

The Psychology of Emunah

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The human being is composed of body and soul, mind and heart. As one observes the human condition, he can't help but to realize that for the best motivation and functioning, all of these elements must be actively involved and their needs satisfied. Addressing the needs of the body without addressing the needs of the soul, leaves the human in a condition disturbed by a spiritual emptiness that frustrates, and often depresses the individual. The opposite is also true. When the needs of the body are not fulfilled, even with spiritual fulfillment, the bodily cravings disturb the total human balance. This is often true not only for neglected bodily needs, but even for some unfulfilled bodily desires.

The same applies to the mind and the heart. They must work together in order for a person to fully accept, believe or even properly carry out a directive emanating from one or the other. Many people mistakenly believe that the mind has a "mind of its own" and don't realize that the heart, the emotions and through them the body, often have overwhelming influence on what we call intellectual decisions.

What this means is that our religious beliefs and convictions are not based on intellectual understandings alone but rather are strongly and often overwhelmingly influenced by the biases and desires of the body and the heart. Thus, if our goal is to inspire and inculcate belief, knowledge and conviction we must use an approach that appeals at least as much to the body and heart as it does to the mind and the soul. Even before a person begins to consider the truth of a religious claim, he must have some positive motivation for body and heart to want to recognize that reality. If he does not, it likely will not really penetrate intellectually. He might just not focus, he might rationalize or he might openly fight it. Either way he is not a very receptive audience and will likely utilize various defense mechanisms to ward off the influence of even the most powerful arguments. In fact the more powerful the intellectual argument is, the harder he may fight to resist its strength.

This does not in any way detract from the crucial need and importance of the intellectual arguments. Even with strong motivation, without the intellectual information he will be lost, with no idea where to go with his motivation. Besides, if convictions are based on emotion, he can wake up one day and think maybe there is something out there that can be even more fulfilling for my body and heart. Therefore, one must have both the emotional and intellectual insights to maintain a real, true, truly meaningful and lasting commitment to religious convictions.

This is true even for light religious commitment, in religious doctrine that doesn't demand much of a person. How much more so, a religious doctrine as demanding as is Torah MiSinai. Therefore to inspire the acceptance of the truth of Torah MiSinai, it requires, besides for extensive exposure and familiarity with the testimony and evidence that is very intellectually compelling, extensive work to appreciate the beauty, relevance, benefits and source of pleasure and true happiness that Torah and a life of Torah and Mitzvos reliably provide for its adherents.

It goes without saying that Chazal were keenly aware of this aspect of human psychology, as they were of

everything in creation. And, the Torah and Chazal addressed these concerns in numerous ways, to assure that Klal Yisrael is capable of overcoming the obstacles that are referred to above, which exist as challenges to allow us to earn the benefits of Torah living, rather than having it come easily. In truth, this is not just an issue for Kiruv and influencing those with shaky commitments. We see from the Torah itself and from Chazal that this issue is relevant to all and an ongoing, endless challenge for a lifetime.

When Moshe Rabbeinu addressed Klal Yisrael before his passing he tells them "*veyadata hayom vehasheivosa el levavecha ki Hashem who HaElokim*". The Targum explains that it means that you should know today and return it to your heart that Hashem is G-d. Why does he have to tell the generation that lived with constant miracles to return it to your heart? They just ate the *Man* for breakfast, and they lived in *Ananei Hakavod*, how could they have lost it? The answer is that the proper realizations of Hashem and His Torah are constantly contested by the *Yetzer Hara*. Even spiritual giants need to review this knowledge again and again to maintain their own level of knowledge and spiritual achievement.

We all beseech Hashem daily "*v'sen b'libeinu l'havin ul'haskeel*". We ask for the ability to understand to be placed in our hearts. The heart is an active participant in our understanding and if our heart is not primed to understand we won't be able to "listen, to learn and to teach."

Chazal tell us "*Emes veyatziv d'oraisah*". In those words that we say daily, we remind ourselves and repeat the concepts that the basic tenets of *Yahadus* are true and beloved and good and beautiful. Everyone needs daily, repetitive reminders of the fact that Torah is good and it is true. The realization of one without the other leaves a serious void.

We see from *Rashi* in *Parshas Yisro* that before Hashem began to tell us what he expects of us, He begins by reminding us of His *Chesed* that He did for us in *Mitzrayim*. From the *Mechilta* that the *Ramban* brings there, it seems that there must be a *Kabala* of *Malchus Shamayim*, before we are focused on the specifics of the demands. Because if we were focused on the specifics of the burden it would be very difficult to keep the *Mitzvos*. Once however, we have a general *Kabala* then it is much easier to observe the obligations. That's why, in the *Mashal* of the *Mechilta*, the king tells the people who asked for laws "if you don't accept my kingdom how will you be able to keep my laws." They asked for the laws, but even so, if they had heard the laws before making an abstract *Kabala*, the king says they won't be able to keep the laws. They will be too overwhelming. Serious demand and obligation are heavy burdens and therefore need psychological efforts to soften the burden.

Most people know that Judaism demands serious obligations. Those with yeshiva backgrounds certainly are keenly aware of it. For those that are weak in their commitments or going off the *derech*, this is a major factor. It must be mitigated by insights into an attractive, positive, relevant and loving Judaism that one can realize will make him welcome and most importantly, will make his life happy.

Happiness is the most desired and searched for state of being. More books, seminars, lectures, etc. are about finding happiness probably more than any other one topic. Yet, judging by the state of society, divorce rates, suicide rates, rates of addiction and the rates charged by mental health professionals, the world does not seem to be a very happy place. How could there be such a quest for happiness and so little success at its achievement? It may be because our society has a mistaken idea, or for some no idea at all, as to what constitutes happiness.

In *Lashon Hakodesh* the three letter *Shoresh* of the word indicates its meaning. "*Osher*" is possibly the highest form of happiness (Dovid Hamelech only wanted to sit in the house of Hashem and he calls that "*Osher*"). The three letter root, *alef shin reish*, references the concept of validation. Happiness is about feeling good about oneself, a feeling of validation. Many people think that pleasure is what happiness is all about. It's just the opposite. When

I rely on imbibing outside pleasure to feel good, it makes me feel bad about myself. I'm not good enough myself; I need outside factors to feel temporarily okay. That thought is personally very invalidating. If this most coveted state of being is about a feeling of validation, how can I possibly have that feeling of self-worth without a sense of purpose? If we don't know our true purpose, how valid and worthy can we feel?

If a person can come or be brought to this realization, he is now far more receptive to hear that the only one who could really know our true purpose is our Creator, our Maker. Our Maker has given us a manual in which He has revealed the true purpose of creation. We now are excited to know about creation and Divine revelation, because it can bring us true happiness.

This, however, is not enough. The difficulty of the burden often coupled with many other obstacles makes it almost imperative to introduce other elements into this process. The willingness to accept ideas, even testimony and evidence, is also a factor of the relationship between the giver and the receiver. The *Ralbag* in the *Toeliyos* in *Parshas Vayishlach* tells us that Yaakov sent a message and some gifts to melt the hatred of his brother Eisav. Eisav felt that Yaakov had fooled him twice already. Why would this show of friendship melt the heart of this mortal enemy? Maybe, once again, he's fooling him. It seems, that friendship and love are so powerful that even the possibility of them being real could melt the most stubborn resistance.

From the Rambam in *Hilchos Deios*, in reference to the Mitzvah of clinging to *Talmidei Chachamim*, it seems that the social relationship is more effective in creating a willingness to accept the truth of the *Chacham's* words, even more than sitting thirstily at his feet to imbibe each word. (See also *Rambam Sefer Hamitzvos* in that Mitzvah). Our relationship, love and friendship, with those who we wish to convince of the truth of *Torah MiSinai* and all of the compelling testimony and evidence that exists, is a very critical factor in the success of our efforts.

There is another important factor in assuring or enhancing success in this process and that is the benefits and personal relevance of Torah and Mitzvos. The *Sefer Hachinuch* was afraid to leave out the *Ta'am* and *Toeles* of one Mitzvah (the prohibition of bringing leaven and honey on the *Mizbeach*, see *Parshas Vayikra*). He writes there that he was afraid that his son and his friends would rebel and go off the derech if he left out the benefit and reason for even one of the 613 Mitzvos. In addition, we must be able to explain benefits that can be appreciated in the present, not just the distant future or the next world. People don't have the patience to wait too long for the benefits.

In general, knowing that the purpose of creation is to achieve human perfection through the observance of Mitzvos, which Hashem wants in order to be able to bestow upon us a kindness of which we will not be embarrassed, rather appreciate it, due to the fact that we earned it, is validating on two levels. We have a real true purpose and since that purpose is perfecting ourselves, we can feel good about making our own perfection, a very validating feeling.

There is another issue which is very relevant to this conversation. Truth is a very scary word and concept. When faced with truth there is very little room to maneuver. There is a tendency to fight the truth and put up defenses to protect ourselves from its overwhelming impact. Part of the natural state of man is the yearning to be free. Truth compromises his freedom and as such is a serious threat. This is all the more so when a person realizes that the truth of Torah is G-d given and therefore absolute. This remains a problem at least until one can appreciate that Torah, in reality, makes one truly free.

We must therefore be very careful in using the word truth or proof. These words evoke defenses and resistance. Truth should be presented in a gradual way, with the least powerful arguments presented first. Only after there is some adjustment to the possibility of facing truth, only then can stronger arguments be shown. Then they will be much more effective. Never say I'll prove it, an understatement works better to help bypass defense mechanisms.

It is also very critical to develop and agree upon a standard for truth. Otherwise, the person really has no context or measurement by which to evaluate truth and therefore can deny it or remain skeptical. People must be given to understand that any truth that we accept as truth is only established as such, beyond a reasonable doubt, not beyond the shadow of a doubt. We only need be as sure of anything as we are that our mother is our mother, beyond a reasonable doubt.

Even after implementing these strategies, the need to evoke an urge, a yearning for truth is very important. The ideas mentioned above about happiness, etc. should be linked with the concept of truth, to create an urge for truth. If my reasons for validation are not true, how valid can I feel? If the purpose that I believe is my purpose is not the truth, how validating can that purpose be? There are many other ways to evoke an urge for truth. For example, fooling your wife with a ring of cubic zirconia would be a fatal mistake. A relationship which is fake is very painful when discovered.

Everyone wants a relationship with the Creator, with the Boss. To really inspire an acceptance of the truth of *Torah MiSinai*, one must be able to see how that acceptance will bring him a passionate and uplifting relationship with his Creator.

The concept of a positive relationship with the Creator sometimes poses difficulty, despite the reality that most people would want such a relationship very much. People understand human relationships, with their interaction, give and take and communication. These elements seem lacking in a relationship with the Creator. Also, oftentimes people see the challenges and difficulties of life as a reflection of the Creator in a less than positive and kind attitude towards us and therefore it can interfere with a positive relationship. We must educate early on about Hashem's love, His Hashgacha Pratis and that everything that He does is for the best, even before people meet up with the difficult challenges. If they already have a positive concept of Hashem's love and kindness it will be easier to put challenges in a better perspective.

It is also important for the developing and maintaining of a relationship with Hashem, that the person not be overwhelmed with fear of Hashem. He is a merciful, kind and forgiving G-d, one should learn to trust Him to counterbalance the fear that one might have.

These are some of the issues in the psychology of Emunah that should precede any effort of convincing anyone of the truth of *Torah MiSinai*. If these strategies are put to proper use then a presentation of the unique system for the transmission of the testimony of eye witnesses to the miracles of *Mitzrayim* and the *Midbar*, will have far more profound and lasting effect. When to this is added the extensive evidence in the form of prophesies and scientific information that no human could have known at the time the Torah was written, the results will most likely be an acceptance of the truth of *Torah MiSinai* and an embracing of Torah and Mitzvos and it will most likely have a much better chance of lasting for a lifetime. Then, the goal of recognition, acceptance and lifelong commitment to a life of Torah and Mitzvos, based on a strong realization of its truth and relevance, will have been accomplished.

Some suggestions to help implement these ideas:

- Study of Shir Hashirim with Rashi
- Share extensive insights into the meaning of Tefillah, Bitachon and Hashgacha Pratis
- Discuss some of the specific benefits of Torah and Mitzvos
- Discuss the uniqueness of our claim versus that of other religions
- Present the testimony and evidence for the Revelation at Sinai