

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Why should I shift myself to a Gd oriented perspective of self?

Reflections on the value of a Gd oriented perspective of self

Healthy self-esteem includes the understanding that our ultimate importance is the importance that we feel when we comprehend that we are connected to Hashem and have infinite value because we are part of an Infinite Being. We can choose to be the way that His Middos can enter this dimension. So choosing removes the concealment of Hashem and brings Him out of hester panim – we become vessels through which He can walk within this world – a keyboard He can count on to bring His mercy and love into this frame of reference and thereby revealing Him, taking Him out of hester panim.

(What are His Middos that we are to bring into this world? See Tomer Devorah to understand how Hashem demonstrates these middos towards us and how we can emulate Him but here is a brief introduction to Tomer Devorah and Hashem's 13 attributes of mercy "It is proper for man to imitate his Creator, resembling Him in both likeness and image[1] according to the secret of the Supernal Form.[2] Because the chief Supernal image and likeness is in deeds[3], a human resemblance merely in bodily appearance and not in deeds debases that Form. Of the man who resembles the Form in body alone it is said: 'A handsome form whose deeds are ugly.' For what value can there be in man's resemblance to the Supernal Form in bodily limbs if his deeds have no resemblance to those of his Creator? Consequently, it is proper for man to imitate the acts of the **Supernal Crown**, which are the thirteen highest attributes of mercy[4] hinted at in the verses:

Who is a God like unto Thee, that beareth iniquity

And passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?

He retaineth not His anger for ever,

Because he delighteth in mercy.

He will again have compassion upon us;

He will subdue our iniquities:

And Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Thou wilt show faithfulness to Jacob, mercy to Abraham

As Thou has sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.[5]
Hence it is proper that these thirteen attributes, which we shall now expound, be found in man.")

We want to remove from ourselves the sense of a separate perceived existence – we are connected and a vital part of an Infinite Being and by viewing ourselves as such, as an extension of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, we awaken the Gdly part within us and we embark on a transcendental sense of self that takes us on an infinite path of connection and closeness to Hashem. Such a comprehension goes beyond seeing ourselves as small and beloved in His eyes, asking for everything that we need. What is added is a sense that while we are small and beloved in His eyes and asking for what we need, we are containers of His Presence, desiring for our actions to be pleasing to Him. By so doing, we qualify ourselves to receive the things we personally need to survive and thrive (i.e. like an expense account for a business man bringing in the profitable deals.)

Unhealthy self-esteem stems from feeling that our value is based on acquiring things that we view as important which are tied to ourselves. In other words, if I view an action or an outcome as important because it puts forward my personal agenda for my own shelo lishma goals, I am creating a layer of concealment to those who view my actions because my own ego wants are most likely eclipsing Hashem's infinite reality. If I have a taking agenda, no matter how hidden it may be, those to whom my actions are visible will see that I have somehow controlled something for my own benefit, even inflicted loss or harm upon someone albeit untraceable to my own actions, and I will have demonstrated only how to take successfully, not how to serve Hashem. I will have exposed the loopholes in the system, how to hide in the darkness! I will have shown that I fear getting caught by people, expecting that Hashem will not involve Himself or interfere with my wishes. And yes, it is up to Hashem whether to grant success for my prayers and requests, but His

“Yes” does not necessarily mean that I have made Him visible. Making Hashem visible is something that takes place when I properly use prayer and my behira to express gratitude and servitude to Hashem, and when I show commitment to fostering the spiritual growth through lovingkindness of those who cross my path for their sake (not for my own sake) so that everyone feels my warmth and caring unconditionally. If I am utilizing anyone’s circumstances or position to advance my own agenda (i.e. for ego reward or recognition or respect) or utilizing my energy in a controlling way so that I may personally benefit or effect a desired result due to a selfish or even hateful agenda, I am experiencing a counterfeit of utilizing my creative energy to serve Hashem that keeps me in darkness and out of the true reality of the world. I may be successful. Hashem may say “yes” to my request. But I will not have brought Hashem out of hester panim because my request could be stemming from sina, from hatred, which conceals Hashem’s light, love and mercy. If I feel connected and loving at all opportunities, I would never question that Hashem will guard and care for me because I am serving Him with all my strength. The challenge though is that we are hardwired to experience sina, hatred, as a good idea! And when we are successful, we feel that Hashem loves us because He granted our wishes! We may feel validated but we may be very far from reality.

After Adom sinned, the energy for the Soton was attached to man placing us in a life or death struggle with the yetzer hara. When people choose to serve Hashem, we create indeterminate forces that allow Hashem to sustain the world with goodness and light. And when people choose to listen to their negativity, we create indeterminate forces that Hashem uses to sustain the world with more and more darkness. Understanding that the Soton and the yetzer hara are connected to each other makes it easier for us to understand how easily we are confounded because we want to live in our emotions. If something hurts our feelings or causes us a loss, almost unconsciously we begin to consider a hurtful action as if it is a good idea, rationalizing it in whatever way we can to justify satisfying our sina - as something of importance tied to my goals and agenda. How can we resist the confusion of our strong instincts? Consider this. Consider that when we insist on living within our emotions, we empower the bullies of the world. And when we are willing to live within awareness that we are here to emulate Hashem, we recognize that when we do not succeed, we are living with the pain of being trapped within human limitations. Thus, when we choose awareness over living within our emotions, we bring Hashem out of hiding, out of hester panim and shine the light of His middos. If there is a dark room, shine light!

Sometimes people pursue horrifying emotional agendas and Hashem permits it. That does not mean that Hashem was made visible, that He was brought out of hester panim There is a huge difference. For example, Hitler (may his name be erased) received a “yes” to his horrifying efforts, but no one would think that he in any way brought Hashem out of hester panim. Hashem’s Will was done with concealment of the good. Yes, it was Hashem’s will, and it may have seemed to Hitler that he was being validated, but no, Hitler did nothing to bring Hashem into this frame of reference. He was a vehicle for the Soton to test us and render Divine Justice.

We are challenged in our day with attacks by people who kill others and claim they are revealing Hashem in this world. If that idea resonates with us, it could be that our own attachment to and dependence on the emotional negativity within us is causing us to fail to see the absolute truth - that such horrifying acts keep Hashem in concealment and instead, empower the bullies of the world. By our identifying with the emotional negativity within us (whose root is hatred), we give spiritual strength to horrific acts!

The important distinction that I am trying to make is that playing a part in bringing Hashem’s purposes into this world is a far cry from revealing Hashem and uncovering Him in this world— a hairsbreadth off makes the difference in understanding how a person can mistake bringing pain into the world for bringing light – just because Hashem says “yes” (i.e. it is His will and we receive an ego victory of some kind) does not mean that we will be credited for bringing Hashem’s light into this world. Bringing the darkness of His Soton is not the same as bringing Hashem’s light. We have a profound choice! We must understand!

Ego could be an acronym for “Edging Gd Out”. We need to transform ourselves from a self-oriented sense of self to a Gd-oriented perspective of ourselves, where we perceive ourselves with an ability to transcend our human limitations. When we do, we truly exist and remove hester panim from our reality.

What motivation do we have to forsake living in our emotions, which is natural and normal and may even be the source for our successes? Would it motivate us to do so if we came to the realization that we can dis-empower the tyrants and bullies of the world who wish to harm us? By choosing awareness, we have the actual power to remove their power!

In the introduction to Perek Shira, it says the following:

“Nefesh HaChaim 1:7-11 cites the teaching of the sages that the angels on high cannot sing their regular sanctification of Gd [Kedusha] until Israel does so on earth (Chullin 91b). Theoretically, therefore, if no one on earth were to sanctify Gd,

the angels would remain mute. He explains that indeed all of Creation, even the angels, function in accordance with the degree of holiness of righteous people. When Israel praises Gd, it infuses even the heavens with the holiness that the angels must have in order to drive their service forward.”

When we choose to shift ourselves to awareness – that I am connected to Hashem and here to bring His light to the situation, and doing so brings me the greatest pleasure there can be and He will give continued sustenance – this movement from human emotion to spiritual connection on our part becomes our salvation, allowing the prayers of people and angels to be heard.

May our service to Hashem be pleasing and may He redeem us.