**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**The Path of the Piaseczner Rebbe**

**By Dr. Ron Wacks**

**Shiur #22: Chassidic Service of God (continued)**

***Hitragshut* (Emotion) vs. *Hitlahavut* (Fervor), and the Role of the Body**

R. Kalonymus draws a distinction between “*hitragshut*” (emotion) and “*hitlahavut*” (fervor). *Hitragshut* is a state in which a person is overcome by powerful emotions, such as love, joy, and longing, but also sometimes awe, hatred, or anger. The source of emotion is the psyche, and emotions help a person to become aware of his psyche. R. Kalonymus demonstrates this as follows: When a person walking down the street sees a stranger walking by, no emotion is aroused in him. But when he sees a beloved friend, a feeling of love fills him and he feels the movement of his psyche.

*Hitlahavut* is a higher level than *hitragshut*. A person may arrive at a high level of emotion, but nevertheless retain his interest in and concern for his bodily state and his affairs and aspirations in this world. When he is in a state of *hitlahavut*, on the other hand, he is altogether given over to the object of his fervor, to the point where all bodily needs and affairs of this world are forgotten as though they never existed.[[1]](#footnote-1) R. Kalonymus provides a sign by which a person can tell whether he is in a state of *hitragshut* or of *hitlahavut*:

If your other aspirations and desires are not nullified in the face of that, and you still desire the world and its affairs at the same time, while your emotions are also oriented to God – then it is merely *hitragshut.*

However, if your emotion reaches such a fiery pitch that at that moment you reject all the world and its interests, leaving you with one sole desire and longing, for God… in other words, that all your [other] interests are nullified… then you have already achieved *hitlahavut,* but are unable to stop there, for all of your being burns with the fire of God.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In this description, as in many others found in R. Kalonymus’s works,[[3]](#footnote-3) there is no mistaking the ecstatic experience of *hitlahavut*.[[4]](#footnote-4) In this state, a person’s psychic experience is so powerful that he is oblivious to his body or physical sensations. Now this person may be granted inspiration from on High; indeed, this was the way of the prophets.[[5]](#footnote-5) Every individual should strive to achieve *hitragshut*, and even *hitlahavut*. One is sometimes able to sense something of *hitlahavut* during the *Ne’ilah* prayer concluding Yom Kippur, which is devoted to closeness to God, and at which time all phsyical desires and wants are removed.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Attaining *hitragshut* and *hitlahavut* is also a Divine reward and a foretaste of the pleasure of the World to Come:

The pleasure [that comes] with a feeling of holy *hitragshut* that a person experiences in his prayer, his Divine service, and his Torah study, is a glimmer of the pleasure and the holy fervor from his portion in the Garden of Eden, which he will experience after the end of his life, in the world of eternity… For the passion and pleausre that you experience in your Divine service in this world is the illumination of your world in the upper spheres.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The body, too, has a role in Divine service with *hitragshut* and *hitlahavut*. R. Kalonymus argues that any attempt to achieve *hitlahavut* without enlisting the body is doomed to failure:

In this generation, in which the body is not immersed in Divine service, and our mind and thoughts have not been elevated and strengthened in holiness, it is difficult to direct ourselves purely through thought and will, if our entire body is not also stirred by holy passion at a time when we wish to achieve *hitragshut*.[[8]](#footnote-8)

It is specifically when a person performs his service vigorously, with his body, then his *hitragshut* and *hitlahavut* are attained and endure; when he does not, then the *hitragshut* and *hitlahavut* themselves will subside.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The connection between spiritual pleasure and physical pleasure was a principle taught by the Ba’al Shem Tov, as attested to by his student, R. Yaakov Yosef of Polnoe:

I heard from my teacher with regard to Shabbat that there is a commandment to eat and drink, as may be understood from the metaphor of the son of a king, who was in captivity, and he received a letter from his father, the king. Seeking to rejoice [over the letter], he plied the local people with drinks so that they would be happy, and then he was able to rejoice in his own happiness. The message is that the soul cannot rejoice in the spiritual realm until the material [body] rejoices in the material realm…[[10]](#footnote-10)

This approach stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing mindset among ascetic groups that engaged in regular fasting and other bodily self-affliction.[[11]](#footnote-11) The inclusion of the body in the service of God is reflected in many chasidic customs. For instance, we can understand why the Ba’al Shem Tov preferred ecstatic prayer over prayer in which the body is still and almost motionless, as in the kabbalistic practice. The body must also be a partner in the act of prayer, and so it must be activated accordingly. Just as the soul longs for its Creator, so the body expresses its longing through ecstatic movement.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In R. Kalonymus’s teachings, we encounter an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, the body helps a person to achieve *hitlahavut*; on the other hand, in a state of *hitlahavut*, there is a disconnection from one’s bodily state and needs. R. Kalonymus attempts to resolve this in his discussion of the mind-body connection. The body must arouse the psyche to action, but once the psyche is aroused to *hitragshut* and onwards to *hitlahavut*, it achieves supreme *devekut* and inspiration from Above. In this state, a person is simply not aware of his body. R. Kalonymus provides several examples:

A person who comes to the *hakkafot* on Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah – through vigorous dancing he shakes himself somewhat out of the dust, and his psyche is revealed.[[13]](#footnote-13) And likewise a person who prays out loud, vigorously… As it is written in the holy books: the voice arouses focus, because he is performing his service with vigor, and thus something is forced to emerge.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The role of the limbs is to arouse the psyche from its slumber, even if this has to be achieved through “artificial” means. The aim is to bring the psyche to a state of *hitlahavut*. However, we should not be mistaken into thinking that the bodily action has no value in and of itself, as though it were nothing but the means to spiritual elevation. This is not so; *chasidut* teaches that one should “expose its [the body’s] holiness and elevate its desires and inclinations to supreme Divine service.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. R. Kalonymus quotes his grandfather, R. Kalonymus Kalman Ha-Levi Epstein, author of *Maor Va-Shemesh*: “I have seen great *tzaddikim* who, in a state of cleaving to the upper worlds, are stripped of the garments of material existence, and the Divine Presence rests upon them and speaks from their throats, their mouths speaking prophecy and telling the future…” (*Hakhsharat Ha-Avrehim*, p. 266). R. Kalonymus claims that even in recent generations it has been possible to attain Divine inspiration. See ibid., p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ekstasis (Greek) – meaning, the state of being or standing “outside of oneself,” a sense of the psyche separating from the body and communing with the Divine. In a different description by R. Kalonymus, he speaks of the psyche “leaving its sheath and flying upwards…” (*Bnei Machshava Tova*, p. 43). In the words of R. Yaakov ben Ha-Rosh: “*Chasidim* and men of exception would meditate in solitude and focus in their prayer to the point where they managed to disrobe themselves of physicality and allow the psychic spirit to triumph, until they came close to the level of prophecy” (Tur, *Orach Chaim*, *siman* 98). Other definitions have been offered for the state of ecstasy. For instance, Moshe Idel writes of “a state in which a person experiences a temporary erasing of his personality as the spirit of God, or Divine presence, or Divine power, rests upon him” (*Ha-Chasidut: Bein EkstazaLle-Magia* [Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 5761], p. 61). There are indeed descriptions in Jewish mysticism that match this description, but in R. Kalonymus’s teachings we find no expression of any “erasing of the personality.” In his descriptions, there is a separating from bodily senses at the time of Divine inspiration. It should be noted that in *chassidut*, we also find states of nothingness that in fact express a broader consciousness, through the removal of the limitations of the self. (See M. Idel, ibid., p. 201; H. Pedaya, “*Ha-Chavaya Ha-Mistit Ve-Ha-Olm Ha-Dati Be-Chasidut,*” *Da’at* 55 [5765], p. 80). For more on the nature of ecstasy, both within religion and independently of it, see M. Laski, *Ecstasy in Secular and Religious Experiences* (Los Angeles, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., p. 14; *Bnei Machshava Tova*, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., p. 5. See also *Mevo Ha-She’arim*, pp. 292-293. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. R. Yaakov Yosef of Polnoe, *Toldot Yaakov Yosef* (Jerusalem, 5733), *Parshat* *Shelach* 12. For more on the mind-body relationship in *chasidut*, see Y. Weiss, “*Reshit Tzemichatah shel Ha-Derekh ha-Chasidit*,” *Tzion* 16 (5711), pp. 143-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For the Ba’al Shem Tov’s opposition to bodily affliction, see his letter to R. Yaakov Yosef in *Shivchei Ha-Besht*, A. Rubinstein edition (Jerusalem, 5752), p. 230; S. Dubnow, *Toldot Ha-Chassidut* (Tel Aviv, 5720), p. 45; R. Rosman and M. Rosman, *Ha-Ba'al Shem Tov Mechadesh Ha-Chasidut* (Jerusalem 5760), p. 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For more on the ecstatic prayer of the Ba’al Shem Tov, see E. Etkes, *Ba’al Ha-Shem* (Jerusalem, 5760), pp. 134-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. We have already devoted some attention to the concept of the “revealed psyche.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Hakhsharat Ha-Avrekhim*, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Mevo Ha-She'arim*, p. 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)