

He shall raise the ashes and place it next to the Mizbayach... He shall remove the ashes. (6:3,4)

The *avodah* in the *Mishkan/Bais Hamikdash* followed a daily routine. It was a clearly defined, Divinely-ordained, unchanging pattern of service. It began with the *Terumas HaDeshen*, the removal of the sacrificial ash from the previous day's offerings, followed by the placing of wood, so that the fire on the *Mizbayach*, Altar, continued to burn. The first sacrifice of the day, as well as the last sacrifice, was the *Korban Tamid*. *Tamid* means consistent, which is a perfect way to describe the *Korban*. It was a constant. When activities are carried out in a particular order, unchanging, repeated daily, it might lead to boring complacency. This was certainly not the case in the holiest of spiritual edifices. The only thing routine about the service was its invariability and unchanging nature.

The fact that the activities in the *Bais Hamikdash* followed an unvarying daily schedule teaches us an important lesson concerning spiritual ascendancy. *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl*, (quoted in the *Wisdom of Living*) derives from here that genuine, sustained growth is not the result of sudden inspirational bursts, or impulsive acts of spiritual service. It is achieved through constant, consistent perpetual and unremitting commitment and persistence. "Bursts", by their very nature, are not sustainable. In order to grow, one must have a foundation upon which he continually builds. So often we hear of someone who has become "turned on" to observance. Unless that "turn on" is structured into continuous, consistent and constant commitment and activity – it will, sadly, dissipate.

Constancy, consistency and continuousness are three requisites which one needs to maintain and sustain. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains how one acquires and integrates these very similar characteristics into our actions. Life is a gift from Hashem. At the end of his "time," a person would do anything for a few more days, hours, even minutes. Yet, we waste time indiscriminately, without realizing the preciousness of every moment. True living means using one's mind constantly. One does not take a vacation from thinking – unless he is not applying himself to what he is doing. Whatever he is doing – regardless of its nature – working on a business deal, having a conversation, reading an article, he should give it his full attention. Otherwise, he is not giving it his all. Every waking minute, one should think. Life is precious. Why waste it?

I always look at it from a practical perspective. Imagine, if at the end of our lives, we were given the opportunity to reclaim all the minutes we had wasted earlier in *schmoozing*, just wasting, doing nothing much of anything. We would be shocked at how much of the precious time that has been allotted to us we could have used constructively. Now, when every minute matters, we see how really valuable those minutes are.

Consistency is probably the greatest key to spiritual growth. (I think it is the key to all success in life: material, social, educational, etc.) Focus on the important things in life – and stick to them.

Jumping all over the place drives everyone around you batty – and destroys one’s ability to achieve true enduring success. Children crave and need structure in order to advance. Discipline is based upon structure. They may refuse to go to bed on time every night, but when they do not get enough sleep, the next day they are off the wall. Likewise, our *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, leaves us alone as long as we maintain consistency in behavior, sticking to a steady, structured routine. Try focusing on a *mitzvah* when *the yetzer hora* does everything to prevent our focus. The *yetzer hora* “leaves us alone” as long as we remain consistent. The second we go off the track, it jumps in. We have been breached.

Thus, the *Rosh Yeshivah* encourages each of his *talmidim* to select a goal carefully, to remain committed to it, in such a manner that he achieves his goal daily at the same time, place and manner. This is consistency. The *yetzer hora* does not want to challenge an individual who is consistent. It is so much easier to “work” on the “others.” If one’s goal is to complete a specific *sefer*, Torah volume, he should set aside a specific time of day which becomes *kodesh kodoshim*, holy of holies; nothing can deter him from that designated time. Thus, that apportioned time is not included in his regular daily schedule. It is on a totally different plane.

Continuousness. One can have the most honorable goal, but if he allows interruptions to creep in, he will not achieve strong success. The *Rosh Yeshivah* notes that one hour of uninterrupted learning is more beneficial than two hours of interrupted learning. One’s train of thought is impeded and his retention becomes limited. Let us consider the famous analogy of a pot of water cooking on the stove: one cannot bring water to a boil when he constantly keeps removing the pot from the stove. Once again, focusing on a set goal and designating a specific set time, which is not to be interrupted under any circumstances, allows the individual to complete the task at hand in the least amount of time. In this manner, he will retain the material, because it is built upon a well-established, indurate foundation.

The famous *Tanna*, Rabbi Akiva, who altered his course of living midway in his life, was the product of the concept that enduring change is the result of persistent repetition. Rabbi Akiva did not have the luxury of a Jewish education. At age forty, he was bathing at a particular waterfall when he noticed a rock with a hole that was created by the falling water that had bored through it. It was a steady, continuous drip of water that was falling right on the spot where there was a hole. He deduced that, if soft water can penetrate a hard rock, then all the more so Torah, which is compared to fire, can leave a lasting impression on a man’s heart. So was launched the change that transformed Rabbi Akiva into the extraordinary teacher that he was.

Each and every drop – falling uninterrupted on the same spot – made an impact. Each and every drop counted, because each and every one was needed to make that hole. Furthermore, had they not all fallen on the same spot, the hole would not have occurred. This, explains *Rav Weinberg*, is the basis of *Yiddishkeit*. Every day, we recite the same blessings, the same prayers, and perform the same *mitzvos*. It is by virtue of these persistent, continuous endeavors that we grow daily in our relationship with Hashem. This is how we change and become one with Hashem.

I think that there is another important thought that should course through our minds on a constant basis. Veritably, many of us allow this somber thought to sneak in when we witness sobering circumstances. *Horav Meir Premishlaner, zl*, feels that this thought should be uppermost in our minds. He refers to the *pesukim* at the beginning of our *parsha* which address the service in which the *Kohen* removes the ash from the *Mizbayach*, Altar. Since this service involves a great deal of ash, it is likely that his *begadim*, Priestly vestments, will become soiled. Thus, he changes into older, more worn, garments. The *Pemishlaner* has a different take on the *pesukim*, *Ufashat es begadav*, “He shall remove his garments – and don other garments.” – Every Jew should (acknowledge and) remember that one day his regular garments will be removed, and he will be dressed in other garments: white shrouds in preparation for his burial. *V’hotzi es hadeshen*, “And he shall remove the ash” – His body, which has become his remains, will be removed outside of the city proper, *El makom tahor*, “To a pure place” – to the place designated for the enteral rest of all the living. *V’ha’eish al ha’Mizbayach tkad bo*, “The fire on the Altar shall be kept burning,” – the flames of *Gehinnom*, Purgatory, will exact their punishment on him. Therefore, he should live a life of *teshuvah*, repentance, in full awareness that there are consequences for the way in which one lives in this world.

The *Alter, m’Kelm, zl, Horav Simchah Zissel Broide*, emphasized that only uninterrupted and exhaustive self-discipline throughout one’s lifetime can catalyze real and permanent change. *Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl*, the venerable *Mashgiach* of Mir and Ponevez, was a *Kelmer*; thus, he maintained an invariable schedule to the minute of the day. He never slept during the day since (he felt) this constituted a breach in his *avodah*, service, to Hashem. In order to serve Hashem, one must maintain an uninterrupted state of consciousness focused on the Almighty. He once remarked that, due to the intense pain that he suffered during an illness, his awareness of Hashem’s Presence was compromised for perhaps a second or two. He said, “Already for many decades, I had not removed my mind for even one second from the *avodah* of *emunah*, faith; recently, in the hospital, the intense pain of my suffering penetrated into these thoughts. Now, I must rebuild everything again from the (very) foundation.”

There is an anecdotal story that occurred in *Ponevez Yeshivah* which (according to the perception of many people) showed Hashem’s concern for the *Mashgiach*’s undeviating *avodah*. Following World War II, the *Bover Rebbe, Horav Shlomo Halberstam, zl*, came to *Eretz Yisrael* to render emotional and spiritual support to his *chassidim* who had survived the European inferno. He was a beloved *Rebbe* and father to his flock; as such, his visit would console and buttress the lives that they were in the process of rebuilding. An influential lay person was able to secure the use of the *Kollel Bais Hamedrash* of Ponevez for the *Rebbe* to conduct a *tisch* (literally) table, during which the *chassidim* gather around a table for festive singing and words of Torah directed by the *Rebbe*. This is common fare in the *chassidic* world. (This was quite unusual for a Lithuanian *Yeshivah*, but the *Bover Rebbe* was quite an unusual individual who captivated the hearts of all who met him.)

The *Kollel Bais Hamedrash* was situated just above the small apartment which was home to the *Mashgiach*. The room was packed, standing room only, filled with *chassidim* and men of good will

who wanted to observe and bask in the *Rebbe's* holy aura. It was quite noisy and joyous. The issue was the time, because the *Mashgiach* went to bed nightly at 11:00 p.m. and was up by 5:00 a.m., arriving in the *Yeshivah* at 6:00 a.m. to begin his daily *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. He never deviated from this schedule. At eleven o'clock that night, the *Rebbe* was in the midst of conducting his *tisch*, when suddenly, out of the blue, the *tisch*, table, collapsed! Without a table, the *Rebbe* cannot conduct a *tisch*. The *Rebbe* bid the crowd *Gutt Shabbos* – and the *tisch* came to a hasty conclusion. After all, what is a *tisch* without a *tisch*? It was 11:00 p.m., and the *Mashgiach's* sleep could not be disturbed. Heaven had intervened.