



## Between Light and Darkness

### Parshas Ki Sezseh

#### Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

#### Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

While I was on a visit in the United States on behalf of Migdal Ohr, a Rosh Yeshiva approached me and told me about a young man, a son of a distinguished family who was once a Yeshiva student, but who had since left the path of religious Judaism.

He had turned to Hinduism, and was living at a big center in the Catskills, among thousands of youngsters and lead by a guru.

The Rosh Yeshiva asked me to meet with the distressed parents. When I met with them I asked them about their relationship with their son.

"What did we do with him? We threw him out of the house, can you even fathom of housing an idol worshipping son in our home?" they said. I told the parents they had made a grave mistake.

One never throws out a son, or severs family ties. I advised them to invite him home using some pretext, and I would "happen" to knock on the door during the visit, presenting myself as an emissary from Israel, and we would then see how things developed.

Two days later I received a phone call from the parents notifying me that their son was coming for a visit that evening. A half an hour into the visit I knocked on the door. "Welcome", the father opened the door, "Where are you from?" he asked, "From the Holy Land" I replied.

I sat on the couch with the son on my side and took out a photo album of Migdal Ohr. The son was enchanted. The word "Ohr", light, is of significance in Hinduism. "Guru", he explained, is comprised of the two words Gu and Ru, light and darkness.

When he saw Migdal Ohr he was very excited and asked to speak with me in private. He started to lecture me about Hinduism, and I feigned interest. I asked him if I could come and see things for myself. The youth replied enthusiastically, and said that the Guru happened to be in the US. The next day I met him, and an Israeli news reporter, Yisrael Katsover, accompanied me.

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I knew I had to save this young man.

On the way to the meeting I told Yisrael about the words in our weekly Parsha. "You shall not see your brother's ox or sheep straying, and ignore them. You shall return them to your brother."<sup>1</sup>

The Ohr Hachayim in his commentary on the verse explains: This verse is an allusion to the need for the scholars to admonish the plain people in order for them to become the true people of the Lord. The term used by the Torah to describe these morally upright righteous people is *Achim*, brothers. It is these people whom G-d commanded that when they see an "ox" who is lost, i.e. a person on a lesser moral level who is compared to a beast, to engage in rescuing him. The reason the Torah speaks of "ox and sheep" instead of donkeys, for instance, is that the Jewish people whom the Torah alludes to by the words, "ox and sheep" are basically sacred, fit for the altar, as opposed to such animals as

the donkey. The word *Achicha*, your brother, is a simile for G-d who "owns" all of us.

Nedachim - "gone astray"; the word is used in a similar sense in Dvarim: "And you are drawn astray."<sup>2</sup> Someone who violates G-d's commandments is considered as having gone astray. The Torah commands that we must not ignore such people but bring them back to one's "brother," i.e. to G-d.

The reason the Torah repeats the instruction "You shall surely restore them" is that if you will make the first move in setting such people on the right path they will complete the journey back to G-d under their own steam".

I told Yisrael that our case is a case of a lost item which must be returned, and reminded him of the words of Yechezkel: "Son of man, prophesize concerning the shepherds of Israel; prophesize and say to them, to the shepherds: So said the Lord G-d: Woe, shepherds of Israel who were shepherding themselves! Do not the shepherds shepherd the flocks?...those astray you did not bring back, and the lost you did not seek."<sup>3</sup> The Jewish people's shepherds were condemned for not seeking the stray – their lost brothers.

Our sages teach us in the Talmud<sup>4</sup>: "When can it be derived that it is obligatory to restore the body of a fellow-man? Because it is said: "And thou shall restore it to him", implying him himself, i.e., his person". If we are obligated to save the body, all the more so are we obligated to save the soul, and if we have come upon such an occurrence now it is a sign that we must engage ourselves in showing the wayward son the proper path which would lead him home.

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Hundreds of youngsters were waiting outside the complex, waiting for the Guru to arrive. When he arrived I approached him and told him I was a Rabbi from Israel. The Guru took me by the arm and led me inside, in full view of 'our' bewildered son. Inside, I entered a hall with the Guru. As we entered he removed his shoes and asked me to do likewise. I refused, telling him I was ordered by my grandmother not to remove my shoes.

As I was standing there a group of youngsters approached me and asked me in Hebrew: "Rabbi Grossman, what are you doing here?". I replied by asking them the same. They were students from Haifa who were learning meditation, and as an award were sent here. I was astonished, telling them: "You are the children of Israel, what are you doing here?".

We went to a side room and sat in a semi-circle. We discussed words of Torah until the early hours of the morning; I felt the impression made was immense.

When I returned to the US a few years later I found the son studying Torah with great diligence, his countenance shining. I knew that the light of the Torah had set him on the correct path. Now he was home.

<sup>2</sup> Dvarim 4:19.

<sup>3</sup> Yechezkel 34:2 – 4

<sup>4</sup> Tractate Baba Kama 81a.

<sup>1</sup> Dvarim 22:1.