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At Har Sinai, we became separate from the world

We are approaching Shavuot. The Torah was given on Har Sinai; why was it called *Sinai*? Chazal say it is because "*sinah*" - hatred - came down onto the world because we received the Torah. When we received the Torah, it became apparent that our nation is different from the other nations. This began the hatred that non-Jews have for us.

On one hand, we must love everyone; we must love all of Hashem's Creation, even a rock. But on the other hand, we must be aware that we are totally separate from the other nations and everything else. We must love all people, even non-Jews, but we must also at the same time realize that we are different. We are elevated than the other nations.

The non-Jewish influence today

A person must examine and see if he realizes about himself that he is elevated and different than the other nations. This is especially true for nowadays, when we live amongst the non-Jews, and it has become even more essential now that in the last few years, the non-Jewish influences have crept into our nation greatly.

When we were in the desert, we were isolated from the rest of the world, but once we came into Eretz Yisrael, which was then the land of Canaan, we have been living amongst the non-Jews. Ever since then, we have had to bear in mind the words of the Rambam, that a person is always influenced by his surroundings.

The fact that we live amongst the other nations has its effect on us. It has influenced us in two ways:

first of all, it causes us to act like them, and also, it has caused us to live a superficial kind of life; our very *pnimiyus* has become affected.

But we received something at Har Sinai: we received the ability to be separated from the rest of the world. This applies to both men and women. It applies to all our actions, thoughts and feelings. We have the ability to feel separate from the other nations.

One has to always examine himself – his actions, his feelings and his thoughts – and see which parts of him are affected. Does he act like a non-Jew in any way? Does he feel the same way a non-Jews feels about something? Does a person think like a non-Jew? We need to check ourselves.

How our whole life is influenced by non-Jews

It's not so easy to do this. We think that many of our attitudes come from our soul, but really they come from the non-Jewish attitude.

For example, we hang pictures in our home. What is the reason we do this? Does this come from our soul, or from a non-Jewish behavior we acquired?

Another example: when we make a wedding, are we making a true Jewish kind of wedding, or are there parts of it which we copy the non-Jewish weddings?

A third example: When we speak, do we speak from our soul, or are we using some words that are a non-Jewish kind of speech?

A fourth example: Our clothing we wear. Are we perhaps choosing our clothing to fit a non-Jewish style? When a man chooses clothing, does he choose it because of anything that has to do with a non-Jewish taste or style? With women's clothing, are there any differences we want in our clothing to resemble a non-Jewish style?

How our emotions are affected

What is the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew? Besides for the fact that a Jew wears a yarmulke and a non-Jew doesn't, what is essentially the difference?

Let's say a Jew is happy, and a non-Jew is happy. What is the difference between Jewish happiness and non-Jewish happiness? Is it just the causes for happiness that are different – a Jew has his causes to be happy, and a non-Jew has different causes that make him happy – or is the happiness itself that we have an entirely different kind of emotion that a non-Jew doesn't experience?

Does a Jew have the same feelings as a non-Jew? Many people think there is no difference. The result of this is that people go to learn in universities and study under non-Jewish teachers, because they think that there is no difference between how a Jew feels and how a non-Jew feels, so what's wrong with learning from them...

Reading non-Jewish literature

In the literature that many people read, the non-Jew authors are teaching us how to feel and think. The result of this is that people learn psychology from a non-Jew, and you can have a Jewish psychologist who uses non-Jewish methods to "help" people. He thinks he's doing a great *chessed* for the community by making all this information available to his clients.

Because we are mixed amongst the non-Jews, we don't know how to differentiate between what is a Jewish feeling and what is a non-Jewish feeling. Now it has become normal to find non-Jewish self-help books in a Jewish home, books that tell us how we to think and feel. Because we live among them, it has become very hard for us to differentiate what is in the Jewish way and what isn't.

This all happens because we started out early in life by reading non-Jewish literature and subjects which would help us get by the practical parts of life. Then we innocently thought that if we used their books to help us get by some part of our life, then we should use their books throughout our whole life as well, learning how to feel and think from a non-Jewish author. People are so used to reading non-Jewish literature that now it seems like a wonder to us when we hear that a Jew is supposed to think differently!

Who can learn psychology?

A person has to be very, very wise to know which information in non-Jewish literature is kosher, and which isn't. But a regular person does not have this great wisdom.

Should a Jew learn non-Jewish psychology? Certainly not. Just like a person who wants to learn *Halacha* will not find *Halacha* in a university, so is it impossible to learn about our soul from a

university. We cannot learn about our *pnimiyus* from universities. People are desperate to know about their souls, but going to the non-Jewish institutions is not the solution. What we do need is *Rabbonim* who can help us answer all our questions about how we should think and feel.

Just like we would never send our child to a non-Jewish school, so should we never learn about our own souls from them. In three words, to learn non-Jewish psychology is *treif, treif, treif* (non-kosher). When non-Jewish literature is taught to our children, what is essentially happening? The non-Jewish *hashkafos* (outlook on life) enters them.

Which non-Jewish literature can we read? A regular person should not look at anything they write. A person who is a very big *Talmid Chochom*, who learned the entire Torah – who finished *Shas* (*Talmud Bavli*, as well as *Talmud Yerushalmi*) and has learned the works of the *Gra* and the *Maharal* – he already has his outlook from the Torah, so he can sift through the information and see which non-Jewish literature is kosher and which isn't. He is able to obtain permission to learn it, because he can know how to sift out what isn't true.

But anyone who hasn't learned the entire Torah yet – and certainly not women, who do not learn Torah in-depth – have any basis whatsoever to read non-Jewish psychology.

What we should do is have a "*Beis Midrash*" for Jewish psychology, in which people can come and learn the *sefarim* that will teach us about our soul^[1].

Just because people have become so used to reading non-Jewish literature doesn't make it kosher. A Jew lives from his soul; it is our soul which produces our thoughts and feelings. It is our soul which should be guiding our life – our *neshamah*.

What to do

People ask, "What should I do? I have to make a living, so this is what I need to do." But would you make a living if you know that it would harm people? Certainly not. So why would you enter a course to learn a living if it's going to harm your own soul?

We can learn psychology from the *mussar sefarim*; these teach us how we can live our life.

At Har Sinai, we were separated from the non-Jews, which caused them to hate us. But today, we are so mixed among them that it has become so hard for us to differentiate what the difference is

between a Jew and a non-Jew. We need to examine the entire spectrum of how we think and feel: does such an attitude come from our soul or not? Is our home influenced by the non-Jewish influence in any way? Is all our literature okay? If there is any non-Jewish books in our home, it doesn't belong there.

People will definitely think that this speech comes from some narrow-minded person who comes from Eretz Yisrael and doesn't understand what's going on. But actually, because I grew up in Eretz Yisrael, I see the depth of this exile we are in. I see how influenced we have become from them. I know so much damage that has come to us because of non-Jewish literature. We must simply empty out our houses from any non-Jewish literature.

Examine your life: how much of your life comes from the non-Jews? The way you can know this is by asking yourself: If you would live in the desert, would you still want to be attached to the world and its influence? Although people say "Times have changed", we have a *mitzvah* to remember *Har Sinai* every day. This is not merely a *mitzvah*, but to remember everyday how we felt then by Har Sinai: separate from the non-Jews.

A person might say, "But everyone else does it." To this, the answer is: just like Avraham Avinu didn't give into the rest of the world's idol worship, so must we separate ourselves from the rest of the world, even if we are alone.

The problem we face in trying to connect to our soul

When a person tries to connect to his *pnimiyus* - his inner self -- he faces a certain hardship: our soul is very hidden from us. Why? It is because many non-Jewish influences have covered our soul from being revealed. We need to first cleanse ourselves from all non-Jewish ideas.

Every day we make a *beracha*, "*shelo asani goy*" - We thank Hashem for not making us a non-Jew. But see how much we are taking from them into our life!

We have to first divest ourselves from all non-Jewish ideas and all the impurity we have picked up from them, before we can attempt to find our own *neshamah*. If you think this sounds too radical, remember that Avraham Avinu was also considered radical.

We know that in our Avodas Hashem, a person has to always take the "middle path" and not do anything extreme. But in our times, the middle path of the world is what is not normal. We need to take a more extreme path if we are to separate ourselves from the non-Jewish influence.

Decide what you want to be like

Sit down with yourself and ask yourself: Are you ready to separate yourself from the non-Jewish influence? Are you ready to live like a Jew?

Once a person decides that he does want to live like a Jew, his soul will become greatly purified. Such a decision is a major clarification in one's life, and it will give a person great *Siyata D'Shmaya* to be able to enter into his real self, his *neshamah* – and to reach closeness to Hashem through it.

All of these words are only a **preface** to becoming close to Hashem. It is not **yet** closeness to Hashem; that is a step which comes after this.

Women at *Har Sinai* didn't receive the *mitzvah* to learn the Torah, but they did receive the light of the Torah. When a person cleanses himself or herself from the non-Jewish influence, he\she becomes a container to be able to contain the light of the Torah.

I hope you realize that these words here are not a radical way of thinking, but simply how to live a life of Torah and how to live of our *neshamah*. We must get rid of the “non-Jew” within us and remain with the “Jew” in ourselves, so that we will be able to reach our *neshamah* and connect with Hashem.

[1] In a different shiur, the author mentioned a list of sefarim that we can learn which teach us about our soul: *Michtav M'Eliyahu* (available in English as *Strive For Truth!*), *Sifsei Chaim-Middos V'Avodas Hashem* (2 Volumes), and *Alei Shur* (2 volumes).

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