

OHR YISROEL, RABBI SALANTER'S LETTERS - PART 30:6

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

There are three especially important things to concentrate on in order to serve G-d well, R' Salanter adds here at the end of this letter. (We'll come to his lengthy excursion that we spoke of above after this.)

We must first be sure to foster a deep sensitivity in our heart to our flaws. We do that, as R' Salanter has been saying all along, by studying, concentrating upon, and taking in our sages' words of Mussar. That alone will encourage such a sensitivity. We must then concentrate on conquering our yetzer harah (i.e., on actually resisting the urge to do one wrong thing or another). And then we must rectify that yetzer harah (i.e., by reaching the level where we're no longer even tempted to do one wrongful thing or another),

There are actually three ways that Torah study helps us achieve that, he adds. Concentrating on it enables us to be refined, it acts as an "elixir" for what ails us, and it serves as a source of true life.

But just as there are learned and unlearned people there are also learned and unlearned ways to serve G-d. The unlearned way is to serve Him without much thought or analysis, in simple faith and wholeheartedly. Now, while that's laudable, it also makes it easier to be thrown by arguments against the faith. A learned person delves into things with his thoughts intact and thus secures his faith with a depth of conviction the other person could not.

Along the same lines, G-d interacts with us all on two levels as well: by means of the usual cause-and-effect ways of the world (which He is behind nonetheless), and miraculously. But R' Salanter ends this letter with the remark that it's clear that G-d must have a compelling reason to go beyond the everyday system of cause-and-effect and it must be based on one's merits.

What would merit that? -- our using our minds to delve into things deeply and analytically. That's to say that we only deserve G-d's special considerations by being deeply self-aware as well as being highly aware of others' own needs, which is actually the goal of Mussar study at bottom.

Text Copyright © 2010 by [Rabbi Yaakov Feldman](#) and [Torah.org](#)