

THE QUICKEST WAY OUT OF YOUR CHALLENGE

YOSEF'S WORDS CONTINUE TO REVERBERATE

In this week's *parshah*, we encounter a life challenge that many of us will face to some degree. Most people lose themselves completely when they face such a challenge. Most people react terribly. The Torah says that when Yosef finally meets his brothers and he tells them *וְעַתָּה אֵל תַּעֲצֹבו*; "don't feel sad, don't feel down," *וְאַל יַחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי־מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי*, "don't be angry at yourself that you sold me" (*Bereishis* 45:5). Could you imagine if you had a brother or brothers that sold you into slavery?! You'd be ticked! And then that sale ended you up in jail, in the papers? You'd be very, very upset. But Yosef tells his brother not to be sad, *כִּי לִמְחִיָּה שָׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹקִים*, "You weren't the ones that sent me here, rather, it was completely Hashem - *middas hadin*." You hear that? So Rav Yerucham Levovitz says (*Da'as Torah, Beurim* *ibid*), if you look at this conversation, what would you say Yosef was doing? *Pashtus*, you would say that he was trying to calm them down. He was trying to placate them, because he realized how guilty they felt, how bad they must have felt realizing what they did, how awful it was. So, he's being a merciful brother, and telling them, "Don't be pained. *L'maiseh* it was not as bad as you thought it was. It turned out alright. *L'maiseh*, it ended up good."¹

But Rav Yerucham says, that's not the way the Torah views these words. Such an explanation is not according to the *ruach Hatorah*. Yosef never intended for it to be understood that way. Yosef was saying, "The whole *ma'aseh* was preordained, it was *gezeirah* of Hashem, in order for me to be a messenger to prepare life-sustaining food for you and the family. You didn't even send me here. Hashem sent me here. You don't have any *shaychus* to this matter." You don't have a finger in this pie. Just like when a person receives good, he can't relate that to what people give him, so too, every evil that he gets. So he tells them, "You're not responsible for your actions - for the bad that happened to me, and you're not responsible for the good that happened to me. Today, I'm a free man. I'm a viceroy. I have no claim against you." Rav Yerucham concluded by saying to his *talmidim*: "This *hashkafah*, this perspective, is the *ruach Hatorah*. And hold on to this *klal*, this concept, with your two hands!"

A RENTAL STORY FROM GEHENNOM

I've been involved for a few months now with somebody who went through a terrible experience. This fellow purchased a home and furnished it for \$50,000. It is a big house, nice furnishings. Couches, consoles, good big beds, outdoor furniture, indoor furniture, a pool. Not *stam*. And he found a renter. A family arrived in America from Eretz Yisrael. He rented them the house. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a rental from Gehennom.

The story is so crazy that it's almost funny. After a short while, the guy stopped paying him the rent. "I'm not paying." Then the owner said, "You gotta pay rent."

He said, "If you ask me again for rent, I'm going to take the house away from you. This is going to be my house, and you will lose your house." The owner said, "I have the mortgage. What are you talking about?!" The fellow said, "I don't care what you have. I'm going to take it away from you."

And the renter said afterward, "I'll be a 'tzaddik.' I'm going to make you an offer. I'll give you pennies for your house. Stop bothering me." The owner said to him, "Are you crazy?! I bought this house. This is my house." He said, "I don't want to hear that."

And then the renter proceeded to take him to court! I could imagine the guy coming to your house, and then suing you because he tripped on your dining room floor. Okay. The only thing is, it wasn't like that at all. The guy took him to court. He took him to one court, to a second court, to a third court. In court, out of court, he made his life Gehennom. The guy came to the door of the house one time and said, "Can I have my rent?" The renter, *pashtut*, went to court and got a restraining order on the owner! He simply told the judge, "The guy is threatening me!" So the court said the guy was not allowed to come within 500 yards of his own house. This crazy story went on for months, 24 months! Finally, the guy called me up. After listening to him, I said, "Is this the craziest story or what? This reminds me, *mamish*, of Yosef and the brothers."

I told him, "Do you realize that you are entangled, ensnared?" (He told me this guy is a *רשע*, a *מושחת*, a *גנב*, a *גזלן*). I told him, "That guy has no power over you whatsoever. This is a *gezeirah min hashamayim* on you. And all that fellow is doing is carrying out Hashem's *shlichus* to drive you bananas. And you'd better accept this from Hashem. Be *mevatel* your *da'as* to Hashem." He asked

¹ כי למחיה שלחני א-להים לפניכם וגו', ועתה לא אתם שלחתם אותי הנה כי הא-להים (מה-ה-ח). מכאן יש לנו ללמוד כלל גדול אשר כבר דיבר מזה הרמב"ם והרמב"ן (שמות יח, יא) על פסוק כי בדבר אשר זדו עליהם, כי אמנם לא היה על המצרים ראוי לבא עונש הגדול של עשר מכות, וטביעה בים, אחרי כי השם גזר על ישראל ועבדו וענו אותם, וכבר הודיע זה לאברהם אבינו ע"ה, וא"כ המצרים קיימו דבר ה', ושלוחי הם, ומה להם להענש עליהם, אבל העונש בא על המצרים רק על אשר זדו עליהם, וחשבו להכרית אותם מן העולם וכו' וכו', ומפני זה בא עליהם העונש המשחית אותם לגמרי, והעונש הוא על הודו שחשבו לעשות להם, עיי"ש. ענין זה הוא גם כן בכל פרט ופרט, כי מעיקרא דדינא אין לו למוכה להיות בכעס ובטענות על המכה אותו, כי כשליח ב"ד כן הוא דומה, שלוחו של מקום הוא לעשות ככל אשר גזר הוא ית', וכן דוד אמר (שמואל ב' טז, י) בעת יצא שמעי בן גרא וקללו קללה נמרצת, כי ה' אמר לו קלל את דוד ומי יאמר מדוע עשית כן, ולא הניח המלך דוד את אבישי בן צרויה אף לנגוע בו. זהו כל הענין אצל יוסף אשר אמר לאחיו אל תעצבו כי למחיה שלחני א-להים לפניכם, ולא כמו שאנו סבורים על פי השגת שכלנו, שהוא רק ענין של הרגעה והשקטה, אשר אח רחמון מתחסד עם אחיו שגמלוהו רעה, והם עכשיו במצב מרוגז מאוד והוא מיטיב עמהם ומרגיעם לאמור: אין דבר, ובפרט שאני גם הרווחתי מכל המעשה, לא כן הוא רוח התורה, לא כלשון בני אדם לשון התורה, לולא הודו של המצרים אשר חשבו להכרית את בני ישראל מן העולם, לא היה ראוי לבוא עליהם שום עונש, כי פשוט ממש, כי לא הם העושים כלום וכלום, כי הא-להים עשה, הא-להים אנה לידם, הוא אמר ויהי, ומי יאמר לו מדוע עשית כן? והוא מה שאמר יוסף, ועתה לא אתם שלחתם אותי הנה כי הא-להים, והוא כפשוטו ממש, כי כל המעשה נעשה בלעד, אין להם שום יד בדבר, ועל פי דין והלכה צריך הנפגע לחפש אחר היתר להיות בכעס על הפוגע בו, כי כל שקרה אתו הרי בהשגחה עליונה באה לו, ומה לו להמכאבי לו, היתרעם אדם על האבן שזרקה עליו? השקפה זו היא ברוח התורה, ונקוט כלל זה בידך.

me, “Why would Hashem do this to me?! I said, “I can think of a couple of reasons. This story is so crazy - never in my life have I heard such a story. It’s gotta be that in a previous *gilgul*, you did this to somebody else. I have no *safeik*, you did this to somebody else. It’s such a clear *midah k’neged middah* because such a story doesn’t just happen to anybody.”

“ACCEPT THAT IT’S FROM HASHEM”

Bekitzur, the guy didn’t pay him rent for a couple of years. And this guy knew how to work the system. He made him take out lawyers. He made him get lawyers and fight the case back and forth. It was *mamish la’yehudim*. I told the guy, “Just accept it’s Hashem, be *mevatel* your *da’as*. I’m telling you, the guy’s gonna go away. If you think that guy has a *koach* on you, against you, he will have a *koach* against you. You are empowering him to do you wrong. Be *mevatel* your *da’as* to Hashem, and say, “Hashem, I accept. I know it’s from you. Please help me get out of this.”

And the guy started to do that. Slowly but surely, he started to turn. I said, “Don’t even think negatively.” He was holding on, thinking negative things. He used to wish that the guy should have an accident, the guy should fall on his face. The guy should have this, the guy should have that. The guy was like wishing him “*kol hatov*.”

I told him, “You don’t realize, every time you wish him *tovah*, it comes back to haunt you! It bites you in the pants. Is that what you want?! You’re being bitten in your pants! You’re *meturaf*. Let it go! Be *mevatel* your *da’as* to Hashem.”

IS THE TIDE STARTING TO TURN?

It took him a long time, but he did. And suddenly, the tide started turning. One judge said, “What is this, a joke?! What’s going on over here?! This is this guy’s house. He has the deed, he paid for the house! What right do you have to make your claim like it’s your house?” But the guy had *chutzpah* like nobody’s business. Now, during this whole time period, the guy who moved in was *frum*. And over time, he became *frei*. He started to be *mechalel* Shabbos, Yom Tov, Yom Kippur. Finally, they were holding by the end, and they told him, “That’s it. Get out.” The guy came to the judge with his wife and said to the judge, “You know, it’s a holiday coming now - Chanukah. Please give us some time till after the holiday to get out. It’s a very hectic time to move. We can’t move, we can’t get out.”

Meanwhile, the owner finds out that the crazy renter already moved out! The guy realized the end is coming, so he rented another house a few blocks away. Good luck to the new owner! He had to hire detectives to find out where they moved, and if he moved, if he took the stuff over from this house to that house. (One time, he showed up with a cop at the house to see how much damage they had done. The wife said, “You can’t come in here! It’s my property, you can’t walk in here.” The cop said, “Ma’am, I’m a policeman.” She said, “I don’t care what you are. Get off my property before I call the real police on you.”) They *pashut* knew how to use that *chutzpah*. They weren’t impressed by anybody. So now finally the guy is out.

WE HAVE TO LEARN FROM YOSEF

At the last hearing, they were hoping that the judge would say, “You know what? They’re out of the house already. Okay, you can move in and take it.” But he said, “We are going to give him to the beginning of January.” The guy almost *chalished* away. “They’re not there anymore!” The judge said, “Yes, but they have to clean the house out.” The guy was working on himself *shtark*, to *mevatel* himself, to accept the *da’as* of Hashem, the *ratzon* of Hashem. And then, after a freezing cold Shabbos, he gets a call from the neighbor next door to that house. The neighbor said, “All your windows are open. Your garage is wide open. Your house is getting air-conditioned.” Maybe he wanted to freeze the pipes. I don’t know what he wanted. The guy had the heat on also. They called the cops. The cops came, and shut the windows.

The guy wasn’t even in the house! They shut the windows and locked the doors. Now, the owner of this house lives in New York. He had to travel out of state to come see his house. He comes to the house. He can’t get in. Guess what? They changed the locks! They changed all the locks in the house. Not only that, but they stole all the pool furniture. So Hashem is *mamish* teaching this guy a lesson. I told him, “It’s just like with Yosef Hatzadik. First, he gets sold. Then he gets accused of assaulting somebody. Then he gets an extra two years for just reminding the guy, ‘Just remember me when you get to Pharaoh.’” *Nach tsvei yahr!* (another two years). Unbelievable!

We have to learn from Yosef. It’ll turn out good. As we speak right now, they’re in court. They got an emergency hearing today to show the damage the renter did to the house. They broke the back porch. Don’t ask what they did! The owner went with a cop today to try to get into the house, but he couldn’t get in. While he was there, the other guy pulls up. He doesn’t even live there anymore. But he pulls up, “What are you doing on my property? Get off my property.” He starts to scream. The owner says, “The keys don’t work.” The *mechutzaf* said, “Of course, the keys don’t work. It’s my property! I don’t have to give you the keys to my property!”

Now, my heart goes out to this fellow, the owner of the house. Don’t get me wrong. But I told him, “It has nothing to do with that guy. That guy is just a *shliach* of Hashem. He’s just a dog and a stick to teach you a lesson. And that’s your *nisayon*. You’re a *ben Torah*. You understand better. You know that Hashem runs the world. And it’s *takah*, a very unique challenge that you have. But you have to learn from Yosef Hatzadik. Yosef told his brothers, says the Ohr HaChaim, an amazing thing. He didn’t say: “Don’t think that I hate you. Don’t think that I can’t stand you.” He didn’t say, “You didn’t treat me nicely.” You know what he told them? Yosef tells them: “It was a very strange story when you sold me. And I was thinking, ‘How could such a crazy story happen? Such a cruelty to sell a brother away.’ But do you know what I realized at that moment? It was Hashem. It had nothing to do with you. It was so out of character. It was so out of touch. So not normal. It had to be completely from Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And it has nothing to do with you. It’s completely from Hashem.”

DON’T EMPOWER THE MESSENGER!

I’ve heard a lot of similar stories where Hashem sends these types of *shluchim*. But instead of people thinking about what Hashem wants from them and how Hashem wants them to react, they make the biggest mistake and they ‘empower’ these *shluchim*.

Remember this lesson. Anyone in this world, any office, any person, any group of people that challenge you - it's within your power to empower them and give them a *shlitah* (control) over you.

If you think that they are your enemies, that they are the ones who are doing it to you, you should know that you are *mamish* giving them the *koach*! And if you say it has nothing to do with them *ki hu zeh klal*, it's *אין עור מלברו* - it's only Hashem - then they become defanged, depowered and their power wanes! A person has to know this is what it's all about.

WHO'S REALLY IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT?

There was once a Rav who was riding in a car. A guy offered him a ride. The Rav was in the back seat. He noticed in the front seat that there were two steering wheels. But on the outside, it looked like a regular car.

So he asked the driver, "Why do you have two steering wheels in this car? Most cars have one." So the guy smiled and said, "I'll tell you. This car is no different than any other car. It only has one steering wheel. But I have a hyperactive child who can't sit still. And every time he gets in the car with me, he jumps onto my lap. He wants to drive the car with his Tatti. He disturbs me and I can't drive. So, I came up with an idea that I'm also going to give him a steering wheel. So, I installed the steering wheel for him. He gets into his seat. I get into my seat. I drive the car. And he tries to copy my actions. He doesn't bother me anymore."

The Rav said, "That was a brilliant idea." After the Rav thought about it, he said, "Wow. What a lesson. What a lesson. You want to satisfy your child and make him feel good so he shouldn't bother you. You gave him a steering wheel. That's exactly what Hashem does! Hashem makes steering wheels for a lot of people. And he puts them into different positions. He makes some 'steer' countries. Some 'steer' cities. Some 'steer' departments in cities. He gives some police uniforms. He gives and plays the game with all the people. He makes them all feel important, as if they're *manhigim*. But the *emes* is that the wheel they're holding on to is not attached to anything. It's *gornisht*. They just look like macho kind of guys. They swagger along. 'I'm the mayor.' I'm this. I'm that. The only One who's holding a real steering wheel is Hashem."

LIVING WITH HASHEM

I've got many calls from people whose spouses have left them. The spouse doesn't want to be in the marriage anymore. Usually, the other spouse feels rejected and upset. And I always asked the rejected spouse: "What do you blame this on?" Some say, "I blame it on the therapist. I blame it on my friends. I blame it on his family. His mother-in-law. His mother." Whatever they blame. They blame it on everybody and everything in the world.

I said, "Did you ever think it's from Hashem? Did you ever think that Hashem actually orchestrated this and took this away from you? Because maybe Hashem wants to give you a tremendous wake-up call. And you think that you control the action: You are going to give a divorce, you're not going to give a divorce. You will do this. You will do that. You think you're a *chacham*."

Let's say a person has to go to a specialist. You call their office, and you want to get an appointment. They tell you, "You want to see so-and-so? The first appointment is in three years, around the time when *Meshiach* comes." But you're going to be retired by then. Okay, so maybe there will be some other doctor and they'll give you an appointment. And it's like nuts. What happened all of a sudden?! You know what the answer is? Nothing happened. I have no problem getting appointments. I get appointments ASAP. You know why? Because I know the only one that controls my appointments is Hashem. I tell my wife, "Please make an appointment for me, for next week." She said, "Are you joking?" I said, "No, next week I'm going for an appointment." Okay.

I said one time to my wife, "I'll need an appointment tomorrow." She started to laugh. I said, "What are you laughing about?" She said, "You're going to get an appointment tomorrow?" I said, "You want to bet that Hashem will give me an appointment tomorrow?" And Hashem did. He gave me an appointment the next day. No problem. It's only Hashem who controls my 'wheels.' The only one who steps a foot on the gas pedal in my life is Hashem, nobody else. But everybody thinks that the doctor at the office - that's the new 'hashem.' Don't you know? The Torah says, "Don't worship foreign gods. That's called worshipping foreign gods."

The funny thing is, people are there. I can't tell you how many times I've called and heard the office tell me, "Oh, it's at least three months until the next appointment. And the very next day, they gave me an appointment for that day. I said, "What happened to three months? What happened?" It's not normal. But if you live with Hashem and you understand that Hashem is guiding you, you won't be disappointed, you won't be upset. You won't blame this person. You won't blame that person. You're going to understand that everything is from Hashem. As much as it looks like there are other people involved, there's no one else involved.

ANGER IS FROM THE LACK OF EMUNAH

Chazal say, *כל הכועס כאילו עובד עבודה זרה*, anybody who gets angry is as if he worships idols. Why is that? Because when a person gets angry, all his *emunah* goes out the window. If he only believed that everything was from Hashem, he would never get angry. He would never get upset. Even though a person has free choice, and that guy curses you, and a guy hits you, a guy is *mazik* you, whatever it is. People blame the *shvartzeh*, they blame New York crime, they blame them because they don't put them in prison or let them out of prison, they blame bail reform. You name it.

People all day long talk *kefirah* (heresy), left and right. You should realize that no one is taking anything away from you. And if you constantly keep that in mind, and you focus on that, you'll end up being a king.

You'll be a king in your life, you'll be the ruler in your life, and you'll listen to all the fools around you, and you'll say, "Please just stop the chatter. Stop your nonsense. Hashem has a lot of *shluchim*. There's nothing that's not the *רוח* of Hashem. Hashem is *מחיה ומקיים*, every single thing in this world. And if we'll accept that, and we'll acknowledge that, we'll become free from all the outside *kochos*, and we'll be with Hashem, and we'll hopefully move past our *tzaros* as quickly as possible.

IN CONCLUSION

Yosef Hatzaddik sums up his entire ordeal from being sold, to being imprisoned, to becoming the viceroy, as coming 100% from Hashem. As we see events unfolding, we can practice tracing the cause not to people who wish to harm or help us, but to Hashem as the only source and cause of events. Often, when we accept that a challenge was only from Hashem, the desired effect is achieved, and the event turns around for the good. When faced with a challenge, we have a choice - we can remember Hashem as the source of all events, or lash back at the supposed causes, effectively empowering them to continue to afflict us. Instead of getting angry with people, we should remember that only Hashem has *koach*, and that people are, at best, merely His messengers. This week (*bli neder*), when I think of someone who has made an annoying comment or acted inconsiderately, I will consider whether Hashem is sending me a message that I have to fix something and try my best to put the messenger out of the picture.

SHABBOS: STRENGTHENING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM

WHY WE EXIST IN THIS WORLD

There is a topic that we frequently discuss. When I mention it, people often ask me, “Where did you get that from?” And that topic is as follows: The purpose of our existence in this world is to build and develop the strongest possible relationship with Hashem. Sadly, this concept is a *chiddush* to many people. However, this is the purpose for which a person was created, regardless of whether it is easy or difficult.

Now, if you tell this to many people in the outside world, they’re shocked. “What? The purpose of the existence of a human being is to develop a relationship with Hashem?” They think if you want to be a big *tzaddik*, then you develop a relationship with Hashem. But that’s not *emes*.

Now, the reason people make that mistake is because, as my *zaide* (Rav Avigdor Miller) *zichrono livrocho* used to say, the one word they don’t like you saying in *yeshivos* is the H word. Now, I won’t ask you what you’re thinking the H word is! The H word is Hashem. That’s the H word. You have to understand that this is the *matara*, this is the dream, this is the *she’efah*, the aspiration, the yearning, and the *mivchan*, the test, to see where you are holding. It doesn’t make a difference how long your beard is or how big your *yamulke* is. Though sometimes, the size of the *yamulke* can be an indication of the direction you’re going. If you have a very small one, one of those disappearing ones, the indication is that you’re trying to get away from Hashem. And sometimes if you have a big one, sometimes, it could be an indication you want to get close to Hashem.

But the Ramchal in Mesilas Yesharim writes in the first *perek* (1:2-5) of his *sefer*, writes that the purpose of existence is in order for a person to be *zocheh* to the *tovah*, the great benefit that Hashem created him for, to grant him Olam Haba. The purpose that we are here is to embark on a journey to Olam Haba. And that’s the greatest benefit that exists in the universe. But in order to get there, he says, it is *ראוי*, it is befitting that we should toil first and we should be *משתדל* we should exert ourselves, *ויגיעו* we should toil, to acquire it. So he says - the purpose of our creation is to get to Olam Haba. That’s what Hashem wants to give me - Olam Haba. To get Olam Haba there is a premise - you have to work, you have to exert yourself. And how? Listen to these words: *שישתדל* - the way you get to Olam Haba is by *you* making attempts, *לדבק בו יתברך* - to attach yourself to Hashem. How? *בכוח* - through the force, the energy that is generated through *מעשים* - through the actions, *שתולדתם זה הענין* - through those actions whose result is this matter. That means, we have to engage, we have to involve ourselves in actions that result in bringing ourselves closer to Hashem. And what are those? *והם הם המצוות* - *mitzvos* are actions that we do that bring us closer to Hashem.²

Now, I hope you understand there’s a very wonderful *lomdus* here. It’s not just a *pashute zach* (simple). This is a *teefe zach* (deep), and I want you to understand why.

Let’s say you’re an employee, and you do work, and the employer pays you for the work. The work and the *s’char* are not necessarily related. Usually, the work is one thing and the wages are another thing. Let’s say the employer gives you money, the money has no *shaychus* to the work. If he gives you food, it has no *shaychus* to the work. If he gives you room and board, a house to stay in, that has no *shaychus* to the work. But by Hakodosh Baruch Hu, you have to know that the *s’char*, the reward, is based on the service and the *mitzvah* that a person does. That means if a person exerts himself in this world while he’s living, by doing *mitzvos*, that act in and of itself is an act of attempting to come close to Hashem. And do you know what the reward is? Hashem brings you closer. Where is the ultimate reward? In Olam Haba. What is Olam Haba? Olam Haba is: You return to Hashem. As the *passuk* says, *והרוח תשוב אל האלוקים אשר נתנה*, “And the lifebreath returns to Hashem Who bestowed it” (Koheles 12:7). You go back to

² והנה מה שהורונו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה הוא, שהאדם לא נברא אלא להתענג על ה' ולהנות מזיו שכינתו שזהו התענוג האמיתי והעדון הגדול מכל העדונים שיכולים להמצא. ומקום העדון הזה באמת הוא העולם הבא... והאמצעים המגיעים את האדם לתכלית הזו, הם המצוות אשר צנו עליהן האל יתברך שמו... וכשתסתכל בדבר תראה כי השלמות האמיתי הוא רק הדבקות בו יתברך, והוא מה שהיה דוד המלך אומר (תהלים עג): ואני קרבת אלהים לי טוב. ואומר (שם כז): אחת שאלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש ששבת בבית ה' כל ימי חיי וגו', כי רק זה הוא השטוב. וכל זולת זה שיחשבוהו בני האדם לטוב, אינו אלא הבגל ושוא נתעה. אמנם לכשיצפה האדם לטובה הזאת, ראוי שיפעל ראשונה וישתדל ביגיעו לקנותה, והינו שישתדל לדבק בו יתברך בכח מעשים שתולדתם זה הענין והם הם המצוות.

Hashem. Many people have this funny idea - if you do *mitzvos* in this world, Hashem gives you a piece of real estate in California or in France, somewhere special; the person gets something. No *shaychus*. What Hashem does is: He lets you come closer to Him, and you enjoy that closeness in a way that is unimaginable and unfathomable. And that enjoyment is *בלי תכלית* and *בלי קץ* - unending and unlimited. That is the *s'char*. You have to remember this. The Vilna Gaon mentions this in his commentary on *Shir Hashirim*. He says the *עיקר עולם הבא* is a person returning to his source to attach himself to the *Shechinah*.

ARE YOU DOING MITZVOS TO CONNECT TO HASHEM?

Now, this is something we need to remind ourselves about constantly. The Mesilas Yesharim writes that for a person to get this, he has to do *mitzvos* that result in this matter. So let's say I do *mitzvos*, let's say a guy wears a big *shtreimel*

or he buys a big, black hat, and grows a big beard; he likes it, it makes him feel spiritual. Some people like warm coats, fur hats, whatever it is. The question is, does that bring you closer to Hashem? Even if you do *mitzvos*, are you doing *mitzvos* in a way that the *mitzvos* bring you closer to Hashem?³

Now, if you studied the first *perek* of the Mesilas Yesharim and you study his *sefer* throughout, he constantly repeats this over and over. But when most people read it, they don't pick up on this. You know why? Because their minds are not programmed to hear this. He says this is the *klal* of what a person's obligation is in this world. So, every time you do a *mitzvah*, ask yourself this question: "Is this *mitzvah* bringing me closer to Hashem? Am I doing it in a fashion that is going to bring me closer to Hashem?"

Here's a person who *davens*. He goes to *shul*, many people go to *shul*, but they don't feel closer to Hashem when they go to *shul*. They go to *shul* because they're the *gabbai*, they like to feel that they're a *macher*, maybe they like the herring, maybe they like the whiskey, maybe they like the social life, maybe they even like the songs, or whatever else they do there. But a person has to realize there is a purpose. You have to ask yourself - am I getting closer to Hashem? Am I doing this in a way that brings me closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu? The same is true with every *mitzvah*; a person learning Tosfos, learning the *sugya* in Makkos. You know you never learn the same *sugya* the same way. Every time you repeat it, you learn it a different way - because you're getting closer to Hashem.

Many people don't understand this. They feel that learning is not for them, they are not cut out for it. They're missing out on the main way to relate to Hashem. That's the main way. That's what we have to understand.

THE QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF

So it comes out that the *nekudah* of life, the whole point of our existence, is to get ourselves to Olam Haba. And how do you do that? By bringing yourself closer to Hashem through the Torah and *mitzvos*. So a person has to think to himself: "Am I getting closer to Hashem or further from Hashem?" And that's why this is something that must be spoken about all the time and every day.

I'll never forget, I once went for a period of maybe eight years without seeing a certain childhood friend of mine. Maybe it was even longer. This is going back maybe twenty years. And when I met him, we embraced. He looked at me, I looked at him, and he said, "I want to ask you one question - since the last time we met, are you closer or not?" Now, I'm sorry to say, I wasn't even sure what he was talking about. Because when I knew this friend, we spoke about a lot of *inyanim* in *yiras Shamayim*, but I don't remember that being one of our subjects - where we're holding in our closeness to Hashem. I thought maybe he meant closer to my life's dreams, to my hopes, my family. And he said, "One question I want to know - are you closer to Hashem?" And I looked at him long and hard, and it was a tremendous shakeup for me. Tremendous. It shook me up to the *yesod*. Do you know why? I remember walking away from him and thinking, "Why isn't that my main question that I ask myself all the time - 'Am I getting closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu than I was?' Not, are you making money, are you happy?"

Two friends meet, they ask each other these questions: What are you doing these days? Are you eating well? Are you sleeping well? You get to a certain age when they talk about that. Are you in the prune stage already? These are the *groise shaalehs* that people ask. Is the economy affecting you? How's the back? How's the knees, the hips? They ask a lot of questions. But they don't think to themselves constantly about this question - are you closer or are you not closer to Hashem?

SHABBOS IS A DAY FOR CONNECTING TO HASHEM

And now that you are familiar with this concept, you know what the purpose of our Shabbos is. Shabbos, we said, is a *beis sha'ar*. It's a gateway for a person to grab onto Olam Haba while in this world, to grab onto *yom shekulo Shabbos u'menuchah l'chaiyei ha'olamim*. This is what Shabbos is. Anything else is a digression of Shabbos, it takes away from Shabbos. And therefore the *l'maaseh*, the practicality of Shabbos is that you spend your Shabbos focusing on strengthening your relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

³ [פירוש ב] לריח שמניך כו'. ר"ל בשביל ריח שמניך טובים שהנאתו מרחוק, משא"כ יין שהנאתו מקרוב. והוא שמן תורק מכלי אל כלי, שריחו הולך למרחוק, כן הוא שמך שנשמע למרחוק, על כן עלמות אהבוך. והענין, שהמלכה עצמה מתקרבת אל המלך מקרוב, לכן נאמר בה ישקני, אבל העלמות הנאתם מרחוק, לכן נאמר בהם לריח, שהוא מרחוק. כי העלמות המכניסין את המלכה לבית המלך אינם נהנים כ"א מרחוק, מיופי הבית ומריח המאכל, משא"כ המלכה עצמה טועמת המאכל עצמו ומתדבקת עם המלך. והנמשל מובן, שקורא כל האומות בשם עלמות, כי עלמה נקרא שאין לה בעל וכמ"ש שליך האדם את אילי כספו וכו'. והנה באדם יש ד' חושים הידועים, ובחטא אדה"ר נחסרו ב' חושים לגמרי, ההנאה מן הראיה והשמיעה. ולא נשארו כ"א שנים אחרים, מעט הריח ולא כולו כדי חיובו, והטעם כולו. וחוש הריח הוא דק יותר מחוש הטעם, ולכן אין נהנין בו כמו מחוש הטעם. והב' חושים הנ"ל הם כדמיון שמים וארץ. שמשמים אינם יכולים ליהנות רק בבחינת הריח, שהוא דק. אבל מארץ הנאתה קרובה ונהנין ממנה כמו חוש הטעם. שכל שמדרגתו פחותה הנאתו מורגשת יותר, והבן בדמיון מהנאת אכילה ושתייה והנאת החושים, וכן הנאת הגופני והנאת הרוחני. ועוד כי בתחנתו נלל גם העליון. וידוע ג"כ שנפשותינו פחותה מהאומות, כי נפשותינו מהארץ כמ"ש תוצא הארץ נפש חיה. ונפש האומות מן השמים וכוכבים. ולכן הם ג"כ מונין לחמה, ממשלת היום, וכן חגיגה מתחילין מן היום. וישראל מונין ללבנה, ממשלת הלילה, וכל השבתות וי"ט טו הולך אחר הלילה. ומפני שנפשותיהם יותר גבוה, שהוא מן השמים, והם על הארץ רחוק מן השמים, שמשם אינם יכולים לקבל רק התמצית, שהוא בבחינת הריח, מה שא"כ אנו בני ישראל, סמוכים לארץ ונהנים בבחינת הטעם. ואל תתמה על זה כי משל הוא, כי עבדי המלך נוטלין אפסניא שלהם מיד המלך לחם חוקם, משא"כ אנו, בני המלך, נוטלין מיד המלך כר עצום ליד המלכה והיא נותנת טרף לביתה. וא"כ, אף שהעבדים מקבלים מיד המלך, מ"מ הסברה נותנת שהבנים מקבלים יותר מהעבדים, כי משולחן גבוה קא זכו, ואמם נותנת המובחר לבנים בוודאי. כן הוא הנמשל בין האומות לישראל. ולכן אין האומות צריכין למצות, כי יש להן בלא"ה פרנסה בריווח. אבל בני ישראל שמקבלים מהארץ, והארץ לית לה מגרמה כלום, רק כשזורעין לתוכה אז נותנת, ולכן אנו צריכין למצות. ובה' יתברך ג"כ מה שהוקשה לכל הקדמונים. מה שלא נאמר בתורה שכר עולם הבא. כי עיקר עוה"ב הוא להשיב הנשמה למקורה לדבק בשכינה, ובוודאי יותר טוב מזה כשהשכינה דבוקה למטה, כאשר היתה כוונת הבריא, כידוע. ושכר זה כתוב כמה פעמים בתורה עד אין מספר, ושכנתי בתוכם, ולא תגעל נפשי וכו'. ונבוא אל הענין, שתורה שבכתב ותורה שבע"פ הם ב' בחינות, שמים וארץ, כידוע. והם ב' בחינות, טעם וריח כנ"ל. ולכן מתורה שבכתב נהנין ממנה האומות מעט, שבחינת ריח. אבל מתורה שבע"פ, שהוא בבחינת טעם, כנ"ל, אינם יכולים ליהנות לגמרי כי אינה משרשם. וז"ש בגמרא ברכות ג' דברים ביקש משה וכו', ב' ניתנו לו וא' לא ניתנה לו. וניתנה לו, ביקש שיתשרה שכינה על ישראל, וניתנה לו, ביקש שיתשרה שכינה על אומות העולם, וניתנה לו, והשכינה הב' אינה מובנת, כי בתחילה בשאלה הראשונה מאי קסבר. אך הענין הוא, בתחילה ביקש שיתן הטעם לישראל, ואח"כ ביקש שלא יותן הריח לא"ה כידוע, ודו"ק. (פ' הגר"א על ש"ש אג.)

