

THE LONG JOURNEY TO THE HEART

by Rabbi Label Lam

You shall know this day and take to your heart that HASHEM, He is G-d - in heaven above and on the earth below- there is none other. (Devarim 4:39)

There's a story about a man in an insane asylum in the mid-west that insisted on eating kosher food. When the hospital refused he demonstrated his sincerity by going on a hunger strike. It became an administrative nightmare but they were forced to capitulate. They had kosher food shipped from hundreds of miles away each day for this one patient. One of the Jewish doctors was making his rounds on Saturday morning and he saw this same man smoking a big cigar. The doctor was aghast. He promptly rebuked the patient, "You turn the whole hospital upside down for Kosher food and here it is the holy Sabbath and you're smoking a cigar?!" He took another big puff and said, "Doc, don't forget! I'm crazy!"

Similarly we often find it difficult to live up to what we know since we tend to act on the warmth of feelings rather than cold information alone. The ideal is when we are emotionally engaged with that which our sober intellect has confirmed true. The question remains even after we are convinced of a critical fact of life like the existence of G-d or the truth of Torah, how does one excite the heart and make it really real? It's frighteningly possible to pass the written exam and fail in the practicum of life. That's crazy! What then is one to do?

A) Take a phrase and repeat it over and over again with more animation and emotion. Pictures, colorful and textured will begin to sprout from the words over time as they become more densely packed with meaning.

B) Koneh lechah chaver- Acquire for your self a friend, says the Mishne in Pirke Avos. That's nice too. The word K'neh can also mean a pen. Let your pen be your friend. Sit with a blank page and ask a question on the top. What lasts? Let it flow unedited. Make lists of 25 things. How can I be a better husband/father/Jew? Let it flow. Edit later!

C) Take a media diet. Life unfolds like a soap opera. You can come back months later and find out you missed little. After a while you might begin to think your own thoughts and hear your own heart beating separate from the noise of the world.

D) Teach others. Nothing causes a person to know something more intimately than to be in a position of having to teach somebody else.

E) Do some quiet acts of goodness without the knowledge or approval of any other persons. By so doing you will have opened a private "inner-world" account and forged a deep personal relationship with HASHEM.

F) Learn Torah passionately and with a highlighter.

Reb Klonymous Kalman of Piasezno writes, "There is a type of prophetic revelation that comes when one looks into a holy book. Not knowledge of the future, for that ceased when the Temple was destroyed. Rather, it is guidance and a call to service of G-d and the holiness of Israel. At times, we have all experienced looking into a holy book and suddenly becoming extremely moved by a certain idea. A word pierces our heart and gives us no rest for years, until it can transform us into a different person and sanctify and uplift us. What is going on? We have already heard this idea from others and seen it in books, yet we remained untouched. Yet now, the matter suddenly penetrates our heart and mind. This is a form of looking into the Breast Plate worn by the High Priest. There too, all the letters were written, yet only some of them would shine into the eyes of the Kohen; and only a Kohen with divine inspiration. Another Kohen could stand beside him and not see a thing."

Taking action on any or all, of this partial list of proven methods can help launch one of life's most exciting and yet all too neglected adventures. From a pure intellect begins the long journey to the heart. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.