



BEGINNING

In the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*, we give away the first of our crops for Hashem. This concept of giving away the first portion to Hashem is also when it comes to non-living creations, plants, animals, and even people. We give away the “first” from non-living objects to Hashem when we separate the first dough of *challah*. We give away the “first” of our crops/plants to Hashem with the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*. We give away the “first” of our animals to Hashem by the *mitzvah* of *peter chamor*, redeeming the first-born male donkey. And we give away our “first” son to Hashem by sanctifying him with the status of *bechor*.

Why, indeed, must we give away of our “beginnings” for Hashem? The Jewish people are called בני בכורי – “My son, my firstborn”. We have the status of a “firstborn child” of Hashem, so to speak. We are also called “children of Hashem”, and Hashem is called “our Father”. This sets us apart from the nations of the world, but even more so, it gives us the status of firstborn, which means that we are the very “beginning” that stems from Hashem, so to speak. The words of Rashi in the beginning of the Torah are well-known: “The world was created for the sake of the Torah, which is called the “*raishis*” (the beginning); for the sake of Yisrael, who are called “*raishis*” (the beginning).” The Jewish people are, in essence, a *raishis* – a beginning. Our bond with Hashem is through the Torah, which is called “*raishis*”.

Hashem is the ultimate *Raishis* of all beginnings: אני ראשון ואני אחרון, “I am first, and I am the last.” The depth of why we give away our beginnings to

Hashem is because since the purpose of Creation is to bond with Hashem, we are meant to reveal the beginning behind each thing and then give it away to Hashem, and this is how we bond with Hashem - Who is called the ultimate “*Raishis*.” The Torah is called “*raishis*”, Yisrael is called “*raishis*”, and Hashem is the “*raishis*” of everything. When we give of our “*raishis*” to Hashem, it is because this is how we bond with Hashem through the aspect of “*raishis*”.

The concept of *raishis* (beginnings) expands into deeper ramifications. In everything that a person does, he is meant to give away its *raishis* to Hashem. The more a person is giving away the *raishis* of each thing he is involved with, it connects him closer to the *Raishis*, to Hashem.

The following is an example of how we can give away something from our *raishis* (beginning) to Hashem. Every day when we wake up in the morning, we begin our day. What does our very first moment of waking up look like? Before saying *Modeh Ani*, we can give away our first thoughts of the day to Hashem, by **thinking about Hashem** in the first few moments when we are getting up.

This can be difficult, because a person is still sleepy when he wakes up, but the purer a person becomes, he becomes more aware of his inner state, and he is able to consciously ‘give away his first thoughts’ to Hashem. As soon as one wakes up and he feels even minimally aware that he has awoken, he can devote his first thoughts (or at least the very first thought after he feels totally awake and conscious) to Hashem, by

thinking about Hashem. What should we think about? Just think a simple thought of *emunah peshutah* (simple, unquestioning belief) in Hashem, the fact that you simply have faith in Hashem. And from that state of *emunah peshutah*, recite *Modeh Ani*. If you do this, you have begun the day with *emunah peshutah* and it will carry into the rest of the day as well, because there is a rule that everything gets pulled after the head, or the beginning point.

Don’t get involved then with clarifying what *emunah* means, and nor is it the time to try to feel Hashem more and sense Him more, which is the *avodah* of acquiring *emunah chushis* (palpable faith in Hashem). You can’t work on that as soon as you get up in the morning. Instead, think a simple thought of *emunah peshutah* in Hashem when you wake up. When you start the day off right like this, the rest of the day will resemble this good and holy beginning. (The same is true for the opposite situation – if a person begins the day with negative or spiritually harmful thoughts, *chas v’shalom*, the rest of the day will also be negatively affected by this). You have given away the first moment of the day, for Hashem – by thinking about Him, simply and earnestly.

When we become used to giving away our beginning to Hashem throughout the day as well (i.e. thinking about Hashem before beginning to *daven*, before we are about to *learn*, before we are about to *bentch*), then when Rosh HaShanah arrives as we are declaring the *malchiyos* (the dominion) of Hashem over all the universe, it will be for us a revelation of the ultimate *Raishis*.
(from Bilvavi On The Parsha)

Q&A – CLOSENESS WITH HASHEM

QUESTION 1) How can it be a good thing for me if I am missing certain things in my *ruchniyus* and I keep davening for it but Hashem doesn't answer me? 2) Also, how does not getting answered by Hashem make a person feel closer to Hashem? It only makes me feel more distanced from Hashem. 3) Also, I don't understand how a relationship with Hashem is built by talking to Hashem throughout the day. If a person just talks and talks to Hashem and nothing is happening from all of his *tefillos*, there's no relationship being created from this. The opposite happens, in fact.

ANSWER (1) Even what a person is missing in his *ruchniyus* is still good for the person. It is through missing these things that one rises higher in the end, because it makes him yearn for even more *ruchniyus*. יתרון אור מהחושך, “More light comes from darkness.” Light (success) comes from darkness (failures and difficulties), be it physical or spiritual darkness. The light that comes after one's darkness is a much greater light than any light which isn't preceded by darkness. All of one's spiritual difficulties, which are a form of darkness, are the tools by which a person can receive a greater light, which he wouldn't have been able to receive had he not gone through the hard work of trying to remove his spiritual darkness. Think well about these words, and then your perspective will change about your situation. It will be a truer perspective than the way you are seeing your situation of *ruchniyus* right now. It is upon you to gain this perspective of יתרון אור מהחושך, that more light comes precisely from darkness. In addition to that, the Ramchal writes in *Derech Hashem* and *Daas Tvunos* two general reasons why we need to undergo exertion and challenges in serving Hashem. (1) Good cannot come to a person unless he first undergoes difficulty and tests – it doesn't come to him as a gift. (2) So that it shouldn't feel like *nahama d'kisufa*, “bread of shame”, meaning that a recipient feels embarrassed to take something from his giver when he doesn't deserve it at all. That is why hard work is needed in order to get anything good. (2) You feel like you have davened so long for the things you are asking for and that it's taking too much time, but that's all according to the way you understand it. Hashem has endless reasons, because He is called *Ein Sof* (Infinite), and according to His thinking which is infinite, the amount of *tefillos* that you need to spend on *davening* for something is the exact amount that you need to be putting it, nothing less and nothing more. You need to believe that this is all for your ultimate good. And Chazal taught that some *tefillos* are answered right away while other *tefillos* are answered at a later time. A *tefillah* may be answered 20 years later – and it's all for your good, even for the good of your *ruchniyus*. (3) The purpose of personal *tefillos* is not *mainly* so that your *tefillos* will be accepted

and answered. Rather, requests are all a *tool* to create a relationship with Him. The purpose of personal *tefillos* is not to ask Hashem “give me this and give me that”. The purpose should be that you just want to *speak* with Him. Examples include thanking Him for what gave you, telling Him everything that is happening to you, and amidst that conversation with Him you can also include requests to Him. What is needed here is a change of perspective. Change your way you think about it – see it all from a different perspective, one which is far deeper.

QUESTION If the purpose of life is to become close to Hashem, why should a person be so careful about doing the *mitzvos* properly (*dikduk b'mitzvos*)? Also, it seems that the main thing we need to work on in this world is to prepare ourselves for the Next World [by attaining a palpable closeness to Hashem], so how can it be that the main thing on This World which is called the “world of action” (*Asiyah*) is to do the *mitzvos*, while the main thing in the Next World is *d'veykus* with Hashem? Also, how can it be that learning Torah, which is the *mitzvah* that brings the greatest closeness to Hashem (as Chazal said, that Torah learning is equal to all of the *mitzvos*), is also a *mitzvah* which contains the dangers of forgetting about Hashem and forgetting about fear and love of Hashem?

ANSWER [Doing Mitzvos and Feeling Closeness With Hashem] The purpose of Creation is to reveal *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, not only in the Heavenly spheres, but throughout every level and plane of Creation. And therefore, we need to reveal *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* even in the realm of action (through doing the *mitzvos*) as well. The “world of action” is the *kli*, the container, which can hold the spiritual power of Hashem's revelation on the world. Therefore any act of a *mitzvah* is another *kli* that furthers the revelation of Hashem. Any aspect within doing a *mitzvah* is an additional detail to the *kli* which adds to that revelation, adding on a specific aspect of revelation. That is why it is very important to be exacting to fulfill all of the details of a *mitzvah* – because without being precise in our *mitzvah* performance, we are missing a detail that could have brought more revelation of Hashem into the world of action. If a person is close to Hashem but he isn't that careful when it comes to how he fulfills a *mitzvah*, this can be compared to a person who knows the general information of a *sugya* of Gemara but he doesn't know the details that are in the *sugya*. (However, there are also some people who, by their very nature, are not that precise when it comes to *Asiyah*, with how they do things. This applies both to *Torah* and *avodas Hashem* [meaning that there are some people who have a general understanding of what they learn in the Torah but they are lacking knowledge of the finer details, and there are also people who have a general grasp of *avodas Hashem* but they are lacking the details of *avodas Hashem*. Their

souls are designed to be this way because that is their *shoresh neshamah* and that is how they are meant to be.) On This World, the main thing is to first build your *keilim*, to make yourself into a proper container that will hold onto *ruchniyus*, and this is by observing the *mitzvos* carefully. Without this, there is nothing to contain the *ohr*, the *ruchniyus*, that could have gone into it, and it is like a tower hanging in middle of the air. That is why our very first obligation to fulfill is, to observe all of *halachah*. But even though that is our first thing we need to concern ourselves with, that is not the **purpose**, it is not the **goal**. The **purpose** of it all is to reach closeness with Hashem, and to reveal this closeness within our “*keilim*” – to reveal closeness Hashem within the acts of *mitzvos* that we do. This World is a preparation for the Next World. However, in This World, our task is to reveal *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* within our physical *keilim* – by doing the actions of the *mitzvos* and all that we are supposed to be doing - while in the Next World, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is revealed in a more sublime way than the *keilim* which we build through doing *mitzvos*. **The common denominator between This World and the Next World, though, is that we reveal HaKadosh Baruch through *keilim*, through containers that house His revelation.** On This World, we are meant to reveal Hashem within the *keilim* of this physical world – the acts of the *mitzvos* - and in the Next World, Hashem is revealed through more sublime *keilim* that are on a higher level of *ruchniyus* than the *mitzvos*. That is why This World is a preparation for the Next World – it is because both worlds are essentially about revealing Hashem with different means of *keilim*.

2: Regarding the question why Torah learning doesn't always improve a person: The entire Creation shows us opposites of the very same thing, *dovor v'hipucho*. Anything in the Creation can either become turned into the spiritual or to increase its physicality. On This World, in the world of physicality, the spiritual and the physical are separate from each other. For example, the soul is separate from the body. But in the Next World, the upper and spiritual world, spirituality and physicality are integrated at once in the same existence.

The purpose of the entire Creation is to reveal *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. The opposite of this is when Hashem's presence is concealed. At the very root, even these two opposite concepts [revelation of Hashem and concealment of Hashem] are actually integrated at once. That is why the Torah, is called *sasrin v'galya*, it conceals and reveals at once. The Torah, which is the root of everything in Creation, is able to be the root of all levels of spiritual revelation, but it is also able to be the root of all spiritual concealment. That is where the root of our power of *bechirah* (free will) lays. The root of *bechirah* is to choose either to reveal *HaKadosh Baruch*

Hu more on this world, or, *chas v'shalom*, to choose to conceal Him from the world [by not doing His will]. And the root of that is in the Torah, which either reveals or conceals Hashem [depending on what one's intentions are when he learns].

Closeness to Hashem contains two main parts: **(1) Feeling** (*Chush*) – to feel the reality of Hashem, and to feel His love, etc. [This part can be attained just by contemplating about Hashem and it doesn't require Torah learning in order to get it. It is a way of directly focusing on Hashem, on His very reality.] **(2) Recognition of Hashem** (*Hakarah*). Part of “recognizing” Hashem is to recognize His will (*ratzon*) and His wisdom (*chochmah*), which are both revealed in the Torah. Through learning Torah, a person gains closeness to Hashem via learning about His will [*halachah*] and learning His wisdom [*Gemara*].

QUESTION *What is the way of avodas Hashem of Brisk? And how can a person know if the derech of Brisk is for him or not?*

ANSWER The path of *avodas Hashem* of Brisk is to be totally subservient to *ratzon Hashem*. And from that sense of subservience, one becomes afraid of *chas v'shalom* transgressing Hashem's will. This is called the *kav smol*, the “left line”.¹ In the area of Torah learning it manifests as giving definitions and boundaries to each thing, and in the area of *avodas Hashem* it manifests as *yirah*, fear of Hashem. But even though *yirah* is the root of the Torah and *avodah* in the way of Brisk, certainly there is plenty of *ahavas Hashem* there too! Upon subtle analysis there is actually a huge difference between the paths of the Beis HaLevi, R' Chaim, and the Brisker Rov. It is enough to mention this just to give some understanding of this. Every person has to examine the nature of his own *nefesh* and his *shoresh neshamah* (soul root) to know if any path of *avodas Hashem* is for him or not, and that is a very broad matter. (From the *Bilvavi Q & A* archive)

1 Editor's Note: Elsewhere, the Rav shlit" a has explained that this “left line” (*kav smol*) is called *Gevurah*, or *din*, or *yirah*, and that in *avodas Hashem*, it is the path of *mussar* which generally focuses on *yirah*, self-improvement out of a sense of awe of Hashem. This also corresponds to *Yesod Aish* (the element of fire), which corresponds to Yitzchok Avinu. The right line (*kav yemin*) is called *Chessed*, or *ahavah* (love), focusing on our love for Hashem and on Hashem's love for us. In *avodas Hashem*, it is the path of *Chassidus* which generally takes this path of *ahavah*. This all corresponds to the *Yesod Mayim* (the element of water), the path of Avraham Avinu. The middle line (*kav emtza*) is called *Tiferes*, or *rachamim*, or *emes* (with *rachamim* being the part of the middle line that leans towards the right line, *chedes*, and with *emes* being the part of the middle line that leans towards the left line, *din*). In *avodas Hashem*, this would be a path that incorporates both *mussar* and *Chassidus* together. This is *Yesod Ruach* (air), embodied by Yaakov Avinu, whose *avodah* contained both the *chedes* of Avraham and the *gevurah* of Yitzchok.

PREPARING FOR THE YOMIM NORAIM

In the *Mizmor* of *L'Dovid* which we say in Elul, we say the words *כי אבי ואמי עזבוני וה' יאספני* "For my father and my mother have abandoned me and Hashem will gather me." The deeper implication of this is that at some point in one's life, one must come to feel, that his need for love and warmth from others will never be fully satisfied even by the fact that he had parents who loved him. The entire love which our parents gave to us was all a *moshol*, a parable, to a *nimshal*, a greater lesson – it was all to show us that just as a child longs for his mother's compassion, so must we long for Hashem and take shelter in Him.

In order to grasp this, we need a certain maturity. Even the non-spiritual aspect in us, our *nefesh habehaimis* – the animalistic level of soul which contains our base emotions – can understand the concept we are describing, as long as one has matured a little about life. The more that you realize that the self-absorbed world that we live on cannot provide us with our deepest needs – our need for love and warmth and nurturing - the more we can be led to truly feel, that the only way to satisfy our need for connection is through a relationship with Hashem. It is painful when we realize how everyone is so wrapped up in themselves, that no one cares enough about you enough the way you need to be cared about - but that painful realization is the catalyst that can lead us to the truth, that there is no one who can really take pity on us. No one but Hashem.

Ever since the first day of Creation, where Kayin fought with Hevel and killed his own brother, the world became a place of strife and disparity. As the world draws to its end, it returns to the beginning point, where there was strife between brothers.

Today there are fights in families, between siblings, between close friends. And even within the Torah world, there is *machlokes*. Right before the arrival of Moshiach, Chazal prophesied foretold that there will be fights against Torah scholars and even amongst each other. People who were together in yeshivah for years ever since they were in kindergarten, who had seemed to be inseparable, are now in strife with each other. This is all because we live in *alma d'piruda*, a world of disparity which became the reality ever since the *cheit*.

Yet, as harsh as this reality as is, we can look at it all and see how we need to look elsewhere from this world, to find a place of true love and warmth. All the strife we see in the world can help us realize, that indeed, we cannot live on this world as it is, which is cold and strife-ridden and where divisiveness is the norm. We need to find a new world where we can escape to, a world of love and warmth, a world of *יחסין* חסין, "In the shadow of Your

wings, take shelter."

People are looking for love, warmth and closeness on this world, and sadly, they will not find it. There are a few people on this world who have a truly loving relationship with their parents and with their spouse, but most people do not have that, and therefore, most people on this world are very lonely! A person can even have a lot of friends, while in reality, they are not even his real friends. They might turn on him one day or abandon him. No one can really know for sure who his real friends are! Friends often talk about each other behind their backs. There is very little real love to be found on this world from people, who are limited human beings.

We must instead yearn to take shelter under Hashem. We can't give up our need to feel connection, but we need to yearn for a true connection. And it doesn't come from any person on This World.

The days of Elul are "*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*", "I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me." In Elul we also say the verse, *כי אבי ואמי עזבוני* "For my father and mother have abandoned me." Elul is all about yearning for Hashem, to take shelter under His wing. When we have this truthful yearning for connection and it is done in the right way, our *nefesh* (soul) will find its shelter.

Without uncovering our yearnings for Hashem, a person remains satisfied with the fact that he was loved by his parents, and he never goes beyond that. He remains in the *moshol* of life and he never gets to the *nimshal*. There are people whose entire life revolves around their family, where they are very family-oriented and the family is everything to them, while others think that life is all about hanging out with close friends. Often, a person's friendships are devoid of meaning and they don't satisfy a person's need for connection. The true lifestyle of a Jew's soul is to demand the true place to run away to in order to feel loved and pitied. The more a person matures through life, the more he should realize and feel the truth about life – that no one on this world can supply us with the love and warmth we need.

Don't realize this because you are now hearing about it from me. Realize it because you have come to that understanding about life from within yourself! We need to realize the deep meaning of life. Life on this world must cause to realize that we cannot feel fulfilled from This World and from any of the people in it, and therefore we have no choice but to seek somewhere else to live – another world than This World: The world of taking shelter under Hashem, *בצל כנפך יחסין* [תפילה_0133_חוס]