

TO ACQUIRE ETERNAL REWARD THROUGH HAPPINESS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

God told Moshe, Take a census of the sons of Gershon as well, according to their paternal line and family." (Bamidbar 4:21-22)

Literally, the expression is "lift up the heads," though it is translated as, "take a census," implying a deeper meaning to what was really being asked of Moshe Rabbeinu. And, indeed there is a deeper meaning, that being that Moshe Rabbeinu was told not only to count the Levi'im, but to encourage them, to literally lift up their spirits, since their job could be dangerous, and even reduce their numbers. They had to know their risk was due to their chosenness.

This idea presents an interesting opportunity to discuss a matter that is so incredibly common, and yet so incredibly debilitating: depression. Even though just about everyone suffers a bout of depression from time to time, and some, unfortunately for extended periods of time, and deeply, it is still not too well understood, or curable. Depression is in the brain, and as small as it is, it might as well be as big as the entire universe given its intricacies and mysteries.

But, is the brain the cause or the vehicle for depression? According to Kabbalah, sadness and depression are the result of certain klipos (literally, "peels," since they block the reality of God from a person) that emanate out from legions of angels in the upper worlds that are based in strong judgment (Drushei Olam HaTohu, 2:4:6). As their light filters down from the upper levels to the lower levels, it results in certain spiritual realities, or impurities that can bring on depression in man.

Obviously this requires some explanation.

On one hand, it is not so difficult to understand. In fact, the physical world works very much the same way when it comes to infectious diseases, which attack a person's immune system and try to take it over. To the extent that they can, the person will become ill, God forbid, and in some cases, even die.

Human beings are somewhat vulnerable to infections, but some are more vulnerable to them than others. As a result, some people can resist some infections that others cannot. However, when it comes to some of the more severe attacks on the immune system, most people cannot prevent them from doing damage, and a pandemic can even occur, killing millions of people, God forbid.

The Klipos work very much in the same way, except that they attack a person's spiritual immune system, which is designed to keep a person spiritually healthy, that is, close to God. Like bacteria or

viruses in the physical world, the Klipos feed off the person, manipulating that which is meant to help him survive, in this case, kedushah, or holiness, against the person, to kill him, if not physically, then at least spiritually.

When it comes to physical infections, a person is forced to consciously pursue a healthy life, if he wants to maintain his well-being, especially if his immune system is weak to begin with. He might want to party all the time, and eat only foods that taste good, but human vulnerability to an aggressive bacterial world curbs his lifestyle, making him more responsible about how he lives. As the Talmud says, illness came into the world to make man more real with the opportunity of life (Bava Metzia 87a).

The Klipos work the same way. There are some people who are more spiritually vulnerable to others, and affected by some klipos that others may not be vulnerable to. For example, some people have little difficulty rising early each morning to pray to God, whereas others have extreme difficulty getting out of bed at any time in the morning to pray. That is not just laziness; that is a specific impact from a specific klipah.

Some klipos are so strong that almost no one can remain immune to them. For example, when the Jewish men fell prey to the Midianite women at the end of Parashas Balak, strong and weak men alike fell. Going to a beautiful banquet of food that looks incredibly appealing can result in just about everyone overeating in ways that they might not do at home-ever. Just going into a shopping mall can bring many a good person down spiritually, since the entire environment is designed to support materialistic tendencies and drives.

Indeed, a large of part of Marketing & Advertising is just to get products to appeal to people so that they will buy them, even if they don't need them. When it comes to products that one needs, very little M & A is needed to sell the product, since people tend to buy that which is healthy for them, at least health-conscious people do.

However, there are a lot of people out there who want to get rich, which often means creating something that others will buy, and not everyone is so fortunate to stumble onto something that truly benefits other people in a real, healthy way. As a result, entire industries are set up just to appeal to people's spiritual weaknesses, such as a person's lack of self-confidence and need to fit in, or a person's innate competitiveness.

Whatever, it should be becoming increasingly clearer that the Klipos exist in order to make it necessary for a person to consciously be spiritual and holy. Anyone who just tries to drift, spiritually-speaking, will fall prey to the Klipos just as someone who does not take care of his health, which includes taking care of yourself and your environment, will fall prey to physical illness.

There are different klipos for different spiritual maladies, but they all work the same in principle, and they will all have the same effect. They are the result of a constriction of God's light, and they will distract a person away from spiritual growth in the direction of spiritual decay. They will weaken the

person's spiritual defense system until doing the "feel good" thing becomes as second-nature as breathing, just so the person will forget about God.

Hence, being overly proud can be just as spiritually-debilitating as being depressed, for in each case the person is too distracted by their personal reality to focus on God and closeness to Him. It is just that some people are impervious to those klipos that cause excessive pride, and as a result, may lack the self-confidence to ward off klipos that attack one's sense of selfworth, while others will never get depressed, because they are so sure about themselves, indeed, too sure.

If you want to know the Klipos content of what you are doing or where you are, just ask one question: "On a scale of one to ten, how much does what I am doing, or where I am going, bring me closer to God?" If the honest answer is somewhere between zero and five, then you know you are walking into a Klipos trap. And, love it as you may, or justify as you do, it will bring you down, and though that may not concern a person today, it will concern him "tomorrow," when God goes looking for the person.

However, there is an additional issue when it comes to depression, which is huge. What about clinical depression? What about chemical imbalances that make what would have been an otherwise happy person into a depressed one? How is such a physical deficiency viewed in light of the spiritual source for depression?

The truth is, we could ask the question about any psychological illness. Why is one person overly proud when someone else who might have experienced the same upbringing and life experiences is not? Why is one person overly insecure when someone else who lived the same type of life turns out just fine?

In each case, there is usually an additional factor, a certain propensity to respond to life's experiences in a particular way that results in a condition over time. The extra pride or insecurity, or whatever the person may do beyond what is accepted to be psychologically normal, is the person's way of compensating for a lack of balance in life, making him feel more whole, though everyone else around him may be annoyed by his behavior.

The extra factor may even be a person's soul. There are kinds of souls with all kinds of "personalities." There are quiet souls and there are loud souls, and everything in-between. And, each soul can have a different impact on the body and evoke a different emotional response from the body that houses it.

For example, the Arizal writes:

If two souls from the same root reincarnate into co-existing brothers or friends, then the two of them will "naturally" hate each other and fight, though they may not know why. However, "even though they don't see, their mazel does" (Megillah 3a), and each will want to draw from the root more than his spiritual counterpart, and thus they will find themselves jealous of each other. However, if

through Ruach HaKodesh they would see that they come from the same root then they would come to love one another even though they live at the same time. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

In such a situation, and there are many like them, a person can find himself feeling jealous of another in a way that cannot be explained by the current physical situation. The fact that his "brother" bought a new house, etc., may provoke feelings of jealousy, but the root of those feelings can be the soul itself, though he may not be aware of this, which can drive a person crazy sometimes, or at least make them act in peculiar and obsessive ways.

Likewise, a person can find himself feeling more for another person than can be explained by the life relationship. There are friends, and then there are soul brothers, when the feeling of connection and loyalty goes beyond anything they have experienced together in this world. Hence, when one suffers, the other suffers along with him, even if he would prefer not to.

Therefore, we all have leanings and spiritual propensities. Some are helpful, others seem to interfere with the smoothness of life. They compel us in directions we might want to go, and often in directions we ought not to go, creating opportunities to rectify mistakes of past incarnations. As the Arizal explains, we are here to work on our weaknesses, not to ignore them. We are not here to glorify our strengths, but to use them for the sake of overcoming our weaknesses, in order to become more perfect human beings.

It is no different for someone born with, or who has developed certain physical conditions, such as chemical imbalances. It may seem very unfair, but only if you believe that this is the world where we are meant to have fun and eternal pleasure, which, of course, is not true. This world is just the corridor to the next one, making it the place to use handicap, be it physical or spiritual, to one's advantage.

Like an athlete who purposely increases the tension on his exercise machine, greatly increasing his struggle for the sake of becoming more physically fit, our challenges do the exact same thing, on a spiritual level. Our pre-existing inclinations to go one direction or another does interfere with our free-will, but enhances it.

Hence, since we are here to earn reward for eternal pleasure in the World-to-Come, the only true tragedy is when someone doesn't know this, and measures his quality of life by how good he has it in this world. Certainly there is a lot of pleasure to be had in the world, and when it comes legitimately, that is, without interfering with spiritual growth and closeness to God, then why not enjoy it?

Rather, quality of life is measured by how well you are doing with your personal handicaps, which may not always be as obvious as someone with actual physical symptoms. Not living with this level of reality means being vulnerable to the Klipos, which can either artificially raise a person up, or artificially bring him down. It really doesn't matter to the Klipos, as long as the end result is the same: spiritual debilitation.

Hence, when Dovid HaMelech wrote:

Serve God with joy! (Tehillim 100:2)

he wasn't just telling us to do the best we can to be happy. He was encouraging us to stay vigilante against the Klipos. For simchah is a function of the intellect, and therefore, it can exist even when life itself works against it, as in the case of the Levi'im in this week's parshah.

Hence, it was Moshe Rabbeinu's job to show them what to truly focus on, and what to ignore. He showed them what was eternal about their work, and what was temporal, for as the Talmud states: There are some who earn their eternal reward in a single moment, while some only do it after an entire lifetime (Avodah Zarah 10b). Happy is the one who does it either way, winning the battle against the Klipos, and their tendency to drag a person down into the depths of sadness and depression.

Dedicated in loving memory of our beloved father and grandfather, Yosef Leib ben Shmui, z"l. May the learning of this parshah sheet be a great merit for his soul, and may he be a meilitz yoshar for all of the Jewish people.

Dr. Barry Shapero & Family, Toronto, Canada

Text

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