

Nourishment for the Neshama

<http://lvracha.com>

Monday, January 20, 2014

We get to choose who we are in the moment, but it takes work - please verbally introspect!

A year ago there was a brave rescue of Jessica Buchanan who had been kidnapped in Africa.

<http://www.npr.org/2013/05/14/183624076/in-somalia-surviving-a-kidnapping-against-impossible-odds>

The amazing humanity of the Navy Seals who rescued her contrasted to her captors who she fully describes is a contrast that we can hold in our minds at every moment. Who do we want to be? Which direction do the choices that we are taking at every moment take us?

One of the consequences of living with wanton disregard of human life, where people blow themselves up or shoot innocent people because they have been victimized is a clouding of consciousness of the value of life. Conscience itself becomes compromised by the preponderance of examples that show ways of solving problems to reach goals whose pleasure comes from the satisfaction of savagery, ego victories, power, vigilante justice, desires and a gamut of emotional and ego based pleasures related to a sense of survival and dominance. The disregard of human life and higher morality speaks to the stronger base instincts of every person, the body that rationalizes what it needs to do in order to survive and thrive in a tough world. Absent clarity in the pleasure of serving Hashem for the sake of the pleasure in doing so, it becomes a slippery slope to seek pleasures that are not only counterfeited but ultimately cause us to violate commandments and sin and become corrupted.

Standing guard to prevent us from developing clarity in the pleasure of serving Hashem for the sake of the pleasure in doing so is none less powerful than the force we call Amalek, the lowest part of our lower soul, the root of the yetzer hara, who throws water on all our higher values and creates doubt and ridicules us for attempting to forge past its rational and logical suggestions for how to bring our desires and lusts to fruition, regardless of what infractions we commit, making sure that we carefully cover our misdeeds so no one can prove our wrongdoing or suspect us. As carefully as a cat covers its excrement in a litter box, the intellect when devoted to the messages of the lower soul and its master - the doubt within us, the cynic that keeps us feeling as though what we are doing is not disgusting and vile but rather productive and sensible - tells us it is even proper and good. Whatever self-interest Torah provides guidelines for when we are interacting with others can be easily overlooked and self interest becomes an idol.

If we fall into self interest but are still capable of feeling guilt, it may show itself as dialogue with others we team with justifying our behaviors and reassuring each other that what is being done is normal. Some might even be able to use imagination to show it is a good deed, overlooking that the whole conversation is necessary only because of the need to assuage a part of us that knows what we are doing stinks in the eyes of Hashem. We find justifications and are thrilled that what our conscience was telling us is wrong is, after all, permissible! And thus our conscience falls below Gd consciousness, heaven forbid.

And if we have fallen so far as to not feel guilt at all, and, as Jessica's captors did, rely on drugs or addictions in order to feel pleasure, making the pursuit of choosing pleasure that comes from serving Hashem totally obscured, then we have descended to the base bottom, the narcissistic life of the body

alone. And because we are all in bodies, we do not realize that each time we hear horrific stories like the kidnap experience of Jessica Buchanan, our relationship with our lowest self is strengthened and our distance from the pleasure of serving Hashem becomes farther away, more hidden and out of reach. Yet when we hear of what it meant to Jessica to be rescued by intelligent, trained men whose commitment it was to bring her to safety, even if it cost them their own lives, we see that a person really does have a choice in what type of pleasure we seek in every moment of our lives.

There is absolutely no one who does not have multiple opportunities every day to express dissatisfaction with another person, either to their face or to share put downs and condemnations or character assassinations with someone who also knows that person. It is a betrayal of trust to the one spoken about but worse, it is an acceptance of something within the speakers that rather needs to be elevated. Often what is being spoken is imagination alone, or a projection of their own insufficiencies upon that person which drives the dialogue. Or perhaps there is something that their higher self knows they did to wrong that person but they cannot admit it to themselves and therefore they "prove" to each other that what they are doing and saying is in deed good, permitted, and they comfort each other, not even realizing that they are creating harm in the world.

All of this to emphasize the importance of verbally introspecting in order to align our thoughts speech and deeds with Hashem's attributes of mercy. When we love Hashem and have awe of Hashem enough to not want to be parted from the pleasure of connection with Him for even a split second, we willingly embrace the challenge of examining our reactions, putting them through a sieve of the six constant mitzvahs, bringing them through the chain of sefrot from keter, chochma, bina, chesed gevurah, tiferes, netzach,, hod, yesod until we have expanded what is perfume to Hashem and contracted that which is skunky to Hashem and refined it all, ready then to absorb it into our hearts and fuel our thought speech and deed in the moment.

Conscience alone without Gd consciousness will succumb to the winds of the horrific violence we see today, rationalizing for the sake of self preservation of the ego and its emotions whatever we are able to discern as in our best interest. Only through verbal introspection where we are willing to open our hearts and challenges in front of Hashem with the desire to be who He wants us to be, that we should live up to the goal of bringing perfume to Hashem through our actions can we rise above the otherwise natural dialogue in our minds - between what we think are our only choices, in order to bring pleasure to ego based on emotion.

Those who believe that bringing humanity face to face with its animal instincts will help them reach political goals and dominance also need to revive within themselves what it means to experience the pleasure of serving Hashem for the sake of that pleasure alone. This pleasure is the purpose for which we are created and is an eternal pleasure that can only be earned while a person is alive. Doing what is pleasurable in Hashem's eyes brings a person to be united with Him, thereby experiencing the pleasure of bringing into the world light, mercy, healing and benefit, such as was felt by Jessica Buchanan through her rescuers.

There are universal truths. There is absolute truth. There is Hashem Who creates the entire world through utterances from His lips at every moment. There is no flow of life that brings a greater pleasure than to be the vessel to bring light, mercy, healing and benefit of the Creator to the world. No one can confuse such eternal and absolute truth with dominance, destruction, senseless killing, hatred or any other fallen truths.

Every person has true free will. We each have emotions and ego. We can choose to be the ones who bring light and mercy and healing and benefit to the world over the impulses and messages of ego and emotion. But we can only hear those distinctions if we seek it out as a daily practice, speaking out loud to Hashem and asking Him to please lead us in the path that we wish to go, to uplift our fallen fears to fear of displeasing Hashem alone, to uplift our fears of abandonment and annihilation to fear of being separated from Hashem's goodness and awe that our choices have eternal consequences even though our actions are

successful only if Hashem deems them to be His Will. Those who wish to enjoy ego pleasures that pander to lusts and savage-based hungers as what "floats their boats" are enjoying the patience of Hashem Who awaits their recognition that such pleasures are not what we are alive to accomplish nor should they be the goal of our choices.

Whenever we are faced with a deception, the question to ask is, would I feel this way if I were the subject of the matter? What we will most likely find is that we are very drawn to being the exploiter, especially if we feel we have been exploited, and our basic instincts don't stop us from thinking it is permitted. True understanding is that we are at all times to desire that Hashem never view us as takers or destroyers but only as His children, attempting to bring light, and mercy and healing and benefit uniformly to all, regardless of our emotions or ego-generated reactions. Why? Everything that is happening is orchestrated by Hashem so that we grow and bring His light to the world or heaven forbid, the opposite. We are creating darkness and light and we will see our creations after 120 years at our trial. While we are alive, we can do teshuva. That means uplifting our fears to fear of heaven, remembering that all glory is Hashem's, taking 100 percent responsibility for every moment of our lives in what we think, say and do. We must realize that our souls are busy even if we are drawn to be lax. We are building and destroying and we are totally responsible. The place of the world is Hashem. All is nullified by Him. And we can be His agent for mercy by remembering that all of mankind is from Adam, one man, and that our humility ultimately must reach the point of each person being a piece in Hashem's majestic puzzle of souls throughout time and space.

May the image of Jessica's rescue inspire us toward victory over what we have to rise above in order to bring light and healing and mercy and benefit to the world and may Hashem grant us success and may we soon see a new light shining in every atom of the world with the coming of Moshlach.