



Parshat Vayeishev: Gathering The Sparks

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

"Vayeishev Yaakov b'ereetz Canaan." Yaakov lived in the land of *Canaan*. Rashi comments, when Yaakov reached Israel and wanted to live in tranquility, he was faced with the difficult episode of Yosef. The sages ask, "Is it not enough that *tzadikim* are rewarded in the World To Come, do they also need to sit serenely in this world?" The Shem MiShmuel questions this criticism. After all, a *tzaddik* wants tranquility only to perform Torah and *mitzvot*, not to live an easy life. Chassidic writings teach us that when Hashem created *olam hazeh*, He scattered many sparks of holiness around the world. A Jew's purpose is to search for these sparks and raise them to their ultimate level. There are four stages of nature: inanimate objects, plants, animals, and man. The food chain travels through these levels until it reaches man in the food that he eats. Only man has the unique ability to descend to the lowest level and lift something up to its highest level. Just as a physical wilderness can be transformed to civilization, a spiritual wilderness can become a community. The

most desolate places that seem completely devoid of *kedusha*, contain hidden sparks of holiness. Just as one must dig very deep to find gold or diamonds, one must toil to unearth the *kedusha* in the spiritual world. We see that the Torah was given in the barren desert of Sinai and the Gemara was written in Babylon, the bastion of idolatry and sorcery. Judaism is unique in contrast to other religions in its teaching that all physical aspects of life can be elevated for spirituality. Torah is our tool to clear away the spiritual wilderness and replace it with a spiritual Garden of Eden. The *mitzvot* are our way of tapping into the holiness of every aspect of this world. What we think is mundane is only a *klipta* – a covering for the holiness hiding beneath. Galut, exile, was a blessing in disguise, so Jews would reach every corner of the globe and fulfill their mission of uncovering *kedusha*. We are still a wandering nation today. The Jewish people draw the holiness from their host countries, while simultaneously infusing holiness wherever they live. *Galut* has an additional side benefit in that our physical

alienation from the land of Israel and Hashem arouses a profound yearning within us to come back to Him. Our struggle to find Hashem shapes us into a stronger nation. Elevating holiness can make us haughty. Therefore, Hashem gave us the pains of galut to keep us humble and in check. We are nothing but Hashem's messengers and only He gives us the ability to achieve and carry on. Yaakov lived a very difficult life with Lavan. When he returned to Israel, he thought the time of *Mashiach* had come and that all holiness had already been gathered. He wanted peace so that he could focus on goodness and be in a state of *Shabbat* and *Olam Haba*. But he was mistaken. Hashem's plan was for the twelve tribes – and the masses of simple Jews who would later emerge from them – to find and elevate the scattered sparks. This was not a mission for a few *tzaddikim* but a goal for an entire nation. May we merit to sanctify our lives, our country, and our society, as we attempt to complete the mission Hashem designed for us.

Chanukah: Sefas Emes Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The Sefas Emes writes that we say *Sh'ase nissim* when we light the Chanukah candles because there's something intrinsically holy and miraculous about our lights. We say, *haneirot halulu kodosh hem*- These very lights are holy. They contain some of the wonder of the lights of long ago. It says, "*Ki ner mitzvah, v'Torah ohr*." The lamp is a *mitzvah* and the Torah is light. The 248 positive *mitzvot* parallel the 248 limbs of the body. If one adds *yirah* (fear) and *ahavah* (love) it equals 250 which is the numerical value of *ner*. A *mitzvah* takes something spiritual and abstract and gives it a foothold in the world of reality. If it is performed with fear and love it can bring down incredible light.

Teva is the repetition of rules that deaden us to the fact that Hashem is continually vivifying the world moment by moment. A miracle takes us out of nature. *Mitzvot* too take us out of the numbing routine of natural life. When we use our body to perform *mitzvot* with love and fear it can receive the light of Hashem's will and wisdom as expressed through the Torah. Our *daat*- our ability to reach conclusions that will get us to our goals, changes. We become more enlightened and aware with the wisdom and ability to find meaning in our lives.

Every Jew has a portion in Torah, something that speaks to him and inspires him. The *menorah* had seven branches paralleling the seven traits we share in common with

Hashem. Our ability to experience our own enlightenment is the *menorah* within us. When we light the Chanukah lights, we reawaken the awareness of our inner eternal flame. *Nes* by definition is above nature. We have to skip over nature, remove the materialism within ourselves at least for the moment, to get to the miracle. Whenever we do a *mitzvah* that uses something physical, it's an opportunity to get closer to Hashem, to get a little bit above that which defines whatever medium the *mitzvah* involves. The love and fear that inspires a person to do the *mitzvah* will affect who he is as he does the *mitzvah* and thereafter for all time.



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Derech Hashem –A Real Humohn Being #2 Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

There's a continuous conflict between wholeness and lack in this world. Our purpose is to get past the concealment and choose good. People sometimes enjoy a robotic kind of existence. It takes the pain out of the picture. But the goal is not to live on automatic pilot. We're meant to find the point within ourselves where we experience real struggle. There we're meant to choose life and meaning.

The body wants material pleasure. But if Hashem isn't in the picture, physicality will create a block. So let's say you try to make your *Shabbat* meaningful. You read a bit about it and try to elevate the food and make the conversation a bit more exalted. But it's not happening because there are other players who aren't cooperating or because you're really hungry or tired. But you tried and Hashem's sees that. So He'll tilt the balance and give you more than your efforts deserve. The real reward for our wanting spiritual

attachment will take us beyond this world.

The goal is not to separate yourself from physicality, but to let your emotions take you to wanting things higher. Teach yourself to associate pleasure with the stuff that's real. Letting your body speak really loud and never learning to rejoice in spiritual things can be tragic. This world is for effort and the next world is for reward. The person you became through all of your battles is the person you will stay forever. You may win the inner struggle today and lose tomorrow and that's ok. It doesn't take away from the victories you already had. But in the end, we write our own scripts and we'll all need to face the consequences. This does not take away from the fact that as long as we're alive, change and *teshuva* are always possible.

Before the sin, Adam had perfect balance. If he would've made the right choice, his descendants would not have had to follow up

with their own choices. In our conflict between body and soul, sometimes one side wins and sometimes the other. We're conscious of the soul choosing and rejoicing, but we don't sense it changing, although it essentially does. An ordinary person may recite a *bracha* without much *simcha* or focus. Although it's not the ultimate level, it will still give the person a perspective that's more than himself. Then there's the *tzaddik* who'll make the *bracha* with genuine joy. He'll see the apple as a gift from Hashem and be beside himself with happiness. As he recites the blessing he'll see the apple changing and his soul changing. Adam saw this. He had the capacity for endless *simcha*. But after the sin he changed and the world changed with him. Man's vision became more limited. Our lives seem insignificant sometimes when in fact we have no idea how much enormous change takes place when we make a good choice. Let us always choose that which is authentic and real and in tune with the will of Hashem.