

Nourishment for the Neshama

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You only get to keep what you give away -

For a refuah shelama for Rota Devorah bat Sara Rivka

In her current 10 week workshop on Tefillah, Rebbetzin Heller teaches that the body is the vehicle through which the soul actualizes itself. When we, with our free will, give voice and expression to the soul over the body, we are demonstrating an integrated understanding that brings our service higher than the angels. Why? The reason is that we have free will only because Hashem is hidden in this world. Rebbetzin Heller explains that when we arouse love for Hashem hidden deep in our hearts, this reflects an integrated understanding and a sense of devekus for which we have been created.

Sounds easy, no? Just choose soul over body! The only problem is that the behira point where we are to be tested ultimately requires a mesiras nefesh that the El Zar and Amalek often are successful in steering us away from actualizing. How? That mesiras nefesh would have to come from a place in our subconscious that is so hidden we could never ever find it without Torah, and even with Torah, it requires an emunah and a desire to choose to love of Hashem with great devotion.

Let's take a look at that mesiras nefesh – the place the soul can constantly draw from our physical existence to bring in mesiras nefesh to Hashem. That place is nothing less than our very egos, the very sense of self-esteem that our intelligence guides us to build in order for us to flourish. It seems like we are giving up everything that makes sense with absolutely no basis for really knowing what we are doing will lead us to our goal or produce success!

Torah is NOT telling us to have low self-esteem, chas v'shalom. But we ARE to adjust our focus on where our self esteem comes from – self esteem is feeling good about the effort we make to actualize the tzelem elokim through our bodily existence. It is not our success in doing so. Self esteem is our effort to do so.

Ideally we are to use our intellect to discern and direct thoughts speech and deeds with love of Hashem to do His Will. The neshama wishes to make Hashem's name known in this world, actualizing what the avos instilled in us, by becoming more loving each day. The neshama wishes to bring to every experience an integrated expression of Hashem's Oneness in order to create positive influence.

What stands in the way is no less than the El Zar, who traps us in a logical cycle based on our own self-preserving tendencies. If we can transcend the cycle of creating destructive beings in self-preserving responses, then we can bring to break the justification Hashem has to enclathe in our lives our negativity that often brings upon us the experience of shame and other humiliating and painful experiences.

Shame is fallen healthy guilt (designed to help us avoid the "bread of shame" and receive the pleasure Hashem intends for us) but shame corrupts our primal will – instead of continuing on a path that healthy guilt leads us back to, to serve Hashem and discern where we have gone astray, shame is fallen healthy guilt grabbed by the El Zar which advises us lovingly (!) to follow instead "for our own good" the one who gives

the shaming message – the destroyer, the shaming one – and ultimately bringing us into a dead-end cycle of being influenced through the advice of the internalized yetzer hara, the El Zar, the strange g.d within

Shame is painful but can be tolerated when we have an integrated understanding of the humiliation it brings, that we are to submit to the humiliation and see it as a way to re-engage our true selves, our neshamas. The humiliation is sent from above as a cleansing for our natural condition after Gan Eden of being turned into self-preserving destroyers (scanning to see where our dangers are and having negative thoughts that we think will help us protect ourselves but really create destructive beings) and thieves (the natural tendency to divert life force more towards my goals, that my goals are not totally synced to Hashem's goals).

Until we realize we are destroyers and thieves when in our spiritually unintegrated physical reality (until we conquer tendencies for self-preservation that bring shame or damage upon others, and realize that our survival is up to Hashem) we are naturally under the spiritual influence of the El Zar and we have corrupted primal will that will continue to bring shame and humiliation and more destruction. When we make the fundamental shift of self-esteem to our neshamas and make effort to emulate Hashem, we begin to integrate that our body is here to actualize our soul, our tzelem elokim, and to bring Hashem's attributes to the world.

When we develop an integrated spiritual and physical identity, and comprehend that as the sole source of self-esteem is our effort to bring into our actions expressions of the tzelem elokim, the constant mesiras nefesh that we are capable of is to arouse ahavas Hashem (obvious to the neshama but) buried in the heart along side the prevailing negative pain of shame and blame and negative emotion.

Through our choice of arousal of ahavas Hashem, we can have the intention for the unification and sanctification of His Name and release the vivifying force of negative painful emotions and experiences along with the Shechina in golus with it, thus demonstrating through integrated thought "Hashem Echad" .

This intention is a thought that produces crucial positive influence. It is a thought that sacrifices the only reality that our unintegrated physical selves know. The ability to do this comes from uncovering the hidden ahavas Hashem in our hearts, which can come only from learning Torah. It is not instinctual. It is not natural. It is totally hidden. Without emunah and bitachon, any inkling of it would easily be dismissed by the far smarter advice of the El Zar who often keeps our intellect at bay from deepening our emunah enough to truly arouse the hidden love that is in every Jewish heart.

Yet when we do have integrated understanding and make the effort to arouse the love in our hearts, we can totally trust that Hashem will utilize the positive influence to affect the entire matter in a way that is good including for the physical side of us that had to be mesiras nefesh.