

A JEW IS NEVER ALONE

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. How does One Create a Consciousness of Hashem's Presence

The Torah states, "And you shall eat it before Hashem, your G-d, in the place that He will choose to rest His Name - the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, and the firstborn of your cattle and your flocks, so that you will learn to fear Hashem, your G-d, all the days." The Torah tells us in this verse that the reason why one must eat his tithes and offerings in Jerusalem is to learn to fear Him. Why does the Torah use the terminology "so that you will learn to fear Hashem"? If the purpose of the eating in Jerusalem is so that one fears Hashem, the Torah should have stated, "so that you will fear Hashem". What is the meaning of "learning" to fear Hashem rather than simply to "fear Hashem"?

How does one "learn" to fear Hashem? The Sforno in his commentary explains that Jerusalem is the location of the Sanhedrin HaGadola (The Great High Court of Israel) which is comprised of seventy one ordained judges who had the greatest proficiency on Torah. Any question unresolved halachic question that was presented to the Sanhedrin was resolved with absolute clarity. If one had the opportunity to experience such a level of clarity through the teachings of the Sanhedrin, he would then fear Hashem as a result of that clarity.

Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) states, "Choose a Rav (Teacher) for yourself so that you may be removed from questionable circumstances." The key in life is to remove oneself from questionable or "gray" areas because it is in these "gray" areas that one can justify any action based on one's own conflict of interest. Life in reality is not ambiguous, but rather it is clearly "black" or "white". Either one does the right thing or the wrong thing - regardless of how it is perceived. The only way one can see life in this context is when one has clarity, which only comes from having the proper Rav.

The reason why Hashem chose Jerusalem as the location to eat one's tithes and offerings is to give one the opportunity to benefit from the direction of the Sanhedrin. By being exposed to this level of clarity, afforded by the Sanhedrin, one was removed from ambiguity. Thus going to Jerusalem was an experience to "learn" to fear Hashem through this new level of clarity. The word for "fear" in Hebrew is yirah which is from the word ro'eh which means "to see". Meaning, that if one sees clearly then one fears.

For example, if one would be walking along the bank of a river and is about to fall to his death, but believes that he is actually in a secure location, then he is oblivious to the danger to which he is exposed. At that moment he will feel confident and free of any fear because of his lack of

understanding of the immanent tragedy that is about to befall him. Identically we only feel deserving and confident in our lives and do not have a fear of Hashem because we lack that clarity which is necessary to appreciate the consequences of our actions.

Rabbeinu Yona in his commentary on Tractate Berachos tells us that if a person had eaten fat that is questionable regarding its status (whether it comes from the part of the animal that would classify it as Kosher or from the part of the animal that would classify it as un-Kosher, which carries the liability of spiritual excision), one must bring a questionable guilt offering until it can be determined what he had eaten. If it is ultimately determined that he had eaten the non-Kosher fat (Cheilev) then he must bring a guilt offering. On a Torah level, there is no minimum requirement of how much must be expended for the purpose of this offering. However, the Rabbis did establish a minimum cost. Rabbeinu Yona explains the reason for this rabbinic requirement is that if one is not certain if he had violated or not, the tendency of a person is to rationalize that he probably did not. Therefore not feeling the gravity of the situation, he would not do proper teshuvah. Therefore the Rabbis established a minimum requirement for the cost of the offering to give one an understanding of the seriousness of the predicament in which he finds himself. Meaning he should in fact understand that he may have eaten the Cheilev which carries severe liability.

When one perceives the world through his own understanding, he sees life as "gray". However, if one sees the world through the eyes of the Torah then he one sees the world in the context of "black" and "white", right and wrong, what is permitted and what is not permitted. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that one should not live in the same community as his rebbe (teacher) if he is not going to abide by his rebbe's rulings. Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon), the wisest man who ever lived, waited until the passing of his rebbe to marry the daughter of Pharaoh (Bas Pharaoh) because he would not have approved of the marriage.

If King Solomon felt that the marriage to Bas Pharaoh was permitted and appropriate, then why did he not marry her in the lifetime of his rebbe? He could have justified this union on the same basis during the lifetime of his rebbe as he did after his passing. So why did he wait? The answer is - one may have all the answers and convincing arguments to justify what one chooses to do; however, inwardly one nevertheless has a sense of what is right and wrong. King Solomon although he could have presented his irrefutable position to his rebbe in the most cogent terms in a way that his rebbe could not respond, he nevertheless knew that his rebbe would not approve. Therefore he waited until his rebbe passed away and only then married Bas Pharaoh.

The pathway to fear Hashem is to reduce the ambiguity in one's Judaism. The only way that this can be accomplished is, as prescribed in Pirkei Avos, by choosing the proper Rav who will teach him Torah. It is only through Torah study that one can gain clarity which ultimately results in fearing Hashem. This is why the Torah tells us that one must go to Jerusalem to eat his tithes and his offerings in order to "learn" to fear Hashem.

2. How to Grow Spiritually

The Torah tells us that in order for the Jews to inherit the Land of Israel and dwell in it in safety, they must first obliterate all of the idolatry and its locations from the Land. Only then would the Jews be able to bring their own offerings to Hashem and rejoice with their families in the Land. Dovid HaMelech (King David) tell us in Psalms, "Remove yourself from evil and then do good." Meaning, that one cannot succeed in his spiritual endeavor unless it is first predicated on the removal of the wrong that is contradictory to spirituality. One cannot grow spiritually when he is straddling both sides of the fence of good and evil. One must first remove himself from evil and only then can he move forward and do good.

Moshe explains in the Name of Hashem that in order for the Jews to inherit the Land, they must first eliminate all trace of idolatry and then establish themselves in the service of Hashem. At the time of the completion of studying a Tractate (Sium), a Kaddish is recited (which is similar a mourner's Kaddish) which concludes, "We will reestablish the city of Jerusalem and establish His (Hashem's) Sanctuary in it and we will uproot any false (idolatrous) worship from the Land and return the service of heaven to its location..." One cannot build a structure on a weak foundation. If the foundation is defective then ultimately the structure will fall. In order to establish a solid foundation, the Torah tells us that we must first eliminate the evil before we can build the good.

One may enjoy and feel benefit from studying Torah and praying to Hashem. However, if he simultaneously behaves in a manner that is not consistent with the Torah it will actually undermine the effect of his learning and prayer. Consequently the study and prayer has a reduced level of value. In order to be positively impacted by one's Torah study, one must abide its dictates and continuously try to advance his spirituality by doing more good and less wrong.

Therefore for us to maximize on the good that we do, we must try to eliminate the wrong. To whatever degree we eliminate the wrong; the right will have that much greater value.

3. A Jew is Never Alone

The Torah states, "You are children to Hashem, your G-d - you shall not cut yourself and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. For you are a holy people to Hashem, your G-d, and Hashem has chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people, from among all the peoples on the face of the earth." In certain societies, they lacerate themselves and pull the hair out of their heads when grieving for their dead. The Torah prohibits this type of behavior for a Jew. The Torah tells us that the reason why a Jew is not permitted to express his grief in this manner is because the Jews are a "holy people to Hashem..."

The Sforno in his commentary explains, "It is not appropriate to show extreme worry and pain for any relative who passes away when there is a relative who is of greater importance and value to that person who is the basis of all good (that being Hashem)". Therefore Moshe says to the Jewish people, "You are G-d's Children" to indicate that He is our eternal Father and there is no basis to

worry and grieve at an extreme level for any deceased. Regardless of who passes away, a Jew is never abandoned just as a father does not abandon his child. Just as a parent loves his child more than the child could ever love his parent, the Torah is teaching us that Hashem values us as His Children. If a Jew was to lacerate himself or pull the hair out of his head as a result of a person passing away, this behavior would indicate that he believes that he has nowhere to turn and he is in a hopeless state which is a denial of Hashem's special relationship with him.

Secondly, it is a rejection of a basic tenet of Jewish belief that when a person passes away, his spirituality (which is his essence) is eternal. Therefore a person who grieves in this manner not only denies his Hashem's special relationship, but also denies the existence of an eternal soul. Thus, it is a Negative Commandment to express grief in this manner.

The Torah tells us that Sarah, our Matriarch gave her maidservant Hagar (the daughter of Pharaoh) to Avraham (her husband) to beget him children. Many years after Hagar had given birth to Ishmael, Sarah asked Avraham to drive Hagar and her son from their home. Hashem said to Avraham, "You must heed the word of Sarah." After they were driven into the desert, the Torah tells us that Hagar "went and she strayed in the desert." Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that "straying" means that Hagar had returned to idolatry of her father's house. A great Torah Sage once asked, "How is it indicated from the words "Staying on the way" that Hagar returned to the idolatry of her father's house?" Seemingly the Torah is telling us that Hagar was wandering in the desert after she had lost her way. This Torah Sage answered that the Chazal understand that "Straying" must mean returning to idolatry because a Jew who is connected to Hashem is never lost. A Jew never "strays" aimlessly because he always has Hashem to whom he can turn as a son turns to a father. If the Torah uses the term "stray" this is a clear indication that Hagar returned to idolatry and had severed her relationship with Hashem. If a Jew understands and internalizes that all that he has is given to him (including his own existence) that regardless of how alone he may be, he is not alone.

When Hashem took the Jewish people as His kingly and priestly and holy Nation, he communicated to us how special we truly are to Him. Therefore we must always understand and appreciate that we are the Children of Hashem and as a parent loves a child, Hashem loves us. Regardless of what we experience in life, Hashem is always there for us providing us with all of our needs.

4. What is so Unique about the Prophecy of Moshe?

The Yud-Gimel Ikrei Emunah (Thirteen Tenets of Judaism) outline the fundamental principles of Jewish belief. One of the Tenets is, "I believe with absolute faith that the words of the Prophets are true." One would think that believing in Hashem would be sufficient; however, we see from this Tenet that it is not enough to believe in G-d but one must also believe that the words of the Prophets are true. The reason why one must believe that the words of the Prophets are synonymous with the word of Hashem is because it is not enough to believe that Hashem created the world and maintains existence but one must also believe that existence has a purpose and that is to fulfill the

Will of Hashem. Hashem's Will is only known to us through the Prophets who communicate to us the His Will.

Another Tenet of Jewish belief is, "I believe with absolute faith that the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu is true and that he is the father of all of Prophets - all the Prophets that preceded him as well as those who come after him." The question is why is it not sufficient to believe that the Prophets communicate the word of Hashem? Why is it if one does not believe that Moshe was the greatest of all Prophets he is considered a heretic? Why would it not be sufficient to believe that the prophecy of Moshe is true - thus establishing the authenticity of Torah?

The question is - how does one establish himself as a prophet, a person who communicates the Word of Hashem? Rambam tells us that the verification process to establish a prophet as Hashem's spokesman is as follows: Firstly, he must perform a supernatural act. Secondly, he must forecast the future and that event must come about. The source for this criteria itself, is the Torah. If one performs a miracle and accurately predicts the future, then he has established himself as a prophet of Hashem.

The Torah states, "If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream, and he will produce to you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes about, of which he spoke to you saying, "Let us follow gods of others that you did not know and we shall worship them!" - do not hearken to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of a dream, for Hashem, your G-d, is testing you to know whether you love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul." Despite the fact that this person performed a miracle and predicted the future, if he suggests to the Jews that they should serve idolatry, then he has established himself as a false prophet. He is definitely not speaking in the Name of G-d. The only reason why the false prophet had the ability to perform the miracle and predict the future was because Hashem endowed him with that ability them in order to test the Jewish people. The basis for classifying this prophet as false is because Moshe Rabbeinu communicated to us in the Name of Hashem that such a person is a false prophet. The question to ask is - if this prophet, who had already established himself as a true prophet (through performing the miracle and predicting the future) should counter Moshe Rabbeinu by saying that in fact G-d did communicate to him that the Jews should worship idolatry and Moshe's communication is false - then how does one determine who is more correct - Moshe Rabbeinu or this prophet who established himself?

Rambam tells us in Hilchos Yisodei HaTorah (The Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah) that the reason we know that Moshe is the true prophet of Hashem is because every Jew who was present at Sinai witnessed Hashem openly communicating to Moshe what he should transmit to the Jewish people. The Basis for Moshe being established as the prophet of Hashem is factual whereas the validity and establishment of all other prophets is based on the criteria that is set forth by the Torah, which is synonymous with the word of Moshe. Therefore any prophet, who counters Moshe and claims that his communication is authentic and Moshe's communication is false, has no basis

whatsoever to make this claim. This is because initially the only way this prophet was established was only because he had met the criteria set forth by the Torah, which is the prophecy of Moshe. Therefore if he contests the validity of Moshe's prophecy there is no basis whatsoever to establish himself as a prophet.

We can now understand the tenet which states that it is not enough to believe in the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu, but one must also believe that Moshe was "the father of all Prophets- those who proceeded him and those who follow him" and only then is the authenticity of the Torah established on uncontestable grounds. Moshe is greater than any prophet because the Jewish people witnessed at Sinai how Hashem openly communicated with him in their presence.

Therefore the Torah itself, which is the basis for Judaism, is not based on presumption or extrapolation, but rather it is based on hard fact because our ancestors who stood at Sinai witnessed openly how Hashem had chosen Moshe to be his spokesman, prophet.

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