

פרשת שמיי



When Aharon Hakohein heard about the passing of his sons, Nadav and Avihu, the verse states: וידום אהרון, *And Aharon was silent*. He was quiet and didn't complain. Seemingly, the term וישתוק, *And he was quiet*, should have been used. This would indicate that he was quiet and didn't say anything. The word "Vayidom" is used to refer to a "domem", an inanimate, silent object. This indicates that Aharon not only was silent, he also didn't even show any type of emotion. He didn't show any mourning.

Rashi says that Aharon was rewarded for his silence when Hashem individualized the Parshah of יין שתויי יין, a kohein who drinks wine, specifically for Aharon alone.

There is a well-known story involving the Chazon Ish ז"ל. He once came to visit the Brisker Rov ז"ל and asked him about a specific occurrence that was greatly bothering him. The Brisker Rov responded simply, "I have bitachon." The Chazon Ish commented, "The Brisker Rov is kulo emes, complete truth. If he had even entertained any thoughts for a second without complete bitachon, he wouldn't have said that he has bitachon. It must be that he believed with complete faith and utter bitachon the entire time without even a moment's lapse."

Had Aharon Hakohein held any complaints about his children even for a moment, the Torah would have not been able to say "Vayidom Aharon" about him. "Vayidom Aharon" means that Aharon was completely silent and emotionless!

The Mashgiach Rav Yeruchim ז"ל explains further that the fact that Aharon received a reward that the Parshah of drinking wine in the Torah was made specifically for him proves that Aharon's silence was more than just an absence of words. It shows that Aharon accepted Hashem's decree with joy and love. The Shechina, Divine Presence, only rests in a place of joy. Because of Aharon's joy, Hashem specifically designated for him the portion of the Torah that only comes through joy of mitzvos.

A person's outlook is meant to be in sync with this lesson of the Torah. One shouldn't view death as a dark and bad thing. On the contrary, the moment of death is the greatest moment.

It is very possible that Aharon Hakohein uttered the blessing of "Hatov V'hameitiv". At the very least, he was on the level that he could have recited this blessing. He had reached the lofty level of the dictum, "Just as we make a blessing on good, so too we make a blessing on the bad."

A person's avodah is to serve Hashem with joy. But how does one reach a level where he is able to be happy at such a trying time such as when a loved one passes away?

Rabenu Yona writes (Shaar Sheini Os 200) that when a person accepts rebuke from Hashem, and he improves his ways and his actions, he should rejoice with his difficulties and tribulations. His suffering accomplishes great things for him. He must thank Hashem for sending him these difficulties, just as he thanks Hashem for his successes. This is as the verse states: כוס ישועות אשא ובשם ה' אקרא, *I lift the cup of my salvations and call out the Name of Hashem, I have found pain and weariness and I call out to the Name of Hashem.*

Chazal say (Sifri Devarim 6:5): Rebbe Elazar ben Yaakov says: As long as a person desists from rejoicing, he won't be absolved from his sins. And through man's suffering, he will become desirable to Hashem Yisborach. This is as the verse states (Mishlei 3:12): כי את אשר יאהב ה' יוכיח וכאב את בן ירצה, *For Hashem chastises the one He loves and desires the pain of His son*. Just as a father is concerned for his son when he hits him and does so only out of his love for him, so too Hashem desires His children when He hits them with suffering and they accept His rebuke.

We may say further: Just as a father only hits a son whom he is concerned about, and doesn't strike a child which he has no hope for, so too Hashem only sends suffering to people whom he knows will use it towards self-improvement. He sends no difficulties to people He knows cannot be helped.

Rabenu Yona states further (Os 5): Whoever has bitachon in Hashem Yisborach must retain hope even in his bitterest moments. He must believe that the darkness will usher in the light. This is as the verse states (Micha 6:8): אל תשמחי אויבתי לי כי נפלתי קמתי כי אשב בחושך ה' אור לי, *Don't let my enemies rejoice over me, when I fall I shall rise. When I sit in the darkness, Hashem is my light*. Chazal say (Medrash Tehillim 22): "Had I not fallen, I wouldn't have arisen. Had I not sat in darkness, I would have seen the light."

Whenever someone experiences difficult times, he should take it to heart and make a reckoning of his actions and fast and repent and daven. This is exactly the same as the obligation upon a public to fast when experiencing a time of troubles, as Chazal enacted (Tannis 10A and 12B). When a good man receives rebuke from Hashem Yisborach, it is meant as a test to him and is sent in order that he gain more reward for the World to Come. This is as the verse states (Devarim 5:16): למען ענותך וללמען נסותך להיטיבך באהריתך, *In order to afflict you and in order to test you, to benefit you in your end*. Chazal say (Berachos 5A): If one looks into his actions and finds no fault in himself, then his sufferings are sufferings of love.

Hagaon Rav Mordechai Schwab ז"ל in his Sefer Maamor Mordechai (Maamor 11) writes: The Mishnah (Brachos 54A) states that a man is obligated to recite a blessing upon the bad, just as one recites a blessing upon the good. The Gemara (60B) asks: What does it mean to bless the bad as one would bless the good? It cannot mean that one recites the blessing of "Hatov Vehameitiv" on bad, because the Gemara already said that one says Hatov Vehameitiv on good tidings and "Boruch Dayan Ha'emes" on bad tidings. Rava answers: The Mishnah only means to tell us to accept the bad tidings with joy. The Bartenura writes that when one recites "Dayan Ha'emes" on bad tidings, he must say it with joy and a good heart. He must say it in the same tone he would recite Hatov Vehameitiv for good tidings.

He explains that since we can't always appreciate and understand the inherent good in bad tidings we cannot recite Hatov Vehameitiv on them. We must say Dayan Ha'emes instead. Still, the way we say the blessing of Dayan Ha'emes should be the same as the way we say Hatov Vehameitiv. It should be with joy and a heart full of gladness because we know that in truth it is good. In the future, when we



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come to comprehend the inherent goodness, we shall also recite Hatov Vehameitiv on "bad" tidings.

The verse states (Devarim 14:1): בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם לא תתגודדו: *You are sons to Hashem Your G-d, you shall not cut yourselves.* The holy Ohr Hachaim writes that we must understand why the verse tells us that we are sons of Hashem next to the prohibition to cut ourselves in grief over the dead. He answers that the verse wishes to teach us that when a person dies it is no loss for the person who has passed on. This is comparable to a father who sends his son to do business in a distant city and, a while later, the father sends for his son to come home. The son has left the place he went to, but he has returned to where he came. It is not a tragedy. On the contrary, it is a cause of happiness that the son has returned to his father. Therefore, since death is not such a terrible thing, do not cut yourself in grief when someone dies.

The Mashgiach Rav Yeruchim zt"l (Da'as Chachmah U'Mussar Chelek Gimmel Maamor 257) writes that according to the Ohr Hachaim death is merely akin to someone leaving one city and entering another. This is stated in the Gemara (Kiddushin 31B): "Honor him in life and honor him in death." For death is merely like going from one place to another. He has merely gone away to another world. But, in truth, he still lives.

Hagaon Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that death is just the beginning of life in the World to Come. The entire life on this world is merely like a baby in utero. When one dies, it is as if he is newly born. Hagaon Rav Shimon Schwab compares this to a rainy day. Rainy days tend to dampen people's spirits. However, someone who is flying in an airplane on such a day is higher than the clouds. He may be exactly in the same spot as someone on the ground, but he can see the sun shining brightly. The same is true when a person passes on from this world. Everyone cries and is sad that he has left us. However, in Heaven it is not a sad occasion. In Heaven, the sun shines and Hashem rejoices when a pure righteous soul returns to Him.

The Alter from Kelm zt"l once said a eulogy on a bochur that passed away and he explained in detail the concept of what happens when someone dies. The father of the deceased was so impressed and moved from the eulogy that he said, "I thought I was going to my son's funeral, yet I feel like I am going to his wedding!"

Hagaon Rav Boruch Ber zt"l had a nephew, a bochur, who grew to be great in Torah and yirah. This nephew passed away at 19 years of age. On the day of the funeral, Rav Boruch Ber was scheduled to deliver a shiur in the yeshiva. It was related that the entire time before the shiur he reviewed the verse: ראשיכם אל תפרעו ובגדיכם על תפרמו: *You shall not uncover your head and you shall not rip your clothing (in mourning for someone who dies).* The students heard how he said to himself, "The avodah must go on! The avodah must go on!" With these words, he went to the shiur and said it with a strong enthusiasm. He was even more enthusiastic than during a regular shiur because he had deeply contemplated that the moment of death is the most significant moment.

As we said, a person's avodah is to serve Hashem with joy. How does

one reach this level during tragic circumstances? The Gemara in Brachos (60B) states: It was learned in the name of Rebbe Akiva: A person should be accustomed to saying that everything that Hashem does is for the good. We see this lesson in the story where Rebbe Akiva was traveling and came to a city and searched for a guesthouse to stay overnight. The people of the city didn't give him a place to stay. He said, "Whatever Hashem does is for the good." He went and stayed overnight in the forest. He had with him a rooster, a donkey and a candle. A wind came and extinguished his candle. A cat came and ate his rooster. A lion came and ate his donkey. He said, "Whatever Hashem does is for the good." That night, a military unit came into the city and plundered it. Rebbe Akiva told the city folk, "Didn't I tell you that whatever Hashem does is for the good?"

The Gemara previously ruled that one must recite a blessing on the bad just as one recites a blessing on the good. The Gemara explains that this means one should accept bad news with joy. What did Rebbe Akiva add with his story?

The answer is that Rebbe Akiva wanted to teach us that the avodah begins with accustoming one's self to say, "Whatever Hashem does is for the good." Simply through uttering these words, a person will go out from darkness into great light. Through this, he can ultimately come to the level of accepting his trials and tribulations with true joy. With the passing of time, this person will merit being able to say the blessing of Dayan Ha'emes with joy and a glad heart. Although we can't actually say the blessing of Hatov Vehameitiv on sad tidings, we can reach a level of saying Dayan Ha'emes with the same joy as we would say Hatov Vehameitiv.

The Gemara (Taanis 21A) says even more. It relates that Nochim Ish Gamzu once was sent with a box full of precious gems and pearls to give the Caesar as a gift. At night, robbers stole the jewels and filled the box with earth. When he came to the Caesar, the Caesar became very upset that he presented him with a box full of dirt. He wanted to retaliate by slaughtering all of the Jews. Elyahu Hanavi then appeared disguised as a minister and said, "Perhaps this is the earth of their forefather Avrohom which turned into weapons." They tested it and miraculously it actually worked like that earth.

We see from this story that even when one really is in a grave situation of danger for all of Klal Yisroel, he still must say "This too is for the good". Even the current untenable situation is also actually good.

The Chofetz Chaim zy"א often used to say: "If a person would accept Hashem's decree and believe with complete emunah that everything He does is for the good, he would merit actually seeing and feeling the inherent good, just as we see in the story of Rebbe Akiva."

This is the Torah perspective that one must adopt. One must not view death as dark and bad – as we are accustomed to doing. On the contrary, this is the greatest moment. Therefore, Aharon Hakohein wasn't emotional at all when he heard that his two sons had died. Through this, he sanctified Hashem's Holy Name. Therefore, he was rewarded to have the Parshah of יין שתיי dedicated specifically for him.