

## The Slabodka Roots of the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoach Teller

Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, the former Mirrer *rosh yeshiva* was a legend in his time. Under his great leadership, the Mirrer Yeshiva grew into the largest institution of its kind in the Torah world. We can better understand who Rav Nosson Tzvi was by tracing his roots back to his namesake the Alter of Slabodka. The Alter was a master pedagogue. He founded the kollel Yad Hachazkah which consisted of 14 outstanding scholars. Among them were Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, Rav Yaakov Ruderman, and Rav Lazer Yudel Finkel. How did one man nurture a veritable 'Who's Who,' of the next generation's greatest Torah leaders? The Alter maximized the potential of every student by teaching *gadlut hadam*, the inestimable significance of every Jew. If one has a true idea of how sublime and holy one's soul is, one would never act in a way beneath one's stature. In this way he succeeded in nurturing a cadre of exceptional leaders who changed the face of the Jewish people. Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel was a great great nephew of the Alter. He imbibed the ideals of his uncle and taught that one must be all one can be and more importantly one must never sell oneself short.

Although Rav Nosson Tzvi was an acclaimed *rosh yeshiva*, he was never ashamed to speak about his past. This was not out of nostalgia. He felt that it was important that

others should know where he had come from. As a sophomore in high school, he went with his parents on a trip to Israel. There they visited his great uncle, Rav Lazer Yudel Finkel, the *rosh yeshiva* of Mir. On the outside Rav Nosson Tzvi, sporting his Chicago Cubs baseball cap, looked like the typical American Yankee Doodle. But Rav Lazer Yudel with the perception of a *tzadik*, saw a vision of a future *gadol*. With the right exposure to the sweetness of Torah, his nephew could blossom into a great leader. Rav Nosson Tzvi convinced his parents to let him stay with his great uncle for the duration of the trip. Rav Lazer Yudel paired him up with the finest study partners in the *yeshiva*. This was akin to taking a second grader and introducing him to top professors of applied mathematics at MIT. Rav Nosson Tzvi was smitten with the love of Torah. When his vacation stay ended, he reluctantly returned to the US. His parents had no desire to let their son stay in Israel before finishing high school.

On a fundraising trip to his hometown Chicago, Rav Nosson Tzvi visited the Skokie yeshiva where he had once been a student. He walked through the glass doors, stood in front of the boys and said, "I too am from Chicago and I too loved baseball and here I am a *rosh yeshiva*." This was his entire address and with these simple words he set the young boys' imaginations on fire. He was able to reach and

touch people with his message. Every summer Rav Nosson Tzvi would address the boys who attended the NCSY kollel in Israel. They would come to his home and he would say, "There's room for everyone in the world of *Torah*. Look where I am today. You too can make this quantum leap. All it requires is desire and abundant diligence." He wanted people to understand that to be an *adam gadol* you don't have to be raised in Bnei Brak or Brooklyn. He certainly wasn't.

After finishing high school, Rav Leizer Yudel sent his great nephew a one-way ticket to Israel. Taking advantage of the time his parents were away on vacation, Rav Nosson Tzvi departed to the airport accompanied by all his friends. This attests to his character and how well beloved he was by all. He arrived in Israel after a long protracted journey, hungry, disheveled, and tired. Rav Leizer Yudel greeted him happily, "Tell me a *chiddush* (novel Torah thought)." Rav Nosson Tzvi replied wearily, "Maybe in the morning when I'm rested." Rav Leizer Yudel immediately countered, "No *chiddush* no bed." Rav Nosson Tzvi shuffled off to the *beit midrash*. He returned a half hour later and related a question on the Tosfot. Rav Leizer Yudel gave him a kiss on the head and told him, "Go to sleep, we'll speak in the morning." And in time, the Mirrer *rosh yeshiva* built his nephew into a *gadol*.

## Meaningful Prayer: Thankfulness

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Chazal instituted three sections in the *shemonei esrei*, *shevach*, *bakasha*, and *hodaah*, the introductory praises, requests, and thanks. We begin by establishing that Hashem is the only address for all our prayers. We proceed on to requests which is the core of *shemonei esrei*. We plead both on an individual and communal basis for all our needs and deepest wishes. We end with thanks which is an intriguing and significant section. It's important to express thanks. We are so dependent on Hashem for all our

needs, that without Him we could not live for even a moment. If we don't show appreciation for all that we have already received, we are nothing but ingrates.

The Mishna says, Rav Yochanan ben Zakai blessed his students, "May your fear of Hashem be as great as your fear of people." At the minimum we should give the Master of the world the same courtesy we give people. If someone does you numerous favors, listens to your requests, and showers you with countless gifts, all of human civilization would demand

that you express thanks. The least we can show Hashem is appreciation. One shouldn't think, whether I say thank you or not, Hashem will give me life and sustenance. Nature is running its course anyway. Simple *derech erez* demands that one say thank you. Therefore after coming before Hashem with thirteen major requests, we express gratitude for all His kindness and goodness and for giving us the opportunity and privilege to stand before Him and pray.



## Derech Hashem: The Soul

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

This world in its present state is imperfect. Therefore there must be an end to all people and to the universe as it is now. The soul can't fully purify the body until it leaves it. It must die and disintegrate. Then the highest level of the soul, the *neshama*, will come back, purify the body, and rebuild it as a new home. This is *techiyat hameisim* (revival of the dead). The world itself will be destroyed in its present form and it will return and be renewed. This is what Chazal say, the world will exist 6,000 years and then it will be decimated. After the revival of the new world, people will be rewarded for the lives they lived and they will experience the wholeness and goodness that they chose through their deeds. Both our bodies and souls will have pleasure and will cease to be at war with each other, because the body will have been purified by the soul.

There are times in this world when we experience moments where the body and soul are at absolute peace. There's spiritual and physical pleasure in equal measure. I remember saying *birchat hachama* (blessing on the sun). I recall the pleasure of seeing the sun's physical light and the spiritual elevation of the moment when the sun returned to the way it had been at creation. It was a moment of absolute equality between what the body and soul were experiencing. In the world after the *tichya*, that is what life will be like. This doesn't mean all people will sense the same thing, because we're all different. We're the self we give birth to through our choices in the world as it is now. This world is called *olam avodah*, the world of work. It creates the context for the eternal future world of the *techiya*. According to what one attempts to achieve in one's path towards wholeness and how much one endeavors to get to the goal, to that extent will one be defined. The Rambam, the great rationalist, tells us in his epic halachic compendium the *Yad*, that every

person can be as elevated as Moshe. Everyone can endeavor, as Moshe did, to find the perfection their own life can lead them towards in a way that's realistic and authentic. In the world after the revival, the difference between you and me and the *gadol hador* next door, will be how much effort one put into one's life. The disintegration of the body is a necessary step for a person to come to grips with their soul and their true identity. The radiance of the soul comes from spiritual exertion and it is that which will purify and elevate both the body and soul so that they can come close to Hashem.

During the time of separation until *techiat hameisim*, both the soul and body each needs its own place. The body reverts back to its foundation, the earth itself, in order to be purified. It has to fall apart and lose its form. This is what Hashem said to Adam, "You are of dust and to dust you shall return." Each of the four observable elements of life, fire, earth, dust, and air from which everyone's body is composed, has a spiritual counterpart. Dust won't move unless you move it. In its negative state, this is laziness, despair, and depression. In its positive state, this is resilience, stability and humility. The body has to return to its positive state of humbleness and resilience. It has to be suppressed and redirected from where it may have misused its energies. Hashem created the world of souls where the souls who are worthy go after the death of the body. There they experience elevation and oneg, spiritual delight. Everyone has their own great moments. For some people spiritual pleasure will come through *nachat* or at the moment when they see things right and clear. For others it may come when they summon up the courage to do something difficult. Still for others it may be when they swallow their ego and make peace with their enemy. *Olam habah* is where you experience all those

moments. It's not only a place of *oneg* but a place of *maaleh* (ascension). It's not static. Since Hashem is infinite, recognition of his goodness takes you higher in *olam habah*. This is only a part of what we'll experience later after the revival of the dead. The soul's capacity to sense spiritual pleasure will depend on what it did in this world. Reward will be meted out according to what the soul developed itself into being. You have to be the ultimate vessel using every situation you were personally given to build you. The true and ultimate reward is not only for the soul or body but when they come back together after the revival of the dead.

Nobody reaches ultimate perfection in this world. This should be a source of great consolation when you catch yourself doing things you shouldn't. Of course you should repent. But this could also help you understand and like people better. No one's perfect. This is not the world of *sheleimut* (perfection) but the world of *tikun* (rectification). *Sheleimut* is only possible after death when one is no longer in the world of temptation. As long as the soul is in the body some of the evil and absence of divinity inherent in this world adheres to it. The soul is darkened and confused. But when one does a good deed two things happen, one's life's mission becomes clearer and one becomes more whole. The affect stays in *olam habah*. The body and the emotions that come forth from physical consciousness make it hard for the soul to sense what it has done. There's a certain kind of spiritual frustration people have because of all the goodness in their spiritual sub consciousness that they can't express it. After the *tichya*, the body and soul will reunite and will experience the purpose for which they were created.