

# ניצוצי אור Sparks of Light

בס"ד



No. 57

פרשת תולדות תשע"ז

## What is Yiras Shomayim?

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger, Editor

### What is Yiras Shomayim?

*Yiras Shomayim* is not a fear of punishment, but an awe that one should have for HaShem.

The most basic fear ("yirah tataah"), which is within reach of every person, comes from a realization that HaShem is watching his every move. Just as one would not want to be seen by another person when doing something wrong, so too one will abstain from wrongdoing when he feels that HaShem always sees him.

A higher form of this fear is when a person recognizes the greatness of HaShem. When one contemplates how HaShem gives life and fills the entire universe, he will be in such awe of HaShem that he will be afraid to rebel against Him.

The highest level of fear ("yirah ila'ah") is attainable only by very great people. This level is defined by the recognition that HaShem is creating this world at every moment, and that a person has no true existence besides Him.

A person who has this fear is completely naught before HaShem, and never once transgressed his wishes.

(תניא פמ"א"מ"ג)

The **Baal HaTanya** writes that everyone can have awe for HaShem by observing the tremendous subservience that the heavenly spheres have to him, similar to a palace where one is struck by the tremendous awe that overpowers mighty ministers in the presence of their king.

The revered *mashpia* in Lubavitch, **Reb Groinem**, would illustrate this with a well known story:

A *Yiddishe* contractor was hired to build a fort for the Russian government. When it was completed, Czar Nicholas came to inspect it in person, and praised the *Yid* for his good work.

Two weeks later the *Yid* received an invitation to meet the Czar in Petersburg. Dread fell upon the poor fellow. Had they found something faulty with his work?

When he arrived at the palace and showed the guards his invitation, they allowed him to enter. In the waiting room, he watched a famous general entered the room with great trepidation, which made him feel fearful too. Soon the king's doorkeeper came out and told the general that it was his turn to enter. The general began shaking from fear, the *Yid* too, began to shake. Hour after hour, officers and dignitaries entered in awe, while each time the *Yid* sat in his place, trembling anew.

After the last visitor had left, the guard came out and told the *Yid* he could now return home in peace. Since at the time that the Czar inspected the fort the *Yid* had been too relaxed, he was invited then, to internalize how one ought to feel when approaching the presence of the king...

(תניא ספמ"ב, רשימו"ד חדש ע' 266)

### Simple Awe

The **Rayatz of Lubavitch** related: "In earlier times, even the simplest *Yidden* had *yiras Shomayim* that you could feel. Before making a *bracha* they would carefully clean their hands. I remember playing in the garden as a child, when I heard a gardener say the *bracha Shehakol* with such feeling that I trembled.

"This was not a profound *yiras Shomayim* that grows out of a deep understanding, but rather a simple fear of Heaven. This expressed itself not only in abstaining from wrong and doing good, but also in a *hiddur mitzvah*."

(סה"ש תש"ג ע' 119)

**Chazal** say that a person should consider these three points and he will abstain from doing wrong: there is an 'eye' above that sees everything he does, there is an ear that hears everything he says and all his actions are recorded in the heavenly chronicles.

(אבות פ"ב מ"א)

When **Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakai** was on his sickbed, his *talmidim* came to visit him.

When they asked him for a *bracha* he said, "Yehi ratzon that the fear of HaShem be upon you like the fear of a human being."

The *talmidim* were surprised, "Is that all?"

"Halevai! If only that!" he told them, "For when a person is about to commit an *aveira* he makes sure that no one will spot him. If only he would fear HaShem the same way, you would be spared from many sins."

(ברכות כח ע"ב ורש"י)

### Acquiring Awe

Once, at a party, a certain baron portrayed to his fellow noblemen the awesome atmosphere in the king's palace. He described how all the servants in their various ranks stood in dread of the king. And as the baron described this in great detail, he was so overwhelmed that he fainted.

When they succeeded in waking him, they asked: "Were you ever in the king's palace, and did you experience this fear?"

"No," he replied, "I was never even near the palace."

"How then do you know all these details?" they probed.

"My brother was a guard for the king," the baron explained.

So too, by contemplating the greatness of HaShem and His kingdom, he will be filled with awe, even though he has never actually seen Him.

(רשימו"ד חדש ע' 195)

## Consider This



What is the person with *Yiras Shomayim* afraid of?

Is *Yiras Shomayim* a means to an end or an end for itself?

## Sparks of Greatness

### The Avnei Nezer

Reb Avraham Borenshtein of Sochatchov is known as the “Sochatchver Gaon” or the “Avnei Neizer.” He was the son-in-law of the Kotzker Rebbe and known as one of the greatest *geonim* and *poskim* in Poland in his time. He also served as a Rebbe of many Chassidim. Reb Avraham passed away on the 11th of Adar Alef 1910 (תר”ע).

The Avnei Neizer would not let any of his Chasidim join his Pesach seder. When his Chasidim pleaded with him to let in at least some of them, he replied, “My seder is a simple one, just like yours. It’s just that by the seder one must feel “free” (*cheirus*) and this is simply impossible when a *chossid* is in front of his Rebbe...”

A widow once came to the Avnei Neizer for a ruling on a particular matter. As she outlined the story of her woes, she burst into tears. “I am no longer fit to judge your case,” the Rebbe told her. “I feel for your

plight and I cannot be objective.”

In his days, the *maskilim* began advancing their cause through writing Yiddish books disguised as Jewish history and stories. Between the lines, these books poked fun at old-fashioned *minhagim* and encouraged loose conduct. Many fell prey to these innocent looking books and were slowly led astray.

The Avnei Neizer wrote a strong letter stating that according to *halacha* it is forbidden to buy, sell or read these books. To those who claimed that they were compelled to sell them to earn a living, he writes that this is no excuse and HaShem can surely find them *parnassa* in a permissible manner. He concludes that though he doesn’t consider himself the most worthy person to address the matter, in instances of *pikuach nefesh* one doesn’t show honor, and every moment is a tremendous loss.

## Library Sparks

In this week’s Torah portion, *Toldos*, we read how Yitzchak wanted to bless Eisav but was prevented from doing so by Rivka. It was through her intervention that the blessings were bestowed upon Yakov instead.

A fundamental question is raised by this incident. How could Isaac have possibly preferred Eisav over Yakov? True, our sages tell us that Eisav repeatedly tried to deceive his elderly father into thinking he was G-d-fearing and observant, by pointedly asking questions about religious law. Yet it is still hard to imagine Isaac being fooled by Eisav’s ruse. In fact, when Yakov presented himself to receive his father’s blessings, Isaac declared that “the voice is the voice of Yakov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav,” recognizing how unusual it was for Eisav to address him in such a civil manner or even to bring G-d’s name into the conversation. Isaac surely realized that something was amiss. But if Isaac was well aware of Eisav’s serious shortcomings, why did he nevertheless want to give the blessings only to him?

The truth is that Eisav, the firstborn twin, possessed an extremely lofty

soul capable of incredible spiritual accomplishments. In certain respects, Eisav was on an even higher spiritual level than his brother Yakov. Yakov was born to be a “dweller in tents (of Torah),” protected from the outside world, enclosed within the four walls of the *yeshiva*. Eisav, however, was “a man of the field,” blessed with the spiritual strength to venture forth into the coarser material world to wage war against evil and impurity, bringing G-dliness and holiness down into the physical realm. It was Eisav, therefore, who possessed the greater spiritual might.

This, then, explains Yitzchak’s desire to bless Eisav, despite his knowledge that his son was abusing these spiritual gifts: Isaac hoped his blessings would cause Eisav’s considerable talents to be brought out and revealed. Not only would Eisav repent of his evil ways, but the entire world would benefit from his actions.

G-d, however, knew it was too late for Eisav to repent and live up to his potential. Instead, the blessings were given to Yakov, and with them, the power to overcome evil and transform it into good, and to illuminate the world with the light of Torah.

## Halacha Sparks

### Havdalah on Tea

Rabbi Chaim Hillel Raskin

**May one who doesn’t have wine or grape juice, make havdalah on tea or coffee?**

The *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>1</sup> *paskens* that although it is always best to make *havdalah* on wine, it is permissible to make it on ‘*chamar medina*’ (lit. the drink of the country). Much has been written in halachic literature<sup>2</sup> to identify the exact definition of ‘*chamar medina*’.

Some say<sup>3</sup> that for a beverage to be considered ‘*chamar medina*’, wine must be unavailable for most of the year. Accordingly, in our times when wine can always be found in the stores, we couldn’t consider another beverage as ‘*chamar medina*’.

Another opinion defines ‘*chamar medina*’ as beverages that substitute for wine at a formal dinner, even in places where wine is available. A clearer definition given by *poskim*<sup>4</sup> is: Beverages which are drunk for the pleasure of drinking, not to quench thirst. This includes alcoholic beverages, tea and coffee, in contrast to soda and fruit juices that are a substitute for water.

While the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*<sup>5</sup> seems to prefer the first opinion, he nevertheless writes<sup>6</sup> that the general custom was to follow the second, more lenient, opinion.

Some<sup>7</sup> hold that even according to the lenient opinion, other beverages can only be considered ‘*chamar medina*’ when grapes do not grow in that vicinity. Accordingly one couldn’t consider tea or coffee as ‘*chamar medina*’ in New York or Eretz Yisrael. Others dispute<sup>8</sup> this condition.

The accepted practice<sup>9</sup> is to be lenient and make *havdalah* on tea or coffee in extreme cases where one does not possess wine or grape juice, nor are they available to purchase or through borrowing from a neighbor. However, when wine or grape juice is available one should be particular to recite *havdala* over wine or grape juice.

1. סי' רצו ס"ב ובשוע"ר שם ס"ח.
2. הרבה קולומסים נשתברו בענין זה. ראה המצוין בספרי המלקטים כפסקי תשובות סי' ערב, שש"כ וכו"ב.
3. דעת היש חולקים בשו"ע הרב סי' ערב ס"ו.
4. שו"ת אגרות משה כמצוין בספרים שבערה 2.
5. סי' רצו ס"ו.
6. שם בס' ערב.
7. קצוה"ש סי' צז בבה"ש ס"ק ח.
8. ראה במילואים לספר 'קיצור הלכות משו"ע אדה"ז' (הל' שבת) עמ' סג-סט. וראה ג"כ בס' הלכות ליל הסדר עם הערות וציורים (אשכנזי) סי' תעב סכ"ח.
9. כן שמעתי ממור' הגרי"ה העלער שליט"א שבשעת הדחק נהגו להקל כמו שהקילו באירופה בשנים קדמוניות.
10. שם הע' רו הסתפק הגר"ז אוירבאך, אכן ראיתי במלקטים שיש מחמירים.

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