

## DAILY CHESHBON HANEFESH #13

The seventh tool takes the six tools we've learned so far and reaches a new level based on them.

We understood all the wonderful things Hakadosh Baruch Hu did for us:

- He picked us – “the child” – off the doorstep
- He gave us our intellect
- He gave us the Torah
- He gave us all the things we're able to enjoy in life, and they all come from Him
- He made a covenant with us, in which we have a mission to perform, and we must not rebel against Him.

Now we are capable of reflecting on the next point: How do we relate to G-d as a servant relates to a Master?

Are we indeed servants of Hakadosh Baruch Hu? Yes. The goal of a Jew is to be the servant of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. After all the tools we've studied, we should be motivated to want to be His servant.

When we say “servant,” we are not talking about a servant who has a terrible taskmaster who forces him to obey his wishes, but a servant whose attitude is: “Your wish is my command.” When was the last time you heard that expression? What does it imply?

The message it contains is: “I really care about you; I'm so grateful for what you've done; and everything I am is because of you. I therefore realize that the greatest pleasure I could give You and *my* greatest pleasure is ‘Your wish is my command.’ “

As we go through the day, we have to analyze our activities and ask ourselves, Do we have that attitude of “Your wish is my command”?

In any relationship, the question that often arises is, Who becomes the “surviving entity” of the relationship? In marriage, one often sees a relationship in which, although the partners say they love each other, at the end of the day there will always be one of them who will always have things their own way. It's a mistake for that person to think they're going to be the “surviving entity” of the relationship. What really has to happen, in the human domain, is that the marriage itself is the “surviving entity” of the relationship, and each of the partners should be giving up their own identity for the sake of the survival of the marriage. It is then that the relationship becomes something wonderful.

In our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, however, that concept of the ideal relationship necessitates our giving up our identity in our relationship to G-d. In that relationship, where G-d represents Eternity and we represent finality, our only hope in achieving any kind of greatness of existence lies in our giving up our existence within

the context of the relationship and allowing G-d to be the “surviving entity” of the relationship. By connecting in that way, we connect to reality.

The Chovot Halevavot tells us how one can determine the greatness of a servant. The status of the servant depends on two factors, he explains:

1. How great the master is, compared to other masters
2. How close the master feels his chosen servant is to him

Since Hakadosh Baruch Hu is obviously the Greatest of all masters and, since He has chosen us to become close to Him, we can enjoy the exalted status of being a servant to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That is the source of our self-esteem. “Look what I am connected to!”

As individuals, we understand the importance of how we view ourselves. Many times we like to gravitate toward movie stars, heroes, people who are greater than us, because we feel that, by connecting to these “higher ranks,” some of their greatness will “rub off on us.”

The idea of being a servant means taking pleasure in the fact that one is connected to the highest level. “I’ve got connections” may not always be a definition of one’s self-worth; but people definitely get pleasure out of knowing “the right people.” Unlike mundane connections, being connected to G-d is definitely an indication of our self-worth, and it’s a great pleasure, as well.

The realization that G-d is the Greatest of all masters, together with the knowledge that we have the opportunity of being very close to this Master, gives us a tremendously elevated status.

The status of servant encompasses certain definitions. The definition of a servant is one whose constant thoughts are:

- “It’s my greatest pleasure to do the will of the master.”
- “The only thing I’m interested in is doing the will of the master.”
- “I’m always ‘on call’ to do His will.”

For example, if the master says, “I’d like you to do something” and the servant answers, “Well, I’m a bit busy right now” – then this person is not really a servant. He may be a hired worker, but he is not a servant.

Chazal say: If you hire yourself out as a worker, you may quit the job at any time, because the person who hired you is not your master. You’re a free person. Your only master is Hashem.

However, when you are a true servant of G-d, there is no such thing as saying, I’m not in the mood today, or, I’m not going to do it. Therefore, the seventh tool requires us to reflect on the question, Do we see ourselves as servants of Hakadosh Baruch Hu?

There are enough good and logical reasons for us to be His servants, as the first six tools have shown us. The least we can do is feel that it is our pleasure to fulfill G-d's commands.

Analyze your day-to-day behaviour to see whether you have acted in a way that shows you are G-d's servant. Did you do these actions in the way a servant would do them for his master, without your personal agenda getting in the way of fulfilling the master's wishes? Or have there been blocks ("I know I should be going to daven, but I'd rather . . . instead)? If the "I'd rather . . ." took precedence over what Hashem wanted, then obviously you're falling down on the job of being a servant to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

***Today's Exercise:***

Select five mitzvot you did today. Ask yourself, Did I do them as a servant does them for a master? Did I go and do them as soon as I knew He wanted them done? Or did I choose to do other things before doing the Will of G-d, when I knew that doing G-d's will could have taken priority?

What things did you not do at all because you had priorities of your own? Recognize where you're at in terms of being a servant, and then try to draw up a game plan detailing how to move yourself closer to being that servant to the master.

[ For a more elaborate treatment of that game plan, I have a taped class on Pirkei Avot, Chapter 2, Mishnah 4. If there is sufficient demand, we can transcribe it and send it out.]