



שמירת הגוף Shmirat Haguf



Shmirat HaGuf - taking care of your body - is viewed as a spiritual as well as a physical act. The well-being of the body has to be maintained as the vessel of the soul, the repository of that which most closely connects us with God. Our body is a gift from God, a divine creation which is to be respected, cherished and cared for as long as we are in this world. With awareness of Shmirat HaGuf, even the simplest activities, such as eating, walking, or washing one's hands, become acts of holiness.

Blessing for the Study of Torah:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, vitzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, Who makes us holy through mitzvot, and commands us to engage in the study of Torah.

פרשנות Commentary

Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) writes about the "Spirit and Flesh" in his book, *Man is Not Alone - A Philosophy of Religion*. (New York: Noonday Press, 1997), p.263-264:

Alliegiance to Judaism does not imply defence of legitimate needs, a tyranny of the spirit. Prosperity is a worthy goal of aspiration and a promised reward for good living. Although there is no celebration of our animal nature, recognition of its right and role is never missing. There is an earnest care for its welfare, needs and limitations.

the carnal. It does not urge us to desert the flesh but to control and counsel it; to please the natural needs of the flesh so that the spirit should not be molested by unnatural frustrations. We are not commanded to be pyromaniacs of the soul. On the contrary, a need that serves the enhancement of life, without causing injury to anyone else, is the work of the Creator, and the wanton or ignorant destruction or defacement of His creation is vandalism. It is indeed God's gift to humanity, that he should eat and be happy as he toils. (Ecclesiastes 3:13)

Rabbi Israel the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), the founder of Chasidism gave the following commentary:

From our Sources מקורות

From the Torah:

And God created humankind in the Divine image, in the image of God, God created it, male and female God created them. (Genesis From the Biblical Writings:

If you find honey, eat only as much as is sufficient for you, lest you over do it and throw up. (Proverbs 25:16)

From the Teachings of the Sages :

Once when the sage Hillel had finished a lesson with his pupils, he proceeded to walk along with them.

"Master," they asked, "where are you going?"

"To perform a mitzvah," he answered.

"Which mitzvah?" they asked.

"To bathe in the bathhouse," he answered.

"Is that a mitzvah?"

"Yes! A person, appointed to scour and wash the statues of the king that stand in the theatres and stadiums, is paid for the work, and is even associated with royalty. Since that is so, how much more should I, who am created in the divine image, scour and wash myself? As it is written, in the image of God did God make humankind (Genesis 9:6)". (Leviticus Rabbah 34:3)

When you seen the *chamor* (donkey) of your enemy lying under its burden, you might want to refrain from helping him, but you must surely help him (Exodus 23:5). This verse is not just about donkeys and helping your enemy. It has a mystical meaning. The word *chamor* can be read *chomer* which means material reality, specifically your body. The verse then means, you may want to see your body as your enemy, for it seems to have an antipathy toward the soul, Godliness, and spirituality. It seems to be lying down under a burden, for it resists doing the mitzvot of the Torah and responding to your higher thoughts. You, looking from your lofty "spiritual" perspective, might not want to help it. You might think that we should adopt fasts and self-mortifications to crush the body and break it. But no, that is not the way to cause the light of Torah to enter. You must surely help him means that you must purify and refine the body, letting the soul's light shine through it. (from a retelling by Rabbi M. M. Schneerson in *Likutei Sichot*, 1992)

שיחה Questions for Discussion:

The following prayer is said as part of the *Birchot Ha-Shachar*, the daily morning prayers:

Praised are You, our Eternal God, who with wisdom fashioned the human body, creating openings, arteries, glands and organs, marvelous in structure, intricate in design. Should but one of them, by being blocked or opened, fail to function, it would be impossible to exist. Praised are You, Eternal One, healer of all flesh who sustains our bodies in wondrous ways.

This prayer expresses a clear sense of awe at the functioning of the human body, which, despite all we know from medical science, is still essentially a mystery. But we do know that our mnds, bodies and souls must all be nurtured if we want them to work at their best, and must be maintained in balance if we want each to thrive. In this world, we can never be purely spiritual beings. To ignore our bodies is to ignore a great gift, and reject the One who presented it to us.

- 1) In what ways do we worship God through our physical bodies?
- 2) How can we demonstrate respect for our bodies in our everyday lives? How can we exemplify that we are "created in the divine image"?
- 3) Why is it important to maintain moderation in all of our activities?

