

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Golus of Esav, Days of Esav, the Three Weeks inspiration from Mesillas Yesharim to dissolve our negatively charged emotions.

"Let us enter into an accounting' Therefore the rulers over their evil inclinations say, 'Let us come and compute the world's account, the loss entailed by the performance of a mitzvah, against the gain that one secure through it, and the gain that one acquires through a transgression against the loss that it entails..."

This true counsel could not have been given nor its truth recognized by any except those who had already departed from beneath the hand of their evil inclination and come to dominate it. For if one is still imprisoned by his evil inclination, his eyes cannot see this truth and he cannot recognize it. For the evil inclination literally blinds his eyes and he becomes as one who walks in the darkness, where there are stumbling blocks before him which his eyes do not see....For the darkness of night can cause two types of error in relation to a man's eye: it may either cover his eye so that he does not see what is before him at all, or it may deceive him so that a pillar appears to him as a man, or a man as a pillar. In like manner, the earthiness and materialism of this world is the darkness of night to the mind's eye and causes a man to err in two ways,

First it does not permit him to see the stumbling blocks in the ways of the world, so that the fools walk securely, fall, and are lost without having experienced any prior fear...

The second error, which is even worse than the first, stems from the distortion of their sight, so that they see evil as though it were goodness itself, and good as if it were evil, and, because of this, strengthen themselves in clinging to their evil ways.

For it is not enough that they lack the ability to see the truth, the evil staring them in the face, but they also see fit to find powerful substantiations and empirical evidence supporting their evil theories and false ideas.

This is the great evil which embraces them and brings them to the pit of destruction...'The heart of this nation has become fattened, and his ears have become heavy, and its eyes have turned aside, lest...' all this because of their being under the influence of the darkness and subject to the rule of their evil inclination ." (Mesillas Yesharim Chapter 3 Divisions of Watchfulness p.37-41)

Every day I wake up to a new door to open – a deeper understanding of how the strength of my neshama has been diverted to a jealousy, a desire or an ambition that has been operating within me in such a hidden way that I truly did not see it, otherwise thinking that what I am doing to good and true. Each time I have a new understanding, it is so pleasant. Yet now I know there will always be another door to open on this path, because it is an infinite path. What makes it a little less crushing though is understanding the process, having tools to address it, and knowing that the painful teshuva is beneficial.

Ultimately the topic under discussion is our emotional charges, specifically our negatively charged emotions, which can often disguise themselves as basic solid principles of life necessary for survival – true reflections of the needs of our animalistic instincts. Within the will of man snakes through the yetzer hara drawing us towards its rationales.

We are designed this way because Hashem has given us true free will.

We are in the final golus, the golus of Esav, who chose to fulfill his animalistic instincts and pursue his desires rather than exercise free will and gevurah to establish the spiritual channels of the 365 negative commandments. Had he done so, perhaps matters would be easier for us. Nevertheless, it was the will of Hashem that he failed. And here we are, thousands of years later, each with something to repair to bring us back to the level of Adom before the sin. Adom, used his free willed choice and sent us out of Gan Eden and into this world. His intention was to show Hashem what man can do here, how we can sanctify His name, how by remembering Hashem in this darkness, we can make a glorious Kiddush Hashem. He did not calculate that Hashem would re-wire us so that the evil inclination would become internalized and therefore much harder to identify and choose against.

The winter and summer months are called the Days of Esav because of the extreme imbalance, darkness and cold, and then light and heat, both of which pull us into situations where we are imbalanced and struggle. How do we say no to the despair of winter and the passions of summer? We remember Esav, who cared nothing about the birthright and therefore followed his passions. And we are inspired to cling to holiness and to serving Hashem. Just say "No" and we repair the lingering quality of the Esav in all of us

And if we are struggling still, Hashem gives us the 10th of Teves in the winter and the 9th of Av in the summer, times to remember the destruction of the Temples. That is where we are today, in the three weeks, a few days before the 9 days. Imagine being able to walk into the Temple and see Hashem's spiritual reality before our eyes. Would that help us to exercise the ability to say no to our despair and passions?

When we could see the spiritual reality of the world, it puts our inner struggle into perspective. Just imagine wanting to get even with someone and then imagine that the the next day Moshiach is here – are you proud to go up to Moshiach and say I could have given in to honor Hashem's name but instead I got even? HARDLY. We will be very embarrassed. That is the inoculation we received from being able to go into the temple. We had a visual representation of the spiritual realty and that could have served to help us just say no to aveiras.

But in the end, even seeing the spiritual reality did not keep us from losing the temple due to our sins.

Something more has to happen. We as individuals can if we choose to build a relationship with Hashem with Him in the center, constantly asking what is it that Hashem wants me to do here to bring honor to His name? We have to search honestly inside for the negatively charged emotions that are subconsciously operating not only in concert with our animalistic instincts but that have gone toward the yetzer hara instead of serving Hashem. And we may be totally blind to it. For that is our construction. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon us to do an accounting, as the Mesillas Yesharim suggests, so that we see how our choices, often subconscious, are keeping us from closeness to Hashem and verbally introspect in dialogue with Hashem to ask Him to help us bring our emotions to loving, fearing and emulating Hashem.

The Days of Esav, the golus of Esav, and the Three Weeks are opportunities for us to bring into our consciousness ideas that can help us see through the wiles of the yetzer hara and free the strength of our souls to serve Hashem. In all the world, there is nothing but the simple unity of Hashem, who gives us free choice and intellect to hunt for Him.

May we each be able to re-direct our negatively charged emotions and rationales from willfulness that is captured by the yetzer hara to free willed choice to serve Hashem and may Hashem answer us with great rapture and redemption!