

Lulav In Our Heart ⁴⁰

Preface: The Torah Is Eternal, And Its Lessons Are Eternal

In *sefer Toldos*⁴¹, it is brought many times a certain fundamental concept: whatever we find in the Torah is always applicable, no matter the time or place. Since the Torah is eternal, its lessons are not bound to any specific event or person; the lessons of the Torah are able to be applied to any soul, and we only need to learn how it can indeed apply to us in our situations.

Based on this fundamental concept, we can think into the laws of the *lulav* brought in the *Mishnah* in *Sukkah*⁴². Besides for how the laws of the *lulav* need to be carried out in the practical sense, these laws can teach us as well about our own Avodas Hashem.

A “Stolen Lulav”

The first law about *lulav* listed in the *Mishnah* is that a stolen *lulav* is disqualified to be used for the *mitzvah*. Simply speaking, the *Mishnah* is saying that a person does not fulfill the *mitzvah* of *lulav* with a stolen *lulav*.

⁴⁰ This chapter is adapted from the last chapter in *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Sukkos*.

⁴¹ A student of the Baal Shem Tov

⁴² *Sukkah*, 3:1.

But there is an inner meaning behind this as well, and in order to know it, we must understand what *lulav* is in an inner sense – the “*p’nimiyus*” (inner world) behind the *lulav*.

In the Zohar, it is stated that *lulav* comes from a combination of the words “*lo*” (“to him”) and “*lev*” (“heart”); this teaches that a person’s heart has to be “his” - a person needs to be in control of his heart.⁴³ In other words, a person’s heart shouldn’t be swayed by the hearts of others – like when it comes to how we serve Hashem. The way we serve Hashem has to come from within us, an expression of our own individuality – and our Avodas Hashem should not be “stolen” from others.

In terms of our inner world, a stolen *lulav* means a stolen heart – and if our heart gets stolen by others, it is “disqualified”, just like a stolen *lulav* is disqualified. The soul of a person should not be “stolen.”

Let us explain what we mean.

Copying Another Person’s Avodas Hashem

Here is a question: There is a *minhag*⁴⁴ to shake the *lulav* in all four directions. When a person shakes *lulav* in the four directions, is he acting from within himself – or is he just copying what he sees other people doing?

There is a well-known story (with several versions) that once there was a *tzaddik* who would *daven* at the *kosel*, and when he came to certain parts of davening, he would move in a certain way. When he died, someone else took him over – and he would

copy the movements of the *tzaddik* when he got to that part in davening. There was a *gadol* who would daven there in the *minyán* every day; but when he noticed that the new *baal tefillah* was copying the *tzaddik*'s movements, he stopped davening there. The lesson from this story is that a person should not copy how another person serves Hashem.

⁴³ This is stated openly as well in *Beraishis Rabbah* 34: 10.

⁴⁴ custom

104

Now let us think about our own situation. When we shake the *lulav*, it should be our own act of self-expression. But are we really doing it like that, or are we just moving our body when we do it – leaving our soul out of the equation?

We can compare this to a five year old child who comes to *shul*, and he wants to *daven*, but he doesn't know how. What does he do? He watches his older brother and imitates his body movements; when everyone stands, he stands, and when everyone sits, he sits. When they cover their eyes, he covers his eyes.

Acting like this resembles a stolen *lulav*. It's a stolen heart! When a person copies others' movements, and the movements are not his own – he is just being like a monkey, who can copy other people. When a person copies others' movements, his body may be moving – but his soul isn't.

Copying Is Really Stealing!

We can compare this to the following.

A person sees someone else on the street walking very fast, and he also begins to walk very fast. He catches up to him and is walking fast alongside him. Then, the first person reaches his house, walks inside, and shuts the door – while the second person is left standing on the street – after all, he can't walk into another person's house.

When we shake *lulav*, are we doing this from an inner place in ourselves, or are we just copying everyone else doing it?

During the rest of the year as well, a person subconsciously is copying other people's movements, and he isn't even aware of it. These movements are not his own.

(Sometimes the person is aware of this, and sometimes he isn't). It's all just copying another person's body language. It seems as if there is nothing wrong with this; after all, he isn't copying anything that's bad. But when you think about it, to copy another person in any way is a form of stealing, and it has no value whatsoever in one's personal *Avodas Hashem*. A person has to act from within himself – what he does has to come from his own self-expression. Otherwise, it resembles a stolen *lulav* – which is invalid for use.

105

A “Dry Lulav”

The Mishnah continues with another law: “A dry *lulav* is disqualified.” In the commentaries, there is a big discussion what is considered “dry”, but regarding us, we need to know what the inner implication of what a “dry *lulav*” is.

The *Talmud Yerushalmi*⁴⁵ states that a dry *lulav* is invalid because it is written, “*The dead do not praise Hashem.*” In other words, a dry *lulav* is considered to be like a dead *lulav*. “*The dead do not praise Hashem*” – but the live ones do. One must understand that shaking the *lulav* is a way to give praise to Hashem – a person praises the Creator for giving him the *mitzvah* of the four species.

On Yom Tov, there is a *mitzvah* to rejoice; “*And you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d*”. Although the possuk is describing the joy one had when he was in the *beis hamikdash*, it really applies to all *mitzvos*; all the *mitzvos* need to be done joyously. It is thus not enough just to take the four species and shake them; we find in *halachah* that the main time to shake them is by *halel*⁴⁶, because the main aspect of the *mitzvah* of the four species is to come to praise Hashem with them. “*The dead do not praise Hashem*”.

Acting By Rote

Thus, a person needs to ask himself the following. When he shakes the *lulav* as he says the words “*Hodu LaHashem, ki tov,*” does he truly feel gratitude to Hashem? If he does, his *lulav* is “alive” – and it’s valid for the *mitzvah*. But if he’s just saying the words and he doesn’t really mean it –as it is written, “*With his mouth and lips he honors Me, but his heart is far from me, and their fear toward me is like commandments learned by rote*”,⁴⁷ then his is among “the dead” who do not praise Hashem! Sure, a person can say the words of *halel*, but does he really feel a vitality in saying them? This is actually the ultimate question that sums up a person’s entire life. Compare this to a person salivating over a delicious piece of food. When he’s eating, he feels a vitality in what he’s doing; he’s not just moving his body – he’s moving towards the food with vitality surging through his body. It’s enjoyable.

⁴⁵ *Yerushalmi Sukkah 12b*

⁴⁶ *Sukkah 37b.*

⁴⁷ *Yeshayahu 29: 13*

Now let’s go back to the person shaking *lulav* by *halel*. He’s moving, but is he feeling vitality from those movements? Is he doing it with *chiyus*? If he doesn’t feel a *chiyus* as he shakes *lulav*, he is like a dry *lulav*. His *lulav* might be alive and kosher for use of the *mitzvah*, but “*the dead do not praise Hashem.*” The possuk here is coming to awaken a person that he shouldn’t be among those who are considered “dead” as they serve Hashem, those who don’t serve Hashem with *chiyus*.

It is not only the *lulav* that has to be alive, but the person holding it has to be “alive” as well! If a dry *lulav* is considered to be dead, surely a person has to be alive inside as he does the *mitzvah*. Nothing is more invalid than being dead – that’s why a dry *lulav* is invalid for the *mitzvah*.

A Lulav Used For “Idol Worship”

Let us continue with the help of Hashem and learn more of the inner dimension behind the *halachos* of *lulav*.

The Mishnah continues that a “*lulav* of *Asheirah* (a kind of idol worship) is disqualified for use of the *mitzvah*.” In our own heart as well, it’s possible for a person to resemble a *lulav* used for idol worship. As we brought from the Zohar, the word *lulav* comes from the word *lo* and *lev* – in other words, the heart of a person has to be “his”. Before, we said how this applies to shaking the *lulav* with *chiyus* – our hearts have to be in it. Now, we will deal with a different issue: the deep desires found in the heart of a person.

When you play the keys on a piano, it produces a harmonious sound. But if you pound on the keys, it sounds terrible. Our heart as well needs to produce the right sounds – in other words, what we say with our mouth has to match what’s on our heart.

When a person is sick, *rachmana litzlan*, he has a lot of *kavanah* when he davens *Refoeinu*. He is saying with his mouth what is true to his heart – he wants to be healed, and so he davens for this. But when a person davens *Hoshiva Shofteinu* (Return our judges), even if he is paying attention to the words he is saying, does he really desire in his heart that Hashem should return to us our judges?

107

This is the big question a person must ask himself: When I ask for something from Hashem, is that what I truly want in my heart? Or am I just saying it?

A Person Has To Want What He Does

Now we will explain how this applies to a “*lulav* used for idol worship.” The Gemara says, “A person should not hire himself for idol worship purposes, and he should not come to need people. What is idol worship? Anything which is strange to him.”⁴⁸ The Gemara there goes on to say that if someone had a prestigious job, such as a doctor, and now he needs money, he shouldn’t take the job of cleaning the streets to make money. If a doctor cleans the streets, the Gemara says, it’s like avodah *zarah* for him – it’s like idol worship, because he’s doing something that’s “strange” (*zarah*) for him to do. However, the Gemara says that it is permitted to take a job that’s beneath his dignity in order rather than become a beggar.

When a person does something that isn’t for him to do, his heart deep down is cringing at what he’s doing. What he wants is contradicting what he’s doing, and he suffers inside.

Now let’s go back to a person doing a *mitzvah*: does he really want he’s doing, or is it like a strange practice to him? Sure, his deeds seem to imply that he’s serving Hashem. But what is he desiring in his heart? Is his heart filled with thoughts of holiness, with yearnings for Hashem and for His Torah and *mitzvos*? Or is his heart, *chas v’shalom*, so materialistic and affected by all kinds of negative influences?

When a person shakes *lulav* and he stirs his heart in the process, he increases the desires in his heart for holiness; but if he has negative desires in his heart, desires for strange things – then when he shakes *lulav*, it resembles a *lulav* used for idol worship. The shaking of the *lulav* will only increase the strange desires, and he will harm himself spiritually in the process. He resembles someone who shakes a *lulav* that's rotted and has a foul smell; as he shakes the *lulav*, the foul smell begins to fill the room. Instead of sanctifying himself through the *mitzvah*, he sinks lower into the impurity of his evil desires, *rachmana litzlan*.

⁴⁸*Bava Basra 110a*

108

An Adult With A Childish Heart

When a person has strange desires in his heart – desires that are not for Avodas Hashem – then when he shakes *lulav*, he's endangering himself and causing Heaven to examine his deeds. He's not having thoughts of gratitude to Hashem as he shakes *lulav*, and his heart is filled with various desires for other things.

We can compare this to a father who gives a treat to a child, and he tells the child, "You have to say thank you, and then I'll give it to you." The child, of course, says "Thank You", but it's without any true feeling of gratitude; he is thinking all about the treat. The father knows that the child doesn't mean it, and he'd rather not hear such a meaningless "Thank You"; the "Thank You" of the child does not increase the father's love toward him at all. It's an empty expression. But what can we expect from a child? We just hope from the child that he will mature one day, and that he will really want in his heart what he's doing and saying.

The same goes for an adult, who is mature on the outside – but inside, he's still like a child. A person can be a fully grown adult, yet he is still immature when it comes to *ruchniyus*. He must develop and mature his heart at some point. If he doesn't have a mature heart yet, he should still do as everyone else is doing; but he has to at least have a desire to mature. If he doesn't, then shaking the *lulav* awakens Heaven to judge him.

Thus, shaking the *lulav* only has meaning when one wants in his heart what he's doing and saying – when he's doing the *mitzvah* with *chiyus*. The Gemara⁴⁹ brings that in the Jerusalem of old, a person would leave his house holding the *lulav*, he would take it with him to *shul*, and he would hold it by *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei*; and he would visit the sick or comfort the mourning as he held his *lulav*. When he came to the *beis midrash* to learn, he would let his son or servant hold the *lulav* for him."

Anyone who could take the *lulav* with him wherever he went obviously derived *chiyus* from the mitzvah of *lulav*. A person doesn't carry a sack of stones on his shoulder wherever he goes, because he doesn't get *chiyus* from this.

If the heart of a person wants other things than Avodas Hashem, the heart is getting *chiyus* from those other things, things that contradict holiness. Such a heart resembles a *lulav* used for idol worship – and it cannot get *chiyus* from the *lulav*.

⁴⁹ *Sukkah 41b*

109

“How Is Work Going...”

Let us reflect more into how far people can be from yearnings for holiness.

A person meets his friend in the street and asks him, “So, how’s work going?”

His friend thinks that he is being asked about how he’s doing financially. He answers, “Oh, *Baruch Hashem*; I’m making it by.” He never entertains a thought that maybe he was being asked about he’s doing spiritually, how his Avodas Hashem is going...and why should he? After all, the main part of his life is his livelihood, his ambitions to make money, to pay his debts, to buy stuff for the house.

Now, if he would be getting his *chiyus* in life from Avodas Hashem, he would interpret his friend’s question differently. He would hear a different question – and he would give a different answer. He would tell his friend about his successes – and his failures – in his Avodas Hashem.

Let’s give another example. A person had a child who was sick, but *Baruch Hashem*, the child recovered. If someone meets him on the street and asks him, “What’s new?” he is likely to answer about how his child got better, *Baruch Hashem*; he doesn’t even think that maybe the person is asking how his Avodas Hashem is going. But who says that his friend was asking him about how his child is doing? Maybe he’s asking him about how his spiritual situation is? A person hears what his heart is hearing – and his heart has *avodah zarah* dwelling in it. We don’t mean real idol worship like they are still practicing today in India. We mean *avodah zarah* in the sense that “*avodah*” to the person doesn’t mean “*Avodas Hashem*”, but how it’s going at his workplace.

If someone’s heart is clean from the strange desires, though, when he hears the word “*avodah*”, he hears it in terms of *Avodas Hashem*, not in terms of “work”.

Maybe he can tell the person, “Oh, you are asking about how my *Avodas Hashem* is going...?”

The asker might of course respond, “No, I’m not asking how your *Avodas Hashem* is going. I meant to ask how your *job* is going.”

Hopefully, the other person will respond – “Ah, you are referring to the curse placed on Adam – “*By the sweat of your brow you shall have to eat bread...*”

110

“How Was Your Yom Tov?”

A person has to pay attention to the whole orientation of the way he is living his life.

We can give another example of what we mean. A person is asked by his friend, “So, how was your Yom Tov?”

What does the person respond? “I went on this trip and that trip. I visited my parents and my in-laws; etc.” He never thinks that maybe he was being asked about how elated he felt from the Yom Tov, like if he fulfilled the *mitzvah* of rejoicing on Yom Tov.

Of course, we don’t mean that one shouldn’t visit his parents, and we do not mean to say that it is forbidden to plan any activities throughout *Chol HaMoed*. What we are trying to get at here is: how is a person going through his life - what is his attitude? Is a person living his life for Avodas Hashem? In the depths of a person’s heart, does he really value Avodas Hashem? Is it a priority by him?

As we said before, *Lulav* is a combination of the words *lo* (his) and *lev* (heart) – a person’s heart has to be involved in a life of Avodas Hashem; he has to have a real heart, and not a heart full of extraneous desires - not to have a heart that resembles idol worship.

Lulav From A “Condemned City”

The Mishnah continues that a *lulav* which comes from an *ir nidachas* (a city condemned to be burned, due to a majority population of idol worshippers) is invalid for use of the *mitzvah*. The previous case of the Mishnah also dealt with a *lulav* used for idol worship, but there is a difference. In the previous case of the Mishnah, a *lulav* of *Asheirah* \idol worship, the problem was with the individual who holds the *lulav*. In the case of a *lulav* from a condemned city, the problem is with the general population as a whole.

This problem can be seen with the superficiality of the public. If the headlines on the newspapers say, “People are working hard”, it is always talking about jobs, and never about the “hard work” of Avodas Hashem.

111

Our Physical Heart and Our Spiritual Heart

To give an example of what we mean, let’s say we ask a person, “Is your heart okay?” the usual answer will be, “*Baruch Hashem*, I don’t get heart attacks.”

However, the question “Is your heart okay?” can have a whole new meaning to it than what we are used to.

In the right chamber of our heart is our *yetzer tov* (good inclination), and in the left chamber of our heart resides our *yetzer hora* (evil inclination).⁵⁰ So when someone asks another how his heart is, the real question should be: “What kind of struggles are taking place in your heart between good and evil?”

Of course, we are not suggesting that everyone respond in the like. But what we mean is that unfortunately, no one is asking about another person’s spiritual situation, about what’s really going on in his heart. People only ask each other “Is your heart okay?” only when something scary happens, like a heart attack. It is rare for a person to meet someone and ask him, “How much evil have you managed to expel from your heart? How much has your *yetzer tov* overpowered your *yetzer hora*?”

The Torah teaches us that “*the inclination of a man is evil from his youth.*” When a person becomes 20, or 40, or 60, or 80 years old – has his heart changed at all?? Where is his head at, where is his heart at? Has he even begun to be among “the righteous, whose hearts are in their control, in contrast to the wicked, who are controlled by their hearts”⁵¹?

A Lulav With Its Tip Chopped Off

The next law in the Mishnah is that a *lulav* with a chopped off head\tip is invalid for the *mitzvah*. In the soul of a person, there can also be a “chopped off head” as well. When the *lulav* grows on the date tree, its leaves are pointed upwards. Since it grows upwards, one has to shake the *lulav* with its tip pointed upwards, because the *halachah*

⁵⁰Zohar, Terumah 162b; see Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 9.

⁵¹Beraishis Rabbah, 34: 10

112

is that the *lulav* has to be shaken in the way it is grown.

⁵² If a person shakes the *lulav* and it is pointed downwards, he hasn’t fulfilled the *mitzvah*.

The *sefer Bikkurei Yaakov*⁵³ asks the following interesting question: If a *lulav* grew in Eretz Yisrael, and its owner is holding it in a different country, must he hold it turn it upside down, so it can face Eretz Yisrael?

From the viewpoint of our inner world, it is simple why we cannot turn the *lulav* upside down. A person has to go upwards in Avodas Hashem, not downwards. All of the *mitzvos* are here to elevate a person. The inner reason why a *lulav* has to be shaken with its tip pointed upwards is because it has to be shaken “in the way it grows” – in other words, the *mitzvah* of *lulav* is to elevate a person upwards.

A *lulav* grows sharper as it grows more and more upwards. This hints to growth in Avodas Hashem, how one has to be like “*a tzaddik, who blossoms like a date tree.*” Everyone has some growth, but most people reach a certain point where they stop growing. A few rare individuals reach the sharpest, uppermost point. However, every person at least has to have an aspiration to get to the highest level.

There is a very big difference between those who aspire to get to the top to those who never aspire to get there. If someone doesn’t have any desire whatsoever to aspire for the highest levels in Avodas Hashem – if he doesn’t believe in himself at all that it’s possible for him to get there – he resembles a *lulav* with a chopped off tip.

People with high aspirations are often dubbed “delusional” and “unrealistic”, but this is a mistake. There can be such a problem in which a person is delusion in Avodas Hashem and acts unrealistic, but when we say that one has to have high aspirations, we do not mean to be delusional. We mean for one **to know exactly at what level he is at, yet at the same time he is aware that he has a higher purpose than where he stands.** A person can always be growing spiritually – like “*a tzaddik, who*

blossoms like a date tree.” A person can have his ups and downs, but he should always be moving toward his goal. One needs to have an ambition to get to the highest level he can reach in Avodas Hashem.

We do not know if we will indeed get to the highest level possible, and we know how difficult this will be. We can daven and cry to Hashem that we reach it.

⁵² *Sukkah 45b*

⁵³ *Bikkurei Yaakov, Hilchos Sukkah, 651.*

113

If someone doesn't have high aspirations in Avodas Hashem, he resembles a *lulav* with a chopped off tip. He has no aspiration to get to the goal – so he won't get there. There is a very big difference between someone who aspires to get to the top – even though he's far from it – to someone who has no aspiration whatsoever to get there.

We Must Have A Desire Human Perfection

When a person has no aspiration whatsoever for human perfection, this is really the greatest sin possible! He is going against the whole purpose of Creation in thinking so, because the purpose of Creation is so that people should perfect themselves. Thus, a person shouldn't feel broken-hearted if he's not perfect yet; one has to know that it takes a lot of work to get to perfection.

One can know that although he's not at perfection yet, he still believes that he can get there – he can definitely get there, with hard work. There is a hope that must always be alive in a person's heart: that it is possible for him to reach the greatest human perfection, because since we all believe firmly that the purpose of Creation is to perfect ourselves, it must be that it is possible for us to perfect ourselves.

When a person doesn't have aspirations, he harms himself a lot in another way than what we have said so far. Reb Yisrael Salanter said on himself: “I aspired to become like the Vilna Gaon – and therefore I became Reb Yisrael Salanter. If I would have aspired to become Reb Yisrael Salanter, I never would have become who I am today.” In other words, a person reaches much more perfection when he aspires for it, than when he doesn't aspire for it.

If a person is always saying, “I know that it's impossible for me to reach the ultimate perfection”, such a statement ices him up inside from spiritual growth, like an evil Amalek within. It's a lukewarm feeling toward *Yiddishkeit* – a lethargic attitude of “Hard enough just to be on an average level of *Yiddishkeit*.” Of course, we all know that not everyone can be *tzaddikim* – that's reality – but when a person says “*I'll never be a tzaddik*,” it's a different story; he's harming himself a lot by saying this! He's denying the purpose of Creation, which is to come to human perfection.

The Ponovozher Rov zt”l had an idea once to open up a yeshivah for intellectually gifted students. The Chazon Ish did not agree with his idea, and he told him as

114

follows: “Every person has to believe that he is an excellent student. If you open up a yeshiva that is exclusively for the best students, you are basically sending a message to boys who aren’t in this yeshiva that they are hopeless.”

We Aspire For Perfection Although We Cannot Reach It Through Our Human Efforts

Yet, there is a fundamental point to bear in mind with all this. We must know that we cannot ever achieve human perfection through our human efforts alone. The Mishnah in *Avos*⁵⁴ states, “The task is not upon you to finish, nor are you exempt from it.” A person has to do whatever he can to reach perfection, but to actually get there is a gift from the Creator. Of this, it is written, “*I toiled, (thus) I found.*”⁵⁵ After a person tries his hardest – then he can “find”; he receives the spiritual growth as a gift from Hashem. This is the way of the Torah – try your hardest, and then, you will “find.” But without trying, a person will definitely never “find.”

The *lulav* represents how we must try to reach the pinnacle of growth – from the way the leaves are designed, getting sharper and sharper upwards until they reach the highest, sharpest point. With a person’s own abilities, he cannot reach perfection, and therefore, perfection is not demanded of us. But what is demanded of us is that we must aspire for perfection – to try our hardest!

There are people who are very disoriented in their Avodas Hashem. They are trying to go way above their level in how they act, yet their aspirations are only to aim for a mediocre level.

There Are Levels To Perfection

One’s Avodas Hashem should be clear to him. On one hand, we need to aspire for the greatest perfection. On the other hand, we must not act too much above our current level. A person has to know that it is not considered being delusional to aspire for high levels; the higher levels are able to become realized. We do not know when those aspirations will finally be realized – we have been waiting for this for at least

⁵⁴ *Avos* 2: 16

⁵⁵ *Megillah* 6b

115

5770 years, and we still haven’t reached our perfection yet. But in the end, we will get there. Our faith that we will get there is represented by how the *lulav* must have its tip intact.

One must also bear in mind that there are levels to perfection. A person can reach a certain level of perfection, and upon acquiring that, it is now upon him to aspire for even higher perfection.

Stages In Life

We can compare this to our life stages. When a person is a child, the perfection which he strives for is his *bar mitzvah*. Later on in life, he needs to reach higher perfection – a man is like “half a body” until he gets married. After he gets married, he needs to acquire more perfection by becoming a father to his children.

When it comes to Avodas Hashem, one has to strive for a certain area of perfection, and then upon reaching that, there is more. A person has to keep perfecting himself more and more until he reaches the greatest perfection – a total *d'veykus* (attachment) with Hashem. A person who does the *mitzvos* properly, who learns Torah in the way he should, whose entire heart is involved with serving Hashem – such a person will find the great connection to Hashem there. All other areas of perfection are only partial perfection in comparison to this.

Realistic Aspirations

Compare the difference between the weeks with the months of the year, and the months of the year with the year as a whole. A week is complete in and of itself, but when you compare it to the month, it is missing. A month is complete to itself, but in comparison to the year as a whole, it is missing. Each year is only a seventh of *shemittah*, and *shemittah* is only a seventh of *yovel*.

All areas of perfection we know of are only in partial areas, but we must aspire for the complete and ultimate perfection.

Many people think that someone with high aspirations is being delusional, and that he's a bit mentally unstable. After all, everyone knows that mentally ill people are

116

disconnected from reality. Aspirations in Avodas Hashem indeed need to be done right; we need to avoid becoming disconnected from reality.

How can we avoid this problem?

A person has a two-fold job. On one hand, a person has to be fully aware of the level he is at, and he needs to be painfully honest with himself. He should be aware of his qualities – as well as his weak areas. He has to be aware that he is really very far from perfection. Yet, this shouldn't kill a person's hopes – not even for a moment. This is how the Torah tells us to reach perfection. A person can't reach perfection through his human efforts – “it is not upon you to complete the task.” One has to do his best, according to his ability. The rest is all a gift from Hashem.

Our human actions will never bring us to perfection, but we have to try our best, according to our ability – that is what we can do; Hashem does the rest (after we try our hardest).

“I'm Realistic.”

This point, because it is not understood by many, causes a lot of people to make a grave mistake. People slacken off from trying to perfect themselves, because they do not believe in having high aspirations. This really stems from a lack of belief in why we were created - and we were created to perfect ourselves.

Already at the beginning of time, man already slackened off from perfection. Had Adam not sinned, he would have gone straight into the ultimate Shabbos of Creation, and the greatest perfection of man would have been reached. But he failed the test, and ever since, the way to get back to our perfection has become very long. Yet, in

the end we will get there again, and it will not happen later than the year 6,000. Man will then once again become perfected.

The aspiration to reach perfection is often not alive within most people. This is usually because people feel, “I’m very realistic.” People are painfully aware of their deficiencies – “*A heart knows the bitterness of its soul*”⁵⁶ – and therefore they give up on reaching that perfection, resembling a *lulav* whose tip has been chopped off.

They are

⁵⁶*Mishlei 14: 10*

117

missing that ladder of growth which is “*footed on the earth, but its head reaches the heavens.*”

⁵⁷

When a person is missing the aspiration for ultimate perfection, he is denying the purpose of why we were created. People excuse themselves by saying, “It’s enough if we just settle with who we are; we should just be happy the way we are.”⁵⁸ Although it is true that a happy person is one who is “happy with his lot⁵⁹,” that is only if someone really believes with *emunah* that he will indeed have everything in the end, and he trusts that Hashem will help him get there.

If one really has this trust in Hashem, it doesn’t matter to him what his current level is – and he is like a *lulav* with its tip intact.

A Lulav With Severed Leaves

The next *halachah* in the Mishnah is that a *lulav* with severed leaves is invalid. *Rashi* explains that the leaves have become separated from the spine, and there is nothing connecting them.

However, we can ask: What is the problem here? Just tie it together with something and it will be considered connected!

It must be, however, that since the leaves are separated from the spine, they can no longer be sustained by the nutrients of the spine. They might be able to survive independently without the spine of the *lulav*, but the Torah requires that the leaves of the *lulav* get its vitality from the spine.

In terms of our soul, this applies as follows.

Are We Connected To Our Mitzvos?

A person does many wonderful things, but he has to ask himself how connected he is to them. When a person does a *mitzvah*, does he feel like it’s his very life – or is he just forcing himself to do the *mitzvah*?

⁵⁷*Beraishis 28:12*

⁵⁸See *Mesillas Yesharim*, chapter 4.

⁵⁹*Avos 4:1*

118

When a person eats his food, he feels very connected to it. He knows he’s getting vitality from the food. When a woman puts on perfume to go to a wedding, she feels

very connected to her perfume and gets a vitality out of it. What about when a person puts on *tefillin*? Does he feel connected to the act?

Is *Tefillin* just being worn on us – or is the person wearing the *Tefillin*? If one is just wearing his *Tefillin* as a superficial act, he resembles a *lulav* whose leaves have been severed. He is doing everything he is supposed to do, but he's not getting vitality out of what he does.

You can have a person who does everything he is supposed to – he has all his “leaves” – but he is lacking a connection to what he does. Chazal refer to this problem as “His wisdom is more than his deeds.”⁶⁰ He might have been taught all the *mitzvos* or he has read about them in the sefarim, and he knows that one who doesn't do the *mitzvos* goes to Gehinnom...so he forces himself to do the *mitzvos*. He never grows from the deeds he's performing.

We can compare this to a father who cares for his child's physical needs, feeding him and clothing him and buying him toys – but he doesn't feel a connection in his heart toward the child. He is missing the natural love and warmth that a father is supposed to have toward his child, and the child feels this. It's easy to imagine what the child is going to look like – he will grow up very sad. Such a father, who gives everything his child needs physically – but not emotionally – gives to the child only because he is afraid of what will be after 120, when he stands in front of the Heavenly court. He won't even be rewarded, though, for even what he has given to children – he neglected his children emotionally with the excuse that he gives to them all their physical needs, so all of his giving will be worthless when he comes to Heaven.

A Lulav With Spread Out Leaves

The next *halachah* in the Mishnah is that a *lulav* with spread out leaves is kosher, *b'dieved*; it is not invalid, but it's not the best thing either. It's not *mehudar*.⁶¹ When the leaves of the *lulav* are spread out, they are pointing in all directions, and the leaves of the *lulav* are supposed to all point to one direction.

⁶⁰Avos 3: 9

⁶¹Halachically “beautiful”

In terms of our soul, this applies as follows.

Sometimes a person is in general heading towards the right direction in life. He knows in general what his purpose in life is, why he lives – and he is beginning to steer himself in that direction. But slowly more and more, as he is actively pursuing this goal, he gets caught up in various deeds which deter him from the goal.

Let us give of a more specific example of what we mean. A person opens up a *chessed* organization – he is motivated to do kindness, to resemble Hashem who is kind and merciful. He truly had good intentions when he started the organization. The money begins to pour in, and he distributes the money to those in need. But as more and more money comes in, he slowly begins to feel, “What's wrong if I make a little money here in the process....”

It's a well-known fact. Many people who started *chessed* organizations ended up taking some of the donations for themselves; they couldn't help it. They caved in due to the pressures they never dreamed it would entail, and decided to pocket some of the money from the donors. Some of these people even pocketed a little money here and there so that their daughter can go on her dream vacation. The person diverged from his original goal of doing *chessed* – due to all sorts of pressures, of course. Yet, in spite of all this corruption, those very same *chessed* organizations continue to exist – and people are happy that these organizations are still around to provide them with relief...

“They Seek Many Calculations”

How does one fix this “spread out *lulav*” in himself? The answer is as we continue the words of the Mishnah. Rebbi Yehudah says that it should be tied from the upper part. In actual *halachah*, we do not practice this; but let us understand Rebbi Yehuda's solution to the spread out *lulav*.

The inner meaning behind Rebbi Yehuda's words is that when it comes to one's Avodas Hashem, a person has to take all his weaknesses and connect them all together, giving direction to them. Sometimes this is feasible, but sometimes the weaknesses have “spread out” so much that it cannot be fixed in the regular way, and the only solution is to start over again from scratch.

120

If a person started out something with good intentions, and he had an earnest desire for something worthy – but along the way, his personal interests swayed him a little – what he can do is attempt to return to the original, straight path which he set for himself. He should remember where he came from – and to where he is going. He must not let other personal interests sway him from his goal.

The spine of the *lulav*, naturally, is straight. A person as well is created straight-minded, as the possuk says, “*G-d made man upright.*”⁶² But when the leaves of the *lulav* spread out, it resembles the end of the possuk: “*And they seek many calculations.*” The “many calculations” (*cheshbonos rabim*) in a person are his *negios* – his personal interests that sway him from the goal.

Yaakov Avinu was able to deal with Lavan and even act suave with him without getting affected by this. But not everyone can be like Yaakov Avinu. People have to lie sometimes to the government, and this presents a danger to our souls. (It is said of the Brisker Rov that he was against joining the Knesset, not because of the Satmar Rebbe's reason, but because being on the government negatively affects the purity of one's soul.)

Lulav of the Har HaBarzel⁶³

The next *halachah* in the Mishnah is that the *lulav* which grows on the *Har HaBarzel* is kosher. However, the Gemara⁶⁴ says that it depends on how the leaves grow. If the bottom leaf is covering a little bit of the leaf above it, it is kosher; but if

the lower leaf does not come at all over the leaf above it, it is invalid, because then the leaves are totally disconnected.

Let us think about how this applies to our own soul.

The leaves of the spine on the *lulav* represent a person's offspring – what comes out of a person. The leaves of the *lulav* don't always stay united with each other, like we see in the case of the *lulav* of *Har HaBarzel*. A person's children as well don't always stay connected; we see that siblings live all over the world. When families are

⁶² *Koheles 7: 29*

⁶³ "Iron Mountain", an area in Eretz Yisrael in which the *lulav* grew in an unusual shape.

⁶⁴ *Sukkah 32a*

121

disconnected from each other, it resembles the *lulav* of the *Har HaBarzel* – which is invalid (in the case where the leaves are totally disconnected).

(In other words, whatever "results" from a person is ideally supposed to be connected – such as our *mitzvos*. Our *mitzvos* have to all become connected in one unit, not just as separate acts that we do.)

Chazal⁶⁵ state that even the emptiest Jew contains as much *mitzvos* in him as the amount of seeds in a pomegranate. There is a famous question on this Chazal: If even the most wicked Jews are full of *mitzvos*, why then are they considered "empty"?

Even more so, the *Malbim*⁶⁶ points out that a pomegranate can contain 613 seeds, the amount of all the *mitzvos*. If even the worst Jew is full of the 613 *mitzvos*, why then are they called "empty"?

Rov Dovid Povarsky zt"l⁶⁷ answered that in a pomegranate, all the seeds stand separate from each other, and that is why wicked people are called "empty", even though they are full of *mitzvos*. There is no connection between all the *mitzvos* they do. They are not "one piece".

Such people resemble the *lulav* of *Har HaBarzel*, whose leaves do not overlap each other – leaves that are disconnected from each other.

Designating Our Heart Towards Hashem

When we daven for rain on Sukkos, in the *Tefillas Geshem*, we mention how Yaakov Avinu was a "yichad lev" – one whose heart was designated totally for Hashem.

Let us ask ourselves: Is our heart dedicated toward Hashem?

The Gemara⁶⁸ says that if one sees a *lulav* in a dream, it is a sign that "he only has one heart, towards his Father in Heaven." This hints to what we mentioned earlier, that *lulav* is a combination of the words *lo* and *lev*; that one's heart has to be "his", that he's in control of his heart, directing it towards fulfilling the will of Hashem. If someone is in control of his heart's desires, he is called someone who "only has one heart,

⁶⁵ *Berachos 57a*

⁶⁶ *Malbim, Shir HaShirim 4: 13*

⁶⁷ *Rosh Yeshivas Ponovozeh.*

⁶⁸ *Berachos 57a*

towards his Father in Heaven.” But if someone is being controlled by the various passions of his heart, it cannot be said of him that he has only one heart towards his Father in Heaven.

Similarly, the Gemara⁶⁹ says that a *lulav* comes from a date tree, because “just as a date tree has only one heart, so does the Jewish people have only one heart, towards their Father in Heaven.”

There is a Gemara⁷⁰ that says that “before a person eats and drinks, he has two hearts; after he eats and drinks, he only has one heart.” Simply, this is because when a person hasn’t eaten yet, he is hungry and thus he is anxious. After he eats, he is calmer.⁷¹ But we can give another explanation: the Gemara is referring to spiritual food and drink. Before a person “eats” and “drinks” spiritually, he has two hearts – his *yetzer hora* and his *yetzer tov* are fighting. After he is satisfied spiritually, the *yetzer hora* subsides, and the person remains with only one heart – a heart designated for Hashem.

The *yetzer hora*, who resides in the heart of a person, is essentially the various desires in a person that are extraneous. A person’s various *retzonos* (desires\passions) are responsible for causing a disconnect in one’s *mitzvos*, that they shouldn’t be all one unit. Instead of resembling a *lulav* of “*lo*” and “*lev*” together – “his heart” – he resembles a different meaning of “*lo lev*”: “no heart”!

When a person likes different things – he likes music, candies, trips, etc. – there is nothing binding together all these desires. They are just a bunch of random desires. But when a person has only “one heart” – a heart devoted towards Hashem – he knows how to utilize everything he likes to bring him to one central point. He is like a *lulav* of “*lo* and “*lev*”, “his heart”, and not a *lulav* of *lo lev*, “no heart.”

The *Rokeiach* says a hint in the Torah how we see that *lulav* comes to unify all of a person’s desires for Hashem. The first letter of the Torah is *beis*. The last letter of the Torah is *lamed*. The first letter of *Navi* is a *vov*, and the last letter of *Navi* is *lamed*. This spells the word *lulav*. If so, *lulav* unifies the entire Torah (and *Navi*) together. The same goes for someone who only has “one heart towards his Father in Heaven.” To him, all of the Torah is one piece.

⁶⁹ *Sukkah 45b*

⁷⁰ *Bava Basra 12b*

⁷¹ *Rabbeinu Gershom and Rashbam, ibid.*

Having One Heart – Only One Desire

We shake the *lulav* in four directions, as well as up and down. Why do we shake it up and down as well? We can compare this to someone building a structure, with four sides. Just having four walls will not be enough – he needs a roof and a floor as well. The roof and the floor are what connect the four walls together.

A *lulav* which grows on the *Har HaBarzel* represent a lack of connection between the *mitzvos*. Each leaf is separated from the one on top of it. It might be kosher, but we are supposed to have a *lulav* which is *mehudar* – a beautiful *lulav*. Only a beautiful *lulav*, which does not contain any of the deficiencies taught in this Mishnah, represents the revelation of the purpose of Creation. Hashem chose us and gave us the Torah; the first letter of the Torah is *beis*, and the last letter of the Torah is *lamed*. This spells the word *lev* – heart.

May it be the will of Hashem that He help us receive the Torah in the inner depths of our heart, that we merit to have only one heart – that our whole desire should be just one desire alone: to do the will of our Father in Heaven.⁷²

⁷² To reveal your inner will, see *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. 4, Chapters 15-22.

124

Chapter Twelve

Sefer Koheles – Everything Is “Hevel Havalim”⁷³

“Moed” – A “Meeting” With Hashem

Yom Tov is called *moed*. *Moed* comes from the word *vaad*, which means “gathering” or “meeting.” Who are we meeting with? With Hashem! When a person makes up to meet with his friend, they make up that they will meet in a certain place. Where is the place that Hashem would meet us in? In the *Beis Hamikdash*. In the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*, there was a *mitzvah* three times a year to go up to the *Beis Hamikdash*. It was an eye-to-eye meeting with Hashem, just like when two friends meet each other and make eye contact.

Nowadays, we have no *Beis Hamikdash*. Where then can we meet with Hashem?

Yom Tov is our meeting with Hashem. It continues to exist, long after we no longer have a *Beis Hamikdash*.

Hashem is fully ready to meet us – He is everywhere. Nothing is holding Him back.

The only thing that prevents a person from meeting with Hashem is his very *self*. If a person manages to remove the barrier holding him back – his very self – he would then be able to meet Hashem, wherever he is. *The Mesillas Yesharim*⁷⁴ writes that a person who is constantly connected with Hashem is considered to always be walking with Him, even as he lives here on this physical world.

⁷³ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p.277 – 280.

⁷⁴ chapter 26

125

When a person is always connected to Hashem in his life, even though he has no *Beis Hamikdash* to meet with Him, he himself has become like a *Beis Hamikdash* – and he can meet with Him.

Every Yom Tov has an inner power in it that enables a person to meet with Hashem. A person has to receive the inner point of each Yom Tov which will connect him with Hashem.

On Sukkos, what is that inner point of Yom Tov that can connect a person with Hashem?

Removing the Barriers

On Shabbos of *Chol HaMoed Sukkos*, Chazal established that we read the book of Koheles.⁷⁵ This is not a coincidence that we read Koheles specifically on Sukkos. There must be some connection between the book of Koheles and the theme of Sukkos; otherwise, why would Chazal establish that we read Koheles on Sukkos? Shlomo Hamelech begins the book of Koheles with, “*Hevel havalim* (“futility of futilities”), so says Koheles; *hevel havalim*, everything is *hevel havalim*.” Rashi brings from Chazal the following: “Koheles is making an announcement and saying that all of Creation is futile; he says “*hevel*” seven times in the possuk, corresponding to the seven days of Creation.”

The commentators are perplexed: How could Shlomo HaMelech say such a thing?! How could he say that Hashem’s Creation is all futility and vanity?

The depth of the matter appears to be as follows. The world is called “*olam*”, from the word “*he’elam*” – “concealment.” This world really conceals Hashem from being revealed to us. The world – this world of *he’elam* – was created in seven days; in other words, there are seven levels of *he’elam*. A person’s job on this world is to remove all the *he’elam* – to remove all the barriers between him and Hashem – and come to reveal Hashem. All of a person’s avodah is essentially to show how all of creation is one big *he’elam*.

When a person comes to really feel that all of Creation is *hevel* - in that it conceals Hashem from us – he personally reveals Hashem in his life. He essentially enters the state of before Creation, in which there was no *he’elam* yet; he will be able to become

⁷⁵ *Ecclesiasties*

126

constantly attached to Hashem as a result. Anything which deters a person from being attached with Hashem is a kind of *he’elam*. When a person manages to remove that barrier from upon himself – he views everything as *hevel*, since it’s all getting in the way of revealing Hashem onto the world – he will be able to always become attached to Hashem.

This is the inner point that one can reveal on Sukkos. This is the way how one meets with Hashem on the Yom Tov of Sukkos.

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt”l once said that it’s not enough for a person to read the book of Koheles written by Shlomo Hamelech; every single person has to write the words “*Hevel havalim...everything is hevel havalim*”, and these words have to be ingrained in one’s blood. A person has to feel clearly in his heart that this world is completely *hevel* – it leads us astray from Hashem. This is the Avodah of Sukkos: write your own personal *sefer* Koheles!

Before and After the Beis Hamikdash

When the *Beis Hamikdash* was around, a person had special Heavenly assistance to reach utter closeness with Hashem and get past all the barriers of this world. He would bring the *korbonos* (sacrifices) and eliminate the physical aspect of the animal, transforming the physical into the spiritual. He would reveal G-dliness in what was previously something totally physical, something that was a kind of *he'elam*.

Now that the *Beis Hamikdash* isn't around, we have to accomplish this very same goal, but through the abilities of our soul. We need to eradicate the *he'elam* of this world and instead to come meet with the Creator of the world – the state of total attachment with Him that existed before creation, when there was no *he'elam* yet.

127

Chapter Thirteen

The Joy of Shemini Atzeres \ Simchas Torah ⁷⁶

Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah: Two Different Aspects of Joy

Shemini Atzeres is called by two names: *Shemini Atzeres*, and *Simchas Torah*. They represent two different kinds of joy. One kind of joy is the joy of “*Atzeres*”.

“*Atzeres*” means to “remain”. This is hinting to the *Midrash* that says that Hashem desired to remain with the Jewish people even after Sukkos ends, saying to them, “Remain with me one more day.”

What exactly is this joy? It is the joy that one can have just in being attached to Hashem, to simply feel with Him a sense of companionship.

Simchas Torah offers a different kind of joy. It is the joy one has in being attached to the Torah, and thus we make a celebration that we have completed the Torah.

Joy Within Nature and Joy Above Nature

A *chosson* and *kallah*⁷⁷ have a certain joy; and it lasts for seven days. The joy of *Shemini Atzeres* is a joy found on the “eighth day”, hinting to the fact that it is a joy that has to do with “eight.” In other words, the regular kind of joy is represented by the number seven, while the higher joy is represented by the number eight. We always find how “seven” corresponds with nature, such as that there are seven days of the week. The joy of a *chosson* and *kallah*, which lasts for seven days, represents the natural joy; the

⁷⁶ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p.284-286.

⁷⁷ groom and bride

128

joy is that two natures are fusing together. Such joy is a joy within the bounds of nature.

But there is a higher kind of joy, the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*. It is a joy that is above nature – “eight” is above “seven.” Let us explain what it is.

Above Nature

It is the custom that when we finish the Torah, we immediately begin with *Beraishis*. The reason behind this is because the Torah is unlimited and endless, and we want to

show that it has no end. The last letter of the Torah is *lamed*, and the first letter of the Torah is *beis*, which forms the word *lev* (heart). The heart is king of the body; a king is above his people. A king is allowed to break fences, and no one can protest him.⁷⁸ A king – or the heart of a person – is not bound to the regular rules.

This is the joy of *Simchas Torah*; it represents the heart of a person, which is above the regular limits, for it is king over the body. The joy of *Simchas Torah* is thus a joy that is above the natural kind of joy. It is the unlimited joy one can have in the Torah. The same is true for the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*. Our Avodah during the seven days of Sukkos is to realize how all of the world and nature is futile, to erase our attachment to this world (see the chapter before)⁷⁹. After a person has hopefully nullified his attachment to this world – and there are seven traits inherent in nature for one to overcome⁸⁰ – he is now able to connect totally to Hashem, a state of being that is essentially above nature; that is the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*.

Within The Struggles, and Above the Struggles

The word *simcha* (joy) comes from word *someach*, and if we rearrange the letters, we get the word *chamesh*. *Chamesh* can mean two different things:

1. The number “five.”
2. From the word “*chamushim*”, which means “armies”; we find this when the Jewish people left Egypt, that they left in “armies.”⁸¹ Rashi states that these armies were unarmed with any weapons. From here we see that the word “*chamesh*” normally refers to weapons of war.

⁷⁸ *Pesachim 110a*

⁷⁹ Hence, we read *Koheles on Sukkos*, which talks about how futile this physical world is.

⁸⁰ the seven middos: *chessed, gevurah, tiferes, etc.*

⁸¹ *Shemos 13: 18*

129

Simcha and *chamesh* have the same root letters (*shin, mem* and *ches*); there is a rule in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that whenever there is a root word⁸², there are two opposite meanings to it. In our case, this will apply as follows.

Simcha is when a person ends his wars, representing a level that is above nature. He has left the level of “*Seven times a righteous person falls and gets up*”, and he is above the regular ups and downs. He is above “seven” – and he is now on the level of “eight”. He no longer has the normal, natural struggles he used to deal with.

Chamesh represents the lower kind of joy – when one is happy upon overcoming challenges. He wages war with the seven “nations” inside him – the seven primary bad *middos*. He still hasn’t completely overcome them yet – he’s still within the normal fights of nature, fighting with his natural abilities.

After Yom Tov Is Over

When *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is over, what does a person remain with? The higher joy of “eight” reached on *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is gone; what does a person have left from Yom Tov?

Simcha is when a person is happy with something that got added onto my essence. People don't find happiness in the fact that they merely exist; people are naturally unhappy. (There is a kind of happiness that a person can have in just being happy with what he has, but no one is happy with their mere existence.) *Simcha* is only present when a person gets something. If a person would take something he gets and make it a part of his essence, he would no longer be happy with what he has gotten, because now it's part of who he is – and he needs something *more* than what he is in order to be happy.

Yet, this is actually our avodah: we need to take what we have gained and make it a part of our essence. Our avodah on *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is to find joy in Hashem and in His Torah – a joy that is above nature. After a person merits this joy, he has to take it and make it a part of who he is. One needs to feel a total connection with Hashem that transcends nature, and an attachment with Torah that transcends nature. When a person takes the happiness of being attached to Hashem and the Torah (and this happiness can be reached on the Yom Tov) and

⁸² *shoresh*

130

he makes into a part of himself, the *simcha* goes away with this, because now there is nothing “more” to be happy about, for it is now part of the person.

For this reason, there is no *simcha* after Yom Tov ends. There can't be. It is not because the great spirituality of Yom Tov has gone, but rather – it is the opposite! If we have succeeded in our avodah on Yom Tov, that means we have transformed the spirituality of Yom Tov into a part of our essence. It has gone from being something great that surrounded us into something that has been absorbed into our being.⁸³ With this attainment, our *simcha* has to go away, but the gain is far worth it.

What is the avodah now as we start the rest of the year? It is now upon us to aspire for an even higher level than what we gained until now – and from there we will derive our next upgrade to our *simcha*.

⁸³ *In the Hebrew sefer, the author calls this “going from the “ohr makif” (“surrounding light”) to an “ohr penimi” (inner light).*

131

Chapter Fourteen

Internalizing Sukkos For the Rest of the Year ⁸⁴

Carrying Over the Yom Tov into the Year

In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of the Three Festivals (Sukkos, Pesach and Shavuot), we say, “*And lift us, Hashem our G-d, the blessings of Your festival, for life and peace, happiness and gladdening.*”

There are those who explain⁸⁵ this prayer to mean that we are asking Hashem to let the blessings of Yom Tov carry over into the rest of the year. “Blessing”, *berachah* in Hebrew, comes from word *beraicha* – a pool, connoting that we want Hashem to

pool upon us His sustenance⁸⁶; in other words, we want to be affected by the special power of the Yom Tov for the rest of the year as well.

It is well-known that not only is Yom Tov an opportunity for immense holiness and growth, but even *Chol HaMoed* is a holy time; Chazal forbade certain activities on *Chol HaMoed* so that we can be free to rejoice in festivity and have time to learn Torah.⁸⁷

Having free time on *Chol HaMoed* is not simply meant to have free time – although that is certainly true in the simple sense; it is really because having this extra time on our hands give us the opportunity to have a calm and relaxed soul, so we can focus on more on serving the Creator and learning the Torah.

When a person is busy with various matters other than Avodas Hashem and learning Torah, his soul is less open to receive matters of holiness. But on Yom Tov, a person

⁸⁴ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Sukkos, chap. 1.*

⁸⁵ *Bad Kodesh on Moadim* (Rav Baruch Dov Povarski), p.416. See also *Birchas Moadecha* (of Rav Margolin) on *Tishrei*.

⁸⁶ See *Rabbeinu Bachye, Parshas Eikev, 8:10.*

⁸⁷ *Yerushalmi Moed Kattan, 9a.*

132

is able to learn how to acquire spirituality, Avodas Hashem and learning Torah – and all of this is because on Yom Tov we are disconnected from materialism. (It is not a total disconnection from materialism, only partial; as we see that certain labors are permitted on *Chol HaMoed*, in certain situations).

Yom Tov can show us that even after Yom Tov, our Avodas Hashem and our learning of the Torah should be from a disconnection from the material world, a disconnection from how the rest of the world thinks – and from this, we come to truly learn the Torah and have true Avodas Hashem.

Accessing the State of Yom Tov Even During The Year

Yom Tov is supposed to affect us and fuel us up with spiritual energy to last until the next Yom Tov. We need this burst of spirituality to keep us going. The days of Yom Tov are few, in comparison to the rest of the year which is much longer; if a person doesn't get affected by Yom Tov, he won't be able to acquire any matter of holiness during the rest of the year.

Let us think into how Yom Tov can affect our soul for the rest of the year.

On Yom Tov, a person is calm and relaxed from the busyness of the world. His mind is settled and he is a bit calmer than he is normally; each to his own level. On *Chol HaMoed*, we buy only food that we will need for Yom Tov, and not more than that. We are frugal and satisfied just with that amount of shopping. We also don't do any work on *Chol HaMoed* unless it will cause us to have a loss. Most stores are closed. Of course, a person might use the relaxation of *Chol HaMoed* for the wrong purposes and waste his time, *chas v'shalom*; but that is a different problem which we are not currently discussing.

It is impossible to live in Yom Tov during the year – that is, in the external sense. But in our inner world of the soul, we can live in a state of calmness that we have on Yom Tov, even when it's not Yom Tov – if we gain the proper kind of mind to do so.

When Yom Tov ends, we go back to our prospective jobs. Even a *Kolel avreich* has his jobs; life is full of responsibilities that surround us all day. Anyone who is married and has children has responsibilities to his family. He has to make sure that his wife and kids have a roof over their heads; that they have food, clothing, doctor visits, etc. That is one side of our life. But there is another side going on in our life – the fact that we are in between one Yom Tov and the next.

133

The Ramban writes that *Sefiras HaOmer* is like *Chol HaMoed*, and that Shavuos is like the *Shemini Atzeres* (of Pesach). By the same token, perhaps we can say also that the days in between Shavuos and Sukkos – and from Sukkos to Pesach – are like one big *Chol HaMoed*, the bridge that connects one Yom to another. There is a holiness we can gain from our “*Chol HaMoed*” year-round.

In Between Yomim Tovim

Perhaps we can say also that Yom Tov is like a Shabbos, while the rest of the year is like the six days of the week. We find that Pesach is called “Shabbos”,⁸⁸ and Yom Kippur is called “*Shabbos Shabboson*.”⁸⁹ This is because our whole essence is that we were redeemed from Egypt so that we could become a nation to receive the Torah, and we also know that every Yom Tov is *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim* – to remember our redemption from Egypt. Shabbos is also *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim*. If so, Yom Tov and Shabbos can be compared to each other. The rest of the year, by contrast, is like the six days of the week.

The six days of the week are blessed by Shabbos.⁹⁰ Perhaps we can also say that the days in between each Yom Tov are sustained by the blessings of the Yom Tov. Just like we have a concept of the afternoon⁹¹ and a concept of “*bein hashemashos*”⁹² (twilight) – times “in between” that serve to connect different times – so can we say that the days in between Yomim Tovim are what connect the previous Yom Tov to the next Yom Tov. If so, the rest of the year is in a sense like a Yom Tov of its own; it is a certain time, a bridge between the Yomim Tovim.

What are the days of the rest of the year like? They are not like Yom Tov itself, but they resemble *Chol HaMoed* – the time which connects one part of Yom Tov to the next. *Chol HaMoed* is the lower level of Yom Tov, and so can we say that the rest of the year is a lower level of Yom Tov, serving to connect Yom Tov to another.

The Gemara⁹³ says that when Haman wanted to get the Jews in trouble, he pointed out to Achashveirosh that the Jews are always busy keeping Yom Tov; “today is Shabbos, today is Pesach.” This hints to the fact that the Jewish people are always in a

⁸⁸ *Menachos 65b*

⁸⁹ *Vayikra 16: 31*

⁹⁰ *Zohar II, Yisro, 88a*

⁹¹ Rashi, *Shemos* 12: 6

⁹² *Avos* 5: 6

⁹³ Rashi, *Megillah* 13b

134

“Yom Tov” – because the whole year is really like a Yom Tov! (Just that it is on a lower level than the actual Yom Tov.)

What We Learn From Yom Tov For The Rest of the Year

The Yomim Tovim given to us are not simply defined by their individual concepts they represent, but they are more than that: they reflect the level we are at during the time that the Yom Tov sets in. That is why we daven in *Shemoneh Esrei* of Yom Tov, “*You chose us from all the nations*”, and we also mention in the davening how Yom Tov is *zecher l’yetzias mitzrayim* – that only the we, the Jewish people, merited to leave Egypt, while the other nations did not merit this special event. Yom Tov expresses how the Jewish people were formed into a nation, and how Hashem chose us as His nation. The world stands on three pillars⁹⁴, and so does the Jewish people stand on three things – the three Yomim Tovim⁹⁵. The Yomim Tovim help the Jewish people survive for the rest of the year. There is much to learn from each aspect of Yom Tov.

For example, on *Chol HaMoed*, one is only allowed to purchase items that are necessary for Yom Tov.⁹⁶ We can learn two things from this. Firstly, we see that you only need to buy things for your house that you need right now, and not to shop for things you’ll only need in the future. Secondly, you have to be frugal and only buy things that you really need, not luxuries.

This is how someone lives throughout the rest of the year as well, when he has a deep connection in his soul with the Creator – he takes the lessons of Yom Tov with him for the rest of the year as well.

Yom Tov – Our Meeting With Hashem

Yom Tov is called *moed*, which comes from the word *vaad* (meeting). The place where we would meet with Hashem was the *Beis Hamikdash*, and from it a Jew would derive vitality from it for the rest of the year by visiting it three times a year. The *Shechinah* was there. Now that it is gone, we express our loss in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Yom Tov, “*And because of our sins, we have been exiled from our land, and we have been distanced from our earth.*”

⁹⁴ *Avos* 1:2 and 1:17

⁹⁵ These are called *Shalosh Regalim*, the “Three Festivals”: *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Sukkos*.

⁹⁶ *Tur*, *Orach Chaim*, 130.

135

What do we mean that we have been exiled from our land? We are able to stand in Eretz Yisrael today. How are we exiled from it?

Simply, it is because the incredible holiness of Eretz Yisrael, the holiness of the *Beis Hamikdash*, has gone away. There is a discussion if the land of Eretz Yisrael still maintains its sanctity even though we have no *Beis Hamikdash*.⁹⁷

But there is a deeper meaning behind the *tefillah* we are saying. We have been exiled and distanced from our land, in the sense that we are far from the great spiritual revelations that one would experience on Yom Tov by the *Beis Hamikdash*. That spiritual light would illuminate the entire Eretz Yisrael. Although this reality still continues to exist in our inner world, it isn't revealed out in the open in the world we see, and thus we are "exiled" from our land. So although a person can be in Eretz Yisrael today, he is still exiled from it – he is missing what Eretz Yisrael used to be like.

When a person went up to the *Beis Hamikdash* three times a year, he saw the *Shechinah*. What does this mean? It means that he revealed in his heart a deep connection with Hashem, an utter awareness of His existence. It was called "*aliyah l'regel*," (ascending on Yom Tov) – going up to the *Beis Hamikdash*. It was an ascension in the sense that one who ascended spiritually from Yom Tov would stay at that high level, and he was able to maintain it and not to fall from it back to routine. This is the meaning of the possuk, "*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy place*"⁹⁸ – in other words, the possuk is praising the one who would gain from the holy spiritual elevation of Yom Tov and maintain his level throughout the rest of the year.

Yom Tov- The Shechinah Within

The Torah is eternal, and thus whatever it imparts is eternal. If there is such a concept of Yom Tov in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash* – when the *Shechinah* was revealed out in the open – then that concept, that point, continues to exist. We have no *Beis Hamikdash* today, but we still have Yom Tov, and we can have *aliyah l'regel* every Yom Tov, even nowadays. This is what we ask for in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Yom Tov: "*V'hasieinu es birkas moedecha*" – ("And carry over the blessings of Your festivals..."). Our avodah on Yom Tov is that we ask Hashem to let the holiness of Yom Tov carry

⁹⁷ See *Megillah 6a* and *Rambam Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 6: 16*

⁹⁸ *Tehillim 24:3*

136

into the rest of the year, in spite of the fact that our level of revelation isn't the same as it used to be.

It is written, "*And I will dwell amongst them.*"⁹⁹ The *Alshich* explains that the possuk is saying that Hashem dwells in the heart of each Jew! In our own heart within us, we can still have *aliyah l'regel* three times a year, on Yom Tov¹⁰⁰ – and see Hashem, so to speak; on our own level. We can access the *Shechinah* in our hearts, three times a year – each Yom Tov – and extend it to the rest of the year. But in order for this to happen, we need to know what Yom Tov really is.

If a person came to a stronger recognition of Hashem's existence on Yom Tov, then the Torah he learns during the rest of the year will become more internalized in his

mind and heart, as a result. If someone is truly searching for Hashem, the Torah he learns will become the real Torah – “*For from Zion comes forth Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.*”¹⁰¹ The true Torah of Hashem becomes revealed to a person, in his heart, when he earnestly pursues Hashem.

Thus, the inner implication of Yom Tov is for one to connect to Hashem in his heart. What will result from this? “*For Hashem gives wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.*”¹⁰²

Experience the Elation of Yom Tov and Then Seek To Maintain It

If someone reaches this on Yom Tov, he has gained immensely; now it is his avodah to continue that growth into the rest of the year. This will fulfill the meaning of what we daven for on Yom Tov – “And carry over the blessings of Your festivals...”

But if a person didn't try to grow from Yom Tov in the way described here, and he didn't come to have a new feeling of a relationship with Hashem from the Yom Tov – then there is no point for him to wait to see if he will be inspired for the rest of the year. He hasn't invested in anything over Yom Tov, so he won't see any of the profits during the rest of the year. Only if a person is clear what he has gained from Yom Tov can he hope to maintain his inspiration for the rest of the year.

⁹⁹Shemos 25: 8

¹⁰⁰Yom Tov here refers uniquely to the Three Festivals of Pesach, Shavuos and Sukkos.

¹⁰¹Yeshayahu 2:3

¹⁰²Mishlei 2:6

137

So first, a person has to make sure that he has gained from Yom Tov in the first place – before he seeks to let Yom Tov carry over into the rest of the year. Even if he has felt a small amount of recognition of Hashem over Yom Tov, at least he has gained somewhat, and he has now what to grow upon for the rest of the year.

On *Simchas Torah*, a person has to have at least felt a minimal amount of closeness towards the Torah. One has to feel the Yom Tov, to feel the *Simchas Torah*, to feel *Shemini Atzeres* – of which Hashem said, “Remain with me one more day.”¹⁰³ He has to feel that it was hard to part from Hashem after such a period of closeness, just as Hashem finds it hard to leave us at the end of Sukkos. He has to have felt that he has the opportunity to feel the reality of Hashem for at least one more day.

The Custom In Kelm of “Asiri Kodesh”

Let us think into how we can hold onto our gains from Yom Tov for the rest of the year.

In Kelm, there was a custom called “*Asiri Kodesh.*”¹⁰⁴ Every ten days following Yom Kippur, people who lived in Kelm would make for themselves a mini Yom Kippur and check to see if they had kept to the resolutions they made last Yom Kippur. They started this custom because they realized that most people are only able to hold onto their inspiration during *Yomim Noraim*, and a few are able to keep the inspiration going until after Sukkos, but not beyond that; *Asiri Kodesh* made a person do some

introspection every ten days and ask himself if he was still keeping to his level he reached on *Yomim Noraim*.

We can learn from this something very important: how to hold onto our gains from Yom Tov. If we really want to have a good year, we need to see after *Yomim Noraim* and *Sukkos* if we are still feeling that closeness to Hashem we felt during these holy times. For every ten days that go by – or once a week, for those who are able to – we should set aside time and see if we’re keeping to the level we were on during those days.

“*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy place.*” This is not just a possuk, it is telling us the avodah we need to do throughout the year: we need to see where we are holding. We all know that Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos

¹⁰³ See Rashi, Vayikra 23: 36

¹⁰⁴ lit. “Tenth Day Is Holy”.

138

and Simchas Torah will once again be here next year, and that we will once again return to making resolutions, developing our will for spirituality, to have yearnings for spirituality, to dance again on *Simchas Torah*. We will do it all again next year – with the help of Hashem. But are we losing all of this, *chas v’shalom*, as the year goes on – and then we are just beginning again from scratch next year? Are we going to start over again next year simply because we have lost all those yearnings?

The truth is that the reason why many people can’t keep their resolutions for the new year is because they don’t believe in themselves enough. They didn’t believe to begin with that they were able to keep to what they took upon themselves. But this is really a denial of the words of Chazal. If Chazal established that we daven in *Shemoneh Esrei* the *tefillah* of “*V’hasieinu*”, it must be that it is definitely possible for us to keep to what we took upon ourselves for the coming year; even if we can’t keep to them as perfectly as we had hoped to, we can still keep to them on our own level.

The Advice of the Ramchal

If someone doesn’t seek advice on how he can keep to his resolutions, we all know that it will be pointless for him to try to keep to them. There is one single advice we have for this, from the *Ramchal*, (author of *Mesillas Yesharim*) in sefer *Derech Eitz Chaim*. He writes as follows¹⁰⁵:

“It is therefore a duty upon each person to reflect with himself. If he doesn’t reflect and think, wisdom will not come after him...a person, for many years of his life, thinks a lot about his various responsibilities, which are only his temporary responsibilities. Why can’t he think for an hour about the things that really matter, such as: Who am I? Why did I come onto this world? What does Hashem want from me? What will be with my end?

“This (an hour of self-introspection every day) is the greatest remedy once can have against his evil inclination. It is easy, yet it does so much. It bears much results. Every

day, a person should reflect for at least an hour a day, and empty himself from the rest of his thoughts so that he can only think about just this (what he have said).

“And he should ask himself in his heart: “What did the forefathers do, whom Hashem found desirable? What did Moshe Rabbeinu do? What did Dovid HaMelech do? What did all the great leaders before me do?”

¹⁰⁵ This has been loosely translated and is fairly literal to the text.

139

“And he should realize in his mind how good it is to do this for all his life.”

What the Ramchal is saying is not just inspiration for Elul. It is something to think about the entire year. If we are really truthful with ourselves, and if we really want to gain from *Yomim Noraim* for the rest of the year – then we have to learn how we can protect what we have gained from *Yomim Noraim*.¹⁰⁶

Make A Self Accounting

The Ramchal has taught us that that the essential tool we need is to set aside time for self-introspection. It can be every ten days; once a week is even better, and if one can do it every day, that’s the most preferable. During the time you set aside, make the following self-accounting: “On Rosh Hashanah, I reached a certain level. Have I succeeded in keeping to it? How much have I kept to it? If I haven’t kept to it, what can I do to make sure I keep to it?”

Hashem has decreed on each person on Rosh Hashanah whatever has been decreed upon him. But it is upon us to make sure that we aren’t among those who don’t keep to their words. We all know that the coming year will have its full amount of responsibilities, challenges, and difficulties. It will definitely not be that simple to keep to the level we reached *Yomim Noraim* during the year. But we at least need to have a hope that we *can* succeed; of course, we cannot blindly trust ourselves that we will for sure see success, but we must try to at least be *eligible* for success.

What a person has to do is designate for himself times of quiet in which he can make a self-accounting. We must bring our life to a halt and think about the purpose of life. We must be truthful with ourselves, and remember what we said to Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. You can write down what you said this way you don’t forget it; take out the paper and read it during this time of quiet you set aside for yourself. One has to see if he’s really keeping to what he took upon himself, and if he sees that he isn’t, he has to ask himself: “How will I face Hashem next Rosh Hashanah...?”

One should be aware that he has free will to decide if he will be among those who merit the blessings of Yom Tov for the rest of the year, or if *chas v’shalom* he will not be among those who merit it.

¹⁰⁶ See also *Kedushas Levi: Shavuos, and also Ramban: Emunah UBitachon, chap. 19*

140

How To Avoid The Sleepiness of the Winter

Anyone who doesn't follow the *Ramchal's* advice can testify that he has never succeeding in keeping to his resolutions he made during *Yomim Noraim*. But if someone follows the *Ramchal's* advice and he sets aside time to think about what's important, he will definitely see results.

If someone sees a different piece of advice in another *sefer*, that's wonderful. But in Kelm, and in other places, they followed the *Ramchal's* advice, which is that one should set aside time to bring his life to a halt and see if he is keeping to his *Yomim Noraim* level.

We hope that those who are reading this feel that this advice is simple and true; it is the words of our great teachers, and nothing has been added here to their words. Anyone who is truthful with himself knows how necessary it is to make this self-accounting.

These words are not meant to be an inspiring lecture. Inspiration is for Elul and *Yomim Noraim*, and it doesn't last for the winter, when people get sleepy and lethargic. If we want to avoid becoming sleep-like to our spiritual situation during the winter, we need to make sure we are keeping to our level throughout the rest of the year. During *Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah*, a person is supposed to act above his normal level.¹⁰⁷ The rest of the year, however, we go back to our normal level. The high level of spirituality of *Yomim Noraim* has ended – each person, on whatever level he is at. But if we want to at least be on the true level we are supposed to be on, than we must take with us a point that we will have from the beginning of the year until its end. May Hashem merit us that we should be able to set aside time to think about the purpose of life¹⁰⁸, and that we should maintain our level for the rest of the year – and that we shouldn't be among those who only wait for the next Elul to become inspired.

¹⁰⁷ *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim: 203*

¹⁰⁸ *For more specific guidance on how to make a cheshbon hanefesh, see Bilvavi Vol. IV, chapters 3-5.*

Epilogue: The Rav's Personal Journey

Feeling Empty

I remember how, about 17 or 18 years ago, when *Yomim Noraim* was approaching, I saw that on the calendar, it will soon be *Rosh HaShanah*.

I knew that I must feel something, but I didn't know what to feel. I didn't see anything in my life that is missing. I knew that I felt empty, but I didn't know what it was that I was missing.

Why did I feel so empty? I learned all day; I had three full *sedarim* in the day where I learned. I *davened* and did all the *mitzvos*. So why did I feel empty inside?

I sat and thought: Am I missing something? Why do I feel empty if I am doing everything I am supposed to?

It bothered me very, very much.

I started to look at others to see if I could know how others are happy, and I saw that everyone else was happy except myself. Then I became very lonely, because I felt that everyone else was happy and enjoying their learning – everyone except me.

After many years, I met many people who felt what I felt then – people who feel like they're empty inside and haven't found themselves in life. There is no one here in Eretz Yisrael who hasn't found themselves when it comes to *mitzvos* and *Halacha*. So what was missing in my life that I have to change myself?

142

I began to ask people if they felt like me. No one understood me – they were like Pharaoh's servants who couldn't interpret his dream. No one gave me answers I was satisfied with.

This was one of the hardest times in my life – I can't forget it. I had no idea what to do and where to go in my life. But I knew that I shouldn't give up; I knew I'm not an old person at the end of his life, that I'm young and that I have hope.

I davened to Hashem to help me

After some time, I went to a private room and cried to Hashem. I asked Hashem, "Hashem, I know there is no more prophecy anymore, but what do You want from me? Tell me what You want from me!"

I cried terribly to Hashem. But I had faith that Hashem would send me my answers and show me what He wants from me in my life.

I hope no one goes through what I went through then. But if you ever went through this too, I want you to know that I was there too and went through it – and I came out of it.

After this, I remember that I made a list of all the things I was unhappy with my life, and I wrote how I feel like an old person who has no satisfaction in life. But I told myself not to give up, and I knew that Hashem will help me and show me what He wants from me. I didn't know where my answer would come from, but I trusted in Hashem that He would send me the answer. How?

I knew it wouldn't come from my mind. I knew that when Hashem opens up my **heart**, it will be then that I understand – to understand what the reality of this world is.

The Realization

I remember this clearly. I was sitting and learning with a *sefer*, and suddenly it hit me: I felt the reality that Hashem exists. Then, everything became clear to me.

I grew up in a *frum* home and learned in a good yeshivah, and I knew all about *Eemunah* that a person is supposed to have. I was taught the 13 principles of faith of the Rambam about belief in G-d. But I realized that although I *knew* a lot, I didn't *feel* what I knew.

143

Then I knew what I was missing.

This is what I realized: There is a place in one's heart where he can feel the Endlessness of Hashem's existence, and when a person doesn't feel this, he feels empty. He will search and search and he will not find the answers to his emptiness. Some people were not blessed by Hashem with much feeling, and this emptiness doesn't bother them, the same way a table doesn't feel anything. They get up and go to work or even if they go learn, they simply don't feel this emptiness. They feel fine. But any person with a little feeling can see how this world is full of so much emptiness – *tohu* and *vohu*, and utter darkness. They want light – the light of Hashem – to illuminate their darkness.

There are a few people who are very deeply feeling people and they are in a lot of pain. They see others who are fine and look happy, and they don't know why they themselves aren't happy. These people suffer greatly inside. In addition to this, they are searching to fill their emptiness, and they don't know how.

The more feeling a person is, the more unhappy he is with what the reality is. He sees others sitting and learning and enjoying their learning – he sees how by others, the Torah is their life. But he doesn't feel in his own life how the Torah is life. He knows that it is supposed to give him life, but he doesn't feel it. He feels that Torah doesn't give him life, so maybe life is found elsewhere... such as the streets...

We must know one thing. The world is full of false pleasures; the Sages say that our soul will never be satisfied with this world's pleasures, whether it is forbidden pleasure or whether it is permissible pleasure. Why? It is because our soul comes from Heaven; it wants something else.

The Root Of All Problems

At one point in my life, I realized what the root of all problems in the world is.

Baruch Hashem, people know most of the statements of Chazal, but they only *know* it intellectually - and that's it. People *know* that Chazal say that the world stands on Torah, and that Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world, etc. But what is missing from us? We only *know* it – but we **feel** differently in our own life.

What we need to do is truly **feel** the truths about Torah and how it is everything, and then everything will change.

144

Falafel and Vacations

For many years, I thought about this until I finally came to this conclusion.

One time I passed by a falafel store and I saw a long line waiting out the store; a new kind of falafel came out, and everyone was waiting in line to try it. I thought to myself, "Maybe they're right – maybe there really is something to this falafel? Maybe this falafel will make me happy?"

I waited on line, I bought it, I ate it – and I was very disappointed.

I began to think about what makes people feel more happy and alive.

I realized that some people feel a certain vitality from the honor they receive from other people, but I knew right away that that this was a false kind of vitality.

I saw people who were always going on vacations who seemed to really be enjoying it, though. I thought maybe there really is something special to all these vacations. I went on one of these vacations, but I was terribly disappointed. I rented a car, checked out into the hotel room, and as soon as I got into the room, I threw the keys onto the bed in frustration. I realized that while going to a hotel may have given me some more relaxation, it didn't make me feel happier with my life.

It took many years for me to go deep into my soul and realize that I couldn't be happy with my life based on anything external, but that it has to come from within myself.

The more connected I felt to Torah and to Hashem, the more alive I felt. The more I would run after pleasure from the outside of myself, the more I realized I was chasing wind.

This is not a lecture. I am talking about a true story of my life – I am talking about my search, and what I found. Candies, cigarettes and walking on the beach can all give a person relaxation, and sometimes a person does need to relax in order to have some *yishuv hadaas*, but these things don't give a person life. A person can only feel alive when he is truly connected to Hashem and the Torah.

More Frustration

It took me a lot of time to come to this conclusion.

One of the hardest times in my life I remember was when I learned in Yeshivah. I learned in Yeshivas Ponovezh, and I learned a lot. But I didn't feel that my learning

145
was giving me more life. I knew that the Torah is supposed to give me life, but I didn't feel it. I thought that maybe I am the kind of student that the Sages say doesn't see success in his learning. It wasn't that I didn't know how to learn; I knew how to learn very well. I was regarded as an excellent student. But I didn't feel like the Torah is what is giving me life, which is what I am supposed to feel.

I thought maybe I should leave yeshiva – I didn't feel like I came onto the world to learn Torah. I knew that there are people who feel that they came onto this world to learn Torah, but I just didn't feel that way.

I went to Jerusalem and decided that I will speak to one of the Gedolim who was there and ask him for his advice.

I went to his house, but he wasn't available. I was very frustrated that I didn't get into him, and I didn't know what to do. I was very, very frustrated!

The Answer

At some point later, I realized what the answer was.

I thought to myself and realized clearly that if Hashem was the one who said that the Torah is our life – “*Ki heim chayeinu*” – then it must be so, and that I should never give up.

My Message To You

Don't ever give up, even for one moment. Hashem is *Avinu Av Harachaman* – He is a merciful Father, and He wants you to have life. If you really want to find life in the Torah, you will find it.

If someone feels empty inside – or even if he doesn't – he must know that he will not find anything pleasurable on this world; it's all in his imagination that maybe there is something good out there other than the Torah.

Any pleasure on this world is fleeting and will not give a person enjoyment out of his life. If you really want to have a true life, cry to Hashem from the depths of your heart, “*Open my heart to Your Torah*” – not just that Hashem should open your mind, but to open your **heart** that you should have the true life – and then you will become a truly happy person, plain and simple.

146

I hope with all my heart that all of you should merit this and that Hashem should open up your hearts to realize that besides for a deep connection to Hashem and learning the Torah, there is nothing else we have that will give us enjoyment out of life.