

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Moral choices on a vertical plane - an important focus for the summer

Very often we think of our choices, even on a moral scale, as one way or the other on a more or less the horizontal plane of time and space and doing.

From now until Tisha B'av, we are in a time zone where our choices, our moral choices too, must be viewed on a vertical planes of right and wrong according to Torah AND voice and expression to garments or to the tzelem elokim within. Why that matters more during the summer is that Passover and the Omer brought forth something within us that had been previously enslaved, and has been retrained, and now is its first steps in our consciousness. We want to reveal what we have grown rather than revisit our aching habits of a lifetime from which hopefully we have broken another layer into freedom.

The circumstances of our lives, how we grew up, our experiences are set within our neurocircuitry. These can become the currency with which we can declare the truth, that there is only Hashem in the world and that we choose to reveal the tzelem elokim within. In order to do so, we beg Hashem for His Help, asking that He please redirect the light trapped within our circumstances enlivening and drawing us toward conduct in response to those circumstances based on relieving the tensions in whatever way we are pulled. We arouse love in our hearts and ask that our good intention to redirect that light to unify His Name so that we may make a kiddush Hashem and sanctify His Name be paired to our deed. And we often bring out that deed through a mitzvah of the Torah, the mitzvah being the connection between the tzelem elokim and Hashem's Name through which the light shines.

Rabbi Ittamar Schwartz in the Getting to Know Your Uniqueness section of Bilvavi, www.bilvavi.com, explains that our soul is composed of its essence and faculties of the soul. Although emunah is very close to our essence, he explains how important it is to realize that emunah is a garment, a midda, just like taanug, ratzon, keser, chochma, bina, chesed, gevurah, tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod and malchus. If something is a faculty of the soul, it implies movement and it can be taken on or off based on choice. The crucial piece of truth imperative to the use of this information is that all there is in the world is Hashem's rachamim. The outward movements of how things appear are orchestrated to stimulate movement within our soul. Who is for Hashem? And what does that mean?

What that means is that if I feel insulted, overlooked, abused, rejected, scared, afraid or any of the myriad of natural reactions inherent in life itself, that my identity must be rock solid in that my inner penimius is tzelem elokim, a piece of rachamim from Hashem, and that ultimately I have the choice to identify with that or not. Nothing here requires us to be insensitive, stifling, suppressing or denying of the reality of existence in life. Rather what we realize is that we are given a real currency, life, to declare the truth that Hashem is One.

Our outward garments can be very hurt, broken, hateful, shamed, insulted, blamed, damaged, imperfect, and more. But inside there is something that is undamaged, loving, merciful and far more powerful that

is within our choice box to elect to reveal! What is its power? Calmness, clarity, connection to Hashem. We want during these summer months to add breadth and depth to our devekus from what we worked on all year.

Inside of us is a tzelem elokim. May our awareness of this vertical option when we have choices be more present in our minds and help us to let the steam out of our more negatively charged garments that might be experiencing a resurgence of overly ego-inflation so that we may choose to add newly freed layers of inclination to our choices when making kiddush Hashem rather than see them retract to pre-Pesach enslavements. When we reveal tzelem elokim through our choices, we literally are providing a physical action and home in our hearts for the Shechina, and may we soon merit to see the geula shelama.

In all the world there is One yet it feels like two. Please help me unify with You.