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WEEKLY SHMUESS

Metzora

**Strive to be Alone
Sometimes**

**DRASHA FROM THE
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Metzora – Strive to be Alone Sometimes

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The Solitude of the Metzora (Leper)

In *Parshas Metzora*, the Torah states that a *metzora* (a leper) “sits alone, outside the camp”. The *Gemara*¹ says that a *metzora* has caused a rift between husband and wife and between man and his friend [through speaking words of slander to them about each other], which caused separation. Therefore, the Torah punishes the *metzora* measure-for-measure by making him dwell alone, outside the camp, where he is separated from society.

The fact that the *metzora* must be alone is the “downside” of being alone, and a punishment. But *Chazal* have taught us that every power can be used for evil as well as for good. If it is a bad thing to be alone, there must be also a good and holy side to being alone.

There are several instances and times where a person is alone. For example, one must relieve himself in a lavatory which is a room set aside for bodily functions so that he can do so alone. The *Gemara* says that King Shaul was especially modest when relieving himself, by defecating only in a cave within a cave. This was a kind of “alone” that stemmed from the trait of modesty. However, this kind of “alone” is for hiding bodily functions, which man is ashamed of, so it is not the holiest use of “alone”.

There is a holier kind of “alone” exemplified by the *Kohen Gadol* in the *Kodesh Kodashim*, on Yom Kippur. No one was allowed there on Yom Kippur except for the *Kohen Gadol* who was completely alone with Hashem. This was the highest function of the power of “alone”.

The Two Sides of Man: Alone and Companionship

Chazal say, “Therefore, man was created alone”. Adam was first created alone. This was the inner essence of man – to be alone. At a later point, Hashem said, “*It is not good for man to be alone*”, and He created woman as a helpmate for man. This became the external function of man: to live with companionship. But the internal function of man - the initial form of existence of man - is to be “alone”.

This function of man, “alone”, was not lost after man received a companion. Rather, it remains as an inner power in man which is still functioning even though it is hidden. All people, throughout all the generations, retained this inner function of man to be “alone”, for “man was created alone.” The *avodah* of every person, on one hand, is to develop this inner space of being “alone”; and simultaneously, man has the task of being a companion to others. The *Gemara* says that it is wrong to learn Torah alone, and one must

¹ *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Arachin 17a*

learn Torah with a *chavrusa*, or else “a sword shall be upon his neck.”

In the depths of our soul, we need to develop the soul’s power of “alone”, man’s “individual” aspect, but at the same time, we also need to build connections with others. You are commanded to love another Jew like yourself, and in learning Torah, you need to learn Torah with others, and not by yourself.

These are the two major, opposite areas in the soul which need to be accessed: the power of alone, and the power of companionship. One needs to build the power of “alone” - in a holy manner, that is - and on the other hand, one needs to be able to connect to others.

True Friendship With Others Is Based On Developing The Power of “Alone”

Therefore, let us understand the following. If a person does not build in himself the power of “alone”, his connections to others will not be genuine. Instead, they will be the kinds of connections that remove a person from his world, such as the traits of jealousy, desire and honor which remove a person from “his world” – meaning his own, inner world. When a person connects to others only in a superficial manner, these connections turn him from being an internal person into an external kind of person who acts superficially.

When a person has no inner place in his soul of “alone” – meaning that he is not accessing this power in himself, and he is just taking life as it comes – his connections to others will be only external and superficial. They will be stemming from a lack of connection to his own inner world – they

won’t be genuine, truthful connections that stem from the depths of his soul.

To give an example, a child cannot really connect to others. A child lives for himself, which is a use of “alone”. This is not the holy use of alone, rather the impaired, self-absorbed use of “alone”. A child cannot have mature connections with others, and all he can do is be dependent on his mother for care and affection. This is a kind of *bittul* (self-nullification), which is some kind of connection, but it is not a connection of love for another person, which is only possible with two mature adults.

When growing up, a child learns how to connect to others, mainly through the power of speech, which is the force that enables conversation and connection with others. But if one has not developed yet his power of “alone”, of “man was created [an] individual”, his connections to others will be on an immature level, and he will not have true, genuine friendships with others.

Therefore, Hashem has created man in a way that he must access both of these aspects – the power of “alone”, and the power of connection to others.

The Balance Between Solitude and Companionship

With regards to our own personal *avodah*, the *Ramchal* in *Mesillas Yescharim* states many times that befriending others often awakens our materialistic aspect, and it often awakens bad *middos* as well, when we are around friends. The *Ramchal* therefore says, that a person must have time every day in which he is alone, spending time learning Torah or in

his own personal *avodah*. In addition, part of the day should be spent in the good company of Torah scholars and those who serve Hashem.

It is impossible to say how much of the time of the day should be spent alone, and how much time of the day should be spent with others, because there are no ironclad rules for this.

Some people naturally like to be alone and they are less social, but they need to have some time of the day of connecting to others, for the Sages say that it is incorrect for a person to learn Torah all day by himself and not to be involved with others when learning Torah (as well as in matters of *avodah*).

On the other side of the spectrum are the people who love to socialize with others and they do not like to be alone, but the *Ramchal* advises that they, too, must have some time of the day where they can learn Torah alone. There are people who dread learning Torah by themselves, and they can only enjoy it when they learn with a *chavrusa*, but if the *chavrusa* doesn't show up one day, they are so disturbed by this that they feel like they cannot learn. This is what happens when a person has not yet developed his inner space of being "alone". He must learn how to be "alone" sometimes.

It is difficult to determine how much time of the day one needs to spend alone learning Torah and doing *avodah*, and how much time of the day one needs to learn Torah with others and to be around Torah scholars and those who serve Hashem. There are no set rules for this, and it is matter that depends on one's personal soul root, as well as on the particular level that one is on now. It is also

affected by external factors, such as the location one is in, and what his particular needs are right now.

But a sensible person must set aside some time of the day for learning Torah alone, and for making private self-accounting, and for speaking with Hashem privately, both mentally and verbally. And he must also have times of the day in which he learns Torah in the company of others.

The Chazon Ish would spend a large part of the day learning Torah alone. He also had some time of the day where others could come speak to him. When he came to *Eretz Yisrael*, the yeshiva students came to his home at certain times of the day to converse with him in Torah. Those who were close to him and who studied his writings in-depth were able to tell that he learned *Bava Kamma* with a *chavrusa*, because the style of his Torah *chiddushim* on *Bava Kamma* was different than all other tractates he had written on. This was a clear example of a *Gadol* who spent most of his time learning Torah alone.

There were other *Gedolim* who were opposite than this, and they spent most of their time learning Torah around their *talmidim* and speaking in Torah with others. But the common denominator between all *Gedolim* is that they were all able to do both – they could learn Torah alone, and they could also converse in Torah with others.

When The "Alone" Is Missing

If a person cannot learn Torah alone at all, he is greatly lacking a fundamental, deep power of the soul, and in all (or most) cases, he will certainly find it difficult to set aside

any time of the day to make any self-accounting. Although there are many different approaches of how to make self-accounting, everyone agrees that self-accounting is mainly a personal matter, which [mainly] needs to be done alone. Perhaps this kind of person will want to make a self-accounting together with his *chavrusa*, but he will be missing the main kind of self-accounting, which is done only when one is alone.

The external part of self-accounting may be done with others, but the main, inner part of self-accounting needs to be done alone. One needs to have time alone every day for making a self-accounting, where he contemplates his situation deeply, alone, by himself.

One needs to really acquire – and with emphasis on “acquire”, because he must work hard at attaining this space of “alone” in himself. This is what is meant by the words of Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair that “Torah brings one to *zehirus*....to *kedushah*....to *ruach hakodesh*....to *techiyas hameisim*.” The Torah that leads one to developing his own “alone” - his own personal share, his own inner world, his own personal obligation on this world – this is the kind of “Torah” that will lead one to all the other levels, such as *zehirus*, *zerizus*, etc.

When one can only learn Torah in the company of others but he cannot learn Torah alone, he has not developed his soul’s abilities – he is not actualizing the potential of his soul to be “alone”. Man was created alone and to become an individual, man must reach his “individual” aspect by discovering this “alone”. He will not be able to reach his individuality if he has no times of being alone during the day. Man needs time of the day in which he can learn Torah alone, as well as to

connect to his inner self, when he is alone. If he merits to exert himself in Torah even when alone, the vast inner world of *avodah* becomes opened to him.

If one wants the world of inner *avodah* without trying to get to his own personal share in Torah – which can only be attained through learning Torah alone - it is like a branch without a root, or a tower floating in the air, which cannot sustain itself.

The root of one’s *avodah* is to activate the potential forces of the soul, to access man’s “individual” aspect, which is unique to each person and which no one else can equal. The root of this power lies in discovering one’s own personal part in the Torah. Hashem created everything in His Divine wisdom, and man in particular was created with a special Divine wisdom, and one’s *avodah* is to activate the potential of all this wisdom.

One reaches his own Torah, on an external level, by learning Torah alone, and on an internal level, by reaching one’s unique part in the Torah. Then, just as Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world, so can a person “create worlds” through his own personal share in the Torah that he reaches: he can build his own inner world, through the unique share in Torah that he reaches. If only learns Torah with a *chavrusa* and never when he is alone, it will be difficult for him to reach his own share in Torah, and as a result, it will be very hard for him to reach his own inner world of *avodah*.

Without developing the power of “alone”, a person may *daven* well, he may be heavily involved in trying to improve his character, which is wonderful, but he won’t reach his own personal obligation on this world as

described in the beginning of *sefer Mesillas Yeshtarim*, that “the foundation of piety and the root of perfect service is to clarify and make true one’s obligation on his world”. As the *baalei mussar* explained, one must reach “his” personal obligation in “his” own personal world.

The *halachos* of the Torah apply to everyone equally, and there are also levels of piety which vary depending upon the person’s particular level, and then there are parts of one’s personal *avodah*, which are unique to each person.

On a similar note, the *Vilna Gaon* in *Mishlei* says that there is a *derech* (path) of serving Hashem which applies to the public, which all people must traverse, and there is also the *orach* (private way) which each person must traverse privately. Each Jew must take the general path, which is called the *derech*, and this path is traversed by all of *Klal Yisrael*, but since there is also the fact that “man is created individual”, each person has his individual aspect, and therefore each Jew must find his own private path as well, which is called his “*orach*”.

So a person must have times of learning Torah in the company of others, as well as by himself when he is alone. When one makes sure to have times every day of learning Torah alone, along with holiness and purity, he can slowly penetrate, at least to some level, to his own personal part in the Torah. When he reaches it, his “individual” aspect intensifies and he activates it from its potential state, more and more. Then a new gate will be opened to him, where he can reach his own inner world, through his own personal share in Torah that he has reached.

The Higher Level: Resembling The “Individuality” of Hashem

Even more so, the *Ramchal* in *Mesillas Yeshtarim* says that a person was not created except to bask in the pleasure of Hashem....and the true perfection of man is in attachment with Hashem.” It is explained in *Pirkei D’Rebbi Eliezer*, and in other sources, that before Hashem created the world, “He was one, and His name was one”. Just as Hashem is the Individual One of the world, so did He give man a resemblance of this power, so to speak, to become an “individual”. This is a root force in man.

There are a myriad amount of creations, but they are united under the oneness of Hashem. *Chazal* teach that man must resemble Hashem’s attributes: “Just as He is compassionate, so must you be compassionate.” The deeper aspect of resembling Hashem, though, is to resemble His individuality. Yaakov fought the angel of Esav “alone”, and *Chazal* teach that when Yaakov remained “alone” after fighting the angel, he resembled Hashem’s complete reign in the future, when it will be clear to all that He alone rules the world. *Chazal* also state that Yaakov *Avinu* also resembled the likeness of Adam *HaRishon*; just as Adam was an individual man of the world, so did Yaakov reach the “individual” aspect of man.

Together, and Alone

The personal *avodah* of man to reach *d’veykus* (attachment) with Hashem contains two deep aspects. One part of it is to connect with all of *Klal Yisrael* together, which was the state of Har Sinai, when all of the people

received the Torah together. The other part is to use the light of Moshe Rabbeinu, who ascended alone to Heaven, receiving the Torah alone, from Hashem.

Each soul contains both of these deep aspects. On one hand, a person can connect to Hashem through the Torah that was given to all of *Klal Yisrael*. But the deeper aspect is to be like Moshe Rabbeinu, who received the Torah privately from Hashem; the Rambam says that everyone can reach a level that resembles Moshe Rabbeinu, and Reb Elchonon Wasserman in the name of the Chofetz Chaim wrote about this extensively.²

A person needs to use both of these aspects together. On one hand, a person should learn Torah in the company of others who exert themselves in Torah, and to connect himself with the company of Torah scholars. But a person also needs to develop his own inner world, by connecting to his own personal share in the Torah, and to activate the potential of his inner world.

But even more so, as a result of combining the above two aspects of the soul together, there is a greater level as well that one can reach: a person can reach a level in which he stands “alone” with Hashem, and resemble the individuality of Hashem, so to speak. Besides for revealing the power of “alone” in the soul, there is a higher level one can reach through it: to discover the power of “Moshe Rabbeinu” within, on his own level. Moshe is called the “faithful shepherd”, who had true *ahavas Yisrael* to all souls of the Jewish people – a genuine connection to each Jew.

Therefore, the more a person develops the power of “alone”, the more his connections to

others will improve, as a byproduct. Then a person will merit rectifying the power of “alone”, of the impaired kind of “alone” of the *metzora*, who sits alone, outside the camp - and in its place, to reveal the true “alone” – which is balanced by an ability to connect to all others.

The way life looks like for a person who traverses the ways of our teachers is to have connections with others, out of a general love for each Jew, and on a particular level, to be able to learn Torah with others; and at the same time, to build the “individual” aspect of the soul, with true, complete *d'veykus*, in the Creator.

² *Kovetz He'aros, hakdamah*