

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Free Will - Every choice imprints itself upon our soul

Free will, which is a Divine gift and creation, can become, and is intended to become, the home for our consciousness, the basis of our self-esteem and the proving ground for our eternity. We are our choices in a more permanent way than we realize.

Rebbetzin Heller in her series Duties of the Heart Day 134 teaches us:

"Every choice we make leaves an impression upon ourselves. We become the person we choose. Every time we listen to the internal voice, what is the truth of what we are hearing, what is it for, we are free. But when we listen to the instinctive nature within us that tells us, "It is okay, it is just now, do what you want," every time we become more like the beast within us, when we give into emotion and break all barriers [to actualize it] we strengthen that.

We are writing our own books ...You become who you are through the small choices we make all along.

There are twos scribes, one who records good deeds, both those we do internally or those portrayed by our actions, seen externally. The other scribe is, of course, going to be recording the side who is base.

We can recognize what happens when we make a positive choice. You change yourself openly meaning that people will see that new person and you will be translated to the world differently, and you will be different internally.

Be affirmed and validated by your choices to become the person you want to be."

Because free will is real, we might take the Divine gift of choice and believe that we can use it to bring out what is in our hearts, as Rebbetzin Heller explains above *"when we listen to the instinctive nature within us that tells us, "It is okay, it is just now, do what you want," every time we become more like the beast within us, when we give into emotion and break all barriers [to actualize it] we strengthen that"*. Why is this problematic for Jewish people? Surely human history shows that intelligent people who master the ability to bring their ideas into actuality are heralded for their accomplishments. And students of history, especially in today's world of media, find successful accomplishments and use these to model how to reach their goals. This reflects intellect. What is the issue?

Rabbi Shlom Leib Brevda [may he have a refuah shelama] tells how his father taught him emunah and why. Rabb Brevda shares that when he was a little boy, his father would tell him Torah stories while he sat on his father's lap. He taught Rabbi Brevda to say shema in the morning and at night. One day, on a street in their neighborhood, where everyone went to work so no one was home during the day, a thief tried to enter through a window in one of the basement apartments. A man who never goes down that street just happened to and saw the break in occurring and called the authorities and B'H the home was protected from loss. Everyone was talking about it. But Rabbi Brevda's father whispered in his ear, "Do you know why that thief was caught? Because the little boy who lives there said Shema in the morning, and that protected it!" Rabbi Brevda grew up with this emunah. He says when we went to kindergarten and the teacher told the stories of Nebuchadnezzar HaRasha, and Haman HaRasha and Pharaoh HaRasha, he thought there were two opinions, his father's opinion that Hashem runs the world and the kindergarten teacher's opinion that the rashes rule the world. Rabbi Brevda shared all of this to explain the truth, the basic spirituality of being obligated to 613 mitzvahs instead of being obligated to 7 mitzvahs. Rabbi Brevda says that we are not judged by Hashem and treated according to nature alone.

He says that we are individually maintained according to our involvement with Torah, mitzvahs and emunah. The more involved we are, the more protection. The less involved, the less protection.

Rabbi Rietti in his shiurim on Derech Hashem shares the same information. The involvement that Hashem has with us in this regard is NOT reward and punishment. It is, as we see in the Shema, a literal description of His involvement in our lives, the role that Torah and mitzvahs provide in our ability to connect to His protection. Reward and punishment are not the issue. Simple sustenance is, in the same manner as an employee has a salary and reimbursement for expenses to get the job done.

What is the job, the purpose of man?

The Mesillas Yesharim tells us in Chapter 1 Concerning Man's Duty in this World:

"Man was created for the sole purpose of rejoicing in Gd and deriving pleasure from the splendor of His Presence; for this is true joy and the greatest pleasure that can be found...the path to the object of our desires is this world..."This world is like a corridor to the World to Come. The means which lead a man to this goal are the mitzvahs and the place of performance of the mitzvas is this world alone....He has put man in a place where the factors which draw him further from Hashem are many. These are the earthy desires which, if he is pulled after them, cause him to be drawn further from and to depart from the true good...man is veritably placed in the midst of a raging battle...for all the affairs of the world, whether for the good or for the bad, are trials to a man...If he is valorous, and victorious on all sides, he...will succeed in uniting himself with his Creator, and he will leave the corridor to enter into the Palace, to glow in the light of life. to the extent that he has subdued his evil inclination and his desires, and withdrawn from those factors which draw him further from the good, and exerted himself to become united with it, to that extent will he attain it and rejoice in it...the world was created for man's use...man is the center of a great balance. ...if he is pulled after the world and is drawn further from his Creator, he is damaged, and he damages the world with him. And if he rules over himself and unites himself with his Creator, and uses the world only to aid him in the service of his Creator, he is uplifted and the world itself is uplifted with him...if man had been created solely for the sake of this world, he would have had no need of being inspired with a soul so precious and exalted as to be greater than the angels themselves...for a man enters this world...to achieve this closeness by rescuing his soul from all the deterrents to it and from all that detracts from it"

We use our free choice to rescue our souls. Every choice writes the book of who we are for eternity.

If you could ask Hashem and know that He would say yes to your request, would you ask Hashem for what you want or ask Hashem to help you be who He wants you to be? Which do you think will bring you more happiness, in this world and for eternity? Thus, it is worthwhile to house our consciousness, our self-esteem and our service of Hashem within every choice.

May the resulting light that we shine bring nachas ruach to Hashem and may we be zocheh to greet the Moshiach Tzidkeinu speedily.