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שיחת השבוע 006 - נח - טהרה

The Purity of Mikveh

The Mabul: The Waters That Purified The World

In *Parashas Noach*, the Torah describes the event of the Deluge / *Mabul*, the giant flood which destroyed all life on this world. The world had reached such a low point of spiritual contamination that it could not continue. Hashem punished the generation by opening up all of the heavens and releasing all of the waters upon the world.

There is a statement of the Sages, "From the wound itself, comes the recovery." The Flood is not to be viewed simply as a punishment to that generation, but as a recovery to that ruined world. The Flood seems to us as nothing but an event of destruction, where the entire world was submerged by the flood besides for Eretz Yisrael, according to our Sages. What rectification did it bring to the world?

The Sages state that from the generations of Adam until Noach, the world was wicked, until the righteous man Noach came and received reward for all of the generations that had ignored Hashem. Not only was Noach rewarded, but in his merit, the world was created anew. All of the nations of the world ever since Noach (except for the Jewish nation) are called "*bnei Noach*" / sons of Noach. In other words, Noach brought about an entirely new world that had not existed before the flood. The waters of the Flood, the waters of destruction that obliterated all of the generations until Noach, at the same time were the beginning of a new world, which would now label all people in the world as "*bnei Noach*".

Thus, the destruction brought about by the Flood was only a destruction of the generations from Adam until Noach. The Flood brought a rectification to the world, a new world in Noach's merit, where people would now be called *bnei Noach*.

Even more so, the waters of the Flood, besides for being waters of retribution and wrath to the world, were like a giant *mikveh* that came and purified the world with its waters. A *mikveh* purifies the impure since water contains the power to purify. (There is also a concept that fire can purify, but it is mainly water which purifies and serves as a *mikveh* to purify the impure). So the flood brought

destruction to the world, but it was also like a *mikveh* which purified the entire world. On a more subtle note, it was like a *maayan* (a spring), which can purify any level of spiritual contamination.

Just as an individual immerses in a *mikveh* when he is spiritually impure, and he is thereby cleansed from impurity by the waters of the *mikveh*, so is there a concept that the world as a whole can be purified by a “*mikveh*”, when the world has become entirely impure and it is need of being purified by water. That *mikveh* was the *Mabul*, which allowed for a new and purified world.

This purity that came to the world by the *Mabul* will once again come to the world at the time of the End of Days, as the prophet states, “*And the world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem, like waters that cover.*” There will be purity that will come to the world, in the sense that everyone in the world will know of Hashem. This is in line with the words of the Rambam when he writes about the matter of *mikveh*: immersing in a *mikveh* means to immerse oneself in the “waters of *daas*”, which refers to the inner, spiritual knowledge of G-dliness.

Even more so, the Sages state that the world will last for 6,000 years and then it will be destroyed for 1000 years, and it will return to the state of being filled with water as it was in the beginning of Creation, and then Hashem will renew the world. Just as Hashem renewed the world in the generation of Noach by bringing the flood upon the world, so will Hashem purify the entire world in the end of days and return it back to water: “*I will remove the spirit of impurity from upon the earth*”. This will be done through water, which purifies. We will then see the prophecy fulfilled in which Hashem will renew the world, just as Hashem renewed the world in Noach’s times, through the *Mabul*.

In the future, death will be removed. Death was the curse given to mankind ever since the sin of Adam, and death causes the highest state of spiritual impurity; death is termed by our Sages as the “father of the father of all impurity”. In the future, when a great purity will come to the world, we will be purified from the great impurity that is death, and we will then be able to live forever.

When we reflect on this, we can better understand the purity that water accomplishes, and more specifically, the purifying power of the *mikveh* which we have in our times.

Raising Ourselves From ‘Earth’ To ‘Water’

Hashem created the world with four elements: fire, wind, water, and earth.

Since man is created from the earth, the nature of man is to be drawn downwards, towards the earth. Just as an animal eats from the ground and lowers itself to the ground, so does man tend to be drawn towards lowliness, towards the “earth”. Although man is created with a soul which seeks to ascend to its Source in heaven, the initial and unrefined state of man causes him to descend to earth. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that “the spirit of the wicked causes him to descend further and further.” After the first sin in mankind, man was told “*You are earth, and to earth you shall return.*” This meant that ever since the first sin, man is drawn towards earth, towards lowliness, towards sin. Every time a person sins, he becomes more connected with the earth.

Therefore, the purity that a person needs is to rise above the “earth” that he has become entrenched in. In the makeup of the soul, earth is the lowest point, and above earth is water, then wind, and then fire. After a person has sinned, he has lowered himself into the earth. In order to be purified from the mud he has fallen into, he must rise from the ‘earth’ and enter into water.

That ‘water’ is essentially the purifying waters of the *mikveh*. We are also able to immerse in a *maayan* (a natural spring), which resembles the purity that came to the world through the *Mabul*. In the generation of the flood, the morality of man had fallen so low that man had sunken deep into “earth”, and being entrenched in the “earth” continued the destructive behaviors of mankind. Thus,

when man is entrenched in 'earth', the way he is purified is through rising from the level of 'earth' to the level of 'water'.

The Rambam says that the law of *mikveh* is a decree of the written Torah which we cannot logically understand, but as we know, there is always a reason that we can understand since there is always an inner meaning to everything.

At the generation of the flood, the many sins of mankind caused them to become too entrenched in the 'earth', to the point that they deserved the curse of death that is associated with the 'earth'. Thus they needed 'water' to purify them from.

But if a person rises from the 'earth' he has fallen into and he connects himself to the level of 'water' (and even more so, to the Source of all living waters, the *Mekor Mayim Chayim*, Who is Hashem), he then leaves the root of the sin that he had been connected with.

Understanding the Purity of Mikveh

The waters of *mikveh* (and even more so, a *maayan*) bring purity upon a person who has become spiritually impure. But that water purifies him only because it is the result of *leaving* the 'earth' that he had been previously connected with and to connect instead to the 'water'. Therefore, this purity is not accomplished through the mere physical act of immersing in the *mikveh*.

Of course, the very act of immersing in a *mikveh* is what enables the purity, but as we have mentioned earlier from the words of the Rambam, there is more to the matter of *mikveh*. The underlying essence of the purification process of *mikveh* is that it requires one to leave behind sin, to leave behind the 'earth', and to elevate his existence to the level of 'water'. It is not simply that a person walks into a *mikveh* impure and he emerges pure, as soon as he is out of the *mikveh*. Rather, the purity takes place only when a person *connects* himself to the waters of the *mikveh* [and what it entails].

Entering a *mikveh*, in its external and superficial aspect, means to enter into a pit of water that is 40 *se'ah* of water [as the *Halacha* states]. But the inner essence behind *mikveh* is to connect oneself to a level of existence that is 'water' to be above the level of existence that is 'earth'. The message is to leave behind the loss of true vitality that resulted from sin, and to instead connect oneself to a place where he will get back his lost vitality.

Rabbi Akiva said, "Just as a *mikveh* purifies the impure, so does *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* purify Yisrael." The waters of the *mikveh* elevate a person from the level of 'earth' that man has sunken into from his sins. It gives him back his lost vitality, by connecting him to the Source of life, Who is *HaKodosh Baruch Hu*, as it is written: "For with You, is the source of life."

Thus, entering a *mikveh* or *maayan* is not merely about entering a body of forty *se'ah* of water. It means to connect oneself to the Source of our life. That is what lies at the purification process of *mikveh*.

Our 'Chiyus' - Knowing Where We Get Vitality From

It is possible that a person is not spiritually impure, he has never touched a corpse or any other objects that render him *tamei* / impure, but the attitude with which he lives life with is still at a very lowly state.

One of the most important questions one needs to ask himself is: "What gives me true vitality? Where do I get my *chiyus* / vitality from?"

Some people are getting their *chiyus* from the 'earth': from pursuing worldly desires that attach a person to materialism. This is a dry source of vitality, and it does not provide a person with real *chiyus*. But others are getting their *chiyus* from the 'waters' that are available on this world - waters that are clear and pure, not waters that are dirtied and sullied with pieces of earth. This is a true and pure source of vitality, a life of holiness.

In clearer terms: if a person gets his vitality from materialism, such as food and other forms of materialism, although this might feel like pleasure (which is rooted in the element of water), it is pleasure that is derived from 'earth'; it is a vitality that comes from a dry and dead source that contains no life, and it resembles the curse given to the Serpent, who is forced to get his vitality from whatever food that he comes across as it slithers its way across the ground.

But if a person is getting his vitality in life from non-materialistic pursuits, he is one who is connected to the Source of life. This refers to those who exert themselves in Torah-study and they feel like it is their *chiyus*, because they are aware that learning the Torah connects them to the Source of life, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Thus, true *chiyus*/vitality, a feeling of being alive, is not derived from any of the materialism found on this earth, but from the vitality found in 'water', from the realm of the spiritual that is completely devoid from any traces of 'earth'.

Now we can better understand why the Rambam calls *mikveh* an immersion in "waters of *daas*." It is because a person can only derive true vitality when he is immersed in *daas*, in a life devoid of pursuing materialistic desires.

This is the essence of becoming purified in a *mikveh*. It is not mainly about the act of dipping in the *mikveh*. Although the act itself is needed, the act of the immersion should be viewed as a mere 'container' that is needed to maintain the spiritual effects which we want to take hold of. The essence of the purity in *mikveh* is to leave behind any connection to materialism and to realize that our vitality must come from the Source of all our life, who is Hashem. This is what it means to live a life of purity, a life of holiness, a life of truth.

To further illustrate the ramifications of this concept, when the time comes where one is about to take leave of this world, where he will return his soul to Hashem and he will leave behind his body on this world. If he has mainly derived his pleasure and vitality in life from the materialistic desires of this world, then he will have no source of pleasure in the next world.

In the Next World (the Afterlife), there is no physicality and no materialism, so he will have nothing to enjoy there. But if one on this world has already come to the conclusion that true pleasure and vitality does not come from materialistic desires, but from the spiritual, from the "*wisdom [of Torah] which sustains its owner*", from *daas*, from fear and love of Hashem, from closeness with Hashem - he is a person who will have a pure life on this world. He will leave this world pure, and enter into the Next World pure, and he will be able to partake of the pleasures of the Next World, which are completely spiritual in their nature; "the radiance of the *Shechinah*".

Therefore, one must know clearly where he gets *chiyus* from. One must see if his *chiyus* is coming from various desires of This World, or if he has at least a little bit of real pleasure from the spiritual. If he merits it, he has even more pleasure in the spiritual. But one must at least know where he is getting his *chiyus* from, so that he will be aware of what superficially gives him *chiyus* and then he will search to find a real source of *chiyus*.

Purity - Removed from the Physical, and Completely Immersed in the Spiritual

This is what lays behind the purity of immersing in the *mikveh*. On an esoteric level, when one is submerged in the water of the *mikveh*, he is not on the 'earth' of this world, and he is instead completely in water. At that moment, he is in a space where there is no connection to materialism and there is nothing but purity.

Learning Torah is also compared to being immersed in a *mikveh*. When one is learning Torah and he is fully immersed in his learning, he is apart from the rest of the world and entirely immersed in a purified form of existence totally divorced from materialism.

Thus, there are also levels to purity, and not every person will be purified by the *mikveh* on the same level. A person is purified in the *mikveh* to the degree that he is living a purer kind of life where he does not get his main vitality in life from materialistic pleasures. When a person is mainly derives his vitality in life from the non-materialistic pleasures, of him it is said, "Who is a *ben olam haBa?*", even as he is on this world.

But a person who mainly gets his pleasure from materialism of this world is the *am ha'aretz* /the ignoramus, who is too connected to the "*aretz*", to the earth. The *am ha'aretz* is not just someone who does not know Torah. A person might know Torah, but he is still living life on the level of an *am ha'aretz*, when he is too connected to the pleasures of this earth and he is not connected to spiritual pleasure, to the Source of life; he cannot divorce himself from the materialism of this world.

How Much Vitality Do I Have? And Where Am I Getting It From?

Adding on another subtle point, there are two clarifications one needs to discover. Firstly, a person must know **is how much** vitality he has in his life; if he feels vitality at all in his life, and how much. Secondly, after knowing how much vitality he has, then a person should wonder: "And **where am I getting my *chiyus*/vitality from?**"

One should examine his 24|7 schedule, and see if he is getting *chiyus* or not; to see if he has a feeling of being alive.

Of course, all people are alive, as long as they are not physically dead and their souls are still inside their body. But the question is: How much does a person *feel* like he is alive? Many times a person will discover that he doesn't even feel alive!

One might be aware that he receives pleasure from time to time, sometimes from good food and sometimes from an engaging conversation, and sometimes from an intriguing Torah thought that someone told him. But he still might not feel *chiyus* throughout the course of his day. He might do what he has to do, he might learn Torah because he has to and he does all the *mitzvos* that he has to do, but it might all be "by rote" and he feels no *chiyus* in it.

So the first question one needs to ask himself is: How much *chiyus* does he feel in his life - and if he has it at all.

The second question to ask oneself is: "Where am I getting my *chiyus* from?" The greater a person is, the higher source of *chiyus* he has. A true Torah scholar gets his vitality from exertion in Torah, as is written of Yissocher, "*And he saw that serenity was good.*" The exertion in Torah learning is not just an exertion, but an exertion that provides a person with vitality, with the more he exerts himself in Torah.

(Understandably, there are also people who continuously get vitality, but not from Torah learning.

Although they might seem energetic and full of life, they are living their life on the level of an ignoramus.)

True *chiyus* in life means that a person constantly is deriving *chiyus*, at almost any given moment of the day, and the source of this *chiyus* is his Torah learning; and on a deeper level, to the Giver of the Torah, Hashem, Who is the Source of all life. When one is connected to Hashem through learning the Torah, his soul is bound up with Him as he learns Torah, and this connection itself brings a pleasurable feeling of vitality. It is the truest source of vitality we can access, it connects us to the Source of life, and it separates us from the level of the ignoramus, who is connected to the materialism, impurity, and earth of this world.

The waters of the flood purified the entire world, and from then onward, it revealed upon Creation the power to be immersed in 'water', in true pleasure, to be disconnected from all materialism. This was the rectification that the Flood brought to the world: now anyone in Creation can have the ability to receive *chiyus* from a true source, which is above 'earth'. That was the purity that came to the world with the Flood, and we can all access it ever since.

When one is clear about what gives him *chiyus* and then he merits to derive true *chiyus* in his life, where he is not attached to pursuing materialism and he is instead immersed in learning Torah and in the pleasure involved in it, when he feels vitality from the fact that he loves and fears Hashem Who gives him life, when he feels vitality from the fact that he lives a life of closeness with Hashem – of this it is said, “*And purify our hearts to serve You in truth.*” His purity of heart will spread to the rest of himself, for his vitality is coming from an entirely pure Source.

The more one's soul is connected to Hashem, to that degree, will there be more layers of his existence that become more purified [by the *mikveh*].

What To Think Before Immersing In The Mikveh

Speaking practically, whether a person is obligated or not to go to the *mikveh* (according to *Halacha*), whether he goes every day or not, the *avodah* of going to the *mikveh* is not simply to immerse one's body in the *mikveh*, in the same way that a chicken bathes in the water in order to clean its body. The inner attitude towards *mikveh* is to be in a state of mind where one connects himself to the Source of our life, where we are disconnected from all materialism of this world. In this way, one is both externally and internally in the *mikveh*.

Both aspects are needed in order to be purified by the *mikveh*. One's body might be in the *mikveh*, but his mind might be elsewhere, thinking about various thoughts that are very un-spiritual. His soul is not connected to the place of purity which his body is immersed in, and this contradiction between his body and soul will not allow for a true purification. When one is immersing in the *mikveh*, it is the time for one to connect oneself to an inner kind of life, divorced from all materialism.

In Conclusion

This is but a beginning towards immersing oneself in the general waters of “*daas*” that enable one to connect to the true Source of vitality and pleasure, and to disconnect from all materialism, which can eventually merit a person to receive the purity of “Just as a *mikveh* purifies the impure, so does *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* purify *Yisrael*” – to be found constantly in a state of purity and holiness.