



Parashat Ekev



English version

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THE ART OF BEING ANTIFRAGILE

Resilient people survive shock. Antifragile people improve from it. I will explain the difference between the two mindsets, and how you can become antifragile, not just resilient.

The antifragile mindset, is the mindset that stress enhances life, and is the only way to growth and happiness. People who win the lottery are not happier after winning the lottery, they actually enjoy life less. The antifragile mindset, is the mindset, that learning to accept things, is a greater skill than learning to control things. The antifragile mindset, is the mindset, that men are disturbed not by what happens to them, but by how they view what happens to them. The antifragile mindset, is that there is no such thing in life as pleasure without pain, and that choosing the right pain, is the only path, to having a meaningful life.

המאכלך מן במדבר אשר לא ידעו אבותיך, למען ענתה ולמען נסתה, להיטבך באחריתך. Who fed you mannah in the wilderness, which your fathers had never known in order to afflict you and in order to test you, to do good for you in your end. (Devarim 8:16) Read that again, and don't rush past it. Forty years. Bread falling out of the sky. Food no human being had ever tasted before — you wanted the taste of steak, you got steak. You wanted pizza, you got pizza. L'ma'an anotcha. In order to afflict you.

What exactly was the affliction? If it tasted like anything you wanted, where's the suffering? The Gemara (Yoma 74b) gives two answers. First answer: The mannah came down for that day only. Today's portion, today. Tomorrow? Nobody knows. Every single morning, forty years, you walk out of

your tent not knowing. And human beings hate that. We want the fridge full. We want the salary on the fifth of the month. We want to see the runway ahead of us. Eino domeh mi she'yesh lo pas b'salo l'mi she'ein lo pas b'salo. There was no bread in the basket. A person who has bread in his basket is not the same person as one who doesn't — even if both of them are eating right now. Living hand-to-mouth on Heaven's schedule — that is an affliction, even when the food is delicious.

Second answer: you tasted it but you never saw it. The mannah held every flavor in the world — but it had no form. You tasted chicken. You never saw chicken. You tasted fresh bread. You never saw a loaf.

The question we really have to ask is why? Why was the sweetest gift Hashem ever gave us, wrapped in pain? We were already slaves in Mitzrayim for 210 years. Beaten, broken, worked to death. Then we come out — and the Torah announces that the next forty years of Mannah also come with a built-in affliction. Not by accident. By design. Master of the World — couldn't You have given us forty years of nothing to complain about?

Now the verse gets even stranger. Why the affliction? "Ul'ma'an nasotecha, l'heitvcha b'acharitecha", to test you, so that it will be good for you in the end. What kind of arrangement is this? You hurt me for forty years so that later on it will be better?

The Netziv, in Ha'amek Davar, reads it completely differently — It doesn't say it will be good for you.



It says you will become good. L'heitivcha — to make you good. That changes everything. The suffering is the workshop, and it's G-d's greatest kindness to you. It's not the price for the person you'll become — it's the process that makes you. Not knowing how you will manage tomorrow humbles you, makes you dependent on G-d, and it keeps you connected to Him.

We all want to have enough money to never worry. That seems like the best life. But the Torah says the opposite: "Vayishman Yeshurun vayiv'at" (Devarim 32:15) — Yeshurun got fat, and he kicked. The life of plenty produces the kicker. Silver spoon children, everything soft, everything easy, everything available — are the first to kick, the first to complain, the first to break. "Vdi Zahav" Having too much gold, is what caused us to make the Golden Calf. Think about the people you actually admire. School was hard for them. Or they had a difficult mother. Or a difficult father. Or a childhood illness, treatments, hospitals. Something in there was heavy. That heaviness softened them. It made them into people who can feel another human being. Someone who has carried pain himself is more sensitive to the pain of someone else. He's been there. He knows what it costs. So he's gentler. He's slower to judge. He's less likely to kick.

L'heitivcha b'acharitecha. The lack, the gap between where you are and where you want to be, is what is good for you. And nasotecha, according to this, does not mean to test you. It means he wants to raise you, like a flag. Nasotecha— from the word nes. And a nes isn't only a miracle or a test. A nes is a banner — the flag you lift up so everyone can see it. "Harimu nes al ha'amim" (Yeshayahu 62:10). נִתְּחָה לִירֵאָיוּ נֵס לְהַתְנוּסָה (Tehillim 60 6)

"I am going to give you the hardships, because if you go through them the right way, you will be lifted up. You'll become the example. People will look at you and say: look how he came through that. Look how he grew." When Hashem remembers the greatness of our Nation in the Desert, He remembers specifically the fact that we

came after Him into the Desert, a barren land, as a Bride follows her Husband out of love, not knowing how he will support her. וְכִרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד יְעוֹרֶיךָ אֶהְבֵּת כְּלוּלָתֶיךָ לְבָתֶּךָ אֶחָד בְּמִדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה

The reason why we find it hard to be more than just resilient, and to become antifragile, is because we have all been sold a lie. Somebody is selling us the story that there are people out there who genuinely have it easy. People who are just enjoying life. People for whom it's fun. And only you, poor thing, are suffering.

We spend our lives waiting for a day that isn't coming. A day where there are no worries, no anxiety, no pain. When does the hard part end? When does the suffering end? It's an illusion. There is no such thing on this earth as a life without pain. Even under Hashem's direct management — clouds of glory overhead, mannah from Heaven, Miriam's well, there was suffering. Right there in the desert, in the amazing mannah itself! Because this world was never advertised as the resting place. "Adam l'amal yulad" (Iyov 5:7) — a person is born to toil. Not to rest. And if somebody sells you the American Dream life and tells you that here, in this world, someone has the perfect life— they're lying to you.

There is no such thing in life as pain without pleasure. And there is no such thing as pleasure without pain. Why did G-d create the World like that? Because that is the way to make people great! But once you accept that truth about the world, you become antifragile and understand there is only one way to Menucha, to rest. It's hiding in Yaakov Avinu's blessing to Yissachar — the pillar of Torah among the shevatim: "Yissachar chamor gareim, roveitz bein hamishpesayim. Vayar menuchah ki tov, v'et ha'aretz ki na'eimah — vayeit shichmo lisbol, vay'hi l'mas oveid." (Bereishit 49:14–15) "Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey, crouching between the boundaries. He saw that rest was good and the land was pleasant — so he bent his shoulder to bear the burden, and became a laborer." Rav Yerucham of Mir asks the obvious question: the beginning of the verse and the end of the verse don't match. He saw that rest is good? Then go to



sleep! Go rest! What does "he saw rest was good" have to do with "he bent his shoulder to carry a load"?

When you want *menuchah* — agree to carry. Yissachar is the donkey who lies down without unloading the packs. He never takes them off. That's the picture the Torah paints. And out of that picture comes the only rest a human being ever actually gets in this world: not the absence of the load, but the end of the war against it. If you want rest in life, put your hand out toward the load. Accept the *seivel*. Connect to it. Say yes to it.

Watch what happens on Erev Shabbat. Two mothers, same floor, same mop. The first one washes the floor for Shabbat. The second one washes the floor for Shabbat — and while she's washing, she's also carrying the following thoughts: Why is this decreed on me? Why is it always me? Why doesn't he help? Why does she have a cleaning lady and I don't? Same floor. Same rag. Same forty-five minutes. One of them is carrying one load. The other is carrying two.

The same with a sick person. He's ill — he already has the illness, the real pain, the real limitation. That's the assigned load. But some people pour fuel on the fire: Only me. I'm lying here while everyone out there is enjoying life, and I'm suffering like some pathetic case. Why only me? Why do they have and I don't? When does it end? Why is this happening to me? Hashem, why are You doing this to me? What do You have against me? Now he's

not just sick. Now he's fighting with the Master of the World.

Learn to separate these two things: 1. The original suffering— the actual back pain, the actual bills, the actual interrupted sleep. This one was assigned to you. 2. The second suffering — why me, why always me, why does everyone else have it easy, when will this end. The first one you carry. The second one you manufactured, and you can drop it.

How do I actually do this? How do I move from being resilient to being antifragile? Step 1 — Name the original load. Write down the plain fact, with no adjectives. "I sleep badly." "My back hurts." "Money is tight this month." Just the fact. Step 2 — Find the second suffering. Now write down everything you've been adding to it, and all your commentary on the suffering... Why me. It's not fair. Everyone else has it easier. It shouldn't be like this. When does it end. Look at that list. None of it is the original load. All of it is weight you're carrying voluntarily. Step 3 — Agree: This is what life is. Recognition. Step 4 — Ask the question that forms who you are becoming. Not "why is this happening to me?" but "what is this making me into?" "It is good for me that I was afflicted" (Tehillim 119:71). Can you say one thing that happened in your own history, where it was good that you were afflicted, it was *L'heitivcha* — that you became good from it?

Repeat these steps, and you will become antifragile.

THE ART OF PATIENCE

The Torah warns us in this week's parasha (Devarim, chapter 8):

(10) You shall eat and be satisfied, and bless your G-d for the good land He has given you.
(11) Beware lest you forget your G-d, by not keeping His commandments, His laws, and His statutes which I command you today.
(12) Lest you eat and be satisfied, build good houses and dwell in them,

(13) and your herds and flocks increase, your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies,
(14) and your heart grows haughty, and you forget your G-d who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery,
(15) who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with snake, fiery serpent, and scorpion, and thirst where there was no water; who brought you water from the rock of flint;
(16) who fed you manna in the wilderness, which



your fathers had not known, to afflict you and test you, to do you good in your end; (17) and you say in your heart, “My power and the might of my hand made me this wealth.” (18) But you shall remember your G-d, for it is He who gives you power to make wealth, in order to establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as this day.

A person says to himself: *“Look at my business skill! I bought here, I sold there. I foresaw that this neighborhood would develop. I predicted this house would rise in value. My wisdom brought me success.”*

But the Torah warns: Do not forget the Creator, blessed be He. Wealth is not proof of your own greatness—it is a gift from Hashem.

The *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* (SMaG) by R’ Moshe of Coucy originally did not list humility—or the prohibition against pride—as one of the 613 commandments. He knew humility was important, but he thought it did not belong in the official count.

When he completed his great work and prepared it for printing, he had a dream. In it, he was shown the verse, *“Beware lest you forget Hashem your God”* (Devarim 8:11). It was revealed to him that this warning—guarding against pride—was the foundation of all commandments. Without humility, the entire spiritual structure collapses. Awakening, he realized his mistake and revised his work to include the prohibition against pride as a formal mitzvah.

Pride is not just a bad trait—it is spiritual poison. The Gemara (Sotah 4b) teaches:

- One who is arrogant is considered as if he worshipped idols.
- Another opinion: as if he denied the very essence of God.
- Another: as if he violated all the forbidden relationships.
- Another: as if he built an idol.

False humility is easy to fake: a lowered head, a soft tone, acting meek in public. But real humility,

says Rashi on *“And the man Moshe was very humble”* (Bamidbar 12:3), is patience. If your wife says she’ll be ready in one minute, and it turns into 20 or 30—you remain calm. You wait without anger. That is humility.

The Midrash tells of Rabbi Preida, who had a student who needed every lesson explained 400 times before understanding it. Rabbi Preida patiently repeated the lesson each time.

One day, after 400 repetitions, the student still didn’t understand—he was distracted, worried the Rabbi might be called away. So Rabbi Preida taught him another 400 times. A voice from Heaven declared: *“Because of your patience, you and your entire generation will merit the World to Come.”*

The Alter of Novhardok asked: Why didn’t Rabbi Preida consider this bitul Torah—a waste of precious learning time? His answer: Work on one’s character traits is higher even than Torah study. In Heaven, they don’t count pages learned; they count self-sacrifice for refining one’s middot.

R’ Chatzkel Levenstein taught that every extra moment of patience—waiting calmly for your wife, controlling anger when delayed—is spiritual gold. Even a single extra minute of patience, done with conscious intention, makes you *“equal to your Creator”* in that moment—emulating His infinite patience toward us (*erech apayim*).

When life tests you—traffic, delays, slow people—see it as an opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah greater than many hours of study: the mitzvah of humility through patience.

Our Rabbis teach that Hashem is *Melech Aluv* “the insulted King” who continuously gives life even to those who sin against Him with the very strength He provides. The words *הַיְיָ כְּמֶלֶךְ הָאֱלֹהִים יִקְוֶה* are explained: *מִי כְמוֹךָ בָּאֱלֹהִים* “Who is like You among those who could speak but remain silent.” True strength is to endure and be patient, even when you have the power to respond. Hashem is “mighty” in that He bears the sins of people, continues to give them life and sustenance, and does not punish immediately—this is His extraordinary patience. The Midrash Tanchuma (Pinchas) teaches: When Moshe asked Hashem to appoint a leader for Israel,

he requested someone patient enough to deal with each person according to their individual needs and understanding.

In *Yechei Reuven*, we find a conversation with Rabbi Bentzion Abba Shaul: His blessings were fulfilled instantly—something rare even among great sages. When asked his secret, he explained: “*Blessings depend on Ahavat Yisrael. True love for every Jew, combined with great patience, is the key.*” When you want a blessing from someone great, find the person with the most patience.

The Chafetz Chaim once noticed a struggling yeshiva student sitting alone in deep sadness on Yom Kippur night. Rather than retire to rest or continue praying, the Chafetz Chaim sat with him the entire night, speaking not of Torah, but of Hershel’s personal worries—encouraging him until morning prayers. This is Judaism: Not abstract holiness detached from life, but the ability to meet people where they are, to bear their burdens, and to lift their spirits.

True humility is not an outward show of meekness; it is the ability to remain calm in the moments that test you most. A humble person:

- Doesn’t explode when his wife is late.
- Doesn’t bring the stress of the day into the Shabbat table.
- Understands his children according to their age and stage—not expecting an 8-year-old to think like an adult.

According to the Siftei Kohen, patience is shown in two parts of Eliezer’s test of Rivka to see if she was worthy to be the mother of the Jewish Nation:

1. “*She will tilt the jug while it’s still in her hand.*” Eliezer says he will ask, “Please tilt your jug.” Instead of taking it from her, he wants to see if she will patiently hold it for him to drink without rushing. This shows *savlanut*—being willing to serve personally without irritation.
2. Each camel can drink a huge amount. Agreeing to draw water for all ten camels—without complaint—shows not just kindness, but remarkable endurance.

Patience here isn’t just waiting calmly—it’s sustaining effort cheerfully for someone else’s benefit, without showing annoyance or cutting corners.

To be a leader, the first ingredient is patience. Yaakov tells Reuven why he lost leadership: *You had two special advantages over your brothers—Kohi, my strength, and Reishit oni, the first drop of my life-force. I had so much patience until I had my first child, and all that energy, was instilled into you. You should have controlled your yetzer—especially in patience—more than your brothers. You had Yeter se’et (extra patience) and Yeter oz (inner power). But instead, when you saw I placed my bed in Bilhah’s tent, you reacted instantly, without patience—like rushing water that cannot stop. For this, you lost the extra honor.*

Patience is humility in action: the world doesn’t owe you instant results. Impatience is haughtiness in disguise: the belief that life should run on your schedule.

The desert years were a masterclass in humility and patience, learning to depend daily on Hashem’s timing and provision. Impatience comes when we forget the manna and start thinking life should arrive on our schedule. “*Remember the whole journey Hashem led you through in the wilderness these forty years—to humble you, to test you, to reveal what was in your heart. He let you hunger and fed you manna, so you’d know man doesn’t live on bread alone, but on every word from His mouth. Your clothes didn’t wear out, your feet didn’t swell. As a father disciplines his son, so Hashem disciplines you.*”

According to the Ramban, the manna wasn’t just food—it was a daily exercise in patience, breaking desires, and training the mind to rule over cravings. Hashem gave it day by day and meat in the evening, not instantly available, forcing them to wait, developing self-control. This was essential for Torah life, because constant Torah study requires a person not ruled by physical cravings.

If you want to know how humble you are, check your reaction next time someone makes you wait. The next time, your patience is being tested,

remember that it is G-d testing you, it is Your loving Father disciplining you!

THE ART OF HUMBLE STEPS

Humility is the only way to get close to G-d, the only path, the one ladder. כִּי כֵה אָמַר יְהוָה וְנִשָּׂא שִׁכְנוֹ עַל יְקִדְיוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ מְרוֹם וְקִדְיוֹשׁ אֲשַׁכּוֹן וְאַת־דַּכָּא וּשְׁפִל־רוּחַ לְהַחֲיוֹת יְהוָה: (Yeshayahu 57;15) As holy as G-d is, He is with, and makes Himself secondary to, those who are humbled: the sick, the poor, the weak, and broken-hearted. (Sotah 5a) In G-d's eyes, there is nothing more complete than a broken heart.

Life problems mostly don't even begin for the humble. The signs that you have a humble heart, according to Orchot Tzaddikim, are, 1) When someone embarrasses you, angers you, and you could respond and you don't. 2) When bad things happen, and a person accepts G-d's ways. 3) When people sing your praises, or reveal your faults and weaknesses, you don't take it personal. 4) If G-d blesses you with abundance, how you treat people. 5) When you hurt someone physically or verbally, and you don't need that person, but you still go and ask forgiveness. 6) Speaking softly, dressing simply, not running after worldly pleasures.

The Or Hachaim teaches us something amazing. There are four things that are needed for your prayers to pierce the Heavens, and the secret recipe is hidden in the passuk, וְאַתְּתַבֵּן אֶל־יְקֹנֶה בְּעֵת הַהוּא *And I pleaded to YKVK at that time, saying...*

First, and foremost, when you pray, you need to beg. G-d will never answer the prayers of the haughty. You can't pray as if you *deserve* anything, but, rather, that you are asking, begging, like a poor man, for something you do not deserve. The root of תחנון is from the words, חן which means grace, which is from the root, חנם, for free. I know, G-d, I don't deserve this; I don't have the merit for this. But please, G-d, I am begging! Even Moshe Rabbenu, asked G-d to enter Israel not in his own merit, but in the merit of G-d's חֲסֵד חִנּוּם, treasure chest of free gifts! The Midrash tells us, that G-d's treasure chest of free gifts, is greater than His treasure chest of gifts that people deserve! (Tanchuma Ki Tisa 27)

One thing I learnt on my fundraising trip this last month is – if you don't beg, you don't get! Of course, you have to try and prove that what you are fundraising for is from the best investments of Olam Haba for the donor, but if you don't beg, the rational pitch alone, without humbling yourself, doesn't work!

No. 2. אַל יִקְוֶה. You've got to tell G-d, I only have You to rely on! You are my Shadchan, You are my Doctor, You are my Brains, You are my Strength, You are my power! No. 3. בַּעַת הַהוּא At that time. There are special times when it is more auspicious to pray. Midnight, after Tikkun Hatzot. Before dawn. Minha Shabbat. Erev Rosh Hodesh. When you pray the same time, each day. No. 4. לֵאמֹר. Saying. You need to be explicit in what we are beseeching G-d to give us. When you bless a person, it is not enough to say, תְּזַכֶּה לְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת, May you merit longevity. You need to add to that, תְּזַכֶּה לְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת, נְעִימוֹת וְטוֹבוֹת, That the years be pleasant and good. When you ask for children, be explicit about what type of children you are asking for.

The other day, I took one of the wealthiest people I know to the Kotel. The person told me that he didn't know what to say to G-d, what to ask for. I told him, before you ask, first, thank Him for all you have. וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת־יְקֹנֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הִנָּתֵן לְךָ כֹּס לַעֲשׂוֹת. And then, as long as you come from a place of humility, and you beg for what you want from Him, G-d will answer your prayers.

The Kotel is one of the most amazing places to visit. Everyone feels something special, just standing in front of the ancient stones of the Wailing Wall. Your heart is touched, the moment you touch it. What happens there that is so special?

When a person is haughty, when a person feels that he deserves what he has and what he has is not directly from G-d's mercy and grace, when a person shows off his wisdom, wealth, looks, strength, fame, or any of the other blessings G-d has granted him, this chases G-d away. כָּל אָדָם שִׁישׁ

בו גסות הרוח – אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אין אני והוא יכולין לדור בעולם (See Sotah 5a) Haughtiness is somewhat of a G-d repellent; it is the most foul odor to G-d. *It is an abomination to YKVK, anyone with a haughty heart!* (Mishlei 16;5)

But there is one place that G-d “can’t” run away from us, no matter how much haughtiness we have in our hearts: The Kotel. אמר רבי אחא לעולם אין השכינה זזה מכותל מערבי של בית המקדש, שנאמר הנה זה עומד אחר כתלנו (Midrash Tanchuma, Shemot: 10) So what does G-d do? He “can’t” leave, but it has the pungent smell of haughtiness!!! He takes away your haughtiness from you, when you are at the Kotel! You get humbled, even if you are wearing the snazziest sunglasses at the Wall! This is hinted at in the first letters of the words we pray at the end of the Amidah, *and my soul should be as dust to all*, which spell Kotel, in Hebrew.

Humility is what makes men great. King Shaul, King David, were appointed kings by G-d, because of their supreme level of humility. The way this week’s parasha begins is fascinating, as well. It starts off *... וְהָיָה עֵקֶב תִּשְׁמָעוּן אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה And it will be, because you will heed these laws and keep them and perform,...* and continues to say that G-d will shower the observant with the blessings of the Torah. The word *עקב*, literally, means *heel*; but here, it means, *because*. And the commentators learn from the usage of the word *heel* different ideas. Rashi learns that the passuk is teaching us about the importance of those Mitzvot that people “step on”, hinted by the word “heel”, referring to those Mitzvot that we don’t give enough attention. If a person is particular to keep the small details of Halacha, you can be sure that he will keep the bigger details, as well.

The other day, I was learning with my son the Gemara in Berachot 6a that talks about demons, and that says that each one of us, has 1000 demons on our left side, and 10,000 on our right side. Every sin we do, we create a demon that will take its toll, through some pain and suffering we might have to go through, big or small, unless we repent and pray. The Passuk says, in Tehillim, a prayer that King David makes, one that we say each Motsaei Shabbat and at the time of burying the dead. *אֶלֶף וּרְבֵבָה מִיַּמִּינִי אֵלֶיךָ לֹא יָגֵשׁ מִצְדָּדָי: A thousand will*

fall at your left side, and ten thousand from your right hand; and it will not approach you to harm you. What does this mean?

The right side is the side of Hessed, the side which represents the Positive Mitzvot, which are the mitzvot of love. The left side of a person is the side of Gevurah/ Din, and it is represented by the Negative Mitzvot, which are the mitzvot of fear. Most people are worried about not transgressing the Negative commandments, so there are only 1000 demons/transgressions the person needs to deal with. But how many positive commandments do people trample on? Ten times more than that! All the times when someone could learn Torah, trust in G-d, serve Him with a focused prayer, fear Him and love Him! There are 10,000 demons that are created from all those Positive Mitzvot we just trample on, and step over! (Magid Taaluma)

The other possible explanation of the strange usage of the word *עקב*, *heel*, here means, *humility*. If you read the passuk this way, it says, if you will be humble, you will be able to learn and understand. The only way to listen will, to learn, is through humility. In coaching, this is one of the fundamentals of what we were taught. The coach needs to talk no more than 20 percent of the session, and actively listen, so that the client will talk the other 80 percent. This is an art in of itself.

I recently picked up a book, written by a former FBI Agent, about how they get their most important information. (Never Split The Difference – Chris Voss) It is not from snooping into your phone cameras and listening in to your phone calls. It is, simply, that people are ready to tell you anything, if you just ask open ended questions (Not questions that they can answer with short answers like yes, no, etc.), add some empathy, mirror the other person’s tone of voice and listen well. The more the FBI makes it as if they know, as if they have power or control, the less information they get. *If you want to listen well, you need to be the “heel” of the conversation.* The only person who ever received the Torah from G-d was the humblest of men, Moshe Rabbenu. משה קבל. After that, Moshe passed it on, to those who passed it further. והיושע לזקנים. He passed it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua passed it to the Elders. But Yehoshua could never receive the

Torah, like Moshe did; therefore, it does not say, יהושע קבל ממושה, that Yehoshua received from Moshe. Because humility is the way that we receive.

And this is the way a person can change all his habits, as the book “Atomic Habits” describes,

HIGH HEELS

והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים האלה ושמרתם ועשיתם אתם ושמר ה' אליך לך את הברית ואת החסד אשר נשבע לאבותך *And, the result will be, when you adhere to these laws and do them, Hashem your G-d will keep the covenant and the kindness which he swore to your Forefathers.* The word עקב is expounded upon in the Midrash Tanchuma: *The meaning of the word עקב, literally “heel”, refers to the Mitzvot that a person belittles, treads upon, as it were, with his heel – for these mitzvot the reward is great as for other mitzvot which are considered of paramount importance. As mentioned in Psalms, בשמרים עקב רב, reward is reserved for those who keep the small mitzvot.*

R' Ben Tzion Mutsafi expounds on this. In the army, a soldier is obliged to have his face cleanly shaved, shirt tucked in, boots tied, and hair cut short. Paying attention to these little things, the things that people take for granted, is often the criterion being judged as obedient. These seemingly minute details put one into a state of mind and make one subconsciously acknowledge the authority of whoever demands them. And, our state of mind determines the quality and fervor of how we do things.

Coming to shul early enough to say what we need to say, without catching up. Not speaking in shul. Praying from the siddur. These things, although they seem to have only secondary importance, things that are not as great as the Amidah itself or as great as the Kriat Shema, will make the whole difference in the quality of our Amidah and Kriat ShemaThe things that we step on: the open cell phone during prayers... The way we dress when we come to shul.

This is true in regard to the Mitzvah of Shabbat. ממצוא חפצין ודבר דבר – in the words we say before Kiddush Shabbat day, we mention the law of the Prophets that we refrain from “speaking speech

making the smallest changes. Ekev, baby steps, which is the outcome of a humble outlook at self-help. I can't change myself, but I can change the smallest parts of me, and over time, I will change.

that refers to things that are forbidden on Shabbat.” This law, says R' Mutsafi, is a law that many “step on with their heel.” The more careful we are in keeping this law, the more seriousness we will relate to our adherence to the 39 Melachot that are forbidden from the Torah as well .

The Midrash Hagadol focuses on the words ושמרתם ועשיתם : the words that mean, literally, to keep and observe. The word שמור refers to the Mitzvot. Keeping, or watching means preparing yourself for and awaiting the opportunity to do the mitzvah. Be ready for it before it comes, and when it comes, do it in the most beautiful and praiseworthy way possible. Accept and welcome the Shabbat early. Be among the first in shul awaiting a minyan. Although in the world we know, a worker will not receive any special payment from his boss for coming early and waiting for his job to begin, this is not true in regard to our reward for Mitzvot. We are rewarded for being ready ahead of time. This behavior can be observed in old-timers. We tend to think that they are ready early to perform a mitzvah because they do not have that many things to do. The truth is that *this was how things were in the last generation.* Coming to shul early, awaiting prayers was a value that was widespread, understood and respected.

If we look closely at the prayer that is cited at a Siyum of a tractate in Shas, we will notice an interesting statement : ...אנו רצים והם רצים : *We run and they run.* . . . When it comes to getting paid as a worker, the boss does not care if you came by foot and it took you a couple of hours, just be there on time! With doing a mitzvah it is not that way. The effort put in in order to get you to the Mitzvah is reckoned in with precision: How far is shul from your house? One gets rewarded for every step he takes along the way. Let us remember that the “heel “, is what might make the whole difference of what type of World we have waiting for us.

DISCIPLINING – PARENTING OR PERSONAL

There are times when a parent must reprimand or punish a child. Ideally, of course, the parent should pause before taking action and think things over. Is he (or she) acting out of love for the child, or for some other reason? Unfortunately, some parents fool themselves or simply ignore this crucial question. The *Ben Ish Chai* helps us see that the Torah itself hints at the importance of making this reckoning before disciplining a child.

In this week's *parashah* (Devarim 8:8), the Torah says: *Know in your heart that Hashem, your G-d, punishes you as a man punishes his son* (וידעת עם (לבבך כי כאשר ייסר איש את בנו ה' אלקיך מיסרך). The *Ben Ish Chai* asks: Would it not be more appropriate to speak of a *father* punishing his *son* rather than a *man* punishing his *son*?

He answers with this remarkable insight. Although a parent usually loves his child more than anyone else does, the parent does not, unfortunately, always have the good of the child in mind. A father, for example, may be motivated by embarrassment

over having a child who did this or that inappropriate thing. In contrast, when an adoptive father needs to rebuke his child that he adopted out of love, he probably does so solely out of concern for the child's good. He does not take the misbehavior to heart as a real father does.

And this is the way G-d rebukes and punishes us when we deserve it. He never punishes us out of "self-interest," so to speak. He disciplines us in order to better us. This is what the Torah means when it speaks of a *man* punishing his *son* rather than a *father* punishing his *son*.

Before a parent punishes his child, he must ask himself this question. "Am I bothered by the damage to my image or by the fact that my child may not grow up to be a good person if he gets used to acting this way?" If parents would always ask themselves this question before reacting to their child's misbehavior, they would be better parents and would raise better children.

FEARFUL FOR A LIVING

In this week's Torah portion, Moshe Rabbeinu said to our nation, during his final national address, "ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ה'" *And now, Israel, what does HaShem your G-d ask from you more than to fear Him...* (Devarim 10:12). This is, of course, a major undertaking; as Shlomoh HaMelech wrote, "אם תבקשנה ככסף וכמטמונים תחפשנה אז תבין יראת ה'" *If you beseech it as if it is silver and if, like treasures, you search it, then you will comprehend the fear of G-d* (Mishlei 2:4-5). It emerges from these words of Shlomo HaMelech that the *quest to achieve the fear of G-d is a lifetime's work*. This is confirmed by the words of the prophet Yonah when he was found to be the cause of the storm that threatened the lives of those on the Nineveh-bound ship. When the crewmembers on Yonah's ship interrogated him, asking who he was and what was his occupation, he answered, "עברי אנכי ואת ה' אלקי" *I am a Jew and I fear HaShem, the G-d of the Heavens* (Yonah 1:9). Yonah responded

that his *occupation is that he "fears G-d"*. How did Yonah answer their question about his occupation by answering his religion? Although this sounds foreign to many of us, bringing G-d into one's life and feeling His Presence tangibly was the *occupation and identity* of many Jews for thousands of years.

Fearing G-d has many levels. The *Ben Ish Chai* conveys the following idea of one of the highest levels, indicating how far the rational fear of G-d can elevate one, directly influencing one's behavior and imbuing within a person an extremely high degree of the emotion of fear. He starts by drawing on the following observation.

We call the fear of G-d in Hebrew יראת שמים – literally the fear of Heaven. Isn't Heaven the place where G-d dwells? Would it not be then more precise to describe fear of Him as יראת השם – the fear of His name?

The answer the Ben Ish Chai gives is that the word שמים *Heaven*, according to one explanation, is a combination of the words אש ומים – fire and water. Our Rabbis explain that Heaven was created with fire and water – usually two extreme opponents. Normally, when combined, fire evaporates water and water extinguishes fire. Nonetheless, out of fear of their Creator, these two elements bond, defy their inherent nature, and resist their opposing laws of existence in order to coexist and fulfill G-d's will. The Ben Ish Chai expounds that this is the very reason why we refer to “fear of G-d” as “fear of Heaven”. It is not only describing the *object* of the fear per se but rather a *degree* of fear. The fear emotion on this degree is so strong and real that all

values, instincts and interests melt in its presence. This, of course, is close to an ultimate degree of fear that is not easily attainable.

Many interpret “G-d fearing” as referring to a person who will act no less righteously alone than when in front of others. This is also a very difficult level of Fear of G-d to attain. One may perceive another's efforts to be in a position where he is not alone as often as possible, saving himself from being tempted to sin, as a level of fearing G-d that is praiseworthy. This is definitely a more attainable level of Fear of G-d. The responsibility each Jew is given is to always look for the next level where fear of G-d can be intensified as a new goal and strive for it.

CHIMPANZEE EXPERIMENTS

Internalizing fear begins on an intellectual level. The Rambam writes in *Moreh Nevuchim*, “When a person constantly focuses on the truism that the Almighty King, HaShem, Whose glory fills the whole world, stands over him and sees his actions, ..., immediately, he will attain fear and trepidation of G-d, and will be embarrassed before Him.” This is the way our forefathers achieved fear of G-d prior to our receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. Our Rabbis teach that we are able to instill fear of G-d through study of and adherence to Torah laws. Contemplating the endless efforts spent by the Rabbis who compiled halachic works, from the Mishnah to the present, to clarify what the law is and the precision of their words can bring us to fear of G-d.

The concept of fear is intellectual; how do we *feel* fear? Theoretical or long-term dangers, such as the effect of smoking on one's health, do not elicit a reflexive fear. We may be able to learn how to attain fear of G-d by studying how a parent instills fear of going into the street in his child. A rabbi once commented that “fear of transgressing G-d's words and caution of following them should be no less than the fear and caution of walking into a very busy highway.”

A responsible parent should plan how to teach his child not to rush carelessly into the street. Some parents severely reprimand a child “after the fact.”

The most effective way to prevent such behavior is to read illustrated books specifically designed to transmit the fear of such an act to the child. Of course, toddlers and young children must be punished appropriately for stepping into a street alone, but this may not instill fear of the street as much as it instills fear of the parent. Fear is somehow assimilated by the child when he sees that we ourselves are afraid of the danger there. In other words *emotions are osmotic*. Movie producers may put a tear on an actor's cheek in order to put one on the cheek of the viewer. T/V show producers know that when we see others cry or laugh, we, too, follow suit. Interestingly enough, the same is true for yawning. If someone yawns in a room full of people, a ripple effect of yawning often takes place.. The emotion of fear is “osmotic” as well; when a child sees people afraid of the cars on the street, he will automatically absorb that fear. Of course, this subconscious lesson can be undermined if he is exposed to people who are not afraid, such as jaywalkers or even his own parents who do not obey traffic rules.

This concept can help us in our lifelong mission to fear G-d. One must seek to be connected to people that demonstrate fear of G-d in their lives, and avoid contact with people who do not. Fear and its absence are both contagious.

A study was conducted in which a group of four chimpanzees was taken and locked in a two-story house. The researchers placed a large amount of good-smelling “chimpanzee food” upstairs. They installed there a sprinkler of boiling hot water that would be activated automatically when the sensor recognized the arrival of a person or animal. One chimpanzee smelled the enticing food, climbed the stairs and was duly burnt by the boiling hot water: the poor thing jumped down the stairs screaming. Another chimpanzee made a similar attempt, and it followed the fate of the first. The other two did not even attempt to go up. The experimenters removed one of the chimpanzees and placed another in its stead. The new chimpanzee did not attempt to go

upstairs either, although it had not been there when the first two got burnt. Then, they replaced another one of the four with a new one. It did not go up either. They replaced the third, and then the fourth, and still, no chimpanzee dared to go upstairs to eat the food. Although the researchers continuously changed the chimpanzees, the fear was still present.

I do not know from where so many chimpanzees were obtained, but the premise of the study is a very good one. Although the chimpanzees may not have communicated their fear verbally, by observing that the *others* were afraid, the new chimpanzees feared going upstairs as well.

RICH DAD/POOR DAD

I coach two friends. A rich friend, and a poor friend. In the process of coaching the two, I stumbled on a great book, *Rich Dad / Poor Dad*, that teaches the difference between the beliefs and behaviors of the rich and poor. In the book, the terms Rich and Poor are not determined by how much money you have. The crucial factor is your mindset. I noticed that all the beliefs and behaviors of the Rich friend were identical to the beliefs and behaviors of the Rich Dad, while the poor friend had the identical belief structure and behaviorisms of the Poor Dad. Amazed, I asked my rich friend if he had read the book. Quite frankly, he said, a friend had given it to him to read, when he was still in Yeshiva. He rattled off most of the beliefs in the book, as if he had just read it. (The concepts that he did not remember were actually those concerning the areas where his performance at business needed some improvement.)He read it 14 years ago. And now, he is way ahead of all my other friends in business. Because he approached business with the Rich dad approach. Do your kids a favor, and give them the book to read before they start working. The younger the easier to adapt the concepts. The book is about financial intelligence, and is a great read.

I would like to add a chapter to that book, and to all the great books out there that teach you how to make money. There is a stinging concept that the Torah teaches us. *Man lives not by bread alone, but by the word of G-d does Man live.* As people with

faith in G-d, we have a different belief system. Fire burns. This is science, like mathematics. It is nature. With world markets, though, with the dynamic of making money, it is different. The world of commerce runs in an unnatural way. It does not run like a river. It swirls like a whirlpool. Even if you change your life and start thinking as the Rich do, adopting their outlooks and approaches, working to – and often over – your limit, it does not add up to \$\$\$\$\$. You can do everything just like the rich, but if G-d does not want you to be Rich, if it is not your destiny, He will S.H.O.C. you. What does S.H.O.C. stand for? S.H.O.C. stands for Situation, Happenstance, Occurrence, Circumstance. In other words, **Situations** change, something **Happens**, or **Occurs**. Due to the **Circumstances**,...”, and G-d is the Great King of all S.H.O.C.

If you want to be rich, follow those get-rich guide books. It is probably your best bet. But, it is still only a bet. The deciding factor is if G-d wants that way of life for you. For even if you know what to do, and you are in the right place, at the right time, with the right amount of money, G-d has limitless S.H.O.C. Ironically, it could very well be that since G-d does not want my Poor friend to become rich, He never allowed him to get around to reading that book....” Because the Rich friend was destined to be Rich, G-d sent Him the book.

The Torah and our Rabbis scatter some secrets, pearls of wisdom, as to how to become rich and how to control your destiny. Before we go on, a message from my Rabbi. The Torah does not view amassing riches as a goal, in itself. Nor is there either a reason or a justification, in the eyes of the Torah, for having so much money that one can never even imagine what to do with it. *Money is not a value in and of itself. Rather, money is valued according to what you can do with it. Your worth is not measured by the number on your bank statements, your assets, but by how you use your money, how you live.* In the eyes of the Torah, it is a goal to have abundance, to have money to live comfortably, to enjoy this world in a way that we can serve G-d and help others to serve G-d. If G-d gives a person great sums of money, it is usually meant as a big test, and is from the most difficult tests to pass successfully.

The first item – secret 1 – on the list of how to become rich and stay rich is so powerful that G-d says, “Please, test me on this”. I’ll say it in Hebrew, in the word of G-d. “עֲשֵׂה נָא בְּחֻנִּי נָא בְּזֹאת “עֶשֶׂה . בְּשִׁבְלִי שֶׁתַּתְּעֶשֶׂה . *Give a tenth of your earnings to charity (“proper charity”), so that you will be rich.* There is no other way recorded in the Torah that G-d lets you test the truth of His words. Except this test.(Taanit 9a) . Even if one does not become

richer when tithing, G-d will prevent him from losing money, from a financial catastrophe, from suffering a great loss. Secret 2. Washing your hands with a lot of water for Netilat Yadaim before eating bread. (Shulhan Aruch O”H 158; 10) Secret 3. Kiddush on Shabbat Morning, each week.(Meggilah 27b) Secret 4. Ketoret, one who brings the Ketoret , and one who recites the Ketoret, the words describing offering it. (Zohar) Secret 5. Being Sandak at a Brit Milah, (Rama,Yoreh D, 265;1) which is like bringing Ketoret. Secret 6. Working with faith in G-d, knowing that it is G-d who brings man to his success, and thanking Him for it. Secret 7. Prayer. (6 and 7 Niddah 70b) Secret 8. Honoring Shabbat, with lavish meals, according to your standards. (Shabbat 119a) Secret 9., staying away from arguments. The Sh’lah writes, that Mahloket, argument, brings about poverty.

So, not always can you control your financial destiny, even though you can control your financial intelligence. However, if you are careful to use these secrets as a practical guide, you may be able to control your financial destiny as well.

LESSON FROM THE SUPERMARKET

State of mind is something we all know about. But do we realize how much the *physical state* we are in affects our own state of mind ? For example: The supermarket I shop at in Israel, attempts to build its customer’s trust by advertising outside their big store, “Do not shop on an empty stomach.” This is a good tip of awareness- not to buy tempting things that you do not need. Have you ever shopped on an empty stomach? If so, it is more than likely that you bought unnecessary things. When hungry, we have a greater temptation to buy those food items that we can surely manage without till the next visit to the supermarket two weeks later. Why? Because when “going on a low tank”, the state of mind is a stressful one. *I need to fill up, and this item might be just what I am lacking.*

No consumer support study recommends to “shop on a *full* stomach”, after overeating; rather, they recommend to refrain from shopping when going on *empty*. Why? Have you ever shopped on a full stomach? You might have been skimpy in what you put in your shopping cart, and might not have bought some of the things that you needed to have in your house. Just looking at the items in the store was probably difficult. You probably just walked up to the shelves where you knew the things that you *absolutely positively* needed were, and bought those items alone. Why? Because a stuffed stomach says to the mind, “You do not need anything”.

It is strange how much the physical state affects state of mind, and influences our decision making in both big and small matters. We need to be

“warned” about our vulnerability by *consumer saving* studies. Food is not the only physical, external thing that can affect the state of mind without our realizing it. The state of mind can be affected by any of the following list of external changes or conditions, and more: Lack of or excess food , too much or too little sleep, room temperature, too hot or too cold, too much or too little light, being in shape or out of shape. I take all this into account when coaching yeshiva students, helping them in their learning and focusing. These variables can make it or break it when it comes to focusing in our studies. We might not even be aware that we are not focused, because these things subtly affect the subconscious.

In this week’s parasha, the Torah describes this concept very clearly, but on another level. Not about saving money. Not about focusing or decision making. But about becoming haughty and forgetting G-d. ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אל קיך In this passuk, we are not only commanded to recite the grace after meals, but also reminded that we should not forget G-d when we are satiated. In the following pesukim, the Torah warns us that, in such a physical state, we may become haughty and forget G-d. Why would we forget G-d just because we are full? Elsewhere, the Torah tells us וישמן and Yeshurun (*the Jewish Nation*) became fat and he kicked... The Midrash tells us that many of the severest sins of our Nation, our greatest downfalls, occurred immediately after a

meal. Why? Because the way the human body is programmed is that when a person eats to excess, or when he is just full, the mind does not think the same. It somehow ignores and forgets that it was once hungry and once, somewhat humble. That it once needed sustenance, but now, after dessert , the body tells the mind “*don’t need G-d no more*” ((הם ושלום .

The following question was asked by the Ben Ish Chai. We know that there are two blessings that we are commanded to make from the Torah. The rest are from our Rabbis. The two are ברכת המזון and ברכות התורה . Why is it that we make a blessing for Torah study in the morning *before we learn*, and not after we finish learning? Why is it not like Birkat Hamazon, the blessing which we make *after* having eaten, and not before? The answer he gives is a classic. Learning Torah does not have a point of “satiation”. Therefore, we can make the blessing only before learning. Instituting blessing after meals is to insure that we be aware of the amount we are supposed to eat before we begin the meal. Imagine what it would be like if, before eating, we would plan how much food we really need for healthy nutrition, *and then stick to that*. We would be healthier, more fit, happier, better at focusing, humbler, more positive, more “ready to go”- by taking only what we need... ..all because we were aware of the effect the physical state has on the state of mind.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H

