



Footsteps of Our Fathers - Perek 5 Mishnah 6
UNCLOGGING THE HEART

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You know, sometimes you wonder where and when it will be heard. I mean the reasonable, warm and caring message of our Torah. It is such a safe and caring place to those who follow it, yet so many are living in darkness without any inkling of what Hashem's words can do for them. Perhaps this is because all too often Hashem's words are heard through the garbled-up filtration system that is the secular mindset. Our hearts get hardened by the worlds latest fit of madness. Today the Yatzer Horah has a new name, 'Woke' and its poison is swamping over all. I'm often left dumbfounded by statements well-meaning people make that are the product of the insidious diet of immorality being served up in all segments of society.

it is hard to dislodge spiritual sludge that is imbedded in the heart. Therefore, assimilating new truths must be done slowly so that the heart can accept its mistakes when it comes to major lifestyle decisions.

After the Churban of the Second World War, many of the works of the Tzaddik and Kodosh, the Piacsezna Rebbe ZTL, were found in a hidden cache that had been buried in the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto. Among these holy gems was a spiritual journal that the Rebbe had written over several years. In one chapter, dated Motzei Shabbos, the first night of Selichos 5689 (1929), we find the following: "I am exhausted from talking to people about Hashem. I am constantly trying to convey how Hashem is so imminent, His Presence right in front of us, even within us, in our thoughts and our actions. Hashem fills our entire outer and inner worlds, our deepest recesses and all our life experiences.

"But all people see is the earthly world, and they bury their heads in it with their entire beings. If only they would listen to my cries: 'Follow the voice of Hashem in all your physical and spiritual actions - your entire life is in His Presence'"

Hashem created the entire world during the six days of creation. Everything was perfect and whole, with His Essence shining forth from every speck, nook and cranny. After man was created the entire creation was ripe for total spiritual realisation.

And then man sinned, and nothing would ever be the same again. The perfection that was inherent in the original creation was one which could only be understood by a world free of any sense of sin. After Adam's mistake there had to be a new understanding, a new reality. In fact, the

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world teetered at the brink, for there was no certainty that a world with sin could have an existence at all.

The Sefas Emes tells us that at this decisive moment Adam acknowledged his mistake, did teshuva and hence changed the balance once more. The sinner became the baal teshuva. Hashem then enhanced His universe, creating in those closing moments of the sixth day of creation several creations that would be significant to the new teshuva-dominated world.

Our mishna hints of this and enumerates what these new creations were. "Ten things were created on Shabbos eve, at twilight." In the list that follows one can trace most of the items to the new teshuva worldview. For example, we find "the mouth of the earth, the mouth of the well, the mouth of the donkey." In his sefer on Pirkei Avos, Harav Yosef Stern quotes the Pnei Menachem who notes that these three openings correspond to the three-character flaws that so often plague us - jealousy, lust and glory. Korach was driven in his rebellion against Moshe by jealousy and was swallowed by the earth. The Jewish people's lust for water was satisfied by Miriam's well. Bilam, who despite his pretenses of humility eagerly sought honor and glory, was humiliated by his donkey.

What we see here is the creation of new spiritual tools that could be seen as mundane but were actually unique for their place in facilitating teshuva. This is all too often where we go wrong in our own lives. As the Piacsezna Rebbe decried, "All people see is the earthly world, and they bury their heads in it." We become so swallowed up in our own gaping hole in the material ground that is our lives that we fail to see the twilight, the hope of creating a new and better place around us.

Twilight is a special time, especially Friday twilight which leads into Shabbos. That is when we take a bit of the holiness of Shabbos and bring it into the workday week that is Friday. This overlapping makes it possible to see the holiness that abides in the mundane everyday all the more clearer.

The Piacsezna Rebbe continues in his journal, "When I left that Friday night tisch, I gave up; no one had been listening to me anyway. So, I began to talk to the universe. I opened my window and saw an entire world just waiting for someone to acknowledge its beauty. I was about to recite the bedtime kerias Shema, so I spoke to the world and cried out to it: Shema Yisrael...Hashem is One! I continued reciting: Enlighten the world with Your Glory...Blessed is Hashem by day, blessed is He by night... Adon olam, Master of the universe Who reigned before creation..."

With these heartfelt tefillos the Rebbe became encouraged, and he writes that all his understanding and strength returned.

Sure, things get difficult at times, dark and even foreboding. But that's just the point. This world is not in a stage of perfection. It needs our teshuva, our heartfelt will to come closer to Hashem. All we must remember is that the implements are there, created in that overlapping moment when the mundane touched the sanctified. If we say it, recall it and yes, open the window of our souls so as to feel it, then joy can find its way into our parched lives.

The Rebbe tells us that when we fill our hearts with words of courage and belief, then the world will reveal its holiness, as he writes, "Perhaps then its inhabitants will also become hallowed with it." We see a living example of this today in the success of the many kiruv organizations. I firmly believe that as much as a student gains from his involvement in a kiruv program, his teacher gains just as much, if not more, from teaching him.

The Rebbe was talking to committed Yidden in pre-Holocaust Poland, Chassidim of long-standing, Yidden whose generations reached back to the beginnings of our people, yet who were stuck with hearts full of the mundane. The Rebbe wasn't dispirited from talking to folk who had no knowledge of Torah practice; no, he was weary from "preaching to the converted." But he recouped his strength and continued to hope and shine. The world was enhanced, and with G-dly timing it has indeed become a world uniquely made for teshuva.

That window of teshuva is open now, the words Shema Yisrael are on the lips, Hashem is within each of us; thus, we dare never despair.

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