

ACHREI MOS - STRIVING FOR CLOSENESS WITH HASHEM

THE DEATHS OF NADAV AND AVIHU

In *Parashas Achrei Mos*, the Torah says that the two sons of Aharon [Nadav and Avihu] died in their “drawing close in front of Hashem”.

The *Ramchal* in the beginning of *Mesillas Yescharim* writes that the true self-completion of life is to reach *d'veykus* (attachment) with Hashem, and that this is what Dovid *HaMelech* said, “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” The purpose of Creation, on a general level, and the purpose of man specifically, who is the crown of Creation, is to reach closeness to Hashem.

This is what Nadav and Avihu died for. They reached what is described in the verse “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good*”, and since they had now reached this purpose, they left the world.

WHEN DOES CLOSENESS COME?

If we take a look at the world only superficially, we will only see a myriad amount of creations, many various actions and movements which exist. But if we reflect on our view of the world, and we think into the words of our *Chazal* that describe this, we see that there is nothing for us to do here on this world other than to reach closeness with Hashem. All creations, and man especially, exist in order to bring the world to its purpose, which is that all of Creation should reach closeness with Hashem.

Closeness with Hashem, according to the Sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair that is explained in *sefer Mesillas Yescharim*, is not reached until the lev-

el that is called *kedushah* (holiness), which the *Ramchal* describes as a constant connection in the Creator, without interruption. It seems to us at first glance that the order of our *avodah* is Torah, then *zehirus* (watchfulness), *zerizus* (alacrity), etc., whereas *d'veykus* and closeness with Hashem can only be reached at the very end of our ladder. That is what it seems when we take a look at *sefer Mesillas Yescharim*, which delineates the steps of our ladder of growth.

However, there is a deeper, truer perspective. When you draw close to something, it doesn't mean you are situated at that level. Closeness means that you have gotten closer from where you are now. The very movement of our life must be towards closeness with Hashem, until we truly reach Him – as is in the verse, “*Return, Yisrael, until Hashem your G-d.*” At that highest level, a person joins the recognition of *tzaddikim*, who have *d'veykus* and closeness with Hashem. But getting closer to Hashem means that one is directing his entire life towards Hashem.

One's deeds need to be mainly directed towards closeness with Hashem. Although there are always spiritual failures, one needs to always have his deeds directed towards this goal, to get closer, and closer, and closer.

THE TORAH'S LIGHT ENABLES A

To explain this in deeper terms, there is the root of our *emunah*, which is to believe with complete faith in the existence of Hashem that He is the Creator of all beings, and there is also the “light” of Hashem, which reveals His presence to us. Light serves

to reveal the presence of something, and the revelation of Hashem on this world is called His “light”. This is referring to the Torah, which is called “*Torah Ohr*”, “Torah of light”. The Torah is here to reveal the One who created this world.

When one has a superficial perspective, he might think that the light found in the Torah is for a purpose unto itself, and that it exists only to reveal the light of the Torah itself. But this is a subtle way of separating the Torah from Hashem. The entire concept of exertion in Torah study is to be connected with Hashem, the “Hashem and the Torah are one”. The Torah reveals the existence of the Creator and therefore it is called “Torah of light”, because it reveals Hashem.

Based upon the above, we can now understand what is meant by the order of steps laid out in *Mesillas Yescharim*, that Torah brings one to *zehirus*, and *zehirus* brings one to *zerizus*, etc. It does not simply mean that a person who acquires the level of *zehirus*, can then proceed to acquire the level of *zerizus*, etc. Rather, it means that the Torah is what brings a person to each of these levels. Thus, the Torah that brings a person to the level of *zehirus* is the Torah that brings a person to *zerizus*, and which brings a person to the level of *nekiyus*, etc.

The Torah is a light, the light of Hashem, which serves to reveal Hashem. It is the light of the Torah which brings a person to *zehirus*, and therefore even in *zehirus* there can be a revelation of Hashem. So *zehirus* is not just the “level” of *zehirus* – it is part of the steps in reaching closeness with

Hashem. That means that even in the beginning of one's way, the Torah's light can accompany him and bring him to all of the levels he needs to acquire. A hint to this is that the word "*zehirus*" is from the word "*zohar*" (illumination), alluding to the Torah's light contained even in this first level.

If a person simply wants to gain the trait of *zehirus*, he may succeed in gaining this trait, but it will not be on a deep level. He will simply know how to become more careful which animals can do also. So a person may have acquired the level of *zehirus*, but only on the level of the "animal" soul. But when a person reaches *zehirus* due to the Torah's light which brings him to *zehirus*, this is not the *zehirus* of animals. This is light of the Torah! It is this *zehirus* which is from the word "*zohar*" (light) which can bring him to the higher levels, of *zerizus* through *kedushah*.

THE TWO VIEWS TOWARDS LIFE

Whether or not a person is at the beginning of "the ladder", or surely if he is in the middle, there are two ways of how he may view life.

(There is a superficial view towards life, which we are not bothering to explain here. This is when a person doesn't even yet recognize that the purpose of life is closeness to Hashem, which is palpable recognition of the Creator.)

Here we are beginning from a point where a person understands the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim*, that the purpose of life is to have pleasure in Hashem, and that true self-perfec-

tion is *d'veykus* in Hashem. After this recognition, there are two different ways of how you view life, from then onward.

Do you have the end goal of life already at the start of your way? When you work on keeping the *mitzvos*, working on your *middos*, speaking of the words of the Torah and learning it Torah in-depth – is your goal to get to the closeness with Hashem at the end? That is one way to live life – to have the end goal of life accompanying you in your thoughts, as you act. Your eventual goal is to reach closeness with Hashem at the end.

A second way to view life, which is deeper, is that closeness to Hashem is not only at the end. Rather, in any level you are at, you can find closeness to Hashem, because you are becoming closer and closer to Hashem, with each stage that you progress. Of course, this does not mean that you have reached the final level of closeness with Hashem. That only comes at the end. But you can keep getting closer and closer, with each level that you advance.

In the second path, closeness to Hashem (palpable recognition of Him) doesn't only come at the end. It is already accessed somewhat even in the beginning of your path. Rather, you can keep accessing it, in any level you are found at and working hard to acquire. You are hoping to reach the final level, which is the ultimate level of the closeness, but even in the meantime, you are directing your life closer and closer towards recognizing Hashem, more and more.

When this is the perspective, we can uncover the depth of life.

HOW WE VIEW DAVENING?

A person is working hard at learning Torah, or he is working hard at strictly keeping the *mitzvos*, or he tries hard to do *chessed*, or in other areas of *ruchniyus*. But throughout the day, we have three times in which we *daven* and speak with Hashem, openly.

Now, if a person is trying to acquire the level of *zehirus*, let's say, and he wants to become more careful in his observance of *mitzvos*, and he is about to *daven*, he might be careful to say *Kerias Shema* and the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* with full concentration; as well as to concentrate in the other areas of *davening*, as explained in *Shulchan Aruch* and in the *poskim*.

But when a person works hard at the deeper part of life (namely, the goal of becoming closer to Hashem), his entire structure changes. He is working hard at whatever spiritual level he is trying to acquire, and along with this, he is also [cognizant that he is] speaking with Hashem three times a day during *davening*.

It is clear that closeness with Hashem is not some far-off high level, but a level that he can keep feeling more and more. He can keep recognizing the reality of Hashem, more, and more, and more.

AWARENESS OF HASHEM WHEN LEARNING TORAH

With regards to learning Torah, the Chazon Ish writes that "the main thing is to know before Whom you are exerting." When a person learns Torah and he is exerting himself, he may just be doing this for the reward, and it is certainly true that Hashem rewards everyone, but this is not the true, inner kind of exertion in learning Torah. But if he is having inner

and truer exertion, then the more he exerts himself in learning, the more he recognizes what is meant by “before Whom you are exerting.”

When a person dedicates his heart to Torah learning, and not just with the physical exertion of the body and with the amount of time he spends learning (which is certainly important, but it is only the external part of learning Torah), he becomes more aware of Hashem’s Presence as he is learning.

When a person merits that a bit of the gates of *daas* (inner knowledge) become opened to him, and he sees the world with a clear lens, he recognizes that physical exertion in Torah learning and diligence in Torah learning is not everything. *Chazal* say that “a person cannot learn Torah except in a place where his heart desires”. Learning Torah depends on how much one has a desire in his heart, the will, to learn Torah. In a place where a person’s heart desires, there is a strong will to learn Torah, and a person can exert himself in Torah with his heart.

If a person’s entire will is to know Torah and to comprehend Torah, this is but one part of learning Torah. But once the inner will for Torah becomes opened in the person – the love for the Torah, and a will to do Hashem’s will – the Torah then becomes absorbed in one’s innards. The desire for learning Torah then intensifies in the person, and then a person becomes greatly aware of before Whom he is learning Torah, and every time he learns Torah it will be with a sense of renewal. It won’t be like yesterday’s learning. The greater one exerts himself in Torah, the greater awareness one can reach of “before Whom you are exerting.”

When this is a person’s perspective towards life, in any level he is at, whether he is at the Torah that brings a person to *zehirus*, or the Torah that brings a person to *zerizus*, etc. or any of the higher rungs in the ladder – his sense of recognition of the Creator becomes sharper.

The barometer that measures this is what a person’s *davening* looks like. When a person is in *Shemoneh Esrei*, he is “standing before the King”, but if a person doesn’t feel that he is now more clearly standing in front of Hashem, it is a sign that his Torah learning and self-improvement are all being done on an external, superficial level. But if a person has a clearer sense of standing before Hashem as he *davens Shemoneh Esrei*, it is a sign that he is more aware of Hashem in his Torah learning and in his other areas of *avodah*.

This is because learning Torah with an awareness of Hashem’s Presence will cause a person to feel Hashem’s Presence with much more clarity during prayer.

FINDING CLOSENESS WITH HASHEM

Closeness to Hashem is therefore not limited to the final levels of *avodas Hashem*. The *Ramchal* in *Mesillas Yesharim*, when describing the level of *chassidus* (piety), says that it means to talk to Hashem “as a man talks to his friend”, and this is certainly a higher and more inner level of closeness with Hashem. But even before that level, in the beginning of a person’s way, one must be cognizant of getting closer to Hashem throughout his Torah learning, his performance of *mitzvos*, in his *middos* work, and in opening his positive spiritual emotions, etc. All of these areas of *avodah* open another

level of closeness with Hashem, and another level, and another level.

Therefore, in whatever level you are at, the focus should not be entirely on what you are trying to acquire, because you must also be cognizant of getting closer to Hashem while you are in the process of acquiring your next more refined level. If you focus only on whatever level you are trying to acquire, you may gain that level, but only superficially, and without reaching the greater purpose.

For example, we can sometimes see that people work on themselves in the areas of *chessed*, or in guarding their speech, or in having a good eye toward others, etc. and various other qualities to acquire, which are all true. But even when people improve in these areas, they don’t necessarily open their hearts to the light of the Torah, which is the light of Hashem – the recognition of Hashem’s presence.

When a person directs all areas of his *avodah* to becoming more and more cognizant of Hashem – namely, to be aware of Hashem even as he learns Torah – then the more he exerts himself in this area, the more this inner level becomes opened to him.

A LIFE TRANSFORMED

After that, a person’s life will look totally different. The levels of improvement which we need to acquire will all be seen differently. The levels of *zehirus*, *zerizus*, *nekiyus*, (watchfulness, alacrity, cleanliness) etc. and all of the *middos* which our *Chazal* describe will be seen in a whole different light.

One will see all of these *middos* as different means that reveal Hashem. As *Chazal* say, “Be similar to Him -

Just as He is compassionate, so must you be compassionate.”¹ A person must be compassionate not just because Hashem is compassionate, but because the world was created to reveal Hashem amongst His creations, and in order to reveal Hashem, man must come to resemble Hashem. The trait of compassion should not be seen as a purpose unto itself, nor should any of the other *middos* be seen as a purpose unto themselves, although they are all lofty levels. The purpose of acquiring good *middos* is to resemble Hashem, and in turn, that reveals Hashem amongst His creations, drawing His presence closer to its revelation amongst man.

When we view life this way everything takes on new meaning. The 613 *mitzvos* will no longer be seen as actions that exist as a purpose unto themselves, but as various means which draw a person closer to Hashem, and in turn, to reveal Him within man. When one fulfills a *mitzvah*, he is doing Hashem’s will. If he does it correctly and with the right intention, with his heart, and according to the definitions of *halachah*, then such a deed draws a person closer to Hashem. This results in Hashem being revealed within him.

If a person’s entire direction in life is to reach this goal, of revealing Hashem within him, his deeds take on entirely new meaning. The gain will be that even if he is not on the higher levels of perfection, and even if he cannot immediately feel the spiritual attain-

ments of his deeds, since he is directing his whole life towards closeness with Hashem, each deed that he does is fashioning him into more of a “container” that can hold the revelation of Hashem – in the world in general, and in man specifically.

When he works on his *middos*, he won’t just see this as a job to acquire each of the *middos*, but he will see how each bad *middah* separates him from Hashem and how perfecting his *middos* draws him closer to Hashem and enables Hashem to be revealed in him.

In addition, when a person speaks words of Torah, with the above perspective, he will view the words of Torah he is saying as the being “word of Hashem”. As *Chazal* say, “Whoever sits and learns Torah, Hashem sits and learns with him.”² When a person is learning the words of Torah (especially if he is learning Torah *lishmah*), it as if Hashem is learning with him, so to speak. Hashem is becoming revealed within him, as he speaks the words of Torah. This is the inner kind of exertion in Torah.

YOU DON'T ALWAYS FEEL THE REVELATION

A person builds his entire inner spectrum by one’s deeds, feelings, words, thoughts in Torah and *kedushah*, his *ratzon*/will, and his *emunah* in Hashem. However, a person will not always feel that his deeds and Torah learning are revealing Hashem within

him immediately. But if the general direction in one’s life is to reach closeness with Hashem in whatever one does, then they become a “container” that reveals Hashem in this world.

But this will only be true if he is **cognizant** of this entire concept. Compare this to a person who has performed an act of acquisition, but he did not actually intend to acquire anything. The act is worthless, and he doesn’t acquire it. But if a person performed an act of acquisition and he also intended to acquire, the act enables him to acquire it.

All of the deeds that we must we do, and all the parts of our *avodah* that we need to do, are all acts of acquisition – what kind of acquisitions? The 48 ways of acquiring the Torah.

IN CONCLUSION

When we direct our lives towards being cognizant of Hashem’s presence in front of us (*nochach p’nei Hashem*), we can merit a general level of purification to envelop us, and then the revelation of the Creator will become more apparent within us. It is the light of the Torah, and the light of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, which can become illuminated in the depths of one’s heart. Upon meriting this, a person becomes a “container” that can hold Hashem’s Presence within this world.

¹ *Shabbos 133a*

² *Berachos 5b*

KEDOSHIM - FINDING HOLINESS TODAY

KILAYIM – FORBIDDEN MIXTURES

Parshas Kedoshim discusses the laws of “*kilayim*”, forbidden mixtures. The Torah discusses the details of these laws regarding certain kinds of plants, clothing, and animals which may not be mixed together. The underlying theme of *kilayim* is that there are certain things which are meant to remain apart from each other, which the Torah doesn’t want together.

Certainly, there is also a higher point than this, where everything in Creation is integrated, and there is even a hint to this from the word “*kilayim*”, which contains the word “*kalul*”, “integrated”. But in the current world, we are in an *alma d’piruda*, a “world of separation”, where certain things must remain separate from each other and not be joined together.

THE ROOT OF KILAYIM – THE EITZ HADAAS

The concept of *Kilayim* also has deeper roots.

The entire Creation is a mixture of good and evil, ever since Adam from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra*, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. When Hashem placed Adam in *Gan Eden*, He showed him all the trees of *Gan Eden* and said to him, “Look at all of this beautiful handiwork I have made. Give thought to this, and don’t ruin My world.” When Adam sinned by eating from the forbidden tree, not only did he sin and become removed from *Gan Eden*, but the state of the world was ruined also.

What was wrong with the *Eitz HaDaas*? It was a form of *kilayim*, a forbidden mixture, because it contained a mixture of good and evil – two forces which are not meant to be together. *Kilayim* is therefore rooted in the evil mixture that was in the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra*, which contained the two ultimate forces that cannot be together – the forces of good and evil. Just as *kilayim* is forbidden, so was the *Eitz HaDaas* forbidden, for the same root reason – they were both forbidden mixtures, which cannot be together.

THIS WORLD – A MIXTURE OF GOOD AND EVIL

Adam ruined the world when he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, by making the world into a place where good and evil were mixed with each other. This mixture spread to the rest of the world, and now the entire

Creation became one giant form of “*kilayim*”, a mixture of forces which is not the ideal state of Creation. This is the current world we are found in – the “world of action” where good and evil are mixed with each other all the time.

For this reason, we are always amidst a “sifting process” in this world. We need to always clarify the good and bad parts of this world in anything we encounter. But, before we try to sift out the good from the bad, we need to first understand that there is a mixture of good and evil in everything.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner (in the *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*) explained that before the sin, the evil inclination was an external force. The Serpent was outside of Adam and Chavah and didn’t yet enter into them. After the sin, the evil inclination, or the Serpent, entered into man. The evil inclination resides in the heart, and is enmeshed with our soul, as the *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* describes.

Thus, we first need to be clear that each thing in Creation has become mixed with evil, ever since the sin. That is the reality today, and it is the result of the sin, not the ideal state of Creation as things were meant to be.

CONNECTING TO THE EITZ HACHAIM – THROUGH TORAH AND HASHEM

But when one merits a connection to the Torah, which is called the “*Eitz HaChaim*” (Tree of Life) – for the Torah is *chayei olam*, “eternal life” - he partakes of the *Eitz HaChaim*, and he is thereby connected with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. He is not simply partaking of a life that is externally good, in the same sense as partaking of the fruit of the *Eitz HaDaas*. Rather, he connects himself to the holy Torah, which is “*A tree of life it is, to those who are steadfast in it*”. The Torah is the revelation of the *Eitz HaChaim* that was in *Gan Eden*.

Through connecting to the Torah, one becomes connected with Hashem, where no evil can damage, for it is written “*In His place, evil shall not visit you.*” Evil cannot affect the place where one stands with Hashem. The more that a person connects with the reality of Torah and with the reality of Hashem, with true, inner *d’veykus*, the more he enters into the innermost chambers with Hashem, where there is no mixture of good and evil. This is the state of the pure soul which Hashem created man with.

As long as a person hasn't yet connected himself to the depths of Torah with *d'veykus* in Hashem, the life he lives is a mixture of good and evil, a life of "*kilayim*". Within this mixture, one still has the *avodah* to sift out the good and evil. Even if he does sift out the good from the evil, he will always be found within a world that is a mix of good and evil, until *Moshiach* comes, may he come speedily in our days.

When one accesses the inner world, by connecting himself to the world of Torah which is Hashem's world, there is no mixture of good and evil. There is only good there, for Torah is called "good". It is a reality that is entirely good.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE "EREV RAV" ON THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Therefore, when a person lives in the external world, he lives in a world of *kilayim*, of mixtures. This was always true ever since the sin of Adam. Ever since the Jewish people left Egypt, there was a group of people called the "*Erev Rav*" (Mixed Multitude), who followed them out of Egypt. The word "*Erev Rav*" is from the word "*taaruvos*", mixture. Simply speaking, they were a mixture of different nations. No slave ever left Egypt until the exodus, and therefore there was already a mixture of many nations in Egypt. That is why they are called the *Erev Rav*, because they were a *taaruvos*/mixture of many nations together.

But the deeper understanding, as explained by the *Gra*³, and later elab-

orated upon by Reb Elchonon Wasserman⁴, is that the *Erev Rav* are souls who contain an inherent mixture of good and evil.

In that way, they are very different from the nation of Yisrael. The nation of *Yisrael* stood at *Har Sinai* to receive the Torah. This wasn't just an event, but a revelation of the *Eitz HaChaim* to them, where they received a world which is free from the mixture of good and evil. But the *Erev Rav* didn't join in this experience. The Ramban says that the *Erev Rav* stood apart from the people when the Torah was being received at Har Sinai. Although they had the status of Jews, they didn't actually stand together with the people at the foot of the mountain, choosing instead to stand apart from them.

After the exodus, the *Erev Rav* became mixed with the Jewish people, up until the point where the Torah was received. At the very apex of the giving of the Torah, Hashem's Presence was revealed – it was a sublime experience. It was the revelation of the Torah that is entirely life, with no mixture of good and evil. The spirit of impurity of the Serpent was removed from them.

But the *Erev Rav* didn't partake of this experience, because they were an inherent mixture of good and evil. When the rest of the Jewish people remained together with the *Erev Rav* afterwards, the mixture of good and evil affected them, and continues to affect us until today, obscuring the light of the Torah from completely elevating the Jewish people.

Therefore, it is clear, says the Ramban⁵ that the *Erev Rav* stand on their own as a separate nation. Otherwise, their mixture with the Jewish people wouldn't have allowed the spirit of impurity to leave the Jewish people at Har Sinai. Since the spirit of impurity was indeed removed from the Jewish people at Har Sinai, it must be that the *Erev Rav* stood apart from the people then, as their own independent reality.

This perspective offers us greater insight into these days before preparing to receive the Torah on Shavuot. When we received the Torah at Har Sinai, we separated from the external world around us, which is entirely a mixture, and we entered into an internal life, which is entirely life. But it is only accessed by one who is attached, in the depths of his soul, to the holy Torah and to Hashem.

When the people sinned with the golden calf, due to the influence of the *Erev Rav* (the other "nation" who influenced them to sin), the mixture of the *Erev Rav* re-entered the Jewish people. The very fact that the people became mixed with that external world, where there is good and evil mixed together, was a terrible decline in their entire spiritual level, for they left their internal world where all is pure and good, and were now connected to a world where everything is mixed up.

"EXILE OF THE EREV RAV"

The *Gra* wrote - and Rav Elchonon Wasserman explained his words further⁶ - that in the final generation, the

3 *sefer Even Shelaimah* 11:1, and *Perush HaGra Tikkunei HaZohar* 41a

4 Reb Elchonon Wasserman (student of the Chofetz Chaim and the foremost Gadol in Europe, Rosh Yeshiva of Baranovitch, and author of *Kovetz Maamarim*, *Kovetz He'aros*, and *Kovetz Shiurim and Epoch of the Messiah*).

5 The *Rav* explained: although the Ramban doesn't proof to his words, it is his own straightforward logic, and therefore we should honor it as the logic of the *Rishonim*, which is self-explanatory

6 In the epistle *Epoch of the Messiah*

influence of the *Erev Rav* upon the Jewish people will once again re-assert itself.

In the previous generations, we went through the exiles in Egypt, Babylonia, Media-Persia, Greece, and later the exile of Edom (Rome). Currently, we are in the *galus Yishmael* (suffering from the Arabic nations) – and within this exile, we also face the “exile of the *Erev Rav*”. The exile of the *Erev Rav* is the final exile, where we are being tested with all kinds of forbidden mixtures.

At the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people were separated from the *Erev Rav*, and even Bilaam understood that there was a separation, saying “*They are a nation that dwells alone, and with the nations they do not think.*” The Jewish people were understandably separated from the rest of the nations when they were in the desert, but even more so, they were separate from the *Erev Rav*. This separation between the Jewish people and the *Erev Rav* was evident when the people stood at Har Sinai.

After the sin with the golden calf, though, the Jewish people fell from this sublime spiritual level into the influences of the *Erev Rav*. Hashem is of course with us and can be revealed even now amidst the mixture with the *Erev Rav*. We are in a generation that is entirely *kilayim*, the total opposite of standing at Har Sinai.

In this final generation we are within the exiles of *Edom*, *Yishmael* and *Erev Rav*, all together. It is not merely a kind of *kilayim* that the Torah describes, such as *kilayim* of plants, clothing and animals. Those are outer kinds of mixtures. It is rather an inner level of *kilayim*, where the mixture takes place on the inside.

There will always be a pure place in our souls which remains unaffected by this mixture, but to the extent that we are influenced by the mixture of the *Erev Rav*, that is how much we will spiritually suffer from the “exile of the *Erev Rav*”, which is like the forbidden mixture of *kilayim*.

DESIRE AN INTERNAL KIND OF LIFE

What then?

In order for a person to live in a true world, he needs to penetrate to the depths of the Torah and to the depths of their own relationship with Hashem.

Certainly, every person has the *avodah* to separate as much as he can from the superficial world and to enter in-

ward. But even more so, as we have been explaining here with *siyata d'shmaya*, the very definition of our *avodah* today requires one to enter inward. For as long as one does not enter inward enough, he is still connected to the mixture of the world today, and that means he will be found in the depths of the exile. Even if a person is able to draw out the good that is available in the mixture of the world today, he is still living in the mixture, so he will be missing the inner truth and he will be found in the depths of exile. This is the meaning of “*Torah, Torah, don a sackcloth.*”

If we understand these words, it should awaken in us a desire, in the depths of our soul, to seek an inner kind of life, where a person is attached to the holy of Torah, in the depths of his intellect and heart, where there is nothing else in his life other than Torah. Where the Torah fills all of his life and that is where one is connected to, and that is where he lives. This does not require a high spiritual level to be on. Rather, all it requires from us is that we not be so spiritually callous, from the depths of the exile we are in.

When one merits reaching a deep connection to the holy Torah and to Hashem, this is a redemption for the soul. “*My soul is close to her redemption*”. It is a way for one to leave the depths of exile. It is not a total redemption from the exile, but it enables one to at least touch upon a place of redemption. That is where purity and holiness resides. That is where a person can merit to feel the holiness of the Torah, and then he becomes transformed.

Understandably, even when one is mainly living within the mixture of this world, he can still be affected by Torah, because the light of the Torah illuminates every place. However, the holiness of the Torah will be obscured by the mixture one is in, and he won't be able to feel the holiness that clearly.

But when one merits to penetrate inward, to the place where there are no mixtures, the soul can then feel the truth of the Torah, “Moshe is truth, and his Torah is truth”, and the person will then feel the truth with clarity, and his soul becomes more and more connected with the truth of Torah. As a result, his soul will naturally recoil from what is found on the outside world today, for the soul will be aware of what the truth is.

†

IMES OF SOLITUDE EVERY DAY

It is written, “*Go my nation, come into your rooms, close the doors behind you, wait for the moment until the wrath passes.*” Just as we can close the doors in our physical world, so can we also ‘close the doors’ in our own soul from whatever is taking place in the outside world. We can live only in the inner world, by being connected only with the holy Torah and Hashem. There, a person can discover the *kedushah* (holiness) of the *neshamah* (Divine soul) of a Jew. There, a person can discover that “My G-d, the soul You gave to me is pure.” It is **pure!**

To live with this perspective on a 24/7 basis is, understandably, not possible. But every person who searches for a life of truth, a life of Torah, needs to have times every day where he disconnects from everything, when he lives only in the inner world.

PREPARING FOR THE TORAH: DESIRING NOTHING BUT HASHEM’S WORD

This is the very idea of the days we are in now. When the Jewish people left Egypt, they left behind the mixture that was in Egypt, and prepared themselves to receive the Torah. Their entire focus was on listening to Hashem. They didn’t want anything else and they had no other goal.

That is what it means to prepare for the Torah – when one prepares his soul to enter into the innermost chambers with Hashem. The more one is connected to the outside world, the more he is found amidst the mixture in this world. The more one lives inwardly, the less he is mixed with the world – until he can reach the ultimate level, where there is no mixture at all. That was the state of receiving the Torah.

Every person needs times every day where he totally disconnects from the world around him – starting with an external disconnect from the world, and continuing with an internal disconnect from the world, by separating your mind (thoughts) and heart (emotions) as much as you can, from all of the troubles of this world. During this quiet time, one needs to bring his mind’s thoughts and his heart’s desires into the depths of the Torah. One should prepare himself, during this time, to enter into the innermost chambers with Hashem.

Of course, a person cannot accomplish this all at once. It is a gradual process, of slowly disconnecting from the rest of the world, whereupon one merits discovering the inner

world. At first, when one begins to try this, it will only be a momentary experience. But as one gets used to it, one will find that it settles their soul, and the inner world opens to a life that is entirely pure, free from all unsavory ‘mixtures’ of this world.

DIRECTING OUR LIFE TO HASHEM AND HIS TORAH

The light of the Torah, the light of Hashem which shines within man, is the same light where nothing else exists other than Hashem’s Presence, revealed through His wisdom, which is the Torah. That is where all of our life should be directed towards. If one is not trying to reach this point, then he is still eating from the mixture of the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra* every day, and every hour....

In contrast to this, when one directs his life towards the light of Hashem and His Torah, he leaves behind the life that resembles “*kilayim*” (forbidden mixtures). For the “*kilayim*” that we are found in in this world are not our true *ratzon* – it is against our true will. When we awaken our true *ratzon*, our *neshamah* will want a pure place which is free from any mixtures that are unsavory and unwanted.

IN CONCLUSION

When one realizes that he they have been forced into a state of *kilayim* in this world, an unwanted mixture, a desire will be awakened in him, for an inner world that is pure, where there are no mixtures.

When one accesses it, he will then be prepared to give his soul for it, and to disconnect from everything else around him, and to penetrate into an inner place that is inclusive of everything. One’s entire being is contained in that inner place, and it includes *Klal Yisrael*, as well as the entire unit of the holy Torah, and, more than anything, the greatest *Klal* of all: Hashem, Whom there is none other besides.

On a personal level, this refers to the complete level of revelation of Hashem’s Presence in the depths of one’s soul.

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT THE EREV RAV?

The Rav explained that the Erev Rav is the most dangerous of the previous exiles because they are mixed into Klal Yisrael. Does that mean that the Erev Rav can be Chareidim? And what is the confusion that they are able to introduce into the Torah-observant community? Also, what's the difference between the Erev Rav with other groups that mixed into Klal Yisrael such as the Tzadukim (Saducees) and Misyavanim (Hellenists)?

ANSWER

Yes [the Erev Rav can be "Chareidim"]. The Erev Rav's influence includes: (1) Views that are contrary to *daas Torah*. (2) A cold indifference [to *halachah*]. (3) A way of life of becoming connected with the world at large, and mixing with the world. That is the goal of the Erev Rav, which means "big mixture."

In simple language, the Erev Rav's influence is the permissive attitude of "Everything is permitted, except for...."

COUNTERING THE EREV RAV IN ERETZ YISRAEL

Why didn't the Gedolim set up educational systems in Eretz Yisrael for those who want to be educated in the way of truth? Since they were aware that the Erev Rav would mix into Jewish education in Eretz Yisrael and try to influence the chinuch of children, why didn't they set up some kind of system to counter this?

ANSWER

If you would know the burden that's on their shoulders, you would see it differently. That is what the Chofetz

Chaim told the young Chazon Ish who was bewildered at the way the Chofetz Chaim was running the generation.

THINKING ABOUT THE EREV RAV

Should a person not think about the Erev Rav topic at all because this kind of thinking can make it impossible for him to love every Jew, because instead of judging others favorably and not seeing faults in others, he is instead hating other Jews and he is suspicious that another Jew might be from the Erev Rav, chas v'shalom?

ANSWER

Yes! But we do need to separate ourselves from all evil, from all of the evil deeds and who show evil middos, and from all of the non-Torah perspectives and opinions out there, and we need to stay away from those who are involved with this [evil behavior, evil character, and non-Torah outlook on life]. We need to become connected only with good people, and we should draw close others who are distant from the Torah only if doing so will not be very dangerous to your own ruchniyus.

EREV RAV IN ISRAEL

Will the Erev Rav – the Israeli government – first disappear before the war of Gog and Magog?

ANSWER

We are already found within the war of Gog and Magog! This is the war with the Erev Rav.

EREV RAV TODAY

In our generation, there are many contradicting aspects in all of our souls, and as the Rav explained, because most of the generation today

have souls that are a combination of many souls together in one body. Does this mean also that there are souls of completely wicked people as well as souls of completely righteous people who can be inhabiting one soul? Can any of us be a combination of both a total rasha and a total tzaddik (or more)? And, would that be the reason why we can feel a pull towards the most evil things possible, yet we can also feel the pull towards d'veykus and hiskalelus in Hashem, and all the other qualities of tzaddikim?

ANSWER

Yes! And, it is also because we are in a time period (End of Days) where opposites are becoming integrated together all at once, "like a bolt of lightning".

EREV RAV IN US

If there exists a "spark of Erev Rav" within our soul, as well as part of ourselves that are a total tzaddik, and if we choose to let the tzaddik part of ourselves dominate over the evil parts of our being, does that raise the "Erev Rav spark" within us into holiness? And if yes, does that mean that this evil part of our soul achieves a tikkun? Or do we have to look at it that we need to destroy and erase the "Erev Rav" within us (the parts of our character that are totally evil) by choosing truth, righteousness, and living a life of holiness, etc.? And would that make the "Erev Rav" parts of ourselves fall away, leaving us with only the parts of ourselves that are completely a tzaddik?

ANSWER

[The evil parts in us need to become] nullified, integrated into holiness, through the secret of revealing our soul's deep yearning for Hashem, to be burned up and destroyed so that we can go back to Hashem – to reach

the state of hiskalelus, becoming integrated with Hashem.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I RECOGNIZE THIS "EREV RAV" ASPECT IN MY SOUL? HOW DO I RECTIFY IT?

ANSWER

First of all, let's understand that if someone has a large percentage of "Erev Rav" in his soul, he won't be that insulted from the words here. However, there are people who do have some "Erev Rav" aspect in their souls. This is the part of the soul upon which we have a "mitzvah to erase Amalek". If a person recognizes that he has some trace of 'Erev Rav' in his soul, he should daven to Hashem that he merit to die al kiddush Hashem. If a person is truly willing to die al kiddush Hashem, that very decision to have mesirus nefesh for Hashem is like a "death" to that evil part of his soul; just as the neshamah leaving the body is considered to be 'death'. In this way a person is left with an entirely holy soul.

The question you have asked is very important, because there are indeed many people in this generation who contained a mixture of good/Jew and evil/Erev Rav in their souls [as explained in sefer Shomer Emunim and others].

THE MATRIARCHS ACCORDING TO KABALLAH

Rochel and Leah are both identified with the Shechinah. Why only them, and what are the roles of Sarah and Rivkah?

ANSWER

Rochel is a complete *Sefirah*, called *Malchus*, also called the *Partzuf* of

Nukva. Leah is a specific spiritual illumination called *Malchus d'Tevunah*, which eventually was turned into its own *Partzuf*.

Sarah is neither an illumination of a *Sefirah*, nor an independent *Partzuf*. The *Arizal* (*Eitz Chaim* 11:8) says that "Sarah" is really "Rochel", and when she was called "Sarai", she was "Leah". The *Arizal* says elsewhere (*Sefer HaLikutim*) that Sarah is the secret of *Binah*, and the *dinim* (judgments) of *Sarah* are called *Tevunah*. Elsewhere, the *Arizal* says that Sarah was a degree of *Keser*, specifically *Keser d'Malchus*.

As for Rivkah, she was a soul reincarnation of Chavah, as the *Arizal* says (*Likutei Torah, parshas Toldos*). *Sefer Me'il Eliyahu* says that Yitzchok was the masculine aspect of *Gevuros* while Rivkah was the feminine *Gevuros*. The *sefer HaPardes* says that Rivkah was *Malchus*.

The *Rema m'Pano* writes that Rivkah and Rochel were in the place of *Gevurah*, while Sarah and Leah were in the place of *Hod*, and according to a second view, Sarah and Leah are at the point of *Gevurah*, while Rivkah and Rochel are at the point of *Hod*.

HOW TO CLARIFY A DOUBT

Ever since corona broke out, I have been trying to follow the Rav's words. Baruch Hashem I have been zocheh to true growth, especially when it comes to keeping a distance from all forms of media/Internet....I have asked the Rav about personal issues, as to how go about corona and the vaccine, so that I could receive the daas Torah of the Rav...I believe that if it will be easier for me to listen to the Rav's daas Torah if the Rav will please "make the decision" for me about something. Although I know that it is not the Rav's way to decide for other people, I want to know if the Rav can make an exception for and decide

for me about a certain issue....because it's too hard for me on my own to reach a decision.

ANSWER

Usually, whenever a person faces a doubt and he has difficulty deciding what to do, he should take one little note and write down one option, and he should take another note and write down another option. Then he should fold the little notes up. 2) Then, he should learn Torah lishmah [i.e. by setting aside the first few minutes of his Torah learning session to be entirely for Hashem's sake and not for any reason of self-gain, honor, reward, etc. Or, alternatively, he should strengthen his emunah that no one is in control besides for Hashem. Then, from clear emunah that Hashem is in charge, he should [hand the 2 notes to a little child] and ask the young child to hand him one of the notes [and whichever note the child hands him, that is the option he should decide on].

AMITAS HAVAYAH - HIS TRUTHFUL EXISTENCE

1) The Rav explains how our entire existence is nothing but a revelation of the *ohr EinSof* (Hashem's infinite light), and that the very first "revelation" (*giluy*) which Hashem revealed was His *ohr EinSof*. How can this be reconciled with the Kaballah teachings of *Chabad Chassidus* [The Torah of the Alter Rebbe] as explained by his student, Reb Aharon of Strotcheleh, which explains a level/ revelation beyond the *ohr EinSof*, called *atzmus haMeor*?

ANSWER

The teachings of *Chabad* are discussing three levels of revelation: *ohr EinSof* (the infinite light), *Meohr* (the Source of illumination) and *atzmus*

haMeohr (the intensity that comes from the Source of illumination). The revelation *Me'ohr* implies “from it, is the light”. *Atzmus haMeohr* refers to “integration of opposites” (*kelilas hafachim*), in which revelation (*giluy*) and concealment (*he'elam*) are fused together, and this level is above revelation/*giluy* alone or concealment alone/*he'elam*. But even this level is not yet *Amitas Havayaso*, the Truth of His Existence [which we have no understanding, definition, or grasp of]. When “Hashem wanted to make a dwelling place for Him below”, this is referring to His *Atzmus haMeohr*.

QUESTION

2) The Rav explains that through our own *havayah* (through becoming connected to our very innermost existence) in our soul, we can connect to the *Havayah* (Existence) of Hashem. Does that mean that through my own *havayah* I can connect to the “revelation” of His *Havayah* (but not His actual *Havayah* itself)?

ANSWER

Our own *havayah*/existence is a *kli* (vessel) to reveal the “revelation” of His *Havayah* – the revelation that He exists, which is the “revelation of His *Havayah*”.

QUESTION

3) The Rav is implying that all we can grasp of *Havayah* is the “revelation” (*giluy*) of His *Havayah* but not beyond that. However, Reb Aharon of Strotcheleh speaks about how there is a revelation of His *Ohr EinSof* which really has 2 different revelations to it, as well as a level called *Atzmus EinSof* where there is only one undifferentiated concept that isn't divide into 2 revelations. And, to my understanding, Reb Aharon of Strotcheleh is even explaining *Atzmus EinSof* in terms of an actual *avodah* to reach [and not as something totally

abstract that we have no connection to]. And the *Chabad* teachings also speak a lot about the level called *Atzmus* that's above concealment (*he'elam*) and revelation (*giluy*). This seems to imply that there is a level beyond the *giluy* (revelation) of *ohr EinSof*.

ANSWER

Reb Aharon of Strotcheleh developed further the Torah teachings of Chabad Chassidus, that there is a unified level of Infinite Light which is at the level of *Radla d'Atik*, of which no questions can be asked on. It is “unknowable” (*lo isyada*) and it remains hidden (*tzniyu*) – a level in which His *Havayah* is unified with His creations. This particular concept was either a novelty of Reb Aharon of Strotcheleh, or, it was his sharpened understanding of the teachings of his Rebbe (the Alter Rebbe, the Baal HaTanya). The level that he is describing cannot be understood, because it is unknowable (as mentioned). His root was to say something about the *EinSof* even though we cannot understand it at all. This was really a resemblance of the Torah teachings of *sefer Yosher Levav*, who said that the *tzimtzum* (contraction of Hashem's infinite light) was *k'pshuto* (literal), meaning that the *EinSof* itself was removed – but not that we can understand this. However, we do not take this approach at all!!!

COMPUTER ADDICTION

I became a baal teshuvah a few years ago. Before that, I used to play a lot of computer games. I was like a “*masmid*” at my computer for the entire day. When I became a baal teshuvah, I decided to give up my computer addiction. I was successful, and for 3 years I didn't touch a computer. I just sat and learned Torah all day, from morning until night. I thought I overcame this yetzer hora. But today,

I found myself once again at the computer, playing games on it for a few hours straight. I felt such a strong desire for it that I felt I couldn't hold back. Is there any advice from the Rav on what I can do about this?

ANSWER

Slowly decrease the amount of time the time that you spend on it.

Take small breaks in between.

During the breaks, try to learn a bit.

Sit on a chair that's not so comfortable.

Every so often, stare at the sky.

4 ELEMENTS & SUGAR LEVEL

I suffer from high sugar levels [diabetes] and I need to constantly be vigilant of my sugar intake because of this. I happen to have a strong element of “fire” in my soul [i.e. issues with anger, pride, ambition, power, control, etc.], and I was wondering if perhaps that is what causes my sugar levels to be high, and if I'm able to control my sugar level by working with my emotional 4 elements of fire, water, air and earth.

ANSWER

Yes [high sugar levels are an outcome of an imbalanced fire in the soul]. Before an emotional issue affects the body, it is possible to treat the issue at its root before it spreads to the body where it causes physical issues. However, once an emotional imbalance in the soul spreads to the body and the body has developed a physical condition from it, it is not enough to treat the emotions in the soul that caused it, it becomes necessary to also treat the physical issues in the body that resulted from it.

SERENITY

DEVELOPING INNER CALM IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

Serenity of the soul is essential for the development of every person's inner being. In the yeshiva of the holy Saba of Kelm (one of the early leaders of the Mussar movement), tranquility of the soul was one of the core foundations and perhaps the greatest principle upon which all human effort was built.

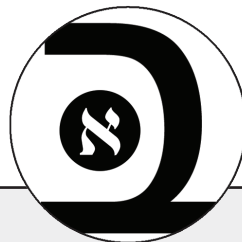
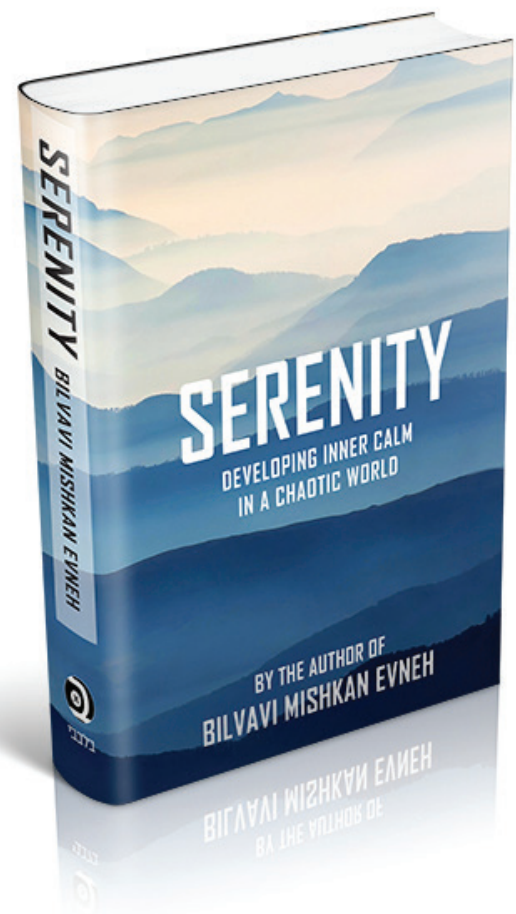
In our generation, the entire lifestyle is the opposite of tranquility. The technological innovations that emerge daily are highly disruptive to the serenity of the soul. Although everything has its pros and cons, from the perspective of the soul's tranquility, these innovations, for the most part, lead significantly to restlessness.

Our forefathers lived lives of solitude spending their time in the tents of Shem & Eber distanced from the materialistic world's noise. Through this, they attained soul serenity and built their inner selves with true dedication.

This sefer, adapted from the Hebrew sefer דע אה מנוחתך, aims to bring us closer to the lifestyle of our ancestors. It attempts to portray a way of life characterized by tranquility of both inner peace and outer calm.

Without a doubt learning the chapters of this sefer can help you lead a calmer lifestyle.

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