



קונטרס

The Ways of My Heart



נתיבות לבי

Adapted from the shiurim of

R' Dovid Steiman shlit"א

Time to Correct Our Drive



Choidesh Elul · Correcting Our Drive



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THE WAYS OF MY HEART · WEEKLY SERIES

נתיבות לבי — The Ways of My Heart

A WEEKLY MAAMAR · ADAPTED FROM THE SHIURIM OF R' DOVID STEIMAN SHLIT" A

ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

Nesivos Libi — The Ways of My Heart is a weekly maamar on emunah, bitachon, and avodas Hashem, adapted from the shiurim of R' Dovid Steiman shlit" a in the derech of the *Nesivos Shalom*.

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Time to Correct Our Drive

Choidesh Elul — the drive is the steering wheel of a whole life, and the drive that counts most is the one we give when we feel nothing

We are holding by Choidesh Elul. These are *yemei rachamim v'ratzon* — days of mercy and of will. It means Hashem is ready to accept us exactly as we are. Now, Hashem is always ready to accept us. But Elul is a time set aside for it, a time when a person can come back. And that alone should make us excited: somebody is waiting for us to come back. There is no greater chizuk than that.

I want to talk about one ingredient in *avodas Hashem*. And this is not a side note. We have mitzvos, we have obligations — this is not one more item on the list. This should be the main stream of our whole *avodas Hashem*.

It is called *cheishek*. The drive.

..... The steering wheel

Cheishek is not simply a desire. It is much more than a desire.

Picture yourself on a ship, and you are the captain. Where is that ship going to end up? It depends entirely on where you turn the wheel. Same with a car — and it makes no difference what you are driving, because what you are really driving is yourself. Wherever you set the goal, that is where you are going to arrive.

That is *cheishek*. It is the steering. And Elul is the time to check where the wheel is pointing.

..... What comes off the income, and what comes off your own

I heard an unbelievable explanation on this. Reb Moshe Feinstein once visited Deal, New Jersey — the Syrian community there. Beautiful kehillah. And he said something amazing that most probably no one thinks this way.

We have two separate obligations. Whatever grows, whatever Hashem sends us, we need to take a portion off the top before we even do anything with it and give it away. One is to take off — *terumah* and *maaser*. And this is taking off our income.

But there is a second obligation. Once the wheat is already home, and it is already ours, and we grind it and mix the dough and now we are making the *challah* we are going to eat — we still have to take off *challah* — *reishis arisoseichem*. And that is coming off at this point from what we owe and therefore it is from our expenses. Off what we already set aside for ourselves. Today we don't give it to a kohen, because of *tumah*, so it is burned. But the obligation stands, on every single woman who makes a dough. There is still continuation of this vort, but this is what I want to bring out.

My father a"h used to say it as a joke: when you borrow money, you are borrowing somebody else's money — but when you pay it back, you are giving back your own. In every joke there is some truth in it, but look how true it is about the way people think. When a

person borrows, it is somebody else's, so he does not feel the hardness of it the way the person who lent it to him does, and he does not think into it too hard. When he gives it back, now it is coming out from him.

And here is how it's in life.

When Hashem is giving, and giving, and giving — gezunt, health, parnossa, naches, a settled head, the ability to sit and learn, and we have the *cheishek* and the excitement and everything is flowing — and we serve Him with all of that, beautiful. This is giving off the income.

But when the excitement is not there. When you cannot concentrate on the learning. When you have hard times in different areas. When you cannot concentrate on the mitzvah, when your head is not present at all, it is flying somewhere else entirely because of the difficulties you are going through — and you still give. That is called giving off your expenses because that is coming out from yourself.

That is what is precious to Hashem. That is where the brachah is. And that, really, is what *cheishek* is all about. Our *cheishek* is either given to us as a gift, or it is created by Hashem out of our giv-

ing off our expenses — out of serving Him fully even in a time that is hard for us.

..... **First the King, and only
then the mechilah**

We are standing before Rosh Hashanah. What is our job on Rosh Hashanah? To be *mamlich* Hashem — to crown Him as King. That is it. Two whole days of King, King, King. We are barely asking for anything, because until you have acknowledged who the King is, until you understand who the Boss is here, until you know who to rely on — who exactly are you asking for what you want?

I always thought there was a *kashya* here. Rosh Hashanah is the day our whole life is hanging on. So it would make more sense to first go ask *mechilah* on Yom Kippur, clean the slate, and only then come to the day of judgment. First Yom Kippur, then Rosh Hashanah.

But it does not work like that. Because Rosh Hashanah is where we acknowledge who the Boss is. Who is the Captain of this ship? Hashem is. And I have to say it over and over for two days until I fully believe in it with my whole

body and it is real by me like I see things around me. Now — now that you know who the King is — now you can come and ask *mechilah*. Otherwise, who is it you are asking *mechilah* from?

..... **A new page**

There is another side to these days. They are *yemei ratzon*, but they are also days of *hischadshus* — of renewal. Hashem is opening a new page and saying: start from scratch. Ask *mechilah*, forget the past, and let us begin a new beginning.

And here is what stops us. So often we are still hooked onto what was. Yes, but I did this. And I did that. How can I possibly go forward and leave it there? Just leave it. Put it on the side. Where you were is not the question; where you are now is the question. Because as long as a person is still tied to the previous person, he cannot move. There is no opportunity for *hischadshus*-renewal. You are holding onto the wall and asking why you are not walking. At some point you have to let go and keep going. Now I need to serve Hashem *besimcha*.

These forty days, from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur, are the days of

hischadshus. And wherever there is *hischadshus* — wherever something genuinely new appears in the world — there is a *nefesh*, a life in it. When a person feels "*Elul is here, Rosh Hashanah is coming, Hashem is ready to forgive me*" — that itself is the *hischadshus*, and it wakes up the *nefesh*, the *ruach*, everything he has.

That is really the main part of teshuvah. Because if there is no renewal, how is a person supposed to come back to Hashem? There is no new page, so there is no teshuvah.

Look at how a year goes. A person gets dipped into the *gashmiyus* — sunk into it, drained into it — until even his *ruchniyus* is running through *gashmiyus*, because that is where his head has been living. Then it is hard to connect to the Torah, hard to learn, hard to do the mitzvos — not because he is bad, but because he is not *present*. Honestly this is how it looks. And our job right now is to give ourselves the boost: it is a new zman, it is a new beginning, and that is what pushes us to move forward.

..... Two things from the man on the mountain

The Nesivos Shalom brings an example here that says it all. Today it is very much in style to go hiking. Some people go up the highest mountains — Everest. Freezing cold, and a snowfall can turn into one ball and become the greatest disaster and that is the end of him. He knows it. He is taking the risk, and he still wants to get there.

From him we can learn two things for *avodas Hashem*.

The first: I have decided, and whatever is going to be, is going to be. I am doing this to the end. Because something is always pulling us in another direction — a mood, a phone call, an emotional drain, a *dachkus*. There is so much going on, and we are all being thrown around by the world. So whatever it is going to be — I am going all the way to the end. That climber does not stop to weigh it up. He has a goal. Finished.

The second: **the belief that I am going to get there. He believes he will reach the top. And if we have that belief — that we are going to win against the yetzer hora** — that belief itself is what

helps us win. We cannot live without this ingredient. It is not optional.

..... **The neshamah comes from the world of pleasure**

Now to the heart of it. There is a *yesod* here that I think people badly misunderstand — because if we understood how important we are to Hashem, we would probably not do half the things we do.

Cheishek is not only our drive toward *ruchniyus*. It is also our drive toward *gashmiyus* — and the two are tied together, because the *gashmiyus* ends up depending on the *ruchniyus*. You cannot run away from it.

The Nesivos Shalom explains that the neshamah comes from *olam ha'taanug* — the world of pleasure. Just as there are different departments down here, there are, so to speak, different worlds up there, and the neshamah comes from the world of *taanug*.

Think about what that means. The neshamah is here *looking for pleasure*. That is its nature. So if we do not give the neshamah the pleasure of *ruchniyus*, it will not go quiet — it will push. It will push the *guf*: give me pleasure, give me pleasure. And the *guf* does not un-

derstand what is being asked, so it hands over the only pleasure it knows — a little more *gashmiyus*, here and there, more and more. And the neshamah is never satisfied. It won't work. It did not come from that world.

This is why a person can have everything and still not be *b'simchah*. He is feeding the wrong hunger.

We see the opposite in Yosef HaTzaddik. He is called *Yosef HaTzaddik* for a reason: he stood in the greatest *tumah* in the world, in Mitzrayim, and held on to his *kedushah* — with his wife, with his children, all of it. His whole *midah* was *kedushah*, and it held even there.

..... **You cannot buy simchah**

There was a wealthy man who came to the Pshevorsker Rebbe in Antwerp, Reb Leibish shlit"a, for Shabbos. He enjoyed the Shabbos so much that afterward he wanted to give the Rebbe something — a *matanah*. The Rebbe told him plainly that there was something he needed money for — a real sum.

So the man wrote out a check for a million dollars. Just like that. And I am sure it was not his only million.

The Rebbe was shocked — nobody writes a check like that. He went to the breakfront, opened up, and took out a becher. He said: this *becher* was used by Reb Itzikel of Pshevorsk and by Reb Yankele — the previous Pshevorsker Rebbes, real *tzadikim*, the kind where whatever they said, that is how it was. And he gave it to him as a present.

And the man said: I am not happy with that. That is not enough.

So the Rebbe said: fine — what do you want? What can I give you?

He said: *simchas hachaim*. I want to be happy.

Do you hear that? A man gives away a million dollars, and what he actually wants — the thing he cannot get anywhere else — is *simchas hachaim*.

And Reb Leibish answered him: *simchas hachaim* is only for people who sit and learn in kollel.

What does that mean? He meant this: rich people keep achieving more money and more money, so that they can have everything. You cannot have everything. Having money does not mean you are going to have *simchah*, because that is not how *simchah* is bought. *Simchah* is

a *davar ruchni*. It is spiritual. And the only way to get it is to satisfy the neshamah — to give it the pleasure it is actually asking for.

And nobody knows how great his own neshamah is. It could be an enormous neshamah. We measure ourselves so small because we have no instrument to measure a neshamah with. So we go on starving it without realizing.

..... **The same fire, pointed the other way**

And now the sharp side of it, again from the Nesivos Shalom. The *midas ha'cheishek* itself is neutral — it all depends where it is aimed.

If the drive is handed over to the *yetzer hora*, a person gets eaten alive by his desires. A bad fire burns in him, one thing after another, until he becomes a destroyer. It is the same engine.

But if he turns that same drive toward *kedushah* — the more, the better — then he is simply lifted. Everything in him: the way he thinks, the way he looks at things, his whole nature. Same fire. Different direction.

That is the whole *avodah* of Elul. Not to kill the drive — the neshamah cannot live without it — but to correct where it is pointing.

..... **Even there**

I will end with something I cannot forget. I knew a Yid, Reb Yisroel Shlomo Langer, originally from Poland, who was caught by the Nazis and was in a concentration camp. And this man never missed a single day of tefillin.

Not everyone says that. Go read the history — there was absolutely no way to put on tefillin there. And somehow he was *zoiche* to put them on every single day.

He said that one time he was standing between the wooden bunks, wrapped in his tefillin, and a Nazi guard walked in. He simply closed his eyes. And he felt that he was not there at all — he was

completely connected to Hashem, in the Yiddish way of saying it, *er hot zich derhoiben tzi Bashefe*. Not present. And the guard did not see him.

That is a man who, in the worst conditions a person has ever been in, put his entire *cheishek* — his whole drive — toward Hashem. Because that was the goal.

It is not an easy *avodah*. But let us not forget that this is the main goal of our *avodas Hashem*, and really why we are here in this world at all. Let us take these forty days and put our hands back on the wheel — a little more *cheishek* toward Hashem, a little more pleasure given to the neshamah that is begging for it, and a real new page. And may Hashem accept us with *rachamim* and *ratzon*, and bring us all close to Him, with the geulah, bekarov beyomeinu!