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FROM THE SHIURIM OF

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

Sukkot - Integrated Congruence

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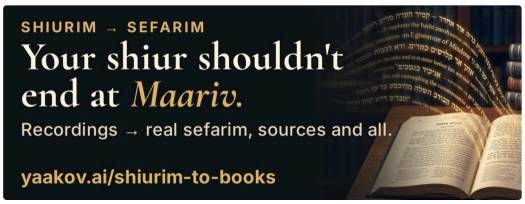
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◆ *Binding the Tzaddik to the Rasha*

SUKKOT PLACES IN FRONT OF US a holiday whose central mitzvah is to take what looks like a ragtag group of heroes and force them to hold together. The teaching is familiar: the four species of the Arba Minim stand for four types of Jew. There is a person with Torah learning and no mitzvot, a person with mitzvot and no learning, a person with neither, and a person with both. The arava, which has neither taste nor smell, is the Jew with no Torah and no mitzvot. The hadassim, which have a fragrance but no taste, are the Jew with mitzvot but no Torah. The lulav comes from the date palm, which has taste but no scent, so it is the Jew with Torah but no mitzvot. And the etrog, which has both, is the one who has both.

Here is where it starts to get interesting to me. You take all four of those characters and you bind them into one bundle and hold them in one place. You cannot hold the etrog over here and the rest over there. **You have to hold the tzaddik gamur together with the rasha gamur.** That is the process. That is the mitzvah.

The language of the pasuk itself is instructive. Normally, when the Torah speaks about mitzvot that involve other people, it uses words like רעך, your friend, or אחיך, your brother, or עמיתך, your compatriot, someone bound to you by nation. Here the Torah says כל האזרח בישראל.[1] What is an אזרח? A citizen. What a strange way to describe a Jew. But really, that is precisely the point. This is not somebody who is your friend. When the Gemara encounters the word אחיך regarding returning a lost object, it asks who exactly is included, and it answers: אחיך בתורה ובמצוות, your brother in Torah and mitzvot. Closeness there is defined by a person's behaviors, his actions, his dreams, his goals, the direction in which he is heading. Here, אזרח means: does the man have a Jewish passport? Then he is in the bundle. It is almost as though we deliberately lowered the bar to the floor.

◆ *The Teaching Nobody Finishes*

There is a second well-known teaching about the same four species. The etrog represents the heart. The lulav represents the שדרה, the spine. The hadassim are the eyes, and the aravot are the lips.

Now follow the logic across the two ideas. If the Arba Minim stand for four types of Jew, and the mitzvah is to bind those four types together into one unity, then when the Arba Minim stand for four parts of the body, the mitzvah must equally be to bind those four parts together. The same act, the same bundle, the same unification. That conclusion follows inescapably, and yet somehow it gets left out. You do not hear people talking about it. What would it even mean to unify one's eyes and one's mouth? What would it mean to unify the heart and the spine?

So really what I want to talk about is one word, and that word is congruence. Congruence means that all the different parts of an object operate together in harmony. If I am a rabbi, and you find me bowing down to an idol, my behavior is incongruent with my job title. That is the failure of congruence. And the Arba Minim, on this reading, are a yearly demand that the parts of a person stop contradicting each other.

◆ *Mouth and Eyes: Only Say What You Saw*

Start with the simplest pairing, the mouth and the eyes. Very often a person hears that somebody did something wrong. Somebody tells me Charles did something terrible. But I was with Charles. I know he did not do it. I saw with my own eyes. When a person chooses his ears over his eyes and then speaks on the basis of what he heard, that is lashon hara. What do you actually know? Only say it if you know it. Do not say it because you heard it. Do you have first-person information that this is true?

The Chachamim point to the order of the letters themselves: עי"ן, פ"א, צד"י. Ayin, peh, tzadi — eye, mouth, tzaddik. If a person's mouth issues only from his own eye, only from what he himself saw, that is a tzaddik. Is that not beautiful? Congruence between the mouth and the eyes means you do not permit your lips to say what your own eyes never witnessed. That much is easy.

But how do we build a four-part congruence? I am wearing a shirt right now with something called four-way stretch. Four-way stretch means you will be comfortable at Thanksgiving dinner, and comfortable at the meal before Yom Kippur too. It is the shirt that moves with you — stretches this way, stretches that way, no problem. It is like Avraham's tent, just with sleeves. The point is that ordinary elastic only gives in one direction, the way the threads happen to run. A rubber band stretches long, but it barely stretches wide at all. Four-way stretch means the weave gives in every direction at once. That is what I want to develop here: a four-way stretch of congruence between heart, spine, eyes, and mouth.

◆ *The Heart: Knowledge That Is Felt*

Where do we begin? Begin with the tzaddik. In either version of the teaching, the etrog is the tzaddik — the one with taste and scent, Torah and mitzvot — and the etrog is the heart. So we start with the heart.

The pasuk says [2] וידעת היום והשבת אל לבבך. Knowledge by itself does not really inform the way we behave. We love to believe it does. But there are a great many things we know perfectly well and do anyway. We all know we should lose weight and get into better shape, and that knowledge influences us not at all. Hand somebody the statistics on how many people die every day from stress on the heart and the arteries — still nothing. The first time it lands is when somebody you know, chas veshalom, passes away, and his wife and children are standing there crying, and suddenly your heart feels what your head already knew. **Emotion is**

what gives our intellect transformative power. When we know something, what we know does not change us. When we feel what we know, everything changes.

Think about the vidui on Yom Kippur. It comes with sound effects — the banging, over and over. What are we doing there? Would the vidui be invalid without the banging? What we are trying to do is make the heart feel something, even if what the heart feels is not yet the sin itself.

There was a study done on addicts — alcohol, drugs, internet, gambling, shopping, looking at what one should not look at. They had each person wear a thick rubber band on the wrist, and every time he looked at what he should not have looked at, spent what he should not have spent, went where he should not have gone, he snapped the band against his own wrist. It is the human version of Pavlov. Pavlov did something very simple: he rang a bell before feeding the dog, again and again, until the dog understood what the bell meant. Then he rang the bell and brought nothing, and the dogs salivated for food that did not exist. They had connected the ringing and the bringing. Snap that rubber band long enough and the body begins to register: I do this behavior, this behavior hurts me. And honestly, many of the things we chase are not bringing us much good anyway — only in our minds are they something we want. The Chachamim understood this, and gave us a custom whereby I say גזלנו and my heart feels a pounding in the same instant.

◆ *The Spine: Standing Up and Standing Upright*

Congruence means that if a person has the heart of a tzaddik, he goes on to develop the spine of a tzaddik. I once had a friend, a baal teshuvah, who told me he grew up in a neighborhood with no religious Jews at all. He said, "We called ourselves cardio Jews." Cardio Jews? He said, "You ever hear someone say, Rabbi, I'm very Jewish in my heart?" Yes. And what do you do about it? Nothing — it is in my heart. I used to joke with him that if it never leaves the heart, that is an obstruction, and an obstruction is the thing that kills you. What did he die of? Judaism in the heart. Stuffed up his arteries. Poor guy.

So a person has something in his heart — ethics, morals, a desire to do good, a feeling that he should be learning or growing or keeping Shabbat. How does he move it outward? The next step is the spine. And notice the order: the lulav comes before the hadassim, because before a person can have ma'asim tovim he needs Torah. First the spine, then the deeds. The function of a spine is to let a person stand up. So the first work of the lulav is that once you have the feeling in your heart, now go stand up for it. Stand on that principle. Be unbending because of it.

There is more to the spine than that. Jewish philosophy teaches that man stands at the top of creation, and the reason is structural. In a human being, the top is the מוח, the brain. Beneath it the לב, the heart. Beneath that the כליות. The hierarchy of how a human being is meant to function runs from brain to heart to kidneys, the organs that filter the body. An animal is not upright; it is bent over, so its brain, its heart and its kidneys all sit on one level. Its eating habits and its reproductive drives are as much in charge of it as its brain or its heart. A

human being who lives that way is behaving like an animal. What makes a מלך a king is that he is capable of a life led by intellect and emotion rather than by gut, appetite and bodily need.

This, I believe, is an opportunity every single morning in the berachah of זוקף כפופים. You are not merely thanking Hashem that you are not the Hunchback of Notre Dame. זוקף כפופים means: I am an upstanding being. I live mission-driven, heart-driven, head-driven — and not driven from somewhere else, from other parts of my body. When a person eats non-kosher knowing full well he should not, he is flipping the script. He takes מלך — mem, lamed, kaf — and turns it into כלם, destroy them, or כלום, nothingness. A man behaving that way is nothing, and therefore he deserves to be destroyed. Why? Because our life force in this world comes from living our purpose. When we do not live our purpose, we have no purpose, and why should we be here? If God made a human being and that human being lives like an animal, God says: **I already have animals.**

◆ *Seyag LaTorah: The Work Is Protecting*

Once a person knows in his heart, the next question is: how do I stand up for this, and how do I stand up to the forces pushing me away from it? This is a marvelous conversation to have right after Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur we were clear. The forces of physicality had no grip on us because we told them, for one day, to take a hike — food, comfort, honor, everything represented by the five עינויים. And that left us in control. We began to see a better path for ourselves, to ask what we were doing wasting our time. And what happened at the end of Yom Kippur? We ran straight back to the phone, straight back to the behavior. I have watched people at a break-fast shoving each other and grabbing at the food. Picture Hashem sitting there with His notebook of freshly inscribed names in the Book of Life. Sesame seeds all over the man's face, took a face-dive into the tahina, put his hand on every single muffin. Nobody wants that guy to live.

We imagine that if something is important to us we will simply do it, and that the doing is the work. It is not. The work is protecting. The Chachamim told us right at the beginning of Pirkei Avot: עשו סייג לתורה.[3] Make a fence for the Torah. Classically we understand this to mean the gezeirot: the Chachamim identify a sin and legislate a step back from it, so we do not blow shofar on Rosh Hashanah that falls on Shabbat lest someone carry it. But I am not carrying the shofar, it is already in the shul — yes, but you might. That is a gezeirah.

I think reading סייג לתורה as gezeirot alone is an underwhelming understanding, and far too narrow a thing for them to have been saying. It is advice they are giving you on every single mitzvah. A person needs to protect his mitzvot.

Take honoring one's parents — one of the top ten, it came down on the tablets. There is honoring your parents, and then there is protecting your parents' honor. I do not mean knocking somebody out for insulting your father. I mean this: my rabbi used to say it constantly. A parent gets very old, and the child takes care of him, and the parent declines further and further until he can no longer shower himself. You would think it is a

mitzvah for the child to bathe his father. But it is extraordinarily difficult for a child to maintain reverence for his father when, at a hundred and nineteen, he is changing his father's adult diaper. We asked our rabbi about it, and he said it is true — but perhaps kavod in that instance, in order to preserve your reverence for your father, is to hire someone else for that, while you come and do everything else. You see children treating their own parents like children. "Dad, no! Dad, I told you!" Of course, at that age the father may well be behaving like a child. But if you let yourself get into a situation where you will inevitably treat him with disrespect, you did not protect the mitzvah of kibbud av.

סייג לתורה means that the moment I understand something is important to me, I must immediately work out how to stand up for it and how to stand up to whatever pushes me away from it. I know that if I do not set aside my maaser it will get spent. I know I owe ten percent, but it is sitting in my account, and there was a big bill this month, and now the maaser money is gone. If maaser means something to you, you protect it. There are people who, the second they are paid, move ten percent instantly into a separate charity account. Others set up a donor-advised fund, where the money flows in automatically and they cannot touch it for anything other than tzedakah even if they wanted to.

◆ *The Eyes: Ayin Tov and the Duty-Free*

Next, from spine to eyes. Most of the time we think about the eyes purely in terms of ראיות אסורות — permitted sights versus forbidden ones. I may look at nice, appropriate things; I may not look at inappropriate things. That is what we assume guarding the eyes means. But there is a far deeper protection of a person's eyes than that.

The Chachamim speak of a person's capacity to look with an עין הרע or an עין טובה. I do not have to be looking at something forbidden in order to look at something in a forbidden way. I can look at your brand new car and think: I cannot believe this guy, everything breaks his way, and he is not even so smart, where does he get this mazal? And here I am in shul every day, and he comes once a week and gets driven in a Rolls-Royce. That is a forbidden seeing. That is seeing through jealousy. An עין טובה means you look at something graciously, with chesed, genuinely glad that this person has what he has. An עין רעה is stingy — you see a poor man who needs tzedakah and your first thought is that he does not deserve it. What do you know? You know nothing.

There is another category of eye entirely. I once checked into what I assumed was an ordinary hotel, and downstairs in the lobby were nine bazillion gambling machines, so that to get anywhere at all you were forced to walk through the lights and the sirens. You go to Great Adventure, you go on a ride — hopefully without the brain damage; did you see the article about the class action against Six Flags over one of the rides, actual irreversible brain injuries? — and on the way out from Superman or Batman or El Toro they route you through a gift shop selling t-shirts of the ride you just got off. Every parent knows this. You leave the airport and the only exit runs through duty-free. What are they doing?

It is not forbidden to look at non-kosher food. It is not forbidden to look at a slot machine. But as the Gemara says, the עיניים are סרסורים, brokers and agents that go out and tempt the body. If you had not seen it, you would not have eaten it. The number one rule for people trying to lose weight is not "don't eat snacks." The number one rule is **don't buy snacks**. If the snacks are sitting on your kitchen counter, you will be eating those snacks. That is simply how it works. So how do you not eat snacks? You do not have snacks to eat, and then you do not eat snacks. The question of the eyes is: I know my eyes will drag me into something, so how do I govern what my eyes land on? How do I engineer a scene that will not get me into trouble?

◆ *The Lips: The Words Your Own Brain Is Hearing*

Last are the lips. We associate the lips with lashon hara, and that is certainly the negative use of a mouth. There is also ניבול פה, speaking crassly, using language that is inappropriate by its nature. This is one of the great problems in comedy — finding a clean comic is extremely difficult. We happen to have one among us. But mostly it is non-stop cursing and non-stop talk about what should not be discussed, and that is the cheapest form of comedy there is.

But there is another kind of harmful speech that is neither saucy nor about other people. Today we have a tremendous amount of understanding about the power of a person's words — not only to communicate outward, but far more importantly to communicate inward. They call it negative self-talk. Statistically, if a person tells everyone in the office, "I could never do that job," and says it again and again, he develops into a person who cannot do that job. And when a person says something again and again and again in a positive manner, do you know who is listening? Not only the neighbors. **Your own brain.** Eventually a person starts listening to himself, and he creates the reality.

The Chachamim teach something fascinating here: that a person must be exceedingly careful with what he says, because God made what is called ברית כרותה לשפתיים, a covenant with the lips. Hashem listens to the words that leave your mouth — and not only in tefillah. He listens to ordinary speech as well. Which is precisely why a person should never speak negative words about himself.

So that is the last piece of the puzzle. If you know from your heart what you want to be, and you stand up for it, and you control the environment your eyes move through, then the way you speak about yourself and about that work must be in the manner of something already accomplished. I am in the process of conquering this yetzer hara — not, I cannot beat this yetzer hara. Speak the second way and your mind takes notice, your heart takes notice, your body takes notice, and you stop fighting the yetzer hara altogether, because you heard it on good authority — your own — that you cannot win. And when a person does not believe he can, his body does not even begin to try.

May Hashem bless us that we succeed in pulling all four of these together in unification. People say the road to hell is paved with good intentions; a great many people, in their hearts, mean only the best. That is the

tzaddik gamur — the heart. It wants you to be your best. The question is whether we can draw all the other threads together, so that the tzaddik gamur of the heart is disseminated through every part and element of us, and becomes something that actually happens in reality.

Sources

1. Vayikra 23:42. בסכת תשבו שבעת ימים כל־האזרח בישראל ישבו בסכת:
2. Devarim 4:39. וידעת היום והשבת אל־לבבך כי יהוה הוא האלהים בשמים ממעל ועל־הארץ מתחת אין עוד:
3. Pirkei Avot 1:1. משה קבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה. הם אמרו שלשה דברים, הוו מתונים בדין, והעמידו תלמידים הרבה, ועשו סיג לתורה: