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Cemeteries with Invisible People

In the Bracha said before entering a cemetery, we say מספר כלכם, Hashem can count the number of bodies in the cemetery. The Ksav Sofer asks that we too can count the number of bodies there. If so, what is it that we are attributing to Hashem?

We have seen throughout history righteous people that have died young.¹ What would be a possible reason for this?

There are those that accomplish in a few hours what it takes others days and weeks to accomplish. The Yerushalmi² records the eulogy of R' Zeira on R' Bun bar R' Chiya who died at a young age. He concludes that R' Bun exerted himself in Torah study for 28 years, learning more than the amount of a *talmid vasik* (conscientious student) would fail to learn in a century. So one who accomplishes a great amount can fulfill his mission in this world sooner and thus can die earlier. This is one reason righteous people can die young.

There are those individuals who accomplish an extraordinary amount in their life which comes out to the equivalent of what many other people together achieve in their lifetime. As a result, these individuals are considered to be more than one person. Only Hashem knows how to count that.

In a similar vein, there are those who affected many people by what they did in this world—the chessed

they did, sefarim they authored, etc. Consequently, they have a part in the lives of many people. Hashem is the one who knows how to count that!

Fight or Flight

What is the proper response to improper thoughts?

The saying goes, “Don’t resist and it won’t persist.” The more we think about a thought, the more it is on our mind. We need to let go of negative thoughts. We should view such thoughts as if we were passing by a smelly garbage in that it is just temporary. This is the explanation in יוכאשר יענו אתו כן ירבה וכן יפרץ³ the more we answer these thoughts the more they increase. If one says to himself I’m not going to think about that person, that is all he will think about. Rather, he should keep his thoughts positive. When one thinks about the positive, the other thoughts will go away as one can only think one thought at a time.

When the wife of Potifar desired Yosef, his response was an adamant no—וימאן, he refused.⁴ The trop on וימאן is known as a שלשלת—that is an uncompromising refusal. One should repeat to himself anytime an improper thought arises, “I firmly refuse to think about it.”⁵

In a similar vein, R’ Eliezer Bentzion Shulevitz⁶ (1848-1931) points out that by the test with Potifar’s wife there is a separation between the word וימאן and the ויאמר with the trop known as a *psik*. This is because in the moment it’s וימאן, meaning not entering into any conversation with her, no debating. Only afterwards did he enter into a discussion and give a reason by saying ...how can I perpetrate this great evil, etc. The reason was only given once the no was confirmed.

³ Shemos 1:12. The words זה האשה אשר תקריבו לה can also be translated as the desire one has for a woman (fire of lust) should be sacrificed to Hashem.

⁴ The שלשלת (Trop) on וימאן (39:8) of is also a hint to the 3 refusals of Yosef as it says in Yoma 35b as שלשלת is rooted in שלש, 3.

⁵ Divrei Yechezkal, Vayeshev. This also explains why Mitzrayim which is ערות הארץ was finished off with Makkas Bechoros—that is the ראשית המחשבה.

⁶ Ohr Eliezer, Breishis 39:8. R’ Shulevitz, who was a student of R’ Yisrael Salanter, founded the Lomza Yeshiva in Lomza, Poland in 1883. The local Jewish community financially helped out in the establishing of the yeshiva; one wealthy widow donated her entire fortune to the yeshiva and moved into an old-age home while another Jewish couple donated 35,000 bricks each. R’ Shulevitz emigrated to Palestine after his sons-in-law were established on the yeshiva faculty. In 1926, fifty students were sent to Eretz Yisrael where another branch of the yeshiva would be established. R’ Shulevitz, who was living there already, chose to open the yeshiva in Petach Tikvah.

¹ Some examples are the Arizal (1534-1572), the Ramchal (1707-1746) R’ Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) and R’ Meir Shapiro (1887-1933).

² Brachos 2:8.

With this we can comprehend a deeper meaning in ויתרו את ארץ as it also means to spy out as in בנען.⁷ Hence, it can now be understood that one shouldn't investigate these thoughts—don't let them linger in your mind.⁸ R' Moshe Wolfson shows a hint to this in the Trop on ולא תתור which is known as an גרש. This can be understood as אולא—if the thought enters, then גרש—chase it away.

We should each have a role model in this area who has already progressed with these tests.⁹ Then we should think, talk and act like him.¹⁰

We should also protect ourselves from seeing such things as then the thought wouldn't even enter our heads. Advice is given to us in the words ויכסה את עין הארץ:¹¹ we should cover our eyes from seeing impure things (ארץ).¹² Then as the Pasuk continues ויכל לראות את הארץ, we won't see the inappropriate. This is the cause, as the eyes see and then the heart covets leading the body to sin.¹³ Now let's take a deeper look into the words איה קדושה?¹⁴ where is the lack of בעינים על הדרך, holiness? When your eyes are all over the road, meaning that you are not shielding your eyes. A famous baseball player was once asked why he doesn't watch movies. He responded because he doesn't want to ruin his batting eye. We should do the same as we don't want to ruin our spiritual batting eye.

This is one area we need to be especially careful in. Rashi in regard to the קרבן עולה¹⁵ comments במקום שיש...בו חסרון כיס. That is, since there is a financial loss to the Kohen by a קרבן עולה,¹⁶ they needed a special urging. In another explanation, the Chidushai Harim explains that the limbs of a person have a כיס, cover, as in כיסוי. The mouth has lips which he can close to protect his speech, ears have a lobe, eyes have eyelids and so on.¹⁷ However, מחשבה is the exception—חסרון כיס, lacking that shield. So we are thus warned to be careful with it. Since the קרבן עולה atones for bad thoughts, the Torah by this קרבן says צו, be careful, because here you need to be more vigilant since there is no covering to מחשבה.

⁷ Bamidbar 15:39, 13:2.

⁸ One is not punished for the initial thought that came into his head only the second and onward.

⁹ Just as Yosef had the image of his father appear and thus didn't sin, similarly, we should have the image of our father in heaven—Hashem, and thus not sin as we are created in His image (see Siduro Shel Shabbos 5,2,4).

¹⁰ We can see ourselves as if we are an actor in a movie to imitate this person!

¹¹ Shemos 10:5.

¹² The Gemara (Sanhedrin 45a) says that the Yetzer Hara prevails only over what one sees with his eyes.

¹³ Bamidbar 15:39.

¹⁴ Breishis 38:21.

¹⁵ Vayikra 6:2, Rashi. Who said this statement? R' Shimon who also said that an עולה atones for הלב—Vayikra Rabba 7:3 (see further).

¹⁶ The Kohanim aren't paid for their sacrificial service. In order to perform it, they must give up their regular means of earning a livelihood. The loss of income is especially great by a קרבן עולה since they don't receive meat only hides.

¹⁷ Tehillim 141:3, Kesubos 5b, Yeshaya 33:15.

Our mind is too precious to be filled with improper thoughts.¹⁸ We therefore need to proceed with caution and make a fence to protect us. In the Torah we have a Mitzva of מעקה,¹⁹ the fence. The Toldos Adam says that מעקה are the initials עבירה קשו מעבירה.²⁰ Since the head is the highest of all the parts of the body, we need to make a fence to protect it. We should all merit to purify our minds during these special days of Shovivim.

Necessary Nos

כל מי שאין בו דעה אסור לרחם עליו²¹ The Gemara says if a person doesn't have understanding it is forbidden to have mercy on him. The Birchas Avraham is bothered that it seems counterintuitive because if one doesn't have דעה then you should have more mercy on him. For example if one needs a livelihood and is not knowledgeable in this area, we should help him. What does אסור לרחם עליו mean?

Of course if you can help another you should—whether concerning charity or the like. However, there are times when one asks for something which isn't good for him. In that case you mustn't have mercy on him and give it. An example is a child cries for a certain toy which you know is bad for him. You can't have mercy on him by giving it because it is really damaging for the child. Another example would be if a child wants to play with neighbors that may have a bad influence on him.²² A last example would be someone who wants an expensive car and you know it would be detrimental for him. In an area where the person doesn't have דעה as in the cases we mentioned then it is forbidden to have mercy on him.

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.

¹⁸ "To be a different person, choose different thoughts." What we choose is what we become.

¹⁹ Devarim 22:8. This Mitzva is that one needs to erect a fence around his roof.

²⁰ Yoma 29a. This translates as thoughts of sin are worse than sin itself (see Rashi there and Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim 3:8 for interpretations of this).

²¹ Sanhedrin 92a.

²² A wise man once said "the child who has not been disciplined with love by his little world, will be disciplined generally without love, by the big world."