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Hashem Desires The Prayers of the Righteous

In this week's *parshah*, the Torah writes, "And Yitzchok prayed to Hashem, opposite his wife, for she was barren; and Rivkah his wife became expectant."

Chazal ask: Why were our patriarchs barren from children, and why were our matriarchs barren from children? Because Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous." Our *Avos* and *Imahos* were unable to conceive, which caused them to have a great yearning to bear children. When their desire for children wasn't being actualized, they were going through a difficulty, which caused them to pray to Hashem with great fervor. Hashem desires those *tefillos* of *tzaddikim*, and therefore He gave them these difficult tests, so that He would hear their heartfelt *tefillos*.

Let us reflect upon the desire to bear children.

Two Reasons To Desire Children

There are two sources of yearning for children. There is a desire to have children which comes from the 'animal soul' (*nefesh habehaimis*) that is connected to the physical body, and there is also a spiritual desire to bear children, which stems from the *neshamah* (Divine soul), the "portion of G-d above."

Clearly, when Avraham Avinu desired children, it was coming from his *neshamah's* desire. Avraham Avinu commanded his children to continue his path, of righteousness. Avraham Avinu's desire to have children was to so that he could pass on the will of Hashem to his descendants.

But there is also a desire for children which comes from the lower aspect of man, the 'animal soul' that is connected to the body. Let us understand the roots of this matter; here we are studying the lives of the holy *Avos* of course, but the same can be said of the nature of every soul.

The Desire For Expansion

The nature of man, which Hashem has created man with, contains his actual essence (his point of *havayah*), and a desire to expand (*hispashtus*) beyond where he is now. Man is a resemblance of Hashem, so to speak, Who is endless, with no limitations or bounds. Hashem created all of His creations with limitations, but He engraved into them a nature to expand beyond their limitations, in resemblance of His own endlessness, which is constantly expanding. Man has a desire to expand and widen his own circle, to gain and grow more, past the natural bounds which he was created with.

Chazal compared this deep power of the soul in man to a straight line (*kav*) which keeps extending further.

To give a more precise definition, there are two ways of how man expands: there is either vertical expansion, or downward expansion. (Man can also expand in any of the directions). Either of these uses of expansion can be manifest in the side of holiness or in the side of evil.

In the side of holiness, the power of 'upward' expansion is the spiritual ladder of growth, "Jacob's ladder", which is "footed on earth, with its head reaching the heavens". When man wants to grow spiritually, he wants to ascend Jacob's ladder - upwards, towards Heavens - like the nature of fire, which seeks to rise higher. This is how man 'expands' in an upward manner. The highest point where man can ascend to is to reach Hashem, so to speak.

Man can also expand in a 'downward' manner, like the nature of water, which naturally descends from a higher place to a lower place. This can also be used for either evil or holiness. When used for evil, man is drawn towards things which are lower than him, and which subsequently lower his spiritual level. This is otherwise known as *taavah* (lustful desire).

If man has an 'upward' ascension that stems from evil, he will want to ascend spiritually because he has *gaavah* (conceit), and if man has a 'downward' expansion that is evil, this is *taavah* (lustful desire) - which can continue to pull a person down, further and further.

By contrast, when 'upward' expansion is holy, a person will want to ascend spiritually because he has aspirations for holiness. When 'downward' expansion is holy, a person 'descends' from his level in order to be *mashpia* (to bestow) upon others, such as how a father teaches a child, and a *rebbe* teaches a student.

Thus, in summary, when upward expansion is evil, it is a desire to rise higher, which stems from *gaavah* (conceit), and when it is holy, it is an aspiration for holiness. When downward expansion is evil, it is *taavah* (lustful desire), and when it is holy, it is a desire to influence others and help others.

The Basic Desire For Children - The Need For Expansion

Herein lays the understanding about the desire in the soul to bear children, which stems from both the *neshamah* and the 'animal soul' in the body.

The desire to procreate is not only in humans; it is also in animals, who have a '*nefesh habehaimis*' just as humans do. We can see from the world that animals also want to bear children, and they also show some traits of mercy upon their own kin, and they will love and protect their kin. Chazal say that the raven is cruel to its children and has no mercy on them, whereas an eagle is compassionate on its children. As for all other animals and birds, they all have a desire to procreate, because they want children.

The desire in a person to bear children that stems from the *nefesh habehaimis* is synonymous to the human desire for expansion. This is the deep reason of why people want children: it stems from a yearning for expansion. People don't want to remain in their bounds; they want to go further from where they are. They want to keep expanding, and one of the main ways to expand - that is, from above to below [a 'downwards' expansion] - is through the desire to bear children. The father is above, the child is below him, and so the desire to procreate is really a 'downwards' kind of expansion.

The desire for expansion is carved deeply into man's soul and it cannot be stifled (it can only be guided and given direction of how it will be used, but it cannot be stifled completely), and man will

expand either upwards or downwards. Therefore, the desire for procreation is a part of the very nature of man. Even the 'animal soul' in man wants to procreate, so it is not something which man can stifle. Man has the *bechirah* (power of choosing) of how he will use it, but it is not within his *bechirah* to stifle the desire itself to procreate.

Chazal teach that four people are considered dead, and one of them is a person who has no children.^[1] Everyone dies at a certain point, so death marks the 'bounds' of each person. Even after a person dies, however, his existence continues on, through his children. But if a person has no children, no one can continue his existence, so he is considered to be dead even while he is alive.

People want to live, and therefore they run away from any possibility that will draw death closer to them. A person will run away from a fire, not just because it is painful to feel fire, but because fire can kill, and nobody wants to die. People naturally fear death and they want to live, because even the 'animal soul' in every person wants to live and continue one's existence.

The Avodah of The Childless

What is the depth of the *avodah* that is upon a person, with regards to the desire for children?

Hashem made the *Avos* and *Imahos* barren because He desires the prayers of the righteous, but in the end, He gave them children. Avraham and Sarah could not naturally bear children, and in the end, after many years of childlessness, they were finally given children. Yitzchok and Rivkah were at first barren from children, but in the end, they were also given children. Chazal teach that even Leah, who bore children very quickly, was actually barren to begin with, but Hashem made her immediately conceive [to endear her in the eyes of Yaakov Avinu]. And Rachel Imeinu was barren for many years until she finally had children; she was the main wife of Yaakov, the '*ikar*' (main point) of his home, yet the price she paid for this was that she was made *akarah* (barren).

Hashem desired all the prayers of these *tzaddikim*, and that is why were they were initially held back from children. But He gave them children in the end, so their barrenness was only a temporary situation. But throughout the generations, we have seen that there were many people who *davened* for children, yet they didn't merit children. Some of these people included were of our greatest *Gedolim*.^[2]

Whether it comes to either the barrenness of the *Avos* and the *Imahos*, which was temporary, or whether it is the barrenness of all those who didn't have children, who did not merit children in their life - what is the *avodah* of a person in such a situation? The desire for children exists in every person, and it cannot be stifled, as we explained. What, then, is the unique *avodah* upon a person when he is not having children?

1. Prayer

On one hand, there is a special *avodah* upon him to *daven* especially for children, for "Hashem desires the prayers of the righteousness", and since all of *Klal Yisrael* are called '*tzaddikim*' to Hashem ("*Your nation is entirely righteous*"), Hashem desires the prayers of every Jew.

2. Find Different Ways To 'Expand'

But that is only one part of one's *avodah* during this situation. Another part of one's *avodah* when in this situation is to utilize the desire for expansion, in different ways. The desire to procreate is a 'downwards expansion', so if one cannot have this downward expansion right now, he should try to have an 'upwards' expansion [by increasing his spiritual growth].

If he will want to have 'downward expansion' right now, through desiring to have children, his pain will be very great, because he cannot actualize this desire right now. But there are alternative ways of how he can have 'downward expansion'. For example, Chazal state that if one teaches Torah to the son of his friend, it is considered as if he has given birth to him. He is having a 'downward expansion' to this young boy whom he is teaching Torah to, and this is an act of giving to the boy whom he is learning with, who he is receiving from him.

This is part of the *tikkun* (rectification) that is needed in this process. The first part of the *tikkun* is *tefillah* (prayer), and the second part of the *tikkun* is to have 'downward' expansion in other ways.

3. Inner Expansion - To Reveal Hashem As Your True Beginning Point

But there is also a more inner part of the *avodah*, as follows.

We explained earlier that the human desire for expansion (whether upwards or downwards) is a resemblance of Hashem's trait of endless expansion, which manifests on some level in a person. Just as Hashem is infinite and He can expand endlessly, like a straight line that keeps extending forward, so is there a power in the human soul of endless expansion. Why did Hashem create this ability in a person?

One simple reason was so that it will serve as the root of the desire to procreate, for Hashem wants this world to be populated with creations. But the more inner reason is not for man's own expansion, but so that man will use this desire for expansion to reveal Hashem's expansion, on this world.

Herein is the depth of man's *avodah*. As long as a person is only seeking to expand his own existence, he is concerned only for his own "I" and to keep expanding this "I" of his. Although there is certainly a positive side to this - love for other Jews can only come after one has expanded his own "I", as Rav Shimon Shkop writes - a person should not end his life that way, having spent his whole life focused on expanding his "I". If he will expand upwards from there, it will be *gaavah*; if he will have downward expansion from there, it will be *taavah*. Even if he expands for holy reasons as we mentioned earlier (spiritual growth, or teaching others), this is still not the depth of one's *avodah*.

The depth of one's *avodah* is to get past the focus on his own "I", and to essentially realize that all existence does not begin with him, but with Hashem. Of Hashem it is said, "*I am the First, and I am the Last, and beside for Me there is no god.*"[\[3\]](#)

Only Through Palpable Emunah

This is also what it means to have *emunah* (belief and faith in the Creator). When one believes, with a palpable sense and not just as knowledge, that there is a Creator, he will come to the point where he realizes that the "beginning point" of everything is Hashem, and that the "I" of a person is but a 'second point' that comes after that - which is meant to serve to continue to reveal Hashem.

Therefore, if a person does not have enough *emunah*, or if he doesn't have any *emunah* at all, *chas v'shalom*, or if he believes intellectually in Hashem and he can even say so, but he doesn't feel Hashem's existence in his heart - he will be entirely self-focused. Everything in his life will be about "me." When he gets up in the morning and he is saying "*Modeh Ani*", he is first thinking about "*Ani*" ("I") and only after that does he think about Hashem. He begins always from his "I", and his entire life will be about expanding his "I".

As explained earlier, there is no way to stifle the desire to expand. But the depth of one's *bechirah* is to choose where he will begin his existence from (from the "I", or from Hashem). We can all know and believe in our minds that Hashem's existence came before us, and that we are just His creations. But

the 'animal soul' in us wants to expand our existence, and it wants to place itself first before everything else.

The 'animal soul' in us acts like Esav, who pushed his way ahead of Yaakov in order to be born first. Esav was born first because he thinks he should be the first of everything. He is the 'firstborn' in the side of evil, which wants to be the first. He is not the holy kind of firstborn, of which Hashem declared the Jewish people as "a firstborn unto Me" after the exodus from Egypt. He is rather like the firstborns of Egypt, who were evil firstborns, who represent the firstborns that want to be first and the most important. When Hashem struck down all of the firstborns of Egypt, it was to show that only He is the true beginning of all existence.

This is the meaning of *emunah*, which is from the word "*imun*", reliance. Hashem is the only One who we can rely on and depend on. Chazal also say that *emunah* refers to the laws of *Zeraim*, for when one plants, he places his trust in the Creator. In other words, *emunah* enables continuation of existence, which can only happen through palpable *emunah* that only Hashem is the Source and beginning (*Raishis*) of everything.

Why don't people have palpable *emunah*? It is because ever since a person is born, he first senses his own "I" as the beginning point of everything, and even after getting older and being taught about Hashem when he learns about Torah and *mitzvos*, this is only intellectual knowledge to him, and it doesn't yet reach his heart, so he doesn't feel it as a simple sense. As a result, he will think that all of existence begins with him, and that his own "I" is the beginning point.

This is really the root of heresy. He cannot be classified as an actual heretic, of course, according to the parameters of *halachah*. In his intellect, he is not being heretical, because he knows and believes that the Creator is more important than he. But in his heart, he does have heresy. He will go about his life thinking that everything must be a continuation of his own existence.

This is why we see all the time that there are people who want to make themselves known. This can also include the desire for more children, more grandchildren, and great-grandchildren - a person might want to have another child and another child and to want to see more *nachas* (pride) from them, all because he feels that each child continues his existence more. He wants his child to take his place and continue his legacy. It all stems from the desire for expansion, to continue one's own existence.

When one does not work to purify his inner character, the light of Torah does not penetrate him and it doesn't illuminate his being, and the person will remain with the desires of his *nefesh habehaimis* ('animal soul'), and he won't reach the goal of his *avodah*. The goal of one's *avodah* is to first know and believe that there is a Creator and he feels the meaning of "*I am the First and I am the Last*", and he can feel simply that there is Creator no less than he feels his own existence.

When the light of *emunah* has penetrated one's heart, he will then feel simply that Hashem's existence comes before his own. He won't even have to think deeply about this; it will come to him as a simple sense. When this becomes his simple sense, there will be an internal transformation upon his soul. He will now have a new beginning point that he recognizes.

Without the light of *emunah*, though, a person is always beginning from his "I." But when the light of *emunah* penetrates a person, the true "I" is revealed to the person, and instead of always being self-focused, he is always focused on the true "I", Who is the Creator. When *emunah* is not palpable to a person, it can also have some effect on a person, but only palpable *emunah* will cause an internal transformation upon a person's soul. It will change his *middos* (character traits) and his entire inner structure.

How Emunah Fixes Negative Character Traits

What does *emunah* have to do with *tikkun hamiddos*? If someone has a lustful desire, why should palpable *emunah* help fix his desire? If a person has problems with anger, why should the light of *emunah* improve this?

The simple understanding of this is that if a person truly believes that everything is from Hashem, he won't pursue any lustful desires and he won't get angry. That is true, but the root of this matter is because *emunah* fixes the entire soul and all of its abilities. It changes the entire inner makeup of the soul.

All of the character traits can be rectified and channeled in their proper direction, with the light of *emunah*. Desires can be channeled into a great desire to reveal Hashem on the world. Anger can be used to show anger towards those who transgress the will of Hashem. Conceit can be used for holiness when one wants to rise spiritually so that Hashem's Presence can be further raised and elevated on this world. All of the other character traits as well can serve to reveal Hashem. But this can only happen when one realizes that his beginning point is Hashem, and not his own "I".

Seeking To Reveal Hashem's Presence Will Lessen The Ego

Let us explain how we can work on this concept practically.

The *neshamah* in us feels the truth that only Hashem is the true "I", but our *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul) in us is self-focused, where everything is all about "me." This contradiction is at the core of our actual *avodah* on this world.

The more a person shines the light of his *neshamah* and he penetrates past his "I" (and of course, nobody can be perfect, because only Hashem is perfect), his desire for children\expansion will be about revealing Hashem in the world. Chazal state that "Hashem desired to have a dwelling on the lower realms", and this is what Avraham Avinu sought, by spreading *emunah* onto the world and essentially revealing Hashem's presence on the world.

The more a person reveals a desire to reveal Hashem's presence on the world, the more he chips away at the ego's desire to expand itself. Clearly, this will also weaken any traits of conceitedness and any other negative character traits that he has.

One has to be aware that the inner force which allows anything to exist is the true "I", the only One who can be the "First", Whose existence comes before anything else - Hashem. Then a person can realize that his *bechirah* is to engage in a constant war of recognizing where his true beginning point is.

When people live superficially, their main 'war' in life is to choose which *mitzvah* to give the most prominence to; going deeper, a person is at 'war' with his character traits, and beyond this, there is also war to wage in one's thoughts; and if a person is even deeper than this, he is at war within his own *retzonos* (desires and aspirations). But the most inner kind of struggle a person can have on this world is to be at 'war' with his beginning point, when he wonders of where everything begins from. This is the 'war' that *tzaddikim* choose to fight. It is to constantly ask oneself: "From where does all of existence begin from?"

Understandably, nobody reaches perfection on this world, but when a person carries this perspective with him, it slowly places the focus on expanding Hashem's existence onto this world, and shifts the focus away from one's own "I".

The Depth of Esav's Sale of The Firstborn Rights

This is like the sale of the firstborn rights from Esav to Yaakov, which can be understood on a deeper level as the ego-focused "I" being sold to the true "I"; the self-focused Esav who thinks he is the first and most prominent, whose 'firstborn' becomes sold to the "wholesome man", Yaakov Avinu, who resembled the wholesomeness of Hashem, the epitome of the perfected human being, whose wholesome and perfected being became the "wholesome image" that is carved into the Heavenly throne (in the language of our Sages). Yaakov Avinu had recognized that everything begins from Hashem, and that is Yaakov Avinu's "wholesome image" which became carved into the Heavenly throne.

In Conclusion

This is the depth of one's *avodah* of the war that he wages on this world: it is essentially a battle to wage war between the focus on his "I" with the focus on Hashem. One also needs to wage war in the areas of action, character traits, thoughts, and his deepest desires. But the highest aspect of our war on this world is to wage war with our own "I" that wants to be in first place, and to instead recognize that it is only Hashem who can be the First.

May we indeed merit that our main battle on this world should be about this, until we merit the complete revelation of *"I am the First, and I am the Last, and besides for Me, there is no god."*

[1] The other three are: One who is blind, one who is impoverished, and a leper.

[2] Some examples include the Chazon Ish (Rav Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz) zt"l, The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Reb Menachem Mendel Schneerson) zt"l, and, *ybdc"h*, Rav Shmuel Auerbach shlit"a.

[3] Yeshayahu 44:10

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