

New points & ideas

Posted by Smart and dumb - 27 Feb 2011 20:49

"A Passion for Truth"

"He is alone with her, he loves her just as much, has his physical strength, and is in the same place where he previously sinned..." (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva)

This is Maimonides' vivid example of what complete teshuva looks like. Lust is blaring in his ears like a trumpet, his eyes are watering, and his knees are weak. The justifications are burning through his mind. "It would be so easy... No one would know... Who cares if they knew..."

But this time, he makes a choice. He chooses truth and wisdom. And he walks away.

How does that work? What motivates a human being, in the exact same situation he was in before, a situation just as tempting, to behave completely differently? Where does that come from?

One unexpected word: passion.

True Passion

Passion is the hub around which lives turn. Do you think our ba'al teshuva walked away easily? He didn't switch an off button. There is no off button for the heart. Rather, as passionate as he was to sin before, and as passionately as he wanted to sin again, his passion for truth was even greater.

It's a little known fact. The secret to real and lasting teshuva is passion.

Jewish law reflects this in other ways as well. For example, what happens when a person damages another or steals from them and is unable to make reparations? What if they don't even know who it was that they stole from? Their teshuva process can only be completed once they have donated something of at least equal worth to the general public. Examples of this are building bridges and roads. The assumption is that at some point the damaged party will benefit from the bridge or the road. In that way, something of an equilibrium returns to both parties.

But this law bespeaks a deeper truth. In doing your best to benefit the person you hurt, even if you don't know who that person is, you are carving out a new direction for your heart. Many schools of medical thought today claim that the body itself holds memories. Science has displayed that speaking and behaving in new ways literally create new neural pathways in the brain. By taking upon yourself to care for the person you hurt in a way commensurate with your previous mistakes, you kindle a new passion within yourself. Your teshuva process goes beyond the cerebral. Your entire body says yes, this time for holiness.

It's actually a bit of a misconception, this whole becoming-a-tzaddik thing. Our holy men and holy women throughout the ages were not emotionless people. Is that how we think of them sometimes? Dry, boring drones who wouldn't understand real passion if it walked up and smacked them in the face?

Instead, Torah explains that the greater a person, the greater his or her yetzer hara. Our sages understood things like lust and anger and bitterness and all the other typical human difficulties very well. They were passionate people, deeply alive in all their senses and emotions. It was just that they had developed a taste for the lasting beauty and sweetness of kindness and justice and integrity rather than for the saccharine transience of coarse thoughts and behaviors.

Their hearts and bodies were incalculably refined, but refined doesn't mean half asleep. True refinement is electric. Their passion for truth, for goodness, and for Torah was much, much greater than any other passions they had once battled.

Our sages today are vibrant, active, awake. They think deeply. They feel deeply. They laugh. They cry. They love. Passionately. And all of us can be just as passionate and alive as they are. Here's how.

You Are What You Love

When the Jewish People committed the sin of the golden calf, their sin wasn't just dancing around an idiotic yellow statue. Their sin was a sin of passion. They had betrayed their loyalty to their Beloved. They had chosen to place their faith, and their hearts, in other means.

Yet when Moshe (Moses) did return from his forty days on Mount Sinai and the Jewish People realized the treachery and humiliation of what they had done, a process began that ended in a deeper passion, a passion renewed. A passion so much more intimate and intrinsic to who they were that their previous, misplaced fervor showed for the superficial sham that it was.

"Moshe commanded and they proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, 'Man and woman shall not do more work toward the gift for the mishkan (sanctuary)!' And the people were restrained from bringing. But the work had been enough for all the work, to do it - and there was extra." (Shmos-Exodus 36:6-7)

The construction of the mishkan began with Moshe gathering the people around him just as they had gathered around Aharon (Aaron) not long ago to build the golden calf. He asked them to bring their gold and their silver just as they had brought it before. Even the words Moshe used mirrored the words used during the creation of the idol. Why?

Maimonides explains that G-d commanded the Jewish People to build the mishkan not because of some inherent universal reality like Shabbos or kashrus. Rather, the Almighty commanded the Jewish People to build a mishkan because the Jewish People really wanted it. Other nations worshipped their gods concretely. Other nations had focal points for their religions. Other nations proverbially got their hands dirty with things like offerings and music and art and ritual. We wanted the same.

Does that mean that G-d, like a tired parent, gave in to His kids' demands for yet another tinker toy? Of course not. ("Behold, He neither slumbers nor sleeps, the Guardian of Israel." [Psalms-Tehillim 121:4] G-d doesn't get tired. Talk about awake, alive, filled with passion...)

But anyway, the bottom line was that G-d appreciated our need to give concrete expression to our passion. And we did. Once Moshe gave us the go-ahead to begin building the mishkan, the same passion that had been so grossly misdirected in the golden calf came out full flush to

finally flow into the satisfying goodness that was our relationship with G-d. The mishkan was our love letter to Him. We were building a house for our hearts - ours and the Almighty's - to figuratively live in together. We just wanted to give and give, connect and connect. "And there was extra."

You want to be fully alive, feel your passion rushing through your veins like a stream of lush, cool water? You want to feel your heart and mind aligned in a state some athletes call the zone, some artists call inspired, some Jews call yiras shamayim? You want to live in a state so spiritually joyful, flush, and awake that there is always "extra"? Do something about it.

Wake Up and Get Out of Your Head

It isn't enough to think about how much you want to do teshuva and fulfill your potential. The mishkan wasn't a toy, it was a tool. So is your life.

Go ahead and say you're sorry - say you're sorry to the people you hurt, say you're sorry to the Almighty - but then stop kvetching and moaning. Really look at your weaknesses and mistakes and then go out and do the opposite. Go build a bridge or a road or a mishkan. Begin living another story. Get out of the chair. Get off of the couch.

They say growth is a step-by-step process, but they don't mean like hiking Mount Exhausted where you can barely pull one foot in front of the other, step...by...agonizing...step. They mean that growth is step-by-step like dancing. Once you get your body moving, you gain momentum. Once you have gotten over the initial challenge to actually begin waking up, staying awake is a lot easier. Get on the spiritual dance floor. "Mitzvah goreres mitzvah, one mitzvah brings another," promises Pirkey Avos.

The mishkan was the heart of the nation, but the purpose of a heart is to pump lifeblood into all the other limbs and organs. "Build Me a mishkan and I will dwell in you." (ibid 25:8) The mishkan wasn't a dry ritual. It also wasn't self-indulgent, creepy, New-Age style superstitious nonsense.

The mishkan was a passion fitness machine.

Listen, here's a surprising hint for our would-be ba'al teshuva: stop flagellating yourself. At a certain point, usually sooner than later, the guilt trip becomes a waste of time. Deflate the drama. Not only was your previous sin a nightmare, it was also irrelevant. It wasn't just heinous, it was dumb. It wasn't just destructive, but in the larger scheme of things, it was boring. You were boring. You were asleep.

Instead, go fill your hands and heart and mind with something else. The yetzer hara, I mean nature, abhors a vacuum. Lasting teshuva means tapping into a better passion, a deeper passion, a truer passion. A passion true to Torah, to the Almighty, and to yourself.

After the Jewish People realized that they had committed a terrible sin with the golden calf, they didn't just sit around moping. They went ahead and built a mishkan instead. They woke up. They got active. They reclaimed their passion.

So can we.

Arachim America Inc.

(in short: your desire to be close to HS"Y should be greater then your desire for lust,

The question is how do you become close to HS"Y, this takes time, first be mispalel every morning and night "vauhavtu as d" alokecho" ask him to put his love in to your heart, ask him to be able to see HS"Y is almost every thing, Remember "the more kdushe in the more tume out" concentrate on bringing the kdushe in)

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Re: New points & ideas

Posted by Smart and dumb - 04 Mar 2011 17:11

My Lovely R' Dov

Lets be open, we know your intentions are good, i started this thread, hoping to post by me or others, ideas, personal stories or solutions that actually helped someone in real life to be misgaber, the least or totally unexpected was that this will become a discussion about myself.

"Perhaps the timing is right, the place is wrong"

Hope u understand.

A lechtigen shaboos to you and to all of GYE members

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Re: New points & ideas

Posted by Me3 - 04 Mar 2011 18:33

I'm glad you cleared that up, but it might have helped to write somewhere what your intention for this thread was. We aren't mind readers you know.

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Re: New points & ideas

Posted by Dov - 06 Mar 2011 05:46

Dear Smart (I'll leave out the dumb part for I do not believe it),

The questions I asked you to 'get personal' may indeed have been at the wrong time, so I will share a story in the "Peninim al haTorah" from the yeshivah in Cleveland I saw today on the parsha about this very inyan, v'hameivin yovin:

A couple discovered their child had an unbreakable habit of eating sweets. The Dr told them he had to quit, they told him he had to quit, but it did no good. Being that they did not know many tzaddikim (and were probably not Jews, either), they spent a gazillion dollars to take him to India and meet Gandhi. They felt maybe he'd be able to connect with this child somehow.

So they get there and Gandhi says, "You need to come back in two weeks." They go ballistic and argue...but what can they do? Two weeks (and another gazillion dollars) later, they come back to Gandhi and he takes the child aside. He says to him, "Son, you've really gotto quit eating all this candy - it's terrible for your health." And the kid shows an immediate change - it seemed to them all that he has no more interest in sweets!

The parents were incensed. They asked Gandhi, "Why did we have to wait two weeks and spend all that money on the extra trip ***if that is all you had to tell him?!!***"

He answered (and this is in Rav Dessler lehavdil, and lehavdil on the last page of AA in "A Vision For You" - ayen shom):

"At the time you came to me, *I had the very same problem myself*. So how could I be effective, at all, in helping him get better in that problem?"

Rav Dessler wrote that he never, ever, gave a shmuz suggesting to the yeshivah guys that they work on anything - until he was successful at doing it himself. This is not 'a madreiga'. It is just that such a schmooze could not possibly be d'vorim hayotz'im min halev. And that is why AA/SA/NA, etc., has discovered that the best person to help another fool addict is another person who recognizes clearly that he or she is another fool addict themselves - but is living sober and free.

Gut Voch!! And I hope we can still be friends.

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Re: New points & ideas

Posted by pinokio - 06 Mar 2011 15:26

dON'T WORRY, DOV.

smart and d is just getting warmed up

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