

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

KI TEITZEI 5784

## Finding HaShem

In the past, we have discussed the remarkable multilayered halachic institution of HASHAVAT AVEIDA - returning what is lost - which is found in this week's Parsha (22:1-3). In this chizuk, let us highlight one of the most extraordinary extensions of this mitzva. Of course, in particular, as we close on Sefer D'varim and approach the Yamim Nora'im, it behooves us to reflect upon this and other broader features of the mitzva of HASHAVAT AVEIDA as we consider - as we ought - the central mitzva of these Holy Days - the mitzva of T'SHUVA. The clear linguistic similarity between T'SHUVA and the HASHAVA of HASHAVAT AVEIDA should not be lost upon us.

Of one such deeper layer of the HA'SHAVAT AVEIDA mandate, we present a deeply moving and enriching religious truth as articulated by Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik zt"l. (HaAdam v'Olam, pp. 77-79).

The Rav begins by explaining the expression, ELOKEI AVRAHAM. He asserts that it does not mean "the Gd who revealed himself to Avraham." Rather, its grammatical usage is in

the possessive - the Gd Who, as it were, became "the acquisition of Avraham". The Rav then continues by referencing the institution of returning lost objects and suggests that prior to Avraham, Gd was "lost". He was forgotten in the pagan idolatries of the time. Gd was HEFKEIR - ownerless. And then, as Rambam states (Hilchot Avoda Zara 1:2-3), there arose the "pillar of the world, Avraham". Avraham begins searching for Gd Who has become lost and abandoned... and he finds Him! And once he does, much like someone who finds a lost item, Avraham make take possession of Gd Himself; hence, ELOKEI AVRAHAM.

From this remarkable insight, the Rav draws an important message. In our age of HESTEIR PANIM - the hiddenness of Gd, His apparent concealment beckons a human response. Although the Master of the Universe appears lost and cast-off, He nevertheless can be found. It all depends, asserts the Rav, upon one condition. Like of Avraham, one must search for Him, quest and pursue after Him, and do so with all his might. The verse that the Rav often quotes is:

"And from there, you will seek the Lord, your Gd, and you will find Him, if you seek Him with all your heart and all your soul" (D'varim 4:29).

In a different source, the Rav, banking off Ramban's cryptic

comment of the phrase, "You shall seek out His resting place and come there" (D'varim 12:5), expands upon his observation above and contributes an additional idea. "The words L'SHICHNO TIDRASHU mean search for His abiding, for His being present; search for His Presence right here and now. Search for Gd and you will find Him... Even when you do come to the realization that He is present in every experience, you will not stop there. UVATA SHAMA - you will come a little further. Where is the SHAMA You will be confronted by Gd from outside and beyond the universe. You will come further than your destination, "to see the face of the Master, the Lord, Gd of Israel" - to see the Gd who revealed Himself to Israel at Sinai. "And Gd descended on Mount Sinai (Sh'mot 19:20) - from outside the world, from beyond the world, from His transcendental abode." (Derashot HaRav, pp. 180-182)

The Alter Rebbe in his Likutei Torah (Parshat R'ei 32:2, s.v. MA'AMAR ANI L'DODI) also presents a similar idea, again referencing the halachot of HASHAVAT AVEIDA, and adds this religious insight: The great challenge of the Jew, he declares, is to retrieve the Divine sparks from exile. And such an act of spiritual recovery and repossession can only be accomplished through seeking those sacred sparks where they were lost. What the Alter Rebbe then asks is this: but

where were they lost? His answer: In the inner recesses of the soul of the Jew.

Of course, in this final expansion of the institution of HASHAVAT AVEIDA - it certainly seems that it is we who are charged to seek the Almighty. However, there is a far deeper idea implicit in this last seeking; a beautiful thought that perhaps brings us to the most radiant and exalted idea of all.

The Kli Chemda (Metzora #1) and the Alter Rebbe (Igeret HaT'shUva, ch. 5, s.v. V'HINEI), among many others, quote this Zohar. On the verse in the Torah (B'reishit 2:7) which states that HaShem "breathed into his [man's] nostrils the soul of life. Chazal teach, " He who blew [into man], from Himself, He blew." In other words, our souls are but a CHEILEK ELOKI MIMAAL (Beis Yoseh L'haba, Vayikra 12:3, 13:2, among others), a piece of the Divine Essence.

If so, may we humbly suggest this elevating spiritual truth: The very moment we steadfastly search for Gd and find Him, we quite suddenly - and blessedly - discover something else entirely. We meet our very souls, our pristine selves, our CHEILEK ELOKI MIMAAL. And with that glorious discovery, we turn - and return - ourselves to HaShem by revealing and unveiling the Almighty within ourselves. He, hushed and hidden,

has always been there. In finding Him, in effect, we find ourselves!

It thus behooves us to fulfill this final and ultimate extension of HASHAVAT AVEIDA. Because in doing so, we will succeed in fulfilling what is, after all, the fundamental core and supreme goal of this mitzva in its broadest and deepest meaning. That of T'shuva - the magnificent and glorious spiritual return of the Jew to His Maker!

As the mitzva of HASHAVAT AVEIDA is found in Parshat Ki Teitzei, always but a few weeks before the Yamim Nora'im, let us conclude with Rav Soloveitchik's relevant, beautifully lyrical, and deeply moving reflection as we approach this awesome and sacred festival moment in time.

"Judaism knows well the tensions and hesitations involved in the weary search for Gd, as well as the joy and ecstasy of the search. All the prophets called upon us to... search out the secrets of the cosmic process... and to uncover the hidden and obscure - the glory of the Creator's majesty, which hovers over mute creation. They all wove laurels for the searchers after Gd, both for those who seek Him within "mechanical" nature, in its gray opacity, and for those who tear open the windows of the wondrous higher realms of pure, utterly perfect being...

"And on the nights preceding the High Holy Days, when the Jewish people recite their penitential prayers (S'lichot), the beloved clings to her lover and pleads with Him that her request should not be in vain, and that He should present himself to her when she goes out to greet Him. A whispered plea bursts forth and rises with the morning star that appears on the eastern horizon: "Present Yourself to us when we seek You, as it is written, 'And from there you shall seek Him with all your heart and all your soul' (D'varim 4:29). "Master of the Universe, behold, we search for and seek You with all our being; we long for You with every beat of our hearts; we run after You. You attract us with an awesome, enormous power that no one can withstand. We hear Your footstep; You are very, very near to us. Please be here with us now, tonight, the night of penitential prayers, [the night] clothed in secret and mystery, the night of extensive grace and manifold mercies. Please appear to us when we seek You!" (And From There You Shall Seek, pp. 19-20) 🙏