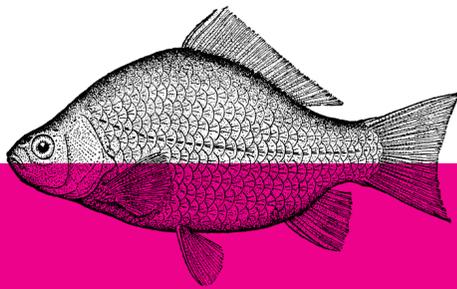


IT SAYS WHAT?!

For many, the term “understanding heart” – לב מבין – conveys an impossible reality, a contradiction and even nonsense. How can a heart understand? Isn't the domain of understanding and reason found in the mind? Actually, what may be a surprise to many, the Jewish tradition, introduced this phenomenon within our very Biblical and Talmudic texts.

After King Solomon assumes the leadership over the nation of Israel, we read in I Kings 3:5, “...HaShem appeared to Solomon in a dream at night and God said ‘Request what I should give you.’” Many err by assuming that King Solomon, being referred to as the wisest of all men, must have asked for wisdom. In fact, he did not. Perhaps he already possessed enough wisdom to request something much more important. A few verses later, in 3:9, King Solomon answers, “May You grant Your servant an understanding heart – לב שומע – to judge Your people, to distinguish between good and evil...” King Solomon intuited that he could only fulfill his Divinely granted mission as the anointed King, with God's presence intact and revealed, if he were able to hear God's people with his heart, understand them with his heart and judge them with his heart.



In the Talmud, tractate Chagigah 3b, the Rabbis discuss the verse that directly precedes the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. In Exodus 20:1, introducing the Ten Commandments, we read, “And God spoke all these words saying.” The Rabbis were concerned how we are to hear “these words,” by what means are we to discern and to discriminate between two opposites as defined by Divine Law. Their answer is, “Make your ears so they resemble that of a funnel, (receiving the words at once and then slowly allowing them to pass through) and acquire for yourself an

understanding heart – לב מבין. In fact, in modern Hebrew, the Rabbinic term for funnel also means the outer ear – אפרנסת.

We understand from these two sources the high value Jewish tradition places on bringing understanding into the heart, considered by most as a cerebral activity occurring solely in the mind.

From this perspective I would like to share the Piaseczner's (Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, murdered in 1943 in Trawniki concentration camp) teaching on cultivating the practice of manifesting an understanding heart, whereby thoughts and feelings integrate into a harmonious blend. This is part of cultivating a higher consciousness – מחשבה טובה – a consciousness whereby we sense the Divine Presence in a visceral, immanent and palpable way.



IT SAYS WHAT?!

In Bnei Machshava Tova, Entry 8, the Rebbe teaches the following: We are missing two ingredients, both of which we desperately need: our mindfulness and meditative awareness needs to be broadened and improved

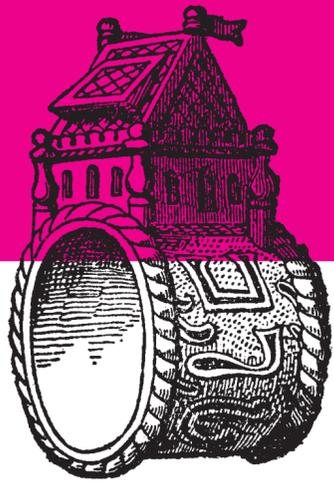
- התרחבות ושכלול המחשבה - and we need to experience inspirational awakenings and emotional openness of the heart - התעוררות והתרגשות. In reality, these two are one.

Pure mindfulness - מחשבה טהורה - depends on inspiration and fiery enthusiasm - בהתעוררות והתלהבות and fiery enthusiasm depends on pure mindfulness. Their existence is one of mutual interdependence. Once we are able to soften our hearts and feel emotional stirrings, we already begin to think more clearly and with enhanced focus. When our minds are relaxed and alert, it is easier to feel deeply and profoundly moved. So, in order to nurture our connection with the Divine, we need to cultivate both of these: Expansive mindfulness and emotional awakenings, organically as one.

With this in mind, we cannot speak exclusively of working on expanding mindfulness - התרחבות המחשבה. We also need to find ways to awaken the flame in our hearts - לעורר את התלהבות הלב. Let us seek out ideas and strategies. May God enlighten our eyes and help us, so finally we may raise ourselves up and beyond the lower level consciousness where we presently feel stuck.



Our method is to start right where we are now and to rise up from there. Let us begin with the emotional awakening of excitement, regardless of how mundane the situation that gives rise to the excitement may be. Each feeling of enthusiasm, motivation, and excitement, is a key to the soul - היא מפתח לנפש.



IT SAYS WHAT?!

Every feeling that is connected to something of this world opens a spark - ניצוץ - of our soul, and our soul becomes revealed a little bit. Let us consciously draw her out even more. You can endear yourself to the soul by greeting her with words of love, awe and pure God-directed mindfulness. Even though the original stimulus was a simple daily event, we now have in our hands an access point to the soul. Employ whatever sensation you are feeling. With this feeling, visualize knocking at the door of your heart and summon your soul from behind the iron gates where she is imprisoned. In the words from the Song of Songs 5:2, "Open for me my beloved, my friend." Come, let us feel deeply, in purity, with the Divine --- with faith, with love and with awe.



The cultivation of the understanding heart - לב מבין - now becomes the bridge from the lower consciousness to the higher consciousness. In summary, the "lower consciousness," is where one may be subject to the physical demands in the world, within the limitations of the five senses, leaving very little chance to sense the presence of the Divine. The "higher consciousness," occurs when one's mind does not become closed and one's heart does not become blocked, the space where instead of being subject to the natural forces in the physical world, one actually senses the Divine Presence in them. By realizing that this is not only when we pray and practice mitzvot, we can actually become aware of the presence of God at all times

Yiscah Smith

