



How Do We Deal with the Pent up Shame and Guilt of the Repentance Process?

Finding Hashem in Our Shadow Side

As we are soon to stand in judgment before the King of kings, we feel a deep urge to straighten ourselves up in every way. When we go out of ourselves to meet our King, we want to be nothing less than our higher-most self. Yet, we are bogged down by layers of thick soul fog, that disconnects us from Hashem and even from our own soul. At this time, more than ever, we want to restore our soul, to its original factory settings, that our Creator imbued within us. We want to return to our true self, without the husks of negativity of ego: judgments, jealousy, anger, fears and worry. But how do we do תשובה/teshuva – ‘repentance’ or ‘return’? When I look back over last year’s list of issues to work on, have they been resolved? If I have really done teshuva on them, why do the same issues keep popping up? Why do I still encounter all these layers of negativity within my psyche? In order to face the King, I need to muster up the courage to first face myself – my entire self – even my shadow side. There is an innate negative inclination, especially among women, to run away from facing ourselves – our whole self, including the ‘dark side’ of our personality. From early childhood, we learn to hide the messy, ugly thoughts and urges, that don’t fit into how a nice little girl is supposed to behave. When we deny and repress them, they form our shadow side. We all have a shadow side. This conglomeration of negative thoughts, desires and impulses is often shoved away and buried for our entire lives. The more we push these feelings away and resist them, the more they persist. All of us, even the greatest rabbi possesses this buried aspect of personality. These unrectified knots pile up and form the barrier of our guilty subconscious that blocks and separates us from Hashem and our own soul. It is time to throw away shame and judgement and admit the truth about ourselves to ourselves. Next time, when unpleasant thoughts bubble through, perhaps, while washing dishes, weeding or trying to fall asleep, let us stop pushing the thoughts away. Instead, we can revitalize our shadow sides by breathing life into them and airing them out in the sun. Let us admit to ourselves that there is a part of our personality that may at times be manipulative, self-centered and uncaring. The challenge is to experience Hashem from within this deepest, most hidden, and embarrassing parts of ourselves. Hashem is the Creator of all, even of our lowly thoughts and urges. When we repress, we lose the vitality and power of those places, because denial causes us to lose a precious vital message of what is.

Teshuva – Recreating Ourselves Through the Power of What

I heard a beautiful concept from one of our new online teachers, Sarah Prijs, a young, former B’erot student, who teaches, ‘The Process of Inner Teshuva’ on our online program. Rather than pushing away a negative thought that pops up, with words such as, “this is so not me,” we could ask מה/ma – “what?” “What is it?” When we ask, מה/ma – “From where does this thought come?” Then Hashem will enlighten us with an answer that revitalizes the dark thought through His presence within it. Asking this question is the quintessence of חוכמה/chochmah – ‘wisdom.’ The Hebrew word חוכמה/chochmah can be unscrambled and divided into מה/מה/koach ma – ‘the power of what.’ The Hebrew word for wisdom denotes the secret of the power of creation, as it states,

ספר תהילים פרק קד פסוק כד מה רבו מעשיך ה'שם כלם בחכמה עשית מלאה הארץ קנייך:

“How great are Your works, O Hashem! You have made them all with **wisdom**; the earth is full of Your possessions!” (Tehillim 104:24).

We also recite daily – אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה – "...Who has created humanity through wisdom." We need to employ חֲכָמָה/*chochmah* – 'wisdom' to recreate ourselves in the process of teshuva. We can access wisdom – כֹּחַ מָה/*koach ma* – 'the power of what,' by delving into our shadow sides, asking from where they emanate. Through this simple question of מָה/*ma* – "what?" we can extract the kernel of goodness from within our negativity, accessing the divine power and life force that enlivens it, by experiencing what is. My neighbor's goat's repeated "mahhhh!" constantly reminds me to become like a kid and release control of knowing it all. When I ask Hashem through כֹּחַ מָה/*koach ma* – *chochmah*, I often receive an answer that takes me to a new place. The answer comes from בִּינָה/*binah* – 'understanding,' which shares the same numerical value as אֱלּוּל/*Elul* – the month of teshuva. *Chochmah* and *Binah* are referred to in the *Zohar* as "two companions that never separate." The *koach mah* of *Chochmah* (potential of "what is") is realized in *Binah*. For example, if I catch myself being judgmental of others, and ask מָה/*ma* – "From where does this thought come?" Hashem may grant me an answer that my judgmentalism emanates from my need for safety. This, desire to be under Hashem's protective wing is in itself a good thing. When this need is brought to my awareness, I can find other ways to feel safe and let go of judgmentalism. This turning the negativity around is a way of true teshuva. After all, a negative is nothing but an inverted image, that needs to be reversed. The more we ask מָה/*ma* – "what?" the more we come to realize that we no longer need to repress, but rather acknowledge and even embrace our disturbing shadows. We then become well-equipped with wisdom, perspective, experience and a fine ability to laugh at even the most unacceptable thoughts. This ability emanates from *binah*, which is associated with joy. By letting go of the guilt, and being gentle, accepting and forgiving towards ourselves, we can release the negativity and cleave to Hashem. We learn from this that true, sincere teshuva is not only about wiping our slate clean and eliminating the negativity from our past, but more about turning our mistakes themselves into a powerful positive force. Finding the positive essence even when we slipped up and re-directing that energy back to G-d, is truly teshuva from love.

Reclaiming Our Entire Selves

As we prepare ourselves for Rosh Hashana, when we must be our truest, most authentic selves, we read *Parashat Nitzavim*, which urges us to reclaim our entire selves:

ספר דברים פרק כט פסוק ט אַתֶּם נִצָּבִים הַיּוֹם לְפָנַי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם...

"You are positioned today all of you before Hashem your G-d..." (*Devarim* 29:9).

The expression "all of you" according to *peshat* (the simple meaning) refers to all the segments of the Jewish people. Yet, on an inner level, it can refer to all the segments of each individual person, including our shadow sides. As we stand up in our integrity, we reclaim all the lost pieces of self, that lie hidden behind the ego-walls of shame or pride, and all the parts of self that we project on others. Now, before Rosh Hashana, we must stand before G-d, embracing our whole selves completely. We are called upon to grow into spiritual adults, who can finally face Hashem in our wholeness, reclaiming the lowliest part of ourselves – the woodcutter and water-carrier aspects, while retrieving the shards of self that have been broken off in trauma ([Parasha Meditations for Spiritual Renewal and Strengthening Communication with the Creator](#), *Devarim*, *Parashat Nitzavim*). Pushing away parts of our true selves is stressful, exhausting and uses up energy that we need to live healthy lives. Rabbi Nachman speaks at length about overcoming judgment and suffering by reclaiming all of our lost fragments and uniting them within the Oneness of the Divine:

ספר לקוטי הלכות חו"מ - הלכות מצרנות הלכה ג

וְכָל הַתְּקוּן שֶׁל כָּל הַבְּחִינֹת הָאֵלֶּה הוּא שְׂיָהִיָּה הַכֹּל נִכְלָל בְּבְחִינַת כָּלוּ אֶחָד... שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת שְׂרֵשׁ הַיְּהוּה פְּשׁוּטָה שְׂמֻשָּׁם נִמְשָׁכִין כָּלם וְעָקָר תְּקוּן הָעוֹלָם כְּשֶׁכָּל הַי"ב גְּבוּלִין נִכְלָלִין בְּאֶחָד בְּשֻׁרָשָׁם שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת הַיְּהוּה פְּשׁוּטָה שֶׁהוּא כָּלוּ טוֹב כָּלוּ אֶחָד שְׂשָׁם אֵין שׁוּם אַחִיזַת דִּין כָּלל, כִּי עָקָר אַחִיזַת כָּל הַדִּינִים וְהַיְּסוּרִים הֵם בְּבְחִינַת צִמְצוּמִים הַנִּמְשָׁכִין מִי"ב גְּבוּלִים, כִּי מְבַחֲשִׁין גְּבוּלִים, שֶׁהֵם בְּחִינַת צִמְצוּמִים וּמִצָּרִים, מִשָּׁם אַחִיזַת כָּל הַדִּינִים וְהַיְּסוּרִים כִּידוּעַ...

And the all-encompassing healing/rectification for all these different aspects, is to include everything in the aspect of where it is all one... This is the aspect of the root of simple existence from which they all emerge. The main healing/rectification of the world is when all boundaries are included in the One in their source, which is the aspect of simple existence (Havaya) which is all good and all One. Because in that place of Oneness the judgements and sufferings have no grasp. (*Likutei Halachot, Choshen Mishpat, Hilchot Metaranot* 3).

Returning to Face Our Whole Selves and Make the Mitzvot Come Alive

We know deep down that the inner purpose of all our troubles and tribulations, are G-d given gifts to help us return to Him, as we learn from *Parashat Nitzavim* during the Shabbat preceding Rosh Hashana:

ספר דברים פרק ל פסוק א-ב

וְהָיָה כִּי יָבֹאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ וְהִשְׁבַּתְּ אֶל לְבָבְךָ בְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִדִּיחָה הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה: וְשִׁבַּת עַד הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלִי כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִּי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם אַתָּה וּבְנֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ:

“It will be, when all these things come upon you the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you that you will consider in your heart, among all the nations where Hashem, your G-d has banished you, You will return to Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and you will listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you today you and your children...” (*Devarim* 30:1-2).

There is no question that the purpose of the current pandemic, which Hashem “has set before you,” is to catalyze us to “return to Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and soul.” When we make friends with our negative side, and reclaim every part of our being without resisting, we learn to live in the present moment with everything there is, by continuously asking *מָה/מה* – “what?” “What is it?” This will enable us to overcome our tendency to keep the mitzvot mindlessly by rote. Being able to face ourselves fully, makes the mitzvot come alive, as we can return to face the King, with the awareness that He commands us right now – today. Through this teshuva of reclaiming our entire selves – “with all our heart and soul,” we learn to feel Hashem’s presence so strongly in our lives, that it is as if He speaks to us directly “today” – even through the vital messages of our shadow sides. Reaching this level of repentance will propel us to the final redemption, as it states, “Great is teshuva, it brings redemption close, as it states, “A redeemer shall come to Tzion, to those who repent of transgression in Ya’acov...” (*Yesha’yahu* 59:20); (*BT, Yoma* 86b). The son of David (Mashiach) will not come until all the souls of the body have been completed, (i.e., until all souls that are destined to inhabit physical bodies will be born) (*BT, Avodah Zarah* 5a). Our Mashiach will arrive when every lost shard of our souls will unite to enter our bodies. When we return to our whole selves, then we all become one being, inhabited by the cosmic soul of the Shechina.