

## **Living with Focus**

### **The Elusive Carrot**

Rav Menachem Zupnik



### **A Hopeless Endeavor**

The picture above depicts a method that was once actually used to motivate donkeys and other stubborn animals to pull their load. The donkey desires the carrot and is even willing to pull the load to reach the prize. But with each step that the donkey takes, the carrot moves away from him. In theory, this could continue until the owner reaches

his destination. But, in reality, the animals eventually catch on and stop chasing the elusive carrot.

This is a simple illustration of the futility of the pursuit of happiness by acquiring wealth. As Chazal taught us, “He who has one *maneh* wants two hundred”. We never quite attain happiness because the bar keeps rising; it is an exercise in futility. Yet, we often disregard Chazal’s warning and continue “pulling the wagon” indefinitely. Sometimes we eventually realize that we are chasing a carrot and look for better sources of happiness and sometimes we continue pulling the heavy load in vain.

### **Count Your Blessings**

The *Chovas Halevavos* offers an insight that illuminates this concept. He **teaches** that in general, *avodas Hashem* is rooted in gratitude to Hashem. Therefore, it is crucial for a Yid to have a deep appreciation for all the blessings in his life. Unfortunately, however, most people are blind to the abundant blessings they receive and tend to take them for granted.

The *Chovas Halevavos* goes on to suggest how to overcome that handicap. Imagine a person who is first granted eyesight as an adult. He will surely ~~marvel and be~~ exultant overjoyed and marvel at his fortune, every

moment of the day. We, too, can thrill at all of our gifts in life, if we learn to see them with the same level of recognition and appreciation as a person granted eyesight later in life. We often hear people who have visited third world countries return with renewed appreciation of “running water. We have more luxury and comfort than human beings have had in all of history yet we lack the joy that we should experience from all these possessions.

The thrust of the *Chovos Halevovos* is that the more we learn to recognize what we have, the more we will appreciate it and enjoy it. This give us a deeper understanding into what Chazal meant when they said, “Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot.” The measure of one’s wealth hinges on how much he appreciates what he has. One has to develop an ~~aw~~renessawareness of one’s blessings to experience the joy that they can bring. The happier he is with his possessions, the more he gets from them. In short, you are only considered as having something if you appreciate it. The *mishnah* is teaching us: Appreciate your blessings and then, and only then, you will be truly rich.

## **Turning a Fortune into Misfortune**

There is another basic truth expressed by both the *Kuzari* and *Chovos Halevavos* about the futility of seeking happiness through the pursuit of affluence, which rings so true that as soon as we hear it, we immediately sense that it is the absolute reality .

“People ... overlook all the good that the Creator showers upon them because they are preoccupied with their obsession for gratifying their every wish and desire.” He concludes by saying that our obsession with getting more dwarfs all the benefits we have, until our benefits are perceived as misfortune.

In other words, when a person sets his sights on a prize and pursues it so as to find happiness, he begins to view his present state of affairs as lacking and unfortunate. The constant pursuit of ~~unattainable~~ the next pleasures translates into constant unhappiness with what we already have.

### **Lesson from the Amish**

The cessation of the pursuit of the” physical “ as the source of happiness, also grants us the ability to appreciate the more rewarding things in life. The *Chovas Halevavos* mentions in his introduction that, based on the example of Chazal, he often quotes the wise and pious

men of other nations. Similarly, I think we may find it enlightening to contemplate the lifestyle of the Amish.

The Amish community rejects most of the affluence and allures of modern Western society. It is very telling that the Amish allow their children to leave the community for a year and participate fully in Western society before committing to a lifetime within the Amish community. One would expect that once the young adults have sampled the outside world, they would not willingly return to their native community. However, surprisingly, ninety percent return! What draws them back to their seemingly deprived lifestyle? I do not believe that it is their religious commitment. Rather, they return because, having experienced a life of community, morals, ethics, and meaning, they realize that it offers a more fulfilling life than the excesses of an immoral society. I suspect that tourists in Amish Country, too, have a twinge of jealousy, seeing the desirable aspects of Amish life that they lack....

### **Retrieving the Lost Message**

We, more than any people on earth, should be capable of conveying this very message to our children. But, somehow, it seems we are falling short. We certainly

promote those ideas at every opportunity: We teach it in our schools and talk about it at our Shabbos tables. We tell stories of tzaddikim in every generation. We buy our children books that feature great Yiddin as their heroes. But, when all is said and done, do we convey the message that a simple life of faith is more rewarding than a high-end SUV? There seems to be an unspoken silent theme running through our lifestyle: “You can enjoy everything the *goyim* have (albeit with a *hechsher*). You needn’t miss even a smidgeon of their standard of living.”

Don’t get me wrong. The fact that we are affluent enough to afford a comfortable standard of living is reason for rejoicing. We wouldn’t want Yiddin to *chas v’shalom* suffer the pain of poverty. We *daven* every month that Hashem should give the Jewish people *osher v’chavod*. It’s not the affluence itself that is problematic. It is the pursuit of affluence as the preeminent source of happiness that unfortunately seems to have become part of the fabric of today’s *frum* world.

The advertisements in our publications are a strong indication of what the targeted audience wants. These beautiful, splashy advertisements in our publications (although they are Baruch Hashem free of most of today’s

problems) promote a message which Chazal have taught is not wise in the long run. Stand back and contemplate the composite picture of the preferred life for a *frum* Yid that a child flipping the magazine pages is likely to come out with. Remember! The children are not reading the articles of meaning and importance. Nor are they particularly interested in counting the ads showing how many *chessed* organizations and yeshivas are being supported. Pictures are worth a thousand words and speak volumes to the young impressionable mind.

A glance at these luxurious ads paints the following picture of the *frum* community: We aspire to eat only the finest meats, drink only gold- medal world-class wines, and spend Yom Tov in the most exotic settings on the planet. Men and women alike wear only designer clothing, buy furniture imported from Italy, and aspire to own a million- dollar apartment in Yerushalayim. Of course, the pages include valuable discussions of *emunah* and meaning as well, but, for obvious reasons, the kids aren't connecting to them. A child whose innocent mind consumes such subliminal messages on a constant basis will have a difficult time later in life relating to the more sophisticated and rewarding lifestyle that the Torah teaches us.

Even without reverting back to the horse and carriage, we, as a community, would be much better off promoting simplicity, because, in the long run, that — and not the pursuit of affluence — is what will bring happiness.

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## **Where is the Mizbeach?**

R' Moshe Zupnik

*Based on the research of Rabbi Leibel Reznick (Author of The Holy Temple Revisited and The Bais Hamikdash Revisited DVD)*

One of the main focuses of Pesach in the time of the Beis Hamikdash was the bringing of the *korban Pesach*. Like all *korbanos*, the *korban Pesach* was brought on the *mizbayach hachitzon*, which was located in the Azarah. According to halachah, even after the Beis Hamikdash has been destroyed, it is technically possible to still bring a *korban* on the site of the *mizbeiach*. There are numerous reasons given why *korbanos* have not been brought, but one issue that has been debated is the exact location of the *mizbeiach*.

1. The most prominent structure on Har Habayis today is a building with a large gold dome called the Dome of the Rock. It was built by Muslims hundreds of years after the *Churban*. The structure is built around a large rock protruding from the ground. Popular belief is that this is the site of the Kodesh Hakodoshim and the *aron hakodesh* actually rested

upon the rock. However, after a careful inspection of the rock, perhaps we will find it to be otherwise.

2. The rock itself is 57 feet long by 41 feet wide. Its height above the present ground level varies from about 1 foot to close to 5 feet.
3. Underneath the rock is a natural cave, measuring approximately 22 square feet. Access to the cave is via a staircase in the southeastern side of the rock.
4. In addition, there is a 3-foot wide hole in the ceiling, cutting through to the surface of the rock. In 1864, an expedition led by a man named Charles Wilson thoroughly explored the entire Har Habayis. It seemed to Wilson that the steps were a later addition, added by the Crusaders around the year 1100. That would mean that, originally, the entrance into the cave was exclusively from the hole in the rock.
5. Local Arabs told Wilson that beneath this cave is an additional cave. According to legend, the floor of the lower cave contains a drain that leads to the nearby Kidron valley, located to the east of Har Habayis. Wilson brought in vats of water colored with red dye

and poured the water into a hole in the floor of the upper cave to see if in fact there was a drain to the Kidron valley. His men spread out around Har Habayis to see where the water would come out and they found that it did indeed flow to the Kidron valley.

So now we know that there is a cave under the rock that is accessed by a small hole in the rock. Additionally, there is a drain leading out to the Kidron valley. From the descriptions of Chazal, there does not seem to have been a cave under the Kodosh Hakodoshim that was accessed by a hole in the floor. There certainly was no drain. If so, what is this rock?

6. On the southwestern corner of the *mizbeiach* were two drains into which the extra blood of the *korbanos*, the *shiyarei hadam*, was poured. The blood flowed into a cave below the *mizbeiach* called the *shis*. From the *shis*, in turn, it would drain into the Kidron Valley.

7. Every so often, a *kohein* would be lowered into the *shis* to clean it out. The entrance to the *shis* was

through a small hole in the floor of the Azarah, near the southwestern corner of the *mizbeiach*.

Based on all of the above it would seem that rock is not the place of the Kodesh Hakodoshim, but rather the place of the *mizbeiach*. The cave under the rock is the *shis*, with a drain out to the Kidron valley, and the hole in the rock is the entrance.

8. This would indicate that the Kodesh Hakodoshim is located a bit more to the west, outside the Dome of the Rock building (red arrow). It should be noted, however, that this is only a theory and not everyone agrees to it. We will have to wait until Mashiach comes to know the truth.

For more information or for a copy of the book and/or DVD please contact - 973-851-7772

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you