

Nourishment for the Neshama

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How can I best express myself Jewishly in today's world?

In Psalm 25 verse 9

"He guides the humble with justice, and He teaches the humble His way"

Verse 14

"The secret counsel of Hashem is with those who fear Him: Gd reveals Divine truths only to those scholars of Torah who are imbued with the fear of Gd " Radak"

There is a story of a family that, when they put their children to sleep, they asked the children who they love. The children would mention all the relatives, near and far, and in this way, the children felt close to them, recalling them every night.

One week, one of the little girls had earned a beautiful prize for her hard work at home. Her mother had given her a trinket necklace. That night, at bedtime, her father asked her who she loved and of course she named him and others. He then asked her if she could have the necklace, if the girl would give him the necklace. The little girl clutched the necklace and could not part with it. She offered her doll, her purse and other things.

The next night, the same scene. Again the father asked her if she would give him her necklace, and she again offered other things. She just could not part with the necklace.

The third night, when the father came in. The little girl had something in her hand. Before her father could say a word, she told her father, "Here Tati, I love you and I want to give you my necklace."

The father then took the necklace, and out of his pocket, he took a beautiful jewelry box and opened it and gave her a pearl necklace to replace the trinket necklace.

The message of this story is that we are clutching values and tactics that we have come to rely on while in the golus. How to be successful, how to accomplish, how to manage – all the wisdom that mankind has accumulated – building systems, governments, and more – these are our trinket necklace. We are clutching them, we don't want to give them up. They represent the best of our intelligence and achievements. But what are we holding onto? Do we not realize that Hashem is waiting for us to give Him our trinkets so that He can give us the Moshiach, the Geula Shelama?

We are afraid to put down what we know because it is our sense of mastery of the world. What will we do if we forsake what we have used to accomplish?!

First we must realize that the only reason that our strategies have been successful is because Hashem permitted it. If He decides that it will no longer be effective, our strategies will backfire and fail. Realizing this, we must deeply introspect regarding the basis of what we are doing. Is it really time to be doing business as usual? What if for the time period from now until Pesach we let go a little and examine closely what we are doing from Hashem's perspective? Are we treating every Jew respectfully in His eyes? Are our actions only from the side of chesed? Do we genuinely love His creations? Are we advancing our own agenda or are we trying to do Ratzon Hashem?

Secondly, we must realize that stepping back from our conception of successful tactics is a taste of humility. The entirety of our thinking has a quality to it that is far less than the Divine mind. Hashem's Torah is as it exists in the minds of the Torah scholars in the generation – Hashem defers to the Torah as it exists in the mind of His Torah scholars. If we are relying on tactics from the secular world, albeit with Torah goals, is it not obvious that we are adding to the wrong side of how Hashem is managing the

world? If we who learn and practice Torah choose the same tactics for success as world leaders and corporate executives, and if we choose definitions of self-esteem and survival that place the emphasis on the ego and the body, we are giving strength to the very forces at play that seek to destroy us.

Thirdly, we must realize that when we choose to see that Hashem is all there is, that there is only Hashem and that we wish for Him to know that we are here to try to serve Him at every moment, we create holiness by acknowledging the limitations of our Divinely given human intelligence – that we re-connect our intelligence to the Divine root in order to sanctify His name and unity and to bring us the greatest pleasure that there is to experience in this world, the experience of being part of Perfection. We become part of Perfection when we set aside thinking that is not firmly rooted in Torah.

Here are three simple applications of this concept:

Firstly, it is human nature to take a grain of truth and use that to politically affect the way others see a person. This is called propaganda. It is very effective building coalitions of people toward a goal. It is very damaging to the person who is being affected by the propaganda. Taking a grain of truth and painting a damaging picture of another person for political gain is not a Torah value. Chas v'chalilah a person might even tell themselves that this type of deception is permitted as given by the example of Yaakov Aveinu deceiving his father by dressing as Esau and by comprehending the trickery of Lavan so that Hashem could protect him from the evil. The yetzer hara is a small hairsbreadth away from truth, but that hairsbreadth is everything! Torah tells us how to handle a person that we are upset or angry with. It is direct and respectful and gives the opportunity for reconciliation. Tochacha with love in our hearts, davening and giving blessings, asking a third party to intercede and more reflect the Divine attributes that we are chosen to bring into this world. If we abdicate for the tactics of secular society, who will bring into this world the Divine image?

Secondly, it is human nature to see things from our own perspective and to have emotional reactions and subsequent actions that communicate in a confronting or painful way our displeasure with each other at times. This is because we often judge ourselves and others. We have to make judgments all day long about what is and is not the will of Hashem, but we are instructed to love each other and not judge each other. Hashem is Tzedek and the Judge. We must remember that the external triggers to our negativity are specific opportunities for us to tell Hashem that it is He we wish to be connected to. When we feel low and upset, it is often because the words or actions of another person have been directed toward reducing us to zero in a hurtful way, whether intended or not. We must learn to label that entire cycle as corrupt because by definition if we are in such a negative space, we have been disconnected from attachment to Gd. First aid here is to re-connect by calming the mind, remembering that there is hashgacha pratis, that everything Hashem does is good even if we do not feel that it is, and that whatever it is is tzedek. We must beseech Gd to answer our cries to Him, trying at every moment to take our next step in avodas Hashem by emulating Him. For example, just as Hashem tolerates our insults to Him (e.g. our halachic mistakes and omissions) so must we tolerate others' insults to us.

Thirdly, we must properly understand the impact of our hurtful words and actions. So often when upset, we are motivated to just "tell it like it is," to speak out the blunt truth for the sake of everyone, getting it on the table, off our chests, clear the air or whatever justification we may use. Understanding the nature of words and the Grand Canyon communication gap that Hashem created is important to understanding what truth and falsehood really is. If I am upset and I tell you in no uncertain terms how upset I am, I may feel like I am saying the truth. But if I am hurtful in the process, then what I do is lower you to a place of negativity, a place where you are disconnected and by definition a place filled with falsehoods. Thoughts and emotions are now streaming through your mind about me, about yourself, about the circumstances, about life in general, and possibly even about Gd and how He runs the world that are loud, painful and in most cases not true! Therefore the true words that I feel I have spoken have created falsehood! Only if you are able to retain attachment and devekus to Hashem will you be able to rise above the falsehood and produce something that is true for you, something that will bring you closer to Hashem. As for me, the one who wielded the stick, I do not get any benefit of having attached myself to Hashem – on the contrary, I am responsible for the negativity I cause you and for any ill outcomes that generate from it! What a price to pay! When Yosef HaTzaddik tested his brothers, he had to find out if they had done teshuva on throwing him in the pit. This was important for him to know, to be sure that they would not still try to kill him. He came up with a strategy to put them to the test. The Torah tells us that the ordeal was tremendous but that if he had gone farther, he would

have removed totally the midda of sina from Klal Yisroel and thereby would have prevented the destruction of the two Bais Hamikdoshim. He did not go this far because circumstances would not permit it. He threw his brothers into this pit of darkness and because they were tzaddikim, the sons of Yaakov Aveinu, they were successful in comprehending how to remain connected, in confronting this Egyptian King and ultimately in doing teshuva and rectifying themselves to a certain degree. For us in today's world, where we know we are not dealing with anyone on the level of the 12 brothers, we should not and cannot risk placing someone into a space of negativity from which they might possibly not successfully transcend because of the consequences upon us if they fail...the harm that comes to them is directly on our shoulders. We pay the the price for the evil that befalls them. Thus, if someone incites me to do something to you, if someone colors my thinking about you so that now I dislike or hate or judge you in a manner that is lowered, and I treat you in a way consistent with that thought because I want to align myself with the one who spoke it to me (e.g. for power, for a sense of belonging, etc.), it is I who will experience the brunt of the aveira. The one who spoke it receives the punishment of avak the aveira, a far less consequence. Thus, if someone persuades me to do wrong to you, they are achieving their purpose with MY merits and MY spiritual bank account! They are gambling with my money! It is crucial that we are aware of how quickly bank accounts get exchanged in this regard. Best is to remember that all of our actions should be from the side of chesed and that those who seduce us with power and ego toward idealistic heights are bringing us into an experience of falsehood far away from connecting to Hashem. They are offering a counterfeit pleasure – a this world pleasure – and labeling it truth and good. This is why we must be fundamentally in touch with what Hashem tells us is true and false. If we produce a good feeling in someone, then they are in a place of truth. If we produce a negative feeling in someone, they are in a place of falsehood. Their actions come to roost in our bank account! And the ripple effect too – so that if they bring someone into negativity because of it, I have to pay for that too, and on and on. Alternatively, if I treat someone well, and I trigger a chain of events that are good and kind, I get credit for that. I much prefer the latter. Thus it is my suggestion that truth and falsehood be properly understood before we embark on our relationships.

All of these applications help us achieve humility, for we see ourselves and our intelligence in a proper perspective to Hashem's Will and Intelligence. Once we re-gain calm, we realize that we do not have to take action. Hashem knows what happened. Instead, we should daven that the other party not come to ruin for their actions, as we say each night before going to sleep, because in Hashem's eyes, we are all one. That other person is in the same boat that I am in!

It won't be long (if we are not already there) before our own strategies will backfire upon us. Just take a look at all that is going on in the world. We can't understand the geo-political implications of it. But it should be quite evident that there is a Higher Power at work and that if we have not already aligned our thinking toward trying to do what is truly ratzon Hashem, it is time to put down ego, power, manipulation, pleasure seeking and frivolity and every narishkeit and start.