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## Tefillah - 108 Balance Between Intellect and Emotion

### *Aging In The Soul*

In the blessing of ולמלשינים, we ask of Hashem: ועל זקני שארית עמך. We ask that Hashem should protect our elders.

Aging doesn't only take place in the physical realm. Our own soul ages as well. According to one opinion in the Gemara, we are required to stand up for even an elderly non-Jew, and Rashi explains that it is because he has seen much miracles in his lifetime, thus, he is deserving of honor. Our soul "ages" when it becomes wiser as a person's lifetime goes on and he goes through many experiences.

The Sages state the older a Torah scholar gets, the more settled his mind becomes, because Torah scholars are constantly ascending in their spiritual maturity; whereas an ignoramus becomes more and more foolish the older he gets.

Let us reflect into what this is, that a Torah scholar's mind improves with the older he gets. Let us not wait until we get old to understand what this is; instead, we should know beforehand and plan ahead of time - "*Sof Maaseh B'Machshavah Techilah*", "The end of actions is first with thought". We need to think about a matter before we encounter it, so that we will know how to deal with it properly when it comes.

### *Mind and Heart*

In our soul, there are four elements - earth, water, wind and fire. Generally speaking, the element of water is rooted in our mind, while our heart is the root of our element of fire. Our **mind** element of **water** contains our power of intellectual thought, while our **heart** element of **fire** contains our desires, passions and inclinations.

The mind and the heart are called the "two kings" that reside in man. These are the two main forces in a person - the mind, and the heart.

If a person doesn't work on his *middos*, he will encounter contradictions between his mind and heart. His heart will be burning for a certain desire, while his mind is rationalizing to him that the desire is improper.

The desires of his heart, and the rational arguments of the mind, will get into a war with each other - an internal war that takes place inside a person's psyche - and what will happen? "Two kings cannot share one crown." The mind is one kind of king, while the heart is another king, and each of them will

attempt to weaken the other's power. The heart's emotions, which are rooted in the element of fire, might burn with so much passion that it will dry up the "water" – it will weaken the mind.

If a person doesn't fix his *middos*, usually, he will lead a life in which his heart's fiery desires are overpowering his rational, thinking mind.

### ***Two Kinds of Imbalances In One's Avodas Hashem***

When a person wants to enter the depth of *Avodas Hashem*, there are two major elements going on that he needs to be aware of: the role of our mind, and the role of our heart.

Some people view *Avodas Hashem* as being entirely a "mind" matter, basing this on the fact that learning Torah is the greatest *mitzvah*. All of their time is spent solely on learning Torah, and nothing else. Others view *Avodas Hashem* as being an entirely "heart" matter, that serving Hashem is mainly about becoming enthusiastic.

Understandably, each of these approaches is extreme, and they lack balance. A person cannot survive on just Torah alone, with no feelings in his *Avodas Hashem*; nor can matters of *Avodas Hashem* compromise on someone's Torah learning. We must find the fine balance between these two major factors in how we serve Hashem. The world stands on three pillars – Torah, Avodah, and Chessed; one without the other is a shaky foundation.

There are people who spend their entire lives immersed in the study of Torah, yet, they do not grow when it comes to anything else in their *Avodas Hashem*. Matters of *Avodas Hashem* remain unrevealed in their lives. This is one kind of problem.

There are others who have the opposite problem: they are constantly involved with their heart's passion to serve Hashem better, but as a result, their mind gets weakened, since they are using their heart too much. When such a person sits down to learn Gemara, he finds that his mind is weak when it comes to learning. Because he always uses his heart, and his mind is not used enough, his mind becomes weakened from the constant use of his heart. Such a person might be learning very passionately and with fiery enthusiasm, learning the Torah "as if it was the day that it was given on Har Sinai" – but when he tries to plumb the depths of the *sugya*, he feels like he can't do it, and he feels that he can't think so well.

### ***When Aging Increases Our Wisdom, and When It Doesn't***

As life goes on, a person's heart/emotions generally weaken when he gets older, and he loses his fiery idealism he had when he was younger. This is due to two factors. First of all, the body becomes weaker, so he doesn't have as much strength any more to become fired up with emotion. Secondly, his own soul has aged. If he spent most of his younger years mainly serving Hashem through his heart, and not enough through his mind, then when he gets old, he will lose his fiery idealism he used to have. His body weakens, and his inner "fire" weakens with it as well.

But if a person made sure to base his *Avodas Hashem* on his mind (or intellect, or power of thought, or Torah learning) when he was younger, then when gets older, he actually becomes wiser. His life was not built on enthusiasm alone; he discovered the secret of *menuchah* (serenity) in learning the Torah, and now he can enjoy its *menuchah*. He learned Torah with *menuchas hanefesh* when he was younger, and now, he continues to learn with *menuchas hanefesh*.

When such a person gets older, he loses his fiery physical emotions, but not the fire of his actual *neshamah* (soul), *chas v'shalom*. His actual element of fire in his soul, the fire of his *neshamah*, will not weaken. He gains more daas with the older becomes, as Chazal say.

## ***Balance Between Our Torah Learning and Avodas Hashem***

The ideal way we are supposed to live is that we develop both our mind and our heart, and that we should know how to have the balance between them.

When we are actually learning Torah, we are making use of our mind – and we need to disconnect from our “heart” for the time being as we are sitting and learning.

The Kotzker Rebbe zt”l said that this is the meaning of the blessing of “*Shetargeileinu B’Torasecha*” – “That we become accustomed to Your Torah”; that when we are actually learning Torah, we should learn it habitually, and not be concerned about any of the other inner workings that are going on as we learn Torah. As we learn Torah, we just need to learn and stay focused, reflecting and thinking into our learning, without using any fiery passions of our heart. We must put our mind off enthusiasm, as we learn Torah.

While we learn Torah, we need to make use of our mind, not our heart. But before we actually sit down to learn Torah, it is then that we need to make use of our heart. Before we open up the Gemara, we need to fire ourselves up with enthusiasm, because this is what indeed prepares us for the Torah.<sup>[1]</sup> The Torah requires *Yiras Shomayim* \fear of Heaven, and *yirah* is a trait which is rooted in our element of fire.

As we actually learn Torah, though, we are not supposed to use this “fire”; rather, learning Torah is about using our mind, which is the element of water. As we learn Torah, our “water” is supposed to be putting out our “fire”, so that our fire for *Avodas Hashem* doesn’t overtake us and deplete the “water” of our rational thinking process. When we learn Torah, what we really need is *menuchas hanefesh* (inner peace), rather than to make use of our inner fire and enthusiasm.

In order to understand our Torah learning, we need *yishuv hadaas* (a calm, settled mind) so that we can reflect into what we learn and get to the truth of what we are learning. There are people who actually feel *yishuv hadaas* when they feel themselves full of fiery enthusiasm, but this is an imbalanced kind of *yishuv hadaas*. In order to reach the truths of Torah, we need total *Menuchah* when we learn it; so as we learn Torah, we must temporarily disconnect from our element of fire.

### ***Cool, Detached Intellect Vs. Fiery Passion and Emotion***

These words are very subtle.

There are people whose hearts are full of fiery passion to serve Hashem, but when they sit down to learn Torah, they find that they can’t think properly into their learning; they find that they can’t deeply reflect into the matters they are learning about.

Others have the opposite problem – they are immersed deeply in the intellect of the Torah’s thinking, but they consider the “heart” (matters of *Avodas Hashem* other than learning Torah) to be a totally strange and foreign matter. But we need to balance out our intellect and our heart.

On one hand, we must exert ourselves in Torah study, which develops our thinking mind. When we are learning Torah, we must make use of our intellect, and we must not deal with our heart.

This is not because we don’t have to serve Hashem as we are learning Torah. It is rather because as we learn Torah, our *avodah* is to disconnect from our element of fire \our heart \our emotional state. The emotions of our heart can get in the way of our Torah learning and hamper it, so we need to disconnect from our heart’s emotions as we sit and learn Torah.<sup>[2]</sup>

It is impossible for a person to truly grow in Torah unless he has *menuchas hanefesh* (inner peace). For this reason, we must disconnect from our emotional state as we are learning Torah, so that our mind can be calm can properly analyze in our Torah learning.

Most people, though, are “either or.” One kind of person only cares for Torah learning, and other matters of *Avodas Hashem* are of no interest to him. Others are heavily involved in matters of *Avodas Hashem*, but this takes its toll on their learning and causes their Torah learning to be compromised. These are both incorrect approaches.

We need a balance. On one hand, we need to immerse ourselves in our learning and analyze every nuance in the *sugya*; on the other hand, we also need a heart that burns with yearnings for closeness to Hashem.

We need both of these elements in our life – a developed mind, and a heart that is alive and burning with feelings to come closer to Hashem. But we need to understand that there are separate times for our mind and our heart – just as Chazal say that there is a set time to learn, and a set time to daven, and we cannot learn while we are davening, and vice versa.

### ***A Balanced Inner Fire***

When we achieve the balance between our mind and heart, the fire of our *neshamah* will be a kind of fire that does not weaken our mind’s thinking process. When we reach the light of our *neshamah*, our inner fire for spiritual growth will be a balanced kind of fire – a revelation of the inner light of the soul.

This is the depth of how Torah scholars become wiser as they get older. The body’s physicality and passions become weakened when we get older, but if a person merits to develop his inner spiritual world when he was younger [by giving himself balance], he penetrates into the inner layer of both his mind and heart.

He reveals that there are more than just “thoughts” in his mind, and that there is more than just “fiery enthusiasm” in his heart; when he penetrates the inner layer of his mind and heart, he merits to feel what the Chazon Ish describes, that a person’s very mind enjoys the spiritual attainments, whereupon he experiences a joy that is more blissful than anything on this world.

Now we can understand better the depth behind the words, **ועל זקני עמך שארית ישראל**.

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[1] See *Nefesh HaChaim Gate IV*.

[2] The source for these words is in *Nefesh HaChaim Gate IV*. Here, the Rov has explained the words of the *Nefesh HaChaim* with understanding the inner workings of our element of fire and water.