



There are a lot of things we know in life, but we don't actually know them.

Knowing Something vs. Really Knowing It

Chachamim teach us that if a person truly knew the greatness of mitzvot—how important they are and how much reward comes with them—and if a person truly understood the devastation of a sin, how terrible it is and what it does to the soul, then there would be no free will in a person's life. If we really knew, free will wouldn't exist.

And on a certain level, that is actually what happens all the time.

Getting Out of Bed for Shul

A person is fighting with himself in the morning. "Should I go to shul or should I not go to shul?" In the end, he wakes up, gets out of bed, and comes to shul. Where did that come from? That he conquered his laziness and came?

Or take another example. A person is being encouraged to be the bigger person, to forgive

somebody. Someone hurt them. Not that forgiving absolves the other person of guilt—what they did was still wrong—but for me, I'm not walking around holding resentment in my heart, wishing them bad things, carrying that poison with me.

When a person actually becomes the bigger man or the bigger woman, what is taking place inside of them? If you could cut them open, you know what you would see happening? At that moment, they are living with the knowledge of what is better and what is worse.

They are living with a clarity that says: going to shul is something I must do. I am in bed, I can go—how could I stay in bed? That clarity lifts them out of bed.

Now, you might not feel like you're so clear in that moment. You don't feel like you're perfectly aligned with what God wants from you. But the fact that you are out of bed tells me that there was enough clarity.

How much clarity do you need to get out of bed? 2 out of 10

How much clarity do you need when you're really angry at someone and you need to forgive them? 5 out of 10

How much clarity do you need when it comes to the biggest challenge you ever faced in your life? 10 out of 10

When you see yourself coming through, that comes from a deep and abiding knowledge that something is wrong. I cannot do this. I will not do this. No matter how hard it is, I am not going to give up.

The Depth of Hakara

I want to point out something important. One of the most powerful things a person can do to improve themselves in this world is to change the depth of their **הכרה**.

So let's understand this concept. What does it mean to have a deep and abiding **hakara**? Hakara literally means awareness. We most commonly use this word in the phrase **הכרת הטוב**, awareness of good.

When someone does something for you, and instead of brushing it off and saying, "Yeah, he was going that way anyway," you recognize what was done for you—that is hakarat hatov.

"He didn't give me a ride," someone says. "He was driving that way anyway. I just sat in his car while he was driving himself home."

That's a person with a negative eye.

Hakarat hatov means saying: look at this guy. I can't believe it. Door-to-door service.

"Yes, but he was leaving from the same place."

"He was passing my door."

"But he didn't have to give you a ride."

I once had someone come and complain to me about a person who was doing them a favor. At a certain point, the benefactor said, "It's hard for me to continue." The person comes to me furious. "What a horrible person."

I said to him, "He didn't have to do it even once. He did this favor for you hundreds—if not thousands—of times. And instead of seeing what he gave you, all you see is that he stopped giving you."

That is **הכרת הרע**.

Living With or Without Awareness

Could you imagine how hakarat hatov could completely change a person's life? Not just because now you owe someone a favor. Forget that.

A person who lives with hakarat hatov is living the best life, because his entire life is good.

A person could have a backache, but his arms are working, his legs are working, his mind is working, his eyes are working, and he's not falling over when he walks. But there's a tweak, causes you a small ache, so everything is terrible.

A person has a stomach ache, but the rest of his body is functioning beautifully.

A person who lives with hakarat hatov is living an entirely different life. It's not that it changes your life. It wakes you up to the fact that the life you're living is not the one you think you're living.

"I have the worst luck—but I have this."

Bishvili Nivra HaOlam — Entering the Idea

Once we have this idea, I want to get into a concept that I think is just magnificent. I saw this in the sefer **Ohel Moshe**, where he brings in the name of the Mashgiach, **Reb Meir Chadash**. He points to a Mishna in **Masechet Sanhedrin**. The Mishna says:

חייב אדם לומר בשבילי נברא העולם — a person is obligated to say, “For me, the world was created.”

Now, before anyone jumps on this and thinks the Mishna is telling you to be a narcissist—“the world was created for me”—we need to understand what Chachamim are trying to teach us. What is being communicated here?

On a simple level, we also have to ask how this statement could even be true. If the world was created only for you, then what about everyone else? If the world was designed for me, what does that mean for all the other people in it?

Obviously, we do not mean that the world was given to me in the sense that everything exists for my benefit. You exist for me. The government exists for me. Your tax dollars exist for me. Everything is mine. That’s narcissism. That is not what **בשבילי נברא העולם** means.

So what does it mean?

The Logical Problem

Chachamim explain that the world was created for me, and we’ll explain what that means. But there’s a problem. The Mishna doesn’t say, “Shlomo Farhi should say this.” It says it to everyone. It says it to Shlomo, and to Joey, and to Shai, and to every single person.

By definition, if the world was created for me, then it wasn’t created for you. And if it was created for you, it wasn’t created for me. So what’s the idea? What’s the concept?

The answer is something very deep.

Individual Worlds

The Mishna is teaching that every single person is a complete and utter individual in the world in which they live. So much so that a person needs to say about their individuality, “The entire world was created for me.”

A person should never silence or squelch their individuality, because the world was created for it.

But again, how could that be? The world was created for everybody.

Makat Dam — Two Realities at Once

Let’s take a look at **מכת דם**, the plague of blood.

When the plague of blood came, Chazal tell us something fascinating. We know that all the water in Egypt turned into blood. But it wasn’t only the water. All moisture turned into blood. Any moisture.

So much so that the idols were bleeding. How can an idol bleed? The answer is that there is moisture in the idol. In heat, moisture forms. You ever see a can of Coke on a hot summer day? You see water all over the outside of the can. It’s not leaking from the can. It’s condensation. That condensation turned into blood.

The Nile was blood. You flushed the toilet—it was blood. You took a shower—it was blood. Everything was blood.

But Chachamim tell us something fascinating. For the Jewish people, there was no **מכת דם**. For the Jews, water was water.

The Torah says that Pharaoh said to his **chartumim**, to his magicians, “Turn water into blood.” And they did. Through their black magic, they were able to turn water into blood.

Ask Chachamim: where did they get water from? All the water was already blood.

One opinion says that they turned blood back into water and then turned it into blood again. But if they had the power to turn blood into water, why weren’t they doing that for Egypt?

So a second answer is given. The Jewish people became very wealthy during this plague. If an Egyptian wanted to drink water, he had to go buy it from a Jew. Instead of Poland Spring, it was Jewish Spring.

The Midrash says: what happens if a Jew is holding a cup of water, drinking his delicious, cold water, and the Egyptian doesn’t want to pay? So while the Jew is sipping, the Egyptian sticks his straw into the cup and starts drinking.

The Midrash says: for the Jew, it was water. For the Egyptian, it was blood.

Someone once said to me, “Come on.” But that’s what the Midrash says.

Ohel Moshe’s Explanation

Says Ohel Moshe, this is mind-blowing. We think that one guy had water and the other guy had blood. Says Ohel Moshe: no. They were living in two completely different realities.

For the Egyptian, what was he drinking? Blood. For the Jew, what was he drinking? Water.

Two realities. Same moment. Same cup.

And now we can understand what **בשבילי נברא העולם** really means.

My World Was Created for Me

A person is obligated to say, “The entire world was created for me.” How could that be? Eight billion people?

The answer is yes. Everyone has their own world.

Let me give you an example from my own life.

The House That Was Meant to Be Mine

When we were buying our house many years ago, I put in an offer that I couldn’t afford to go higher than. It was a lowball offer.

The guy comes back and says, “Your offer was accepted.”

I said, “Thank you very much.”

The real estate agent, not Jewish, is shaking his head. He says, “I don’t understand. There were eight people before you who gave offers like yours and higher, and they always said no. And now they said yes.”

The agent says to me, “I don’t understand how the others were rejected.”

I said, “I’m Jewish. I can’t tell you how to feel about this, but I can tell you what Jewish tradition says.”

I told him what the Torah says. I told him what the Gemara says. Forty days before a person is born, a heavenly voice declares: **בת פלוני לפלוני**. Forty days

before you're born, they decide who you're going to marry.

But the Gemara also says **בֵּית פָּלוֹנִי לְפָלוֹנִי**. Not just who you marry—what house you're going to live in.

I told him: in Heaven, it was decreed that this was my house. So all the other offers were rejected, and mine was accepted.

The agent shook his head and said, “I never understood this in my life. Now I understand. Every house has someone’s name on it.”

Why This One? Shidduchim, Opportunities, and Parallel Worlds

You know where else you see this? Go talk to a shadchan.

They try to set up a guy or a girl. Twenty times the answer is no. No to this kind of person, no to that background, no to that level, no to that family. And then one day, they give one suggestion, and the person says, “Okay. Whatever. Let’s try.”

Why that one?

How many times has this happened in your own life? You’re offered opportunities again and again. To go to a class. To learn with someone. To do a mitzvah. And every time the answer is no. And then one day, out of nowhere, you say yes.

You go up to the Torah. You donate a plaque to the Torah Center. You never did that before in your life. Why today? Why this charity? Why this moment?

The answer is that there are multiple realities happening at the same time.

In the world in which that other person lives, that house offer would never be accepted. And it never was. But in the world that I live in, Hashem said yes.

Selling, Buying, and Different Outcomes

People ask all the time: “I don’t understand. I sold the house, I told the guy everything that was wrong, I gave him a good price. I meet him later in shul and he tells me everything is falling apart.”

Has that ever happened to you?

Or you sell a business. Or you sell a position in the market. What happens right after you sell? It’s perfect. Or the opposite—you sell, and suddenly it’s garbage.

For you, it worked beautifully. For the other guy, disaster.

We are living in different realities.

Same Child, Different Worlds

You have a kid, and I have a kid. It’s the same kid.

But your chinuch for him is working, and mine isn’t. And people say, “I don’t understand how this is happening. This doesn’t happen to anybody.”

And the answer is: you’re right. It only happens to you.

You have multiple kids. One of them is so smart—smarter than the others—and he can't get his act together. You're thinking, this is not the one I thought would have issues. And another kid is matzliach. He finds his shidduch. He gets his kids into the school. Everything works.

The other one is a disaster. You can't figure it out. It's like they grew up in different homes.

One kid is confident and put together. The other one can't find his left sock. He's looking for three days for his left sock until you explain to him that both socks are identical.

Changing the Way We See Our Existence

I want to share with you an amazing idea based on this, because what we're slowly building here is a change in the way we perceive our world and our existence.

The **Sfas Emes** says something incredible on the Mishna, **אמ אין אני לי מי לי**.

What does that mean? If I am not for me, who will be for me?

Most people think it means: if you want something done, you have to do it yourself.

That's not what it means.

The Sfas Emes says: if I was created in a singular universe, why would God do that? The answer is because I have something singular and unique to bring to the world that no one else has.

— the “me” that I am, the one-of-one, the version of me that exists nowhere else. If I don't bring that to the table, who will?

No one.

Erev Pesach and the One Job

Imagine it's erev Pesach back in the day. Everyone stayed home. Everyone had to pitch in.

Your wife went meshuga cleaning the house, cooking for weeks, preparing everything, switching dishes, scrubbing, organizing. She did everything.

And then she says to you: “There's one thing I need you to do. Just one. You're going to shul anyway. Sell the chometz.”

You say, “Yeah, yeah. Tomorrow. I'll do it.”

You push it off. You push it off.

Erev chag arrives.

All of a sudden, the guy wakes up at two o'clock in the afternoon “Rabbi, it's four p.m., can I still sell the chometz?”

The wife turns to the husband and says: “I did everything. Everything. There was one thing I asked you to do. I don't go to shul. I can't sell the chometz. One thing.”

But back in the day, when men were men, she was upset. And she was right.

Because if I'm not going to do the thing that only I can do, who's going to do it?

You Really Only Have One Job

Understand this. Technically, a person in this life only has one job.

We all have to do all the mitzvot. Everyone. That's not your job. That's your baseline.

It's like telling your boss, "You give me too many jobs." And he says, "I gave you one job. To send out the bills. Coming to work, taking the train—that's not the job. That's part of being here."

Everyone has to keep mitzvot. Shema, Sukkah, Matzah, mezuzah, tzitzit, tefillin.

The irony is that before you do mitzvot, you think there are so many. Once you start doing them, each one becomes part of who you are. Then you move to the next. That's how growth works.

You onboard something until it's painless. Then you grow again.

So what is your one job?

To do the thing that only you can do.

אם אין אוי לי (שפט אמת) מי לי

Who else could do the job that only I can do? Only me.

The Doctor in Australia — Doing the One Thing You Came to Do

The Sfas Emes brings **Rav Shneur Kotler**, and this is one of my favorite examples.

Imagine a man who has a serious medical condition. He finds out that there is one doctor in the world—in Australia—who knows how to

perform the surgery he needs. One doctor. No one else can do it.

He sells his business. He puts his entire life on hold. He gets on a plane and flies the nine thousand hours it takes to get to the other side of the world, to the land down under. He arrives. They put him in a hospital bed. They hook him up. He falls asleep. They attach an IV. The doctor says, "Good luck," and leaves.

The man wakes up the next day. He says, "Is the surgery done? I don't feel anything."

The doctor says, "No. I didn't do the surgery. I just gave you morphine for the pain."

The man looks at him and says, "Are you crazy? I sold my business. I put my life on hold. I flew across the world because you are the only doctor who can do this surgery. I don't need morphine. I could have gotten morphine back in New York. I came here for you to do the surgery."

This is what **Borei Olam** says to the neshama.

Standing Before Hashem

The neshama comes up after living an entire life. After traveling all that way. Hashem asks, "Did you do your job?"

The neshama says, "Yes. I put on tefillin."

Hashem says, "חזק וברוך. Beautiful."

"But did you do your job?"

"I wore a tallit. I got married. I raised a family."

Hashem says, "Very nice. I'm going to give you reward for all of that."

"But did you do your job?"

"I ate kosher."

Hashem says, "Gorgeous."

"But did you do your job?"

Because if you didn't do your job—your job—you didn't fulfill your mission. And if you didn't fulfill your mission, you have to come back.

Just like the doctor in Australia. If the doctor brought the patient lunch from the bikur cholim room, that's very nice. I'll fill out a card saying he went above and beyond in customer service. But if he didn't do the surgery, he failed completely.

That is the power of our uniqueness. It defines what we are here to deliver.

How Do We Know This Is True?

Someone once came up to me and said, "Rabbi, how do you know this is true? Maybe all Hashem cares about is whether we did the mitzvot in the Torah. How do you know every person has a unique mission?"

Rav Shneur Kotler answers that question.

On the High Holidays, when we are judged, we say in the tefillah:

כִּי זְכָר כָּל הַנְשָׁכָחוֹת or — **כִּי זְכָר כָּל הַיְצֹרָר לְפָנֶיךָ בָּא**, depending on the nusach.

The remembrance of every being comes before You.

Then we say: **מְעֵשָׂה אִישׁ וּפְקוּדָתוֹ** — the actions of a person and his mission.

Not only are your actions judged. Your **mission** is judged.

Every soul has its own magnifying glass.

The Magnifying Glass

The other day, someone came up to me and handed me a magnifying glass. On the handle it said **Chacham Asa**. **עליו השלום**. It was the president of our shul's father. He used to pray here. He used to learn here. Someone found it and gave it to me. I gave it back to the president.

And I thought to myself: in Shamayim there are billions of magnifying glasses. And on each handle is a different name. Joey, Jack, Jonathan, Leanne, or Adina.

Hashem looks at each person through their own magnifying glass and asks: did you bring what you were meant to bring?

Why the World Is Built Around You

Says Rav Shneur Kotler: how does Hashem bring out the thing that is unique to you?

He builds an entire universe around you. With good things and bad things. With pain and success. With clarity and confusion. All of it calibrated to bring you to completion.

Sometimes we don't see it until much later. But when we do, we say, "Wow. This made me who I am. This brought this out of me."

That is what it means to live in your own reality.

Human or Animal

Rav Yerucham says this on a pasuk in Tehillim:
וְאַדְם֙ בַּיקַרְתָּ וְלֹאַ יִבְנֵן — a person does not understand their own preciousness.

Rashi says **יקר** means precious.

When a person does not understand how valuable and unique they are, what happens next?
נִמְשֵׁל כְּבָהָמוֹת נְדָמוֹ — they are compared to animals.

Not as an insult. An animal lives its program. It wakes up. It eats. It sleeps. It looks for food again.

A human being lives by awareness.

If you don't realize that you were created for something only you can do, you won't live like a human. You'll live like a program.

The Greatest Failure

Not Knowing Your Own Worth

Rav Yerucham says this on a pasuk in Tehillim, and with this I want to end. The pasuk says:

וְאַדְם֙ בַּיקַרְתָּ וְלֹאַ יִבְנֵן.

A person, **בַּיקָר**, and Rashi explains that **יקר** means precious. A person does not understand his own preciousness. He does not understand how valuable he is, how special he is.

And when a person does not understand that, what happens next? The end of the pasuk says:
נִמְשֵׁל כְּבָהָמוֹת נְדָמוֹ — he is compared to an animal.

Now, this is not an insult. We are not calling people animals in a degrading way. That is not what the pasuk means, and that is not what Rav Yerucham means.

An animal is a being that lives its program.

An animal wakes up. It eats. It goes to the bathroom. It lies down. It wakes up again. It looks for food. It reacts to stimulus. It follows instinct. It does not ask why it exists. It does not ask what it is here to accomplish. It does not ask whether today mattered or whether tomorrow should be different.

It lives.

And that is it.

Rav Yerucham says that when a human being does not understand his own **יקר**, his own preciousness, his own uniqueness, then even though he looks like a human being, he lives like an animal. He lives by default. He lives by habit. He lives by reaction. He lives by routine.

What makes a person live a human life is not intelligence. It is not morality. It is not even religiosity.

What makes a person live a human life is awareness.

When a person knows that he was created for something specific, something that no one else can do, then his life is driven. Then his decisions matter. Then his struggles matter. Then his pain matters. Then his delays matter. Then his successes matter.

But if a person does not know that — if he does not know that there is something only he can bring into the world — then even if he keeps mitzvot, even if he lives a respectable life, even if he does good things, he drifts.

And drifting is animal life.

Rav Yerucham ends with a line that is terrifying in its honesty.

He says:

עבירה גדולה היא שאדם אינו יודע את חסרונותו — it is a great sin when a person does not know his failings.

But then he says:

עבירה גדולה עוד יותר היא שאינו יודע את מעלותו — it is a much greater sin when a person does not know his greatness.

It is a great sin not to know what you need to fix. It is a far greater sin not to know what you are capable of.

Because when a person does not know his greatness, he will never attempt what he was created to do. He will never take responsibility for his uniqueness. He will never step into the thing that only he can deliver.

And then the world is missing something.

If I don't deliver what only I can deliver, there is a hole in the world that no one else can fill. If I steal myself from the world, there is no replacement. There is no substitute version of me. There is no backup plan.

That is the power of **הכרה**.

And that is why **בשבילי נברא העולם** is not arrogance. It is obligation.

Hashem should bless us to live with that awareness, to live with that responsibility, and to live that elevated life.

Takeaway from the Lecture

What I learned in this class is that my life is not happening in a shared, generic world. I live in a reality that was constructed specifically for me. The people, the events, the successes, the failures, the timing, the frustrations, and even the things that feel unfair are not random. They are part of a world Hashem built in order to draw out something that only I can bring into existence.

I am obligated to do all the mitzvot. That is not my uniqueness. That is my baseline. My real responsibility is the one thing that only I can do—the mission that no one else can fulfill in my place. If I do everything except that, I may live a religious life, but I will have failed my purpose.

The greatest danger is not ignorance of my shortcomings. The greater danger is ignorance of my greatness. When I do not recognize that I am precious, singular, and irreplaceable, I live like an animal following a program instead of a human being living with awareness. When I recognize that

my reality was built for me, my responsibility becomes unavoidable, and my life gains meaning.

5. If there is something that only you can bring into the world, what are the signs that you might be avoiding it—or postponing it—instead of stepping into it?

Shabbat Table Discussion Questions

1. The Mishna says **בשבילי נברא העולם**. How does understanding this as “my reality was created for me” change the way you interpret hardship or disappointment in your life?
2. Rav Shneur Kotler teaches that Hashem judges not only **מיעשה איש** but also **פקודתו**. What might it mean, practically, to ask yourself whether you are doing *your job* and not just doing good things?
3. The story of **מכת דם** shows two people experiencing the same moment as completely different realities. Where have you seen this play out clearly in your own life or family?
4. Rav Yerucham says the greater sin is not knowing your greatness. What prevents people from recognizing their own **מעלות**, and how does that affect the way they live?