

yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 29 Jun 2009 19:47

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(any questions , insights & suggestions about this thread,feel free to email me at [taryaga@gmail.com](mailto:taryaga@gmail.com))

There are many reasons we need to be where we are and who we are,most are unknown.Why do we even have to be in a situation or have in our soul so much darkness and a pull toward self-destructing negative behaviors?

I saw once an amazing thought in a sefer.Moshe Rabeinu came from a union that after the Torah was given would have deemed him a mamzer(parents being an aunt & nephew).He could not boast of his lineage.This is one reason that let him be the greatest Anov that ever lived.

We who have to deal with the stuff that's in us that we would rather not have in the first place-this pain and shame over the course of time -makes us realize that even when we b'ezras Hashem pull out of the addictions-we will never look at another Yid that is struggling with this in a negative way

We catch a Yid looking where he shouldn't be looking and our hearts are full of compassion.We will daven for him,treat him with respect,gently try to get him out of it.We would never disgrace him-not even in our hearts-because we were there.We know what it's like.In our eyes he is a potential tzaddik.

This is surely one reason Hashem gave us this urge towards baseness with all it's shades of ugliness.Yes you are special-like every Yid is-but never ever judge harshly My son or daughter that is struggling-because I love him or her - he or she is part of Klall Yisroel.Just as indispensable as you are.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 05 Nov 2012 02:57

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appreciate it very much TZ

but maybe some tcheppening puts me in my place so I dont become self -centered or take myself so seriously

"shiki-kook"-hey it does have an interesting ring to it!!!

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by Dov - 05 Nov 2012 04:20

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Yechida, please don't encourage the groyseh Zugger. He'll just bring in Woodford again and muddle things.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 05 Nov 2012 14:09

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Look at my hand!!!

Don't you see?

Within my physical hand(and yours!!)

Is the hand

Of Avrohom,Yitzchok Yaakov!!!

Their hearts are

Within mine!!!(& yours!!!)

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 06 Nov 2012 18:26

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### 3-You are Unique

"You are unique. You are a valid & special part of the universe. You are important. You are here to create your own special way, a way no one else can. Know this, in the deepest core of your being."

I recommend the book "Gateway to Happiness" by Zelig Pliskin. It is one of his earlier books & it may be out of print but try to get it & read a page of it daily & internalize the messages because they are lessons in life. He talks about happiness, appreciating what you have, how happiness is dependent on your thoughts (the basics of cognitive therapy which with Hashem's help we will speak more about so that you can use it to treat your own depression, anxiety or negative thinking), He talks about anger, guilt, suffering, preventing problems, approval seeking, dealing with insults, envy, desires, grief & discouragement. I just listed the headings of all the chapters of the book. It's a wonderful book. And if you internalize the concepts written there, it can change your life.

I will quote what he writes in the name of R Noson Tzvi Finkel, known as the Alter from Slobodka

"Your feelings of self-worth need not depend on any external situation. Every human has intrinsic value regardless of what he does. If you make mistakes & transgress, do not feel discouraged & lose your feelings of importance. There is no greater danger than that. Rather, when you have transgressed, strengthen yourself & elevate yourself above your transgressions. Keep your mind focused on your great potential for accomplishment. Regardless of what you have done in the past, you always can elevate yourself

Keep these quotes close to your heart

"So, if this were indeed my Final Hour, these would be my words to you. I would not claim to pass on any secret of life, for there is none, or any wisdom except the passionate plea of caring ... Try to feel, in your heart's core, the reality of others. This is the most painful thing in the world, probably, and the most necessary. In times of personal adversity, know that you are not alone. Know that although in the eternal scheme of things you are small, you are also unique and irreplaceable, as are all of your fellow humans everywhere in the world. Know that your commitment is above all to life itself."

? Margaret Laurence

"Watch out for the average--they're usually hiding something big."

? James St. James

I took the road less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.

- (Robert Frost) The Road Not Taken

Sometimes we live our lives like puzzle pieces turned upside. Then along comes life, and it starts flipping them over, showing us and the world who we are.

~ Manifest

Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again And what do we teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are?

We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you. Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move. You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything.

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

- Henry David Thoreau

We do not choose to be born. We do not choose our parents. We do not choose our historical epoch, the country of our birth, or the immediate circumstances of our upbringing. We do not, most of us, choose to die; nor do we choose the time and conditions of our death. But within this realm of choicelessness, we do choose how we live.

- unknown

And so as not to get discouraged I present this poem

Emerging Butterfly

Tammi L. Morgan

The caterpillar had done this before; attached itself to the thinnest thread of hope, struggled to shed some of its old ways, and then returned back to life as it knew it. Day after day it would slowly move through life using all its energy just to get by and yet never seeming to get very far. It led an unadventurous life and felt very low. But still it dangled by a thread...

But this time something seemed different. Hanging by what felt like its final thread of hope, the caterpillar became motionless as it contemplated its world turned upside down. It continued in this manner until the things happening within overwhelmed all it had known prior and slowly it felt as though it's very self was being stripped away. This left it feeling very alone and more vulnerable than it ever had before. But still it dangled by a thread...

It remained, as it was, unable to move on. Afraid of all that it did not understand it became paralyzed and almost frozen in fear. All its former dreams seemed to come tumbling down around it. Layer by layer it encased itself in fear, worry, doubt, and a spiraling depression until

only darkness filled its tiny self-made cocoon of life. Feeling trapped within the emotional casing it heard life outside but felt unable to fully participate in it. But still it dangled by a thread... Time continued and within the restrictive cocoon a different kind of work began to take shape. Life altering work was in progress unlike had ever happened before. Slowly and after what seemed a lifetime the day finally arrived when an opening appeared from within the layers of the cocoon and light pierced through the darkness. After much struggle and persistence the opening grew and was eventually pushed aside by a colorful emerging butterfly. Although afraid of what lied beyond the safety of the cocoon it gained strength gradually. With a new perspective it noticed both the beauty in itself and the world outside. It no longer dangled.....instead it basked in life itself and then it outstretched its wings... and it flew.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 08 Nov 2012 16:18

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Thanks

by W. S. Merwin

Listen

with the night falling we are saying thank you  
we are stopping on the bridges to bow from the railings  
we are running out of the glass rooms  
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky  
and say thank you  
we are standing by the water thanking it  
smiling by the windows looking out  
in our directions

back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging  
after funerals we are saying thank you  
after the news of the dead  
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you

over telephones we are saying thank you  
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators  
remembering wars and the police at the door  
and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you  
in the banks we are saying thank you  
in the faces of the officials and the rich  
and of all who will never change  
we go on saying thank you thank you

with the animals dying around us  
our lost feelings we are saying thank you  
with the forests falling faster than the minutes  
of our lives we are saying thank you  
with the words going out like cells of a brain  
with the cities growing over us  
we are saying thank you faster and faster  
with nobody listening we are saying thank you  
we are saying thank you and waving  
dark though it is

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Re: yechida's reflections  
Posted by yechidah - 08 Nov 2012 17:07

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White Snow

As it softly falls

Upon the earth

Serene , calm, beautiful

Pure white layer

Light upon my eyes

Bringing a smile

To the excited child

Lying dormant within our soul

Awakening it

To the sparkling renewal

Coming with the soft white diamonds

Floating downward

Outside the window

As its intricate design

Speaks to me

Of the infinite wisdom

Of its Creator

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by tehlimzugger - 09 Nov 2012 12:06

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[yechida wrote on 05 Nov 2012 02:57:](#)

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Yechida, please don't encourage the groyseh Zugger. He'll just bring in Woodford again and muddle things.

Heya Dovie Shiki-Kook!

AUTHOR

I sit  
Upon the throne of  
My pen  
And fail to notice  
That

To the world  
It's just

A pen.

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Re: yechida's reflections  
Posted by yechidah - 09 Nov 2012 14:16

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The First 12-Step Program  
In History  
And Why it Didn't Work  
By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

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#### Israeli "Serenity"

An American tourist was riding in a taxi in Israel.

As the taxi approached a red light, the tourist was shocked to see the driver drive straight through without even slowing down. Surprised as he was, he didn't say anything, feeling himself a 'guest' and not wanting to make waves.

The trip continued without event until the next intersection.

This time the light was green and, to the American's dismay, the cab driver brought the vehicle to a grinding halt.

Unable to contain his astonishment, he turns to the driver. "Listen", he says, "When you went through the red light, I didn't say anything. But why on earth are you stopping at a green light?"

The Israeli driver looks at the American as if he was deranged. "Are you crazy?!" he shouts.

"The other guy has a red light! Do you want to get us killed?!"

#### Twelve Princes

It would not be a bad idea for contemporary descendants of Ishmael -- and for all of us -- to reflect on the individual names of Ishmael's 12 sons, who all became princes and fathers of Ishmaelite nations.

"These are the names of Ishmael's sons in order of their birth," records the Torah in this week's portion, Chayei Sarah, and it goes on to list them in three groups and in three separate verses (1):

"Ishmael's firstborn was Nebayoth, Kedar, Adbiel, Mibsam." Then is the second group of sons: Mishma, Dumah and Massa. Finally, the Torah lists the last five sons: Chadad, Tema, Yetur, Nafish and Kedmah.

The Torah then relates where they lived in the Middle East. It concludes its account -- and the



entire portion -- by stating these ambiguous words: "They fell in the presence of all their brethren (2)."

What's the Relevance?

What is this episode telling us? Is it a mere incidental detail? The Torah does not include mere random facts. We have no idea, for example, what Abraham, Sarah, Isaac or Ishmael looked like. Though the Bible records many genealogical and historical facts, it is fundamentally not a book of history or genealogy, but as its very name "Torah" indicates, it is a book of instruction, a blueprint for life.

The record of Ishmael's family members, then, is not merely a record of dry genealogical facts. Rather, like every sentence and word recorded in the Torah, it is part of a roadmap for our lives journeys.

But what is the relevance of the 12 ancient names of Ishmael's children? And why did Ishmael give his sons these particular names?

One more question: Why does the Torah divide the 12 names into three distinct uneven groups: a group of four, a group of three and a group of five?

### The First Twelve-Step Program

The writings of Jewish mysticism explain that these names represent Ishmael's 12-step program toward living a healthy and well-balanced life. His guide to good living covers the three primary components of life: health, relationships and work.

#### A. Health

The first group of Ishmael's sons, comprised of four names, represents his four-step guide towards good health.

##### 1. Nebayoth

Nebayoth in Hebrew means hollowness (3). This indicates the need to maintain a body that is hollow and clean from trash and substances detrimental to the human organism. The body is not a garbage can. The body must remain "hollow," free, light, and translucent, flowing with alacrity and energy.

##### 2. Kedar

The meaning of the Hebrew word Kedar is warmth or heat (4). This represents the need to exercise regularly, maintaining a warm body temperature and good blood circulation.

##### 3. Adbiel

The meaning of this name is "do not overeat (5)." Even if you are eating nutritious foods, you should consume only the amounts that are needed for your health.

##### 4. Mibsam

The Hebrew translation of Mibsam is spice. In addition to good eating habits and regular exercising, one should add some "spice" and "seasoning" to his or her bodily life, enriching its existence and giving it pizzazz. This is achieved through fine living – eating first rate foods, drinking fine drinks, absorbing the sights and fresh air of nature, enjoying fragrant scents (6), etc.

#### B. Relationships

The next group of Ishmael's children, comprised of three sons, represents Ishmael's three-step guide towards effective relationships, both in the home and in the work place.

##### 5. Mishma

Mishmah means to listen, to pay heed to. You must cultivate the skill to truly listen to another human being.

##### 6. Dumah

Dumah means silence. The second step toward creating a good relationship consists of the ability to remain silent. You must not always feel that you need to respond to your wife's criticism; or don't always have to give an answer to a question asked. Remain silent. You won't perish if you don't shoot a response out of your hip; your silence may even grant you unexpected insight. Successful people do a lot more listening than talking.

#### 7. Massa

Massa, which literally means "a burden," symbolizes the third step which is effective in developing balanced and long-term relationships, namely, patience and tolerance, the ability to tolerate and contain the burdens of another human being, though they may be flawed and imperfect.

#### C. Work

Once our bodies and our relationships are in order, we may approach the final group of Ishmael's five sons, conveying his five-step program toward work and productivity. In this case, the five names need to be read and understood in a single sequence.

Chadad in Aramaic means newness. Tema indicates wonder. Yetur is a straight line. Nafish means serenity, finally, Kedmah means first and ahead (7).

This is Ishmael's five-step program towards work and achievement:

#### 8. Chadad

First, you must be driven to embark on a new and novel path, the road less traveled. You must overcome the fear of failure and be ready to take risks and break new ground. Fear not to be original and creative.

#### 9. Tema

Yet every creator and entrepreneur will encounter resistance. People around you will shrug their shoulders in wonder and astonishment (Tema), criticizing you for an unrealistic fantasy, for youthful arrogance, for immature stupidity. They will predict your failure. What do you do?

#### 10. Yetur

At this point, you need to make sure that your plan is well organized and structured, as perfect as a straight line. The mission statement must be decisive and clear.

#### 11. Nafish

You also need to withdraw, relax and rethink your plans and goals from a serene and tranquil state of mind. Don't allow an inspiring but fleeing mood to define your long-term goals; make sure you have serenely internalized your mission statement.

#### 12. Kedmah

But if and when you conclude that this is the right path, you need to jump into the project headfirst and not allow the many obstacles along the way to hinder the execution of your dreams. "Move on!" – be first and ahead of the game, because if you procrastinate at this point, someone else will beat you to it, or you will get distracted with many side agendas.

Thus we have Ishmael's 12-step program towards good living: hollowness, exercise, nutrition and pizzazz; listen, be silent and tolerate; think out of the box, be confident, organized, thought-out and when the moment comes, don't look back.

#### The Void

When we reflect on these 12 steps, we notice that one crucial element – perhaps the most important element -- is missing from Ishmael's impressive list. This is the component of meaning.

A human life needs meaning. When we are devoid of inner purpose, it is extremely difficult to maintain these 12-steps which require discipline and focus. At some point you ask yourself, what is the purpose of it all? This question cannot be answered with getting a personal trainer,

learning about effective relationships and working your way up in the company.

Thus, the Torah concludes its account of these 12 sons by stating, "They fell in the presence of their brethren." Even the balanced life of health, relationships and work that is devoid of inner meaning, might ultimately fail, because it lacks the oxygen of depth that keeps the person inspired and motivated to live well, and to ensure that the steps are channeled for the right purposes, not for futile and meaningless objectives.

Ishmael's twelve-steps capture an important but relatively superficial layer of existence. It tells us how to live within the rhythms of nature and biology. It does not address our sense that there is something at the core of nature which transcends it. For this we have the names of another twelve tribes, the twelve sons of Jacob, whose names represent the blue print for living not only a fine and balanced life, but also living with the Divine, with the mysterious core of reality (8).

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 11 Nov 2012 03:09

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Recognizing

by Myrna D Badgerow

Recognizing

Love should not be just

about the giving of it...

nor should it be about the

receiving of it...

it should be about

the recognizing

of it...

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that it simply is.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 16 Nov 2012 20:32

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This article puts into words what was in my heart for many many years.i sensed this since i was 12 years old-maybe earlier

People become addicts more from the issue described in this article than from internet or from any other reason.This is my view.It always was.It always will be.

Its from R Moshe Weinberger

Klal Perspectives, Spring 2012 Symposium on Connectedness

THE REBBE OF PIACEZNA, R' Klonymous Kalman Shapiro, z"ya, was approaching his fortieth birthday:

"My heart pounds from my impending fortieth birthday, my entire body shakes from my oncoming declining years. Still, I will try to muster all my strength to commit myself and my life to G-d. Perhaps, perhaps, something will remain. But to what shall I commit myself? To learn more? I think that as far as possible, I don't waste any time. To abstain from physical pleasures? If my own desires are not fooling me, thank G-d, I am not so attached to them. So what am I missing? Simply to be a Jew. I see myself as a self-portrait that shows all colors and features real to life. Just one thing is missing: the soul." (Tzav V'ziruz, To Heal the Soul, page 45)

I have often reflected upon these searing words penned by the Aish Kodesh a decade before his holy body was consumed by the inferno of the Holocaust. The post-Holocaust generation has come of age. We have prospered financially and religiously. The self-portrait of our Torah community "shows all colors and features real to life." Soon, the Siyum HaShas will take place before an anticipated audience of 90,000 people. Our institutions are bursting at the seams. We have a formidable array of daily and weekly publications filled with our own current events and advertisements for the latest, non-gebrokts, Pesach getaways. Many neighborhoods take pride in their "minyán factories" where a Maariv can be caught until the wee hours of the night. We have morning kollels and evening kollels and gemachs for everything under the sun. "Just one thing is missing: the Soul."

R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once called all the Jews of the city to a massive "asifa" (gathering) in the main shul. A hush fell over the "oilam" (crowd) as the Tzaddik climbed to the top of the bimah and cried out, "Yidden (Jews), don't forget! You must always remember that

the Ribbono Shel Olam (G-d) exists! He really exists!!” The Kedushas Levi was appealing to a shul filled with strictly observant Jews. Apparently, he felt that despite all the “colors and features” of Yiddishkeit, something very precious was slipping away. Real davening cannot be manufactured in a “minyan factory;” it longs for a soul. True tznius (modesty) is not just a matter of stockings and sleeves. It has a neshama, a soul. Torah learning that does not lead to a meaningful Torah life filled with sincere joy, authentic yiras shomayim and simple human decency, is without a soul.

In the seforim hakedoshim (holy books), this intangible ingredient, this soul, is often referred to as “ohr,” light. A couple might enjoy the security that comes with a marriage in which mutual responsibilities are taken seriously. But if that is all the marriage consists of, it is a dark and dismal home they share. When a relationship is “lichtig” (“lit up”), when it has a neshama, even the “C minor” of everyday life is illuminated by the light that binds them together.

The Noam Elimelech (Yisro) teaches that when Hashem gave us the Torah, He gave us infinitely more than the actual words and commandments. “And Hashem spoke all these words saying, ‘I am Hashem your G-d...’” (Shemos 20:1). “All these words” means not only the actual words, but all their implications, as well – even from the white space of the parchment surrounding them. According to Chazal, “I am” – in Hebrew “anochi” – is an acronym for ana nafshi kesavis, yehavis – “I have inscribed My very soul [in this Torah] that I’m giving you!”

In davening, we say, “with the light of Your face, You have given us a Torah of life.” It is impossible to define this light, but when it’s missing from a marriage, a family, a friendship, or from one’s Yiddishkeit, it is painfully obvious. Some might admit to remembering the lyrics of an old song, “Something inside has died, and I can’t hide it, and I just can’t fake it.”

Our communities – spanning the entire spectrum of Orthodoxy – are swarming with Jews of all ages and backgrounds who feel little, if any, connection to Hakadosh Baruch Hu (G-d). This is not a conclusion reached by way of scientific study or formal assessment, and it cannot be proved in a laboratory. It is, I believe, glaringly apparent to anyone who has taken a peak outside the bais medrash.

It is obvious to anyone who is not fooled by the billboard brand of frumkeit that is as shallow and empty as the so-called “Jewish” music blasting at our simchos. Forget about data. The “defectors” who simply couldn’t go on hiding and faking have shed the external uniforms of Yiddishkeit to become the object of our latest outreach efforts. These individuals comprise but a fraction of those who are simply unable, or who are afraid, to disengage, who listlessly drag their feet through the motions of avodas Hashem (service of G-d), while waiting desperately for the next “bain hazmanim” (intercession), “break in davening,” or any other distraction from the monotony of the charade.

This type of “disengagement” or “disconnection” has little to do with the intellect or with matters of theology. Thus, enjoying a fascinating shiur provides little assurance that one will find meaning in davening, or even behave in shul. It does not even prove that he believes in anything at all. Attending a seminar on the meaning of davening and the structure of the siddur, while important, has little to do with passionate tefilah. Many of our grandparents knew much less about davening than we do. They, however, knew G-d, cared deeply about Him and lived in an ongoing dialogue with Him.

This void is wreaking havoc upon the spiritual integrity of our communities. Yet, this very same void is itself responsible for a resurgence of spiritual longing among those who are honest enough to admit that something is so terribly wrong and broken that something must be done about it.

We are all familiar with a number of wonderful kiruv initiatives that were initially established as a means of reaching out to the assimilated and unaffiliated. While these are still the populations officially being targeted by kiruv seminars and shabbatons, a large percentage of attendees are actually (forgive me) FFB's of all stripes and colors. Last year, I was asked to speak at such a convention and prepared a drasha geared for the uninitiated and newly observant. Upon arriving, it became quite apparent to me that the great bulk of those attending were Chassidish, Yeshivish, Heimish and Modern Orthodox. Their common denominator? The intense longing they had to connect to Hashem and the sincere need they had to understand why they were keeping mitzvos and making sacrifices for Yiddishkeit.

Many shared with me a sense of "lamah nigara" – why should we be kept back and denied the rich spirituality and the open and honest discussions about emunah typically offered to our secular brothers and sisters? Mind you, these were intelligent, observant individuals – most graduates of our finest yeshivos and seminaries. Why do so many of our fold flock to Carlebach minyanim on Friday night, or try valiantly to introduce some of the song and spirit into their shul's davening? And these are not a fringe element of "holy hippies." To dismiss or misinterpret these and many other phenomena of this genre would be both wrong and dangerous. Jews – healthy, learned, and sincere Jews – are aching for meaning and inspiration. They are not, G-d forbid, rejecting traditional Torah learning and halacha, nor do they seek to stir some revolution against the old guard. They are simply searching for the soul and light they are missing.

These various trends and behaviors should cause us to wonder whether or not the latest technology is truly the greatest problem facing Klal Yisroel. Judging by the number of proclamations, as well as their content and tone, one might conclude that our world would simply be perfect but for the Internet and all of the accompanying gadgetry that comes along with it. Life would return to the simpler and more civilized sixties and seventies. It is quite obvious that technology creates a serious threat to all that we've worked so hard to achieve, and we must support every effort to combat this malady. Yet, there is something I find profoundly pathetic in the great search for the perfect filter.

The Nesivos Sholom (Tzav) cites a mashal (parable) in which a certain fellow would like to build a housing development on a huge piece of property that he owns. The property, however, is covered by a forest, so he grabs an axe and begins to chop away. After falling a tree or two, he realizes that even if he were to have a whole crew of lumberjacks, this effort would take many years. It dawns on him that what he needs is a fire – a powerful, controlled conflagration that can destroy the forest in a matter of minutes. The Nesivos Sholom explains that it takes a fiery, passionate, and soulful Yiddishkeit to overcome the vast forests of filth and confusion that dominate our environment.

In every generation, the outside world stands as a tempting alternative to Yiddishkeit. History and common sense prove repeatedly that wielding the axe can never provide more than a short-

term, superficial respite from the onslaught of secularism. Hashem sent the Baal Shem Tov and R' Yisroel Salanter to set Klal Yisroel on fire! Only a deep, introspective, passionate Yiddishkeit bursting with a tangible consciousness of Hashem's presence can expose the emptiness of any alternative.

Let's face it: if on Monday the anti-Internet convention takes a powerful swipe at the latest technology, by Tuesday the kids (and the "young at heart") will discover something better and faster. Many express shock upon hearing about the latest fad of Shabbos text messaging. But was this not inevitable? What exactly does Shabbos mean for these kids? In fact, what does Shabbos mean for many of their parents? Aside from some fuzzy familiarity with the do's and don'ts, what is it about Shabbos that would make the pastime of Friday night texting abhorrent in their eyes? The shock is usually followed by a shaking of the head and the comment "but he (or she) is learning in a fine yeshiva!" It is true. The yeshivos are wonderful, and they are filled with many talented and sincere rabbeim and teachers. But there is Torah and there is Torah.

The navi (prophet) Amos said (8:11), "Behold days are coming, says Hashem, when I will send a famine in the land – not a famine for bread nor thirst for water, but for hearing the word of Hashem."

One of Ramchal's greatest disciples, R' Moshe Dovid Valli, zt"l, in his commentary Mashmiya Yeshua, explains that, in Tanach, Torah is often referred to as bread and water. During our long galus (exile), there have been an astonishing number of seforim written and an incredible amount of Torah taught. Is it really accurate to describe our present state as a famine or drought? Whoever is hungry for Torah and thirsting for its wisdom can simply dive into the infinite resources at his fingertips! R' Moshe Dovid answers that the key lies in the final words of the verse; "but for hearing the words of Hashem":

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Yes, never before have as many Jews had the privilege to learn Torah. Neither a famine nor drought has befallen us. Our generation is starving for "divrei Hashem" – the clear, deep, penetrating and powerful divrei Hashem.

The kids "off the derech" or "on the fringe" are not running away from Yiddishkeit. They have never met it. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov once told an atheist: "I also don't believe in the God you don't believe in!" Look into the eyes and hearts of the kids on the streets and in the clubs. You will see the hunger and thirst for the "divrei Hashem" – for the truth and nothing but the truth. Rav Kook wrote of the "chutzpah," the insolence, that Chazal predicted would be rampant before the arrival of Moshiach. The time has come when many are simply refusing to settle for merely bits and pieces of the truth. If this demand is not satisfied, if our schools and homes ignore or misinterpret this hungry chutzpah as rejection, it will claim countless more victims.

“The human soul relishes sensation, not only if it is a pleasant feeling but for the very experience of stimulation. Sooner sadness or some deep pain rather than the boredom of no stimulation. People will watch distressing scenes and listen to heartrending stories just to get stimulation. Such is human nature. So he who is clever will fulfill this need with passionate prayer and Torah learning. But the soul whose divine service is without emotion will have to find stimulation elsewhere. It will either be driven to cheap – even forbidden – sensation or it will become emotionally ill from lack of stimulation.” (Tzav V’Zeruz, To Heal the Soul, page 23)

It is easy to blame the Internet for all our problems. It is much more difficult and painful to consider the possibility that we have failed to communicate the true inner joy and light of Yiddishkeit to a generation that is anxious and ready to hear it.

Recently, a serious, G-d-fearing young man, who teaches math in a yeshiva high school, told me that his students shared with him (though not with their Rebbe) their skepticism about G-d’s existence and the truth of Torah. Many simply admitted that they do not really believe in anything. Mind you, this is an afternoon, secular class. The boys had spent the entire morning engaged in sophisticated “lomdus,” (Talmudic analysis) and by four o’clock in the afternoon they are candidly sharing with a teacher their doubts in Torah MeSinai (divinity of the Torah). The teacher, a Baal Teshuva who fought long and hard to become who he is, shared with his class some of the thoughts and insights that inspired him on his journey to Yiddishkeit. The boys were very inspired, and asked to continue the discussion after school hours. The teacher told me that he went to the administrator but was told that these are issues that are best left to the home. Unlike him, he was told, these boys come from frum homes and have a “mesorah” (tradition) about these matters (i.e., they can be presumed to have each picked up the correct beliefs they need). Those who are intimately familiar with the situation know that this is far from an isolated or extreme incident.

What is to be done? As the question is posed: “Are there any proven methods to inspire observant Jews experiencing a gap in religious enthusiasm?” The answer, I believe, is a resounding YES! We must pursue two approaches in meeting this challenge: one experiential and one educational.

Rav Yosef Ber Soloveitchik zt”l, often agonized over what he felt was his inability to impart the emotional world of Yiddishkeit to his students. In a lecture delivered in 1968, he said,

“In the past, this great experience of the tradition was not handed down from generation to generation through the medium of words. It was absorbed through osmosis; somehow, through silence. We used to observe. Today in America, however, and in the Western world, this is completely lost. The father cannot pass it on to his son. The father does not possess these emotions, because he never observed and experienced them. He cannot expect his son to receive something he himself does not possess. Therefore, it is up to the Yeshiva and the teacher to open up the emotional world of Judaism to the student...”

In this lecture, Rav Soloveitchik insisted that the only way to inspire the observant is by having them actually observe inspired Yiddishkeit in the parents, rabbis, teachers, and mentors of the generation.

“...I do not believe that we can afford to be as reluctant, modest, and shy today as we were in



the past about describing our relationship with the Almighty. If I want to transmit my experiences, I have to transmit myself, my own heart. How can I merge my soul and personality with the students? It is very difficult. Yet it is exactly what is lacking on the American scene” (The Rav. R’ Aaron Rakefet, Vol. 2, pages 168-169).

In essence, there needs to be a fundamental reconstruction of the traditional model of the teacher/rabbi.

On another occasion, the Rav explained that, “the disconnection of modern man from living examples of religious experience has made self-revelation an educational necessity.” It is fascinating that the most sought-after speakers and teachers generally are not known for their scholarship. Their effectiveness is in their ability to inspire – not by dazzling their audiences with brilliant insights, but by sharing their own experiences and struggles in Yiddishkeit. Self-revelation has become an absolute educational necessity.

Obviously, this is difficult to implement. How can a rebbe or rabbi transform himself into such a person? There are no guidelines for this; it is usually a matter of one’s personal charisma. Nevertheless, there must be constant encouragement in this area. Again, it would be helpful to make use of the methods commonly used in Jewish outreach: storytelling, music, shabbatons or other such venues of inspiration. All of these have proven to be astonishingly effective in the world of kiruv, and the observant are desperately in need of this warm, exciting brand of experiential Yiddishkeit.

On the educational front, our institutions must begin to bring the Infinite into the four Amos (cubits) of the classroom and of the shul. Rebbeim, morahs, and rabbonim must be trained to impart the heart and soul of Yiddishkeit in a lucid and inspiring way. There are many extraordinary mashpiim and mashpios (influential role models) whose talents have been mostly tapped by the world of Jewish outreach. We (the “FFB’s”) must admit that many of our rabbis and educators are simply unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the language of emunah. There seems to be an expectation that emunah will be miraculously conveyed to baalei batim and students by means of some mysterious osmosis that is perhaps complemented by an occasional shabbaton or seminar. But, it ain’t happening.

The thirteen fundamental principles of faith must become a basic part of the curriculum in all schools and shuls. G-d must be brought back into our institutions and into our homes. It makes no difference if one place prefers a Litvishe G-d and the other a Chassidishe G-d. Open and frank discussions about faith and doubt must be encouraged – not feared and stymied. To ignore these critical dimensions of religious growth by claiming that it would supplant the traditional format of chinuch is, I submit, a grave error. All the regular Torah learning must surely continue. If anything, such learning will be energized and uplifted when taught to individuals who are struggling to get to the bottom of what this whole undertaking known as Yiddishkeit is about.

It would be wonderful if seforim such as Nesivos Sholom, Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh (Rav Itamar Schwartz) and those of R’ Shimshon Pincus, zt”l, would be adapted as a means of developing a curriculum to teach emunah, beginning even with young children.

I have often been asked whether it is really possible to teach emunah as a subject. The answer

is no. A rabbi, rebbi, teacher, and parent must begin with the belief that emunah is inherent to the Jewish Soul. The child/student/congregant is already a maamin (believer). Rather than actually being taught, faith already lies in the neshama, but must be nurtured and drawn out through Torah, tefilah, and kiyum hamitzvos. There is a great thirst for pnimiyus HaTorah (the inner light of Torah) that cannot be ignored. It is a healthy sign of revival that must be used as a tool of inspiration in classrooms and congregations. We must begin.

I conclude with a story that my daughter, Suri, shared with me. It is apocryphal, but it hits the mark. Years ago in London, a poetry recital was taking place in a large auditorium. The finalists in the competition were given one last poem to recite – the twenty third Psalm. The obvious winner was a young gentleman whose rendition of the Psalm was perfect. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... He restores my soul... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” The audience responded with thunderous applause.

Suddenly, an elderly, Eastern European Jew called out, “Judges! Would it be alright if I had a chance to say the Psalm?” The judges were amused and invited him up to the stage. In his heavy accent, the gentleman made his way through the kapitel (chapter). A reverent hush fell over the crowd, and many people were moved to tears. The winner received his prize but followed the old man out to the street. “Rabbi, you know that you really deserve the prize.” “Not at all,” he responded. “I wasn’t competing. You did a fine job and it belongs to you.” The young man continued: “But rabbi, perhaps you could explain to me why it is that when I concluded the Psalm the audience cheered, but when you concluded many people were crying?” The alter Yid replied: “The difference between you and me is that I know the Shepherd.”

Hopefully, the recitation of our Yiddishkeit will soon be accompanied by an honest – if somewhat accented and imperfect – outpouring of the soul. The Ribbono Shel Olam is waiting for us, and the prize is redemption, waiting right there in His outstretched hand.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by Dov - 19 Nov 2012 04:06

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Beautiful, though I need to read it sitting down again, later.

We need to know the Shepherd. Not to know *who the Shepherd is* - but to know *the Shepherd*.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 21 Nov 2012 15:48

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Aish Article

Way #4 Introduce Yourself to Yourself

by Rabbi Noah Weinberg

Don't go through life making assumptions about who you are. Take the time now to "meet" yourself - before a crisis comes along and forces the issue.

Did you ever get on a train going somewhere, only to find that you're headed in the wrong direction?

The same thing happens in life. We set goals and make plans – and sometimes discover that we're on "the wrong train."

Bi-vinat ha-lave literally means "understanding the heart." The heart is the seat of emotions. We say: "My heart is heavy, my heart is lifted, my heart is broken," etc. To understand your heart is to understand your true inner self.

Many people go through life making assumptions about who they are. They never take time to "meet" themselves. Don't be afraid of discovering that the "real you" may be different than the "current you."

Often a crisis hits at midlife when people ask: "What's my life about? Is this all worth it?" We've heard stories of people who suddenly change direction, quitting their job and getting divorced. You know, like the successful doctor who decides he never wanted to go into medicine in the first place – so he drops it and becomes an artist.

Knowing yourself is the essence of being alive. If you don't know yourself, you are not living. If

you don't know what makes you tick, you're a robot, a puppet, a zombie.

So don't wait for a crisis. Life is too short to take wrong trains.

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## GETTING STARTED

Think of someone you'd be fascinated to meet, someone you'd really like to find out what makes him tick.

Now realize the most fascinating person you could ever meet is ... yourself.

Sit down, say hello, and introduce yourself to yourself. Become familiar with yourself as if you'd just met a long-lost cousin. Interview yourself. Ask questions about your life and the direction you're going. Search out your dreams – both the ones you're fulfilling and the ones you've pushed to the back of your mind.

Get down to basics. You want to be rich. You want to be famous. You want to be good. You want to accomplish. You want meaning. You want to be creative. But why do you want all this? What's driving you? What you really want out of life?

The process of self-discovery involves asking a series of questions, always probing deeper until the underlying truth emerges. Ask yourself 10 questions that you would ask an intimate friend. Then wait for answers. Don't worry, no one is going to poke fun at you.

- ? 1. What is the purpose of life?
- ? 2. What is my goal in life?
- ? 3. Why did I choose this career?
- ? 4. How do I spend my spare time?
- ? 5. What is my motivation for doing what I do?
- ? 6. What really makes me happy?
- ? 7. Am I as happy as I want to be?
- ? 8. Is it more important to be rich or to be happy?
- ? 9. What are my future plans? Why?

? 10. What are my secret dreams and ambitions?

Don't be surprised if the answers aren't immediate. This process can take many months. Stick with it and find out what makes you tick. The answers are hiding in there. After all, you have a fascinating partner.

Finally, the most important question to ask is:

"What am I living for?"

It sounds like a simple question, but many are embarrassed to ask it. A voice inside us says, "Nah, why ask such a basic question?" We're resistant because we know this requires a lot of difficult soul-searching. And when you thoroughly know yourself, then you have changed. You've changed your relationship with yourself and the world.

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## CONFIDENCE IN DECISION-MAKING

People often avoid making decisions out of fear of making a mistake.

Actually, the failure to make decisions is one of life's biggest mistakes.

Imagine the beggar who receives a letter saying that he's inherited a million dollars. If he doesn't read the letter, is he rich ... or not?

Similarly, God gave us the free will to make choices in life and achieve greatness. But if we're not aware of our free will, then we don't really have it. And then we wind up blaming others when things go wrong – even though we know the decision is really up to us.

If you're not using your potential, it wears away at your confidence. Do you know what your potential is? Have you tried to use it? You have to tackle life. You haven't given up yet, have you? Let's get on with the game, with the business of really living, of not just "going through the motions."

Know the difference between "making decisions" and just floating, falling into place. Did you choose to go to college? Or perhaps you had nothing to do with the decision. Was it something you just did because you graduated high school and everybody else was doing it? Did you think it through and actually make a decision?

Imagine this private conversation of a college student:

Why am I going to college?

To get a degree.

Why?

Because I want to get into a good graduate school.

Why?

So I'll get a good job.

Why?

So I can pay back my college loans!

Through the process of questioning, he reveals a logical fault in his motivation. Really, the primary reason for going to college should be to acquire wisdom, knowledge and information. In other words, to get an education!

Now try the process yourself, using this example:

Why do I want to get married?

Don't accept pat answers. Keep asking "Why, why why?" Be frank. It's yourself. Ask any question you like. Be patient and persistent. Eventually you'll get an answer.

When you thoroughly analyze an issue, then you can make wise decisions with confidence.

Identify where you lack confidence. What makes you nervous? What situations inhibit you from being yourself? Why can't you make decisions? Is it that you don't know how to make decisions? Or that you doubt your decisions after they're made? Or you just don't feel like

making decisions?

Enjoy making decisions. Deal with the world you live in. That's loving the dynamics of life.

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## ISOLATE YOUR BLOCKS

Anytime you find it difficult to achieve a goal, figure out what's holding you back.

Everyone has problems. Being aware of these problems is the key to getting in touch with yourself. Because as long as you don't face problems, they fester and bug you from behind.

Write your "blocks" on a piece of paper. That's a good step in the right direction. By isolating specific obstacles, you turn them into concrete challenges that require solutions.

Ask yourself:

? ? Am I lazy? Why?

? ? Am I disorganized? Why?

? ? Do I get angry? When?

? ? Why do ever I get defensive? About what?

? ? What makes me jealous?

? ? What makes me arrogant?

? ? Do I have trouble making decisions? Why?

? ? Do I lack self-discipline?

? ? Do I lack self-confidence?

? ? Why don't I take more initiative?

Negative character traits are the roots of our problems. Make a list of your negative traits, and identify when they affect you the most. Then analyze what triggers these reactions in you. Finally, formulate an effective counter-approach.

Working through this takes time. But do you have anything better to be doing right now?

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## READ YOUR EMOTIONS

Get in touch with your emotional state. Take a reading of how you feel. Happy? Angry? Tense? Sad? Emotions are a measuring stick for what's going on below the surface. It's like taking your temperature. If you're sick, you need to be aware so you can fix the problem.

Find out why you're upset. Who or what is pressuring you? Is it an internal or an external problem? Identify it.

Let's say you are irritated. Why?

Because the boss chewed me out.

So why am I irritated?

Because I resent him.

So what? Why does that bother me?

Because I feel I am no good.

I'm no good? He's nuts!

Get out of yourself and track it down. If you don't, it's just irritation. And the next thing you know, you'll go home and yell at your kids.

Once you've identified what causes negative feelings, adjust yourself to minimize the impact. Either avoid these situations, or prepare yourself to handle them when they arise.

Further, root out negative motivations that corrupt your behavior. Let's say that you give charity. Why? One motivation is to help humanity. Another is the pleasure of being constructive. A third is the desire to do the right thing. These are all positive motivations. A negative motivation for giving charity is: "I want people to admire me." That's corruptive.

The next time you give charity, do so anonymously. Eliminate the wrong reasons. They are destructive.

The same goes with the positive emotions. Be aware of how your emotional state affects



decisions. For example, don't buy a new stereo when you're in a euphoric mood. Wait. Think it over. You are susceptible.

Pinpoint what makes you happy. You can have more joy on a daily basis by formulating some practical applications. You got up in the morning, it's a gorgeous day and you feel great. You're energized. Now take that feeling and teach yourself how to get up on the right side – every day!

Another example: You did a good job and got the boss's compliment. Now focus: Do you need the boss to tell you did a good job? No! Create your own pleasure out of doing a good job.

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## GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR TWO SIDES

Everyone has an urge for greatness. We want self respect, power, fame. We want to accomplish, to be strong, to do the right thing, to even save the world.

Yet at the same time, we have a counter-urge to run away from responsibility, to get into bed and crawl under the covers.

Someone may say, "Life is beautiful," but he doesn't feel it. His emotions hold him back and he walks around going, "Ugh, life is a burden."

Recognize the volcano of conflict within you: What you truly "want," versus what you "feel" like. This is the conflict between body and soul.

Once you appreciate the dichotomy, you can identify at any moment whether your body or soul is talking. This makes it possible to live with sanity and choose the right thing.

The next step is to make peace between your two sides. The easiest way is to squash your drive to be great. But life is not about taking the easy way out. Just because you feel uncomfortable about an idea doesn't mean it's wrong for you. It's hard to break habits, and growth can be frightening.

For example, would you rather be happy or rich? Okay, you'd rather be happy. Now imagine this exchange:

"Come on, I'll teach you how to be happy. All it requires is effort and change."

"Oh, I'd love to, but I can't right now. It's impossible. I've got a flight to catch."

"Really? I'll pay you \$10,000 a week to work on happiness."

"Sure! Where do I sign up?"

"Oh, but I thought you can't right now..."

We conceal our problems with rationalization: "I'll wreck my mind thinking about what life is about! Nobody really knows what life is about. It's not going to work. Nothing can be done about it anyway. I don't really care. It's not worth the time!"

The Sages say that a person only makes a mistake when overcome by a moment of insanity. So realize that you are fighting "insanity." It is not logical. You've got to be on guard. Because if you get off track, you'll pay for it down the road.

So ... do you want to change? What have you got against it? Feel the antipathy of the body. We are so darn lazy. The body just wants to sleep. "Aaaah ... I don't want to change. I'm happy enough. I'm comfortable in my niche of misery." Are you rich enough? No! So are you happy enough?

You see the importance of tracking that down? You have to identify the animal you are fighting. "The dread of change."

If you're alert, you see the enemy. You can fight it. You may lose a struggle with the body, but at least you have your confidence. "I know what I am doing."

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## COAX THE BODY

Get in touch with your spiritual core. Know what is driving you. Don't let free will be a subconscious thing. You want greatness. But the body says that's too much effort.

To try to convince the body, try to identify the tangible benefit. "Why is it necessary? What will it do for me?" You have to bring it home to emotional realization. "What do I lose?" What do I gain?" Only then will the idea have power. And you'll get out there and do it.

Here's the secret formula: Identify with your intellect, and coax your heart along. For example, if you're emotionally convinced of the benefit of getting into shape, then even when you break out in a cold sweat and your heart is doing palpitations, you will keep going. Because you have decided, "I want this," you know it is important.

To avoid negative backlash, your emotions have to feel comfortable with the changes you make. Learn to relax and reassure the body. Cajole the body and say, "It won't be so bad. Remember the last time you made an effort, how great you felt!" Be encouraging and reward yourself for success.

Don't say it doesn't work. You haven't made the effort. Don't give up on your intuition and

perception. Just realize you haven't yet brought it home to actualization.

Consider how the basic human drives affect you: security, self-respect, honor, passions, social pressure, and possessions. Pay particularly close attention to how you accept responsibility. Let's say that you made a mistake. You want to apologize in a full and forthright manner. Yet you feel like forgetting the whole thing, hiding, running away and saying "it's not my fault."

This is the volcano. We want to be tough, dedicated and powerful – yet we feel like being marshmallows. Choosing the path of the soul doesn't come naturally. It takes a lot of time and hard work.

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## KNOW WHAT YOU KNOW

Don't think that just because you understand something, you are living with it. It is possible to believe one way, and yet act another. It happens to us all the time. You can believe it's important to eat healthy food, yet gorge yourself on French fries and chocolate cake.

Our actions are determined by our level of clarity. If we understand an idea on just a superficial level, then we'll have difficulty sticking to it when the going gets tough.

Next time you go to a funeral, watch carefully. When they remove the body from the chapel, the mourners start to cry. Are they crying because they want the body to stay there?! No. All of a sudden there is a realization of death, that he won't be coming back. At the cemetery, they lower the casket into the ground and the mourners cry again. It's the emotional realization that death is final now.

Until you align your feelings with reality, you are in dreamland. Growth begins in the mind, but your heart has to buy into everything your mind discovers. Only then will you integrate these ideas into day-to-day life.

A lot of people believe in God. There are very few people who live with God. Does that make sense? You have to assimilate something that you've accepted as true. It has to become part of you.

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## FIVE-FINGER CLARITY

You've got to know yourself cold, just like you know your hand has five fingers. How do you know you are on the right path? How do you know you're not making a mistake right now?

To develop this clarity, articulate the important principles that guide your life. For example, in Judaism we say that love is an obligation. Is this reasonable? Work the issue through with yourself:

"Ridiculous. You can't obligate me to love."

"But if I have children, will I love them?"

"Of course I'm going to love my kids!"

"How do I know? I don't know what kind of kids I'm going to have. Maybe they'll be brats and I won't love them."

"I will. I'm obligated to love my children."

Do you see the contradiction? On an intuitive level, you know that love is an obligation. But the concept is not so clear that you can articulate it.

Take your time. Sort out the basic aspects of living. Ask yourself important questions about life's global and spiritual issues.

? ? What is the meaning of existence?

? ? What's good about living?

? ? How do I feel about humanity?

? ? What is the afterlife?

? ? How do I understand good versus evil?

? ? Do I have free will? How do I activate it?

? ? What makes me sad? Is it okay to be sad?

? ? How do I feel about God?

? ? Am I proud to be a Jew?

? ? How do I understand the Holocaust?

Some of these topics may be unpleasant to think about. If so, why is it unpleasant? Track it down.

Don't just use slogans to parrot things that you heard. Know why you are doing what you are

doing. Otherwise, it's just society talking. You may have adopted part of society without analyzing its validity. Check it out.

Work through all the issues until you have "five-finger clarity." A human being who knows what he wants will get there. By hook or by crook. It's like a homing mechanism on a missile. If you program it right, you will get there.

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## WHY IS "KNOWING YOURSELF" AN INGREDIENT IN WISDOM?

? ? You can know truth if you look honestly into yourself.

? ? Emotions are powerful forces of greatness. Know them. Harness them.

? ? Identify your problems. It's the beginning of solving them.

? ? If you don't get it straight now, you're bound to make some bad mistakes.

? ? Don't be afraid of finding out who you really are.

? ? Use your free will as a conscious tool for better living.

? ? If you're angry or upset, track it down. What's the root?

? ? If you're acting illogically, at least acknowledge that to yourself!

? ? The key to sanity is letting truth into the body.

? ? You can't afford to wait too long to get to know yourself. Because you are the most fascinating person you'll ever meet.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 22 Nov 2012 01:01

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Also from Aish

Way # 1 of 48 ways of wisdom by R Noach Weinberg ztl

To achieve significant results in life, the effort must be constant. Don't waste a minute.

by Rabbi Noah Weinberg

Join the 48 Ways email list

Imagine you're stuck in traffic, and another driver is taking dollar bills and throwing them out the window. You can't believe it. The guy is whacko. Every five minutes, another dollar flies out the window!

You probably never saw this. But you have seen someone throwing five minutes out the window.

Maybe you even did it yourself. The bus takes off and you're really enjoying the scenery: "Oh, a hill... look at that store... and there's a park!"

It's not so bad for the first few minutes. But then the cash register starts ringing up more wasted time. Ding! Ding!

To become a great human being requires applying your mind constantly, until it pervades every fiber of your being.

It all begins with a decision, a commitment. Try saying aloud: "Life is an opportunity. I want to use my mind, and be constantly moving toward my goal."

You may notice some resistance as a little voice protests inside: "No way! All work and no play will make Jack a dull boy. C'mon, let's space out and watch TV!"

Does this mean being an obsessive workaholic? Of course not -- you still need to sleep!

Let's understand. "Constant striving" means that when you sleep in order to be more productive, then the sleep becomes part of your overall goal. It's the same with eating and exercise.

So what about relaxing?

Of course it's okay to relax. But relaxing means "changing gears." Your relaxation should be purposeful and directed. Think of something else that's not as exerting, but is still meaningful. For example, shift your focus to nature, music or art. Sometimes, even a simple change of scenery, a cold drink, or a breathe of fresh air is enough to recharge your batteries.

But don't space out.

We do this, because it is painful to be constantly aware, to be constantly "on."

To break through that pain, focus instead on the pay-off. When you are constantly aware, every experience becomes a lesson in life. For example, if you are in a dentist's office, you could use that time to reach any number of crucial insights:

- I'm lucky to have teeth. A toothless life would be much less pleasurable.
- If there is such a thing as dental hygiene, there must be a concept of spiritual hygiene, too. I wonder what it is.
- Without the pain of the drill, my teeth would fall out. Perhaps some other difficulties in life also

help me accomplish good things.

- The human body is so intricate. The integration of teeth, gums, tongue and saliva is an incredible feat of anatomical and physiological design. How did it all come about?

Whatever you are doing at any given moment -- watching the news, working on a business deal, talking to a friend, reading this article -- give it your full attention. Decide that you are willing to take the pain of thinking, of being aware, all day long.

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## "CONTINUOUS:" WITHOUT INTERRUPTION

Whenever you pursue a specific goal, it should be without interruption. It's actually better to study for one hour straight, than for two hours with interruptions. Interruptions break our train of thought and limit our ability to retain information. They take the power out of learning.

Set aside a certain time when you block everything else out, where you will not budge from the activity you're focusing on. Don't sit down and then get up to open the window. Then get up to fetch a Coke. And get up again to close the window. And get up to turn on the radio.

Make up your mind: "I am going to do 'X' for one hour straight. No bouncing up and down!" For an entire 15 minutes, don't stop. Not to change your seat, not to get a drink, not for anything that isn't life-threatening!

You can practice this while riding on the bus, or waiting at the dentist's office. Set yourself a goal of 15 minutes to focus exclusively on one subject. It may be a problem you're having at work, a personal goal, or an issue in a relationship. For example, you might say to yourself, "The next 15 minutes I am going to devote to thinking about my family, how I can help them, why I love them, my pleasure in them."

Or try devoting 15 minutes a day to be aware of every aspect of life around you -- from the blood coursing through your veins to keep every cell alive, to the ant crawling across the ground under your feet. For that 15 minutes, you are totally attuned to the miracle of being alive.

Then, at the end of these 15 minutes, appreciate how the time was well spent. Time that otherwise would have been wasted...

Little by little, increase your time. First 15 minutes, then 30 minutes, then one hour, then two hours. Once you hit four hours, you're sailing.

The Vilna Gaon, the great 18th century Jewish scholar, said that the first three hours and 59 minutes is stoking the furnace. By the fourth hour, the pot is boiling.

And don't stop. Because if you take the pot off the fire -- even for a few minutes -- you have to reboil it all over again.

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## "CONSISTENT:" ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE

To really get into gear, you need to find your rhythm.

The human body loves patterns. Even the most daunting tasks become fluid when set into a schedule. This means doing the activity in the same place, at the same time, and in the same way (as much as reasonably possible).

That's why Judaism has certain pre-set activities every day. When waking up, for example, we say: "Thank God I'm alive." It's a moment of conscious appreciation for getting another chance, another day. This awareness gets us up on the right side of the bed, starting our day on a high note.

When it comes to any goal, make a certain time of the day "holy." For however much or little time, make a commitment and be consistent every day. There is power in that commitment. You know you are going to change. Your life will be different.

Try it. Commit yourself 365 days a year, for the rest of your life: When you wake up in the morning, appreciate being alive.

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## "CYCLICAL:" REPETITION AND REVIEW

Life is not one-dimensional. It must be studied from every side and turned upside down.

Study the same subject for a long period of time. Don't bounce around superficially from one topic to the next. Choose a topic you love and become an expert in at least one aspect of life. Become engrossed.

Whatever subject you choose, there is always more to learn. Even as you move to other areas of knowledge, be alert to pick up information pertinent to previous topics. This allows for cross-referencing, and ultimately, a deeper understanding.

Whatever you learn, make sure you don't forget. How many times has an insight struck you with astonishing clarity -- and then slipped out of your mind the next day? The insight is fleeting if you don't capture it in some way. It has to sink into your bones and permeate your mind.

This means constant review of one's learning in some form or another.

Verbal repetition is powerful. It clarifies an idea and brings it into reality. That's why we repeat the Shema twice a day, and why we review the Torah year after year. The Sages of the Talmud would repeat any new insight 40 times -- and repeat an especially vital idea 101 times.

It's kind of like "Remember the Alamo!" Of course, you may forget the Alamo, but you can remember this article in a catch-phrase like "Make Every Second Count" or "Live to the Max."



Whatever moves you and gets you energized, repeat it again, again and again. Make it your refrain, your background music. When you wear out one phrase, get yourself another. Whatever works has power. \* \* \*

"COMPREHENSIVE:" BE A STUDENT OF LIFE

Imagine someone asking you, "What do you do?" You answer, "I'm a lawyer," or "I'm an engineer," or "I'm an accountant."

Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!

Suppose you see someone going to sleep, and you say to him, "What do you do?"

He says, "I'm a sleeper."

"You're a sleeper? How do you make a living doing that? Who pays you to sleep?!"

That's my point exactly. When you add up the hours over a lifetime, you spend more time sleeping than being a lawyer.

The essential you is not the lawyer. It is the thinker, the seeker, the living, breathing human being who loves, who is continually growing, who desires greatness, who hungers to know more. Identify with this. It is who you really are.

Ask a woman with four children: "Who are you?" She answers: "A mother." But that's only one aspect of who she is (albeit an important one). She's also a friend, a community volunteer, an educator, a chef, a nurse, a child psychologist, a thinker, an information gatherer, a pursuer of truth, and more.

Unfortunately, we develop this identity problem early in life. Every child is asked: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" This question has subtle implications that can damage a developing personality. The child is thinking: "What's wrong with being 'me'? Is 'me' so terrible that I have to 'become' something different when I grow up?"

The Sages say: "Make the study of life your main occupation, and your profession secondary." The question is not "what are you doing for a living," but rather "what do you do for life?" If you see yourself as a "thinker," then thinking becomes a priority. So update your self-definition. Learn your whole reason for living and live it fully.

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**IS LIFE GOOD?**

The bottom line is you have to decide: Is life good or not?

This comes down to a more basic question: Does life have purpose? If it doesn't, then there's no reason not to waste time, because nothing really matters anyway. But if you believe there is a

purpose to life, why would you want to waste any bit of it? You'll want to understand every aspect of life, to do the most with the limited time you have.

Jewish consciousness says that the worst crime is murder.

Human beings were created for pleasure. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden. In Hebrew, Eden means "pleasure."

When you commit yourself to what a human being was destined for -- a life of pleasure -- you will go out searching for the highest pleasures. Along the way, you'll make distinctions between pleasure and comfort, between necessary pain and needless suffering. And through the process, you'll discover the true meaning of life.

The Torah says: "Abraham was old and he came with his days." Many people can become old without their days, because they may only experience growth over a year. But Abraham and Sarah had daily growth spurts. They got as much out of living as possible.

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Make the commitment to discover life's deeper pleasures. It could be the difference between a useful life and a wasted one.

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## 10 TOOLS FOR CONSTANT AWARENESS

- Plan out what you want to accomplish. If you know what you're after, you'll pursue it with more vitality.
- Plan in the evening how you'll get up in the morning. Don't let the snooze button control your life.
- To start off on the right foot, get up 10 minutes early and say the Shema.
- Review your day. See what the obstacles were. Strategize how to avoid them in the future. Review what you learned in the past 24 hours.
- Catch yourself day dreaming at least once a day and examine: "What am I doing right now, and how could I use this moment more effectively?"
- Become a student of life. Study wherever you are. Have books, thoughts, etc. ready to keep your mind growing. (No staring out the window like a zombie.)
- Memorize pieces of wisdom. It will give you something to learn as you walk down the street or wait in line at the supermarket.
- Pick appealing catch-phrases, to inspire yourself on the spot, and to wake yourself up when you feel like drifting off.
- Frequently ponder the question: What is the purpose of life? What am I doing on this planet?
- Plan ahead now. What do you want to study? What do you need to realize your ambitions? How do you want to grow?

Everyone says that "time is money." But which is more important: five minutes or a dollar? Time is the greatest opportunity of your life. Don't waste a minute of it.

- The worst murder is premeditated.
- The worst premeditated is of family.
- Even worse is murder of self -- i.e. suicide.
- Spiritual suicide is worse than physical suicide.
- Killing time is spiritual suicide.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 24 Nov 2012 23:17

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A little pain in my heart

As I recite Havdalah

But comforted shortly after

By thinking

About the Kiddush

That I will recite

Just 6 nights away

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