

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Dominance

(The author would love to have comments, especially to find out how you found this article - kindly leave a comment saying how you found this article, if you are so inclined. Updated May 2010)

I was born in the early 1950's to a man who escaped Nazi Germany in 1937 at the age of 13 and an American-born college graduate whose immigrant Lithuanian mother (direct descendant of the Vilna Gaon) and American-born father weathered the great depression with reasonable success. My father served in the US Army in Military Intelligence interviewing German soldiers because he spoke perfect Berlinese, having been born and raised there. Even though he learned to speak without a German accent, he never lost the imprint of Nazi Germany, having night frights of being chased down the street by his schoolmates. He built a life here in America, was an avid Democrat, and watched the current events constantly. He passed away in 1981, but he warned me that what happened in Germany could happen again anywhere. Thinking I was humoring him (not believing that it could happen again) I asked him how would I know if it were happening again. He said it is incumbent upon all of us to watch the papers and to see there a foretelling. It seems as though we are all in agreement that we stand here, in a similar or chas v'shalom worse plight, not feeling that we have a response that will "cure" the problem(s).

This article is not going to delve into the historical, political or social history of the present situation. There are many talented and knowledgeable people who write and express these important facts. What I want to focus on is the place spiritually that we are. I ask myself often, how did we get here? And what will it take to spiritually get us out of here? The Ramchal, in Derech Hashem, teaches us that the physical realm is a manifestation of the spiritual realm. When we conduct ourselves in a certain manner or restrain ourselves in a certain manner, to our limited eye, it may not have a direct physical consequence on the physical world; however, it has a huge impact on the spiritual realm, and it is from the spiritual realm that the physical world is maintained.

For the purpose of trying to bring out the ideas that I am contemplating, I would like to coin some words. The first two words describe different mental faculties that we use every day, defined as follows:

Yetzerharayatrist – This is the part of us that tries to understand and comprehend the negative conduct that we see, in our family, in our friends, in our work places, in our governments, and in the world in general. For example, we might know someone with a terribly short temper, a good person who every now and then flies off the handle and starts screaming and yelling and saying things that he later never remembers he said. We might feel upset with that person, but, if we love that person, we enlarge our understanding of that person to include his history and background until we get to the point where we are able to give the person the benefit of the doubt. "His father died at an early age," we might remember, "and he didn't get all the attention he needed." We are not excusing the conduct, but we are explaining it to ourselves, perhaps even seeing a trend with others who are short tempered. This part of us I am labeling the yetzerharayatrist. It is a crucial part of us because through empathy it helps us smooth over the conduct of others who have given into the Yetzer HaRa (an Angel also known as the Satan, also known as the Angel of Death) When we look at others, with empathy and compassion, we utilize our yetzerharayatrist to define their weakness and possible failure, and see them as human, and thereby continue to love and associate with them. (In Tomer Devorah terminology, we are emulating Hashem's middos of tolerance and kindness and more.)

Yetzerharaxorcist – this is the part of us that we use to improve ourselves, to overcome our bad habits, to purify our souls through controlling our thoughts, speech and deeds. It is more than our conscience because it takes right and wrong beyond the law to the commandments of the Torah. For example, there is no secular law against eating non-kosher food. When we limit ourselves to kosher food, we accept a connection to Hashem in order to strengthen our spiritual side. By coming to understand the yetzer hara and how it operates within us, we see how the yetzer hara might tempt us (see article on the Maharal notes for a detailed description of the tactics the yetzer hara uses. For the most part, the yetzer hara feeds on our feelings of lack and, sounding like our best friend or lawyer, gives us what sound like good reasons to try and fill that lack in ways that might be even just a hairsbreadth deviation from Torah and the Seven Noahide Laws. By creating even a hairsbreadth distance, the yetzer hara succeeds in making us think there is "two" and not just "One" in this world. This essential and crafty untruth leads us down the wrong path). By educating ourselves about the yetzer hara and by seeing when and how we fall into the yetzer hara's hand (in Rabbi Dessler's terms, we try to bring into focus our actions that are at or above our behira point – our free will point), we are able to try to begin to strengthen ourselves against the yetzer hara and we ask for Hashem's help so that we can be successful in turning away from the yetzer hara and turning towards lovingkindness, mitzvahs and good deeds. This part of us I am labeling the yetzerharaxorcist. It is part of our conscience but more urgently it is a crucial part of our emunah and commitment to Torah and the Seven Noahide Laws. When Hashem grants us success in our use of the yetzerharaxorcist, we feel that we have grown closer to Hashem and have grown spiritually, and this self-control (what we perceive as self-control which is really self-control with siyata deshmaya) helps us build self-respect. And, it helps us become holy people, for through the yetzerharaxorcist, we are able to rise above our limitations, and conduct ourselves in a manner despite our physical makeup. (See Chapter 2 of How to Find Happiness in 2007 there is a discussion of Who Am I which goes into detail about devekus being our eternal identity. The yetzerharaxorcist is crucial to building our conduct based on identifying the self from devekus. While the yetzerharaxorcist is not our devekus itself, it is our motivation at our free will point to choose a response). UPDATE: SEE DIAGRAM PUBLISHED APRIL 2010 ON HELPING OURSELVES AT OUR FREE WILL POINT - In the Ramchal's terms, overcoming our limitations IS our mission - we are created imperfect for the sole purpose of using our free will to create positivity, and by so creating, we are emulating Hashem and building spiritual realms as well as holiness (holiness is rising above our limitations.).

With these two phrases in mind, let's look at the first chapter of Tehillim, the Book of Psalms:

Praiseworthy is the man that walked not in the counsel of the wicked, and stood not in the path of the sinful, and sat not in the session of scorners. But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem, and in His Torah he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree deeply rooted alongside brooks of water; that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaf never withers, and everything that he does will succeed. Not so the wicked; rather they are like the chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked shall not be vindicated in judgment, nor the sinful in the assembly of the righteous – for Hashem attends the way of the righteous, while the way of the wicked will perish. (emphasis added)

After reading this, I wondered to myself – if I never walk in the counsel of the wicked and not stood in the path of the sinful, would I ever need my yetzerharayatrist? The first word of the tehillim is "Praiseworthy," not "Fortunate", which implies that the yetzerharaxorcist was involved. Is there a preliminary gate through which we can avoid going all together so as to not place ourselves in a situation where the yetzerharayatrist becomes engaged? We will come back to that question.

First, though, let's explore - is it better to have never had to process something that resulted from the wicked intentions of another person? After all, don't we feel that these tests result in us becoming stronger? And is this not a universal reality for all of us? Yet this is not what the tehillim, on its face, says is best! Ideally, it would be best for us to choose to be involved with Torah and the Seven Noahide Laws and to choose away from all

situations that would take us in the path of the wicked. Would this mean that we would not be tested at all? And if we would not be tested at all, doesn't that contradict the purpose for which we are here, so that we can grow spiritually? After all (as discussed in How to Find Happiness in 2007 in this blog) every person here is here because we have something to go through before we are able to enjoy our eternal reward, that if we had already been on a level to enjoy our eternal reward, there would have been no reason for us to be on this planet. We are here to earn merits through our service to Hashem, to mold ourselves in His Image and Middos. Is the Tehillim, through the word "Praiseworthy" telling us that being able to sit and learn and be involved with Torah and mitvahs and the Seven Noahide Laws is, in itself, a life filled with many challenges and should not necessarily require a person to walk in the counsel of the wicked?

In Journey to Virtue, in a chapter on Accepting Lashon Hara (p. 112), the author enumerates that,

"On a practical level, we should:

- Become accustomed to rejecting any negative thoughts which we have about others and any derogatory information we hear about them, unless a legitimate need exists, such as protecting ourselves or others from harm.
- Make a positive effort to recognize the good in others and to keep their positive qualities foremost in our minds at all times.
- Develop a personal and natural love of truth and dislike for falsehood.

These efforts will enable us to build and strengthen a personal foundation on which to observe Torah in a natural way, and which, in particular, will protect us from violating the serious prohibitions (against accepting lashon hara)."

These three basic rules are consistent with the message of Tomer Devorah (see Sidebar for link to Tomer Devorah) on keeping our souls pure of negative thoughts. Let us label people who choose to do this Devekutites.

At this point, if you are thinking as I do, you are wondering if Devekutites would not be first class naive people.

Let us entertain the alternative, for (as the yetzer hara would try to persuade us) how many people can live a life like that anyway? So, let's refer to non-Devekutites as Dominators, those involved with mastering this beautiful world that Hashem has given to mankind to dominate.

In order to acquire prowess and success, Dominators are tested through normal everyday misunderstandings and the milieu of average conflicts of interest that pervade human existence, and that it could be that through these "innocent" tests, the dominators would advance empathy skills and develop a strong yetzerharayatrist. Now these Dominators could be on a loving path, desiring to be kind to all and do the right thing, giving the benefit of the doubt, understanding the imperfections of others, accepting them as they are, and growing in love. Yet something has happened to the Dominator. He has now, for his own sake (and may also have rationalized that it is also for the sake of heaven) accepted an action in someone else that he would not otherwise have thought of, nor accepted for himself. In other words, although he himself would not do such a thing, he has come to a mental accommodation for this other person where he has accepted this person for who he is, with all his limitations. Our Dominator has grown in love and has emulated Hashem (Who sustains patiently all His Creations and awaits their repentance – see Tomer Devorah). But something else has happened. He has been exposed to a behavior and a way of conduct that is not proper but that has now been assimilated into his thinking.

What happens now? The Dominator has a situation where he wants to succeed, to dominate, to master. The action he might not have thought of before that is now in his repertoire comes to mind, along with a temptation to do the same thing...for example, whatever was done to him for which he had to come to a place of forgiveness of the other person, he may now be tempted to try that same tactic on someone else, thinking that it is among the possible alternative ways of being effective in that type of situation. It might have been a slightly unfair business tactic that was successful or a political maneuver that succeeded in influencing others. He has seen a real-time display of something that was successful and his original objections and offense at the conduct is now "matured" into accepting that it is a dog eat dog world out there and this is part of surviving. The yetzer hara itself is giving him "good" advice to move ahead, that it is a small matter and everyone is doing it. More subtly, what he has emotionally learned here is that it is better to be the one inflicting pain than the one receiving it, a step toward serving the self and a giant leap away from the path of infinity and holiness.

As a result of utilizing his yetzerharayatrist, he has changed his values – instead of accepting the challenge for his yetzerharaxorcist to continue seeing the conduct he witnessed as offensive and excluding it from his own actions, he has made a natural value-adjustment based on his own self-interest, with rationalizations that might suggest it is "the way it is" or "for parnasa" or for whatever higher value he chooses to put in. In the end, his value of living for the sake of Heaven has shifted. If, lo aleinu, a person becomes swayed toward the natural tendencies of survival and self, the yetzerharaxorcist will never be engaged in this conflict. All that will happen is that the person will acquire more and more tools – win at any cost – anything goes! The Dominator has come down a slippery slope from just sitting and learning Torah and not walking in the path of sinners to becoming the taker, the one who puts himself ahead at any human cost. Thus, whatever labels of naivety one might place on the Devekutites, there is surely a question regarding where the Dominators could end up.

Let's take a look at Tehillim 11:

"To the Chief Musician, a Psalm of David. In Adoshem I have taken refuge; how do you say to my soul, "Flee to your mountain as a bird. For behold, the wicked bend the bow, they have made ready their arrow upon the bowstring; that they may shoot in darkness, at the upright in heart. When the foundations are destroyed, what has the righteous done? Adoshem is in His Holy Temple, Adoshem, in the heaven is His throne; His eyes behold, His eyelids examine mankind. Adoshem examines the righteous, but the wicked and the lover of violence, His soul hates. He will rain coal upon the wicked; fire and brimstone and burning wind is the portion of their cup. For Adoshem is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.

Where has being a Dominator taken a person? Is that where we think we are going when we choose to master the world? Is there a gatekeeper before the yetzerharayatrist comes into play?

Let's go back a moment to the Garden of Eden. Hashem gave Adom dominion over the entire world except he forbade dominion over one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The line was drawn quite clearly, and yet Adom crossed the line. Can we rectify this?

Perhaps we can. Perhaps if we define ourselves as Devekutites and stick to the basic principles of Tomer Devorah and the Torah (or for non-Jews, the Seven Noahide Laws), we can be the praiseworthy ones who do not walk in the counsel of the wicked. And what about domination? What about the fact that Hashem gave us the world to dominate and realistically, are we not involved with being Dominators every day to earn parnassah, to build communities, to run nations and more?

The very first commandment is "I am G-d". In "Let My Nation Serve Me", by Yosef Deutsch, page 242, it says:

"The First Commandment is a positive commandment that is incumbent on everyone. It is the basis of all the Torah. It commands the sincere belief that Hashem is the essence of all existence, that nothing in the world has any being or existence external to Him. Hashem alone is the Supreme Being, Creator and Master of the Universe. He is One, everything is unified in Him. He is therefore infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, timeless and eternal. He is the source of all physical and spiritual existence, and the ruler, supervisor and master of all."

When we make ourselves Devekutites, we are making ourselves into vessels into which the Shechina can dwell, into vessels that contain holiness, the holiness of the only real power that there is. When we see ourselves as united with Hashem in our daily lives and when we do only actions that will form ourselves into pure vessels so as to do His Will with joy, we are, in the starkest reality, subjugating ourselves to His Purposes and since He is the Master of the World, have we not, in fact, actualized our mission to dominate as well? The difference is, our dominion is for the sake of

Heaven, not for ourselves.

In America, every four years we vote for our government and effect an overthrow or a continuation. We do this in a peaceful way by casting our vote. Each person votes, quietly, with intention, and the result is either a new government or the same government. This is the power of freedom. There is no military coupe, no riots, no war, no death. Only a free election. In a spiritual analogy, only through personal free will choice (not through coercion, bribery, fear of man or any other externally imposed method) can we turn ourselves into worthy and sturdy vessels that can be filled with the Shechina and thus become holy and part of the only dominating force in the world.

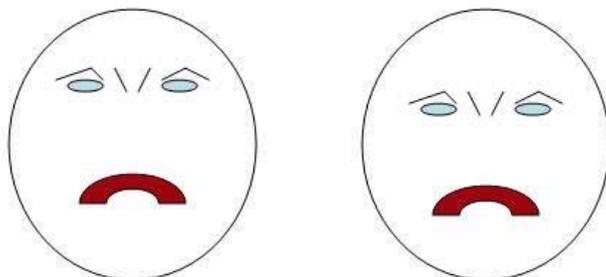
Toward this end, can each of us think of instances where we can make a choice to be a Devekutite (again, for Jews it is commitment to Torah and for non-Jews commitment to the Seven Noahide Laws) and not a Dominator? What would we have to give up for that choice? A business practice? A way we speak? A grudge we bear? A hobby? Please submit your commitment in writing as a comment to this article and let that be a korban, a sacrifice, an atonement that will help us be Devekutites instead of Dominators.

May all of our korbonos, and sacrifices to make ourselves into Devekutites be matzliach. That huge difference between dominion for ourselves and dominion for the sake of Heaven can move the spiritual realm to bring about the ultimate redemption, may we be zocheh to see it speedily in our day.

UPDATE: 4 minute video to further illustrate these ideas - see also slides shown in the video below:



Lack



When we feel lack, it stimulates our will to do something

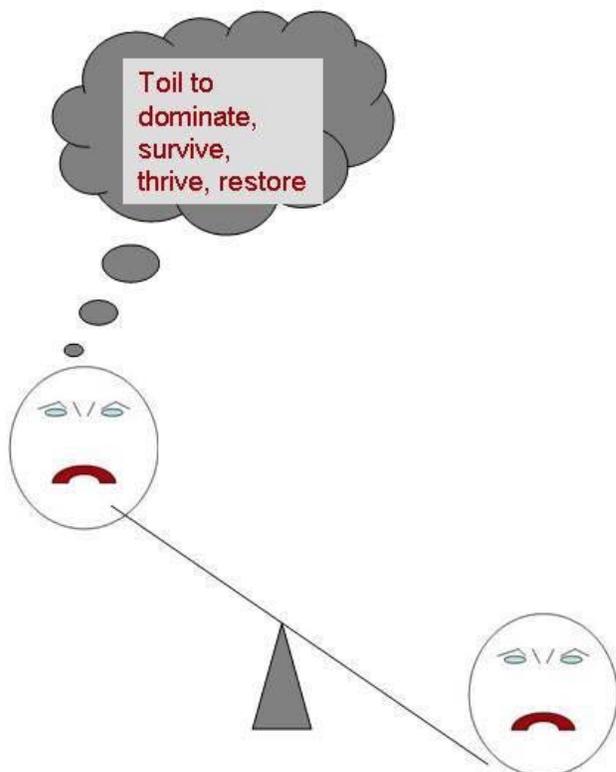
Do we think before we act?

We are placed at our "free will" point.
How shall we respond?

What happens
if we do not
emulate the
Creator?

What do we
look like?

What are the
consequences?



Lower
another person
through
words
or
hurtful actions

Notes from Rabbi Tatz's class "End of Days": The ultimate test that Adom had, which he failed – The Creator gave Adom this cosmic power to do greatness and the Creator did not want Adom to use it – the Creator gave Adom free will for one purpose, to give it back to the Creator. The deepest test is to kill ego, to accept we are only a vessel and there is something higher.



Zoom out to see reality



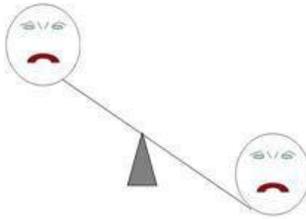
Our task – Filter out hurtfulness by remembering that Everything the Creator sends is good, for our ultimate growth and development

Are we reacting or are we aware we have a meaningful choice?

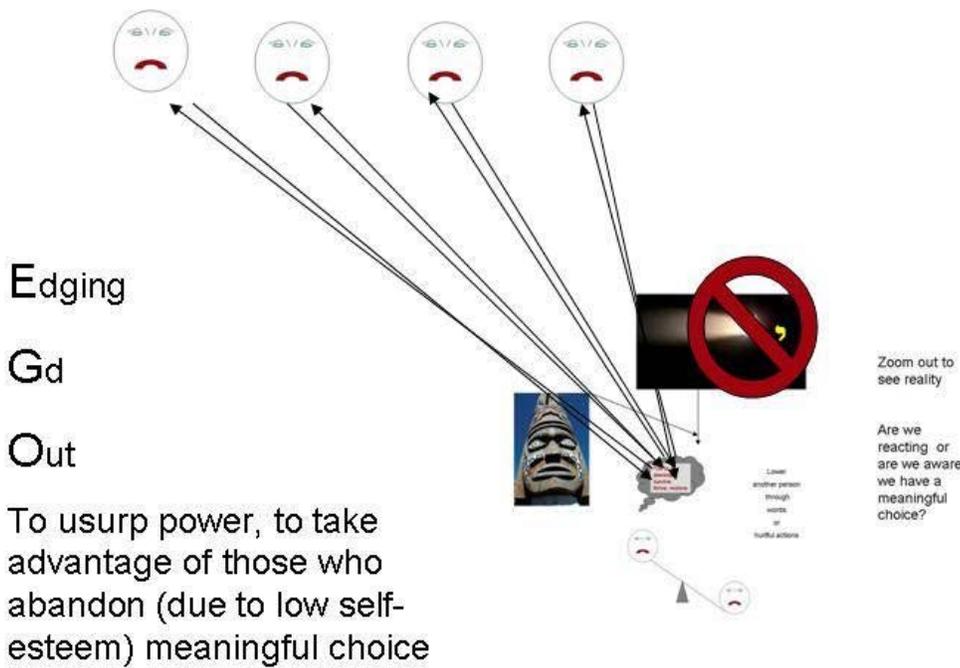
Bring the Creator and His Mercy into the picture



Lower another person through words or hurtful actions

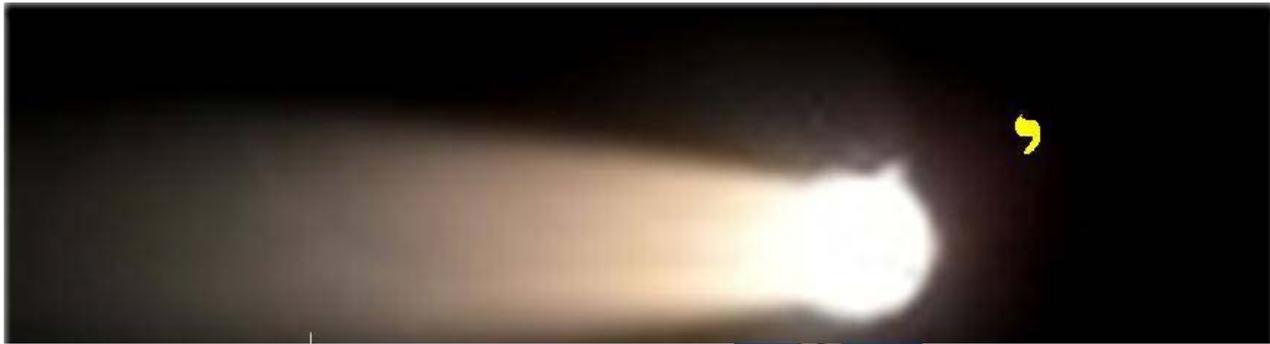


What if we close our eyes to the reality of a meaningful choice
Or what if we encourage people to abandon looking for such a choice?



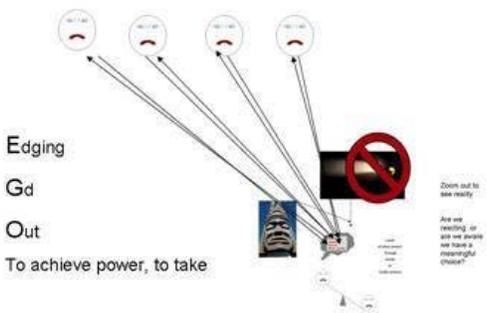
In a one world picture, we form alliances and societies to dominate and muster support to compete and struggle and, possibly, to discriminate, hurt or harm others

However, our conduct has consequences in the true reality, a two world picture



Is this what we want?

Closing our eyes to the reality of a meaningful choice

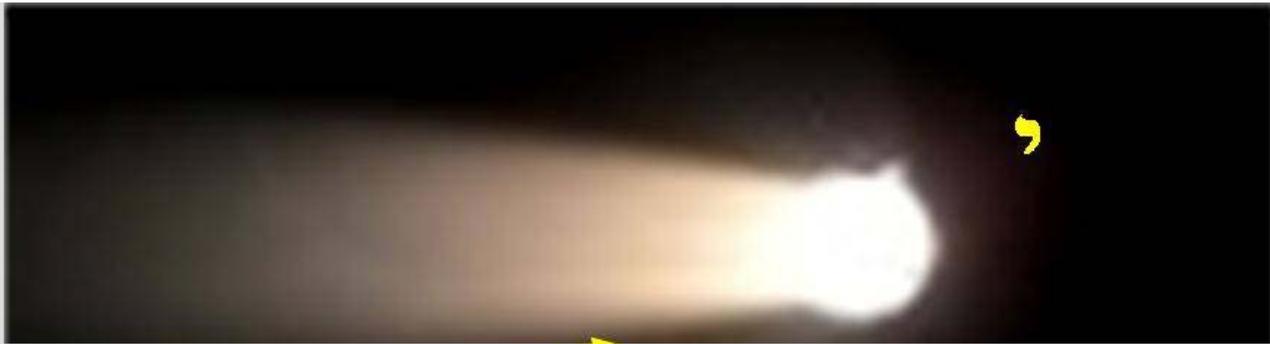


In a one world picture, we form alliances and societies to dominate and muster support to compete and struggle and, possibly, to discriminate, hurt or harm others

In a two world picture, when we hurt and close our eyes to the reality of a meaningful choice, we (knowingly or unknowingly) take the benefit that comes from the Creator and through choosing hurtful actions, we use the power that the Creator has given to us to designate hurtfulness as the prevailing force the Creator uses to sustain the world.

However, our conduct has consequences in the true reality, a two world picture

What makes sense to us in a one world picture, what is within the highest intelligence of our thinking with only a one world picture, sustains winning/losing, power/defeat, riches/poverty, flourish/wither.



JOY
CONSISTENT
PLEASURE
THAT IS
IN OUR
CONTROL

Unity, mercy

Holiness through connection
(Similarity to the creator brings closeness
and development
Rise above human limitations and be treated
above nature)
The Creator is unlimited
(no animal limitations ,e.g. survival, ego)

Calm, Tranquility
JOY, Acceptance, Kadosh

Kindness, Respect
Know that He knows our pain.
Refrain it to rise above our
animalistic limitations

Emulate the 13 attributes of mercy
Adds abundance to what comes to us
Choose to bring mercy into the world thereby
emulating Hashem and create abundance for
ourselves, for He is Master of the Universe and we
are part of Him

THINK!!

Everything is for
the good, for our
personal growth
and
development



Disunity, hatred

Pleasure limited to
sporadic and inconstant
Ego victories



Did you get
pulled into
this? Get out
by using the
six constant
mitzvahs

is what we
want?

in we hurt and
y of a meaningful
unknowingly) take
in the Creator and
ctions, we use the
; given to us to
re prevailing force
the world.



What makes sense to us in a one world picture,
what is within the highest intelligence of our thinking
with only a one world picture, sustains
winning/losing, power/defeat, rich/poverty,
fountainwater

Who are we? Who do we want to be? Where does our real self-esteem, integrity and eternity come from?