

Parshas Haazinu Beyond Free Will

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Parshat Haazinu begins with the words, "*Haazinu hashamayim v'adabera v'sishma haaretz imrei fi*- Let the heavens be there as I speak and let the land listen to the utterances of my mouth." Rashi quotes the Sifri who writes that Hashem told Moshe to tell the Jews to learn from the sky and the earth. Although they don't receive reward, they continue to do Hashem's bidding. How much more so should we who receive reward, follow His command. Humans have free choice while nature is programmed to do Hashem's will. How can we understand this?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that there is a disagreement between the Rambam and the Ramban whether Adam and Chava had free choice in *Gan Eden*. The Ramban writes in *Parshat Nitzavim* that when *Mashiach* will come there will be no evil inclination. People will be so repulsed by evil that it will be impossible to sin. The Rambam disagrees and says there will be free choice. The difference is that the environment will be so conducive to awareness of Hashem that it will be easier to choose good. However, there will still be two paths. Likewise, the Ramban says that Adam and Chava were not given free choice. It was only limited to the Tree of Knowledge. However, the Gemara says clearly that Adam was given 6 of the 7 *mitzvot Bnei Noach*. If Adam had no free choice, why then was he given these *mitzvot*?

The Shem Mishmuel points out that if the sin is beyond one's free choice there is no temptation to do it. We see gentiles eating non-kosher food all the time and it never enters our mind to do the same. If we would

develop that same knowledge and sensibility for all 613 *mitzvot* then we wouldn't have to make choices. It would be so obvious that it was wrong. If I make the choice not to think about the consequence of sin, it leads to temptation. If the fires of *gehinom* don't exist in my mind I must make the choice between good and evil. *David Hamelech* was a great *Torah* scholar. After *Shachrit* he had to go to his royal chamber to deal with matters of state but invariably his legs would take him to the *beit midrash*. He had reached a point where it was so instinctive that there wasn't even a choice anymore. Of course, getting to that point involves training oneself and repeatedly making the right choices so that it becomes automatic. When we are on the level of the Ramban, it's not a choice anymore because it's so beyond us that in a sense we become like angels who can only do good. If a person allows the temptation for evil to be there, he is then presented with a choice and must choose good. It's a choice to be in a situation of choice and a choice to go beyond choice and this is what Adam faced.

Shem Mishmuel explains that at the beginning there's a learning stage, where there's free choice. But after a number of years of repeatedly choose the right thing we don't have to make choices anymore. Stage one is when the person may be tempted to do wrong. Stage two is when the person has already made the right decision enough times that it becomes ingrained. After the time of *Mashiach*, people will also go through these stages but it will start with stage two just as Adam started off with the instinct to do good. He was given the six *mitzvot* but he wasn't tempted to sin

because there was so much spirituality surrounding him. He was so imbued with Hashem's presence that he was instinctually driven to good and didn't have to struggle with evil. When the snake spoke to Chava, she moved away from that awareness of Hashem and introduced temptation. She went down to stage one making the decision to face choices and eventually chose the wrong choice. So too, in the days of *Mashiach*, there will be an overpowering awareness of Hashem, but we will still have the choice to go from stage two to stage one and face choices.

When Hashem told us that we can become like heaven and earth He meant to say that we can make a decision to go beyond temptation, to reach the higher level of angels where doing Hashem's will is instinctual. It's just a question how to get there, how to perfect ourselves to get to that level. We don't have to be stuck in stage one of free choice. We don't have to be in a constant struggle. We can go beyond that and be like heaven and earth. Of course, in many areas it is not easy, but it's certainly a goal.

Make the choice not to have to choose by putting yourself in a good environment whether it's college, a job, or a new neighbourhood. Don't put yourself in a situation of challenges. The snake argued that it's greater to serve Hashem through temptation. This is false. Hashem gives us enough tests. We should avoid unnecessary challenges and try to be like Adam before the sin, like the world after *Mashiach*, with such a powerful awareness of Hashem that evil fades to nothingness.

The Multiple Reasons for Happiness of Sukkot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The Torah emphasizes the obligation to be happy on *Sukkot* three times. Why?

We sit in a *sukka* to remember, "I made you dwell in booths..." Rabbi Eliezer says the booths were clouds of glory that surrounded the Jewish people. Rabbi Akiva says they were actual booths. The Jews had three

miraculous gifts in the desert, the mohn, the well, and the clouds. We don't have a *yom tov* to celebrate the mohn and the well, why the clouds? The *Sichot Mussar* explains that the mohn and the water were a must for survival. But the clouds were an act of love. The Zohar calls it, *tzila demeimenusa*, the shade of faith. Hashem invited the Jews into His domain and

protected them. To remember this love, we celebrate *Sukkot*. The clouds were with them already a half year before in Nissan. Why do we celebrate in *Tishrei*? In order to be in such close proximity to Hashem, one has to be worthy of it. After the Days of Awe and repentance when we are now clean of sin, we can be invited into the chamber of Hashem.

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Rabbi Akiva says we celebrate *Sukkot* to remember the booths. Why celebrate? When the Jews entered Israel and planted fields and then gathered in the harvest, there was a risk they would forget to thank Hashem. They would think it was the fruits of their own labor. Therefore, Hashem gave us the *mitzva* of *sukka* so that we would remember that in the desert we had nothing and Hashem provided for us. It's not our strength and capability. When we connect to Hashem and come close to Him, it creates tremendous joy. Therefore, *Sukkot* is at the time of the harvest.

The Mishna in Avot says, "Jealousy, desire, and the pursuit of honor take a person out of

this world." On *Sukkot*, we recognize that what we have is all from Hashem and that is the key to happiness.

It says about the *mitzva* of *lulav*, "Be happy in front of Hashem." Why does this *mitzva* make us happy? The *Midrash* tells us each of the four species have some aspect that symbolize Hashem. Remembering our relationship with Hashem makes us happy. Another *Midrash* tells us that the four species symbolize the four types of Jewish people, those with *Torah* and *mitzvot* and those without. We tie them all together so that it becomes one so that there is mutual atonement. This brings closeness to Hashem.

Physicality is limited and therefore there's room for jealousy and resentment. But if we understand that our goal should be spirituality and the things we have are only a means to fulfill our purpose, we can put all differences aside and unite with others. Good relationships are more precious than anything and are the source of happiness. Joy creates unity. Difficulties turn into challenges, an opportunity to take a world so removed from purity and bring it to holiness. This too creates happiness. We leave our comfortable homes and enter a flimsy shack, making the first step, the channel that will help us internalize what we learnt during the Days of Awe and take it with us throughout the year.

Sukkot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Sukkot is not about an event, but about our relationship with Hashem and being enveloped in His presence. For most of us who are observant, Hashem is always in the background. Why do we need to go out to the *sukka* to sense Him? A person might admit that Hashem is there, but he might not believe that He loves him enough to give him what he needs and therefore he can't sit back and must take care of himself. People can also forget Hashem because he's intangible in contrast to the physical world which is very visible. In addition, many people feel despair and anger when things don't go the way they want. There's a little voice that says this isn't how it should be. And because you believe in Hashem it will take you to despair thinking that you must have done something terrible either in this life or in another life. All these factors are enemies of *bitachon*. *Bitachon* doesn't mean believing in Hashem. It means developing a sense of Hashem's tangible immediate beneficence and presence in your life.

In *Chovos Halevovos* there are several premises given to be able to trust someone. He must care about you, be able to do what he promises, put you before anything else, and do whatever he sets forth to do. Only Hashem can do this. Humans have a need to trust and the only one we can trust is Hashem. Where does this trust come from? The first way to do so is noticing all of the

times that we as a people survived against all odds and moving that into our own life. Surely there were times when things happened, that if it wasn't for Hashem's help, could never have happened. The *sukka's* qualifications demand its fragility. It can't be a permanent structure to teach us that this world is transient and the only one who can protect us is Hashem. Money can give you freedom and pleasure, but it can't buy happiness. When you uplift physicality for spiritual purposes, it becomes eternal and that evokes true joy. This is the message of the *sukka*. Recognizing that we've survived for years without any observable means of self-protection and that Hashem who is intangible does things for us to sustain us, is the beginning of trust in Hashem.

One of the qualifications of the *sukka* is that it must be covered with *sechach* placed close together so that there's more shade than sun, but enough space to discern the stars. The embitterment and darkness in this world is meant to make us participants in our own self-creation. People give birth to themselves constantly through their choices. The darkness is functional. In the next world, we will have only one complaint - why was my life so easy. Real achievement always come at the price of struggle.

In order to have *bitachon* we need gratitude. How do we develop it? The *Zemach Zedek* used to say, "Think good and it will be good."

People take this to the wrong direction leaving Hashem out of the picture. Hashem will give you what's good for you whether this is what you ordered or not. If you think positive, you'll see everything in your present life as positive. In order to do that, you have to learn to control your mind. All of the obligations of the heart in the Torah are based on this assumption. You can't fulfill the *mitzva* of loving your fellow man or Hashem if you're full of hatred and jealousy. The first step to achieve *bitachon* is to recognize that you could be wherever you want to be. The next time you feel angry ask yourself, "Is this really where I want to be?" If the answer is no, then decide not to be there. Choose a different focus.

You have to take control of your thoughts, but you have to replace it with something. This is where prayer comes in. Prayer has two components, content and words. The *Chovos Halevovos* says the main thing is the content, but the words give you channels to let the content flow through. If our hearts were in the davening and the words were just a conduit, we wouldn't be afraid of life.

Living in the *sukka* all year is feeling the fragility of this world by recognizing the enormity of Hashem. It's understanding that this world is about facing challenges because when you make the right choices you become bigger, stronger, and more divine like.