

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Pull back the veil behind which Hashem is hidden – How to Hunt for the knowledge of G.d and reach towards true joy and find the path to redeem our souls

“...true joy – rejoicing that one has been privileged to serve the Blessed Master, who has no equal and to occupy oneself with His Torah and His mitzvot, which embody true perfection and eternal preciousness. Solomon, in his wisdom, expressed the idea thus (Song of Songs 1:4): “Draw me on; we will run after You. The King has brought me to his chambers; we will rejoice and be happy in You.” The further a person is privileged to enter into the chambers of the knowledge of the greatness of the Blessed One, the greater is his happiness and his heart rejoices within him. And again (Psalms 149:2) “Israel will be happy in its Maker. The sons of Zion will rejoice in their King.” David, who had already reached a high plane in the cultivation of [saintliness] said (Psalm 104:34) “Let my words be pleasant to Him; I will rejoice in G.d” and (Psalm 43:4), “and I will come to the altar of the Lord, to the G.d who is the joy of my rejoicing and I will praise You with the harp, O G.d” and (Psalm 71:23), “Let my lips rejoice, for I will sing to You, and my soul which You have redeemed.” His joy waxed so strong within him that his lips moved of themselves and sang upon his being engaged in the praises of the Blessed One – all this because of the great fervor of his soul, which was consumed in its joy before him, as he concludes, “and my soul which you have redeemed.” We find that the Holy One blessed be He stormed against the Jews because they omitted this element in their Divine service, as it is said (Deuteronomy 28:47): Because you did not serve the Lord your G.d with happiness and willingness of heart.” David, seeing in the spirit with which the Jews donated towards the building of the temple that they had already attained to this trait, prayed that it remain with them and not depart, as it is said (I Chronicles 29:17,18), “And now, Your people that are found here I have seen offering to You with joy. O Lord, G.d of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this eternally for the inclination of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and set their hearts aright with You.” (Mesillas Yesharim p. 253)

There is a huge difference that can often be invisible to us between being right and asking ourselves if we judge our thoughts, emotions and actions as precious to Hashem. Many people who are angry or upset will respond “But I am right!” and feel energized and proceed down a path that may or may not be precious in the eyes of Hashem. When we forget to consider the hunt for the knowledge of Hashem as part of every moment of life, the information and integration of the circumstances facing us becomes a complex maze of emotion and action to navigate based on the best operating values of our limited analytical minds, imagination and experience. If we consistently forget to hunt for the knowledge of Hashem, we may find connections that bring what we view as positive outcomes based on our imagination and determination. And if G.d forbid we become comfortable with those outcomes and continue to rely on our limited analytical minds and determination alone, we may miss entirely the purpose for which we were created –

“...for the sole purpose of rejoicing in G.d and deriving pleasure from the splendor of His Presence; for this is true joy and the greatest pleasure that can be found. The place where this joy may truly be derived is the World to Come, which was expressly created to provide for it; but the path to the object of our desires is this world, as our Sages of blessed memory have said (Avos 4:21), “This world is like a corridor to the World to Come.” (Mesillas Yesharim 17)

Hashem in His love for us gives us free will. But the purpose of free will is to help us use it to serve Him alone. Hashem has given us a real meaningful choice. How can we navigate each moment with a G.d-consciousness that strengthens our spiritual muscle toward ein od milvado, toward acknowledging that in all the world there is nothing but the simple unity of Hashem?

Below are suggestions to help us retain Yiras Hashem and Menuchas HaChaim at every moment.

I judge this thought as precious to Hashem – what mitzvah or midda may I bring to this matter?

OR

I judge this thought as not precious to Hashem – Dear Hashem it is my choice to have only thoughts and feelings that are precious to You. I am asking that the strength of my soul that is attracted to this thought or feeling shift to something that is precious to You. I am showing you (by confessing the thought or feeling the emotions connected to them in Your presence for the purpose of beseeching You to help me clean them off) the set of thoughts and feelings that I judge as not precious to You, and I see them as garments covering over the pure neshama that You send me every moment. Please help me clean off these thoughts and feelings that are covering my neshama and re-connect the strength that is hidden within those garments to passionate love, fear and emulation of Your attributes of mercy. Without Your help, how can I with my limited analytical mind move strength that has its source in You? For You are behind every force and there is no strength from any other source. Therefore please listen to my sincere confession of the areas where my strength is trapped in matters that are not precious to You and accept my prayer to You and kindly with mercy please redeem my soul so that I may with that same strength love, fear and emulate You alone.