

commitment to Torah study. A complete transformation, an altering of oneself, occurs. This person is not just touching his toes to the “water” to check the “temperature,” to see if it feels right; he is all in.

The other penitent, however, either does not have the ability and stamina to make a total commitment, or is simply not there yet. He requires a bit more time before he will take the plunge. Slowly, carefully, he refines himself and his service to Hashem – one *mitzvah* at a time. He works on each known sin, each faulty *middah*, character trait, individually, patiently. From a figurative perspective, he is to be compared to the individual upon whom the waters of the *Parah Adumah* are sprinkled.

Regardless of how much a person is capable of committing himself, he has begun the journey and this speaks volumes. *Teshuvah* akin to sprinkling the *Parah Adumah* water effects a great deal of purity and is an indication of a break with the past, a step towards the future. *Siyata diShmaya*, Divine assistance, which is administered to those who are sincere and worthy, facilitates the task of completing the *teshuvah* process. The last two words: “sincere” and “worthy” spell the difference between he who eventually completes the process, who swims in the sea of the *Talmud*, who overcomes the many challenges and obstacles, and he who does not. It may seem insurmountable, and, veritably, it is a formidable climb, but one is helped along the way – if he is deserving.

The more one applies himself to Torah study, the greater and with more ease will he achieve closeness with Hashem. One concretizes his return through Torah-study, since it enables him to climb the ladder of spiritual growth. Torah grants one the ability to clarify the ambiguities in life and to smooth over its obstacles. It is the vehicle that protects as it nurtures growth. Last, nothing gives Hashem greater joy than a Jew who studies Torah.

Being that tonight is *Rosh Chodesh Av* (*Peninim* is written early), I cite an inspirational Torah thought quoted by the *Lelover Rebbe, Shlita*. During the Nine Days one may not eat meat or drink wine unless he participates in a *seudas mitzvah*, such as a *siyum Meseches*, Tractate, of *Talmud*. The *Belzer Rebbe, zl*, *Horav Aharon*, explains that, when a Jew studies Torah, there is no *galus*, exile. (*Galus* is associated with sadness. When *Klal Yisrael* was thrust into *galus* following the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*, a pall of mourning enveloped them. When a Jew studies Torah, he is filled with a sense of joy unattainable through any other means. The Torah-study, with its ensuing sense of joy, abrogates the strictures of exile and its resulting sadness.)

The *Chozeh m'Lublin, zl*, asks why it is that everyone who attends or participates in the *seudas siyum* may eat meat and drink wine, while, if a *seudas Bris* occurs during the Nine Days, only ten men, the minimum number to comprise a *minyan*, quorum, are permitted to eat meat and drink wine – no more. Why does the *Bris* differ from the *siyum*?

The *Chozeh* explains that, in part, a lack of Torah

study catalyzed the *churban*, destruction, of the *Bais Hamikdash*. *Yirmiyahu HaNavi* laments, *Al mah avdah ha'aretz – al ozvam es Torasi*; “Why was the land destroyed? Because they abandoned My Torah.” (*Yirmiyahu* 9:11). Thus, when one studies and completes a *meseches*, he has mended the root cause of the destruction. On a certain spiritual plane, one can assert that the scent of *geulah*, redemption, is in the air, allowing for all participants to partake and enjoy in this redemptive experience.

If we would only realize the joy that we generate in Heaven when we study Torah, it would evoke within us a sense of bliss, a feeling of rejoicing, so that such learning would be transformative.

Va'ani Tefillah

רופא חולי עמו ישראל – Rofei cholei amo Yisrael. Who heals the sick of His nation, Yisrael

In his *Yaaros Devash*, *Horav Yehonasan Eybeshutz, zl*, writes: “One should concentrate on the sick people in his (your) city along with the invalids of all *Klal Yisrael*, when reciting this *brachah*. We are all one body, so, if one Jew suffers, all of us should identify with his suffering, sharing his distress, and pleading fervently for him as if it were our own child or brother. Every Jew fulfills some of the *mitzvos* and, even if he is a *rasha*, evildoer, we should pray for him, hoping that he will mend his ways upon recovering. Hashem waits (patiently) for each person (regardless of his level of spiritual deficiency) to repent and return to Him. This waiting continues up until his very last mortal moment. Were he to die without having performed *teshuvah*, the totality of *Klal Yisrael* would be incomplete, and the *Shechinah* does not rest upon something that is defective.”

זכר נשמת

רחל לאה בת ר' נח ע"ה
פריידא בת ר' נח ע"ה
שרה אסתר בת ר' נח ע"ה

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Parashas Ha'azinu

תשע"ה

פרשת האזינו

כי שם ד' אקרא הבו גדל לאמקו

When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d. (32:3)

Rashi observes that the word *ki*, which is used here (*ki Shem Hashem ekra*), means “when” (when I call out), rather than “if” (which is the more common translation). Thus, the *pasuk* reads: “When I call out and mention the Name of G-d, you should bring greatness to our G-d and bless His Name. This is the source/reason that we answer *Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuso*, “Blessed is the Name of His glorious Kingdom,” after we hear a blessing recited in the *Bais Hamikdash*.

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, offers a novel interpretation for this *pasuk*. The *Shem Hashem*, Name of Hashem – *Yud Kay Vav Kay*, represents Hashem’s *Middah of Rachamim*, Attribute of Divine Mercy. Thus, explains *Rav Alpert*, the *pasuk* is intimating that, when we pray to Hashem petitioning Him for Divine Mercy, we should not lose sight of recognizing and praising Him for His *Middas HaDin*, Attribute of Strict Justice – which is alluded to by, *Havu godel lei'Elokeinu*, “Ascribe greatness to our G-d” (*Elokeinu* is indicative of *Din*). We all want mercy; we are all prepared to relate to Hashem in His Attribute of Divine Mercy, but are we equally prepared to ascribe greatness to His Attribute of Strict Justice?

We are quick to acknowledge Hashem when we are at the receiving end of His mercy. Are we prepared to acknowledge that only good comes from Hashem, and that what appears to us as strict justice is as perfect as His mercy? We are just not privy to the entire picture. Thus, our vision is limited. We respond to what we see, but we must recognize that, as mortals, our vision is myopic. *Havu godel Lei'Elokeinu u*: Let us acknowledge that Hashem’s vision is far-reaching and all-inclusive; so, too, is His Strict Justice – filled with compassion and mercy.

Alternatively, we suggest that the Torah is intimating to us a standard for how a Jew should live. *Ki Shem Hashem ekra*, “I see to it that Hashem’s Name is glorified in my every endeavor.” Every action, every endeavor, bespeaks *Kiddush Hashem*. Obviously, nothing is further from our minds than *chillul Hashem*. A Jew should live by the credo that his every activity represents *ki shem Hashem ekra*.

In *Reflections of the Maggid*, Rabbi Paysach Krohn writes about Rabbi Moshe Sherer, zl, an individual who valiantly and ably represented Orthodox Jewry in the halls of the government. A confidante of a number of America’s secular leaders, he earned their respect for his unstinting integrity and commitment to Torah ideals and values. His life

was a true *Kiddush Hashem*, glorification of Hashem’s Name. One of his personal relationships was with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a native of Furth, Germany, who was raised as an Orthodox Jew before immigrating to America when he was fifteen-years old. Unfortunately, his move to this country was not conducive to his spiritual well-being, as he became an avowed secular Jew, assimilating into the American spiritual landscape and eventually marrying out of the faith.

Yosef Mendelovich was a well-known Soviet *refusenik* who earned an enviable reputation for his uncompromising commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*, despite living under the oppressive Russian regime. *Yosef* had a cousin, a young woman, who was imprisoned in Siberia. He asked Rabbi Sherer if there was any way that he could secure her release (using his political connections). Rabbi Sherer replied that only one person might have the connections and respect of the Russian government to effect her release: Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. A problem existed, however, since Secretary Kissinger was then considering a bid to run for the United States Senate. In order for Rabbi Sherer to solicit the Secretary’s assistance, it would demand a *quid pro quo* of endorsing his run for the senate. How could he publicly support the candidacy of a Jew who had married out of the faith? This was an issue of *chillul Hashem*. On the other hand, a young woman’s life was in peril. What was it to be: *chillul Hashem*; or *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life?

Rabbi Sherer sought guidance from *Horav Yaakov Kaminetzky, zl*, who said that he required a day to mull over the issue. This was highly irregular, since the *Rosh Yeshivah* tended to respond immediately. Obviously, this was a weighted question which needed some serious thought. The next day, the *Rosh Yeshivah* issued the following response: “Although *pikuach nefesh* overrides just about everything else, we do not find in *halachah* that it supersedes *chillul Hashem*.” Rabbi Sherer was not permitted to solicit Secretary Kissinger’s help. P.S. The young lady eventually was freed through the assistance of others. Nothing stands in the way of Hashem. As long as our actions coincide with Hashem’s Will, we pay tribute to Him and glorify His Name. This is the mission of a Jew.

For some people, the title which precedes one’s surname bears great significance. *Rav*, Rabbi, Doctor, *Nasi*, President, etc. are titles – some earned, some warranted, others bestowed – not necessarily earned. Nonetheless, we tend to define people by their titles – or lack thereof – and ascribe honor and esteem to the individuals as a result of these titles.

One *Purim*, the holy *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl*, remarked to one of his *talmidim*, students, “You must be happy today, since you were able to study a significant amount

of Torah... I, though, am happy about being Jewish. I am happy that my father and mother were *Yehudim*, Jews, and that, as a result, I was born Jewish” (*Ki Shem Hashem ekra* – it is all about pride in being part of the *Am HaNivchar*, Chosen People).

In the *Klausenberger’s Sefer, Shefa Chaim*, in the section on *Purim*, the *Rebbe* writes; “*Baruch Mordechai ha’Yehudi*, blessed is Mordechai, the Jew... Consider the fact that Mordechai is not bestowed with any title, *Nasi, gaon*, or *tzaddik* (all appellations that would aptly describe him) – but, simply, “Jew,” because this is the greatest and most important gift of all.”

עם זבל ולא חכם

O vile and unwise people. (32:6)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* wonders how a nation that owes so much, indeed its very existence, to Hashem has the audacity to be so vile and unwise as to sin against Him. “Vile” refers to their lack of gratitude. “Unwise” is a reference to their lack of foresight in recognizing the inevitable dire consequences of their actions. *Targum Onkeles*, as explained by *Ramban*, has a different take on this *pasuk*. He writes – *da ama d’kabilu Oraissa v’lo chakimu*, “A nation that received the Torah and tired of it, literally, became tired out, exhausted from it, their lack of wisdom is manifest in not realizing that: only Torah has value; only Torah has good; only Torah will sustain them throughout their days. Thus, the word *navol*, which has been translated as vile, is now translated as to become worn out, exhausted.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* is in the process of issuing *tochachah*, rebuke, to *Klal Yisrael*. In *pasuk* 31:29, he says, “For I know that, after my death, you will surely act corruptly, and you will stray from the path that I have commanded you.” Moshe foreshadows the future, following his passing the baton of leadership to his successor, Yehoshua, by describing the deviation, corruption and evil to which the nation will succumb. This hardly sounds like a walk in the park. Why then does he admonish them for not studying Torah enthusiastically, for being exhausted from “too much” learning? Should this failing be categorized together with “deviation and corruption” as reasons for Hashem’s dissatisfaction with them?

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, explains that being too tired to learn Torah -- manifesting a lack of excitement with regard to placing this most important priority at the top of the list -- is the precursor and eventual catalyst for *Klal Yisrael’s* falling prey to the sin of *avodah zarah*, idol worship, as well as the whole slew of moral, ethical and spiritual deficiencies which lead to a complete breakdown and eventual alienation from Judaism and Hashem. It has to begin somewhere – and that “somewhere”, is lacking an appreciation of the immeasurable value of Torah – for a Jew.

When one does not appreciate the value of Torah, he reads it like a book. He does not study it as if cognizant that this is the *dvar*, word, of Hashem. In other words, he is learning – but neither with passion, nor with drive; he is unexcited about attending the class, fighting to stay awake; his mind is on how soon he can go home and continue where he left off there. The *Rosh Yeshivah* concludes with the well-known words of the *Iglei Tal* (in his preface to the *sefer*) (I take the liberty of citing the paragraph in its entirety): “*Chazal’s* dictum, *Mitzvos lav l’henos nitnu*, ‘the

performance of *mitzvos* were not given for one to experience personal pleasure,’ does not apply to Torah study. (For) The study of Torah should engender a heightened sense of joy within a person. The underlying principle of Torah-study establishes the idea that a person should envision the truth and be overwhelmed with joy by experiencing firsthand the depth and clarity of mind achieved through Torah-study. The primary objective of the *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah* is the pleasure and satisfaction one derives when he understands a passage of his learning.”

In addition, ideally one’s Torah learning will impact the development of his cognitive ability so that he will apply this intelligence to his entire life, even outside of his Torah lessons. *Horav Yechezkel Abramsky*, the author of *Chazon Yechezkel*, was a giant among Torah giants. He was a personality that radiated the glory of Torah together with a rarified air of nobility. His diligence in Torah-study was unfathomable. He once said (when he was very old), “I can attest that, from the age of twenty, I have not diverted my thoughts from Torah: while I eat, I learn; when I lie down, I learn; while I sleep, I think in learning; every breath that I take is laced with learning.” In a revealing moment, he once said, “As a young man (and meticulous about spending time away from learning), I attended just two weddings: one was my sister’s; the other was my *Rebbetzin’s*.”

Rav Abramsky was discussing Torah topics with a *Kollel* fellow. When the fellow had left, *Rav Abramsky* turned to his wife and said, “We must pray for that young man’s marital harmony.” The *Rebbetzin* looked at him incredulously, “But you only spoke to him in learning. How were you able to discern that he has problems at home?” she asked. “A person whose mind is meandering, who does not think straight and who is incapable of understanding the *Rashba* (early *Talmudic* commentator) is also incapable of understanding his wife. I am convinced that there must be some trouble over there.”

A happy home requires an organized mind. Learning Torah has the ability to heighten and strengthen one’s cognitive ability – if he learns properly. If his Torah study is cursory and superficial, his mind will not grow.

ישימן ישורון ויבטל

Yeshurun became fat and kicked. (32:15)

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, notes the use of the word *yeshurun*, implying the august nature of *Klal Yisrael*, characterized as *yashar*, straight, upright, just; appellations which bespeak our nation’s strict adherence to the high standards demanded of us by Hashem. Regardless of one’s moral and ethical standing, if it is not channeled properly, prosperity can destroy him and bring about his total downfall. The Torah teaches us that, even when we are up there, on the level of *yeshurun*, we can fall, if we defer -- and eventually succumb -- to our desires. How does one properly channel his prosperity?

First and foremost, he can share his wealth by giving *tzedakah*, charity, to those less fortunate than he is. Veritably, it all boils down to perspective. How does one view his material success? Does he think that Hashem has blessed him simply because he deserves it, or does Hashem trust him to be a steward for His money, to see to it that it is spread around in the best possible manner, to help the most people? What helps a person adhere to the correct

perspective? Honesty, integrity. An honest person who has earned his money righteously through hard work, never cutting corners, maintains a sense of modesty, understanding that every penny that he possesses was earned the “old way,” through blood, sweat and tears. He understands that his material success is the result of a Heavenly blessing. Whatever the reason, he is the beneficiary of Hashem’s beneficence, and, as a result, he is humbled to be His delegate for apportioning the money to those in need.

Perhaps we might take this idea a bit further. Anyone who has been the beneficiary of Heavenly blessing -- be it material wealth, extraordinary acumen, unusual physical strength, stamina, an outstanding personality to which people gravitate-- must never lose sight of the fact that he has been blessed for a reason. If you have it, there is a reason for it, and it is surely not for the purpose of self-aggrandizement.

Everything that we do should be for the purpose of glorifying Hashem’s Name or helping others. This justifies our blessing and grants it legitimacy. *Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl*, relates a story/analogy with regard to the significance of one *mitzvah* and the change it can engender, which I think is relevant to the above. A wealthy man sought to divide his wealth among his three sons. He wanted, however, to reward the son who presented the greatest foresight, who used his mind for its G-d-given purpose. In other words, he wanted to apportion the greater part of his wealth to the individual who would make the best use of it.

In the man’s luxurious mansion was an extremely large, but empty, room. Whichever son could, in the space of one day, completely fill up the room would receive the bulk of his father’s fortune. Son number one thought it best to fill the room with large objects. For days, he gathered large objects and prepared them all to be moved into the room on the designated day. He erred in thinking that he had the strength and physical stamina to move all of these heavy, large objects into the room in one day. By late morning, he was thoroughly wasted, exhausted beyond exhaustion. The room was only partially filled. Strike one: he was out of the running.

The second brother derived a lesson from his older brother’s error. He would seek out large, but light, objects which would fill the room without physically exhausting him. Reams of crumpled paper are large, but lightweight. Thus, he prepared an enormous amount of crumpled paper, but alas, he did not take into account the amount of time he would have to invest into transferring it all into the room. At the end of the day, he had filled a little more than half the room.

After seeing the shortsightedness of his two brothers, the youngest brother was stymied for an alternative idea. Everything was either too heavy or too time-consuming. He gave it much thought, but was unable to conceive of a solution to his dilemma. The day arrived, and he sat there thinking. It was a large, cavernous room, and, as the hours toward nightfall passed, he was becoming more and more depressed. The sun began to set, and the room became darker. His time was almost up, when suddenly he hit upon an idea. He reached into his pocket, took out a matchbook and immediately struck a match. The room immediately lit up – all of the room! He had solved the problem. The fortune was his.

We can build and buy and endeavor, but, if it is all for ourselves, it is for naught. If we light up the world for others, then we have truly earned our fortune.

כי לֹא דבר רק הוא מכם כי הוא זייכם

For it is not an empty thing for you, for it is your life.

(32:47)

The *Midrash* explains that there is nothing empty, vacuous, about the Torah. What about the fellow that studies Torah and does not find it to be satisfying? The failure stems *mikem*, from you/him – not from the Torah. Sadly, this happens. A person decides to become observant, and, with great sacrifice, he severely alters his lifestyle, turns his back on friends, family – even very close family, such as parents, spouse and children. It is all part of a rational decision, a cognitive realization that a life without Torah is essentially not living. He begins to learn, but, for some reason, it is not stimulating; he is uninspired, dissatisfied. Did he make a poor choice? Was it a mistake? Absolutely not! The problem is not with the Torah – it is with him. Something about his attitude does not coincide/sit well with the Torah, thus preventing the inspiration and satisfaction from penetrating him.

Why does this happen? Why do some have little to no problem? In fact, they, like fish in water, swim in the sea of *Talmud* and grow exponentially with each passing day; while others neither seem to attach themselves to Torah, nor have the same satisfaction from learning.

In *A Vort from Rav Pam*, Rabbi Sholom Smith quotes the *Rosh Yeshivah* as citing an insightful exposition from *Horav Hirsch Rabinowitz, zl*, the *Kovner Rav*, that will perhaps illuminate this phenomenon for us. In the concluding *Mishnah* of *Meseches Yoma* 85b, Rabbi Akiva states: *Ashreichem Yisrael!* “Fortunate are you, *Yisrael*, for before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you? It is *Avicha She’ba’Shomayim*, your Father in Heaven, as the *pasuk* in *Yechezkel* 36:25 states: ‘Then I will sprinkle pure water upon you, that you may become cleansed,’ (in addition to the *pasuk* in *Yirmiyahu* 17:13) ‘the *mikvah* of *Yisrael* is Hashem;’ just as a *mikvah* purifies the contaminated, so, too, does Hashem purify *Yisrael*.”

It is obvious from Rabbi Akiva’s two citations that two distinct purification processes are available to the penitent/contaminated Jew. There is *hazaah*, sprinkling, during which the contaminated Jew is sprinkled with *mei chatas*, the *chatas/Parah Adumah*/ashes water mixture; and there is *tevillah*, total immersion in a *mikvah*, ritualarium. The *Kovner Rav* posits that a major distinction exists between these two forms of purification.

A *mikvah* purifies a person only when his entire body is immersed in the water. If one hair of his body is outside of the water, he is not rendered pure. The sprinkling process of the *Parah Adumah*, however, is effective even if only a part of the contaminated person’s body comes in contact with the water. A tip of his finger, his lip, suffices to render the entire body pure.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* suggests that the distinction between these types of purification applies, likewise, with regard to the *teshuvah* process and to those individuals who embark upon the journey of return. Some will immerse themselves totally in the process – working on expunging the sins and performing all the *mitzvos*, together with a