



Adapted from the sefer **במוצאי שבת** a collection of maamarim on
תנא דבי אליהו given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Melave Malka

Melave Malka Parshas VaYeishev 5770

The Shem Mishmuel quotes a lesson that he heard from Harav Avrohom Hamalach zt"l (son of the Magid of Mezeritch zt"l)

The Gemara tells us that at the end of his life, R. Yochanan ben Zakai cried and said "There are two pathways before me, one leads to Gan Eden, and one to Gehinnom, and I don't know where I will be taken".

How could it be that a great tzadik like R. Yochanan looked back at his life of Torah and mitzvos and felt that the result would be Gehinnom?

R. Avrohom Hamalach explained that there are two types of tzadikim. Some tzadikim, upon discovering that they chas v'shalom did something wrong that damaged their neshama, do not move on to anything else until they have repaired that damage.

However, there are other tzadikim, who, despite recognizing the damage caused by their wrongdoing, do not pause their avoda in order to repair the damage. They understand that stopping to repair themselves will be עבודת עצמם, serving themselves, instead of serving Hashem. These tzadikim immediately move on to their next task of Avodas Hashem, without paying attention to their own needs. This is a very high level of avoda.

The consequence may be, however, that at the end of his life, such a tzadik will have to repair that damage in Gehinnom. Such was the life of R. Yochanan ben Zakai, who left the world with that question unanswered.

The Shem Mishmuel applies this approach to the life of Yehuda. Rashi tells us that his brothers demoted him from his leadership position, blaming him for the suffering of their father. They pointed out that it was his idea to sell Yosef. They also told him that if he would have instructed them to return Yosef to his father they would have done so.

Yehuda did not isolate himself to repair the spiritual damage that may have resulted from this incident. Instead, he immediately moved on to get married and bring forth children who

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would build Am Yisroel. This marriage brought the light of Mashiach into the world, through his descendant Dovid Hamelech.

My grandfather R. Yochanan Twerski zt”l, explained the tears of R. Yochanan ben Zakai in a way that reflected his own humility. Throughout R. Yochanan ben Zakai’s life of Torah and Avoda, he never once imagined that at the end of his life he would go to Gan Eden. Suddenly, in the last minutes of his life, he found himself thinking that perhaps he would go to Gan Eden. His tears resulted from disappointment with himself for thinking such a foolish, arrogant thought.

This approach explains a story that I was privileged to hear from the Gerrer Rebbe, the Bais Yisroel zy”a.

“After the passing of R. Elimelech of Lizhensk zt”l, his talmid the Rebbe of Lublin zt”l was saddened. His chossid R. Mordechai of Rakov z”l was a “badchan”, whose task was to bring simcha to the Rebbe and those around him. He approached the Rebbe and asked for permission to speak. When the Rebbe agreed, R. Mordechai described what happened when R. Elimelech left this world.

“R. Elimelech,” he said, “assumed that he would certainly be taken to Gehinnom. When the Malachim brought him to his place in Gan Eden, he looked around and said “How do people dare to speak such loshon hora about Gehinnom, saying that it’s a place of fires that burn the reshaim? Here I am and its mamash Gan Eden!”

The badchan’s story brought a smile to his Rebbe’s face.

The deep message of the story is that R. Elimelech learned Torah, performed mitzvos, and helped so many Jews, without thinking about how much favor he will find in Hashem’s eyes. As R. Avrohom Hamalach said, such thoughts can be considered “Service of Self” rather than “Service of Hashem”. As far as R. Elimelech was concerned, he was headed to Gehinom, but that thought didn’t decrease his Avodas Hashem by one iota.

This is the true path of Avodas Hashem. The Yetzer tries to distract us with thoughts of “How much favor am I finding in Hashem’s eyes”.

The halachos of Chanuka teach us a similar lesson. The Halacha states “כבתה אין זקוק לה”. If someone set up their Chanuka neiros properly and lit them, but something caused them to go out before the halachically allotted time period, he does not have to relight. He has fulfilled the Mitzva.

This Halacha teaches us not get caught up in the past, but to move on and serve Hashem with joy.

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My Grandfather R. Yochanan of Tolna zy”a embodied this approach and one Chanuka he applied it during his own lighting.

Those who were present at the Rebbe’s Chanuka lighting, knew that on Chanuka, the Rebbe failed in his usual attempt to hide the intensity of his Avodas Hashem. His yearning and love for the mitzva of Ner Chanuka was evident in every aspect of the mitzva. From learning and davening while preparing the wicks, to the lighting itself, the Rebbe’s Chanuka inspired all who were present. Even the date of his passing, the first night of Chanuka, expressed his deep connection to the mitzva.

One year, immediately after my grandfather lit the candles that he prepared so painstakingly, a child walked too close to the menorah and knocked it over. The Rebbe hadn’t even begun to sing the zemiros. Those who had gathered for the lighting were shocked and the boy who knocked over the menorah, started trembling with fear and embarrassment.

My Grandfather’s reaction was entirely different. He rejoiced with the boy and proclaimed “Boruch Hashem! Now I can finally fulfill the instruction of Chazal who taught us, “כבתה אין, זקוק לה, if the candles go out, one does not have to relight them!”

Each of us should think about how we would react if this happened in our home. Would we express even a smidgen of joy at the wonderful opportunity to **not** relight our extinguished candles?

If, with Hashem’s help, we follow in my Grandfather’s footsteps, we will be privileged to serve Hashem כל בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב !

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