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WEEKLY PARSHA
ARCHIVE Q&A

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בלבבי
משכן
אבנה

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GREATNESS IS KNOWING HOW TO GET UP AFTER FAILURES

What is the difference between great people and external people since everyone falls anyway? There's no person who doesn't fall, but Rav Hutner would say that the biographies of tzaddikim don't portray what really happened, the books make it seem as they rose very quickly, they knew all of Torah and smiled at every person - as if they didn't go through so many difficulties before they could really get to where they were. Those chapters are always missing from the book. Who knows how much they went through before they reached their greatness. You can't write it in a sefer of course because it's not respectful to them.

A recent biography about one of the Gedolim portrays the whole life story of the Gadol but left out the details of when he grew the most – the last period of his life when he was going through illness. They couldn't write about it because it's not respectful to show pictures of him sick in the hospital, but that was the period where he grew the most. Rav Hutner

would say who knows much a Gadol went through before he got to his greatness. True growth is step by step, which then enables one to get up after he fails. The failures bring difficulty but one can deal with them and heal from them after he knows how to grow properly step by step.

WORKING WITH YOUR CURRENT LEVEL AND CAPABILITIES

In order to live like this, one needs to know where he is right now. Many times people do not even know where they are now, what their abilities are right now. Otherwise they join a place or setting which is set way beyond what they can do, then they think they become broken from this and they can fall very low afterwards.

How many hours a day should a person learn Torah every day? One fulfills the mitzvah of learning Torah with saying Shema twice a day, but beyond that, how much should a person learn? The clear answer to this is that every person is obligated in learning Torah as long as he's available to learn Torah and he doesn't have to take care of anything else. He has to learn according to his capabilities. How capable is a person? No sefer tells you the answer. Can a person learn every day for the same amount?

How much should a person eat, how much does he need to eat? Reb Chatzkel would wonder how much he needed to eat, before starting to eat. When he ate the set amount he stopped eating. The average person though eats and eats as long as he's hungry. How much time does a person need for sleeping? Between 6-8 hours, some need less and some need more, a baby sleeps a lot and as he gets older he doesn't need to sleep as much.

Every person has to feel inwardly what his capabilities are, he has to know himself this much: What am I capable of and what am I not capable of? You can't know it clearly and exactly but generally. A Gadol can learn much more, but most people who try to do this don't succeed, they aren't

acting according to their capabilities. Thus, we need to have passion (*fire*) in our progress (*wind*) as we build ourselves step by step (*earth*) in order to have joyous growth. How do we know how to grow step by step? By knowing what our current capabilities are. We have to be very attentive, for our entire life, of where we stand currently and what the next step for us is that we would like to reach.

We have to know the purpose and greater goal but we also have to know the very next step we can take. These are two parts of life – knowing our greater purpose of where we want to end up, and knowing the current level of growth we are striving for right now.

One of my children saw a group of people who were sitting together and talking endlessly. He said to me, “I don’t want to be like these.” We don’t know what we want to look like at the end of our lives but we can know for certain that we don’t want to be like certain people. The more truthful we are and the more we think, we can know, to where do we need to be heading now and what is the eventual purpose that we need to end up by?

There are some mitzvos which are equal to the entire Torah, such as the mitzvos of learning Torah, donning tzitzis, keeping Shabbos, and teshuvah. Why does teshuvah equal the entire Torah? “Return Yisrael until Hashem your G-d.” To where does one return when he does teshuvah? To Hashem. The person was once by Hashem and now he is returning to Him, He is the source of all our souls. Every mitzvah that He gave us is so that we will return to Him through it. Torah is to recognize Him, to cling to His wisdom and will. It is all to return to Him. How do we return? Through keeping His mitzvos, doing His will, and clinging to His will. Thus all the mitzvos are about returning to Hashem.

The goal which we should want to end up by is to become attached with Him totally. Those who are zocheh (*worthy*) die with “kiss of Hashem”,

they clung so much to Hashem. At the beginning of one’s way, one learns that the purpose is to be close to Hashem and he may attempt right now to reach it all but he has to realize that’s the goal and he can’t reach it all right now. He has to know where is going to, where he wants to end up, but he also has to know what his current goal should be.

Some people are always wanting to grow but they just want to be a little better, they aren’t heading for the purpose of life. The Mesillas Yesharim talks about such people and explains why they are making a mistake. They are moving their whole life, like wind, but they have no fire, they aren’t going up. But it has to be with earth, growing step after step, one after another. Then a person can be happy.

Why are people sad? Either when they are not using their potential, like when they want things that aren’t suitable for them, or the opposite, when they are overdoing their idealism and aspirations by acting above their current level and capabilities, when they take on extreme levels of growth and then they fall afterwards. In contrast to all this, a person can be happy throughout all of his growth, [making sure to maintain his drive but also making sure to work at one step at a time] and he doesn’t have to wait for Succos or any festival to be happy, because he can be happy right now. One example of this is learning Torah, which gladdens the heart.

We have mentioned here briefly how a person can be happy every day, to be “happy with his share”, being happy with his current level of growth, making sure to grow step after step, which is by working with his current level and capabilities, heading towards the general purpose of life (*closeness to Hashem*) yet also making sure that he has the next level of growth that he’s striving for, going from one level to the next without trying to get to the higher levels all at once. That is how a person can live a life of constant growth - and true happiness.

SENSIBLE GROWTH & TESHUVAH

QUESTION 1: *How can a person know if he's ready to grow to another step?*

ANSWER When a person feels that his current level of growth isn't stressing him and that he's natural at it, he is ready for the next step. If one feels that his current goals are a pressure on him and he feels many times that he has no desire to grow at his current level, it means he hasn't acquired his current level yet and he's certainly not ready to start working on the next step. When he feels it's easy to do it, now is the time to go to the next step.

QUESTION 2 *How can a person know what his current capabilities are*

ANSWER A person can't know this exactly, just as one cannot know exactly how much he needs to eat and sleep. But a person is able to have an idea of what's too extreme for him to do right now.

QUESTION 3: *What should a person do if he can't figure it out? A person who gravitates towards extremities is likely to be imagining what his actual capabilities really are.*

ANSWER: That is a very good question. Some people have souls that are very emotional, stormy, and imaginative, so they can't see things clearly and objectively, and they will need to find either an expert Rav or a wise friend whom they are close with, whom they can regularly seek advice with, because they aren't able to get clarity by thinking on their own. They also should realize that they can't act right away on every thought and feeling they have, and if they want to make any kind of change or resolution or commitment to something, they should push it off for another month and then re-assess to see if they still want to make that change, and usually a month later a person discovers that he was mistaken about something. If a person suddenly gets an idea when he wakes up in the morning and immediately he decides to act on it, it is very likely that he will err. He got the idea when he felt inspired from some factor, and though he can act on it for a day or two, soon after he falls. If he would think about it for a month beforehand, then gradually the emotional inspiration will fade and then at the end of the month he can see that he had been acting from a place of faulty logic. This is how a person gains clarity. A person can also write down all the different thoughts, feelings, and ideas he had over the course of a month, and he will see all the shifts in his thoughts that took place. That is how a person can see that he doesn't know himself well, and this very awareness will give him more clarity about himself.

QUESTION 4: *How can someone know if he's making the mistake of "jumping" to a higher level that he's not ready for yet?*

ANSWER: The first thing one has to know is: "Where am I found?" [or, "What is my current level?"] The second thing to know is, "What is the next level of growth that I'm capable of right now?" He can try visualizing that a friend is coming to him and asking him this very question. He can now think more objectively. If he can do the above, the next step is to try for a few days or a week to go about acquiring his next stage of growth. Not to take on resolutions, but to simply experiment and try it out (*just like a person first tries out a new job for a few days to see if it's for him*). After a week he should re-assess. If he feels that he has acted too extreme, it means he was making an error. But if it didn't feel extreme to him then he can keep trying at it again for another period of time, this time a bit longer. If, after trying it out 3 times he feels relaxed and calm about the new changes, then the chance of him being mistaken are very low. Usually thought people decide to take on changes for the year before they have even tried it out a little. How many people can keep to the changes they accepted on Rosh HaShanah? Not a lot, because they aren't being realistic. But if a person would first try out the change a bit before taking it on, though he may make mistakes, they will be a lot less. He is going at it sensibly. Along with davening to Hashem to guide him, he will succeed, and even if he makes mistakes, the mistakes won't be major and he is in a lot less danger of falling, after following the above.

QUESTION 5: *By doing mitzvos it's easier to take on change and go at it slowly, but when it comes to not doing aveiros it's much harder not to do. How can a person grow slowly at not doing aveiros?*

ANSWER: This is a sensitive issue. In the final generation where there are so many baalei teshuvah who have recently discovered Yiddishkeit, this question is often asked, and the Gedolim answered many of these kinds of questions, of how to guide baalei teshuvah, of how much to push them forward and how much can be ignored so that they don't fall back. There are certain rules though which don't change. Something which is clearly forbidden will always be forbidden and it can't be compromised in any situation. One has to do the will of the Creator right now, regardless if he feels he can make the change or not – if it's clearly the will of the Creator then he must do it. The only issue of taking on growth slowly is only when it's something that's not clearly forbidden (*for example, in the area of sanctifying permissible pleasures, which require gradual pulling back and which cannot be done rapidly*). In the last generation the Gedolim decided what to tell baalei teshuvah who fall back into doing their old aveiros. These are matters which need an expert, reliable Rav to guide a person in, and one can't know the answers to this on his own.

QUESTION 7: So if a person got used to do something forbidden, he won't be able to rapidly "jump" out of it?

ANSWER: When a person is doing something that's clearly forbidden, this is the only time where he in fact he must jump out of it. It is just that most people can't even do this. If a person earnestly says that he is able to handle the change then we cannot tell him not to change. He's doing something forbidden, so we can't tell him to do otherwise. Here we are discussing a different problem, when people say they can't separate from all their forbidden behavior all at once. It is a delicate issue because this involves sins of the Torah, not merely levels of growth. But if to begin with we merely tell him to try at it, there are things he can handle for a short period of time but which he won't be able to do for a long period. For example if a person tries to get only 3 hours of sleep, for how many days can he do this? A person can't try extreme changes for too long. But if tell him to begin trying something out, he can keep to it and slowly he will understand that yes, it's difficult, but then he can better accept that he can't do more. Instead of feeling like a failure, he can realize from the start that he was merely trying out a new change for a short period of time. That is the healthy and proper way to do it – on one hand not to slacken off from being idealistic, but at the same time, knowing from the start that he doesn't have to end up in "failure" later.

QUESTION 8: But if a baal teshuvah is told that his growth is limited, then we are stifling his great fiery enthusiasm.

ANSWER: That's very true, but practically speaking we have to give him a step by step plan to work with. We can tell him "Try for a week learning for these hours of the day." Don't tell him that he needs to learn a certain amount, just tell him to try this for a week. Like this, even if he couldn't keep to it, he won't feel that he failed. Instead he will feel that he tried something and saw that it wasn't compatible with him. If we would have told him "Learn for these hours of the day" and he fails with the task, he feels like a failure. That is why we need to instead tell him to try it out as an experiment.

QUESTION 9: How can it be that one day a person has yiras shomayim and the next day he doesn't? What changed?

ANSWER: There isn't one answer to this - there are several possible reasons for it. Everything always goes through changes, nothing stays the same. Everything in creation comes from the spiritual, it is always changing. Only Hashem doesn't change. Every person changes, either a person is going up or down. But extreme changes have to be avoided.