

B”H

ESSAY

ON REACHING THE AGE OF SIXTY

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By

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INTRODUCTION

With great praise to the A-mighty for having achieved the milestone of “*Ben Shishim l'ziknah*” (Avot, Chapter 5, Mishnah 22), I am presenting a revised translation of a discourse the Lubavitcher Rebbe delivered on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday.

This discourse I originally translated in honor of the sixtieth birthday of a dear friend, Reb Aaron Meir Gellman'ש. As I approach my sixtieth birthday I decided to revise the translation and add several explanatory notes to it that are all bracketed. It should be noted that all of the footnotes are the Rebbe's except where indicated by brackets.

May Hashem help us to go from strength to strength and immediately merit the complete revelation of Moshiach that will usher in the period when we will all enjoy eternal life. Amen.

B”H

ESSAY: ON REACHING THE AGE OF SIXTY

I. THE BLIND SPOT

On the verse: “The G-d of Abraham your father and the G-d of Isaac,”¹ Rashi cites a Midrashic comment,² that G-d does not attach His name to righteous people in their lifetime, since even with regard to them one cannot be sure³ that “the

¹ Genesis, 28:13.

² *Tanchuma* 7.

³ Even though “The Holy One, blessed is He knows all that will be, and even before it happens, He knows that this person will be a righteous person.” (Citation from Rambam’s *Hilchos Teshuvah*, end of Chapter 5. See there for the explanation as to why His knowledge does not deny us free choice.), nevertheless G-d does not associate His name with them by verbalizing the words “G-d of so and so.” Once G-d’s knowledge of the future is expressed (verbally) it does compel the person to act accordingly. This is similar to the idea expressed in the matter of “And righteous and wicked He does not **say**. (See *Toras Chaim, Toldos*, 13c ff., and in several other places.)

This premise will also help to elucidate Rambam’s question (ibid. end of Chapter 6): “Does it not state in the Torah, ‘And they will enslave them and afflict them.. And this nation shall arise and stray... etc.’” How do we reconcile this with the earlier statement of Rambam (end of Chapter 5)

evil impulse will not cause them to err,” Nevertheless, G-d did say “the G-d of Isaac,” (though he was still alive), because, “Isaac’s eyes were dimmed, it was as if he was dead, since he was secluded in his home, the evil impulse had departed from him.”

This concept is difficult to understand. It is true that a blind person may be regarded as if he were dead, as the Talmud states, “There are four people who are regarded as dead, a poor person, leper, blind person and one who has no children.”⁴ Moreover, the analogy to the dead with regard to a blind person is even more pronounced. According to one opinion, a blind person is exempted from observance of all the

that G-d’s foreknowledge does not compel us, “for his knowledge is not like our knowledge,” (as the *Lechem Mishneh* asks there)? However, in light of the above distinction between G-d’s knowledge and His verbalizing of it these two statements are not mutually exclusive. When the Rambam maintains, “G-d’s knowledge does not pull him or **decree** upon him,” he refers only to the knowledge that does not get expressed through speech. However, when the prediction about how, “they will enslave them and afflict them,” and likewise the prediction that, “this nation shall arise and stray...” is expressed verbally by G-d, it does indeed compel the person to do as was stated. In Rambam’s words: “He did **decree...**”

⁴ *Nedarim* 64b. See there for cross-references. *Bereishis Rabbah, Parsha* 71:10. See there for cross-references.

Mitzvos⁵ just as a dead person is, as it says, “the dead are free.”⁶

This does not, however, justify the language employed by the Midrash to the effect that “the evil impulse departed from him.” Don’t we clearly and regularly see how blind people have desires (evil impulses) and are, indeed, capable of sinning, etc.?⁷ How then does the Midrash state, “Since his eyes were dimmed...the evil impulse departed from him,” and because of this, G-d associated His name with Isaac even though he was still alive?

2. SWEET SIXTY

The Talmud⁸ relates how *Rav Yosef*—who was blind⁹—made a “holiday celebration for the rabbis when he reached

⁵ *Kiddushin* 31a. *Bava Kamma* 87a.

⁶ *Tehillim*, 88:6. *Shabbos* 30a.

⁷ Note *Sanhedrin* 91, beginning of side b. *S’dei Chemed, Pe’as Hasadeh, Kelalim* 1,149 (Volume 7, p. 3084 – Kehot edition).

⁸ *Moed Katan* 28a.

⁹ “Literally: *Sagi Nahor*—“An over abundance of light,” implying the very opposite of blindness where there is no light! The reason why this euphemism is employed is explained in the discourse, s.v. “*Min Hameitzar*, 5705, chapter four. See there.

the age of sixty. The reason he gave for this celebration was, “I have graduated from the [penalty] of *Kares*.”¹⁰

However, *Abaye* challenged him, “Granted that the master has graduated from the *Kares* of years, since when did the master graduate from the *Kares* of days?”¹¹

Rav Yosef replied, “At least you can hold on to half in your hands.”¹²

This Talmudic passage begs for clarification:

First, it is natural that when a Jew has a cause for celebration, he would make a feast for **all** of his good friends.¹³ Why then does the Talmud relate that Rav Yosef made the holiday celebration for the rabbis exclusively?¹⁴

¹⁰ [Dying before the age of sixty, as a punishment for certain serious transgressions such as eating on Yom Kippur.]

¹¹ [“Perhaps he can still meet a sudden death.” – Rashi]

¹² [“At least, I escaped the *Kares* of years.” – Rashi]

¹³ The case of “I will make a Holiday celebration for the rabbis” in Tractate Shabbat (119, beginning of side a) and Kiddushin (31a) and Bava Kamma (87a) is different. There the discussion concerns the conclusion of a **Tractate*** [something that is primarily a rabbinical preoccupation] and the reward for Mitzvos [a spiritual pursuit that is appreciated mostly by the rabbis]. Whereas his escape from *Kares* is a celebration of life [that affects everyone equally. Why then did he only invite the rabbis?].

Second, it would seem that there is really no difference between “Kares of years” and “Kares of days” wherein one could die a sudden death¹⁵ because of a transgression committed after reaching the age of sixty. Is this not similar to one who dies before the age of sixty for a transgression that was committed earlier?¹⁶ Since Rav Yosef did not escape from the possibility of the “Kares of days,” and the “danger that he might still die a sudden death still existed,”¹⁷ it is difficult to understand why he would throw a party and celebrate just because he graduated from “Kares of years.”

Third, What did Rav Yosef mean when he said to Abaye: “At least you can hold on to **half** in your hands?” If Rav Yosef maintained that “Kares of years” and “Kares of days” were indeed two distinct matters—which explains why

*Note the words of *Shach, Yoreh Deah*, sec. 246:27: “All the lay people have a custom...it is customary to notify them.”

¹⁴ One cannot answer this question by suggesting that these were his only friends, because if this was the reason, why did he emphasize the word “rabbis?” It would be difficult to explain that the Talmud’s intention was to tell us that all his friends were rabbis, exclusively.

¹⁵ This is the terminology employed by the Talmud, *Moed Katan* *ibid*. See also Rashi there s.v. *Kares d’yomi*.

¹⁶ This can also be deduced from the question Abaye so simply posed: “Granted that...graduated from...the Kares of years, since when did the master graduate from the Kares of days?”

¹⁷ Rashi’s terminology there.

he made a celebration for eluding the former while the possibility for the latter still existed—then Rav Yosef should have stated to Abaye: “At least you can hold on to one thing in your hands,” and not, “hold on to **half** in your hands.”¹⁸ By using the term “half” he implied that Kares of years and Kares of days are two halves of one thing, and by attaining the age of sixty he merely emerged from a half of Kares.

3. WHY WAS RAV YOSEF DIFFERENT?

In addition to the foregoing questions concerning the story of Rav Yosef, there are several other matters that need clarification:

First, why is that the *Shulchan Aruch*, etc. do not mention that one should make a “holiday celebration” when one reaches the age of sixty?

The *Rema*¹⁹ (based on the Talmud²⁰) rules that when one concludes a Tractate, a *siyum*, it is a mitzvah to rejoice and to make a feast. Now if the making of a *siyum*—about

¹⁸ As the *Meharsha*, *Chidushei Agados (Sanhedrin, 90b – s.v. Minyan)* raises a similar question with regard to the terminology “*Palga-half*” used there.

¹⁹ *Yoreh Deah*, sec. 246:26.

²⁰ *Shabbos* 118, end of side b.

which Abaye said²¹ “It is to my credit,” i.e., that it was an extra measure of piety²²—is mentioned in Halachic sources, how much more so, there should have been some codification of the law or custom that mandates making a celebration upon reaching the age of sixty. After all, when the Talmud mentions that Rav Yosef, upon reaching the age of sixty made a holiday celebration for the rabbis,” it does not add the qualifying statement, “It is to my credit.” Rather it is stated as an obvious practice. Yet, Halachic sources have entirely omitted this practice.²³ Why?

²¹ Ibid.

²² See *Bach, Orach Chaim*, sec. 2: “All uses of the phrase “It is to my credit” there indicate that it was a matter of extra piety. See *Yad Malachi, klal 646* and the works referenced in *S’dei Chemed, ma’areches tav, klal 1* (Volume 3, p. 1338).

²³ The work *Leket Yosher* – a collection of practices of the author of *Terumas Hadeshen – Yoreh Deah*, p. 40 (published in Berlin, 5664) writes: “On the day the illustrious sage, of sainted memory, made a *siyum* of a tractate, he summoned two elders to exempt him from conducting the “feast [**for reaching the age**] of sixty.” However, in addition to the fact that that this was the author of *Terumas Hadeshen*’s personal custom—hence it was not recorded in Halachic sources as noted in the text here—the author of *Terumas Hadeshen* connected this event with the *siyum* of a tractate.

It may be suggested that the author of *Terumas Hadeshen* also had proof that his life-force was nurtured by holy energies as was the case with

Second, Rav Yosef was a third generation *Amora*,²⁴ [Talmudic Sages who lived in the post Mishnaic age]. He was preceded by generations of *Amoraim* and *Tana'im*, many of whom reached the age of sixty.²⁵ The question is thus: Why don't we find that any of the other *Tana'im* and *Amoraim* would make a holiday celebration when they reached the age of sixty?

4. TWO WAYS OF LIVING

The explanation of all the above is as follows:

Rav Yosef (as will be explained later) – and similarly with regard to *Kares* of days [he trusted that he no longer had to contend with any evil impulse as was the case with Rav Yosef]. Due to his profound humility, however, he connected this even with a *siyum* of a tractate.

The reason he invited two elders, one may suggest, is because this expression of gratitude that he “had graduated from *Kares*” is analogous to another thanksgiving blessing, the blessing of *Hagomel*, that should be said in the presence of ten, and amongst them two Torah elders (*Seder Birchas Hanehenin* of *Alter Rebbe*, Chapter 13:2).

²⁴ See Introduction of Rambam to his *Yad. Seder Hadoros*, fourth millennium, 82.

²⁵ In that very discussion (*Moed Katan* *ibid.*) it is recorded that Rav Huna lived past eighty and Rav Chisda lived ninety-two years. Both Rav Huna and Rav Chisda preceded Rav Yosef. (See *Seder Hadoros* in the corresponding entries.)

In the Temple era, one who transgressed a “Kares” prohibition would actually die before the age of fifty and a “death by heaven” transgression would die before the age of sixty²⁶. (And this punishment—as all punishments that come

²⁶ This is consistent with *Iggeres Hateshuvah*, beginning of Chapter 4, and is based on the approach of the Jerusalem Talmud (*Bikkurim*, beginning of Chapter 2, as explained by *Tosphos* (*Shabbos* 25a, s.v. *Kares. Yevamos* 2a s.v. *Eishes*). *Tosphos* there observes that according to the Babylonian Talmud (*Moed Katan* 28a) *Kares* is where he does not live to the age of **sixty**.

The reason the Alter Rebbe accepts the position of the Jerusalem Talmud can be explained thus:

- (a) According to the Jerusalem Talmud the question [posed by the Alter Rebbe in *Iggeres Hateshuvah*] about all those who incurred the penalty of *Kares* and yet lived pleasant lives beyond the age of *Kares*, is also about those people who incurred the penalty of *Kares* and lived beyond fifty. Therefore he cites the opinion of the Jerusalem Talmud to strengthen his question.
- (b) *Tosphos Yeshanim* in *Yevamos* there has a variant reading of the text of *Moed Katan* there: “When I reached the age of fifty...I graduated from *Kares*.” Since there are two versions in the Babylonian Talmud about Rav Yosef’s statement (in addition to the earlier statement there, “One who dies at the age of fifty...*Kares*...sixty is death by the hands of heaven”), this matter is then subject to the principle (laid down in *Yad Malachai klal* 94. *Ibid. Klalei shnei Hatalmudim klal* 8. *S’dei Chemed, klalim, ma’areches beis*:90 (Volume 1, p. 138). *Ibid. Klalei Haposkim, sec. 2* (Volume 9, p. 1807) that wherever there are various views in the

from **above**—is a direct and natural consequence of the transgression.²⁷) The *Alter Rebbe* in *Iggeres Hateshuvah*²⁸ explains that as a result of the violation of these transgressions: “the rope that is drawn down from the name *Hava’ye*, May He be blessed, is cut off and severed. And since, the physical life of a Jew is nurtured by his G-dly soul that derives its sustenance from the flow of energy from the name *Hava’ye*, therefore, when the rope is cut and severed, it automatically affects the vitality of the body as well. (The fact that the people who transgress these *Kares* and “death by

Babylonian Talmud that remain unresolved, we follow the Jerusalem Talmud’s opinion.

²⁷*Shaloh, Bayis Acharon* (12a-b) cites two opinions about this matter. From the *Alter Rebbe*’s words (*Tanya*, beginning of Chapter 37): “That which causes the reward of the Mitzvah is the Mitzvah itself” it is plausible to imply that the *Alter Rebbe*’s view is that the same can be said about transgressions.* So it appears from *Iggeres Hateshuvah*, chapter 5 (cited later in the text). *Sha’ar Hateshuvah* (from the *Mitteler Rebbe*), volume 1, 6c; 17d ff.; 50, end of side b. *Derech Mitzvosecha* 38b.

*See *Tanya* (Chapter 39, p. 53a): “‘The reward of a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah.’ This means that from its reward we can know its character and level.” From this passage it is evident that the same interpretation can be applied to the saying, “The reward of a transgression is a transgression.” Indeed, the Mishnah (*Avos*, Chapter 2:2) records both sayings together). And this idea that “from the reward we can know its character etc.” is simply because the reward is a direct consequence etc.

²⁸Chapter five.

heaven” prohibitions and can live until the age of either fifty or sixty, is due to the existence of a “trace” of the G-dly soul until that time.)²⁹

With this premise, the *Alter Rebbe* answers the question as to why in every generation “there are many who incurred the penalty of *Kares* or death and nevertheless lived their days and years pleasantly?”³⁰ It is because in the period of exile, the

²⁹ Ibid. Chapter 6.

³⁰ Language of the *Alter Rebbe* in *Iggeres Hateshuvah*, Chapter 4.

The reason he adds the word “pleasantly” is to eliminate the attempt at answering the question, albeit with some difficulty, that the punishment of *Kares* is meted out by suffering poverty etc. that are likened to death in the Torah (Exodus 4:19) as well as by our Sages (referred to earlier in footnote 4, cited by Rashi in his commentary on the Torah there).

One cannot suggest, however, that the intent in adding the word “pleasantly” is because the question is only valid for those people who incurred the penalty of *Kares* and lived free of any suffering. Otherwise, if they did endure suffering, one could have explained their longevity as a result of their “suffering purging” their sins (as mentioned in the beginning of Chapter 1 of *Iggeret Hateshuvah* quoting from the end of *Yoma*).

This approach is untenable because:

(a) Suffering, even if it endured over a brief period of time also has the purging effect, as the Talmud (*Makkos* 23, end of side a). “Once they receive their lashes, they are exempted from the penalty of *Kares*.” The fact that they lived long pleasant lives does not preclude the possibility that they did experience some suffering of a short duration.

flow of energy from Divine presence channeled through the Ten *Sefirot* of “*Nogah*.”³¹”

It is therefore possible for one who incurred the penalty of *Kares* or death by the hands of heaven to live a long (and even pleasant) life, beyond the fifty or sixty years (notwithstanding the fact that the connecting “rope” to the name *Havaye* has been cut off and severed). This is because, during the period of exile, one can receive their sustenance through the domain of the *Sitra Ahchara*—the ‘other side’—heaven forbid—and still live.³²

(b) Since the *Alter Rebbe*’s question is predicated on the idea that the penalties of *Kares* and death by the hands of heaven are natural consequences (as will be established in the next footnote), the very same question can be raised with regard the Mishnah in *Makos* there and the *Beraisa* at the end of *Yoma*, as well: How is it possible to be released from the penalty of *Kares* simply by receiving lashes. (and suffering) since the natural order does not allow them to live.

³¹ [The flow of Divine energy that emanates from the Ten Divine attributes is through a process wherein this light is filtered and screened to the extent that only a nominal amount of light is perceived.]

³² The reason the *Alter Rebbe* resorts to this answer even though the Talmud rules (*Makos* 13b): “The heavenly court forgives those who incur the penalty of *Kares* and repent.” It is thus possible that those who enjoy longevity repented, as *Tosphos* answers a similar question (*Kesubos* 30, beginning of side b) on the statement of the Talmud (there) that “the judgment of the four death penalties did not cease.”* They are still meted

out through heavenly intervention, despite the fact that “we see many transgressors and idolaters that die a natural death.”

This answer is unacceptable to the *Alter Rebbe* because his question (in Chapter 4) was about this very matter. How does repentance relieve a person from the penalties of *Kares* or death by the hands of heaven? Inasmuch as these punishments** are direct and natural consequences from the transgression, how is it possible to distance oneself from them through *Teshuvah*? The *Alter Rebbe*’s explanation of Chapter 5 clarifies this point as well. There it is explained that the idea of *Kares* is that “the “channeling rope...is cut off and severed.” Now this question [how can *Teshuvah* rectify that which is caused naturally as a result of the cause and effect status of a transgression] is also resolved: When one does “*Teshuvah*, he restores the flow of the Divine presence to its original place.” (End of Chapter 6). The soul is thus reconnected to its root. See *Likkutei Torah*, beginning of *Parshas Bamidbar* (1b): “The soul is cut off... as in the analogy of a person whose body is severed from his head. The remedy to this situation would be similar to the hypothetical remedy that would reattach the body to the head. Similarly... (Note that there is an apparent lacuna in the text (ibid. 1, end of side d): “With regard to the penalty of *Kares*...”)

*The reason *Tosphos* poses the question on the novel idea that the death penalties by the courts are substituted by Divine retribution and not on those who have incurred the penalty of *Kares* and death by the hands of heaven, because the answer given in *Iggeres Hateshuvah* (cited here) adequately explains that phenomenon, [but it does not explain the penalty that is a substitute for capital punishment meted out by the courts, which is not a consequence of the transgression. See next asterisked note, where the *Rebbe* makes this distinction].

5. HUMILITY

We can now understand why the *Shulchan Aruch* does not cite the practice to make a celebration upon reaching the age of sixty. In addition to the fact that one can still incur “*Kares* of the day,”³³ the mere fact that a person has lived

** By contrast, the penalties of lashes and the four forms of capital punishment are in the jurisdiction of the court. Consequently, we must conclude that for those sins G-d suspended the natural consequence factor “Your evil shall afflict you.” Similarly, with regard to the Divine substitute form of retribution, since they are substitutes for capital punishment meted out by the courts.

(There is, however, a need for further research in this matter considering the statement of our Sages (*Makkos* 10b), where the Talmud comments on the verse: “And G-d caused it to happen,” that the victim of this unintentional killing had committed a capital crime, but there were no witnesses...”)

We can now also understand why the Alter Rebbe poses his question (*Iggeres Hateshuvah*, Chapter four) only on those who incurred the penalty of *Kares* or death by the hands of heaven, and not on those who receive the substitute four death penalties (notwithstanding their more sever nature).

³³ This reason alone suffices to negate any possible pretext to celebrate when one reaches the age of sixty, as can be demonstrated by the question posed by Abaye (see above footnote 16). Based on this premise, we can now also understand why, even prior to the destruction of the Temple (see

beyond the age of sixty does not guarantee that they have even escaped the possibility of the “*Kares* of years.” Since, as stated, one can enjoy longevity, beyond the sixty years, even when his “channeling rope” has, G-d forbid, been cut off and severed.

This can also explain why there is no record of other *Ta'naim* and *Amoraim* (who lived after the destruction of the Temple³⁴) who preceded Rav Yosef would ever make a “holiday celebration” when they reached the age of sixty. Due to their profound humility they were skeptical as to whether their life support came from holy sanctuaries. In the well known words of one Talmudic Sage:³⁵ “I do not know in which direction I will be led.”³⁶

text) they did not make a celebration at this age. Rav Yosef’s case was different as will be explained later on (section 6 ff.).

³⁴ See preceding note.

³⁵ *Berachos* 28b. [These were the words Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, the leader of the Jewish nation at the time of the destruction of the second Temple, on his deathbed.]

³⁶ [Hence they did not feel that the attainment of the age of sixty was a cause for celebration. Perhaps they still were cut off from their Divine source.]

The fact that Rav Yosef³⁷ did deem it appropriate to celebrate his sixtieth birthday, is because he had clear proof that his life-support derived from the holy precincts exclusively, as will be demonstrated shortly.

6. NO PHLEBOTOMISTS PLEASE

The Talmud relates³⁸ that Rav Yosef was known for his encyclopedic knowledge (known as “Sinai” because his knowledge of “*Mishnayos* and *Beraisos* was so clearly organized in his mind, precisely as they were given at Sinai”³⁹), in contrast to Rabbah who was better known for his brilliant power of analysis and incisive approach to Jewish law (known as an “*Okeir Harim*-one who could ‘uproot mountains’ due to his sharp and penetrating approach to Torah”⁴⁰).

When the need to appoint a new *Rosh Yeshivah* [Head of the major Talmudic Academy] arose, there was a question as to who, of these two sages, was better qualified for the position. They consulted with the rabbis in the Land of Israel

³⁷ Despite the fact that he was known for his utmost humility (end of Tractate *Sotah* and Rashi there).

³⁸ End of Tractate *Horiyos*, and also at the end of Tractate *Berachos*.

³⁹ Rashi, *Horiyos*, there.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

and submitted the following question to them: “Which one of them takes precedence?” And their response was, “A Sinai is preferable...because everyone depends of the purveyors of wheat.”⁴¹

The Talmud continues to relate, that in spite of the fact that Rav Yosef was considered superior and more qualified for the position, he refused to accept the appointment and Rabbah ascended to the position of Rosh Yeshivah instead. And the Talmud concludes: “All the years that Rabbah reigned, Rav Yosef never had the need to call a phlebotomist to his home.”

Ramah⁴² explains that in the merit of Rav Yosef exhibition of such great humility by refusing to assume a position of leadership and power in the presence of Rabbah, he was afforded special protection for himself and his household. For the duration of twenty-two years that Rabbah reigned, neither he nor his household became ill; nor did any of them even need the service of a phlebotomist.

⁴¹ [Rav Yosef was given precedence because his encyclopedic mastery of Jewish law was comparable to the one who sells wheat, the staple of life, that everyone depends on. Whereas Rabbah’s brilliant approach to Torah knowledge could be appreciated only by a limited percentage of the populace.]

⁴² Cited by *Tosfos HaRosh* on *Horiyos* there. He concludes: “And this explanation is plausible to us.”

This is clearly a supernatural phenomenon. According to Jewish law,⁴³ a Torah scholar may not even live in a community that does not have a phlebotomist because G-d endowed the human being with a natural need and dependency on being phlebotomized.⁴⁴ In light of this, how was it possible that for twenty-two years, Rav Yosef and his household, did not need it?

From this it can be proven that the sustenance of his body transcended the constraints of the natural order. In a most overt sense, he derived his life-support because of his humility and total self-abnegation (much like angels whose life-support derives from their awe of G-d and self-abnegation⁴⁵).

We can now appreciate the fact that Rav Yosef said so nonchalantly “I have graduated from *Kares*” notwithstanding the fact that during the period of exile one can live beyond the age of sixty even if they incurred the penalty of *Kares* (because their life-support derives from the impure precincts). Rav Yosef was different because it was clear and visible to even eyes of flesh that the sustenance of his body “was not a

⁴³ *Sanhedrin* 17, end of side b. Rambam, *Hilchos De'os*, end of chapter 4.

⁴⁴ [Or, alternatively, other medical procedures that keep a person healthy, none of which Rav Yosef ever availed himself]

⁴⁵ See *Derech Mitzvosecha* 16b.

life of flesh”⁴⁶ but spiritual life,”⁴⁷ “The fear of G-d is to life.”⁴⁸

He did not make the celebration before he reached the age of sixty, because he was still concerned that he might have incurred the penalty of *Kares*. And since one who is deserving of *Kares* can still live until the age of fifty or sixty, deriving his sustenance from the holy precincts, drawing on the trace of holiness of his G-dly soul, as discussed in *Iggeres Hateshuvah*, cited above.

7. SEE NO EVIL

There is still a need for further clarification:

⁴⁶ Biblical terminology in Proverbs 14:30. The explanation of *Iggeres Hakodesh* (next note) provides for a simple explanation as to why the Midrash (*Breishis Rabbah*, beginning of *Parsha 57*) when it interprets this verse as a reference to Abraham, does not explain the word “*Besaryim*” literally.

⁴⁷ *Iggeres Hakodesh*, sec. 27 (p. 146b).

⁴⁸ Proverbs 19:23 (cited in *Iggeres Hakodesh* there*)

*In the foregoing citation from *Iggeres Hakodesh* the text is “**And** the fear...” This has already been corrected in “*Heoros v'tikunium*” on the *Tanya* there

It is quite obvious that every Jew has been endowed with the power of free choice. Consequently, even one who knows that his life is not “life of the flesh” but “spiritual life” is capable (because of the power of free-choice) of transgressing. Torah, which is a guide for every Jew, thus exhorts us, “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.”⁴⁹ The question, therefore, persists: what was Rav Yosef’s rationale for the celebration upon reaching the age of sixty, since he was still vulnerable and did not elude the possibility of “Kares of days”?⁵⁰

This matter can be explained in light of an Aggadic passage (cited by the *Rishonim*, early commentators⁵¹) that Rav Yosef could not condition himself to never look outside of his “four cubits.” This led him to become blind. His strong desire to not see outside of his four cubits actually caused his body to lose its ability to see. When that occurred, he was not only denied the ability to not be tempted by the “seeing

⁴⁹ *Avos*, Chapter 2:4.

⁵⁰ [In other words, Rav Yosef’s blindness was not simply a physiological one. It came about because he conditioned his body to resist temptation to the extent that his eyes would literally not see anymore. Thus, his vision impairment was a manifestation of a spiritual refinement that attested to the likelihood that he would not sin anymore.]

⁵¹ *Ran* and *Ramban*, *Kiddushin* 31a.

eye”—which leads one to “a desiring heart”⁵² from which all undesirable consequences ensue—but, in addition, he was capable of uprooting also the “desiring heart” that exists independently of the “seeing eye.” Thus, Rav Yosef was also protected from the possibility of the *Kares* of the day.

Rav Yosef, however, still said to Abaye: “Take, at least, **half** into your hand,” because his profound humility did not allow him to think that he was totally insulated from sin. After all, it is stated, “Do not believe in yourself until the day you die.”

On the other hand, having successfully escaped from the state of *Kares* of years, without any doubt, as explained above, his trust that that he would elude *Kares* of days was also reinforced. He therefore made the holiday celebration.

This can also explain why Rav Yosef used the term “half” rather than “one thing.” The word “half” implies—as was noted earlier—that his emergence unscathed from the *Kares* of years, was not only an achievement in its own right, but it actually contributed to eluding *Kares* entirely, even the *Kares* of days. By successfully securing his escape from *Kares*

⁵² Jerusalem Talmud, *Berachos* 1:5. Rashi, Numbers 15:39 (taken from *Bamidbar Rabbah* and *Tanchuma* there).

of years, his trust in his ability to evade the *Kares* of days was strengthened.

In other words: there was one dynamic that was responsible for the two consequences. Rav Yosef's graduating from *Kares* of years and his trust that he will not be vulnerable in the future and incur *Kares* of days was predicated on one fact: his evil impulse had been neutralized.

8. ONLY FOR THE RABBIS

Based on the foregoing analysis we can also understand why Rav Yosef made the party for the rabbis exclusively.

The Talmud states:⁵³ “Even if one were to read only the Shema in the morning and evening he fulfilled [the precept of] ‘Do not let it [the Torah] depart.’ One must not, however, say this in the presence of an ignoramus.” Not having adequate knowledge of all the details of this law, the ignoramus might take it literally and apply it indiscriminately.

Offhand, one can raise the question as to why it cannot be said in the presence of an ignorant person. Why can the law

⁵³ *Menachos* 99, end of side b.

not be articulated unambiguously and authentically that would prevent the possibility of some negative result?⁵⁴

The answer lies in human nature. When a person hears something he wants to hear and is savors it, it usually integrates well into one's psyche. Conversely, when one hears something that one would rather not hear, it will not be assimilated as easily without special efforts.

Thus, one is not permitted to state the law—that reading the Shema morning and evening suffices to fulfill one's obligation of constant Torah study—in the presence of an ignoramus even if one were to supplement this statement with some of the details of the law (such as reading of the Shema alone is not sufficient etc.), because only the part that reading of the Shema suffices to fulfill the exhortation, “Do not let it depart” be etched into his consciousness.⁵⁵

The same can be said about our situation: When Rav Yosef would have invited even non-rabbis (ignoramuses) to his sixtieth birthday celebration, they would have imagined that anyone who reaches the age of sixty is no longer in need

⁵⁴ See *Kuntres Acharaon, Alter Rebbe's Hilchos Talmud Torah*, Chapter 3, s.v. *v'hinei chiluk zeh*.

⁵⁵ This is also the basis of the principle of “One should not be lenient in the presence of an ignoramus.” See *Shulchan Aruch, Admur Hazaken*, sec. 317:6 and other sources.

of reinforcement, since they no longer possess the evil impulse.

Even by adding the caveat that Rav Yosef was an exception to the general rule—inasmuch as he no longer had the “heart that desires,” and that even he did not categorically dismiss the possibility of further transgression; he just had his trust boosted that it would not happen, and it did not, however, negate his realization that, “do not believe in yourself until the day you die”—they would have absorbed only the message that they need not be as vigilant after the age of sixty.

Since the celebration could have sent the wrong message to the ignoramuses, he made the holiday celebration for rabbis exclusively.

9. BLINDED BY THE SMOKE

Based on the above analysis we can understand what the Midrash says about Isaac: “Since his vision had become dimmed, the evil impulse departed from him.”

On the verse: “And his eyes were dimmed [preventing him] from seeing,”⁵⁶ Rashi writes (in his **first** commentary):

⁵⁶ Genesis 27:1

“Because of the smoke of these [Esau’s wives], (for they were making smoke and burning incense for idolatry.)”⁵⁷

One can ask, while it is indeed true that smoke does have the capacity to harm one’s eyes (as it says: “As smoke for the eyes”⁵⁸), why was Isaac the only one who was harmed by it. Obviously since no one else became blind because of this smoke, including Esau’s wives and Esau himself, that it was not sufficiently potent to cause blindness. How then did it harm Isaac?

The explanation of this matter is that dimming of Isaac’s eyes was not caused solely by the deleterious effects of the smoke, but by virtue of the fact that the smoke was “for idolatry.” Isaac’s eyes were so sensitive—“his eyes were pure, [prevented] from seeing evil”⁵⁹—that he was unable to tolerate the idolatrous smoke, to the extent, that as a direct consequence, his eyes were dimmed.

There is an analogous story told of Rabbi Nochum of Chernobel.⁶⁰ By mistake he was served *Chalav Akum* [non-

⁵⁷ These parentheses are found in R. *Eliyahu Mizrach*’s commentary. However, in most editions, including the first printed edition of Rashi, it is not in the text. See also *Yalkut Shimoni* and *Tanchuma* on this verse.

⁵⁸ Proverbs, 10:26.

⁵⁹ Habakuk 1:13, with slight variations. See also *Radak* there.

⁶⁰ S.v. *Ki na’ar Yisroel*, 5666 (and 5716).

kosher milk⁶¹] and he could not see the milk. Rabbi Nochum [when he was apprised of the existence of the milk] subsequently explained this phenomenon [of not physically seeing the milk] with the words of the Mishnah: “Milk that was milked by a non-Jew and a Jew did not see it.”⁶² The same words could yield the translation of: “A Jew does not see it.” Since it is something that a Jew ought not see, he does not see it.⁶³

(From the talk of the 11th of Nissan, 5722 – celebration of the conclusion of – the sixtieth year*)

⁶¹ [When a cow is milked without Jewish supervision, the rabbis prohibited its consumption.]

⁶² *Avodah Zarah* 35b.

⁶³ *S.v. Ki na'ar Yisroel*, *ibid.* With this story we can understand the dispute in the Talmud (*Temurah* 4, end of side b): “Any matter the Torah says we are not to do, if it was done, is it effective after the fact.”

* In this *Farbrengen*, the Rebbe made a *Siyum* [conclusion] on tractate *Pesachim*. See above, footnote 18.