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Our Struggle Today With Proper Self-Identification

With the help of Hashem, we will reflect here on how we relate to spirituality today - the way spirituality was in previous generations, and the way it is today.

When Hashem first created man, He formed him from the earth and breathed into him a living soul. In the original state of mankind, the body did not conceal the soul. Man perceived himself as a soul inside a body, and not as a body containing a soul. When a person grasped himself in this way, he was naturally spiritual, and he naturally connected to Hashem as a result. (When Adam sinned by eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, it was not a physical desire, but rather a spiritual desire.)

The sin of Adam changed the entire world, and it changed man in particular, in the way that man perceives himself. Adam was told "*You are earth*", which implies that ever since the sin, man views himself as mainly being a body, and not a soul. The change that took place to the world, ever since the sin, affected our entire psyche. Our desires, our thoughts, our speech, our actions, are naturally inclined towards physicality, and we are not initially connected in our psyche to spirituality.

Our earlier Rabbis wrote that our souls were all once part of Adam's soul^[1]. Thus, by studying what happened with Adam, we can understand the nature of our soul, and what our life's journey will be like. Also, because our soul was once rooted in Adam's soul, our soul still retains its original perception, which was that we identified our existence as mainly being with a soul covered by a body, rather than a body with a soul in it.

This second aspect of the soul is further from us to reach, because we currently live in a generation that is very far from Adam. However, just because we are very far from it doesn't mean that we can't reach it. It is still there, it is just hidden very deep inside us.^[2]

When we stood at Har Sinai, we returned to the state of Adam, and we saw ourselves as a soul again. But with the sin of the Golden Calf, once again we were back to the state of after the sin, in which we view ourselves initially as a body. Ever since the sin of the Golden Calf, we have remained at that state. This is written about by the *Arizal*.

There have been two points in time we were totally pure - before Adam's sin, and during the 40 days after the giving of the Torah, which end at the 17th of *Tamuz* when the Luchos were broken. The pre-sin state is deep in the recesses of our soul; it is hidden away very deep underneath many layers.

When a child is born, he perceives himself as a totally physical being. A child constantly expresses

physical desires. As a child begins to mature, he begins to access his emotions a little more, and he laughs and has more mature conversations, but he still perceives himself as mainly being a body. When we get a little older and we mature, and we access our intellect, even at the age of 20 or 40, we can still very well be perceiving our existence as being a bodily existence. This is the situation of most people – the way they come into this world is the way they leave the world.

Why Doesn't Torah Learning Improve All People?

The Torah is the “soul” of the world. Just like the soul is the soul of our body, so is the Torah the soul to this world, which is like the body. The Torah shows us the spirituality of the physical universe that we see. It helps us reveal our own soul as our existence.

Here comes the difficulty. It could be that a person learns Torah - but only through his body. This is because although he learns Torah, if he still identifies himself as a body and not as a soul, *the words of Torah he learns are being learned through his body*, and not through his soul.^[3] When a person views Torah through the physical orientations of the body, a person sees Torah as a mere physical object, a body of laws he has to follow, and he never sees the “soul” of the Torah.

This is the problem in our generation. It was always an issue, but now it is especially an issue: many people are viewing Torah as being some physical body of law, and therefore they are not seeing the “soul” of Torah as it, because they are perceiving everything as physicality. There were always individuals who were able to see the Torah as a soul and to live life through the soul, while the general masses couldn't do it. For this reason, we always had a problem with identifying our spiritual existence. But now this issue has become much more magnified.

Knowing What We Know vs. Feeling What We Know

To illustrate what we mean, people today know about bad *middos* (negative character traits), but they still find that they can't overcome their bad *middos*, in spite of their knowledge about these matters. A person can “know”, intellectually, that it's evil to have a bad desire or to get angry, but he doesn't internalize this knowledge into his feeling, and therefore he doesn't actually improve on his *middos*, even though he knows good and well that it is evil. He doesn't *feel* his knowledge.

Even when people have heard about the soul and they know about soul concepts, their actual orientations in life are being experienced entirely through their body. People are at least aware intellectually of what bad *middos* are, but when it comes to perceiving ourselves as a soul, there is no conscious awareness of this at all. This is a deeper problem than a lack of control on our *middos*.

The Discovery of the Author of “Chovos HaLevovos”

The author of *Chovos HaLevovos*^[4] wrote that when he discovered that there is an inner world of spirituality, he was surprised how such an essential concept is not being written about and not being taught. The *Chovos HaLevovos* even thought that because people are so unaware of their spiritual existence, maybe it doesn't exist!

But he realized that concepts such as love of Hashem, fear of Hashem, joy in serving Hashem, are all written about in the Torah, and he concluded that they are *inner matters*, and that is why people don't know them well. He discovered that our Sages explain much about these inner matters, and that was how he realized that inner matters exist, in spite of the fact that being immersed in spirituality wasn't being emphasized in people's lives.

Just Because It's Hidden From Us Doesn't Mean It's Not There

The world is called “*olam*”, from the word *he’elam* (concealment), because the inner world of spirituality, which is so real and existing, is at the same so hidden from us and concealed from our conscious awareness. The most basic and essential concepts which we need to know about are often covered over and hidden from our awareness. Man is called “*olam katan*”, a small world, because we are all a “small world” - just as the reality of this world is hidden from us, so is man’s awareness to himself very hidden.

The conclusion is clear - the inner world is hidden, and we need to reveal it. What is hidden from us? Almost everything is hidden from us! Even the basic belief in Hashem is often hidden from us. In the generation of Avraham Avinu, no one believed in Hashem. These days, everyone knows about Hashem, but the big question is if the person’s actions are matching up to that belief.

It is not only hidden from people in Africa who haven’t discovered their Judaism. Even in Eretz Yisrael, there is lack of awareness to the *simple reality* of spirituality. It is hidden even from *frum* people who keep Torah and mitzvos. And often, awareness in Hashem’s existence is missing from people who are deeply involved with serving Hashem! A person might be serving Hashem his whole life, yet he is still not aware of simple realities, such as awareness that Hashem exists. It’s a chilling thought, but it is very painfully true.

May Hashem merit each and every one of us to uncover the reality of spirituality, and to merit to palpably feel Hashem and completely do His Will.

Questions And Answers With The Rav

Q1: Can the Rav give advice on how one can begin to reach our inner world?

A: You don’t need to “begin” entering it; you are already there, to a certain extent. The only question is *where you are exactly* at this point. A child needs to begin something, but all of you are mature adults, who have already begun spirituality. Rather, what you need to know is *how to continue your own personal spiritual path* - and this differs with each person, because each person is holding at a different point.

There are two things that you need to clarify: Each person needs to make a personal self-assessment of where you are holding and how much you have already reached in your soul until now, and then you need to discover what you personally need in order to progress, attuned to the specific nature of your soul.[\[5\]](#)

Q2: How can we educate our children to know about the inner world?

A: Avraham Avinu succeeded in educating Yitzchok - but he didn’t succeed with Yishmael. Yitzchok succeed in raising Yaakov - but he didn’t succeed in raising Esav. They tried all they could to raise their children right, but when their children grew up, they each went their own way. None of us are greater than Avraham and Yitzchok, so none of us are either able to do a perfect job with *chinuch*[\[6\]](#) on our children. We all have hardships in raising children, as we see that even the Avos had a hard time in succeeding with raising good children.

Therefore, practically speaking, it is impossible to tell you exactly what you need to do in *chinuch* and what not do in *chinuch*, because life is so vast. The external part of *chinuch* of course is to raise our children to do the *mitzvos* and not to sin; this part of *chinuch* is more well-known. But there is another kind of *chinuch* we need to impart which is lesser known: to educate our children **to search for truth.**

If a person doesn't search for truth in this generation, he will fall to the lowest levels! If someone searches for truth, he sees how much falsity is in this world. If a person doesn't search for the truth nowadays, he will use any "*heter*"^[7] and "*hechsher*"^[8] he comes across from any Rabbi. If we educate our child to search for truth in life, that even when something is "permissible", it still might not be the will of Hashem – this would solve most of the problems involved in *chinuch*.

We all have kind of *nisyonos*^[9] and problems with our *middos*^[10]; if we would have the aspiration to search for the truth, we would be able to cut out most of our problems. That is the main part of *chinuch* which we need to impart, which is often not known: that in life, we need to search for truth.

To train our children "to seek *ruchniyus*\spiritual greatness" is very hard to instill in a child, but one thing we can all strive to instill in our child is: to **search for truth**. The search for truth will lead us to everything else we need.

Q3: Does the chinuch begin by working on ourselves to search for truth, or to first begin teaching about it to our children?

A: If you don't work on searching for the truth but you are teaching about it to your children, there is no greater lie than this, and it's not called "searching for the truth". A person has to search for his truth in his own life, and together with *chinuch* on yourself, you also need to give over that awareness to your child, but it all begins with you.

Q4: It seems that there is a third point in time in which we identified ourselves as a soul, because Chazal say that when a child is in the mother's womb and he is taught the entire Torah, is that also the state of pre-sin. Isn't this a third time in which we experienced our existence as a soul?

A: No. Although we are taught the entire Torah in the womb, this is not a time in which we identify ourselves a soul, because the fetus still identifies itself as being part of this world. It is a much clearer state, but the fetus does not consider itself to be a soul clothed by our body. However, there exists another category of those who experience themselves entirely as a soul: the *Arizal* writes that there were "new souls" who were not existent as Adam sinned, and these rare souls sometimes appear on this world. These souls are totally aware that they are a soul. But most people are not one of these rare souls, thus, most of us were present by the sin of Adam and we lost of our proper sense of self-identification; however, we still retained the pre-sin state deep in our soul. The Gemara says that only four people in history died due to the curse of death upon mankind. Almost everyone else dies because our souls were all part of the sin of Adam.

Q5: Are all the souls in this generation from Dor Haflagah (the generation that built the Tower of Babel), and Dor HaMabul (the generation of the flood), and Sodom? Or is it to be understood as being influenced by the generation?

A: Very good question. There are always exceptional souls in every generation, even when the generation around them is evil. The *Arizal* writes that Moshe was named so because he was "drawn from the water", **מן מהמים משיתוהו**, which is a hint that even Moshe's soul is from the *Dor HaMabul* (the generation of the flood), in which there was a decree of judgment that involved water; and he was saved from those destructive waters, because he was the exceptional soul of *Dor HaMabul* who merited not to be a part of the decree of the flood; his soul was contained in Noach's soul. As for Sodom, Sodom was not a "generation" of Sodomy, rather, it was an evil city, of which Hashem decreed that it be destroyed. Lot was saved from it, because he was the exceptional soul in Sodom who deserved to be saved.

Our souls are from those generations, and we are sent here to this world to rectify their sin. Therefore, our souls are the holy parts of those previous souls. Just as in those generations there were very few souls that were holy, while most of the generation was evil, so is our generation mostly evil, with a few souls that are holy and pure.

Most of the souls in this generation are totally from the “*Erev Rav*”^[11], according to the writings of our Rabbis. The souls of “*Erev Rav*” are rooted in the three elements of fire, water, and wind. The souls of Sodom were the roots of the *Erev Rav* souls that are rooted in the element of **fire** (as we see that it was fire which destroyed them), the *Dor HaMabul* was the root of *Erev Rav* souls that are rooted in **water** (they were destroyed by water), and the *Dor Haflagah* was the wind-rooted souls of the *Erev Rav* (they were dispersed by the wind). In our own souls, there is evil contained in the elements of fire, water, and wind in our souls. If a person purifies his inner character, he merits to sanctify the elements of fire, water and wind into holiness.^[12]

Q6: I am learning ‘Getting To Know Your Feelings’, and I am feeling two kinds of feelings - I am feeling something around my heart, and something around the back of my neck.

A: This is a complicated question. To give a general answer, there is a mystical matter known as “*Tikkun Rachel*” and “*Tikkun Leah*”. Rachel represents feelings of the heart, and Leah represents the *daas*, which is present in the back of the neck, because it stems from the brain. Our *avodah* is to internalize our knowledge into our feelings; the *daas* of the “neck” has to become internalized into the feelings of our heart.

To apply this on a personal level: in a time of quiet, identify where you feel your “I.” Have you done that yet? Some people during a time of quiet try to identify where their “I” is and they can’t find it, and this kind of person is too connected to his body, thus he can’t meditate that well and he can’t find where his “I” is.

Q7: I am trying to learn the art of concentration [as described in ‘Getting To Know Your Feelings’]. Is it detrimental to my concentration if I think about the future?

A: If a person is simply dwelling in his thoughts on past or future, he is not connected to the present moment, and there can be no greater lack of concentration than this. But if a person enters inward into his soul, he can be concentrated on his soul that he is unaware of what is going on in his surroundings. If a person goes even more inward, he will be able to be aware of both his inner world as well as his surroundings at the same time.

^[1] In response to a question asked after this class, the Rav brought the words of the Arizal that there are rare exceptions to this rule, for there were a few “new souls” that appear throughout history who were not existent during Adam’s sin, thus they were never part of the sin at all. Most people, however, are not from these “new souls.”

To clarify a bit more, the Rav explained in ***Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Volume 8*** (Chapter 3) that there were two groups of rare souls which were not part of Adam’s soul, and the third group of souls, which is most of us, were all present in Adam’s soul at the time of the sin. One group of souls fled from Adam’s soul at the time of the sin, and there were also “new souls” which begin to come to the world

at the End of Days; both of these souls are rare, and therefore most of us are of the third group of souls, who were part of Adam's soul at the sin.

[2] *Ramchal*, in *sefer Adir B'Marom*

[3] For more on this concept, refer to the Rav's ***Getting To Know Your Torah_03_Soul Connection To Torah***

[4] "Duties of the Heart", written by Rabbi Bachya ibn Pekuda, 11th century Torah scholar and philosopher

[5] See the author's ***Getting To Know Your Soul*** to learn how you can discover more about your unique personality.

[6] child education

[7] leniency

[8] kosher certification

[9] difficulties

[10] character traits

[11] the "Mixed Multitude"; for more about how the concept of "Erev Rav" relates to us today, refer to the *pdf* of "***Erev Rav***", a collection of *derashas* where the Rav has spoken about *Erev Rav* and how it pertains to the current generation.

[12] See the Rav's ***Getting To Know Your Soul*** and the Rav's '*Fixing Your Middos*' series, which includes ***Fixing Your Earth, Fixing Your Water, Fixing Your Wind, and Fixing Your Fire***

Source: <http://bilvavi.net/english/droshos-inner-world-today>