

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

Exploring the Greatness of Man

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-ציון שלום | ר' ברוך בן ר' יהודה | שרה בת ר' יחזקאל | ראובן יוסף בן יהושע | דב בעריש בן פסח צבי
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In Parshas Ki Seitzei the Torah tells us (21:22-23), “If a man shall have committed a sin whose judgment is death, and you shall hang him on the gallows. His body shall not remain for the night on the gallows, rather you shall surely bury him on that day, for a hanging person is a disgrace of G-d.”

The Seforno explains the rationale for why a hanging person is considered a disgrace of Hashem. He says, “Behold every object that is separated from matter is called Elokim, and regarding man the essence of the intelligent soul is called Tzelem Elokim, the image of G-d... The disgrace brought upon a deceased person after death is shameful to his intelligent soul, which is considered as the essence separated from matter that remains after the death of the body; hence it states that it is a reproach to Elokim, because allowing the hanging body to remain overnight without burial is shameful to that everlasting essence called Elokim.”

This Seforno provides us with a fascinating insight into our greatness. In this situation the Neshamah which exists eternally is no longer in the body. The body seemingly represents the animalistic side of a human being and is the polar opposite of the Neshamah. Therefore, one would have thought that once they are separated the Neshamah would have no connection to the body, and would not be impacted by anything that happens to the body. Yet, we see from here

that the Neshamah even after death is still connected to the body to the extent that it feels ashamed and insulted from what happens to the body. This means that the Kedushah of the Neshamah must fully permeate the body and remain connected to it even after death, how much more so when a person is alive. Often when we look at a person we see two parts to him: his G-dliness, and his humanity. From this Seforno it seems that our vision is blurred, and with a clearer perception, we will only see man's G-dliness.

Focusing on our greatness is the foundation of growth. This is best expressed by the Rabbeinu Yonah who says the following, “The first opening is that a person should know his own value and recognize his greatness and the greatness of his fathers, their greatness and value to Hashem. They should strive and constantly strengthen themselves to reach that level... What results from this is that when a person has a desire, and arrogance comes up in his heart to do something inappropriate he will be embarrassed in front of himself and his forefathers. He will return to his heart and say, ‘A great person like me who has all these lofty qualities, who is the son of kings, how can I do this very bad sin etc.’” We see from the Rabbeinu Yonah that focusing on our greatness allows us to set a new standard to aspire to which can help motivate change.