

MUSSAR AND THE FORCE OF GRAVITY

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Human beings have always attempted to push against the limits imposed on them by their nature, but we seem to have few tools for doing so when the nature we are dealing with is internal. We try to build buildings which push the limits of physics; we create and play games which tax the limits of human intellect and others which pit us against the limits of the human physique. In fact, we get upset when folks do not play by the rules and accept the limitations imposed on them by nature, for example, by using a computer, taking drugs or using a bionic arm. We have accepted that there are limits which are inherent in our condition and we devise strategies to test those limits. When the limits don't exist we create them. It would be rather simple, for example, to kick a small ball into a huge goal if somebody hadn't put a goalie there to impede our kick. Yet we put the goalie there, and we won't even 'count' the goal if it did not take place in the face of an opponent who was testing the limits of our ability to outwit him. Such is the nature of human striving. We find limits and we push against them. We don't trouble ourselves with the fact that the long-jump would be far easier on the moon with near weightlessness, to say nothing of the fact that we could hit a ball into orbit with zero gravity. This is our condition and now we struggle against the built-in limitations.

Somehow, as the limitations get closer to our daily lives and our most intimate fantasies, they become harder to accept and work with. Frustration builds when I confront the fact that I cannot be in two places at once, nor have 'enough' balance in my bank account. I have to deal with the fact that the machine is broken and that the part won't fit where it's supposed to, when the train is late and the teller is slow. Here we are called upon to activate the human ability to work with the limits called reality; to utilize what we have rather than bemoan what we don't have. The depths of depression follow if we focus on living life without these 'burdensome' limitations. Giving up, anger and frustration are really about not accepting the built-in realities which invite us to push against their limitations while accepting the existence of those limitations. What we are looking at is the need to recognize personal limitations and to devise strategies to push their limits. These are thought of as emotional/psychological limits which may, in a different light, be viewed as spiritual challenges or built-in limits.

Spiritual growth is no different than the other types of progress we mentioned above. In order to climb from reality towards the ideal we have to work with the built-in challenges associated with our humanity. We are designed with built-in spiritual gravity. Our material, physical nature makes it hard to recognize and adhere to eternal values. The limitations of our senses make it hard to see that our actions are creating buildings and destroying others in the realm of the spirit. The rat-race makes it

hard to pause and contemplate the purpose for our being. In short, spiritual life would be much easier if we were angels. Unfettered by the need to eat, drink, cohabit, or earn a livelihood; unhinged from tension and forgetfulness; free of jealousy and short-sighted anger, we could soar spiritually, growing ever closer to our Creator and to the purpose for which He created us.

But that is not how we are built. Our Creator intended for us to struggle against the formidable challenges of our humanity without ever vanquishing it. We don't win the war; we are meant to fight it - battle by battle. The forces against which we struggle are collectively known as the Yetzer Hara or evil inclination. This is not some devil trying to dupe us into hell; it is a catch-all phrase for the obstacles that stand between ourselves and our life-mission. The Yetzer distracts us from our mission and hijacks our energies while invading the very reasoning capacity which would allow us to detect its machinations. The Yetzer can even convince us that our self-indulgent program of self-improvement is really spiritually uplifting when, in fact, it takes us further and further away from proper service of G-d. By invading the control systems of our moral compass the Yetzer is creating distortions both within and without.

The result of the existence of the Yetzer is the fact that we do not 'free float' towards our spiritual perfection; anything but. The struggle is a lifelong encounter with avoiding the pitfalls of the Yetzer and climbing the ladder of spiritual growth one encounter at a time. But us humans are supposed to be used to working with reality. We don't seem to get terribly upset by the existence of gravity (with the marked exception of a 3 year old trying to make a Lego tower up to the sky only to have old Newton and his silly rules beat her at her game). As such, we have to pause and consider how we are approaching our spiritual quest. Have we given up in frustration? Have I allowed the Yetzer to redefine the growth process on the Yetzer's terms? Have I attempted to climb the mountain in one great moment of resolve? Or have we taken the task seriously and given the task its due consideration, thought and acceptance that, in the end, it will be the dogged effort towards spiritual growth that will count and that we will likely still be left with our old nemesis, spiritual gravity, till the end. Satisfaction must be in the present moment of rising above our nature, not in the overall victory over that nature.

The success is in the small victories and effective strategies for growth while the ultimate victory awaits us in a different place entirely.
