

November 19 2006

Page 1 of 6

So here is our next class in Maharal, Netiv Choach HaYetzer from Netivat Olam Perek Beis

For those of you have books, we are beginning with the perek on Avoda Zara.

Question from last week:

What would you say to someone who does not feel fulfilled by the Torah filling that empty space.

Answer:

To tell you the truth that is the topic of this week. The question is deeper than it sounds. Everyone has a hailich in Torah. Sometimes the halik has to do with the theoretical side, and sometimes the hailik has to do with the practical. In addition to that (that is going to be the topic this week – different aspects and expressions of Torah) what we find is that for various reasons a person sometimes doesn't know their halik in Torah because the nature of teaching in a group setting is that the teacher addresses the group. The Arizal's talmid Reb Chaim Vital quotes a gemara that says if a person doesn't see a simmon bracha in what they are learning in five years, they have to go on to another form of learning. In the case of Reb Chaim Vital that other form of learning had to do with Toras nister rather than Toras nigleh exclusively. People have to be creative in their approach to learning. The reason I am not saying maybe you should become an artist to fill the empty space, is that when you look at what a person is, we look at their thoughts, he is in communication with you. The Torah has thought and the part of us that relates to Gd most intimately is our mind. The mind to mind connection has enormous potential. Everyone has their halek. For women, it isn't Torah lishma but whatever inspires them in Torah, for some it will be mussar, or finding the ideas of Torah in the world, whatever is inspiring. If we find the part that is their halik it will be profoundly fulfilling.

He begins by quoting a gemara in which it says "Happy are you who plants upon all of the water." Happy are you oh Yisrael, at the time you are busy with Torah and acts of kindness then your evil inclination is given into your hand and the Jews are not given into the hand of the Yetzer Hara.

Happy are those who plants in all the water, and there is nothing compared to planting more than charity is. Plant charity. There is no water other than Torah. All those who thirst shall come to water. The gemara concludes by saying that we have to put your foot to the work of this the way an ox does (to his yoke by putting his focus on it) and a donkey does (he bears it). All those who thirst will come to water. The gemara concludes by saying you have to put your foot to this the way an ox does (he channels his energy to his yoke) and the way a donkey (he bears his burden).

He is saying how does the work of the Torah bring about the situation where the yetzer hara is satisfied by the work? The answer is that there has to be a combination of Torah and gemilas chesed. And not only in Torah and gemilas chesed, the what, but also the how. There has to be a way to take your energy and give it direction. The example of how to do it is plural. There has to be a way to take your energy and give it direction the

way an ox does with enormous force controlled by the yoke and the way a donkey does it.

Now the Maharal explains the gemara

We all have evil in us from the day of our birth. Let's look at that idea for a moment – do we see little babies as evil? Of course not. So, what does it mean? The Gra explains the way we start out, our awareness is ego centric and physical. For babies all that matters is themselves. The only thing important is physical. There is no reciprocity in the relationship. He doesn't understand. We start out a very different way than we hope to end up. As a person grows, his spiritual awareness becomes stronger until the point when they become Bar or Bat Mitzvah their spiritual awareness which is experienced to some degree as intellectual openness as such. At Bar Mitzvah, they can understand the logical consequences of their actions. If a 13 year old breaks a window, the child should understand the consequences, he is accountable. But it takes until 20 when the voice of the soul and the body are heard equally loudly which is why people are judged by Hashem only from the age of 20. We are born with evil and to overcome evil we have to have a relationship to good. (a baby is still innocent because he does not choose to do evil) So good is what the Torah is offering you, that is what fills the empty space, not the information but the goodness and devekus that comes forth from the information.

The place where you have to let good affect you is in your mind and in your soul. That means there is a huge difference when a person does a positive act with consciousness as opposed to without consciousness. In the highest form of tzedakah, a person makes the other self sufficient. Compare that to an external way of giving...just habitually writing a check. The more your mind and your soul is involved, the more that the good that you do becomes you. It is something we have to do with the mind and the soul.

Torah changes the way you think. Torah is called good. When you get a picture about how Hashem wants the world to look, which is what all learning is about, even abstract learning shows how He wants the world elevated, it shows you His plan. And the elegance and logic of His thought gives you a closeness and intimacy to His thought. That gives your mind a relationship to goodness. When you do chesed, your soul is involved, so that your soul and not just your mind (nefesh is the spiritual self experienced through the walls of the body) is elevated and that is what fills the empty space.

If a person is devoted to goodness in mind and soul, of course they are distant from yetzer hara which is blocked – which is evil, evil means blockage of good. If a cup is full of wine it can't be full of milk. If you are full of Torah and chesed, you are not going to want to or try to fill it with something else.

He now begins to tell us what that destructive something really is. He stops telling us about good and now he talks about the alternative way of filling the empty space. It has a name. What is the name? Ra. Absence of goodness. But it has a name, so there is a presence of something.

November 19 2006

Page 3 of 6

There is no such thing as a dark wave, only a light wave. If something blocks light, it is dark. Evil is an illusion, it is intangible. Imagine building a lego tower and then taking it down, knocking it over. When you build it, it is there, but when you destroy it, it feels good but there is nothing there, just the absence of the tower and the force you generated to make it happen.. The same when you humiliate someone. You make them less, you don't make them something else. When you are kind to someone and you build up their esteem, you build and there is something to see. Destruction has no mamashal.

The Ramchal explains from a different angle. He agrees, saying there is no mamashal, no presence in a physical sense, but there is magnetism. Hashem imbued the act of destruction with a certain sort of magnetism and draw and those are called chochos a tuma, the result of destroying something that is rather than becoming something that is.

If the yetzer hara doesn't control a person then they control it. When you do something positive, you fill the empty space by going higher than you were. The illustration is acts of chesed. Let's think about any chesed...when you visit the sick, you hear someone is ill, you go to Manhattan. You blank out time, you bring something with you, you have the ride, you go to the hospital building, you go see her and it may be stressful. We realize the person before us could be us, and she might need something, a trip to the pharmacy. Could you be happy? If you keep her in mind, and care for her the whole way, you can feel good. You can see that you can have enormous pleasure in what we did. Chesed removes you from the realm in which you associate pleasure with physical sensation (riding on the train is not that pleasant), but you replaced it and are energized by the spiritual sensation of giving. The act of doing chesed does is it redefines the definition of pleasure for you, you take pleasure in giving and building instead of physicality. So you move into the transcendental world, to the world that isn't limited by what limits physical things and through doing that, the coarseness and the earthiness that holds us down (and in the end keeps us away from pleasure also, by the way) is diminished.

He quotes Pirke Avos, "A person of the earth isn't one who goes beyond the limits and does chesed". Here, we usually translate am ha'aretz as ignorant. But He takes it literally. A person is am ha'aretz, when all they understand is physical pleasure, they can't understand giving and be a chasid. As soon as he does an act of kindness, he becomes a person of kindness. That is the effect of chesed. When you go through the list of cheseds, hachnchas orchim, etc., the acts themselves don't give pleasure, but you are absorbed by the act of self transcendence by giving to the other to the point where the physical tirkas doesn't matter to you. You are flying on the simcha.

Now he talks about how Torah works. The joy of learning Torah, "I got it, I understand!" Sometimes chesed is difficult and it is hard to feel spiritual pleasure. Because chesed is difficult, that is what makes it easier to feel the pleasure. There is a family in Har Nof that is a hard case. The derech a teva is not resolvable. The person who was in charge wanted to help them out, and went there, and saw the list. Another person solicited students – you will not solve their problems, this is chesed lishma. This is chesed where you can effect at the moment, but it is hard. Many volunteered. If you are informed that

the chesed is hard so you realize you are running the fast track and there is elation. It is sometimes hard to move from expectation to the fast track. This is really the issue. But when you realize that you can do it, the more elation there is. The more overwhelmed you feel, the less elation you feel.

This is something understood for people who think deeply. So now we are leaving what to do and moving toward how to do it. But there is a new question. What if the sick person you were visiting was sleeping or asked you to leave or was discharged? The fact is that the chesed exists not just externally in the effect you have but internally in your desire to move beyond physical comfort. If you were committed to that person the whole trip there, you have moved within yourself. You have accomplished something within yourself. Internal change has to do with intent. There is a famous story of a violent demonstration in Israel a few years ago, and someone threw a rock through a police car window and hit an officer but he wasn't injured. Word came to Reb Levenstein who called a big meeting and was dramatic. "There is a murderer amongst us". The person who threw the rock is a murderer. From the negative to the positive, the person is discharged. Your kavannah to rise above yourself and relate to another person and ease their burden is in your hands and you are a baal chesed whether or not there is a recipient.

A myth that we have, the more you don't enjoy a mitzvah the holier you are. NO. Many tzoros in the Torah came upon us because we did not serve Hashem with simcha. The Rambam quotes, the lack of simcha shel mitzvah takes away the energy and spirituality of the mitzvah. Of course you should feel simcha shel mitzvah, it doesn't degrade the mitzvah in anyway to enjoy the mitzvah. Is a difficult mitzvah preferable? According to the difficulty is the reward. You don't get kvetch points. In order to get to the mitzvah you may have to make tradeoffs. Ideally you are aware enough of what a chesed and a mitzvah are that you make the tradeoffs with joy. If you make the tradeoffs with joy, and according to the value of the tradeoffs it is visible how you value the mitzvah, the chesed. For example, if I asked you if \$15000 is a lot of money, you would say yes. If someone let you buy an apartment for \$15000, you would have great joy and think it was nothing. Even though the sum hasn't changed, you would have joy in spending \$15000 for something worth more. If you are getting something worth far more, there is joy in spending it. If less, there is intuitive regret in spending it. The same is true with a chesed. The more you see that the chesed is far more than the maximum tircha, the more you give then the more you are, then the more simcha and the greater the mitzvah.

There was a woman active in Bikur cholim who helped a man from Israel who was in bad shape and the airlines didn't want to take him back on the plane. The woman took off her pearls and gave it to the attendant who put the man on the plane. This woman understood he wanted to die in Israel with his family. That was worth more than the pearls. That is what this is supposed to be.

Q Mitzvah at shul involves too much politics and stroking

A. If I ever do someone a real favor, I will have to defend myself (he had a rock). Social reality is that most things that involve people involve imperfection because people are imperfect. There is a certain kind of a person who can carry others' imperfection with them as part of their chesed. (Mrs. Heller has a son involved with the poor. The

organizer took the volunteers – you need more food, go ask the farmers for donations. Bring back cartons of eggs. Her son couldn't understand why the farmer would give him eggs. They taught him to knock and say he is collecting for the poor can I have one egg and see what happens next. The man says yes and gives many eggs. If you can touch their goodness, then besides whatever good the shul is doing you are getting part of the tikkun) Now, he tells us the way you do the mitzvah is specific. He said the yetzer hara has two routes, d'erva, desire or avoda zara, wanting to make Gd small to make oneself feel big – lashon hara, ego stroking, power politics. People want personal significance. If we are skilled enough to give significance to them so they can feel good about themselves, it is a chesed, and you help the person enjoy the good feeling of ruchni direction of egocentricity and you are part of their tikkun which is huge chesed. You should continue with that expectation. You will see imperfection, accept it and be part of the rectification process.

Avoda zara has to do with the ego, compared to the shore. Why? Of all the domestic animals the ox is the strongest –the lion for wild – but without wild, the strongest is the ox. The ego is compared to the ox. It is hugely powerful and it yearns for direction. Torah gives direction, it tells you where do you put yourself, where do you put your mind? It makes you part of something bigger than yourself. The word shore is the same as ashrei, has to do with vision. If you take someone's inner vision, who they are and what the world could be and channel it through Torah, that is huge. Conversely, there is another part of us, that has to be like the chamor --the desire yetzer, which is not a visionary, it wants pleasure. You have to be like a chamor and be willing to take the chumri world, bear it and make it go where you want it to go.

A person who is learning is like an ox and a chamor. A person should put their foot to it like an ox and a donkey. The foot comes into direct contact with the earth. We don't only have the rosh in shemayim, we are held down by ego, material considerations...when a person learns Torah, they have to be able to involve their soul like an ox and move above the earthiness and like a chamor to contend with the physical things that keep us from learning Torah.

In general, the Maharal says in other places, go exactly where your koach is maximized but where you won't be pushed beyond your endurance. However, every so often Hashem will present you with something that does push you beyond your endurance. He thinks it is time to move onto the next level. Open your heart and mind and soul and flow with it. For example my daughter runs a gan. The bus comes at 1 o'clock and some go on the bus. One day, the parents came before 1 to pick up the children. One of the mothers had a child who had a syndrome and she was visibly expecting. What is the worst thing someone could say? Aren't you afraid that this baby might also have this syndrome? There are no words. The woman replied I don't make the babies Gd makes the baby. I want whatever baby He gives me. This means when things happen, Gd says this is where you can be maximally effective.

We have to get rid of what draws us down from both, symbolized by the foot. All of the person's energies are in control and aim toward that one goal. A person should be

November 19 2006

Page 6 of 6

focused upon Torah with body and soul. Their physical actions and emotions which are connected to the physical since we experience emotions through our senses which are attached to the physical world via the sense, should be directed as should our minds. The key to everything is direction.

This is very clear to those familiar with the remez of ox and chamor. If a person is occupied with Torah, if it is their essence and drive...

Q What if someone is struggling, what bracha if Hashem thinks you can handle the situation?

Even if someone is standing in the grocery and they are holding a shopping bag with lemons and one falls on the floor and they ask to wipe up, don't say gam zuletova. People will think you are patronizing unless they know you and trust you so much that they know you have become them at that moment. If you can't be them at that moment in a way that is credible, there is not much to say. You can't possibly say something. It is a matter of their trust in you, which means that you are trustworthy, there is nothing voyaristic about your interest, you could say "this is going to take you far and I will be here to help you". If you really become them that is obviously the next question.

Q In a case when Hashem presents a hard situation, does that minimize the yetzer hara.

Only if that is where you want to go. It is an opportunity to reduce it, but we have free choice and the possibility of not responding well is in the picture. Not responding well isn't just in the case of the woman, but on the people who interact with her. It is a nisayon to help. I had a student at Neveh from California with a mentally ill sister. At that time Reagan was governor of Cal and he released all patients in mental institutions who were unlikely to hurt themselves or others. Her sister was released and sent home. The mother was unable to be with the woman 24 hours. The girl would wander, and she was pretty and she was taken advantage of. She had a child. The sister went back to Ca to legally adopt the child. She went through the bureaucracy and what kept her going, she had to find out all the legal ramifications. Someone said, "I'll help you" he helped her in every way possible. There is no guarantee that those around us will pass our tests, that depends on their free choices..

To conclude, we got as far as understanding that the whole concept of filling the empty space is a combination of Torah and gemilus chesedim, not just good will. Torah works because of its effects on the mind, chesed works because the self transcendence that it engenders. We spoke about the different sources of chesed and how they work, the different forms of yetzer hara and how they have to be dealt with. We spoke about being like an ox and a chamor. We concluded by saying that you can be this and if you become this you can go far far beyond where you were at the starting point.