

Fascinating INSIGHTS

ה' כסלו תשפ"ב

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פרשת ויצא

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AN EXCITING NEW BOOK! I am happy to announce the release of the book *Extraordinary Insights*, which is available for purchase and delivery at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09KDW6QVX>. It can also be bought from the author by sending an email to 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 more than 70 topics contained in this book include the greatness of our generation, educating children according to their uniqueness, passionate Judaism, overcoming our fears and the astounding future redemption. The book features *haskamos* from R' Yisroel Reisman, R' Moshe Wolfson, R' Zev Leff, R' Yitzchak Scheiner and others. 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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[Attitude of Gratitude](#)

When Yehuda was born, Leah was especially grateful as *בטלתי יותר מחלקי*, I took more than my share.¹ It should be the same with each of us as whatever we have is more than we deserve. For this reason, we are called *יהודי*, from the term *הודאה*, to be grateful for all we have² and say I took more than my portion. Indeed, this is the attitude we begin our day with *אני מודה*—thanking Hashem.³ As someone once put it, “We thank before we think” (referring to *אני מודה* as we say this immediately when we awake).⁴

We should constantly ask ourselves, “What am I grateful for now?” We always have what to be grateful for at any given moment. Our health, food, beautiful weather, just being alive... is not something to be taken for granted.⁵

There is so much to appreciate: the air we breathe, which is in abundant supply. Water, which is plentiful. The sunlight, wind, rain, trees, gardens, mountains, seas, moon, stars, fire, heat, cold, snow, dew, use of our limbs, the ability to see, hear, smell, taste, feel, the faculty of speech, thought, memory, the variety of food of every taste and color, the body's secretions and chemistry. The materials that compose our clothing and supply our homes. Utensils, grains vegetables, fruits, meat, chicken, fish, minerals, electricity, light, wood, coal, petroleum and all the resources of the earth. For many, this is as if it doesn't exist. If the happiness of life passes by unnoticed, it also passes by not enjoyed.⁶ It is when one is about to leave the world that he looks back with regret at all that he possessed but failed to enjoy.⁷ There is an expression, “The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our own blessings.”⁸

Let us think what Adam had to do until he found bread to eat: He plowed, sowed, reaped, gathered the stalks together, threshed the stalks, winnowed the chaff from the grain, selected the other waste from the grain, ground the grain into flour, sifted the flour, kneaded the flour into dough, baked the dough and then afterwards ate the bread. We arise in the morning and have all these labors already prepared for us. Now let us think of the exertions involved for Adam to have a garment to wear. Adam sheared the wool, cleaned it, disentangled it, spun it into threads and wove the threads. Then he had a garment to wear. All of this is already performed for us!⁹ We must have an attitude of gratitude!

R' Ovadia Yosef said that nowadays even when things are tight, everyone is wealthy compared to the way he lived

¹ Breishis 29:35. Since Yaakov had four wives and would have 12 sons (see 29:34 Rashi s.v. הפעם), each wife would be expected to give birth to three sons. With her fourth son, Leah took more than her share.

² Sefas Emes, *Vayigash*, תרל"א, s.v. ויגש.

³ The Midrash says that we should praise Hashem for each breath (Breishis Rabba 14:9).

⁴ A wise man once said, “A woman who wants to be thanked for the Challa she makes has to thank her husband for the dough (money) he brings home.”

⁵ It was known that R' Moshe Feinstein didn't want an air conditioner. He explained, “What happens if it breaks? Then I can't learn because I became so used to it.”

⁶ There is a saying, “It is not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful.”

⁷ Sing, You Righteous, pp. 17-18.

⁸ The son of R' Yaakov Kamenetsky once related that his family was so poor when he was growing up that his suit for his bar mitzvah was his father's old suit. For the honor of the bar mitzvah his father inverted the suit.

⁹ Brachos 58a.

when he was a child. He wrote, “I never had a suit. My father bought my Shabbos clothing secondhand. I had a long jacket that probably had been worn by twenty people before me. At that time, the bus company Mekasher provided transportation from Beis Yisrael to the Old City for a half-grush (currency). I didn't want to waste the coin, so I walked—rain or snow. All the half-grush coins that I saved funded my wedding. When we were young, we took dry bread and water to school every day, often with a tomato, which we rubbed into the bread. That's all we took for an entire school day, to hold us over until dinnertime. If someone was eating bread with an egg, we thought he was a millionaire. I once brought cream, which they sold in a small container, and that day was a holiday. For dessert, we were often given a teaspoon of coffee grains with sugar.”¹⁰

A 109 year-old-Holocaust survivor who lost her entire family in the holocaust was having hip surgery. After the surgery she was walking in the corridor at the hospital where she met someone who came to visit her. When asked how she was doing, she replied, “Great. This time it took them only three tries to find the right vein. I'm surrounded by doctors that are looking after my health and many have come to visit me!” We should internalize that, “*At the root of complaining is thinking the situation could be better. At the root of satisfaction is being aware that the situation could be worse.*”

What is a truly wealthy person? Although many may take for granted what they are born with, let us take a look at what we possess so we can appreciate it. Eyes to see which is more sophisticated than the best camera. Teeth to chew and grind up the food. Hands to take care of our many tasks.¹¹ Feet to walk with. With this we can grasp בחלקו השמח עשיר השמח, ¹² one who is happy with his lot is a truly wealthy person, as the Chida tells us עשיר is an acronym for בגלים, גדים, שיניים, עיניים, eyes, teeth, hands and feet. To see how wealthy we are, we must see all that we have that money can't buy (children, being married, health, just being alive and so on).¹⁴

There was a secular woman that was so excited because she was soon about to buy her dream car. This is all she would talk about. She finally bought and couldn't contain her excitement as this is what filled her conversations. Soon after she bought it she came into work looking upset. A colleague asked her if she got into an accident, since she wasn't talking with excitement about her newly purchased car. She answered that she didn't get into an accident but she was driving when suddenly a nicer car passed her and that became her new dream car. This new car made her present car nearly worthless to her.

¹⁰ See Ma'adenei Hamelech, volume 1, p. 22 and p. 25. Neighbors of R' Ovadia Yosef often saw him, in his younger years, rocking a stroller outside on the porch, with a sefer propped above the stroller. Sometimes though, his intense concentration got the better of him. As he drifted deeper into the words of Torah before him, he was liable to lose awareness of his little child, and his wife had to come to the aid of a crying baby who R' Ovadia was rocking but had not heard.

¹¹ If one would be granted all his wishes—vacation of his dreams, the food he desires, financial wealth he wants and so on—in exchange for one of his hands, he would turn down the offer. Consequently, we should appreciate our hands at least that much and not complain about that which we lack.

¹² Avos 4:1. Through studying our marvelous body we can connect to Hashem as it states מבשרי אדמה אלוהה, from my flesh I see Hashem (Iyov 19:26).

¹³ See Shemos 21:24. Rabbeinu Efraim there says that this is a hint to אין עושר כבריאות, there is no wealth like health.

¹⁴ The story is told of someone who asked a soldier that tragically lost both of his legs in battle, “How are you so positive without your legs?” His reply: “How are you so negative with yours's?” Many times it's the ones that are happy in the good times that are also happy in the negative times. Let's ask ourselves how are we when life is smooth and we are not going through rough times. Do we constantly complain?

It has been recommended to keep a gratitude journal where at the end of each day we write what we are grateful for from that day. Other advice that has been suggested is to think, speak and act as a grateful person even if we don't feel that way since ההיצונה מעוררת הפנימית, the external arouses the internal.¹⁵

This trait of being happy with our lot is that of Yaakov's as he said יש לי כל, I have everything.¹⁶ There are those that have plenty of wealth and abundant possessions yet in truth have nothing. With this we can explain יש מתעשר ואין כל¹⁷ there are those who seem to be wealthy but really have nothing since they lack the trait of כל, gratitude.¹⁸

Speech and Silence

Hashem created us with two lips to allude to the two functions of the mouth: to speak in Torah and to be silent as in וקאלם לא יפתח פיו, like a mute who doesn't open his mouth.¹⁹ These two are represented by Moshe and Aharon. Moshe symbolizes Torah since he gave the Torah to us. Aharon, on the other hand, symbolizes silence as it states וירום אהרן.²⁰

One who uses a calling card knows that his minutes are limited. He therefore doesn't speak unnecessarily.²¹

We need to internalize the explanation of R' Michel Zlotchover on מדבר קדש ה' יחיל: Hashem yearns (יחיל) to hear holy words from us.

In whose portion is the Beis Hamikdash found? Binyomin. Why? Because he used his mouth properly, as the Midrash tells us.²³ This is what the Beis Hamikdash is as it is called תל תלפיות because תל שכל פיות פונים, the hill to which all mouths turn.

The Chofetz Chaim would say just as with weapons one needs to keep it fresh for it to always be available to use, the same is with our mouth as this is our weapon— אין כחו אלא בפיו, our power is with the mouth.²⁴

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 three books including the recently released Extraordinary 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, 71,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

¹⁵ Mesilas Yesharim, chapter 7.

¹⁶ Breishis 33:11.

¹⁷ Mishlei 13:7. The Pasuk states ואין העם מכירים קול תרועת השמחה לקול בכי, the people didn't notice the sound of the joyful shouting because of the sound of the people's weeping (Ezra 3:13). The same can be said of those who don't realize what they possess: they don't notice the pleasures and joys in life because they are lamenting what they don't have.

¹⁸ One exercise that is recommended is to repeat to ourselves, “It really makes no difference to me what anyone else has.”

¹⁹ Tehillim 38:14.

²⁰ Vayikra 11:3.

²¹ R' Yisrael Salanter was once conversing with his relative in idle chatter with a happy countenance. It seemed to his student who was present that his Rebbe was involved with this for an unnecessary lengthy period of time. At a later time this student was talking to R' Yisrael Salanter about idle speech and he asked his Rebbe about that incident. His Rebbe replied that this person whom he spoke with was very depressed. The idle chatter was Gemilus Chassadim as it would remove the man's worry and sadness. Speaking to the man in Yirah and Mussar would have been useless. Only this mundane talk would uplift him (Tallei Oros, Vaeschanan 6:7).

²² Sichos Biavodas Hashem, p 98. Tehillim 29:8.

²³ Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeitzei, 6.

²⁴ Bamidbar 22:4, Rashi. As the situation with the Jews in Egypt deteriorated in 1948 due to Israel's war of independence, R' Ovadia Yosef was high on the government's list of suspected Zionists. More than once the Egyptian authorities called in R' Ovadia for questioning as they suspected him of spying for Israel (R' Ovadia was arrested at least twice but each time he was released by order of King Farouk, who was the ruler of Egypt then.). When he was writing very late at night, he would sense the detectives standing below his window, whispering among themselves. Here is an excerpt from an article in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot dated October 20, 1972: “They began to suspect that I was an Israeli spy. Occasionally we were surprised by searches of the secret police. I remember one night when Egyptian officers broke into our house with guns demanding: where is your gun? I told them: ‘Come, I'll show you my gun,’ and I took them to my library and said, ‘here are my weapons.’”