


**Vayakhel Pekudei
Hachodesh**

English version

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The Art of Retelling Your Story

There is a story that has been circulating for many years in the name of Charlie Chaplin, although it is not certain that it ever actually happened with him. Charlie Chaplin once told a joke to an audience. Everyone laughed. He told the same joke again. Only a few people laughed. He told it a third time. Almost nobody laughed. Then he said something like: "If you can't laugh at the same joke again and again... why do you keep crying about the same problem?" How do we answer this psychological question from Charlie Chaplin? And why does this have to do with us, right now?

When R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was eight years old, he visited R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld together with his father, R' Chaim Auerbach. R' Sonnenfeld asked the young Shlomo Zalman, "Did you ask this year on the night of the Seder the Four Questions?" He answered yes. "What did your father answer?" "Avadim Hayinu LePharoah BeMitzrayim." "Did you ask the Four Questions last year?" He said yes. "What did your father answer you last year?" R' Shlomo Zalman was quiet, knowing full well that his father had answered the Four Questions with the same answer the year before. R' Yosef then asked him: "If you already forgot what he answered last year, why did you ask him again this year?" This is a very good question. Why do we ask the same questions every year, and say the same answer, telling the same story each year? If I called you once a year and told you the exact same story that happened to me, the same story I had told you every year for the past

three years, you would probably hang up the phone on me, or mark me as spam! In all mitzvot we must overcome the test of not allowing them to become routine. מצוות אנשים מלומדה But specifically this mitzvah, where we must tell a story that everyone already knows, again and again, with the same excitement, that is no easy task.

Another question must be addressed. The Talmud (Berachot 13a) quotes the verse in Yeshayahu: אִל־תִּזְכְּרוּ רֵאשִׁוֹנוֹת וְקִדְמוֹת אֱלֹהֵינוּ — "Do not remember the former things, and do not contemplate the ancient things" (Yeshayahu 43:18). The prophet tells us that in the times of Mashiach, in the era of Gog and Magog, we will no longer mention the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The miracles of the End of Days will be so great that they will make the miracles of the Exodus appear small in comparison. The Rabbis ask: how could it be that a prophet, or the Talmud, would uproot the mitzvah of the Torah of recounting the Exodus from Egypt? After all, no prophet can uproot one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. R' Isser Zalman Meltzer answers that the main mitzvah is not the historical account of leaving Egypt. Rather, the heart of the mitzvah is the story of Hashem's Hashgacha — that He watches over us — and that ה' מלך ה' מלך ה' ימלוך לעולם ועד. Hashem is King, He was King, and He will be King forever and ever. In the days of Mashiach, the story of the Exodus will encompass all the exiles, on a national level and on a personal level, and it will still be the fulfillment of the same mitzvah of



telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Your personal redemption is part of the mitzvah of the Haggadah just as much as the national redemption. Notice that this is the very meaning of the blessing we recite at the end of the Haggadah: אשר גאלנו וגאל את אבותינו ממצרים — Who redeemed us and redeemed our forefathers from Egypt.

The hardest mitzvah of the night is not only to see ourselves as if we ourselves were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. We must also show ourselves as if we just emerged from Egypt (Rambam, Chametz U'Matzah 7:6). How is this possible? The mitzvah is to tell one's family, or whoever is willing to listen, that I was a slave, just like this slave or that maidservant — כמו שפחה (Rambam, Chametz U'Matzah 7:2). But today we do not have slaves or maidservants to show our children who we once were like. Or do we? Hold on, I will explain what I mean. The Alshich offers a fascinating insight: the reason Moshe's name does not appear in the entire Seder Haggadah (except for the verse “ויאמינו בה' ובמשה”עבדו”) is because the first person in the world who told the story of the Haggadah to his son was Moshe Rabbeinu himself. Since Moshe's own sons were the first Jewish children who had not been in Egypt, Moshe told them the Haggadah. Because he was telling the story from his own perspective, he did not mention his own name. The real mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus is telling your own story.

There is another interesting point. Have you ever noticed that most of the Haggadah is not actually about the miracles of Egypt? Much of it consists of laws, introductions, discussions about the night, and explanations surrounding the story, but only a relatively small portion of the Haggadah actually describes what Egyptian slavery and the Exodus looked like. This is striking. The mitzvah of recounting the miracles and the redemption is your mitzvah of the night, one you are meant to prepare for. It is a once-a-year opportunity where every word you research and speak about the miracles of Egypt fulfills another positive commandment from the Torah. People invest great effort in preparing

the other mitzvot of the holiday for many days: matzah, maror, charoset, removing chametz, clothes for Yom Tov, and the joy of the holiday... But for some reason many people arrive at the night of the Seder and rely on a good Haggadah sefer to carry them through, without having prepared the retelling itself beforehand.

And this is where Charlie Chaplin's point comes to light. Why do people cry when they repeat their problem again and again? Because everyone carries a story they cry about, a story they carry their whole life. Whenever something triggers that story, the pain returns, because they have just relived it. Try to think about the story you carry, the most painful one, the one that surfaces in your mind whenever you feel stuck in life.

People laugh less each time they hear the same joke because the brain already knows the surprise. A joke works because of novelty. But pain works differently. Pain intensifies when we replay it. Every time we retell ourselves the story, the brain experiences it again. We are not remembering the pain, we are reliving it. That is why some people carry the same story their entire life.

The Torah understands something very deep about human nature. If people naturally repeat painful stories, the Torah teaches us to repeat a different story, the story of redemption. Now let us understand what the real story of the Haggadah is. It is different from the version we often tell ourselves. The real story is that Hashem is the King. He always was, and He always will be. Have you ever noticed how strange it is that we say at the end of Avadim Hayinu that if G-d had not freed us from Pharaoh, we would still be slaves in Egypt? Pharaoh died, didn't he? Of course, Pharaoh died. But the mindset of slavery, the idea that we are trapped by circumstances, by the powers that seem to govern our lives, would have persisted forever had Hashem not taken us out of that mindset. At the time of Pharaoh, Hashem showed us that no matter how the story of our lives appears to us, Hashem is really the true King. He always was, He always will be, and He will reign forever and ever.

The real slavery was not only the chains. The real slavery was believing that Pharaoh controlled reality. The Exodus was the moment when Hashem

showed the Jewish people that no human power controls history.

THE ART OF BEING THE ETERNAL NATION (2024)

Things don't look that bright for Israel, with Ramadan coming up, but we don't fear. The Holocaust did not happen because we were weak physically as a people, or because we had no army. It did not happen because it made sense it would happen. As a matter of fact, nothing made sense back then. After all, there were at least 42 failed plots to assassinate Hitler, that historians uncovered! If logic would dictate, IDF would have never won the Six Day War, nor the Yom Kippur War. We are a miracle. And a miracle means, G-D.

Seemingly bad things happen only if and when G-d allows them to happen, for a reason we will only know when Eliyahu Hanavi comes with good tidings of Mashiach. For the meantime, though, we have faith, that Am Yisrael Hai, through connecting to G-d, who is **חי העולמים** the Life of the Worlds, as it says, **וְאִתָּם הַדְּבָקִים בִּילִקּוֹךְ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם** We rejoice each Purim, for we are part of an indestructible nation. We celebrate the fact that all those who wanted to destroy us, evaporate with the news. We are The Eternal Nation, a nation that is comparable to that sheep that is surrounded by 70 wolves. We are protected, and not because we protect ourselves. G-d protects us, for the Torah we learn, and the Mitzvoth we do. Here are just a few:

What protects us is the Shabbat Table. **וְשִׁמְרוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם:** Making Shabbat, is what gives us דורות, generations. If you have no Shabbat Table, even if your kids will stay Jewish, but your grandchildren probably won't. The Megillah tells us at the outset, that Shabbat is what saved us in Shushan. **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כָּטוֹב לִבְהַגִּילָה בַּיַּיִן** G-d contrasted how we behave at our Shabbat meals when we drink, singing Shabbat songs to G-d, versus the immorality at the party of Achasverosh, when the gentiles get drink. G-d then punished Vashti with

her life on Shabbat, and put Esther in her stead, who eventually saved the day. This was measure for measure, for Vashti forcing Jewish women to work her field on Shabbat, and tend to her garden. **כִּי אֲשַׁמְרָה שַׁבַּת אֶל־יִשְׁמְרָנִי**

What protects us is charity. There are two things that what you take from it, they become bigger. A hole, and fire. You can light a flame from a flame, and the first flame does not get smaller. When G-d wanted to show Moshe the way to get the Jews to give charity of the Mahatzit Hashekel, the way to do that, was by showing Moshe a half coin of fire. Why fire? Moshe had no idea how to get the Jews to give from their money. After all, people believe that money protects them, and giving away money, would mean giving away protection. Money is time, and time is life, which is why money is called דמים, blood. How do you expect to get people to give their life to charity? But G-d told Moshe, the way to get them to give is by getting them to believe, that by giving charity, you don't lose. You gain. Just like fire. How so?

The money you have, is the money G-d entrusted you with, to do good things. If you do good with your money, G-d will give you more of it, because He knows He can trust you with it, He knows you can be His partner. G-d is **נותן לחם לכל בשר**, He gives food to all, He is **הזן את הכל**, He supports everything. When you give charity, you are ensuring G-d that He can partner with you in supporting His Creatures. This is also why, giving Tzedaka, is an atonement, and it annuls the Evil Decree, and saves from the Angel of Death. Because giving charity, is pledging allegiance of Faith in G-d.

What protects us is unity. The Sefer Hassidim writes, **לא יעשו הערלים רעה אלא א"כ יעשו ישראל תחילה**, *The non-Jews can't do us any*

harm, unless the Jews first cause harm, or are cruel, to each other. (209) The idea of the Half Shekel, was to show, that we are all incomplete when we stand alone. The reason why the Jew is more successful than the gentile in business is because when one Jew gets rich, six Jews get rich. They work together, they network, with a win-win mindset.

The half shekel, was originally to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. Eventually, it became the fundraiser before Nissan, to unite the People in bringing communal sacrifices in the Temple. A deeper meaning for the Mahatzit Hashekel, is found in the Midrash, that it is an atonement for the brothers selling Yosef לִישְׁמֵעָאֵלִים וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת-יוֹסֵף לְיִשְׁמֵעָאֵלִים בְּעֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף. (Esther Rabba 7;20) The amount that each of the ten brothers received, 2 *Kesef*, was the exact amount of Half a Shekel. The only ones who were able to save the Nation from the decree of Haman, was Mordechai and Esther, who were descendants of Binyamin, the brother that was not at all part of the sale of Yosef. The selling of Yosef was from the belief, that we don't need this brother, we could manage without him. A person does not get into a fight with someone he needs. In the end, the brother Yosef, was the brother who supported all of them in the years of the famine, and was the most needed.

The divide in the nation is what got us into the Purim mess. As Haman told Achashverosh, יִשְׁנֵי עַם-אֶחָד מְפֹרָד וּמְפֹרָד *There is this nation that is divided...* And the way to get out of the mess, is to reunite, through Mishloach Manot and Matanot Laevyonim. The Halacha says, כַּשֶּׁם שֶׁנִּכְנַס אֶב מִמַּעֲטִין *Just like when the month of Av begins we are to lessen our joy, so too,*

when the month of Adar begins, we are to add in joy. Why doesn't the Halacha just say, that we should be happy in Adar, without the comparison to being less happy in Av? The answer is, that just like the destruction of the second Temple was the result from a divide in the Nation, from senseless hate, so too, the redemption of the Nation will be only through unity, as unity always brings salvation. Thus, the introduction to Adar, is the Half Shekel. To remind us, that we are all interdependent.

What protects us is Torah learning. When a defeated Haman came to Mordechai to take him around town on the King's horse, Mordechai was learning Torah. It was the second day of Passover, and he was teaching on that day, when the whole nation was fasting for three days, the laws of bringing the Korban Haomer, for that was the sacrifice of the day. He was teaching the students, how the Kohen does Kemitza, on the Korban Haomer. Haman said to Mordechai, *Your Kemitza of barley flour, outweighed all the silver that I gave to Achashverosh.* What got Haman the most angry, was seeing Mordechai in the Bet Midrash, studying Torah. The passuk says, וַיֵּצֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא שְׂמֵחַ וְטוֹב לֵב וְכִרְאוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת-מֶרְדֵּכָי בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלֹא-יָזַע מִמֶּנּוּ וַיִּמְלֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל-מֶרְדֵּכָי חֲמָה: When Haman would see Mordechai sitting in the gate of the king, and he did not get up for Haman, this burned Haman with anger. We know, that whenever the Megillah says in it the word Hamelech, it is hinting to the King of the World. If so, when Mordechai was sitting in the Shaar Hamelech, in the gate of the king, he was sitting in the Bet Midrash! What bothered Haman more than anything, was that he could not disturb Mordechai's learning, for even a second!

THE ART OF MANAGING BEAUTY

The Eshet Chayil is not a woman of strength, but of valor. Valor is strength of the mind, the ability to face danger and adversity with firmness, bravery and courage. A woman needs valor and courage to dress nicely but modestly, and that courage comes

from a focus on the next world and on the future of her family. עוֹדֵי-וְהִגֵּר לְבוּשָׁה אִתְּשֵׁחַק לַיּוֹם אֶתְרוּן. (see Akedat Yitzchak Chaye Sarah)



G-d has no interest in monks or nuns; He has plenty of angels in Heaven. He wants humans who make the mundane spiritual, infusing it with meaning and purpose. Separating ourselves from worldly pleasures is not a Jewish definition of holiness. Jewish Holiness is using the worldly pleasures only for spiritual, Torah purposes and to sanctify G-d's Name. Refraining entirely from having any connection to anything material or physical is a sin, as the Nazir needs to bring a sin offering to finish his Nazir status, because he could not enjoy wine, during his Nazir days.

When Moshe fundraised for the Mishkan, the women came running with all their jewelry. With their gold, silver and copper. They brought ornaments such as the כוֹמֵן, a women's belt ornament, and they brought their copper mirrors, בְּמִרְאֵת הַחָבֵרֶת. One reason why women gave in their copper mirrors, נְחֹשֶׁת, is to fix the sin of Chava with the נָחָשׁ, the snake, as the letters are similar. Moshe was disgusted with these mirrors that women used for beautifying themselves, for he understood that the attention to physical appearance was a ply of the yetzer hara. But before he rejected the mirror and belt donations, G-d said to Moshe: Take those mirrors and belts!!! They are the most precious to Me, to be used for My Mishkan and my copper כִּיּוֹר, water basin! There is nothing more precious to Me and My Mishkan than the mirrors that were used by these Jewish women in Egypt to beautify themselves for their beaten and broken husbands, and build large families during the 86-year holocaust. Each woman would take her mirror out to the fields and call her husband/slave to eat lunch under the apple tree. And they would look at themselves in the mirror, together with their husband, ... as the passuk says, תָּהָת הַתְּפוּזִים עֹרְרֵתֶיךָ. (See Rashi 38:8)

Hormones are not bad or good. They just **are**, and it depends how you use them. When a person uses them in accordance to the Torah, G-d says that there is nothing more holy and precious. When a person gets married, in accordance with Jewish law, this is called Kiddushin. There is nothing else, in Judaism, that is referred to as holiness, other

than marriage, itself. Because according to Judaism, holiness is making the mundane spiritual, and there is no greater making the mundane spiritual than marriage.

When a woman uses her strengths to strengthen the man to be holier and greater, there is nothing more spiritual that a woman can do. If we look at all the women who entered the Eshet Chayil hall of fame, it was always because of their having empowered men, not because of something related only to themselves. *Sarah, for making her husband rich from Pharaoh. Rivka, for helping Yitzchak overcome the loss of his mother. Leah, for greeting Yaacov with a cheerful face when he returned from the field, when she purchased that night from Rachel for some mandrakes. Rachel, for going through the embarrassment of having no children, every day, hoping to be a mother of the Tribes. Bitya, daughter of Pharaoh, who converted and dealt with Moshe. Yochebed, for being the mother of Moshe. Miriam, for prophesying that her mother would have the child (Moshe) that would save the Jewish People, for getting slapped on her head over her prophecy by Amram when the slavery got worse instead of the redemption arriving, and when little Moshe was thrown into the Nile, she stayed strong to her prophecy, by waiting on the side of Nile to see what would happen to her brother. Chana, for praying for a son, and in that merit of prayer, to be the mother of Shmuel, who was equal to both Moshe and Aharon. Yael, for not killing Sisra with a sword, so as not to wear something associated with men, but instead, killing him with a tent peg. The widowed woman who gave bread and water to Eliyahu the prophet. Rachav, the harlot, who was willing to help the Jewish Spies when the Jews came to destroy Yericho. Bat Sheva, for being the mother of King Shlomo. Michal, for saving King David's life from the hands of her father, King Shaul. Shimshon's mother. Elisheva bat Aminadav, the wife of Aharon, and the mother of all Kohanim. Serah Bat Asher, who saved a whole city of Jews, with her sound advice. The wife of Ovadiah the prophet, who prevented her sons from falling into King Achav's persuasion to worship idols. Shunamit, for*



feeding the prophet Elisha. Ruth, for converting and embracing the religion in such a way that she merited to be King David's grandmother. (Midrash Mishlei)

In Az Yashir, we mention how, when the Jews left Egypt and they crossed the Sea, the nations of the world were petrified from the Jewish nation. תַּפְּלָהּ *Her fear and trepidation will fall upon them.* The word אימתה, her fear, is strange here. Why doesn't it just say אימה, fear? The answer is, when the nations of the world saw all the little children leaving Egypt, they wondered how the Jews were able to have the strength to have children, while they were in an 86-year holocaust? Every male slave was definitely going through the two greatest causes of depression: hopelessness and helplessness. How were they able to have children?!? The answer has to be that the Jewish nation has SUPERWOMEN!!! Women who know how to give their husbands hope, encouragement and spiritual strength! Women who recognize that only through building families, can we hope that זְמַן לְעֶלְמָא יִמְלִיךָ, that Hashem will rule forever, through descendants. The nations of the world realized that with women like that, the Jewish nation is indestructible!!! And that is who they feared! The incredibly spiritual Jewish women!!!

How does the woman have this power? This עוֹזָה? The answer is, הַתְּשֻׁקָה לַיּוֹם אַחֲרָיוֹן, she knows how to laugh through the craziness, because in the end, on her last day, she will laugh best. She will give back her soul to her creator, saying, I gave every part of me for You, G-d! She knows how to look into the future, past the slavery. Ever wonder where Miriam and the women had drums and bongos in the desert, to sing at the Yam Suf? The answer is that the women were preparing these bongos while they were in the midst of slavery, knowing that there will be a lot to sing and dance about, when G-d brings about their salvation!

Mirrors, beauty, are creations of G-d, and they are good and beloved to G-d, but only when used in line with the Torah's guidelines. According to the Ibn Ezra, it was the giving in of these mirrors, by these women, that G-d loved so much. These women realized that now that we have a Mishkan, we don't need mirrors as much, because our homes will have tranquility in them, with the husband and wife growing spiritually, through their connection to the Mishkan, which brought G-d into their homes. And those mirrors, G-d wanted more than anything else!

VOICES OF A LEADER

Andrius Caesar, of Rome, once challenged Rabbi Yehoshua, son of Hannanyah, a very wise rabbi who was close to him: "I am better than Moshe, your teacher and leader, for I am alive, and he is dead. And it says in your Torah, in Kohelet כִּי לַחַיִּים טוֹב מִן הָאֲרִיָּה הַמֵּת – A live dog is better than a dead lion. (Kohelet 9 ; 4) R' Yehoshua asked the Caesar in return , "If you were to decree that your people light no fire for three days, would they obey?" The Caesar responded – "Yes, of course". And so he decreed.

The first night after his decree , they both climbed up to the rooftop of the Roman castle. They looked around Rome, as far as the eye could see, and there was no light. Then, suddenly, they saw smoke

in the distance. R' Yehoshua asked the Caesar, "What is this smoke coming up out of that chimney in the distance?" The Caesar answered, "The general of the city fell ill, and the doctor went to examine him. The doctor said that this general needs to drink hot water to get better. They lit fire to heat up the water." R' Yehoshua answered the Caesar, "Even while you are still alive, your people do not keep your decrees. They disobey your command even for reasons that are not פִּיקוּחַ נַפְשׁ , not a life and death issue. Even on the first day of your decree, one of your generals has disobeyed your words. From the time that Moshe, my leader and teacher, taught us in his Torah לֹא תִבְעֵרוּ אֵשׁ בְּכָל מִשְׁבְּתֵיכֶם בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת "a fire shall not burn in your dwellings on the day of Shabbat",

(Shemot 35 ;3) no Jew, during his whole life, lights a fire on Shabbat. Moshe's decree was not annulled. How do you say, then, that you are better than him? (Kohelet Rabbah 9; 3)

Just a few questions here. First, Caesar's argument was based on Kohelet. If he is *alive*, he is better than Moshe, who is *dead*. How did R' Yehoshua refute this? Second, were there no non-observant Jews who did not keep Shabbat over the years and did not listen to Moshe? And finally, why did R' Yehoshua pick this law, specifically, out of all the laws that Moshe gave his people in order to prove his point?

The answers can be understood on two levels. The first level is the basic difference between Moshe and Caesar's roles as leaders. The difference between Moshe's rule and the Caesar's rule is that in addition to Moshe having been our leader, he was also our beloved teacher. Caesar was just a leader in the form of a dictator who gave orders. Moshe's teachings are eternal, he is *still* our leader and teacher, and therefore, he is *still alive in the minds of his people*. The words of Moshe are taken very seriously, and his words still echo in the thoughts of the nation, as they have done for thousands of years, *because Moshe knew how to be the greatest leader ever*. Once a week Moshe's people hear him say, just as he did thousands of years ago; "*A fire shall not burn in your dwellings on the day of Shabbat.*" The reason why R' Yehoshua specifically chose this law regarding fire on Shabbat is because this law is one of the most inconvenient laws to live by; it effects our lives the most. For instance, lighting up a dark room, heating our homes in the winter, cooking... . Even today, electricity, the modern day "fire", is forbidden on Shabbat, for it falls under the category of burning an actual fire. Not lighting fire on Shabbat makes it obvious to all the nations of the world that we still adhere to Moshe's teachings. Although not all of the Jews keep all of the laws, it is about the significant number of Jews who *do* take the "trouble" to keep Shabbat. So, R' Yehoshua explained to the Caesar, *Moshe is still alive: people are still listening to his voice. Your*

voice, your command, is disobeyed for the slightest inconvenience.

The deeper answer to the questions asked above is really in the way we understand how one hears the words of a leader. People go through their entire lives "hearing" voices of authority figures, leaders, in their heads, in their subconscious. Voices that they no longer hear in the literal sense, but still feel obligated to obey. These are the voices of our *parents and mentors, those who imprinted in us our morals and values*. It is they who told us *what* is important in life, and how important it is. These voices are so strong that people feel an obligation to heed their words, long after those who first spoke those words are gone.

So, can we say that *all* those who have been in a position of authority over us have this effect on us? Absolutely not. This is where the type of leader plays a crucial role in the degree to which one heeds his words, and for how long. The stronger the trust and love of the leader/parent is for the subject/child, the stronger the impact of the voice, and the stronger the feeling that one must adhere to, or "hear" the words that were spoken.

Now, there are two types of authority figures/parents. There are those who are dictators, and there are those who are leaders. A leader's voice is truly heard: it echoes in those who follow him. Of course, the *greatest leader ever* was Moshe, and that's why his voice keeps echoing in Jewish hearts. If we just pay attention, we can learn all of the qualities that make one a good leader from almost every story we know about Moshe. To mention a few of these qualities; **Trust:** Moshe gave an exact account of funds received, down to the last shekel that he collected, avoiding any distrust amongst his followers. **Open communication:** Moshe was willing to hear and discuss whatever was important to his people; *if it was important to them, it was important to him*. They felt comfortable talking to Moshe about every last detail. Moshe preferred one-on-one communication, and was easily approachable. (Once he realized that he would

become worn out by continuing this way, and it would have a bad effect on his leadership he followed Yitro's advice to delegate certain positions.) On our level, we can understand that leadership requires a person to be **emotionally intelligent**, aware of his own feelings and those of the people around him. This enables us to prepare for expected situations and reactions. (Moshe was sensitive to the fact that his older brother, Aharon, would logically be the one to lead and take the Jews out of Egypt.) **Knowing when and how to give criticism**: Moshe was careful not to criticize the Jewish nation until the end of his life. Moshe **went out to his people**, to be part of them and be "hands on" when they were still in slavery.

Moshe displayed **compassion** by running after the sheep, which was one of the prime reasons he was chosen to be a leader. Immediately, he was appointed by G-d at the Burning Bush. Moshe **defended his people**, and he was able to **understand their feelings**... There is no end to how one can learn leadership qualities from Moshe.

As parents and role models, we must be aware of whether we are leading or dictating. We must learn from Moshe Rabbeinu what needs to be done in order to lead. We must decide whether we want to be heard for a moment, like a dictator, or if we want to be heard for generations, and have our voices echo for years to come, like true leaders.

UNDERSTANDING THE SINNER

At times, we hear very unsettling things about people we know – people who we thought of as good and honest can fall so low. There is a mitzvah to judge people favorably. That, however, is not the topic at hand. Rather, our focus is on understanding people.

It is extremely perplexing to us when we become aware of the fact that someone whom we know sinned: should I try to understand how this happened, or should I just forget about it, saying it doesn't make any difference. Either way is fine, as long as it is not thought about too much. But at times, when the story involved someone close to us, we cannot find peace within ourselves.

There are parts of the Torah which raise complex questions. Now, just because they are complex, it does not mean that there are no answers. There **are** answers. And many of them are lessons for life. Here is one of them.

We know that the Jews rose to the level of angels upon receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai. They heard G-d. They almost *saw* G-d. How could they plunge so deeply and swiftly to the abyss of the Sin of the Calf, a sin of idolatry, just because they thought that Moshe was a couple of hours late? Even if the Satan tricked them into thinking that

Moshe was dead. And, even if it was not the whole nation that was involved... How could anyone fall into idolatry at the foot of Mt. Sinai? And even kill Hur for opposing them?

There are more than a few answers to this question. R' Yaakov Kametzky, zt"l, answered it with a unique twist. He said that the question does not even exist! As many times in life, it becomes a question only when you do not "put yourself in the shoes" of the sinner. The Jews were, at the time, living a life of miracles. A whole nation of more than 3 million people were in the Sinai desert. They were sustained by the Manna that G-d gave them in Moshe's merit. If he had left them, and they would not have Manna, many would die in the dessert from starvation. Their life was dependent upon miracles. Without Moshe, they would be no more than a poor nation without food. Our Rabbis tell us that a poor person is considered dead. They were in a state of mind that defied logic, a state of panic. At that time, idolatry was extremely common in the world. It was natural for people to want to serve something tangible. After our Rabbis removed the Yetzer Hara for idolatry by giving us prayer, it is, altogether, very hard for us to understand the Sin.

I believe that many times, when we do not understand the reason for a person's downfall, and we are left with a question, it is in actual fact not a question. We are barely able to put ourselves in the shoes of anyone else, especially in the shoes of those who went through or are going through

different traumas, tests or nightmares. We should, however, pray with fervor in our morning prayers- ואל תביאנו לידי ניסיון *and please, do not bring me to a situation where I am tested...*and, if we do ever have to face a test, that we should be strong enough to meet the challenge.

JEWISH REMEDY FOR RELAXATION

“שבת שבתון... שבת שבתון... ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי... שבת שבתון” *Six days your work shall be done and on the seventh day...rest* (Exodus 35:2). In this passuk, there seem to be two commandments: to rest on the seventh day, and to work the other six days. But is there really a *mitzvah* to work six days a week? Also, the words “*your work shall be done,*” are surprisingly passive. It would seem the Torah should have commanded to “do your work” instead.

On Shabbat, many have the custom to eat fish. There is an interesting phenomenon about fish. If one were to open the belly of a large fish shortly after it has consumed a smaller fish, he would find the small fish facing the tail of its predator. Judging from its position, one can deduce that the big fish's “fish-food” was not the one he had chased to near death, but rather another fish, one that swam straight into its mouth. This is the lesson of the Shabbat as we shall soon see.

Rabbeinu Bachye in *Chovot Halevavot* mentions a fundamental concept of Jewish belief that may be confusing at times. *A person must realize that the effort he puts into something is not the cause of his success.* (Bitachon Chap. 4) Success is delivered by G-d, in His infinite, unfathomable ways. It is incumbent upon each man to do his utmost to make a living; G-d does not want us to rely upon miracles. It is for this reason that the *passuk* specifically commands each person “*six days your work shall be done*”. We are commanded to do our part by putting in our effort and working on the other six days of the week. However, we are also expected to realize that, essentially, we are just going through the motions. Ultimately, success

rests in the hands of Hashem alone. This is why our *pasuk* says “*your work shall be done*” as opposed to “*Do your work*”.

Rav Wolbe explains (*Alei Shor 2; Bitachon VeHishtadlut*), that this can be a very difficult concept. For example, a farmer is commanded to do all his many, diverse jobs in order to prepare and sow his field, yet he must still believe that his toil was not needed by G-d in order to provide his sustenance. He toils only because that is the manner in which G-d commanded that he behave when He created the world.

The Torah gives us one day a week to change perspective and internalize this belief. The world on Shabbat is a time when money has no value, and no bearing whatsoever on our lives. *Chazal* explain that, on *Rosh Hashana*, each person is allotted a certain amount of money for the whole year, and any Shabbat expenses are separate from that allotment, not diminishing the original year's sum in the least. The fact that our livelihood comes from G-d is clearer to us on Shabbat, but, of course, holds true in the same measure during the week, even though we are required to invest our efforts in work. We demonstrate our recognition of this principle by eating fish on Shabbat: just as the large fish had to toil for its meal by chasing a smaller one, its actual sustenance came from a totally different fish!

One can truly rest on Shabbat only if one feels that ‘his efforts are his responsibility- but his successes are not in his control’. By internalizing this concept, one can experience true relaxation on Shabbat. It is for this reason that there is really no

point in working to an extreme degree. A workaholic, by definition, thinks his level of success is determined through his own efforts, as opposed to being granted by G-d. Tension and stress come when one feels the loss of a control

that he thought he once had. But when we can internalize the fact that G-d was (and is) really in control all the time, then, we can experience a truly restful state.

REFRAMING QUARRELS WITH LOVE

Many couples live under the mistaken impression that *shalom bayit* (tranquility at home) means no fighting. This is very untrue. *Shalom bayit* means knowing *how* to fight. It means knowing how to make up. No two people are identical, and neither are their life perspectives. True love is existent in the new couple after their first disagreement. Until then, they simply did not know each other. Knowing how to disagree, without being degrading or insulting, means that there is mutual respect. Making up and compromising means that the relationship is more important than the topic at hand. Many times, this requires a sense of reframing, a change in the way things are perceived.

Although the Jews sinned with the golden calf right after their commitment to G-d at Mt. Sinai, G-d showed us that He still desired to be among us. He told us that He wanted to be among us in a Mishkan. This was the display of love that was greater than the offense.

Strangely, the Torah writes that it was not so simple. G-d told Moshe **וּבְיוֹם פְּקֻדֵי וּפְקֻדַתִּי עֲלֵהֶם** (32: 34) “And on the day that I make My account, I shall remember their Sin.” Rashi comments here that throughout the generations, when the Jews must suffer, G-d adds to their trials a bit of punishment for the Sin of the calf. If He were to have visited the whole punishment upon us all at once, we would have been annihilated! G-d broke the punishment to a “swallowable bite-size.”

R' Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev was troubled very much by this. *How could the All Merciful G-d write in His Torah that He would never forget our Sin, even after repentance?*

R' Levi Yitzchak, as he always does, was able to reframe even the greatest of sins. He pointed to the Talmud (Berachot 32) that G-d will actually “forget” the Sin following our repentance. Rather, the idea of the passuk is that G-d will never forget the Sin of the calf in the sense that *we had Free Will then*. When someone comes from a pious family and grows up to be pious, no eyebrows are raised. On the other hand, when someone pious comes from a house in which the family members and their ancestors were anything *but* pious- this amazes people. When the Jews accepted the Torah, this did not show anything special about them – for the Jews were the descendants of the Holy Forefathers. What else could we expect from the descendants of such a family? *This was who they were naturally*.

When they sinned with the calf, this displayed that they actually were not pious at the core. It showed that the people who accepted the Torah did so, not only because they followed in their parents' way; rather, it was because they overcame their desires. They rose to the challenge. When the Jews repent for such a sin, it is through a battle against an inner instinct for evil that all humanity must overcome. It shows that *we were not naturally pious*.

G-d will remember this Sin of the calf on the days of wrath. He will remember the inner power struggle between good and evil: that we decided of our own free will to listen to the Yetzer tov to accept the Torah. That we decided of our own free will to repent from the Sin. With this in mind and with the positive way in which He will look at it, G-d will count this for our merit.

In marital harmony, we can reframe the fights of the past and turn them into signs of love. This is

the way of G-d. We are commanded to follow.

Detecting Bad Habits

“והנשיאם הביאו את אבני השוהם” – *And the princes brought the shoham stones* (Exodus 35:27)“. Rashi asks the question, why is the letter *yud* missing from the word *vehanisi'im* (והנשיאים)? He explains that while the Jewish nation was donating to the *Mishkan* (tabernacle), instead of bringing their own offerings at the same time, the *Nesi'im* offered to bring whatever would be missing at the end of the collection. To their shock, Bnei Yisrael quickly donated all the necessary materials, leaving the *Nesi'im* with nothing to donate. Disturbed at their plight, they asked how they could still take part in the building of the *Mishkan*. Hashem responded that they could donate the “*avnei shoham*” stones. However, since they had been complacent during the period of donating, the letter *yud* was removed from their name.

Rav Chaim Leib Schmulevitz points out that removing the letter *yud* from their name in the Torah was no simple matter. In fact, Yehoshua was later given this letter by Moshe as a *shemira* (protection) against being part of the plot of the spies. R' Chaim asks – why were they penalized with the loss of a *yud*, if their intentions were good? Weren't they ready to donate however much would be missing?

Rav Chaim explains that it was the trait of laziness that drove the *Nesi'im* to wait until the end. *The element of laziness here was minute, and the Nesi'im themselves were unaware of the presence of this trait within them!* On a similar note, Rav Yisrael Salanter, while expressing the importance of *mussar*, writes that negative traits hide in the deepest recesses of the heart. *Mussar* is like a flashlight that helps one discover and reveal his true self. Still, we may ask ourselves, how could the *Nesi'im* be guilty of laziness, if they offered to make sure all the costs would be covered?

At the Sin of the Golden Calf, those involved worked with zeal and alacrity. They told Aaron that they couldn't wait for tomorrow. They killed Hur, who opposed them. They quickly took off their gold rings to ensure that the Calf would be made without delay. Those involved in this sin displayed motivation and ambition in carrying it out.

When one truly desires to do something, it is understood that he puts in much more effort and shows more determination than when he is not really interested. The *Nesi'im's* failure to donate immediately reflected a minute level of indifference stemming from laziness. The *Nesi'im* should have learned from the behavior displayed at the Golden Calf and translated it to worshipping Hashem with that same zeal when fulfilling His Will.

In applying this to ourselves, many times we can observe other people's actions and learn from them the innate strength we have within us. For example, one who has trouble getting up in the morning to go to pray need only look at the millionaire who jumps out of bed with enthusiasm early each morning to earn more money. By seeing his fellow's ability to get up, regardless of his exhaustion, one understands that it is possible, when there is true will, to do the same. Tapping in to the power of hidden energy, one can, with wisdom, direct it toward meaningful goals.

The former Mashgiach of Yeshivas Ponivitch, Rav Yechezkel Levenstien, would act with tremendous strength, even though his physical makeup was frail and weak. When asked about this, he commented how he had learned from the Chinese, while staying in Shanghai during WWII, how it is possible to use extreme physical strength. The frail, old Chinese men would harness themselves and pull heavy wagons, the way horses would, using

unusual amounts of strength. Rav Levenstien learnt from their ways and applied this to himself.

I myself once used this method to improve myself. I would always have tremendous difficulty staying up learning on the night of Shavuot, until once I stayed up the entire night on the phone, having a delightful conversation. After hanging up, I made

note of my inner strength which enabled me to carry on – even with lack of sleep – when properly motivated.

I KNOW I CAN

Upon being commanded to build the Mishkan, the Jewish People – who just a short while before had been enslaved in Egypt, accustomed to doing hard, physical labor – somehow did all the skilled work that would normally have required the most experienced artisans. Where did this miraculous ability come from? We find, also, that the Torah uses the words “*Chacham lev*” – “of wise heart” – to describe those who built the *Mishkan*. Isn't intellect in the brain, not in the heart?

In the very last chapter of Orchot Tzaddikim we learn some interesting things about the human body: specifically, the brain and heart. The Hebrew word *Melech* (king) is a combination of the first letters (ראשי תיבות) of the Hebrew words *mo'ach* (brain), *lev* (heart) and *kaved* (liver). These specific body organs are also referred to in Judaism as the dwelling places for the *neshama*, *ru'ach* and *nefesh*. *Kaved* is the location of one's *nefesh*. The *nefesh* represents bodily and material desires. The desire to “feel good” comes from the *nefesh*. The *lev* is *ru'ach*, which is one's ego. This is the desire to “look good” in the eyes of others. Lastly, the *mo'ach* is the seat of one's *neshama*: it's a person's innate desire to “do good.” The *neshama* is supposed to rule over the *ru'ach* and the *nefesh*. It is for this reason that the brain, containing the *neshama*, is in the skull – similar to the fortress of a king. By controlling one's *lev* and *kaved*, a person will become worthy of the title *Melech*. Thus, it is possible for three people to do the same act, but each with different intentions. One's intention is to

feel good, another is preoccupied with looking good, and the third is simply trying to *do* good.

Interestingly, when you ask a person to point to himself, he points to his heart, the place of *ruach* – ego. He doesn't point to his head or stomach. The German word “ich”, which means “me”, comes from the Latin word “Ego”. The place of one's esteem is his heart, where one is conscious of himself. The Masters of *Mussar* (self introspection) write that if you take away all of a person's honor, he will want to commit suicide. Conversely, positive self esteem, an internal reflection of a person's confidence in his being capable, is a positive, vital life force. Thomas Edison explained that he invented the light bulb only after having experimented with hundreds of possibilities, failing time and again, until he met with success, at last. He must have needed a great deal of initiative and ambition in order to persist; but, beyond that, he needed to believe in himself.

The *chachmei lev* believed that if G-d had commanded the intricate building of the *Mishkan*, then, without a doubt, someone had to be capable of doing it. They knew that perhaps they would have to persist and keep trying again and again to reach their goal, but they had self-esteem and believed in themselves. That's being smart at heart!

Self-esteem is very important. A wise rabbi once pointed out that the first step of *tikun hamidot* – fixing bad habits – is recognizing your good ones. Looking solely at one's faults will only rob him of his self-esteem. A healthy self esteem is needed to

give oneself the energy needed for the long path to perfection.

While I was studying as a *bachur* in Jerusalem, I remember hearing that one of my colleagues, who was, at the time, 25, had not spoken *lashon hora* – gossip – from the age of 19. At the age of 19, he simply told his *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) that he

would not speak gossip for the rest of his life! That takes a lot of positive chutzpah (i.e. high self-esteem). His old friends were shocked. “How could the same boy who, in elementary school, was the biggest trouble maker of the class, suddenly become so religious on us?”

I hope he keeps it up!

THE ART OF BEING READY FOR MASHIACH

So, as it seems, Mashiach is around the corner. We have all the signs, again, and from the greatest Rabbis. Are you ready for Eliyahu Hanavi? He is going to ask you, What questions bothered you so long in your Torah learning that you waited for me to answer? What was your personal *תיקו* in your learning, your personal Tishbi Yeshev Kushyot Ubayot, (acronym of Teku) that you were waiting for me, for so long, to answer? What?!? You have no questions, except if you could eat OUD? You have no questions of how to understand any certain passuk, chapter, Gemara?!?

One of the criteria of Mashiach, is that he can judge people not by sight or sound alone, but by smell. He can smell your sins and smell your mitzvot. As Yeshaya prophesized, *And Hoter (a shoot, but one of Mashiach's names) shall spring forth from the stem of Yishai, and a twig shall sprout from his roots. And the spirit of YKVK shall rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and heroism, a spirit of knowledge and fear of YKVK. And he shall smell by the fear of YKVK, and neither with the sight of his eyes shall he judge, nor with the hearing of his ears shall he chastise.* (Yeshaya 11, 1-3) This criterion of judgment through scent seems significant, as the Talmud states that Bar Kochba was proven that he was *not* Mashiach because he could not judge according to smell. (Sanhedrin 93b) What is the significance of judging according to scent and not by sight or sound alone?

The way Mashiach will perceive you is at your deepest core, your deepest interests, agendas, and motives. Just as when someone faints, by giving

them strong scents, you are able to get down to the deepest parts of the soul to awaken it, so too, Mashiach will be able to smell the deepest desires of your soul, not only the what, when, how, where, and with who of all your actions, but he will be judging the **why** of all your actions. And he will be smelling how much you couldn't stand the Galut, and how you waited for him. The reason why he is not here yet is because we don't mind the Galut that much. It doesn't bother us that much; it is not so much of a burden to live in a world run by heretical and unethical leaders and governments: we can endure it. The Jews were redeemed from Egypt only once they could not stand it anymore. **וַיִּדְעֻם כִּי אֲנִי יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִצְרַיִם: And you will know, that I am YKVK Who takes you out from **under the endurance** of Egypt.** (Shemot 6;7) Some people pray for Mashiach to come to make our Galut better, and that is why he is not coming. Mashiach will come, to make the world a more G-dly place. Mashiach is waiting for us to feel that we can't wait anymore, that we can't endure the exile anymore, not that we are just looking for an improved exile. And he will smell how badly we waited for him.

I know that in the Jewish Music world, it seems as if when Mashiach comes, it will be just one big party, and everyone will just have a merry time, smiling to each other. That is true. It will be like that. **בָּשׁוּב יִקְוֶה אֶת־שִׁיבָת אֲזוּ וַיִּמְלֵא שְׂחֹק פִּינוּ וּלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רִגָה. צִיּוֹן הֵיְיִנוּ כְּחֹלְמִים** (Tehillim 126;1-2) But it will be because G-d will be recognized as the One and Only power in the universe, and there will be clarity and clear judgment, justice and recognition of G-d and the truth of His Torah, once and for all, **צְדִיק וְטוֹב לֹו רָשַׁע וְרַע לֹו**. Only good things will

happen to the Tzaddikim, and only bad will happen to the wicked. And a great part of all the clarity will be the judgement on the quality of intentions.

When we do a Mitzvah, we are to do it לעשות נהת ריח לייצרנו ולעשות רצון בוראנו, *To make a pleasant scent to our Maker, and to do the will of our Creator.* G-d does not only judge you according to the what you have done, but He smells the reason why you do what you do, your intentions. Are you after money or respect, after self-actualization or acceptance? Or are you doing what you do, because you want to do G-d's will??? What have you done for G-d?? I believe that G-d will ask me, as a Rabbi, *Did you stand up for Me in a way that would be most effective? Did you, as a Rabbi, care about money or honor? How much effort did you put in collecting for My most important projects? Am I ready to honestly answer? Did I consult and listen to my Rabbis, to learn and discover what G-d wants from me, and live accordingly? A Rabbi, is only impactful, long term, when he is focused on, and motivated by, one thing: **To do G-d's will.*** Not if he gives great speeches, or knows how to learn on the highest level.

When the Torah mentions how Moshe built the Mishkan, it says 18 times, that Moshe did it all, just as G-d commanded Moshe. Why does it need to mention, so many times, that Moshe did everything, just as G-d commanded him? Why does it not just say that once, at the very end of the whole construction? Why 18 times?

The answer is deep. The Torah has many reasons for every single Mitzvah. And the Mishkan, as well, had many reasons in it. It is מכון לשבתך, which means that the Mishkan is מכון, parallel, to the Mishkan in Heaven. The Mishkan has in it the secrets of the creation of the world, the 39 acts of Shabbat; the spiritual power-grid of Torah learning is from the Aron, parnassah is from the Shulhan, wisdom from the Menorah. But that is not why Moshe built the Mishkan!! He built it to do the Will of G-d!!! Every single thing he did was not because it made sense, or for good reason. It was all about **just doing the will of G-d!**

This is why men are supposed to recite, every day, the blessings of שלא עשני גוי, שלא עשני עבד, שלא עשני אשה Thanking G-d for not making me a gentile, for not making me a slave, and for not making me a woman. Because even a righteous gentile like Shindler, a righteous slave like the servant Tebi and a woman like Sarah Imenu, do not have the commandment of the 613 Mitzvoth that are time bound!!! Even if they do the time bound Mitzvoth with the greatest intent, they cannot reach the actual greatest intent, which is to do what G-d asked, just because He asked!

It is easy to do things לשם שמים, for G-d's sake, when you also have some side gain. When there is a mitzvah that a person runs to do, naturally, you need to ask yourself, what other agendas are there in all this? Of course, today, we are not strong enough spiritually to only do things that are totally for G-d's sake, when we have no personal gain. But still, we should strive to do things, and ask our Rabbis, what exactly G-d wants us to do. When Naomi saw Ruth trying to convert, she tried her hardest to discourage her, because Ruth was running to convert, and Naomi was worried that Ruth had ulterior motives. But when she saw that Ruth still wanted to convert, even after the dissuasion, Naomi realized that her motives were genuine, and she accepted her conversion. וַתֵּרָא (Ruth 1;18): כִּי־מִתְאַמְצֶת הִיא לְלֶכֶת אִתָּהּ וַתִּתְחַלּ לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיהָ

When you are serving G-d לשם שמים, to do His will, to listen to His command, you are giving of yourself, you are genuinely serving. When you have other agendas, you are taking, not serving, not giving. All life's problems begin, all depression comes from when we are looking to take from this world, and all problems and depression end, when we are looking to give of ourselves for G-d's Name. (Baal Shem Tov- צוואת הריבש; ידבק מחשבתו; למעלה) And this is something my mother always taught me, throughout my childhood. *Yosef, no matter where life will take you, no matter what happens in the world and how confusing the world looks, focus on one thing, and you will succeed. Focus on, ask yourself and your mentors, what does Hashem want from you in the situation that*

you are in. Do it, because that is what He wants from you. And life will be much simpler, more fulfilling and meaningful.

BUILDING TRUST

“אלה פקודי המשכן משכן העדות אשר פוקד על פי משה”... – These are the calculations of the Mishkan...which were accounted for by the command of Moshe. (Shemot 38:21)

In this week’s parsha, the Torah makes an accounting of where all the gold and silver that Klal Yisrael donated for the building of the Mishkan went. Why did Moshe feel the need to make this calculation and report to Klal Yisrael about how he had used these donations?

The Midrash explains that after the construction of the Mishkan, Moshe overheard a fellow Jew poking fun at his wide neck and knees, suggesting that Moshe was gaining weight – possibly because he’d been dining a bit more lately.

A second “mocker” joined in and said, “What do you expect? I’m sure the man who took charge of building the Mishkan pocketed some of the donations for himself!”

Upon hearing this, Moshe told them, “I promise you, when we finish the Mishkan I will give you a detailed summary of every last penny!” And so he did, in this week’s parsha.

Why was Moshe so concerned with what these “mockers” thought? And if they were interested in finding flaws in their leader, wouldn’t they soon find something else to complain about even if Moshe appeased them now? After Moshe had been Hashem’s messenger to bring the ten plagues, bring the Jews out of Egypt and split the sea, hadn’t he already established himself as a man of integrity who kept his word?

The answer to these questions is simple, yet powerful. We are all familiar with how our bank account works – if you want to take money out, you need to first put money in. In any relationship,

we must consider a different type of bank account – our “emotional bank account.” Relationships are built on honesty, kindness and integrity; for a relationship to succeed, one’s “bank account” must be filled with actions which demonstrate these traits. If you make a deposit in the emotional bank account through honesty, kindness and integrity, you build up your credit, and trust is built.

Conversely, when one shows dishonesty, ignores others or acts selfishly, he is making “withdrawals” from this account, and eventually the emotional account is overdrawn.

Every relationship has its rocky moments – these moments are like applying for a loan. If one invested enough into his account, at these moments he can use the credit from this account to save the relationship. If the account is empty and one is in “debt,” however, his dubious credit history makes fixing the relationship difficult.

The sad reality is that while it might take a lot of time and effort to build this credit, it is very easy to overdraw the account with a few careless mistakes.

Consider parenting, for example. Parents who show their children that they are concerned with the children’s best interests will have “credit” available when their children grow into teenagers. If the parents did not inculcate this feeling into the children, however, when the teenage years arrive the children probably will not consult with their parents even if the parents plead and promise the children that now they are interested in the children’s well-being.

Moshe Rabbeinu knew the importance of building trust. Moshe knew that someday, these “mockers” would rear their heads again and question Moshe and the Torah, and he would need credit in the bank. Additionally, Moshe knew that building trust

would help ensure that when he said something, Klal Yisrael would know that Moshe was saying it for their best interests, not his own.

Trust between parents and children is especially important in Torah families. One of our strongest resources for emunah – faith in G-d – is the mesora that is passed down from parent to child. Judaism is unique in its claim that over 600,000 witnesses experienced G-d speaking to His nation at Mount Sinai. This testimony has been passed from parent to child ever since then. A child is naturally

receptive to this testimony and believes his parents, and is sure that a parent would never lie about such a central life issue.

Unfortunately, sometimes children lose faith in their parents, and the child is 'at risk'. Throughout childhood, a parent must treat his or her child with the respect due to a person, as opposed to the respect one shows to an e-mail that he can ignore until he is interested at looking at and dealing with it.

THE ART OF CARING

We just ran a campaign this week in our Yeshiva, Lev Aharon, that collected over a million dollars in two days, towards our building fund. I coached it. Together with the Rosh Yeshiva's son Yitzhak, and Charityextra, and of course, the hand of Hashem, we were able to put it together. I put the videos together, ran the back end, and the Yeshiva Staff and students, worked very hard. Although one of the things that make me feel the most successful in life, is fundraising for worthy causes, this one was not so easy for me. The night that we reached the million, I went to bed, feeling bittersweet. The only one who did not raise anything, for this great yeshiva, during the campaign, was me!

Why did not I not send out a link? Because just two weeks ago, I tried powering back on my phone after Shabbat. I put in the pin, and pressed OK on my Samsung phone screen, and it did not unlock. No matter what I tried to do, I could not open my phone. I went to the phone provider Hadran, and they said, we can just to a factory reset, which will wipe out everything on your phone. It will be like a brand-new phone. We are sure, that you have it all backed up, to your Gmail account. They did factory reset, and I lost EVERY SINGLE contact I have, from the last 10 years of fundraising, and all media, conversations, etc. of the last few years. I don't know how this happened, but I did not have anything backed up! All my clients, all my donors, all my friends and family, all erased. I have no way

to get back some of those numbers, as some were big donors that NO ONE will give you their personal numbers again. I had no contacts to send out the link to! Being that I was running the back end of the campaign, I had no time to reach out to people, and ask for numbers, either. All the other Rabbis in yeshiva, had raised whatever they raised. I was the only Rabbi, that had a big, fat, ZERO, on my team, on the yeshiva campaign page.

The next morning, when the Yeshiva had already raised \$1,120,00, I woke up with this bittersweet feeling, at 6:15 am. There are no 6:30 minyanim right next to my house. So I walked to a small shul, Rabbi Dupar's underground shul, and waited for the 6:45am. I said Great! At least I can look for something to write on, for Parashat Pekudei. The first Sefer that caught my eye, was the Sefer from Rav Heiman, Hikrei Lev. And this is the exact words that jumped out at me on the page I opened to in Parashat Pekudei:

There was one person in the whole nation who did not give anything towards the building of the Mishkan. Moshe Rabbeinu himself! How ironic!

The Midrash Tanhuma tells us that once they finished the construction of the Mishkan, the Nation was sitting and waiting, yearning, for the Shechina to dwell in the Mishkan they built. So, what did they do? They went to the Chachmei Lev,



the wise craftsmen, who built it, and said, What are you sitting around for? Set up the Mishkan, so that the Shechina will dwell amongst us!

The Chachmei Lev tried to erect it, and they did not know how! They couldn't erect it! When they tried to erect it, it would fall. They then went to ask Betzalel and Aholiav his helper, who constructed the Mishkan, but when they tried erecting it, again, it would fall. The Nation hoped, that if these two knew how to make it, maybe they would know how to erect it! But when they tried to erect it, they could not.

The Midrash asks, Why could they not erect it? It answers, that this is because Moshe felt bad that he did not take part of the construction of the Mishka. The donation was given by the Nation, the work was done with the guidance of Betzalel and Aholiav, by the Hachemei Lev. Moshe felt bad, that he did not have a part in it all , so, Hashem hid from them the way to erect the Mishkan, and they could not erect it.

All the people came to Moshe, and they said, why can't it be erected? Hashem told Moshe, "Since you felt bad that you had no part in making the Mishkan, that is why all the previous ones could not erect it." Moshe said, "Master of the world, I don't know how to erect it. He told him, make with your hands as if you are erecting it, and it will stand on its own." (Tanhuma Pikudei,11)

The Hikrey Lev (page 232) writes, that this Midrash is telling us something. Moshe did not give anything towards the Mishkan! Why not? The Yefe Toar writes that it happened by mistake. Moshe made the same mistake as the Nesiim, who thought to wait for the end, to see what was lacking, that they could fill. But in the end, everything was quickly donated by the people! There was nothing lacking!

The Hikrei Lev writes, that this is an impossibility, to say, that Moshe made such a mistake, if our Rabbis explain that there was a complaint from Heaven on the Nesiim who waited till the end.

They were coined lazy by our Sages. והנשעם ה'יאו ואת אבני השנים ואת אבני המלצים לאפוד ולהשן Rashi writes that due to their laziness, the letter Yud was taken from the name of the Nesiim. So how could we hold Moshe accountable for such a thing?

The Hikrei Lev writes, that Moshe did not give anything of his own, because G-d told Moshe, to take from the materials from THEM , וזאת התרוימה , אשר תקחו מאתם ונתב ונכסר ונחשט which Moshe understood, that he was not to give from his own towards it! He was to take all the donation from the Nation!

The Hikrei Lev, writes that the Mishkan was supposed to be from the money that the people took with them from Egypt, the gold and silver they borrowed from the Egyptians, or found at the shore of the Yam Suf. G-d wanted, to forever remember what the Jews went through, the pain they suffered.

Also, I thought, maybe one can say, that G-d wanted the Mishkan to be an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe was not there, during the sin, so he could not be held accountable for not doing anything to stop it. So G-d wanted all the money to come only from those who needed an atonement.

We find in the Purim story, that Mordechai would ask the students what they just learned, in order for him to get an idea what message G-d is telling him. (Esther Rabba 7;13) For me, to open the Sefer, and the first thing that I see is this Dvar Torah at that hour, right when I was feeling the feelings I felt, is G-d speaking to me. There is a special power in yearning. Sometimes, you just can't do something that you respect or value, sometimes you can't be the person you aspire to be. But that inspiration, G-d does not ignore!!!!

The Zohar (Terumah 157;2) tells us, that a person needs to remember on his table, while eating a meal, the destruction of the Temple, and the destruction of Jerusalem. Through worrying and feeling bad over the lack of the Temple, when one



is sitting, and enjoying food and drink, IT IS CONSIDERED AS IF HE BUILT THE TEMPLE! This is why Ashkenazim say prior to Birkat Hamazon, the Psalm עַל נְהָרוֹתוֹ בְּכָל הַיּוֹם and we mention the Destruction in our Birkat Hamazon. The whole story of Purim, started, when the Jews enjoyed a meal at Achashverosh's party, that the utensils of the Temple were being displayed and used!

Sometimes, all G-d wants from us, is to want. He wants us to want to be better. To want to have more Faith, more Kavana, more Torah, more Peace, more Mitzvoth. Sometimes, that is all G-d is testing us with.

THE ART OF RENEWAL

Big days are ahead of us. The whole month of Nissan, we don't say Tahanun. This is because the whole month is considered Rosh Hodesh, as it says, הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֵם רֵאשׁ חֻדְשִׁים. The first 12 days, we don't say Tahanun because those days are the anniversary of the twelve days of holiday each Tribe's Nasi made on his day's inauguration. The 13th of the month is considered Isru Hag of those 12 days. The 14th, Passover eve, is the day of Korban Pesah. From the 15th until the 21st is Passover. The 22nd is Isru Hag. From the 23rd until the 29th are the days we will celebrate the building of the 3rd Temple. The Third Temple will be built on the 15th of Nissan, the first day of Pesah, and the 7 days of inauguration of the Mizbeach will be postponed until after the holiday, so we will be able rejoice over it in its own merit and not on the Passover Holiday, itself.

There is a Hassidic twist to this. The month of Nissan is the month when we celebrate *the Jew* becoming a King. As the Talmud calls it, רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְמַלְכִּים. Although there is a Rosh Hashana in Tishrei, that is to commemorate the creation of the world and Man, and the continuous nature in which G-d runs the world from the day He created it, and how G-d judged Man and graciously awarded him another year, despite his sin. Rosh Hodesh Nissan, though, is to commemorate that G-d crowned us as Priests to Humanity, וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיּוּ-לִי מִמְּלָכֶת פְּהַנִּים, and He empowered us to rule our lives and nature, through giving us the power to control perspective and time. We control when it is the beginning of Spring and when Passover starts by deciding if we have a leap year or not, or a leap-month or just a regular month.

The month of Nissan is the head of the year, רֵאשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה הַזֶּה which makes it confusing. Rosh Hodesh Tishrei, is Rosh Hashana, because the world was created on that date. But still, G-d commands us to count the months of the year in such a way that Nissan is Month One, while Tishrei is Month Seven, the holy Jewish number. So, how does it make sense that we start the year with two First Bases? How can there be two first starts, one in Nissan and one in Tishrei, and what is the meaning behind it?

What does this mean, that if we are Kings over our Time, over our Schedule, we are Kings over the world?

The month of Nissan, we celebrate the New Year for Kings. (Rosh Hashana 2a) This means that a king's official starting date to count each year of his reign, is not from the anniversary of when he started to reign, but from Rosh Hodesh Nissan.

The Jew has two options. A Jew can be living with a long-term perspective, thinking about his Olam Haba, and then he will be a Melech, a king, because he will be a Rosh-Hodesh-Nissan Jew. Or, a Jew, can live as a Rosh Hodesh Tishrei person, live like a Gentile, and then he will fall into the category of an Eved: he will live like a slave. What does it mean to live like a slave? Living like a slave means living with a short-term perspective, thinking only about Olam Hazeh, with the concept of עֲבָדָה בְּהַפְקִירָה נִיחָא לֵיהּ, a slave prefers a life of no responsibilities or rules. (Ketubot 11a, Gittin 13a)



The two calendars are two mindsets. The Orhot Tzaddikim tells us in Sha'ar Yirat Shamayim that everything in the world represents something in Man, as Man is an עולם קטן. Man is linked to the world, as he is responsible for it. The Skull is like the round sky, with the right eye compared to the sun, and the left eye compared to Venus. The veins in the body that transport the blood are like the rivers; the hot air and cold air of Earth resemble when Man blows with a wide-open mouth, which creates hot air and when he blows with his mouth nearly closed, emitting cold air. There is thunder in the world, which is like when Man speaks, and there is lightening, which is when Man gets mad, and his face “lightens up”. Just like mountains, man has shoulders, knees, and heels and the rest of his joints. Just like different types of rocks, there are many types of teeth. Just like trees that bear fruit and others that don't, so too, there are people who can bear children and people who cannot. Parallel to the 365 days a year, in the solar calendar, there are 365 sinews in humans. And just like there like is a soul that fills the body, maintains the body, outlives the body, can see but can't be seen, is pure in the body, and does not sleep, so too, G-d fills his world, supports His world, outlives His world, sees and can't be seen and never sleeps.

We can add to this Orhot Tzaddikim, that that two Rosh Hashanas, of Rosh Hodesh Nissan, and Rosh Hodesh Tishrei, which essentially are two types of calendars, one lunar and one solar, are the two psychological quests of the Jew: Man's search for Meaning, and Man's search for Survival. There are two parts of man. The part of man that needs to take care of his basic needs and the part that needs to make sense out of it all. The power of the Jew is the power of the New Moon, which is the power of renewal. A Jew needs to be a מחדש: once man tends to his basic needs for survival, he looks for what Maslow calls self-actualization, to reach goals and become greater beyond just surviving, or going with the flow, or continuing with the everyday. A Jew, has in his psychology, that he needs to be some sort of King. He needs to be the employer,

the boss – and most important, he has a need to control his life and schedule, and not allow his schedule to rule *him*.

The Jew always has a way to think out-of-the-box and to be witty, more than gentiles. Rav Ovadia Yosef would say the Jewish Joke. There was this guy, who, after his wife cleaned the whole house for Pesach, he would snap at her, jokingly, after Biur Hametz and say, “Baruch Hashem, we got rid of all the Hametz in the house. But the main Hametz, we never got rid of!”... referring to his wife, as the Hametz. The wife would snap back, “Don't worry, my dear husband. My father already sold me to a Goy, like you!”

The Parashat HaHodesh is the Parasha where G-d is telling all of us to go through a renewal, like the Moon, to do Teshuva. As we read in the Haftarah, G-d wants us to get ready for His Bet Hamikdash. This power of renewal is given specifically to the Jew, as it means the Jew has an innate trait of doing Teshuva.

No matter what, G-d wants our Teshuva. No matter what, G-d always forgives us. We have no doubt in that, for we make the blessings, הרוצה בתשובה, that *G-d wants our Teshuva*, and the blessing הנון לסלוח, *Gracious, Who grants abundant forgiveness*. We recite these two blessings, using G-d's Name. You can't make a blessing if you are in doubt. The rule in Halacha is that ספק ברכות להקל. When you are in doubt, regarding making a blessing, better not to do so, as you may mention G-d's Name in vain, which is stricter prohibition than the Mitzvah of making a blessing. Still, we repeat these blessings, as we are sure that G-d will accept any Teshuva we do, and He will forgive, no matter how far away we have gone.

R' Shneur Guata told a story that he had read recently. There was a young man here in Israel who had a wife and daughter. The wife got cancer, and during the time when she went through treatments, this good man took care of his wife, worked extra jobs to pay for the treatments and at the same time, brought up the daughter. He



survived the juggling, until things got really serious with his wife. Then, his wife begged him that if she dies, he will always protect their daughter, Shlomit. When she passed, this man became not only the father of this girl, he also became the mother.

Of course, a man can never replace a mother, and the time that Shlomit reached high school age, she suddenly was taken over by the טיפוש עשרה teenage syndrome. Teenagers, from the age 15 till the age 25 can go through changes of growth in their prefrontal cortex, as the body and brain mature. This can cause teens to lack competency in three main executive areas in the brain. Long Term Perspective, Justice, and Consequence. Especially if there are reasons why the teen brain won't work effectively, like different causes of trauma. Trauma could come from early exposure to desires, a sibling that gets more attention, being screamed at or other abuse, ADD/ADHD, an identity crisis, and a long laundry-list of other things. The only thing parents can do when their teens rebel is give unconditional love and affection, and pray their hearts out, when they say in the Amidah for the children to have a relationship with G-d, לדור ודור, בודה לך ונספר תהילתך, *for generation after generation, we will thank You, and we will speak your praise!*

Well, Shlomit who grew up without a mother, with only a father who tried his hardest, looked for other places of love and acceptance that she might have felt lacking. The father warned her to stay away from bad friends, from getting close to boys, from dressing in ways that can attract the wrong type of people and from coming back extremely late at nights. But she told her father, "Dad. It's my life... They are just friends... It is just clothing..." "But Shlomit dear, I promised your Mom, before she died that I would protect you. I can't choose your friends for you, but please realize: the person you will be are the friends you have, and the clothing you wear."

Shlomit said, "Dad! You can't force your values on me. It is my life. Let me learn from my own mistakes."

This went back and forth for a while. Until one day, Shlomit said to her father, that she is flying with her Israeli friends to India, with a one-way ticket, not sure when she is coming back. The father told her, "Shlomit, you are going to dangerous places. You are hurting your soul and your future. I never stopped you. But this is too far. Shlomit, you are not flying! It is out of the question!"

Well, with all the emotions involved, his only daughter and family member, and his promise to his wife, Shlomit's father forgot the first rule of power. *Never try to overpower the one who has more power.* This is what our Rabbis call, תעלה כעידוניה סגיד ליה *When you are with the fox in his fox hole, bow to him.* Our teens have the power of choice of their own lives, more power than we. Shlomit's father met her at the airport with her suitcases and friend-hippies. He watched in dismay as Shlomit was *a c t u a l l y* walking through security. This was for real. This was not a joke. With shock, and tears in his eyes, he called to Shlomit and begged her to come over to him before she walked through security towards the gate, with her passport in hand.

My daughter! Why are you doing this to me? I am begging you! Shlomit, if you walk past that gate, if you board that plane, you are walking out on me. I am putting down my foot now, because I love you, and I gave a promise to your Mom that I will always protect you. If you go now, you are going against all of your father and mother's values. You may never come back, and I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU. If you walk on now, I am cutting off all connection with you.

Shlomit turned around, and with tears in her eyes, said to her father what she was saying all along. "Dad, its hard on me, too. It's my life. I can choose my friends, how I want to dress and the values that I believe in. Your path – Mom's path – does not work for me. I am not holding by where you want me to hold. I don't want what you want. You have to accept me as I am, and this is who I am. Don't force me to live my life your way."



With that, he said, “If so, I am breaking off all connection with you.” He turned around and walked away, in tears. Shlomit walked back to her friends and walked passed security.

She had a great time in India... for the first few days. Parties, sin, freedom, drugs, alcohol, music, discos, living like a gentile or, more precisely, like an animal... It was hard, though, to get out of the cycle of guilt and lack of happiness. But at least, she was free, and no one could stop her from trying to find the love and happiness she thought she had missed, because she grew up without a mother. But, of course, she never found that love and happiness that she was looking for. This is because when a person feels like they are not complete, when they feel a lack, they need to connect to G-d to fill that lack. This is what is hinted to, in the words, תָּמִים תְּהִיָּה אֵלֶיךָ יְיָ יִקְרַךְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ

Three years later, a friend from Israel showed up in India and met Shlomit. She surprised Shlomit and gave her a hug, telling her she is so sorry about her father, and that she could not make it. “What?? Why are you sorry for him? What are you talking about?” The friend turned white. “Your father passed away a few months ago. You did not know?”

Shlomit went into shock. She told her friend, that she did not know, and how her father was so disappointed with her, he cut off all contact. She got on the next plane back from India to Israel and ran straight from the plane towards the cemetery, looking for her father’s grave, near her mother’s. She read the inscription of her father on his grave, and she fell on his grave, balling. She hit herself, looked up to the sky and said, “Dad, I am sorry!!” But the clear-blue sky was quite, as if her father’s soul was repeating the last words he told her. SHLOMIT, I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU.

Shlomit, I will never forgive you. Shlomit, I will never forgive you. Shlomit, I will never forgive you. That is all Shlomit could hear in her head. She turned to G-d and said, “G-d!!! I want to do Teshuva! I want to come back to you! I know that

You always accept Teshuva, and that You always forgive, EVEN IF MY FATHER WILL NEVER FORGIVE ME! But this voice in my head is not letting me come back!!! Father in Heaven, HELP ME GET OUT OF THIS!!!” She called a cab, and she went straight to the Kotel, to pray her heart out.

She stood up front, crying, like a daughter who is leaning on her father; she leaned on the Wailing Wall, right near the Mehitzah. As she cried her soul out, she looked up to the sky again, and saw the letters in the Wall. She decided to write a letter, and push it into the cracks between the stones in the Wall. She wrote, *Father in Heaven, send me a sign of forgiveness. Send me a sign of acceptance. Send me a sign that what I have done to my father will not stop me from coming back!!! Send me a sign that my father forgives me!*

She folded this letter and looked for a crevice to put her note in, but there was none. She tried to find a spot, but she could not find one. She felt that maybe G-d is was just telling her, Shlomit, I will never forgive you.

But Shlomit did not give up hope. Any woman who attended a Bar Mitzvah at the Kotel knows there is some sort of step, on the Mehitzah. She stood on the step and looked over the Mehitzah for a spot on the Wall: maybe she could reach a spot in the men’s section. The Kotel was empty, as it was midday, and she noticed that nobody was paying attention to her, when she leaned over the Methitza. So, she pushed in her note... and another note fell out, into her hand. She was about to put that other note back, but then she saw that written on that note, was the same name as hers. Shlomit.

Out of curiosity, she opened it up to see what was written on it. She started to shake. “*Master of the Universe! My daughter is in India. Please bring her back; make her repent! Her name is Shlomit bat Rivkah! If I could speak to her, I would tell her, I forgive you for everything, just go in the right path in life!!!*”



She cries out thanks to G-d, and she repents completely. A father of flesh and blood can forgive his daughter, no matter what she has done. G-d,

who can do the impossible, who is א-ל טוב וסלה, the Almighty of Forgiveness, He for sure can forgive!

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H

