

Kohelet Perek 9

The Fate of the Righteous and the Wicked – Part II

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

What should inspire a person to live righteously, if externally the same things seem to happen to everyone, whether we choose good or bad? “Go forth and eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a good heart.” This describes the *tzadik*. When Kohelet uses the expression, “Eat and drink,” it refers to taking in Torah. Torah is what sustains us.

“At all times let your clothing be white, and oil should not be missing from your head.” The garments of the soul are thought, speech, and action. Moment by moment, we must see that our garments remain pure. This is what makes life have value. On an external level, a *tzadik* and a *rasha* might be living the same life, but they are wearing different clothing. This is what makes all the difference. Oil is the symbol of transcendence because it rises above other liquids. Shlomo Hamelech tells us, see that your mind remains elevated and that your thoughts remain unsullied by lust, impurity, or hatred.

“Be happy with your wife and see that there’s love between you all the days of your life. This is your portion in life and this is your toil that you struggle with under the sun.” Rashi explains that both good and bad people must struggle to earn a living. What makes it meaningful is if people have shalom bayit in their home. Then whatever you have to do to sustain your family is worthwhile. In the writings of Chazal Yosef is called a *tzadik*. The Torah also refers to him as hamshbir, the one

who supplied everyone. He is considered righteous not only for passing the moral test with the wife of Potiphar, but also for putting aside human pettiness to supply his extended family with everything they needed.

The Gemara says that when a man supports his family it is an act of *chassidut*. For shalom bayit to result, the wife has to be able to express her *simcha* and validate her husband’s role as a giver. When she affirms his providing, he feels actualized. Supporting a family goes far beyond material sustenance. Often what a family needs most is a sense of meaning, future, and Torah direction. By learning *Torah l’shma*, the husband brings meaning to his family and fulfills his role as a giver.

The relationship of the soul to the body is compared metaphorically to the relationship of man and woman. The woman’s role is to actualize the man’s higher will by moving it from the abstract to the concrete. Similarly, the body is meant to take on that mission by studying Torah and fulfilling *mitzvot*. In order to be a giver, a person has to commit himself to providing. This certainly changes the person but it doesn’t necessarily guarantee that he’ll succeed. Success is in the hands of Hashem.

Kohelet tells us further, “The people who are quick don’t always win the race; and the people who are strong don’t always win the war. The people who are wise don’t always have food to support themselves; and the people who are understanding aren’t always

rich; and even people who should have grace at the time they entreat Hashem don’t always get what they want.” Rashi illustrates this with examples from Tanach. Asael was an incredibly fast and brave warrior, and still was killed by Yoav. The mighty King Shlomo was deposed by Ashmadai. Iyov was very wise, but lost his wealth in a moment. Even Moshe, who had infinite spiritual grace, was refused entry into Eretz Yisrael.

“So I said to myself, ‘Wisdom is greater than strength and the wisdom of a poor person who people mock and his words are not always heard.’” Often the words that we hear inside ourselves are silenced by the deafening roar of our desires and ambitions. We have to stop and listen to ourselves. One of the best ways to do so is through *hitbodedut*. Make a time every day to speak to Hashem in your own words. “The words of the wise are heard calmly more than the shouts of a person who rules over fools.” The words you hear yourself saying to Hashem will in a qualitative sense shout the brash words of externality.

“Wisdom is better than weapons but one mistake could cause great loss.” You have to ask yourself who you really want to be. Do you want to be one who betrays your higher and more eternal self or do you want to be that higher and more eternal self. On the outside, things might look the same for the *tzadik* and the *rasha*, but in reality their responses and in turn their inner lives are very different.

Aspiring Acceptance: Shavuot

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

The *Sichot Beavodat Hashem* tells us that every year on *Shavuot* Hashem asks our souls, “Will you accept the Torah?” And all the souls respond once again, “*Naaseh ve’nishma*, we will do and we will listen.” Every year we are credited anew for accepting the Torah. How can we understand agreeing to do before hearing the particulars? The *Drash Dovid* explains that *naaseh* is a commitment to doing the *mitzvot*. Once we actually “taste” the *mitzvah*, understanding will

follow. Further, if we perform it with some level of understanding, even greater understanding will follow.

The Medrash tells us that at Sinai every Jew heard Hashem’s voice according to his own ability. If so, why did their souls leave them? The *Shaarei Binah* points out that while Hashem’s voice reached each individual according to his capability, Hashem spoke to each person’s potential for holiness. When the

person saw the chasm between his potential and reality, the ensuing anguish caused his soul to depart. *Nishma*, then, is the declaration of willingness to dedicate ourselves to spiritual growth, to narrowing the gap between our potential and our reality. *Nishma* is active listening. We are all hoping to return fully to our spiritual source.

This growth is the challenge of our lives. As Rav Hutner wrote in a letter to his student,

Continued on page 2



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Continued from page 2

when King Shlomo said that the righteous fall seven times and rise, it does not mean that the righteous just keep getting up; rather falling and failing is the means through which they grow. No one is born righteous. We each must struggle with our *yetzer hora* to overcome it and grow.

If *nishma* is about personal growth, *naaseh* is about unconditional acceptance of Hashem's commands without personal rationalization. As the *Chazon Lamoed* writes, Adam did not simply refuse to obey God's command. He inserted his own intellectual process into the command. He reasoned that he would create a greater sanctification of God's Name by falling and then rising up to do Hashem's will than if he just blindly obeyed. In short though, he disobeyed. His sin was "for the sake of Heaven," yet it brought death into the world, for God's wisdom must always supersede our own. Therefore, When Bnei Yisroel said *naaseh* before *nishma*, they regained the status of Adam before the sin.

Rabbi M. Salomon adds that Bnei Yisrael knew that if they asked what laws the Torah contained, they would undoubtedly find the challenges beyond them. However, they also understood that receiving the Torah would transform them, and would infuse them with a strength to make the impossible possible. It

would create a new way of life.

Surely if Hashem gave humankind the ability to experience pleasure, He would not impose laws to deprive us of it. But there are two levels of pleasure. Physical pleasures are of a lower level and fleeting, while pleasures that envelop our spirit elevate us far beyond the moment. By accepting the Torah, we rose to a higher level, where we gladly gave up physical pursuits for the greater joys of living as sons and daughter of the King. In this context, Torah limitations were not onerous, but a way for us to reach and maintain an elevated status and relationship with the King.

Heorat Derech writes that *naaseh* does not mean we will accomplish, for results are in the purview of Hashem. Rather it means that we will do whatever is in our power to fight the *yetzer hora* and we will focus on performing the *mitzvot*. If, in spite of all our efforts we still fail, we are nevertheless credited with having performed the *mitzvah*, says the Gemara. Rabbi Weissblum explains the verse, "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." Even in spiritual matters, we ask for Hashem's help, for He lends His hand to all who have the desire to do His will. Once we demonstrate our desire, Hashem will help us along the path we choose.

The Netivot Shalom writes that *naaseh* means

working on our *middot*, purifying ourselves and removing the blockages that prevent us from accepting God's will as our own. This is the purpose of *sefirat ha'omer*. In addition to counting the days, we prepare ourselves so that we shine and sparkle like the sapphire stone that is a part of God's symbolic throne. It is undoubtedly difficult to reach this level in one leap. Rabbi Y. Levovitz cites the *gemara* that *Bnei Yisrael* accepted the Torah a second time on Purim out of love. Yet the *Megillah* records only one *mitzvah* that they took upon themselves, reading the *Megillah* every year. Through performing this *mitzvah* wholeheartedly and with love, *Bnei Yisrael* sought a closer connection to Hashem by performing all the other *mitzvot* as well. Rabbi Levovitz points to this phenomenon and tells us that we too should begin by performing a single *mitzvah* with love and dedication, and our connection to Hashem will grow until we seek to do all the *mitzvot* to the best of our ability.

This is our task on *Shavuot*, writes the *Shaarei Derech*. We should commit to take on one *mitzvah* with *ratzon*, and that will be a demonstration that all the *mitzvot* are *b'ratzon*. This is the rededication of *naaseh ve'nishma* every *Shavuot* that we must strive to work on the rest of the year.

Rebbetzin's Perspective IV Class #4

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Question:

I have Yom Tov performance anxiety. Before the holiday, I try to listen to Torah lectures and get into the spirit of the chag. But when it finally gets to Yom Tov, I get so wrapped up in taking care of the kids, serving meals, cleaning up, etc. that I feel as if the chag just passes me by. What can I do?

Answer:

Be thankful to Hashem for giving you the ability to take care of your home and children. If you have young children, be kind to yourself. You can have delicious food, but it doesn't have to be fancy. A simple mousse can be just as tasty as a seven-layer concoction. Your house can look nice but it doesn't have to be immaculate. I

recommend the books *It's about Time*, by Chaya Levine and *Akeres Habayis* by Sara C. Radcliffe which can help simplify holiday planning. The idea of *yom tov* is to celebrate the *chag*. The consciousness of the holiday, that Hashem loves us and cares for us, is what the preparation is meant to celebrate. All the good food, the pretty clothes, and the clean home should contribute to this end.