

AVINU *Parshas Ki Seitzei* discusses the *ben sorer umoreh* (the wayward child) who rebels against his parents – he doesn't listen to his father and mother who taught him the way of the Torah. Kayin, Cham, Yishmael, and Esav all did not go in the ways of their righteous parents. Even Yaakov Avinu, whose children were all *tzaddikim*, certainly suffered grief from the strife between the brothers and Yosef. They didn't go in the ways that he taught them. When children don't go in their parents' ways, this is not always the fault of their parents. The parents can be *tzaddikim*, yet not every parent has the *zechus* (merit) to be saved from this. When Hashem told Avraham that Yishmael will not be his progeny, Avraham *davened* for Yishmael's survival, but he still knew that Yishmael was no longer regarded as his son. How did he console himself over the pain of this? It is because as deep as the father-child relationship is, there is an even deeper space in our *nefesh*: Our bond with our **אבינו אב הרהמן**, our true, merciful Father. (And that is how Avraham consoled himself.) For the father-child relationship is not the deepest relationship we can find – there is something even deeper and more powerful than it. When a child does not go in the ways of the Torah, the father needs to do *teshuvah* that perhaps it is his own fault, and hopefully in that *zechus*, the child will become inspired and return to his father's ways. But if the child doesn't, then the father must now let go of the father-child relationship and instead enter into the space inside his *nefesh* which goes even deeper than the relationship with his child: The bond that a person can have with **אבינו שבשמים**, our Father in Heaven.

Elul is the time to penetrate into the depths of *nefesh* and find the Father

Who resides deep within us, *to feel a palpable sense that He is Avinu, our Father*. Throughout the days of *Selichos*, Rosh HaShanah, and the days of *teshuvah* and Yom Kippur, we keep saying the words "*Avinu Malkeinu, Avinu Malkeinu, Avinu Malkeinu!*" ("Our Father, our King"). But if we really mean it, we must really *feel* that Hashem is indeed *Avinu*, our Father.

How, indeed, can we get ourselves to realize that Hashem is "*Avinu*"? When a child grows up with his parents, he turns to his parents for all his needs. Later he grows up and he becomes more independent, but at first, a child is totally dependent on his parents. He asks his parents for anything he needs. So, too, one must turn to Hashem for everything, for all his needs, just like a child in his parents' home. He must ask Hashem for everything, big or small. When a person gets used to this, he will slowly begin to feel that Hashem is indeed his Father.

One who fulfilled the *mitzvah* of honoring parents properly has a good *moshol* to work with for this. But even if one did not merit to fulfill the *mitzvah* of honoring parents, he can still get used to asking Hashem for everything and thereby come to relate to Hashem as his Father.

We all have this power, but it can become covered over by many layers that have accumulated from all the years. But we never lose this ability, and we just need to reveal it outward, from its hidden state.

One can train himself to keep turning to Hashem, on a regular basis, for all things that he needs. This will slowly enable him to have a bond with Hashem, more and more, as a person gets used to this. When one lives this way and he turns to Hashem many times

throughout the day, and not just during the three *tefillos* we *daven* each day, he slowly develops his bond with Hashem and he begins to relate to him as *Avinu*.

These days of mercy reveal to us this particular aspect of realizing that Hashem is our Father. These days are not just about *davening* more, but to show us how the rest of the year should look like – to constantly turn to Hashem for everything, and relate to Him as our Father. This does not mean *chas v'shalom* that we should *daven* the entire day and not learn Torah! The point here is that there is an inner layer to the life that we live, which is: To always talk to Hashem for all matters, big or small, and to turn to Him throughout the day whenever we need something.

Getting used to it helps us acquire the nature that is really deep in our soul: To turn to Hashem. It enables a person to have true closeness with Hashem throughout the day. It transforms a person's Torah learning into truthful Torah learning, and it makes our *tefillos* more earnest, and it causes our performance of the *mitzvos* and the act of doing Hashem's will to stem from a deeper place in ourselves, to be more genuine.

This is the perfection of our *avodah* we can reach on this world – to merit a relationship with Hashem in which we feel like He is our Father and that we are His child. And when we feel like a child of Hashem, we will be like the child who naturally listens to his parent – the child who hears the voice of Hashem. But in order to truly feel like a child of Hashem, we need to relate to Him as our Father. This is the true kind of life – to be constantly connected with Hashem, every day and throughout the entire day, always desiring a closeness with Him.

(שיחת השבוע 02_ כי תצא_ בן סורר ומורה)

Q&A – GENERAL AVODAS HASHEM

QUESTION *What is the source that our purpose on this world is to feel and sense closeness with Hashem on this world?*

ANSWER The *Chovos HaLevovos* elaborates about the concept of *hakarah*, recognizing Hashem, which is to feel and sense Hashem. The *Mesillas Yesharim*, in the level of *chassidus* (piety), says that one needs to talk to Hashem “as a man talks to his friend.” And there are many other such terminologies as well.

QUESTION *Elul is the most anxiety-ridden time of the year for me. I feel so pressured to grow in my ruchniyus in Elul and not only don't I grow but I fall even more in Elul, because of all the tension I feel. What can I do about this?*

ANSWER You need to change the way you view Elul. It is a time of *Ani L'Dodi v'Dodi Li*, “I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me”. These are days of closeness and love of Hashem. And during the ten days of *teshuvah*, it is said “See Hashem where He is found” – “Find Him where He is found”: it is a time of closeness with Hashem. When you have this perspective, you will gradually gain the balance in your soul between *yirah* (dread) and *ahavah* (love) of Hashem, and then you can be *zocheh* to find the middle, balanced path, to approach these days with both *yirah* and *ahavah*. It is well-known that the path of *mussar* leans towards *yirah* (fear of Hashem) during Elul, while the path of *Chassidus* leans towards love and closeness with Hashem in Elul. Find the balance between them.

QUESTION *How do we balance the idea of concentrating on the concept of renewal, with the work of Elul of inspecting what we did wrong and doing teshuvah?*

ANSWER: A person should do *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting) for 5–10 minutes a day and it will fix what is needed, but the majority of our outlook should be of renewal. The days of *teshuvah* are also days of renewal, because if the person only does *teshuvah*, and only looks at the past, he will only go into his shortcomings of the past. Going deep, the energy that a person has to do *teshuvah* is because he is renewing himself. The Rambam says that a *ba'al teshuvah* is called a “*breiah chadashah*” (new being). This is the how deep *teshuvah* goes, if the person regrets the past. A person who doesn't regret the past cannot feel the “*mechadesh bechol yom*” ... But if someone did *teshuvah* 5–10 minutes per day, then he should try to go back to the place of renewal. This is the depth of a *ba'al teshuvah* who becomes like a new being.

QUESTION *Is the meaning of “A tzaddik falls seven times and rises” just to comfort and encourage us after we fall, or is it because a tzaddik knows how to use the power of renewal?*

ANSWER Of course the first interpretation you mentioned is true, but the main process should be the second way you mentioned: It is because of the concept of renewal. From where does a *tzaddik* have the power to fall and get up and fall and get up again? A regular person, if he falls once or twice, says

to himself, “I fell and tried to get up but couldn't do it, so the next time I will fall, I will not be able to get up either.” If he fell twice and couldn't get up, on the third time he will feel that now he has a *chazakah* (an established pattern) and for sure will not be able to get up. But a *tzaddik* believes that Hashem gives him *koach* to fix himself. With the power that Hashem gives, one can succeed in anything. If it was my own power, it is limited and I can't succeed, but if I receive every day a new power, who gave me the power? Of this it is said “*Hashem li b'ozrai* — Hashem is my helper.” Therefore even if in the past one failed, he should know that that Hashem can still help him. There is never a place of despair, because one can know that Hashem will help him even if he fell a lot.

QUESTION *Even the most carefully observant Jew who is very machmir (strict) on the smallest nuances will occasionally commit aveiros. And even if a person tries with all his might to do the will of Hashem, it's not possible for him to avoid doing an aveirah. That means that most of us are going to have to endure punishment. It's almost as if it's 'set up' to be this way. And who are the exceptions who don't get punished? How can it be that Hashem, Who is called HaTov V'HaMeitiv (The Good One, Who Bestows all good) has created all of His creations to be “set up” for punishment like this, since even the best people do aveiros and there's no way around that reality? And since it's practically guaranteed that everyone is going to get punished through suffering in the Afterlife, how can we not feel yeiush (despair) from all of this?*

ANSWER Most people need to undergo some form of punishment, but there are exceptions to this. (1) **Those who consistently do complete teshuvah at all times.** Chazal said, “Repent a day before the day you die, and spend your whole life doing *teshuvah*” [since we do not know when we will die]. (2) **Also, if a person does teshuvah out of love for Hashem and he also does it lishmah** (with pure motivation) then he also doesn't get punished, because it is written, על כל פשעים, תכסה אהבה, “*Love covers over all sins.*” When a person repents to Hashem out of love for Hashem, Hashem deals with him measure-for-measure and treats him with extra love, and He is less exacting towards the person.

A person needs to have emunah that Hashem is the Tov V'HaMeitiv, because we see there is a lot of suffering both on This World and on the next, and therefore in order to really be aware that Hashem is the *Tov V'HaMeitiv* **a person needs to both see all of the good that Hashem does for people, as well as have emunah that everything is good, as Chazal teach, “Whatever Hashem does, is done for one's good”** (*Hakol d'ovid Rachmana, l'tav ovid.*) We cannot completely understand this, and therefore we need *emunah* (to trust and have faith in G-d) in this concept.

QUESTION *I don't understand the purpose of physical suffering. I am trying so hard to learn Torah better and to do teshuvah - how can it be that I didn't get a kaparah (atonement) by now for my aveiros?*

ANSWER A person needs a *tikkun* (soul repair) for *aveiros* of

his current lifetime, as well as for any *aveiros* committed in a previous lifetime. We also need a *tikkun* for some of the evils that have been committed since the beginning of history, and each *neshamah* has a specific role in this universal *tikkun*. In addition to this factor, there is also the concept of the suffering of *tzaddikim* (the righteous), the higher and more elevated souls who suffer from simply being on This World and enduring all that it entails, which contains both external and internal suffering. These higher souls are a “spark of the *Shechinah*”, and their pain is part of the “pain of the *Shechinah*”, and an example of this was the suffering of Rabbi Akiva [at the hands of the Romans].

QUESTION *What is the definition of living a life of pnimiyus, becoming a more internal kind of person? And isn't the main thing to learn how to fulfill the will of Hashem, which is through fulfilling the mitzvos properly? Why do we need more than this?*

ANSWER Rabbeinu Yonah says in *Shaarei Teshuvah* that as long as a person accepts upon himself the words of the Sages, he is considered to be a total *baal teshuvah* (penitent), and it is considered as if he has done it all. That is why there is an *avodah* upon a person to take upon himself that he will fulfill every *halachah* with all its details. There is a lot to learn, and one needs to amass much knowledge about it, but as soon as one gets up from learning his *sefer* and he seeks to fulfill what he has learned, he is considered to be a total *tzaddik*. This is what the Ramban says in *Iggeres HaRamban*. For it is impossible for a person to learn all of the details of every *halachah* in a short amount of time, and if only an entire lifetime would even be enough to know all of it! There are four realms of existence: *Asiyah*, *Yetzirah*, *Beriah* and *Atzilus* (*Nefesh HaChaim shaar 1*).

When one is making sure to fulfill what he learns, he is connected to “*Asiyah*” (action). But beyond this, there is also a more inner realm, the realm of holy emotions (*Yetzirah*), and beyond that, there is the realm of holy thoughts (*Beriah*). Beyond that is the realm of *Atzilus*, which is the state of *d'veykus* (attachment in Hashem). These are four realms, one of top of the other, and they are also each within the other: The more one enters inward [going from proper actions, then proper emotions and then proper thoughts, etc.] the further he is getting deeper into his *pnimiyus*, internality.

QUESTION How does a person become connected to the 4 *Olamos* (*Asiyah*, *Yetzirah*, *Beriah*, *Atzilus*) through *davening*?

ANSWER If one is *zocheh*, he actually ascends to higher *Olamos* in his *davening*. All of these ascensions take place in the depths of the *nefesh* (soul), that is, in his *middos* and thoughts.

QUESTION I am a *baal teshuvah* and recently came to Eretz Yisrael to learn Torah. I love to learn *hashfakah* and *mussar* and I am very into self-awareness and learning about the *nefesh*, and about *pnimiyus* etc. But I struggle with learning Gemara and I don't find it enjoyable. What can I do to make my learning better?

ANSWER You are praiseworthy for being *zocheh* to come to learn

Torah in *Eretz Yisrael*. It is important that your basis should be learning Gemara *b'iyun* (in-depth) according to your level, and to go from *sugya* to *sugya*. And write down your summaries and conclusions of each *sugya*. Also, have fixed times every day for learning *bekiyus* (simplistic learning) so that you can learn and know *perek* after *perek*, and *masechta* after *masechta*. You can still be involved with developing your inner world of *pnimiyus*, but it must always be balanced with learning Gemara. And when it comes to learning about matters of *pnimiyus* as well, you should also write down your summaries and conclusions, on each topic you learn. “*Chazak, chazak, alah v'hatzlach!*” (“Be strong, be strong, rise and succeed!”)

QUESTION In today's times how can a person fulfill what Chazal say, “Eat only bread dipped in salt and water in order to learn Torah”?

ANSWER Minimize a bit of the pleasures you are used to. Every so often, i.e. once a month, train yourself to eat just bread dipped in salt. However, make sure that you are balancing yourself out with enjoying your learning and enjoying *avodas Hashem*.

QUESTION *There are all kinds of stories and speculations that corona was developed by people. What should be the attitude about this?*

ANSWER It should make no difference how exactly it came. It was the thoughts of the Infinite, Blessed Is He, and it doesn't matter in what way it came to the world.

QUESTION *During the first wave of corona, the Rav [and others] explained that the corona was really a physical manifestation of the concept of “Keser” (Hashem's crown) for it was showing the world how Hashem is in charge and He is King, and therefore our avodah now is Keser, also called Yechidah, the deepest part of the soul in which one is alone with Hashem. In light of this, is there a deeper perspective to have towards the vaccine? Is it obscuring the reality that Hashem runs the world? And what is our avodah during these times?*

ANSWER The *sefarim hakedoshim* describe *Keser* as an illumination that “shines between the cracks”, meaning that it comes and goes, it appears, disappears and reappears in a cycle of *ratzu v'shov* (progressing and regressing). That is why the vaccine is able to partially “conceal” the light of the *Keser* (it can partially obscure the reality of Hashem being in charge). Our *avodah* now is to hold onto the revelation of *Keser* that Hashem revealed onto the world with corona [the clear recognition that only He is in charge, which reveals His as King to the world] and to see how the *Keser* is actually becoming clearer and clearer to us, as time continues. (From the Bilvavi Q & A archive)

PREPARING FOR THE YOMIM NORAIM

Why is it that people usually succumb to evil when they are tempted? It is because they view themselves as mainly evil, so when they see evil and they are thinking about it, it awakens their negative self-perception of “I am a bad person.” But if one is tempted in a situation yet he identifies with the pure place in his soul, even when he is tempted, he will remain attached to the pure place in his soul. True, he still has free will, and he can still fall. But he will be able to place in himself in a place that is pure, even as he is being tempted.

Every day, the *yetzer hora* gets stronger, Chazal say, and if not for Hashem’s help, we cannot overcome it. Why is it impossible without Hashem? When a person identifies himself superficially, the *yetzer hora* can easily sway him to do evil. When Hashem helps a person, his pure point is awakened when he is tempted with evil, and that is how he is aided in overcoming the *yetzer hora*.

Chazal say that when the *yetzer hora* is present, there is no mention of the *yetzer tov*. You don’t remember any *tov* (good) when *ra* (evil) is present. But if you are already used to dwelling on the pure point in yourself, then when you meet temptation, you will be very close to returning yourself to the good place in yourself, and then the evil won’t be able to sway you.

If you’re not used to dwelling on your inner purity, it will be very hard to overcome evil temptations when you are faced with them. This is why most people are struggling with their *yetzer hora*.

Every year, when Rosh HaShanah comes, the original spiritual light returns to the world. When we were first created, we were pure. When Adam sinned, he fell into a mixture of good and evil. On Rosh HaShanah, we have the opportunity to identify our original pure state and connect to it. Rosh HaShanah is a great light – it is a power to identify our pure point in the soul, which existed before Adam’s sin, in which the world was still a pure place. If we want a true kind of life, we need to reveal that inner point in ourselves.

If we check ourselves and we want to see how we view ourselves, we should see what our first thoughts are when we think about ourselves: Do we initially feel negative towards ourselves, or positive towards ourselves? If we have a positive view towards ourselves, we are connecting to the light that comes on Rosh HaShanah. But if we just look at Rosh HaShanah as a scary day in which we are judged for our actions, this is a superficial outlook, which only dwells on the mixture of good and evil that is This World.

On Rosh HaShanah, there is no *viduy*, we don’t mention any *aveiros*. Not only don’t we verbalize them, but even to

think about our sins on Rosh HaShanah is not allowed. Because when you think about your faults and sins, you are connecting yourself to the external parts to yourself, which are not pure. On Rosh HaShanah, our main *avodah* is to connect ourselves to the way we are the beginning of creation, before the sin, when we were entirely pure. We need to awaken in ourselves the part in the soul which resembles Adam’s state before the sin.

This is not simply to ‘take our mind off’ *aveiros*. It is about entering into a deep place inside ourselves, the place in our *nefesh* which there is no possibility of doing an *aveirah*.

Shofar on Rosh HaShanah is meant to penetrate into our soul, that we should enter our souls. One aspect of *Shofar* is to remind us to do *teshuvah*, but that is only the external part of *Shofar*. The inner message behind *Shofar*, as Rav Saadyah Gaon says, is to remind us of *Shofar* at Har Sinai, when we were pure again. If one hears *Shofar* and only thinks about improving his ways, his Rosh HaShanah is superficial. But if one hears the *Shofar* and is reminded of his purity, he enters the place in his soul where there is no sin.

There is *Shofar* in Elul and in *Rosh HaShanah*. The sound of the *Shofar* in Elul is to get us to cry and improve our ways. *Shofar* on Rosh HaShanah is to help us enter the place in our souls where there is no sin. This is Rosh HaShanah, the ‘head of the year’ – to begin the year from a pure, clean place. We each need to reveal in our own personal soul that our beginning point is a place of no sin. We can’t begin from a place of mentioning *aveiros*. Instead, we begin from a place where there is no possibility of *aveirah* – we begin from the pure point within us.

When one who absorbs this concept, first intellectually, and then in his heart, these words can transform his entire life, from beginning until end! There is a [Chassidic] saying that goes, “Think good, and then it will be good.” Where does this saying come from? It is really based on the concept of thinking about the pure place in your soul, where there is no evil. Rosh HaShanah is when this perspective shines particularly.

Even a person who kept falling into *aveiros* this year, time and time again, should not despair. One of the reasons why we should never despair is because we can change our very orientations. As we have explained here, we can train ourselves to dwell on our pure essence, and this will help us succeed, with Heavenly assistance. You can do this by reflecting every day on the concept that you are renewed each day by Hashem: **המחודש בכל יום טובו**, “He renews every day, in His goodness”, every day there is a renewal of Creation, and therefore we are being renewed each day, and when we tap into this renewal, our lives are transformed.

(דרשות_011_היה עצמך תשסז)