

בְּשִׁיטְיָחָה

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HARSH HABITS

After Avraham Avinu's miraculous victory over the mighty four kings, we find the king of Sodom greeting Avraham — which would not have been odd if not for the fact that he should have been dead!

When the king of Sodom was defeated by the four kings, the *passuk* states that while fleeing, he fell into a tar pit, something that would mean certain death.¹ How, did the king of Sodom survive?

The Ramban² explains that in Avraham's honor, a miracle occurred. When Avraham was thrown into a fiery furnace by Nimrod, Hashem saved Avraham, but there were those who were skeptical — did Avraham truly survive a furnace?

To satisfy the doubters, Hashem caused the king of Sodom to be miraculously extricated from the tar pits, just as Avraham came to rescue him, in order to save Avraham the trouble of rescuing the king. If Avraham's merit could save another from certain death, reasoned the populace, then he certainly was able to save himself!

Avraham was obviously favoured by Hashem, and if one wanted to please Hashem, one should follow Avraham's example. Yet, we find the most astonishing thing. There is only one place on this planet that was so cruel, and so evil, that Hashem decided they had to be wiped from the face of the earth. And that place was Sodom.

How is it possible that the man who experienced a miraculous salvation through Avraham would be so unaffected — so much so that he continued his own way of life, and led his people to continue their descent into their selfish lifestyle?

R' Elya Lopian³ (1876–1970) explains that this is a fundamental facet of the human psyche. The goals of the citizens of Sodom were one of pleasure and enjoyment in this world, with no spiritual component whatsoever. With a lifetime of habituation, they were almost powerless over their own desires. Thus, although they may have known their lifestyle was incorrect, they were slaves to their own temptations, running wherever their appetite brought them. Therefore, despite knowing what Hashem wanted of them, they did not veer from their tragic course.

One should not fool oneself into thinking, "When I need to, I can *daven* properly, I can learn without interruption," and so on. If we don't consistently work on our growth, we will be out of practice, and may falter when we need to excel.

¹ Bereishis 14:10-17

² Bereishis 14:10, s.v. בארת בארת

³ Lev Eliyahu

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

We all know that creating good habits is a key component in our *avodas Hashem*. But is there a particular way to go about doing this?

It goes without saying, to create a good habit, one must not let much time pass between actions. A good habit must be nurtured, and if ignored, does not grow, but rather, it withers.

Another important point to keep in mind is that growth is much different than construction. With construction, one can see the difference overnight. Yesterday there was no building, today there is. However, with growth, a seed germinates, sprouts, and incrementally flourishes, until there is a mighty tree standing where there was once only dirt.

We will not see immediate results when working on our habits. In fact, it is likely we will falter, work slowly, and make mistakes. Nevertheless, it is important to trust the process. Just like it took months or even years to learn how to read and write properly, a good habit can take a long time to develop, but the payoff is well worth it.¹

¹ Ohr Yisrael, Letter Six

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Every righteous person, every wise individual, from Shlomo HaMelech to the modern era, has cried, "Learn Mussar! Learn Mussar!" - R' Yehuda Leib Chasman, Ohr Yahel, Parshas Tazria

DON'T WAIT TO PRAY

Gad Tzion* glanced at the man to his right, an older fellow who Gad had seen around, but never really interacted with much. But after this Yom Kippur, Gad knew that he wanted to get to know this man better. *Maariv* was winding down, and after the intensity of the day, Gad's mind began to wander. He thought about his *tefillos* this Yom Kippur, and how they had been elevated because of his proximity to the fellow next to him.

After *maariv*, Gad introduced himself. "Gad Tzion, nice to meet you. I'm sorry I didn't introduce myself earlier." "Nice to meet you as well. Yishay Elbaz." Mr. Elbaz smiled as he gathered up the few *seforim* in front of him.

"Mr. Elbaz, can I walk with you after we say *Kiddush Levanah*?"

"Of course — I'll be running home to make *Havdalah*, but if you're going my way, we can walk together."

A few minutes later, Gad and Yishay were making their way together towards their respective houses. "I just wanted to know," Gad said, "how did you do that? I know you know what I'm talking about. I could see not just the concentration, but the sincerity, the real interaction you had with Hashem on this Yom Kippur. I felt it wash over me, and it uplifted my davening. What's your secret?"

"Well, that's a fine question, and we've only just met! I'll tell you — it's a long story, but I'll give you the short version since we are almost home. Many years ago, I had done something that I was very not proud of, to say the least. I knew I needed to do *teshuva*. *Elul* came, but I was so busy with my job, my home, and so on. Who had time? So I told myself that come Rosh Hashanah, I would certainly do *teshuva*, think about my ways, and see how I can change.

"Rosh Hashanah came and went, and I still did not have time. I consoled myself that Yom Kippur, with its inspiring *tefillah*, would certainly break through my hardened heart. *Kol Nidrei* did not move me, nor did the *tefillos* during the day. I knew in my head that I must think about how to change, make a plan, something! But I did not. I waited for the final prayer of the day, *Ne'ilah*, to affect me.

"I still remember the feeling, as *Ne'ilah* finished. I sat there, realizing how I put nothing into my Yom Kippur, and how these days just passed by without me doing anything. A tear formed in my eye, the only tear in the past forty days.

"I decided right then, if I wanted to grow, it was up to me. It won't come to me, and inspiration won't move me without me making the first move. This was about three decades ago. In particular, I worked on my *tefillah*. And what you saw today is a product of decades of work."

Gad had no response, just nodded his head slowly. "Thank you," he said. "I needed to hear that." With that, they said their goodbyes, and went to break their fast.

*Based on a true story, names have been changed.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Yeravam ben Nevat knew that he was sacrificing his eternal afterlife, but he still could not shake his desperate desire for honor.¹
- One who is caught in their desires may lose the ability to think clearly, or even act of their volition. At that point, the only thing they can do is cry out for help!²

¹ *Mesillas Yesarim*, Chap. 11

² *Kiddushin* 81a

**"I sat there,
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