

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Identity crises – An answer for those of our loved friends and family who say “ being an observant Jew is just not who I am!”

The universal spiritual currency is doing what Hashem wants of me in the moment. This is what we were created to do, this is how we acquire merits and eternity, and this is how we can experience in this frame of reference the greatest joy in life.

How do I know what Hashem wants of me in the moment?

Torah teaches it to us.

Why do so many people say, “But that is not who I am!” meaning that they don’t find it pleasurable or beneficial to keep Torah and mitzvohs. And those who do keep Torah and mitzvohs, how many of us experience our observance as the greatest joy in life?

Simply stated, wherever we are on the spectrum of not deriving pleasure from a life of Torah and mitzvohs, it is most likely that we have a case of mistaken identity. The mistake is thinking that the peel of the orange is the orange itself. We are bodies and bodies have tremendous vitality and purpose, but ultimately our bodies are nothing more than a garment that will decay. It is crucial that come to identify with what is poured into the body, the neshama, which is a reflection of the Divine attributes of mercy.

Everything in heaven wants expression in the physical world, and everything in the physical world wants and needs to be elevated back to the spiritual realm. Ultimately, although it would be denying our humanity to say it is not important, what matters is not what happens to us, the traumas, the losses, the illnesses, the financial challenges and ultimately our death. Ultimately what matters is what we CHOOSE to do with it. To the extent that we are able to exert effort toward doing what Hashem wants of us in the moment, we effect a spiritual influence that translates into our eternity and our true identity. And, as we attempt to give voice and action to Hashem’s attributes of mercy and to Torah and mitzvahs, we bring into our physical being a status of rising above the natural reactions and an infusion of something holy. Likewise, when we subdue our natural reactions in favor of emulating Hashem’s attributes of mercy or enacting a mitzvah of the Torah, that act of subduing the garment over and over again is a mesiras nefesh, a circumcising of the heart, that releases into the spiritual realm the spiritual currency Hashem desires of us, doing what He wishes in the moment.

The barriers to this work are spiritually strong, guarded and provided courtesy of the yetzer hara, an angel of Hashem designed to challenge and test us. Will we fall for thinking we are that separate individual and seek our pleasure from within a sense of separate existence according to the rules of nature, human courts of justice, equity and more? Or will we notice that within the challenge is an opportunity to wash off a bit of our attachment to the garment, a cleansing that when we do it is a zechus for Klal Yisrael, a tikun that is uniquely ours to do and that no one else can do?

How, then, can a person say “Torah and mitzvahs is just not who I am?” What we are really saying is that we have yet to come to a definition of who we are that is an eternal definition, reflective of more than a one world picture.

If we do believe in more than a one world picture, why would we be satisfied with just a small share in another world? Are we satisfied with a minimal existence in this world? Probably not! And if that is “who we are,” then we had best consider that will be who we will be and how we will feel when we are in a place where we can no longer earn or grow spiritually and G.d forbid have just a minimal existence. Or worse.

What then is holding us back? Ultimately the package of thinking we are our bodies in a one world picture is tied together by nothing less than that tiny piece of doubt, the Amalek within us, that just refuses to let us take a leap into the unknown. Instead, it takes our natural desire to please and gives us a sense that we are good and just and right, and we never notice the subconscious payoff that is keeping us in darkness, that the good feeling we have from discerning what is right is coming not from truth for a higher sake but from a subtle addictive message that we are better because we are right. Perhaps we have been trained toward this - trophies for winning, rewards for good grades - being right and good pays off! But we don’t realize how deeply we might naturally feel better than others when we see what is right. And that feeling that we are better because we are right is not true. It is arrogance. We are right when we recognize that our ability to discern and choose comes from intelligence given by Hashem alone, the only Power, and beseech Him to cast our sins and those of anyone stimulating discomfort for us into the sea. For the stimulating event is orchestrated by Hashem to elicit from us a rectification, a teshuva, an opportunity to bring His light to the world and make His name known. Torah learning, especially the writings of the Ramchal, the Slonimer, Rav Wolbe, Rabbi Dessler, the Sfas Emes, the Nefesh HaChaim ,

"Duties of the Heart" and more, lovingly and gently help us bring from our hearts a love for and the relationship we seek. It starts with experiencing pleasure and it leads to loving Hashem.

Let us all comprehend how to quiet the negative corrective messages of the Amalek within, subdue it and respond instead with a Torah answer to the question, what is it that Hashem wants of me in the moment?

May our love for Hashem and our knowledge of Him grow strong, and may we make His Name known in the world.

Interested in this journey? visit Rabbi Nivin's personal development chaburas www.newchabura.com