

IYYAR - Heart - Thought

Paul writes in Romans 14:17-19 that the kingdom of God is a matter of righteousness, peace and joy in the *Ruach HaKodesh* - the Spirit of Holiness. A friend pointed out that this is a progression.

Righteousness (holiness) leads to Peace (Shalom - wholeness) and Peace leads to Joy. The greater our righteousness, the greater will be our peace, and, in turn, the greater will be our joy. The question then is, "How do we become more righteous - more holy, and thus more whole and more deeply joyful?" The process requires *tikkun* - healing, rectification, restoration.

The key to *tikkun* is the reality and power of our Father's Infinite Love.

The body part we are focusing on during the month of Iyyar is the heart - *lev* (לב). The Psalm for the month is Psalm 32, which number, interestingly, is the numerical value of *lev* - ל = 30 and ב = 2.

The heart is the organ we most associate with love. What emotion do we commonly consider as the opposite of love? In my research I came across the interesting concept that the opposite of love is not hate but Fear! If one digs deeper into the roots of hatred one can discover that hate is a manifestation of fear. It turns out that most negative emotions we experience, such as pain, grief, anger, resentment, depression, and guilt, are all rooted in, and are forms of, fear.

When true love and real peace are allowed in, these negative emotions disappear - just as darkness does when light shines in.

Another interesting idea, according to Dr. Gerald Jampolsky, (formerly on the faculty of the University of California's Medical Center, and author of 'Love is Letting go of Fear') is that, "Love and peace are so interwoven that they never can be used separately." To be able to experience the enveloping love of God in our lives, we must allow peace in our hearts, and, vice versa, to experience true peace, we must open our hearts to the love of God.

We can apply this concept - the reality and power of our Father God's love, and the Shalom that accompanies it, in many different scenarios. Even politically. The core issue in the 'Middle East Conflict' - the desperate attempt to devise a "Peace Plan" between Israel and so-called Palestine, seems doomed to failure. Why? Because peace and love are interwoven with the light of Truth. The three realities must work together. Picture a three-legged stool - with peace, love and truth as the legs. Remove one leg and the stool will topple. It cannot stand. Any relationship, whether between friends, family, spouses, political partners, etc, must be based on all three - truth, love, and peace, then the relationship will have a base upon which it can grow and endure. Without the three working in harmony, the fruit will only be fear, hatred, and violence in one form or another.

We all naturally want to be happy, healthy, and productive human beings. During this 'Being Holy, Being Whole' series, we are aiming to take gentle and manageable steps to clear our minds, nurture our spirits, and to strengthen our bodies. Now is the time, as we consider the theme of *Thoughts and the Heart*, to make the decision to respond in love rather than in fear to any situation or circumstance in our lives. How do we do this? Remember the three-legged stool!

First, each thing needs to be brought into the light of truth - the warm light of God's loving truth;

not a harsh interrogation spotlight! This is where the vital link between our thoughts and our hearts comes into play. Our thoughts and imagination are powerful and feed what we believe in our hearts. They are the interface or bridge, as it were, between the physical and spiritual - our bodies and souls. Our thoughts and imagination are the source of our creative ability and can raise us up to spiritual heights or drag us down to the depths of sin and degradation.

The mind is a battleground and the apostle Paul refers to our godly thoughts and beliefs as "weapons" of our spiritual warfare, and exhorts us to: "...destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive in obedience to Messiah"

(2 Corinthians 10:5). We can only "destroy the strongholds" of the enemy if our minds are filled with the knowledge of God and the truth of His Word, as patterned and exemplified in His Son and Messiah Yeshua. According to His Word, the first basic, foundational truth to grasp is the assurance that you are a child of God, precious in His sight. Secondly, you are not a bad person or a failure for having problems or having made mistakes and, as a result, are unloved and being punished. Thirdly, you are unique and have a purpose in God's plan that only you can fulfil. Finally, He always is there when you call or reach out for Him.

These truths are beautifully illustrated in Yeshua's parable of the merciful father and his prodigal son (Luke 15). The son, who had insulted and disregarded his father, left home and wasted the inheritance he had demanded from his father, and ended up in a pigsty. As soon as he woke up to his mistake, and saw the results of his bad choices, he truly repented in his heart. He turned around in humility and, willing to admit his error and to work as a servant, he decided to return to his father. What was the father's response? It was the same as our Father in Heaven's when we repent of sinning against Him and causing Him pain. The father was waiting and constantly watching for his child and, when he saw him far in the distance, went running to meet him. He embraced him with great joy. He took him home, dressed him in beautiful robes, gave him a ring of authority, and celebrated his return with a huge feast!

Mistakes and pain come and go in life. They are a great means of learning and growing. It's when we get stuck in our pain, as it were, or bury it and ignore it, that it becomes detrimental to our well-being and growth. Nobody likes pain. Children are able to cry, and even throw a tantrum, to naturally express their pain, and then let it go and move on to new experiences. If children can grow and mature in a healthy environment, they learn that there are better ways of dealing with pain. However, if one's childhood environment was not loving and healthy, we develop negative coping strategies to deal with our pain. We can repress our feelings, or deny and run away from them. We can even close down our heart and be unwilling to trust or to try new things, all in order to avoid suffering heartbreak, rejection, or failure. Another negative, as a result of being stuck in one's pain, is that a person can get so used to living with their pain that the thought of being without it scares them.

So, what does one do? Whether one's pain is from childhood or from an experience this week, we need first of all to face it - be aware of it. We can begin to notice familiar patterns of pain. Then we need to bring it into the light of God's truth and love. When we experience and embrace the positive feelings this engenders we can gently let go of any hurt, hatred, bitterness, guilt, resentment, and release them into our Father's outstretched hand, which is always there ready and waiting. As we let go and allow His healing love and peace to flow in its place, one can go forward - joyfully reconnected to the source of His life.

Then, we must determine to keep moving forward. Each new day, each new moment, our response can be one of love and peace. Sometimes it may be difficult, but the more we embrace the reality of our Father's Love, the more we will understand that it is far more powerful than our own pain or guilt, *as well as* the other person's behavior and guilt.

In every situation, the only meaningful choice we have is between fear and love. Let us choose to fill our thoughts with truth and righteousness, and our hearts with love. Then we will be filled with the joy of Adonai, which is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). As Yeshua described in his parable of the master and those servants who had served him faithfully: "Well done, good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things; enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:23).

Shemah Yisrael!

You shall love the Lord your God with *ALL your heart*,
and with all your soul, and with all your might.
(Deuteronomy 6:5)

Yeshua affirms this: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
(Matthew 22:37-40)

1. Loving **wholeheartedly** involves loving God, loving yourself, and loving others. What are our strengths and weaknesses in this regard?
2. To build authentic connection in one's relationship with God and others takes **courage** - to be who you are, **compassion** - towards yourself and others, and **vulnerability** - a full awareness of your value and worth as one who is unique and precious in God's eyes that enables you to reach out in love without guarantee of reciprocity.
Where do we stand in these three areas?

When we love with all our hearts we can...b'ezrat HaShem,

