

## ASKING HASHEM FOR A FREE GIFT

### MATNAS CHINAM - THE CONCEPT OF ASKING FOR A 'FREE GIFT' FROM HASHEM

In *Parshas Va'Eschanan*, Moshe beseeches Hashem to be allowed to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. Rashi states that the word *Va'Eschanan* is from the word "*chinam*", free, and that *tzaddikim* do not ask Hashem for anything they feel deserving of - they only beseech Hashem to give them from His treasury of *matnas chinam*, of "free gift".

In *Shemoneh Esrei*, we ask Hashem, **אתה חונן לאדם דעת** – we are asking Hashem for *daas*, for understanding, namely, in our Torah learning. Knowing the Torah is the root of all understandings; as the *Gemara* says,<sup>1</sup> "If you have it, you have everything."

But we ask Hashem to "bestow" it upon us – **חונן**, to bestow, which is from the word **חן/חנם**/grace and free. We are asking Hashem to give us *daas* as a free gift. This is the concept known as *matnas chinam*, to ask Hashem to bestow blessings as a "free gift."

Moshe *Rabbeinu* is the one who personifies *daas*, and he also asked Hashem to allow him to enter *Eretz Yisrael* as a *matnas chinam*. He did not ask to get into *Eretz Yisrael* due to his merits, but rather, that Hashem give it to him out of *matnas chinam*, a free gift of Hashem's mercy.

This is the way of *tzaddikim* –

when they ask Hashem for something, they do not ask Hashem to give them something due to their own merits, but because Hashem has a treasury in Heaven called *matnas chinam* in which He grants free gifts not due to any personal merit.

We find the concept of *matnas chinam* in our relationship with Hashem. We are called the children of Hashem, and the *Gemara* says that "No matter how they behave, they are called My children."<sup>2</sup> We are always Hashem's children. Therefore, when we ask Hashem for something, we are not saying we deserve it, but rather, because we are like a son asking his father for something.

Let us try to understand what this concept of *matnas chinam* is.

### THE TWO PARTS IN US

When a person falls in a sin, one can feel how far one is from Hashem, if he is a bit in touch with any spiritual feelings. If a person is totally entrenched in a materialistic lifestyle, then he is dull to spirituality, and he won't feel anything after he sins. But if someone is at least a little bit open to feelings for spirituality, he feels a sense of shame and guilt after a sin. One feels the impurity hovering over him and surrounding him, as a result of the sin. He feels how his sin is distancing him from Hashem, as it

is written, **עוונותיכם היו למבדילים** - "*Their sins divided them.*"<sup>3</sup>

Yet, a person must also be aware that there is deeper place in his soul in which he always feels connected to Hashem, no matter what – as it is written, **חבוקה בך** - "*Connected and attached in You.*" This is the inner place in our soul which always feels and recognizes how we are always "you are children to Hashem". From the perspective of this inner place of the soul, we can realize that our bond with Hashem doesn't depend on any factors, for we are always considered children of Hashem no matter what, even after sin.

But we must understand the following. These are the two layers we have in our soul – the lower layer feels that you are far from Hashem after falling to a sin, while the higher layer in our soul tells us that we are always close to Hashem no matter how much we fail. We must access both layers of the soul and live with them simultaneously. If we only have the perspective of the lower layer or the higher layer, we are living life in the wrong way.

### THE LOWER LAYER OF THE SOUL - FEELING DISTANT FROM HASHEM

If a person only knows the lower layer of his soul – the part that feels distanced from Hashem after falling to a sin – then what will happen to him

<sup>1</sup> *Nedarim* 41a

<sup>2</sup> *Pirkei Avos* 3:18a

<sup>3</sup> *Yeshayahu* 59:2

after he falls to a sin? He will fall into total despair.

He will feel like the *metzora* who has to “sit alone” and feel how he has been greatly distanced from Hashem. As a result of despair, he is apt to fall even more, because he has become hopeless. He feels the meaning of the verse, “*Your actions distance you*”; he feels like he has been shunned. He is likely to feel, “Hashem doesn’t love me. Hashem does not want me.” He feels literally widowed or divorced from Hashem, not just “like” a widow or a divorcee, but like an actual widow or divorcee from Hashem.

A person with such a perspective will feel that Hashem loves him only when one has a day in which one did *mitzvos* and acted properly. When one falls from his spiritual level (and we all have fallouts, some more and some less), one feels that one is very far from Hashem, now that one has fallen to a sin. One lives life based upon a very shaky foundation; one views one’s relationship with Hashem as something that depends on how one acts. On a day that one acted well, one feels close to Hashem, and on a day where one knows that one didn’t act so well, one feels distant from Hashem.

It is commendable that a person feels bad after one sins, but the problem starts when the person feels a great despair that Hashem no longer loves him.

There are people who give up on doing *teshuvah*, since they feel like they committed certain sins. They feel

that they have become like a rebellious child towards Hashem, who deserves to be chased out of the house. A person says to himself, “If my child would do certain acts that are very improper, I would also disown him. I’d have no choice but to throw him out of my house. Well, I acted the same way towards Hashem. I committed a certain sin and I don’t deserve to be forgiven by Hashem for it....”

This is the problematic attitude that gets developed when a person only knows of the lower layer of his soul, the part in him which feels distanced from Hashem after a sin. He becomes extreme in his remorse and thereby damages his relationship with Hashem.

#### THE HIGHER LAYER OF THE SOUL – TO FEEL ETERNALLY CONNECTED WITH HASHEM

Now let’s take a look at the “other side of the coin” here. The deeper part of our soul knows that they are always connected with Hashem, even after we sin. Yet, if a person only focuses on this part of his soul, he is also incorrect.

There are people who are always very content inside themselves, knowing with full certainty that “Hashem loves me, no matter what” – as well as the concept of “A Jew who sins, is still a Jew.” He knows that Hashem always accepts our *teshuvah*, as we express in the *tefillos* of *Selichos*, “*Your hand is open to accept those who return.*” But they take this knowledge and abuse it, allowing themselves to sin intentionally and do whatever they please.

“After all”, the person thinks, “Hashem always loves me”. He knows

“Hashem loves him”, therefore, he does whatever he wants...

It is wonderful that he feels that Hashem always loves them, but when one takes this concept too far and does whatever one pleases, one is apt to lose all his *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven). He won’t fear a sin, because one thinks that Hashem will take them back a second later anyway.

It resembles the statement of *Chazal*, “Someone who sins and says, ‘I will repent afterwards’”.<sup>4</sup> It is like someone who immerses in a *mikveh* while holding onto a *sheretz*, which disqualifies his immersion. His entire Torah learning and *mitzvos* are in danger when he thinks that he do what he wants, whether he is aware of this consciously or not. His whole keeping of *Halacha* will be very shaky.

It is like a spoiled child whose parents shower him with love, and then he goes and gives them a kick. This is what is written, “*And Yisrael got fat and kicked.*”<sup>5</sup>

#### LIVING WITH BOTH ATTITUDES AT ONCE

There are basically two kinds of people we find. One kind of person despairs immediately upon succumbing to a sin, and feels hopeless in doing *teshuvah*. He feels like Acher, who felt, “Everyone can do *teshuvah*, except for Acher.”<sup>6</sup> Another kind of person has the opposite problem: he feels that Hashem loves him no matter what, therefore, he is careless when it comes to being careful with the *mitzvos*.

<sup>4</sup> Yoma 8:9

<sup>5</sup> Devarim 32:15

<sup>6</sup> Chagigah 15a

The way of the Torah is that these two attitudes are extreme. We need to **balance** both perspectives into our lives – the fact that sin distances us, and the fact that we are always loved by Hashem. We must be able to live this paradoxical kind of existence.

On one hand, we need to have tremendous *emunah* that Hashem is always with us, no matter what situation we are in, even when we fall to sin. (In fact, even if someone is in *Gehinnom*, *chas v'shalom*, he still needs to feel how Hashem is with him...). Yet at the same time, we must not let this awareness compromise on how careful we are with following the *mitzvos*.

#### THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE ABOUT DEATH

If someone lives life knowing that Hashem always loves him no matter what – he will be able to go through all kinds of situations in life and feel how Hashem is always close to him. Even as he is dying, he will feel Hashem next to him, and he will thus feel calm and relaxed as his soul is taking leave of his body.

People don't like to think about death, so they try to take their mind off it. But someone who searches for the truth deals with the facts of life, and he knows that death is inevitable, so he thinks about how he will be able to face his time of death. If a person always made sure throughout his life to feel that Hashem is always close to him, he will feel close to Hashem even as he dies. This is the meaning of the statement, "*They serve Me in life, and they serve Me in death.*"<sup>7</sup>

This concept needs to be absorbed well, so that we can let it penetrate into the depths of our soul! We must know very clearly that even when a person dies, he can feel a deep closeness with Hashem.

#### THE PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARDS SIN

But this is only one side of the coin. On the other side of the coin, we also need to recognize that we have a lower part of our soul as well, which feels distanced from Hashem after a sin.

What indeed should a person feel after he succumbs to a sin? He must realize that although he is a *neshamah*, which is a pure soul from Hashem, and that he is always a beloved son of Hashem, still, this does not exempt him from feeling regret over a sin. We must realize that we have two parts in us – a higher part of our self, which can always feel attached with Hashem, and a lower part of our self, which is cognizant of our actions and careful not to damage our relationship with Hashem. Thus, we still need to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* if we fall to a sin.

But we should not dwell too much on this lower part of our soul. If a person always focuses on his sins and how he needs to improve, he lives his life in a constant mode of tension and fear, and this is also not good.

Most people are "either or." Either they are too tense in their *avodas Hashem* and they don't realize how their *neshamah* is always close to Hashem, or they are too soft on themselves because they know they are always loved by

Hashem and thus they aren't careful when it comes to keeping *halachah*.

#### ASKING HASHEM FOR UNDERSTANDING – AS A FREE GIFT

Thus, when we ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* to bestow *daas* upon us, from which point in our soul does this prayer emanate? It is a prayer coming from the deeper part of the soul – the part of us which always feels connected to Hashem, where we ask Hashem for a *matnas chinam*, a free gift, and not because we are deserving due to any actions that we did.

We must be able to live paradoxically in our life – we need to always make sure we are doing the right actions, but at the same time we must also be aware that our relationship with Hashem is not dependent on our actions. These are the two sides of our life which we need to balance our life with. This is not just another fact to know – it is something we must actually **feel**.

In order to live with these two contradictory attitudes at once, we need to develop a power in our soul which can handle two contradicting ideas at once. (This is also known as the power of *daas ha-mis-hapeches*<sup>8</sup>).

Thus, we cannot dwell solely in just the higher part of our soul (eternal attachment with Hashem) or just the lower part of our soul (fear of distance from Hashem) – we must be able to live with these two attitudes together. They are two sides of the same coin.

<sup>7</sup> Kesubos 103a

<sup>8</sup> See end of the shiur Tefillah #0127 – Turning Against and Turning Over.

## ON SERVING HASHEM

I first want to thank the Rav for the wonderful shiurim on all topics which really strengthen my avodas Hashem. My life has changed completely because of this and may Hashem bestow the Rav with blessing and success in all matters and to continue to guide the nation of Hashem in the proper path. I am a 16-year old yeshiva bochur and I have heard some of the Rav's shiurim, mainly Getting To Know Your Self, Getting To Know Your Soul and Torah Way To Enlightenment. I would be happy to receive guidance on several topics.

Question: 1) The Rav says that the purpose of life is to become connected with Hashem. But the sefer Yesod V'Shoresh H'Avodah says that the purpose of life is to make Hashem proud of us, to give Him a nachas ruach, satisfaction. How is that not a contradiction?

Answer: Hashem has satisfaction (*nachas ruach*) from those who become close to Him, just like a father wants his children to be close with him and to be with him. The mitzvos are from the word tzavta, companionship- they are a means of becoming closer with Hashem.

Question: 2) When do we say that a person should try hard at something and when shouldn't he push himself? What kind of pushing leads to too much pressure that breaks a person?

Answer: Trying hard at something is good when it leads to joy afterwards, and when your mind and emotions stay calm and balanced. It can be something that exerts you physically, but it should be the kind of exertion that leads you to happy and serenity after doing it, so that you continue serving Hashem after trying hard at what you have done. *[But if trying hard is causing you to feel stressed about it, then trying hard is not constructive to you and it's just pressure that's not constructive].*

Question: 3) How do you stay balanced between doing ratzon Hashem with being socially accepted by your friends?

Answer: You need a close relationship with 2 or 3 friends, and with everyone else you just need to have a light relationship with them and being respectful to them.

Question: 4) How do we serve Hashem lishmah and what does it mean? If I want to make Hashem proud of me, is that called serving Him lishmah since it's really about me?

Answer: That is called lishmah. In every major thing that you do, try to do it with some minimal intent of doing it lishmah, meaning that you should try to minimize any personal negios (*self-serving motivations*) in doing it.

Question: 5) If I learn because I enjoy learning, is that called learning lishmah? What does it

mean to learn Torah lishmah?

Answer: See Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar IV.

Question: 6) Does a person need to be frugal in our times in order to succeed at acquiring Torah, by eating only bread dipped in salt and drinking only water as Chazal say in Avos? What are the parameters of staying frugal today, and in today's day, what's considered eating for the sake of taavah (*physical desire*)?

Answer: Minimize a bit of the pleasures you are used to. Every so often, i.e. once a month, train yourself to eat just bread dipped in salt. However, make sure that you are balancing yourself out with enjoying your learning and enjoying avodas Hashem.

Question: 7) If in yeshivah they are learning a certain perek of Gemara and I would rather be reviewing what I learned last year, which kind of learning should I mainly be immersed in? What yeshiva is learning, or what my heart desires?

Answer: Learn what your yeshiva is learning. In your free time, learn what you wish.

Question: 8) Since we get greater reward according to the amount of pain we have, and an action done out of pain has greater worth to Hashem than when there's no pain involved, why then do we place so much importance on gaining a love for Torah and enjoying ruchniyus? Isn't pain preferable to pleasure?

Answer: A person needs a balance of both hard work and pleasure – it is impossible to have one without the other and succeed.

Question: 9) What's the difference between humility and low self-worth? And at what age should a person start avoiding gaavah (*conceit*)?

Answer: Humility is to recognize your strengths that Hashem has given you, while low self-worth is when you don't admit to your own strengths and instead you want to be more like your friend. Every day, think of your qualities, and once a week, think about where you fall short in.

Question: 10) What's better, to learn with a good chavrusa whom I enjoy learning with, or to take a weaker chavrusa that I don't learn as good with and which isn't as enjoyable?

Answer: Most of the time you should be learning with a chavrusa you enjoy learning with, and 10% of your time should be spent on learning with someone you don't enjoy learning with.

Question: 11) What's the best thing to learn when it's not during seder, during a break? Finishing more Masechtos of Gemara, or learning Nach, or Mishnayos, or analyzing the parsha, or halachah?

Answer: Split up your schedule according to what your heart desires. **During Bein HaZemanim**

**you can complete whatever you missed.**

Question: 12) How can I develop my pnimiyus while being in yeshiva when we are found all day with friends and we have to keep to the daily schedule every day?

Answer: Follow the advice of the Ramchal in Derech Eitz Chaim, which is that a person should set aside a few minutes every day to think: "What am I living for?"

Question: 13) Is it better not to download shiurim from Kol HaLashon in a shul?

Answer: There is no need to, unless you think that not doing so will be very damaging to you.

Question: 14) I have chiddushim I've written, should I put it out as a sefer if I think it will encourage me? And if I should, should I put it out anonymously? Should I put my father's name in it and his words of approval for my sefer, where everyone will realize that it's me? Or should I put it out completely anonymous with no mention of my father's name?

Answer: Yes – put it out anonymously, and with your father's words of approval at the beginning of the sefer.

Question: 15) How does one serve Hashem when going through a dismal period?

Answer: First become aware that you have less emotional and mental energy when the dismal period sets in. Then write down how your schedule will look during your times of growth as well as what your schedule will look like when you can't grow as much.

Question:

16) If someone asks me a technical question in middle of my learning, do I need to answer him or can I tell him respectfully that I can't talk right now?

Answer: Tell him respectfully that you cannot answer his questions right now.

Question: 17) I don't yet feel "taavos" when I see immodesty. Should I travel to yeshiva on a quicker route even though I will see immodesty, or should I take a longer route to get to yeshivah in order to avoid seeing immodesty even though it will cause me to come later and give up more time from learning?

Answer: Take the longer route where you will avoid seeing the immodesty.

Question: 18) How do we prepare for the arrival of Mashiach?

Answer: Every day, think about what's missing the world, and await for all of these things to be filled and complete. From all of your questions, it is recognizable that you are a ben aliya!