

Q AND A

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SERVE G-D?

BY ARYEH GUREWITZ

Until a couple of years ago, I found myself somewhat bothered by the term “avodas Hashem” – “service of G-d”. When we speak of one person doing a service for another, it is usually because the one being served needs help from the one doing the service. What exactly are we providing to Hashem, such that our Torah and mitzvos can be called “service” to Him? Personally, I found it difficult to relate to ideas like “I was created to serve my Creator” (*“ani nivresi l’shamesh es koni”*) when I didn’t have clarity about how it is possible for Hashem to be “served”.

My problem was solved when I found out that the Alter Rebbe asks and answers this question directly in a single column of Likkutei Torah.¹

His amazingly clear answer brings out how Moshiach and Geulah are fundamentally important to the very definition of “serving Hashem”.

The general thrust of the answer is familiar. Since Hashem had a desire for a dwelling in this lowest world (*“Nisaveh haKadosh Baruch Hu Lih’yos Lo Dirah Betachtonim”*), it becomes possible for us to serve Him by creating this Dirah.² But the way the Alter Rebbe defines “Dirah” in this particular source makes it perfectly clear that “Dirah Betachtonim” and the coming of Moshiach are completely inseparable—which means, by extension, that “avodas Hashem” and the coming of Moshiach are completely inseparable as well.

The Alter Rebbe explains there that Hashem’s perspective on the world is that everything, before Him, is considered like nothing (*“kula kameih k’lo chashiv”*). This does not mean that He “thinks” the world doesn’t exist, but rather that to Him, it is *as if* the world doesn’t exist because it is merely an expression of Him that cannot change Him.³ This perspective, however, is only *kameih*, before Him. We, on the other hand, experience the world as a separate

entity from Hashem (*“yesh u’davar bifnei atzmo”*). This perspective of ours is what we call “concealment of Elokus” and “darkness”. The meaning of “Dirah”, though, is that *our perspective switches and becomes the same as His*.⁴ This revelation is brought about through our actions now, but it will only be actualized when Moshiach comes.

Let’s say that again, a bit more simply. “Dirah Betachtonim” means that Hashem has a desire that we should see the world the way He “sees” it, which means true spiritual transformation for each and every one of us. Our service is to fulfill that desire. The way we accomplish that is by learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvos until Moshiach comes and triggers that shift in perspective. Put it all together, and it comes out that *to serve Hashem means to bring Moshiach*.

This may or may not sound like such a novelty on an intellectual level, but either way, I personally find it powerful to keep this in mind whenever any form of the term “avodas Hashem” comes to mind. For example, have you ever wondered, “What is my avodah?” or “Is this my avodah right now?” If so, what you were really wondering was, “What is my job in bringing Moshiach?” or “Is this what I’m supposed to do to bring Moshiach right now?” Another example: if you’ve ever heard someone ask, “Why do we have to focus on Moshiach? Isn’t it enough to just do our avodah?” That’s like saying, “Why do we have to focus on Moshiach? Isn’t it enough to just do what we need to do to bring Moshiach?”

This “translation” of the term “avodas Hashem” can be a very helpful way to make the idea of avodah more real to us, as well as to bridge the gap between Moshiach and the way we think about our day-to-day lives. In our time, when the Rebbe has asked us to learn Inyonei Geulah uMoshiach in order to start living with Moshiach, it is hard to imagine a more crucial avodah than that.

¹ Parshas Balak, 70c.

² In other sources, it is clarified that our role in making the Dirah is intrinsic to Hashem’s desire. See, for example, Basi Legani 5731.

³ See U’lekachtem Lachem 5661 for more complete explanation of this type of bittul.

⁴ In the Alter Rebbe’s words: “hisgalus Elokuso yisbareich b’yediah shelanu gam kein k’mo shehu l’maalah b’yediah elyonah, d’kula kameih k’lo chashiv”.

