

Consider This...

Ten things you need to know to be your own master

Essays on Jewish-Chassidic Life
in Contemporary America

Gershon Schusterman

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B”H

Forward

Consider this image: a toddler, tightly clutching his blanket and stuffed animal, angrily shrugging, pouting and sucking his thumb. Think: have you seen an adult indulging himself the same way? Think again!

The Pursuit of Happiness is in the American Constitution, not in ours.

Giving in to unreasonable demands teaches that true principles and values are not essential. Giving in is giving up.

Yesterday’s indulgence was a temporary weakness, not a policy statement.

Our destiny is that of a people apart. We have to be in the world but we are not of the world.

Where others saw simple-mindedness, the Rebbe saw single-mindedness.

Pay attention to yourself. The voices you seem to be hearing may all be your own.

This book is about life — and how to live life to its fullest. So much of our time and energy are spent — squandered, really— on dealing with life’s detours and potholes which, with a proper roadmap, could be avoided.

This book offers guideposts and it maps the high road to reach one’s destination in life.

Fresh insights into issues such as *emunah* and *bitachon*, courage, coping, hypocrisy, sincerity and dealing with life’s conflicts are but a few of the topics addressed.

Gershon Schusterman
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The chapters are not sequential and there is some recurrence of a few fundamental themes, common to an anthology.

A Tale of Three Personae

“Let me introduce myself. My name is Martin Cromwell. I know my *name* doesn’t sound Jewish, but *I* certainly am; somewhere way back when, my grandfather anglicized his original name of Koenigsbourg by changing it to Cromwell — to fit in better. I am a successful businessman who works hard and plays hard. I have amassed a significant fortune in the 1970s by making clever real estate deals, and I’m very proud of myself. Cutting ethical corners does not bother me; in fact it entices me. I am doing it my way, and I’m darn proud of it.

“For fun I do whatever I find enjoyable. I love to eat. I’ve checked out almost every classy restaurant in all the cities I’ve traveled to. My 280-pound body is a living testimony to that. I guess it’s obvious that I don’t keep kosher. It’s a drag, especially if you like to live life in the fast lane. I know I’m Jewish, ancestrally at least, but I have little patience for the rules. I don’t know enough about them, nor do I care to. I’m 30 years old, and I don’t waste time. My life and interests are fully occupied with practical and productive things, the results of which are tangible and enjoyable, while the study of ancient concepts and abstract ideas is not. In fact, I have no interest in anything abstract or theoretical. I deal primarily with ‘hows,’ not ‘whys.’

“I have little place in my heart for charity. I work very hard for everything I have. Nobody ever cut me any slack, so why should others get a free ride?

“A fellow businessman has been bugging me to reconsider some of my priorities. His name is Barry Gutglick and he’s an Orthodox Jew. While I have great respect for him and his business acumen —he’s older, wiser and much more successful than I am, and I hope one day to be like him, or at least to have the fortune he has— I cannot understand why he spends so much time on his holy books when he could easily make tons more money if he would come into his office a few hours earlier, like I do. I open the offices of Martin Cromwell and Associates at the crack of dawn every morning.

“Barry Gutglick once tried to introduce me to one of his heroes, a wizened rabbi who looks and acts as if he just stepped off the boat, though he’s been in the US of A almost 40 years! Would you believe he prays for hours every day? What he is praying for, I don’t know. Not for food, that’s for sure. He looks emaciated. He has a small rundown

house and many kids. The day Barry introduced me to him, the old man asked me to roll on the straps that bar mitzvah boys do; this was right in middle of the day, in broad daylight! I did it because I felt I had to; my friend was watching, and I didn't want to insult his hero. But as far as I'm concerned, that old man is from a different planet and a different century. We have absolutely nothing in common."

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"My name is Dovid Kletzker. In America they call me Rabbi, though I don't have a shul. I learned in a Lubavitcher Yeshiva in Europe before the war and I was deeply moved by the message of *Chassidus*, and it became my life. I work for the Rebbe; he is my guiding light. I learn and daven and help Yidden in whatever way I can. I spend a good portion of my time on *Mivtzoim*. I feel I must put on Tefillin with a few Yidden every day, having heard so many times how strongly the Rebbe feels about this. For myself I need little. My wife and children have a roof over their heads —though it leaked last winter— enough food to eat, *boruch Hashem*, and clothes to wear. Nothing fancy, mind you, but who needs fancy? Values are what is important, not things.

"People tell me I don't eat enough or sleep enough. My wife tells me that we need to save some money for the future. What can I say? There are not enough hours in the day to get the important things done and have time and energy left over for such trivia.

"Some people think I don't know what's going on in this world; they say I'm otherworldly. I wish it were so, but it isn't. I follow the stock market and understand the small print on the stock pages as well as any businessman. I need to. I do fundraising for the Rebbe's institutions, so I have to know what I'm dealing with. I know the world well and I choose to relate to the world as it is filtered through the perspective of Torah and *Chassidus*. I've worked on myself diligently for many years to achieve this. There are so many things that are simply unworthy of a Jew's attention and interest and that are entirely meaningless in the grand scheme of things. My enjoyment comes from doing things that I believe give the Rebbe and, hence, the *Eibershter*, *nachas*. More, I don't need.

"Take, for instance, this young man that my friend Berel Gutglick introduced to me recently, a young man by the name of Martin Cromwell. He is a big guy, about 6' 4" and weighs almost 300 pounds. When he looked at me I could see that he thought I was from Mars. He thought I couldn't possibly understand him. Does he think people are so hard to understand? I'm almost twice his age, I'm approaching 60 years old, and I saw people like him 40 years ago in the old country long before he was born. Compared to the indulgences of today, yesterday's desires may appear primitive. But 40 years ago they were the most modern desires of that day, and just as decadent as today's. People haven't changed; just the things they desire have changed.

"I asked him to put on Tefillin, which he did. I'm pleased that he felt compelled to show respect for what I represent even if he does not yet acknowledge belief in it. I wish we could talk; then he would know how well I understand him and his aspirations, silly and

self-indulgent as they are. But that may have to wait a while since we are, not from different planets, as he thinks, but in different orbits. It may be up to our mutual friend Berel to bridge the gap.”

* * * * *

“My name is Berel Gutglick. At my business I’m called Barry, but I prefer Berel. I came to this country in 1951 with just the clothes on my back. Today, 30 years later, I am the owner and chairman of the board of a number of very successful business enterprises. If names mean anything, I have the right one. Gutglick means good fortune. I am humbled by my good fortune. I know that Hashem’s blessing is an opportunity and responsibility, and I am proud to say that over the years I have given away millions of dollars to Tzedaka.

“I know that to be worthy of Hashem’s continuing blessing obligates me to be aligned with Him. I daven with a *minyan* almost every day, I say *tehillim*, lots of *tehillim*. I learn Torah every day. In fact I don’t come into my office until I’ve learned at least my daily *shiurim* which take between one-and-one-half and two hours. (I get up very early, usually before sunrise, giving me a head start on the day.)

“I am now secure enough in my business affairs that I can afford the luxury of directing others, not only in business affairs, but in things much more important — life, and specifically Jewish life. I know that I have become a role model to many, and I don’t take this responsibility lightly. I conduct my business affairs with honesty and integrity, with a dose of kindness and generosity to boot. Because of my image, that of an Orthodox Jew even if I don’t have a beard, I know I have to be squeaky clean.

“Take my relationship with this young man, Martin Cromwell (where did he get such a *goyishe* name?). He wants to become a millionaire overnight; he has no patience. He’s smart and he works very hard. This I like; he will be OK one day, financially speaking at least. But he is self-indulgent. When he gets older and matures, he will see how foolish some of his attitudes and values are, but it may take a while until he gets there. I make suggestions to him on life’s real issues, then I back off. I don’t want to push him away. When he’s ready he will know to whom to turn. Meanwhile I bide my time.

“I recently introduced him to my revered friend, Reb Dovid Kletzker. To our community—and to me personally— Reb Dovid personifies a true *chossid*, such a rarity today. I hoped that being in the presence of such a unique person would give him some insight into things that he cannot get anywhere else. I’m not sure it worked. He did put on Tefillin with Reb Dovid, certainly an accomplishment, but I had hoped for more. I know I have to be patient. What I detect, I think, is that although Martin didn’t relate to Reb Dovid directly, he did relate to him through me. That is, by Martin relating to and respecting me for materialistic reasons and my relating to Reb Dovid for spiritual reasons—which Martin has yet to develop an understanding and appreciation for— Martin has a kind of begrudging, vicarious respect for Reb Dovid and for what he represents. I hope that eventually I will be the bridge between their two worlds.”

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“Hi! It’s me, Martin Cromwell, again. Fifteen years have passed since I introduced myself to you. Things have changed a lot over these years, and for the better. I’m married now to a wonderful woman, Mindy, and we have three kids, a son and two daughters. Our son was bar mitzvah’d just a few months ago, and what a bar mitzvah it was (more about that soon). Wish us *mazel tov!* He’s a great boy and I’m proud of him. He goes to Akiba Academy, a Modern Orthodox day school. His teachers in the secular and Jewish departments are really pleased with him, which is great, considering that he only started there three years ago.

“Who would have believed that one day I would be Orthodox? Certainly not I. I still go by the name Martin but I found out from my great-aunt that I was given the name Mendel at my *bris*, after my great-grandfather, who was a *chossid*. Would you believe that? Had someone said to me ten years ago that I would one day be Orthodox, I probably would have punched him! But Hashem —that’s G-d, if you don’t know— works in strange ways, and this time He worked through my friends Berel Gutglick and Reb Dovid Kletzker.

“Initially, I couldn’t relate to this other-worldly kind of person while I was so heavily invested in this-worldly matters. The slow but gradual change in me came about by seeing Reb Dovid as he was reflected in Berel’s eyes. I just couldn’t understand what does a smart, successful, practical businessman see in this old, bearded man that so energizes him? I courageously decided to go for broke and have a straight conversation with Reb Dovid, one on one. What I found amazed me. I saw a person who knows much more about many things that are really important than many more sophisticated people I know. And though he was hovering somewhere around the seventh heaven, his feet were firmly planted on terra firma. And his advice to me was always solid, that day and every time thereafter that I spoke with him.

“Gradually, my values changed. I got married, and fortunately —I say today— my wife was Jewish. It wasn’t so important to me when we got married, but it is very important to me today. Adjusting to marriage taught me a lot about not being so self-centered, and having children was the clincher. You can’t do your children justice without learning how to give and what to give. I realized that I was quite vain and superficial, and it was suddenly very important to acquire some real values rather quickly. I needed a crash course!

“It was a painful realization but I had to act quickly. Just as I quickly learned a lot about business by listening humbly to those in the know, I figured I could apply the same principle here. I started listening with an open mind and a humble heart to Reb Dovid, my friend Berel, and other wonderful people in their community, and to learn from them... so I would have what to hand down to my children.

“The rest is history. Reb Dovid began learning *Tanya* with me once a week and it opened my eyes and my mind. I found that when I learned a little Torah here and did a mitzvah there, things started making sense, and it felt right. I began feeling good about myself because of values, not because of things! I gave so much *tzedakah* that Mindy and I were named Guests of Honor at a recent fundraiser — which, as you can imagine, cost us big bucks, even after the tax deduction. In a way I’m still self-indulgent, yet I’m very different. Believe it or not, I now get a bigger charge out of helping someone in need than I would from spending the same amount of money on myself.

“Let me tell you the highlight of my son’s bar mitzvah: Reb Dovid ate a piece of meat! Reb Dovid doesn’t eat anything, anywhere, other than that which his wife prepares in their own kitchen. When we started planning the bar mitzvah, I asked Reb Dovid if he would come and he said yes. I asked him if he would eat, and he demurred. I asked him again and again, what it would take to get him to eat. He said he doesn’t, period. So I asked him if Rabbi Goldsmith, a respected, G-d fearing Lubavitcher Rov, would kosherize the kosher kitchen of the banquet hall and we would use brand new dishes and the meat would be *shechted* by the Lubavitcher *shochet* of his choice and flown in from anywhere he would want, would that work? Seeing how important it was to me, he yielded. Now, hanging in my den is a photo of Reb Dovid at my son’s bar mitzvah taking a bite of meat!”

* * * * *

While the above Tale of Three Personas is actually based on real people and events, it is presented here as a *moshol*, an analogy, in order to understand the three personas that reside within each of us. They are the animal soul (played here by Martin Cromwell, also known as the *nefesh ha'behamis*), the G-dly soul (Reb Dovid Kletzker), a.k.a. the *nefesh ho'elokis*, and the rational soul (Berel Gutglick), a.k.a. the *nefesh ha'sichlis*.

We all possess each of the characteristics of these three personas. To some, one drive (most commonly, the Cromwell-animal soul drive) or another is more pronounced, but we all possess all three. This becomes complicated because the animal soul and the G-dly soul are naturally in conflict with each other. Each draws the person in a different direction and toward a different goal. It is not surprising, therefore, that many good people feel conflicted, even as they make the right choices and do the right things.

For a person to be harmonious and integrated, he must identify the different voices of his two opposing souls and get them to talk to each other. This way decisions will have the endorsement of both of them. And help is available — from the third (rational) soul.

Cromwell and Kletzker are so very different that initially there is no possibility for them to communicate. Cromwell doesn’t relate to Kletzker and everything about him, and Kletzker doesn’t have the means with which to communicate with Cromwell. They would never have gotten together, were it not for Gutglick, who bridged the gap.

(In the *moshol*, the analogy, they could ignore each other forever and never interact; in the *nimshal*, the analogue, the three drives being within one person, one cannot get by without making peace among the three or the person will be conflicted.)

The rational soul's (Gutglick's) role is that of an honest broker, an apolitical, agenda-less mediator-type within us. He seeks truth and wants harmony within the person, wanting him to be whole. He is unlike the self-indulgent Cromwell drive that we know too well, which wants the entire person to pursue *his agenda only*. Nor is he like the spiritual, esoteric drive (Kletzker) that we surprisingly uncover from time to time, which, too, is single-minded in its quest to govern the entire person *his way only*. The rational soul understands our teeming drives and can also relate to our spiritual yearnings. By serving as the mediator, he (Gutglick) can help the animalistic drive understand and relate to the G-dly drive, both of which are innately part of who we are.

Sound too abstract? Here's a down-to-earth example. When you need to make a difficult, life-altering decision, do you ever ask yourself, "How will I look at this five years from now?" That is the present, underdeveloped you talking to your projected five years older and wiser you.

Likewise, when we defer to the still, quiet voice within us, the voice of conscience that whispers to us, it is often the voice of the G-dly soul talking to our animal soul. And its appeal is not simply a domineering shout, "IT'S WRONG!" Often the appeal takes on a tone of *ess paast nit*, it's not appropriate for you. You are better than this; you are higher than this. This is the G-dly soul's appeal softened and interpreted by the rational soul in a way that the animal soul, too, can hear wholeheartedly and allow itself to be influenced.

Pay attention to yourself. The voices you seem to be hearing may all be your own.

Where there's A Will.... Hashem Shows the Way

Monday, Sept. 30, 1974, Erev Sukkos, 5735: 4:40 A.M., Long Beach, California (7:40 A.M. New York time): Rinnnng, Rinnnng... Ringggggg. Could I have set the alarm clock for this pre-dawn hour? Rinnnng. That's not the alarm clock, that's the phone! Who could be calling at this hour? It must be a mistake! I warily reach over and pick up my phone.

"Good morning; it's me, Gila," the voice on the phone says. "My father just died."

As if a bucket of ice water had been dashed in my face, my mind is suddenly alert. It all comes back to me in a flash. I remember that Gila Cyrulnik's father was very ill for the last few weeks and had gotten worse over the last few days. Her husband Reuven is in New York, and she is home alone with her four small children in Long Beach, California (where we live on Shlichus with our own bunch of small children). And now this.

"I just received the call from my brother at the hospital. I need your help," Gila is continuing. "Since Reuven is in New York, would you take me to the funeral?"

It's Erev Sukkos and my *sukkah* is not up yet, and there's so much to do today. "Sure, no problem," I hear myself saying.

I ask her, "Who is with your children? Is anyone besides you making the funeral arrangements?"

She answers me. I sense that she is overwhelmed and on the verge of tears. I ask her, "What can I do to help you?"

In a soft voice, almost a whisper, Gila says, "Just get Reuven back home before Yom Tov." "Sure, no problem," I hear myself saying again.

Reuven, an M.D., had gone to New York to take his Boards in neurology (which, upon passing, would make him a Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, quite a prestigious achievement). The Cyrulnik's plans were for Reuven to spend the first days of Sukkos with his brother in Kew Gardens, Queens, and for Gila to go to New York and spend *chol hamoed* together with Reuven at the Pineview, a kosher hotel in the Catskills. Then they would go to Crown Heights for Simchas Torah and spend it with the Rebbe. Now, those plans were not going to happen.

Reuven, who studied medicine at the Albert Einstein School of Medicine of Yeshiva University, and Gila, had been Modern Orthodox. After coming into close contact with the Shluchim a few years earlier, they became full-fledged Lubavitchers.

"Just one more thing, please," Gila is saying. "You mustn't tell Reuven that my father died. He just spent the whole summer studying very hard for this test. If he hears about it, he won't be able to concentrate, and he may fail the test. If that happens, he will have to spend all winter preparing for it again."

The Talmudic metaphor for doing the impossible, *Shvor chovis u'shmor ess yaynah* (*Bava Basrah* 16a), break the barrel but preserve its wine, flashed through my mind.

"Call me when you have an exact time for the funeral," I say, and hang up.

No point going back to sleep with this project placed on my lap. First of all, I must track Reuven down and talk to him. It's almost eight o'clock in the morning in New York, which is a good time to call.

4:50 A.M. (7:50 A.M. NY time) I find the hotel where Reuven is staying and I reach him. He says, "I'm just getting ready to leave to my day of exams. Had you called a minute later you would have missed me. How did you know where I am? Why are you calling? Is everything OK?"

“Sure, sure, everything’s fine here, *boruch Hashem*, it’s just that your father-in-law is very sick, and last night he took a turn for the worse. I think you should come home for Yom Tov,” I say.

Reuven doesn’t understand. “I had told you that I wrote to the Rebbe asking if I should go to New York to take the Boards since Chanie, my four-year-old, is sick, and my father-in-law is very sick. The Rebbe answered, first, ‘We should hear *b’suros tovos*’ [good tidings] and then —Rabbi Klein called me just yesterday morning— ‘Yes, come to New York.’ I’m sure it will be OK,” Reuven is saying.

“Well, the Rebbe didn’t exactly say that it will *definitely* be as you want,” I respond. “The Rebbe said, *azkir al hatzion*, which means that he will daven for him at the *Ohel*... and that we should, *hopefully*, hear *b’suros tovos*’.” I find myself in this convoluted conversation trying to convince one of my *baalei-batim*, who is optimistic and full of *bitachon* in the Rebbe’s *brochos*, that things are not necessarily going to be OK in spite of the Rebbe’s answer, while unbeknownst to him, his father-in-law’s body is at this very moment on its way to the *chevrah kaddisha* for a *taharah*.

“Furthermore, Gila doesn’t think it would be a good idea for her to go to New York after Yom Tov under these circumstances. It would be better if you just come home today,” I conclude with finality.

“OK, I’ll think about it, but it’s too late to do anything about it today. My last test is to conduct a pediatric neurological intake exam, and it’s scheduled for 2:00 P.M., ending at around 3:00 P.M. That’s too late to get to the airport in time to get a flight to California before Yom Tov. I already tried unsuccessfully to get this scheduled earlier since I have to get from Columbia University Hospital in Manhattan’s upper West Side to the nearby hotel where I’m staying to pick up my belongings, and then go to my brother’s home in Queens, during rush hour traffic. So let’s talk again after Yom Tov and we’ll see how my father-in-law is feeling then. Anyway, I have to run now or I’ll be late for my first test. Good-bye,” Reuven says.

“Good-bye and good luck on your tests,” I answer, while thinking, “He’s right. This can’t be done.” The best laid plans of mice and men ...

By now, a little after 5:00 A.M., I’m wide awake and thinking of the full day ahead of me. I get dressed and begin shifting my schedule around to allow for the two or three hours the funeral will take. The shul’s *sukkah* still needs *s’chach* and my own *sukkah* still needs to be put up. These two things are top priority, besides the million other Erev Yom Tov things that have to happen.

5:45 A.M. Gila is on the phone again. “I’m sorry, but I hoped you didn’t go back to sleep. My brother says that it may not be possible to arrange the funeral today in such a short time. The California cemeteries are not as accommodating as those in New York City, which has so many Jews.”

“You must insist,” I advise. “Do you want me to talk to him? If it’s not today, it won’t be until Thursday, the fourth day, that’s not *kovod hames* [respect for the deceased]. Also, you won’t begin ‘sitting *shivah*’ until after Simchas Torah, but if it’s today you will start and fulfill all of *shivah* today. If you insist that it *must* happen today, it will.

“By the way, I spoke to Reuven just now. I didn’t tell him about the funeral, but it seems impossible for him to get home before Yom Tov. There are simply not enough hours left to the day after his tests are over.”

Gila starts to cry. “I can’t do this on my own...the funeral, four small kids at home, my husband 3,000 miles away.... Where there’s a will.... Hashem will show the way. Please, don’t give up yet.”

I rethink the times. *licht benching* is 6:21 P.M. today. Flying time from NY to California is a little over six hours, but only three hours or so on the clock since California is three hours earlier. So, if one gets a 2:00 P.M. flight from New York, one should get to California a little after 5:00 P.M. Is there a 2:00 P.M. flight? But Reuven’s last test ends at 3:00 P.M.... We’re back to the same conundrum.

By now I am rushing to shul to attend our struggling *shacharis* minyan.

8:00 A.M. I’m home again. I’ve davened, cleared my calendar somewhat by delegating chores to others, and I’ve gone to the store to buy some items vital for Yom Tov (such as Pampers for our two babies at home). Now I can focus on the task at hand. Yes, I know “the impossible just takes a little bit longer...” but where does one begin?

I check the flights coming from New York to California today. I call the three major carriers in our market and find out that there are 1:00 P.M. flights and 3:00 P.M. flights, but no 2:00 P.M. flights. A 3:00 P.M. flight will arrive in California at 6:09 P.M.; 12 minutes before *licht benching* time (if the flight is not delayed). This is not enough time to get to Long Beach, which is only 18 miles from the airport, even if there’s no traffic. During the afternoon rush hour traffic, it could take an hour and a half. Well, one can always walk... but 18 miles? Alone? Some of the areas are not safe, and Sukkos has no *lail shimurim* protection like Pesach. And what if the plane is delayed? The *halachah* is that if you arrive on a plane on Shabbos or Yom Tov you have to stay on the plane, and certainly you can’t leave the airport, until Yom Tov is over. Well, at least I learned that there is a flight available that Reuven could take *if* the other obstacles can be overcome.

I check Reuven’s test schedule. I am placing a call to Columbia University to find the department in charge of the neurology Boards. I don’t expect to get to the right department on my first try, and I’m right. It takes five calls, but finally I’m speaking to the registrar in charge of scheduling. I tell her my story. “Well,” she says, “this is highly unusual. We *never* make changes in the Boards test schedules since it is an enormous coordination feat. Please hold; let me see what I can do.” While on hold I say a *kapitel Tehillim*. She returns. “It’s been approved to move up his last test to 1:00 P.M., would that help?” she’s asking. “Yes,” I say softly, trying to contain my excitement, and then,

pressing further, I say, "What about the noon slot? Is it possible?" "No," comes the instant response, "there is no noon slot. That is the lunch hour, which is sacrosanct. Be happy with the 1:00 P.M. slot. I cannot remember the last time there were changes to a Board's test time slot. They are set weeks in advance."

9:00 A.M. (Noon in NY) I call Gila and confer with her. I tell her what I've learned so far and present the uncertainty and risks involved. "Should we go for it?" I ask. "It's your call." "Let's go for it. It will work out... somehow..." she concludes feebly.

I call United Airlines and ask if there is a coach seat available on the 3:00 P.M. flight to Los Angeles. There is! I ask to move Reuven's plane reservation from *Issru Chag* to today at 3:00 P.M., due to a death in the family. They comply and waive all the change fees, saying something about bereavement fare. I don't quite understand what that means, but I don't ask any questions. I'm satisfied that the seat was available and that they made the change. I'm surprised and pleased that things are working out. How come they believe me? I don't know, but I don't complain.

I call the hotel (I have the number scribbled on a paper from earlier this morning) and say that I'm calling regarding Dr. Cyrulnik who is a guest at the hotel. He has been called away on an emergency. Would they please send the concierge to pack up his personal belongings and ship them to his home address, billing any costs to his credit card? "Consider it done," comes the reply. I'm surprised; why do they believe me? I don't know, but I don't complain, I'm just amazed and grateful at how things are falling into place.

Now to find Reuven and let him know. After another round of calls I locate him. I tell him, "Your father-in-law is much worse and the doctors don't think he will make it another day; you *must* come home!" "OK," he says, resignedly, and then adds with some excitement, "Hey, I was just informed that I was rescheduled to 1:00 P.M." "I know," I say. "You do?" He doesn't wait for an answer, but continues, "But I don't know when there's a flight to Los Angeles, and whether I can get a seat on it, and all my stuff is in the hotel, and I have to get in to the exam room shortly..." he trails off in frustration.

"It's all under control," I assure him. "You have a seat on United's flight #21 which leaves at 3:00 P.M. Your stuff at the hotel is being shipped to your home, so don't worry about it. Just take a taxi from Columbia to JFK as soon as possible. I hope an hour will be enough time to catch the flight. Call me if you don't make it onto the plane. If I don't hear from you, I will assume you made it. May you pass your tests with flying colors! Good-bye."

10:00 A.M. Gila is calling. "OK. The funeral will be at 3:00 P.M., uncomfortably close to Yom Tov. It was 3:00 P.M. or Thursday, so we said yes." "You did well," I say. "Everything will have to be abbreviated and rushed. I'll pick you up at 2:30 sharp."

The question of how Reuven is to get home from the airport will have to wait a while. But we have time. If everything falls into place, he won't be arriving for more than eight

hours from now, and it is Erev Sukkos with so many things yet to do. And *s'chach still* has to be gotten for the shul's *sukkah*, and my *sukkah still* has to be put up. "Oh, *why* did I wait until the last minute?" I berate myself.

1:00 P.M. (4:00 P.M. NY time) Reuven hasn't called. Shall I believe —wonder of wonders— that he's actually on the plane on the way to California? If so, I can start thinking about Reuven's trip home from the airport! I call United Airlines and ask for flight #21's estimated time of arrival and am told that it will be at 6:04 P.M., five minutes early, and 17 minutes before *licht bentching*. "It's only five minutes but five minutes early is much better than five minutes late," I mutter to myself. He might get a taxi to take him the mile or so from the airport along Century Blvd. to the freeway, but then what? Walk 18 miles, alone? No, that wouldn't work. My colleague, Reb Moishe Yosef Engel, is volunteering: "I'll find a walking route; I'll drive to the airport, meet him and walk back with him." "Really? OK; agreed!" As for the safety along the route, let's try to get them a police escort. Is it possible? Whom do I know with influence in those circles? Perhaps M.W., director of the City's Queen Mary Dep't. (a unique position in Long Beach's city government, equal in rank to the fire chief and police chief) could help? Two calls, from me to M.W. and from him to the police chief, might just do the trick. I call M.W. He says he'll do what he can and let me know in a while.

2:00 P.M. (5:00 P.M. NY time) I still haven't heard from Reuven, so I'm sure he's on the flight. I'm putting the final touches on my *sukkah* and have to go to Shul and make sure the *s'chach* is going up on the shul's *sukkah*. Everything that can be done is now done.

2:15 P.M. M.W. calls back. He can't get the police chief to provide a police escort. Reb Moishe Yosef calls to say that he will go to Reuven's home to check on *his sukkah*. His *sukkah* is the pre-fabricated canvas kind, still standing from last sukkos, with the bamboo *s'chach* still on it. He wasn't planning to use it this Sukkos so it is still under the overhang next to his garage, dusty and full of spider-webs. Also, *al pi halachah*, the *s'chach* must be lifted and reset specifically for this sukkos. "I will take care of these things," Reb Moishe Yosef promises.

2:30 P.M. I pick up Gila and accompany her to her father's funeral, which takes place at 3:00 P.M. Due to the time, mid-afternoon on an Erev Yom Tov, there were no sermons or eulogies. Only the essential Psalms and Kaddish were said.

4:30 P.M. Reb Moishe Yosef is leaving for the airport. He's leaving early because there's heavy traffic both ways, and he doesn't want to risk missing Reuven.

4:45 P.M. I'm back home from the funeral, which was, indeed, as dignified as the harried circumstances allowed. Gila is back in her home, and my wife Rochel Leah is with her. My wife is the only one of the young Shluchos who has sat *shivah* for a parent, so she is acquainted with the *minhagim* of the *seudas havra'ah*, the meal eaten by the mourner upon return from the funeral, when one starts sitting *shivah*. The meal, traditionally brought over by friends, consists of round breads —rolls in this case— and hard-boiled

eggs. My wife had come to the house earlier, along with fellow Shluchos Mrs. Nechama Engel and Mrs. Chana Piekarski to await Gila's arrival and to sit with her for a while. While there, they quickly warmed up some food, straightened up the house, washed the dishes, etc., and got the house ready for Yom Tov.

4:50 P.M. I have an idea. There are many charter plane companies on Lakewood Blvd. abutting Daugherty Field, Long Beach's airport. I wonder if one can charter a small plane to provide taxi service from Los Angeles to Long Beach, and if it would be affordable?

I make a few calls and find out that the cost of chartering one of those four passenger planes is \$30 per half hour. The flight from Long Beach to Los Angeles airport and back should not take more than an hour, including taxiing and waiting time. However, since the small plane cannot enter the main Los Angeles airport because of danger to it from jet exhaust turbulence, it can only get as close as the Imperial terminal, which is two miles away from the main airport. It would be up to us to get the arriving passenger from the jet to his plane. "No problem," I hear myself saying. "Can I pay with a credit card?"

"Big talker," I say to myself. "How does one get Dr. Cyrulnik and Reb Moishe Yosef — can't forget about him since he's on the way already— to the chartered plane with the precious little time from landing at the Los Angeles airport to Yom Tov?"

I call United Airlines at Los Angeles airport. I work my way up the hierarchy until I am speaking to the chief supervisor. "Listen," I say, "I have a very serious problem, and I need your help. On your flight #21 there's a neurologist by the name of Dr. Cyrulnik. This is an emergency! (I don't specify whether it's a medical emergency or a Yom Tov emergency; I let him draw his own conclusions.) We must get him to Long Beach as soon as possible. Every minute counts! We have a chartered plane waiting for him at the Imperial terminal, but we need to get him to it as fast as humanly possible. Can you help me?"

"I believe so," comes the hoped-for reply.

I continue, "And then there's the Rabbi who is in the passenger terminal waiting for the doctor. He, too, must be alerted and gotten to that chartered plane..."

"Is that in case he is needed to administer the last rites?" the supervisor is questioning.

"No, and wrong religion, sorry," I say. "But please, would you get the Rabbi, too?"

"We'll radio ahead to the pilot to alert Dr. Cyrulnik to move to a seat near the exit door and be ready to bolt as soon as the plane lands. We'll page the Rabbi in the passenger terminal to go downstairs to wait in an area that we will designate. We will have a car waiting on the tarmac to rush the doctor and the rabbi to the plane at the Imperial terminal. Will that do? How else may we be of service to you?"

“Great!” I almost shout with joy, “And thank you very much, and the family with the emergency thanks you, too!”

5:30 P.M. I am drained... is this really going to happen? “*Az der eibershter viel, shist a bezim eich 'et,*” (if the One-Above wants it, even a broom can shoot) goes through my mind! Now, how are they going to get from the Long Beach Airport to Dr. Cyrulnik’s home? It’s only four miles, but still... I guess I’m the one.

6:00 P.M. I’m on my way to Dougherty Field. It’s an eight-minute drive. I arrive and park my car close to the opening in the chain-link fence that leads to the runway for the charter plane.

6:15 P.M. I raise my eyes to the heavens to see if I can see the incoming commuter plane. All I see are clouds and a setting sun. *Licht bentching* is in six minutes, *shkiah* in 24.

6:21 P.M. It’s *licht bentching*; no plane in sight.

6:26 P.M. It’s five minutes after *licht bentching*; no plane in sight. G-d help us.

6:27 P.M. It’s six minutes after *licht bentching*; is that a bird or a plane...?

6:28 P.M. It’s seven minutes after *licht bentching*; it’s definitely a plane, it is *the* plane; I can even see Dr. Cyrulnik and Reb Moishe Yosef through the plane’s windows!

6:29 P.M. It’s eight minutes after *licht bentching*; 10 minutes to *shkiah*. The plane door is opening. They see me and they are sprinting across the tarmac towards me. I open the car doors for them. Now, every second counts.

6:30 P.M. I’m driving a car, not a plane. How quickly can I drive the four miles?

6:35 P.M. No lights, no police, no tickets! We pull up into Dr. Cyrulnik’s garage and park. *shkiah* is in four minutes. Dr. Cyrulnik walks into his home to his waiting wife, and we hurry across the street to shul.

Where there’s a will.... Hashem shows the way.

Why, G-d, Why?

Who among us does not feel pained when we hear of another tragic terror attack in Eretz Yisroel? And after we hear about the murdered and injured, so often children, or a few members of the same family, we cannot help but silently ask ourselves, why, G-d, why? Why them, why now, when will this stop? When will the world be just? These are rhetorical questions for two opposite reasons: First, because we know the answers (yet the heart cannot but protest), and second, because even as we know the answers we know that the questions remain unanswered.

The subject of why the righteous suffer and why the wicked prosper has a name. “Theodicy” (G-d + justice) is the scholarly term for this age-old question. We believe in a just and kind G-d Who is in charge of the world, so it pains and perplexes us to see what seems to be unwarranted suffering. The truth is that to explain the issue philosophically is one thing while to digest it personally, especially when one is faced with the need to cope with life’s crises, is an entirely different matter.

One’s bias makes up one’s vocabulary: Someone else’s problems are written off as *nisyonos* (tests). One can ask the question, why are they suffering, and a question gets an answer. One’s own problems, on the other hand, are defined as *tzoros* (troubles). They are not questions that need answers; they are problems that need solutions. This distinction is illustrated by the following story:

A wealthy talmid chochom of the last generation in Poland was also a Rosh Yeshivah in the community’s small Yeshivah. He earned his living from a timber business. He would buy the trees of an entire forest and have them cut down, made into logs, tied together as rafts and floated down the river to their destination. There the timber would be sold at a handsome profit.

Once, when a special deal was offered to him, the Rosh Yeshivah used all his money and even borrowed more to maximize his profit. All went well until an unexpected storm hit the river region as the rafts were passing through, destroying the timber completely. Suddenly the rich man was penniless — and deeply in debt.

The disastrous news reached his friends first, who were afraid to tell him about his devastating losses. They decided to ask his brightest student, a brilliant young man, to tell him the news. The talmid went to his Rosh Yeshivah with the passage from the Gemora (Brochos 61a) that says, “A person is mandated to bless [Hashem] for bad events just as he must for good ones.” The talmid asked the Rosh Yeshivah to explain how this is possible. When the talmid received the pat answer about all “bad” events being really good, only good comes from G-d, etc., he persisted and questioned more deeply. He kept prompting the Rosh Yeshivah to develop the subject with brilliance and clarity.

“So, Rebbe,” he finally said, “If I understand you correctly, it means if you were to find out that all your timber was destroyed, you would dance for joy?” Still believing that the question was purely academic, the Rosh Yeshivah responded, “Certainly!” Then the talmid said, “In that case, Rebbe, start dancing. All your timber has been actually destroyed by a storm.”

Upon hearing this, the Rosh Yeshivah fainted.

When he was revived, the Rosh Yeshivah looked at his talmid and said, “Suddenly, I don’t understand the Gemora...”

Sometimes people find themselves in the *Rosh Yeshivah*'s dilemma. Suddenly, when they are challenged to cope with a crisis in their own lives, yesterday's wisdom, which they may have so glibly dispensed to others, is inadequate to sustain them today.

In the agony of the *tzorah* there are two components. The pain itself (be it physical, as in an illness, or emotional, as in a loss) is the first component. Then there is the uncertainty and insecurity that it brings to one's life. (Will the illness go away? How long will it last? When will I find a new job?) In this state of insecurity, we ask, "Why is this happening to me?" and feel dejected. We wonder, "Does anyone care how I am doing?" and feel lonely. It is the second component, the uncertainty and insecurity that are part of a *tzorah*, which is often much worse than the pain itself, excruciating though it might be. If one would know with absolute certainty how things would eventually work out, the trauma, dejection and loneliness would be minimized greatly. But since mortals cannot see beyond the present, we are anxious and fearful as we face what seems to us to be a great unknown.

Witness the difference between a child and an adult in dealing with a minor, though painful, medical procedure, such as a blood test. The child is in a state of terror and is likely to cry hysterically and beg to be freed from this ordeal. The adult does not enjoy being stuck with a needle and seeing his blood drawn either, but he is calm. The pain is the same for both of them, but the child is also experiencing fear of an unknown.

It has been said, "He who has a *why* to live can bear almost any *how*." Likewise, when one has a focus on the *why* of one's pain, the *how* is that much more bearable. Usually, however, it is difficult to grasp the *why of one's* suffering.

It is, however, a mistake to think that if one only had proper awareness of Hashem, if one only had more *bitachon*, more *emunah*, or more of some other lofty quality, the pain would be lessened, or would never have come in the first place. Indeed, that was true for Reb Zushe of Anipole, who did not recognize his *tzoros* as such at all. Reb Zushe was painfully poor, but when asked how does one deal with *tzoros*, he answered, "Why would you ask me such a question? I don't have any *tzoros*." However, since we are not expected to be a Reb Zushe but to be ourselves, our expectations need to be realistic. Speaking for most of us, when we experience pain, it hurts.

Suffering the pain and having true faith in G-d and His *hashgachah pratis* are not incompatible. The Frierdiker Rebbe (*Likkutei Dibburim* 34) describes his thoughts shortly after he was arrested. He imagines the feelings of those near and dear to him, his mother, wife, daughters, sons-in-law and the *chassidim*, and he bursts out crying. His pain was overwhelming. Then, the Rebbe states, "Suddenly, as a lightning bolt, a thought hit me: Who did this? Hashem! I did that which was my responsibility, and Hashem does as He sees fit. And at that moment I was elevated from my lowly situation and I ascended heavenward in thoughts higher than those who dwell in the material world, with pure faith and complete confidence in the living G-d..."

When the Rebbe cried, it wasn't for lack of faith, *chas v'sholom*. Yet even for a *tzaddik* and a Rebbe, the pain is so real and intense that he burst into tears. And then, the painful challenge propels him to greater heights ("Suddenly...I was elevated...") of *bitachon*.

Those of us who feel the pain need to recognize that the pain itself must be addressed directly, that wise words can only cushion but cannot lessen it. The uncertainty, however, can be ameliorated — even when there are no answers forthcoming. How? Let us look at a verse from "the wisest of all men (*M'lochim I 5:11*)."

Shlomo Hamelech (*Mishlei 17:17*) tells us: "At all times love a friend, and in time of *tzorah* a brother will be born." Someone who remains a friend even in time of *tzorah* becomes close like a brother.

Of course, this is true in the basic, obvious sense. But in a deeper sense, the commentaries say that the Friend regularly mentioned in *Mishlei* is the Al-mighty; He is the friend of every Jew. If one maintains a personal relationship with Hashem during tranquil times, that friendship will blossom into the loving support necessary to sustain one through rough times.

We often fall into a rut in our association with Hashem. When things are going well, we may take Hashem for granted and relegate Him to the background; familiarity can breed content. Life is good, so we become complacent and even smug, thus blocking Hashem from having an active role in our lives. A crisis changes that. A crisis shatters our smugness; it challenges our relationship with Hashem and forces us to reevaluate our basic values, to reacquaint ourselves with our real selves more honestly. We may find ourselves wanting. The process is a difficult one, for it forces us to soul-search as never before. But when this process is undertaken with commitment, we often find that our bond with Hashem is (or needs to be) much deeper than it had been up to then, and we feel the need to renew the bond in a profoundly different manner.

In this process of soul-searching we realize that *seichel* (reason), though one of man's most important faculties is inadequate to deal with all of life's issues; there is more going on here than we can grasp with our understanding. Life transcends reason. To be smart is not synonymous with being wise. In times of distress, we find that wisdom, maturity and faith are more meaningful than critical analysis. In the depth of one's pain, one comes to realize that Hashem is with one in one's distress *and that He cares*.

One's faith-bond with Hashem exists on two planes: before and beneath *seichel*, and above and beyond *seichel*. The former is sincere but simplistic ("Why do I need depth? I believe!"), the latter, deep and transcendent. The challenge of the *tzorah* raises one's relationship with Hashem to heights otherwise unattainable. Only when this has been worked through can the survivor say, "I've taken the working relationship —*seichel*— to its limits, I've come to recognize its limitations, and I can now relate to Hashem in a deeper, closer and more personal way." As the *Tikkunei Zohar* (17a) states: "No thought [wisdom] can comprehend Him at all; but He can be grasped in the heart's yearning."

As *Chassidus* explains, the purpose of a *nisoyon* is to achieve a greater level of *daas* (of Hashem); *daas* is the faculty of recognition, realization and closeness.

The realizations achieved by this experience clear up the uncertainty by substituting the need for answers with the knowledge and sense of certainty that one's suffering is purposeful in Hashem's plan, even though it may be unfathomable to the person. An example of this would be a child who falls and hurts himself, then runs to his mother for comfort, and when held for a few moments, becomes calmer. Has the scrape on his knee gone away? No, but the child's sense of security is reestablished in his mother's embrace. Likewise in Shlomo Hamelech's analogy: does expressing the pain that is in one's heart to a supportive and sympathetic brother make the problem go away? No. But it does give one the strength to cope. So it is with us, in dealing with our scrapes and bruises as we go through life. We need at all times to maintain a close relationship with Hashem so that when we need it, we can sense His embrace—even as the *tzorah* is at its most painful.

This is one reason that we *daven* every day. We know that we do not constantly generate our full *kavanah*-potential. But we *daven* nevertheless, we talk to Hashem daily and thereby we know Hashem and He knows us; after all, we have *just* spoken. We touch base. Then when there is a difficulty and we say *refo'einu* for health, or *borai chaim* for *parnasah*, suddenly, the words that we said by rote yesterday now become larger, highlighted and personal... and we sense that Someone is listening.

In fact, this deeper bond with Hashem arrived at through the *tzorah* initiates an actual deliverance from the *tzorah*. Dovid Hamelech says (*Tehillim* 91:14-16) that because a person trusts in Hashem and reaches out to Him, He will take away his *tzorah*: "Because he desires Me, I will deliver him, I will fortify him because he knows My name. When he calls on Me, I will answer him, *I am with him in his distress*, I will deliver him and I will honor him. I will satiate him with long life and *show him My deliverance*."

Perhaps this will give us a glimpse into the souls of those giants of spirit who went to the crematoria singing *Ani Maamin*, and the souls of the bereaved and maimed in the terror in Eretz Yisroel, who experience their agony yet express sincere *emunah*, *bitachon* and *ahavas Hashem* even as they challenge Hashem to bring an end to their travail.

Very soon, when Moshiach comes, we will merit to be in Hashem's presence constantly. Then there will be no more tests; we will see everything from the vantage point of the Divine. But until Moshiach's times—may he come speedily in our days—in these last days of *golus*, we can get strength from knowing that Hashem is with us.

Life's Potholes

Life's roads are not smoothly paved; they are cobble-stoned, with an occasional pothole and detour. It is important to have good shock absorbers to cushion the inevitable jolts; otherwise one might lose control when hitting a deep pothole.

When dealing with life's challenges and losses, some people react with variations on the theme of "It's not fair" and "Life stinks!" This is their way of expressing their frustration and anguish. Others rail against what they perceive as G-d's injustice and speak out harshly or cynically (as posted in a recent blog, "G-d is my bitter enemy, etc."). When they express their protestation of the events, they, implicitly or explicitly, blame G-d and fault Him for the way He runs the world.

After suffering losses of Biblical proportion, Iyov's (Job's) wife says to him in utter desperation, "Iyov, blaspheme — and die!" Iyov's response? "You speak as a loutish, impious woman; furthermore, shall we accept the good from G-d and not accept the bad? (*Iyov* 2:9-10)!" The verse goes on to say: "Despite everything, Iyov did not sin with his lips!" Even under the most horrendous circumstances, he would not criticize G-d or tolerate his wife's angry language.

When one engages in negative rhetoric, he is actually doing himself a great disservice. By viewing his situation in a depressed and bitter light, he makes it harder to extricate himself from his predicament. One should heed what has been referred to as the Law of Holes, namely, "When you are in a hole, quit digging."

The Talmud, while not justifying this behavior, is sympathetic to human frailties and rationalizes them. The Talmud states compassionately, "A person is not culpable for blasphemy expressed while grieving (*Bava Basra* 16a)." But indirect and forgivable as it may be, blasphemy is still blasphemy.

Actually, we have a rich tradition of leaders who criticized G-d's ways. Avrohom Avinu said: (*Breishis* 18:25) "*Cholilo Licho!*" (it would be sacrilegious to You [to bring death to the innocent along with the guilty]); Moishe Rabeinu (*Shmos* 5:22-23) rebuked G-d, saying: "*Lomoh Harieosa*" (why did You mistreat Your people [when things got worse for the Jews after he interceded on their behalf before Pharaoh]? And again, when G-d threatened to destroy the Jews when they made the golden calf, Moshe Rabeinu said (*Shmos* 32:32), "Forgive them! And if not, erase me from Your Torah!"

It is told of Reb Levi Yitzchok of *Berdichev* —who was called the Jews' advocate— that he "summoned" G-d to a *Din Torah*. He "filed suit" in *Bais Din* against G-d for not alleviating the suffering of widows, orphans, the poor and the downtrodden, as set out in the Torah!

But what all these advocates have in common is that, although they spoke critically to G-d, they had already established their bona fides as intimate 'friends' of G-d. *They* were therefore allowed to speak this way. Others who speak in this manner might rightly be construed as insolent and moreover, playing with fire!

* * *

The Talmud says that one of the significant distinctions between the Jewish Nation and the Nations of the World is the way they react when they are blessed and the way they

react when they are chastised. The Jews react —to both— with humility and submission to G-d, while the Nations react to blessings with arrogance and to chastisement with railing and rebelliousness (*Chulin* 89a; *Avodah Zarah* 3a). There is strength in this submission (see *Ovos* 4:1), and historically, it has been a vital element in our national survival (see *Shmos* 9:31-32).

Dovid Hamelech, whose life was filled with challenges and whose prayers are immortalized in the Book of *Tehillim*, guides us to a proper perspective. He says, “Hashem, it is through Your favor that you made my mountain strong; but should You conceal Your countenance, I become disoriented (*Tehillim* 30:8).”

When things are going well, we tend to coast as on automatic pilot, as if we deserve the blessings. Contentment breeds complacency, and we don't perceive a *need* for G-d in our lives, and then it is possible to forget Who is really in charge. We tend to overlook that only Hashem has the panoramic overview of what our life really is about and what His role in it is.

When one hits one of life's inevitable potholes and becomes disoriented, one has choices. One can rage and sulk and mope and glower and engage in sophistry and protest G-d's ways — but all that is accomplished is that one digs oneself deeper into the hole of cynicism and distances oneself from Hashem, at a time when one needs Him desperately. Or one can stop and reflect and get real.

The reality is that whether things are going well or not, it isn't our own doing, for we are never alone. G-d is with us in the good times, and it is His will that makes our mountain strong (even if we weren't appreciative enough at that time). In the difficult times, what we are experiencing is the disorientation resulting from G-d hiding His countenance. He hasn't forsaken us (*chas v'sholom*), He is just hiding. His deep desire is for us to seek Him out and find Him (see *Introduction to Shaar Ho'emunah*).

G-d wants a personal, intimate relationship with each of us. We must be willing to allow Him into our minds and hearts. Cynicism and disparagement are a shell that isolates us from Hashem; even as He knocks and cries “Let me in!” we are not willing to open up. To be intimate, we must be vulnerable. When things are not good and we become disoriented and frightened and feel vulnerable, we need to channel our vulnerability to reunite with Him.

Picture a child who is lost and then is found — bruised, weary and disoriented. When he is reunited with his mother and feels her loving embrace, his sense of self and serenity is restored. So, too, when we hit bottom, it is essential to reflect, sense and recognize Hashem's presence, providence and embrace, and thus feel restored. (See *Why, G-d, Why?*)

On Understanding and Forgiveness

No one makes it through life unscathed. We are hurt by circumstances and we are hurt by people.

Sometimes the hurt is entirely unintended; sometimes the person's intent is to do something for himself and the hurt to the other person is unintended; and indeed sometimes the intent is actually to hurt the other person.

Sometimes we deserve the hurt, such as when we step out of line and are put in our place. Sometimes it is for our own welfare (physically, morally or spiritually), as when we are about to step off the curb into the path of a speeding car. The person who shoves us roughly to keep us from stepping into its path has done us a great service, even if we feel "roughed up!"

Although there is a natural, spontaneous urge to strike back when we are being hurt deliberately and we do not deserve it, we need to stop and think. We have an ethical duty to evaluate the situation and determine what is real, what is right and what our response should be.

For example:

If a person steps hard on your toe in a crowded elevator, your toe really hurts, but you write it off as unintentional and ignore it. However, when a person intentionally brushes by you to get ahead of you in a line, he has affronted you. The first hurt didn't "hurt;" the second may not have hurt much, but it really "hurt."

Now surely we are supposed to try to understand and have empathy for another person's inner turmoil which might cause inappropriate behavior, while simultaneously not tolerating the inappropriate behavior that stems from that very same turmoil.

It is established that most abusers were themselves unfortunate victims of similar abuse in their youth. Having understanding and empathy for what compels them to perpetrate the abuse on others does not —*in any way whatsoever*— exonerate them. It does not mitigate, even one iota, their bearing full responsibility for the consequences of their own deplorable actions. If this were not so, every criminal or sinful act would have to be only understood and not prosecuted.

Do you think that people who do bad things think of themselves as bad? Almost everyone thinks he or she is a good person who is doing his or her best under the circumstances.

Torah society and people with common sense make the following distinction clearly and emphatically. One may be going through one's own torment on the inside, but nevertheless one must act appropriately to others on the outside. People are to be judged by their actions, not by their intentions or by the validity of their excuses.

In fact, being patient and understanding with one who deserves rebuke encourages and reinforces the bad behavior. Doing so makes you an enabler — the classic definition of which is *one who enables another to persist in poor behavior by providing excuses or by making it possible to avoid the consequences of such behavior*.

Our *Chazal* state it succinctly, "He who has it within his ability to protest and doesn't is called a *roshoh* [wicked] (*Shvuos* 39b)." They further warn us (*Koheles Raba*, 7:16) of the consequences, "He who is merciful to those who are cruel ends up being cruel to those who deserve mercy!"

There's a Yiddishism, "*Bist broigez? Bayse a pereneh!*" (You're angry? Bite a muff.) Alternatively, "*Bist broigez? Klap kop ohn vant!*" (You're angry? Bang [your] head against the wall.) These sayings are meant to convey that even if you feel justified in your anger, find an innocuous way to vent, but don't take your anger out on others!

Taking one's pain out on someone else doesn't heal it; it perpetuates more pain.

The *only* time a person can get away with inappropriate behavior caused by one's inner turmoil is when one is deemed (by Torah and the law of the land) mentally incompetent. Then that person is to be pitied and helped — not merely understood. But if the person *is* competent (even if s/he was hurt or damaged), then s/he is accountable for his/her behavior.

Strong people are admired for their ability to rise to the occasion; weak people are viewed with sadness for their apparent inability (i.e. unwillingness) to do so.

(I say apparent, because Torah does not give a "pass" to those who deem themselves weak; if it is a person's responsibility according to Torah, he *can* do it. *Chassidus* defines one as strong when he *chooses* to access his inner resources, as in, "Who is strong? He who conquers his inclination" *Mishneh, Ovos* 4:1. See elaboration on this theme in *Leadership — Chazak v'Ematz*.)

These are really the only choices: Either people *are* competent and therefore responsible for their actions, or they are *incompetent* and therefore not responsible. If they are incompetent, they are to be pitied, period. You can't have it both ways.

In dealing with our hurts, first we need to establish clearly what has happened or is happening to determine what our proper response should be. Fuzzy thinking will not do. Then, even if we establish that the other person has acted inappropriately or out of weakness, *we* still need to act appropriately. We need to treat that person with dignity (which we should afford every person), respect (if the other person is an otherwise respectable person) and, ultimately, with mercy. As we want to be judged mercifully — by Hashem and by our peers — so must we judge others, even if we have been mistreated by them. Hashem *always* judges us honestly, fairly and, we pray, mercifully.

Note: On an *entirely supra-altruistic level* (that of *midas Chassidus*, which is *lifnim m'shuras hadin*), a person who has been affronted and hurt should simultaneously see the offense as a providential, vicarious learning opportunity from On-High (*Tanya, Iggeres Hakodesh* 25). Also, one might be able to find place in one's heart to have mercy on, and even pray for, the "G-dly person" who is "trapped" in the weak and poor mindset of the wrongdoer (*Tanya, chapter* 32). These strategies may enable one to depersonalize the hurt and even forgive the offender, while concurrently holding him responsible for his wrongdoing.

Shalom Versus Emes

(Peace Versus Truth)

Early on, when we became the Jewish nation, we had two leaders: Moshe Rabeinu and Aharon Hakohen. Moshe embodied truth while Aharon embraced peace. Hashem desired both, hence He established a leadership team representing the two values.

In theory, both noble ideals should go hand in hand. In reality, because of our human foibles, the two are often in conflict, and we must choose between one and the other.

Maintaining peace often involves compromising truth. Truth requires integrity and often provokes dissension. Which of these vitally necessary virtues should be considered primary and which secondary? When they appear to be in conflict, which one should yield to the other?

Peace has an emotional, feeling character. Truth is associated with thought and intellect which can be seen as cold and dispassionate.

There is an advantage and a disadvantage to each of these. Our emotions feel real while our intellect seems detached. On the other hand, feelings are sentimental and are easily influenced while the intellect is clear and objective.

Peace-loving people desire what is best, but they can be swayed from what is right to achieve peace. Peacemakers are prone to appeasing. We remember with disgust British Prime Minister Chamberlain's infamous proclamation of 1938 (when he entered into a pact with Hitler *ym"s*): "I believe it is peace in our time." (Not surprisingly, Hitler broke the pact a short while later when it no longer served his purpose.)

The same is true on a more familiar level. Consider the mother and daughter in the dressing room, negotiating over an outfit that is not *tzinusdik*. "It's okay, Ma. Everyone dresses this way today. You don't want to be old-fashioned, do you?" Although the mother knows that it is inappropriate, she yields. The daughter knows her mother's vulnerabilities well, and, when pressed, the mother responds on cue; after all, she doesn't want to alienate her daughter.

Here truth was compromised for peace. Had the mother prioritized truth over peace she would have said, "No, it is not suitable. I care for you too much to allow you to exchange your dignity for inappropriate and superficial trendiness. I know you may not appreciate this today, but one day you will."

When people say they want to maintain peace, it often reflects their own desire to be popular with everyone. This subjects the peacemaker to emotional blackmail. You see this with mothers and their children. When little children do not get their way, some try to manipulate their mothers by saying, "I hate you!" Adolescents do the same in more subtle ways. Yet giving in to children's unreasonable demands teaches them that true principles and values are not essential and consistent. Giving in is often giving up.

This type of peace, reached by compromising one's truth, is illusory and unreliable.

To those who run with their feelings, "he is all heart" might be considered a compliment. But our sages (*Sefer Meorei Ohr*) say that a dog is called *kelev* because it means *kulo lev* — he is all heart! The dominion of the mind over the heart distinguishes a human from an animal.

Hashem granted the human being a mind to guide his heart. Animals have minds, too, but only to serve their instincts and feelings. The uniqueness of the human being is that s/he can reason independently of his/her feelings and that his/her mind can and should guide his/her feelings, not the other way around.

This is what the Alter Rebbe says: (*Tanya*, chapter 12) ...*hamoach shalit al halev b'toladeto v'teva yetzeeroso*, the mind rules the emotions from birth, naturally. Indeed, human self-control based on the mind's truth is "built in." It is not a trait one must acquire; we simply (okay, not so simply) must choose to exercise it.

In the Moshe and Aharon team, Moshe (Truth) was the leader, Aharon (Peace) his second-in-command. And when Moshe was on the mountain and Aharon was in charge, Aharon, with his best, peace-loving intentions, facilitated the building of the golden calf (see *Shmos* 32:35)!

If one chooses peace over truth, the truth is lost and the peace, if achieved, will be superficial and short-lived. If one chooses truth over peace, one has truth for sure, and there's a good chance one will, in the long run, gain true, lasting peace, as well.

Worshipping One's Feelings

I met a friend in shul the other day and asked him, "I called you two days ago, why didn't you return my call?" He responded, "The day you called me I was in a bad mood; that is just how I am!" This was meant to convey that, though his behavior was inappropriate, it was somehow justified. "It wasn't my fault. I couldn't help it."

We've adopted a modern habit —or shall we say vice— of worshipping one's feelings, as if feelings, as long as they are sincere, are an acceptable standard-bearer of right and wrong. They are not.

Take, for example, the seemingly innocuous matter of one's moods. We would like to be in a good mood all the time, but when we are in a bad mood, what then? Do we accept it or do we fight it off?

I'm not talking about those simple blue moods brought on by lack of sleep or by hunger. Such moods are easily resolved. Men, in particular, work better when watered and fed. Nor am I talking about clinical depression, which requires medical intervention. I'm

talking about the familiar gloomy, depressed moods we all experience periodically and those who allow their moodiness to take over their life.

“This is how I am” may, indeed, be true up to a point and *up until now*, but it is not how you have to be *from now on*. You are in charge. “I cannot control my feelings!” is a lie; you can, and you must.

A positive, optimistic attitude is a vital and integral part of Chassidic doctrine and Jewish living. It is expected of *and achievable by each of us*. The best self-help book on this subject, tried and tested, is the Alter Rebbe’s *Tanya* (chapters 26-33).

We hurt ourselves when, because of our moodiness, we feel burdened, and our everyday tasks require excessive effort. We hurt those around us who have to walk on eggshells, fearful of our responding peevisly or sullenly. It gets even worse; since moods are contagious, we often elicit a bad-mood response from the person reacting to our surly behavior. What a mess!

Consider this image: a toddler, tightly clutching his bottle, blanket and stuffed animal, angrily shrugging, pouting and sucking his thumb. Think: have you seen an adult indulging himself the same way? Think again!

We brush our teeth and bathe so as not to inflict what is natural but unpleasant on others. We should grant others the same courtesy with our unpleasant moods.

A person who is in a bad mood is miserable. When one has a cold and feels miserable, one fights it by all available means (medicine, hydration, rest, etc.). Why would one not do the same for a morose mood?

The answer is because to be moody is to be self-indulgent.

Some people are not “happy” unless they are sad and miserable. Why would one want to be sad and miserable? What is the payoff? The moody one sees himself as a victim (of people, circumstance, fate, etc). As a victim, one does not have to take responsibility for one’s feelings and behavior. How convenient!

Another matter is that giving in to one’s moods creates a warped reality. When you have an argument with your spouse and you are in a bad mood, you might engage in the following mental rumination: “My spouse is a ... s/he *always*..... and s/he *never*...” But is it true that s/he *always* or *never* etc.? Of course not. Suddenly, all the good and caring acts of the past seem to have been forgotten! Does the circumstance warrant the broad-brush, dramatic reaction? Usually not. One’s bad mood warps one’s perception of reality and a reality check is in order.

It would be worthwhile to get a handle on what sets off your moodiness. It may require some uncomfortable soul-searching, but there is always a specific catalyst. Talking it

through with a wise and trusted counselor might help pinpoint that catalyst and could improve the quality of your life immeasurably.

The Midrash (*Breishis Rabba* 34:10) says that the righteous control their hearts, whereas the wicked allow their hearts to control them. As with all moral matters, it is a choice we make. Urges, desires, impulses, feelings and moods, need to, alternatively, be squelched, harnessed, channeled, guided and directed. *We* are in charge here.

Life is a battle between the good and the evil, between the selfish and the altruistic, within us. One cannot engage in a battle passively. Not wanting to engage in this battle is not pacifistic, it is surrender; and when we give up, we know who the victor will be.

One *can* control one's feelings. If one gets a phone call from a friend right in middle of a moody incident, notice how smoothly one can metamorphosize and have a perfectly civil conversation and then go right back into one's moodiness. That is proof positive that *we are* in charge.

We are even in charge of much more visceral drives. An addicted smoker, who claims he is unable to quit, stops smoking every Shabbos for 25 hours and doesn't suffer withdrawal pangs. (I know; I've been there.) When we set our minds to the task, we are stronger than we give ourselves credit for.

We *are not* our feelings; we are multifaceted people who, among other things, *have* feelings. The role of feelings is to help us relate, warmly and wholesomely, with others and with ourselves. When feelings are warped and get in the way of this role, they need to be analyzed and fixed.

We can even speak to our feelings in second person. The Alter Rebbe (*Tanya*, chapter 29) instructs a person to address his animal soul (when it wants to take over) by saying, "Indeed, you are truly evil and wicked, abominable, loathsome and disgraceful." The you is not I; I'm much better than that, so don't bother me. This is how we must, at times, view our very own feelings; meddlers and intruders on our better selves.

Each one of us enters the world with different circumstances, character and disposition, and with unique challenges to overcome, some easier and some more difficult. Why allow our moods, which, like the weather, are constantly changing, to run our lives? We each have but one life to live; let us make the best of it.

I Could Have, Should Have, Would Have... but...

I Don't Want to Be a Hypocrite

Have you ever held back from doing something that you knew you should do, but didn't because you didn't want to come across as a hypocrite? I know I have. Have you ever done something you knew you shouldn't do because you didn't want to come across as a hypocrite? I know I have.

Let's face the truth: that little voice appealing to our integrity, saying, "Don't be a hypocrite," is the voice of the *yetzer hora* who is out to trip us up. Because that which we define as avoiding hypocrisy is often an attempt to avoid facing our weakness.

Let's look at a common example. Many of us valiantly fight the battle of the bulge every day. We want to lose the few extra pounds that have crept up on us. We win some days, lose on others. Now, would you say that if you overindulged yesterday, it would be hypocritical to pass up the extra piece of _____ (insert your favorite indulgence) today? After all, you did give in to your baser self yesterday! Would you say that you have to be consistent and overindulge again? No, you wouldn't say that at all. You would say, "Yesterday I fell off the wagon; I was weak. I cannot redo yesterday. But today I feel strong, and I can take control of myself, and I will!"

Yesterday's indulgence was a temporary weakness, not a policy statement. *Today*, I am back to who I really am or at least to who I really want to be.

There's an unwillingness to accept and label one's poor behavior as a behavioral issue. One would rather convince oneself that one's behavior is a definition of one's self, as in...

"I am just a regular guy, as you can see from my behavior. I don't go to shiurim, not because I am lazy or simply not interested; no, not at all. The reason I don't is that if I were to go to a shiur, I would be making believe that I am some kind of inspired, scholarly type which would be hypocritical and duplicitous. So I won't go to the shiur because I am not a hypocrite."

We tend to call it hypocrisy when we act in a way that is inconsistent with who we truly are, which we define as our natural, unchallenged self. If we go beyond our comfort zone occasionally and do something right, we define it as a mere act, as if we were actors on a stage. But what if we really, truly want to be the way we act only occasionally because that's what we aspire to be? If we are working diligently to achieve it, yet because we don't have the strength to keep it up 24/7 we sometimes falter, does that mean we are insincere and hypocritical, or merely weak? Perhaps this is part of being human.

Let us define hypocrisy.

A hypocrite preaches, but doesn't practice what s/he preaches. A hypocrite rationalizes, "Do as I say, not as I do."

A hypocrite eats chocolate chip cookies while on the phone telling a friend, "Do not eat sugar, it's bad for you!" and while she is talking she eats another few.

To try to do good even though we can't *always* do good is not hypocrisy. It is trying to better oneself. If one doesn't always learn Chitas, for example, and one's daughter asks, "Do you want to learn Chitas with me?" it would be wrong to respond, "Since I don't always do Chitas and since I don't want to be a hypocrite, I won't learn Chitas with you

now.” On the other hand, one who doesn’t do Chitas daily is not in a position to give a speech at a public forum on the importance of doing Chitas every day.

There is a gap, sometimes small and sometimes large, between our aspirations and our reality. This is axiomatic. This doesn’t impugn our aspirations as insincere; it merely means that we have not yet achieved our goals. We should see ourselves as a work in progress.

Our Chazal demand of a *talmid chochom* that “his inner self be consistent with his outer self, otherwise he is despicable” (*Yoma* 72b). Only “a *tzaddik* lives by his faith” (*Chavakuk* 2:4). The rest of us experience a gap between living our faith (that which we aspire to) and our reality (the way we actually are).

There is an elementary concept in *Chassidus* (see *A Tale of Three Personas*): We are motivated by two opposing forces, a holy, selfless drive (the Divine soul) and an animalistic, selfish drive (the animal soul). *Each* drive wants to influence our behavior. *Each* drive wants to govern all of us, all the time. *Each* drive is sincere and loyal to its own calling. And so the battle is joined — over us. *We* get to make the final decision in each and every skirmish. It is up to us to determine which drive to call our own and which to call the other, the outsider, trying to influence us. We get to exercise our freedom of choice to decide who the “I” in “I am...” is!

There was a chossid in the lumber business, let’s call him Reb Chaim, who would buy entire forests and hire workers to cut down the trees and ship them to the lumber mill. Most of the time he associated with his workers who were lower-class laborers, and dressed like them, too. When he went to his Rebbe on special occasions, he donned his kapota and shtreimel, the garb of a chossid.

Once, Reb Chaim was stricken with a sense of guilt. “What am I doing? Am I trying to fool the Rebbe? Do I think he doesn’t know how I appear all year, dressed like a goyishe lumberjack? I don’t want to be a hypocrite.”

So, the next time he went to the Rebbe, he came dressed as a lumberjack. He was summarily informed that the Rebbe would not see him. He was shocked — for two reasons: first, because he was exiled from his yechidus (private audience) with his Rebbe, and second, it appeared that, indeed, his Rebbe was not aware of his daily attire. Now that he had come dressed as a lumberjack, he was being rejected. He had been certain that his Rebbe, with his holy eyes and vision, would have known all along...

Reb Chaim beseeched the Rebbe’s gabbai to intercede on his behalf and he was able to get a private moment with the Rebbe. He then asked the Rebbe, “Could it be that, before this time, the Rebbe did not know how I usually dress?”

The Rebbe answered, “Certainly I knew how you dressed. I assumed, however, that the true you was the chossid in the kapota and shtreimel, and the lumberjack image was the façade. If so, when you had your moment of truth, I would have expected that the true you, the chossid, would prevail over the lumberjack you, to wear the chossid’s clothes in the forest. Instead, you chose to wear the

lumberjack's clothes here! I may have been mistaken in my evaluation of which is the true you."

Reb Chaim, like all of us, was tormented by the conflicting roles of the *chossid* and the lumberjack, symbolized by the outfits he wore. How Reb Chaim dressed, appropriate to each setting, was an acceptable compromise — even to the Rebbe. But when he chose to not be a hypocrite and to allow his true self to take over completely, he chose the lumberjack over the *chossid*, thus wrongly defining his true self. *That* was not acceptable to the Rebbe!

To be conflicted by opposing forces within ourselves is endemic to the Jewish condition. It is why the Alter Rebbe wrote a few chapters in the *Tanya* (12-14, 27) just for us. It is to help us struggling-to-be-a-*bainoni* types cope with this discordance and to assure us that we're not crazy or hypocritical.

How well do we really know ourselves anyway to be able to identify our true selves and the actors we sometimes are? Even one as great as Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakkai said on his deathbed, "I do not know in which direction I will be led [to heaven or to...]" (*Brochos* 28b). Even Rabbi Nochum of Chernobyl (a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid of Mezritch) had to pause in middle of *yechidus*, to reflect on his tentative decision of how to allocate the large sum of money he had just been given and whether it was coming from his altruistic side or his selfish side (*Sefer Hasichos* 5703 page 67). If such great sages and spiritual leaders had uncertainties about which of the dual forces was driving them, what are we Lilliputians to say? Could we really expect absolute purity of purpose from ourselves?

It is certainly easier to identify with our baser selves and slothful instincts, but does that mean that this is who we are? Is not our specialness our *neshamah's* input into our lives? Aren't we really the person who aspires to rise above his animalistic instincts to be a better, more refined person and a Jew who serves Hashem? Is that not our true being?

The Torah claims that every one of us truly wants to do the will of Hashem — even when one thinks otherwise, even when one categorically rejects that motive (see *Rambam Hilchos Geirushin* 2:20). For example, when you approach a woman on Friday morning and offer her candlesticks and candles with the suggestion that she light Shabbos candles that night, and she says, "I don't usually do that, so I won't light candles tonight because I don't want to be a hypocrite," what would you answer her? What *should* you answer her?

You would and should tell her the truth, saying (first to yourself and then to her, finding the right words, *b'ofen hamiskabel* [in an acceptable manner]): "This is your true desire as a Jew whether you know it and appreciate it or not. It is the real you. It is like plugging a lamp into an electrical outlet; it energizes the lamp and illuminates the room because it is a light plugged into a power source. You, too, are a lamp; the Shabbos candles/Torah/*mitzvos* are the G-dly power sources for who you really are. Plug in and turn on!"

If this is true about one whose spiritual consciousness is as yet underdeveloped, how much more so is this true regarding a *chossid's* struggle to live up to his or her aspirations?

Shlomo Hamelech says (*Mishlei* 24:16), “*Ki sheva yipol tzaddik v'kom,*” a *tzaddik* falls seven times and rises. The fact that we fall does not mean that our aspirations are not real—even a *tzaddik* falls—we just have to pick ourselves up and continue from where we left off. We are not defined by how many times we fall, but by how many times we get up. And we have to get up only one time more than we fall!

Now, let's review the “I don't want to be a hypocrite” defense. Is it right to set unrealistically high standards for ourselves and then, when we cannot live up to them, view ourselves as hypocritical? Consider that this is a ploy of the *yetzer hora* to get us to set our sights low, under the pretext that then we won't fall very far. After all, if you fall from a high place you could get hurt, but if you never rise above the ground, you'll stay safe. The problem with this attitude is that, true, you can't fall, but then you can never rise above your lower self either.

The Rebbe wrote the following analogy to a new and frustrated principal who longed for his earlier, more secure days as a successful teacher: When you are on the ground you are secure. When you're on the second floor you are again secure. But when you're on the steps between floors, you're in a precarious position, with only one foot on a step and the other in the air and no firm ground under you. If you fall *while on the steps* you can get hurt badly. However there is no other way to get from the ground floor to the second floor. Transitional insecurity is part of the growth process. The Rebbe encouraged the principal to continue climbing and assured him that the sense of security would return in due time.

To argue that one doesn't want to do something good because one fears that one cannot (or does not want to) keep it up forever, saying, “I don't want to be a hypocrite,” keeps one's standards and self-image low. That is actually itself hypocritical—and arrogant to boot!

When one insists, “This is who I am, I don't want to be a hypocrite,” one is really saying, “*I don't want to change. This is who I want to be.*” Rather than facing one's inner self and challenging oneself to grow, one retreats behind a dishonest argument, feigning a devotion to sincerity in order to excuse one's laziness and unearned self-satisfaction.

To acknowledge that we are weak and need help is truly humbling. But as demonstrated in many successful self-help programs, recognizing one's own powerlessness and surrendering oneself to Hashem is a critical prerequisite to growth. The Torah predates these modern programs by thousands of years. We constantly beseech Hashem in davening for His aid to succeed in our struggle with the *yetzer hora* that designs to govern us. “Were it not for Hashem's help, we would not be able to overcome him [the

yetzer hora],” our Chazal tell us (*Kiddushin* 30b). We struggle as individuals, but we are not unique.

The Rebbe often quoted the Friediker Rebbe, “It is forbidden to speak *loshon hora* (slanderosly) about a Jew—any Jew—even about oneself.” Let us not put ourselves down as hypocrites. Let us not walk away from opportunities to do something good even one time because of a false devotion to appearing sincere. Let us challenge ourselves to aspire to be more today than we were yesterday. Even if we achieve only a part of what we set out to do, we will have succeeded. And who says that the goal is to succeed? Perhaps the goal is to strive.

Leadership — Chazak v’Ematz!

Leadership is a very powerful quality. It is a lot more than just the sum of the leader’s parts. A leader must have many talents and skills to be effective, but those are not what make him a leader. A leader needs to know how to do everything himself — but not do it himself. A large part of his leadership is being able to identify and utilize the capabilities of his followers. The greater the leader, the higher the caliber of the followers he attracts.

What are the intrinsic factors that constitute leadership and distinguish a leader from otherwise extraordinarily capable people? How can we incorporate these qualities into our own leadership positions?

When Moshe Rabeinu charges Yehoshua with the responsibility of carrying on as leader after him, he exhorts him (*Devorim* 31:7) by saying, *Chazak v’Ematz!* (Be strong and courageous!) After Moshe Rabeinu’s passing, Hashem Himself says to Yehosua, *Chazak v’Ematz!* (*Devorim* 31:33). When Yehoshua assumes leadership, Hashem instructs him *Chazak v’Ematz* three more times (*Yehoshua* 1:6,7,9). Finally, when Yehoshua addresses some of the Jewish leaders, they respond by saying to him *Chazak v’Ematz!* (*Yehoshua* 1:18). *Chazak v’Ematz* is found in Tanach two more times, both when Dovid Hamelech exhorts his son Shlomo regarding Shlomo’s future kingship. Obviously, this exhortation —*Chazak v’Ematz!*— is a fundamental element of leadership.

What is to be achieved by exhorting one to “be strong and courageous”? If one is not already strong, will telling him to be strong make him so? If one is fearful, will telling him to be courageous make him less fearful? What is the underlying message in these words that empowers the listener to become strong and overcome his fear?

Chassidus, the inner Torah, hones in on the fundamental meaning of strength. It defines strength not in relative terms —that which distinguishes the 99-pound weakling from Shimshon *hagibor*— but in absolute terms. *Chassidus* defines strength as the ability to call upon one’s inner resources (*Maamar Vayigash*, 5668). The underlying power is already within us; it is up to us to determine *if* we want to make the effort to evoke it. This conscious choice is the subtle but essential distinction between being weak and being strong.

We are aware of incidents where in a moment of danger people performed feats of great strength which would be impossible for them to repeat once the danger had passed:

The Frierdiker Rebbe tells of an incident in the times of the Tzemach Tzedek. Murderous robbers had attacked some people, and one of them hid by squeezing himself through a very tight space. When the danger was over and he tried to emerge from his hiding place, he was stuck; no amount of twisting and squirming could get him out. Finally, they had to break the opening to free him (Igros Kodesh M'hoRayatz 4: page 211).

There's an Associated Press report of Angela Cavallo of Lawrenceville, Georgia, who, on April 9, 1982, lifted a 1964 Chevy Impala off of her teenage son to free him. Tony had been working under it and it had fallen on him and knocked him unconscious. When she heard the neighbor's son screaming, Angela, in her late 50s, 5-foot-8, ran outside, grabbed the side of the car with both hands and pulled up with all her strength. That was enough to take the pressure off her son and two neighbors reinserted the jack and dragged the boy out. (Tony recovered.)

Now certainly there are physiological explanations, such as a rush of adrenalin, which explain why under extreme circumstances people can do much more physically than we ever considered possible. But we can apply this concept to strength of character as well, and choose to respond to circumstances with our hidden strengths revealed. It is the choice to evoke one's inner resources that distinguishes the strong from the weak. One should not think that the courageous are not fearful; they are. What distinguishes the courageous is that they access their inner resources so that despite their fear, they do it anyway!

Sometimes even simple daily situations need to be met with strength and courage. These have nothing to do with adrenalin and everything to do with strength of character:

When the alarm rang next to the kolel yungerman's bedside, he decided that he hadn't slept enough so he turned over to go back to sleep. His wife, the primary breadwinner during their first year of marriage, was getting dressed and noticed that her husband was not getting up. She asked him, "Are you okay?" He said, "Yes, I'm fine, I'm just tired and I decided to sleep in today." She didn't say a word; she just stopped getting dressed and got back into bed. Her husband opened his eyes and looked at her and said, "Are you okay?" To which she said, "Yes, I'm fine, I'm just tired and I decided to sleep in today..." Without another word, he got out of bed and went to the kolel, soon followed by his wife getting up and going to work.

This is a fine example of *chachmos noshim bonsoh beisoh*, the wise of the women builds her home (*Mishlei* 14:1). Without a word, she took a tired and weak husband and made him strong!

Our Rebbeim at *farbrengens* have quoted a certain pithy Russian phrase numerous times. *Mozhesh da nye chotchesh* means, “You are able; you are just unwilling.” Its origin was a wagon stuck in the mud:

The Shpoler Zaide was once traveling to the Mezritcher Maggid by foot. A Jewish wagon driver whose loaded wagon had gotten bogged down in mud saw him walking by and asked the Shpoler Zaide to help him pull it out. The Shpoler Zaide answered, “I can’t lift such a heavy weight.” The disappointed wagon driver responded, “Mozhesh da nye chotchesh.” The Shpoler Zaide took his words to heart and went to help him. As soon as he put his hand on the wagon, the wagon emerged from the mud (Igros Kodesh M’hoRayatz, 9:98).

Those who say, “I’m weak; I can’t do this,” can’t; those who say, “I can,” can! Those who are afraid to try something challenging remain fearful, unchallenged and unaccomplished. However, those who experience fear but take on the challenge anyway, accomplish! As a bonus, they also overcome their fear.

This is what the Mishnah means: *Eizehu gibor? Hakovesh es yitzro*, Who is strong? One who subdues his [evil] inclination (*Ovos* 4:1). Hashem made the battle between good and evil very personal, and the two conflicting sides in each person are perfectly balanced. How does one overcome the very personal challenge of the seductive whispers of the *yetzer hora*? When two opponents are perfectly matched, the one who can access his or her inner resources will emerge victorious. The Mishnah says that one must be a *gibor* who draws on resources that are beneath the conscious surface, to triumph in the battle.

Now we have a better insight into how the quintessential quality of leadership is expressed in the exhortation, “*Chazak v’Ematz!*” A leader is not a teacher though he does that too; a leader inspires! A leader models to his followers how they can be more than they are and more than they imagine they can be. A leader leads by being a living example of digging deep within oneself to achieve one’s goals. A leader is not deterred by obstacles; his/her vision and determination enable him/her to navigate around the obstacle or to go *lichatchila ariber* (over the top).

That is why people are drawn to a true leader—because s/he enables them to perceive that they can be greater than they realize. A real leader helps the followers find the treasures buried within themselves. Through his or her inspired leadership, the followers become mini-leaders, too (see *Rashi Breishis* 15:18).

If one needed proof of this in our time, observe the Rebbe’s inspired leadership and his many thousands of Shluchim. Many of these individuals might very well have been just ordinary folks, but charged by their leader, the Rebbe, sometimes relocating to the far corners of earth, they became strong and effective leaders of their communities.

The Rebbe was a true leader (and continues his leadership from on high, as explained in *Tanya, Iggeres Hakodesh*, 27-28). He looks into each of us and sees our true *neshamah*-potential. He continues to exhort us through his *brochos*, letters, *sichos* and *maamorim*:

“*Chazak v’Ematz!*” It is up to us to be strong and courageous, to dig deeply within ourselves and to mine the inner resources which we possess in order to help ourselves and those we influence to reach ultimate fulfillment, with the coming of Moshiach!

Is it Okay to Be a Modern Chossid?

The beloved *chossid* Reb Mendel Futerfas spent his first Tishrei with the Rebbe shortly after he was allowed to leave the Soviet Union. During Sukkos, he *farbrenge*d every night with many of the same *chassidim* he had known during World War II. He had, in fact, been instrumental in enabling most of them to leave in 1946, and because of which he himself was arrested and sent to Siberia for eight years. By the time he got out, the Iron Curtain had been sealed, and he was separated from all the people he held dear until 1963.

Though the subjects of his *farbrengens* were serious, his presentation was lively, upbeat, and, at times, funny. The *chassidim* enjoyed listening to him immensely.

During one of those *farbrengens* he chided his friends for becoming too Americanized, saying, “Do you remember what our concerns were then? Can you compare them to what they are today? Then we worried about whether we would have a little food for our families and where we might hear *tekias shofar* on Rosh Hashanah. “But today?” asked Reb Mendel, “My friends’ two major concerns in life are how to lose weight and where to find a parking space!”

Many years have passed since then. The European-born *chossid* has already lived in America for many decades. The American-born-and-bred *chossid* is now the norm. The American environment affects today’s *chossid* to a greater or lesser degree. This leads to the question and challenge: How is one to be a modern-day Lubavitcher *chossid*?

The answer depends on how you define the word *modern*. If the term *modern* refers to aspects of the *chossid*’s lifestyle (e.g., current year’s car, the most up-to-date PDA, the latest electronic appliances in the kitchen, etc.) but not to one’s values, then, *boruch Hashem!* If, however, *modern* is a description of one’s values and outlook on life—one’s *Chasiddishkeit* is modernized—then I think we have a problem.

We are all very proud to be Lubavitchers. We are part of the great Chabad dynasty, from the Alter Rebbe to our Rebbe. We are eager to partake of Chabad’s dynamic teachings, from the *Tanya* to *Likkutei Sichos*, which are vibrant, relevant and practical. We are very proud of Chabad’s activism, personified by our Shluchim throughout the world. Who could have imagined the transformation of Jewish life in the former Soviet Union brought about by our most dedicated young (and not so young) Shluchim and Shluchos? We are not secluded in a small *shtetl*; we are active and respected everywhere in the world. Didn’t we see the photo of our Shluchim presenting the President of the United States of America with a *menorah* in the White House?

Our senior Shliach in London was invested by the Queen of England with the title O.B.E. (Officer of the British Empire), and the royal protocol was modified — diplomatically and in advance— to allow him not to shake the Queen’s hand and to wear his Lubavitcher hat throughout the ceremony. (The royal protocol requires all men to be bareheaded when greeting the Queen.) Upon being presented to the Queen, he said the brochah one says when seeing royalty (the Queen was informed in advance that he would do so) while the Queen listened intently. At the end of the investiture ceremony, the Queen bowed her head to him, and respectfully followed him with her gaze until he left the room.

Talk about a *kiddush Hashem!*

Wonderful as this world recognition is, we can fall into the trap of thinking that if the world admires us then we must really amount to something. Instead of taking pride exclusively in our holy mission, we may be minimizing our self-worth by taking pride in the world’s acceptance (see *Likkutei Sichos 31* pages 171-174). On a more personal level, we might begin to feel as if we can have the best of both worlds; that we can be Lubavitcher *chassidim* and be “with it,” too! This opens us up to accepting the world’s values and its negative influences as well.

Some of society’s ills are affecting us. We watch painfully as some of our young people drop out of Yiddishkeit. We agonize over the increasing divorces (and not only of short-lived marriages of people in their 20s that didn’t take for one reason or another, but also long-term marriages *Rachmana litzlan*). And then there are those people, though older and wiser, whose need to be in style challenges the standards of *tzniusdike* appearance, setting a new sub-standard for the younger generation to imitate. Acknowledging that each situation is unique and personal, there is no doubt that some aspects of society’s shifting mores have infiltrated and affected us.

Indeed, we have much to be proud of as Lubavitchers, who are in the world to change it. But in order to do what we have to do we must be careful not to let the world’s values influence who we really are.

It is obvious that in order to influence other people, one needs to engage them, for *hamivarer tzorich lihislavesh bilivushei hamisbarrer*, he who refines another must clothe himself in the garments of the one being refined (*Biurei Hazohar* 142b). Yet, one’s best intentions notwithstanding, there is a price to be paid because *hamisabeik eem hamenuval misnavel gam kein*, he who wrestles with a despicable one is sullied as well (*Tanya* chapter 28).

Since we Lubavitchers deliberately choose to be not isolated but insulated, we must provide an antidote to the negative influences that can affect us despite our best efforts to be protected.

A point of infiltration is the desire to live the American dream. We must remember that we live to serve Hashem, not to achieve a state of happiness. The Pursuit of Happiness is

in the American Constitution, not in ours. A *chossid's* life is truly a joyous one, but the happiness comes as a by-product of living a meaningful *chassidische* life, not as a result of pursuing the ever-elusive happiness.

It is essential that we have clarity, certainty and sincerity in the truth of our identity. We are proud, uncompromising *erliche Yidden*, inspired by *Chassidus*. We —whether or not our grandfathers came from Nevel— stand for the very same things that Chabad *chassidim* have stood for—and sacrificed for—throughout our history. We are in this life for a purpose, to serve Hashem, to make our environment a home for Him.

Many of us remember the moment we accepted this clear commitment, this religious coming of age. Whether it was in our idealistic youth, at the time we returned to Hashem through *teshuvah*, or at a special, personal moment we had with the Rebbe or whenever it was. It was as memorable as it was transformative.

This clear commitment is neither abstract nor esoteric. It is expressed in the phrase the Rebbe Rashab told the Friediker Rebbe on his 15th birthday, when he was inaugurated into communal life (and *chassidim* have used this phrase to bolster their resolve ever since): “*Azoi, un nit andersh,*” so [it must be], and not otherwise (*Sefer Hasichos* 5705 page 112). There is no waffling, no negotiating and no flirting with the boundaries. Simply, what is right is right, and what is wrong is wrong.

If one is not clear about one's commitment now, one must rededicate oneself at all costs. One's life as a *chossid*, even as an *erlicher Yid*, depends on it. For some, honest soul-searching will be enough to rekindle the fire. Others will need the help of a friend or a *mashpia*. Some will be inspired by a *farbrengen*, a *maamar* or a *sicha*. Others will reconnect by remembering and reliving a special moment with the Rebbe. Some will experience this vital moment of truth at the *Ohel*, or in some other way. But commit we must.

When one has clarity in one's mission in this world, one is spared much unnecessary struggle:

A Reform rabbi wrote in his book of a question he asked of the Rebbe in yechidus in the 1950s:

“...as a matter of fact, I blurted out, all of your Hasidim seem to have one thing in common: a sort of open and naïve look in their eyes that a sympathetic observer might call temimus [innocence] but that might less kindly be interpreted as emptiness or simple-mindedness, the absence of an inner struggle.

I found myself taken aback by my own boldness but the Rebbe showed no resentment. He leaned forward. “What you see missing from their eyes is a ‘kera!’”

“A what?” I asked

“Yes, a ‘kera,’” he repeated quietly, “a split.” The Rebbe hesitated for a moment. “I hope you will not take offense, but something tells me you don’t sleep well at night. Perhaps if you had been raised wholly in one world or in another, it might be different. But this split comes from trying to live in two worlds.”

The Rebbe was pleased with his *chassidim*’s *temimus*. He didn’t see simple-mindedness; he saw single-mindedness.

It is an ancient struggle. The Rambam was asked by a wise man, “How could it be that after Adam and Chava ate from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge they became smarter? The Torah says (*Breishis* 3:7) ‘Their eyes were opened and they knew...,’ were they *rewarded* for acting sinfully?” “Not so,” the Rambam answered. “Their new knowledge was not superior. Previously their knowledge had been purely intellectual-spiritual; now it was also sensual.” (Previously they were both naked and [due to their innocence] they were not bashful; later they knew that they were naked, and they took fig leaves and covered themselves.) This new sophistication was actually a diminution of their purity (*Moreh Nevuchim* quoted in *Kuntres U’Maayon*, Maamar 26).

Sophistication is good, but only up to a certain point, and it comes at a price. “Unsophisticated” *temimus*, *emunah*, *bitachon* and *kabbolas ol malchus Shomayim* (sincerity, faith, trust and acceptance of Hashem’s yoke) are the lifeblood of every Jew, especially of a Lubavitcher *chossid*.

Some things in life are axiomatic, and we don’t struggle with them. When one has a bronchial infection and breathing becomes painful, we don’t ask how we can get along without breathing. We ask how we can quickly cure the infection so we can breathe painlessly again. As for breathing, it is a no-brainer: we know we must.

When we have clarity of purpose, there is no struggle to choose which learning track our son should embark on, how much we can compromise with our adolescent daughter regarding the outfit she wants to buy or whether we should have a TV in our home.

When we have clarity and convey that clarity to our children, they get it! When, on the other hand, we are uncertain, our children sense that, and the resulting arguments bring us to compromise even further.

We must live as who we are, a special people with a unique calling. We are Hashem’s people, making our environment a home for Him. This is who we are — in these modern times and in all times. Our destiny is that of a people apart. We have to be *in* the world to have a positive influence as a light unto the nations, but we should never see ourselves as *of* the world. We are of another world placed here for 70-80 years for a special purpose. Let us not squander our life’s mission.