

How to Live a Redeemed Life

Source Sheet by Olivia Friedman

1. Why did God place us in Egypt and then redeem us? What were we meant to learn from that experience? And how do we make sure to channel that redemption properly- living a redeemed life today? א.

Today's *shiur* will explore these topics in the following order:

- Kur HaBarzel/ The Crucible
- The First Mitzvah
- Why Are We Here?
- Living a Redeemed Life

2. **KUR HABARZEL- THE CRUCIBLE** ב.

3. It appears in our prayers over and over. We consistently speak about our redemption from Egypt/ *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. But why were we placed there in the first place? And what was the purpose in our redemption? To understand this concept, we will take a look at an interesting phrase used multiple times to describe our slavery in Egypt - *kur habarzel*, the iron furnace. ג.

4. **Deuteronomy 4:20** ד. **דברים ד':כ'**

(20) but you ה' took and brought out of Egypt, that **iron blast furnace**, to be God's very own people, as is now the case.

(כ) וְאַתֶּכֶם לָקַח ה' וַיּוֹצֵא אֶתְכֶם מִכּוּר הַבַּרְזֶל מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעַם נַחֲלָה בְּיוֹם הַהוּא:

5. **I Kings 8:51** ה. **מלכים א ח':נ"א**

(51) For they are Your very own people that You freed from Egypt, from the midst of **the iron furnace**.

(נא) כִּי־עַמֶּךָ וְנַחֲלָתְךָ הֵם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מִמִּצְרַיִם מִתּוֹךְ כּוּר הַבַּרְזֶל:

6. **Jeremiah 11:4** ו. **ירמיהו י"א:ד'**

(4) which I enjoined upon your fathers when I freed them from the land of Egypt,

the iron crucible, saying, ‘Obey Me and observe them, just as I command you, that you may be My people and I may be your God’—

(ד) אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם בְּיוֹם
הוֹצִיאִי־אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם מִכּוּר
הַבְּרֹזֶל לֵאמֹר שְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְעַשִּׂיתֶם
אוֹתָם כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־אֶצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם וְהִיתֶם לִי
לְעָם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים:

7. What is this furnace? And why is our time in Egypt compared to it? ז.
8. **Rashi on Deuteronomy 4:20:1** ח.
(1) מכור — a כור is a vessel in which one refines gold.
(א) מכור. כור הוא כלי שֶׁמְזַקְקִים בוֹ אֶת הַזָּהָב:
רש"י על דברים ד':כ':א'
9. Where else do we see this metaphor? ט.
10. **Malachi 3:3** י.
(3) He [God] shall act like a smelter and purger of silver; and he shall **purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver**, so that they shall present offerings in righteousness.
(ג) וַיֵּשֶׁב מְצַרְף וּמְטַהֵר כֶּסֶף וְטָהַר אֶת־בְּנֵי־לֵוִי וְזָקַק אֹתָם כַּזָּהָב וְכַכֶּסֶף וְהָיוּ לֵה' מְגִישֵׁי מִנְחָה בְּצִדְקָה:
מלאכי ג':ג'
11. Why did we need to be refined? How was this accomplished? יא.
12. **HaKtav VeHaKalah, Deuteronomy 4:20:1** יב.
The iron crucible. The was the true intended purpose of the slavery in Egypt, to refine the Jewish people as gold is purified in a crucible. He wanted to remove the dross so that only the pure gold would remain. The impurities which were the wicked, died during the plague of darkness, and only those who remained were chosen to receive the Torah. If Hashem would have increased the Jewish people and showered them with all kinds of goodness without the slavery in Egypt,
הכתב והקבלה, דברים ד':כ':א'
מכור הברזל. כור הוא כלי שמזקקין בו את הזהב (רש"י) כי זה היה התכלית האמתית המכוון ממנו ית' לשעבדם במצרים, לצרפם כזהב בכור שיתפרדו הסיגים וישאר זהב טהור לבד, חלאת הפושעי' מתו בימי החשך, ורק הנשארי' נבחרו לקבלת התורה, כי אלו הרבה את ישראל והשפיע להם טובות גדולות בלתי שיעבוד, לא היו מתרצי' לקבל עליהם התורה הזאת האוסרת

they would not have been willing to accept the Torah which forbids so many actions which they would have been accustomed to. Therefore it was Hashem's plan to enslave them under the yoke of a harsh kingdom. Through this they were purified and refined until they were able to accept the Torah willingly.

עליהם כל עניני' שהיו רגילי' בהם,
לכן היתה מעצת ה' לשעבדם תחת עול
מלכות קשה ולסבה זו נטהרו ונזדקקו
עד שהיו ראויים לקבל התורה מרצון
נפשם:

13. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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1. Why was slavery necessary?
2. Why would Bnei Yisrael have been willing to accept such a difficult Torah (with so many laws which include restrictions) after the crucible experience?
3. Do you think there could have been an easier way to prepare Bnei Yisrael to accept the Torah?

14. Excerpt from 'Three Reasons We Were Slaves in Egypt' by Rabbi Lawrence Hajioff

.ד.

The third reason for the slavery explains the Tosfot Shalem, Shemot, Va'eira, p. 22 was **to remove from the souls of the Jewish people, any extreme desire for money and material success**. At the outset, the Jews were offered payment for every brick that they made, but because of their desire for money they did more than necessary. After this, the Egyptians forced them to continue making bricks at the same rate as when they were being paid. This experience would remain with the Jewish people for generations to come. Whenever we become hyper focused on material success and make that our raison d'etra, we remind ourselves of **the futility of pursuing money for its own sake**, and instead realize that only spiritual goals last into the next world.

15. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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1. According to the Tosfot Shalem, why was slavery necessary?
2. What was the crucible effect here/ what was being removed?

16. **Exodus 13:16**

(16) "And so it shall be as a sign upon your hand and as a symbol on your forehead that with a mighty hand ה' freed us from Egypt."

שמות י"ג:ט"ז .טז.
(טז) וְהָיָה לְאוֹת עַל־יְדֵיכֶם וּלְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין
עֵינֵיכֶם כִּי בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ ה'
מִמִּצְרַיִם: {ס}

17. **Kli Yakar on Exodus 13:16:1**

.יז. כלי יקר על שמות י"ג:ט"ז:א'

(1) Our sages (מנחות לז) explain that you place the Tefilin on the weaker hand, to

teach us that Tefilin should be placed on the left hand. the reason for this is that the intellect and our physicality are problematic for on another; when the one rises, the other falls. When the physicality of an individual is afflicted, the strength of the intellect waxes. **The reason for the affliction in Egypt is to bring the physicality of the Jewish people into the iron crucible (as mentioned in Deut.) and through that the intellect of the Jew would overcome it.** Both young and old men will attest to this - when a man is young and immature, his physicality is in the ascendancy over his intellect, and when he gets older his intellect has the ascendancy over his physicality. It is for this reason that Solomon (In Ecclesiastes) says "Don't say that your earlier days were better than your later ones because it is not out of wisdom that you ask it" - because at the age of 60 comes wisdom, length of days and understanding.

18. **Kli Yakar on Exodus 13:16:2**

(2) So it is with the two hands of man, because the left hand is weaker. and it is weak because of its proximity to the heart, which is the source of intellect. (This is therefore the primary example of the intellect controlling the physical forces in man). However, the right hand is next to the liver which is the source of desire. The liver does not oppose the physical force in any way, because that is the source of its strength. The place in which the intellect dwells (the heart) makes the hand weak. Therefore when the verse says: והיה לאות על ידכה it is as if it says that it should be a sign on your heart, because the heart is the reason that his hand is weak. Indeed, this is the reason of the Tefilin should be put on the arm, (to remember that the whole purpose of the exodus from Egypt is to teach this concept), and the Shel Rosh

(א) והיה לאות על ידכה. ארו"ל
(מנחות לז) יד כהה להורות שהנחת תפילין ביד שמאל, וטעמו של דבר כי השכל והחומר הם כצרות זו לזו כשזה קם זה נופל וכאשר יענו את החומר כן ירבה הכח השכלי, וטעם עינוי מצרים הוא כדי להביא את חומר ישראל בכור הברזל ועי"ז יתקומם ויתגבר השכל, ויעידו על זה זקנים עם נערים כי בעוד היות האדם נער ובער וכח חומר בתקפו אז כח שכלו חלש וכאשר יבא בימים וכח חומר הלך וחסור יתגבר שכלו, ולפיכך האומר שהימים הראשונים היו טובים מאלה לא בעבור החכמה שאל על אלה, שהרי בישישים חכמה ואורך ימים תבונה.

יה. כלי יקר על שמות י"ג ט"ז:ב'
(ב) וכן הוא בשני ידות האדם, כי יד שמאל החלושה והיא כהה כנגד הלב שבו משכן החכמה, כי המקום השכלי שבלב גורם שידו כהה כי היד עסקנית בתשמישי החומר, אבל יד ימין במקום הכבד כי בו משכן הכח המתאוה ואינו מתנגד אל היד כי שם עיקר כחה, אבל במקום משכן השכל שם היד כהה, וכשהוא אומר כאן והיה לאות על ידכה כאילו אמר שיהיה לאות על לבך כי הלב סבה לכהות היד, כי טעם התפילין הוא להיות לאדם לזכרון במקום משכן השכל שבמוח ושבבלב, ואמר בשל ראש שיהיו בין עינוך כי עינא ולבא תרי סרסורי דחטאה נינהו (ירושלמי ברכות פ"א הל"ה) על כן שני מקומות אלו

should be between the eyes, because the heart and the eyes are the two agents of sin (as seen in the Yerushalmi). Therefore these two places need something to remind them about the existence of G-d and his capacity, and through that will return from sin.

19. **Kli Yakar on Exodus 13:16:3**

(3) Another explanation is as follows: It mentions the weaker hand to teach us that man will not overcome (anything), but that G-d is the one who battles in any war. (Wearing Tefilin on the left weaker hand illustrates that) a man's hand is weak and he is unable to do anything with it unless G-d will help and strengthen his hand.

This is the meaning of the verse in Psalms (תהלים טז ח) I place G-d opposite me always, He will never move from my right hand). At first, King David was upset that the heart should be on the left hand side, and the liver on the right hand side of a human being. This would indicate that G-d created man in such a way that his desires should be the main force, and his intellect subservient to his desires.

Afterwards, David states: G-d is opposite me - his right hand supports my left hand. It is through that I am confident that I will never be moved - that the strength of his desires will never move him from the straight path. this is because the hand of G-d provides power and energy to the heart (intellect) which is opposite him as he stands in front of G-d. It is for this reason that he states afterwards: "Therefore my heart rejoices" to see that G-d is supporting my left hand. David ends the psalm stating: the pleasantness of your right hand is eternity" - not in my right hand, because the intellect is supported by the right hand of G-d which is opposite my left hand. Therefore, G-d commanded us to put on

צריכין לדבר המזכיר אותם על מציאת הש"י ויכלתו ועי"ז ישובו מאון.

יט. כלי יקר על שמות י"ג:ט"ז:ג'
 (ג) דבר אחר, לכך הזכיר יד כהה להורות שלא בכח יגבר איש כי אם לה' המלחמה, לפי שיד האדם כהה וחלושה מלעשות גדולה או קטנה אם לא כי יד ה' עשתה זאת המחזיק בידו, כמ"ש (תהלים טז ח) שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד וגו', כי מתחילה היה דוד מצטער על הנחת הלב ביד שמאל והכבד בצד ימין כאילו היה רצון האל שכח המתאוה יהיה עיקר והשכל שבלב טפל כמו שיד ימין עיקר והשמאל טפל, ואח"כ אמר שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד ואז יד שמאלי כנגד ימין ה', ובזה אני בוטח כי מימיני בל אמוט שלא יהיה כח בתאוה שבימין למוטט אותי מן דרך הישר, לפי שימין ה' רוממה ליתן עוז ותעצומות אל הלב השכלי שכנגדו כשפני לנגד ה', לכן שמח לבי בראותי כי ה' סומך ידי, וזהו שמסיים ואמר נעימות בימינך נצח, משמע ולא בימיני לפי שהכל תלוי בימין ה' כי היא כנגד יד כהה שלי, וע"כ צוה ה' להניח התפילין אשר שם ה' חקוק בהם על יד כהה להורות שיד ה' החזקה הימנית היא הנותנת כח ליד כהה זו, ז"ש כי בחוזק יד הוציאנו ה' ממצרים היינו יד ה' הימנית החזקה אשר היא כנגד יד שמאל שבאדם ובה

Tefilin, where the name of G-d is engraved on them on the weaker hand, to teach us that the strength of G-d's right hand gives our left hand strength. This is the meaning of the verse: כי בחזק יד הוציאנו ה' ממצרים. G-d's right hand opposite man's left hand took us out of Egypt. This in turn teaches that no deed is dependent upon man's action, rather with the help of G-d.

הוציאנו ה', ובהיות פני כנגד ה' אז ימינו כנגד יד כהה, ולהורות נתן בלבם שאין שום מעשה תלוי בפעולת האדם כ"א בעזר השם ית'.

20. DESIRE VS. GOD'S WILL

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21. Excerpt from 'Catharsis' by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

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The idea of catharsis through the dialectical movement manifests itself in all Halachic norms regulating human life. Nowhere, however, does this doctrine of dialectical catharsis assert itself more frequently than it does in the aesthetic-hedonic realm.

How does man purge himself in this realm? By engaging in the dialectical movement by withdrawing, at the moment when passion reaches its peak. The stronger the grip of the physiological drive is felt by man, the more intoxicating and bewildering the prospect of hedonic gratification, **the greater the redemptive capacity of the dialectical catharsis - of the movement of recoil.**

בטנך ערמת חטים-

אדם נושא אשה בת כ' או בת שלשים משיוציא יציאותיו הוא בא להזדקק לה והיא אומרת לו כשושנה אדומה ראיתי והוא פורש ממנה מיד ומי גרם לו שלא קרב אליה אי זה כותל יש ביניהם ואי זה סייג ואי זה נחש נשכו ואי זה עקרב עקצו. אלא מי עקצו דברי תורה שהן רכין כשושנה שכתוב בה (ויקרא יח יט) ואל אשה בנדת טמאתה לא תקרב. וכן הוא מי שהביאו לו תמחוי של בשר והוא רעב לאכול אמרו חלב נפל בתוכו מיד מושך ידו הימנו ולא טעמו ומי גרם לו שלא לטעום אלא דברי תורה שהן רכין כשושנה. כמה דאת אמר בהן (ויקרא ג יז) כל חלב וכל דם לא תאכלו

Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies. It often happens that a man takes a wife when he is forty years of age. When, after going to great expense, he wishes to associate with her, she says to him, 'I have seen a rose-red speck,' he immediately recoils. What made him retreat and keep away from her? Was there an iron fence, did a serpent bite him, did a scorpion sting him? A dish of meat is placed before a man and he is told some forbidden fat has fallen into it. He withdraws his hand from the food. What stopped him from tasting it? Did a serpent bite him; did a scorpion sting him? Only the words of the Torah which are as soft as a bed of lilies.

-Shir HaShirim Rabbah to Song 7:3

Bride and bridegroom are young, physically strong, and passionately in love with each other. Both have patiently waited for this rendezvous to take place. Just one more step and their love would have been fulfilled, a vision realized. **Suddenly the bride and groom make a movement of recoil. He, gallantly, like a chivalrous knight, exhibits paradoxical heroism. He takes his own defeat. There is no glamor attached to his withdrawal.** The latter is not a spectacular gesture, since there are no witnesses to admire and to laud him. The heroic act did not take place in the presence of jubilating crowds; no bards will sing of these two modest, humble young people. It happened in the sheltered privacy of their home, in the stillness of the night. The young man, like Jacob of old, makes an about-face; he retreats at the moment when fulfillment seems assured.

This kind of divine dialectical discipline is not limited to man's sexual life, but extends to all areas of natural drive and temptation. The hungry person must forego the pleasure of taking food, no matter how strong the temptation; men of property must forego the pleasure of acquisition, if the latter is halachically and morally wrong. In a word, Halacha requires of man that he possess the capability of withdrawal. Of course, as we have made evident above, man is called, following the movement of withdrawal, to advance once again, toward full victory.

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22. **THE FIRST MITZVAH (NATIONAL)** .כב.
23. **Exodus 12:2** .כג. **שמות י"ב:ב'**
 (2) This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. (ב) הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה:
24. Why is the new moon/ the creation of the lunar calendar the first national mitzvah? (Brit Milah had been given to Avraham, but this is the first mitzvah given to the entire people.) .כד.
25. **Sforno on Exodus 12:2:1** .כה. **ספורנו על שמות י"ב:ב:א'**
 (1) These months will be yours, to do with as you like. [you have My authority to (א) הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים מִכָּאן וְאֵילַךְ יִהְיוּ הַחֳדָשִׁים שְׁלֹכֶם,

organise your own calendar. Ed.] This is by way of contrast to the years when you were enslaved when you had no control over your time or timetable at all. [Freedom, i.e. retirement from the "rat race," means being able to formulate one's own timetable. Ed.] While you were enslaved, your days, hours, minutes even, were always at the beck and call of your taskmasters.

לעשות בהם כרצונכם, אבל בימי
השעבוד לא היו ימיכם שלכם, אבל היו
לעבודת אחרים ורצונם, לפיכך ראשון
הוא לכם לחדשי השנה. כי בו התחיל
מציאותכם הבחירי:

26. Excerpt from 'Sacred and Profane' by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

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From Slavery to Freedom

The basic criterion which distinguishes freeman from slave is the kind of relationship each has with time and its experience. Bondage is identical with passive intuition and reception of an empty, formal time stream.

When the Jews were delivered from the Egyptian oppression, and Mosheh rose to undertake the almost impossible task of metamorphosing a tribe of slaves into a "nation of priests" [Shemoth 19:16] he was told by G-d that the path leading from the holiday of Pesach to Shavu'oth, from initial liberation to consummate freedom (*Gillui Shechinah*, Revelation), leads through the medium of time. The commandment of *sefirah* was entrusted the Jew; the wondrous test of counting forty-nine successive days was put to him. Those forty-nine days must be whole. If one day be missed, the act of numeration is invalidated.

A slave who is capable of appreciating each day, of grasping its meaning and worth, of weaving every thread of time into a glorious fabric, quantitatively stretching over the period of seven weeks but qualitatively forming the warp and woof of centuries of change, is eligible for Torah. He has achieved freedom.

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27. Excerpt from 'Parshas Bo- Everything New Under the Moon' by Rav Yitzchak Adlerstein, part of his series 'The Timeless Rav Hirsch' and adapted from The Hirsch Chumash, Shemos 12:1-2

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Everything New Under the Moon¹

Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt, saying: This month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year.

The calendar described in this section, the first mitzvah given to the people about to become a nation, is a study in engineered inefficiency. And so it was meant to be. Efficiency, in the Torah's view, pales in comparison to the value of important instruction. **In this case, the inefficiency of the calendar tells us volumes about human free will.**

Calendars, we would think, ought to be linked to astronomical events that are known and predictable. We see great advantage in a calendar that would allow all people, in all places, to know in advance when the important events of the year will take place, so that they could plan accordingly, long in advance.

Such a calendar, however, would leave in place an impression that the Torah insists on overturning. Were our holidays linked to fixed astronomical events, we might conclude, as so many others did, that all of us – Man, G-d, and the way we relate to each other – are equally fixed and constrained.

If *Rosh Chodesh* were determined by the time of the earth receiving the first rays of sunlight reflected by the lunar mirror, we would be worshiping the dutiful periodicity of Nature. The Torah wants us to do nothing of the sort. We are not worshippers of Nature. It is not Nature and its regular ways that we celebrate each month. The waxing and the waning of the moon mean nothing to us, other than to act as symbols of the vicissitudes of life. **We are required to pass through times of darkness and obscurity – but they will always be followed by glimpses of illumination. The moon and its phases are no more than a model to us, challenging and prodding us to rejuvenate ourselves periodically, to renew our dedication to Him after a lapse of time in which the relationship may have become dulled.**

It is not the astronomical חודש – the first appearance of the new moon – that has us count the days till the מועד – the special days of encounter. Rather, it is the חידוש, the newness, that takes place within ourselves that allows us to spend time with G-d on the special days of the year. Because we can change and move towards Him, we experience something powerful when He makes Himself available to us. Without that change, we would just be commemorating the past, but it would not be a מועד, a meeting and encounter.

In other words, *Rosh Chodesh* is not determined so much by the moon as by the way it is noticed and perceived by us. Our calculation of the astronomical event does not fix the day of *Rosh Chodesh*. In the system that the Torah here describes, human beings must visually note the appearance of the moon. Their testimony has to be accepted by the court, which then formally proclaims the day as *Rosh Chodesh*. (Interestingly, this is only a requirement when the moon is cited by the witnesses on the day that it is expected to be seen by calculation, but not if the that day has already passed. It is only when the astronomical event coincides with the visual sighting that it is important to

downplay the role of “natural” law, and treat it as unworthy of veneration in its own right.) **It is Man that declares the New Moon – not the moon itself!**

Halacha dictates that the visual sighting predominates over the “actual” occurrence in other ways as well. The court can artificially tamper with the calendar and delay *Rosh Chodesh* for human convenience. In this way, they can prevent *Yom Kippur* from falling on the day before or after *Shabbos*, which would be a hardship. It is thus the human court that determines when the Heavenly one will meet in judgment of the people! The declaration of the court has finality, even when it is later learned that the testimony of the witnesses was inaccurate, whether by error or intentionally. In all these cases, human need trumps natural “fact.” The occurrences of holidays that count from the beginning of the month depend entirely on human input. They are fixed by us, and recognized by Heaven only after our declaration.

How foolish it is to cheer the establishment of the fixed calendar that we rely upon today as if it were a monumental achievement, an improvement upon the “primitive” method of the past. Our calendar is a sad concession to the realities of *galus*, of not having a court populated by judges with real *semicha*. Gone – until the restoration of the old system when the Redemption draws near – **is our consciousness of being the ones who control time, rather than time controlling us.**

28. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER .כח.
1. According to Rav Hirsch, what is of essential importance when it comes to declaring a new moon?
 2. What lessons are we meant to take from this seemingly "inefficient" process?
 3. What does this teach us about our own cycle of growth (waxing and waning) and our own connection to God?
29. CRUCIBLE MOMENTS: TRANSFORMING WOUNDS INTO PEARLS .כט.
30. 'Coping With Crucibles' by Bill George, Harvard Business School Professor .ל.

“Suffering is universal: You turn it around so that it becomes a creative, positive force,”
(Terry Waite).

Psychologist Abraham Maslow found that tragedy and trauma are the most important human learning experiences. Crucibles enable people to learn life is uncertain, and that they have limited control over events.

In recent years, a new reality is emerging that empowers individuals to look at their crucibles and difficult experiences as growth opportunities — we term this approach,

Post-Traumatic Growth.

Think of the most challenging moment in your life. Perhaps it was a time when a loved one passed away, or you had a personal health crisis. Or you lost your job or your family. Whatever it was, it was a time of crisis for you — but also a moment that caused you to reflect deeply about who you are and what is truly important in your life.

Traumatic moments propel many people into a downward spiral. As they refuse to address or even acknowledge their crucibles, they make the memories more painful. As a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are painfully aware of “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” — or PTSD — but this phenomenon doesn’t just happen to war victims or military veterans.

New research shows that traumatic experiences can result in post-traumatic growth (PTG). PTG starts by recognizing life’s uncertainties and embracing them as fundamental tenets of human existence. It also requires self-awareness to acknowledge your personal responsibility for the choices you make in life coupled with the desire to undergo personal transformation. As Warren Bennis explained in *Geeks and Geezers*, “Some magic takes place in the crucible of leadership. Whatever is thrown at them, leaders emerge from their crucibles stronger and unbroken.”

All of us face trials in our lives. How can you respond to your crucible to transform your deep feelings of loss — which are real and natural — into opportunities for personal growth?

After reading *True North*, Pedro Algorta, one of the survivors of the famous 1972 crash in the Andes mountains, reached out to me. In his letter, he wrote while flying with 45 friends, his plane crashed into the Andes. “After 72 days barely surviving in the mountains without food or clothing, sixteen of us were finally rescued.”

For 35 years, Algorta never mentioned being part of this experience to anyone other than his wife, in spite of the worldwide publicity the event received. As an MBA student at Stanford, he didn’t even share it with his classmates. After reading *True North*, he began to process how this event had shaped his life. When he visited my Harvard Business School classes in 2008 and 2013, he shared three ways to deal with crucibles:

- Focus on the event, and live your life looking backward, often an angry life of blaming others.
- Live your life as if nothing happened, while the memories and the pain remain deep inside you.
- Use the event to transform your wound into a pearl.

In my new book, *Discover Your True North*, Algorta shared the metaphor of the oyster pearl. When sand grates against the oyster, its natural reaction is to cover up the irritant to protect itself with a substance called nacre (mother-of-pearl), which eventually forms the pearl itself.

Are you turning your wounds into pearls?

To do so, you will need to reflect on the impact your crucible has had on your life and what you learned from the experience.

After discerning its meaning, you can reframe it as an opportunity for personal growth.

My crucible came when I least expected it. In my mid-20s, I was engaged to be married, just 18 months after my mother's sudden death. A few weeks before the wedding, my fiancée started having severe headaches. I took her to a leading neurosurgeon, but all her exams were negative. On a Saturday night three weeks before the wedding, we talked about final plans. The following morning her parents called to say she died during the night from a malignant brain tumor.

In the aftermath of her death, I could have easily become bitter and depressed and even lost my faith. In times of personal crisis, the power of faith and the support of close friends can provide the basis for healing. I was blessed to have both.

Together, they enabled me to accept this tragedy and to learn just how precious every day is and to appreciate fully the value of those who are there for us when things go wrong in our lives.

Tragic as the event was, it opened my heart to the deeper meaning of life. This tragedy caused me to think more profoundly about what I could contribute to others during my lifetime. As my wife Penny explained about her breast cancer diagnosis in 1996, "Life is what happens when you're expecting something else."

With all of life's uncertainties, we learn to accept what life brings us and to use each experience as an opportunity for personal growth. You cannot go through life without getting knocked down. The question is how you will respond, and whether you will come back stronger than ever. Rather than living an angry life, suppressing your crucibles, or living a fearful life, I urge you to embrace life's uncertainties and reframe them as learning opportunities in order to turn them into pearls of wisdom. If you do, you will lead a fuller, richer life, and you can help others to cope with life's challenges.

31. BRIEF RECAP .לא.
 -Our experience in Egypt was us going through a crucible, the Kur HaBarzel. God was refining us in some way.

 -There are several possibilities as to which aspect of us He refined. One of them is the ability to use intellect over our physical self/ earthly desires (halachic heroism.)

 -The first mitzvah we received had to do with the halachic calendar. This was to underscore the importance and value of time and also of *our choices* and our *free will* in determining a) when the month begins and b) what we would do with that time.

 Consider how all of this was possible because we actively turned our "wound into a pearl" - learned from our horrible experience in Egypt in order to understand HOW WE WOULD LIVE once we were redeemed.
32. **WHY ARE WE HERE?** .לב.
33. God took us out of Egypt for a purpose. He gave us His Torah, and He also gave us a command. We are here to do something specific. We are here...to be *kadosh*. .לג.
34. **Exodus 19:6** שמות י"ט:ו' .לד.
 (6) but **you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.”
 (1) וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מְמֻלְכֹת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
35. **Leviticus 19:1-2** ויקרא י"ט:א'-ב' .לה.
 (1) ה' spoke to Moses, saying: (2) Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: **You shall be holy, for I, your God ה', am holy.**
 (א) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל־כָּל־עֵדֻת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:
36. What does it mean to be holy? .לו.
37. **Rashi on Leviticus 19:2:2** רש"י על ויקרא י"ט:ב:ב' .לז.
 (2) YE SHALL BE HOLY — This means, **keep separate from the forbidden sexual relations** just mentioned and from sinful thoughts. [It is evident that this is the meaning of תהיו קדשים because]
 (ב) קדשים תהיו. הוּו פְּרוּשִׁים מִן הָעֲרִיּוֹת וּמִן הָעֵבֶרָה, שְׂפָל מְקוֹם שְׂאֵתָהּ מוֹצֵא גֹדֵר עֲרוּהָ אֵתָהּ מוֹצֵא

wherever you find in the Torah a command to fence yourself in against such relations you also find mention of "holiness". Examples are: (Leviticus 21:7) "[They shall not take] a wife that is a harlot, or a profane etc.", and in the next verse "for I, the Lord, who sanctifieth you, [am holy]"; (Leviticus 21:15) "Neither shall he profane his seed (by the forbidden unions mentioned in the preceding verses) for I the Lord do sanctify him"; (Leviticus 21:6) "They shall be holy... followed by (v. 7) "[they shall not take] a wife that is a harlot or a profane" (cf. Vayikra Rabbah 24:4-6).

38. **Ramban on Leviticus 19:2:2**

(2) YE SHALL BE HOLY. "Abstain from the forbidden sexual relationships [mentioned in the preceding section] and from [other] sin, because wherever you find [in the Torah] a warning to guard against immorality, you find the mention of 'holiness.'" This is Rashi's language. But in the Torath Kohanim I have seen it mentioned without any qualification [i.e., without any particular reference to immorality, as Rashi expressed it], saying: "Be self-restraining." Similarly, the Rabbis taught there: "*And ye shall sanctify yourselves, and be ye holy, for I am Holy.* Just as I am Holy, so be you holy. Just as I am Pure, so be you pure." And in my opinion, this abstinence does not refer only to restraint from acts of immorality, as the Rabbi [Rashi] wrote, **but it is rather the self-control mentioned throughout the Talmud, which confers upon those who practice it the name of P'rushim (Pharisees), [literally: "those who are separated" from self-indulgence, as will be explained, or those who practice self-restraint].** The meaning thereof is as follows: The Torah has admonished us against immorality and forbidden foods,

קְדוּשָׁה, אִשָּׁה זֹנָה וְחֻלְלָה וְגו' אֲנִי ה'
מְקַדְשְׁכֶם (ויקרא כ"א), וְלֹא יִחַלֵּל זְרָעוֹ,
אֲנִי ה' מְקַדְשׁוֹ (שם), קְדוּשִׁים יְהִיוּ,
אִשָּׁה זֹנָה וְחֻלְלָה (שם):

לח. רמב"ן על ויקרא י"ט:ב:ב'
(ב) קדושים תהיו הוּו פרושים מן
העריות ומן העבירה שכל מקום שאתה
מוצא גדר ערוה אתה מוצא קדושה
לשון רש"י (רש"י על ויקרא י"ט:ב:ב')
אבל בתורת כהנים (פרשה א ב) ראיתי
סתם פרושים תהיו וכן שנו שם (שמני
פרק יב ג) והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים
כי קדוש אני כשם שאני קדוש כך אתם
תהיו קדושים כשם שאני פרוש כך
אתם תהיו פרושים ולפי דעתי אין
הפרישות הזו לפרוש מן העריות כדברי
הרב אבל הפרישות היא המוזכרת
בכל מקום בתלמוד שבעליה
נקראים פרושים והענין כי התורה
הזהירה בעריות ובמאכלים האסורים
והתירה הביאה איש באשתו ואכילת
הבשר והיין א"כ ימצא בעל התאווה
מקום להיות שטוף בזמת אשתו או נשוי
הרבות ולהיות בסובאי יין בזוללי בשר
למו וידבר כרצונו בכל הנבלות שלא
הוזכר איסור זה בתורה והנה יהיה נבל
ברשות התורה לפיכך בא הכתוב

but permitted sexual intercourse between man and his wife, and the eating of [certain] meat and wine. If so, a man of desire could consider this to be a permission to be passionately addicted to sexual intercourse with his wife or many wives, and be *among winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh*, and speak freely all profanities, since this prohibition has not been [expressly] mentioned in the Torah, and thus **he will become a sordid person within the permissible realm of the Torah!** Therefore, after having listed the matters which He prohibited altogether, Scripture followed them up by a general command that we practice moderation even in matters which are permitted, [such as in the following]: One should minimize sexual intercourse, similar to that which the Rabbis have said, “So that the disciples of the Sages should not be found together with their wives as often as the hens,” and he should not engage in it except as required in fulfillment of the commandment thereof. He should also sanctify himself [to self-restraint] by using wine in small amounts, just as Scripture calls a Nazirite “holy” [for abstaining from wine and strong drink], and he should remember the evils which the Torah mentioned as following from [drinking wine] in the cases of Noah and Lot. Similarly, he should keep himself away from impurity [in his ordinary daily activity], even though we have not been admonished against it in the Torah, similar to that which the Rabbis have said: “For the *Prushim* (Pharisees), the clothes of the unlearned are considered as if trodden upon by a *zav*” [or *zavah* — a man or woman having suffered a flux], and just as the Nazirite is called “holy” because of guarding himself from the impurity of the dead. Likewise he should guard his mouth and tongue from being defiled by excessive food and by lewd talk, similar to what

אחרי שפרט האיסורים שאסר אותם
לגמרי וצוה בדבר כללי שנהיה פרושים
מן המותרות ימעט במשגל כענין
שאמרו (ברכות כב) שלא יהיו תלמידי
חכמים מצויין אצל נשותיהן כתרנגולין
ולא ישמש אלא כפי הצריך בקיום
המצוה ממנו ויקדש עצמו מן היין
במיעוטו כמו שקרא הכתוב (במדבר ו
ה) הנזיר קדוש ויזכור הרעות הנזכרות
ממנו בתורה (בראשית ט כא) בנה
ובלוט וכן יפריש עצמו מן הטומאה
אע"פ שלא הוזהרנו ממנה בתורה כמו
שהזכירו (חגיגה יח) בגדי עם הארץ
מדרס לפרושים וכמו שנקרא הנזיר
קדוש (במדבר ו ה) בשמרו מטומאת
המת גם כן וגם ישמור פיו ולשונו
מהתגאל ברבוי האכילה הגסה ומן
הדבור הנמאס כענין שהזכיר הכתוב
(ישעיהו ט טז) וכל פה דובר נבלה
ויקדש עצמו בזה עד שיגיע לפרישות
כמה שאמרו על רבי חייא שלא שח
שיחה בטלה מימיו באלו ובכיוצא בהן
באה המצוה הזאת הכללית אחרי
שפרט כל העבירות שהן אסורות לגמרי
עד שיכנס בכלל זאת הצוואה הנקיות
בידיו וגופו כמו שאמרו (ברכות נג)
והתקדשתם אלו מים ראשונים והייתם
קדושים אלו מים אחרונים כי קדוש זה
שמן ערב כי אע"פ שאלו מצות
מדבריהם עיקר הכתוב בכיוצא בזה
יזהיר שנהיה נקיים וטהורים ופרושים
מהמון בני אדם שהם מלכלכים עצמם
במותרות ובכיעורים וזה דרך התורה
לפרוט ולכלול בכיוצא בזה כי אחרי
אזהרת פרטי הדינין בכל משא ומתן
שבין בני אדם לא תגנוב ולא תגזול ולא

Scripture states, *and every mouth speaketh wantonness*, and he should purify himself in this respect until he reaches the degree known as [complete] “self-restraint,” as the Rabbis said concerning Rabbi Chiya, that never in his life did he engage in unnecessary talk. It is with reference to these and similar matters that this general commandment [*Ye shall be holy*] is concerned, after He had enumerated all individual deeds which are strictly forbidden, so that cleanliness of hands and body, are also included in this precept, just like the Rabbis have said: “*And ye shall sanctify yourselves*.” This refers to the washing of hands before meals. *And be ye holy*. This refers to the washing of hands after meals [before the reciting of grace]. *For I am holy* — this alludes to the spiced oil” [with which they used to rub their hands after a meal]. For although these [washings and perfuming of the hands] are commandments of Rabbinic origin, yet Scripture’s main intention is to warn us of such matters, that we should be [physically] clean and [ritually] pure, and separated from the common people who soil themselves with luxuries and unseemly things. And such is the way of the Torah, that after it lists certain specific prohibitions, it includes them all in a general precept. Thus after warning with detailed laws regarding all business dealings between people, such as not to steal or rob or to wrong one another, and other similar prohibitions, He said in general, *And thou shalt do that which is right and good*, thus including under a positive commandment the duty of doing that which is right and of agreeing to a compromise [when not to do so would be inequitable]; as well as all requirements to act “beyond” the line of justice [i.e., to be generous in not insisting upon one’s rights as defined by the strict letter of the law, but to agree to act “beyond” that line of the strict law] for the

תונו ושאר האזהרות אמר בכלל ועשית
הישר והטוב (דברים ו יח) שיכניס
בעשה היושר וההשויה וכל לפנים
משורת הדין לרצון חבריו כאשר אפרש
(שם) בהגיעי למקומו ברצון הקב"ה וכן
בענין השבת אסר המלאכות בלאו
והטרחים בעשה כללי שנאמר תשבות
ועוד אפרש זה (רמב"ן על ויקרא
כ"ג:כ"ד) בע"ה:

sake of pleasing one's fellowman, as I will explain when I reach there [that verse], with the will of the Holy One, blessed be He. Similarly in the case of the Sabbath, He prohibited doing certain classes of work by means of a negative commandment, and painstaking labors [not categorized as "work," such as transferring heavy loads in one's yard from one place to another, etc.] He included under a general positive commandment, as it is said, *but on the seventh day thou shalt rest*. I will yet explain this with the help of G-d.

39. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER .לט
1. What are the different possibilities referred to when the Torah talks about being holy (Rashi vs. Ramban)?
 2. How do both of them understand the role of separation in holiness?
 3. Which approach do you find more persuasive and why?
40. Let us contrast this with the rebellion of Korach. .מ
41. **Numbers 16:3** .מא
- (3) They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! **For all the community are holy**, all of them, and ה' is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above יהוה's congregation?"

במדבר ט"ז:ג'
 (ג) וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ
 אֱלֹהִים רַב־לָכֶם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כֹּהִם
 קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה' וּמָדוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ
 עַל־קְהַל ה':

Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt's Dvar Torah on Korach

Korach's argument was that all of the nation was inherently holy or exceptional, due to pedigree or according to some sources, due to experience at Sinai. he exclaims. We are all holy! כולנו קדושים.

This is in contrast with the Mosaic tradition, which is קדושים תהיו, "You *shall* be holy!"

Greatness is not inherent- it should be forever aspirational.

It is not a question of being-but rather of becoming.

Many love to believe in exceptionalism (whether religious or national) because it is comfortable. It does not demand anything of us. We don't have to try harder.

In my work as both a journalist and a rebbetzin, I see many who fashion themselves to be religious leaders who are personally complacent, comfortable, purport to know everything, to have all the answers, to declare themselves holy, inherently. They sit on thrones and bless people, imagining that they've already achieved greatness, whether by virtue of their pedigree or schooling or the color of their shirts...but truly religious leadership is about sharing humbly in the journey with others. It's about modeling genuinely that greatness is never inherent for human beings. That it is something we *all* strive for. Continuously.

The journey is never over, as long as we live.

Excerpt from *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State* by Yeshayahu Leibowitz

The Judaism of Moses is arduous. It means knowing that we are *not* a holy people. The Judaism of Quorah (Korach) is very comforting. It allows every Jew to be proud and boast that he is a member of the holy people, which is holy by its very nature. This obligates him to nothing. There is no greater opposition than that between the conception of *Am Segulah* (a chosen people) as implying subjection to an obligation and *Am Segulah* as purely a privilege.

[...]

The uniqueness of the Jewish people is not a *fact*; it is an endeavor. The holiness of Israel is not a reality but a task. "Holy" is an attribute that applies exclusively to God. It is therefore inapplicable to anything in the natural or historical domain. He who does so apply it is guilty of idolatry. He exalts something natural or human to the level of the divine.

The uniqueness of the Jewish people is a direction and a target. Were it reality, it would have no value. The people of Israel were not the chosen people but were *commanded* to be the chosen people. In what does its being chosen consist? This is made perfectly clear in the wording of the benediction "who has chosen us from among all peoples and has given us His Torah." The Jewish people has no intrinsic uniqueness. Its uniqueness rather consists in the demand laid on it. The people may or may not heed this demand. Therefore its fate is not guaranteed.

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LIVING A REDEEMED LIFE

So we are here to become holy. What does that look like in our actual lives? How do we refine ourselves, reenacting the Kur HaBarzel of Egypt, in order to live redeemed lives?

Excerpt from *Olam HaMiddos: A Guide to Understanding Ourselves and Refining Our Character* by Rabbi Moshe Don Kestenbaum

CHAPTER ONE: THE PURPOSE OF OUR EXISTENCE

הַחֲזִק בְּמוֹסֵר אֶל־תִּרְרָה נִצְרָה כִּי־הִיא חַיִּיךָ:

Hold fast to discipline, do not let go; guard it, for it is your life (Mishlei 4:13).

With regard to this pasuk, the Vilna Gaon writes that the reason a person is alive is so that he can correct a *middah* that he has not yet rectified. Therefore, he says, a person must constantly strengthen himself in this regard, and if he does not, what purpose is there to his life?

The Gaon's words make it clear to us that a person's purpose in this world is to perfect his *middos*- and that *tikkun hamiddos* is not simply a nice or pious thing to do, but rather something fundamental, something on which a person must always focus.

The Rambam teaches us (Hilchos Teshuvah 7:3) that *teshuvah* is not limited to sins involving actions; a person also needs to repent for his bad *middos*, such as anger, jealousy, pursuit of money or honor, gluttony and the like. **The sin of bad *middos*, the Rambam writes, is far more serious than the sin of actions, for it is more difficult for a person to tear himself away from bad *middos* than bad actions.**

The source of the obligation to rectify one's *middos* is found in the *pasuk*: והלכת בדרכיו, *And you shall go in His ways* (Devarim 28:9), as the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Dei'os* (1:5).

Rav Chaim Vital (*Shaarei Kedushah* 1:2) offers an illuminating and powerful insight: There are two souls within a person: a base soul, upon which a person's character traits depend, and a lofty soul, which is connected to the person's mitzvah observance. The person is able to keep the Torah and thereby elevate his higher soul only through the base soul, which is attached to the body. **Bad *middos* are therefore**

far more serious than the sins themselves, for they are the basis and prerequisite for everything. Accordingly, when our Sages say that anger is tantamount to idol worship or arrogance to denial of Hashem, they are to be taken literally. Therefore, Rav Chaim concludes, one has to be careful with bad *middos* even more than with fulfilling the actual mitzvos, for with good *middos* he will be readily able to okeep all the mitzvos.

TORAH: NOT FOR ANGELS

The Alter of Novadhok, in his *sefer Madreigas Ha'adam* (*Cheshbon Hatzedek* Ch. 7) explains that this concept of the primacy of *tikkun hamiddos* sheds light on the Sages' teaching that "The conversation of the servants of the *Avos* is more precious to Hashem than the Torah of their children" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 60). Many of the Torah's laws are written in succinct language that must be interpreted through Talmudic methodology (such as *gezeirah shavah* and *binyan av*), while the discussion that Eliezer, Avraham's servant, had with Besuel and Lavan, is recorded in the Torah at great length, with every detail mentioned explicitly. That is because the essence and goal of the Torah is *tikkun hamiddos*.

We can see this, says the Alter, from the Sages' teaching that the reason the Torah was not given to the angels is- as Moshe Rabbeinu argued to the angels- "Is there any jealousy among you? Is there any hatred among you?" (Shabbos 89a). Apparently, it is precisely because human beings have flawed *middos* that we were given the Torah, in order to help us fix our *middos*. Accordingly, since the conversation of Eliezer teaches us how he overcame his own *middos* and self-interest in finding a wife for Yitzchak- whom he had wanted for his own daughter- the Torah records the discussion in great detail.

With this insight of the *Madreigas Ha'adam* we can understand the following teaching of the Midrash. The Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 8:13) states that Hashem exhorts the Jewish people, "Be mindful that you not hate one another or envy one another or stir up a quarrel with one another or shame one another, so that the ministering angels do not say before me, 'Master of the universe, the Torah that you gave the Jewish people, they do not engage in.'" Why does Hashem need to address the angels, and why specifically regarding this issue of character flaws? The answer is that Hashem is cautioning the Jewish people to rectify their *middos*, for otherwise the angels will have grounds to maintain their argument that the Torah should have remained in their possession.

From the wording of this Midrash, we can infer that a person who learns Torah but does not rectify his *middos* properly is not considered to be truly engaged (עוסק) in Torah, for the Midrash stresses that the Jewish people's character flaws, not their lack of toil in Torah, is the reason the angels will say that the Jews are

not engaged in Torah. This is because, as we have shown, the entire purpose of the Torah is perfecting one's *middos*, and one is therefore not considered a true student of Torah if his learning does not bring him to perfect his character.

-pages 23-25

Note that we need to work at it. Just learning Torah and hoping that somehow it will seep in and transform our middos is not enough.

Translation of an excerpt from *Sefer Even Sheleimah* by the Vilna Gaon

11- The topic of the Torah to the soul is analogous to the rain to the ground, **that it causes to grow whatever is planted in it, an elixir of life or elixir of death. So too with the Torah, it causes to grow whatever is in his heart.** If his heart is good, the Torah will cause his fear (of God) to grow. And if in his heart there is a source, “a root that bears gall and wormwood” (Deuteronomy 29:17) the Torah will cause *that* negative feeling to grow in his heart like it is written “the righteous walk in *them* (God’s ways) and the transgressors stumble in *them*” (Hosea 14:10). And like they say in BT Sabbath 88b “And that is what Rava said: To those who are right-handed in their approach to Torah, and engage in its study with strength, good will, and sanctity, Torah is a drug of life, and to those who are left-handed in their approach to Torah, it is a drug of death.”

Therefore, he needs to clear his heart every day prior to and after his learning from the reek of the negative thoughts and character traits, with fear of sin and with good deeds. And this is considered when they [the Sages] discuss what one does in the bathroom (the body ridding itself of waste) and regarding this [**ridding oneself of *spiritual* waste**] they hinted when they said in Brachot 8b [we looked this up and ACTUALLY it’s 8a; this is a mistake by the publisher] “the time of finding refers to finding a lavatory” and this is also what they say in Brachot 55a “in praise of one who prolongs his time in the bathroom” and this is also what they say in Brachot 62a “Ben Azzai said: Rise early in the morning and go defecate, wait for evening and go defecate.” This means to say in his youth (that’s what “rise early” refers to) and in his old age (that’s what “evening” refers to), that you should not distance from your Creator a great distance, because then she (the Torah) won’t be able to help. And he needs to feel out whichever bad quality is strengthened in him, and after this he should clear it out. He should not be like *Baalei Taavah*, desirous individuals, who fast, and their desire becomes even stronger. And he needs for this great shrewdness/cunning, shrewdness in fear, against (to counteract) the shrewd/cunning serpent. (The serpent in biblical literature is a reference to the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination.) **And the one who is too lazy to search out every bad quality, all of the boundaries and fences that he makes won’t help him because any malady that is**

not cured from within [is not really healed.] And even the fence of the Torah, that is a shield and a salvation, is destroyed through his laziness (Proverbs 24:31, 19:15, 25:4).

And for those who are married...

Excerpt from *Olam HaMiddos* by Rabbi Moshe Don Kestenbaum, pages 26-28

It is said in the name of Rav Chaim Vital that a person's *middos* [character traits] are assessed purely on the basis of how he treats his wife: מדותיו של אדם נמדדות אך ורק כפי יחסו אל אשתו. This statement is puzzling, however, for why should a person's *middos* be assessed solely on the basis of how he treats his wife, and not on the basis of his interactions with other people? True, the marriage relationship is more important than other interpersonal relationships (as explained below, p.199), but why is it the *only* factor in assessing a person's *middos*? Moreover, it is probable that a person spends most of his time outside his home. Considering that his interactions with his wife constitute a small portion of his time, why, then are his *middos* assessed purely on the basis of the way he treats her?

In order to answer this question, we need to recognize that the obligation of *tikkun hamiddos* [rectifying one's character traits] is not merely an external requirement to behave kindly and pleasantly with others. Rather, it is an internal obligation that requires us to refine our inner emotions and to perfect them, according to the will of the Torah. Just as we understand that envy is a trait that lurks inside a person's heart, the same is true of all *middos*. Let's say a person performs many kind deeds. That is an impressive achievement, but it does not prove that the person has truly acquired the *middah* of *chesed* [kindness], that he truly cares about others. The obligation to rectify one's *middos* involves improving our inner character so that the *middos* will be implanted in our souls. To the degree he has perfected his inner character, so are his *middos* measured.

If you want to know what a person's true inner character is, look at the way he treats his wife. We've all seen people who appear to be good- they have good *middos*, they perform *chesed*- but at home they turn into completely different people, and unfortunately do not treat their wives properly. Sadly, therefore, there are many Jewish homes that are filled with conflict. The reason for this phenomenon is that since a person wants to find favor in people's eyes, and wants to be liked and respected by them, he naturally behaves calmly around them. Without much thought and effort he is motivated to behave properly. He is certainly afraid to do something truly bad in front of others, for he is afraid of what they will say about him. Consequently, the good behavior and good *middos* that he displays before others

are not altruistic, as he is acting this way only in order to earn their respect. **In contrast, in his interactions with his wife he is not afraid to show his bad *middos*, since he does not receive any honor for displaying good behavior and good *middos* around her. Therefore, the way a person treats his wife shows us to what extent he has perfected his inner character.**

Furthermore, when a person is in the presence of other people, he can easily hide his true feelings. Even if he harbors ill will toward a close friend, he is capable of concealing those feelings, for two reasons. One, since he does not always have to be in the presence of that friend, he can wait until his anger dissipates. Two, even if he does have to be with that friend, their relationship doesn't require so much love that it would be obvious from his behavior that he is upset with his friend. **The relationship of marriage, on the other hand, requires constant love, and therefore, if a husband is angry with his wife, it is difficult for him to hide his anger, and it is virtually impossible that he will treat her the same way he treats her when he is not angry at her.**

Additionally, if the husband's heart is filled with grievances against his wife, it is practically impossible that she, with her woman's intuition, will not sense it. For this reason, we find that at times, a woman is unhappy in her marriage, and her husband does not understand why; after all, he is treating her respectfully! But because she understands what is really going on inside him she is able to discern his true inner feelings and sense that real love and appreciation is missing, which causes her pain.

In addition, the relationship between husband and wife is very delicate. The wife is sensitive to any insult from her husband, and vice versa. Therefore, in order for love and peace to reign between them, and for them not to offend each other, there has to be true *tikkun hamiddos*.

TAKEAWAYS

We experienced the Kur HaBarzel/ The Crucible to refine us as a people. God desired to separate the gold from the dross (whether in terms of wicked people or wicked attributes).

When God gave us the first mitzvah, he was affirming our ability to control our time (and use it well) and to have and use our own free will. This is the transition from being slaves to free men- a major part of the redemption.

We are here to be *kadosh*. Being *kadosh*, holy, is an *active* process. We are constantly *becoming*. We are constantly growing. We are constantly striving.

How do we do this? Of course, there are the mitzvot. But we can get complacent when it comes to mitzvot. We can say, "Oh, I already keep Shabbat. I keep Kashrut. I'm a good Jew. I'm holy enough." The deeper and more difficult work in living a redeemed life is to continue the work God began

when He gave us control of our lives- through giving us control of our time and our choices. We live a redeemed life by refining our character, especially our *middos*. This challenging work is a lifelong process. It is why we are here.



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