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י' טבת תשפ"א

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The Greatness Within Us

We tend to think that struggles in certain areas show how low a person is. However, the opposite is true as this shows the greatness that lies within the person, says R' Tzadok Hakohen.¹ The following metaphor is given: when a robber seeks to rob someone he pursues the wealthy, not the poor since they are the ones who possess the money. The same can be said of the Yetzer Hara as he pursues the important people, the holy נשמות. These people can be compared to the finest restaurant, which contain the most garbage (since many people eat there). The same is with those who have great potential.²

¹ Tzidkas Hatzadik 44. He writes that if one has a big yearning for a physical desire, he shouldn't be sad and think how low he is since he has such a desire rather it is just the opposite. If he channels it he can become great. With this we can grasp why in the future the Yetzer Hara will appear to Tzadikim like a mountain and to the wicked as a strand of hair (Succa 52a) since to the Tzadikim it was a much stronger desire. This is in line with גדול הימנו יצור גדול הימנו, the greater one is, the bigger his Yetzer Hara.

² The Mishna states דע מאין באת ולאן אתה הולך, know where you came from and where you go (Avos 3:1). This can also be understood as we come from a place so high (אין) לאן אתה הולך can refer to the heights we can

reach as one must realize where he can go in a spiritual sense as he can reach great heights.³ On תקום עלי מלחמה בזאת אני בוטח,³ it is said in the name of the Baal Shem Tov, that if a war with Yetzer Hara arises against me, it is because of that itself (בזאת), אני בוטח, that I believe I am important.⁴

It is through overcoming these struggles and tests that we elevate ourselves⁵ and can become great.⁶ In fact, this is what the word נסיון, test, means as in לבעור להודיע⁷ Through overcoming tests we can fulfill⁸ נסות אתכם להודיע⁸ making known to us our abilities as it brings forth our potential to fruition.⁹

Yosef tells his brothers, “I am Yosef, is my father still alive.” His brother were unable to answer because נבהלו מפניו, they were disconcerted. Yosef then says I am Yosef אשר מכתם אתי מצרימה, whom you sold to Mitzrayim.¹⁰ By saying I am Yosef whom you sold to Mitzrayim he is embarrassing his brothers more? The Sefas Emes¹¹ explains that the brothers surely felt the Kedusha of Yosef. This is what is meant in נבהלו מפניו. The brothers thought when Yosef was by his father he was much greater. Yosef says I am Yosef whom you sold to Mitzrayim meaning I reached this level¹² because of being sold.¹³ This removed their pain.¹⁴

reach as one must realize where he can go in a spiritual sense as he can reach great heights.

³ Tehillim 27:3. The Alter of Navardok once remarked “everyone wants to believe in themselves and understand God. We would be better off if we would believe in God and understand ourselves.”

⁴ Even though at times we may fail, we need to repeat the motto “a failure is an event, not a person.” “Yesterday ended last night.” One doesn't drown by falling in water rather one drowns if he stays there. We should also bear in mind that “failure is a detour, not a dead-end street.”

⁵ This is similar to the Gemara of אין אדם עומד על דברי תורה אלא אם כן נכשל, one doesn't arrive at a full understanding of the words of Torah unless he has first stumbled in interpreting them (Gittin 43a).

⁶ It is much easier for us to overcome a test since earlier generations withstood these tests (Sichas Haran 114).

⁷ Shemos 20:17. Someone once commented the only time we grow is when we are uncomfortable.

⁸ Tehillim 145:12. The adage goes “for trivial things, any obstacle is great. For great things, any obstacle is trivial.”

⁹ R' Dessler (Michtav M'Eliyahu, volume 1, p. 79) relates how he struggled to quit smoking and failed, but continued to fight this battle. In the footnotes his students added that he eventually succeeded in quitting.

¹⁰ Breishis 46:3-4.

¹¹ Vayigash, תרל"ו, s.v. בפסוק. It has been pointed out that when one flatlines, he is dead. It is only when the line is going up and down on the machine that one is alive. The same is with life as when everything is smooth and easy, one is not truly alive.

¹² The Gemara (Menachos 29b) says about R' Akiva that he will expound upon each point mounds of Halachos. This can also be understood as for each pain (קוין), many Halachos and Torah came forth, as suffering can elevate a person. (See אור לשמים, s.v. ויאמר לה). This is just as we see by R' Shimon Bar Yochai whose acumen in Torah increased dramatically during the years he spent in the cave (Shabbos 33b).

¹³ Sefas Emes, Vayigash, תרמ"ג, s.v. בפסוק. The Parsha of ויחי is written when their hearts and eyes were closed from the hardships of the galus, as hardships build and elevate a person (This is referred to in the word ויחי because it means to live, to elevate yourself.).

¹⁴ The brothers hated Yosef and sold him. However, it was because of all his challenges that he mounted to becoming Yosef Hatzadik. The brothers asked Yosef to forgive their sins—עבדי אלהי אביך, the servants

The story is told of a high ranking Israeli officer in the secret service of Israel that was attacked one day by Arabs who accused him of being a spy thereby trying to convince him to relay information. The officer didn't budge. The Arabs were so insistent that they beat this officer until the point that he was ready to relate information. They then exited the room and spoke amongst each other in Hebrew, not knowing the victim was able to hear. The victim then understood that they were just testing him to see if he will leak information. If he refrains from doing so, he realizes, then he will continue and rise to the next level. They then enter and begin to beat him again. However, he now has no problem tolerating the beating thereby passing the test since he knows it is all for him to get to a higher position.¹⁵ With this powerful insight, we should view life's tests.¹⁶

The analogy is given of a wagon that is traveling speedily as this is a sign it is going downhill.¹⁷ This is contrary to when it is going slow with difficulty as then it is going uphill. The same applies in our service of Hashem.¹⁸ The Pasuk states *לא טוב היות האדם לבדו*, it is not good for man to be alone. This can be understood that it is not good for man to be alone—without challenges. So, as the Pasuk continues *אעשה לו עזר כנגדו*—I will make a Yetzer Hara that will counter and give him struggles.¹⁹ In this way, we can grow.²⁰

[A Second Hearing](#)

R' Eliezer Papo²¹ instructs that when someone relates words of Torah to you that you know, make it seem as if you don't know it. One should let the other person feel as if he told him great words of Torah that he never heard before.

The Pasuk says *משמע תורה גם תפלתו תועבה*, if one turns his ear from hearing the Torah, his Tefila, too, will be considered an abomination.²² The Gra²³ is

of your father's God (Breishis 50:17). In these words the brothers were hinting to Yosef that if it weren't for all the hardships he endured, he would be a regular person as he wouldn't have attained his greatness. His growth came through the difficulties. Where is the hint? *אליהו אביך* as it is an acronym for *אליהו יוסף איכא בשוקא* for *אוי לא האי יומא כמה יוסף איכא בשוקא*, if not for that day, how many Yosef's are there in the market place and I would have been indistinguishable from them (Pesachim 68b)!

¹⁵ A famous champion boxer, Mohammed Ali, took about one million hits in his career. Likewise in spirituality, we may take many hits but we must make sure to get back up.

¹⁶ It is said that "if you are only willing to do what is easy, life will be hard. But if you are willing to do what is hard, life will be easy."

¹⁷ The saying goes "the only way to coast is to go downhill."

¹⁸ We must realize that we are not fighting alone as Chazal say if Hashem wouldn't help us we wouldn't be able to overcome the Yetzer Hara (Kidushin 30b). Likewise, it says *גם כי אלך ...*, though I walk in the valley overshadowed by death, I don't fear because you are with me (Tehillim 23:4). We need to integrate that *רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל*, Hashem wants to confer merit upon us. In the name of the Chozeh of Lublin it is said on *בא ליטהר מסייעים*, one who comes to purify himself, they help him (Shabbos 104a), that *מסייעים* is in plural form because it refers to Hashem and the Tzadikim that help that person.

¹⁹ Breishis 2:18. We should keep in mind "the road to success is always under construction."

²⁰ The word *משבר* means is a birth stool as well as being related to *שבר*, break. This is because low times can lead to times of birth and growth.

²¹ Oros Eilim, 19.

²² Mishlei 28:9.

bothered why it says *משמע*, from hearing Torah, and not *מסיר פיו מללמוד תורה*, turning away one's mouth from learning Torah. It is the way of people that when they hear something they already heard not to listen again. This is how we can explain the Pasuk: *מסיר אזנו משמע תורה*—one turns his ear from hearing Torah because he heard it already (which is the case many times when someone is relating a short vort), *גם תפלתו תועבה*,—the same Tefila he davens thrice daily that Hashem heard already will be considered an abomination.

R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spector²⁴ (1817-1896), who was a dayan, was once sitting in Beis Din when there was a knock on the door. The person told R' Spector that a man named Moshe, whom R' Spector worked hard to have him freed from the army, was released from the army.²⁵ This was exciting news because entering the army in those days meant the person didn't exit as a religious Jew (besides that it put one's life in danger). R' Spector thanked the bearer of the news profusely for relating this news to him. A few minutes later, another person knocked on the door to relate the same news, not knowing that it was just told. R' Spector thanked this second person immensely just like he did with the first person. The same scene repeated itself with the many more people who came to relate the same news to him. The same heartfelt thank you was given. R' Spector made each person feel that he was the one that made him happy with the good news.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg Ztz"l. 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.

²³ Ha'maor Ha'gadol, p. 489.

²⁴ At the age of thirteen he married and settled with his wife's parents in Vilkovisk, where he remained for six years. R' Spector was known for his *hasmada*. Even when, for whatever reason, he had to leave the Beis Midrash, he would begin leaving while still reading a sefer, continuing to do so until he approached the table closest to the exit. There he would lay it down open to the page that he had been studying. When returning to the Beis Midrash, he would pick the sefer up and once again begin studying where he left off. In 1937 when R' Spector was twenty, he was forced to seek means of employment as his dowry was lost due to the bankruptcy of his debtor. He became the rabbi of the town of Sabelin near Vilkovisk. After two years, he traveled to the city of Karlin where he met R' Yaakov Bruchin, Chief Rabbi of the city of Karlin and author of "Mishkenos Yaakov" and "Kehilas Yaakov." R' Yaakov Bruchin was so impressed by R' Yitzchak Elchanan that he recommended him to the community of Baresa (Biaroza) who engaged him as Chief Rabbi. In 1846, he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Nishvez and in 1851 he accepted the position of Chief Rabbi of Novardok. In 1864, he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Kovno which he held until he died in 1896. This was the most prominent rabbinical position at the height of 19th century Lithuanian Jewry. In the last forty years of his life, when he was steadily becoming more recognized as the foremost rabbinical authority in Russia, he maintained a large correspondence with rabbis, communities, philanthropists, and representative men in many parts of the world, who sought his advice and instruction on all conceivable subjects relating to Jews and Judaism. His sound reasoning and love of peace established him as truly one of the great leaders of Russian Jewry. R' Spector had three sons and one daughter. He is the author of the *Ein Yitzchak*, *Be'er Yitzchak*, and *Nachal Yitzchak*.

²⁵ In general, R' Spector, did what he could to avoid people being drafted into the army.