

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

The Formula For Attaining An Understanding Of Hashem

Based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנחם | הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר | רפאל חיים דוב בן-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה | שרה בת ר' יחזקאל | ראובן יוסף בן יהושע | דב בעריש בן פסח צבי
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In this week's Parsha, the Torah commands us (26:16-17) "To walk in His ways." The Ralbag derives the following lesson from here: "The fourth benefit we can derive is in regards to Mitzvos. Hashem commanded us to walk in His ways, to emulate Him according to our abilities. This is expressed by the words, 'And you should walk in His ways.' Through this Mitzvah a person will be directed to all the good Middos when he reflects on Hashem's extreme kindness, graciousness, and fairness in how He conducts Himself with His creations. In addition, he will also reach the highest levels of comprehension of Hashem through constantly researching and observing Hashem's ways so that he can emulate them."

A fascinating insight can be gleaned from this Ralbag. Although a human being has a strong desire to know Hashem, and will go to great lengths to understand everything about the world to know his Creator, it is clear from the Ralbag that to truly comprehend Hashem, a person's motivation has to be to act like Hashem. The Kochos Hanefesh of a person is such that to truly focus on something requires that his reflection be for the purpose of bringing it into action. Philosophizing and pondering the mysteries of the world in the abstract will not allow a person to reach the same depth as a person who is pursuing knowledge for the purpose of doing. Therefore, if we want to maximize our understanding of Hashem's kindness, our motivation has to be to emulate His ways.

Understanding Hashem's kindness is critical to our happiness. This is illustrated by an insight from the Alter of Slobodka. The Alter points out that in Bentching we say, "Please Hashem let us not need to receive gifts from human beings, rather directly from Your hand that is full, open, holy, and expansive, so that we not be embarrassed and humiliated forever." The Alter points out that our soul is so sensitive to its dignity, that if we would receive gifts from Hashem, but the gifts were somewhat restrained, we would be embarrassed forever. A person who is lacking in his comprehension of the magnitude of Hashem's kindness will always be lacking in his recognition of the gifts he receives from Hashem. This will cause him to suffer in this world and the next. It is therefore so important that we attain a full understanding of Hashem's kindness so that we are not embarrassed forever. This understanding is best motivated by our pursuit to emulate Hashem.

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, it is clear that the theme of Elul is reconnecting to Hashem. This relationship is built on our knowledge of Hashem. As the Seforno tells us in Shir Hashirim, "That love is defined as one who rejoices in the qualities of his beloved." It seems from the Ralbag that the medium to this knowledge is through Tikkun Hamiddos. By trying to emulate Hashem we will be able to strengthen our connection to Hashem.



Shir HaShirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

*With Me from Levanon My bride, with Me from Levanon
you will come.*

(Shir HaShirim 4:8)

Confusion mingles with apprehension in the back of my mind. It's already two weeks since my blissful spiritual hibernation was shattered with the sound of the shofar on Rosh Chodesh Elul and my thoughts are still unsettled. I know that in the end what I really want is to come closer to Hashem. This desire itself gives me hope; I'm really not too far away from Him.

On the other hand, what are these feelings really worth? Let's be practical - How far am I from being a true servant of Hashem? The sad fact is, mundanity encompasses my life from morning until night, and the few short bursts of spirituality that seep through the cracks are quickly pushed away in the grind of life. What is the worth of my meager annual Elul yearnings?

Rabbeinu Elisha Galiko, based on the Medrash, explains the Pasuk above as follows: Hashem says to Klal Yisroel, "You went after me from Egypt when you were in the lowest of spiritual states. However, this is also a tremendous praise, the fact that you wanted to come with me, despite your being in such a low spiritual state. Despite having almost no recognition and grasp of the knowledge of My service, you chose to come towards Me and with Me. Certainly I am indebted to you for this. This itself is reason for Me to choose you as my people.

So there's no reason for confusion. The mundanity of your life is in fact the greatest proof that your current yearning for Hashem is a reflection of your true essence. The significance of those meager yearnings to return to Hashem are not to be underestimated, in fact the opposite is true. The fact that you still yearn for Hashem, despite your overall spiritual state, is the surest sign of true inherent greatness. In fact, it was the very catalyst for our being chosen as Hashem's eternal people.

Welcome to the real you!



ELIEZER INSTITUTE Emunah Highlights

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I will flee from You - Toward You

I will take shelter from Your wrath - In Your shadow

*(Rabbeinu Shlomo Ibin Gabriel, piyut from the Rosh
Hashanah davening)*

The Brisker Rav explains: True Bitachon is not trusting Hashem while unaware of the present danger. Rather, Bitachon is when one fully appreciates the danger in which he is in and despite it, he still places his trust in Hashem that He will save him. Therefore, before the Yomim Nora'im, prior to one's running towards Hashem and placing his trust in Him that He will judge him favorably, one must run away from Him so to speak, fully realizing the danger his sins have placed him in. However, where does a Jew have to flee if not his Father in Heaven?

The Brisker Rav says that this concept is brought out in the words of the Rambam (Pirush HaMishnayos, Rosh Hashanah Chapter 4) "They [Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur] are days of service, subjugation, fright, and being in awe and fear of Hashem and fleeing from and towards Him."

This concept is beautifully brought out every morning during the month of Elul. As Shacharis comes to a close, we blow the shofar to instill in us the fear of the approaching day of judgment as the Pasuk (Amos 3:6) states, "Will a shofar blast in the city and a people not tremble in fear? However, we immediately follow with the words of Dovid HaMelech, "LeDovid Hashem ori mimi ira - Hashem is my light and my salvation, from whom can I fear?"