

Fascinating INSIGHTS

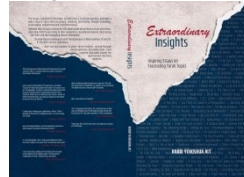
יג' טבת תשפ"ב

December 17, 2021

פרשת ויחי

10th year, edition 415

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Purposeful Prison

In the summer of 1992, while running a program for prisoners,¹ R' Leibel Lam brought a colleague who traveled widely as a guest speaker. Because the prisoners crave to know what is going on “out there” and they live vicariously through the adventures of others, they nudged the rabbi to tell them where he had been recently. He answered, “I was just in the world’s largest prison and there I confronted the most-fierce warden of them all! The largest prison in the world is the whole world! Who is that fierce warden? Myself! This guard keeps you from going a few feet to your right and left! I have my limitations too. If I travel north I can’t go south. Of course my limitations are far more expansive than yours—on the horizontal plane. But who keeps you from going up, from climbing

vertically,² transcending the confines of this place³ and reaching the fullness of your real potential,⁴ even here in prison?⁵ Nobody stops us but ourselves!”⁶

When one points a finger at another, there are three pointing back at him. This signifies that people blame others for the way they are when really it is because of themselves. Growing or not in spirituality⁷ is dependent on us as it says *עלים וירדים בו*, ascending and descending.⁸ Don't blame others for where you stand!

People may feel they have excuses as to why they are the way they are. However, when we look at life we see people who became who they were because of those challenges whereas others used it for excuses as to this is

¹ R Ovadia Yosef said that it is a mitzvah for Jews to teach Torah in prisons to the prisoners so that they can begin to rehabilitate themselves through Torah and ethical teachings, as many prisoners have done so already (Halichos Olam, volume 8, p. 372).

² The story is told of a person that would come to the circus with a glass box of birds that were flying. When he would remove the top of the cage the birds wouldn't fly out because after banging their head so many times on the top, they internalized that they can't fly higher. Consequently, they didn't bother to attempt again to escape, even when the top was removed.

³ Those in a low state should keep in mind, “It is never too late to be what you might have been.”

⁴ Someone once remarked, “Within you is a destiny waiting to be born. You are here to make a unique and valuable contribution to the evolution of humanity.”

⁵ There is an expression, “Begin where you are, but don't stay where you are.”

⁶ It has been said, “When the game is over, the king and pawn (in the game of chess) go into the same box.” The same applies to life. So, what will we do with our lives?

⁷ Someone once said that he is not a “human being” but rather a “human becoming.” He explained what he meant: that he wanted to always grow spiritually in life.

⁸ Breishis 28:12. We should bear in mind that sometimes fear of success, not fear of failure, keeps us from succeeding.

why they haven't become anything. Some claim they can't reach their potential because of their job at work whereas for others that makes them reach their potential.⁹ Some find it challenging to live in Eretz Yisrael because they miss their family that doesn't live there, lack of money and so on. Yet others in the same situation become better because of it, as they become more independent, creative and so forth. Some complain about a difficult spouse whereas others use this opportunity as a pedestal to become great by working on their character, seeing the positive and so on.¹⁰

Everyone has challenges in life. The more difficult the challenges are, the more possibilities there are for growth. Some are saddened because they have few children whereas others are overwhelmed because they have many children. Some are distressed since they have little money while others are worried due to having lots of it.¹¹ We all have challenges. The question is will that drag us down or make us greater?

People say if I would have had... great parents, an understanding rebbe, a better mind, etcetera, then I would be a great person. If we take a look at our great leaders throughout time, we notice how they didn't fit the perfect box. They could have had excuses for not becoming great. Avraham's father was Terach, an idol worshipper. Additionally, he was one against the entire world concerning believing in Hashem. Yitzchak's brother was Yishmael. Yaakov's brother was Esav, a murderer, and even attempted to kill him. His father-in-law, Lavan, cheated him. His daughter Dina was violated. Yosef, his favorite son, was sold by his other children. Yosef Hatzadik was hated and sold by his brothers. After overcoming the test with Potifars's wife, he ended up in prison for twelve years. Now let's talk about our great leader Moshe. Moshe grew up in the palace of Paroh, surely a poor spiritual environment. Furthermore, he had a speech impediment. He also fled for his life after killing the Egyptian. What about Dovid Hamelech? People thought he was a *mamzer*.

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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, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

⁹ Someone once said, "God gives us the ingredients for our daily bread, but He expects us to do the baking."

¹⁰ Imagine you could open your eyes to see only the good in every person, the positive in every circumstance and the opportunity in every challenge. Well, you can!

¹¹ A wise man once said, "We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses."

¹² In the year 2020, there was a gathering of the heads of the Israeli police force, prison service and justice system. The gathering was dedicated to the topic of prisoner rehabilitation. During the meeting, a comment was made by one of the officers in the prison authority who stated that the most successful rehabilitation program in Israel was the one established by R' Yitzchak Dovid Grossman when he was a young rabbi in the early

Moreover, his father-in-law, Shaul, and his son, Avshalom, attempted to kill him.

Judge Dov Levine was a judge on the Israeli Supreme Court for years. R' Yitzchak Dovid Grossman once gave him a tour of the different institutions of Migdal Ohr. When they entered the Migdal Ohr kollel (which has many that spent time in prison but altered the trajectory of their lives by being rehabilitated¹²), one of the kollel members was giving a Torah lecture to the rest of the group. This member stopped and said, "Your honor, I need to give you a sincere thank you." "For what," asked the judge? "For sending me to prison, as it caused me to participate in R' Grossman's rehabilitation program, which introduced me to Torah and mitzvos. It also introduced me to my future teacher R' Chaim Golombeck."¹³ The judge joked that it was the first time in his life that someone thanked him for being sent to prison.

[Life Support, Wife Support](#)

The Chassam Sofer¹⁴ writes that if a wife supports her husband and children in learning Torah, although the husband and children have their reward diminished if they mess up and don't follow in the Torah path she supported, her reward is not reduced.

A passionate chassid of the Bobover Rebbe, R' Ben Tzion Halberstam, known as the Kedushas Tzion¹⁵ (1874-1941), would leave his family many times for the sake of Avodas Hashem including learning Torah and visiting his rebbe who lived in a distant city. One day his wife decided that to be sure she will receive half the reward of her husband's Avodas Hashem, which she supported, she will go with her husband to the Rebbe to make a contract which will state that she receives half of the reward. After mentioning the purpose of their visit, the Rebbe told the husband that he should make a contract to receive half of her reward! "Her reward is much greater than yours. You learn Torah, practice your Avodas Hashem, and enjoy! But she remains home alone! What kind of pleasure does she have?"

1970s, and which is still in operation today. Many of those prisoners have gone on to learn in Migdal Ohr's kollel.

¹³ They learned under the guidance of R' Chaim Golombeck who had spent a majority of his week living in prison with his students, learning Torah with them.

¹⁴ Drashos Chassam Sofer p. שנג, s.v. ואמר טפכם.

¹⁵ Under R' Ben Tzion's leadership, Bobover Chassidus was almost alone among Chassidic groups in its focus on youth, and the network of 50 yeshivos which he founded recaptured the hearts and minds of thousands of youth who were left spiritually devastated by the First World War. R' Ben Tzion was very gifted musically and composed scores of niggunim. He was murdered by the Nazis on the fourth of Av in 1941, along with family members and thousands of his followers.