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Redeem Your Soul From Its Exile

We will attempt here to clarify who we are, what our soul is.

In these *parshiyos*, we are learning about the exile of Egypt and the redemption from Egypt. The women as well were part of the exile and they played a crucial role in the redemption from Egypt.

There is a concept in the *sefarim hakedoshim* known as "*Olam, Shanah, Nefesh*" (World, Time and Soul), which is that everything which takes place in a place in the world also takes place in the sphere of time, and anything we find it time also takes place in our soul. Therefore, just as there is an exile that takes place in the world with our physical body, so is there an exile in our soul. And just as there is redemption to our physical bodies, so is there redemption that takes place in our soul.

When we were exiled in Egypt, not only was our body in exile, but our soul was in exile as well.

The exile of our soul consists of two aspects. One part of this is that we are distracted by our physical needs and thus unable to attend to our soul's needs; this put our soul into exile. This is represented by the cruel labor which the Jews were enslaved to in Egypt – because they were exiled in the physical sense, there was no time to focus on their soul needs.

But there is a deeper aspect to our soul's exile as well: when we are confused about what our soul is. To illustrate, the Jews in Egypt faced a spiritual struggle with their goals, because they saw the behavior of the Egyptians, and this made them compare themselves with Egyptians and learn be somewhat affected by their behavior. Chazal praised the generation for not adapting the names, style of dress, and manner of speech from the Egyptians, but other than these things, the Jewish people were negatively affected by the impurity of Egypt.

Galus is also related to the world *galgal*, circle, because *galus* is a cycle, for we have gone through exile as a reoccurring cycle. The physical aspect of exile represents the concept of *galgal*. *Galus* is also the opposite of the concept called "*giluy*", revelation. This hints to us that *galus* conceals from us having a *giluy* of our true soul.

The *galus* causes us our soul to become enslaved, because it conceals our soul from us. Most people recognize the exile of their soul in the sense that they are very tied down to the world, but those who have begun to search for Hashem in their life recognize a deeper kind of exile in their soul. They come across confusion about what their soul is, and this is the deeper kind of exile to our soul.

First we will explain this concept on an intellectual level, but after learning about this, we must then seek to internalize it, as it is written, “*And you will know today, and you will return the matter to your heart.*” We will discuss here the difference between secular wisdom about our psyche, with the Torah’s wisdom on the psyche.

The Problem With Modern Psychology

The view of secular psychology – specifically Western psychology - views the body as the main thing, with the soul only being secondary. The soul is definitely considered by secular psychology to be an existing entity, but it is only viewed by them as an additional factor in a person that can contribute to one’s mental health. However, the main focus of psychology is always the physical body. Jews who live among the nations of the world have unfortunately adapted the secular approach, viewing their souls as only secondary, and they consider themselves mainly as a body.

People are drawn after psychology, and it seems like a good thing, because in this way people are detaching from physical pursuits, and often people consider it to be beneficial to teach others about the knowledge of psychology and therapy. There are people who consider it to be an act of *chessed* for their community to become a psychologist and treat others with this field of practice.

But the problem is that Jews who are learning secular psychology are viewing their existence as being mainly a body, with the soul being only secondary. While the study of psychology can help a person leave his attachment to physicality – which helps a person leave his enslavement to this physical world - it puts a person into an even deeper kind of exile of the soul: confusion about what his very soul is.

If we can realize how this is a problem, we have already left one stage of the exile to our soul, and we will be able to begin our soul’s redemption.

Knowing Our Soul - Through the Torah’s Perspective

After realizing that secular psychology isn’t a path for a Jew to take, comes the next stage: to recognize the soul. The more a person understands his soul, the more redemption he will have in his soul; he will have *giluy*, revelation. The less a person understands his soul, the more he is in *galus*, exile.

Why should we want to know our soul? First of all, in order to use our soul, we need to know how it works, and this will enter us into a truly pleasurable and satisfying kind of life. Secondly, by knowing what our soul is, the better we can deal with the difficulties and complexities of life. These are both understandable reasons to anyone, on any level.

But there is a third reason why we must know our soul, and this is harder for people to grasp. The Gemara says that a person’s head was created from Eretz Yisrael, while the rest of the body was created from Bavel. Eretz Yisrael represents wisdom, as we know that “the air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise.” A person’s head is either in Eretz Yisrael, or he is living in “Bavel” – from the word *bilbul* (confusion). Most people are living life only through the prism of their body – they are living in “Bavel”, and therefore they have *bilbul*, confusion.

Someone who is living an inner kind of life already identifies with everything we are saying here; he understands that the world we see is a world of superficiality and confusion. Anyone who isn’t living an inner kind of life isn’t aware that there is a whole different world than the one we see in front of us,

a world which we can enter that is an entirely spiritual dimension.

To summarize, there are three reasons why we need to understand our soul. First of all, because we need real pleasure in life, and this is only reached through knowing our soul. The second reason is because knowing our soul helps us deal with our problems in life. The third reason is the deeper reason, because we need to attain clarity in our life, to live in a clear world – an “*olam barur*”, a world of clarity.

Finally, there is an even deeper reason why we need to know our soul: because in order to become close to Hashem, we need to first know our soul.

The Three Ways Of How We Become Close To Hashem

How can we come to Hashem and be close to Him? To give a general description, there are two basic parts to this, and then we will discuss the third part, which is deeper.

One part of it is through keeping the *mitzvos* of the Torah; we are “believers, the sons of believers”, and therefore we know and believe in the Torah, which helps us become close to Hashem. This involves the use of our intellectual mind; by connecting to Hashem through the Torah and *mitzvos*, we have an intellectual connection with Hashem.

The second way of how we get close to Hashem does not involve our intellect, but it is rather to involve our emotions and feelings. By getting used to sensing the reality of Hashem, we can feel Him, in an experiential way, as a very real feeling.

Understandably, there are levels to how much we can feel Hashem. When someone is in pain, he can find that he can push deeper into his soul and arrive at a greater sense of Hashem.

The first way to know Hashem – through knowing of Him intellectually, which is accomplished through the study of Torah and observing His *mitzvos* - is called “*emunah yedidah*”, an intellectual faith in Hashem. The second way is that we sense the reality of Hashem as a real, palpable feeling.

There is a third, deeper way of attaining closeness to Hashem: by attaining clarity in life, to live in a “clear world”, the perspective from our soul. So the more we are clearer about our soul, the closer we can become to Hashem, and we are then able to connect to Hashem from *within* ourselves.

The third way is what we are coming here to discuss. It is about living in an inner world of clarity. When a person lives in the inner world of clarity, he gains the other two levels as well – he knows about Hashem intellectually, and he also senses Him as a feeling.

We have described here thus far the general reasons why a person must know his soul.

Modern Psychology Is An Incomplete Picture Of A Jew's Soul

We must distance ourselves from the study of secular psychology. People want to know what is wrong with learning psychology, and what is so terrible if we learn psychology. We have explained before the three reasons why a Jew must know his soul; none of these three reasons can be accomplished through secular psychology. Secular psychology is an incomplete understanding of the soul, because it doesn't grasp the holiness of a Jew's soul.

For example: depression. Secular psychology uses a general approach of explaining to the person

how he can get out of his depression. But the picture is still incomplete, because they don't tell you how you can build and develop a plan for happiness. Escaping depression might solve the actual depression at hand, but it won't give the person happiness. Secular psychology doesn't have the complete picture of things; they've only gotten some of the facts.

That is just one example. But the same thing is true with regards to all negative emotions, anxiety, social disorders, etc. - the knowledge of secular psychology merely removes the symptoms of a problem, but it does not get down to the root of the problem. It doesn't help us attain the redemption of our soul, and it instead puts our soul into an even deeper exile than before, when we try to learn about our soul using modern psychology.

How sad is it that a Jew can read a non-Jewish book with a title like "How To Have A Happy Life." Now, if the book would be called "How To Deal With Depression" or "How To Get Rid of Anxiety", that's not so bad if a Jew reads it, because at least he is understanding that the book won't take care of **all** his problems, and he's just looking to get rid of one particular problem. But to read a book on "How To Have A Happy Life" is truly sad for a Jew to read, because then the Jew is thinking that a non-Jew can help him lead a happy life in general - something that is impossible, as a Jew contains a holy soul that a non-Jew does not have.

May Hashem merit each of us to truly know our soul - from working hard to understand it, and together with *davening* to Hashem for this; and through that, we will merit to become close to Hashem. May each of us merit to leave our exile of the soul and the redemption of our soul, and that each of us should reveal our soul's abilities.

Questions And Answers With The Rav

Q: In "Da Es Atzmecha", the Rav says that it's for a person to run away from himself and divorce his soul from his body, when he alienates his soul. How does that fit into this current discussion, in which the Rav said that we are a soul and that we cannot ever leave it?

A: As long as the body is in charge, a person is sending away his soul, but the soul always remains intact, even if a person alienates his soul.

Q: I have a strong yearning to connect to my soul and to be close to Hashem, and I cannot read Hebrew sefarim. Unfortunately, I have gotten used to the language of non-Jewish self-help books, and I can't find anything more helpful than these books. How will I be able to enter my inner world, as there are no sefarim which I can find that are helping me?

A: We cannot create solutions out of nothing, so entering our inner world cannot happen based through reading any book. There are many holy *sefarim* available today that have been translated, which cannot definitely help you get started. There are also many *shiurim* you can listen to, which can simplify all the information of the *sefarim*. But *sefarim* and *shiurim* can only give us the **information** we need to develop our inner world; there is no *sefer* written in history that will bring you directly into your inner world. You can only access your inner world from **within yourself**. About 2 or 3 percent of entering your inner world can be accomplished through a *sefer*, but the other 97% of entering your inner world can only happen from within yourself.

Q: The Rav has said here that there is a whole different reality going on in our life - the spiritual world. How can we live the world of the spiritual, when we are living our life here on this earth and we have to take care of all our worldly needs?

A: Let's say there's a blackout and there's no electricity. Different people have different reactions. Some people will go crazy, while others still maintain their peace. What is the reason for these different reactions? If a person is living his life too caught up in the physical reality of life, then he goes crazy when there's a blackout. Being in the dark for a long time will feel like *Gehinnom* for him. But if someone is used to living a more spiritual kind of life, he identifies more with his soul, and even darkness isn't scary to him. When he's in the dark, he's already used to it, because he has already learned to disconnect from physicality with more he has experienced his soul. He actually will enjoy it is an opportunity to make a soul-accounting and connect even more with his soul and with Hashem.

The way we can transcend our worldly kind of life, even as we live on this world, is for us to ask ourselves: What is our first *ratzon* (will) we have when we wake up in the day – is it for something physical, or is it for something physical? We aren't talking about what you actually do with your day, but what you want as soon as you wake up in the morning. This is a very simple yet piercing way of how you can know how much you are connected to the spiritual reality.

Q: *If we are a neshamah, why do we say "Elokai Neshamah, shenosata bi" - "My soul that You have placed in me" - if my soul is me, then why does it have to placed in me?*

A: This is an old question, and it is a fundamental one. According to the Vilna Gaon, we experience life through the layer in our soul called "*Ruach*" – which is the root of our power of *bechirah*, free will. Since man is a chooser by essence, we start our life through our *Ruach*. Therefore, Hashem is placing our *Neshamah* in "me", which is our *Ruach*; He places our *Neshamah* in our *Ruach*.

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