

Attaining the Spiritual

by Rabbi Y. Ashlag (1882-1955)

The spiritual - this is the Awakening from Above, then why is the Awakening from Below necessary?

As we hold, what must be done in order to merit the attainment of the spiritual, is beyond man's comprehension, because it is beyond human reasoning to grasp how could such a thing (to do something for it's own sake, i.e., without self-interest) exist in the world; and this is because everything that is given man to grasp should he busy himself in spiritual deeds, results in some sort of attainment, (and) necessarily he will gain some benefit for himself - for a man in not wont to do otherwise whatsoever. But the spiritual is the light that comes from above, and only he who tastes this, is able to know and to grasp, and about this it was taught "Taste it and see that the Creator is good".

If so, one should understand for the sake of what is it that prompts a person to seek strategies and counsels to help him attain the spiritual, is it not obvious that counsel is of no use, for if the Creator does not give him a second nature, called *desire to bestow*, a man's labor is useless when it comes to attaining the spiritual?

And the answer is, as the rabbi's taught (Avoth, Chap. 2, v. 21) "It's neither yours to complete the work, nor yours to free yourself entirely from it" - which means that it is encumbant upon man to contribute the Awakening from Below, that is prayer, for prayer is called *chisaron* (a deficiency, a need for something lacking), and without a lack there is no filling, therefore, as a person finds himself deficient in attaining the spiritual, then his lack is answered from above (in answer to his awakening from below, prayer), and then the answer to the prayer comes from above, i.e., he receives a fulfillment for his lacking; thus man's service is necessary in order to receive from the Creator the (manifestation of, aspect of) the spiritual, though it is only the manifestation of a deficiency and a vessel, and the filling, though attained by a person himself, it is a gift from the Creator.

Indeed the prayer needs to be a wholesome prayer, i.e., from the depths of the heart, which means that the person knows one hundred percent that there is absolutely no one in the world who can help him, but the Creator, Himself, and how does man know this - that there is no one who can help him, but the Creator, in His Honor and by Himself? - this knowledge is attained by a person specifically when having employed every possible means at his disposal and all to no avail; therefore, it is up to man to do everything possible, in order to merit to a manifestation of the spiritual. Then he is able to pray from the depths of the heart, and then the Creator hears his prayer.

However one needs to know that at the time one makes efforts to attain the manifestation of the spiritual, that he takes upon himself the desire to serve all for the sake of bestowal, for the sole purpose, i.e., all is just to bestow and not to receive anything for himself whatsoever, and only then he begins to see, that his limbs do not cooperate with his mind's purpose , and from this he is able to come to a clear understanding that he has no alternative but to pour out his heart to the Creator that He help him so that the body will cooperate and subjugate itself to the Creator without any conditions. As he realizes that it is beyond his control to persuade his body to surrender itself completely, then, precisely at that moment he realizes that there is no hope -- then his body agrees of its own accord to serve for the sake of the Creator; in this way his prayer is able to be from the depths of his heart and then his prayer is received.

And note that by meriting to a manifestation of the spiritual, he kills his evil inclination, for the evil inclination is the *desire to receive*, and by this, that he merits to attain the desire to bestow, he (simultaneously) nullifies the desire to receive and deprives it of any recourse, and this is considered as if he killed it, since being that the opportunity to transgress presents itself, and he has no recourse (to act from his desire to receive, i.e., his evil inclination) for he already discontinued any cooperation with it and discarded it from use; it is considered as if he killed it.

And when a man's soul takes an accounting (and asks) - "What did he gain from the hard labor that he labored so hard under the sun"; then he may see that it's not that difficult to subjugate himself to the Creator, (and this is) from two reasons:

1) whether he wants to or whether he does not want to, it's a foregone conclusion that he must labor (to achieve anything) in this world, and what is left to him from all of the hard work that he put forth?

2) if a man serves the Creator, he receives delight also at the time of his work, according to the parable taught by the Magid from Dubnov, (a legendary itinerant preacher who guided his listeners in the ways of good behavior), who taught about the verse "It was not me who called for Yakov, when you toiled for Me, Yisroel" saying that this is similar to the story of the merchant who stepped off the train with a small package and deposited it at the place where all the merchants leave their parcels; and then the porters came to transport the parcels and brought them to the hotel where the merchants were staying, and the porter thought that surely that such a small package would be carried over by the merchant himself, and no porter is necessary. Therefore, he took over a large parcel and the merchant wanted to give him a small sum as he was accustomed to give (for his small package), and the porter did not want to accept it, and he said I brought a large parcel into the hotel's storage room which tired me out very much, and with difficulty I dragged this parcel, and you want to give me a pittance for all this?

And this is analogous to when a man comes and says that he made great efforts in fulfilling God's will, The Blessed Holy One replies to him "It's not me that called for Yakov", i.e., you did not take my parcel -- this parcel must be someone else's, being that you say that you toiled much in Torah v'mitzvoth (wisdom and good deeds) surely there is another employer for whose sake you toiled, therefore go to him that he may pay you, and the verse's conclusion "when you toiled for Me, Yisroel" which is to say, whosoever would serve 'etzel' (in proximity, nearby) the Creator, he has no hard labor (to complain about), rather, on the contrary, delight and an exalted spirit are his, which is not the case for whomsoever serves for the sake of other objectives - he may not come with complaints to the Creator (saying) why didn't the Creator grace his service -- being that he did not serve the service of the Creator on account of which the Creator pays him for his service -- but that man can go with his complaint to those men, for whose sake he served, that they may bestow delight and life on him; and being that it was not *L'shma*, there are many (laborious) assignments, therefore a man must claim from that assignment for whose sake he served, that that assignment for whose sake he served give him his reward, i.e., delight and life, and on those (servants) the verse says "Like them (idols) will be those who make them, all that trust in them" (they who serve empty things will be left empty).

But according to this (above parable) a problem arises -- haven't we seen, even at the time that a man takes upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, without any other intention, and nonetheless he feels no life (enthusiasm at that time from his service), which we said that this (receiving delight and) life requires one to accept upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, and in this case he certainly accepted the yoke (albeit) only because of faith beyond reason, i.e., he did this by strength of force and not out of his goodness (desire to bestow, therefore he feels no enthusiasm or

inspiration in his service and on the contrary) there remains the question why does he feel the heavy toil in his service, so much so that the body continually seeks for the moment when it can release itself from this service, being that the man does not feel any life in this service and according to what we discussed above, at the time when a person serves modestly (without assuming some reward), he has no other aim but to serve on condition to bestow, if so, why does not the Creator bestow on him some taste and enthusiasm in his service?

And the answer requires one to know that in this matter (why the Creator does not bestow His grace) is a great *tikun* (correction, adjustment) for if not, i.e., if it was the case that light and life would shine immediately at the moment that a person began to accept upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, then life would be in his service (automatically), and then the *desire to receive* also would agree to this service, and then it's certain why he agrees, for surely it is because he desires to satiate his appetite, that is, he would gladly serve to benefit himself, and if it were so, there could be no existence that would be possible to obtain *L'shma*. For every person would necessarily serves out of self-interest, for the reason that he feels in God's service more delight than from material delights, if so a person would necessarily remain in self-interest, and this is because he would be content in his service, and in a place where there is contentment a person is not wont to do any thing because without the promise of gain, a person is not wont to work, thus, if a person were to receive contentment in this service he would necessarily remain in this condition (since there would be nothing more to gain in obtaining the spiritual).

And this would be comparable to people pursuing after a thief to catch him, shouting "thief, thief"; then the thief also runs and shouts "thief, thief", making it impossible to know who is the real thief and to stop him and retrieve the stolen object from his hand. But when the thief, i.e., the *desire to receive* does not feel any taste or life in the work of accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven - then if the person serves from a faith beyond reason, by forcing himself (without enthusiasm), and the body becomes accustomed to this work, i.e., against his will, against his *desire to receive* - then the person has a means that enables him to come to serve in order to give spiritual pleasure to his creator; being that the essential thing that is asked of man is that by means of his service he comes to *d'vekut* (cleaving to God, union with the Creator, attachment with the Creator) which is a manifestation of *hish'taavot ha'tsura* (the quality of his deeds becomes equal or identical to the quality of God's deeds, i.e.) all his actions are done on condition to bestow.

And this is what the verse intended when it said '*then* you will delight on the Creator', whose interpretation is that 'then' refers to the beginning of his service when he has no delight, rather, on the contrary, his service is a coercion, which is not the case afterwards, when he already accustomed himself to work on condition to bestow, and not to look continuously to see if he is getting some taste (benefit) in the work, but rather he believes that he serves in order to give spiritual pleasure to his Creator, and a person needs to believe that the Creator accepts the service of mankind and not think about the quantity or quality of the work and in everything the Creator looks to the heart's intention and from this the creator finds spiritual pleasure, *then* a person merits to delight on the Creator, for also at the time of serving the Creator he already feels a taste and a delight, being that now the person is actually serving the Creator, for the toil that he toiled at the time of coerced service makes a person fit to be able to serve truly for the Creator's sake, thus, the delight that he receives is from the Creator, i.e., from the Creator specifically.