

*There is a question that plagues many of us for most of our mature years. Typically, we first start asking it at late-night school shabbaton discussions somewhere around eleventh grade, and we keep asking it of ourselves throughout adulthood and into old age: "What is my tafkid, my mission in life?" We would love the clarity of knowing that we are doing right, being right, of fulfilling the vision of who we are meant to be. Of course, we assume, there's no chance that we are 'enough' just by being who we are. We look around at others who seem so much more accomplished, more like who we should have been...and feel that much more convinced of our failings and shortcomings. So we push ourselves harder, take on extra work, go to one more "how to be better (wives, mothers, listeners...)" class, beat ourselves up for not being more. We reflect on our unmet goals, our aspirations of old. (At some point in this journey we usually end up in the fridge...) We mourn the missed opportunities and wish we would have grown and done so much more. Because if we were better, more productive people, Hashem would be happier with us and we could be happier about ourselves. Right?*

There was a point in life that I knew that I needed to make a change of direction, but wasn't sure what that change should or could be. I knew what I *couldn't* do- I couldn't continue doing what I was doing- but I wasn't sure of what I *could* or should do. What would bring Hakadosh Baruch Hu more *nachas*? What was I guilty of not doing and being for Him? For *klal Yisrael*? What would I have to answer for "after 120" and regret if I didn't do it now? I was so busy creating mental checklists of regrets, 'would haves' and 'should haves.' I went down the all-too familiar road of knowing that I had to be harder on myself.

It was a Shabbos afternoon and time for Mincha. As I have mentioned in these pages before, there is a tactic I've learned to employ in tefilla that has always bore me fruit: before opening my siddur, I asked Hashem to please steer me to the words He wants me to notice and focus on most in my davening. I have come to be prepared for surprises, since He knows me and my needs far better than I ever will. This time was no exception.

It is such a simple request, but one which I don't usually pause on to ponder. *Ritzei b'menuchaseinu*- be pleased and desiring, Hashem, of our being at rest. It hit me; the message was so powerful and profound. You are happy and pleased with my just *being*! Everything else- the work, the accomplishments, the 'next things to do on the list of self-improvement...' are all icing on the cake, but never integral ingredients to meriting Hashem's acceptance and love. He gives me permission to just be at rest, to feel the beauty and bracha of life, to experience the joy of the present state of being and receiving His goodness. Yes, there are things to get done and work toward. But I don't have to see them as conditions of being acceptable and worthy. The tefilla continues: "*sanctify us with Your commandments, grant our share in Your Torah, satisfy us from your goodness and gladden us with Your salvation.*" Once I feel accepted in my state of rest, I'll get the messages I need to fill my role in His world and experience the satisfaction I crave. Steer me, Hashem, 'to purify my heart and serve You sincerely,' from the place of knowing that just my *being* is virtuous.

I remember, years ago, going to the *shiva* of a young Down's syndrome child. Her mother had been unbelievably devoted to the child's needs and well-being throughout her short life. She sorely missed her and wanted to use the week to teach others what she learned from the special *neshama* which was in her care.

"My daughter was and never would be able to be productive. She couldn't find the cure to cancer, wouldn't even ever be able to make Shabbos. But she proved how valuable it is to just *be*; she was loveable just for her essence of self. And loving her made me learn to love just that about others and myself."

That Shabbos afternoon's tefilla embraced me with that sense of value. There were still decisions to make. But they were then made with a different sort of *menucha*. Rather than "will this decision make me 'okay?'" it was "I'm okay being *me*. With that confidence, what decision will work best?"