

## Nourishment for the Neshama

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#### Who rules our hearts?

Our hearts direct our actions and experience. If we have a strong emotional reaction or desire or attachment, it seems as though that becomes the control center – no matter how hard we try to resist, we fall back into doing what we are emotionally attached to. Can we rule our hearts? If not, who does?

The Torah tells us that we are to love Hashem and fear Hashem. If we don't rule our hearts, how do we do this? Or, if we do rule our hearts, how can we make certain to love and fear Hashem as the Torah dictates?

In the natural order of emotionally developing love and fear Hashem, we observe this world and experience gratitude. The direction that gratitude, love and fear of Hashem can take is, if we yearn for connection with Gd, is a deepening of emunah, faith in Gd. When we yearn for connection with Gd, perhaps it is fair to say that we are yearning for more consciousness of His Presence in our lives, more awareness of His Love for us, more connection to knowing that everything Hashem does is good and for our good. The Torah tells us we have no separate existence from Hashem (the place of the world is Hashem and He is all there is although hidden in this world). By consciously directing our minds through free willed choice to the reality that everything is from Hashem when we face adversities, we attach ourselves to the Perfection of Gd and we improve ourselves and can move from an experience of anxiety and pain to an experience of calmness and a sense of joy - the pleasure of being connected to Perfection. (Ramchal Mesillas Yesharim chapter 2)

Emunah is the crucial tool! When we have a trust in Hashem in the deepest part of our understanding, then we begin to really care for our souls. Until then, we are lost in the maze of thought, emotion, experience, trapping and heaven forfend torturing our soul while we run the maze of turns and twists that lead to dead-end pleasures or horrific mistakes..

Our passionate emotions seem to have a life of their own. However, it is within our free willed choice to direct our path, and if our emotions are taking us to a place that is attached to physicality, we can stop ourselves by asking a simple question. Is what I am about to do going to serve Hashem? If the answer is no, and we have deep emunah, knowing that we stand before Hashem at that very moment, that He is rooting for us to choose well, our hearts may still pull us farther away.

So, how do we rule over our hearts?

We can shift our emotions into the service of Hashem, for the unification and sanctification of His name, with free will. The result is calmness. There is no sight, sound, smell, taste or touch-like sensory feedback that we have accomplished this shift, aside from the absence of compelling emotional impulse we had to the precipitating event. It could be that the free willed process, with emunah at its pinnacle, might be something like this:

"I wish to rise above these emotions for the sake of the unification and sanctification of Your name. Please help me to not stray or please help me to know there is no other power and instead to take these emotions and give them to You as love and fear of You."

[the emotions now might feel like this]: "I am clinging to this event with my emotions – how can you ask me to not feel this way? This is normal human emotion and I have a right and I am not letting go!"

"With my emunah and with Torah learning, I comprehend that the emotions are attached to this world and not serving You. Please give me unlimited will power to steer my heart to loving and fearing You, for this is my choice!!"

This is NOT suppressing emotion. It is accepting emotion and declaring that our emotion serve our emunah and Torah learning. We can shift emotional attachment from physical reality, which is ultimately nothingness, TO spirituality, which is basically everything and all there is. The prerequisites are that we have the Torah learning and emunah to ASK for the huge amount of will power it takes to support the intellectual choice to move the emotions to love and fear of Hashem.

With emunah comes awareness that all there is in this world is Hashem, in many different ways. The soul of the world is Hashem. Nothing exists without Hashem. With the consciousness that Hashem gives us, we have the freedom to comprehend that it is His consciousness, for which we will be accountable for its use. Our body is nothing more than a speck of dust to Hashem. Our consciousness does not belong solely to our body. It fills our body at the will of Hashem but exists beyond that for all eternity. Home for our consciousness is connection with Hashem. Yet there are no neurons or electronic transmissions of the brain to direct us toward that goal. Instead, what guides us toward that goal is deepening emunah and the choices we make to serve Hashem, to stick to Hashem like glue, in devekus. When we do this, we experience a sense of calmness, of clarity, of peace. No light bulbs go off, no sound, no taste, no smell and no touch reveals it. Rather it is a peacefulness that courses through the veins, that dissipates negativity, that brings a sense of connection and humility, possibly for just a moment. But that moment, the experience of that moment, can change a person's eternity if a person

realizes what it means and wisely begins a journey for more.

Our bodies are very busy and overwhelmed with sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, emotional reactions, reflexes, and the pressures of daily life including relationships, financial matters, chores, work and more. We can be very distracted all day, go to sleep exhausted, wake up the next day, do much good and accomplish and give and love and earn and contribute. We may be walking past a doorway every single day that we could regret not discerning.

That doorway is our free willed choice to live with comprehension that our emotions, unless first connected to love and fear of Hashem, are attaching us to unreality. And we cling to physicality! Comfort! Desires! Ease!

Nevertheless, Hashem is all there is. Ein Od Milvado. If we are attached to something and we do not first see it as an emanation of Hashem's goodness, how will we have proper gratitude and use it to properly serve Hashem? And when we see everything, including ourselves and our consciousness, as an emanation of Hashem's goodness, and we strengthen our emunah, we begin making choices to reflect the intellectual awareness that we are here to serve Hashem and emulate Him and do His Will. Over time, as we experience the quiet peace and calm that results, an acquired taste for the pleasure of spiritual connection develops. It is incumbent upon us to increase our emotional connection to the realization that we can receive a pleasure that is not coming from sight, sound, smell, taste or touch and is greater than any of them, for it is an intangible joy that is completely trustworthy, enduring, constant and free.

When we have sincere intention to connect to Hashem and we send Hashem messages by doing His Will and by emulating Him, communicating with our intentions that we know He is there and wish to please Him, we get a positive response. This is very real. Key is to slow down and get quiet enough to realize it. When we are moving through our busy day, with all the stimulation, challenges, and obligations we have, we could run right past this important door. Don't. Every moment of life becomes different when we realize there is an infinite path parallel to the temporal path.

We have free choice. We learn Torah. Emunah that we develop becomes THE lifeline for us to energize our free will and dedicate the emotions of our heart to Torah, to loving and fearing Hashem. The alternative should be unacceptable to us, being that the alternative is to follow our hearts into darkness and disconnection. Our emotion, our basic hearts desire, if it is not first attached to love and fear of Hashem, is ultimately going to take us away from serving Hashem.

We can rule our hearts.