



INSOURCING, REFLECTION AND THE LONG SHORT PATH

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BACKGROUND

Concluding my 21st year at Chabad of Brandeis, I recently had the opportunity to reflect on the past two decades, in a facilitated conversation in front of students and alumni. I described the initial years, brimming with idealism and naïveté, followed by challenges and the juxtaposition of failure and success. My journey evolved into a process of reflection from which pivotal shifts emerged, leading me to the here and now, where I am immersed in understanding, learning and growing from my story.

“Rabbi Yehoshua ben Hananya said as follows: In all my days, no person defeated me in a verbal encounter except for a woman, a young boy, and a young girl. What is the incident with a young boy? One time I was walking along the path, and I saw a young boy sitting at the crossroads. And I said to him: On which path shall we walk in order to get to the city? He said to me: This path is short and long, and that path is long and short. I walked on the path that was short and long. When I approached the city, I found that gardens and orchards surrounded it, and I did not know the trails leading through them to the city. I went back and met the young boy again and said to him: My son, didn't you tell me that this way is short? He said to me: And didn't I tell you that it is also long? I kissed him on his head and said to him: Happy are you, O Israel, for you are all exceedingly wise, from your old to your young.”¹

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad Chasidic philosophy, understood the two paths to the city as representing two ways to reach a goal. The story demonstrates that the faster way is not necessarily the best or most productive way. Perhaps the journey referred to in the story

¹ Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 53b.



can be seen as our journey through life, with the “long, short path” – the “Derech Arucha U’ktzarah” being the optimal way.

REFLECTION AND THE LONG SHORT PATH

Reflection is a powerful engine of change and growth. Looking back on the 21 years, I took stock of what happened, how choices were made, where I am and where I want to go moving forward. This pause to reflect, with a language to do so, gave me a way to understand my past, present and future life choices, with decisions reflective of my unique voice rather than the voice of others. My ability to author my experiences and responses to life and not simply appear as a character in someone else’s script is agency, and agency is critical to change and growth.

Most people seem uncomfortable with the experience of reflection and pivoting, reject deeper understanding and may even dismiss this process completely, reacting with visceral surprise or fear. Why is reflection so uncommon, perceived as threatening or challenging? Why is it not embraced as a desirable experience? It seems that it is easier to just keep going each day than to take the time to intentionally and actively reflect. Reflection is a slow and steady process that requires honesty and commitment. Facing our choices, patterns and the awareness that our life is finite and we are responsible for it, is a complex and nuanced process. It requires a language with which to articulate the moments we experience and to utilize lessons learned from them to move forward. It is often a difficult journey to navigate. However, in the absence of reflection, I do not hold myself accountable for past choices and do not have to be accountable for future ones either. I can look outward to comprehend my life. I can choose to be validated by taking on or mimicking an authority figure’s choices, or by meeting communal or familial expectations. When I do not reflect, I can outsource my life to others. Religious people often outsource their decisions to rabbis or mentors. In a non-religious world, people often base their choices, such as a college education, on social norms. We have internalized the idea that choices that have



already been approved by others are correct. Simply put, we outsource, taking the “short, long way”.

The shift to reflection is to give authority to one’s own decisions and own the consequences. We could call this **insourcing**². It requires the courage to trust ourselves to experiment with an unknown outcome. Experimentation allows for internal insights that nurture real change in one’s life. It has stakes and risks but empowers the individual, strengthening and sustaining their growth, through trust in oneself as the decision maker. Making choices based on your own internal world requires looking inward, discovering patterns in our life experiences and delving into their meaning. This is not a short path. Developing the ability to reflect and articulate is a lengthy journey. Yet finding one’s own voice and language in this process provides us with a “long, short” route to agency and vibrancy.

Life has its own trajectory, presenting us with new crossroads and experiences that we are continually negotiating and navigating. A “short, long way”, or outsourced way provided by others, is developmentally necessary as we begin our journey in life. However, remaining in this mode as we mature can ultimately lead to disconnection, burnout and a lack of self-fulfillment. Insourcing, or a “long, short way”, manifested through reflection, articulation, agency and vibrancy, is essential for personal fulfillment, empowerment and ultimately, long term stamina and success. To navigate it smoothly we need the language to address the next step of our journey. Reflecting and exploring one’s life through a gained language (long, arucha) allows for agency and ownership (short, k’tzarah). We go through these phases over and over again in an upward spiral where “long, arucha” leads to “short, k’tzarah”. We are able to invite more “long”

² The use of the terms outsourcing and insourcing emerged from a conversation between M54 and 1 Stephen Markowitz, Founder of Markowitz Consulting. This idea can be further explored in Hollis James, Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life (New York: Avery, 2005), 33-34, where he speaks about transitioning from finding solutions “out there” to “our lives...always unfolding from within.”



experiences in, knowing that they will be rewarded in “short”, creating a vibrant and sustainable process.

THE PEDAGOGY OF THE "LONG, SHORT WAY" "DERECH ARUCHA U'KZTARAH"

Younger people, with less life experience, must learn necessary skills to navigate and live their lives. This outsourcing is a necessity in the earlier stages of life and the pedagogy of this process will be explored separately. At a certain point, **outsourcing one's choices must evolve into insourcing**. As we mature, amass life experience and make more consequential choices, we must acquire the skills needed to unpack them, understand them, and be accountable for the results. However, embarking on an insourcing journey can be perilous, or cause ruptures. Opening up your inner world risks opening a floodgate and boundaries must be set in place to ensure the gate can be safely resealed. The pedagogy of reflection, of the “long, short way”, focuses on acquiring the language and tools with which to **safely** explore and learn from **existing** experiences, habits and choices, at appropriate life stages, through reflection and agency.

Over the past year, I have been working with two groups of Chabad on Campus Shluchot (emissaries). Shluchim and Shluchot set out at a very young age and are quickly engaged in life consuming work that involves tremendous responsibility. They hit the road running with minimal support, diving in and swept along without developing an internal language with which to negotiate their lives and the deeper questions. They are often overwhelmed by their mission of unceasingly engaging Jews and making Judaism accessible and many are just attempting to make it through each day. Each year a campus Shluchim and Shluchos convention (kinus) is held to provide support through connecting to colleagues and addressing the challenges that they face. Motivational speakers address the participants, reframing their mission or reminding them why they chose Shlichut. Inspirational Chassidic texts are re-learned. Suggestions are offered on



preparing classes, fundraising, and tips are recommended for preparing food easily for large crowds. This kind of outsourced support has its merits and could be framed as the “**Short, Long Way**”, the “**Derech K’tzarah Ve’Arucha**”.

In contrast, a “long, short way” pedagogy does not offer quick solutions or inspiration. Instead, it invites us to **examine our own unique experiences and find language to articulate what is actually taking place, providing tools to effect change through insights gained**. This process requires investment of time, acknowledging and facing the discomfort and difficulties life brings, committing to developing a new language and skill set, and developing the self-esteem and confidence necessary to spiral up and forge our own path, mistakes and all.

Four pedagogic areas surfaced from our work on this “long, short way”: **Design; Commitment, Group and Independence**. They are not necessarily innovative in and of themselves, being found in existing group facilitation pedagogies. However their application to this framework is, we feel, new, non-generic, and productive.

DESIGN

Transitioning from outsourcing to insourcing is challenging without prompts, intervention and an external perspective. A designed framework provides these elements, inviting us to the table and helping us get unstuck and shake off inertia. It creates an arced space and the language and skills to hold the process.

COMMITMENT

Commitment to a change process framework requiring investment of time and patience enables insights, ideas and opportunity for change to emerge.

GROUP



A **relational** process, in which the group setting expands understanding of our own experience and we are enriched through encountering that of others, offers deeper exploration of topics and individual support.

INDEPENDENCE

Working towards the long-term goal of being able to navigate our “long, short way” **independently**, utilizing the language and skills gained and personalizing our upward spiral.

CORE PRACTICE AND APPLICATION

DESIGN

Core Practice: The process begins with the facilitator designing a narrative arc of the experience that builds a vision of what could be and a structured process for change. They then outline a series of topics within the arc that hold the process, allowing learnings and growth to steadily unfold. Each topic is explored in a customized session comprising an **introduction**, a **conceptual tool** (language) with which to explore the topic and ground participants’ experiences in, and a **summary** to conclude. The hybrid learning experience is holistic, combining zoom sessions with an in-person retreat, a framework that offers a safe space for the courageous reflection, intentionality and change processes that emerge. Content, language, skills, processing and application are woven in throughout the sessions and retreat, incorporating critical flexibility that enables learnings to emerge organically. Guided facilitation holds the process and the “messiness” involved to reach readiness for change.

Sample topic and tool:



Introduction: The topic is introduced using two texts. The first describes how each individual is³: “stamped with the seal of Adam, the first man, as all of them are his offspring, and not one of them is similar to another. Therefore each and every person is obligated to say: The world was created for me”. The second text describes how words create, just as G-d creates the world⁴.

Tool: The “What 3”:

Create your own language to identify yourself with 3 words that describe your character, strengths, or skills (your ‘thing’) and develop it into tangible expressions applicable at work and at home. This tool is inspired by what3words.com, where for the purpose of navigation, every three-meter square of earth has been given a unique combination of three words. Each participant personally lists positive descriptive words about their own character. They then select their top three, the ones they feel are most uniquely theirs, that reflect their skills.

Participants are then prompted with a series of deeper questions that nurture discovering how to practically express each word, e.g. “How do I pursue it?”; “How do I get better at it?”; “How does it become my thing?”; “How do I work towards making it my superpower?” or “How can I be accountable to it?” They respond in writing and through smaller group conversation in breakout rooms.

Conclusion: Discussion on transforming these concepts and ideas into a living document that should be worked on continuously and adjusted as each participant hones in on their expressions and experiments with them.

COMMITMENT

Core Practice: Through an initial intake conversation with the facilitator, participants are brought to an understanding that the “long, short way” process is a long-term commitment and

³ Mishnah Sanhedrin, 4:5.

⁴ Liadi Shneur Zalman, The Gateway to Unity and Faith, Chapter 1.



consider whether they are prepared to embark on it. If both participant and facilitator are in agreement that they are ready to start, they register with a tuition fee to reflect their commitment to the process. As they traverse the initial sessions, the intentional, slow design of this process becomes apparent, as well as its centrality in enabling experiences to surface, a language and insights with which to understand their experience to develop, and experimentation with change. The facilitator may need to have “offline” conversations with individual participants to support and encourage them to stay with the process. This is the realization of the commitment to a “long, short way” and its benefits.

GROUP

Core Practice: Opportunities for relational encounters with one’s own and others’ experience in a group setting are created and integrated into the process. Through sharing, listening and reflecting, participants internalize the idea that they are not alone and can grow in a supportive framework. Group size should allow for participation (preventing stagnancy), space (allowing time for insights to land) and chemistry (allowing people to get to know each other). Norms⁵ and expectations are discussed and agreed upon in the first session, including respect, trust, privacy and active participation. The facilitator pays close attention to the social dynamics of the group, working either during the session or in private to ensure respect and mutuality. The facilitator also pays attention to and works with each participants’ unique way of processing. The retreat is a crucial element, as a tremendous immersive experience that deepens group relationships. The facilitator allows for generous allotment of retreat time to processing learnings in a group setting. Through shared experiences and exploration of ideas, relationships develop and flourish.

⁵ There’s a sweet spot of 8-10 participants (the facilitator decides the final number).



INDEPENDENCE

Core Practice: Participants learn to navigate this experience independently, discover their own insights and gain agency over their choices. As part of the intentional design arc, participants are given the opportunity to offer a case study and a holding space for feedback. In addition, they learn how to facilitate a session within their group, exhibiting their growing independence and do not become reliant on the facilitator or a particular idea. Interested participants can also facilitate their own groups after the program, forming their own community of practice.

THE PATH AHEAD

The path we are treading offers the comfort and security of predictability and familiarity. Investing in exploring alternative ways to live our lives, through insourcing, reflection and agency, enables us to hone in on the meaning and purpose of our journey and elevate it. This process is lengthy and requires courage, commitment and determination, yet offers vibrancy and depth of experience. The pedagogical framework of the “Long, Short Path” empowers us to reach for more through a facilitated, supported process that spirals up, restoring the glow of curiosity, vitality and enthusiasm with which we set out on our initial journey and kindling the fires to illuminate the path ahead.