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Thinking About The Meaning of Life and Death

על חיינו המסורים בידך [For] our life that is given over in Your Hands." We recognize here in this blessing of Shemoneh Esrei that our life rests in Hashem's hands.

In the morning prayer of *Elokai Neshamah*, we say, "The *neshamah* (soul) You placed in me is pure...and You will eventually take it from me, and return it to me." Every day, Hashem returns to us our soul.

Man lives on average for seventy years, and if he's strong, eighty years. After that, he is reincarnated in another lifetime and he experiences more lifetimes, until the eventual resurrection of the dead, which will be in the End of Days.

In order for a person to feel that his life is totally in Hashem's hands, he needs to contemplate death. He can then realize that death and life are totally in the hands of Hashem. If one never thinks about death and the meaning of life, he won't either come to feel that his life is up to Hashem.

We all know what death is, and we always hear about it, but often it registers only as a superficial awareness.

Chazal tell us that we are supposed to think about death all the time. The *Orchos Chaim L'Rosh* writes, "Place the day of death before your eyes." A very important part of life is to think about death.

Seeing The Grand, Total Picture Of Life

The Mishna in Avos says, "Look at three things and you will never come to sin: Know from where you come from - a rotten droplet; and to where you are going - to the earth and to the worms; and in front of Whom you will have to give an accounting - the King of all Kings". These are three important facts to always bear in mind, but they are not just 'facts' that are separate from each other. The Sages are teaching us to have an inner perspective towards life, a wise perspective, and not a mere intellectual one.

A person with a wise perspective sees life from beginning until its end. A superficial person gets caught up in the many details of life, whereas a wise person sees the beginning and end. People in the world who are superficial are busy with various details about life, and they never think about the meaning of it all. But a wise person, an inner person, is aware that all of the details are leading towards a certain path. He sees how all the details are not separate and random, but how they all

connect.

The deep perspective is not just to realize that our body will die one day. That's only the first part, as the Mishnah says. The ultimate goal is to realize that our soul will have to give an accounting in front of Hashem; that is how the Mishnah ends off. Giving an accounting before Hashem is the level beyond our physical existence, and thinking about it reminds us that we are a soul. Thus, life does not simply end after death. There is physical death, and after that, there is judgment on our soul. That is the inner perspective.

Chazal say, "Repent a day before you die." This is not just another random detail about life. Chazal also tell us that when the *yetzer hora* is getting stronger, remind yourself of death. This is also not just another detail. Thinking about death is to think about the totality of our life.

Our mind might know very well what death is, but we are not consciously aware of it. Even if a person knows all the statements of Chazal about death, and even if he reminds himself about death as Chazal say to do, and even if he has seen people die in their deathbeds and he did a *taharah* and he buried the deceased – this is all just a beginning of a reminder. All of these things will not be enough to make a person aware of death. Death is not just a "dead" topic - it should be a topic that is very much alive in one's life.

In order to realize that thinking about death is a part of life, it's not enough to just remember about death once in a while. Rather, we have to realize that the entire path in our life is heading towards death, towards giving an accounting before Hashem. It is a knowledge that must accompany us throughout all the details in our life, wherever we are at. It must always be in the background of our minds.

In addition, we go through special times of the year, and all these times are a *tahalich* (path) that our soul takes. Time is not just time – it is a path we take. An animal just goes through time, but a person goes through time on a deeper level, because time is a *tahalich* for his soul.

These concepts are about how to view reality. One who lives with an inner lens knows that Hashem is the First and the Last.

In order for a person to live a truthful life, he must know what life and death is about, not just to know about life and death, but to recognize it. In order for knowledge about death to affect us, it must be with an internal perspective: "Know in front of Whom you will give an accounting".

But we need to see how all the details in our life are connected with the beginning and end of life. Most people are not consciously thinking of death, usually because people are caught up in materialism; but even those who do think about do not view death as a real thing, rather as another detail. But we have to see how death is part of the grand picture.

"Torah scholars have no rest in this world or in the next world", because they are always on a *tahalich*, a *mehalech*, a path, in which all details connect. The perspective of a Torah scholar is to have this mature lens on life. A person might know a lot of Torah, but he doesn't have the Torah's perspective on things; he is missing the perspective of a Torah scholar. He has knowledge in Torah (and we all have knowledge in Torah, more or less) - but he doesn't necessarily grasp the reality of things.

Only an inner perspective on life makes you grasp reality. Just as an adult sees life differently than a child, so does one with an inner perspective see Creation differently than those who are not in touch with their inner world. An inner person is very aware of what life and death imply.

It is more than just being aware that one day we will die and that we will have to give an accounting before Hashem. It means to live a life in which we realize that we are heading towards this self-accounting.

When one is in touch with his soul, with his inner world, he does not see this world through a materialistic lens. He views Creation through his soul. He questions his deeds to make sure he is in line with where he's heading. But he is also aware that Hashem created his soul, and that he is not just a body created from the lowly earth.

This is not just knowledge; we can all "know" it, but that won't be enough. It must be viewed through an inner perspective; for one to feel himself as a soul, as a soul created by Hashem. It is a much clearer recognition of the facts.

Thinking About History - Through An Inner View

When one takes a look at history, he must also view it through his soul. He knows he will have to give an accounting before Hashem at the end of his own personal life, as well as in the great day of judgment in the future. But one must see all of Creation like this as well, from its beginning until its end, contemplating how all the details are all part of a bigger picture and heading towards a certain path.

Most people only focus on their present life, and at best, people think about the past week, the past month, and the past year. If one is deeper, he thinks about his entire current lifetime. But an inner perspective is for one to reflect about the entire history of Creation from the beginning of time until now, and after that.

A person sees a new world when he has this view. He sees destruction when he thinks about the destruction of the *beis hamikdash*, but he is aware of the future resurrection. He sees the history of how the Jewish people were shaped, and then all of the destruction we went through, the sin of the Golden Calf and the two destructions, the exiles, all the way until the current exile, the exile of Edom. He will see a different kind of exile than the way most people see it.

Most people are only reflecting on the past week, month, or year; and even that can shake up a person when he sees all those details connecting. But when you think about history from its beginning until its end, it can shake you to the core. You see something else entirely then.

Destruction In The End of Days

Our Sages said that in the End of Days (we don't know when the end will come, but we are definitely close to the end), all of the forces of evil will be here all at once.[\[1\]](#)

Chazal say that either the generation will be entirely deserving of redemption, or the generation will be entirely undeserving. According to the first opinion of our Sages, that we will be totally deserving, the meaning is that we will be able to elevate ourselves above all the evil that surrounds us. But if we are not a generation that is meritorious - the other option that our Sages describe - then all the evil around us will be allowed to be unleashed, resulting in tremendous spiritual destruction.

A person with an inner lens on reality can see how an entire generation is heading towards a grim end, spiritually speaking. In fact, most of them are already gone, and the rule is that "most of them is like all of them." One who sees this kind of destruction truly understands what it means to mourn over the destruction of Yerushalayim and the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Focusing On The Positive Amidst Destruction

But all of this destruction we've gone through is not the end. That's only one side of the coin. There is a greater picture going on. There will be a resurrection of the dead. We are at the end of a 6000-year period, which is one dimension, and after it's over, Hashem will make a new dimension, in which He will rule alone.

We are in great destruction, and it is a time of mourning in a very broad sense. But when we gain a more inner perspective, we can laugh just as Rabbi Akiva did, when he saw the site of the destruction[2]. When he saw the destruction, he laughed, because he realized that if the prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem came true, the prophecies about the redemption will also come true. This is the inner perspective. As the Sages say, "Who is wise? One who sees what is to come." There are 6000 years in this world, but then there will be a new world. From destruction you can realize that there will be a revival of the dead, a rebuilding, a new world.

On one hand a person has to see all the destruction that has taken place, but even more so, he has to be able to see the inner dimension behind it all, which is that we are heading towards a renewed world, in which Hashem's Name will be one, just as He was "one" before the creation of the world. Hashem is First and He will be last; He will rule the world alone. The destruction must cause us to mourn, but it can also remind us that there will be a redemption. This will not just be in the future - even now, you can have a degree of redemption, when you believe strongly in it.

The possuk compares the current time to planting a seed, when we see all the fruits in the future. We plant it with tears, and we harvest it with joy.[3]

These words are not just sparks of hope for the future. Rather, it is the deep perspective to have on everything, our history, our beginning and our end and all that comes in between. When we think of the fact of how our life is in Hashem's hands, we can be aware of life and death, but even more so, we can realize that death is not the end. There will be resurrection of the dead. We must be aware of death and what that will mean for us, but we must not think that death is the end. Thinking about death can remind us that there will be a resurrection. Hashem revives the living even as they are alive, and He will revive all souls in the future.

This is the view that spans all of Creation. It is the view of the soul, the view that sees the totality of things, and it is the view which the ideal Torah scholar has.

Without this perspective, a person might 'believe' in the resurrection of the dead, but he doesn't feel this as a palpable reality. Hashem revives the dead, both in the future as well as now, for our life is up to Him and He is in charge of our life; therefore, He is always reviving us.[4]

One who realizes this deep perspective here, is tasting of the original light that was hidden by Hashem on the first day of Creation, which enabled man to see from one end of the world to another[5]. There were only rare righteous individuals who merited to completely see through this hidden light, but any person who penetrates into his soul can draw himself closer to this light on his own level, and thus he can be closer and closer to having a deep, broad perspective towards the history of Creation, from beginning until its end.

Upon reaching it, a person will feel, sharply and clearly, a great mourning over all the destruction that has taken place throughout all of our history; he feels pain that comes from his *Neshamah*. [6] But when a person merits to penetrate even further into his inner self, he reaches his *Chayah* (deeper life-force), realizing what the Source of his life is; and when he penetrates even deeper, he can see the view that comes from his *Yechidah*, the deepest part of the soul, which sees nothing but one thing alone - Hashem's Oneness. The fact that He is one and will always be One, the One ruler who will rule over all, that there is nothing besides Him.[7]

There, in that deep place in oneself, a person can understand the true meaning of the words **על חיינו המסורים בידיך**. There, a person lives his life near Hashem and with Hashem; he feels what life is and what death is, but he also feels how there will be a truer kind of life after all of that death (which includes both the death that will happen to himself personally, as well as the 'death' of the generation and the world that intensifies as we get closer to the end).

In Conclusion

Living with such a mindset towards life enables a person to reinforce his belief in the future redemption, in the future resurrection of the dead, in which Hashem will renew the world. This is the depth behind the belief in the future resurrection – may it come speedily in our days. Amen.

[1] See ***Tefillah #019 - Revealing Oneness***

[2] See Makkos 24b

[3] Tehillim: 130

[4] See ***Tefillah #034 - Revival of the Living*** and ***Tefillah #043 - Finding Renewal***

[5] The *ohr haganuz*, “the hidden light”

[6] There are five levels to the soul: Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, and Yechidah.

[7] Otherwise known as “Ain Od Milvado”

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