very positive, loving mindset, enabling them to rebuild and strengthen relationships. Try to find those interpersonal relationships which need strengthening. There is no better time than Purim to rebuild them.

Let us now take a look at the relationship one has with himself and how the time of the Purim Seudah is so apropos for this. I have a confession to make – *I don't like getting intoxicated*. It gives me a headache. However, on Purim, I take the opportunity to learn about myself. After a few drinks, all I want to do is dance, make my family happy and share ideas about the Megillah to whoever is willing to listen (even if it is only the mop!). Getting drunk is getting down to your true self. It is a whole year's work to make sure that who I really am deep down is not someone that I am ashamed of!

The seudah is a time for enjoying a good meal, giving our bodies pleasure. Rav Moshe Aaron Stern, the former Mashgiach of Kaminetz Yeshiva, once suggested that when a woman wants to have a calm conversation with her husband, she should first set the table. A meal somehow makes people relaxed. Probably, the idea is that when the body is satiated with good food and there are no distractions from bodily emotions and wants, the stage (as the table!) is set for a calm and pleasant talk.

Another idea of the seudah is a point Rashi makes in Megillat Esther (9:28). The megillah tells us that Purim is to be celebrated every year by “*mishpacha u’mishpacha*” – each and every family. Rashi explains that this refers to families gathering together to eat and drink at the Purim seudah. It is important to celebrate the most joyous seudah of the year with siblings and in-laws, with uncles and aunts, with parents and grandchildren. Even if one doesn’t get along with his various relatives and would rather be with friends partying, and even if one enjoys peace and quiet and would prefer not to have any company at all, Rashi tells that one must look past the difficulties of these feelings and be ‘*heimish*’ (the “at home” feeling) with his own family. If G-d makes them your family, try to make the best of it! G-d wants us to refine ourselves through the difficult relationships that we encounter!

The Everlasting Purim

Happiness – Guaranteed(?)

As Purim approaches, many of us are filled with a feeling of anticipation and excitement, looking forward to the simcha this special day can bring. However, after Purim, many often experience disappointment, feeling that simcha somehow passed them by.

There is tremendous potential in Purim day, and if utilized correctly, Purim can be a source of happiness that lasts all year long. As the Yiddish song goes, “A gans yor freilich” – joyous all year round! ! We need to understand, then – how do I get the most out of Purim this year?

The Ancient Happiness Theory

Our relationships determine our happiness. Nothing brings a person more happiness than having healthy, thriving relationships. On the other hand, a person who is lonely or suffering from failing relationships feels miserable, making happiness an unattainable dream.

There are three types of relationships: between G-d and oneself, between oneself and others, and the relationship one has with himself. The more one works on improving each of these three

When I was a child and my brother and I would have an argument, I would put a cereal box between us at the breakfast table, so I wouldn’t have to see him. Unfortunately, this does not really work for adults. One’s family is a big part of how one feels about his relationship with himself. Until someone is able to get along with his family, many times he won’t be able to feel comfortable with himself. The Seudah is supposed to be together with family for all these reasons:- to provide us with an opportunity to improve our relationship with ourselves.

If one can work on all three types of relationship – between himself and G-d, between himself and others, and his relationship with himself – he will feel tremendous happiness.

relationships, the higher the happiness meter rises. The potential is infinite – the sky is the limit!

There are four mitzvot on Purim: reading Megillat Esther, feasting at the seudah, sending mishloach manot and giving matanot l’evyonim.

Below, we will see how these four mitzvot correspond to the three types of relationships: the megillah is to rediscover our personal relationship with G-d. Mishloach manot and matanot l’evyonim allow us to build our relationships with others. The seudah provides an opportunity for us to reconnect with ourselves.

Hide and Go(d) Seek!

Megillat Esther is the story of our relationship with G-d.

The word megillah comes from the verb l’galot – to reveal. Esther means “hidden.” Megillat Esther is the revelation of G-d’s hiddenness. G-d stands behind the scenes, and at any given moment might bring about the most ironic and unexpected scenario. Just as G-d was right behind the curtain, caring and loving every one of us, during the entire story of Megillat Esther, He is always there. He never leaves our side, even during the most bleakest of hours. Ever stop to wonder why we

whisper our prayers? Perhaps, there is a profound lesson which we impress upon ourselves day in and day out.

The world is filled with clatter, loud noises and confusion. There are so many people with so many needs. If you ever went shopping in the Machane Yehuda Shuk, you'll understand what I mean. If you want to be heard, if you want to be served in this world, you've gotta scream. Otherwise, you won't be heard and you'll return home empty handed. Not so with G-d. he is right by my side. He is right by your side. He hears my whispers and he hears yours too. Amidst all the clatter and confusion, He's right there!

Many people have a misconception that G-d "plays favorites." When things don't go as they expected or hoped they would, they feel forgotten and forsaken. "If G-d exists, why did He turn His back on me?" they ask. Life can be so bleak from this perspective. When a person has such a worldview, even the light at the end of the tunnel looks to him like a train coming to run him over! If a person feels that G-d is "out to get him," he may experience grief and hopelessness.

The Stubborn Dead Guy

Hashem is always present in our life, and no matter how many times we "give up on Him," He never gives up on us. Yet, sometimes no matter how much Hashem does to show us He is there, we stubbornly refuse to see Him. The following mashal (parable) can shed light on this stubborn mindset: A man walked into a psychologist's office and told the psychologist that he was positive that he was dead. The psychologist asked the patient, "Do dead men bleed?" The patient answered in the negative. The psychologist took out a needle from his drawer and pricked his patient's finger, drawing blood. In shock, the patient said, "I never knew that dead men bleed!"

Unfortunately, many people cannot relinquish a negative belief even if proven false.

This year, instead of just listening to and learning the megillah – live it! Feel G-d "producing your life movie." Our relationship with G-d can be improved by applying the megillah's concept – changing our perspective and realizing that G-d is

always with us, even when we don't see His love and concern. Just internalizing that G-d cares for us brings tremendous happiness.

Imagine if you had a big picture on your desk of yourself shaking hands with the President of the United States. Every time you would see it, that memory would bring you happiness. Imagine the happiness of someone who feels G-d holding his hand throughout his whole life. The opportunity of the mitzvah of reading Megillat Esther is to internalize this Truth and develop a closeness to G-d that lasts all year.

Mishloach Manot and Matanot L'evyonim

Interpersonal Relationships

There are two types of interpersonal relationships: there are relationships in which both people give to and receive from the other, and there are relationships in which one only gives and the other only takes. The relationships in which each person gives and receives are usually the ones that last. The problem, though, is that people don't like to give without taking or take without giving.

With the mitzvot of mishloach manot and matanot l'evyonim, the rabbis gave us an opportunity to give and take. Even a poor man is required to give. Even a rich man is expected to receive. This leaves everyone feeling they've had the opportunity to show their appreciation to others, while also not feeling they've been taken advantage of.

Giving Unconditionally

People who give of what they have are usually happy people. Therefore, Rabbi Noach Weinberg ztz"l used to point out that when a person becomes a giver, he is acting like a happy person; and when one acts like a happier person, he becomes a happier person (as the baalei mussar say, "chitzoniyut m'orrer et hapenimiyut" – external actions can awaken inner feelings).

Another reason it feels so good to give is because there is nothing more "G-d-like" than giving. Being G-d-like makes one very happy, since such a person knows he is fulfilling the purpose for which he was created. The giving and unconditional love shown on Purim puts people in a very positive,

loving mindset, enabling them to rebuild and strengthen relationships.

Try to find those interpersonal relationships which are falling apart. There is no better time than Purim to rebuild them. Rebuilding and re-strengthening our relationships brings us much closer to true happiness!

Seudah

Getting Along With Yourself

The mitzvot and customs of the seudah are all related to the relationship one has with himself.

Bringing Out the Booze – Not the Boos ()

I have a confession to make – I don't like getting intoxicated. It gives me a headache. However, on Purim, I take the opportunity to get to learn about myself. After a few drinks, all I want to do is dance, make my family happy and share ideas about the megillah to whoever is willing to listen (even if it is only the mop!). Getting drunk is getting down to your true self. It is a whole year's work to make sure that who I really am deep down is not someone that I am embarrassed of!

The seudah is a time for enjoying a good meal, giving our bodies pleasure. Rav Moshe Aaron Stern, the former mashgiach of Kaminetz Yeshiva, once suggested that when a woman wants to have a calm conversation with her husband, she should first set the table. A meal somehow makes people calm. Probably, the idea that the body will be satiated with good food is a good way to calm the bodily emotions and wants.

Another idea of the seudah is a point Rashi makes in Megillat Esther (9:28). The megillah tells us that Purim is to be celebrated every year by "mishpacha u'mishpacha" – each and every family. Rashi explains that this refers to families gathering together to eat and drink at the Purim seudah. It is important to celebrate the most joyous seudah of the year with siblings and in-laws, with uncles and aunts, with parents and grandchildren. Even if one doesn't get along with his family and would rather

be with friends partying, and even if one enjoys peace and quiet and would prefer not to have any company at all, Rashi tells that one must look past the difficulties of the relationships and to be 'heimish' with his own family.

If G-d makes them your family, try to make the best of it! G-d wants us to refine ourselves through the difficult relationships that we encounter!

When I was a child and my brother and I would have have an argument, I used to put a cereal box between us at the breakfast table so I wouldn't have to see him. Unfortunately, this does not really work for adults. One's family is a big part of how one feels in his own relationship with himself. Until someone is able to get along with his family, many times he won't ever feel comfortable with himself. This is all why the Seudah is supposed to be together with family – to improve one's relationship with himself.

Clarity or Death

It is common for one to feel depressed when he is confused. Everyone has a long list of principles and beliefs and it is crucial that one organize his priorities and achieve clarity so that he can act accordingly. When one has failed over and over again to take control of his life, one stops trusting himself. Failure to prioritize principles and set appropriate goals can cause much grief. The most powerful tool to bring happiness is an effective plan for growth and achievement, and one cannot create such a plan until he figures himself out.

The megillah ends by telling us that Mordechai and Esther "kimu v'kiblu" – established and accepted – to commemorate Purim.

This Purim, we need to create our own "kimu v'kiblu," by committing to organize ourselves properly and to build new goals, giving ourselves proper structure to live the happiest life possible.

If one can work on all three types of relationship – between himself and G-d, between himself and others, and his relationship with himself – he will feel tremendous happiness.

WISDOM FROM THE MENORAH

Someone once asked one of the heads of Rolex, "So, how is the watch business going?" He answered, "I have no idea. I am not in the watch business! I am in the luxury business!" No one who needs a watch for telling time buys a Rolex. They buy a Seiko.

McDonalds is not in the cheeseburger business. He is in real estate. He gets prime commercial real estate, and holds on to it. He just needs to pay off his properties, so he does that by selling cheeseburgers. Starbucks is not in the coffee business. You can buy a good coffee for almost half of their price. They are in the customer service business, giving you a coffee with a smile; a great way to recharge your day with your coffee.

The common denominator of all these is that they know what business they are in, *at the essence*. After they know WHO they are, they expand from there. When someone has a business problem, it is many times deeper than where to put the next advertisement. It usually depends on defining what business you are in, what service or product you are selling, and in what way your selling it is unique. Who is your ideal customer? Who is your competitor, and what do *you* have to offer? When you get down to the basics, you are in business. But if you ignore the basics, the essence, your business will run around in circles.

The Messilat Yesharim, one of the best self-help books in the world, starts off his masterwork with the basics. Why are we here, what is the point in life. He expands the rest of the sefer from that point. If your marriage is not like you want it to be, maybe your definition of marriage is wrong. Try to define what a marriage means, what is the point. And then, when you know, you might be able to tweak things. If your learning with your study partner is not turning out the way you would want it to be, maybe find out what is the purpose of studying with a partner. Is it about reading the text one to another, or discussing how each one understands the concept, questioning each other for clarification. If your coaching is not going well, maybe define to your coach or to your client what your goal in this coaching relationship is, and then go from there. The reason why we get stuck is because we did not clarify the basics.

It is common for yeshiva students who do not understand the Gemarah to ask someone else. They look to Tosefot, before reading on in the Gemarah. They look for what some commentary says. They go outward, not inward. That is ineffective.

But the way that will help you understand something in learning is by reading it again. And again. And again. Going for the essence. Saying it over out loud, crystallizing what you already know. The brain has a kind of a magic: If a person understands some things, but not others, it depends on what we focus. If a person focuses on the things that he has not yet been able to comprehend, the brain begins to doubt even those things that were clear. And, on the contrary, if a person focuses on those things that are clear to him, suddenly, the brain is able to grasp those areas that were problematic.

If you get stuck in learning, in life, in anything, always read in rounds. Start all over again. See the passuk 'inside'; see the Mishna inside. Understand what you have already understood at a deeper level. Ask the six questions, Who, What, When, Where, Why, How, as much as you can, to get clarity on what you already "know". And then, the brain does its magic. From what you understood, it branches out, just like the Menorah, to things that you did not understand before.

The Menorah represents the wisdom of the Torah. Learning Torah has in it this amazing feature that when you focus on the main concept, other concepts slowly branch out. Just like the Menorah, that had one middle stem from which three branches spread out on both sides. The Menorah needed to be made of one, solid piece of gold, without anything added on to the main piece. *השׁק מְנֹרָה*. Why? Because the side subjects automatically branch out from the main subject. You just need to take the essence, to take what you've got, and when you focus on it long enough, when you play around with it, you have a beautiful Menorah.

This is also the way to take notes, to think clearly. Make a main goal the middle stem, and the ideas branch out, like the branches of the Menorah. Write down the passuk as the main stem, and branch out from there to all the things that are learnt from it. Use the six questions, like the six

stems that branch out from the Menorah. This is why the Torah repeats itself over and over when describing the Menorah, to teach you that just by

CHILLING WITH AMALEK

G-d told Moshe to pass on the message that He is at constant war with Amalek, in each and every generation. In each generation we must ask ourselves to identify the current Amalek, who is continuing the age-old war against recognizing the monarchy of G-d. Who is the today's Amalek causing something to be missing from G-d's Throne, and to be lacking the full complement of letters from His Name.

We can look a bit deeper into exactly how Amalek fought the Jews in the first battle. This can shed light on how he fights us today, and reveal "who" he is. The Rebbe from Pasishche made an amazing observation. If we study the words of the Parashat Zachor, we may notice that the Torah describes what Amalek did to us in *singular form*. זכור אשר קרך בדרכ means "remember" – in singular; and that "happened upon" you (singular) on the way ... ויזנב בך כל הנחשלים אחריך when you were faint and exhausted and without fear of G-d... Each time the word "you" is mentioned in these psukim, it is in the singular form. Why does the Torah refer to Amalek's attack on the Jews as an attack on individuals, and not on the nation as a whole?

We learn from the Midrash that the Jews who were attacked by Amalek were from the tribe of Dan, the tribe who walked behind all the others. There were idol worshippers in their number. Amalek approached the Jews at a time when they questioned G-d's Presence among them – when the Jews were not studying Torah with the enthusiasm that they were capable of. Amalek could not strike the Jews who were surrounded by the Clouds of Glory, serving as a shield. Rather, they borrowed the listings of the Jewish names from Egyptian archives and stood outside the clouds, calling out (with a voice of fondness and brotherhood) to those who were falling behind, to those who could not give up their lust for idolatry. "Reuven ben Shimon, you are being paged!" As Reuven walked

reviewing what you already know again and again, you will suddenly discover many new ideas. Try it, and let me know how it works for you!

CHILLING WITH AMALEK

out, not knowing who was calling him, Amalek murdered him. One after the other, those of weakened faith were called out... This is how Amalek strikes. He goes for the "dropouts". And G-d is not willing to give up on even one of the dropouts. He is willing to wage war with Amalek until the end of time, in order to get each and every Jewish soul back. **And we, those who read Parashat Zachor every year, are the generals in this everlasting war.**

The Rebbe would say that Amalek does not just strike. He tries to look for where there is no unity or community. This is the very characteristic of Amalek, as we can openly see in the words that our Rabbis termed the greatest slander that Haman was able to use against us: *ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפוזר בין העמים* There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed ... (Esther 3:8) Our weakness, our lack of unity was and is Amalek's power against us. And to defuse this power of Amalek, we put to use our time, money and effort to do the Mitzvot of Mishloach Manot and Matanot La'evyonim, to bring unity to our people, ultimately fighting the power of Amalek.

We may ask ourselves how Amalek causes disunity amongst us. The Torah answers exactly what he does בדרכ אשר קרך that he "happened upon" you... (implying chance, random occurrence) Rashi, in accordance with the Midrash, explains these words with another explanation – *that he cooled you down*.

R' Z. Wallerstien once explained this to a group of teenagers. There is a word that is commonly used when you ask a teen what he was doing out till late (shall we say, 3 AM) and he answers "I was chilling". What is chilling? Chilling means not doing anything to answer up to responsibilities. It means ignoring that one **has** responsibilities. This can, mistakenly, be confused with pleasure. Chilling is not pleasure; rather, it is a fear and an avoidance of the "pain" of behaving with responsibility. Being up till 3 in the morning, doing nothing constructive, is simply saying, "I do not

have to be responsible for tomorrow.” People somehow get into this habit of “chilling”; it’s usually done by finding others who are “on the same page” – finding people who are “chilling” to chill with. That’s all it is.

When the Jews were not studying the Torah the way that they were supposed to – they were shirking their responsibilities. People are shying away from their responsibilities when they do not pay attention to those who are falling out of the community. Of course these people who are falling to the wayside are too busy chilling but maybe the members of the community are chilling as well from their responsibility to care. For their responsibility to fight for every Jewish soul.

The first thing that dropouts do to “chill” is to say to themselves, “We do not need the community. We do not need others, nor do we care what they think of us.” Often, this attitude is a result of their feeling that they are unimportant in the eyes of their peers. So, they start to chill – to do nothing

with their time and wait for someone (Amalek) to call to them by name and say, “Leave your camp. We care for you out here.” They walk out and get strangled. It gives us much food for thought about this deep, eternally insightful commentary that the word “**רָרָר**”- *that he cooled you down* is used so concisely for the same type of attitude in the 21st Century.

G-d does not give up on any one of his children, even if they end up as idol worshippers and fall into the claws of Amalek. And, in every generation he asks us to fight his battle to save those who are falling behind. Let us fight Amalek by keeping a sense of unity. Let us fight Amalek by recognizing our responsibilities to our Torah study and to each other. Then, we will merit a redemption like the one in the days of Mordechai and Esther. *And on that day, G-d will be One and His Name will be One*, together with us and with all of our brethren in the Holy Temple. Amen.

ERASING AMALEK FROM OUR SOLES AND SOULS

It has been said that when the Rebbe Reb Heschel needed to test the ink in his quill, he would not scribble just anything and then erase it. He would write Amalek or Haman and then scribble over it. Many people practiced this custom of writing the name of Amalek or Haman on the sole of their shoe and then stamping it out by stepping on it. It is not enough just trying to forget about Amalek: we are commanded to *actively* erase his name. We must remember, and erase. Write, and cross out. This is in contrast to many things that are to be erased and never again mentioned. What is different about the remembrance of Amalek?

Our Rabbis tell us what it was that made Amalek worse than all the other nations who caused us pain and suffering. Amalek came to wage war with the Jews when they were considered by all the other peoples as ” off bounds”. The nations of the world were petrified: as described in Rashi, who would have considered “stepping into the hot bath” and confronting the Nation of Miracles? Amalek came and “cooled down the bath” for all the others who wanted to fight the Nation of G-d. (See Rashi Devarim 25:18)

There is difficulty understanding why this made Amalek much worse than the others. Amalek, who had initiated the attack, had gotten burnt. If anything, this would show the nations of the world *not* to consider making trouble for the Jews. Everyone else should have learnt not to follow suit. But this was not the case. Amalek is held accountable for having made fighting the Jews and their G-d open for discussion as well as negotiable . *“Maybe we lost because we did not have the right strategy – because we were alone – because we were not strong enough. Maybe someone else could win. Maybe it can be done.”*

Until Amalek came, this was not an option. Amalek planted the seeds of doubt in what had been accepted as fact. The numerical value of Amalek 240 = (א ל מ ע) is doubt 240 =(ר א ס). This doubt is a focal place in our service to G-d: we fall when we begin to doubt our core beliefs, and we question doing things that, in our heart, we know to be right.

Amalek is guilty on an additional count: Bilaam advised Amalek as to how to choose the proper timing: they were to wait until the Jews would be

in a state of **עַיְף וַיָּגַע וְלֹא יָרַא אֱלֹקִים** *when you were faint and exhausted and without fear of G-d*. This was their heretical strategy. They did not come just to fight. They flaunted their lack of fear of the Jewish G-d by showing that their calculation was based only on the strength of the people. Once the Jewish people were weak, Amalek could win. “Who says that we cannot fight them or their G-d?” Despite the fact that this was within the year of the Ten Plagues and the Splitting of the Red Sea, Amalek had the audacity to ignore the reality, the facts. “Maybe it was all chance?” As Rashi explains, this is one of the three possible explanations to the words **דֶּרֶךְ מִקְרָה – בְּדֶרֶךְ** *happstance*. G-d’s Name is established and complete when humanity recognizes Him. Amalek decided to openly ignore Him, and thus, caused the last two letters of His Name to be missing.

Amalek, Haman and other Amelikite descendants all have one thing in common: they make their appearance when the Jews believe that G-d is absent or doubt His presence among them. Amalekite “modus operandi” – work style – is to support this negative belief when we have it. They appeared when we asked, consciously or subconsciously, “Where is G-d?”. The Midrash relates that Amalek came to fight after we asked each other in Masa, “Is G-d among us? If we do not see him, He must not be around.” Or – “If He

exists, we should not have to express our prayers verbally and ask for food – He should be able to read our minds!” After such thoughts, G-d called to Amalek and then we realized, without a shadow of a doubt, that our only hope was to cry out to G-d! We know *then*, in times when we are keenly aware that we need Him, that He is among us, and He answers our prayers. Suddenly, the philosophical doubts of G-d’s presence in our midst dissipate.

Mordecai, the first person to be called Yehudi, was a living force against this. He would walk out with the T’chelet – blue – to remind everyone and himself in exile of the sky, which ultimately brings to mind the knowledge of G-d’s Presence everywhere, similar to the visual reminder found in the T’chelet strings of Tzizit. Mordecai intended to walk publicly, clothed in this color to demonstrate that G-d is actually here with us. Using the T’chelet as a kind of banner, he demonstrated that Amalek and their atheist beliefs were nonsensical. He reestablished the Name of G-d in his generation. And if we take the last two letters of **יְהוָה**, the **ה** and **ו** (‘underneath **ה**’) form the letter **ה** revealing the ending letters of **הוּא** that Amalek tried to ignore and erase from the world!

This is a battle for us as well. We must actively erase the Amalek’s banner of doubt, and anything that reminds us of even a suggestion of a belief that G-d is not amongst us.

The Masked You

Undercover in Shushan

Everybody knows there is a minhag (custom) to dress in costumes on Purim. This minhag is not just a silly children’s activity – there is deep significance behind the masks and costumes we wear on Purim.

A mask or costume hides one’s identity. This theme – of hiding one’s identity – is one we find often in Megillat Esther. The most obvious example of this is, Queen Esther herself, who hid her identity in the palace of King Achashverosh. Another example is Harvona, whom we remember for good (“zachur latov”) due to his suggestion to King Achashverosh to hang Haman on the very same tree he designed for Mordechai. Our Rabbis

tell us that this was actually Eliyahu Hanavi, who had come disguised as Harvona, a close friend and adviser of Haman, and made the suggestion to the king.

We find in the Purim story that while Haman was leading Mordechai on the King’s horse, Haman’s own daughter mistook her father for Mordechai, and publicly humiliated Haman. According to one explanation, the reason she made this mistake was because Haman had asked Mordechai for permission to don his sackcloth while he led the horse, in order to disguise himself and avoid embarrassment.

There is yet another who hid His identity throughout the Megilla – Hashem himself.

Hashem's name is never actually mentioned in the Megillah; however, the Vilna Gaon explained that every time the Megillah says the word "HaMelech" (the King), even though it seems to be referring to King Achashverosh, it is a veiled reference to the "King of kings" who orchestrated all the events of the Megillah, while hiding Himself behind the scenes. It is for this reason the Talmud says that when the Torah says V'Anochi haster astir panai bayom hahoo ("And I will hide my face on that day" – Devarim, 31:17), it is referring to Purim.

Double Identity

The Jewish people also donned a "mask" throughout the Purim story. The Talmud explains that Haman was given the power to destroy the Jewish people as a punishment for the Jews' attendance at Achashverosh's feast. Even though, according to many opinions, the food at the feast was 100% kosher and no halachot were broken, the Jews were guilty of trying to hide their Jewish identity and blend in with the gentiles. In order to repent, Esther asked them to fast for three days in order to "remove the food of Achashverosh's party" from themselves and stop hiding their true identity.

The Power in Purim

The rabbis instruct us that on Purim, "Kol haposhet yad notnim lo – anyone who outstretches his hand, we give him". Simply speaking, this refers to giving charity on this day, but these words have a secondary message as well – anyone who asks from Heaven on Purim will be answered. The word Kol ("everyone") – includes even someone who appears before us whose status as a poor man may be questionable. Similarly, even if our outer self might sometimes contradict our inner self, G-d still accepts us and will answer our prayers even more on Purim than He usually does.

Holier than the High Holies

The Arizal teaches that one reason the Torah calls Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, "Yom

A BAD IDEA

People ask me how I manage to come up with an amazing article every week. Here is my secret. I don't. I come up with an article that is not so great.

HaKippurim," is because Yom Kippur is "K'Purim" (like Purim). By calling Yom Kippur "like Purim," the Torah implies that even Yom Kippur doesn't stack up to the holiness of Purim. How can Purim – with its costumes, feasting and drinking – possibly be holier than Yom Kippur?

Getting behind the Mask

Purim is a time where we are given the opportunity to remove our "personal masks" and reveal who we really are. One can connect on this holy day to his deepest, purest intentions in a way of repentance more elevated than Yom Kippur itself. It is for this reason that we have the custom to get drunk on Purim; when a person drinks, he lets go of all of his inhibitions and reveals his true self. The Talmud teaches, "Nichnas yayin yotzei sod" – wine enters and the secrets come out.

Self Searching

The Hebrew word for costume is tachposet which stems from the root word chipus – "search". Throughout the year, we all behave in many ways which do not reflect who we really are. The word "panim" (face) literally means "aspects" – because there are many aspects to the "face" we put forward, and many aspects to who we really are. On Purim we must "search" beneath the costume in which we hide our true selves, and see through the masks behind which G-d and our fellow Jew hide. We must search for the "understanding of G-d" who is currently hiding behind the mask of galut (exile), and we must simultaneously search for our "true selves" – who we really are and who we really want to be – rather than just accepting the status-quo and carrying on in the way we normally behave. We must also reveal the essence of other people, working to accept others by finding the good and positive in them. Let us learn from the masks of Purim that in reality, it is on this day that we truly reveal ourselves – we were masked all year round!

And then I change it. I tweak it 'til it's better. And then change it again. Each time looking for something that didn't seem right the first time. I

never come up with a good idea the first time around.

Ask the *honest* shadchan. He'll tell you. "What percentage of your attempts make it to the chuppah?" The most successful shadchanim I know told me the secret recipe. "I fail 50 times so that the 51st might send me an invitation!" They are ready to fail before they start. They don't fear the "No, we're not interested."

This is the secret recipe of the successful. Fail 9 times, so that you will succeed on the 10th. The comedian needs to make 9 jokes so that the 10th might be funny. Then, he doesn't tell you those bad jokes, he just tells you the funny ones. In writing, or any other area where you need to come up with a good idea for something, if you need creativity, remember that your #1 enemy is fear of failure. As long as your child is afraid of falling, he will never learn how to ride a bike. One boy I coached was afraid to date, because he might get a no, or even worse, get married and then divorced. A young married fellow was afraid to open up emotionally, out of fear of rejection. Napoleon Bonaparte was quoted, *'He who fears being conquered is sure of defeat.'*

I specialize in coaching for effective learning. More than one person says he can't read Talmud on his own, and that he needs a tutor/superior study partner to explain the entire section of Talmud being studied. *Can you read a piece of Talmud on your own?* "No". *Okay. Let's see what happens when you try.* The student reads the Mishna out loud. After the first line, he says, "I don't know what its talking about." *What did you understand?* "Nothing". *Did you have 5 % comprehension of the text?* "No". *Is it talking about xyz?* "No." *How do you know?* "Because its talking about abc". *So you do understand 5%?* "Yes..." After a few more questions, we realize that he knows closer to 60 percent of the info! And the reason why he gives up trying to read on his own is that he is afraid to get a 60. I have found this to be a very common problem.

The ones who are the "geniuses" don't believe that you have to understand the info with a 100 percent comprehension the first time around. Somehow, they never assumed that one has to learn in such a

way. This is many times the difference between those who make it in the study hall and those who don't. *A successful yeshiva student learns in percentages of comprehension.* The non successful yeshiva student wants to get 100 percent comprehension the first time around. In Talmud study, sometimes you need to read ahead, to get a picture of things, even if you don't understand 100 percent of what you are reading. You need to get however much of a picture you can, the best percentage you can for a rough draft, and then come back for a second and then a third round. The Talmud tells us this. You need to learn the text at least four times before you can say, "I got it". This is why the Torah scholar is called **תלמיד חכם**. He is always in the studying stage. He always sees himself at 50 percent comprehension. **אין דברי תורה מתקיימים אלא למי שוכשל בהם תחילה**. (Gittin 43a) He first reads the Gemarrah knowing that his initial understanding is not absolute.

The **ארון הקודש**, the Holy Ark, is symbolic of the Torah scholar. *Just as the Ark was gold on inside and on the outside, so, too, a Torah Scholar needs to be genuine on the inside, as he is on the surface.* (Yoma 72b) There are other allegories here between the Ark and the Torah scholar. The Ark had unique measurements. *2 and a half, by 1 and a half and 1 and a half.* It was different from the other vessels in the Mishkan, in that all its measurements included halves. **To teach you that a student needs to look at himself as if he is still at a partial percentage and has not reached 100 , ההכממה percent comprehension.** (see Kli Yakar)

There is always room for another round, to get a higher percentage of comprehension than what you are up to now. This is a twofold lesson. If a student says "I got it", and goes on thinking that he has reached maximum comprehension, this will stop him from advancing in his level of understanding and coming up with a new, creative thought. You need to be ready to come back to the text, to learn it for another round. *"I got the idea, but I need to think it over"*, is the frame of mind of those who come up with good questions, good answers, and new concepts. Take the telephone, for example. If you think that technology has reached its climax with the phones, you are in good company. With

every new burst of technology, people think this way, that there is no more room for innovation. *Those inventors who come up with new ideas first believe that there is always more to go.* Just as there have been innovative ways of thinking since the time the Talmud was recorded, there continue to be new ideas to come up with. This is the first side of the coin with learning in percentage, seeing yourself only halfway there.

The other side is being ready to fail, *to learn in percentages*. The *all or nothing student*, who says to himself, *If there are some words that I don't understand, if there is something not clear, then I didn't understand anything*, is prevented from even trying. Those who are successful in the study hall are not necessarily smarter, they just have a different approach. They are willing to fail the first time around, to reach just a 20 percent comprehension, and the second time around are ready to fail again, but with 60 percent comprehension. By the fourth time, they are at 90 percent comprehension. They never shut off the engine during the first time around. The first round is somewhat of a rough draft, quickly going through today's material, looking for what the text is generally talking about. In round two, we look for more detail, and the third round is putting it all together. It's not about speeding through the text, hoping to be the first or the fastest to finish. It's about getting the information in the most effective way. *Never getting stuck. Never saying "I don't know what it's talking about".* Rather, saying, *"I don't know yet!"*

R Tzvi Meir Silberberg, shlita, said it the best. The Torah scholar utters a prayer upon entering the study hall and upon exiting. When entering, he is to say, *"May it be Your Will, G-d, that no mistakes come out of my learning. That I make no mistake in Halacha. That my friends should be happy learning with me..."* And, upon departure from the study

hall, he says, *"I thank You, G-d, for having allotted my portion amongst those who sit in the study hall, and not amongst those who waste time..."* (Shulchan Aruch O'H 110, 8)

The student prays for the *highest level of success* in learning, and when he leaves, he expresses his thanks for *just having sat in the Study Hall*?!? What about all the hopes and dreams, the aspirations this student had and prayed to achieve? He did not have a successful study session, his friends told him 'You didn't get it, and you made a mistake in halacha,' and yet, he is thankful for just not sitting with the guys who chill? He is thankful for coming??!

This is the mindset of the successful student. He aspires for the stars, and settles for whatever he gets. He is happy, even if he gets 20 percent. Because 20 percent of comprehension in learning is worth so, so much.

In Daf Yomi last week, Rabbah told us the parenting tip for the generation. *Rabbah would buy utensils for the little kids to break, and give them to his kids, so that they could fill their desires (in breaking the utensils).* (Yoma 78b) What is the meaning of this? The lesson here is deep. Fear of failure is rooted in fear of criticism, fear of rejection. A child is criticized for breaking things, for spilling the milk. He is taught that you can't break things. He is reprimanded, for... being a child. So, Rabbah came up with an amazing new way for parenting. Instead of telling the kid *not to break anything*, tell him what he is *allowed* to break. Give him something that is only his, a feeling of ownership through which he can fulfill his desire. It shows the child that we, the parents and family, respect the child's feeling of security, privacy, ownership and right to fail sometimes. *Give your child, and yourself, something that, if it breaks, it won't break you*

IF YOU ARE ENJOYING THESE ARTICLES FREE EACH WEEK, PLEASE HELP SUPPORT THIS PUBLICATION!

SPECIAL OFFER! Take upon yourself to spread the papers/emails and receive free coaching sessions with Rabbi Y. Farhi! Send an email to rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com for details.

One week's sponsor to cover all costs is \$300.

These articles are being distributed to over 20 thousand readers each week!

To support this publication, or receive it by e-mail, please email me at rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com.