



Introduction

From deep inside the body, comes a voice of longing. Sometimes barely audible, other times loud and clear, it calls out, saying:

I want to feel my own root; to feel connected to the Source of my life. I want to stand in my rightful place, in right relationship to everyone and everything around me. I want to know myself as a spark of the Divine through direct experience, not through the mirror of the opinions of others. I don't want to borrow life force from those around me. I don't want my giving to be corrupted by needing.

I want to carry within myself the validation, recognition, respect, and love that are needed to sustain me. I don't want to manipulate others to give me these essentials. And I don't want to use their authentic offerings to try to fill holes in myself that are my responsibility.

I want to remember that inside every difficulty is a gift of growth waiting to be unwrapped. I want to be who G-d created me to be – and for that to be enough.

This desire to stand tall in the totality of our life circumstances – to know ourselves as sparks of the Divine, to embrace our life stories with all their ups and downs, to be fully who we are and to bring that fullness to our relationships with Hashem and with others – is a *ratzon*, a will, that is a powerful force in its own right.

Torah teaches us that a *tzaddik*, a holy person, is one who needs nothing but the potential and *chein* (grace) of what he is, of what Hashem created him to be. He is always – and only – himself, and therefore completely reliable. He has no desire for more than himself, for what can never really be his.

Just the longing for such integrity of self, for such wholeness, for the closeness to Hashem that the *tzaddik* embodies, can open doors and change lives. If each of us were to take responsibility in this way – if we were to work toward becoming balanced, whole, and holy adults – our relationships with each other and *Am Yisrael* would be radically altered. We could stop blaming and ferret out the truth more clearly, even in situations where we disagree. We could see the intricate design of Hashem's creation made manifest through all the different souls that He placed together on this earth at this time, hoping they would be able to recognize each other and the beautiful pattern that their combined existence has the potential to reveal.

Instead we often live in collective chaos, bleeding into each other's lives and feelings without any recognition of the boundaries we are violating and the damage we are inflicting. And all that overlap only increases our sense of loneliness. We lose the ability to achieve intimacy with ourselves and, as a result, with anyone else. We fail to recognize that we must know

the self that lives within our own borders in order to truly meet others, and that such a meeting is most profound at the place where our world and theirs meet.

We don't know how to stay within our own *daled amot* (our own personal space) and connect to each other from there. We're constantly reaching too far outside of ourselves or pulling back too far inside of ourselves. We can't seem to simply stay where we are, taking in what is, without reacting by either pulling away or pushing in. We can't seem to hold our own centers, stay connected to our own roots, while interacting closely with others. We bend and twist, we collapse and inflate. We do anything but hold still and give ourselves a chance to absorb whatever is happening, realize our relationship to it, learn what the Torah asks of us in such a situation, and then decide how best to engage the person or event.

Yet Hashem gave each of us the capacity to stay in right relationship with ourselves and others. That capacity is so basic to our ability to be what He created us to be that He implanted it in the breath – the most essential component of life itself – and in the body – the soul's home in the physical world. The breath and body can help us to come into deep contact with ourselves and maintain that contact in our encounters with others.

Where the body and soul connect is where, in Judaism, the self – free will – is found. The soul either thrives or suffers from the body's actions. The self, "I," is the decider who chooses what to do. It is up to us to choose to relate to our breath and our bodies, like everything else in our lives, in ways that bring us closer to G-d, closer to our true selves.

This book, the third in the Inner Torah series, explores the terrain of breath and body in service of helping readers make just such a choice. The underlying premise is quite simple. It is that bringing awareness to the body and breath is a way to connect

with and be enlivened by the powerful life force that is within all of us. That life force is the essence of who we are; it is the spark of Hashem that animates our beings and connects us with Him. When we are able to experience ourselves on this essential level, we are able to be more fully ourselves and interact with others more authentically, no matter what the circumstances. It is an ability that can be cultivated with attention and practice.

This book offers ways to do that – but the ways are secondary to the understanding that it is our own consciousness, our own awareness, that is the key to coming into relationship with this dimension of reality. So while I write in detail about the breath and various parts of the body, the words are meant only as guide ropes to this ability to pay attention, to bring one’s awareness into the miraculous container that Hashem devised to house our souls in this world. From there, from the essential core of who we are, we can navigate the challenges of our lives with unimaginable ease and serenity.

As part of the Inner Torah series, this book elaborates and expands on ideas discussed more generally in the original book, *Inner Torah: Where Consciousness and Kedushah Meet*, and is intended to be used in conjunction with the second book, *Practical Inner Torah: A Guide to Going Within*.

Working with the breath and body alone is not enough. It needs to be coupled with the Inner Torah process, the approach to coming to know and heal oneself that *Practical Inner Torah* describes at length. Like any other activity undertaken to improve the self, the breath and body work explored in this book is meaningful only to the extent that we recognize what our true innermost self knows – that the ultimate purpose of our existence is to draw closer to G-d. Anything we do to better ourselves needs to be with the intention of manifesting our G-dly essence, of helping us to better serve G-d and His world.

The Breath and Body of Inner Torah

In this way, breath and body are additional entryways to one's Inner Torah, to taking one's rightful place in Hashem's world. And they are always available to explore since we are always in our bodies – to one degree or another – and always breathing – at least in some minimal way that keeps us alive.

Following the style of *Practical Inner Torah*, I've written this book in a way that allows readers to work with it on their own, both individually and in groups. Toward that end, I've included exercises and activities that I term "explorations." The reason for naming them as such is to remind readers that the exercises and activities are not significant in their own right. They are useful only as a means to help us develop awareness in the physical realm and spend time with ourselves in ways that feel connected and genuine.

Rote performance of these explorations cannot effect change at a core level. As with rote performance of anything, the results are only superficial; the deeper self, the spirit, will not be engaged. The explorations are really only suggestions as to possible ways to work with oneself. The focus is on experiencing what happens, not on doing something to get somewhere. And the experience changes all the time. There is no one correct experience.

What is encouraged is to develop awareness so that we can use the awesome gifts of breath and body that Hashem bestowed on us as He intended us to use them. For they are indeed miraculous creations designed to support us in our *avodat Hashem*. With just a little attention, we can better develop these resources and allow them to help us become more fully ourselves, more fully the people Hashem created us to be.

There is another reason, too, for this focus on the body. Our bodies are vessels for G-d's light. His light is intended to

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penetrate into every corner of our beings. Our goal ultimately is to know the highest and most mysterious truths from inside the depths of our beings – to viscerally experience and rejoice in our connection with Hashem. We see this reflected in the words of the prayer *Nishmat Kol Chai*, which we say every Shabbat at the end of *pesukei d'zimrah*:

...Therefore the organs that You set within us, and the spirit and soul that You breathed into our nostrils, and the tongue that You placed in our mouth – all of them will thank and bless, praise and glorify, sing about, exult and revere, sanctify and declare the sovereignty of Your Name, our King, continuously. For every mouth shall offer thanks to You, every tongue shall vow allegiance to You, every eye shall look toward You, every knee shall bend to You, every erect spine shall prostrate itself before You, all the hearts shall fear You, and all innermost feelings and thoughts [lit. each of my internal organs and kidneys] shall sing praises to Your Name, as it is written: All my bones shall say: Hashem, who is like You... let all my innermost being [all my internal organs] bless His Holy Name.

We see it, as well, in the words of the prophet Yirmeyahu (31:30–33):

Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Yisrael and with the house of Yehudah...I will put my Torah in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their G-d and they shall be My people, and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more.

The Breath and Body of Inner Torah

Working with the breath and body not only brings us into more authentic and deeper connection with ourselves, but it can begin to transform our very beings into vessels of G-d's light, vehicles for Divine will. The body can start to "know" what the soul knows, to experience reality from the soul's perspective. From our flesh, as it says in *Iyov* 19, we can begin to see G-d.