

Fascinating INSIGHTS

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COMING SOON Bez"H

Fascinating Insights—The Sefer (in English)

[Excuseless](#)

There are those that give different excuses for why they believe they can't accomplish in various areas (studying Torah, being successful at a profession and so on). One's excuse is because of his upbringing while another blames his Rebbe. Another claims he has a learning disability. The list goes on. Nevertheless, we see some that have troubles yet become successes and others that don't, as it depends on us, not outside factors. In this way the Ritva¹ explains why Yaakov and Esav were twins, as it was to show that the righteousness of Yaakov came because of himself and not because of his parents or any other reason. Yaakov and Esav were in the same stomach, the same parents and so forth yet Yaakov was righteous and Esav evil. So, the cause of our greatness or lack of it is dependent on us. This is just as R' Elazar Ben Durdiya remarked אין הדבר תלוי אלא בי, it depends solely on me.²

The great R' Akiva could have had many excuses why he shouldn't be a success. He didn't begin learning Torah until age 40,³ didn't descend from Jewish lineage,⁴ his father-in-law was against him marrying his daughter,⁵ 24,000 students of his died⁶ and so on. Yet he persevered

and became the great R' Akiva to the extent that he recited Shema at his final moments on this world while being combed to death with saying I finally have the opportunity to fulfill בכל נפשך (even if he takes your soul)!⁷

This idea is shown in the Parsha where it speaks of the two goats of Yom Kippur. The Mishna⁸ states that they should be alike in appearance, height, value and purchased in a single transaction. Yet, one is for Hashem and one is לעזאזל.⁹ Similarly, two people can have the same parents, attend the same Yeshivos and the like and turn out so different.

One may have good excuses for why he is unsuccessful. We can compare this to one that is overweight who was extremely busy working and taking care of his family that he had no time to exercise thereby being unable to lose weight. Although it may be true, nevertheless because of his inaction he looks the way he looks.

The Gemara says שובו בנים שובבים חוץ מאחר, return wayward sons except for Acher.¹⁰ This can also be interpreted that those who say I am the exception, I am different (אחר) are the ones that can't (חוץ) do Teshuva because they think they are different. It is the ones who say I am different that don't accomplish in life, as they always have excuses.

[United or Untied](#)

We, Jews, can be compared to one body as we each represent different parts of a body. In this way, we can understand ואהבת לרעך כמוך¹¹ as, ואהבת לרעך can mean a fragment, a piece as in שבת ברזל ח, smash them with an iron rod.¹² Thus, we should love our fellow like ourselves since, in essence, we are one.¹³

As a result, when one Jew sins, he causes separation between Jews. A hint to this is found in עונתיכם ביןכם¹⁴ as our sins cause separation among us.

¹ In his commentary on the Haggada, p. 27 s.v. ואתן ליצחק (printed in Chidushai HaRitva after Mesachta Pesachim).

² Avoda Zara 17a. The Pasuk says by Yaakov and Esav ויגדלו ויהנערום, they grew up. Esav became one who knows hunting and Yaakov was an איש תם, wholesome (Breishis 25:27). When one grows up and he is out of the domain of his parents and Yeshiva, which way does he go? Like an Esav or a Yaakov.

³ Avos Drebi Nosson 6:2. It describes there how he, together with his young son, went to Cheder to learn the Alef-Beis.

⁴ Brachos 27b. See R' Nissim Gaon, s.v. נוקי לר' עקיבא.

⁵ Kesubos 62b. After he betrothed her, and she sent him away to learn Torah, her father threw her out of his house and made a vow prohibiting her to benefit from his possessions.

⁶ Yevamos 62b. This is alluded to in את עמר (Vayikra 23:15)—which is dealing with Sefira—as it is an acronym for תלמידי ר' עקיבא, the students of R' Akiva from Gevas until Antifras (border towns) died during Sefira. How many

died? This is alluded to in the same Pasuk in the words וספרתם לכם, count for yourselves. Let us multiply each letter of the word לכם by its adjoining letter. ל (30) multiplied by כ (20) is 600. 600 multiplied by מ (40) is 24,000!

⁷ Brachos 61b. R' Akiva was arrested because the Roman government decreed that the Jewish people not engage in learning Torah yet R' Akiva convened public assemblies and studied Torah with them.

⁸ Yoma 62a.

⁹ Vayikra 16:8.

¹⁰ Chagiga 15a.

¹¹ Vayikra 19:18.

¹² Tehillim 2:9. See R' Shmshon Rafael Hirsch to Breishis 6:5.

¹³ See Tomer Devora 1. For this reason, we are instructed to be נושא בעל עם חבירו, share in your friend's yoke (Avos 6:6).

¹⁴ Yeshaya 59:2. The simple meaning is that our sins separate us and Hashem.

This is analogous to one who makes a hole in the bottom of a boat as the hole affects everyone on the boat.¹⁵

The reverse is also true as when we do what Hashem wants we cause unity among us. With this, we can understand a deeper meaning in the Gemara that teaches—when we did the will of Hashem, פניהם איש אל אחיו—the כרובים faced each other.¹⁶ When we do the will of Hashem, then פניהם איש אל אחיו, there is unity amongst Jews.

First Haircut

The custom among many is to give a child his first haircut at the age of three. Many go to Meiron to the grave of R' Shimon Bar Yochai to do this. In fact, the Arizal¹⁷ took his young son with his family to the grave of R' Shimon Bar Yochai and gave him a haircut (*Upsherin*¹⁸) there on Lag Baomer, followed by a celebration. This is called a חאלאקע (*Chalaka*), from the term איש חלק¹⁹, smooth-skinned man, since when one has an *Upsherin*, he now has a smooth head.

We have a principle known as a ערלה²⁰, the first three years of a newly planted tree or its grafted shoots is forbidden for use. Since man is compared to the tree of the field—²¹עץ השדה—we therefore don't touch his hair for the first three years. In the fourth year all its fruit is קדש הלולים לה', sanctified to laud Hashem. So too, at the beginning of the fourth year of a child, he is dedicated to Hashem as we introduce him to the Torah.²² Indeed, this is why we have a celebration by an *Upsherin*.

We find an allusion to this custom in the word והתגלה, which is written with a peculiarly large ג.²³ This alludes to that at age three (as ג has a Gematria of 3), we do והתגלה, give a haircut.

Desire for Pork

Rashi tells us one shouldn't say that I am disgusted by pork (pig meat)...rather I wish I could eat it but Hashem decreed upon me not to.²⁴ Looking at it from this perspective, we can view our service of Hashem in a

¹⁵ Vayikra Rabba 4:6. Tanna Dvei Elyahu Rabba 11.

¹⁶ Baba Basra 99a. Shemos 25:20. The כרובים were winged figures in the Kodosh Hakodashim.

¹⁷ Shaar Hakavonos, Inyan Sefira.

¹⁸ Referring to the first haircut of a child.

¹⁹ Breishis 27:11. Taamai Haminhagim, p. 269. Parenthetically, this is one difference between a Jew and a non-Jew as the core of a Jew is איש שער in contrast to a non-Jew who is an איש שער.

²⁰ Vayikra 19:23-5.

²¹ Devarim 20:19.

²² See Rema in Yoreh Deah 245:8 that we teach him the letters of the Torah so he can be accustomed to read in Torah (See Midrash Tanchuma in Kedoshim 14). This is also when we train him in Mitzvos such as Payos, Tzitzis and so on. The שו"ת דברי יציב (Yoreh Deah 133:3, s.v. והמנהג יציב) is an acronym for his name (יקותיאל יהודה בן צבי) writes that he remembers when he turned three his father covered him in a Tallis and carried him to Cheder to learn. His father put honey on the letters his son would lick. Also, he was prevented from seeing a non-Jew or anything חמא the entire day.

²³ Vayikra 13:33.

²⁴ Vayikra 20:26, Rashi.

different light. When we act in accordance with what we are commanded, we should repeat to ourselves we are doing this because it is a decree of Hashem.²⁵

In this light, after Pesach the Gra would make a special effort to taste Chametz in addition to refraining from eating Matza with which he fulfilled his obligation with on Pesach. This was to show it was not for his pleasure rather because it was a decree of Hashem.²⁶ Likewise, the Sanzer Rebbe would make Havdala after Pesach with beer.²⁷

Experience This

It has been said regarding the Simcha of Lag Ba'omer that מי שלא ראה שמחה זו לא ראה שמחה מימיו, one who hasn't seen this Simcha, has never seen Simcha in his life.²⁸ The Bnei Yissoschar²⁹ writes that ...the Simcha on this day by the Tziun of R' Shimon Bar Yochai is שלא הטבע, above nature. We are left to wonder why the first 32 days of Sefira we mourn for those who died and on the 33rd day—Lag Ba'omer—we celebrate? The question is also asked concerning other Tzadikim that died where we don't celebrate their Yartzheit like R' Shimon Bar Yochai?

During the first 32 days of Sefira, when the students of R' Akiva died, their Torah was also lost, as we don't have any of it. Consequently, we mourn. However, when R' Shimon Bar Yochai passed away, secrets of Torah were³⁰ revealed.³¹ What does it say about his Torah? דנהיר כל עלמא באורייתא,³² R' Shimon lit up the world with his Torah. That is a cause for celebration.³³

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander Tzt"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

²⁵ See the Arvei Nachal, Chukas.

²⁶ Maaseh Rav, 185.

²⁷ Taamai Haminhagim, p. 249. R' Sternbuch (Teshuvos V'Hanhagos 2:304, s.v. והנה) writes that the Gra also did this. See there also regarding sitting in a Succa during Succos for the Mitzva which is shown by not sitting in the Succa once there is no more Mitzva to.

²⁸ Taamai Haminhagim, p. 275. There is a custom to learn Mesachta Shavuos—which has 49 pages—during Sefira, which has 49 days. The Chassam Sofer tells us a fascinating hint: since a Mesachta starts on דף ב (the second page), the 34th page is what is learned on the 33rd day—Lag Ba'omer. What does it say there? R' Shimon says... מחכו עלה במערבא. This alludes to the celebration that takes place in Eretz Yisrael (במערבא) on Lag Ba'omer (Taamai Haminhagim, pp. 271-2).

²⁹ Iyar 3:3.

³⁰ Regarding other Tzadikim that died where we don't celebrate their Yartzheit like R' Shimon Bar Yochai, we didn't lose their Torah with their death but we also didn't gain, like we did with R' Shimon Bar Yochai.

³¹ This is consistent with the words of R' Shimon elsewhere ח"ו שתשתכח תורה מירשאל, G-d forbid that the Torah be forgotten from us (Shabbos 138b).

³² Zohar 1, 156a.

³³ See the Munkatcher Rebbe in his Sefer Shaar Yissaschar, Maamarei Chodesh Iyar, Maamar Gal Einai, Os 23.