

“And the Egyptians did evil to us and to our forefathers.” (20:15)

Rashi says that from here we see that the Avos, Patriarchs, feel pain in the grave when Klal Yisrael is punished. Rashi adds the word “b’kever,” in the grave, which is enigmatic. The neshamah, soul, of the departed is not really in the grave. Its place is in the Heavens. Why does Rashi seem to emphasize the pain sustained by the souls in the grave? In his commentary, Eish Kodesh, the Piaseczner Rebbe, z.l., posits that Rashi focuses on the souls in the grave by design. He is teaching us that the Avos, whose bodies lie in the ground, are pained by the anguish that their progeny are experiencing. These neshamos understand that the exalted spiritual plateau which they achieved was only a result of their physical dimension, their corporeal bodies which existed in This World. The Rebbe adds that while these neshamos study Torah in the Mesivta d’Rekia, Heavenly Academy, their lips in the ground are simultaneously uttering words of Torah. It is the fulfillment of mitzvos in This World that catalyzes the soul’s holiness in Olam Haba, Eternal World. Consequently, their bodies in the ground feel pain when the living feel pain.

This is the reason that it is beneficial for the soul of the departed that – in addition to the recitation of Kaddish and the study of Mishnayos – one should remember the neshamos during the times that he is actually engaged in mitzvah performance and Torah study. Furthermore, the Rebbe explains that this means not just remembering them, but binding ourselves to them, soul to soul, in order to study Torah or perform a mitzvah together. When we connect with them, they become invested with a body in this olam ha’assiyah, world of action. That Torah study or mitzvah performance grants them the opportunity for increased and intensified sanctity.

The souls of the departed yearn to be with the living, yearn to do mitzvos with the living, yearn to participate in the physical act of mitzvah performance. Not only can the living commune with the departed, they can actually give them the most precious gift of all: the opportunity to once again be invested in the concrete act of mitzvah performance.

With these words the Rebbe, who was the spiritual leader and inspiration of the Warsaw Ghetto, attempted to console his bereaved chassidim. He wanted to share the idea that they could commune with the spirits of their departed loved ones, bestowing upon them the gift of physical-being in mitzvah performance.

In a drashah, lecture, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan in 1942 the Rebbe said, “Our departed ancestors are pained by our physical pain. Do not think that since they are tzaddikim, pious and righteous – especially now that they have departed this physical realm – do not think that they are above any contact with the physical. While, indeed, they are in Heaven above, they are acutely aware that it was by means of their physical bodies that they were able to achieve their level of sublime attainment. While it is true that their souls are studying Torah in Gan Eden in the Yeshiva Shel Maalah, Heavenly Academy, it is also true that their lips whisper words of Torah in the grave, catalyzed by the Torah study of Jews who are alive and well in this corporeal world.”

It is not enough to say that our souls will be saved, our spirits will live on in Heaven. Our bodies also have an element of holiness, and therefore, our corporeal existence demands salvation. This enlightening idea lends an entirely new perspective to our relationship with those who have passed on. It also places upon us an awesome responsibility with respect to the way we act in our mitzvah performance.