



Parashat Ki Tetze



English version

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The Art of Immersion

The Parsha talks about when a man marries a woman. It says the following words three times in our Parasha. קִי־יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה The rabbis of the Midrash recorded a case study. A righteous man was married to a righteous woman. They had no children. Eventually they divorced. He remarried — to a wicked woman. And she made him wicked. She remarried — to a wicked man. And she made him righteous.

The Midrash closes with four words that have made people uncomfortable for centuries: "Ha, hakol min ha'isha"— so it all comes from the woman. (Bereishit Rabbah 17:7) Same man. Same soul. Same gifts. Change one variable, the woman he marries, and you get a different human being.

Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschutz (1690–1764) noticed that in Hebrew, the word for woman— אִשָּׁה, spelled as the Torah spells it, without the yud — has the numerical value 306. So does the word for honey, דְּבַשׁ.

$$306 = (5) ה + (300) ש + (1) א$$

$$306 = (300) ש + (2) ב + (4) ד$$

The obvious reading is that it's about sweetness. But what does that even mean? Not every woman is sweet! And even a sweet woman, is not sweet every week!

Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky offered a different understanding of what it means, that woman equals honey. The point isn't how honey tastes. The point is what honey does to whatever falls into it.

Throughout laws of Kashrut, when something forbidden falls into something permitted, it gets nullified — when it falls into sixty parts, or into a majority. But note what nullification actually is: the forbidden thing is still forbidden. It hasn't changed. It has simply been outnumbered. It's hiding inside a volume large enough to render it irrelevant.

Honey is the exception. Rabbeinu Yonah and the Rosh record a striking position: something that falls into honey and remains there long enough doesn't get outvoted. The honey converts it into honey. It emerges with a new identity. A bug in honey, is not a bug anymore. It becomes honey. (Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim 216:3)

This explains why when someone wants to do Teshuva, he should learn Torah. This is from numerous sources. Rav Huna: if a person stumbled into a sin and became liable for death at the hands of Heaven — what should he do to live? If he was used to reading one page, let him read two; one chapter, let him learn two.... Eli Hakohen's descendants couldn't be atoned by sacrifice, but Rabbah says it is atoned by Torah; Abaye adds acts of kindness. The Gemara then notes that these two were descendants from Eli Hakohen. Rabbah, who engaged in Torah, lived 40 years; Abaye, who did both, lived 60. Reish Lakish: whoever engages in Torah is as if he brought an olah, mincha, chatat and asham. Rava sharpens it: he needs none of them... Even chillul Hashem, which suffering doesn't atone, finds atonement through constant toil in Torah. As it is written, G-d says, I wish, they

would have abandoned Me but kept learning My Torah, for through engaging in it, the light within it would return them to the good.

Why does Torah learning have in it an unmatched power of atonement?

The Chafetz Chaim explains, that Torah learning is compared to honey. ומתוקים מדבש ונפת צופים and דבש וחקל תחת לשונך. How is Torah compared to honey? Those who learn Torah, and enjoy its sweetness, transform. The biggest condition for Teshuva, is נהפך לאיש אחר, that a person changes to a new man. Judaism believes that people can change. The only way to truly change, is through enjoying Torah study, immersing in Torah study.

A woman, too, has that power of honey, that whoever connects to her will be influenced by her, transformed by her.

How is it though, that many righteous women, want to impact their family, to make them more religious, and they are not successful? They recommend classes, books, clips, and inspiration quotes, but it does not impact and they do not transform those they love for the better?

The reason for that is, those women imagine influence as ביטול, they try to nullify: enough good people and good influence around you will outvote your bad instincts. That's nullification thinking. You're still you, just outnumbered.

That is their mistake. The power of the woman, is like honey. Not suppression. Conversion. If a woman just keeps her values, without any lecturing, advising, comments, criticism, or speeches, and she just stays sweet, she could have the greatest transformation to those that are in her life.

We spend enormous energy on the question how do I change? — hunting for the technique, the system, the discipline.

Everything here is telling us to focus on something else. Not how do I change, not what do I do different, but who do I associate myself with?

What type of environment am I sitting in? My community? My social? My work place? You can fight yourself for a decade. Or you can change what you're immersed in and let it do to you what honey does.

I want to reveal to you something amazing though, of influence from those around us.

In 2015, researchers at University College London followed 3,722 married couples, all over fifty, and tracked something simple: who changes their habits, and when?

They identified people who smoked, never exercised, or carried too much weight. Then they watched to see if they'd change—and they looked at one variable: what was their spouse doing?

They found three kinds of husbands:

Husband One: Still smoking. Not trying.

Husband Two: Never smoked in his life. The good husband. The one who should matter most.

Husband Three: Was a smoker. Is quitting right now, alongside her.

Here's what happened to wives in each group:

If her husband was still smoking: 8 out of 100 wives quit

If her husband never smoked at all: 17 out of 100 wives quit

If her husband was quitting right now: 50 out of 100 wives quit

Read those three numbers slowly, because the massive insight is in the gap between the second and the third. Husband Two is, on paper, the better man. Lifelong non-smoker. Nothing to fix. Husband Three has a cigarette habit he's in the middle of breaking — he's the worse husband by any conventional measure. But no!! The fact that the husband three is proactive in changing, that influence is better than the influence who never



smoked at all! Being good is not as good as being in motion!

If you want to influence someone you love—a spouse, a child, a friend—stop forwarding them content. Stop lecturing. Stop pointing out who else is doing it. Just visibly, quietly, close enough, let them watch you grow. Not announced. Not aimed.

THE ART OF STAYING IN YOUR OWN LANE

In Parashat Ki Tetze, we find the mitzvah not to plow with an ox and a donkey together. The reason for this according to the Daat Zekenim Baal Hatosafot is simple yet profound—it's not fair to the donkey that the ox is chewing its cud while they're both working. The donkey hears the ox chewing, causing envy, stress, and maybe even a bit of donkey FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Imagine the donkey, plowing away in the field, pulling this heavy plow and sweating buckets under the sun. All the while, his buddy the ox is next to him, nonchalantly chewing his cud like it's a five-course meal at a fancy restaurant.

The donkey is trying so hard to focus, but the sound of that chewing? Oh, it's getting to him. "Seriously? This guy is still chewing? What's he even eating? Does it never run out? Is there some magical buffet I wasn't invited to? He's not even pulling the plow, just standing there like a king while I'm out here breaking my back. Oh, fantastic—another chomp. That's like the 200th chew. How does he do it? I can barely make my breakfast last five minutes, and this guy's been at it since sunrise! Is it a grass thing? Am I missing out on some gourmet pasture that I didn't get the memo about? What's he got—premium cud? Gluten-free? Organic?! Oh no, here comes that slow chew... that's the 'I'm so full but I'm gonna keep eating just because I can' chew. Disrespectful. Meanwhile, I'm running on empty over here. What I wouldn't give to be an ox for just one day. I could chew cud and chill, no rush, just chewing and staring into the distance, like some philosophical cow version of a Zen master. But noooo, I'm the

Just there. Moving. Working on yourself. Enjoying the growth. And present enough that they're sitting in it. That's the honey. That's the conversion. That's the art of immersion. You don't change people by fixing them. You change them by becoming the kind of person whose presence transforms everything it touches.

donkey! The designated workhorse. 'Keep pulling, donkey, you'll get a carrot later.' Yeah, well, guess what? I'd rather have some cud right now, thank you very much!

"You know what, this isn't even about the food anymore. It's the principle. If I have to listen to one more 'nom-nom-nom' sound, I'm gonna lose it. Is there a way to mute an ox? Can we get some noise-canceling cud? It's like he's taunting me! Oh look, now he's doing that casual 'I'm-just-gonna-turn-my-head-slightly-and-keep-chewing' move. Like I don't see him! Like I'm not paying attention! Ox, please. I see you. I hear you. And I smell that cud from here. Thanks for rubbing it in. I'm gonna write a formal complaint. 'Dear Farmer, can we please implement a "chew break" for the ox? Some of us are trying to work, and it's getting ridiculous out here. Sincerely, The Donkey—who, by the way, is doing all the actual work.' I bet if I start chewing something, he'll notice. Yeah, that'll get him. Just gotta find something... let's see, this rope? Nope, tastes like old sweat. Dirt? Not ideal...."

Now, if this mitzvah can teach us how to treat animals, what can it teach us about ourselves? Or employees, our children, our students! What can it teach us about how we compare ourselves to others, who seemingly have it better than us? Stop comparing your pace to someone else's. You each have your own rhythm, and mixing the two will only lead to burnout, frustration, and, dare I say, donkey-level envy. Focus on your field, your own pace. Don't waste your energy wishing you were chewing cud. Everyone gets their turn.



In the spirit of Elul, the ox and donkey lesson takes on a whole new layer of meaning. Elul is a time of self-reflection and self-improvement, a time of cheshbon hanefesh (soul-accounting)—figuring out where we're at and where we need to go. But let's face it, it's easy to get caught up in looking around at what others are doing: "Oh, she's so spiritual, he's already started 40 days of selichot at dawn, and I'm still struggling to wake up for Shacharit on time."

In Elul, it's tempting to compare our spiritual journey to others. One person seems to be "chewing their cud," spiritually satisfied, while we're still working on plowing through our challenges. In Elul we must remind ourselves that

every soul has its own work to do. We can't compare our unique mission, struggles, or progress to anyone else's. Spiritual jealousy is counterproductive. Your Elul journey is YOUR journey. Maybe you're working on waking up earlier, while someone else is focusing on bettering their relationships. It's okay to be in different places as long as we're moving forward.

Focus on your own path, find joy in your growth, and most importantly—don't let anyone else's cud-chewing moments distract you from your own plowing. By Yom Kippur, you'll be glad you stayed in your lane, because the real reward comes when we stop comparing and start becoming the best versions of ourselves.

THE ART OF DIRECTION

For most of us, life can be split into two. The first part of our life, we form habits. The rest of life, we are on autopilot. How we eat, how we think, how we respond, what we value. It's almost as if we have no free choice, something that G-d takes into consideration. כִּי יֵצֵר לֵב הָאָדָם רָע מִנְעֻרָיו. *Because the Inclination of Mankind is bad from its youth.* (Bereshit 8;21) The Baal Haturim comments on this, that from a person's youth, he needs to fight his Yetzer Hara. And if he succeeds in conquering his Yetzer Hara from his youth, he will have a much easier time when he gets older. Because the power of the Yetzer Hara is, מִנְעֻרָיו, from the habits of the youth. It's funny that I once saw a self-help trick: whenever a person is in a place of temptation, he should scratch the stubble on his face, to remind himself, that he is a grown-up now, and he doesn't fall for those old tricks of his inclination.

The Yetzer Hara trained you when you were so young and small to listen to his stupidity, that even later, as a "giant", you still listen to his nonsense. We are all like the big circus elephant that obeys the small whip of the circus master, because he was

trained to do so from when we were small. We are scared to disobey, and we are afraid of the whips of our youth, even though, those whips don't hurt, now, any more than a mosquito bite. We are like the bear that was trained to dance to music, because his trainer put burning coals under his feet: the bear heard the music and associated it with the coals – hence the "dancing bear", even when there is just music without the coals. Similarly, we hear the "music" and take the cue to "dance", even there are no longer "coals" anymore under our feet. We have gotten used to so many cues, from our youth, that even if the reward is not there, we still dance to the tune of our Yetzer Hara!

So, how do we stop?!? From the day of our Bar or Bat Mitzvah, we have the power to change direction. The Ben Sorer Umoreh, the rebellious child, is held responsible, at the young age of 13-13.5, to change direction, with this Yetzer HaTov. What is the secret? How does one change his כִּוּוֹן, his direction? The answer, again, is hidden in the Dikduk, the secrets of the Lashon Hakodesh! He needs to change is כּוּוֹנָה, his intention! If he does not, he is punished for his indulgent behavior and



for where it will lead him. He will, eventually, need to be a thief to live on his high maintenance budget, and he will eventually kill, in order to steal. But - wait a second. Listen to this! If a person kills, his death punishment is סייף, to be killed by the sword. But a Ben Sorrer Umoreh is given a harsher death than the one who actually kills! He is killed by stoning, סקילה! How could it be, that the one who killed is punished with a less harsh death than the one who is in the direction of killing???

The answer is because *your direction, your thinking, has more weight in Judaism, than your actions!* We see this in parashat Shoftim, with עדים זוממים, witnesses who plotted to hurt someone by falsely testifying against him in Jewish court. The plotting witnesses are punished, only if they were caught before the verdict was carried out. Once the court ruled like they plotted, they are not punished when they are caught! Why? וְעֵשִׂיתֶם לוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר זָמַם כאשר זמם ולא כאשר, and the Rabbis learn, לַעֲשׂוֹת לְאָחִיו עֲשֵׂה, like he plotted, but not like he actually did! What? How does that make sense? The answer is because in Judaism, what you plot, your plans, are more powerful, have more spiritual weight, than the actions that are done! So much so, that Yosef ended up being the “firstborn” of Yaakov, and, as such, got double portion, Menashe and Ephraim, because on that first night of his wedding, Yaakov thought he was with Rachel, not with Leah! And that thought carried through: that Yosef, Rachel’s first child, ultimately became Yaakov’s firstborn!

Why is thought more powerful than action? Because we don’t decide what will happen in life, anyway. We only decide what we want to decide, how we want to think and plan. רְבוֹת מַחְשְׁבוֹת Man plans, and G-d laughs. Even the person who is responsible for making a fence on his roof, and he does not, this week’s parasha tells us, that if a person fell from the fenceless roof, it was meant that he fall and die, anyway. כִּי תִבְנֶה בַּיִת חֹדֶשׁ וְעָשִׂיתָ מִצְוָה לִגְגֶּךָ וְלֹא-תֵשִׂים כִּי תִבְנֶה בַּיִת חֹדֶשׁ וְעָשִׂיתָ מִצְוָה לִגְגֶּךָ וְלֹא-תֵשִׂים דָּמִים בְּבֵיתְךָ כִּי-יִפֹּל הַנֶּפֶל מִמֶּנּוּ The one who fell, was anyway going to fall! So, why do I need to put up a fence, if anyway, everything is preordained? Because I need to be a responsible person,

regardless. I need to plan to prevent, because that is all G-d holds me accountable for. To plan. To think ahead, as if I am responsible for my actions!

The way to change your כיוון, your direction, is with your כוונה, your thinking. Ever wonder how Yizkor money can bring up the soul in Heaven, if the person’s life is over? How can dedicating a Sefer Torah in the merit of someone elevate their Neshama, if that person did not make that choice when they were alive? Isn’t death “game over” for free choice? The answer is that this soul *wanted* to do many mitzvot, but did not get a chance. This person learnt Torah, but could not keep it the way he wanted to. So, now, even though the person is no longer here, his intention is alive!

This is the reason why when a man dies childless, and his wife marries his brother, and they have a child, the child is given the name of the deceased. Because when someone marries the way the Torah intended, his intention is only to build a family. That intention, that direction, is still in the world, as if that person is still in the world! A person who is a פצוּע דכא, who does not have the ability, physically, to have marital relations, is not allowed to marry in to G-d’s People, because marriage is not about being a couple, but about the intention to build a family, a legacy, insuring that the intentions of the father live on, in the children. When we pray, we put our feet in the direction of the Bet Hamikdash, because that is בית חיינו - the place of our souls. Even if we can’t get there, ourselves, we hope that our children can get there.

We need to do Teshuva for our bad intentions, even if we did not actually follow through with those intentions. That is what is meant in the words וְהִחֲזִירְנוּ בְּתוֹכָהּ שְׁלִימָה לפניך . What does it mean - a “Teshuva Shelema”? Is there a Teshuva that is *not* Shelema? That is not complete? Complete Teshuva is when you do teshuva on your direction, not just on your actions! As we see in Parashat Mattot, from the words וַיִּקְנֶן וַיִּסְלַח־לָהּ כִּי-הָיָא אֲבִיהָ אֹתָהּ , that even when a person actually does not do anything wrong, but just intended to wrong, he needs a סליחה, a forgiveness. The Rabbis explain this



passuk to refer to the example of a girl under her father's responsibility who made a neder not to eat a certain meat. Unbeknownst to the girl, the father had annulled the vow. When the girl ate the meat, thinking that she was guilty of a transgression, but, in fact, she was not – she must have G-d's forgiveness for her intention, not for the act.

So the Yetzer gets us to do the worst is by getting us used to it, through habit. Humans can get used to anything, even the most immoral, despicable things! At first, sin can look horrible; but then, we get used to it. As we find in Parashat Nitzavim, וַתֵּרָאוּ אֶת־שְׁקִיּוּצֵיהֶם וְאֵת גִּלְלֵיהֶם עֵץ וְאֶבֶן גָּסֶר וְזֶהָב אֶשָּׁר עִמָּהֶם At first, idolatry looks disgusting, like dung; but then, we get used to it, and it becomes like wood and stone, something innocent, and it doesn't bother us. And then, it becomes silver and gold, something we chase after.

Rashi tells us that the human nature of ripple effects is the hidden message in our Parasha: one thing leads to the next in life, for good and for bad. For bad: לא דברה תורה אלא כנגד יצר הרע. שאם אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מתירה ישאנה באיסור. אבל אם נשאה, סופו להיות שונאה, שנאמר אחריו כי תהיין לאיש וגו' וסופו להוליד ממנה בן סורר ומורה, לכך נסמכו פרשיות הללו And ripple effects works for good as well: אם קיימת מצות שלוח הקן סופך לבנות בית חדש ותקיים מצות מעקה, שמצוה גוררת מצוה, ותגיע לכרם ושדה ולבגדים נאים. לכך נסמכו פרשיות הללו: We get into the habits of sin, and we can get into the habits of serving G-d, as well. But it all starts from the direction we stepped into, and then, we just continue in that direction. The law of habits is, that there is no such thing as a one-action in life, one that is solo, isolated. Everything has a ripple effect. מצוה גוררת מצוה, עבירה גוררת עבירה.

So, how do we change direction? First of all, we need to know how strong we are, how big we are. We need to believe in ourselves that we can change, and that we are not dependent on our past, no matter how hard it is to overcome our tendencies from the past. Second, we need to take it "step by step". The greatest enemy to change is speed. Third, we need to internalize our faith, through our speech הֶאֱמַנְתִּי כִּי אֲדַבֵּר and אֲדַע. When you speak about Emunah in G-d, you start believing more. And when you speak about what you want to do, how you want to change, and you focus on it and visualize it, you will believe in yourself, and you will be preprogrammed for peak performance. What you say to yourself, before you go to sleep, what you focus on in bed, is how you program yourself for the next day. אָמְרוּ בְּלִבְכֶּם עַל־מַשְׁכָּבְכֶם וְנָמוּ סֵלָה. If you write in big letters on a small piece of paper, I will do x, at the time of y, in the place of z, and you stare at it before going to bed, your thought of the act will intensify. When you say, x is what I want to do at y and z, because this is what I really want, you are empowering yourself. Writing down is key, as the passuk says, אָמַר עַם־הַסֵּפֶר יְשׁוּב מַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ (Esther 9;25) Most importantly, you will start imagining yourself doing those things that you wrote down. This will also help you fall asleep faster, when you go to sleep focusing on just one thing. The reason why people have a hard time sleeping is because the mind is racing. Planning before sleep will cause the mind to settle on just one thing.

If one does this exercise long enough, he will be able to start any new habit. Because he decided the direction he wants to go in.

MEANINGFUL IMPACT

There are three judgements all souls need to go through by the Heavenly court. 1. Rosh Hashana. 2. When one dies. 3. And at the resurrection of the dead. (Ramban Shaar Hagmul)

When King Shaul brought the soul of the prophet, Shmuel, down to earth to ask about his fate and the upcoming war, Shmuel's soul was trembling so much, it brought Moshe along, as a kind of attorney. Shmuel was afraid of the judgement of the End of Days, of the resurrection of the dead.



Why did Shmuel fear Judgment at the End of Days, at the resurrection? Upon his death, he had been judged and G-d ruled that he was equal to Moshe and Aharon, together! מִשְׁפָּה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּכֹהֲנָיו וְשִׁמְעוֹן בְּקִרְבָּאֵי שְׁמוֹ (Tehillim 99)

The Ramchal answers that in the final judgement at the resurrection of the dead, G-d will judge all the **results** of your actions, the impact you made, for good or for bad, until the end of days. The ripple effects that keep going on, even after we do not. Shmuel was afraid of the repercussions of his actions. Children, students, followers, etc. (Daat Tvunot) When G-d judged Kayin for killing his brother Hebel, He said, קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי, It does not say the voice of the **blood** of your brother are crying out to me from the ground... It says the voice of the **bloods** of your brother. All the children that could have come from Hebel cried out to G-d for vengeance. Judgment concerns every outcome, present and future, of one's actions.

We say שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד. Why do we mention "Listen Yisrael", when we accept the yoke of Heaven? Because Judaism is accepting G-d in a way that it will have ripple effect, influencing other Jews. On Rosh Hashana, we are judged as to how effective we are in acting as **channels** to bring G-dliness into the world. מלוך על כל העולם כולו בכבודך. How much G-dliness is there in each of our actions? (Rambam Deot 3;2) כתבנו בספר חיים למענך. אלוקים חיים. Write us in the Book of Life, so we can live our life for You, G-d. בְּכָל־דְּרָכֶיךָ דַּעֲהוּ יְהוָה יִישָׁר. In all your ways know Him, and He will straighten your paths (Mishlei 3) The whole religion is this passuk, because Judaism is about being a vessel to bring G-dliness into the world, into everyday life, with whatever He blessed us with. (Berachot 63a) We are being judged in Tishrei, even according to the opinion that the world was created in Nissan... because now is the time of plenty, of harvest. G-d is judging us, seeing how much we use what we have, to serve Him.

Rebbetzin R. Shemesh tells the most fascinating story that took place in Israel. An observant Jewish

singer was hired, with his orchestra, to perform at a wedding. When he arrived at the hall, he was shocked to see that wedding was inappropriately attended. Apologetically, he approached the young couple, explaining that, as an observant Jew, he could not perform at their wedding. He was never invited to play at such weddings before, and he assumed it was obvious from the type of person he is, and from the type of music he played, that he would not play at such weddings. His apology was completely sincere, but firm.

The bride and groom said, *No! We are not religious, and you were hired for the event. You cannot leave us without a band!* The singer, head of the group, expressed his apologies again, but told them that to perform under such conditions was against his principles. All this commotion disrupted the wedding, and in the middle of the disarray, a lawyer strode up to the singer and informed him: "It is against the law for you to not play, if you were hired and you took the job. If you leave, you will be fined in accordance with the law, \$10,000!"

This silenced the whole commotion. The head of the orchestra, after a moment of thinking, apologized, but with a firm voice, told them that he would pay the \$10,000, no problem. And with that, he packed up his orchestra and went home.

A little over a week later, he got the charge for the fine, and he paid it with love and joy, to show G-d how dedicated he is to His Mitzvot. Two years passed, and he was asked to play at someone's Pidyon Haben. He came with his band, and while he was setting up, the father and mother of the baby approached him. "Do you recognize us? Do you remember us? You left our wedding two years ago, because you do not play at the type of wedding we made. You paid us a \$10,000 fine, and you are probably puzzled as to why we are inviting you again. Well, you have no idea what happened after the wedding. As we went home, shocked because of what had happened, we asked each other, where can you find people that have the strength of principle to stay firm in their values!?!"



Who is willing to make a fool of himself, and lose 10k, just for a belief and a value?!? Where do you find Jews like that that are so dedicated to G-d? If dedication to Torah and Mitzvot can give you such strength of character, we, also, want to be like you. So, we started, slowly, to learn to become more connected to G-d, to His Torah and to His Mitzvot. And now, after we had our first baby, at our Pidyon Haben, we wanted to invite you to play; we wanted to pay you back the \$10k and also pay you for playing music at our Pidyon Haben. Because we wanted to tell you how your dedication to G-d melted us; it melted our Yetzer Hara.

When you are willing to give up your money, time, sleep, honor, respect, comfort, relationship, pleasure, vote or rights for something, that means you are living by that value. When you are a walking, breathing, living example of your value, you make a ripple effect, you impact others. Nothing will build your self-esteem or character like having values and living by them.

What type of meaningful impact do you *strive* for? To be great in Torah? To be great in prayer? To be great in relationships, kindness? That is who you are. Judgement on Rosh Hashana is on your goals, on the direction you are headed in. The Ben Sorer Umoreh, the rebellious child, is punished, because his whole goal in life is to be זולל וסורא, to be a person who is focused on the most materialistic life possible. Although G-d judges people only as they are at the moment, באשר הוא שם, still, a person is the sum of his goals. (Siftei Chaim) Only G-d can fathom this and make judgment on it. The world is called Olam, which means hidden, for there are seven things that are obscured from mankind. 1. Day of death. 2. Day of consolation (the day when a person will be calmed from his worries). 3. **Depth of judgement.** 4. You will never know what is inside a person's heart. 5. You cannot know what will bring you financial success. 6. When Mashiach ben David will come. 7. When the wicked will receive their punishment. (Pesachim 54b)

Judgment is so deep. A student once asked R Naftali Rupshitz why G-d hides the depth of judgement from us. Just as G-d revealed Himself at Mt. Sinai, once, why does He not open the Heavens, once, to show us the reward of Gan Eden and the punishment of Gehinom? The Rabbi answered: If people would see who is rewarded and who is punished in Gan Eden and Gehinom, and how, everyone would leave the religion!

The student was astounded! Why?!? The Rabbi explained: People's vision is extremely limited. כִּי יֵרָאֶה לְעֵינָיו וְיִקְנֶה יֵרָאֶה לְלִבּוֹ: *For a person sees only that which is before his eyes, but G-d sees into the heart* (Shmuel 1:16:7) If G-d opened the Heavens and people would see those who they thought were Tzaddikim being punished in Gehinom, and those who look like Wicked ones being rewarded, they would lose their minds!

The judgment of Rosh Hashana is too deep for mankind to fathom, as it entails infinite ripple effects and the deepest goals of your heart. And, most of all, it is the judgment of how much you are willing to make yourself into a channel, a vessel, for infusing the world with G-dliness. There is nothing more humbling than accepting that G-d *uses* you to bring his G-dliness to the world. At the closing moments of Neilah on Yom Kippur, we beg G-d to set in motion a new direction for our lives. א-ל נורא עלילה, The G-d who is the Awesome One of the Plot, who orchestrates people's lives in ways that they will return to Him. G-d sees the goals in your heart, your "plots"... and if you pray with enough intent, He will set everything in motion for you to make the right goals and achieve them.

How does one make the most meaningful impact? Here are the selfie steps:

1. Live according to your values.
2. Look for a place where what you have to offer, something that is needed and relevant. Education. Charity. Mentoring.



Tutoring. Entertainment. At times, you need to go against the systems and the powers that exist. At times you need to help them.

3. Widen your imagination of what and how you can impact. Covid has taught us that the world is so interconnected that what

happens in one part of the world will impact another.

4. Widen what you are willing to commit to. Ask yourself what impact you would be happy to leave behind.
5. Most of all, love the people around you.

TESHUVAT FOR THE ORTHODOX JEW

Teshuva for the Orthodox Jew is usually more about quality than about quantity. For the Orthodox, Teshuva is more about improving how you do what you do more than it is changing what you do. *But Rabbi, my plate is too full! I am doing too much already! I do not have more time/energy/money/headspace to do more! I am maxed out!*

Teshuva is not about *doing* more. It is about *being* different. It is not about the *what*. It is about the *how*.

Improving on the *how* in G-d's service is not an investment of time/energy/money/headspace as much as it is one of emotional intelligence. About being in total control of your emotions. What you focus on. What state of mind you are in. No matter how much you did or you are doing. Let me give three examples.

In Eshet Chayil, we sing, גִּדְיָה שְׁלָחָהּ בַּפִּישּׁוֹר, Her hand she sent to the spike. Who is this referring to? To Yael. Yael did not kill Sisra with a sword. As it says לַיָּדָהּ תִּשְׁלַח הַחֶנֶּה her hand she sent to the spike (or tent peg). (Shoftim 5 26) And why did Yael kill Sisra with the tent peg and not with the sword? Because in the Torah, (in our Parasha) it says, אִשָּׁה לֹא יִתְּנָה כְּלֵי-זָכָר A woman should not bear masculine accessories . (Yalkut Shoftim 5, 56)

Yael saved the Jewish Nation at war from the evil general, Sisrah. G-d performed a miracle at the war, and the 900 iron chariots of Sisra got flooded in the valley during the miraculous thunderstorm. Sisrah fled to hide out in the tent of Yael, the wife of Heber Hakeni, Sisra's friend. She then slept with him 7 times, to make him weak. (R' Akiva was a

descendant of the third relationship. Rama Mipano) Yael offered him some milk, to make him sleepy. And then, she took the tent peg to kill him. She did not use Sisra's sword. She was allowed to do what she did with him based on three factors. A. She was saving the entire Jewish people, B. He was a non-Jew, and C. She had no pleasure from sinning with him. *But she did not need to use a sword.* Using a sword is forbidden, as war is a masculine occupation. It is forbidden for a woman to wear armor, as armor is considered to be exclusively masculine. (Nazir 59a, see Rashi. Also, Shu"t YD 182;5) So, she used the wooden tent peg, instead.

Why was this small element of Yael's superhuman act worthy of such a great amount of attention? Because Yael kept her cool in serving G-d to the max at the time of an emotional whirlpool. Despite the fact that she was allowed to transgress the laws in order to save the Jewish Nation, she was able to minimize those permitted transgressions. It was the same superhuman act. But her finesse in the *how*, in choosing to use the wooden tent peg was what got her into the Eishet Chayil Hall of Fame. גִּדְיָה שְׁלָחָהּ בַּפִּישּׁוֹר.

We are all at war. An internal war against our Evil Inclination. In this war to do the right thing, our ability to control our emotions, to perform at our best in the 613, makes all the difference. And it is the small things that count. *If Yehonatan, son of King Saul, would have offered David just two loaves of bread, when David was fleeing from K. Saul, he would have circumvented all the tragedies that followed. The Kohanim in the city of Nov would not have been killed, and Doeg would not have been lost, and Shaul and his three sons would*



not have died.”(Sanhedrin 104a) Despite the everlasting love that Yehonatan had for David, his willingness to give up his rights to the throne to David and even to risk his life for David... still. The Torah holds him responsible for not offering David two loaves of bread for the road. It is the small things that count. It is the small things that make all the difference. A drop more consideration. A drop more awareness. A drop more Kavannah.

There were seven prophetesses, Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Chanah, Avigail, Hulda, and Esther. (Megillah 14a) Deborah lived in the time of Yael. How did Deborah become a prophetess, and merit being the author of one of the Ten Songs of Tanach? The Yalkut Shimoni hints to the answer in his words.

Although Eliyhau Hanavi was present at the time, Deborah became the prophetess and the Judge of the Jewish Nation. G-d promises us, and testifies by the heavens and the earth, that both a gentile and a Jew, a man or a woman, a slave or a maidservant can have Ruach Hakodesh. Bestowing Ruah Hakodesh is dependent upon a person's actions.

What was so special of Deborah's actions that she deserved Ruach Hakodesh? She is known for being the wife of Lapidot. Her husband was a simpleton. But she wanted him to have a portion in Torah learning. Deborah donated the wicks for the Mishkan in Shiloh, and she would make them, and send her husband to the study hall, so that he would be a part of the righteous and merit Olam Haba.

What? From making wicks she became a prophetess? That's all you need to do to achieve Ruach Hakodesh?!

Eliyahu the Prophet teaches us Deborah's secret. She was מתברונת, she focused on making the wicks to be especially thick wicks, to bring about the most light in the Mishkan of Shiloh and the study hall there. G-d sees the intentions of the heart, and He said to her, Deborah, you intended Me to have a lot of light. So too, said G-d, that He would make

Deborah's light spread throughout Yehuda and Jerusalem. (Y Shimoni Shoftim 42)

It was Deborah's *focusing*, not to make just *any* wicks. Not even her making the *thick* wicks. But it was her *concentrating* all her efforts on serving G-d. It was her complete dedication to making the wicks, specifically in such a way as to serve G-d to the max. The focusing, the intensity of devotion, is what made her different. The how.

G-d wants quality. So, what do we need to focus on? Here is the trick. Listen closely, because if you cross the wires, you can blow your battery.

The 613 are divided into 248 positive and 365 negative commandments. The service of G-d, of the heart, is split into two. Fear of G-d and Love of G-d. If you want to improve your *positive commandments*, i.e. learning Torah, Birkat Hamazon, Tzitzit, Tefillin, honoring parents, your best bet is to focus on upgrading the quality by adding LOVE of G-d into those acts.)See Ramban, Yitro) If you try to keep the positive commandments by adding FEAR of G-d, you will burn your battery. FEAR is reserved for the negative commandments, like not speaking lashon hara, not mixing meat and milk, not desecrating Shabbat, etc. To improve on the quality, we need to add LOVE to the positive commandments, and FEAR to the negative commandments.

Even in the realm of the material, studies and experience in all life areas teach us, quality over quantity. To manage your time to the max, it is not how many things you cram in, but accomplishing your most important tasks first, "Important over Urgent". In learning, it is not about amassing knowledge (quantity), but about attaining wisdom (quality). Knowledge comes and goes, but wisdom lingers. With family and friends, quality time has more value than quantity time. In dieting, you need to increase the quality of what you eat, not just reduce the quantity.

And in serving G-d, as well. לְמַה־לִּי רַב־זְבָּחִים יֹאמֶר לְמַה־לִּי רַב־זְבָּחִים יֹאמֶר To what purpose is the multitude of your



sacrifices to Me, says G-d? (Yeshaya 1; 11) G-d wants from us quality over quantity.

OLAM HABA EYEBALLS

I recently realized what my biggest life problem is. Why I can't focus in davening and learning. Why I can't forgive and forget. Why I can't make those important decisions in life when faced with crisis, or deal with conflict and chaos. It is a problem with my eyeballs.

I've been printing 1000 parsha sheets of self-introspective Torah for the last 6 and a half years. I was told so many times by publishing companies, "Rabbi Farhi, if you would only write more stories... People LOVE stories! You'd make best sellers!" But the answer, I realized, is that I am always writing stories. Every introspective Torah idea I write is the underlying story behind my life story and the stories of many others. This article is the idea behind ALL of our stories. It is the Olam Haba Eyeball story.

I see my world as the world I see. But the real world is the Olam Haba world. G-d created the world with the intent that we wear Olam Haba Eyeballs. ברוך אלוקינו שבראנו לכבודו... והיי עולם נטע. It is a lifetime of work. To live a life of נצח. To transcend time. But so many times, I foolishly stick to Olam Hazeh Eyes, because they are so "sticky". It is like the fellow who is stuck with a stock of Nasa Eclipse Eyeglasses. You have use of those only before and during the eclipse. No one will buy that stock today. The faster you get rid of that useless stock, the better. Olam Hazeh Eyes work for you only when you have a nice car, a nice paycheck, and things go your way... But when the "eclipse" is over, you don't want to be stuck with those glasses. Get rid of them as fast as you can! All the pain you have in life is because you are trying to hold on to those stupid eclipse glasses. The faster you get rid of your Olam Hazeh Eyes, the easier it will be for you to focus on davening and reconnect. The faster you will be able to make those important life decisions. And the faster you will find serenity.

The stories of our rabbis are all Olam Haba Eyeball stories. R Yisrael Salanter sees a candle late at night at the shoemaker's shop, and the shoemaker bangs away with the last drip-drop of his candle. He tells R Yisrael, "As long as the candle is still burning, I can keep fixing." R' Yisrael, with his Olam Haba Eyeballs, says, "As long as I am alive, נר ה' נשמת אדם, I can still fix my soul..." R' Yisrael! What is the connection? What is the relevance? But R' Yisrael has different eyeballs than most of us. And that is what he saw. What he heard. What he lived. All of the Chafetz Chaim stories. They are all Olam Haba Eyeball stories. About conceptualizing.

Imagine, for a second, that you meet Tarzan in the jungle. You pull out a map of Israel, point to Jerusalem, and tell him, this is where I live. If you go north, you will get to Rosh Hanikra. Go south, and you hit Eilat. Go west, and you hit the ocean. East, and you hit Jordan. He looks at you, and says, "What is this map thing? This is just a piece of paper with different colors, lines, numbers and letters (!?)", because he sees only a two dimensional piece of paper. He does not understand that the map on the piece of paper represents a three-dimensional world, charting places and the distances between them. But to you, there is something much deeper than that page. Olam Haba is seeing our 3d world with a fourth dimension. The spiritual dimension.

Our parents, our grandparents, lived more Olam Haba Eyeball lives. The Lower East Side Jews that gave up their parnassah, getting the pink slip each and every Friday, and still staying strong, positive and proud, all had Olam Haba Eyeballs. For many of us, Olam Haba sounds scary, unknown, distant, so we stick to our Olam Hazeh stories, our Olam Hazeh Eyeballs, lacking the spiritual dimension. And then, we can't be the Jews we want to be, and we just can't figure out why not. The worst things can happen to us when we stick to our Olam Hazeh eyes. Because the only way we can be the Jew we



want to be is if we are calm, courageous, and consistent. And to be those “three C’s”, we need to be able to transcend the other 3 C’s: circumstance, conflict and crisis. We need Olam Haba Eyeballs, with the spiritual dimension in them.

In this week’s parasha, the Torah tells us about the mitzvah of Shiluach Haken. ‘You can take the baby birds from the nest, but you have to send away the mother. Do this, so that your G-d will give you good, and you will merit longevity’. Elisha Ben Avuyah sat in the valley of Ginosar, learning Torah. He was the Rebbi of Rebi Meir, and R’ Meri was the anonymous Tannah of Shas and one of the pillars of Torah Sheh b’al Peh, the Oral Torah. So, just imagine who R’ Meir’s Rebbi was. And as he learnt Torah, he noticed a fellow climbing up a fig tree, to take a nest of chicks, while sending away the mother bird. The man climbed down the tree, but did not make it to the bottom before getting bitten by a venomous snake. End of story, end of life. No longevity, no good life, and Elisha is left confused. He looks at his Book, he looks at the circumstance and can’t make sense of the contradiction. So, Elisha gives up the Book, and becomes Acher. The other one. And lives a life that is the opposite of Judaism, until he cries on his deathbed, hoping that maybe G-d will accept his Teshuva.

The Talmud explains that Acher made this mistake, because he did not know how R’ Yaakov explained that verse of the Torah. ‘Longevity’ is referring to life in the Next World; the good life is referring to the Next World. Acher didn’t know this, so he rejected everything that he had believed until then, because of what seemed to him to be a glaring contradiction. But didn’t Elisha know that there is a Next World?

The answer is, yes, he did. But this world is full of contradictions not to be resolved until we get to the Next World. So, to get by sane, it is not enough to know that Olam Haba exists. You need Olam Haba Eyeballs. You need to be someone who, when you speak about a good life, you are referring to a

spiritual life. A good wedding is a spiritual wedding. A good marriage is a spiritual one. So, when the Torah says that a person who performs the mitzvah of Shiluach Haken is going to have long life, a good life, OF COURSE IT IS TALKING ABOUT THE NEXT WORLD!!! Acher missed that point, because he did not have the Olam Haba Eyeballs, and that led to his demise.

Trying to describe Olam Haba is like trying to paint a picture for a blind man, or play a tune to someone who is deaf. The Talmud refers to Olam Haba as a place that is *יום שכולו ארוך*, A day that is entirely long. R Dessler explains what “A day that is entirely long”, means. Every minute of Olam Haba is Eternal. How so? Because every minute is above Past, Present and Future.

Take a piece of paper with a little hole in its center and place it over a map, the hole over Jerusalem. All you see is Jerusalem, nothing else is seen, although it is there. Move the paper with the hole to Rosh Hanikra, and Jerusalem can’t be seen. Take off the piece of paper, and the whole map is exposed, at once. The whole Israel. In this world, we can experience only the present. The past, the future, cannot be experienced in the present. But take off the paper, and you see past – present – future, all as one, with no boundaries. That is one minute of Olam Haba, experiencing past, present and future, all at the same time. To be an Olam Haba person means to be able, in your mind, to transcend past, present and future and not get stuck on any one of them. It means being fully aware of the fact that what we are aware of now is not the whole picture. There is much more than the ‘now’. To be able to say, “Make G-d King” over all three, *ה' מלך ה' מלך ה' ימלוך לעולם ועד*.

On Rosh Hashana, according to the Ramchal, this is what we are judged on. If we are Olam Haba people, if we will have Olam Haba Eyeballs, and if we will have an Olam Haba life, a spiritual life. And this is our prayer: *למענך אלוקים...זכרנו לחיים חיים*



YOUR OWN NEW TESTAMENT

The *Ben Sorer Umoreh* is the child we know who went astray from his parents, and went astray from the ways of the Torah. We all know that the word *sorer* means to go astray. But what does the word *moreh* mean? Rashi and the Targum explain this word as rebellious. But usually, that word means teaching. What did this rebellious child teach? And to whom?

The Yalkut Gershuri writes that this boy is not only a bad kid. He gets others to join him in crime, so that he won't burn in hell alone. He teaches others his Torah, as he teaches himself his own Torah. For a person to become a sinner, he needs to create his own Torah. He needs to make his own New Testament, to justify his inappropriate behavior. Even Eichman justified his behavior, saying that he was just following orders.

The more I coach, the more I realize that everyone has their own story. I realized that productivity and performance are closely connected to the 3 S's. State, Structure, and Story. Our State of Mind, will have a powerful effect on our performance and productivity, in any given situation. The Structure that we are in has an equal effect on our performance and productivity. But the most powerful effect on performance and productivity is the Story. How did you get into this area of productivity or performance? Why are you there? When did you start and when will you end? Who are you up against, and who is on your side? Where is this story taking place?... Most of the time, the client is not even aware of all the parts of his own story, until he gets into some sort of bottleneck between his motivation and his goal.

Studies have proven that story telling is an extremely potent form of persuasion and motivation. Stories set your brand. Stories build your identity. And people sometimes give up everything they have, because they cannot give up on their version of the story. Even G-d wrote the Torah in story fashion, because that is the way the human mind connects with concepts. When one

spouse calls me for help with Shalom Bayit, I know that the only way I can help them is if I can listen to both stories, find the contradiction between the two stories, and figure out how they can both buy into a third story. When I help a yeshiva student with his conflicts in religious observance, it is usually not the religion that he wants to be coached on. It is about his personal story in the religion, his story with his relationship with G-d. "What is your story?" is a powerful question. Everyone has a story, a perspective on their place in the family, how much they deserve, and how much they were mistreated.

The *Ben Sorer Umoreh* could not have become such bad kid, if he did not have a story. When a religious teenager takes off his yarmulke, he is not just taking off a piece of clothing. He has a long story that is behind it. The *Ben Sorer Umoreh* has a story; he has a belief that this world is where it all begins and ends. And that the easy life is the good life. And he teaches others his story, to make himself feel that there is credibility to his story, that he does not stand alone.

We start off the Selihot saying, לך ה' הצדקה ולנו בושׁת הפנים *To You G-d, is Righteousness, and all we have is shame.* The difference between a sinner and one who sinned is that the sinner has a story of self-justification, while the one who sinned realizes his wrongdoing. This is the beginning of Selihot, because the first part of repentance is to alter our story. And this is what we mean in the beginning Piyut of Yom Kippur, לך א-לי, when we say with a tear on our cheek, ובהלתי בתורתך- ובחרתי בתורתי. *And I was repelled by Your Torah, and I chose my own Torah.*

When we do *Teshuva*, when we change from our sinful ways, we are ridding ourselves of our story and buying into G-d's story. Our story is that we are Orthodox Jews, so we are okay. Relative to the place from which I started out, I have come quite far in my religious observance. But G-d has a different story. His story was, is, and will always



be, the Torah, Shas, and Shulchan Aruch. It does not make a difference how digital or crazy the world becomes; Obama, Clinton, or Trump: G-d does not change His Story. His story is an old one, starting from before Creation, freeing us from slavery, keeping us alive through the exile, and giving us all an ultimatum; to choose which world

TZEDDAKAH! TZEDAKKAH!

Tzedaka is difficult to give, only if you believe that the money you earned was earned by your hard work alone, and not given to you by G-d. Tzeddaka is one of the greatest tests on your core beliefs, measuring how much you believe that G-d is in your life and involved in your successes. Listen in to a conversation that the rich man has in his subconscious, that he, himself, might not be aware of...

“But I worked so hard for my money! If G-d gave it to me, why did I need to work so hard for it?”

There are those who worked harder than you, that are smarter than you and did not make the money you made. There are those who had much more money than you, and now, they have much less. So, why do you still have the money that’s in your account? G-d. G-d. G-d.

“But I came up with the business idea! It was my brainstorming! Not G-d’s!”

Your creativity is from your Creator. Your brainstorming – your brain is just some noodle mush.

We start the middle blessings of the Amidah by confessing this to G-d. **אתה חונן לאדם דעת ... You grant Man Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom.** This is the greatest confession Man can ever make to G-d. *All my intellectual achievements came from You.* The greatest honor you can give someone is appreciating and honoring his opinions, ideas and beliefs, because, naturally, people attribute “thinking” to the big “I”. “I thought of a great idea.” “I believe...” “I am of the opinion...” So, that is how we start our prayers. “G-d, You

is of higher importance, this world or the next. His Story is the story of our accepting his Kingship over us and the Universe, even if it is a digital Universe. And His story is always the real story, while our story is just digital. Just as fast as you created it, you can delete it.

give me knowledge, and I need You so, so greatly in life.”

99% of success in today’s business world boils down to an advantage in one of these three fields: Knowledge, Understanding or Wisdom. Whether it is financial intelligence, being street smart, book smart, or whatever smart, money comes to the ones who use the grey matter, the “noodle mass”, the brain. What is that matter? I saw it once in a jar, in a Museum, when I was 12 years old. A jar of noodles. So, Who generates guts? How does it work without batteries? Who decides when the brain will be focused and when it won’t be? G-d. G-d .G-d. Sometimes, such wise people make such foolish mistakes and lose all their life’s savings. A little, humble reminder of how much we need G-d in life. And, once we realize how much G-d has given us, and how generously He gives us tzaddakah, it will be much easier for us to give others, as well. We would feel like that overflowing cup.

Some approach Elul on fire. Others, on ice. Most religious Jews are somewhere in between, waiting for some outside factor to heat them up, motivate them, to have the Elul they are “supposed” to have. Someone sent me a letter in Hebrew, to wake me up, but all it did was shake me up. The letter was headed “letter from the Heavenly Courts”, telling me that I am being summoned by my Father, the Judge, to stand trial, in thirty days time. I will not be allowed to come with any lawyers, witnesses on my behalf, and I will be unable to deny any claims against me. The claims against me will be that I have not learned Torah on the level that I could, I have not given enough tzeddakah , I have not guarded my eyes properly, I have spoken Lashon



Hara. Etc. I will not write the punishments in this article, as they are too harsh. The only way to make things easier, to tilt the verdict in my favor, is to admit that I have sinned, and to try to better myself in the course of these Elul days. To give Tzeddakah, learn Torah, and perform acts of kindness. If I am found guilty, I will be graced with ten days to change my behavior, and, ultimately, change my fate. Signed, Heavenly Court.

I was shaken up by the letter although nothing changed inside. But, when I read the words in

PARTY PLANNERS

The Mesillat Yescharim writes in the very beginning that a person in this world is always at battle. There is always a war, whatever you do and wherever you go. The reason why we are not conscious of this is because we are living in a trance. We get used to thinking that things are the way they appear on the surface. For example: One might think that he is going to a wedding, when, in reality, he is going to war. *Is he or she going to keep the guidelines of tzniut and modesty? Is he or she going to be jealous of others? Are you going to the wedding to enjoy the food and the music or to make the bride and groom happy?* This is an inner war. We have this battle every day of our lives, in every scenario, at every moment. We think that if we socialize, we are just socializing. But our rabbis tell us that this is not the case. We are actually waging a war against letting ourselves speak freely of the faults of others. We think that when we sit down for a meal, we are just having a meal. No such thing. If and how you say the blessing before you wash your hands or eat is an inner war. If you will speak Torah at the meal or not is a war, and when you think that you are just having a sandwich, you most probably will lose your battle with the Evil Inclination. This is written between and behind the lines in the words of the Messilat Yescharim on the very first page.

This is the importance of the words that start off our parasha *כי תצא למלחמה על אייבך* When you go out to war against your enemy ... One must mentally and intentionally be prepared for this

Selichot, *לך ה' הצדקה*, ולנו בושת הפנים, I twisted the meaning of the words a bit, and it twisted my heart. *To you G-d, you are the One who gives me Tzeddaka, and all I own is embarrassment.* All that I have is Tzeddaka from G-d, and I owe You so much. I felt motivated by that thought. I felt that everything I have ever had, possessed, or done in life was asking me to give it all for Him. My energy, my thoughts. My money, my time. All for G-d. For as long as I think this thought, I am on fire. *I am to my Beloved...*

inner battle. If you are going to be passive about this war thing, then it is more than likely that you will lose the battle. Thus, the Torah warns us that we must go out to fight, and not just sit back, thinking that things are just “chilled”.

The way we go out to fight is by planning: we plan what and how we will behave at the wedding in advance, we decide consciously that we are coming not to look around with envy at what others have; rather, we know that coming to the wedding is a mitzvah, one to be done with a smile on our face. Our presence says that we are happy for the new couple. With this mental preparation, there is a much better chance that this is how we will behave. Similarly, if we have in mind that the Shabbat table is a time when we can share Torah thoughts and learn some halachot, then there is a better chance that the planning will come true than if we do not plan at all. And, even in areas in which we are weak, if we plan ahead, there is a greater chance that we will succeed in overcoming our obstacles. This is one of the ideas that was very much encouraged by R' Yisrael Salanter. One can help himself to form good habits by picturing exactly how he will make his Berachot and thinking what type of blessing he will make. People are creatures of habit, and being used to something will more often than not dictate the way they will behave. That is, unless they plan differently. And, when someone does plan, for better or for worse, there is a special Divine aid to put a person on the path which he chooses for himself. *בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך*



מוליכים אותו . I have found this true while coaching people. Once someone says and describes, spells out in detail what he wants, G-d just helps him achieve it.

SHORT AND SWEET

The Gemara in Makot tells us, *“How foolish are those who stand up for a Sefer Torah, but not for the rabbis! The Torah states, YOU SHALL SMITE HIM 40 TIMES, and the rabbis come along and say that one should get only 39 lashes.”* A great question is asked about this. Why does the Gemara have to go through so many parashiot to find a passuk which highlights the point that our rabbis had the power to interpret a passuk in a way different from the literal translation? In Sefer Vayikra, we find the same concept regarding Sefirat Ha’omer. The Torah tells us to count 50 days, and our rabbis come along and tell us to count only 49!”

The answer is this. To be able to learn that the Torah means to say that one should count only 49 days when it says 50 is not such a great feat. However, to say that one gives only 39 lashes, not 40, decreasing the amount of pain this Jew would have to go through, making his life easier for him – THAT’S GREATNESS!

The Mabit, in Beit Elokim asks the following: If we read the Ten Commandments with concentration, we will find that the first five, the commandments that are between man and his Creator, are much longer in comparison to the last five, those between a man and his fellow. Some of the latter five are merely two-word commandments. If this is so, why did G-d leave so much empty space in the last tablets in comparison to the space in the first tablets? Could He not have

elaborated a bit on the commandments between a man and his fellow, making the size of the margin somewhat equal?

The answer given is that when it comes to the laws between man and his fellow, people often prefer to ignore their social duties. It is much more *difficult* to forgive and forget, especially in a case where there is money over which we are in dispute with others, then it is to part with possessions to do a mitzvah. It is in this very sensitive area of preserving our honor, our self image, that we are given the opportunity to excel in refining our middot. When a person is able to rise above his distaste for a fellow Jew – no matter how justified his feeling may be – he transcends himself and makes a powerful Kiddush HaShem. This is why G-d wrote the latter mitzvot in big letters, leaving the same amount of open space as in the first set of commandments. Just to have the commandments between man and his fellow stand out, showing and underlining their importance. It is in observing these mitzvot that we have the opportunity to be complete in our serving G-d.

People who recognize that the latter five commandments are those that give us an opportunity to care about others – whether we like them or not – are people who deserve to be stood up for. They stand out like bold letters on a blank page!

COMFORTABLE WITH SIN

At first I did not understand the Midrash in this week’s parasha. But when I did, I was all shaken up.

“...And G-d did not want to listen to Bilaam, and Hashem your G-d turned the curse to a blessing,

because He loves you...” The Midrash comments, *why did Bilaam go against the will of G-d, and try to curse the Jews? Because he thought that he himself would redeem the Jews from Egypt, and he thought that the Torah would be given to the Jews through his hands. Once Bilaam saw that*



the Jews were redeemed from Egypt by Moshe and that the Torah was given by Moshe. Bilaam became filled with jealousy and planned a list of curses against the Jews....

How could Bilaam, the most impure, the most selfish of all, the master of the Evil Eye, believe that the Torah could be given through him? How could he be “shocked” that Moshe Rabbeinu, who loved each and every Jew as himself, was chosen to take out the Jews from Egypt instead of him? What was he even thinking?

I thought about this for a while, and when I figured it out, it shook me up. The reason is because Bilaam could only be so wicked as Bilaam, if he really, truly believed that he was as righteous as Moshe Rabbeinu. When people we know do

wicked things, it is along the lines of “all roads to hell are paved with good intentions”. A person, in essence, cannot do bad. One can only do something wrong when he *thinks that there is something right to it*. That it can be justified. So Bilaam, as well, could only be *so* evil, only if he truly thought that he was a tzaddik *like Moshe*. He truly believed it, and when he faced reality in the mirror, he was filled with rage.

A person can go his whole life thinking that he is a tzaddik. He has no clue that this is many times the only way that his conscience will allow him to actually go ahead and be a Rasha. As we approach days of Judgment, let us keep this in mind.

READY FOR WAR

כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך ונתת ד' אלקיך בידך ושבת
When you go out to war against your
enemy, and Hashem, your G-d, gives you victory...

Our Sages tell us that this *passuk* is hinting at going to war against the Evil Inclination, our *worst enemy*. As the *Chovot HaLevovot* writes: *Know this: Your greatest enemy in the world is your Evil Inclination...he gives you advice for your every step. While you sleep, he is awake plotting against you. He appears to you as a friend, and he becomes one of your most trusted friends and advisors... His greatest weapon against you is confusion and false arguments to make you forget your true interests and doubt your confirmed goals and beliefs... (Shaar Yichud Hamaaseh)*. The ways of the Evil Inclination are manifold. He always has new ideas, and he never gives up. When you thought you conquered him, you find that he has only gotten stronger. This is the general picture. The Rebbe from Pashische put it even more dramatically: You should always perceive the Evil Inclination as one who is standing over your head with an axe waiting for the moment to chop off your head. If you cannot perceive him as such, it means that he has already chopped off your head!

The metaphor of battling the Evil Inclination has always been extremely apt – all the way down to our time. We can illustrate this through the example of the modern tank, which was a product of World War One. During the war, the leaders of England and France (Allied Forces) looked for a way to break through the front lines of forts established by the Germans. After much thought and research, they concluded that this could be accomplished by vehicles with thick side walls to protect them from being stopped by machine-gun fire, and ones in which soldiers could hide and shoot. They also wanted a vehicle that could climb over obstacles and pass over trenches.

At last, a vehicle was invented that met all these requirements, and a squadron of them was to be brought to the front. The leaders of the Allied Forces wanted their new weapon to surprise and startle the enemy. To conceal their true identity as weapons, they were brought to the front lines as water carriers for the Mesopotamian campaign, and referred to as *tanks* (as in *water tank*).

The Evil Inclination works very much the same way. He presents himself as innocent – a mere



water tank – or even as good. And he always invents new ways of doing things.

As for the essence of the Evil Inclination, the statements of the Sages may, at first glance, seem paradoxical. Is it an external angel or an inner part of the human psyche? On the one hand, we have a Talmudic passage which tells us that the Evil Inclination, the Satan (Adversary), and the Angel of Death are one and the same. The Evil Inclination attempts to get one to sin, and when he succeeds, he goes to the Heavenly Court as a prosecuting angel. When he succeeds in his prosecution, he returns to the world as the Angel of Death, and executes the punishment (*Bava Batra* 16a). From this description, it seems that the Evil Inclination is external. On the other hand, the Sages tell us that ever since Adam and Chavah ate from the Tree of Knowledge, the Evil Inclination resides within us (see נפש החיים א' פ"ו). This also seems to be reflected in the *Chumash* itself: “*The inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth*” (*Bereishis* 8:21); “*Love the L-rd, your G-d, with all your hearts*” (*Devarim* 6:5) – with both the good and the evil inclination (Rashi); “*You should not have in you an alien god*” (*Psalms* 91:10) – i.e., evil inclination (*Shabbat* 105b).

The resolution of this paradox lies in the observation of R’ Yisrael Salant that there are

actually two Evil Inclinations – the internal and the external, or what he calls the *Yetzer Hatumah* and *Yetzer Hata’avah* (see *Iggeret Hamussar*). R’ Yisrael uses this to explain contradictions in a given person’s behavior that almost make the individual look like he has a split personality. He notes, for example, that while a person may have a desire for honor, this desire is strangely absent when it comes to honor for spiritual or ethical matters. He explains that this person’s inner desire for honor is being neutralized by an outside force (*Yetzer Hatumah*) which influences him not to look for honor in the spiritual or ethical realm.

Although it is often difficult to figure out whether the external Adversary or the internal Evil Inclination is operating, one thing is for sure: neither one has anything to do with our “inner self.” There is an “inner self” deeper inside than the “heart,” the abode of the Evil Inclination. In other words, the Torah perspective is that our bad habits are external, something we can fight against. This is an amazingly useful self-help concept! (If the Evil Inclination had been part of our inner self, we wouldn’t have had a chance.) This may well be hinted at by the Torah when it speaks of “*going out* to war against your Enemy.” Even the internal Inclination is not part of the inner self. With all this in mind, we are ready for war!

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