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Appreciating Our Teeth

The *Chovos HaLevovos* [in *Shaar HaBechinah*] writes at length about how grateful we have to be to Hashem just for our teeth, and that we should imagine what life would look like if we wouldn't have teeth. We would endure terrible physical suffering; and we would also go crazy from it. Our teeth fall out and then get replaced, and the reason that Hashem made this is so that we should come to appreciate our teeth.

Our fingernails and our hair fall out too, but this doesn't bother us as much, because we don't use them as much as our teeth. But our teeth we use all the time, and Hashem wants us to appreciate them more. For this reason, our teeth eventually fall out when we get old, so that we can appreciate them and thank Hashem that we still have them.

Our teeth are worth millions of dollars. It's expensive to go to the dentist; a mouth full of teeth that works is priceless. The *Chovos HaLevovos* reminds us that we always have to be grateful to Hashem for just our teeth, as our life would be full of suffering without them.

Think a little bit about what your life would look like without teeth!

Reflecting On Our Suffering

The *Chovos HaLevovos* continues that we have to reflect as well into all the events in our life in which we were in danger, and we were saved: How many times were we sick? How many times did we know others who were sick?

When a person gets sick, he tends to think, "It's because of my sins. Let this be an atonement for my sins." But the *Chovos HaLevovos* says that besides for this reason, there is an additional reason why Hashem sends us suffering: so that we should come to be grateful to Hashem for all that we have, that we shouldn't take things for granted. We are used to taking things for granted; people just go through life living like an animal, taking life as it comes. When a person gets sick, he can begin to appreciate how much he had.

But if he doesn't reflect on this, then he is merely involved with: how he can recover from his illness, who the best doctors are, and that *Baruch Hashem* now he has something to be preoccupied with so he can get away from the bothers of life....

When a person is suffering from a physical illness, his physical desires are lessened. Normally, a

person is pursuing his various physical desires, and the desires can get very strong. But when a person is sick, he loses his physical desires. He often doesn't have an appetite for food. Hashem does this to help us realize that we have to detach from the physical desires of this world.

This is the opportunity that a sick person has – he can reflect on his suffering, and then realize that the root of all his suffering are his physical desires for this world. He can listen in an inner way to what's going on in his life. He is then able to detach from his pull to this world, and he achieves a great spiritual connection with Hashem.

Hashem provides us all with life and with many things, but our lives as well are full of suffering. Life is full of suffering, and this generation in particular is suffering more than any other generation. What is the reason for this? It is because the generation is full of pursuing many physical desires.

The pursuit of physical desire is the root cause of all suffering.

We learn from *Chovos HaLevovos* that the purpose of suffering is to give us the opportunity to detach from materialistic pursuits, and therefore it follows that physical pursuit is the root of all our suffering.

When a person is suffering, he is able to reflect and realize that his strong connection to this world is really what causes him all his suffering. Of course, just going through suffering or hearing about others' suffering doesn't help a person gain this perspective. If we never reflect on our suffering, then we continue to take life as it comes, remaining unmoved. But all our suffering, and the suffering we hear about, can be an opportunity for us to "do" some reflection.

Let's say we hear that a tragedy happened to someone else. What should we think? What should we think about all the widows and orphans we hear about? Of course, we have to feel compassion for them. But besides this, we must know that all these events happened to remind us that our life on this world is temporary, and that we need to detach from our pull towards this physical world.

In today's generation, many young people have tragically passed away. There are many reasons for this, but one of the reasons is because people are causing great suffering by pursuing their heavy physical desires.

Additional Reflections To Think About

When we go to sleep at night, we're sure we will wake up the next day, but really, we cannot ever be sure. Many people don't wake up the next day. Do we ever think about this...?

If we keep reflecting like this, we will find that our physical desires will lessen. The more we realize that our connection to this world is only temporary – our lives are constantly in the balance – the more we pull away from our connection to this world, and the less we will suffer. We do not know if we will live for another day! We are living with one gigantic "doubt"; we do not know if Moshiach will come today or tomorrow...

There are tzaddikim who merited to live a long and accomplished life, but there are other tzaddikim who did not merit to live a long life – they were taken suddenly in the midst of their life. Do we ever think about this...?

When you eat on Shabbos and you're enjoying the good food, think to yourself: "Maybe this is the last time I'm eating a Shabbos meal!"

The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that if one analyzes his physical body, he can come to be grateful to Hashem for each part of his body. Of course, if someone is pulled by physicality, he will get caught up

in the physical aspect of his body, forgetting to reflect deeply about Hashem. But if someone is an internal kind of person, he can analyze how his body works and he can come to thank Hashem from it, when he realizes how much he has to be thankful for.

A person has to realize how much he has in his life and not to take anything for granted. In order to appreciate what we have, we have to think into what our life would look like when we don't have these things.

For example, the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that we should thank Hashem that we have eyes that can see. Shut your eyes for 5 minutes and keep them closed; now you understand what it's like when you can't see.

If you wear glasses, take off your glasses for 5 minutes and try to look around. It's hard to see. This will help you appreciate that normally you have glasses to see.

Hashem gave us a heart, which provides us with our feelings. Our feelings help us communicate with people and have relationships with people. Can you imagine what the world would look like if we wouldn't have feelings?? Of course, we would be able to talk, because we have a mouth, but we still wouldn't be able to have relationships with people, because we would have no feelings for them.

We can also go through each of our five senses – sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste - and see what our life would look like without any one of these. When we begin to reflect about each of the details in our life that we have to be thankful for, we come to a greater and greater recognition of Hashem and His goodness to us, with the more we reflect.

This concept is called *hergesh mussar* - “A feeling for introspection” - which was taught in Kelm. We need to become aware and open ourselves up.

At first, we need *sefarim* to help us reflect. But after getting used to learning from sefarim comes the next stage, in which our senses have been opened up – and we are then able to recognize the goodness of Hashem from **within** ourselves. This is the meaning of “The way of the wise is to constantly they walk.”^[1]

^[1] *Derech Eitz Chaim* of the Ramchal