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## Inner Redemption Series - 03 Freeing Your Feelings

### *Emotions In Exile*

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we shall continue explaining how to redeem the soul. Previously, we dealt with redeeming the "actions" of the soul. Now we will explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, how to do redeem the emotions of the soul. We will see how the emotions are in exile, as well as how as we can redeem them.

The first aspect of how the emotions are in exile is when one's emotions are not being activated from their potential state, and they remain dormant and hidden. This may be true about a person's emotions in general, or they may affect only some of one's emotions.

There are verses and statements of Chazal which compare the Egyptian exile to a fetus in its mother, and the redemption from Egypt to the birth of the fetus. In the same vein, when one's emotions are either generally or partially in exile, they are not being actualized from their potential state, and this is one kind of exile to the emotions.

The second aspect of exile to the emotions is because since a person has many different kinds of emotions that come from the soul, if the emotions are not given order, they mix with each other and this creates a form of exile to the emotions. This is like an "*Erev Rav*" (Mixed Multitude) within our own emotions - a detrimental mixture of many forces within us.

In summary, there are two kinds of exile to our emotions. The first kind of exile to our emotions is when our emotions are not being actualized and they remain in their potential, unutilized state. A second kind of exile to our emotions is that even when our emotions are being utilized, they are an unsorted mixture of many forces taking place all at once.

### *Three Factors That Contribute To Emotional Development: Nature, Environment, and Experiences*

Let us first deal with the first kind of exile to our emotions: where the emotions of a person remain dormant and they aren't being actualized.

There are some people who have been born with a more emotional personality, and others are born with a personality in which their emotions are more covered over and concealed. In those born with more revealed emotion, there may be some people who are born with an extremely emotional personality.

Besides for the nature a person is born with, though, there are also experiences in life a person may

go through, which will either reveal his emotions more, or, the opposite – he may become emotionally hardened from certain experiences.

A person may have been born with a personality that shows less emotion, but he has grown up in a home where he was raised by very emotional parents, and therefore he may gain a more emotional side to his personality as he grows up, even though this is not the nature he was born with. He has grown up in an environment where emotions are revealed, and this can cause him to gain a more emotional personality, enabling him to reveal the power of emotion from its potential state.

The same is true vice versa – a person may have been born with a more emotional personality, but he grew up in a home where the parents did not show that much emotion, and this may cause his own emotional personality to close up and go into hiding. Or, if the environment around him does not express that much emotion, he may want to please the environment around him and try to make himself less emotional, teaching himself to have less emotion, in order to fit in with his direct surroundings. This is especially the case if his parents were less emotional than he is, where he will try to be more like his parents' unemotional nature so that he can feel more accepted by them.

Even more so, a person may have grown up in an environment or home which not only shows less emotion than he does, but which belittles those who express their emotions. In most of these cases, the children coming from such homes will [subconsciously] train themselves to close off their emotions, even if they were born with a more emotional kind of personality, because they cannot handle being shamed by others for their emotional personality.

Besides for environmental factors, there are also certain events and experiences we go through in life which may either reveal, or close off, our emotions. Any experience we go through has some effect on our emotions – for better, or for worse. In particular, major events of a person's life will especially shape a person's emotions, either revealing them more, or hardening them. If a person goes through an especially painful event in his life, or an extremely joyous life, this can either open his heart to have more powerful feelings, but if the event was so painful that a person could not process the pain, he may teach himself to close off from his feelings altogether.

### *Choosing To Develop Our Emotions*

We have so far explained three factors which contribute to the development of one's emotions: the nature a person is born with, the environment a person grows up in, and the major events a person goes through in life.

However, in spite of these three factors which contribute greatly to the shaping of our feelings, we have the power of *bechirah* (free will), though, to choose how much we will reveal our emotions, or how much we will keep them concealed. Although Hashem has placed us into situations which may have either developed our emotions or hardened them, He has also given us the power to choose to develop our emotions and reveal them more.

We cannot, *chas v'shalom*, blame everything on the nature we were born with, or on the environment we grew up in, or on the events we have gone through in life. That is a superficial way of thinking, which comes from the beliefs of gentiles. We, as Jews, are "believers, sons of believers", and we believe that Hashem has given us the power to choose. There are definitely factors that contribute to the shaping of our emotions, as we have explained, but Hashem has given us the choice right now to either reveal our emotions... or keep them closed.

How indeed can we choose to develop our emotions and reveal them more, if they have been stifled in our childhood or because of what we have gone through in life?

## *Becoming Aware of Your Active Emotions*

Some people show less emotion, but they are still very sensitive to insults, and they can feel easily slighted if someone attacks their honor or doesn't treat them in a way that is sensitive to their feelings. However, this is the downside to being more feeling – the aspect of being sensitive to insults. Our aim here is not to develop our emotions in a way that will make us more sensitive to insults. Rather, we are referring to basic emotional experiences, such as joy, sadness, etc. One must ask himself: How much emotion is revealed in my life? Which emotions are normally expressed?

Again, this is not a question about how sensitive you are, like if you are easily insulted or not. As we have explained, there are people who do not express that much emotion, but they may still be very sensitive; clearly, then, emotion and sensitivity are not the same thing. Here we are dealing with the power of emotion, not sensitivity. The question one needs to ask himself is: How much emotion is revealed in my life? What are the emotions that I experience?

In some people, the emotions are active, and in others, the emotions are closed off. There are also people who show too much emotion, and they are overly reactive when they get emotional. Whatever your personality type is, you need to know how emotional you are: Fairly emotional, non-emotional, or very emotional.

### *When There Is Too Much Emotion: How To Attain Emotional Balance*

There are generally three levels in the soul (in order of highest power to lowest power): thought, emotion, and action. When there is too much emotion, a person needs to balance himself out with thought and action. Sometimes emotional balance will need to be attained through thought, and sometimes a person needs to make use of some action in order to attain balance in his emotions. A person may get involved with heavy thinking, or a very focused kind of action, which can each balance out his strong amount of feeling.[\[1\]](#)

That concerns one who has a strong, heavy amount of emotion.

### *When There Is Too Little Emotion: How To Open Your Emotions*

However, in this lesson, we are mainly discussing one who shows less amount of emotion [whose emotions are in exile and who needs to 'redeem' his emotions from exile]. The *avodah* for this will be as follows.

#### *Step 1 - Writing Down Your Feelings Each Day*

If one doesn't show that much emotion, he needs to open his emotions by taking a paper and pen and writing down his feelings each day. That is the first step. Then one should take this further and write down which feelings are positive, and which feelings are negative, on two different columns on the paper. On the right column, write down any positive feelings you feel. On the left column, write down any negative feelings. There should also be a middle column, for any feelings you're not sure about. On top of the columns, write down your strongest feelings, in order to intensity. Do this for both the positive and negative feelings.

This may sound new to many people, and since people often are not used to doing this, it may be difficult to write down these lists, perhaps even very difficult. But it is all a matter of habit. It helps a person simply become aware of his feelings.

The point of this is not to be able to release the emotions from their potential state. Rather, the point is to set aside time for writing down your feelings, with concentration, investing your time and

thoughts into it - and this itself will help you become more truthful about your own feelings and to get in touch with them.

This exercise is not just a recommendation, but a way of living life and to attain organization of your inner world. It helps build a person's entire inner world, the world of the soul.

Getting used to this will not take a day or two. It can take time until a person reaches more clarity about his emotions. Eventually, after getting used to this practice of making these lists, after from much thinking, a person can eventually discover what his strongest positive emotion is.

### *Step 2 - Finding Your Strongest Positive Emotion*

When a person's emotions are concealed, how can he discover it? He needs to find some emotion that is somewhat revealed in his life. He may have very little emotion in his personality, but he surely has a little bit that is consciously revealed. He should try to discover what that emotion is.

Again, the point here is not to try to release your emotions from their concealed state. Rather, the point here is more basic. It is to simply find the little amount of positive emotion that is revealed in your life and to just be aware of it.

You should try to find the strongest positive emotion that you recognize in your life, as opposed to a weaker positive emotion. That way, you will have an easier time releasing this positive emotion further. If you try to work with a positive emotion in your life which isn't that strong, it will be too difficult for you to try to bring it out more. So instead, find your strongest positive emotion, and that way, you will have a much easier time with releasing your emotion from its hidden state into a more revealed state.

(This should only be done with a strong positive emotion, not with a strong negative emotion.)

Through becoming aware of your strongest positive emotion, you will be closer to releasing it from its potential state, which will in turn open all of your emotions.

### *Example - Revealing Your Love More*

It is hard to give examples of how to do this, because each person is different when it comes to this. But we will give some examples so that we can have some idea of this.

A person can think: How can I reveal my love more? If I love someone, what are the things I can do that will make the love greater? Can I give him something that expresses my love? Can I say something or write something to the person that expresses my love? Can I think deeply about my love to the person (which can cause the love to become greater)? Focus on the emotion of love, see how it is present in your emotions, and think into how you can expand this love further.

We have used the example of love, but the same is true for all of the other emotions as well. Identify a positive emotion in yourself and think of how you can expand it further. Become aware of it deeply, not just as a fact, but by being aware that there is an emotion here. That emotion may be love, joy, or some other positive emotion.

So, practically speaking, identify your strongest positive emotion and then expand it further, by being aware that this emotion is now becoming revealed more from its potential state.

### *In Conclusion*

We have described here the first part of leaving the exile of the emotions, which is to go from a state of locked feelings to a state of revealed feelings. The second part of leaving the exile of the emotions will be about how to leave behind the confusion within our own emotions, which we will discuss in the next lesson, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q1: I always thought that releasing your emotions is not a good thing, but the Rav has explained here that it's a good thing to do. What is the proper perspective about releasing emotions? Is it a good thing or not?

A: There is a *mitzvah* of the Torah of *ahavas Hashem* (to love Hashem) and *yiras Hashem* (to fear Hashem), which is a release of positive emotion. However, because there are also negative emotions, people are often cautious about releasing their emotions in general, out of concern that this will cause them to release their negative emotions. But this is a mistake. If a person tries to keep his negative emotions inside, he will stifle them, and at a certain point, they will explode outward. The proper perspective is to deal with these feelings, in the proper way. We should never completely release all of our negative feelings at once. Rather, we must deal with each of these negative feelings, slowly, and one by one. But we should never let negative emotions fester inside ourselves, because usually they will explode outward some time later.

Q2: I have learned about the concept of the trait of *hishtavus* (lit. "state of equilibrium"), and I understand it to mean that since every situation is equal, it doesn't matter if a person has strong emotion or weak emotion towards you, such as if someone gives you a compliment or he doesn't; it doesn't make a difference, since every situation is equal to another. How does this concept fit in with what the Rav has taught here about freeing the emotions? Why should one become aware of his/her feelings, since there is a viewpoint of *hishtavus* which makes all situations equal to one another....?

A: *Hishtavus* is an extremely high spiritual level mentioned in *Chovos HaLevovos*. It only comes after one has richly developed his emotions. If one tries to reach *hishtavus* before developing and clarifying his emotions, he is trying to skip levels, and he will instead stifle his emotions, rather than reaching *hishtavus*. Only after one is clear about his emotions can he work to acquire the level of *hishtavus*.

Q3: The Rav has explained here a method of revealing the emotions by way of using the intellect. But we know that it is also possible to reveal the emotions by way of the emotions themselves. Is the approach explained here by the Rav the only way in which the emotions can be revealed from their potential state?

A: There is never any one way in a person's *avodah*, whether it concerns the work he must do with his own personal soul or whether it comes to man's task in serving his Creator. There is certainly a way to reveal the emotions by way of the emotions themselves. However, the way we mentioned here is not just a way to reveal the emotions by way of the mind. It is rather a way to reveal the emotions from the existing emotions, by way of the mind. So it is not just using the mind, and it is rather like a middle path between the mind and emotions.

There is certainly a way to reveal the emotions by way of the emotions themselves, and there is an advantage as well as a disadvantage to this method. The advantage is that it is a more direct approach, going straight to the emotions, as opposed to dealing with the issues on an external and superficial level; it is an inward kind of approach. But the disadvantage of this method is that usually the person who reveals his emotions through becoming more emotional will become emotionally

dysfunctional. The emotions will be off-base. A person then has to make use of his mind to stabilize his emotions, and indeed, this can work.

However, here we have presented an opposite approach: Instead of exposing the emotions in a way that will lead to problems and then taking care of them with the mind, the approach we explained here is to use the mind and emotions together, to release the emotions through the mind and emotions together. The emotions are being opened through the mind.

Practically speaking, however, if a person feels however that the approach of working with the emotions directly will work better - which is often the case with women, who have a stronger amount of emotion - then the way to go about this is as follows (briefly): Identify an emotion, and focus on it. This further reveals that emotion, with the more you concentrate and focus on it. However, even when using this approach, which uses the emotions directly, you will still need use your minds to carefully scrutinize your emotion, to make sure that the emotion isn't going too far, to make sure the emotion doesn't get thrown out of whack, and to maintain clear awareness to the emotion.

Q4: If one has emotions that are very strong, it probably won't help to use the mind to maintain emotional regularity, since this kind of person has an intense experience of emotion, and he has only a superficial experience of his intellectual mind. Will such a person be helped by using his mind to direct his emotions (since this kind of person can only use his mind to deal with the external surface of his feelings, and not the depth of his feelings)?

A: This is a subtle question and I will try to answer it as precisely as possible. If someone has a strongly emotional personality, he identifies his emotions as his "I", whereas his intellectual abilities are deemed by him as external and superficial. When he uses his intellect to deal with his feelings, he will feel as if he is using an external, superficial ability to deal with his "I", and therefore he will find his intellectual abilities of little value, when he tries to deal with his emotions. He will feel that he is not getting through to the depth of his emotions. But he can become deeper than this, and he can learn to identify his power of intellect as his "I". When one has that self-perception towards himself, he will feel that using his intellect to deal with his emotions really does get to the depth of his emotions.

Q5: If a person has two different kinds of strong emotions and he wants to reveal these emotions, should he deliberately place himself into an emotionally charged situation which would reveal those emotions more?

A: Certainly a person can have more strong emotions than one, but he has less awareness to the other emotions, and more awareness to a particularly strong emotion than he has for his other emotions. But there certainly exist other strong emotions in a person.

As for the question if a person should deliberately place himself into situations that would reveal his other emotions, it depends. If it is an extreme situation, the general response to this would be no. If it is not extreme, then sometimes, he may place himself into such situations. That is one way of *avodah*.

Another way of *avodah* is to begin to work with the strongest positive emotion that is already revealed, and then a person will become more aware of his emotions, and this will make him aware of his other emotions as well.

These are two options to take. To repeat, one should only place himself in normal situations which can reveal his emotions, and he should not place himself into abnormal, complicated situations in order to reveal his emotional side, because that is a dangerous path to take.

Q6: Can a person place himself into a situation which is not extreme, in order to reveal his emotions more?

A: Anything which causes you to have a strong emotional experience is not something that is recommended. If Hashem has placed you into that situation, then you need to utilize that situation to its fullest, but in most cases (with some rare exceptions) it is not recommended to place one's soul into a situation which would cause him to become strongly emotional. Only situations which cause you to have a subtle experience of your emotions, is recommended.

Q7: Why did the Rav say earlier that a person can identify his "I" as his thoughts, if the thoughts are only a garment of the "I", and not the "I" itself?

A: There is the "I" itself, and there are the garments of the "I". The soul's garments are action, speech, and thought. When we discussed identifying your "I" as either the thoughts or the emotions, we did not mean the actual "I" itself, but the garments that are closer to the "I". If a person identifies his feelings as being closer to his actual "I" and his thoughts as being further from his "I", we explained that he will have a difficulty using his power of thought to deal with his emotions. But if a person identifies both his emotions and thoughts as being close to his "I", he can easily use his thoughts to deal with his feelings.

With most people, the emotions are stronger than the thoughts, and this is especially the case with women. They will perceive their emotions as being closer to their actual "I", whereas they perceive their thoughts as being further than their "I". This does not necessarily mean that they will perceive their feelings as their very "I". It just means that they identify their feelings as being closer to their actual "I". Therefore, when a person learns to identify that really it is his thoughts which are closer to his "I" than his feelings are, he will have an easier time dealing with his feelings, using his power of thought.

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[1] Editor's Note: This is explained further by the Rav in ***Getting To Know Your Feelings: Part II: Chapter 6: Balanced Feelings.***

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