

Fascinating INSIGHTS

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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 metaphor is given of a robber, as 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 contains the most garbage (since many people eat there).² The same is with those who have great potential.

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 יצור, the greater one is, the bigger his Yetzer Hara.

² 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."

It is through overcoming these struggles and tests that we elevate ourselves and can become great. In fact, this is what the word נסיון, test, means as in לבעור³. Through overcoming tests we can fulfill the הודיע⁴ making known to us our abilities as it brings forth our potential to fruition.⁵

Yosef tells his brothers, "I am Yosef, is my father still alive." His brothers were unable to answer because in נבהלו, they were disconcerted. Yosef then says I am Yosef whom you sold to Mitzrayim⁶. By saying I am Yosef whom you sold to Mitzrayim he is embarrassing his brothers more? The Sefas Emes⁷ 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 level⁸ because of being sold.⁹ This removed their pain.¹⁰

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

³ Shemos 20:17. Someone once commented the only time we grow is when we are uncomfortable.

⁴ Tehillim 145:12. The adage goes "for trivial things, any obstacle is great. For great things, any obstacle is trivial."

⁵ 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.

⁶ Breishis 46:3-4.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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 (קוץ), many Halachos and Torah came forth, as suffering can elevate a person. (See אור לשמים, s.v. ויאמר יצחק). 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).

⁹ Sefas Emes, Vayigash, תרמ"ג, s.v. בפסוק. 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."

¹⁰ 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 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? In אלהי אביך as it is an acronym for יוסף איבא 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)!

a higher position.¹¹ With this powerful insight, we should view life's tests.¹²

The analogy is given of a wagon that is traveling speedily as this is a sign it is going downhill. 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. The Pasuk states לא טוב להיות 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 לעזר כנגדו, I will make a Yetzer Hara that will counter and give him struggles.¹³ In this way, we can grow.

Many years ago there was a unique manuscript from a Rishon that was discovered in the Cairo Geniza.¹⁴ This came to the attention of a wealthy Jew named R' Yosef, who made it his mission to procure and publish it. This would be the first time this manuscript would be seen in centuries. Although it was difficult, in the end he was able to acquire it, at a cost of \$750,000. R' Yosef gathered a team of experts to study the manuscript. Then the unthinkable happened. While the manuscript was opened, one of the people present leaned over to see a certain line and in doing so, his coat brushed against a cup of hot coffee causing the entire cup to spill. The spilled coffee ruined the manuscript, making it undecipherable. R' Yosef's response to the man who spilled the coffee who was so embarrassed was: "Don't worry. I'll get you another cup of coffee." R' Yosef explained that he went to such lengths to retrieve this manuscript because he felt it was the will of Hashem to spread this Torah to the world. Now the will of Hashem is not to be angry. So what is the difference? Either way, I am just doing the will of Hashem.

The Heart of the Week

The three days prior to Shabbos as well as the three days after Shabbos are connected to¹⁵ Shabbos¹⁶ and as we say

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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."

¹³ Breishis 2:18. We should keep in mind "the road to success is always under construction."

¹⁴ The Cairo Geniza is a collection of some 400,000 Jewish manuscript fragments and Fatimid administrative documents that were found in the Geniza or storeroom of the Ben Ezra Shul in Old Cairo, Egypt. The Geniza texts are written in various languages, especially Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic. In addition to containing Jewish religious texts such as Biblical, Talmudic and later Rabbinic works (some in the original hands of the authors), the Geniza gives a detailed picture of the economic and cultural life of the North African and Eastern Mediterranean regions, especially during the 10th to 13th centuries. The 1896 discovery of the Cairo Geniza was one of the greatest Jewish treasures ever found. It has provided the world with some of the most important documents of the medieval Middle East. Pages from the Geniza identify hundreds of previously unknown people as well as provide new information about well-known men. More than 200 previously unknown poems by R' Yehuda Halevi (c. 1080-1145) were found in the Geniza. Perhaps the most important papers found belong to the Rambam (1135-1204). The Geniza contained over thirty works authored by the Rambam, including commentary on some Mesachtos of Mishnayos and a number of letters. Before this discovery, only a few lines of original Rambam writings had ever been found. Today, a large portion of the Cairo Geniza's documents are available at the University Library in Cambridge, where documents are under glass, bound in albums or placed loosely in boxes. Smaller collections are spread out across the world, in libraries in London, Oxford, Paris, Frankfurt, Vienna, Budapest, Leningrad and Philadelphia.

¹⁵ There are three parts of the soul that we can relate to: Nefesh, Ruach and Neshama. For Shabbos we get an additional one of each of these. The Arizal tells us that on Wednesday, the Nefesh enters a person. On Thursday his Ruach enters and on Friday his Neshama. When do they leave? On Sunday, his Neshama leaves. On Monday his Ruach leaves and on Tuesday, his Nefesh leaves. This is what it means that the three days

in Shabbos Zemirots כלל וביניהם, three preceding days to the right, three succeeding days to the left and amid them the Shabbos Kalla. For this reason, in the Shir Shel Yom of Wednesday—three days prior to Shabbos—we say לכו נרננה, although it is not in that chapter of Tehillim as the rest of the Shir Shel Yom.¹⁷ We say this because from Wednesday on, it is connected to Shabbos. This is why there is an opinion that one can read שתיים מקרא ואחד תרגום until the following Wednesday.¹⁸

The Pasuk says ובקציר תשוב, on Shabbos, you should desist from plowing and harvesting.¹⁹ חרש, plowing, are the initials of ששי, רביעי, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday—the three days we prepare the ground for Shabbos as this is what plowing is. The three days after Shabbos are קציר, harvesting, as if one observes Shabbos, he will reap the benefits.

Shabbos is like the heart.²⁰ Just as the heart is in the center of the body, Shabbos is the center of the week as it is surrounded by the three days prior to it and the three days that succeed it. Additionally, just as the heart gives life and sustenance to the body so does Shabbos do to the week²¹ and as we say in Lecha Dodi it is the מקור הברכה.

There are those who don't work on Friday so that they can prepare for Shabbos. In this light, we can explain the Chazal that says מן בערב שבת סימן יפה לו, one who dies on Erev Shabbos, it is a good sign for him:²² on Friday we should make ourselves as if we are dead in that we should be dedicated to preparing for Shabbos.²³

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 in addition to being the host of The Fascinating Insights Podcast. His writings, some of which have been translated into German and French, 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 Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

prior to Shabbos and the three days that follow it are connected to Shabbos.

¹⁶ Pesachim 106a. See Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Hashabbos 1. For this reason, one may recite Havdala up until Tuesday, the 3rd day after Shabbos (Tur, Orach Chaim, 299:6. see Mishna Brura 299:16).

¹⁷ The Shir Shel Yom of Wednesday is from Tehillim, chapter 94 whereas לכו נרננה is from chapter 95. The Shir Shel Yom of all the other days of the week is exclusively from one chapter of Tehillim.

¹⁸ Mishna Brura 285:11.

¹⁹ Shemos 34:21.

²⁰ In the Hakdama to the 3rd volume of the Mishna Brura, he writes the following: there are different punishments for sins. There is a punishment for that which is an איסור עשה as well as that which is a לאו which is even more stringent. More severe of a punishment is for that which is punishable by מיתה בידים שמים. Then that which is followed by that which is מיתה בידים אדם. Within there is חנק, strangulation, הרג, execution by the sword, שריפה, burning with hot lead and then סקילה, stoning. The punishment for Shabbos desecration is stoning. The Mitzvos parallel the limbs of the body. Just as there are limbs of the body that one can live without although he will be blemished, so too the same applies to the Mitzvos. Thus it says בהם... (Vayikra 18:5) and כי... (Devarim 30:20). Shabbos is like a limb which life depends on—like the heart.

²¹ Shabbos brings bounty to the world. The first Shabbos of existence gave only enough energy for the existence of the world for just the following 6 days. The same applies to each week as by the time Shabbos arrives, there is no more energy left for the world to continue to exist as Shabbos only gives energy to the world for the upcoming 6 days. This is just as when a battery dies and is then recharged until it dies again. This explains why it says כי ששת ימים עשה ה' (Shemos 31:17) and not בששת ימים as Shabbos gives renewal for the upcoming week.

²² Kesubos 103b.

²³ See Nesivos Shalom, Emor, s.v. מקראי קדש.