

Fascinating INSIGHTS

יא' תמוז תש"פ

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[Many Roads, One Destination](#)

There is plenty of variety in Judaism that many take advantage of. These include attending a Chassidish Tisch, learning Chassidus, joining a Kabbalas Shabbos with lots of singing, the analytical Brisker way of learning and so on. How can we know for ourselves what to take part in?

The answer is that if something brings us close to Hashem, then we can pursue it. This is hinted to in ואני י טוב קרבת אלהים לי טוב—if it brings us close to Hashem, then it is good.¹

There is no one way in Avodas Hashem. For this reason, there are so many different factions within Judaism—Sefardim, Chassidim, Litvaks and so on. Even within these, there are various groups. Within Sefardim there are Yemenites, Moroccans among many others. Likewise among Chassidim, there are many groups—Ger, Viznitz, Breslov and Skver to name just a few. Then there are those that comprise themselves from some or all of these.

One way is not more correct than the other rather one must choose that which brings him close to Hashem. A way to comprehend this is that just as there are many ways for example to get to the number 19—11 added to 8, 14 and 5, 10 and 9 and so on. Similarly, there are many paths in Avodas Hashem. Another way to understand this is when one drives for instance from New York to Los Angeles there are many different routes to take to reach the destination. Likewise, the same is with

¹ Tehillim 73:28. We can also apply this to other aspects of life. Talking to a friend before one learns or eating good food to help one get into a better mood also may be the right thing to do. The way to determine this is to evaluate if it will bring us closer to Hashem. Will I be able to serve Hashem better if I do this?

Avodas Hashem. This idea is hinted to in ²זה שער השמים, this is the gate of the heavens, as זה has a Gematria of 12, alluding to the 12 Shevatim. Each Shevet as well as each person has their own path to reach the gates of heaven!³

Why is it that different people have different paths in serving Hashem? There are 600.000 letters in the Torah and 600,000 Neshamos in Klal Yisrael.⁴ The placement of where one's letter is in the Sefer Torah⁵ is why each person is attracted to different aspects—Chassidus, singing, Halacha and so on.⁶

When we look at a cake, we may not know the ingredients it consists of. However, upon tasting it, we realize how much flour is in it, the amount of sugar it contains and so on. The same applies to our Avodas Hashem as once we taste it, we can know what we need at which time (Tefila, Chassidus, Halacha, Gemara, a break), how much we need as well as what and how much is missing.

[A Brainless Ruler](#)

A person is comprised of three parts—מה, intellect, לב, emotions (includes desires and urges)⁷ and כבוד, physical material.⁸ The Chassam Sofer⁹ (1762–1839) illustrates it in this way: A wagon is comprised of a driver, horse, and wagon. The driver, in this case, represents the מה, as he is the brains behind it. He tells the horse when and where to go. The horse characterizes the לב since animals follow their instincts. Finally, the wagon signifies the material aspect, כבוד. The wagon follows the horse.

Concerning Tzadikim, the מה rules and the לב follows followed by the כבוד. Regarding the wicked, it is the opposite just as the horse that takes his owner to a ditch when the horse is in control. In relation to Paroh, it says לב פרעה¹⁰ as his heart was run by his כבוד, his material aspect.

² Breishis 28:17. See Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim, 68.

³ Rashi comments on מה טוב אהליך, how goodly are your tents (Bamidbar 24:5) that Bilaam said this because he saw their entrances that they weren't aligned the one opposite the other. Elsewhere, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 105b) tells us that אהליך in this Pasuk refers to Shuls and study halls (Beis Knesses and Beis Midrash), which can mean the ways we are different in our Avodas Hashem, as this is what the Beis Knesses and Beis Midrash allude to. There are Chassidim, Litvaks, Sefardim and so on. Not being aligned to each other can be understood that each Jew has their Avoda and still they live in peace and unity. This is what is meant in וירא את ישראל שכן לשבטיו...רוה אלהים—He saw the Jewish people dwelling according to its tribes and the spirit of Hashem was there (Bamidbar 24:2. See Rashi.)—each tribe has their way of serving Hashem, and still the whole of the Jewish people live in harmony with each other, which causes the spirit of Hashem to be there.

⁴ This is hinted to in ישראל—יש ששים רבוא אותיות לתורה—ישראל, there are 600,000 letters in the Sefer Torah.

⁵ When Moshiach comes, we'll know which letter in the Torah we are.

⁶ This also explains why some people are zoned into a specific Mitzva. For example, one person can learn and live the mitzvah of Succa while another is obsessed with the mitzvah of Tefillin. This is because this is where their letter is placed in the Sefer Torah (See Shemen Rosh, Parshas Miketz).

⁷ See Tanya, chapter 9.

⁸ לב means liver as well as heavy since the liver is the heaviest organ in the body. For this reason, לבב refers to materialism.

⁹ See Toras Moshe, Bo, s.v. ונהג.

¹⁰ Shemos 7:14.

A true king is one who is king over himself, in control of himself.¹¹ Examples include not overeating, not oversleeping, being in control of what his eyes see, utilizing his time properly and the like. This is someone who is led through his intellect, not his emotions and impulses. Just as in the parable mentioned above, for the wagon to function properly the driver (מח) must be in control, the same applies to a person. His intellect needs to be in control.¹² This is hinted to in the word מלך as it is an acronym for כבוד, לב, גח.¹³ It is precisely in this sequence since the intellect should lead the emotion which is then followed by the material aspect.¹⁴ In this way, we can understand why rabbis are called kings—רבנו איקרו מלכים.¹⁵

In this light, we can comprehend what it says regarding the laws of a king, שום תשים עליך מלך,¹⁶ set over yourself a king—that we should be in control. The next Pasuk there says not to return to Mitzrayim. This can be understood to mean don't return to our own Mitzrayim, referring to our own constraints.¹⁷ If we revert back to our negative traits such as anger, jealousy and the like then we are not in control of ourselves. Following this, it says a king shall have the Torah with him and he should read from it in order that he learn to fear Hashem...¹⁸ Another interpretation is that a true king should always carry a Sefer Torah with him because through learning it and inculcating its teachings, it makes him a מלך over himself as it says בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין I have created the evil inclination and the Torah as its antidote.¹⁹

There were Tzadikim that when breaking their fast after Yom Kippur would eat food that contained bones since this would give them control over their desire to eat after such a long fast.

A Nazir is one who is in control of his desires since he doesn't drink wine.²⁰ Therefore, the word נזיר is rooted in נור, crown,²¹ just as a king wears a crown. Moreover, a crown rests above the head indicating that he transcended the physical by not being governed by his urges.

We find that Tzadikim are in control of their לב whereas the wicked are controlled by their לב.²² In reference to the wicked, the Pesukim say ויאמר עשו בלב, ויאמר ירבעם בלב, ויאמר דוד בלב. In contrast, in regard to a Tzadik such as

¹¹ See Ibn Ezra to Bamidbar 6:7. In fact, the Pasuk says טוב ארך אפים... מגבור, he who is slow to anger is better than a strong man and a master of his passions is better than a conqueror of a city (Mishlei 16:32).

¹² The head of a person is on the top of his body since that is what should be in control (intellect). This is in contrast to an animal where the heart and mind are horizontal to each other.

¹³ See Zohar, 2, 153a and Nitzotzai Zohar there. See Toras Moshe, Bo, s.v. רבואלי.

¹⁴ It comes as no surprise that the letters of מלך are in descending numerical value order (מ is 40, ל is 30 and כ is 20). It represents one who is in control of his intellect since there is an order.

¹⁵ Gittin 62a.

¹⁶ Devarim 17:15.

¹⁷ Just as there is a land Mitzrayim there is also one in our personal lives (see Tanya, chapter 47). Each one of us has our own constrictions (see Tehillim 118:5. מצר is related to מצרים). Likewise, just as there is a Geula physically there is also a personal Geula as it says (Tehillim 69:19) קרבה אל נפשי גאולה, draw near to my soul, redeem it (Toldos Yaakov Yosef, Shemini, s.v. פן. Also Toldos Yaakov Yosef in Devarim, Shomer Emunim in Pischu Shearim, 19. See Teshuos Chein, Vaeira).

¹⁸ Devarim 17:19.

¹⁹ Kidushin 30b.

²⁰ See Bamidbar 6:3,4.

²¹ As we say in the Zemer על ראשו נזיר, crown on his head. נזיר also means separation since he separates himself from desire (See Bamidbar 6:2, Rashi).

²² Breishis Rabba 67:8.

²³ Breishis 27:41, Melachim 1 12:26, Esther 6:6, Tehillim 14:1, 53:2.

Dovid Hamelech it says ויאמר דוד אל לבו.²⁴ Dovid was saying a message to his heart whereas the wicked were dominated by means of their heart. אל לבו means with his heart meaning his reason is controlled by his passions. אל לבו, to his heart means his reason controlling his passions. Another instance of this is at Matan Torah where it was כאיש אחד בלב אחד, as one man with one heart—starting from the איש, intellect.²⁵ In comparison to Mitzrayim the phrasing used is בלב אחד כאיש אחד, with one heart as one man,²⁶ as their starting point is the לב.

We are told Bilaam could have cursed us in the moment (רגע) that Hashem gets angry, with the word כלם, destroy them.²⁷ However, Hashem reversed it into the word מלך as it says ותרועת מלך בו, the friendship of the King is in him.²⁸ In this way, the Daas Zekanim explains ויהפך ה' אלהיך לך את הקללה (Bilaam's) to a blessing for you,²⁹ Hashem reversed the curse (Bilaam's) to a blessing for you, מלך in reverse spells כבוד, לב, גח, the reverse order of the letters of מלך.

Balak And The Days Of Tachanun

It says in the Sefer Chessed L'Avraham³⁰ that in a regular year there are 354 days where 222 of those days we say Tachanun and they are days of דין, judgement while the other 132 days we don't say Tachanun and those are days of רחמים, mercy and favorable. The Gemara³¹ tells us that from the blessing pronounced by Bilaam you can deduce what was in his heart to curse.³² Balak wanted the 132 days of רצון should be cursed so that the attribute of דין will rule and the 222 days should remain as they are. However, Hashem reversed this to a Bracha and blessed the 222 days that it should be רחמים ורצון and the 132 days of רחמים ורצון would remain as they are. This is the meaning in Balak saying to Bilaam מה עשית לי לקב איבי לקחתך והנה ברכתך, what have you done to me, to curse my enemy have I brought you, but behold you have even blessed,³³ as לקב has a Gematria of 132. You took (לקחתך) the 132 days that I wanted to curse (לקב) and you blessed the 222 (the Gematria of ברכתך) days.³⁴ Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander Tzt"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the Sefer, Fascinating Insights: Torah Perspectives On Unique Topics. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

²⁴ Shmuel 1, 27:1.

²⁵ Shemos 19:2 Rashi. The word איש are the first letters for שמים.

²⁶ Shemos 14:10, Rashi.

²⁷ In fact, when Hashem threatened to destroy us after the rebellion of Korach, He said to Moshe ואתכלה אתם כרגע, I will destroy them in a moment (Bamidbar 16:21). We see destruction (אתכלה) within the span of a moment (רגע).

²⁸ Avoda Zara 4b, Tosafos s.v. רגע. Bamidbar 23:21.

²⁹ Devarim 23:6. Daas Zekanim, Balak, 23:8.

³⁰ מעין ב נהר מה.

³¹ Sanhedrin 105b. Incidentally, the Redak (Yehoshua 13:22, s.v. הקוסם. See also the Ramban, Bamidbar 22:31 and the Kesav Sofer, Vzot Habracha, 34:10.) says that Bilaam wasn't a Navi rather his prophecy was just for that time.

³² The Pasuk ויהפך ה' אלהיך לך את הקללה לברכה, and Hashem transformed Bilaam's curse into a blessing for you (Devarim 23:6) indicates that his blessings were the reverse of what he really had planned to say.

³³ Bamidbar 23:11.

³⁴ Chassam Sofer in Toras Moshe, Bamidbar 23:11. The Divrei Yosef (181) writes that once there were two ravens resting on a tree and their feathers fell out. The Arizal said these ravens are Bilaam and Balak that now left one Geinom to go into another more intense Gehinom and they came to me to exonerate them and daven for them. The Arizal scolded them and said "Reshaim, in this world you wanted to uproot the Jewish people and now that you are in pain you come to me so I should accept you. Go on your way." They immediately flew away.