



UNEDITED INTERNET VERSION

V16

[05.02.2019]

AVODAH ROSH CHODESH

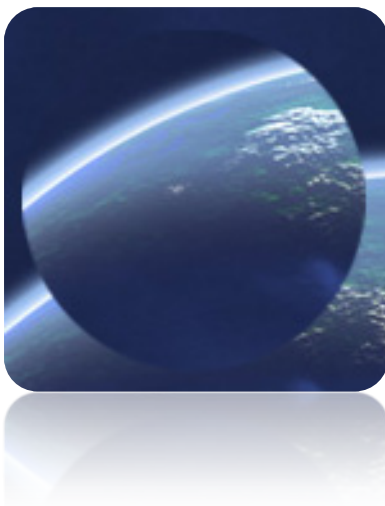
The Avodah & Essence of Each Month

Collection of Drashas from the
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Part One:
Avodah
of the
Month

1 | Nissan – Conversation

Nissan: Speech

The special ability in the month of Nissan (according to the *Vilna Gaon*) is identified as the power of speech (“*sichah*”).¹ The power of speech is mainly utilized by women; as our *Chazal* say, the women took ninety percent of speech, while the men only took ten percent.² In addition, *Chazal* state that in the merit of the righteous women, the Jewish nation merited to be redeemed from Egypt.

Thus, the power of speech, which is the nature of the month of Nissan, is mainly reflected in the speech of women, whose merit brought about the redemption. With the help of Hashem, let us learn how we can utilize the soul’s power of speech.

Three Kinds of Talking

It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that there are generally three kinds of speech:

- (1) Talking for the sake of a *mitzvah* (i.e. *davening*, or speaking with someone in order to help him);
- (2) Talking about matters that are not about a *mitzvah*, but are nonetheless necessary (such as talking about matters that we need to take care of); there is nothing wrong with this.
- (3) Talking about things that are unnecessary.

Man Is a Creature of Speech

A person is called “*medaber*” (a social creature). The Torah calls man a ‘*nefesh chayah*’ (living spirit), which is interpreted by *Targum Onkelos* to mean “*ruach memalelah*” – a “talking spirit”. Speech personifies man. Thus, speech is clearly an ability in man that can be used for holiness.

¹ This series of “Rosh Chodesh Avodah”, which explains the special abilities contained in each of the Jewish months of the calendar, is based on the Vilna Gaon’s commentary to Sefer Yetzirah 5:5.

This shiur was given to women and is geared towards women specifically, in how to use the power of “*sichah*” in the month of Nissan. A series of three shiurim similar to the concepts of this shiur was given to men, in the series “Fixing Your Wind”, classes #09, #010, and #011. For a deeper understanding of the power of ‘*sichah*’ in the month of Nissan, see also “Essence of Rosh Chodesh 01. Nissan. Speech and Prayer”.

² Kiddushin 49b

Analyzing Our Conversations

Let us think about the following: How much time of a day do we spend talking, throughout the 24 hours of the day?

Once we're thinking about that, now we need to think: What is the nature of our conversations? Are we talking about things that are a *mitzvah* to talk about? Are we talking about things we need to take care of? Or are we engaging in empty chatter?

Making this reflection helps us become aware of our speech and how we are conversing. Being that there are three kinds of speech (*mitzvah*, necessary, and unnecessary), we need to first identify these three kinds of speech in our own conversations. Most people, upon making this reflection, will discover that most of their conversations are not necessary.

When our power of speech is mostly being used for unnecessary conversations, we can let it bother us that our power of speech (*medaber*) which defines man is being used for lower and unholy purposes. In fact, many of us will discover that our speech is mostly being used to speak about things that are forbidden – such as *lashon hora* (gossip) and *rechilus* (slander), and *motzi shem ra* (spreading false and derogatory information about others). This is even more degrading to the power of '*medaber*' which personifies man.

Thus, the first thing we have to become aware of is to realize that most of our conversations are not utilizing the true and intended purpose of speech.

Two Kinds of Unnecessary Speech

When it comes to speaking about unnecessary matters, there are actually two kinds of this.

One example of idle speech is when people meet each other and they get into a conversation, and they talk about meaningless things. For example, when two friends meet each other in the store or on the bus, or in the street, or if a bunch of people are sitting together and chatting; they will speak about all kinds of various topics in the conversation, which are really not important to speak about.

Another example of idle speech is when a person finds himself alone, like when's alone in the house, and he wants to relieve his loneliness, so he picks up the phone and calls a friend. This is a more idle kind of talking, because here, the person *seeks* the conversation and initiates the idle conversation.

In the first example of idle speech that we brought, the person encounters a situation in which he ends up talking pointlessly. It can happen when he's with his family or when he goes to other places where he meets people, and he finds himself having pointless conversations. In the second example of idle speech that we brought, the person actively seeks a conversation with another; he deliberately places himself in that situation. These two examples we brought are not merely two different scenarios of idle speech that can happen. They are two completely different reasons for unnecessary speech.

Why Do People Like To Chat?

Let's analyze the first example of idle speech that we brought: when a person meets others and ends up chatting with them, speaking about pointless things.

Certainly, when a person is around other people, he should talk to them, because it is '*derech eretz*' (proper manners) to do so. People become uncomfortable when they are with a person who isn't engaging in a conversation. It's considered rude and unpleasant to be completely silent around others; therefore, it is only proper that we allow ourselves to engage in conversation with others.

However, most of the time, we are not talking to others simply out of '*derech eretz*' for them. It's because we simply enjoy talking! There's a certain pleasure in talking. Just as we enjoy food, so do we enjoy talking. Thus, the deeper reason of why people like to engage in idle chatter is because there is a certain pleasure in talking with others.

On a deeper level, ever since the sin of Adam, there has been pleasure in talking simply for the sake of talking, due to the negative effect of the Snake on mankind. *Chazal* state that all of the animals asked the Snake, "What pleasure do you have in speaking *lashon hora*?" [For it spoke *lashon hora* to Adam and Chavah]. This implies that although there is no pleasure in speaking *lashon hora*, there is pleasure in talking itself.

Talking In Order To Relieve Boredom and Inner Emptiness

In the second example of idle speech we brought, a person seeks a conversation with others because he is bored and he feels empty inside, so he wants to relieve his feeling of loneliness, through chatting with others.

When a person is getting anxious from the loneliness and emptiness that he is feeling, and he doesn't know how to fill the loneliness, he will seek to fill it through external means, and one of these ways is through chatting with others. In this way, he takes his mind off his troubles.

Chazal say that "A worry in the heart of man, should be spoken to others". When a person is worried or upset about something, he should speak to others about it in order to be able to relieve his anxiousness. Even if a person isn't worried about anything particular, and he's rather just feeling bored inside and a general lack of happiness towards himself, he feels a need to speak with others in order to take away his feeling of inner emptiness and boredom. The problem with this, though, is that it causes a person to remove himself from his own inner world, as he exits himself and gets involved with the external and superficial world, via all kinds of conversation and chatting.

So we have explained that there are two motivations for talking to others: Either because there is a pleasure in talking to others, or because of loneliness, boredom and emptiness.

In Summary

To clarify, let us summarize until now [and add on some additional points, for clarification]. There is a normal and healthy need of the soul to talk to others, but the problem is when we go beyond the normal amount of talking. There are two reasons why people speak unnecessarily: because there is pleasure in talking, or because a person wants to relieve his loneliness or boredom.

Sometimes, both factors are present when we talk. When a person meets others and he ends up engaging in conversation with them, it is not always because he simply enjoys having a conversation; it can very well be because he feels bored. He feels tension when there is quietness between him and others, so he talks, in order to avoid that feeling of boredom. Let us again emphasize that there are three motivating reasons of why we talk. Sometimes we talk when it is a *mitzvah* to do so, sometimes we talk in order to take care of things that are necessary, and some of our speech is unnecessary.

Defining 'Necessary' Speech

To clarify, 'necessary' speech doesn't mean that a person will only say things so long as it takes care of something important. This cannot be, because we have a natural and healthy need to talk, and this is also considered 'necessary' speech. It is a need of our soul. What we are coming to address here is, that part of our speech is used for things that are totally unnecessary to talk about, and it is this part of our speech that we need to eliminate.

The Vilna *Gaon* says that the Torah is acquired through "less speech", and that this means that a little bit of talking beyond what we actually need ['schmoozing'] is in fact a 'necessary' kind of talking, for our basic emotional needs. Therefore, our discussion here about 'unnecessary' speech is only concerning speech that we don't need; it does not apply to the basic amount of talking which we need in our life.

Elevating Our Speech

Thus, altogether, we have learned that there are really four kinds of speech:

- (1) Talking for the purpose of a *mitzvah*,
- (2) Talking for something necessary that we need to take care of,
- (3) Pleasurable talking (which is necessary for our emotional health, but it is sometimes overdone),
- (4) Talking out of loneliness and boredom. Our *avodah* is to fix the third and fourth kinds of speech: when we talk unnecessarily and it's beyond our normal needs for talking, and when we talk out of boredom. It is these kinds of speech which need to be fixed.

We also explained that there are two kinds of unnecessary talking: talking for the sake of pleasure (when it's beyond our normal needs), and talking out of boredom. If we analyze our unnecessary conversations, we will discover that both of these factors are usually present. The only issue is in the

percentages: how much of the extra talking is being motivated by pleasure to talk, and how much of a percentage in the extra talking is coming from boredom?

Talking for Enjoyment (When It's More Than the Usual)

When a person talks simply because it's enjoyable (when it's more than the usual healthy need), this is like anything else we do that's enjoyable. People do things that are enjoyable, even if it's not purposeful; whatever a person enjoys, he naturally does it. Even if nothing constructive comes from such talking, as long as the person is enjoying the conversation, he will continue on talking for a very long time.

We can see that this kind of conversation is very common. A person goes to a wedding or a *simcha*, or he meets someone on a trip, and he gets into a lengthy conversation with another person he meets; it can go from being two minutes to being several hours! And it is entirely an empty conversation, with nothing of purpose that was discussed. Where does this nature stem from?

What we need to understand is that everything which Hashem created, He created it for a purpose. The purpose of Creation is often not on one's mind; usually, a person is mainly concerned at the moment to do what he enjoys. To illustrate, a child enjoys anything that will give instant pleasure; when he plays games, he is doing so that he can enjoy the results. When he gets that enjoyment, it lasts momentarily, and then he's onto the next thing he enjoys. So there is a deep nature in man to always seek something pleasurable at the moment. Usually, this desire for pleasure manifests in one's speech.

With most people, their conversations are unnecessary. The conversations that most people have are for the purpose of an enjoyable conversation, and not about anything in particular that is of purpose to discuss.

But if a person reveals purpose in his life, he will begin to notice that there is no longer a need to have most of his conversations. He will realize that most conversations are empty and meaningless. The less a person is living with purpose, the more he engages in conversations that have no purpose; he can chat for hours on end, about nothing important, yet it doesn't bother him that he is having empty conversations. Even worse, most conversations that lack purpose to them often lead to speaking about matters that are forbidden.

To summarize: the more a person lives with purpose in his life, the less he is dominated by the pleasure of the moment. His conversations will become more purposeful and 'to the point'. In contrast, the less a person lives with purpose, the more he is drawn after what's pleasure right now, and he will find it difficult to pull away from an enjoyable conversation that has no purpose to it.

Thoughtless Talking

We explained that there is another motivation for talking unnecessarily: when a person gets used to talking without thinking at all about what he's saying. The Ramban says, "Think about the words

[that you are about to say], before you release them from your mouth.” If we reflect, we can see that most conversations are thoughtless.

It is shocking to see, but it is very common: We can see people going on and on in their conversations, talking about topics that they have no idea about!

In the first kind of unnecessary talking that we discussed, a person might talk about things that he knows about, but it is simply a conversation that has no purpose to it. For example, a person meets someone and says to him, “I did such-and-such yesterday....Tomorrow, I plan to do such-and-such...My daughter did....My baby woke me up last night. I got up, then I walked around, then I had a drink, then I sat back down.” Conversations like this are meaningless. However, at least the person knows what he is talking about.

In the current kind of talking we are discussing, though, a person is having a lengthy conversation about matters that he really doesn’t know anything about. He has no clue about the topics he’s discussing, yet he talks about them anyway. Many times, a person will have a whole conversation in which he offers his opinions about all kinds of topics, when in reality he doesn’t know what he’s talking about.

For example, he will give his opinion on politics, on how the principal should run his child’s school, his views on *chinuch* (child education), and on current events. It’s very possible that he has absolutely no idea what he’s talking about, yet he continues to express his views on such matters. Where does this nature stem from?

It is a result of living for the pleasure of the moment. Such an orientation doesn’t allow a person to connect his thoughts with his speech. When a person doesn’t think, he cannot talk properly; thus, when people don’t think, their words sound thoughtless and meaningless. Of course, there is always some minimal thought that goes into how we speak, enough to carry a conversation, but the words will still be lacking a great degree of content. In most scenarios, the words will come out of his mouth quickly, with no involvement of thought beforehand.

There is another problem with thoughtless conversations: the quality of the conversations is often devoid of any real content. So the more a person puts thought into his conversations, thinking before he talks [as the Ramban writes], the more he will talk with precision, and his words will be less. He won’t have to speak so much, because he is already putting content into his conversations. When a conversation has content and meaning to it, it’s impossible for a person to talk so much, for his words will be limited to speak a certain amount that is necessary.

Let’s summarize the two steps in elevating our conversations that we have spoken about until now. Most extraneous conversations that people have are being motivated for either of two reasons. Either a person is engaging in idle chatter because he is missing a sense of purpose in his life, which results in talking many words that have no purpose to them. Or, the conversations are thoughtless, because the person is simply talking without thinking beforehand of what he will talk about.

If we examine most of the conversations that go on in the world, we can see that most conversations lack purpose to them, in addition to being thoughtless, or with minimal thought from beforehand.

How to Think Before You Talk

The more a person gets used to having purposeful conversations, and he is thinking of how he can put more content into his conversations, he will see an overhaul in how he talks. He will suddenly discover an entirely new power of speech in his life.

Practically speaking, before a person knows he will have a conversation, he should think about what he will say. Let's say a person knows he will go to a certain place and meet people there, and he knows that he will end up 'shmoozing'. He should prepare the conversation: what kind of subjects he will speak about, and how; and what the purpose of the conversations will be.

A person should try doing this once a day. This slowly gets a person used to speaking with thought and with purpose.

Understandably, along with this, a person also needs to lessen the amount of idle chatter in his conversations and to avoid speaking words that are thoughtless and purposeless.

[On a deeper note], getting used to this enables a person to reach the holy power of "*sichah*" (conversation) – to leave the "*peh ra*" (evil mouth) that is hinted to in the word "*Pharoah*", and to instead enter into the holy kind of "*sichah*" – to tell over the story of the exodus for the entire night of Pesach.

Don't Speak About Everything That Comes To Mind

There is also another fundamental point to consider: A person needs to get used to the idea of not always saying everything that comes to mind.

Just because a person has an opinion about something doesn't require him to say it. One must know that there are things he has no understanding of, as well as things he doesn't have that much understanding about, as well as things which he doesn't understand at all. So just because you see a bunch of men or a bunch of women sitting together and discussing a certain topic does not require you to express your personal opinion about the subject being discussed.

A person needs to get used to talking only about things he is clear about. When a person limits his conversations to only speaking about matters that he is clear about, this will also lessen the amount of idle chatter in his conversations, because he will be speaking a lot less. When a person is used to talking so much without any restraint to his speech, he will naturally talk about all kinds of subjects, as if he knows it all. This is more than just a habit that one acquires; it is human nature for a person to talk about all kinds of topics.

So it is very important for a person to train himself to only speak about matters that he knows about, and not to speak about all kinds of topics. As *Chazal* say, “Teach your tongue to say, “I don’t know.” These are the three steps we need in order to elevate our conversations: to seek purpose in our conversations, to think before we talk, and to only speak about things we know about and avoid speaking things that we don’t know about.

Conversations Caused By Boredom and Emptiness

Until now, we explained how to fix the first kind of idle chatter, which stems from a pleasure in talking. We explained the three steps we need in order to elevate our conversations.

But there is another kind of idle chatter we mentioned: when a person feels lonely, or empty, or bored, so he engages in conversation with another, to relieve his feeling of emptiness. Either he will go to a friend’s house, or he will pick up the phone and call, or he will use any of the means of communication that are available today.

This is a different kind of ‘schmoozing’ than when two people meet and they get into a conversation. Here, the person actively seeks out a person to have a conversation with. It is usually stemming from inner emptiness and boredom. The first step to overcome this is for a person to become aware, in the first place, of the loneliness. When he’s picking up the phone to call his friend, or as he’s feeling the need to communicate, he should stop and ask himself: “Why do I want to talk to my friend now? Is there a real need for this, or is it just a desire I have?”

If a person realizes that it is more of a desire than a need, the next step is for him to analyze where this desire is coming from. Is it coming from a desire for the pleasure of talking, or is it coming from boredom? When he realizes that it is coming from boredom, he should become aware that the boredom is a sign of emptiness. If so, the communication with another that he wants is stemming from a need to fill his emptiness. But it is not really filling his emptiness – he is rather running away from it, by seeking a friend to get into a conversation with.

The first thing one must realize, then, is to become aware of his situation. After that he can work on a solution, as we will soon say (with the help of Hashem), but the very first and essential step must be that he become aware of this in the first place.

If one realizes that deep down he feels empty, he should know that this comes from a lack of satisfaction within himself. A person needs to learn how to solve his general sense of emptiness in life, but here we are not addressing this³. Here we are addressing how to solve conversations that stem from emptiness.

³ See the derasha called “The Void”; refer also to *Reaching Your Essence #02 – Searching For Satisfaction*

Chatting With a Friend vs. Talking With Hashem

As we brought from the words of the Vilna *Gaon* , every person has a normal and healthy need to converse with others. This is necessary for peace of mind. But most of our conversations are more than the normal amount of speech that we need in order to stay emotionally healthy. The question is, how much of our speech is necessary for our peace of mind, and how much of it is unnecessary? We definitely need to ‘schmooze’ a little, and the only question is, how much.

The more a person lives an inner kind of life, he lives deeper. He lives more with the Creator in his life. He will naturally talk to Hashem a lot more. When a person is alone, and he is used to talking to Hashem, “as a man talks to his friend” (as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes), he will find himself talking to Hashem a lot when he is alone. He can do so mentally or verbally. His speech will mainly be utilized to talk with Hashem, and as a result, he will feel much less of a need to speak with people.

We must know, clearly, that the desire to talk is human nature. We all have it. Most people are not talking as much with Hashem as they are used to talking with people. Talking to Hashem, by most people, is limited to the times of *davening*, but this is not nearly enough; often a person does not feel that he is standing in front of Hashem as he *davens*. A person often does not feel as he is *davening* that he is talking to Hashem; he thinks he is just saying words. Therefore, most people are not using their power of *sichah* properly, and instead, their power of *sichah* is turned outwards – empty chatter with others.

But the more a person is living inwardly and deeper, he is more connected with his true self, and he connects to the Creator more often. His power of *sichah*, for the most part, will be used towards Hashem. When he finds himself alone, instead of becoming bored and seeking a conversation with another, he will realize that being with himself means that he is with Hashem. When he feels a need to talk, he mainly talks with Hashem. This doesn’t mean he never talks to others. He talks to others too; it is just that most of his speech is directed towards talking with Hashem.

The more a person is living inwardly, he trains himself to think more. The first gain from this is that he will find that he speaks less with others, (because he is living more in the ‘world of thought’ than in a ‘world of speech’).

To Speak To Hashem, Naturally

Additionally, one must understand the following important point. We see people who can talk, talk, and talk. Human nature is that we like to talk. Women, especially, have a nature to talk; *Chazal* say that the women took nine out of ten measurements of speech. The only issue is what we do with all of this talking. It needs to be mainly channeled towards speaking with Hashem.

When two people meet, they can get into a conversation that lasts for hours. If a Jew truly lives with Hashem in his life, he will speak to Him a lot, throughout the day. Speaking to Hashem is not limited to the three times of the day that we *daven*. Nor is it limited to when we do *hisbodedus*

(meditation). Talking to Hashem is meant for the entire day! It is to speak with Hashem, naturally; to recognize that Hashem is the partner in your life, Whom you include your whole life with⁴.

This will sound very foreign to certain people when they hear it. It might even sound strange and weird. But a person only reacts that way when he isn't used to living with the Creator in his life in a palpable sense. The more a person lives with Hashem in his life, in his heart, in his thoughts – and he feels that he is actually with Hashem, and he feels Him in his heart – he will naturally talk to Him. His power of *sichah* is then channeled towards its true Source.

This is the depth of the redemption from Egypt, when we were redeemed from Pharaoh, from “*peh ra*”, the “evil mouth”, and we instead entered the holy kind of *sichah*. In the true way that a Jew lives life, he indeed speaks a lot – he speaks in prayer to Hashem, and in addition, he speaks a lot with Hashem throughout the day.

Of course, this does not mean to imply that a husband should lessen how much he talks with his wife, and that a wife should talk less with her husband, or that the parents should speak less with the children. This cannot be done, because it is not *derech eretz*, and it is not a way to live. Life requires us to speak with our family members a lot. We are only addressing the many extraneous conversations that people have, which are not necessary. It all stems from a lack of sensing Hashem in one's life.

In Summary

To summarize, when it comes to unnecessary speech, we explained that there are two kinds.

There are conversations that stem from the pleasure to talk; in this, the way to improve is by training ourselves to speak with purpose. In the general sense, this means to live life with a sense of purpose, and on a more specific level, it means to speak with purpose: to infuse content into our conversations. It also includes thinking before we talk about what we will about, and to only talk about things we know about, as opposed to talking about things that we don't know about.

The second kind of unnecessary speech is when a person engages in conversation because he is feeling bored or empty. The way we improve this is by speaking with Hashem whenever we find ourselves alone. When one gets used to talking Hashem when he is alone, his life will undergo a complete overhaul. He will feel new, even more new than how a convert feels upon becoming a Jew. He will feel like he has left a narrowed kind of existence in which he was living disparate from the Creator, and that instead he has entered a world in which he lives together with Hashem, connected with Him.

⁴ See the shiur of *Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus (Practice)* #018 - “Talking Continuously With Hashem”

Every person needs to get used to talking with Hashem, simply, and earnestly. Sometimes we talk to Him from the depths of our heart, and sometimes less. But in either situation, we need to train ourselves to always talk to Hashem, on a regular basis. We can talk to Hashem verbally or mentally.

Understandably, talking to Hashem needs to be done sensibly and only when it is not disrespectful to others to do so. The point is that a Jew needs to get used to living life this way, in which he lives with Hashem and he speaks with Him on a regular basis. His nature of *sichah* is then turned towards the Creator.

This is the meaning behind the redemption from Egypt. May we merit with the help of Hashem to speak words of holiness, to tell over the story of the exodus, to speak to others properly, both in our family life as well as towards our friends, neighbors, and those we know.

Even more so, may we merit that our power of speech mainly be used to speak with Hashem, to connect to Him completely – which will make our speech true and holy.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *What exactly is the power of a woman to talk (since they took ninety percent of speech), more than a man?*

ANSWER: Since a woman's heart is [generally] more opened than a man's heart, she can speak more easily from her heart to Hashem.

Q2: *If a woman is very reserved and doesn't like to talk to her neighbors, and instead spends her time reading books all the time (I know such a person), does that come from an emotional problem (since a woman by nature likes to talk), or does it come from avoiding idle chatter?*

ANSWER: It depends. Some people have a more reserved nature and don't like to get into lengthy conversations, and they only talk out of *derech eretz*. They will say "Hello" or "Good morning", but they don't like to get into conversations. This can also be because some women are more intellectual by nature, and would rather spend their time reading than talking. But if a woman doesn't like to talk to people, it might come from an emotional issue that she has which needs to be addressed. It could be that she is very afraid what others think of her, and she has an unhealthy fear of people which she must work to get rid of.

Q3: *When someone insults another person or talks to hurt people, from where does this come from in a person? Which kind of speech is this included in – talking out of enjoyment (because the person enjoys hurting someone) or out of inner emptiness?*

ANSWER: When a person talks, he reveals what's going on inside his *pnimiyus*. Since we are made up of good and bad, the bad inside a person is revealed by how he talks, and that is why a person can talk to harm another person. Part of what's going on deep down needs to be fixed and dealt with.

Q4: *If I'm talking to a close friend and we are just talking mutually, isn't that a mitzvah of chessed?*

ANSWER: We do not mean that a person has to measure every single word that comes out of his mouth. It is impossible to live like this. A father who talks to his child only about what's absolutely necessary is sorely lacking in his relationship with his child. A husband and wife who only talk with each other about what's absolutely necessary is not a way to live together. In every relationship, it's necessary also to talk things that are unnecessary in order to maintain a healthy relationship. We are not saying that a person has to have "exact" speech and only speak what's necessary; this is an impossible way to live. We are just saying that many times, we speak about unnecessary things that have no benefit whatsoever, speech which doesn't contribute to a relationship. This is a fine line we need to think about: what is considered small talk that is necessary for a relationship, and what is considered small talk that is unnecessary.

Q5: *If a woman has a certain nature to be very outgoing and friendly, does she have to work on uprooting her nature? For example, if someone has a daughter who is very talkative, does she have to train her daughter not to talk so much?*

ANSWER: We cannot tell our child exactly how much to talk. We cannot tell a child, "Don't talk more than 30 minutes every day with someone." We just need to give them over a general message, that we need to make our conversations more meaningful and not to always talk mindlessly.

Q6: *If a woman is more intellectual and doesn't like to talk so much, does that mean that something is wrong with her heart and that she needs to open up her heart more?*

ANSWER: This is a deep question. Generally speaking, a woman's heart is more open than a man's heart, and therefore a woman has a nature to talk more with Hashem about her feelings more than a man does. But although this is a rule, there do exist exceptions to the rule. There are some men whose hearts have been opened up much more than most women, and there are some women who are more intellectual than others. If a woman is more of an intellectual and has a hard time talking out her feelings, it might be that she is an exception to the rule, and it is merely upon her to learn how to speak out her thoughts. But no matter how intellectual a woman is, every woman is still a woman, and she has a heart which she can access if she works to get there. A more intellectual kind of a woman might have a harder time getting to her heart, but she still has a heart in her, and she can work to get to it.

However, it may also come from an emotional issue that she has, or it can come from a difficult time she is going through, like if there are major problems in her marriage or in her house. These are emotional problems which can all be dealt with, and it doesn't mean that something is wrong with her natural heart.

2 | *Iyar – Thinking*

Women Have “Extra Binah”

The ability of the month of Iyar is *hirhur* (thought). This is also known as *binah* (contemplation), the ability to have deep thought and analyze.

Chazal say that women were blessed with “extra *binah*” than men, for the wife of a household can better recognize the spiritual level of her guests more than the husband can. A woman can better sense inner realities; she can see into the heart and sense what kind of guest the person is. A guest might look very well-dressed and well-behaved, but a woman can see what he’s all about inside, like if he is a G-d fearing person or not.

What is the “Extra Binah” that Women are Blessed with?

Our eyes only see something appears like at first glance, but with our power of thought, we can see what’s really going on in the inside of something.

Everything in Creation has much depth in it – depth within depth. We need to think into things, at how deep everything really is.

A child doesn’t think that much. He knows that food is food and that a toy is a toy, but he doesn’t realize that there is more uses to everything. He never thinks into the depth of something. But as a person gets older and matures, he thinks more into things and discovers that there is a lot more to life, such as picking up a pen to write or driving a car. The more we think into something and what it is, the more depth we uncover to everything in life.

The more we think into things, the more our outlook changes. When we think into things, we get a whole new outlook on the same situations, just like an adult sees a situation in a totally different way than a child does. If we use our ability to think deeply, we can see a whole new depth to old situations and uncover a whole new outlook on what we are used to.

To give an example, as parents, we change our perspective on raising children as they grow older. When our children are younger, we send them to nursery, and as they get older we help them with their homework. Parenting gets more challenging the older our children get. When they reach marriageable age, our perspective as parents is a whole different outlook than when our children were young.

The same can go for any other situation. We need to change our perspective on our situations in life and think into them. We must mature in life.

Our responsibilities have grown more since we were young. We have grown in our actions, and we have grown in our feelings. We must grow as well in our thoughts – our outlook on life. Our outlook has to be different now than it was ten years ago.

1- Thinking Into Our Acts of “Chessed”

We will give a few examples of how we can gain a more mature outlook on situations in life.

One example is *chessed* (acts of kindness). It is not just in our actions of *chessed* which we must learn to increase as we go on through life, but it is our perspective on *chessed* which must change. We can gain a whole new perspective on *chessed* now if we think about all the *chessed* that Hashem does in Creation. *Chessed* is not just acts of kindness which I do, but it is a power which affects all of Creation. Hashem does endless *chessed* throughout the whole world. When we do *chessed*, we are called “partners with Hashem” in doing *chessed*. This is a change in perspective to our *chessed* that we need to acquire as we get older and more mature.

2- Thinking About The Purpose of Life

Another example is to contemplate the concept of our *tachlis* (the purpose of life). We know that there is a purpose and goal to everything we do, but how much do we think about the purpose of life? We know what the purpose of life is, but how much do we think about it? Knowing what the purpose of life is not just another detail in life. The more a person thinks into the purpose of life, the deeper his perspective is on the purpose of life becomes.

3- Thinking About Being Close to Hashem

A third example of using our power of thought is to contemplate *kirvas Hashem* - what it means to be close to Hashem. We know that the purpose of doing the mitzvos is to become close to Hashem (as the *Mesillas Yesharim* states), but how often do we think about this? We must deepen our awareness of this. Are you close to Hashem on the same level that you were when you were younger?

Most people look at closeness to Hashem in the same way since they were children, but our whole attitude to being close to Hashem should be vastly different now than it used to be. Most people stay the way they were as children and aren't connected yet to Hashem. Their feelings toward Hashem haven't grown since they were younger. We need to think about this more and it will become more of a reality to us.⁵

⁵ Refer to the *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Parts One and Two

We gave three examples of how to think deeply into familiar parts of our life, but we must know one thing. If someone doesn't have time to think on a constant basis about his life, he might get older and become smarter, but his actual level of *Yiddishkeit* remains small.

Making Use of Our Power to Think

The month of *Iyar*, which is to work on deepening our thoughts and awareness about life, can change us and help us grow in our values.

Usually, a person only uses his deep thinking to think about his problems: "How do I get out of this problem...What should I do..." But we should make use of our power of thought and think into simple things as well, when we are calm.

Women have a power of "extra *binah*", and they can use this to take simple things and think into them deeply. So we should take everything that we know about since we were younger, and think into them.

Women are often using their extra *binah* to think into materialistic parts of life, but really this power can be used as well to grow in spirituality. In order for a woman to really utilize the potential of her "extra *binah*", she should take the time every day and think into her life, such as the three examples we gave. If we begin to think more into what's in our life, our whole way of life will change for the better! We will uncover a deeper and inner kind of life.

There is a lot more which we can know and should know. We should think more into important topics, such as the foundations of *Yiddishkeit*, some of which we mentioned before.

The words here are not just a piece of advice. It is a way to really live life. We need to think more about what we do and what we feel. This is the root of an inner kind of life. Once we are connected in our minds more to a matter, we will carry them out with a whole different meaning, and we will feel totally different toward them. When we use our thoughts, our actions and feelings gain a whole new perspective, and we reveal a whole new depth to life.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *If my birthday is in Iyar, does that mean that my special Avodah in life is to use the power of deep thought?*

ANSWER: It can definitely help you find your main *avodah* in life, but it doesn't mean that this is your main *avodah* in life.

Q2: *If someone wasn't born in Iyar, can he still have this ability of deep thought?*

ANSWER: Yes.

Q3: *How can I know what my main, personal Avodah in life is (Besides for the general mission that the Jewish people has)?*

ANSWER: That is a very complicating matter. Generally speaking, a person has to know his main quality and his main weakness in life, and these are the roots of his *avodah*. The rest are always details which one has to learn about himself, but the root of one's mission on this world is to know the depth of his main quality, and the depth of his weakest point.

Q4: *What does it mean to analyze things using the power of binah?*

ANSWER: There are three kinds of *binah*. There is *binah* which comes from the mind, and in this men are better at than women. This is intellectual understanding. There is another kind of *binah* which comes from the heart, which is intuition, and in this women are better at than men. There is a third kind of *binah*, when we think into facts. This is also an ability which women excel at more than men. It is this third kind of *Binah* which was discussed here in this class.

Q5: *Is there a month which is associated more with the other kind of Binah that women have (intuition)?*

ANSWER: The month of *Elul* has the *mazal* of *besulah* (a virgin girl). This represents the power to have intuition.

Q6: *Is there a connection between the two kinds of binah?*

ANSWER: Yes, there is a connection. First, we must analyze facts, which is the power of this month of Iyar, and then we will be healed, which is the power of the month of *Elul*, when we are healed from our spiritual failings.

Q7: Is there a special power of *refuah* (healing) in the Hebrew month of “Iyar”?

ANSWER: As is well-known, the Hebrew word “Iyar” (**אייר**) is an acronym for the verse, **אני ה' רופאך**, “*Ani Hashem Rofecha*”, “I am Hashem, your Healer”, and the Talmud teaches that the request in *Shemoneh Esrei* for healing, *Refoeinu*, is placed near the request about *teshuvah*-repentance, *Hashiveinu*, to show that healing is a result of doing *teshuvah*. This is based on the verse, “*And understand with its heart, so that it will repent and be healed.*” (Yeshayahu 6:10). Through attaining the heart’s ability to understand, one draws forth *refuah*/healing from there. The verse is teaching us that through gaining the ability to “understanding” (*hirhur*, which is the special power contained in the month of Iyar), one can get healed. Iyar is a month of gaining the ability to understand deeply (*hirhur*) and that is precisely how one gains *refuah*/healing that is inherent in the month of *Iyar*. But it depends on one condition – doing *teshuvah* (repentance).

Q8: Is *hisbonenus* (reflection) the same thing as *hisbodedus* (meditation)?

ANSWER: That is a very good question. They are two different abilities in our soul. Many of our Sages said that they need to be practiced together, but some say they are two separate forms of *avodah*. What we need to do is integrate them with each other. *Hisbodedus* is to be alone from people, but what do we do once we are alone? That is where *hisbonenus* comes in: we analyze our life, and we also use our power of simplicity (*peshitus*) in the soul to talk to Hashem. There is a deep, analytical part to it – which was the subject discussed today -- and there is also a simple part, which is to talk to Hashem freely.

Q9: What is the order – to first think deeply and then think simply, or to first have simplicity and only then to think deeply?

ANSWER: It depends on the person, and we would need to have a whole series of derashos just on this one topic to know the answer.⁶

Q10: Is analyzing our strong points and weak points a part in this?

ANSWER: Yes, that is part of how we become close to Hashem.

⁶ Refer to the Rav’s series on **Inner Silence**, which explains how to do *hisbodedus*

3 | *Sivan – Keep Going*

Sivan – The Month of “Walking”

Every month has a special power in it, and the special power found in the month of Sivan is “*halichah*” – walking.⁷ This is not referring to physical walking, but walking with our soul. What is walking with our soul? It is not just another ability we have, but it is a power which encompasses the full spectrum of our soul.

When a child grows into an adult, at a certain point he stops growing. A woman at a certain point in life stops being fertile. Physical growth is limited - but spiritual growth never ends. When a person studies a profession, like if he studies to become a doctor or a lawyer, he learns much knowledge, and there comes a point in life where he has reached the peak of how much he can know about these fields. The growth in areas of knowledge eventually stops. Here we will speak about a kind of growth that never stops: our spiritual growth.

Endless Growth

Chazal say that Torah scholars are always advancing to another level, and they never stop⁸. The kind of walking that is the power of the month of Sivan is this kind of endless walking – *halichah* - it is an ability in a person to have endless growth.

There is no person who doesn't have times of growth in his *Avodas Hashem* (spiritual improvement and service towards G-d). We all have a desire to grow in spirituality. But most people experience this desire only temporarily, and then people usually go back to their routine in life, and then they stop desiring to grow. Even when people do restart their spiritual growth, it is not a continuation from where they last left off, but they have to start all over from scratch.

We need to find a place within ourselves that enables us to have endless growth – to never stop growing in spirituality. As one of the Sages said, “I have seen those who grow spiritually, but they are few.”⁹ There are people who are constantly advancing in their spiritual growth.

⁷ *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:5

⁸ *Berachos* 66a

⁹ *Berachos* 45a

The question is: don't we all need to rest sometimes? How is it possible to always be involved in growth? Don't we need to relax...?

How To View Breaks

Here we come to a great fundamental in life. All of us go through stages in our life – we go through times that are hard either physically and emotionally. One who constantly grows spiritually learns how to grow from these situations, while a non-growing person falls apart from difficult times.

One who wants to constantly grow more in his spirituality knows that he has to relax as well, but he understands that resting is in order to re-energize so that he can have return to progress. A non-growing person, however, relaxes so he can sit back and take it easy – he does not desire to continue his growth. When he relaxes, he disconnects from spiritual growth.

It is impossible for a person to constantly be in growth mode when it comes to our spiritual progress. This is because we all have times that are simply too difficult. We all have times in which we are slowed down to a halt, times in which we feel like we can't go on anymore. So we all need to take a break sometimes from our progress - but the only issue is how we *view* these situations. Are we looking at these breaks as a way to give up on our growth – so that we can sit back and just take it easy - or are we looking at our breaks as a way to refresh ourselves so that we can have more energy to go on?

That is the question we should ask ourselves: we need to realize how we view our necessary breaks, with what attitude are we going about it.

Holding Onto Our “Fire” When We Go Dry

There is another way to deal with the times in our life in which we don't feel any drive to grow.

[To illustrate the concept we are about to mention], let's say a woman is cooking supper for her family, and suddenly she realizes she needs to leave the house to take care of an errand. Either she can put out the fire on the stove when she leaves, or she can lower the flame a little. What's the difference? If she turns off the flame completely, the food gets cold, and she may have to start cooking it all over again when she comes back. But if she just lowers the flame, the food will stay warm, and when she comes back, she can continue cooking from where she left off without having to start all over again.

The same can apply to our own personal situations in life. When we have to “stop” sometimes and take a break, we need to be able to hold onto our inner “flame” of growth, and not to put it out just because we're relaxing. That is how we should go about our difficult times, in which we lack the motivation to grow: by knowing that even though we can't grow fully, at least we can grow a little. Hold onto your “flame” at least a little, even though your flame isn't being ignited so much – and in

this way, you retain your aspirations and hold onto them even as you're not actively involved in spiritual growth. You can do this by remembering the times in which you *did* grow.

Good Times and Bad Times

Rabbeinu Tam writes in *Sefer HaYoshor* that every person has “Days of Love” and “Days of Hatred” – in other words, we periodically have “good” times and “bad” times. Our “good times” are when our soul feels opened, and we thus feel good about ourselves. During our good period, our emotions and our thoughts are positive. Our “bad times” are when our soul feels closed up – when we feel negative about ourselves, and we aren't experiencing positive emotions and thoughts.

What are we supposed to do during our bad times – our “Days of Hate”, as Rabbeinu Tam describes it?

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz *zt”l* said that the way is to hold onto our inner fire, as we described above. We should hold onto our previous growth even though we are currently in a time when we aren't growing. In this way, we connect our current dismal period with our uplifting periods. By holding onto some of our growth even as we take a break, we form a connection between our “bad” times and “good” times, and then we can survive even the bad times!

For example, if a man always was used to learning five pages of *Gemara* a day when he felt that he was in a period of growth, and now he finds himself in a period where he feels that his willpower has weakened, he can still learn four pages of *Gemara*. He can tell himself that although right now he's not up to it to learn five pages of *Gemara*, at least he's able to learn four pages of *Gemara*.

Another example: If someone learns with a *chavrusa* (study partner) for ten minutes a day and then a day comes where he doesn't feel like learning with his *chavrusa*, he can at least learn with his *chavrusa* for two minutes a day.

If someone has ten a minutes a day in which he or she sits quietly and talks to Hashem, and then a hard day comes in which a person feels that he/she has no motivations whatsoever to do this, then one can at least do it for two minutes. That is something one can do no matter how hard of a period he/she is in.

In this way, even if you aren't actively involved in a period of spiritual growth, you are still somehow involved in growth, in spite of the dismal period you're going through.

We Need Both Attitudes

We mentioned two ways how we can survive difficult times in which we don't feel like working on ourselves. Let us summarize them – and we will see why we in reality, we need both.

The first way is that when we are in a hard time, we can tell ourselves that really we want to grow right now, but we are just taking a break so we can re-energize and have more strength to later progress. The second way is to take some small growth with us even into the times when we don't feel like growing, "lowering the flame", as opposed to putting it out totally.

We need both ways simultaneously. Everything in life has an external layer to it and an internal way to it. The first way we mentioned is the external layer of our avodah here, while the second way is the inner layer of the avodah here.

Let's say a person only uses the second way, which is the inner way. The person is in a rut, so she decides that she will grow at least a little, even though she can't grow fully. This alone won't be enough, because a person has to realize as well that her break from growth is really a way for her to reenergize. A person has to realize that even if I can't grow fully right now (because I am growing through a very hard time right now and I am too stressed out to work on myself), I am taking a break right now so that eventually, I will be able to return to my growth, reenergized.

And if a person only uses the first way, which is to view the situation as only a temporary break – but she doesn't try to grow at all during a hard time – it will also not be enough. When a person completely stops *Avodas Hashem* and gives up totally from continuing – even if it's only a temporary period of total despair - then the person's desire to grow in *Avodas Hashem* may become lost totally.

So when we go through a hard time in our life and we don't have the strength to work on ourselves and grow, we need two things: we need to look back at the times of growth even as we are not actively growing, and in this way we hold onto some growth even as we're in a rut; and we also need to know that although right now we are taking a break from growth, the plan is really to return to eventually return to our growth.

Failures Are Not Failures

Finally, there is a third step we will add onto this and clarify.

When a person is in a difficult time and he doesn't feel a drive to grow, there are two attitudes he can have. One attitude is to completely give up: "That's it. I've had enough, and I can't take it anymore. Today is a bad day, and I'm only going downhill. I can't work on myself today."

But the other attitude he can have is to have a different perspective on the situation: "My soul needs a break sometimes. I can't always be growing. It's really not a *bad* day – it's a day that I have to go through, because it's normal for my soul to feel closed up sometimes, [since Rabbeinu Tam has written that] everyone has these "Days of Hate"."

We can compare this to going to sleep. Although sleep is not productive, is sleep a bad thing? No one looks at sleep as unproductive, because we all realize that we need to go to sleep in order to

reenergize. We can't function unless we get our sleep. Taking a break is part of life, and we must not look down at ourselves for this.

The difficult times in our life are thus really not “difficult” or “bad”. Rather, they are like our sleep. It is necessary for us sometimes to pull back from growth, and let us not beat ourselves up that something is wrong with us that we don't feel any willpower to grow spiritually. If you have those days in which you don't feel like learning or *davening* or making any spiritual progress, realize that it's normal, and that it is actually a necessary part of your growth to go through these times in which you lack motivation.

This can change our whole attitude about life! Our soul needs to rest sometimes – we can't always grow and reach higher levels. This is not a fall from our level – it is a necessary part of our growth. “Failures” are thus not really “failures” – they are needed for our growth.

This is important to know even while you're in a period of growth and you feel fine. You need to prepare yourself for those times in which you will find it hard, by telling yourself that in order to grow, we need to go through a constant cycle of rising and falling from our level.

In Conclusion

In the month of Sivan, we didn't just receive the Torah. We received the power of a Jew – the power to always grow, no matter what we feel like we're in. Our difficult times are like times in which we go to sleep.

This power is revealed in the month of Sivan, but we must take it with us to the rest of the year: remember that no matter what, a Jew never gives up.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *What is an example of a good point to hold onto when we are going through difficult times?*

ANSWER: Good question. There are two opposite powers in the soul: despair, and hope. When a person is in a going through a dismal period and he despairs, and he is too accepting of the despair, he is weakening the “fire” of his hope. The only thing a person needs to do, in order to access the power of tikva/hope, is for a person to know that “I will soon return to the way things were.” Practically speaking, a person should understand that his soul needs to go to “sleep” sometimes, just as the body needs sleep [meaning that the soul isn't able to perform at it best, during a dismal period].

Q2: *So when a person is awakening the power of hope, there is nothing specific which a person needs to hope for?*

ANSWER: You only need to be on the proper level to do so, to have hope that you will certainly return to the way things were before, and that you can certainly succeed. This doesn't mean to simply say "I hope" superficially, but to feel truly confident that Hashem will certainly help you succeed.

Q3: If a person gets sick and is physically not able to do anything, and he doesn't even have a minute or two minutes a day to work on the idea of increasing the power of "hope", is there anything she can do, to grow right now?

ANSWER: If he doesn't have 2 minutes, he can still find half a minute for this.

Q4: The sick person can only think about hope, but he has no one to work on it together with and speak about. For example, he was used to learning every day with a chavrusa, and now that he is ill, he has no one to verbalize his hope with.

ANSWER: So he can do it while learning alone.

Q5: But there are days when an ill person will find even this too difficult for him to do.

ANSWER: He still has a second or where he can find time to work on this – in spite of the fact that the yetzer hora (evil inclination) is very strong.

Q5: If a person's ratzon (will) dries up, how can he get it going again?

ANSWER: During a dismal period, a person should not focus on action (maaseh) that much, and instead he should focus more on maintaining whatever willpower (ratzon) he has acquired until now. It will be too difficult for a person to "create" a ratzon now for more growth, now that his will for growth has stopped. But this much, he will still be able to do.

Q6: I have learned that a person needs to keep doing what he needs to do and to keep serving Hashem, even when he doesn't feel like it and he has no enthusiasm or will to serve Hashem. For example, a person should daven to Hashem even if he doesn't feel particularly enthusiastic about davening right now. But according to what the Rav is saying here, it sounds like we need to keep awakening our emotion and will.

ANSWER: Only a person who has reached a very high level of pnimiyus is able to do so. A person will never build his inner world if he serves Hashem without feeling. If a person has already developed his pnimiyus, then he is able to have times in which he serves Hashem even when he doesn't have any will. But for most people, it is not a proper approach to always serve Hashem without any feelings.

Q7: But perhaps the approach (of action over emotion) would work better for women, who are usually more action-oriented.

ANSWER: Actually, it is the opposite. Since women are more usually emotional than men, they need to work more with their emotions, than with trying to act when they don't feel like it. By contrast, men, who are less emotionally inclined than women, are better equipped to do what they have to do even when they don't feel like it. But this doesn't either mean that men to need to act robotic and mechanical, with no feeling in what they do. Everyone needs to open their hearts. This should not be about "doing what you have to do even when you don't feel like it."

Q8: Do we have any way of knowing when these "good times" or "bad times" will come?

ANSWER: We do not have any control of when they come and go, but the more a person works on himself, the less the "bad times" will come, and the less intense they will be. But there is almost no one in the generation who never goes through these "bad times."

Q9: During a dismal period, a person wonders if he's going on the right path or not. How can person indeed know if he's going in the right path?

ANSWER: During the "bad times", it is too difficult for us to know if we are going on the right path or not, so we will have to wait for the "good times" when we can think more objectively. During a dismal period, if a person feels that he needs to improve in certain areas or take a different path, it is usually coming from an unhealthy place in the soul, from feeling down and broken. So in order to analyze one's path, one will need to wait for the dismal period to pass, and analyze his path later, when "good times" return.

Q10: How do you know if you're going through those "Bad Days"? Can it be that for two hours a day that you're going through "Bad Days?"

ANSWER: "Bad Days" ("Days of Hate") can last well beyond 2 hours or half a day. They can go on for several days, and sometimes they can even go on for several weeks. Sometimes you can feel physical aches from them. But if you feel like you're in a dismal period for more than a few months already, that's a sign that there is a problem. Then it is not just a period of "Bad Days" anymore – it is a sign of depression.

Q11: Why does our soul need to go through this state of "sleep", or "Bad Days"? And is there any way we can prolong our periods of "Good Days?"

ANSWER: Hashem created the world that everything needs sleep, even our soul. Since our soul needs sleep, we need to also go through “Bad Days.” There is nothing we can do about it. But the more we work on ourselves, the longer our “Good Days” will last.

Q12: How do we start serving Hashem? Where do we begin?

ANSWER: Start by working on a point that is closest to your heart. But you need to also daven to Hashem for help in this. Every person’s soul is different [when it comes to where a person should start].

4 | Tamuz – Seeing The Good

Tamuz – The Power of Re'iyah (Inner Sight)

Tamuz and Av are the two most tragic months from the whole year, due to the tragedies in our history that took place during these times. We must know how to properly view this time of the year, or else it is possible that a person views this time of the year as a sad and tragic time of the year, with no other meaning to it. We must know the *avodah* that is upon us during these difficult months of the year.

Chazal state that five tragedies took place during the month of Tamuz. These months require a lot of contemplation, and we need to find how Hashem is here with us, even in these trying months. It seems as if nothing good can be said of these two months, which are full of sad events. But we can learn how to see the good, even amidst all the bad.

The power contained in the month of Tamuz, as explained by our Sages in the *sefarim hakedoshim*¹⁰, is *reiyah* (“sight”). There is physical sight which our eyes can see, and there is an inner power of sight, called “*einei haseichel*”, the “eyes of the intellect”.¹¹ Just like our physical eyes can see both good and bad things, so can our power of inner sight see both good and bad.

Ever since Chavah set her eyes upon the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil), which contained a mixture of good and evil, all of the things which we see in the world since then are a mixture of good and evil. Nothing we see is totally good, and nothing we see is totally bad. It is always a mix.

There are people who were naturally born with a very positive nature and they are inclined to focus on the good in everything, while others were born with a more negative nature and thus they are naturally inclined to see the bad side of everything. But all of us can see everything as a mixture of good and evil.

Chazal state that those who have a “good eye” (*ayin tova*) are the students of Avraham *Avinu*, while those who have a “bad eye” (*ayin ra*) are students of Bilaam, so we must therefore strive to have a “good eye”. Ever since the sin of Adam, everything has become a mixture of good and bad. If we look at the good of things, we are being “students of Avraham”, but if we only see the bad in something, we are being negative, “students of Bilaam”.

¹⁰ *Sefer Yetzirah*, with the Vilna Gaon’s commentary

¹¹ A term used by *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*.

We can't see only good or only bad, though, because in the current state of affairs, there is no such thing as only good, and there is also no such thing as something totally bad. Everything is a mix. Therefore, we need to see the good, and bad, in everything, and after that, we can connect to the good that is found in it.

We will try to explain, with the help of Hashem, how we can come to think about only the good in things.

The First Step: Taking Apart the Information

Since everything is a mixture of good and evil, the very first step of learning how to see the good is to see what each thing we encounter is made up of. We need to see how much good is in something, and how much bad is in it. Everything has some good in it and some bad in it, and we need to get used to thinking into the good parts and the bad parts in something. The point is to take something apart in your mind and analyze it, thinking: "What is the good here, and what is the bad here?"

Practically speaking, take a piece of paper and make two rows, one row labeled "Good" on the right side and the other row labeled "Bad" on the left side. Write down all the good things you can find in a situation, and all the bad things you see, and line them against each other.

You will discover as you get used to this that there are things which you thought were totally good that have really have some bad in them also, and there are things which you thought were totally bad that actually has something good in them.

The Tricky Part

Now comes a danger which you should watch out for, though. When you realize that a situation is mostly bad, you know that you should keep away from it. But the tricky part is when you discover something good in something which also has bad in it, and you might be tempted to connect to it, because you see good in it. But although you see good in something bad, this doesn't mean you should connect to it.

There are some situations which we cannot choose otherwise, so there is nothing we can do to get out of them, even if there is bad in them. But there are situations in life which we can choose to connect to or not. In these complicated situations, should we choose to connect to the good in them, or not?

What we need to do is to somehow connect to the good in every situation. The question is, how? If there is mostly bad in a situation, even if you have found some good in it, how can you connect yourself to it and feel that it is somehow good, when you know quite well that there is bad here also?

Finding the Root Good Point

This is the hard part. There are difficult times we go through in which we can't seem to find anything good in the situation. When we go through a difficult time, we must bear in mind that our difficult times are just like everything else in life that is made up of both good and bad.

If there is more bad than good, how do we get by a situation? How do we deal with situations that are mostly bad? True, there is some good to everything, even situations that are mostly bad. But if it is mostly bad, how indeed do we get by these situations?

What one has to do in such a situation is to find the strongest good point in this situation, and that will shed an entirely new light on the situation. Let us give some more background to how this works.

Everything in Creation has in it a root and its branches. There is always one root good point in every situation, and although there are many branches that stem from it which are bad, the root is always good. There are actually 287 branches which can stem from one single root¹², so a person can find 287 negative things to say about any situation! But if a person finds the root of a situation – if he finds the root good point – then all of the “branches” lose their vitality, because they have no ‘bad’ root with which to feed on.

Thus, if you want to see how any situation is good, no matter how bad it is, you need to find the “root” of the situation. The “root” is always good, and this knocks away all the negative things you see in the situation.

We will try to explain how we can put this into practice. These are really very deep matters, but they are the root of how to live a true, inner kind of life.

What It Means To “See Good”

There are two approaches in how a person can become more positive, to have an “*ayin tovah*” (“good eye”). One way is to think positive thoughts all the time, and as the saying goes, “Think good and then it will be good.”¹³ When you think positive, your good thoughts can help you transform the situation into a good situation. Another way, though, is to find the good point that is contained in every situation. [This second approach is the way we are describing here.]

¹² The source for this is in the writings of the Arizal

¹³ Editor's Note: Based on the Yiddish saying, “*Tracht gut un zul zein gut*” – “Think good, and then it will be good.” Based on a statement of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.

This doesn't simply mean, however, for a person to try to find the one good point in any situation; that alone will not be enough, because there are many other bad points in the situation which would just cancel it out. If a person is aware of many bad points about a situation and he simply comes up with a good point contained in the situation, this will not help, because then he is still saying that there is mostly bad here, and he is just admitting that there is some good here also. This is not the depth to having an "*ayin tova*".

The real definition of "*ayin tova*" is to find how the *root* of the situation is somehow good, and therefore, that root good point makes the *entire* situation good as a whole.

An Example From Chazal

How do we know this is true? We can give a very good example. The destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, as we know, was a very great tragedy, a truly sad situation. On one hand, we must mourn the destruction and all the tragedies it caused, but on the other hand, *Chazal* also brought words of comfort for us. How did *Chazal* find comfort over the destruction?

There is a statement of *Chazal* that Hashem was so angry with the Jewish people that He really wanted to destroy them, but instead He unleashed His anger on the stones and wood of the *Beis Hamikdash*. In this statement, however, *Chazal* did not find comfort. This fact alone wasn't enough for *Chazal* to find solace. There is a different fact about the destruction, however, in which *Chazal* found comfort in. *Chazal* state that on the day of the destruction, Moshiach was born. This was how *Chazal* found the positive in the tragedy of the destruction.

The fact that Hashem took out His anger on stones and wood doesn't bring out the comfort in the situation, because this doesn't show how the destruction was a good thing. It just shows us some good amongst the bad. But the fact that the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* heralded the birth of Moshiach is something that shows us how the entire tragedy, at its root, was good, because now we saw that the destruction was a cause to begin the final redemption.

From here we can see that when *Chazal* wanted to find how even the worst situation can be good, they didn't find comfort in the fact that there was one good point to say about the situation. That alone was not a comfort. What *Chazal* found positive about the situation was that the root of the entire sad situation was good, and that was what is able to comfort us.

Summary

To work on seeing how every situation is really good its root, a person still needs *siyata d'shamaya* (Heavenly assistance), *tefillos* (prayer), and *hisbonenus* (reflection) in this concept, besides for what we have explained here, in order to see how every situation is really good.

Anyone can split up every matter into how it is good and bad, and then he can see how the root of it is always good. Then he can connect himself to the root good point of any situation.

Applying This to Current Events

The words here are not only true on a general basis; they apply as well on a more specific level.

As we speak now, *Eretz Yisrael* is going through trying times. Three young boys have been kidnapped by terrorists, and we have not yet merited for them to return home. The entire country is worried for them, and this appears to be such a bad situation that it doesn't seem that any good can be said about it.¹⁴

Yet, if you think about it, there is some good in this situation. This situation has revealed so much *Ahavas Yisrael* amongst Jews from all walks of life. All Jews are united together in prayer for the boys, and everyone has put aside all their differences. Another good point is the *chesed* that this situation has caused people to increase in.

These are some good points about the situation, yet one can still argue that the bad of this situation far outweighs the good. To counter this pessimistic attitude, we can use our deeper method of *ayin tovah*, which is to find the root of the situation, which is good; and when we find the root good point of this situation, it will show us how this entire “bad” situation is really good.

The root good point of this situation is that it shows us about our own situation: we are also “kidnapped” amongst the seventy non-Jewish nations of the world. We are Hashem's children, and we are kidnapped by the nations. This situation can show us how much we long to be rescued by Hashem from the nations who want to destroy us.

The kidnapping of the three boys shows us the depth of our exile, and how much we should want to come out of it. It can show us that we shouldn't only *daven* for the children who were captured – we should *daven* for the entire *Klal Yisrael*, who currently live in darkness, surrounded by people who wish to destroy all the Jews – who have no value whatsoever for a Jew's life.

It is unfortunate that we have to use the three captured boys as a *moshol* (parable) to our own situation, but now that this is the situation, we need to use it as a way to get us to daven for all of *Klal Yisrael*, who are kidnapped in this exile. We are kidnapped from our true level of spirituality, because of the effect that the non-Jews have had on us throughout this dark exile.

¹⁴ This shiur was given the day before the sad news of their tragic deaths. Yet, the lesson remains true, as the author has stated that every situation is good, and it can still be said that this episode caused much unity amongst Jews.

May we merit from Hashem that the boys return home, and may all of us merit the redemption. That is how this situation is good, at its root – it can stir up in us a realization to daven for *Klal Yisrael*, that He take us out of this dark exile – speedily, in our days, Amen.

Questions & Answers With The Rav

Q1: *What exactly is the “root” of all good that we must find? Isn’t Hashem the root of everything, who is always good?*

ANSWER: Very good question. Yes, it is true that Hashem is the root of all good, but the question is, what is that root that Hashem is trying to show us in every situation? We need to find that good root of every situation. We know that Hashem is the source of everything, and that is clear. But we need to see in our own personal life how we see how the root of every possible situation is somehow good.

Q2: *If I see bad in a situation, how do I focus on the good? Do I have to get myself to see a situation how others see it?*

ANSWER: Good question. It depends why something is bothering you and not other people. Sometimes there is something that bothers you that really shouldn’t, and you are just overreacting. This kind of problem stems from simply being negative, which is a problem that stems from the *nefesh habehamis* (lower, animal layer of our soul). But if it’s a problem that not only bothers you but bothers others as well, it can be because the negative elements in the situation far outweigh the positive aspects of the situation. If that is the case, the *avodah* is, as we have explained here: to find how the root of the situation is somehow good.

Q3: *What is the source for how there are 287 negative things to say about every situation?*

ANSWER: The source is from the *Arizal* in *Parshas Beraishis*, who says that the word “*merachefes*” (blowing) has in it the letters *reish*, *pei*, and *ches*, (רפ"ח), which altogether has the numerical value of 288. If a person has the root, then these three letters become the word “*perach*” (פרח) which means “flower.” If he doesn’t find the root, then the letters become “*chafar*”, (חפר) which means “dug under”, a reference to being underneath the tree.

Q4: *If someone is in a difficult marriage, how can he/she work on seeing the positive in this situation? Should he just focus on the nachas he/she has from the children?*

ANSWER: Take apart all the factors going on in your marriage, and see everything that’s going on. This can take a few months. You will then discover much good in your marriage, and then, you should *daven* to Hashem that He should help you find the root good point in your marriage.

Q5: *How do you know what the “root” of the situation is, and what the “branch” of the situation is?*

ANSWER: If you know your soul well, you can identify better what the root is.

Q6: *If a person doesn’t see anything negative about a situation, is he supposed to think about the negative? For example, if a person doesn’t feel pain at a situation going on in Klal Yisrael that he is supposed to feel pain about, is he supposed to feel that pain, as part of the process of seeing the bad and good?*

ANSWER: It’s hard to answer this question, because it depends on each person and what his situation is in life. There are some people who are very stressed out in their life, and it will be detrimental to them to work on seeing what’s bad in our situations, because this will only add to their stress. Only a person who is capable of doing this emotionally should work on it.

Q7: *The Rov said that a person should write down the good points on one side and the bad points on the other side. What can person do if he doesn’t like to write, and it’s not practical?*

ANSWER: Type it on a computer. Or, sit with a close friend and do it, and you will find it much easier to write it down.

Q8: *How do we tell this to people who are secular? How do we explain this concept to them?*

ANSWER: Even *frum* people who keep Torah and mitzvos have to work on the topic we discussed here [in this chapter]. In today’s generation, although we keep the mitzvos, most people aren’t connected to their *pnimiyus* (inner, spiritual world). Of course, every Jew is good in general, and there are some people today who are amazingly connected to their *pnimiyus*; but most Jews today, even *frum* Jews, are weak in their *emunah*, and therefore, they have to work on this *avodah* of seeing the good point in a situation.

Q9: *But what we can tell secular people, who aren’t asking on how they can improve themselves?*

ANSWER: The concepts taught here was for people who keep Torah and mitzvos, who want to work on themselves. If a person doesn’t ask how he can work on himself, then he doesn’t have our questions, and he doesn’t seek answers. The material here is thus not for people who aren’t seeking to improve themselves, because my answers here are only for those who are asking on how they work on themselves.

Q10: *What practical point can the Rov suggest we work on every day from now on, in order to improve ourselves?*

ANSWER: Every day, seek to become a more truthful person.

Q11: *Which point should a person work on to become more truthful in – in learning Torah, in doing mitzvos? Which point exactly?*

ANSWER: Each person must become more truthful in his own unique circumstances in life and on his own level. This is a question which cannot be answered on a general level, because I would have to know the individual person who is asking it, in order to see how he needs to become more truthful. But there is something to this question which can apply to all people no matter what situation: no matter what your situation is in life, every person needs to try to become a more truthful person each day, in general.

5 | *Av – Turning Sadness Into Happiness*

The Month of Av - and Our Avodah of Transforming Sadness Into Joy

We are in the month of Av, the month of mourning and sadness, which will one day be turned into joy, when we merit it from Hashem. Our *avodah* during the month of Av is two-fold. On one hand, we must know what sadness in the soul is, and then our *avodah* is to transform it into joy. Let us try here with the help of Hashem to understand what the source of sadness is, what the source of happiness is, and how we can leave sadness and enter joy.

A Difference Between The Soul of Men and Women

Since this is being delivered to women, we will try here to mainly discuss this subject in terms of the woman's soul.

First we will need the following introduction. Our Sages reveal that when Hashem created the world, He created it with four elements: fire, wind, water, and earth. A man's soul is mainly comprised of the elements of water and wind, whereas the soul of woman was mainly based upon the elements of fire and earth.

Of course, in general, every soul, man and woman alike, contains the four elements¹⁵. A man certainly has fire and earth in his soul, and a woman certainly has water and wind in her soul. But it is just that the man's soul is mainly based upon water and wind, and a woman's soul is mainly based upon fire and earth. Therefore, whenever a woman feels sad, this is either coming mainly from the fire in her soul, or it is mainly coming from the earth in her soul.¹⁶

When Chavah sinned by eating of the *Eitz HaDaas*, she was cursed with, "*With sadness shall you bear children*". Women have to endure the mood swings that result from childbirth and pregnancy. There are also other times in a woman's life where sadness becomes dominant. The element of earth

¹⁵ Refer to *Getting To Know Your Soul*

¹⁶ In *Understanding Your Middos #002 (Laziness)*, the Rav explains the various causes for sadness which each of the four elements in the soul can cause, when they are left imbalanced. (1) Water-based sadness is a sadness due to running after various physical desires, which eventually breeds on sadness. (2) Wind-based sadness is a sadness which is caused by being too haughty, which causes a person to feel disappointed at his failures. (3) Fire-based sadness is the sadness that results from becoming angry. (4) Earth-based sadness is when a person feels lethargic.

is where the sadness in women stems from, and it was activated when Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*. Again, to emphasize, it is either the element of earth or the element of fire which is the main source of a woman's sadness. The sin of Chavah, which brought about the effects of sadness upon childbearing, was only a means to activate the sadness that was already part of her inner makeup.

Let us try to understand how we can see sadness coming from either the element of earth or fire.

Sadness Starts With 'Fire' and Awakens Our 'Earth'

To illustrate the concept, we can reflect into the following. The *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed by fire, and when we mourn it, we sit on the ground – the 'earth'. Thus, it is 'fire' which plunged us into sadness and mourning, connecting us to the element of earth, similar to how the sin brought about the curse upon mankind, "*You are earth, and to earth you shall return*". We can imply from this that it is 'fire' in the soul which causes us to have a reason to be sad, sending us to the level of the 'earth', where the sadness is clearly manifest. So the sadness begins with the element of fire, and it is revealed in the element of earth.

Soon we will explain how sadness can come from the element of earth, but first let's digest the above concept. Now let us explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, how exactly the element of fire causes sadness in the soul, and how sadness becomes manifest in our element of earth.

Fire: Destruction and Sadness

Fire destroys. Just like fire destroys physical things, so does the element of fire in our soul, our spiritual fire, tend to be destructive to our own soul. When a person misuses his element of fire, he destroys everything in his path, like a person who feels that nothing is important to him.

You can see this clearly from sad people who complain about everything and are never happy about anything in their life. When a person is sad, he feels that nothing is important to him anymore; nothing can make him happy, because nothing has any value to him. This is how a person uses his spiritual fire to unleash devastation and destruction upon his own soul – just like a very real fire.

We can give a few examples of this. Let's say you have a person who has five children; four of them are doing well, for the most part, and are generally a source of *nachas* to the parents, but one of the five children is a problematic child, causing the parents much heartache and grief. How does the person look at this situation? Either he can focus on the four good children he does have, or, he will become entirely consumed with sadness and frustration over his problematic child.

Some people feel that they have everything good in their family, because they were born with more of an "*ayin tovah*" (a good eye); they naturally adapt a positive outlook on everything. Others

weren't born with such a positive nature, and tend to see their lives mostly in a bad light. But if a person is totally negative about his situation in life, then he is never happy. Nothing has any value to him – even if he has a spouse whom he is happy with and he has been blessed with a large family of children and he has other good things in his life. It is all worthless to him, and it's all because he is consumed in a particular part of his life which is distressing him.

This is a clear example of when one uses his spiritual fire in his soul to be destructive and it negates everything. Such a person, if he wants to change his outlook, should do some positive thinking every day. He should say to himself, “Did I get up in the morning today? Yes. Am I alive? Yes. Am I married? Yes. Do I have children? Yes.” And just start with that.

Writing Down a List of What's Good In Your Life

Let's give another example: when a person is amidst a stormy marriage. Although this is a problem, the question is: Is the person totally consumed by his problem? How does he look at his life? Does he consider his life to be worthless just because he has this one problem, or does he feel thankful to Hashem at least that he got up in the morning, that he's alive, that he's healthy, and that he has a family?

Many times people forget about the good that they do have in their life, and instead focus on the one bad part of their life. People have plenty of good in their life – good health, children, a house, and so many other good things – but because they have one problem, they don't consider their life to be good in general. This was Haman's problem. He had almost everything to be happy about, but only one thing didn't go his way. For this, he said, “*All of it is not worth anything to me.*” Many people feel that way too!

We need to balance out our feelings by making sure that our inner ‘fire’ is not getting out of hand and destroying all the good that is in our life.

If a person were to write down a list of everything good and bad in his life, usually, the list of the bad things will come out bigger. This is because people are too focused on the one bad thing in their life, and thus they don't consider their lives to be good. If only they could just get themselves to focus on the good parts of their life and keep reflecting into it.

Some Positive Reflections To Think About Each Day

There are a few things which we can reflect about that can immediately make us happy, no matter what our situation is.

For example, one good thing that we can think about it is the fact that we are Jewish. Every day we make a *beracha* (blessing) of “*shelo asani goy*” (That you did not make me a gentile); we thank

Hashem for not making us a non-Jew. This is not just something we say – it can bring us great happiness, if we really think about it.

Another good thing to think about is that we possess a *neshamah*, a Divine soul, and we come from our great forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. Imagine if you had been born as a gentile, and you wouldn't be part of the Jewish nation. You would be missing out on everything! If you just think about this and reflect into it, it can cause you to feel sheer joy.

Another thing you can think about is: all of us stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah. Can you imagine what your life would be like if not for this? Think about this one thing, and you will have plenty to be happy about.

Another good thing to think about is that all of the Jewish people have a share in *Olam HaBa* (the World To Come), except for a few wicked sinners who do not have a share. Do we ever think about this? The thought of this alone can make us happy.

When This Doesn't Work

However, some people, when they think about this, don't really care about the fact that we all come from the *Avos*, or that we all have *Olam Haba*, and that we all stood at Har Sinai.

A person might feel, "These are all very nice things to think about, but it doesn't help me. Right now, I have problems. I have *shalom bayis* problems. I have problematic children. I'm not seeing enough *nachas* from my children. My financial situation is very difficult for me. My life is full of problems. It is certainly nice that I come from the *Avos*, and it's nice to hear that I stood at Har Sinai and that I will get *Olam HaBa*, but right now, I am on this world, and it's filled with nothing but hardships for me."

But we have to remember that we are made up of a body (*guf*) and a soul (*neshamah*). We can use our soul's perspective to calm our angry perspective that's coming from our body, by reminding ourselves that we have all these great reasons to be happy: we have *Olam HaBa*, we have the Torah, we were made apart from the nations when we stood at Har Sinai, and we come from the *Avos*.

If we only look at life through the prism of our body, then yes, we will be consumed with our physical problems, and we will become paralyzed by our element of earth, which slows us down and makes us depressed.

But if we look at life through our soul, we are able to think about the fact that we come from the *Avos* – which is meaningful to our soul, because that means we have spirituality. The more we see our life through our soul and are focused on spirituality, the more of a balance we achieve between our body and soul, and we calm down inside ourselves.

Self-Help Books Don't Help Us

There are many gentile methods to get rid of depression which people turn to, out of desperation. When a Jew is sad and he seeks relief, he is tempted to read self-help books, written by various gentile psychologists or professors. But a gentile cannot help a Jew become happy. This is because a gentile lives only for This World, and therefore, a gentile's perspective is to seek how life on this world can be the most gratifying life on this world. A gentile is interested in how he can get the most out of This World, which is the world of the physical body. The secular methods of the world when it comes to treating depression cannot help us, because we have a Divine soul within us, and the soul in us needs something else which the non-Jewish books can't tell us.

We, the Jewish people, have special souls within us, and we have our own methods to reach happiness. There are actually many different ways we have, and each person needs to find the proper way that is for him. The way a Jew attains happiness is essentially by leaving his body's viewpoint, and entering into his soul's viewpoint. Then he sees life through the prism of the soul, not through the body, and then he can be happy. As a person begins to enter the inner world of spirituality, he will find that his pull towards sadness and depression is lessening.

It takes a lot of inner work to arrive at true happiness. We cannot explain here in this short amount of time all the ways how we can reach happiness; it would take several hours. But we have said here what the key is. The key to happiness, the very first step to take, is to begin living a more internal kind of life, where we are seeing life through the prism of the soul, as opposed to living a life of superficiality and the body. Everyone should try to discover how he can enter this inner world; there are many ways (as explained in the previous months).

May we merit to transform our mourning and sadness in the month of Av, into happiness.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *Why is fire associated with sadness? Also, isn't fire usually associated with enthusiasm?*

ANSWER: Very good question. Each of the elements has positive and negative uses. There are good and evil uses of earth, good and evil uses of water, good and evil uses of wind, and good and evil uses of fire.

Enthusiasm is certainly a nature rooted in the element of fire. When a person doesn't use his fire for enthusiasm, what happens? His fire is not being activated for good uses, so it will be destructive instead, and the person will view everything in his life as negative. Some people even use fire for enthusiasm in a bad way, like when they act very giddy always, and they aren't so focused in their life; they act childish and irresponsible. They are enthusiastic one day and forget about their enthusiasm a few days later. The way to use enthusiasm in a good way is to build upon it, not to use your fire to destroy your previous successes, but to keep the fire going and building upon your enthusiasm.

Q2: *If women are more prone to sadness, since we come from fire and earth (which are the elements that mainly cause sadness), is there a way for us to have more access to water and wind?*

ANSWER: Certainly. But we need to know how to use the other elements, and it is a very long discussion which we don't have time for now. Generally speaking, the element of earth is the root of the traits of sadness and laziness. If a person is mainly drawn towards laziness, the general solution is to try to stick to doing a certain pastime every day which you never veer from. If a person is mainly drawn towards sadness, the solution is generally to find certain positive aspects about yourself and your life which you can receive pleasure from on a continuous basis.

6 | *Elul – Renewal*

Hashem Recreates the World Continuously

Hashem created the world on the 25th of Elul. On the surface, it seems that Hashem created the world one time, 5,773 years ago.

But, Hashem also re-creates the world every single day, as is explained in the *Gemara*.¹⁷ “*Hamechadesh betuvo b'chol yom tamid ma'asei bereshis*.” (He renews, in His goodness, every day constantly, the act of creation.) Not only did this happen the first time on the 25th of Elul, 5773 years ago, but in fact, every single day, Hashem re-creates His world and renews it.

What difference does it make to us whether the world was created only one time 5,773 years ago, or if Hashem keeps re-creating his world every day anew?

With Hashem's help, we will try to answer this question and explain how the fact that the world is constantly being re-created is relevant and has practical implications for every one of us. We will look into the immense repercussions of the fact that Hashem keeps re-creating the world. Hashem created the world, on the first day, on the second, third, fourth, fifth, and on the sixth day he created Adam.

On each day of Creation, it was said to be “*ki tov*,”¹⁸ that it is good, and when Hashem completed the Creation, He testified that it was all very good. “*Vayar Elokim es kol asher asah, v'hinei tov me'od*.”¹⁹

But after Hashem had created the Creation, which was **all very good**, Adam and Chavah did not listen to Hashem, Who commanded them not to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* (*Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*). By eating from it, they not only damaged themselves, but they also damaged the entire world.

If a person would not have the energy he needed for each day's spiritual work, then every morning he would start it from an imperfect, unclean, contaminated place.

17 *U'mechadesh bechol yom ma'asei bereisheis* – “Who renews the Creation every day” (*Chagiga* 12:2). Also in the morning prayers, just before *K'riyat Shema*.

18 After each day, Hashem saw that it “*ki tov* – was good” (*Bereishis* 1)

19 Hashem saw that “*v'hinei tov me'od* – and it was very good” (*Bereishis* 1:31)

But because Hashem continuously re-creates the world every day, He gives each person the opportunity to start each day from the depths of his soul, from a place that is totally innocent, totally pure and totally holy [thus providing perfect conditions for his spiritual growth].

Continuation vs. Renewal

There are two frames of reference that Hashem gives us in order to observe the world. One view is that there was only one Creation, that Hashem created the world once 5,773 years ago and, ever since, the Creation continues every day from the previous day, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. Just about every one of us has been reincarnated many times during the 5,773 years since the “first” Creation. Sometimes we did good deeds, and sometimes, G-d-forbid, we did not-so-good deeds, sometimes we were good and holy and sometimes, *chas ve’shalom*, we were not so holy. If a person lived with only this perception, then they would live their life with all their past, which was sometimes good and sometime less good.

The second view is that Hashem planted in the world a force of re-creation continuously every day, every hour, every minute, every instant. Hashem re-creates and gives a person energy to always start with a new beginning that is not affected by the defects of the past— not affected from all the transformations the person has gone through in all the years since the world was created.

Knowing Our Strengths and Weaknesses

Each and every one of us knows their own soul to some degree. We all have our own weaknesses, which are expressed differently by different people. In some people, it is expressed by a tendency for sadness – some people get stressed easily while others get overwhelmed. For other people, it is expressed by fears. In other people, it is expressed by a tendency to be suspicious and in other people it is expressed in low self-esteem.

There are many other predispositions that people have, depending on their particular history. A great many of these tendencies are the results of the many situations that the person went through during his life in childhood, in adolescence, or at various other times in their life.

If a person would try to remember where certain difficulties stem from, he may be able to recall and sort through all kinds of adverse situations that he went through, along with the particular situation when this mishap was implanted in his soul.

Sometimes these situations happened in this life, but very often, these emotional difficulties do not stem from this lifetime, but from the many other lives that the person lived during his various incarnations (*gilgulim*) since the start of Creation.

Getting Rid of Our Emotional Blocks

Our soul, which is now clothed in our current body, went through thousands of years in This World, in *Gan Eden* or even in, *chas veshalom*, *Gehinnom*. We have a lot of baggage that has accumulated in our soul— we are an accumulation of a lot of scars and many emotional disturbances. And these disturbances can combine generating whole new disturbances!

If each one of us had only one disturbance, or even a couple, it would have been much easier to deal with. But usually each one of us has at least a few disturbances, and many times dozens and even hundreds.

How can a person get rid of all these emotional blocks? Here we arrive to the special power we spoke about that is imbedded in the month of *Elul*.²⁰

The advice seems to be to deal with one problem— to try to figure out how it started, what is its reason, and by finding its root reason, it would be possible to try to remove the source of that disturbance. Sometimes we can find the reason for a disturbance if we could track down its source. Sometimes, however, it is more hidden, especially if the reason for the disturbance was not in this life, but was in a previous incarnation. It is almost impossible to get to the bottom of any disturbance using the mind alone.

So, if it is difficult to solve one disturbance, how much more difficult is it to solve them all. Therefore, it is impossible to accomplish fixing everything. Of course, if we could clearly see the reason for the disturbance, we should go through it and fix it.

But for everything else, either because the reason is hidden or because there are too many disturbances, we have the power of renewal of “*Mechadesh betuvo bechol yom tamid ma’asei bereshis*”.

The *koach* (strength) that Hashem uses to renew the Creation every day gives us a new, tremendous and amazing ability to deal with the tribulations of our *nefesh* in order to attain a more *pnimi* (internal) and pleasant life.

The Renewal Within

20 How do we balance this idea of concentrating on renewal with the avodah of Elul which is focusing on what we did wrong and doing teshuvah?

In response to this question, the Rav answered: “In fact there is an avodah of the part of the soul that sees the continuation of day after day. A person should do a *cheshbon hanefesh* with their lower soul for 5–10 minutes a day and it will fix what is needed, but the majority of our outlook should be on renewal.

The Ten Days of Teshuvah are also days of renewal, because if a person only does teshuvah, and only looks at the past, he will only focus on his shortcomings of the past.

The Rambam says that a *ba’al teshuvah* is called a *breiah chadashah* (new being).

If a person doesn’t regret the past they cannot feel the renewal of *mechadesh bechol yom* ... If someone does *cheshbon hanefesh* 5–10 minutes per day, then they should try to go back to the place of renewal also. This is the depth of a *ba’al teshuvah* who feels like a new being.”

This force of renewal is found in the inner recesses of everyone's soul.

In the parts of the soul that a person is aware of which are closer to the physical, a person feels that every day is a continuation of the previous day. But in the very depths of everyone's soul, is the place of "*Asher yatzar es ha'adam b'chochmah* – That He created man with wisdom."²¹ Iyov asked "*Chochmah mei'ayin timatza?* – Wisdom, from where is it found?"²² The answer is that in the root of the creation of a Jew is the place that is known exclusively only to Jewish souls – Hashem is constantly re-creating continuously.

This phenomenon, that Hashem re-creates the world continuously (and one's private soul in particular) means that the soul is re-created without any defects, impressions, or disturbances imprinted from the beginning of Creation.

"*Chadashim labekarim, rabbah emunasecha*" – "They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness,"²³; "*Briyah chadashah mamash*" – "In actuality, a new creation".²⁴

As such, a person is like a newborn baby or like a new convert. He starts anew in that place in the soul, where there are no imprints. The *Mishna* in *Avos* explains, "*Kotev al neyar chalak v'lo kotev al niyyar machuk*", that we can "write on a clean slate and not on an erased piece of paper".²⁵ There, a person can start anew; there he has a future that starts growing from a new beginning.

A person first must know that there is such a place in the soul, and then reach that place. He needs to understand that there is such a place in the soul where he could start anew, every day, every hour, and any time.

[When *bnei Yisrael* were in the desert for forty years, Hashem gave them *manna* from Heaven every single day for their sustenance.] What was the necessity for the *manna* to descend daily? Hashem could have brought it down once a week or once a month so that it would stay fresh. Hashem gave them the *manna* every day so that they will feel "*Chadashim labkarim rabbah emunasecha*."²⁶

21 *Gamara Brachos 80b*

22 *Iyov, 28:12*

23 *Rashi, Eichah 3:23*

24 "*Briyah chadashah mamash*" (*Chesed l'Avraham 3:22*).

25 "Teaching a child is like ink on a new page, and teaching an old man is like ink written on an erased piece of paper" (*Pirkei Avos 4:25*).

26 "*Chachmah mei'ayin timatz – Wisdom where is its root?*" (*Iyov, 28:12*)

Every morning when the *manna* fell, they felt that there was new food in the world, because it was a new world. This *manna* was white, and whitened their sins, and clearly allowed them to start every day from this new, white, blank page in their soul.

Believe In Renewal, Then See It

First of all, as we explained, a person must know that the inner strength in his soul experiences a new beginning every day.

It is only the external part of our soul that feels the world as if it is merely continuous; a day follows from the previous day, from the previous week, from the previous month, from the previous year. But in the depths of our soul, we can access the power of renewal.

After a person knows and believes the fact, that the world is always being re-created, a person should try to observe the world and see all the things that are renewed each day.

Chazal say that a chicken lays an egg every single day.²⁷ *Chazal* also say that in the future a woman will be able to give birth every day instead of after nine months. This is simply because the world is constantly being re-created!

We need to observe this in order to silence the external noises in our soul in order to listen to the deepest internal place in us. If we do that, we can access the place of the inner wellsprings in the soul, where the soul is continually renewed. In the language of the *Mishnah* in *Avos*, it was said, “*Na’aseh k’ma’ayan hamisgaber*”. A person becomes like a flowing wellspring,²⁸ which keeps renewing.

A person who does not quiet his soul is only aware of things that happen externally, so he only sees the world as a continuation of the past.

Internal Quiet

A person has to quiet his soul, either by listening to a *niggun*, or nibbling on something tasty, or by relaxing in a comfortable position. All these are tools to reach the place of internal quiet where he can quiet their heavy feelings and thoughts.

When he is in a place of quiet, he can then dwell on this simple thought: **“I am being renewed. Hashem is in my heart, and is renewing me every moment.”**

27 “*Asida ida sheteled b’chol yom.*” *The Gemara* compares it to a chicken laying eggs every day (*Shabbos* 30).

28 *Mishlei*, 18:14

Repeat this sentence dozens of times. This should only happen when you are in this quiet place – the deepest place in the soul. Try to repeat this from total awareness and slowly try to experience them as deep as possible in your soul.²⁹

Each one of us should try to do this “quieting” every morning for a few minutes, and feel the reality of Hashem in the heart, and then try to believe and try to experience that “Hashem infuses in me every day new *koach*, renewing me from the start.” We can realize that “Hashem gives me a new *koach* to succeed. Even though I couldn’t succeed in the past, I was given new energies to succeed and if today I will not succeed, tomorrow I will be given again new energy so that I will succeed then.”

If a person starts each day with this process of internal observation it will fill him with mighty power. The whole day will be built from this great infusion from Hashem that resides in each of us and gives us power every day.

Also, during the day, especially after a person fell in *emunah*, or did something inappropriate, or expressed something that had disappointed him, the advice is to go back to the place where we were at, and to believe that “Hashem is planting in me new power, which is not affected by all the failures of the past.”

If a person works on this correctly, with patience and clarity, from a stable place with the understanding that on one the hand the world continues forward to the next day, but that the world is also re-created every day, then he will receive great powers of strength and purity, beauty and liveliness.

The ones who work on this will merit, with Hashem’s help, that their obstacles will become smaller so that they will be able to overcome them. But even more so, the person will live an uplifted and happier life.

29 In response to a question, the Rav explained that the best time to try this is at the very beginning of the day, before you start your daily routine. It’s best to get up a few minutes earlier, and do this before everyone else wakes up. Then you would start your day from this clean, pure and internal state.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: How do we balance this idea of concentrating about the renewal with the work of Elul of inspecting what we did wrong and doing teshuvah?

ANSWER: In fact there is an *avodah* of the part of the soul that sees the continuation of day after day. A person should do a *cheshbon hanefesh* with his or her lower soul for 5–10 minutes a day and it will fix what is needed, but the majority of our outlook should be of renewal. The days of *teshuvah* are also days of renewal, because if the person only does *teshuvah*, and only looks at the past, he will only go into his shortcomings of the past. Going deep, the energy that a person has to do *teshuvah* is because he is renewing himself. The Rambam says that a *ba'al teshuvah* is called a “*breiah chadashah*” (new being). This is the how deep *teshuvah* goes, if the person regrets the past. A person who doesn’t regret the past cannot feel the “*mechadesh bechol yom*” ... But if someone did *teshuvah* 5–10 minutes per day, then he should try to go back to the place of renewal. This is the depth of a *ba'al teshuvah* who feels like a new being.

Q2: I heard of the idea that a tzaddik falls seven times. I thought that this is to comfort us, that even tzaddikim can fall seven times, but could it be that we can become a tzaddik by doing this renewing work ourselves?

ANSWER: Of course the first is true, but the main process should be the second part. From where does a *tzaddik* have the power to fall and get up and fall and get up again? A regular person, if he falls once or twice, says to himself, “I fell and tried to get up but couldn’t do it, so the next time I will fall, I will not be able to get up either.” If he fell twice and couldn’t get up, on the third time he will feel that now he has a *chazakah*, and for sure will not be able to get up. But a *tzaddik* believes that Hashem gives him *koach* to fix himself. With the power that Hashem gives, one can succeed in anything. If it was my own power, it is limited and I can’t succeed, but if I receive every day a new power, the question is who gave me the power?. On this *Chazal* say, “Hashem li *b’ozrai* — Hashem is my helper.” Therefore even if in the past you failed, a person knows that Hashem helps him. Therefore there is never a place of despair because he knows that Hashem will help him even if he fell many times.

Q3: Is there a specific time of a day when this is happening? Also because it is Elul, should we do this Avodah specifically now? Is there anything in Elul specifically to take advantage of?

ANSWER: At the beginning of the day, before you start the day, is the best time. It is best if possible to get up a few minutes earlier, before others, and do this before everyone wakes up, and then the day would start from this clean and pure and internal state.

Additionally, Elul gives the *koach* for all the year, like a person who takes upon himself to do certain things on Rosh Hashanah, because it is Rosh Hashanah he has the power to sustain this throughout the year. But if he makes certain commitments and only does them on Rosh Hashanah, then they are not so helpful. Elul is the time from where this light shines through the whole year. It is the time to accept/acquire this energy and to stretch it to the whole year.

Q4: *In regards to renewal of the Creation, going to the siddur and saying Modeh Ani for returning my soul, does it mean returning us the soul as it was, is it the same soul or a new soul?*

ANSWER: Like we say, it is “*Elokai, neshamah sh’nasata bi tehorah.*” You gave it to me pure, and I dirtied it and now you give it to me clean and pure again. A person needs to feel that Hashem is in his heart, so this feeling of “*mechadesh ma’asei bereshis*” is more real and pure. If a person doesn’t feel Hashem in his heart, he can’t feel the *mechadesh bi ma’asei bereshis*. The more a person feels that Hashem is in his heart, the more the feeling of renewal is more internal, deeper, and purer.

Q5: *The renewal is there already there, but do we need to do an action to access it?*

ANSWER: We need to uncover it and feel it. It already is there, but one’s personal *avodah* is to feel it.

Q6: *What are the different ways practically to internalize it?*

ANSWER: Most people have fantasies of the past and future; therefore, people don’t live in the present state of renewal. The more we quiet our thoughts and imaginations regarding the past and the future, and we focus of the present, then the person removes most of the screens covering his thoughts. When we are in the present and a person sits quietly, we can utilize tasting a fruit or hearing a *niggun*, and sitting comfortably to try to feel Hashem; then we have the possibility to feel the place of renewal. All this must be with davening to Hashem, asking him to help him get there in a complete way.

Q7: *A question on the avodah: I understand doing it when it is quiet, and we have time and space, but then the Rav mentions also accessing it when a person gets frustrated. Does the Rav have an eitzah (advice) on how to get there even if things are chaotic?*

ANSWER: We need to be deep into it and that allows you to be able to get into it in a flash. It works faster after we are experienced with this *avodah* for a while. If reality doesn’t allow, we must know that life is involved with pain, and not everything has a solution for this moment or exact second.

7 | *Tishrei – Touching The Spiritual*

Tishrei and the Sense of Touch

What is the *avodah* of the month of Tishrei? It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that the month of Tishrei is the time to use our sense of touch (*chush hamishush*).

There are many ways how we can feel something through touch. One way is through our mind: our mind is the root of our five senses. Our mind sends messages through our body when we touch something. Another kind of touch is through our **heart**: our heart is able to feel something that is going on outside of us.

The regular sense of touch which we are familiar with, which comes from our brain, is, for example, when we want to feel if food is fresh, so we feel it if it is soft or hard. Our physical sense of touch can only feel the external part of something - it cannot feel the essence of something. Only our heart can feel the essence of something.

Our heart is able to sense what is going on in the inside of something. For example, when a mother hugs her child, not only does she feel her child physically, but she connects to his soul with her own soul. Her heart is feeling her child.

All of us need to become aware of our ability to feel something through our heart. Sometimes we feel through our physical sense of touch, and sometimes we feel through our heart; sometimes we use both. We need to become aware of how we feel something, and where it comes from.

Appreciating The Sense of Touch

Imagine if we wouldn't have the sense of touch, and we only have the other four senses. What would our life be like?

We wouldn't be able to hug or kiss anyone. We wouldn't be able to even feel someone's hand. The world would be a very cold, unfriendly place. And when we cook food, we wouldn't be able to put the fork in to feel if it's soft or not.

All of us enjoy going swimming. If not for touch, we wouldn't be able to feel the enjoyment in swimming around in the water or even taking a shower; we would only be able to drink it. On a hot day, everyone loves to feel a breeze. If not for touch, we wouldn't be able to feel a breeze.

Touch is called "*mishush*" in Hebrew, from the word "*mamash*" – "real." When we feel something, we are able to feel how it is real. Touch enables us to connect to something. Just like we use physical touch to connect to something physical, so does our spiritual sense of touch enable us to connect to spiritual matters.

We don't only connect to something through touch. The sense of sight, for example, can also connect us to something. Just by seeing the sky, we connect to the sky. But there are things which we don't feel connected to unless we touch. A clear example of this is a mother who talks to her child on the phone when he is away. It's not enough that she's connected to him through hearing him; a mother wants to feel and touch her child.

We have so far described our need to touch the physical. It is because we have a need to connect ourselves outward to the world. Now we will discuss here the deeper sense of touch which we have: the heart's sense of touch.

Feeling Ruchniyus (Spirituality)

Where is the heart's sense of touch?

Let's say Reuven is talking nicely to Shimon, but he doesn't feel any love for him; really he can't stand Shimon. If Reuven would properly develop his spiritual sense of touch, he would be able to feel what's going on in Shimon's heart and see him in a whole different light, and then he would feel a love for him.

Our sense of touch in our heart is able to feel something that we can't feel with the other four physical senses. The only way we can connect to Hashem is through feeling Him with our heart; we cannot see or hear Him physically, but we can feel His existence with our heart. This is the power of our heart: it can feel the spiritual.

The Opportunity of the Month of Tishrei

During the month of Tishrei, and especially during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, our heart is more open to feel Hashem. Of the month of Tishrei, it is written, "*Seek Hashem where He is found, call out to Him where He is close.*" Hashem is closer to us during these days. Not only is Hashem closer to us, but it is we who can feel Him more clearly, during the month of Tishrei.

The month of Tishrei are days in which our heart's sense of touch is more opened. We can feel things from our heart much more during these days than the rest of the year.

If we learn how to use our spiritual sense of touch, we can become close to Hashem during these days, to "feel" Hashem.

What Prevents Us From Feeling The Spiritual?

Men have the *mitzvah* to learn Torah, while women do not. This shows us the unique role of both a man and a woman in *avodas Hashem*. Men are mainly using the **mind** to serve Hashem, and that is their main role. Women are using mainly the **heart** to serve Hashem - and this is the main role of a woman.

However, the *sefarim hakedoshim* say that during these days of *teshuvah*, even men have to use their heart more than they use their mind. The days of doing *teshuvah* in the month of Tishrei is a time to become more in touch with our heart, with our feelings for *ruchniyus*, and this makes much more use of the heart than of the brain/mind. Therefore, during these days, even a man's main *avodah* is through the heart.

Men and women have different deterrents holding them back from accessing their hearts' sense of touch. With men, the issue is that since they are mostly involved with their minds and not with their hearts, they have a harder time relating to a sense of touch that goes beyond the physical; they are not familiar with the spiritual sense of touch, and it does not come naturally to them to feel the spiritual.

Women are much more easily open to feeling the spiritual; they can access it much more easily than men do. But women face a different issue that prevents them from accessing the heart: it is because they are so busy that they don't have any time for themselves. In today's times especially, where women are working, in addition to taking care of the home and the children, and in addition to many other things as well - they are being held back from accessing their hearts.

A woman in today's times is much busier than she was in the past. She has no time for herself; every second she is doing something else, whether it is work, being on the phone, or helping a friend, and they simply don't find the time to sit alone and feel what's going on in the heart.

But if any woman wants to improve her *ruchniyus*, she must set aside time every day to have total quiet and have time for her heart.

Setting Aside "Heart Time" Each Day

Every person – man or woman – needs times of quiet every day. This is no less necessary than our need for eating and sleeping; we all need a little *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity) every day.

We have to sit with ourselves alone, every day, with total quiet. We need time out to relax and think. Soon, we will speak about "what" to think, but first, we need the actual time.

This is not a time to learn *mussar*, or even to talk to Hashem. It is not a time for *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting). All of these things are wonderful and necessary too, but we are not talking about this here. We are talking about a much more basic step: a time in which we silence our thoughts, so that we can access our soul.

We need this time every day in to tune in to what's going on inside of our heart. If we never think into what is inside our hearts, we will go our entire life living with a physical heart but without every using it for its inner purpose, which is as good as living an entire life without a heart.

What to Do During “Heart Time”

During this time of the day you set aside, sit down with a pen and paper, perhaps with light music playing in the background or by first reading light material, in order to create a more relaxed atmosphere.

When you feel relaxed, now, write down all your feelings. What do you feel all the time? Do you feel love, or hatred, or any other emotion going on inside you? Write down everything positive and negative you feel in your life; the good and the bad.

We are not talking yet about *how* to work on yourself and self-improvement. We are simply writing down what is going on in our life, because we need to become aware of what’s going on inside our heart. It can take months until a person figures out what’s going on inside her heart.

We need to have this “heart time”, every day. If we don’t feel what’s going on inside our own heart, how will we be able to feel what’s going on inside others’ hearts....? How will we be able to use our heart to sense Hashem, if we don’t even use our own heart....?

Just like a woman gets used to living with her husband and children, so must she get used to living more with her heart and experiencing more what’s going on inside it. To do this, time must be set aside every day for this.

In Conclusion

If we do this, we will be able to utilize our heart’s sense of touch and then we will feel what’s going on in our hearts – whether it is love, hatred, etc. We will become aware of the feelings in our heart. From there, our sensitivity to feelings will be heightened, and we can feel what is going on in others’ hearts. Eventually, we will be able to feel Hashem, Who is really found deep within every person.

May we merit to a *gmar chasima Tovah* (to be sealed for a good year), and to come to feel Hashem more in our life.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *According to how I am understanding this, “heart time” is not a time to talk to Hashem, and it is a time to just be alone and write down our feelings. Is this correct?*

ANSWER: It is exactly as you have said; it is a separate *avodah*, which is besides for the *avodah* of setting aside time to talk to Hashem. However, it is not that this *avodah* is “instead” of talking to Hashem. Talking to Hashem is also an important *avodah*, but just as we can understand that a person also has to make special time to talk to Hashem - besides for the three times of *davening* each day - so can we understand that a person needs time alone with himself each day to sit with himself and discover what’s in his heart, *besides* for talking to Hashem.

Let us emphasize again that this *avodah* of “heart time” is not meant to replace our *avodah* of talking to Hashem. Rather, it is another *avodah* which we need, *besides* for talking to Hashem each day.

Q2: *What does it mean to write down what’s on our heart? Should we just write down whatever thoughts come into our minds?*

ANSWER: In order to understand yourself, you need to sit with yourself quietly and listen to what’s going on inside your heart. This is the general concept, and it is hard to say exactly what to do. Basically, try to see if you feel happy or sad, as well as your other feelings. As time goes on, you will discover more and more about what you are feeling and you will come to better understand yourself.

Q3: *Should a person first talk to Hashem and then write down a list of how one feels, or should it be the other way around?*

ANSWER: It is better to first write down the list of what you are feeling, because first we need to calm ourselves down before we talk to Hashem, so that we can talk to Hashem from a calmer place in ourselves. In order to be able to daven properly to Hashem, we need to first be calmed, and then we are speaking with Him from a more genuine place in ourselves.

Q4: *Even when we have “heart time”, how do we know if we are understanding ourselves from our heart? Maybe we are only understanding ourselves from our mind?*

ANSWER: Excellent question. Even listening to our heart is problematic, because the *yetzer hora* resides in our heart (in the left chamber). The question is if what we are hearing from our heart is coming from the external layer of the heart (which contains the *yetzer hora*), or if it is coming from a more inner place in our heart that tells us the truth. But certainly we must be concerned that what we are hearing is perhaps coming from the *yetzer hora* present in our heart.

The general answer to this issue is that all good in our soul stems from either the “light of the *neshamah*”, which is present in our brain/mind, or from the “*Ruach*” that is present in our heart. All evil present in ourselves stems from the *yetzer hora* in the heart, and to be more specific, from the *nefesh habehaimis* (the animalistic layer in the soul), which contains the negative trait of *shiflus* (lowliness).

Our *avodah* is to get used to listening to what’s going on in our hearts. As you get used to listening to your feelings, you will be able to discern it as a physical sensation, and there are usually two places where you can feel it. There are feelings you can feel coming from your heart, and there are feelings you can feel coming from the lower section of the stomach, which is closer to the liver. When you feel it coming from this lower half of the body, it is usually a feeling stemming from the body, and if you feel it coming from your heart, it is usually a feeling linked to your *middos*. This is a very subtle matter. The question you asked was very good, and the answer to it is not always so clear.

It is entirely a matter of getting used to it. As you get used to listening to your heart and writing down its feelings, you will slowly be able to discern better what it is telling you, just as it took time for Shmuel *HaNavi* to discern the voice of Hashem and he had to get used to hearing it in order to recognize it.

Q5: *When we starting to do this, should we write down everything that comes to mind, and not try to discern where the thoughts are coming from?*

ANSWER: At first as you begin to get used to this, just write down everything that comes to mind. Only afterwards will you be able to discern which thoughts and feelings are coming from the *neshamah*, and which thoughts and feelings are coming from the *nefesh habehaimis*. Some things you can clearly identify as *nefesh habehaimis*.

For example, if you discover that you like to be lazy, you know clearly that this stems from the *nefesh habehaimis*. You can write it down on the list of negative desires you have in yourself. But as for any other thoughts and feelings that come to you which you don’t know if they are good or bad, write them down in a middle column on the page and come back to it later, when you will be able to better discern if it came from the *neshamah* or the *nefesh habehaimis*.

In summary, your list should include three rows. One row will contain all the good *middos* and desires you discover in yourself, another row will contain bad *middos* and desire you discover in yourself, and a third (middle) row will be the parts of yourself which you’re not sure about if they’re good or bad.

Q6: *Should a person say a tefillah before writing down this heart time?*

ANSWER: Before anything we do, we can always *daven* to Hashem for help. In our case specifically, we can *daven* to Hashem before we do this that He should help us know ourselves.

The Raavad writes, based upon the verse “*From my flesh, I see G-d*” that we can only come closer to Hashem through understanding ourselves. Thus, we must bear in mind that we are only trying to understand ourselves because that is part of our *avodah* of recognizing Hashem, and not because we simply want to know who we are. The goal of trying to understand ourselves is so that we can come closer to Hashem through clearer self-knowledge. So a person should always *daven* before any *avodah* that Hashem should help him, because our goal is always to come closer to Hashem.

Q7: *What should I do when I discover that I have many negative middos in myself and I see that I am very far from being close to Hashem?*

ANSWER: If a person can only discover bad things about himself and he can't find any good in himself, it is a sign that he does not recognize anything about himself at all, and that he has never yet taken a deep look into his heart. This is because every person contains good qualities. As long as you reflect deeply into what is going on inside your heart, you will be able to find good qualities in yourself.

Of course, we must also discover our bad *middos* that we have too, but first we must reflect on the good *middos* that we have. When we begin to work on ourselves, we first need to work on our worst *middah*. The time now is too short to explain how to do this, because it a deep *avodah*. To say it briefly: we must first begin to work on our worst *middah*, or, we should first work on an area that is easiest for us to improve in.

I must repeat, however, that if you are only finding bad middos in yourself and you are not discovering any good in yourself, it is a sign that you are not reflecting properly into your heart, because every person contains good. There is always your best quality, but besides for this, there is also many other good points which you can discover about yourself, and you must discover all of these good points in yourself.

Q8: *Should we begin to work on our bad middos when we discover them? Or should we leave that for later?*

ANSWER: Absolutely **do not** begin to work on your bad *middos* right away. You have just started to get to know yourself, and before you discover lots of good in yourself, it is detrimental for you to work on your bad *middos*, because you will become overly focused on the bad in yourself and you are unaware of the good in yourself. You would be working on yourself with a lowly view towards yourself. Only after discovering lots of good about yourself can you begin a healthy kind of self-improvement. You must begin from a place of finding many good points in yourself, and if you have not yet found any good in yourself yet, you must keep looking for it. If you still cannot find any good about yourself, ask someone else to point out to your strengths. Either way, you can only begin self-improvement after you have found a lot of good parts about yourself.

Q9: *When the Rav talks about the “heart”, is this referring to the “nefesh” (the basic life-force of the soul)?*

ANSWER: Whenever a person feels some emotion, like if he is happy or sad, where does he feel it coming from? Does he feel it coming from his toenails? He feels it coming from his heart. Of course, there is depth upon depth within our heart. We discussed here how one can enter the place in his heart which feels things. All of us can relate to what the “heart” is, each on our own level. We must first begin to recognize what our heart is, as much as we can on our current level. This is only the beginning stage, where we are first beginning to enter our heart. It is not yet the “heart” itself. The “heart” actually is experienced differently with each person, depending on what level he has reached. But what we all have in common is that all of have some understanding of the heart, and that is where we can begin from.

Q10: *The Rav has said that at first a person can get to feel what is in his heart, and then he can feel what is going on in others’ hearts, and then a person can feel Hashem. Is this order specific, or can it be the other way around also? Can a person begin with feeling what is going on in others, and from there he can get to know himself better, and then feel Hashem?*

ANSWER: This is a good question. There are some people who are born with more of a feeling for others’ hearts, and they can get to know themselves better by understanding others. Most people, however, need to use our method, which is by first understanding what’s going on inside their own hearts, before they can feel what is in others’ hearts; and after that they can feel Hashem.

There are a third group of people who are born only with feelings for Hashem, but they do not feel what’s going on inside their own hearts, nor do they feel what others are feeling. For them, the order will have to be different than how it was explained here. Here we were addressing most people, who usually are not born with a strong sense of knowing what is going on in their hearts or in others’ hearts, and certainly they can’t feel Hashem yet. The order presented here, which applies to most people, is: To first get in touch with your own feelings, then with others’ feelings, and then you can begin to feel Hashem.

8 | *Cheshvan – Smell and Breathing*

Cheshvan – The “Smell” Left Behind From Yomim Noraim

We are now in the month of *Cheshvan*, after all the festivals of Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos, heading into the winter. We are taught by our Sages that every month contains a special ability which we can use to serve Hashem. In the *sefarim hakedoshim*, our Sages tell us that the power of the month of *Cheshvan* is the sense of *reiach*, smell.

Smell is unique from the rest of the senses in that it continues to linger with us even after what we already smelled isn't in front of us anymore. The senses of sight, hearing, taste, and touch can only be sensed when you're sensing it in front of you. You can't see, hear, taste or touch something if it's not in front of you. But you can continue to smell something even when it isn't in front of you anymore. For example, when a person smells flowers, he can remember how it smelled long after the flowers aren't here anymore.

This is why the month of *Cheshvan* is connected with “smell”. During *Cheshvan*, we are left with the spiritual ‘smell’ of the *Yomim Noraim*, long after it's gone. What is this sense of smell that we remain with from the *Yomim Noraim*, and how we can use it?

Having Quiet Time Every Day to Reflect

Firstly, before we continue, we must know that if a person wishes to serve Hashem in a true and inner way, one needs to have quiet “heart time” every day (which we spoke about last month).

During each of the continuing months, we will explain what the *avodah* of each month is. But in every month, our goal is the same: to live a more inner kind of life. This can only be done with our “heart time” that we must set aside every day. We need this heart time in order to internalize any *avodah* we do.

If someone doesn't set aside time every day for heart time, it is not possible to really understand any of the coming ways of *avodas Hashem* which we will speak about in the coming months. We **must** have times of quiet every day in order to think and reflect into our inner world. Without this “heart time”, not only will we be preventing from actualizing any of *avodah*; we won't even understand at any of the methods of *avodah* at all.

The purpose here is to open our *pnimiyus* (inner world) to us and reveal a more inner kind of life. This needs specially set aside time for every day; we must seclude ourselves a little from the world, in order to open up the internal world within us.

We have repeated this point several times, because it must be very clear: We must set aside time every day for “heart time”. There is nothing to be gained from these words unless we have this time every day.

Smell Helps Us Sense Our Inner World

Having understood that, now we can start the *avodah* of this month: using our sense of smell (the *chush ha-rei'ach*).

When used in an inner way, the sense of smell helps us feel beyond the external dimension of things. When we smell something, we are sensing something more internal than what it appears to be.

Every Jew's soul wants to know of the inner world of the soul, but we cannot sense it with the other four senses. The sense of smell is the only sense that is able to sense any *pnimiyus* (inner, spiritual layer of reality) in our life. The Sages say that the only physical sense which our soul has pleasure from is the sense of smell; smell is the most spiritual kind of sense from all the senses. It is beyond the physical senses - it can “smell” spirituality. The external, superficial layer of our sense of smell can only smell the physical, but there is an inner use of our sense of smell, which can ‘smell’ the spiritual.

Our sense of smell has two layers to it: the external, superficial layer of smell is when we smell the physical, such as smelling the scent of a flower, and the inner layer of smell, which can smell the spirituality in even the physical. Our sense of smell is able to reach deep into the physical and ‘smell’ something spiritual in it. ‘Smelling’ spirituality can show us how something which looks only physical can really be spiritual.

The Power of Breath

Our nose can do two things: it can smell, and it can breathe. The power of breath³⁰ in us is essentially the *nishmas chaim* (the “breathe of life”) that was breathed into us from Hashem.

It is written, “*Every soul praises Hashem*”, and the Sages explain this to mean that “for every breath a person breathes, a person must praise Hashem”. Thus, one must be aware that his every breath comes from Hashem. If one is not aware of his breathing, he is not able to thank Hashem for it, because if he does not feel it, he cannot appreciate it. If a person is unaware of his breathing, maybe he will be able to express his gratitude to Hashem after every ten times that he breathes in and out, but he will not be able to feel grateful to Hashem for every single breath. Only when one becomes aware of his breathing can he come to thank Hashem for every single breath that he breathes.

³⁰ In Hebrew, “breath” is “*neshimah*”. It is also known under the terms of *neshimah* (inhale) and *neshifah* (exhale).

Beginning To Become Aware of Your Breathing

How does one begin to feel and become aware of his breathing? One needs to set aside time for this and **sit quietly**, and start exhaling and inhaling, with calmness. **Pay attention to the breathing**, and **listen, slowly, to the breathing**. Then you will begin to *feel* the breathing.

Quiet time is necessary for this, because if a person is harried, like if he is mentally anxious about something, and surely if he is physically bombarded, then there is no chance that he will be able to feel his breathing and become aware of it. But if a person sets aside time in his day for this, even if it's just **5 minutes a day**, or even **3 minutes a day**, and he tries to become aware of each breath that he breathes during this time – not only when will he become aware of his breathing, but he will begin to feel a more *inward* kind of feeling as he is exhaling and inhaling.

Without having this quiet time to feel your breathing, your breathing is only being experienced superficially, as if it is one of the many various functions of the body. But when a person makes sure to have this quiet time during the day to feel his breathing and to pay attention to his breathing, he will begin to uncover the *p'nimiyus* (the inner depth) that is contained in every breath.

Inhaling and Exhaling To Reach Our P'nimiyus (Inner Essence)

Many people, especially in our times where people are borrowing secular ideas that come from the gentile world, are practicing a method of breathing where a person imagines that he is releasing any negativity from his body upon exhaling, and upon inhaling, the person imagines that his breathing in new energy that will invigorate his body. However, this is just an external use of breathing. Our Sages revealed to us the inner way to use the power of breathing, which goes far deeper than this.

When we speak here of setting aside quiet time during the day to feel your breathing, we are not intending to copy the gentile approach. Our intention here is to tread the path that our previous Sages took when it came to this power, and it was they who taught us about it.

When we became of our breathing, we are essentially becoming aware that there is a *nishmas chaim*, a “breath of life”, that was breathed into us by Hashem; and thereby become closer to Hashem from this depth that we reach. Our breathing, which is sustained by Hashem's breath, is thus our very life. We can find the very source of our life contained in our breathing. When we begin to become aware of our breathing, quietly and calmly, by listening to our breath, we begin to recognize and feel an entirely different and inner perspective towards what life is.

Let's explain what is meant here. In whatever action we perform, whether we use our sense of sight, hearing, speech, or anything else that we do, most of the time we are unaware of these actions. These actions are usually not connected to our awareness. Most of the time we are far from our own selves, and surely that will mean that we are far from Hashem – because most of the time, we are far from our own inner world.

Therefore, when we begin to take deep breaths and we are listening deeply to the breathing, we need to bring the breath into a deeper place in ourselves, and then we exhale that breathe and we go deeper from there, from the deeper place that we have already reached. Slowly as we keep doing this, we can keep penetrating further and further into ourselves, deeper and deeper into ourselves.

From all of the senses, the sense of smell (which our breathing is enabled by) is the deepest and most inner kind of sense. When we see something, sometimes it can have a deep effect on us, and sometimes it does not. When we hear something, sometimes we are deeply affected, but sometimes we are not. When we touch something, we are feeling the physicality of something, and we are not feeling anything deep in this. But when we inhale the scent of something, using our sense of smell, we can sense it deeply. We can keep taking in the scent of something, where we continue to smell it more deeply.

In the same way, we can also deepen our breathing. We need to try this in the actual sense. For every breath that you exhale and inhale, you can take the breath deeper and deeper into yourself. Train yourself to slowly deepen your breathing, deepening your breathe each time.

This is an amazing ability which Hashem has given to His creations. It is a physical act of exhaling and inhaling, yet it is a use of the sense of smell, which is the only physical sense that our *neshamah* enjoys, as our Sages taught. It is the sense which we can use to penetrate deeply into ourselves. When a person gets used to this, sitting quietly and calmly, taking in deep breaths and listening to them, it can open up before him a great opening that will help him get to deeper places in his soul.

Entering Our Inner World

The *avodah* of a person, as we have mentioned and as is known, is to enter into his inner world, and live an internal life, a life of the heart, a life of living the depth of the *neshamah*. The power of breathing which Hashem has given to man is one of the amazing powers which man can use to enter into his inner world.

Of course, the main *avodah* of a man is to learn Torah and to keep the *mitzvos*, and the main *avodah* of a woman is to keep the *mitzvah* of modesty. And the common denominator between all men and women is that we all have to work on our *middos*, so that our hearts can become more purified and so that the barriers between us and Hashem will be removed. Then we can enter into the inner depth contained in our heart. But there is also another way for us to enter into our inner world, which works in tandem with keeping the *mitzvos* (and it is not independent of learning Torah and keeping *mitzvos*, *chas v'shalom*): the power of breathing can help us enter more inward into ourselves.³¹

³¹ The sources in our sefarim hakedoshim that discuss the *avodah* of “breathing” are: in the sefarim of Rav Abulefia, and sefer Yesod Yosef (of Reb Shlomo of Zhevil). For more on the *avodah* of breathing, derashos of

At first, getting used to it will feel like a mere breathing exercise, and you will only feel it in the physical sense. But if you get used to deeply listening to your breathing as you take the deep breaths, concentrating deeply into this, you will suddenly feel that you have entered deeper places which you never knew about until now that were inside of you.

This is one of the powers that help us serve Hashem, but it is not necessarily meant to be the path that every person must take. Some people are more inclined to this *avodah*, and some people are less inclined to take this path. But for those who do feel inclined towards this path, this *avodah* can be a great key for them to enter their inner world.

It begins from a mere physical act of exhaling and inhaling, and at first it will not feel very inward or spiritual at all, but as you get used to deeply listening to the breathing, the breathing will first enter deeper into the physical heart, and eventually as you keep doing it, it will enter into the deeper and more spiritual parts. (This is the “*ruach chaim*”, the “spirit of life”, which penetrates into the “*Ruach*” that is found in the heart).

A Word of Caution Before Beginning The Breathing Exercise

We must emphasize that this *avodah* must be done calmly, slowly, and patiently. If a person will try to accelerate the process by taking in many deep breaths in quick succession of each other and he's anxiously trying to get inward with each breath, this is *physically endangering*, and it is spiritually harming as well. It must be done quietly and calmly, pleasantly, and not with pressure to get anywhere.

You need to strongly want to get there, of course, but it must not be forced and anxious. You need to want to get there calmly, with serenity. The desire should be calm. You are calmly trying to get to get deeper into yourself.

We have had to give special caution about this, because it is very possible for one to harm himself if he is ignorant of these rules. Now we can begin, with Hashem's help, of how to make this more practical. Although these are very subtle matters, we will try to explain it as much as Hashem allows us to, and to explain as precisely as we can.

Step 1: Becoming Aware of Your Normal Breathing

The first step is to begin with your normal breathing. Become aware of your breathing, and don't try to manipulate your breathing in any way that you are not used to. Simply become aware of your normal breathing. This is the first step: sit with yourself each day for a few minutes, breathe normally, and just pay attention to the breaths.

Step 2: Deep Breaths

After you feel that you have become more aware of your normal breathing and that this awareness has become more natural to you and that you're not straining yourself for this, now comes the next step. Try to deepen your breathing a bit more. Sit and take slightly deeper breaths than your normal breathing. The first time you do this, take a deep breath, and keep repeating this for a few times, with the very same kind of deep breath.

After you feel that you have reached a certain depth, and that it is natural to you and you are not straining yourself to feel it, try to deepen the breathing a bit more. Concentrate a bit more deeply on the breathing, and breathe in more deeply than before, and keep repeating.

We need to keep doing this until we can do it easily without concentrating too deeply on it. Do not try to accelerate the process of trying to reaching a deeper place in yourself each time. Just go slowly in this process. Breathe in a bit deeper after a number of breaths, keep deepening the breathing this way, and slowly, you will see that you have reached a deeper place in yourself, but without concentrating so hard to get there.

Step 3: Sudden Inner Recognition

When you have reached a deeper place in yourself, at some point, you will suddenly recognize that you have reached a deeper place in yourself. This might not happen to you right away as soon as you reach the deeper place in yourself. You might feel it sometime after you have slowly gotten there, where it will suddenly dawn upon your awareness.

This does not mean that you have simply learned how to take deeper breaths. If you have done it correctly and you have gotten further into yourself with the breathing, it is like entering into a new room in yourself, where you see what is inside of it. When you deepen your breathing and you have truly reached a deeper place into yourself, you will know that you are there. You will begin to recognize a deeper place in yourself that you were not aware of until now. If you do not feel that you've reached a deeper place in yourself, it must be that all of the deep breathing was done superficially, with not enough genuine intent to go deeper into yourself.

When you have reach a deeper place in yourself, of this *Chazal* refer to when they said, "For every breath, praise Hashem." The meaning of this statement is not that each breath is like the breath before it and that you must praise Hashem for the same kind of each of these breaths. Rather, it means that each new breath that we breathe can help us enter deeper into ourselves, which gives us greater inner recognition of ourselves, and thus there is new reason to praise Hashem for each of these breaths.

The power of deep breathing can provide a person with a great opening, a key, to a greater depth of feeling and inner recognition, because it takes you to a deeper place in yourself. Therefore, we must emphasize that it needs to be done slowly, and to keep repeating the process described until you are calm, which enables you to act from a deeper place in yourself.

Hashem says, “*My son, give your heart to me.*” Hashem wants our hearts, and the kind of heart that Hashem wants us to give to Him is that we give Him the very depth that we reach in ourselves. Reaching a deeper place in our heart, which we can reach through the power of deep breathing, enables us to daven to Hashem from a deeper and more genuine place in ourselves. It enables us to be kind to others from a deeper place in ourselves. It enables us to really use our hearts for Hashem; “Hashem wants the heart” (*Rachmana liba ba’ee*).

There are many ways of how we can reach the depth of the heart: through exertion in Torah learning, through *tefillah*, through fixing our *middos*, and other ways as well. But an additional way to get to our heart, as we explained here, is to use the power of breathing: to get used to breathing deeply and to reach a deeper place in oneself, from the breathing.

When we reach deeper into ourselves, we are able to act from a more genuine place in ourselves, from our heart. When one gets used to this power and he is regularly reaching a deep place in himself via the act of deep breathing, he will see a transformation in his life, where his actions will be emanating from his heart.

Step 4: Reaching the Self

Let’s try to continue explaining this *avodah*, although it’s a matter that is very deep, subtle, and hidden.

After a person feels that he has reached a deeper place in himself and he feels that he has reached the deepest possible place in himself that he’s aware of, now comes the next stage, where a person can slowly penetrate even further than this [as he continues the deep breathing]. He will eventually feel that he has reached the very essence of his “I” – the deepest possible place in oneself. One can reach it by continuing to breathe deeply, feeling that he is getting deeper and deeper into himself, until he eventually reaches his “I”.

At that point, his breathing is helping him touch upon his very “I”. His breathing has brought him into the deepest possible place in oneself. In order to reach such a place in oneself and to be able to breathe deeply to get there, it takes a lot of hard work before this. It will take a lot of time and effort to get there, lots of hard work, but again, it needs to be done calmly and peacefully. It will mainly require a lot of purity and holiness in one’s life, which opens the heart more and makes it easier to get there. The more a person has purified himself internally, the more he has softened his heart, and his heart goes from being a “heart of stone” into a “heart of flesh”. It will then become much easier for his breathing to get further into himself, where he can penetrate into the deepest part of himself.

Step 5: Sensing Hashem’s Existence in the Self

Finally, there is one more step to reach. Let us explain it, with *siyata d’shmaya*, although it is a very, very deep and subtle matter.

The final step is for one to deepen the breathing to the point that he senses the reality of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

It is written, “*I will dwell amongst them*”, and the Sages explain this to mean, “It does not say “in him,” but “in them” – in the hearts of each person.” Thus, we are taught that Hashem dwells in the heart of each Jew. This point is the deepest place to reach through breathing, and it is the true meaning of the *nishmas chaim* that was breathed into us by Hashem. When Hashem breathed into us a spirit of life, He breathed into us a breath of Himself, so to speak. That means that we are breathing due to Hashem’s own breath that was placed in us.

When one accesses this kind of deep breathing, he is touching upon the revelation of G-dliness that is found deep in the heart. This is the deepest possible kind of breathing that a Jew can ever breathe.

In Conclusion

Part of the reason why we have had to explain this exercise very specifically is because there are many “breathing exercises” which have been gleaned from modern, gentile sources. We have tried to present here one of the paths explained by our Sages that describes how to use the power of breathing in a way that helps us reach a purer place in ourselves. The power of breathing is a way for us to reach the “I” in us, the pure soul which Hashem creates us with, and even more so, breathing can help us feel Hashem’s breath as the source of our own breathing.

The words here were not ideas. They are about a way to reach an inner kind of life, of how to reach the depth of the *neshamah*, and of how to reach the Creator. But these are matters which require a lot of effort and training and getting used to, as well as holiness and purity and Heavenly assistance, in order for us to be successful with it.

May we merit from Hashem to have a desire to enter into our inner world, and to at least choose one of the paths that help us get there, even if is not necessarily through the power of breathing.

Let us stress one last point. The power of breathing is just **one of the ways** of how to serve *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. There are many other ways to serve Hashem as well which are proper and valid, and each person needs to choose one of the paths that are mentioned by our Sages. One should choose the path that speaks the most to his heart. The words here do not mean to imply that everyone must take this path [of using the power of breathing]; *chas v’shalom*. A person should only use this path of serving Hashem if it is close to his heart.

The common denominator with all people is that all of us need to enter our inner world, in order to live a more inner kind of life, so that we can reach our essence and reach a more complete recognition of our Creator.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *What's the connection between breathing and the sense of smell? Is it simply because both of these come from the nose?*

ANSWER: A very good question. The sense of smell utilizes our nose, and then we are better able to deepen our breathing, which comes in through the nose. Before you begin the breathing exercises, it is indeed recommended to first inhale the scent of something holy, such as an *esrog* that was used on Sukkos, or *besamim* that was used for *havdalah*. This opens the nose in the first place, and then we can deepen the sense of smell, and from deepening the sense of smell we can develop a deepened breathing. Through a physical smell which is found on this world, one can tread its path to open the nose, and then enter the depth contained in breathing. It is therefore very recommended to start with inhaling a scent [of something holy] and use it as a way to enter into our breathing.

Q2: *When a person supposedly "feels something" when he breathes in and out, how does he know if it's a real feeling and not it in his imagination?*

ANSWER: Usually, nothing is ever a total fantasy, nor is anything a totally real feeling. There is always some degree of fantasy in everything we feel, and there is always some truth to what we are feeling in every feeling that comes to us. This is because everything we come across in our feelings is always a mixture of fantasy and feeling, and the only issue is in the percentages: How much of the feeling is real, and how much of the feeling is just being imagined. We always need to sort out what we are feeling and try to discern which parts of the feeling are real, and which parts of it are in the imagination. In order to do this, we need to try to name precisely what we are feeling and refine our perception.

Q3: *For those who haven't yet begun to recognize their inner world, how can they recognize if they are feeling something real about themselves, or if it is just being imagined?*

ANSWER: If a person begins to feel something deep, that is a sign that he is becoming connected to the real inner world. If a person is not used to it yet, he can get some idea of this at least when he goes through an event that awakens his deepest feelings, such as when he feels pain or when he feels joyous. The very fact that he is beginning to sense deeper things is already an opening to the inner world.

Q4: *How is the sense of smell the most spiritual of all the senses?*

ANSWER: It is because we can turn something physical into the spiritual. The physical sense of smell can be turned into a spiritual sense. A clear example of this was when they would smell the *korbonos* in the *Beis HaMikdash*, which gave off a "pleasant scent" (*rei'ach nicho'ach*) to Hashem.

When you smell the spirituality in something, smell becomes spiritual. This can be experienced when you smell something before it has been turned into physical uses (and on a deeper level, even if it has already been used for physical uses and it has been returned to its root).

Q5: *How much time is needed for this breathing exercise? Also, after we have already gotten past the first step and we are at the second step, should we still begin each day from the first step, or can we begin immediately each day from the step?*

ANSWER: At first when you begin to get used to this it should not be more than 3 minutes a day. After that, the amount of time you will need to spend on it depends on how far you have advanced in the *avodah*, and if you are doing it correctly. However, no one should be spending more than 30 minutes a day on it. If you can try this *avodah* in the beginning of the morning, this is even better, as long as your schedule allows it.

Q6: *After we succeed in the first step, can we go quicker with the second step?*

ANSWER: Yes. But we must make sure that we truly gotten past the first step and not try to move on quickly to the next step. First, we must feel that we have become connected to our breathing.

Q7: *What should a person think during the first step, as he is beginning to take breaths?*

ANSWER: In the first step, do not think about anything, other than the focus on your breathing.

Q8: *Should a person try to rid anything from his thoughts that hamper his focus on the breathing?*

ANSWER: Quiet the thoughts. Try to become aware of the breathing, and then after that, try to think more deeply into the breathing.

Q9: *Should we sit or stand during this time? Should we close our eyes?*

ANSWER: However you are more relaxed.

Q10: *The Rav mentioned that there are gentile methods of breathing exercises – what exactly is the Rav referring to? Which parts of the non-Jewish breathing exercises are inappropriate for a Jew to use?*

ANSWER: The Torah's approach to the power of using breathing is not so that we should expel negative energy contained in the body and bring in positive energy. A Torah-approved method that is being somewhat mirrored in the gentile practices of breathing is that a person can bring positive energy into his system. However, this is not being accomplished through the gentile methods. A Torah-approved method would be to imagine a thought about something holy and to imagine that it is entering him, or that it is his enveloping his body, or something similar to this. The gentile approach of breathing exercises, however, involves imagining a "light" that enters the body and purges it from all evil or negativity found in the body. This approach is heresy.

The purpose of the Torah's approach towards breathing is that breathing enables us to reach *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* found in the depths of the soul. Unlike the gentile methods, which are entirely self-focused, the Torah way of breathing exercises is to come to live with Hashem in our life, through the breathing exercises. However, that is only reached at a much higher stage of the breathing, as we explained. But we must be able to bear it in mind even as we begin to work with our breathing. We must know that the goal of deepening our breathing is because it enables us to live with Hashem in our life.

We can penetrate deeper and deeper into ourselves by imagining a holy thought that is entering us, and we can also think that it is purifying us – these two aspects are acceptable according to the Torah. But the part where they imagine that a light is entering the body and cleansing out all of the negativity – this is against the Torah, and it is basically a form of idol worship.

Q11: *Does the Rav mean that one may imagine a certain holy thought entering his body as he is doing the breathing exercise?*

ANSWER: It may be done, by imagining that it is found outside of oneself and that one wishes to bring it inside of himself. The way we have described using the power of breathing here in this class is a way of how we can get inside of ourselves, as opposed to using external factors.

However, it is certainly an acceptable method for one to imagine a *possuk* or a certain holy thought about *emunah*, and to imagine that this is entering him and purifying him. But when doing so, the person must be aware that it is the holiness which is entering him, and not that some other outer force or power is entering him and cleansing him. To think that "A power is entering me" is a method that has originated in the gentile nations, and it borderlines on idol worship.

I have had to speak about length about this topic, because I am aware that many people are unfortunately using these improper methods in their breathing exercises.

Q12: *Is the avodah of focusing on our breathing a separate matter from the power of “levad” (alone) which the Rav has spoken about in sefer Da Es Atzmecha, “Getting To Know Your Self”? Does it get in the way of “levad” or it is a part of “levad”?*

ANSWER: It is within the *avodah* of “levad”. There is a general *avodah* of acquiring the power of *levad*, but what do you once you’re in the space of *levad*? Part of the *avodah* of being in the “levad” is to focus on your breaths.

Q13: *In the first step, when we just focus on our simple act of breathing, should we think that Hashem is providing us with our breathing and enabling me to breathe? Or should I just focus on the mere fact that I am breathing, without thinking of Hashem is in the picture?*

ANSWER: In the very first step, the point is to become simply aware of your breathing, because the first step is to simply become aware of ourselves, way before we connect our self to Hashem. This is because in order to connect ourselves to Hashem, we need to first become aware of ourselves in the first place, and awareness of our breathing is one of the ways to accomplish this.

Q14: *Is this avodah of breathing the same avodah as “hisbodedus” (meditation) and of talking to Hashem when we are alone? Is it an alternative to hisbodedus, or is it something we need to practice besides for hisbodedus?*

ANSWER: It is a separate *avodah* than *hisbodedus*, not a replacement to *hisbodedus*. It needs to be practiced outside of *hisbodedus*.

Q15: *Should a person try the avodah of breathing before doing hisbodedus, or after hisbodedus?*

ANSWER: It doesn’t make a difference if you do it before *hisbodedus* or after *hisbodedus*. Just like a person has to eat and sleep, so is there an *avodah* of breathing that is besides for the *avodah* of *hisbodedus*.

Q16: *What does it mean to reach a ‘more inner place’ in oneself? Does it mean that you feel calmer? Does it mean that you feel more connected to yourself?*

ANSWER: Just like when you wade through a pool you feel yourself getting deeper and deeper into it, so do you experience yourself going deeper and deeper the more you try to enter your *pnimiyus*. The more you feel yourself, the more you can discern where you are. When a person becomes connected to *pnimiyus*, it is an experience, and you can feel it, and then there is no room for this question.

9 | *Kislev – Sleep and Dreams*

The Month of Kislev: The Power of “Sleep”

We are currently in the month of *Kislev*. Our Sages described the wintertime as a time of “sleep”, and the month of Kislev is especially identified with the soul’s “power of sleep”.³²

Our Sages reveal to us that it is not only human beings and animals that sleep. Even the plants and even the non-living objects sleep. Therefore, there is a lot more to sleep than we think. But let us try to understand at least what our own soul’s power of “sleep” is, and how we can channel it towards its proper direction. When a person sleeps, there are both negative and positive aspects of this human function.

Women and Sleep

Let’s look at the first time the Torah talks about sleep. When Hashem created Chavah’s body from Adam *HaRishon*’s body, Adam *HaRishon* was put to sleep. Chavah’s entire creation came about through sleep – thus, the entire creation of woman stems from sleep. Therefore, understanding what sleep is an important part of understanding a woman’s *avodah*.

Sleep – A Time Where the Heart Dominates the Intellect

As is well-known, the strong point of a man is *seichel* (intellect), and the strong point of a woman is *lev*, the heart. What is the root of this difference? Man was created with Hashem’s wisdom, which is called *chochmah*. The *chochmah* refers to the intellect. That is why a man’s initial perception is based on his intellect and not from his emotions. Woman, however, was created when man was asleep.

When a person sleeps, the heart dominates the intellect, as it is written, “*I am asleep, but my heart is awake.*” When Adam *HaRishon* was put to sleep, the only thing that stayed awake was his heart. Woman was created from this state, and that is why woman act more from their heart, from their feelings and emotions, and less from their intellect.

³² *Sefer Yetzira* 5:5

The Two Parts to the Heart - The Inspiration and the Desires

We need to understand how we use the power of “sleep”, as a way to reach and reveal our spiritual heart.

As a general description, the heart is comprised of two parts: our feelings that inspire us, and our deepest desires. The second part, our deeply rooted desired, is also linked with our *middos* (character traits). The *middos* we exhibit are actually an offshoot of our deeply rooted desires (*retzonos*) that are present in our heart.

When a person sleeps, the main part of the heart that stays awake when he/she sleeps is not the “inspirational” part of the heart, but rather the deeply rooted desires of the heart, which produce our *middos*. It is this part of the heart which becomes revealed to the person during the state of sleep.

Dreams

We are referring to dreams. When a person sleeps, he dreams. What is the source of our dreams? There are three different possible sources of a dream. The foods we ate during the day can affect what we dream about, and the body’s liver is involved with this process. The nature of the food affects our dreams, and even the thoughts of the person who made the food can affect our dreams.

There is also a second factor which can influence our dreams: Our Sages state that a person dreams about what he thought about during the day.

There is also a third cause for our dreams: we dream about our deep, subconscious desires that we may not even be aware of. It is written, “*On my bed at nights, I sought that which my heart loved.*” In the *sefarim hakedoshim*, it is explained that our dreams can show us what our deepest desires are; our dreams can help us figure out what our heart really wants deep down.

Each of our dreams contains a key to reaching a deeper understanding of ourselves. We can simply dismiss our dreams and just ignore them - or we can use them to uncover a great wealth. We will try here to explain, with Hashem’s help, of how we can use our dreams.

Our Dreams Show Us Our Pnimityus

Every person consists of two layers: his *chitzoniyus* (external layer) and his *pnimityus* (inner layer). We are all aware of the most external part of our *chitzoniyus*, which is our physical makeup. We see ourselves in the mirror so we recognize our *chitzoniyus*. A slightly deeper part of our *chitzoniyus* than this is our actions that we do. When it comes to this area, we can also identify this part of ourselves, more or less. We are all aware, somewhat, to the actions that we do, each of us to a different degree.

The more inner parts to ourselves, our *pnimiyus*, refers to our *retzonos* (what we want), our thoughts, and our *middos*/character traits. This is the main part of who we are, and this is what more closely defines our identity.

Obviously, our *pnimiyus* does not negate the need for our *chitzoniyus*. Our *pnimiyus* cannot be contained anywhere if we have no *chitzoniyus*. So just because our *pnimiyus* defines our self does not mean that our *chitzoniyus* is worthless. But what we need to know is that if we only acknowledge our *chitzoniyus* and we have no recognition of our *pnimiyus*, we are missing the main part of ourselves.

How do we recognize our *pnimiyus*? Some of it we already recognize, and some of it is harder to recognize. We generally know if we are drawn towards laziness or towards being energetic, if we are drawn towards positivity or negativity, or if we are drawn towards joy or sadness. Anyone can have this general awareness of his character, when he makes a simple reflection about himself; unless he is a person who stubbornly refuses to acknowledge these tendencies in himself and he'd rather live in denial and fool himself.

So we have recognition of our *chitzoniyus* and we also have some recognition of our *pnimiyus*, to a certain extent. But we know that the soul is complicated consisting of many deep layers, layer after layer. How do we get in touch with the more inner parts of ourselves? How do we get to know what is going on deep down in our *pnimiyus*?

Our soul is like a roll of string; the beginning of the string is thick, and we can see it. But as the string goes on and on, it gets thinner and thinner, and it becomes harder to see it. This is like the inner parts to our *pnimiyus*, which are so refined that it is very hard to discern.

Almost nobody reaches the depth of their souls, because the more inner parts to the soul are extremely subtle to discern. If someone thinks that he recognizes his soul well, it means that he is still found on the more external layers of his soul, which are thicker and easier to see. But the more a person is recognizing himself, he begins to understand that there is layer within layer, subtlety within subtlety, in the soul. He realizes that anything he does understand about himself is a drop in the ocean. *"It is very deep, who shall find it?"*

When a person remains ignorant of self-knowledge and he has never worked hard to understand himself, it is definite that his life will lead him in a proper direction. Living on this world for 70 or 80 years without knowing oneself is like a shoemaker who never learned how to make shoes and he tries to make shoes.

A person will not be able to live properly if he does not recognize what is in his soul. Indeed, it takes a lifetime of inner work in order to recognize the soul. The Raavad and the Maharal and others, based upon the verse *"From my flesh I can see G-d"*, have explained that it is not possible to recognize Hashem unless we have a recognition for our own souls. That is why we need to work

hard at understanding ourselves, more and more, discovering more and more subtleties about our souls.

Preface to Self-Recognition

Today there are all kinds of self-help books and different methods which teach people of how to understand themselves [psychology]. However, we need to learn about our souls using the information of the Torah and the Sages. In addition, even after a person has gone through appropriate *sefarim* that explain this knowledge, one must understand that is but a step in the process. It does not mean yet that you know yourself. Instead, all of what we learn about is like a stepping stool that helps us get more and more inward into ourselves.

Step 1 – Write Down All Your Feelings & Character Traits You’re Aware Of.

The first step of getting to recognize our soul is, to take a pen and paper, and write down all of the positive qualities you are aware of about yourself, and on a separate column of the paper, write down all of the negative qualities in yourself that you are aware of. However, make sure to emphasize the good parts about yourself.³³

Simply write down all of the good *middos* and bad *middos* that you recognize in yourself, with emphasis on the good, and this gives you a general look at your soul, and it is the first step in self-recognition. You need to sit with yourself and write this list.

Step 2 – Write Down the Negative Feelings You Sometimes Feel.

After making this general list (which should include all the good/bad *middos*, all of the good/bad aspects of your personality, and all of the good/bad desires that you are aware of in yourself), now comes a more inner and fundamental part of this *avodah*: to understand that each aspect of our personality also contains an opposite feeling that we sometimes feel. If we have a good *middah*, there are also times where we experience the opposite of that good *middah*.

This is due to the complex nature of our soul. We are never one-dimensional, and that is why if we experience a good *middah*, we also sometimes experience its opposite. The deep reason for this is because every aspect of the soul consists of itself and its opposite; this is called ‘*dovor v’hipucho*’.

³³ Editor’s Note: This is based upon the approach of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l, that the first step in self-awareness is to become aware of one’s qualities, for “woe is to the person who does not know his weaknesses, but even worse is a person who does not know his qualities.” (See *Daas Torah*, parshas Bamidbar). This point is further explained by the Rav in *Fixing Your Fire_012_Individuality*

For example, if we identify in ourselves an emotion of love for others, that means we also have hatred for others sometimes. We are already familiar with what it means to love and hate, but what we may not be aware of is that we sometimes experience hatred towards the very people we love!

For example, if a mother feels certain that she loves her child, there are also times where she feels hatred towards her own child. It might not be absolute hatred, but there is certainly a slight feeling of hatred that she may feel sometimes at her child (and sometimes, unfortunately, it is even more than just a slight feeling). The same is true for all close relationships – husband and wife, and parents with children. There is always love, but there will also hatred sometimes!

There is a well-known story that once a student of Rav Dessler dreamt that he had taken a knife to kill his son. He woke up terrified from the dream and he went running to Rav Dessler, to ask him how it was possible that he could dream such a thing. Rav Dessler said to him, “You love your son, but sometimes you experience negativity towards him, such as when he wakes you up at night and your sleep is disturbed. This little feeling of resentment that you have towards him made it possible for you to have a dream of killing him.”

Obviously, the father loves his child, and that is what he mainly experiences towards the child. But does he love him one hundred percent? No, because there is always an ‘opposite point’ for each point in the soul, which makes its appearance sometimes; there is some small percentage of hatred contained at the other end of the love, and it came up in his dream.

Dreams – The Revelation of Our Subconscious Feelings

When a person is not trying to understand the subtleties of his soul, he doesn’t take his dreams that seriously. He knows that sometimes he has pleasant dreams and sometimes he has nightmares. But when one understands that he is here on this world in order to serve Hashem and that self-recognition is a very large part of this (“*From my flesh I see G-d*”), he is aware that there is subtlety within subtlety of recognizing his inner layers, and such a person will view dreams as a great tool to help him greater self-awareness of himself and to improve his service towards Hashem.

Analyzing Our Dreams

Above, we mentioned three sources of our dreams. Our dreams can be influenced by the foods we eat that day, or by something we thought about by day, or by our innermost desires present in our subconscious. Therefore, after you wake up from a dream, try to see which of these three reasons caused the dream.

When we have dreams, we must figure out where they come from. We mentioned in the beginning three causes for dreams – what we ate that day, what we thought about that day and what we really want. If it did not come from foods or from our daydreams, it must be coming from

something in our subconscious. It is hard for us to know exactly which kinds of foods we ate that day that may have caused the dream, therefore, we should mainly suspect that the dream came from our subconscious thoughts and desires.

[Here is an example of how our subconscious desires can show up in a dream.] Once the Chofetz Chaim dreamt that he has become wealthy. The next day, he fasted over the dream. He thought to himself, “Either way, this is not a good dream. If it happens and I become rich, my service to Hashem will be interrupted. And if it doesn’t happen, it is bad that I had such a dream, because it shows me that I want to be rich.”

Our dreams can show us about what our deepest desires are. Sometimes they are about desires we are already consciously familiar with, and sometimes our dreams show us our deep desires which we were out of our conscious radar, and through our dreams, we discover them.

Listening To the Subtleties of our Soul

If one wants to listen to the subtleties contained in the soul, one of the ways is through using our dreams. With the help of Heaven, will briefly list here some ways of how a person can listen to the subtleties in the soul.

Now that we have explained the need to recognize the subtleties of our inner world, our souls, the question is: How indeed do we recognize those subtle parts of ourselves? Here we will present briefly a general picture of how we can know.

1- Learn Sefer ‘Michtav M’Eliyahu’ of Rav Dessler

The *mussar sefarim*, which span the earlier centuries down to the later centuries, were written by our Sages and *Gedolim*, and they exerted themselves to explain to us the most subtle and refined points. In the more recent generations, we have merited a particular sefer which does this job quite well: the sefer *Michtav M’Eliyahu*.³⁴, written by HaRav Eliyahu Dessler *zt”l*. In this sefer, we can see how the author toiled to explain to us how to understand the human soul, based entirely on the words of the Sages. He shows us there the most subtle points about the soul.

The very first step we need to take in order to know our soul is to learn sefarim like this which provide us with an in-depth understanding of matters about the soul, which explain to us how our middos work, in their many details.

³⁴ Available in English from Feldheim Publishers as “Strive For Truth”

2 – Time Every Day to Develop Self-Awareness

Just as some people were born with a sense for music or a feel for cooking, so are there people who are born with a subtle sense of discerning their inner worlds. If someone was born with this inner sense for soul matters, he needs to identify it, and he should have designated times each day where he concentrates on this sense for soul matters. He needs to bring out this power from its potential state and activate it, by having time every day for this.

However, not everyone is blessed with this ability. The first method presented above is applicable on all levels: everyone can learn *sefarim*, each on their own level, and gain some understanding into the subtleties of the soul. But the second way we are mentioning – setting side time each day to sense soul matters – will not come so easily to every person, because not every person is born with a sensitivity to soul matters.

In spite of this, each person to some degree can sense matters about the soul and reach a certain degree of subtle understanding towards himself. It is just that the understanding will differ with each person, depending upon how much sensitivity to these matters that a person has been born with.

3- Find a Friend Who You Can Talk To

A third way of how we can understand soul matters is, if possible, to find a friend whom we can talk to about these things. A man should choose a man, and a woman should choose a woman, and they should discuss matters of the soul together. Often the combined understanding of a close friend who understands you can be a great help in understanding yourself.

4 - Inner Silence

Now we will say a fourth way of how one can understand the soul, but let us emphasize that it should only be attempted after one is already doing the first step: to learn the *sefarim* written by our *Gedolim* which explain to us about the soul. We should not be learning any secular psychology books for this, and we should only seek the words of our Sages about these matters.

The fourth method which we will mention begins with having designated times every day for “heart time”, a concept which we have spoken about often in the past. When one has this quiet time each day, he can use the quiet as a way to reflect into his soul, until he eventually attains a certain inner calm. Once a person reaches this calmness, his sense of recognition towards soul matters will be heightened, and he will be able to sense subtler understandings of his soul amidst this quiet and calmness, things which he wouldn’t have been able to sense amidst a noisy environment.

The more a person has entered this quiet and calmness, the deeper he can enter into himself and come across subtle areas in his soul. This allows him to better recognize what's going on inside himself.

This method is one of the strongest ways to recognize the deep areas of the soul: through having quiet, deep reflection, and subsequent calmness; amidst the calmness, one can sense understandings about his soul. A person can first try reflecting and then steadily reach the calmness, or he can begin right away with calming himself and then reflecting; it depends upon personal preference. When one reaches deeper places in his soul, he experiences his soul more, in a clearer and sharper perception. From there he reaches greater self-recognition – each person on his own level.

5 – Paying Attention to Fleeting Emotions and Thoughts

There is a fifth method of becoming aware of soul matters, which can be worked upon even as we are not amidst the quiet.

The more a person lives throughout the day with general self-awareness, the more he will notice and pay attention to any fleeting thoughts and emotions that quickly flit through his sensory process. There are some thoughts which we spend a lot of time thinking about, but sometimes we notice thoughts which pass by very quickly and they are gone in the blink of an eye. We also experience certain feelings and emotions which are gone as soon as we become aware of them. We can slowly begin to identify these quickly passing thoughts and feelings, and begin to recognize them and become more aware of them.

Throughout the course of the day, a person who is more self-aware will “listen” to the quickly passing thoughts and feelings which come and go very quickly. Don't take any thought or feeling lightly – each of them is saying something important. These quickly passing thoughts and emotions are portals that can open to us more awareness about what is going on inside our souls.

6 – Dreams

The sixth and final method which we will mention, of how we can come to better recognize the depth of our souls, is the subject of this chapter: the *avodah* of the month of *Kislev*, which is “sleep”. In our sleep, we have dreams, and our dreams show us our thoughts which we are not consciously aware of during the day.

When has already worked upon the previous five methods mentioned, he will access even greater depth to himself when he sleeps. As he sleeps and he is experiencing his dreams, he will be able to identify parts of himself which are hard to recognize during the daytime when he is awake. After he wakes up from the dream, he can analyze what caused the dream: if it was caused by certain foods he ate, or from something he daydreamed about or if it's coming from something deeper than these

things. Often, he will find that the dream is caused by a deep subconscious thought, feeling, or desire.

In this way, a person accesses the deep power that lies in “sleep”, and instead of viewing sleep as a wasted part of his life, he will see sleep as a valuable tool that helps him enter more within.

In Conclusion

All that was said here is only applicable to one who wants to live a more internal kind of life. It is not merely for one who wishes to live an inner life, but for someone who wants to actually *enter* into the inner kind of life. Entering into an inner kind of life doesn’t mean to begin tasting it and then to remain at the doorway. It means to keep entering further within.

These words described in this chapter are not a way to begin serving Hashem. Rather, they are a continuation for someone who has already begun to serve Hashem and he has already traveling his inner world. The six methods mentioned in this chapter of how we can recognize our inner worlds were but general descriptions, which are describing ways of how we can enter into more subtle areas of the soul, enabling us to go deeper and deeper into ourselves, until we get to our innermost point.

We must remember, as we begin to embark on this journey into our inner world, that there is a greater purpose here we should be trying to reach. Our goal must be to gain a keener sense of the Creator. We are merely passing through these inner roads being described as pathways that lead to our innermost point, where we reach the Creator.

I want to repeat and emphasize, however, that the first step cannot be skipped: one must study the words of our Sages about the soul and its *middos*.

May we merit from Hashem to be of those who are seeking to know their inner worlds, of those who are trying to recognize their soul, as a way to reach true self and from there, to reach *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. May all of us merit to climb the spiritual ladder that leads towards Hashem, to recognize our souls with greater and deeper clarity, and from this we can come to have clearer recognition of Hashem, and connect to Him in a more complete way.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *Besides for sefer Michtav M'Eliyahu, which other sefarim can the Rav recommend [for women] to learn?*

ANSWER: Besides for sefer “*Michtav M'Eliyahu*”, learning any other *sefarim* will depend on how well one understands these matters.

- One can try learning the *sefarim* of Rav Chaim Friedlander *zt”l*, the two volumes of *Sifsei Chaim: Middos V’Avodas Hashem*.
- If someone is deeper kind of person, he/she can try learning *sefer Shiurei Daas* of R’ Bloch *zt”l* [from Telz].
- If one is even deeper than this, he/she can try learning the *sefarim* of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt”l* (two volumes of *Daas Chochmah U’Mussar*, and five volumes of *Daas Torah* on the *parsha*).
- It is very recommended to learn *Sefer HaMeoros HaGedolim*, which contains stories of the *baalei mussar* since the times of Reb Yisrael Salanter.
- You can also try learning *sefer Beis Kelm*, which was also produced by Rav Dessler *zt”l*; it contains the *mussar* teachings taught in Kelm which he hails from.

Q2: *When we make a list of our middos and we discover bad middos in ourselves, what do we do about this?*

ANSWER: Just write it down so that you are aware of it. At this point we will not yet be addressing how we actually uproot bad *middos*. Just write down everything you recognize about yourself, in general terms. Remember to focus on your positive points and to avoid focusing too much on your negative points. Don’t ignore your negative points, of course. Write them down, but just don’t focus on them too much. Make sure that you are keeping the focus on your good points.

Q3: *Is there a spiritual meaning why women have a hard time falling asleep when we are getting older?*

ANSWER: Yes. The simple reason for this is because when we sleep, our mind leaves us and our hearts dominate as we sleep. In women, the heart is more dominant to begin with, for their hearts are softer; throughout the day, their hearts are more active, so they are already drawn towards sleep from during the day, and that is why their need for sleep at night becomes lessened [which explains why there is a harder time for older women to fall asleep].

Q4: *The Rav has said that it is more important to focus on our positive qualities when we write down a list of our middos. Does this include any desires I have that are in order to do the*

will of Hashem? Or can it also include things which are positive but they are not necessarily in order to do Hashem's will?

ANSWER: Any desire that is aligned with Hashem's will is a positive desire. The lower part of our soul, our *nefesh habehaimis*, contains a mix of desires – some of them are desired by Hashem, and some of them are not. Some of our desires are simply coming from our faculty of *ratzon* (will), and these can be simply desires to want a certain thing, and some of these desires can be channeled towards doing the will of Hashem. Each desire needs to be examined to see if it can be channeled towards doing Hashem's will or not.

Q5: What then does the Rav mean that we should focus on the positive? Is it referring only to our positive desires, or does it also include our positive middos and other positive aspects of our personality?

A: If a person only writes down on the list the desires he has which are aligned with Hashem's will, he is probably fooling himself, because a person is usually not on the level where his main desires in life are to do Hashem's will. That is why we should write down on the list all of the natural desires we recognize in ourselves. We can also include in it our spiritual and holy desires which are Hashem's will, but we should not focus on this part alone, because then we would be avoiding a basic part of our self-awareness, by ignoring our natural desires. If someone is at the level where he only does the will of Hashem, that is wonderful, but most people are not living that way, so we need to be honest with ourselves as we make this list.

Q6: Based on what the Rav said earlier that older women need less sleep, does that mean that a woman who has more "heart time" each day will also need less sleep?

A: Often it can happen that the more spiritual a person becomes, the less sleep he needs. Some people need more sleep due to certain physical conditions in their body, but generally speaking, the more a person is living an internal kind of life, his need for sleep is greatly weakened and he will find that he doesn't need as much sleep. Of course, we are physical human beings, and we need to sleep. Chazal say that it is impossible for a person to go three days without sleeping. But the need for sleep can be greatly lessened, with the more a person is living an internal kind of life.

Q7: We have a general question about how to serve Hashem. We are a group of women who learn Chovos HaLevovos (Shaar Avodas Elokim), and it is explained there that a person cannot reach his neshamah (soul) until he has purified his middos (character traits). But we are getting the impression that the Rav's general approach towards Avodas Hashem differs with this, for the Rav is saying that we must first reach the depth of our neshamah and after that to work on our middos. This implies that we don't have to first work on our middos in order to reach our neshamah. How do we reconcile the Rav's approach with the words of the Chovos HaLevovos?

ANSWER: That is a very good question. The *Chovos HaLevovos* lived in the times of the Rishonim (the earlier sages, spanning the tenth and fifteenth centuries), but we live in the times of

the Acharonim (the later sages, which began from the period of the fifteenth century), of which it is written about by our *sefarim hakedoshim* that we are closer to the time of Mashiach, in which the light of the *neshamah* is easier to access, for it will soon be revealed upon the world. This phenomenon contains both an advantage and a disadvantage, as follows.

The advantage is clear: the *neshamah* is made easier to access, in our times. But it also presents a certain danger. You can have a person who did not sufficiently work on his *middos* and he begins to enter inward into his soul, and he reaches the light of the *neshamah* which is more easily accessed nowadays – and then what happens? The light of his *neshamah* enters his unfixed *middos*, and then all of his *Avodas Hashem* is not genuine, because he is still full of unrefined character.

Can we say that one should first work on his *middos* and only after that he should enter into his *neshamah*? This is certainly a valid point. But in spite of this, the *sefarim hakedoshim* state that as the generations get closer to Mashiach, it is easier for us to access our *neshamah* and reach its innermost point.

Therefore, our *avodah* ends up being two-fold. We need to work on our *middos* at the very same time that we work to reach our *neshamah*. We have to be careful not to fall into the trap of neglecting to work on our *middos*, *chas v'shalom*.

Q8: *The Rav has said that men are more gifted with chochmah and seichel (the intellectual abilities) as opposed to “heart”, whereas women are more gifted with “heart” and less with intellect; because Chavah was created from a state of sleep, where the intellect isn’t working and only the heart is active. However, it seems that the sefer Chovos HaLevovos, which is explaining to us the duties of the “heart”, is certainly teaching us how to approach the world with intellectual chochmah and seichel, and not with spiritual feelings of “heart”. What is the proper path in a woman’s Avodas Hashem? It is it the path of the Chovos HaLevovos (which seems to stress the use of seichel/chochmah), or the path of the Rav, who is explaining that womanly are meant to mainly use the heart and not the intellect....?*

ANSWER: You have made a clear and proper definition. But the truth is that if there is just “heart” and there is no use of the intellect, a person will not succeed in *Avodas Hashem*. Even more so, there is additional reason today why women need to use their intellect in *Avodas Hashem*. Women today are worldlier and are anyways using their intellect, to think about other things that are not spiritual. If women would not be using their intellect at all, they would easily connect to the “heart”, but since women are using the intellect more these days, for materialistic concerns, the only way to counter this problem is to put their intellect to holy uses.

So in essence, the heart is the main function of the woman, as opposed to the intellect; but in more recent times, where there are women who have become more intellectual as they are involved more with the outside world, they are using the intellect for non-spiritual purposes, so they are less drawn towards using the heart; and the only way for them to counter this is to use their intellects for

holy purposes. However, in most women, the heart is the stronger point than their intellect, and thus the main *avodah* of a woman in most cases is to use the heart, and less with intellect. The language of our Sages, such as the words of *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, is certainly a more intellectual approach that is geared towards men and not towards women, but in our times where women are anyways using their intellect in all kinds of areas, they need to channel their intellect towards holy areas, to counter the use of their intellect that is being used towards mundane things.

Q9: *If we learn a sefer such as Sifsei Chaim, and we come across parts that have to do with Gemara that are only for men, what should we do?*

ANSWER: If you come across any parts in the sefer which you cannot understand, skip those parts. The truth is that sefer *Sifsei Chaim* was written for yeshiva men, so you will definitely come across parts that are not meant for women to learn. Rav Dessler's sefer *Michtav M'Eliyahu* is preferable for women to learn because it is written in easier language. If you find *Michtav M'Eliyahu* too hard to understand, you can try learning sefer *Alei Shur*, which is easier to understand. (Volume II of *Alei Shur* is easier to understand than Volume I).

Q10: *If we recognize our desires and middos, does that mean that we recognize our "neshamah"? Or is the "neshamah" deeper than this and it requires more layers to traverse?*

ANSWER: The second option you guessed is correct. We begin to understand ourselves by recognizing what is taking place in our *nefesh habehaimis*, There are many levels (the 'animalistic' part of our soul), after that we can recognize our *nefesh Elohis* (the G-dly part of our soul), after that is our *Ruach*, and after this is our *Neshamah*. It takes a long time in order to reach the *Neshamah*.

Q11: *Since the Neshamah is very far from a person's reach, is it possible for a person to feel a closeness with Hashem after gaining the more basic levels of self-awareness? Or is this not possible until a person reaches the Neshamah?*

ANSWER: It surely is possible. We have been describing a path here in which we build our way upwards, beginning from the bottom levels and working our way upwards. It is definitely possible for a person to feel sparks of higher levels even before he is there, because the light of the higher levels sometimes shines itself onto the lower levels. However, we will not be able to understand the sparks of the higher levels until we have actually entered more inward.

Every person contains a spark of the *neshamah*, which enables him to feel a deep closeness to Hashem at times, even before he has risen to the higher levels of his existence. There are several ways of how it is experienced. Sometimes it happens when a person has a deep feeling of simple faith in Hashem (*peshitus/temimus*), sometimes it is experienced through a deep experience of *davening*, sometimes it is felt through talking to Hashem, sometimes it can come from feeling a deep love for Hashem.

But it still does not mean that the person's actual soul level is there. There is a 'crack' in the soul which enables us to connect deeply to Hashem through those places, as we mentioned earlier, due to the light of the redemption which is closer to us now, which enables the light of the *neshamah* to be more easily accessed. That is why it is easier these days for a person to feel deep experiences in his soul, long before he has entered within.

However, as we said earlier, it doesn't mean that person is actually there at that level. It is just that sometimes, the light of the *neshamah* penetrates into the lower layers of the soul and enables a person to connect to it easily.

Thus, generally speaking, we must work our way upwards, starting from the lower levels of our soul. That is why when we work on our middos, we begin working with the lower levels and we work our way upwards, as opposed to beginning from a higher plane. We need to start from the bottom upwards. First we need to recognize the lowest parts of our soul and work our way upwards. We work to 'build' ourselves in this organized manner.

It is certainly possible for one to begin with the "*neshamah*" level, but it is a dangerous to do so. There are some people who begin with this path because they cannot deal with their weaknesses, and if they were to begin analyzing their weaknesses, they would do nothing to improve themselves, so they instead begin to enter the "*Neshamah*" level as an alternative. For such people, there is no realistic alternative, so they feel no other option other than to begin with the "*Neshamah*" level. Others are inclined to begin with *Neshamah* because there's a strong portal available in their souls that enables them to reach their *Neshamah*, and they would have a hard time descending to the lower levels of the soul and working from there. Others want to begin with *Neshamah* simply because they want to see success right away and they wouldn't want to deal with the failures of their weaknesses that are present in the lower layers of their soul.

So it is possible for a person to begin with the *Neshamah* level, but in all of these cases, it is always risky to do so.

The path which we must mainly use to traverse in our *Avodas Hashem* is to work in a step-by-step manner, beginning from the lower layers of our soul. This was the main path which our great leaders traversed throughout the generations. There were always exceptions to this who began to work on themselves from the higher plane [of *Neshamah*], but they were still taking a risk, and it is usually dangerous for us to take that unusual route.

Q12: *When I begin this avodah of calming myself to enter deeper within, I try various ways of trying to calm myself. I am doing so in order to connect to Hashem. I think of pesukim (verses) that mention Hashem, and I think about the “Ein Sof” (the Infinite) of Hashem, and this calms me, and I truly feel that I am more connected to Hashem when I do this. Is this a true feeling that is coming from my neshamah, since I am feeling a deep feeling? Or is it just something that calms me and there is a lot more for me to feel....?*

ANSWER: I do not know personally who is asking this question, so I cannot give a complete answer to this question. But generally speaking, any feeling which feels deep to you contains some truth to it, for there is a ‘crack’ in the soul that enables you to experience the light of the *neshamah* somewhat. But it is only experienced temporarily and it doesn’t mean that you are at that level. It is possible for a person to live in that higher state on more permanent basis, but if a person has not purified the lower layers of his soul, he is taking a very dangerous path by attempting to live in this higher state. It is fine to connect to this higher place in yourself from time to time, but then you must make sure to return to your lower levels and continue fixing yourself there.

When one is working his way upwards, beginning from the lower levels of the soul, and he is not yet feeling a deep connection with Hashem, it is very hard for most people to patiently work on themselves, when they are not getting a feeling of more connection to Hashem. This is especially the case with our generation. That is why every person needs to connect to Hashem from the place where he is currently found in, and along with this, he needs to work his way upwards. Each person can connect to his inner point of the soul, on his own level.

The truth is that sometimes a person is only imagining that he is becoming closer to Hashem, and sometimes it is a real feeling. However, even if it’s being imagined, he is still being spurred on to become closer to Hashem and to enter deeper into himself; and if only all people could imagine in this way. But, we cannot build our path in *Avodas Hashem* based upon this point. It is fine to feel a deep closeness with Hashem if this will calm you and then you immediately return to reality and you work on yourself; as long as you understand that you have merely entered into a ‘crack’ in your soul which lets you experience a higher level. But you must immediately return afterwards to the actual level that your soul is found on, and to continue to work on yourself from there.

10 | Teves – Overcoming Fear

Our Soul Feels Scared During the Scary Months of the Year

The month of *Teves* is of the difficult months of the year. Our Sages said that the three difficult months of the year are *Teves*, *Tamuz*, and *Av*, due to the difficult events that took place in these months; and the month of *Teves* is considered to be the most difficult from all of them.

Just like when a person enters a dangerous place he feels scared, so does our soul inside of us become scared when it senses the danger manifest in this time of the year. Let us learn about how we can deal with those fears of our soul.

There are several kinds of fears we experience. Some people have more fears than others, but all of us have fears. One kind of fear is a fear of something that we know of. Another kind of fear is fear of the unknown. There are also more kinds of fears other than these which we will discuss later.

First, we will explain how we can deal with fears of what we are sure of.

Fear of Something Happening To Us – Based On a Previous Fearful Event

When a person knows clearly why he is afraid - let's say it's because he is afraid of something bad happening to him in the future - it is really because previously, he must have went through some previous experience that was traumatizing. The old fear he once went through is triggered again, every time he has the new fear.

Therefore, a fear of something happening to you in the future is actually based on something that happened the past. You fear that thing from happening again. Since you went through it and you know what it is, and you don't want to experience it, and naturally, you fear it from happening again. So any time that we feel towards something in the future that didn't happen yet, it is actually being fed from our fear of the past.

Although it seems to us as a fear of the future and not as a fear of the past, a fear of something happening to you in the future is actually a fear of the past – you are afraid that the event of the past will happen again to you, because you are still traumatized from it.

Fear of the Unknown

There is also another kind of fear: when a person is afraid of something happening in the future, even though he has no idea what the future will bring. A person may be scared that something bad will happen to him even though he doesn't seem to remember having ever gone through that event in his life before.

We would simply say this second kind of fear has nothing to do a previous trauma, because if he has never gone through that fear before, why would he fear it from “happening again” if it never happened to him in the first place? Fear of the unknown seems to be unrelated to fear of the past. But upon deeper analysis, we can see that even fear of the unknown is based on some kind of previous trauma.

How can this be? It could be that the person once witnessed a tragedy or something painful happening to someone, or he has simply heard or read about something that happened to another person, and he fears it from happening to him. Subconsciously, he absorbed the fear that what happened to others might happen to him.

Locating the Source of the Past Fear

Once we find the source of the fear, we can deal with it so that we won't be afraid of it again. In most cases, a person can find out what is causing his fear. A person can sit with himself and reflect, and try to trace the event that is causing him to have the fear. He can then realize that his fear of something happening in the future is really linked with something he has experienced in the past [and this calms the fear].

There are a few cases where a person cannot trace the source of the fear. However, in most cases, we *can* trace the source of the fear and then eliminate it from continuing to haunt us.

As we said, there are things we experienced which we are afraid of from happening again, and there are also things which we did not personally experience, but we subconsciously absorbed it into ourselves because of something that we either saw, heard, or read about in relation to others, and we are afraid that those things will happen to us as well. In either case, we discover that the fear of the future event is really based on something we went through in the past.

Thus, there is a subtle and deep definition of most fears of the future, which are really based on the past. These fears are really because we have experienced something in the past that was traumatizing to us, and we fear it from happening again. If so, the problem that is fueling the fear is because *we haven't gone through the experience in the proper way*. That is why we are scared of it happening again. That being the case, we need to go back and re-experience the event in the proper way.

This is understandably true when it comes to our fears based upon what we have gone through in the past, but as we will see, it is also true about fears which we are afraid that will happen which we have never even gone through in the past, so that we can re-shape our thought patterns about the event; then we have no more reason to fear this event, and in turn, it will no longer continue to haunt us that it may happen again in the future.

How indeed can we view the situations in life which were difficult for us of which we are afraid of? How do we deal these fears? With the help of Hashem, we will try to explain.

Reliving the Past in the Right Way

The basic idea is that if a person went through a traumatizing experience without sufficient *emunah* (faith) that was this difficult event was really Heaven-sent from Hashem for his own good, if he did not feel Hashem's love for him as he went through it, then he did not experience that situation in the right way. As a result, he is left with a fear of this event, and naturally, he will fear it from happening again. But if a person were to have gone through the difficult situation or predicament with *emunah*, knowing that the situation was for his own good and that it came from Hashem's love, he would have no reason why he should fear it from happening again.

Let's say we have gone through something that was difficult\bad\scary, and we didn't have *emunah* when it happened to us; we did not feel Hashem's love for us as it was happening to us. We never dealt with it in the right way, because we had no *emunah* with us and we didn't feel Hashem next to us and taking care of us, as we went through the painful ordeal. Now, we are afraid of that ordeal from happening again. What can we do to get over it?

One of the ways brought in *sefarim hakedoshim* to fix our past fears is actually by using the power of **imagination**, to *relive* the event that causes the fear. We will be going back into the past experience which was painful and traumatizing to think about, and we should imagine it vividly as possible. Let your imagination picture the entire event again – go back into the past, using your imagination. But this time, you're going back into your past experience with a new weapon in your arsenal: *emunah*.

Let us explain what we are trying to do over here. We need to look back at our past experiences and see Hashem loving us in those very situations. When we first went through the ordeal, we did not feel Hashem next to us when it happened. We did not feel His love for us. Therefore, we did not experience that difficulty in the right way. What we need to do is to go back into that past experience, using our imagination, and then re-experience it this time, *in the right way*.

We need to return to those past experiences with our imagination – but with *emunah*. As you picture yourself going through it again as it happened, you can think to yourself: “Who caused this situation to happen to me? It wasn't by chance. Hashem made it happen, and Hashem loves me, and He was doing the best thing for me, because He only does good things for me out of His endless love for me. So I really had no reason to be afraid then.”

Go step-by-step through the entire painful scenario of the past, and remember how in each step of the way, Hashem was with you throughout and loving you. Let the thought penetrate into you, more and more: “Hashem only made me go through this, out of His love for me!” You can keep repeating the exercise, and slowly you get rid of the past fears. Instead, you now emerge from it with a stronger heart.

This is both applicable to fears of our own previous experiences, or with our fears when we heard about what others went through. If we heard someone else go through something bad, and we reacted negatively, we need to use our imagination and also relive that experience with *emunah*. Let us imagine ourselves returning to that time in which we heard the devastating news, but this time,

we are not afraid, and that we instead have *emunah* and feel Hashem's love for us as we imagine ourselves hearing about the disturbing news.

In this way, a person can erase the fears of the past that he has created, whether they are fears of something that happened to him or fears of something that he heard which happened to others; he removes a very large amount of fear in his heart – the kind of fear that is very commonplace in today's generation.

Fear of the Unknown

Until now we explained, with *siyata d'shmaya*, of how to remove fears of the known; when we know clearly what event in the past is causing us to be afraid. But how do we deal with fears in when we have no idea of what is causing the fear? When we aren't sure of why we are afraid, we do not know the source of our fears, and if we can't trace the source of our fears, how do we deal with the fear?

We can again use the same idea of the above solution, but a little differently. With fear of the unknown, ask yourself *why* exactly you are afraid of the future event you fear from happening; then, imagine what exactly you are afraid of from happening. See yourself going through that possible scary situation - but this time, apply *emunah*: think to yourself that even if it happens, it's for your own good, since everything is from Hashem and therefore anything that happens to us is for our own good; and also, Hashem is always with us and He loves us in every situation that we go through.

Understandably, there are some fears we may have which are very frightening to even think about, and we won't even want to imagine them from happening. But in most cases, our fears of the future are not that intense, and we should be able to use this method to get rid of the fear. Either it will totally remove the fear, or if it doesn't totally remove the fear, it will still greatly weaken the intensity of how much we fear the future.

In summary, of the kinds of fears that we discussed so far - fears that stem from a previous trauma we experienced, or fears based upon hearing of what happened to others, or fears of the unknown – can all be dealt with, using this solution: by using our power of imagination to fully relive the situation (whether we are reliving the past event or whether we are imagining the future event), with *emunah* and with feeling Hashem's love for us, as we explained.

Unexplainable Fears

Now we will explain another kind of fear. There are fears in which a person does not know why he is afraid, and he cannot express what is causing the fear. He can't express with words why he is afraid, and even his mind is not sure of what is causing the fear. He feels uneasy inside about something; he just knows that he is not calm, and he feels fear.

Many people experience fear, and there are essentially two groups of people in this category. Until now we have been addressing one kind of fear, where a person knows why he is afraid. A second category of people, however, are those who have fears, but they do not know what they are afraid of; and they are consciously aware of the fear. Sometimes this person will go to a professional to help explain to him his fears, and sometimes this kind of person will be put on pills, in order to calm his anxieties about the fears.

There is also a third group of people: people who are not even consciously aware that they are afraid. They experience sudden “explosions” of impatience and general uneasiness, where they feel very anxious. This is really being caused by a fear they have deep down in themselves. This kind of person is not even aware of the fear; all he is aware of are the *results* of the fear – the nervousness, the lack of calmness, the lack of patience, and other symptoms, where he just cannot remain tranquil. This is a very common scenario, especially in our generation, where people have fears yet they do not even know that they are afraid.

Altogether, we have discussed four kinds of fear. (1) A person who knows he is afraid, and he is also aware of the source of the fear, which is something he went through in the past. (2) A person who knows he is afraid but he cannot trace its source in the past, but he can identify what he is afraid of from happening in the future. (3) A person who is aware that he is afraid but he does not know why he is afraid. (4) A person who experiences sudden anxiousness and uneasiness about something, but he is not aware that this is really stemming from a fear that he has deep down.

We have already explained what to do in the first two scenarios. Now we will tackle the third and fourth scenarios: When a person knows he is afraid but he doesn't know why, and when a person is anxious about something but he does not even consciously register that he is really afraid.

Two Sources of Subconscious Fears

When a person knows that he is afraid but he does not know the reason for the fear, there are general rules for how to deal with this kind of fear.

The *Gemara* brings of a student who was afraid and he didn't know where the fears were coming from. He asked his *rebbe*, and his *rebbe* told him, “You sinned.” His sins were causing the fears. When a person sins, his *neshamah* become afraid of the consequences; it looks from its lofty perch and it sees the lower section of the soul where sin can take hold, and the *neshamah* is worried about what will happen now to the lower part of the soul. This is one possible source of fear: fears that result from sin.

Thus, whenever a person is afraid and he has no idea why, he should do *teshuvah* (repentance), from the depths of his heart. The more a person is regularly doing *teshuvah* every time he experiences fear, he will find that he is calmed afterwards. Of course, we always need to do *teshuvah*, but all the more so when we are seized with fears of the unknown, which awakens us to do more soul-searching.

Fears Stemming From Mystical Sources

There is also another kind of fear, which is of a more specific nature. It is brought in *halachah* that if one places his fingernails into a place where people walk, this will cause him to have fears. Another kind of carelessness which can cause fear is when one isn't careful to wash *netilas yadayim*. There are also additional matters brought in *Halacha* in which laxity in these matters can cause a person to have fears. [These fears are solved and prevented by being careful in these areas].

The Inner Fear of the Soul

Here we will focus more on the source of our more inner fears (when we don't know why we are afraid, and when we feel general uneasiness but we aren't consciously aware of the fear), and the solution to these inner fears.

The source of our inner fears, deep down, stems from a fear of our soul - it fears that it is not going towards the proper direction; it fears that it will not arrive at its proper destination. On a deeper understanding, it is really afraid that it will be left alone and cut off from its Source, Hashem, as it journeys on this world. Hashem created us with a nature that we do not like to be alone; that is why people are afraid of being alone.

Thus, our soul deep down is afraid that it will not reach its goal, that it will not reach its perfection, and that it will not end up in the proper destination, *chas v'shalom*. But on a deeper level, it is afraid of becoming alone, apart from its Source.

This is the deep source of all fear. We have a simple way of understanding it: anyone can attest to being afraid of a dark, lonely road at night. We are afraid when we feel alone. If someone is walking with us, we are much less afraid. Why are we less afraid of a dark road at night when someone is walking with us? If *chas v'shalom* we encounter danger, will that person be able to help us? Probably not. So why are we more calmed when someone is walking with us? It is because we feel that we are not alone.

The Questions About Suffering and Tragedy That People Grapple With

Let's discuss here an important point which people ask about. Earlier, we mentioned the solution to fears where we know the source of the fears, which is to relive the past experience with *emunah* and with Hashem's love for us. When we relive the past and we try to approach it with *emunah*, many people grapple with a disturbance. They wonder: "How will it help me if I just have *emunah* that everything is from Hashem and that Hashem loves me? Are there not *tzaros* (painful events) that happen to people??"

After all, we see that even the greatest *tzaddikim* had lives that were filled with *tzaros*. In these *parshiyos*, we are learning about Yaakov Avinu, who went through so many difficult circumstances. He had to flee from Esav and later he had to meet with him again, where he feared for his life. He

also had to deal with his tricky father-in-law, Lavan, who caused many problems for him. Then his daughter Dinah is kidnapped. Then his beloved son Yosef is gone. Then his son Shimon is imprisoned, and then Binyamin is imprisoned. Yaakov Avinu definitely believed that all of this was from Hashem and that Hashem loved him throughout; he is called the “choicest of the *Avos*”, the most righteous of all the forefathers, yet even so, all of these *tzaros* happened to him.

So people ask: “What does it help to have *emunah*? If I increase my love for Hashem does that mean that bad things won’t happen to me? Even our greatest Gedolim had *tzaros*, in spite of all of their *emunah* and love for Hashem. So what will it help me to work on my *emunah* and on feeling Hashem’s love for me? In the end of the day, bad things happen to people, and when these bad things happen, they are painful!”

If we think about it, it’s a burning question. Even more so, all of us have contact with people and with the world, and we read and hear and see about how much suffering is taking place in the world. We have all heard of people who were living very happy and calm lives, until suddenly one day their entire life changed, plunged into tragedy or misfortune. So many people are suffering in the world! How can we not be afraid of it not happening to us too?

Of course, if someone has a very carefree and very easygoing nature, he isn’t bothered by all that he reads and hears about, and he just continues to live his life as he pleases. He can easily calm himself and get over it very quickly, because he doesn’t think too much about it. But when someone seriously contemplates what takes place in the world today, and his heart goes out to the suffering of the Jewish people, he is seeing and feeling so much of the *tzaros* that take place. How can he *not* be afraid, from all of the many *tzaros* that he hears about?

It is a very strong question to deal with, a burning issue, for anyone who reflects into the situation of the world and is aware of the many *tzaros* taking place. The answer to this gnawing question is a very deep and subtle answer.

Above The Questions

These questions that people have are questions that stem from our *seichel* – our logical, thinking, rational mind. There is no “answer” to this “question” – from the perspective of our intellectual mind, that is. But there is a more inner place in ourselves – our inner soul - which has the answer to this question. When a person is deeply connected to Hashem in his life, when he feels Hashem’s Presence in his heart, he can go above his logical thinking, and he will be above this question.

In a deep place in our soul, we are able to feel that we close with Hashem. When we feel the closeness to Hashem, that secure feeling of being connected to Hashem will help us go above all of our natural fears and questions. This is also known as the point of “*temimus*” (simplicity, or earnestness) in the soul – where we feel pure and genuine faith in Hashem.

When a person remains outside of this inner place in the soul, he has questions: “Do you think that if I become close to Hashem, then I won’t have *tzaros*, that I will no longer have any suffering?!”

I might “know” in my mind that “everything is for the good”, but it is still very frightening to me that I may go through it, and it will still feel very painful if it happens to me.”

But when one enters the inner place in his soul, there, his feelings will be connected to a higher place. His heart will recognize a higher dimension, which is above the perception of the human intellect. It is there that a person draws forth *bitachon* (trust in Hashem), which is above the place of fear in the soul.

We might still grapple with the question, for we see that our *Gedolim* did go through many *tzaros*, such as what we see with the life of Yaakov Avinu (and he had certainly had pain. He was consumed with agony over the loss of his son Yosef, that the *Shechinah* left him, for all those 22 years). Our *Gedolim* had high levels of *emunah* in Hashem and in feeling Hashem’s love for them, yet they still had pain from all of their suffering. If we see that even our *Gedolim* had pain from their suffering, then what are we to say? What will it help for us to increase our *emunah* in Hashem? Surely having *emunah* can definitely weaken the extent of the pain, but it will not remove the pain totally; there will still be a lot of pain left over.

So there is no logical answer to the questions that we may have. Our *seichel* (intellect) cannot provide us with the answer. The ‘answer’ can only come to us through a deep place in our heart, the part that is intrinsically connected with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. In a deep place in the soul, a person is connected to Hashem, and there is no room there to feel alone in any way.

We explained earlier that the root of all fears stems from the soul’s fear of becoming alone. Thus when we are in a place where we do not feel alone, there is no fear. When a person feels that he is not with Hashem, when he is unaware that Hashem’s Presence can be felt deep in his heart, he will have fears, and indeed, he will have many things to be afraid of. He will be afraid of all kinds of painful circumstances, but the root of all his fear is because he is afraid of feeling so alone. But when a person connects to Hashem deep in his soul, the reasons for the fear fall away.

Although he will still find it possible to fear all kinds of things, if he has removed the source of the fear, he will not have that much reason to fear; his feeling of fear will only be minimal.

Why Our Current Generation Experiences Much Fear

The reason why so many people in this generation have fears is not simply because there are many *tzaros* (difficulties and hardships) in people’s lives. The inner reason is because most souls feel deep down as if they have no Father to be close to – we are a “generation of orphans.” When a person feels that he is so far from Hashem, it is a truly frightening feeling for him, and this is the source of most fears taking place in this generation.

There is an inner place in our soul which is so closely attached with Hashem and feels His presence, where there is no place for fear there. But we are not consciously aware of this place in ourselves, because we have usually not revealed it outward from its hidden state, and that is why we don’t often feel it on a conscious level.

It appears to many people that they are afraid of certain things, or of certain trying circumstances that have happened in the past which they are afraid of from happening again. But if we look at all of this from a truthful lens, the many difficulties and trying events which we see in our generation are not the actual cause for fear, but a symptom of a deeper kind of fear. The deep root of the fears is because deep down, there is a loneliness, from feeling so apart from Hashem. When that fear exists, all the fears in the world can take hold of a person.

The deep advice we can use to solve our fears, as we said, is not simply to remove the outer symptoms of the fear. Sometimes there is a possibility to deal with fears in a superficial way, which we spoke about earlier; but although this is helpful, the main thing we need to is to get to solve the fear at its root. For this, we need to dig deep into ourselves. The inner solution to fear is: to understand that we are never “alone” on this world, and to connect ourselves to the One who has made this world come into existence. This is the true solution to all fears.

Practically Speaking

All that was described here is essentially an inner solution, a more truthful solution, to deal with our fears.

However, practically speaking, since this is a very deep and inner approach, which we cannot reach in one day alone, in the end of the day we may have to use physical remedies available in order to soothe fear. People might have to take certain pills to relieve them of the anxiety they have from their fears, while simultaneously trying to get to the inner method described here. The outer layers of the soul which are closer to physicality cannot relate to the inner solution to fears described here, so they will need to be calmed with various physical means.

The physical aspects involved treating our fear may involve confiding in someone who can advise us; it should be someone who can listen to us attentively, who understands us, who feels us. Many people, when they feel that they have the support of others, become calmed from this feeling, and on a more subtle note, it is because they feel like they feel that they are no longer facing their fear alone.

Also, sometimes we can help a person with fears by showing him that it's all in his imagination, and that it is not happening in reality; this can also soothe a person. However, many times a person is well aware that his fear is only in his imagination, yet even so, he continues to have the fear. When this is the case, he should then make use of the inner solution to fears, described here.

Therefore, our intention here is not to invalidate the physical methods of alleviating fear. There are times where indeed a person needs to take pills in order to remove his fears. Here we are presenting a more inner solution that exists: that there is a deep place in our soul, where we can feel closeness to Hashem, where we can truly feel that we are “with” Hashem, and there are no fears there in that place.

Practically speaking, when we want to solve our fears, on a temporary basis we may make use of the various physical methods of treating fear; but this should not become a fundamental approach

towards how we deal with life. Our point here is that in order to *fully* treat our fears, we will need to dig deep into our soul, to bring out the fear from its root, so that we can remove the root of our fears and all of the 'branches' of the fear that come along with it.

In Conclusion

May we merit from Hashem to eliminate our fears, by feeling the great closeness with Him in the depth of our souls; and may we merit to reach holy fear, which is called "*pachad Yitzchok*" (the fear which Yitzchok Avinu had), in which our entire fear is solely about a fear of becoming disconnected from Hashem, *chas v'shalom*. This returns all of our fears to their holy root. Through this, we will become attached to Hashem from the depths of our heart, and then we will see no more reason to ever be afraid.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *Is fear ever a good thing? For example, I live in a place in Eretz Yisrael where we need to protect our cars from rocks that Arabs sometimes throw at our cars, and sometimes there are life-endangering situations here which cause us to have real fear. Is this a constructive kind of fear to have?*

ANSWER: *The only thing a person must ever be afraid of is the fact that he fears anything besides Hashem.* That is something to be truly afraid of, and it is the only pure fear which exists. Either we fear Hashem Himself, or we fear anything that is besides for Hashem – which essentially causes us to have the fears. Whenever we experience a fear, like when we feel fear from the Arabs, we should view it as an awakening to remind us that we are not afraid enough of Hashem, and that is why we have become afraid of something. It is an awakening to us that we are not close enough to Hashem; because if we would really feel close with Hashem, there would be no reason to fear anything.

Again, let me emphasize that this is not a mere intellectual definition. If a person would really believe that Hashem is close to him, he would not be afraid. When you are found with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, there is no fear there. So if a person experiences a fear, it is a reminder to the person that he needs to be afraid of the fact that he is not close enough to Hashem. That is why a person becomes afraid of the Arabs!

Q2: *So if it is not a good kind of fear to have, is the fear showing us that something in ourselves needs to be fixed?*

ANSWER: Correct. Every situation can be used for good. When someone is afraid and he needs to be calmed, either we can tell him, “Don’t be afraid” [which is a superficial approach], or, we can tell him, “This fear that you are having – use it to awaken in yourself a holy kind of fear, the fact that you don’t feel close enough to Hashem.” However, this only calms a person when he is in fact upset at the fact that he is not close to Hashem. If he doesn’t care, then telling him to be afraid of his lack of closeness to Hashem will not do anything for him, because he doesn’t fear it. Only if a person is afraid of not feeling close to Hashem, can he be calmed when he is afraid of the Arabs, that the source of his fear is just a reminder to him, that he is not close enough to Hashem.

Q3: *When using the power of imagination to relive the past fearful experience, won’t this cause the fear to happen? Isn’t there a concept that thinking and imagining about the fear cause the fear to actually happen in reality?*

ANSWER: That is a very good question! Indeed, it is possible for a person to “cause” bad things to happen when he imagines about them; the Sages say that if a person worries obsessively about poverty or other forms of suffering, the poverty or the suffering will chase after him. Therefore, we don’t try to deliberately imagine bad things.

Our intention here is that if a person is in any case experiencing fears in his imagination, we need to face this imaginary fear by bringing out into the open and then uprooting it with thoughts of *emunah* in Hashem and Hashem's love for us. If a person is not having a problem with fears, we are not encouraging him to use these ideas; we are only discussing here a person who is afraid of something in his imagination, and since this is the case, we need to get him to redirect his thoughts. When a person is afraid, he is suffering from his imagination, which means that he is lacking in *emunah* and in a feeling of Hashem's love, and it is the kind of person who needs to attack the imagination in the way we have described here.

So we are not encouraging a person to deliberately imagine something fearful and to increase his *emunah*. Why should he, if he doesn't have the fears? We are only addressing here someone who already has fears and we want to help such a person face those fears that he is in any case having. So you have asked a very good question.

Q4: *We see that when the people were making the Golden Calf, they came to Aharon HaKohen about what they should do, and he was afraid of what would happen, so he gave them the idea of bringing together all the jewelry and make the Calf, to stall for time, because he feared for his life. So even Aharon HaKohen had fears of possibly getting killed. Why didn't he just use the method of dealing with fears, as described in this class?*

ANSWER: Aharon HaKohen was afraid because he saw them kill Chur for opposing them, and he feared that they would do the same to him. Are you asking how it is possible that even our *Gedolim* and the biggest *tzaddikim* can become afraid? Is that what you mean to ask?

Q5: *What I mean to ask is, why didn't Aharon HaKohen just use the method that the Rav has explained here, in order to solve his fear of getting killed.*

ANSWER: The answer to this is because even the greatest *tzaddik* is not always completely attached to Hashem in total *d'veykus*, and for this reason, there is room for fear even in the biggest *tzaddikim*. This is known as the concept of "*tzeil haguf*" ("body shadow") – since even the greatest *tzaddikim* ultimately have physical body, there is always some part of a *tzaddik* that is not attached completely to Hashem, and this is why there is no *tzaddik* who is perfect.

Yet it is always possible for a person to *minimize* his fears, using the method described here in this class. Although we can never totally uproot all of our fears, there is a very big difference between someone who has is consumed by fears with someone who has greatly minimized his fears.

There is also one more kind of fear which we did not speak about in this class: fears caused by sinning. We find that Yaakov *Avinu* was afraid of Esav, even though Hashem promised him that he would not be harmed, because he was afraid that perhaps he had sinned in the interim and that he was no longer worthy of Hashem's protection. However, in order for this kind of fear to be holy, a person needs to be balanced out with feeling Hashem's closeness. If one feels that Hashem is close

by, then it is valid for him to fear the effects of sin. But if one does not feel this closeness, then fearing the effects of the sin is not a holy kind of fear.

Q6: *So is this something else we need to fear (to fear the effects of sin)?*

ANSWER: Yaakov Avinu had this fear, of being afraid of the effects of a possible sin. But even this fear that he had was ultimately stemming from the “*tzeil haguf*” (“body shadow”), from the physical body of a *tzaddik*, the part which is not completely and perfectly attached with Hashem. But Yaakov Avinu had a balance between the inner layer of the soul (which contains no fear, for it is part and parcel with Hashem), and the outer layers of the soul, which fears sin. If a person does not feel enough closeness with Hashem, he will be dominated by more fears, fear of sin included. If a person becomes more connected to Hashem and he feels closer to Him, he is calmed on the inside, and the outer part of the self which feels the effects of fear will stay in balanced proportion. This is the kind of fear which our *tzaddikim* had. They had a fear of sin, which was equally balanced with a great feeling of closeness to Hashem.

Q7: *When a person fears the effects of a sin, does this fear exist even in the inner part of the soul which only feels closeness to Hashem? Or does it exist only on the outer layers of the soul that experiences fear?*

ANSWER: The inner part of the soul feels a complete closeness with Hashem, so it is not possible in that point to feel any fear of sin, because the inner part of the soul is above the point of sin. Therefore, when a person feels this part of the soul where he is completely attached with Hashem, there is no fear of sin, because there is no possibility of sin there.

Q8: *So whenever a person feels a fear, it is a sign that something is wrong and that he needs to improve in some area? Does it mean that he has sinned, or that he is not close enough yet to Hashem? Fear is thus entirely a symptom that something is wrong?*

ANSWER: You have defined it correctly. If a person is feeling a very intense fear, it is a sign that something is amiss. But if you keep feeling an alternation between fear and feeling close to Hashem – in other words, at the same time that you feel calmed by the knowledge that Hashem is near you, you are stilling experiencing a fear – this is called *pachad d'kedushah*, “holy fear”. If you do not feel that you are moving back and forth between these two feelings, it is a sign though that something is wrong [and that you need to work on your relationship with Hashem].

Q9: *Is it possible for one to have fears that come from his previous gilgul (soul reincarnation)? And if it is possible, is a person allowed to take away his fears by going to a hypnotizer?*

ANSWER: Yes, it is possible that one's fears come from a previous *gilgul*. Rav Chaim Vital said that his Rebbi, the *Arizal*, said that some of his fears came from his previous lifetime. Whenever the *Arizal* heard that someone had been killed, he felt fear, and he said that this was because in a previous *gilgul*, he had been one of the Ten Martyrs who were killed by the Romans.

As for going to a hypnotizer, this is not the ideal solution to solve our fears. First of all, you have to do your research on the hypnotizer in question and find out if he is a real *ben Torah*, who genuinely observes Torah and mitzvos. But even if he is a *frum* hypnotizer, there is a more inner issue involved with turning to hypnosis in order to deal with our fears: it would only be removing the outer garments of our fears, and it would not be uprooting the fear at its root. We want to get to the root of the fear and uproot it totally, as opposed to just removing its symptoms. The inner solution to fears which we have said here, which gets to the root of fear, is: that there is a deep place in our soul where we can feel close to Hashem and that we are with Him. This soothes our soul from all fears.

11 | *Shevat – Elevated Eating*

The Month of Shevat – Sanctifying the Act of Eating

The month of *Shevat*, as we are taught by Chazal, is associated with the act of *le'itah* (chewing), which is otherwise known as *achilah*, eating.³⁵ When Esav was starving and he wanted food, he said, “Feed me (*hal-iteini*)” from that red stuff” – from the word “*le'itah*”, to chew and consume food. Let us understand what our *avodah* of “eating” in *Shevat* is.

We know that a person cannot survive without eating. It is possible for a person to go several days without consuming food, but generally speaking, we need to eat every day of our life. Except for the fast days, such as Yom Kippur and the Rabbinically ordained fasts, we eat every single day. If we never reflect into the purpose of why we eat – of how it can be holy to us or of how it can be spiritually detrimental to us - then we will go our entire life without any sense of purpose in our eating.

If you make a simple calculation, each person eats an average amount of 70,000 meals in his lifetime (assuming that a person lives for 70 years, since “*the years of a man are seventy*”, and that he eats about 1000 times during each year of his lifetime). Should a person eat for his entire life, going through 70,000 meals or more, without ever reflecting into the purpose of why he eats?

Clearly, we need to understand what the role of food is in our life, and how it can serve to elevate us spiritually. There's a very big difference between a person who thinks about it and a person who doesn't think about it; being aware of the purpose in our eating can change the whole way we are living our life.

Four Possible Reasons of Why We Eat

Eating takes up a big part of our life. Let's first think into what factors are included in our eating. Usually, when a person eats, there are two factors. The first thing to consider is: What kind of food to eat. It can be bread, eggs, vegetables, fish, chicken, and other foods. Another factor in our eating is the taste of the food. Usually, we want to eat food that has a decent taste to it. We are usually not just looking to eat a certain kind of food – we want it to also taste good.

So whenever we eat food, there are always two motivating factors taking place: a motivation to eat the particular food we are eating, as well as a motivation for taste. If we make a reflection, we can notice that sometimes we eat because we really need to eat, and sometimes we eat because we just want to taste something good, and not because we really have a need to eat right now. We might

³⁵ *Sefer Yetzirah III*

want to eat because we really need to eat, or we might want to eat just to fill up our stomach; both of these motivations are within the desire to eat. But there is also a third motivation of why we eat: to simply taste something that's good.

In the first motivation of why we eat, it is a desire for food, not taste. This itself divides into two categories: (1) Eating because we are hungry, and (2) Eating more than what is necessary to fill our hunger – which is actually a desire to experience more materialism of this world. In the second motivation of why we eat, we eat simply because we feel a need for taste, and we will want to experience various kinds of taste.

If we reflect into it, we can discover these three motivations in our eating. Sometimes we eat because we are hungry, sometimes we eat because we are desiring materialism, and sometimes we eat for a completely different reason: because we are looking for taste.

There is also an additional, fourth reason why we eat, and every person can also discover this motivation in his eating: sometimes we eat because we are feeling bored. We are in the mood of doing something, and sometimes we fulfill this need for action through engaging ourselves in eating. In this motivation for eating, we are not eating because we need to eat, nor are we even trying to fill our stomachs and pursue physical desires, and we are not either doing so out of a need to experience new tastes. Rather, we are in the mood of having some kind of action, and we are using eating to fill that void.

In Summary

So there are altogether four possible reasons why people eat: (1) Because we are hungry, and we are trying to fill the hunger, so that we can feel nourished and full. (2) Because we are pursuing bodily cravings, which is a materialistic kind of desire; (3) Because we want to enjoy a good taste, (4) Because we are bored and we feel a need for action, and eating makes us feel like we are being active.

Developing Awareness of Why We Are Eating Right Now

Before we continue our discussion on this, with *siyata d'shmaya* – we first need to conceptualize the first idea we mentioned, which is that we need to reflect into the things we do and to have an awareness in what we are doing; to know why we are doing something as we are in the midst of doing it. If a person eats and never pays attention to why he's eating, his eating is no different than how an animal eats. But if a person is at least a bit spiritual and isn't entrenched in the materialism of life, he thinks into why he eats, before he is about to eat something, as well as while he's eating. He eats with a sense of awareness.

When a person wants to become aware of why he is eating, he should first reflect: “What is the reason that I am about to eat right now? Is it because I am hungry? Is it because I simply want to nosh? Is it because I want to taste something? Or is it because I'm just bored?”

One must be aware: “Why do I eat?”, and try to find which of the above four reasons are his motivation to eat right now. Clearly, there will not always be one reason that is motivating him to eat. There can be two reasons, three reasons, or even all four of the above reasons, which are all driving him to want to eat right now. The more a person can “listen” to what’s going on inside himself, he can better discern what his motivations in eating are.

Focused, Calm Eating

By many people, there is problem that they have of having food in one hand and doing something else with their other hand, and at the same time, they are talking on the phone during all of this multi-tasking. Besides for how this ignores the *halachah* that one must not converse as he’s eating, there is another problem which develops from this unfocused kind of eating.

When a person is doing other things as he’s eating, he usually will not have any awareness of why he’s eating right now. He won’t be able to listen to himself at this moment and be aware of why he’s eating. When a person gets used to eating in this way, he does not pay attention to why he’s eating at the moment, and he will be very far from developing any awareness in his eating and from elevating the act of eating. Therefore, practically speaking, we need to avoid as much as possible this kind of unfocused eating, where a person does various different things as he’s in middle of eating. One should view eating as a time to work on his *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity). Eating should always be done calmly, and that will enable a person to have the calmness to listen to himself and reflect into the reasons of why he’s eating.

Therefore, in order to carry out this advice, try to make sure that you don’t eat during a time of the day where you are harried or feeling pressured with lots of tasks to take care of. Every person needs to set aside a part of the day where he will have some *menuchah* (serenity), and for part of this time, he should eat calmly.

When a person isn’t focused and calm as he eats, he doesn’t digest it as well. Not only is it unhealthy to our physical body, but it damages us as well on a more inner level. When a person eats as he’s not calm, he will eat more than he really needs to, because he can’t think properly about how much he needs to eat right now.

If we do not see the importance of paying attention to our eating, we damage ourselves both physically and spiritually, and as we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we would go through about 70,000 meals during our lifetime having never given any thought to our eating, and all of those meals would be eaten without any purpose.

1) How We Can Elevate Hunger

Let us now continue, with the help of Hashem, to discuss the last point we mentioned.

We need to have the proper perspective towards eating. Eating is an important part of our life, both in the physical and in the spiritual. However, we mainly need to consider how eating affects us

spiritually. We need to have a serious attitude towards eating, by setting aside some time of the day where we will work on mindful eating. But if we never think into why we are eating and we don't take it seriously, we will probably not care to set aside the time each day to work on mindful eating, and then we will go through a lifetime of meals with no sense of purpose in them, and all of the meals of our lifetime then become wasted opportunities.

That was the introduction to the discussion here, of how we need to generally view eating. Now we will elaborate upon the four motivations of eating which we mentioned earlier, and go through each of these with greater depth.

The first reason we mentioned, of why a person eats, is to eat out of hunger. When a person feels hungry to eat, he should ask himself the following: "Who made me hungry? Did I make myself hungry? No, that can't be." Whenever a person feels that he is "hungry" and he immediately goes to eat something, without thinking it through enough, he might open up the fridge and eat whatever he finds there. But this resembles the way an animal eats. A person who wishes to live a more inner kind of life doesn't act upon his impulses so fast. He first thinks, calmly, about this simple thought: "Who made me hungry?"

If a person immediately answers to this, "The nature of my body made me hungry", he should then counter to this thought, "And who made the body have this nature?" After simply reflecting onto this, you discover simply that it is Hashem who made you hungry. Now ask yourself, "And why did Hashem make me hungry? Ah, so that I will need to eat, and then make the required *berachah* (blessing) to Him before I eat it, so that I can thank Hashem for it. In this way, I am elevating the materialistic act of eating." And, on a deeper level, perhaps you are also elevating the souls who may have been reincarnated in the food you are eating, who are raised to holiness when a blessing is made over them.

The point of this thinking is so that you become aware that there is a more spiritual source to your hunger. The reason why your hunger has appeared is not simply because your body has made you hungry, but because Hashem made you hungry so that you will be able to elevate the act of eating, and on two levels. First of all, you make a *berachah* over the food, where you thank Hashem for the food you're about to eat, and that itself elevates the mundane act of eating. Secondly, by making the *berachah*, you can feel gratitude to Hashem for this food, and this elevates the materialistic aspect of the food, bringing Hashem into the picture.

As you are feeling a hunger for food, be clear about this attitude: "When I get hungry, it is because Hashem made me hungry, so that I should eat in a more elevated manner, which enables me to elevate the food I am eating, from the material to the spiritual."

In summary of until now: When you are aware that the reason that you're eating is because you are hungry, don't act upon it so fast. Train yourself to start thinking like this before you are about to eat, and get used to the habit of making reflection before you eat. Even if it is only a little amount of reflecting, it is helpful, because it trains you not to act upon impulse as soon as you get hungry. You

can try waiting for 60 seconds, or 30 seconds (and if you can't do that, try it for 20 seconds) before eating upon the hunger.

Whatever amount of self-control you can muster when it comes to this, the point is not to eat immediately when you feel hunger. When you get used to reflecting a bit before you eat, your eating becomes more spiritual, it becomes more refined and loftier, and it becomes elevated from the normally animalistic eating that it would have been. This advice has been mentioned in the works of the *Rishonim*: whenever you are hungry, wait a little bit before you eat [and reflect into the purpose of eating].

2) What To Do About Cravings

Until now we explained about what to do when you're eating of hunger. Now we will learn about what to do when we are eating due to the second possible motivation in our eating: when we are eating simply because we are getting a craving for food, which is really a desire to attach ourselves to the materialism of this world.

First of all, let's go deeper into this motivation. Every person contains a *guf* (body) and *neshamah* (soul). Our *neshamah* doesn't need anything to eat, because it is completely spiritual. It is only interested in the spiritual, as it is written, "*When there will be no hunger for bread, no thirst for water, except to hear the word of Hashem.*" But we also have a body, which needs physicality in order for it to be sustained. For that reason, we need to eat when we feel hunger.

But our body also causes us to pursue the second motivation in eating: to eat food simply because we feel a craving for materialism. The body is interested in more and more materialistic desires, and that is what causes us to pursue food and other desires which we don't really need to sustain ourselves. It is simply a desire to attach ourselves to the thick and heavy materialism of this world, and it comes from our physical body.

We can see this in different meals we eat. Sometimes we have a lighter kind of meal, and we don't feel heavy afterwards, and sometimes we eat in order to feel full, where we will eat heavier and thicker kinds of foods, and we feel heavy after such meals. Many times people will intentionally eat a thicker kind of food which makes them feel heavier afterwards, because they want to have this feeling of "feeling full" after they eat. This is a bodily desire, which wants to experience more materialism. It causes cravings in a person for more food that is necessary for him to eat, and it is rooted in the body's desire to "feel full" after a meal.

It is written, "*A righteous person eats to satisfy his soul, and the stomach of the wicked always feels lacking.*" The *possuk* is saying that a *tzaddik* eats until he feels satisfied, whereas a wicked person eats in order to feel that his stomach has been filled up. Many times people mix up the two motivations, and they think that to feel "satisfied" from a meal means to "feel full". But if a person has trained himself to eat calmly and with awareness, as we spoke about before, he will be able to make a distinction between eating to feel "satisfied" and eating to "feel full", and he will be able to see how they are not the same thing.

The Rambam says that a person should eat less than a third of his portion, but even if a person can't eat on the disciplined level that the Rambam reached, he can still train himself not to eat his entire portion at once, and to instead eat slowly and calmly. He can try eating a bit, then pausing, then continuing to eat, and repeating the cycle, during his meal. When a person gets used to eating like this, he will suddenly begin to feel a deeper place in himself, where he will realize that his hunger was not actually hunger, and that he had really been satisfied all along. It was simply a desire to have a "full stomach", and not a desire to become satiated.

When a person keeps eating continuously and without pause, he might think that he is doing so in order to be satisfied from the meal, but in actuality, it is stemming from a desire to have a "full stomach". But by getting used to taking breaks as we are eating, such as by pausing for 2 minutes every here and there during the meal, a person will suddenly discover that his will to keep eating is not stemming from a will to be satisfied, but from a will to feel like he's "full" afterwards, a "full stomach".

This is a very subtle differentiation to discern in oneself. The practical way to work on this is by pausing every so often as you eat, and the point of it is to be able to eat in a serene way, where you can listen to the real needs of your body.

There is an inner power we have of listening to the body. It is hidden from most people, but the more a person is living a serene kind of life and he does things calmly and with reflection beforehand, he is better able to listen to the messages of his body. As a person is eating, pausing, and continuing to eat, he can listen to the body and discern if his need to eat right now is stemming from a desire for hunger\satiation, or because he simply has a desire to have a "full stomach" – which is not necessary, and it is merely a desire rooted in materialism.

Another point to mention here is, about what we actually eat. In order for a person's eating to be on the level of a *tzaddik's* eating and to avoid the kind of eating that is about having a "full stomach", a person needs to get used to eating lighter and more refined kinds of food. We know that some foods are heavier, thicker, oilier and fattier, with many different ingredients, whereas other foods are lighter, more refined, and contain fewer ingredients. If a person wants to live a more truthful life and he wants his eating to become more spiritual and less materialistic, he should get used to generally having a lighter diet.

Much of the cooked meals that we eat are heavy and thick, which are not meant to merely satiate us and nourish us, but to make us feel like we have a "full stomach" afterwards. A person needs to get used to eating foods that are closer to the nature which Hashem Himself prepares. This doesn't mean that you should only eat vegetables and fruit, but the point is to eat lighter foods, with most of your meals being lighter in their nature, and to avoid heavy, thick foods with all kinds of ingredients. By getting used to a lighter diet, the body will become trained to eat for the purpose of satiation, and much less for the purpose of "feeling full".

In summary, when a person feels cravings to eat more food than what he needs, the first part of the advice for this is to get used to takes pauses in between the meal. The second piece of advice is to train ourselves to eat lighter kinds of foods, and to avoid eating heavier and thicker kinds of food. All of this should be done with conscious attention that you are trying to eat calmly, and it should be done during a time of the day that you set aside specially for this, where you will work on eating with more *menuchas hanefesh*.

There are also loftier and more spiritual ways than this to elevate our eating, and if a person can have those lofty thoughts while he is eating, that will also serve to help him avoid heavier, thicker foods and to stick to a lighter diet.

3) *What To Do About the Need for Taste*

Now we will deal with the third reason of why people eat: when a person feels a need for taste.

Our body has a nature to want to taste things, and this is especially the case ever since the sin of Adam, where man tasted of the *Eitz HaDaas*. Ever since then, there has become a genuine need to taste things. This need is used for holiness when we taste of the Shabbos food, as it is written, “*Those who taste of it [Shabbos], merit life*” [and this refers to tasting the Shabbos food]. But even during the weekday as well, almost all people need to have a good taste in their food, and they will not be able to have tasteless food.

However, we need to have the proper attitude towards the need for taste. The Hebrew word for “taste” is *taam* (טעם), which has the same letters as the word *me’at* (מעט) – which means “a little”. This hints to us that the need for taste is only meant to be utilized “a little”, meaning, to eat the food in order to taste it, and not more than that. But if a person eats more than that need, he is mixing in a craving for more food, which is the motivation in eating that we discussed earlier, where a person eats in order to feel full; he will keep eating it until he feels heavy afterwards. This is a double motivation contained in one act: a motivation for taste, and a motivation for more materialism.

For this reason, most people, when they taste a certain food, they will keep gorging on it, even though they didn’t plan on having more than a taste of it. When people keep eating the food after they have tasted it, this is not stemming from the original need for taste. If it would be a need for taste, the person would taste it and no more.

A person should first identify this when he tastes something. When he tastes it, he should realize that this came from a need to taste it. If he keeps eating after the original bite, he should identify that this is not coming from his need to experience taste, but from a craving to eat more food and to feel full and heavy afterwards. To counter this problem, one should taste the food, then pause, and then taste a little bit, and then repeat the cycle. In this way, he will calm the desire to engage in unnecessary eating. He will still want to taste it, but he will have calmed his desire to gorge on the food.

When most people overeat, it is due to these combined factors in their motivation. They usually began with a desire to taste of the food, and this awakens the desire for materialism, where a person will want to finish what he tasted, so that he can “feel full”. The motivations of taste and materialism become mixed with each other in the act of eating.

As we mentioned, the advice that can work for this is to take pauses after you taste something. Taste it, then pause, then take another bite, and repeat the cycle. Make sure not to go overboard as you are tasting it, leave it at just a taste of the food, pause, then taste it again, making sure not to eat beyond that amount, and repeat. In this way, you will identify in yourself the two different motivations, the desire to eat more and the desire to taste something, and by getting used to this, not only will you calm the desire to eat more, but you will also be able to calm the desire for taste itself.

This is a subtle matter which requires you to listen to your body, and when you identify the motivating factors that are taking place in your body, you are then able to deal with them accordingly.

To bring out this idea, the *Shelah HaKadosh* writes that the *mitzvah* to taste of the Shabbos food is precisely to take a little taste of each thing [on Shabbos]. But when people taste the *cholent* on Shabbos, and they like the taste of it, they will usually keep eating it, until they feel like they have full stomach from it.

However, Shabbos is the time to elevate our eating. By having a little taste of the food on Shabbos and by leaving it at that, we elevate the act of eating, on the holy day of Shabbos. Even during the weekday as well, there is this concept, where a person can elevate his eating by having a mere taste of the food, in order to calm his anxiousness; but nothing more than that.

Based upon the above, a person should make sure to taste things, so that his body will be calmed, and he should try this with lighter kind of food which doesn't have too many ingredients. Throughout the day, if you ever feel a need to taste something – and we should emphasize that it's only when you feel a need to taste something, and it should not be brought on deliberately – make sure to put something tasty in your mouth, so that you can satisfy the need for taste; and leave it at that.

You can try this with the Shabbos food, which is the main time to work on this *avodah*. But even if you can't do it with Shabbos, you can still try it during the weekday, as we explained.

This is something that can be worked upon by almost anyone. There are others who can elevate their eating even more than this, because they have worked very much on purifying themselves from materialism. But the words here are geared towards most people, who still struggle with the pull towards materialistic desires.

The words here are about a very basic level, which can be worked upon by anyone. Understandably, if one can achieve an even higher level of self-control than this, it is certainly praiseworthy.

4) *Eating Out of Boredom*

Now we will address the fourth reason of why people eat: boredom. When a person feels a need for movement and action, he may ease this tension by eating, which gives him the feeling that he is “doing” something.

Here is an example of it. Many times, when people nosh on glazed nuts or the like, it makes them move around a lot as they eat it. There is much movement in their mouth as they crunch on the food, and they are moving around their hands a lot too as they eat it, so it can feel very engaging. There is also a lot of digestion taking place from this kind of eating, which is internal movement, and all of these movements make a person feel like he is active, which eases his boredom.

Firstly, one needs to become aware of this motivation in his eating. If he is bored and he is eating, the first thing he should realize is that he does not need to eat this, and that it is only because he wants to feel like he is having some kind of movement.

When this is the case, a person needs to set up a schedule for himself where he will be able to engage in productive kinds of movement, in order to satisfy his need for movement. If he wants, he can taste something as he’s involved in the activity that he chooses, in order to calm his desire. The main thing to do, upon becoming aware of his need for movement, is to find other movements to do, which can calm his body’s need for movement.

With some people, this desire for movement is calmed if they go for a walk. Another person is calmed by engaging in conversation. Another person can calm himself by reciting verses of *Tehillim*. Another kind of person can calm himself by listening to a *shiur*. The point is to replace the eating with another kind of movement that will calm the body, and each person will have to find what kind of movement calms him from boredom; it is mainly about being aware that his desire to eat food right now is not coming from a need to eat, but from a need for movement.

By replacing the food with some other engaging act of movement, he calms his body’s need for movement which is causing the boredom. As we mentioned, he can also try eating something as he’s involved with that other activity he chooses, so that he can feel calmer. This is similar to the idea we mentioned earlier when we spoke about how to calm the desire for taste. Once he becomes aware of the motivation of why he wants to eat, there is much less of a chance that he will be dragged after the eating, if he just takes a taste of it to calm himself and no more.

By finding some engaging activity that makes him feel like he is doing something, he calms his desire to eat out of boredom, which is entirely a need to experience movement.

In Summary

We have learned here about four motivations of why we eat. These are subtle and complex matters to understand, and there is a lot more to say about this topic. But the most important thing to remember is the point we started out with, which is that a person should always reflect into what is motivating him to eat. It is a whole different kind of eating when a person eats with this

awareness, which spans an average of 70,000 meals a lifetime – it would be a shame to have all these meals go to waste.

We should first internalize the fact that eating with this mindfulness causes us to **be** better off physically, but we should mainly think of its spiritual benefits. Thus, we should try to bring an inner attitude into our eating. We should eat calmly, with *menuchas hanefesh*, and from “listening to our body” as we eat. Eating calmly includes avoiding eating while standing, avoiding eating quickly, and not to multi-task while eating. Therefore, we should set aside time every for “*menuchas hanefesh*” eating.

Slowly but surely as we get used to this, we will be able to better feel what our motivations are as we eat, and direct ourselves accordingly.

Avoid Talking About Food So Much

There is also another important point we will mention now: we shouldn't make such a big deal out of eating and talk about food so much. It has become common in our generation for people to talk about food for hours and hours, discussing all kinds of foods and tastes. People will talk about what kinds of food they ate at a wedding the day before, and how it tasted, and wonder how it is made. But if we want to live a more truthful kind of life, we need to develop an inner attitude towards eating. We need to avoid talking about food and how it tastes, and instead we need to view eating as part of how we can serve Hashem in an inner way.

With the help of Hashem, if we reflect into these matters well, our eating will be elevated, and then all of us together will merit to eat from the *korbonos*, with the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash* - *Amen*, and *Amen*.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *I do not make a deal out of food that much, but I make sure to have certain foods and drinks when I eat breakfast, which doesn't take up much of my time. I just eat a quick breakfast and then I'm done. Is there anything wrong with this kind of rushed eating, since I'm not eating normally and I'm just eating and drinking enough to stay healthy?*

A: It sounds like you are eating in order to stay healthy. What is wrong with this?

Q2: *What I want to know is: Is this a lack in elevating my eating?*

A: If you are referring to how you eat during the weekday, and not Shabbos, there is no problem with this. It is totally fine. However, you need to know for sure if it's indeed coming from a reason to stay healthy, as opposed to a motivation to become physically slim. You need to know for sure if you're eating less because you are indeed keeping away from physical indulgence, or if it's just coming from a desire to "look good" [which is not a holy desire].

Q3: *I make sure to eat only healthy foods, and I educate women on how to eat healthy foods, by informing them of how necessary it is to eat healthy and how to avoid the unhealthy foods which are so common in our generation. Since the Rav said that we shouldn't make such a big deal talking about food, how much should I talk with others about the need to eat healthy food, and how much shouldn't I talk about it? It seems from the Rav that the main thing is not about what you eat, but about how you eat. So what is the amount of time that I can spend talking to people about what to eat?*

A: This is a very, very good question. There's a problem in our generation where people talk a lot about health, but it does not come from a balance between the physical and the spiritual. In fact, it has become like a form of *avodah zarah* (idol worship), where people emphasize physical health so much, to the point that they only care for their physical well-being. The *Chovos HaLevovos* has a term for this: "They made their stomachs into their own gods." When the body becomes the central aspect in people's lives, this is what causes people to talk about health so much and to make such a big deal out of it, because the physical body is their priority, and therefore, much effort is expended by people to make sure that the body is being well taken care of. After all, they see their body as the main thing in their life.

Therefore, when we want to speak about health with others, we need to have the appropriate balance between a concern for our body and our soul. We can inform others of what the healthy foods are and what the unhealthy foods are, and to guide them to eat the right foods, but not as a purpose unto itself. The reason why we need to keep our body healthy is because it is the *kli* (vessel)

which contains our *neshamah*, and we need to maintain our “vessel” and keep it strong, so that the light of our *neshamah* can shine properly within us.

If a Jew does not have this perspective towards health and he\she is a health practitioner, then his attitude towards health is no different than a gentile’s outlook, for a gentile can give over the very same health education. If a person teaches other people about how to stay healthy, he\she must be clearly aware of the reason of why he\she practices this: the Torah’s view of health is that our body needs to be a proper vessel to maintain the spiritual effects of our *neshamah*. When the focus is purely on physical health and there is no awareness that we are a *neshamah*, this is purely the gentile attitude towards living, and it is not the way for the Jewish people.

Q4: In today’s generation, where food is out of control and people overeat, just for the sake of taste and enjoyment and for no other purpose, how can we raise our children to make sure that they shouldn’t eat too much nosh and candy? Are there guidelines of nosh that we should try to formulate, like what to give out and what not to give out to them, and what the limitations should be?

A: This is a very good question. In today’s generation, you can find no less than 1000 different types of candy in the stores, all with a *hecshe*. It is a giant ocean of desires. To simply tell a child, “Don’t eat all of this stuff!” will not do much for the child. There is really a deeper issue we need to address when it comes to all of this. We need to train a child to understand that we have a body as well as a *neshamah*, and that our need for taste is actually a spiritual need that comes from the *neshamah*, only, it is often channeled in the wrong direction; and that when we pursue physical tastes, we prevent ourselves from tasting the spiritual. The same is true vice versa – the less we pursue physical taste, the more we can taste of what is waiting for our *neshamah*.

Therefore, our task in *chinuch* (child education) is really a task to bring to them to live more spiritually, and part of this includes experiencing spiritual enjoyment and tastes. To tell our children not to eat so much is perhaps a little bit helpful, but it will not do much for them. Instead, we need to emphasize to our children what a life of *ruchniyus* (spirituality) is like, and to explain to a child that pursuing physical gratification prevents us from experiencing the taste and enjoyment of *ruchniyus*.

We must know that there is a spiritual kind of taste, which is pleasurable to our *neshamah*, and there is also physical enjoyment and taste, which prevents a person from tasting the spiritual. A person has the free will on this world to choose what kind of taste he wants to have – either to taste of the spiritual, which is of the higher realms of our existence, or to taste the physical, which is of the lower realms. That choice is what we need to convey to our children.

Understandably, we will not be able to convey this information 100% to our children. We are only speaking of percentages. It is an inner way to live life, which we can bring our children into slowly, but this does not happen in a day or two. It is also not just about the issue of food, but about how to live life in general. We need to train ourselves, and our children, to live a more inner kind of

life. We need to slowly show a child how he needs to choose between pursuing the physical vs. the spiritual. The point is not to tell him what to eat and what not to eat. Rather, we need to convey the message to the child that it takes several years to work on ourselves when it comes to this, and to deepen our sense of taste, so that we can reveal a taste in the spiritual. If the child gets the message correctly, we can then do appropriate *chinuch*.

So it is really a very good question, and it is a big problem which our generation struggles with, where there are so many different kinds of indulgence everywhere we turn.

Q5: *So is the Rav saying that there is nothing we can practically about this, and it is just that we need to have the proper hashkafah (perspective) about it?*

A: A young child is not at the point of desiring so many candies and nosh, but as a child gets a bit older and he begins to want things, we can start training him to choose between living a more hedonistic kind of life versus a more spiritual kind of life. Again, it is not about telling him what to eat and what not to eat, but to help him decide and make the right choice, of what kind of life he wants to live.

How should we help him choose? This is what we should ask him: “Do you want to live a life of *gashmiyus* (pursuing physical gratification)? Or would you rather live a life of *ruchniyus*? Do you want to be a person who chases after *gashmiyus* or do you want to be a person of *ruchniyus*?” If he says that he does want *ruchniyus* over *gashmiyus*, then we can guide him slowly and in steps from there.

For example, on Shabbos when giving out candy and sweets to the children, we can tell a child to put aside one candy and not eat it. If he gets a full bag full of nosh, tell him to put aside one candy that he won’t eat. Don’t tell him not to want it. Instead, train him into the inner perspective that we have described here. Again, the point is not to tell him how to behave. The point is to bring him to a certain awareness, a more mature perspective towards life, where he thinks about the spiritual and he chooses between *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus*.

Q6: *Can we also get others to follow these principles, and not just to use them for our own children?*

A: If a person is in charge of a shul or school, where children bring in nosh and candy, the person in charge can try to set guidelines about what can be brought in to *shul*/school and what should not be brought in. It’s really impossible to control this, though, because there are so many children in these places, and we can’t control all the *nosh* that comes in. But it would be good if one community would set guidelines about these things. The message behind it, though, should be clear: Life is not meant to be *hefker* (free to pursue whatever desires we want). The fact that everything today has a *hefsher* on it is a lifestyle that is totally *hefker*, and it doesn’t make sense.

Q7: If a person feels hungry, could it also be because his soul is feeling hungry, and the body intercepts this message and translates it into a hunger for food?

A: That can certainly be possible, but in order to discern this, we would have to explain this point more in-depth. Most people are not aware to the messages that their *neshamah* is sending them. In order for a person to recognize if a desire is coming from the *neshamah* or not, he would have to know how to identify that the desire is coming from the *neshamah*, and that the desire of his *neshamah* for more spirituality is merely being clothed under the “garment” of a physical desire for food. But I did not speak about this point in this class, because most people do not pay attention to the sounds of their *neshamah*. It is certainly possible, though, for a person to identify his hunger as a spiritual hunger that is coming from his *neshamah*, and that it is being translated by the body into physical hunger; but this is a much higher level of *avodah* than the level that was discussed in this class.³⁶

³⁶ The Rav has also spoken about how to elevate our eating in the shiurim of *Fixing Your Water*.005 and *Tefillah #081 – Eating With Holiness*.

12 | *Adar Aleph – How to Increase Happiness*

The Month of Adar – A Time of Happiness

With the help of Hashem, we are in the month of Adar. (In a leap year, we merit to have two months of Adar). It is well-known what power is revealed during the month of Adar: it is the month where there is more *simchah* (happiness). The Sages state, “When Adar enters, we increase happiness.”³⁷ To be more specific, the power which describes the month of Adar is known as “*sechok*” (laughter).³⁸

Let us reflect, with *siyata d’shmaya*, into what the roots of sadness are, so that we can learn how to remove sadness and reveal happiness in our life.

Reflecting On the Roots of Sadness

In whatever we think about, we can always discover details and roots. Either we can see the details involved in a matter, or we can see the roots of the matter. So when it comes to analyzing sadness, either we can think into the many different details that can cause sadness, or we can look into the roots of sadness, and see what the roots are that bring a person to sadness.

Here we will try to analyze the roots that cause sadness, as opposed to studying the many ‘branches’ that can bring on sadness. There are several “root” causes for sadness.

Two Sources of Sadness – In the Body and In the Soul

Man is comprised of four physical elements: fire, wind, water, and earth. These four elements are in all of Creation, and they are in man as well. Earth is the heaviest of the elements, and when it was left unbalanced by the other elements, the element of earth will weigh a person down with its heaviness, which ultimately causes a person to feel sadness.

Thus, sadness can stem from the heaviness that is found in our physical body, in our body’s element of earth. Our body was fashioned from the earth. Man comes from dirt, and the heaviness in this dirt that is part of his physical makeup can breed sadness, when his earth is imbalanced and it is weighing him down. This is the first source for sadness: the element of earth, which is contained in the physical body.

³⁷ Taanis 29a

³⁸ Sefer Yetzirah 5:5 [see next month’s shiur, Rosh Chodesh Avodah_013_The Power of Laughter, for how to use the power of “*sechok*” laughter in the month of Adar].

When a person commits a sin (Heaven forbid), and certainly if he commits more sins, his soul becomes sad from this, because it does not want to be in a situation of sin. When a person sins and he does not immediately do *teshuvah*.³⁹ for it, the soul becomes sad at this, and when this is the case, the sadness that a person feels is stemming from the soul.

Solving Sadness Due To Heaviness

Generally speaking, a person needs to get used to eating a lighter diet, as we spoke about in the previous month. Our body becomes heavy from the “earth” in us, so we need to be careful with what we eat. When we overeat, this makes us feel heavy, and heaviness causes us to be sad, since heaviness is a trait of earth, the root element for sadness. So we should get accustomed to eat light foods that won’t make us heavy.⁴⁰

In addition, when someone is drawn very much towards lethargy, he needs to get used to doing things enthusiastically, which will combat the nature of the ‘heaviness’ within him that is causing him to be sad. He should mainly work on this by practicing doing things energetically. For example, he should resolve upon himself that for 3 times a day, he will do something quickly and with enthusiasm.⁴¹

This is the two-part solution that solves sadness that comes from feeling physically lethargic and sluggish. The first part of the solution is, to get used to a lighter diet. The second part of the solution is, to try to do 3 things a day with enthusiasm. This will enable a person to acquire the trait that described in the *Mishnah* in *Avos*, “as light as an eagle”, and to avoid the lethargy and sadness that is produced from the ‘heaviness’ in the body.

Solving Sadness of our Soul

The second source for sadness that we mentioned is, when sadness comes from the soul. The soul becomes sad when a person commits sins. The solution for this kind of sadness is due earnest *teshuvah* from the depths of the heart.

Our Sages wrote that there are four main times to do *teshuvah*: before going to sleep at night, on Erev Shabbos, on Erev Rosh Chodesh, and on Erev Yom Kippur (which is the most important time to do *teshuvah*). These are the “general” times to do *teshuvah*, but if a person lives a more inner kind

³⁹ repentance

⁴⁰ This was discussed in the shiur of Rosh Chodesh Avodah_011_Elevated Eating; see also Fixing Your Earth_010_Counteracting Laziness

⁴¹ Editor’s Note: It is said about Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l that he would practice doing things against his will for 5 times a day, in order to counter the nature of laziness (and another note, the Rav explained this in terms of getting used to *bittul haratzon* (nullifying one’s will). Perhaps the reason for the Rav’s recommendation of doing this 3 times a day, as opposed to 5 times a day as Reb Yeruchem did, is so that even simpler people (like us), who are not the level of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz, can also practice it, on our own level.

of life, he does *teshuvah* whenever he feels inner sadness coming from his soul, and he does so from the depths of his heart.

The *teshuvah* should not be done monotonously, but truthfully and earnestly, until a person feels that his *teshuvah* was genuine, to the point that “The One who knows all secrets (Hashem) can testify on him that his *teshuvah* is truthful.”⁴²

This is an internal way of living, in which a person trains himself to react to any time that he feels inner sadness, by concentrating deeply and resolving to live like a more truthful kind of Jew; to resolve that he will truly submit himself to the *Ribono Shel Olam*.⁴³

If the *teshuvah* was done earnestly, he will find that his sadness will subside, either totally or at least to a very large extent.

Identifying Your Sadness

From the two above possible reasons for sadness (feeling heaviness of the body, or feeling sad due to sins), a person should be able to identify which kind of sadness it is when he’s feeling it.

If a person feels a sense of ‘heaviness’ in his body, if he is feeling somewhat sluggish and lethargic, then this stems from the body’s element of earth, and the solution for this kind of sadness as we said is, to get used to a lighter diet and to do things enthusiastically. But many times a person will feel that the reason for his sadness is deeper than just a general sense of feeling lethargic. Such sadness is not stemming from heaviness of the body, but from a deep inside himself. It is coming from the depths of the *neshamah* (the soul), due to sins, which feels painful to the soul. When that is the case, the solution is to do earnest *teshuvah*.

If a person reflects a little and he has become a more internal kind of person, he will be able to keenly identify if the sadness he’s feeling is coming from heaviness of the body (the element of earth in the body), or if it’s coming from sins; and he should use the solutions above that we explained, accordingly. We have so far mentioned two root causes for sadness, and how they can each be rectified, and how a person should go about identifying them.

A Third Cause for Sadness: Lacking a Sense of Purpose in Life

Until we explained, with *siyata d’shmaya*, about two kinds of sadness - a sadness that comes a feeling of ‘heaviness’ in the body, which is rooted in the body’s element of earth; and sadness that comes from the soul, due to sins and improper actions. Now we will speak about a third kind of sadness, which is very common: when a person is living without any sense of direction in his life, when he doesn’t know what he wants from himself, what his purpose is, and to where he is heading in his life.

⁴² A quote from the Ramban

⁴³ Master of the world

Many times, when people have various kinds of failures in the external aspects of their life, or when they have time to think quietly about their situation, a person will discover that he has no clear-cut direction to take in life. When a person is living without a sense of clear direction in his life, he is filled with all kinds of doubts about what to do and what not to do, and in a broader sense, he is filled with doubt about his entire life in general. This is the main kind of sadness which we see by most people, and the world is full of much of this kind of sadness in people.

We have so far given a general description of it, and now let's explore this deeper so that we can have a clearer understanding of it.

There is a well-known statement, written by the Rema, who says, "There is no happiness like the clarification of doubts."⁴⁴ These words imply that when there are no doubts, there is happiness, so if there are doubts, there cannot be happiness present, thus there will be sadness whenever a person has doubts. When a person is trying to make a decision but he is filled with doubt about how he should decide, his soul becomes sad, from this very state of being in doubt.

(A hint to this is that the Hebrew word for sadness, which is *atzvus* (עצבות) is from the word עצב (*etzev*), which is from the words 'עץ ב', which hints to the term "two options of advice (because the word עץ is also from the word עצה, advice) – in other words, when a person faces two conflicting paths of advice to take, he has *atzvus* \sadness.)

Sometimes a person is sad due to a particular doubt about something that he is going through, like if he isn't sure about whom to marry, if he doesn't know which house to buy and where to live, or if he's not sure about what kind of job he needs to work in. In these cases, a person can know clearly of the doubt that is plaguing his happiness. But in many cases, a person cannot name exactly a particular doubt is bothering him. He is just feeling doubtful about his entire life in general and which direction it is taking, and he feels a general lack of clarity towards his life. These are the kinds of doubts that fill the lives of many people, and therefore the world is full of this kind of sadness.

Lack of Centeredness

If we ask any believing Jew, "What are you living for?" he will surely answer that he is living in order to do the will of Hashem and fulfill the *mitzvos*. But if we look deeper into what's going on inside many people, we would discover that most people - while certainly saying that they this is what they live for, and that they know in their minds what they must do - their souls are not directed towards any one point that they are striving for. Their souls are scattered over many different points that they are involved with. When the soul is so spread out like this, and it is not aiming towards any one point in particular, this lack of direction towards anything clear results in a deep kind of sadness to the soul.

We can see that there are many people who are working towards a goal. Sometimes they have materialistic goals, and sometimes they have spiritual goals, but in either case, they are heading towards one point that they strive for. They are centered and focused on attaining a particular goal that they have, and this keeps them largely from falling into the pit of sadness.

⁴⁴ *Toras HaOlah*

Based upon this observation, we can uncover the solution for the deep sadness that fills most of the world – sadness that stems from lack of clarity and direction in life – by learning how to stay focused on a particular goal in life that each person can strive for. Our goal we want to develop, however, will be of a spiritual nature, and not of a materialistic concern. Yet, we can still learn a lesson from the goal-oriented people of the world and use their method of success, when it comes to our own spiritual potential. With the help of Hashem, we will explain this.

Having a Spiritual Goal

There are many observant Jews who go to learn a profession today, whether it is to become a doctor, lawyer, or whatever profession they choose. They are juggling many different aspects in their life, yet they are focused on attaining a certain goal, by going to school to learn about the profession that they are trying to attain, and this helps them stay centered as they aim for that goal. The fact that they are working towards a goal gives them a sense of happiness, from the mere fact that they know that they are heading towards a goal – whether the goal is a worthy one, or not.

Just as actively striving towards a particular goal can work for success in the material world, so can it work when we have a spiritual goal to strive for. There are some people who have spiritual goals, and they gain satisfaction and happiness from it whenever they are actively pursuing it.

For example, there are some people who feel that doing *chesed* for others is their spiritual goal in life. They open up a *gemach* or an organization that helps people, they are focused on what they are doing, as opposed to being not spread out over many different goals they want; they are involved solely in one goal that they are aiming for. Some people help others with money, some people help others with their advice, some people help others by lending their possessions to others, and there are many other ways as well how people help others. In all of these scenarios, the person is focused on a spiritual goal of *chesed* that he is aiming for.

Whether the goal is materialistic or spiritual, as long as person can stay focused and concentrated on pursuing his goal, his soul feels connected to something. He will be less prone to sadness, and he will find it easier to be happy.

Most people are usually doing many good and wonderful things, but they are not aiming for any one goal in particular that they are striving for. For example, if a woman is a housewife, she does many good things every day; she takes care of the house, she is constantly nourishing her husband and children with meals, and each of these acts involves countless achievements. In addition, a woman does many constructive acts each day besides for this. Yet, this doesn't necessarily make her happy, even though she is doing all of these good things.

Why? It is because she doesn't see how it all connects. She may feel very 'spread out' all over the place with all of these things that she does, and she does not feel that she is aiming towards anything in particular that she is living for. She would be very happy if she would just consider how all of these acts really connect into one piece. She could focus on the fact that all of these things are *chesed*, and then she would derive happiness from this – that is, if she considers *chesed* to be her goal. But when a woman doesn't consider all of what she does as part of a general goal that she is striving for, then in spite of all her many actual achievements, she will not be happy.

Every Jew, man and woman alike, needs to have a spiritual goal in his life to aim for. No matter how much countless wonderful acts a person is doing each day, a person will not actually be happy from all of this unless there is a particular spiritual goal that he\she is striving for.

Each person can have a different unique goal to strive for; it is not the same for all people.

Figuring Out Your Personal Spiritual Goal in Life

In the secular values of the material world, people are seeking wealth, status, and nice houses to live in, and that is what drives them to stay focused on their goals. But when we speak about the inner, spiritual world, the focus must be on a spiritual goal, on a certain inner point which we would want to aim towards, as we go about our day-to-day living.

Every person will have to sit with himself in a quiet place and try to figure out, as best as he can, of a spiritual goal that will speak to him and which he feels is closely attainable. A person needs to wonder: “What is a worthy, spiritual goal that I would want to aim towards and direct my whole life towards?” The point is to be focused on you can utilize your own potential, which lays dormant within you.

Once again, let us emphasize that there is a difference between how the secular world pursues their goals, with how a Torah Jew needs to pursue his goals. When a gentile speaks of having goals in life and on being focused and concentrated on working towards a goal, the attitude is to lay down the desire that you really want and how to get to what you want the most; how to attain that which you want badly. But when we speak of spiritual goals, the goals that a Torah Jew needs to have, which utilize the potential of our *neshamah* (Divine soul), the way of knowing our goals is a different process.

It is about how to actualize my actual potential that is within me, as opposed to getting what I want out of life. It is about figuring out which point speaks to me and is close to home by me, as opposed to something that my *nefesh habehaimis* (external, animalistic layer of the soul) wants, which are expressed in the gentile world. It is a clarification about the innermost point that I currently identify, which speaks to me. It is that point which a Jew needs to strive for, and to figure out how to actualize this potential.

If a person succeeds at uncovering the spiritual point that speaks to him the most right now at his current level, he is engaged in utilizing his potential, and he will succeed at removing the deep sadness of the soul, the pain of the soul when there is a lack of clarity and direction in life.

However, in order to figure out what the goal will be, it is not an easy thing to figure out so quickly, and it will not take a few minutes. A person needs to sit with himself quietly and try to go deeper into himself and recognize himself better and better, until he can get to know what his deepest spiritual ambition is. Often a person will need to speak to someone else for help with this.

A person will also need to *daven* to Hashem for help with this, that he should merit to discover a spiritual goal that he wants to aim for. If he can get himself to cry to Hashem for this, he should do so. But even more so, we must understand that we will not get to it so fast. We don’t immediately see what our deepest spiritual desire is. But at one’s own current level, one can try to figure out a spiritual goal that speaks very much to him, and to aim towards it in his day-to-day life.

Slowly as time goes on, a person will gradually be able to uncover an even deeper spiritual goal that he will want, and then direct himself accordingly to actualize that goal.

The Prerequisite to Happiness

We need to understand the following point, which is a prerequisite to *simchah* (happiness). It is a very root and essential point to be aware of: *simchah* is not just based on that which I want to attain but haven't yet attained. It is mainly based on whatever I have attained thus far.

If a person is not focused on any one goal in particular, he will not be clear of what he wants to reach, and he will not either be clear of what he has already reached thus far.

These two points are unclear to a person when he doesn't have a goal. Upon having a goal, a person first needs to clarify what he wants to reach, but at the same time, he must also be aware of what he has already attained thus far. He needs to always remind himself of this: to be clear in what he wants to reach, and to be clear in what he has gained so far. That which you have already attained is actually the root of your *simchah*, and that which you are aiming for, which you haven't yet gotten, is the factor that takes away sadness.

Thus, *simchah* is comprised of two factors: the removal of our sadness, and the revelation of happiness itself. Anything you have attained thus far is included in your aspect of "*someach b'chelko*", "being happy with one's lot" (which is the revelation of happiness), and anything which you haven't gotten but which you are aiming to get, is what takes away sadness, when you are involving yourself in trying to get there.

Let's review this again so that we are clear about it: there are two parts to *simchah* – the removal of sadness, and the revelation of happiness. When I am focused on attaining a certain goal, this removes my current sadness [because the soul will feel like it is moving towards a certain direction]; to be more specific, it removes the doubts that create sadness. And where do I derive *simchah* from in the present? From that which I have attained thus far; this is the "*someiach b'chelko*" that reveals happiness in one's present state.

Now we can understand the following. We mentioned earlier the difference between the gentile and Torah approaches of being goal-oriented. The way of the gentiles, which is especially the case in our current generation, focuses on what you should want out of life, and how to get it. It is about "getting what you want". When you get it, you are happy, because that was what you wanted, you aimed for it, and you got it. That is Western mentality. By contrast, the Torah has a different approach to being goal-oriented: it is about actualizing the "I". For we need to wonder: What is the "I" in us that wants things?

If "being happy with my lot" means that I got what I wanted, that would mean that I partially have what I want and I partially don't have what I want. There is a rule, "He who wants a hundred, will want two hundred." We are never completely satisfied when we attain what we want, because the next day we will want something else, and then we are back to where we started. There is no "lot" to be happy with here.

But if I tried to reach something which my "I" wanted – if it came from a very deep inner drive – then when I do attain that which I want, it is not simply that I have gotten what I wanted, but it is a part of my very "I." If I wanted something that was a part of my "I" and I reach it, then I have

attained a revelation of my “I”, something that is part of me. The happiness that results from that is coming from the actualization of the “I” – the happiness that comes when one utilizes his potential. When the “I” is brought out from its potential state and it is actualized, there is resulting happiness.

We need to understand this deep point, which is very clear. When a person wants something, and he attained it either partially or even completely, the happiness that results from this is just superficial; it is an incomplete happiness. The happiness will be fleeting, and sadness will soon follow.

The only genuine happiness which exists is not when I simply attain what I want, but when I reveal my “I”; when I actualize the potential of my “I”. That is *simchah*. For if something is not a part of me and it is only on my outside, reaching it will not give me true and inner *simchah*, even it is a wonderful thing to attain; whether it is a physical attainment, or even if it is a spiritual attainment. By contrast, if I achieve something that is small but it actualized my “I” in the process in getting there, then the happiness I will experience is coming from my “I” when I get it. You can only have real *simchah* in something that is a part of your “I.”

The meaning of “*someiach b’chelko*” (being happy with one’s lot) means that even if my “lot” is small - like when I compare myself with others and I see that others have more than me - I can still be *someiach b’chelko*.

How indeed can one be happy if he sees that others have reached more than him? The depth of this is because *simchah* does not come from what I acquire. If it would come from what I acquire, then I can never be happy, because in comparison to others, I may have acquired very little. *Simchah* rather comes from actualizing the potential of my “I.” When my “I” is actualized, when I have reached something which is “me”, there is resulting *simchah*.

For this reason, if a person does not have true self-recognition, he is not aware of any actualization of his potential, and he finds nothing to be happy about. If he hears the words here that have been explained until now, he will not be satisfied, and he will feel, “In the end of the day, I don’t have much to be happy about. Even the things I do have in my life are minimal compared to what others have. Others have much more than me to be happy about. So how can I be happy with what I have, when I see that everyone else around has more than me [both physically and spiritually]...?”

When a person finds it impossible to be happy with what he has, it can only be because he is out of touch with his “I”. He is unaware that the only thing which truly gives us happiness is when one utilizes his personal potential. If he would be aware of his “I” and he would be aware that only actualizing his potential is what provides happiness, he would have a whole different perspective towards life, and he wouldn’t need answers to his question, for he would be above this question.

When a person lives only superficially, he will remain with the question, and it pains him. He will not be able to happy with what he has. But when a person comes out of superficiality and he realizes that happiness does not come from acquiring things, but from actualizing the “I”, he will feel that everything he attains is a part of his “I”, and the *simchah* that he experiences will be a happiness in his very “I” as it is.

We are speaking about a totally different perspective of *simchah* here! It is not a *simchah* that comes from getting what you want, where you remain unsatisfied by the things you haven't yet gotten to. It is a *simchah* that one has in his very "I".

It is difficult to explain it any more than how it has been explained here, but herein lays an entirely different and deeper perspective of *simchah* - for anyone who understands what we mean here.

Summary

In summary, we have explained three main underlying reasons for sadness.

The first source of sadness comes from our body, when we have a feeling of 'heaviness' that dominates us and makes us lethargic. This can be counteracted with watching what we eat, together with doing things enthusiastically each day.

A second source of sadness comes from our soul, when there are sins that we haven't done *teshuvah* about yet. The solution for this is to train oneself to doing *teshuvah* on a regular basis, from the depths of the heart. A person should awaken himself to *teshuvah* for every time that he feels a deep and inner sadness.

The third cause of sadness, which is the most common kind of sadness that people have, is when people don't feel fulfilled in their life, and they lack a sense of direction in life. The solution for this is two-fold: to realize what we have already gained so far in our life, as well as to be focused on a certain spiritual goal that speaks to us. Unfortunately, most people in the world are suffering in their souls from this kind of sadness – they feel like they are not aiming for any particular goal in life.

In Conclusion

All that we have explained here until now, understandably, is but the introduction for one to get to the complete and true *simchah*, which is described in the verse, 'שמחו צדיקים בה' - "*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*" We did not speak here about this kind of *simchah*, but that is the desired goal of all that has been explained here.

May we merit from Hashem to feel true happiness in our life - by being happy even with even the parts of ourselves that we haven't yet actualized, as well as by being happy with the parts of ourselves that we have actualized; and that all of us together should rejoice, in the Creator – as it is written, "*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*"

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: Does this idea (of being focused and connected to one spiritual goal in our life) also apply to other areas in life, such as marital peace, children, and livelihood, and other areas of our life?

A: This question stems from living a superficial kind of life, where a person is experiencing life from outside of himself\herself, and not from the inside. When a person lives inwardly, all of these aspects mentioned (marital peace, children, livelihood) are placed in secondary focus to the main point that he is directed towards. When one is not directed towards any one inner point in his life, he will go through the motions, and sometimes his focus will be on his marriage, sometimes on his source of livelihood, and sometimes on his children. But when there is one inner point that he is directing himself towards, none of these things will take over his focus, because he is heading towards a larger picture than any of these aspects.

Q2: Can the Rav give me specific questions that I can ask myself in order to get clarity in what my main point is that I should be focused on in life?

A: This is a very fundamental question to ask, which is hard to answer in a brief amount of time. To put it forth in general terms, every person needs to know: (1) The strongest positive quality that he possesses, (2) and after that, he should know what the “deepest” thing is that he experiences in his soul. (3) After a person knows both of these factors and he has the combined knowledge of both of these factors together, he should then reach a third stage: the deepest part of himself that he currently recognizes. (4) After that, he can slowly reach deeper experiences.

However, this is really a very big question, and it is like the request of the person in the *Mishnah* [in the times of Hilel and Shammai] who asked, “Teach me the entire Torah on one foot.”

Q3: How does this idea of ‘figuring out our main point’ fit into our general goal of life, which is to learn Torah and do mitzvos? Are there really two goals in life – our personal goals, and then our general goal in life (which is Torah and mitzvos)? How do we integrate the goal of keeping Torah and mitzvos with having my own personal spiritual goal?

A: Torah and mitzvos are the purpose and goal that applies to all of *Klal Yisrael*, and in that aspect, all of our goals are equal. But within our general goal of Torah and mitzvos, there is also the individual and private goal that each Jew must strive for. The Sages say that everyone is different and that everyone thinks differently (Berachos 57a). Each person contains a point which no one else has. The private goal of each Jew is not meant, *chas v’shalom*, to take away from the general goal, which is keeping Torah and mitzvos. Rather, each of us needs to bring out our individual point and fulfill our own private and unique mission.

Our personal goals in life are not to be viewed as a ‘separate’ goal that we have other than Torah and mitzvos; rather, our personal goals in life are a goal within our general goal, which is Torah and mitzvos, which enables us to have a connection with Hashem. The individual mission of a Jew is within the general goal of keeping all of the Torah and *mitzvos*, and it can be a particular *mitzvah* or *middah* (character trait) that he is meant to perfect; so it is all within the general goal of Torah and mitzvos.

Each person has a point where his stronger in than others; within Torah and mitzvos, there is also a person’s individuality. The purpose of one’s individuality and unique strong point is a path for him to get to the goal of Torah and mitzvos, and not as a purpose unto itself. Rather, utilizing our unique potential and individuality is our own way of how we can connect ourselves with Hashem, which is our general goal in which we are all the same in.

Q4: Isn’t the fact that we are all created with a “tzelem elokim” (“in the image of G-d”) also a point in which all Jews are the same in?

A: When Hashem created people, did He create them all with the same height, looks, natures and personality? Are we all the same, or are we different? We are all created different from each other. We each look differently, we each have different *middos*, we each have different ways of thinking, and we are different from each other in many ways. Why did Hashem make us differently? It is to show us that we each have a unique aspect – within the path of Torah and mitzvos - in how we can each come to recognize the Creator. Our individuality is a detail contained with a larger whole. It is not excluded from the whole, rather, it is within it. Each person needs to reveal his individual, unique point – and each person’s unique point is different from anyone else’s. Although Torah and mitzvos are the general goal of *Klal Yisrael*, within Torah and mitzvos there is also each person’s individuality.

Q5: Would learning about the “Ten Sefiros” help a person reach his\her particular strong point in life?

A: How did you hear about the *Sefiros*? There are two ways how this knowledge is learned – either in a holy manner, or in a manner which creates confusion.

Q6: Assuming that we learn this information from a Rav who is knowledgeable in these things....?

A: If you find a person who is far removed from materialism of this world and he is a reliable and trustworthy person who can teach Kaballah to women, then yes. But this has to be researched well.

Usually when people start studying Kaballah, they become very confused. If you go to learn Kaballah, you are entering into something where there is a possibility of becoming very confused.

Q7: *Is there a particular sefer the Rav can suggest that one can learn which will help him understand himself?*

A: There is no one way to take; there are many *sefarim* like this. I can't say which particular *sefer* to learn. If you are used to listening to our *shiurim*, then you can try learning sefer "*Da Es Nafshecha*" ("Getting To Know Your Soul", of this author). But there are other *sefarim* too which can help you understand yourself.

Q8: *Are there are other sefarim that the Rav can suggest we should learn, in order to understand ourselves?*

A: Let me explain what the difficulty with this is. Most of the *sefarim*\books which are being written today are taking ideas from gentile authors, and people are attempting to convert these ideas into *kedushah*\holiness. There is no *sefer* [about self-knowledge] being produced today that is entirely based on Torah and with no traces of non-Jewish ideas. Therefore, it is hard to know which parts of new *sefarim* are appropriate for us and which parts are not appropriate, because we don't know if it's taken from secular knowledge or not. That is why I can't recommend any on *sefer* [about self-knowledge] to learn - I do not know if everything that is written there is appropriate for a Jew to look at. Some of the *sefarim* being written today are borrowed from gentile thinking and the authors are trying to bring it into Judaism, and that is why I can't say to learn them or not to learn them; for this reason, it is a complicated matter to address.

Q9: *Are there no sefarim written by our Rishonim (earlier sages) and Acharonim (later sages) which can help us understand ourselves? Aren't those sefarim entirely sourced in kedushah?*

A: The *sefarim* written by the *Rishonim* were not written in an orderly style that speaks to our own language, so they are not that accessible to our generation. There are only a few parts in these *sefarim* which are written clearly, and they are hard for someone in our generation to go learn and come out with anything concrete from it.

As for the *sefarim* written by our later *gedolim*, such as the *sefarim* of the Alter of Kelm ["*Chochmah U'Mussar*"], the *sefarim* of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l ["*Daas Torah*" and "*Daas Chochmah U'Mussar*"] and the *sefarim* of Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l ["*Ohr Yechezkel*"] – in order to know how to learn these *sefarim* properly, one needs to be a great *bar daas* (a very knowledgeable, wise, and sensible person) to learn these *sefarim* in a clear manner, to know when and where to apply the lessons.

There are those in our generation who do try to learn these sefarim in a clear manner, but at the same time, they are also learning non-Jewish books along with it. But when learning gentile ideas, one would have to be an even greater *bar daas* to know which parts of it are appropriate for a Jew and which parts should be discarded. And it indeed hard to know which ideas are taken from Torah and Chazal and which parts are being taken from gentiles, in the books and *sefarim* that are being learned today.

Therefore, it is difficult for me to answer this question.

Q10: *If I am into my health or I am a healer who makes others healthy, is this considered to be using my strongest point for a spiritual goal, or is it just an external factor in my life which is not part of goal in life as an individual?*

A: If a person identifies his field of practice as being the strongest innermost point that he is focused on – in this particular case, health - what will happen one day when he eventually takes leave of the world, where the soul leaves the body? What does a person remain with? We all leave the world one day, and our health isn't here anymore. Health is not part of who we are. But if you are concerned about health because you like to help others, that could be a very big lead to part of who you are, because then it is a spiritual goal. Meaning, if you are a healer because you want to do *chessed* to others – and you consider this your goal in life – then this is a spiritual goal, and this will make you happy. But if you're not doing it for a spiritual reason, and it's just because you are "into health" and you 'also' happen to do *chessed* with it, then it's not a spiritual goal in your life, and it won't give you happiness.

13 | *Adar Beis – The Power of Laughter*

Adar – The Month of Laughter

With the help of Hashem, we are now in the month of *Adar Beis*. Here we will continue what we began to discuss last month in *Adar Aleph*, where we spoke about the power of *simchah* (happiness). Now we will speak about another power found in the month of Adar, “*sechok*” (laughter)⁴⁵, and how we can use this power with our soul.

Holy Laughter and Evil Laughter

The power of laughter, as with every other power in the soul, can be used for either good or evil.

On one hand, we find that Sarah Imeinu named her son “*Yitzchok*” because she had *t’zchok* (laughter) when she first heard that she would have a child; she was laughing that she had a child in her old age. This was a holy kind of laughter. On the other hand, there is also an evil kind of laughter, as one of the prophets lamented about: “*I have been made into laughter all along, and of what is this festivity about?*”

Thus, we find *sechok* (or *tzechok*) *d’kedushah* (holy laughter) by Yitzchok Avinu, and there is also evil *sechok*. What is holy laughter, and what is evil laughter?

First of all, before we explain when laughter is holy and when it is evil, it is hard to understand in the first place of how laughter can be holy. Laughter is usually associated with lightheadedness, which causes us to stop being serious; it is something that cools us off from being focused on our inner, spiritual world. It prevents us from the levelheadedness that is required for having *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven). How can laughter be holy, then? And how can it be that Yitzchok Avinu’s name comes from the term *tzechok*, laughter?

Let us therefore see what the role of laughter is.

An Antidote for Anger and Sadness

There are two positive ways to use laughter.

(1) Laughter can take away a person’s sadness. Sadness can also be solved through the power of *simcha* happiness, which we spoke about last month; but another power which can counter sadness is through *sechok* laughter, which is the other aspect that is contained in the month of Adar. (We will soon explain what the difference between *simchah* and *sechok* is.)

⁴⁵ *Sefer Yetzirah* (5:5) lists “*sechok*” (laughter) as the defining characteristic of the month of Adar.

(2) Another positive use of laughter is that it can counter anger. When a person is angry and we get him to laugh, we can see that his anger immediately cools down and he is calmed. There is something about laughter that dissipates anger.

Using Laughter to Calm Down Our Anger

We will explore here the second positive use of laughter: its power to calm us down when we are angry.

Rav Yitzchok Kaduri zt”l was an elderly *Gadol* in Eretz Yisrael who was *niftar* recently. He lived to be over 100 years. When he was asked how he merited to live so long, he answered that it was because every time he was about to get angry, he laughed instead, which made his anger subside.

When a person is angry, his heart is filled with what the Gemara calls “boiling of the blood” (*resichas damim*). Through laughter, a person cools off the “boiling of the blood” which fuels anger. Let’s explain how, indeed, laughter can calm anger.

The External Use of Laughter: Remembering Something Funny

First of all, we should know that this is not the only technique we can use against anger. There is an external way to use laughter and an internal way to use laughter, in order to deal with anger. The external way to use laughter, which we are about to explain, is one of the solutions brought in the works of our Rabbis.

How can a person use the external method of laughter to calm his anger? The advice is that when a person is about to get angry, he should imagine a situation which gets him to laugh. Remember something funny you once saw, heard, or read about, which made you laugh; and imagine it strongly as you find yourself about to get angry about something. You will find that this calms the soul.

The Internal Use of Laughter: Awakening Your Emunah

The internal way to use laughter to counter anger is to remind ourselves of *emunah*, when we remind ourselves that everything that happens is from Hashem. When we realize that we were wrong in how we originally thought, and we realize that we were incorrect for thinking that we had it all right, we are able to laugh about it.

This is the inner way to use the power of laughter. You thought it was supposed to be a certain way, and now you realize that it’s not how you thought, because Hashem planned otherwise. “*My thoughts are not their thoughts.*” Anytime that a person wanted something and he thought that this was the logical course to take, and it didn’t end up happening as he thought it would - he can remind himself of *emunah* that Hashem is in charge and that Hashem knows better than him, and this can get a person to laugh.

Such laughter will be stemming from *emunah*. One can laugh at the very fact that he had thought that things should be a certain way, and then he realized that Hashem had other thoughts in mind for him. He realizes, “Hashem is running the world, not me!” It can actually bring you to laughter – a holy and deep laughter that stems from a realization of *emunah*.

We will give a parable that illustrates this idea. If a lion and a cat get into a fight [and the cat got away alive], should the cat feel bad that the lion defeated it, and cry about this? Instead of crying, it should laugh, because it is laughable for the cat to want to win a fight with a lion. Why is this laughable? Because when things don’t go our way, this was how it was supposed to happen, so there is no reason to cry; instead, it can awaken us to laugh.

The lesson we can take out from the parable of the cat and lion is: Why should we cry when things don’t go our way? Whatever happened to us was supposed to happen, because Hashem runs the world. Instead of being angry that something didn’t go our way, we should laugh. This laughter can calm down our anger.

However, in order to use laughter in an inner way to calm down our anger, one needs clear *emunah* and to feel *bittul* (self-nullification), to Hashem. If one does not have clear *emunah*, he will only get angrier when he reminds himself that things didn’t go his way. Thus, the clearer one’s *emunah* is and the more one agrees to submit his will to Hashem’s will, the better he will be able to laugh at himself when things don’t go his way. This is a very deep way to use the power of holy laughter.

Holy Mockery: Making Fun of Your Anger

Chazal say that “all *leitzanus* (mockery) is forbidden, except for mocking *avodah zarah* (idol worship).” Besides for the simple meaning of this, which is also true, a person can also mock the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) which is present inside his heart - for the *yetzer hora* is called the “strange god that resides in a person”, it is called “a spark of idol worship” inside the person, and a person can make fun of the *yetzer hora* inside himself, the “internal *avodah zarah*” - when he reminds himself of *emunah*.

It is permissible to “make fun” of one’s *own yetzer hora* – i.e. his anger - when his will doesn’t happen; and one should indeed do so. This is the concept of *leitzanus d’kedushah* (holy mockery), which can remove anger.

Using Both Kinds of Laughter At Once

To summarize thus far, there are two ways to calm ourselves down when we are about to get upset – an external way to use laughter, and an inner way to use laughter. The external way is to remind ourselves of something funny. The second way to is to summon forth our *emunah* and laugh at ourselves that Hashem had different thoughts and plans than we did.

We must emphasize that the external method (remembering something funny) should be used only in tandem with the inner part of the solution (reminding ourselves of *emunah*). Every matter has an external layer and an internal layer to it, and we need both of these aspects; therefore, we need to make use of both the external and internal aspects, when we use the power of laughter. If one just uses the external part and he doesn't use *emunah*, this is like a body without a soul, and it is the way of the gentile nations of the world, not the way of the nation of Yisrael. The balanced approach is to use both of these methods together in our laughter. Through that, we can merit with Hashem's help to weaken anger, by using this *leitzanus d'kedushah* (holy mockery) and *sechok d'kedushah* (holy laughter).

What Is Simcha, and What Is Sechok?

Let us continue to discuss now how we remove sadness, which is through *simchah* (happiness) and *sechok* (laughter/mockery). Firstly, let us understand the difference between *simchah* (happiness) and *sechok* (laughter).

Simchah means that I have a genuine reason to be happy. We can find *simchah* both in the spiritual as well as in the physical areas of life. A Jew can feel happy when he thinks about the fact that he is a Jew, or when he merits helping others and being kind to others, etc. Even physical accomplishments make us happy: we are happy when we buy a house, or when we get married, or when we find something that was missing, etc. Thus, *simchah* is when I am happy with something that's here, and it's tangible.

Sechok (laughter), though, comes from something that *isn't* – not about what is. The word “*sechok*” is come from the word “*shechok*”, which means to “grind” (from the term ‘*shechikas samimanim*’, “grinding of herbs”), and when you grind, you are making something that “is” into something that “isn't”. This is also the root behind *leitzanus* (mockery) – when a person mocks something, he is nullifying its important and to make it into something that “isn't”.

Thus, *simchah* is when I am happy with what is, and *sechok* is when I am happy with something I have nullified, not with something that is here.

With *sechok*, a person is happy with something that is non-existent, because the very concept of *sechok* is that it attaches a person to a non-existent world. *Simchah* connects me to that which exists, while *sechok* brings a person into the non-existent (even when it is holy). *Sechok* (laughter) is the synonymous with *leitzanus* (mockery and joking), which is rooted in the word “*tzeil*”, “shadow” - a lack of light - an absence of something that is, and instead something that isn't.

Therefore, when we laugh or when we hear laughter, we are connecting ourselves to a nonexistent world. We don't think about what we are laughing about, we just laugh. That itself is an attachment to the nonexistent. Now let us learn about how this power is used in the side of evil and how it can also be used in the side of holiness. Whether it is used for holiness or for evil, however, *sechok* is always about becoming attached to that which doesn't exist.

Holy Laughter: Using Humor to Loosen the Body's Hold

We find in the Gemara that some of the Sages would begin their lessons with a *milsa d'bedichusa* – with something humorous. What was the purpose of this? It is because every person has a body and a soul. Our body covers our soul, and therefore there are many physical aspects of our being which prevents us from getting into the inner, spiritual light that is our soul. One of the ways to shed our physical layers is to use the power of *sechok\leitzanus* (laughter/mockery) for holiness.

How does it work? Laughter connects us to the nonexistent, which in turn sheds our physical layers. We can then immediately return to our inner world afterwards, the world of our *neshamah* (Divine soul), which is our inner reality. This is the purpose of holy laughter: it can help us free ourselves, to have “*purkan*” (freedom) from our normal physical restraints, and connect us better to our inner world.

Soon we will see how this is also used for evil and how it is used for holiness; but this is the concept of how laughter works. It loosens up our physicality, and when used for holiness, it enables us to go free from our physical restraints and to enter into our inner world of the soul.

Based upon this, let us understand the following. If someone is already connected to his inner world and he is solidly anchored there, using laughter can help him get past his physicality, and to enter into his inner world more. But if a person is not yet in touch with his inner world, or if he has a very minimal revelation of it, laughter will disconnect him from physicality, and where does he return to afterwards? He returns to the materialism where he is found in. Laughter doesn't help him at all, and it even damages him internally, because he gets used to lightheadedness and it leads him towards sin, and he gets used to connecting to the nonexistent.

This is the depth of the difference between holy laughter and evil laughter. Holy laughter was used by the Sages when they began their lesson, and it is used by a person who is already connected to his inner world, where he can use laughter in order to enter more inward into their souls; after laughter, this kind of person can maintain his connection to his inner world. But those who have no inner world to connect to are not using laughter to enter into their inner world. They are using laughter simply to escape sadness, and when they are done laughing, they return to where they were before – and their laughter did nothing for them.

Take sleeping, for example. There are two general reasons why people sleep. A person who has no connection to his inner world sleeps because he loves to sleep. An inner person sleeps to energize his body so that he will be able to get up the next day refreshed to serve the Creator. There are some people who sleep because they want to feel the lethargy of it, which further attaches them to the heaviness of materialism and physicality. On this it is said, “*Lazy one, until when will you sleep?*” But a person who cares about his spiritual state will go to sleep because he needs to refresh his body, so that he can serve Hashem properly. He enters into sleep so that he can return to his inner world afterwards.

The same is true for laughter and mockery. Most people enjoy mockery because they enjoy the humor for its own sake and they get a kind of vitality from it. This is the evil use of laughter and

mockery. But if a person uses mockery in order to free himself from the body's hold, through using humor, such humor is "holy laughter", because it is calming the body and helping him reveal his inner world of the soul. Thus, if a person is connected to his inner world and he uses humor to loosen up his body, this is "holy laughter".

How indeed can we know if we used laughter for the right reasons or not? He should see what happens afterwards. What was he like before the laughter, and what is he like afterwards? If a person finds that he is more frivolous about his *ruchniyus* after he is finished with his fit of laughter, it is a sign that he didn't laugh for the right reasons. But if a person is able to return to being serious about his *ruchniyus* even after laughing, it is a sign that he has laughed for the right reasons, and then his laughter was holy.

A Dose of Humor in the Home

There is another important point to mention about this. The Chazon Ish wrote that there must be a pleasant atmosphere in the home, and that a little bit of humor is necessary for this. We need to create a calm atmosphere in our homes, because there are many stressful situations that arise in the home with our spouse and our children. With a good dose of humor, these stressful situations become easier to deal with – both for ourselves and for the rest of the family. This is a more basic level which can be worked upon, whether one has reached holy laughter or whether he hasn't.

It takes wisdom to know exactly how much humor is needed in the house – what to joke about, and what not to joke about. This requires some thinking. But the point is that we need to induce some amount of humor into our home, and we need to figure out how much humor we need in the home, as well as where to draw the line.

The Laughter of Purim

Now that we are approaching the day of Purim, we need to reflect: what kind of laughter should we have on Purim, and what kind of laughter should we avoid?

The holy laughter that is contained on Purim represents the second kind of holy laughter we described here, which is when we use laughter to ward off anger when things don't go our way. Through the story of *Megillas Esther*, we keep seeing how everyone's plans were foiled. Achashveirosh wanted to have his way, Vashti wanted to have her way, and Haman had all his grand plans of destroying all of us. But in the end, Hashem's plan prevailed over all of their plotting. This is the deep laughter we can laugh about on Purim.

We should draw forth our holy laughter on Purim from the story of the *Megillah*, and after that, we can access this power of laughter in our own souls. When one reaches this deep place of laughter in his soul after studying the events of Divine Providence in the Purim story, this is the holy laughter of Purim, where we use external characters as a way to enter inward.

But if a person does not draw his laughter on Purim from this source, and he just laughs on Purim like everybody else found in our streets on Purim, who are laughing an evil kind of laughter – such laughter is rooted in the terrible *kelipah*⁴⁶ that is Amalek, because it is nothing but evil *leitzanus*. Amalek's defining trait is *leitzanus*, as the verse describes about Amalek: "זד יהיר, לץ שמו" – "A rebellious, arrogant one; a scoffer is his name."

To our chagrin, most of the laughter on Purim that takes place is not "erasing" Amalek – it is instead the very laughter of Amalek, who laughs an evil, mirthless laughter. Only after revealing deep *emunah* can a person laugh on Purim in a way that erases Amalek. But if a person is 'connected with Haman' [through frivolous laughter that doesn't emanate from *emunah*] on Purim, his laughter on Purim is not being "*moche*" (erasing) Amalek, and he is rather being *mechayeh* (sustaining) Amalek, *chas v'shalom*. Therefore, as Purim draws closer, we should reflect into what kind of laughter we want to have on Purim. Do we want inner laughter or do we want superficial and evil laughter?

The holy kind of laughter which brings a person to have more *emunah* is the laughter that brings a person to the true *simchah*. It is when one laughs at himself, by nullifying his own will to Hashem's will, where he makes *leitzanus* out of his own "inner *avodah zarah*" – and then he comes to experience *simchah* in *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, as it is written, 'שמחו צדיקים בה', "The righteous rejoice in Hashem."

In Conclusion

May we merit from Hashem to avoid the evil kind of laughter, all of us together, and to instead reach the holy kind of laughter, which erases our anger and sadness - and through this, we should be *zoche* to connect ourselves to Hashem Himself, in these times of celebration and *simchah*. *Amen*, and *Amen*.

⁴⁶ *kelipah* - impure spiritual "husk" or "shell" which conceals holiness

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: How can Yitzchok Avinu have both the middos of “gevurah” (restraint) and “sechok” (laughter)? Why isn’t this a contradiction?

A: Excellent question. Chazal say that “Who is strong? The one who overcomes his inclination.” When a person overcomes an aspect of his character, any emotion or thought, he gets rid of the inner “*avodah zarah*” within him – the spark of idol worship which is the antithesis to *emunah* in Hashem, the “other gods” which a person serves within himself: the drives of his *yetzer hora*. Thus, Yitzchok Avinu overcame these “other gods”, and this was his *gevurah*, which revealed the depth of *sechok*.

Q2: Does it start with gevurah (restraint), or with sechok (laughter)?

A: Without *gevurah* a person wouldn’t be able to have *sechok*. But it is *sechok* which enables a person to have *gevurah*. Without *gevurah*, a person cannot persevere. Through *gevurah*, a person is able to have *bittul* (self-nullification), which is also known as *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven). The depth of *gevurah* is for one to be prepared to nullify his will, which brings a person to have *sechok*, and *sechok* brings a person to *simchah*. So *gevurah* brings a person to *sechok*, and when *sechok* is actualized, this is the depth of *gevurah*, and this brings a person to complete *simchah*. The *sechok* is the completion of the *gevurah*.

Q3: Can the Rav explain what the “sechok” will be in the future when Moshiach comes, which is what we say in the possuk, אִזְיִמְלֵא שְׂחֹק פִּינוּ (“Then our mouths will be filled with laughter”)?

A: The *sechok* of the future will be that there will be no more free will, and then we will realize that all the things that ever happened in history the world are all a joke, because we will see that it was Hashem who made it all happen. This will be the complete, ultimate laughter which will emanate from our *emunah*.

Q4: How do we balance seriousness (working hard on ourselves) and laughter (based on emunah that everything is in the hands of Hashem) in our life?

A: That is a very good question. It is complicated. To give a brief answer to this, there is a verse, לְאָדָם מֵעֵרָכִי לֵב וּמָה' מַעֲנָה לִשְׁוֹן (“To a man belongs the arrangements of his heart”); the depth of our power of *bechirah* (free will) comes from the heart’s search for the truth and from the will for holiness. The rest is up to Hashem. Our entire *avodah*, from a deeper understanding, is to perform deeds that purify our heart which brings us to the greatest possible purity of heart we can reach. All that we can do is to choose to act correctly when we access the depth of our heart, and that is our

role in *bechirah*. When a person truly purifies his heart, his actions will surely be the will of Hashem. But the actions we then do are not really from our own free will; they are done by Hashem, for Hashem “does” everything.

If so, being that Hashem does everything, what is the depth of our *bechirah* and our *avodah* on this world? The depth of our *avodah* is to purify our heart as much as we can, and to perform deeds from a purified heart. But our actual *avodah* is always “*מערכי לב*” – it is only that part which is “*to man*”, in our hands to do. That is entire role on this world, and it is only this aspect which we can get reward for. Although it is ultimately Hashem Who does all actions, it is still a result of our free will, therefore, we will get reward for it. Therefore, a person has to try his best, and the rest is up to Hashem.

Q5: How can a person know if his motivations are pure or not?

A: This is a complicated matter, and there are two factors involved with this. Part of our motivations we can clearly identify as holy, and we can clearly identify other motivations that are not holy. All of that is found within our conscious (*muda*, or *hakarah*). However, we also have subconscious motivations (*tat-muda*, or *tat-hakarah*), and even deeper than that layer is the area of above our conscious (*al-hakarah*, or *al-muda*).

The areas of subconscious and above-conscious are hidden from our consciousness and it is subtle *avodah* to get to know them, and there are several methods explained of how to access it. Firstly, though, we need to begin with identifying our conscious motivations. We can know clearly what we want and what we don’t want, what we like and what we don’t like. Using this area of our consciousness, we can feel if we are having a pure motivation for something or not.

Now, in order to tap into our subconscious and above-conscious, this is a very deep and complicated matter to know, and our greatest leaders worked their entire lives at uncovering their subconscious and above-conscious. In general terms, Rav Dessler zt”l explained that we are able to know what our subconscious motives are by paying attention to our quickly passing thoughts. These include thoughts that we like to push away sometimes because we are uncomfortable with such thoughts. Those thoughts make their appearance sometimes and we tend to quickly push them away, and all of this takes place very quickly and we often don’t register it. But if we pay attention to those quickly passing thoughts, we are able to discover the thoughts that are coming from deeper in our soul – the area of our subconscious. These are thoughts which we usually think have nothing to do with us. They can be either be positive and holy thoughts, or they can be more shameful and evil kinds of thoughts. When we discover those thoughts, we gain an entirely different awareness towards what’s going on inside ourselves.

Most people only recognize themselves from the most superficial area of their conscious. There is almost no one who completely recognizes his true self. However, the more a person goes deeper into himself, the better he can recognize himself. There are many other ways as well (besides for the one

we mentioned here), that are explained by our Rabbis of how a person can get deeper into his subconscious.

There is another way brought by our Rabbis of how one can know his deeper motivations: through our dreams at night⁴⁷, which show a person his deepest desires that he had during the day. This is based on the verse, “*On my bed at nights, I sought that which I loved.*” Dreams show us what we thought about during the day, as Chazal state, that a person only dreams about at night that which he fantasized about during the day; and in addition, they show us what our deeper subconscious desires are. Even when we dream at night of total fantasies, those fantasies are like the ‘waste products’ that are produced from our thoughts and desires, so even the fantasies tell us a lot about ourselves. However, getting to know ourselves through dreams requires much specific guidance.

There were other ways as well which our leaders used in order to know their subconscious. Reb Yisrael Salanter writes about several different ways of how to know it. But these are very subtle matters.

Q6: *If someone is down or depressed, is there anything wrong with trying to get him to laugh?*

A: This is a very general kind of question, and generally speaking, the answer is, yes. However, usually when people do this, they end up falling too far into the laughter and then they end up back in depression afterwards.

There is a kind of therapy where people use laughter as a way to heal people from their problems, but the problem with this kind of therapy is that the therapist himself will become too caught up in his own laughter, and in the end he will also need therapy. Only a person who is solidly anchored to his inner world can know how to use laughter to heal others. This is what we find in the Gemara, that there were people who used *badchanus* (Jewish humor and entertainment) to cheer others up, and Eliyahu HaNavi said that these people merit *Olam HaBa*. But with most people, as soon as they use *leitzanus* to cheer up others and make them happy, they fall too much into the laughter, and they have a spiritual downfall from it.

There is a well-known story that once a distraught person came to his Rav to seek advice from him, and his Rav told him that he should go to a *badchan* to get himself cheered up. The person then said to the Rav, “That *badchan* is me.”

⁴⁷ See Rosh Chodesh Avodah_009_Kislev_The Meaning Of Our Dreams

Q7: Can laughter be used to heal people from [emotional] illnesses?

A: I will explain this briefly; this question is really leading to something else. We should understand that there are some people who are very much ‘down in the dumps’, and laughter can help such people. But, everything needs to be used properly and be given its proper boundaries. When people overdo laughter and joking, firstly, they fall too far into their laughter and joking, and in addition, they are getting others to think that laughter and joking should be a basic part of life. They don’t know how to place boundaries on the power of laughter and joking.

If laughter is just being used as a form of therapy to heal someone, that is one thing; but what usually happens? Laughter is made into a part of life itself. When laughter is used within its proper boundaries, it is holy. As soon as it is overdone, though, not only does laughter not help, it is damaging. In a case where someone needs laughter as part of his therapy, if this is the only thing that can help him, then by all means, the person helping him should use laughter to help him, without question.

If someone is in a little bit of a better situation than this and he is only minimally depressed, there are two abilities he can use to be helped: to awaken inner *simchah*, and to also use external *leitzanus* (joking and humor). But when people get used to *leitzanus* as a way to heal themselves from pain, they come to view it as a part of life, and he is brought down from a higher spiritual level into a lower level of living.

Another example is when people rejoice with the *chosson*⁴⁸ and *kallah*⁴⁹ at weddings. Most of the time, by *simchas chosson v’kallah*, people think that gladdening the *chosson* and *kallah* means to make *leitzanus* in front of the *chosson* and *kallah*. This is not using *leitzanus* as a way to heal people; it is simply an example of how people use *leitzanus* as a basic part of their life, where they bring down people from a higher spiritual level that they could have remained on. When people think that *simchah* (happiness) means *sechok* (laughter) and *leitzanus* (joking), it is because they don’t know when and where the power of *sechok* should be used. Once people engage in *leitzanus*, there are “no strings attached” anymore, and then people think that *simchah* means *leitzanus*.

The common denominator between the scenarios of laughter therapy, gladdening a groom and bride, and *simchas Purim*, is that many people erroneously think that “*simchah*” means to act with *leitzanus*.

⁴⁸ groom

⁴⁹ bride



Part Two:
Essence
of the
Month

14 | Nissan - Speech and Prayer

Nissan – ‘Head of the Months’

Of the month of *Nissan*, the Torah writes, “*This month is to you, as the head of the months, the first of the months of the year.*” The month of *Nissan* is called ‘head of the months’; it is the time of the year when the Jewish people left Egypt. This has ramifications both in time as well as in our own personal soul.

We will try to explain the roots of this matter: what exactly the “head” of the months is that *Nissan* personifies.

The Twelve Months of the Year: The Roots of Our Soul

In our soul, there are three [active] elements – wind, fire, and water. (Earth is the element which holds them together, but it is not active). There are also seven powers which branch out from the soul. The Vilna Gaon says that these seven powers are not intrinsic of the soul, and therefore it is possible for a person to part from them at times; whereas there are ‘intrinsic’ abilities of the soul that a person cannot part from [which includes 12 roots].

The seven [branching] abilities of the soul are: 1) *chochmah* (wisdom), 2) *oisher* (wealth), 3) *zera* (offspring), 4) *chaim* (life), 5) *memshalah* (dominion), 6) *shalom* (peace), and 7) *chein* (grace).⁵⁰

Here we will not discuss these seven abilities; instead we will focus on the twelve essential roots of the soul, which are represented by each of the twelve months that span Nissan through Adar.

Furthermore, the Vilna Gaon lists a unique attribute to each month of the year: (1) *Nissan* is the month of *sichah* (speech). (2) *Iyar* is the month of *hirbur* (thinking). (3) *Sivan* is the month of *halichah* (walking). (4) *Tamuz* is the month of *re'iyah* (seeing). (5) *Av* is the month of *shemiah* (hearing). (6) *Elul* is the month of *maaseh* (action). (7) *Tishrei* is the month of *mishush* (touch). (8) *Cheshvan* is the month of *re'iach* (smell). (9) *Teves* is the month of *rogez* (anger). (10) *Kislev* is the month of *sheinah* (sleep). (11) *Shevat* is the month of *l'eitah* (chewing/eating). (12) *Adar* is the month of *sechok* (laughter).

These are the words of our holy Sages, and it gives us the general picture of the 12 months of the year.

⁵⁰ In different terminologies, the seven powers of the soul are known as *chesed* (kindness) *gevurah* (restraint) *tiferes* (harmony) *netzach* (eternity) *hod* (beauty), *yesod* (foundation), and *malchus* (royalty). In a different system, the seven are known as *chesed\ahavah* (kindness\love), *gevurah\yirah\din* (restraint\awe\judgment) *rachamim* (compassion), *nitzuach* (victory), *hodaah* (nullification), *biskashrus* (connection) and *shiflus* (lowliness).

Nissan: The Month of Speech

Nissan, the first month, is the month of *sichah*, speech. The month of Nissan is called “first”, which implies that it is the root of all the other months; if so, speech is the root of all the other abilities contained in the rest of the year.

We can see how speech is a common theme that runs throughout Pesach. On Pesach, we went free from Pharaoh. The word *Pharaoh* is from the words “*peh ra*”, “evil mouth”, implying that we were redeemed from evil speech [and gained the holy kind of speech]. *Pesach* is from the words *peh sach*, “a mouth that speaks.” There is also a *mitzvah* on Pesach to tell over the story of the exodus, which uses our power of speech.

This is a month all about using the power of speech - and it is not a coincidence that it is like this.

Man is called “*medaber*”, a social creature, and this is what sets him apart from other creations. The Jewish people in particular are called “*medaber*”, for the Sages state that the Jewish people are called “*adam*” (man), whereas the other nations of the world are not called “*adam*”; and “*adam*” is synonymous with the term “*medaber*”, being that “*adam*” is called “*medaber*”. The month of Nissan, which contains the festival of Pesach, builds the particular aspect of the Jewish people that is “*medaber*”: the power to speak.

It is written, “*And man became a living spirit*”, and *Targum* translates this to mean that he became a *ruach memalelah*, a “talking spirit.” This is referring in particular to the soul of a Jew, whom the power of speech is mainly manifest with, in contrast to the other nations of the world.

“*Yisrael v'oiraisa*” – the Jewish people are interconnected with the Torah; the two of these uphold the world’s existence. The connection between the Jewish people and the Torah is through the power of speech. The *mitzvah* to learn Torah is specifically “*And you shall speak in it*”.⁵¹ It is a verbal kind of *mitzvah*, unlike all of the *mitzvos* which are fulfilled through an action.

The Jewish people personify the aspect of man that is *medaber*: the power to speak. There were Ten Commandments said by Har Sinai, where the Torah was given, parallel to the Ten Utterances of Creation.

Thus, the root of the entire year for the Jewish people begins with the month of Nissan. Nissan is the month of the conception of the Jewish people. Although the month of *Elul* is also considered the beginning of the year, that is true with regards to our actions; with regards to our speech, it is *Nissan* which is the root of the year, for the Jewish people.

⁵¹ Editor’s Note: We also find that the *mitzvah* to learn Torah is fulfilled mentally, when one “thinks in learning”, and indeed, thought is the essence of Torah, as the Rav explains in many places. (See *Getting To Know Your Thoughts* – Chapter 3). However, there is also a specific command of the Torah to not only learn the Torah and to delve in it, but to speak of it.

Within the month *Nissan*, there is the festival of Pesach, which contains the words “*peh sach*”, “a mouth that talks”. It is the time of the year which builds each of the souls of the Jewish people, each of us on a personal level, with specific regards to our power of *medaber*/speech.

Three Kinds of Speech: ‘Amirah’, ‘Dibbur’, and ‘Sichah’

We find several terms for speech in the Torah. There is *amirah* (to speak softly), *dibbur* (to speak harshly), and *sichah* (conversation).

It is written, “*So shall you say to the house of Jacob [the women] and so shall you speak to the children of Israel [the men].*” *Rashi* explains that the women needed to be addressed in a softer manner, *amirah*, whereas men need to be addressed in a harsher manner, *dibbur*.

We find the difference between *amirah* and *dibbur* with regards to the difference between Creation and the Torah. The world was created through Ten Utterances, “*maamaros*”, which is from the word *amirah*, whereas the Torah was given through Ten Commandments, “*dibros*.”

A third form of speech is called *sichah* (conversation). The word *sichah* is contained in the word Pesach, which is from the word “*peh sach*” (a mouth that talks). The Gemara says that “There is no *sichah* except in prayer⁵², for it is written, “*Tefillah l’oni, ki yaatof, v’lifnei Hashem yishpoch sicho*” - “A prayer for the afflicted man when he swoons, and pours forth his supplications before Hashem.”⁵³

Thus, different kinds of speech are used, depending on the situation. The term “*dibbur*” is used in reference to Torah, whereas the term “*sichah*” is used in reference to *tefillah*, prayer.

Being that Nissan is called the month of *sichah*, it follows that it is a month of *sichah/tefillah* – times of speaking with Hashem, in prayer, in conversation.

What is the depth that lies behind this?

‘Sichah’: When There Is No ‘Daas’

In the Gemara, there is a *halachah* of ‘*masiach l’fi tumo*’, “conversing casually”: if two people are overheard talking with each other, and in midst of their casual conversation they mention certain facts about someone, we can rely on what has been overheard during this conversation and accept it as testimony in *Beis Din*, because there is no reason to assume that they are lying. The concept of *masiach l’fi tumo* is rooted in the term *sichah*.

Elsewhere, the Gemara says that ten measurements of *sichah* (talking) descended onto the world; nine of these measurements were taken by women.” Here we also see a usage of *sichah*.

⁵² *Berachos* 26b

⁵³ *Tehillim* 102:1

What is the depth behind this matter? It is because there are two kinds of speech [as we are about to explain].

The Gemara says that an impoverished person is one who lacks *daas* (knowledge of Torah).⁵⁴ There, the Gemara says, “*Dida bei, kula bei, u’do lo da bei, ma bei?*” - If one knows the Torah, he has everything, through it; and if he lacks Torah, what does he have?” The Gemara brings proof to this from the *possuk* we quoted before: “*A prayer for the afflicted man, when he swoons, and pours forth his supplications before Hashem.*”

So it is a lack of *daas* that epitomizes *oni*/poverty; and that being the case, the impoverished man, the *oni*, pours forth his *sichah* (supplications) in front of Hashem. Thus, we learn from this that ‘*daas*’ is the opposite of ‘*sichah*’ [so when there is no *daas* (knowledge), a person is left with nothing but *sichah* (conversation)].

We have learned thus far that *daas* is used in reference to knowledge of the Torah, whereas *sichah* does not flow from one’s *daas*. In learning Torah, the mitzvah to speak of Torah is *dibbur* (“And you shall speak in it”) which comes from one’s ‘*daas*’; as it is written, “*For the lips of the Kohen, guard daas*”. This is referring to the Torah learning, which stems from his ‘*daas*’. The term ‘*daas*’ is also associated with the concept of *hanhagah*, to lead [for Moshe Rabbeinu it is the epitome of *daas*, and he was granted the power of *hanhagah* over the Jewish people]. Thus, *daas* is the power of Torah, and it is the power which “leads”; and from *daas*, comes our *dibbur*, an orderly kind of speech which is fused by holy intellect of the Torah.

Sichah, however, is the lack of *daas*; as we brought before from the Gemara, an impoverished person is defined as someone has a poor amount of *daas*.

Sichah: Speaking From the Heart, To Hashem

If *sichah* doesn’t stem from one’s *daas*, where does it come from? The answer lies in the term, “*masiach l’fi tumo*” – “casual conversation” – it stems from ‘*tumo*’.⁵⁵ This does not stem from one’s *daas*.

Sichah does not come from *daas*; it comes from the *lev*, the heart. The Sages said that “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart.” This is the essence behind the power of *tefillah*/prayer. In contrast, learning the Torah uses a completely different ability: the ability of *daas* (knowledge). Torah is all about *daas*, whereas *tefillah*/prayer is all about an absence of *daas*.

Sichah, the power of the month of Nissan, is the concept behind its festival, Pesach. Leaving Egypt (Pesach) was the beginning of our path, and we ended it when stood at Har Sinai to receive

⁵⁴ Nedarim 41a

⁵⁵ Editor’s Note: Later in this shiur, it will be explained that “*tumo*” is referring to “*temimus*” – “earnestness.” It will also be explained that *temimus* does not stem from our *daas*, and it is rather ‘above’ our *daas*.

the Torah (Shavuos). So our path began with *sichah*, with Nissan/Pesach – a month in which our power of *tefillah* was revealed – and it ends with *daas*, with the giving of the Torah/the festival of Shavuos, in which we received the Ten Commandments, the *dibbur*/speech that stems from *daas*.

The exodus from Egypt did not take place due to the merit of the Torah, for the Torah was not given yet. It was entirely achieved through prayer! Of course, they had Torah learning as well, for the Sages state there was a *yeshivah* in Goshen. But there was no giving of the Torah yet, so there wasn't enough of a level of Torah for them to be redeemed. It was prayer which redeemed us from Egypt: *"And their supplications arose."*

When Moshe told the people that they would be redeemed soon, they did not listen, from their *"koitzer ruach"* – they were "short of breath." In other words, they were not yet connected to *daas*; they could not yet connect to the words of Moshe, who is *daas*, for they had not reached *daas* yet.⁵⁶ They were at the level of *tefillah l'oni*, "A prayer for the afflicted man." Although they certainly possessed *dibbur*/speech, it wasn't a *dibbur* of the giving of the Torah yet, and instead all they had in them was their ability to cry out to Hashem in prayer: *"And their supplications arose."*

Every year, when the month of Nissan returns, this power of *sichah/tefillah* (earnest prayer and conversation with Hashem) comes back with it. It is the power which brings us redemption; it returns to us every year, enabling us a new chance each year to merit redemption.

Telling Over the Story of the Exodus: The Power of 'Sichah'

In the *Hagaddah*, we say, "Even if we were all wise sages, even if we were all understanding, it is an obligation to tell over the story of the exodus from Egypt." There are many explanations of this matter, but we will present an explanation of this according to the lines of our discussion.

Telling over the story of the exodus – *sippur yetzias mitzraim* – is not a *mitzvah* accomplished through the powers of our intellect. It is very unlike the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, in which we use our powers of the intellect, *chochmah* and *daas*. The *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzias mitzraim* it is reminiscent of the concept we brought earlier from the Gemara: the idea of *"masiach l'fi tumo"* – "casual conversation". It is a kind of simple speech, which flows from pure earnestness in ourselves, and not from the area of the rational intellect.

"Even if we were all wise sages, even if we all understand, it is an obligation to tell over the story of the exodus." This *mitzvah* is not dependent on being a Torah scholar or not! It is not about wisdom. It is about being able to tell over the story just as when you are having a casual conversation, simply, earnestly – *'masiach l'fi tumo'*.

Nissan, the Tribe of Yehudah, and Temimus/Earnestness

⁵⁶ Editor's Note: This is in line with the words of the Arizal, that the Egyptian exile was an "exile of the *daas*". In Pesach #002 (Redeeming Our Soul), the Rav elaborates further upon this concept of "exile of the *daas*."

The month of Nissan is explained in our *sefarim hakedoshim* as being represented by the tribe of Yehudah⁵⁷. Upon the birth of Yehudah, our matriarch Leah expressed her gratitude to Hashem, “*This time I thank Hashem.*” [We will explain the depth behind this matter].

There are two roots of the twelve tribes: Rachel and Leah. Yaakov Avinu possessed two uniquely different qualities: he is called the ‘*ish tam*’, (wholesome man), which refers to his power of *temimus*/earnestness, and he is the one whose “hand grips onto the heel of Esav”, which refers to his power of destroying Esav in the future. The two main wives of Yaakov Avinu, Rachel and Leah, received one of these two powers.

Yosef, the son of Rachel, received Yaakov’s power to destroy Esav in the future. In one of the prophecies about the future, Yosef is compared to a fire that will destroy the “straw” that is Esav. This is not the *temimus* of Yaakov Avinu; it is Yaakov’s other power, his power to destroy Esav, and it is essentially this power which Yosef received from the Torah that he learned from his father Yaakov. It was Yehudah who received the *temimus* from Yaakov Avinu. His mother Leah thanked Hashem upon his birth, which hints to the *sichah/temimus* which she connected to in Yaakov and received from him.

So Yosef received the *chochmah* (wisdom) from Yaakov Avinu, while it is Yehudah who received the *temimus* (earnestness) from Yaakov Avinu. Yosef received the Torah from his father Yaakov Avinu, through *daas*. This enabled him to receive the *chochmah* of Yaakov Avinu. But Yehudah received from Yaakov Avinu the power of *temimus*.

The power of *temimus* is a whole different kind of understanding. It is written, “*Toras Hashem Temimah, meshivas nafesh*” – “the Torah of Hashem is complete, it settles the soul.”

This concept does not mean to imply that Torah/*daas* and prayer/*temimus* are separate from each other, *chas v’shalom*. Rather, it means that there is a part of Torah which is attained through *daas*, and there is a part of Torah which is attained through *temimus*.

The power of the month of Nissan, which is *sichah*, is essentially the power that is identified with “*temimus*” (earnestness). [Thus, *sichah* flows from our *temimus*.]

The Holy and Evil Uses of ‘Temimus’

The power of *temimus* exists both in the side of holiness as well as in the side of evil. So there is a good and holy way to use *temimus*, and there is also a negative connotation of *temimus*.

The negative implication of *temimus* implies a lack of *daas* when it is detrimental to the person. Chazal say, “Women have light *daas*”, therefore, women naturally have more *temimus*, because they are less inclined towards *daas*. But when there is a lack of *daas*, a person will develop an uneducated

⁵⁷ There is an entire series devoted to explaining the avodah of the 12 months of the year based on each of the 12 tribes; see *Tribe of Rosh Chodesh #001 – Nissan -Yehudah*

and foolish kind of earnestness, [“pseudo-*temimus*”], such as becoming naïve and other negative attributes. This is an evil [and undeveloped] kind of *temimus*.

In contrast, the holy kind of *temimus* is to be an “*ish tam*”, as it was said of Yaakov Avinu - which implies *shleimus*, wholesomeness and completion. A *tam* is an unblemished animal, whereas a *baal mum* is a blemished animal; thus the term “*tam*” implies being whole and perfect.

Many people think that *temimus* is a negative term, something that implies foolish naiveté. But *temimus* is an entirely different idea than how most people think of it. *Temimus* is indeed superficial when it stems from a simple lack of *daas*. Such *temimus* flows from incompleteness. It is holy when it stems from the power to be wholesome and perfect, and to be earnest from that place in oneself; such *temimus* is stemming from completion.

It is brought in the words of the Sages that Yaakov Avinu’s ‘wholesome image’ is carved into the Throne of Glory. Elsewhere, the Gemara says that the beauty of Yaakov Avinu was reminiscent of the body of Adam *HaRishon*. The meaning of this is that Yaakov had reached *shleimus*, completion, which was symbolized through his trait of being an *ish tam*; in that way, he resembled Adam *HaRishon*, the epitome of perfection [before the sin].

Prayer - Standing Before the King: A Glimpse at Shleimus/Completion

The Sages said that “There is no *sichah* (conversation) except prayer.”⁵⁸ Prayer is to “stand before the King”. All creations are lacking; no one is complete. There is only One who is complete: *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. When one truly stands before Hashem in prayer, he is coming into contact with a *hakarah* (recognition) of what it means to view *shleimus* (completion). In contrast, one who does not “stand in front of the King” is one who does not have any recognition of *shleimus*.

When one truly senses that he is before Hashem as he prays, he recognizes the reality of Hashem’s existence. His heart is alive and awake to the fact that Hashem resides in his heart. That is the true, inner definition of “standing in front of the King”. He can then feel what *shleimus* is.

Of course, even with this perception, that doesn’t mean that the person has reached *shleimus*. There is no such thing as a perfect person, so it is impossible to actually reach *shleimus*. But at least one can have a recognition of what it is.

When one is engaged in prayer, he is aware that he is lacking, and that the Creator is the complete One who can fill whatever he lacks. In *Shulchan Aruch*, it is brought that one should reflect upon the greatness of the Creator and on the lowliness of man, as a prerequisite to prayer. However, this does not mean for a person to simply compare his lowliness to that of the greatness of the Creator (which is also true, on the simple level). It is deeper than that: it is for one to realize that

⁵⁸ *Berachos 26b*

Hashem is perfect and complete, while I am lacking and incomplete. That is the perception which must accompany one's feelings as he prays.

This is the true depth of “standing in front of the King”: to recognize that I am lacking, while Hashem is complete. This is the depth behind all of prayer.

When a person is praying with this perspective, his prayers to Hashem are not stemming from a mere will to complete what he lacks, for that would not be *'sichah'*. Rather, *'sichah'* is to be like “*the afflicted man when he swoons, and pours forth his supplications in front of Hashem.*” It is to recognize that “I am lacking, for I recognize that I am in front of Hashem – Who is perfect”, because that allows me to recognize what *shleimus* is.

Sichah is to be *'masiach l'fi tumo'*. The more a person is lacking, the more he will pray to Hashem, and that is true; but this is not yet the depth of prayer. The depth of prayer is for one to recognize that he stands before Hashem, and from that perception, one prays. This is the *sichah* that is *tefillah*: “*masiach l'fi tumo*”, to be able to let the words flow casually and freely, in recognition of the perfect *temimus* of Hashem.

‘Temimus’ Stems From ‘Shleimus’

So we must not have the mistaken notion that *temimus* is to simply lack *daas*. It is rather to recognize what *shleimus* is; out of a recognition that I stand before Hashem, aware that He is complete and perfect, which means that I am not complete.

When *temimus* does not come from this perspective, such *temimus* is the kind of *temimus* that came about after the sin of Adam, a *temimus* which connotes deficiency, and such *temimus* is not holy. Only the *temimus* that stems from “*In front of Hashem, he pours out his supplications*”, is the *temimus* which comes from the depths of [recognizing] *shleimus*.

The Incomplete, Facing the Complete

When we were enslaved in Egypt and we cried out to Hashem to be saved, such prayer stemmed from how we felt lacking in our situation. Therefore, it did not represent the depth of our salvation from Egypt. The redemption from Egypt is rather epitomized by the possuk, “*I, Hashem, am going out, amidst Egypt.*” When Hashem revealed Himself at the end of the plagues, this was the apex of the exodus; it was what made that night into Pesach. From this episode came our redemption.

Egypt is *Mitzraim*, from the word *meitzar*, “confinement”, which implies a situation in which we are missing and lacking. When Hashem revealed Himself in Egypt at the end of the plagues, this was the revelation of perfection amidst all that was lacking. It was the revelation of the Endless amidst the limited and confined. It was the stark contrast of the absolutely complete against the backdrop of the utterly incomplete.

It is not by coincidence that Hashem chose to reveal Himself in that manner. It was to show us that as we are aware of our own incompleteness, we need to view what Completion is. On one side of

the coin, we must be aware of our deficiencies, and on the other side of the coin, we must be aware of the great Perfection that exists: the perfection of the Creator. This is the depth behind prayer.

It is not Torah which reveals this perspective; it is only prayer where this concept is revealed. Torah is all about perfection, for it is perfect and complete, whereas prayer is all about the incompleteness of man. In the exodus of Egypt, we were utterly incomplete and lacking, and we came into contact with perfection: the revelation of Hashem, amidst all the incompleteness we were in. It was not about just revealing the state of perfection or about showing us how incomplete we are. None of these alone is the lesson. Rather, the purpose of it was to show us how the incomplete must recognize that which is Complete.

In the laws of telling over the story of the exodus, the *Rambam* writes that we must “begin with disparage, and end with praise.” [We begin the *Hagaddah* by saying how dismal the Jewish people had become, and we end with praise, describing the greatness which we became.] This is the idea of the concept we are describing, in which perfection is revealed amidst incompleteness.

This idea is what lies behind prayer: for one to recognize that because Hashem is perfect, I am lacking, as I stand before Him. It is that perception which truly enables one to pray and pour out his heart to Hashem. It is not simply for one to feel that he is lacking; although it is certainly true when one prays, he needs to feel that he is lacking. It is to recognize that because *Hashem is perfect*, I am not, therefore, I pray. [Thus, the main emphasis of a person during prayer should therefore be, on the fact that “Hashem is perfect”, as opposed to dwelling on one’s own imperfections].

For this reason, the entire *Shemoneh Esrei* is composed as a public prayer, and not in the private and individual language. It is because prayer is not about turning to Hashem from my own personal imperfections; rather, it is that because we turn to Hashem, from there, we recognize how lacking we are.

The Difference between “Daas” and “Temimus”

During this time of the year – the month of Nissan, and on Pesach specifically, we can reach the depth of the power of *sichah*.

Sichah is also from the word ‘*shach*’, to bend, to be lowered. The Gemara learns out that *shechitah* (ritual slaughter) on animals is the place of the body which is “*shach*”, a part of the body which bends over, which is the neck⁵⁹. We also find this term with the word ‘*shiach*’, a burrow in the ground, which is a low place. *Sichah* is thus about lowering oneself and being subservient. The Sages praise one who lowers himself “like an animal” and is able to engender high qualities of character because of this. This is referring to the trait of *temimus*. It does not come from a lack of *daas*; to the contrary, it comes from *shleimus*, from perfected character.

⁵⁹ *Chullin 27a*

Shleimus – self-perfection – is not able to be achieved through *daas*. Our *daas* is limited. Even Moshe Rabbeinu, who achieved the highest level of *daas* possible, was only able to comprehend as far as his *daas* could understand. It was his *daas*; it was not the *daas* of the Creator. *Daas* can understand only so much, but it cannot grasp the plane of *shleimus*. Only through *tefillah*/prayer, which stems from *temimus*, can a person reach *shleimus*. This is because *temimus* is above *daas*. It can be said that at the point where *daas* ends, that is where *temimus* begins.⁶⁰ Therefore, one's *temimus* can grasp perceptions that his *daas* cannot grasp. The Egyptian exile is called the “exile to our *daas*.”⁶¹ It follows, then, that the redemption from Egypt meant that our *daas* had been redeemed. Yet, besides for this aspect, there was even deeper revelation: the revelation of our power of *sichah/temimus* - which is higher than *daas*.

Telling Over the Story of the Exodus, All Night Long: The Power of “Sichah/Temimus”

The *mitzvah* to tell over the story of the exodus, ideally, is meant to span the entire night of the *seder*, for as long as one is capable of doing so. This is the spiritual light that is *temimus*: the state of perfection that was revealed from Hashem's Presence appearing in Egypt, the peak of our exodus. The *mitzvah* to tell over the story of the exodus is not something you read, hear, or merely “learn”. It comes from a deep recognition in our souls of “*I, Hashem, will go out, in the midst of Egypt.*” The deeper the recognition of this, the deeper the *mitzvah* of telling over the story of the exodus will become.

From Pesach to Shavuot: From “Temimus” To “Daas”

These days of the month of *Nissan* are days in which we have the special opportunity to acquire the power of *sichah*. Through our power of *daas*, we cannot reach anything perfectly, because *daas* cannot reach *shleimus*, as we explained. *Shleimus* can only be reached when a person has a recognition of it, which comes from his *temimus*.

When Shavuot comes, it is the time to accept the Torah, and the Torah is a “*Toras Hashem Temimah*”, a Torah that requires *temimus*. It is written, “*Wisdom, from where is it found?*” The *posuk* is saying that the source of all *chochmah*/wisdom is *ayin*, “nothingness”, which is really referring to the *temimus* that must precede all of the *chochmah* of the Torah. It is *temimus* which is the deep source of all *chochmah*. If one has reached *temimus* on Pesach, he has the prerequisite to be able to receive the Torah on Shavuot.

⁶⁰ Editor's Note: This statement is reminiscent of a statement of Rav Dessler, “In the place where *seichel* (intellect) ends, that is where *emunah* (faith) begins.”

⁶¹ A statement of the Arizal. For further elaboration of this concept, see Pesach #002 – Redeeming Our Soul

The next month, *Iyar*, contains the power called '*hirhur*', deep and reflective thought. If *hirhur* is not preceded with this *sichah*, though, then *hirhur* becomes superficial: one will only be thinking about various personal issues that are not of real importance.

The true way to prepare to receive the Torah is only through *temimus*: to recognize the *shleimus* of Hashem. "*Remember the day in which you stood before the mount of Sinai*" – the deeper meaning of this is that Torah must first be nursed from an inner source: from "standing at Har Sinai." In other words, in order to accept the Torah and learn its wisdom, one must first have some recognition of perfection: to view the perfection of the Creator.

"*Follow after Me, into the desert.*" This is referring to the *temimus* which a Jew must have towards Hashem: to realize that Hashem is perfect and complete, so I will follow Him, wherever He takes me and wherever I must go.

The essence of Pesach, besides for its many other aspects and *halachos* which are also important, is this concept: to be '*masiach l'fi tumo*', to let our conversations with Hashem flow, freely and naturally, from our point of *temimus*.

15 | Iyar – Thought and Visualization

Preface

With the help of Hashem, we have concluded the festival of Pesach, and now we are in the month of *Iyar*.

Our Sages state that the twelve months of the year are parallel to twelve abilities (or senses) of the soul. Each month contains a unique ability that reflects the nature of the month, which is manifest in the soul of man.

There is a dispute about the abilities which each month reflects, but the main view of our Sages is as follows: (1) *Nissan* is parallel to the ability of “*sichah*” (speech), (2) *Iyar* is parallel to the ability of “*hirhur*” (thought), etc.⁶²

The Concept of ‘Hirhur’: Mental Speech/Thoughts of the Heart

The month of *Iyar* contains the ability called *hirhur*, thought. The rule is that everything has a holy use and an evil use, so there is a way that *hirhur* is used for holiness, and there is a way how *hirhur* is used for evil.

The holy kind of *hirhur* is ‘*hirhur b’divrei Torah*’, ‘thinking into the words of Torah’ - when a person’s thoughts are immersed in Torah. The evil kind of *hirhur* is “*Do not follow after your eyes and after your heart*”; when the heart has thoughts of heresy or sin.

The Gemara⁶³ says that one of the things that a person cannot avoid each day is *hirhur aveirah* (thoughts of sin).

Before we try to understand what good *hirhur* is and what evil *hirhur* is, let us first understand the very concept of *hirhur*.

The *Vilna Gaon* lists five layers of the soul: *ratzon* (will), *machshavah* [thoughts of the brain], *hirhur* [thoughts of the heart], *kol* (voice), and *dibbur* (speech). Everything begins from the point of *ratzon* (the will): the *ratzon* of a person is found in the essence of the soul, for *ratzon* is identified

62 [(3)*Sivan* is the month of *halichah*\walking, (4) *Tamuz* is the month of *reiyah*\sight, (5) *Av* is the month of *shemiah*\hearing, (6)*Elul* is the month of *maaseh*\action, (7) *Tishrei* is the month of *mishush*\touch, (8)*Cheshvan* is the month of *reiach*\smell, (9)*Kislev* is the month of *sheinah*\sleep, (10) *Teves* is the month of *rogez*\anger, (11) *Shevat* is the month of *le’itah*\eating, and (12) *Adar* is the month of *sechok*\laughter.]

63 *Bava Basra* 164a

with the very *nefesh* (soul) of a person. *Machshavah* is found in the mind, and *hirhur* is found in the heart. [*Kol* is in the throat, and *dibbur* is in the lips].

What exactly is *hirhur*? The Vilna Gaon describes it as '*dibbur b'machshavah*', "mental speech." What is the difference between a *hirhur* and a *dibbur*? *Hirhur* is what a person 'says' in his mind and heart. We find that "*Haman spoke in his heart*." It is a kind of speech which takes place in the heart. *Dibbur* is when the speech exits the mouth.

There is a *halachah* that if one is not allowed to say *Kerias Shema*, he may mentally imagine the words, '*meharher b'libo*', and he fulfills the mitzvah of *Kerias Shema* in this way⁶⁴. The person 'says' the *Kerias Shema* in his heart. So *hirhur* is essentially a kind of mental speech: when a person speaks inside himself.

When the prophetess Channah (mother of Shmuel *HaNavi*) prayed, the *possuk* says that she "spoke on her heart". She was speaking with her heart - meaning, she spoke with herself. Eli HaKohen saw her talking to herself and therefore assumed she was drunk. It appears strange when you see a person talking to himself; but in essence, every person talks with himself.

There is a *mitzvah* of "*And you shall speak in it*" - to speak words of Torah - and the Sages expound, "Speak words of Torah, and not idle words." The Gemara brings a *halachah* that it is forbidden for a Torah scholar to walk in an unclean place, because a Torah scholar is always thinking of Torah, and it is forbidden to think Torah in unclean places⁶⁵. The *Acharonim*⁶⁶ dispute if a person fulfills the *mitzvah* of speaking words of Torah through thinking. The more simple view is that thinking of words of Torah is considered like speaking words of Torah; "*hirhur* is like *dibbur* (speech)".

But there are two kinds of speech: speech of the mouth, and speech of the heart. Whether one says the words or whether one thinks of the words, in either case, he first 'speaks' with himself, in his mind. So *hirhur* is when speaks within himself. One thinks *to* himself - and *with* himself.

What is the reason that we were given such a power as *hirhur*? The abilities of regular thought and speech make sense: we need to think, and we need to tell others what we are saying in order to have conversations; we cannot survive being a mute our whole life. But in between the faculties of thought and speech is the process called *hirhur*: speaking with oneself. Of what use is it? Why must our thoughts pass through the stage of *hirhur*, before they are released by our mouth in the form of speech?

Another question we can ask is that we see that Eli HaKohen thought Channah was insane for talking to herself. So why is it a good thing to speak to oneself?

⁶⁴ *Berachos 20a*

⁶⁵ *Tractate Berachos, Chapter II*

⁶⁶ "*Later Sages*", the great Torah scholars spanning from the 15th-19th centuries

Our first task with this is to identify in the first place that we have such an ability called *hirhur*. When we identify it in ourselves, it will then be much easier to realize its purpose. Let us think about the great wealth that is contained in the power of *hirhur*.

Hirhur: The Ability to Lead Oneself

What is the purpose of speaking to others? When two people wish to bond, they speak with each other. However, Chazal say there is a deeper reason: “*Daber echad l’dor*” – there is ‘one leader per generation’, who speaks to them. One leads himself - as well as others - through speech. Sheep are guided through the command of their shepherd, just as humans are guided by speech.

There are two “kings” that reside within man: the brain, and the heart. The heart is the king that presides over all the parts of the body. If someone is not in the category of *tzaddik*, he is ruled by the left chamber of the heart [which contains the evil inclination].⁶⁷ With *tzaddikim*, “their hearts are in their control”, whereas with the wicked, their hearts rule them.

Speech is both in mouth as well as an ability of our heart. What is speech of the heart? It is the ability in oneself to rule the rest of himself, just as a king rules his country. *Hirhur* is found in the heart, as the Vilna *Gaon* writes, and it is a kind of speech. So it is a kind of speech in which one speaks with himself, and through this internal kind of talking, he leads himself. When one wants to lead others, he speaks to them and commands them. So too, when one wants to lead himself, he speaks within himself, so that he can lead himself.

There is a possuk, “*I believed, for I spoke.*” If one wants to acquire *emunah* (faith in Hashem), he must speak words of *emunah*. This is a revelation of the concept of *dibbur* (speech): one leads himself through speaking with himself. Without speaking with oneself, one is not able to lead himself.

“Hirhur”: The Power to Internalize Our Knowledge

It is written, “*And you shall know today, and you shall let the matter settle on your heart.*” We might know what the truth is, but our heart contains certain desires which are preventing us from subordinating ourselves to what that knowledge will demand.

We all are familiar with this [inner contradiction in ourselves]. A person can *know* what the truth is very well, but he wants the opposite of the truth. He *knows* he must learn Torah, but he *wants* to chat or waste his time. One might *know* very well that he needs to disconnect from indulging in worldly pleasures, but his *heart* still desires This World very much. The distance between what we know and what we want is like the distance between the sky and the earth.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Sefer Tanya*

⁶⁸ *A statement of the Alter of Kelm*

So the knowledge that our mind is aware of is not strong enough to subordinate our heart. Our mind, our *daas*, is aware of the 'X', for example, while our heart has a desire for the opposite of what 'X' will entail....

This is true with all people, but the difference between knowledge and internalization is not the same distance with each person. In some people, the contradiction is greater, and in others, the facts are closer to the heart. But every person contains in himself a distance between his mind and heart, creating a contradiction between what he *knows* with what he *wants*. In all people, the mind is more mature than the heart, and therefore, the heart isn't capable of understanding what our mind knows.

How, indeed, does a person 'download' the information of his brain into his heart? How do we internalize in our hearts, the knowledge that we know of in our brains? What is the language that speaks to our heart?

It is called *hirhur*. It is the ability to speak to ourselves and within ourselves, using our heart.

'Thinking in Learning': Through Our Brain, Or Through Our Heart?

The *mitzvah* of learning Torah is "*And you shall speak in it*" – it is essentially a *mitzvah* for our heart to think the words of the Torah and reflect into them. Learning Torah, which requires us to speak in learning, is not simply a *mitzvah* to 'talk in our learning' using our physical mouth. It is a *mitzvah* that involves the use of our heart to *think* about the words of the Torah.

Thus, if one is thinking about words of Torah using his brain alone, this is not the ideal kind of learning Torah! In order to speak of the Torah, one needs to speak of it using his mouth or his heart, but what kind of speech must it be? If the brain is thinking about Torah but its knowledge is not yet in the heart's reach, it is not the ideal form of the *mitzvah* of learning Torah.

A wise person, a *chacham*, is called *chacham lev*, one who has 'wisdom of the heart'. It is when one's *chochmah*/wisdom that he learns is on the level of *hirhur*; when it has become speech of the heart.

When wisdom remains in his brain and it doesn't reach his heart, Chazal refer to this as one whose "wisdom is greater than his actions". He knows a lot, but it doesn't affect him enough. Wisdom is only called wisdom when it is in his heart.

Shlomo HaMelech is the epitome of a *chacham*, for he was the wisest person who ever lived, and he himself was the one who said, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*" True wisdom is when the heart is aware of the wisdom, and it is beyond the intellectual understanding contained in the brain. The heart's wisdom is not called *machshavah* [brain-thought]; it is rather called *hirhur* [heart-thought] – the "speech of the heart".

A Torah scholar is defined as one who "sits and thinks ('*meharher*', from the word '*hirhur*') of it constantly"; the way of a Torah scholar is to always use his ability of *hirhur*, in thinking about Torah. If one finds that he cannot think about Torah all the time, it must be because he only knows

how to ‘think’ in Torah using his brain, and the wisdom of Torah he learns is not yet in his heart. But when has reached his heart, he is able to always speak words of Torah, and he is able to always think of Torah; this is the level of *hirhur b’divrei Torah* that is reflected in the ideal Torah scholar.

The difficulty which many people have is that they are either involved in the “world of action” or in the “world of thought”, whereas the “world of speech” is often misunderstood. Speech is mainly used by people either towards others, or in praying and speaking to Hashem; but when it comes to the idea of speaking with *oneself*, most people cannot identify with this. With regards to oneself, we can relate very well to either actions or thoughts that we do with ourselves, but who can relate to speaking to himself? A person almost never speaks with himself.

But this is a problem. The structure of our soul is generally composed of action and thought, and in between these two faculties, is our speech: the ability of *hirhur*, to speak to ourselves. Thoughts are the highest layer of the soul, with our actions being the lowest layer of our soul. Our ability to speak to ourselves is the middle layer. It is the design of Creation.

How did Hashem create us? Through His word. We were formed through His speech. The world was created with His Ten Expressions. First Hashem had the thought of creating man, then He formed Creation and made man – but in between the stage of “thought” and “action”, came His speech: the Ten Expressions. So speech represents the idea of Creation itself that we live in. In addition, the Torah was given through speech: the Ten Commandments.

On a deeper level, the ability to speak to ourselves is an ability that is rooted in Hashem’s act of speaking with Himself, as it were, when He commanded each creation to come into being. When Hashem said, “Let there be light”, of what use did He say this for? He could have created it without saying it. But it is to show us that even Hashem speaks with Himself (so to ‘speak’).

Thus, when we speak to others, it really begins in our ability to speak to ourselves. Those are the words of the Vilna Gaon, that *hirhur* precedes *dibbur*. But this is true with all kinds of speech that exist: speaking to others, speaking to the Creator, and speaking to ourselves.

Identifying “Hirhur” In Your Thinking Process

Although we are always speaking to ourselves before we talk, we are not consciously aware of it, because it is a very quick internal process. In order to become aware of our *hirhur*, we need to consciously become aware of the five stages of speech, as the Vilna Gaon lists them, in this order: our *ratzon* (will), our *machshavah* (thoughts), *hirhur* (speaking to ourselves), *dibbur* (speech), and *kol* (audible voice). The crucial stage we need to become aware of is *hirhur*, because it is often overlooked.

When a person is unaware of the stage of *hirhur* – the fact that he talks to himself in his mind/heart – his speech will be external. It will not be “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart.” When Chazal tell us that our speech comes from our heart, this is not simply to dismiss the notion that perhaps speech comes from other parts of the body. Obviously, speech stems from our

heart. So why are Chazal telling us that words must come from the heart? It is to hint to us that we need to think before we talk, of the words that we are about to say.

The *Ramban*⁶⁹ writes that one should think about the words he is about to say, before he utters them with his mouth. This is more than just to think *what* you will say and formulate the words in your mind. It is to think *about* what you will say, before you say them.

When one skips over the *hirhur* stage [subconsciously], he lacks the proper structure of the soul, and has omitted one of the essential stages of the mental and verbal process. In fact, when one skips over *hirhur* [by not consciously being aware of it], he has omitted the basic and root faculty of the entire thinking process.

This is not a mere intellectual discussion. It is the entire secret of all inner work we must do with our soul! It is based on the words of the *Vilna Gaon* quoted earlier.

‘Hirhur’ – The Expression of the Heart’s Thoughts

Man is called *medaber*, a social creature. The Sages state that the animals, trees, and birds can also converse with each other. If so, why is speech considered to be the defining nature of man? There are many explanations given, but we will say the answer that pertains to our discussion. It is because “*medaber*”, which is our trait of *dibbur*, is not simply to say words using our mouth. It is preceded with the stage of first speaking with our heart. This is unique only to humans.

By contrast, animals and trees do not have the heart as a factor in their speech. There is only speech, with no heart involved. When speech only comes from the mouth and it does not first pass through the heart, it is not called *dibbur*. Thus, animals and trees are not called *medaber*, even though they converse. The title of ‘*medaber*’ refers to the inner essence of speech: the speech that takes place in the heart, before the words leave one’s mouth. The superficial layer of speech is the words that exit the mouth, but the essence of speech is the speech that takes place in the heart, before the words exit. This is the unique ability of man, who is called *medaber*, one who can speak: only man has the ability to speak with himself, to speak in his heart, before he speaks with his mouth.

Furthermore, man is also called *maveh*, which is identified with prayer⁷⁰. Prayer is called the ‘service of the heart’⁷¹. Prayer is not simply when the heart concentrates, nor is it limited to being an expression of the heart’s desire; although this is all true, it is not the essence of prayer. Prayer is the speech that flows from the heart. It expresses the *hirhur*, the thinking process, of the heart.

⁶⁹ *Iggeres HaRamban*

⁷⁰ *Bava Kamma 3b*

⁷¹ *Berachos 31a*

Thought vs. Visualization

Let us think into the depth of the concept of *hirhur*, the ability of man to think before he talks.

The *Gemara* states that a person dreams at night about what he thought about during the day. Because of this fact, elsewhere the Sages warn that a person should not entertain lewd thoughts during the day, so that he won't become contaminated at night⁷². This is because our heart imagines what we thought about during the day. A person dreams about things that he has [mentally] visualized during the day, not about things he has merely 'thought' about. The heart imagines various fantasies.

At night, when imagination is more dominant, a person will fantasize about what he imagined about during the day. And if a person has a very imaginative nature, he will fantasize like this even during the daytime, when he is perfectly awake. At nighttime, when people have dreams, there is a kind of 'videotape' that a person visualizes as he's dreaming, which is experienced as a visualization, not a mere abstract thought. That is essentially the dreaming process: it is the imaginative faculty presenting various visions to the mind. When we dream at night, these are not simply thoughts – they are visions which we can palpably experience.

Being that a person dreams at night about what his heart imagined about during the day, Chazal warn that a person should not look at improper sights during the day. Our heart is full of visions, whereas our brain is filled with thoughts; there is very big difference. The heart's ability to imagine, *tziyur*, can have a mental picture of things; whereas our brain can only conceptualize a thought, and it cannot conjure any kind of mental image. These are two distinct mental abilities: *choishev* (or *machshavah*), and *tziyur* (visualization)⁷³. To give a simple example of the difference, if you think about an apple, you can either 'think' about what it is, or you can envision what it looks like. They are two different kinds of thoughts. [The first kind of thought is called *machshavah*, and the second kind of thought is called *tziyur*.] The Torah says that those involved in building the *Mishkan* were called "*chacham lev*", those who possessed 'wisdom of heart'. It refers to those who were able to envision – the ability of *tziyur*.

When There Is a Disconnection between the Mind and Heart in Learning Torah

When one is 'thinking' in learning, using only in his brain, and not his heart - this will mean that his mind can be immersed in Torah, but his heart is entrenched in the desires of This World at very same time! These words are deep and penetrating to anyone who understands them.

⁷² Kesubos 44a

⁷³ For more on the difference between thought and imagination, refer to *Getting To Know Your Thoughts_05_Intellect and Picture*, and the Hebrew audio file of (מדמה) 036_את כוחותיך דע את דע and (מחשבה) 039_את כוחותיך

It is possible that a person is regularly involved in learning Torah, *davening*, and doing all the right actions he needs to do, but it's all in his brain, and his heart is disconnected from all of this. His *heart* might be filled with all kinds of fantasies about This World even as his *brain* is immersed in Torah and in doing *mitzvos*!

And even worse, his heart might very well be filled with sinful thoughts and images that are outright forbidden by the Torah to think about, even though his *brain* is immersed in Torah.

The brain of a person might be thinking about Torah, but at the very same time, his heart might be filled with fantasies of This World; some of these fantasies are simply vain, while other fantasies are worse than just fantasies: they are sinful and evil.

If one wishes to truly purify his heart, his only weapon against this problem is to develop an imagination for holiness [as we will soon explain].

The Imagination Process

As we explained, the brain thinks about thoughts in the form of abstract conceptualization, whereas the heart imagines, in the form of mental pictures.

The Torah commands us not to stray after our hearts and eyes. The Sages learn from this that the heart desires what the eyes see, and this leads a person to the act of sin. Let us think into these words of the Sages. The heart has desires for certain things which are improper. How does it desire? It imagines something.

It uses the ability of *tziyur*, visualization, and not the ability of *machshavah* that's in the brain. The heart can only imagine what the eyes have seen, however. It can only receive images from the lens of the eye. It is not capable of thinking in the abstract.

Thus, even if a person is very accustomed to 'thinking in learning', this might only be involving his brain's thoughts; his heart remains empty from any content of visions that are holy. As we explained earlier, there is a huge distance between the brain and the heart. The brain is thinking about Torah, and at the same time, the heart is immersed in a fantasy; sometimes the heart is completely visualizing a sinful image even as the brain is thinking in learning.

What is the remedy to this problem?

Method 1: Holy Visualizations

One method, brought in the works of our *sefarim hakedoshim*, is for a person to imagine holy pictures. Examples of this include looking at pictures of *tzaddikim*, imagining what the *Beis HaMikdash* looked like, or to imagine the song of the angels on High.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Mentioned in *Sefer Chovas HaTalmidim* of Rav Kolonomis Kalman zt"l, the "Aish Kodesh"

Method 2: Picturing the Letters of the Gemara

However, there is an alternative method brought, which is even clearer and simpler to implement, as a means of purifying the heart. It is as follows.

All of the letters of our *Aleph Beis* are essentially pictures. Each letter of the *Aleph Beis* is a *tziyur*, a visualization, of the letter that you see or read. The Sages state, “*Osiyos Machkimos*” “Seeing the letters [of the *Aleph Beis*], brings wisdom.” To view the letters of the *Aleph Beis* is to view a holy kind of vision. In every letter of the *Aleph Beis* that you read, there are two aspects contained in it: the thought or idea that it tells you, as well as the holy image that it appears in. The letter of the *Aleph Beis* that you see is its *tziyur*, and the information it imparts to you is its *chochmah*/wisdom.

When a person does not see letters of the *Aleph Beis* in front of him, all he views is the *chochmah* that is contained in the letters and words he is reading. He can comprehend the meaning of the words, and he will understand the message that the letters and words are forming, but he is missing a vision of holiness that he could have seen in it.

That is the “*hirhur*” stage of learning Torah, and if it is skipped over, a person is lacking a holy visualization of the words of Torah he has learned. He might have gone through the other stages of *ratzon*, *machshavah*, *dibbur* and *kol* in his Torah learning, making sure to ‘think in learning’ and ‘talk in learning’, but he is missing the stage of *hirhur*. An important element of the process has been missed. His thoughts and his speech have touched holiness, but his actual heart is still far from the words of Torah he has learned.

It is written, “*The inclination of man is evil from his youth.*” The evil inclination from youth refers to the evil desires that are present in the heart. A person’s brain might think of Torah and the person’s mouth can speak Torah (and other words of holiness, such as prayer), but if one’s heart is not included in the process of one’s Torah learning [when *hirhur*/visualization is skipped], then his heart remains at its initial and immature state of fantasizing the desires for This World,

But if one makes sure to build his soul in the order of the stages presented by the *Vilna Gaon* (*ratzon*, *machshavah*, *hirhur*, *dibbur*, and *kol*) – in particular, when he makes sure to think of what he will say, before he says the words – this is “*hirhur*”.

‘Hirhur’: Using Our Heart’s Visualization, As We Learn Torah

How, indeed, does one use the power of *hirhur* [in his Torah learning]? He can use his heart to imagine the holy letters of the *Aleph Beis* of the words he is reading. This internal process is what cleanses and purifies the heart from within.

This is really the secret behind learning Torah. Our entire *avodah* is “*And purify our hearts, to serve You in truth*” – and how, indeed, is the heart purified? We know that the mitzvah to learn Torah is

the greatest mitzvah, equal to all the other *mitzvos*; and Chazal state that “Hashem wants the heart.” How do we reconcile these two facts? Does learning Torah have anything to do with our heart? It would seem that they are two completely separate issues, and that they have no relation to each other. After all, we can all see that there are many people who spend a lot of time learning Torah, but it doesn’t purify their heart.

But the truth is that the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, and the fact that Hashem wants our heart, are interdependent on each other. When a person learns Torah in the true manner, (which is to go in the order of the *Vilna Gaon* – (first *ratzon*/will, then *machshavah*/brain-thought, then *hirhur*/heart-thought/visualization, then *kol*/sound, and then *dibbur*/speech), then it can be said of his Torah learning that “It [the Torah] is life, to those who verbalize it with their mouths.” We just have to make sure that we do not skip over the crucial stage of *hirhur* as we learn Torah. When we are in touch with ‘*hirhur*’ in Torah as we learn the words of Torah,

Hirhur in our Torah learning means that the words of Torah we are learning are passing through the visual lens of the heart, [which pictures the holy letters of the *Aleph Beis* contained in the words what we are learning]. This in turn weakens the evil and forbidden images that have become stamped onto our psyche. As we get used to this holy visualization technique more and more, it slowly weakens and conquers the improper images which our heart contained.⁷⁵ It is then that it can be applied the concept of “*Osiyos Machkimos*” – “Seeing the letters [of the *Aleph Beis*], brings wisdom”.

In this way, we arm ourselves with the power of *tziyur d’kedushah*, holy visualization, which can counter the images of *tziyur d’kelipah* (fantasies that are improper or evil).

If one is not aware of the stage of *hirhur* in his Torah learning – in other words, if he is not using his heart to visualize the letters of the words he is learning – what will happen? He only remains with thoughts of Torah, which are conceptual and abstract, and he does not palpably envision them. His brain has learned Torah – but his heart did not.

Concentration in Prayer

The same problem exists with *davening* as well. A person might be thinking of the words he is saying as he’s *davening*, and he’s concentrating on the meaning of the words, but his heart is fantasizing about all kinds of things.

⁷⁵ Editor’s Note: As explained before, however, the heart only ‘contains’ what the eyes have laid sight upon; it does not conjure any images on its own. According to the approach here, we have a way of uprooting the evil images that our eyes have seen and, in turn, what our heart has desired.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that the main “*kavanah*” (concentration) we need to have when we daven is to think of the meaning of the words. This does not simply mean to mentally think of the meaning of the words. Thinking of what we are saying is *machshavah* (thought), but it is not yet the heart. We can call it ‘*iyunah shel tefillah*’, ‘analyzing the prayers’, which is certainly an accomplishment, but it is not yet called having “*kavanah*” when we *daven*.

Real “*kavanah*” in davening, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes, is to vividly picture the words of what we are saying, in our heart. When the words of prayer then exit the mouth, it is called prayer, which is called the “service of the heart.”⁷⁶

Tziyur D’Kedushah: Infusing the Heart with Holy Images

When a person learns Torah in this way, making sure to use his heart’s power to visualize the letters, his heart becomes filled with the holiness contained in the 22 letters of the *Aleph Beis*. These 22 letters were used by Hashem to create the heavens and the earth. It brings wisdom into the heart, transforming it into “*The heart of the wise person, is to his right.*”

What does it mean that the “*heart of the wise person, is to his right?*” It means that his heart is filled with visualizations that are holy. By contrast, the “*heart of a fool is to his left*” – when the heart is not fused with holiness, it is filled with all kinds of unholy images.

We cannot live [spiritually] without the ability of *tziyur d’kedushah* (using our heart to envision holiness images). Generally, women are stronger when it comes to the area of the (spiritual dimension of the) heart, and therefore, they are naturally more inclined towards using their imagination and mental visualization.

But every person has the *bechirah* (free will) to choose what kinds of images will fill his heart – if he will be filled with holy images, or with unholy images.

The Avodah of the Month of Iyar: Gaining Control Over Our Imagination

The [previous] month of *Nissan* contained the power of *sichah*, conversing; to tell over the story of the exodus to our children. The month of *Iyar* contains the power of *hirhur*, to think. [We have explained that *hirhur* refers to the thoughts of the heart, which mentally visualizes something].

It is harder to gain control over our thoughts than what comes out of our mouth. We have an easier time restraining our speech, but restraining what we will think is quite difficult. When our mind is filled with fantasies, it is very hard to stay focused on what we are doing at the time, even for a timespan of one minute. This is because it is very difficult to fight the fantasies of our heart.

Animals can communicate, but they have no *bechirah* (free will). They do not decide what they are going to say. But people have *bechirah*. We have two “hearts” to decide between, whenever we

⁷⁶ For more on this concept, see *Tefillah* #0137 – Inner Prayer

are about to talk: a ‘right side’ of the heart, and a ‘left side’ of the heart. We have the *bechirah* to transform the visualizations of our heart from evil images to holy images.

We can transform the heart from its initial state of “*the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth*” - the heart ruled by the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) - into a heart that can conjure images of holiness, *tziyur d’kedushah*, the heart that is ruled by the *yetzer tov* (the good inclination).

Both the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer hora* are from the word *yetzer*, which is from the word *tziyur*, to visualize. The *yetzer tov* in our heart can visualize images that are holy, and our *yetzer hora* is the source of fantasies (*dimyonos*) that strengthen the hold of This World on us. When a person’s imagination dominates, the root of the problem is that his heart needs fixing; as Chazal say, “The wicked are ruled by their hearts.”

The “wicked” refers to those who are not in control of their hearts, and it is rather their hearts which control them; they are stuck in evil kinds of fantasies.

The *Vilna Gaon* says that the month of *Iyar*, which contains the power of *hirhur*, has the power of rectify the trait of *taavah* (indulgence in desires). As we brought earlier from the words of Chazal, Desire begins in the eyes and continues into the heart, and the heart continues to visualize the image more and more until a person eventually sins. But our heart also contains an ability to counter this: *hirhur*, or *tziyur d’kedushah*.

Hirhur, the ability of our heart, and the special power of the month of *Iyar*, is the ability to receive visualizations of holy images; it is the power that can essentially help us eliminate improper desires.

In Conclusion

This concept is really describing the inner root behind the purpose of Creation, which is, “Hashem wants the heart.” It is how we can reach, “*And purify our hearts, to serve You in truth.*”

The genuine kind of *Yiddishkeit* (religious Judaism) is to live a sanctified kind of life. It is not just actions that we do. And it is not just about going to *shiurim*⁷⁷ (which is of course commendable). It is mainly about being able to use our heart to visualize images that are holy!

May Hashem merit us to turn our hearts and visualize the truest image of all: “There is no Rock (*tzur*) like our G-d.” Our Sages expound this to mean, “There is no artist (*tzayar*) like our G-d.” Then we can come to the truest possible recognition: to recognize Hashem, in the depths of our heart. *Amen*, and *Amen*.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Torah lectures*

⁷⁸ *For more on the topic of imagination and how it relates to the brain and the heart, refer to Getting To Know Your Imagination_05_The Heart’s Imagination*

16 | *Sivan – Walking Towards The Endless*

Sivan – “Walking”

The month of *Sivan* is the month when we received the Torah. Each month contains a special power, as our Sages taught; the power of *Sivan* is called “*hiluch*”, “walking.”⁷⁹ What is the connection between *hiluch*\walking and with the giving of the Torah? And what exactly is the power of “*hiluch*”, “walking”?

The Constant Spiritual Progress Of A Torah Scholar: Where Is His Serenity?

The *Gemara*⁸⁰ says that Torah scholars have no *menuchah* (serenity), not on this world and not in the next, for it is written, “*ילכו מזהיל אל חיל*”, “*They go from place to place.*” If Torah scholars have no rest on this world or in the next, what kind of situation are they in?

They are always in a state of *hiluch* – they are always ‘walking’, going, progressing.

However, there seems to be a contradiction. A Torah scholar, our Sages say, is the epitome of *menuchah* (serenity). The Torah says about the Yisrocher, who is blessed with Torah scholars as his descendants, that “*he saw that serenity is good.*” The wisest of all men, the greatest Torah scholar ever, was Shlomo HaMelech, yet he is called ‘*ish menuchah*’, a ‘man of serenity’. But the *Gemara* we brought above says that a Torah scholar has no *menuchah*, not on this world and not on the next! How do we reconcile these two statements?

Making the question stronger, there’s another statement of our Sages that says, “A Torah scholar is called *Shabbos*.” *Shabbos* epitomes the concept of *menuchah* – serenity and rest. Here again we see that a Torah scholar is the epitome of *menuchah*.

Therefore, the statement of our Sages that “A Torah scholar has no *menuchah* (rest\serenity), not on This World, and not on the Next World” is a matter which needs understanding. If they are always progressing and moving forward, when do they ever get to have *menuchah*?

And if a Torah scholar is the epitome of *menuchah*, why does he keep aspiring for more and more spiritual levels?

⁷⁹ *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:5

⁸⁰ *Berachos* 64a

Defining The Concept of Hiluch\Walking\Progressing

In order to know this, we will first need to understand what the concept of “*hiluch*” (“going”) is. What does it mean that Torah scholars are always in a state of “*hiluch*”, that they are always ‘going from place to place’?

The way that a Torah scholar progresses and ‘goes’ [from one spiritual attainment to another] is not in the same way that we understand how a person simply ‘goes’ from one place to another. It’s not the same kind of “*hiluch*”. The Sages make a contrast between angels and Torah scholars: an angel is always standing, whereas a Torah scholar is always ‘walking’. In this statement, the Sages are revealing to us that the Jew has the special power in his soul to keep progressing to higher levels; to constantly be in a state of “*hiluch*”. In that sense, there is no *menuchah* (serenity), because there is always more spiritual growth for a person to reach.

There are two types of *hiluch*\walking. One way is when a person ‘goes’ from one place to another, and another case is where he leaves his own “*daled amos*” (four cubits); the Torah defines a person’s *daled amos* as his actual *makom*, space. In other words, one kind of person will go from place to place by simply leaving his place, while another person can move from place to place while still being able to remain in it – he can move around within his own space of *daled amos*, and it is not considered as if he is gone anywhere.

On Shabbos, it is forbidden to leave the *techum* (boundary of the settlement). Within one’s own *techum*, though, one is allowed to move around in on Shabbos. It would seem that moving within one’s own bounds is the same kind of movement as moving past one’s bounds, but they are actually two different kinds of movement. Understanding this deep difference will help us understand what the *hiluch* of a Torah scholar is.

One kind of *hiluch* is where a person moves from one place to another and as a result, he loses his *menuchah* (serenity). This is where a person leaves his place, and he goes to another place. When a person is always going from place to place, he cannot have *menuchah*. But when a person is remaining in his space, even as he’s moving within it, he can have a degree of *menuchah* there.

Avraham Avinu left for Eretz Yisrael, and Yaakov Avinu was promised Eretz Yisrael, when Hashem folded the entire land of Eretz Yisrael and placed it under his head. In both of these situations, they were staying within one “place”. Yaakov clearly had the entire place of Eretz Yisrael, but even Avraham was remaining in the same place the whole time; he was not actually leaving one place to go to another place. How?

When one walks in Eretz Yisrael, it is as if he is staying in one place the whole time, whereas walking outside of Eretz Yisrael is considered going from one place to another. What is the difference? Of Eretz Yisrael it is said, “*From beginning of the year, until the end of the year*”. The entire land of Eretz Yisrael is considered to be one “place”. The Sages teach that Hashem is called the

“Place” of the world.⁸¹ When one feels this perspective, even as he walks from one place to another, he does not feel like he is leaving one place and going to another. Rather, he knows that he is always found in the same place – for the only “place” of the world is Hashem.

When one walks within his own property, we say that he’s walking within his own place and that he hasn’t left his place. But if one leaves his property and goes to another person’s property, we say that he has gone from one place to another. We can learn from this that if a person views two different places as one place, he is not leaving that place, wherever he goes. When a person understands that only Hashem is called the “Place” of the world, he sees every place in the world as all one place – Hashem’s.

Based upon the above, we can understand the difference between the “walking” of a Torah scholar, with the “walking” of one who is not a Torah scholar, an ignoramus. To a Torah scholar, every place is all one place, for only Hashem is the “Place” of the world. In his perspective, he is never leaving one place and going to another, because every place is really Hashem’s. But someone who does not have the perspective of the Torah scholar thinks that he goes from one place to another, and that is why he will not have *menuchah* (serenity), because according to his perspective, he’s always on the go.

“By the mouth of Hashem they shall journey, and by the mouth of Hashem they shall camp.” The Gemara says that from this verse, we learn that only Hashem is called the “Place” of the world, for wherever we go, we must follow Hashem; that makes every place into Hashem’s place. This is how a Torah scholar progresses – he has the perspective that every place where he goes to is really all one place. It is all Hashem’s place. It is like when the entire land of Eretz Yisrael was folded and placed under the head of Yaakov Avinu, and it is like walking in Eretz Yisrael, which is entirely one place – *“By the mouth of Hashem they shall journey, and by the mouth of Hashem they shall rest.”*

Hiluch\Walking – Uncovering More Depth In The Same Area You Are In

Now let us explain this in terms that apply to our own personal souls.

Every person goes through all kinds of situations in life, where they are moving and progressing from one area to another. Some people are progressing in their spiritual attainments, whereas others are making progress in areas that are spiritually harmful (may Heaven save them). The Vilna Gaon says that a person is either ascending or descending, in his spiritual progress. No one stays in one place for long; either a person is rising, or falling.

Sivan is the month of *halichah\hiluch* (walking\progressing). The Torah is the revelation that whenever I go, I am in a place where Hashem is. “Hashem looked into the Torah, and created the world” – from the Torah, it is revealed that all of Creation is really one “place”: it is all Hashem. The

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Sages said this explicitly of Eretz Yisrael (that anyone who walks in it is walking in Hashem's place), but it also applies anywhere outside of Eretz Yisrael, except that there it is more hidden.

The Torah is all one unit. There is no such thing as two different versions of the Torah, *chas v'shalom*. We find that a "place" can be divided, such as how the land of Eretz Yisrael is divided amongst the portions of the twelve tribes. But at the root, all is one. When a person sees the world through an inner lens, when he sees the root of this Creation, what does he see in the world? All he will see in the "world" is "Torah", for that is what the world was created from, and therefore only the "Torah" is the "world" (when one has the inner perspective).

If a person sees the world through superficial vision, however, he has the perspective that one can move from place to another, that he can be uprooted from his place and find rest in another place. With such a perspective, he has no real stability, so he will never have *menuchah* (serenity). But if a person only sees "Torah" in Creation (for "Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world"), he will see all places of the world as one single place.

Thus, the meaning of "Torah scholars have no *menuchah*, not on This World and not in the Next World" is that they don't stop moving within the place they are in. They are not moving out of one place and into another. Rather, in the very place they are in, they keep moving. In that respect, they don't have *menuchah*.

What does it mean that Torah scholars keep progressing, from one spiritual attainment to another, **יֵלְכוּ מִחֵיל לְחֵיל**? Does it mean to finish all of *Talmud Bavli* and then *Talmud Yerushalmi*? Along the lines of the same question, what essentially is the difference between a Torah scholar and an ignoramus?

The true Torah scholar is always revealing more depth to the very same verse of Torah he is learning, or in the very same page of Gemara he is learning. He keeps progressing spiritually within the same place, and that is he is always in movement, but without leaving the place where he is, by revealing more depth within the place where he is at.

Thus, the special ability of the Torah scholar is that he can keep "walking" \ progressing in the very area of Torah he is learning, by seeing another angle of understanding to it, another layer of depth to it, endlessly.

Hiluch \ Walking \ Progressing – The Way To Receive The Torah

What is the connection, though, between this concept of *hiluch* \ walking \ progressing and receiving the Torah?

It is because the Torah is the revelation of the very idea that a person can keep walking \ progressing, endlessly, within the very same place that a person is in. One can keep revealing more depth to the same verse of the Torah he is learning, to the same Mishnah he is learning, to the same subject of Gemara he is learning. The amount of depth one can keep uncovering is infinite.

The Menuchah (Serenity) of Learning Torah In-Depth

To illustrate the concept, Rav Chaim of Brisk told his students to spend 40 days learning the same page of Gemara. It is because one can keep uncovering more and more depth within the very same area of Torah he is learning about, without moving on to a different area.

Now we can also understand how this also provides a Torah with *menuchah*. The soul cannot have true serenity when it keeps viewing a different page of Gemara every day; it never finds any place to rest in. But if it has 40 days to keep seeing the same words of the Gemara, it can be serene there. This is on condition, of course, that a person keeps studying the words with the intention to uncover more depth of understanding.

The *menuchah* in learning Torah comes from spending time learning the same page of Gemara for a while, getting yourself deeper and deeper into it. Compare this to digging a pit in the ground in order to lay a foundation to build a home upon. The deeper you dig into the ground, the more stable of a structure it will be, because the foundation is stronger when it is placed deeper. This is the meaning of true “*menuchas hanefesh*” (serenity of the soul).

A Torah scholar therefore does not simply ‘go’ from one subject to another in Torah. Rather, in the same subject of Torah he is studying, he keeps revealing more and more depth in that area. Now we can understand why Shlomo was called “*ish menuchah*”, a man of serenity. He was the one who built the *Beis HaMikdash*, the deepest spiritual place that there is in Creation. It was the gate to Heaven that was on this world of action, and it was a gate that led to the most absolute spiritual place [and since he uncovered the most depth, he attained serenity].

Reaching The Infinite

At Har Sinai, Hashem opened up all of the heavens and showed them “*Ain Od Milvado*”, that there is nothing else besides for Hashem. What was the reason for this? It is because the Torah enables a person to reveal more and more depth, until a person reaches *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, which is the recognition of “*Ain Od Milvado*”.

That is what it means to have “*hiluch*” (walking) within Torah; it means to keep “walking” and moving within one place, within the very same area he is thinking about, until one reaches the Infinite - the deepest place possible to reach.

Sivan is the month when the Torah was given. The Torah is “*longer than the earth and wider than the sea*”, but besides for this, the Torah also reveals a power to keep “going” within the same place where one is, to keep revealing more and depth within the place that one is, until he reaches the *Ein Sof*, (the Infinite).

This is not a matter which comes by itself to a person [as an automatic byproduct of learning Torah]. Rather, it is a matter which needs to be acquired, and it is the meaning of what it means to be a “Torah scholar.”

In order for a person to see the depths of the Torah, when he sees the “deep waters” that the Torah is, he must become an *“ish tevunah”*, “a man of understanding”. This refers to the concept of the “50 Gates of Understanding”.

The Depth of Sefiras Ha'Omer: Getting Deeper Into The Gates of Understanding

There are “50 Gates of Understanding” to the Torah. There are 50 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, and the inner reason for counting each day of the *Omer* is so that one can keep entering deeper and deeper into the spiritual realm within him; until the innermost gate is reached.

The Vilna Gaon says that each of the 50 gates of understanding contain 50 levels, so when one reaches the 50th gate, he will find himself before another 50 gates to traverse. Thus, the depth of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* is to keep entering deeper and deeper into one's inner spiritual realm, until one gets to the “giving of the Torah” that is reached when one gets to the recognition of *Ain Od Milvado* (“There is nothing besides Him”).

Counting *Sefiras Ha'Omer* is therefore not just a verbal act of the mouth, but a matter of the soul. When the Torah says, “Count fifty days”, the intention is to keep entering deeper, past another gate and another gate, into one's inner spiritual dimension.

That is the depth of the concept of *“hiluch”*. It is about digging deeper and deeper, into everything. In everything we encounter, there is always more depth to uncover, because there are always “50 gates of understanding” in everything.

The first 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* represents the external part of our task in preparing to receive the Torah. What is the preparation that we need to make in order to receive the Torah? To reveal more and more depth in whatever we see! *Sefiras Ha'Omer* is about revealing depth, to enter into another gate and into another gate.

Reaching The “50 Gates of Understanding” – Through Exposing The Heart

The *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that the root of Creation is that the Torah reveals all of Creation. The depth of this matter is that Torah can be found in any place where one is; it is not limited to any one place. A Torah scholar can see, in everything he comes across, the “50 gates of understanding”. He doesn't only see it in one particular place; he can see it in any place, in anything he sees.

In order to reveal the depths of the Torah, one must reveal the “50 gates of understanding” in his own heart. The heart contains 50 gates. When one reveals his heart, he can enter into the 50 gates that are within the heart. Shlomo HaMelech said, “My heart has seen much wisdom.” The 50 gates of the heart became opened to Shlomo, and that is how he was able to reach the 50th gate of the Torah, for his heart became a proper vessel that could receive the 50 gates of understanding in everything.

In order to see the 50th gate of understanding in anything, one cannot reach it through his intellect. The intellect is not capable to reaching the 50th gate of understanding in anything, because the 50th gate is always beyond intellectual comprehension. Only the heart, which contains 50 gates of understanding, can reach it. The Torah speaks of those who are “wise of heart”, and this is not referring to intellectual wisdom, but “heart” wisdom. Only with this “heart wisdom” can a person reveal the depths of understanding in something.

Purifying The Heart – Through Revealing Depth Within The Heart

It is written, “*A pure heart you created me with.*” If a person wants to comprehend the Torah, he first needs to go through an inner process, of revealing the depths of his heart.

The spiritual structure of the heart is a complicated to know, because it is not one single layer. The “heart” itself is not the emotions of a person; it is a deeper dimension than just emotion, and there is depth upon depth to it. If a person has not yet purified his heart, he will only feel the outer dimension of his heart, which is the emotions, and if he stays that way his entire life, he will remain at the same emotional level of a child, yet he will feel certain that he’s using his heart.

When a child feels happy, or when he feels sad, he feels that this is all there is to his heart. All of his recognition is based on the level he is at. But true “heart recognition” is only when one reveals new depth within his heart; one can keep entering deeper and deeper into it, traversing through the 50 gates that are hidden in his heart. That is where a person receives the “wisdom the heart”.

This is the meaning of Shlomo HaMelech’s words, “*My heart has seen much wisdom.*” The wisdom he uncovered was the depths of the Torah, and he saw more and more depth in everything in the Torah.

The level of one’s Torah learning will depend on the level he has reached in his own heart. When a person truly comprehends anything in Torah, it is not reached due to any intellectual prowess. If one is intellectually gifted when it comes to Torah learning, that is only the external part of Torah learning. One reaches true understanding in Torah only to the degree that he has revealed the depth within his heart. The more one uncovers the depth of his heart, the more understanding he will reach in Torah. The highest point one can reach is the “heart” itself. Beyond that, we are not able to know.

In Conclusion

And so, preparing to receive the Torah is through *hiluch*, “walking.” It doesn’t mean to “go” from one “place” to another “place”, which is the perspective of the ignoramus. Rather, it means to keep walking\going further and further into our own depths; to the depths of recognition in our heart. That is the vessel that one needs in order to contain the depths of the Torah’s wisdom.

“*My heart has seen much wisdom*” – to the degree that one has purified his heart, that is how much wisdom he will reach in Torah. Any of our previous sages and Gedolim who merited to receive

much wisdom did not reach this from any of their intellectual abilities, but according to the degree that they purified their hearts. They therefore merited to become a “*maayan hamisgaber*” (mighty wellspring) that can reach understanding in Torah.

May Hashem give us the ability to go from one spiritual accomplishment to another, to reveal more and more depth in the Torah, and the Creator Who lays hidden in it.

17 | *Tamuz – Holy Imagination*

The Month of Tamuz: The Power of “Sight”

The month of Tamuz contains the especial power of *re'iyah* (sight). A hint to this is because each of 12 months is parallel to one of the 12 tribes, and the tribe represented by the month of Tamuz is Reuven, whose name comes from the words, “*Reu, ben*” (“See, that I have a son”). So the month of Tamuz is connected with *re'iyah*, with “seeing”.

Let's try to understand how this is a power of the soul as well, and what we do with this power.

Inner Sight: The Heart's Power to See

The Gemara says, “A *dayan* (judge) only sees what his eyes see.”⁸² A *dayan* determines a case according to how he “sees” it – meaning, according to what he feels and discerns the information. So seeing doesn't just mean to see in the plain and simple sense. It means to discern, and it involves the heart's feelings.

Our eyes can see the physical, whereas our heart can see a deeper dimension into the physical. Shlomo HaMelech said, “*My heart has seen much wisdom.*” The heart “sees” – it can discern things. Chazal say that “the eye sees, the heart desires, and the actions complete”. It seems from this statement that sight is only with the eyes, and not with the heart. But the real understanding is that *the heart sees* from the eyes. Thus, when the heart desires that which the eyes see, it is really seeing that which the eyes see.

The Sages state, “The evil inclination rules only where the eyes see.” When the eyes see something, the heart desires it and thus “sees” what the eyes are seeing. Chavah desired the *Eitz HaDaas* as soon as she saw it; the possuk says, “*And the woman saw that the tree was good for consumption.*” How did she ‘see’ that the tree tasted good, before she even ate it? It was because her *heart* saw the tree and thereby desired that which her eyes laid sight on.

Thus, there are two places from which we “see” in ourselves. One place is the eyes, and the other place is the heart. What does it mean that the heart can “see”? Firstly, we need to know what the nature of the heart is.

The heart is the seat of emotion in us. It is the source of both positive and negative feelings we experience: hatred, joy, sadness, etc. It is also the source of our various desires, motivations, and yearnings. But besides for this, there is another dimension to our heart: its power to “see”.

⁸² *Sanhedrin 6a*

What does the heart see? When a *navi* (prophet) is young, he is called a *chozeh* (seer), before he actually sees prophecies. A prophecy is an interpretation of Hashem's word, but it is a kind of vision. The prophet would see things from his heart. A prophet was at a purified internal state, where his heart could see a clear vision. The prophets reached the total level of this kind of vision (the heart's sense of sight), but each person as well can also reach it on his own level.

It is written, "*In the hands of the prophets, I appear.*" The visions of the prophets were seen through the lens of a purified kind of imagination (*dimayon*). When most people hear of this concept, they react skeptically: "Prophecy involved imagination?!" But this reaction is only possible when a person is not aware of the concept of a holy kind of imagination. The prophets saw a holy and purified kind of imagination. Since most people have not reached a level of a purified kind of imagination, most people identify imagination as nothing but fantasy. But when imagination is pure, it is the level of prophecy.

Currently, we do not possess the level of prophecy. But we are still capable of traversing the very way that the prophets took to see their prophetic visions: the power of holy imagination.

We aren't referring to the kind of imagination techniques which the secular world presents. We are speaking here about the way of our forefathers; we are trying to return to their footsteps.

The Heart Needs to Picture Information

What exactly is the power of imagination which the heart is capable of?

Our intellect can think, scrutinize, build, take apart, decide, etc. Our heart, however, cannot relate to abstract information. It must be able to receive some kind of image, and then it can work with the image to understand it. If something cannot be imagined, it can be perceived rationally, by the intellect; but it cannot pass into the heart. The heart will not register any information that has no mental picture to it. If something can be pictured, it is perceived by the heart.

Our rational intellect is aware that two plus two is four. The heart, though, can only understand this if there is a picture of this. For example, if two books are placed next to two books, the heart can perceive that there are four books. There is now a picture here being given to the "two plus two", it can be imagined and thus the heart can register it. Thus, our intellect works with the abstract, whereas the heart needs some kind of picture of the information.

Mashal V'Nimshal – A Parable and Its Lesson

Shlomo HaMelech said, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*" Of Shlomo HaMelech, it was also said that he "established many parables." The concept of a *mashal* (parable) speaks to the heart, for it is a way to envision the information.

Shlomo HaMelech spoke in the form of parables. Why was this necessary? What is the idea of speaking in parables? It is because when our intellect is not capable of understanding things, we need

to give it some kind of wrapping, like a parable, that will help us perceive it. Our heart will visualize the information being conveyed through the parable, and then the heart can understand.

Shlomo HaMelech spoke in parables, so that the wisdom he is imparting will be perceived by our heart.

The Difference Between Hirhur (Visualization) and Re'iyah (Inner Sight)

Generally speaking, there are two ways how the heart visualizes things.

One way is through envisioning it in letters of the *Aleph Beis*. This is also called *hirhur* (visualization), which is an ability of the heart, for we find that a person can fulfill *Kerias Shema* through '*hirhur b'libo*', through thinking of the words in his heart. This is the idea behind the month of *Iyar*, which we explained in the past.⁸³

The month of *Tamuz*, however, is about *re'iyah*, "sight". It is the idea of perceiving things in terms of parables; to draw lessons from what we observe on this world and to understand the *nimshal* (lesson) that the *mashal* is teaching. The heart fantasizes the information, which makes use of the imagination, and in that way, it can use *mashal* to reach the *nimshal*.

Imagination: A Tool

The heart imagines something, and this forms a *kli*, a spiritual 'container', to hold the information. What will enter this 'container'? A true and tangible vision (*tziyur*) can enter it and be contained in it. That is the purpose of using imagination: it is a tool that allows us to receive a great vision that will become contained in us.

Thus, if one simply remains with the fantasies alone, he lives in his imagination. The 'guided-imagery' techniques of today therefore are not using the higher purpose of imagination, and they are causing people to become immersed in fantasy. It is a way meant for people who are very ill in their souls. The true way to use the power of imagination is to always see the *nimshal* (lesson) of the *mashal* (parable) that we are processing.

Guided imagination, which has been devised by gentiles, is placing too much emphasis on the 'container' (the imagination). Imagination is but a tool we can use to receive something greater. It is a tool to receive a true vision.

The prophets reached the highest level of this, for they were essentially receiving the spiritual light of the *nimshal* contained in the *mashal* they were seeing. In the broader sense of things, man is an entirely a *mashal* (parable) of how to receive a *tzelem elokim* (image of G-d) and have it shined upon him – which is the *nimshal*.

⁸³ See *Essence of Rosh Chodesh #02 _Iyar _Thought and Visualization*

Tziyur (Visualization) and Dimayon (Fantasy)

There are two powers related to the imagination. One is called *tziyur* (visualization) and the other is called *dimayon* (fantasy).

Dimayon is for a person to imagine something which a person cannot understand rationally. It is used a *kli* (tool) to contain the vision which we want to put into it. *Tziyur*, though, is to imagine something which the person already knows of.

Feeling Hashem: Through Holy Imagination

We must use our imagination for holiness, so that it will become a container for the *tzelem elokim* (image of G-d) or the *tzurah elyonah* (heavenly image) that we want to put into it: a spiritual vision of a reality that is palpable.

It is written, “*And I will dwell amongst them*”, and the Sages explain, “In the hearts of each and every one of them.” Hashem dwells in every person’s heart. How can a person grasp such a thing? How are we to relate to such a thing? One of the ways that can help us understand this is through using the power of holy imagination. Through using the power of imagination for holiness (to envision spiritual realities), we build in ourselves a container that can hold onto the spiritual. That is what allows us to experience G-dliness in ourselves.

Holy Imagination vs. Unholy Imagination

However, there is a fine line that differentiates between holy imagination and unholy imagination. When a person uses imagination as a purpose unto itself, with no greater goal in mind, than imagination is unholy. By contrast, when imagination is used as a tool to reach a greater purpose, it is holy.

How Do We Internalize?

It is written, “*For the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth.*” How, indeed, does a person change and purify his *yetzer hora* (evil inclination)? The tool we can use this is the power of holy imagination, which our heart is capable of.

Our intellect is not capable of this; our intellect cannot tell our heart what to do and rationalize with it. Even if a person could live for 1000 years, his intellect would not be able to change his heart. This is because the intellect and the heart are polar opposites. The intellect rationalizes and brings proof, while the heart needs some kind of picture or vision of the information in order to be affected. The heart speaks a different language than our intellect.

For this reason, although many people know in their heads what the right thing is, their hearts remain unaffected by this knowledge. The *Ramchal* writes that if a person would know what a sin is,

he would never sin. We all know what a sin is; our minds are aware of right and wrong. So why is sin so common? The *Ramchal* says that it's because the knowledge in the mind isn't in the heart.

How, indeed, can we internalize our mind's knowledge into our heart? One of the ways is through the power of *hirhur* (to visualize the letters of the *Aleph Beis* of things), which we explained about in the month of *Iyar*. But another way is through *dimayon d'kedushah*, holy imagination – in which we can use our imagination as a tool to receive the spiritual.

The power of holy imagination was a power that many of the leaders of the past used. It is the heart's power to “see”: the heart in us can see holiness. The tool and container we use for this is the vision of holiness, and the spiritual light that can enter that container is the actual spiritual vision.

The Powers of Ahavah and Yirah

There are two parts to seeing the spiritual. These are really well-known matters, and here we will attempt to understand these concepts.

The heart can “see”. What can it see? What does it envision?

As the Sages tell us, there are two *chalalim* (spaces) in the heart: the *chalal hayemini* (the right side of the heart) and the *chalal hesemali* (the left side of the heart). It is written, “*The heart of the wise is to his right, and the heart of a fool is to his left.*” A heart that is “to the right” is referring to the “right side of the heart”, and a heart that is “to the left” is referring to the “left side of the heart”.

Our *avodah* (task) on this world, simply speaking, is to bring our *yetzer tov* (good inclination) into our heart, and drive away the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) from the heart. This is true, but there is more depth to the matter.

Everything in Creation is two-sided; there are always two opposite aspects which we need to utilize in order to reach our desired purposes. There are two abilities which we can use in order to work with our heart. The Sages call them the “right side of the heart” and the “left side of the heart”; and the *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hora* are found in them. But let's speak here about the actual different *spaces* of the heart, rather than the forces present inside them.

They are really two different abilities of the heart – the “right” aspect of the heart, which is otherwise known as *ahavah* (love), and the “left” aspect of the heart, which is otherwise known as *yirah* (awe).

We have a *mitzvah* to love Hashem as well as a *mitzvah* to fear Hashem. Our heart can “see”, and we can “see” from the place of *ahavah* that is in our heart. But we can also “see” from the place of *yirah*; the word *yirah* is related to the word *re'iyah* (seeing).

What are the abilities of *ahavah* and *yirah*? It seems the *ahavah* and *yirah* is simply a *middah* (character trait), and this is true, but from the fact that the heart can “see” we learn that there is a way to “see” from the place of *ahavah* in our heart, and there is a way to “see” from the place of *yirah* in our heart. What does it mean to “see” from *ahavah*, and what does it mean to “see” from *yirah*?

Reb Yisrael Salanter would mainly use the power of *yirah*, and there was a lot less emphasis on *ahavah*. He would mainly practice envisioning thoughts that inspired *yirah*, such as imagining the fire of *Gehinnom*. This was the way of the great leaders of the *Mussar* movement. However, this is not yet the stage of purifying the heart. It is the tool to get there, but it is not yet the goal.

Thus, the method which Reb Yisrael Salanter and the *mussar* movement used was the power of *tziyur* (visualization) present in the “left side of the heart.” This was the path of *yirah*, and it is one side to the power of *tziyur* which the heart is capable of.

There are many ways to use the heart’s power of *tziyur*. If someone has a hard time imagining what *Gehinnom* is like, one of the methods written about in the *mussar sefarim* is for a person to place his hand in a physical fire, so that he can get some kind of *mashal* (parable) of what *Gehinnom* is like. In any case, the heart’s power of *tziyur* uses the “left side of the heart”.

The other power of *tziyur* in the heart, the “right side of the heart”, is totally different. It is to imagine something that is loving and embracing. One example of it is to try to imagine the reward in the World To Come. In *Michtav M’Eliyahu*⁸⁴, it is explained how a person can vividly see this world as a *mashal* to the reward of the World To Come, such as by trying to imagine how many drops in the ocean there are and how this mimics the magnitude of the reward that awaits a person in the World To Come. This is a loving kind of vision, not a fearful one, and it is experienced through the “right side of the heart” (also called “*kav hayamin*”, the “right line”).

In summary, we have explained the two general kinds of *tziyur* in the heart: to imagine a vision that conveys *yirah*, and to imagine a vision that conveys *ahavah*.

In recent generations, our *Gedolim* realized that people today are weaker when it comes to *yirah*; for example, most people have a hard time when trying to imagine *Gehinnom*. Therefore, the *Gedolim* wrote that we mainly have to make use of thoughts of *ahavah*, and deal less with thoughts of *yirah*. However, they never meant that *yirah* should be abandoned completely. We need both *ahavah* and *yirah*. The only question in our *avodah* is where to begin: Should we begin with *ahavah* or should we begin with *yirah*? But it is impossible to have one without the other.

Seeing Everything In Terms of Parable and Lesson

When we use the heart’s power of *tziyur*, this surely has a positive effect on our heart, and it purifies the heart to a certain extent. Yet it is not enough to connect a person to the reality of the spiritual. With the power of *tziyur* alone, a person will only live in the *mashal* of life, but he will never get to the *nimshal*. He will still remain connected to the materialism of This World.

What a person needs to do is to try to get to the *nimshal* (lesson) of the *mashal* (parable), and then he will leave the ideal kind of life, in which he will be truly connected with the spiritual. When

⁸⁴ *Michtav M’Eliyahu Vol. I, 1*

a child hears a story, he is only hearing of a *mashal*; he does not hear the *nimshal*. In every story we hear as well, it's possible that we are just hearing the *mashal* alone, without ever grasping the *nimshal*.

The Chofetz Chaim would hear an inspiring message in every event. He saw and heard events as entirely being a *mashal*, a parable, to something greater; he saw the *nimshal* of each *mashal*. He saw all of reality as a *mashal* against the backdrop of a greater reality. He realized that everything on this world can be seen as a *mashal* that leads to a *nimshal*.

The idea of this is not simply to see everything as parables and to remain there. Seeing everything as a parable is but the first step, but the second step, which is the goal, is to see the lesson behind the parable. For example, when a person sees snow, he can see it as being an example of Hashem's power. He sees the snow as a *mashal* of Hashem's power. But he has not yet reached the *nimshal* of this *mashal*. When one sees the *nimshal* behind each *mashal*, he reaches purity of heart.

But one cannot jump to the *nimshal* unless he has first seen the *mashal*; the *mashal* is needed in order to relate to the *nimshal*. *Sefer Shir HaShirim*⁸⁵ is entirely a *mashal* of a loving relationship between husband and wife, and the *nimshal* of this is the relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem. Yet many people have heard and read *Shir HaShirim*, but they never see it as a *mashal* to the *nimshal*. They are aware of the *nimshal*, but they skip over the *mashal* stage.

Everything you see on this world is all a *mashal*. If you get used to seeing the world like this, you have a tool to get the *nimshal* of each *mashal* you come across. Your eyes will see something, and your heart will see the *mashal* that is behind what you are seeing, and then your heart will search to understand what the *nimshal* is.

Hashem did not place in Gan Eden. He placed on this world. What do we do with everything that we see on this world? If we do not think into the reality we see before us, we never see the *mashal* of life. All we will see is the *nimshal*, and if we remain at this thoughtless stage, the *nimshal* we will see is nothing but the materialism of this world. But if we get used to seeing everything as a *mashal*, then everything we see can become a tool that we can use to connect to the spiritual.

The Heart Sees Reality

Thus, the abilities of *tziyur* and *dimayon* which are in our heart are both representing one *avodah* we have on this world. Our heart's ability of *tziyur* (or *dimayon*) can conjure realities we have never seen, and we have explained that there are two kinds of holy imagination which accomplish this: thoughts of *yirah* [i.e. imagining *Gehinnom*], and thoughts of *ahavah* [i.e. imagining the reward in the World To Come].

⁸⁵ *Song of Songs*

This is the inner essence that is behind the heart's power to "see". The depth of it is because our heart is capable of grasping reality. Our eyes see things objectively, but our heart sees the reality behind what we see; it sees into the inner dimension of what we are physically seeing.

A Life Ruled By Fantasies

Everyone has the power to imagine. Most people only know of it from the fantasies of dreams, and many people fantasize during the day as well; in fact, many people are immersed in imaginative thoughts during the day, ruled completely by their imagination; some more and some less. The problem with this is not the fact that people are immersed in fantasy. The problem is that it negatively affects the heart.

When imagination dominates a person, the heart will imagine various fantasies, and it will not imagine spiritual realities. It will be the kind of heart of which it is said, "The eyes see, and the heart desires" – the heart will fantasize about unholy and evil thoughts. As the Sages say, "If a person wants one hundred, he will want two hundred." Everything physical that we see will then turn on the imagination, and then our heart will do nothing else except fantasize of various, worthless desires.

It's even possible that a person's head is immersed in thoughts of Torah, yet his heart is immersed in childish fantasies. Just because a person isn't consciously aware of this doesn't mean that it is not the case. A person can have a highly developed intellect yet his heart still remains at the level of a child. As long as a person has not yet worked to purify his heart, his heart lives in various fantasies.

This is the depth of the contradiction between our intellect and our heart. It is not simply because the heart doesn't feel the knowledge present in the intellect. That is also true. But it is a much deeper contradiction. It is because the heart's role is to grasp reality, whereas the intellect knows rationally what the right thing is, but it doesn't grasp that knowledge as a reality; what results from contradiction [when it is left unresolved]? The heart is left with nothing but fantasies.

Fantasy dominates over any person who has not had enough involvement with a Torah scholar to learn from, even if the person has learned a lot of Torah in his life. When the heart is left unchanged as it is, it will desire what the eyes see, and it will fantasize over worthless pursuits. The *Sforno* says that the desire to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* was essentially the power of imagination.

Not only will the heart desire and fantasize about things that are not good – it will completely immerse a person in a pursuit of fantasy. The person will live a fantasy kind of life, and he will never live reality. Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote of the woes of imagination: "Man roams around freely in his imagination." This is because when the heart remains at its initial and immature state, it fantasizes.

But if a person learns how to see the *mashal* of each thing, and he also searches to understand the *nimshal*, he lives in the reality, and he leaves imagination behind.

In Conclusion

Thus, the depth of our *avodah* on this world is not simply so that we should “*purify our hearts, to serve You in truth.*” That is what we should aim for, but it does not define our actual *avodah*. Our actual *avodah* is to leave imagination, and enter into reality - namely, the ability to palpably feel Hashem as an existing reality.

Why is it that a person doesn't feel Hashem as a reality in his life? It is not because his heart isn't pure; it is because his heart is living in fantasies. When a person leaves fantasy behind, he can then feel the simplest reality that exists: Hashem's presence. The more a person leaves behind fantasy, the more he will feel Hashem - in his heart.

When a person sees all of life as a *mashal*, and he searches to get to the *nimshal* of the *mashal* – he is the person who will reach the Creator..⁸⁶

⁸⁶ For more on the concept of seeing life as ‘*mashal v'nimshal*’ (a parable and its lesson), see *Getting To Know Your Home_012_The Lesson of Marriage*.

18 | Tamuz – Two Eyes To See With

Tamuz, Reuven, and the Sense of Sight

In our mystical teachings, the five senses of man are listed as sight, hearing, smell, touch, and speech. This order is given specifically. Therefore, our most prominent sense is the sense of sight. It is like the ‘firstborn’ of our senses. It is also at the highest place in our body from all of our senses: it is located in the eyes, which is at the top of the head.

The month of Tamuz is represented by the tribe of Reuven, the firstborn son of Yaakov Avinu. Reuven was named so from the words “*Reu, ben*” which is mother Leah expressed upon his birth, and these words are related to the word *re’iyah*, to see. Thus, the month of Tamuz is connected with the sense of *re’iyah* (sight), and the tribe of Reuven.

A person sees the world through his eyes. The sense of sight is the sense that accompanies man wherever he goes, guiding him and directing him.

The sense of sight is linked with Reuven. Being that Reuven lost his rights to the status of *bechor* (firstborn son), the sense of sight was damaged along with this. Reuven lost the rights to the firstborn status, and it was given instead to Yosef. Reuven was originally called the ‘*raishis*’ (beginning) of Yaakov’s children, but it was taken away from him, due to the episode with moving Bilhah’s bed out of Yaakov’s tent; he was cursed for being too impulsive. The ‘beginning’ was thus ruined, and he is no longer considered the firstborn of Yaakov Avinu.

We have no comprehension of the greatness of our *Avos* (the forefathers) and their children, the *shevatim* (the 12 tribes), but what can we learn from this? It shows us what damages the sense of sight, and it shows us what causes the sense of sight to lose its ‘firstborn’ status from us (thus the sense of sight is no longer the initial guiding sense in man).

Chazal say that “a *dayan* (judge) does not see except that which his eyes see.”⁸⁷ There are people who go to *Beis Din* and they witness an argument erupt between the *dayanim* there, and they become terrified at this sight; they watch in horror as the heated *machlokes* (argument) takes place. But the truth is that *machlokes* amongst the wise people of *Klal Yisrael* has always been around. The Sages record that the very first *machlokes* between the sages was the argument between the sage Yoezer with Yochanan *Kohen Gadol*, regarding what the *halachah* is if one may perform *semichah* (anointing) on an animal on *Yom Tov*. Ever since then, there has been *machlokes* amongst the Sages about what the *halachah* is. [We will try to understand here the deeper meaning behind why this is so.]

⁸⁷ *Sanhedrin 6a*

The 'Right Eye' and The 'Left Eye'

We have two eyes – a right eye and a left eye. Each of them are two different lenses that view the physical world. From a deep understanding, every person contains two different 'eyes' which see different views on reality - and it is our head which connects our two eyes together and unites them to see only one view. The *sefarim hakedoshim* write that we have a 'right eye' and a 'left eye' which each see different perspectives on a situation. With most people, they see two different perspectives on things, and they do not see the same exact thing. Therefore, every person sees things differently.

It is explained that the 'right eye' sees the *hekef* (general picture) of things, while the 'left eye' sees the *peratim* (details) of things. The true perspective on things is to see the totality: to see its *hekef* and to see its *peratim* together with it. But most people are "either, or." Either a person will be the type to focus on the general picture without paying attention to details, or a person will get too focused on a particular detail of a situation and thus he misses the bigger picture.

Chazal say, "Who is wise? One who sees what will come." This is not referring to the ability of *Ruach HaKodesh* (the holy spirit); it is referring to a far simpler level. It is referring to the ability of seeing the *hekef* of a situation. A person tends to only see the moment and be in the moment, but he usually cannot see further. As a person matures spiritually, he begins to see a bigger picture that goes beyond the present moment. As an example, in regards to the timespan of Creation, the *hekef* is a timespan of 6,000 years (And in the mystical teachings, it is also brought that there will be a total of 10,000 years).

So the 'right eye' in us sees the bigger picture of things, while the 'left eye' in us sees only details, such as the current moment. The more a person matures spiritually, the more he can see from his 'right eye', which sees the bigger picture.

Reuven was punished for removing Bilhah's bed from his father Yaakov Avinu's tent. We can now have a deeper understanding of this: he was too focused on a particular detail. As the Sages state, he did this in deference to his mother's honor, for he felt that his mother Leah should not have the same status as the maidservants. Although he acted for the sake of Heaven, he could not see beyond this particular detail; he did not see the bigger picture. In his mind, though, the detail that he saw was a representation of the bigger picture. His father Yaakov saw the real bigger picture of this episode; he saw that it reflected a flaw in Reuven's nature and thus he knew that Reuven cannot be of the firstborn status.

If we try to understand this episode in the Torah from *seichel hayashar* (straight, human logic) alone, Reuven is definitely right. He had a very good reason for how he acted. But Yaakov saw beyond that reason; he saw a bigger picture.

The *chachamim* (the sages) are called '*einei haeidah*', eyes of the congregation, because a truly wise person sees not only the current moment, but the bigger picture that goes beyond the current moment, and he fuses the two views together. The *Gemara* says that the definition of a *chacham* is one who can answer a question on any area of Torah he is asked; so a *chacham* is one who sees the big picture. The numerical value in Hebrew of the word '*chacham*' is '*chaim*', life, for a truly wise

person sees what life is all about. He sees something from its beginning to its end – “One who sees what will come.”

Seeing the *hekef* (bigger picture) of things is the power of *chochmah* (wisdom); the view of *chochmah* sees an all-inclusive view which goes beyond the amassment of many details. This is also the concept behind *emunas chachamim*, believing in the Sages. In order to believe in the words of our Sages, one has to see the bigger picture of a situation. It is the power to believe that the Sages can see things which I cannot see.

This is not a power that comes from our logical and deciding power of *da'as*. It is not simply to believe in the “*Daas Torah*” of our Sages. Although that is also true, it is deeper than that. It is because the Sages see a larger view towards the Torah and towards life.

Adam *HaRishon* was given a light that could see from one end of the world to another; Hashem hid this light away because He saw that mankind will not know how to use this light properly, and it will be revealed in the future. This is otherwise known as the *Ohr HaGanuz* (the hidden light). But the Baal Shem Tov revealed that this hidden light was hidden away into the Torah; therefore, through learning Torah in the right way, a person is able to gain an all-inclusive view on things. Thus the meaning of a ‘*chacham*’ (wise person) is one who receives the hidden light from the Torah he learns.

We have outlined the concept, and now we will try to draw this concept closer within reach of our souls.

The Right Eye Sees Past and Future; The Left Eye Only Sees The Present

What does it mean to see the bigger picture of things, and what does it mean to see the details?

From all of the senses, the sense of sight contains a drawback, with the fact that it cannot see except what it is directly in front of it. A person can only see what’s in front of his eyes, but he cannot see behind him. By contrast, our other senses can sense both what’s in front us and what’s behind us. We can speak to someone who is in front of us or behind us. We can smell something that is in front or behind. We can hear and touch something that is either in front us or behind us. But we can only see what’s in front of us, and we cannot see behind us.

This is because, as we brought earlier from the words of our Sages, that the sense of sight has become damaged (ever since Reuven lost his status of the firstborn). Therefore, we start out in life with an initially damaged ‘sense of sight’, which can only see the present moment and not beyond. Obviously, we are referring to our spiritual sense of sight, not our physical sense of sight. We are explaining the depth of our spiritual sense of sight. We start out with a limited kind of view that cannot see the bigger picture of things; the ‘left eye’, which only sees details.

The Gemara says that a person is apt to forget the words of Torah he learned the day before. (But the fantasies of yesterday, that he remembers...). This is an example of the ‘left eye’ – where a person only lives in the present moment; he does not recall past nor can he see beyond the present. He only

sees what's in front of him, right now, but he cannot see 'behind' him – he doesn't see his past. He doesn't connect the present day with yesterday.

By contrast, the 'right eye' can see both yesterday as well as the morrow, within the present moment. This is the deeper meaning of "Who is wise? One who sees what will come."

The hidden light which Hashem created on the first day of Creation was a kind of view which man could use to see from one of the world to the other. It could see both the present moment and the past and the future - within the present. It was the original sense of sight of man in its pure form: the 'right eye', which saw the totality of things.

In contrast, when Chavah laid eyes upon the *Eitz HaDaas* and desired it, she only saw what was in front of her, and she did not think about the consequences. It was her 'left eye' dominating her. When the faculty of desire dominates, a person is so immersed in the present moment that he cannot see beyond the desire. The desire continues to pull the person after it because the person is not seeing past it. He is only seeing this very moment that is taking place right now.

The 'right eye' though sees the past and the future within the present. It is aware of the statement of our Sages, "Know from where you come from...and to where you are going" even as it views the present moment.

Reuven lost his firstborn status; the deeper understanding of this, as we explained, was that he lost his 'sense of sight'. And on a larger scale, mankind in general has a damaged sense of 'sight', ever since Chavah laid eyes upon the *Eitz HaDaas* and desired it. She was immersed in her *taavah* (desire) for the *Eitz HaDaas* and she could not see beyond it; this represents the depth of the trait of *taavah*. Indulging in a *taavah* makes a person focus only on the present moment, on the *taavah* itself, and the person loses sight of his past and future.

We find in *halachah* that there are certain sights which are forbidden to stare at. For example, it is forbidden to stare at the rainbow. If one does so, he is spiritually damaging his eyes by laying his physical eyes on it. However, there is also a concept of damaging one's eyes on a more inner level: when a person fantasizes about what he sees and he is pulled after his vision. Ever since the sin of Adam with the *Eitz HaDaas*, man initially sees an incomplete and disparate picture of something, and his imagination can lull him after this disparate view that he sees. Man initially sees things now based on how desirable it is to his eyes, reminiscent of the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*.

"Who is a wise person? One who sees what will come." A truly wise person sees the beginning, middle and end of the picture. Thus he is able to be drawn after the inner essence of life.

Changing Our Perspective

The view from the 'right eye', the ability to see the bigger picture of things and see beyond the present moment, is essentially the view that comes from our pure and higher *seichel* (intellect).

An example of this would be if a person on his wedding day can remind himself of his day of death. (There is indeed a *minhag* by some people to remind themselves of death on the day of their wedding). It is an example of having a totally different view towards life; to be in the moment yet not to become too caught up in it, so that a person is still aware of the larger picture of life even as he's in the moment.

The Sages state that at the time where the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) is present, there is no mention of the *yetzer tov*.⁸⁸ This can also be explained in terms of the 'right eye' and the 'left eye'. When a person is stuck in the vision of his 'left eye', he cannot see beyond the fragmented pieces of reality that lay before him. What is our task when we are faced with improper desires and sights? Our task is not simply that we must try to overcome the difficult temptation. Rather, our task is to gain a new view towards the situation; to leave the view of our left 'eye' and instead see it through our 'right eye.' If we accomplish that transition, our difficulties with temptation will become greatly weakened. The change of perspective will give us entirely new strength to deal with it.

When a person only sees through his 'left eye', all he sees is the desire of his eyes, and there is no way for him to succeed in overcoming the desire and to stop lusting after his eyes. What is really needed is a change of perspective towards the situation, and then the person will have a much easier time with the struggle.

Compare this to a child who has developed the bad habit of overeating. The parents tell him, "Stop eating already!!" but he continues to eat and eat, because he doesn't know how to control himself. But if they tell him, "This snack has been set aside specifically for Shabbos", then the child understands that he cannot eat it, for it is specially set aside for Shabbos. He has a change of perspective towards the food now, so he doesn't touch it.

When a person fails at his *nisyonos* (difficulties) with temptation and lust, the true perspective is not to feel "I just couldn't withstand the temptation...I failed...."; rather the perspective needs to change entirely.

The *Gemara* says that if a person is coming towards an immodest sight and there is an alternative route to take, he should take the alternative path; but the *Gemara* says that even if he takes the alternative path, it is still very difficult for him to avoid the immodest sight, because the temptation is very strong. What, indeed, is the 'path' that a person must take? It is for a person to acquire a change of perspective towards the situation.

So, how does a person acquire a change of perspective? It is through looking into the Torah.

The Torah gives a person a new perspective entirely towards life; through viewing the situation through the lens of Torah – through an all-inclusive view that sees beyond the current moment.

88 *Nedarim* 32a

Leaving the Narrowed View of the 'Left Eye'

Every person has many failures and difficult tests on this world. Usually a person begins to seriously deal with his problems only when the problems become very extreme. A person is usually complacent with his issues, and he only gets nervous when the issues become extreme. Compare this to a person who hears about a fire. He is relatively calm when he hears the news. Then if he hears that the fire is getting near his house, now he begins to worry.

Another example: a person hears that another person has become ill, yet he remains calm, and he doesn't think that maybe it can happen to him too. He thinks, "Only other people get sick. These things don't happen to someone like me..."

It is like the verse, "*Seeking desire, breeds separation.*" When a person lives apart from others and he never empathizes with others' pain, he thinks "I am okay, *Baruch Hashem*. As for others, *rachmana litzlan* (may Hashem have mercy on them)..." And then if he himself receives the very same *nisayon* which he thought only happens to other people, he reacts with negativity: "This is so not fair! Life is so difficult!"

This is all the view from the 'left eye'. The 'left eye' immerses a person into a self-absorbed kind of existence. In contrast, the view from the 'right eye', the view of the wise, is the view that can bring a person to get to where must get to.

The Sages state that "all of the world has the status of a blind man, until Hashem comes and opens up the eyes." Everyone must understand that he is like a blind person who cannot see properly. (This is referring to our inner sight, not our physical sense of sight.) When a person really feels in his heart how true this is, he will then seek how to come out of his narrowed perspective, and receive a new way to view situations.

"Woe is to the creations, who see and do not know what they are seeing." This is referring to people who remain at the view of their 'left eye'.

It is indeed a challenging *avodah* (task) upon us to develop our 'right eye'. But for this, we are given an entire lifetime to work on this; an average lifespan of 70 years. We are given an entire lifetime to work on drawing ourselves closer to gain the view that is *einei haeidah*, 'eyes of the congregation'.

Here is an example. Whenever the Chofetz Chaim felt that he needed to strengthen himself and improve, he would look to strengthen his *emunah*, by reviewing the story of *Beraishis*. (Yes, even our *Gedolim* had ups and downs in their *ruchniyus*, and they needed to strengthen themselves). The depth of this was because whenever a person has a struggle or difficulty, he should remember where he comes from. When a person simply remembers his beginning, this itself can be a remedy to his problems.

All of our great forefathers, sages, and leaders of the past had difficult lives. But they saw life through the lens of their 'right eye', thus they saw the bigger picture of things, and that was how

they got through life. They saw past their private existence and were aware of the bigger picture of Creation that goes beyond oneself.

This does mean to say that all of a person's problems are coming from a previous *gilgul* (incarnation). We are trying to explain a far deeper perspective than blaming it on a past *gilgul*. We are speaking about a perspective that comes from the power of *emunah*.

Hashem says, "*I am the First, and I am the Last.*" This describes our *emunah*. With *emunah*, we can see the path of things from beginning until end. And ultimately, the beginning and end of each thing is Hashem.

To illustrate, Rav Dessler would say that at a wedding, the boys dance so much and are very joyous, because they are immersed in the present moment and they aren't thinking about the totality of life. He saw a wedding much differently. On a similar note, many people think that the world begins with them and ends with them.

Gaining the View from the 'Right Eye'

These words are not mere ideas. It is a way to view life.

To practically actualize this concept, get used to thinking into the beginning and end of each thing, and realize that everything begins and ends with Hashem. When you get up in the morning, think: "What is the beginning of the world? The fact that *"Hashem is One, and His Name is one"*. What will be at the end of the world? *"On that day, Hashem will be One and His Name will be one."*

This is what it means to get used to the view of our 'right eye', to the hidden light of Creation which saw from one of the world to the other. What does it mean that the hidden light could see from one of the world to another? Did it mean that a person could see the entire universe all at once? It means that a person was able to always see the beginning of creation and the end of creation: Hashem.

The Complete View: Bigger Picture and the Details Together

In actuality, we were given both a 'right eye' and a 'left eye', so we need to make use of both. We need a 'right eye' because we need to see the bigger picture of things, but we also need a 'left eye' which can see details. We need to fuse both perspectives together.

If a person only sees the general picture of things, he never sees details, and this is obviously detrimental. If a person only sees details and he never sees the bigger picture, he will think that a particular detail *is* the bigger picture of things; this resembles a person who is mentally deranged. Yet if a person tries to only see the bigger picture of things without seeing the details, he lives a delusional kind of existence.

We need both the right eye and the left eye; we need to see both the *hekef* (bigger picture) and the *peratim* (details). A wise person sees a situation through both of these lenses; he is aware of the

general picture of the situation as well as the details, and he knows how to avoid getting caught up in either one of these views.

This is what it means to possess “*einei haeidah*”, “eyes of the congregation” – it means to see the all-inclusive view on things. Not only did the wise sages of the past see the general picture of what was going on in their own generation, but they were able to connect all the details together and see how it formed the general picture.

May Hashem give us the strength to acquire the perspective that comes from both seeing the general picture of things as well as seeing the details, and to be able to combine these two views together: as one of the sages prayed, “That we see the qualities of our friends, and not their faults” – to view Creation through a true lens.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ For more on this topic, see *Tefillah* #0117 – *The Big Picture and The Details*; and see also *Getting To Know Your Thoughts*, chapters 06-09.

19 | *Av – Hearing Hashem*

The Month of Av and the Sense of ‘Hearing’

The month of Av, as we know, is the root of all tragedy and suffering in our history.

There are twelve months of the year, and each month contains a special power. The power contained in the month of Av, our Sages explain, is the power of *shemiyah* (hearing).

The Spies’ Evil Report Was ‘Heard’ In the Month of Av

The Vilna Gaon explains that in the month of Av, the *bnei Yisrael* heard the accounting of the Spies about the land of Israel, where the Spies spoke disparage about the land. Instead of listening to Yehoshua and Calev’s report, who spoke in praise of the land, the *bnei Yisrael* instead chose to listen to the other eight Spies, who spoke negatively about the land.

There is a power to use our ability of hearing for good, and there is a way how our hearing is used for evil. Our Sages explain that our ears contain an extra piece of skin underneath them, so that we can block out our ears from hearing something evil⁹⁰.

During the month of Av, the power of hearing was used for evil, when the *bnei Yisrael* listened to the Spies’ report about the land, and they came to cry ‘tears in vain’. Because they cried ‘tears in vain’, Hashem declared that day, the ninth day of Av, as “a day of crying throughout the generations”.

When we stood at Har Sinai, we used our power of hearing for good, where we heard the voice of Hashem. This was where our power of hearing was used in the most elevated way possible. But in the month of Av, where we cried futile tears, the ears that heard at Har Sinai were damaged. At Har Sinai, we were freed from all forces of impurity and evil, and we returned to the level of perfection.

When we heard the Spies’ report and we cried, the month of Av became a month of mourning for all generations to come; it was like a form of death that came to mankind.

There is personal mourning in each person’s life, and there is mourning on the collective level of the Jewish people, which is when we mourn over the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash*. Let us try to understand, with the help of Hashem, what good listening is, and what evil listening is. Let us see how we can use the power of hearing for holiness - which will merit us to hear the sound of Mashiach’s *shofar*.

⁹⁰ *Kesubos 5b*

Hearing and Understanding (Da'as)

Firstly, we need to know what the sense of hearing is about. The Sages state that there are four senses (contained in the parts of the face): sight, hearing, smell, and speech. What is the essence of the power to 'hear'? We can know what it is by analyzing its opposite. The opposite of a listener is a deaf person (in Hebrew, "*cheiresh*").

The Gemara defines a *cheirish*/deaf person as one who is born with the inability to hear and talk. If he can talk, he is not considered to be "deaf" according to the Torah. The Gemara also says that a *cheiresh* has no *da'as* (sensible understanding), just like a minor or mentally ill person has no *da'as*. Elsewhere, the Gemara says that he has 'weak' *da'as*. But either way, there is something missing from his *da'as*.

Thus, one who can hear, one who has "a heart that listens", is one who has *da'as*. There is an expression in the Gemara, "You do not listen to me, you do not understand me." Being a listener doesn't just mean to use your physical ears to listen to the other person. It means to listen with your heart; to have a "*lev shomea*", a heart that listens, or a "*lev meivin*", a heart that understands.

Thus, hearing implies the ability to both hear and talk, and it also includes the ability to have *da'as* (sensible understanding). What is the explanation of this matter?

The Ability to Hear the 'Word of Hashem'

If we want to understand the essence of any matter, we need to examine where it appears the first time in the Torah. The first time the Torah speaks about the idea of hearing is by Adam *HaRishon*, when he heard the voice of Hashem calling to him in Gan Eden.

From where does a person get his power to talk from? It is because Hashem breathes into a person His word; the "*dvar Hashem*" (word of Hashem). Our entire speech gets its vitality from the "*dvar Hashem*" that empower it. The entire Creation is supported and sustained by the *dvar Hashem*.

This is also why the Sages say that we are commanded to always speak words of Torah, and to avoid speaking words of idle chatter. It is because we have to use our power of speech to emulate the *dvar Hashem*, and such speech contains true vitality that comes from Hashem. By contrast, when someone speaks meaningless words, and surely when he utters forbidden speech such as gossip and other forbidden forms of speech, he is speaking words that are empty from vitality.

Man is called "*nefesh chayah*" (a living soul), and *Targum* says that this means man is a "*ruach memalelah*" (a talking spirit), thus our entire ability to talk is due to the word of Hashem that was breathed into us.

When Hashem created the universe, He created it with ten expressions, but there was no man yet to hear it. Man was created last, and he didn't hear the *dvar Hashem* that said "Let there be light" and "Let there be a firmament." Until we received the Torah at Har Sinai, no one ever heard the actual *dvar Hashem*. For twenty-six generations, no one heard Hashem's voice. Although our *Avos*

kept the entire Torah, and there was Torah learning in the yeshivah of Shem and Ever and in the yeshivah in Goshen, there was not yet a revelation of the *dvar Hashem* which a person could hear. Only at Har Sinai did we hear the voice of Hashem.

This is also the depth of the declaration of “*Naaseh V’Nishma*” (We will do, and we will hear), when we stood at Har Sinai. It was because we received a new kind of hearing, a new set of ears: the ability to hear Hashem’s voice. The ears we had before we stood at Har Sinai were not the same ears we had after Sinai. The ears we received at Har Sinai enable us to hear the *dvar Hashem*, to hear the Ten Commandments of the Torah, which commands us to speak the words of Torah. Ever since then, a person is able to remember Har Sinai – he is able to connect to the word of Hashem, which he heard at Har Sinai.

The Gemara defines a deaf person as one who is born as both deaf and mute; he cannot talk because there are no words which he has ever heard, to talk about. This is true about the physically deaf person - but there is also spiritual deafness (as we will soon explain).

When a person hears a spiritual message, he is connecting to the “*dvar Hashem*” that was heard at Sinai. Every single Jew received that ability.

The giving of the Torah was essentially a conversion process to Judaism, and it is also called a birth. The Sages said that a deaf person is one who is born deaf and mute, but if he can hear from birth, he is not called a deaf person according to *Halacha*. The birth of the Jewish people, which was at Har Sinai, meant that we were all on the level of hearing from birth. So we were all ‘born’ with the ability to hear the *dvar Hashem*, and ever since then, we have the ability to speak words of truth: the words of Torah, which is the word of Hashem.

The giving of the Torah at Sinai enabled us to receive a new kind of listening and speaking, in contrast to the person who is born deaf and mute, who cannot hear nor speak. This ability was only given to the Jewish people, for only the Jewish people stood at Sinai. It is forbidden to teach Torah to a gentile, nor may a gentile learn it; he is liable to capital punishment if he does so. This is because a gentile doesn’t view Torah as the *dvar Hashem*; he only learns it for the sake of knowing its information. But the Jewish people’s view towards the Torah is to learn it with the understanding that it is the *dvar Hashem*.

This is what it means to truly “hear”. A *lev shomeia*, a “heart that listens”, is a power exclusive to the Jew’s soul, who stood at Har Sinai. It is spiritual hearing; to hear the voice of Hashem – to hear the *dvar Hashem* in each thing.

Now we can understand what evil hearing is. When a person doesn’t hear the *dvar Hashem* in something, he has misused the power of hearing.

Hearing Hashem

Our *Gedolim* would often view the people who told them news as messengers of Hashem to let them hear what they needed to hear. They would hear Hashem talking to them within the

information. But even a person who is not a *Gadol* can hear the messages of Hashem through the things he hears, for it is said that every Jew can hear the Heavenly “*bas kol*”.⁹¹

The Destruction of the Beis HaMikdash: What We Lost

Yirmiyahu HaNavi warned *Klal Yisrael* that if they don’t repent, Hashem will come and collect His debt. He said, “*Hear, O heavens, and listen, earth.*” When *Klal Yisrael* didn’t listen to the Navi, it was not only because they didn’t repent, but because they lost the ability to listen with their hearts. By refusing to listen to the Navi, they lost their listening heart.

The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* was because *Klal Yisrael* wasn’t listening to what they needed to hear. Hashem speaks to a person all the time, but if someone doesn’t hear His voice, he does as he pleases and thus he never repents.

Yerushalayim, and specifically the *Beis HaMikdash*, was the place where the voice of Hashem would go out from to the rest of the world. “*For from Zion goes out Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.*” The voice of Hashem was heard at the giving of the Torah, and then it was no longer openly heard. But it continues to be heard in the Torah, in the “word of Hashem” - and it was heard in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The *Beis HaMikdash* was a place where a person could always hear the word of Hashem. Whereas the giving of the Torah was only a temporary time to hear the word of Hashem, the *Beis HaMikdash* was a place where it was heard constantly.

Thus, when we lost the *Beis HaMikdash*, we lost that ability to always hear Hashem’s word.

The Loss of the Shirah (Song)

Let us try to understand more what the deep power of “hearing” is.

The *Gemara* says that two voices cannot be heard at once. However, the *Raavad* writes that we can hear two tunes at once. This is because *nigun* (tune) is a higher kind of sound than hearing words. A person can also hear the *taamim* (sounds) and *nigun* (tune) contained in the Torah, the *shirah* (song) of the Torah, as he hears the words of Torah. In the *Beis HaMikdash*, the Kohanim would do the *Avodah*, and the Leviim sang the *shirah*; this was together with the “*dvar Hashem*” that went out from there.

We still have the Torah, even after the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed. What is missing now from the Torah, then? What Torah did we lose with the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*? We lost its inner song, its *niggun*, its *shirah*.

This is the depth of why the Sages wanted to forbid *shirah* after the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed. The *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred); the *shirah* is

⁹¹ A statement of the Baal Shem Tov. See *Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus* #010 – Inner Listening, and *Reaching Your Essence* #003

the opposite of the concept of *sinas chinam*. Whereas *sinas chinam* causes disparity, *shirah* comes to unify. It unified sound with word and enables us to hear two sounds at once.

In addition to the reason of *sinas chinam*, the *Beis HaMikdash* was also destroyed because of *lashon hora* (evil gossip). *Lashon hora* is also a kind of speech that causes disparity. *Lashon hora* is at its name implies – it is ‘*lashon ra*’, evil speech, because it is not true speech. It is far removed from the concept of *shirah*. One who speaks *lashon hora* about his friend is not unified with him and separates himself from him. He is missing the *shirah* of the Torah.

It is forbidden to hear *shirah* during the Nine Days, and the depth of this is because we lost the *shirah* of the Torah. We are missing the true *shirah*, and thus it is forbidden for us to take our minds off this loss; that is why we cannot listen to music during these days.

A *cheirish* (one who is born both deaf and mute) has no *da'as*, and the depth of this is because he cannot connect to others. He doesn't hear and he doesn't talk to others, so he cannot connect with others. Thus he has no *da'as*. If he can hear others or if he can talk to others, he is not considered by Chazal to be “deaf” according to *Halacha*, because he can at least connect to others.

Our Avodah: Hearing the Word of Hashem in Everything We Hear

Now we can better understand what our *avodah* is during these days.

The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* was rooted in the fact that *Klal Yisrael* heard the Spies' evil report. In addition, *Klal Yisrael* didn't listen to the prophets who warned them of the impending destruction. The *avodah* of these days is thus to access and regain the power of *shemiyah*, inner listening.

Our ears heard the word of Hashem when we stood at Har Sinai, and this ingrained in us the power to hear the word of Hashem in each thing. One can hear the *dvar Hashem* in each thing he hears. In this way, everything that a person hears can bring him to the state of oneness with Hashem.

When one doesn't hear the word of Hashem in each thing, and instead he simply hears the events of the world without connecting it to the *dvar Hashem*, he is listening to this “world of disparity” (as it is called by our Sages), instead of listening to the *dvar Hashem*. He hears the sounds of This World, not Hashem. This will also cause his own words that he speaks to be disconnected from the *dvar Hashem*.

But if one hears the *dvar Hashem* in each thing that he hears, he hears His one voice in everything. He only hears “one” voice alone. When he hears that “one” voice, he will find that his speech only can speak of only “one” thing....

In Conclusion

May we merit from Hashem that the impurity and blockages be removed from our ears, that instead of hearing the nonsense of this world, we should instead hear the word of Hashem. When we

are hearing the word of Hashem, we can then speak of one thing alone, a kind of speech will unify all of *Klal Yisrael* together and turn us into one unit again. And through this we will merit, with the help of Hashem – may it come speedily in our days - the rebuilding of the complete *Beis HaMikdash* and the coming of *Mashiach*. Amen.

29 | *Elul – Action*

Elul – The Month of Maaseh/Action

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are nearing the month of Elul, may it come upon us for good tidings. Let us try to understand a little, with the help of Hashem, the *avodah* upon us during these days, and hopefully we will each merit to also act upon these words, each on his own level.

Each month contains a special power that is connected to the particular time of the year that it is found in. The power of Elul is called *maaseh*, action. The power in man to “act” is especially manifest in Elul.

The Sages state (according to one opinion) that the world was created on the 25th of Elul. The Creation is called the “handiwork of Hashem”, His *maaseh* (action), thus the month of Elul is rooted in the original *maaseh* of Creation. Hashem revealed the power of His *maaseh* in Elul, so to speak; He “made” the heavens and the earth, which is all in terminology of “*maaseh*”.

When Elul arrives each year, the power of Hashem’s *maaseh* returns each year, as it were. Being that man has an *avodah* to resemble Hashem (as the Sages say, “Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful; just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate”), there must also be a power of *maaseh* on man’s own level, in some small resemblance to Hashem’s power of *maaseh*. What exactly is that *maaseh*, though, that we must perform?

The Gemara says that “the purpose of Torah is *teshuvah* (repentance) and *maasim tovim* (good deeds).” The simple meaning of this is that these are two different things the Torah leads to: repenting, and good deeds. It seems as if these two matters bear no connection; simply speaking, if a person commits a bad deed, he must repent over it, and thereafter he must perform good deeds. But the depth of the matter is as follows.

When Hashem created the world, He made it over the course of six days. This was an utterly pure and holy action, but even more so, Hashem created it with His ten expressions; His *dibbur* (word). He said “Let there be light” and there was light. He told the heavens to be created, and they were created. All of Creation is thereby powered by His word. When people perform an action, we usually attribute it to ourselves, thinking that it is our hands which do things. Our hands are the symbol of human action. But the symbol of Hashem’s actions is His word, for it is His word which created each thing.

Elul are days of *maaseh*, but it is hard to understand how exactly these days are days of *maaseh*. The *Tur* says that Moshe Rabbeinu stood for 40 days to receive the Torah, and the first 30 days of this were in Elul. The 40th day was Yom Kippur. Where is the ‘action’ in these 30 days of receiving the Torah? Moshe stood there for 40 days to receive the Torah, but how was this “action”? In truth, however, it shows that Elul is both a time of action and a time of receiving Torah. It is just hard to

understand how exactly it is a time of action. What we need to understand is that these days are of a different kind of action that the usual kind of “action” that we are familiar with.

This is a deep concept, so we will need to explain it very thoroughly.

Action/Building in Elul: Using Our Power of Speech in Selichos

The Gemara says that Torah scholars are called builders⁹², for it is written, “*And all your builders are those who learn [the Torah of] Hashem*”. How is something built? The power to ‘build’ [in the spiritual dimension] is not like how we build physically, which is through our hands, but through speaking words of Torah. A Torah scholar spends his day speaking of Torah, and that is how he builds the world.

This power is also given to all of us as well: we can build and perform deeds, through our power of speech. Just as Hashem created the world through His word, so did He give us the power to build, through words.

Where do we see this kind of ‘building’ take place, though? In Elul and in the Ten Days of Repentance, we make heavy use of our power of speech. There is *Selichos*, where we repeatedly ask Hashem for mercy. This is surely connected with the fact that we must increase our good deeds during Elul; but we just need to understand what exactly the connection is.

The way we know the answer to this depends on knowing what our soul’s power of *maaseh* is. What does it really mean to ‘do’ something? In the spiritual dimension, how can we ‘do’ something? We can understand that our body ‘does’ something, but how does our soul “do” something? If we understand what it is, we can understand what the *avodah* of “*maaseh*” in in Elul, but if not, then perhaps we will be able to increase our good deeds in Elul, but we will not have succeeded in developing the soul’s power of *maaseh*.

Let us reflect into the soul’s power of *maaseh*. The body performs actions, and it is our words which execute actions. Man is called “*nefesh chayah*” (living spirit), and Targum translates this to mean “*ruach memalelah*”, a talking spirit; man’s power of speech is essentially his spiritual power to “do” things. Thus, our power of *dibbur* (speech) is the source of our power to perform deeds (*maaseh*).

To illustrate this [on a deeper level], a Torah scholar lives in the realm of Torah words. He is constantly accessing his spiritual power of *maaseh*. In contrast, someone who does not live in the realm of Torah is not making use of the spiritual power of *maaseh*; the only *maaseh* he performs are physical actions with his hands,

Being that *dibbur* (speech) is identified with man’s title of *nefesh chayah* (living spirit), *dibbur*/speech is the source of all our spiritual actions. In Elul where we use the power of *dibbur* a lot

⁹² Berachos 64a

[through prayer and *Selichos*], we are thus involving ourselves in a *dibbur* that leads to *maaseh*; we are involved with a kind of *dibbur* that is all about *maaseh*. Soon we will explain what it is, but this is the outline of the concept.

Action Is About Completion

What exactly is the soul's power of *maaseh*/action that is contained in the power of *dibbur*/speech?

The Gemara says that one should perform that which he says. Otherwise, he has not completed that which he spoke about. We can learn from here that an "action" implies the *completion* of something. [On a deeper level], the "world of action" we live in is the finalized and completed form of all the higher worlds which precede it. What we "do" here on this world is the last step of everything that emanates from the higher worlds; it all ends here. Hashem intentionally created an imperfect world - and it is "completed" in the world of action we live in. We were created imperfect, and it is our task to complete ourselves, here on this world, this world of action.

A person thinks, then he says what he is thinking, and then he acts upon what he says. The action is the final step of the thinking process; it is the final step of everything. So action is not just an action – it is the completed and final step of a process.

What is the soul's power of *maaseh*, then? It is essentially the *completion* of the soul. Our body completes an action when it finishes "doing" some kind of labor or work, and our soul "does" something when it has completed its spiritual work on this world.

The Depth of Teshuvah: Uprooting the Reason to Sin

Let us try to understand a little more about the concept of *maaseh*.

Elul is the time where the world began (according to one opinion in the Sages, as mentioned earlier), but in the order of the months, it is the final month of the year. This shows the connection between Elul and *maaseh*: because Elul is the completion of the year. This is not because it is the 'last month on the Jewish calendar'; it is the time of the year where *our soul has finished its work* for this past year.

Teshuvah (repentance) includes regret and confession, and the Ramban famously writes that Hashem knows what the person is really thinking as he does *teshuvah*, if he is earnest or not. The depth of his words is because *teshuvah* is about putting an end to the sinful action. If one continues to sin, his "action" continues, thus he has not reached completion. If one confesses the sin but he continues to sin, he has not yet ended his sinful action. He is missing his soul's completion. But if he does *teshuvah*, that means he has put an end to the sinful action; he has reached completion.

Thus, the soul's power of *maaseh* is to put an end to things; for one to place boundaries and limitations on himself that he will not cross.

Elul, the days of *maaseh*, are also days of *teshuvah*. The connection between these two facts lies in the understanding of the earlier-quoted statement of our Sages, “The purpose of Torah is *teshuvah* and good deeds”. It is because when we do proper *teshuvah*, we access the power of *maaseh*. The concept of *teshuvah* is thus connected to the soul’s power of *maaseh*, which is essentially the idea of putting an end to things, to place boundaries and limitations on any sinful acts which we were doing, so that the sinful actions won’t continue to spread any further.

There are some parts of the soul which do not need boundaries to be placed on them. The desire in our soul to learn Torah, to *daven*, and to do *mitzvos* are all holy desires, which should only be increased, not decreased. But there are parts to the soul which we need to place limitations on. That is the idea of *teshuvah*.

Teshuvah is about returning the soul after one has sinned, not just to stop sinning. In order to do *teshuvah* in which one will not return to the **sin**, it is not enough to do *teshuvah* over the act itself, but to do *teshuvah* over the reason that motivated the person to sin. Often we are used to doing *teshuvah* over the sinful act, but not over the reason that caused us to sin. For this reason, the *teshuvah* of many people does not last. The depth of *teshuvah* is to stop the particular aspect in the [external layer of the] soul that is being motivated to sin.

Whenever our Sages said their words, they were not speaking to our bodies. They were speaking to our souls. The language of the soul is different than the language that the body understands. Of course, our body is a factor; much of keeping *Halachah* affects our body, not just our souls. But *teshuvah* is about returning the soul, not just to stop sinning. When one sins, the action is no longer here, but the motivation to sin is still here. We aren’t supposed to do *teshuvah* just on the mere actions that we did; we are meant to do *teshuvah* on the motivations to sin, which remains on this world long after the sin is over. That is how we return our soul when we do *teshuvah* - and that is the depth of *teshuvah*.

To Feel Complete

Let’s attempt now to explain this in clearer terms. We will ask: Why does a person sin? What is the internal source in the person that causes a person to do the opposite of Hashem’s will, *chas v’shalom*?

In the blessing of *Borei Nefashos*, we say, “*Borei Nefashos rabbos v’chesronam*” –the Creator of many souls and their deficiencies.” A person sins when he feels deficient about something and he seeks to fill that deficiency. If he would feel filled, he would not seek to fill himself with anything from the outside, and he would never commit the sin.

Thus, we can now understand better how the depth of *teshuvah* is not merely about stopping to sin, but about uprooting the reason that caused the sin in the first place.

For example, if a person spoke *lashon hora* about someone, why did he speak *lashon hora*? He was jealous of him, or doesn’t like him. What is his *teshuvah*? To stop talking *lashon hora* about the

person? Or to uproot his negative emotions towards him? The only reason why he spoke evil speech about the person was because he had an evil ‘eye’ towards the person. Every sin stems from some deficiency in the soul. That is where the main aspect of the *teshuvah* lies.

The main *avodah* of a person in doing *teshuvah*, besides for avoiding the sin, is to do “complete *teshuvah*” – to uproot the inner reason that caused one to sin. Incomplete *teshuvah*, by contrast, is to repent over the evil deed that was committed, without regretting the evil motivation that caused it. *Teshuvah* is therefore about returning the soul’s abilities to their pure source, after they had been used for evil.

For example, when a person steals 100 dollars, not only should he return the money; his *teshuvah* should be about regretting the desire he had to steal. If he would have been “happy with his lot” as the Sages teach, then he wouldn’t have come to steal. He only stole because he felt deficient about himself. Had he felt complete within himself, he never would have come to sin. The main part of the *teshuvah* is thus to return the soul from its deficient state into its original, complete state.

This is the meaning of “complete *teshuvah*” which we daven for in *Shemoneh Esrei*, and this is also the idea behind the soul’s power of *maaseh*.

Now we can understand better what the power of *maaseh* is. *Maaseh* is to feel complete and to feel that we lack for nothing; to feel complete within ourselves.

Of course, this is a power that needs to be used in its proper time and place. It does not mean that one should not have aspirations for holiness. If one learned a page of Gemara, he must certainly want to learn more pages of Gemara and he must not remain satisfied with the page of Gemara he learned. The power of *maaseh*, to feel complete, is only referring to being at peace from avoiding materialistic desires, not spiritual desires.

If a person is jealous of another person, if a person lusted after something, it was because he felt deficient about himself. The root of sin is always about some kind of deficiency the person felt. Thus the depth of *teshuvah* is to nullify the very desire for the sin, not just to regret the act of sin itself.

The days of Elul are called *yemai ratzon*, “days of will” – for it is the time to get in touch with our innermost will; to uproot the negative desires we have. This is what lays in the power of *maaseh*. When I don’t feel a necessity to pursue a desire, because I feel complete within myself, this is called *maaseh* – the “action” is complete.

The Deep Source of Teshuvah

This is a subtle and deep approach towards *teshuvah*. We all know we must do *teshuvah*, we all resolve to be better this year, but there is much more to *teshuvah* than this!

Chazal say that *teshuvah* was one of the things that existed already before Hashem created the world. Why was there a need for *teshuvah* if nothing was missing at that point from Creation and

there was no possibility of sin? It is to show us that the level of “complete *teshuvah*” is only when one connects to his deep inner source which lacks nothing.

If we do not know this deep source of *teshuvah*, it is very hard to actually do *teshuvah*. We all know what *teshuvah* is, we all want to *teshuvah*, but if we do not understand the deep source that it comes from, we cannot really do *teshuvah*.

The Sages said (concerning physical action): “The eyes sees, the heart desires, and the actions complete.” Not only does the body complete and “do” action that begins in the eyes and the heart (this was said in the context of physical desire), but so does the soul contain the power to “do” actions that complete: by feeling complete within itself, with no need for anything else outside of it. In this way, a person will never feel deficient, and he will never come to sin.

On *Rosh HaShanah*, it is brought in *Halacha* that one must rejoice⁹³. How can we rejoice on *Rosh HaShanah*, when Hashem is judging the world? It is because if one doesn’t rejoice on *Rosh HaShanah*, it is because he feels deficient. If he is incomplete, he cannot come to do real *teshuvah*.

So we must really know what *teshuvah* is about. *Teshuvah* is not only about regretting the sin and resolving not to sin again. The depth of *teshuvah* is to reach the deepest part of our soul, where we feel complete. When we feel that completion, we will find there that we have no desire to sin.

“One who is greater than his friend, has a greater *yetzer hora* than him.”⁹⁴ Why is this so? Compare this to a person who has a hundred dollars, who wants two hundred dollars. The more one has, the more he wants. But how indeed does one get rid of all his extraneous desires? By accessing the power of *teshuvah* that came before Creation. (In spirituality, we must aspire endlessly and always want more. But when it comes to materialistic desires, we must nullify all of these desires.)

That is complete *teshuvah*: to return to the deepest part of ourselves, where there are no desires. In that place in our soul we find the deeper power of *teshuvah* that has been around before Creation.

The *teshuvah* in Elul leads to Rosh HaShanah, the beginning of the year; thus the *teshuvah* in Elul leads to a new beginning. It is not simply leaving this past year (5771) and entering the new year (5772). It is about reaching an entirely new beginning.

Elul are days of *maaseh*. It is not about simply doing more good deeds, although that is also true that we must increase our goods. It is about reaching the completion of our soul, where we feel complete inside ourselves, where we are so attached in closeness to Hashem that we feel the greatest sense of completion from this.

Elul is depicted as “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” (“I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”)—one who does not feel this in Elul cannot feel completion, and then he will be missing the true depth

⁹³ Tur: Orach Chaim 597:1

⁹⁴ Sukkah 52a

of *teshuvah*. But if one feels the meaning of “*Dodi*” (“my Beloved”) in Elul – that Hashem is our Beloved companion Who fills all of our life – this enables him to feel completion at this, and from that place in himself, he is spurred on to do “complete *teshuvah*”.

The Deep Source of Our Completion

Thus, we can now understand that “Torah scholars are called builders” in the sense that they build from a place of completion in themselves, not out of deficiency. They build the world through their words of Torah, and the Torah is complete; thus they are building the world from a complete source.

The more a person is attached in closeness with Hashem, he is connected to completion and perfection, and he lacks for nothing. It won’t be possible for him to sin, because there is no more reason that motivates him to sin. Of course, we are human and imperfect. But when one is close to Hashem, he receives a special spiritual light of completion, which makes him feel complete and doesn’t allow him to sin.

In the days of Elul and *Yomim Noraim*, we should know that these are not just days to increase Torah learning and to do more mitzvos, although that is certainly truthful to do; it is not the purpose. The purpose of these days is to enter the depth of this time, to enter the deepest part of our own souls, where our soul is connected to the reality of Hashem. It is a place in the soul which is attached to perfection, and when we connect to this place in our soul, we are connected to completion and perfection, and there is then no possibility of sin there, with the more we are connected to that place. It is there that we can do complete *teshuvah*.

In Conclusion

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*, “Return us, in complete repentance, before You.” To do *teshuvah* “before Hashem” is to do *teshuvah* and become closer to Hashem through it. If the *teshuvah* doesn’t bring one closer to Hashem from it, it is not “complete” *teshuvah*.

May the Creator merit us to reach this perfection in our souls and to connect ourselves to the reality of the Creator, and to do His will always, throughout every day of the year.

21 | *Elul – Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*

The “I” That Connects To “My Beloved”

Elul/אלול is an acronym for “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” (אני לדודי, ודודי לי), (“I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”).

There is “*Dodi*” (“my Beloved”/Hashem) - and there is our “*ani*” (the “I”). But what exactly is that ‘*ani*’ that bonds with our ‘*Dodi*’?

Let us reflect on this. When Elul comes, every Jew feels somewhat inspired; we all feel some level of spiritual awakening. But is that inspiration on a level of “*ani*” (“I”)? There is no Jew in Elul who does not feel inspiration (as long as his soul contains a bit of holiness). Everyone feels some kind of awakening. But the question is, if this inspiration translates into the level of “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*.” Has the inspiration become a part of one’s ‘*ani*’ - a part of his “I”?

Going Beyond Inspiration

The word for “inspiration” in Hebrew is “*hisorerus*”, which is from the word “*raua*”, “shaky”. This implies that all *hisorerus*/inspiration is a shaky foundation to build upon. Although inspiration is better than nothing at all, and it is certainly important, we cannot [only] build ourselves on inspiration. We need something more than inspiration in order to build ourselves. When we rely on inspiration to do it for us, we are on a shaky foundation. But if we make something a part of ourselves and we allow it to become our actual level, we are connected to it on an ongoing basis.

Inspiration to do something nice does not come from the deepest part of our existence (our *havayah*). If it would be a part of our essence, then it wouldn’t be inspiration. “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” is describing the bond we can reach with Hashem in Elul which can only come from being in touch with our “*ani*”, with our “I”, our inner self. If it is not coming from one’s ‘*ani*’, then there is no “*V'Dodi Li*” that follows.

Defining the “Ani” (Our “I”)

So what is the ‘*ani*’? Similarly, what exactly is the “*Li*” (“to me”) that is in the words “*Dodi Li*”?

It is definitely not referring to inspiration, as we explained above. It is much more than inspiration. Inspiration is wonderful, but it does not lead to “*Ani L'Dodi, V'Dodi Li*”. So we first must understand what the “*ani*” is.

We are used to assuming that our “*ani*” (our “I”, our self) should become dedicated to our *Dodi* (“My beloved”/Hashem), and that all we have to do is direct our *ani* to our *Dodi*; to become closer

to Hashem. But it is more than that: our *avodah* begins with the getting in touch with our “*ani*” in the first place.

Rav Chaim Vital said that the “*ani*” of a person is not defined by his physical flesh, but by the *nefesh*, the spiritual life-force of man.⁹⁵ Yet, there is even more depth to the “*ani*” of a person than this.

There are three letters contained in the word “*ani*” (אני) – the letters *aleph* (א) *nun* (נ) and *yud* (י). There is a rule taught by Sages [in the *sefarim hakedoshim*] that the letters of *Lashon HaKodesh* (the Hebrew alphabet) which describe a word are really the very essence of the thing being described. The “I” of the person is called “*ani*” in *Lashon HaKodesh*, which will mean that the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* are describing our very essence.

This “*ani*” of ours must become dedicated to our “*Dodi*”, but we first must know what the “*ani*” is. What is the “*ani*” in us? [Now the question has become clearer and deeper]: What does it mean that the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* form our actual essence?

Someone who doesn’t like to think deeply will balk at this question. “What do you mean, “*Who am I?* I am who I *am*! That is who I *am*.” But if a person has never thought deeply about his *ani* “I”, it means that he has never reached his “*ani*” yet - and he definitely won’t be able to connect his “*ani*” with Hashem.

Returning to the original question: What is the significance that our “*ani*” consists of the letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud*?

The Concepts of Aleph, Yud, and Nun

The letter “*aleph*” represents beginnings; it is the source. *Aleph* is the first letter of the *Aleph Beis*, and Hashem created the world from the letter *Aleph*.

Where do the letters *nun* and *yud* come into the picture?

The Sages say that “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”. The Ramban says that “the Torah consists entirely of names of Hashem”. Although Hashem has many “names”, He has one name which is His main name: the four-letter name of *havayah*, which contain the letters *yud*, *hey*, *van*, and *hey*. Within Hashem’s name of *havayah*, the letter “*yud*” is the first and root letter; thus the letter *yud* represents a higher kind of beginning that precedes all.

The letter *nun* is equal in numerical value to the number 50, paralleling the concept of the “50 Gates of Understanding” which the world was created with.

At first these concepts will appear abstract the first time we hear them. We hope to explain these concepts more clearly as we continue. At this point, all we can understand is that these three letters

⁹⁵ *Shaarei Kedushah* 1:1

of *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* (and the concepts they represent) form our “*ani*”, our “I”; and when we have these three aspects integrated, we can then connect our “*ani*” to our “*Dodi*”, to Hashem. If we are missing the integration of these three aspects, there is no formation of our “*ani*” - and then there is no “*ani*” to connect with to our *Dodi*.

“Aleph” – Getting To the Root/Source of Things

We encounter many things each day. Do we ever look into the source of each thing we encounter? For example, when learning a *halacha*, does a person make sure to look up the source of the *halacha*?

One kind of person learns the *halacha* because he wants to know what to do, but another person will not only learn the *halacha* to know it, he also looks into the source. He wants to understand it at its root. This is a power in the soul to search for the root of things, and it is a very deep power. One can keep looking further into the root of things, then into the root of that root, then into the preceding root, until he reaches the very Root itself.

Of course, if we ask any person what the very source and root of each thing is, every person will say, “Hashem.” But is that perspective carried over into our own soul as well?

Everything is rooted in the Torah. Does a person see how something is rooted in the Torah? To give another example, does a person ever wonder what the source of the word “Elul” is? Where does it come from? **We speak of Elul, Elul, Elul – but what is the word “Elul” and what does it come from? Do we ever think of this?**

This is just one example, but there are many more examples as well, of this idea. The point is not to amass knowledge. The point is to uncover the source and root of the things we come across.

This puts us in touch with the power in our soul to see beginnings. This is a unique ability to the Jew’s soul, called “*raishis*” (beginning; the power to see the beginning). The Sages state, “Yisrael is called “*raishis*” (the beginning)”, because a Jew’s soul has the special ability to get to the “*raishis*”/beginning of things. A Jew has the ability to see the “*raishis*” of each thing – to see the root of each thing, and at a deeper level, it used to get to the very Root of all: Hashem. A Jew can get to the *raishis* of the *havayah* (essence) of each thing.

The “*aleph*” of our “*ani*” is to get to the beginning of each thing, and then we have the power to connect to the Creator. This is one aspect of how our “*ani*” can connect to our “*Dodi*”.

“Yud” – Reflecting Into the Chochmah (Wisdom) Of Everything

The second aspect of our “*ani*” is the letter *yud*, which hints to the root of the four-letter name of Hashem. The letter *yud* represents the higher beginning of Creation – a beginning that came before the ‘beginning’ of Creation. We say how “*All of them You made with wisdom*” - Hashem created the world with His *chochmah* (wisdom); all of the creation stems from Hashem’s *chochmah*/wisdom. The inner essence of each thing is thus the *chochmah*/wisdom of Hashem which empowers it.

The “*yud*” aspect of our “*ani*” is thus referring to searching for the *chochmah*/wisdom that is found in each thing we encounter. The creation in front of us is not simple; it is very complex and deep.⁹⁶ You can see wisdom in each thing in Creation. If a person only sees what his eyes see, he only sees the superficial layer of what he is seeing. If he is seeing the G-dly wisdom in it, he is seeing its essence, its reality.

Thus, the second aspect of our “*ani*” is to think deeply into things. It essentially refers to our true *seichel* (intellect). This is not referring to normal level of human logic, which even the gentiles possess (and Chazal say that we can even trust this basic level wisdom found in the gentiles). It refers to a higher kind of *seichel* which comes from the Creator - a “G-dly” kind of intellect that is poured down into the soul.

To give an example of it, if a person eats bread every day, he should reflect on the concept of bread. He can think: Where does the Torah talk about bread? What is the purpose of bread according to the Torah? What is its concept? In this way, you gain doubly: you see its source in the Torah (which is the first aspect of our *ani*), and you also see the *chochmah* in it (the second aspect of our *ani*).

“*Nun*” – *Expanding Upon Our Thoughts (Binah)*

Now we will explain the third aspect of our “*ani*”, which is the letter *nun*.

The letter *nun* is equal in numerical value to the number 50, corresponding to the “50 Gates of *Binah* (understanding)” that Hashem created the world with. *Binah* is the power we have to reflect deeper and expand upon our original thoughts, which gives us greater understanding [of the matter at hand].

Thus, in summary, our ‘*ani*’ is meant to look for the root of each thing in the Torah (this is the ‘*aleph*’ aspect of the ‘*ani*’), it can see the G-dly wisdom found in each thing (this is the ‘*yud*’ aspect of the ‘*ani*’), and it then reflects deeper into those thoughts (the ‘*nun*’ aspect of the ‘*ani*’).

This parallels the statement of the Sages that “Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one” – the “*ani*” of the Jew’s soul (Yisrael) is a part of the Torah (by seeing how the source of each thing is in Torah), and the Torah is connected with Hashem.

Reaching Our “Ani”

⁹⁶ Editor’s Note: Elsewhere, the Rav has quoted the statement of the Chazon Ish that “There is no such thing as something in Creation that is not complicated – everything in Creation is complex and deep.” (See *Getting To Know Your Thoughts_01_The Basis of Thought*). In other places, the Rav has quoted the teaching of Rabbi Nachman of Breslev that there is an avodah to see the *seichel* (G-dly wisdom and intellect) in each thing.

Thus, when one reflects into the root of each thing and into the wisdom of each thing, he reaches his “*ani*”. After reaching his “*ani*”, he can then dedicate his “*ani*” to Hashem: “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi Li.*” How many people think they are already in touch with themselves, and they think that all they have to do is become closer to Hashem...? They are really missing their connection to their “*ani*” to begin with!

One’s awareness towards his “*ani*” is usually very superficial, shallow, and shaky. When one tries to connect to “*Dodi Li*” when he hasn’t yet reached his “*ani*”, he will try to ‘inspire’ himself, but as we can all see, this inspiration does not last for very long. It usually lasts until a little bit after *Simchas Torah*, and then people quickly return to the routine of the year. In most instances, inspiration usually does not last. It is all because the person did not really use his “*ani*”. If he would have, it would have become “*Dodi li*”; the person would have felt that Hashem’s presence has become more permanent in his life.

“*Ani L’Dodi*” is not a perception that is reached through waking up one day and learning a *mussar sefer* or a *sefer on chassidus*, and to suddenly feel inspired and feel, “*Ani L’Dodi!*” There is a structure that must precede it; it is only reached through a certain approach towards life from during the rest of the year. When a person has the proper approach during the rest of the year, he gains a holy intellect from this, which enables him to come to the understanding of “*Ani L’Dodi*”, during Elul.

Removing Extraneous Desires From the Heart

In order to get to this understanding and live in this way, one needs to improve his spiritual heart. If one’s heart is not pure and it is full of desires for This World and it contains unfixed *middos*, the heart will block the true *da’as* (awareness) from the mind and it will prevent a person from accessing his higher intellect.⁹⁷

Dovid *HaMelech* said, “*My heart is empty within me.*” One must empty out the heart from all traces of evil, and then there is space in his heart to allow his *da’as* to settle there. The truth of Hashem’s existence can then be internalized there. Then one can attain a bond with Hashem.

But if the heart remains unfixed, a person will continue to have desires that are for other things, and it will be like a “strange god” living inside the person. It will prevent his mind from having the clarity to see truth. One needs to uproot his desire for This World and the worldly desires which are not truthful. When one yearns instead for Hashem, this is “*Ani L’Dodi*”.

Yearning for Hashem needs to be accomplished both through our mind (which contains our *neshamah*/Divine soul, also known as the power of “*seichel d’kedushah*”, holy intellect), and through our heart (which contains our *Ruach*, the “G-dly spirit”, contained within man). These two parts (the mind and the heart) comprise our true “*ani*” that enables us to reach “*Dodi Li.*”

⁹⁷ Refer to “*Getting to Know Your Thoughts*”

Why Inspiration Often Doesn't Last

Inspiration as well stems from our heart, but it first has to pass through the various desires that are in our heart, and if there are still unholy desires in our heart, the inspiration wanes. There are many desires in the heart, in quality and in their magnitude, so if a person feels awakened to desire something holy, it is quickly washed over by the many desires in the heart that contradict it. For this reason, inspiration is usually gone as soon as it appeared.

What was missing from the person? Did he not have a desire to improve? He surely had a holy desire; we aren't arguing with that. But the problem is that he didn't uproot the other many desires of his heart, so his one desire to improve didn't stand a chance, against all those many desires.

The days of Elul are called "*yemai ratzon*", "days of will". The simple meaning of this is that Elul is when Hashem's desire for the Jewish people is more revealed and He draws us closer to Him. But it is also because these are days where we can reveal one *ratzon* (will) alone: "Our desire to do Your will." The *Gemara* says that we all want to do Hashem's will, but the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) prevents us. So what, then, is our *avodah*? Our *avodah* is to get rid of the unholy desires in the heart.

Practically speaking, one cannot uproot all negative desires at once. They must be uprooted slowly and in steps.

Improving the Mind and the Heart

Our *avodah* in Elul is really two-fold. We need to gain a holy mind and a holy heart, and integrate them.

We gain a holy mind by thinking into the source of each thing. One can keep probing into the source of each thing, more and more, until he discovers its beginning in the Torah.

We gain a holy heart by getting rid of our unholy desires. We cannot do it by simply trying to want the right thing, as many people think. This won't do much; at best we will be able to inspire ourselves for some time, and it will not last beyond Elul. It is of course a wonderful thing to desire holiness, but it will not be enough to implement change; we will also need to get rid of the other desires in ourselves, if we are to really change. This is because as long as the unholy desires remain in our heart, they prevent us from holding onto our holy desires.

Inspiration Vs. Lasting Change

The Ramban says that one must be able to turn inspiration into lasting change. From this we can see that inspiration itself is temporary and it doesn't have much value. It can definitely get a person started on the path towards change, but after inspiration goes away, it is very difficult and unrealistic

for a person to keep it up. Often when a person is inspired he makes resolutions to change in certain areas, but soon after he is back to routine.

Instead, a person needs to accept upon himself something that he can never veer from, long after the inspiration is over. If inspiration has caused a person to take upon himself an absolute change which he never reverses, then the inspiration has served its purpose. But if the inspiration is just something that came and went with time, such inspiration is not describing Elul.

Thus, the point of this time of inspiration is so that we can resolve to make *absolute changes* in our life; *decisions*, and not merely to feel spiritual awakening. It must cause a person to feel obligated to change and to accept himself a certain change that he will never veer from.

That change, as we explained, consists of two parts. We need to make use of our mind (holy intellect) and our heart for it. As we explained, these changes must be gradual and in steps. When we attempt to remove our unholy desires,⁹⁸ this must not be done rapidly and in an extreme manner, but slowly and in steps. We must slowly eliminate each desire, one by one.

If this is what our inspiration in Elul leads us to, the changes are permanent; our mind and heart is changed. This enables us to truly build ourselves, to build our own inner worlds, to reach our true “*ani*”, and it is that *ani* which can become the “*Ani L’Dodi, V’Dodi, Li*” (“I am to my Beloved – and my Beloved is to me”).⁹⁹

⁹⁸ See the author’s sefer, *Getting to Know Your Thoughts*

⁹⁹ For more on how to maintain our inspiration, see Tefillah #0119 – *Inspiring Ourselves Vs. Building Ourselves*

22 | *Kislev - The Depth Behind Sleep*

The Month of Kislev – The Power of “Sleep”

Our Sages state that the month of the Kislev contains the power of “sleep”.¹⁰⁰

This concept needs understanding. How is “sleep” an *avodah*.¹⁰¹ for us?! True, the winter is a time where people sleep more, so we see that there is a connection between sleep and the winter, where the month of Kislev falls out in. But how does that make “sleep” into an *avodah*?

When we learn Torah or when we *daven*, it’s clear that we’re doing an *avodah*. When we eat, we are able to elevate this act for *Avodas Hashem*, because we can sanctify our eating, in various ways.¹⁰² But how can sleep raise us spiritually? How can sleep be a holy *avodah*?

The simple answer that people say to this is because when we go to sleep, we can have the intention that we are refreshing ourselves to be able to serve Hashem better. Although this is true, this is only the superficial answer, and it does not explain the depth that is behind the *avodah* of “sleep”.

The Beis HaMikdash and Sleep

The *Vilna Gaon* explains that sleep is an *avodah*, because since the *avodah* [of the *Kohanim*] was performed in the *Beis HaMikdash*, and we find that the *Beis HaMikdash* was a place of “sleep” [soon this will be explained], therefore, sleep is an *avodah*. Those are his words, and here we will try to understand this ambiguous and difficult statement; and through this we will see how sleep can be an *avodah*. If the *Beis HaMikdash* was a place that epitomized “sleep” [at this point we do not understand what it means, and later we will explain], it must be that sleep is not just something we do to refresh ourselves to serve Hashem better; it is something that reveals spirituality.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was a place where there was a revealed spirituality. If the *Beis HaMikdash* is a place of “sleep”, it must be that our sleep somehow serves to reveal something in our own spirituality.

¹⁰⁰ *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:1, as explained in the commentary of the Gra (the Vilna Gaon)

¹⁰¹ form of service to Hashem

¹⁰² The *avodah* of “eating” is the idea of the month of Shevat; see *Rosh Chodesh Avodah_011_Shevat – Elevated Eating*

Before we explain how sleep can be an *avodah*, let us try to understand this statement of the Vilna Gaon that the *Beis HaMikdash* is a place of “sleep”. First of all, how can this be? Doesn’t the *Gemara*¹⁰³ state that on Sukkos, everyone stayed up all night from all of the festivities of the *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah*, and they were fending off sleep, so that they shouldn’t fall asleep in the *Beis HaMikdash*? How then can the Vilna Gaon say then that the *Beis HaMikdash* is a place of “sleep”?

Prophecy and Sleep

All of the prophets, except for Moshe *Rabbeinu*, received their prophecies in their dreams, as they slept. Prophecy could only come when there is sleep; this shows us that sleep is a time in which a person can reach a very spiritual high level. Prophecy is the highest level one can achieve, so there must be something very special about sleep, if prophecy only happens during sleep. It shows us that sleep is not just something we do to refresh ourselves to serve Hashem better; sleep itself has its own purpose.

What is the loftiest *avodah* that we have? A person can attain certain high levels of closeness to Hashem through his *davening* (prayer) which he doesn’t get through learning Torah; this is more known to us. Yet, even *davening* isn’t the highest level we can reach. Prophecy was attained precisely through sleep, not through prayer. How, indeed, does sleep raise a person to such high spiritual levels? How can it be more spiritual than prayer?!

The *Arizal* and the Vilna Gaon both wrote that sleep is a time in which a person receives the highest comprehensions, even more than during the daytime. However, although this is true in concept, we still need to know how exactly we make sleep can be an “*avodah*” for a person. What exactly is so special about sleep?

What’s even harder to understand about this is that the Vilna Gaon writes that when a person sleeps, he loses his *seichel* /intellect, and instead his imagination takes over. What then is so spiritual about sleep? A person loses his *daas* (his rational thinking abilities) when he sleeps. Man is gifted with the quality of *daas*; man has the title of “*bar daas*” and that is his greatness. But when we sleep, we lose our *daas*; our intellect is not working and instead our imagination is dominant. It is thus very hard to understand how sleep can give a person more spiritual comprehension.

Sleep – A “Sixtieth of Death”

The answer to this lies in a statement of Chazal, that sleep is called a “sixtieth of death”. This hints to us something special about sleep. It is a time where the soul leaves the body; we leave our body’s hold upon us when we sleep. In this sense, sleep is an opportunity for us to become elevated spiritually. Soon we will soon explain how exactly sleep can elevate us, but this is the outline of the concept.

¹⁰³ Sukkah 53a

Earlier, we brought from the Vilna Gaon that the *Beis HaMikdash* was a place of “sleep”. We raised the question that this is very difficult to understand. Making the question stronger, it is written, “*For from Zion comes forth the Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.*” The *Beis HaMikdash* is known as the place where the Torah rulings issued forth from. How, then, can the Vilna Gaon say that the *Beis HaMikdash* is a place that epitomizes “sleep”?

The answer lies in the following.

The Beis HaMikdash, Binyamin, and “Sleep”

The Vilna Gaon wrote that the month of Kislev is the revelation of the power of “sleep”, which was epitomized through the *Beis HaMikdash*. The site of the *Beis HaMikdash* was in the tribe Binyamin’s portion of land. This shows us that there is a connection between sleep, the *Beis HaMikdash*, and the tribe Binyamin. What, indeed, is the connection between these three?

The Torah recounts how Rachel *Imeinu* died in childbirth as she gave birth to Binyamin. Chazal state that the birth of Binyamin was very difficult for her and it depleted her all of her strength, and that is why she died in childbirth. But there is more to this matter. It wasn’t simply that Binyamin’s birth simply drained her of all her physical strength. It was really because it took *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice, or altruism) on Rachel Imeinu’s part to give birth to Binyamin. Therefore, Binyamin represents the power of his mother’s *mesirus nefesh*.

If the *Beis HaMikdash* is in Binyamin’s portion, and Binyamin represents *mesirus nefesh*, it shows us that *mesirus nefesh* is required in order to acquire the *Beis HaMikdash*. We also know that Yitzchok Avinu showed *mesirus nefesh* by being willing to give up his life for Hashem at the site of *Akeidah*.¹⁰⁴ which was at the future site of the *Beis HaMikdash*. The hint of this is because *mesirus nefesh* is the power that is necessary to have the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Now we can understand the mysterious words of the Vilna Gaon that the *Beis HaMikdash* is a place of “sleep”: it is because **when a person goes to sleep, he is exercising the power of *mesirus nefesh* – by giving his soul back to the Creator. The soul leaves the body when we sleep, for sleep is a “sixtieth of death”, thus, sleep is a manifestation of the power of *mesirus nefesh*.**

The Avodah of Mesirus Nefesh – Before We Go To Sleep At Night

Now that we have explained that the *avodah* of “sleep” is really a use of *mesirus nefesh*, what we need to understand is how we show *mesirus nefesh*. When do we ever exercise *mesirus nefesh*?

When we recite the *Shema*, which is twice a day, by the prayers of *Shacharis* and *Maariv*, it is brought in *Halacha* that a person should have the intention of *mesirus nefesh*, that he is willing to die

¹⁰⁴ The Altar on “Har HaMoriah” (Moriah Mountain), where Avraham Avinu performed “the binding of Yitzchak”

for Hashem, upon finishing the word “*Echad*”..¹⁰⁵ However, this is still not yet an **active** use of *mesirus nefesh*; it is only **potential** *mesirus nefesh*. The only time that a person **actively** has *mesirus nefesh* is when he goes to sleep, for sleep is when we give back our soul to the Creator.

In the *Kerias Shema Al HaMittah* (the recital of the *Shema* which we say before we get into bed at night), a person says the verse, “*Into Your hand, I give over my spirit.*” When a person is going to sleep, he is giving over his soul to Hashem – he is actually giving it away! We should be aware of this before we go to sleep. When we are saying *Kerias Shema al hamittah*: “*I am giving away my soul to Hashem!*”

This opportunity usually goes lost. Usually when people go to sleep, they get into bed very tired and exhausted, and sleep is usually viewed as just a means to relieve tiredness. But sleep is really an *avodah*. It is an *avodah* of actively having *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem: to feel that we are giving away our soul to Him for the night.

During the rest of the day, we do not have this opportunity. Even if we had the intention of *mesirus nefesh* as we say *Kerias Shema* during the prayers of *Shacharis* and *Maariv*, it is only a potential kind of *mesirus nefesh*, and it is not active *mesirus nefesh*. The only time during the day that we **actively** exercise *mesirus nefesh* is by the *Kerias Shema Al HaMitah*, at night, before we go to sleep.

Animals also sleep, but they sleep only because they’re tired. A Jew, however, is able to sleep with a higher intention, *mesirus nefesh*, by being ready to give away his soul to Hashem for the night, before going to sleep. Of course, our body needs to sleep because it is simply tired and exhausted. But if a person goes to sleep just because he’s tired, then his sleep is no different than how an animal sleeps. Our existence is that of a body and a soul; our body needs sleep so it won’t be tired, but our soul needs sleep for a different reason – so that it can have *mesirus nefesh*.

Thus, even our soul “sleeps” at night. How can our soul sleep? Don’t we know that there is no sleep in *Gan Eden*? Is there such a thing as sleep in the spiritual realm? Our soul “sleeps” by giving itself away to Hashem, when our bodies go to sleep.

This is the ideal intention to have in mind before we go to sleep at night: “I am really giving away my soul to Hashem”. It is the opportunity we have once a day to be able to have *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem!

(This is also the depth behind the *mitzvah* to sleep in the *sukkah*. We aren’t just sleeping in the *sukkah* in the physical sense. We are sleeping in the *sukkah* because we are giving ourselves away to Hashem in the *sukkah*, and that is the message of taking shelter in the *sukkah*).

Now we can understand why prophecy could only happen during sleep. It was because only someone who is willing to really give himself up for Hashem can attain prophecy, for sleep is the act of giving oneself away to Hashem.

¹⁰⁵ *Shela HaKadosh*

Now we can also understand why the *Beis HaMikdash* was a place of “sleep,” as the Vilna *Gaon* says. It is because *mesirus nefesh* was required in order to have the *Beis HaMikdash*, and our sleep is a time in which we can reveal our power of *mesirus nefesh*. The *Beis HaMikdash* served this entire purpose: it showed us that a person has to dedicate his entire life to Hashem - to have *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem.

In Conclusion

We should realize that once a day, we have the opportunity to have active *mesirus nefesh*: before we go to sleep at night, each night, we can utilize *mesirus nefesh*. It is active *mesirus nefesh*, as opposed to potential *mesirus nefesh*; thus, right before we go to sleep at night is the prime time where we can utilize the power of *mesirus nefesh*. One should feel then that he is actually giving himself away to Hashem.

If a person lives like this, his whole life will change – he will go to sleep very differently, and he will wake up an entirely different person.

When Yitzchok *Avinu* had *mesirus nefesh* by the *Akeidah*, he was clearly not the same Yitzchok as before the *Akeidah*. He was not the same person anymore, after he utilized *mesirus nefesh*. Using the power of *mesirus nefesh* transforms you into a whole new person. Thus, if we go to sleep at night with the intention of *mesirus nefesh* beforehand, we will wake up in the morning an entirely new person.

Each person, according to his own level, needs to absorb this point, and to feel before he goes to sleep at night that he is giving himself away to Hashem.¹⁰⁶

May we all receive the strength to do this and merit the future, when all death will be removed from the world, where the dead “will get up and rejoice.”

¹⁰⁶ For more on this avodah of practicing “*mesirus nefesh*” before going to sleep at night, see Tefillah #0141 – *The Fear of Death and Its Purpose*, and Tefillah #0153 – *Protecting Our Souls From Harm*. For more on the avodah of “sleep”, see Tefillah #0154 – *Society and Your Self*. On another occasion, the Rav has explained the avodah of “sleep” in the context of analyzing our dreams – see Rosh Chodesh Avodah_009_Kislev_Getting To Know Your Self Through Dreams

23 | Teves – How To Get Angry

Studying Every Concept In-Depth

Whenever we start a *sugya* (discussion), we need to learn it in all its details. Just like a person who is learning to become a doctor learns about all the details of health before he starts his practice, so must we learn about all the details of something when we want to know what it is. When a person tries to understand something, he has to see how it will affect him on a personal level, how it will affect the way he relates to his family and how he relates to the rest of the world.

Everything is made up of many details. For example, we find ten expression of *tefillah*/prayer. This shows us that *tefillah* has to be to us a carefully built structure – made up of ten floors. All of these floors need to be climbed.

The same goes for every *sugya*. It is not enough just to focus on how something applies to us *l'maaseh* (practically). We are not supposed to simply be looking for advice on things. “An ignoramus cannot be a devout person.” We must build a plan for ourselves.

“*The world is built on kindness.*” First we must always build our plan, and then we can implement it and be affected. But we can’t jump to the “doing” part unless we first study the background of it. Inspiration and ideas are not either enough to be able to know how to act properly. In order to act properly, we need to study the background properly.

We first need to tackle the root information of a concept, in anything we learn.

Anger Destroys Our Structure

Each person is a microcosm of the entire universe. Whenever we build and develop anything, it is a part of our growth. But there is something in particular which can uproot whatever we are building: the trait of anger.

Anger is the destructive force in Creation. *Chazal* say that one who gets angry experiences all kinds of Gehinnom. An angry person also breaks things; anger is the antithesis to building and developing, because it comes and destroys things. Anger can destroy not only the person himself and his family, but it can even destroy the world, similar to how the Flood came and destroyed the world.

Different Kinds of Anger

Every person knows what anger is, but only in general terms. There is much more to anger, however. Just as the body can get sick in many different ways, so are there many different forms of anger. *Chazal* list ten kinds of anger. Therefore, when we attempt to work on uprooting anger, we

must know from which source the anger is coming from, and after we know that, we can then attempt to correct the anger.

We must each know the different kinds of anger that exist, and each person has to find his personal kind of anger that he sees manifest in himself most often, and which kinds of anger he does not have. After figuring this out, one can then attempt to begin weakening his unique anger.

The *Gemara* ¹⁰⁷ lists six kinds of anger. However, before one tries to figure out which kind of anger he has the most, we need to get to the root of anger.

There are four elements in our soul – earth, water, wind and fire. Rav Chaim Vital writes (in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*) that each of our *middos* (character traits) stem from one of these four elements. Sadness and laziness are rooted in our element of earth. Desires are rooted in water. Evil speech is rooted in wind, and anger is rooted in – fire. Thus, the root of anger is always the element of fire.

Therefore, if a person has a problem with anger, it shows that his element of fire is getting out of hand. Anger is an internal illness – it comes from a defected element of fire in the soul.

The *Gemara* ¹⁰⁸ says that “*the liver gets angry*.” However, the *Gemara* elsewhere says that anger is found in the heart; “the heart gets enraged.” We also know that anger is called “*charon af*” – wrath – and *af* means nose. Simply speaking, anger manifests physically in our nose. So where is our anger located? Is it in our liver, in our heart, or in our nose? We need to know where the source of our anger is coming from, because if we don’t know the source of the anger, we won’t be able to treat it.

We are not merely asking an intellectual kind of question here. We are not having a biology discussion on where anger is in the body! Anger is a bad character trait, and it is present in a layer of our soul. We need to locate where it is, and then we can know how to remedy it.

Let us try to understand this.

Fire Rises

Each of the four elements has their own unique nature. Water by nature descends, while fire’s nature is to rise. Anger is rooted in fire, and thus anger is a power to want to “rise.”

When something rises, it starts from a lower point and works its way upwards. If fire/anger rises, then it must be that the anger is beginning from a lower point in the body, and then it rises higher and higher. This explains to us the mystery of where the source of anger is. It starts in the liver, and this is the kind of anger of which *Chazal* say, “All kinds of Gehinnom control him.” Gehinnom can be found in a person – when he gets angry! Gehinnom is not simply a place to get punished. It is an

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existing reality exists even inside a person – and it exists in the liver. Thus, the root of anger begins in the liver.

The anger of the liver, when it continues to burn, rises its way upwards to the heart. It then becomes the “heart’s anger.” If the anger continues, it goes all the way to the nose, and if it is released through the nostrils, where it becomes *charon af* – wrath.

When a person gets angry, *Chazal* say that his entire body feels the anger. The anger acts very much like a fire, which eats everything in its path - destroying the entire equilibrium of the body.

Holy Anger: “Charon Af”/Hashem’s Wrath

Chazal also say that Hashem has a moment a day in which He has anger. This is obviously a holy kind of anger, and it is not destructive. We will soon explain what it is. Since we are all created in His image, then we have somewhat of Hashem’s anger in us as well, which is an anger that we can use to fix our own anger.

Hashem’s anger is called *charon af*, “wrath.” Humans also have *charon af*, and therefore, the holy kind of *charon af* can be found in our own *charon af*. Hashem overcomes His own anger each day, and this shows us that there is a holy kind of anger that exists – an anger that is restrained. Hashem has *erech apayim*, the trait of “being slow to anger”, and He uses this to cancel out His wrath toward us.

Hashem’s wrath is called *charon af* – it leaves His nostrils, so to speak. This shows us that we can use *charon af* to fix our own anger. Usually when a person gets angry, the anger will show up in his hands, and when he bangs down with his hand or strikes something in anger, the anger will get released. But the correct way to release anger is to release it from the nose – to use the holy kind of *charon af*. When the anger is coming from the nose and then it settles upon the heart, this is the correct kind of anger. When the anger rises from liver and then to the heart and then gets released from the nostrils, this is the evil kind of anger.

Using the *charon af* of Hashem is the holy kind anger. We need holy anger sometimes – otherwise, we wouldn’t be able to tolerate life. It’s impossible for a person to be perfect on this world when it comes to having good *middos*, and this applies especially when it comes to anger. Even Moshe *Rabbeinu* got angry. Why is anger so hard to avoid?

It is really because anger is an inherent part of our existence. The deep meaning behind this is that our soul is really angry that it is confined to the body. It is written, “There is no righteous person on the earth who does not sin.” Since no one is perfect and everyone has sins, there is always an anger from Hashem upon all Creations, even His greatest tzaddikim. But this is a kind of anger that is already built into Creation. It is a holy kind of anger – the anger of the Creator. The *Gemara* says that Hashem’s anger only lasts for a moment. This shows us what holy anger is: when the anger is restrained and under control.

Since we are all created in the image of Hashem, our *middos* bear somewhat of a resemblance to the *middos* of Hashem, and therefore, we are able to access a power in our soul to have holy anger.

Holy Anger vs. Evil Anger

When a person goes against Hashem's will, Hashem is angry with him – but for how long? Only for a moment. This shows us what evil anger is: anger is evil whenever a person feels that something or someone didn't do like what he wanted – his *ratzon*/will got opposed. When we feel overridden by someone else, we get angry, because our *ratzon* was opposed.

Holy anger is thus when I am upset that something was done against *Hashem's* will, not against my will. Evil anger is when I am upset that something was done against *my* will.

Anger is always a sign of pain about something. Whenever a person is angry, it is rooted in the fact that something pains him, and he is releasing the pain. The only question is what bothers the person. If it bothers the person that something was done against his own will, then his anger is evil. If it bothers the person that something was done against Hashem's will, then his anger is good.

“Charon Af”: Angry On the Outside, Calm on the Inside

Charon af is the holy kind of anger. When a person is calm even as he's angry, he resembles then the anger of Hashem, Who remains calm even as He is angry, for His anger only lasts for a moment. It is for one to only show anger on his outside¹⁰⁹, on his face; but on his inside, he is calm. *Charon af* is thus a balanced kind of anger – to be “angry” only externally, but to remain calm inside.

¹⁰⁹ Editor's Note: The Alter of Kelm zt"l is known to have said that anger is a mask that one should put on his face when it needs to be worn, and after the situation ceases, the “mask” should be taken off.