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Less Pleasure: Get The Real Pleasure

The *Mishnah* in *Avos* (6:6) lists the 48 qualities to acquire the Torah; one of them is “less pleasure” (*mi’ut ta’anug*).

We were created for enjoyment^[1] [1]; the only question is what kind of enjoyment we seek. The *Mishnah* isn’t saying that we can’t enjoy life; we must enjoy life, but it is just that we must seek the right kind of enjoyment. That is the meaning of “less pleasure” - we must not indulge in the wrong kinds of pleasure.

Without some enjoyment in our life, life is not a life. But how do we get to real enjoyment in life? Is there anyone who doesn’t want to experience real pleasure? We all want it. The question is how much we are willing to get it.

Let us try to explain the difference between true pleasure and false pleasure.

True Pleasure Vs. Temporary Gratification

There are two [Hebrew] words for ‘pleasure’: The word “*hana’ah*” - enjoyment - and the word *ta’anug*, which is “pleasure”. What is the difference between these two terms? (In America, maybe there’s no difference...)

Real enjoyment, *taanug*, is when you feel **connected** to the pleasure. It is the kind of pleasure which you feel attached to. Fake pleasure, *hanaah*, is when you just have enjoyment, but you don’t really feel a connection afterwards with whatever you enjoyed.

When you eat pizza or ice cream, is it *hana’ah* or *ta’anug*? The enjoyment lasts for only a few moments. You bite into it, you enjoy it, you swallow it - and it feels enjoyable. Then the pleasure is gone. That’s not real pleasure; it’s not *ta’anug*. It’s just a passing feeling of enjoyment - *hana’ah*.

But when you have a deep kind of connection to something you’re enjoying, your enjoyment will be a deeper kind of feeling. That is *ta’anug*.

When it comes to physical pleasures, people only enjoy them according to the amount that they are pulled after it. The pull only lasted for a few moments, and therefore, the enjoyment will also only last for a few moments.

So *ta'anug*\pleasure - real pleasure - is based on having a **connection** with the enjoyment. By contrast, *hana'ah*\enjoyment is a feeling of pleasure based on mere **pull** towards what you enjoyed.

The World Is Mostly Seeing Enjoyment, Not Pleasure

Let us reflect: Is most of our enjoyment a kind of *ta'anug*\real pleasure or a kind of *hana'ah*\enjoyment\fake pleasure?

Are we connected permanently to anything on this world? One day we will all leave this world; we leave our house, our car, and we go to the Next World. Even our families we leave. So we are not really connected to anything on this world - and therefore, we don't have any real enjoyment on this world.

Hana'ah is to be pulled after a physical desire. How long does it last? It happens very fast, and therefore, the enjoyment doesn't last. But *ta'anug* is to have real pleasure, and it is achieved only when we form a deep connection with the pleasure. Connection takes a long time to happen.

If you observe the world, you can see that people spend a lot of time looking for real pleasure, not for mere enjoyment. Enjoyment lasts for a very short time, and what people want is real pleasure, but they are searching and searching for it and they are not finding it. This is not by chance, because it takes a lot of time until you reach real, lasting pleasure.

The world is running after the fake kind of pleasure, which is *hana'ah*\enjoyment. Our inner, spiritual world is based on *ta'anug* - it is based on forming a connection with real pleasure. If a person seeks *hana'ah* and he doesn't seek *ta'anug*, he lives a superficial kind of life.

The Preface To Having Real Pleasure: Identify Your Self As A Soul

Most people are living a superficial kind of life, running after enjoyment, and they're not getting real pleasure. There are only a few people who are living an inner kind of life and being connected with real, lasting pleasure.

On our world we live on, we indeed cannot be connected with pleasure. But in our soul, we can be.

If someone likes a particular kind of food, and then he dies - does he continue to love it? He does. But it's not here anymore after he leaves the world. If a person wants real pleasure, he should make sure to seek things that are lasting, not things that are temporary.

As long as a person identifies himself as a body and not as a soul (and this is true even if he is aware intellectually that he has a soul, but in actuality, he identifies himself as a body), then the only pleasure he knows of is *hana'ah*\enjoyment - the fake kind of pleasure which doesn't last. Not only won't he find real pleasure, but his whole entire life will be spent on seeking fake pleasure.

If a person wants to have real *ta'anug*\pleasure, he must identify himself as a soul. Herein lays the difference between real pleasure and fake pleasure. The world is running after all kinds of physical gratification, and this is only *hana'ah*\enjoyment. As the world runs after *hana'ah*, they are actually running away from the real pleasure. People in the world identify themselves as a body, and therefore, they run after fake pleasure.

A Method To Open Yourself To Having Real Pleasure

To make this concept practical, we can all use the following exercise and think the following simple thought: What were we like before we were born?

People don't like to think about after death; it's unpleasant and it can make a person get depressed. But we can all think about what we were like before we were born.

Some people think that before they were born, "I didn't exist". But we as Jews believe that we were around before we were born. We don't remember what happened before we were born, but there is a very simple way how we can know what we were like: the way we are like now is the way we were like before we were born! Our physical body has grown and matured, but our soul is the same now as before we were born.

This is a subtle kind of idea to absorb. If a person doesn't know how to make a reflection like this, it is a sign that he identifies himself as a body. But if someone is able to think and reflect a little, he can discover that he is a soul - and therefore, he can realize that he was around before he was born, and he continues to exist even after he dies.

A person can then come to the following realization: Whatever we are connected to on this world does not last. We are instead looking for something that has been around earlier before the physical desires we seek. The reason for this is because our soul has been around before our body was around, and therefore, our soul inside us is really seeking something way before our body began to seek things.

To illustrate this, let's say a child grows up in a certain house, and one day his parents tell him that he's adopted. What does he do? He tries to search for his real parents. At first he thought that these are his parents, but now he finds out that these are not his real parents. He has parents that came before the ones he sees - and those are his real parents.

In the same way, our soul is really searching for something that was around way before our body. The body convinces a person not to think about before and after life, and that is how it distances us from *ta'anug* real pleasure and to instead seek *hanaah* physical gratification. But if someone has developed a healthy soul, he can understand that his body has been pulling him away all this time from what he's *really* searching for.

A Deeper Method

Let's make this concept even more practical.

If a person shuts his eyes, he sees nothing. Does he feel that he is not around? He can understand that he is still here, even though he can't see. Then he shuts his ears as well and now he can't hear. Does he think he has stopped existing? He can take it further and now sit still, and again make this reflection: Do I still exist, even though I'm not seeing, hearing or moving?

Take this exercise a bit further and think (if you can do this): "What would I be like had I been born in a different country, and my skin color was different, and my nation is different? Would I be different, or is it just that I would look physically different than how I look in real life?"

Such thinking can help you begin to enter a different world. It will help you realize that you are a soul who always stays the same, and that you are not your body. These are not mere thoughts or ideas - this is a way of how you can begin to get in touch with your real self.

If someone does this kind of thinking on a regular basis - and not just consider this to be a nice idea that some speaker mentioned - by getting used to this kind of thinking, he will begin to identify his existence as a soul. If someone does this for tens of times, he will begin to recognize that he is a soul, and he will identify himself less a body.

This kind of thinking can help a person change his life completely! Such a perspective can help a person begin to seek real pleasure, and give up seeking enjoyment. He will begin to feel that the world we see in front of us is actually very strange – a world that runs after pleasure that cannot be found. Instead, a person will feel that he has discovered a whole new world inside himself which contains real pleasure.

When someone identifies himself as a soul and he really feels this way, he will look for different things in life than what he used to look for. While most people in the world are looking for money, honor, beauty, and all kinds of other desires, a person who identifies himself as a soul will look for things that are totally different than these things. He will realize that it is his body which is looking for all this physical gratification and that it is getting in the way of his soul's true search.

He will slowly begin to feel less pleasure from this world's desires, and his search for real pleasure will get stronger.

Searching For Hashem

Why is it that most people do not search for Hashem in their life, and even when they do look, they don't find Him in their life?

One of the main reasons is because most people are searching for *hana'ah*, which is fake pleasure, and not for *ta'anug*, which is real pleasure. Closeness to Hashem is a kind of *ta'anug*, and it not a feeling of *hana'ah*. Therefore, many people aren't interested in getting close to Hashem, because since it doesn't involve *hana'ah* – only *ta'anug*, which they do not seek – it doesn't look interesting. They're pulled after the *hana'ah* of the body, and it is only those kinds of superficial pleasures they'd rather seek.

Finding Real Pleasure

How indeed can we reach true pleasure (*ta'anug*)?

Don't be concerned about getting the pleasure; if you do, you are seeking *hana'ah* \enjoyment, and you won't find *ta'anug* in *hana'ah*. Put aside your desire for enjoyment and instead seek the connection itself to the pleasure. In other words, seek to have a **connection with Hashem** and don't be concerned about how much pleasure you're getting out of it.

When you have the connection to the real pleasure – pleasure in the inner place of our soul, which is to seek closeness to Hashem – the pleasure will come as a result.

No matter what your situation is in life – whether you are single, married, widowed, orphaned – even after death, and even before you were born – there is only one thing we can always connect to. We can find it inside our souls: it is to be close to Hashem. This is a totally new way to live life.

Seek A Lasting Kind of Connection

Think about it. How many connections from your childhood are still around? Our friends from kindergarten – are they still our friends today? Our high school friends – are we still friends with them today? The house we grew up in as children – is it the same house that we live in today? Almost all of our connections we have formed on this world are gone. Even the few connections we did form that are still around are bound to disappear very soon.

This reflection shows us that we aren't connected to anything. We can then understand that our soul is searching for a kind of connection that will last.

There is only one thing that we can truly feel a connection with. We won't only be able to know of it -we will be able to feel it. It is a true and calm place inside our soul, and the more we connect to it, the more pleasure we will get from it: **to be close to Hashem.**

This is the **only** true way that there is to get **real** pleasure in your life.

This is not an "idea" that you hear in an evening lecture. It is life! We can all decide if we will live a true kind of life. Will we remain in life like most of the world and living superficially as they live, or will we choose to enter the depth of life? Do we want to have a deep and constant connection with a lasting kind pleasure?

I hope that all of you here understood these words.

[1] [2] As the Mesillas Yesharim states, "A person was not created except to bask in the pleasure of Hashem."

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