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of Rabbinic Studies

בית המדרש ע"ש זיגלר

בשביל החיים
Walking with Life

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LEAVING THE WORLD

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As Reb Simhah Bunim of Przysucha lay dying, he heard his wife weeping. He said to her: "Why do you cry? Have not all the days of my life only been so that I might teach myself how to die?"¹

With this unit, as we conclude our investigation of the lifecycle, it is worth stopping to reflect on its nature. For any individual, the experience is of only one revolution of the cycle, from birth through death. While there are streams within Jewish tradition that believe in transmigration of souls – of souls returning to the earthly plane to perfect themselves through different life-times – for the most part the tradition has held that we experience earthly life only once. The classical tradition teaches of bodily resurrection at the end of time. Yet it is not for the purpose of reliving this lifetime or of eternal embodied life in a mundane plane; rather, it is a necessary component of the transition to the world-to-come. So, in our own lives, we experience only one turn.

But, in the course of a lifetime, we also witness and participate in the turning of the wheel of life in all of its forms. We all begin as infants and children, and if blessed with life we grow to share in the births of siblings, relatives or friends; we may marry or partner – as our parents and grandparents did – and then also bring forth children of our own; we grieve the death of our parents, even as we celebrate the arrival of grandchildren, the emergence of new generations. Thus, the “lifecycle” is not limited to what happens to us individually, the unique personal events of our lives, but comprises the experience of the many stages of many others’ lives cycling through ours. The sages of the Talmud recognized this, expressing it with regard to the rise and fall of wealth in families over time:

It was taught: Rabbi Eleazar Hakappar said: A person should always pray about this [poverty], because even if that person does not become poor, their child will, and if not their child, then that child’s child, since Scripture says: “[Give to your needy relation readily and have no regrets when you do so,] for it is because [*biglal*] of this that [The Holy One your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings].”² In relation to this verse, the School of Rabbi Ishmael taught: “It is a wheel [*galgal*] that turns in the world.” ... Rabbi Hiyya said to his wife: When a poor person comes, welcome him with bread, so that others may be quick to offer it to your children. She said to him: How can you say this? You curse your children! He said to her: Scripture says: “for it is because [*biglal*] of this” – regarding which the School of R. Ishmael taught: “It is a wheel [*galgal*] that turns in the world.”³

The wheel is always turning. While we may stand at one particular stage on our cycle, the cycles of others intersect with us, and we sense the rising and falling of the wheel throughout our lives. Even on our way “up” we sense and anticipate that we will also finally make our way “down.”

Thus we discover that the stages of the life-cycle are relational: we do not experience them by ourselves, nor can we perform the rituals associated with them alone. The dying die; they alone experience the process of their own death. But around them are those who care for them, accompanying them on the last stage of their journey, witnessing and taking in the fact of death, learning what it means to die. Still, it is impossible to know what it means to die except vicariously, and all that we imagine is just that, our imaginings. We witness the ease of the aged slipping into the calm of death and imagine that the transition is one of peace and quiet. We accompany those who struggle to breathe, whose path is pain, and we imagine that the passage is one of terror and suffering. Yet we still do not know what it means to die.

Our Rabbis taught: Were it not for the grinding sound of the sun on its wheel, the tumultuous sound of the throngs in Rome would be heard: and were it not for the sound of the crowds in Rome, the sound of the movement of the sun would be heard. Our Rabbis taught: There are three sounds that resonate from one end of the world to the other: The sound of the wheel of the sun; the sound of the multitudes in Rome, and the sound of the soul as it leaves the body.... The Sages prayed regarding the sound of the soul as it leaves the body and silenced it.⁴

¹ *Ramatayim Tzofim* 1:104

² *Deuteronomy* 15:10

³ *Babylonian Talmud Shabbat* 151b

⁴ *Babylonian Talmud, Yoma* 20b



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Raba was seated before Rabbi Nahman and saw him falling asleep [in death]. He said to Raba: Tell him [the Angel of Death] not to cause me pain. He said to him: But are you not an important man? He replied to him, Who is esteemed, who is regarded, who is distinguished [before the Angel of Death]? Raba said to him: Please show yourself to me [after your death]. He did show himself. Raba asked him: Did you suffer pain? He replied: Like taking a hair out of milk; and were the Holy Blessed One to say to me, “Go back to that world as you were,” I would not wish to, for the fear [of life and death] is great.⁵

The awareness of death is represented in the first text as a deafening cry emitted by the soul as it leaves the body. That sound – were it audible – would drown out all else, leaving us unable to function in our lives. While the sages of antiquity were able to annul the sound, they were not able to remove the fear that accompanied it, the terror that death strikes into our hearts. And it is not only when we witness physical death that the fear of death emerges in our hearts. Every experience of loss is a reminder of death; each frustration, each instance in which we sense our beings to be ignored, denied, nullified, is a taste of the final annihilation. For some people, that constant reminder of death is just too terrible. It is, for them, impossible to sustain and still remain compassionate, responsible, caring. Instead, they attune their lives to self-satisfaction, to doing anything that seems in the moment to deny death. This is the source of sin. The unwillingness to live fully, consciously and responsibly in the face of death is the root of injustice, cruelty, sadness and emotional suffering.

Raba son of Rav Ulla expounded: What is meant by, “[I envied the wanton; I saw the wicked at ease.] Death has no pangs [*hartzubot*] for them; their body [*ulam*] is healthy?”⁶ The Holy Blessed One said: It is not enough for the wicked that they do not tremble [*haredim*] and are not grief-stricken [*atzevim*] before the day of death, but their hearts are as firm as the Temple building [*ulam*]. This is similar to what Raba taught: What is meant by, “[Man can not last long in honor; he is like the beasts that perish.] Such is the fate of those who are foolishly self-confident [*kesel*]?”⁷ The wicked know that they are headed to death, but they have fat on their loins [*kislam* – understood to cloud their thought processes]. Further: so that you do not think their wickedness is due to forgetfulness, Scripture concludes: “they approve their end with their own mouths.”^{8/9}

There are those who, in the face of death, are unable to abide it, to accept it as it is. They imagine that in witnessing others dying they, too, are dying in that moment. They cannot imagine living when others die. That was the impulse that led to the tragic failure of the people following the rebellion of Korah and his fellow leaders.¹⁰ After witnessing the earth swallow Korah and his party, and fire consume those rebels who offered incense, the rest of the people became confused. They witnessed death and drew an incorrect conclusion: “We perish! We are lost, all of us lost! Everyone who so much as ventures near the Tabernacle of the Holy One must die. Alas, we are doomed to perish!”¹¹ Crazed with their fear of death, the people panicked and instigated yet more death and destruction.

But this is not the only possible response to death. It is also possible to stop in the moment of fear to investigate what is true. That which prompts intimations of death is not death itself. It is only danger, or surprise, or need. The terror at potential annihilation is only the fear of loss, a sense of invisibility, a slight to the ego. When we stop to investigate our true situation, we gain the space in time, and in our hearts and minds, to reconsider how to respond. We are able to calibrate our response according to the truth of our circumstances, and not out of our fear of death. Indeed, this is the lesson that Moses hoped to have shared with the people at the shore of the Sea:

The Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them...And they said to Moses, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness?”...But Moses said to the people, “Have no fear! Hold still, and see the deliverance that the Holy One will work for you today.”¹²

⁵ *Babylonian Talmud Mo'ed Katan 28a*

⁶ *Psalms 73:3-4*

⁷ *Psalms 49:13-14*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 31b*

¹⁰ *Numbers 17ff*

¹¹ *Numbers 17:17-18*

¹² *Exodus 14:10-13*



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Rabbi Yehudah Meir Alter of Gur asked: how could the people have complained against Moses so soon after having left Egypt and witnessing all of the miracles? Understand it this way: the people knew that in leaving Egypt they were also emerging from the deepest depths of impurity, of spiritual confusion and constrained consciousness, to strive for a life of holiness. When they saw the Egyptians pursuing them, it seemed to them as if they were still stuck in the mire of impurity as before. It was to that Moses responded: “Hold still, and see the deliverance that the Holy One will work for you today” – that is, “hold still; realize that the very fact that you can see and understand the difficulty of your situation is God’s saving power! Before this, you could not see your situation at all, and could not appreciate how to get out of it.” When one sees one’s true situation one has the capacity to be relieved, saved.¹³

The ability to face one’s true situation has other repercussions, too:

Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Yonatan were once walking about in a cemetery, and Rabbi Yonatan’s *tzitzit* dropped to the ground. Rabbi Hiyya said to him: Lift it up, so that the dead will not say: Tomorrow they are coming here yet today they insult us! He said to him: How do they know all this? Does not Scripture say: “But the dead know nothing?”¹⁴ He replied to him: Have you not had it explained to you? Scripture says: “For the living know that they shall die”: these are the righteous, who even in their death are called “living”, as it says: “And Benaiah the son of Yehoyadah, the son of a living man [*ben ish hai*].”¹⁵... Scripture says: “The son of a living man”: are all other people then the children of dead men? Rather, “the son of a living man” means that even in his death he was called “living”.... “But the dead know nothing”: These are the wicked, who even in their lifetime are called “dead,” as it says... “By the testimony of two witnesses shall the dead be put to death [*yumat hamet*].”¹⁶ But he is still alive! Rather, it is as if he is dead already.¹⁷

An aspect of character that contributes to being “righteous” is the capacity to face the truth of mortality, the inevitability of death and yet remain engaged in life, balanced, wholehearted, compassionate and just. We must bring constant attention to our response to the assaults on our sense of self, our ego, our base fears as well as our legitimate needs – assaults that echo death and annihilation. At risk always of being distracted, we must bring our attention back over and over to our present experience, so that we do not slip into fantasy and fear. Vulnerable to mental and spiritual fatigue, we must return over and over to the root of our awareness: this breath of life, moving in and out, reminding us that we are indeed, despite all fears and fantasies, alive. It takes work not succumb to a premature spiritual death.

This is the true work of *teshuvah*: repentance, yes, but also “return” – return to the ground of truth, the fundamental awareness of being alive in the face of death. This process of return is transformative. It raises us up out of despair and inspires action despite the inevitability of the grave. Never denying death, a life lived in constant return, *teshuvah*, will be one that is filled with awareness of each moment lived, attentive to the preciousness of each moment shared with others, and so attentive to their needs.

Rabbi Eliezer taught: “Repent one day before your death.”¹⁸ Rabbi Eliezer’s disciples asked him: Can anyone know on which day one will die? He replied: Then all the more reason that we engage in *teshuvah* today lest we die tomorrow! In that manner, all our days will be transformed.¹⁹

Rabbi Ya’akov taught: better is one hour spent in self-transformation [*teshuvah*] and doing good deeds in this world than the whole of the world-to-come; better is one hour of ease of spirit in the world-to-come than the whole of the life of this world.²⁰

¹³ *Hiddushei HaRi”M, Siach Sarfei Kodesh, Beshallah*

¹⁴ *Ecclesiastes 9:5*

¹⁵ *II Samuel 23:20*

¹⁶ *Deuteronomy 17:6*

¹⁷ *Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 18a – 18b*

¹⁸ *Mishnah Avot 2:10*

¹⁹ *Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 153a*

²⁰ *Mishnah Avot 4:17*



LEAVING THE WORLD

When we come to see ourselves not only riding on the wheel of our own personal “cycle of life” but constantly rising and falling through the cycles of all life, we are liberated from the limited term of our own mortality, able to taste the eternity of all existence. In this world, we experience the world-to-come. A life lived in *teshuvah* will not only lead us to a life of righteousness, it will free us to live each moment fully, never dying in the midst of living, never giving in to death until the last moment. A life lived in *teshuvah* may make it possible that we die unconfused.

The challenge that we face in life is not to die every minute, not to retreat from engagement for fear of loss, not to abjure love or altruism because we will not attain everything we desire. Indeed, over and over we are forced to pass through the experiences of loss, of frustration, of fatigue. Yet we can survive them when we live our lives in *teshuvah*, realizing that we are constantly returned to wholeness, to inner balance, expanded consciousness and energetic engagement – until that very last moment. We suffer small deaths over and over, but are returned to life so that we might be less afraid of, live less in the shadow of, our death. That is what it means to experience our passage through the cycle of life. That is our true hope for salvation. That is how we might attain true eternal life even in this world.



LEAVING THE WORLD – TEXT 1

ספר קול מבשר ח"א - פרשת בראשית

ט. טעם התחלת התורה בבי"ת. נלפענ"ד עפי"ד רבינו הרב ר' בונים מפרשיסחא זי"ע, שאמר שצריך כל איש מישראל להיות לו ב' קעשינעס (שני כיסים), להשתמש בהם בעת צרכו. והיינו, כאשר היצה"ר מראה לו את גדלו ורוב תורתו ועבודתו, אז צריך לומר, ואנכי עפר ואפר, (בראשית י"ח כז) וכאן וכאן נחשבו כל מעשיו הטובים. וכאשר היצה"ר מראה לו חטאיו ושפלותו, אז צריך לומר, בשבילי נברא העולם, ועדיין יש לי תקנה. ומש"ה פתח הקב"ה התורה בבי"ת, לרמוז על ב' דברים הללו שצריך האדם להיות לו תמיד, ועי"ז יוכל לבוא לקיום התורה והמצוות.

KOL MEVASER,¹ GENESIS 1:8

Why does the Torah begin with the letter *bet*? I suggest that we can understand this according to the teaching of Rabbi Simhah Bunim of Przysucha. He taught that every Jew should have two pockets, and to use them when needed. That is, when the yetzer hara reflects back to him his greatness, and how much Torah he has learned, and how devoted he is in his service of God (trying to provoke him to haughtiness), he should say, "I am but dust and ashes" [Genesis 18:27], and all of my good deeds amount to nothing in the end. But, when the yetzer hara reflects back her sins and unworthiness, she must say "For my sake was the world created" [Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4:5] and therefore I still have hope.

That is why the Torah begins with the letter *bet* (which signifies the number two): to point to these two things that we are to remember always, and whereby we will be able to keep the Torah and mitzvot...

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Why do you think Rabbi Simhah Bunim specifically chose the two texts he chose?
- How might the awareness of our mortality make us more humble?
- How might the awareness of our importance help us to study Torah and keep the mitzvot?
- Can you relate each of these texts to the first letter of the Torah? How?

¹ Rabbi Meshullam Rath, 1865-1963



LEAVING THE WORLD – TEXT 2

מדרש רבה שמות פרשה מח:א

וְיוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹלָדוֹ. יוֹם מֵיָתוֹתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם גְּדוֹל מִיּוֹם לֵידָתוֹ. לָמָּה? שֶׁבְּיוֹם שְׁנוֹלָד בּוֹ אֵין אָדָם יוֹדֵעַ מַה מַּעֲשָׂיו אֲבָל כְּשִׁמַּת מוֹדִיעַ מַעֲשָׂיו לְבָרִיּוֹת. הַיּוֹם יוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹלָדוֹ. אָמַר ר' לוי: מְשַׁל, לְשִׁתִּי סְפִינוֹת שֶׁהֵיוּ פּוֹרְשׁוֹת לַיָּם הַגְּדוֹל, אַחַת יוֹצֵאת מִן הַלְּמִין וְאַחַת נֹכְנֶסֶת לַלְּמִין. זֶה שִׁוְצָאָת, הֵיוּ הַכֹּל שְׂמַחִין בָּהּ; זֶה שֶׁנִּכְנְסָת לֹא הֵיוּ הַכֹּל שְׂמַחִין בָּהּ. פִּקְחָ אֶחָד הָיָה שֵׁם אָמַר: חֲלוּפֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲנִי רוֹאֶה כְּאֵן. זֶה שֶׁהִיא יוֹצֵאת מִן הַלְּמִין לֹא הֵיוּ הַכֹּל צָרִיכִים לְשִׂמּוּחַ, שְׂאִיֵּן יוֹדְעִין בְּאִיזָה פֶּרֶק הִיא עוֹמֶדֶת וַיְמָה יְמִים מְזַדְּוֹגִין לָהּ וַיְמָה רִוּחוֹת מְזַדְּוֹגוֹת לָהּ. וְזֶה שֶׁנִּכְנְסָת לַלְּמִין, הֵיוּ הַכֹּל צָרִיכִין לְשִׂמּוּחַ לְפִי שֶׁהֵם יוֹדְעִים שֶׁנִּכְנְסָת בְּשָׁלוֹם וְיוֹצֵאת בְּשָׁלוֹם מִן הַיָּם. כִּדְ אָדָם: נוֹלָד מוֹנִין לוֹ לְמִיתָה; מֵת מוֹנִין לוֹ לְחַיִּים. וְעָלָיו אָמַר שְׁלֹמֹה (קֹהֶלֶת ז א) וְיוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹלָדוֹ.

MIDRASH RABBAH SHEMOT 48:1

“[A good name is better than fragrant oil,] and the day of death than the day of birth [Ecclesiastes 7:1].” The day on which a man dies is greater than the day on which he was born. How so? On the day of his birth no one knows what his deeds will be; but at his death, his good deeds are made known to all. It is for this reason that “better is the day of death than the day of birth.” Rabbi Levi said: “This can be compared to two ocean-going ships, one leaving the harbor and the other entering. For the one that was leaving, all were celebrating; for the one entering there were none who rejoiced. A wise man there, observing, said: ‘Things here appear inverted! For that ship leaving the harbor no one should celebrate, since they do not know her true condition, what seas she may encounter, and what wind she may have to face. But everybody ought to rejoice at the ship that is returning into harbor, as they know that she set forth in safety and returned whole from the sea.’ Similarly, when a man is born, every year brings the day of his death nearer, but when he dies, one begins to account his days for life. And concerning this, Solomon said: “better is the day of death than the day of birth.”

STUDY QUESTIONS

- How does this passage help to explain the Jewish preference for marking the *yahrzeit* (anniversary of the death) of a loved one over celebrating birthdays?
- Can you think of an alternative image to the one of the two ships, that teaches the same lesson?
- How might these teachings affect your relationship with your elders?
- How might these teachings affect how you see yourself and how you view the years left you in your life?



LEAVING THE WORLD – TEXT 3

דברים יד:ז

וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בְּי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם הַיּוֹם:

DEUTERONOMY 4:4

You who hold fast to the Holy One your God are all alive today.

ספר דגל מחנה אפרים - פרשת ואתחנן ד"ה עוד

עוד ירמוז כַּדּוּעַ ה' אֶחָד וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הֵם אֶחָד כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (שמואל - ב ז', כ"ג) "וּמִי כְעַמֶּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד", וְלִכְךָ הֵם דְּבוּקִים בַּהֲשִׁי"ת, כִּי נֶאֱמָר לְאֶחָד לְדָבֵק בְּאֶחָד. וְאַיִמְתִּי הוּא? כְּשִׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל הֵם אֶגּוּדִים וְדְבוּקִים יָחַד בְּאַחֲדוּת גָּמוּר. אִזּוֹ לְאֶחָד יִחְשְׁבוּ, וְשׁוֹרָה עֲלֵיהֶם ה' בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁהוּא אֶחָד. אֲבָל כְּשֶׁחֲלִילָה חִלַּק לָבָם, וְנִפְרְדִים זֶה מִזֶּה, אִי אֶפְשֶׁר לָהֶם לְהִיּוֹת דְּבוּקִים בְּאֶחָד, וְאִין הַשֵּׁם שׁוֹרָה עֲלֵיהֶם (חֵס וְחֲלִילָה) וְשׁוֹרָה (חֲלִילָה) אֵל זֶר עֲלֵיהֶם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (דברים ל"א, י"ז) "עַל כִּי אִין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקַרְבֵי מִצְאוּנֵי הָרְעוּת הָאֵלֶּה". אִזּוֹ נִחְשְׁבִים לְבַחֲנִית "מִיתָה" שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת סַמָּא"ל.

זֶה יֵשׁ לֹמֵר הָרַמְזוּ בַּפְּסוּק "וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים": הֵיינו כְּשֶׁתְּהִי דְּבוּקִים וְנֶאֱחָדִים זֶה בְּזֶה, אִזּוֹ "בַּה" אֱלֹהֵיכֶם" הֵיינו בְּנֻדְאֵי דְּבוּקִים בַּה', אֶחָד בְּאֶחָד, וְשׁוֹרָה עֲלֵיהֶם הַשֵּׁם בְּרוּךְ הוּא, חִי לְכָל הַחַיִּים. וְזֶהוּ "חַיִּים כּוֹלְכִים". אֲבָל לְהִיפּוּךְ (חֵס וְחֲלִילָה) נִחְשְׁבִים כְּמִתִּים כ"ל. אֲבָל כְּשֶׁהֵם בְּאַחֲדוּת אֶחָד אִזּוֹ נֶאֱמָר לְאֶחָד לְדָבֵק בְּאֶחָד וְשׁוֹרָה עֲלֵיהֶם ה' אֶחָד אָמֵן:

SEFER DEGEL MAHANE EFRAIM¹: VA-ETHANAN

Another secret meaning: it is known that God is a complete unity and Israel is a complete unity, as it says: "And who is like Your people Israel, one nation in the land? [II Samuel 7:23]." That is why Israel hold fast, cleaving to God: it is proper for unity to cleave to unity. But when is this fully true? When all the Jews hold fast, cleaving one to another in a complete unity. Then Israel is truly considered "one", and God dwells in them, as God is "one" as well. But when their hearts are confused and they separate one from another, it is impossible for them to cleave together into a unity, and God cannot dwell in them, and instead (as it were, and heaven forbid) a "strange god" settles on them, as it says: "It is because God is not in me that these misfortunes have befallen me [Deuteronomy 31:17]." When the heart is confused and cut off from others can be considered as state of Samael [the Angel of Death].

This, then, is the secret meaning of our verse: "You who hold fast" – when you hold fast to life and to each other, and so are unified one with the other – then you are certainly connected, cleaving "to the Holy One your God" – a unity tied to a unity, such that God, the life of all existence, dwells in you. That is the sense of the phrase "are all alive today" – you are completely alive since you are connected to the source of all life. But, when the opposite holds (heaven forbid), then you are considered like the dead. But, when you are whole and unified in yourself, then it is proper for unity to cleave to unity, and the One God will dwell in you. Amen.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- How many different sorts of unity are suggested by this passage?
- How do they relate to each other?
- Why is it like death when the heart is cut off and confused?
- What, according to this author, are the ways in which to be completely alive? Can you think of others which could be learned from this verse of Torah?

¹ Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Efraimof Snylkov, d. 1800



LEAVING THE WORLD – TEXT 3

ספר נועם אלימלך - פרשת חיי שרה

וְזֶהוּ 'וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה': לְשׁוֹן הוֹי"ה וְקִישׁוֹר בְּחַיִּים הַנִּצְחָיִים. "שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה" -- כּוֹלֵךְ שְׁוִין לְטוֹבָה: רְמִזָּה, אַחֲרַי שְׂיִזְכָּה הַצְּדִיק לְמִדְרָגָה זֹאת, אֲזִי הַכֹּל שֶׁנֶּה לוֹ לְטוֹבָה, הֵן שְׂמֻנְגִינִים אוֹ מְשֻׁבְּחִים אוֹתוֹ, הַכֹּל שְׁוֶה לוֹ לְטוֹבָה.

וְהִנֵּה יוֹתֵר צָרִיךְ הָאָדָם לְהִתְחַזֵּק לְקַדֵּשׁ עַצְמוֹ בְּאֲכִילָתוֹ וּשְׂתִיָּתוֹ בְּקְדוּשָׁה וּבְטַהָרָה, שְׁעַל יְדֵי זֶה הוּא מוֹצֵא נִיצוּצוֹת קְדוּשׁוֹת, וְעַל יְדֵי זֶה זֹכָה לְחַיִּים הַנִּצְחָיִים. וְזֶהוּ שְׂאֵמֶר אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם לְהַמְלֵאכִים: "וְהִשְׁעֵנוּ תַחַת הָעֵץ" -- רוֹצֵה לומר תַּחַת עֵץ הַחַיִּים. עַל יְדֵי זֹאת "וְאִקְחָה פֶת לָחֶם". דְּהֵינּוּ עַל יְדֵי אֲכִילָה כּנ"ל.

וְזֶהוּ 'וַיֵּאמֶר ה' הֵן הָאָדָם כּו' וְעַתָּה פֶן יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מִגַּעַץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחַי לְעוֹלָם". יֵשׁ לוֹמֵר הַפִּירֶשׁ כָּךְ: דְּהֵנָּה הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּרוֹב רַחֲמָיו, רוֹצֵה בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה, שְׂתִיָּתְקוֹן אָדָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר קִלְקַל... כִּי אִם בְּזֶה הָעוֹלָם יוֹכַל לְתִקּוֹן לְהוֹצִיא נִיצוּצוֹת קְדוּשִׁים כּנ"ל.

וְהַצְּדִיק הַזֶּה הִמְתַּנְּהֵג בְּקְדוּשָׁה, בְּתוֹרָה וּבְאֲכִילָה וּבְשְׂתִיָּה וּבְכָל מַעֲשָׂיו, הוּא מוֹשֵׁךְ הַשְּׁפָעוֹת חֲסִדִים לְעוֹלָם...

No'AM ELIMELEKH,¹ HAYYEI SARAH

This is how we should understand our verse: "These were the lives of [*vayehiyu chayyei*] Sarah" [Genesis 23:1] – the verb signifies vitality from the divine source, a connection to eternal life. "The years of lives [*shnei chayyei*] of Sarah": the midrash teaches – "they were all equally for the good." This is meant to teach us that when a righteous person attains this degree of spiritual awareness, that all becomes equally for the good for her – whether others despise or praise her it is all one, and equally good.

Toward this end, it is even more important for us to strive to sanctify ourselves when we eat and drink. When we conduct ourselves in holiness and purity in this regard, we discover sparks of holiness (in what we eat and drink) and thereby merit eternal life. This is what Abraham intended when he spoke to the visiting angels saying: "[Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet] and recline under the tree [Genesis 18:4]". He meant "recline under the Tree of Life", for that was how he would then "fetch a morsel of bread [that you may refresh yourselves; then go on] [Genesis 18:5]," – through their consumption of the food.

We know this from the following: "And the Holy One, God, said, "Now that the man [has become like one of us, knowing good and bad,] and now, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever! [Genesis 3:22]" Out of great compassion, God desires that human beings transform their lives, returning to a path of wholeness and life; through teshuvah to repair that which they have spoiled...It is only in this world that it is possible to bring about repair, and to bring forth holy sparks as explained above.

Now, any righteous person who conducts himself in holiness, in study of Torah as well as in eating and drinking, in all of his activities, draws down divine love into this world...

STUDY QUESTIONS

- **What do you understand the "holy sparks" to be?**
- **How do they relate to drawing divine love down into the world?**
- **When you reflect on your life "outside the garden," do you experience it as exile?**
- **What would be lost or gained by humans returning to Eden?
learned from this verse of Torah?**

¹ Rabbi Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, d. 1786



LEAVING THE WORLD – TEXT FOR GROUP STUDY

PSALM 146

Hallelujah!

Praise the Holy One, O my soul!

I will praise the Holy One all my life,

sing hymns to my God while I exist.

Put not your trust in the great,

in mortal man who cannot save.

His breath departs;

he returns to the dust;

on that day his plans come to nothing.

Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help,

whose hope is in the Holy One his God,

maker of heaven and earth,

the sea and all that is in them;

who keeps faith forever (alt.: who protects the truth for the world);

who enacts justice for those who are wronged,

gives food to the hungry.

The Holy One sets prisoners free;

The Holy One restores sight to the blind;

The Holy One makes those who are bent stand straight;

The Holy One loves the righteous;

The Holy One protects the stranger;

He gives courage to the orphan and widow,

but makes the path of the wicked tortuous.

The Holy One shall reign forever,

your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Hallelujah!

FROM THE *AMIDAH*

You sustain all life with love, bringing life to the dead with great compassion.

You support those who fall, heal those who are sick and set prisoners free. And you keep faith with those who sleep in dust.

Who is like You, O Mighty One, and who can be compared to You, O Sovereign who brings both death and life, blossoming forth salvation?

You can be trusted to bring life to the dead.

Praised are You, God: You bring life to the dead.





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