



Monotony in Avodat Hashem is Detrimental

"Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days" (Bereishit 49:1)

The Gemara tells us (Pesachim 56a): "Ya'akov wished to reveal the end of days to his children but the Shechina left him. He said perhaps, G-d forbid, there is some blemish among my children... His children recited 'Hear O Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem, the One and Only'. Just as in your heart there is only One, so too in our hearts there is only One. At that moment Ya'akov Avinu called out, 'Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity!'"

This Gemara is most puzzling. How could it be that Ya'akov Avinu a"h suspected that there might be some blemish among the holy Shevatim? Was not the Name of G-d engraved on them, as it says (Tehillim 122:4), "The tribes of G-d, a testimony for Israel". How could he suspect one of them of not being wholly committed? Certainly, Ya'akov knew his children and was aware of their greatness and prominence. So why did the holy Shevatim need to prove their allegiance by reciting the Shema, which is a declaration of acceptance of the yoke of heavenly sovereignty?

Chazal also tell us that when Ya'akov met up with Yosef, he did not fall on his neck and did not kiss him. The reason for this was because at that moment he recited the Shema. We need to understand why Ya'akov chose to recite the Shema just at that moment. Was it because this moment happened to be the exact time when the Shema must be recited?

To answer these questions, we have to understand what kind of blemish Ya'akov suspected might be present, chalila, in his children. The Mishna tells us (Succah 29b): "A dry lulav is unfit". The Torah commands us to take a green, fresh lulav. Once the lulav dries up, it is no longer called a lulav but a piece of wood. Within this commandment lies an important allusion to the way in which we must serve Hashem. A person may not fulfil the mitzvot blandly, without vitality and enthusiasm, for this disqualifies his Avodat Hashem. A person may pray three times a day and even study Torah, but he is doing it out of habit, without zest and fervour. He is missing a passionate excitement in his avodat Hashem. His lips utter words of prayer and Torah but it is not an expression of his heart.

It is possible that this was Ya'akov's concern. Of course, he knew clearly that all of his children were faithful and pure, "seed that Hashem has blessed", but he thought that if the Shechina suddenly departed from him, maybe it was due to a lack of 'freshness' in their mitzvah performance. Maybe one of the Shevatim were fulfilling the mitzvot without feeling inspired and motivated, which would disqualify their Avodat Hashem. This is why the Shevatim immediately recited

the Shema. They wished to prove their allegiance so they told Ya'akov that he should know that just like in his heart there is only One, and he accepts the yoke of Heaven with enthusiasm and with a holy awe, so too, in their hearts there is also only One. They too accept the yoke of Heaven with enthusiasm and they perform their avodat Hashem with a fiery holiness. When Ya'akov heard this, he rejoiced greatly and thanked Hashem by saying, "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity".

To what can this be compared? To a tall, sturdy tree that has started to wilt inside. Although externally it still looks beautiful and blooming, but since it has started withering inside it does not stand a chance. It certainly doesn't possess the strength to stand firm against even the slightest wind. Ya'akov Avinu a"h was concerned about this since his children were now living in Mitzrayim. If they fulfil Hashem's will without vitality and their Avodat Hashem is bland, the impure winds that blow in that land will have the power to uproot them completely from their pure roots and distance them from the correct path.

Now we can understand why, when Ya'akov went down to Mitzrayim and met his son Yosef, he recited the Shema. Ya'akov Avinu a"h was also concerned about his own Avodat Hashem. He thought to himself, if until now he was a holy and spiritual person living in the Holy Land, filled with sparks of holy fire that motivated him to fulfil Hashem's will, now that he is going to Mitzrayim, the power of this impure place can cool off his Avodat Hashem and have a negative influence on him, chalila. He was worried that he might lose his enthusiasm, his Avodat Hashem may become dry and without feeling. Therefore, he immediately accepted the yoke of Heaven upon himself and with this act he designated Hashem's Name to inspire his soul and strengthen his heart. Specifically now, when going to live among the nations of the world, he required additional protection and additional spiritual reinforcement.

How can we distance ourselves from this inappropriate 'dryness'? The answer is: Only through consistent Torah study. One who merits studying Torah regularly every day, besides the enormous reward of studying Torah, also acquires the merit of being able to arouse his soul to fulfil Hashem's commandments with enthusiasm, passion and alacrity.

May Hashem give us the merit of removing all impurities from our hearts. Both the impurity of blandness in our Avodat Hashem, and the impurity of discord. May we fulfil Hashem's will with a fiery enthusiasm, together with the freshness of the life-giving dew, the holy Torah, and with complete unity between man and his friend. Amen v'Amen.

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14 - Rabbi Rafael Meir Panizhel,
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15 - Rabbi Chaim Mordechai
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16 - Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth

17 - Rabbi Salman Mutzeff

18 - Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapira,
author of 'Bnei Yissachar'

19 - Rabbi Avraham Shmuel
Binyomin Sofer, the 'Ksav Sofer'

20 - Rabbeinu Moshe Ben Maimon,
the Rambam



Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita



Words of our Sages

The Power of the Tongue

About ten years ago, on Erev Shabbat Parshat Vayechi (5770) my mother a"h baked a special cake for Shabbat, in our honor. After the Friday night meal, this cake was brought to the table.

I was the only one who had already tasted a small amount when my daughter tchy' ran to the table in a panic and informed us that the cake was milky!

I was terribly distressed. It is hard to describe the aggravation that I felt at that moment.

Of course, I immediately tried to vomit what I had ingested. I also searched my soul and started examining all my deeds. I wondered why I had come to commit this sin, especially now, after a week that I had spent in Eretz Yisrael giving many Torah lectures and devoting myself to public matters. Why had I stumbled with this serious prohibition of eating milk together with meat?!

Suddenly I remembered that a few days ago, I had unintentionally stumbled with my tongue. While talking to my mother a"h about a certain matter, she felt offended by something that I had said, r"l, since she did not understand me correctly. Later on, she told me that for three days she had been distressed about it and had even shed tears. In truth, I certainly did not intend to hurt her with my words or cause her any suffering, chalila. It was simply a case of some misunderstanding. Nevertheless, Hashem was punishing me for the insult that she felt and the same mouth that unintentionally insulted her and offended her honor, also stumbled unintentionally with the sin of forbidden foods.

I know that I will never forget this day; it is deeply engraved in my heart. Certainly not by chance did I, David Pinto, who is almost sixty years old, transgress such a serious prohibition of eating milk and meat, even unintentionally...

The Haftarah

"Kind David's days grew near to die" (Melachim I, 2)

The connection to the Parsha: The Haftarah speaks about the death of David Hamelech a"h, and his final instructions to his son Shlomo. The Parsha speaks about Ya'akov Avinu's death and his testament to his son Yosef.

Guard Your Tongue

Investigate the Matter

One may not accept lashon hara even if the speaker announces the lashon hara in public. One may not take this fact as a proof that the matter must be true. However, the ones who hear the lashon hara may be suspicious and investigate the matter, and if they find out that it is true, they should reprove the one who was spoken about for his misdeed.

Tranquility Versus Achievement

"He saw tranquility that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, yet he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured laborer" (Bereishit 49:15)

Switzerland is famous throughout the world for its breathtaking scenery. With its snowy Alps that add to its imposing beauty, we admire Switzerland for the enchanted tranquility which saturates its expanses, for the calm and serenity which envelops its residents. It is a country which sees little poverty and its residents generally enjoy a high standard of living, coupled with much wealth. From a financial viewpoint, the country is stable and everything appears promising and impressive.

Poland and Lithuania are two backward countries whose residents live in poverty. The standard of life is low, its scenery is nothing remarkable, and progression and technology were slow to make their impression. Their financial situation is considerably lacking, and things appear depressing and despondent.

Yet we are faced with the unlikely outcome! Switzerland, with all the peace, wealth and tranquility that its residents enjoy, has not benefitted the world proportionately with impressive achievements. The number of famous scientists or artists and its scientific and technological advancement for the benefit of the world at large is not in ratio to its serene state of affairs. In which way Switzerland has profited the world beyond its exquisite, scenic pictures adorning living rooms and hotel lobbies has to be thought about.

However, strangely some nearby countries, such as Poland, Lithuania and Hungary are considered backward countries. When Berlin was already enjoying electric street lights and modern modes of transport, Warsaw, Vilna and Lodz, lacking the infrastructure for electricity, were still enveloped by darkness at night. Yet these countries produced the greatest merchants in the world, and l'havdil, the greatest Torah scholars. A partial illustration is Vilna that produced Torah luminaries such as the Vilna Gaon and his talmid, Rabbi Chaim (of Volozhin), Poland that was

home to the Rema, the Maharsha and the Maharshal, and Hungary where the Chatam Sofer and Rabbi Akiva Eiger grew up. The list goes on but what is significant is that they all grew up in countries that lacked basic infrastructure, lived in abject poverty and endured the pressure of day-to-day survival.

How do we understand this phenomenon?

The answer can be found in this week's Parsha. As part of Ya'akov's blessings to his sons, he blesses Yissachar with the words "He saw tranquility that it was good...yet he bent his shoulder to bear". There is a famous question: Don't these words contradict each other? If he saw how good tranquility was, why did he bend his shoulder to bear? One who appreciates the advantage of tranquility, immediately books a weekend in a luxury hotel. Yet concerning Yissachar it says that after seeing the benefit of tranquility, he decided to bend his shoulder to bear?

The Mashgiach of Mir, Rabbi Yerucham, explains a great foundation in life that transforms our entire perception of the much beloved concept, 'tranquility'. For the nations of the world, tranquility is, as we mentioned, synonymous with a dream vacation in a luxury hotel, or a situation where a person is unhindered by the burden of livelihood or employment and he is free to do as he pleases, without being encumbered by any obligations or demands.

But the Torah outlook on tranquility is completely different. True tranquility is when a person carries a burden: the responsibility of restrictions and times or obligations of demanding tasks with which one is occupied from morning to night. This is when a person's soul feels that it is doing what it is supposed to be doing. All these obligations ensure that we are filled with vitality and eliminates any feelings of a depressing emptiness. This kind of person is relaxed and at ease, his soul is at peace and he personifies tranquility.

True tranquility, the Mashgiach R' Yerucham zt"l explains, is accustoming oneself to hard work and carrying responsibility, for this fortifies the body and soul and enables it to stand strong against the regular winds of change. This is called tranquility! Life is full of surprises and one who feels capable of withstanding any changes in life, feels truly at peace. ('Shteigen')



Pearls of the Parsha

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
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The Indictment of Am Yisrael is Undesirable

"Ya'akov lived" (Bereishit 47:28)

Many explanations have been offered to try and clarify the meaning of the Rashi that tells us: "He wished to reveal the end of days but the Shechina departed from him".

Rabbi Bunim of Pashischa zt"l offers his own unique interpretation: Ya'akov wished to reveal how the generation will appear at the time of 'the end of days'. He wanted to tell his children about the chutzpah and the ignorance that will prevail when the Moshiach arrives, but the Shechina departed from him. Why was he prevented from revealing this information?

Because Heaven did not want him to talk negatively about Am Yisrael, chalila.

Who is Called a Son of the Creator?

"So he called for his son, for Yosef" (Bereishit 47:29)

Seemingly, the verse should say 'for his son Yosef'?

The point is, the Noam Elimelech zt"l explains, that fulfilling the Torah and not transgressing its commandments, qualifies a person for the title of 'eved', a servant. A servant is one who does not transgress his master's command.

But to be considered Hashem's 'son', one must add precautions and restrictions, increasing one's efforts to the best of one's pure reasoning, while striving to climb from level to level.

This is the meaning of "He called for his son". If you wish to know who is considered a 'son', the answer is 'for Yosef', (lit. meaning to add) one who continually adds precautions and restrictions in his Avodat Hakodesh.

In the Merit of Our Forefathers

"O G-d before Whom my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked" (Bereishit 48:15)

The holy Ohr Hachaim stresses that Ya'akov Avinu first asks in the merit of his fathers and only after that in his own merit. From this verse, the Leaders of the Great Assembly derived the correct order of the blessings of the Shemone Esrei prayer: One must first awaken the merit of our forefathers, the holy avot, and only after that to ask for mercy and compassion.

Ya'akov Avinu mentioned his own merit using the phrase "G-d who shepherds me", saying that in front of Hashem he feels like a sheep in front of its shepherd, prepared to go to any place that Hashem will lead him.

Yosef Continually Remembers the Day of Death

"Yosef said to his brothers, "I am about to die" (Bereishit 50:24)

It seems strange that Yosef phrased his sentence in the present tense, **בנא הנא** **תמ**, lit. I am dying, and did not say "I am going to die", using the future tense?

Rabbi Akiva Eiger zt"l answered that Yosef used this expression to let his brothers know that he doesn't hold a grudge against them or feel any jealousy.

Chazal have advised us (Berachot 5a) how to handle the yetzer hara at all stages: "If a person is victorious, all is well and good, but if not, he should study Torah. If (now) he is victorious, all is well and good; if not he should remind himself of the day of death."

The way to uproot pride from a person's heart is by remembering the day of death.

This is why Yosef said to his brothers, "I am about to die", using the present tense. He was implying that he continually remembers the day of death and this is how he acquired the attribute of submission.

Chazal also say (Shabbat 152b), that if a person does not suffer from jealousy, his bones do not rot (after his death). According to this one can understand the continuation of Yosef's words: "Then you must bring my bones up out of here", meaning even if you leave Mitzrayim after an extended period, you will still be able to take up my bones for they will not rot.

What Tzaddikim See with their Pure Eyes

One who studies this Parsha will notice that the word 'eyes' is mentioned several times. "Now Yisrael's eyes were heavy with age", "Red eyed from wine" and more. Why is this?

Due to Ya'akov's old age, he was no longer able to see, but this only refers to human sight. He was, however, able to foresee all that would transpire in the future with a spiritual vision, for he had rectified his eyes. Since Ya'akov's attribute was truth, as it says (Micha 7:20) "Grant truth to Ya'akov", he was therefore unable to hide what his eyes saw with Divine Inspiration and asked "Who are these?", for even though Menashe and Ephraim were considered tzaddikim, he saw that their descendants will serve idolatry.

The holy Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto zya"l, became blind in his old age yet he could perceive everything using his supernatural wisdom. Although he could not see, he was able to name every person who entered his home.

I recall an incident that happened many years ago, with my esteemed father Rabbeinu Moshe Ahron zya"l. He required a certain medical procedure on his eyes and I was directed to an expert doctor for eye disease, who lived in Manchester, England. I accompanied my father zya"l on this trip and on arriving in England, we took a taxi to the doctor's house. The taxi stopped two streets away from his house since there was no entry for vehicles, and from there we had to make our way by foot.

Wonder of wonders! My father had never been to England and was not familiar with its streets, but when we got out of the taxi he started walking quickly with his face down. He knew exactly where to turn and where to go, and I had to run to try and keep up with him, all the time wondering how he knew the way.

When we arrived at the doctor's house, Abba zya"l stopped and asked me simply, "Is this where the doctor lives?" And indeed it was the right address.

How did Abba zya"l merit attaining these holy levels? Because he rectified his eyes and was most particular to guard them from looking at forbidden sights. This is how he merited seeing things with Divine inspiration. With this spiritual vision, he knew how to get to the doctor's home, without any previous knowledge of the area.

May it be His will that we merit guarding our eyes against looking at improper sights and may we sanctify ourselves with our actions, sight and thoughts. Amen v'Amen.

A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA



As part of the momentous occasion of Ya'akov blessing his children before his death, we read about the unique blessing which Yis-sachar merited, "He bent his shoulder to bear". What burden did he take upon himself? Rashi answers that it refers to the yoke of Torah.

The Gaon Rabbi Chizkiyahu Mishkovski shlita tells over the following story:

There was once a very talented bachur who had an excellent memory. He could learn an entire page of Gemara in five minutes, after which you could test him in great detail. Waking up one morning, he discovered to his astonishment that he had suddenly lost this ability...

He sought out all the Gedolim to ask for their blessings and advice. Each Gadol, according to his personal outlook, suggested a different piece of advice.

But the Steipler's zt"l reaction was entirely different. He said to the bachur: "You are asking me to curse you. There is no way I will do this... a camera in one's head is not a blessing! A person does not come to this world to photograph. There are enough cameras in the world... We are here to work, to put in the effort!" Even though the bachur continued crying and begging, the Steipler remained firm! "Under no circumstances will I bless you to retrieve your previous ability. It is a curse, not a blessing!"

Another bachur once came to the Rosh Yeshiva, Harav Shteinman zt"l, and told him that he was encountering difficulties in the yeshiva where he was learning at present and he wishes to move to a different yeshiva. The Rosh Yeshiva replied: "You have problems? Difficulties? Know that this is l'chatchila, this is how things are meant to be. When things do not go easily, this is how one merits acquiring Torah, for Torah is acquired with toil, with hardship! Only in

this way can a person grow in Torah". He instructed him categorically to remain where he was.

Our generation, (this was already said by the Chafetz Chaim zt"l!) is a pampered generation. This is why not many people merit acquiring Torah. We live in a generation where everything needs to go exactly as we want and every problem, even the smallest, takes us away from our learning. In this manner, it is impossible to grow!

When the Yeshiva 'Orchot Torah' was first established, it was located above a bakery and the smoke and smell made it hard for the bachurim to learn. We approached Moreinu, the Rosh Yeshiva zt"l and told him the problem. The Rosh Yeshiva sighed and replied forcefully: "Do you think that the creation has changed? From time immortal this has always been the way of Torah: 'Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure...' If all the conditions were optimal, it would be impossible to succeed. To be successful, there have to be hardships! Be happy that these are your difficulties. Torah without toil and effort, without investment and sacrifice, does not thrive."

The Dog is Under Five

Harav Mishkovski illustrates the admirable personality of the distinguished Harav Hirsh:

The outstanding feature of the Slabodka Yeshiva of Chevron, under the leadership of the two Mashgichim, Rabbi Meir Chadash and Rabbi Hirsch Palei, was its emphasis on a shining countenance and good middot. The two Mashgichim served as a living example for their talmidim, with their exceptional devotion on behalf of others. They invested tremendous thought in how to make another person happy, how to help him and elevate him. They lived only for their talmidim. Rabbi Meir's home was open twenty-four hours, completely at the service of the talmidim. They would come in and make themselves at home, at all hours. He even gave them his house keys. He did not know the meaning of a private life.

When Rabbi Hirsh was niftar, I came to be menachem avel. While I was there,

they read out a letter that someone had faxed, in which the writer wished to protest. This is what he wrote: "Rabbi Hirsch zt"l was greatly praised for the extent to which he would take care of all his acquaintances, and how he devoted himself completely to the Yeshiva bachurim. But I wish to protest! Did Rabbi Hirsch care only for those who were close to him? Did he give himself up only for the Yeshiva bachurim? I lay in 'Hadassah' hospital, Rabbi Hirsch did not know who I was, yet when he saw that I was suffering, it is impossible to describe in words how much he sacrificed himself for me, how much devotion he showed for me. I felt that he was not living for himself, but only for me and for others"...

The following is a story that circulated about Rabbi Hirsh, in the Chevron Yeshiva. It is hard to verify if the story is true or not, but generally, the stories that they told there could be backed up.

Once Rabbi Hirsch was travelling by bus, and he found a seat towards the back of the bus. At one of the stops, an irreligious lady boarded, together with a big dog. The driver demanded that she pay for the dog too but the woman refused. An argument broke out, a complete tumult of raised voices and angry words.

The Mashgiach of Chevron yeshiva was not embarrassed. He walked from the back of the bus all the way to the driver and said with a smile: "The dog is under five years of age and the law is that one who is not yet five does not need to pay"...

At once everybody calmed down. The driver smiled, the woman smiled, the argument ended and the bus carried on its route.

What would we say? The Rav was embarrassing himself! Is it fitting for the Rav to get involved and try and get a ride for a dog?! But all of this did not interest Rabbi Hirsch. What was important to him was offering a good word and making peace between people!