

Nourishment for the Neshama

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If everything is good why do I feel so badly and what can I do about it? Bring the King into the picture!

How many of us go around with heavy emotions, dragging our feet, distracted, stewing, processing and basically in a place of thought that is not in the present moment of what we are doing? Honestly, can we say that we do not spend far more time there than we would like to? Do we know with any clarity at all that there is a real alternative for our focus?

Just knowing we have a choice is the first step. We can be certain that we have a choice even if it doesn't feel that way because of the simple reality that we all do know, which is that most of us (those blessed with a normal range of mental functioning) have free will. And even within that range, there are things that could be outside of our choice box. However, when it comes to our thoughts, speech and deeds, it should be understood that there is a level of free willed choice, even though it might not be apparent at first.

The next step is to understand the value that we can choose to bring to every moment. As our life force flows to us, we can choose to attach it to different actions, different speech, and, yes, even to different thoughts, which is of course the primary source of emotion, speech and action. Many thoughts may float through our mind. How do we choose which to bring into the realm of time and space through our emotions, speech and action?

The basic value that we wish to apply is "Is precious to Hashem?"

We are in Elul, when Hashem, the King, is in the field. He is near to us. On Rosh Hashanah we will declare His Kingship, which means that we will have brought ourselves to the deep understanding of ourselves as nothing but dust and ashes, mere atoms enlivened, sustained and invigorated through the soul He gives us, to do His will, for another year.

When we are in a low state, a state of processing, a state where we feel like a cannon ball has been shot through us and we have a gaping hole in our stomach, a state where we are feeling overwhelmed with frustration, disempowerment, or any negativity whatsoever, we can pause from the languishing and just look upwards and say to the King, even in this place that I find myself, I know that its Source is You, that the power of the mood is from You and that by my telling You so, even though the feelings are all still there, I am re-connecting myself to truth, the truth that the entire world including these tornado-like painful emotions, are sourced in You and are sent for my growth and development in remembering You are the Source at this time. When we train ourselves to really see this as a choice, to see Hashem as the Source for the sole purpose of building within us the ability to see Him as the Source and know that He is helping us come closer to Him through this process of choosing, then we can expect to see some relief of the negativity, even if the situation itself does not get better right away.

An analogy to understanding this would be a walnut inside a shell. We might see the shell of the walnut around the inside and think that the matter is not edible, that there can't be any nutrition to it. But if we know what a nut cracker is, we open it and find inside the delicious nutrition.

Our negative experiences, although they can have very real and eternal consequences that we do not like at all in time and space, present to us charged situations. The Source of the charge is the attachment of our very life force to a belief or thought that is not a Torah belief or thought. We can learn to bring our free will to that point before we go to the false place, but when we do not yet have that fine control over our thoughts and we find ourselves there, we can bless the matter and tell Hashem that we wish to use the same energy involved only to do what will give Him pleasure and to please lead us in that path.

It may fly in the face of our survival instincts, and very often our survival is exactly what is at stake and the intensity of the negativity is coming from a place of self-protection, a place of survival needs. And that is the point exactly. We must acknowledge deeply to the part of us that wishes to survive that Hashem is in the picture. He alone determines the success of our efforts to survive. He is the one giving us all the pleasures we hope for. He is the King. Let us in those moments of darkness remember at least to say, I know this huge set of instinctive reactions which have been with me since childhood and developed over the course of my lifetime, that seem to run me, have their Source of strength in the King and I am yearning to tell the King that I wish to do only what is pleasing to Him, please lead me in the path that You wish for me to follow.

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The next step is to apply Torah values and attempt to discern what mitzvah or what attribute of Hashem can be brought to this matter. The choice to do so elevates the matter and frees from the matter the holiness, and through us can then shine the light He is sending to us. With our free willed choice and trust in Hashem, we can change what is before us. The result is clarity and joy, for once we succeed in connecting our will with His Will, we experience the greatest pleasure there is and the reason for which Hashem created us.

Who has experienced as a people more challenges to their survival than the Jewish people? And it continues today, with threats of nuclear war, heaven forefend. Are we not all being challenged with our very survival even in a time where comfort and bodily pleasures readily abound? We are not here for this world, we are not here for the comforts of this world alone, although we have much to be grateful for. Just a slight movement when we are uncomfortable, when we feel threatened, when things are not going smoothly as we would like, could be all that is needed to change the world, for it would be an exercise demonstrating emunah and bitachon, it would be a choice reflective of truth, a revelation of our awareness that He alone is King and that we wish to serve Him above all other considerations.

May we begin yearning every moment to ask Hashem to please show us what we can do that is precious to Him. And may we straighten out our own will in doing so. And may we, whose souls are all hewn from the heel of Adom HaRishon, succeed in turning everything around and bringing about the redemption immediately!