

CHAPTER SEVEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

What have you heard from your somatosensory cortices lately? "Uh, what's that again?" I can hear you asking. Believe me, I felt the same way when I first heard the term.

The somatosensory cortices are brain structures known to be involved in mapping and regulating internal states. Recent scientific studies claim that by tracking blood flow in these areas, we can actually see how various emotions activate different regions of the brain. Hence my question. Or, in laymen's terms, "How do you feel?"

Be this as it may, the wizards in the lab still have a mystery on their hands. They can't figure out why deeply rooted emotions are as they are in the first place. They can scan the results of these events, but the whys and wherefores are still unknown.

I would like to bring to their attention the words of one of history's greatest doctors on the subject. One Friday evening, as he began the Friday night meal, the Kotzker Rebbe said, "The world is filled with wise, learned men, researchers and philosophers, who spend their time pondering, analyzing, researching and philosophizing on the verity of the existence and the functions of Hashem and His creations. But how much can they truly understand? No more, of course, than the limit of their intelligence.

"The Jewish people, though, were given tools the mitzvos with which they can reach far beyond their own limitations. This is the whole truth in the meaning of the words 'We shall do and we shall hear.' If we have the tools with which to act, then we will be able to hear, to understand, to attain anything, even in the highest and loftiest realms beyond our limited human capabilities."

I introduced the Rebbe as being a doctor, realizing of course that this may sound dubious, to say the least. But let me explain.

Our tzaddikim are the doctors of our souls. As such, they are able to reach places no medical or scientific expert can. The most challenging, complex and difficult to understand subject is the human mind. The seventh kapitel of Tehillim sheds some light on the mysteries of the mind.

King David never had an easy time of it. He was constantly bedeviled by enemies. Of them all, he considered King Shaul the most difficult. The Gemara tells us that, unlike the others, Shaul was a truly great and righteous man. But Saul pursued David relentlessly. Time and again he promised he would stop, only to rekindle the feud soon afterward. Twice David had it in his power to destroy this

implacable foe, and twice he showed mercy. At each occurrence, Shaul repented his past misdeeds, as the prophets quote him, "I have sinned.... Behold! I have acted like a fool and erred very much."

Shaul suffered from an all too human affliction: he was jealous of the young David. As a result, he became depressed, and this led to tragedy. David's emotions were also complex. *Shigayon by David, which he sang to Hashem, concerning Kush ben Yemini.*

Chazal tell us that the word shigayon is related to the Hebrew word shgia, error. David sang a song at the time of Shaul's downfall. Later he realized it was a mistake to do so at that point, and he therefore asked to be forgiven. Why the remorse? Because even though Shaul was an enemy, he was anointed the first king of Israel and was in many ways more devout than David.

Hashem, my God, I have taken refuge in You. Save me from all my pursuers and rescue me.... Like so many verses in Tehillim, this can be understood at many levels. At the simplest, David is asking to be saved from his enemy, Shaul. Then again, perhaps David is speaking of the enemy within. If a man as righteous as Shaul wanted to do him harm, perhaps the fault lies within. David might have wondered, What is it in me that is causing his hatred? His own character flaws might be at the root of the debacle.

Lest they devour my soul like a lion, tearing it to pieces, there being no one to rescue me. Without siyatta diShemaya, the soul can be ripped apart by that king of the jungle, jealousy. Of all the traits that can get the brain working overtime, jealousy must rank pretty high up on the list. This passage can allude to Shaul as the lion or, once again, to David's misgivings about his own actions.

David goes on: *If I repaid my friends with evil, I, who released those who unjustifiably torment me then let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it and trample my life to the ground, and may my soul remain forever in the dust.* David is saying, "I have treated others in a proper fashion. Even more, I released my enemy on two occasions. If that is not the case, then let them take me to the dust."

However, we can look at this from a different angle. Perhaps David is questioning his own motives in releasing Shaul. The Kotzker tells us that when Reuven convinces his brothers not to kill Yosef but instead to cast him into the pit, it is ostensibly to return later to save the lad. Even so, Reuven's act of mercy is not without its murkier motives, to which the Midrash alludes when it interprets Reuven's later return to the pit in terms of teshuva, repentance. In fact, the Midrash praises Reuven as the first man to repent.

Reb Mendele asks, "Had not others done teshuva before? What about Adam and later Kayin?" True, but Reuven's teshuva had a new aspect never seen before. Reuven perceived that his act of mercy was tinged with self-interest, for his father could justifiably hold him responsible for his younger brother's safety. What would he say? How could he face him? This realization, that one could do a mitzva with mixed motives, was a fresh insight and earned Reuven the status of being mankind's first baal teshuva.

So, too, David was suggesting that perhaps all that kindness he showed others even his altruistic freeing of Shaul might have stemmed solely from selfish reasons that of which even he was not aware. "If so," he says, "let my soul be driven by those I have wronged, even to the dust of the earth!"

Finally, the sweet singer of Israel cries out, *He began digging a pit and deepened it, only to fall into the pit he himself dug*. The mind is so tricky that we can think one thing but at another level feel something entirely different. It is so deep, this pit that can entrap us. It's so hard to really know and not to deny, *I will express gratitude to Hashem for His justice, and sing praises to Hashem's exalted name*. As the soul doctor said, we have mitzvos, and through doing them we can see through the fog, see through the limitations of this mortal life.

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