

To Remove the Old in Order to Make Room for the New

Earlier and Revised English Versions

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Revised English translation from the Hebrew and editorial context: Eva Laser

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This passage is from Lesson 7 of the twelve lessons in *Shichlul HaYecholet: Halacha u'Ma'aseh*. It is presented here in an earlier English version and a revised translation from the Hebrew.

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Earlier English version
Get rid of the old when you have new

The discomfort, or even pain, experienced during normal behavior after a large number of successive movements in one particular position is interesting. We are unable to use our bodies in any but accustomed patterns of muscular action. When extensive change is introduced to most of the muscles, or at least to those essential to the movement carried out—as with twenty-five repetitions of a movement—we never- the less instruct our muscles to fall into their usual pattern.

Only the experience of change and close attention will convince us to think and direct ourselves differently. Only when this experience of change causes us to discredit and inhibit the accustomed pattern, which now appears invalid to us, will we be able to accept the new pattern as habit or second nature. Theoretically, all that is needed is an effort of the mind, but in practice this is insufficient.

Our nervous system is so constructed that habits are preserved and seek to perpetuate themselves. It is easier to stop a habit by means of a sudden traumatic shock than to change it gradually. This is a functional difficulty, and that is why it is important to pay close attention to every improvement and to assimilate it after every series of movements.

We thus get a double effect on our sensing capacity: the inhibition of the previous, automatic pattern of movement, which now feels wrong, heavy, and less comfortable, and the encouragement of the new pattern, which will appear more acceptable, more flowing, and more satisfactory.

The insight thus obtained is not an intellectual one—proven, understood, and convincing—but a matter of deeper sensing, the fruit of individual experience. It is important to know and understand the connection between the change and its causes in order to encourage one to repeat the experience with sufficient accuracy under similar conditions to reinforce its effect and impress the improvement deeply on our senses.

Revised English translation
To remove the old in order to make room for the new

The discomfort, or even the pain, that accompanies the first movement back to the usual position after repeatedly performing movements in one and the same position is very interesting. A person cannot use his organism in a muscular configuration that differs from the one he is accustomed to, since this is the only configuration available to him.

If the change in most muscles, or at least in the essential muscles for the intended movement, is large, the person will automatically give commands to his muscles in such a way that he returns to the habitual configuration. At the same time, the changes that have been made require another configuration, better or worse. Only the new experience and the attention can convince him of another d'mut (gestalt/form) and lead him to regulate himself in a different way than before.

Only when the new experience brings him to the point where the habitual configuration, he previously depended on is now perceived as inadequate — a “command” that in his sensing appears as something necessary but not sufficient — only then will he allow the new one to become a habit or become natural for him. Our system is built in such a way that habits are preserved and strive to persist. It is easier to halt a habit through a sharp traumatic event than to change it gradually. This is one of the functional difficulties.

It is therefore important to notice the improvement and the ease after each series of movements, so that two things occur simultaneously in the sensing: the first — an inhibition of the earlier, automatic configuration, since it now appears inadequate, heavy, and less comfortable (a “command” that in the sensing is experienced as something necessary but not sufficient); the second — an encouragement of the new configuration, which is now experienced as more pleasant, more flowing, and more satisfying.

The conviction is not intellectual, proven, or logical, but sensory and internal — the result of personal experience. Awareness and understanding of the connection between the change and its cause is necessary in order to renew the sensory experience with sufficient precision, repeat it under similar conditions, and thereby, in a more deeply sensory way, strengthen it and allow the improvement to sink deeper into the sensory experience.