

BADERECH

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L'chaim!

The year 1804 saw the famous "Zhlobener Wedding", also known among chasidim as "the Great *Chasuna*". A granddaughter of the Alter Rebbe, Reb Schneur Zalman of Liadi zy'a married a grandson of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the Kedushas Levi zy'a. The historic wedding lasted from Friday through the end of Shabbos.

During the wedding meal, the Alter Rebbe poured a shot of vodka and said *l'chaim* to his *mechutan,* the *tzadik* of Berditchev: "*L'chaim heilige mechutan! Hashem* should bless us *b'gashmiyus* and *b'ruchniyus*, material well-being and spiritual success!"

The Kedushas Levi was taken aback by the Alter Rebbe's toast, and responded with a look of wonderment: "My dear *mechutan,* how can this be? *Gashmiyus* before *ruchniyus?* Should a blessing for physical well-being precede a blessing for spiritual success?"

The Alter Rebbe explained: "Yes, indeed!



Is this not what we find clearly in the Torah, When Yaakov Avinu awoke from his dream of angels ascending and descending celestial ladder? His prayer was just that: "If He gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear . . and I return in peace . . *then* Hashem will be my G-d." He mentioned *gashmiyus* — bread and clothing — before *ruchniyus*, returning to Hashem!

Seemingly unconvinced, the Berditchever pressed on. "But how can we compare our *gashmiyus,* our physical needs, to Yaakov Avinu's *gashmiyus*?"

The Alter Rebbe replied with a smile: "And tell me, dear *mechutan*, how can we compare our *ruchniyus*, our spiritual state, to *Yaakov Avinu*'s level of *ruchniyus*?"

"And Yacov awakened from his sleep, and he said, "Indeed, the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it...!"(28:16) Declaring "How awesome is this place; surely it is the gate of Heaven," Yaakov Avinu draws close to Hashem in prayer. This is also hinted in the words, *Vayifgah Bamakom*, "and he had an encounter with *haMakom*," the Omnipresent.

What does Yaakov pray for during this awesome encounter with Hashem? Directly after the dream vision of angels descending and ascending to Heaven, after a Divine revelation of historical magnitude, Yaakov simply and humbly davens for the basics:

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Beged lilbosh, lechem le'echol, "If Hashem will provide me with a garment to wear, bread to eat...." Shouldn't he have prayed for something of cosmic spiritual import at such a moment, perhaps that Moshiach come immediately?

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov urges us to make fulfilling physical needs a spiritual experience, and not to fall prey to a superficial understanding of Creation. That which can be seen, touched, measured and physically experienced is not merely 'earthy', while study, prayer and meditation are 'Heavenly'. Some people eat, sleep and fulfil their bodily needs in order to have the strength to study Torah and meditate. Others, who are more spiritually aware, study Torah in order to know how to eat, sleep and live.

Each of us are a *Neshama b'Guf*, a Heavenly soul temporarily carried about within an earthly body, in order to fulfil our mission in this world. Our basic, 'worldly', physical needs are therefore holy, and meeting these needs brings honor to Hashem, for this is a fulfilment of His will.

So often we compartmentalize our "religious" and "spiritual" endeavors, and imagine that our workday, our household chores, shopping or commute, to be necessary but "mundane". The students of the Baal Shem Tov help us to see our lives in a more expansive way — we are instructed *B'chol Derachecha, Da'eihu*, to "Know G-d in *all* your ways"(Mishlei, 3:6) Living with this recognition, even every simple *gashmiyusdik* task becomes suffused with meaning, *ruchniyus*, and cleaving to G-d.

L'chaim L'chaim! May Hashem help us to live with this awareness, and may He provide for us *b'gashmiyus* and *b'ruchniyus*!

"Master of the World,

Grant me the wisdom to reveal the harmony of my body and soul.

Let their oneness be revealed in my devotion to You.

My soul perceives Your light — let my body discern it too.

My soul calls out Your praise — let my body sing it too...."

— Reb Nosson of Breslov, *Lekutei Tefillos*

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