

Elevating Ourselves Through the Materialism

In this week's Parsha, Rabbeinu Bachya shares with us a fascinating insight into the interplay between the body and the soul. Yitzchok calls Esav and says, "Now, I have aged; I know not the day of my death. Now sharpen, if you please, your gear- your sword and your bow- and go out to the field and catch game for me. Then make delicacies for me such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die." (27:2-4). It is clear from the Pasuk that a prerequisite for blessing Esav, was Yitzchak indulging in delicacies that he loves. This connection seems counterintuitive and requires further clarification.

The Rabbeinu Bachya explains this connection, noting that Yitzchak's intentions were not for personal pleasure, rather his ultimate goal was to achieve spiritual ecstasy. Yitzchak understood that by strengthening the senses of the body, the soul becomes awakened and the natural joy is brought out, and through that joy one can attain a state of Ruach Hakodesh and prophecy. The Rabbeinu Bachya further states, that this concept is expressed by our Sages (Shabbos 30b) when they say, "The divine presence does not rest through laziness or sadness, rather through happiness." From this Rabbeinu Bachya we can extrapolate a few insights into the workings of the soul. It seems that the state of happiness experienced by the soul, is a direct result of awakening

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the soul, with no other contributing factors. As we live in a society that is in constant pursuit of happiness, this thought is rather comforting. The realization that joy is innate and is a natural state of the soul, can have far reaching ramifications. Instead of asking what will make us happy, the question should shift to how can we release our inner self? In addition, we see how interwoven the body and soul really are. In the aforementioned situation, Yitzchak was not merely asking Esav for food because he was weak and needed physical strength. He requested delicacies as a means to alert the soul. The body and the soul are so intertwined that the state of the body automatically impacts the soul. Furthermore we see that the indulgence in delicacies for the right reasons, will not only not detract from our spirituality, but it can actually enhance it.

This positive perspective on materialism is extended further by the Rabbeinu Bachya. He asks, if Yitzchak's goal was to reach a state of happiness in order to achieve a prophetic state, why didn't he use the method commonly used by all prophets, which was accomplished through music? He answers that Yitzchak was trying to gain an additional merit for his blessing to come to fruition. He was using the system of מדה כנגד מדה. Since the blessings he wished to bequeath were for materialism, he wanted the cause for his joy to be from something physical and materialistic. It seems that even though Yitzchak was given the power to give blessings, it is possible that other factors could hinder the blessing from being successful. Perhaps if the recipient is unworthy this would create a limitation to the blessing. Therefore Yitzchok felt it necessary to tap into another system of מדה כנגד מדה, as an extra way to be entitled to his blessings being successful. We can learn from here that using the material world as a means to elevate our spirituality can generate more merit to attain materialism.

Often people view spirituality as a state that is completely divorced from the physical world. Luxuries and delicacies are seen as the ultimate detractors to a spiritual life. However, the above teaches us that when used properly, earthly delights can be used as a means to attain the highest levels of spirituality.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לרפואה שלמה רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה