

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

ר' ניסן תשפ"א

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**EXCITING NEWS:** I am happy to announce that the book **Incredible Insights** is available for purchase and delivery at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/Bo8VCH8Z7T> where you can also see the reviews. It can also be bought from the author by sending an email to [yalt3285@gmail.com](mailto:yalt3285@gmail.com). The essays contained in this book, written from a Torah outlook, deal with a wide array of assorted topics that are unique, inspiring, interesting, thought-provoking, encouraging, enlightening, and transformational. The book includes Haskamos from R' Shmuel Kamenetsky, R' Yisroel Reisman, R' Moshe Wolfson, R' Yitzchak Breitowitz, R' Zev Leff and R' Yitzchak Scheiner. Over the last number of years these insights have inspired thousands around the world, in more than forty countries. This read is for all ages. It has something for everyone, for beginners and scholars, and students and teachers. It makes a great gift for friends, relatives, business associates, and learning partners. Please spread the word about it.

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## Powerful People

The Rambam<sup>1</sup> writes it is natural for a man's character and actions<sup>2</sup> to be influenced by his friends and associates and for him to follow the local norms of behavior. Therefore, he should associate with the righteous and be constantly in the company of the wise, so as to learn from their deeds. Conversely, he should keep away from the wicked, so as not to learn from their deeds.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, we are instructed to distance ourselves from a bad neighbor and to not associate with the wicked.<sup>4</sup> This is just as it says ...הולך את החכמים יחכם...

<sup>1</sup> Hilchos Daos 6:1.

<sup>2</sup> Man's ethical makeup is a combination of character and action (See the Rambam in Sefer Hamitzvos, עשה, 8 מצות עשה).

<sup>3</sup> Now we can have more Kavana when we say at Shacharis מאדם והרחיקנו מאדם רע ומחבר רע, distance us from an evil person and an evil companion.

<sup>4</sup> Avos 1:7. When the American soldiers went into combat in World War Two, 25% of them were unable to kill their enemy, since it's not easy psychologically to kill another person. The Americans hired a team of mental health professionals—psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers—to teach these soldiers how to kill, in which they were

one who walks with the wise will become wise while one who associates with fools will suffer.<sup>5</sup>

Studies show that we pick up the moods and habits of the five people we spend the most time with. The energy of those that we surround ourselves with makes an enormous impact. Their positivity becomes our positivity. Their tendency to dream bigger leads to the expansion of our dreams. Their positive outlook on the world and on others becomes our perspective as well. And their encouragement and belief in us becomes the impetus for us to view ourselves in a brighter light. And when we are surrounded by the wrong people, the opposite is true. This is the intent of **לציים לא ישבו**,<sup>6</sup> praiseworthy is the one who doesn't sit in the company of scorners. Don't hang out with negative, cynical people as they drain your energy and get you down. One is influenced by the company he keeps as it says ...**לציים**...<sup>7</sup>

This idea is shown in the Mishna<sup>8</sup> that tells us someone asked R' Yose Ben Kisma if he would be willing to live in his locale even offering him lots of wealth. He replied that even if he was given all the wealth in the world, he would dwell only in a place of Torah.<sup>9</sup>

In August 2007, a boy, named Yaakov, that was visiting the Catskills stayed by a friend who had someone there that wasn't religious, named Meir. In the morning, when Yaakov arose for Shacharis, Meir decided to join him. From that morning onward, Meir continued to daven Shacharis with a Minyan for the remainder of his stay in the Catskills for the summer. Soon after, Meir attended Shor Yoshuv full time.

In Soviet Russia, there were Jews that assembled in secrecy in a basement in order to learn together and strengthen each other in religious observance which was against the Russian government. This secret meeting grew larger to the extent that it couldn't contain them all. One week several new interested participants arrived during the shiur. However, there was no room for them. In the basement was a long-time member named Boris who because of his weak religious background, couldn't comprehend the learning that took place. As a result, some senior members murmured to each other that maybe they should ask him to leave in order to create space for someone who would grasp the learning. Boris overheard this exchange which caused him to then address the crowd. He rolled up his sleeve showing his many scars. He explained what happened. He was once sitting in a café in Moscow and unbeknown to him there was a group of revolutionaries present

successful. Years later, during the Vietnam War, the Americans again began this program with the mental health professionals. However, this time, it was immediately canceled. This was because there was no need for this program since it was the first war fought by a generation raised on watching television. As a result, they already knew how to kill because they saw many murders on television. What can be said of today where the youth spend an immense amount of time surrounded by such violent scenes and murders in movies they watch, video games they play and the like? (This doesn't even include foul language, criminal behavior and other negativity they are exposed to from this.)

<sup>5</sup> Mishlei 13:20.

<sup>6</sup> Tehillim 1:1.

<sup>7</sup> Mishlei 3:34. See Rashi.

<sup>8</sup> Avos 6:9.

<sup>9</sup> In this light we can understand why the section of Nazir and Sota are juxtaposed. Anyone who sees a Sota in her state of disgrace should separate himself from wine by vowing to become a Nazir since wine brought her to such a state (see Sota 2a). This is why the Mesachtos of Nazir and Sota are juxtaposed.

plotting against the Russian government. Suddenly, the KGB entered and starting beating everyone. Boris said to a KGB officer that he was just eating lunch there and had no connection with these revolutionaries. The KGB officer responded, "If you are sitting with the group, then you are part of the group." And he continued to beat Boris, leaving him with scars. Boris then said, "Even if I can't grasp all the learning but being with the group makes me part of the group. I want to sit with these Jewish revolutionaries here in this basement." That night, those present learned more from this story than the shiur that took place.

The word **חבר** rearranged spells **בחר** since we should choose good friends. These letters also comprise the words **הרב**, sword and **ברח**, flee, because bad friends are like a sword since we should run away from such people.

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### Towering Tehillim

The Midrash<sup>10</sup> states that Yaakov recited Tehillim in the house of Lavan. The Divrei Yoel<sup>11</sup> says that Yaakov already comprehended Sefer Tehillim with prophecy but it wasn't revealed until Dovid Hamelech. He prepared this power for the generations of Galus that through this the Jewish people will exist and be saved from their troubles.

An allusion to this idea is that the end letters of the words **וְיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבְּאִים**, these are the names of the Jews who were coming to Mitzrayim<sup>12</sup> spell **תְּהִלִּים**. This hints to that in all pain and troubles (**מצרים** means straits, referring to our troubles), one can recite Tehillim, thereby bringing about a salvation.<sup>13</sup>

R' Yechiel Meir of Gustonon was called the Tehillim Rebbe because whenever people approached him with their problems he would prescribe a regimen of Tehillim. To some he would say, recite the entire Tehillim while to others he would suggest a section of Tehillim or a few chapters. Each person received their prescription which led to their salvation. When asked about this, R' Yechiel Meir said that he's not a man who performs miracles. He would quote the Kotzker Rebbe that Tehillim is not in the order that Dovid Hamelech arranged it. If it would be, then Tehillim would have the power of Techias Hameisim (resurrection of the dead). Because it is obviously not the time to give people such power, Dovid Hamelech rearranged the chapters of Tehillim. Despite this, all other salvations can be attained by reciting Tehillim.

A man named Levi was invited by a 60-year-old man, named Naftali, to attend his Seudas Hodaa in 2021 for surviving his month-long battle in the hospital against the coronavirus. Although Levi was unsure why he was invited as he barely knew Naftali, he still attended since was personally invited. At the seuda there were 18 other people. This crowd seemed very random as they were all from different communities. Levi struck up a conversation with one of the guests at the seuda named Binyamin. Binyamin told Levi that he was unsure why he was invited as he wasn't even sure who this person was. Levi related that he felt the same way, since he hardly knew Naftali. Then Naftali began his speech and he explained why he invited everyone. He said that when he was lying in his hospital bed, nearly dead, he ascended to heaven where he saw his mother who died a few years earlier. She told him to return to earth. He responded that he wanted to but was unable. She then replied, "look down and you'll see you can go." He then looked from heaven and saw these 18 people that he invited to the seuda

saying Tehillim for him, each one in their locale. At that moment they all mentioned his name for a Refua Shleima with the Tehillim they were reciting, although they didn't know who they were davening for. His mother told him that these 18 people are giving him the power to return alive. This is why he invited these 18 people. Look at the power of Tehillim!

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### Haggadah History

The word **הגדה** comes from **להגיד**,<sup>14</sup> tell your children on that day... The Haggadah was initiated by the Anshei Knesses Hagedola, the supreme council of sages that ruled during the times of the Beis Hamikdash in Yerushalayim. Although the minimal fulfillment of this Mitzva is a simple recounting of the going out of Mitzrayim and explaining a few of the Pesach symbols, appropriate fulfillment requires much more. To enhance this Mitzva, over time additions have been made to the Haggada—many of which gained wide acceptance that they became part of the Haggada. The additions include *Chad Gadya* and *Dayeinu*. R' Saadia Gaon<sup>15</sup> (882-942) had neither *Dayeinu* nor *Chad Gadya* in his Haggadah, although he did recognize the existence of *Dayeinu*.<sup>16</sup> Rashi (1040-1105) as well as the Rambam (1138-1204) didn't include *Chad Gadya* in their versions of the Haggadah, although Rashi did include *Dayeinu*. In the Machzor Vitri, R' Simcha of Vitri<sup>17</sup> includes sections which we don't say today. Although Rashi himself didn't say them, they were said in Provence, France in his day.

The changes of the Haggadah came to an end in the late Middle Ages, aided by the invention of the Printing Press, which enabled the basic Ashkenazic version which had been endorsed by the Arizal to be accepted even in Sephardic communities.<sup>18</sup> The text is based upon the Haggadah of R' Amram Gaon,<sup>19</sup> who headed the Babylonian Yeshiva of Sura between 856 and 876. This text was endorsed by Rashi. R' Amram's Haggadah concluded with the after-blessing on the fourth cup of wine. It didn't include *Chasal Siddur Pesach*. Different *Piyutim* (poetic prayers) were added to the Haggadah of R' Amram Gaon, including *Chasal Siddur Pesach*,<sup>20</sup> *Az Rov Nissim*,<sup>21</sup> *Ki Lo Naeh Ki Lo Yaeh*,<sup>22</sup> *Adir Hu*, *Echad Mi Yodea* and *Chad Gadya*.<sup>23</sup>

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 books, *Fascinating Insights and Incredible Insights*. 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> Shemos 13:8.

<sup>15</sup> R' Saadia Gaon said that he belonged to the noble family of Sheilah, son of Yehuda. He called his son Dosa, after his ancestor R' Chanina Ben Dosa.

<sup>16</sup> The *Avadim Hayinu* section was written in the second century by R' Eliezer Hagadol. The section of the Haggadah which speaks of the rabbis who stayed awake all night in Bnei Brak discussing the Exodus from Mitzrayim is cited in the works of Tosafos (eleventh century).

<sup>17</sup> R' Vitri, who died in 1105, was a student of Rashi.

<sup>18</sup> The first known printed Haggadah as we have it today was made in 1485 in Venice, Italy.

<sup>19</sup> He was the first to arrange a complete liturgy for Shul—*Siddur Rav Amram*.

<sup>20</sup> This was authored by R' Yosef Tur-Elam I, who died in 1040.

<sup>21</sup> This was authored by R' Yannai, the ninth century Rebbe of R' Eliezer Hakalir. A later custom reported by the Maharil (circa. 1365-1427) adds the words: **אז רוב נסים יהי ד' בחצי הלילה** before the words **אז רוב נסים**.

<sup>22</sup> The author is unknown but cited by the Eitz Chaim, R' Yaakov Bar Yehuda of London (circa. 1285).

<sup>23</sup> The earliest known inclusion of *Chad Gadya*—of whom we don't know the author—is in the *Sefer Rokeach* (1160-1238). Hundreds of explanations have been written on it. The Chida (1724-1806) writes that the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) wrote more than ten different explanations!

<sup>10</sup> Breishis Rabba 68:11.

<sup>11</sup> Vayeitzei, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> Shemos 1:1.

<sup>13</sup> Mayana Shel Torah, Shemos 1:1.