

MIND AND HEART

By Rabbi David Algaze

“And Joseph said to them [the brothers], ‘Fear not, for am I instead of G-d? Although you intended me harm, G-d intended it for good...’” (Beresheet 50:19)

After a traumatic experience, when the brothers realize the enormity of their mistake and the pain they caused Joseph, they plead for mercy. They are afraid that Joseph would justifiably take revenge on them and they beg for forgiveness of their “spiteful deed.” Indeed, when they made the decision to sell Joseph into slavery, they had felt that they were justified in their action. They felt endangered by what they perceived was Joseph’s attitude and ambitions and worried that the plan to create the people of Israel from the twelve tribes would be disturbed. Nevertheless, now they saw their error and experienced profound guilt and terror.

Joseph reassures them, saying that, even if he wanted to harm them, he did not have the power to do it for everything is in G-d’s hands. As proof of this idea, he reminds them that they themselves had intended to harm him and yet they were not able to –this is incontrovertible proof that “everything is in G-d’s hands” (*hakol byide shamayim*). The question is why was it necessary for Joseph to teach his brothers such a fundamental concept that everything is in G-d’s hands? Surely, they—as spiritual leaders just as Joseph--knew and understood this fundamental concept. Moreover, why did Joseph feel that he needed to prove the point to them?

Rabbi Hensch Leibowitz, zt’l, the former Rosh Yeshiva of Hafetz Hayim, discovers in this exchange a very profound psychological insight. Joseph realized from the brothers’ conduct and deeds that—although they were aware of the concept intellectually-- in their hearts they did not feel the truth of this concept. In truth, no one can harm another unless G-d decreed that it be so. If they had accepted the concept fully that everything is in G-d’s hands, they would not have been afraid of Joseph.

In this exchange, we can see that the mind and the heart need not always be together. It is perfectly possible that a person will have a concept in his mind but act in a very different—and even contrary—manner. An intellectual acceptance may not

translate into a full emotional concurrence and someone may behave in a way that contradicts his own ideas. This is what Joseph perceived and it is for this reason that he gave them this brief “lecture.” Another lesson from this event is that sometimes we need to review even the most basic and simple concepts. In order to connect the mind to the heart, it is imperative that we study and contemplate the most basic concepts and not take them for granted. In this story, it is evident that although the brothers knew the concept of “everything is in G-d’s hands” well in their mind, they did not have full emotional grasp of the same notion. It is for this reason that Joseph felt he needed to remind them of this idea and even to prove it from their own experience.

We can learn from this that it is important that we review frequently the most basic ideas that we think are clear in our minds. The belief in G-d, the trust in His providence, the conviction that everything that happens to us is because of His will, that no one can really harm us if G-d does not will it and so on—all these ideas need to be looked at and re-examined often. The same may be said of our adherence to ethical concepts. We need to remind ourselves of the importance of truth, of not lying, of acting honorably and with honesty. We need to assess how much we respect others, how considerate we are and so on. As we evaluate our actions and our feelings, we will connect the concepts that reside in the mind as intellectual baggage with the emotions that direct our lives. The true power of Man lies in his ability to connect the mind and the heart and to bridge the intellectual force of an idea with the emotions of our heart. In this fashion, we will lead unified lives, without contradictions and with clarity that will lead us to a serene and peaceful life.

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