

## DAILY CHESHBON HANEFESH #14

Tool #8 requires us to make a qualitative analysis of our role as servants to G-d and inspect our actions to find out how much we are directing our hearts to G-d alone in His service.

Directing our Hearts to G-d involves:

- a. Accepting His Oneness. This includes many aspects: e.g., having no other god; not attributing to G-d any form, shape, likeness, attribute, change, movement, corporeal reality, or anything having to do with essence or property. It also includes knowing there is no other Creator or Former, and knowing that there is no other being who can share His great titles and exalted attributes. Basically, these are the ingredients for understanding the true Unity of His Essence, as written in the first five of the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith. Once we are clear about the fact there is only one G-d and He is our Master, and there is no way we can possibly conceive of more than one master within that mastery, then we can undertake the more critical inspection in b.
- b. Doing everything for the sake of G-d; that is, doing everything only for altruistic reasons, and not for ulterior motives. Some ulterior motives for serving G-d are: the desire for other people to praise us; the hope to get some benefit from it; fear of not serving Him lest other people see us; distancing ourselves from any disadvantage or damage in this world or in the world to come.

As it says in Pirkei Avot, Chapter 1, Mishnah 3: "Do not be like the servants who serve the master for the sake of a reward. Rather, be like the servants who serve the master not for the sake of getting a reward."

Yesterday, we focused on "Your wish is my command." Now, we're looking at the quality of the service to the master. Our goal is to ensure that it is indeed the One G-d we are serving, and that we are serving Him out of true, altruistic love and not for ulterior motives.

The Chovot Halevavot gives the example of two people who really love each other. What would happen if someone else would find out that one of them, who outwardly shows they love their spouse, does not really love the person?

Or take the case of the servant. He does everything he is supposed to do, with dedication and precision, yet he knows, deep down, that he really doesn't care for the master. What would be the response of the master if he found out what his servant was really thinking and feeling?

In both the above cases, the response would obviously be anger. Of course, we're talking about human situations in which the offended person needs the other person's help and has to nurture a relationship with that person. Imagine how angry he would be upon finding out the other person has been lying to him all along!

With the Almighty, however, things work differently. Unlike a human being, the Almighty does not need us at all! Moreover, he can penetrate our hearts and sees our true motives. How crucial it is for us to reflect upon our true motives for serving Him!

This tool requires deep introspection. We have to be truthful with ourselves and validate the realities that Hashem is our Master; that it is truly our greatest pleasure to serve this Master; and that we have no other reasons for serving the Master.

An obvious question arises: How is this sincerity of devotion, without desire for any benefit or reward – either in this world or the world to come – consistent with the eleventh of the Thirteen Principles of Faith? Every day we say in this Ani Ma'amin: "I believe with perfect faith that G-d gives a reward to the good people who observe His commandments." The Rambam explains that this reward is Olam Haba. This is a principle of Jewish belief and it must be ingrained in our minds. There appears to be a contradiction between the Rambam's statement of belief, and what this tool is telling us based on the mishnah in Pirkei Avot which tells us to serve the Master without any thought of reward. How do we resolve this discrepancy?

Most typical answers say that the eleventh principle teaches us that there is a reward in Olam Haba; namely, deveikut (clinging to Hashem), and that the mishnah in Pirkei Avot refers to the reward in this world. However, in the context of the Chovot Halevavot, this answer is problematic, because he says that a person should not be looking for any benefit at all, even in the world to come. We need to look for a deeper answer.

The following story may help to explain this idea of sincerity of devotion:

A father has a child who is overweight. He tells the child to go on the exercise bike because he needs to lose weight. He pushes him to go on the exercise bike for an hour each day, and sometimes he won't give him supper unless he exercises for an hour. After six months, the child has lost 50 pounds. He looks good. He goes over to his father and says, "Dad, I've been working on losing weight for the last 180 days, an hour a day – minimum wage \$10 an hour. You owe me about \$2,000."

To this the father will say: "Don't you understand? The whole reason I made you go on the bike was not for my benefit, but for yours! Why should I pay you for something that was for your benefit? Even though I was tough with you sometimes, and took away privileges from you, I did it for your own good."

This story helps us understand our service to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Hashem wants us to be His servants, not for His benefit (He has no needs) – but for ours. Serving Him with true devotion makes us grow to become better human beings. It makes us become people who are capable of having the pleasure of the infinite relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in Olam Haba.

But we shouldn't look at our service as something we are doing for G-d. It's not a job. It's not that G-d has needs and He needs us to do what He needs and He owes us a reward if we do His bidding. When the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot tells us not to serve the master with a reward in mind, it means that we shouldn't assume that, just because

we've done something for him he owes us a reward since we did something for him that he needs. That is not the way to serve the master. Likewise, the Chovot Halevavot is telling us that this should not be our motivation in serving Hashem.

What, therefore, is the eleventh of the Thirteen Principles telling us? It is saying that we should know that the mitzvot are for our benefit and there will be a reward. However, this reward will not be something G-d is paying us because He owes us, but it will be the inherent value of becoming a person who is capable of relating to Hashem in Olam Haba. Consequently, there is no contradiction in the two statements.

We don't want to go to Olam Haba, says the Chovot Halevavot, because there is a reward waiting for us that G-d owes us. Rather, we should be ever cognizant, as a principle of faith, that the mitzvot that we do are for our benefit; indeed, the whole system works for our benefit. Since the whole system is for our benefit, we should know that *there will be a payoff*. The payoff is becoming a person who is capable of having a relationship with the Infinite Being, and that is certainly to our advantage.

If we look at our relationship with G-d in terms of obliging him with our service because He needs it and therefore He owes us, that is not proper. If, however, we realize that our service to G-d is not only for our own pleasure, but also for our own benefit, we become better human beings through our role as servants to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

As well, we should definitely understand that we are going to Olam Haba because of our service. The reason is that Hashem has been so Kind as to enable our service to form us into the quality of human being that is capable of appreciating and enjoying Olam Haba. Hashem did this because He loves us. In other words, the reason we serve Hashem is that He wants us to serve Him for *our benefit*.

Yesterday's tool taught us that it should be our pleasure to serve G-d. Tool #8 teaches us why it is a pleasure to serve G-d. Since we are not looking for an exterior reward, but realize that serving G-d is for our benefit, that in itself is the motivation to be the sincere servant.

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

Review the five mitzvot you chose yesterday. Ask yourself, Did I do them for the pure pleasure of serving G-d? Did I do them for other reasons (honor, praise, fear of others, other external reasons) or for the sole reason that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave me a service for my benefit and because it is His Will to bestow pleasure on me? I realize that when I serve G-d for my pleasure and without ulterior motives, it is certainly not felt as a burden. Once I realize that I am the one who benefits in an intrinsic way, I will have the chizuk to do all those things and to always be on call to do the Ratzon (Will) of Hashem.