

Question #1

BY DON JARASHOW

As we get closer to Yom HaDin, we think about *malchus*. We think about our role — being part of *malchus Hashem*, being in the army of the Ribbono Shel Olam. Hashem is reconsidering and rethinking: Who does He need for His army? Who are the main guys, the generals, the sergeants, the soldiers He can count on? That's what Rosh Hashanah is really all about. But it's not just about being Hashem's chosen nation in the collective sense. Each and every one of us is also Hashem's only child. That is one of the core foundations of our *emunah* — that Hashem doesn't just look at us as a people, He looks at me, at you, as His only one.

The question is: How are we living up to those standards? How do we measure ourselves in that light? Elul is a time to refocus, to think about how we've been living, and how we want to live going forward — because soon we will stand before Him, reporting back and assessing the future, on the upcoming Yom HaDin.

BLESSINGS & CURSES

In this week's parshah, we encounter the *brachos* and *klalos* — the blessings and curses. At the end of the list of curses, Hashem concludes (27:26):

ארור אשר לא יקים את דברי התורה הזאת לעשות אותם, ואמר כל העם אמן.

Cursed be whoever will not uphold the terms of this Teaching and observe them. — And all the people shall say: Amen.

Rashi explains that the curse is on one who does not fulfill the entire Torah. Rav Yankel Galinsky, in his sefer *V'higadeta*, elucidates and strengthens this message, showing how deeply relevant it is for us.

THE CHAFETZ CHAIM'S VISIT

He recounts: One time, when he was a young boy, he remembers when the Chafetz Chaim came to visit the city of his childhood, Krenik. The Chafetz Chaim came to collect funds for the Vaad HaYeshivos, which he had founded along with Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzensky. The yeshivos of Europe were in dire need of support, and the Chafetz Chaim took it upon himself, together with Reb Chaim Ozer, to raise funds for the yeshivos.

By then the Chafetz Chaim was already a very frail, sickly man, but he made every effort because the need was so great. Despite his weakness, the city rented a huge hall to accommodate him, and literally the whole city came, throngs piling in.

The Chafetz Chaim arrived — this old, small, weak man — and there wasn't even room for him to enter. They had to lift him up on a chair and pass him over the crowd until he reached the front. Finally, the Chafetz Chaim got to the podium.

Reb Yankel said, "I remember it vividly. The Chafetz Chaim could barely get out a few words — but what he did say, I'll never forget.

"He began addressing the crowd, quoting the Gemara in Kidushin (40b):

אין תחילת דינו של אדם אלא על דברי תורה

"Hashem is reconsidering and rethinking: Who does He need for His army?"

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“The beginning of a man’s *din* — the very first accounting — is: How much Torah did he learn? This is the first question a person is asked when he stands before Heaven after 120: ‘How much Torah did you learn, and how much did you support those who learned Torah?’”

The Chafetz Chaim then continued, quoting the Yerushalmi brought by the Ramban on the very *pasuk* in this week’s parashah with which we began.

אשר לא יקים, למד ולימד ושמר ועשה, והיה סיפק בידו להחזיק ולא החזיק, הרי זה בכלל ארוה.

Who does not uphold [the Torah]: A person who has learned, taught, observed, and performed [the Torah], but it was in his power to uphold it and he did not, he is included in the curse.

The Chafetz Chaim continued, “This is a frightening thought. The first question that we’re going to encounter before the *beis din shel maalah* is going to be: How much Torah did you learn? How much did you support? How much was Torah the foundation of your life?” And then the Chafetz Chaim cried out: “What are we going to answer on the Day of Judgment? What will we tell the Ribbono shel Olam? With what will we ascend to Shamayim? With a pinch of snuff? What hope do we have if we stand dumbfounded at the very first question?”

A PINCH OF SNUFF

Reb Yankel writes: That was the end of the story. The message was clear, strong, and more than a necessary reminder of what we are doing in this world. But one question lingered in his mind for years: What exactly was the Chafetz Chaim alluding to with the mention of the snuff? It bothered him deeply — until years later, when Reb Yankel heard another story from the Chafetz Chaim, and suddenly it all came together.

One time, the Chafetz Chaim walked into a shul and saw a few boys huddled together, laughing. Curious, he asked, “Nu, what’s the *chevrah* laughing about?”

They told him — a local *meshuganeh* had just come back from the fair in Eishyshok, twelve miles from Radin. He walked there and back, twenty-four miles round trip. And what did he get? He came in all proud and said: “I made the best deal! Everyone else paid money for merchandise, but me? I got mine for free!” And he held up his fingers pinched together: “A pinch of snuff!” What a *letz*, what a *meshuganeh*! Again they burst out laughing. “This guy’s *mamish* crazy! Twenty-four miles for a pinch of snuff?!”

The Chafetz Chaim grew serious. He said: “Before you laugh at

others, make sure you’re not guilty of the same thing yourself. Make sure you’re not really laughing at yourself. As funny as he seems, you may be even funnier.”

Dumbfounded at what the tzaddik meant, the *chevrah* listened as he continued:

“A *neshamah* comes down from the loftiest heights, from under the Kisei HaKavod, through all the worlds, into this world. Why? Because here is the fair. And what do we do? We spend our lives chasing *hevel havalim*, emptiness. We get dazzled by the allure, by the dazzle, by the *gashmiyus* of this world. Yes, money is needed to sustain our families and to support Torah. But what’s the *ikar*? What are we really after?

Here, and only here, the *neshamah* can acquire Torah, mitzvos, *maasim tovim*, withstand *nisyonos*, and gather the true merchandise of eternity. And then, after 120 years, the *neshamah* goes back up. And Hashem asks: Nu, what did you bring back from the fair? Did you really travel twenty-four miles just to bring Me back snuff? If that’s the case — *rachmana litzlan* — the joke may be on us.”

ארוה אשר לא יקים את דברי התורה הזאת לעשות אותם — this was not a one-time curse limited to those who neglect the 613 mitzvos. It is an eternal reminder, a warning, a call to action: Torah must be learned, taught, preserved, strengthened, and supported. Our lives must reflect that — not be wasted on trivialities and the ever-buzzing noise of *olam hazeh*. One who ignores this is no different from the *meshuganeh* who walked twenty-four miles for a pinch of snuff. A person can spend an entire lifetime chasing *hevel havalim*, and when all is said and done, the disgrace and the crushing sense of lost opportunity will be far greater than the wasted efforts of that *meshuganeh* of Radin.

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, we are reminded that each of us stands before Hashem and our role is reviewed and reassessed. The world is fleeting and full of distractions, yet every moment is an opportunity to gather eternal treasures — Torah, mitzvos, chessed, and *avodas Hashem*. The *passuk* warns, “ארוה אשר לא יקים את דברי התורה” — a timeless call to learn, teach, uphold, and support Torah. We must act with purpose, discipline, and awareness and put in the work down here, so that בעדיה after 120 we can stand with confidence before the *beis din shel maalah* and face question #1. •

**“What’s
the *ikar*?
What are we
really after?”**

