

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

# בְּשִׁיטְיָחָה



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS  
CHUKAS

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## WE'RE ALL ACCOUNTANTS

**A**t the end of *Parshas Chukas*, we learn about the battle between *Klal Yisrael* and *Sichon*. In this battle, the Jewish nation captured *Cheshbon*, a city that was previously captured by *Sichon* from *Moav*. Curiously, the Torah then states, "And the poets say, 'Come to Cheshbon...'"<sup>1</sup> The ballad continues for a few more *pesukim*, after which the Torah returns to the narrative of the battle.

Why is the Torah quoting the poets of the time, what importance do these verses have for the Jewish people? The *Gemara*<sup>2</sup> explains that these same words can be read to mean, "And those who control their *Yetzer Horah* say, 'Calculate the account of the world! Weigh the value of a *mitzvah* against its loss, and the loss of an *aveirah* against its gain."

Reb Itzelle Peterburger<sup>3</sup> (born Reb Yitzchak Blazer, 1837–1907) asks, why do we need the 'rulers of their *Yetzer Horah*' to give such advice, this advice seems pretty simple. To add to this, the *Mesillas Yesharim*<sup>4</sup> states, "Only those who have experienced the success of this course of action can truly see its benefits." Doesn't everyone know the importance of weighing our actions?

Reb Itzelle explains that *because* the value of *avodas Hashem* is so obvious, we don't spend any time making this risk-reward analysis. Why bother spending time on something known to all?

However, those who have truly seen success in their battle against the *Yetzer Horah* tell us how to win. It's not enough to simply know that *mitzvos* are valuable. One must spend time thinking about *avodas Hashem*, the importance and beauty of each *mitzvah*, the lowliness and degradation of an *aveirah*, and how lonely it is to distance oneself from *HaKadosh Boruch Hu*. This will make the knowledge a part of one's psyche.

This is the accounting we are advised to do. Spend the time learning the *mussar sefarim*, and apply their teachings to our actions. And only then will one emerge from the maze of life victorious, as one who 'rules over their *Yetzer Horah*'!

1 *Bamidbar* 21:27

2 *Bava Basra* 78b

3 *Sha'arei Ohr*, Chap. 4

4 Chap. 3

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to simply know  
that mitzvos  
are valuable.**

### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

There are a few more important steps after making a *cheshbon hanefesh*. First, we need to determine the source of our challenge. Sometimes the same action can be guided by different *middos*, or by a mixture of *middos*.

Now we are ready to create *tachbulos*, strategies, to affect those *middos*. A strategy is a thought-out plan aimed at a particular goal.

A pitfall to avoid is taking on too much. Sometimes a person gets inspired, and ends up failing once the inspiration wears off.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, a good strategy often lessens the challenge instead of attacking the challenge head on. By preparing beforehand, the challenge isn't as difficult as it used to be. (Having a *chavrusa* makes it easier to have a set time to learn, etc.)<sup>2</sup>

Our strategies should be checked every so often, to see if we are indeed doing them, and if they are effective. We will know if they are effective — good strategies will certainly accelerate our growth in *avodas Hashem*.

1 *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh* on *Mesillas Yesharim*, Vol. I, pg 355

2 *Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 2



**Even our greatest predecessors  
utilized strategies against the Yetzer  
Horah instead of battling head on.** - Rav  
Hench Leibowitz, zt"l, *Chidushei HaLev*,  
*Vayikrah* 19:4

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# A STRATEGIC DECISION

Tamar Rosenbaum\* sat at the table, her eyes downcast. Her husband Chaim sat across for her, also in silence.

Finally Mrs. Rosenbaum spoke, "It's so upsetting. I walk in there now, and they look so pure. But bedtime..." she trailed off, as a tear appeared in her eyes.

"Is just impossible," Chaim continued. "I don't know what to do. I feel like we've done everything. *Boruch Hashem*, we have a large family, but that makes the evenings very difficult. And I never thought I'd become an enemy of my children, but they resist, they fight, they negotiate, and by the end of the night, I've lost my patience. This is not good for them, and it's not good for the family.

Silence again. Suddenly, Mrs. Rosenbaum lifted her head. "I have an idea. I'm not going to share it, let me just try it. If it's going well, I'll let you know." Confused, Chaim shrugged, "I'm open to anything that works!"

A few weeks passed. Chaim was looking for his keys so he could get to *maariv*. "Tamar, tell me if I'm wrong — have you seen a change in bedtime? In fact, the house seems calmer in general. Please tell, what was the magic?"

Tamar smiled. "No magic. You're running, so I'll tell it to you in short. I created a system which helped me focus on the amazing qualities of our kids, and it just helps me be more laid back. They don't listen any more than they used, I don't think. But I don't raise the alarm as much, and the house is much calmer."

"But you have to tell me what the system is!" Chaim said, as his eyes darted to his watch, seeing how much time he had left.

"I keep a notebook handy. I tell myself I must write at least one story a day. And I write down all the cute, funny, witty, or special things that happen. It keeps me focused on how wonderful our children are, since I'm constantly looking for stories.

"It's so easy to lose sight of what really matters. We tend to focus on what they're not doing instead of what they are doing. This keeps me on track."

"What gave you this idea?"

"This idea? It came from something you said. We were learning *mussar* together the other day, and you were discussing coming up with strategies. I thought long and hard about the area I could tackle in this battle, and how to do it."

An amused smile came to Chaim's face. "Me, eh? Well, how do you like that. Oh! I have to go!"

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

## DID YOU KNOW?

- An integral part of the *cheshbon hanefesh* process is coming up with strategies on how to battle the *yetzer horah*.<sup>1</sup>
- While weighing *mitzvos* against their loss, one should envision the scales in front of oneself, watching how the weight of the *mitzvos* is greater than anything against it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chap. 3

<sup>2</sup> *Sefer Shemiras HaLashon*, Vol. II, Chap. 8

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