



Parashat Tezaveh



English version

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THE ART OF BEING THE HAPPIEST YOU CAN BE

The following thought changed my life:

Last week's article mentioned the 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. Many choose to be happy though, and can't seem to be happy. Why not? Because they choose to look for happiness in the wrong places.

My rabbi once explained that there's a difference between money that G-d gives you, and money you work for with extra Hishtadlut effort, which is money that you take. Money that is meant for you, that comes to you without desperation, stays, because it was truly meant to be yours. Money you chase and take, can disappear just as quickly as it came.

The same is true for joy. There are two kinds of joy: the joy we chase, and the joy we notice. The joy we chase: achievements, status, possessions... can feel exciting, but it's fragile. It can vanish overnight. But the joy we notice is already here, you just have to NOTICE it. That is the joy that G-d gives you.

Happiness isn't hidden, it is overlooked. Take time to notice what you have been ignoring. A smile from someone you love, a meaningful learning session, how it feels to be snug under the blanket each morning, as we wake and notice that our body is working. This is the power of mindfulness. Happiness is not created by achieving more, by

having more, it comes from recognizing what is already present.

When the Megillah says, "LaYehudim hayta orah v'simcha v'sasson vikar" the Jews had light, happiness, joy, and preciousness... our Sages explain: Light is Torah. Happiness is Shabbat and Yom Tov. Joy is Brit Milah. Preciousness is tefillin. The Jews then REALIZED what true light, happiness, joy and preciousness is. They finally recognized what they already had, instead of searching elsewhere. They felt at that time, between the first and second Temple, that until we have our Temple back, we can't be happy! Only, after the Purim miracle they realized that they were connected to G-d through these mitzvoth all along, they just were not noticing it! Why? Because they were searching it outside of what they already had!

Children are born happy, because naturally, we are born with a mindset to be present. Children enjoy simple things: an ice cream, sitting next to a parent, being tucked into bed. So why when we grow up, do we find it so hard to be happy?

As children, watching our busy parents, we grow up thinking that if we want to be adultlike, if we want to grow up, we need to be busy! So, from our youth, we strive to busy ourselves with what is important and what is urgent, as we rush from achievement to achievement, with no time left to be present. We think that being constantly occupied means we are important. We fill our schedules as if activity itself were the goal. But a full schedule is not the same as a meaningful life.



And that is exactly the reason why we can't find happiness. We adults wear busyness like a badge of honor, and nothing blinds us from joy in life, like busyness does. Joy is found not by speeding up, but by slowing down enough to notice the good.

There's a famous story about a man who dreamed of a treasure buried under a bridge. He traveled there and began digging, only to be questioned by a guard. The guard at the bridge laughed at how foolish dreams can be and said he had also dreamed about a man living in a distant town on a street with a funny name, and a very simple house, with a strange front door, who had a treasure hidden behind his own fireplace. The dream sounded ridiculous... until the first man realized that the house described in the guard's dream was his own home. He returned home, broke the fireplace and found the treasure.

Joy is like that treasure. It is not somewhere else. It is under your own roof, right in front of you. The greatest mistake is searching everywhere except the place where it already exists. You can spend 180 days partying, wining and dining, with your best friends, having the time of your life, showing off all your wealth and achievements. Achashvarosh has been there, done that. He was almost at the pinnacle of pleasure possible in this world, until when he wanted to show off his wife, the beautiful Queen Vashti, one of the most beautiful women ever, and then, things went sour. He got insulted from her, got angry, and killed her. All the happiness of the 180 days, were forgotten in just one minute. To be never remembered again.

That is the story of most happiness we chase. We go on a high, a dopamine rush, and then, it is all over. All your left with, is a heavy bill, an angry wife, or a bad stomach. That is where most pleasures in life take us. Our brains are hardwired chemically, to be a pain/pleasure seesaw. There is no such thing in life as pleasure without pain, and there is no such thing as pain without pleasure. The more pleasure, the more pain in the end. The more pain, the more pleasure at the end. To contrast Achashverosh's pleasure that ended in pain, Mordechai, Esther and the Jewish people, went from the greatest pain, of fear, fasting, and frantic prayer, to the greatest pleasure, **מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֲבֵל**

לְיוֹם טוֹב. We actually celebrate Taanit Esther, the only fast we celebrate.

The rule in life is, that what you try taking for yourself, there is no promise that you can keep it. But what you give away, is yours forever. No one can take it away from you. Here is the shocking Rambam, on Purim, word for word. "It is better for a person to give generously to the poor, in Matanot LaEvyonim, than to expand his festive meal or send abundant gifts to friends in Mishloach Manot, for there is no joy greater or more magnificent than gladdening the hearts of the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the convert. One who brings happiness to these broken souls is likened to the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, as it says: "to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the crushed."

Why is it that when one is altruistic, when one gives without any intent to get back, is he the happiest of all? Because a person who does this fulfills the Tzelem Elokim, the Divine image within him and becomes similar to the Shechinah! He resembles G-d, and cleaves to Him! There is no greater happiness to your soul, than that!

What does it mean to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the crushed? There is a girl I know, a seminary girl, who does kindness, the Matanot LaEvyonim way, to look where to give without expecting anything in return. On the way to Eilat, four hours on a bus, there was a girl from her Sem that nobody wanted to sit next to. Someone unpopular, someone who was going the whole year in Israel socially unnoticed. This girl saw her sitting alone, and she made a choice. She sat down next to her. Not because they had anything to talk about...they didn't. Not because anyone would notice or give her credit... they wouldn't. She sat there for four hours, simply so that another girl would not have to spend four hours watching an empty seat beside her and asking herself why. Think about what that means. Four hours is a long time. Four hours of conversation that doesn't flow easily, four hours of quietly giving up whatever else the trip could have been. And at the end of those four hours, nothing. No applause, no recognition, no social gain.

But here is what the Rambam would say about that moment: that girl, on that bus to Eilat, was doing something divine! When you gladden the heart of someone who has been overlooked, who has been quietly hurting in a seat that everyone avoided, you are not just being kind. You are being G-dly! When another girl's loneliness matters to you more than your own comfort, you are resembling the Shechinah. In a world where everyone knew who was popular and who wasn't, she acted as though that didn't exist. She will carry it for the rest of her life, knowing that when it counted, she did the right

THE ART OF LISTENING TO YOUR RABBI

King Shaul was given a clear and absolute command from the prophet Shmuel, dictated by G-d: Go and utterly destroy Amalek. Do not spare them. Slay man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” (I Samuel 15:3) This was no ordinary war. The mission was not about political conquest or expansion but about fulfilling a divine decree: the eradication of Amalek, the nation that had attacked the Jews in the wilderness with no provocation, embodying the eternal force of evil. Since then, anyone who attacks Jews, just out of hatred, is considered from the root of Amalek.

Shaul fought and won the battle. However, instead of completing the task as commanded, he spared Agag, the king of Amalek, and preserved the finest sheep and cattle. Instead of listening to Shmuel, he followed the counsel of another great Sage and close friend, Doeg HaEdomi.

Why did Saul not kill Agag immediately?

Shaul had a moment of hesitation because, through prophetic vision, he foresaw that a righteous descendant would emerge from Agag's lineage. Our Rabbis tell us that Haman, who was a descendant of Agag, had descendants who converted and became great Rabbis in Bnei Brak, like Rabbi Shmuel bar Shilat. Shmuel bar Shilat is mentioned in multiple places in the Talmud as a dedicated and beloved teacher. He was known for his incredible devotion to his students and to education, someone who would treat his students like his own children, ensuring that they were not only knowledgeable but also well-cared for and

thing. Imagine the girl who when they call about her in shidduchim, they say, Oh, Chanie? She is the one that no one wants to sit next to on the bus to Eilat for 4 hours. Well, because of this chessed, of this girl, Chanie forever, is the girl, that someone wanted to sit next to, on her ride to Eilat.

No one can take away from this girl that good feeling, that she did the right thing, in the time when it mattered most.

disciplined in their studies. This insight shook Shaul. If something good could come from Agag's bloodline, perhaps it was not right to destroy him completely. However, this was a miscalculation, a classic example of human reasoning interfering with the direct command from Shmuel the Prophet in the Name of G-d. Shaul may have thought he was acting wisely, but in reality, he had disobeyed a direct order.

That night, G-d revealed to Shmuel: “I regret that I have made Shaul king, for he has turned away from following Me and has not carried out My commands.”(I Samuel 15:11) Shmuel was devastated. He stayed up the entire night crying and praying for Shaul, but in the morning, he knew what had to be done. When Samuel confronted Shaul, the king greeted him confidently: "Blessed are you to G-d! I have fulfilled the word of G-d!" Shmuel replied with the piercing question: “What then is this sound of sheep and cattle I hear?” If Shaul had truly obeyed, how could there still be livestock alive? Shaul, realizing the confrontation, attempted to justify himself: “The people spared the best of the sheep and cattle to offer them as sacrifices to G-d.” Shmuel responded with the eternal lesson: Obedience is better than sacrifice. Listening is better than the fat of rams. G-d values obedience over human rationalizations. Then came the final verdict: “Because you have rejected the word of G-d, He has rejected you as king.”

Shaul begged for forgiveness, but the decree had already been issued. His reign was over. Meanwhile, Agag spent the night in captivity in a pit. Agag, realizing that he was doomed, prayed

bitterly. He wept to G-d that night over the fact that he had no offspring, no legacy, it was going to be the end of Amalek. And in response to his tears, G-d allowed him a moment of salvation —just enough time to father a descendant. How? According to the Midrash, Amalek were skilled in sorcery. When they saw that Shaul was killing all of Amalek, they used magic to transform themselves into animals, blending among the sheep and cattle. That night, Agag was visited by a slave woman who had been magically disguised as an animal, and from that union, a child was conceived. This child's lineage would eventually lead to Haman the Agagite, the villain of the Purim story, who nearly succeeded in annihilating the Jewish people centuries later.

At dawn, Shmuel himself took up a sword to complete the mission that Shaul had failed to finish. Agag was brought before him, and he walked delicately, "ma'adannot" (gently, in a pampered way). He felt a false sense of security. Why? Because he saw before him an elderly prophet, not a warrior. He even said: "Surely the bitterness of death has passed." In other words: If I was going to be executed, it would have happened last night. If I am still alive, then maybe I have been spared. On a deeper level, he Agag was calm, as he knew, that the end of Amalek did not happen. He knew that his seed will live on.

Shmuel, however, delivered his final words: "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." Agag had used his sword to murder Jewish men. Now, justice would be served—measure for measure. Shmuel then executed Agag in a highly unusual manner. The text states: "And Samuel axed Agag to pieces before G-d in Gilgal." He did not merely kill him; he dissected him completely. This was a rare, severe form of execution—one that signified finality, an end to Agag's direct reign of terror. Yet, the damage had been done. Agag's lineage had already survived.

Shaul's hesitation had allowed Agag's descendants to survive, leading to Haman the Agagite—the arch-enemy of the Jews in the Persian Empire. Haman would go on to orchestrate a genocidal plot to wipe out the Jewish people. The very mercy Shaul had shown to Agag nearly resulted in the total destruction of the nation he had been chosen to protect.

However, history came full circle.

Esther, a descendant of Shaul, ultimately corrected his mistake. She and Mordechai led the Jewish people to victory, bringing Haman's downfall. On the 71st day of his reign, Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordechai.

When Agag said to Shmuel **וַיֹּאמֶר אָגָג אֶכֶן סָר מֵרֵמֶזֶת** The word **אֶכֶן** numerical value is 71. This is why Agag was walking to Shmuel so calmly. Agag was telling Shmuel that the day will come, when Amalek will rise for 71 days, to destroy the Jews. To which Shmuel responded, **וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל בְּאַשְׁרֵי שְׂכָלָה נָשִׁים חֲרָבָה בְּרֵית־שָׁבֵל מִנָּשִׁים אִמָּה**, hidden in these words, is that a Jewish woman, Esther, will take down Haman.

There are so many lessons we can take from this story. 1. Shaul thought he was acting wisely by sparing Agag, but human reasoning cannot override **הַשֵּׁם** Divine Command. 2. The Power of a Single Decision. One night of hesitation led to centuries of suffering. Haman's near-destruction of the Jews could have been prevented if Agag had been executed immediately. 3. Evil must be eliminated completely. When we allow small remnants of negativity to remain—whether in our personal lives, in society, or in history—it has a way of growing back stronger. 4. Prayer can change reality, even for the Wicked. Agag's heartfelt prayer in his final moments led to a descendant who nearly destroyed the Jewish people. 5. No mistake is beyond correction, even if it takes generations to fix. Although Shaul failed, Esther and Mordechai completed his mission centuries later.

There is a concept that was talked a lot about when I was growing up in Yeshiva amongst the serious Yeshiva boys. An Olama Haba Masechta. What Masechta, tractate, are you going to master by heart, that wherever you go, you can review the Talmud, something that you can take with you to Olam Haba? (Menorat Hamaor)

I got up at 4 a.m. to write this article right in time to get it out to the printer. Wasn't yet sure what to write, as I had a crazy week, of doing the right thing, despite how hard it is... Like apologizing to someone who I got into an argument with for getting into an argument with him, even though I was right. Working hard on a project, alone, while others, who should be more involved than me (at least so I believed), just stood by to watch. Or going to visit a friend, who was having a hard time, to be there for him, although he did not show me that he cared that much, that I took out my time to be there for him. Or turning myself into a pretzel for some of my family member, each one with what they are going through. One of the hardest laws in the Torah for me is to not hold a grudge. וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר . We are commanded to just let go of things, and allow life to go on. This is the only way that the world can survive. (Rambam Deot 7:8)

Then, while saying Birkot Hashahar I said, in my prayer, וְנִכַּף אֶת-יְצֵרִי לְהִשְׁתַּעֲבֹד-לְךָ, G-d, help me win my Yetzer Hara, to be subservient to You! Then, I realized something amazing. THIS WOULD BE MY OLAM HAZEH PRAYER. Yep. I just made that up. Imagine a prayer, that you have with you, on your lips, wherever you are in life. I don't have an Olam Haba Masechta, to take with me to the next world. But at least I could have, an Olam HazeH Tefilah, something that can take me through this world!

One of the ways to get on with life, to get over grudges, to smile through the stress, to serve G-d out of happiness despite the crisis of life, of the many things of self-care, is a sense of humor. To learn to laugh. I just heard in Israel a bad joke. They call it here, הומוור שחור. Here is an example of "Black Humor." It has nothing to do with black people. "There was once a woman who was dragging a couch down the stair case in her apartment building. A man saw her, and said,

"Hey, wait for your husband!" She responded, "What husband are you talking about? The couch will be much heavier if my husband would be here. He would be sitting on it!"

Here is another. 2 old women were sitting on a bench for many hours. One said to the other, Fruma, do you smell this horrible smell? It smells like a corpse!... FRUMA!!!!!!

I swim weekly Fridays in the School for the Blind pool in Jerusalem, an Olympic pool with separate hours, where serious swimmers come to do laps. There is a sauna there, that I go into, when I get tired from laps. Each Friday, at that hour, there are the same guys there, in the sauna. One guy, each week, lays down with his feet up, with socks covering his feet halfway, something strange. To break the silence I said, two weeks ago, "There is a statistic that says, that if you see someone in the sauna, laying down with his socks on half way, most chances, you will see him again laying there in the sauna with socks half on, each week! One Hassidic, two French guys who did Aliyah, a Kolliel guy, and the guy laying down, broke out in laughter.

As we continued to sit in the shvitz, sweating away, each one sitting silently, long enough to show how we are so manly and can sweat it out more than the next guy, I broke the silence again. "Does anyone know if this sweating thing even helps anyone? Does it do anything? " They all burst out laughing again. One said, "Of course it does. Statistics say, it helps the blood circulation, and it helps the breathing!" I said, "OK. Statistics say, that a good laugh helps solve all that and more... So why do we have to all sit her sweating? Why can't we just tell jokes instead?"

So they all challenged me, to say a joke. "I am not a funny guy. So if my joke is not funny, and you are not sure that I passed the punch line, I will bang on the wall of the sauna, like they do in shul to remind you of Yaaleh Vayavo, and you know to laugh. Do we have a deal?" They all burst out laughing, and agreed. "Ok. Here goes. There was once an older man and an older woman, who lived in the same nursing home. They were both lonely, but they liked to meet each morning to play chess.

One day, this elderly man, decided to have the courage to ask the woman, for her hand in marriage. So cute, right? She said, Yes! He was so happy when he went to sleep that night, so excited. But in the morning, when he woke up, he forgot what she said! Did she say she was willing to marry him, or she refused! He did not know what to do. But while playing chess again with her that morning, he again mustered up enough courage, to ask her, what she said just yesterday. Yes or No?

The old woman looked relieved, "It is so good you asked me that this morning. Because just yesterday, I told some guy, that I would marry him, but I forgot to who!

The whole sauna burst out laughing. When they calmed down, and there was quiet again. I banged on the wall, and they burst out laughing again. We all went back into the pool for laps. As one of the laps ended, I stood there, to rest for a minute, and one of the guys from my new Erev Shabbos Sauna Comedy Club, confessed to me, that he is having a hard time swimming after the sauna. אני שוחה וצוחק. I am swimming, and laughing, swimming and laughing. I told him, Good. Next week, its your turn to make everyone laugh.

He said, well, next week is Parashat Terumah. That is the week that none of the cheap people come to shul. What do you call a man who moves out of Israel, marries a covert, and moves back to Israel, with his new wife, when he does Aliyah? מעלה גרה. (I can't explain it, in English, if you did not get this one. Especially because I am Syrian community Jew, and people will take it the wrong way, with our edict about converts. Lol.)

Well, the black humor I heard yesterday, was connected to our Parasha. There was a man who asked his Rabbi for a Beracha. The Rabbi said, well if you want a Beracha that I will give you with a half a heart, it will cost you 500 shekel. If you want a Beracha with a whole heart, it will cost you 1000 shekel. The man said, What?! What type of thing is this? A Rabbi who takes money to give out blessings!? The Kohanim give out blessings, for free! And here you are, charging for your blessings! The Rabbi said, Well, look. That is why,

the Kohanim go barefoot! Because they don't charge!

Sometimes, the best Rabbis, are the ones with the best jokes. The ones who know how to make the people cheer up, and get them to laugh. כי הא דרבה, מקמי דפתח להו לרבנן אמר מילתא דבדיחותא, ובדחי רבנן. לסוף יתיב באימתא ופתח בשמעטא. Before Rabbah would give his class to the Rabbis, he would start off with something that would make every one laugh, so that people open up. Only then, would he sit with seriousness and start learning. (Shabbat 30b, Pesachim 117a)

But the best of the best Rabbis, are the ones, who are willing to go barefoot for you. The ones who will care for you, like a father cares for his son. Not that we should ever let them go without shoes. But the care that they have for us, is amazing. My mother would always tell me about Rav Ovadia Yosef. "The Rabbi used to come to Deal to give chizuk and to raise money for his institution יחזק דעת and later for Shas. He would regularly come either to eat at our house or I would prepare and bring meals to where they would be staying. One morning, as I rushed between getting the children out to school and bringing them the breakfast, I missed a step of the stairs, and I twisted my ankle in such a way that I couldn't walk. (I tore a ligament and ended up in a boot) Abba called and apologized that breakfast would be delivered a little bit late since I had gotten hurt. (The Rabbi kept a schedule so not to waste time from his learning). Fast forward maybe 8-10 years, and when you, Yosef, went with your father and father in law, to ask the Rabbi to be marry you off, to be mesader Kiddushin, one of the first things that the Rabbi asked was how was my foot and if there was any problem with my walking! He still felt badly that I had rushed and gotten hurt while trying to serve them! He was so happy when Abba (who already forgot about my ankle) assured him that I was getting around just fine. He then said רגלי חסידי ישמור...

The best Rabbis have a heart. The best Rabbis listen to you, better than how you listen to yourself. The best Rabbis remember you in all their prayers, and what is important to you, is important to them.

months later. On the 13th of Nissan when Haman's letters went out that they will be destroying a certain nation, just a few days after Haman rolled the dice, Mordechai and Esther decreed a three-day fast. But there were 11 months left, until the date of Haman's decree?! There was plenty of time to make a three-day fast! Why did they specifically and intentionally want to make the fast coincide with the first night of Pesach? Matzah and Succah are the only two times a year when we have a mitzvah from the Torah, to eat a Kazayit!

There was once a kind king that everyone loved, for his kindness and truth. But his servants were jealous of the king's favorite minister, and they set him up with a libel, and prosecuted him with false testimony. The judges took bribes to accept the false witnesses, and this minister was sent to death row. This loyal minister asked for a second chance in court, but again, the judges were bribed. The loyal minister then tried writing a letter to the king, knowing that the king loves justice; but his enemies bribed the king's closest servants, and the letter could not get to the king.

Desperately, the wise minister made his last move. He asked to be let out on bail, for just a couple of hours. He stood outside the king's palace and threw a stone that shattered the window of the king's private chamber, and was immediately arrested again. The king said, if in my kingdom there is a person who is willing to do such a thing to me, he certainly has a reason, and I want to judge this case myself, to learn what his complaint is against me and to hear what he has to say. When they brought this minister to the king, he started to cry and to beg forgiveness for disgracing the king, but he claimed: I had no other option to get to the king, except in this way. All my attempts to come to the king, or to send a message, were of no avail, as I was subjected to libel, by my enemies. The king promised to get to the bottom of it all, and he put an end to the lives of those disloyal servants.

The lesson from this story sheds light on the decision of Mordechai and Esther to cancel the Seder night of the Jewish people, that year. The Jews were going through a horrible time, a time when G-d was hiding Himself, וְאֶנְכִי הַסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי, וְאֶנְכִי הַסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי, And I will hide My Face on that day. And

a time when all prayers of the Jews would be blocked. וְאֶנְכִי הַסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי וְאֶנְכִי הַסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי: Also when I would scream and shout, he blocked my prayer. (Eicha 3;8) That is why Mordechai thought, what will it help if we pray, if the prayers will not be accepted? So, I will "throw a stone at the King's Window" - we won't eat Matzah, Marror, no four cups of wine, and then, we will be able to shake the Heavens. (Daf al Hadaf- in name of Tiferet Shlomo)

It is so interesting. What got them into this mess, that all gateways to G-d were shuttered tight?! Was it just eating from the feast of Achashverosh, a feast that was 100 percent Kosher, with Mordechai as the Mashgiach, פְּרָצוֹן אִישׁ-וְאִישׁ, with the people under a threat of betraying their loyal identity to the new, all-powerful king? Was that so bad? The Jews have done much worse things than enjoy a meal by a gentile King!?!

The answer is that the Jews *enjoyed* the meal. They saw the utensils of the Temple, and instead of mourning and crying, they were able to swallow the food and enjoy it! G-d felt, Hey! What about us? What about our relationship? What about the 70-year Exile coming to a close, and you don't even miss Me? You are enjoying being in Exile?

This is a grave claim. Even if, at other times, Jews have sinned, it could be argued that they did not enjoy the sin, identify with it, or internalize it, so the sin did not penetrate. Enjoyment at Achashevrosch's feast, enjoying a non-Jewish life, on the other hand, penetrates the heart. Although the exile after the First Temple was destroyed lasted only 70 years, we are still in exile now, thousands of years after the destruction of the Second Temple. Why? Because the three cardinal sins that led to the downfall of the First Temple were "external". In contrast, senseless hate has, by definition, its source in the heart. The sin of the feast was neither eating the food nor attending the party: it was the enjoyment of the occasion— an unspoken acceptance of Exile and a kind of admission of betrayal of the Temple. מפני שנהנו מעבודתו של אותו רשע (Megillah 12a)

In any relationship, many things can be forgiven, but one thing can't. *Enjoying* a relationship outside

the relationship. Mordechai knew that he needed to bring back the relationship, to open a conversation between G-d and His people, and the way to do that was making the Jews realize how much they were going to miss eating Matzah! How much they were going to miss having a Seder night connection, with their G-d! There was no other way, no better stone to break the glass, to wake up the connection! Mordechai knew that not mourning the Temple was the underlying sin of the Seudah, so he did not just fast: he fasted like a mourner, with sackcloth and ashes!

This explains other difficulties in the Megillah story. Why did Mordechai choose to fast and pray as his first move to eradicate the danger of the decree? Why the rush? First, do your Hishtadlut. At least, let Esther know, first, that you are getting the whole Jewish nation to mourn their future, before you walk through the Shushan streets screaming “Marah”, something bitter is going to happen?! Maybe Esther could help! Why take the difficult, drastic move first? And, why did Esther invite Haman to the first meal? She could have just invited Haman to the second meal?

The answer is because Mordechai knew that the root of the problem, the reason why this decree came into fruition to begin with, was the lack of connection with G-d. Mordechai knew, then, not to accept the fresh clothes Esther offered him when he was wearing sack clothes, but instead, to continue to pray, because the *real* solution was not Esther’s moves. It was the Jews going back to their relationship. Esther knew that the Jews would not fully reconnect with G-d, so long they had a Jewish Queen in Achashverosh’s White House, so long they had someone to rely on. She knew, that she had to make the Jews think that she betrayed them, that she was now friends with Haman, and on Selfie steps to reconnect:

1. Find out what you need to DISCONNECT from, so the you can RECONNECT.
2. Meditate on how dependent we are on Him. We don’t have “options” to rely on.
3. Enjoy the merit to do His Mitzvah, enjoy the merit to be able to speak to Him, enjoy the merit to be His own chosen people.
4. Find the right mediums, and connect with the deeper meaning: Jewish Music means music that helps you connect to being more Jewish, not Judaism to help you connect to the music. A bar

Haman’s side, to make the Jews truly reconnect with G-d.

When Haman came to get Mordechai, to parade him around on the king’s horse, Mordechai was on the third day of his fast, teaching the students the laws of the Kemitzah of Minhat Haomer, as the day was the 16th of Nissan. When Haman saw this, he said, your Kemitzah of barley outweighed all the 10,000 silver talents I offered Achashverosh. (Roughly \$165,000,000 USD).

Why was Mordechai teaching the students about Korbanot, about the Bet Hamikdash, if he was afraid they were to be annihilated 11 months later? Because korbanot comes from the root, Karov, getting close to G-d. G-d does not want us bringing ourselves as sacrifices to get close to him; He wants our Korbanot instead.

The Purim story is a story of reconnect. Ask any woman who is having a problem in her Shalom Bayit what pains her most. She will tell you. It is being in a relationship that there is no relationship, where she *feels* alone. Where she feels that she and her husband are not *enjoying* time together, even if they are together. It is not the financial difficulty. It is not that her husband is busy. It is that she feels that his heart is not with her.

To get G-d to listen to us, to *force* Him to listen to us, to shake the Heavens, there is only one way. As we say in Shir Hashirim, מְלֶךְ אֶקוֹר בְּרֵהֲטִים, Rashi explains this, The King who is tied to those who run to do Mitzvoth. הקדוש ברוך הוא נקשר באהבה Because when we run to do His Mitzvoth out of love, we have, so to speak, G-d’s Hands tied! Mordechai knew that bringing back the love for the night of the Seder was the way to bring back the love of G-d!

mitzvah means having a bar to connect to the Mitzvah, not the mitzvah to be a reason to make a bar. Etc.

QUESTION/ANSWER OF THE WEEK

Q: Rabbi Farhi, I learn in the Mir, and I help Bachurim with their learning. I enjoy your papers, but I don't understand why you recommend learning new ways of learning. The story goes, that the Chazon Ish would say, that the best way to teach, the best way to learn, is the way old school. Kametz Alef, Uh! Why are you bringing in new ways, things like speed reading, or modules we never heard of? Even if they work, maybe they are just short-term learning success? Also, why should we learn tools from the Goyim on how to read and learn? Anonymous

A: I really respect that you are open with me and trust in me enough that we can be vulnerable with each other. You are right. The best way to learn, or to teach how to learn, is old school. The problem is, when we do not listen, we do not follow, what they taught us, in the elementary levels of school. For example, the secret to speed reading is to read with your finger moving on the place. That was a discovery by Evelyn Wood, that she built the whole foundation of her theory on this discovery of reading with the finger, that she found by chance. Every Rebbi teaches this in Cheder, in Elementary, to read with the finger, to keep it on the place. Every picture of every Gadol learning, you will see that they have a finger on the place, and have the back off the chair. These are just small pointers of effective learning that make a huge difference in effective reading/learning.

I will give you an example. Mastering Lashon Hakodesh is a must, in order for you to learn most effectively. So many new "Rebbes" today tell me that Dikduk, lashon hakodesh, does not need to be mastered by their students, or they should know it already, or it is not that important. Saying dikduk is not important is like saying, let us erase 10 percent of Rashi's in Tanach, because they are dikduk Rashis. These laws are not hard to understand, if you just spend some time with N Marcusson's book, Mastering the basics of Loshon Hakodesh. There is no reason why Rebbiim today, themselves do not know the difference between אמר, אומר, יאמר. It is ridiculous that the system is becoming more and more dependent on context clues, and less dependent on Dikduk. And, if we are already erasing 10 percent of the Rashis in Chumash, we might as well just erase the whole Rashi, because, when the Siftei Chachamim explains what is bothering Rashi, the problems of Rashi are mostly Dikduk questions. There are only 250 root words in the whole lashon Hakodesh, everything else is dikduk expansions of the same words. If you master that book, you can read and understand every passuk in Tanach, with Rashi, without looking at English translation! You could read Tehillim, you can pray, and actually communicate with G-d, from the Hebrew words alone, in the most natural way, knowing that you know what you are really supposed to communicate.

The tools that an effective learning specialist learns from the Goyim, are just tools to help us understand what the old school is trying to tell us, but there is a disconnect. For example, the tool that "If there is a problem that is too hard for you to tackle, it is because there is something that is easier for you to tackle, that you did not solve yet. First solve the smaller problem, and then you will be able to solve the bigger problem." This tool is found in Rashi's explanation of the words we say every day in Shema **יְהוָה אֱחָד** . *If you learn the old, you can learn the new.*

There is nothing wrong using tools from the Goyim, as long as you can find a source for it in the Torah, or in our Rabbis. All the tools I teach, all the tools I help people with, are learning tools that are being used by my Rabbis naturally, and they are just frustrated that they are tired trying to explain the tools to their students who are just not getting it. They are tools that all the top 30 percent of every learning system I was ever a part of, used naturally. Whether the learning partner was from Mir, Brisk, Chevron, or Ponivitch.

This happens to be a great time, to open the discussion, if it is at all valid to use tools from secular sources, since we have the Torah, that is the source of all wisdom. When King Achashverosh was angry with his Queen, Vashti, he consulted with others as to how to punish her. ויאמר המלך להכמים יודעי העתים *And the king (Achashverosh) said to the wise men, those who know to calculate the times...* The Gemara asks, מאן רבנן? הכמים? *Who were these wise men? It was the Rabbis!* (Megillah 12b) The Maharsha asks how the Talmud knows that the wise men being referred to, here, were the Rabbis. Aren't the intelligent gentiles also considered wise? Don't we see that the Torah calls the advisors of Pharaoh "wise" (Shemot 7; 11)? Doesn't the Midrash say, *'if a person tells you there is wisdom amongst the gentiles, believe him'* (M. Eicha 2; 13)? The Maharsha explains that since it says יודעי העתים, *those who know how to calculate the lunar months*, we learn that Achashverosh was referring to the Jewish Sages.

This is strange. The Talmud said that "the wise" means the Talmid Chacham, even *before* quoting Achashverosh's saying he sought those who could calculate lunar months. Rabbi Y. Galinski has a different answer. He says that the original wise man is the Talmid Chacham. He is "the real McCoy", for the Torah is the origin of all wisdom. Rabbi Galinski says, in the name of the Kadmonim, that all wisdom was once possessed by the Jewish people. When the gentiles ruled over us, we lost some of our wisdom and they received some of our wisdom. When we see what we think is some new wisdom in their books, we are impressed. But that is only a small iota of the wisdom we once had. The Mishna in Avot teaches, *בה הפך בה והפך בה דכלא בה Turn it over and over (examine the Torah's teachings from every side, from every angle), for it contains everything* (5; 22). In his introduction to his Sefer on the Torah, the Ramban writes that all wisdom is hidden in the Torah. King Solomon, to whom G-d gave wisdom and scientific knowledge, knew everything from Torah. He wrote the Book of Cures with his knowledge of the secret powers of different herbs. He knew the essence of everything in Creation, from the tallest trees to the lowest blades of grass; he spoke about the essence of the animals, the birds, the fish, etc. (see Melachim 1: 5, 13)

R Galinsky quotes the Vilna Gaon, that the wisdom of the gentiles is only a reflection of a reflection of the wisdom of our Torah. If we had learnt Torah and Mussar properly, we would see it directly in the words of the Torah and our Sages! The gentiles have wisdom of self help, on a certain level, based on research of living life in this world. They speak the language that we got used to in Exile. They spelled it out in a way that we can relate to it as tools. But of course, if the self help tool is not found or does not appear to be based on something in Torah or Chazal, either we could not find it, even though it is there somewhere, or it is so simple it does not need to be said, or it is not true! Because the ultimate self help books are the Torah and the wisdom of our Sages.

I hope this was helpful.

Yosef

G-d's Encrypted Messages

One of the most interesting items in the garments of the Kohen Gadol was the Urim Vetumim. What exactly was the Urim Vetumim? There was a parchment between the garment that held the Choshen, and the Choshen with the array of twelve stones. This parchment that had Holy Names on it was written by G-d and was found only in the times of the first Temple. The word Urim, lights, was because the letters of the Tribes would light up, to answer important questions of the Nation.

The letters would light up out of order, and this would be G-d's way of answering the question at hand, in an encrypted way. What is the word Tumim? The word Tumim means that the Kohen Gadol needed to have Ruach Hakodesh in his heart, in order for him to understand G-d's encrypted message (See Rabbenu Bachye and Ramban). The word Tam reflects the Middah of Tifferet, which reflects the heart and torso (See footnotes on

Rabbenu Bachye on the words ויעקב איש תם (Bereshit 25, 27).

We find in the Tanach a few occurrences where the Urim Vetumim were used. Chana was praying at the Mishkan, in Shiloh, where Eli Hakohen was a Kohen Gadol. She was childless, and she wanted a son who would be a servant of G-d. Chana was praying with her face to the wall and her heart to G-d. She was the first ever to pray silently, very quietly. Chana was a holy woman, one of the 7 prophetesses. Her unusual behavior, praying silently while moving her hands, made Eli Hakohen wonder if she was at her senses; or if, perhaps, she was under the influence of alcohol. So, Eli approached Chana with the statement: 'Until when will you be drunk? Rid yourself of wine!' To which Chana responded, ותאמר לה אדני, אשה קשת-רוח אבני גנין ושכר לא שתיתי ואשפד את-נפשי לקני: *No, my master. I am a woman that has suffered, and I did not drink wine or beer, and I poured out my soul to G-d* (Shmuel 1;1; 15). Our Rabbis explain, further, what Chana was telling Eli. *You are not a master in this matter. And the Shechina is not upon you, and you have no Ruach Hakodesh now, and you judged me unfavorably... And because he judged her unfavorably, Eli needed to bless her...*(Berachot 31)

The Vilna Gaon asks, why did Chana not just mention that Eli judged her unfavorably? Why did she add that he was also not a master in this, and had no Ruach Hakodesh?

The Vilna Gaon's explanation follows the line of what has been mentioned above. Eli Hakohen did not just assume that Chana was drunk. *He saw it in letters lit up on the Choshen on his chest.* But, the encrypted message that G-d sent through the Choshen were the letters ה, כ, ש, ר, and Eli misinterpreted the message to mean שכרה, a drunken woman. The truth, though, was one of two other possibilities: כשרה, like Sarah our Matriarch who prayed for a child. Or כשרה, a Kosher woman.

Although the Urim, the illuminated letters were precisely correct, the way they were deciphered was not "Tumim", was not with Ruach Hakodesh.

So, Chana told Eli, you misinterpreted the message, for you did not have Ruach Hakodesh.

You could be getting the most accurate messages, in life. From G-d. From your work. From your family. But it is up to you *how* to decipher them. Even in health, even from the best doctor, his opinion is just a subjective one, especially if there might be personal interest involved in his decision. Whenever one needs to make a medical procedure, it is so important to have a second opinion. Because as great as a doctor may be, there is only a certain degree to which he can see things objectively. Even the greatest research is subjective, up to a point, as the research, itself, is dependent on the researcher and his decision as to what to focus on. As great as Eli Hakohen was, and he was one of the greatest people our nation ever had, and as great as the tool was to enable him to tap into messages from G-d,... because his heart was not "Tumim", because he did not have his Ruach Hakodesh, he misinterpreted the message...

The only one who ever got G-d's unencrypted messages exactly as they were transmitted was Moshe Rabbenu. When Moshe taught G-d's 613 commandments, he would prophesy, using the words וַיֹּאמֶר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְקוּקָה: (Bamidbar 30; 2) **This is the word that Hashem commanded.** All other prophets used the words כה תאמר, **So you shall say.** They could not relay G-d's word, for all they saw was a vision, and they needed to translate that vision into words. All they could relay was the message itself, but not the way it was relayed to them.

In every circumstance we find ourselves in life, G-d is sending messages to us. Through all of our senses, He sends us messages. He sends us love. He sends us compassion. He sends us kindness. Failing to seriously contemplate G-d's encrypted messages is something that G-d is not happy about. יָדַע שׂוֹר קִנְיָהּ וְחֹמֹר אֲבוֹס בְּעֵלָיו יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַע עַמִּי לֹא הִתְבּוֹנֵן: *An ox knows its owner, and the donkey knows the feeding trough of its master, but the Jewish People don't know, My nation does not contemplate* (Yeshayahu 1).

So, what is the solution? How does one tap into the ability to decipher the encrypted Messages of G-d with precision?

We have two solutions. 1. Ask your Rabbi, so that you have the Torah's view about this, and that you

DRESS WELL

It is amazing how much our psychology is dependent on how we dress. What we wear not only tells other people who we are. It is the greatest reflection of your self-perception. So many times, I have found that by helping a person change their wardrobe, they can change their self esteem. It might be a bit expensive, but clothing can do more to your psyche than hours of therapy. Change your clothes, and you will change your life.

It is so ironic how every climactic part of the Torah's story makes mention of clothing. G-d made clothing for Adam after the Sin. After the flood, Shem and Yefet covered their father, Noah. Yaakov wears Esav's garment to take the blessings. Yosef's coat was taken from him. The Jews merited being saved from Egypt in the merit of their clothing. When Shmuel got upset at Shaul for not wiping out Amalek, he ripped his garment and said that the royalty would be passed on to someone else. It seems that there is something very deep about clothing.

One of the main reasons why we do not bring Korban Pesach on the Temple Mount today is because we do not have the materials that make the Kohen's clothing. We are not 100 percent sure what T'chelet is, and T'chelet is one of the crucial components of the Kohen's clothing. A Kohen can do the Temple Service only if he is classified a Kohen, and to be a Kohen, he needs to wear the priestly garments. This is so interesting. We know that the Beit Hamikdash, even without the Aron Hakodesh, was considered a Beit Hamikdash. In the Second Beit Hamikdash, we had no Aron, and still, the Kohanim were able to perform the Service. It seems that the Kohen's clothing is essential to performance of the Service, even more so than the "furniture" that made up the Mishkan. Why?

If you look through the whole story of the Megillah, you'll find that the climax occurred when

don't rely on your own subjective opinion. 2. Purify your heart. Make it Tumim. Make it humble. Keep your calm. And don't be judgmental.

Esther "donned royalty". (6:1) ותלבש אסתר מלכות. That is when things started to turn around. We make mention of the fact that Mordechai, also, wore royalty. (8; 15) What is the meaning behind all of this?

There is something interesting in the Aleph Bet. After the letter Aleph, we have the letters א, ב, ג, ד. The letters that spell the word "cloth". The reason why G-d wanted the אלה בית in this order was because it serves to teach us that G-d, אלוהי של עולם, Master of the World, is always hiding behind a cloth in the world. Everything we see, everything we experience, is just G-d's garment. G-d is hiding everywhere, behind everything. Every noun, every verb that you can come up with in the Aleph Bet, every person, place or thing, every action, is just G-d hiding behind a cloth. The clothing of G-d, the world we see, is the way G-d *portrays* Himself to the World.

Now, if you take the letters א, ב, ג, ד and you do אב"ש, which means, you take the letters of אב"ג, ד and you look at the corresponding letters at the other end of the Alef Bet, the letters that you get, are שקר. Falsehood. When you don't look at the world from the perspective of Alef, Alufo Shel Olam, when you do not see the world as a בגד, as a "cloth" concealing G-d, you are living a world of שקר. When you look at Nature as an independent thing in and of itself, independent of Alef, you are seeing שקר. At every climactic point in Jewish history, G-d was projecting Himself through בגד, making sure that things happened the way they did. Nothing happened without G-d wanting it to happen.

The same is true about your clothing. You, a G-dly Image, can wear clothes that are either projecting who you are, a reflection of your innermost self, or a projecting lie, a false image, someone who you are not. When you have a hard time deciding what to wear, it is because you are having some type of

identity crisis in disguise, not knowing who you really are that day, not knowing how to project a certain part of your personality and self that day. Or, you may have difficulty in deciding who or what you want to connect with, like the word קשר. But clothing can be an independent, untrue picture of self that you are portraying to the world, or to yourself, a שקר.

The Kohanim are not Kohanim, in regards to Temple Service, if they are not portraying their true identity, לכבוד ולתפארת. If they are not wearing the clothing that reminds them to focus constantly on serving G-d, they are not Kohanim. Because the Kohanim's clothes make the Kohen a Kohen, because wearing them causes them to connect emotionally, קשר, to the service that they are doing. (See Sefer Hachinuch 109) If the Kohen does not connect emotionally, if he has thoughts that are not לכבוד ולתפארת, the Service can be disqualified. If they are not wearing that uniform that puts their whole existence in line with their service, to bring G-d honor, and to show G-dliness to the world, they are not considered Kohanim. And if they are not classified as a Kohen, the sacrificial service never started.

When you change the way you dress, you change the way you feel, you change who you associate with. You change the way people perceive you, and the way you perceive yourself. The greatest change in the Purim story happened when Esther wore Malchut, when she wore royalty, because then, she connected with the inner concept that she is a queen, and a messenger of G-d in this world. When she dressed differently, she felt different, and when she felt different, she merited Ruach Hakodesh. (Megillah 14b) Because at that moment, she realized how everything around her is just a

THE BIRTH OF THINKINGABOUTME.ORG

This time of year is very special for me. It is the time of year that Thinkingaboutme.org was created. It all happened one Friday morning, in the long, double-Adar winter z'man of 2011. After dropping the kids off at school, I sat on my couch, with a pen and paper in hand, and wrote out a plan. At the time, I was being taught some self-help

בגד, a cloth covering G-d, which is true Malchut, because nothing can stop G-d, or you who represent G-d. Until now, she was seeing just Sheker. But after fasting, davening, doing Teshuva, she reached that level of being a queen, not only externally, but the level of being the Jewish Queen each and every one is inside. Mordechai, also, reached this level of realization that nothing exists except G-d; and therefore, he totally disregarded Haman and Amalek, that represent the Sheker that there is a power of Nature in the world independent of G-d. Mordechai reached Malchut, the identity of the Jewish King that each and every Jew has inside, that G-d is unstoppable, and if we represent G-d in this world, then we are also unstoppable. So, Mordechai, also, merited Ruach Hakodesh.

This is the month of Adar. The month of Aderet, which means that we are to don the clothing of the Midah of Malchut. That only G-d exists. This can be done specifically in the month that there was the Plague of Darkness in Egypt (Nissan was Plague of Firstborn, so Adar was the month that had the Plague of Darkness); because in the darkness, when nothing is making sense, we have an opportunity to reach that level of realization that everything around us is just G-d's בגד.

If you find a talmid chacham with a stain on his clothing, he is deserving of death. Because he makes himself despised in the eyes of the people, and that makes Torah hated. (Shabbat 114a) What you wear represents who you are. It represents who and what you stand for. It communicates to the world around you how you perceive yourself, and it portrays how you perceive others, who and what you want to associate with.

Make sure you dress well.

concept in Rabbi Geisler's coaching course, from some gentile book. I asked the Rabbi, "Why do we need to learn this stuff from the gentiles? You bring so many self help concepts from Torah sources. Wouldn't it be good enough if one was able to derive this same self-help concept from Shaar HaT'vunah of the Chafetz Chaim?" He

answered me, “100%! If we had learnt Torah and Mussar properly, we would see it directly in the words of the Torah and our Sages! The gentiles have wisdom of self help, on a certain level, based on research of living life in this world. They speak the language that we got used to in Exile. They spelled it out in a way that we can relate to it as tools. But of course, if the self help tool is not found or does not appear to be based on something in Torah or Chazal, either we could not find it, even though it is there somewhere, or it is so simple it does not need to be said, or it is not true! Because the ultimate self help books are the Torah and the wisdom of our Sages.” So, I asked him, “Well, in the course, we are getting these tools sourced from the Torah; but what if we had access to self help literature that spelled out these tools to the Torah world, sourcing them in the Torah, so that people who are looking to better their lives, to live like better Jews, could have such knowledge for better living? What if we found, in the Torah, the self help from G-d, and we could spell it out in a way that people can relate to it, so they can see for themselves how the Torah can improve their personal lives?” The Rabbi said, “Yosef, if you can do that, that would be amazing! There is always a deeper truth that the Torah has to offer. If you can write out these concepts, you could change the lives of many, many people.” That Friday, Thinkingaboutme.org was born.

When King Achashverosh was angry with his Queen, Vashti, he consulted with others as to how to punish her. ויאמר המלך להכמרים יודעי העתים *And the king (Achashverosh) said to the wise men, those who know to calculate the times...* The Gemara asks, מאן הכמרים? רבנן! *Who were these wise men? It was the Rabbis!* (Megillah 12b) The Maharsha asks how the Talmud knows that the wise men being referred to, here, were the Rabbis. Aren't the intelligent gentiles also considered wise? Don't we see that the Torah calls the advisors of Pharaoh “wise” (Shemot 7; 11)? Doesn't the Midrash say, ‘if a person tells you there is wisdom amongst the gentiles, believe him’ (M. Eicha 2; 13)? The Maharsha explains that since it says יודעי העתים, *those who know how to calculate the lunar*

months, we learn that Achashverosh was referring to the Jewish Sages.

This is strange. The Talmud said that “the wise” means the Talmid Chacham, even *before* quoting Achashverosh's saying he sought those who could calculate lunar months. Rabbi Y. Galinski has a different answer. He says that the original wise man is the Talmid Chacham. He is “the real McCoy”, for the Torah is the origin of all wisdom. Rabbi Galinski says, in the name of the Kadmonim, that all wisdom was once possessed by the Jewish people. When the gentiles ruled over us, we lost some of our wisdom and they received some of our wisdom. When we see what we think is some new wisdom in their books, we are impressed. But that is only a small iota of the wisdom we once had.

The Mishna in Avot teaches, הפך בה והפך בה דכלא *Turn it over and over* (examine the Torah's teachings from every side, from every angle), *for it contains everything* (5; 22). In his introduction to his Sefer on the Torah, the Ramban writes that all wisdom is hidden in the Torah. King Solomon, to whom G-d gave wisdom and scientific knowledge, knew everything from Torah. He wrote the Book of Cures with his knowledge of the secret powers of different herbs. He knew the essence of everything in Creation, from the tallest trees to the lowest blades of grass; he spoke about the essence of the animals, the birds, the fish, etc. (see Melachim 1: 5, 13)

R Galinsky quotes the Vilna Gaon, that the wisdom of the gentiles is only a reflection of a reflection of the wisdom of our Torah. A great speaker in Israel, Rabbi Yitzhak Fanger, writes a beautiful story in the prologue to his new book, FHT-Fanger Healing Technique: Once, an experienced thief set out in the morning, searching for “prey”. He noticed a rich man, who purchased a big diamond after having closed a lucrative deal, right in front of the thief's envious eyes. The thief's eyes lit up! The rich man boarded a train to travel home, holding his attaché case in his hand, with the precious diamond hidden within. The thief, followed the



rich man onto the train. The rich man entered a sleeping cabin, to rest during the long ride home. The thief followed him, and sat down nearby. The thief waited patiently for the rich man to fall asleep. Finally, it happened! The rich man dozed the thief quickly opened the attaché case. To his bitter dismay, the diamond wasn't there! Ever so gently, he slid his hand into the man's pockets, but the diamond wasn't anywhere to be found! The thief did not give up. He checked again and again, but to no avail. Dawn broke, and still, he did not have the diamond! Sunrises woke up the rich fellow from his sweet slumber. He turned and noticed the thief sitting next to him, looking very disturbed, and rubbing his tired, red eyes. "Why do you look so disturbed, sir?" The thief answered, "I'll tell you the truth. I have been stalking you from the time you bought the diamond, for I planned to steal it

from you. This is my parnassah; I am a professional thief. But now, I promise you, I give you my honest word, that I won't take it from you. Just please, tell me, where did you hide it? Until now, my pickpocketing efforts have never been fruitless." The rich man answered, "I'll tell you. I noticed that you were stalking me like a shadow, the whole day. I figured that you wanted to steal the diamond. So, when we entered the sleeping cabin, I hid the diamond in your coat pocket."

The nature of man is to look "outside" for solutions, while the real answer exists "inside". The root of all wisdom, the ultimate truth in life, is found in our Torah; it is in our own pockets, if we would only look there. Even the gentiles, even Achashverosh, knew it!

ANTICIPATION THERAPY

Happiness is something that will help us in so many life areas. The Arizal was quoted as saying that sadness is what ruins a person's Parnassah. And when a person brings happiness into his life, he brings Parnassah. This is hinted at in the end letters of the words *והיית אך שמח*. The letters spell the name of the Angel who is responsible of Parnassah – *חַת"ך*. At times, all you need in order to close a deal is a real smile, but the real smile is sometimes so hard to keep on our faces. All people search happiness, but only a minority find it.

Pesach occurred in Adar and Nissan – so these are happy months, months of miracles, hope and redemption. We begin to be happy in these months because, as the Baal Shem Tov would say, *כִּי־בְשִׂמְחָה תֵצְאוּ*. When you feel happy, you can leave your difficulties behind. Because when you are happy, miracles happen. Through happiness, we will be redeemed. To keep this happiness a whole year long, one needs not just one month of happiness, but two.

The mitzvah of happiness in Adar is not just for the holiday of Purim. It is the mitzvah of the month. As the passuk says, *The month that was reversed for them from grief to joy*. (Esther 9:22) Happiness has a number of elements to it. What, specifically, is the happiness of Adar about? And, is there something unique in the month of Adar that made G-d want the holiday to fall out then, and not in another time?

The happiness of Adar is an inner happiness, a positive state of mind. When R' Akiva saw a fox exiting the Holy of Holies after the destruction of the Temple, although his friends were crying, he was laughing. *R' Akiva, why are you happy to see the Temple in total destruction? He answered, why are you crying? If the prophecy of Uriah that the Temple will be plowed under came true, the prophecy of Zecharia will definitely come true, יָשְׁבוּ זָקְנִים וְזָקֵנוֹת בְּרַחֲבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם*. *Men and women of ripe old age will yet again dwell in Jerusalem...* With these words, R' Akiva's friends announced, *You have consoled us*. You have opened a window of hope for us.

Rashi explains why Adar is a time to increase happiness. *משנכנס אדר – ימי נסים היו לישראל: פורים ופסח*. We begin to be happy in the month of Adar *for there were miracles then* – Purim and Pesach. (Taanit 29a) The miracles of Purim and

R Noach Weinberg would teach that one way to happiness is to anticipate something amazing. Then, you will have much more pleasure from what you anticipate, because you already preprogrammed yourself to view this upcoming experience as amazing. Happiness begins from the minute we hope, from the anticipation that something amazing is about to happen. If you always look forward to something, you will always be happy.

R' Chaim Shmuelevitz teaches this, as well. When we anticipate something we do not want, we cannot stay happy. The Or Hachaim in Vayechi tells us that the reason sometimes the Torah refers to Yaakov as Yaakov, and at other times Yisrael is that when he was happy, he was called Yisrael. But when he was down, when he was in pain, when he was worried..., he was referred to as Yaakov. This answers the question – How did the angel of Esav hurt Yaakov? Wasn't Yaakov able to overpower him? The Seforno writes, on the words *וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יוֹרֵא כִּי לֹא יִגַּע בְּכַף-יָרְכוּ וַתִּקַּע כַּף-יָרְכוּ יַעֲקֹב* *And he saw that he could not reach him, and he touched his hip, and he displaced the hip of Yaakov.* The words that say that the angel could not overcome Yaakov mean that as long as Yaakov was connected with G-d, in thought, or in speech, the angel could not cause him harm. But once the Angel of Esav told Yaakov of the future sins of the Jewish nation's leaders, *sins that come from Yaakov's hip, from his descendants*, this got Yaakov worried. And these worries made Yaakov vulnerable. Because when Yaakov was worried, he lost connection with G-d, for just a second.

R Wolbe teaches something amazing. All real happiness in life is a combination of two opposites joining – man and woman – body and soul – heaven and earth – G-d and His people. When it rains, it is the joining between heaven and earth, and this is the happiness of Sukkot at the beginning of the rainy season. This is why it is so important to learn Torah with happiness, and to pray to Hashem with happiness, for, as we know, prayer and Torah are where G-d and His people connect. “When you pray – you are talking to G-d. When

you learn – G-d is talking to you”. If you are not happy when you are learning – G-d is not talking to you. *פְּקוּדֵי יְקֻנָּה יִשְׁרִים מְשֻׁמְתֵי-לֵב*. If you are not happy when praying, you are not talking to G-d.

Adar is when winter and summer meet. It is the time when last year meets the new year that begins with Nissan. It is a time that past meets future. It is a time to anticipate, to say that the past is the past and the future can be a new beginning, if only we can find hope in the present. Hope in G-d that He can start everything anew. It is the month in which you have the most hope, because it is the month that is *אלף (אלופו של עולם) דר*. G-d is among us in a special way.

According to Sefer Yetzirah, the month of Adar corresponds to the feeling of laughter. Laughter is when the opposite of what you expected happens. Adar is correspondent to the tribe of Naftali, and Naftali's power is *גַּם-יִגְלֵתִי*... *נִפְתָּלִים* | *נִפְתָּלִים* | *אֶלֶהִים* | *נִפְתָּלִים*. It is the month when, if we pray hard enough, learn Torah enough, G-d gives us the power to change even His own decisions, Kavayachol. It is the month of *וַיִּנְהַפְּוֹד הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹטוּ הַיְהוּדִים הַמָּזָה בְּשָׁנֵיהֶם*.

Why did Haman pick this month of all months? In the timeline of Jewish History, Purim took place when the Jews were a bit confused. They had experienced nearly a millennium of miracles. They learnt to rely on miracles. And now, they were in exile, and dependent on the laws of nature. They were at a spiritual decline. And their only hope was the words of the prophet Yirmiyahu, that after seventy years of exile, G-d would bring them back home to Eretz Yisrael. The Talmud, in Megillah, tells us how the people of the time miscalculated the 70 years, and thought that the time had passed, and that G-d had given up on His People, H"V.

Haman picked this month of Adar, out of all months, for there was no holiday, no miracle in it. Adar is the month in which the leader of the Jews, Moshe Rabbenu, the man who brought miracles to the nation, the man who led the nation into G-dliness, died. Moshe's death in Adar was seemingly a proof to Haman that Jews have times when they are not G-dly. Haman wanted to use this



opportunity to make the Jewish people doubt that G-d was really in their midst. (עמלק=ספק;המך-העץ) He wanted to take away our hope in the future.

It did not take long for Haman to learn how mistaken he was. The hope of our nation, the G-dliness of our People, is our connection to Moshe's Torah, not to Moshe himself. Haman came to get Mordechai, to give him a haircut and take him around on the king's horse. He saw that Mordechai was teaching his students the law of the day: it was the 16th of Nissan, the second day of Pesach. The day we bring the Korban HaOmer. Haman expected Mordechai to be teaching the laws of Sh'mad – of יהרג ואל יעבור – in Yeshiva. How one should die, Al Kidush Hashem. But instead, Mordechai was teaching the laws of the Omer that would have been brought on that same day, had the Temple been rebuilt!

+ or –

Probably the hardest part of coaching is getting started. How do you begin the conversation with the person you are coaching so that they will open up? Sometimes, a person knows what he wants, so he is much easier to coach. But, more often than not, people don't know. They just know that they are not happy, that something could be better. Opening up the other person is not only a talent, but a skill. It all starts with a question, but the questions is... *which* question? As a rookie coach, I would ask, "If I were your genie, if I had a magic wand and could give you whatever you wanted in life, what would be your three wishes?" Sometimes, it worked. Not that I had magic to fulfill the wish, but I did have what seemed to be magic to help him figure out what he wanted. From childhood to grandpa-hood, what makes people upset is wanting something and not getting it. People are happy when they have what they want. Simple. What is *not* simple is why this person does not yet have what he wants, what exactly he wants, and what can be done differently so that he can get it. Just being a genie of the lamp, revealing someone's wants, we already met two major goals. We got them to realize that there is something that

"But Mordechai! Don't you read the news? Don't you know that you will all be annihilated? What Omer are you even talking about?" The first thing Haman said to Mordechai was – Mordechai – the handful of flour that you are teaching the students about, to do the Kemitzah, has outweighed the 10,000 bars of silver that I offered Achashverosh, to annihilate the Jewish Nation!

What does this mean? Mordechai was telling the people to ignore Haman's decree – to have hope that nothing and no one can interfere with the destiny of the Jewish people! The Jewish people are above the Mazal. The word Mazal comes from the word *nozel*, that means that things drip from above. Everything that happens drips from above... Except for the Jewish Nation. We can change Heavenly decrees!

they want that they do not have. And we got them to realize, to some measure, what that thing is. But, this magic didn't always work. People cannot always think of a real wish, a real life want, when they meet me in a genie costume.

So, I learned another coaching trick. And this one almost always works. Ask what they *don't* want. What would you really like to stop having, doing or being – and if you could stop whatever it is, it would be amazing? The reason why the negative approach works when the positive does not is because there are two types of people in this world. There are the + types and the – types. One type has a plus sign in his head, and the other has a minus sign in his head. Some people are "positive" people, looking at the positive side of things. And some are running on "negative". The latter do not know what they want, but they know what they don't want, what bothers them. The mind can't be in both states at once. Most people usually drift between being positive and negative. Sometimes like this. And sometimes like that. The mind can function on only one operating system at a time. If they can't think of what they want, many times the



reason is because *they are thinking of what they don't want*.

A good coach needs to connect to whoever it is he is meeting with. He needs to come up with “the mirror question”, a question that reflects the state of mind of the client. Then, step two of the skilled coach is to take the things that the person does not want, the negative expression, and turn that into something that they do want, the positive... “I want my boss to **stop** screaming at me. I **want** my boss to respect me. I **don't want** to have such a hard time getting up in the morning early enough for prayers. I **want to** wake up well rested. I **don't want** to be jealous anymore. I **want to be** happy with what I have.” Once a person translates his “wants” from a negative to a positive form of expression, there is a much greater chance that he will get what he wants. It is less complicated to get your boss to respect you than it is to get him to stop screaming at someone he does not respect. It is simpler to make a schedule to wake up, well rested, than to stop having a hard time getting up when there is no schedule. Out of many reasons that explain this phenomenon, one big reason is that when the mind is busy with what it does not want, it is in the negative mode, and the *creativity factor* is nil. We need to be in “creative thinking mode” in order to be on a different level from the problem.

I have learnt an effective approach to use when someone approaches me with a negative life story, with a lot of negative things going on. I say to him, “I understand that you have a lot of bad things going on in life.” (By doing this, we validate emotion. We validate the fact that there is such a perspective, the negative view of what is going on; that life situations can be seen as being negative. And, most important of all, by validating his feelings, we have connected to the client. The client feels that the coach understands him.) “I want to hear every last bit of the bitterness. But, first I need to hear of all the good things that you have in life, the things that make you feel as if G-d showers His Kindness and Goodness on your side or the fence.” When you first relate to the person's

present state or condition, you build rapport – a subconscious connection. Then, you can help them deal with the problem, now that you are on the same page.

In the case of many people, the problem starts and ends with a negative mental filter: seeing only the bad side, the problem. If we can get the person to see past that filter, we might get him to feel better. It does not mean that they will not think negatively again in a week from now. The Evil Inclination is that filter, and it gives a person no rest, forcing him to look at the negative side of things and to slide into the negative operating system. Negativity is not *all* false; it is just not the whole picture. The person who is suffering has been dwelling on the negative too long, without looking for the good in life and appreciating it. This would not happen, and does not happen, to a practicing Jew. Practicing Judaism means to pray with your whole heart, *מודה אני עבודה שבלב*. It means to wake up and say, *מודה אני* for waking up. A genuine Jew starts off his day with appreciation, channeling him into the positive operating system. Some practicing Jews internalize this way of life, making it their hallmark and identity. And some give up this practice, and just stay Jewish.

Haman was on a roll. He was ahead of the game. Unstoppable. Nothing could stop him except for himself, tripping over his own shoelace. How did Haman fall? The same way that every wicked man has fallen. From Nimrod to Hitler. They looked at what they did not have. That one Jew. Abraham. That one Jew. Mordechai. Today, Europe; tomorrow, the world. *וכל זה איננו שוה לי בכל עת אשר אני רואה את מרדכי היהודי יושב בשער המלך. Tomorrow I am invited to the private and intimate party of the King and Queen, and all this (honor and power) has no worth for me, when I see Mordechai the Jew, sitting at the King's gate.* (Esther 5) Haman had everything, but he had nothing. Because of one Jew who wouldn't bow to him. All the Jews bowing to him did not make him feel power. Because he focused on what he did not have. This was his downfall. This negative filter. The only thing that makes sense would be for



Haman to kill Mordechai, not all the Jews. He could have finished with him, on the spot. He would, then, have all the Jews bowing down to him, loyally. But once someone focuses on what he does not have, he forgets even what he does have.

This was Haman's downfall. And of course, who did it? G-d. The way G-d runs people's lives in this world is by running their operating systems. Take a look at the last letters of the words זה איננו שוה לי and you will see G-d's Name written backwards.

The Talmud asks, Where do we see Haman in the Torah? המן העץ (Breishit 3;11) . (Hullin 139b) The subtle reference to Haman in the Torah is hidden in words G-d said to Adam after the sin of eating fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. G-d said, המן העץ אשר

צויתך לבלתי אכל ממנו אכלת... *Did you eat from the one tree that I forbade you to eat from?* What is the common denominator between Haman, and Adam eating from the forbidden fruit?

The answer is the mindset of looking at what you do not have, the negative. G-d was saying to Adam, I gave you all the fruits of the world. I gave you all the good. Angels grilling you cowboy steaks and mixing you the finest of wines. All was yours, except for one fruit. And you could not hold yourself back? You had to look at what you do not have? Nothing else has any worth?

+ and – is behind all emotions. Is our operating system negative or positive?

THE PARACHUTE JUMP

One of my students doesn't like attending class. So the other day, when he attended, I asked him why he bothered. Especially, because for that class, he was the first one there. "Rabbi, today, I went up to the North of Israel, and I jumped off a plane. I went parachuting, and it was amazing! It cost me 300 dollars. And I was able to see Syria, Lebanon, and Mediterranean...!" It looked like he showed up to class just to let me know. Part of the enjoyment of the parachute jump is the reaction you see on the people you tell about your experience. I asked him, "You jumped alone? No friends?" He said that the other boy from the class did not want to join him. "The other boy said, 'If I die, I do not want to die for parachuting. When people ask how I died, I want it to be about something important. I want to have a reason to die. Not just because I jumped off a plane for the thrill or the adrenalin.'"

This was going to be a great class. I asked the boy, who was sitting in front of me, thrilled, and alone, "What is the fun in the adrenalin? Why do people enjoy ALMOST dying, dancing between life and death? Why are people amused by thriller-rides in the amusement parks?" He said, "Rabbi, I never thought about it." My Rabbi taught me this one. Many people do not feel alive. They are not living – they are merely existing. By almost dying, they feel alive again. I asked the boy, "What are you

willing to die for? In what way do you want to live on after you are dead?" He thought and thought. That lesson was a great lesson. I got the boy to think.

This week's Parasha talks about the Mizbeach HaKetoret. The Altar of Incense. R' Shimshon Pincus explains something that always bothered me, something about which I asked so many people, and no one had the answer. So says the Ramah, in Hilchot Milah: (YD 265; 11) *To be Sandak at a Brit Milah, to be the one to hold the baby of the Brit Milah on the lap during the circumcision, is a huge thing, even greater than being the Mohel. A Sandak is like someone who is bringing Ketoret, the sacrifice of incense, and therefore, the custom is not to give two sons of the same father to the same man to be Sandak; rather a different Sandak for each boy.* The Sandak is like the one who brings Ketoret, and just as they would not let the same Kohen bring Ketoret more than once in his life, being that Ketoret makes one rich, so too, being Sandak makes one rich, and therefore we do not give this honor and merit of two sons to the same man.

I pondered the following question for a very long time. *What is the connection between being Sandak and bringing Ketoret?*



R' Pincus answers with a parable. A billionaire brings his wife a piece of gold jewelry. She is not impressed, because there are no diamonds in it. But, when he brings her a beautiful bouquet of flowers, she gets all emotional and very touched. Why? Why does the 250 dollar bouquet touch her heart, but the 500 dollar piece of gold jewelry not mean much?

This is because of the structure of the world, according to Judaism. The world has in it only four categories- *Inanimate objects*, like rocks and metals. *Growing objects*, like flowers and fruit. *Living objects*, like animals and birds. And, the top of the hierarchy, those capable of communicating: *people*. When you give your wife an inanimate object, like something made of metal or stone, there is only a certain level of emotion that you can touch. When you give her flowers, when you go up a level in the hierarchy of the world's structure, you touch a different level of her emotions. If you give your wife from the lower level, if you want it to touch her heart, you need to pay a lot more than if you would just buy her flowers.

The third level of a present is a living object, a Korban. When someone brings a Korban, he is expressing love, demonstrating that he is willing to give up his life, his flesh and blood, to G-d. Today, we do not have a way to express this love, for we do not have a Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The fourth level is the level of מדבר, the communicator. Nobody, ever, brought a Korban of this caliber up to G-d. Except for one man, Avraham. He brought his son Yitzhak, as an Olah sacrifice, up onto the Altar. G-d was so "touched" by this, כביכול, that He never forgets it. Until today, every Rosh Hashana,

THE POWER TO IGNORE

King Solomon taught *מְתוּקָה שְׁנַת הַעֲבֹד אִם-מְעַט וְאִם-הַרְבֵּה יֹאכַל וְהַשְׂבֵּעַ לְעֶשֶׂיר אֵינְנוּ מְגִיחַ לוֹ לִישׁוֹן: The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the satiety of the rich will not let him sleep.* A poor man does not lose any sleep over his lot of poverty. It is the wealth of the rich that does not allow him to sleep. (Kohelet 5, 11)

every Yom Kippur, each morning, we "remind" Him again and again about this, and He never gets bored hearing it.

This is expressed in the Ketoret. The Ketoret is different from the Korban, because the Korban was a blood offering, a meat offering, something materialistic, representing the flesh and blood of the person. But the Ketoret corresponds to the Neshama of the person. Smell is the most spiritual of the senses; it is something you can perceive, but cannot touch. The Neshama, also, is something you can't see. You know it is there, only because there is breathing, through the nose. *ויפה באפיו נשמת חיים. G-d breathed into the nose of Adam a living Neshama.* The Ketoret corresponds to sacrificing your Neshama to G-d. Your identity, your emotions, the greatest moments of life, your life story, dedicating it all for your Creator. The Brit Milah is not a Korban of flesh and blood, like what is done on an animal. It is a Korban of the Neshama. The Sandak is bringing, on his lap, a sacrifice at the level and category of a Medaber – a human being, with his soul – to G-d.

The question that is the ultimate question in your life is often the hardest one to answer: What has G-d put you on this earth for? What legacy do you want to leave behind? What are you willing to die for? These are the most powerful questions, because these questions define your identity. They define your Neshama. And once you know, you will be internally motivated to achieve your life's mission. Nothing will or can stop you.

Average men learn how to live. Great men learn how to die. All of life is a parachute jump. Make sure to get it right the first time.

Rachel, the wife of R' Akiva, gave up all of her father's wealth and support to be married to Akiva, the shepherd. Her father, Kalba Sabua, excommunicated them. They were so poor, they slept on hay in a barn.



Eliyahu Hanavi came to their humble abode, in the form of a poor man asking them to give him a few stalks of hay on which they slept. The “poor man” claimed that he needed it to place it under his child that was just born to him. R’ Akiva told his wife – You see! There are people who don’t even have a stalk of hay! (Nedarim 50) When someone asks you for tzedakah, it is a message to you from Heaven, a reminder how much worse off things could have been. There will always be people who have more than you. And there will always be people who have less than you.

The Orchot Tzaddikim lists four elements to happiness, Emunah, Bitachon, Contentment and Common Sense. We all want to be happy, and we know that contentment is the key. So, why can’t we just turn on the contentment switch and stay happy? Why can’t we just focus on the part of the cup that is half full and ignore the part that is half empty? Why can’t we ignore those who have more and focus on those who have less? Why can’t we stay grateful for what we have, and not be ungrateful for what we don’t?

Contentment is not a switch. It is a lifelong battle. It is part of your lifelong mission. Your struggle to be content with what Hashem gives you is not just *your* struggle for happiness. It is the story of Purim and of all humanity –back to Adam Harishon.

The Talmud in Chullin 139b asks, *המין מן התורה מנין*? Where is Haman hinted to in the Torah? *המין העץ*? Hamin Haetz- When G-d asked Adam, *Have you eaten from the tree I forbade you to eat?* What is the Talmud teaching us by connecting Purim to the Forbidden fruit?

Amazing. Adam had the whole world, except one tree. Had he been happy with that, had he lived within his means, he would have lived forever. If the Jews would have only heeded Mordechai’s plea, not to enjoy Achashverosh’s party, the decree of annihilation would never have been signed in Heaven.

Lack of contentment is what brought Haman’s demise. Haman had everyone’s respect, except for that of one old rabbi. And still *וְכַל-יְהוָה אֵינְנוּ שׂוּהָ לִי בְּכָל-עֵת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי רֹאֶה אֶת-מְרֹדֶכַי הַיְהוּדִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמְּלָכָה*: *And all of this is worthless to me whenever I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the Palace Gate.* Haman – why can’t you just ignore Mordechai? Everyone is bowing down to you, and you are not happy, because of one Jew?

Haman – there is a great tee-shirt that says, “I wish I had the power to ignore you, like you ignore me.” You’d still be around, if you had lived by this tee-shirt! It is amazing! The greatest pain a person brings on himself can result from something as innocent as not being able to ignore the one person who is not nice to you. The one person who has more than you. The one upsetting comment said to you. Sometimes, all we need in life in order to be happy, for relationships to work out, for a person to stop himself from saying something foolish is the power to ignore. But, Haman could not access this power.

This is our life story, as well. If we can live within our means, we can merit longevity. *רקב עצמות קנאה. Jealousy rots the bones.* And so many people suffer, feeling they have nothing, because they don’t have what they want. Because they don’t have the power to ignore.

Here is an amazing tool. Take a pen and paper, and write a list of all the things you wish you had. And then, on another piece of paper, write another list, of all the things you already have. Then, honestly, ask yourself; Are you willing to make the tradeoff? Are you willing to give up what you have for what you want? This is the most powerful way to recognize that what you already have is greater than what you want. The way to live this is through *אדר*- Aleph Dar. When you realize how G-d is literally “pumping you” with goodness, you will be able to ignore the things that G-d tells you, “this tree is not for you”.

Ben Zoma teaches in his Mishna of Avot, *איזהו עשיר*. Who is rich? One who is happy with his lot. Why not say, One who is happy with

his Parnassah, or happy with what he has? Why the word “lot”?

G-d made each human being unique. Each human being is his own Adam Harishon. No two people have the same Tafkaid, so no two people have the same looks, personalities, possessions or conditions in life. Whatever you have is all you need and all that is good for you. And this was and is the battle between Esav and Yaakov, for all generations. יש לי כל or רב לי. I have all I need, or I have a lot. Accepting G-d's rulership in life is the ability to say, I have ALL that I need. ומלכותו בכל משלה. Esther and Mordechai were able to achieve great things by living this way, by living with the Middah of Malchut. – ותלבש אסתר מלכות ומרדכי יצא מלפני המלך בלבוש מלכות was, even if she needed to be married to the lowest guy on earth, she totally accepted it. But Haman was the exact opposite – וְקַל-יָהּ אֵינְנִי שֹׁנֵה לִי – I do not

ATTRACTING OPPOSITES

Kids fight. Lots of kids, lots of fights. Simple math. It's confusing for one parent to deal with fighting kids. Who is right and who is wrong? The truth is, it does not make a difference. Judging is a complex task, especially if we are talking about your own children. Which child should be punished, the one who hit or the one who teased? Who is the guilty one? The initiator, who said something mildly degrading or the oversensitive sibling, who snapped back, cutting his foe to shreds?

The first thing I do is listen, *as if* I am judging. One at a time. This puts things in order; kids need to feel that there is order in the house. The kids who I am judging are not allowed to talk to, or interrupt, each other while court is in process. Each one waits until he is addressed. They must await being asked what the other one did to them, and how it was done. I ask the accused to verify each act, each crime and claim, and to what degree it is true. The exact words that were said need to be repeated in front of *the judge*. They need to demonstrate, on the big teddy bear, the velocity of the slap, pinch, elbow, kick, or speed of the thrown toy. Then, I don't judge. *I never judge*. I just separate them, in

want this “כל”; it is worthless to me, if G-d does not give me everything I *want*. Because Haman does not believe that his life is orchestrated by G-d; he flips the letters of יקוק. Note the last letters of Haman's comment, and you will see יקוק, G-d's Name spelled backwards.

This concept is the whole Torah. The Vilna Gaon teaches that the Torah is summarized in the Ten Commandments. And all of the Ten are summed up in the last one: Do not covet. Contentment is a life long struggle. And it is something we all need to pray for. הוא ברחמיו יעשה שלום עלינו – May Hashem, in His Mercy, make peace on us. The Chatam Sofer says this is referring to the ability to be content. And when we access this trait of contentment, when we access the power to ignore, then, and only then will there be peace on all of the Nation. ועל כל עמו ישראל.

an official sounding voice, putting each one in his/her room. I bring them toys to play with, books to read, each one in his own room. A few minutes later, depending how long it takes for things to cool down, I call them out of their rooms and direct them toward something positive and productive to do for 5- 10 min., not allowing them to talk to or look at each other. The next time I turn around, they are playing nicely again. Just separating the two does so much.

Parents also fight. Adult siblings fight. Sometimes in a silent way. At times, that's worse than the open disagreements. Deep down, siblings suffer from these cold wars at every family get together. Each time they look at the family picture, something seems wrong. Even though it's *just emotional stuff*, it can sometimes hold people back from success in life. There is no “official” to act as referee when siblings are, themselves, parents. There is no judge, waiting to listen to each one, allowing each person to state clearly what the other one said or did, verifying it with the accused. There is no arbitrator, clarifying what was meant, etc. Bad feelings live on inside, for days, months and



years. Sometimes, till death. The sibling in the fight may not attend the funeral of his/her rival, and, if he/she does, he/she just stands there, frozen, leaning on a walking cane, staring at the grave in confusion. How did this all happen? Sometimes, people don't even *want* to get along. But in general, they do. They just don't know how to.

The first sibling rivalry, between Cain and Hevel, is something that the Torah does not want us to forget. Two brothers were to share the world. Cain took the fruit of the land, its food and non-food produce. And Hevel got the livestock. Sounds like a good split, doesn't it? Well, not really. Almost impossible to be fair when things are split between siblings. Cain was born with one twin sister, and Hebel was born with two, prettier twin sisters. Each brother was to take his twin sister(s) as his wife; that's how things went in those days. What about the Jewish Law that the firstborn son gets double portion? Too bad, Cain. Hevel was going to have more children. More children, more power. Simple math.

In Cain's eyes, his younger brother Hebel was a thief. In Noachide law, a thief is to be punished by death. Hebel's sheep needed to eat *something*. "All the grass belongs to me." But Cain, held this thought in, nice older brother that he was. Till Passover. Passover eve, Adam told his two boys that on this very afternoon, in the future, all G-d's children will bring a sacrifice. Hebel put his best sheep on the altar. Cain, put some leftover's from lunch on the altar. Flax seeds, פשתן. G-d sent down the altar flames, which totally consumed Hevel's sacrifice. Cain's flax remained in place. Cain looked at his brother, the "tzaddik-thief", and the accepted offering. Cain's eyes drifted to his own offering. No fire. Cain burned inside. He said to himself, "Enough forgiving my brother, the thief. Thieves should die." And you know the end of the story.

Since then, G-d said, no more wool and linen garments, no shaatnez. Don't put them together. Fights, disagreements and cold wars happen when the two "different" siblings are on the same platform. Wool is Hevel, and linen is Cain. (Pirkei Dr' Eliezer; Alter from Novardhok) Don't compare them, trying to see whose sacrifice is better.

Parents do this: it kills the children. Sometimes parents put their children into a situation or condition that forms a competitive atmosphere. My Rabbi told me what R' Y' Kamenetzky, zt"l, once told him: Shalom does not mean peace, or oneness. Shalom means harmony. The difference between peace and harmony is that in peace, things fit together like a puzzle, making a whole, a unit. In harmony, different things work together in unison. They do not fit together as one; each component is independent. The piano is the piano, and the clarinet is the clarinet. Each has its uniqueness, and the idea of competition in the same orchestra just sounds ridiculous. In harmony, each sound blends with and complements the other. Families where siblings have differences need to respect those differences, not to try to force everyone to share opinions and interests. A successful family does not mean "one". A successful family is "harmonious".

There is a rule in NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming.) Everyone loves his own self the most. *אהבת לרעך כמוך Love your neighbor as yourself...* "As yourself", because people love themselves the most. This is why people like people who are like them. People whose facial features and style of dress resemble theirs, who are approximately the same age, etc. If you match me, then I must like you, because I love myself. Somewhat subconscious. If you want to build rapport, a connection or bond with someone or with a group of people, just act like a mirror. Mirror their body movements (subtly), mirror their beliefs, mirror their interests. When you bring up the differences between you, rapport will wither. Everyone has differences, but you don't have to accentuate them. Play them down if you want to get along. It has been said, "It is the things in common that make relationships enjoyable. But it is the little differences that make them interesting." Opposites attract, only when a common denominator is found. It seems that Cain and Hebel put their possessions, their values, on the altar, trying to see which one was more valuable. And Cain lost, so they both lost. This is what happens when differences are forced together.

If you would like to get along with family members who have a world view other than yours, don't

bring up the differences. Ignore whatever differences you can, to the best of your capability. Try to look for and bring up whatever you do have in common, and you will build rapport. Do not try to make your contrasts the subject of conversation. It's almost always possible to find a common denominator.

There are two exceptions to the forbidden shaatnez law. On tzitzit strings, and in the kohen's garments, worn during Temple service. T'chelet, the bluish, greenish dyed linen strings are attached to the wool garment to make tzitzit. And the t'chelet strings were woven into the woolen, priestly garments. Why was there an exception in the Temple and for tzitzit?

The Temple was a place of harmony, a בית עולמים. Harmony between heaven and earth. Harmony between G-d and man. Harmony between heart and

SECRET (OF) CHARM

Some people have charm. Wherever life takes them, people are drawn to them like a magnet. I used to believe that charm is something that you either got from Heaven or you didn't. Time has taught me that some people who have charm can lose it, while others who did not have it suddenly figure out how to turn it on, consciously or subconsciously. Charm is important, for it is the secret recipe for getting people to like you. It can get people to want to have you around. There are a few ingredients in the recipe for gaining charm. Many people who have charm did not break it down to a science. They do not know that they naturally stumbled onto the secret recipe. They just naturally put into play the behavior that creates it. Not being aware of just what it is that they are doing right can sometimes result in trying other modes of behavior and losing the charm.

There is a Hebrew word consisting of only two letters that, despite its brevity, can take you very far in life, if you really know what it means. חן. The translation of the Hebrew word חן is grace or favor. Grace is so important that we pray to G-d three times a day in שלום שמים at the end of the Amidah, asking him to grant us grace. We pray for it immediately upon awakening in Birkot Hashachar. People know, at least subconsciously,

soul. It was a blend of Love of G-d and Fear of G-d. Shaatnez is permitted in the Temple and in tzitzit, for there is a common denominator there between the wool and linen. Serving G-d. The wool and linen are not there for warmth, comfort or style. They join for a deeper purpose. And when there is a common denominator, especially when the common denominator is a purpose that transcends self, there is harmony.

People are, generally, not aware of how they are perceived by others, how they stand out, how they are different. If we can identify the points of divergence, and overlook them for at least the times that family members meet, it could enhance harmony, and... in this way... we may just get back our Holy Temple.

what grace is. But most people do not or cannot define it in cognitive terms. Once you know what grace is and you implement it, you have what we call charm. Charm and grace are really dependent on a few factors. We are going to focus on the most important one, the one that has to do with our ancestor, Noah.

There are two main characters in the תנ"ך that won this title of חן, two people that had grace. Noah is the first one. In Havdallah, Sefardim say the last passuk in parashat Bereshit ונח מצא חן בעיני ה', *And Noah found favor in G-d's eyes.* The Talmud (Sanhedrin 105) writes that the decree of the Flood applied to Noah, as well as to the other people in his time אף על נח נחתם גזר דין אלא שמצא חן בעיני ה'. Noah was spared from the outcome of the decree because he had this favor, this grace. Grace saved his life! The power of grace is so great that one who possesses it can be rewarded royally, without even deserving it. Moshe Rabbeinu beseeched G-d to forgive the Jewish Nation of the sin of Golden Calf in the merit of grace. And G-d answered him וחנותי את אשר אחון – I will act with grace to those in whom I find grace. Rashi comments (Berachot 7a) " Even though the one who possesses grace is not worthy of My grace.

It is obvious, then, that one who has grace gets much more out of life than he deserves. And, people forgive such individuals much faster. But, what is this grace thing, and how does one get it?

The next person who won the title of **חן** was Queen Esther. From all of the girls that were candidates to be Achashverosh's queen, Esther was chosen. And here are the words of the psukkim **ותהי אסתר נשאת חן בעיני כל ראייה** *And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her*. Then the passuk says, **ויאהב המלך את אסתר מכל הנשים ותשא חן והסד לפניו מכל הבתולות** *And, of all the women, the king loved Esther, and she found favor and kindness before him more than all the virgins.* What did Esther do to get this **חן**, specifically in the **בית הנשים**, the place where all the female candidates were busy with jewelry, perfumed oils and beauty treatments? And another point. It seems that **חן** and **הסד** go together, both in the case of Esther and in the Amidah, in **שים שלום**. What is the connection?

There are two approaches to life, exemplified by the way people relate to others. When joining company, some will walk into a room and say, "Well, here I am!" There are others who walk in and say, "Ahh, there you are." The first person shines the spotlight of the conversation *on his own life's interests*, while the other shows genuine concern for *what is important to his fellow*. You have two tracks of thinking that you can run in any given relationship: *What can I do to that will make it more enjoyable for me when I have this person around?* Or, *What can I do to make things enjoyable for the other person to have me around?* What is the difference between the two? **חן**. Grace. Favor.

Noach's father gave him the name **נח** saying, **זה יבחמנו ממעשנו ומעצבון ידינו מן האדמה אשר אררה ה'** This (son) will make things easier for us to deal with the land that was cursed by G-d. The Hebrew word **נח** means "comfortable". Noach lived up to his name, making things comfortable for the people he shared the world with. The Midrash tells us that Noach invented the plow, the spick, and all other tools for working. Until then, people would just plow with their hands, cut wheat with their hands – and everything was very difficult. **Thorns קוץ ודרדר**

and thistles were in abundance, due to the curse that G-d gave the land when Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge. But Noach invented the solution to a global problem. Noach did not become rich from this. There was no way to patent a shovel or a rake. But he thought how to make life easier for the people in his generation. Everyone else was just busy solving his own life's problems. No one invested time designing things that could help mankind. Noach, however, genuinely cared for other people. This is what gave him grace and favor. And, this is what saved his life. G-d knew that the right man for the job to care for the animals in the Ark had to be Noach. This explains why Noach got punished severely the one time he brought food late to the lion. The lion slashed his leg, making Noach limp and bleed heavily- **וישאר** **אך נח** (see Rashi 8;23). Why was Noach punished so severely for just a little delay? But, now we understand that Noach was, in fact, not worthy of being saved. He was actually part of the decree of annihilation in the flood. The only thing that kept him alive was grace: caring for others, showing interest in others. When he slacked off in that even a bit, he lost his merit for a minute; he lost his grace, and was now punished as part of the original decree.

Esther's **חן** had the same basis as Noach's: caring for others. The Talmud (Meggillah 13a) tells us that the source of Esther's **חן** was in her making each person feel that she was from his nation. How did Esther make people from so many varied backgrounds feel that she was a "landsman" – a fellow compatriot? She showed them that she loved them and cared about what was going on in their lives, with such warmth that they felt she was part of them. Despite her being queen, she behaved with humbleness, treating each person as a **צלם אלקים**. (see Me'am Loez 2; 15) This is what brings a person grace. And it can take a person very far in life. It seems that this is the connection between **חן** and **הסד**, kindness and grace.

King Solomon, in Mishlei, teaches the main variable for this charm. **ולענוים יתן חן** (Mishlei 3 ;33) *And G-d gives favor (or grace) to those who are humble*. Humbleness means putting yourself on hold for a bit. All sensible etiquette is connected to recognizing that there is someone else in the

picture. There are infinite details of how to express this recognition: the way one acts, talks, and even one's body language. All these bring about the grace, the favor, the charm. Respecting that there is someone else, and caring that he is there. We ask

G-d that we merit this humbleness, have that charm, and show that we care that there are people in our world other than "me".

Honor's Correct Address

In the Purim story, Haman managed to pass legislation requiring everyone in Achashverosh's kingdom to bow down to him, and the people obediently did so – except for one. Mordechai refused to bow down to Haman. This led Haman to complain that everything he had accomplished was worthless in his eyes as long as there was one person who didn't bow down to him.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, in his sefer *Sichos Mussar*, explains Haman's particular frustration in seeing that Mordechai did not share this quest for honor. "Kol zeh einenu shaveh li bchol et asher ani roeh et mordechai hayehudi yoshev bshaar hamelech" (5:13) – "All of this is not worth anything to me, as long as I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the gate of the King!" R' Chaim asked: why did Haman get so upset from just one person out of the whole kingdom?

His answer is powerful. Someone who chases after honor is never at rest. As long as there is more honor to be chased after – and there always is – he will have no peace until he has "conquered" that honor. All the other honor is not enough.

By contrast, Mordechai sat and learned Torah all day, completely disinterested in what others thought of him. As a result, he was not the slightest bit impressed with the worldwide recognition and honor that Haman was receiving. When one knows he is doing the right thing, as Mordechai did as he sat and learned Torah, he feels an inner peace that cannot be challenged by others. This healthy mindset of Mordechai gave him the power to stand up against all the ridicule he received for protesting against the seuda of Achashverosh.

This inner peace is completely unattainable to someone who chases honor.

Credit Where Credit is Due

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (6:6) says *HaOmer davar b'shem omro meivi geula l'olam* – One who repeats something he heard from another, and attributes the saying to the one who said it, brings redemption to the World. This is learned from Esther, who told Achashverosh that it was Mordechai who discovered Bigsban and Seresh's plot to kill the king.

The Maharal asks two questions on this Mishna. First, we know that reward is always proportionate to the deed which was done (*Middah K'neged Middah*, "measure for measure"). Why was redemption an appropriate reward for Esther's willingness to give the credit to Mordechai?

Second, many people throughout history have attributed their statements appropriately, yet they did not bring redemption!

He answers that since the redemption was to come through hidden miracles, G-d wanted it to come about through someone who was herself willing to remain "hidden" and not take any credit for herself. Esther "gave credit where credit was due." The name "Esther" means "hidden" – because this was the character trait that made Esther the right one for the job.

The Maharal understands that this Mishna does not mean that every time someone attributes a statement it brings redemption. Rather, it means that when redemption comes, it will always come through someone who is willing to hide himself and not take the credit for the redemption.

Stop Searching for Yeshuot (Redemption)

The Chovot HaLevavot (*Shaar HaBitachon*, Perek 5) writes that a true "Baal Bitachon" attributes all of his successes to G-d. If one would do this more often, as opposed to only blaming G-d for his failures, he would feel more love for G-d, and G-d

would be more willing to send salvation through his hands.

Imagine standing on top of a 20-story building, and feeling that because one is so high up that makes him tall. This is the foolishness of attributing our successes to ourselves, rather than realizing we are just midgets on a giant's shoulders – Hashem is creating our successes!

YOUR TIME HAS COME

My ultimate life coach is the Ramchal. He begins Messilat Yesharim talking about goals, about habits, about awareness, about growing step by step, etc. And the way he starts the ultimate coaching of all time is with his famous words. יסוד החסידות ושורש העבודה התמימה הוא שיתברר ויתאמת אצל האדם מה חובתו בעולמו. “It is the basic obligation of every Jew to clarify and internalize the reality of his purpose in this world”. “What are you doing here?” “Why were you created?” “Who are you?” The most basic questions of life are, indeed, the most trying ones.

אם תשקט כי אם תשקט תחרישי בעת הזאת *For if you remain silent at this time..* (Esther 4, 14) Mordechai put pressure on Esther to beg Achashverosh, on her own behalf and on behalf of her nation. Esther was on board with Mordechai's request, but she responded that entering to speak to Achashverosh without an invitation could cost her her life. She had not been summoned for thirty days, now. The decree was not for another 11 months, for the letters that were written, signed and sent, had the doom date of the 13th of Adar. It was, at that time, only the 13th of Nissan. But, Mordechai insisted. “Esther, NOW or never!” Why the rush, Mordechai? This is the Malbim's question.

As a matter of fact, Esther needed not one, but *three* miracles for her to approach King Achashverosh at such short notice. Three angels came to save her. One angel raised the eyes of Achashverosh, one painted grace on Esther's face, and the third angel made the King's staff stretch from 2 Amot to 60 Amot! (Megillah 15 b) The Talmud teaches us not to rely on miracles (Shabbat 32a). So, why was Mordechai so demanding?

There is another benefit to attributing one's successes to G-d. The Sfat Emet explains that when others see someone attributing his successes to Hashem rather than taking all the honor for himself, they actually feel more comfortable around that person – and people are “turned off” by those who take credit for their own accomplishments and make themselves out to ‘G-d like’.

The answer the Malbim gives is a lesson for everyone. He lays down three principles. Here is the first. When something out of the ordinary happens in life, this is an act of G-d, calling for some Divine Intervention. Esther, a righteous, modest woman, getting married to the lowly, wicked, gentile king Achashverosh, was part of G-d's plan. After Haman's decree, things started falling into place, making sense of how and why Esther was in this position. This was a sign that she was to be the messenger of G-d to save His People. The second principle is that G-d does not need Esther, or any other person to save His People. If a person who is in the position to save does not seize the opportunity, whenever it comes, G-d chooses a different path to salvation, for He will never forsake His People. And the third principle is, when you are a means to an end, when your whole purpose is for some other goal, once the goal is accomplished, your existence has become meaningless. Esther was obviously in her position not for the sake of being queen, but for the sake of salvation for G-d's Children. If Esther would slack off, now, G-d might just find some other messenger to do the job, and that would be the end of Esther. Mordechai told Esther, your time has come. You are here for a mission, and if you wait, G-d will find someone else, and you will be lost, forever and ever.

Every man wonders what his personal mission in this world is. The way to find this out is to learn who you are. To see what you enjoy doing, what you are good at, what makes you feel alive, and what G-d wants from you, from where you are, right now, in your life. R Moshe Feinstein learns that this is what the Torah means, when it says “See: I appointed Betzalel to be the one to build the

Mishkan.” What did G-d mean when He said “See”? How were the people able to *see* that Betzalel was the appointed builder of the Mishkan? The answer is because Betzalel was good at it (Shemot 35; 30. 32-34) . G-d sends you messages in life. When things are weird, when things don't make sense, that is how G-d wants things to be, for some reason, and that is where He wants You to be, for some reason.

Some of the biggest mistakes in life are the result of your not working from where you are, and from who you are. Now, today, is your opportunity for success. Ask yourself, constantly, the following questions: What can I, and only I, do, today, that if done well, will make a real difference? What is the most valuable use of my time, right now? Success in life almost always boils down to self-discipline. Self-discipline means doing what you should do, when you should do it, whether you feel like it or not. Every time you practice self-discipline, your self-esteem goes up. You like and respect yourself even more. This is the secret of serenity.

Mordechai needed to get involved in royal affairs after Haman's execution, so he could not keep up his previous high level of learning. Mordechai was thus downgraded from his being the 5th greatest rabbi of the nation, to being no. 6 . The Talmud deduces from here (Megillah 16b) that Torah learning is greater than saving lives. Why did Mordechai give up a portion of his learning time, if

this meant that his greatness was diminished? Because that was the position in which he found himself in life. He recognized that this was the spiritual mission that G-d had assigned to him. For only he could do it. And, it needed to be done now. Otherwise, Mordechai would not have taken out time from his learning.

One of the prayers that shake me to the core on the High Holidays is *אלוקי! עד שלא נוצרתי איני כדאי ועכשיו*! *שנוצרתי כאילו לא נוצרתי*! “*My G-d! Before I was created I was unworthy, and now that I have been created, it is if I had not been created!*” Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchok Kook explains. All of our souls were created at the very beginning of time. They were not ready to be brought to the world, until our time has come. For 6000 years, your soul waited, ever so patiently, for the moment to go on stage. Hence, “before I was created, I was unworthy”. After 6000 years of patience, I am pushed into this World, and I forget my script. My mission. My purpose. “It is as if I was not created.”

Be aware of your background and your position. Learn it. Make the best of it. Make the best of you. And I will leave you with a little poem, from Dr. Seuss. *You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose. You're on your own, and you know what you know. And you are the guy who'll decide where to go.*

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In memory of Yashaya ben Rahil, Klara bat Rita, and all their ancestors

