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The Giving Heart – Developing Harmony of Body and Soul

The Mishkan: An Everlasting Bond

The final *parshiyos* of *Sefer Shemos* discuss the gathering of materials for the Mishkan, and the construction of the Mishkan out of those materials.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל כָּל עֵדֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לֵאמֹר.
קָחוּ מֵאִתְּכֶם תְּרוּמָה לַה' כֹּל נְדִיב לִבּוֹ יְבִיֵאֶה אֶת תְּרוּמַת ה' זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנַחֲשָׁת.

(Shemos 35:4-5)

Moshe spoke to the entire community of the children of Israel, saying; "This is the thing which Hashem has commanded [me] to say [to you]: Collect from among yourselves a contribution offering for Hashem. Every person whose heart inspires him to generosity should bring the contribution for Hashem.

The Midrash connects this passage with the *pasuk* in *Shir Hashirim*,

מִיָּם רַבִּים לֹא יוֹכְלוּ לְכַבּוֹת אֶת הָאֵהָבָה וְנִהְרֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּנָה אִם יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת כָּל הוֹן
בֵּיתוֹ בְּאֵהָבָה בּוֹז יְבוֹז לוֹ.

Many waters cannot extinguish the love, nor can rivers flood it; should a man give all the wealth of his house for love, they would despise him.

If all the idolatrous nations were to gather in an attempt to eliminate the love that exists between Hakadosh Baruch Hu and Yisrael, they would not succeed. The *many waters won't be able to extinguish the love.*

"If a person gives all the wealth of his house, he will be scorned. In contrast, My children made Me a *Mikdash* of curtains, and I descended and dwelled among them."

The simple explanation of the Midrash is that by building the Mishkan, a powerful bond of love was formed between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. Since the nations do not have this bond, even if they offered all of their wealth, they would be scorned.

Damage Wrought by Sin

The Sfas Emes explains the Midrash by introducing an important insight.

[Although Bnei Yisrael sinned just after hearing the *Aseres Hadibros*,] the love and *deveikus* that Bnei Yisrael achieved at Har Sinai lives on forever.

Because of the sin, they became unable to bring the hidden *ahavah* from potential to actuality. Therefore, after the *cheit*, they needed this act of giving. The power of this donation brought their giving, yearning, and *deveikus* from potential to actuality, to the extent that they brought the *Shechinah* down to this world.

Let's try to understand what the Sfas Emes is teaching us.

We know that many powers exist within each person. One of them is the ability to take ideas or feelings and implement them, bringing them into the real world. For example: If someone wants to construct a building, he also has the ability to define what needs to be done to implement that idea so that it doesn't remain a daydream. If someone has an idea that he wants to convey to others, he also needs the ability to explain the concept in a way that others will be able to understand. If someone wants to finish a *masechta*, he has to utilize his ability to fulfill that aspiration: he needs to consider what changes he may need to make to his daily schedule, choice of *chavrusa*, and so on.

The Sfas Emes draws our attention to this power that we often ignore, and certainly find difficult to define. **It is a vital element of our personality; without it, none of our aspirations could come to fruition.**

The name of this power is *da'as*. The Sfas Emes explains that when

someone sins, his power of *da'as* is damaged, and he loses the ability to actualize his potential.

The *neshamah* is never damaged. Even if a person sins, his *neshamah* continues to have a burning desire to draw close to Hashem. He may sense that desire – but he won't be able to put the desire into action.

We can understand this by studying the effects of an *aveirah* more deeply. Since the *neshamah* fights hard against any *aveirah*, it is only the external level of a Jew that transgresses. Therefore, the damage caused by the *aveirah* only affects our external levels – by creating a gap between our internal and external selves.

For example, if a person made negative use of his time by speaking *lashon hara*, he will find it difficult to learn Torah. He feels heartbroken, because he really does want to learn but he's not succeeding. What is obstructing his progress? The damage he inflicted on his *da'as*, his ability to translate his desire and talent for learning into reality. He will experience similar difficulties in fulfilling his desire to do *chesed* or anything else a Jew has to do.

Repairing Da'as: A Giving Heart

How can a person repair his damaged *da'as*? The Sfas Emes explained that someone with impaired *da'as* should force himself to bring something from potential to actuality. In other words, he should do something for Hashem's sake although he feels no desire to do so. However, the Sfas Emes is not recommending that we undertake a mechanical action. Healing will only come by acting with *nedivus lev*, a giving heart.

This was Hashem's prescription for Bnei Yisrael after *cheit ha'eigel*. Because He loves Bnei Yisrael, He instructed them to repair the damage to their *da'as* by building the Mishkan. It's as if Hakadosh Baruch Hu told them: "Donate your possessions to the Mishkan for your own good. **By pushing yourself with all your heart**, you can regain your natural ability to bridge the gap between aspirations and reality."

Aveiros Cause Conflict

Let's explore this idea further. Hakadosh Baruch Hu created us with two opposing forces. The *neshamah* yearns to serve Hashem and always wants to help and give to other Jews. The *guf*, on the other hand, tends towards laziness and pursuit of comfort; it wants to receive, rather than to give. A person can train his body to submit to the leadership of the *neshamah* and work together with the *neshamah*. To the extent that a person develops that synergy, he will experience a great sense of inner peace, and will no longer have to wage war with his *guf* over each step of spiritual progress.

When a person sins, he strengthens the power of the *guf*. It's as if he says, "Why do I have to work with the *neshamah*? I don't want to! I prefer to sleep as much as I want, and eat when I feel like it. If I want to waste time rather than learn Torah, and I feel like eating rather than davening, I should be free to do what I want." **As a result of aveiros, the *guf* turns its back to the *neshamah*.** However, rather than feeling free or happy, the person begins to feel unwell and unsettled because of the battle between *guf* and *neshamah* that rages within him.

This struggle within the *ba'al aveirah* can be compared to a quarrel between two people who've been fighting for years. Some *askanim* get involved and undertake the difficult task of mediation. They finally get the two parties so close to reconciliation that just one more push will bring them together. Suddenly, someone mixes in and tells one of the parties, "Don't be a fool! Don't give in! Tell him that until he puts \$100,000 on the table, there is nothing to talk about."

This is what an *aveirah* does. It whispers in the ear of the *guf*, "Don't make peace with the *neshamah*! Don't become its slave! Why should you let the *neshamah* make a fool of you? Just because it wants to fast, learn, daven and do *chesed*? Absolutely not!"

A War of Attrition

Obviously, when the *guf* refuses to work with the *neshamah*, a person cannot actualize his potential. When the *neshamah* tells the *guf*, "Let's

learn," the *guf* retorts, "I don't feel like it." If the *neshamah* then suggests compromise, the *guf* turns that down as well. Each transgression further empowers the *guf* to defy the *neshamah*.

The internal friction erodes a person's spiritual, mental and physical health. The *neshamah* has not been damaged and still yearns for *kirvas Elokim*. However, the emboldened *guf* refuses to subjugate itself to the wishes of the *neshamah*.

If the *neshamah* would surrender and say to the *guf*, "I'm with you! Go enjoy what *Olam Hazeh* has to offer!" – then the person would not suffer from internal conflict. **However, the *neshamah* will never turn about-face in that way.** Its very essence is *ahavas Hashem* and yearning for *kirvas Elokim*. It simply won't give up, and the person will continue to suffer the agony caused by the endless, internal struggle.

People who have grown distant from Torah and mitzvos are not living a happy life of "eat, drink, and be merry." As people who know them can testify, **the internal conflict between *guf* and *neshamah* takes a heavy toll on them in countless ways.**

The Sfas Emes adds that the Mishkan is called *mishkan ha'eidus* because it testifies that the *Shechinah* dwells among Yisrael even after they descended to the lowest level (as with *cheit ha'eigel*). The *neshamah* remains the *neshamah*, no matter what; and a Mishkan for the *Shechinah* can be built in this world.

Educating the Guf

So, what is a person to do?

The *sefer Abir Haro'im* (a biography of the Avnei Nezer of Sochatchov) relates the following story.

It once happened that the Avnei Nezer was not feeling well, and the doctors told him that he must rest: above all, he must not exhaust his mind by learning in depth (*b'iyun*). Having no choice, he spent the time skimming through a variety of *sefarim*.

One day, he visited his father-in-law, the Kotzker Rebbe. The Rebbe asked what *sefer* he had read that day. The Avnei Nezer replied that he'd read a *sefer* called *Bechinas Olam* that explained why matters of *Olam Hazeh* are insignificant.

The Kotzker was surprised. "Did this *sefer* teach you anything you didn't know before? Anyone who looks at *Olam Hazeh* with the eyes of the *sechel* knows that it's meaningless.

"The question is how to explain that to a *guf* of flesh and blood.

"However, if you learn a *daf* of Gemara *b'iyun* to the point of exhaustion, the *guf* will also understand that matters of this world are meaningless. "

Unfortunately, *cheit* obscures that clarity and allows the *guf* and its priorities to become dominant.

The Rebellious Servant

Another *mashal* can help illustrate this concept.

The owner of a business employs a capable manager, who runs the business according to the owner's wishes. The owner feels secure, knowing that the business is running well and looking forward to great success.

After some time, he notices that the manager, rather than implementing his instructions, constantly questions and opposes them. The manager makes it quite clear that he views things differently than the owner, and feels that the business should be run differently.

Ultimately, the owner realizes that business can't continue to run this way. He summons the manager and tells him, "You have to either understand that I am in charge, or move on and find another position."

Each of us owns a business, and when our time comes, we have to send the manager, our physical body, back to where it came from. The

question is how to rule over our *guf* during our lifetime, so that we do not have to send it away. **The proper approach is to take our *guf* and turn it to face in the same direction as the *neshamah*, striving upward.** The owner and the manager must be on the same page.

This is exactly what Hakadosh Baruch Hu did after *Cheit Ha'eigel*. He instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to tell Bnei Yisrael, "This is what you have to do now: you must force your *guf* to undertake and perform tasks with *nedivus lev*, a giving heart. As each successive task causes the *guf* to conform to the wishes of the *neshamah*, ultimately the damage will be repaired and you can return to the path of spiritual progress."

Once we are aware of this process, we can apply it in many situations. For example, educators know how much a struggling student can benefit from giving to others with *nedivus lev*. Though the *talmid* may not be aware of it, channeling his energy and talent into giving steers his *guf* toward the same direction as his *neshamah* in its journey. Of course, this is not limited to young people or to educational settings.

If the *guf* is not trained to give with *nedivus lev*, it will always oppose the *neshamah*. However, once giving becomes second nature, the partnership of *guf* and *neshamah* enable us to live a happy, healthy life.

The Challenges of Our Generation

The development of technology and everything that comes along with it makes it much more difficult to become a giver, a *nosein*. A person may manage to devote an hour a day to giving, while for the rest of the day he is a *mekabel*, receiving stimulation, information, and pleasure. Even if he keeps up the admirable practice of devoting an hour a day to giving, it won't be enough to transform him. To be a true *nosein*, a person has to be giving for at least fifty-one percent of his time.

As recently as twenty years ago, as soon as a person channeled his energy into giving, he became a *nosein*. For example, a boy who could not sit through all of the *sedarim* in yeshivah would be appointed to the position of *sefarim*-binder for the yeshivah – a job that consists

entirely of giving, to the yeshivah as a whole as well as to the individual *talmidim*.

Usually, the *bachur* assigned to this task would put his heart and soul into it. Once the positive use of his talents was established, it became much easier for him to add more Torah and *tefillah* into his schedule.

In our generation, that same *bachur* has headphones in his ears all day; even as he is binding *sefarim*, and certainly during his breaks, he's immersed in news and other information or entertainment. An adult, as well, might keep up *sedarim* of learning, but as soon as he closes the *sefer*, he can easily spend the next forty-five minutes catching up on the news. **These habits accustom a person to being a *mekabel* – receiving, rather than giving.** Over time, his *guf* becomes more and more dominant, and ever more easily refuses the wishes of the *neshamah*.

It is difficult to switch from the mode of *mekabel* to that of *nosein*. Think of typical children who have just finished watching a three-hour Chol Hamoed play. They are self-absorbed and unwilling to help at home. All of their faculties have been totally absorbed in receiving, for hours on end. It's hard for them to shift modes and immediately start giving.

The Unseen Danger

We have to recognize these very real consequences. When children get into the habit of receiving one pleasure after another, it hampers their ability to give. Parents understand that if they fulfill every wish of their children and constantly shower them with candy and toys, they will become spoiled and selfish. It's harder for parents to realize that technology can impact their children's *middos* in the same way. The *chinuch* value of the content is not what we're discussing here; it's the very process of sitting for hours and imbibing pleasure that reinforces the *guf* and hampers the children's ability to express their *neshamos*.

On the other hand, children who are taught lovingly to exercise self-restraint and give to others will develop positive *middos* that reflect the nature of their *neshamos*. This is why it's so important for both

children and adults to develop and maintain the habit of giving with *nedivus lev*, giving from the heart.

We all see the world getting more materialistic with every passing day. We are bombarded with advertisements whose basic message is "Come and enjoy more kosher pleasures." The constant pursuit and consumption of pleasures (even if they are permitted ones) corrupts the *middos*. As the chasm between *guf* and *neshamah* widens, it becomes more difficult to resist the temptation of *aveiros*, and to implement positive aspirations.

The Roots of Regret

People who spends large portions of their lives pursuing and experiencing pleasure still have dreams. "If only I were able to learn," many people say. "If only I could daven with *kavanah*." Their yearning is sincere. Sometimes they even shed tears, expressing their *neshamah's* longing to express itself in this world. **Unfortunately, they are stuck.** They don't know how to translate those feelings into action, because their *guf* has become used to traveling in the opposite direction.

The solution is not simply to stop consuming so much pleasure. Along with limiting consumption, the person who wants to transform himself must invest his energy into giving. At the beginning, it will be very difficult. However, if he clearly understands that **if he wants to "choose life" there is no alternative**, he will persevere and succeed.

Where to Start

The choice of where and how to start giving is very individual. One person may choose *hachnasas orchim*. While serving his guests, he davens quietly: "May this *avodah* transform my *guf* from taking to giving, so that it will follow the wishes of my *neshamah*."

Regarding *tzedakah*, the Ba'al HaTanya states that although Chazal prohibit giving more than a fifth of one's money to charity, someone whose intention is to gain atonement (*kapparah*) can give as much as he wants. The rationale is that money he donates for *kapparah* is viewed as an expenditure for his own benefit.

The same can apply to someone who hopes to transform himself from taker to giver. If he initially decides to give a certain sum to *tzedakah*, he may decide to double the amount (assuming that it won't put him into debt), so that it will be difficult. His *yetzer* will complain, "You're being reckless! In a few years you'll have to marry off your children. Your needs come first!" **By overcoming those objections, he is giving with *nedivus lev*.**

There are many other ways to give. A person can travel or make calls to raise money for others. Fundraising can be especially transformative if the collector has to suffer humiliation in the process.

Six Hundred Thirteen Ways to Give

The Sfas Emes explains that all mitzvos can and should be an expression of giving.

This is true for all mitzvos, for they are ways to bring *nedivus* and *ratzon* from potential to actuality. The *pasuk* says, כל נדיב לבו – this *terumah* brings out all the *nedivus* and *retzonos* that were buried in their hearts. So too, all mitzvos are called נר – a candle, as the *pasuk* says נר הנצוה and נר ה' נשמת אדם. We can elevate all of our *retzonos* to Hashem by mitzvos.

The transformative power of mitzvos depends on how we approach and fulfill them. Before learning, a person decides: "I want my learning to turn me in the right direction, body and soul." He then sits down to learn without interruption, and turns off his phone. **He has not tried to learn this way for fifteen years.** He takes this step out of heartfelt desire to give *nachas ruach* to Hashem, and his learning now transforms him from a *mekabel* to a *nosein*. No longer is he sitting in a comfortable chair while listening to a shiur with his feet up. He is straining and toiling to break his nature. This effort can transform him as much as sweating to do *chesed* with others, and it has the added advantage of "*talmud Torah k'neged kulam.*"

Over time, learning this way will no longer be a chore that he forces himself to complete. It will be sweet and pleasurable, because his *neshamah* always wanted to learn. He just never managed to implement

that desire because his *guf* always objected. Now that he has tried with all of his strength to change direction, his *guf* makes peace with his *neshamah*, and learning becomes a pleasure.

This idea can help us understand a teaching of Rav Shmelke of Nikolsburg. He said that when a person is learning, and wants to close the Gemara because he is exhausted – **if he learns for just five more minutes, he receives *kapparah* for even serious *aveiros*** (punishable by *kareis* or *misas beis din*). As we have learned, the *neshamah* is never damaged: it just cannot express itself once the *guf* turns it back on the *neshamah*. The more severe the *aveirah*, the more obstinate the *guf* becomes. Those five minutes of fighting off sleep and learning a bit more enables a person to ‘reset’ the *guf* and free himself of even the most serious *aveiros*.

Breaking Free

This approach can also help a person who is in the process of freeing himself from addictions of any kind.

We are meant to experience pleasure from Hashem’s world in a healthy, balanced way. However, it’s possible for a person to immerse himself in a pleasure to the extent that his system becomes dysfunctional and he simply cannot get enough. He never stops searching for more of whatever he’s become addicted to. It can even take the form of needing to check the news every few minutes, or constantly checking a phone for new messages. A person may truly want to stop, and may find that he simply cannot.

These are heartbreaking examples of someone who truly wants to change, but simply can’t do it. He wants to stop. He tells himself, “That’s it! I’m done with it.” However, fifteen minutes later he feels that he cannot live without it.

Here (along with seeking professional help when necessary), the Torah provides a person with a way to fix his dysfunctional system. Pushing yourself to learn, do mitzvos, and give to others with *nedivus lev* can be very bitter when you don’t feel any desire to do those things. However, **pushing through that can heal the rift between *guf* and**

neshamah, enabling a person to experience the freedom of living the life his *neshamah* yearns for.

It's important to understand what's happening here. The dysfunction he suffers from cannot be repaired simply by force of will. **His will (which emanates from his *neshamah*) has not been damaged;** it's the second part of the mechanism, the *da'as* that translates aspirations into reality, that has been damaged. It can be repaired by pushing the envelope and giving with *nedivus lev*. Though difficult at first, that process will open the gates to a life of pleasure that surpasses anything he experienced in his previous pursuits.

Of course, throughout the process, he must remember that the type of transformation he hopes for is really supernatural. He will only succeed by combining his *hishtadlus* with *tefillah*, recognizing that only with Hashem's help can he achieve his goal.

Never Too Late

Anyone, young or old, can reconnect with his *neshamah*, even if he has drifted far away. However, he needs to identify the root of the problem. It's not really the particular activity that overpowered him. Constantly receiving pleasure and stimulation breaks down the boundaries that form a person's internal structure. **Just as building the structure of the Mishkan enabled Bnei Yisrael to regain the proper balance of *guf* and *neshamah*, we have to build our own internal Mishkan with *nedivus lev*, giving from the heart.** Then, we can experience a life of peace and pleasure as our *guf* helps our *neshamah* translate its yearnings into reality.



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