

PARASHAT BEREISHIT A NEW BEGINNING

“Hayom Im Bekolo Tishmaoo”- “Today, if you listen to his voice“. Rav Nachman of Breslov asks, why today (hayom)? That is superfluous. What does this mean? All you have before you is today. You want to be successful? You take it one step at a time, one day at a time. It looks impossible if you look at the whole thing. If you look at the whole year of yeshiva, you’re going to think its impossible. But if you take it one step at a time, then it goes fine. Rav Soloveitchik says its such a contradiction people say that can’t learn gemara and go to shul because it’s too hard. Even the easiest things in Judaism are too hard for them. But they go out and get a nice car, they go to medical school, they do hard things in the material world !? When it comes to what’s important, all of a sudden a guy with all these talents can’t learn torah?

“Vayehi Erev, Veyehi Boker”- Rav Avahu says the medresh tells us, before G-d created this world he was building and destroying worlds, building and destroying worlds. What is that supposed to mean? G-d’s playing a game? Rav Soloveitchik says a person has to build even if he has destroyed everything before. Those previous world were beautiful but they were not what G-d wanted. This teaches us, even if you messed up before you can always do teshuva and build up again.

G-d wants our best effort to serve him the best way we can. Even if his previous efforts were demolished, a person has to keep building. For example, to get into Chochmei Lublin 60 years ago, you had to know 200 blat Gemara with Rashi/Tosfot cold. Rav Soloveitchik was walking through his school and he saw one boy sitting down and reading Chumash with Rashi and he was ecstatic! But in Chochmei Lublin they would learn hundreds of blat, what is this to be happy about? G-d doesn’t expect 200 blat from us, but he expects us to give our all. Avodat Hashem means to struggle, to work. The root of our souls is to recreate this world. To create the best possible person you can be. There are a lot of battles with the yetzer hara, and it may be hard at times, but at the end of the day, you have to win the war. Rav Hutner says on the pasuk in Mishle “A tzaddik falls seven times and gets up.” A tzaddik is a tzaddik because when he falls down he keeps getting up. He doesn’t stay down. No one demands perfection. Perfection is not reality. Falling is part of Avodat Hashem. The statistics in Israel are that 93% of Israelis get a brit milah, no matter if they are religious or not. Everyone knows it’s true. We are on this earth for a reason.

Unfortunately in our days people are afraid of being bored. They are always looking forward

to the next “big” event. The next time they go out and eat, the next time they go to a ball game. There are only 5 days in the year that a professional sport is not playing. People live in a fantasy world of sports and can’t face the reality of life; why we’re here. In NYU, they are having non-stop pleasures; constant drugs, partying and sex; a life that any American would envy. But the biggest talk on campus is the suicide rate! Why are people so unhappy if they are living the American fantasy? It’s a big contradiction! Victor Frankel says that if a person has a reason to live, you can live anywhere and bear anything. You can even live in Auschwitz, and if you have meaning in your life, a reason to live, you will stay alive. If you don’t have a reason to live, you can’t live anywhere; even NYU. When you’re living to the next “big” event, that’s meaning?

There is a story of a yeshiva bachur who was living a double life. By day, he was learning in a yeshiva morning and afternoon seder, and by night, he was drumming in the biggest clubs in that town. He was a very talented drummer. One day an agent comes to him and wants to promote him to try out and play with a big band. This was his big chance! So he went to New York, played his heart out and got a contract to be a backup drummer for that big band! This was the greatest thing to ever happen to him! But there was one thing, the first night they were playing was on a Friday night. He’s in a huge dilemma and he doesn’t know what to do. He goes to a rabbi and tells him the whole story. The rabbi tells him to take a piece of paper and on one side he should write the pros of playing on Shabbat and on one side the cons of playing on Shabbat. He tells the rabbi he needs to think about it and he’ll come back in a couple of days. When he comes back to the rabbi, he shows the rabbi the paper. On the pro side, there was everything you could imagine: money, fame, women, all the pleasures of the world. The pro side was huge! On the con side there was one word written: eternity. “That’s why I can’t do it” he says. “Eternity is just too big to lose”. Rav Dessler gives a mashal on how big eternity is. Imagine you have a mountain of sand as big as Mt. Everest and once every thousand years, a bird comes by and takes one of the grains of sand and drops it into the ocean. As many years as it takes for all the grains of sand to finish, that’s not even close to eternity! As Wayne Gretzky says, “Maybe it wasn’t the talent G-d gave me, maybe it was just the passion”. It doesn’t matter how smart you are or how talented you are, at the end of the day all that matters is if you have the passion.