[**Falling from the Roof of the Mind – Parshat Ki Tetzei**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/falling-from-the-roof-of-the-mind-parshat-ki-tetzei)

Is there a time when failure is actually success?

כִּ֤י תִבְנֶה֙ בַּ֣יִת חָדָ֔שׁ וְעָשִׂ֥יתָ מַעֲקֶ֖ה לְגַגֶּ֑ךָ וְלֹֽא־תָשִׂ֤ים דָּמִים֙ בְּבֵיתֶ֔ךָ כִּֽי־יִפֹּ֥ל הַנֹּפֵ֖ל מִמֶּֽנּוּ
*When you build a new house, make a parapet for the roof, and you won’t bring blood upon your house when one falls from it…*

* Deuteronomy 22:8

The fact that the Torah talks about preventing a person from falling off the roof by building a protective barrier implies that, indeed, people must have fallen off rooves; it was probably the failure to anticipate this danger that led to the law of making a *ma’akeh*, or parapet.

Similarly, when we become aware of our own misdeeds in the past, we too can build some kind of *ma’akeh,*some kind of protective fence to prevent the same thing from happening again.

There are two main types of misdeeds: mistakes and temporary insanity. A mistake would be: you’re up on the roof and you’re goofing around, not paying attention, or maybe you just miscalculated your footsteps and you fall of the roof, God forbid. Temporary insanity would be: you’re up on the roof with someone, you get into a fight and push them off the roof, God forbid. You didn’t intend to hurt them; you just got angry and lost control.

The *ma’akeh*prevents both types of scenarios. Whether accidental or by temporary insanity, the parapet prevents a person from falling. There’s a hint in the wording of the*pasuk:*“one who falls” is *yipol hanofel –*literally, “will fall, the falling.” The repeating of the verb “fall” is an idiom of emphasis, but also hints that the *ma’akeh*can prevent both the accidental and the impulsive falling crisis.

Similarly, we too can take measures to prevent ourselves from repeating our misdeeds, whether they be accidental or impulsive. To do that, we need to see our lives clearly, contemplate, and create our own “parapets.” This is the transformative part of *teshuvah,*the main practice in this month of *Elul,* leading to the Days of Awe.

There is yet a third kind of misdeed, one that is far more difficult to prevent. This is the misdeed of habit, the misdeed that has become part of one’s personality and lifestyle – such as addiction, relationship dysfunction, abuse, and so on. The more emmeshed we become in the negative behavior, the less likely we are to change it. And yet, we absolutely can change it. This is the deepest and most transformative kind of *teshuvah.*

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev once came upon a wealthy man in the street who was known to be abusive with his money and power. “Oh, I envy you sir!” said Levi Yitzhak. The *rasha*(evil person) looked proudly at Levi Yitzhak, thinking that the rabbi wished he too could have all that money and power. But then Levi Yitzhak continued, “I envy you, because when you finally return, when you finally do *teshuvah,* all your sins will be transformed into magnificent lights, and what a brilliant spectacle that will be! Oh sir, I envy you that brilliance!”

These three types of misdeeds – accidental, impulsive and intentional, are three main types of “sins” mentioned in the liturgy: *het*means “missing the mark,” as in shooting an arrow and missing the target. This is the accident. An *aveira*is crossing over a boundary impulsively; you accept that there is a boundary, but you become possessed by strong feelings and you violate it. Lastly, an *avon*is a misdeed that is not a mistake and is not impulsive; it has become part of how you operate. The *avon*cannot be prevented by any kind of *ma’akeh;*you can’t “trick yourself” out of this kind of misdeed. For the *avon,*you actually have to choose differently; you have to fully transform.

These three kinds of “sin” are different from each other, but for a person who wants to become free from them, a single ingredient is needed.

Whether we are merely setting a boundary to prevent mistakes and impulsivity, or we are seeking to overcome a deeply ingrained behavior, the root of all transformation on any level is the application of awareness. The outer *teshuvah*of returning to intentional action is rooted in the inner *teshuvah*of bringing our awareness out from its compulsive preoccupation with thought (which ordinarily reinforces our patterns), and into our actual present experience, into our senses, into our bodies. In doing so, acceptance and forgiveness of the past is natural and spontaneous, as the pain we cause ourselves by holding on to the past becomes blatantly obvious. And not only that, but the more we bring our attention to this moment, the more we can see that *we are the awareness* of this moment. We are openness, we are free, and we are in no way trapped by the past or by habit. In Presence, the power to choose reveals itself.

Whenever I travel (and I travel a lot), I am always amazed that I can draw together the clothing, toiletries, books, computer equipment, etc., and pack them all into a single suitcase. It actually seems miraculous to me, that all the disparate items can come together into a single whole.

But miraculous as that is, it is nothing compared to the miracle of Presence: that through the simple shift of opening to the immediacy of actual experience, all the disparate chaos comes together in the “suitcase” of the present moment; in Presence, there is no longer “me” and “that” – there is only the fullness of the what is, in all its richness, arising and falling away in the one field of awareness that we are.

בְּרֶ֥גַע קָטֹ֖ן עֲזַבְתִּ֑יךְ וּבְרַחֲמִ֥ים גְּדֹלִ֖ים אֲקַבְּצֵֽךְ
*For a tiny moment I forsook you, but with a vast compassion I will gather you together…-*- Isaiah 54:7

When we “gather together” our awareness into the fullness of the present, there is paradoxically a vastness and a benevolence – a *rakhamim gedolim*that is our own nature, revealing all past misdeeds for what they really are: tiny moments of forgetfulness arising and disappearing into the vastness of Being…

**More on Parshat Ki Tetzei...**

[**The Price for Freedom – Parshat Ki Teitzei**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-price-for-freedom-parshat-ki-teitzei)

There’s a story of Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov, that once he travelled through many villages trying to collect funds so that he could liberate the poor Jews who were incarcerated in the Ukrainian debtor’s prison. Day after day, he went from door to door pleading the case of those poor souls rotting away in the dungeon, but no one would contribute anything.

After weeks of failure, feeling dejected and frustrated, he gave up and set out to return home, regretting having wasted all that time he could have spent learning and praying. But just as he approached his house, a woman ran up to him in a panic:

“Rabbi, my husband was caught stealing a piece of clothing and was viciously beaten by the police and thrown in jail!”

Without hesitation, the rabbi turned around and went to intercede with the judge. After much effort, he was able to get the prisoner released. When he went to fetch the prisoner from jail, he sternly warned him: “Remember the beating they gave you and don’t ever do anything like that again!”

“Why not?” replied the thief, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!”

Upon hearing his words, the rabbi resolved to return to his task of raising money to ransom prisoners, and eventually was highly successful in liberating many.

There is a debt to be paid for our spiritual freedom as well.

We too must not give up “raising the funds,” moving from one situation to the next, bringing our consciousness fully to each moment, to each feeling, to each reaction, to each thought. Again and again – we might get caught, absorbed and coopted by whatever is arising in our experience, but don’t give up! The real danger is never failure. The real danger is allowing our failures to develop into the belief that freedom is impossible. The phenomena of our experience have a certain gravity; they tend to draw us in, to capture us.

But if you don’t give up, if you keep at it, you will eventually capture their captivating power. After all, you are far more vast than any impulse, than any experience. You are the open space within which the experience unfolds.

But how can you access this truth? This week’s reading begins:

כִּֽי־תֵצֵ֥א לַמִּלְחָמָ֖ה עַל־אֹֽיְבֶ֑יךָ וּנְתָנ֞וֹ יְהֹוָ֧ה אֱלֹהֶ֛יךָ בְּיָדֶ֖ךָ וְשָׁבִ֥יתָ שִׁבְיֽוֹ

When you go to battle your enemies, Hashem your Divinity gives them into your hand, and you capture their captivity…

Life is, in a sense, like a battle ground. If you want spiritual freedom, you have to be one pointed and relentless, like a warrior.

And yet, וּנְתָנ֞וֹ יְהֹוָ֧ה אֱלֹהֶ֛יךָ בְּיָדֶ֖ךָ – Hashem your Divinity gives them into your hand – the victory is a gift placed in your hands by the Divine; it is not something you win through effort. So, there’s this paradox – on one hand, you’ve got to have unshakable will, and on the other, total surrender. In fact, there’s no contradiction, because the unconscious impulse is to struggle, to fight with Reality. The impulse to fight is oyevekha– your enemies– and to conquer that kind of enemy requires surrender to the “is-ness” of this moment.

אַחַ֤ת שָׁאַ֣לְתִּי מֵֽאֵת־יְהוָה֮ אֹותָ֪הּ אֲבַ֫קֵּ֥שׁ שִׁבְתִּ֣י בְּבֵית־יְ֭הוָה כָּל־יְמֵ֣י חַיַּ֑י לַחֲזֹ֥ות בְּנֹֽעַם־יְ֝הוָ֗ה וּלְבַקֵּ֥ר בְּהֵיכָלֹֽו

Only One Thing I ask of the Divine, this I seek: to dwell in the House of the Divine all the days of my life and meditate in Its Sanctuary…

These words from Psalm 27 are an invocation for this Kavanah, this heart direction, for the inner freedom that must be ransomed through the consciousness-funds collected in every moment, every situation, every feeling, every thought: Above every goal, above every desire, there must be Only One Thing.

קַוֵּ֗ה אֶל־יְה֫וָ֥ה חֲ֭זַק וְיַאֲמֵ֣ץ לִבֶּ֑ךָ וְ֝קַוֵּ֗ה אֶל־יְהוָֽה

Kaveh el Hashem, hazak v’ya’ameitz libekha, v’kaveh el Hashem –
Hope to the Divine, be strong and your heart will be courageous, hope to the Divine!

In this time of Elul, let us remember and practice ever more deeply this one-pointed surrender… Good Shabbos!

[**The Security of Anger- Parshat Ki Teitzei**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/september-12th-2016)

Once I was in the Oakland Airport with my family. After checking our suitcases, we arrived at security to find an incredibly long line, winding around rope dividers and culminating with a tiny funnel into only two security gates. There were several more gates that could have been opened to move things along, but for whatever reason, they were not staffed and were closed.

Right in front of us, a middle-aged man started cursing angrily. “What the %$^$ is going on here? Why don’t they ^%&$\*# open the other gates??”

He started verbally abusing the security person looking at IDs and checking tickets. He demanded to speak to a supervisor. When the supervisor arrived, he cursed him out too. The supervisor said, “You just hold that thought, and I’ll go get someone for you to speak to.”

I was sorry my three-year-old girl had to hear that language. I was bracing myself for some police to come and wrestle this guy to the ground.

Strangely, no police showed up. Instead, he just kept on cursing and venting all the way through the line.

When it was time to remove our shoes and put our laptops in separate bins, I didn’t want to aggravate him more with our clumsy family choreography, so I offered to him that he go ahead of us.

“Nah, that’s okay,” he said, “I have plenty of time, I’m just mad about how they’re running this place.”

He had plenty of time!

I saw an interview once with an Indian spiritual teacher who had a novel way of explaining the spiritual path that I had never heard before.

He said that the “self” is like a cow in a pasture.

The cow always wants to wander outside the field and into the town or woods, but when she does, she gets attacked by wild animals, kids throw rocks, people shoot guns. Eventually, she figures out she’s better off to just stay in her own field.

The “field” is the inner heart. When the “self” dwells in the inner heart, according to this teacher, it enjoys union with the Divine. When it gets tempted and wanders outside the heart, it always ends up in suffering.

So, in this teaching, the aim is to learn to keep yourself in the cave of your heart. That’s it.

To me, this was a wonderful description of Presence.

To “wander outside the heart” means to lose connection with this moment by getting lost in the mental narratives that our minds are constantly superimposing on Reality. The mind can dream up something wonderful one moment, but then change to a nightmare in the next.

I thought of this teaching when I saw this guy in the airport. Even if he were to miss his flight and his plans would be disrupted, what is really creating his suffering, and hence the suffering of those around him?

Nothing but his mind!

The mind creates stories and gets all excited about them. It was even more telling to learn that he wasn’t even going to be late. He was just out to make some enemies, to do some warfare.

As this week’s reading begins-

“Ki teitze la-milkhama al oyvekha-
"When you go out to battle against your enemies…”

When you leave the sacred place of the heart, when you leave your connection with the present as it is and travel the labyrinth of the mind and its necessarily self-centered stories, you create your enemies and battles.

But then the rest of the verse says,

“Untano Hashem Elohekha b’yadekha v’shavita shivyo-
"And Existence- your Divinity- puts it in your hand, and you capture its captivity.”

It’s a strange construction- “shavita shivyo- capture its captivity.”

But if you understand that it is you who are captured by seeing the world as your enemy “out there”, then you need to “capture your captivity”- meaning, you need to be bigger than those ensnaring mental narratives.

How do you do it?

You can do it by understanding- Untano Hashem Elohekha b’yadekha - Existence, which is your own Divine nature, is giving this moment to you.

This is both surrender and empowerment:

Surrender to the truth of what is, rather than fighting with your idea of what is, and also empowerment to create a narrative that allows you to dwell in the cave of your heart, that allows you to respond not from ego, but from the Divinity that you are…

It once happened that a large group of hassidim went to visit Reb Yitzhak of Vorki in a village near Warsaw. In their enthusiasm to get to their rebbe more quickly, they cut through a field and damaged the grain crops with their trampling.

One of the employees responsible for the damaged field was himself a hassid by the name of Reb Moshe. Seeing the damage the hassidim caused, Reb Moshe stormed into the rebbe’s room and cried, “Look what these idiots have done! They should be beaten for this! It would be a mitzvah to beat them!”- for this was the custom among wealthy land owners of that time.

Reb Yitzhak gave no answer. Assuming that the rebbe agreed with his view, the angry man strode out to have the hassidim beaten.

But the tzaddik called him back and said, “When you perform a mitzvah, you must articulate your holy intention by first contemplating and pronouncing the evocation that begins, ‘L’shem yikhud- for the sake of the Unification.’ Since you are a hassid, you should also purify yourself for the holy act by immersing yourself in the waters of a mikveh (ritual bath). So, after you go to the mikveh, and devoutly chant l’shem yikhud, then you can go ahead and perform your mitzvah…”

Of course, the thought of performing those rituals to sanctify his "mitzvah" made him realize his own unconsciousness. Embarrassed, he left the rebbe's presence.

My friends, before going out against our “enemies”, may we enter the mikveh of the present and connect with our deepest heart-intention for unity and peace. And, may we have the strength of commitment to remember to remember, even as life circumstance and reactive forces try to pull us into the battlefield!

Good Shabbos!