

# PARSHAS HA'AZINU - YOM KIPPUR

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## YOM KIPPUR: HOW TO BECOME A BAAL TESHUVA

### ONE TESHUVAH TOOL FOR ALL TYPES OF YIDDEN

We are in the middle of the aseres yemei teshuvah and the subject which we want to discuss today is obviously going to be teshuvah. First of all, the question is how do you make someone a ba'al teshuvah? That would be a very nice thing to know. Many of us have relatives that are, nebach, not connected, not observant, maybe grandparents, maybe parents, maybe uncles, cousins, friends, with whom we have some type of relationship; I'm not talking about somebody you meet in the street and you don't have any relationship with them. And I'm sure the thought has entered your mind, how do you make these people commit to becoming observant? If you ever tried, you've certainly got the same answer that you give to your yetzer tov. "Oh, come on, don't bother me now! Don't put pressure on me. I respect what you're doing, but don't put your things on me." And you say to them, "But you know, it's important." And you say, "I love you. I don't want you to get Gehinnom."

So if I were your relative, I would reply, "What do you tell your yetzer hara when he tells you to do aveiros and he's trying to give you gehinnom? Your yetzer hatov says to you, 'You know what? You don't want to do that. It's not good for you. You're going to get gehinnom.' And you say, 'Eh, I'm not so worried about it. I'll take my chances.'"

So, this is a very important question because the same way you become frum and do teshuvah is the same way that you mekarev others. It's one size fits all in teshuvah. So the lesson I'm going to share with you today is going to be be'ezras Hashem yisborach a most powerful lesson of how you can do kiruv, first on yourself and then on others.

### WHAT MAKES A PERSON NOT OBSERVE MITZVOS?

The first thing you have to understand is: What is it that makes a person not observe mitzvos? Why does a person - even a frum person - not observe some mitzvos or not care about the mitzvos? What motivates them not to do mitzvos? You'll ask people, "Why do you talk lashon hara? Why don't you take davening more seriously? Why don't you take learning Torah more seriously? Why don't you take Shabbos seriously?" You have to realize that the same reason why the not-observant guy doesn't keep Shabbos is the very same reason why the shomer-Shabbos-officially, doesn't take it seriously.

### WHAT MAKES OUR TESHUVAH "NOT WORK"?

If you have this advice you'll be set to succeed. The yetzer hara doesn't want you to have this advice. I'll tell you what advice he wants you to have. Let's say you get an inspiration -or like an old talmid of mine called it, "a perspiration" - so let's say you get that "perspiration," and you decide to be mechazek yourself and not talk lashon hara. What do you do? You take out a Chofetz Chaim, you try to learn, but it doesn't work. And you want to know why it doesn't work.

You try to learn mussar, so you get a Mesilas Yesharim. You look around, where does he talk about this aveirah? The problem is, he only talks about the aveiros that you transgress, later on, in perek yud alef. That's where he starts to talk about the aveiros. But until perek yud alef, he doesn't discuss specific aveiros. So you decide to skip to that perek and you try to become frum. But without the first 10 perakim, you're not going to accomplish anything.<sup>1</sup>

Now the emes is, this question has to be discussed because Hashem taught us the answer to this question of what makes a person not observe mitzvos. We have our Yomim Noraim beginning with Rosh Hashanah, and concluding with Yom Kippur. David Hamelech said, ה' אורי וישעי ביום - Hashem בראש השנה וישעי ביום הכפורים אורי וישעי ביום הכפורים, the Rabanan interpreted this passuk to refer to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. "Ori" means "My light" on Rosh Hashanah, "veyishi," means "My salvation" on Yom Kippur (Midrash Tehillim 27:3).

So there's a famous question, posed by no less than the great Rav Yisrael Salanter, in the sefer Or Yisroel, presented

<sup>1</sup> Ed. note: the 'secret' to doing proper teshuvah, as outlined below, lies in learning the first 10 perakim of Mesilas Yesharim.

We know Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants the benefit of Klal Yisrael. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't want to catch them but he wants to spare them and teach them how to get out of their traps. When they are caught in the traps that are laid by the yetzer hara, Hashem wants to teach them how to release themselves from those traps. Yom Kippur is a day of selichah umechilah, a day of mechilas avonos of Klal Yisrael. Rosh Hashanah is a more scary day, Yom Hadin, day of judgment. All the people of the world come before Hashem. וספרי חיים וספרי מתים פתוחין לפניו (Rosh Hashanah 32b). Everybody's parnasah is decided for the year, and also everybody's health.

### WHY IS ROSH HASHANAH BEFORE YOM KIPPUR?

So Rav Yisrael asked, why wasn't Hakadosh Baruch Hu metzaveh to make Yom Kippur first? And after we have selichah umechilah – we can start off our year with taharah and selichah and mechilah – and then we should have Rosh Hashanah and then people will be able to be zocheh badin for a shana tovah umevorach. Hashem is a rotzeh leheitiv. He is not trying to set me up. But it seems that the order of events doesn't show that, since He made Yom Kippur following Rosh Hashanah, it is a little bit on the tough side. So the question is, why are the Yomim Noraim set up in this order?

So I am going to tell you an answer of what I think is the pshat, but just with bringing it down to our level.<sup>3</sup> We need to understand that when Hashem wants to forgive me for my chataim, He is not trying to give me a get-out-of-jail-free card. He is not trying to tell me, "Okay boys, you sinned, you did terrible things in your life no one knows about." (And if anybody knew about it, they wouldn't get near you, they wouldn't talk to you, they wouldn't want to have shaychus to you. You would be a pariah.) Hashem is not here to give out free taharah and free kaparah. You know what Hashem wants you to do? He wants you to change. He wants you to do teshuvah.

### WHAT REAL TESHUVAH IS: CHANGE AND ACKNOWLEDGE

Teshuvah means coming back to Him. Hashem wants you to change the direction of your life. Getting you out of jail for free won't change your direction. It will make you become more entrenched in *cheit*. You won't get out of jail. You'll always be a jailbird. You know, you see some of these people who go into jail, they come out of jail, they go back into jail. They are "yoshvei jail." That is their position in life. Just sometimes they get furlough, and they get out. But they are basically always on the way back to jail. They are *eino benei yishuv*. They are not part of normal society. But that's not what Hashem wants from us. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants His *yidden* to always be on the path coming home.

And here comes the *bombe chiddush*. The reason why you don't keep the *mitzvos* of *lashon hara*, the reason why people are not careful about talking *nivul peh* at the Shabbos table, about *devarim mechuarim* and *nevalim* is not because they didn't learn *hilchos* Shabbos. It's not because they didn't learn *sefer Chofetz Chaim*. They *taka* didn't, but that's not the reason. You know what the real reason is? The real reason is as follows. Because the person doesn't believe and doesn't acknowledge Hashem's presence in his life, or may not even acknowledge Hashem's presence at all.

### A PERSON WHO IS UNAWARE OF OTHERS

Rav Yerucham Levovitz (1873-1936), *zt"l*, writes that you could have two people sitting on the same bench in a *yeshiva*. And you'll ask one of them, "How do you think you're doing in *bein adam lachavero*?" The guy will say, "*Gantz fein*." And he says, the fellow is so unaware of the existence of his *chavero*, it's mind-boggling. He *pashut* lives in his own world, he lives in his own existence – he's not even *makir* there is another person there. He doesn't realize that Hashem put him there for a reason, and that he has *chiyuvim* and responsibilities of *bein adam lechavero* toward that person.

I heard the following in the name of the *zeide*, the Telzer Rav (Rav Eliezer Gordon, 1841-1910). When two people depart from each other, it is referred to as '*haniftar meichaveiro*'? The question is, what kind of language is that? *Niftar* is a word we use when a guy departs this world, a guy dies. Dead. He's *niftar*. *Nifteres*, *nifterah*. The *zeide* said, it comes from a different language. *Niftar* comes from the *lashon patur* – the language of not being obligated. You know what *Chazal* are telling us? That when you are together with somebody, you have *chiyuvim*. You have obligations. You have to be aware first that somebody exists, and you have to be aware that this person is a person toward whom you are

<sup>2</sup> כתוב בס' כוכבי אור פ' פ"ג ומביא מסי' ל' לקוטי יעקב" אודות זה, וז' ל': [מה שמשמתי מפי הגאון הגדול הצדיק רבי יצחק בלור זללה"ה אשר אמר בשם רבו מרן הגר"ס זללה"ה]. איתא במדרש (זק"ר פכ"א) ע"ה פ' ה' אורי וישעי ממי אירא (תהלים כ"ו) אורי - בראש השנה, וישעי ביום הכפורים. ואמר הנ"ל דלכאורה קשה, דהלא ידוע דהקב"ה שוקד על טובת ישראל ורוצה בהצלחתם, ויהי"כ הוא יום סליחה ומחילה - יום שנמחלו עונותיהן של ישראל, וה"ה הוא יום הדין, אשר כל באי עולם עוברין לפניו כבני מרון - וספרי חיים וספרי מתים פתוחים לפניו, וכל מזונותיו של אדם קצובין לו מר"ה, וא"כ למה לא ציוה הקב"ה לעשות יוה"כ מקודם, ואחר שיטהרו מעונותיהן, יעשו ר"ה, ואז יוכלו לזכות ביום הדין לשנה טובה וברכה. אולם בודאי הקב"ה רוצה בטובתן של ישראל, ואדרבה עבור זאת גופא צוה לישראל לעשות מקודם ר"ה דזקא ואח"כ יוה"כ. יען כי הקב"ה יודע לבבות בני אדם כי רחוקים המה מאוד מדברים רוחניים כמו סליחת עונות ועוה"ב וכדומה - להיותם פה בעולם השפל, וכל ההרגשים - המור רק בדברים גשמיים - כמו בני חיי, ומוזני, ולא יוכלו לעלות פתאום למדרגה הגבוהה - להרגיש ענין הרוחני של יוה"כ - כפרת עונותיהם, לאת צוה להם מקודם לעשות ר"ה - שבו נדים את האדם על דברים גשמיים - דברים שיש לו בהם הרגש גדול - וכאשר יחס לבנם בבקשתם על בני חיי ומוזני - או אז אולי יוכלו לצעוד הלאה גם ליוה"כ - שהוא עומד על דברים הנעלים - לרוחניות, לסליחת עונות וכדומה! והו כונת המדרש אורי - בר"ה, ר"ל שעל ידו הוא מאיר לנו לעלות מעלה - להרגיש התשועה הגדולה - בכפרת העונות. והו וישעי - ביוה"כ, פ' שעי"ך אך אנו נושעים באמת ביוה"כ. ע"כ אמר בשם רבו. במדרש הנ"ל ע"ה פ' ה' אורי וישעי, אורי - בר"ה וישעי - ביוה"כ, י"ל הכונה, כי אמנם האור הוא באמת דבר טוב ויקר עבור האדם, יען כי בחשך אינו רואה גם הדברים הקרובים אצלו וכ"ש דברים הרחוקים ממנו, וע"י האור יראה ויבין גם מרחוק, עכ"ל האור אינו מאיר רק לפי שעה - כשהוא מאיר ולא יורה, אבל הישועה היא ענין הנמשך לזמן רב, ולפעמים יודמן אשר הישועה אשר יעשה לאדם נמשכת לעולם. כן ר"ה הוא בדמיון האוויר הדייני אם יהי' רצוננו לידע מה יהי' יום האדם ומשפתתו על שנה הבע"ל אין עצה ותחבולה לידע זאת, אבל אם יחי' רצוננו לידע מה שנגזר על האדם בר"ה העבר - זאת יוכלו לידע ידיעה ברורה, בעת אשר יבוא ריה של שנה השני, ויבין ויראה על כל הסיבות והמקרים אשר באו עליו בכל השנה עד עתה, יאמין באמונה שלמה אשר הכל נכתב עליו בר"ה העבר. והו פי' אורי - בר"ה, היינו שבר"ה זה כבר נתגלו ונתבררו לנו דברים המכוסים עד עתה כי אין אדם יודע העתידות, יען כי השני"ת מן ענין האדם ידיעת העתידות לטובתו, וגם הידיעה והתבוננות האדם על העת אשר עברה, ג"כ לטובתו הוא, כי יאמין באמונה שלמה אשר הכל נכתב עליו בר"ה העבר ויכול להיות אשר באו עליו המקרים לא טובים. יען אשר לא הרבה בתפילה ובתחנונים בר"ה העבר, והו כדמיון האור אשר צופה בו למרחוק. אבל יוה"כ הוא בדמיון ישועה, ולא ישועה לפי שעה, רק ישועת עולם! כידוע אשר יוה"כ מכפר על כל העבירות, ומלבד אשר יכפר על העבירות של שנה זו, גם מכפר על כל העבירות שעשה כל ימי חייו, לאת יחי' עיקר הבקשה של האדם ביוה"כ - רק סליחת ומחילת עונות - ויושעו ונראה למשל, שני אנשים הפלפלו ביוה"כ העבר ביוה"כ אחד היה עיקר בקשתו על סליחה ומחילת עונות, והשני היה בקשתו על דברים גשמיים על בני חיי, ומוזני, ושיהיה לו"א יזכר שתתקבל בקשתם וזכרו לחיים, נמצא כי האיש אשר עשה תשובה שלמה ומת מתוך התשובה - טוב לך מאוד, אבל האיש השני אשר בקשתו הייתה על הדברים גשמיים, כמה מיני צער ויסורים יסבול עד אשר יגיע למדרגתו, כי יש עבירות אשר גינתם כלה והם אינם כלים, כמבואר במס' ר"ה (דף ט"ו). לאת כל אדם יהי' עיקר בקשתו ביוה"כ על מחילת עונות, וכאשר יראה השני"ת אשר בקשתו הוא על דברים רוחניים. יחיתיו לו השני"ת שנה טובה וברכה, והו פי' ישעי ביוה"כ, כי ביום זה יוכלו להשיג בו ישועה עולמית, עכ"ל.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. note: Rav Brog, Shlitta, offers another approach in answering the question of why Rosh Hashana is before Yom Kippur, based on the mesorah he received. This answer is different from Rav Yisroel Salanter's approach (see footnote #2).

obligated to.

When it comes to thinking about another human being, you can be totally unaware that the other person has needs. You are not sure if the person has wants, you are not sure if the person has desires that you can help with, in *ruchniyus* or in *gashmiyus*. You are totally unaware. You are living in your own bubble. Likewise, it's much easier for people to live without an awareness of Hashem. The reason why a person talks *lashon hara* is one reason and one reason only, and that is because they do not believe and have no awareness that they are in the presence of Hashem.

### IN THE PRESENCE OF RAV CHAIM

I'll give you an example. Imagine a person, who's right now in the presence of Rav Chaim Kanievsky. There is a *balagan* all around. You have his *einiklach*, you have his *shamashim*. They look like regular folks. Rav Chaim stands out. But I know that every time somebody goes to Rav Chaim Kanievsky, he is so careful with what he says, it is unbelievable. What happened? Did the guy become a *baki* in Chofetz Chaim all of a sudden?! No. But he is simply aware that Rav Chaim doesn't tolerate nonsense. You know how many people walk into Rav Chaim and remove their watches because they heard Rav Chaim doesn't like that people wear watches? You know how many people go to Rav Chaim and put their *peiyos* in front of their ears because they are afraid Rav Chaim will tell them something? You know how many people who don't have beards are petrified to go to Rav Chaim? What happened?! All of a sudden they know all *hilchos gidul zakein*? No. But they are aware, and in Rav Chaim's presence, they are moved. There is a certain motivation. Rav Chaim never hurt anybody. He never cursed people. He never raised his voice. The Steipler was a scary man. He could raise his voice. If you ticked him off the wrong way or he thought you were doing something wrong, you'd hear about it. But Rav Chaim doesn't do that. He doesn't deal with you personally. He doesn't look through you. He barely looks at you. He has his head down. He looks at you sometimes like this, with his head down. That's what he does. He gives a big smile to everybody. You'd think in his presence, a guy would tell you some good *hock*. You know what this guy did to me, what that guy did to me. But people don't do that in front of him. You know why? Because you are aware and cognizant of your own behavior when you are in his presence.

The reason why people sin, the reason why a person is not *shomer Shabbos* like he should be is because he's not aware of Hashem. That is the reason why the majority of *yidden* out there are not observant, and there is really no difference between them and you. You are not observant in certain *inyanim*, they are not observant in more *inyanim*. You are more aware of Hashem, they are less aware of Hashem. You hope that the reason why you are observing what you are observing is because you are aware of Hashem.

### DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM

A lot of people do *mitzvos* while being unaware of Hashem. Ask an average *bachur* why he puts on *tefillin*. Because of Hashem? Neh. The real answer - if he's honest with himself - is simply peer pressure. "It was how I grew up, it became my minhag already, I'd feel guilty if I didn't do it." What? You're afraid? When it comes to *tefillin* you're afraid of Hashem? When it comes to *lashon hara* you are not afraid, but with this you are afraid of Hashem? The *teretz* is, it's not because you're afraid of Hashem. You are no different than the *freier yid*.

This is such an important thing to realize. And this is why, the first *yesod* that you have to convince yourself to develop is a relationship with Hashem. And it has to be one that has clarity that Hashem is truly in your life.

That is called *emunah*. The reason why people do *aveiros* is because they have no *emunah*. They may know about *emunah*. They know they are supposed to believe that there is a Hashem in the world, but they don't have the *emunah*. The clarity of your *emunah* is directly correlated to your degree of *kiyum hamitzvos*. You can only do *mitzvos* after you are *makir* that there is a Ribono Shel Olam, that there is a *melech*. Then you could be *mekabel* His *malchus*. If you don't believe He's there, you think you can do what you want, how you want, where you want, and when you want. You have no *shaychus* of being *frum* and you have no *shaychus* to *mitzvos*. Ay, you are a nice guy, and *punkt* you didn't talk *lashon hara* for the last week? Okay, it was a *mikreh*. Even though we say there is no *mikreh* in the world, that means Hashem has no *mikreh*. By you there is *mikreh*. It was a coincidence.

A guy called me up today. He wanted to work on his old *chataim*. I said, "Where are you holding now?" "Now, I have no problem. He tells me, "I imagine myself now as not even *shayach* to the *cheit* anymore." I tell him, "You are fooling yourself." I told him, "I hate to tell you something. You are being set up for a trap, my friend. It's going to hit you so hard, like a ton of bricks, and you're going to say, 'I don't know where it came from. I was sure I was done with it.'" I said to him, "The history of your *chataim* is terrible. You're not just a regular *choteh*. You're a serious *choteh*." This guy did things that a lot of people don't do. He didn't have one smartphone. He had several smartphones He had a smartphone for a month and a half, and then threw it away. He said, "I'll never do it again." But then a few months later, he's in a down rut, he passed store, saw a smiling face in the window. "Don't you want one of these to pick yourself up?" "Sure I do." He bought a second one. Had that for a month and a half. Then he threw that away. A few months later, he goes by that store again and gets another one. I tell him, "Three in two years, that's a *chazakah*. You think now you're finished?" "Now I feel disgusted." I said, "Of course, the *yetzer hara* wants you to feel disgusting. You know why? He wants you to fill yourself up with *kedushah*." And then he drains you out. That's all. But you have to understand, do you know why a guy who walks into that store buys a smartphone? Because he doesn't believe Hashem is watching. He doesn't believe

that Hashem actually knows. He thinks he slipped it into his pocket, he threw the box out in the store, or he put it under his jacket, put his coat on, and walked out, with a black hat. You know, his *peyos* were sticking out and flying behind his ears. No one is *choished* him of having a smartphone. And all of a sudden, he meets somebody. "What were doing there?" "No, I was just fixing my phone, my kosher phone." "They have kosher phones there?" "No, I just went to see if they do, but they don't have kosher phones there." A person has to know, this is how you do *teshuvah*: You've got to see Hashem clearly in your life. You have to work on that every single day of your life. Because that is the **only** thing that is going to keep you from doing *chataim*.

## **ROSH HASHANAH GIVES US LIGHT AND EMES**

The reason why Rosh Hashanah precedes Yom Kippur is because on Rosh Hashanah it's called אור, it's the light. When you see the *emes*, when you see Hashem, that's called "you're seeing the light." The light of Hashem is the clarity, the *emes le'amito*, the clarity that there is a Ribono shel olam in this world. Once we see the light, the *emes*, then we can do *teshuvah*.

I'll never forget having a discussion - he called it a debate - with a fellow who was on President Clinton's advisory board. He told me he is a very bright professor, a brilliant professor. He came to my house. He had to be in the Cleveland Clinic, so he stopped by at 12 o'clock at night. He said, "I hope it's not too late." The guy had no *middos tovos*, but that is beside the point. That wouldn't have made a difference. We started to talk, and I said to this fellow, "Do you believe in Hashem?" He said, "Of course not. I'm an intelligent person." I said, "What would you say if I could prove to you that there is Hashem." He said, "There is no way for you to present such a proof." I said, "But what would you say if I could prove it?" I said, "Would you be willing to hear what I have to say?" He said, "You can't prove it." And every time I tried to get a word in edgewise, "Let me suggest to you a proof that there is a Hashem. I'm not going to tell you any kabbalistic things. I'm going to say something a rational mind can accept as facts." Every rational mind gathers certain facts about anything. Facts about cars, facts about cereal, facts about planes, and about the safety of planes. And then the rational mind makes a presumption.

A person tells himself, I could go on the plane and the plane is going to fly. I'm not going to fall down. Some people don't trust it, but most people do trust it. That's how it is. We absorb rational facts in our minds, and make decisions based on facts. We make life decisions. People invest their life savings based on a rational decision. I said, "I'm going to give you a number of rational ideas." He still wouldn't listen. He wouldn't accept. So I said, "Professor, do you understand why you won't accept it?" "Because it can't be so. There's no proof to G-d," he replied. I said, "No. I'm going to tell you why you can't accept Him. Because the second I prove you there's G-d and I prove His existence to you, I've got you in the bag. You are stuck, and you are going to have to become as *frum* as me, or *frummer*. Because if there is a G-d in this world, that is going to obligate you. The existence of a G-d will obligate you."

Then I told him that he wasn't being honest and he was petrified of hearing about it. He didn't even want to hear the discussion. He didn't want my suggestions. I said, "I want you to know, there is very, very solid evidence to believe in Hashem and His existence. I understand why you don't want to hear it." I said, "Are you married to a Jewish person?" "I'm not." I said, "You're living with a non-Jewish woman. That is not kosher. As a matter of fact, it's *treif*. And if you believed in G-d, you couldn't live with her. You're stuck. How are you going to rationalize your actions?"

## **"E" IS FOR EMES, FOR EMUNAH, FOR EVERYTHING**

A person has to understand that this lack of *emunah* that Hashem is in our lives is the *shoresh* of every single *aveirah*. That is why *emunah* is the key to every *mitzvah*. *Emunah* is not just a nice thing to have. It's not just the first *mitzvah* the Rambam mentions in his Sefer Hamitzvos. It's the beginning and the basis for my whole observance and my whole *shaychus* to *Yiddishkeit*. Torah means nothing without *emunah*. It's just another book. It may be a holy book, it may be a wonderful book, a great book, but what makes it unique is that it's Toras Hashem. And what makes Hashem unique is that Hashem is *chai vekayam*. He is ובטובו מחדש בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית. And a person has to work on himself again, and again. He has to see Hashem and train himself to see Hashem in everything in his life. To see Hashem in every person in his life.

I remember my *zeide*, (Rav Avigdor Miller, zt"l) once saying that he spoke about *emunah* a lot, and that people were getting tired of it. He did not talk about *emunah* directly. You know how he talked about Hashem? He talked about apples. That's what he talked about. Apples. There was a *tekufah* that all he did was talk about apples. Not only that, he carried apple seeds in his pocket. And he would put his hands in his pocket all the time, and he would touch the seeds. That was his thing. "Hashem, I believe you're right here in my pocket." And he would take them out, and he would say, "You know what this is? It's an apple factory. Imagine the biggest factory in the world that produces the most complex, *geshmake zachen*. That's what this is. This tiny apple seed, it's a factory." And he started to save them in bags. If somebody ate an apple, he saved the seeds. It was an *avodah shebemikdash*. "Hashem, I want to be *makir* you." He thought about Hashem the first second he woke up in the morning. He wanted to know Hashem, and he *chazered* it over every day. I asked him, "Aren't you bored, *zeydy*? Every day the same thing?" He took the same two breaths every day and said with *kavanah*, "*Kol haneshamah*." And he wasn't talking to me. He was talking to Hashem. He was letting me listen. He told me that numerous times. And he said, "על כל נשימה ונשימה." I remember how he once picked up dirt. He held a spoon of dirt in his hand, and he was looking at the spoon, studying the spoon. What was he seeing? He was seeing

Hashem.

## SEEING HASHEM, IT'S MECHAYEV A PERSON

He once said that when he was in Slabodka during a *bein hazmanim*, he was sitting on a rock somewhere and he saw a flower. He said that when he saw that flower, that was the first time in his life that he finally got it. He realized he was looking at Hashem. This awareness seized him, it grabbed him, it woke him up. And everybody else didn't want to know about it. You know why? They realized it's going to be *mechayev* them. If Hashem is here in the *beis medrash*, you can't walk out. You're stuck. You're stuck by the Gemora. That's tough.

If Hashem is with you on Shabbos to a higher degree, which Hashem is - Hashem's presence comes to a higher degree - you know what happens? You stop doing things as you did them. You can't *shluf* away the Shabbos of Hashem.

Rabosai, *aseres yemei teshuvah*, is the time of the year that Hashem is closest to you! *Be'heyoso karov!* A lot of people say, "I don't want to know. I don't want to hear what you're talking about, I don't want to hear about it." The second Rosh Hashanah is over, it's like they say, "Good-bye Hashem, see you next year. Hopefully, I made it." You didn't make anything, my friend. Whatever you've made, you've flushed away. You give a little charity, and you'll send some money for the calendar of the old age home in the Lower East Side that closed down about 55 years ago. And the calendar of so-called 'sages' who supposedly sit and learn all day long, you are 'supporting the sages' and in reality there is not even a building, there it's a postbox (i.e., it is not a bona fide Torah-dik support campaign). That's all you do. You say, "That's my *tzedakah*." And you think, I made my peace with my Maker.

Rabosai, this is why Rosh Hashanah has to precede Yom Kippur. You have to see the *or*. You have to say during these two days again and again, "*Hashem Melech, Hashem maloch, Hashem yimloch*." *Zichronos*. You remind yourself that there is not one iota of a thought, there is not one movement, not one *zach* that you did that Hashem is not aware of. He never forgets. He is *pashut* aware of your life. The *hashgachas* Hashem is *lo ye'uman ki yesupar*. He is the *melech*. He is *mashgiach*. And he gave us the Torah.

When my *zeide* learned Torah, that was the way of connecting to Hashem like nobody's business. Every time he learned, he thanked Hashem. He thanked Hashem for Rashi. He said, "Rashi was a gift from Hashem. What would I do without Rashi? What would I do without Tosafos? What would I do without the *mefarshim*? I would be lost. I wouldn't know how to *teitch* a *gemara*. We'd be like blind people walking around." You've got to have the *or*. Don't get sidetracked. Don't get involved with things that distract you.

## TAAVOS DISTANCE US FROM HASHEM

*Zogt* the Mesillas Yesharim, what causes a person to be *misrachek* (distanced) from Hashem? What is the common denominator in any *hisrachkus* from Hashem? You know what it is? The *hisrachkus* from Hashem is the *taavos hachumriyos*. Any materialistic desires. The reason why a person is not connecting to Shabbos is because sleeping is a very strong materialistic desire.

Hashem put us in a world that is full of desires, even kosher ones. Not even *aveiros*. You look at the *sefarim*. From one meal of *bisra shmeina* (fatty meat), you know how many *klipos* you can get?! You know how far you can get from Hashem? The Chazon Ish writes that *אכילה כשירה* is the *אבי אבות הטומאה*! You know how many people have left Hashem because of that? It's amazing. People pursue wine, they pursue whiskey. Of course, everything's *lekovod* Yom Tov. Then they take it during the weekdays to prepare for Yom Tov that is coming, you know. It's all *lekavod* Shabbos and then it's left over from Shabbos. Whatever it is. It goes round and round. There are people that live like this. They live in the *olam hachumriyos*; it takes a person. That's what stops me and everybody else. That's the reason why you talk *lashon hara* - that's the only reason you talk *lashon hara*. Because you don't believe for one second *ki yesh borei olam* - that there is a Creator in this world. You don't believe it.

## KIRUV 101

So if you want to know how to talk to a non-*frum* person, never talk about *mitzvot*. Don't do that because that's like talking about hieroglyphics. What you have to do is talk to them about Hashem. "You know there is a Hashem in your life? Do you know what Hashem does for you on a daily basis?" But if you're not convinced that Hashem does it for you, you can't convince that person that Hashem does it for him.

"Do you know Hashem is keeping you alive? You know, if for one second Hashem would let go - and Hashem lets go once in a while - the guy gets a backache, the guy gets a neck ache, he can get a foot ache, he can get a toothache. Hashem let it go. And all of a sudden, if Hashem lets go of you, you're lost. If Hashem lets go of your mind, you become an emotional basket case. Have you ever seen a basket case? They have nothing to look at. That is a *rachmanus she'ein komoso*. I've seen basket cases in my life, I can't tell you how many! That is Hashem letting go. It's a *chessed* that people are normal. It says in Tehillim (121:4) *הנה לא ינום ולא יישן שומר ישראל*. You've got to tell the person: "There is a Hashem Who gave us the Torah. There is a Hashem in your life."

## "I'LL SERVE HASHEM IN MY WAY"

So some people whom I call spiritually dishonest, you know what they say to me? This is a very common thing. "I'm

very spiritual," they tell me. So I ask them, "So how come you don't do *mitzvos*?" "I serve Hashem in my own way. "You serve Hashem your way? That is a contradiction in terms. Could you imagine if somebody came to you and said, 'You know, I really appreciate you. Oh, by the way, you want to know how much I appreciate you? I want to say thank you.' And he takes a swing, and he smacks you in your face. And you say, 'What was that?!' And they say, 'Well, it's my way of expressing myself. You know, some people bang you on the back when they want to show you friendship? I bang you on the face.' And he says, 'Oh, that hurts.' 'I'm sorry, let me do it again.' Baam. 'But I'm expressing myself! You see, I'm connecting with you. I'm not hitting you. I'm having a connection. This is my spiritual internal connection.'"

You know, when the terrorist comes and says, "Allahu akbar," he thinks he's doing a *grosse* religious duty. He is sticking a knife in your kishkes. That's what he's doing. Nobody is saying, "No, thank you." So how do you tell Hashem "This is how I'm serving you Hashem. I do it in my way"? We've got to do it the way Hashem wants us to do it! I mean, it's the stupidest thing how the *yetzer hara* convinces these idiots that there is such a rationale. It makes no sense. But the guy says, "I'm doing the best I can." I tell him, "Do you have an IQ of 5? What do you have, some kind of problem? Are you mentally unstable? Because if you were mentally stable and you're doing the best you can, there is some contradiction here. It makes no sense." A person who has mental faculties and doing the best he can, usually you see it in the actions.

### FOCUSING ON HASHEM'S RATZON

Hashem is אורי, Rabosai. When you know about Hashem and you think about Hashem, you think about what He wants, you acknowledge that "Hashem didn't create me for no reason." Then you say, "Okay, what is the book of instructions?" When you focus on Hashem, you will seek out the instructions. And then, when you are not sure if you should do something, you will then ask yourself, "Is this okay with Hashem?"

If someone would be in the presence of Rav Chaim Kanievsky and he was having some compote and wanted to know what *brachah* he should make, you could be certain the guy would ask, "*Veleche brachah mach ich?*" Even if he thought it was *haetz*, he wouldn't make *haetz*. He would want to make sure. He would do it the way Rav Chaim would like him to do. Why? Because Rav Chaim is here. A person who is aware of Hashem in his life is always thinking, "Does Hashem want me to say this? Does Hashem want me to leave? Does Hashem want me to come? Does Hashem want me to go? Does Hashem want me to do this? What does the Ribono Shel Olam want me to do?"

"No, I can't do this - because of somebody else. I don't want to say a *brachah* out loud, people will think I'm too *frum*. I don't want to ask for a *bentcher*, I don't want people to hear my kids saying *birchas hamazon* out loud, because at my table, everybody is sitting there." They give Hashem the silent treatment. They talk and they *yenta* the whole meal about every piece of *chazerei* possible and all of a sudden, it comes to *birchas hamazon* and they all open their bentchers and they all look grrrr, they 'get angry' with Hashem. They've got to give Him a sourpuss face, and they give Him the silent treatment. I asked someone sitting at my table once: "Are you angry at Hashem? We just had a delicious meal. Why wouldn't you say thanks?" We think opening a book and looking at a book is saying thanks. Would you like somebody else to say thank you to you in that fashion? What is that? Why don't you say the words out, and express yourself? Show your children you have gratitude. "Nah, that's for *frummies*, we're not that type." That's the way people are. They have no awareness of Hashem. If they were in the presence of Rav Chaim, you can be certain they would say the words. Rav Chaim would say, "Say louder so I can answer Amen!" and they would sing like a bird.

### A SECULAR TAXI DRIVER VISITS R' CHAIM

So you need the *or*. You have to get the *or* of Hashem first. And as you become *frum* and as you grow, you have to constantly think about Hashem and about people. Not "This is Mr. So-and-so on the phone." No, your message should be: "You just reached a child of Hashem. You reached somebody who is aware of Hashem."

Let's say, for example, a guy calls himself Sammy. If Rav Chaim asked him what is your name, do you think anybody would be foolish enough to tell R' Chaim, "My name is Sammy"?

I had a taxi driver who I hired to take me to Bnei Brak one time. We had a private session with Rav Chaim. The gabbai said to us, "Where is your driver?" "He is in the car." He said, "Bring him in also." I say, "He's a *freier*." He said, "Bring him in also." I ran outside and said, "Come on in." He said, "No, no, no." I said, "Harav *rotzeh otcha*, the *rav* is calling you." "Ah-ah-ah-ah." I said, "*Hu lo noshech*, he doesn't bite anybody, you know what I mean? *Yesh lo chiyuch yafeh*, he smiles beautifully." The guy was standing, he felt uncomfortable about how he was dressed. A *freier* mentch! What *shaychus* does he have to Rav Chaim?! But you know something? He understood. Even him, I guarantee you, if Rav Chaim would say, "What's your name?" he wouldn't say Fred, he wouldn't say Jackie, and he wouldn't say Sammy. You know why a guy says Sammy? Because he doesn't think it's negative, that's why.

When you come to the next world, they are going to say, "So what's your name?" and you're not going to know. You're going to forget your name. And they are going to say, "You don't know your name? What are you, stupid?" Hashem is going to look at the computer and say, "When I created you, I gave you an IQ of 140 or 110. Even the 110 is expected to know their name. How come you don't know your name?" You know what the answer is? You weren't made aware of your iniquities. You had no *yachas* to Hashem. You weren't a ben Yisrael. You didn't see yourself as one

of Hashem's people. You didn't see yourself as such. Hashem wasn't in your life.

That's what a person has to do during these days. I want to see this place talking to his *talmidim* hopping with awareness of the presence of Hashem. That's the *avodah* now over the next week. You should be asking yourself every step of the way, "Is this what Hashem wants me to do, as Yom Kippur is fast approaching?" Is this the Rosh Hashanah you had, that your batteries already went out? They are extinguished already. You need another Rosh Hashanah. Because if you need one, Hashem can give you one. Hashem can give you Rosh Hashanah with the snap of a finger. And trust me, you're not going to like that Rosh Hashanah He's going to bring to you. So, you'd better run to Him and see the light and feel the light and focus on the light, get closer to the light, and then you'll be *zocheh* to 'yishi,' the salvation of Hakadosh Baruch Hu on Yom Kippur, and you'll be *zocheh* to *teshuvah sheleimah*.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

Teshuva means coming back to Hashem by changing our direction in life. We can do this by clearly recognizing the presence of Hashem in our lives every single day. This foundational principle explains how we must start doing teshuva, how we can be *mekarev* others to Torah and Yiddishkeit, and it also informs us why people, both observant and non-observant, either completely transgress or don't take the mitzvos of the Torah seriously. Recognizing Hashem in our lives is the only thing that will keep us from transgressing mitzvos. This reason is an answer to the famous question of why Rosh Hashanah precedes Yom Kippur, which is, that the only way to do teshuva is to first see the "light" of Hashem in our lives. And if we succeed in that, we'll be able to do proper teshuva and seek out and start observing (or deepen our commitment to) His mitzvos. This is why *emunah* is the foundation of Torah observance and the key to every single mitzvah we do! In the next few days before Yom Kippur, whatever actions I take - no matter how insignificant and mundane - I will ask myself, "Does Hashem want me to do this? Does Hashem want me to go here?" And in the *zechus* of recognizing Hashem's role in guiding my actions, I will be *zocheh* to do teshuva *sheleimah* and merit to see His salvation, iy"H, this Yom Kippur!