



Chaya Sara

GRIEVING

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Grieving¹

Dealing With Loss

In *Parashas Chayei Sarah*, Avraham Avinu mourns Sarah and eulogizes her. He had spent a large part of his life together with Sarah, and the time had now come for Sarah to leave the world. It was now time for them to part ways, and there was eulogizing and weeping over her.

We have no comprehension of the greatness of Avraham Avinu, who is called the “great man amongst giants.” But by the law of nature which Hashem has decreed upon mankind, as a result of the first sin, there are times of our life where we enjoy connection with others, and at a certain point, there comes a parting of the ways, and we see the root of this concept from the fact that Avraham eulogized and wept over the loss of Sarah.

In our own life, we need to reflect truthfully: How must we view loss? How should we react to losing our loved ones and our close friends? At some point, we all have to deal with loss, where there is a disconnection from the other whom we were close with.

External Loss and Internal Loss

There are external and inner kinds of loss.

External loss is when we lose an object or possession that was valuable to us. Some people take these losses very hard, if it was something that was very dear to the person. Sometimes people have a hard time leaving behind the house that they liked so much. A teenager might feel homesick when he has to leave town for *yeshiva* and he misses the home and the family. Going deeper, sometimes a person has to leave behind friends with whom he was close with.

But the most painful losses we go through, as we see from *Parashas Chayei Sarah*, are the loss of a close relative. Losing a father or mother makes a person feel somewhat lonely, for the parent has gone away, and the child is left here on this world, apart from the parent who has gone.

Let us analyze the root of this and see the proper attitude we need to have towards this.

Relationships Are Not Forever

There are all kinds of connection we have on this world. We start out in life as children, where our first connections with people are towards our parents and our siblings. At that point, however,

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we have no *daas* (mature understanding) to be aware of these connections. We are born into these connections, but we are not initially aware of the connection. When a loss of a loved one finally arrives, it can hit a person very hard.

But there are other connections which we choose to enter. When we get older and we gain some *daas*, we are aware of the force of connection to others. We think of how to enter into these relationships.

In any connection to another that we enter, we must know that all of these connections are temporary. We must first realize that just as we enter into a relationship, so will we have to take leave of the relationship one day.

This thought needs to come before taking the action of entering the relationship. If a person has already begun the relationship without being aware that it is not forever, that is already his first mistake. The sensible way to enter into a relationship - whether it is an external connection, such as moving into a house or buying new clothes, or some other possession, or whether it is an internal connection, such as our friends and family – we must be aware, to start out with, that just as there can be connection, so can there be disconnection. Sometimes a relationship ends forcibly, and sometimes it ends willingly. But any connection\relationship we enter is not forever.

How much time will the connection last? Usually, we do not know how long. We usually cannot predict when it will end. But what we do know is that it is not forever. The time will come one day when the relationship or connection will end. This awareness applies to one who has become a *bar daas* (sensible, thinking person) who can reflect and understand this.

Our Primary Sources of Connection: To Hashem, To Torah, and To The Inner Self

Let us elaborate further upon this point.

Every person needs connection. A true, perfection connection is only attainable with Hashem and with His Torah – for those who merit it. An additional important connection we have on this world is towards our *self*.²

Some people hear about this concept and they are puzzled: What does it mean to become connected to your **self**? Are our hands chopped off, G-d forbid, that we need to piece them back together and become more “connected to our *self*”? What does it mean to have a connection with your **self**?

But the answer to this is because we are comprised of a body and a soul, an outer layer and an inner core. The outer layer of our self is more revealed in our life. Our inner layer is hidden from us, when we start life. The more a person has exertion, prayer, and clarity [about his inner world], he enters more within himself, and he finds his true “I”, which is at first very hidden from a person.

² Editor's Note: The Maharal says that there are three relationships we have on this world – man's relationship between himself and Hashem; man's relationship with others; and man's relationship towards himself.

When one finds his true and pure “I” (which is not a place of selfishness, but a place of selflessness), he discovers a deep connection to himself. This is a constant connection to his actual essence.

These are the true connections one needs to form on this world - a deep connection to Hashem, to His Torah, and a deep connection to oneself.

Superficial Connection To Others vs. Genuine Connection To Others

If one does not solidly have these three connections, his power of connection will be drawn outward, towards superficial things which are outside of himself. He might become very connected to the various desires of This World, or even to friends or neighbors, or to his family members – but the quality of the connection he has with others will usually not be genuine. It will instead become a kind of dependency, where he is hanging onto others in order to have some kind of connection, because he doesn’t feel secure within himself. Since he is not anchored enough to Hashem, to Torah, and to his inner self, instead he will connect to that which is outside of him.

The result will be, that when the day comes where he experiences a loss of another whom he had been close with, he will feel like he cannot continue to exist. He had built his life on a ‘foundation’ that wasn’t truthful. He had attached his reason for existence on factors that were outside of his self, and this had become the ‘foundation’ of his life. He becomes dependent on others, on his surroundings, on his friends, or on his family members. When he loses whatever he had attached his existence to – whether it is a close friend, or a family member – he will feel: “What is my life worth?”

Grieving over the loss of a close friend or beloved family member might feel to the person like a high level of “*ahavas Yisrael*” to the person, but most of the time, it is not actually stemming from *ahavas Yisrael*. It is usually stemming from an absence of a secure, deep connection to Hashem, to Torah, and to his inner self; he replaced this void by connecting to that which is outside of him. It might seem to him like a praiseworthy trait of love for another, but it is usually coming from a deep internal void that he was trying to fill.

In contrast, the proper way for a person to fulfill his need for connection is by having a deep connection *to* himself, and *within* himself; and to be connected to his root, which is Hashem and His Torah. And one also needs to have a deep connection to all other souls in the Jewish people, which is *ahavas Yisrael*. It takes time and effort to acquire each of these connections, and each of them require a separate discussion. But this is the outline: one needs a deep connection to Hashem, to Torah, and to his inner self.

In order to connect to others, it cannot be based on the recognition and experience of others which we are familiar with. It is not like that at all. True connection to others is only when we have a genuine *ahavas Yisrael* (love for the souls of the Jewish people). **We need to have a love for *Klal Yisrael*, and upon that, we can base our relationships with others.**

The basis of connection we have others must not be based on the fact that the person sits in the same row or bench of the *beis midrash* we learn in, or on the fact that he is our *chavrusa*, etc. These

are all external, superficial reasons to love others. Of course, if that leads to an inner connection with another, then the external aspect of the connection certainly has its place. But the root of our connection to others needs to come from pure *ahavas Yisrael*. This means that one needs to feel connected to the general whole of *Klal Yisrael*, on a collective level, and also to each Jew separately, on the individual level.

When this is the basis, connections with others can be formed, and they will be genuine. Connection to others needs to be securely based on connection with Hashem, Torah, and oneself, and pure *ahavas Yisrael* to others; then our relationships with others can thrive and they are real.

If these conditions are met, the external aspects of our connection to others are then joined with their root; the *nefesh hebeheimis* (the animalistic layer of the soul) and the lower soul³ which is contained in the body, is then joined together with the deep and true dimension. That is the true way life is supposed to look like.

When The Connection Is Severed: How There Can Be Consolation Amidst Grief

When a person only connected to others superficially, and then he goes through the loss of a parent or a friend, the entire connection will be gone. This leads to great sadness and inconsolable pain. But if one made sure to connect to others through pure *ahavas Yisrael*, upon experiencing the loss of a loved one, whether it is death or separation from another, the deep connection will continue to exist.

[To explain this on a deeper level], the “garment” of the relationship has been severed, but not the connection itself. The deep love formed from our *neshamah* (Divine Soul) will continue to exist, after the external aspects of the love cease. There will surely be pain, and even great pain, upon the loss of the other person; but the very root of the connection with the other will remain intact.

As long as a person is not connected to Hashem, Torah, and to his inner self, he will be shaken to the core upon experiences the loss of a loved one.

Only after one feels a connection to Hashem, Torah and to the inner self can one have a genuine connection with others, which does not come from a need for dependency and from an inner void, but from the depths of the soul that he has been connected to from beforehand. Connecting to others needs to stem from that very depth of connection that a person enjoys with Hashem, Torah, and to his own *pnimiyus* (inner world) and the love for every *neshamah* in *Klal Yisrael*.

If that is the root of a person’s connections, he will be able to enjoy genuine connections and friendships with others, and even when the external aspects of the relationship become weakened, he will still be able to maintain his ability to connect. But even more so, as we are explaining, even the relationship itself to the other will remain.

³ *nefesh tachtonah* (“lower soul”) – the lowest part of the soul, which is attached to our physical body; it includes our basic emotions.

The external aspect of a relationship also has its place, and it is not to be invalidated; we are not ethereal beings right now living in Heaven, with no physicality. We have physical bodies right now, for our souls are contained in a body as we live here on this earth. Part of our relationships with others includes the external, physical aspect of it, and this is necessary in the relationship. This is especially the case with how we feel close to our parents, which is usually more of a physically related and with less emphasis on a soul connection with them.

But the point being conveyed here is that when we make sure to form a spiritual connection to another, it will always remain, and even when the other takes leave from us, it will not be a total parting of the ways.

Eternal Connection With Another

Herein lays the deep perspective towards life.

Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and weep over her. Chazal say that it takes time to grieve, cry, and mourn. But if a person did not yet develop the areas of connection which we explained until now [to Hashem, Torah, to one's own *pnimiyus*, and *ahavas Yisrael* to others] and he is trying to mourn the loss of another, as Avraham did for Sarah – it will be too difficult for a person to digest the pain of the loss.

Avraham cried over Sarah, but it was not like how the average person cries over such a loss. Even as Avraham cried over the loss of Sarah and he buried her in *Kiryat Arba* in *Chevron*, he was not mourning in the individual sense; it was not simply that Avraham was crying on a 'private' level over the loss of the individual who was "Sarah". Rather, Avraham and Sarah were connected to each from the depths of their *neshamos*, from their innermost. Since that was the quality of their connection, even when Sarah took leave of the world and Avraham had to bury her, it was not simply the end of their relationship. The "garment" of their relationship had ended – the physical parts of their relationship, which were temporary – had now gone. But their inner connection was formed and it continued to remain.

Even more so, Chazal tell us that Avraham was with Sarah in his lifetime, and then he experienced a temporary absence of Sarah in the years that he survived her (which lasted 10 years), and after Avraham was *niftar*, they were once again together [in Heaven]. Whatever separation occurred between them after Sarah's demise was only temporary. The connection soon returned. Connection to another isn't for this world only – it is also in Heaven; and later it can return on this world as well, with *techiyas hameisim*⁴.

From the deeper perspective which we are explaining here, when it comes to all of the connections we have on this world with others, if these connections are only on an external\superficial level, they don't return after they are severed. But if our connections to others

⁴ revival of the deceased

were inner and truthful, even if we lose those connections, it is only the outer “garment” of the connection we are losing, and not the connection itself. The loss is only temporary. We may have to wait until *techiyas hameisim* and *Olam HaBa* until the connection returns, but it will definitely return, and on a more purified and inner level. Therefore, all of our losses and severed relationships with others are but temporary.

Deep Nechamah (Consolation) During Mourning

There are some people who receive *nechamah* (consolation) over the loss of a loved one when they believe in *techiyas hameisim* (the revival of the deceased), of which it is said, “*Awaken and rejoice, those who dwelled in the earth*”. But from a deeper understanding, what gives a person the true *nechamah*? It is only when a person had an inner connection with the other person. The external aspects of the relationship go lost, and the inner aspect of it remains, for it is constant and eternal. When a person realizes after some time that the inner connection is still there, his soul is calmed from this.

Without reaching this perspective, a person is bereft after a loss, and his pain is inconsolable.

Tasting The “Eitz HaChaim” On This World

Ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, death was decreed upon man. Besides for the curse of death which was now placed on man, there was a more inner kind of damage that came to mankind. Now the world would be a place of *alma d’piruda* – a “world of separation” – not only is there death, but all of our life contains so many forms of severed connection. The sin of Adam caused the greatest pain to come to all of mankind.

How much suffering people go through due to severed relationships with others! The pain is tremendous. Every day, there are severed connections; there is *pirud* separation. The *pirud* separation experienced on this world is one of the deepest forms of pain which the body and soul go through, and all people in the world experience it. The *pirud* that began with the sin of Adam has caused pain, upon pain, upon pain.

But when a person merits a little bit to partake of the “*Eitz HaChaim*” on this world, which contains eternal life – when a person connects to Hashem, Who is “the Almighty, the King, Who lives forever”, and when a person connects to the “Torah of life”, and when a person connects to the deep part of himself which is called the “*Chayah*” (vitality)⁵, which is eternal, and when a person connects to the root of the *neshamos* of *Klal Yisrael*, who can never cease (as Chazal say, that “the congregation cannot die”) – when one is connected to there, he is partaking of the *Eitz HaChaim* on

⁵ The five parts of the soul (from lowest to highest levels) are called *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*; these terms are first mentioned in *Devarim Rabbah* and are explained further in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, *Derech HaShem*, *Tanya*, to name a few.

this world, on some level. An entirely new perspective will be revealed to him, on how he will view connection with others and loss of others.

The Proper Way To Grieve

When some people go through a loss, they would rather have *hesech hadaas* (“taking the mind off it”) in order to avoid thinking about the loss, and in this way, they save themselves from experiencing the pain of the loss. But if someone wants to live truthfully, he knows that this is not the attitude to have towards loss.

He will not bury his head in the sand. Instead, he is well-prepared for the loss long before it happens, by attaining clarity on how to live. He knows that dealing with a loss cannot be worked upon as he’s actually going through the loss. Rather, it is about knowing how to connect to others in the first place, long before we wonder about how to grieve over the loss of the connection to the other. When a person connects to others in the right way when they lived, the loss of the other person will be experienced in an elevated manner.

The Sage Rabbi Eliezer *HaGadol* told his son on his deathbed: “My son, I am going to bliss with Hashem.” His time had come to leave the world, and as he was taking leave of all that was external, his inner connections were strengthening. As he was dying, he became more aware of the bliss he was heading towards. On a similar note, the Sages state that when Avraham was tying his son Yitzchok to the Altar, all of the love that he had for Yitzchok was ready to be given towards Hashem.

Using Our Power of Connection

The power in a person to connect is always intact, and the only question is how we will use it, and what we will reveal it towards.

When one uses the power of connection correctly and as it should be, his entire life will look different. When the time comes in which he must experience the loss of connection with the other, whether it is a small level of disconnection from another (which happens often in our life), or whether it is an actual parting of the ways with another - which can be very difficult to go through, and a painful part of life, which we have to endure until the time comes when “death will be swallowed forever”, when “Hashem will wipe away the tears from all faces” – when these times of loss inevitably arrive, we can truly merit the meaning of the verse, “*And the living shall take to heart*”, in the sense that the connection with the other is always alive.

The more we elevate our power of connection and we use it as it should, a person becomes closer and closer to Hashem, to the holy Torah, to his own self, and to the depth of all other *neshamos* in *Klal Yisrael*, in his love for them. Then even the external aspects of our relationships with others will be improved.

In Conclusion

May we merit from Hashem that it be fulfilled with us the verse, “*And death will be swallowed forever*”, when “*Hashem will wipe the tears from all faces*”, when there will no longer be severed connections from others - whether they are small losses or big losses to the person; and may the most complete, deepest connection of all be revealed, when all *neshamos* of *Klal Yisrael* together will become attached, together, to Hashem, and to His Torah.