



BEING YOUR TRUE SELF

Q: The Rav explains that there are two levels to our “I” – a higher version of our self in which are integrated with Hashem, and a lower version of our self in which we are involved with our complexities of human nature. How does this relate to the “root” of our soul?

A: In the highest place we can reach where we are totally divested from the self, our “I” is not “Who I am”, but our “I” is rather the “I” of the Creator. We become nullified there. In the space where we are divested [of our physicality and ego], our “I” is not personality traits and character. We don’t exist there as our own existence. Rather, we exist there as a “nullified” existence. My “I” that “exists” is only when I exist as a complex being full of various factors, but when “I” exist as a “nullified existence”, the “I” is divested of all those factors.

Q: Can a person get a sense of stability/security from this space where he is divested of his existence?

A: If a person lives strongly in the space of being divested from all sense of self, he will find his security there, and he will have bitachon there. But we should understand that we cannot only live in that state. It’s not possible. We always need to understand our “I”.

Q: If a person comes to the conclusion that his true self is not compatible with learning Torah in a regular Kolel system (learning all day), and he is far from being academic and learning analytically, and instead he gets his satisfaction from some other area – let’s say he enjoys business – does that mean that he needs to be

more “himself” and not force himself to be in Kolel all day or in the beis midrash all day [and instead he should be involved with the pursuit that utilizes his talents and capabilities]?

A: For every question about how to act practically, there are two areas to know. We have to first analyze the subject of the question itself, minus all of the issues or external causes that can be contributing, and we also have to know other external factors which may be playing a role and which we also have to take into account. What a person may have to do practically may be completely different than what we understand based on the general understanding of the subject. Let’s analyze each of these two areas.

The first aspect to analyze here is the subject itself here. Chazal argued about this. Rabbi Yishmael held that a person should be involved in business, while Rabi Shimon bar Yochai ruled that a person should only learn Torah and have bitachon that his livelihood will come from Heaven. The Gemara says that many did like Rabbi Yishmael and succeeded, while many did like Rabi Shimon bar Yochai and did not succeed. Therefore, if theoretically a sensible person would come to the conclusion (with no personal motives involved) that his soul root is drawn to the path of Rabbi Yishmael – to become a businessman – then his true self is more closely connected to being a businessman. If that is indeed the case, then he has to be a businessman! If that’s who he is, then that’s what he must do – he has to be himself. He can’t abandon his true self and pretend that he’s trying to become a Talmid Chochom and running away from what he’s

meant to be – a businessman. His success in avodas Hashem will be revolved around being a businessman. Understandably, he still has the basic obligation of setting aside daily every day for Torah study – at day and at night. He is also obligated in maser, tzedakah, chessed, and davening, etc.

But, this is all true only if his true self is to be a businessman. A person might be easily mistaken though about this. Many people want to become successful businessmen, but that doesn't mean that this is who they are really meant to become. They may have seen others who were successful at business and therefore they also have a wish to become a successful businessman. But they are not being themselves.

Now, let us explore the practical aspect. Even if a person clarifies that going into business is “more for him” than learning in Kolel all day, he still faces a problem. Even if his role on this world is to serve Hashem by being a businessman, he faces tests in the business world – he can easily commit the most serious aveiros along the way. If he will be actively involved in business, he is bringing himself closer into a situation where he might totally destroy his soul and become completely distanced from serving Hashem. He might fall into the lowest levels. If that is indeed the case, then he has to compromise on his true self – on his affinity for being a businessman – and instead he should be protecting his soul and his connection to the Creator, by being in the beis midrash.

Q: Perhaps no one should take on any project or endeavor if he isn't yet clear about his true self?

A: To a certain extent there is truth to that. If a person enters a big project with a lot of obligations where he has to commit himself for a long period of time, with no end in sight, then he might get very hurt in the process, if he's involved in something that is not compatible with his personality that's matched to his soul root. He has to wear a 'costume' for a long

amount of time, which doesn't match his true personality at all. He is forcing his soul to be involved in that pursuit, and he gives no room for his true self.

But on the other hand, it is not good for a person to not do anything just because he didn't yet figure himself out yet totally. A person will first need to enter into jobs or work in which he learns how to identify better what his true self is. He examines what's motivating him to seek a particular job or project: “Is it coming from my true strengths, which are pushing me to enter into such work? Or maybe there's some external factor here that's dragging me into this?” He has to check into his thoughts and feelings about it, learning to identify himself more and more.

Only after he has reached a decent clarity about himself can he decide if he should enter into bigger and more serious projects that obligate him more in his time and energy.

Q: The Rav mentioned that the external environment of a person can be in direct contradiction with a person's true self, thus preventing him from being himself. But maybe that's because the person isn't comfortable with himself, he has his own internal contradictions within his own personality, and that's why he's having a hard time conforming to his surroundings.

A: It's true that a person's internal contradictions are the source of his outer conflicts with his environment, and because of this, every person has to learn how to settle his own internal contradictions before he deals with the outer conflicts. When one makes peace with his own self, his “enemies” – his challenges that he faces in his environment – will also be at peace with him (Mishlei 16:7). Even after a person has reached somewhat of an inner peace with himself and he is at peace with his own internal contradictions, he will still have to deal with many outer factors and challenges that run against him.