

Seuda Shlishis, Parshas Shoftim, 5760

At the third Shabbos meal, Mohorosh *Shlit"á* spoke inspiring words about the secret meaning of the month of *Elul*, based on *Lekutei Mohoran*, Part I, Lesson 6.

We have now entered the holy days of *Elul* – days of *teshuva*, forgiveness and mercy. Rebbe Nachman reveals to us in this lesson the secret of the meaning of *Elul*, which is the secret of *teshuva*. Rebbe Nachman says: “Every person needs to minimize his own honor and enhance the honor of Hashem. For he who runs after honor and glory will not merit the Glory of G-d, but only the glory of kings, as it says (*Mishlei*, Ch. 25): ‘But the glory of kings is to investigate a matter’, and everyone will investigate and scrutinize his deeds and ask: ‘Who is he that people should show him so much honor; and they will argue with him, saying that he is not worthy of such honor. However, he who flees from honor, minimizing his own honor and enhancing the honor and Glory of Hashem, will merit the Glory of G-d, and people will not investigate whether or not he is deserving of such honor. About such a person it is said (*ibid*): ‘It is the Glory of G-d to conceal a thing’, for it is forbidden to investigate this type of glory. And it is only possible to merit this type of glory through *teshuva*. And the essence of *teshuva* is when a person hears his own disgrace and remains silent. And when a person wants to go in the ways of *teshuva*, he needs to be an expert at ‘going’ in two ways: 1). How to go forward and 2). How to go backward; as it is written (*Zohar, Vayakhel* 213b): ‘Happy is the one who can go in [i.e. to ascend to lofty perceptions of G-dliness] and come out again’, which is an aspect of (*Tehillim*, Ch. 139): ‘If I ascend up into heaven, You are there’ – the category of going in – of being an ‘expert at going forward’; [and the continuation of this verse is] ‘And if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there’ – the category of coming out – of being an ‘expert in going backward’. And this is the meaning of the verse (*Shir HaShirim*, Ch. 6): ‘I am my Beloved’s, and my Beloved is mine’ - ‘I am my Beloved’s’ – this is an aspect of going in; and ‘My Beloved is mine’ is an aspect of coming out. And this is the secret meaning of *Elul*.” (These are the words of Rebbe Nachman.)

Mohorosh explained that the goal of a person’s striving for *shleimus* (wholeness) in this world is to come to an awareness of Hashem; specifically,

to recognize His Glory and Honor from each and every detail of creation and to dedicate one's entire life to enhancing His Honor and Glory. Moreover, as a person comes to an awareness of Hashem, he also helps others to come to this awareness. And he merits all of this by considering his own honor null and void in relation to Hashem's honor. This means that he is not particular about his own honor at all, but only about the honor of Hashem. And he is concerned that whatever he does should only redound to Hashem's honor. And in this way, he will merit G-dly honor. About such a person it is said (*Mishlei*, Ch. 25): "It is the glory of G-d to conceal a thing", for this kind of glory is beyond the investigation of any human being. It is concealed and hidden from the eyes of all men. Moreover, it is something only between Hashem and the person who merits it, as it is said (*Isaiah*, Ch. 64): "No eye has seen it, G-d, except for You."

The meaning of "G-dly honor" is that a person merits to feel the Glory and Honor of Hashem hovering over him all day long; and from every aspect of creation all he sees is Hashem's Glory shining forth. This is something that is completely impossible to explain or relate in words. Furthermore, it is the very purpose of life and the reason a person was created and placed on this earth. And this purpose is to recognize Him and to see His Glory. However, to the degree that a person feels his own self-importance and "weight" in this world and desires to be "seen" by others, for example, he desires to be famous for his great wealth, or he desires to be a Rebbe or a leader, etc...he will not merit G-dly honor, but only the honor of kings, about which it is said (*ibid*): "But the glory of kings is to investigate a matter", which means that although it very well may be that people will show him honor and run after him, there will also be many critics who will scrutinize and investigate him, questioning whether he is truly worthy of all this honor. And many people will be envious and hateful of the person who has honor. Therefore, they will come to criticize and argue with him as they feel that he is not worthy of such honor. And he will have to suffer from numerous and bitter controversies and disputes from his "watchful foes (*Tehillim*, Ch. 27)". He will simply have no rest and peace from all his honor.

However, in truth, we find that even the greatest Tzaddikim throughout Jewish history have suffered from controversies and bitter disputes from coarse and unrefined people who quarreled with them for every possible reason and who harassed them in every possible way. So, there would seem to be a contradiction here in Rebbe Nachman's lesson: Why did these Tzaddikim have to suffer such persecutions when they have certainly merited

G-dly honor? But the truth is that from heaven they have compassion upon these holy Tzaddikim who serve and toil all the days of their lives and have reached very lofty levels in their perception of the *Ohr Ein Sof* (Endless Light), Blessed is He. These Tzaddikim are always fearful lest the smallest amount of self-importance and arrogance enters them. Since a person finds himself in a physical world, it is very likely that some thought of self-importance will enter his mind; for example, he might imagine that he has already reached a very lofty level in his perception and understanding of G-dliness. And this is exactly why from heaven they send to these Tzaddikim all kinds of opposition and controversy. And through these sufferings, their hearts become broken within them, completely shattering into tiny pieces, for they are in great pain over the fact that people are persecuting them for no good reason – even people that don't really know them. And these “watchful foes” open their mouths and speak against these Tzaddikim every evil thing, like dogs who bark at innocent passersby, as it is brought in the words of our Sages (*Talmud Yoma*, 83b): “A sign of a mad dog is that his jaw is always hanging open.” And the Chafetz Chaim explains that one whose mouth is always open to speak about others is like a mad dog that barks for no reason at whoever passes by. Another sign of a mad dog given by the Talmud is that “its tail rests between its legs”. This alludes to the blemish of the *Bris*, G-d forbid, for he who speaks against the Tzaddikim is surely very blemished in this area, which is an aspect of the verse (*Tehillim*, Ch. 55): “He [the opponent of the Tzaddikim] put forth his hands against them [the Tzaddikim] that were at peace with him; he has profaned his covenant.” Therefore, when these wicked people speak evil about the Tzaddikim, this causes the Tzaddikim tremendous pain and it completely breaks their hearts and spirits until it is impossible for any thoughts of self-importance or arrogance to enter them. And this brokenness helps them merit a very high level of G-dly honor and it causes them to be included completely in the *Ohr Ein Sof*, Blessed is He.

So we find that the only way to merit G-dly honor is through *teshuva*. And the essence of *teshuva* is when a person hears his own disgrace and remains silent. For when a person hears himself being disgraced by others and yet he doesn't go out to quarrel with them and insult them back, but rather accepts it all with love, knowing that there is a divine purpose in his accepting the disgrace and embarrassment in silence, he thus becomes nullified and completely humbled in his own eyes and merits G-dly honor on a very high level.

The disgrace and embarrassment that we've been speaking about thus far are specifically those that a person receives from others. But, there is also a kind of embarrassment and disgrace that a person receives from himself. For example, when a person wants to be occupied in serving Hashem and he is constantly striving to grow and elevate himself higher and higher, but he notices that he keeps falling back into his negative character traits and base desires again and again. And because of this, he feels deeply embarrassed and disgraced in his own eyes. And when he does not accept the embarrassment and disgrace with love, his heart will fill with doubts and confusion and he asks himself, "Why must I always keep falling back into old negative traits and behaviors when Hashem knows that all I want is to be an upstanding Jew?" And from this thinking, he becomes very upset and discouraged. And now he is liable to throw in the towel and totally forsake serving Hashem, G-d forbid. However, as soon as he accepts everything he is going through with love and with the awareness that (*Tehillim*, Ch. 145) "Righteous is Hashem in all His ways, and loving in all His actions" and with the knowledge that it is indeed necessary for him to go through all of these falls and regressions before he can merit to enter the gates of holiness – if he has this attitude and concentrates on these thoughts, he will then be silent in the midst of all of the disgrace and embarrassment which he receives from himself. And in the end, he will merit to rise to the level of G-dly honor and to perceive Hashem's blessed light on the highest levels. Happy is he!

Everything we have spoken about so far is referred to as the "path" of *teshuva*. From the time one leaves his mother's womb until he returns to the earth from which he was taken, a person finds himself on a "path" - a "bridge" - on which Heaven is leading his soul from this world to the next, as Rebbe Nachman has said (*Lekutei Mohoran*, Part II, Lesson 48): "Know, that a person needs to pass over a very narrow bridge. And the main thing is not to be afraid at all." At the time a person is born, they place his soul into his physical body and say to him that he will now begin to walk upon this "path" which will bring him to his eternal goal in the World to Come. However, in order to go successfully upon this path he needs to have certain skills, for this path is a very narrow bridge and it is easy to fall off, G-d forbid, if he is not careful how he walks. Therefore, one needs to be a *baki* (one who is skilled) in "going forward and backward", which means one knows how to go upward and how to go downward. And these two skills (*bakios*) are themselves the actual "path", for two times the *gematria* of *baki* (112) equals the *gematria* of *derech* (path - 224).

On the one hand, a person needs to know how to go upward, which is referred to as being an expert in “going forward” – at constantly striving to raise oneself upward closer to Hashem, never thinking that one has finally reached the ceiling. When a person thinks that he has attained it all, this is a sign that he has still attained nothing, for the goal of knowledge is to know that we still don’t know. And the goal of all of our service of Hashem is to know that we have attained nothing in relation to Hashem’s Endless Light, for (*Tehillim*, Ch. 145) “His greatness is beyond investigation”, and (*Tehillim*, Ch. 139) “If I ascend to heaven, You are there”, which means that no matter how high I manage to go, You, Hashem, are found there, and I have still attained nothing in relation to Your Endless Light. All of this is called “being an expert in going forward”.

Being an expert at “going backward” means that a person is highly skilled at going downward – that even if he falls and sinks to very low places, G-d forbid, and it seems to him that he is the lowest and most inferior Jew in the world, nevertheless, he will never let himself despair in any way whatsoever, for he knows that even in the enormity of his fall, Hashem is found there, which is an aspect of the verse (*ibid*): “If I make my bed in hell, You are there” – that even if I have already “made my bed” in the lowest level of hell, G-d forbid, even there You are found, as Rebbe Nachman cried out in a loud voice (*Lekutei Mohoran*, Part II, Lesson 78): “There is never – ever – such a thing as giving up!” For even in the lowest pit of hell, one can actually be very close to Hashem. But the main thing is to believe that no matter where a person is standing right now, Hashem is found there and so he should cry out to Hashem from that very place, which is an aspect of the verse (*Yona*, Ch. 2): “From the belly of hell, I cried out; You have heard my voice.” When a person has these two skills – he knows how to go up and how to go down, he will go securely upon the path/*derech* of *teshuva* – and *derech* is *baki* (skilled) times 2 in *gematria*, and he will surely merit to draw close to Hashem from everything that he goes through in life.

This is the secret of the word *baki* (skilled), which is spelled out from the first letters of the words *Yichud Bracha Kedusha* (from *Bereishis* 32:22: “And he[Yaakov]rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven children, and passed over the Bridge of *Yabok*[*yud-beis-kuf*]; See *Kisvei Ariz*”l, *Pri Etz Chaim*, *Shaar HaBrachos*, *perek* 7). And the *gematria* of these three letters is the same as the *gematria* of the two divine names – *Yud-Kay-Vav-Kay* (26) and *Elokim* (86=112). *Yud-Kay-Vav-Kay* represents the divine attribute of *chesed*; and when the goodness and kindness

of Hashem is revealed to a person and he merits to climb from one level to the next in his perceptions and understanding of G-dliness, he will have the skill to know how to draw closer and closer to Hashem, never thinking that he already understands it all. The name *Elokim* represents the divine attributes of judgment and strength – when a person goes through difficult times and he sees himself slipping and falling time and again, he will have the skill to know how to stand his ground no matter what he goes through and his feelings of self-worth will not suffer at all. This is the matter mentioned above of “He hears his own disgrace and is silent” – which means that he will not become frustrated and discouraged at all. And in this way, he will merit to be included in the *Alufo shel Olam* (the Master of the World). The overall shape of the letter Aleph alludes to this path of *teshuva*. The *aleph* א has an upper point and a lower point and between them there is a line. This teaches us that a person always needs to ascend from the lowest point, even the lowest level of hell, towards the highest point, which is the Blessed *Ohr Ein Sof*. And the main way to do this is through the line which represents the letter *Vav* that is between them. This flat *Vav* alludes to the expanse of the sky that changes colors from sunrise to sunset; and these colors allude to the matter of shame and disgrace, like the face of one who is shamed that changes many colors. And through his enduring this shame and embarrassment in silence he merits to ascend from the lowest level to the highest and to be included in the Blessed Endless Light, and he will get a taste of the World to Come in his lifetime. Happy is he and fortunate is his lot.

Mohorosh connected the above ideas to our parsha in the following way. We find in our parsha the chapter dealing with the unintentional murderer, as it is written (*Devarim*, Ch. 19): “Prepare for yourself the path and divide into thirds the border of your land that Hashem, your G-d, causes you to inherit and it [the six cities of refuge] will be for every murderer to flee there.” It is explained in the words of Reb Nosson (*Lekutei Halachos, Eiruvei Techumim, Halacha 5*) that the matter of the unintentional murderer alludes to one who kills his own soul unintentionally, tearing it away from its Supernal Root in Hashem. But the way it can save itself is to flee to one of the six cities of refuge, which are an aspect of the six words of the *Shema* – *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*. The *Shema* represents our overall holy *emunah* in Hashem. And through *emunah*, a person merits atonement for everything, as Rebbe Nachman says (*Sefer HaMiddos*, Ch. *Emunah* #33): “Through *emunah*, Hashem will forgive you for all your sins”. Sins cause doubts and heretical thoughts to enter one’s mind, G-d forbid, as also mentioned by Rebbe Nachman (*ibid*, #22): “One’s willful sin causes heresy to

enter one's mind." Therefore, one's main rectification is through *emunah*. Perhaps we can say that the above teaching of Rebbe Nachman – that the essence of *teshuva* depends on two different but complimentary skills – is hinted at here in our verse: **“Prepare for yourself the path”** – you should prepare for yourself a “path” of *teshuva* - how to return in complete repentance, even the person who has already killed his own soul unintentionally, G-d forbid. This is accomplished through **“divide in thirds the border of your land”** – which refers to the three parts of the *Aleph*, mentioned before – an upper point, a lower point and the *Vav* in between.

It is explained in the words of Rebbe Nachman at the end of this lesson, that these three parts of the *Aleph* correspond to the three mitzvos that the Children of Israel were commanded to carry out when they entered the Land of Israel, and these are: 1) To cut off the seed of Amalek - the category of the lowest point of the *Aleph* which corresponds to being an expert in going backward which means to not fall into despair no matter what happens, even if one is being pursued by Amalek and his impure helpers, 2) To build for themselves the *Beis HaMikdosh* – the category of the uppermost point of the *Aleph* which corresponds to the attainment of wisdom and perceptions of G-dliness, 3) To appoint a king for themselves – the category of the *Vav* in the middle of the *Aleph*. And the *Vav* corresponds to the shame and disgrace that one must suffer before one merits G-dly honor (Note: How does the *Vav* correspond to the King/Tzaddik? The *Vav*, which means “and”, is the letter which connects two words, and it also connects the highest point to the lowest point within the letter *Aleph*, so too the King/Tzaddik knows how to connect the highest worlds with the lowest worlds, i.e. he is able to bring the highest levels of G-dliness to *every* person and he can teach them how to raise themselves up from even the lowest levels). **“Divide in thirds the border of your land that Hashem Elokecha causes you to inherit”** – prepare for yourself a path of *teshuva* which is composed of all three categories of mitzvos that the Children of Israel were commanded to carry out when they entered the Land. **“...that Hashem (Yud-Kay-Vav-Kay), your G-d (Elokecha), causes you to inherit”** – the categories of the two divine names mentioned before – *Yud-Kay-Vav-Kay* and *Elokim* – which together equal the word *baki* (skilled) in *gematria* (112). Upon these two names rests the essence of the two necessary skills of *teshuva* – to recognize Hashem whether one is ascending (the attribute of *chesed*) or descending (the attribute of judgment). And through this **“it will be for every murderer to run there”** – for even the one who has already killed his own soul unintentionally, G-d forbid, through this skill in the path of *teshuva*, he is able to fix everything.

May Hashem help us to return in complete *teshuva* and to prepare ourselves to greet the holy days of *Rosh HaShannah*. And may we receive a good and blessed year, a year of redemption and salvation for all the souls of Israel, nationally and individually. *Amen v'amen*.