

### MESIRUS NEFESH

**QUESTION** The Rav has said that the avodah of our generation is mesirus nefesh. Is this referring to mesirus nefesh in avodas Hashem, in doing mitzvos, or in learning Torah? Or in all of them?

**ANSWER** In this generation, there is a spiritual illumination of the ability to act with “mesirus nefesh”, which is called the “light of Mashiach”, the light of Dovid HaMelech, who is called a “stillborn”, with no life support of his own, whose entire life source stems from acting on the level of mesirus nefesh.

**QUESTION** I have heard from the Rav many times that the way of mesirus nefesh is only for individuals. If so, what is the Rav’s intention that the avodah of mesirus nefesh is for this entire generation?

**ANSWER** In essence, the way of mesirus nefesh is applicable only to individuals. However, as mentioned above, since we are currently in a time period where the “light of Mashiach” is shining strongly, the light of mesirus nefesh is also present, and it exists in order to aid us in contending with the evil of the “50th Gate of Defilement” that is rampant today. The only way to spiritually survive the “50th Gate of Defilement” is through mesirus nefesh.

### CIRCUMCISING THE HEART

[In *Parshas Tazria* the Torah commands:] “*And on the eighth day, circumcise the flesh of his foreskin*”.<sup>1</sup> The *Mishnah*<sup>2</sup> states that only a circumcised Jew is called “circumcised” (*mahul*), whereas a gentile who is circumcised is not considered to be “circumcised”, but an *arel*, one who is uncircumcised.

This is based on the verse, “*For all the gentiles are uncircumcised, and the entire house of Yisrael are uncircumcised in their hearts*”.<sup>3</sup> Anyone who learns these words of the Mishnah can clearly understand there is much depth contained in the concept of *orlah*, of being uncircumcised, and that *orlah* exists on an inner level as well.

It is written, “*And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your hearts*”,<sup>4</sup> and the *Targum* translates this to mean, “*And remove the foolishness of your hearts*”. The *Ibn Ezra* writes: “*It makes sense that the meaning of this is to purify the heart, until one understands the truth.*” His words are closed and mysterious, as he does not explain what kind of “truth” he is referring to. The *Sforno* explains more about this matter: “*It is proper that you*

remove the foreskin of your hearts, and this means that you reflect about how to remove all errors which produce erroneous beliefs and so that your stiff-neckedness will not increase. When you remove the stiff-neckedness which prevents you from turning to that which it is proper to turn to, you will turn to recognize your Creator.”

What is the ‘error’ that produces erroneous beliefs, which prevent a person from recognizing the Creator?

#### Discerning Hashem's Message

When Hashem sent angels to Avraham and Sarah in the form of Arab wanderers, they promised that Sarah would have a child in a year’s time, and Sarah laughed. Hashem rebuked Sarah for her laughter, for she should have believed that Hashem could do anything. It is difficult to understand Sarah’s error. The Arab guests who came to Avraham were suspected of idol worship, so why should she have believed their promise that she would have a child? Why should she trust these Arabs who were idol worshippers? Why shouldn’t she laugh at their words, if they were promising her something that went against nature?

There is a traditional explanation for this matter. The criticism of Sarah is based on the statement,

1 Vayikra 12:3

2 Tractate Nedarim Chapter III

3 Yirmiyahu 9

4 Devarim 10:16

# CIRCUMCISING THE HEART

“A person cannot lift his finger below, unless it was so decreed from above.”<sup>5</sup> That is the brief outline of the answer. (We shall elaborate upon this and explain it.) When we reflect into these words of the Sages we see the true perspective of how we need to view each thing in Creation.

“A person cannot lift his finger below, unless it was so decreed from above” – this means that nothing in the Creation is by chance. Everything that happens is with precision and calculation, to the tiniest detail.

Here is an example. A person is walking in the street and he sees a sign posted on the streetlight pole, about an organization for *kiruv rechokim* (drawing our brethren close to the observance of Torah). It says on the sign that they are arranging for *avreichim* to go to countries outside of Eretz Yisrael for the purpose of *kiruv rechokim*, and there is a phone number listed, for anyone who is interested in joining. A person sees it and immediately tells himself that he cannot join this endeavor, for various practical reasons. He continues on his way. While it may be true that he cannot join this *kiruv rechokim* program, it is still true that it isn't by chance that he came upon the sign! He should have thought to himself, “It's not for nothing that I came upon this sign and saw it.”

Now, if a person lives without any palpable *emunah*, then he will think that he just “happened” to have noticed the sign, and that perhaps if he would have been guarding his vision better when he walks in the streets, he wouldn't have seen it. But a person who lives with palpable *emunah* knows that this is just being superficial. The truth is: “A person does not raise his finger

below, unless it was so decreed from above!” It didn't happen by chance that he saw the sign.

Certainly, he chose to see the sign, but that is only the external part of the matter. There is definitely an inner reason of why he noticed the sign. If there was no necessity for him to see the sign, then he wouldn't have noticed it. In whatever a person encounters in his life, there is a reason that he encountered it.

If a person does not live with this attitude, then he is missing the feeling that Hashem runs the world every hour and moment, and that He runs every detail. He lacks clear, strong *emunah*.

Let's return to the example of the person who notices the sign about doing *kiruv rechokim* in *chutz l'aretz*. Although it is true that he cannot be involved in this for practical reasons, he should still view it as a message from Heaven, that something is wanted from him, in this area. If he can't get on a plane to do *kiruv rechokim* in *chutz l'aretz*, at least he should tell his friends about it, so that perhaps he will find someone who can.

Or, if he can't go to *chutz l'aretz* to do *kiruv rechokim*, perhaps he can do *kiruv* in Eretz Yisrael, where he is living, because we have brothers here in Eretz Yisrael who, unfortunately, are distant from the Torah (may Hashem have mercy on them), and they can use help from others.

In fact, there are even a percentage of those who sit in the *Beis Midrash* of whom it can be said, “*And their hearts are not proper with Him*.”<sup>6</sup> Their hearts are very far from Hashem... may Hashem have mercy on them.

And if a person feels that he cannot help even those people, then at least he should try to do *kiruv* on one person: himself!

## In Conclusion

Now we can understand why Hashem rebuked Sarah's laughter. While it is true that the promise that she would have a child came from Arab wanderers, she should have understood that nothing is by chance. If they were blessing her that she will have a child, she shouldn't have laughed at their blessing, because she should have realized that this entire event wasn't by chance. This does not mean that she should have believed in the blessing of these Arab wanderers. Rather, she should have realized that the Arab wanderers were a tool of Hashem, to convey His words to her.

When one lives with the feeling that nothing in the world is coincidental, and that he lives in the world of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, it changes his entire view towards everything around him. Whenever he sees something, instead of seeing only the outer, external wrapping of the event, he reflects: “How is Hashem speaking to me?” This can be done in any place and in any time, and in any situation.

In a time such as this, when the entire world is shaking, everyone has the obligation to understand, that Hashem is speaking to him and that he wants something from him. One does not have to be a prophet to understand this. One only needs to be someone who isn't so blind and foolish who can't understand, for of him it said, “*And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your hearts*”, which the *Targum* explains to mean: “Remove the foolishness of your hearts.” (BILVAVI ON THE PARSHA)

5 Chullin 7b

6 Tehillim 78:37

# SELF-RECOGNITION & SELF-ACTUALIZATION

## INTRODUCTION

Before a person enters into the process of self-recognition and self-actualization, the very first introduction which one will need to know is: The need for self-recognition. Logically speaking, before a person enters into anything, he should know what the need for it is - If he doesn't see a need for something, he should not enter into it.

Understanding the need for self-recognition and self-actualization is very important, especially in our generation. And if a person will ask: Is there such a pressing need to explain the necessity for self-recognition? Isn't it so simple and clear that every person needs to understand himself?

The answer to this is contained in the very question! It is precisely the simplest and clearest things which are the most forgotten. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato in the beginning of Mesillas Yesharim said that "Because these words are mostly known and because their truth is revealed to all, that is why it is very commonplace for people to be unaware of them and it is increasingly common for people to forget them." Reality proves that in spite of the fact that self-recognition is incumbent upon a person and that it is clearly a necessity to recognize the soul, there are very few people who actually deal with this kind of self-work.

That is why it will be necessary for us to explain the need for self-recognition, and, to quote the Mesillas Yesharim: "Through studying this topic and re-viewing it, these words which are naturally forgotten by people will become remembered, enabling one to be aware in his heart about his duty which he has ignored."

## 3 REASONS WHY SELF-RECOGNITION IS NEEDED

In this chapter we shall explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, of the necessity for self-recognition.

On a simple level, the need for self-recognition is because of two reasons: (1) So that one can know how to serve the Creator and fulfill the *mitzvos*, and (2) because one has a need for this knowledge for his own purposes.

A deeper reason for this necessity is because self-recognition enables a person to look inward and unify the soul. Although the third reason mentioned is necessary in order to receive a true and inner perspective about life, and it completes the other two parts mentioned, it is also a deep concept, and reading about it and trying to understand it is not for everyone. It is mainly for those who want to deepen their understanding of self-recognition. Therefore, it is not recommended to learn about this point when you are at the beginning of your way. In order not to over-

whelm the readers who don't have a desire to delve into this point, we will not explain about it now, and instead we have included it in the appendices at the end of this book.

Until then, we will be explaining the first two parts of self-recognition: How it is necessary for serving Hashem, and how it is necessary for our own purposes. Anyone who wishes to deepen their understanding of self-recognition can certainly refer to the appendices and quench his thirst there.<sup>1</sup>

## MAN – A COMBINATION OF THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL

On the sixth day of Creation, Hashem made man, as it says, "And G-d made man."<sup>2</sup> At first, man was not one unit. Man was made with a body, "dirt from the earth"<sup>3</sup>, and a soul, a "breath of life."<sup>4</sup> After that, Hashem fused together the soul with the body, turning them into one unit, when He blew the soul into man's body: "And He breathed in his nostrils a breath of life."<sup>5</sup>

Man was given the title of "adam" only after this fusion of soul and body: "And He called their names man (adam)."<sup>6</sup> The word adam actually implies two different things. The word adam is from the word *adamah*, "earth", implying earthy materialism. The word adam also implies *dimayon*, the ability to compare and resemble. These two different aspects are the entire concept of man. On one hand, man has a physical body made from physical material, and on the other hand, man has a soul which is a spiritual entity, through which a person can get himself to resemble more the Creator, and as the prophet said, "I will become a resemblance of Above."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, a person is comprised of two parts: A body, which is an external covering over the inner aspect of the person – the soul – which is the spiritual and inner content of the person.

## TWO PARTS TO OUR SERVICE TO THE CREATOR

Just as the Creator made a person's body from physical material and a person's soul from spiritual matter, so did Hashem create His world to have both a physical and a spiritual layer to it – there is a physical, external world

1 Editor's Note: For this reason, it is better to see the appendix only after finishing this entire book.

2 Beraishis 1:27

3 Beraishis 2:7

4 ibid

5 ibid

6 Beraishis 5:2

7 Yeshayahu 14:14. The verse is discussing the evil outcome of this, but this is also a concept that is used for holiness.

# SELF-RECOGNITION & SELF-ACTUALIZATION

[which we see in front of us], as well as a spiritual, internal world<sup>8</sup> within it.

Hashem created both man and the world so that man will use his physical body and take care of physical concerns, as well as using the soul to take care of spiritual, internal concerns. Hashem did this precisely so that a person will accomplish doing His will in two ways: By using the two parts of man's existence, the body and the soul, so that man will serve Him both externally and internally.<sup>9</sup>

The external aspect of serving Hashem is accomplished when we fulfill the actions of the *mitzvos* that the Creator has commanded us with, in the 248 positive and 365 negative commandments, as well as all of the Rabbinical commandments and safety measures. Many of them are fulfilled through our body, either by actively fulfilling a *mitzvah* or by refraining from sinning.

The internal aspect of serving Hashem involves our soul. There are some *mitzvos*, both Biblical and Rabbinic, which can only be fulfilled through our soul. The soul has many faculties in it, which include our will, thoughts, and feelings. One needs to serve the Creator with his mental faculties, his heart faculties, his feelings, and all of his other soul abilities and senses. "All of my bones shall express, Hashem, Who is like You?"<sup>10</sup>

However, the purpose of serving the Creator is not merely to limit our physical mitzvos to our body and our internal work to our soul, alone. Rather, since Hashem combined the soul with the body and made them into one unit, so must a person combine the two parts of his service to Hashem together into one unit: Physical actions of mitzvos fused together with the soul's internal powers.<sup>11</sup>

8 To be more precise, there are several spiritual, internal worlds [within the physical world].

9 As explained in the introduction to sefer Chovos HaLevovos

10 The commentaries explain this verse to mean that "All of my bones" refers to "All of my very being."

11 This will be explained further in this chapter, as well as in Addendum 1.

## SOURCE OF THE OBLIGATION TO WORK WITH OUR SOUL

Just as every able-minded Jew has an actual obligation<sup>12</sup> to serve Hashem in the practical sense, and it is upon him to fulfill the mitzvos and not to commit any physical acts of sin, so is there an actual obligation upon every Jew to serve Hashem with his soul, by keeping the *mitzvos* that involve the soul and by avoiding the sins that are soul-related.

The source of serving Hashem with our soul is that which the holy Torah commands us with, in the mitzvos that involve our soul: The *mitzvah* to love Hashem, to fear Hashem, to go in His ways, to attach ourselves To Him, to love the Jewish people, and all other [heart-dependent] *mitzvos*, which involve the emotions of our soul.<sup>13</sup> According to some views of the Rishonim, there is an obligation to do physical acts that awaken our inner feelings of the soul, in order to fulfill these [heart-dependent] *mitzvos*<sup>14</sup>, but even according to these views, the mitzvos are being performed through our soul, and not through our physical body. However, in many cases, these *mitzvos* are usually given outward expression, or they will lead a person to do physical acts of *mitzvos*. And even so, these mitzvos are always being performed by our soul, and they are outcomes of using our soul. [מהספר: הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש]

12 As opposed to anyone who is not mentally capable, such as children or those who are insane.

13 See the introduction to Sefer HaChinuch (cited in Biur Halachah in the beginning of Orach Chaim): "There are six mitzvos which are constant, and one should never interrupt any of these mitzvos for even one moment of his life. Every moment that a person thinks of them, he fulfills a positive commandment, and there is no end to the reward for these mitzvos. They are: (1) To believe that there is one G-d over the universe, Who allows for all reality to exist...and Who took us out of Egypt, as it says, "I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out of the land of Egypt." (2) We shall not believe in any other god besides Him, for it says, "And you shall not have any other gods before Me." (3) To declare His oneness, for it says, "Hear Yisrael Hashem our G-d, Hashem is One." (4) To love Hashem, for it says "And you shall love Hashem your G-d." (5) To fear Hashem constantly so that we are prevented from sinning, as it says, "Be afraid from Hashem your G-d." (6) Not to stray after the thoughts of our heart and after what our eyes have seen, for it says, "And you shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes."

14 Sefer HaChinuch 16

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