

A BODY AND SOUL JOB

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Moshe answered the descendants of Gad and Reuben, "Should your brothers go to war while you live in peace here? Why would you discourage the Israelite nation from crossing into the land which G-d has given to them? That's exactly what your ancestors did when I sent them from Kadesh-Barnea to scout the land . . ." (Bamidbar 32:6)

When it comes to spiritual growth, it is all about increasing "the light." The more the light, the stronger the connection is to G-d and therefore, the greater is the spiritual growth. Hence, we learn more Torah, pray with more intention, and do even more mitzvot in order to draw additional light towards ourselves and achieve greater spiritual heights.

But what are we really trying to improve in the end, to our souls or to our bodies? Are we trying to enhance our spiritual or our physical component, so that it can retain more of the light that is already there, but we simply don't access because at the present time, we can't? Is life about adding candles to a dark room, or about finding a bigger glass with which to draw water from the sea?

As the Vilna Gaon points out, life is about "shevirat hamiddot," the breaking of traits, as in negative character traits, which are obviously a function of the body, but not the soul. We come into this world with strengths and weaknesses, with the goal of using the former to rectify the latter. We are born to be "craftsmen," in order for us to bring perfection to the kli - the physical vessel with which we have been born into so that it can access the light that is already there.

That is why Bilaam changed his mode of attack. For, when he tried to curse the Jewish people, an attack on their soul, he failed, because the Jewish soul is, by definition, blessed. Hence, his next attack was on the Jewish body, and with respect to that he was VERY successful when he sent the daughters of Midian in to draw the tribe of Shimon in a very "physical" direction.

With the vessel damaged through the entire episode of Ba'al Peor, the light of G-d and Torah could no longer be retained and a transformation occurred. Hence, not only did the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and Menashe ask to live outside of Eretz Yisroel, something that was unfathomable at that stage of Jewish history. They couldn't even sense on their own how they had repeated the mistake of their ancestors just forty years prior! Even after hearing Moshe Rabbeinu's reply, and then after he agreed to their terms for living there, they could not sense the importance of abandoning their plans and desires in order to contribute their part to the Geulah Shlaimah - the Final Redemption.

This is, in fact, the basis of what Rashi says on the fourth posuk of the Torah:

G-d saw that the light was good, and G-d separated between the light and the darkness. (Bereishit 1:4)

G-D SEPARATED: He saw that the wicked were unworthy of using it (the light); He therefore set it apart for the righteous in a Future Time. (Rashi)

As we have pointed out before, this time "Future Time" does not refer to Yemot HaMoshiach, but history henceforth. In other words, access to the holy Primordial Light of Creation was going to be limited once mankind was created, limited to those worthy of using it.

Hence, as the Talmud points out, Adam HaRishon had access to the light for a while, and it allowed him to see from one end of the world until the other end (Chagigah 12a). Thus, the Leshem explains:

He [G-d] made a separation in the illumination of the Light that it should not flow or give off light except for the righteous, whose actions draw it down and make it shine. However, the actions of the evil block it, leaving them in darkness, and this itself was the hiding of the Light. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 133)

Thus, the light IS there, but it just won't enter them; their bodies simply block it, being instruments of evil.

SHABBOS DAY:

The concept of teshuvah is very fascinating, for a number of reasons. It is even more fascinating to watch another person go through the process of teshuvah, knowing that one day he or she will become the very thing that he or she, at the present time, is terrified of becoming.

"I could never wear a kippah full time," someone I used to learn with once told me. "I can't stand having anything on my head for a period of time," he explained.

Two months later, the kippah went on full time and he never complained about it, nor did he look uncomfortable about wearing it all the time. Quite the contrary, he wore it like a crown of distinction.

"And I could NEVER wear those fringes . . . EVER!" he said quite emphatically. "It's one thing to put on Tefillin every morning for an hour in shul, but I grew up wearing T-Shirts all summer long. Just looking at you guys wearing your . . . what are they called again? Tzi . . . tzi . . . uh . . ."

"Tzitzis."

"Right, tzeetzees. Watching you wear that AND your jackets and hats on 90- degree days makes me want to pass out from heat exhaustion right on the spot. I don't know how you guys survive, but I would go NUTS!"

Well, needless to say, after learning for a while longer he didn't go nuts, and he went to the

tzeetzees man to buy his own pair . . . and today he wears the entire get-up, tzeetzees, jacket, hat, and all.

"Cover my hair?" a beginner once said to me when I taught in a girl's seminary. "NO WAY! My hair is one of my best features . . . so I'm not about to cover it up! Besides, my family will think I've really gone off the deep end this time . . ."

I could only smile that knowing smile, for she was walking the path tread by so many ba'alei teshuvah before her. After a few years of learning, and a confirmed commitment to G-d and His holy Torah, she will begin to date young men who will only marry someone who covers her hair, as she dreams of building her own "Bayit Ne'eman B'Yisroel."

Granted, you put anything religious on the body before it is ready and it will buck like a wild bronco. And, since Judaism places such a great emphasis upon using one's free-will to decide to serve G-d, the body has to buy into the sacrifice of physical freedom, which can only happen after a process that includes Torah education and a refining of the spiritual body itself.

In fact, you wouldn't believe how spiritual the body can become, based upon how physical it became. And now, at this late stage of history, the body has been taken to its lowest point of spiritual potential, as the Western world goes to extremes to physically enhance it with all its materialistic experiences. We have truly arrived at the end of history, for how much more can Heaven put up with?

The question is, what is happening when a person does teshuvah, on any level? For a secular Jew, it is about embracing the totality of Torah. For an already religious Jew, it is about being committed to continuous growth in the direction of G-d, which includes yearning for redemption and the return to Eretz Yisroel. If a Jew is out of step with any Torah concept, either in thought or in action, teshuvah is necessary to bring him back in line with every aspect of Torah. What is teshuvah really about?

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

Every concept, like a Holy Spark, is an aspect of the Divine Light, a hint to the Ohr Ain Sof. Any misconception is the result of the lack of this light, something that is most pronounced during times of Hester Panim, when Divine Providence works behind the scenes and in seemingly mysterious ways.

As the rabbis teach, the Torah is the blueprint of Creation, which means that Creation must, by definition, exude all of Torah,. In other words, every concept is there in the world all around us, and our being able to see each one depends upon our body's ability to receive and retain that light. If we are lacking some aspect of Torah understanding, it is because, for some personal reason, our bodies are not capable of receiving that particular aspect of the Ohr Ain Sof. Our "keilim," that is our "vessels" are damaged in some respect, and teshuvah is about making the necessary repairs.

For, even though service of G-d is not an all-or-nothing thing, it is, nevertheless, limited by what is

missing from the totality available to man. This is why "dereck erez" (good character traits) must come before Torah, because it is pointless to pour Divine Light into a "kli" that cannot retain it. On the contrary, it can be damaging, as the Talmud warns: "Torah can be either an elixir for life or one for death" (Yoma 72a); it all depends upon the body's ability to receive the Torah's light.

Hence, teshuvah is about returning the body to its illustrious state of "Kesones Ohr," when it was more like a soul rather than a body, prior to the sin of Adam HaRishon. Indeed, the whole point of Techiyat HaMeitim (Resurrection of the Dead) is to achieve precisely this. In that period of time, the body that will return will resemble an angel more than a man, and thus be ready to enter the next phase of history, after the year 6000.

However, in the meantime, that is what we are supposed to be trying to achieve on whatever level it is possible, based upon our spiritual advantages and disadvantages. And, the important thing to remember is that whatever we don't do on our own time through learning and mitzvot, we do in G-d's way and as He determines. Kabbistically, this is called "tziruf v'libun," - "refinement and whitening," and as cleansing as the term sounds, it refers to the suffering we undergo in life.

MELAVE MALKAH:

The descendants of Reuven and Gad had a lot of cattle, and saw that the land of Ya'azer and Gilad was a good place for cattle. The descendants of Gad and Reuven approached Moshe, Elazar the kohen, and the princes of the congregation, and asked, "Atarot, Divon, Ya'azer, Nimrah, Cheshbon, El'aleh, Sevam, Nevo, and Beon, in the land which G-d struck before the Children of Israel is a land for cattle, and we have cattle. Therefore, if it is good to you, allow us to take it. Do not require us to cross the Jordan." (Bamidbar 31:1-5)

The upshot of this is that the request of Reuven, Gad, and the half tribe of Menashe revealed the "damaged goods" that arrived with Moshe Rabbeinu to the border of Eretz Yisroel. As the nation stood there at that momentous occasion of history that was literally the threshold of the Final Redemption, and the light of Eretz Yisroel emanated out in all directions, it could not penetrate the keilim of these three tribes.

Therefore, they remained unmoved and uninspired to live in the land they had been traveling to for forty years, if not longer if you also take into account the dreams of the Forefathers. Instead, their bodies were then more attuned to the frequency of materialism, though they were committed to keep all the Torah they could on the east side of the Jordan river.

The light emanated out, and those unaffected by the episode of Bilaam, and those that had at least done teshuvah and fixed their keilim, were able to absorb it and become transformed by it. There was spiritual ecstasy, and an even greater draw to enter the land and to settle it, even though others had just the opposite reaction.

In fact, it is very interesting how different Jews react to Eretz Yisroel. You have some who are

religious and can't leave the land, and you have some who are religious and can't tolerate it. As well, there are those who are secular who love the land, while there are those who are secular who have no connection to the land whatsoever. You have some who have lived here all their lives but yearn to be elsewhere, and some who grew up in Chutz L'Aretz (outside the land) but came to love the land only after moving here.

What's the difference? Is it all only just a matter of upbringing?

Yes and no, for as much as we are genetically the products of our ancestors, our physical bodies can still vary quite a bit from those who came before us. On the other hand, each family has its own approach to life, even if there is a major common denominator, such as Torah, guiding all of us. Thus, the patterns that one family chooses to live by can be very different from those of their neighbors and the rest of their community.

This has an effect on the body, making it more receptive to some of the aspects of G-d's light, and less receptive to others.

So, therefore, as we sit down to do our "Cheshbon HaNefesh," our "Accounting of the Soul," we should recall that it is really an accounting of our bodies, a reality check of what we are prepared to accept as truth, and what we reject without any basis. Knowing this allows us to chart a course across our own "Jordan river," a course of teshuvah that allows us to finally receive and benefit from the Ohr Ain Sof that flows all around us.

CHAZAK!

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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