

## Nourishment for the Neshama

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### Reflections on Politics AKA the nature of mankind

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This is NOT a political statement in support or opposition to ANY candidate. Far be it. The purpose of this article is an urgent call to every thinking person to show them that inherent in a person is a good inclination and a bad inclination, and that without this knowledge, the emotions of the heart can sometimes bring the body into a direction it does not really desire to go.

In Cheshbon HaNefesh, the author describes the connection between the heart, mind and body as follows – the emotions, the heart, are likened to horses that pull a carriage. The carriage of course is the body. In order to control the direction that the horses take the body, seichel sits in the driver's seat. Our intelligence must be the driver.

Taking intelligence one step further, we know that man, of himself, receives chochma only from the Torah. By himself, mankind cannot derive chochma from his own efforts. Chochma comes from Torah as a beginning idea. When related ideas accumulate, we call this Bina. It becomes Daas, which is what we would call intelligence, after the ideas formulate with the emotions and have shape. From here, we act.

Thus, it is very important that the beginning of the ideas be trustworthy.

We have a commandment not to lie. Why is lying such an averah? Because when someone trusts us and we lie, we are changing their reality. We take them out of the world of truth and bring them into a world of falsehood, where they develop Daas and subsequent actions that reflect unreality. However, they do not know it. If a person were to look at the definition of psychosis, it would be actions based on unfounded ideas, on thoughts that have no basis in reality. Hmmm. When we lie, we render the trusting soul who believes us to a stature of psychotic. At some point, the original lie will be known and the person will have done things that they will have regretted. The cumulative impact of the lie is very severe. And, the greatest burden is on the one who committed the wrong deeds, even though it seems that the bigger averah should go to the one who lied. We are responsible for our actions and for determining for ourselves what is true. - we should not be able to blame others for our not taking proper adult responsibility for our actions. G-d-forbid

Trusting our government is crucial. Therefore, it is, for me, a great litmus test to see how government officials speak and refer to events, for me to understand their character and how they will be affecting our reality on a day to day basis.

I am thinking back to President Nixon who resigned because of his Watergate lies. And I am thinking back to President Clinton who reinforced the belief that lying in office is okay to do. I am remembering the O.J. Simpson trial where the defense accused the police of racial prejudice and lying to frame O.J. Simpson, and playing on the emotions of the jury, prevailed with that defense in placing reasonable doubt in their minds.

How can we really know the truth? We really can't know ultimate truth. However, we can be aware of one

basic point that can help us a great deal.

That basic point is the stark realization that we have an evil inclination and a good inclination. What we learn from Rebbetzin Heller's class on Netivos Yetzer Hara by the Maharal is that the ONLY enemy we have is the evil inclination. Why?

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden. When Adom was formed, the snake, the evil inclination, was external to mankind. Adom was not confused. He saw the snake and with the way the world was set up at that time, Adom, who was incapable of doing anything he did not believe was the will of Hashem, believed that by eating of the tree of good and evil that he, Adom, would come into this lower world and resist the yetzer hara, the evil inclination, making such a wonderful Kiddush Hashem as to be pleasing to Hashem. That was his purpose, to serve Hashem in this world by resisting the external yetzer hara. However, when he did this, Hashem saw that man would become on a level that He did not create man for. Hashem at that point cut the shefa to the yetzer hara and attached it to the shefa of man, placing mankind in a life and death battle with the yetzer hara. Now, with the evil inclination internalized, the feelings and ideas that come to man are mixed up...man does not have the clarity tha Adom had in the Garden of Eden, the clarity that led him to believe he could come into this world and overcome the yetzer hara's seductions.

The purpose of the yetzer hara is to spiritually destroy us. As we know, the yetzer hara, the Accuser and the Angel of Death are one and the same, the Soton. The role of this supernatural being is to test mankind and eventually to kill him and prosecute him. The yetzer hara is an expert on how to deceive and mislead us. The evil inclination often sounds very logical, like our best friend. The only antidote we know to the yetzer hara is Torah, for the Torah shows us the ways of the yetzer hara, reinforces for us our ability to choose the yetzer tov and to choose to involve ourselves in activities that we know straight from the Torah are ways to connect to Hashem and to grow spiritually in a positive direction. We rely on Torah for our chochma, for helping us choose amongst the often confusing emotions and choices that face us each day. We choose to listen to the yetzer tov so that we grow spiritually and receive Eternal reward.

The Maharal sets forth a detailed description of the basic machinations of the yetzer hara, our mortal enemy. The evil inclination is the ONLY true enemy that mankind has. The good news is that, with Hashem's help, we actually can overcome it. We cannot overcome it by our own efforts alone, for the Soton is an angel of Hashem and is far stronger than any man. However, if a person asks Hashem to help him overcome his yetzer hara, Hashem helps. Why? Because the person has done the simple task of recognizing that he HAS a yetzer hara, that it is wrong to act on it, and that he chooses to act in a manner pleasing to Hashem.

And this is the point of this article. I beseech every person to accept that he or she has a good inclination and an evil inclination, and not to consider this a benign ordinary fact of life but rather a crucial realization through which every person can defeat evil.

So, how does this translate?

In math, we know that if  $A=B$  and  $B=C$ , then  $A=C$ . This is straight logic and is true.

Emotionally however, this does not hold. If I live in a brick house and the Queen of England lives in a brick house, it does not make me the Queen of England. Yet this is what happens emotionally with moral equivalents where there are grains of truth.

ANYONE using this kind of emotional manipulation, in my opinion, is hoping the horses will run the carriage of those who trust them into a direction that they may not really wish to go but that the speaker would LIKE them to go. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to THINK! Is what we are being told true? It may sound good and trigger our emotional responses, but, is it true? If it is not true, it says a great deal about the person saying

it. To me, it means the person is trying to manipulate me rather than respect my intelligence. If it is true, then I need to consider what the response is from the opponent. Does he admit or deny and support with apologies or explanations? Or does he avoid the fact with a smoke screen of moral equivalents and emotion packed fears?

Very often, it is impossible to really know what is true. Every person is a universe unto themselves and we all perceive things based on our experiences, history and education. One person may see something in a totally different way from another. That is why we have a democracy...even with all the self-interest and bias, somehow, as long as people are thinking and aware of human nature, it can come out to a decent position. The conditional element here is that people have to THINK and not just react or feel.

What has undermined our thinking? I remember when MTV started, short, superficial videos of life. I remember thinking to myself how empty they are, how shallow a look at life. But we now have a second generation of people and they probably do not share my perspective since this is normal to them, just like they don't remember what life was like before microwave ovens. We had to take the food out in the morning to defrost to make something in the evening.

The next thing that has undermined our thinking is the lack of needing to know how to do math because of calculators. I am not picking on calculators specifically, because I know they also enhance mathematical ability. However, I know many people who do not remember their basic math skills and rely on the calculator now. I am not convinced that is best. A good example again of this is GPS, which I recently have and really love. Before, I had to have a map, check my directions, make sure I knew where I was going. Now, I just turn on the GPS and it tells left, right, straight, etc. Again, I don't have to think. And even the internet has interfered with our thinking. Information is so readily and easily available, I don't have to remember much as long as I have my laptop. I love all these conveniences, but have we made ourselves so stupid that we don't know how to think?

Remember, we need to think because our seichel has to be in the drivers seat or our emotions will be the horses charging in a direction that our bodies may not want to go. And the yetzer hara runs wild with our emotions if it is not checked by Torah, truth and intelligence.

So, it is incumbent upon us to understand and accept that we have a yetzer hara. It is our responsibility to get an accurate job description for the Soton so that we can spot it within our own thinking. And, it is our duty to joyously refuse to listen to the Soton's suggestions, rationalizations and seductions. And when we do, we are taking out our personal garbage. If every person does this, we will restore decency and justice to the world.

Please don't allow your life energy to be persuaded into believing something that is not true. Don't be satisfied with answers from anyone whose statements are not factual, no matter how many moral equivalents or emotional analogies are evoked. If we do, we as a nation will go into psychosis - we have to trust our leaders. Something is not necessarily true just because it strikes an emotional chord. It needs to be based on facts that are verifiable. And if the facts were true at one time and a person's positions changed, we need to hear facts and evidence to verify that the original fact is no longer in play.

And if someone is challenged to respond to a fact that is verifiable and they evoke an emotional chord or a moral equivalent instead of answering honestly, please see through that. It is politics but for every voter, it drives us to act as if we suffer from psychosis.