

A YOM KIPPUR/PARASHA THOUGHT

The Self Returns

For most people, the focus of Elul has always been the well-known contraction of the word "Elul" - Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li - I am to my Beloved (Hashem) and my Beloved is to me. For many, this contraction portrays what the whole month of Elul represents: an expression of desire to strengthen our relationship with Hashem. However, there is something very pertinent that must precede this. One of my Rebbeim, Rav Yakov Lieberman, used to share a very powerful maxim: before one focuses on the "Dodi" (Beloved), one must first focus on the "Ani" (I); only then can we come to focus on the "Dodi."

One must understand who one is, what one's strengths are as well as one's weaknesses. The Medrash in Eicha says "ksheim she'ein partzufaihem shavin, kach ein deiosaihem shavos" - just as we know that no two faces are the same, so too no two personalities are the same." People unaware of their own *techunas hanefesh* (abilities and personality) are ill-equipped, at best, to serve Hashem. Every person has his or her own mission for which the person was sent down into this world and Hashem gave each person the tools to carry it out. Without being aware of one's strengths and even weaknesses, one fails to understand one's own portion in *Avodas Hashem* and ultimately in one's mission to serve Him.

Imagine the following social experiment: a group of people are dropped off onto a deserted island and each person is given his or her own storage unit, full of paraphernalia to accompany the stay on the island. They are told only that the island should be a

functioning community by the end of their stay, but they aren't told their roles on the island; they'll have to figure it out on their own. The manager of the experiment tells them he'll be back in two weeks and he expects that they'll have finished whatever they were supposed to do by then. Each person on the island quickly realizes that they were given different things in their storage units. One person was given a lot of hardware: a drill, a hammer, and saws. Another person was given construction vehicles: an excavator, a bulldozer, a tree chopper, and a cement mixer. A third individual was given cooking supplies. A fourth individual was given a sewing machine and cloth and materials. The person with the construction vehicles is very excited; he gets to work right away. He's digging, drilling, and pouring cement before you can blink. Before you know it, the whole island is abuzz with sounds of building. The other individuals see their fellow island-mate and get very dissatisfied with their lot. What am I supposed to do with this stuff that I was given? How am I supposed to have fun and make lots of noise just like this fellow with the heavy machinery? They all decide individually to try their best despite the tough odds. The person with the hardware hammers away at the ground and saws away at every tree he sees, but to no avail - he accomplishes nothing. The person with the cooking equipment also attempts to emulate his friend who's having a lot of fun: he mixes water into his flour in an effort to make cement; he takes his pots and pans and attempts to knock down the obstacles in front of him. The other people on the island also try their hardest to accomplish as much as the fellow with the construction vehicles, but not one person has any success. No one can match the output or sheer joy

RABBI
YAAKOV
SAKLAD



LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

In the harsh words of the covenant of *Haazinu*, Hashem says that if it were not for the fact that the nations of the world would take credit for their destruction, He would have destroyed the Jewish people in His anger. Rashi explains that the nations of the world, if allowed to destroy the Jewish people, would pin their victory on their own greatness and on the greatness of their false gods. They would fail to see that it was, in fact, the greatness of Hashem that was behind it.

Concern for the nations praising their false gods is one of the reasons given for the *halacha* stated in the opening to *Meseches Avodah Zara* that one may not do business or other transactions with idolators three days before their holidays. According to Rashi, this prohibition was enacted to prevent these idolators from seeing these transactions as their successes and taking them as a source from which to draw praise to their deities. The Gemara, later, records the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael that the prohibition applies for three days after their holiday as well. Based on this, Shmuel says that with the idolatrous observance of Sunday as a day of worship, there would be a prohibition of transacting with them the entire week.

Tosofos wonders then, as a practical matter, on what basis did the people of his time justify doing business with



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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

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their non-Jewish neighbors. After rejecting some possible explanations, Tosofos says that it is no longer common for these worshipers to offer praise based on their success in business, in general. Additionally, because they are often regular trade partners with the Jews, who have an ongoing relationship, the non-Jews do not find anything significant about these transactions. The Sha"ch (Yoreh Deah 151:7) also says that their misguided beliefs do not rise to the level of idolatry that is prohibited for non-Jews. Although these beliefs would certainly be considered idolatrous for Jews, nevertheless, it is not a concern for the Jew to be the cause of the non-Jew offering praises under these circumstances. 🕒

A PARASHA THOUGHT

CONTINUED

of the man hard at work building. The manager of the experiment eventually comes back to the island and takes one look at the scene around him. It's an utter disaster, to say the least. Everyone and everything is falling apart. The whole island is starving, lacking adequate clothing, and missing basic necessities. The only thing that was accomplished was that there is shelter for everyone on the island. The manager asks everyone why it is that only one person managed to do his job and everyone else was unsuccessful. Overwhelmingly, he's told that they weren't given the proper tools to do their job. Had they been given the same tools as the first fellow, they also would've been able to do what he did. The manager explains to them that they were deliberately given different tools from each other. Everyone was supposed to realize that they were given tools based on the job that they were supposed to accomplish and that they simply didn't contemplate why they were given different tools.

The message here is that Hashem deliberately gave us different tools – different strengths, different weaknesses, and different life circumstances to match. We're even given, like the above Medrash states, different faces in order to remind us of this concept. We're supposed to be putting two and two together to realize what we're supposed to be doing in this world. Once we do this we'll be able to accomplish effectively. The Daas Tevunos states that we receive satisfaction when we feel that we're accomplishing our *tafkid* (mission in life). The *neshama*

isn't satisfied with physicality; it's only satisfied with spiritual achievement and specifically with accomplishing our *tafkid*. Once one figures out one's strengths and utilizes them, one will lead a life completely disconnected from jealousy and desire for different life circumstances. One will ultimately lead a happy life full of purpose and meaning. Without recognizing our own strengths, we can't properly connect to Hashem, as we don't have the faintest idea of what specifically is being demanded from us. We might even wear ourselves down trying to use our specific tools to accomplish someone else's mission.

The biggest *teshuva* one can do is by zeroing in on oneself, focusing on one's strengths and weaknesses, and tailoring one's *Avodas Hashem* to the tools that one has been given. Obviously, there are basic obligations which every Jew has, but the trajectory of their *Avodas Hashem* will be contingent on the understanding that they have of themselves. No one can ignore the dictates of *halacha* and claim that they aren't cut out to serve Hashem because they weren't given the abilities to do so.

It may be difficult to discover ourselves, but Hashem will help us along this journey. "*Habah leta'her, mesayein lo* – one who comes to purify oneself, Hashem will help him," and "*B'derech she'adam rotzeh leilech, molichin oso* – the way that a person wants to go, Hashem will lead him there." Rav Hirsh says on the *pasuk* in this week's *parasha* – "*K'neshet yair kuno al gozulu yeracheif* – like an eagle He awakes His nest, on His young birds He hovers," that just as an eagle will await its children to climb onto its back, Hashem will avail Himself to us to carry us on our journey – we just have to make the first step. 🕒



TRIVIA

RABBI GAVI KADISH

What items can be used for *kapparos*?

There is a fascinating Rashi (*Shabbos* 81B) that describes the process and timing of *kapparos*. Rashi says that people would take palm leaf baskets and fill them with dirt 15 or 22 days before Rosh Hashana for each boy and girl in the house. In these baskets they would plant either an Egyptian bean or legume. On erev Rosh HaShana everyone takes this plant and swings it around his or her head seven times and states, "this is instead of this, this is my replacement, this is my exchange," and would subsequently throw the plant into the river. Rashi clearly says that the custom was to do this on erev Rosh Hashana (unlike our *minhag*), and to use a bean plant. The *Shulchan Aruch* (605:1) is opposed to the proverbial *minhag* of using a chicken for *kapparos*. However, the Rama cites the *minhag*, and remarks that this is indeed the *minhag* and one should not tamper with it due to the fact that it is a "*minhag vasikin*." Why do we, in fact, use a chicken? The Tur cites two reasons. One is that chickens are more commonly found in the home than any other animal. The second reason is that a chicken is called "*gever*," and a man is called a "*gever*," therefore, it is best to exchange a "*gever*" with a "*gever*." What if one doesn't have access to chickens? The *Mishna Berura* (605:4) *paskens* that one can use a goose or other animals which are unfit for being used on the *mizbeach*. Why do we specifically choose an animal that is unfit for the *mizbeach*? The Magen Avraham (605:3) explains so that it shouldn't appear that one is sacrificing animals outside the *Bais Hamikdash*, which would constitute a serious offense. A special shout out to the boys in my Tuesday night *shiur* who mentioned using fish as a potential options for *kapparos* – an opinion cited in the *Mishna Berura* (605:4). Finally, many people use money as an alternative to chickens (*Mishna Berura* 605:2, see there for the reason). *Gmar chasima tova!* 🕒