

TORAT HAR SHMUEL

PARSHA

Rabbi Warren Katsztel

NEEDS AND WANTS REDEFINED

There are two ingredients that take Tefillah, prayer, to the level of spiritual, personal fulfillment. The first is obvious and difficult to achieve on an ongoing basis. It is Kavono, intent. Volumes have been written on this topic. Nonetheless, blocking out everything around us and focusing on the opportunity to communicate directly with our Heavenly Father is for many a daunting task. The reality is that davening within a minyan goes a long way toward achieving this goal.

The purpose of this is to focus on the second element in helping us succeed in communicating effectively with Hashem Yisborach. That element is *understanding* what we are saying. Please understand that I along with many of you struggle in achieving the goals expressed herein.

For the last year, I've struggled with the wording in the opening words of the Shemona Esrei, something we say at every service throughout the year. We express that Hashem Yisborach is "gomeil chasodim tovim", the ultimate precipitator of acts of kindness followed by "v'Koneh Ha'kol", the owner of *everything* in the universe He created and continues to sustain every moment since before the beginning of time. Before one can bestow anything on another, they first have to acquire it. I cannot give someone anything that does not belong to me. Therefore, in the Shemona Esrei shouldn't we first express that Hashem owns everything and then acknowledge Him as the Infinite Master of bestowing kindness upon mankind? Why are the two concepts not expressed in this order?

This opinion, Boruch Hashem Yisborach, popped into my head after Mincha on my grandfather's forty third Yahrzeit. To place "Koneh Ha'kol" before "Gomeil Chasodim Tovim" would infer that Hashem has needs. We acquire things because we need them to sustain life, enhance the quality of our existence or to fulfill a specific purpose - need.

One of the grand marks of Hashem's uniqueness is that He has no needs whatsoever. Hashem by definition and within His own infinity, is totally self-sufficient! The fact that Hashem "owns" everything is a consequence of the reality that He created and continues to sustain everything. He doesn't "need" any of this. That raises the grand question that if indeed Hashem has no needs, why did He create it? Chazal teach that Hashem created the world because He wanted to share the experience of His infinite goodness with another entity, what has become known as "mankind". All we know is that the desire to share is there. What precipitated that desire, why He had it in the first place is beyond human comprehension. One thing though is clear. What's being described here is a "want", not a "need". Yes, Hashem Yisborach, our Heavenly Father has no "needs" but has some very serious "wants". To fulfill a "want" that HKB'H has requires us to perform Mitzvos in a free will manner that will ultimately enhance the relationship we have with our heavenly Father. This cannot be forced, as the essence of every relationship is founded

on a give and take that the two parties freely engage in.

The reason "Gomeil Chasodim Tovim" precedes "Koneh Ha'kol" is because everything Hashem created solely and exclusively facilitates Hashem's "want" to be a Gomeil Chesed. This goes far beyond the reality that Hashem sustains our lives. The ongoing personal exchange in a meaningful relationship produces a greater level of intimate knowledge between the parties. This is the essence of the husband wife, parent child and Rabbi Talmid bond. The love they share is a consequence of the intimate knowledge they have of each other: How they feel, what they think, comprehending the essence of each one's metaphysical uniqueness. We can see this in the first, all important verse of the Shema. The Ayin in Shema and Dalet in Echad are enlarged to teach us that everyone who is meticulous in observing Hashem's commandments gives testimony, (the meaning of ayin, dalet, which spells "aid", "witness"), to His existence and the relationship Hashem has with us. Reverse these two letters and the reward for this is clear. Dalet aleph spell "dah", to know. Our Shemiras HaMitzvos will lead to an ever greater knowledge and appreciation of Hashem, thereby fulfilling the purpose of creation, and the "want" behind it.

Why place us in a universe, the expansion of which we have only begun to scientifically understand in the last fifty years? If the essence of Hashem's goodness is understanding a part of who He is, the more we understand about this vast universe, everything from the atom to the expanse of the heavens, the greater the appreciation we have for the infinity that is HKB'H. Just as the heavens expand, so too with the passage of time does our limited understanding of "omku machshevosaycho" (Psalms 92) the depths of Hashem's incomprehensible knowledge. All this and more serves to achieve Hashem Yisborach's goal of being the ultimate Gomeil Chesed that each of us benefits from. Hashem as Koneh Ha'kol serves no "need" but facilitates His "want" to be kind to mankind. That kindness manifests itself in understanding, in part, who Hashem Yisborach is and experiencing a bit of what makes up His Infinity.

For centuries, man tried to take Hashem out of the sciences. Gerald Schroeder's book, "Genesis and the Big Bang" reconciles the Bereshis account of creation with the archeological record. The Mabit, (HaRav Moshe ben Yosef of Trani: 1500 – 1580) in his Sefer, "Bais Elokim" (1576) explains something fascinating for all of us. The population of the Jewish people has, from the time of Avrohom Avinu, been compared to the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore. Throughout our entire history, have we ever been as numerous as the stars? Obviously not. So how are we to understand this? Since there is a Mesorah, a rich and holy tradition that links one generation to the next, the fact that a Jew passes on from this world does not remove him from the census of the Jewish population. We count all generations because of the historical linkage we enjoy with the past, with our Mesorah. (Note that in the Bais Midrash, we don't refer to our sages in the past tense, but in the present. No one says, "The Rambam said". We always say, "The Rambam says" in the present tense because he is sitting with us learning whatever subject we are engrossed in.) So if we count all the generations, our numbers can indeed be compared to the stars. How does this manifest itself scientifically? The reality is that many of the lights we see in the sky on a clear night are just that: Lights!! Those lights came from stars so many light years away that by the time a person sees that

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Light, the star it came from may have burned out and ceases to exist. The lights are there but the stars they came from are gone. Our forefathers may not be physically alive alongside us, but their "light" continues to shine for us, to learn from, to grow from.

How sad is it that scientists, for the most part, have become G-dless!!! Studies that should be part and parcel of enhancing the greatest relationship mankind can experience with our Heavenly Father has become the foundation of conceit, self-centeredness and heresy. The concept of "discovery" does not reveal anything new. It only serves to explain how the universe has operated since Hashem created it. The theory of relativity did not "begin" when Einstein presented his scientific findings. Theoretically the "frumest" people in the world should be the mathematicians and scientists, since they are gifted with minds that can understand the greatest depths to date of Hashem's wisdom. Did the working of the universe come about by chance? Did chaos produce the great order of everything from the human body to the universe? Was there no architect, no builder, just unguided, chaotic evolution?? How very sad!!

Prior to my Father in law's petira, he was on dialysis. I have had many opportunities to stand in on autopsies and have seen what kidneys look like. You would think that for all they do, each one would be huge. In fact, one kidney probably comprises less than three cubic inches of space, and a person can live without dialysis if only one of them is operating at fifteen to twenty percent efficiency. The dialysis machine they brought into the room stood about five feet tall, three feet wide and a foot and a half deep. All this to replace only part of an organ comprising about three cubic inches. "Mah Godlu Ma'a'saycha" - "How great are Your works"!!

Take a look at how much medical knowledge, science and math appears on the pages of our Talmud. Our sages enjoyed a thorough understanding of the heavens, time, and how they relate to each other. The Tanna, Rav Yehoshua identified what is known as Haley's comet centuries before it was named. All this drew our sages closer to Hashem Yisborach and enhanced their ability to serve Him with complete dedication. What's interesting is that their Avodas Hashem was so powerful that their ability to understand nature *and alter it* was very real and remarkably profound. This was not limited to the Tanaim, but a privilege that in its own way exists today amongst our most pious.

Permit me to share with you an event that occurred not three or four hundred years ago, but within the last decade. HaRav Chaim Konievsky, one of the premier Talmudic minds and a Godol HaDor completes *everything* related to Jewish knowledge every year on the eve of Pesach. This annual achievement is not limited to Shas, the entire Talmud, but includes everything related to Torah, the Talmud, Jewish law and philosophy. A few years ago, a man entered Rav Konievsky's house carrying his child of about eighteen months. The Rav came out from a back room and asked how he could be of assistance. The man explained that he wanted the Rov to participate in an *upsherin*, to snip a bit of the boy's hair in what was to be his first haircut. The Rov explained that this is not done until the child's third birthday and questioned why the man was doing this now? The father explained that a brain tumor had been recently diagnosed, and it was thought that the child would not live until his third birthday. He wanted for his son to be a part of any and every Mitzvah possible prior to his demise. The Rov asked if he could have the child for a few minutes which of course the father agreed to. Rov Konievsky took him into another room for about thirty minutes, after which he came out, returned the boy to his father and instructed him to bring him back on his third birthday at which time they will do the upsherin. The father wished the Rov a Chag Sameach and informed him that he was headed to the hospital for a scheduled MRI on the child's brain.

The child was taken in for his MRI and returned to the father a short time later. The staff explained that the machine was not working properly and asked him to return with the child in two days, following Yom Tov. The father and child returned two days later. Following the MRI, the staff emerged with the boy and a look of amazement on their faces. They showed the father the CT scan that had been taken within the last week and clearly pointed out the location of the brain tumor on it. They placed the MRI next to it that revealed a healthy, tumor free brain. They wished the father and child well after expressing that they were unable to explain this apparent miracle.

There are many who will view this with great skepticism. Now for the "rest of the story". When the father arrived at Rov Konievsky home, he and his guests were completing the Siyum on everything Torah related that Rov Konievsky learns every year. Birkat HaMazon was about to begin over a cup of wine. Following the Birkat HaMazon, Rov

Konievsky gave the child some wine from his "Kos shel brocho", the wine blessed as part of Birkat HaMazon.

What's the difference between this wine and the chemotherapeutic drugs oncologist administer today? Is the scientific research that leads to the development of these drugs the reason they work? There is a natural process, much of which remains to be discovered, that provides us with the confidence that if said drugs are administered under the following circumstances, they will yield predictable results. If the natural process is based in chaos, it just happened out of nowhere, would we be able to predict future results with confidence? If the natural order of the world is chaotic, how do we know when anything will work? More problematic is the notion that when the drugs do not work, we would not be able to understand why. We would have to chalk it up to the chaotic order of nature and learn to live within a system where results are as chaotic as the universe.

Scientist have come to postulate that the universe is orderly based. We don't hear them speaking much about the source of the order, the architect, the author. Nonetheless, they opine that said "order" does exist. The problem is that within this system, nature is rigidly fixed. There is no room for exceptions to the rules scientist have discovered through which nature operates. Science remains very uncomfortable acknowledging the possibility of "miracles" because, by definition, miracles represent a departure, a break from the order that defines the rules of nature.

For those us who believe in a living G-d (as opposed to a stagnant One whose interaction with our physical world is nonexistent), the consistency of nature is a consequence of the infinite intelligence of its creator, Hashem Yisborach. It simultaneously allows for the possibility of exceptions to the rules, which by definition is what "miracles" are all about. The wine blessed by Rov Konievsky while this young lad was seated in his lap has far greater ability to cure a brain tumor than any drug available today. Why? Because Hashem Yisborach, our Heavenly Father, heard the Rov's prayer on behalf of the child. Hashem wanted to!!

There is nothing "deep" about this philosophy. One need not be blessed with great intelligence to wrap their head's around what was expressed above. What is required, though, and what comes along with acknowledging the reality of this thought is the desire to engage in a meaningful relationship with the G-d who has that "want" to be a part of our lives. That requires sacrificing some of the comforts we have become used to in exchange for living a more meaningful life. We cannot eat anything we want and our time has to be structured in a manner that accounts for Hashem's enhanced presence in our lives on Shabbat, the holidays, etc. Our physical drives have to conform to G-dly standards that acknowledge their existence and the reality that they can be on a sanctified level rather than that of animal instinct. We all have standards of acceptance upon which our relationships operate. We don't generally find the upper class socializing with the destitute and homeless. This is beneath them. If they did consort with them, the lower class would soon become jealous of the rich and their lifestyle. G-d has standards in relationships as well. The difference is that the standards He sets truly benefit the quality of life we enjoy. We may begin on the bottom. The beauty is that we don't bring G-d down. He raises us!!

There is one caveat that makes all of this real. One can read every book ever written on swimming. Until they get into the water and experience what the books are teaching, they will never understand or appreciate the fun swimming has to offer. Judaism is very much the same. Learning Torah is an integral, indispensable part of Jewish life. Nonetheless, at Har Sinai our people said "Na'aseh, v'Nishma" - "We will do and we will understand". Action not only precedes intellect, but concretizes our present and future commitment. Why? Because with all the wisdom provided by everything written about our heritage, at the end of the day, we do what we do because Hashem Yisborach commanded us to do so. Humbling service is our mark of distinction. Meaningful observance begins by us know our place, who we are and before whom we owe *everything* that makes our lives what they are. Oh, that we should be able to master the lost art of humility. What's the reward? Maintaining humble character will justify Hashem's desire to raise us to heights we never thought possible. Therefore, walk humbly before our Heavenly Father so the "wants" He has may be fulfilled through us. I humbly close by expressing that Hashem's greatest want is to bring the Geulah, the Mashiach, the building of our third and final Bais HaMikdash and the time when the entire world will stand in unity, led by us in acknowledging that "And it will be that Hashem is King of all lands, and that on that day, Hashem will be One, and His Name One".