

Joy and Awe in the Service of Hashem

Introduction

We present here some basic ideas on how to attain the two constant types of awareness and feeling for Hashem that every Jew lives with- joy in Hashem's service and being in His presence, and awe and respect before Him.

This article was originally written by ר' יעקב אל מנחם רפא ע"ה, one of the mashgichim of Yeshiva Tomchei Temimim 770 for many years.

How to attain awe and fear of Hashem

What will be brought now is a detailed description of how to think through the basic ideas that will bring a person to this awe and fear of Hashem, as explained in chapter 41 and 42 of Tanya. This will then lead into how it can be applied to having joy and happiness in His service:

Three ideas from chapter 41 and 42 of Tanya

To come to the fear of Hashem one should first learn what it says in chapter 41 and 42 of Tanya until the following three points are clear:¹

- 1- That Hashem “fills” all of the worlds at the same time that He “transcends” all worlds. What does this mean? That Hashem who is infinite and has no limitations at all, not of time, not of space, and not of spiritual levels—this Infinite Hashem who no thought can grasp at all He is the one who is personally creating and giving life to every created being and to every detail of my personal life. Thus, at the same time that He transcends all limitations and definitions, He is present and found and creating and giving life (“fills”) in everything in the world and in everything in my personal life.
- 2- That this Infinite Hashem who transcends and fills everything, He put aside caring about all the lofty spiritual worlds and decided from His own free will to choose to care about the Jewish people in general and me personally. He cares about what we do not only because He wants us to be good people, but He made His Kingship and His ultimate plan for which He created everything completely dependent on our actions. (This is the difference between a dictator and a king: a dictator doesn't need anyone accept him since he forces himself on the people, a king however needs the people to accept him as their king before he can rule over them.) He is waiting for each and every Jew individually to crown Him as their personal King and to dedicate him or her self to fulfilling His will and completing His plan of having a dwelling place in our lives.

¹ These three points are the main points mentioned in the beginning of chapter 41.

- 3- That this Infinite Hashem who transcends and fills everything, and who is my personal King who cares about everything I think, say, do, and even feel in my heart, He is standing over me and watching me and examining everything I do and feel.

Two analogies to understand how Hashem is watching us

How can I imagine Him standing here when He has no body (and my physical mind can't tangibly imagine an abstract concept)? Furthermore, how can I imagine Him watching and listening to me when He has no physical eyes or ears? In chapter 42 of Tanya the Alter Rebbe answers by giving two analogies:

1- The first analogy:

A person has a head and a body. The head feels everything that happens in the body—even in the toenails—without using the eyes or ears at all. Rather, since all of the life in the body comes from the brain² the brain automatically feels and is aware of all of the parts of the body that receive life from it (that's why if G-d forbid some part of the body loses its connection to the brain it can't be felt anymore.) So too and much more so since Hashem is giving life to everything including me He automatically feels and is completely aware of everything He is creating and giving life to. Obviously by Hashem this awareness of His creations is much more powerful and penetrating than the way that the brain is aware of the body, since the brain isn't creating the body, it's just giving life and managing the body. Hashem, however, is actually creating everything from nothing and is completely involved in every detail of what He is making (but He isn't affected by that involvement at all, since His creative power is part of His limitlessness, and so He can't be limited to being affected by the created beings since He has no limitations at all). Hence, His awareness of everything in general and of my personal life in particular is infinitely more powerful and penetrating than—not only my ability to perceive things outside of me, but more so than—my own self-awareness.

2- The second analogy:

Just as when a person is scared of a king (or any great person) he isn't scared of his physical body but of his soul that is invested in the body. The proof is that when the person is sleeping he isn't scared of him since his soul isn't manifested (how much more so that a one isn't scared of a person after he passes away since then the soul isn't manifest at all even though the body could be completely intact). It's just that by physically looking at the other person's body this triggers the spiritual awareness of his mind to recognize that there is the soul of another person (or great person or king) there. Thus, his fear that comes from (being in the presence of and) physically looking at king is really that his mind is aware that there is the soul of a king invested in a physical body with clothing etc. but from the body itself he wouldn't be scared. Thus, his physical sight is only a trigger for a spiritual awareness of the person's soul from which he is scared. So too, if a person realizes that the heaven and the earth and everything therein are only expressions of Hashem's creative power and life-force that He invests in them, he can come to realize that he is always in Hashem's presence.

² More specifically, from the soul and through the brain, see Tanya chapter 2 and 51.

These two analogies are each bringing out a different depth: The first is bringing out the depth of how much (how powerfully) Hashem is aware of us more than we are aware of ourselves, and the second is bringing out how all-encompassing this awareness of Hashem should be to the extent that everything in existence is telling us that Hashem is here.

Fear of Hashem at least as much as of a person

These two analogies are also expressed in the idea that Raban Yochanan ben Zakai told his students: “You should be afraid of Hashem as much as of a person. I will prove it to you—because when a person wants to sin he says ‘I hope no one is looking’.” What he was saying is that just like a person feels a certain amount of embarrassment in the presence of another person who can see him doing or saying something inappropriate, so too if person were aware that Hashem is present [as explained in second analogy] and sees what He is doing and saying (and thinking and feeling, since Hashem sees thoughts and feels as clearly as He sees actions and words) [as explained in first analogy] he should feel embarrassed even if he doesn’t understand the true greatness of Hashem.

Thinking it over before davening and throughout the day

After one has thought through all of the above at length (a few times, not necessarily but better if before davening), then every day before davening a person should say over the first 11 lines of chapter 41 and think through in short all three points as they are brought out in those 11 lines. Then, throughout the day one should think over even more in short the basic idea that “*Vehinai Hashem Nitzav Alav*—Behold, Hashem is standing over me, and the whole world is full of His glory, and He is watching me and examining my mind and heart to see if I am serving Him properly.”³ This shorthand reflection should be repeated throughout the day as many times as necessary, especially when the yetzer hara comes to bother us. The main thing is that this recognition of being in Hashem’s presence should never leave us for even one second.

This idea of thinking over many times throughout the day that *Vehinai Hashem Nitzav Alav* is something that the Rebbe told everyone—from young adults to elder chassidim and everything in between—as a method to stay focused in serving Hashem, as related by Rabbi Gurary.⁴

This idea the Rebbe referred to when explaining the pasuk (Tehillim, 42:4): “My tears were my bread, when they said to me all day long ‘Where is Hashem?’” The simple meaning is that David Hamelech’s enemies say to him all day long ‘Where is Hashem (to save you from us)?’ The deeper meaning is that we are being asked: Where is your awareness of Hashem all day long? Are you aware of Him when you are eating, at work, on the street, or in bed? Or is it only in shul by davening that you are aware of Him?!⁵

Summary of attaining fear of Hashem

To summarize in three steps:

³ The same way this pasuk is brought as the 6th of the 12 pesukim for children to memorize and say daily.

⁴ And printed in “the Chassidisher Derher” for Iyar of this year (5775).

⁵ Likutei sichos vol 1 p. 149, vol 4 pp. 1281-3.

- 1- Learn chapter 41 and 42 of Tanya well and think them through at length a few times (better if before davening) and **every once in a while to go over the ideas at length again.**
- 2- Every day say first 11 lines of chapter 41 of Tanya and think through in short the three point explained at length above.
- 3- **Many times throughout the day** (especially before mincha and maariv) and whenever the yetzer hara comes at us to think through the pasuk *Vehinai Hashem Nitzav Alav* that Hashem is right here and watching me.

Rejoicing of being in Hashem's presence

We now come to the idea that when the Rebbe said to think this over throughout the day it wasn't just to come to fear Hashem. The Rebbe said on different occasions that this was also to have *simcha*- to be happy to know that Hashem is here taking care of me, to not worry (for the same reason), to not be lazy (since Hashem is here watching me I have to move energetically to fulfill His will etc.).

For example, see the following excerpt from a letter⁶:

"It is also proper that you should learn by heart from the holy book of the *Tanya*, from the beginning of chapter 41 until the beginning of the next page by the word "*hamelech*". You should think over the following ideas: Hashem is standing over you, and He who is the essence of all goodness has guaranteed that someone who comes to purify himself will be helped to do so, and when a man sanctifies himself a little bit in this world then they sanctify him much more so from above, when he will contemplate on these ideas then surely his worries will get smaller and be released from him until they will be completely nullified, since we are commanded to serve Hashem with joy and gladness of the heart, as is explained in many places."

In other words- this is an all-encompassing awareness of being in Hashem's presence that we need to have the entire day which will push us to not rebel against Him and to serve Him happily and with enthusiasm.

Story

There is a story told (I can't verify if it's true) of R' Mendel Futerfas. He had a custom of immersing in the lake as a mikve during the time he was in Siberia. During the winter he would break a hole in the ice to immerse. One day during the winter he undressed to immerse in the hole in the ice and when he came out he realized that someone had stolen his clothing. Not having any clothing during the winter in Siberia (especially while wet) meant certain death. When he thought over his situation he came to the following conclusion: "Until now I had

⁶*Igros Kodesh* Vol. 18 pp. 126-7, see also vol. 17 letter 6,376 expressing a similar idea.

something, I had clothing, now I have nothing besides for Hashem Himself!” He was so happy at this realization that he was able to focus only on being with Hashem Himself without any physical distractions at all (literally) that he started to dance! One of the fellow inmates saw someone without clothing on dancing on the lake and immediately told one of the guards to put him in a nice warm insane asylum, thus saving his life.

Whether or not this story actually happened, it could have happened, and the lesson is the same—the happiness of being in the presence of Hashem Himself is so true and real that it can save our lives spiritually and physically. All we need to do is realize and remember that He is with us.

Simcha Shel Mitzvah

In addition to the idea of *simcha* that comes from being in Hashem’s presence, there is a deeper level of *simcha* that comes from fulfilling the mitzvos. In the *maamar* of *Samach Tesamach* 5657 (of the Rebbe Rashab) he explains at length the greatness of *simcha shel mitzvah*. We know the teaching of the Arizal (brought in *Tanya* and throughout Chassidus) that the meaning of the *pasuk* “Because you didn’t serve Hashem with joy and gladness of heart from all good things (*Meirov Kol*) you will serve your enemies.” He explains that when it says “from all good things” (*Meirov Kol*) it means that our joy in His service should be more than the joy of all good things in the physical and spiritual world. Meaning, we should realize that everything in the physical world is like nothing compared to the lowest level of Gan Eden, and all of the levels of Gan Eden are only like one ray of light from the mitzvos that we perform in this world (*Yafa Shaa Achas Shel Teshuva Umaasim Tovim Baolam Hazeh Mikol Chayeい Olam Haba*).⁷ This is because through the mitzvos we connect to the Essence of Hashem Himself who completely transcends any spiritual understanding of Gan Eden or the like. The Rebbe Rashab⁸ extends this idea as follows: the enjoyment and happiness a person can have from understanding about Hashem is limited to a certain level of the person—his mind. Whereas the joy that a Yid has in connecting to Hashem’s Essence is connected to the very essence of his being—his *Yechida*—and therefore is completely unlimited. He goes on to say that even though *kabalas ol* is also essential for the fulfillment of the mitzvos, but this *simcha shel mitzvah* is even deeper and more accomplishing than the *kabalas ol*.⁹

In the *sicha* of *parshas Ki Seitzei*, the Rebbe¹⁰ brings down this *maamar* to show that specifically this type of *simcha* has the power to will bring Moshiach, since only this unlimited type of *simcha* that comes from our very essence has the power to reveal the very Essence of Hashem in the third Beis Hamikdash with the coming of Moshiach!

Simcha to bring Moshiach—Simchas Hageula

⁷ See *Tanya*, chapter 4.

⁸ Both in *Samach Tesamach* 5657 and the end of *Hemshech Rosh Hashana* 5665.

⁹ When it comes together with the *kabalas ol*, since there can’t be *simcha shel mitzvah* without first having the *kabalas ol*.

¹⁰ In *Sichas Parshas Ki Seitzei* 5748

In that *sicha* the Rebbe goes on to say that it isn't enough to have the *simcha shel mitzvah* as just something secondary to the fulfillment of the mitzvos, there has to be a special emphasis on the *simcha* itself as something important for its own sake. Meaning, that besides for working on fulfilling the mitzvahs with *simcha*, we should make a special effort just to work on being happy that we are Jewish and connected to Hashem. We should work to have a real feeling of happiness until we actually feel happy (to the point that it is contagious).

In addition to being happy that we are Jewish and connected to Hashem, we should be happy by realizing that any second Moshiach will actually come and we will be redeemed from galus. The Rebbe says that it is very hard to come to such a feeling of happiness while we are still suffering in galus, but that Hashem gives us special powers to overcome the sadness and experience actual happiness in the imminent arrival of Moshiach. If we think into the fact that the Jewish people already finished all of the work they had to do in galus, and even polished all of the buttons etc. and literally any second we will be redeemed, and we should expect him to come any second, then we can develop such a *simchas hageula* mindset.

Two Constants

These two ideas—the fear of Hashem and joy in His service should be constantly on our minds. This is brought out in a *sicha* for Purim Katan¹¹ where the Rebbe mentions that there are two *Temidin*—“constants”: The first is (*Tehillim*, 17:8): “I have placed Hashem before me constantly.” Meaning that we are constantly aware that Hashem is with us and watching us and we should fear Him. The second is (*Mishlei*, 15:15): “A good hearted person is constantly rejoicing.” This is referring to constantly rejoicing in the service of Hashem. These two aspects are constant—they need to be with us every second of our life and every second of the day, even when we are sleeping. These two ideas merge into one unified mindset and are both a result of the reflection on the fact that Hashem Himself is literally here now with us, watching us, and taking care of us, and guiding us through life. This is why a person has to think this over constantly to remind himself of this throughout the day.

Conclusion

If we will guide ourselves to create that mindset which leads to the fear of Hashem and joy in His service, it will have a transformative effect on ourselves and our surroundings, and hasten the coming of Moshiach may we see him speedily, right now!

¹¹ *Likutei sichos* vol. 26, pages 209–11.