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[Home](#) > Rosh Chodesh Avodah - 007 The Spiritual Sense of Touch

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## Rosh Chodesh Avodah - 007 The Spiritual Sense of Touch

### ***Tishrei and the Sense of Touch***

What is the *avodah* of the month of Tishrei? It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that the month of Tishrei is the time to use our sense of touch (*chush hamishush*).

There are many ways how we can feel something through touch. One way is through our mind: our mind is the root of our five senses. Our mind sends messages through our body when we touch something.

Another kind of touch is through our **heart**: our heart is able to feel something that is going on outside of ourselves.

The regular sense of touch which we are familiar with, which comes from our brain, is, for example, when we want to feel if food is fresh, so we feel it if it is soft or hard. Our physical sense of touch can only feel the external part of something - it cannot feel the essence of something. Only our heart can feel the essence of something.

Our heart is able to sense what is going on in the inside of something. For example, when a mother hugs her child, not only does she feel her child physically, but she connects to his soul with her own soul. Her heart is feeling her child.

All of us need to become aware of our ability to feel something through our heart. Sometimes we feel through our physical sense of touch, and sometimes we feel through our heart; sometimes we use both. We need to become aware of how we feel something, and where it comes from.

### ***Appreciating The Sense of Touch***

Imagine if we wouldn't have the sense of touch, and we only have the other four senses. What would our life be like?

We wouldn't be able to hug or kiss anyone. We wouldn't be able to even feel someone's hand. The world would be a very cold, unfriendly place. And when we cook food, we wouldn't be able to put the fork in to feel if it's soft or not.

All of us enjoy going swimming. If not for touch, we wouldn't be able to feel the enjoyment in swimming around in the water or even taking a shower; we would only be able to drink it. On a hot day, everyone loves to feel a breeze. If not for touch, we wouldn't be able to feel a breeze.

Touch is called "*mishush*" in Hebrew, from the word "*mamash*" - "real." When we feel something, we are able to feel how it is real. Touch enables us to connect to something. Just like we use physical touch to connect to something physical, so does our spiritual sense of touch enable us to connect to spiritual matters.

We don't only connect to something through touch. The sense of sight, for example, can also connect us to something. Just by seeing the sky, we connect to the sky. But there are things which we don't feel connected to unless we touch. A clear example of this is a mother who talks to her child on the phone when he is away. It's not enough that she's connected to him through hearing him; a mother wants to feel and touch her child.

We have so far described our need to touch the physical. It is because we have a need to connect ourselves outward to the world. Now we will discuss here the deeper sense of touch which we have: the heart's sense of touch.

### ***Feeling Ruchniyus (Spirituality)***

Where is the heart's sense of touch?

Let's say Reuven is talking nicely to Shimon, but he doesn't feel any love for him; really he can't stand Shimon. If Reuven would properly develop his spiritual sense of touch, he would be able to feel what's going on in Shimon's heart and see him in a whole different light, and then he would feel a love for him.

Our sense of touch in our heart is able to feel something that we can't feel with the other four physical senses. The only way we can connect to Hashem is through feeling Him with our heart; we cannot see or hear Him physically, but we can feel His existence with our heart. This is the power of our heart: it can feel the spiritual.

### ***The Opportunity of the Month of Tishrei***

During the month of Tishrei, and especially during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, our heart is more open to feel Hashem. Of the month of Tishrei, it is written, "*Seek Hashem where He is found, call out to Him where He is close.*" Hashem is closer to us during these days. Not only is Hashem closer to us, but it is we who can feel Him more clearly, during the month of Tishrei.

The month of Tishrei are days in which our heart's sense of touch is more opened. We can feel things from our heart much more during these days than the rest of the year.

If we learn how to use our spiritual sense of touch, we can become close to Hashem during these days, to "feel" Hashem.

### ***What Prevents Us From Feeling The Spiritual?***

Men have the *mitzvah* to learn Torah, while women do not. This shows us the unique role of both a man and a woman in *avodas Hashem*. Men are mainly using the **mind** to serve Hashem, and that is their main role. Women are using mainly the **heart** to serve Hashem - and this is the main role of a woman.

However, the *sefarim hakedoshim* say that during these days of *teshuvah*, even men have to use their heart more than they use their mind. The days of doing *teshuvah* in the month of Tishrei is a time to become more in touch with our heart, with our feelings for *ruchniyus*, and this makes much more use of the heart than of the brain\mind. Therefore, during these days, even a man's main

*avodah* is through the heart.

Men and women have different deterrents holding them back from accessing their hearts' sense of touch. With men, the issue is that since they are mostly involved with their minds and not with their hearts, they have a harder time relating to a sense of touch that goes beyond the physical; they are not familiar with the spiritual sense of touch, and it does not come naturally to them to feel the spiritual.

Women are much more easily open to feeling the spiritual; they can access it much more easily than men do. But women face a different issue that prevents them from accessing the heart: it is because they are so busy that they don't have any time for themselves. In today's times especially, where women are working, in addition to taking care of the home and the children, and in addition to many other things as well - they are being held back from accessing their hearts.

A woman in today's times is much busier than she was in the past. She has no time for herself; every second she is doing something else, whether it is work, being on the phone, or helping a friend, and they simply don't find the time to sit alone and feel what's going on in the heart.

But if any woman wants to improve her *ruchniyus*, she must set aside time every day to have total quiet and have time for her heart.

### **Setting Aside "Heart Time" Each Day**

Every person - man or woman - needs times of quiet every day. This is no less necessary than our need for eating and sleeping; we all need a little *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity) every day.

We have to sit with ourselves alone, every day, with total quiet. We need time out to relax and think. Soon, we will speak about "what" to think, but first, we need the actual time.

This is not a time to learn *mussar*, or even to talk to Hashem. It is not a time for *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting). All of these things are wonderful and necessary too, but we are not talking about this here. We are talking about a much more basic step: a time in which we silence our thoughts, so that we can access our soul.

We need this time every day in to tune in to what's going on inside of our heart. If we never think into what is inside our hearts, we will go our entire life living with a physical heart but without every using it for its inner purpose, which is as good as living an entire life without a heart.

### **What To Do During "Heart Time"**

During this time of the day you set aside, sit down with a pen and paper, perhaps with light music playing in the background or by first reading light material, in order to create a more relaxed atmosphere.

When you feel relaxed, now, write down all your feelings. What do you feel all the time? Do you feel love, or hatred, or any other emotion going on inside you? Write down everything positive and negative you feel in your life; the good and the bad.

We are not talking yet about *how* to work on yourself and self-improvement. We are simply writing down what is going on in our life, because we need to become aware of what's going on inside our heart. It can take months until a person figures out what's going on inside her heart.

We need to have this "heart time", every day. If we don't feel what's going on inside our own heart,

how will we be able to feel what's going on inside others' hearts....? How will we be able to use our heart to sense Hashem, if we don't even use our own heart....?

Just like a woman gets used to living with her husband and children, so must she get used to living more with her heart and experiencing more what's going on inside it. To do this, time must be set aside every day for this.

### ***In Conclusion***

If we do this, we will be able to utilize our heart's sense of touch and then we will feel what's going on in our hearts - whether it is love, hatred, etc. We will become aware of the feelings in our heart. From there, our sensitivity to feelings will be heightened, and we can feel what is going on in others' hearts. Eventually, we will be able to feel Hashem, Who is really found deep within every person.

May we merit to a *gmar chasima Tovah* (to be sealed for a good year), and to come to feel Hashem more in our life.

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### ***Questions And Answers With The Rav***

***Q1: According to how I am understanding this, "heart time" is not a time to talk to Hashem, and it is a time to just be alone and write down our feelings. Is this correct?***

***A:*** It is exactly as you have said; it is a separate *avodah*, which is besides for the *avodah* of setting aside time to talk to Hashem. However, it is not that this *avodah* is "instead" of talking to Hashem. Talking to Hashem is also an important *avodah*, but just as we can understand that a person also has to make special time to talk to Hashem - besides for the three times of *davening* each day - so can we understand that a person needs time alone with himself each day to sit with himself and discover what's in his heart, *besides* for talking to Hashem.

Let us emphasize again that this *avodah* of "heart time" is not meant to replace our *avodah* of talking to Hashem. Rather, it is another *avodah* which we need, *besides* for talking to Hashem each day.

***Q2: What does it mean to write down what's on our heart? Should we just write down whatever thoughts come into our minds?***

***A:*** In order to understand yourself, you need to sit with yourself quietly and listen to what's going on inside your heart. This is the general concept, and it is hard to say exactly what to do. Basically, try to see if you feel happy or sad, as well as your other feelings. As time goes on, you will discover more and more about what you are feeling and you will come to better understand yourself.

***Q3: Should a person first talk to Hashem and then write down a list of how one feels, or should it be the other way around?***

***A:*** It is better to first write down the list of what you are feeling, because first we need to calm ourselves down before we talk to Hashem, so that we can talk to Hashem from a calmer place in ourselves. In order to be able to daven properly to Hashem, we need to first be calmed, and then we are speaking with Him from a more genuine place in ourselves.

**Q4: Even when we have “heart time”, how do we know if we are understanding ourselves from our heart? Maybe we are only understanding ourselves from our mind?**

**A:**Excellent question. Even listening to our heart is problematic, because the *yetzer hora* resides in our heart (in the left chamber). The question is if what we are hearing from our heart is coming from the external layer of the heart (which contains the *yetzer hora*), or if it is coming from a more inner place in our heart that tells us the truth. But certainly we must be concerned that what we are hearing is perhaps coming from the *yetzer hora* present in our heart.

The general answer to this issue is that all good in our soul stems from either the “light of the *neshamah*”, which is present in our brain\mind, or from the “*Ruach*” that is present in our heart. All evil present in ourselves stems from the *yetzer hora* in the heart, and to be more specific, from the *nefesh habehaimis* (the animalistic layer in the soul), which contains the negative trait of *shiflus* (lowliness).

Our *avodah* is to get used to listening to what’s going on in our hearts. As you get used to listening to your feelings, you will be able to discern it as a physical sensation, and there are usually two places where you can feel it. There are feelings you can feel coming from your heart, and there are feelings you can feel coming from the lower section of the stomach, which is closer to the liver. When you feel it coming from this lower half of the body, it is usually a feeling stemming from the body, and if you feel it coming from your heart, it is usually a feeling linked to your *middos*. This is a very subtle matter. The question you asked was very good, and the answer to it is not always so clear.

It is entirely a matter of getting used to it. As you get used to listening to your heart and writing down its feelings, you will slowly be able to discern better what it is telling you, just as it took time for Shmuel HaNavi to discern the voice of Hashem and he had to get used to hearing it in order to recognize it.

**Q5: When we starting to do this, should we write down everything that comes to mind, and not try to discern where the thoughts are coming from?**

**A:** At first as you begin to get used to this, just write down everything that comes to mind. Only afterwards will you be able to discern which thoughts and feelings are coming from the *neshamah*, and which thoughts and feelings are coming from the *nefesh habehaimis*. Some things you can clearly identify as *nefesh habehaimis*.

For example, if you discover that you like to be lazy, you know clearly that this stems from the *nefesh habehaimis*. You can write it down on the list of negative desires you have in yourself. But as for any other thoughts and feelings that come to you which you don’t know if they are good or bad, write them down in a middle column on the page and come back to it later, when you will be able to better discern if it came from the *neshamah* or the *nefesh habehaimis*.

In summary, your list should include three rows. One row will contain all the good *middos* and desires you discover in yourself, another row will contain bad *middos* and desire you discover in yourself, and a third (middle) row will be the parts of yourself which you’re not sure about if they’re good or bad.

**Q6: Should a person say a tefillah before writing down this heart time?**

**A:** Before anything we do, we can always always *daven* to Hashem for help. In our case specifically, we can *daven* to Hashem before we do this that He should help us know ourselves. The Raavad writes, based upon the verse “*From my flesh, I see G-d*” that we can only come closer to Hashem through understanding ourselves. Thus, we must bear in mind that we are only trying to understand ourselves because that is part of our *avodah* of recognizing Hashem, and not because we simply want

to know who we are. The goal of trying to understand ourselves is so that we can come closer to Hashem through clearer self-knowledge. So a person should always *daven* before any *avodah* that Hashem should help him, because our goal is always to come closer to Hashem.

**Q7: *What should I do when I discover that I have many negative middos in myself and I see that I am very far from being close to Hashem?***

**A:** If a person can only discover bad things about himself and he can't find any good in himself, it is a sign that he does not recognize anything about himself at all, and that he has never yet taken a deep look into his heart. This is because every person contains good qualities. As long as you reflect deeply into what is going on inside your heart, you will be able to find good qualities in yourself.

Of course, we must also discover our bad *middos* that we have too, but first we must reflect on the good *middos* that we have. When we begin to work on ourselves, we first need to work on our worst *middah*. The time now is too short to explain how to do this, because it is a deep *avodah*. To say it briefly: we must first begin to work on our worst *middah*, or, we should first work on an area that is easiest for us to improve in.

I must repeat, however, that if you are only finding bad *middos* in yourself and you are not discovering any good in yourself, it is a sign that you are not reflecting properly into your heart, because every person contains good. There is always your best quality, but besides for this, there is also many other good points which you can discover about yourself, and you must discover all of these good points in yourself.

**Q8: *Should we begin to work on our bad middos when we discover them? Or should we leave that for later?***

**A:** Absolutely **do not** begin to work on your bad *middos* right away. You have just started to get to know yourself, and before you discover lots of good in yourself, it is detrimental for you to work on your bad *middos*, because you will become overly focused on the bad in yourself and you are unaware of the good in yourself. You would be working on yourself with a lowly view towards yourself. Only after discovering lots of good about yourself can you begin a healthy kind of self-improvement. You must begin from a place of finding many good points in yourself, and if you have not yet found any good in yourself yet, you must keep looking for it. If you still cannot find any good about yourself, ask someone else to point out to your strengths. Either way, you can only begin self-improvement after you have found a lot of good parts about yourself.

**Q9: *When the Rav talks about the "heart", is this referring to the "nefesh" (the basic life-force of the soul)?***

**A:** Whenever a person feels some emotion, like if he is happy or sad, where does he feel it coming from? Does he feel it coming from his toenails? He feels it coming from his heart. Of course, there is depth upon depth within our heart. We discussed here how one can enter the place in his heart which feels things. All of us can relate to what the "heart" is, each on our own level. We must first begin to recognize what our heart is, as much as we can on our current level. This is only the beginning stage, where we are first beginning to enter our heart. It is not yet the "heart" itself. The "heart" actually is experienced differently with each person, depending on what level he has reached. But what we all have in common is that all of us have some understanding of the heart, and that is where we can begin from.

**Q10: *The Rav has said that at first a person can get to feel what is in his heart, and then he can feel what is going on in others' hearts, and then a person can feel Hashem. Is this***

***order specific, or can it be the other way around also? Can a person begin with feeling what is going on in others, and from there he can get to know himself better, and then feel Hashem?***

**A:** This is a good question. There are some people who are born with more of a feeling for others' hearts, and they can get to know themselves better by understanding others. Most people, however, need to use our method, which is by first understanding what's going on inside their own hearts, before they can feel what is in others' hearts; and after that they can feel Hashem.

There are a third group of people who are born only with feelings for Hashem, but they do not feel what's going on inside their own hearts, nor do they feel what others are feeling. For them, the order will have to be different than how it was explained here. Here we were addressing most people, who usually are not born with a strong sense of knowing what is going on in their hearts or in others' hearts, and certainly they can't feel Hashem yet. The order presented here, which applies to most people, is: To first get in touch with your own feelings, then with others' feelings, and then you can begin to feel Hashem.

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