

issue #858
perceptions
re'eh

See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse . . .
(Devarim 11:26)

WHEN WE REACH Parashas Re'eh, I can really feel Rosh Hashanah breathing down my neck. I think it also has to do with the fact that the parsha itself is very Rosh Hashanah-like in nature, dealing with blessing and curse and judgment overall. Moshe Rabbeinu is in his final approach for the World-to-Come, and he is trying to leave behind a nation intensely loyal to God.

Last Shabbos, I was told that the Vilna Gaon said that he could not even imagine what a simple thought was like in the mind of a Jew from the Temple period of time. As much as they seem similar to us, their spiritual level was VERY different from ours, and if the Gaon meant from the Second Temple of time, how much more so from the First Temple period.

The same thing can be said about us and the Vilna

Gaon. We know he was a great rabbi. We know he was an amazing human being. If we could be in his presence today, we would accord him GREAT honor, even more than we do our current Gedolim who, themselves, would humble themselves before the Gaon from Vilna.

But it would still be like greeting an alien. As great as the spiritual and intellectual gap is between the average Jew and the Torah leaders of this generation, it is not nearly as great as the gap between the greatest of our generation, and the GR”A (the other name for the Vilna Gaon). It’s like comparing humans to aliens.

It’s hard to fathom, for two reasons. It’s like trying to appreciate a nuclear explosion from a small burn mark on a wall miles away. They’re connected, but so much exists between the two extremes. Secondly, it’s hard for us to imagine how, being so technologically advanced, some people from the past, who were technologically unsophisticated, could be so much smarter than we are.

But that’s only because people have a much greater appreciation of material wisdom than they do spiritual wisdom. They can see how to apply for the former, and have already benefited tremendously from it. They do NOT see any practical value in spiritual wisdom. Can it make a phone smarter? Can it make a car better? Does it make a person more financially independent? Not as far as man can see.

Not as far as man can SEE.

Everything in life comes down to what a person SEES. It is seeing, in whatever form it takes, that makes a person aware of the world of which they are part, and what they have to deal with. That awareness is crucial for knowing how to adequately respond to the opportunities of life, and very often how to avoid making a fool of ourselves.

It has happened on occasion that I have been in the same vicinity as a person who thought they were alone. I did not realize it until they did something, like talk to themselves, that they probably would not have done had they been aware of my presence at the time. That's usually when I have ducked out, lest they discover me there and feel embarrassment.

But, at least the physical reality is one that CAN be seen. It would be a completely different life if we could see the spiritual one as well, as this story points out:

The king of Aram was greatly disturbed about this matter, and he summoned his servants and said to them, "Will you not tell me who of ours [reveals my secrets] to the king of Israel?"

One of his servants said, "No, my master, the King, but Elisha the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom."

He said, "Go and see where he is, and I will send and take him."

He was told, "Behold, he is in Dosan."

He sent horses, chariots, and a great army there. They came at night and surrounded the city. The servant of the man of God arose early and went out, and behold an army with horses and chariots was surrounding the city. His attendant said to [Elisha], "My master! What shall we do?"

[Elisha] said, "Have no fear, for those who are with us are more numerous than those who are with them."

Elisha prayed and said, "O God, please open his eyes and let him see." God opened the lad's eyes and he SAW, and behold the mountain was full of fiery hors-

es and chariots around Elisha. (II Melachim 6:11-17)

We may not be able to see what Elisha caused Gehazi to see, but the request is just as relevant today. We have to pray for God to open our eyes so that we can see where He is, what He is doing, and why as much as possible. That is the kind of vision that makes it possible to go through life achieving levels of personal greatness that others only dream about, or don't even consider at all.

Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Part 4: He does not acquire all of them at once, but rather, [he acquires each level] based upon his merits. At first he takes the lowest of them all called 'Nefesh.' After that, if he merits more, he also takes Ruach, just as it is explained in many places in the Zohar, such as in Parashas Vayechi, Parashas Terumah, and especially at the beginning of Parashas Mishpatim (94b), where it says: "Come and see: When a person is born, they give him a Nefesh, etc."

Commentary: PERSONAL RECTIFICATION IS a lifetime of work. The moment it is complete, a person usually leaves this world. Most of the time, people leave this world WITHOUT completing their tikun, necessitating reincarnation to finish the work.

A person usually begins their first life on the level of Nefesh, the lowest level of soul. It too has intermediary levels, as do all the soul levels, so they will start on some Divinely-designated level WITHIN the level of Nefesh. This is the level they must rectify in order to ascend to a higher level of soul and its rectification.

If a person merits to rectify their ENTIRE Nefesh, then they will merit access to their level of Ruach, and be able to rectify it, level by level. If they succeed at completing

the tikun of their ENTIRE Ruach, then they will gain access to their Neshamah, and be able to rectify it.

At the beginning of history it was possible to move on to the next level of soul, Chayah, and rectify this level as well. However, man, since leaving Gan Aiden, has descended spiritually to such an extent that, for the time being, Neshamah is the highest level of soul anyone is able to reach, even tzaddikim. At this stage of history, therefore, to have completed the tikun of one's Neshamah is to have completed one's personal rectification, as much as possible.

How does a person graduate from Nefesh to Ruach, and from Ruach to Neshamah? Spiritual improvement, which is best accomplished through the learning of Torah and the performance of mitzvos. When Torah is learned and mitzvos are performed, Divine light is drawn into the world and to the person. The additional light causes a person to ascend to a higher spiritual level. They will act spiritually-enhanced.

The opposite is also true. If a person sins, Divine light is withdrawn from them, and this causes the person to spiritually descend. This will be reflected in their actions, and they will find it increasingly more difficult not to sin, resulting in a spiral downward.

Since the level of Nefesh is more "physical,"¹ it is the more action-oriented mitzvos that will cause its tikun. The better a person forms the mitzvah, especially with respect to intention, the greater the tikun it will cause.

Speech-related mitzvos have a greater impact on the level of Ruach. For example, the proper and holy use of speech will rectify the Ruach, as will mitzvos such as

¹ But still completely spiritual.

tefillah—prayer. Abuse of speech, and sins such as loshon hara—derogatory speech about another—blemish the level of Ruach.

It is thought-based mitzvos, like thinking about Torah, and focusing on coming closer to God, that rectify the Neshamah. A person should intend for a mitzvah to rectify on any level, but especially when rectifying the Neshamah.