

Netivot Olam: Netiv Koach Heyetzer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

In Netiv Koach Hayetzer, the Maharal cites a verse from Mishlei. "If your enemy is hungry give him bread, if he is thirsty give him water. It is as if you have poured hot coals on his head and Hashem will repay you." King Shlomo is telling us that the way to deal with your enemy is by acting with mercy. When a person feels compassion for someone, he identifies and feels close to the other person, and this produces a reciprocal effect. Pouring hot coals means annihilating one's enemy by forcing him into a different status. He can no longer hate you because you've attached yourself to him with compassion. The more self-regard a person has, the higher his threshold of shame. When you feel compassion for someone, the message you give him is that you value him. This in turn gives him a sense of shame. He cannot hate someone who respects him. When you sustain an enemy you get him under your control. If he has received from you, it's as if you have poured coals on his head because you've changed his ability to act against you. The bond created through giving is the first step in defeating the enemy.

If you have a child or teenager at risk, there are several ways to approach him. One way is opposition, which is sometimes necessary, but never very good. The other way is to find out what he wants. Does he want a feeling of significance, does he want attention? What's

his bread? Give him what he desires and he'll be embarrassed to oppose you.

The Maharal, based on the Gemara, says that a person's real enemy is his own self. The *yetzer hara* presents itself as hungry and thirsty. When you feel that lack inside you and you have an urge to fill it with physicality, drench it with the waters of spirituality. The *yetzer hara* appears in two forms. The first form is *yitzra d'evra*, taking physical reality in its baser form and letting its pleasure fill the empty space within you. This manifests itself through pursuit of desire and all of the things that it leads to: materialism, theft, and lack of holiness in relation to physicality. Overindulgence opens the door to evil.

The second form is *yitzra d'avodah zarah*, taking one's sense of yearning, meaning, and connection and degrading it by not moving it all the way up to Hashem, but settling on a more base form of perceived self-significance. The Maharal tells us that both forms of the *yetzer hara* have to be fed with Torah. The Gemara says, "If you happen to find the despicable one (the *yetzer hara*), drag him to the beit midrash. If he's stone he will be erased. If he's iron he will shatter, as the verse states, " 'Are not my words like fire,' says Hashem, 'and like a hammer that explodes a rock.' "

One form of *yetzer hara* opposes positive

mitzvot. There's a part of us that's comparable to a stone. The nature of the physical body is that it doesn't want to move. It's made of earth, which doesn't move unless you move it. On a deeper level, when we despair we no longer believe in our ability to change. But just as small drops of water can penetrate a rock, taking small steps can transform us.

Another form of *yetzer hara* is the desire to destroy. Self-destruction and destroying others gives one a feeling of power. The *yetzer hara* tells the person to transgress negative *mitzvot*. This is similar to iron that breaks and shatters. The Torah can fill any empty space within us to the point that the impediments that limit the person will disappear.

The Torah brings a person to a level of *sechel* (knowledge). The Maharal discusses the *sechel* of Torah as opposed to ordinary intellectual pursuit. The process of knowing, which relates to observation, understanding, and drawing conclusions, is always restricted by the limitations of human observation. We can't see all that much. Our lives are short, our subjectivity is great, and our quest for truth is very limited. In contrast, the Torah is perfect and comes from beyond human *sechel* and our power of observation. Because of that, when a person enters the limitless power of the Torah he can fill any empty space and extinguish the voice of the evil inclination.

Mesilat Yesharim: Perfection of Thought, Speech, and Action

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

In the tenth chapter of Mesilat Yesharim, the Ramchal discusses the virtue of *nekiut*, cleansing one's soul of evil traits. This includes not only those sins we are aware of and acknowledge as bad, but all the sins which our heart rationalizes as permitted.

One who strives for *nekiut* will go beyond the letter of the law. Rav Shimon ben Shetach once purchased a donkey from an Arab. After bringing it home, he found a bag of precious stones hidden in the animal's neck. According to Jewish law he could have kept the find. The Arab wasn't aware of the stones and perhaps someone hid the bag on the donkey after Rav Shimon purchased it. But the great *tzadik* refused to take it and ordered his students to

return the bag. He would not gain from a possible desecration of Hashem's name. When the Arab received the find back he proclaimed, "*Baruch Elokai Shimon ben Shetach.*"

Just as a *mikvah* does not purify if one is not completely immersed in the water, *nekiut* demands that one's entire being be pure, including one's thoughts.

Rav Yisrael Salanter once visited a small town near Vilna. When he entered the shul to pray he noticed that there was only one small bucket of water to wash. Although the Rambam writes that one must wash one's hands before davening, Rav Salanter took

very little water and some say he didn't take any at all. He worried that if he would wash generously he would force the shul attendant to bring new water from the well. He wouldn't wash his hands at the expense of another Jew. *Nekiut* is not just having clean hands for davening, but caring for others.

In discussing *nekiut*, the Mesilat Yesharim warns that one must be careful with other people's possessions. Taking something from someone without permission, even if one has in mind to return it, is stealing. The Gemara tells the story of an innkeeper whose silver cup was stolen. Shortly after the incident, Rav Amram Chasida saw a Jew wipe his hand on a cloth that didn't belong to him and immediately

Continued on Page 2



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Continued from page 1

pronounced the Jew the thief. A person who lacks *nekiut*, sensitivity for another person's property, will likely steal. The Gemara says if one eats without a *bracha* one is considered a

thief. This too is part of *nekiut*.

May we strive to go beyond the letter of the law, may our actions and thoughts always be

pure so that we may grow in Torah, *avodah*, and *nekiut*.

Yom Kippur Hardened Hearts

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

One of the first sins that we confess on Yom Kippur is the sin of *imutz halev*, hardness of the heart. We have the attitude of always being right. Such arrogance makes us stubborn, refusing to admit our shortcomings. This in turn leads to lack of compassion for the needs of the poor and infirm. Also included in this sin is refusing to listen to our rabbis and teachers who try to steer us on the straight path, and not sensing the fear and trepidation of the day of judgment.

Why are we so hardhearted? Perhaps we feel some remorse for our sins, but it doesn't drive us to improve. Rav Shwadron, quoting the Alter of Kelm, says that what we know and experience has to be on the same page. Physical pleasure blocks us from knowing what we may know in the spiritual world. The love of this world and the next is like fire and water. When a person is able to move away a bit from the world of darkness and physicality, then there is room for spirituality to take hold in his life. We're so immersed in the material world that we cannot sense the fear of judgment. The desire to change is in the heart, but if it's closed to spirituality we cannot move forward. We cannot feel the fear of judgment when our whole mindset is bent on filling our physical desires. *Aseret yemei teshuva* is a time to step back and ask ourselves, "Have I gotten lost in materialism and indulged more than necessary? Let me limit my time on the computer, let me fill the vacant hours with learning Torah, doing *chesed*, and giving my spiritual needs a voice." The beginning of change is attaining the right focus in life.

How do we utilize this time of intense intimacy with Hashem? Rav Pincus gives a parable of a farmer who has a limited measure of wheat grains. He can grind it into flour and bake a small amount of bread or he can plant the grains in the ground and hope to harvest a bumper crop. The Gemara says sowing seeds

represents the idea of *emunah*. If the farmer doesn't have the faith and patience to see the planting process through, he may ruin any chance of seeing his crops grow. Likewise, anyone who wants to go through the *yomim noraim* in the proper way needs to have this model of *emunah*. So last year on Yom Kippur you felt like an angel and an hour later you yelled at your kids. If you let yourself slide into despair, you'll stay in a frozen state. We have to keep in mind that *emunah* is like planting. We don't see results right away. When we sow the seeds of prayer and repentance we must trust that with the help of Hashem it will bear fruit.

Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei, "The door revolves on its hinges and the lazy one is on his bed." What stops a door from moving forward are its hinges. The hinges that holds us back is the mindset of, "Who am I? I can't change." You may open and close like a door but you'll go absolutely nowhere. Rosh Hashana is called *yom harat olam*, the day of the conception of the world. It's a day when Hashem recreates us and brings us back to the state of Adam before the sin. It's a day where there's nothing holding us back from starting anew. Inner change takes time but we must believe that it can happen. If we trust that the future will not be like the past, if we believe like the farmer and plant, we will see the fruits of our efforts. We'll feel the *chesed* of Hashem and be worthy of His forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

The Chovot Halevot says a person should take stock of himself and ask himself honestly, "What are my abilities, what can I do realistically, what can I accomplish in serving Hashem?" We can break out of our rut. We have limitless resources. But we have to take the first step. We have to want to change and grow. Then we can pray to Hashem to give us the abilities and tools to accomplish what we desire. Before blowing the shofar we say,

"*Ashrei h'am yodeah teruah Hashem b'or panecha yehaleichun.*" When a person discovers the Divine light within him, he can extricate himself from the narrowest straits. When we live in the Almighty's light, we are no longer frozen in place. We can move forward. What holds us back is our lack of belief in Hashem and in our own ability to tap into this light. If we really daven, Hashem will send us higher insight to choose the right path in life.

Rav Frand suggests taking on one *kabala* (good practice) that requires effort but not overwhelming, and telling oneself, "I will do this no matter what." *Kabalot* are like exercise. A person doesn't start off doing 100 pushups. He begins with five and works his way up. So too, when you begin to make *kabalot*, start off slowly. Rav Reisman quoting Rav Pam says a *kabala* is like a down payment. We give Hashem something small to show him we're moving in the right direction. If we believe this small act will yield greater results, it in fact will.

Another aspect that contributes to hardheartedness is lacking faith in the idea of reward and punishment. Rav Dov Yaffe notes that we're far from fearing sin because we don't realize its severe repercussions. We have to recognize that everything we do has accountability and that sin causes spiritual defects within us and in the world around us. Rav Yitzchak Isaac Sher suggests creating a mock trial during *Aseret yemei teshuva*. You're the judge and the one standing on trial. Go through the list of *al cheits* and ask yourself, "Where do I stand?" The more you do this, the more it will mitigate the judgment. If we bring the judgment on ourselves and realize how wanting we are, that in itself will create fear of judgment.

May we merit to break out of our hardheartedness, plant the seeds of repentance, and reap the fruits of change.