

Listen Up

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In preparation for Rosh Hashana, Breslovers always review a certain lesson in the month of Elul. Torah Vav, as it's called, discusses Rebbe Nachman's approach to Teshuva, returning to Hashem.

The Rebbe makes the following statement:

ה' אומר, "ה' אומר" – ה' אומר, "ה' אומר"

"The essence of Teshuva is to hear oneself being insulted and remain silent"

Simply understood, as has been said in this forum many times, returning to Hashem means aligning your will with His will. In order to align our will with His, we need to be the party that concedes. After all, His will is perfect and righteous. It's only our will, controlled by our ego, that's messing up the alignment and stuffing up the pipes of blessing that should flow down on us. This act of teshuva takes quite a measure of humility. Typically when someone is insulted by another, his

ego becomes unleashed. The Rebbe says that the blood in his heart boils from an insult. We need to turn the דם (the blood of the heart) into שתיקה (silence), by shutting our mouths when someone lays it on us real thick. Although it's a simple act, it's quite difficult to do. Overcoming the ego's blood-boil, can have majorly positive results on our character and also make big noise in Heaven.

When my wife, Yocheved, was learning this lesson, she questioned it's relevancy to those that are oppressed. Wouldn't such an avodah, of letting oneself be humiliated, be unhealthy for them? How can it be beneficial for someone who is abused, or even someone who feels abused, to allow himself to be ashamed?

One can easily answer that the Rebbe is only addressing someone who is emotionally stable and not a person who is suffering from legitimate abuse. Although this might be the case with another tzaddik, it's hard for me to believe that the super tzaddik (אברהם אבינו) that Rebbe Nachman was wouldn't address even the most unfortunate of us. I mean, that was what he was/is all about!

Yocheved had a great answer and a novel interpretation of this idea. The Rebbe doesn't say that the essence of teshuva is when you hear another insult you and remain silent. He says real teshuva is when you hear your own humiliation and remain silent. It's not as easy as we think to be truly honest with ourselves. Although we seem more ashamed before others than when we are in our own private space, we still hide from ourselves in the most humiliating situations.

It's hard to truly hear our own criticism. Even this generation, with all its openness and vulnerability, suffers from terribly low self-esteem. That's because we're afraid to be real about our most serious shortcomings. We're ashamed to even admit these things to ourselves. But how can one align himself with something else, if he's unaware of his true self?

And all the more difficult it must be to align with the source of all truth if we aren't truthful to ourselves.

We need to open our minds and ears to our souls' calling. We need to let go of our illusion of control and admit to ourselves who we really are. That's the essence of teshuva, it's coming back to the real you. Hashem already knows it anyways. It's only us that's still in the dark.

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