

DAILY CHESHBON HANEFESH # 27

TOOL #18

Today's tool addresses a potential trap that people can fall into as a result of working on yesterday's tool. After focusing on which groups of people you will be part of, and spending time in isolation in dedication to the service of Hashem, you may become arrogant about your spiritual stature. You begin to develop a smug "holier than thou" attitude toward others after you have achieved your newfound spiritual status.

Begin by reflecting on your low worth and insignificance in relation to the rest of worldly existence. What is your stature in relation to the entire planet Earth? You are as a speck of dirt compared to the enormity of Earth. You are just a statistic! Compare the stature of the earth to the Milky Way Galaxy. Compare the stature of our galaxy to the entire cosmos. Compare all handiwork to the Creator's greatness. Now go back and compare yourself to the Creator. You are not even a speck by now! And how long are you going to exist while all the rest continue forever! What are you worth in the scope of it all? Nothing! What are you arrogant about?

On the other hand, you should reflect on the greatness that Hashem chose for you when He:

1. Allowed us to dominate animals, plants and minerals.
2. Allowed us to know the laws of the Torah.
3. Authorized us to improve ourselves by delving into some of the world's greater and lesser mysteries.
4. Elevated us to a level where we could praise and thank Hashem.
5. Enabled us to call upon Hashem in times of trouble and distress and have Him respond.
6. Sent us prophets and other holy people to bring us closer to Hashem.

Even though Hashem does not need you, whereas you so desperately need His governance and guidance; nevertheless, in spite of your relatively low worth, He has glorified you. Do not take the gifts Hashem in His goodness and kindness has given you in order to exalt you and corrupt them by becoming an arrogant, haughty person. Do not think that what He did for you was "coming to you" because you deserved it.

Imagine yourself as a weak, lowly servant whom your master elevated over your closest friends. How should you act? You should not think that now you are a more valued person just because of your master's kindness. You should not become arrogant toward your master and feel that you no longer need to put your trust in your master. It is a true challenge: to recognize the greatness that Hashem has vested in you, while at the same time not being carried away by it. It is difficult to balance your understandings of your potential as a human being with the recognition of your own frail abilities. It takes a great amount of true humility to acknowledge one's limitations.

Today's Exercise:

Take an inventory of all your great accomplishments. Take an accounting of all the sterling qualities you have. Realize how great it is for you to be a human being and how noble of rank you are in being Jewish. Take great pleasure in all of that. Then turn to G-d and give Him the credit for it! Take pleasure in the fact that you made the effort, but understand that the success belongs to G-d. Do not look down in disdain upon others who have not succeeded. Do not totally isolate yourself from them.

The next time you finish praying to Hashem, say the following short prayer to bring this message home:

"G-d, neither my foolishness, my insignificance, nor my ignorance of Your greatness and loftiness, authorize me to stand before You. For You are eminent and exalted, and I am insignificant, despised and too meagre to ask anything of You, address You with praises and compliments, or sanctify Your holy name in the same tone as the venerable and holy angels. But what authorizes me to praise Your exalted name in accordance with my recognition of You and my knowledge of Your glory, is the chance to demonstrate my service and humility before You.

"You alone know how to improve and guide me; however, I have not articulated my faults to you to call Your attention to them, but only to sense my dependence upon You and my trust in You. If, in my ignorance, I have asked anything of you that is not good for me, and seek anything that will not improve me, I leave my concerns to Your eternal and lofty guidance, because Your glorious choice is better than mine."