

The Sfas Emes next brings another Gemara, from *Chagigah* 15a, which is very interesting:

שאל אחר את רבי מאיר לאחר שצא לתרבות רעה, אמר ליה: מאי דכתיב: "גם את זה לעומת זה עשה האלילים?" אמר לו: כל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא, ברא כנגדו. ברא הרים — ברא נבעות, ברא ימים — ברא נהרות.

The Gemara relates: Acher asked Rabbi Meir a question, after he had gone astray. He said to him: What is the meaning of that which is written: "G-d has made even the one as well as the other" (Kohel's 7:14)? Rabbi Meir said to him: Everything that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created, He created a similar creation corresponding to it. He created mountains, He created hills; He created seas, He created rivers.

אמר לו: רבי עקיבא רבך לא אמר כך, אלא: ברא צדיקים ברא רשעים, ברא גן עדן ברא גיהנום. כל אחד ואחד יש לו שני חלקים, אחד בגן עדן ואחד בגיהנום. זה צדיק — נטל חלקו וחלק חבירו בגן עדן, נתייב רשע — נטל חלקו וחלק חבירו בגיהנום.

Acher said to him: Rabbi Akiva, your teacher, did not say so, but explained the verse as follows: Everything has its opposite: He created the righteous, He created the wicked; He created Gan Eden, He created Gehinnom. Each and every person has two portions, one in Gan Eden and one in Gehinnom. If he merits it, by becoming righteous, he takes his portion and the portion of his wicked friend in Gan Eden; if he is found culpable by becoming wicked, he takes his portion and the portion of his friend in Gehinnom.

The Sfas Emes explains on this Gemara that it's a process — a Yid does a mitzvah and brings down the *shefa* and *kedushah* from Above. Then he does an *aveirah*, which causes him to lose that *shefa* he earned (that *chelek* in Gan Eden). The question is, where does that *shefa* go when he loses it?

It can't go back to *Shamayim* because of the rule we learned above from the Gemara in *Taanis*. But it has to go somewhere. So it goes to the *tzaddik*, as the Gemara above in *Chagigah* explains.

We see this process multiple times in the Torah. For example, we see it by Avraham Avinu, as it says in *Pirkei Avos*:

עשרה דורות מאדם ועד נח, להודיע כמה אדם צריך אפים לפניו, שכל הדורות היו מקיימים ובאים עד שהביא עליהם את מי המבול. עשרה דורות מנח ועד אברהם, להודיע כמה אדם צריך אפים לפניו, שכל הדורות היו מקיימים ובאים, עד שבא אברהם וקבל עליו שכר כלם:

[There were] ten generations from Adam to Noah, in order to make known what long-suffering is His; for all those generations kept on provoking Him, until He brought upon them the waters of the flood. [There were] ten generations from Noah to Abraham, in order to make known what long-suffering is His; for all those generations kept on provoking Him, until Abraham came and received the reward of all of them.

2 It is worthwhile to note here that we saw in a prior *dvar Torah* that while it is possible to lose the *schar* from a mitzvah previously performed, it is not possible to lose the *schar* earned from *limud Torah*. 3 See Sfas Emes on Parashas Yisro בפסוק תרסיב דה בפסוק 4 See above; see also Zohar Parashas Yisro 32.

The twenty generations from Adam Harishon until Avraham did some things right and they earned *zechuyos* for those actions, but then they lost those *zechuyos* when they did various *aveiros*. However, the *zechuyos* had to go somewhere, because of our *klal* that *Shamayim* gives but does not take back. Therefore, they went to the *tzaddik*, Avraham Avinu.

We also see this with the *ketarim*, which we've discussed in previous *dvar Torahs*, that *Klal Yisrael* merited 1,200,000 *ketarim* when they said *naaseh v'nishma*, but then they lost them all when they fell by the *cheit ha'egel*. Again, *Shamayim* could not take the lost *ketarim* back and they had to go somewhere, and they therefore went to the *tzaddik*, Moshe Rabbeinu.

Applying These Two Premises to the Mitzvah of Hashavas Aveidah and Its Pesukim

The Sfas Emes uses the above two premises to learn that, on a deeper level, the mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah* is referring to Hashem returning to the Yid the *zechus*, the *shefa*, the *ruchniyus* they obtained through the mitzvos they accomplished, but then lost due to the *aveiros* they committed.²

The Sfas Emes *darshens* the third *pasuk* about *hashavas aveidah* as follows. The *pasuk* says, וכן תעשה לכל-אברת אחיך אשר-תאבד ממנו — *And so are you to do for any lost object of your brother's that is lost from him*, which you find. The *aveidah* is נמצא in the hand of the *tzaddik*.

Looking at the second *pasuk* in the *pesukim* about *hashavas aveidah*, it says, ותיה עמך עד דרש אחיך אתו — *And let it stay with you until your brother searches it out*. The Sfas Emes explains that this is referring to the sinner doing *teshuvah* and searching out Hashem, searching out the *ruchniyus* he lost through his *aveiros*. When he does, Hashem returns his *aveidah* to him. This, of course, is what we need to be doing this time of year, during Chodesh Elul, in preparation for the Yamim Nora'im.

Shabbos Kodesh

A similar process happens each week on Shabbos Kodesh. As we discussed in a previous *dvar Torah*, Moshe Rabbeinu returns our lost *ketarim* to us each Erev Shabbos, and this is what forms our *neshamah yeseirah*. During the week, we forget these *ketarim*, the *neshamah yeseirah*, that we lost on the prior Motzaei Shabbos. This is the natural state of affairs in *Olam Haze*, that we forget what we lost, because this world is עולמא דשכחה, the world of forgetting.³ But Shabbos is יומא דזכירה, the day of remembering, as we see in the integral mitzvah of *zachor es*

Yom HaShabbos l'kadsho.⁴ Therefore, when Shabbos comes, we remember what we lost, we start searching for it, and Hashem returns it to us in the form of our *neshamah yeseirah*. This is the meaning of the Gemara in *Menachos* that *darshens* “וַיִּנָּפֶשׂ” as “וַיִּנָּפֶשׂ אֶבְרָהָם נֶפֶשׁ” — on Shabbos we remember the *ketarim* we lost, and the *neshamah yeseirah* we lost on the prior Motzaei Shabbos.

Midosav shel Hakadosh Baruch Hu

The Sfas Emes concludes this *ma'amer* with a כל שכן : If Hashem has given us the mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah*, כל שכן that Hashem performs this mitzvah as well, or put differently, that this is a *middah* of Hashem. His proof for this is in *Shemos Rabbah* 30:9, where it tells us that Hashem's *middos* are not like the *middos* of a *melech basar vadam*. A *melech basar vadam* tells his subjects to do things that he does not necessarily do himself. This is unlike Hashem, this Midrash tells us, who does everything He asks us to do; He also keeps all the mitzvos (although obviously in a very different way than we do).

As such, it must be that Hashem is *shomer* the “*aveidah*” (the lost *shefa/schar mitzvah/ruchniyus* due to our *aveiros*) for those who are דורש אחריה, who search after their *aveidah* (do *teshuvah*). Hashem reminds us of this each day, telling us to search for what

we have lost, with the *Bas Kol* that comes out each day from Har Chorev (as we have discussed in prior *dvar Torahs*), which announces: אֵי לָהֶם לְבָרִיּוֹת מִעֲלֻבוֹנָהּ שֶׁל תּוֹרָה — Woe to those creations who have forgotten/forsaken Torah.

This also explains the Gemara in *Avodah Zarah* (26b), which says that the mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah* applies also to a מומר, an apostate who succumbs to his temptation, rather than sinning out of insolence. With our understanding of the deeper meaning behind this mitzvah, it makes perfect sense that the mitzvah would still apply for such an individual. There is still hope for such a person if they make the decision to search for what they have lost.

Practical Takeaway

This deeper meaning behind the mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah* revealed by the Sfas Emes is a great concept for us to focus on as we enter Chodesh Elul and try to prepare for the Yamim Nora'im. Let us simply search for what we have lost, muster up the *ratzon* (the key to everything) to regain the *ruchniyus* we have lost, and Hashem in His Mercy, as the greatest *Shomer Aveidah*, will surely return it to us.