

## EMOR : RELATIVES &amp; BEYOND

OUR PHYSICAL RELATIVES ARE  
TEMPORARY

The beginning of *Parshas Emor* discusses the laws of deceased relatives that a *Kohen* may become ritually contaminated for. These include the seven closest relatives, which are his father, mother, brother, sister, daughter, and son, and wife.

There are other laws in the Torah regarding relatives also. For example, a person must first give *tzedakah* to his closest relatives, before giving to anyone else. Chazal also state that one should “draw close his relatives”.

The first, basic level of “relative” refers to those who are blood-related to the person: one’s family members. After family members, the next closest “relatives” that one has in his life are those who live in his community, whom he is required to give *tzedakah* to if they are in need. That is one kind of relative – our physical relatives and neighbors, whom we are connected with this on this “world of action”.

But as we know, there are levels of our existence more than our physicality. Our physical layer is only one aspect of our being, and therefore we have more “relatives” than just those whom we are physically bound with. *Chazal* state that a close neighbor is better than a distant brother, but this, too, is a relationship from our “world of action”.

Action is the lowest level of the soul. The deeper parts of the soul include emotion and thought. We can be emotionally close to another person which is a deeper level of closeness

than with a blood relative and with those in our community. People can be physically far apart from each other yet feel emotionally close to each other. For example, when someone finds *chein* (favor) in our eyes, we can feel close to that person, even though we cannot explain it logically. Our emotions simply connect to the person who has the quality of *chein*.

Our physical relatives and our community neighbors are those whom we are *halachically* obligated to support, and this is because the Torah descends all the way to the lowest realms, all the way down onto our realm of action. Thus, we are required by the Torah to do act with kindness towards those in our closest vicinity, whether they are attached to us through family or through our community. But those aren’t our only relatives. There are other relatives we have – those whom we feel emotionally close to. Those who live more inwardly can feel an emotional closeness towards another, a bond of the soul. Just as there is closeness to our blood relatives and to our community neighbors, so too are there relatives in our emotional realm.

Those who live totally in the material realm will only feel closeness towards his blood relatives, whom he is bound with in the physical realm, and towards his neighbors and friends in his community, whom he is connected to through physical space. The main closeness that he feels is towards his family or to his neighbors. But when one lives in a more inner world than the material world in front of us, he lives more with his emotions. He can acutely feel love, fear, joy, etc. To him,

closeness has a different definition, so he has other “relatives” than just his blood relatives.

When one moves from one town to another, he switches his friends for new friends, and essentially switches those whom he was close with. So his closeness to others depends on the place where he lives. Unlike family members, who cannot become severed from him, his neighbors and community members can be exchanged, when he moves somewhere else.

Even when it comes to one’s closest relatives themselves, there are levels. No one can switch his mother, father, son, or daughter, or brother or sister. However, a person may lose his wife, either through death or divorce.

When one takes leave of this world, he also takes leave of all his relatives. He was only bound with them through this physical world – even the seven main relatives of a person are only a temporary relationship. The only connection he may enjoy with them after he leaves the world is by being buried together in close proximity to each other. But the relationship with them is essentially over. Now he is in the world of souls, and physical proximity doesn’t have much meaning to him, as a soul without a body.

When the souls meet in Heaven, in *Gan Eden* or above that, a person discovers who his true “relatives” are. It is not his father, mother, brother, or sister. His blood relatives, and his spouse, are not necessarily his true relatives in Heaven. If a person lived mainly for This World, when he ascends to Heaven after death, he has no

relatives whom he recognizes. He is no longer close with his own relatives from This World. He will sit alone with no one to connect with.

Although a person's relatives escort him to Heaven as his soul is taking leave of the world, this is only out of Hashem's mercy for him to calm him so that he should leave easily. They may escort him to burial, but afterwards, they leave him alone.

## A SOUL BOND WITH ANOTHER IS ETERNAL

True, emotional closeness to another does not depend on physical space, because it is a bond of the soul. When there is true love between two souls, that love never ceases, even after they physically separated from one another. As the Sages state, the love of Dovid and Yehonasan is eternal, for it was a love that did not depend on anything. This closeness does not depend on time, space, or anything material.

We all have blood relatives, (unless we are converts), and we also have those whom we feel emotionally close with. To whom do we feel closer to? Most people feel more closeness with their family (unless they are in a family feud) or with the people in their community. However, if a person is more inner, he feels more closeness to those whom he loves, loving them more than his own blood relatives. His main closeness towards others is towards those whom he feels a deeper inner connection with.

## A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP - A TORAH CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

A deeper closeness than this is when people bond together though sharing a similar world of Torah

thought.

When people think alike with each other and they enjoy an intellectual relationship with each other, this is even deeper than an emotional connection. When people learn Torah with each other, they feel a closeness that goes beyond the physical and emotional. There are souls who learn Torah together on the next world. When one lives with *daas* (Torah thinking) on this world, he goes to a *beis midrash* in Heaven which reflects his own level of *daas*, where he meets other souls there who share a similar *daas*.

If one didn't learn his true portion of Torah on this world, he is not in his true place when he goes to Heaven. Certainly, Hashem repays every person with reward for learning Torah, but if a person didn't learn his own share in Torah on this world, he doesn't get it either in Heaven. If one learned Torah *lishmah*, though, he merits finding his own share in Torah on this world, and when he goes to the next world, he finds other souls who share his own *daas*, who are closer to his root in Torah. This is true, inner closeness.

## CLARIFYING WHOM WE FEEL CLOSEST TO

Thus, there are three levels of closeness – physical connection, emotional connection (which is deeper) and intellectual connection (the deepest).

To whom does one feel closest to? Towards his family and blood relatives, towards his close friends, or towards those whom he learned Torah with? We may consciously feel more love towards our family and blood relatives, but in our subconscious, we are more connected with others

whom we feel emotionally closer to.

Going deeper, our deepest closeness is with those whom we share an intellectual connection with, in Torah. A Torah scholar lives in a world of *de'os*, inner knowledge, a world of *daas Torah*, and he can feel closeness with those who share his *de'os*. This is not referring to people who say their own superficial *de'os* (opinions) about all matters because they like to state their opinions. We are referring to the inner "*hilchos de'os*". The more a person lives in this world of *daas*, the closer he can feel towards those who live with *daas*.

If we wake up a person in middle of sleeping and we ask him whom he feels closer to, what does he answer? Who would he want to be together with in *Gan Eden*? If one is not that spiritual, then one will say that they want to be together with their family. The more inner a person is, the more he feels closer towards those whom he feels emotionally close to. If one is more inner, then one feels even closer towards those who share a connection of *daas* with – he would choose their company over anyone else. The more a person learns words of Torah with others and enjoys their *daas*, he will feel that they are his true relatives, the relatives of his soul.

One can take the quiet time and try to feel whom he feels closest to. Does he feel closest to his family, or to his friends, or to those whom he learned Torah from and with?

## OUR CLOSEST RELATIVE: HASHEM

There is also a deeper aspect beyond the above three levels of relationships.

Dovid *HaMelech* said, "*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*" The

more that a person enters the inner, spiritual realm, he will find that his definition of “relatives” changes. He first discovers that a soul connection with others is a deeper closeness than with family. Even more so, he feels closer with those whom he enjoys a connection of *daas* with, whom he shares a Torah connection with. But after that, there is a greater kind of closeness to uncover. After one has revealed a connection of *daas* to others, he can then reveal the depth of his soul, where he reveals that it is Hashem, Who is his closest “Relative”.

It is written, “*Hashem is close to all those who call out to Him, in truth*”. This does not just mean that Hashem readily hears our prayers when we call out to Him in truth, but that Hashem is our ultimate Relative – for the verse says “*Karov Hashem*”, Hashem is our *Karov* Relative. The Torah says, “*You are children to Hashem*”. On this world, it is our parents who raise us, but in our inner world, we have our true, absolute Father.

Therefore, closeness to the Creator is not an *avodah* to try to become closer to Him. It is simply a return to Him, for there is an inherent closeness. It is like a person returning from jail and going to see his parents again. He is not discovering them as new relatives, he is just returning to them.

Before we came to this world, when we were souls in Heaven, we felt our greatest closeness towards Hashem, our second greatest closeness towards those whom we share *daas* with, and a third greatest closeness towards those whom we feel emotional closeness with. When our souls descended into this world, the order gets turned around. We think we are closest to our physical relatives, mainly towards our parents. We may

then discover a deeper closeness with friends, and we can discover a deeper closeness towards others whom we enjoy Torah with. As for our closeness to Hashem, even if we do sense this closeness, it seems the furthest from us, in comparison to all of our other relationships.

The reason for this is because the physicality of this world conceals the truth about our true, spiritual world of the soul. Therefore, we identify our main closeness with our parents, as we are on this world, whereas our relationship with Hashem is seen as secondary in our life, or far away from us.

But when a person merits an elevation to his spiritual level and he becomes purer, he discovers a different sense of closeness, and his priorities change. He feels closest to Hashem, and hence, the least close with blood relatives and anyone else whom he is bound together with only in the physical sense.

Dovid *HaMelech* said, “*For my father and mother have abandoned me, and Hashem will gather me.*” Dovid *HaMelech* realized that the true closeness is with Hashem, and the least with his parents. He was ridiculed by others for his questionable status, and in this sense, he felt separated from his lineage, as if abandoned by his parents. He also said “*As for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” His feelings of estrangement from his parents, and his being ridiculed by others for having no lineage, was a tool for him to uncover the greatest closeness, the true good, which is closeness to Hashem.

When one feels deeply in his soul that there is nothing other than Hashem, this is the depth of closeness to Hashem. One’s love for Torah

should be an extension of one’s love for Hashem.

One should also give financial support towards blood relatives and community members, as the Torah commands, and indeed, there is a certain order of priority when it comes to this. But he must go beyond the level of blood relatives. The more a person enters inward into the soul, the deeper kinds of “relatives” he uncovers, until he discovers the truest closeness of all – his relationship with Hashem.

### CLOSENESS WITH HASHEM INCLUDES ALL ASPECTS OF RELATIONSHIPS

Closeness to Hashem is an all-inclusive kind of closeness. It includes every aspect of closeness mentioned above – being connected to Him through physical space, through emotional connection, and through intellectual connection.

When one feels close to Hashem, he is connected to how His glory fills the world, so a person will feel Him next to him all the time. The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that a person can talk to Hashem as if he is talking to a friend in close proximity. A person can discover that he is a child of Hashem, who can turn to Him whenever he wants. In this way, a person is always connected to Hashem in every place, so he is connected to Him always even in whatever physical space he is in.

One can also feel an emotional closeness to Hashem, by feeling love of awe of Him. He also feels a connection of *daas* to Hashem, by learning His Torah, and his own *daas* becomes aligned with the *daas* of Hashem. From there, he can uncover a sense

of oneness with Hashem, which is the deepest level of the closeness – when he is *chad* (one) with Him, so to speak.

Thus, closeness to Hashem is not just the highest and deepest form of closeness possible, but it is also includes all aspects of closeness possible – spatial connection, emotional connection, intellectual connection, and oneness.

## IN CONCLUSION

The depth of the entire concept of “relatives” is for us to discover deeper and deeper kinds of “relatives” – beginning with priorities in our relationships [i.e. family first, then community members], then discovering deeper “relatives”, those whom we share a bond of souls with – and our even deeper “relatives” than this, whom we

share a bond of Torah learning with.

Finally, we should discover the deepest closeness of all – *“As for me, closeness to Hashem is good”* – which includes all of the above levels of closeness, for only He is our true “Relative”.

## PRAYING BY GRAVES OF TZADDIKIM

QUESTION 1 How important is it in our current times - where we are momentarily before Mashiach’s arrival – to go the graves of tzaddikim and pray there for our spiritual and material needs?

On one hand the Rav has taught us that when a person goes to a great person for a blessing, we are supposed to learn from how the great person always prays to Hashem, without any means in between. The Rav has also said that we need to turn directly to Hashem, and that this is how Hashem wills it. Therefore, according to my feeble mind, I have kept a distance for some from visiting the tzaddikim of the generation, because I understand that it is Hashem’s will for me to turn to Him directly, and not through using a tzaddik as a go-between. On the other hand, I have learned that praying by the graves of tzaddikim was always the way of the tzaddikim throughout all the generations.

Does the Rav recommend going to graves of tzaddikim to pray there? And if yes, how many times of the year should this be done? Are there are any particular graves of tzaddikim which the Rav recommends us to go to nowadays?

I know that the Rav will tell me that this depends on whatever a person feels drawn towards, but even so, I want

to know if there is any one particular tzaddik, or several specific tzaddikim, who contain an “all-inclusive” soul of the Jewish people, whose graves we would be obligated to go to, at least once a lifetime.

Also, it is possible to reach the “Yechidah” level of the soul without going to graves of tzaddikim?

ANSWER 1:

There are two ways of avodah: [Connecting to Hashem] by means of an intermediary, and by connecting directly with Hashem. Each soul is different when it comes to this, so it is a matter which depends on a person’s soul root [some souls will connect to Hashem through a tzaddik, and some souls will connect directly to Hashem].

But the particular time period we are in is also a factor. Throughout all of history, there has always been the way of “the entranceway which leads to the palace”, meaning [that a person can get to the “palace”, Hashem] through the means of an intermediary [i.e. through tzaddikim]. As the light of the future shines more strongly now, a person is closer to reaching Hashem more directly, without the means of an intermediary.

However, this does not invalidate the approach of using an intermediary [a tzaddik] to reach Hashem, *chas v’shalom*. Most souls reach a “direct”

connection with Hashem [only] after they have connected to Him via an intermediary [i.e. through a tzaddik].

Connecting to Hashem through the means of an intermediary is not only via visiting the graves of tzaddikim – rather, it is mainly by connecting to the Torah teachings of the tzaddik. Therefore, there is no specific requirement to go the graves of tzaddikim. As the Sages state, “We do not erect monuments for tzaddikim. Rather, their words [of Torah] are how they are remembered.”

However, we do find as well that there are certain places to daven in, where one can connect more “directly” with Hashem. One can connect “directly” to Hashem in any place he is in, but especially in holy places. Getting more specific, the holy places to daven in [which enables one to have a more direct connection to Hashem] are: the Kosel, the Me’aras HaMachpeilah, and Kever Rochel.

QUESTION 2

When coming to pray by the grave of a tzaddik, what is the main avodah (inner work) of a person there?

ANSWER 2

1) Connect to the Torah teachings of the tzaddik, if possible. 2) Be disconnected from materialism, and become connected to the spiritual world of the soul.