

The Torah AnyTimes

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Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein zt"l

Born a Winner

The creation of a child takes place when a woman generates a single female cell and it unites with one male cell. However, in the process, a man produces millions of male cells.

I remember wondering why a woman creates one cell, whereas a man creates millions? Hashem should have made it that only one male cell is produced, which then unites with the one female cell and forms a child. Why did God make it that there are millions of male cells?

The answer is amazing and found in none other than a Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (3:1).

Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin. Where did you come from? From a putrid drop. Where are you going? To a place of maggots and worms. Before whom are you destined to give judgement and accounting? Before God, the King of Kings.

It seems as if this Mishnah is very sobering. We originate from a dead cell, we're going to rot when we pass away, and we'll need to account for our every action before God. The Mishnah would appear to intimidate us and make us feel down about ourselves and our life.

But the truth is just the opposite. This Mishnah is one of the most empowering and encouraging that there is.

Before a child is conceived,

there has to be struggle. A human being's whole life is about struggling and actualizing potential. Therefore, even before a person is created, there exists the struggle that one out of millions of cells is going to make it. And who is that one cell which wins?

You.

You are the one cell which prevailed out of millions of others. Before you were even conceived, you had to struggle to become the human being that you are. This struggle and victory is inherent in your very makeup, and is there to give you the strength to struggle your whole life.

The Mishnah is therefore telling us something completely different than it seems at face value. You'd think to read it, "Where did you come from? A putrid drop that is rotten and dead." But it's just the opposite. You were the only cell which was not rotten and dead. And that's what the Mishnah means. You triumphed all those other putrid drops to emerge as a living child. You made it, while the rest of them didn't. That's where you came from. You were in the struggle, in the fight even before you were born, and you succeeded. You won.

Thinking of life this way, this Mishnah is incredibly inspiring. How can we feel depressed when we realize that our entire life, even before we were created, we were faced with struggle and overcame it? If we don't live life to our fullest potential, then we will need to answer why all

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the other million cells did not make it and we did? All those other unborn cells will be asking, "What did you accomplish with your life? None of us made it and you did! Had I survived and lived in the world, I would have accomplished my potential!"

If you are alive, then you were the winner. And if you were the winner,

you must live like one. All the other cells died for you to be born. Your life must be worth their death.

The Mishnah is thus very positive. Don't ever tell yourself that you can't do something and that you're a loser. If you were a loser, you wouldn't be here. You would be nothing more than a putrid drop.

You are a winner. You were born a winner.

Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein zt"l

A Lifetime for G-d

The story of Avraham Avinu jumping into a fiery furnace is well known. However, it is not known from the Torah itself, but from the Midrash. The fact that the Torah refers to the location as Ur Kasdim, the Fire of Kasdim, alludes to an incident involving fire. This was the episode with Avraham Avinu. But the Torah makes no explicit mention of the story.

The Torah does tell us, however, about Avraham Avinu's departure from Charan. He is asked by Hashem to leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house. It then goes into detail of what the promise entails to him and his children. This, we know, is included as one of Avraham Avinu's ten tests.

But how can this be the case? How can the test of jumping into a fire not be counted as one of ten tests while leaving where he grew up be counted? It should be ex-

actly the opposite. Moreover, why does the Torah hide the story of Ur Kasdim and it's only included in the Midrash?

I once asked this to a rabbi, who offered me a fantastic answer.

To give up your life for Hashem takes a second, but to live your life for Hashem takes a lifetime. It's much harder to live for G-d than to die for G-d. To put on Tefillin every day, pray every day, watch what you say to others every day, be careful what you look at every day. That is hard. Dying for Hashem is extraordinarily noble and the greatest Kiddush Hashem that can be made. However, it is something else to live for G-d every single minute of every single day.

We don't subscribe to the belief that we are to commit suicide for the sake of G-d.. That is what other religions believe. That takes a second. We believe in living for G-d. That takes a lifetime.

Living for G-d, that is what Hashem wants written in the Torah. That takes a full lifetime of work. But dying for G-d, that is not spoken about explicitly in the Torah. That finds its way into the Midrash.

Lech Lecha is the test of living for G-d. We need to leave our surrounding culture that influences us in ways that don't support Yiddishkeit. Avraham needed to leave all of that. And that was a test. Dying for G-d is one moment of bravery; living for G-d is an entire life of bravery.

That is what Avraham Avinu was about, and we should too.

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One With It

The time of Omer is when we spend forty nine days focusing on specific qualities, such as kindness, strength

and beauty. What is the meaning behind this?

We can have a present that we received over Pesach, even as many of forty nine gifts, and yet

not utilize it well. We have potentials for kindness and compassion to others inside us or strength to fight the yetzer hara. We all also received on Pesach the gift that

we are beautiful inside. Every one of us has kindness inside, strength inside, beauty inside. Every person has a royal-like quality within themselves too, and every one of us is a foundation and glorious.

But the question is how this can be true. We've gone through so many years of Sefiras Ha'Omer and yet we do not feel glorious, beautiful or as kind as we can be. So what is this time of year about if we've gone through it so many times but nothing has changed inside us?

The answer is that it's never been absorbed. It's a separate en-

tity but not you. You can go daven and learn, but it isn't absorbed. Your davening and you are two separate things.

The way to feel all these qualities within yourself is to become one with it. You are prayer. You don't just "do prayer," and let it be something external to you.

My Rebbe used to tell me to become a "shtick Torah," which meant to become a walking Sefer Torah. What does that mean? They should hagbaah and gelilah with me? Put words on my body? The answer is to become one with Torah. When that

happens, it doesn't just become part of you. It becomes you.

And when you have that, it lasts.

Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein zt"l

The Real Truth

Hashem loves every one of us. Some of us don't let Him in because if we would, then we wouldn't be able to do everything we want. Most people come to me and say, "I don't believe in G-d." But I tell them that they do believe in G-d, and they just need to get rid of Him, because they're acting in ways that they know G-d doesn't condone. If G-d would tell us to eat lollipops and do whatever we want, we wouldn't get rid of G-d.

It would be great. But if I can't do this or that, then I can't agree to that.

Over all my years of chinuch, people have asked me to prove G-d. But in all of my years, no one has come to me and said, "I don't believe in angels." Why don't people have problems with angels? Why is there a difference between G-d and angels?

Because angels don't tell you what to do. So they don't bother us. No one denies their existence, because we want to do what we want to do, and in order to do so, we need to ex-

clude Hashem from the picture, but not angels.

It's a powerful way to re-shift our perspective knowing that it is not a disbelief in G-d which makes people do what they do, but doing what they want to do makes them find reason to push Hashem out of their lives.

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Look at the Heart

When you are looking for a shidduch, what does the Torah say you should focus on?

The heart.

The Navi says, "Hashem sees the heart." The heart, not appearances, is what we should focus on. If you want a good guy who will treat you like the most precious thing that he found in his life, you need to focus

on his heart. Yes, you need to be attracted, but it's not what to look for. In fact, focusing that much on appearance doesn't allow a person to focus on others. The more a person thinks of himself, the less he thinks

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of others. There is no room in that heart to think of others. You don't want a guy who thinks that "he's it," because if "he's it," you're not. You don't want a broken and depressed guy either. But you don't want a guy who believes that he is doing you a favor by marrying you, as if you are his mantlepiece. Find a guy who has a heart and cares about people.

He should also get along with his parents. If you get into a car with a guy and he begins badmouthing his parents, it's a red flag. The first relationship he has ever had is with his parents, and if he is not successful at that or appreciate what they did for

him, how will he be able to be successful in a relationship with you? No matter how dysfunctional it was, there needs to be hakaras hatov. If he floundered in that first relationship, how will he be successful in his next one?

To all my sons-in-law, my question that I first asked was: does he get along with his parents? My second question was, besides learning himself in yeshiva, does he give of his time to help others? Does he learn with a boy who is weaker in learning?

Being a learner is great, but if you don't have a heart, the marriage

will suffer. A man without a heart is missing something huge.

So look for the heart and you will find the right man.

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The Zodiac in Your Life

Every month that you are born in has a sign. It sounds non-Jewish and secular, but it's a very Jewish concept.

I was, for example, born during the mazal of Tammuz. The mazal then is the Sartan, or crab. A crab lives in water. My sign, therefore, is water. There are certain middos, or behaviors, which apply during that month.

The question with this all is that the Gemara tells us that the Jewish people are beyond mazal. We are not restricted by its meanings and predications. So what are these signs about?

Each month has its own nature: anger, patience, love, miserliness, open-handedness, and others. When Hashem puts your soul into this world, there is a certain journey that it needs to take. Be-

cause of your soul's previous travels through this world, there are certain tikkunim, rectifications, that it needs in order to return to Heaven in its pure form.

For example, if in a previous lifetime you stole something because you were cheap with your money. Hashem will then bring you back to this world in the mazal of miserliness, and you have to rise above it.

Now a Jew can rise above his mazal. And when Hashem came to Avraham Avinu and told him that he will have many children, Hashem took Avraham Avinu outside and raised him above the stars. The reason is because the month in which he was born, he wasn't able to have children. Hashem, therefore, needed to take him above his mazal.

Left alone, we would fall to our mazal. However, we have Torah and

mitzvos, and with that we can rise above. However, our test in life lies in those elements tied to that mazal. The tools for each neshama need to be fixed with the middos of Tammuz, Tishrei or Adar. Each neshama is therefore placed in the mazal of that month. (On this note, the mazal of the thirteenth month, the Second of Adar, is untouchable and cannot be harmed by the ayin hara. Moshe Rabbeinu was an example of being born in the Second of Adar).

Hashem sets everything up in a specific way. When you are born is not in accident. And in that month, Hashem gives you the weapons with which you can overcome and accomplish what you need in this world.

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