

**Pesach: Start Over Again, and Have the Life you Want**  
**Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ 4/5/2014**

Any baseball fans here? You baseball fans know that earlier this week was Opening Day. The season has begun just the way I thought: the Cubs lost to the Pirates 1-0, and they're 1-3 on the season. I'm not sure if you realize it, but yesterday, the Chicago Cubs were mathematically eliminated. That's hard to do three games into the season!

This past week was Opening Day for baseball. Next week will be Opening Day for the Jewish People: It's called Pesach. Many tend to think of Pesach as a stand-alone spring holiday. But if we look at Pesach in the context of the entire year, it truly is 'Opening Day'. Pesach, the holiday celebrating the freedom of Exodus, is the birthday of the Jewish People.

Moses tells Pharaoh, "*Let my people go that they may serve Me.*" The ultimate aim of the Exodus wasn't simply the physical liberation from Egypt, but to create a relationship with G-d; thus, "*...that they may serve Me.*" Forty-nine days after the Exodus on Shavuos we received the Torah on Mt. Sinai. The remainder of the 'season' proceeds onward, with perhaps the spiritual equivalent of the playoffs and the World Series occurring on Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkos, Simchas Torah.

Pesach is almost here. What does that mean for us? Pesach always occurs in the spring.

Pesach, like spring, means things are new  
Pesach, like spring, means things are changing  
Pesach, like spring, means there's an opportunity for a fresh beginning

Just as nature changes in the spring, and just as the Jewish people at Pesach transitioned from slavery to freedom, we can change, too.

One of the wonders of the world is that at any moment -- particularly at this time of year -- you can begin again. The way in which we can "Start Over Again, and Have the Life You Want" takes two forms.

First, every person has experiences of disappointment, frustration and failure. At times it was your fault, at other times it was totally beyond your control. At times you didn't live up to your standards or values, at other times you did but other's didn't. At times the setbacks are financial or academic, at others they are emotional or spiritual. In all of the above, you can begin again.

The Jewish people had fallen to the 49th level of spiritual impurity just before the Exodus. If they had stayed a moment longer in Egypt they would have fallen to the fiftieth level and been irretrievably lost. But they bounced back to begin again. Pesach means you can pick yourself up no matter how far you've fallen.

When J. K. Rowling, author of the phenomenally successful Harry Potter series, had been out of college for seven years, she found herself at a dark juncture in her life. At that time, she says, she had failed in life on an epic scale. Rowling said:

*An exceptionally short-lived marriage had imploded. I was jobless, a lone parent, and as poor as it is possible to be in modern Britain without being homeless. Rock bottom is the solid foundation on which I built my life."*

Second, starting over again doesn't only mean correcting mistakes, but additionally, realizing your potential for understanding, accomplishment and celebration.

King David said, *Sur may'rah v'aseh tov -- Turn away from evil, and do good.* We begin our journey by seeking to correct flaws and mistakes, but must also take the approach enabling us to develop our latent potential through a positive, proactive approach.

The first two mitzvos given to the Jewish people on the eve of their departure from Egypt were *Kiddush HaChodesh* and *Korban Pesach*, the sanctification of the New Moon and the Passover Offering. These two mitzvos, both positive, set the tone for the nature of the national renewal that was to take place upon leaving Egypt. We can begin again by creating invigorating goals, deeper relationships and spirituality, and living a life of significance and meaning.

One single approach holds the key to beginning again.

A rabbi was taking a stroll through the forest with a student and stopped before a tiny tree.

"Pull up that sapling," the rabbi instructed his student, pointing to a sprout just coming up from the earth. The student pulled it up easily with his fingers. "Now pull up that one," said the rabbi, indicating a more established sapling that had grown to about knee high. With little effort, the student yanked and the tree came up, roots and all.

"And now this one," said the rabbi, nodding toward a more well-developed evergreen that was as tall as the student himself. With great effort, throwing all his weight and strength into the task, using sticks and stones to pry up the stubborn roots, the student finally got the tree loose.

"Now," the rabbi said, "I'd like you to pull this one up." The student followed the rabbi's gaze, which fell upon a tree so tall the student could hardly see the top. Knowing the great struggle he'd just had pulling up the much smaller tree, he simply told his rabbi, "I'm sorry, I can't."

"My dear student, you've just demonstrated the power that habits will have over your life!" the rabbi said. "The older they are, the bigger they get, the deeper the roots grow, and --- for better, or for worse -- the harder they are to uproot. Some get so big, with roots so deep, they're almost impossible, if not impossible, to move."

Aristotle wrote, "We are what we repeatedly do." Merriam-Webster defines *habit* this way: "An acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary."

There's a story about a man riding a horse, galloping quickly. He appeared to be going somewhere very important. A man standing along the roadside shouted, "Where are you going?" The rider replied, "I don't know. Ask the horse!" This is the story of most people's lives; they're riding the horse of their irregular, inconsistent habits, with no idea where they're headed.

We are what we repeatedly do. Leadership expert John C. Maxwell said, "You'll never change your life until you change something you do daily. The secret of your success is found in your daily routine."

A well-known principle of Jewish thought, as articulated by *Sefer HaChinuch* (the Book of Mitzvah Education) is that a human being is affected by their actions. One wishing to improve oneself should undertake to direct one's actions to abide by a higher standard, even if their thoughts or emotions aren't in sync with this standard. In directing one's actions in a certain direction, ultimately one's character -- and heart -- will follow. As the *Sefer HaChinuch* succinctly states, "*Our being will follow our actions.*"

How long does it take to break a habit -- or create a new one? The truth is, you can change a habit in a second. The first time you touched a hot stove, you instantly knew you'd never make that a habit! But in

most cases, according to research, it takes three hundred instances of positive reinforcement to turn a new habit into an unconscious practice -- that's almost a year of daily practice.

Let's look at three ways to go about changing habits.

### 1) Even a small adjustment.

The best illustration I can give you to emphasize the power of a small change of habit, a small adjustment, is that of a plane traveling from LA to NYC. If the nose of the plane is pointed only 1 percent off course -- almost an invisible adjustment when the plane's sitting on the tarmac in LA -- it will ultimately end up about 150 miles off course, arriving either upstate in Albany or in Dover, Delaware.

Such is the case for your habits. A single poor habit or good habit, can ultimately lead you miles off course, or bring you back on course from or to the direction of your goals and the life you desire.

### 2) Compound consistency

If you were given a choice between taking \$3 million in cash this very instant and a single penny that doubles in value every day for 31 days, which would you choose? If you've heard this before, you know the penny gambit is the choice you should make -- you know it's the course that will lead to greater wealth. Yet why is it so hard to believe choosing the penny will result in more money in the end? Because it takes so much longer to see the payoff. Let's take a closer look.

Let's say you take the cold, hard cash and your friend -- we'll call her Penny Lane -- goes the penny route. On Day Five, Penny has sixteen cents. You, however, have \$3 million. On Day Ten, it's \$5.12 versus your big bucks. How do you think Penny is feeling about her decision? You're spending millions and loving your choice.

After 20 full days, with only 11 days left, Penny Lane has only \$5,243. How is she feeling about herself at this point? For all her sacrifice and positive behavior, she has barely more than \$5,000. You, however, have \$3 million. Then, the invisible magic of compound consistency starts to become visible. The same small mathematical growth improvement each day makes the compounded penny worth \$10,737,418.24 on Day Thirty-one, more than three times your \$3 million.

In this example we see why consistency over time is so important. On Day 29, you've got \$3 million; Penny Lane has around \$2.7 million. It isn't until day 30 of this 31-day race that she pulls ahead, with \$5.3 million. And it isn't until the very last day of this month long marathon that your friend blows you out of the water; she ends up with almost \$11 million to your \$3 million.

Very few things are as impressive as the 'magic' of compound consistency. Amazingly, this 'force' is equally powerful in every area of your life.

### 3) Who Influences you?

Birds of a feather flock together. The people with whom you habitually associate are called your 'reference group.' According to research by social psychologist Dr. David McClellan of Harvard, your 'reference group' determines as much as 95% of your success or failure in life. Rambam (Maimonides) wrote: *Adam nimshach acar s'vivav* -- a person is profoundly influenced by their surroundings.

Who do you spend the most time with? Who are the people you most admire? Are those two groups of people exactly the same? If not, why not?

Jim Rohn says that we become the average of the 5 people we hang around the most. I can tell the quality of your health and attitude by looking at the people around you. Eventually we start to eat what they eat, talk like they talk, read what they read, think like they think, watch what they watch, treat people how they treat them, even dress like they dress. The funny thing is, more often than not, we're completely unaware of the similarities between us and our circle of five. Why not? They nudge us over time.

Next week begins Pesach. It's 'Opening Day', and we have a chance to start over again.

- 1) Eliminate the bad, and clean house. And then go on to begin build upon and create good
- 2) Habits are the key to change
- 3) Ease in. With most things, you don't have to go cold turkey. Create the type of life you want, one step at a time through small, measurable consistent steps. And watch very carefully who you associate with.

Pesach, like spring, means that the things were old are now reborn

Pesach, like spring, means that just as nature changes, so can you.

Who you were yesterday has nothing to do with the choices you make today.

Like the Jewish people in the Exodus, you can become rejuvenated, restored, and redeemed, and have the life you w