

## DAILY CHESHBON HANEFESH #11

Whenever we discern that our attitudes, inclinations, and character traits tend to lead us to rebel against G-d and negate the covenant we made to keep his mitzvot, the sixth tool is the remedy.

Whenever we are in that mood to not do what we are supposed to do, we should think of the following, which is tool #6:

In terms of what a person's senses can apprehend, every person should conduct a careful study regarding the operation of the natural world around him. He should think about all the elements of nature, all the details of their functions, and see how they fulfill the Will of Hashem and keep the covenant they have with Hashem to do His will.

For example, have you ever seen any single aspect of creation cast off its yoke and refuse to do the job Hashem gave it to do? Did any creature ever go against G-d's Will, negating the covenant and not doing what it is supposed to do?

If any one aspect of creation were to go against G-d's Will, a human being would not last for a moment. What would happen if one of the four fundamental elements of creation –air, earth fire, and water – rebelled and refused to fulfill its mandate? For example, what if the air changed its molecular structure, resulting in an air we could not breathe? What if the earth beneath us were not firm and we were not able to stand on firm ground? What if water, with its natural boundaries within the oceans and rivers, refused to adhere to its natural boundaries, but went beyond them and flooded the world?

We know that the present position of the earth in space ensures that we are not “fried” by being too close to the sun, and that we do not freeze to death by being too far away from the sun. What if the earth's orbit shifted?

If any of nature's elements disobeyed G-d and rejected its mandate, what would happen to the world?

Just as the world would be in chaos if but one of the elements changed its nature and rebelled against G-d's instructions, so too is man's world in chaos when we change our nature and mission on earth.

The Chovot Halevavot says something even more wondrous: What if one of our body parts went against the contract it has with G-d? What if one of the body parts that normally moves, ceased to move? What if one of the body parts that does not normally move, started to move? What if our senses ceased to operate? A human being would not be able to function were the body parts to refuse to fulfill their original mission.

In light of the aforementioned, says the Chovot Halevavot, the question now is, How can a person not be embarrassed to go against the covenant he made with G-d in this world, the promise he made not to transgress G-d's Will? And worse, how can he disobey G-d's Will

using the very body parts G-d has graciously given human beings to serve them faithfully? It's tantamount to asking G-d to help you do an aveirah (sin)!

When a person speaks lashon hara, he uses his mouth and his brain – G-d-given body parts that function continuously. He takes the very tools G-d gave him in order to do a sinful activity! How embarrassed a person should be!

This tool builds on the previous tools. Although we learned in the previous lessons that we are superior to other creations in terms of our independent mind and free will, and we have the wonderful tools of Torah and the intellect to learn Torah; nevertheless, we can see that, as a result of our superiority, we can do untold harm to ourselves when we rebel against Hashem. In tool #5, we saw that if we don't try our best to understand the Torah properly, it means we are not trying to solidify the relationship properly. The next logical step is rebellion. We will then use the tools we have to harm the relationship instead of helping it grow, and ultimately harm ourselves.

The Chovot Halevavot gives the following parable: A king commanded his servants to help a general in the king's army cross a dangerous river. The servants' job was to make sure to watch over the general, support him, transport him across the river, and help him reach his destination.

In addition, the king commanded the general to take care of the needs of the servants – to feed them and clothe them adequately, and provide them with everything they needed to function successfully.

The mission began. The servants did everything in their power to help the general cross the dangerous river. The general, however, was not doing his job in making sure the servants were well taken care of. The king had told him, "Make sure the servants have guns and ammunition and protective armor." But the general had not requisitioned these materials and consequently his servants were unprotected and ill cared for.

One of the brighter servants decided to speak up. He said to the general: "You, the general, are ignoring the king's commandments. Aren't you afraid that we will do to you what you are doing to us? If you disregard the king's commandments, what stops us from doing the same? If we disobeyed the king's orders, you would fall into this river and die instantaneously in a very bizarre fashion. Change your folly! Do as the king commanded you! Then we, too, will do what the king told us to do. *For the king commanded us to neglect our duty if you neglect yours.* "

When the general heard these words, he "woke up" and began to fulfill his mission in the proper fashion.

The Chovot Halevavot connects the above parable with the human situation, and says: Has it ever happened that one of a person's body parts willfully rebelled against what the Almighty commanded it to do in terms of its service to human beings? Know that the Almighty set forth a condition in the Torah, upon which He greatly elaborated. In Parshat Bechukotai. He said that when we serve Him, everything in the world is subservient to our needs and does whatever we need in order to get our job done. But if we transgress his words, the world will accordingly go against us and cease to provide for our needs.

The story of Moshe's sin of striking the rock – as explained by Rashi – can help us understand this concept:

Rashi says that Moshe Rabbeinu was supposed to speak to the rock, and not hit it. Had he spoken to the rock, he would have made a tremendous Kiddush Hashem before all the Jewish people. They would have said, "If a rock, which does not hear and does not speak, nonetheless obeys the command of the Almighty, how much more so should we obey His commands!"

This exegesis of Rashi's is a little problematic. Ramban asks a question regarding Rashi's comment. Frankly, he says, whoever witnessed this sight would have seen a miraculous happening, whether Moshe spoke to the rock or hit the rock. The fact was, water did pour forth from the rock, and the moment would have been a great Kiddush Hashem either way, for everyone knows a rock does not have free will.

The Maharal answers Ramban's question. He says: The point here wasn't so much the viewing of the miracle of water coming out of a rock, for the Jewish People had seen many miracles of this nature before. The issue here was to show the people a very basic principle of Judaism; namely, that all of creation has a natural tendency, a natural leaning and flow, to do the Will of G-d. Consequently, when you talk to a rock, which has no heart or mind, nor initiative nor free will, and you simply tell it what G-d's Will is, and it readily performs the Will of G-d; this proves that deep down, in the nature of this world, there is an intrinsic will to fulfill Hashem's bidding.

In every pebble, in every blade of grass, in every flower, there is a throb and life beat to do the Will of G-d. It is inherent in the nature of existence. The reason G-d told Moshe to speak to the rock was to show the Jewish People that deep down inside every one of us there is a natural tendency to do Hashem's will. This goal would have been accomplished had Moshe only talked to the rock. If he had talked to the rock and it willingly did Hashem's Ratzon (Will), then the people would have seen that doing Hashem's will was a natural, easy-flowing tendency for every single created thing.

However, once you take a stick and bang the rock, it means that the Will of Hashem gets done, but you have to "carry a big stick" to make it happen. The purpose of Hashem's command to Moshe to speak to the rock was not to show the Jewish People a miracle, but rather to show them the perfect unity and synchronization that lies deep in the universe, whose goal is to fulfill Hashem's Will.

If the Jewish people could have seen that concept operating in the universe, they would have looked deep inside themselves and said, We, who have a heart, a mind and a Sechel, and were given the mission and function of doing the Will of Hashem, certainly have the potential to do the Will of Hashem.

Had Moshe spoken *softly* to the rock and not hit it, he would have sanctified Hashem's name to the highest degree. Unfortunately, however, Moshe failed in that area, and that lesson was never transmitted to the people.

(to be continued)

## CHESHBON HANEFESH - #12

This tool presented by the Chovot Halevavot is really based on a very mystical orientation that is more fully explained by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhyn in the first few chapters of Nefesh Hachayim. There, Rabbi Chaim defines the nature of the human being, in light of his having been created in the image of G-d – Tzelem Elokim. He says, notwithstanding the fact that Hashem is Omnipotent and is Master of All Forces, and everything operates through His Will; nevertheless, He created a partnership with Mankind. In this partnership, whatever man does impacts on the universe. The human being is a “mini-universe.” Within the human being’s physical and spiritual composition working in unison, is a miniature model of the entire physical and spiritual universes that exist. And all these primary universes parallel the human being, and whatever the human being does, good or bad, it all impacts on all the spheres in the world, and they, in turn, ultimately affect, positively or negatively, what goes on in the world. There is such a powerful connection between the human being and the rest of the world!

To further illustrate this principle, Rabbi Chaim explains Chapter 3, Mishnah 1 of Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers). This Mishnah says:

“If you look deeply into the following three things, you will never come to sin: Know what is above you: An Eye that Sees, and an Ear that Listens; and all your actions are written in a book. “

Rabbi Chaim focuses on the words “Know what is *above you*” and gives them a slightly different interpretation. He explains as follows: “You should know that whatever happens above in the spiritual realms, it comes from you. “ In other words, once you do something, positive or negative, it sets in motion a spiritual reaction above, and what happens above will impact on the world below. Rabbi Chaim says, therefore, that anyone who uses his brains will understand the truth and tremble inside at the thought of all the negative things he has done and how far-reaching is the destruction caused by even a minor sin. The destruction caused by a sin a Jew commits is even worse than those done by Nevuchadnezzar and Titus when they destroyed the Beit Hamikdash. Why? Whatever non-Jews do, their actions do not affect the higher spiritual realms, as they have no portion in affecting them. However, the actions the Jewish People do affect, not only this world, but also the spiritual realms above. And it is only when the Jewish People negatively affect the higher realms, that they empower people like Nevuchadnezzar and Titus to act below. As the midrash on Eicha says: When these terrible people destroyed the Temple, they did nothing more than grind up wheat that was already ground. As the Zohar tells us, everything on earth has a spiritual root above. Just as there was a Holy Temple on earth, the spiritual root of the Holy Temple lies above. And the Holy Temple below cannot be built until the Heavenly Temple is built. Likewise, the Holy Temple below cannot be destroyed unless the Holy Temple above is destroyed. Who destroys the Holy Temple above? The Jewish People, through their actions. Then, and only then, can a Titus and a Nevuchadnezzar have the capability of doing what they do below.

This explains one of the statements in the Selichot - "We have sinned more than any other nation." This sentence is hard to understand – the Jewish People never committed the same evils as those of the other nations of the world! The answer is that the destruction we have caused is far worse than theirs, because the destruction we cause impacts the spiritual realms, which, in turn, give the orders to the physical realms below and set the tone for how the world operates.

This is the sobering lesson of Tisha B'av. Do not forget the message of Tisha B'av. If the Beit Hamikdash is not rebuilt, the blame lies with one group only – and that is the Jewish People themselves. We have taken all the wonderful gifts Hakadosh Baruch Hu has given us – gifts whose purpose is to do exactly what G-d intended them to do and assist us in our service – and we have misused them.

Rabbi Chaim says that the core of a person is the heart; and the core of the universe is the Holy Temple. He draws a wonderful parallel between the Holy Temple and the human being. If a human being entertains thoughts of immorality, even though he does not commit any act of immorality, his heart is the core, the essence of this human being, and therefore his thoughts are just as heinous as the act of immorality committed by Titus himself in the Holy of Holies. Our heart is the Holy of Holies of our person, and what we do in this Holy of Holies reflects on what happens in the Holy of Holies in the earthly Beit Hamikdash and in the heavenly Temple above.

### ***Today's Exercise:***

When we see the suffering and misery and tragedy around us, and when we see body parts ceasing to function in the way they are supposed to function, and cells going wild and doing things they shouldn't do, we should realize it's not a coincidence. When we see the physical world is not operating the way we want it to, we should realize we only have ourselves to blame.

Let each of us focus on one characteristic within himself that he is not developing the way G-d intended him to. Let each person ask himself, Am I going to exhibit this characteristic in the same way tomorrow? Focus on a specific body part of yours that is doing things that G-d does not want me doing or that is not doing things that G-d wants me to be doing. Am I going to continue to use these gifts in the wrong way?

If we continue doing the same thing tomorrow, G-d will summon all the servants at his disposal, whom He has instructed to serve us, and cancel their mission, and they will no longer serve us. There's a lot riding on the decisions we make.