

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Reflections on the joy of closeness to the Creator

Looking at the world today, it might seem to a non-religious person that religion itself is the cause of today's troubles. After all, look at all the wars, killings, and suffering that is rampant in the name of the Creator. For this reason, people may turn to atheism, secularism and more. Doing so takes a person into unreality!

Reality is understanding that there is a Creator Who makes us every moment and Who is running things to the smallest detail. If we comprehend this – even just intellectually - we logically should want to understand more. How could we not investigate, for after 120 years, we surely don't want to find out that we lived in unreality!

How do we expand our consciousness to bring us into reality?

The most tangible way is to explore something that we can understand internally, our emotions, our personal energy – specifically, our own Gd-given piece of eternity, called our soul.

We, mankind, are made in the Creator's image. Therefore, it makes sense that we should strive to be like the Creator. How do we get to know Him? His Attributes of Mercy are described in Tomer Devorah (see other articles on this blog).

As we develop a close relationship with the Creator, with Hashem, there are certain things that come into focus which dispel the notion that religion is the cause of today's troubles. What we find instead is that all people – whether religious or not -- have a nature that needs to rise to a level, of being more lovingkind, like the Creator, in order to be happy and healthy in this world. We are instructed to choose life!

For example, a person who does not respect another person does not have love and fear of the Creator, and they come to feel aggravated, disappointed, and entertain unhealthy thoughts that are damaging to himself as well as to the other person. Anyone who works on drawing closer to the Creator, blessed be He, comes to understand how much each and every one of us is loved unconditionally, is given patience, mercy, and good so that we can continue our spiritual journey. When we understand our own imperfections and how good the Creator is to us, it is incumbent upon us (upon we who wish to emulate Him) to have more patience and respect and tolerance for each other. We learn to turn our eyes upward and trust in the Creator. Yes, our adversary may be plotting to harm us or tear us down. But no, our thoughts remain invested in emulating the Creator and we choose not to entertain negativity of any kind.

The Creator does not want us to divert and unleash the holy energy that He sends us to destroy the world or each other. He wants us to live within the frame of reference and the morals that He sets out for us. Thus, if we trigger within ourselves gevurah and cruelty in His name, we run the risk of taking it to such extremes as we see today – the diversion of holy energy for human goals. It is incumbent upon mankind to remember the Creator's goals of love, tolerance, mercy, kindness and personal growth and to set spiritual goals according to His moral standards rather than goals of human nature – dominance, destruction, control, and death. Those who feel that directing their energies toward dominance and control is proper are experiencing a counterfeit pleasure. The greatest pleasure a person can know is the pleasure of using our holy energy and creativity in a way that is pleasing to Hashem, that acknowledges Him as the King, as the Creator and life force behind the universe. A good test of whether we are using our holy energy in the way we were designed to use it is to see if we and those affected by our actions are nurtured and benefitting from our actions.

There is tremendous power in latching onto gevurah for human goals. By understanding how easily trapped people can be by the attractiveness of power, control, ego victories and more, we may be seduced into setting a course for these goals, which are quite achievable. We know how to persecute. We know how to tear down. We know how to exclude. We know how to use and take. We know how to victimize. We know

how to manipulate. If these are your goals, you can certainly achieve them, and there are many fine examples of it to emulate. And the mitzvahs that we do along the way? They will accrue to the people we hurt, for chances are that in order to be successful with the goals above, people would need to hide behind community position and good deeds to cover their true intentions. Only the Creator, Who knows the intentions of every person, can judge. But judge He will, and if we use our mitzvahs to jockey for position so that we can fulfill our taking agendas, those mitzvahs go to the ones we hurt.

Alternatively, perhaps we have become trapped in fulfilling the wishes of powerful people who we are controlled by, who we don't wish to be victimized by. Have we subjected ourselves to man instead of to the Creator? Is our concept of the Creator conscious and growing or something unattainable and remote, such that we feel we must align ourselves with and rely on man-made societies and structures? Are we abandoning reason to cause the powers that be to turn their wrath upon us just so that we can do what is good and right in the eyes of Hashem? Surely there must be a heter, a leniency, so that we can live in this world and still keep our mitzvahs?

For Jewish people, the concept of Ein Od Milvado is central. We place the Creator at the center and being out of rapport for even one moment means that we have departed from reality. There are not two solutions, one for the next world and one for this world. There is only one approach that brings us the greatest pleasure imaginable, to think, speak and act in ways that are pleasing to the Creator. Settling for counterfeit pleasures might be easier, but only for this world. Heaven help us!

Let us make for ourselves certain goals – that if we see we are concerned with ego pleasures and things that have this world “me” as a goal, make sure that we are not being controlled by comfort and wants. Instead, look upward and see what the Creator wants from us and do it. A day of comfort and ease may feel pleasant but it is empty and lonely compared to a day when we are able to bring in the Creator’s light, to feel bonded and connected to Him through mitzvahs and middos, to feel close, small, and beloved to Him. Yes, our lower self might silently grumble, but soon, over time, even our lower self will feel lacking if it seeks only comfort and ego victories, for these pale in comparison to the joy a person can truly experience in this world from mesiras nefesh, mitzvahs, and connection through emulating His Attributes of Mercy.

May the Creator have mercy on those who are not ready or able to embark upon the task of attaching to Him, for this is normal and average and understandable, given how we are constructed. Yet I pray that we train ourselves to make ourselves in His Image so that the light we bring to the world may make us meritorious for redemption and so that we will not be embarrassed when the Moshiach comes.