

INHERITED STRENGTHS & INDIVIDUALITY

We all inherited *middos* from our *Avos* and *Imahos*, but each person is drawn towards one of these particular *middos* based on his particular *shoresh neshamah* (soul root). Some are drawn towards *chessed*/kindness, the *middah* of Avraham Avinu. Others will be better at *dikduk hadin* (being very meticulous with *halachah*), the trait of *yirah*, as personified by Yitzchok. Others are drawn towards *rachamim*/compassion or *emes*/truth (the level between *chessed* and *din*), the *middah* of Yaakov.

When we live through the perspective of the *guf* (body) and not through the *neshamah* (Divine soul), we will have a superficial perspective and we disdain the *middah* which we aren't drawn towards. For example, if someone is very drawn towards *chessed*, he might look down on others who are very exacting when are very careful with *halachah*. In his viewpoint, he sees *chessed* as the most important quality to have, and he looks at the strict, serious nature of *dikduk hadin* as someone who isn't kind. A person has the tendency to look down on people who are drawn towards *middos* that are opposite his personality, because he considers those people to be missing the point of life. Every Jew is directed towards the same goal of following the dictates of *Shulchan Aruch*. Yet, in spite of this fact, a person has a nature to disdain others who are different from his personality, and to look at them negatively with a bad eye.

The *Avos* all looked similar, but they were all so different from each other. They each had a different *shoresh neshamah* (soul root). The *avodah* of Yitzchok Avinu, which was *yirah* (strictness), was a completely different

avodah than his father Avraham, who personified *ahavah* (love). But what they all strove for was one goal: They used their quality as a tool to come closer to Hashem. Since we inherited the *middos* of all the *Avos*, we are able to harmonize all of their traits together.

Although each of the *Avos* excelled at their respective qualities, they all showed *mesirus nefesh*. Avraham Avinu once had to give up his own life and let himself be thrown into a fire, and he was also tested with even greater *mesirus nefesh*, by being willing to offer up his beloved son Yitzchok. And Yitzchok was readily prepared to give up his life for Hashem. After Avraham passed the test with the *Akeidah*, Hashem said, "Now I know that you fear G-d." Avraham is being praised for his *yirah*, which was the opposite of his main trait, *ahavah*. It is because Avraham didn't simply love Hashem and practice kindness to emulate his love for Hashem. Rather, he used it all for an even greater purpose, which is to fear Hashem. And this was because he understood that his life was meant to become a life of *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

Through *mesirus nefesh*, we reveal how any of our specific qualities are meant for the goal of having *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem. Although every person has different characteristics and we are each unique from other, we all have one common denominator – we all possess the ability to exercise any of our particular qualities for the greater goal of having *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

Avraham Avinu had to exercise *mesirus nefesh* twice in his life – once with his body, when he was willing to get thrown into the fiery furnace, and once

again with his *middos*, in which he was tested to overcome his love for his son, for Hashem. We are generally not faced with the rest of *mesirus nefesh* on our body, and only Rebbi Akiva awaited the day in which he could get killed *al kiddush Hashem*. But each day, we face a test of *mesirus nefesh* when it comes to our *middos*, in which we must sacrifice our emotions and desires for Hashem.

Each of us possesses a certain outstanding quality. As Rav Chaim Vital explained in sefer *Shaarei Kedushah*, there are "4 elements" in our soul – earth, water, air, and fire. Each of these elements are the roots of our various *middos*. We all possess one element that is particularly dominant over the other, so each of us will excel in certain *middos* more than others. We are each drawn towards certain bad *middos* as well, but if we have *mesirus nefesh*, we can **give up our very will** to be drawn towards those certain bad *middos* that we are naturally drawn towards.

Through uncovering our ability of *mesirus nefesh*, we realize that we must ultimately do things because it is the will of Hashem, whether we are drawn towards doing it or not. **We can give up our very ratzon to Hashem, and surrender ourselves to Hashem's Will.** When we have *mesirus nefesh* to do Hashem's will – whether we want to do it or not – it's not because "we" should want to do this, but rather because **Hashem** wants us to do it, regardless of whether "I want" to do it or not.

We should be willing to give our desires for Hashem that are materialistic, but even when it comes to our desires of *ruchniyus*, we need to be able to give it up for Hashem. For example, there are people who act very spiritual, but

they act brazenly and impulsively because they get excited, and Hashem does not desire their actions at all. They are not interested in doing the *ratzon Hashem*, they are only interested in doing their own *ratzon*.

The secret in all our *avodas Hashem* is for us to realize that all our *middos* are only a tool to be used for what Hashem wants from us. If Hashem doesn't want us to use a certain *middah*, that is what we must be prepared for. We must be prepared to give up our *ratzon* (will), and that is how we exercise *mesirus nefesh*. All of our *middos* are meant to be used as tools in revealing one single goal: To do what Hashem wants from us.

In the future, each *tzaddik* will point to Hashem and say, "This is my G-d." Each *tzaddik* will have his own unique recognition of Hashem, "My G-d", because each *tzaddik* utilized a different way to get to Hashem. That will also connect all us all together, because it will show us how we were all united in one single goal, of wanting to do the will of Hashem (although it is true that we each had our own way unique of getting there). (תפילה 011)

We all received good *middos* that we inherited from the *Avos*. However, we are not the *Avos*. Chazal said that all people are very different and unique from each other, in how we look and in how we think (*Berachos 58a*), even though we all inherited the *middos* of the *Avos*. This is describing the individual role that each of us plays. Although we all come from the *Avos*, we are also one of 600,000 different *neshamos* (souls) that are each unique. Each of us was given a certain uniqueness, an individuality, which is meant to reveal Hashem in a different way than another.

On one hand, we have an *avodah* of realizing our unity, how we are all part of one unit and we all have same goal of striving to reach closeness to Hashem and doing His will. This is so that

we can all emulate the good *middos* of the *Avos* that we all received. But each of us also has an individual role in revealing Hashem.

In addition to what we received from the *Avos*, we also inherited a power from Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe Rabbeinu was the one who aroused compassion for the Jewish people when he beseeched Hashem and evoked the 13 traits of Hashem's compassion. Even when we are found in a state of grave *aveiros* (sins), we are still deserving of Hashem's mercy. Chazal said, "A Jew, even when he sins, is still a Jew" (*Sanhedrin 44a*). This concept became revealed through the 13 traits of compassion that Hashem arouses in order to forgive us from *aveiros*, and it was Moshe Rabbeinu was revealed this onto the world. No matter how low of a situation a person is in, even if he is in the lowest state of *shiflus* (lowliness), he can still access Hashem's compassion.

Dovid HaMelech took this revelation even further. Dovid HaMelech, throughout *sefer Tehillim*, expresses how a person can reveal Hashem precisely *because* of his lowly situation, from his *shiflus*. Dovid HaMelech also came from Rus, who was from Moav, the lowliest nation. People questioned his status, suspecting that he wasn't even Jewish, or that he descended from *mamzer* status. He was in a lowly situation, yet, he praised Hashem even amidst the demoralizing situation he found himself in. Dovid HaMelech revealed how even amidst a lowly state of *shiflus*, a person can still reveal Hashem and praise Hashem there. Also, Dovid HaMelech descended from Yehudah, the root of his dynasty, and it was Yehudah's mother Leah who revealed Hashem amidst her very painful and lowly situation, in which she felt hated and unimportant.

The *Avos* revealed the traits of *chessed*, *yirah*, and *emes*, and we each inherited these special traits. Moshe Rabbeinu revealed that we can also get Hashem's

compassion no matter what situation we are in, and Dovid HaMelech revealed the depth of this, that a person can reveal Hashem precisely when he finds himself amidst a lowly situation.

These were two different kinds of revelations that came to the world. The *Avos* revealed Hashem through a situation of growing higher, while Dovid HaMelech revealed Hashem even amidst the lowliness that he felt amidst his personal predicaments. Of course, the *Avos* certainly had great difficulties and tests, but they were mainly revealing Hashem through using their good qualities, through growing higher, whereas Dovid HaMelech revealed Hashem in his dark and demeaning situation of being considered lowly in everyone's eyes.

We inherited from our *Avos* the quality to reveal Hashem from our *middos* of *chessed*, *yirah*, and *emes*, as well as the ability to reveal Hashem even when we are in a dismal period. Our generation is the lowliest situation there ever was. Yet, **precisely in a low-level generation of *shiflus* like this, we are able to reveal Hashem more than ever!** Dovid HaMelech revealed that Hashem can be revealed even when we are amidst *shiflus* (lowliness). The power of Dovid HaMelech – revealing Hashem amidst a situation of *shiflus* is the power we can use to get by this dismal period we are in the history of *Klal Yisrael*.

Even though we all find ourselves in the worst state of *shiflus* for *Klal Yisrael*, there is no generation which cannot reveal Hashem, and **it is precisely our generation which can reveal Hashem even more than in the previous generations.** How do we see that we are able to reveal Hashem in the lowest of situations? Moshe Rabbeinu revealed the 13 traits of Hashem's compassion, showing how we can always be deserving of Hashem's compassion, and he revealed it precisely from the lowly situation of sinning with the *eigel*.

The accepted lifestyle of today's gen-

eration is not a kind of life which we can be connected to. It is a situation of total *shiflus*. But as we know, we can reveal Hashem even amidst lowliness. Dovid HaMelech descended from the lowly nation of Moav, but he also comes from Yehudah and he is the ancestor of Moshiach.

Dovid HaMelech is therefore the root of the *Geulah* (Redemption), the fact that greatness can be revealed precisely from lowliness. Dovid HaMelech came from the *Avos* and he became part of the *Merkavah*, but he also came from the lowly nation of Moav, and he needed to come from both in order to reach his potential! For it is only through first going through lowliness that one can reveal true greatness. That was what Dovid HaMelech revealed, and since Dovid is the root of Mashiach, it is this perspective which is the key to the *Geulah*.

We need to combine together both our special abilities that we received from the *Avos* (*chessed*, *gevurah* and *emes*), as well as the power that is available to us through Dovid HaMelech's revelation. How can we do this, practically speaking? On one hand, we must separate from the lifestyle of the generation, and in this way, we can resemble somewhat the lives of the *Avos*. At the same time, we can reveal Hashem amidst the lowly situation of today, revealing the power of Dovid HaMelech. When we live with a balance between these two aspects of life, it is the true life. (015. תפילה)

Q&A – THE AVODAH BEFORE THE GEULAH

QUESTION What does it mean to have “*mesirus nefesh*”, when it comes to (a) *avodas Hashem*, (b) learning Torah, and (c) doing the *mitzvos*? And what is the simple meaning of *mesirus nefesh* - does it mean that I have to be mentally willing to be killed *al kiddush Hashem* over something, or does it mean that I have to spend a lot of energy on something? **ANSWER** *Mesirus nefesh* in *avodas Hashem* means that a person works on

an area which he finds personally difficult to work on, and he perseveres in that area, through self-sacrifice to succeed, no matter what comes his way. *Mesirus nefesh* in learning Torah is that a person learns above his natural physical capabilities, and with mental exertion, until he exhausts his mind over it. *Mesirus nefesh* in doing *mitzvos* is that a person takes one *mitzvos* and does it as perfectly as possible, on his own level, according to the *halachah*, and with love and awe of Hashem, and with the conviction that he will never give up this *mitzvah* under any circumstance.

QUESTION What did the Rav mean that “the *avodah* of our generation is *mesirus nefesh*”? Is this referring to *mesirus nefesh* in *avodas Hashem*, in doing *mitzvos*, or in learning Torah? Or in all of the above? **ANSWER** In this generation, there is a special *ohr* (a spiritual illumination), the ability to act with “*mesirus nefesh*”, which is called the “light of Mashiach”, the light of Dovid HaMelech, who was called a “still-born”, with no life support of his own, whose entire life source stems from acting on the level of *mesirus nefesh*.

QUESTION Is the way of *mesirus nefesh* only for individuals or is it the *avodah* of *mesirus nefesh* the entire generation? **ANSWER** In essence, the way of *mesirus nefesh* is applicable only to individuals. However, since we are currently in a time period where the “light of Mashiach” is shining strongly, **the light of *mesirus nefesh* is also present, and it exists in order to aid us in contending with the evil of the *shaar HaNun d'tumah* (the 50TH Gate of impurity) that is rampant today.** The only way to spiritually survive this “50TH Gate of impurity Defilement” is through *mesirus nefesh*.

QUESTION Is *mesirus nefesh* the same thing as *lishmah*? **ANSWER** *Lishmah* and *mesirus nefesh* bear the same root. However, there are two ways to nullify one's “I”. One way is to do it from within oneself, and this is called *lishmah*, which means the proper intention that one needs to have in Torah learning. This is experienced through

the faculty of thought: learning Torah by thinking the intention of learning it *lishmah*. There is also a way to nullify oneself through external means, through action, which is accessed through exerting oneself in Torah beyond one's natural physical abilities, through losing sleep over one's Torah learning, through physical frugality, etc. [This is *mesirus nefesh*.]

QUESTION If a person has difficulty with learning Torah and is lazy and he likes to sleep a lot, does such a person need to give up his entire being, in one moment, in order to serve Hashem by overcoming his difficulty in learning and his desire to sleep? How can he do this, if he's not on that level? **ANSWER** Throughout all of the generations, there were always two paths: 1) *Hadrugah*, to progress step after step. 2) *Mesirus nefesh*, self-sacrifice, as Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya did [Avodah Zarah 17a]. **In our generation, where the “50TH Gate of Defilement” is in full force, the only way to counter it is through *mesirus nefesh*.** Therefore, each person needs to exercise *mesirus nefesh* on [at least] one area of his life. However, this does not mean that a person needs to do all of his actions with *mesirus nefesh*. It just means that a person needs to have some connection to the level of *mesirus nefesh*. It is possible for one to implement this idea by taking the area of his life which he finds his greatest struggle in, and to have *mesirus nefesh* in that area. Practically speaking, though, this is unfeasible for most people. So instead, one can try to find other areas in his life [where he struggles in] – each person on his own level and according to his own unique situation – and to exercise *mesirus nefesh* in those areas [in which he struggles in]. In that way, one can become connected to *mesirus nefesh*, and thereafter, one has a connection to the “50TH Gate of Holiness”, and he is no longer held captive by the “50TH Gate of Defilement”. Once a person accesses this spiritual illumination, it will be shined onto all other areas of one's *avodah*.

QUESTION The Rav has said that

it is not within our power to change the generation, except through *mesirus nefesh* (sacrificing our will for Hashem), which comes from Above. It sounds like we can indeed change the generation, if we have *mesirus nefesh* – so what did the Rav mean that it's not within our ability to change the generation? It seems that we can, if we have *mesirus nefesh*.

ANSWER It is not within our power to do anything that can bring about change. But if we show *mesirus nefesh*, we awaken a great light. **When we have *mesirus nefesh* below on this world, our awakening from below (*isarusa d'lisata*) causes an awakening above (*isarusa d'leila*) which brings a great light from above to come down to the world, and through that light, changes will happen on their own, not through us.**

QUESTION How is *mesirus nefesh* “a light that comes from above”? If each of us has the power to awaken ourselves and have *mesirus nefesh*, then it's an awakening from below, from us, and it's not coming from above. **ANSWER** *Mesirus nefesh* is an “awakening from below”, from us, which then brings about “a light that comes from above”, which then brings about change.

QUESTION Normally a person is not supposed to act above his or her *madreigah*, but when it comes to Internet is a person supposed to act above their current *madreigah* and give it up? Or should a person only act only according to their current *madreigah* of what they can or can't handle? **ANSWER** To tell a person that he must actually have *mesirus nefesh* not to have Internet - that is the truth.

QUESTION How can I live without using the Internet? It makes life so convenient and saves me so much time. As much as I would like to give it up, I feel like I need it now that I've gotten so used to it. Can we really survive today without Internet? **ANSWER** You do have need for it, because it eases you emotionally, but the problem is that the Internet is dangerous for your soul, in a very palpable and clear way. It needs *mesirus nefesh* (a sacrifice on your part).

Without *mesirus nefesh*, it is not possible for anyone in this generation to be saved from the 50TH level of *tumah*.

QUESTION Are we able to be calm and serene now, through having *bitachon* and relying on Hashem that He will send a big awakening to Klal Yisrael before Mashiach so that all of us will be deserving of Mashiach? **ANSWER** Yes. But there is also a responsibility upon each person now, according to his ability, to remove himself from today's *tumah* [internet] so that he can reveal *kedushah* [holiness and *mesirus nefesh*].

QUESTION When Eliyahu appears before Mashiach's arrival, how he will get everyone to do *teshuvah*? **ANSWER** It will not necessarily be an actual face-to-face revelation of Eliyahu. Rather, it is very possible that “Eliyahu” will be a revelation in which people will be enlightened to recognize the truth, and then each person will choose if he wants to do *teshuvah* or not.

QUESTION There is a nature even in every intelligent people to be skeptical and cynical about everything, even when they hear truths, and they don't want to accept what they are hearing. What does this nature come from? **ANSWER** It comes from a lack of clarity about fundamentals, and on how to understand the mode of Hashem's conduct. And generally it comes from lack of having an expansive knowledge and a lack of deep understanding about matters. Many times it also comes from *negios* (subconscious ulterior motivations) and also from unfixed *middos*.

QUESTION When a person has the sense that he must do what's worthwhile for his *neshamah* and he also feels that this is the greatest pleasure a person can have (overcoming his natural will and impulses) and how overcoming his impulses can eclipse all of the self-gratifying pleasures that a person can get pulled towards – is this feeling something which is developed gradually with time, or can a person begin to feel it right away? **ANSWER** Usually that is a gradual process which requires one

to slowly amass a lot of Torah knowledge. However there are times when a person merits to get everything at once, as with those who “acquire their World To Come in one hour” – and this can come either when a person gets a sudden gift from Hashem because of all his efforts, or he gains it though having *mesirus nefesh*.

QUESTION What does it mean that “the closer we get to Mashiach, the light of Mashiach gets stronger”? Lately I feel a strange feeling of darkness, both because of what's happening in the world and also because of darkness that I feel inside me. I don't feel the “light of Mashiach” that is shining strongly in these times. I know that it exists, but it's abstract to me, and I just believe dryly that it exists but I don't feel it. How can I feel the light of Mashiach during these times and how can I feel that it's getting stronger? **ANSWER** Connect to *p'shitus* (unquestioning loyalty to Hashem) and *Ain Oid Milvado k'pshto* (the simple and literal sense that there is truly nothing other than Hashem, as discussed in *Nefesh HaChaim shaar III*). That is the light which is above our world and above all *tumah*/impurity. When one truly feels a disconnection from the world, it is easier to feel this.

This weekly parsha sheet is based on translations by talmidim from the divrei Torah of HaRav Isamar 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 fifty *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.