

Now is the Time

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

Time marches along, too quickly it seems. It feels like it was only a couple of weeks ago that the weather warmed and summer was upon us. It was just yesterday that many were packing for camp and the country, looking forward to a slower pace of life with reduced pressures and time for travel, rest and relaxation. Those experiences are now rapidly coming to an end, as we welcome the month of Elul, which signifies seriousness as well as a return to school, yeshiva and our regular routines.

Some find it more difficult than others to resume their normal schedules and get back to doing what they must to be productive and realize their potential and purpose. Often, in the razzle dazzle of life, we forget what it is all about, that there is a reason for our being here, and that it is not necessarily to engage in full-time enjoyment. Perhaps the shortness of the time that the calendar allows us relaxation before the shofar of Elul is blown is a reminder that we all have jobs to do.

One of the reasons that secular people convince themselves that the world haphazardly came to be is that this mindset creates no obligation to seek accomplishment and advancement. If man is equal to soulless animals that somehow came to find themselves on earth, then there is no reason to pursue anything more than enjoyment and physical contentment. Life is little more than a pursuit of food, shelter and pleasure.

It is because we know that Hakadosh Boruch Hu created the world that we understand that we are here for a greater purpose. Since the world has a Creator, and He created us as well, everything that exists was placed here for a reason. Hashem speaks to us through the Torah and tells us what He expects of us and how we are to conduct ourselves.

Last week's parsha of Re'eh spoke of the brachos reserved for those who follow the mitzvos of Hashem and the klalos that befall the ones who do not listen to what Hashem commands. We can understand that those who follow the mitzvos are blessed not only as a reward, but as a natural occurrence.

Chazal teach us that Hashem created the world with the Torah for Am Yisroel. The understanding of this is that since Hashem created the world with the Torah, the Torah is our guide for how to live in

His world. If we follow its prescriptions and instructions for life, then we will be living the life that Hakadosh Boruch Hu intended for us.

It is the same as your car, which requires gasoline in order for it to get started and run, because the person who invented the car devised it to use that form of fuel in order to generate its power. So too, lehavdil, Hashem requires us to live our lives according to the contours of the Torah in order for us to be functional and successful. If we live our lives in a manner that conforms to Hashem's intentions, we can be productive and blessed, but those who don't, live cursed lives, because they simply are not able to function properly, as they are not living the way they were created to live.

Just as if someone places water into his gas tank it will ruin the engine and not allow it to produce the energy required to operate the vehicle, so too, a person who doesn't follow the Torah will break down. Every limb of a person is powered by a different mitzvah. Should a limb be causing pain or not function properly, tzaddikim who understand these things and are proficient in Torah are able to cure themselves by strengthening their observance of those specific mitzvos. In fact, it is said of the Steipler Gaon, whose yahrtzeit is this week, that he was able to cure himself without going to doctors. His son, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, was famous for, among other things, advising people as to which portions of Torah to study to help cure ailments and sickness.

It is that way with specific limbs and organs, as well as with a person's entire being. Failing to properly observe mitzvos and study Torah leads a person to ruin. Those who think that they can spend their lives lounging around, eating, drinking and enjoying themselves full-time, soon enough learn that such a life breeds emptiness, shallowness and sadness instead of contentment.

A life lived without Torah is not lived. It is not life. It quickly degenerates into boredom and pointlessness, because Hashem created man with a purpose, and those who ignore this are not only denying creation and the purpose of creation, but also denying themselves life itself.

Man was not created as a machine that can constantly operate. Rather, Hashem made us with the need for daily rest and for periodic breaks. Not only is there nothing wrong with vacation, but it is a necessary component of the human condition, just like sleep.

After a couple of weeks of taking it easy, albeit, of course, with shemirashamitzvos and limudhaTorah, from which there is never a vacation, we need to return to the more vigorous life Hashem intended for us, lest we begin to slacken off.

Elul arrives as a month of rachamim, mercy, to help us get back to where we were and where we need to be. It is a month when Hashem reaches out to us and accepts our teshuvah so that we can earn another year of life on the upcoming Yom Hadin of Rosh Hashanah.

Summer was good, getting away – for those who were able to – was great, and recharging the batteries is imperative, but it is incumbent upon us to recognize our obligations in this world and do what we must to merit a year of good health, success and life that comes with proper observance of Torah and mitzvos.

The Dubno Magid was gifted with the ability to put life in the proper perspective in a way that people were able to understand deep and important concepts on a basic level. He told the story of a successful store. It was before the days of credit cards and checks, and every day, people would come to the store and spend money. The cash began piling up and the owner decided that it was no longer safe to keep the money at home and in his store. He began depositing the money at the local bank for safekeeping.

Eventually he hired a local young man to take the money to the bank every day before closing. To prevent against being robbed, the fellow would only walk on the main street and never take any detours or shortcuts. That way, there were always people around who could see if anything untoward was happening. The man was confident that if anyone would attempt to steal the money, the townspeople in the street would stop him.

There was a thief who became aware of the carrier's route and schemed to come up with a way to get his hands on the money. It was just too tempting for him to know that every day, there was a bag of cash making its way through the street and he couldn't get his hands on it. And then he came up with a plan.

On the path that the man followed every day as he walked on the main street from the store to the bank, there was a tailor who had a nice little shop with a large glass window facing the street. One

day, the thief went into the shop and told the tailor that he was sent by a wealthy fellow to have a suit made for him. This was in the days before suits and clothing were mass produced.

The tailor was thrilled with the prospect of sewing a suit for a wealthy customer. "Tell him to come in for a fitting and I will sew him the nicest suit in town," the tailor told the supposed messenger.

"But the prospective customer is too busy to take off to come to the shop for a fitting," the messenger said. "He suggested that I watch the people walking down the street past your store, and when I see someone of his size and build, I should ask him to come into the store for a few minutes and you will conduct your measurements on him. Based on your fine reputation, my boss is confident that you will fashion for him a fine suit."

The tailor, hungry for business, agreed to the proposal.

The messenger stood at the stoop and looked over the crowd. When he saw the young man coming with the briefcase full of cash, he innocently stopped him and asked him if he could come inside for a few minutes. He explained the reason, and the fellow with the cash was happy to do the Jew a favor.

The tailor got to work and placed upon him his most expensive material. He began measuring it and marking it up for a perfect fit. As the tailor was doing his work, the bag with the cash began to grow heavy, so instead of holding it and switching it from hand to hand to facilitate the fitting and measuring, the man placed it on the floor.

The thief was waiting for just this moment. As soon as the bag was placed on the floor, the thief scooped it up and ran out of the shop and down the busy street. The young man began running after him, screaming, "Thief! Thief! Come back here!"

But then the tailor began running after the young man. "Hey, where do you think you're going? You have my best material on you! Come back here. I need that."

Meanwhile, the thief got away.

During Elul, said the Dubno Maggid, we can gain so much. We can earn millions. Everyone knows that Elul is a most advantageous month. The yeitzer hora has a serious problem: How can he trip up people and get them to forgo the opportunities Elul presents them? So he tailors for each person a

suit to keep them occupied. Each person gets a pekeltailor-made for them to keep busy and make them forget about Elul. Some people get happy stuff loaded up on them, and others get not-such-happy things to be busy with. The main objective is that they not bring themselves back to where they belong.

Rabbosai, Elul is upon us. Let us take advantage of the time to get our things in order and remember that we are in this world for a reason and a purpose. If we want to be healthy and happy and successful, then we have to tune ourselves in to the word of Hashem.

Let us rededicate ourselves to Torah, its observance and study. Let us learn the parsha of the week thoroughly. Let us learn sifreimussar that inspire and speak to us at this time of year. This week, Daf Yomi starts a new masechta. Let's hop aboard. The zeman is about to begin. Let us return with a renewed frishkeit and bren.

Let's all do what we can to throw the yeitzer hora off and concentrate on becoming even better than we have been, realizing our potential and bringing meaning to our lives and the lives of others, so that we will all merit a happy, healthy and successful new year.