

## STORY

## Downgrade & Comeback Through the Eyes

The audio playing in the taxi taking me to Yerushalayim, contrasted sharply with the



appearance of its driver. He could have passed as one of the many yeshiva drop outs of the streets of Tel Aviv. However, the CD was that of a very strong Hashkafa lecture. Seeing that I was curious, the driver turned down the volume and told me his story.

The Rabbi on the CD, a Lakewood alumnus, was his passenger years ago and really impressed him. He tried to be mekarev me, but I spiraled downward from my Yeshiva upbringing fast. And backup is not as quick.

We compromised on something small, something in the field of Shmiras Einayim, of which I knew about all too well from my yeshiva days. The first twenty minutes of every day will be dedicated to watching the eyes. Without going into details, I began doing my daily twenty minutes. Four days into my newfound practice it was Shabbos. With business as usual, I got into my cab and went looking for clients. I was flagged down by a couple. But being within my

dedicated twenty minutes, the way they were dressed, I just passed up on them.

I felt very awkward.

Driving on Shabbos but watching my eyes?! It was absurd! I was going to go back and pick up those people - but "a deal is a deal", so maybe in twenty minutes. A cigarette was at the ready in my hand, and again that hypocritical feeling - watching my eyes and lighting up a cigarette on Shabbos? I couldn't take it any longer. I just parked the car and figured I'll wait out the twenty minutes in a nearby park. However that contradicting feeling refused to leave me for the rest of Shabbos.

The following Shabbos I was not going to go through this again. I just decided to forget the driving for this Shabbos - And also the smoking. To make a long story short Tefillin, Kashrus and full Shmiras Shabbos came soon after.

My slide downwards in Yeshiva began with my eyes, and so did my comeback. And most amazing of all, Hashem can bring us back to Him if we even take on something small. But it needs to be with "truth".

## SMILE! IT'S CONTAGIOUS



### Wise Sayings:

Do not walk behind me, for I may not lead. Do not walk ahead of me, for I may not follow. Do not walk beside me either. Just pretty much leave me alone.



It's always darkest before dawn, so if you're going to steal your neighbor's newspaper, that's the time to do it.



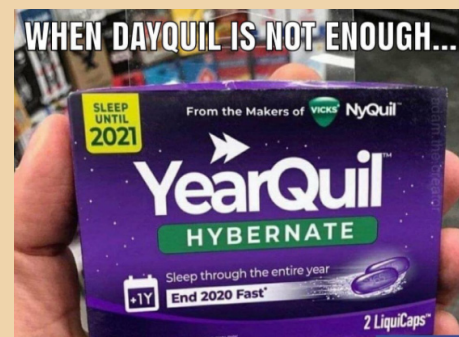
Always remember that you're unique. Just like everyone else.



Never test the depth of the water with both feet.



If you think nobody cares if you're alive, try missing a couple of mortgage payments.



## Why Don't We Blow Shofar on Erev Rosh Hashana?



**QUESTION:** In Elul, we blow the shofar every weekday, except one day - the day before Rosh Hashana. Why?

**ANSWER:** The shofar represents our collective crying out to G-d. A cry from such a deep place in us that there are no words. A cry for connection, to be seen, to be helped, to be heard, to return.

When children fall down, they get hurt, they get scared. They need comfort, connection. They need the compassion of a parent, holding them. There is no sound - it is simply connection and feeling that they need. And the harder they fall down, the longer and deeper is the breath they take before they cry out. They can't help it - the silence before the cry is deafening sometimes. The longer the breath, the harder the cry, the more they need from their parents.

We need the connection with our Father on Rosh Hashana. It is the start of a new year and a new beginning in our lives. We want that connection so badly, we need it. The day before Rosh Hashana, we take a collective deep breath - because we need to cry that much harder on Rosh Hashana!

May Hashem hear the cries that come from our core and comfort us, and hold us, and may we feel the love that Hashem has for us.

## The Bee's Honey

By Rabbi Yisroel Reisman



יהי רצון מלפניך... שתחדש עלינו שנה טובה ומתוקה  
*May it be Your will... that You renew for us a good and a sweet year*

One of the most widespread customs associated with the night of Rosh Hashanah is that of consuming various food items – e.g. carrots, leeks, beets, dates, pomegranates, head of a fish – for a good omen. Intending to serve as a source of merit for our upcoming year, we hope that we will be blessed with a new year filled with prosperity, success and productivity.

Of the many foods eaten, arguably so, the apple and honey serve as one of the main highlights. Taking an apple and dipping it into

honey, we wish that the year we are about to embark upon be full of sweetness.

Yet, this is not the only instance in which honey plays a significant role in Judaism. In praise of the Land of Israel, the Torah tells us that it is a “Land flowing with milk and honey” (Shemot 13:5). Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction between the nature of honey mentioned in this verse and that which we use on the night of Rosh Hashanah. As explained by Chazal (Ketubot 111b), the honey referred to in this Pasuk is that of date's honey. And as common custom has it, the honey used to dip our apple in on the night of Rosh Hashanah is that of a bee. Yet why is that so? Why in fact do we not use date's honey and instead resort to bee's honey?

As any keen observer would quite quickly notice, the manner in which honey is obtained from a date and a bee are strikingly different. When a date is crushed, its honey easily and smoothly flows straight out. Little more is necessary to attain the desired honey from within the date. It is in this respect that Eretz Yisrael is praised as a land flowing with honey. When the Jewish people abide by the Torah, the Land produces an overabundance of blessings, including sweet honey, which is easily obtainable and accessible by all.

But such is not the case with bee's honey. Aside from the arduous process which the bee undergoes in producing the honey, the concerted effort needed to procure the honey subsequently is not so simple and easy a task. Needing to contend with the bees and circumvent their stinging efforts used to protect themselves and their honey, only after much labor can one anticipate returning with anything.

Yet that is the very point. Our definition of a sweet new year is a year of effort and accomplishment, of labor and fulfillment. We are not simply looking to enjoy an easy year where we do not work and feel any sense of achievement. Quite to the contrary, we recognize that by exerting ourselves to confront challenging situations and overcome them, we will attain the sweetest life possible.

Such is the message of the bee's honey. A sweet year is a year of fulfillment, of attainment and of satisfaction. Yet we understand that such sweet feelings are only a byproduct of hard work and much effort. And that is best represented by the bee's honey. If we wish to enjoy such sweetness, there is no better place to look for it than the beehive.



### How the idea that "Hashem is One" can help us in the battle with the Yetzer Hara

In the Mitzva of Kriyas Shema, we declare that Hashem is ONE with great fervor twice a day. Why is the yichud (unification) of Hashem - the idea that Hashem is ONE - so central to Judaism? Why do we need to declare it? Any child knows that there is only one G-d, what's the big deal? After all, there is also only one of ME and one of YOU! But there's no Mitzva to believe that there's only one of us. What lies behind the great Mitzva of believing that Hashem is ONE?

So the simple meaning of the Mitzva is to believe that Hashem is the only force that exists, and no other will or force can do anything that He does not allow. It also means that ultimately, everything is really just an extension and manifestation of Him, in some way or another. Nothing exists separate from Him. But again, what difference does that really make to ME, on a personal level? Why is this Mitzva so important for us to declare and internalize deep in our hearts?

The chassidic sefarim explain that the Mitzva of unification of Hashem is really in our hearts, to strive that everything we do should ultimately be with ONE purpose: ONLY for Hashem's sake and not for our own. When we exercise our own will in contrast to Hashem's Will, it is, in some way, denying Hashem's absolute unity, because we are declaring that OUR will also matters and can even CONFLICT with His Will. Our actions are declaring that there are really שני רשויות - two distinct dominions. On the other hand, completely negating our will to His is the ultimate form of unification and declaration of "Hashem ECHAD." And this is the goal of every Jew, to reach this complete unification, where our own will is ONE with Hashem's.

But this is a very high level. How can a human being, who has such strong desires for so many things, be expected to negate his will completely before G-d?

So I'd like to suggest that the unity of Hashem is really twofold. The first aspect is what we discussed above, i.e. negating our will to His. However, the second aspect of 'Divine Unity' is like a flip side to the same coin of ONENESS. We have a Mitzva of Emunah - to believe that Hashem has absolutely no self-interest in anything He

does. His will is also ONE, i.e. it is completely selfless and only for our good. Since He is G-d and needs nothing for Himself, then by definition everything He does is for US. As Chazal say: בשבילי נברא העולם - "the world was created for me." What this means is that we actually have a Mitzva to believe and have faith that anything that ever happened - or will happen - that affects us in any way, is ultimately for our good. There can never be any reason in the world that Hashem would not be doing everything possible for our very best interest at this very moment.

When we are pulled to look at things we shouldn't or towards forbidden desires, we must remember this Pasuk **אם תקום עלי מלחמה בואת אני בוטח, אחת שאלתי מאת ה' א-תקום עלי**. "If a battle comes upon me, I will trust in this: "ONE" I have asked from Hashem." In other words, when we truly believe that Hashem has only ONE interest in mind at all times - that He is always providing us with all our needs, and that He is the ONE and ONLY provider, then how can we try to take pleasures outside of what He is providing for us? It is actually a form of blasphemy for us to seek to "take" - in whatever small way - pleasures that Hashem doesn't deem fit to give us right now. Because when we do, what is really happening deep down in our hearts is that we are believing in other gods (or goddesses?) who we think can provide our needs OTHER than Hashem.

The Zohar states that when Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai would pass by beautiful women with his students, he would urge them to avert their eyes and would recite the Pasuk **אל תפנו אל האלילים** - do not turn to other gods." When we look where we shouldn't, in our subconscious minds we are denying that Hashem is the ONLY provider or our needs, and that He is taking care of us completely and has only our very best interest in mind at all times. Because right now we are attempting to take the care of ourselves into our OWN hands by seeking pleasures outside of what He has deemed fit to give us at this very moment. We are attempting to receive "good" from a "provider" that is OTHER than Hashem.

So the more we work on our Emunah that (a) Hashem is only טוב ומיטיב and only has our very best interest in mind at all times and (b) that He is the ONLY source of all good and there is no good outside of what He provides for us, then the easier we will find it to throw away any selfish desires that counter Hashem's will, and put ourselves completely into His loving care instead.

May Hashem help us always live this way, especially now in Elul which is Roshei Teivos **אני לדודי ודודי לי**, and also the time when we say every day the Pasuk **אחת שאלתי מאת ה'**. And may we all be zoche to a **כתיבה וחתימה טובה**

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