

Fascinating INSIGHTS

כ"ט תמוז תשפ"א

July 9, 2021

פרשת מטות-מסעי

9th year, edition 393

Listen to the short Fascinating Insights podcast at <https://jewishpodcasts.fm/fascinating-insights>, where it can also be downloaded!

To purchase any of the author's books (hardcopy or e-book), please send an email to yalt3285@gmail.com or visit https://www.amazon.com/Books-Yehoshua-Alt/s?rh=n%3A283155%2Cp_27%3AYehoshua+Alt (where you can also see the reviews).

To join the thousands of recipients and receive these insights free on a weekly email, obtain previous articles, feedback, comments, suggestions (on how to spread the insights of this publication further, make it more appealing or anything else), to sponsor this publication which has been in six continents and more than forty countries, or if you know anyone who is interested in receiving these insights weekly, please contact the author, Rabbi Yehoshua Alt, at yalt3285@gmail.com. Thank you.

לעילוי נשמת שמואל אביגדור בן יצחק מאיר

This newsletter can also be viewed at <https://www.dirshu.co.il/category/הורדות-עלויות/fascinating-insights/> and <http://www.ladaat.info/showgil.aspx?par=20200425&gil=2725>

Archives: <https://parshasheets.com/?s=Rabbi+Yehoshua+Alt>

To view these essays in German, please visit <https://judentum.online/>

Please feel free to print some copies of this publication and distribute them in your local Shul for the public, having a hand in spreading Torah.

Fascinating Insights is now available in French. To view or download these articles in French, send an email to yalt3285@gmail.com or visit <http://www.ladaat.info/showgil.aspx?par=20210612&gil=3162>.

[Ability of Disability](#)

Many people we consider successful in this world aren't happy.¹ The reverse is also true as many people who we wouldn't consider successful are the ones who are truly happy.² This is because it is dependent on one being happy with his lot. Happiness doesn't depend on what we have rather it depends on our outlook on whatever there is. If one is unhappy with what he has, he won't be happy with what he gets. Indeed, the Gemara says אין עני אלא בדעה, a truly destitute person is one who is impoverished of דעת, knowledge.³ The word שמח is a contraction of שם מה, focus your thoughts, because happiness depends on where your thoughts are, where you place your mind.⁴

In the 1980s, a man named Jerry Long—who was paralyzed from his neck down since a driving accident at

age 17—wrote, “I view my life as being abundant with meaning and purpose. The attitude that I adopted on that fateful day has become my personal credo for life: I broke my neck but it didn't break me.⁵ I am currently enrolled in my first psychology course in college. I believe that my handicap will only enhance my ability to help others. I know that without the suffering, the growth that I have achieved would have been impossible.”

R' Yitzy Hurwitz, who is completely paralyzed with the disease ALS,⁶ recently wrote thoughts that were shared in his name by his son at a convention, in 2019, of over 5,800 people: One thing I have learned from my experience is that there is hardly a person who doesn't have struggles. Whether it be health, money, shalom bayis, shidduchim, children, or something else. In my case it's open and impossible to hide, so I am on display. But that doesn't mean that your struggles are any less. You need to know that whatever you are dealing with, it's directly from Hashem. That means that He wants something from you that can only be realized through your difficulty. It doesn't mean that your mission and purpose has to end, rather that there is something else being asked of you, a new stage of your purpose and mission.⁷ You don't have to fight it, rather, you should find a way for your struggle to take you to the next level... This is positivity in the face of any challenge, not only to deal with your challenge, or to learn from your challenge, but to use your difficulty to lift you and your family to heights previously unimaginable, and even more, to use your difficulties as a platform to lift others up.⁸ Because there is nothing better than lifting the spirit of a Jewish person. When I went for the first round of tests, I was given a devastating diagnosis, “You have bulbar ALS.” I didn't understand what the doctor was saying, so I asked him to explain. He said, “It's very serious, you are going to lose your muscles and you will be paralyzed, it's the most aggressive form of the disease, you have two years to live.” As you could imagine, I was shaken to the core. When I left the office I was all alone, walking into the empty hallway I broke down in a fit of bitter tears. When I composed myself, I exited the building, and I saw a man falling on the ground

⁵ There is an adage, “We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.”

⁶ He relies on a permanent ventilator to breathe and a feeding tube for nourishment. He communicates with his eyes, not only by moving them to control a screen that enables him to type, but also by simply looking into the eyes of those around him.

⁷ In Mussaf of Rosh Hashana we say that Hashem is aware of all our doings: מי לא נפקד כהיום הזה כי זכר כל היצור לפניך בא מעשה איש ופקדוהו ועלילות. מצעדי גבר, for who is not judged today? For the memory of all creation is brought before You; the deeds of man and his charge and the causes of a person's steps. Another explanation of these words is that man is held accountable for his deeds in general as well as how effectively he has carried out his “charge”— the unique mission of his life.

⁸ The Ponovitcher Rav spoke about the Holocaust and his own survival with R' Shlomo Hoffman. He was certain that Hashem spared his life so that he could rebuild Torah institutions that were destroyed in the Holocaust. The Ponovitcher Rav spent the rest of his life focused on his mission. Instead of letting the tragedies he experienced destroy him, he used them as an impetus. They filled him with a sense of obligation.

¹ A wise man once said that many people are dying to be like celebrities. However, the celebrities are dying because they are them.

² Someone once commented, “Being happy doesn't mean everything is perfect. It means you decide to see beyond the imperfections.”

³ Nedarim 41a. A sign once read, “The reason we struggle with insecurity is because we compare our behind-the-scenes with everyone else's highlight reel.”

⁴ Concerning jealousy it is said: “Jealousy is the art of counting someone else's blessings instead of your own.”

having a seizure and I ran to help him. At that moment, I realized that there is still a lot that I can do. I resolved right there and then that no matter what the results of any further “tests,” I am going to remain positive and find a way to make a difference. I couldn’t imagine how high that way of thinking would take me.⁹

The word *מדוע* is a contraction of *מה דעה*, meaning to say when we ask why something happened, we must ask ourselves what we can learn from it. We can learn to be more vigilant next time, attain more knowledge in a given area and so on. Similarly, the word *למה*, why, when vowelized differently can be read as *למה*, for what. That is to say, for what purpose did this happen. How can I grow from this? We must realize that problems are opportunities. If you have a difficulty in your life, don’t miss the opportunity rather make it purposeful.

[The Mission For Av](#)

The Gemara¹⁰ tells us how far *כבוד אב ואם*¹¹ extends to from a story of *דמא בן נתינא*, a non-Jew. Why from a non-Jew?

It is because of Esav that the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed.¹² It of course is no coincidence that the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed in the month of *אב*, as Esav is the one who excelled¹³ in *אב ואם*. In fact, Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel remarked that no one honored his father more than him besides Esav.¹⁴

The Maharal¹⁵ teaches us we are commanded to respect our parents¹⁶ since they brought us into this world.¹⁷ Honoring parents¹⁸ is more related to non-Jews since they have *עולם הזה* and as the Midrash tells us Esav took *עולם הזה* and Yaakov *הבא*.¹⁹ This is why Esav honored his father more, since this world is his portion

⁹ There is a saying, “Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t – you’re right.” Our attitude determines success or failure.

¹⁰ Kidushin 31a. See Yerushalmi Peah 1:1.

¹¹ The Beis Lechem Yehuda (Yoreh Deah 240) quotes the Sefer Chassidim that if a son wants to voluntarily take upon himself to fast for spiritual elevation and it would cause his parents distress, then he shouldn’t fast.

¹² See Tehillim 137:7.

¹³ The Midrash (Tanchuma, Ki Seitzei 10) says that Esav falls into the hands of the children of Rachel. This is because Esav excelled in *כבוד אב ואם* and the selling of Yosef was the opposite of this. Who were the ones not involved in the selling of Yosef? Yosef and Binyomin—the children of Rachel!

¹⁴ Devarim Rabba 1:15.

¹⁵ Chidushai Aggados, Kidushin 31a, s.v. *מה עשה*.

¹⁶ The Rema (Yoreh Deah 240:18) writes that there is no obligation to honor a father who is a Rasha, wicked person unless he did Teshuva. However, it is forbidden to cause him pain (Shach, Yoreh Deah 240:20).

¹⁷ See Baba Metzia 33a. Once, when R’ Yisrael Salanter had a Yartzeit for his mother, another person wanted the Amud (to be a Chazzan for davening). R’ Yisrael Salanter conceded. Someone present was astonished as he told him, “You can excuse your own honor but not of your mothers!” R’ Salanter’s reply was, “I am certain my mother has bigger *nachas* from me to give in than fight.” In a similar vein, the orphans of a father that died suddenly wanted to do a project in honor of their father. They asked a Gadol who told them not to fight to be Chazzan for the amud during the year of the Yartzeit. That is the best merit for the father.

¹⁸ The great *baal chesed* Shloime Gross would daven in Khal Tiferes Yaakov for Rosh Hashana. On the years his mother davened, he would come to shul prior to Rosh Hashana and try out the various types of chairs that were in the women’s section so that his mother would have the most comfortable chair. When he decided on the right chair, he would ask the *gabai* to set it aside for his mother.

¹⁹ See Yalkut Shimoni 110, Breishis 25:22, Rashi.

and his father is the one who brought him here. It is for this reason that we learn the extent of *אב ואם* from a non-Jew.

The Gemara²⁰ highlights the *אב ואם* of his father *אברה*. It comes as no surprise that the letters of *אב ואם* rearranged spell *אב*, the days of the month of *אב*.²¹ Another connection we see of parents to children in context with the month of *אב* is the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza which caused the Churban—destruction of Yerushalayim—²² since *קמצא* and *בר קמצא*, as the Maharsha²³ tells us, can be a father and son, as *בר* means the son of.

In light of what we said, we can understand why the Mitzva of *אב ואם* is in Parshas Vaeschanan,²⁴ as it falls out in the month of Av. We should all strengthen ourselves in *אב ואם*, bringing about the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash.

[From Dire to Higher](#)

In appreciation of miracles that saved their lives, there were those that dedicated their lives to Hashem and His Torah. One case of this is R’ Yosef Chaim of Baghdad, also known as the Ben Ish Chai (1832-1909). At the age of seven, he fell into a deep pit in the courtyard of his home while playing with his sister. He was eventually saved by a miracle. In gratitude to Hashem, he decided to devote his life to the study of Torah.²⁵

Another story that demonstrates the same point is with R’ Yaakov Gesundheit (1815-1878). At the age of 18, he fell ill with a life-threatening illness, but was later healed. To show his appreciation for the miracle, he accepted upon himself to publish his *chidushim*. The next year, he began to write *Tiferes Yaakov* on *Choshen Mishpat*, which he published four years later. In 1858, his students published *Tiferes Yaakov* on *Masechta Gittin*, an amazing work on the entire *masechta*, not missing even one *Tosafos* without a comment or a *chidush*. He also published other volumes of *Tiferes Yaakov* on *Masechta Chullin* and others.

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.

²⁰ Kidushin 31b.

²¹ Furthermore, *אברה* is comprised of the letters *ה, ו, א*. This is understood if we analyze the section of the blessings and curses in Parshas Bechukosai. The Brachos are from *א* to *ת* (צם בחוקתי...קוממיות) —from the first letter of the *א-ב* to the last. This is in contrast to the curses there which are from *ה, ו* to *א*. Hence, the *ה, ו* of *אברה* is the opposite order of the curses, as they are a *ו* and then a *ה* since the curses won’t last.

²² Gittin 55b.

²³ Gittin 55b, s.v. *ואמר דאול*.

²⁴ 5:16.

²⁵ Observing the life of many Jews we can notice the *mesirus nefesh* they have for Judaism. A Chabad emissary in Argentina, in the year 2018, once mentioned some of the *mesirus nefesh* involved in living there. In order for a married woman to go to the mikva they travel four hours by bus. Their religious little children have no friends in the completely secular neighborhood. The young boys awaken extremely early so they can attend via the computer the gemara shiur at 3 a.m. in Israel (3 a.m. in Argentina is 10 a.m. Israel).