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## Overview

**I**n the Inner Torah process the body helps us gauge what's happening in our inner world. We first pay attention to the breath and to physical sensations in the body, and from there we move into an exploration of feelings. In that context we are relating to the body and the messages it sends as gates through which to enter into fuller relationship with ourselves. A tight chest, churning stomach, shallow breath, and a host of other bodily sensations alert us that something is happening within that needs attention.

Having entered through these gates, we then come into relationship with the part of the self that is experiencing distress and, G-d-willing, are able to facilitate healing and growth. At that point, the body again plays a crucial role by letting us know if the intervention is truly helpful. If it is, the bodily signals of distress – the tightening, churning, etc. – should subside and, hopefully, be replaced with a sense of ease that was not there before.

In this way, someone doing Inner Torah work begins to develop somatic awareness and an ability to interpret the signals the body sends. The actual impact on the body – the shift from a state of tension to ease – is a byproduct of the healing relationship that is developed between the adult and the younger, vulnerable self. The bodily sensation itself is not worked with directly.

Yet, there are also ways to enlist the body to help us come more fully into ourselves and into relationship with Hashem. These ways involve working with the body itself to soften, open, release blocks, increase stability, become more fluid and resonant, access deeper places, dissolve masks, and generate more life force.

The two approaches work in tandem. Focusing on the relationship between our adult self and younger, vulnerable selves can result in bodily openings and releases. And focusing on the body can strengthen the adult self, help younger, vulnerable selves surface, and deepen the relationship between the two.

For some people, adding the component of breath and body work to the Inner Torah process is inviting. Others may not be so inclined. As I wrote in *Practical Inner Torah*, the Inner Torah process stands on its own and does not need to be supplemented with any physical practice. But for those who are drawn to such practice, there is much to be gained from coming into more conscious connection with your breath and body. For those who are somewhere in between, know that your nervous system also understands the language of imagery, so even just imagining yourself doing the explorations can be of some benefit.

Batya was filled with anxiety whenever she thought someone might be upset with her.\* In a complicated family situation, with

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\* All of the stories in this book are based on actual situations. Names, certain identifying details, and other features have been changed to protect privacy, and some stories are composites.

a stepmother, mother, grandmother, father, and siblings, all of whom were on varying degrees of speaking terms with each other, it wasn't unusual for Batya to get caught in the middle, one way or another. On top of that, she had in-laws who spent what she felt were excessive amounts of time at her house, which created its own tension.

Just thinking about all these family dynamics and the possibility that one or another of her relatives was annoyed with her would tighten Batya's chest so she almost couldn't breathe. Instead of being able to give her full attention to her children and her household, she found herself constantly going over the details of whatever incident had provoked the latest tensions.

The whole thing was getting out of control. She knew she had to get a grip on herself and not let these situations, which seemed to arise repeatedly, get the best of her. She decided to begin by paying attention to what went on physically when she got caught in these familial tailspins. Immediately she noticed that she was disconnected from her body. She was so consumed with her thoughts that it was as though she didn't even have a body. Ah, she thought, that's a good place to begin.

She looked first at her breath, remembering that it could help guide her back into bodily connection with herself. When she saw how short it became in these moments, she focused on her exhale and invited herself to let more air out on each breath. She realized that if at the same time she brought her awareness to her feet and how they made contact with the ground, it made it easier to exhale longer. Just making this association pleased her. She felt like it was her first indication that her body was taking on a sense of reality for her. Then she added a sound that soothed her both in making it – as she sensed the vibration it created – and in listening to it. All of these things served to bring Batya's awareness back to herself and remind her of her

own reality independent of the relationship machinations that swirled around her.

From that place more inside of herself, Batya once again reflected on the latest family feud. But this time, instead of flying off in her mind, trying to figure out what everyone else was thinking and feeling, she had more of a focus on herself, on her piece of the puzzle. She thought about the role she had played, how she had handled herself, what she had said, and she asked herself whether she was okay with how she had behaved. Finding that she was, Batya then asked herself whether there was anything else she wanted to do to foster *shalom*. For the first time, she didn't busy herself with trying to figure out the others involved. Also for the first time, she felt, in a very real way, that Hashem was also in this picture. She could only be responsible for her piece of the puzzle. Other family members held other pieces, and Hashem held still others.

Securely anchored in her own breath and body, Batya felt more able to let events unfold without anxiously trying to engineer an outcome to relieve herself of the excruciating pressure she felt in such circumstances. She was more able to concentrate on her children and her other responsibilities, and to trust that whatever needed to happen would happen in time. She was willing to do her share but not to do everyone else's anymore. While Batya wanted to understand more about what made her so anxious in these situations to begin with, she didn't feel ready to go down that road yet. So she was happy to have at least eased the intensity of her response with the breath and body work.

Chaya took easily to working with her breath and body. It helped her to come into the moment, to not get caught up in endlessly going over the many times in her life, beginning in early childhood, when she had been wronged. Until then it had

been her habit, each time she experienced a new injustice, to remember the many others that had preceded it. And the pain would be close to unbearable. Her great despair at repeatedly reaching this place led her to Inner Torah, where she chose first to concentrate on the breath and body work.

Her life at that point was still too crisis-driven to give her the time and peace of mind to do the other aspects of Inner Torah. Realizing that was an important first step in her new resolve to take better care of herself and get out of the vicious cycle of painful feelings in which she had been caught for decades. With her husband and mother both seriously ill, she had very little time to tend to herself. What she liked about the breath and body work was that she could easily incorporate it into all the things she was being called upon to do and handle. It required awareness and consciousness that she felt sure would strengthen rather than deplete her energies.

At the moment what was happening was that in the course of trying to care for her sick and aged mother, she was running into longstanding issues with her siblings. These new experiences were triggering memories of many other such difficult times in the past. At the same time, she was facing struggles with the medical personnel who were supposed to be caring for her husband. That was bringing back memories of all the medical mishaps she had endured both in childbirth and with her own illnesses. Just thinking about all these episodes made her feel weak and defeated.

By staying present in her body as she was navigating these challenges, Chaya found it easier not to go spinning off into her mind. It was the beginning of coming into deeper and fuller relationship with herself, of taking responsibility for her life and starting to function as the adult woman who deep down she had long wanted to be.

However you decide to go about it – whether you work with the Inner Torah process alone or in concert with breath and body work, or you initially focus just on breath and body – remember that we all need to keep growing spiritually, to keep manifesting more and more of who G-d created us to be. G-d is Infinite. To emulate and connect with Him, we must also dwell in the realm of the infinite, continually plumbing the endless depths of our beings.

“Man was created to toil” (*Iyov* 5:7). Our work is to make visible Hashem’s presence in this world, to serve Him with the entirety of our beings, to free G-dliness from its prison of physicality by revealing the G-dliness within us. We are commanded to “be holy, for holy am I, Hashem your G-d” (*Vayikra* 19:1). There is much at our disposal today to help us in this effort. It is up to each of us to determine how best to go about our work.

Part I of this book is devoted to breath and its natural extension, voice – vast subjects that could easily fill entire books on their own. Breath is the medium through which we are most directly connected with Hashem. The spark of G-d that animates each of us is in our breath. And He blessed every one of us with a unique breath rhythm which connects us to our authentic self.

Hashem not only breathed life into our bodies and empowered our bodies to breathe on their own, He also gave us the capacity to participate in that process, to bring consciousness to our breathing – an aspect of our lives and our selves that would otherwise operate involuntarily and unconsciously. This seems to be an invitation to join Him, to engage more fully in helping our souls manifest. For at any given moment, no matter what the circumstances, we all have the capacity to come back into relation with our own breath cycle. It is a master key to our inner homes.

Part II of this book includes different ways to begin to reclaim one's bodily home and come into relationship with whatever might be hidden there. The body knows everything that has happened to it. With patience and a willingness to listen, we can begin to hear a story that otherwise might be lost.

Our goal in cultivating body awareness – as it is with breath – is a higher level of consciousness, recognition of the G-dly dimension in every aspect of existence, and a closer connection with Hashem. The work of refining and elevating our consciousness and allowing that consciousness to penetrate the physical matter of our bodies is continual as long as we are alive. There is no end to the G-dly light we can access and manifest on this physical plane. The more we are able to open to this reality, to experience our eternal nature, the more our bodies will loosen their grip on the fear, hurt, and other emotions that keep us contracted and separated from ourselves, from others, and from G-d.

Most sections in Parts I and II include a discussion followed by explorations to facilitate actual physical practice. Even if you can't do the practice, just reading the discussion sections will increase your self-awareness. With this greater awareness, you'll be more alert to subtle cues from your breath, voice, and body, which can help you better know yourself and better live your life.