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**The Animalistic Soul and … Dog Training**

It is well known that the dog, man’s best friend, which he domesticized at the dawn of time, is an accurate reflection of its owner. The dog’s mood is a projection of its master’s. The dog’s personality is also influenced by the personality of whoever holds its leash.

Experts believe that the dog is never at fault, as its aggression or subservience, virtuousness or cruelty are a direct result of its owners’ behavior. In other words, if the dog is “frustrated” and takes out this frustration by attacking people or biting dogs and other animals, we must search for the human connection.

*Chazal* teach us “Why is it called a dog [*kelev]*? Because it is all heart [*kulo lev* – the same letters as the word *kelev*] (all emotion!!). They add that the words *kelev* [dog] and *beheima* [animal] have the same numerical value (52). With this in mind, it is interesting to examine the human vital animalistic soul[*nefesh behemis chiyunis*] through the perspective of a dog’s life.

Insights gained from dog training can help us to draw conclusions about educating our animalistic soul*.* And vice versa, a deeper understanding of our animalistic soul will lead to a better understanding of how to relate to animals, especially considering *Chazal’s* prohibition against cruelty to animals [*Tza’ar Ba’alei Chaim*].

If so, what is the animalistic soul, also referred to as the vital soul [n*efesh chiyunis*], which is an integral part of each and every person?

The Alter Rebbe, the founder of the Chabad school of thought, in his book *‘Likutei Amaraim – Tanya*’, provides us with extensive explanations about the animalistic soul. In short, he says that the world exists in a state of constant duality. There is the *“Sitra D’Kedusha”* [the holy side], and the *“Sitra Achra”* [the other side]. In other words, the world has a holy side – the side of G-d and anyone who accepts his authority and submits to him; as well as the other side, the *“Sitra Achra”* – anything which cannot be categorized within the realm of holiness and which conflicts with it. Parenthetically, sometimes an element of holiness is hidden and covered within the *Sitra Achra*, making it difficult to detect. Of course, like everything in our world, there are thick and crude aspects of the *Sitra Achra* as well as gentler parts; to the extent that great skill is sometimes required to differentiate between holiness and these gentle elements of the other side. In any event, this animalistic soul can be defined as the source of man’s natural attributes as a living being. In other words, all our biological needs, beginning with simple actions like eating and drinking or even enjoying a good joke, and extending to the need for company, studying various philosophies, or reproducing and continuing the species, are all expressions of the animalistic and vital soul. In other words, it is what defines man as a unique animal in the general zoology of creation.

When taking an in-depth look at this metaphysical source, which is basic life energy, we discover that we are incapable of understanding it in its pure form. We can only grasp it through several ‘*levushim’* [literally: garments, physical manifestations of spiritual concepts]. A *levush* has an identical function to our everyday clothing. We wear clothing to cover and hide our body, however, the clothing itself causes us to reveal ourselves to society. Some *levushim* are more internal, whereas others are more separate and distant from the body. The two inner *levushim* inherent to the soul itself are the powers of *sechel* [intellect] and *middos*, [character traits] which are hidden as they are and, through a long and complex process, clothed in the more external *levushim* of thought, speech and actions.

The powers of *sechel* are recognition, intellect, grasping matters inside the soul as they exist outside it; whereas *middos* are primal desires, urges, and impulses which activate a person and cause him to relate emotionally to an external object. The results are like or dislike. Hate or don’t hate, indifferent or not indifferent.

“The dog which is all heart” is also activated by primal impulses – its natural instincts. The need to belong to a pack of dogs is an example of a primal instinct, a distant echo of the ancient period before domestication. Man utilized the dog’s natural social tendencies and, with correct training, transformed it into his faithful friend. This social instinct can also be found in human nature, as is written “It is not good for man to be alone”, or as the *Navi* says “Each man says to his brother – strengthen yourself”, and more firmly in *Pirkei Avot* “Do not separate yourself from the community”. Another example is the dog’s natural instinctive need to belong and for control over its own territory, which man utilized to train it to faithfully guard his home. In human life, control can be expressed by a careful choice of words or by defeating our inclination, as *Chazal* say “Who is strong? One who conquers his inclinations”. Just as the dog, or (almost) any animal’s animalistic impulses can be channeled for positive purposes, so too the vital animalistic soul can be educated and directed to the side of holiness. Here man has the upper hand, as he has the powers of recognition, intellect and *sechel*. The result is that the dog follows commands like a robot, whereas man has free choice.

Until recently, six months was considered the optimal age to begin training dogs. Until then, the puppy was able to play, be wild, perhaps even destroy belongings and basically do whatever it wants. However, experts now believe that it is better to begin training puppies from the very first month of their lives.

Just like babies, a dog’s personality is distinguishable when it is only a few days old, and it can be taught appropriate behavior suited to its character. Puppy training is based on “give and take”. The trainer takes advantage of the desire to eat and offers tempting food to the hungry puppy (and they are always hungry), while conditioning it to carry out the action the trainer wants. When the puppy repeats the action, and does it well, it will receive more and more tasty treats, and the actions will gradually become second nature.

As the dog matures, the mere intonation of the command or the trainer’s hand signal will suffice for the dog to carry out its master’s command. And… of course, it is important to give a compliment or a gentle stroke with each successful action. The dog will be very “appreciative”.

From familiarity with small children’s personalities and energy, if we replace the word “puppy” in the above paragraph with the word “child” or baby”, and the word “trainer” with the word “parent”, “teacher” or “counsellor”, re-reading this paragraph will provide us with an ancient recipe for education.

We find in several places in *Chazal* that one who wants to encourage a small child to love learning should offer him sweets or prizes in exchange, as well as compliments, to stroke his “childish self”. When he matures, his powers of recognition and intellect will enter the “prizes – success, success – prizes” equation. Therefore, in contrast with the dog, who continues to be conditioned by prizes, sounds or smells, a person is guided by his conscience and intellect, and by restraining his negative emotions.

Anger is one of the negative *middos* which stems from the animalistic soul.

Anger appears when a person’s desire is not realized, despite his absolute conviction that he deserves it. A small child is angered due to trivial things, whereas the object of an adult’s desire can sometimes be valuable and sometimes…is revealed to be similarly insignificant. Anger feeds itself. It can begin with just a small spark which continues burning and increasing, because the more a person thinks in terms of “I deserve” without receiving his desire, so the flame grows and his anger becomes increasingly stronger.

The solution is to abruptly disconnect the thoughts and to distract them to other things. Then, with the help of the naturally cool *sechel*, to cool the enthusiasm and try to control the emotions.

It is interesting that the dog undergoes the same process when he is angry. A dog can become angry for various reasons. The more it barks, the more its body tenses up and saliva drips from his mouth, the more it fuels its anger and enters a terrifying vicious cycle. In such a case, the “loop” must be abruptly stopped. How can this be done? A light kick on its backside, sudden pull on its leash, or an unfamiliar noise cause it to pause for a second. This pause disconnects the canine emotion and brings the dog back to reality.

César Millán, a well-known dog trainer in America and a popular television star, deals with particularly wild dogs in his programs. He is known as “the dog whisperer”, and coined the expression “The dog needs to be corrected and the owner needs to be trained’. He detected, following in-depth observation of the dog’s psyche, that all wild dogs have one common denominator: the dog’s owner is led by the dog; the dog has become the leader and the owner is the follower.

This causes the dog to rebel, become wild, attack, pounce, to go crazy. There are those who reacted by tying the dog with iron chains and a spiked collar, so that every tug causes the “patient” great suffering. Others punished it for its behavior by putting it in a prison-like place, behind tall bars, and so forth. All these responses demonstrated a lack of understanding of the dog’s nature and only increased the rage, frustration and suffering of an animal which became increasingly more dangerous.

Incredibly, when the famous trainer replaced the irritating chains with a relaxed and pleasant grip and took the lead, with the dog obediently and submissively following him, an unbelievable change occurred. The dog began acting pleasantly toward people and animals.

Dogs naturally want to be led, a distant echo of a period when they lived in packs, and will be completely devoted and ready to do anything for their leader. Therefore, the dog owner must show assertiveness, radiate confidence, and take control of the situation. In human terms, we are familiar with the principle “As in water, face answers face, so is the heart of man to another man”, when we act pleasantly toward someone they, even subconsciously, reciprocate affection.

The definitive sign of canine surrender is when a dog lies on its back.

There are two ways for dogs to reach this position. One is when it is faced with a violent owner who hits it, or a dog stronger than the dog lying down; the second is by lying the dog on the ground and turning it onto its back. In both cases, the result is a dog who becomes “a rag dog”. Such a dog will not fulfill its required functions (guarding, sheepherding, defense, saving others, etc.). We therefore have no need for such a weak and frail creature.

In translation to the animalistic soul: A strong animalistic soul is not an inherently negative state, and indeed we cannot create a situation in which we completely dispose of our animalistic soul. It has been with us since birth and will accompany us until we breathe our last breath. However, we can educate it to two goals: Firstly, not to disturb us by attracting us to undesirable things; secondly, to use its natural strength (“But an abundance comes from the strength of the ox”) to help us fulfill our purpose as people in the optimal manner. This is hinted at in the approach of the *Ba’al Shem Tov*, who believes that the animalistic soul and the body should not be suppressed through fasting and penances, but rather purified and made gentler. How can this be done? By keeping the Creator’s laws, expressed by the *Torah*’s *Mitvos.*

In summary, when dealing with a person’s animalistic soul; what can we do to prevent a result who is lawless, frustrated, full of anger, frustration and anxiety and all kinds of negative phenomena which damage the person himself and his surroundings? And even more so, how we educate someone to become positive, creative, productive, responsible, one who accepts himself as he is and is prepared to integrate into society and to help others (man is a social being)? In order to achieve all this, the master must be one step ahead, present a vision, and steer his body’s primal instincts and urges toward the “holy side”.

And who is the master of the vital animalistic soul? The powers of recognition and intellect which are capable of proposing ideas, analyzing situations, and choosing alternatives in order to steer emotions in a controlled manner. They also have inherent natural faith, and were created to activate the *middot* and to help man realize his full potential through thought, speech and action.