

RATZON OF THE NESHAMAH

Many extra donations came pouring in for the *Mishkan*, and Moshe had to tell them to stop donating because it wasn't needed. They had such a *ratzon* to give, but much of their *ratzon* couldn't be actualized. Simply speaking, they wanted to donate, and their donations were refused. But the deeper understanding is that this, too, was actually a part of building the *Mishkan*: Their very *ratzon* was to donate more, which they couldn't actually do. This was a part that enabled the revelation of the *Shechinah* upon the *Mishkan*.

The *Mishkan* really was built from two aspects - the donations that were given, as well as the desires of all the people to donate. The actual donations for the *Mishkan* were like "Great is learning Torah, for it leads one to action" – they were needed to build the *Mishkan*. As for the donations that weren't needed to build the *Mishkan*, the extra donations, the *Ohr HaChaim* says that a miracle happened, and the amount that was originally needed now changed, and now even the extra donations were needed. The depth behind this matter is because the depth of their *ratzon* to bring more to the *Mishkan* turned into a necessary part of the *Mishkan*!

The donations to the *Mishkan* were from those who were *nediv lev*, "generous of heart." One part of their heart was actualized, in the donations that were actually used for the *Mishkan*. The part in their heart that was not actualized – their mere desire to donate to the *Mishkan*, even after it was no longer needed – remained as a *ratzon* that they had. Although these donations did not have a part in the *Shechinah* that came upon any of the vessels of the *Mishkan*, it still had its place in the *Shechinah* itself that came to the *Mishkan* and *Beis HaMikdash*.

Even more so, however, there was a higher gain from this, a higher light of the soul that they reached: the deep yearning of the soul, as described in the *posuk* "It yearns and it also pines my soul in the courtyards of Hashem." There was no greater "courtyard of Hashem" than in the place of the *Shechinah*, which was the *Mishkan*. These are yearnings of the soul which have no end, and of this it is said, *חבוקה ודבוקה בך* "Clinging and attached, to You." Hashem is infinite, and one who is connected to Hashem will thereby have a yearning for Him which is endless.

This is why the nation kept bringing donations to the *Mishkan*, much more than what was needed, because their *ratzon* for holiness had no end. This was a part of building the *Mish-*

kan, and of this it is really said *ושכנתי בתוכם* "And I will dwell amongst them" – the *Shechinah*, the revelation of Hashem Who is infinite, was revealed in the *Mishkan*, from the deep yearnings of the souls of the Jewish people to give, endlessly, out of their desire for Hashem, Who is endless.

This concept is true about the *Shechinah* which settled on the *Mishkan*, but it also applies to every Jew's soul, in every generation. Every person needs these two powers, *maaseh* action and *ratzon* will. A person mainly needs to do action, "Great is learning Torah, for it brings one to action," but in addition to the actions, one also needs deep desires and yearnings of the soul, for Hashem, for His Torah, and for love of His people, Yisrael. At times, we need to make use of the lower part of the soul, which is used to perform actions, and at times we need to make use of the higher and deeper part of the soul – the yearnings and desires of the soul. We need to give space to this deeper place in the soul to let it yearn for Hashem.

This was the depth of the exile and redemption from Egypt, which was called "*Mitzrayim*," from the word *meitzar*, "confines." There are evil confines, and there are holy confines. The evil confines refer to exile. The holy confines refer to the "actions" of the Torah which Torah learning leads to. And, as we have been explaining here, there is a deeper place in the soul than this, where there are no confines at all, just freedom. Of this it is said "There is no *ben chorin* (free person) except one who is involved in Torah study." We need to let this part of the soul free, and to let it yearn as it wishes to, for its deepest wish – to have true *d'veykus* with Hashem.

FINDING SIMCHAH IN ADAR

We ask Hashem in *Shmoneh Esrei* *ולעולם לא נבוש כי בך בטחנו* that we not become eternally shamed, "for in You, we have trusted." Here in *Shmoneh Esrei* we state that if we achieve *bitachon* (trust in Hashem) that we will not be shamed. Clearly, though, we are not yet on the level of *bitachon*, for we just mentioned in the previous part of the *berachah* that only the *tzaddikim* attain true *bitachon*. Why are we requesting this, then, if we are clearly not yet on the level of having true *bitachon* in Hashem?

The answer lies in the following. Everything is inside man. All good *middos* – as well as all bad *middos* – are inside us, being that we contain in ourselves a mixture of good and evil. When a person wants to acquire *bitachon*, or any other good quality, the superficial attitude is, to try to 'acquire' the good

trait. A person wants *bitachon*, so he feels “I need to acquire *bitachon*.” A person wants *simchah* (happiness), so his attitude is “I need to acquire *simchah*.” But there is a more inner perspective to have. In whatever we want to acquire, we need to first see how much of it we have already acquired, and how much we still have to acquire, and upon that, we can then seek to fill whatever we are missing.

For example, if a person wants to have *bitachon*, he shouldn't think “I don't have *bitachon*, so I must get *bitachon*.” Rather, he needs to see how much *bitachon* he already has revealed in his life, and then he should seek to acquire the remaining amount of *bitachon* that he still hasn't acquired yet. Why? It is because since all of the good *middos* are really found inside us – for man is all-inclusive – therefore, you already have some of it already revealed in you. You need to have that perspective. Even if you only have a small revelation of the good quality you're trying to acquire, it is still valuable. *Chazal* say that one should first give gratitude over the past before he cries to Hashem about what he needs. So first, you should see what you already have, and only after that should you ask Hashem for more. For example, if you need *parnassah*, but you are healthy, first thank Hashem for your health, and then ask for *parnassah*.

There is also a deeper understanding of this. Whenever we thank Hashem, it can only happen as a result of recognizing what we already have. In order to thank Hashem, we first need to see what we have, and admit to it. If we just say it with our mouth but we don't admit to it in our heart, then it's just superficial lip service. We have to really say it from our heart.

This concept is also known as having an “*ayin tovah*,” a “good eye.” It is also called “*someach b'chelko*,” being happy with one's lot. A person has to first focus on the positive, and only after that should he ask Hashem for what he needs. If a person is always focusing on what he's missing, he feels constantly deficient because “I'm missing this good *middah* and that good *middah*, etc,” then all he is concerned about is how to fill his void. He never stops to consider what he does have.

The correct mentality is to first focus on what you already have. This gets you used to being positive - on what you *do* have, not on what you *don't* have. Whether we need something physical or even something spiritual, first we need to realize what we do have. We should not focus on what we don't have and what we need. And actually, the more we grow in *ruchniyus*, the more we see how much we are missing and how much more we have to grow, and naturally, we grow more and more negative towards ourselves. Therefore, the real mindset to have is to first reflect on what you do have until now, and then, by thanking Hashem for these things, your gratitude will then connect you to all those things and help you realize them.

If a person can't thank Hashem for what he does have, he doesn't really recognize what he have, and he will be negative towards himself, because all he thinks about is how much he doesn't have. He places his soul in a place that always feels lacking which is damaging.

R' Chatzkel Levenshtein ז"ל (*Ohr Yechezkel, Darkei Avodah*) quotes the *Gra*, who said that we need to be *someach b'chelko* (happy with our lot) even when it comes to our *ruchniyus*. So the basis is to realize what we already have gained in our *ruchniyus*. This is a major basis we must know in our *avodas Hashem*! And it is especially relevant to those who are drawn towards sadness and negativity. When we apply this concept of being focused on the positive to our *avodas Hashem*, we will leave our pull towards negativity and instead feel more drawn after *simchah* (happiness).

There is also a deeper point to be aware of with regards to this. In any matter of *avodas Hashem*, we do not acquire a matter from “outside” ourselves. Rather, everything is really drawn from within ourselves. Everything we need to acquire is already inside us. All we have to do is expand what we already have. If someone is only focused on what he doesn't have in his *ruchniyus* since he is always thinking about the *middos* and spiritual qualities he needs to acquire, then he has never thought about all the good that is really inside him up until this point. All you need to do is to expand the good points that are already revealed to a certain extent inside you. To illustrate what we mean, Rav Shimon Shkop said that in order to love others like yourself, you can't do it by simply trying to love another person. Rather, you expand your own love which you have for yourself, and you let it extend to others. (*Hakdamah to Shaarei Yosher*).

In whatever good point we are trying to acquire, you need to first be aware that some of it is already revealed in you! You just need to keep expanding it. But it's already revealed in you somewhat, and you should not think that you need to “get” some quality or some good *middah* from outside of yourself. It is already within you, and you just need to keep opening it up more and more from within yourself. This is the constructive perspective to have towards anything you want to acquire in your Torah learning, your *kedushah*, and any of your *avodas Hashem*. You don't acquire growth from “outside” of yourself. Rather, you get it by expanding upon the good points that are already in you. All of the good points really are found in you!

These words are describing a subtle concept. Usually, when a person wants to acquire a certain quality, he will learn the words of *Chazal* about them. But the inner method is to realize that all's inside you, and you just need to expand the good that's already in you; there is nothing “new” you need to ac-

quire from the outside! This will change your entire perspective towards *avodas Hashem* the more you clarify this point and the more you actualize it.

There are people who enter into *avodas Hashem* but they become more and more disconnected from actual self-recognition, even as they are involved with becoming more serious and more devoted to better serving Hashem. They become more superficial! There are also people who immerse themselves in Torah study, and they lose their self in the process – they run away from themselves and they lose self-awareness. They become disconnected from their own self-recognition even as they are involved with pursuing *ruchniyus*. But this is not the proper way of Torah. When it comes to *avodas Hashem*, a person might think that he's trying to acquire matters that are beyond himself since he is involved in trying to grow, but he loses his own self in the process. However, if a person uses the inner approach here, he truly experiences the inner world contained in *avodas Hashem*.

An even deeper point is to know the following. In our soul, there are parts that are revealed to us and parts that are hidden from us. Our good *middos* are partially revealed and partially concealed. If we want acquire good *middos*, we need to expand what has already been revealed, and that is how we will bring out the rest that is concealed. This is what we explained so far. But the concealed good parts in our soul are not just our good *middos* that we haven't yet revealed. In the very depths of our soul, there is nothing but the actual purity itself of our soul. All perfection is contained there – in the “*neshamah*” (Divine soul) that is within us, which is called *cheilek eloka mimaal*, “a portion of G-d above.” Therefore, since we all possess a *neshamah*, all of the great qualities are already contained deep within in us. (The *Nefesh HaChaim* writes part of the *neshamah* is present in the thoughts of the brain).

So the first point of all this is that a person needs to realize, that all good *middos* are already in him. Practically speaking, one has to be thankful for whatever good he already has. Then, he has to realize that whatever else he needs to acquire, it is also inside him, and he just needs to expand the good that is already there. We have discussed these two points, and now we will explain the third point we need to know, which is to realize the innermost point of the soul. In the very inner depths of the soul, all perfection is contained! There, there is absolute perfection in our Torah and *middos*. But, it is dormant, and we need to reveal it from its potential state and activate it.

We feel ‘poor’ on the outside, but we really have a million dollars inside our “bank.” If only the “pauper” would be informed that there are millions of dollars stored somewhere in his house. You just have to recognize it by getting in touch

with it. We have good *middos* and bad *middos* in ourselves – all of them. From the perspective of our *nefesh hebeheimis*, we feel lowly towards ourselves because we see how more we need to improve and acquire. Our *avodah* is that we must thank Hashem for the good we have revealed and seek to expand the good that is already in us. But the higher aspect is to utilize the perspective coming from our very essence of the soul, our *neshamah*, which is the point of perfection in us.

We thank Hashem every day for returning to us our pure soul, when we say *Elokai Neshamah*. A person might say this for seventy years but he doesn't reflect on this concept. Why do we keep thanking Hashem every day for returning to us our soul? It is not just to say thanks to Hashem. It is because it is so fundamental to realize that we are a pure soul in our essence. It's unbelievable – a person might go his whole life and say *Elokai Neshamah* every day, yet the life he lives does not reflect this at all. A person might live his whole life and never realize he is really a pure *neshamah*.

All perfection is contained in our soul's essence. This gives you a whole new perspective towards your self-awareness. Of course, we still have a body and an animalistic level of the soul, and we still have bad *middos* in us. All the bad *middos* are indeed in us. But that's only one way of looking at it. If we focus on the fact that we are a body with base desires and bad *middos*, we view ourselves with a lowly perspective. The real “*Modeh Ani*” is when we say it with awareness that we have a *neshamah*.

We still have an *avodah* to work on ourselves and improve ourselves, of course, but we need to do our *avodah* from the perspective of our *neshamah* – to realize how wealthy we are! It is called being *'someiach b'chelko'*. It is to recognize oneself with the understanding that one is a perfect *neshamah*!

We are in the month of Adar, days of *simchah* (joy). We have three ways of how to reach *simchah*, as we have so far explained. 1) The first perspective we explained is that whenever you wish of gaining more qualities, you should realize how much of those good qualities you already have in you. Practically speaking, a person should take a pen and paper and write down whatever good qualities he already has, so he can learn to appreciate what he already has. This is a basic source of *simchah* which can be accessed by any person and on any level. 2) A deeper level of *simchah* is that when you want to gain more spiritual qualities, your work is not to “acquire” those qualities from outside of yourself, but rather to expand the good that is already in you. For example, if you want to acquire a good *middah* of a good quality (i.e. *bitachon*), realize that you already have some of the level that you want. When you think into this, it can provide you with an even more profound degree of *simchah*. 3) The highest perspective you can have is

to realize you are a *neshamah* (a Divine soul), which is called “*cheilek eloka mi-maal*,” a “portion of G-d above” - which contains all inner wealth possible.

When you reveal this joy in yourself, you will feel like one who has converted to Judaism who is like a person who has been born anew, like a new being. With this deep perspective, you will also stop comparing yourself with others and instead just realize that you are a pure *neshamah*, which contains all perfection. When you dwell in it, you live in a world of *ohr* (light). A life of *neshamah* means to connect yourself with the spiritual world, and on a deeper level, it is to connect yourself with the Creator.

These words are not merely inspirational ideas or an intellectual understanding of something. Rather, it is a perspective to view life with; it is a certain self-awareness. It is about recognizing reality as it is. When a person lives with this attitude, he enters into what is written “*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*”

Now we return to the question we started out with. On one hand, one must aspire for *bitachon* in Hashem and ask Hashem that he be among those who truly trust in Hashem – as we ask in *Shemoneh Esrei* וְשִׂים חֵלְקֵנוּ עִמָּהֶם. At the same time, recognize that you are a *neshamah* – therefore, all good and all perfection is really contained deep down in your essence. This we express in the words וְלֵעוֹלָם לֹא נִבוֹשׁ כִּי בְךָ בִטְחוֹנוּ.

Becoming aware to these three aspects can cause a major overhaul in your life and it helps you enter the inner, spiritual world. Of course, there are always ups and downs, there are always times when we fail, but generally, this is the perspective you can carry with you that will lead you to a truly spiritual life, and you can keep going with it until you

reach the complete bond with Hashem. (תפילה 116 עבודה חיצונית ופנימית שמחה)

SIMCHAH

QUESTION What does it mean that a person has to *someiach b'chelko* (happy with his portion) even when it comes to his *ruchniyus*? If a person isn't aspiring to reach great levels, then why should he be happy with himself? Just like when it comes to money and other physical assets, a person who has 100 will always want 200 and he isn't happy with what he has, isn't it the same with *ruchniyus*, that no matter how much a person has accomplished spiritually, he can't be satisfied with himself because he always wants to go higher?

ANSWER Being *someiach b'chelko* is not merely a concept that one needs to be intellectually aware of. It is not a calculation or an equation to make. Rather, it means to feel an actual *connection* to what you have so far reached. When you become connected to what you have reached so far, you become connected to your *havayah* (your very inner reality), according to your current level. And there, all other calculations fall away. Compare this to a child who is given a small present, who is the happiest person in the world with his little present. As long as a person doesn't connect himself to what he has so far reached in his *ruchniyus*, he can only be aware of it intellectually, and it will be very hard for him to be happy with himself. A person needs a lot of strong *emunah* to believe that this is what Hashem wants from him, to reach whatever he has so far reached in his *ruchniyus*, and that this is his allotted portion which Hashem has given him, at least for now. And sometimes, even if you are merely intellectually aware of your spiritual accomplishments, you can also find happiness in these thoughts as well.

QUESTION I am full of idealism and aspirations to grow. I am very ambitious to always want to grow higher. Yet all my aspirations don't amount to anything, and I'm always full of fears and anxieties because of it. I don't feel serene and calm,

I just always want to grow higher. And I never really get anywhere, but I keep aspiring, and the cycle repeats. I also don't know what I should be learning and how to learn in a way that makes me calm and happy and serene while also applying myself and fulfilling goals. I can't seem to strike the balance. (1) Why does all of my idealism create anxiety for me, if we are supposed to want to grow higher in *ruchniyus*? (2) Which of the “4 elements” in the soul does this all come from? What do I need to do to help myself? (3) How can I help my learning?

ANSWER (1) This is happening to you because you keep aspiring, but you are not connected to what you have currently. This doesn't allow you to feel any *menuchah* (serenity). Aspirations for more growth cause the *nefesh* (soul) to be constantly “moving” inside of himself, and when a person is always on the move, his serenity becomes depleted. The more you become connected to what you are doing, the less anxious you will be about all your aspirations. It would be important for you to have some time every day when you connect to your personal *cheilek* (to what you love doing).

(2) This is all coming from a dominance of the *yesod aish* (element of fire). You need to write down what you have so far achieved until today, and then be happy with it, allowing yourself to become connected to your achievements. You should do this every day. For example, allow yourself to become connected to your abilities of intellect and thinking. (3) Primarily, learn Gemara with *iyun* (in-depth analysis), starting from the Gemara and down to the actual *halachah*.

QUESTION How does a person reach *simchah* (joy)? There seems to be so many conditions that are needed in order to find true *simchah*.

ANSWER It is a long way to reach true *simchah*, but one has to be happy already now with whatever he has reached (*someiach b'chelko*). One also needs to be happy with even the smallest point that there is to be happy about, for one can always find *ohr Hashem* (revelation of Hashem) that shines in even the smallest point that makes him happy.

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