

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Doing Teshuva As If Our Lives Depend On It - Purim 5772

For a refuah shelama for HaRav HaGaon HaPosek HaDor Yosef Shalom ben Chaya Musha (Eliashiv) and for Rabbi Aryeh Leib Dovid ben Esther (Nivin)

"Let My Nation Live" by Yosef Deutsch is a comprehensive book compiling all the explanations of Megillas Esther. It reads like a novel but is all truth. In that book, on page 209-210, he explains what was happening in the heavens at the time of Purim:

"Up in heaven, the Jewish people were also facing judgment. Satan stood before the Heavenly Throne and argued for a decree of annihilation. 'How long will You tolerate this rebellious nation, Almighty?' he asked. 'So much time has passed since they have eaten at Achashverosh's feast, not to mention that they bowed to Nevuchadnezzar's idols, and they still haven't repented. They deserve to be destroyed.'

"Then what will be with the Torah?" asked the Almighty.

"The angels in Heaven will learn the Torah."

"Very well," said the Almighty. "Bring me a scroll, and I will issue a decree of death against the Jewish people."

Happily, Satan brought the scroll, and the deed was done.

"The Torah saw that might soon be separated from the Jewish people to whom it had been married since Mount Sinai. It donned mourning garments and sat in bereavement. The angels wept bitterly. The sun, the moon and the stars of the galaxies and constellations also felt there was no purpose in their continued existence if they could not serve the Jewish people. They, too, dressed in sackcloth and went into mourning.

Eliyahu HaNavi had also witnessed the terrible decree, and he hurried to get help. He approached the patriarchs and pleaded with them to come to the aid of their descendants.

"How can you sleep when your children are in distress?" he demanded

"What can we do?" they said. "They are guilty."

Eliyahu ran to Moshe Rabbeinu. "How many times have you interceded with Hashem on behalf of the Jewish

people? When they worshipped the Golden Calf, you came to their defense. When they listened to the Spies, you turned away the evil decree. They need your help again. Please pray for them. Please save them!"

"Are there any righteous people among them?" Moshe asked

"Yes" said Eliyahu. "There is Mordechai."

"Very well then," said Moshe. "Go see how the decree was sealed. If it is sealed with clay, we have a chance. If it is sealed with blood, all is lost."

What was the significance of the clay and the blood? Clay is a physical sign, meaning that the Jewish people had been condemned for the physical contamination of participating in Achashverosh's feast. This could be overcome. Blood, however, is a spiritual sign, indicating that the contamination had penetrated to their souls, and that the only atonement was with their blood. Such a decree could not be overturned. Perhaps also, the clay recalled the food at the feast, while the blood recalled the yayin nesevch, the gentile wine, that the Jews had drunk, which was far worse.

Eliyahu returned with good news. The decree was sealed with clay.

"Good," said Moshe. "Go tell Mordechai that he should pray from the earth while I will pray from the heavens. Together, we may reverse this decree."

Significant here are two portions – the rebellion of the Jewish people (i.e. the lack of concern for the honor of Hashem) and the depths of the sin, on the flesh alone or also within the soul.

The Chofetz Chaim in "The Fortress of Faith" p. 38 First Essay Out of Respect for the Almighty says:

"Our sages say: "Everything that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, created in His universe was created only for His honor, because it is written, 'Whatever is called in My Name, for My honor I created it...'"

"...This is particularly true for the nation Gd chose as His portion, who are called by Him "children" – 'You are the children of the Lord your Gd. Surely they must be alert to honor His Name, i.e. to sincerely accept Gd as King with the responsibilities that this implies, to follow in His ways and to observe His Statutes, His Commandments and His Judgments , as it says "You have this day acknowledged the Lord that He is your Gd, to walk in His ways, and to observe His Statutes, His commandments and His judgments...Treasuring His ways, His Commandments and His Judgments by fulfilling them – this is all included in honoring His Name."

"...Everyone must remember that the Almighty governs mankind with the principle of measure for measure. Therefore, when one's soul will eventually come before the Throne of Glory and seek to be honored in the presence of the heavenly hosts, what will he answer if the Lord asks him, "Why were you indifferent to My honor and the honor of My Torah which was profaned before your very eyes"...Behold it is an open passage, "Those that honor Me will I honor and those that belittle Me will be made light of."

"One is considered honoring Gd when he openly displays his love for Gd's Torah and His Mitzvahs and alerts others to fulfill them as well."

With these thoughts in mind, and with the current circumstances of Purim 5772 before us, threat of annihilation, a tremendous need to overcome obstacles to Jewish unity, how can we comprehend the teshuva we need to do and are we facing a gezeira that is written in blood, Gd forbid?

Let's start with this terrifying possibility, for the Vilna Gaon foresaw that at the end of days there would be a war that would last 12 minutes where one third of the world would be wiped out, one third saved and one third injured. 12 minutes. He had no idea what a nuclear bomb was! And if we are at the fruition of this vision, what can we do?

First thing on the list is to take comfort in knowing that if such a terrible decree is going to happen, then it is correct and just. Nevertheless, as individuals, we have the opportunity to do teshuva at all times and prepare ourselves. Hopefully, our efforts to do so will simultaneously evoke Divine love and mercy.

Each of us needs to look to ourselves. Rabbi Eliezer Papo, in Pele Yoetz speaks about the Love of Self, p. 30-31

"It is part of human nature as designed by the Creator that a person should love himself. An individual identifies with himself and loves himself more than the entire world or any thing in the world. He will give everything that he has to save his own life. However, there is an evil sickness, the exploit of the evil inclination, which seizes the eyes of the person and makes a man as one who is sick or intoxicated, who cannot distinguish between his right and left hand. This causes damage unto himself; it destroys his body and soul, even more than his own worst enemy could do! This is tremendous folly! In truth, our Sages said (Sota 3a), "A person does not sin unless a spirit of foolishness enters him." A fool's folly will sometimes cause him to commit suicide, Heaven forbid. Someone who has a brain in his head will realize that it is proper for a person to love himself, his body and soul. He will earn a choice reward by his efforts so that his soul will delight in abundance and his body will rest in security."

"The primary motivation for his love of self, body and soul must emanate from the love of his Creator. Just as a man loves his possessions and is careful that they should not be soiled or broken because he loves himself and wants them available for his use, so too, he should be ultra-careful regarding his body and soul that they not be sullied or broken, for they are the tools for serving the Master. This should be his total intention in the guarding of his body and soul, and he should balance his matters with justice. Gd will help him and be his strength."

The Pele Yoetz continues regarding Love of Gd, p. 29

*"Torah is more precious than pearls, and all desires cannot equal it (Mishlei 3:15)! " In truth, our Sages said (Avot 6:2), "Woe unto humanity from the insult of Torah!" **There is no greater insult than one who could earn a 'great profit' and provide satisfaction to his Maker, and yet, just does not care.** If at that same time he engages in levity and idle speech, regarding him the prophet (Yirmiyahu 2:13) says, "They have abandoned Me, the source of living water, to dig cracked wells." Fortunate is the man who listens and values the reward of a mitzvah and, by doing so, gives pleasure to his Maker, for "Better is one moment of Torah and good deeds in this world than all of the World to Come." One needs especially to strengthen oneself in a situation whenever there might be monetary loss, so that he should not come to love money more than his Creator. **Whoever abandons the service of his Creator, the study of Torah or any mitzva opportunity, for some inconsequential reason, has demonstrated that he loves that thing more than Gd – great is his shame and the wrath upon him!** In everything in which a person is involved in matters of this world, he should think that it is for the purpose of facilitating his service of Gd, may His name be blessed. All of his actions should be for the sake of heaven, in accord with the verse (Mishlei 3:6), "In all of your ways, know Him, and He will straighten your paths." This is a great principle in Torah, for one who abides by it shall not deviate from the correct path and will weigh all of his deeds on the balanced scale. As a result, his entire life will be considered as one who engaged in the Torah!"*

The Pele Yoetz on pages 26 and 27 explains more about love of Gd:

*"In truth, the reason for us to rejoice in all of the good of this world and the deliverance from evil is that through life and its good we will be able to achieve the greatest goodness, which is to serve our Creator. This is horror of death and evil – that it prevents us from serving our Maker. For without service of our Master, life and death would be the same. Our lives are but a fleeting shadow, and the good and evil of this world are vain – "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." However, our only desire in life and its goodness is that it seems to advance our service of Gd. This is the intent of our statement '...until now your mercies have helped us,' in the prayer, Nishmat Kol Chai, after "...and even if our mouths were filled with song like the sea". **The message is that our true joy, beyond all of Your kindnesses and rescuing us from evil, is that Your compassion has allowed us to serve You.**"*

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*"...To the extent that a person diminishes his study of Torah and performance of mitzvot, so shall he retreat from his love of Gd. **This is either because of dissimilarity to his Creator or that his wrongdoings have become a barrier between himself and his Father in Heaven.** The sins are prosecutors that confound his mind with a multitude of thoughts, so that he can no longer remember or be capable of continuous reflection regarding the love of his Creator.*

*"Behold we are orphans of orphans, and we have become very low and increased impurity and guilt. **Our sins withhold good from us, and we are not able to direct our thinking to the love and fear of the revered and awesome Gd.** ...In these [mussar texts] our words, perhaps there is hope to partially fulfill the mitzvot of to fear and to love Gd. Fear emanates from love – for in accord with the abundance of one's love, either due to the good that one has received from Him or due to His exaltedness and perfection, a person is fearful of violating His will, angering Him, or causing Him any pain. The mitzvah of fear is realized with thinking alone ...As a result of the thought of love, the thought of fear will be derived."*

Each of us who may be striving toward love and fear of Hashem with a desire to emulate Hashem, to have a close relationship with Hashem must still ask, am I doing this for myself, for my family, for the sake of the Jewish people or am I doing this out of altruistic love for Hashem to bring honor to His name?

When the ten tribes were reincarnated as the ten martyrs, they understood that the penalty for kidnapping is death, and that because the ten brothers had not given up their lives for that crime and that they had never received mechila, that the judgment of martyrdom upon them was correct and they accepted it wholeheartedly. Their souls and their bodies in the lifetime that they lived were not blemished! It was for a prior lifetime error that their lives were forfeited, but their love of Torah and Hashem stood firm.

Our generation where we see terror victims and threats of nuclear war is one where our very lives can be taken at Kiddush Hashem, whether or not we prepare ourselves for it. The threat is there – what is it for? Hashem is trying to awaken us to come close to Him. Regardless of the outcome, building relationship and doing teshuva are the call of the hour. Hashem is the King and I and my wishes and goals cannot possibly come before His. To the extent that I comprehend that giving Him my free willed service is the very reason that I am here, and not to accomplish my own agenda, will come the greatest pleasure and peace possible, regardless of what happens to me here. It is comforting to know that Hashem is our Father who loves us, and when we do His Will, He protects us and gives lovingly to us. Does that register with us? Our mesiras nefesh and acceptance of His World on His terms is crucial and unifying. The Jews who lived at the time of Purim did this teshuva.

The Vilna Gaon tells us why Esther had to invite Haman for a second meal. At the first meal, Esther did not know whether the teshuva of the Jewish people had been accepted and she did not know if that was the time to bring up her request to Achashveros. It was that night that Haman visited Mordechai and threw the children in prison and Hashem heard the cries of the children and tore up the decree, and it was that night that Achashveros awakened from the nightmare and the reward to Mordechai to be dressed in the King's clothes and led on a horse in the city was declared. When Esther saw Mordechai being honored, she understood that the Jewish people's teshuva had been accepted by Hashem, and that night, she asked for Heavenly assistance and made her request to Achashveros and Hashem granted success.

How can we attempt to know if our teshuva that we do for our sins goes far enough to cleanse our souls? We know that when we change our actions and show ourselves to be different today than at the time of our mistakes, that Hashem can clean our record. But is there something we can do more, to assure Hashem that our teshuva is sincere? Can we go into our hearts and bring to Hashem the very core qualities that caused our error – our innate love of ourselves can often mislead us to overlook something that Hashem wants from us. It is for this reason that we cannot be satisfied with business as usual. Our actions must include activities that bring us to a behira, where we are engaged in the battlefield between our two inclinations, the yetzer hara and the yetzer tov. What we want to show Hashem is that we are moving the battle line upwards, conquering more and more of our hearts and bringing out more and more our intrinsic qualities, the aspect of the Divine within us.

Creating unity within our families has been a wonderful focus of the Tiferes program. It helps to make us greater and better people. Yet when we are loving towards our families, is there not an intrinsic reciprocal reward – can we be certain that we are not giving to get? If I am nice to her/him then they will be nice to me – how can we make it absolutely clear to Hashem that we love Him and accept His Torah on His terms? How can we make it apparent to Hashem that we love Him? Jewish unity is the answer. Gather together.

Let us stretch beyond our comfort zone – small stretches – to reach out and place ourselves at a new behira, one that can create real unity between our people, for love of Hashem. Let us gather together, settle maklokes, make peace, forgive, overlook horrible behavior where the person has changed.

I am saying this not only for my own personal sake, which of course every person looking at the world can comprehend – we want to live! But we must want to live in order to serve Hashem, for His honor, and when we honor the aspect of the Divine behind every face, we tell Hashem that are doing this to be like Him and to be one with Him and our nation.

I admit being imperfect and failing many times! But I try to do cheshbon hanefesh, and it seems like a planter's wart, no matter how much I bring out, there seems like another layer. That is the nature of our behira point. It is an infinite path. We all enjoy this beautiful world. Surely I am very clear that Hashem does not need a nuclear bomb to destroy me if that is His Will. He has an infinite number of ways of bringing about my demise, Gd forbid, if that is His will. But loving each other is what Hashem wants from us. When I feel resistance, I confess it to Hashem, I ask for His help, I summon up the emotions, I do teshuva and I ask for unlimited will power to truly clean out my heart, for the yetzer hara has many wonderful rationales for why I need not forgive, overlook etc. But the pleasure that the yetzer hara offers is totally inferior to the exhilaration of feeling connected to Hashem and bringing His light into the world. "I" am in my own soul's way! Realizing it is my first step. Asking Him to clean my mistake, to wash my soul clean from it is what I choose to do. Yet Hashem Himself must give me success, for in matters of the soul that He gives me, I surely have no power. When we recognize the truth of our existence and our utmost reliance on Hashem for success, when we comprehend that the entirety of the world including everything within me is totally within His direct control except for my choice to fear Him and serve Him, when we give up the illusion that He does not see all the ways we forget to show Him honor in order to take something for ourselves, then we are able to humbly approach, confess and begin becoming more like Him.

May these words show Hashem that despite the amount of teshuva that I have yet to do, it is for love of Him that I seek to improve, so as to remove all barriers that stand in the way of my expressing love and fear of Him, so that I may be like iron drawn to a Magnet in serving Him out of love, fear, and honor and respect. And if I make progress, may every drop I willingly and wholeheartedly do be a zechus for Klal Yisrael and remove any need for more korbonos.

And may Hashem have rachamim upon us and heal the sick of Klal Yisrael and send us speedily the redeemer and the geula shelama!

