



Parashat Vayikra



English version

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THE ART OF PARENTING IN A BOMB SHELTER

The most important parenting moments in your life will not happen when you give speeches, or teach lessons and values at the Shabbat table. They won't happen during a deep conversation with your child. They won't happen when everything is calm. They happen when everything falls apart. When a child tests your limits, when your plans collapse, or when a siren goes off. Because in that moment, your children are not listening to what you say. They are studying who you are. לא תהיה שמיעה גדולה מראייה

If you don't live in Israel, you cannot fully understand what it means to live in a world of sirens. A siren is not just a sound. It is an interruption of reality. Before it even begins, every phone in the house starts screaming alerts. You don't know if it will come, but you already feel it coming. And then, it cuts through the air. You don't hear it. You feel it. You have 90 seconds. Shoes. Kids. Door. Shelter. And then, quiet. Not peaceful quiet. The kind of quiet filled with breathing, with tension, with eyes scanning faces.

And then the boom. Sometimes distant. Sometimes not. The walls shake. You hold your children. And in that moment, every child in the room is asking one question: "Is everything okay?" But they are not asking with words. They are asking with their eyes, locked on you.

We live like this for weeks. No school. No routine. Just trying to keep a small apartment functioning from siren to siren. So the question becomes: How

are we supposed to parent like this without going crazy? Isn't parenting supposed to be built on routine? On calm? On structure? The answer is: **No**. Real parenting is revealed when there is no structure left. We tend to think that crisis interrupts chinuch. But the opposite is true. **Crisis is chinuch**. It is the moment your children finally see the real you. Not the "Shabbat version." Not the "lecture version." The real version. When your children are home all day, do they feel like they are ruining your schedule? Or do they feel like they are your life? When everything is falling apart, do they feel like a burden? Or do they feel held?

And it's not just war. It's when your teenager wakes up past 11:30 AM. Sits on the couch. On his phone. While you're exhausted. And something inside you is boiling. Can you stay calm? Can you choose connection over criticism? Can you hold yourself back when everything in you wants to explode? That moment—**That is chinuch**. We look at crisis as interruption to chinuch. Quite the contrary, my dear Watson! Crisis is the revelation of you and your values! Because in those moments, your child's brain is wiring itself. He is learning: "How do I respond to pressure?" "How do I treat people when I'm overwhelmed?" "What does strength look like?"

If a father, in a moment of crisis, turns outward, cares for others, stays grounded, holds up the emotions of his environment, that becomes the child's lifelong blueprint, for all the sirens and



disruptions, for the rest of his life. Not because he was told. Because he saw.

And this is not just what the child records. This is what Hashem records. **כֹּה אָמַר יְיָ לְיָדְכִי לִזְכוֹרֹתֶיךָ לְךָ הַחֶסֶד** “So says Hashem: I remember for you the kindness of your youth.” (Yirmiyahu 2:2) One understanding of this passuk is astonishing: Before leaving Egypt, most fathers did not survive. Eighty percent died in the plague of darkness. Families were broken. And yet, some fathers stepped forward, and adopted multiple families. Five families. Dozens of children. Don’t forget, each birth in Egypt brought six babies at a time. These adopting fathers walked into the desert, not knowing how they would feed even their own children, and took responsibility for many more. That is what those children saw. That is what they learned. And that is what Hashem remembers forever.

Now let’s bring it back. When you are in a bomb shelter, watching how you respond to the stress, to the fear, to the panic, your children are discovering something very uncomfortable: Are you worried and concerned about your world, or are you worried and concerned about the world of everyone else in the shelter with you? And this reveals to them something even more uncomfortable: Why did you bring them into the world? Was it because you wanted *them*, whoever they are? Or because having children fit into your life plan? When your routine is disrupted by them, are they destroying your life? Or **are they your life?**

This is where Torah parenting is fundamentally different. In Torah, there are only two real measures of success: How you live Torah. And how you raise your children to live Torah. Everything else, like money, honor, career: is all secondary. They are only valuable only if it supports those two. And that changes everything. Marriage is not built around romance. It is built around mission. A man is choosing the future mother of his children. A woman is choosing the future father of her children. Children are not an

outcome of marriage. **They are the purpose of marriage.**

So why don’t we feel that? Why don’t we experience our children as our greatest gain? Because we live in the gap, not in the gain. We see what’s missing. What’s not working. What’s not ideal. And we lose sight of what we already have.

And this is where the Haggadah comes in. At the peak of the Seder night, after everything, we sing a strange song: **אֲחַד מִי יוֹדֵעַ** — Who knows One? It sounds childish, and out of place. But it is one of the deepest moments of the night. Because after everything we’ve been through, we begin to count. Not what we lack. But what we’ve gained as a Nation. One G-d. Two tablets. Three forefathers. Four mothers. Five books of Torah. Six orders of Mishnah. Seven days of Shabbat. Eight days of Milah. And then: Nine months of Birth.

It is so strange. We don’t say **תשעה ירחי הריון**, nine months of pregnancy. We say **תשעה ירחי לידה** nine months of birth. Why? Because in Torah, those nine months are not a burden. They are not something to “get through.” They are part of the process of bringing life into the world. Allow me to explain.

When Pharaoh commanded Shifrah and Puah to kill the babies, they refused. And they explained: **כִּי-תִהְיוּת הַנָּהָה** Usually translated: “They give birth quickly.” But **חיות** also means: **they live**. They live for their children. The reason why they can’t kill these babies is because **כִּי לֹא כְנָשִׁים הַמְצַרְיֹת הָעֵבְרָיִת** The Jewish women are not like the Egyptian woman! Their entire existence is tied to their children. A Jewish mother is not inconvenienced by motherhood. She is defined by it. We can’t kill these baby boys, because the mother’s will give up their lives for their kids!

And there nothing more Jewish, than a Yiddishe Mamme. Just like we don’t “have” six weekdays and one Shabbat, we have six days that lead *toward* Shabbat. **שבעה ימי שבתא**. Just like we don’t “have” eight days before a brit, we have eight days of preparation for a Milah, **שמונה ימי מילה**... So too, we

don't "have" children interrupting our lives. Pregnancy is not an interruption. Children are not an interruption. **Our lives are built around them.**

And nowhere is being a parent more revealed, than in a bomb shelter, when the parent holds on to the child, not because the kid deserves it, but because the kid is the kid that G-d gave me.

THE ART OF GIVING G-D THE KEYS

The Gentiles know that the Jew is indestructible. When Haman fumed over Mordechai not bowing to him, he turned to his 365 advisors for help. He needed a plan to rid this Jew. No one had the solution. Except Zeresh, Haman's wife. She said to him, If Mordechai is of Jewish descent, there is nothing you can do to rid him. If you will try throwing him into a furnace, Hananyah, Mishael and Azarya already survived Fire. If you will throw him into a lion's den, Daniel survived the lions unscratched. If you will lock him up in jail, Yosef came out of jail and became second to King. You might think to exile him to the desert, but this Nation thrives in the desert. You might want to blind his eyes, but that wont work either. Shimshon killed so many Pilishtim, after they took his eyes!

The only thing you might want to try, my dear husband, Haman, is to hang your enemy Mordechai on a high tree. No Jew survived that one yet! (Midrash Rabah)

The hardest question on Judaism, is why do bad things happen to the Tzaddik, and why do good things happen to the Rasha. The answer is, we need to define our terms. We don't know what is good, and what is bad. Also, we don't know what defines one a Tzaddik, and what defines one as a Rasha. There are only two Jewish heroes that merited the title Tzaddik. Yosef Hatzadik and Mordechai Hatzadik. Mordechai was referred to as Mordechai Hatzaddik, in the Talmud. (Megillah 10b) What did Mordechai do, that deserved him such a title?

Well, we know what Yosef did, that deserved him the title Yosef Tzaddik. The only place it refers to

When everything external is stripped away,... when schedule, routine, honor, money, respect, obedience, household help, is taken away, what remains is the truth of what type of parent we are. And your children are watching. Not what you say. But who you are.

Yosef, as Yosef Hatzaddik, is regarding the following words of Avot DR' Natan.

Potiphar's wicked wife tried abusing Yosef her slave, threatening him with her words. She threatened that if he would not sin with her, "I will lock you up in jail!" He answered, G-d is מַחַיֵּי אֲסוּרִים, He frees those who are imprisoned. She then said, "I will pull out your eyes!" He said, G-d is פּוֹקֵחַ עֵינֵי עִוְרִים, He opens the eyes of the blind! She then threatened, "I will break your back!" He said, G-d is זוֹקֵף כּוֹפְּטִים, He erects those who are fallen. She threatened, "I will make your name into a Rasha" He answered, G-d is אוֹהֵב צְדִיקִים, He loves the righteous. She threatened, I will make you into a Gentile. He said, G-d is אוֹהֵב גֵּרִים, He loves the converts! (Avot DR' Natan 1 16) This is the only time, Yosef is called Tzaddik, in the words of our Sages! And it is not because he passed the test of adultery. It is because he had faith in his test. It is because, he relied on G-d, during the test, and gave G-d the keys. The same is true with Mordechai. He was called Mordechai Hatzaddik, because he was not afraid of Haman. He relied on G-d, and G-d alone. He gave G-d the keys.

The question of life, your biggest underlying test, is, can you give G-d the keys? Can you let go of the steering wheel, when you are going at 100 miles an hour, when G-d asks you to let go and trust in Him? That is what makes you into a Tzaddik! Yosef and Mordechai, had one thing in common, that they both won the Tzaddik trophy! They relied on G-d, and on no one or nothing else! When you say to yourself, to the world, and to G-d, אֵין עוֹד מִלְבָּדוֹ, there is nothing else in the world,

except for G-d, you become that indestructible Jew! (Nefesh Hachaim 3 12)

This is the meaning of the passuk, each time we bless G-d after our meal, and thank Him for giving us our sustenance. בְּרוּךְ הוֹבִיב אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְבָרֵךְ אֶת הַיָּדָיִם וְהַיָּהוּבָה יְבָרֵךְ בְּרוּךְ הוֹבִיב *Blessed is the man, that he will trust in YKVK. And G-d will be his trust.* (Yirmiyahu 17;7)

What is the double talk? What is the purpose of this redundancy? If this man is trusting G-d, of course G-d is his trust?!

No! It is not enough to trust in G-d, to be a blessed man. YOU NEED TO TRUST IN NO ONE ELSE, EXCEPT G-D, to be that blessed man! (See Malbim) G-d is his ONLY trust, only support system, only means for Parnasah, only Shadcan, only doctor, and only writer! Yep. I keep running out of ideas to write, and I wonder each week what I should even get in front of the computer to type for. Of course, I look for ideas all week long, but then I procrastinate until the last minute. And then, I just say, *G-d, You and I know, that I have nothing to write. Please write for me!!!* He literally types through my fingers. All I need to do, is play music in my ears while I type, so as not to let myself get in the way.

This is how, the best speakers speak. They ask G-d to speak for them. This is how, the best fundraisers fundraise. They tell G-d, I can't do this. I need a miracle. It works every time. This is what the best public speakers and fundraisers told me. This is a new meaning to the words, לֵב-מֶלֶךְ בְּיַד-יְהוָה *The heart of the king, is in the hand of YKVK* (Mishlei 21;1) When you want to be a king in any area of life, give G-d your heart. Give Him the keys.

The problem is, the animal inside us gets in the way. The animal inside us, is the part of our brain that is in charge of fear, of fight or flight. The animal that is inside us, causes us to be passionate about materialistic desires, and causes us to get angry when our ego is hurt. This is why, when we want to get close to G-d, when we want to ask forgiveness for sin, we bring a Korban, we sacrifice an animal. Even though that animal did

not do anything wrong, but that sacrifice is representing the animal inside us, that did something wrong, that we are willing to sacrifice, for our relationship with G-d.

So, ask yourself these three questions. Are you willing to stop being afraid, for G-d? Are you willing to stop being passionate about pizza, poppers, and playing with your phone? Are you willing to be as low as a worm, וְאֵנֶכִי תוֹלַעַת וְלֹא-אֵישׁ, and not let your ego get in the way? These are the three animals inside you, that you need to give up, for your relationship with G-d.

When a couple gets divorced, the Mizbeach sheds tears. (Gittin 90b) Why? Because the Mizbeach is the Jewish Icon of sacrificing that animal inside of you for a relationship. When a couple gets divorced, it is because one of those three animals, could not be sacrificed, in the personalities of this divorcing couple!

On Taanit Esther and Purim, there is a SUPER PRAYER, where anything you pray for, you will be answered! Psalm 22. Say it seven times, each time asking for something else. But, a word of caution. The super power of that prayer, that you say in the merit of Mordechai and Esther, needs to be read, with understanding and meaning. Concentrate on the words. I gave a half hour class on the depth of this Psalm this week, and I did not have enough time to say everything I prepared. Psalm 22 is about Esther, אֵילַת הַשָּׁהַר, The Doe (female deer) of Dawn, before she walked into Achashverosh's room to invite him to her party. It was at the part of the Purim story, where it was the darkest moment, before the light. It was recited, where there was nothing left for Esther to rely on, except for G-d. Esther was telling G-d, I am protected and not because I protected myself. After all, You protected me, when I could not protect myself. When I was in my mother's womb, you fed me. When a child comes out of the mother's womb, You supply them with mother's milk, immediately, the best food on Earth for the child. וְעָלֶיךָ וְעָלֶיךָ וְעָלֶיךָ וְעָלֶיךָ וְעָלֶיךָ וְעָלֶיךָ וְעָלֶיךָ and הַשְׁלֵכְתִּי מִרְחֹם מִבְּטֹן אִמִּי אֵלֶי אֲתָהּ

This Psalm is not only a prophesy by David about Esther, 400+ years prior. It is about every Jew in Exile, who is in his darkest time, before the light at the end of the tunnel. The Psalm ends, talking about Mashiach's time. כִּי לִיקְנוֹת הַמְּלִיכָה אֲמַשִּׁיל בְּגוֹיִם as this dark moment for Esther and the Nation, was right before the bright light of Redemption, and the building of the Second Temple.

This year, we had two Adars. The Rabbis ruled that we celebrate Purim, and read about the eradication of Amalek, in the second Adar, and not in the first. Why? The Shem Mishmuel writes, that in the days of Mashiach, Gog Umagog, and the eradication of

Amalek will be thirty days, beginning on Purim, and ending on Erev Pesach. He had this legend from his Rabbis. Therefore, we need to have Purim in the Second Adar, to be exactly 30 days from Pesach, for the year when Mashiach will come. This makes sense, now, why Psalm 22 which is the Psalm of Purim and Taanit Esther, ends with the Final Redemption.

G-d is waiting to Redeem us. But He is waiting first, for us to let go of the steering wheel, and hand Him over the keys. Because He is עֹשֶׂה נִפְלְאוֹת לְבַדּוֹ He makes miracles, when He is alone. Without anyone's help.

THE ART OF FAITH

"Why do we drink four cups of wine on the Seder Night?" is a question to which most people have only one answer. The answer most people know is that the cups are correspondent to the four terms of redemption G-d promised Moshe. וְהוֹצֵאתִי וְהַצַּלְתִּי וְגֵאלְתִּי וְלִקַּחְתִּי (Shemot 6. Midrash R) This year, I bought a Sefer called Ki Yishalcha, that asks every possible question I can think of and gives all the possible answers, in short. For this question, alone, the author offers 12 answers, with sources!

One of the twelve answers is a Midrash that counts the word כוס, cup, mentioned four times by the Butler, when describing his dream to Yosef. (Bereshit Raba) What in the world is the connection between Pharaoh's כוס, his cup, to our drinking four cups of wine on Seder night?!?

10 years ago, my neighbor told me the most amazing Dvar Torah. But first, he asked me four questions. 1. Why, in the butler's dream, did Pharaoh have only a כוס, a cup, not a גביע, a goblet? Didn't Yosef, who was *second* to the king, have a goblet? (Bereshit 44:2) 2. If all dreams go after the way you interpret them, (Berachot 52b) why did Yosef interpret the dream of the Butler for good and the Baker for bad? Yosef could have interpreted the dreams the other way around! 3. When Avraham was told the news at the Brit Bein Habetarim that his descendants would be enslaved for four hundred years, (Bereshit 15:13) Rashi

says, there, that the count was only 210 years, because the 400 started from when Yitzhak was born. But why does the passuk say that the Jews were in Egypt for 430 years? (Shemot 12:40) 4. Why do we drink only four cups, if there is not four terminologies of redemption G-d used when speaking to Moshe, but seemingly five? Isn't there, also, another terminology of redemption, וְהוֹבֵאתִי

The answer is that Yosef, who was destined to be responsible for his brothers in Egypt, was worried about one thing, until he heard the dream of the Butler. How could the Jews survive the 400 years, stay with a Jewish identity and not fall to the 50th level of impurity, a point of no return? 400 years is too much to endure! Yosef knew he was not just randomly in an Egyptian jail for a crime he didn't commit, but on a mission for something greater than himself, to provide and bring his brothers to endure the 400 years G-d told Avraham about, and he knew that there was a Seder, a sequence of events that would lead to his redemption. When Yosef heard the dream of the butler, in which he did not use the word גביע, goblet, for Pharaoh, but instead used the word כוס, cup, Yosef got the hint! The numerical value of כוס, is 86. 86 is not only the amount of wine (86cc) that is a Reviit, the required measurement. It is also the numerical value of G-d's Name Elokim, the Attribute of Judgement. Yosef figured, that G-d was telling him not to worry. There would be 86

years of harsh and bitter slavery, in order to speed up the redemption date, and we would not need the four hundred to be redeemed. (Miriam was named her name for the bitterness of the exile that began in her day, וימררו את חייהם, and she was 86 years old when she left Egypt.) We would be freed from Egypt, after just 210 years.

Now, if we do the math, we will be blown away. Because we left Egypt *before* the 400 years were up, we needed a total of 430 years to fulfill the decree on Avraham. We did only 86 years in Egypt, but we would need to do another 4 4 כוס, 4 times 86, to achieve 344, the numerical value of שמד. Every time the Jews go through difficult times, it is called שמד, because we are finishing up the 344-year quota. We did one of the five כוס in Egypt, and 86 times 5 is 430. The reason why we do not drink five cups of wine of redemption, but instead only four, is because we did the first 86 years in Egypt! We drink the four cups, so that G-d will consider that the exile that we are going through is going to cover the other four cups of wine as well. (See Torat Chaim Chullin 92a)

A lot of times in life, we ask questions; we want to know the Seder of events, we want to understand. But this world is the place of lack of understanding, Olam from the root of העלם, hidden. Avraham asked G-d a question, 'How will I know that I will be given the Land of Israel?', and we are still dealing with the 400-year decree till today. When Avraham was asked to offer up his son on the Altar, Avraham asked, which son? I have two sons, Yitzhak and Yishmael. G-d told him, your only son, and Avraham answered, both sons are the only son to their mother. And then, G-d said, the son you love, to which Avraham answered, I love both sons. Finally, G-d told him, Yitzhak! If Avraham had not asked questions, he would just have brought Yishmael up as a sacrifice, and we would never have heard from the Arabs again!

The Jews refer to this holiday as Pesach, but G-d refers to it as the Holiday of Matzot. Why? Because Matzah is symbolic of our faith in G-d, in not asking questions, relying on G-d as we enter a

barren desert, eating the Matzah as slaves in Egypt. It is what G-d celebrates, each year on Pesach: our faith in Him. On the other hand, *we* call the holiday Pesach, because we celebrate the fact that G-d believes in us, even when we do not have enough merit. He skipped over the unworthy Jewish homes and punished only the Egyptians. And he skipped over the 400 years, to redeem us at year 210 instead. Why?

It is so interesting. Even if out of four children, only one is a Chacham, only one is wise enough to have an intelligent conversation about the Pesach story, we say, ברוך המקום ברוך הוא. We bless G-d for the children we have. One of G-d's praises is that He is שמח בחלקו, He is happy with His lot. (Tanna D' Elyahu R. 1) But how does that make any sense, if G-d could create anything He wishes? The answer is that חלקו, G-d's portion, is His People. כִּי תִלַק יְהוָה עִמּוֹ (Devarim 32:9) G-d loves every Jew as he is, and He hopes each and every Jew finds his way to reconnect to Him. We are all on this journey of reconnection, and there is always a Seder in the path to an end that we may not understand. Yet. The answer we give to the smart son, when he asks for the laws of Pesach, is the very last law of the night. אין מפטירין אחר הפסח - The last thing you eat Seder night is the Korban Pesach, or Afikoman. Why specifically the last law of the night, out of all the laws? Because we tell the smart son who has questions, have patience till the end, and everything will make sense.

One of the reasons we have the four cups is correspondent to the four mothers, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. 1st cup, Sarah, אשר בהר בנו מכל עם of Kiddush, G-d chose our Nation, because Sarah converted the women. 2nd cup, Maggid, corresponding Rivka – ארמי אבד אבי – the battle with Lavan, Rivka's brother. 3rd cup, Rachel – Birkat Hamazon for Yosef, who provided food for Egyptians and his brothers. 4th cup, Leah – Hallel – she was the first to say thank You to G-d, calling her son Yehuda. (Shlah) Although women are not obligated to sit in the Succah, because they are not commanded to do Mitzvot that are time-bound,

women are still to drink the four cups of wine? Why? Because the four cups are to commemorate the faith of the greatest women of our people.

There is something about Leah's praise that can blow your mind. Leah had six boys, and in her seventh pregnancy, she prayed that this pregnancy would not take away from her barren sister Rachel's chance to have her portion of at least 2 tribes. So, G-d gave Leah a daughter, Dina, instead of a son Yosef, who was given to Rachel. Leah thought, hey, at least I can get a son-in-law who is a Talmid Chacham to marry Dina.

Instead, Dina was raped by Shechem, and Dina came home to her mother Leah, embarrassed and... pregnant. Dina's child Osnat was sent away by the Tribes, and G-d sent an angel to take Osnat down to Egypt, and in the end... she married Yosef... and from that marriage, two more Tribes, Menashe and Ephraim, came into being! Leah did not see the end of it; she died a year or two before Yosef was sold (Sefer Hadorot/ Sefer Hayashar). But she praised G-d knowing, that all along, there is a Seder to every redemption!

Selfie steps to faith, patience, and positivity

1. Hopefulness is the key to positivity, and the key to hopefulness is looking past the

JUST A THOUGHT

This week we discuss the Mitzvah of bringing offerings in the *Beit HaMikdash* to atone for sin. Why are we commanded to bring a sin-offering – קרבן חטאת – for (certain types of) sins committed unintentionally, but not for sins committed intentionally? Why can't intentional sins also be atoned for by sacrificing an animal?

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 95) explains why the sin-offering is appropriate only for the unintentional sinner. He notes that the body of a person is similar to the body of an animal in many ways. The main difference between humans and animals is that humans have intellect and a superior

level of consciousness. When a person sins against G-d unintentionally, he is essentially abandoning his intellect, and acting like an animal. When he brings an animal sacrifice for atonement, he realizes that he deserves to be put on the altar – if not for G-d's mercy – for failing to use his intellect, and, essentially, acting like an animal. In this way, he internalizes the importance of rectifying his unintentional behavior. He resolves to act in a more self-aware and self-critical way in the future. This is part of the *teshuvah* process which cleanses one from sin. The intentional sinner (מזיד), in contrast, cannot receive atonement in this way, for he sinned with his intellect. The

2. Focus on the purpose of it all, and find the inspiration in it. You are only Pharaoh's slave, or the slave to your problems, if you don't see G-d behind the problems. It is your choice. Are you Pharaoh's slave? Or are you serving G-d who put this Pharaoh that you need to deal with, in your life?
3. Stop reading the news, or anything that focuses on the bad, on the negative, on information that does not help you personally, in any way, shape or form. Surround yourself with positive people, people who can bring you closer to your goals.
4. Focus on what G-d gave you choice to actually change, and accept and ignore what He did not give you choice or options of changing. Being active in changing what you can, and active in looking for options and opportunities, empowers you to stay positive and patient, and ironically, helps your faith.

conceptual framework we have been discussing does not apply to him, for although he may have sinned out of passion or desire, he decided consciously to sin. He put his thought into it.

The Ben Ish Chai takes this a step further. A thought is something that has tremendous power, for good as much as bad. The reason for this is because our thoughts are spiritual, and our actions are only physical. In the upper worlds, spirituality has much more weight than physicality. Our Rabbis teach us הרהורי עבירה קשים מעבירה - thoughts of sinning are a more serious violation than the sin itself (Yoma 29a.). The Shulchan Aruch rules that Mitzvot need כוונה , intent, focus and thought.(Orach Chaim 4) Without thought, the mitzvah will not make its mark in the uppermost worlds (עולם המחשבה).

There are other places in the Torah that show us about the power of thought. We find a thought-provoking law concerning עדים זוממים , plotting witnesses. ועשיתם לו כאשר זמם לעשות לאחיו (דברים. "And you should do to him as he plotted to do to his brother." The plotting witnesses are to be punished by death, having to make a monetary payment or lashes— depending on what they had plotted to do. The words mentioned are כאשר זמם *as he plotted* and not כאשר עשה *as he did*. The Talmud derives from here that when these plotting witnesses are caught *after* the Jewish court carried out the decree, the plotting witnesses will not get punished. This of course is seemingly incomprehensible. How can the witnesses who carried out the plot go free, whereas the one who actually was caught before court carried out the decree be punished?

There is a very deep Maharal on this concept. The Maharal (Be'er Hagolah be'er 2) writes that the explanation for this is that as long as the plot or thought is in existence, it has a certain power. Once the plot has already come to fruition, the power of the *thought* is used up. It is not a thought anymore; rather it is classified as an act. However, as long as the plot was left in the realm of the abstract and not carried out, the Jewish court will use that plot

against the plotting witness. The Maharal compares the *thought* to a ball that is thrown against a wall: the ball bounces back at the person who threw it, according to the velocity of the throw. This is true only for the power of a *thought*. However, if the thought was translated into action, this plotting witness who got caught will not be punished by death, because he did not do any *physical* damage. Rather, the damage was the outcome brought about by the court.

One of the first tractates that a Yeshiva student is taught is Massechet Makkot. I always wondered why it is such a common Tractate for young students. The Chida, in his sefer Dvash L'fi, writes that he heard from an ancient *mekubal* (one who studies mystic works) that it is very good to study the tractate of Makkot, for it stops one from evil thoughts. The *mekubal* said that the *gematria*, or numerical value of the word מכות , is the same as the Hebrew word for *thoughts*466 – הרהורים. Therefore, writes the Chida, the *minhag* of the Yeshiva system for generations has been to teach this tractate, specifically, first, preferring it over all other tractates.

I once heard the following concept in the name of the Maharal. The reason that Yaakov loved and cherished his son Yosef and gave him more than he gave to the other Tribes(K'tonet Passim, Sh'chem and deserving of two tribes- Menashe and Efraim) was because Yosef had, in a way, the title of firstborn. Although Reuven was the first one that Yaakov fathered, Yaakov thought, on the night of the wedding, that he was marrying Rachel, when it was actually Leah. *Being that this was the thought of Yaakov*, he felt closeness to Yosef, who was, in fact, Rachel's first born, as a father feels towards a firstborn son.

The Ben Ish Chai brings from the Midrash a story of a certain white-skinned king and queen who gave birth to a black-skinned child. When they looked into the reason for this surprising phenomenon, they came to the conclusion that it was because of the paintings of black people in the palace: the queen would look at these paintings,

and since her thoughts were absorbed by the paintings and their black images, her offspring was born black.

Our thoughts do a lot. A lot more than we think!

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