



The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn

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CONDUCT DOES MATTER

The week that follows Shabbos is “blessed”, and receives its energy, from Shabbos, and the Friday following this Shabbos is the 11th of Nissan, the Rebbe’s birthday. We will then begin reciting a new chapter of *Tehillim*, which, according to custom, will be chapter 113, which states: “Hashem is above all the nations, His glory is upon the heavens; who is like Hashem our G-d Who dwells beyond, Who lowers Himself to watch the heaven and earth?”

Chassidus explains that these verses depict a Gentile-Jewish debate. The gentiles believed that Hashem only concerned Himself with the heavens, the stars, constellations and the angels, who in turn oversee the happenings on earth; but to suggest that Hashem involved Himself in our affairs is degrading. However, we believe that Hashem’s *hashgacha* extends to even the tiniest detail on earth.

Their argument can be addressed by considering whether Hashem’s greatness is finite or infinite. To frame it in numbers: A hundred, while small, is closer to a million than one; this is because a million is a finite number. Whereas even a million is no closer to infinity than one, because it is impossible to ever reach infinity. Similarly, the gentiles saw Hashem’s greatness as finite, in which case the Heavens are close enough, while the earth is too low. But we are aware that Hashem’s greatness is infinite, and therefore heaven and earth are of equal significance.

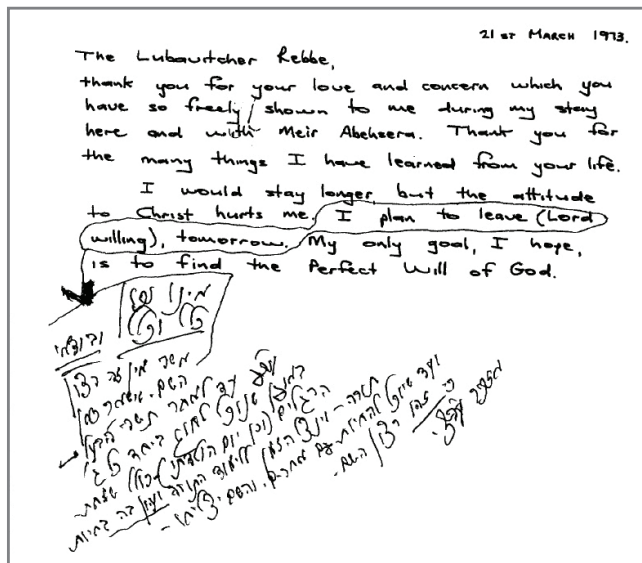
The *pesukim* then read as follows: “Hashem is above all the nations,” they acknowledge His greatness, therefore, “His glory is upon the heavens,” they restrict Him to what they deem honorable for a finite G-d. But “who is like Hashem our G-d Who dwells beyond,” whose greatness is infinite, “Who lowers Himself to watch the heaven and earth”, because they are equally as low. This is how the Alter Rebbe puts it in *Likutei Torah*.

WHICH ACTIVITY BRINGS US CLOSE?

Later *maamarim* add that this debate extends beyond *hashgacha* into the realm of *avodas Hashem*, the question of how we can become closer to Hashem. The gentiles argued that engaging in ‘Heavenly’ activities like meditation and solitude and employing one’s emotions were vehicles for closeness to Hashem, but how could physical *mitzvos* like wrapping a leather strap precisely as described in *Shulchan Aruch* be of relevance? “G-d wants the heart!” The emotion, the intent, the mind. At most, Tefillin might be a tool for meditation.

But we reply: “Who is like Hashem our G-d Who dwells beyond;” if loving Hashem wasn’t a *mitzvah*, then no matter how much love we felt, we would never come any closer to Hashem, since a million is no closer to infinity than one. Only a *mitzvah*, which is Hashem’s will, is significant, and the majority of *mitzvos* consist of practical, physical acts, and don’t call for the mind and heart. Being particular about a *mitzvah* is more important.

While the majority of *mitzvos* are physical acts, there are a few like *ahavas Hashem* which involve emotion; but if there weren’t, then no amount of love would accomplish anything, since Heaven itself as just as far from Hashem’s infinity as earth. Either way we look at it: If *ahava* is a *mitzvah*, then so are the physical *tefillin* and *Shabbos*; and if it isn’t, then it’s as worthless as Heaven. *Ahava* alone won’t bring us closer to infinity, *mitzvos* (meaning *tzavsa*, connection) do, because Hashem decided that we’ll bond with Him that way. And without the *mitzvah*, or worse, with an *aveirah*, no amount of feelings and *kavanos* will make us any less distant. While this is true about *Yiddishkeit* in general, it is emphasized in Chassidus, and particularly in the conduct of the one whose birthday we’re celebrating, the Rebbe.



EXTREME LOVE

The Rebbe always spoke about *ahavas Yisroel*, and Chazal's statements that we're Hashem's children no matter our situation, and that Hashem says that He can't replace us with another nation. The Rebbe always emphasized that both as a nation and as individuals, we're always Hashem's children and He loves us.

There's an amazing story about someone who was spending time in Crown Heights, and he liked it there except for one thing: he couldn't stand the locals' denigrating attitude towards the founder of Christianity, and this made him wish to leave. And so he wrote a letter to the Rebbe laying this all out, and he added that he feels that leaving is Hashem's will. The Rebbe replied (and this was at the beginning of Nissan): On the contrary, it's Hashem's will that you stay, and I request that you remain here for half a year through Succos, so we can celebrate all *shalosh regalim* together, and we can celebrate my birthday together.

This is incredible! Inviting someone for Yom Tov isn't just an act of outreach; being invited to spend Yom Tov and a birthday together indicates tremendous friendship! And for who? For someone who was so off the right track, that the attitude towards the founder of Christianity bothered him, and yet it was he who received an invitation for the Yomim Tovim and the Rebbe's birthday! This is the definition of boundless *ahavas Yisroel*.

AHAVAS YISROEL VS. TOLERANCE

But does that mean that one's attitude towards Christianity and *avoda zara* doesn't matter? If a father's only child is a bandit and a murderer, and yet he still loves his son, does that mean he doesn't care about his son's actions? Of course they bother him tremendously, and in fact, because he loves him so much, he's bothered and hurt even more deeply. Love doesn't equal agreement. There's a terrible situation and everything must be done to rectify it.

Like human corruption, the same goes for spiritual debasement; while every *mitzvah* brings us closer, every *aveirah* makes us distant. And if we experience a spiritual awakening, then the *aveiros* we committed must truly vex us, and these deeds are especially hurtful to Hashem as our father. Yet we mustn't

despair, we've been given the power to tear ourselves out of any condition, and through performing more *mitzvos* and committing fewer *aveiros* we can slowly become entirely *frum*.

That's true *ahavas Yisroel*. *Ahavas Yisroel* isn't an acceptance of the person's behavior. The Rebbe did tell the fellow that he loves him as a Yid, and invited him to celebrate his birthday together. But what's the nature of the celebration? The Rebbe continues in the letter: through learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*.

Tanya states immediately at the beginning that not caring about wickedness leads to flippancy. We aren't allowed to take Yiddishkeit, Torah and *mitzvos* lightly. We must be upset, but without despairing, and be aware that no matter the depths of depravity, (and spiritual death is worse than physical death), we can always find it within ourselves to tear ourselves out of the mess. We can't expect it to occur in one shot, but we should strive

to learn a little more, do another *mitzvah*, until becoming a completely *frum* Yid.

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THE LOVE CONTINUES

When discussing the Rebbe's birthday, there's another important point that should be made: there isn't the slightest doubt, according to Tanya which states that *tzadikim* who have passed away are more present than during their lifetimes, that the happening of 3 Tammuz only had an effect body-wise, but on a soul level the situation remains identical to before. Just as we witnessed the Rebbe's dedication to every Yid then, even of the sort described above, (and by the way, we have a copy of the Rebbe's handwritten response, printed in *Igros Kodesh* [vol. 28 p. 18], where

both a photocopy of the letter and the Rebbe's reply and invitation appear), it's exactly the same way now.

If something bothers us physically or spiritually, we can visit the *ohel* and know that the Rebbe is listening to our request; this is not just visiting *kivrei tzadikim*; this is communication with the Rebbe of every individual Yid and of our entire nation. And when we notify the Rebbe of our problem, the Rebbe is anguished, and the Rebbe prays to Hashem that He help him help us, and when we return to notify the Rebbe that things have improved, the Rebbe is pleased.

We must be aware of this, and we have to make ourselves worthy. Therefore, we should learn something from the Rebbe at every opportunity, recite the Rebbe's chapter of *Tehillim*, and that will help us tap into the Rebbe's connection with us and with every Yid. Let's hope the Rebbe returns soon, and leads us to the complete *geulah*.