

yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 29 Jun 2009 19:47

(any questions , insights & suggestions about this thread,feel free to email me at 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 - 21 Dec 2009 18:47

Thank you Imtrying

and here is a powerful quote

Once you label me you negate me. (Soren Kierkegaard)

that is why I do not like when people call themselves addicts even if they suffer from a serious addiction

yes,they have a powerful addiction BUT THAT IS NOT THEM.

their true self transcends any problem they may have,no matter how serious.

and that knowledge itself is what promotes the healing.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by imtrying25 - 21 Dec 2009 18:49

True Yechida. I think we need to say something more like; we have an addiciton not that *we are* addicits.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 21 Dec 2009 19:41

Tanya Chapter 26 (part 1)

A lot of this is based on the Shuirim of R' Y.Y. Jacobson, as well as the book "The Long Shorter Way" by Adin Steinsaltz , and the English Transalation is from "Lessons in Tanya"

Chapter 26-28 deals with issues of sadness, depression and melancholy

Chapter 29-30 deals with issues of emotional apathy, indifference, and the blockage of the heart

Chapters 31 -33 deals with how to attain inner joy and love within one's heart

Here is the text of the beginning of Chapter 26

In the previous chapters, the Alter Rebbe explained how it is "very near to you," i.e., how it is very easy and accessible to every Jew to serve G d with love and awe. He stated that this can be accomplished either by creating a love and fear of G d through meditation on G d's greatness, or by arousing the "hidden love" (which also comprises a fear of G d) inherent in every Jew.

In the coming chapters, the Alter Rebbe will discuss means of overcoming possible obstacles in the path of one's service to G d. In the first instance, he shows how one may overcome the sadness, and dullness of heart, whereby the heart becomes insensitive to feelings of love and fear of G d.

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But this must be made known as a cardinal principle:

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It is with the service of G d just as it is with a victory over a physical opponent; for instance, two people who wrestle with each other, each striving to fell the other.

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If one of them is lazy and sluggish he will easily be defeated and will fall, even if he be stronger than the other, since his laziness and sluggishness prevent him from revealing his strength.

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Similarly with the conquest of one's evil nature.

Despite the fact that the good nature is stronger than the evil, for as explained in previous chapters, "Even a little of the light of holiness dispels much darkness of the kelipah," yet

here too the previous rule applies; and thus:

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It is impossible to conquer the evil nature with laziness and sluggishness, which stem from sadness and a stone-like dullness of the heart,

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but rather with alacrity, which derives from joy and an open i.e., responsive heart that is unblemished by any trace of worry and sadness in the world.

Hashem is telling us that intrinsically, I made you stronger than your yetzer horah.

Hashem is helping you, of course,

but He is telling you that you are stronger, you can beat him

But if you are dragged down by a sadness or by emotional apathy or by laziness, then you cannot beat him, even though you are stronger because all this sadness weighs you down, and you cannot fight the battle because these emotions drain that energy from you, and you are only a shell of your real self.

Read the words carefully here .

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Do you realize what is being said here?

Laziness and feeling of heaviness are NOT the causes.

They are Symptoms, not the true Root of the problem.

What is the Root Problem?

Sadness and Emotional Apathy

So when you see that a child or teenager or adult with a great level of laziness and heaviness of motion, it can often be that this is because there is a great sadness within them

And the opposite is also true

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The only way to fight the yetzer horah is with alacrity, which can only come after removing worry and sadness from your heart, and this joy, and openness of the heart is what causes the alacrity.

And even those who do not really “fight” but rather “let go”, this must be done with joy, I put my life in Hashem’s Hand, I surrender to His Will , only He can help me, This “letting go” is also a form of fighting the yetzer horah even though it surely does not look like it—and that too(the letting go) must be accompanied with a feeling of joy.

For me, I don’t need to convince myself of the truth of what is being said here.

You are stronger than the yetzer horah

He knows this

He is weaker than you

But he is not stupid.

He is actually very shrewd.

He DISCOURAGES you.

Which drains all the energy out of you.

Because you are saddened by what that discouraging voice just told you.

You're a SHMUK for just slipping and looking at what you did

That killed you

Not the slip or not even that big fall.

It's that discouraging and even mocking voice that eats at you.

That is what killed you

No sin can kill like that \

No sin can devastate you like that mocking voice in your head could.

That is when you just lie there

And you do not want to get up

You don't think you can.

The sin is not what paralyzes you.

We have to know how to deal with that voice that beats you down,

The voice that will scream at you with very vicious and devastating words if you even make the smallest attempt to get up.

And you will learn to ignore it.

It starts as a Game

You hear that dreadful voice loud and clear.

BUT IT IS TIME FOR FUN,

SO YOU PLAY DEAF AND DUMB.

(hey, I just realized, that was a rhyme!! not bad.)

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 21 Dec 2009 22:19

Tanya Chapter 26 (Part 2)

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As for the verse,1 “In every sadness there will be profit,” which means that some profit and advantage would be derived from it,

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the wording (“there will be profit”) implies that, on the contrary, the sadness itself has no virtue, except that some profit will ultimately be derived from it.

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This profit is the true joy in G d which follows the true i.e., justified sadness over one's sins, with bitterness of soul and a broken heart, which must come at specific, suitable times.

Hence the “profit” of sadness is the joy that follows it.

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Why should this sadness lead the worshiper to joy? For thereby (through one's sadness) the spirit of impurity and of the sitra achra is broken, and so too the “iron wall” that separates him from his Father in heaven,

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as the Zohar comments² on the verse, 3 "A broken spirit, a broken heart, [You will not despise]."

The Zohar interprets the verse as follows: "A broken spirit of the sitra achra is accomplished by means of a broken heart" Since sadness over one's sins causes the sitra achra to be broken, and the "iron wall" to vanish, it leads one to rejoice — as the Alter Rebbe now goes on to say:

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Then the preceding verses will be fulfilled for him: 4 "Make me hear joy and gladness";... 5 "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and support me with Your generous spirit."

This joy is the "profit" of sadness, whereas sadness itself is neither "profitable" nor advantageous.

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This is the simple reason i.e., apart from the deeper, mystical ones for the practice instituted by the AriZal (Rabbi Isaac Luria) of reciting this Psalm containing the verses quoted above after Tikkun Chatzot (the midnight prayer) before resuming one's Torah study —

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in order that one should study with the true joy in G d, that succeeds the remorse of Tikkun Chatzot.

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Such joy is of a greater quality than joy which is not preceded by sadness, similar to the distinctive quality of light which follows darkness.

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As the Zohar⁶ comments on the verse, 7 “And I (King Solomon) saw that wisdom surpasses foolishness as light surpasses darkness.” Note there, and this will suffice for him who understands.

The Zohar asks: Does it take a Solomon to see this? And it answers that the intention of the verse is that just as darkness contributes to light, for we cannot truly appreciate light unless we have experienced darkness, so too does foolishness contribute to the appreciation of wisdom. Similarly in our case, one’s earlier sadness adds strength to the joy which follows it, and this is the “profit” of sadness. Sadness itself, however, is a hindrance in one’s service of G d.

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Furthermore, the verse states explicitly: 8 “Because you did not serve G d your L-rd with joy...[therefore you will serve your enemies]” — and everyone is familiar with the explanation of the AriZal on this verse. 9

The verse reads: “Because you did not serve G d your L-rd with joy and gladness of heart, from an abundance of everything [good]” The simple meaning is: “When you had an abundance of everything you did not serve G d with joy” (This meaning is borne out by the context of the following verse: “You will serve your enemies in hunger, thirst, and nakedness, and in want of everything.”) But the AriZal interprets it thus: “You did not serve G d with a joy greater than that caused by an abundance of everything.”

We see from all the above the importance of serving G d joyfully. Yet, many things in one’s life, both physical and spiritual, may cause him sadness. The Alter Rebbe now goes on to propose means of combating this sadness, so that one may always be joyful.

First question we ask ourselves is that if indeed sadness is such a terrible and destructive force then why does Shlomo Hamelech , the wisest man of all time say “In every sadness there will be profit,” ??

The answer is as follows:

Sadness is not intrinsically good. But we need a measured dosage of sadness at certain times,to produce a benefit.

For example, poisons are harmful, even fatal, but when a person’s life is in grave danger, or loses consciousness, there may be a need to administer a small dosage of this “poison” to pull one out of this terrible state. During the shuir by Rav Jacobson, there was a doctor present who gave chemotherapy as an example. Chemotherapy is poison. But that poison has prolonged and in some cases saved lives.

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The key is to have

1) TRUE Sadness-not a false on. It comes from a true desire of coming close to Hashem

2)AT SPECIFIC TIMES (EXTREMELY , EXTREMELY ,EXTREMELY IMPORTANT-we will discuss this later.)

And THESE 2 Conditions break that Iron Curtain that separates you from Hashem

Chatzos is a time to cry and to grieve, it should break you into pieces, it should tear your heart into shreds, it should break that Iron Wall that separates you from Hashem

But Hashem does not want you to stay this way too long.

You must switch gears, because after Tikkun Chatzos you are to learn with SIMCHA, how in the world can you turn off the grief and turn on the joy? We are not machines.

That is why the Arizal instituted this chapter in tehillim

Why?

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in order that one should study with the true joy in G d, that succeeds the remorse of Tikkun Chatzot.

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Such joy is of a greater quality than joy which is not preceded by sadness, similar to the distinctive quality of light which follows darkness.

The Arizal tells us that it is true that sadness is no a good thing. But a dosage of it is needed to bring about a desired result.

When a person has bad substances in his stomach, he must take medication that causes him to

throw up.

Extremely unpleasant

But it opens you up ,it gets rid of the garbage that is in your system, and thus it is truly a great healing for you.

So the Arizal tells us that you can learn with joy now. and it was that bitter grief stricken Chatzos that ultimately opened you up to that great joy

The Rebbe once expressed this by telling this story about the Rashab, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe.

A Yid came from far with a terrible dilemma

He pours out his heart to the Rashab

The Rashab tells him bluntly “I cannot help you”

The audience is concluded

The Yid is crushed.

He walks out of the room, into the hallway, and faints

The Rashab’s older brother (who was in Lubavitch in the early years) sees this Yid and revives

him. The Yid weeps and cries and told him what the Rashab said

The Rashab's brother runs in to the Rebbe "Is this how you treat a Yid ? Is this what you tell him? Even if it is true that you cannot help him, you can encourage, you can inspire, you can give hope?

So the Rashab says "Ok, call him back"

The Yid comes back into the room. The Rashab gives him a big Beracha and exact advice how to proceed and the Yid came out rejoicing and everything turned out well.

The Rebbe said as follows

This seems to be an absurd story.

If the Rashab had the ability to help him, he should have so originally

And if he couldn't, what changed?

Many people are alive. But very few have a live "life" experience. They do good things, they raise a family, do mitzvos ,but they do not have a true experience. They are not living. because we live in a performance.Our acting director within us tells us that it is not time to do this or that. A real emotion is difficult to experience. A real relationship is difficult to experience. We are on stage. We are Actors. We play the role. Nice performance but it is acting, nothing more.

This is the Iron Curtain between you and Hashem.

What breaks this Acting and smashes down that Iron Curtain of separation?

Sometimes a very happy event

But usually it takes an utterly devastating event to make you real.

The Acting is forced to be stripped away

The Stage departs.

It's the real you now.

So this Yid who came to the Rashab was “stuffed up”. He was not a vessel to receive the blessing that Hashem wants to give him.

So the Rashab tells him “I can't help you”.

That was, in essence, SHOCK TREATMENT.

Those words broke this Yid.

And the broken Yid is forced to redefine himself.

The defective vessel breaks and a new strong one emerges.

Now he can be helped.

And I heard R' Jacobson relate this story and then say as follows:

Child abuse, Spousal abuse, Parental Abuse ,a plague amongst us.

It causes blockage in the victims.

Falling into numb apathy

Until various healing processes (ie 12 steps therapy ect) open up the neshamah

Redefining the person

Breaking down that Iron Curtain

The Sadness departs and Joy emerges.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 22 Dec 2009 13:40

Face the facts of being what you are, for that is what changes what you are.

Soren Kierkegaard

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by 7yipol - 22 Dec 2009 13:43

May I suggest a new thread dedivcated to the Tanya posts?

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 22 Dec 2009 14:02

Hi 7UP

that is a good idea,but if with your permission,let's wait a little,because I just started and I am not sure how it will turn out as this (as well as everything else) requires alot of Siyata D'shmaya.If after several more posts you see this is going in the right direction,than yes,I would say a separate thread for Tanya would work very well.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by Dov - 22 Dec 2009 18:15

R' Yechida - If you haven't already, check out one of the letters in the back of the tanya, where he advises someone in how to daven with more simcha by allowing sadness beforehand - it sounds like this chapter you quote.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 22 Dec 2009 19:51

I remember seeing something like this but I do not remember exactly where.

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 22 Dec 2009 19:52

Thanks for Your Time

Author Unknown

It had been some time since Jack had seen the old man. College, girls, career, and life itself got in the way. In fact, Jack moved clear across the country in pursuit of his dreams. There, in the rush of his busy life, Jack had little time to think about the past and often no time to spend with his wife and son. He was working on his future, and nothing could stop him.

Over the phone, his mother told him, "Mr. Belser died last night. The funeral is Wednesday."

Memories flashed through his mind like an old newsreel as he sat quietly remembering his childhood days.

"Jack, did you hear me?"

"Oh sorry, Mom. Yes, I heard you. It's been so long since I thought of him. I'm sorry, but I

honestly thought he died years ago," Jack said.

"Well, he didn't forget you. Every time I saw him he'd ask how you were doing. He'd reminisce about the many days you spent over 'his side of the fence' as he put it," Mom told him.

"I loved that old house he lived in," Jack said.

"You know, Jack, after your father died, Mr. Belser stepped in to make sure you had a man's influence in your life," she said.

"He's the one who taught me carpentry," he said. "I wouldn't be in this business if it weren't for him. He spent a lot of time teaching me things he thought were important... Mom, I'll be there for the funeral," Jack said.

As busy as he was, he kept his word. Jack caught the next flight to his hometown. Mr. Belser's funeral was small and uneventful. He had no children of his own, and most of his relatives had passed away.

The night before he had to return home, Jack and his Mom stopped by to see the old house next door one more time.

Standing in the doorway, Jack paused for a moment. It was like crossing over into another dimension, a leap through space and time.

The house was exactly as he remembered. Every step held memories. Every picture, every piece of furniture... Jack stopped suddenly.

"What's wrong, Jack?" his Mom asked.

"The box is gone," he said.

"What box?" Mom asked.

"There was a small gold box that he kept locked on top of his desk. I must have asked him a thousand times what was inside. All he'd ever tell me was 'the thing I value most,'" Jack said.

It was gone. Everything about the house was exactly how Jack remembered it, except for the box. He figured someone from the Belser family had taken it.

"Now I'll never know what was so valuable to him," Jack said. "I better get some sleep. I have an early flight home, Mom."

It had been about two weeks since Mr. Belser died. Returning home from work one day Jack discovered a note in his mailbox. "Signature required on a package. No one at home. Please stop by the main post office within the next three days," the note read.

Early the next day Jack retrieved the package. The small box was old and looked like it had been mailed a hundred years ago. The handwriting was difficult to read, but the return address caught his attention.

"Mr. Harold Belser" it read.

Jack took the box out to his car and ripped open the package. There inside was the gold box and an envelope. Jack's hands shook as he read the note inside.

"Upon my death, please forward this box and its contents to Jack Bennett. It's the thing I valued most in my life." A small key was taped to the letter. His heart racing, as tears filling his eyes, Jack carefully unlocked the box. There inside he found a beautiful gold pocket watch.

Running his fingers slowly over the finely etched casing, he unlatched the cover. Inside he found these words engraved:

"Jack, Thanks for your time! -Harold Belser."

"The thing he valued most...was...my time."

Jack held the watch for a few minutes, then called his office and cleared his appointments for the next two days. "Why?" Janet, his assistant asked.

"I need some time to spend with my son," he said. "Oh, by the way, Janet... thanks for your time!"

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 22 Dec 2009 20:43

A Brand New Day

by Rose M Rideout

We start out in life young and innocent falling in love and starting a new life, a husband/wife and then a home and family, celebrating a new year after year, aging gracefully, greying and often forgetting the important things. Do we really forget or can we not just speak of them anymore but think of them. Often I catch myself saying I know it is on the tip of my tongue but can't seem to get it out. Maybe we look at others as we age knowing who they are but can't quite get it out. Who knows, I can only pray that with age my family doesn't toss me aside thinking I am too much work to have in their life. I can only hope that see through me and know I am the same person who cried the day they were born and walked the floor many nights when the cried in

pain and help them to be the person they have become today. For we don't really know what each brand new day has in store for any of us.

A Brand New Day

October 2, 2008

Written By: Rose Marie Rideout

Twinkling shinning stars up in the sky,

A raindrops drips by the way,

A smile creeps across one's face,

So begins a brand new day.

A gentleman and a lady,

Smile that certain smile,

Caught up in a feeling,

Sure to make a style.

A baby's harsh cry,

A mother's listening ear,

Runs to sooth this tiny infant,

To tend to it's gently fallen tear.

First words are spoken out loud and clear,
Mother turns to her child and with a big hug,
Holds the child in her arms with pride,
While at her heart they tightly tug.
So begins a brand new day.
Another birthday to celebrate,
Another year to add to the years passed,
Just another senior to toss aside by the way,
In the way of our lives, just another old outcast.
Greying of hair, losing their mind, now gone astray,
Too much to consider caring for them as a part of our life,
Remember soon that will be as you and me dear one day,
Love still lies deep within our hearts and souls,
Still we choose to share with you our time,
For what is left of it today is little,
Memories dwindle in our mind.
We will continue to see,
The beauty inside you,
The beauty that we saw that day,
That special day you cried out loud to me,
That precious day you knew me and called my name,
That day I held you so tight with great pride and a hug,
That same day at my heart you so tightly tugged,
For that was the beginning of our love,

The day you knew I would be there,
Always to love you dearly,
As I celebrated,
year after year,
The older you got,
The more I loved you dear,
Never to let you forget, Each day was,
A brand new day,
Another day,
To cherish
you.

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Re: yechida's reflections
Posted by yechidah - 22 Dec 2009 22:07

Tanya 26 (Part 3)

On the previous post, we have to stress the extremely important conditions of the “the profit that comes from sadness” that it has to be True Sadness (for sins and separation from Hashem), and to express this sadness at SUITABLE SPECIFIC TIMES

Like that medicine, the negative substance that you must take to heal, it must be taken with caution, at the right time, and with the right dosage.

I heard R' Jacobson relate the following

In very old siddurim you would find this phrase “Kan Bochim”—“Here, you cry”

(I resisted the notion of crying at specific prescheduled times, thinking that there is something phony about the idea of fitting “crying” into your schedule. But after hearing this, and thinking about it, I slowly began to realize that it is within a human being to do this , not in a machine-like mechanical way, but in a way that is truly real and very important to do. After all, we try to do the same thing in our calendar. We align our crying with Av, and our rejoicing with Adar)

You cannot weep 24 hours a day.

But it is also wrong not to grieve, not to experience pain,

But all day long?

No.

“Kan Bochim” “Here, you cry”

Take the time, the specific time and let it ALL out to Hashem

ALL OUT.

But for 5 minutes,10 minutes,30 minutes, perhaps an hour on Sunday.

But then you move on.

With Hashem's help , we will discuss more about this soon

Here I will post from chabad.org

Why am I so sad?

By Baruch S. Davidson

Question:

This may sound like a strange question but as I incorporate more and more Jewish observance and ideas into my life, I find myself falling into occasional depression. Nothing serious, but I do occasionally feel useless and hopeless. Is this a contradiction? Is it possible to be so close to G d and still be sad?

Response:

Your question is not strange at all. Odd as it may seem, it is quite common for people who are actively trying to infuse their lives with G dly meaning to have bouts of sadness.

Particularly, becoming more conscious of Torah ideals makes one much more focused on the real and meaningful things in life. It's possible that in the past you more or less lived in the moment, without a strong focus on your spiritual goals and aspirations. While this is an unbelievable step in the right direction, it can also be depressing. Suddenly you realize how far away you are from where you want to be—a fact that you may have never really focused on before.

The issue of depression, and specifically depression stemming from spiritual causes, is addressed by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, in his book, popularly called "The Tanya." The following is (my humble distillation of) the enlightening and empowering teaching that he presents in his classic work of soul psychology:

If the human experience were driven by a single personality with one set of views, impulses and emotions, then sadness could never dwell in a person engaged in the sweetness of Torah. But truth be told, we are each driven by two souls, two personalities, each with its own goals and aspirations. One soul is a divine soul, whose life's dream it is to come closer to G d to the point of being completely one with Him and His will. The other soul, called the animal soul, is intent on remaining exactly that: a life form whose whole being revolves around satisfying base instincts and animalistic desires. These two spend an entire lifetime fighting it out; their battleground is the gamut of human experience and behavior.

Now, tell me: What happens in a war when one side finds its army surrounded and in danger of imminent defeat? Knowing that it is fighting for its very life, it gathers up its last strength to break free and strike back at the enemy. The same is true of the battle of souls going on in the human being. When the divine soul starts finding expression in Torah, prayer, mitzvot and faith, and with that power is about to crush its opponent, the animal soul calls out all its reserves with a fierce and ruthless vengeance.

The most powerful tool in the animal soul's chest is sadness. Even if you are fueled up with a passion to do what is right, depression will drag you into lethargy and impotence. In turn, that state leads you to the exact things that the animal soul so much craves and lives for: Instant gratification in whatever form it can get it, to comfort its poor, pitiful self. Easy win, at least temporarily.

The main thing is to know that this is the enemy, and not to surrender. Know that this is not a real setback, but on the contrary, a sign of real progress—like the pull of inertia that tells you your vehicle is moving forward, or the wake behind your boat as you speed over the waters.

Of course, it is also important to balance your goals against all you've achieved to date. Yes, you have a long way to go – we all do... – but you've also come so far, which should gives you the confidence that you will keep on heading in the same direction.

For more strategies to deal with depression, how about reading for yourself: Tanya, chapters 26–28. You can find that here on our site

Best wishes,

Rabbi Baruch S. Davidson

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 22 Dec 2009 22:16

Don't forget to love yourself.

(Soren Kierkegaard)

when we feel depressed,

know that we have forgotten to do this

it's time to do this

it's long due

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Re: yechida's reflections

Posted by yechidah - 23 Dec 2009 15:05

very connected to the above post

because part of loving yourself is giving yourself that space

This is from aish-Making Space for Feelings

My husband and I were both raised in homes that nurtured our physical needs, but not our

emotional ones. We were not neglected; we were thoroughly middle class. I had ballet lessons, and drama lessons, and spent my summers at a country club. My husband studied piano, and went to boy scouts and summer camps.

Yet when we met, we recognized in each other a profound loneliness. It was the loneliness of being seen and not heard. It was the loneliness of never knowing what it meant to have a voice in the family.

The challenge in having been raised in this sort of family is that once your emotional needs have gone unacknowledged for so long, you begin to question whether you are entitled to have them. We both became intellectuals, academics who lived lives ruled by the mind rather than the heart.

We needed to learn how to move towards each other, rather than silently retreat into one of our many books. After we married, we needed to learn how to move towards each other, rather than silently retreat into one of the many books that lined the walls of our home. We needed to learn how to say, "I need you now. Please close your book and pay attention to me for a moment."

It wasn't easy, and it didn't come naturally. We read books that rabbis and therapists had written about how to have a good marriage, and for homework, we practiced the exercises they recommended. We wrote lists, and charts, and learned how to actively listen. We stumbled and fell as we strove to develop true intimacy. That was preferable to taking refuge behind the familiar walls of silence while pretending that we didn't have emotional needs because we were too afraid to voice them. We eventually succeeded in forging a bond that could both nurture us and sustain a family of our own.

People often marvel at how expressive our children are. My four year old knows how to say, "Please don't make me do this. It's too scary for me." His older sister can say, "You made me a booboo in my feelings when you said that, and even though I wasn't crying with my eyes, I was crying in my heart." Sometimes, I hear her say to her little brother. "Don't cry. Use your words. Tell me what is wrong."

The rule in our house is that there is always space for feelings, and while their feelings don't determine our house rules, it is our responsibility as parents to recognize how our behaviors affect them.

My kids have clear boundaries that they know not to cross. They go to bed on time and do their homework even when they don't feel like it. And they also know that we are here to listen, that they are assured a chance of being heard.

Sometimes it is my listening more than my answers that are truly an act of love for my children. It is not easy to assume this extra responsibility of listening as well as teaching, of learning as well as guiding. But it's worth the extra effort. When my children go to bed, I use this time as I tuck them in to listen to their last fading thoughts about their day. I know who their friends are. I know who hurt their feelings. I know that sometimes it is hard to listen to a teacher who talks in a funny voice, and that the tendency to snicker at those times can be overwhelming.

Yet I also know that occasionally these random thoughts are chased away by more serious concerns, such as "Do you love me when I misbehave? Then why do you punish me?"

At those times, I believe it is my listening more than my answers that are truly an act of love for my children. I hope that one day my children will recognize that each word and thought that they shared was heard, and held, and remembered, and became part of the fabric of our home

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