

Shalom Bayis Newsletter Issue 35

Doing vs Being PART 2



The systems approach we discussed in [part one](#) casts a new light on a story about the Chazon Ish.

He once took a swimming excursion by a river together with his *talmid-chaver* Rav Tzvi Hirsch Applebaum. The Chazon Ish began splashing water on R' Tzvi Hirsch who, surprised, asked, "What's this about?"

The Chazon Ish responded, "If you can frolic and have fun, you can generate *chiddushei Torah*".

My rebbi, Rav Moshe Twersky Hy"d, was probably the most serious, disciplined person I've ever met. Yet he often had a bounce in his step and suddenly flashing a radiant smile seemed like the most natural thing in the world for him. His undercurrent of *simchas ha'chaim* was unmistakably ever-present and impactful on everything he was and did.

I believe the Chazon Ish was not saying that if you sometimes relax by "having fun" your mind will be refreshed and able to go back to creating novel Torah insights. He was saying that you need that undercurrent of fun and excitement to be ever-present. An integrated part of who you are. It is **being** a person in whom joy exists that enables one to generate the flow of *chiddushei Torah*.

Many people seem to have a perception of sexuality as a "necessary evil". Needed for *shalom bayis* and having children, then carefully boxed away. This negative conditioning can go even further: Wrong > Don't feel > Don't want > Don't be.

But Chazal paint a very different picture for us.

The *Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah* davened for the *yetzer* of *avodah zarah* to be removed — and it worked. Seeing this success, they attempted the same with the *yetzer* of sexual impropriety. After three days, they searched all of Eretz Yisrael to see if a fresh egg could be found anywhere. There were none.

But why eggs? They could have asked: Is *peru u'revu* still relevant to anyone here? No? Then we're done. But that is not what they did. Because they were checking to see if something deeper and more sweeping had shut down. And it had.

Chazal concluded, if we nullify this *yetzer*, the world will cease to exist.

Contemporary scientific discoveries echo this message and cast a fascinating new angle on it: It is not possible to selectively dampen sexual motivation without often affecting broader systems of reward and drive.

Both are modulated by the mesolimbic dopamine pathway. Since sexual desire is deeply interwoven with the brain's motivation and reward circuitry, interventions that blunt libido (psychological or medicinal) frequently reduce reward sensitivity more generally.

For many people, this is experienced not merely as reduced sexual interest, but as emotional flattening, diminished motivation, and a loss of vitality or zest for life. While not universal, this pattern reflects the shared biological substrates that underlie sexuality, motivation, and engagement with the world.

The *yetzer* for sexual gratification, then, is not merely a matter of pragmatic need or temptation to be struggled with. **It is a life-generating force. Eliminate it, and life itself collapses.**

The Zohar takes this one step further:

Rabi Yitzchak once asked Rabi Yehuda, "Why don't the Sages see to it that the yetzer hara should be neutralized other than what it is needed for marital relations?" Rabi Yehuda responded, "By your life! The yetzer hara is needed for the world the way rain is needed for the world, for if not for the yetzer hara there would be no joy in the study of Torah!"

Air is an absolute necessity for the world to exist, as is sunlight and many other aspects of creation. So why is it that Rabi Yehuda specifically likened the *yetzer hara* to rain?

Sunlight provides energy for plants to grow and function. But dehydrated, enzymes cannot operate, membranes lose fluidity, transport halts, and photosynthesis collapses. Functionally dead.

Rainwater wakes up the system by hydrating proteins, inducing internal pressure-force and transport; and, critically, by providing the electrons and protons that catalyze the photosynthesis process that powers the entire system.

Torah is the abstract information. It is the light. The energy that powers everything. A person has the tools of cognitive grasp, intellectual analysis and reasoning, and deep intuitive reflection for absorbing, processing, and integrating this light. However, without a sense of connection, joy, excitement, and desire, those tools remain inert. Functionally dead.

It's like trying to teach a man to play piano while he is wearing noise cancelling earphones. What is the likelihood that the raw information of where to strike the keys will stick and become integrated into him? He hears nothing! He cannot connect to what he's doing.

Likewise, were a person to feel no connection, joy, excitement, or desire – no *chedvesa d'shmaita* - in the study of Torah, there would be nothing to fire up his neurons and drive the flow of electrical signals through his neural network. Like rainwater for plant life, it is the *chedvesa d'shmaita* that awakens the entire system and brings it to life.

And this power of *chedvesa d'shmaita* – the sense of connection, joy, excitement and desire – is bound up with the sexual drive.

After all, what is the sexual drive all about? It is about the need and urge to find connection. To become a fully whole being. A complete life that generates further life.

With this in mind, we can begin to understand why the Torah repeatedly goes out of its way to emphasize the physical attractiveness of the greatest women: Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel. Chazal go even further with figures like Rachav, Achsa, and Avigayil — vividly describing the overwhelming impact of their sexual appeal.

Chazal are not embarrassed by the sexual power of these great women. They highlight it.

Which means their sexuality was not despite their greatness. It was an integral part of it. Activating their sexuality was not something they “did” occasionally. It was their animating force.

Sexuality is an integrated, always-influencing system. No different than sleep, digestion, or language processing. It is a system that is inextricably intertwined with the entire vitality of life.

Fully integrating the sexual part of yourself is about reclaiming a *chiyus* that may have been suppressed.

It's about what you're allowed to be. What you need to be. And when marriage becomes a place where a person can be fully present, many technical problems soften on their own. Not instantly, and not uniformly — but the system can begin to unlock.

So, if despite learning and applying all relevant techniques, nothing seems to be helping, it may be time to shift the question to: “Am I perhaps not allowing myself to be?”

A final thought: coming to a realization like this, especially if it comes only after many years of suppression, there may be grief.

Chazal teach us that the main *sechar* of making a *shiva* call is silence. It's simply about making space for and being there with the individual in their pain without trying to fix it.

If a part of the self has been silenced, and it now begins to stir and speak — perhaps the first response is not correction. It's just presence. Making room. For it and the pain that may come along with it. Making space for that pain can be the first step towards real healing.



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