

## Nourishment for the Neshama

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### **A Portrait of the Essential Self and How to Shine Light**

Per Rav Dessler, the areas of our personality that are above our behira are within the domain of our yetzer Hara. The Vilna Gaon tells us that the entire purpose of our existence is to uproot our negative character traits. Each person is a microcosm of creation, an aspect of the Divine concealed within the natural physicality of this world. We are here to bring out our true eternal self, bringing light into the world and earning eternal reward.

Often we choose poorly over a period of time and develop a pattern that brings us to a resolution in time and space but which is not a resolution consistent with Torah. This pattern, this string of bad choices, may not seem at all bad to us. It may seem consistent with secular values, with societally rewarded standards and more.

Hashem tries to wake us up, through suffering, challenges, tests. As we focus on an area and we deal with it, He brings us to a place where we can choose to exercise behira, the ability to apply free willed choice. If we have yiras shemayin then we choose consistently with Hashem's moral dictates. If we are in doubt or deceiving ourselves, we choose to put ourselves in the center, reflecting a weakness in emunah, a weakness in Yiras Hashem, an attachment of emotion to the gashmius world beyond its purposefulness or its natural pleasure, a subtle rebellion against the way Hashem has created the world, or an emotional attachment to anything besides Hashem Echad.

When we strive to have more yiras Hashem, when we do cheshbon hanefesh, hisbodidus, verbal introspection, etc. we may find some of the discrepancies between Torah and our lives. If our personalities are difficult, if we find an area where we have emotionally deviated or physically valued wrong choices, the lowly bodily downward pulls can be quite invisible and seem out of reach. Just yearning for these to heal can be enough - if we truly wish it, sincerely. Then we need Hashem's help because if we are in the clutches of lowly downward pulls we need Hashem to lead us in the path we sincerely pray to go and grant success to our efforts or else the Yetzer Hara will continue to dominate us. That is where free will comes in. We energize our free will with ahavas and yiras Hashem,, e.g. we want for the sake of the unification and sanctification of His name to bring ourselves into alignment with His moral standards. The effort is a successful process regardless of whether Hashem grants us success. We can't fail in serving Hashem if we use this process, for it is the effort of choosing that reveals to Hashem our comprehension that He alone is the source of everything, including our negative traits.

What if the amount of time and the pattern of behavior reflect an investment of energy that we now see as wrong or misguided and wish to change, but don't feel we have the awareness of what to change to? We can start by telling Hashem "I wish to take the energy from the past that I invested in this wrong conduct and my emotional attachment to it and shift it to serving Hashem. Please help me." We may not have any idea how that will come about! Just energizing our free willed choice sincerely, lets Hashem know that we know we have no separate existence from Hashem and that the misapplied energy gave something to our apparent self, to our experience of self, that concealed Hashem even more than He is already concealed in this world. By recognizing it, we remove the barrier that WE placed in the way. At this point, we should feel vitality return, for we have replaced our false egocentric concern with the true intrinsic reality that Hashem Echad.

Imagine that we could take buckets of destructive beings and by energizing our free will, take them from darkness and choose and have them added to the light in the world. This is what the Ramchal tells us – that Hashem defers to man – if we do good, Hashem sustains the world with good. If we do badly, Hashem sustains the world that way. Like global warming or an oil spill, there could be much clean up to do!

To clean things up, we can comprehend that our pain is caused by confusion between our essential self and our ego. We devote essential self life force to egotistical concerns and stew – creating negative destructive beings that we feel entitled to sustain! But once formed, these beings affect the manner that Hashem sustains the world, for He tolerates them until WE do

teshuva and remove them. Thus it becomes important to make our sense of self INDEPENDENT of ego – based on a comprehension of our Divine attributes. Rabbi Labinsky's [www.becomingdivine.com](http://www.becomingdivine.com) website has a shiur that explains this exquisitely! We can bring the Divine attributes into our ego and transform ourselves into a person who shines light and is resilient and above egocentrism.