

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Reflections on the Ten Days of Repentance 5769

Stock market crash is the backdrop to Rosh Hashana.

Arutz 7 has a report that autistics in Eretz Yisroel are predicting the end of the world.

Kassam rockets falling on Sderot

Rabbi in South Fallsburg says this is our last year in Golus.

Taliban have reorganized and strengthened in Afghanistan.

Osama Bin Laden is alive in the hills of Pakistan.

Russia is at war with Georgia.

Democratic and Republican candidates for Vice President debate each other discussing how to handle all these domestic and international issues.

Corruption in the Israeli government reported.

Wow.

During these 10 days we are instructed to look inside ourselves and to confess our sins and to repent. I think of this as every Jew taking out of the world their personal garbage. Imagine for a moment if everyone, Jew and non-Jew actually did this...if everyone truly looked inside, saw the futility of negative thinking and hurtful actions, repented, and resolved on how they plan to be kind and implemented it instead. What could happen? What would the world look like? Would we have headlines like we have now?

I mentioned this to people over Rosh Hashana, intelligent, educated people, men and women. For the most part, the vote was that this is too hard. TOO HARD!! No matter how I spoke about it, I was uninteresting. The conversation drifted back to blame for the stock market, the importance of talking to regimes we don't agree with like Iran and other things that the ordinary person truly has no direct ability to impact. I once again tried to suggest that by short circuiting the power of the yetzer hara by each Jew doing this internal work, we would have a positive effect on the world in the way Hashem maintains the world. Blank stares, too hard.

So, I pulled out Tomer Devorah and tried to share details of the Thirteen Attributes that we read at this time. Here we are told that not only is it not too hard, but that we should not forget to do it when the opportunity arises so that these traits of Hashem will remain visible in the world. Very nice, TOO HARD!

When I hear that, I think of Rebbetzin Heller's series on the Maharal (www.naaleh.com). In that series, we

learn that the yetzer hara is a blemish that feeds off lack, and that the yetzer hara takes us in the wrong direction through anger, jealousy, laziness, desires and more, sounding like a very intelligent great friend. Being that the yetzer hara, the Soton and the Angel of Death are one and the same, it appears to be a reasonable statement that the only enemy we HAVE is the yetzer hara, who manifests itself through the manner of different people who find it simply too hard to say NO to the yetzer hara. I do not mean to sound judgmental here, for I am also constantly pursued by negative, insecure thinking. But what I have learned is that if I give in and act on the yetzer hara's seductive suggestions, I myself bring that negative thing into the world, the thing I am afraid of, the thing I judge to be inappropriate, the thing that I don't like. By allowing it space in my mind, it may lead to an action or a word and now it is alive in Olam HazeH! I have given birth to an avenging angel of some kind whose existence is beyond my control until I regret it, do teshuva, and remove it! And worst of all, I probably did it because I believed it would help me or someone else!

Let's digress for a moment. We met the yetzer hara in the Garden of Eden, when it was external to mankind. Adom did not have an internal yetzer hara. He saw the evil inclination and saw the world and believed he could do great sanctification of Hashem's name by coming into this lower world and still resisting the evil inclination (which was external). He ate from the apple. Hashem then changed the flow of energy to mankind...He cut the shefa from the yetzer hara and reattached it to the shefa flowing to mankind, so that now the yetzer hara would be internalized, causing confusion. He required that man should labor for the good that Hashem had been providing in abundance in Gan Eden, and that women should have unusual desire for their husbands and pain in childbirth. When mankind acts in accordance with the yetzer hara, it creates EVIL indeterminate forces through which Hashem sustains the world. Likewise, when mankind acts in accordance with the yetzer tov, the good inclination, it creates GOOD indeterminate forces through which Hashem sustains the world in accordance. And here we are.

We all hope every day that Eliyahu HaNavi appear to announce the coming of Moshiach. What is it that we wait for? We wait for Olam Haba, the World of Truth, the return of Gan Eden. Yet I believe our ability to have Olam Haba is not an instant tea....we have to brew it, we have to build it within ourselves, we have to prepare ourselves.

If we want the return of Gan Eden, and if what is different about us now is that the yetzer hara is internalized instead of external, I am suggesting that we begin "spitting out" the yetzer hara every moment of every day. Got a fear? Tell yourself "We don't want fear Hashem, we only want You" (dismiss the fear, fear only Hashem in awe, Who only does good.)

Then my friends, what do we make of all the suffering? Surely we see the suffering and evil in the world...how do we say it is good just because it comes from Hashem? That is correct because there is a two world picture going on. Hashem has not changed. He WAS IS AND WILL ALWAYS BE, kind, tolerant, patient, merciful, all thirteen attributes.

In our world, we see terrible tyrants, terrorists, evil murderers, corruption and more trying to dominate nations and systems. We see their success and we are inclined to align ourselves with the biggest ones, to avoid harm to ourselves. This is human nature, this is the way corruption works. The locus of control in our minds shifts to obey the one causing pain in order to stop the pain from being inflicted upon us. If only we can convince this big bully that we really like them, perhaps they will stop trying to destroy us. Or perhaps even worse, we begin to emulate the biggest bullies, seeing them as powerful and deciding that we can accomplish more by such tactics. Sound like a good idea to you?

Let's look at an analogy. If a person takes all the colors of paint and mixes them together, we get brown or black, muddy, darkness. If a person takes all the colors of light and mixes them together, we get white light. It makes little sense – why don't all the lights make a dark light? My own thought on this is to show us that there is a two world picture. When we suffer, we believe that Hashem is sending this for our good even

though we don't understand it. It is a kaparah, a cleansing, something to bring us to a higher plane. And this brings us comfort. When our grandparents died in Auschwitz at the hands of Hitler, Hamach Shemo, there was terrible suffering, just as there is now with the terrorists. Yet, with Hashem in the picture, we understand that we are to draw close, to emulate Him, to shine His Light. And we feel better knowing that we are in Hashem's Hand and not in the hands of man. White light instead of brown mud. We never want to be the cause of harm to any Jew, for there will wait for us an avenging angel and what shall we then say to Hashem? Oh, everyone was doing that?

My point is that not only isn't it too hard to work on overcoming the yetzer hara, but it brings us the greatest pleasure that there is on earth, to live close to Hashem Yisborach. It is the Emes. Is it better to live in Olam HaSheker, with solutions that man has created to solve problems arising from living in Olam Hasheker? Or is it worth a little fortitude to take a look inside and find the point of truth within us, the point of truth that knows we are all going to die one day and meet our Creator and explain what we did with our lives to bring His Middos into the world? What will we say? It was too hard?

May we resolve during this time to find shiurim (on www.naaleh.com, the Maharal series with Rebbetzin Heller on how the yetzer hara is a great place to start) or seforim (Derech Hashem, The Knowing Heart, Duties of the Heart, Tomer Devorah, Tanya and more) that guide us in understanding our nature and how to rise above our limitations and use our free will to cleave to Hashem through acts of kindness and emulating His Middos.

And may we merit to see the Moshiach speedily in our day with protection for Klal Yisroel.