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Redeeming The Soul's Actions

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we will begin to learn about redemption of the soul. With the help of Hashem, we will begin with the lower stages and then work our way upwards to the higher stages.^[1]

This world is called "*olam hamaaseh*", "the world of actions." Therefore, a major part of being here on this world involves physical action. There are also additional, higher abilities in the soul, such as speech, emotion, thought, and will. But a large part of our soul is involved with the area of action, being that we live in a world of action.

When it comes redeeming the soul in the area of action, we need to consider how the soul is in exile when it comes to action, and there are two parts to this: The amount of actions we are doing, as well as the quality of the actions we are doing.

The Amount of Actions That We Are Doing

Let's analyze the first aspect of actions: the amount of actions we do.

It's possible that a person is performing as he should, doing the actions he should be doing and needs to be doing, but it's also possible that a person is overdoing what he needs to do, or less than what the amount that he needs to be doing. Every person needs to be doing a certain amount of actions that are in line with his unique inner characteristics - some people need to do more, and some people need to do less, but all people need to do a certain amount of action in accordance with their soul's needs.

The amount of action that each person needs to do differs with each person, because it is determined based on one's own soul, so different souls have different action needs. Some people have a nature to be more active and they have more of a need to do more actions, whereas some people need less action, because their soul does not need do this much action.

Each person's soul contains the areas of action, speech, emotion, thought, and will, and other forces. But in addition to this, each person also has one area where his uniqueness is more apparent, and which his soul is more rooted in - the area which he or she is mainly meant to pursue.

Some people shine mainly in the area of action. They are very active and they have more of a need to do action, and that is where they excel. Others mainly excel in the area of emotion, or in speech, or in thought, or in their willpower. Since not all souls are equal, not every soul has the same need for

action.

Although all people need to be active, not everyone needs to do the same amount. Only those who are meant to mainly pursue action need to put their main energies into how much they are doing; those whose souls are not rooted in action are not meant to pursue action as much. Their main power may lie in their power of speech, or emotion, or thought, or will. Surely they need to do action also, but it won't be their main strength.

Knowing If You Are More of "Action" Person

Therefore, a person must know: Does my main power lie in the area of doing action? Or does my main power lie in other areas, such as speech, emotion, thought, or will?

If a person's main power lies in action, and he is instead investing most of his energies into his powers of speech, emotion, thought or will, that means that his power of action is in exile! He has a soul whose main ability is action, and instead he is investing most of his energy into other areas. What will happen? He is not using his main potential, and his main power will remain dormant, and it will be actualized.

The same is true vice versa: If a person is not mainly an "action" person and his main strengths lie in other areas, and he tries to mainly be more of an "action" kind of person, his power of action is also in exile, because it is not supposed to become his main power and he has exiled it by forcing it into being his main power.

So one should know if action is his main area, or not. When trying to discover this, here are some subtle points that one needs to pay attention to, in order to know it.

There are people whose main strength lies in action, but they aren't very active, because they may have a dominant element of earth in their souls which causes them to be drawn towards laziness. They might think that because they have a lazier nature, it must be a sign that action isn't their main area to excel in. But the truth may be just the opposite. Action may be their main strength, and it is just that their laziness is preventing them from revealing their true potential!

The same is true vice versa: A person may be the type whose main strength does not lie in action, yet the circumstances of his life have made him very active, so he thinks that he is mainly an "action" kind of person. In reality, though, his main strengths lie in the areas of emotion, or thought, or will, but he never gets to use these parts of his soul, because he is so busy getting things done. He will do much action, but all of this action stifles his true potential. His ability to perform so much may seem to be an indicator to him that he is meant to be more of an "action" person, but in truth, this does not come from his soul's true potential. Rather, he is running away from himself all the time, by always doing action, when in reality he is meant to mainly pursue other areas, which may be emotion, thought, or will.

Learning About The Soul

For this reason, it is necessary for a person to learn about his\her own soul. If a person does not try to learn about his\her own soul, he\she may never even realize which part of his soul is in exile. If he doesn't know which part of himself is in exile, he will not seek its redemption. In order to attain personal redemption, one needs to see which parts of himself are in exile. In order to know that, one has to learn about his own soul [his own unique personality, etc.]

Without this basic self-recognition, a person will never reach inner redemption. The gateway to inner redemption is to recognize how the soul is in exile, and in order to see how the soul is in exile, one

must learn about his soul, its general forces and its details.

This particular point, understandably, contains a difficulty, because it is a vast and all-encompassing matter which cannot be covered here extensively.^[2] All I can do here is emphasize how important this knowledge is, and that it is absolutely necessary if a person wants to redeem the soul. The soul must be learned about, on a general level and then on a more detailed level, and then a person can know if his main strength lies in action or in the other areas of the soul.

In fact, from a deeper understanding, a lack of knowledge about one's personal soul is the very depth of being in a personal exile. The Maharal writes that the word *galus* (exile) and *geulah* (redemption) are from the same root letters, *gal*, "reveal"; when something is in a state of concealment, it is exiled, and when it is revealed, it has been redeemed. Therefore, when one doesn't know what the main power of his own soul is, this is the very epitome of a soul in exile. The beginning of redeeming the soul, then, is to get to know one's own soul [by first knowing its main area of strength].

Knowing How Much You Need To Do

We are all in a "world of action", and therefore a big part of life consists of doing action. However, as we have just explained, action is not always the primary aspect in all people.

One needs to figure out if he is the kind of person who mainly belongs to the area of action, or not. As a result, he can then know *how much* action he needs to do, and if it should be his main area of involvement, as opposed to his powers of speech, emotion, thought, and will. If one doesn't know how much action he needs to do, the ratio of actions he is doing will not be in line with the amount of energy he needs to spend on his speech, emotion, thought or will.

That is all one aspect of action: how much action one needs to do. However, there is also another area of personal exile when it comes to action which we need to explain about.

Avoiding Over-Involvement In Actions

Since we are in a world of action, life brings all kinds of responsibilities with it, such as running a home and being busy all day taking care of the home and the children. Often a person has to do many things which are really above his actual capacity to do. When it comes to responsibilities of life which need to be taken care of, we have no choice, and we must do those actions. But many actions are not necessary to do, and when people do such action, they are placing their soul in personal exile - even if action is their main strength.

The first part of personal exile when it comes to action is that a person doesn't know how much action he really needs to be doing, which causes him to either be too active or not as active as he should be, which we explained about earlier. But the second aspect of personal exile when it comes to action is, that even after a person knows his limitations when it comes to how much he needs to do, he may be doing many actions that are not true to who he is, and this happens due to the many responsibilities of life which brings so much action with it.

This problem, of doing so many things that are not true to one's own soul, is very common.

Knowing Your Limitations, and Minimizing the Amount of Action You Are Doing

Firstly, however, it still helps to recognize oneself and one's limitations when it comes to action, and this is the already the beginning of personal redemption, as we explained earlier. If it is clear to a person what his main area of strength is, and as a result of this he becomes clear about how much or how little action he needs to do, he is already somewhat clear about himself, and this is the beginning

of redeeming the soul. It is not the complete state of redemption of course, because one may still be doing much action that he doesn't really need to do, but he has certainly has a degree of personal redemption, just by having some knowledge about his own limitations.

Practically speaking, sometimes there is a difficulty in knowing how much action one needs to do, but often, when one acquires a bit of wisdom about life, a person can assess this. Sometimes he will notice that he is doing a lot of action simply because he doesn't make a calculation about it, or because he is disorganized.

When he discovers this, he will immediately recognize the cause of his over-involvement in so many actions, and naturally, he will cut down on how much he is doing.

For example, sometimes a woman needs cleaning help to come to the house because she is doing so much and therefore she needs more help in the home as a result, so there is a need to hire cleaning help. But once she realizes that she is doing too much in her life and she begins cutting down on all that the activities she is doing, she will have more time for her home and then she will realize that she doesn't need the cleaning help. One should go about this sensibly, of course.

Taking Breaks While Working

Taking this further, even when a person is doing too much and above his normal capacity, there is a way to minimize this stress, albeit the fact that it is not the best situation to be in. The advice is that a person should not be constantly involved with physical activity. There should be breaks every so often, amidst taking care of all these actions. This applies to both men and women when they are working in the home. In this way, there is at least a bit of space for the soul to "breathe" in between action, and this is somewhat of a redemption for the soul, to some level.

Therefore, a person should make sure not go into action overdrive, by taking breaks every so often.

This is also a general course of action to take whenever a person needs to unwind from all of the stresses of life. By taking breaks every so often, one can quiet things down and reach his own internal quieting, and to reconnect to his own inner world.

Here we have explained how this idea is necessary as well for anyone who has too much action in his/her life. It applies to men in general, and it is especially applicable to women, who are very involved in the "world of action". Since women have much more physical activities to take care of, they must not do too much without stopping, making sure to take breaks every so often and to find some quiet and temporary serenity.

This can be accomplished either through sitting down and having a drink, or listening to a song, or to chat with a friend (assuming that there is no forbidden speech involved). The point is to unwind from all of the actions that a person is doing. After some time, either a half hour or an hour later (depending on the particular circumstances), she can return to what she's doing, refreshed after the break.

Avoiding Actions That Are Not In Sync With Your Personality

Until now we have explained how the soul can be in exile with regards to *how much* actions one is doing. Now we will explain how the soul may be exiled with regards to the *quality* of the actions one is doing, and how to come out of this exile.

Every person has certain actions which are closer to his soul, and some actions which are further. The classic example of this was in the exile of Egypt, where there was "*avodas perach*", "cruel labor" -

where the men were given women's labor, and the women were given men's labor. This is a personification of the "cruel labor" of the Egyptian exile. This exile was in Egypt, but in our own generation, it also exists!

It is especially common amongst those who are far from observing Torah and *mitzvos*, who consider men and women to be "equal" in the home; the women are doing tasks of men, and vice versa. They deny the human nature of the different natural capabilities between men and women, which Hashem has created as part of the design of Creation. In reality, there are some tasks which are more designed for men to do, and other tasks which are more designed for women to do. But when people are ignorant of this reality, it is "exile" within the home.

This also applies on a more subtle level whenever a person is doing anything that doesn't suit his or her nature. For example, one type of woman may have a talent for sewing or knitting, while another woman has less talent in this area. Another kind of woman enjoys drawing, whereas other women do not. Another type of woman is good at accounting, whereas other women stay far from anything to do with calculations and accounting. Each person enjoys different actions and does not enjoy other actions, and all are different with what they enjoy and do not enjoy doing.

Slowly a person needs to get to know himself\herself, as mentioned earlier. In our generation especially, where there are all kinds of activities that people pursue, one must know which actions are closer to his\her own soul, and which actions are less. One needs to know which actions "fit me", and which actions "do not fit me".

The better a person gets to know which actions are more appropriate for him to do, he can better know which activities are mainly meant for him to do.

Choosing A Profession That Is In Sync With Your Personality

This point is especially important and fundamental to know before choosing which profession to work in. The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that when chooses a profession in order to pursue a livelihood (this mainly applies to men who work for a living, but it is also applicable to women), he needs to choose a livelihood that suits his nature.

It would seem that when a person chooses a livelihood, he should choose whichever job will bring in the most money. After all, the point of going to work is to be able to support one's family, so shouldn't it mainly be a job which will bring in the best money? But the *Chovos HaLevovos* says that the attitude should be totally different than this. It is an inner perspective: One has to choose a job that will suit his own unique personality.

If a person cannot find a job that suits his nature, he must not choose that job, says the *Chovos HaLevovos*. If he chooses that job and it's not "for him" to do, he is not only enduring the case of having to go to work to earn livelihood - he is entering into an entirely new "cursed" kind of labor. He is doing something that is not for him to do, and this is like "exile" upon the soul, with regards to the soul's actions - because he is stifling his area of action.

When a person chooses a job solely because it will bring in more money, or because it's more socially acceptable to choose such a job, or because it's considered more prestigious, most of the time, he will become a workaholic, from morning until night. If he has chosen a job that does not really suit his personality, he has placed most of his life into an exile, and deliberately so, and the curse upon mankind of having to work to earn livelihood is then increased so much more.

This idea does not only apply to work and livelihood, which is a major area of life, for it takes up much time of a person's day. It is also applicable to any of the actions that a person does.

Here is a fundamental example of this. If a woman in the home needs help with something and she has a few daughters that are around, she needs to use some of her wisdom about life to know which activities are suitable for each of the daughters to do. If one of her daughters is not good at doing a certain chore in the home, she should not ask it of her, and she should instead ask the daughter who is better at doing this chore. Through this, she avoids the problem of placing another “exile” upon the souls of her daughters, by not making them do things that don’t fit their personality.

And in a case where a woman does not have any daughters home to help her, she should have a cleaning lady to all the tasks in the home which she is not naturally good at, so that she doesn’t do things that don’t fit her nature and thereby avoid placing her soul’s actions into exile.

Where To Draw The Line

The following point must be clarified, though. We are not saying that a person should only do things that fit his personality and to avoid doing things that a person finds uncomfortable. This is simply not possible, because in the reality of life that Hashem has created, a person must take care of many different actions and responsibilities, which are not always suitable to his nature.

We have said that the main activity a person is involved with, his\her profession, should be a job that fits the person’s nature. This is not always possible, but one should try, as long as it is possible, to choose a job that is suitable to his\her personality.

But when it comes to various activities that are performed in the home and elsewhere, it is impossible to only do the activities and errands that will suit your nature, and to avoid things that don’t. In spite of this, it is still possible for one to lessen the amount of activities that don’t suit his\her nature, such as through hiring cleaning help, and by making sure not to give chores to any of the children that they aren’t good at doing.

Finding Your Favorite Activity

Even more so, in order to utilize the potential of our soul’s true power of action, which is the light of the soul’s redemption, every person needs to know of a particular activity that is closest to his\her soul, and to make sure to consistently do that activity.

This kind of activity, whatever it may be [you will know what it is only after getting to know yourself very well], is your soul’s power of true action, and it is this activity that can bring out your potential to its fullest. It is something that you have a particular enjoyment in doing.

For example, some people have a pleasure in carpentry, in taking pieces of wood and then building structures from it. Even if such a person cannot actually become a carpenter, the fact is that he enjoys cutting pieces of wood and building things from it. Such a person, every so often, should get hold of some pieces of wood, cut them, and build things from it. They enjoy doing it, and this is their favorite activity, so they should fill this need every so often.

Understandably, this is an outlet which must be pursued sensibly. One should not waste all of his day on such activities just because he enjoys doing them. He should just make sure to give it some outlet and expression, by doing this activity every so often, in order to fill his soul’s need for this action.

When a person makes sure to practice all of the above, he reveals the root of his soul’s power of action, and this is the light of the redemption of the soul, with regards to the power of action. Without doing this, one never utilizes the true potential of his power of action, and it remains exiled.

A person should try to discover what his primary activity is that is meant for him to pursue, and to

make sure to do those activities. He may have a list of three or four activities that he enjoys doing in particular, and he should find what the main one is, and then do that action often.

Summary & Conclusion

In summary, the exile of the soul with regards to action is when a person is either doing too much or too little action; and when a person is doing things that do not fit his personality. Even more so, the soul is redeemed from its exile when a person makes sure to do the main activity which his soul is meant to pursue.

We cannot come out this exile completely, being that we are all still within the general exile. But what is possible is for us to lessen the exile for ourselves. The complete redemption will come in its time in the future, and we pray that it should come already today, with the help of Hashem. But until the redemption arrives, when we are still in exile, we cannot reach inner redemption completely, since we are still within the general exile. But we can lessen the exile upon ourselves, and to that degree, we can experience inner redemption, and that is the perspective behind all that we are saying here, which we are explaining, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q1: Which factor determines what kind of actions a person needs to do that will be uniquely tailored to his own soul? Is the source of this the *neshamah*, or does it come from the physical experiences a person has went through, such as how he grew up, environmental factors, etc.?

A: Good question. Any behavior of a person can be influenced either by internal factors within the person, or from external factors in one's life. A person may act a certain way because of external factors that shaped his personality, because that is how he grew up, that is what he saw, and etc. Or, he may be acting based on internal factors, his inside. When he is acting in a way that comes from his inside, this is coming from his own *nefesh* (lower soul). The *nefesh* is rooted in a higher source, the *neshamah* (Divine soul), but the actions mainly come from the area of the soul that is called "*nefesh*", which is the root of a person's power of action. Each person needs to do actions that are in accordance with his unique personality, and accordingly, that is how he can redeem his soul [in the area of action].

...So it is possible for this [a person's main area of activity that he is meant to pursue] to be influenced either from external factors, or from internal factors. To say this in subtler terms, it may not always come from the *neshamah*, and it instead coming from the *nefesh*, because the "world of action" is rooted in the *nefesh*.

Q2: Is it possible to know whether this [the main activity that a person needs to pursue] is coming from the *nefesh*, or from the *neshamah*? Also, is there a practical difference of where it's coming from?

A: There is certainly a difference, because if a person's main area of activity in life is stemming from external\environmental factors, it is not coming from the person himself, and a main part of one's *avodah* is to reveal his own potential. Sometimes, anything a person does which is influenced by external\environment factors can have nothing to do with the person's unique essence, yet he is mainly doing this particular action. Either way, the main *avodah* of a person is to reveal his true potential. That answers the question of if there is a difference or not.

How does one know it, though? By attaining internal quiet, one can better recognize if he's doing something that suits his personality or not.

Q3: How can a person know if action is his primary power, as opposed to the powers of speech, emotion, thought, or will?

A: The more a person gets used to acting from within himself, and from internal quieting, his actions will become deeper, and then he will feel more connected to his inner being, and then he will slowly be able to identify where the main strength of his soul lies in.

Q4: Can a person fluctuate between what his primary power is, depending on his current stage on life? Can it change, based on the current circumstances in one's life?

A: Yes, it can definitely change. For example, a child's main strengths may change by the time he is a teenager or adolescent, and a teenager or adolescent may change entirely by the time he is an adult. The changes happen due to maturation in general, and they are also influenced due to various events and periods in a person's life, which move the soul in different directions. So there can be always be changes in whatever stage of life a person is up to (which are usually subtler kinds of changes), and certainly there are changes of orientation when different stages of maturation are reached, such as going from childhood to adolescence, or from adolescence to adulthood (which are more dramatic kinds of changes). But the root primary power of the person will always remain as it is.

Q5: I used to do a certain action because I thought that this action was my primary action to do in life, and then I had to give it up because I realized that it wasn't really for me to do, because it felt pressurizing for me to do, and I also that it was making me conceited. Is there a way for me to know how certain actions are meant for me to do?

A: Feeling conceited while doing a certain action is not a sign that it isn't for you to do. It is merely a sign that the action isn't being done for totally pure intentions. As for how a person can know if a certain action is meant for him to pursue or not, that is related to the above question, and the answer was that the more a person is acting from within himself and from having internal quiet, he can slowly become more connected to his inner being and then he will know better which actions he should mainly pursue or not.

Q6: What does it mean exactly to act more from within oneself? Does it mean that a person feels *sippuk* (fulfillment) when doing it? What does it mean exactly to act more from within?

A: Feeling fulfillment from what you do is the result. The more a person gets used to doing things not because of what others are thinking and not because of what they are doing, and instead he does things because he feels this is the right thing for him to do, he is acting more from within himself. This is the beginning of inner redemption. Slowly with time, as a person continues like this, he will act from a much more inner place in himself, and then he will feel great *sipuk* (fulfillment) from what he does, but that is a much later stage, and it is but the result of the entire process.

The first step, then, is to make sure that you are doing things not because of what others are thinking, what everyone else does, what is socially acceptable, what will others think about me, etc. Instead, do what you feel is right for you to do. Slowly as a person gets used to this, he enters further [into the path towards inner redemption]. Then he will be able to slowly awaken his own inner potential, and then he is closer to feeling a personal sense of fulfillment from what he does.

Q7: Are all the components of inner redemption mentioned [action, speech, emotion, thought and will] regarding the level of "*nefesh*" alone, or are they also applicable to the higher levels, such as "*ruach*" and "*neshamah*"?

A: In general, action is a power of the *"nefesh"*, emotion comes from the *"ruach"*, and thought comes from the *"neshamah"*. But, to be more specific, when a person is living life at the level of *"nefesh"*, he may either *nefesh d'nefesh* (a *"nefesh"* within *"nefesh"*), or *ruach d'nefesh* (a *"ruach"* within *"nefesh"*) or *neshamah d'nefesh* (a *"neshamah"* that is within *"nefesh"*), etc.

Q8: Is there a way to identify if something is stemming from my *nefesh*, or from my *ruach*, or from my *neshamah*?

A: This is a deep point to know. Most people have not reached beyond the general level that is called *"nefesh"*. In order to be on the level of *"ruach"* [the level of the soul higher than *"nefesh"*, which is emotion], a person would have to be in a constant state of feeling emotions. In order for a person to be on the level of *"neshamah"* [which is deep thought], he would have to be constantly connected to deep thought. There are some people who can live on this level, but they are few and rare. All other people live at the level of *"nefesh"*, and they can move up and down within the *"nefesh"* itself, but they do not reach the general levels that are called *"ruach"* and *"neshamah"*.

Q9: The Rav in previous times has used the word *"neshamah"*, such as reflecting into the fact that we are a *"neshamah"*, etc. and now the Rav is using the word *"nefesh"*. When the Rav said *"neshamah"*, did the Rav mean the general *neshamah*, or the *neshamah* that is within *"nefesh"*?

A: The soul has five names: *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. However, the soul is generally called by either of these two names – *"Nefesh"* or *"Neshamah"*. Sometimes when I speak about *nefesh* or *neshamah*, I am speaking in more specific terms, either about the *nefesh* or the *neshamah*, and sometimes I am speaking in general terms. When I spoke about *"neshamah"* I was speaking in general terms and not in specific terms, so I did not mean the *neshamah* specifically, but even the *nefesh*. Generally, when I speak about *neshamah*, I am speaking about the level of *neshamah* that is within the experience of *nefesh*.

Q10: If a person was used to doing a certain action which he\she got satisfaction from, and then he\she gave it up because he realized it wasn't appropriate according to *halachah* to do – how can one replace that action or talent that was given up?

A: This is a very delicate question. Maybe if you can give more details of what you mean I can then understand what you are asking about.

Q11 (Continuation of Q10): I used to figure-skate in public and then I gave it up because I realized it was not appropriate. Perhaps I can do it in a private setting and in such a way I can give expression to this talent of mine...?

A: This is not your main talent in your life, it is just an aspect of childhood fun which is seeking to express itself. It is enjoyable for you to do, but that doesn't make it your primary action in life; it feels good for you only because it is a youthful experience which you enjoy. I am confident that this is not your main action in life.

There is a verse, *"For the inclination of man is evil from his youth"* – at first a person thinks that what he wants is who he truly is, but when he comes to know himself better and he reaches his true "I", he then realizes that those actions are not really meant for him to pursue and want, and instead he is shown what actions he really needs to pursue.

Q12: The Rav said that one should take breaks in between working, so as not to do too much action. Why didn't the Rav suggest that part of taking a break is to use our power of *ratzon* (will) to connect to what we are doing, and in that way it will make it easier for us to do?

A: That is a very good suggestion in concept, but in the beginning of one's improvement, this is not practical to implement. In most cases, a person's *ratzon* to do a certain action is not that strong. It is certainly a worthy point in one's *avodah*, but it is an advanced stage and it will only work for one who is very in touch with his\her internal world. So it is not the advice for those who are beginning to improve.

Q13: What can we say to a person in order to help him take a different course of action, when the person thinks he is doing the right thing and really he is not?

A: First we need to get the person to open up his inner world and to help him become aware that not all actions that people do are true to who they are. The first step is to get him to simply become aware of this, and then we can further work with him.

[1] Editor's Note: As mentioned in the previous chapter, the order of stages of inner redemption, in order of ascending order are: action, speech, emotion, thought, will, and desire.

[2] Editor's Note: The Rav explains the general powers of the soul in "Getting To Know Your Soul" (Da Es Nafshecha)

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