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Subject: Why I Regret My Response, [REDACTED]
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To: [REDACTED]

HI

“Yismach lev mevakshei Hashem” (Tehillim 105:3)

H.E.A.R.T. Initiative

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Dear subscriber,

Here's a new message on emotional wellness from a Torah perspective.

If you've been reading the HEART messages long enough, you already know what this week's Torah Tidbit will be... And that's why I made it my business to work on this message today, so you can enjoy this *vort* when we're still in *parshas Shemos* :)

Have a wonderful week of growth and connection and a gut Shabbos,

Shiffy Friedman

Part I: The Heart of The Matter

Why Am I Doing This?

I often say that self-awareness is a most underrated component in *avodas Hashem*. So many aspects of our mitzvah observance are directly related to our emotional state—namely, how we feel about ourselves. The more we get to know our inner world, what ticks us off and how we operate, the more in sync we become with what is required of us in regards to *avodas Hashem*, especially in the realm of *bein adam lachaveiro*.

One of our greatest impediments to self-awareness—in other words, inner work—is our

fear of meeting who we think is our “true self.” It’s hard for us to admit that yes, I’m feeling jealous right now, or, yes, even if I have so many friends and am so beloved/popular I’m feeling alone, or, yes, even if my husband and I seem so compatible, I sometimes feel so lonely in my marriage. But understanding that this is exactly the place Hashem wants us to meet—it’s a reality He implanted within us in order for us to achieve our purpose in this world—is not only tremendously helpful, but also tremendously healing. Instead of seeing it as a flaw we must hide or distract ourselves from, we can start to see it as a vehicle of our growth.

Part of the Plan

That we feel various unpleasant feelings throughout our life is not a glitch in the system. It IS the system! Hashem chose to take our pure, holy *neshamah* and implant it in a *guf* that has a wide range of physical needs, as well as emotional experiences. Not all of them are pretty, just as not all our physical needs are becoming, but together they direct us toward our *tafkid*.

In fact, according to the Rema, this is precisely the meaning of *umafli la’asos*. The Rema notes that this is the *peleh*, the wonder, we’re thanking for—

that a *neshamah* that originates from such heights of *kedushah* is intended to function in tandem with such seemingly plebeian needs.

The same is true for our emotional world. *What, me? A mature adult? A teacher? A smart, cultured, poised woman like me is feeling jealous/lonely/small/unworthy?* Yes, yes, dear sister, you and me and every other creation of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, because this is how He intended for us to reach our *tachlis*.

Imagine if we’d be emotionally self-sufficient. Imagine if our marriage would be only bliss. Imagine if parenting would be a smooth ride. Imagine if we’d wake up every morning feeling energized, effortlessly jumping out of bed (only in the storybooks, my friends). Imagine if nothing ever triggered us. How would our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu look? **How would we feel that taste of real connection, the pleasure of sweating for something?**

Starting with that first struggle (*Where’s the snooze button? How many seconds do I have left until I absolutely must must must pull myself out??*) and carrying on throughout the day, Hashem keeps turning on those emotional tug-of-wars, because that’s just how it’s meant to be.

From Limitations to Limitless

When we work on becoming self-aware, we’re able to notice which underlying emotion triggers us and how. This is critical because instead of trying to stop a negative behavior from the outside—which doesn’t work—we can focus on accepting the feeling we’re experiencing, thus minimizing the chances of experiencing the behavior, which is only a

experiencing, thus minimizing the chances of experiencing the behavior, which is only a result. (See Part II for an example.)

The Piaseczner Rebbe writes that the emotions we experience are not new to the specific incident during which they came up. Rather, they're emotions we've been feeling under the surface that simply came to the fore. **It all boils down to this: When this emotion comes up for me, do I resist it or accept it?**

By facing our limitations, we can connect to the G-d that's limitless, the One whose *koach* is *ein sof*. When we connect to this Power, we're connecting to the Infinite. It's the place where anything can happen, the place where healing and living our best life becomes a reality.

Take It To Heart

Part II: Introspective/Practical Implications

So we already did some imagining in Part I, to realize that a world without unpleasant emotions wouldn't get us anywhere. Now, let's take our imagination a bit further. How much we would benefit from imagining that every day is a fun kind of test, a challenge that we're eager to tackle. My gifts were just gifted with the game SET, and we've been playing it on repeat for the past few days. Every time a new set of cards are out on the table, I notice how exciting it is for all of us. The competitive streak in us is stoked and we're eager to find the next set of matching cards. If we wake up every morning with this perspective, "I'm so curious to see what the challenges will be for me and how I'll nail them!" we're giving ourselves an incredible gift. When this one says a negative word or that one disappoints us, we feel a sense of eagerness to handle the situation right, to allow ourselves to face what comes up without resisting it and injuring ourselves, others, and our relationships along the way.

Last week, I was at the US embassy to take care of some passport renewals for the kids. I waited a long time to speak to a rep there, and when he finally appeared, someone else went ahead of me. True, we were in a rush to leave and what she did was not right. But, I noticed what came up for me: I felt so utterly small and unnoticed. And what was my

reaction to that feeling? I was seething. I wouldn't show it, of course, because, you know, I try to be nice to everyone, but inside I was mad. I politely waited for her to finish—it took a while—and then, as she left, I said to her, “This was very disappointing for me, to have to wait so long. You could have asked me before you went ahead.” (She knew that I'd been there before her.) The words I said were quite polite, but what I regretted was the place from which they came. I was fuming. And it was emanating from my resistance to my feeling small. When the next opportunity for this emotion to arise came up (not too long after!), I chose instead to let the feeling come up and not to react in a way that would hurt others or myself. The more we allow ourselves to feel these unpleasant emotions, to accept that they're what enable us to truly connect to Hashem, the more beautiful our life becomes.

P'sach Libi Besorasecha

PART III: Torah Tidbit

No Shoes Allowed

Although the Torah encourages us to work on negative emotions, such as *kinah*, *teivah*, and *kavod*, many of us erroneously believe that denying that we feel these emotions makes them go away. This can't be further from the truth. The Torah is *emes* and only with *emes* can we actually fulfill its commands. Our work in this world, the *sefarim* teach us, is not to deny that we feel what we feel, only to admit to where we're at and to learn for the future.

In this vein, I'd like to share a thought that I've already shared in the past, but is so appropriate for our discussion.

In Michtav M'Eliyahu (2), Rav Eliyahu Dessler *zt"l* speaks directly to that part in us. In his commentary on *Parshas Beshalach* titled “A person's growth—through his deficiency,” he cites a passages from Yalkut Shimoni, in which Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to Moshe Rabeinu, “Every time you see footsteps of a person, know that I am there before You.”

The feet, Rav Dessler notes, allude to the lowest rung of an individual's *ruchniyus*. Davka through that low place, a person could reach great heights. If only a person would acknowledge where he's really at, says Rav Dessler, he would draw from this the greatest inspiration for growth. “Remove your shoes from your feet,” Hashem commanded Moshe

Rabeinu before speaking to him from the Burning Bush, “the place on which you stand is holy.” Says Rav Dessler, that only when we remove the cover from our deficiency, through admitting where we’re up to at the current moment, through revealing our “foot,” we’re able to reach a holier, higher place.

Contrary to common error, growth is unable to happen when we turn a blind eye to what goes on inside of us. Yes, it may be frightening for us to admit that this is where our *yetzer hara* is at, that right now, at this very moment, we cringe when we see our mother’s name on the caller ID; that right now, at this very minute, we lie in order to appear perfect; that we criticize our spouse or children around the clock; but that is crucial to the growth process. This is what Hashem commands us to do—through acknowledging where we stand right now we can make real progress.

Vehashevosa el Levavecha

PART IV: Summary of Foundations

1. Imagine if we’d be emotionally self-sufficient. How would we feel that taste of real connection, the pleasure of sweating for something?
2. It all boils down to this: When this emotion comes up for me, do I resist it or accept it?
3. **Contrary to common error, growth is unable to happen when we turn a blind eye to what goes on inside of us.**

Ule’achiv Yomar Chazak

PART V: Growing Together

If you would like to share feedback or an anecdote from your *avodas hanefesh*, which will give *chizuk* to all of us, please send it my way. Here are some from subscribers:

Thanks for your eye-opening messages that have truly changed my perspective and approach to living as a Torah Yid. I especially get such chizuk when you show us how the tzaddikim are the ones that should be our role models not only for halacha and hashkafah but also for dealing with our emotions. The powerful story of Rav Nissim Karelitz offered such food for thought: it's not because their emotions were erased, but because their self-esteem was so powerful and real to them. Halevai on all of us! I shared the story with my teenaged students, for whom self-esteem is obviously a big issue, and they were very inspired.

Having grown up in a generation and home where discussion of the inner world was taboo, I especially appreciated the last message on the Torah's approach to looking back at our past. From the outset, it may seem similar to what modern psychology advocates for, but as soon as we look deeper and realize the intention of a Torah-focused counselor, we can't help but notice the stark difference of the two approaches. They're actually polar opposites. I wish more counselors would help out others from this wholesome, emunah-based perspective.

H.E.A.R.T. Initiative

Healing **E**motional **A**trophy through **R**econnecting to **T**orah

"Yismach lev mevakshei Hashem" (Tehillim 105:3)

All identifying details have been changed to protect the confidentiality of individuals I work with.

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For questions or comments on this content, or to suggest a topic for discussion, or for sponsorship opportunities, please write to Shiffy.HEART@gmail.com.

*L'zchus refuah sheleimah for Chananya Yom Tov Lipa ben Yehudis
and Alta Ettel bas Blima Gittel*

HEART Initiative

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