

## Nourishment for the Neshama

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### **Taiva and gaiva - accepting free will to choose avodas Hashem at their most primal and concealed levels**

I don't remember being two really. But somehow I think what I learned at age two has been cooking in the subconscious all these years and it is time to change the recipe.

Here is what we know from Torah:

The yetzer hara feeds off our feelings of lack (which result in a feeling of fear of annihilation or abandonment, the realities imprinted on us due to Adam's sin) and comes in the form of feelings in the heart that are like iron (desires, taiva) or like stone (anger, gaiva). How does the yetzer hara pull us out of the world of connection with Hashem? Torah tells us through our choosing to keep alive the yetzer hara's subconscious suggestions by following after jealousy, lusts and desires, and the yearning for honor.

Unless we train ourselves in thought management and find the originating dot of entry into our minds, we find ourselves well into the symptoms of having been drawn into the darkness. In fact, absent this learning, we are all aware ONLY of the darkness and attempt to posture our actions based on a world where the true essence is concealed. We are angry or sad, frightened or experiencing unhealthy compensations, such as overeating, oversleeping, speaking in an unbecoming manner, etc.

Torah gives us a birthright - we are animated by a spiritual force emanating from Hashem structured in His Image, meaning that it contains His attributes of mercy. Torah tells us our mission - to choose the attributes of mercy over the desiring emotions in order to unify and bring back into the service of Hashem the spiritual force contained within the garments of this world, through making brachas, keeping mitzvahs, restraining from aveilas and rectifying our thoughts speech and deeds so that they reveal Hashem's light.

The very basic place where Hashem asks us to exercise our free willed choice is to peel back the chocolate coatings that gaiva and taiva offer because the coatings of gaiva and taiva -like a magnet - attract and tempt us to add and keep alive the goals of the yetzer hara, to add confusion and concealment to Hashem's presence in this world. This is hard work because we do not recognize as gaiva and taiva very basic aspects of our existence! For example, food, sleep, intimacy - all of these are needs of the body yet we all know that there are traps of excessiveness and traps of abstinence. How do we learn the balance?

Rabbi Itamar Schwartz has a book called Getting to Know your Personality where he describes what is universal within us, the building blocks of every personality, in terms of earth, fire, water and air. It is in the area of water, desires and taiva, and fire, anger and gaiva, whose depths reach into who we believe we are since we are born.

Consider a two year old who wants something and is told no. The child cries or throws a temper tantrum.

Subconsciously, the child is experiencing a lack, feeling a concern that she will be annihilated by not having her needs/desires met or a concern that she will be abandoned by not having love and attention. For a child, feeling loved and protected is crucial in order to have the ability to resolve when older these same reactions.

Fast forward to adulthood. We have desires for normalcy, for security, for things to go smoothly, and yet sometimes there is no shalom bays, or there is hurtful talking and our desires are frustrated and we become angry. No one would say that having normal desires is a taiva. That would presume too much. Nevertheless, when we are speaking about any desire, it is fair to say that it is in the realm of water, and water is Torah and the Source of all Vitality is Hashem. Underneath even normal desires, we must have an understanding of the well from which pleasure flows. With that Primary Source in mind, we can make progress. Likewise, no one would say that having normal anger when bad things and losses happen is avoidable. Anger is an emotion and its initiating thought is really not within our control. Nevertheless, when we are speaking about any anger, it is fair to say that it is in the realm of fire, and fire is passion and needs to rise to passion for Torah in order to be productive and not devastatingly destructive. With its Primary Purpose of avodas Hashem in mind, we can make progress.

Ultimately, with maturity, we come to realize that having desires other than a desire for closeness with Hashem, other than a desire to emulate Hashem and bring light to the world, is a desire that is transient and far less potent than the pleasure for which we are created. And we come to realize that having anger in not obtaining lesser desires contains distortions that bring us deeper into darkness, and that the element of fire, the strength of our reaction, is better directed toward burning out lower and erroneous beliefs so that we can move upward in our climb to bring light into the world.

Deep within us is a yearning to cling to Hashem's attributes of mercy, which we demonstrate when we cling in thought to tolerating insult, overlooking faults, bearing the burden of confusion that results from Adam's sin, and forgiving and casting sins into the sea, a teshuva we do when we use the strength of fire within us to burn out the falsehoods within us, thereby submitting to Hashem and pulling off the chocolate coating magnetically trying to draw us to poison. It is incumbent upon us to choose to find a way in every moment to do teshuva in this way. Each time we do, we erode the peel of taiva and gaiva and permit the reunification of its strength back to its Source in a rectified way that is most pleasing to Hashem because when we do this, it is inevitable that we will have done an act of mesiras nefesh, we will have forgone a pleasure of the physical world in favor of avodas Hashem.

May we be inspired to comprehend our true purpose in being in this beautiful spiritual world that looks physical – to be in a constant state of teshuva so that we reveal the attributes of mercy Hashem enlivens us with over the natural desiring emotions and reactions, in awe and love of Hashem. May we feel no lack, may we experience the pleasure that He creates for us to have in this world, and may the light we shine create a new light and redemption b'ahava.