

Afflicting Your Souls

In the Torah we are told that on Yom Kippur, “You shall afflict your souls.” What does this mean, “You shall afflict your souls?” We are not eating, drinking, washing anointing, wearing leather shoes, or having sex, and this is called “afflicting your souls?” I would think that this would be called afflicting your body. The rabbis tell us, no, we are afflicting our souls.

We have five levels to our soul. There is Chaya, Yechida, Nefesh, Neshoma, and Ruach. Chaya stands for that aspect of our soul that we share with all animals. It is the desire to live. It is a desire we all strive for, but we know it is limited. We, like animals, need to eat, but, in spite of everything, we are all going to eventually die. No doctor ever saved a patient; he only delays the end. Wars, diseases, famine, aging, etc. show us how limited this desire to live is.

Nefesh stands for our mind, but our minds are limited, too. We know we cannot understand everything. Modern science talks about these limitations. The Heisenberg Principle tells us that the very act of observing something changes it. We cannot talk about reality, only models and constructs.

Yechida talks about that aspect of our souls which craves relationships. We know that we all need positive relationships. We know that we have only one mother and father, and that usually we will outlive them. We know that to have a successful marriage, it has to be exclusive. It is hard to have fulfilling relationships. We are limited there, too.

Neshoma speaks about our urge to be free, but nobody is really free. We need each other. We cannot live alone without the help of others. We cannot build all the things we need, all the roads, all the schools we need. We need each other.

Ruach speaks about control or mastery. We all want to control situations, even relationships so they will not get out of hand or disappoint us, but if we do that we will have no relationships.

On Yom Kippur we know that we are afflicting our souls. We know that the needs of our soul are limited by the physical. Without a drop of water or a morsel of bread none of the levels of our soul can function.

In this world, there are two types of evil: moral and physical. Even if we were all angels and did nothing wrong, there would still be evil in the world: pain, death, frustration, etc. The very basis of the animal kingdom is one animal eating another. Not all evil in the world is of our making. We human beings are vulnerable. All aspects of our soul are buffeted by many circumstances, and they all depend on so many physical things. We believe that you cannot even get to the spiritual unless you go through the

physical. That's why the Sabbath, the most spiritual of days, requires that we eat meat, drink wine, be friendly with our spouse, and dress up in our finery.

G-d is telling us on Yom Kippur, "I know you are being buffeted by many different circumstances and needs, but whatever you do, don't give up. All I expect of you is that you do your best to be a mentch on all levels of your soul. Never despair." Fortunes change overnight. We Jews especially are subject to many inside and outside forces working on us. We are not complete masters of anything. G-d knows this, and that's what He is telling us on Yom Kippur. "All I expect you to do is your very best, and if you do your very best, I will help you and forgive you for all your sins of the past year."

May we all do our very best so that we will enjoy a New Year filled with happiness, joy, good health, good things, and forgiveness so the Moshiach will come quickly in our day. Amen