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How This Blessing Includes 'All' Aspects of Abundance For A Good Year

In the blessing of **ברך עלינו** we ask Hashem,

(ברך עלינו ה' אלוקינו את השנה הזאת ואת כל מיני תבואתה לטובה (ותן טל ומטר לברכה) - We ask Hashem for a good year of blessing, in that 'all' our grains should be blessed.

(We will continue here the discussion which we began in the previous chapter.)

There are four judgments a year - a judgment on people, on water, on trees, and on grain. Three of these judgments are on each of the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuos and Sukkos. Trees are judged on Pesach, water is judged on Sukkos, and grain is judged on Shavuos. On Rosh HaShanah, there is a judgment on people.

In this blessing, which is when we ask for a good year, we are asking that our grain be blessed, but we are not just asking about grain - we are asking that 'all' types of grain be blessed. First we ask for a good year, then we ask for blessed grain. When we ask for 'all' types of grain, this includes both trees and grain, while in the beginning of the blessing we ask for water, when we say **ותן טל ומטר לברכה**. Thus, this blessing incorporates all three aspects of the year which are judged - for grain, trees, and water.

Connecting To Time

There are two kinds of connections we have with time, and in the blessing of **ברך עלינו** we are asking Hashem to become connected to a 'blessed year', in which we connect to the auspicious times of the year [this was explained in the previous chapter].

Throughout the year, we have many special times, such as the Shabbos, Yomim Tovim and Rosh Chodesh. The more a person connects to these times, the more holiness he draws onto himself for the rest of the year. That is one perspective we have towards time - that the holiness of certain times can uplift us.

Hashem created man to live within time. Is there a difference between an animal's time and a person's time? Plants as well have time; there are laws of *orlah*, *nota revai*, and *sheviis*. Is there a difference between the time of a person, and the time of animals and plants? (Rocks and non-living objects also have time.)

When Hashem created woman for man, He declared that she is *eizer k'negdo* "a helpmate opposite him"; Chazal explain that if man merits it, his wife helps him, and if he doesn't merit it, she opposes him, and he will be subject to *midas hadin* (attribute of judgment) by her. The Vilna Gaon explains that time is also like an *eizer k'negdo* to a person. The depth of this is that if man merits it, time will help him, but if he doesn't merit it, he will enter a time of punishment, the *middas hadin*, and he will be punished by the time itself.

Thus, time is of help to a person, and these are the holy times of the year, such as Shabbos and Yom Tov. These times can help a person reach higher levels even if he's not initially at that level. Shabbos is a time when all the spiritual realms are elevated. This is how time helps a person – it can open up his mind and heart to elevate him.

However, we see that people are not always affected by Shabbos or Yom Tov at all. People go through Shabbos after Shabbos, another Yom Tov and another Yom Tov, and the elation comes and goes; it doesn't last, with most people. Most people leave Shabbos the way they went into it. The elation of Shabbos and Yom Tov can help a person, but it is like how a wife helps the husband – unless they are really bound together in love, there will be no help. When a person is not connected to the holy time, and that is why the time doesn't do anything for the person.

If a person wants to be helped by the holiness of Shabbos, Yom Tov, and Rosh Chodesh, a person has to connect himself to the concept of time. In order to gain from Chodesh Nissan - which is called *Rosh L'Chadashim*, the head of all the months - a person has to connect himself to the auspicious time that is Nissan, which is when we left Egypt, thus, a person has to connect himself to the concept of exodus from Egypt. If you connect yourself to the exodus, you experience your own personal redemption, and you can then be uplifted by the Yom Tov [of Pesach]. If you connect yourself to what Shabbos is all about, then Shabbos will take you and uplift you.

It's very possible that a person goes through thousands of Shabbosim and Yomim Tovim, yet it doesn't do a thing for him, and this is because he has never **connected himself** to the holiness of these times. Without trying to connect ourselves to what is inherent in these special times of the year, we just experience them on the purely superficial level, and we do not gain from the holiness that they can offer us.

Utilizing Time Vs. Utilizing Your Soul

Although time can help us, as we see from the concept of Shabbos and the festivals, there is another perspective with how to view the concept of time.

When a person opens his heart a little to realize that this world is futile, and that life on this earth is temporary – his immediate reaction is, to utilize our time on this earth, to make the most of our time. Indeed, we find that this was the way of many our *Gedolim*, who made a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul-accounting) on how to use every moment of their time to their utmost.

On one hand, this is a wonderful aspiration in a person to have, but it can also be detrimental to a person [as will be explained].

In the depths of our soul, there is a point that is above time [as explained in the previous shiur]. Time is just the external aspect of how we can be helped on this world. Our main way to help ourselves on this world is **to utilize the potential of our soul's abilities**, rather to place our focus on how to always utilize our 'time'.

Using our soul's potential is a whole different attitude towards life than always making the most of our time. Time is not who 'I' am – it is a tool, it is a 'garment' we make us of and wear, but making the

most out of our time is not all there is to life. If making the most of our time is the deepest part of our life, then we will never to experience our actual existence (our *havayah*).

To illustrate, the *baalei mussar* write that there are two kinds of *cheshbon hanefesh* that a person has to make on the sin of *bittul Torah* –wasting **time** of Torah study (*kamus*) and wasting **quality** of Torah study (*aichus*). The first kind of *cheshbon hanefesh* a person needs to make on his *bittul Torah* is: “How much of my time am I using in order to learn Torah?” The second kind of *bittul Torah*, though, is about the quality of one’s Torah learning – and this it is not about “how much” I learn with quality, but rather about if ***I am using my soul enough*** in my Torah learning - if we I am using my soul’s potential in my learning, or not.

The following is a very sharp [yet true] statement: it’s possible that a person is always using every spare moment of his time to learn Torah, yet he’s not even using 10% of his soul.

Because we live in a superficial kind of world, where everything revolves around time – after all, we have set times every day to daven and learn – the concept of utilizing our soul is a lesser known concept. ‘Saving time’ is not always the best way to live life; to use ‘every second of our time’ to either learn Torah or do mitzvos might seem like a wonderful thing, but to remain at that level it is still being very superficial, and it is not the depth of life. The preferred method is to make sure that we are ***utilizing the potential of our soul***.

When a person realizes that life is not that long on this world, and thus he wants to “utilize his time” to his fullest, although this is wonderful, it is superficial, and it is not yet the depth of how to live life. The deeper way to utilize our life to its fullest is by always making sure that we are understanding what our soul is and that we are utilizing it to its potential. Most people, by the time they have ended their life, have not even utilized 1% of their soul’s potential.

Why do people prefer to save ‘time’ rather than to work deeply with their soul and use their potential? It is because time is palpably felt, while our soul is not felt as something real. Therefore, people are drawn towards making the most out of their ‘time’, rather than on really working to discover their soul’s potential, because time is much more real to most people than the reality of the soul.

The ability in the soul to always utilize time is not coming from a deep place in the soul, for even non-Jews can express a desire to make the most out of their time. If so, what is the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew? If a Jew thinks that life is all about utilizing his time to its fullest, and that this is the depth of his life, he views life through the same lens as a non-Jew. The true perspective a Jew needs to uncover is that life is about utilizing our soul’s potential.

When Hashem gave us the Torah, He gave it to us in the time of Shavuot, but He also gave us His soul in it, so to speak. “*Ana nafshi kesavis yehoin*”, “My soul is written in it.” Life is about using our soul – therefore, utilizing our ‘time’ to its fullest is not all there is to life! Instead, a person should place the emphasis on utilizing the potential of your soul!

There are layers within layers in our soul; it is vastly deep. People can understand that we need to utilize every second to its fullest, but what about using our soul? Does it make sense that a person can go his whole life and always make sure to use every second correctly, but he ignored his actual soul for his entire life....?

Giving Quality To Your Life

The difference between ‘saving time’ vs. ‘using your soul’ comes to play as follows.

Many times, people take on things that are really not for them to work on, because it is above their

soul's capacity. They make their soul suffer in their process, all in the name of "saving time." And they get flustered from taking on all these various undertakings, because they're doing things that are not for their level to work on. If a person would realize that he needs to **utilize his soul as well as to utilize his time**, then everything would look different, because the focus would be on the soul, not on time, and then a person would gain doubly: he would utilize his soul, and he would save time as a direct result.

What Does It Mean To Ask For A Blessed Year?

Earlier in *Shemoneh Esrei*, we ask Hashem for *daas*, for *teshuvah*, for forgiveness, for relief from our suffering, to be healed from sickness in our body and soul. These were all requests for help to our **soul**. In this blessing as well, **ברך עלינו**, we must realize that we are asking for help for our soul as well; it is not a request about our body. In this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, if a person lives a very materialistic kind of life, all he thinks about in this blessing is to ask for livelihood. But even if a person isn't that attached to materialism, and he lives a spiritual kind of life, he might still have the wrong attitude towards this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* and think that it is simply a blessing about having a good year and that grain should be blessed.

In this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we are really asking Hashem that our time be utilized properly, to make the most of our time, but in addition, we are also supposed to be asking Hashem for help in utilizing our soul. We want to utilize our time by always learning Torah and doing mitzvos with our time, but we must also make sure that we are utilizing our soul's potential.

The inner way to view life is that time helps us, and for this we ask for in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, but the main priority in life we need to have is to pursue is to utilize our soul's potential. Of course, we need to use our time properly with always learning Torah and doing mitzvos, but it is more important for us to dwell on how we can use our soul when it comes to our Torah learning and mitzvos.

Many times people read stories of *tzaddikim*; there are pros and cons to it. It can awaken our soul, but the disadvantage is that it causes a person to compare himself to the *tzaddik* and despair from reaching those levels. The problem behind this is that a person doesn't realize that life is about building his soul, and thus he gets very confused and wonders who he is.

In our current generation especially, most of the confusion and mistakes that people are making is because people think that life is all about "how to use your time to its fullest", and they don't know how to go beyond that perspective. Most people are wasting their time with empty pursuits, and there are a few people who are always using every spare moment of holiness. But if people would mainly be interested in how to use their soul's potential, and the focus would not be on "How do I get the most out of my time" but rather on "How do I use my soul to its utmost", a person would be lead a much more successful life.

This does not just mean simply "to work on yourself" in the superficial sense, but rather to learn how to use your soul's potential.^[1] Thus, although we must utilize our time always for holiness, at the same time we must work with our soul and put our soul into all that we do. Through that, we can attain closeness with Hashem.

[1] Refer to ***Getting To Know Your Soul***.

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