

EVERYONE COUNTS!

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Ki Savo

Everyone Counts!

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This week's parashah tells us (28:9), "You shall walk in His ways," teaching that a person, through his good deeds, actually can walk in Hashem's footsteps. R' Eliezer Zvi Safran z"l (1830-1898; Komarno Rebbe) observes, though, that most of us don't believe this, i.e., we don't believe in our own spiritual potential.

For example, how often do we pray, and, when we see that we aren't answered, we assume that our prayers can't really make a difference? The Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (died 1760) teaches that this is the result of excessive self-deprecation. One must believe that his prayers have untold consequences in the heavens, even if he does not see those effects. If one believed this, R' Eliezer Zvi adds, how joyously would he pray?! How carefully would he pronounce every letter, every syllable?!

If one believed that he is (in the words of Bereishit 28:12) "a ladder standing on the ground with its head in the heavens," that every movement, every word, every step and every business deal makes a spiritual impact on the world, he would do them all for the sake of Heaven. Also, the Zohar comments, "If people knew the love with which Hashem loves the Jewish people, they would roar like lions in their eagerness to follow Him."

On the other hand, if one thinks that he can't make a difference, he should know that he is on the road to heresy. If he thinks that way, it is a sign that the yetzer hara has succeeded with him and will soon deprive him of life in this world and in the next.

Rather than despair, one can learn from Yaakov, who said (Bereishit 35:5), "I lived with Lavan and I delayed until now." The letters of "Lavan" are the reverse of the letters of "naval" / "degenerate one," a reference to the yetzer hara. Why was Yaakov successful in turning around the "naval," and "whitening" (from "lavan" / "white") it? Because "I delayed until now," i.e., because he did not expect

immediate results from his prayers and mitzvot, but rather had faith that the results would come with time. (Zekan Beto, p.216)

"It will be when you arrive at the Land that Hashem, your Elokim, gives you as an inheritance . . . You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your Land that Hashem, your Elokim, gives you . . ." (26:1-2)

R' Mordechai Leifer z"l (1824-1894; Nadvorna Rebbe) explains this verse as follows: "When you arrive at" the understanding that "the Land" i.e., material things, are also part of what "Hashem, your Elokim, gives you as an inheritance" and that they can be elevated to a spiritual state, you can accomplish this if you "take of the first" - the loftiest, spiritual part - "of every fruit," i.e., if you look for spirituality in everything and aim to elevate your interactions with the material world. (Divrei Mordechai)

A related thought:

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l (Italy; 1707-1746) writes: There are two parts to man's service of Hashem - those things which man does because he is commanded to do them, and those things which he does because they are necessary. This latter category covers man's use of the material world for his own needs.

The first rule relating to the second category of Divine service is that man should stay within the boundaries that Hashem has set - for example, not eating things which Hashem has prohibited [for example, non-kosher food] or which Hashem has limited [for example, not eating before davening].

A second rule is that man should eat only things which are good for his health, and which will sustain him in the best possible way [i.e., healthy, but tasty]. One should not, however, eat whatever his material body lusts for. A person's intention when eating should be to make his body fit and ready to serve the Creator. If a person does that, fulfilling his material needs itself becomes part of his Divine service. (Derech Hashem I 4:7)

"The Egyptians were bad to us (26:6) " (אותנו וירעו).

These Hebrew words also can be translated: "The Egyptians made us bad," meaning that they were a bad influence on us. R' Shlomo Amar shlita (Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel) writes:

We read about the time when Yaakov came to Yitzchak deceptively to receive the latter's blessing (Bereishit 27:27), "He (Yitzchak) smelled the fragrance of begadav / his (Yaakov's) garments." Our Sages comment that the verse can be read, "He smelled the fragrance of bogdav / his traitors" meaning that Yitzchak was fooled because he sensed that the person standing before him would have some descendants who were unworthy of the blessings. [According to this view, Yitzchak knew

that Esav was less righteous than Yaakov.]

Why then, asks R' Amar, didn't the Torah use the word bogdav? He answers: The Torah is hinting that any traitorous behavior by Yaakov's descendants is not inborn; it is merely a garment concealing the person's true nature, as in our verse, where the Egyptians were a bad influence on Bnei Yisrael. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Mi'yamim Yamimah)

"I did not eat of it in my intense mourning, I did not consume it in a state of impurity, I did not give of it for the needs of the dead ..." (26:14)

Literally, this is a statement that one makes upon completing the three year tithing cycle, attesting that he has complied with all the laws of ma'aser. However, in the spirit of the High Holidays, R' Moshe Avigdor Amiel z"l (1883-1945; Chief Rabbi of Antwerp and Tel Aviv) interprets the verse as decrying the loss of proper focus in many people's service of Hashem. He writes:

In past generations, Yizkor was never a big deal. It has no source in the Torah or the books of the Prophets. Yet, it has become a major event, and people are very meticulous to observe it.

In contrast, many people forget to remember their own souls. We are supposed to recite every day, "Elokai, the soul which You have placed in me is pure. You created it, You 'blew' it into me, You guard it within me, and You are destined to take it from me and return it to me in the World-to-Come." This "Yizkor" has the potential to save man from sin, but it has taken a back seat to a much less important Yizkor.

Likewise, Jews in our time take particular care to observe yahrzeits as if that is one of the Thirteen Foundations of our faith. This is another practice that seems to have received very little attention in earlier generations. In contrast, man forgets to observe his own yahrzeit. What does it mean to observe ones own yahrzeit? Our Sages teach: "Repent one day before you die." But, does a person know when he will die? they ask. Indeed not! Therefore, one should repent every day. (Derashot El Ami)

"Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you . . ." (28:10)

In the kinot for Tishah B'Av we refer to "The glorious crowns with which You bedecked Your servants." What does this mean? Do servants wear crowns?

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) explains: This passage refers to tefilin shel rosh / the tefilin worn on the head. These are the most conspicuous and unequivocal testimony that a Jew belongs to G-d. The Gemara (Berachot 6a) says, likewise, that our verse, "Then all the peoples of the earth

will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you," refers to the tefilin shel rosh. The tefilin are a manifestation of our being Jewish and a testimony that, in spite of our travail and persecution, we belong to G-d.

R' Soloveitchik continues: The tefilin are a crown on our head, and they teach us that there is a power above us. The Torah teaches that the King of Israel is to wear a crown, but this crown is not a symbol that the king is an absolute sovereign. Rather, it is a symbol that there is an authority above the king. Modern political philosophy speaks of a "sovereign state," which means that the state has the power to formulate its own policies, that the source of authority is within the state, and that there is no source of authority above the state. From the Jewish perspective, this view is idolatrous. Even the state, even the absolute monarch, should be committed to a higher power, and that higher power is symbolized by the tefilin shel rosh. Every Jewish man wears a crown, not because he is powerful, but because he is committed; not to enhance his power, but to limit it. (Quoted in Kinot Mesoret Harav p.232)

Teshuvah

R' Shabsai Alpert z"l (rabbi in Plonk, Poland; later in New York) writes: Teshuvah is the key that opens all of the gates in the world. Without it, one could not exist. Imagine a person who boarded up his dining room, then his bedroom, then his study, then the foyer of his house, and then the front door, until he was left standing outside, with no way to enter his house. This is what happens when one sins; he locks the gate that would have allowed him access to G-d, and places an iron curtain between himself and his Creator. Likewise, when one sins against another person, he locks the door that would have let him have a relationship with that person. When one wastes time that could have been spent studying Torah, he not only loses that time, he actually places a blockade between himself and the Torah.

Suddenly, he realizes that he has walled himself off from all life-giving forces in the world: G-d, friends, and Torah. The midrash records that wisdom was asked, "What will become of the soul that sins?" Wisdom answered, "He shall die." Wisdom - reason - cannot envision any other result, for the sinner has left himself no other way. [However, the midrash concludes, G-d says that "wisdom" is wrong. The sinner need not die, for he can repent, notwithstanding the fact that the existence of teshuvah defies reason.] Thus we can understand the verse (Tehilim 118:21), "I will thank You Hashem, for You have answered me; You have become my salvation."

We recite in the High Holiday prayers, "Teshuvah, prayer and charity remove the severity of the decree." Shouldn't teshuvah have been listed last? After all, it is the hardest of the three. Everyone prays, most people give charity, but how many actually succeed in doing real teshuvah? Nevertheless, R' Alpert explains, teshuvah is listed first because, until one performs teshuvah, the gates of prayer and charity remain locked.

Why then does teshuvah work? Because one who does teshuvah recreates himself! Suddenly, he is back on the other side of the locked gate where he started.

In addition, G-d permits teshuvah because, whereas man's sins decrease the honor of Heaven, teshuvah restores it. (Sha'arei Olam p.190)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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