

Torah and Tefillah - Fresh perspectives from an FFBBT

Posted by Ben Moshe - 23 Jul 2009 14:08

Return to Torah

At first it will seem next to impossible. You will feel antsy and be unable to focus. You will barely be able to stifle your yawns. You won't be able to wrap your mind around a simple piece of shaklah vetaryah. But rejoice. That is the perfect raw material to work with. The tumah toxins inside you are screaming against the powerful chemo treatment of the samah de'chaya, the elixir of life. Focus, focus, focus. Drag yourself through the Gemmara, then Rashi, then Tosefos, then Maharsha. One hour. Two hours. Be brutal with yourself. No quick fixes of "acharonishe torahs." Memorize the shakla vetaryah. Think through it backwards, then forwards. Try to find flaws in the breathtakingly beautiful logic.

Do not learn the way you learnt way back when, in yeshiva or kollel, lackadaisically looking for the quick chidush fix. Learn with total and absolute focus, as if you are trying to decode the secret key to a million dollars. Let the sweat gather under your armpits and let a light buzzing fill your head, as you slowly, ponderously, with great effort, unlock the strands of Divine DNA within the Gemmara and within you. Do this night after night and early morning after early morning. Write down your kushyos. Take them to your local Rosh Yeshiva.

Consider the "drip-drip" of this daily regimen to be a vital part of your treatment. Know that it is building up your antibodies in small but steady increments and restoring your health. After a while compare before and after photos of yourself. Before: dead eyes, forced smile, deep sadness. After: twinkling eyes, warmth, attractiveness. Rejoice.

Your yetzer horah will still attack you, and is guaranteed to continue to do so till your very last breath, but almost immediately you will begin to notice the following:

1. Extremes that at one time glittered, now seem repulsive. They no longer interest you. You cannot imagine how you once embraced certain sewage up to your eyeballs.
2. The frequency that you fall will diminish. You will finally get a life outside your two-dimensional self-made gehinnom. You will feel and exhibit genuine warmth for your family and community.

Hashem has sent us an extraordinary blessing, the mp3 player. Switch off, for good, that radio in your car and your home. Wash your ears and starving mind with the beautiful sound of shiurim, downloaded to your mp3 player. Many times, especially when you are driving, you will not be able to focus on a shiur, but background noise is also fine because you will still be living in the Beis Hamedrash. You will be steadily rising, not sinking. Find a maggid shiur who speaks to your heart, who resonates emotionally, whose neshama resides in a holy place. Mix upbeat and non-threatening halacha shiurium with uplifting hashkafa and mussar. And here is a very important tip: Say your yetzer horah gets the better of you; you fall and go somewhere you shouldn't. There is no reason to sin while you are traveling there and back. What a bitul zman! Listen to a Torah shiur. Farkert! Show the yetzer horah that bit by bit you are taking over. You are on your way to winning, and winning big.

Chazak VeYe'ematz!

Return to Tefillah

You thought you had it all figured out. Hashem would forgive you for the stuff you had no control over, but you would keep everything else. A sweet deal. So you davened. You found the fastest minyan in the neighborhood. You came late and left early. You snuck into the back room to daven, sometimes the ezras noshim, sometimes the coatroom. Sometimes, in order to keep people off your track, it was a combination of all three. You were never sure what day of the week it was because, well, krias haTorah and shir shel yom did not appear to be me'akev. Eventually you figured out that pesukei dezimra is probably not me'akev too. Same for Uva Letzion. Ashrei, you did say, because chazal say that one who says Ashrei three times a day is a ben olam haba. You shook the words out of your mouth as fast as you could, while your mind was a million miles away. Of course, you couldn't daven at home, because that would give your wife a mistaken impression; she would think that she had married a bum.

You're not sure what the catalyst was. It was obviously sent by the One Above. One day you looked in the mirror and you saw...a complete loser. You saw pain in your own eyes. You contrasted yourself with the cheerful dedicated members of the minyan, and you suddenly felt very, very, lonely. You felt cut off from the healthy body of the Jewish nation. You made a decision to, come what may, create an inner revolution.

You sought out the most reputable minyan in town and began to daven there. A forty-five minute shachris? Shrek! Your legs felt like bolting towards the door ten times that first morning. Chazoras hashatz seemed interminable. You were not sure whether you were allowed to learn during chazoras hashatz, in order to distract yourself and relieve the tension. But you made it through to the painful end. You made through one week. Two weeks.

And now...

You are ramrod straight. You are in The Marines. The few. The elite. Chosen out of millions. A select group, honoring the Almighty each morning, without fail. You remain in full battle dress until after the last Kaddish. You allow yourself no excuse for tiredness, weakness of spirit or pressing work schedule. You take fierce pride in your allegiance and dependability. You feel camaraderie with the other loyalists who show up unflinchingly each day on time, rain or shine, troops in the brotherhood, links in a two-thousand year-old chain. You share a tikkun after davening. You thank the baal tefillah. You wish the rav a good day. You to wish mazeltov to the latest grandfather. You feel an unspoken acceptance and respect: "Ah! Now there goes a Baalebos vie es darft zein. Halevai bei mir!"

But your kavana during davening still leaves lots to be desired. Your spiritual baggage and handicaps play games with your mind. They dull your sensitivities. You are groping through a pea-soup fog of swirling mists, not able to connect no matter how much you try. You reach deep into your toolbox and, bechasei Hashem, come up with the following tools. You know that these tools will dull over time as you keep pedaling uphill, but you make a mental note to keep strengthening them, and coming back to them.

1) You purchase a siddur translated into your mamaloshon. As your lips mumble the well-worn words that have tripped effortlessly off the end your tongue since you were a child, your eyes scan the translated portion. ... "The G-d of our fathers"... "Forgive us"... Suddenly what you are saying become very, very real.

2) You use the precious time each day before davening to learn Torah beiyun; real iyun, with mental exertion. While you are doing this, you shut out your past, because now is not the time to brood over your bruised neshama. You are focused entirely on entering the zone of the spiritual, besimcha, and, when the curtain rises on davening, you are on your toes and ready. You ask the malochim to step aside, and you talk directly to Hakadosh Boruch Hu .

3) You study the meaning of "Yehei shmei rabbo...". It becomes your mantra. You say it with passion. Because, when all is said and done, this is what everything is all about.

4) Davening is over. You read the three tefillos printed in the siddur at the end of shachris; tefillos for teshuva, yir'as shomayim, and parnosso. You are a marathon runner, so you don't strain your emotions. You hold your emotions in check because you are in this for the long haul. You ask Hashem calmly and with humility. You kiss your siddur and leave shul, optimistically and confidently, and walk out into the bright sunlight of the morning.

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Re: Torah and Tefillah - Fresh perspectives from an FFBT
Posted by 7yipol - 23 Jul 2009 14:26

Ben Moshe,

I hope you dont mind that a woman is the first to welcome you.

And to thank you.

Your writing is poetry through prose.

Please keep sharing.

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Re: Torah and Tefillah - Fresh perspectives from an FFBT
Posted by bardichev - 23 Jul 2009 15:29

bm heliger tzaddik

welcome

bardichev

i need more yishuv hadaas to read your post bi-iyun

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Re: Torah and Tefillah - Fresh perspectives from an FFBT
Posted by Ben Moshe - 23 Jul 2009 16:09

Thanks for the welcome 7up and bardichev!

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Re: Torah and Tefillah - Fresh perspectives from an FFBT
Posted by 7yipol - 24 Jul 2009 10:20

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PLease keep your insights coming