

"ONE THING I SEEK"

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT YOU WANT IN LIFE?

The days of Elul are here, and a new year is before us, approaching. There is no Jewish soul during these days who isn't inspired at least on a minimal level. Every Jew has some feeling, at least a tiny feeling, to do *teshuvah* (repentance), to change.

Let us try to understand a bit more about this matter, so that we can have a clearer and deeper understanding of it.

Everyone has many things in his life that he wants. A husband wants his wife to be a good wife to him, a wife wants to have a good husband, and they both want good children, good health, ample livelihood, and a comfortable home. Each person has many more things to add onto this list as well. Now let's come to a person and ask him: "Now that you've listed all these things that you want, from all of these 50 things you wrote down, what do you want the most?"

There's a saying in Israel going around, "*Ha'Ikar, Berius*" – "The main thing, is health." A 20-year old isn't concerned about health, though. Only when people get older do they start to worry about their health. And if they have good health, what, then, do people think about? Happiness.

The truth is, however, that even if a person would have both complete health and happiness, he

would be in a lot of danger [spiritually speaking]. Why? Because he would grow complacent and feel, "I have everything!"

Every person, as we said, has many desires. But what is the main thing that a person wants in life? One needs to think about this at times. It's possible for a person to live 70 or 80 years yet not even once did he think, "What is the thing I truly want, more than anything, in my life?"

Of course, a person might give a quick answer to this. But it won't be truthful. It is not a question that you can answer so quickly. It needs more than half a year's worth of time to answer!

If Elijah the Prophet would reveal himself to a person and say to him: "Hashem has decreed that whatever you asked for, will happen. You can now ask one thing, as in the verse "One thing I seek from Hashem, that is which I sought" - what would a person ask? That his oldest daughter should become engaged? That the bank shouldn't put his house in foreclosure? What would a person ask for...?

As long as a person hasn't yet thought about this, he remains unclear about the main point of life. If he is unclear about it, he is like a person who has many important businesses yet he is unaware of what his main one is. He will invest

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most of his money in the businesses that are less important, and the main business will be financially neglected for the most part. His main business will surely fail with this approach – clear and simple.

So a person first needs to become clear what the main point of life is that he is living for. The question is: How much is a person willing to invest, in order to figure out what he truly wants in life?

When a person goes for a blood test and the results don't come back good, he goes back for more blood tests, until they tell him, "We see that something here is abnormal. But we don't know exactly what it is. Maybe go to a certain doctor for this, Dr. X. He is an expert and he will almost definitely know what the problem is." In such a situation, a person would be prepared to spend much money in order to find out what the illness is in his body. It is directly affecting his health and his entire life.

Now: How much is a person willing to invest in knowing what he truly wants in life?

If a person is sure that his main interest in life is money, a nice house, a nice car, or getting lots of honor, then he also has a problem to deal with. It is clear that such a person is living for a purpose that is clearly not the purpose of life, and he will have to deal with this problem.

The first thing, then, that a person needs to do, is to try to figure out to himself what the main thing is that he wants in life. After that he can begin to understand on what level his *Avodas Hashem* is.

Before a person figures this out, chances are that he is living in a totally delusional realm. He

might be a person who has regularly fixed times for learning Torah, for an hour at night or more; he might regularly give *tzedakah* and try to be a *baal chessed* and to host guests, and many other wonderful things. But what does he really want in life? It is not *tzedakah*, hosting guests, or the hour of learning Torah he has every night. Those things rank at either #9, #17, or #36 on his list of what he considers "the most important things that I want"....

What is the main point in life that a person wants more than anything else?

A BIG SURPRISE ABOUT THE REWARD IN THE WORLD TO COME

We all *Baruch Hashem* do the *mitzvos*, for the most part. We make effort to *daven*, to put on *tefillin*, to wear *tallis* and *tzitzis*, to keep Shabbos, etc. What will be our reward for all of this? We will be paid back with spiritual reward. But if a person doesn't care too much for the spiritual, he can't enjoy the reward for all his *mitzvos*! He will come upstairs to the High Heavenly Court and there is nothing physical there, only spirituality. But that is not what he wants, so he will remain there with nothing.

If a person wanted a nice car more than anything else, after 120 when he goes upstairs, with millions of *mitzvos* at his side, he will be told: "Here is payment for all of the millions of *mitzvos* that you did. Here is your greatest wish: the new car which came out this year." Understandably, he will not want to get into that car, realizing that he has lost his entire spiritual reward! This is what is meant in the verse, "*A man according to his praise.*"

This is not some kind of joke, and it is not a

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mere thought of *mussar*. If anyone is working at a job and he finds out that he will not get paid at the end of the month, what would he do...? What happens if a person finds out after 70 years of living that he will not get any payment for anything he did? Does anyone have a guaranteed 'insurance' in the World To Come that he will get paid for all the *mitzvos* he did?

Compare this to a child who did something good, so his father buys him a new car as a gift. What can the child do with the car? Only after 16 years old can he get a permit to drive. Right now, he can't do anything with the car. Hashem is loyal to pay back anyone with reward, but who says that the person when he gets upstairs will be able to use the reward that was given to him?

Imagine a person who works for someone for a month and then at the end of the month, he is given a pair of glasses as his payment. He doesn't need glasses, he can see quite fine. This is not considered payment to him, because he doesn't need the glasses.

We all *Baruch Hashem* make effort to do the right actions, each person on his own level. But is it clear to any of us what we want? If a person wanted what they will give to him in the Next World, he can enjoy it as reward. But if this isn't what he really wanted in his life, he cannot enjoy his reward in Heaven, because this is not what he wanted. *Chas v'shalom*, it can be the realization of the verse, "*He pays back his enemies....to destroy them.*"

KNOWING WHAT YOU REALLY WANT IN LIFE

Every person needs to figure out for himself if Hashem is satisfied with his actions or not, and

this is a very important issue to know. But that is a second question to know. The first question one needs to answer for himself is: "What do I want from *myself*?"

Here is an example from the physical world to illustrate what we mean. Sometimes there is a boy who is 19, 20, 21 or 23, and he has no idea what trade he wants to learn. To our chagrin, his parents do not really understand his soul and what he really needs, and what his true interests are. A year goes by and he still hasn't decided what he wants to do with his life; perhaps he has some options now, but he hasn't yet decided. He learns about a certain trade for another half a year, then he stops, thinking that it's better to switch to a different field. The parents are at a loss of what to do. They are prepared to spend all of the money in the world, just so that their son should become focused and learn something. But the boy doesn't even know what he wants from himself.

In the physical world, it is clear that if a person doesn't know what he wants, he won't be able to make something out of his life. How can it be, then, that a person can remain unclear about the entire meaning of his life altogether?!

Of course, a person can say: "I want Torah, mitzvos, and good deeds." But is that really what the person wants? Or does he want other things than this too [which he considers more important]? A person might do good deeds, learn Torah, and keep the mitzvos, and surely his deeds are important, but what does he really want in his life?

Dovid HaMelech testified about himself what he wanted: "*And as for me, closeness to Hashem,*

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to me, is good."¹ There is a well-known question: Was it only 'good' for Dovid HaMelech? Is it 'not good' for everyone else? The answer is: No! Most people do not want closeness with Hashem! Therefore, for them, it is not called "good". Most people, if you would come to them ask them if they want to have the reward of dwelling all day with Hashem (*as Dovid HaMelech says*) and nothing else, they will say: "I don't want the *mitzvos*, or the reward."

A story is told over about one of the *tzaddikim* who was asked to be shown what Gehinnom (*hell*) is and what Gan Eden (*paradise*) is. They showed him a person sitting with a *shtender* and learning. They said to him: "This is Gan Eden, and it is also Gehinnom." He didn't understand what this meant; either it's Gan Eden, or Gehinnom, but how could it be both? They explained it to him: "It is very simple. If a person loved to learn Torah, this will be Gan Eden for him. If he did not love to learn, for him, this is Gehinnom."

Gehinnom is experienced by one who never connected to the heavenly realm, and he remains connected to this lower realm. What happens the moment he dies? If all he wanted his whole life was money, a car, a nice home, and other worldly desires, what happens the moment he dies? He has nothing to do when he goes upstairs. He will have no car and no house there, nothing. That is his Gehinnom – the fact that none of his desires can be actualized.

It is certainly possible that a person learned Torah (*Baruch Hashem*), put on *tefillin* every day, gave *tzedakah* and hosted guests, but in his heart, he wanted other things entirely. He doesn't even

understand what the issue is. He would come to his Rav and ask: "What sin did I commit? Where is it written that I did anything wrong?" But it doesn't have to be written anywhere – rather, he's in a situation that is entirely the wrong place to be in.

This is not another side issue, but a root issue, of where a person is living from, what he wants, what he breathes from morning until night, what interests him, what he is involved with in his life.

Every person has *ruchniyus* (*spirituality*), but the question is, how much percentage it takes up in his life, and how much of a percentage of balance there is between his spiritual side of life and his material side of life. Where is he found? Is he 99% found in the material, and only 1% in the spiritual? Or the opposite? Or are the percentages different?

A person gets up in the morning, and until he goes to sleep at night he is thinking about the material side to life, such as making money and his health. Only at night does he grab an hour to learn Torah (*in the best scenario, that is*). If he is worried about his spiritual situation, he uses even more time for Torah study, but since he only cares for his material situation, he doesn't.

There are some people who want to feel good about themselves, so they give *maaser* (*a tenth of their earnings*). Once I was speaking to a wealthy Jew, who entered into a million-dollar business deal. I asked him: "For what reason do you need this?" He answered, "So that I'll be able to give *maaser* from all the profit."

I said to him: "You didn't do it to give *maaser*. You did it because you wanted to make millions of dollars. But to quiet your subconscious, you

¹ Tehillim 73:28

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tell yourself that you'll give away a tenth of it for Hashem. If you would have really entered this investment for the sake of giving *tzedakah*, for Hashem, why are you only giving away a tenth of the profits? Why not 100% of the profit? Obviously it must be because you are really doing it to become a millionaire. Your heart isn't at peace with this, though, because deep down you know it stems from a lust for money. So you are trying to 'bribe' Hashem, by giving away a tenth of the profit.

"But this won't help you. Hashem knows exactly the reason why you entered this business endeavor. It is not because you don't have what to eat and you need to support your family, or because you really want to give it all to *tzedakah* and increase the honor of Heaven. It is simply a desire for more money. Giving *maaser* from it is just the excuse."

The deepest, most fundamental question in life for each person is: "What do I really want?"

If a person answers that what he really wants is *ruchniyus* (*spirituality*), he should think of the following: If that is really what he wants, then why doesn't it take up his mind the entire day? If a person has an affidavit in the bank which he doesn't succeed in finishing by the end of the month, he thinks about it the entire day. If a person has a child who is ill, Heaven forbid, he searches for the right doctors and healthcare and it occupies his mind the entire day. Not because it's 'written' anywhere to do so, but because this is what he wants.

If a person claims that he really wants *ruchniyus*, he should think about it for most of the hours of the day, besides for anything else necessary that he needs to think about, which he needs to

take care of. In the end of day, there are other things which also must occupy our mind, due to the various responsibilities of life. But in spite of that reality, there is one main point which you should want with all your heart.

RUCHNIYUS SHOULD BE REAL TO YOU

Each and every one of us wants, with Hashem's help, to merit a good, sweet year. Who doesn't? On Rosh HaShanah night, everyone is blessing each other to have a *shanah tovah u'mesukah*, a good sweet year. But does anyone think that the year will suddenly become transformed into a good, sweet year, just because his friend said so?

Let's imagine for ourselves a person standing in front of the Heavenly court in judgment, and it is decreed upon him that he must die. His friend comes to him and says to him, "May you have a happy, sweet new year." Will anyone think this will help?

The problem is that we have gotten used to a lifestyle where the spiritual side of life is ambiguous and unreal to us.

When two people lift a glass of wine together and declare, "*L'chaim*" (*To life*), does that really mean that we are given a new year of life? How exactly does that work? When we are dealing with the spiritual, suddenly things seem unclear to us.

Think for a moment: If a person owes a thousand dollars to his friend, and he comes to him and says "May it be the will of Hashem, as if I have paid you", will his friend accept that? Will it solve anything? No! Why is it then that when it comes to the spiritual side of life, suddenly people believe that eating all of the *simanim* will

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make everything good? We eat different foods on Rosh HaShanah night, confident that we will merit a good year, in their merit – but where do we get this from?

Our words here are aiming at something deeper of what the intention should be in this custom, and not G-d forbid to nullify the custom of eating these foods. The point we are driving at here is that we have gotten used to being imaginative and unrealistic about the spiritual world, without approaching it as real.

A person may think that just because he has done certain customs on Rosh HaShanah night, everyone at the table will have a good year! But he did the same thing last year, and it didn't work. His blessing didn't 'work' for everyone. It is unrealistic to assume that the coming year won't have any troubles in it, and that everyone will have it all good and pleasant, in their health, livelihood, etc.

The point here is very basic and fundamental: *Ruchniyus* (spirituality) has to become a simple reality in our lives, no less real than the material side of life. If *ruchniyus* would be a clear reality to us, our desires for *ruchniyus* would be realistic, in turn.

But when *ruchniyus* is cloudy, unknown, and unclear to us, when it is not tangible to us, this causes us to be immersed in the material side of life, and *ruchniyus* to us is then limited to all kinds of various *segulos* (spiritual charms). A person will think, for example, that if he gives a fifth of his earnings to *tzedakah*, says certain *tefillos* on *Motzei Shabbos* and also gives some *tzedakah* to *Vaad HaRabbonim*, then, everything will be fine. But he is not living this *ruchniyus* in the same

way he experiences the material side of his life.

CHANGING OUR LIFE

Each of us has already been through many Rosh HaShanahs. Does it help anyone, having been through Rosh HaShanah many times?

Maybe you'll say: "We have good hopes for this year. We hope this year will be a better one."

One year, about one or two days after Rosh HaShanah, I was walking in the street and I thought to myself: "The world looks exactly as it did, when it was the 28th of Elul. Nothing has changed at all!" Does anyone think that after Rosh HaShanah anything will change? Where will this sudden change come from?

Now let's come and think about this: We know that life continues. We aren't little children anymore who are 2 or 3 years old. Do we want the coming year to look like the past year? Or do we want to change one day?

If a person has a business that isn't making any profit, and his wife comes and tells him, "Enough. This business used to be doing well, and it seemed profitable. But now you need to spend 2 or 3 years learning a different trade, so that we can support our family, with Hashem's help." In the same way, we must change the entire direction of our life. It is not one detail we have to change, but our entire life.

In simple words, a person needs to reach the conclusion of what he really, truly wants. If he discovers that he really wants material comfort, he must change the direction of his life and desire the spiritual. And if he says that he really wants *ruchniyus*, he should examine his life and see if everything he wants throughout the day is

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matching up with his desire for *ruchniyus*.

No one can succeed 100% in changing, because no one in the world is perfect. But it is always upon a person to keep checking himself to see if he is getting closer to the goal of life, or if his actions are contradicting the goals which we are supposed to want.

First, we need to clarify what we want, and after that we can begin to examine our actions. A person gets up in the morning and says *Modeh Ani*— does he really want to say it, or not? If he eats before *davening*, does that match up with what he really wants in life? If he learns Torah, does this fit in with what he wants or not? One can take apart all aspects of his schedule and keep seeing if they fit his spiritual goals in life or not. The point is to become aware of what you truly want in life, and to then inspect all your deeds and see if they are aligned with your goal.

The point of this is not to start changing everything you do, from this day onward. Rather, there are some things which require quick change, and some things which you will only be able to gradually improve in. Compare this to a person who has a house in need of repair, and he doesn't have enough money to get all the repairs done. He must sit down and make a list of what's most important to fix first, then what's second to most important, etc. Every year he can do another repair, in order of preference. Slowly as each year passes, the house can get more and more repaired.

DEALING WITH THE TRUTH ABOUT LIFE

If a person doesn't clarify to himself what he wants in his life, he has no reason to live!

Once there was a Jew who passed away on Erev Yom Kippur, and when the Brisker Rav heard about it, he said, "He was born a fool, and he died a fool." Someone there who was close to him (*perhaps it was one of his children*) exclaimed: "Rebbi! Of all times to speak *lashon hora*! It's Erev Yom Kippur!" The Rav zt"l responded: "You don't understand what I said. I tried finding merit for this person, who led a sinful life. The only single merit that I could find about this person was that he was born on Erev Yom Kippur as a fool, and he remained foolish until he died, so there is no complaint we can have on him."

But does anyone think that this would be a true way to live? Is that how we should lead our lives? Would our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov, and the rest of the leaders throughout the generations, live this way? Have the times changed so much that people now consider priorities to be secondary, and what was secondary has now become priority? Has everything become completely upside-down?

This is not an inspirational lecture for Rosh HaShanah, nor is it a program. I am presenting to you a very simple question which each person needs to ask himself: "What do I really want? Am I taking the right direction in my life?"

The fact that most people don't want to think about this and that there is almost no one who speaks about this publicly doesn't show us that it's not true. It is the truth and there is nowhere to run to from it. It is as unpleasant as thinking about the day of death, which no one likes to think about, yet that doesn't help us evade death. People die even if they never think about it; it is useless to avoid thinking about it. The same is true for our question of what we are living for.

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The issue is if we are truly prepared to deal with the truth in life. One needs to ask himself: "Do I believe that there is a Creator of the world, or not? Yes. Do I believe He gave the Torah at Har Sinai? Yes. Do I believe that there is an eternity? Yes. Do I believe that there is no physicality in the eternal world? Yes. Do I believe that in the eternal world there is only One alone – the Creator of the world, together with His Torah? Yes. Is my life really aligned with all of this?"

Take apart all the parts of your life, bit by bit, and inspect them truthfully, to see if they are matching up to the truths you recognize. If one hasn't yet made this clarification of the truth, he should begin to do so, starting today. Sit and learn the *sefarim* that deal with this topic, or speak to Torah scholars who are knowledgeable in this topic, those who know what the truth is. But whatever option you choose, begin to do it, immediately! Now!

We all know that there is a truth, that there is a Creator of the world. The question is if a person is prepared to align his lifestyle with this truth. We live in a world where there are many well-known truths that all people know about, yet many live in a way that is totally opposite than this knowledge. The world today is not lacking in this knowledge; it is not found at the other side of the Sambatyon. Most people know

the truths, but they behave differently.

When Rosh HaShanah arrives, the Rav in the shul might get up and say a nice idea for Rosh HaShanah. Everyone will praise the *derasha* and say how good it was. But what did the idea help? Perhaps everyone listening fulfills a *mitzvah* of learning Torah for two minutes. But did it change anyone? Did a person become a different person from listening to the *Dvar Torah* he heard, as the Rambam says, that one who does *teshuvah* is not the same person anymore and he becomes an entirely new being?

I hope that you understand that I did not say here anything new, not even one thing. So if they are not my own novel words, you should agree to act upon them. Don't do it because I said to, but because each of you alone knows it on your own.

May we merit with the help of Hashem, each of us, to align our lifestyle with the goal and purpose of life.

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