

## Nourishment for the Neshama

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### Reflections on the Emotions of our Heart and Action

Have you ever had a fight with someone where you felt strong negative feelings for that person? Were you able to put it past you? Unless the matter produced a total turn around in facts so that the cause of the matter was proved untrue, chances are, you were able to make up with the person to a certain degree but the relationship never regained the footing it had. A remnant, a scar, remains on our hearts that is a blemish. And this can be true even if it was due to our own misperceptions, based on a grain of truth and a negative reaction. Things can get very blown out of proportion and distorted, and leave terrible scars.

“A person who feels strongly about something will pursue it relentlessly” says Rabbi Yitzchak Berkowitz in his sefer on the Six Constant Mitzvahs (p. 236). He continues:

“But are emotions always rational? Can we control them? Take a look at people reading a novel. When they sit down on the sofa and begin to read, they know that they are about to enter the world of imagination. They know that it is fiction. Before long, however, they reader begins to feel an emotional attachment to the characters. A moving novel will cause a reader to live through the trials and tribulations together with the characters. Try to stop someone in the middle of a novel and point out that the fear he is feeling for the hero or heroine in danger is all for naught, because he or she never existed. Will it make a difference? Hardly. Their emotions have taken control of them...

“Since the heart responds so readily to petty or false cues, can we trust it to make our decisions in life? Much as the heart is crucial, we must remember that it is no more than a muscle. Like the heart of every other member of the animal kingdom the human heart instinctively produces emotions that protect us or help us survive. But as humans, we must strive for more. We must place our heart in the service of our superior intellect.” (p.237)

Our emotions affect our decision-making process and often may cause us to make improper choices. In this world, everything appears separate and we sometimes have doubt about the ultimate unity of Creation. The example of Shaul HaMelech shows this – that his compassion led to failure. By listening to emotions that were a product of his misguided heart twice – when his heart told him to be compassionate toward the Amalekite King as well as when his heart later told him to protect his kingdom and his family’s future (whereby he followed it in an act that totally lacked compassion.) he shows us why the Torah warns us not to follow our hearts alone – our values become distorted when we accept emotions that should not exist. We must learn to control and redirect them when they are inappropriate. (paraphrased from Rav Berkowitz’s sefer, pages 240-242).

“The primary objective in combating the natural feelings generated by our heart is to circumvent them by developing more powerful ones for the truth that we have come to know from the first five constant mitzvahs”[Hashem is One, There is no other power, love Hashem, fear Hashem, Know there is Hashem] (p.244) We must not react to our feelings, we must act in response to Hashem’s Will .How do we do this? Hashem says “My child, give your heart to Me”(Mishlei 23:26)

“Take your heart and submit it to your intellect. Emotions can be combated only with more intense emotions, which, in turn, can be created only by the mind. As we develop clarity in our understanding of these mitzvos, we should become emotionally involved with them. We should walk around feeling “Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu,” feeling fortunate that we have the opportunity to take part in the purpose of this world, and that we will eventually reap the most pleasurable reward possible in the World to Come. The clearer we are in our purpose, the more emotion we will generate for it. These emotions can become so strong that they will make us impervious to the threat of the heart’s challenging emotions.” (p. 244-245) To know there is Hashem and that Hashem is One, to Love and Fear Hashem and to strengthen ourselves in knowing that there is no other power are daily, hourly, minute by minute choices in the milieu of opportunities presented in our day. The choices we make are what bring down shefa from above.

“We learn from King David that the first step is to avert the danger by avoiding situations in which we may be tempted to indulge in cravings or senseless passion. We must face the difficult reality that we are human and that we have a yetzer hara inside us that tries constantly to lead us toward sin. Yes we realize that he is part of the great purpose of the world but we must still admit to ourselves that we are often too weak to resist his constant badgering. If we are honest about how much of a presence he is in our system, we will train ourselves to run away from potential temptation...the good news is that cravings are not in the sole possession of the yetzer hara. We can develop cravings for spirituality as well.” (p. 245)

A person who is mevater, who chooses to see only good in others or to do chesed with someone who wronged them, who gives the benefit of the doubt – this person is not a doormat although it may look like that. This person understands that doing the Will of Hashem, Who is the Only Power, Who is so big and omnipotent as to be able to provide all of the person’s life, needs and more (for all eternity), is a sensible approach and a real alternative to taking a stand that might cause himself to offend or create machlokes or any type of destruction in the spiritual realms. And when we rise above our limited selves to serve Hashem, Rebbetzin Heller, in her shiur on Yechezkeil on [www.naaleh.com](http://www.naaleh.com) tells us that Hashem has an outstretched arm that lifts us above the circumstances from harm, and that this turning toward Hashem, this teshuva, unfolds tremendous healing from Hashem.

If it is good, then Hashem wants us to have it, provided our sins donot create a barrier to it. Giving our heart to Hashem protects us from scarring ourselves and blocking the good He wants to give us through ill-advised actions stemming from our own this-world only perceptions.

May Hashem help us to develop the emotions we need to be able to rise above our every day challenges and limitations to respond with actions that serve Him.