

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Seeing who we are spiritually - One soul, Nishmas Am Yisrael, for all time

On Tu B'Shevat Rabbi Tatz gave a shiur explaining that trees and people have very much in common. Structurally, trees are rooted in the earth, they have trunks and bear fruits that feed us. and structurally, people are rooted in the heavens, with bodies that bear fruits that nourish our families, our communities, and the world(s) at large. We hope we have a positive impact here!

The image of our soul reaching from the heavens to nourish the worlds through our thoughts speech and deeds thereby likening us to the trees when we are in our most physical sense in the animal kingdom rather than the plant kingdom is yet another conflicting image. Hashem places a soul that is spiritually built like a tree vertically extending through four worlds into a body that is built to horizontally traverse time and space and then decay. We speak about genealogical trees for our family history. We don't speak about breeding without risking an insult, for the reference to a lower form of life exists in that term, where it does not in reference to a family tree.

Perhaps this axis of existence can be of assistance when we view ourselves in a conflict. Rabbi Dessler teaches about behira and explains that often our habits are due to a self-deception that we struggle to rectify with our intellectual understanding of what is good. He gives an example of a man who smokes and suffers from the coughing, who resolves not to smoke and then deceives himself that one more smoke won't matter, and of course the coughing resumes. This internal struggle is a battle between the more present and immediate physical and emotional and egotistical urges versus the intellect that wishes to do what is truly good.

Defining what is truly good becomes crucial, because if someone were to say that it is good for him to smoke because it is too emotionally hard for him to stop smoking and he suffers too much, would there be people who would agree to just let him smoke, that it is "good" for him to smoke?

Torah comes exactly for that purpose, to give us parameters for what is and is not permitted on the horizontal plane of conduct, emotion, desires and speech. Torah teaches us that the ultimate goal of our conduct, emotion, desires and speech is to reveal Hashem's will and attributes. We are instructed to refine our choices by activating love in our hearts for Hashem, to cling to the love of our Creator, and to be so satiated in knowing that He is where our roots are embedded, in the soul of Nishmas Am Yisrael, drawing all our sustenance and having clarity that no sustenance is coming to us through anything other than His Will albeit our hishtadlus gives the appearance that our sustenance is coming through systems that we understand and control. The image of the axis provides a mechanism for asking ourselves questions in order to avoid the natural deception that we are susceptible to.

When we experience physical pleasures, food, intimacy, warmth, verbal praise, and more, do we realize that these "condition" us towards values that are on a horizontal plane? Despite our best efforts, it will always be so, for that is the design that Hashem has created for us to struggle with. Yes He desires that we be happy serving Him. Torah teaches us the balance we need to be careful that we don't expand into the time

and space existence He provides us with and which we need in order to bring spiritual fruit and nurture to our families, communities and the world(s).

Nishmas Am Yisrael is one soul. We have only ever been one soul for all of history. We exist in different times and spaces, but we are all one soul. Thus it is important to not be distracted by individuality in time and space to the degree that we overlook that each of us has a unique opportunity to transcend our horizontal reality in favor of bringing kadosh into the world that benefits all of Nishmas Am Yisrael for all eternity. There is no one who cannot choose to see this. What stands in our way is that natural self-deception. And this can be something a person in a lifetime does not ever see, lo aleinu.

The process of peeling away layers of falsehood that veil the real opportunity before us, if there is a great deal of tuma over us, can be confusing and there are many stones that might not move much, if ever. Nevertheless, the effort to try to peel away these veils and move these stones is what the Vilna Gaon says is the purpose for being here, to rectify our middos, to improve and fix our corrupted character traits. The vision of this for someone who understands this intellectually but is hesitant to begin should not be of one holding their nose and taking their "spiritual" medicine. Rather, the Ramchal teaches us that we are empowered to experience the greatest pleasure possible for a soul, the experience of touching Hashem's perfection while in a body, in a place where Hashem's presence is concealed, and that a moment of such pleasure here is even greater than the pleasure available in the next world.

Recycling our problems for pleasure sounds like a much fairer deal than the suffering we experience. But how does that make sense in a world where there is tremendous loss, suffering, illness, hardship, hatred, and more? It is beyond our ability to solve directly terrible tragedies or answer such a question. The Torah tells us what our function is and that our choices nourish the worlds and that is the basis for our use of free will.

Let us remember that what seems like pleasure may be laced with something that is far from a mitzvah.

The basic molecule of pleasure is desire and a component of personal interest, emotion and ego. The atoms can be coming from talva and galva as easily as from permitted pleasures and passion to serve Hashem.

When we are choosing an emotion to act upon, stop and ask ourselves, what is our thought behind this emotion? Is it something we want and will assert with our personal powers? If so, why not take a deep breath and ask if the thing we want is something Hashem wants too? And if Hashem wants it and we are frustrated, then is it His will at the moment? And if it seems to not be His will at the moment, can we direct our anger, our disappointment, our fear for the future to burn out lower levels of behavior, submit to Him, and ask Him for the unification of His Name, to accept and re-direct that same fire power with sincere awe of Hashem asking Him to please add our passion to a protection for all Klal Yisrael from our enemies, may the added light be a merit for redemption.

When we do this, we experience pleasure, even if it is not the pleasure we thought we were pursuing. When we do this, we truly become a spiritual tree bringing a flow from the roots of Nishmas Am Yisrael through serving Hashem in this world. It is a struggle to use our life and our Gd given talents to overcome our nature in pursuit of giving pleasure to Hashem. There is great pleasure in doing so, a higher pleasure than the ones we know naturally. It is the pleasure for which we are designed, may all glory be recognized as Hashem's, Who Gives us good in this world and for all eternity.

May we cling to Him and to seeking the pleasure that He desires for us and may doing so unify His Name, end sinas chinum, join together Klal Yisrael, and bring a new light to the world.