

Pursuit of Purpose

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The Fear of the Unknown

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

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנחם | הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר | רפאל חיים דוב בן בן-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה | שרה בת ר' יחזקאל | ראובן יוסף בן יהושע
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In this week's Parsha, the Medrash Rabbah states the following, "The day of death is better than the day someone is born. What is the reason for this? This is because on the day that one is born no one knows what his actions will be. However, when he dies his actions will be known to people. This is what it means that the day of death is better than the day someone is born. Rebbi Levi says that the following Mashal illustrates this idea, two boats went out to sea, one just embarked on its voyage, and the other just finished it's voyage and docked. The one that just embarked causes everyone to rejoice, and the one that just docked does not cause such a joyous reaction. A wise man who was watching said the reactions should be just the opposite, the boat that just embarked should not cause such a celebration, as it is unknown whether the water will be calm or the whether the boat will encounter a storm. However, the boat that entered the dock should cause a great celebration, as it is now known that it entered in peace and left the sea in peace."

Upon initial analysis this Medrash is quite perplexing and requires further clarification. The only factor that the Medrash is weighing into the discussion of whether the day one is born or the day of the death is better, is if the outcome is known or unknown. The Medrash seems to be ignoring a significant other factor, that on the day one is born he has potential to reach great

heights, and to live a life filled with Torah and Mitzvos. However, once someone dies he is no longer able to elevate himself and grow. Furthermore, the Medrash implies that this concept even applies to a person who did not accomplish much in his life, even for him the day of death is better due to the outcome being known, how can this be?

To explain this Medrash we must say that the fear of the unknown, and living with uncertainty is so difficult for a person to cope with, that this fear overrides the joy of having a clean slate and the potential for growth. In addition, the relief of the known even if it is not the desired result is more comforting than the opportunity to achieve the desired result. It is based on this understanding that the Medrash says that the day of death is better than the day one is born. This idea is echoed in the statement אין שמחה כהתרת ספיקות, there is no joy like the resolution of doubts.

This Medrash highlights the need for each one of us to work on our Bitachon. Life is filled with uncertainty, and it is clear from this Medrash, that this feeling is so overwhelming that it can override the joy and potential of the unknown. Bitachon in Hashem can combat this feeling and provide a sense of security and confidence that we are always being taken care of.



Shir HaShirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

“Through the study of Shir HaShirim I’ve come to realize my inherent greatness, but in a practical sense, in my daily life I’m not a mover and shaker, neither monetarily nor politically. Without seeing any real effect that I have on the world, it is hard to feel pride in myself. How do I deal with this?”

By simply realizing the truth that Chazal teach us, you will see how big of a “mover and shaker” you really are. As Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes (Nefesh HaChaim Sha’ar 1:4) “And this is the essence of man—each person in Yisroel should not say in his heart (Heaven forbid): ‘What am I, what power do I have to effect anything in the world via my lowly actions?’ Truthfully, one should understand and know and fix in his heart thoughts, that every detail of his actions, speech, and thoughts, in each instant and moment, are not for naught (Heaven forbid). And how many are his actions and how great and exalted, that each one rises according to its root to effect its result at the loftiest heights, in the worlds and highest levels of the heavenly lights.” Based on this, Rav Chaim then says a beautiful Pshat in the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:1): “And it is likely that this too is included in their (Chazal’s) intention in Pirkei Avos ‘Know what is above from you,’ as if to say that your eyes don’t see the awesome situations caused by your actions. However, know reliably that all that is caused above in the higher worlds, highest of the highest, all is ‘from you,’ according to the inclination of your actions—by their commands they go and come.

So next time you think, “But what real effect do I have on the world around me?” Remember Chazal’s answer: More than the effect of the president or ruler of any country on earth!



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“Is it a lack of Bitachon to trust that Hashem will help me through a specific natural means?”

The following Pesukim (Yirmiyahu 17:5-8 with commentary from the Malbim) answer this question: Cursed is he who trusts in man, who makes mere flesh his strength, for there are those who trust in man and nevertheless they trust in Hashem, that is they trust in Hashem that He will save them through a specific minister, for although he trusts in a man the main strength of his trust is in Hashem. However, one whose entire trust is in man to the extent that even the main strength of his trust is in flesh, for he trusts solely on flesh and turns his thoughts from Hashem, completely, he is cursed. He shall be like a bush in the desert, which does not sense the coming of good: It is set in the scorched places of the wilderness, in a barren land without inhabitant. Blessed is he who not only trusts in Hashem, but Hashem is “Mivtacho.” For one who trusts in Hashem that He will save him through natural means, though he trusts in Hashem, nevertheless, “Mivtacho” - meaning that through which he attains his trust, is not Hashem, rather, it is natural means which he trusts that through them Hashem will save him. Though he is not cursed since he does trust in Hashem, he is not blessed either. Only if one trusts completely in Hashem alone and not through any natural means at all, until Hashem is also “Mivtacho”- that through which he attains his trust. He shall be like a tree planted by waters, sending forth its roots by a stream: It does not sense the coming of heat, its leaves are ever fresh; It has no care in a year of drought, it does not cease to yield fruit.

Your Father-in-heaven is in complete control of every aspect of the world, let Him take care of it alone, He does not need your input as to how to accomplish that.