

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

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## Winning Through Sinning

One's sins can propel him to become great, providing that he changes his ways. This is just as we are taught that one who does Teshuva his sins are counted as merits.<sup>1</sup> This also explains שבעלי תשובה עומדין צדיקים במקום, גמורים אינם עומדין stands, the completely righteous don't stand,<sup>2</sup> since his previous sins are what made him who he is today.<sup>3</sup> The saying goes, "Your past can either beat you or you can let it teach you."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Yerushalmi Peah 1:1. See also Yoma 86b. The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 16b) asks why do we sound a Tekia and Teruah when the congregation is sitting and again when they are standing. The Gemara answers כ"י... לערבב השטן, in order to confuse the Satan. Rashi explains that once the Satan sees that the Mitzvos are beloved to us, he becomes offended and is unable to successfully prosecute us. In the name of R' Akiva Eiger it is said that being when one does Teshuva out of love his willful sins are counted as merits (Yoma 86b) so when the Satan sees we are doing the Mitzvos out of love he is scared to say over our sins. This is because the sins that he reports will add merits and Mitzvos (Taamai Haminhagim, p. 317).

<sup>2</sup> Brachos 34b. The Pasuk states וואיננו...בימים ההם, in those days and at that time, the word of Hashem, the iniquity of the Jewish people will be sought but it will not be there (Yirmiya 50:20). The Ohav Yisrael is bothered why Hashem would seek out our sins? Because one of the purposes of a sin is for it to become a merit when he does Teshuva, Hashem thus seeks out our sins at that time.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to any person since there is no one who doesn't sin (See Shabbos 55b and Tosafos there). Hence, every person has the ability to be a Baal Teshuva.

<sup>4</sup> R' Tzadok Hakohen (Tzidkas Hatzadik 44) says that one who has a strong yearning for desires shouldn't be sad by thinking how deficient he is since this can be a preparation for the proper yearnings. For this reason, the Gemara (Succa 52a) says in the future the Yetzer Hara will appear to the Tzadik as a high mountain and to the wicked as a חוט strand of hair, because the Tzadik's yearnings and desires are much stronger. This is in line with the story the Gemara there brings of the holy Amora Abaye who said if he was on a journey with a certain woman he would have sinned with her whereas a regular person didn't. Abaye was despondent until an elderly man told him כל הגדול מחבירו יצרו גדול הימנו, whoever is greater than his friend, his Yetzer Hara is also greater.

<sup>5</sup> For some, their troubles break them whereas for others it makes them.

The Gemara<sup>6</sup> reports that there wasn't one זונה R' Elazar Ben Durdia wasn't together with. Once, he heard of a זונה that was overseas who took a purse of coins for her fee. He took a purse of coins and crossed seven rivers to be with her. This זונה told him that his Teshuva wouldn't be received. In the end, he sat between two ranges of mountains and foothills, placed his head between his knees and burst forth in crying until his soul departed. A heavenly voice (בת קול) proclaimed R' Elazar Ben Durdia is בזמן לחיי העולם הבא, readied for the life of the world to come. Rebbi remarked there is one who acquires the עולם הבא through many years and there is another who acquires it in a single moment. So, how long did it take him to become this? In one moment? No! We use yesterday's mistakes to live better today.<sup>7</sup> It therefore took R' Elazar Ben Durdia a lifetime to become who he became! We can apply the same to each of us as we can become greater because of our previous sins. This can be compared to garbage that can be recycled as then we turn garbage into value.

Chazal teach לו פותחין, if one comes to defile himself an opening is provided for him.<sup>8</sup> Another explanation offered is that one who comes to defile himself can become great from it, by doing Teshuva, as in פתחו לי שערי צדק, open for me the gates of righteousness.<sup>9</sup>

When one is grading a test, he gives a check where the answer is correct and an 'X' where it is incorrect. The difference between them is, is that when a check is written, it descends, and then rises up. In fact, it will go up higher than it originally went down. An 'X' on the other hand descends from both sides and doesn't rise at all. This hints to that success is falling and rising, thereby reaching even higher levels. Failure is falling and remaining in that state. In this way we can grasp שובה it is because of sin (כי כשלת בעונך) that one can become so great.<sup>11</sup>

These are the steps to becoming a Tzadik as it says שבע יפול צדיק וקם—the Tzadik becomes who he is through his failures.<sup>12</sup> R' Yitzchok Hutner<sup>13</sup> writes in a letter that when people look at Gedolim they just see the final product. They don't see the struggles they went

<sup>6</sup> Avoda Zara 17a.

<sup>7</sup> There is a saying, "Making mistakes is better than faking perfections."

<sup>8</sup> Yoma 38b.

<sup>9</sup> Tehillim 118:19.

<sup>10</sup> Hoshea 14:2.

<sup>11</sup> The following is said in the name of R' Tzadok Hakohen: Everything has a Hechsher Mitzva: A Shofar is cut from the animal. We get an Esrog from a tree. What is the Hechsher Mitzva for Teshuva? Sin (provided that one does Teshuva from the sin)! The purpose of sin is Teshuva! R' Simcha Bunim would say that in the next world we won't be asked why we sinned (because maybe we have a good excuse for that) rather we will be asked why we didn't do Teshuva.

<sup>12</sup> Mishlei 24:16. In a similar vein, ה' איש מלחמה (Shemos 15:3) can be translated that Hashem wants those who fight their Yetzer Hara—to keep fighting even after the fall.

<sup>13</sup> Pachad Yitzchak, Igeres Uksovim, 128.

through to become<sup>14</sup> who they were.<sup>15</sup> This can be understood through an example of a champion boxer who was in the hospital for three weeks. We just see the final product, that he is a champion, not the weeks he spent in the hospital.<sup>16</sup> The difference between a successful person and one who is unsuccessful is not how many times he fell<sup>17</sup> but how many times he got up.<sup>18</sup>

Looking at a masterpiece of art, the viewer has no idea how many hundreds of hours the artist worked on the canvas, how many times the artist changed and reworked every stroke, how determined the artist was to constantly improve the picture. Likewise, looking at great people, only those close (and perhaps not even them) to them know how hard they toiled to actualize their goals and how much struggle was involved in attaining those spiritual heights.

R' Yechiel Halperin (1660-1746) in his sefer Seder Hadoros<sup>19</sup> brings from the Shalshelos Hakabala<sup>20</sup> that he saw in an old booklet the following: A man named Maimon didn't want to get married. He had a dream that he should marry the daughter of a butcher that lived in a city near Cordova. He ignored the dream but when it kept recurring he decided to marry this girl. They had a child named Moshe but his wife died in the childbirth. Maimon married again and had more children. Moshe had a hard time understanding since he had little desire in his learning and his father eventually gave up on him. Moshe then went to a shul, fell asleep, and awoke a different person. He went to the city where the Ri Migash was and learned from him, becoming great in his own right. This was the famous Rambam!

We need to realize that just as penny by penny a fortune is amassed.<sup>21</sup> Small snowflakes add up to be feet of snow. Small bricks build an entire house. Seconds add up to minutes. Minutes become hours. The same applies to spirituality. It is told over that it took Thomas Edison 200 experiments to invent the light bulb. When asked how it felt to fail 199 times, he responded that he didn't

fail once. It was a 200 step process! We should have the same attitude with our spirituality.

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### Noble Noach

The following are some explanations showing the greatness of Noach:

1) The Mishna<sup>22</sup> teaches במקום שאין אנשים השתדל להיות איש, in a place where there are no men, strive to be a man. When people are not behaving correctly we need to make an effort to act properly. During the time of Noach, the world was corrupt to the extent that even the animals mated with different species.<sup>23</sup> Yet, Noach did not follow this path. This is the meaning in איש צדיק.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, איש צדיק refers to someone who stands up against promiscuity as in יוסף הצדיק. The same is with Noach. Accordingly, he is given this title.

2) Rashi<sup>25</sup> tells us the main children of a Tzadik are his good deeds. The children of Noach—שם, הם, and שם ה'—are his Maasim Tovim. שם ה' he always had the שם, name of Hashem with him. שם means warmth meaning he did acts with passion and enthusiasm. יפה, beauty refers to that he performed actions תפארת לעושה ותפארת לו מן האדם.<sup>26</sup>

3) The continuity of the world was due to Noach. In this way we can grasp יסוד עולם, וצדיק,<sup>27</sup> a Tzadik is the foundation of the world, since Noach is called איש צדיק.

4) Rashi says ...מאמין ואינו מאמין<sup>28</sup> מהמאמין היה, Noach was one of little faith, he believed and didn't believe that the Mabul would come. R' Yitzchok of Vorka asks if Noach is described as איש צדיק תמים<sup>29</sup> how can we label him with the title קטני אמנה? Furthermore, the words וצדיק contradict this since he is called a צדיק? Noach believed that his generation would do Teshuva and remove the decree of the Mabul. So, this is how we should read Rashi: מהמאמין היה, Noach believed that even those with little Emuna would do Teshuva. He therefore didn't believe the Mabul would come—שיבוא ואינו מאמין המבול—since their Teshuva would remove the decree.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander Tz"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 and is the author of the Sefer, Fascinating Insights: Torah Perspectives on Unique Topics. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. 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.

<sup>14</sup> There is an expression, "It is not the most talented who succeed rather it is those who never stop trying."

<sup>15</sup> The adage goes, "Things may not be great but everything is an opportunity for greatness."

<sup>16</sup> A famous champion boxer once said that he is willing to suffer now in order to be a champion for the rest of his life. We need to think the same, as we may struggle in learning, guarding our eyes, and so on.

<sup>17</sup> There is a saying, "The one thing worse than messing up is holding onto it afterwards."

<sup>18</sup> This is shown in שבע יפול צדיק וקם, as the wicked also fall. The וקם is the difference. It has been said that it is not the fall that injures, rather it is the sudden stop. So too, when one stumbles in sin, the problem is the stopping of Avodas Hashem.

<sup>19</sup> Elef Hachamishi, p. 341. R' Yechiel Halperin was a descendant of the Maharshel, and traced his genealogy back through Rashi to the Tanna, R' Yochanan Hasandler. He served as rabbi first in Glusk until 1711, when he was called to the rabbinate of Minsk, where he officiated also as head of the yeshiva until his death.

<sup>20</sup> p. 45b. The author, R' Gedaliah Ibn Yechia, lived from 1515-1587. He studied at several yeshivos including that of R' Ovadia Sforno. When Pope Pius v expelled all the Jews from his domains in 1569, R' Gedaliah, who lost much of his possessions, wandered for some time from city to city in Italy. In 1575, after living in Ferrara for a few years he settled in Alessandria (northern Italy) and in 1579 became the local rabbi.

<sup>21</sup> As someone once put it: "Your piggy bank can turn into a biggy bank."

<sup>22</sup> Avos 2:6.

<sup>23</sup> See Breishis 6:11,12 Rashi.

<sup>24</sup> Breishis 6:9. Rashi says (Noach 6:9) some expound the Pasuk to Noach's praise while others' to his disparagement. According to the latter even though it is to his disparagement but the world nevertheless still exists because of him. Rav Pam would say likewise in our generation people comment we are on such a low spiritual level in comparison to previous generations. However, the world continues its existence because of us.

<sup>25</sup> Breishis 6:9.

<sup>26</sup> Avos 2:1. Mayana Shel Torah, Noach, 6:9,10.

<sup>27</sup> Mishlei 10:25.

<sup>28</sup> Breishis, Rashi, 7:7.

<sup>29</sup> Breishis 6:9.

<sup>30</sup> Chavakuk 2:4.