

Strong Like A Lion

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Once, when Reb Nosson, z"l, ran into Reb Meir of Teplik, z"l, he took the opportunity to ask Reb Meir about another man from Teplik. The fellow townsman had recently started coming to learn with Reb Nosson, and he wanted to know more about him.

Reb Meir answered in an offhanded manner—it was clear that he didn't think much of the man.

Reb Nosson protested, "Listen to me. If you view people in a critical manner you will end up denigrating the entire world. One who looks at others in a disparaging manner can literally start at one end of town and judge every Jew unfavorably. Eventually, you will conclude that no one is truly up to par. You are the only genuine Jew in the town."

“But I am also not the way a real Jew should be,” sighed Reb Meir.

The *Sefer Yetzirah* tells us that the astrological sign of the month of Av is the lion.

The Talmud tells us that when the sages disabled the evil inclination for idolatry, a lion of fire emerged from the holy of holies. Reb Nosson, z”l, explains that animal desires are alluded to by this lion as well. We don’t need to squelch these desires, but they must be sublimated to holiness and used for the good. For this reason, fasting is discouraged; nowadays, adopting additional fasts is forbidden aside from a few regulated exceptions. We are commanded to marry and have children—it is no mitzvah to avoid this relationship. Quite the contrary, this is one of the greatest *mitzvot*. It is how we partner with G-d and the highest manifestation of *tikkun habrit*—rectifying the covenant. Kabbalists explain that the letter *tet*—the letter associated with Av—alludes to *tov*, good; this good is also associated with *Yesod*, the rectification of the covenant.

Rebbe Nachman, z”l, teaches that the difference between using our material natures positively and negatively is not much quantitatively. After all, whatever one’s attitude, one acts the same. We need to eat. There is a mitzvah to procreate. But one’s primary focus is either on fulfilling G-d’s will or on selfish pleasure—that is where the difference lies.

“Strengthen yourself like a lion while serving the creator.” These words of our sages in *Avot* allude to overcoming the destructiveness of misused physical desire. In order to focus the inner lion of fire, we first must learn patience. We need to be happy with ourselves, with who we are right now, even as we yearn for so much more.

Dear G-d! Please show me that the very traits which cause me such distress are actually the path to true connection and

purity. Help me keep patiently yearning until You enable the slight adjustments of attitude and action and transform my negatives to advantages.