

## Nourishment for the Neshama

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#### Preparing ourselves for redemption - get started now

Many of the essays in this blog explain in detail how and why self-esteem, to be healthy, needs to be based on having free willed choice with which we may bring out the aspects of the Divine Image within us and NOT based on ego (such as how we look to others or to ourselves). This essay is going to take this a step further – to show how and why living with self-esteem based on bringing out the Divine aspect within us will ready us for redemption, by directing the most powerful aspect of our personality, our free will, towards purity of service to Hashem.

In a recent workshop with Rebbetzin Tzipora Heller (Elul 5771), Rebbetzin Heller teaches that our emotions, because they are primarily reactions to what is happening in this world of time and space, belong to this world. Rabbi Shapira teaches that our emotions do not give us access to our essential self! Yet, we all want to live in our emotions, and more, unless we are careful with the feelings of others, we create destructive beings! How can our emotions on the one hand be the significant dominating influence over our daily sense of well-being and at the same time have no real ability to affect our essential self? The answer lies in the use of our free will and the resultant actions.

We are almost to the end of the month of Tishrei, forming the seed and beginning the work of a brand new year, in bringing our spiritual growth to a new level. Free will is the tool that we are given, and there is another huge factor. Hashem created a pathway of teshuva to return to Him. So we have the energy, and we have the path, but what is our motivation? After all, if we feel comfortable, and everything is reasonably okay, what motivates us toward spiritual growth? Why not just continue floating down the river of life, reacting to what happens in the very best way possible, using our free will to cope as best we can? What is wrong with that?

As much as I like to feel emotionally happy, I have become aware that the cause of my emotional happiness matters very much. If what is ultimately giving me a feeling of happiness is something that will backfire or eventually collapse, then I will be in the unfortunate position of having attached my emotions to something and, when it is gone or no longer available, at a loss with no ability to replace it. That is grief. It happens when people die. It happens when we lose things. Therefore, it has become important to me that with my free will, that I attach emotion to something eternal, something everlasting, that cannot be destroyed and that exists beyond this world. It is one of the Six Constant Mitzvahs, to Love Hashem.

Loving Hashem, and realizing that our self-esteem comes from bringing out the aspect of the Divine image within us are crucial to our every day happiness. In fact, there is no greater pleasure than the spiritual joy a person experiences when using free willed choice to connect – for loving Hashem and realizing where our self-esteem comes from brings us into the reality that we have no real spiritual separate existence from Hashem. The more we energize our free will toward choices to invest emotion and action in bringing His Will into this world, the more we understand what pleasure is. It is experiential. It cannot be described. The Ramchal discusses this in Mesillas Yesharim.

Hopefully some time this week, Gilad Shalit will be returned to his parents. Over a thousand terrorist murderers will go to Gaza and elsewhere and be given a status of hero by their supporters. So much emotion! But where is the truth? A grain of truth and 99% untruth can generate a huge amount of emotion! 100% untruth can generate a huge amount of emotion as well! Does emotion alone create truth or does it just create a temporal reality that generates more emotion? And if we are determined to live in our emotions, trying to comprehend what the truth is about the situation or treating the situation as if it were true and therefore awarding it power, have we lived up to loving Hashem and bringing out the aspect of the Divine image within us, which we know is the reason we were created, to experience the greatest pleasure there is, from having a spiritual experience of pleasure in connecting to Hashem (devekus)?

I recently observed someone's elderly relative in the middle stages of memory loss. The man wanted to continue to drive, to live on his own and to enjoy life as if there were no problem. Part of the problem was that he didn't realize his limitations. The sad part is that his emotions were so strong, that he alienated those trying to help him, firing those hired, flaunting those trying to assist. His emotions were that of hurt, rebellion, determined will and more – all emotions of power that in his lifetime as an executive brought him success. People served him. But now, the mind was no longer providing any truth to back up the emotion. He didn't want to give up his car. His son took the car, feeling like a criminal, and sold it, but his blood pressure skyrocketed knowing that he was hurting his father's emotions. Yet, he realized that if he did not sell the car, his father would get in the car and drive and endanger himself and others. The truth had to be digested, his free will had to be aligned with protecting his father and others and thus he lovingly withstood his own emotions and did what he did, he sold the car, despite the verbal lacerations and complaints of his father.

Why do I share this here? What is the connection? Emotion is a tremendous influence on our lives. When we see people emotionally overwrought, it touches our hearts and we ascribe whatever truth we can, whatever true comment we can muster,

to empathically comprehend their emotion and try to alleviate their pain. We view this as kindness in the highest regard. And when there are two groups at odds and both evoke these emotions, we send out the negotiating teams to try to come to resolution.

As long as there could possibly be a grain of truth in either case, kind people continue to feed attention and energy to the matter, looking for resolution and positive outcome. But what if it is the case that there is absolutely no grain of truth – that it is the case of the man who no longer can drive but can't accept it? Then what? Then, despite our desire for emotional satisfactions, we must summon our strength and free will and take action to do what is the higher good, look for the truth, and bring out the aspect of the Divine and shine it into the darkness.

In today's world, there are many situations that are showing us that the reality of this world, the intrinsic truth of this world, is beyond the scope and reach of mankind. At some point, mankind will have to wake up to the reality that what we think is true and within the realm of reasonable men to determine is, basically, not. Suffering is Hashem's way of letting us know that there is a Divine truth, and allegiance to that Divine truth becomes the only joyous way to recover emotional wellbeing. To regain emotional wellbeing, we activate free will and align our highest power toward Divine truth and reality.

HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook wrote Oros HaTeshuva in 1925. Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, Mara D'Asra of Congregation Aish Kodesh in Woodmere, New York, just published [Song of Teshuvah](#) a commentary that reveals the treasures embedded with Oros HaTeshuva. "...the ultimate level of teshuva, which is intellectual teshuva...It is in that world that a person exercises his free will on the highest level, forcing himself to use his mind despite the urgings of his body and his environment. By doing so, he demonstrates that he has regained control of his life." (p. 47) ..."When he turns towards Hashem and pushes himself to be better, he is holding onto the example of Avraham Avinu, who turned away from idolatry and headed towards Eretz Yisrael. With his every moment of self-restraint, of giving up what his body urges upon him and instead doing the will of Hashem, he is joining together with Yitzchak Avinu, who allowed himself to be bound to the altar in order to serve Hashem." (p. 48)

What is false in today's world is that mankind can determine what is absolute truth, what is ethical and right. Hashem the Creator is the One who tells us what is true and what is ethical and right. It is up to us to bring out His Will, not to rebel against it and emotionally bring our narrative of truth to replace it. When we exhaust ourselves emotionally and physically, when we come to see the futility of insisting that we know better than Hashem, then we accept and stop fighting and just live as He designed the world. How far away from that point are we? Do we not see the madness of paining ourselves trying to pretend that we can still "drive the car?" Has Hashem not made His Will manifest enough in the world – can we continue to deny that He is trying to shepherd us gently toward His Will as reality, asking us to use our free will to bow what we think is true to what He has told us in Torah is true? It is not about which man is right or wrong. It is about the idea that mankind is limited and cannot possibly determine in truth anything that would establish new ethical standards deviating from Torah.

Powerful emotions. But without Divine truth, our efforts are destructive and self-defeating.

May we prepare ourselves for redemption by abandoning our investment of attention and emotion in matters that are not Divine reality and a reflection of Divine Attributes.