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The Concept of Brazenness

In the previous chapter, we mentioned that there are four traits which stem from the hard nature of the earth: stubbornness (*kashyus oref*), brazenness (*azus*), cruelty (*achzariyus*), and anger (*kaas*).

In this chapter, with Hashem's help, we will learn about the concept of brazenness\azus. We will see how it can be used either for good or evil.

The Sages state that one should be as "brazen as leopard" to do Hashem's will.^[1] This is the positive kind of being brazen, in which a person boldly and bravely perseveres in serving the Creator. In the very same statement, the Sages end off with: "A brazen-faced person goes to *Gehinnom*." This is referring to a person who uses brazenness for evil.

We must understand the essence of brazenness - what makes it good, and when it becomes evil.

The simple and superficial understanding is that a person is brazen for evil, it's the same kind of brazenness as when he acts good, and he is just using it for evil purposes; according to this understanding, "Be brazen as a leopard" refers to using your brazenness for good, while using this very same brazenness for evil is what makes a person go to *Gehinnom*, for being brazen-faced.

But the deeper understanding is that they are two totally different kinds of brazenness. When a person acts brazen for good, it's a whole different concept than when someone acts brazen for evil - and the same is true vice-versa.

We will try to understand this a little, with the help of Hashem.

Four Manifestations of Brazenness

Where do we find brazenness manifest? We will start by showing how it is in our body, and then we will progress to see how it shows up in our soul.

We have already mentioned one place in which brazenness comes up in: the Sages called a brazen person by the title of *az panim*, "brazen-faced." Brazenness shows up on a person's face, when he acts brazen.

But if we get more specific, brazenness is located in the forehead. We confess to Hashem in *Viduy* for the sin of having *azus metzach*, "brazenness of our forehead." In addition, the Gemara says that the

tzitz, the band of the turban of the *Kohen Gadol* – which is placed on the forehead – atoned for the sin of brazenness.^[2] We also find that *Tefillin*, which are placed on top of the forehead, are called *oz*, “splendor,”^[3] which is related to the word *azus*\brazenness, because *Tefillin* also atones for brazenness. So brazenness is associated with the forehead.

We also find brazenness associated with the left hand. The word *oz*, which means “might”, is related to the word *azus*\brazenness, and the *possuk* states that Hashem His arm to act mightily with.^[4] We know that the “right hand” of Hashem is used for kindness, while the “left hand” is used for might and justice.

Finally, there is a fourth place of the body which is associated with brazenness – the nose. It is written, “*Who knows the might of Your wrath?*”; the Hebrew word for “wrath” is *af*, which can also mean “nose”, and the word for “might” is *oz*, which is related to the word *azus*\brazenness. So brazenness bears a connection with the nose.

These are the four general parts of the body in which brazenness is connected with: the face, the forehead, the left arm, and the nose.

The Difference Between Brazenness of The ‘Face’ and ‘Forehead’

The first two kinds of brazenness we mentioned are brazenness of the face and brazenness of the forehead. What is really the difference between them?

The *Mahara*^[5] explains that brazenness is mainly manifest in the forehead (*azus metzach*), and this is when a person’s brazenness lays dormant within him; he is not attacking anyone yet with his brazenness. But when a person turns his brazenness on others, it becomes *azus panim*, to be “brazen-faced.” The word *panim*, “face”, also can mean to be “*poneh*”, to “turn”; when a person turns his brazenness on another person in the form of aggressiveness toward him, it becomes the trait of cruelty (*achzariyus*).^[6]

Brazenness of The Face: A Form of Internal Hardness

What is brazenness of the face, *azus panim*? How does it develop?

We explained earlier that brazenness stems from the nature of hardness in the element of earth. Just like internal hardening can produce the trait of evil stubbornness, which is called *kashyus oref* – to be “stiff-necked” – so can it be a source for producing *azus*\brazenness. Brazenness of the face is called *azus hapanim* – it is when a person turns his face from another, indifferent to another person, and instead of showing face to another, the person shows him his neck instead – his *oref*. We will explain what this means.

When a person doesn’t want to show interest in something, he turns his face away. He turns his neck on the person instead. This is *kashyus oref*, “stiff-necked” – when a person, instead of showing face to another, turns his neck on him instead and hides his face from the other.

But when a person has *azus panim*, he goes even further than this: he shows the other person his face, but he gives the person a hardened look on his face. Although he faces the person, it’s like his face isn’t there, because instead of showing him a soft expression, he basically gives him his “neck” instead. It’s as if his neck is on his face.

So *kashyus oref* is when a person is indifferent to another and therefore turns his face away from another, showing him his neck instead. But *azus panim* is when a person gives his face to another, but he gives the person a hardened expression on his face, and it’s as if he’s showing the other his neck

rather than his face [although he is facing him physically].

With *kashyus oref*, a person acts hardened towards another person, when he could have dealt with him softly. With *azus panim*, a person uses a deeper and more negative kind of indifference towards the other: he takes his face, which normally gives a soft expression, and he hardens it instead.

The Root of Brazenness: Lack of Feeling Inferior To Others

Now we can understand with sharper clarity what the definition of brazenness is.

When a person turns to another and faces him, either one of three things are going on here. Either he is turning to the other because he identifies the other as being equal to himself; or he looks at another person as being beneath him; or he is looking at the other person as being someone of greater authority than he.

If a person is looking at another person as if the other person is beneath him, he will most definitely harden himself towards that person, and he will exercise strength and authority towards the person whom he deems lower than himself.

This is actually a power that can be used for good, and it is used by a teacher, who must teach his student with a command of authority.[\[7\]](#)

Of course, a teacher must perfect his character and act softly with his students, and he must show a pleasant countenance to them, even though he is of higher authority than them. But the nature of a teacher is to see the students as lower to himself, and thus he will naturally be overly strict towards them, if he does not try to perfect his character.

There is also a person who looks up to others and sees them as above himself, and he feels nullified to them. If he looks at another person as being above him, he will act softly toward him. This is the root of the trait of bashfulness. When a person realizes that there are certain people who are authority over him, he realizes his low self-worth next to them, and he acquires the positive trait of bashfulness.

But when a person acts brazen towards someone higher than himself – either because he doesn't realize that he is lower than the other person, or even if he considers the other to be equal to him, when in reality the other person is on a higher level than him – such a person is the kind of person of whom the Sages say, "A brazen-faced person will go to *Gehinnom*."

When a person has the negative trait of brazenness, he is in essence being prevented from accepting upon himself the yoke of Heaven. The Sages equate the trait of bashfulness with fear of Heaven,[\[8\]](#) so if someone is missing bashfulness, he is missing fear of Heaven. Brazenness is thus when a person doesn't want to nullify himself to someone who is on a higher level than himself.

Chutzpah\Impudence and Azus\Brazenness

The Sages say that *chutzpah* (impudence) towards Heaven might get a person somewhere, but at the same time, *chutzpah* is like acknowledging the king without acknowledging that he wears a crown.[\[9\]](#) *Chutzpah* is the same concept as *azus*\brazenness.

What exactly does it mean that *chutzpah* towards Heaven can be effective for a person?

We are on this earth, while Heaven is above us. When a person realizes that Heaven is above him and thus he nullifies himself to that dimension that is beyond his grasp, he has what is called *yirah*\awe.

That is why *yirah* is known as *Yiras Shomayim*, “fear of Heaven”, because he recognizes that Heaven is above him and thus he comes to nullify himself. If a person doesn’t have this awe towards Heaven and he instead views himself as being equal with Heaven, he has *azus panim*. Of him, the Sages state that if he acts with *chutzpah* towards Heaven, he can still get somewhere.[\[10\]](#)

But, the Sages say that even though he might get results from his *chutzpah*, he is only acknowledging that Hashem is King, but he doesn’t acknowledge the “crown” of the King. In other words, a brazen person doesn’t know how to see others as higher than him; he doesn’t acknowledge authority. Either he thinks he’s the authority, or at best, he will acknowledge another as his equal, but never does he see anyone else as his authority that he must acknowledge.

The Sages said that if a Jew walks without a head covering, he is very brazen.[\[11\]](#) Why? The answer lies in a different statement of the Sages. The Sages state that wearing a head covering increases fear of Heaven.[\[12\]](#) The depth behind this is that in order for a person to have fear of Heaven, he must recognize what is above him – he must have authority in his life that he submits himself to. Of course, there are many levels to how much a person can fear Heaven, but in general, fear of Heaven is accessed as long as a person recognizes that is a Higher Authority over himself.

A brazen person therefore might recognize that there is a King, but he doesn’t want to acknowledge that the King wears a crown as well. That is the depth behind why he won’t wear a head covering – he doesn’t want anything to be on top of him.

This is the depth behind brazenness.

A Woman’s Natural Bashfulness Towards Her Husband

The Sages state that generally, a woman does not act brazen towards her husband [with regards to lying to him]. The depth of this is because ever since the sin of Adam, woman was cursed with, “*And he [man] will rule over you.*” A husband is above his wife when it comes to authority, and this is the natural way of the world.[\[13\]](#) For this reason, a wife is naturally bashful with her husband, and she will generally not be so brazen as to lie outright to him.

The Gemara says that during marital relations, the husband should be on top of her body, and the wife should lie underneath him; if they switch around their roles, the Sages say that the union will result in impudent children.[\[14\]](#) The depth of this is that had they done the act properly, with him on top and her on bottom, her natural bashfulness would remain. But when the husband is on bottom and she’s on top, this is brazenness for the woman’s part, because he is supposed to be “above” her; thus their union will result in brazen children.

We can bring many more statements of our Sages about brazenness, but the point of all the examples we brought was to show what the definition of brazenness is: whenever there is a lack of recognizing authority.

Brazenness: Not Interested In Being Connecting With Others

We mentioned earlier that the element of earth is always on bottom of the other three elements; fire, water, and wind are always above earth. This aspect of earth, that it is always on bottom, alludes to the trait of humility, in which a person sees himself as being below others, allowing others to be above him, in the same way that people walk over the earth and trample it. As we ask Hashem in the end of *Shemoneh Esrei* - “*Let my soul be like the dust to all.*”

However, this aspect of earth can always be used in a person for evil, and that is when a person does not want to accept that he is at a lower level than others. When a person doesn't want to accept that others are above his level, he hardens himself, and he uses the internal hardening in his element of earth [which was the concept described in the previous chapter].

When our Sages describe a person who acts with brazenness, it is usually with regards to a person who is acting disrespectful to another person, when that other person is someone of important status. When a person does not honor those who are to be more honored, this defines him as being brazen.

Chazal say that in the era preceding Moshiach, *chutzpah* (impudence) will increase [15] - the trait of evil brazenness will be revealed to its full depth. What is the nature of this brazenness? Chazal say that children will disrespect and shame their elders; sons will disgust their fathers, daughters will revolt against their mothers, and daughters-in-law will also rebel against their mothers-in-law. This is the brazenness in the time before Moshiach's arrival - people cannot accept that there are others who are authority over them.

This shows us the depth of brazenness. Brazenness stems from the element of earth; how can it be that earth, which has a tendency towards lowliness, is the source of brazenness, in which a person does not feel lowly about himself towards others at all? If anything, an increase of earth in the soul should make a person feel lowlier about himself; how does it make him become more brazen?

It is due to the hard nature of the earth. Earth can make a person develop internal hardening in his soul, and then the person is hardened; this makes him unable to accept other's authority over him, and thus he acts brazen.

The Depth of Brazenness: Lowering Others

There is a more subtle understanding, though, as follows. Earth can be the source of humility in a person - when he feels lowly about himself, in a healthy way; such a person is using his element of earth for holiness. But if a person uses his element of earth *towards others* - he feels that others are lower than him, and thus he won't respect even one person. That's brazenness - when a person has no concept of respect for others, and even more so, he belittles others, because others are lowered in his eyes.

If a person uses his sense of lowliness towards himself, he uses earth for a holy purpose. "*And let my soul should be like the dust to all.*" Avraham Avinu said on himself, "*I am like dust and ash.*" He was humble; he did not feel himself as being more important than others. This is also known as the quality of *bittul*, that a person can "nullify" his sense of self-worth, feeling completely nullified, "like the dust of the earth," as we say when we nullify the *chometz* on Erev Pesach. This is not low self-esteem - which is a base emotion in the lowest level of our soul - but rather a true sense of humility which our soul can reach.

But if a person turns his "earth" on someone else - when he considers others to be lowly and worthless in his eyes - he uses earth for evil. To illustrate, if a person throws dirt on someone, this is the prime example of having no importance for another. Throwing dirt on someone is basically saying that the person is worthless. This is when a person uses earth for evil, and if a person has this negative trait, he won't be able to subjugate himself to even one person in the world.

A person only subjugates himself to something that is above him. If the person perceives something as being above him, he will honor it. When a person recognizes that the *Shechinah* is above him, that his teacher is above him, that his parents are above him, and that older people are above him, he will honor all of these, whom he recognizes as being above himself. He uses his element of earth for

holiness, nullifying himself and feeling lower than those who are higher than him.

But when a person takes his lowliness of earth and combines it with internal hardening of earth, he becomes brazen, and he belittles the honor of others. This defines brazenness.

If a person would only harden himself inside, but he wouldn't belittle the honor of others, then he's not totally brazen toward others, because at least he is honoring others. On the other hand, if he only belittles others, why doesn't he belittle himself also while he's at it? Only when he hardens himself inside, in addition to belittling the honor of others, will he become totally brazen.

Fixing Brazenness: Showing A Smile To Others

The ultimate level of evil brazenness is when a person doesn't "show his face" to anyone – he doesn't want a connection with others, because instead he nullifies everyone in his eyes. His whole relationship towards others is that he sees others as dirt in his eyes. Instead of making himself be "like the dust to all", he feels that everyone else is like the dust. He has hardened himself inside, so he can't nullify himself to others; other people to him are lowly and undeserving of honor. With his attitude, he does not wish to connect with any person on the world.

When a person gives someone a pleasant look on his face and he smiles at him, he shows the other person that he is aware of his existence. By smiling at another person, you acknowledge his existence, that he's worth something. By contrast, if a person nullifies the existence of other people in his eyes, he doesn't show his face to them.

Smiling at another person with a pleasant countenance (which is called *he'aras panim*) is a trait which can either come from fire, wind or water. But earth can never be a source of *he'aras panim*. This is because the element of earth is the root of having low self-worth for others, and therefore earth cannot help a person produce a radiant countenance towards someone else.

This is the evil that is behind brazenness. When a person is brazen towards others, he does not show his face to others; he does not smile at others. A brazen person is called *az panim*, "brazen-faced", because he gives no face to others. He turns his face on other and instead other people see his neck. How do we rectify the trait of brazenness? A brazen person needs to show another person his face, a face of radiance and holiness.

Whenever we want to fix one of the elements, we need to make use of the other three elements. Since brazenness is stemming from a lack of showing face to another, and it is rooted in the element of earth, we need to make use of the other three elements – water, wind and fire – and use those three elements to reveal a "face" to another person.

Using Water To Fix Brazenness

How can we use the element of water to reveal a "face" to another? It is written, "*Just as water reflects a face to another, so does a heart reflect one to another.*"[\[16\]](#) Water reflects back our face when we look into it; nothing reflects better than water, because water is clear. Even though water is still and unmoving, it can still reveal a face.

Of course, if we look into the water with an angry grimace on our face, it will reflect back to us our angry expression. If we smile into the water, it shows us back a smile. But the point is that water reflects back a face to us, so water can help us reveal a "face" to another. If water is dirty from any earth that it's in it, it can't cause a reflection, but naturally, water is clear, and it can cause a reflection when we look into it.

Hashem created Adam out of earth, and then mixed water into him to form him. Thus, water and earth can work together to create a form. This shows us that when water combines with earth, it can give form to the earth. (There were *tzaddikim* who knew this secret very well and they were able to create a *golem* from earth and water, and if he was extra meritorious, he was able to use wind and have a spirit of life breathed into the *golem*). The point we see from this is that water can give form to earth, thus revealing a “face” in earth.

On a deeper note, the reason why earth does not have a face is being face is called *panim* in Hebrew, which can also mean *pnim*, the “inside”. Earth has no inside. When we turn over a piece of earth, we do not see its inside (unless we dig into the earth). With the other three elements, we can see into their inside. When water is clear, we can see all the way all the way until its bottom. We can see clearly into wind, which is air, as long as the air isn’t dusty. Fire is naturally clear and we can see through it, as long as it’s not burning something, where it then becomes a murky smoke.

But we cannot see into the inside of earth. The inside of the earth is always covered from the human eye.

However, we can see the inside of earth when we dig into it. When we dig into earth, we can fashion a container out of the earth, and then earth can get an ‘inside’ to it for us to see. This is unlike the other elements. When we see into the inside of water, we see the water itself, and the same goes for wind and fire. But when we dig up the inside of earth, we turn the earth into a container.

From this we can see how we earth can work together with other three elements. When we use earth as a container, earth gets an inside – it gets a *pnim*, which can also be read “*panim*”, “face”. In other words, when we use earth as a container for the other three elements, then our earth can help us gain a face to show others, which can rectify the trait of brazenness.

As we mentioned earlier, earth is the containing element of the other three elements. It is not an element unto itself, because it is useless by itself. It can only gain importance when it contains the other three elements, whereupon it helps the other three elements activate their potential. This is also because earth is the lowest of the four elements, and therefore, it really serves to lower itself to other three elements and let them go on top of it, where it acts as a container to hold them.

How do we fix the “lowly” nature of earth [which is the source of brazenness, since a person lowers other people in his eyes]? If we give an inside to the earth, we turn it into a container for the other three elements, and then it enables the other elements to be active. Really, the earth has no inside, but if we use it as a container for the other three elements, it gains an ‘inside’, because now it contains the other three elements. In this way, the earth’s lack of *pnim*/*panim* is fixed, and we give an inside – a face – to earth. Now it can connect with the other elements of fire, wind and water.

Now that we have seen this point, we can return to discussing how we can use water to fix earth. It is precisely the aspect of lowliness in the nature of earth which aids in its rectification. Earth has no inside of its own – it only serves to contain the other elements. When we use it to contain the other elements, it becomes a container which will either hold the inside of water, fire or wind. With regards to water – our current point – we give earth an inside, a *pnim*, when we pour water into it. We can see this from our physical world clearly. When we pour water into earth, the water burrows into the earth and creates a formation out of the earth, enabling the earth to become a container and hold the water.

What we see from this is that earth receives its rectification when it makes itself into a container for something else other than itself. With regards to itself, it has no importance, but with regards to something else, it gains importance, because it is a container for other things.

[In other words – when a person nullifies his inflated sense of self-importance and instead makes others important, he rectifies the trait of brazenness].

This is how one rectifies brazenness through using the element of water.

Using Wind To Fix Brazenness

How do we fix brazenness using the element of wind? It is similar to how we use water to fix brazenness. The root of the problem behind brazenness is because the person removes his face from someone else and instead shows him his neck. The way we fix this is through revealing our face to the other. Thus, a person with brazenness fixes himself by somehow reconnecting to the other person. Wind can also be used to reconnect with others, as follows.

Earth is the source of disparity, for it is dry and cold. Wind, by contrast, is hot and moist. Heat and moisture are both properties that foster connection.

Man is called *ruach memalelah*, a “talking spirit.”^[17] Speech is thus identified with wind. When we speak with others, we can connect with others; thus, “wind” is what connects us with others.

In addition, the trait of bashfulness is the opposite trait of brazenness; “A brazen-faced person goes to *Gehinnom*, while a shameful-faced person goes to Gan Eden.” Bashfulness is rooted in the element of wind; this is apparent from the fact that its opposite trait, brazenness, is rooted in earth. If brazenness is rooted in earth, then it follows that its opposite, bashfulness, is rooted in the opposite element of earth: wind.

When a person is bashful to others, he humbles himself to others. This is a trait that comes from our wind. We don’t ever find fire or water getting “humbled”. Someone who is humble is called *shefal ruach*, “humble of spirit”, which hints to how he is using his wind to humble himself more to others.

This is not to be confused with *shiflus* lowliness, which is a trait that is rooted in the element of earth. Lowering oneself to others is *shiflus* [which can be used for good or evil],^[18] and this is rooted in the element of earth. Bashfulness does not that mean that one lowers himself to others, but rather it is a different way for one to humble himself. When a person is bashful, he rectifies his brazenness, through using the element of wind.

Using Fire To Fix Brazenness

It is obvious how we use fire to rectify brazenness. When a person is brazen, he has removed the pleasant expression from his face from others. Fire is bright and thus illuminates; when a person shows a shining countenance on his face toward others, this is called *he’aras panim*. The trait of *he’aras panim* is what rectifies one’s *azus panim*.

When a person is brazen, he doesn’t show a pleasant expression on his face toward others. In essence, he has removed the “light” of his face, his *he’aras panim*, and in its place he instead shows *azus panim* toward others, by turning his face away from others. A person rectifies this by going in the opposite direction: by showing *he’aras panim* toward others. This is how we use fire to rectify brazenness – by using the “light” of *he’aras panim* towards others; our “light” is rooted in our fire.

Until now we have explained how one can rectify *azus panim*, the trait of being brazen-faced, through using the elements of water, wind and fire.

Rectifying ‘Brazenness of the Forehead’

Earlier, we discussed another kind of brazenness: *azus metzach*, “brazenness of the forehead.” What is the depth of *azus metzach*? The Maharal explains that *azus metzach* is the essence of brazenness, while *azus panim* is the result of *azus metzach*; it is when the *azus* gets turned on others.

Before, when we discussed the concept “internal hardening”, we explained the trait of *kashyus oref*, being “stiff-necked” [in other words, evil stubbornness]. We explained that this develops from two factors: dryness of earth, and from a hardening of one’s *daas*. This is a hardening that takes place to one’s *daas*, which is present in the area of the *oref* – the neck.

When the *daas* of one’s neck becomes hardened (and he dries up inside), this develops the trait of *kashyus oref*, to be stiff-necked. But there is also *daas* present on one’s face, and it is in the forehead; when this *daas* becomes hardened, it develops the trait of *azus*\brazenness. It is known as *azus metzach*.

To be a bit clearer, the trait of *azus panim* develops from *kashyus oref*, which is stemming from one’s element of earth. The trait of *azus metzach*, however, is coming from a hardened *daas* [from the *daas* that is present in the forehead, and not from the *daas* that is in the neck].

The Sages say that the Jewish people received the Torah precisely because we are brazen.^[19] This is being said in a good context of us; it is referring to the holy kind of *azus*\brazenness that we possess. What is the depth to our holy brazenness? It is connected to the fact that the generation of the desert was known as the “generation of knowledge” (*dor de’ah*). In addition, we received the Torah through Moshe Rabbeinu, who is the epitome of the concept of *daas*. This is the depth of our holy brazenness – we are brazen, in a holy way, because of our power of *daas*. That is what enabled us to receive the Torah.

By contrast, the Sages that the epitome of a brazen animal is a dog. “*And the dogs are brazen of spirit.*” The main enemy of the Jewish people, Amalek, is also identified as a “dog.” The brazenness of dogs, represented by Amalek, is the exact opposite of the holy brazenness of the Jewish people, which is *daas*. Thus, Amalek is the force in evil that opposes our holy power of *daas*.

The difference between holy brazenness and unholy brazenness is really contained in the Maharal’s words which we quoted before. The Maharal says that unholy brazenness comes from the body, and this is the kind of brazenness which develops from our element of earth; while holy brazenness comes from our soul, our *daas* – this is called *azus metzach*.

So *azus panim* is when one’s brazenness is coming from his neck, from his body – from his element of earth. When one reveals the holy essence of his brazenness, *azus metzach* – the “forehead”, which is also where one’s true *ratzon* (will) is contained in – he reveals the holy kind of brazenness. Of course, if one uses his *ratzon* for evil, this is the unholy use of *azus metzach*. But when one reveals his true will – how “It is our will to do Your will” – he utilizes brazenness for holiness. Of him, it applies the praise of the Jewish people, “The most brazen of the nations is *Yisrael*.”

Azus\brazenness is used for evil, though, in the following scenario. The Gemara says that if a woman openly asks her husband for marital relations, the children of such a union will be “brazen children.” But if she is modest in her request and she instead convinces him into marital relations, without verbalizing her request, then they will merit good children.

What is the difference between the two ways? It is because being verbal in a request is a sign of brazenness.

It is written, “*A destitute one speaks in supplications, while a wealthy one speaks brazenly.*” When a person is brazen, he verbally expresses his brazenness. The Sages state, “*Daas* is hidden in the lips” –

what a person says with his mouth reveals what's going on in his *daas*. If a person is brazen with his mouth, it shows that he has an impaired *daas*.

But when one's brazenness is coming from a holy source, it is stemming from his inner *ratzon* to do Hashem's will. Such a person, when he needs to make a request (such as a wife who wants marital relations) does not express it verbally, but rather, he is gentle about it. The "brazenness" here is holy, because it is not coming from an impaired *daas*, but rather from his inner, true *ratzon* [to do Hashem's will].

Thus, *azus metzach* might be used either for good or evil. When it is used for evil, it becomes evil brazenness, and it is expressed in an aggressive manner, manifesting itself in impudent speech. But if it is being used gently yet firmly, then the brazenness is coming from one's true *ratzon*, and it is the holy way to use *azus metzach*.

The Depth of Evil Brazenness: When Connection Is Impossible

Now we will go deeper into the depth behind brazenness – when it is evil, and when it is good.

The Sages give two prime examples of a "brazen-faced person." One opinion in the Sages is that it is referring to a child born out of a forbidden union, in which the woman was a *niddah* (ritually impure) at the time of the union. The other opinion is that it is referring to a child who is a *mamzer*, a child born out of wedlock.[\[20\]](#)

A *mamzer* represents a more complete kind of brazen union than a child born from a *niddah*. A Jew is forbidden to have marital relations with his wife when she is a *niddah*, but it's only a temporary disconnection. She is not, in essence, someone who he may not connect with; it is just that she is temporarily forbidden to him, until she becomes ritually purified again. But a *mamzer* is someone who a Jew cannot marry at all. In other words, a *mamzer* is someone who we cannot connect with, and this is the depth behind brazenness – someone who cannot have connections with other people.

If one has marital relations with a *niddah*, he has been brazen in that he has connected with someone whom he was not allowed to have that connection with, for the time being. But when one has relations with a married woman, he has done something much worse – he has attempted to connect with someone whom he is *in essence* disconnected from. The child born from wedlock, a *mamzer*, is thus the result of brazenness on its most ultimate evil level.

We can see a hint to this from the words *niddah* and *mamzer*. The word *niddah* comes from the Hebrew words "na" and "nad" together, which means "moving and wandering." This hints to the fact that when a woman becomes a *niddah*, she is distanced from her husband, but only temporarily. She has "wandered" away from him, but eventually, she comes back, when she is ritually pure again. But the word *mamzer* comes from the word *zar*, "stranger." This is because a *mamzer* was born from someone whom one was never allowed to connect with – a married woman is a complete stranger, in essence, to the man who had relations with her.

Thus, brazenness is when one is a "stranger" to another person, and that is why he acts brazen to the person.

When Brazenness Is Holy

Chazal say that one should be "brazen like a leopard." Why is the leopard the epitome of brazenness? The answer lies in the following. Elsewhere, Chazal say that a leopard comes from the union between a forest hog and a jaguar. This is reminiscent of a *mamzer*, because one kind of animal has connected with an animal that is a complete stranger to itself. A *mamzer* represents the evil kind of brazenness.

When this brazenness is used for good, however, of this Chazal say, “Be brazen like a leopard.”

There is another way how we can see that a *mamzer* is worse than a child produced from *niddah*. A *mamzer* may not marry into the Jewish people; he is considered a complete stranger, because he has come from an evil, “strange” relationship. But the child born from a *niddah* may marry into the Jewish people; it is just that his lineage is somewhat damaged.

A *mamzer* thus represents an attempt to achieve a union when it is really impossible for the connection to ever happen. Since all evil has its equal use when it comes to good, we can find this concept when it comes to good as well. Chazal say that one should be “brazen as a leopard”, meaning that when can strive to form a connection with something even when it seems impossible, if it is for something holy. When a person is brazen in a holy way, when he is “brazen like a leopard”, he is unlimited in how much he can connect with something that doesn’t seem to allow for a connection.

The Hebrew word for “leopard” is “*namer*”, which has the same numerical value in Hebrew as the word “*eret*”. The word *eret* comes from the words *ratz* (run) and *aleph* (chief), which alluded to how a person must “run” to the *Aleph*\Chief of the world: Hashem.

Every person has the ability to be brazen, but usually we are limited in how brazen we are when it comes to pursuing a holy goal. When we run into an obstacle in our path of spiritual progress, we often lose our ambitions, and we get lethargic. On this, Chazal say, “Be brazen as a leopard.” That even when you have obstacles in your path and it seems impossible, you can transcend the obstacle. That is the depth of holy brazenness – you can brazenly persist to achieve your goals for spirituality and holiness, even though it seems impossible sometimes.

The power of holy brazenness, *azus d'kedushah*, comes from our power of holy *daas*. Through utilizing our holy *daas*, we can connect to anything and achieve the seemingly insurmountable.

Through using holy brazenness, we have the tool to receive the understanding of the holy Torah. The Torah is the source of everything, and it can connect all of Creation together. In order to be eligible for the Torah, which connects everything, we ourselves have to acquire the ability to persevere in our spiritual goals and be able to connect to anything. As Chazal say: “The most brazen of the nations is *Yisrael*”!

[1] Avos 5:20

[2] Zevachim 88b

[3] Berachos 6a

[4] Yeshayahu 62:8

[5] Nesivos Olam: Nesiv HaBushah

[6] See Rashi to Pirkei Avos 5:20.

[7] The Sages state, "Cast bitterness upon the students" – Kesubos 103b.

[8] Nedarim 20a

[9] Sanhedrin 105a

[10] The Sages say this regarding Moshe Rabbeinu, Eliyahu HaNavi and Channah HaNeviah, who all prayed to Hashem and spoke impudently to Hashem out of a great desire that their prayers be answered.

[11] Kallah Rabbasi: 2

[12] Shabbos 156a

[13] Nedarim 20b

[14] *ibid*

[15] Sotah 49a

[16] Mishlei 27:19

[17] Targum Onkelos to Beraishis 2:17

[18] This will be explained (*b'ezras Hashem*) in Chapter 19.

[19] Beitzah 25b

[20] A mamzer is a child born of the union from a Jewish woman who is already married to another Jewish man. His status is that he cannot marry into the Jewish people (except for a woman has the same status that he does).