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Parshas Metzora

Healthy Self Improvement

SELECTED DRASHAS
FROM
THE AUTHOR OF
BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH
THAT HAVE **SOMETHING**
TO DO WITH
THE WEEKLY TORAH
PORTION

Healthy Self-Improvement

The Concept of Asking For A 'Free Gift' From Hashem

אתה חונן לאדם דעת – We ask Hashem for *daas*, for understanding, in our Torah learning. Knowing the Torah is the root of all understandings; as the Gemara says¹, “If you have it, you have everything.”

But we ask Hashem to “bestow” it upon us – חונן, to bestow, which is from the word חן\grace and חנם\free. We are asking Hashem to give us *daas* as a free gift. This is the concept known as *matnas chinam*, to ask Hashem to bestow us blessings as a “free gift.”

Moshe Rabbeinu is the one who personifies *daas*, and he also asked Hashem to grant him allowance in to Eretz Yisrael as a *matnas chinam*, when he beseeched Hashem. He did not ask to get into Eretz Yisrael due to his merits, but rather, that Hashem give it to him out of *matnas chinam*, a free gift of Hashem’s mercy.

This is the way of *tzaddikim* – when they ask Hashem for something, they do not ask Hashem to give them something due to their own merits, but because Hashem has a treasury in Heaven called *matnas chinam* in which He grants free gifts that are not due to any personal merit.

We find the concept of *matnas chinam* in our relationship with Hashem. We are called the children of Hashem, and the Gemara says that “no matter how they behave, they are called My children.” We are always Hashem’s

children. Therefore, when we ask Hashem for something, we are not saying we deserve it, but rather, because we are like a son asking his father for something.

Let us try to understand what this concept of *matnas chinam* is.

The Two Parts In Us

When a person falls to a sin, he can feel how he is far from Hashem, if he is a bit in touch with any spiritual feelings. If a person is totally entrenched in a materialistic lifestyle, then he is dull to spirituality, and he won’t feel anything after he sins. But if someone is at least a little bit open to feelings for spirituality, he feels a sense of shame and guilt after he sins. He feels the impurity hovering over him and surrounding him, as a result of the sin. He feels how his sin is distancing him from Hashem, as it is written, עוונותיכם היו למבדילים - “Their sins divided them.”

Yet, a person must also be aware that there is deeper place in his soul in which he always feels connected to Hashem, no matter what – as it is written, חבוקה ודבוקה בך - “Connected and attached in You.” This is the inner place in our soul which always feels and recognizes how we are always “you are children to Hashem”. From the perspective of this inner place of the soul, we can realize that our bond with Hashem doesn’t depend on any factors, for we are always considered children of Hashem no matter what, even after sin.

But we must understand the following. These are the two layers we have in our soul – the lower layer feels that you are far from

¹ Nedarim 41a

Hashem after falling to a sin, while the higher layer in our soul tells us that we are always close to Hashem no matter how much we fail. We must access both layers of the soul and live with them simultaneously. If we only have the perspective of the lower layer or the higher layer, we are living life wrong.

The Lower Layer of the Soul – Feeling Distant From Hashem

If a person only knows of the lower layer of his soul – the part that feels distanced from Hashem after falling to a sin – then what will happen to him after he falls to a sin? He will fall into total despair.

He will feel like the *metzora* who has to “sit alone” and feel how he has been greatly distanced from Hashem. As a result of despair, he is apt to fall even more, because he has become hopeless. He feels the meaning of the *possuk*, “*Your actions distance you*”; he feels like he has been shunned. He is likely to feel, “Hashem doesn’t love me. Hashem does not want me.” He feels literally widowed or divorced from Hashem, not just “*like*” a widow or a divorcee, but like an *actual* widow or divorcee from Hashem.

A person with such a perspective will feel that Hashem loves him only when he has a day in which he did mitzvos and acted properly. When he goes through a fall from his spiritual level (and we all have fallouts, some more and some less), he feels that he is very far from Hashem, now that he has fallen to a sin. He lives life based upon a very shaky foundation; he views his relationship with Hashem as something that depends on how he acts. On a day that he acted well, he feels close to Hashem, and on a day where he

knows he didn’t act so well, he feels distant from Hashem.

It is commendable that a person feels bad after he sins, but the problem starts when the person feels a great despair that Hashem no longer loves him.

There are people who give up on doing *teshuvah*, since they feel like they committed certain sins. They feel that they have become like a rebellious child towards Hashem, who deserves to be chased out of the house. A person says to himself, “If my child would do certain acts that are very improper, I would also disown him. I’d have no choice but to throw him out of my house. Well, I acted the same way towards Hashem. I committed a certain sin and I don’t deserve to be forgiven by Hashem for it...”

This is the problematic attitude that gets developed when a person only knows of the lower layer of his soul, the part in him which feels distanced from Hashem after a sin. He becomes extreme in his remorse and thereby damages his relationship with Hashem.

The Higher Layer of the Soul – To Feel Eternally Connected With Hashem

Now let’s take a look at the “other side of the coin” here. The deeper part of our soul knows that it is always connected with Hashem, even after we sin. Yet, if a person only focuses on this part of his soul, he is also incorrect.

There are people who are always very content inside themselves, knowing with full certainty that “Hashem loves me, no matter what” – as well as the concept of “A Jew who sins, is still a Jew.” He knows that Hashem

always accepts our *teshuvah*, as we express in the tefillos of *Selichos*, “Your hand is open to accept those who return.” But they take this knowledge and abuse it, allowing themselves to sin intentionally and do whatever they please.

“After all”, the person thinks, “Hashem always loves me”. He knows “Hashem loves him”, therefore, he does whatever he wants...

It is wonderful that he feels that Hashem always loves him, but when he takes this concept too far and does whatever he pleases, he is apt to lose all his *Yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven). He won't fear a sin, because he thinks that Hashem will take him back a second later anyway.

It resembles the statement of Chazal, “Someone who sins and says, ‘I will repent afterwards’”. It is like someone who immerses in a *mikveh* while holding onto a *sheretz*, which disqualifies his immersion. His entire Torah learning and mitzvos is in danger when he thinks that he do what he wants, whether he is aware of this consciously or not. His whole keeping of *Halacha* will be very shaky.

It is like a spoiled child whose parents shower him with love, and then he goes and gives them a kick. This is what is written, “*And Yisrael got fat kicked.*”

Living With Both Attitudes At Once

There are basically two kinds of people we find. One kind of person despairs immediately upon succumbing to a sin, and he feels hopeless in doing *teshuvah*. He feels like Acher, who felt, “Everyone can do *teshuvah*, except for me.” Another kind of person has the opposite problem: he feels that

Hashem loves him no matter what, therefore, he is careless when it comes to being careful with the mitzvos.

The way of the Torah is that these two attitudes are extreme. We need to balance both perspectives into our lives – the fact that sin distances us, and the fact that we are always loved by Hashem. We must be able to live this paradoxical kind of existence.

On one hand, we need to have tremendous emunah that Hashem is always with us, no matter what situation we are in, even when we fall to sin. (In fact, even if someone is in *Gehinnom*, *chas v'shalom*, he still needs to feel how Hashem is with him...). Yet at the same time, we must not let this awareness compromise on how careful we are with following the mitzvos.

The Proper Perspective About Death

If someone lives life knowing that Hashem always loves him no matter what – he will be able to go through all kinds of situations in life and feel how Hashem is always close to him. Even as he is dying, he will feel Hashem next to him, and he will thus feel calm and relaxed as his soul is taking leave of his body.

People don't like to think about death, so they try to take their mind off it. But someone who searches for the truth deals with the facts of life, and he knows that death is inevitable, so he thinks about how he will be able to face his time of death. If a person always made sure throughout his life to feel that Hashem is always close to him, he will feel close to Hashem even as he dies. This is the meaning of the statement, “*They serve Me in life, and they serve Me in death.*”

This concept needs to be absorbed well, so we can let it penetrate into the depths of our soul! We must (be) know very clearly that even when a person dies, he can feel a deep closeness with Hashem.

The Proper Attitude To Have Towards Sin

But this is only one side of the coin. On the other side of the coin, we also need to recognize that we have a lower part of our soul as well, which feels distanced from Hashem after a sin.

What indeed should a person feel after he succumbs to a sin? He must realize that although he is a *neshamah*, which is a pure soul from Hashem, and that he is always a beloved son of Hashem, still, this does not exempt him from feeling regret over a sin. We must realize that we have two parts in us – a higher part of our self, which can always feel attached with Hashem, and a lower part of our self, which is cognizant of our actions and careful not to damage our relationship with Hashem. Thus, we still need to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* if we fall to a sin.

But we should not dwell too much on this lower part of our soul. If a person always focuses on his sins and how he needs to improve, he lives his life in a constant mode of tension and fear, and this is not either good.

Most people are “either or.” Either they are too tense in their *Avodas Hashem* and they don’t realize how their *neshamah* is always close to Hashem, or they are too soft on themselves because they know they are always loved by Hashem and thus they aren’t careful when it comes to keeping *Halacha*.

Asking Hashem For Understanding – As A Free Gift

Thus, when we ask Hashem for *daas*, from which point in our soul does this prayer emanate from? It is a prayer coming from the deeper part of the soul – the part of us which always feels connected to Hashem, where we ask Hashem for a *matnas chinam*, a free gift, and not because we are deserving due to any actions that we did.

In Conclusion

We must be able to live paradoxically in our life – we need to always make sure we are doing the right actions, but at the same time we must also be aware that our relationship with Hashem is not dependent on our actions. These are the two sides of our life which we need to balance our life with. This is not just another fact to know about – it is something we must actually feel.

In order to live with these two contradictory attitudes at once, we need to develop a power in our soul which can handle two contradicting ideas at once. (This is also know as the power of *daas ha-mis-hapeches*²).

Thus, we cannot dwell solely in just the higher part of our soul (eternal attachment with Hashem) or just the lower part of our soul (fear of distance from Hashem) – we must be able to live with these two attitudes together. They are two sides of the same coin.

*Translated from the original Hebrew shiur: תפילה
אתה חונן לאדם דעת – 051*

² See end of the shiur Tefillah #0127 – Turning Against and Turning Over.