



Exploring the Fascinating Explanation of the Tiferes Shlomo

Torah Only Endures in Someone Who Sacrifices Himself on Its Behalf One Should Imagine that He Has Passed Away and Returned to Study Torah for a Single Day

In this week's parsha, parshas Chukas, it is fitting that we explore the significance and implications of the following passuk (Bamidbar 19, 14): "זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל"—**this is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent.** We find an elucidation related to this passuk in the Gemara (Berachos 63b) from one of the preeminent scholars featured in the Talmud, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish. He provides us with a fundamental principle that is relevant to anyone who desires to learn Torah and attain its wisdom: "אמר ריש לקיש, מנין שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, שנאמר 'זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל'—according to Reish Lakish, this passuk teaches us that Torah knowledge is only retained by someone who sacrifices himself on its behalf.

We learn another basic principle in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shabbas 6a): "כל האומר שמועה מפי אומרה, יהא רואה בעל השמועה כאלו הוא עומד כנגדו"—whenever presenting a teaching (ruling) in the name of its author, one should imagine that the author is standing before him. This concept is explained in the sefer Siach Sarfei Kodesh (Lech Lecha) in the name of the Chiddushei HaRim, zy"l: The teaching and its novel implications are related to the root of the neshamah of the author. Thus, when one learns the teaching and recognizes its Torah-related implications, the neshamah of the author of the teaching shines within him. This is what is meant by: "One should imagine that the author is standing before him."

Applying this concept to Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, the author of the teaching above, it is apparent that his

elucidation is intimately related to his unique character: "שאיין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה." For, he epitomized the maxim (Chagigah 14b): "נאה דורש ונאה מקיים"—**one who both expounds well and practices well.** As the Gemara (B.M. 84a) teaches us, he was initially the leader of a group of highway-robbers, until Rabbi Yochanan rehabilitated him, bringing him closer to Hashem and teaching him Torah. Under Rabbi Yochanan's tutelage, he dedicated himself to the study of Torah; ultimately, he became a leader of Yisrael, one of the greatest sages of Torah she'b'al peh. His sacred teachings appear throughout Talmud Bavli and Talmud Yerushalmi.

A Fascinating Insight from the Tiferes Shlomo

We will now explore in great depth the incredible connection between Reish Lakish and this teaching based on an insight from the Tiferes Shlomo regarding the practical significance of this teaching. His insight is based on an actual incident involving Reish Lakish and two of his cohorts. The other two did not make amends by performing teshuvah and were held accountable in the heavenly court. Here is the episode as it appears in the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 43):

Ben Azai says: Come and learn the power of teshuvah from Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish. He and two companions were robbing and harassing everyone who passed them by on the road. What did he do? He left his two

companions robbing in the mountains, while he returned to the G-d of his father wholeheartedly through fasting and praying. He would rise and retire before HKB”H; he studied Torah all of his days and gave gifts to the poor; he never returned to his wrongdoings, and his teshuvah was accepted.

On the day he died, his two companions who continued robbing in the mountains also died. Rabbi Shimon was given a portion of the living, while his two companions were placed in the depths of the abyss (hell). The two of them complained to HKB”H, “Master of the Universe, do You give preferential treatment? This one was a bandit with us in the mountains. Yet, he is in the storehouse of the living and we are in the depths of the abyss.” He replied to them, “This one performed teshuvah while alive, but you did not.” They said to Him, “Allow us, and we will perform teshuvah.” He replied to them, “Teshuvah is only possible until one’s death.

Here is a parable: It is analogous to a person who wished to take a sea voyage. If he neglected to take bread with him from dry land, he will surely not find it at sea. If a man wishes to travel to the ends of the wilderness, if he neglects to take from civilization bread and water, he surely will not find what to eat and drink in the wilderness. Similarly, if a person does not perform teshuvah in his lifetime, after death, he no longer has the opportunity to perform teshuvah.

Based on this account, the Tiferes Shlomo interprets the passuk: **“This is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent”** and Chazal’s exposition that this teaches us that Torah-knowledge is only retained by **“someone who sacrifices himself on its behalf.”** Interpret it thusly: **“This is the Torah”**—study it with such contrition and intense devotion as if you died in the tent from all of your exertion. Then request to be returned to this world for one more day. Imagine how much such a person would exert himself in the study of Torah and performance of good deeds on that one extra day he was granted. He would undoubtedly not allow a single moment to pass without serving Hashem and performing acts of tikun for the rest of his life.

Reish Lakish Lived Every Day as if He Had Returned from the Dead to Study Torah and Serve Hashem

Now, the Tiferes Shlomo does not mention the fact that the author of the statement: **“אין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית”**—**“עצמו עליה”**—is Reish Lakish; even though his interpretation of this statement—that a person should imagine that he has passed away and was afforded the opportunity to return to life to study Torah for only one day—was based on what happened to Reish Lakish and his two companions after they died.

We can postulate that although Reish Lakish was obviously still alive when he expounded on this passuk; nevertheless, he treated each and every day as if he had been given the opportunity to return from the dead to study Torah for one more day. This concurs with the elucidation in the Gemara (Berachos 18a) of that which is written (Koheles 9, 5): **“כי החיים יודעים שימותו, אלו צדיקים שבמיתתן נקראו חיים... והמתים”**. **“For the living know that they will die”** refers to the tzaddikim, who even after their deaths are still considered as being alive . . . **“but the dead do not know anything”** refers to the wicked, who even while they are still alive are considered as if they are dead.

Accordingly, since Reish Lakish abandoned his life as a bandit, performed teshuvah and studied Torah diligently, it was as if he had returned from the dead (from the life of a rasha) to study Torah. Furthermore, David HaMelech said (Tehillim 51, 5): **“כי בשעי אני אדע וחטאתי נגדי תמיד”**—**for my transgressions I recognize, and my sin is before me always.** Hence, due to his immense kedushah, Reish Lakish performed teshuvah daily. As such, he viewed each and every day as if he had died and was afforded the opportunity by HKB”H to return for one more day to study Torah.

Therefore, based on his own personal experience, he revealed this teaching to the world: **“From where do we know that words of Torah are not retained except by one who kills himself over it (the Torah)? For it is stated: “This is the Torah of a man who dies in a tent.”** Then, the Tiferes Shlomo explained that this means that a person should

imagine that he died, and he should plead to be allowed to return to life for one more day. One can only imagine with that mindset how much a person would strive each and every day to study Torah and perform good deeds.

The Chafetz Chaim Following in the Footsteps of the Tiferes Shlomo

We find a precious teaching from the great tzaddik, the Chafetz Chaim, in his commentary on the Torah in this week's parsha. Due to his extreme righteousness, his teachings are accepted throughout the Jewish world. His sefer on halachah, the Mishnah Berurah, has been printed countless times with numerous commentaries. His sacred sefer Chafetz Chaim dealing with the prohibition of speaking lashon hara is studied extensively. He stresses the importance of loving the Torah and "yiras shamayim."

Therefore, it is fitting that we present to our esteemed audience the words of the Chafetz Chaim on this week's parsha which resonate with the sacred insight of the Tiferes Shlomo.

He presents a real life parable to help us better comprehend the meaning of the passuk: **"This is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent"** and Chazal's exposition that this teaches us that Torah knowledge is only retained by **"someone who kills himself on its behalf."** He points out that this is at odds with the teaching of **"והי בהם"**—that we are to live with the words of Torah not die with them. **He compares this to a merchant who was inundated with buyers from his own village and all the surrounding villages. This kept him so extremely busy, day and night, that he did not even have time to go to the Beis Kenesses to daven with the congregation.**

As the years passed, white hair appeared in his beard and his strength deteriorated. He sensed that he was nearing the end of his life and that he would soon be held accountable for his actions. Hence, he began to make preparations. He started going to the Beis Kenesses to daven with a group. After the tefilah, he would spend two hours learning in the Beis Midrash. He decided to neglect the merchants and customers, knowing that they were inconsequential and would not help his plight.

When he returned to his business from the Beis Kenesses, after working for three hours, his wife asked him with wonderment about his late arrival. After all, the store was full of merchants anxious to get on their way. He simply answered and explained to her that he was preoccupied and was forced to come late.

On the second day, the morning had already passed, and her husband had still not returned from the Beis Kenesses. She decided to go herself and see what happened to him there. She was appalled to see him sitting and learning. She began screaming at him out loud. What is with you? Have you gone out of your mind? Or are you crazy? The store is full of customers and he is sitting leisurely and learning. I am not concerned about the financial loss you are causing us, but is it sensible to drive customers away from the store while the other storekeepers on all sides are competing with us?

Her husband responded and said to her, "Please listen, my dear wife. What would you do if the Malach Hamaves came and said to me, 'Your time has come to depart from the world. Get up and go.'? Would you be able to say to him that there is no time now while the store is full of customers? If so, you can view it as if I am currently dead. And what does it matter to you if I return to life in another two hours, and then I will come to the store to help you?!"

This is the meaning of the statement above: "Words of Torah are not retained except in someone who kills himself over her." A person must think that he is dead. To that he cannot reply that he is not available. If he has this mindset, he will be able to study and fulfill the precepts of the Torah, which provide life to those who study it and observe it.

**"And you who cling to Hashem,
your G-d, you are all alive today"**

It is with great pleasure and delight that we will now delve into the wonderful interpretation of the Tiferes Shlomo together. We have learned in the Gemara (Shabbas

”רבי אליעזר אומר, שוב יום אחד לפני מיתתך, שאלו תלמידיו את רבי: (153a) אליעזר, וכי אדם יודע איזהו יום ימות, אמר להן וכל שכן ישוב היום שמא ימות.” **Rabbi Eliezer says: “Repent one day before your death.” Rabbi Eliezer’s students asked him: “But does a person know which day he will die?” He responded: “All the more so, let a person repent today, lest he die tomorrow; and in this way, he will find himself living all his days in a state of teshuvah.”** Thus, we learn from Rabbi Eliezer that a person should imagine every day that it is the last day of his life, that perhaps he will die tomorrow.

In this vein, the great author of the Ben Ish Chai in the commentary Chasdei Avos on Maseches Avos (2, 20), explains the implication of the passuk (Devarim 4, 4): **“ואתם היום”**—**and you who cling to Hashem, your G-d, you are all alive today.** If a person believes that he is going to live many more years, he is likely to be remiss and lackadaisical in his service of Hashem. For, he believes that he has plenty of time left to rectify everything by means of teshuvah. Therefore: **“ואתם הדבקים בה”**—**if you wish to cling to Hashem, your G-d, it is advisable: “היום כולכם היום”**—that you adopt the mindset that you will be alive only **“today.”** With this mental outlook, you are likely to serve Hashem with the devotion of a person who is about to depart this world today.

This allows us a very nice interpretation of another passage in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 98a). Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi encounters Mashiach and asks him: **“לאימת אתי מר”**—when are you coming to redeem Yisrael? Mashiach replies that he will come today: **“היום”**. When the day passes, and Mashiach fails to arrive, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi goes to Eliyahu HaNavi and complains that Mashiach lied to him. Eliyahu explains that what Mashiach meant to say was that he would come (Tehillim 95, 7): **“היום אם בקולו תשמעו”**—even today, if Yisrael would only heed the words of HKB”H. Now, in keeping with our current discussion, we can suggest that Mashiach was telling him the following: If Yisrael will serve Hashem with the mindset of **“היום”**—like there is no tomorrow, like this is the last day of their lives, the complete geulah will become a reality very soon.

Notwithstanding, this deserves further clarification. Why did HKB”H convey this message to us with the passuk: **“זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל”**—in relation to dying in a tent, prompting Reish Lakish to teach us that this passuk comes to teach us that words of Torah are only retained by **“someone who kills himself on its behalf”**? The Tiferes Shlomo provides further clarification explaining that a person should treat each day as if he has already passed away, and he has been granted a virtual, mini-“Techiyas HaMeisim”—the opportunity to return to life to serve Hashem for one more day. Based on what we learned from Rabbi Eliezer, a person should imagine that every day might be the last day of his life in Olam HaZeh. This coincides very nicely with the outlook that one has already died and has come back to life for a single day.

“Perhaps he will die tomorrow” Promotes Teshuvah Inspired by Yirah

I had a wonderful idea based on what we have discussed. I would like to suggest an explanation for the following Gemara (Berachos 19a): **“תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל, אם ראית תלמיד אם חכם שעבר עבירה בלילה אל תהרהר אחריו ביום, שמא עשה תשובה”**—**a Baraisa was taught in the Academy of Rabbi Yishmael: If you saw a talmid-chacham (a Torah scholar) commit an aveirah at night, do not think ill of him the next day; for, perhaps he performed teshuvah.** The Gemara asks: **“שמא סלקא דעתך”**—**you presume that only “perhaps”** (he repented)? It answers: **“אלא ודאי עשה תשובה”**—**rather, we should presume that he certainly repented.** The Chavat Yair, written by the brilliant author of the Ohr Chadash, writes in the name of Rabbi Shlomo Algazi that when the Gemara says: **“Perhaps he performed teshuvah”**—it means that the talmid-chacham most certainly performed teshuvah that very same night out of concern that **“perhaps he would die the next day.”**

If we accept this interpretation, however, the Gemara’s question that follows: **“You presume that only “perhaps”** (he repented)?” and its answer: **“Rather, we should presume that he certainly repented”**—do not really flow. Hence, the Chavat Yair provides a very nice explanation based on what we have learned elsewhere (Yoma 86b): **“אמר”**

Reish Lakish said: Teshuvah is so great in that a person's deliberate transgressions are transformed into inadvertant ones. The Gemara notes that that seems to contradict an earlier teaching of Reish Lakish: "איני והאמר ריש לקיש, גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכיות"—is that so? **But did not Reish Lakish himself say: Teshuvah is so great in that a person's deliberate transgressions are transformed into merits!?** The Gemara resolves the dilemma as follows: "לא קשיא כאן מאהבה כאן מיראה"—this is not difficult. Here (this second statement) is referring to teshuvah motivated by "ahavah" (love), whereas here (the first statement above) is referring to teshuvah motivated by "yirah" (fear). In other words, due to teshuvah stemming from the fear of punishment, deliberate transgressions are considered as inadvertent ones; while due to teshuvah inspired by love of the Almighty, deliberate transgressions are viewed as merits.

Let us introduce another elucidation (B.M. 33b): "מאי דכתיב הגד לעמי פשעם ולבית יעקב חטאתם, הגד לעמי פשעם, אלו תלמידי חכמים ששגגות נעשות להם כזדונות, ולבית יעקב חטאתם, אלו עמי הארץ שזדונות נעשות להם כשגגות." **What is the meaning of that which is written (Yeshayah 58, 1): "Inform My nation of their deliberate transgressions and the House of Yaakov of their unintentional transgressions"?** The first phrase: **"Inform My nation of their willful transgression"** refers to talmidei-chachamim, whose unintentional transgressions are considered (by Hashem) to be like deliberate transgressions. The second phrase: **"And the House of Yaakov of their unintentional transgressions"** refers to the common people of the land, whose deliberate transgressions are considered (by Hashem) as unintentional transgressions. Consider the implication! This implies that talmidei-chachamim who sinned cannot achieve tikun via teshuvah motivated by "yirah." For, as we have learned, teshuvah based on "yirah" only transforms deliberate transgressions into inadvertant transgressions. So, if for talmidei-chachamim **"unintentional transgressions are considered (by Hashem) to be like deliberate transgressions,"** teshuvah based on "yirah" serves them no benefit. Perforce, their only tikun is through teshuvah based on "ahavah," which transforms deliberate transgressions into merits.

Applying this understanding, the Chavat Yair explains the significance of the Gemara's statement: **"If you saw a talmid-chacham commit an aveirah at night, do not think ill of him the next day; for, perhaps he performed teshuvah."** According to Rabbi Shlomo Algazi, this means that he performed teshuvah out of fear that **"he might die the next day."** This prompts the Gemara to ask: "שמה סלקא דעתך"—but this is problematic, because teshuvah motivated by the fear that **"he might die the next day"** is a form of teshuvah motivated by "yirah," which would only transform his deliberate transgressions into inadvertant ones. And, as we have just learned, that is of no benefit to talmidei-chachamim. To which the Gemara answers: "אלא ודאי עשה תשובה"—he most definitely performed teshuvah motivated by "ahavah" and not out of the fear of dying the next day. In this case, his deliberate transgressions are accounted for as merits. This concludes his eloquent explanation.

We now stand enlightened and have cause to rejoice. There are two aspects to imagining that one is living the last day of one's life. Let us refer to a concept presented in our sacred sefarim and brought down by the Kedushas Levi (Eikev). The initial phase of teshuvah should be teshuvah from "yirah"; only afterwards can a person ascend the spiritual ladder to also perform teshuvah from "ahavah."

With this understanding, we can suggest that Rabbi Eliezer's advice: **Repent one day before your death . . . lest he die tomorrow; and in this way, he will find himself living all his days in a state of teshuvah**—is directed to every Jew. Every Jew should perform at least teshuvah from "yirah" daily with the concern that he might die tomorrow. On the other hand, the passuk in our parsha: **"This is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent"**—is speaking about talmidei-chachamim, Torah-scholars who toil in the tents of Torah. As explained, it does not suffice for them to perform merely teshuvah from "yirah," which transforms intentional transgressions into unintentional ones. After all, their unintentional transgressions are treated like intentional ones.

Therefore, they are advised: **"This is the Torah concerning a man should he die in a tent,"** which is

interpreted by Reish Lakish to mean: **“Words of Torah are not retained except by someone who kills himself over her.”** As the Tiferes Shlomo explains, this means that a person should imagine that he has already died and was granted the opportunity to come back to life to learn Torah for one more day. This tactic should not cause sadness but rather joy; for it allows a person to return from the dead to study Torah one more day. This joy enables him to make amends for everything via teshuvah from “ahavah,” transforming all of his deliberate transgressions into merits.

This can be alluded to very nicely by the words of the prophet (Yeshayah 58, 2): **“ואותי יום יום ידרשון ודעת דרכי יחפצון—yet they seek Me each and every day, and desire to know My ways.** Thus, HKB”H requests that they seek Him out **“every day”--“יום יום”**—referring to two distinct

ways to envision one’s last **“yom”** in Olam HaZeh. The first is to imagine that it is the last day of one’s life, so that he will perform teshuvah from “yirah.” The second is to imagine that one has already passed away and is being allowed to return to life to study Torah for one day.

We will conclude with the prophetic words of the navi concerning the future geulah (ibid. 54, 12): **“וְשִׁמְתִי כַדְכָד”**—**I will set your window frames with ruby.** Note that the letters **כ”ד** appear two times in the word **כַדְכָד**. Their numerical value is 24. Thus, HKB”H is alluding to us that every day is composed of two types of **24** hours—the two ways in which we envision our last day of life in Olam HaZeh. In their merit, we will witness the future geulah, swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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