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OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM



FROM THE SHIURIM OF

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PARSHAS EMOR



HARAV YISROEL BROG, SHLITA | ROSH HAYESHIVA, YESHIVAS TIFERES AVIGDOR

A MITZVAH IS A HUG WITH HASHEM

In this week's *parshah* we find an interesting mitzvah. Most people look at mitzvos as rules, as commandments. Every government has its rules, its laws of conduct, and people look at mitzvos like that, but the *emes* is that mitzvos are a basis for our relationship with Hashem. The *shaychus*, the relationship that exists between a Yid and his Creator is such that it's a personal relationship. Mitzvos are not rules. The difference between Charedim and non-Charedim is that Charedim live for a relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu through mitzvos.

Now there are many people who are not looking for a relationship with Hashem and that's sad. Once I had a fellow who told me every time I said the words "relationship with Hashem," he *mamash* got upset, like, "what are you foisting on me with new relationships? I'm more of a private person. I'm not a big relationship person. I have a wife, my parents, my kids, and I do the job that I'm supposed to do. Now you're telling me I have to have a relationship with Hashem? I'll follow the rules." He was so disturbed by it, it *mamash* boggled my mind.

But mitzvos are relationships. It's brought down from Zohar that a mitzvah is like a hug with Hashem. It's a *chibuk* with Hashem. Every relationship is usually a two-way street. Let's say you have a husband and a wife. It's not that one relates to the other and the other doesn't relate to the first. They both relate to one another. That means both invest in the other's happiness. That's a relationship. There are isolated people who don't invest in anybody's happiness other than their own. They would do nothing for anyone else unless it grants them some happiness. They'll get something out of it, so they'll pay the price.

But let's say a person has a relationship with his spouse or with his parents. Many children don't know that. They think that the relationship is based on the parents taking care of the kids. What about the kids relating to the parents? To their needs? Many children are extremely selfish. They don't give a flying hoot about their parents' feelings. The only thing they're concerned about is if they make their parents feel bad, maybe they won't get the benefits

that they want from the parents. They relate to their parents like they relate to the government. No one expects and no one dreams of having a relationship with the government. A government is there to serve the people. That's what the government is for, to provide benefits, security, to provide funds, health, police and so on and so forth. Does anybody ever dream that you owe the government anything, that the government wants to have a personal relationship with you? No. No such thing. There are many people who do the exact same thing with their parents.

I met very seemingly religious people who are rule followers. They're 'black and white' and they follow rules, but the rules have nothing to do with Hashem. It has to do with one thing. Themselves. What makes me happy? What do I want to do? How do I want to do it? And Hashem has to *shtell tzu* to that. I've seen many people who are *frum* whom I've told, "You know, if you wouldn't be *frum*, you wouldn't be any different. You'd be one of these American citizens who is very religious about the rules." Have you ever met somebody like that? I've met people like that. It has nothing to do with Yiddishkeit, but they're very strict rule keepers. *Medakdek*.

THE ULTIMATE COMMITMENT

Now in this *parshah* we have something that is amazing. It says Hakadosh Baruch Hu told us that I want to be *בני בתוך בני ישראל*, "sanctified among Bnei Yisroel" (Vayikra 22:32). There is a mitzvah to be so committed to Hashem, so dedicated to the *ratzon* of Hashem and so concerned about what Hashem wants, that if Hashem wants you to give up your life, you'd do it. Now, would anybody ever give up their life for the government? You've got to be crazy to do that. You know why? If you gave up your life for the government, you would never get any benefits anymore. The whole purpose of me being a citizen in this country is to get benefits. If I'm dead, I get no benefits. That's the antithesis of being a citizen in this country. If a country would demand for me to give up my life, I'd be out of that country as soon as I could, as fast as I could. I'd go to some place where I could get benefits without giving up my life. Why do people like coming to America so much? Because America gives out tremendous benefits and it lets you do what you want.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells me, "I want you to be *mekadesh* me." That's the ultimate commitment to a relationship. To die for somebody? I never heard of that. Even a wife and a husband who love each other, would they die for each other? I don't think so. Let's say a husband would say to the wife, "I wish you were dead." Would she jump off the roof? No, I don't think so. Let's say the wife said to the husband, "I wish you were dead." Now, I have had people who came to me over the years and said, "I'm *davening* that my spouse

should get hit by a truck.” I said, “That’s an *aveirah*. You’re not allowed to do that. That’s terrible to do.” But people who are willing to end their lives for their spouses? That’s almost unheard of.

When it comes to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Hashem said, “If I ask you and I give you an opportunity to be *mekadesh* Me, to consecrate and die for Me, you have a mitzvah *mideoreisa* to give up your life for Me, to fulfill My *ratzon*.” And there’s never been a time in my life, even until today, that I don’t think about it and the depths of what that demands. That’s a relationship which I cannot fully conceive of.

I remember, years ago, I was invited to a famous *yeshivah* in Eretz Yisrael that dealt with *kiruv rechokim*. They tested me in a number of different departments in the *yeshivah*, and in one department they brought in about 40-50 new guys who had traveled to Eretz Yisrael from San Francisco. They managed to get them into the *yeshivah*, to see the Kosel and to see the *yeshivah*, this and that. The *rosh yeshivah* told me, “I want you to go in there and convince them to die for the cause.” I said, “Excuse me? They don’t know Who Hashem is. They don’t know what Torah is. They don’t know anything.” He said, “Don’t waste your time. You have five minutes... now you have four. Four minutes and you’re up. We’re taping it. We’re going to be in the room next to you and we’re going to critique and analyze your performance. And one thing I want to wish you is - *hatzlachah*. You better be convincing.”

I’m thinking, “That’s impossible. I can give them a lot of *shmoozen*. I’ll tell them stories. I’ll tell them this. But to die for the cause?” And I went in there and I said, “Do you know who the founder of Judaism was? Who were our founding fathers? So these are ‘big’ folks.” No one knew. Some people thought it was Abraham Lincoln. Some people thought it was George Washington. Everybody gave their own *narishkeit*. I told them, you know who they were? Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. And each one of them stood out. They were willing to give up their life without a struggle, without questioning. They were so committed, so loyal. They weren’t nuts. They were very rational, very logical people. They were willing to *mekadesh shem Hashem*. I told them the story of Chana and her seven sons, how each one was called before the king to worship *avodah zarah*, each little child, younger, younger, younger. They said, “I ain’t going to do it, buddy.” “I’m going to kill you.” “Well, let the chips fall where they may,” and they all died for the cause.

I can’t imagine any family having kids like that. I can’t begin to dream of knowing a family where every kid would be willing to go and give up their life! But that’s what Hashem wants from us. And you have to know that Yiddishkeit demands that commitment. And it’s not only when you’re being asked to give up your life. We

are so indebted to Hashem. We are His beings. We are a creation of Hashem. We are a figment of His imagination. I only exist because Hashem imagined someone, Yisroel Brog, and because Hashem imagined that, that's why I exist. The second Hashem would blink, I would cease to exist. Hashem wants me to understand that and to live for Him.

WHAT CAN WE OFFER IN THE RELATIONSHIP TO HASHEM?

Now, I would think to myself: What does Hashem need me for? What in the world does Hashem need me to live for Him for? I have nothing to offer Hashem. Hashem lacks nothing. But Hashem created a system. It's called תנו עוז לאלקים "Give strength to Hashem." But everybody is an expert, it's natural that you give strength to yourself. You seek to empower yourself. You seek to enhance yourself, to benefit yourself. That's the natural default situation. But to live for Hashem, to do something because that's what Hashem wants me to do, that's a *madreigah*. Many people, many spouses, can't do that. Many husbands can't do that for their wives. Only if they understand that their wives are going to give them something back. Many wives do it for their husbands because they feel that their husbands will give them back. There will be benefits. Now, there are benefits, but that's not the goal in a relationship. There are benefits between kids and parents also, but it can't be completely because of the benefits. That's why you'll see a lot of kids who tell their parents if you don't give me a big enough prize, I'm not going to behave. If you want me to behave, you better pay up.

I recently had a father call me, "What can I do? I wanted to get my little kid who is eight years old to learn. I told him, 'if you learn *bein hazmanim*, I'm going to buy you a present.'" You know what the kid said? "I'll do it for \$500." The father said, "Are you joking?" The kid said, "No, I think that's right, for \$500." The father's first reaction was, he was pretty upset, a *chutzpah!* You're holding me up. You're putting a gun to my head for 500 bucks. He called me up. I said, "My friend, inflation. Everybody knows things are expensive. A dozen eggs cost in some places \$12 nowadays. You're not going to eat eggs?" I said, "I know it's a little highway robbery. You've got to tell your kid for \$500 I'm *maskim*, but you have to learn \$500 worth," and then maybe he'll bargain down with you a little bit. He'll become less demanding, but that's what it is today.

One of the most amazing things is that Hashem cares if I have a sense and a feeling that I want to make Hashem great in the world. If I could make Hashem great in the world, that's actually something that would give Hashem *nachas ruach*. I find that to be amazing. I find it an amazing opportunity. The Vilna Gaon says we say in

davening לשמו כבוד לטוב. טוב יצר כבוד לשמו. *Tov*, that's Hashem. *Yatzar*, He created. Hashem created an ability to do *tovah* to him. It's a *nes niflah*. It's a creation beyond your imagination. Hashem created such a system that you could do *tovah* to Hashem. You know how He did that? You can give *kavod leshmo*, you can give *kavod* to Him. By giving *kavod* to Him, that is Hashem's creation. And that's what it says in this week's *parshah*, that I want the נקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל.

Now the *emes* is if a person does that, there are tremendous benefits that he can't begin to imagine. If you would think about building up Hashem's name, about bringing honor to Hashem, about bringing respect to Hashem, if you would think how to get people to be interested in doing the *ratzon* of Hashem, I can only imagine what Hashem would do for you. I can only dream!

Now, I could try to do it for Hashem but I'm very limited. My power is limited. But if Hashem wanted to do good for me, Hashem would have no problem whatsoever.

Our Chazal teach that this idea extends beyond the mitzvah of giving up one's life for Hashem. Of course, that's the ultimate *mesiras nefesh*, but the Chafetz Chaim brings down in his *Mishnah Berurah* in *Hilchos Kedushah* in *siman kuf chaf hei se'if katan daled*, that a person can fulfil this ideal when he says *kedushah* in shul. Hopefully for those of us who come to *davening* we say *kedushah* during *schacharis* and *mincha* in shul. So the *Mishnah Berurah* says that a person should put an extra *kavanah* when he says *kedushah* - in order to elevate Hashem. Now, everybody here reads *kedushah*, but to actually think, "I want You, Hashem, to be elevated and Your *kavod* to be raised in the world?" The Chafetz Chaim says that if you do that, Hashem will rest His Presence upon you and you're going to be *zocheh* to who knows what. He says you should be *mechaven* to fulfill the *passuk* of בני ישראל.¹

EVERY KADDISH AND KEDUSHAH IS AN OPPORTUNITY

And the Chafetz Chaim adds something incredible. He says the Arizal, the great Arizal, who knew secrets that everybody only dreamed of knowing, used to warn, *al zeh meod*. He used to warn and tell people, do not lose this opportunity. Grab this opportunity and try to think of Hashem a couple of times a day. You think about נקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל.

The Chafetz Chaim brings this again in his *sefer Toras Habayis*. He writes that when a guy starts to say *kaddish*, he can't even get to 'first base' with his *kaddish*. One guy says *yisgadal veyiskadash*. One

¹ (ד) לכוין רגליו - כמ"ש בסו"ט צ"ה. וצריך לכוין ביותר בקדושה לקדש את השם ית' ובזכות זה ישירה עליו הש"י קדושה מלמעלה ויכוין לקיים הפסוק ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל והאר"י ז"ל היה מזהיר מאוד ע"ז. הנוסח שמקדישים ולא שמקדישין. גם יפירש קצת בין תיבת שמקדישים לתיבת אותו שכתוב א"כ ודלעיל בסו"ט ס"א לגבי ק"ש. [אחרונים]:

guy says *yisgadel veyiskadash*. One guy says *yisgadel veyiskadash* or *yisgadal veyiskadash*.² They can't figure out how to do it. But what you're supposed to be thinking is, "I want to be *mekadesh shem Hashem*. I want to elevate the *shem* of Hashem." By you saying *יהא שמייה רבה מבורך לעולם ולעלמי עולמיא*, you know what you're doing? You're saying: "Hashem I want Your great name to be glorified. I'm just expressing my wish that I want Hashem, that Your name should be glorified forever and forever." And then there's a special magic sentence you put in there *יהא שמייה רבה מבורך לעולם ולעלמי עולמיא*. That's magic. That has power. That sentence gives Hashem such *nachas ruach* because you're glorifying Hashem! That's what you're doing.

We say *kedusha* in *uva leTzion*. We say *kadosh kadosh* in *birchas krias shema*. We say *ברוך את ה' המבורך*. We say *kadosh* and then *baruch*. You're being *mekadesh*. That's *kedushah*. We say it during *shemoneh esrei*.

Now, if you do this, obviously the more awareness you have of what you're saying and expressing, and the more sincerity that you have when you say it, the greater effect it will have.

The Chafetz Chaim quotes the *Mishnah Berurah* in *kuf chaf hei*, he brings down from the *sefer Heichalos*. *Heichalos* is a heavy *sefer*. It's a holy *sefer*. And he says that when Yidden say *kaddish* and *kedushah* to Hashem, Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, 'ברוכים אתם לה', "you are a *gebentchte* nation."³ He writes that Hashem says to the *malachim*, "If you would go down and tell them what I do, how I, Hashem, react when Klal Yisrael says *kaddish* and *kedushah* and *kadosh kadosh kadosh*, and teach them the following: *ולמדו אותם*." The Chafetz Chaim quotes: they should raise their eyes to Me and I will look at them. Did you ever try to talk to somebody and the person feels you're talking to him? The guy is looking at you, he's looking back at you, and you're connected. Then you have people who don't look at you when they talk.

I remember a teen who used to *daven shemoneh esrei* for at least 20 minutes. Every *shemoneh esrei* 20 minutes a day. He earned himself a reputation, a name, that he was a *tzaddik*. He was a high school kid, and he was the *tzaddik* type. He played the part *gevaldig*. So one day another guy asked me, "That guy is amazing. Why is he such a *tzaddik*?" I said, "I don't know. I don't know him

² מב ס' נ"ו סע"ב (ב) הקדיש - נוסח הקדיש יתגדל ויתקדש שחודש ע"פ המקרא והתגדלתי והתקדשתי האמור (ביחזקאל ל"ח:כ"ג) לענין מלחמת גוג ומגוג שאז יתגדל שמו של הקב"ה דכתיב ביום ההוא יהיה ד' אחד ושמו אחד. ויאמר הדלית דיתגדל ויתקדש בצירי כי הוא עברי ולא תרגום [ענין בב"א] ולא בשני שוואין כאלו התיו והגימל בשווא אלא הגימל בפתח. וידגיש הגימל דיתגדל דלא לישתמע יתקדל לשון עורף תרגום עורף קדל. ולא ידגיש ביותר הב' דיתברך. ויחתוך היטב ה' דויתלהל.

³ (ה) ויש לישא [הענינים למרום בשעה שאומרים קדושה] וכו' - כי כתבו בשם ספר היילות ז"ל ברוכים אתם לד' שמים ויודי מרכבה אם תאמרו ותגידו לבני מה שאני עושה בשעה שמקדישים ואומרים ק"ק ולמדו אותם שיהיו עיניהם נשואות למרום לבית תפלתם ונושאים עצמם למעלה כי אין לי הנאה בעולם כאותה שעה שעניניהם נשואות בעיני ועיני בעיניהם באותה שעה אני אחז בכסא כבודי בדמות יעקב ומחבקה ומנשקה ומזכיר זכותם וממחר גאולתם.

at all. I can't tell you." I decided I'm going to find out. One day I went over to the kid and I said, "*Shalom aleichem*, my name is Yisroel Brog. What's your name? I would like to talk to you for a few minutes. Could you ever have the time to talk to me for a few minutes?" He said, "Where?" I said, "When you walk down the lane. I see you once in a while walking down Nutwood Lane. Stop by my house. I want to ask you a question or two."

He came to my house and I said, "Tell me. When you *daven shemoneh esrei* what do you think about? Do you think that you're talking to somebody?" He said, "No, I'm reading and thinking about the words." That's what he told me. I said, "You don't feel like you're talking to Hashem and connecting to Hashem?" "Not at all." It was *kriah* time for him, *mamash*. It was time to practice reading. That's what he was doing. So he spent a long time *davening*. He read slowly. He practiced the art.

And I introduced him to this. I said, "I want you to know that the whole purpose of *davening* is to be aware that you are communicating with Someone and that Someone is listening to you and Someone is accepting what you're saying."

This is what the *Mishnah Berurah* brings down from the *sefer Heichalos*. They should go to Klal Yisrael and tell them: אין לי הנאה בעולם, I don't have any pleasure in the world, כאותה שעה, like that time that their eyes נשואות לעיני, are lifted up to My eyes and My eyes are

looking at their eyes. At that time Hashem says, "I grab My *kisei hakavod* that has Yaakov Avinu on it," ומחבקה ומנשקה ומכיר וממהיר, "I hug it," Hashem says, "I kiss it, and I remember and I'm *memaher* the *geulah*." You hear that?! That's amazing.

It's brought down at length in the *Rishonim*. They quote from this *Heichalos*. It's brought down in the *Ohr Zarua* in *Hilchos Shabbos siman mem beis*, and over there it says amazing things and describes in a much greater depth how Hakadosh Baruch Hu reacts when people say ה' מלך ה' מלך ה' ימלך לעולם ועד. You know what you're saying? "Hashem, I would like to see Your *malchus* flourish." When you say at the end of *kedushah* ימלך ה' לעולם אלקיך ציון לדור ודור הללוקה with *kavanah*, that's a *shir* that Dovid Hamelech used to sing before Hashem.

Rabbi Yishmael once met up with the Sar Hapenim. The Sar Hapenim is a major *malach* in *shamayim*, and he said to him, "Could you show me the *kavod* of Dovid Hamelech? Give me a glimpse behind the curtain." The *malach* said, "If you want, wait three hours. In three hours, I'll be able to show you the greatness of Dovid Hamelech." Nu, I waited, said Rabbi Yishmael. He grabbed me after three hours, he held me in his bosom and he said to me,

He said, “How are things going for you in the other world,” and he said, “Very good.” He said, “What *zechuyos* did you have? You were not anybody special in this world. You were a *pashute mentch*. You were an *adam kol dehu*. He said, “In the *zechus* that I said *brachos* every day aloud, in a pleasant voice in the *beis hakenesses*, *bezechus zeh* they brought me to Gan Eden and they’re *mechabed* me. And the *siman* that I’m really the guy who you know is, if you look at my sleeve, that’s torn, you tore it.⁷ When you put my *tachrichim* on and you buried me, you tore the sleeve of my cloak that you wrapped me up in. That’s how you’ll know it’s me. Remember you tore my *tachrichim*.”

So he said, “What’s on your head?” He said, “These are *asavim* that I put on my head to be *mevatel* for myself bad odor of this world. I came to this world and when you come from the next world the *rei’ach* in this world is terrible. So I put these good smelling grasses over me so it should deflect the smell.”

The Ohr Zarua says I’m writing this *ma’aseh* so that a person should increase his *yiras shamayim* and take to heart and to start to sing the praises of Hakadosh Baruch Hu *bekavanah* and he’s going to be *zocheh* for himself Gan Eden.

✧ IN SUMMARY ✧

It is refreshing and beautiful to realize that mitzvos are not mere rules; they are the basis of our relationship with Hashem. In this relationship, we are committed to Hashem and His ratzon, even to the point of dying al kiddush Hashem, the ultimate kiddush Hashem. Actually, Hashem created many opportunities for us to give honor to His name in This World. This constitutes living al kiddush Hashem. The Chafetz Chaim says that Hashem rests His Shechinah on such a person. Other sefarim say that a person will also be zocheh to great things in Gan Eden, at the end of their life on This World. The Mishnah Berurah points out that in Kedushah, we should have kavanah to elevate Hashem’s honor, and the Arizal reminds us to think of kevod Hashem throughout the day. Our opportunities in tefillah for living al kiddush Hashem include (but are not limited to), saying and answering Kaddish with kavanah; saying the Kedushah in the brachos before Krias Shema of Shacharis, in Shemoneh Esreh in chazaras hashatz, and in Uva l’Tzion; and saying Pesukei d’Zimrah with kavanah since we are mekadesh Shem Shamayim with the shevachim. This week, (bli neder,) I will increase my yiras Shamayim and improve my relationship with Hashem by being mekadesh Hashem with kavanah at the special points in tefillah.

⁷ וזה לך הסימן שאני הוא המדבר אליך כי תראה בית יד חילוקי שקרוע שקרעת לי כשהלבשתי התכריכין ושאל לו מה זה שבראשך וענהו הם עשבים שבג"ע ששמתי בראשי כדי לבטל ריח רע מעלי של זה העולם. כתבתי אני המחרב אילו המעשים כדי שיראה ירא שמים וישם אל לבו ויאמר שבחותיו של הקב"ה בקול נעים ובכוונה ויזכה לג"ע (שם)

