***Why Does Inspiration Always Fade?***

***The Secret to Genuine Growth***

***Shmuel Reichman[[1]](#footnote-1)***

1. ***Why Does Inspiration Fade?***

Have you ever noticed that everything worthwhile in life seems to fade? The energy of youth fades into old age, the excitement of beginnings fade into routine, the inspiration of a new goal fades into habit. This distressing experience extends to almost all dimensions of human experience. When you begin a meal, the taste is delectable, but after only a few bites, the food seems to lose its mouthwatering appeal. Did you ever hear a great song, immediately fall in love with it, and play it endlessly on repeat? After a few days, you probably couldn’t listen to it anymore. This once enchanting song somehow lost its appeal, and you were forced to move on to the next song.

This numbing experience has its advantages as well. If you've ever heard a loud or disturbing sound, you may initially be annoyed or irritated. However, after a few moments, your senses become dulled and your mind is able to muffle out and ignore the sound. The sound is still there, but the sensation has faded. The same is true by physical touch: only a few moments after getting dressed, you likely no longer notice the clothing you're wearing. It's still pressing against your body, but the sensation has been filtered out, and you therefore pay no attention to it.

This concept permeates all of human experience, leading us to question *why* Hashem created the world this way. Why did Hashem create a world in which the delight and inspiration, and all physical sensation, always appear to fade? What is the deep spiritual concept behind this phenomenon?

1. ***The Problem With Yetzias Mitzrayim***

Before we answer our question, let's take a deeper look at this pattern and how it plays out through the events in the Torah. In this week’s parsha, Mishpatim, Klal Yisrael is experiencing the aftermath of Pesach, Yetsias Mitzrayim, and Matan Torah. But let’s take a closer look at this process: The first day of Pesach was the absolute pinnacle and climax of Yetzias Mitzrayim, the exodus from Egypt. Hashem has just revealed Himself to the world through the miracles and 10 plagues, and the Jewish people are in the process of being born. Hashem *Himself* performs makkas bechoros, the plague of the firstborn, and the Jews are performing the mitzvos of their conception, korban pesach and bris milah. The *Ba'alevi Machshava* describe this night as an absolute high for the Jewish people. It's therefore astonishing that immediately following this elevated experience, the Jews descend into the midbar, the desert, and fall into total disarray. The midbar is a place of spiritual emptiness and the next forty days are defined by hardship, complaining, and spiritual challenge. Then, upon completing forty days, the Jews once again experience spiritual transcendence. The Jews receive the Torah at Har Sinai- Mount Sinai, cementing their marriage relationship with Hashem and committing themselves to a destiny of greatness.

There is an obvious question: why didn't the Jews go straight from Mitzrayim to Matan Torah, from one high to the next? Why did they first have to go through such a low, losing everything they had gained on that first night of Pesach? This difficult problem reoccurs once again by a famous passage in Niddah 30b.

1. ***The Fetus in the Womb***

The Gemara discusses a very enigmatic tale describing the initial stages of your formation. The Gemara explains that when you were just a fetus in womb of your mother, you were in a perfected and transcendent state of being. A *malach* was specifically assigned to teach you *kol ha'Torah kulah,* all of Torah. This means that as a fetus, you understood all of and wisdom, you viewed reality through a crystal clear lens. However, the Gemara continues with an anticlimactic punch (literally): immediately prior to your birth, the malach strikes you on the mouth, causing you to forget everything you have learned.

The obvious question is, why does the *malach* cause you to forget everything he just taught you? But even more importantly, if he's going to make you forget it, then why even teach it to you in the first place? This is the same pattern we have repeatedly see: An inspirational high, followed by an all-time low. The high lasts just long enough for us to realize how low the fall has left us.

1. ***The Answer: Why Inspiration Fades***

The deep explanation behind this process is explained by the Arizal, the Ramchal, the Vilna Gaon, and many other Jewish thinkers. They expound as follows: Every process contains three stages. The first stage is the high, the inspiration, an experience of perfection and clarity. Next comes the second stage: a complete fall, a loss of everything that was experienced in the first stage. Then we have the third stage, a return to the perfection of the first stage. However, this third stage is fundamentally different than the first. It is the same perfection, the same clarity, but this time it's a perfection and clarity that you have ***earned***. The first time it was given to you, now you have worked to build it for yourself.

The first stage is a gift, a spiritual high. It's there to help you experience the goal, the destination. It's a taste of what you can and hopefully will ultimately accomplish; but it's not real, it's given as a gift, and is therefore an illusion. It serves only as a guiding force, but can’t compare to the genuine accomplishment of building something yourself. It's therefore taken away to allow for the second and most important stage: building it yourself, undergoing the work required to attain this growth in actuality, to work for the perfection that you were shown. A gift isn't real, something chosen and earned is. We're in this world to choose, to assert our free will, and to create ourselves. Now that we've tasted the first stage, we know what we're meant to choose, what we're meant to build. The third stage is the recreation of the first stage. While it appears the same, it's fundamentally different. It's real, it's earned, it's yours. The first stage was a gift, an illusion; the third is the product born of the effort and time you invested. These three stages are the secret behind many spiritual concepts: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov; Chesed, Din, and Tiferes; Male, Female, and the child created from their bond of oneness. We will develop these themes in the future. Now, let's give a mashal, an analogy, to better understand this principle:

1. ***Learning to Walk***

Imagine you are a young child, still unable to walk. One day, your father holds your hands and begins to walk with you. Suddenly seeing the world from a higher vantage point, you immediately fall in love with your new ability to walk. Your father takes you around the kitchen, around the house, and you start to feel more and more comfortable in the walking position. You feel so close and grateful to your father for walking with you. Suddenly, just when you felt so safe and loved, your father does the unexplainable, he lets go! A second later, you fall to ground, shocked, feeling both hurt and abandoned. All you can think is: "Why would my father do this to me? I thought he loved me?!". The next day, the same exact thing happens. Once again, just as you feel safest, your father lets go, and you fall straight to the ground. You can't understand why your father is putting you through this suffering! However, a few weeks later, something magical happens. Your father lets go, but this time, you don't fall to the ground. This time, you remain on your feet. You begin to walk around, by *yourself!* You have officially learned to walk.

Only now do you realize the truth. Your father wasn't trying to hurt you. On the contrary, he was simply trying to help you walk. First he needed to show you how to do it. However, it was only by letting go and forcing you to stand on your own that you eventually learned how to walk. While he was holding your hand it may have *felt* like you were walking, but you now realize that it was only an illusion. It was a gift, it wasn't real. Only now that you were forced to build it on your own do you really have the ability to walk. The first stage was the gift. The second stage was the fall. The third stage was the recreation of the first stage, except this time, it's now real.

1. ***Recreating Your Torah***

Changing the way we view the human mind, the Vilna Gaon (as well as The Rav, Rav Yosef B. Soloveichik) explains the Gemara in Niddah 30b according to this model. He explicates that that the torah you learned in the womb was not Chumash with Rashi.

Rather, it means that you were learning *your* Torah; you were being shown your unique purpose in the world, and how your unique role fits into the larger scheme of the human story as a whole. This Torah belongs to a different realm, a different dimension. You experienced ultimate transcendence, you learned Torah in its ultimate depth, and you learned who you could become in the deepest sense possible. You were given a taste of your own perfection, of what you could, should, and hopefully *will* become. But most importantly, you didn't lose it; rather, you lost *access* to it. Instead of it disappearing completely, this state of self became buried deep within your subconscious. The reason is as follows: What you received in the womb wasn't real, it was merely a gift; something unearned and undeserved. The goal of life is to enter into this world and reconstruct all that you once were in the womb. However, this time, it will be real, since you've built it yourself. In essence, your job in this world is not to create yourself, but rather to *recreate* yourself; to re-attain your original state of perfection, as you were shown by the *malach*.

1. ***Learning or Re-Learning?***

Perhaps this is why we sometimes have a sense of recognition when we hear a deep thought or a profound insight. Instead of feeling like we're learning it for the first time, everything just clicks, almost as though we already knew it. This is because we *do* already know it. We're not learning, we're *re-learning*, rediscovering what we already learned in the womb, what's ingrained within us. It’s already there, now we have to put in the effort to build it ourselves.

We can use this approach to elucidate a puzzling Gemara in Bava Metzia 6b. The Gemara says that if someone claims to have exerted himself in learning, but has failed to succeed, you should not believe him. Likewise, if he claims to have put no effort into his learning, but has succeeded, you shouldn't believe him either. Only someone who claims to have exerted himself in his learning *and* succeeded should be believed.

The Vilna Gaon raises a simple question: The wording the Gemara uses to describe someone who claims to have toiled and succeeded is strange: “yagati *u'matzasi”*, I exerted myself and I *found*. What has this man found? Why doesn’t the Gemara use words such as asisi, pa'alti, or hitzalti, all of which refer to accomplishment or achievement? The Vilna Gaon explains this according to our aforementioned idea. Genuine learning isn't about discovery or achievement; it's about *finding* what already lies dormant within your subconscious, what you learned when you were in the womb.

1. ***The Nature of Education***

This approach to learning underlies a famous debate between philosophers Plato and Locke in regards to the nature of education. Locke claimed the human mind begins as a blank slate, and you are then imprinted and molded based on everything you learn and experience throughout your life. Plato, however, quotes Socrates who believed that everyone already knows everything, but has simply lost access to it; the job of the teacher isn't to teach, but rather to help the student come to understand on his own what he already really knows deep within himself. This is why the word educate comes from the Latin words which means to "take out" or "draw forth", because teaching is nothing more than bringing out the potential that already lies dormant within the student.

1. ***The Secret Behind Desire***

To complete our understanding of this topic, let's consider the concept of desire. As humans, we tend to have cravings and yearnings. However, these cravings are usually limited only to that which we have already experienced. For example, many people crave pizza, ice cream, steak, and other delicious foods. But we only crave them since we’ve tasted them before. I don't know anyone who craves kosher bugs such as locust, even though in certain Asian counties, bugs are served as delicacies. We only yearn for foods that we've tasted before. I want you to genuinely think about this; do you crave anything that you haven't tasted before? Do you crave the remarkable cuisine called "yabagaloola"? Of course not! It doesn’t exist, because I just made it up. We only crave things that we've once tasted before. If so, then how come as human beings, we all crave wisdom, greatness, significance, and perfection? The answer is that we've all tasted it before, in the womb! We were all once in this perfected state, we tasted it, and now we crave to re-experience and rebuild what we once were.

***Yetzias Mitzrayim vs. Matan Torah***

Returning to our original discussion, we can now understand why the Jewish people couldn't go straight from Yetzias Mitzrayim to Matan Torah. The first night of Pesach was a spiritual high, a revelation of their ultimate destination; but it was a gift, unearned. They therefore had to go through the challenges of the midbar in order to rebuild and *earn* that initial stage. Matan Torah was the third stage, the recreation of the first stage, but earned, real. Only then was Klal Yisrael truly able to experience their connection and marriage with Hashem.

***The Light Within the Darkness***

This is the process of life. Inspiration, followed by hardship and difficulty, usually to the point where you hardly even remember that initial stage of excitement. The Rambam compares this experience to a man lost in the forest, in the darkness night, in the midst of a thunderstorm. Unable to see his hand in front of his face, he has no idea where to go. Suddenly, there's a flash of lightning and he sees the path home, clear as day. A second later the lightning fades and he's left with only the memory of clarity to guide him back home. The lightning represents flashes of inspiration in a challenging and difficult world. The darkness represents the journey we must take to recreate that initial stage of inspiration. We must hold on to those flashes of lightning, understand our goal and destination, and then recreate that light *within* the darkness. For, one day, you will once again experience the clarity of that light. Except this time, it will be real, earned, never again fading away.

1. Shmuel Reichman is an inspirational speaker and has spoken internationally at shuls, conferences, and Jewish communities. You can find more inspirational shiurim, videos, and articles from Shmuel on **Facebook** and **Yutorah.org**. For all questions, thoughts, or bookings, please email ***shmuelreichman678@gmail.com*** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)