

Pursuit of Purpose

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Changing The Way We Look At Mitzvos

based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

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In this week's Parsha, the Sefer Hachinuch (95) writes as follows, "Know my son, the only thing Hashem gets from us doing His Mitzvos is His will to do good for us. When a person refines and prepares himself through the Mitzvos to receive the good, then Hashem will do good to him. Therefore, He informed us of the good path, so that we can become good. The good path is the path of Torah, through it a person will be good. In conclusion, anyone who accepts the Mitzvos fulfills Hashem's desire, as he is now worthy of receiving the good."

A few insights can be derived from the Sefer Hachinuch. He starts off saying that the Mitzvos refine and prepare a person to receive the good, yet he concludes by saying that through a person just accepting to do the Mitzvos he will become worthy of receiving the good. We see from here that if a person sincerely accepts to do the Mitzvos, this alone has the power to mold and refine him to the extent that he will be worthy of Hashem's good.

Secondly, the Sefer Hachinuch seems to present a different perspective from how we normally look at Mitzvos and the reward for doing them. Generally we look at Mitzvos as a means to earn reward. While this is true, the Sefer Hachinuch presents a different point of view. It is not that the Mitzvah causes you to earn the reward, but rather the Mitzvah makes you capable of receiving the reward. In other words, Hashem wants to give us good even without earning it. However, in our present state we are unable to appreciate and derive benefit from that good. He therefore gave us Mitzvos to prepare us to be able to receive the good.

Often when a person views a Mitzvah as an opportunity to earn reward, he may be neglectful at times and either think that he already earned enough reward or he will pass on the opportunity and grab the next Mitzvah. However, when a person views himself in a way where without Mitzvos he is in a state in which he is incapable of appreciating and deriving the greatest benefit that exists, he can increase his motivation to do Mitzvos, as the Mitzvos allow him to receive the good that Hashem created the world to give.

The Secret To Our Tefillos Being Answered

The Sefer Hachinuch writes the following (606) on the Mitzvah of Kriah on Bikkurim, "A person awakens his thoughts and creates a picture in his heart of the truth, through the words of his mouth. Therefore, when Hashem does good to a person by blessing his

land to produce fruits, and he merits in bringing those fruits to the house of Hashem, it is appropriate to awaken his heart with his mouth and think that everything came to him from Hashem. He should tell over the kindness of Hashem that He did to him and to the entire Jewish People. Therefore, he begins with Hashem saving Yaakov Avinu from the hand of Lavan, and Hashem saving us from the hands of Mitzrayim. After we praise Hashem we ask Him to continue blessing us. Through awakening our soul in praise to Hashem, and His goodness, we will merit for our land to be blessed. It is for this reason that Hashem commanded us in this because he desires to do kindness to us."

Upon initial analysis this Sefer Hachinuch is perplexing. If the goal is for a person to focus on the fact that everything comes from Hashem, why is it necessary to focus on the kindness that Hashem did to the entire Jewish people going back to Yaakov Avinu and Lavan? Why is it not enough just to focus on the kindness that Hashem did to you by blessing you with fruit?

It seems from here that we can't fully appreciate the kindness of Hashem, unless we view each individual kindness as part of a whole system of Chesed. Hashem's kindness is not in a vacuum. It is not a one time occurrence, but it is part of a long history of constant Chesed. We have to see every kindness as a manifestation of עולם חסד יבנה. Our feeling has to be, not that Hashem was kind to me, but rather that Hashem is always kind to me. As we say in Hallel, הודו הודו כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו.

Another insight can be derived from the above Sefer Hachinuch. He explains the system of how our field continues to be blessed as follows: Through awakening our soul to praise Hashem and recognize His goodness, that causes us to merit that our Tefillos are answered. Often we view the power of our Tefillos being answered based on the strength of our request. However, it seems from here that our Tefillos being answered is based on our internalizing Hashem's goodness through our praise of Him. Perhaps this is why a Tefillah must be structured with praise before our request.

It is not uncommon for people to put forth full effort and concentration in their requests during Tefillah, but be lax in Pesukei D'zimra and praising Hashem. However, we see from the above that it is actually through praising Hashem that we merit our Tefillos being answered. We therefore need to be Mechazek ourselves in these areas.



Shir HaShirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks, hidden by the cliff, Rashi this is said regarding the time when Pharaoh pursued them and overtook them camping by the sea, let me see your appearance, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your appearance is comely. (Shir HaShirim 2:14)

The Medrash tells us: Klal Yisrael at that time was comparable to a princess whose father, the king, desired for her to speak with him. When he saw that she wouldn't, he arranged for some of his servants to act as though they were bandits and attack her. When the princess saw she had no choice, she cried out, "Father, Father save me." So too, Hashem desired to hear Klal Yisrael call out to Him, but they did not want to. Hashem then caused Pharaoh to pursue them. When they saw that they were being pursued they turned their eyes to Hashem and cried out to Him.

Rashi on Chumash (Shemos 14:10) explains that at that moment, the Yidden in desperation, "Grabbed on to the handicraft of their fathers." The Gur Aryeh explains that they didn't pray like a Tzaddik prays, for at the same time they were complaining to Moshe saying, "It would have been better for us to serve as slaves in Mitzrayim..." Rather, they naturally acted out according to what was ingrained into their nature from their parents.

We see from the above words of Chazal the spiritual state of Klal Yisrael at the time and that despite having just been redeemed from slavery through the unprecedented revelation of Hashem's love for them, they did not want to call out to Hashem, only doing so in fear of death. Yet, even at such a time and in such a state, what does Hashem say regarding their Tefillos? "Show me your appearance, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your appearance is beautiful." What is so beautiful about such reluctant Tefillos?

The answer is that the very fact that crying out to Hashem was without proper intent, but rather their natural instinct, shows us who Klal Yisroel, no matter their present level of spirituality, really are! Even at a time when they sinned and seem to be spurning Hashem's love, immediately following His saving them from eternal slavery, and even when their relationship seems to be on the rocks, their actions are a mere aberration, a coating of dirt covering the true beauty and sweetness of their soul and the depth of their eternal closeness to Hashem.



ELIEZER INSTITUTE Emunah Highlights

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Reb Pinchas Weinstock z'l was twenty years old in the year 1940 when the Germans approached his hometown. He and his family escaped by traveling south. They took along some chickens, so they could live off of the eggs; Reb Pinchas's father would bake bagels and sell them; and they would do other odd jobs to support themselves as they escaped from place to place, away from the Germans. Four years later, they found themselves in France. But then, Reb Pinchas fell ill with a contagious and deadly disease – typhus. The family was devastated; after everything they went through to save their lives, Reb Pinchas may die by a disease. But Reb Pinchas strengthened himself with Emunah. He said, "Ribono shel Olam, for four years I was running, trying to save my life. If it's Your desire that I die and return my soul to You, so be it. I accept Your decree with love." He was quarantined in the hospital. For months he was delirious and didn't know what was happening outside his closed ward. Unbeknownst to him, during that time, the German's invaded France. When Reb Pinchas finally recovered, he sought his family, and was told that they were all deported to Auschwitz. He was the sole survivor of his family. The disease, which everyone thought was a dreadful problem, proved to be his ticket for life. He lived a long, healthy life, and was niftar two years ago at the age of one hundred. He established a family with children and grandchildren, all going in the ways of the Torah. Throughout his life, he would repeat this story, so we should know that when one thinks that the worst is happening to him, it's really all for his best!

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