**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**The Path of the Piaseczner Rebbe**

**By Dr. Ron Wacks**

**Shiur #21: Chassidic Service of God (continued)**

**A Revealed Psyche**

One of the principles of the process of self-awareness that R. Kalonymus demands of a person is for him to become familiar with his own psyche. This is an important key to bringing man closer to God:

The beginning of the revelation in the holy ones of God was their own Jewish psyche. This part of God in Heaven that was in their midst was revealed to them, and then, with their psyche revealed, they were ready to become a chariot for the great and lofty revelation that they merited in their holy state. In the introduction to his book *Sha’arei Kedusha*, R. Chaim Vital writes that it is possible for a person’s own psyche, being well purified, to be revealed to a person and to guide him in all his ways. In other words, there can be a *tzaddik* who does not merit more than the revelation of his own psyche – [he achieves] neither prophecy nor Divine inspiration – but this, too, is an [elevated] level and it, too, can guide him on his path to God.[[1]](#footnote-1)

R. Kalonymus quotes from R. Chaim Vital, the disciple of the holy Ari. In the introduction to his *Sha’arei Kedusha*, R. Chaim Vital speaks of the exceptional individuals in his generation who sought to achieve supreme *devekut* and the level of *ruach ha-kodesh* (Divine inspiration), but were not successful for some reason:

Indeed, as for us – if only we could merit a small measure of Divine inspiration, something like a revelation of Eliyahu [the prophet], of blessed memory, which is something that many people used to achieve [in times gone by], as we know, or like the revelation of the souls of the *tzaddikim*, as is mentioned frequently in the *Sefer Ha-Tikkunim*. Furthermore, even in our times, I have seen holy people who have merited all this. But sometimes it is possible for a person’s own psyche, being well purified, to be revealed to a person and to guide him in all his ways. And all of these similar paths can be achieved even in our times, by those worthy of them. However, a great measure of discernment and extensive efforts are needed to detect the truth, for perhaps a different, impure spirit was with him.[[2]](#footnote-2)

When the psyche is revealed, it manifests itself as a guiding force. In other words, a person can rely on the guidance emanating from his innermost psyche as a reliable source, just like prophecy or Divine inspiration. However, R. Chaim Vital adds, just as one has to beware of false prophets or revelations of extraneous forces, so it can happen that a different spirit, from an impure source, may awaken in a person’s psyche. The way to achieve “revelation of the soul,” according to R. Chaim Vital, is through purification. His book offers detailed instructions as to the purification of the psyche in particular, and one’s self and experience in general.

In R. Kalonymus’s teachings, the concept of revelation of the soul assumes broader significance. He relates to this concept as a state in which a person is fully aware of his feelings, his consciousness, and his moods. Of course, when one’s emotions run high, it is easier to gauge what is happening internally, as opposed to times when feelings are opaque and imperceptible (especially for people who do not have an emotional tendency).[[3]](#footnote-3) When the psyche is revealed, a person can sense his inner workings, both through the movement of his limbs – as, for example, in energetic action to perform a *mitzva* – and through states in which there is a body-mind connection[[4]](#footnote-4) – such as, for example, an increased heart rate when one is excited. The psyche is constantly in motion, never stopping for even a moment:

The sensations and vibrations of the psyche never cease, whether they are in flaring fervor over Torah, a *mitzva*, and holiness or in spasms of pain as you strike and wound it… But either you feel nothing of this or you feel some sort of sensation, without knowing what the feeling is – whether it is vibrations driving you in the direction of synagogues and *battei* *midrashot*, or vibrations in the direction of excessive food and drink and the other frivolities of this world…[[5]](#footnote-5)

People are generally aware of and attentive to what is going on outside of themselves, but not what happens inside their own psyche. For instance, when we hear something, our mind registers the noise and we focus on the sound. When we move a table, we are focused on the movement of the table, rather than what is happening inside us.

Why is it important to arrive at revelation of the psyche?

R. Kalonymus argues that in order to be granted inspiration from on High, a person needs an exposed psyche. Inspiration is the beginning of the outpouring of blessing from the upper worlds to our lower existence, a mode of insight, Divine inspiration, and prophecy. But it is also possible for the psyche itself to guide a person – a lower level than Divine inspiration, but nevertheless a rather elevated state. In order for the psyche to become a platform for inspiration, it must be revealed, exposed, perceived, and experienced to a greater degree than the senses, to the point that they are nullified:

Inspiration requires a revealed psyche to serve as its chariot. But when one performs one’s Divine service with fervor, since his psyche is then revealed and his senses are somewhat dimmed, he merits a greater measure of inspiration from on High. Therefore, although this is not all of *chassidut*, there can be no *chassidut* without it. Divine service with passion is the beginning, and it is indispensable, since *chassidut* is adherence to the path of the prophets, and inspiration from on High demands a revealed psyche.[[6]](#footnote-6)

R. Kalonymus teaches us that to attain a revealed psyche one has to do more than just passively observe the workings of one’s inner thoughts and feelings. One has to arouse the psyche in different ways, so that it becomes revealed and is able to perceive supernal insights. The process requires an initial catalyst, but then becomes self-propagating: at first a person arouses fervor and passion within himself, whereupon the psyche is revealed and becomes a platform for inspiration from on High. When the person receives this Heavenly gift, his fervor is intensified, his senses are nullified, and as he elevates himself the inspiration that he receives is greater and stronger.

The psyche is revealed especially in one’s character traits, and specifically in the traits of love, awe, fear, and joy. Hence the great importance of working on one’s character. Also important is to accustom oneself, from an early age, to work up fervor and enthusiasm over phenomena that are good and worthy:

The psyche is revealed in the passion of one’s character traits. When a person accustoms his psyche from early on to be aroused and excited by foolish and vain matters of this world, he damages part of his revealed psyche – for his forces them in the direction of folly, to the point where they are able to be aroused on their own by lowly passions, love for base things, etc.[[7]](#footnote-7)

This is clearly borne out by the vast number of contemporary advertisements that try to create interest in and excitement about consumer products by arousing shallow and vulgar passions.

(To be continued)

1. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. R. Chaim Vital, *Sha’arei Kedusha* (Jerusalem, 5745), Introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. R. Kalonymus speaks in harsh terms of “people whose hearts are completely dulled… whose psyche is buried under a great heap of refuse, and who fail to extend even a finger of their hand to the outside…” – in other words, people of cool disposition in whom it is difficult to arouse any sort of emotional experience, since they have “no will or desire for anything that is holy” (*Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, pp. 4-5). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Concerning the mind-body connection, R. Kalonymus writes: “The mind [psyche] is closely bound up with the body, and nourishes it, and unites with it, and just as all movements of the psyche are revealed to us via the entire body, so it is that with regard to fervor, the action of the psyche is revealed, and it acts via the body and its channels. However, while its other activities are clothed within the body, without revealing themselves to anyone, the action of fervor is discernible as arising from the psyche. And since it is closely bound up with the body, therefore they affect and influence each other. In response to a physical sensation, pain, or pleasure, one’s psyche grows animated and passionate, and when a person thinks about something that he loves or hates, even if it has nothing to do with the body, in either a positive or negative way, but only the thoughts are involved – nevertheless the body, too, is activated and animated, and his heart rate rises and he breathes faster, etc.” (*Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)