

AVRAHAM VS. THE WORLD

The Chazon Ish wrote in *sefer Emunah U'Bitachon* that a person needs to have quiet time every day to contemplate *emunah* and *bitachon* (belief and confidence) in Hashem. When a person calms his *nefesh* (soul) and silences all of the "noise" from the outside and inside, he will be able to feel yearnings for the Next World, like iron pulled towards a magnet.

In order for a person to really feel *emunah* in Hashem, he needs to reflect on it every day, and he needs to have quiet time every day for this. This was always applicable, even in the previous generations, but it is especially necessary in the current times we live in.

In the generation we live in, the End of Days, there is much suffering in the world. It's a very "loud" situation, it is not a quiet one. All of the suffering and all of the tragedies are indeed here to awaken us to *teshuvah*, which brings us closer to Hashem. Chazal and *tzaddikim* said that there would be mind-boggling suffering in the End of Days, and that the purpose of it all is to get us to do *teshuvah*. Indeed, Hashem is calling out to us, more than ever before. He's screaming out to us to return to Him. But although it is certainly good when a person connects to Hashem from all the suffering, we must know there is so much more to our relationship with Hashem than finding Him amidst all the suffering. We can find Him even amidst calmness. There is a more inner way to become close to Hashem, and one does not have to wait to find Hashem from suffering. He can find Hashem even when he's in a perfect-

ly quiet and calm place. When one is in a quiet place, he can choose to reflect and concentrate on the fact that Hashem exists and that He is *Hashem Elokeinu*, He is our G-d, which is the greatest thing to be thankful for. One can focus on all of the goodness that Hashem does. In this way, a person connects to Hashem mainly from finding the "good" points of life and focusing on the good.

Of course, our suffering also must be used a way to find Hashem through it all and get closer to Him. We need to find Hashem in our life both through the suffering and good times. But that should not be the main way we get close to Hashem. The main part of our life should be spent on reflecting on all the goodness that Hashem does for us.

However, it is impossible for one to be thankful to Hashem if he is too attached to what goes on in the world today. In order for a Jew to live properly today, he must live an inner kind of life, a life of having more *pnimiyus*, which requires one to disassociate himself from the superficial kind of life that exists these days. As long as *Moshiach* hasn't come yet, the spiritual level of the world continues to decline rapidly, and as time goes on, it is becoming increasingly rarer for one to have any time of quiet in his life, which he so desperately needs. It is astounding that it has become so much harder today to find quiet time, precisely when we need it so much. There is rarely any calmness in the world today. Fear and tension grips the world all the time. Any sensible person knows that we cannot survive and be stable unless we have some calmness and quiet in our life.

There is much suffering in the End of

Days, and Hashem is calling out to us through it to come closer to Him. But why focus on that alone? That would be such a negative kind of life! With the more you are involved with the world, you get more confused and bewildered. We need to separate and disconnect from This World, and then we'll be able to discover a life that is good. If a person doesn't do that, all he will be left with is the suffering and the crying of the End of Days. At most, he can get a spark of closeness with Hashem, but he won't have the ultimate closeness with Hashem that can be achieved through experiencing an inner kind of life, the good life that allows a person to focus on the goodness that Hashem does for us.

In our spiritual situation, most of the Jewish people right now are like sheep being led to a spiritual slaughterhouse. There is a *shmad*, a spiritual genocide being declared on our entire nation [through the 50 level of *tumah* that is enabled through internet devices]. But we do not have to become bewildered from it. **אחד היה אברהם**, "An individual was Avraham". He was an individual on this world, the only one in the world to choose a true life, while everyone else around him did not. We can be like that too - we can be individuals who will not live like the rest of the world, and choose a true life.

Chazal predicted a long time that darkness will befall the world during the End of Days, of which it is said, "*And darkness shall cover the earth.*" But amidst the darkness, there is light to be found by those who live an inner kind of life. In the **external dimension** of This World, there is only *daas tov v'ra* (a mixture of

good and evil knowledge) and much darkness. But if we discover our **inner world** that is within ourselves, we will find there a light that will help us make our way through the darkness.

The main time in which we thank Hashem is precisely through all the confusion around us, which is all a result of this dark exile we are in. It is mind-boggling pain which nobody can bear anymore. We can choose a truthful, inner kind life and recognize Hashem from that inner serenity and then connect ourselves to all of the good that Hashem does. And from recognizing all the goodness that He does, we will connect to the One who bestows it all. Through that, we will have a constant *d'veykus* with Hashem. **שאתה.הוא.ה.אלוקינו (תפילה 0148)**

As the generations go on, the spiritual struggles increase. Struggles with the *yetzer hora*, with *middos*. But in the later generations, especially in the last couple of years, we have entered a new kind of struggle: We do not know what *emes* (truth) is. People are searching, but they aren't finding what they are searching for. Chazal revealed that the generation in which Moshiach will come, there will be a lot of confusion. If someone lives with even a little bit of feeling, with even a drop of purity, he can see clearly that there is very little *emes* to be found these days.

We become disoriented and mixed up with the more we are connected to the world and what goes on in it. And even in the Torah world, we do not see enough genuine Torah, and that also leaves us confused. If a person doesn't care about truth, than he doesn't see the problem, and he feels fine as long as he is immersed in the *Gemara*. But if someone searches for truth, he won't be satisfied with that. He doesn't want to remain superficial, and it bothers him greatly that there is a lack of truth in the world today.

People have a hard time knowing what the truth is, as they try to raise their children in the right way. They really want to know what truth is, what way to go in, but they are confused. They don't know what's good and what's not good, what's true and what's false. The impurity of the "*Erev Rav*" mixes up the world in the final days, so much that we can't tell truth apart from falsity. It can bother any person who searches for truth. Chazal say that one should have a *rebbe*, and that will remove a person from his doubts. But what do you do if you still even doubt even after that? People don't know what to do, what to even ask about. They don't feel like they have the heads to try to understand what's going on today and what the issues are. Even after asking their questions, people have a hard time understanding what the *Rabbonim* are saying. By the time a person hears it, there are so many different versions of what was really said and what wasn't, adding to the confusion.

People are saying today that they don't feel what *kedushah* (holiness) is, what *taharah* (purity) is. The breaches in *tzniyus* (modesty) today are so appalling and it dulls the mind. Every food has a *hechsher* (*kosher* certification) on it, and even devices of technology have a "*hechsher*" on it, but that doesn't make it really kosher. The *Erev Rav* today wants to uproot whatever *kedushah* is left in our world today. But we should know that the main war is not taking place in the outside world. The main war is taking place within the world of Torah itself, in which we have become very confused, and we can't tell the difference between *emes* and *sheker*.

This world we live in today is like walking "in the shadow of the valley of death", for anyone who lives a truthful life and who isn't satisfied with superficiality. But, "*I do not fear evil, for You are with me*". We need to find how Hashem

is here with us, in this very darkness.

Chazal taught that Hashem saw that there would only be a few *tzaddikim*, so He spread out the *tzaddikim* throughout the generations. The main "*mikveh*" to immerse ourselves in is to realize that we are not part of this world. We should feel as Avraham Avinu said, **גר אנכי בארץ**, "I am a stranger to the land". We don't belong here on this world. You should feel like a "stranger" towards the city or community you live in. It is not your real place. Your *neshamah* came from above. Realize that you have nothing to do with this world! The "*tzibbur*" (community) you are found in today is not either your real place. Even in *Eretz Yisrael*, we should feel like we are stranger to this land. Avraham Avinu also said he's a stranger to this world, and he said it even when he was in *Eretz Yisrael*. As long as we live in a world in which *kedushah* is so hidden from us, we need to feel like we are a stranger to this world.

Anyone in this generation who feels true yearnings for Hashem can be considered one of the *tzaddikim* of the generation! Anyone who truly searches for Hashem in this generation is a *ya-chid*, a rare individual. If we should not feel connected to this world, what *are* we connected to? We should only feel connected with Hashem, His Torah, His *mitzvos*, and to love others Jews (genuinely).

We are living in very hard times, not because of the tension and wars in our world, but because of the cold, indifference to *ruchniyus*. What does a person yearn for when he has some quiet time to concentrate? Does a person have yearnings for Hashem? Does he talk to Hashem and cry to Him when he's alone? The simple feeling we need to feel, first of all, is that we are "strangers" to this generation. We need to return somewhat to the life which our *Avos* lived, each person on his own level. We must disconnect our-

selves from the 'accepted kosher' lifestyle of today. We must search for those individuals who are truthful. We must *daven* for *Moshiach* and believe that he will come, but in the time being, before he comes, we have to feel like we are strangers here. It doesn't matter which community we are from, we all need to separate from the lifestyle of today. To actually do this, you need to connect to an inner kind of life in which you feel a quiet solitude in you, to feel apart from the world. Every day, make a deep *hisbodedus*: Connect yourself deeply to Hashem, and to His Torah, and to doing His will.

May we be *zocheh* to see the (light) of Hashem, and may we all be *zocheh* to see the coming of *Moshiach*, quickly.
(תפילה.048 וקדושים בכל יום)

Q&A - GROWING

QUESTION I can't keep to a schedule for that long. I don't keep to any of my *sefarim* (learning sessions) for that long and neither can I deal with anything for that matter, for that long. I don't get anywhere in anything, and I feel like all of my *ruchniyus* and growth is all just shaky and unstable.

ANSWER Take one small point to work on and try to keep going at it.

QUESTION I have learned so much about *Avodas Hashem* that I find it a bit difficult to open up more when I am around my friends in yeshiva. I am a deeper thinker than they are. Because of this, I keep a certain distance from them and I prefer to learn alone. What can I do about this to stay more balanced?

ANSWER Firstly, you need to examine if your separation from others stems from truly being on a higher level of *ruchniyus*, or if it stems from *gaavah* (conceit). Or, it may stem from being too "closed up" inside. On a practical level, it is recom-

mended for you to find the one person whom you feel closest to, and to speak with him *a little more* than how much you personally would like to. You should also be aware that generally speaking, the more inner that a person becomes, in most cases he will also experience a certain loneliness. This is because even the inner world has an external and internal layer to it – this is written about by the *Reshash*, that even *pnimiyus* has both a *chitzoniyyus* and *pnimiyus* within it. Not always is a person *zocheh* to live in the internal layer of the inner world. For this reason, Chazal said, "Either a *chavrusa* (friend) or death." On the other hand, there is also an awesome *kedushah* that a person can gain when he can separate from others and be alone with himself. If a person uses the power of being "alone" correctly, he can penetrate very far into the inner world, into the very essence of the soul. One needs a very subtle balance between internal solitude and connection with others. When one does connect to others, it must also be a subtle, refined kind of connection – such as by associating with someone who is serving Hashem on a very inner level. One should also be able to have a "coarser" and less internal kind of connection of others, by dealing with "worldlier" types of people, so that he stays balanced.

QUESTION I am a growing person and I have a lot of aspirations in *ruchniyus*, and I am very in touch with *pnimiyus*, with my *neshamah*. But in yeshiva, I feel terribly lonely, because I'm not finding anyone in touch with their *neshamah* the way I am. I don't feel connected to most people I'm with in yeshiva because I feel that I am seeking *ruchniyus* while they are not. Maybe the problem is me – I am not viewing them as *neshamos*. Or, maybe I'm projecting my own problems onto others – maybe I'm also self-conscious of how I look in the eyes of others (and, like the Baal Shem Tov says, a person

sees faults in others because he has those very faults that he is seeing) and that's why I see my own faults in others. But I also suspect that the main reason is because I'm different from others and I'm more inward than them. I know about certain concepts in *ruchniyus* which they have no connection to because of all the *shiurim* and *sefarim* I've heard about *pnimiyus*. I always find myself in "judging" mode of others for being that way, and I feel a disgust and a dislike towards people who aren't trying to grow in their *ruchniyus*. As a result from this sense of separation that I feel from others in yeshiva, I feel so apart and different from others around me and this all makes me feel very lonely. I feel like I don't have friends who share my aspirations in life. I feel a sense of separation from others when I'm learning in the *beis midrash*, as well as when I go out for a coffee break and I overhear people having such empty conversations. I can't help but feel a certain distaste towards them. But really I wish I could love everyone no matter what level they are on. I also wish I could be become more involved with others and to be a friend for everyone. But it's so hard for me, due to the reasons I mentioned.

ANSWER Someone wise said, "The world is entirely fools, and the sages are like strangers living amongst them." This is the meaning of the verse, "*I am a stranger in this land.*" The more elevated a person becomes, the more of a "stranger" he becomes towards this world, and he feels more emotionally disconnected from people who are materialistic. This is the suffering that the *tzaddikim* experience, and a person is lucky and praiseworthy if he experiences this kind of suffering. But, at the same time, it is necessary for a person to also be connected with others, to a certain extent. Here are some ways. (1) One has to feel an inner love for other people, which goes beyond reasoning

and intellect. This is because we must feel a love for each other which comes from the depth of our *neshamah*, for we are all rooted in one unit. (2) It is written, “*You are children to Hashem*”, and therefore all Jewish souls are connected to the Creator. Included in our mitzvah to love the Creator is to love His children. Just as a person loves his child or his brother, even when they are infants, so is it with the mitzvah to love other Jews. Understand this well. (3) Find a point of good in every person, even if it is only a little bit of good, and focus on that good. (4) Recognize that just as a person has a head, nose, heel, and etc., so is it when it comes to all the different souls that there are in the Jewish people: Every person has a different *shoresh neshamah*, a “soul root” [some have higher soul roots, corresponding to higher parts of the body, and others have lower soul roots, corresponding to the lower parts of the body. Those on the lowest level correspond to the heel, the lowest point of the body]. There is no place for disdaining any soul level, because they are all part of the greater human design. (5) Chazal said “Do not judge your friend, until you reach his place”, don’t judge him until you can understand him entirely. And the Kotzker taught that you will never reach your friend’s place anyway, so there is no justification in judging another person. (6) The more that a person is genuinely living in his internal world (*olam pnimi*), he becomes inwardly purer and calmer, he will become less interested in analyzing others around him, and the less he judges others.

QUESTION I get easily intimidated from others who are wealthier, better looking than me, funnier, more charismatic, etc. It makes me anxious and then I totally shut down. What can I do about this?

ANSWER Set aside some time alone to yourself (making sure you are also balanced by having friends and enjoying

being around them), and build for yourself a world of your “self”, your own internal world, an internal space where there is just you, alone, and which only you can enter. It is the internal world of connection to yourself, to the good that is in you, to your very “I”. Thereafter, whenever you meet other people who awaken feelings of unworthiness in you, you can enter within, into your very existence, and from there, you can receive strength and inspiration. For now, don’t bust yourself trying to fix the trait of *gaavah*, until after you have solidly built for yourself an inner world of your own.

The foundation of repairing all problems is when you have built your own inner world, with a strong and powerful connection to your inner self. It is a pure and subtle connection to who you are: to your true self. In order to do it, you should identify the most positive aspect of your personality and connect to it - on the intellectual level, on the emotional level, and on a “soul” level. And you should actively connect to that positive aspect of your personality. You should accustom yourself to sitting with yourself alone at times, in silence, and slowly you can gain a love for this silence. It is for you to reflect upon and understand that a person has an “inner world” - a complete world, in and of itself. In contrast to this inner space in yourself, there is also the outer part of your existence, which turns outward to others. As long as a person isn’t strongly connected to his own inner world, his encounters with others will cause him to go outward from himself, and the person will try to adapt himself to his surroundings, and he will be very reactive to whatever takes place outside of him. That is why, in your situation, when you meet people whom you feel are successful, you feel unworthy about yourself, and your inner core is being influenced and shaped by what takes place outside of you. In contrast, if you would become stronger within yourself,

you wouldn’t be that reactive to others. You would be only minimally reactive to them, so you wouldn’t be as affected from others, and also, the frequency of your reactivity to others would also be a lot less, and it wouldn’t affect you on such a core level. Becoming strongly connected to your own inner self would allow you to be more comfortable around others, because you wouldn’t feel a need to be the center of the social circle. It is very possible that others have certain expectations from you and they want you to be a certain way, and that is why you also expect this from yourself, to try to become more popular and be noticed by others. But when people seek social approval, this actually stems from an inner emptiness, to take leave of one’s true self, and a desperate attempt to show others “who I really am” - but it is actually *not* who you really are. Therefore, whether the issue is feeling unworthy or feeling a need to be popular amongst your peers because you aren’t strongly connected enough to your true self, the solution is to reveal your own inner world and to enter it regularly. The more you will live like this, most of your issues will be solved, with *siyata d’shmaya*.

This weekly parsha sheet is based on translations by talmidim from the divrei Torah of HaRav Itamar Shwartz, Shlit" a the author of the Bilvavi and DaEs series. The Rav attended the Pachad Yitzhak Yeshiva of Rav Yonasan David, Shlit" a and graduated from the Ponovitch Yeshiva of Rav Gershon Edelstein, Shlit" a. The earliest of more than 50 *sefarim* of the Rav where enthusiastically endorsed by Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch, Shlit" a, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, Shlit" a, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlit" a, the Tolna Rebbe, Shlita, Rav Yitzhok Meyer Morgenstern, Shlit" a, Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp, Shlit" a, Rav Sherayah Deblitzki, z" l, Rav Chizkiyahu Erlanger, z" l, amongst others. Using an eclectic approach, the Rav's teachings speak to the hearts of Jews from all walks of life.