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2011

Choose Life 2

**PART II**

*Illuminating  
essays on living with  
faith and closeness to Hashem*

*Adapted from the shiurim of* **Harav Avraham Tzvi Kluger**

## Chapter 3

### May All of Us Know Your Name and Study Your Torah “Lishmah”

**Once we thoroughly understand the great value of the Jew’s power of free choice, we have a deeper grasp of Chazal’s statement (*Pesachim* 50b): “A person should always engage in Torah study and mitzvos, even not for its own sake, for from doing so not for its own sake, he will come to [do it] for its own sake.”**

A Jew who does a mitzvah “*shelo lishmah*” — not for the exclusive purpose of carrying out Hashem’s command, but for his personal gain — may have performed the act of the mitzvah, but he has not fulfilled its purpose. Hashem gave Am Yisrael the power of free choice, and He wants us to choose **Him** and to cleave to **Him** and do His will. But this Jew is still immersed in his own external desires. He is choosing the fringe benefit he derives from the mitzvah, not Hashem's mitzvah itself.

Nevertheless, when we face a spiritual test and our personal desires and tendencies intensify, Chazal advise us to keep in mind — just for the time being — the personal benefits we stand to gain from doing the mitzvos. The main thing is to withstand the test and engage in Torah and mitzvos, even if we are not doing so for purely spiritual reasons, for “From doing so not for its own sake, he should come to do it for its own sake.” When the moment of temptation and trial pass, we can complete our choice of good and raise it to the level of “*lishmah*.” Then we can once again connect to our true inner desire and discover that what is really important to us is the actual mitzvah that we are doing for Hashem’s honor.

This is how we educate our children. Sometimes a school or *cheder* launches a campaign or a contest. The students are tested on certain material they have



learned, or, alternatively, work on *davening* properly, or behaving with *derech erez*, and their efforts are rewarded with prizes. At the party that takes place when the campaign is over, you won't hear the speakers saying: "See, dear children, how worthwhile it is to learn/ *daven*/ behave properly? Look at what nice prizes you won!" Rather, they'll stoke the students' inner desire: "Today is such a happy day for us, because we were privileged to learn Hashem's holy Torah and complete *Maseches X*/ to experience an uplifting month of *davening* with devotion/ to behave with *derech erez* and bring *nachas* to Hashem!"

The prizes that are presented at the party were promised at the outset in order to motivate the students to do the right thing even when it was hard. Once they've successfully accomplished their mission, they can rejoice in the Torah and mitzvos themselves, "*lishmah*." Retroactively, they see that right from the very beginning, their happiness actually flowed more from the learning and *davening* itself than from their anticipation of the prizes and the external recognition they would receive. Now they know that their choice really always was Hashem and His Torah.

So it is with our *avodas Hashem*. Sometimes we face a tough *nisayon* and we draw on external factors to help us stand up to the test. For example: "If I say this piece of gossip, my friend will think less of me," or "If I wear this skirt, I won't feel comfortable among my neighbors/friends, who are very careful about *tznius* requirements," or "It's worth my while to make an effort to help so-and-so, because people will admire me for it." But the moment we overcome our inclination, we can once again connect to our inner desire and raise the mitzvah from the level of "*shelo lishmah*" to the level of "*lishmah*." It's a good idea to express our choice of good orally: "Ribbono shel Olam, I'm doing this for You." Our true desire is purely to do Hashem's will.

On Yom Kippur, two he-goats were brought to the Beis Hamikdash. One was sacrificed as a *chatas*, a sin-offering to Hashem, and the other, the "*sa'ir*

*hamishtaleyach la'Azazel*," was hurled off a tall cliff until its limbs were completely shattered. The Ari Hakadosh explains that the *sa'ir la'Azazel* was a "gift," a concession, to the realm of impurity. In our service of Hashem, it is sometimes necessary to "placate" our earthly, materialistic side, rather than confront it head-on. At times we need to give our physical self the feeling that it is benefiting from our *avodas Hashem*, to persuade it that when we follow in Hashem's ways, it, too, will bask in the feeling of respect from others, or satisfaction, or comfort... But later on, the *sa'ir hamishtaleyach* was hurled from the cliff and killed. Likewise, over time we need to drop the external motivations and cling once again to our true inner will — an "offering to Hashem."

The Mishnah tells us (*Yuma* 6:4) that a special elevated bridge would be built for the *Kohen* to lead the goat out of the courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash. He would not lead the goat through the crowd of people, because there were some Jews who would pull the *Kohen* by his hair, saying to him: "Take it and go! Take it and go!" The Jews goaded the *Kohen* to hurry and take the *sa'ir hamishtaleyach* to its death. On Yom Kippur, the day that the *Kohen Gadol* entered the Kodosh HaKodoshim, the innermost chamber of the Beis HaMikdash, the innermost soul of every Jew was revealed, and he cried out from the depths of his heart that his only desire was to be connected to Hashem alone, without any external factors! The Jew is a "*chelek Eloka mima'al*," a part of Hashem above. He is "one" with Hashem and he cannot tolerate any partition separating him from Hashem. Under no circumstances is he willing to live his life for his own glory or personal success. He wants to choose Hashem, plain and simple!

Every Jew has the simple desire to do Hashem's will. We enjoy being good, not just for external reasons, such as that others will take notice or the like, but because



we simply want to do Hashem's will. Hashem's greatest *nachas* is when we uncover this innermost will of ours and acknowledge our desire to cleave to Him.

## **I Have Separated You from the Peoples to Be Mine**

Unfortunately, nowadays there are many workshops, courses, and books that aim to teach people to focus on their external motivations. They accustom people to seek appreciation, empowerment, and personal fulfillment. Many people are drawn to these resources, mistakenly thinking that they will help them overcome their faulty *middos* and other obstacles to *avodas Hashem*. But they fail to notice that these methods and approaches are founded on the wisdom of the nations, who have no inkling of the Jewish soul, the "*chelek Eloka mima'al*", and its pure inner desire. They are geared entirely toward connecting a person to "*shelo lishmah*" motivations.

While it is true that Chazal instruct us to engage in Torah and mitzvahs even for ulterior motives, this is only when the goal is to eventually attain the level of *lishmah*. Chazal stress: "...so that from doing so not for its own sake, he should come to do it for its own sake." In contrast, techniques taken from the non-Jewish world teach a person to hone his external motivations and focus on goals such as success and personal fulfillment — "not for its own sake."

Studying human psychology might enhance a person's diligence in Torah study, improve his performance of practical mitzvot, or help him adopt proper conduct, but it robs him of his pure inner yearning for Hashem, *R"l*. He may become so engrossed in his own personal success that he becomes detached from the Ribono shel Olam, *chalilah*. "*Rachmana liba ba'ei*" — Hashem desires the heart of the Jew, a pure heart that seeks Hashem. Only the holy Torah and our *tzaddikim* can give us that bond with Hashem and instill in us the true joy of faith in Him.

In *Parashas Kedoshim* (20:26), Hashem commands us: *"You shall be holy for Me, for I Hashem am holy, and I have distinguished you from the peoples to be Mine."* Chazal explain, "Your separation from them should be for My sake. A person shouldn't say: 'I am repulsed by swine meat,' or 'I have no desire to wear clothes that are *sha'atnez*'; rather, he should say: 'I would indeed like them, but what can I do, my Father in Heaven has imposed these restrictions on me.'" Hakadosh Baruch Hu commands us to steer clear from what is forbidden to us, not because it is convenient or pleasant for us to do so, but "for His sake" — because our Father in Heaven has decreed it upon us and we heed His command. This is what makes us different and sets us apart from the other peoples — that we are holy **for Hashem**. *"You shall be holy for Me... and I have distinguished you from the peoples to be Mine."* It was for this reason that Hashem chose us and distinguished us and exalted us above every other people and tongue, "to be Mine" — so that we should choose and serve Him "for His sake."

### **"Had I Not Believed"**

Sometimes, we hold tight to our personal motivations and are afraid to let go of this external motivation: "It gives me such satisfaction to know that I resisted temptation!" After standing up to a *nisayon*: "It's so nice to feel strong and in control!" We're afraid that if we don't have that external push, where will we draw the strength to continue carrying out our mission in life? The truth is that we only think this way because we don't sufficiently know and believe in the power of every Jew. We have a G-dly power within us, a pure desire to do good, even in the absence of any personal interest. Every Jew, just by virtue of being a Jew, wants to do only good, and we must never obscure this fact.



Hashem chose us to be His treasured nation, and His choosing of us is revealed in us and gives us the power to choose Him. Just as Hashem's choice of us is the outcome of His will and no other factor — *"Not because you are more numerous..."* — so, too, this power of free choice is ingrained and revealed in us. We, too, have a straightforward desire to choose Hashem. We, too, have the power to choose to do Hashem's will simply because we know that Hashem loves us and has pleasure from our serving Him, and we want nothing more than to give our Creator that *nachas ruach*.

The end goal for which Hashem created the world was so that Am Yisrael, His chosen People, should come and choose Him. The uniqueness of the Jewish People and their preciousness to Hashem is that we serve Him *"lishmah,"* simply because we want to do His will, because He is our life.

***"Choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring,  
to love Hashem, your G-d, to listen to His voice and to cleave to Him,  
for He is your life and the length of your days."***