

RAV ITCHE MEIR MORGENSTERN

Sod HaTaanug

*A penimiyus-oriented
approach to nisyonos
and the soul's desire
for pleasure*



**LOST
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INITIATIVE

Sod HaTaanug #1

What Are We Truly After?

RAV ITCHE MEIR MORGENSTERN



“You are not far from Hashem. To the contrary, you are very, very close to Him. There is no one closer to you than the Creator. This is because our closeness with Hashem is a reality that never changes, and it does not depend on any factors.”



This series of articles is adapted from an English translation of Rav Itche Meir Morgenstern shlita's sefer Yam HaChochmah. This foundational pamphlet, "Sod HaTaanug", presents a deep perspective on our desire for pleasure and the intense battle with the yetzer hara our generation is fighting before the coming of Moshiach. We hope you enjoy this kuntres, and please remember to share it with family and friends!

Introduction

The *neshamah* – the soul or the spiritual essence that's inside every Jew – is seeking pleasure and fulfillment. We can all perceive the extent to which we desire pleasure. We all want to “feel good” – we want to enjoy ourselves, we want to be serene, we want to feel alive, we want to be happy.

So a person opens up his eyes in order to look around and see where he will get pleasure, and what does he find? *Taavos* – the various lusts, desires, and cravings of the body. *Taavos* have a certain attraction about them, and they seem exciting. But here's where a person is in for a shock. Because the more a person gives in to the *taavos*, he feels less and less fulfilled. He has brief pleasure, and soon afterwards there is always a horrible, empty feeling that follows.

So a person says, “I know what to do about this: I'll enjoy even more *taavos*! I will keep experiencing more and more physical sensations and pleasure, and maybe then it'll feel really good.” But what happens? Exactly the opposite of what he imagined! The more he felt pulled after the desire, the more disappointed he is afterwards.

This leads a person to two gnawing questions.

Firstly, one asks himself: “Why? Why don't I feel fulfilled and satisfied from all of these pleasures I experience?”

Secondly: “What can I do about this? How do I satisfy my soul that is craving something so badly?”

The Pleasure we are Truly Searching For

The reason why lusts and desires leads to disappointment is because you are Hashem's child, and He has given you a G-dly soul, a spiritual entity, and the soul in you is not able to be satisfied from physical pleasures. Your soul is spiritual and it comes from Above, so it does not enjoy physicality. Just like an animal enjoys straw and hay while a person does not enjoy eating it, despite the fact that the very same food is indeed enjoyed by the animal, so is the G-dly soul within us (our *neshamah*) forever unsatisfied from physical pleasures. Although there's an "animal" level to our soul which does enjoy these physical desires (called the *nefesh habehaimis*), the G-dly part of our soul (*nefesh Elokus*) does not.

The satisfaction and fulfillment which your soul is searching for is found in one thing alone: The pleasure of sensing *Elokus*, G-dliness. To feel the Creator! Only when a person merits to connect himself with *Elokus*, which is called the "G-dly light" (*ohr Eloki*), can his soul finally find the pleasure that it wants. Only then will his soul feel good, and only then will his soul find its fulfillment. This is because we are created for pleasure, the true pleasure; the pleasure and bliss of sensing Hashem's Presence, which is the only true pleasure that exists.

Two Questions

You might be saying, "Okay, fine, I hear that. But I have some questions. First of all, even if you are right, this all sounds true only for *tzaddikim*, for people who are righteous and saintly, who are on a very high spiritual level. But me? I cannot spend the entire day learning, and I have already committed so many *aveiros* (sins). How can I reach the level you are describing when I'm so far from Hashem – when I can't even feel Hashem at all?"

And another question: "If you're right – that the only true pleasure on this world is to feel Hashem's presence – then why I am so pulled after *taavos*? If my *neshamah* doesn't want those *taavos*, then why doesn't that prevent me from wanting those *taavos*?"

Hashem Is With You At All Times

So you are thinking, "How can I – with all of the *aveiros* that I have done – be successful, in getting closer to Hashem and enjoying a relationship with Him? Haven't all of my *aveiros* made so far from Hashem?"

The answer is simple. *You are not far from Hashem*. To the contrary, you are very, very close to Him. There is no one closer to you than the Creator. This is because our closeness with Hashem is a reality that never changes, and it does not depend on any factors. You must know that Hashem not only created the universe in the past, but He continues to renew it every moment, re-creating it anew. He keeps flowing His energy into the universe to sustain it. Not only does He allow you to exist, He keeps renewing you. *So He is always with you*. He is making for you a new *neshamah*, every moment. This is true about all creations, but it specifically applies to a Jew, because the Jewish nation are the people who are meant to reveal the Creator upon the world. Every Jew is a prince of the King, as the Torah says, "And you are children to Hashem your G-d." Any normal father loves his child, no matter what the child

has done. In the same way, Hashem is waiting for you to connect to him. He is waiting for you to turn to him and to feel Him.

Connection To Hashem – The True Pleasure

This is what the neshamah is longing for – only for this! And it is so simple, and so good, and so enjoyable: “Taste it and see, that Hashem is good.” The moment a person connects to the Creator – in any situation – the neshamah finds its fulfillment. The fulfillment, satisfaction, and pleasure that we are searching for is only found in this!! In connecting to the Creator. As for all of the evil and forbidden pleasures and lusts of this world – they are just empty acts that don’t satisfy us.

The question thus begs: Why do we feel such a strong pull towards *taavos*, if our *neshamah* doesn’t really want those *taavos*?

The answer to this is that everything in Creation contains a “G-dly spark” (*nitzotz Eloki*) in it, which is really Hashem’s light that He places into each creation. This light, also called the “G-dly spark”, is what empowers each thing and enables it to continue existing. It is like the battery in a clock – without the battery, the clock doesn’t turn. Whenever we feel a pull towards something that’s evil, we are not really being pulled towards the evil itself. This is because evil has no reality in and of itself. Evil is entirely illusory. If so, what are we being attracted to when we want to engage in something forbidden? We are being pulled towards the “G-dly light” that exists in that place, to the good that is within it, to the “G-dly spark” that’s contained in the lust. That is what’s making us feel drawn towards the craving.

Now, the spark of good hidden within what we’re feeling attracted to is wrapped, clothed, and covered over by a *kelipah*, a “shell” – something in our physical world that’s covering the spiritual spark underneath it. We don’t see the “G-dly spark”, because it’s invisible, we can’t tell that it’s there at all. Therefore, when we feel pulled after a lust or a particular desire or physical enjoyment on this world, we mistakenly think that the physical act of the pleasure contains the pleasure that we want, while in reality, it is the G-dly spark that we are feeling attracted to. In essence, we are getting scammed every time. The pleasure will only come from experiencing the “G-dly spark”, not from any physical sensation. It is only the G-dly spark of something that our *neshamah* is interested in, and nothing else. We get fooled by the external wrapper of what we’re after, thinking that the *kelipah* will give us the enjoyment that we want. But this is all a trap, because the *kelipah* has nothing good to offer us at all. When people allow themselves to sin when they’re vulnerable, they take the enjoyment that the *kelipah* is offering them, thinking that this act will give them enjoyment. But in the end, they are always left disappointed. Initially, they feel pleasure as they are sinning, because they began to touch the sparks of G-dliness found in the pleasure which is what grants them the real feeling of pleasure. However, the spark of G-d immediately falls away from them, and it is gone. The spark is the Creator’s light, and it cannot be attained through doing a sin. The only way to receive true pleasure and to hold onto it – the only way to attain the G-dly spark and to reach the pleasure found in it – *is by overcoming the lust*. Real pleasure is only attained when we simply overcome the feeling of lust and withhold from committing the act of sin.

To the extent that we refuse to following the offer of the *kelipah*, realizing that the pleasure in the *kelipah* is pseudo-pleasure and that it’s not real at all, we are killing the evil that exists there. When we are aware that the pleasure there is false, we take away the *kelipah*’s energy, and then the G-dly

spark trapped within is freed. It then it enters into the person who freed it [that's you, the one who overcame the desire!]. That is why we always feel good after we overcome a temptation. We feel a certain joy and pleasure that can't be described. During the moments of temptation, it is a difficult struggle, and our *yetzer hora* is pulling us towards the desire, but when we understand and realize that it's all false pleasure and not real, and we overcome the desire , saying "No" to ourselves – we will then feel an awesome, amazing bliss at having overcome the temptation. It is precisely through overcoming temptation, that we are able to retrieve the G-dly spark contained in the evil/illusory pleasure.

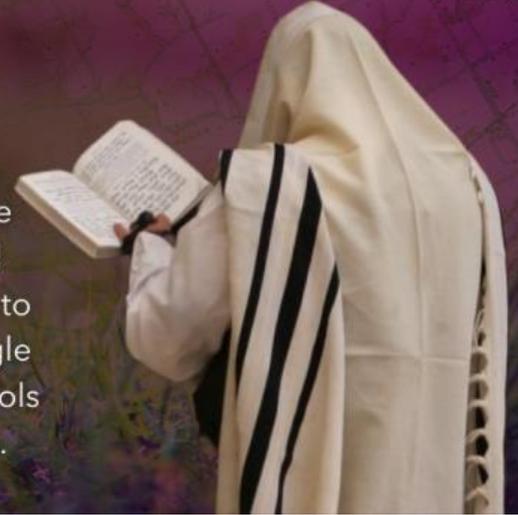
Sod HaTaanug #2

Living My Best Life

RAV ITCHE MEIR MORGENSTERN



Torah and mitzvos are the enjoyable tools of pleasure which satisfy our neshamah, giving us a pleasure and bliss in the G-dly light that all of our neshamos yearn to experience. The Creator is basically telling every single Jew - every single one of His children - to take the tools that He has given us and use them to connect to Him.



How Do We Connect To Hashem?

“Okay. What I truly desire is to connect to Hashem. But how do I do that? How can I connect to Hashem?”

The answer to this is that *you are already connected* with Him, by virtue of your very existence. It is only that *in order to feel* that reality, you will need to do certain things.

The first thing to do is: Talk with Hashem! Simply start opening your mouth and start talking to Him. He is found with you every moment, and He is listening to everything you are saying. You just need to talk to Him and pour out your heart to Him.

Go to a quiet place, or close the door, and start saying simply, “My Father...I feel like...” Start telling him everything you’ve been through and what you’re going through now, and start asking Him for help.

When you keep talking to Hashem and you are consistent about it, you are creating a relationship with Him. An inner connection to Him forms inside of you, and your soul begins to feel satisfied and fulfilled.

The second thing you need is to learn Torah and fulfill all of the mitzvos which Hashem has given you. These are the physical tools which we are given in order to connect to Hashem, which enable us to experience a light that is pure bliss.

Finding True Pleasure

At this point, after we’ve acknowledged all of the above [and we have begun to form a relationship with Hashem], the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) will jump on us and try to convince us otherwise. It will argue: “Torah and mitzvos are difficult to keep. When you learn Torah and keep all the mitzvos, it’s a difficult life! You are going to lose out on all the pleasures of life...”

What a lie! The unequivocal truth is that all of the ‘pleasures’ found in this world are empty and they don’t satisfy our souls. Only Torah and mitzvos are the true and genuine pleasure, as the Creator testified: “*Hearken to Me, and eat well, and enjoy the bliss for your souls.*” The Torah’s ways are “ways of pleasantness”, it is all pleasant and sweet to a conscious Jew who is working on a relationship with Hashem. In fact, all enjoyment and all pleasure was created so that we can use it to serve Hashem, for the main way to serve Hashem is when it’s enjoyable for us to serve Him.

This is what Hashem intended – that we should have it all good, and only good – and that we should *enjoy* our connection with Him.

Torah and mitzvos are the enjoyable tools of pleasure which satisfy our *neshamah*, giving us a pleasure and bliss in the G-dly light that all of our *neshamos* yearn to experience. The Creator is basically telling every single Jew – every single one of His children – to take the tools that He has given us and use them to connect to Him. It is through Torah and adhering to the *mitzvos* that we will succeed in giving ourselves over to Hashem – letting Him become the focus of our heart’s passions and desires – and that is how our soul will attain the satisfaction and fulfillment that it wants.

When that happens, not only will you taste the pleasure in *ruchniyus* (the spiritual), but even our physical desires will become more fulfilling, because they will become infused with a greater measure of inner meaning.

Unlike what you might be thinking, you do not have to be learning Torah all day in order to experience to this pleasure and this light which is being described here. All you need to do is become connected, *genuinely*, to the Creator, and to listen to His calling to you, to what He’s asking of you – which is for your own good, no matter what level you are on. Learning Torah, keeping the mitzvos, and serving Hashem are all “sweeter than honey”. Serving Hashem and having an actual, personal relationship with Him is the true pleasure, the only true enjoyment in life that we can have.

How Aveiros (Sins) Destroy Our Pleasure

Do you want to know the reason why the Torah has forbidden certain acts of pleasure and why the Torah warns us to stay far away from them? The reason why the Torah forbade these experiences is for our own good. It is because, in blocking our souls from connecting to Hashem, these actions thereby withhold the true pleasure from us.

The *yetzer hora*, our evil inclination, tries very hard all the time to convince us that it’s enjoyable to do an *aveirah*. It says, “This is a normal function of human nature. It really shouldn’t be forbidden at all. You are losing out on so much pleasure if you don’t do this *aveirah*.” This is how the *yetzer hora* uses convincing arguments to sway us to do the *aveirah* and to go against the Creator’s will.

One must learn how not to fall for the *yetzer hora*’s argument and how to recognize this argument as a complete fallacy. Because in truth, there is no *real* pleasure in any of these *taavos* that your *yetzer hora* wants you to do. The small, fleeting feeling of pleasure in these *taavos* is like bait that the *yetzer hora* puts in your way so that you’ll fall for his trap. If you fall for it and you go after the fleeting pleasure that the sin affords you, you will only find pain afterwards. Sometimes you will even fall into sadness and melancholy afterwards. Everyone is well aware of this vicious cycle.

Sod HaTaanug #3

The Great Illusion

RAV ITCHE MEIR MORGENSTERN



“The yetzer hora is nothing but a professional con artist who is trying to scam us again and again with his false claims. He’s offering us something that isn't good, that will additionally result in only pain and misery to follow. Any pleasure one thinks he might get out of doing an aveirah is nothing but imagination. Therefore, one's mindset has to be: “It is only when I overcome this struggle that I will experience real pleasure!”



They End in Bitterness

Even though you know all of what we have learned until this point, the *yetzer hora* doesn't give up. With no shame at all, it continues to entice you and tell you to sin, even though you know that this little act of pleasure will end with disappointment, pain and sadness afterwards.

The *yetzer hora* knows that it is convincing you to go after a false and pseudo form of pleasure, and it knows all the damage that will happen to you afterwards. Ultimately, the *yetzer hora* wants nothing other than to destroy your *neshamah*, because it knows that if you will do the *aveirah*, you will be blocked from connecting with Hashem. It knows that your *neshamah's* only satisfaction is to have a genuine connection with the Creator, and it knows that doing an *aveirah* will ensure that the *neshamah* is blocked from becoming connected to Hashem. This is why the *yetzer hora* tries very hard to convince you to do the *aveirah*.

The Creator, Who loves us and wants the best for us, warns us very well in the Torah to stay away from committing *aveiros*. This is not because He wants to withhold pleasure from us, and it's not because He wants us to suffer and be deprived. It is just the opposite: Hashem wants to prevent us from all of the sickness and pain that comes to us from giving in to pleasures that are evil, false, and imaginary. “Do not desire his dishes, it is bread of falsity.”

Any of the *taavos* that the *yetzer hora* wants us to do are not *real* forms of pleasure.

Aside from *aveiros* and forbidden acts of *taavah* failing to provide us with true pleasure, they end in bitterness, and even a person's physical existence in This World becomes full of pain and misery as a result. We must always remind ourselves that the *yetzer hora's* pleasures are nothing but a fantasy. If we would clearly see the lies of the *yetzer hora's* arguments to us and how much it cons us into thinking that we are going to gain pleasure and enjoyment from acts that do nothing but damage us afterwards, we would hate the *yetzer hora* and recognize it as our bitter enemy. We would not even listen to it for a moment.

As we learned, we get genuine pleasure only from the Creator's light [which we gain through keeping the *mitzvos* and developing a relationship with Him].

We need to think about this truth and internalize it into our being: The Creator's light is the only source of vitality on this world, and therefore any pleasure that we can get on this world will only come from tasting the Creator's light. There is no chance of us ever getting any real pleasure from something that's forbidden by the Torah.

In addition to being the Source of everything that was created, Hashem is the source that continues to sustain everything in the present moment as well. Everything in our world is only able to keep existing because of the G-dly light that Hashem is using to empowering each creation. Therefore, it is not possible to get real pleasure from something that the Creator has forbidden from us. Every *aveirah*, everything that Hashem forbade us to do, is essentially the presence of evil, called the *kelipos* (lit. "shells") which are so thick that Hashem's light doesn't penetrate them. And since they are empty from Hashem's light, it not possible to get real pleasure from them, because real pleasure only comes from experiencing Hashem's light. Although everything in creation is sustained by the G-dly spark within it, Hashem's light and the feeling of true pleasure is never gained from a forbidden act, only through permissible acts. Therefore, there is no gain in any forbidden act, because it does not give a person the G-dly spark, and hence there can be no real pleasure in the forbidden act. The only way to gain pleasure is by retrieving the G-dly spark in something, and the only way to retrieve a G-dly spark from a forbidden act is by *overcoming* the lust for it, as explained above.

The Creator is asking of us: "I have given before you that which is life and good, and that which is death and evil, and you shall choose life." The Creator knows infinitely that true pleasure and satisfaction for us human beings is only when we connect to Him [when we are doing His will and building a conscious relationship with Him]. As Dovid HaMelech said, "*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good to me.*"

The Imaginary Pleasure in Aveiros

Therefore, when the *yetzer hora* comes to you and tries to convince you to do an *aveirah*, it puts forth very convincing arguments, as we all know. We need to let our intellect take over and decide for ourselves: "I'm not listening to my *yetzer hora*, that lying con artist! All of the pleasures that it presents to me are nothing but falsehood."

In other words, the way to fight our *yetzer hora* is not by thinking that we simply have an obligation to overcome the *yetzer hora*, but by understanding that there is no substance in the *yetzer hora's* argument! The *yetzer hora* is nothing but a professional con artist who is trying to scam us again and again with his false claims. He's offering us something that isn't good, that will additionally result in only pain and misery to follow. Any pleasure one thinks he might get out of doing an *aveirah* is nothing but imagination. Therefore, one's mindset has to be: "*It is only when I overcome this struggle that I will experience real pleasure!*"

To the degree that we internalize this, we will be able to minimize our struggle with the *yetzer hora*. The perspective described here gives us an amazing amount of energy and empowers us, because by internalizing it, we feel that it is worth overcoming the struggle. We will remember that it is only when

we *do not* give in to it, that we will truly find pleasure – the true pleasure and inner satisfaction that our *neshamos* crave.

Besides for trying to convince us into doing *aveiros*, the *yetzer hora* also convinces us to be lazy and not fulfill *mitzvos* or *halachos*. We need to be aware that it's worth it to push ourselves a little bit, because through pushing ourselves to do what Hashem wants, that is how we succeed in connecting to Him, and that will afford us the true pleasure to which nothing else compares.

Purifying the Heart

It must be mentioned that in order to succeed at feeling the pleasure and Hashem's light which is found only when we serve Him, we need to protect the cleanliness and purity of our soul. When a person regularly indulges in physical pleasures – even if these pleasures are not forbidden, and certainly if he is doing *aveiros*, *chas v'shalom* – his soul becomes covered over by *kelipos* (the presence of evil). The bigger and stronger the *kelipos* on his soul are, the less he will be able to feel the pleasure of serving Hashem. He becomes like a sick person who loses his taste buds – the sweetest foods will taste bitter and disgusting to him, preventing him from enjoying any food. The result of indulging in physical pleasures (and all the more so when a person indulges in acts of *aveiros*) causes *kelipos* to cover over a person's soul, and they prevent a person from enjoying the Creator's light. This is because *ruchniyus* (the spiritual) and *aveiros* (sins) cannot co-exist with each other. When a person falls into *aveiros*, the greater the fall, the less he can enjoy the feeling of Hashem's Presence. The more he tasted evil, the more he loses his taste in *ruchniyus*. It can get to the point where he has no desire at all in Torah, *davening*, and *mitzvos*, and it all becomes bitter to him. He won't even be able to enjoy Shabbos. This is the devastating effect that doing *aveiros* has on a person – they turn the sweet pleasure of *ruchniyus* into bitterness, and he loses his feeling of pleasure in sensing Hashem's Presence.

This is also why the *yetzer hora* tries extra hard to bring people down in areas of *kedushah* (personal holiness) and *tzniyus* (modesty). Besides for how important these areas are in terms of our obligations to Hashem, these areas also have a tremendous effect on all of our *avodas Hashem*. If a person doesn't try to sanctify his permissible acts of pleasure, his soul becomes dirtied and he will be unable to feel the Creator or feel pleasure in His Presence. He will have no pleasure in serving Hashem, which will cause him to look elsewhere for pleasure, turning to all kinds of unsavory sources of pleasure by indulging in physical pleasures and in forbidden acts that only strengthen the barriers around his soul, which fool him into thinking that he is getting pleasure from these acts. The further he falls into this vicious cycle, he 'snowballs', becoming more and more covered over with negative forces – "One sin leads to another sin."

In order to experience true and proper pleasure which is a legitimate necessity for our soul, we need to put in effort to cleaning off our soul from the *kelipos* that are covering it. Each person needs to do this on his own level, keeping himself away from anything that brings down his *kedushah*. That is why it is so important for a person to be careful at maintaining his *kedushah*, which includes going to the *mikveh* in the morning, consuming foods that have a proper kosher symbol, and, primarily, by carefully guarding his eyes. To the extent that a person cleanses his soul from evil, that is how much he will experience Hashem's light and to taste true pleasure in the spiritual. Then he will become entirely elevated, and he will experience success in *avodas Hashem*. Besides for making sure to purify one's deeds (as explained

until now), one also needs to purify the heart, and this is mainly done through Torah study, *davening*, and personal *hisbodedus*: talking to Hashem in one's own language and pouring out one's heart to Him, telling Hashem how much we want to feel Him and begging Him to purify us and open our hearts to feel Him. We need to remove ourselves from evil, cleaning off our souls from any evil acts that have dirtied our souls. After we have cleansed ourselves, our *neshamah* can then be revealed in all of its light, where it will sparkle like the beautiful gemstones worn on the breastplate of the *Kohen Gadol*.

Sod HaTaanug #4

Teshuvah is Simple

RAV ITCHE MEIR MORGENSTERN



“Hashem knows you very well and He recognizes exactly what your situation is. He knows exactly about the struggles and challenges that we find ourselves in, and for this very reason, He has given us the ability to perform teshuvah - to return to Him. This is the way by which we can cleanse our souls, fix all that needs to be fixed, and become clean and pure again.”

There is Always Hope!

At this point, you may be saying, “Nice. I’ve internalized that only connecting to the Creator is the true pleasure in life. The truth is that I have indeed felt this at some points in my life, and now I am beginning to understand what this is. But I have one problem. That last thing you said – that doing *aveiros* prevents me from feeling this true pleasure that is being described – has shattered me. I feel like everything is over for me, like all is lost, and there is no longer any hope.”

Hashem knows you very well and He recognizes exactly what your situation is. He knows exactly about the struggles and challenges that we find ourselves in, and for this very reason, He has given us the ability to perform *teshuvah* – to return to Him. This is the way by which we can cleanse our souls, fix all that needs to be fixed, and become clean and pure again.

It is actually very simple and easy to do *teshuvah*. Simply tell the Creator, “I made a mistake, a big mistake. I went after the falsity of the body’s desires and lusts, and now I see that I gained nothing from the – experiencing only bitterness from these empty acts. I regret doing these sins, and I am returning to You now. I am accepting upon myself to act according to Your guidelines.”

In truth, the Creator was with you all along. The moment He hears these words coming from you, He will be fully compliant to take you back and He will erase your past, enabling you to start fresh on a whole new page, where you will be able to forge a true bond with Him, a bond filled with pleasure and joy.

The *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) lies to you all the time, telling you that Hashem doesn’t want you, that He’s angry at you because of what you’ve done and that He has no desire for you, making it seem as if you have no chance of being close with Him. What is the truth? But the truth is that He always loved you and still does. If we fall into a sin, *chas v’shalom*, He is simply waiting for us to come back to Him.

The moment that a Jew re-connects with Hashem and begins to take his first steps towards Hashem, Hashem will accept his *teshuvah*, and from that point onward the person will live a life of truth, a life of

closeness with Him. But we need to believe in Hashem's great compassion, exhibited in the fact that He has given us the power to do *teshuvah* and return to Him. When a Jew returns to Hashem and truly regrets his past, accepting upon himself to begin living a truthful life, Hashem erases all *aveiros* that the person did and He turns it all into something good for the person.

The Pleasure of Emunah In Hashem

When a person lives connected to Hashem, aside from the fulfillment and enjoyment he will get out of living a truthful life for his *neshamah*, he will also be filled with constant joy.

Everything that he will go through, and everything that he has already gone through, can now be seen with a new perspective: It is all for the best!

He can now be filled with a confidence and a deep sense of peace which stems from his knowledge that Hashem sustains everything in the universe, that He's doing everything, and that nothing in Creation exists independent of Him.

Living in this way will enable you can be calm and happy, knowing that whatever happens to you is all from the Creator, and everything He does is good, and even when something appears to be bad, it's only because we have limited vision and we can't see how it's all for the best. However, in the end, we will realize how it was all completely good.

Sod HaTaanug #5

Serenity in the Darkness

RAV ITCHE MEIR MORGENSTERN



“We need to know that there can always be pleasure in serving the Creator. Consciously serving Him and being close to Him inherently gives us pleasure. It is only that there are different kinds of pleasure in serving Him, experiences we should get used to and learn how to identify.”

When Life Gets Difficult

Perhaps one might ask: “It’s true that serving Hashem is generally enjoyable and pleasure-filled. But what about when times get difficult? What about when there’s no yearning and no enthusiasm, when we don’t feel any pleasure or light in serving the Creator?”

We need to know that there can *always* be pleasure in serving the Creator. Consciously serving Him and being close to Him inherently gives us pleasure. It is only that there are different kinds of pleasure in serving Him, experiences we should get used to and learn how to identify.

The first experience is a very clear kind of pleasure, one in which the pleasure is easily felt. This is when we experience light, satisfaction and fulfillment. An experience filled with this kind of pleasure affords us sublime pleasure and joy, giving us a feeling of tangible connection to Hashem. It succeeds in exciting us, each on our own level.

In order to more easily attain this awareness and experience the pleasure in our mitzvos, we need to do certain exercises that bring us into the recognition that we are always surrounded by Hashem. For example, when we are putting on a *tallis* in the morning, we should stand in our place for a few seconds and concentrate on the idea that being surrounded by a *tallis* is representative of our being surrounded by Hashem’s light, for being wrapped by a *tallis* is a hint that we are always wrapped in Hashem’s light, love, and protection – and that we are now absorbing this feeling within us.

However, if a person is always looking to experience tangible pleasure, he will find avodas Hashem to be very difficult when the pleasure disappears. Any light we feel in our lives will always appear, only to then disappear again. If there is certain pleasure at every moment, then by definition we cannot feel the pleasure because, being constant, it will no longer be enjoyable. That is why pleasure comes and disappears, so that we will long for it, experiencing renewal and freshness when it is felt once more.

Therefore, we should not be dependent on our experience of pleasure. Rather, when we don't feel pleasure, it is important to work hard even when we aren't finding pleasure, to serve Hashem even though we don't feel the light.

Finding Hashem Amidst Difficulty

However – and this is the most important point – we need to learn how to find light even in the darkness. Hashem's light is always present, and although we don't always feel it, it is only our subjective feelings which change because Hashem's light is revealed in different ways. But His light is always there, constantly. During times of darkness, when one can no longer feel any overt pleasure in his avodas Hashem, he needs to be aware of a different kind of pleasure that isn't as obvious: pleasure that isn't tangibly felt. This is a deeper kind of pleasure, a feeling that comes from deep within the *neshamah*. When a person becomes aware of this and thinks about what it is, he can find taste the pleasure in it. What does it feel like? It is a deeper sense of serenity, which comes from very deep within the Jewish soul.

This feeling is able to be accessed at times when one doesn't feel any desire for anything, when darkness and bitterness fills one's life. That is when he should arouse the deep inner pleasure from within himself, simply by thinking about it and focusing his awareness on it, whereby it becomes revealed. This inner pleasure is founded upon the mind's awareness that, "Hashem is with me, in any difficulty, and I am intrinsically connected with Him – regardless of what I am doing or not doing, feeling or not feeling, right now." It is the awareness that, "By dint of my very existence, I am together with Hashem, and He revitalizes me every moment."

When you experience spiritual darkness, try to become aware of the fact that Hashem is with you, and also say it verbally, again and again: "My Father, I know You are with me – even though I don't feel it." Keep deepening your awareness of what you are saying. With time, you will eventually be able to actually feel that sweet, heavenly feeling – *Hashem is with me!*

After first becoming intellectually aware of this in your mind, you will then be able to feel it. You will feel close to Hashem and recognize the way in which your closeness with Him is completely unconditional, not dependent on any factor. You will arrive at the point where you can literally feel Him, with no barriers separating you from Him – *"Me and Him, alone.*

Sod HaTaanug #6

Elevating Physicality

RAV ITCHE MEIR MORGENSTERN



“In order to succeed in enjoying physical pleasure properly and elevating our physical pleasures by bringing Hashem into the picture, a great deal of Heavenly assistance is required. In general, there are three fundamental keys in elevating physical pleasure.



The Pleasure Of Overcoming Bodily Lusts & Cravings

Finally, let's talk about the pleasure in overcoming bodily cravings and urges. This is commonly referred to as the pleasure of self-control. Even when it's hard for us to overcome a bodily urge or craving, our soul feels happy and fulfilled when we overcome the craving that the body wants. A person can feel a great inner whenever he overcomes any bodily urges, cravings, desires, or lusts. Certainly, self-control is challenging and requires effort on our part, but this doesn't contradict the pleasure that we can feel deep inside as a result of not giving in to the body's urges. Outwardly, it may feel difficult to overcome the desire. However, inwardly, our soul is rejoicing at how we are succeeding to overcome the desire. It is this satisfaction which our soul truly desires.

A proof to this is that after a person has put great effort into overcoming a bodily desire or craving and succeeds, he feels a tremendous sense of fulfillment, an awesome and wonderful light. The Torah's ways are "*ways of pleasantness*". The pleasantness of following the Torah isn't always easy. While it is a very deep inner feeling of enjoyment, no one said it was going to be easy. Still, no matter how difficult the struggle to overcoming the body's various urges may be, there is always a deeply pleasant feeling that sets in after the battle is won, an inner serenity that follows. This deep feeling tells us: "You have done the best possible thing for yourself, and that it was worth it to overcome the urge, because by overcoming the body's desire, you have done what you needed to do."

Living A Life of True Pleasure

Truly serving Hashem means that one is able to find a deep pleasure in every situation – not only when you feel the light and how sweet and pleasant our connection to Hashem is, but even when things are tough and one isn't feeling tangible pleasure. When you have achieved this level, you can still know that in every situation, Hashem is with you and doing what's best for you. When you know that Hashem is

with you in every situation, this itself fortifies your connection and relationship with Hashem, and that is true pleasure.

This knowledge will give you the emotional strength to endure difficult times with serenity and joy, for you will be aware that Hashem is with you at all times and He never abandons you for a single moment. Any difficulty you find yourself faced with is simply a test. *It is precisely through the difficult times that you can get even closer to the Creator.*

Turning Physical Pleasures Into Holiness

Although the main pleasure we need to experience is the pleasure of the soul which enjoys only closeness with Hashem and the pleasantness that comes from enjoying Torah and mitzvos, we need to have the proper perspective on physical pleasures which are an inevitable reality in our lives.

As a rule, all physical pleasures that are *permitted* by the Torah are good and fine for us to enjoy – if we are using these physical pleasures as a tool in serving Hashem. If we only ingest physical pleasures without ever infusing these experiences with any meaning, and think that we are simply supposed to be enjoying these pleasures, this leads us into a life devoid of meaning, and the physical pleasures will cause us to abandon our relationship with Hashem.

But if we realize that all pleasures are powered by the G-dly light that sustains them, we merit to uncover the inner layer of pleasure. When we feel pleasure in eating food, for example, we should understand that the pleasure we are feeling is only because there is a G-dly light that is being clothed by the food, *and that the real pleasure is the G-dly light, not the food.* When we have this kind of thinking, we elevate the physical pleasure of food.

It all depends on what our thoughts are. Before engaging in a physical act of pleasure, and during the act of the pleasure as well, we should be aware that any pleasure we experience in these acts is the Creator's light contained within the physical pleasure. As we enjoy permitted physical pleasures, we can learn how to direct our thoughts and channel them into focusing on the G-dly light clothed by the physical pleasure. In that way, we can transform all physical pleasures into a state of attaching ourselves with Hashem.

To the extent that our thoughts are holy and attached with Hashem as we engage in permitted physical pleasures – such as by feeling gratitude to Hashem that He allows us to feel these pleasures – so will we succeed in elevating and sanctify these physical pleasures, turning them into acts of holiness and transforming the physical pleasure into spiritual pleasure. The main thing to be aware of during all physical pleasure is the necessity of feeling the presence of the Creator amidst the pleasure.

In order to succeed in enjoying physical pleasure properly and elevating our physical pleasures by bringing Hashem into the picture, a great deal of Heavenly assistance is required. In general, there are three fundamental keys in elevating physical pleasure:

(1) Engaging in physical pleasures only to the extent that we need. If we take even a little bit more pleasure than we actually need, we become drawn into the external world of empty physical pleasure.

(2) Elevating our thoughts during acts of physical pleasure. For example, feel grateful to Hashem as you are enjoying the pleasure. The more pleasure you are enjoying, the more grateful you should feel to Hashem that He is allowing you to feel pleasure.

(3) Engaging slowly in the physical pleasure. For example, eat slowly. When a person is enjoying his food and eating quickly, it is because he is getting pulled further and further into the physical desire of the eating. If he would eat slower and more calmly, he would be able to regain control over his thinking process as he's eating and thereby enter into the inner layer of the pleasure: to feel the pleasure of experiencing G-dly light (*nitzotz Eloki*) as he's eating.

The only ones who truly enjoy life on this world are those who serve Hashem. It is those people who are with Hashem at all times and connected to Him even as they experience the physical pleasures on this world – the only true pleasure that can be found in life.

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