**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**The Path of the Piaseczner Rebbe**

**By Dr. Ron Wacks**

**Shiur #24: Chassidic Service of God (continued)**

**Ways of Achieving *Hitragshut* (continued)**

**The Importance of Self-Awareness**

One of the primary keys for entering the gates of inner service is self-awareness. Remarkably, although a person is generally concerned for his own wellbeing, he is not always aware of what is happening in his own inner world. His psyche is in constant movement, expressing its will and its aspirations, but even though the person may sense something going on, he is not equipped to interpret it and to take the appropriate steps:

The hiddenness and imperceptibility of what is happening inside him distances a person greatly from himself. He is unfamiliar with himself and ignorant of what goes on inside him. Even the psyche of the simplest person never ceases its restlessness and writhing, crying out in supplication over its lowliness, and over all the blows and trials and tribulations that he causes it through his foolish actions, speech, and thoughts. The fact that he senses none of this is because he gives no thought to listening to this tempestuous wretch.[[1]](#footnote-1)

A person naturally tends to occupy himself with matters external to himself; he is not attentive to his own inner workings. It is easier to engage with the outside world, with its affairs of greater and lesser importance, than it is to listen inwardly. Even when he detects inner movement, he is unable to decode and make sense of it:

For that is the way of man: he always strive for that which is extraneous to himself, the affairs of the world, both those that are vital and those that are not. He interests himself in what happens at the end of the world, but he pays no heed to his own psyche, and does not listen and give attention to the business that is within him. Or he may sense it, but since even at the moment that he senses it his desire, his attention, and his thought are turned to the lowly muck of this world, he hears the moaning and its voice only weakly. This may be compared to a person who is asleep and a mosquito bites him on his forehead. If he is a merchant, he dreams that a bag of his merchandise has fallen on his forehead and struck him; if he is a tailor, he dreams that his needle has pricked his forehead, etc. Each individual perceives his inner workings in the guise of his own dreams.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The psyche expresses its longings in different forms, but often a person is unable to decode any of these spiritual needs, such as a desire for *teshuva* and the fear of God. Sometimes, when he feels something oppressive inside him, he goes to the refrigerator and takes out a bottle of sweet drink and some cake, or he tries to distract himself by joking with his friends. Often, a person makes the mistake of thinking that it is his body that is suffering physical hunger, and he believes that he can satiate it by filling his stomach – while in fact it is his psyche that is starved and crying out in distress:

Sometimes the psyche of a Jew is animated by regret, *teshuva*, submission, fear of God, and so on, and the person feels some sort of movement and restlessness within himself, but he has no idea what the problem is. He thinks he may be hungry, or thirsty, or in need of some wine and wafers, or he may think that he has fallen into melancholy, and in order to lift his spirits he chatters playfully with the members of his household, or goes over to a friend to joke and engage in *lashon ha-ra*, gossip, foolishness, etc.[[3]](#footnote-3)

R. Kalonymus’s grandfather, author of *Maor Va-Shemesh*, also addresses the connection between an unhappy psyche and stuffing oneself with food. Attention should be paid to the chain of wrongdoing: *Bnei Yisrael* complain, convincing themselves of how bad things are for them. This leads them to melancholy, which gives rise to the craving for meat and the punishment that follows:

“And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord” – This means that they fell into melancholy… and the Lord’s fire burned amongst them, for black bile is detestable and abhorrent, for it is a tinge of idolatry… and for this reason they were punished. And Moshe prayed, and the fire subsided, but it continued through their melancholy, for they felt a lusting and they said, “Who will feed us meat?” For as we explained, the lust for food is drawn from black bile… Therefore, one has to distance oneself far from melancholy, for it brings a person to all sorts of sins. And despondence begins with a growing desire to eat, as we see when a person is mired in black bile, heaven forfend, he eats with lust, ravenously, and very quickly.[[4]](#footnote-4)

When a person tries to “quiet” his inner distress with sweets and snacks, not only has his psyche not received what it really wanted, but it is greatly pained by his failure to understand its true needs. Sometimes, after a person continually ignores and steamrolls his inner voice, it simply grows silent:

Sometimes, after all of these actions which he has done, he still feels inner discomfort, since with these worthless medicines not only has he not cured the sores of his psyche, nor given it relief from the blows that he has administered to it, but he has in fact added further injury and assault. But sometimes it happens that after these misguided actions he actually feels better, and his spirit is quieted within him, because the blows and injuries and sores that he has added through his actions have rendered his psyche unconscious, or he has piled mounds of dirt and refuse over it to the point that it is completely hidden. Then he will no longer hear even the slightest peep out of it – and he can relax.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The psyche also transmits signals of joy, not only distress. A person often misses these signals too, failing to give them expression. For example, when a person fulfills a *mitzva* or rejoices in his prayer, and his psyche awakens with joy and *hitragshut*, he will fail to notice this – both because of his general insensitivity to his inner world and because his attention is oriented elsewhere.

R. Kalonymus argues that the way to achieve *hitragshut* and *hitlahavut* is not by “importing” new feelings from outside of oneself; they are already to be found inside him. However, they must be given more powerful expression and allowed to effect a greater influence on his consciousness:

It is not new excitements that you need to seek, nor a heavenly-initiated awakening. First and foremost, the work is required of you yourself, for everything exists within you. You are capable of *hitragshut*, and you are a person who is able to attain fervor; you simply need to try to get to know yourself and what is going on inside. Your psyche is full of signals, shouts, and supplications, and all you need to do is to provide space within yourself within which it can be revealed and strengthened. Then you will come to know and feel your natural *hitragshut*, with no need to garb yourself and your needs.[[6]](#footnote-6)

R. Kalonymus not only demands self-awareness, but also explains how to attain it. A person has to learn to listen to his own inner world and ask himself questions: Is my psyche happy, and if so, about what? Is my psyche sad, and if so, why? What are the inner feelings that accompany me in this situation, and how did they come about?

At first, this work will involve only the major movements of the psyche. It is not advisable to start with weaker movements, since, owing to their delicate nature, their meaning is not always clear. Attention should therefore be paid to the stronger signals, and when one notices them, he should “provide space” and allow them expression. This is facilitated through paying attention to them, strengthening them, and allowing them to reveal themselves through our power of imagination.

We will now elaborate on each of these tools individually.

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. Kalman Kalonymus Epstein Ha-Levi, *Maor Va-Shemesh* (Jerusalem, 5748), *Parashat* *Beha’alotekha*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)