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Following the Path of the Defender of Israel

From the teachings of Kedushas Levi
Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

וירא את האור כי טוב

And He saw the light that it was good

Which does Hashem desire more, the deeds of the Tzaddikim (righteous) or the deeds of the Reshaim (wicked)?

It sounds like a bizarre question. Why would we entertain the thought that Hashem desires the deeds of the Reshaim and may even prefer them to the deeds of the Tzaddikim? Yet this question is posed in the Midrash.

On the first day of Creation, Hashem created light and dark, calling the light, day and the dark, night.

The Midrash explains that light and day refer to the deeds of the Tzaddikim. Darkness and night refer to the deeds of the Reshaim. The Torah seems to put the two on par.

But from the end of the verse "and Hashem saw the light that it was good", the Midrash concludes that it is the deeds of the Tzaddikim that Hashem desires.

The great Tzaddik and Rebbe, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev (whose Yartzeit was on Friday, Tishrei 25) offers a beautiful explanation of this perplexing Midrash.

The Midrash does not refer to Hashem's desire for the righteous or the wicked, it deliberately refers to the "deeds" or "ways" of the Tzaddikim and the Reshaim.

On the injunction to love Hashem with all your heart – *בכל לבבך* - our sages teach that one must serve Hashem with both of their inclinations, the Yetzer Tov and Yetzer Hara. Rabbeinu Yonah explains

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Shemini Atzeres One Year On

A reflection on the lesson of the first anniversary of last year's Massacre

As Jews, we don't commemorate events based on the date in the secular calendar. Like birthdays and Yartzeits, significant events and Festivals, both joyous and sad, are observed exclusively according to the Jewish date.

We have our own Land, our own language and we have our own calendar. But aside from expressing our unique identity and pride as a nation, distinct from those around us, the Jewish dates also have Divine significance and meaning.

One of our fundamental beliefs is Hasgacha Protis, that everything that happens, including when it happens, whether we understand it or not, is not coincidental.

The war that broke out on October 6, 1973 is known by Jews as the Yom Kippur War. Only our enemies, the invading Arab nations, refer to it as the October war. In our collective memory, we forever bind the outbreak of the war, the tragic loss of so many lives and our ultimate triumph, with the holiest Day of our year.

The October 7th attack took place on Shemini Atzeres. In the Land of Israel, where only 1 day of Yomtov is observed, this day is also the celebration of Simchas Torah. As Jews, the anniversary of the massacre will always be Shemini Atzeres.

In the fact that this horrific attack took place on Simchas Torah, Hashem is sending us an important message. We need to learn from the inner significance of this day, because in it lies the key to the resilience of our people, the path to victory over our enemies and the key to a brighter future.

Shemini Atzeres is the festival of Achdus, the unity of the Jewish people.

There is a well-known Midrash that explains the reason for the Festival and its name Atzeres. The Midrash presents a parable of a king, whose children come from near and far to celebrate with him. At the end of the celebration, before they each head off on their own ways, he asks them to stay with him for one more day, saying, *קשה עלי פרידתכם*, "our parting is difficult".

On Sukkos, Jews from all over the world would be Oleh L'regel. From near and far, Hashem's children

would travel to Yerushalaim and the Beis Hamikdash, to spend the Yomtov in the presence of the King of kings.

Before taking leave, Hashem asks us to stay back (Atzeres) and celebrate with Him for one more day, because *קשה עלי פרידתכם*, "our parting is difficult".

The Baalei Mussar and Chassidus point out that the Midrash does not say *פרידתנו*, "our separation". Rather, the Midrash says *פרידתכם*, meaning "your separation".

Hashem's pain comes from the divisiveness and separation between His children, the Jewish people themselves.

The implication of the Midrash, is that the additional day of Shemini Atzeres is the solution to this divisiveness that ensures that even as we each go off on our own, we will remain united.

The festival of Sukkos is itself a celebration of Jewish unity. The four species of the Lulav and Esrog represent the full spectrum of our people in the advance of Torah observance, from the Esrog that represents a complete service of Torah study and Mitzvos, to the Arava that reflects those who are lacking both. Yet the Mitzvah can only be fulfilled by bringing them together *אחת באגודה*, in one bundle.

Why is this not sufficient to hold us together when the festival ends? And how does one additional day of celebration ensure a unity that will last?

The unity of Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres are fundamentally different.

Whilst we bring the four species together to fulfill the Mitzvah, they remain essentially distinct from one another.

This represents a unity where our divisions are put aside or superseded for a common objective. But the distinctions are still present and recognisable. When the common pursuit that holds us together comes to an end, they can once again come to the fore as a source of division and separation.

Shemini Atzeres reveals the essential oneness of the Jewish people.

This oneness comes from the essence of our souls, that lies deeper than the external things that may divide us. We may be different and separated in our level of observance of Torah and Mitzvos as represented by the Arba Minim, but at our core, we are completely united and inextricably bound together.

This unity is always there, but it becomes hidden as we focus on the external layers and qualities that highlight our divisions.

On Shemini Atzeres, our essential unity is revealed. Since this unity is not based on any reason, it does not go away.

This is why the celebration of the Torah is through dancing. Were we to celebrate through learning Torah, this would once again emphasise our distinctions and differences. But everyone can dance.

In the months leading up to Shemini Atzeres 5784, there were deep divides and rifts plaguing the Jews in Eretz Yisroel. For more than half a year we saw protests that pitted the different segments of society against one another. We heard hateful rhetoric and slander and even saw acts of violence between fellow Jews. This culminated in the tragic and shameful events that took place in Tel Aviv on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year.

In addition to physically weakening the nation and its governance, our internal divisions weakened the nation spiritually.

The Hamas terrorists themselves said that the internal divisions and discord within Israeli society emboldened them in carrying out their horrendous attack.

But the tragic attack awakened an incredible, unprecedented spirit of unity and brotherly love. The protests were called off and the nation came together, uniting the full spectrum that makes up our people. Jews in Israel and around the world rallied as one behind the army, the victims and the captives. We witnessed a tremendous outpouring of Chessed and saw unity gatherings of prayer and solidarity around the world.

Tragically our memories are short and after the initial months of unity, we are now seeing the evil of division, discord and incitement emerge once more. Instead of uniting against our enemies, we are turning against one another.

In Tehillim, King David says **מֵאוֹיְבֵי תַחְכַּמְנִי**. Literally this means "make me wiser than my enemies." However, it can also mean "make me wise from my enemies", suggesting that we can learn from our enemies.

What could we possibly learn from Hamas?

From Hamas we learn that a Jew is a Jew.

When Hamas attacked the revellers at the Nova festival, they slaughtered them because they were Jews.

It made no difference to the terrorists that they were participating at a dance party on Yomtov. It made no difference how their victims were dressed or the tattoos on their bodies or their personal lifestyles. In their eyes, the Jews they killed while dancing at the Nova festival, were the same as the Jews who were murdered in a Shule in Har Nof, while praying in their Tallis and Tefillin.

Our enemies do not distinguish and divide Jews as being an Esrog, Lulav, Hadas or Arava. We

do. Our enemies do not get caught up in the external differences that separate us. We do.

Unlike the secular date of October 7, marking the anniversary of the massacre on Shemini Atzeres calls on us to introspect as a people and as individuals.

It is easy to come together when facing a common enemy and existential threat. Ironically like the Lulav and Esrog, we come together when we are shaken as we were last year. But unless we change how we truly see and value one another, unless we internalise the message of Shemini Atzeres, this unity cannot last.

As we approach the first anniversary, let us mark this holy day and the memory of the Kedoshim with a firm resolve to strengthen our Achdus and Ahavas Yisroel, to see every Jew as their inner essence and to love them and relate to them accordingly. Looking beyond which "specie" we may present as externally, let us go hand-in-hand not only as we fight, but as we dance to a brighter future of peace and security.

This is the greatest way that we can honour the memory of the victims and of the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for our Land and for our people, without distinction.

Our unity is our greatest strength and is the key to Hashem's blessings. With this strength we will triumph over all of our enemies, see the return of our hostages and bring about the Redemption when will all return back to our Father's home, never to be divided again.

how this is possible and what it means.

The natural traits of the Yetzer Tov is to love peace, pursue peace and to draw our fellow Jews closer to the service of Hashem through sweetness and positivity. These are the Middos of the Tzaddikim.

In contrast, the Middos of the Yetzer Hara are anger and hatred. The Reshaim use these Middos to do evil and harm and to despise those who serve Hashem.

The Mishna is teaching us that the Tzaddik can also utilise the Middos of the Yetzer Hara in the service of Hashem, to direct anger towards those who go against Hashem's will.

With this, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok explains our Midrash. The "deeds of the righteous" refer to the path of drawing others closer through love, kindness, positive words and compassion – that are likened to the light and warmth of day.

The "deeds of the Reshaim" refer to the use of the Middos of the Reshaim in the service of Hashem, to use words of stern rebuke and anger to those who have gone astray, in an effort to cause them to regret their ways and to return.

Since both are approaches within the service of Hashem, the question of the Midrash is now understandable, which approach does Hashem desire?

The Midrash concludes that whilst both paths may have holy motivations, it is the path of closeness, love and positivity that Hashem desires, not the path of anger.

The Posuk **וַיִּרְא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב** can also mean that Hashem saw the light, because He is good. Hashem is the ultimate of goodness and kindness and so He chooses the Middas Hatzaddikim, the path of light.

In contrast to the path of Mussar, the Baal Shem

Tov, with the Chassidic movement, espoused the approach of love, closeness and positivity towards every Jew, even to those who had gone astray.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev championed the approach of light, the Middas Hatzaddikim. He was renowned for his loving every Jew and always judging them favourably. Through his constant defence of the Jewish people in the eyes of Hashem, he earned him the title "the Defender of Israel".

The Alter Rebbe taught, that through his efforts to judge every Jew favourably, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok created a new palace of merit in Heaven (Heichal Hazechus). Whoever follows in his ways and judges their fellow favourably, merits to enter this chamber, from which they can draw down blessings to fulfill all of their desires, for themselves and their fellow Jew.

Zechuso Yagein Aleinu, may his merit be a source of protection for us.