

Bilvavi

בלבבי
משכן
אבנה

BAMIDBAR: OUR INTRINSIC CONNECTION TO HASHEM

In *Parshas Bamidbar*, Hashem told Moshe to sanctify both the firstborns (the *bechorim*) as well as the *Leviim*. *Rashi* explains that after the *cheit haEigel*, the firstborns were punished for taking part in the sin, and were no longer allowed to do the *avodah*. In their place, the *Leviim* received the rights to do the *avodah* of the firstborns, in the merit of refusing to take part in the sin.

However, even though the status was transferred from the *bechorim* to the *Leviim*, it was clearly not on the same level. The Torah says that the *kedushah* of the firstborn is because he is the first to emerge, he is the *raishis*, the beginning. In terms of closeness with Hashem, this represents the concept of being connected to Hashem on an intrinsic level. Every Jew's *neshamah* is called the firstborn child of Hashem. In addition, the Jewish people as a whole are called the *raishis*, the beginning point, and the most prominent. The *kedushah* of the *Levi*, however, is rooted in the word "Levi," which means to "join" - to become connected with Hashem. This hints to the inherent tri-fold connection of *Klal Yisrael*, the Torah, and Hashem, which are all enjoined with each other.

The "three" days preceding Shavuos, when we prepare for the Torah, symbolizes the "three"-fold connection between Hashem, Torah and Yisrael, corresponding to the *kedushah* of the *Levi*. At the day of the giving of the Torah itself, though, there is a deeper level of close-

ness revealed, *the Creator's very revelation to us*, "one with Hashem," since "Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are *chad*," one unit. That is the level of closeness with Hashem that comes from our status of being the *raishis* and *bechor*, to Hashem.

By the giving of the Torah, Hashem opened the heavens and revealed "*Ain Od Milvado*," that there is nothing else besides Him. It revealed the bond between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem which was there even before Creation.

We have no loftier day of the year than the day of the giving of the Torah. All other days of the year, with almost no exceptions, are on a level of after the *cheit* (first sin). The giving of the Torah, though, was a return to the level of before the *cheit* where we were free from the Angel of Death, with no traces of *tumah*. Although the light of this day is not completely revealed, due to the presence of *tumah* today, it is still allowed to shine in a concealed dimension. **The power of *Klal Yisrael* to bond with Hashem from the depths of their *neshamos* shines during this time of year. It is the power of each individual Jew to reveal how he is intrinsically connected with Hashem, for he is the *raishis*, and *bechor*, to Hashem. A person can connect to the Torah which is called the *raishis* - the level of Torah as it was before Creation, at its very beginning, the original level of Torah in a world where there was no evil or sin.** (from Bilvavi on the Parshah)

Chazal ask: Why was the Torah given in the desert? One reason given is because the desert is an uninhabited place. There is nothing there. *Chazal* also state that the Torah is only acquired by “one who kills himself over it, as in the desert.” One who ‘kills himself’ over learning Torah is one who disconnects from his surroundings in order to learn Torah.

This is not a rule that was only applicable to the time when we received the Torah. We are currently in This World, and we await the World To Come, the days of Mashiach. *Chazal* teach that the Sages’ only desire for the days of Mashiach was so that they could learn Torah in peace. If we try to picture what the World To Come is like, what is it? There is a very clear picture of what the World To Come is. **There is only HaKadosh Baruch Hu and His Torah** there. That is what “eternity” is.

Let’s understand this clearly. If Torah is not the main part of a person’s life, and he has many other desires in his life that are on his mind instead, he will not be able to live a “life of Torah.” He will be able to *learn* Torah, but he will not be able to *live* a life of Torah! He won’t become a “*ben olam haba*” (one who is destined for the World To Come) on This World. In the Next World, there is nothing except for Hashem and His Torah. That is all that goes on there, 24|7!

In This World, even if we learn Torah all day,

we eventually go to sleep at night. But in the Next World, there is no sleep. It is for 24 consecutive hours in a day! Every day! (On a deeper note, the 24 hours of the day are only from the perspective of This World, but in the Next World, there are no 24-hour intervals). It keeps continuing. It is a “day of entirely light,” a “day of entirely Shabbos,” where the *tzaddikim* bask in the rays of the *Shechinah*.

If one tries to imagine this, he might think of it as a bright, sunny day which warms his body. That is very far from what the Next World is like; it is but a parable. What is life in the Next World? There is nothing there at all, other than Hashem and His Torah!

When considering how we are living our own life, this is not simply a question of what “level” we are on. There are certainly levels upon levels

that a person can be on in the World To Come, for it is the “world of reward,” but our question is: Who is the kind of person that can live a life on This World that resembles the World To Come? Only someone who lives it and is found there. Someone immersed in Torah is one who can live a life that resembles the “Next World” already on This World. If someone cannot identify with such a concept [in which there is nothing in the world other than Hashem and Torah], he is far removed from anything to do with the Next World.

One who ‘kills himself’ over learning Torah is one who disconnects from his surroundings in order to learn Torah.

Let us imagine the following simple example in our own lives. If we come to a person today and we tell him, “From Elul until Yom Kippur, for 40 days straight, when you are waiting to receive the second pair of Luchos, you will have absolutely nothing on This World. It will be just you and Hashem, Hashem and His Torah, and that’s it.” Can a person do that for 40 days straight, doing nothing else?

Let’s consider the three days preceding Shavuos (the *y’mei hagbalah*). Can a person just imagine three days in which there will be nothing in the world other than Hashem and Torah, and himself? (A person needs a *chavrusa* too, because “Either a *chavrusa* (friend) or death.”) But can a person be ready to live three days with nothing other than this, just him, Hashem, and the Torah? Would a person feel that these three days are a “resemblance of the World To Come,” or does he instead feel towards it like Hashem removing the sun from its sheath in the future, which will punish the wicked? How does a person feel about it?

If someone cannot fathom going for three days with nothing in his world other than Hashem and Torah, and it seems to him too far-fetched and not for our generation, and that we should just feel fine with learning Torah seriously for even 5 minutes – we must counter to this: “But Hashem has created a certain reality. He has created the situation of the Next World, and all people will need to

reach it someday!”

This is not an issue of what personal *madreigah* (spiritual level) one is on. Rather, it is the general level of all of the *madreigos* which describe the Next World. Within the Next World there are of course are many levels of *madreigos*, and there is no end to these levels, depending on how much Torah one has attained. But this is the picture of the life that we need to arrive at!

When we understand it, we can realize that This World is but a passageway to the Next World; it is like preparing on Friday afternoon for Shabbos, so that we will have what to eat on Shabbos. All that we do on This World is but a preparation stage for the Next World. What does it mean to prepare on this world for the next world? It means to reach a deep place in you where you prepared to live such an existence, where there will be true spiritual life, and not the opposite of that, *chas v’shalom*. That is what it means to prepare for the Next World.

In the Next World, where all is repaired, where the perfected level of the End of Days is already realized, where “Hashem is One and His Name is one,” it is a realm where there is complete revelation of *Shechinah*. That is what life is like there! That is what our life will be like, because that’s the way it’s supposed to be!

... to prepare in this world for the next world is to reach a deep place in yourself where you prepared to live a true spiritual life...

If you want to visualize a perfect picture of what life should look like, what is the driving force in our life that will help us reach this perfect picture? It is to have a goal of reaching such a kind of life, in which there will be nothing in our life other than Hashem and His Torah. That is what a person should want, and that is what he should be enjoying. If one keeps reflecting on this point, he can eventually reach a point where he will want this to continue without pause. If he can envision such a thing, he is touching upon a “resemblance of the World To Come” in the soul. For how long will he be able to remain in such a space in himself? It will depend on how connected he is to this. If he has a connection to this, he can already experience a “resemblance of the World To Come” here, in his own soul.

(A higher level than this to become a “*ben olam HaBa*” (destined for the World To Come; here we are talking about the first step, which is to experience *me’in olam haBa*, a resemblance of the World To Come).

It is to imagine a life in which you are totally removed from everything on This World, and you are perfectly content with all that you remain with [nothing but Hashem and His Torah]. This is a truthful visualization to imagine, and one who has *da’as* (mature understanding) and who desires true life will visualize this many times. Slowly as a person gets used to this visualization, he will see

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what his current level is, and think of how to get to the next step. It will be a journey in his soul.

This imagination exercise is only but one example of how you can personally connect yourself to the Torah (and it is in addition to what we said before about learning about the importance of Torah study). Anyone who desires to be a true *ben Torah* should try the above imagination exercise.

On the flip side, a person might counter to all of this, “But I have a wife and children, *Baruch Hashem*, and I also have physical needs.” That is all true, but a *ben Torah* needs to think about the following.

The Torah says that in the three days preceding Shavuos, the men were told to separate from their wives. After they received the Torah, they then were told, “*Return to your tents.*” The meaning of “return” here is to return to your previous state, where you are not as elevated. But there is also a point in our soul in which we need to ascend to higher levels. This is also known as the concept of *ratzu v’shav*, “advancing and retreating,” in which we move back and forth between spiritual progression and regression. Our soul has a point of “*shav*,” where we return\retreat to our previous level, after we have become spiritually elevated. But our soul also has a point of “*ratzu*,” to advance – to reach for higher levels.

We must want to ascend to an existence in which there is nothing but Hashem and His Torah. After we reach higher levels we will certainly fall back onto our previous level, “return to your tents,” but we must also have a point in our soul in which we ascend to higher levels, where we want nothing other than Hashem and His Torah.

The point is to develop an attitude in our life in which we want to experience a “resemblance of the World To Come”. Practically speaking, it is advisable for a person to set aside a few hours of the day of his Torah learning in which he understands that this is all a taste of eternity.

If a person gets used to this, putting his heart into it and not simply as a habitual practice (which does not bring a person to the desired purpose, and it is just fleeting inspiration). What we should mainly want to achieve here is to feel how Torah learning is “a resemblance of the World To Come” on this world. For a little bit of time, a person can temporarily feel in his soul a resemblance of the World To Come, where he is disconnected completely from everything, and that has nothing in his life other than Hashem and His Torah.

When a person truly desires the World To Come, he seeks ways of how he can experience some of it already on This World. He can try learning Torah for several hours straight,

consecutively and without interruption, in which he truly feels that has nothing in his life other than his Torah learning. He can try this twice a day as well. Every day, one should set aside time of the day in which he does not just learn Torah by rote, and to reflect before he begins to learn Torah: “Where do I want to go with this? What is the purpose?”

There are simpler reflections than this that one can make as well. But we are approaching the days preceding Shavuos, and it is worthy to contemplate this, even if one is not actually on the level of living like this

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all year round. Since it is the desired purpose of one’s life to reach this, it is worth it to have it at the forefront of our minds, even if a person can’t reach actually reach it yet

When one gets used to this kind of thinking, his entire attitude towards his Torah learning will receive an over-

haul. The point is not to enjoy the feeling of disconnecting from the world, which feels uplifting and which is certainly wonderful to experience. Rather, the point is to truly connect oneself to the purpose of life, to connect oneself to the World To Come as one is amidst This World. May we all be zoche to truly live in a world which is entirely a world of Torah, a world which is entirely the world of Hashem

translated from the hebrew shiur:

שבועות 031 הכנה למתן תורה בנין תורה תשע"ז

QUESTION How should one's learning on Shavuos night be different? Should a person learn with a lot of people around him and be more 'with the program' or is it better if a person learns alone in a quiet place?

ANSWER Learning Torah on a Shavuos night should be coming from a deep connection of our mind and heart with the Torah: We are connected to the Torah both intellectually and emotionally. Each person can do this according to his own level, from the deepest place in his *nefesh*, which is the "50th gate of *kedushah* (holiness) in oneself that can be more apparently revealed on the 50th day since the beginning of counting *Omer*. Part of this is that a person should also reach the place in oneself in which he is "alone" with Hashem, which is the deepest place that one can reach in his personal *nefesh*.

QUESTION How does a person become connected with *shaar HaNun d'kedushah*, the 50th level of holiness, through his learning on Shavuos night? How can I stay focused on my learning on Shavuos night while also trying to reach this level of *kedushah* in my Torah learning on the night of Shavuos?

ANSWER Before beginning to learn, concentrate from the depths of your heart and with thoughts of doing *teshuvah* (as stated in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim, shaar IV*). Your heart should mainly be ignited before beginning to learn, as a preparation for learning. After you have made this "heart" preparation well, attach your thoughts, calmly, and with precise focus, as you calmly concentrate with your mind,

in a deep and penetrating way [to what you are learning], and keep focusing deeply into your learning until you can no longer think, exhausting your thoughts over your learning amidst an inner calmness and pleasantness in yourself.

Keep repeating this process, in a cycle, as much as you can on your own level, by using your *nefesh*. Make sure that you do not exhaust your thoughts too much *chas v'shalom*, because that is a big error which many have fallen into. Every so often, you should break up your thinking process by calming your thoughts, by not thinking of anything.

In summary, this is the practical way in which you can begin your Torah learning sessions with *teshuvah* and with a clear heart, then connecting your mind to the Torah discussions you are learning about, concentrating with all of your focus, amidst calmness and pleasantness, as mentioned before, and after you can no longer think, you should then calm your mind by not thinking about anything. Keep repeating the cycle. This kind of learning closely resembles the way that the Chazon Ish would learn Torah for all of his life.

QUESTION Is touching upon the *shaar HaNun d'kedushah* (the "50th Gate of Holiness") during one's learning Torah only a level for those who learn Torah *lishmah*?

ANSWER Primarily. But as long as one learns Torah with all of his energy, especially with regards to mentally exerting himself in Torah, this is in the category of *mesirus nefesh*, which is rooted in the *shaar HaNun d'kedushah*.

QUESTION In our generation, how is it possible to connect to the event of standing at Har Sinai, when we are so far from that level and we are missing the necessary conditions of receiving the Torah?

ANSWER Through *mesirus nefesh* [willingness to give up our souls for G-d and for His Torah], we penetrate to the root that was present at the giving of the Torah. The root of the giving of the Torah was *mesirus nefesh*, because the souls of the Jewish people left them at every word of Hashem they heard.

QUESTION What is the connection between dairy treats and Shavuos?

ANSWER Many reasons have already been explained [about why dairy products are eaten on Shavuos]. There is now a sefer which gives 70 reasons of why dairy is eaten on Shavuos.

Here is an additional reason. An infant's only food is its mother's milk. This is due to the very sensitive and refined nature of the infant. At the time of the giving of the Torah, when Hashem descended upon Har Sinai, and His Infinite Light was revealed to the people, all creations were on a level of little children, against the backdrop of the endlessness and unlimited light of Hashem which was revealed then.

At the time of the giving of the Torah, all of the people reflected the verse, "*Like a child on its mother's lap,*" an infant nursing from its mother. It was a state of deep *temimus* (child-like innocence). On Shavuos, we return to this *temimus*. From this *temimus* we become

attached with Hashem, as in the verse, "You shall be wholesome with Hashem your G-d," meaning that when you are a *tamim* [pure and trusting, like a child], you are then "with" Hashem. This is how we become attached with the Torah, on the level of *Toras Hashem Temimah*, "the Torah of Hashem is perfect". [Thus, the white color of dairy foods can remind us of the milk that the infant receives from its mother, which is its only source of nourishment, just as we were all considered like infants who were totally relying on Hashem. And the depth of this is because on Shavuos, we were in a state of *temimus*, of total childlike innocence and reliance on Hashem for all of our needs]

QUESTION What is the pleasure (*taanug*) that I am supposed to be feeling when learning Torah?

ANSWER It is the pleasure of stimulating the intellect, it is the pleasure of connecting to your root (which is the Torah), and it is the pleasure of connecting yourself to Hashem's wisdom and His will.

QUESTION When a person is learning is he supposed to be thinking about *d'veykus* in Hashem?

ANSWER The view of *Chassidus* is that a person should interrupt his learning every so often, for a bit of time, and remind himself of *d'veykus* with Hashem, so that he shouldn't forget about Hashem while he is learning. This is said in the name of the *Baal Shem Tov*. The view of the *Nefesh HaChaim* is that a person should interrupt his learning to think

about Hashem only when he feels that his fear of Hashem has dulled.

QUESTION There is a dispute between the *Nefesh HaChaim* and *Yosher Divrei Emes* if a person should think about Hashem while he's learning. I personally connect a lot with the view of the *Yosher Divrei Emes* that a person should think about Hashem even while he's learning, but I suspect that it's because I am being lazy in trying to work at focusing on the Gemara I'm learning. How do I know which approach I should take when I am learning?

ANSWER It sounds like you need to take the view of the *Nefesh HaChaim* (not to think about *d'veykus* in Hashem while you are learning), at least for the time being.

QUESTION Is there a way for a person to fuse together the views of the *Nefesh HaChaim* and Baal Shem Tov (*Chassidus*) about having *d'veykus* to Hashem while learning Torah?

ANSWER There is always a rule of advancing to a higher level and then retreating back to one's normal level, in a cycle (*ratzu v'shov*). When one feels like he wants to go a higher level, he should be focusing on becoming more connected to Hashem, and when one

returns to his normal level, he should go back to focusing on his learning.

QUESTION How can women and girls feel more connected to the festival of Shavuos?

ANSWER 1) [A woman can feel a connection to the event of receiving the Torah since] all of the Jewish people stood together at Har Sinai with one heart. So the women, too, were each unified with the whole of *Klal Yisrael*. 2) Women have a connection to a more inner root than the above: they can connect to the *ohr*, the "light" of Torah.

There is a "light" within the Torah which is at a higher spiritual point than the intellectual aspects of Torah (referred to as *chochmah*, *binah* and *daas*), and this higher level is called "*Toras Hashem Temimah*," the "Torah of Hashem is perfect" [and it is this particular aspect of Torah which women can emotionally connect to]. 3) Women also have an active connection to the Torah, on the level of "*shirah*," "song," for the Torah is called *shirah*.

QUESTION Should a person try especially hard to find a *mikveh* [on Shavuos morning before *Shacharis*]?

ANSWER Yes

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