



Revealing the inner beauty of the Torah in a way that touches and inspires the Jewish soul

MEDITATION AND TRANSFORMATION JEWISH STYLE

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One of the experimental and clinical findings of scientists and doctors has corroborated the benefits of meditative breathing, because the combination of cadenced contemplation has apparently the power to harmonize imbalances to the psyche and emotions caused by life's daily stresses. However, the esoteric teaching of the Jewish scriptures (Torah) reveals far deeper connections between the breath and the soul (neshoma). It is no coincidence that the word for breath in Hebrew (Loshen HaKodesh) is the word neshima whose root letters are the same letters (osios) as neshoma which is the Hebrew word for the soul. The Torah thereby has for over three thousand years revealed this secret of the symbiotic relationship between the soul (neshoma) and the (neshima) breath. In lay language one could say that in order to turn up the volume of the metaphysical realm one needs first to turn down the volume of physical sensations.

Many mistakenly assume that these meditative practices originated in the far East, however this revelation actually has its roots going all the way back to the very creation of man. On a deeper level we can add that within every breath, that is bound to a positive thought, we are able to nourish from the spiritual treasury of the Source of all life. Then through our exhaling we have the ability to share those blessings with others and with the whole creation.

Also, we can consciously envision each inhalation as a Divine reenactment of that initial breath that came directly from the Creator to the first man. (Please look at footnote 2 here if you have not already done so.) Each breath is a new opportunity to reawaken our souls energy thereby revitalizing the health of the body, mind and emotions.

One of the main purposes of the neshoma having been sent into this world is to endeavor to help purify and rectify it. The body, mind and emotions are meant to be helpmates in providing their unique functions and talents. Since thought comes before words and action, the building blocks of righteousness begins in sifting and straining any less than ideal thoughts that arise and replacing them with "kosher vibrations".

What are kosher vibrations you are asking? They are the kind of thoughts and perceptions that we are not ashamed to entertain in front of anyone including the Creator. They are the good conscience factors that counsel restraint rather than indulgence. They are the kinds of thoughts experiences we would feel proud to relate to a beloved grandparent or a respected teacher. They are the kind of thoughts that we can safely assume have occupied the head space of great righteous people (tzaddikim).

Ideally, every sound we hear and image we absorb should afford us only the purest and most focused thoughts. However, in our world today, such is often, unfortunately, not the case. We begin therefore by setting up a series of "filters" through which impressions from the outside and our inside world can be sifted. The first such filter is watchfulness. A good exercise in watchfulness is to first identify undesirable thoughts and feelings, then isolate and expel them as you exhale into oblivion. At first blush, this may seem stilted, however, once we begin to scrutinize how many unwanted sights and sounds pass through the "borders" of our senses we will begin to realize that we need to tighten our "border security".

After a relatively short period of contemplation, we then are able to quickly recognize potentially detrimental thoughts, words and images and immediately either escort them to the waste bin or transform them into kosher thoughts and feelings that elevate the soul. However, if all we do is purge ourselves of the mental and emotional toxins, this is not enough to bring us to glowing vibrant health, because just as in a healthy diet, we need to replace those "empty calories" with nourishing foods, how much more so do we need to absorb only a highly refined supernal diet filled with holiest "nutrients". The Torah teachings offer us a lifestyle that is balanced and the highest quality of spiritually enriched nutrients.



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(Let us now do a Jewish meditation that will aid in the purification and enlightenment process. First find a quiet moment where there are no outer distractions. Begin, for example, by saying Psalms (Tehillim), chanting in your own words, scanning some esoteric passage or by listening to an uplifting song or melody.

Once you have begun to relax, try to stop all mental activity except for the observation of your breath. As you inhale, picture your breath (neshima) as a renewed aspect of your soul sent to you from on High and entering as a pure radiance of holiness and then circulating throughout your entire body. Breathe in slowly, deeply holding each breath for as long as is comfortable. During this time, concentrate on the breath thinking that this, neshima, breath is giving you your renewed Neshama, soul which comes directly from the Creator to you with Infinite love and care and that through this you are intimately connected with G-d.

Then as you slowly exhale, send mental and emotional stresses and undesirable thoughts out of your mind. Just breathe and let them go with a puff as if you are winnowing out undesirable chaff. Feel burdens and stress lifted from you as you purify and refine your thoughts and emotions exchanging negative thoughts for positive ones. Continue doing this until you feel totally relaxed, renewed and free from toxic stress and negative thoughts and emotions. Now you are able to exhale pure thoughts, filled with holiness and goodness. Visualize yourself as sanctifying the entire world with these pure breaths and thoughts, understanding that they are a spiritual place (mikveh) of purification for the world, bringing it to greater levels of holiness. Before completing your meditation, verbally express your gratitude and appreciation for the gift of life.)

Perfection of the meditation practice that was described is not meant to be an end unto itself, but only act as catalyst to help bring about a shift in consciousness that we can adapt into all of our days activities. Even as the baby is crying or the boss is making demands or a tire goes flat on the highway, we will be able to spontaneously exhale away the stress and feel reinvigorated as we reconnect, through the breath (neshima), with our soul (neshoma) thereby successfully dealing with the challenging situations with equanimity and dignity. However, even this desirable level is not our ultimate goal, as we should continue to refine our thinking until we reach the place where we can use every breath, word and action to express our deep appreciation of life and the bounty we constantly receive from the Creator.

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