

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Chocolate chip cookies were discovered by accident - open ourselves to Hashem's vision for us

(Below this essay is a shiur by Rabbi Yaakov Zalman Labinsky and a transcript of the introduction to his shiur on circumcising the heart.)

Our strongest urges come from our earthly selves, and within our lower self, the lowest part is the yetzer hara, the evil inclination. Yet we are told that the yetzer hara is an angel of Hashem, whose role is to help make us great. The evil inclination though is dark and sinister and is also the angel of death. It's job is to tempt us, to kill us, and then to accuse us for what we choose wrongly to do. Hashem has empowered it, placed it within our internal heart and mind, and He gave us the Torah as the antidote. And Hashem gives us free will.

Without an ideological understanding of what it means to live to serve Hashem by bringing out the aspect of the Divine within us, there is zero chance that anything within us other than our emotions generated from the lower self will have any chance of even being heard, never mind being chosen to act upon. In a real sense, it is possible for a person who has even a drop of cynicism about the purpose of life as the Ramchal describes it – to experience spiritual pleasure through love and fear and communion with Hashem – to be pulled into the world where the yetzer hara runs things, with no way out.

Do you know that chocolate chip cookies were a mistake? A baker was trying to create something else and it came out as a chocolate chip cookie. Delicious!

Very often in our lives, we have circumstances that are very difficult tests. Real challenges that cause us emotional hardship, physical suffering, financial loss and the like. But sometimes we have circumstances that we do not perceive as challenges but as reality and we accept these as standards to work within. Society helps us field our way through these types of every day, routine challenges, such as traffic, the need to earn money, establishing a home and documentations like licenses, education, and more. Yet woven within these every day circumstances are more challenges. A simple example is the coach who works the team very hard and it produces a great team. Another example is a parent who finds raising children very challenging and yet the children feel loved and interpret for the good overall the parent anyway. Hashem flows through our hearts thoughts and emotions for us to sort and select our actions.

Why do we come out okay when we have circumstances in our daily lives that are out of our control yet affect us deeply? The challenges are an ingredients to turn us into that chocolate chip cookie. It may not be the recipe that we had thought of as good or intended, but Hashem in His wisdom understands what He put within us and what each person needs in order to develop the aspect of the Divine within us. Hashem is trying to give us the opportunity to bring out what we are uniquely here to do

When we comprehend that Hashem is the only Power Who grants success and that it is our role to do what we can in His service, we accept His recipe over ours. However, most of us want to continue trying to make our recipe, mistakenly listening to the advice coming through our hearts whose source is the yetzer hara. We may therefore take actions to advance s personal goal and in so doing, cause injustice to another person. Hashem frustrates our efforts, but the impact upon us can be quite serious – why? The consciousness that we use to apply free willed energy toward serving ourselves and hoping Hashem likes it and grants success is far different from partnering with Hashem to do His Will knowing that Hashem knows what our hearts desire. It must be very clear to us that we definitely do not know better than Hashem what is truly good for us. If it is not clear, it is deeply possible that we have gone too far into our cynicism, thinking that with the droplet of consciousness that Hashem gives us we can build and make something better for us than what Hashem's plan is for us. And heaven forfend if we do this, our emotions flow into our bodies, - misdirected to body - when they are intended to flow constantly in love and fear of Hashem. We are failing to keep the constant mitzvahs of love and fear of Hashem when we mentally divert our consciousness to goals set based on accomplishment using power, influence, taking, and the like without first bringing that consciousness to love and fear of Hashem and commitment to serving Him. The more we set aside that cornerstone value, the farther into cynicism and egoism we get pulled by the yetzer hara, lo aleinu. And the longer we do it, and the more we have invested in the successes we delusionally may think are coming from our own hand, our own personal power and influence, the harder it is to bring back the constancy of our service to Him with love and fear in our hearts.

But when we do approach the circumstances with love and fear of Hashem, and we stumble and we experience kaparah and even apparent defeat, we become something entirely different from what we thought our tangible goal was. We become holy. We come to experience the reason we were created, to enjoy the spiritual pleasure of connection with Hashem and to concretize with our emotional attachment the mitzvahs of love and fear of Hashem. There is no greater pleasure.

And we become chocolate chip cookies – delicious to Hashem! As such, He makes sure we have what we need to continue our service and He protects us from getting eaten up by people, unless that too would be good for the recipe, for our recipe.

How can I best accomplish what I need to today? Tell Hashem I wish to be His partner only – that today, I have these things to do but that I wish to do it only in a manner that is pleasing to Him for the unification and sanctification of His name. This means finding within me an aspect of the divine to emulate Him while I go through the hishtadlus of what I need to, with that emulating being the real goal rather than the apparent goal – the object of the hishtadlus, passionately checking with Him to see if He has an insight for me. When we do this, we will see much deeper into our day and come to understand Hashem in a much more relationship oriented way that builds. And when I fail to do this, as often happens, to immediately apologize to Him and try to make rectification sincerely and ask for His help in repairing my mistakes, whether they are tangible or intangible.

In order to become what Hashem wants us to be, we need to open up a channel to hear His Will. Otherwise, the only radio channel is coming from the yetzer hara and our existence will remain within time and space with no dimension of palpable holiness. What will we say before the kise Hakavod after 120 years? Oh – I thought the Torah was just too idealistic and hard, an exercise that was not more important than actualizing my own goals with the very best of intentions? After all, it was even too hard for Adom HaRishon. If I cynically relent to thinking that we are constructed this way and the simplest solution is to make the best of it and seek to fulfill what I can with the intellect and resources Hashem has given me, so that I can feel good about myself and my ability to traverse this world, that I came out on top, that I was a sought after team player because I work with people in the realm of giving by taking from each other., Hashem will soon show us, after being very patient, that the place of the world is Hashem.

Ultimately He will shepherd us back to Mt. Sinai, to climb to stand under the chuppa and love and fear Him – directing our emotions to love and fear and then toward relationships and worldly matters. How else can we fulfill the task of being His chosen people?

Click the podcast below to hear Rabbi Yaakov Zalman Labinsky's shiur from <http://www.becomingdivine.com> Pirke Avos series. Transcript of the introduction to the shiur appears below the podcast.
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Our next series of discussions is talking about the paradigm of love. what we are trying to do, we are looking at Chapter 1 Mishna 3 in Pirke Avos, the paradigm of how to serve Gd out of love and fear the core of all emotions within the human structure. We are trying to take the realms of love and fear, yira and ahava, and develop existing love and fear and direct it away from the body and toward the soul and simultaneously to take whatever obstructions we have in fear and love and circumcise our heart. Why do we circumcise? We said because when we have an obstruction around our heart, what we are really saying is that we have a certain amount of emotion that is blocked and if it is blocked then it is in the body and not in the soul. Just as there are 3 steps to circumcision, cutting the foreskin, drawing back the outer layer and prick on top. First step is cut off the foreskin; remove the falsehood in the emotion. In every emotion there is a parallel intellect, get into the intellectual understanding of the emotion and remove the falsehood. Stage 1. stage 2 pulling back the foreskin is extracting out the kernel of truth, that is underlying the falsehood that is embedded in that misdirected emotion; stage 3 is once we pulled out the positive kernel of truth, direct it back to its higher expression of truth where that falsehood gets transformed into ultimate truth, the darkness of one's self gets transformed into higher light where ra goes to tov mod and the emotional level is that any fear on the body level or any expression of love on the body level gets redirected to the side of the soul. And our job is to ultimately circumcise ourselves every day. The more we circumcise ourselves the more we remove the obstruction that prevents our heart from coming out fully and from the emotions fully directed to Hashem. Where does that come from? Rav Weinberg tells us about the 6 constant mitzvahs, the six mitzvahs that have a realm of pure divine consciousness, the first three are intellectual, know there is a Gd, not to believe in other powers other than Gd, and to know Gd is one, that rectifies all the realms of intellectual blemish the next two are love and fear, to love and fear, it is a constant commandment. We have to keep removing the blocked fear into the body and bring it back to the side of the soul constantly. It doesn't

happen on its own and if you don't it will play out in all kinds of negative ways and this is why people have relationship challenges, because the emotion is blocked and is misdirected away from the soul to the body. By the realm of fear, we said the root of all fear is annulations and abandonment. When your existence is being threatened either you are going to be alone in your existence or you are going to disappear in your existence. those are the 2 core fears behind all fear, and the more we rectify our human fear and get to the core of the abandonment and annihilation we are actually fixing up the realm of fear to bring to the side of soul - fear of Hashem, that is our choice in this world healthy fear, to see and perceive Gd's reality if we don't do that we carry out all these conscious and unconscious fears, they come out as worries, distrust, insecurities and the like and they get projected onto realities and we reenact them from our past into our present, we are not living with Hashem, we are not living with a rectified heart and we are not living with a full heart that fully loves and fears the Almighty and that is the job of every person and Jew in this world in order to do this. Do I have to be in therapy every day of my life? No, good luck finding someone who is qualified but you have to do the work yourself, own it, be responsible and take the core reigns in your hand. I am going to make that difference. Ultimately every piece of wisdom you do and every commandment in the Torah is teaching us how to rectify our heart. For example prayer is called service of the heart. when we do service of the heart in prayer we are fixing up fear and love of Hashem, once we do that it trickles down to the human realm between man and man, and that ultimately within our self, that is how we rectify our emotion - if we don't we become either talking heads and there are a lot of people out there who are pure intellect who talk and teach Torah for years and years but they are not engaging the heart, they are disconnected or the opposite, totally disconnected from the heart. They are just robotic and unfeeling people. Both are unacceptable. He wants our full heart in love and fear so we can be the most complete servants we can and then bring it into our human relationships so they can become Gdly and our relationships with ourselves so we can become Gdly that is our goal that is our job. That is an extremely daunting overwhelming and difficult task and yet the almighty wants it from us. And we discussed the sources last time. In tehillim 100 it says mizmor lesoda, a psalm of praise thanks that King David is singing. The Arizal says a very beautiful thing. The head letters are Mem and Lamed which is mal .Mal is the active verse of circumcise. When we are singing that song, we are praising you and I want to circumcise to praise you. it doesn't come easy -open your eyes to the people in your life around you, in hour personal life, your family can be challenging at times, at work and see what is invoking you, and do the work to see what are you struggling with, what you need to have some help with then guess what, there is a place to actually circumcise your heart. The Almighty will send exactly who you need to fix yourself. If you don't what happens - you can work - I am serving Gd doing all these wonderful things...guess what not acceptable. The Almighty will get you. He is sending exactly the people you need to work on yourself. you don't have to do it all yourself you just have to open your eyes and see what is in front of you, be humble, be courageous, and have to know that what you are doing is the right thing and He will help you. He sends us everyone we need. That is the paradigm. We spoke about all the fears and what we need to do to rectify.