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WEEKLY SHMUESS

Vayeira Moving Beyond Despair

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Moving Beyond Despair

The Proof from The Torah That There Will Be A Resurrection of the Dead

In *Parshas Va'eira*, it is written לתת להם את ארץ כנען וגם הקימותי את בריתי איתם “*And I will also upkeep My treaty to give to them the land of Canaan*”. The *Gemara* derives from this verse the the Torah’s proof that there will be resurrection of the dead in the future. The Torah says that Hashem promised to give *Eretz Yisrael* to “them”, to our three forefathers, whom He had made this original promise to, even though they are no longer alive. From here the *Gemara* learns that the *Avos* themselves will receive their inheritance, *Eretz Yisrael*, which was promised to them by Hashem.

What needs understanding is: Why it is specifically this verse from which the Sages derive proof to the resurrection of the dead? Even more so, we need to understand: Of what relevance does the resurrection of the dead have to us now?

The Daily Resurrection of The Dead

In the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we praise Hashem for how He revives the dead. The blessing concludes, “*Blessed are You, Hashem, Who revives the dead.*” Since this is in the present-tense, not in past-tense, it shows us that Hashem revives the dead every day, and not only in the future. It implies that there is a revival of the dead which takes place on a **constant** basis.

We can understand this simply as referring to sleep. *Chazal* state that sleep is “a sixtieth of death”, for the soul leaves the body when a person sleeps. When a person wakes up, Hashem has returned his soul to him, which is a form of resurrection. The complete resurrection of the dead will be in the future, but even in our times we experience a partial level of resurrection, which is when we wake up from sleeping.

What is the root of the concept of resurrection? When Hashem created man, He fashioned his body out

of earth and blew into him a soul from His breath, so to speak. The earth is the symbol of death; man’s body returns to the earth after death. Thus the body in a person is a “dead” part of him, which would not have any life of its own, if not for the soul that Hashem breathes into man. The soul of a person is the root of resurrection. Whereas the body of a person is devoid of any vitality of its own, the soul of a person is the very life-force of a person, which enables the body to be alive.

Thus, the fact that Hashem has breathed a soul into a man is the root of the concept of the resurrection of the dead.

Death – The Endpoint

To be more precise, death is defined as the end of something. When a person’s soul goes back to his eternal life in Heaven, he has reached his end. Death is the end to something on This World. If Adam wouldn’t have sinned, there would have been no such thing as death. His end on This World would have ended in holiness, in completion, in earnestness. But ever since Adam sinned, the end of everything on This World culminates in death.

The curse of death given to mankind ever since the sin was not simply a curse of having to die. Rather, it was a curse that came to the entire Creation – that death must become the end of everything. Animals and plants also die because of the curse of death that was placed upon Creation due to Adam’s sin.

When Hashem first placed Adam in *Gan Eden*, he placed him on all of the trees in *Gan Eden* and said to him, “Look at how beautiful My creations are. All that I have created, I have created for your sake. Make sure that you do not ruin and destroy My world.” Thus, the curse of death that came after the sin wasn’t just a curse upon man that he would now know of death; it was a curse placed upon the entire Creation, that it was now a

ruined state of Creation. Ever since then, the end of each thing culminates in a death; the death of something is its end.

There is physical death after an average lifespan of about 70 or 80 years of being alive, and there is also a degree of death which all people experience every day, when they go to sleep. But if we look deeper, there is another kind of death which we experience. Whenever we encounter something and we don't have a way to move forward, this is like death. It feels like reaching an end, where we feel stuck, and parallels death. For death is not just an event that happens to a person at the end of his physical life; rather, it envelopes all of Creation, ever since the first sin.

Death In The Soul: Despair

In terms of our soul, this concept is manifested in the nature of despair (in Hebrew, “*yei'ush*”). When a person despairs at something, he feels like he has reached the endpoint and that he can't get further.

To illustrate, the *Gemara* says that when a person finds a lost item, he is only allowed to keep it if the owner had completely given up on finding it, saying, “Woe to me on this monetary loss.” Until he despaired, he had owned the item and he could do with it as he pleased; he could sell it if he wanted. But when he lost the item and he despaired of finding the object, then that object has reached its ‘end’ so to speak. The object no longer continues to exist in his possession. When he despaired of it, not only is he upset at his monetary loss, but he is upset at all of the possible monetary gains that could have come to him from this item or money.

Thus, despair is felt by a person when he feels like he has reached the end, the loss of continuation, of something. A person can experience despair over his money or over other areas in his life.

The Hebrew word for “despair”, “*ye'ush*” (יאוש) comes from the word *aiish* (איש), fire, implying that despair works like a fire, which burns up something and destroys it, so that it has no more continuation. Fire brings an end to something and doesn't allow for that

thing to continue. This is how despair works: it makes a person feel that he has arrived at a certain end, where something can no longer continue. The destructive “fire” within a person's soul can ‘scorch’ something until it has become dust or ash.

Despair is essentially the curse of death which came to mankind. There is physical death as we know it, and there is also an ‘inner’ kind of death: *yei'ush*/despair.

Defeating The Voice of Despair

What is the root of how we can defeat despair?

As mentioned before, the soul of a person is the root of resurrection. The body itself is dead without the soul. That will also mean that from the body's perspective alone, there can only be despair. But since we also have a soul within us, which is our life-source, we have the power to transcend the limitations of the body. The body by itself has an end, but the soul does not. The soul can be above the element of earth which the body is created from, and it can allow continuation.

The understanding of this is not simply that the body can work because there is a spiritual life-force in it, the soul, which allows it to perform. The understanding is much deeper than this and it has far broader implications to the entire task of man.

When there can be earth/death/despair, there can be a new lead on life due to the soul, which is called the “breathe of life” placed in man, which can transcend all of the base aspects in man. Whatever is said of death is also describing the limitations of man, which man always meets up with at some point. Each person's soul makeup is different, but every person hits a point where they feel absolutely limited, and that they cannot do anything to change a situation.

This is taken to an extreme level if a person despairs over his entire life in general, *chas v'shalom*, he will feel like he cannot do anything at all. The despair becomes a terribly destructive “fire” that burns him up inside, destroying any chance of hope for anything. But all people experience despair, on some level, in certain

areas of their life – where they feel like they cannot move on and get beyond where they are.

If a person thinks that the inability to get to the next point will still not deter his *shleimus* (self-perfection), then he is delusional, and this stems from conceitedness. But if one thinks he can't move to the next point because it simply looks like the 'end of the rope' and that it is impossible for him to get further, this is what we refer to as "despair."

The *Gemara* says that every day, the *yetzer hora* (the evil inclination) gets stronger and it wants to destroy the person, and if not for Hashem's help, a person cannot overcome it.¹ Man is comprised of a body and a soul. Our body cannot overpower the *yetzer hora*, because the *yetzer hora* is an angel, Reb Yisrael Salanter writes that there is also an outer *yetzer hora*, which is called an "angel", and there is also an internal *yetzer hora* embedded in the body's nature, which pulls a person towards evil. The inner *yetzer hora* exerts a strong pull, but the outer *yetzer hora* is above the person and is even stronger. The pull of the *yetzer hora* contains mostly evil, and when it overtakes man, man feels helpless. From the viewpoint of our body alone, man is on a world which is mostly evil and only partially good; for this reason, the *yetzer hora* has a strong pull over man - and he needs Hashem's help to overcome it.

There are many ways to understand how a person can enlist Hashem's help. One way is through *emunah*, and another way is through *tefillah*. Here we are explaining a third way to get Hashem to help us: through believing in the power of our *neshamah*, the "breathe of life" that Hashem has placed in us, which is far stronger than even the angel that is the *yetzer hora*. This is because the angels are found "outside" of Hashem's inner chamber, whereas the soul of a Jew is found more "within" Hashem's chamber, like the *Kodesh Kodashim*, where the *Kohen Gadol* truly stood "before" Hashem, in the most intimate level of closeness with Hashem.

The *Kodesh Kodashim* was the place in the world, the innermost place, where one was utterly connected to

Hashem. In the depths of our own souls as well, whenever we encounter a part of our life which seems impossible to traverse and we feel like we have truly reached our "end" point – we really have a deep ability to get past it. We find that another term for the "endpoint" is "*meitzar*", "narrow confine", which comes from the word "*Mitzrayim*" (Egypt). The concept of *Mitzrayim* represents our *meitzar*, our narrow confines, where we feel trapped in; just as were exiled within the confines of Egypt. Yosef was sent to *Mitzrayim* and he paved the way for our redemption from there. "Yosef" is from the word *tosefes*, "addition", a hint that we can "add" onto the endpoint a step and move past the *meitzar*.

How indeed do we reach the *tosefes* that can bring us past the *meitzar*? How do we move past the 'end of the rope' when we feel like we are in it?

Step One: You're Only Seeing One Part of the Picture

One must first realize that the situation which appears impossible to move past, which is his endpoint, is only due to the element of earth in the body, which causes man to feel limited. It only "appears" to be impossible, because it is all in his imagination that he can't move past it. It is always the earth/body of man which makes him feel that he has reached his limitation, his endpoint.

When a person remembers that this defeating perspective is only one side of his existence – for he also has a *neshamah*, and that he is not just a body created from the element of earth - he can remind himself that he only has a limited perspective and he is not seeing the entire picture. One needs to remind himself that his feelings of despair and defeat come from the element of earth in his body, which shows him only one side of the coin – his limitations.

A *dayan* (judge) is not allowed to hear one side the story if there are two litigants involved and one of them is not present. So too, one should not listen to his *yetzer hora* before he has heard what his *yetzer tov* has to say. *Chazal* say, "Make yourself into a *dayan*" – in this sense

¹ *Sukkah* 52a

that one should not listen to his *yetzer hora* before he has heard the voice of his *yetzer tov*. If he only listens to his *yetzer hora*, he is only focusing on one side of the story.

When one is focusing on his limitations and has feelings of despair and defeat, he should realize that this inner voice that he is hearing is only one side of the story. It is his body's opinion talking to him, of "*You are earth, and to earth you shall return*" – that you have reached the end and that there is no hope of moving past this point.

Step Two: Seeing The View From Your Neshamah

Even more so, though, one must always see the other side of the coin, in every situation he encounters. This is a fundamental perspective about the inner workings of the soul. When a person is focused on his endpoint, on his limitations – he must also see the 'other side of the coin'. This is true about all the inner forces which the *yetzer hora* uses at its disposal: one must always "hear both sides of the story", and not to hear one side alone.

Chazal say about learning Torah, "Turn it over and over, for all is in it." One needs to always see the two different possible angles of understanding in a situation [especially in learning Torah, where there are always at least two ways of understanding something]. This is also true about life in general when we are in a situation in which we feel like it is impossible for us to see the way out, where we feel like we are at the 'endpoint'. However, if we are aware that this is because we are only seeing one side of the situation – the viewpoint that comes from "*You are earth, and to earth you shall return*" – then we can demand from ourselves to look further within ourselves, and to reflect and listen to the higher place in ourselves, where our essence is.

One needs to listen to a more inner place in himself, the "breathe of life" placed into us by Hashem. If one truly listens to this inner place in himself and he connects to the perspective of the *neshamah*, through *emunah* in this concept, his soul will then feel that although we have our limitations, and that those

limitations are certainly true, they are only one side of the coin.

The limitations we find ourselves in represent only one side of our existence, which is that we come from the earth, and that we return to the earth one day, with death [of the body]. At the very same time, we can realize that from the very element of earth which Hashem originally created us with, so also every day as well Hashem breathes into us this breathe of life, returning our soul to our body. Within our very limitations, is a power that enables us to continue past our endpoint; and Hashem keeps sending us this power of renewal every day. It enlightens the depths of our soul and enables us to keep going.

Escaping Inner Slavery

Now we can understand why the *Gemara* derives proof of resurrection of the dead specifically from the words our *parshah*, in which Hashem promises to give *Eretz Yisrael* to the *Avos*, in the future.

These words are said in our *parshah*, which discusses the exodus from Egypt, *Mitzrayim*, from the word *meitzar* (narrow confine), and from the word *tzaar* (pain). The exodus from Egypt was not a one-time event that took place in the 15th of Nissan many years ago. It certainly took place, but it has far broader implications, throughout our ongoing story, in our souls.

When we left Egypt, the bones of Yosef came with us. The depth of this is that every *meitzar* (narrow confine; painful situation) stems from our body's viewpoint; but when the light of the *neshamah* shines within us – represented by the "bones of Yosef", Yosef is the *hosafah* (addition) of the *meitzar*/Mitzrayim – then one can realize that the viewpoint which comes from our body, or our element of earth, is essentially the Egyptian exile.

Egypt was a place where no slave could escape [due to the sorcery that protected its borders] – and so too can a person feel like he is a total "slave" to the level he is currently at, feeling like he cannot escape from it. But

with the redemption from Egypt, we became the “children” of Hashem, and the “firstborn” of Hashem. We no longer had the status of slaves, but children; a slave feels like he cannot escape, whereas a child is free to choose escaping.

Being enslaved in Egypt represents the concept of internal slavery, where one feels ‘enslaved’ to various evil forces, which he feels like he cannot escape from. He feels like a ‘slave’ deep down to those lusts and passions, and it feels impossible to escape, just as no slave could run away from Egypt. But with the redemption from Egypt, we received a spiritual light that enables one to escape all forms of ‘slavery’. And it is this light which is the light of the resurrection of the dead.

For this reason, the Sages found proof to the resurrection of the dead, from the words in our *parshah*. The resurrection of the dead, as we explained, is not just something we believe will happen in the future. It happens every day, when Hashem returns our soul to us upon waking up. It is not only after we sleep that we are revived from ‘death’. Whenever a person feels that he has reached the ‘end of the rope’ in something, he feels like he is trapped in a *meitzar* (narrow confine), and his *avodah* then, practically speaking, is to ask himself: “Who says that I am seeing the entire situation? Who is telling me that it is impossible?” Then a person can conclude that it is the body’s voice telling him that nothing can be done.

When one gets used to this inner kind of listening, he is then able to deepen his listening and hear the voice of his *neshamah*, and then he can hear a different voice entirely. He will be able to hear the voice of the *neshamah*, the “breathe of life” that Hashem placed in man, the voice that can convey to him that there can be a freedom from all narrow confines.

The Depth of Our Bechirah (Free Will)

Herein lays our power of *bechirah* (free will) which we can use to **awaken** the voice of our *neshamah*. Our *bechirah* is to choose if we will remain confined or not to the voice of our physical body, which tells us that we

have certain limitations and that we can’t get past our difficulties, and to remain confined to the element of earth that we are created with, which is an inner slavery and a place that is impossible to escape from.

Accordingly, this will also determine how much ‘resurrection of the dead’ we will experience in the present. The complete resurrection of the dead will only be in the future, when all “death will be swallowed forever”; but its light can be accessed even now, on a partial level. It is accessed through using our power of *bechirah*, to choose, which voice we listen to in ourselves.

The more that a person chooses to awaken the voice of his *neshamah*, in **every point** in his life when it seems impossible to get past, the more he will access the light of the ‘resurrection of the dead’ now. This is accomplished by first settling his mind and listening to where the inner ‘voice’ in himself is coming from. Upon listening to your inner voice, you then need to discern the other inner voice that counters it, just as a *dayan* must hear the two differing litigants before deciding on the verdict.

The more a person gets used to this kind of internal reflection, believing in the truths of these matters, he draws forth inner vitality, on a constant basis.

Receiving Higher Abilities To Break Your Natural Limitations

In deeper terms, there is the power of the body, the power of the soul, and the power which comes directly from Hashem, which the individual’s soul can receive higher abilities from which are more than their innate natural capabilities.

This is the depth of the matter of the “key of the resurrection of the dead, which is not given to any messenger”,² and the depth of the exodus from Egypt, which was “not through an angel, not through a *seraph*, and not through a messenger, but from Hashem Himself, in His glory.” To receive higher powers that

² See *Taanis 2a*

go above one's natural capabilities is a very high level, and it is the depth contained on the night of Pesach, where we were redeemed from Egypt and prepared to receive the Torah; we were on the level of the resurrection of the dead. The Sage Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair lists ten levels in serving Hashem, beginning from Torah, *zehirus*, and *zerizus*, and all the way to *kedushah*, *ruach hakodesh*, and, finally, *techiyas hameisim* (resurrection of the dead). These are very high levels to reach; the Sages in the times of the *Gemara* had the ability to resurrect the dead.

On our own level, how do we access the power of the resurrection of the dead? It is by shining the light of our *neshamah* onto our body.

Any individual can do this, as long as he is a person who searches for Hashem. Then a person will be able to see, with *siyata d'shmaya*, that the very limitations upon him which he thought he could not escape from, can slowly be broken; like a personal exodus from Egypt.

In Conclusion

In this way, one accepts upon himself the *ol malchus shomayim* (the yoke of Heaven), and “One who accepts upon himself the yoke of Heaven, is spared from the yoke of *derech eretz* (worldly matters)” – his limitations are removed. Then a person will merit to open up another gate, and then another gate, and then another – until he reaches the gate of the King Himself, in all of His glory.