



FOUND TREASURE

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Our Shtieble is about to start the work on our long-awaited extension. Like most such enterprises, the clearing out of cupboards and storage spaces is something that us mere mortals must go through. The boys with the big machines will be doing the real work, but the nitty gritty tasks are up to us. Last week I had a huge surprise, my grandson found a hoard of one of my books that I thought were lost when we last had to move. The particular book is the second volume of The Rabbis Journal, and it has not been available in the book shops for some time. Suffice to say I was ecstatic, and last Motzei Shabbos found me giving out autographed copies to a number of bar mitzvah boys who I owed presents to. Allow me to share a secret that most authors will be hesitant to share. When one finishes a book, the writer feels in many ways as it no longer belongs to him, but to those who purchase it. I sometimes pick up one of my seforim and read with great wonder the very words I authored years ago (hopefully with pleasant surprise.) As I flicked through some of the pages of my new found treasure I came across an article that touches on a subject I have been learning with my chevra this very week. Please allow me to share this preview, in the hope that it will whet the readers appetite for more.

The Real Reasons

Say a special prayer of thanks to the experts, for they have discovered that overweight people have a hormonal problem. That's right, it's not the double-glazed cinnamon doughnuts that make you gain weight; it's a heretofore unknown peptide hormone called "ghrelin" that makes you feel hungry even after you have downed a large portion of chocolate ice cream and that causes you to want even more of that yummy stuff. Soon, the researchers say, it may be possible to control this hormone with a pill, making obesity easily manageable.

Well done, guys, but I'm not so sure that everyone will be svelte and trim that fast. Something tells me that our eating habits go beyond our hormones. We may first have to become more honest with ourselves when it comes to how many calories pass through our craving lips.

This whole subject is indicative of the human condition. We kid ourselves all the time and rarely do we accept the unadorned truth, so let's put the hormone factor aside. I'm sure there are internal sources that can trigger off every sort of misbehaviour, but instead let's talk about who we are and from where we come.

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לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
כ"ק מרן אדמו"ר מפיאסצנה
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זצוקלה"ה



לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
הרבנית הצדקנית
חיה שרה בת הרב שלמה
יחיאל רובין ז"ל



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Avraham Avinu was the first Jew, and he was our father not only in a biological sense but in a moral one as well. What made Avraham unique was that he had the ability to go beyond his surroundings and seek the truth that others refused to accept. Born and raised in Ur Kasdim, a notorious place of immorality, Avraham initiated a new relationship with Hashem.

The Maharal explains that Avraham was the epitome of a beginner. By definition, a beginner is someone who is not connected to his surroundings. He breaks out of the existing social structures. The more he is different, the more of an innovator he is.

Avraham was the opposite of the society in which he was born. The people of Ur Kasdim were corrupted to such an extent that our Sages tell us, "Hashem regretted creating them because they were so bad, as it is written, 'The land of Kasdim does not deserve to exist.'" The Midrash tells us that the only reason this despicable place was able to survive at all was in the merit of Avraham.

Into this moral swamp was born our father, and his greatness was that he could see beyond this reality and create a new one. The Maharal goes on to show that we, his children, mirrored Avraham's experiences on a national level. That is why we were enslaved in Egypt, a place steeped in immorality. Just as Avraham the individual had to innovate and create a new perception despite the filth that surrounded him, so did his children. They had to break away from the lowest society imaginable, expanding on Avraham's personal experiences to become a nation that was holy.

The Jews were beginners, too, and, like their forefather, they were fundamentally different from their surroundings.

Today we see the corruption of society at large. Secularism has raised selfishness to new heights. Everything is permitted, and misdeeds are excused by the claim of victimization. No one has to take responsibility for his actions. It's always someone else's fault, or perhaps it's the genes.

In this atmosphere, a group of overweight people instigated a class-action suit against the purveyors of junk food. They claimed they became unhealthily fat because the producers of this garbage never told them that their product was fattening. Talk about being in denial! The joke is that their lawsuit was taken seriously.

Into this huge ocean of debris, we find the Yidden, who are meant to be a light unto the nations and holy as well. I have been asked, "What does it matter if the other nations are obsessed with materialism? At least they are not busy driving us out of our homes." This is a mistake, for just as Avraham's greatness came from such an evil place, so too ours. Even more, the environment that surrounds us obviously plays a role in who we become. It sets the measure of our test, if you will. We are floundering in the same waters as those around us — but we are supposed to find some bit of driftwood to hold on to.

This is where Avraham Avinu's example comes in. We are his children, and as such we are called upon to be beginners, innovators, despite the state of those who surround us. This is no easy task, but it is why we are here.

Avraham gave us a tool that can cut through all the murkiness. It is called chessed, and it works every time.

The Midrash tells us that all the Avos lived their lives in accordance with the Torah even though the Torah was not given until many centuries later at Har Sinai. It is interesting to note that our Sages underline specific mitzvos that were done by Yitzchak (such as shechita) and Yaakov (such as Shabbos), though they kept the rest as well. Only regarding Avraham do we find our Sages saying that he kept "the entire Torah."

The Maharal asks us to consider one thought: Avraham's defining character trait was chessed, doing good for others. He spent his lifetime bringing others close to Hashem, and he did this through acts of loving-kindness and hospitality. The Torah, too, should be seen as essentially an instrument of chessed. Its goal is to guide us to the ultimate good, the ultimate pleasure, that of knowing Hashem. In fact, the Torah is called Toras chessed for this very reason. Avraham has given us this tool of chessed, and by using it we can be drawn closer to our real selves.

Yes, we are floundering in an ocean that is steeped with denial of Hashem, and it is harder than ever to remain above the waves. However, Hashem is a loving Father; He has given us the concept of teshuva and change, of new beginnings. We have choices. We can blame the hormones, or even the makers of the junk that is strewn around us, or we can recharge our inner souls with Torah. We can create new chessed and greater feeling for others; we can build homes that speak of a Toras chessed. In this way, we can swim through adversity and discover new beginnings in the world we live in.

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