

UNEDITED INTERNET VERSION

[06.26.2018]

WEEKLY SHMUESS

Bechukosai

How To Use This World

DRASHA FROM THE
AUTHOR OF BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/ws>

Bechukosai – How To Use This World

Understanding The Blessing of Physical Abundance

Parshas Bechukosai begins with, “If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time.” When one leads a life of exertion in Torah and doing Hashem’s will, there is a guarantee from Hashem that the physical side of life is improved as well. Through the power of the holy Torah, which is rooted in the highest realms, there is *shefa* (Heavenly abundance) poured down onto the world, which improves even the most physical needs – the rain specifically, and all physical aspects of life in general.

Let us understand what the blessing of physical *shefa* (abundance) is.

The Relationship Between Torah Learning & Physical Enjoyment

The *Mishnah* in *Avos* states, “Eat bread dipped in salt and water in a cistern, and sleep on the ground, and live a life of suffering. If you do so, praiseworthy are you in This World, and it will be good for you in the Next World”. If so, why does the Torah state in *Parshas Bechukosai* that physical abundance is a blessing?

There is a dispute in the Gemara if there is a *halachah* to have physical enjoyment on the festivals, or if they should be totally spiritual enjoyment. The Gemara says that “on Atzeres (Shavuos), everyone agrees that it also requires

“for you” (physical enjoyment), for it is the day when the Torah was given, so it should be halfway for Hashem, and halfway “for you”. We learn from this that when there is revelation of Torah – represented by the festival of Shavuos, when the Torah was given – it follows with physical enjoyment.

Rashi in the beginning of the *parshah* states that the words “If you will follow My decrees” means, “That you should exert yourselves in Torah”. This leads to the end of the verse, “Then I will provide your rains in their time”, which refers to physical abundance. This needs understanding: What is the connection between exerting ourselves in Torah learning, with enjoying physical abundance?

What is the proper way to go about physical enjoyment, and what is its connection to learning Torah?

When The Connection To Physicality Becomes Harmful To The Soul

The root of the matter is as follows.

Man is made of body and soul. The body comes from the earth, and the soul is a “breath of life” from Hashem. When man is involved in the spiritual, he awakens the light of the soul, and he reveals it from its hidden state. When man is involved with the physical, the physical body encounters physicality, its “companion”, and its gruff physicality is increased.

Therefore, when man becomes connected to the material side of life, he becomes more materialistic. He becomes lowered from his spiritual source and he descends into a materialistic existence. His soul becomes concealed from him and it will play less of an active role in his life. But even more so, since the ‘companion’ of the physical body is the involvement with materialism, these two ‘companions’ find each other and then the physical forces become strengthened. The physical body of man then gains much greater control over man.

On one hand, our involvement with the material side of life is necessary. Hashem has created us in His wisdom to be involved with the physical. He created us with a physical body taken from the earth, and that forces us to be involved with the physical and be connected to it. But when man becomes too involved in the physical, much more than necessary, or if his intentions in using the physical are improper, that is when the connection to the physical becomes damaging, increasing the physicality of the body and covering the soul.

How Much Physicality Do We Need?

It is impossible for man not to be involved in the physical, because Hashem in His wisdom has created us with a physical body that needs to be involved with the physical. If so, we are led to a deep question about the life of man: How much do we need to connect to the physical? What is the proper amount? We can't do without it, and overdoing it is harmful to our soul. So we have a subtle work to do, and it is one of the most difficult tasks

we have: How much should we connect to the physical?

Understandably, it is not the same amount with each person. When the manna fell in the desert, everyone received the same amount, whether he was a child or adult, whether he was a bigger or smaller person. The manna was Heavenly food, so it was equal for each person, but with physical food, each person needs a different amount and different kinds of food. Even more so, all physical needs, such as a house, clothing, etc. and all other material aspects of life, are not the same amount for each person.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* states that everything that brings a person closer to Hashem should be greatly pursued, and anything that distances a person from Hashem should be avoided as if it is a fire to run away from. That tells us how much we need to use this world. But the definition is really more specific than this.

Basic Needs Of The Nefesh HaBehaimis: Animal Soul

A person has many parts to the soul – the lowest part being the *nefesh habehaimis* (“animal” level of the soul), and the higher parts to the soul, starting from the *nefesh Elohis* (“G-dly” aspect of the soul), then the *ruach* (a more spiritual force), and then the higher parts of the soul [which include the *neshamah*, *chayah* and *yechidah*].

There are the minimal physical needs a person has in order to sustain his body, such as how to eat, drink, etc. How much does one need to eat and drink? This can be determined by asking a nutritionist, but even the

nutritionists disagree about what the proper amount is, so even figuring out our basic physical needs is difficult to know. There is some vague outline of how much food and drink one needs, but it is still unclear, and it is subject to a matter of opinion.

However, even if a person knew exactly what his body needs in order for it to be sustained, there are more parts to his existence that he needs to take care of. He has a *nefesh habehaimis*, which also has its needs for well-being.

The *nefesh habehaimis* has different needs than the body, and it demands much more needs than the body does. From a simple perspective, we can view it as entirely evil, and of this we can subtly apply the statement of Chazal, “Eat bread dipped in salt and water in a cistern, sleep on the ground, and live a life of suffering.” However, the truer perspective is that the *nefesh habehaimis* has more needs than the body does, in order for it to be sustained and healthy. These are normal, healthy needs of the *nefesh habehaimis* - which we should make sure to give to it.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* asks the question of how much we should avoid physicality and how much we should make use of it, and he answers that it depends on how much a person needs for his *yishuv hadaas* (peace of mind). But besides for the needs of the physical body itself, there are also the needs of the *nefesh habehaimis* which need to be considered.

It is tough to know how much one needs for his *yishuv hadaas*, and it is a subtle determination; but even more so, it is even more difficult to know how much we need to give our *nefesh habehaimis* - and how much we should not give in to it.

Chazal state that “a beautiful wife, beautiful utensils, and a beautiful home” are all things that expand the mind. But how much should a person actually go about making use of these things? It is a very subtle matter.

Staying Centered Between Physicality and Spiritual Growth

On one hand, a person’s *avodah* is to strive for self-perfection and growth, to keep growing, on the ladder that ascends to G-d. As a person grows spiritually, his connection to materialism is weakened, for his G-dly soul is awakened, and in turn, the hold of his animal soul upon him becomes less dominant. The more connected a person becomes to Hashem, to Torah learning, to his davening, to doing *chessed*, and to doing the *mitzvos* and to truly doing Hashem’s will, the more inner and truthful he becomes, and his connection to the material world weakens.

But at the same time, a person must know his current level. Along with aspiring for spiritual growth, one must also accept that he isn’t perfected yet and that he currently has some material needs.

So while one must always aspire for more spiritual growth, he must also know the current level where his “animal soul” is at. If one lacks this awareness, there will be detrimental results. He will detach from materialism when he is not really ready for this level, and often, it is way above his current level to do so.

This is especially common amongst adolescents when they are idealistic, who may do extreme things in order to climb to higher

spiritual levels by detaching from the physical. The results are often disastrous, and the plan backfires, making them recede far in the opposite direction. If a person doesn't know himself well – meaning, if he is unaware of the current level that his animal soul stands at, which are his current physical needs – for him, disconnecting from materialism will backfire on him. It will be too much for him to handle.

Imagined Needs and Habitual Desires

There is also an additional kind of desire which one needs to know how to go about using. In the current generation we live in, where so many people have become attached to materialism in a way that they have come to feel dependent on it, there are many desires that people have which are viewed of as “needs”, while in reality they are not needs, but wants.

In many cases, there are things that appear to be absolute needs for his “animal soul”, but they are not actual needs. They are simply the result of environmental and social factors, which have caused people to habitually get used to having these desires, but they are not real needs for the person, even though it may seem that way.

It appears to a person that certain things are his “needs”, such as certain ways of dress, certain acquisitions to own, etc. If we take away these things from a person, he might feel as if he needs to be supported by *tzedakah* in order to have them again, as if they are needs of his soul. But the reality is that these are not his actual needs. After he has gotten used to it, this has become his level, but he does not actually need it.

Even more so, sometimes a person would really like to uproot a desire for something that he has gotten used to, but he sees that it's acceptable in the world today to pursue this desire, as if these desires are simple needs of the soul.

When a person really seeks a true kind of life and he is in touch with his actual needs and with what he doesn't need, he is aware that he must disconnect from certain desires on this world. But without this awareness, he will come to think that many of the things he desires are his own needs, when in reality, they are not needs, but simply his desires.

Three Kinds of Material Desire

So far, we have explained how one should view desires for materialism which are not actual needs. There are things a person has become used to habitually, which takes work in order to uproot, where one must realize that he has grown used to having these things merely out of habit, and not because these are his actual needs. In addition, we also explained that there are desires that a person has lusts for, and he thinks he needs them, when they are not really needs.

But there is also a third kind of desire, mentioned earlier: the needs of the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal level of the soul). These needs are not imagined or learned from the environment; they are rather genuine needs, depending on one's particular personality. Hashem, in His wisdom, has implanted certain needs in every person, as part of his nature. Concerning these needs, the *Mesillas Yescharim* states that a person must only make use of these desires to the point that he has

yishuv hadaas (composure) from it [and not more than that amount].

So one must know very well if a certain desire of his is merely a habit he needs to uproot, or if it is a desire that he wants but which he doesn't really need [both of which should not be pursued], or, if it is an actual need in his *nefesh habehaimis* - which he may make use of, and which becomes refined with time as he grows spiritually.

No one is the same when it comes to this. All people have different needs. Therefore, connection to materialism is a matter that depends on each person's level.

The Proper Perspective Towards The Abundance of Materialism In Today's World

So, how much does one need to make use of the physicality of this world? In this generation where people have become so attached to materialism, like a fetus dependent on its mother, it seems that this is an accepted way of living, to pursue materialism this much.

But as we draw closer to Shavuot, where the Torah was given, let us think: "Hashem looked in the Torah and created the world", which means that all *shefa* (heavenly sustenance) on this world is nothing but as a means of revelation of Torah. The entire creation is really Torah, all *shefa* comes from the Torah, which comes from Hashem; and we need to make use of all this *shefa* to the point that it upkeep our Torah learning and service to Hashem. That is the correct perspective towards the material *shefa* available

on this world. We should see all the *shefa* as being rooted in the Torah.

Hashem sends the rains in its proper time, if we have exertion in Torah, as *Rashi* states in the beginning of this week's *parshah*. This is because in the ideal state, the rains come from the Torah! All abundance of materialism is here only to enable and upkeep our Torah learning and to be able us to serve Hashem truthfully.

There is a way to behave, and a way to think, about this. So far, we have explained how one should behave, with regards to making use of the materialism of this world. One needs to know how much of this world he needs to make use of. It is not simple to know it, but it is part of our *avodah*.

All of that pertains to how much we should allow ourselves to connect to the material world. But besides for how to go about it in terms of behavior, there is also how to think about it, how to view it properly, what the correct perspective towards it should be. When one doesn't think, he lives by rote, and he pursues physicality without considering what the proper amount should be, based upon how he grew up and what his surroundings are like, as Hashem has placed him into [but he will never grow past this level, and he will remain superficial].

But the beginning of *Parshas Bechukosai* tells us that when there is exertion in Torah, there will be rains in its time, and this is not simply a guarantee that the rain will come in its time if people learn Torah. That is also true, but it is more than that. It means that exertion in Torah is the very root of all *shefa*. The "Torah of life" is what upkeeps the entire world. All *shefa* comes from Torah, and therefore, all *shefa* exists solely for the

purposes of enabling learning Torah and service to Hashem! That is the proper perspective on how should view the materialism available on this world.

The *Ramchal* says that one needs physicality to the point that he has *yishuv hadaas* (peace of mind). That concerns the amount of how much *shefa* one should pursue, but there is also a proper perspective that is needed. One should view all *shefa* as nothing but a means to enable Torah learning and more closeness to Hashem. That is what this world is here for and that is how we should use it.

If one is missing this perspective towards materialism and he has never really thought about this, he will live life by rote, indulge in materialism as much as he wants, and become entrenched in it [preventing him from spiritual growth]. This has always been true, but it is even more so in the recent generations, where there is an abundance of

materialism that surrounds a person from all sides, where people are attached to it “as a dog laps up its vomit”, as a fetus in its mother, enveloped in all directions by a vast amount of material abundance.

In Conclusion

If a person has the proper perspective towards *shefa*, then all of this *shefa* will become a blessing for him, as it was meant to be. If not, this intended blessing is turned into a curse, *chas v'shalom*.

With the proper perspective towards how we should make use of all the *shefa* on this world, a person can merit to become sanctified and purified from amidst this material world, and he will make use of this material world in the proper amount, and with the right perspective, with *yishuv hadaas*, and then he will have a space in his heart that is devoted to serving the Creator.