



Parshat Shekalim: Love and Fear

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Avnei Nezer teaches that just as Elul is a preparation for the month of Tishrei, Adar is a preparation for the month of Nissan. The Gemara writes that when there's a double Adar, we keep Purim during the second Adar so as to connect the redemption of Purim with the redemption of Pesach.

Chassidut teaches that an *itaruta d'leyla*, an arousal from above, is closely linked with an *itaruta d'latata*, an arousal from below. If we move towards Hashem, He moves towards us and vice-versa. A great part of our focus in serving Hashem is achieving *deveikut*, cleaving to Him. The months of Tishrei and Nissan reveal two differing paths on how to attain this.

Elul is *bitul hayesh* (nullification of self). During Elul, we create a relationship through the process of focusing on our flaws and weaknesses and experiencing a sense of failure and shame. When Hashem sees our pain and remorse, He too cries along with us and reaches out to lift us up from the morass of sin. As the month of Tishrei unfolds, there's a constant cycle of inspiration from above and

below which culminates with complete *deveikut* on *Shemini Atzeret*.

In contrast, the months of Adar and Nissan celebrate *gadlut ha'adam*, man's awesome potential to reach levels higher than an angel. In Nissan, with the first touch of spring, as the world begins to stir with new life, we too are given a fresh start in *avodat Hashem*. The Jewish people fell to the 49th level of impurity in Egypt. Yet Hashem saw their latent greatness and redeemed them from the depths. Every year we too can tap into our inherent powers and come closer to Hashem.

The word *keseif* (silver) is mentioned many times in Megilat Esther. It connects to the *machatit hashekel*, the half *shekel* which was collected every year in Adar. In Kabbalah, *keseif* signifies loving kindness and is related to the word *niksof*, to yearn. Donating the *machatit hashekel* for the daily sacrifices represents that desire within us to connect to Hashem. This is expressed in the profound love between Hashem and *klal Yisrael* in the month of Adar.

Purim celebrates the victory of the Jewish people over Amalek, our physical and spiritual enemy. Haman said to Achashveirosh, "*Yeshno am echad*," There is one nation that is scattered among the nations. Chazal interpret *yeshno* as *yashnu*. They were old and tired of the *mitzvot*. The Torah says that Amalek "*korcha ba'derech*." He cooled you off on the way. He placed doubts in our mind. Perhaps Hashem abandoned us. Are we truly the chosen people? And if we are, how did they succeed in attacking us?

This is what Haman meant when he said *yeshno*. He told Achashveirosh, we were successful in diverting their passion for *mitzvot* to physicality. Now we can destroy them. But he was wrong. The decree was signed, but the Jewish people repented and rediscovered their enthusiasm for Torah.

This is the lesson of Purim. We must fight Amalek by serving the Creator with love, zeal, and joy. In this way we will be able to defeat all the enemies of the Jewish people and create *kiddush shem shamayim* in this world.

Parshat Mishpatim: Consciousness

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

In Parshat Mishpatim, the Torah tells us, "You shall worship Hashem and He shall bless your bread and your water and He shall remove illness from your midst." In what context are we commanded to serve Hashem? Why does the verse switch from plural to singular form? What do bread, water, and the removal of illness signify?

The Ohev Yisrael explains that *avodah* doesn't mean serving Hashem, but bringing Him pleasure. The greatest *avodah* of a Jew is *kedoshim tiheyu*, enjoying this world but not getting lost in it. We must put Torah and *mitzvot* first and worldly matters second. Blessing our bread and water connotes spiritual pleasures. When we know our priorities and live by them, Hashem blesses our efforts.

In Parshat Beshalach the Torah says, "The

illness that I put on the Egyptians I will not put on you, because I Hashem am your healer." The sickness of Egypt was the hardening of their hearts. All that happens to us is a message from Hashem. When we open ourselves up to hear His voice, Hashem removes the barriers that distance Him from us and help us come closer.

The Gemara says there's no reward for *mitzvot* in this world. The verse moves from plural to singular to teach us that when we collectively do our part, Hashem gives each of us exactly what we need to fulfill our mission. Blessing our bread and water is not a reward, but a medium to serve Him better.

The Chayei Moshe explains that "*V'avadatem et Hashem*," connotes doing *mitzvot* with joy. If that is where we get our pleasure, Hashem says I will bless your bread and water and take

away your sickness. You'll see some of the reward in this world. Physical happiness fades while spiritual *simcha* stays with us forever.

The Be'er Moshe explains that one can read the verse as one continuous statement, "You shall serve Hashem through blessing your bread and water, and as a result Hashem will take away illness." Making a blessing on food elevates the spiritual sparks within it and returns them to their source. This in turn affects our health and equilibrium. Rav Tatz notes that the function of food is to maintain the bond between the soul and the body. It connects the physical to the spiritual. The Torah says, "Not on bread alone will a man live, but rather on that which comes out from the mouth of Hashem." The word of Hashem that He puts into food is what sustains us. All of the outer processes of separation that are involved in preparing food are a reminder of

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the inner separation, the hidden sparks that we must elevate. When a person is conscious that eating is a way of connecting with Hashem, his physical and spiritual aspects unite as one.

The final level of *avodah* is *tefilah*. In Nishmat

we say, "If our mouths were filled with praise like the sea... we would not be able to praise Hashem." Why then do we go on to praise Him? The Chatam Sofer explains that one person alone cannot praise Hashem, but an assembly of people can. *V'avadatem* in the plural form refers to approaching Hashem as a

collective unit. Every prayer, although it may seem like an individual request, has a cosmic effect on all of *Klal Yisrael*. If you weren't personally helped by your own prayers, perhaps another Jew was. No *tefilah* will ever go unanswered.

The Meaning of Trust: Anxiety #9

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Confronting challenges in a proactive, positive, way is a three-prong process. The first step is to involve your mind. Remember your happiest moments and try to figure out what gave you joy. Most people discover that what they desire most is connection, achievement, and security. Ask yourself during your difficult moments, "What can I do to come closer to the goals I really want?" Tell yourself, "Hashem put me in this situation for a reason. There must be something good that will come out of this, assuming I've done my best." Examine the issue from all sides. Ask people who've been there and done that. Then draw conclusions.

The second step is to move from your mind to your heart. The heart responds to imagery. Replace the negative imagery that's causing you anxiety and try to brainstorm solutions. Be creative and try new things. Talk to people who you have never consulted with before. See yourself attaining achievement and connection. Tell yourself, "This may be something I have to go through in life but I'm not alone." At that point your anxiety should begin to dissipate.

Then you have to bring it to your gut and ask yourself, "What will I do concretely? How will I maintain my joy and *bitachon*. Will it be through saying Tehilim, through a friend, through going for a *bracha*?"

The head, heart, and action are attributed to

three organs. The *moach* is the repository of the brain. Lev, the heart, is the seat of emotion. *Kaved*, the liver, purifies the blood. Its function is to reject and accept. The concrete part of you has to be involved in making decisions. It has to firmly say, "I'll do what's right and not what's wrong. I'll act with faith rather than with panic." The first letters of these three organs spell *melech*. A person who has achieved sovereignty over himself is unencumbered by circumstances or by other people's opinions. He can turn it all over to Hashem and say, "I've thought this through. These are the steps I will try to take. It's now up to you take me where You want me to go."

For the most part there's no suffering without sin. Pain comes to fix that which was broken. In a sense, we're not afraid of Hashem, we're afraid of ourselves. Guilt can and should cause anxiety.

In the book of Daniel, the prophet Daniel says, "I saw the vision, but the men with me didn't see it. Yet they had terrible fear and ran away and hid." The realization that something big was going to happen made them inwardly focus on the fact that there was something broken inside of them.

Many times fear, anxiety, or depression will stem from a deep place in the subconscious. Chazal say that when a person loses a loved one he should be aware that he is vicariously experiencing his own death. We become suddenly aware of our mortality and it's

overpoweringly frightening and hard to face.

Anxiety that stems from sin is purposeful. Worrying about leaving this world without achieving the level of completion and connection you wanted, is good. Chazal teach that a *tzaddik* is always afraid. He looks at himself critically and is consciously aware. He's not neurotic or sad, but proactive. He will ask himself, "How can I grow and what is holding me back? How can I bring more spirituality into my life, my world, and the people I come in contact with? What do I have to be careful about so that the opposite doesn't happen?"

It's easy to lose awareness. This is why the Baal Hatanya says that it's an obligation to say *Pesukei D'zimra* and *Shema*. These prayers awaken within a person the enormity of Hashem's love for us, the incredible intricacy of His world, and the wondrous way in which He governs it.

Greek philosophy espouses the stoic's theory – being a real man, not flinching at anything, and never being afraid. Risking one's life for the thrill of it is not the kind of courage we admire or value. While the physical world is vanity, it is a vehicle for revealing Hashem and therefore it is very precious. A *tzaddik* understand that there's nothing enduring about this world except serving the Creator. He will view every minute in this world, even the gashmiut part, as priceless because it is a means to a greater end.