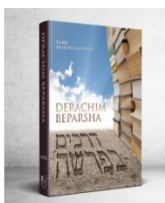


דרכים בפרשה האזינו

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האזינו השמים ואדברה ותשמע הארץ אמרי פי

Listen, heaven, and I will speak; let the earth hear the words of my mouth.

It is that time of year when we hear many stories about kings and princes who have been sent to faraway lands.

My dear chavrusa recently shared with me a mashal he heard from the Alexander Rebbe of Bnei Brak. The mashal has been related in many different variations and appears in different forms in seforim over the years. I would like to take it in a slightly different direction, because I think there is a point in this mashal that speaks very directly to where we are right now.

There is a familiar mashal about a king who had a son who, for whatever reason, was sent away to a distant land. Far away from the palace, the prince eventually became accustomed to a completely different life. In need of a livelihood, he became a woodchopper, spending his days in the forest chopping wood with his axe.

One day, the king decided to visit his son. Before he arrived, he sent word to the prince that he was coming. And then came the incredible part. The king told his son, "When I come, you can ask me for anything you want."

The prince had not seen his father in years. He was being given an opportunity to ask the king for anything in the world.

The king arrived and found his son in the forest. "My son," he said, "what would you like?"

The prince thought for a moment and said, "My axe is old. The blade is rusty and isn't as sharp as it used to be, and the wooden handle is starting to come loose. If you could give me a new axe, it would make my work much easier."

We hear the story and think: What a missed opportunity! He could have asked to be taken back home!

But maybe there is something unfair about that reaction. After all, the prince really did need an axe. He was a woodchopper. This was his livelihood. His axe was not some silly distraction. He needed it to make a living. There is nothing wrong with asking for a better axe.

Are we really any different? We come before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and we ask for parnassah. We ask for health, for nachas, for our families, for hatzlachah and for all the things we need to live a good life. We are not supposed to stop asking for those things. We need our "axes."

So let's reframe the question: It isn't whether we should ask for the axe, but rather, while asking for the axe, do we remember Who is standing in front of us, and why we need the axe in the first place. We don't have to put down the axe. We have to look up from it.

"דרשו ה' בהמצאו, קראוהו בהיותו קרוב." The Rambam tells us that although teshuvah and tefillah are always valuable, during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah they are "יפה ביותר ומתקבלת היא מיד." These are days when Hashem is "מצוי" to every Yid.

The Seforim Hakedoshim explain that there is something significant about the word "בהמצאו." It comes from the language of מציאה, a find. A metziah is something that comes to a person without his having prepared for it or worked for it. That is what is so special about these days. Hashem is coming close to us even before we have managed to become the people we want to be. We don't first have to climb back to the palace. The King comes to the forest.

But then the pasuk continues, "קראוהו בהיותו קרוב." It is not enough to know that Hashem is close. We are being told to call to Him, to seek Him, to turn toward Him. That is where the word "דרשו" becomes so important. We are not simply being told to ask Hashem for things. We are being told to seek Hashem Himself.

There is a tremendous difference between knowing that someone is standing nearby and actually turning

toward him. That is one of the things Rosh Hashanah is asking from us. Of course we have our list. We need parnassah. We need health. We need nachas. We have things we desperately want Hashem to help us with, and we should ask Him for them. But while we are asking for the axe, we have to remember that the King Himself is standing in front of us.

Let's look at the opening pesukim of Haazinu. Moshe Rabbeinu says, "האזינו השמים ואדברה ותשמע הארץ אמרי" (פי"א). Chazal explain that Moshe was "קרוב לשמים" and "רחוק מן הארץ." Therefore, he said "האזינו" to the shamayim and "ותשמע" to the earth (Sifri)

The seforim explain that this can also be understood on an avodah level. There are times when a person is "קרוב לשמים." He feels connected. He learns Torah and feels that he is standing close to Hashem. His tefillah means something to him. He feels inspired. He is in the mode and alive. And then there is "הארץ." There are days when a person feels completely ordinary. He has to go to work. He has bills to pay. He has children to deal with. He has a thousand things on his mind. Sometimes he doesn't feel anything at all.

But being "רחוק מן הארץ" does not mean being far from Hashem. There is a closeness that comes through Torah, tefillah and avodah, through understanding and feeling connected. And there is another closeness that comes through simply doing what Hashem asks because He is Hashem. Sometimes we are "קרוב לשמים." Sometimes all we have is "ותשמע הארץ." And both are part of avodas Hashem.

This is what makes the mashal so powerful. The King does not come to the palace and wait for the prince to become worthy of seeing Him. He comes to the forest. He comes to the place where the prince has been living. He finds him exactly where he is, with the old axe in his hands.

That is "בהמצאו." Hashem is making Himself available to us. And our job is "דרשו." We have to turn toward Him and look up.

"וקרבנו מלכנו לעבודתך" and "השיבנו אבינו לתורתך." We aren't only asking Hashem to improve our circumstances. We are asking Him to bring us closer. We are asking Him to bring us home.

The prince really did need the axe. We really do need our parnassah, our health, our nachas and all the other things we ask Hashem for. There is nothing wrong with that. But the axe is not the destination. It is a tool. The question is whether, while holding it, we remember where we belong.

המלך בשדה. The King has come all the way to the forest. He is standing right there. And when He asks, "My son, what do you want?" we can certainly ask for a better axe.

But we can also look up from what we've been chopping all year and say, "Tatty, I don't only want a better axe. *Ich vil kumen aheim* -I want to come home.

**Good Shabbos and a Gmar chasima tova,
מרדכי אפפּעל**