

Fascinating INSIGHTS

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Scatter and Matter

R' Yehuda Heschel Levenberg¹ (1884 until 1938) was the Rav of New Haven, Connecticut and founded the first advanced Yeshiva in America in 1922.² The major part of his income as chief rabbi of New Haven went to maintain the Yeshiva.³ When R' Levenberg was on his deathbed, he told R' Sender Lichner "Do you know what מסירת נפש, sacrificing yourself is? You probably think of

as being burned at the stake to sanctify Hashem's name. That is מסירת הגוף ("sacrifice of the body"). I could have stayed in Slabodka and spent my life learning shas many times but instead I came to America and spent my days collecting tomatoes from the Jewish farmers around New Haven so that the boys would have something to eat. That is מסירת נפש!"

In explaining why Avraham is called אברהם אהבי⁴, the Chassam Sofer⁵ postulates it is because he forfeited his personal spiritual growth in order to help others come close to Hashem as it says ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן, the souls they made in Charan.⁶ This is why it states כי ידעתי I have loved him because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem.⁷ This is what מסירת נפש is! To give up one's life, his physical body, as Avraham did by the האש is just מסירת הגוף!

The Fourth Going Forth

There are four קליפות, shells of impurity. Three are complete⁸ whereas טומאה can be elevated to Kedusha.⁹ The following illustrates this:

(1) The fruits of the first three years of a newly planted tree or its grafted shoots are forbidden for any conceivable use. In the fourth year, the fruits are holy and are to be eaten in Yerushalayim.¹⁰

(2) There are four exiles which correspond to the four non-Kosher animals.¹¹ The pig, which is the fourth,¹² in the future will be kosher.¹³ The last exile is Edom and after that we have an eternal redemption.

(3) In the Bracha of (למשמדים) ולמלשינים in Shemoneh Esrei, according to Nusach Ari, it says ותעקר ותשבר ותכלה ותכניעם, to uproot, smash, destroy and submit. The first three terms express complete destruction whereas תכניע can be elevated.

(4) At a Bris, three parts are cut off in contrast to פריעה, the fourth part.¹⁴

⁴ Yeshaya 41:8.

⁵ Shu"t Yoreh Deah, Pituchei Chosam.

⁶ Bereishis 12:5. Notice the pasuk uses the term nefesh, souls, since he imparted spirituality to them.

⁷ Bereishis 18:19.

⁸ In this way the Tikunei Zohar (11b) understands אין דורשין בעריות (Chagiga 11b), as קליפות are from the three impure עריות.

⁹ See Tanya, chapter 7, Bnei Yissoschar, Adar 2:7.

¹⁰ Vayikra 19:23-4.

¹¹ See Midrash Tanchuma in Shemini, 8.

¹² Vayikra 11:7.

¹³ Ohr Hachaim Shemini 11:7. R' Bachaye, Shemini 11:4-7. See Chassam Sofer in Toras Moshe, Reeh, s.v. ואת.

¹⁴ See Tikunei Zohar 11, Bnei Yissoschar in Tishrei 4:3, Derech Pikudecha in חלק המחשבה, מצות עשה 2, אות י.

¹ He was a student in Slabodka. The Alter of Slabodka sent him to America to found a mussar oriented Yeshiva on the model of Slabodka because he was impressed with R' Levenberg's oratorical skills, refined character and distinguished personality.

² The yeshiva did not offer any secular studies as only Torah study was on the curriculum. At different times, the yeshiva had on its faculty the likes of R' Moshe Feinstein and R' Ruderman.

³ Among the students were R' Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg and R' Shachne Zohn.

(5) Avraham fighting the four kings is fighting these four shells of impurity.¹⁵

Holy Heroes

Here are a few of the many Kiddush Hashems that have impressed non-Jews in recent history.

In 1978, when R' Ovadia Yosef was the Chief Sefardic Rabbi of Israel, he visited France. As he exited the plane, the music band which came special from London for this, played on both his sides accompanying him the entire way. Those present began to watch—including Arabs and Christians. The Paris police sent a special guard of honor just as when presidents and prime ministers of other countries came to visit. A fleet of police cars and motorcycles escorted R' Ovadia's car to the home of the community's rabbi, R' Sharvit. When he arrived at R' Sharvit's home, he asked him, "please ask the policemen and security agents who escorted us to come inside. I want to thank and bless them for going out of their way for me." The rabbi invited them in and gathered R' Ovadia and he blessed them. Although they didn't understand R' Ovadia's Hebrew, they felt his warmth and care to the extent that some even began to cry. A while later after R' Ovadia returned to Israel, R' Sharvit met with the French President Jacques Chirac who asked him, "How is R' Ovadia Yosef from Israel?" The President told him, "I received a magnificent letter from the French police force stating that the Jewish 'pope' is a very special person. He has a caring, sensitive heart, treats every person with great honor and thanks anyone who helps him."¹⁶

In 2013, R' Noach Muroff, a contemporary Torah teacher in the United States, bought a second-hand desk for \$150 through a classified advertisement website. In order to fit the desk through the door in his house, he partially dismantled it. He was shocked to find a bag full of cash wedged into the desk that contained \$98,000! He called the original owner who told him that she had hidden an inheritance in the desk which she had assembled herself and then forgot where she had put it. The next day, the rabbi, his wife, and their four children went to her home to return the money. In a "thank you" aired on CNN, she wrote, "I do not think there are too

¹⁵ Breishis 14.

¹⁶ In 2011, at one of his weekly Motzai Shabbos lectures, R' Ovadia Yosef prayed for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak who was going through a difficult time. He explained that in 1984, he met with President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. There had been plans for the construction of a highway in Egypt that was to run through a Jewish cemetery in which Torah sages were buried. MK Aryeh Deri and R' Ovadia immediately traveled to Egypt and met with the President of Egypt. After explaining to the President the disgrace that would be caused by razing the cemetery and requesting to change the highway's route, Mubarak agreed, despite the cost involved. In 2011, R' Ovadia recounted: "After we finished, the president asked everyone to leave the room. He told me, 'rabbi, please bless me. I believe in your blessing.' I put my hands on his head and blessed him, 'May your presidency last many years.' This was 28 years ago and his authority lasted for over 30 years which rarely occurs in Egypt..."

many people in this world that would have done what you did by calling me." Subsequently, R' Muroff was invited to address the 91st annual convention of Agudas Yisrael of America. He told the crowd, "99% of Klal Yisrael would have done the same thing. *Mi ka'amcha Yisrael...* And this isn't my Kiddush Hashem but our Kiddush Hashem."

Soon after the catastrophe that occurred in Surfside, Florida on June 24, 2021, where a 12 story condominium collapsed leaving nearly 100 dead, a non-Jew approached and hugged R' Shalom Lipskar, the rabbi of the Shul of Bal Harbour in Surfside. The lifeless body of the son of this father was just found and although he was broken, this is what he said: "I'm not Jewish but I have never seen anything like what the Jewish people have done. I have an entirely new view of Jewish people now. If it weren't for them, the body of my son wouldn't have been found. The food they distributed, the care we received was unparalleled of which I have never seen anywhere in my lifetime. I love the Jewish people."

Becky Syrett, the Operations Manager at the SSE Arena in London for the Siyum Hashas in January 2020, wrote the following in a letter to the organizers of this Siyum Hashas: Dear Siyum Team, it is 2 am as I write this to you having just got home after the Siyum. On behalf of the entire team, I must express our deepest pride and pleasure at being given the opportunity to host the Siyum event...6,748 tickets were scanned at the door, aside from the top table, Rabbis who entered via the VIP entrance, and of course all your volunteers and crew.

There are a number of points that have blown us away:

1. We have a security cupboard in which we allow guests to deposit anything deemed dangerous or inappropriate. At an event this size we would normally collect anything between 700-1,000 items. Tonight we held nothing.

2. There was not a single incident of drunkenness, boisterous or rowdy behavior. Not a single one. I have been at the Arena for 28 months and accommodated over 300 events in that time. Never have we had no incident.

3. The entire team was blown away by the amount of thank yous that we received at the end of the evening. I actually thought everyone had been instructed to do this! She concludes: I am devastated that the Siyum only takes place once every seven years. This event was a delight for all of us.

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 Hebrew, 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.