

בשבת

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INTERNAL CONTROL

Last we left Yosef, he was languishing in jail, alone and forgotten. Though he had given his assistance to Pharaoh's wine bearer, the wine bearer did not return the favor, and failed to mention Yosef's plight to Pharaoh. All this changed when, two years later, Pharaoh woke in a panic after having two very disturbing dreams. He called his wise men and magicians, and although they offered their interpretations, none of them settled Pharaoh's mind.¹

At this point, the *Medrash*² explains, the wine bearer feared for his livelihood. He realized that the dreams were not just nuisances to Pharaoh, but they were driving Pharaoh mad. If Pharaoh were to die, the wine bearer may very well lose his job! Thus, to protect his income, he spoke up and mentioned Yosef and his ability to clarify enigmatic dreams.

The wine bearer describes Yosef as, "a youth, a foreigner, and a slave." The *Medrash* points out that even when the wicked do good, they mix it with evil. Instead of praising Yosef, he refers to him derisively. In the *Medrash's* words, "A foolish youth, a despised foreigner, and a slave, who is forbidden from rising to any level of rule."

This *Medrash* is perplexing — what did the wine bearer want? Was he interested in self-preservation or not? If he wanted Yosef to be taken seriously, why would he speak ill of him? And if he felt that Yosef was a charlatan, why did he think Yosef's suggestions would be accepted, when the wise men and magicians' suggestions were not?

It is clear from the *Medrash* that the wine bearer truly felt that Yosef held the key to his future. Nevertheless, he could not stop himself from demeaning Yosef's stature because of the wine bearer's very nature; he was not a good man.

What we find here is a shocking insight into human nature. One may think that bad *middos* are something that one can turn on and off. Yet, despite the wine bearer's desperate desire to see Yosef's success, his bad *middos* caused him to be self-destructive! He simply could not speak well of Yosef, he just had to undermine Yosef's character.

We all know that bad *middos* are hurtful to those around us, but if one does not control their bad *middos*, their bad *middos* will end up controlling them.

¹ Bereishis 41:1-8

² Bereishis Rabbah 89:7

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Perhaps the most challenging part of being undermined by our own bad *middos* is the fact that we often don't even realize that we are doing it! Only later, when looking back, do we realize we were acting through arrogance, laziness, or deceit. This being so, how do we determine what is truly pushing us as we make our way through life?

Hashem has given each individual the capability to discern even the most minute area that needs improvement.¹ How does one access this amazing ability?

It's actually quite simple. When trying to determine what *middah* is driving a particular course of action, find a quiet space and question oneself, "Am I doing this because I want accolades? Would I do this even if nobody knew about it? Perhaps I'm refraining because I'm nervous about something?"

By simply taking the time to think through the various possible causes of one's actions, one's thoughts will 'click' when one's true motivations are brought into focus.²

¹ Ran on Nedarim 81a, s.v. דבר זה

² Chovos HaLevovos, Introduction



Thank you Hashem for allowing me to strengthen Mussar learning, which is tragically akin to a Mes Mitzvah nowadays. - R' Yechezkel Levenstein, Ohr Yechezkel, Michtav 379

Wishing a Happy Birthday to Mrs. Susie Bensoussan.
May you experience only *nachas* and *brocha* always.
With love and admiration, Cousin Sue Plastrik
New York, New York

OCCUPIED WITH AN OCCUPATION

My wife saved my life. I mean in the figurative sense, but I feel that what she did was just as life-saving as if she did CPR.

I'm an accountant by trade, having started my own company when I was still single. Being a small business owner, I worked ridiculous hours. It wasn't uncommon to see me waking at five after going to bed at two. There were times I slept in the office.

When I got married, it was with the understanding that I am running a business, and would often work on Sundays as well. And even when I got home, I was too tired to have a meaningful conversation with my wife. I just wanted to read the news and relax.

Even after our children were born, the only real time I was able to spend with my family was on Shabbos and Yom Tov. But somehow there were always things to take care of — friends to speak to, maybe a little learning, etc.

This continued for eleven years. During this time, my firm really took off. We hired staff, and found a new location. I had a lot of responsibilities, but *Boruch Hashem*, we were not just financially stable, but quite well-to-do.

All this came crashing down during *Chol HaMoed Sukkos*. Despite my tumultuous schedule, I try to avoid working on *Chol HaMoed*. This gives my wife the ability to schedule some trips. However, right before we were all about to leave to the zoo, I received a phone call. One minute led to five, and a half hour later my frustrated wife walked out with the kids. The phone call finished up soon thereafter, but I needed to check something on the computer, and before I knew it, the family was already home.

"What are you trying to avoid?" asked my wife later that evening. "It seems that no matter what, you always find something to do, instead of spending time with your family."

I had a thousand excuses. I argued that it was my work, my exhaustion, even my natural personality. But by the end of the evening I knew something had to change.

The day after Sukkos, I took the day off. I spent the day on the phone, speaking to an old friend of mine. His words hit the mark. He pointed out how it really wasn't about the work, the money, or the responsibility. It was my way of avoiding a true relationship, and in the long run, how I was hurting myself and my family.

It was a painful conversation, and I struggled mightily with the implications of the past, and the challenge of the future. But I realized that what I called my 'drive,' 'energy' and 'obligations,' were really just a front and an excuse. Of course, things still needed to get done at work, but I learned to delegate more, and tried my best to keep my work at work.

Looking back, I can't believe what I was thinking. My family life is so much better, and I'm a much happier person for it. My bad *middos* were controlling me, and I simply had no idea.

**Based on a true story.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Jealousy can cause a person to choose to have his own eye blinded, so as to not allow someone else to have good fortune.¹
- Even the greatest sages struggled to discern if their good or bad *middos* were driving them.²

¹ *Orchos Tzadikim*, Gate of Jealousy

² *Chovos HaLevovos*, Introduction

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