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INNER REDEMPTION

Assorted droshos from the
sefarim and audio recordings
by the author of
"BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH"

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Editor’s Preface	2
1- Introduction	3
2 - Public Redemption and Personal Redemption	4
3 - Who Will Merit Moshiach?	5
4 - Nullifying Your “I”	7
5 - The True “I” Is Hashem	15
6 – Lishmah: Part One	21
7 – Lishmah: Part Two	27
8 - Sacrificing for Hashem	33
9 - Knowing Your Soul: A Personal Redemption	39
10- How To Merit a Good Year: Coming Out of Your Ego	45
11 - A Personal Redemption	52
12 - Redemption of the Soul: Nullifying Your Self	53
13 - Leaving Inner “Egypt” & Experiencing True Redemption	58
14 - How You Can Leave the Exile	64
15 - Two Stages of Moshiach ’s Arrival	65
17 - Through The Ups and Downs	72
18 – To Yearn For A Pure World	77
19 - Knowing Our Soul	81
20 - Tzedakah and Redemption	85
21 – Redemption Within Exile	90
22 – Leaving The Confusion	93

Editor's Preface

This compilation of *derashos* is a collection of talks from the Rav about the topic of *geulah penimis*, “the inner redemption” which a person can experience in his own lifetime.

The coming of Mashiach, which man has been awaiting for since the beginning of time, is not just an external era of bliss that will come to the world. As the Rambam portrays (in the end of *Hilchos Melachim*), it will be a world in which everyone, Jew and gentile alike, will strive to gain more and more knowledge and recognition of the Creator. It will be a unified world where there will be no hatred, strife, or disparity, where all of mankind will rise above the pettiness of human nature and instead strive to fill themselves with G-dliness.

In order to appreciate the redemption when it comes, we must await for it and prepare for it. That preparation is an inner process, and these *derashos* can aid us in that inner process. If we can internalize the lessons of these chapters, we will experience the “private redemption” which our Sages wrote about, and we will be able to experience the full revelation of the redemption when it will come. Through learning these *derashos*, we will gain awareness that the redemption is not some far-off event in the future which we simply long for with wistfulness, but an event which can slowly unfold within our own souls, as we live and breathe what the Redemption will mean for us.

1- Introduction¹

There is a private redemption, as well as public redemption for the masses. The public redemption will come in its time – whenever Hashem wants it to happen. But there is a private redemption which takes place for each person who works on it; and it is given to a person by Hashem as a gift, just as Hashem will bring the general redemption as a gift to the masses.

But before anything, we need to know: What is redemption? What is the true reality?

It is by firmly establishing in our thoughts - without even delving into this intellectually - there is a Creator, and His creations are not separate from Him (they are integrated with Him).

¹ from Bilvavi Vol. IX, chapter 2, p. 41 עמ' מא ב. פרק ב. עמ' מא 41

2 - Public Redemption and Personal Redemption²

It is written in the Megillah, “*And Esther spoke to the king, in the name of Mordechai.*” (Esther 2:22). The Sages learn from here that when one says something over in the name of the original person who said it, he brings redemption to the world (Avos 6:6).

There is a famous question on this: We see that people many times say over a statement in the name of the person who said it, yet the redemption still hasn't happened yet. Why not? Why hasn't *Moshiach* come yet?

The answer to this is because there are two redemptions. There is a redemption for the masses that will happen, and there is a private redemption for each person which must also happen.

When a person says over something in the name of the person who said it, he brings for himself a private redemption, not the public redemption. When will all of Creation have its redemption? It will only be when *everyone* in the world is saying that everything is all for Hashem's name.

Let us explain this matter.

In exile, we are cut off from our root. We only see branches of the root as we are in exile – and we never see the root, which is the source of all the branches. In the redemption, however, unity will come to the world – and all of the branches will become unified through the root. All of the branches will return to their root, and then all of the branches will become unified.

Thus, when a person says over something and makes sure to mention who said the statement, he has somewhat of a connection to the source, but it's only his private connection. The connection has begun, but it's not complete yet.

The redemption which will take place for the masses, however, will be an integration with the root of all roots – Hashem. In the redemption, G-dliness will be revealed in everything, and there will thus be unity amongst everything. Everyone then will be saying over Who the source of all information is – Hashem. People will feel that everything is all for Hashem, which will unify all of Creation together.

² Adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p.385 עמ' שפה 385.

3 - Who Will Merit Moshiach?³

Waiting for Moshiach

One of our 13 principles of faith (listed by the Rambam) is that we believe that *Moshiach* will come, and “even though he tarries, I wait for him every day that he should come.”

The Chasam Sofer asked: Why is belief in *Moshiach* one of the 13 fundamental beliefs? If a person doesn't believe in *Moshiach* coming, does that mean that he doesn't believe in G-d? Why is belief in *Moshiach*'s arrival so important that it is considered to be one of the 13 basic tenets of our faith?

Why We Wait for Moshiach

In order to be able to wait for something, we need to be able to conceptualize it. If we don't know what something is, why should we wait for it? By knowing the concept of whatever it is that we are hoping for, we can then hope for it.

The more we know what a concept is, the more we await its revelation – and the less we know about it, the less we care about it.

Believing in *Moshiach* is not just to believe that he will come. There is more to this belief, and this is eminent from the fact that we have to awaken this belief every day. If we don't know what *Moshiach* is all about, why should we care if he will come or not, and what would we need him for? Only if we know clearly what *Moshiach* is about – what his purpose is, and what we are missing because he's not here – can we have await him.

Anyone who is waiting for *Moshiach* to come but doesn't know who or what *Moshiach* is just imagining things, and he's just fantasizing of a better world – he's dreaming about the unknown. This isn't belief in *Moshiach*, it's just a fantasy. In order to really await *Moshiach*, we need to know who and what *Moshiach* is.

The Concept of Moshiach

Chazal state that the first redeemer will be the last redeemer (*Bamidbar Rabbah 11:2*). The first redeemer was *Moshe Rabbeinu* – so he will be our last redeemer as well. Why is *Moshe Rabbeinu* our redeemer?

Moshe has the same letters as the word *lishmah* (to act for the sake of Heaven). This is because *Moshe* reached a level in which he was divested of all physicality, any vestige of ulterior motives that stem from the body. He was connected to the Creator at all times with the greatest closeness, and all of his desire was about fulfilling his Creator's desire. He did not live at all for himself – he considered his existence only as a connection to Hashem.

The redemption is rooted in the ability to act *lishmah*, and thus *Moshe* will be the redeemer, because he personified *lishmah*.

³ Adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p.256 עמ' רנו

Who Will Merit Moshiach?

It is written (*Yeshayahu 43:7*), “*All is called in My name, for My honor I created it.*” All of Creation, everything in existence, was all created for the sake of Hashem.

We are currently in exile. What is exile? Exile is essentially a situation in which we do not recognize how everything is all about Hashem. In exile, we are either missing this recognition in our minds or in our hearts. But redemption will be a situation in which we recognize – both from our internal self and the rest of our external self – that everything is all for Hashem, and we do not live for ourselves.

This is what *Moshiach* is about. *Moshiach* is a recognition – a revelation of this recognition – that everything exists for Hashem.

If a person considers his life to be for himself – whether he’s looking for honor, or some other desire in life – he’s disconnected totally from the concept of *Moshiach*. His whole existence is contradicting the idea of *Moshiach*. Only when a person lives *lishmah* will he merit the revelation of *Moshiach*.

A person always has some part of him that isn’t *lishmah*. When *Moshiach* comes, only the *lishmah* aspect of a person will remain, while the rest of the person will disappear – the parts in us that are *shelo lishmah*. Our *shelo lishmah* will vanish from all of our senses.

Now we can understand why belief in *Moshiach* is one of our fundamental faiths – it is because *Moshiach* is about the purpose of Creation.

4 - Nullifying Your “I”⁴

Many Ways, One Goal

The essence of life is Hashem, who is found in our heart. Our mission is to reveal Him from within ourselves. There are many paths to get there.

Generally speaking, the *mitzvos* are the ways to get to Him. There are 613 Biblical commandments and 7 Rabbinical commandments; if so, there are altogether 620 ways to reveal Hashem.

Each of our forefathers had their own way as well. Avraham *Avinu* figured out the whole Torah by himself (*Beraishis Rabbah* 95:3), and that was one way. The Torah which we received at *Har Sinai* is another way. What both ways have in common, though, is that they are both about how to reveal Hashem.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that the giving of the Torah didn't add anything new to our goal; the goal always remains the same – revealing Hashem. What the giving of the Torah revealed was how to get to Hashem, but the inner point, which is to reveal Hashem, never changes. It was unaffected by the sin of Adam.

The constant search always remains: to search for Hashem. The ways to get there are many; before the sin of Adam, there was a certain away to get there, and after the sin, the plan changed. Avraham *Avinu*'s path was *chessed*, Yitzchok *Avinu*'s path was *gevurah*, and Yaakov, (who is *emes*) is the synthesis of these two; Moshe *Rabbeinu* is the inner dimension of Yaakov's path. But the goal of getting to Hashem always remained the same.

The many ways to serve Hashem are only “garments” of the inner point they cover over, which is to search for Hashem. “Just like all faces are different, all *de'os* (opinions) are different” – there are many paths to “know” Hashem, but the common denominator between all the paths is that a person has to become close to Hashem. How we look for Hashem differs with each person, but What we look for is always the same.

This should be very clear. When we learn *sefarim hakedoshim*, especially the works of *Chasidus*, a person usually attempts to find himself in it. A person thinks, “My soul is rooted in Avraham *Avinu*, who is *chessed*”, or “My soul is rooted in Yitzchok *Avinu*, who is *gevurah*.” This is dangerous because people try to base their entire life on all kinds of speculations. We must all know, however, that we have only one goal – to become close to Hashem. Where to start is a different issue, but what we search for should always be the same.

The Danger of Thinking About Yourself

The words here are deep matters about how to work with our soul.

Usually, when a person is more involved with *Avodas Hashem* (serving the Creator) and he seeks to improve, what happens is that he begins to become very self-absorbed. He thinks about himself all the time – about his spiritual situation, and he is totally absorbed in himself. Now, if someone isn't an internal kind of person, he doesn't have this problem, and he just goes about his way with life. He also has desires for glory, but he's not immersed in himself, and he's just leading a superficial kind of life.

⁴ Adapted from *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. VI, Chapter 3 פרק ג. ז'לבי בלבבי

He looks for outer kinds of desires, and he isn't connected to himself to begin with. He experiences jealousy, desire, and a longing for honor, but these are just desires to enter outside one self. A superficial person doesn't have the kind of problem we are describing.

Only an internal kind of person, who really seeks to serve Hashem better, is faced with the danger of becoming too self-absorbed. An internal kind of person really wants to know his soul, and he is critical of himself, as he is involved regularly with making a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul accounting); each to his own. He wants to know who he is. On one hand, this is wonderful; *Chazal* say, "Know the G-d of your father and serve Him", and it is written, "*From my flesh I see G-d.*"

A person indeed must know himself well and what his soul is, so he can figure out in which way he should serve Hashem. Without this internal self-examination, a person just lives a superficial life.

On the other hand, when a person enters himself and he begins to clarify who he is, he wants to know very much what his "I" is, and this is apt to make him become very self-absorbed, and it can have disastrous results. It can either make person become very broken and sad, and if this doesn't happen, the opposite will happen - it can make him become haughty and arrogant, because he thinks he knows himself so well. Either of these is not the proper way we want to achieve.

When a person is too absorbed in himself, it can be said of him in a subtle sense the statement of *Chazal*, "I and him cannot dwell under one roof." *Chazal* say this of a *baal gaavah* (haughty person), but the root of haughtiness is when a person is absorbed in himself, and thus it can be said that Hashem doesn't want to be with someone who is self-absorbed.

When a person is truly humble, he doesn't that he thinks he's a nothing. True humility is that a person doesn't think about himself at all – he's not thinking about "I." He thinks only about Hashem, the Torah. and how to help other Jews – both physically and spiritually – and he takes his mind off himself.

When a person thinks very much about himself all the time, this itself prevents him from reaching the goal, which is to be close to Hashem.

"Ani" Vs. "Ayin"

We said in the beginning of this chapter that there are many methods on how to begin serving Hashem, but the end goal of all these ways is always the same: Hashem. What we really mean is as follows.

A person's "I" (*ani*) is to be used as a tool to get to the purpose, which is to reach Hashem. Our mission is not solely for the sake of building our "I". Just to be in it for the sake of developing our self is like how "the building of children demolishes" (*Nedarim 40a*). A person only reaches perfection when he is totally divested of his ego; instead of *ani* (I), he has reached *ayin*, "nothingness." Perfection is not when you build your "I" – it when you leave your "I" “.

Perfection is not about building your "I"; it is rather about negating your "I". This does not imply that one should feel low about himself; it is instead that a person should realize that he doesn't live for himself, and that he is not meant to think and worry about himself.

This is the ideal situation which we are trying to achieve. The more a person enters into *Avodas Hashem*, if he becomes more self-absorbed in the process, although he gains in that he has left the materialism of this world, he has harmed himself in a way that is very hard to come out of.

If a person isn't aware of this as he starts out in his *Avodas Hashem*, he will suffer from his self-absorption until the end of his life. This is like what is written, “*Until elderliness and old age, I will endure.*” His “I” will prevent him from any true progress, and his whole life he will only be interested in how his “I” come into the picture.

The recognition we are supposed to have, though, is that when we want to search for closeness to Hashem, we should know that this is the common goal of whatever we are doing. The more a person purifies his “I” and leaves his ego, the more he will leave with Hashem in his life, and come to the recognition of *Ain Od Milvado*, “There is nothing besides Hashem”.

“Your Face, Hashem, I seek”

We are stating this point at the beginning specifically, and not at the end. Simply speaking, our mission is to first build up our self and then nullify it. But it is really more than that. Instead of entering our “I” and then leaving it, it's better to stay outside of the “I” altogether. This is because we must be clear in what we are searching for: are we just searching to find ourselves, or are we searching to find Hashem?

When a person hears that he has to work on his *middos*, if he has only a superficial perspective, he will likely groan to himself, “*Oy*, I have so many faults, I am full of so many problems I need to fix.” It is indeed true that no one is perfect, and that we all have areas we need to work on. If you ask a person why he wants to work on himself, he might respond, “Because I want to give pleasure to Hashem.” But the truth is that he is only working on himself for the concern of his own well-being. He views “working on himself” in the same way that he has to fix a broken machine. He is aware that “working on yourself” and “getting to know yourself” is part of serving the Creator, and thus he thinks about himself a lot and does all kinds of outer actions to try to improve himself.

This is an erroneous attitude.

We need to correct this outlook from the start and clarify what the goal here is, what we are really trying to arrive at. If someone is really searching for *Avodas Hashem*, he must know that it's not about himself. You don't need to find yourself, and the only search you need to have is to search for Hashem.

When people want to know, “Who am I? What am I? What is my *shoresh haneshamah* (soul root)?” – people have all kinds of questions like this – it shows that the intention isn't for the sake of coming to better their *Avodas Hashem*. They are seeking knowledge about themselves, and that is not the true depth of *Avodas Hashem*.

The proper attitude to have about self-knowledge is that knowing about yourself can definitely enhance your *Avodas Hashem*, but to be aware of what we are really searching for – Hashem. It is written, “*Your face, Hashem, I seek.*” One should not be looking for his “I”, but for Hashem! Our mission is not to build ourselves; it is rather to realize that there is nothing else other than Hashem, and that we search for nothing other than Him.

Forgetting About Your “I” Is Personal Redemption

These words – that *Avodas Hashem* is not about you – can make a great change in your life. It can greatly help you – or it can backfire and make you sad.

If a person accepts these words in the way he should, he will feel like he has become free. When a person is involved in *Avodas Hashem* and he is immersed in himself in the process, upon seeing the words here he will feel like he is leaving Egypt. Many people who are involved in *Avodas Hashem* indeed feel like they are trapped inside their souls, and they want to be free of themselves.

When a person truly realizes the words here, he no longer thinks so much about himself, and he feels free inside.

Of course, a person still has to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul accounting), but if one has succeed in leaving his ego as we have said, he will only have to do it for ten or fifteen minutes a day; the rest of the day, what is he thinking? Either he is free to think about Torah, or about Hashem. The point is that he will no longer be thinking about himself.

This will feel like a personal redemption inside oneself – when you forget about your “I” completely.

The truth is that even if a person would try to understand himself more and more, he would get even more confused the more he enters inward, and he will never succeed in knowing himself. The soul is “a piece of Heaven from above”, and just like we cannot comprehend Hashem, so is it impossible to fully understand our soul.

We are not only referring to the knowledge of secular psychology, which explains the lowest parts of our soul. Even in what our Sages revealed to us about our soul, we still don’t know what our soul is, because our soul is so deep and vast. “Hashem, the Torah and the Jewish people are one.” Our thoughts cannot comprehend Hashem, and the “Torah is vaster than the sea”; so is it impossible to understand our soul. If someone is trying to clarify his soul, he should know that he is dealing with something that he will never fully understand.

Maybe a person will counter: “Just like we try to understand the Torah even though it is so deep and vast, so must we try to understand our soul as much as we can!”

That is true, but we must know one thing. If a person is trying to understand the Torah, and he isn’t looking to find himself in it – he learns Torah *lishmah* – then he is fulfilling the purpose of Creation, which is to connect to the Creator. But if he learns it for personal reasons, like to gain honor, then he doesn’t become close to Hashem through learning the Torah.

The same attitude we must have when trying to learn about our soul. If we are trying to understand our soul in the same way that a person can look at another person – in other words, if we remain outside our ego – then we can enter this field of study. But if a person wants to know his soul simply because he wishes to enter deep into his self and understand himself – for that sake alone - then this comes from an egotistical desire, and he’s not acting *lishmah*. He will become very self-absorbed, and he will think the whole time that he is gaining and adding onto his knowledge, but he’s really just gathering air. All his work will be based on a faulty basis.

The goal of whatever we do, as we mentioned before and in the last chapter, is always to find Hashem. This is the groundwork for all that we want to build upon. When a person wants to build a structure, he first needs a foundation. Hashem has to be the foundation of anything; the goal must always be about Hashem.

When a person builds all his *Avodas Hashem* based upon his “I” – his main interest is in getting to know himself better – than of him it can be said, “I (Hashem) and him cannot dwell under one roof.”

If these words are understood well, they will make a total overhaul in your life.

Naturally, when a person wants to become close to Hashem, he starts by trying to develop his “I”, but this is an erroneous mindset.

It is written, “*And as for me (v’ani), closeness to Hashem to me is good.*” It’s possible that a person just focuses on the part of the *possuk* that says, “*as for me*” (*v’ani*), and he’s not focused on the part that says, “*closeness to Hashem*”?

We do not mean to imply that if a person feels that he has some personal interests (*negios*) that he should disengage from *Avodas Hashem*, and never enter inward into himself. *Chas v’shalom!* Our intention here is rather to give the proper outlook on how to build our plan. If one feels that he has personal interests in this other than closeness to Hashem, he should *daven* to Hashem that these interests be removed, so that his motivations in this will be pure.

There is a very big difference between someone who has some *negios* to someone who is engaging in this only due to his *negios*. If a person basically has the right goal, which is to become close to Hashem, even if he has some *negios* as well, then he can *daven* to Hashem about this; there is actually no person who doesn’t have some *negios*. Even Moshe and Aharon were commanded not to take *shochad* (bribery), and even the greatest *tzaddikim* can be affected by taking a bribe. No one can say he is totally pure from personal interests.

But if someone is only involved in *Avodas Hashem* entirely because he is concerned about self-knowledge, then everything he does will be based on his ego, and when everything stands on his *negios*, his plan will never come to fruition. Not only will it never finish – it never starts!

By contrast, someone who has the right thinking is aware that he also has some *negios*, but he is working to break them, and he knows that he needs Hashem to help him, and he implores Hashem for this. His *Avodas Hashem* will last, because he is truly searching for Hashem, not to find “himself.”

This is the benefit that results from forgetting about your “I.”

“The End of the Action Is First In The Thoughts”

If someone has a strong amount of ego in him, he will not enjoy hearing this. Since he’s only in it for himself, when he hears that *Avodas Hashem* is not about “you”, he is likely to lose all his interest in *Avodas Hashem*. He thinks to himself: “If I’m not getting anything out of this, what’s the point?” It could be that he wants to become a great person and reach high levels, but it’s all a kind of haughtiness (albeit subtle and more spiritual). Such aspirations don’t purify a person.

We cannot run away from the truth. In the future redemption, we will see that the world was all created for Hashem’s sake, and not for our sake. “*On My behalf I created.*” (*Yeshayahu 48:1*). The redemption will essentially be a personal redemption that will take place in each person’s soul. When this point is revealed to each soul, *Moshiach* will then come. This inner point is the understanding that all of the universe was created by Hashem for Himself. **We were created for Hashem, not for ourselves.** This point will be fully understood in the future – and *that* will be the redemption.

When a person understands that he was created for Hashem, not for himself, he will be able to search only for Hashem and not for himself. So when all is said and done, every person has to learn to forget about himself, and to

stop being concerned for his well-being. Understand that the center of our life should be Hashem, and it's not about you.

This is the goal of all our *Avodas Hashem*: not to arrive at your “I”, but to be totally nullified of your “I” and to be integrated with Hashem, which is the state of *ayin* (nothingness).

If a person can't come to terms with this revelation, then there he will not be helped by any *Avodas Hashem*.

We all have to arrive at this understanding, and eventually, all of us will get there and become integrated with Hashem, divested totally from our ego. The only issue is, will we choose this on our own, or will we be forced to accept this fact by being purified through intense suffering, both in this world and in the next...?

We are not describing a “nice quality” to have, nor are we describing an act of *Chassidus* (piety). We are describing the very reality of Creation. These words are actually contained in the words of the *Mesillas Yeshtarim*, in the chapter about *Chassidus* (piety). But that doesn't make these matters “*Chassidus*.” The *Mesillas Yeshtarim* already writes at the very beginning of his sefer that that we must realize that life is all about becoming close to Hashem. If so, the words here are not some high level that only comes later. It must be worked on even in the very beginning stage of *Avodas Hashem*.

If a person isn't prepared to accept that at the end of all this, he will not receive anything personally, and he thinks that he is doing a favor for Hashem by working on *Avodas Hashem* – then he is working against *Chazal*. He won't succeed.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner wrote in the name of the Vilna Gaon that if a person doesn't have any trace of *lishmah* (pure intentions) in his learning, he is prohibited to learn Torah! One is permitted to learn Torah *shelo lishmah*, if his intention is to arrive at *lishmah*. What does *lishmah* entail? It is when a person isn't learning to find himself, but Hashem. Although a person always have some *negios*, *Chazal* state that one should learn *shelo lishmah*, and one is not allowed to excuse himself from learning Torah with the fact that he isn't entirely *lishmah*. But we must know even at the beginning of learning that the purpose of learning is to eventually arrive at *lishmah*, and without this intention from the start, the Vilna Gaon writes that it is prohibited to learn Torah.

If a person never figured out that the purpose of learning Torah (and all of *Avodas Hashem*) is to arrive at *lishmah*, then all his learning is based on *shelo lishmah*, and such a person is actually not allowed to learn Torah. This is not *Chassidus*; it is the basis of *Avodas Hashem*. A person is allowed to begin with *shelo lishmah* if he aspires for *lishmah*, but as we know, “the end of the actions is first in the thoughts”, and thus *lishmah* has to be our goal from the start.

What should first be in our thoughts? We need to know if the reason that we search for Hashem is because that will give us more gratification, or if we are searching for Hashem to find our His will.

These words aren't new. They are already written by the Vilna Gaon, as well as in all the *sefarim* of *Chassidus*. They are just written there in much shaper terms than how we have said it here. We must all know that our goal is to arrive at *lishmah* – both in how we serve Him and in learning Torah – and *lishmah* means that one isn't thinking about himself, but about Hashem. This is life itself, this is reality as it is!

It's possible that a person is learning Torah and abstaining from worldly pleasures, but he's still missing the whole point, because he isn't aware of the words here. A person might be learning a lot of Torah, but that doesn't necessarily mean he is looking for Hashem in his life. Maybe he thinks, “One day, I will get there...”

Such a miracle doesn't happen by itself; if you never think about what *lishmah* is, you don't just go from *shelo lishmah* to *lishmah*. Although the sefarim describe the change as a miracle, this miracle never happens if you don't have a plan to get there.

Why Don't People Succeed?

This point is one of the big reasons that people never arrive at the truth, even though they are looking for Hashem in their life. People can work very hard for many years at trying to grow – each to his own – but only few people reach the true connection with Hashem.

Why? People claim it's because of laziness. We cannot say this is incorrect, but there is a more inner reason that holds people back. When a person wants to grow in *Avodas Hashem* but he has never fully clarified what he wants to achieve, then he won't be successful. You have to know what it is exactly that you want to achieve, before you embark on an endeavor.

This Needs A Long Time of Thinking

Maybe a person will say, "Okay, I tried a day or two to clarify what my goal is. Now what do I do, *l'maaseh* (practically speaking)?"

This question shows a lack of understanding what *Avodas Hashem* is.

Avodas Hashem is not a building contract. Although there is a rule that "the heart is pulled after the thoughts", and we need to do actions to influence our heart and purify it, we must know that this is only part of our job, and it is also not where we must begin with.

The beginning point is that before we start to work on ourselves, we need to know to where we are trying to go.

In order to accept this, if a person is truthful, then he should realize that it can take months even to think about this point. A superficial person will think "What's the big deal?" when he reads this, and immediately try to start improving *Avodas Hashem*. But if a person is truthful, he can feel that his soul wants the opposite. How many tears a person must cry in order to arrive at even a small percentage of truth, to really want to be in this for Hashem and not for himself!

There is nowhere else to run to. Hashem is here. It is just that we must not become wrapped up in ourselves, and then we will feel Hashem. If you nullify your "I", you will then feel Hashem every second in your life next to you.

This is an internal self-examination. It is a question of what we are really looking for. Even if a person understands the concept of nullifying his "I", is he actually prepared to give up his "I" in order to reveal Hashem in himself? Or does he want both – he wants Hashem, but he also wants his ego to remain...?

It's not that a person has to make a space in his heart for Hashem. That's not enough. If there are still traces of ego in a person, Hashem cannot enter there, and the soul will not be able to truly feel that there is nothing else besides for Hashem that exists.

If we want to feel Hashem in our self, we have to get rid of our "I". The more *lishmah* we uncover, the more room we give to Hashem to be revealed in us.

Chazal say that “There is nothing besides for Hashem – even in the space of the world.” There is an empty space in ourselves which doesn’t allow for Hashem to enter into it, and this is our traces of ego. But a person can give even that up for Hashem and allow Him to enter.

The words here require a lot of thought. Without this internal clarification process, it’s not possible to truly serve Hashem. If a person has at least ten percent, or even less, of a desire to give himself up for Hashem, he can then begin to truly serve Hashem.

May Hashem merit all of us to give up our self and give Him space to enter our souls, and through this, we will all merit the revelation of *Ain Od Milvado* – how there is nothing besides for Hashem.

5 - The True “I” Is Hashem⁵

Revealing the True “I”

In the beginning of *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*, Rav Chaim Vital writes that a person is defined by his soul, not by his body. He brings proof to this from the words “*flesh of man*” (Shemos 30:32), which implies that there must be two parts to our self: our flesh/body, and our soul.

What, exactly, is a person? Generally, a person is called “*neshamah*.”

My “I” is identified with my *neshamah*, which is a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a “piece of Hashem”. Why is the *neshamah* called “a piece of Hashem”? There are many reasons, and we will explain one of them, which is particularly relevant to our discussion here.

It is written (Devorim 32: 39), “*For I am who I am, and there is no G-d with me*”. The true “I” is Hashem. The sage Hilel once said, “If I am here, everyone is here”, and this is explained to mean that he was referring to Hashem, who is called “I”.

The soul is called a piece of Hashem, and this means that just as Hashem is called “I”, so can a person feel his “I”. Since our soul is a piece of Hashem, and Hashem is considered the only true “I”, our soul is able to feel this “I” as well. Our mission is to reveal and recognize who the true “I” is.

We will try to explain this, and how we can nullify our “I” and instead come to reveal the true “I”, whom is there is only One of.

Removing Evil By Nullifying The Self

A general rule is that every matter is made up of two stages – to first remove the evil, and then to do good. “*Remove yourself from evil, and do good.*” First we need to remove the obstacles that hold us back from what we want to achieve, and after that we can begin to do positive actions that will enable us to get to the goal.

The first step we will have to do – to remove ourselves from evil – is to nullify our “I”. Then we can reveal the true “I”, Who is Hashem. Let us begin with the first step.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that whenever a person sees something, he sees it through his “I.” A person doesn’t just see himself as his “I” and worry for himself, tending to be selfish toward others; his ego goes even further than that. He sees himself in everything! *Chazal* say also that “Just as all faces are different, so are all *de’os* (opinions) different”. This is because people see their “I” through everything.

To give an example, *Chazal* state (Avos 2:4), “Do not judge your friend until you get to his place.” The Kotzker Rebbe explained that you will never be in your friend’s situation anyway, so don’t judge him. A person never really understands another’s situation, because since each person has his own individual outlook, he never understands another’s outlook. Everyone sees things differently.

⁵ Adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. VI, Chapter 47 פרק 47 בלבבי זוו פרק 47.

Why did Hashem create the world this way? Simply speaking, it is because Hashem wants many different faces in the Jewish people. But another reason, a deeper reason, is because Hashem wants each person to realize that his view isn't everything, and there are other views to a situation.

If a person would never realize that another person can have a different opinion than him, everyone would be very haughty. We see that there are a lot of arguments in the Gemara, such as Beis Hilel and Beis Shamai, who never agree. Yet, the students of Shamai still married the students of Hilel, because they respected each other, and their arguments were not personal. Although *machlokes* (arguing) is known for its evil, it can be good and holy as well, when it serves to reveal how each person's opinion doesn't have to be the right one. Hashem purposely sets up in situations where we will meet others who disagree with us, and this is all to show each person that his opinion isn't the only one.

The Purpose of Different Opinions

Let us explain this a bit more.

When any two people meet, they have to each realize that you need to accept others' way of thinking. Each person needs to discover that he is not the only one in the world who has an opinion on a matter, and he isn't always right.

Why did Hashem make the world like this, that people always disagree with each other? It wasn't so that the world should be full of confusion or doubt. The reason for this is because there is so much depth to life – depth within depth.

This concept is not an "*Avodah*". It is an attitude to have on life. When someone disagrees with you, it is an opportunity for you to realize that your way of thinking is not the only way to think. Although Hashem gave you the power to think for yourself, He also gave others this power, and there is no one correct way to think; each person has his own way of thought. For this reason, two people can take opposing sides, yet they are both right, because "Their words and their words are both the words of the living G-d."

The only undisputed fact is that we must all do the will of Hashem and give Him pleasure.

Two Ways to Reach Hashem

In *Chazal*, there are two approaches brought on how to reach Hashem. One approach is to begin with love for the Creator, which will then lead one to reach love for Jews. The other approach is to begin with love for the Jewish people, and from that, a person comes to love Hashem.

In more simple language, a person has to make room for Hashem in himself, and let go of his "I." There are two ways how this can be accomplished.

One way is that a person has to allow room for others in his life, and that he shouldn't live a selfish existence. However, this is not yet the purpose; it is only the means to a greater goal. The goal of not being selfish is that a person should get used to giving up his "I". By getting used to *Ahavas Yisrael* (loving other Jews), a person learns how to make room for Hashem in himself. That is one approach.

The other approach, which is a straighter approach, is to first make space for Hashem in oneself, and that will get a person to leave his “I” (and thus come to love others as a result).

Which approach should a person take? It depends on each person; both ways are correct approaches, and each person has the way that is meant for him. Let us try to understand, however, the underlying concept of these two differing ways.

A person’s job is to learn how to remove his ego from all situations. We can give an example on how one can work on this. Let’s say a person is standing and thinking who is standing here. A simple, superficial response would be that he is standing there by himself, but if you think about it, this can’t be, because we know that Hashem is everywhere, so how can it be that Hashem and you are standing in the same exact place? If Hashem is here, then how can I stand where I am standing, if Hashem fills everything in existence?

That is the way to start thinking. It is not upon a person to understand this intellectually how it can be that he stands where Hashem is; rather, the approach should be that if Hashem is here, it must be that I am not here at all!

Of course, we don’t mean to imply that we do not exist. We exist, and we have Torah and *mitzvos* to keep. But we mean that a person should think to himself: Who made me have such a question in the first place? Hashem. How do we know this is true? It is because *Chazal (Sotah 5a)* state that Hashem says about a *baal gaavah* (a haughty person), “I and him cannot dwell under one roof.”

Maybe one will counter that this is only true about a *baal gaavah*. But upon deeper thinking, all people have *gaavah* by their very essence, because there is no one who does not think how it is possible that he and Hashem can be in the same place at once. Hashem causes each person to have this question at some point: How can it be that I and Hashem can be at once in the same place? The point of this questioning within is so that a person will realize the truth: Since Hashem is here where I stand, it must be that “I” am not really here!

Such a conclusion is a fact that cannot be comprehended. But it is supposed to make a person think, “Am I trying to discover where I fit into Creation, or did Hashem make me think about this question so that I should realize that I need to stop thinking about my ‘I’?”

Leaving Your “I”

This is a deep and subtle matter. Whatever you encounter, get used to forgetting about yourself and how you fit into the picture. Get used to the attitude of, “It’s not about you.” Instead of seeing how something has to do with you, see how the matter comes to make you leave your “I.”

We can give another example on how one can work on this. *Chazal* state (*Chagigah 12b*) that the world exists due to the merit of a *tzaddik*. The *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* also brings from *Chazal* that if there would be one second in the world in which there is no study of Torah, the world would cease to exist.

This seems to be a contradiction. Who upholds the world – a *tzaddik*, or someone who learns Torah? What happens if the *tzaddik* doesn’t learn Torah – does the world still stand on his merit? We will not go into this discussion. Our aim here is to approach the question, not to get into the answers.

Chazal state (*Sukkah 45b*) that the world cannot survive unless there are at least thirty-six *tzaddikim*. The world needs to stand on some foundation, and the *tzaddik* is that foundation. Which of the thirty-six *tzaddikim* does the world truly stand on? There are those who say that there is one *tzaddik* who is the most righteous of all of them, and

on him the world stands. This is true, but again, we are not looking for answers to our question. What we want to get at is how we look at the question.

Let's say this *tzaddik*, whom the world stands on, is thinking that the world stands on his merit. If he were to have such a thought, he is wrong. No one should be thinking that the world stands on his merit. First of all, no one should consider himself a *tzaddik*, because *Chazal* say (Niddah 30b) that even if everyone tells you are a *tzaddik*, you should consider yourself to be a *rasha*. Even if someone really is a *tzaddik*, he can still be aware that there are another thirty-five *tzaddikim*, so the world doesn't necessarily depend on him alone. Even if he is indeed the greatest *tzaddik* from all of them – like if Eliyahu HaNavi came to him and told him so – he should still know that the world survives on Torah, not on him.

The point of this thinking is that a person has to get used to removing his “I” from the equation. A person needs to see how he is *not* in the picture – not how he *is* in the picture. When a person is sitting and learning Torah, he should not be thinking, “Baruch Hashem, the world stands on my merit.” (Sometimes a person does need to say this, because there is such a concept as *gaavah d'kedushah* – “holy arrogance”, to be proud of one's learning. But the more truthful viewpoint is that one should be aware that the world doesn't depend on him for survival. We see that *tzaddikim* die and the world continues to go on afterwards, so even a *tzaddik* has to be aware of that., that the world doesn't depend on him.)

Maybe a person will ask, “If so, why did Hashem create people, if He doesn't need them anyway?” The answer to this is, that's the whole point of why were created – to be able to realize that there is nothing besides for Hashem! The purpose of our existence is to reveal Hashem, and how He is perfect – which is essentially to realize that He doesn't need us.

We have the power of free will, though, and this makes us believe that we are in control of things, which makes us feel in turn that we are needed. But the true attitude to have is that since Hashem is perfect and He lacks nothing, it is our purpose in Creation to reveal this truth – *Ain Od Milvado*, There is nothing besides for Hashem.

Hashem Is The Sole Provider

Another example of how we can work on nullifying our self is as follows.

A person usually feels that he is in charge of supporting his family. He is afraid to die, because he worries for his family: Who will feed them if I'm not here? There are some people who, unfortunately, are told that they will die soon, and they are immediately filled with complaints on Hashem: “If I die, what will be with my family??”

People naturally think that they control their family's livelihood. It seems to be this way, because we can see that those who become orphaned need to depend on others for survival, because they have no one to worry for them.

This is one of the examples of how our senses delude us. The true attitude we are supposed to have is that we all have one Father, and He is the father of orphans and widows. He is also the Father of all of us as we live. *Chazal* say that a person has three partners – his father, his mother, and Hashem. Even if a father dies, Hashem can still take care of his family, and nothing can get in His way.

When people feel that their families won't be able to survive without them, it really comes from the ego, which doesn't want to accept that Hashem doesn't need him.

If Hashem is in charge of everything, why, indeed, did He give us responsibilities on this world if He doesn't need us anyway? It is because we are supposed to feel our responsibility, but after we take care of our responsibilities, we are supposed to feel that Hashem still didn't need us to do it. When we learn Torah, we should feel how important it is for the world to survive, but after that, we should remember that Hashem can still upkeep the world even without us.

This feeling of humility towards Hashem should not cause us to feel sad that we are not needed. Hashem doesn't need us, but He created us so that we can come to recognize this. The problem is that our soul by nature doesn't want to accept this so easily, because it is very hard to undermine your whole existence. People always want to see how they are in everything and how they are needed, and this natural part of our psyche holds us back from nullifying ourselves to Hashem.

Let's say a person travels somewhere to go to an act of chessed, and when he arrives, they tell him that he isn't needed anymore, because it was taken care of already. His reaction will likely be, "I came here for nothing...at least *Chazal* say that you get reward for traveling for a mitzvah."

Although that is a true statement of *Chazal*, this shouldn't be the inner perspective to have on the situation. His reaction should really be, "Hashem did this to show me that He doesn't need me."

Anything we encounter serves one purpose alone: there is a Creator here, and He is perfect and lacks nothing. Hashem created us so that we can reveal Him, that He alone is in charge. If so, why do we do anything, if He doesn't need us? It is because our actions serve to clarify this very point: Hashem doesn't need me.

This is how we perfect ourselves – when we realize how Hashem is perfect, because He doesn't need us, and He can run the world without us.

See Hashem In Everything

The point of this discussion is so that a person can come to see Hashem in each thing, and not himself.

We only gave a few examples of this concept, but it can be applied to an endless amount of details in our life.

A person naturally either sees Hashem or himself in everything. Those are the two possibilities. How can one come out of seeing himself in everything and instead to see Hashem in everything? The tool one can use for this is *Ahavas Yisrael*. By loving other Jews, you come out of yourself. The goal of this, though, is to see Hashem in everything.

Take this point we are saying and expand upon it, and keep seeing how one has to always see Hashem in everything, not himself.

Think About Hashem

Until now, we addressed the first stage of this concept, which is to "remove yourself from evil." The next step is to "do good" – to actually do positive actions that bring about the goal. This part is simpler.

After one has learned to let go of his "I", now what? Now a person has to think simply about the fact that Hashem exists. Believe in His existence, and this very thinking will help your soul be able to nullify yourself.

You don't have to reflect deeply about Hashem for this; just think about the simple fact that He exists. This will reveal the true "I", who is Hashem, and it will slowly remove your ego more and more.

If a person jumps straight to this stage without working on the first part we mentioned, we cannot say that this is pointless, but it won't do much.

When a person works on both of these stages, he will receive *siyata d'shmaya* (Heavenly assistance) to erase his "I", and he will come to reveal the simple truth of *Ain Od Milvado*.

6 – *Lishmah: Part One*⁶

Lishmah – The G-dly Element in the Soul

Chazal (*Pesachim 50b*) state that “one should always learn Torah *shelo lishmah*, because *shelo lishmah* leads to *lishmah*.” Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that there is always some *shelo lishmah* involved in a person. We will try to understand why this is so, and this will help us, *b’ezras Hashem*, understand the inner meaning of “*lishmah*” and “*shelo lishmah*.”

Shelo lishmah, upon a superficial perspective, seems to differ depending on the situation. There are many different kinds of ulterior motives that a person can have. However, the inner point of it always remains the same, and it contains everything we need to know about *shelo lishmah*. The same goes for understanding what *lishmah* is. There are many *sefarim* that give definitions of *lishmah*, but there is one inner point that always remains true about *lishmah*, and it contains the whole essence of *lishmah*.

What is that inner point? The inner point is that our “I” in us represents our *shelo lishmah*, while the ability in us to go above our “I” – to reveal our power of *elokus* (Godliness) – represents our *lishmah*. In our “I”, there is no *lishmah*. The more and more we reveal Hashem within ourselves, though, the more we reveal *lishmah*.

In other words, the inner desire of a person who really seeks Hashem to leave *shelo lishmah* and enter into *lishmah* is essentially a desire to leave one’s ego, and to instead integrate with Hashem. *Shelo lishmah* thus is when we are separated from Hashem, while *lishmah* is all about connection with Hashem.

When a person only thinks superficially, it appears to him that he really wants to learn Torah and do *mitzvos* *lishmah*, and that it is just the *yetzer hora*, bad *middos* and other deterrents that hold him back. But upon reflection, one can discover that his very “I” is all about *shelo lishmah*, and that is what is holding him back from *lishmah*. It’s not that a person has both good and bad desires. It is that his whole essence is to only be involved with his “I”, and thus he is at the level of *shelo lishmah*.

Where do we find in ourselves a desire for *lishmah*?

This is the power of *Elokus* (Godliness) that is deep within us. There is a spark of Godliness in everything, and in a person, it is mainly manifest in our heart. The *lishmah* in us is not found in our “I”, but in our Godliness – the fact that we are a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a “piece of Hashem.”

There can be two underlying motivations when a person desires to leave *shelo lishmah* and instead be *lishmah*.

If it is for a truly spiritual reason, then it is coming from his spark of G-dliness that is found in every Jewish soul, the part which is pure, nullified from any sense of self, and thus totally *lishmah*.

But it can also be coming from an unrefined motive – a motivation that comes from *gaavah* (haughtiness), to feel exalted that one is on the high level of *lishmah*. If a person is just desiring *lishmah* because he wants to be on a high level, it’s really *shelo lishmah*. His haughtiness is what is spurring on him to be “perfect”. Such a motivation will prevent a person from reaching *lishmah*, because the person is desiring a high level for his own personal esteem, to feel that he has reached a high level – and it’s just a desire to feel as if he’s G-d.

⁶ Adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. VI, Chapter 6 פרק 6.

We do not know where motivations are coming from in our soul. If we feel a desire to be *lishmah*, is it coming from the pure spark of G-dliness in us, or is it coming from haughtiness? It's possible that a person claims for many years that he wants to be *lishmah*, but he really just wants himself. It's all about himself, and this is *shelo lishmah*. The true desire for *lishmah* is when a person makes room in his heart for Hashem to be revealed there.

Lishmah Is Above Logic

These words are about how we use the power of our soul, and to what we are aspiring to. Logically speaking, it doesn't make any sense why a person would want to be *lishmah*. We will explain why.

There are situations in which it seems as if the person is acting *lishmah*, but really he's acting *shelo lishmah*. To give an example, a person gives up worldly desires so he can get *Olam HaBa*. He can really be just exchanging a "cow" for a "donkey", because he's giving up one high level for another high level. It might be more *lishmah* than what he is ordinarily, but he's still not doing anything for Hashem. Why, indeed, would a person ever want to be *lishmah*?

The real answer to this is that it cannot be explained; it is above logic. The essence of a person, his very "I", is one's *daas* – the knowledge which we can comprehend. But the point that is above our "I" is above our *daas*, and thus we cannot comprehend matters that have to do with going beyond our "I", which is the matter of *lishmah*.

The "I" of a person is not just mixed with ulterior motivations (*shelo lishmah*); our very "I" is in essence *shelo lishmah*. This is not a weakness in a human being; it is the entire idea of a human being – we do things only for ourselves. We are all about *shelo lishmah*.

A person, by definition, is all about *shelo lishmah*. The desire that a person can have to give up his ego is not a logical matter. Why on earth would a person want to give up his ego? What do we get out of this? What's in it for us...?

This is the first thing we should understand. The fact that we are human beings makes us be *shelo lishmah*, by very definition. The power to act *lishmah* is not a human ability – it comes from a point of G-dliness deep within our soul.

What Can Spur Us On To Act Lishmah

We have just said that it not humanly possible to act *lishmah*. If so, what can spur us on to leave our *shelo lishmah* state and enter *lishmah*?

If someone merits to reveal the G-dliness within himself, then he doesn't have this question. All he has to do is expand that G-dliness more and more, but he doesn't have this issue.

How can a person awaken himself to leave *shelo lishmah* and instead enter *lishmah*? This is when we make use of "yirah". There are levels in *yirah*, but the depth of *yirah* is to bring a person to nullify himself. This is a level of *yirah* which is even above *ahavah*, love of Hashem, as the *sefarim hakedoshim* explain.

Really, it is impossible to escape *shelo lishmah*, because Hashem has willed it this way, that human beings are *shelo lishmah*. The only thing that can make us leave *shelo lishmah* is the *yirah*, the fear, of remaining at *shelo lishmah*. First of all, one should be afraid to remain at this level, and secondly, a person is permitted to act *shelo lishmah* if he

eventually wants to arrive at *lishmah*, but without this intention, it is forbidden to remain at *shelo lishmah*. Thus, one should be afraid lest he remain forever at *shelo lishmah*, and this fear will be able to help him nullify his ego. Without this fear, one has no hope in breaking his ego.

Reaching Lishmah

That is only one side of the coin – *yirah*, to be afraid that one will remain at the level of *shelo lishmah*. Along with this one needs also *ahavah*, and that is to actually have a desire for *lishmah*. This is the power of G-dliness in a person, and it is the ability in a person to go above his “I”.

However, a person is apt to become mixed up and attempts to reach *lishmah*, by doing actions to reach *lishmah*; but although he is doing deeds of *lishmah*, he has never reached his “I” yet. When a person hasn’t yet reached his “I”, his desire for *lishmah* is simply a desire to reach high levels. It is coming from a self-love. Even if he acts with *mesirus nefesh* (altruism for G-d) and he tries to awaken *lishmah* in himself, he is just doing it all to reach levels, and when he finally reaches *lishmah*, he will discover that he isn’t being himself. When a person hasn’t yet reached his own “I” yet and he attempts to reach *lishmah*, he will not reach it, and he will become very broken in the process.

Even if he reaches *lishmah* and he feels that “This is what I am”, he is really confused. He might have some spark of *lishmah* here, but because he hasn’t yet clarified who he is yet, he has confused “*lishmah*” with his “I”, and this is wrong, because “*lishmah*” is really beyond the “I” of a person.

To summarize, *Lishmah* is the point in which one removes his “I”, and *shelo lishmah* is when one’s “I” is revealed.

Lishmah is D’veykus

Chazal revealed to us that the purpose of learning Torah – and our entire mission in general – is to reach *lishmah*. “One should always learn Torah *shelo lishmah*, because *shelo lishmah* leads to *lishmah*.” On one hand, it appears that *lishmah* is our goal on this world.

Yet, we also find that the goal of Creation is *d’veykus* to Hashem, for it is written, “*As for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*”

This is a seeming contradiction. What is our purpose on this world – *lishmah*, or *d’veykus*?

However, upon analysis, they are really one and the same concept. A person has to reveal Hashem in his life – in other words, he has to nullify his ego.

When a person nullifies himself, that itself is the concept of *lishmah*. This is also essentially the same thing as *d’veykus* with Hashem – being close to Hashem is to reveal Hashem in one’s heart.

Shelo lishmah, though, directly contradicts *d’veykus*. A person either has *d’veykus* or *shelo lishmah*. In order to reach *d’veykus*, one needs *lishmah*, like the words of Reb Meir. This is not just a “segulah” to reach high levels. It is the very concept of *lishmah* – to remove one’s “I”, which brings one to have *d’veykus* with Hashem.

It is written, “*I stand in between Hashem and you.*” This alludes to how the “I” of a person holds back connection with Hashem. When a person is at *shelo lishmah*, he is still in his “I”, and he will not be able to have *d’veykus* with Hashem.

This is the inner structure of all of our *Avodas Hashem*. The Ramchal writes in the beginning of *Mesillas Yescharim* that “man was not created except to bask in the pleasure of Hashem”, and later in the chapter about Chassidus, the Ramchal writes that if spiritual bliss is one’s sole desire in serving Hashem, then he is still not reaching perfection, because it is still *shelo lishmah*. Perfection, writes the Ramchal, is to act selflessly for Hashem, and not for a person to think what he will get out of it. He shouldn’t be in it for the pleasure.

On one hand, we have a part in us that only wants to serve Hashem for personal gain. This is our element of *shelo lishmah*, and this is a desire to experience spiritual bliss. On the other hand, there is an element of *lishmah* in us that only wants to reveal Hashem.

It is not possible for a person to totally nullify his ego. There is no such thing. The only thing we can do is raise the amount of our non-ego over the amount of our ego. But our “I” will not be totally nullified until the end of the year 10,000.

So there are altogether three levels:

1. **Total *shelo lishmah***. This is when a person doesn’t have any motivation whatsoever for G-dliness or even for spiritual pleasure.
2. ***Lishmah*, mixed with *shelo lishmah***. The *lishmah* in a person wants G-dliness, but the *shelo lishmah* in a person is it for the pleasure.
3. **Total *lishmah***. This is when a person removes his ego, and this level will only be revealed in the future.

Which Comes First?

A person’s mission, then, is to first clarify to himself what *lishmah* is, and what *shelo lishmah* is.

Lishmah is the point of G-dliness in the soul, while *shelo lishmah* is a person’s “I.” The most refined kind of *shelo lishmah* there is the desire to have spiritual delight, (as described in the beginning of *Mesillas Yescharim*.) A person should keep clarifying his motivations more and more and see how much *shelo lishmah* he still has left in him, until he finally begins to reveal some *lishmah*.

After this becomes clarified to the person, he now has in front of him two options.

There are two forces in us – our point of G-dliness, our ability of non-ego, and our “I”, which is our ego. From where in our soul do we start to serve Hashem – by trying to reveal Him more within us (which implies that we need to build our “I”, by seeking to reveal Hashem more in our life) or by nullifying our “I” (which is to first attempt to break our ego)?

On one hand, it is written, “*Remove yourself from evil and do good,*” so it seems that first we must remove ourselves from evil by nullifying our ego, and only then should we “do good” by using our “I.”

On the other hand, there is an opposite approach to take: the Baal Shem Tov explains this *possuk* to mean that *through* doing good, *that* is how we come to remove our evil.

So, where do we start? Should we first remove our ego – and that will help us reveal Hashem within us - or should we first attempt to reveal Hashem within us, and only after we should attempt to purify ourselves from our ego and nullify it?

Our *sefarim hakedoshim* have different approaches to this. Some of the ways brought in them is to break our *middos*, enduring physical suffering, and fasting. The common denominator between all paths, though, is to somewhat nullify the ego, to get used to giving up a little of the self. If a person bears in mind this point, this will help him clear space in himself for Hashem to enter and be revealed, and from this he will come to have spiritual delight in Hashem. That is one approach: breaking the ego.

The second approach is the opposite: don't start by breaking your *middos* or by fasting. Instead, draw upon yourself spiritual light by thinking about the Creator, such as thoughts of love toward Him. This is the approach brought in many works of *Chassidus*.

Either way has its dangers. The first approach has a danger in that a person is focused on breaking his "I", and if he breaks his "I" without having a source from where to draw his vitality from (since he hasn't yet merited to reveal Hashem in himself), he will have no vitality.

The second approach also has a risk, because if he is focused on revealing Hashem more and more inside himself, then even if he does arrive at that point, he still has bad *middos*, because he hasn't worked on himself yet. What will happen is that his bad *middos* will only get fueled on more from all his spiritual revelations.

(This is reminiscent of a story told about a certain person who was known as a "big *tzaddik*", who one time cursed someone who wronged him, and the curse took effect. When someone told this to Reb Yisrael Salanter, he said, "This person damages people with his mouth.")

When we hear this story, there are two different reactions one can have. A person might hear this and say, "Wow. What a high level this person was on, that he was able to curse people, and Hashem carried out all his curses... he must have been so close to Hashem." But Reb Yisrael Salanter did not look at it this way. He felt that this story showed that the person lacked good *middos*, because he was using his high spiritual level as a weapon to hurt people with.

What is the depth of Reb Yisrael Salanter's view of this person?

In the spiritual realm, there are *oros* (Heavenly lights) as well as *keilim* (containers that receive the light). If a person is worthy, he merits to draw forth Heavenly lights upon the world, *oros*; but if he hasn't yet purified his *middos*, he might even be capable of performing miracles, yet his *keilim* are still dirty, because they haven't been purified of bad *middos*. The person will receive the *oros* with *keilim* that are dirty, and who knows what will become of him...?

Thus, it is clear that we **both** need to reveal Hashem within us, as well as break our "I." We can start with one way and then work on the other way, but the point is that we need to do both. One of these alone will not get us to our goal.

We all have these two forces within us: the power to be *lishmah*, which is to be G-dly and have no ego, and the power of *shelo lishmah*, which is to have a sense of self. It is a person's mission to try to leave his *shelo lishmah* as much as he can and reach *lishmah*.

Even if a person has purified his *shelo lishmah* and he has more earnest motives - such as the desire to have spiritual bliss in Hashem - he still has to purify his motives even more, until he's totally not focused on his personal gains at all from *Avodas Hashem*.

A person has to always check if he has any G-dliness revealed in him, that he is not in the category of the statement, “I and him cannot dwell under one roof.” Even if a person sees that has revealed some more *lishmah* in himself, he still has to see if his *shelo lishmah* aspects have become more purified as well with this.

Daven For Help About This

The truth is that everyone has to *daven* special about this to Hashem, and to beg Him that he be shown the way how to begin.

However, *sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah* – “the end of the actions is first with thought”, and thus we have to be aware of our goal - where it is exactly that we are striving towards.

The purpose of our existence is to become close to Hashem; “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” That unbelievable closeness has to ultimately be felt by our “I”, and so we have to purify our “I” more and more⁷ until we merit to truly connect and integrate with Hashem.

⁷ *By always seeking to reveal Him more and more in our life.*

7 – *Lishmah: Part Two*⁸

“*Shelo Lishmah Leads to Lishmah*”

In the previous chapter we quoted *Chazal* that “A person should always learn Torah and do *mitzvos* even *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motives), because from *shelo lishmah*, he will come to act *lishmah* (pure motives).”

From here we learn that *shelo lishmah* and *lishmah* have to be integrated, and they are not two separate concepts. They go hand in hand with each other. In order to understand how they connect, we need to first reflect about the very concepts of *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*.

Chazal say that a person should “always” act *shelo lishmah*; the word “always”, *l’olam* in Hebrew, has the same root letters as the word *he’elam*, which means “hidden”. This alludes to the fact that *shelo lishmah* conceals our true purpose, which is to utterly sense Hashem’s existence. As long as a person is still involved with *shelo lishmah*, his very existence conceals him from revealing Hashem in his life. *Lishmah* is about revealing Hashem, while *shelo lishmah*, which is a human being by essence, conceals Hashem from the person.

A Human Is “*Shelo Lishmah*” By Essence

On a more subtle point, it’s not truthful enough to say that a person serves Hashem originally *shelo lishmah*. It is much more than that; a person by essence is *shelo lishmah*! Our very existence is to act *shelo lishmah*.

Shelo lishmah is not a matter that one thinks about. If *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* was something I can think about, then I can just “think” to act *lishmah*; but it’s not a thought. It is our very essence as human beings to be *shelo lishmah*. The “I” in a person allows for *shelo lishmah* and conceals Hashem from being revealed.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that “a person should always act *shelo lishmah*”, that it is impossible for a person not to begin with *shelo lishmah*. This is because the very existence of a person makes one act *shelo lishmah*, and there is no away to avoid this.

If we absorb this, then instead of looking at the concept of *shelo lishmah* with disdain, we can see that it is a required human weakness. It is not to be looked down upon. Our mission is to eventually negate our *shelo lishmah* and become integrated with Hashem, so *shelo lishmah* serves a purpose: it helps us reach *lishmah*.

When we describe what the “essence” of a person is here, we are **not** referring here to the deepest point in the soul, which is the selfless part in us that is the *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a “piece of Hashem.” There are different meanings of the “essence” of a human being, as we will explain.

Three Kinds of Existence

We explained that *lishmah* is when we reveal Hashem into our life, and *shelo lishmah* is when we still live within our ego and Hashem is concealed from our life. *Shelo lishmah* is actually always describing the “lower” level,

⁸ Adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. VI, Chapter 7 פרק 7

depending on the situation. *Lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* are different with each person, because what is a higher level for one person is a lower level to another person.

To be general, there are three different dimensions of existence (“*havayah*” in Hebrew.) –we can exist on three different kinds of planes. There is the physical world, and the spiritual world – and beyond that, Hashem Himself. The physical world is the world we see in front of us, and it is the lowest kind of existence. The spiritual world includes all the upper realms above the physical world, including angels and souls. Higher than that is Hashem – His actual existence and reality.

This has applications to our own soul as well. We can want three different kinds of desires: a desire for physicality, a desire for spirituality (which is not necessarily a desire to be close to Hashem as we will see), and a desire that comes from the deepest place in our soul (called “*Yechidah*”) which seeks to become integrated with Hashem. This deep desire in our soul already recognizes that it is one with Hashem, and thus its sole yearning is to always remain integrated with Him.

These are the three general desires that a person can have: material desires, spiritual desires (but not yet necessarily focused on bonding with Hashem), and the desire to become integrated with Hashem. This deep desire is in the *possuk* (Tehillim 73:25), “*Who do I have in heaven, and when I am with You, I do not desire this earth.*” A person is not meant to search for the physical, and his search does not end with the spiritual either; the real search of a person is for Hashem Himself, to become close to Him. (This is written as well in *Mesillas Yescharim*, Chapter 16.)

Three Levels of Shelo Lishmah

The same can be applied to *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*. If a person has desires for the physical, this is clearly *shelo lishmah*, because he doesn’t have any pure motivations yet. But even if he desires spirituality, this is still *shelo lishmah*, because it is not yet the deeper motivation, which is to strive for a bond with Hashem.

Just like the body conceals the soul, so can “spirituality” also be hampering one’s connection with Hashem! This is when a person wants more “spirituality” in his life, but “Hashem” is not necessarily in his picture.

We have learned so far that there are two levels of *shelo lishmah*. One is simply *shelo lishmah*, like when a person has material desires (and in this there are levels too. There is a simple desire for materialism, as well as deeper desires such as the desire for honor and glory, which is also materialistic). Then there is a higher kind of *shelo lishmah*, and this is when a person wants spiritual levels, such as a desire for *ruach hakodesh* and heavenly revelations.

There is also a third kind of *shelo lishmah*, and it is the highest kind of *shelo lishmah*. This is when a person has the will to become attached to Hashem, but for ulterior motivations. Even the desire to become close to Hashem can be *shelo lishmah*, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* writes (Chapter 19).

Closeness to Hashem for Ulterior Motivations (Shelo Lishmah)

The first two levels of *shelo lishmah* are more or less clear to us. We all recognize what it means for a person to have desires for materialistic reasons, as well as desires for spirituality that aren’t about connecting to the *Ein Sof* (Infinity) of Hashem. We understand that these desires are *shelo lishmah*. But the third kind of *shelo lishmah* – a desire to connect with Hashem, but for ulterior motivations – is hard to recognize as ever being *shelo lishmah*.

But it means as follows. Why does a person strive to be close to Hashem? It is because (as is written in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*) the greatest pleasure that exists is “to bask in the pleasure of Hashem and enjoy His radiance.” If so, a person can want to be close to Hashem, but he’s only in it because of the sheer enjoyment of it; he wants to receive pleasure, and he’s not yet focused on recognizing the reality of Hashem. As long as a person still wants to be a receiver, it is still *shelo lishmah*. It’s a very subtle kind of *shelo lishmah*.

So altogether, there are three kinds of *shelo lishmah*.

Lishmah – Focused Only On Hashem

Now we need to understand: What is *lishmah*, which is a higher desire than any of the above?

It would seem to imply that *lishmah* is to want to be close to Hashem, without any thought of trying to receive pleasure from this. But what we still need to know is, what would bring about that desire in us? What can we do to motivate ourselves in the first place to have a motivation that is entirely pure?

The truth is that it can indeed be spurred on by *shelo lishmah*, as follows: a person recognizes that human perfection is only achieved by being close to Hashem, and since the person has a desire to become perfected, he wants to connect himself to perfection and integrate with it. If so, we can see that even the desire to become integrated with Hashem can still be coming from a subtle kind of *gaavah* (haughtiness) in a person, and so there is really a fourth kind of *shelo lishmah*.

What, then, is the perfect kind of *lishmah*?

Lishmah is that a person can have a will to integrate with Hashem **without any reason!**

How can a person know if such a desire is coming from an entirely pure motive, or if it is perhaps coming from his *gaavah*, or a desire for spiritual pleasure? How are we able to know where our motivations are coming from?

The answer is called “the secret of *hishtavus* (nullification)”. If Hashem would come to a person and ask him if he is ready to give up his soul level and exchange his soul for a lower level soul, would the person be willing to accept that? If the person is truly willing to become close to Hashem, then he is able to nullify himself to the will of the Hashem, who (for some unbeknownst reason) wants now that he should receive a lower level soul. If it’s about “what Hashem wants”, and not what “I” want – *that* is the true litmus test of what the real motivations in the person are.

If a person is ready for this, this shows that he truly wants to become close to Hashem, because his main concern is about fulfilling the will of Hashem.

A person must thus clarify to himself why he wants to become close to Hashem: is it coming from my *shelo lishmah*, or from my *lishmah*? If it is coming from any desire for some personal gain, it is *shelo lishmah*, but if it is coming from a desire to do the will of Hashem, then it is coming from *lishmah*. There are many kinds of personal reasons why a person would want to become close to Hashem, and we mentioned four different possibilities. There are other personal motivations as well besides for what we mentioned, but these are the general four personal kinds of *shelo lishmah* that can exist.

Shelo lishmah is all about one’s “I”, the focus on personal interests. *Lishmah* is all about revealing Hashem in a person’s life. When a person removes his “I”, Hashem can then be revealed in his life.

Now that we have explained what *shelo lishmah* is, we need to understand how *shelo lishmah* can lead to *lishmah*. How does *lishmah* result from *shelo lishmah*?

The Self Is Expressed In The Emotions and In The Thoughts

There are two implications of the “I”, a person’s self. One part of a person worries for himself in an emotional way, and another part in a person is his mind, the *da’as*, which is also called the “I” of a person (“I” *stand between Hashem and between them.*”)

To explain this a bit more, there are two expressions of the “I”. A person loves himself and does things for himself, which is a result of his “I”. This is how the “I” is expressed – through emotions: a person worries for himself, either because he loves himself or because he fears for his safety.

The fact that a person does things for his own survival doesn’t yet define a person’s self, only the actions that result from the self. For example, a person can still act kind to another person, so we see that it’s possible to act when it’s not for himself. We can never define an act of a person as being all about *lishmah* or all about *shelo lishmah* - because there are always two possibilities. So when it comes to our emotions\ *middos*, there can be *shelo lishmah* involved, or *lishmah* involved.

But higher than our emotional aspect is a deeper part of our self, and this is our mind. The mind is also called one’s “I”, as is written, “I *stand between Hashem and between them.*” A person is called a “*bar daas*” – someone capable of a thinking mind; and his very *daas* is identified as the actual “I.”

If we are trying to define how the process works of leaving *shelo lishmah* and entering *lishmah*, it must be that there are two ways how one must leave his “I.” We have already clarified that *shelo lishmah* is one’s “I”, and *lishmah* is to nullify the “I.” If so, we have to nullify our “I” in two ways – both our emotional aspect (*middos*) and our mental aspect (*daas*) – if we are to leave our *shelo lishmah* and reach *lishmah*.

The Lesson from Parah Adumah

We can find a concept that brings out the idea of nullifying the **emotional aspect** of one’s self, from the law of *parah adumah*. When a *Kohen* uses the *parah adumah* (red heifer) to purify those who have become contaminated from a corpse, he purifies the person who comes to him as he sprinkles him with the blood, and the *Kohen* himself becomes contaminated in the process. Here we see the concept that a person is willing to do something to help someone else yet give up himself in the process.

We can also see from *parah adumah* how a person can nullify the **mental part** of himself, to nullify his very *daas*. This is because Shlomo *HaMelech* said of *parah adumah* that it is the only *mitzvah* which his great wisdom didn’t allow him to understand: “I said [to myself] that I will try to understand it, but its matter far from me.”

“It Is Better Had Man Not Been Created”

The Sages say (*Eruvin 13b*), “It is better had man not been created, but now that he has been created, he should examine his deeds.”

What's the point in telling this to us? What happened already happened; we exist now, so why should we know that it would have been better for us had we not been created?

Chazal are telling us, though, an inner revelation about people: We must begin serving Hashem from a lower path and ascend to the higher path (*m'lisata l'eila*). First a person begins to learn Torah and do *mitzvos shelo lishmah*, and from *shelo lishmah* a person arrives at *lishmah*. That is the way to go from the “lower” path to the “higher” path. There is another path, though, and that is when a person works his way downward, beginning from the upper path (*m'leila l'sata*). This is when a person begins with *lishmah* and shines its light upon *shelo lishmah* - by beginning with selfless closeness to Hashem, which is *lishmah*, and ending up by perfecting our “I”, which reflects *shelo lishmah*.

If so, when *Chazal* say, “It is better had man not been created,” they are revealing to us that there is a way for a person to begin serving Hashem from the point of “it is better had man not been created” – to begin with total selflessness.

Of course, the simple meaning of *Chazal* still remains true (that *shelo lishmah* is the beginning, which leads to *lishmah*). But there is also an opposite approach contained in their words which is no less true, that “it is better had man not been created.” This is when a person begins from selflessness - when all he is concerned about is revealing the reality of Hashem in his life; and his *shelo lishmah* is just like a garment upon his *lishmah*.

The Mission of the “End of Days” Era

We still need to understand, though, how this does not contradict the words of the *Nefesh HaChaim*, who wrote that a person is “always” *shelo lishmah*, and that every person has to start with *shelo lishmah* in order to reach *lishmah*. How we can say the opposite of this, that there is a way to begin with *lishmah*?

However, herein lays the secret to our inner mission. Until the end of this 6,000 year period we are in, we must start with *shelo lishmah*. We are headed towards the end of this era, which will be the true “*olam*” (world), and it will serve as a *he'elam*, (concealment) of this current world. As we head towards that “*olam*”, it can be said of us that we are “*l'olam*” – towards that world.

We are thus currently in “*l'olam*”, and not yet in “*olam*.” Of *l'olam*, our current state, the Mishnah in *Avos* states that “A person, *l'olam* (should always) learn Torah and do *mitzvos shelo lishmah*, because from *shelo lishmah* will come *lishmah*.”

The current state of affairs is thus to begin with *shelo lishmah*. However, at the very same time, if we reveal already now the light of the future Redemption – of which Hashem said, “*For My Sake, I will do it*” – then Hashem is revealed in our life, and the “I” in us becomes nullified; the *lishmah* in us is then revealed.

In previous generations, they were far from the redemption, and their *Avodas* Hashem did not permit them to begin with *lishmah*, because the light of the Redemption wasn't yet close by. They were deeply hit by the exile, and the light of the Redemption was very hidden from them. Thus, they were not allowed to serve Hashem starting from *lishmah*, and they had to start with *shelo lishmah*.

But in our current era, which is the End of Days (*acharis hayomim*), the “light of *Moshiach*” has already begun to ignite, as the *sefarim hakedoshim* have written about long before. If so, our *Avodah* now is the opposite. We can begin from the point of “*Better had man not been created*” - the point of selflessness in us, the point of *lishmah*. We

can begin our *Avodah* by recognizing the truth of Hashem's existence and to radiate that light downwards, shining it onto our *shelo lishmah*.

To summarize, we have two forms of *Avodas* Hashem. One way is to go upwards starting from the lower point, which is called *m'lisata l'eila* (from the bottom up), and this is the main *Avodas* Hashem of this 6,000 year era. A second way is to start from the higher point and bring it downwards, *m'leila l'sata* – from the point of selflessness, the point of *lishmah* that we can radiate downwards onto our *shelo lishmah*.

We can use both aspects at the same time – on one hand, we are living in this current 6000 year era, but on the other hand, the light of *Moshiach* has begun to shine, so we can utilize the higher point at the same time.

The ability to serve Hashem selflessly has begun to take form as the Redemption draws closer – its light is able to be accessed by us, even in our times.

8 - Sacrificing for Hashem⁹

The Message of Death

To continue the discussion begun by the previous chapters, we will give a short introduction to the root of these matters.

When Adam was first fashioned, Hashem placed him in Gan Eden, and he had a clear recognition, felt in his heart, that Hashem was in front of him. There was an open revelation of Hashem, and nothing was hidden from man. The first sin came and allowed for the recognition of Hashem to become concealed and hidden, and since all souls were once contained in Adam's soul, every soul became affected from this and thus faces a test in recognizing the reality of Hashem. After the sin, confusion about the truth entered the fabric of Creation, and now each person according to his level is somewhat affected – in his mind and heart – and the truth is now somewhat hidden from people.

Hashem warned Adam that if he eats from the *eitz hadaas*, “For from the day you eat from it, you will surely die.” Here we see that death is in essence a concealment of recognizing the truth of Hashem's existence. “You will surely die.”

However, even where He is concealed from us, it is precisely there where He can become even more revealed to us. The *possuk* says, “For no man can see Me and live,” and the Zohar comments on this, “In life no one can see Him, but in death, they can.”

On one hand, sin resulted in the curse of death, which is essentially the concealment of Hashem from us. On the other hand, death is the time in which Hashem is the most revealed to a person, because a person can't see Him when he's alive, but when he dies, he can then see Him.

The first sin is the root of all concealment about the truth of Hashem's existence. This can get fixed through “death”. There is a power in our soul called “death” – the ability to die *al kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify His Name. Rabbi Akiva awaited his whole life to reveal this ability and be able to die *al kiddush Hashem* (see Berachos 61a).

There are two ways to die *al kiddush Hashem*. One way, as we know, is to literally be killed in order to sanctify Hashem's Name, as Rabbi Akiva and the other sages who were martyred by the Romans. But there is another way to “die” *al kiddush Hashem* – this can happen in our very own soul, when we accept upon ourselves something that is very hard to accept.

Before the first sin, Hashem was totally revealed to a person. After the sin, the truth became concealed; the amount of concealment differs with each person, and thus some people have more doubts about Hashem than others. The common denominator between all people after the sin is that all people became somewhat doubtful about the reality of Hashem in their hearts.

If a person has a will to want to feel Hashem, it is thus essentially a will to leave the situation caused by sin and to want to enter the level that existed before the sin of Adam.

⁹ Adapted from Bilvavi *Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. VI, Chapter 8 *זו פרק 8 חז*.

When we enter the “pre-sin” state, we are essentially removing the “death” caused by sin. In order to fix up our state of “death”, we instead need to “die” *al kiddush Hashem* – in our soul. We will explain what we mean.

Being Ready To Sacrifice For High Levels

When we speak about dying *al kiddush Hashem*, it seems like something very far from us. In previous generations, this topic was very relevant, but to us, it seems way too far-fetched to talk about.

In this chapter, we will try to explain how it is still very much applicable to us, in our very own life as we know it. We will give a brief introduction.

There are many details in our *Avodas Hashem*. But there is one matter which is all-inclusive; if we have it, then we can acquire all perfection.

If you think about it, a human being by definition cannot ever acquire anything perfectly. A human can never be perfect; only Hashem is perfect. All people have deficiencies.

If one’s “I” is still involved in his *Avodas Hashem*, then he will never be able to acquire any gain perfectly, because since one’s “I” is never perfect, the “I” will always get in the way of reaching perfection.

How, then, can one ever hope to become perfected in any area?

Here is where the secret of “*mesirus nefesh*” comes in: the ability in a person to be self-sacrificing towards Hashem. This matter is written about in the *sefarim hakedoshim* and it has many ramifications. The *Reshash* wrote that all qualities are gained only through *mesirus nefesh*. It is also brought that if a person wants to make sure he never accidentally eats *treif* (non-kosher), besides for being careful in the regular *Halachic* sense, he should have *mesirus nefesh* when it comes to keeping kosher. In other words, he should decide that if *chas v’shalom* he ever comes across food that is *treif*, he’d rather die than eat it.

This is just one example, but the concept can be applied to everything in *Avodas Hashem*. *Chazal* say that “the words of Torah only exist by one who dies over them” (Berachos 63b). The way you “die” over Torah is by having *mesirus nefesh* for it – by being prepared, in your soul, to die over it if you must.

We don’t mean to *actually* give up your life; there is almost no one who has to do this. We mean to *potentially* give it up – to be prepared for such a thing and develop in yourself the potential ability to do it. For example, if Hashem would come and give you either the choice to live without a certain spiritual attainment, or to reach a certain attainment but to die for it – what would you choose?

An Internal Examination: What Is Our Life Worth If We Are Missing Some Ruchniyus?

The truth is that this matter needs an inner clarification. If someone claims that he’s already ready for this immediately upon seeing these words, it’s highly doubtful if he will practice what he preaches if he is tested, and he’s just imagining that he’s already at the level of *mesirus nefesh*.

A person has to come to an inner decision to be prepared to even give up his current level in *Avodas Hashem* in order to receive a higher level – if he knows that has more to improve on, then he should want to give up his current life rather than remain on his current level.

This should not be done out of feeling morbid about one's life or as an escape from the stress of life. It should come from recognition that this is really what life is all about, and that a life without this acceptance is really *death*. In other words, don't think you're giving up anything for this! You're instead gaining the real kind of life. That is the real attitude to look at it.

If a person wants to acquire a certain area in *Avodas Hashem*, he has to work very hard to get it. But the truth is that it's not really within his reach to get it; after all, he is only human, and without the help of Hashem, nothing is possible. *Chazal* say (Sukkah 52a) "If not for Hashem helping a person, it would be impossible to overcome." This doesn't mean simply that Hashem gives a person help from some outer force; it means that when Hashem is revealed inside a person's soul, He assists the person from within, and through that a person is able to achieve something.

We already brought the words of *Chazal* that Hashem says of a *baal gaavah*, "I and him cannot dwell under one roof." As long as a person's "I" is still in the picture, he doesn't receive help from Hashem. If a person is willing to give up his ego, like to give up his current life that lacks a higher level – rather than live without that level – he has the key to acquire all spiritual attainments.

If a person wants to reach a higher level in *Avodas Hashem*, but he feels that he can still live without it – it's as if he wants both the physical world and the world to come at once, which cannot co-exist, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes.

When Eliyahu Hanavi faced the false prophets at Mt. Carmel, there were two sides – truth and falsehood. Those who knew the truth sided with Eliyahu, and those who were swayed by falsity stood with the false prophets. Every soul as well has to go through a test to choose between the truth and falsehood. A person has to clarify to himself if his life is worth living without the higher levels he hasn't yet reached. If he feels that he is able to go on his life even though he hasn't attained higher levels yet in his life, then his "I" is getting in the way of his growth in *Avodas Hashem*. But if a person is prepared to give up his life in order to receive a higher level in *Avodas Hashem*, he has the key to it all.

Many people are trying to serve Hashem, but there are two kinds of people that serve Hashem. There are people who serve Hashem in an inner way, while there are many others who are just suffering and enduring the experiences of life, yet that doesn't make them "servants of Hashem". How can we tell the difference between them?

Those who are really serving Hashem are living a life of *mesirus nefesh*, every second. As long as a person isn't ready yet to give up his life for Hashem, he never passed his true test in his life (and every person has to at some point pass the "test of the *Akeidah*" in his life...). *Yiras Hashem* (fear of G-d) is only reached if we pass the true test in life, just as Avraham Avinu's greatness was only proved by his tenth and final test.

Without that sense of fear of Hashem in life – without realizing that it is better to be dead rather to be alive and not grow spiritually – a person will never be able to really acquire any matter in his *Avodas Hashem*.

The Inner Redemption

At first, these words seem very far from us, too difficult to work on, and perhaps way too lofty of a concept. But we cannot run away from the truth. When a person wants both this physical world and he also wants to grow spiritually, he must know that he is sorely mistaken.

Moshiach ben David is called “*bar nafli*” (Sanhedrin 96b). He will have no ego, and he will be entirely self-sacrificing for Hashem. This is the secret of the redemption. There will be a general redemption, in which we all await for *Moshiach* ben David to come; there is also a personal redemption, however, that each person can reveal in his very own soul – “*My soul will be drawn close to her redemption.*” There is a private redemption that can take place in every individual Jew’s soul.

Just like the *Moshiach* who will come in the general redemption will be someone who has no life to himself and he will be all about *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem, so can each individual Jew strive for his own personal redemption and have *mesirus nefesh* to give up what he wants for closeness to Hashem.

These words apply to all areas of *Avodas* Hashem – they can be applied to any area a person wants to attain.

Vitality of the Soul – Revealing G-dliness

Hashem breathed a soul into man, from His very own spirit. The *nishmas chaim*, “breath of life” which Hashem breathed into us, is a G-dly source of vitality that is found in every soul. To what does this apply?

A person generally feels that he is in charge of his life, and it is upon him to give himself up for Hashem if he wants to acquire spiritual attainment, as we said.

But it is even more than this. Hashem breathed into us a spirit that comes from His own breath, so to speak – and this means that the vitality in our own soul is not our own; it is from Hashem! If so, *mesirus nefesh* really means that one is revealing that his vitality, the air he breathes, is really coming directly from Hashem. “*And I will dwell in his innards.*” Hashem is found in each person, and we only have to bring Him out from concealment and reveal Him.

That should be the true way to realize it: all our life-force is a revelation of the G-dliness which Hashem has placed in us, and in order to **feel** this, we need *mesirus nefesh*. After a person has decided with conviction that he will give up his lifestyle for Hashem, he will realize that really he isn’t giving up anything! He has only given to Hashem what was already His in the first place. After all, his very life-force is a piece of Hashem. All our life and vitality streams to us directly from Hashem, and when a person truly recognizes this, he realizes that the energy in him is not his own, but a G-dly vitality sustaining him.

The *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) is called a “strange god” who inhabits the body of a person (Shabbos 105b). On a very subtle note, perhaps it can be said that a person tends to view the G-dliness in himself as something strange and foreign to him, and this is really because a person feels his ego very strongly, thus he doesn’t feel the G-dly vitality sustaining him every second.

A person’s *Avodah* is to clarify and recognize how each thing contains a G-dly vitality that sustains it. We do not mean for this to become mere intellectual information; any person who has read a little knows this. We mean that a person has to realize how the life-giving energy in each creation by essence comes from Hashem.

In order to clarify this concept, one has to clear away his own existence and give room for Hashem space to enter and be revealed in him.

There is also a more subtle kind of *Avodah* here.

From a superficial perspective, *mesirus nefesh* is that a person has to, let’s say, give up some of his money to help someone out. If so, the attitude is that really the money is mine, but I’m giving it up for another, a good *middah* of

being charitable. *Mesirus nefesh* in our *Avodas Hashem*, though, is much more than this. It is to feel that we're really not giving away anything for Hashem! We have to realize that our situation, without being prepared to give up anything for Hashem, is not really a life, but a deathlike kind of existence. So you're not really "giving up" your life for Hashem; you are instead gaining for yourself the true life, by being prepared to "give up" for Hashem.

If a person feels that he's giving up for Hashem, it will be very difficult for him to serve Hashem, because he will always feel like he is stepping on his ego and losing control over his life. He will always feel like he's depriving himself with all his *mesirus nefesh*. It is, of course, possible for a person to serve Hashem even with this attitude; but it will be very difficult. The simple way to do it is to realize that you don't really have anything of your own to give away to Hashem.

So altogether there are three levels:

1. That one feels like he is giving up "his life" for Hashem – and he feels deprived in doing so.
2. That he realizes that all of his life comes from Hashem.
3. That he realizes that he doesn't really have what to give away in the first place, because without *mesirus nefesh*, life is not a life, but death.

Above Free Will

Chazal (Shabbos 151a) state that when *Moshiach* comes, one of the changes that will happen is that there will be no more *bechirah* (free will).

Why are *Chazal* telling us what will be when *Moshiach* comes? Of what relevance does it have to us? What is the point in revealing to us that in the future our power to choose will disappear?

Chazal are revealing to us here that if a person reaches the inner point in himself – the ability of personal redemption, which can be reached even in today's times – he realizes the truth, that he is really not "giving" anything towards Hashem. We really have nothing to "give"; all we can do is reveal Hashem's existence.

That is how our power of free will disappears in the future. Free will means that I have what to give to Hashem, and I am choosing to give it for Him; "I'm in charge." But in the future, we will "choose" not to "choose" – we will realize that all of life belongs to Hashem, not ourselves.

The true aspiration for perfection a person must have is to realize that there is G-dliness sustaining everything, and that means that Hashem *is* everything, as the Baal Shem Tov wrote. A person's simple mission is to realize that everything belongs to Hashem, and that we have nothing to give to Him.

It's possible that a person can know all this in his mind and even say these words over with his mouth, but that doesn't mean he is there yet. If a person wants to live these words, he has to be prepared to die at any second for Hashem; otherwise, he still thinks he's in charge of his life, and all these words will just be a superficial discussion.

This is the secret of the "light of *Moshiach*" which began to become revealed during the time of the Baal Shem Tov. It is for a person to really check himself and see if he's ready to have true *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem – to be above the regular kind of *mesirus nefesh*.

“May He swallow up death forever.” In the future, there will be no more death, and this is because we will all realize that life isn’t possible without Hashem. When we realize that, there cannot be death, because then the “true life” will be revealed – the revelation of Hashem’s existence and how He sustains the world.

On one hand, these words are about a very lofty concept, but on the other hand, they should be so simple to every person, as simple as can be. If a person has matured in his *ruchniyus* (spirituality), he should know that one cannot want both. It’s either or. A person is either prepared to give his life for Hashem, or he isn’t, which means that he will just go through constant ups and downs in his *ruchniyus* and he will never really get anywhere.

These words are clear, simple, and well-known to anyone who serves Hashem in an inner way. This is how the earlier generations were able to readily give up their lives *al kiddush Hashem*; they were thus deserving of miracles, because they were in control of the tendency in people towards superficiality.

Every single person has the power to be able to give himself up for Hashem, to accept that he is prepared even to die (if he must) in order to attain more closeness to Hashem.

May Hashem merit the entire Jewish people that we be inclined to serve Him, and that we should quickly merit the truest revelation of all – *“And Hashem will remain, alone”* – as a personal revelation in each of our souls.

9 - Knowing Your Soul: A Personal Redemption¹⁰

Understanding Ourselves

The world is a continuous path. Its history is an intentional order of events. Each event in history has its roots. A person who reads about the Egyptian exile and wonders why there had to be this type of an exile has obviously not learned anything about the events that happened before it. But when a person looks back a few parshiyos in the Torah before the exile, he sees that the reason for the exile was because Avraham Avinu asked Hashem for a sign. Then he discovers the root of the exile. He sees how history was shaped. When a person learns in the holy sefarim that all the exiles came about from Adam's sin, he sees that there are even more roots to the exile.

One may know various details about his soul, but he doesn't see what the roots are and he doesn't see how they all connect. He might encounter major details about his soul, but he still has many emotional difficulties. The fact that he knows here and there about his soul doesn't help him enough. However, when a person sees each part of his soul step-by-step, he can see what the source of his soul's forces are. In order to see in this way, one needs to have a certain feeling for it.

Two Kinds of Vision

There are two ways to see. One way is with a superficial vision and the other way is with an inner vision. It is written, "A person sees with his eyes, and Hashem sees with His Heart." This is a hint to the two different kinds of vision a person can use. With a person's physical eyes, he can only see what's on the outside, but when a person uses his inner vision, the vision of his soul, he can see the inner layer of something.

We are not discussing the deep layers of the soul, only its outer layers. In fact, even the outer layers of the soul have an external and inner layer. When a person sees something, either he can see the outer part of it, or he can see the inner part of it.

What does it mean to see the outer part of something external or the inner part of something external?

When a person uses his emotional amazement to understand something, he only sees the external. When a person uses a quiet place in his soul to see something he can then see the internal in the external.

When a person only sees the outside of something, he doesn't really know what's going on inside. He thinks he understands it, and he is aware that sometimes he succeeds in answering his questions about something, and that sometimes he doesn't. But he doesn't see what's really going on.

This shows us another reason why many people feel a lot of stress, besides for everything we have said until now. People don't see the big picture of themselves, only a part of themselves. In addition to this, even what many people do see in themselves is only the outside of them-selves. They have not reached their inside yet. Thus, they have an incomplete picture of themselves, so they cannot fix their own problems.

¹⁰ Adapted from sefer *Da Es Menuchasecha* Chapter 7 דע אַת מנוחותרך פרק ז

Most people will not even be helped if they read many psychology books that explain the human soul, because they haven't worked hard to discover what's going on deep down inside themselves. Although a person can learn about different problems that people have, this only teaches a person about the external part of a problem. A person needs a more inner kind of vision in order to truly see what's going inside the soul.

Seeing The Inside From the Outside

In order to understand the human soul, a person requires two things. He has to really know information about it and he needs to see how it works. If a person is a non-feeling person, he will not know the information about the soul, and as a result he doesn't know how to treat the soul. Even if he knows how to treat the soul, it will only be superficial solutions. He doesn't really know what's going on in the soul, just like a person who sees a car but has no idea what to do with it.

To understand this idea, we will quote the *Mesilas Yesharim*, "To what can this be compared; to a garden-maze. This is the type of garden that is planted for amusement, that is popular among nobles. The plantings are arranged as many walls, and between them there are many confusing and interconnecting paths, all of them resembling another, and the goal of these paths is to reach the single pavilion in the middle. Some of these paths are correct and lead to the middle, while some paths take him further away. The one walking in the maze cannot see or know at all whether he is on the correct path or a false one, because they all appear the same with no difference to the eye that sees them. He cannot know the correct path unless his is familiar with them...one who is already standing on the pavilion at the middle has a vantage point from above, and see all the paths spread out before him, and see which paths are correct and incorrect. He can call out to the traveler and warn them which paths are incorrect. One who wants to trust him will follow his directions and reach the middle of the maze, but one who doesn't feel like trusting him will just follow his eyes and he will certainly remain lost, and he will not find the middle of the maze."

Someone who is still in the garden-maze only sees part of the picture. Someone who has already been through it sees it all from above.

The lesson from this is that there are two ways to see something. First, there is a superficial way of seeing something, which is only a partial view. The second way to see something is to use an inner kind of vision, which sees the whole picture from above. When a person is amazed, he only sees from one part of his soul, and his understanding of something is superficial and only partial. But when a person lives with an inner silence, he can see everything, without getting overly amazed. He sees all the details and doesn't get caught up in minutiae.

In order to see what's going on inside of something, a person needs to see it from the outside. Someone who stands on the inside of something sees outside of where he is, and someone on the outside can look into the inside. When we go above the soul, we can see into it, but if we are still inside it, we can only see what's outside, and not within, it.

A Person Needs To Be Very Calm For This

In order to see the inside of something, a person needs calm and quiet. When one has this quiet, he can move in and out of his view when he wants without becoming overly attached to what he sees.

When a person becomes very amazed at his discoveries, he's too connected to what he sees. He is pulled after his sheer amazement and gets caught up in something interesting. This causes him to divert his attention and become mesmerized by a particular detail. However, when a person has an inner calmness, he isn't pulled after something interesting and he is able to stand tranquilly, taking in the full view of what's before him. He is then able to probe into the depths of a matter.

We can compare this to someone who looks at the surface of the ocean to see what's underwater. When the water is wavy, he can't see what's underneath. Only when the water is still and calm can a person see what's underneath.

If a person never reached his inner silence, he cannot comprehend how something stays the same. He needs something new to keep his interest. However, when a person lives with inner silence, he is not moved emotionally as easily, because he is in control and serene. Even if he does get excited sometimes, he immediately returns to his calm and unexcited state.

A person who always gets excited has a soul that feels imprisoned. Everything he encounters captures him. This can be compared to a person who needs his job for his livelihood. He will be very obedient to his boss because he has no other way for a livelihood. Someone who needs excitement for vitality, will never want anything other than what excites him because he only feels alive when he's excited.

On the other hand, a person who gets his vitality from a more consistent kind of life, that doesn't involve excitement, can move back and forth from what's exciting and what isn't, with ease. A person who doesn't require an exciting occurrence to feel alive, has the ability to see things in greater depth. He can see all the details, both in the Torah and in the human soul. This gives a person an entirely new experience of life that is above the many confusions of life.

Life in this world is very confusing. When a person is a child, he has no idea how to make sense of what's happening in his life. As a person matures, he notices more and life becomes further confusing.

How can a person leave all the confusion?

Chazal say, "A prisoner cannot release himself from his cell." A prisoner, even if he is the greatest person, cannot free himself from his jail. When a person lives his life based on excitement, it's as if he's in a jail, because he is being controlled by his emotions and gets pulled after them. He can't help himself. The only way for him to be saved is to be helped by another person who isn't a prisoner, who can release him. Even if the helper doesn't know everything, he is at least not trapped under his emotions. Therefore, he can help others and himself.

Seeing Yourself From Above

When a person learns how to be separated from his emotional excitement, he is able to see from above. He can see his own soul as well as the souls of others. He can see his soul from above, as well as his problems. He can view himself in the same way someone who is outside of a room looks into the room.

There is a way for a person to see from above himself, to view himself through his very soul. Just like we know of near-death-experiences in which people have reported what it's like for their souls to leave their bodies (after being announced clinically dead). They have described viewing their body from above. So too, we can see ourselves from above, in our own lifetime, through our soul.

Chazal (Pesachim 50a) reported that one of the Sages had this type of experience and came back saying, “I see a clear world.” When a person sees from this deep place in his soul, he can see everything from above, with total clarity. He can understand the soul and how it works without getting fazed by its many complex details, and he can experience the soul in a calm and unmoving manner.

Why Therapy Doesn't Always Help

Most people who try to learn about the soul don't succeed in understanding the soul because they themselves are stuck inside their own souls. A therapist can't always help someone, because he has his own problems (unless he has a lot of *Abavas Yisrael*, he usually doesn't succeed in truly understanding the person who comes to him for help). Although a therapist is able to view a person's problems from the outside, which is a better view from the person's inside (who can't see himself at all), he still doesn't really know what's going on the inside of the person who comes to him for help, and he doesn't see the total picture of what is going on.

The only way for a person to know about the soul is not from within inside of himself, so to speak, but to see himself from above. A person can reach into a deep, quiet place in his soul in which he can go above himself and see himself from a higher view. Then he will be able to see how his emotions, thoughts, and experiences are simply his garments, not who he actually is. In the same way that a person can see an X-Ray of his body, so too, it is possible for a person to get a picture of his soul, when he learns how to view himself from above.

All problems, physical or spiritual, are really because people don't understand their souls. A lack of information about the human soul causes a lot of inner contradictions and frustration. Hashem indeed wants us to have problems and He hides knowledge about our soul, so that we will have to work hard in our *Avodas Hashem*.

In the future, though, there will be total clarity. *Chazal (Eruvin 22a)* say, “Today is for action, and tomorrow is for the reward.” In today's times we have no clarity and we have to work very hard at our *Avodas Hashem*. In the future, we will have clarity in our *Avodas Hashem* and we won't have to work hard.

In the future Redemption, we will all see the big picture. Ramchal writes (in sefer *Daas Tevunos*) that the purpose of the world is to reveal Hashem's ways and this will be when Hashem shows us the big picture of everything. Just like there is a general Redemption that will take place in the world, so too, there is a Redemption that a person can experience in his soul.

When a person succeeds in knowing his soul, he will experience a personal redemption. The secret to all of *Avodas Hashem* is inner silence. Through an inner silence, we can reveal our soul.

In order for a person to do this, he needs to have utter calm and quiet. The problem is that most people don't have this inner silence. There are generally six common causes why a person may lack this inner silence.

The First Cause: Our Shortcomings (Or Our Talents)

All of us have our shortcomings, areas where we are not strong. All of us have a particular weak element, whether it is earth, fire, water, or wind, depending on each person. Our weakest element is always our downfall. Our weaknesses don't let us have *menuchas hanefesh*.

For example, if a person has a problem of overeating, not only does he have a problem of overeating, which is very unhealthy, he also doesn't have *menuchas hanefesh*. Why? Every time he overeats, he becomes anxious and impulsive. Up until the moment he saw the food, he was calm. The moment he saw the food, he was driven out of his calm state to fulfill his desires, and lost all of his *menuchas hanefesh*.

Not only does a person's main weak area destroy his *menuchas hanefesh*, but even a person's main good quality can be his downfall.

I knew someone who was a great spiritual personality. He had excellent talents, a great personality, and was very influential on others when he spoke in public. But because he was on such a higher plane than others, he couldn't relate to them in simple, mundane matters. It was "beneath him" to talk to his congregants about daily chatter. Therefore, he wasn't able to influence them the way he could have. He was too lofty to relate to others in practical, daily life. Here we see an example of how someone's positive qualities can also be detrimental to him.

The Second Cause: What We Want

Another deterrent to *menuchas hanefesh* is when we want things. When we have a whole list of things we want, it doesn't let us have any *menuchas hanefesh*. To want something comes from word *ratzon*, which comes from the word *ratz*, to run. When we want something, it's like running out of our minds! We need to quiet our desires in order to feel at peace inside.

Even what we want in spiritual matters can ruin our *menuchas hanefesh*. When we want to grow so much in our spirituality, it can create a lack of balance in our soul, destroying our *menuchas hanefesh*.

The Third Cause: Rapid Actions

Another cause for a lack of *menuchas hanefesh* is working fast. Fast actions can have an effect on the soul. We become anxious when we constantly do things very quickly, and we cannot be calm, which takes away from our *menuchas hanefesh*.

The Fourth Cause: Amazement

Many people express *hispaalus*, amazement or wonder at a new idea that comes to mind, and it actually takes a person out of his *menuchas hanefesh*. Many people are very earnest in their *Avodas Hashem* but they lack *menuchas hanefesh*, because even though they are continuously involved in how to best serve Hashem, they are always feeling amazed at so many things, causing a certain disconnection. This is a lack of inner calmness.

The Fifth Cause: Too Many Roles

When a person does too many things, even if they are all for good causes, a person cannot have *menuchas hanefesh*.

A very wonderful, earnest and G-d fearing individual asked me how he can really grow and serve Hashem as best as possible. I asked him what he does. He told me that in the morning he is a Rebbi, in the afternoon he is a Mashgiach, and at night he is a Rov. In addition to this, he is involved with his shul during Friday and Shabbos so he can answer all their halachic queries. I told him, “How do you not go crazy? You are doing too much.”

Not only can doing too much destroy your *menuchas hanefesh*, but thinking too much can also destroy your *menuchas hanefesh*. Thinking too much can drive you insane. No one would think of teaching Kaballah to his child, because he knows it would strain the child’s brain to understand these matters and thereby, make the child go insane.

Many people are exerting themselves in learning Torah. However, this exertion has to be an exertion that causes us to feel at peace inside, not to feel anxiety in our studies.

The Sixth Cause: Noise

Finally, it should be noted that even noise can take away our *menuchas hanefesh*. Loud noises don’t let us think calmly and make us anxious. Even being around someone who isn’t calm can make us anxious and does not allow us to have *menuchas hanefesh*.

In fact, simply talking to someone who is very nervous and not calm can take away your *menuchas hanefesh*. Talking is a form of connection. When a person talks to an anxious person who has no *menuchas hanefesh*, he connects to him and receives all of the lack of calmness that prevents *menuchas hanefesh*.

Find Out What Is Destroying Your Inner Peace

Most people lack *menuchas hanefesh* because of the first two reasons mentioned. Either they have major weaknesses that pull them away from doing what is right and good or they have many things they want. Some people aren’t calm because they keep feeling “amazed” during their *Avodas Hashem*, and they are suffering from an imbalance and a disconnection. One must take the time to reflect on which one is destroying one’s inner calm.

10- How To Merit a Good Year: Coming Out of Your Ego¹¹

The Hint of the Shofar

On Rosh HaShanah, we have a mitzvah to blow Shofar. A Shofar is designed in a way that one side of its opening is narrow, and the other opening is wide.

The sound of the shofar comes out from a narrow opening, but it is heard on the wide end of the opening.

The Gemara states that the sound of the shofar sounds like someone crying. That is why we blow different sounds that resemble crying (shevarim and teruah). These are two kinds of crying that a person exhibits. When does a person cry? When he is in pain. When a person feels confined by something, and he wants Hashem to release him from his confined state, he blows (and hears) the shofar in order to come out of his “confines” and reveal instead an “expansion”.

The purpose of the shofar is not just the sounds that come out from it – the shofar is an expression of our soul’s mission during these days: “*Shapru maaseichem*” – “*Beautify your deeds.*” The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4*) writes that the shofar comes to awaken those who are slumbering.

The shofar is narrow in the place where the sound comes from, and it is wide in the opening that the sound escapes from. This reflects what a person’s *Avodah* is during these days: to come out of his “narrowness” and expand from his “confines”.

What do we mean by this?

In the physical world, we can understand well what a confine is and what an expansion is. When a person’s monthly income isn’t enough to cover his expenses, this feels like he is confined. When he has adequate livelihood, Baruch Hashem, he feels widened from his confines. A person wants to escape the confines of having to live so frugally and instead to live comfortably, without having to worry so much about every penny he spends. People like to be free from any confines.

The lesson of the shofar, though, is not just about escaping your confines when it comes to the physical. It is a lesson about escaping confines within our own soul, and it is upon us to understand how we can leave our “confines”.

There are many ways how we leave our confines, and we will try to go through each of them.

Leaving Your Narrowed State

Every person worries for himself. There is no such person who can say about himself that he doesn’t worry about himself. On the other hand, every person also has some caring for others. There is no person who only cares for himself his entire life and never worried about another person.

¹¹ Adapted from sefer Bilvavi *Mishkan Evneh, Yomim Noraim, Chapter 8*

The higher level a person is on, the less he worries for himself, and the more he worries for others. The less of a level he is on, the more self-absorbed he is, and he is less worried for others.

To come out of your “confines” means to come out of your narrowness and instead expand beyond yourself. A person has to leave his private little life and look at the world with a widened view, thinking: “There is such thing as the Jewish people, and there are 600,000 souls who are one collective essence. My existence is only one out of these 600,000.”

When a person leaves his self-absorption in this way, it’s like experiencing redemption in his own soul.

Rosh HaShanah is the Day of Judgment. Hashem writes for each person on this day how much income he will make this year, what his health will be like, and all the rest of his needs. We want to have comfort in all these areas. But if we want to take care of our body’s needs, we need to understand that it depends on a healthy soul. If our soul is stuck in a narrow confine, than this will manifest itself in our body. So if a person wants to be comfortable, he has to make sure his soul is comfortable – in other words, he has to make sure that his soul is not stuck in a narrow confine. If a person succeeds in that, his body’s needs will be affected as well by this, and he will have all his physical comforts.

A person expands beyond himself starting by expanding his internal world, and this slowly spreads outward onto his physical body.

A husband and wife can live together in a house, but it can be like a narrow confine – when each of them is living for themselves. If a person only thinks about himself and only worries for himself, that is a confine. When a person understands and feels that there is another person living with him in his house, and he is involved with giving to that other person – he has left the narrow confines.

A person comes to Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment. He is thinking about himself and he wants to merit a good judgment. Is he only preparing with himself for Rosh HaShanah, or is he thinking about others too, about how he can help them come properly into the Yom Tov? Is he concerned for anyone either for their physical needs or their spiritual needs?

If a person comes to Rosh HaShanah only thinking about himself, he has basically already signed for himself his decree....

“Every person signs with his hand on it.” Every person seals his fate on this day. How do you seal your own decree? Aren’t we on this physical world, while the decree is being made in Heaven? Don’t we need to ascend to Heaven to sign a decree?

The simple answer to this is that our soul goes to Heaven at night when we sleep, and then it signs the decree. But the depth of this matter is as the Maggid of Mezritch z”l explained: the way a person lives is what signs the decree. Everyone signs his own decree! How? If a person has left his “confines” and he has expanded beyond himself, he has signed for himself a decree that he has left his confines. If a person still remains in his own personal confines, it is as if he never heard the shofar, from an inner perspective.

If a person blows shofar and one of the openings is closed, he hasn’t fulfilled his obligation of shofar. The mitzvah is only fulfilled when you blow from the narrow opening and it comes out of the wide opening. In terms of our own soul, we need to come out of our narrowness and expand beyond ourselves.

But if a person comes to Rosh HaShanah and he only thinks about himself, from an inner perspective, he has not performed the purpose of the mitzvah.

There is a well-known story that Reb Yisrael Salanter was walking on the street on Erev Yom Kippur, when a certain pious individual walked by him. Reb Yisrael Salanter gave him a blessing, but the person looked so serious about the Yom HaDin that he failed to respond “Shalom.” Reb Yisrael Salanter remarked about this, “This is not righteousness. True righteousness is when a person leaves his confines and expands beyond himself, and he isn’t self-absorbed and only worrying for his private life. If it is Erev Yom Kippur and he is so absorbed in himself that he can’t greet me with a Shalom Aleichem, he is missing the whole point.”

Every person signs his own decree. The narrower a person is, the narrower his income, health and happiness will be. The more a person expands beyond himself, the wider his blessings will be – he will widen his life, his marriage, his income and all other areas.

Inner Redemption - by Nullifying Your Private Life

How can a person expand beyond himself? He has to realize that there is no such thing as a “private” life. Reb Zusha of Anipoli zt”l merited to see Eliyahu HaNavi, who told him the following: *Chazal* state that *Moshiach* will not come until all the peratios (coins) from every wallet will be used up. Peratios can also mean “private.” The real depth behind why *Moshiach* hasn’t come yet is because every person is worrying only for himself!

People will for sure react with a question: “Is this the only reason that *Moshiach* hasn’t come yet?! He hasn’t come because there are still many people who aren’t keeping *mitzvos*, and even those who fulfill the *mitzvos* aren’t doing so perfectly. We can make a long list of all the problems in this generation.” But if a person wouldn’t be thinking only of himself, he would be serving Hashem perfectly. A person commits a sin not because he wants to do something good for others, but because he only cared for himself at the moment. He cheated in business to make a good deal – why? He only cared about himself at the moment. He might pat himself on the back that he gives maaser up until a fifth of his money, and he might even give half of his money to tzedakah, but that still doesn’t erase his sin of stealing. The reason why he sinned was because he only worried for himself and thus he wanted some pleasure.

If a person erases his private life, he wouldn’t come to commit a sin. A person only sins because his yetzer hora convinced him that it will be good for him to do so. In other words: “Just worry about yourself...” It seems simply that to get rid of our private life means to have a positive attitude toward others and to give more tzedakah, but really, it means much more than that. If a person reflects about his life in a true and deep way, he will conclude with absolute, simple clarity: The root of all problems is when a person only thinks and worries about himself. Sometimes a person isn’t necessarily having a forbidden thought, but sometimes a person commits a sin simply because all he thought about was himself.

The Nefesh HaChaim writes in the introduction: “A person was not created except to help others.” If that would be a person’s perspective in whatever he does, he would ask himself each time: Is what I’m doing now for myself, or in order to help others? When a person eats something with a questionable hechsher (Kosher certification), what is the real reason that he did so? If he thinks about it a little, he will discover that it was because he only worried about himself at the time.

Donating Some of Your Learning

If we would succeed in uprooting our self-absorption, we wouldn’t even come to one sin. “There is no righteous person on the earth who only does good and never sins.” It is impossible for a person to totally get rid of his self-

absorption, but he still must try to balance his needs with others' needs. The Gemara says that one should combine *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motives) with *lishmah* (pure motives).

It is a person's job to examine his deeds and make sure that he's not only acting for his own concerns. We will give a few examples.

A person goes to a *shiur*. Why did he come to the *shiur*? We are not speaking about someone who is bored in his house, so he comes to a *shiur*. We are speaking about someone who comes to a *shiur* because he really wants to learn Torah. Why, indeed, does he want to learn Torah? He knows that *Chazal* say that if a person doesn't learn Torah, he won't be resurrected from the dead in the future. A person wants to live forever, and he knows that in order for this to happen, he has to learn Torah. It seems like such a simple reason.

Is he coming to learn only for his own survival, or because he is also worried for others? If he's only concerned for himself, he will still get rewarded for his *mitzvah* in learning Torah, but he has taken the holiest thing in Creation, the Torah, and he has used it all for himself.

We can compare this to a guest who visits the king's palace, and he takes the king's crown off his head and wears it. Such a person is really rebelling against the king and deserves the death penalty. If a person is coming to a *shiur* to learn Torah only because he is concerned about his future, he is taking the most precious thing in Creation – the holy Torah – and using it all for himself.

A deeper kind of person not only worries for his own learning, but he worries that others should learn too. Even if he doesn't get another person to come to a *shiur*, he can decide before the *shiur* that he will give a percentage of his reward to other Jews.

How many Jews unfortunately haven't been worthy to have the Torah in their life! How will they get up by *techiyas hameisim*? What will be with them?! But if certain righteous individuals give them a percentage of their reward for learning, they will merit to be revived.

If a person gives away some of his reward for learning to other Jews, first of all, he might very well bring other Jews to complete *Teshuvah*, in the merit of the Torah that he has given to them which can awaken their inner world. On a deeper note, a person like this can help other Jews merit eternity!

The Gemara states that ignoramuses who don't learn Torah still have hope. If someone benefits a Torah scholar from his assets, it is considered as if he clings to the *Shechinah*. But many people, besides for not learning any Torah, don't even help a Torah scholar. They give charity, but not for Torah causes. What will be with them? How will they get up by *techiyas hameisim*!?

There are millions of Jews all over the world who have no Torah in their life, and they have never even said *Shema* once in their life. If a person wants to care about any of these Jews, what can he do? People usually don't have the strength to open up a new *kiruv* organization, and they aren't interested in going around raising money. So what can a person do if he wants to help all these Jews?

There is something you can do. You can sit in the *beis midrash* and hear a *shiur*, and as you listen to the *shiur*, you can be giving merits to the whole world. How? By giving away part of your reward to those who haven't merited to learn Torah yet in their life.

The point of meriting the public (*mezakeh es harabim*) is to leave one's private life.

Donating A Building...For Whom?

A person donates a building to become a shul. He gets his name plastered on the entrance so everyone should see his name, and he gets the rights to the first *Mi Shebeirach* every Shabbos. He has all kinds of demands.

Now, if he would donate the building so that it should be a place of learning and closeness to Hashem, why would he need to donate the building in his name? Does Hashem not know who donated the building? Hashem knows every private thought; He surely knows that someone donated a million-dollar building.

But the donor is thinking about himself. He wants the whole neighborhood to know that it was him who donated the building, and he wants to be in all the newspapers. Even though much Torah will be learned in this building due to his charity, all he thought about was himself.

If a person would really search to live a true kind of life, and he wants to donate a shul or beis midrash, I am not saying he has to do this purely for the sake of Heaven, but at least he should be ready to give up some of his reward to others who have no Torah or *mitzvos* in their life. Is he prepared to do this, or is he just thinking the whole time: “I donated it, I’m the boss over here, It’s all about my name...!”

The Root of Arguments – Thinking Only About Yourself

If we reflect, we can see that this point affects all areas of life.

Most marriage problems are not because a person has a bad heart and is mean to his wife. There are many husbands who are wonderful, nice people – yet they still have serious problems in their marriage. Why? It is because people are simply absorbed in themselves and only worry about themselves.

When a person lives with the goal of how he can nourish others, and Baruch Hashem he gets married, he sits for at least two minutes a day and thinks: “How can I give more to my wife? How can I help her more?”

There are some people who think all day about how they can get more out of people, but there are others who think: How can I give to others?

When a person gets into a fight in shul about certain honors and privileges that he feels should go to him, or when people are involved in strife and heated arguments, the root of this all is because each person is thinking only for himself.

This is an internal kind of question: How does a person look at his life? Is he looking to unify with others by giving to them (which is what Hashem intended the world to be like when He created it), or is he just living life as he naturally does, worrying only for himself since the time he was a little child? When a person only cares for himself in his life, he thinks that everything is about him, and he resembles someone who lived in the Generation of the Flood, who were erased from existence due to their selfish lifestyle.

Giving Must Be Truthful

Many people give maaser, yet it doesn’t make them into better people. Why is this so? It is because although they are involved with giving, they are not doing so out of concern for others, but simply because they know that *Chazal* say that giving maaser makes one wealthy...

We can see that many people give tzedakah, yet their money isn't going to the right places. *Chazal* indeed say that a person has to be worthy of his tzedakah going to the right places. A person donates a new shul, and they can barely get a minyan to come....

Why do these things happen? It is because when the person gave the money, he didn't give it with the intention of helping others – he did it all for his own merits. If that his intention, his money won't end up in the right places.

But if a person gives something to another with his heart, he is truly giving, and Hashem helps such a person's money go to the right destination.

How This Affects Your Own Spiritual Situation

If a person looks at life with this proper attitude, he will find himself not only improving his interpersonal relationships, but even his relationship with Hashem will improve.

“What you don't want done to you, do not do to others.” Hillel said that this is point is the entire Torah. How can this be the whole Torah? How can interpersonal relationships be everything? What about one's relationship with Hashem?

There are many answers to this, but along the lines of our discussion, the answer is because our issues with Hashem and our issues we have with people are all the same issue: that a person is thinking only about himself, lives for himself and worries only for himself.

But when a person gets used to giving to others with the right kind of attitude – because he has a desire to bestow good upon others – he is fulfilling the purpose of creation, which is to help others. He will also find that he has an easier time when it comes to holding back from a sin.

The root of sinning is because a person is used to thinking and worrying only a about himself. When a person slowly gets used to giving to others, he leaves his selfish mindset that everything is all about him; if a certain evil desire comes to him, it will be easier for him to control himself from giving in to the yetzer hora, because he has already gotten used to the idea of not only worrying about what's in it for himself.

If a person doesn't get used to giving up something for someone else, then when is faced with a sin, it will be hard for him to have self-control, because he is so used to always fulfilling what he wants. But if he has gotten used to nullifying his desires for other people, this will weaken his selfishness, and when he faces a temptation to sin, he has given himself more tools to deal with it. He has learned how to not give in to something he wants, and with Hashem's help, he will be able to overpower his evil desire.

Worry That Another Person Should Have A Good Year

We are in days of mercy, a time in which anyone who feels a little bit of spiritually aspires to prepare properly for Yomim Noraim and merit to be written for a good year. What can a person do to merit a good year?

There are many tips to merit a good year, but often these tips are superficial and do not get to the root. For example, if a teenager doesn't want to get up in the morning to daven, you can offer him a prize for getting up, and

if he is being too fresh toward his parents, you can get him to stay out of the house when there is any tension going on. There are all kinds of ideas out there.

But there is another way to deal with problems in a child, and that is to treat the problem at its root. You need to get through to his soul. If you solve the root, everything else will get solved with it, if not for the most part.

When a person arrives at Yomim Noraim, if he all cares about is that he should have a good year, he is already preparing to fail. If someone really wants to have a good year, he should first care that other people in the world should have a good year.

How can a person do this?

The first thing to do is that a person must look for ways how he can worry that others should have a good year.

There are people who feel inspired one day to buy a present for their child, so they go into a store and ask the salesperson what to buy. Such a person isn't giving from himself – he's getting advice from the outside. The deeper a person becomes, the more he searches within himself what to give to others.

If a person is waiting to be told what to do in every situation, he is like a toddler who has to be told everything: do this, do that. A person who matures doesn't need others to tell him what to do.

Therefore, a person has to first think to himself: How can I worry that others should have a good year?

Even if he doesn't come up with a way, the fact that he is thinking that others should have a good year is already a big accomplishment. He is preparing for Rosh HaShanah with a deep perception that he doesn't only live for himself. This is the root of being to improve oneself.

We are all hoping to have a good year, but have we changed at all since last year? Have we tried to improve ourselves at all?

Take at least a minute a day and think how you can help someone – whether physically or spiritually. The point is to get used to thinking for just a minute a day in which one is not just living for himself, and to see if he is really giving to others. Don't give to get honored or even to get Olam HaBa – just give for the sake of giving!

If a person takes these words to heart, then just as he will learn to worry about others, so will Hashem worry about him, measure for measure. Just like a person will get used to giving to others without expecting to gain something in return, so will Hashem give to him.

This growth process must be done slowly and step after step. Don't try to jump to high levels so fast. Just take this one point with you throughout the rest of the year – it is not difficult.

May Hashem merit us and all of Klal Yisrael to have a good, sweet year.

*11 - A Personal Redemption*¹²

In everything, there are general rules, as well as details. The rules are called the *klal*, and the details are called the *p'rat*. When it comes to serving Hashem, this is true as well. There are rules, and there are details, in serving Hashem.

At the beginning of a person's way, it is impossible for a person to know what the rules of serving Hashem are, and what details it will entail. It is almost definite that a person will confuse the details and the rules, and the rules with the details.

Therefore, in order to give a person the picture in which he can see the rules first, the Ramchal writes in the beginning of *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* what the greatest rule is. The greatest rule, he writes, is that the purpose of man on this world is to become close to the Creator. When a person understands this, he looks at everything through the lens of *d'veykus* (attachment to Hashem): "How will this bring me to have *d'veykus* in Hashem?"

It's possible that a person thinks that he has many things to work on in *Avodas Hashem*, and he is aware of all kinds of wonderful advice to work on many areas, yet he's still missing the knowledge about the general rule, which is the purpose of it all. The truth, though, is that the Zohar states that the 613 *mitzvos* are called "advice", because the *mitzvos* are all advice on how to get to the goal, which is *d'veykus* in Hashem.

When a person builds up his attitude and way of thought in this way, he is reaching the root of the redemption, and now it is upon him to shine the light of that personal redemption – the light of *d'veykus* – onto all the details of *Avodas Hashem*.

¹² Adapted from Author's Introduction to *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Volume IV* בלבבי חלק 7. הקדמה

12 - Redemption of the Soul: Nullifying Your Self¹³

Lower Humility and Higher Humility

About Moshe *Rabbeinu*, it is written in the Torah, “*And the man Moshe was more humble than any other man.*” The humility of Moshe *Rabbeinu* is that he was able to negate his “I”. In this kind of humility, a person recognizes that he has an “I”, but instead of enlarging his ego, he lessens his ego. Moshe *Rabbeinu* reached the greatest level of this humility, in that he decreased his sense of “I” more than any other person.

But there is an even deeper kind of humility, and it is the humility which *Moshiach* will possess. It is to have absolutely no sense of “I” whatsoever. Let us explain the difference.

The lower definition of humility is when a person works to think about how lowly he is – either because he has sins, or because he has bad *middos* – and on a deeper level, to feel lowly simply because he is a limited human being (as the *Mesillas Yeshtarim* describes). In this humility, a person reckons with his “I” and still has a sense of self-worth; it is just that he lowers his ego. He is still within the realm of his “I”. Moshe *Rabbeinu* reached the greatest level of this humility – the lower level of humility.

But the humility of *Moshiach* doesn’t even consider the “I.” It is absolute humility, in which a person does not think at all about his existence. (However, it is brought in *sefarim hakedoshim* that this level will never be completely attained by anyone until the end of the year 10,000. But each person, to his level, can access this somewhat).

To sum it all up, there is an *avodah* in which we work *within* our “I”, and this is when we work our way upwards towards higher spiritual levels. But there is also an *avodah* in which we *leave* our “I”.

When we work within our “I”, our “I” itself is getting in the way of having a complete connection with Hashem. But when we go above our “I”, we are in the state of Before Creation, *Ain Od Milvado* in its simplest form. In this state, there is nothing else we connect to other than Hashem, because there is indeed nothing else.

In our holy *sefarim*, we find that the general *Avodah* of a person is to lower his sense of self and to think into his lowliness as a human being. This represents the lower humility. In this *avodah*, a person reflects into his deeds so he can improve them, and the like.

But in the *avodah* of “the light of *Moshiach*” (described in the sefer), to think about one’s “I” to begin with is already a downfall. The more a person forgets about his “I”, the less one thinks about himself, and the more he will redeem himself.

Redemption of the Soul

One must know that there is only one true “I”: Hashem. The more a person recognizes what we are saying here, the less and less he thinks of himself (and he only thinks about himself when he has to, like how to fulfill the Torah and the *mitzvos*) and besides for this all he does is immerse himself in learning the G-dly thinking of Torah – such a person has a personal redemption from within himself. This is the secret meaning of the redemption from this

¹³ Adapted from Bilvavi *Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. VIII, Chapter 12 בלבבי אזה. פרק יב

6,000 year period. The true redemption is the redemption of the soul (*geulas hanefesh*), and it is a personal freedom because the person finally doesn't live for himself anymore. It is when a person finally realizes that “*For I am Who I am, and there is no other G-d with me*” (Devorim 32: 39).

Redemption of the soul – when a person never thinks about himself and doesn't live for himself – is really the secret implication of the term “*lishmah*” (acting for Hashem's sake). The *Mesillas Yesharim* (chapter 19) describes this when he writes that even if a person is only serving Hashem to get close to Him and to enjoy this spiritual bliss, it's still not *lishmah*, because the person is still thinking about himself. A sense of one's “I” holds back *lishmah*.

The depth of *Avodas Hashem* is to negate our “I” and to instead reveal the true “I” in its place – “*For I am who I am.*” The *avodah* of this 6,000 year period, (termed *Neshamos*) is for us to connect to Hashem with our *neshamah*. It is to purify our souls – through divesting ourselves from the body, as well as by purifying the soul itself as we draw our “I” closer and closer to Hashem. But the *avodah* of “the light of *Moshiach*” (also known as *Elokus*), is to realize that there is no “I”, and because there is no “I”, there are no barriers that hold us back from completely integrating with Hashem.

Mesirus Nefesh

When we understand these words, we receive a whole new perspective on what it means to be humble, and what it means to have *mesirus nefesh*.

Noach had *mesirus nefesh* when Hashem told him to build the Ark. Avraham Avinu had *mesirus nefesh* by praying for Sodom. Moshe *Rabbeinu* had *mesirus nefesh* by willing to be erased from existence for the people to be forgiven. The *mesirus nefesh* of *Moshiach* will be that he won't even attribute to himself any sense of existence at all. Humility was personified by Moshe, but it will also be personified by *Moshiach*. The humility and the *mesirus nefesh* which we find by Moshe and *Moshiach* are different definitions, and they are not the same.

Moshe is personified by the middah of *da'as* (understanding). He merited great comprehension because of his humility. The humility of *Moshiach* will reveal a whole new depth to the concept of humility, and it will thus also reveal a whole new depth to the meaning of *da'as*.

This is what we mentioned earlier (in chapter 9), that there is a level which is above *da'as* – “*lo yeda*”. In *da'as*, there is a *daas* which separates (*daas hamavdeles*) and a *daas* which unifies information (*daas hamechaberes*). That is all from the view of *yoisher*, “the line”. But the higher view, *iggulim* (“the circle”), shows us how all the points are equal from each other (*hishtavus*), and that there is no need to come and unify, because everything is already unified.

The humility of *Moshiach* will reveal that that there is a Torah above one's “I”, a Torah of complete *Elokus*. The Torah of Kabbalah, which is entirely *Elokus*, is thus the secret to the redemption. A Torah which is still within one's “I” is what upholds this 6,000 year period, which is exile. But the Torah of the future will be above the “I”, and it is entirely *Elokus*, so there will be no “I” at all involved.

(Although we do find in the works of Kaballah that the “I” is given much attention – that one has to expand his “I” – that is only due to the concept of *hishtalshilus* (lit. “chain”, that everything Heavenly gets constricted and downsized more and more until it finally reaches the realm of the physical). But from the actual view of *Elokus*, the “I” is totally out of the picture.

This is actually the secret meaning of the redemption.

Teshuvah – Returning to the Source

We have a mitzvah to do *teshuvah* (repentance). Simply speaking, one has to correct his deeds, his *middos*, and his thoughts. The deeds are the realm of *Asiyah*, the lowest world. The *middos* are the realm of *Yetzirah*. Higher than that is the realm of *Beriah*, which are the thoughts.

The highest world is *Atzilus*, and to do *teshuvah* on the level of *Atzilus*, one has to return his very “I” to its Source. What is that source? It is the state which existed Before Creation. Before Creation, as we said before, was not just a point in time, but something that implies an *avodah* for us to do: to connect ourselves to that state of nothing but Hashem. This is the depth of *teshuvah*.

Now we can see that *mesirus nefesh*, *anavah* (humility) and *teshuvah* are really all one and the same. They are all synonyms for having no “I”.

Even more so, the entire Torah consists of names of Hashem. This shows that the entire Torah is all an expression of how to return our “I” to its source – the state of Before Creation.

In the lower *avodah*, (*Neshamos*) where one reckons with his “I”, there are various levels of comprehension in the Torah. But in the higher *avodah*, *Elokus*, the entire Torah is all an expression of how to negate one’s “I”, to return our “I” to the state of “*For I am who I am.*” In the higher *avodah*, there are no differentiations between levels; from this higher perspective, every topic being discussed is essentially about how to remove the “I” and return it to the state of Before Creation.

Of course, there are endless details to this, because the Torah is “*longer than the earth and wider than the sea.*” But there is one fundamental point that holds it all together; when we have that root – the root from which everything else stems out of – then we can understand that we have to look at all of the Torah as one piece. All of the Torah is coming to negate our “I” and integrate it with its Source. We need a clear view to be able to see this in everything, but there is one single fundamental point: we must return our “I” to its Source and integrate with it.

The Shabbos of the Future

The year 7,000 will begin a period of “a day that is entirely Shabbos.” The Shabbos which we know of, amidst this 6,000 year era, is not yet the true Shabbos; it is a concept to rest from labor, but it is only a “mini” World to Come (*me’ein olam haba*). The true Shabbos will only be in the future, which will be “a day that is entirely Shabbos, an eternal rest.”

The true Shabbos will be when our self is completely nullified. Our “I” represents *daas*, because just like our *daas* helps us lead the way, so does our “I” dictate to us the way. *Daas* is the core behind this 6,000 year era, each century representing one of the six general *middos* (*chessed, gevurah, tiferes, netzach, hod* and *yesod*). In the future, our knowledge of the facts will be so clear that there will be no more free will; now, when we have free will, our “I” is involved, but in the future when our “I” will no longer be active, and thus there will no longer be free will.

The current era is an era of “movements” (*tenuah*), but in the future, there will be no movements, just *menuchah* (rest); the only movement will be our “I” moving toward its root. The movement toward our root is not really a movement, but a rest; we only perceive it as a movement because since we are in this current 6,000 year era of movement, all we understand is movement.

The depth of this matter is as follows. It seems that we have an “*avodah*” to return our “I” to the Creator, but to what can we compare this to? To a person who loses a certain item, and he’s looking all over for it in his house. After much effort, he finds it right where he began to look for it. Although he has worked so hard to find it, he realizes at the end of the search that it was all for nothing, because the item was there the whole time right in front of his nose.

This reflects our own situation of the world – we are similar to blind people who cannot see anything, until Hashem comes and opens up our eyes. When our eyes will finally get opened up, we will see that all our “movements” on this world did nothing at all.

When one toils to find something, what he finds is not because he toiled to find it. All of a person’s exertion is so that a person can learn how to nullify his “I”, but when he finally finds that state, he will discover that even this isn’t needed. In order to come to this understanding, one needs to first go through a stage of exertion. After a person works hard at nullifying his “I”, he enters a reality in which his “I” is integrated completely with Hashem; it is impossible for one to see and feel this reality unless one gets rid of his “I” completely.

The Two Parts To Our Avodah

The *avodah* of a person is thus two-fold. Firstly, we must understand that there are two views on reality – there is a reality in which we are within our “I”, and there is another reality – the place that is above our “I.” Secondly, we must take this concept and try to live the entire Torah by it.

The Three Stages of Creation – Three Aspects of Avodah

It is well-known from the works of Kaballah that at first, Hashem’s endless light filled all of existence (in simple words, “*He is One and His Name is One.*”); after this, Hashem created a space to make the universe (called “*chalal*”), and then He created *adam kadmon*, the prototype formation of man in which all of Creation was fashioned out of and modeled after. This shows us that there were three stages. Stage One was Hashem’s endless existence, *Ein Sof*, when it filled the entire world. Stage Two was that He created an empty space, “*chalal*.” Stage Three was the formation of *adam kadmon*, the design of man and all creations.

We can understand easily why there had to be a first stage. Hashem is eternal, and since He is the Creator, He had to come before Creation. We can also understand why there had to be a third stage, in which Hashem formed Creation. But why was it necessary to have the middle stage, in which Hashem emptied out a space to make the universe? If anything, it should just be part of the third stage, because it was a necessary prelude to Creation. But why did the *chalal*-space have to be a stage by itself?

The meaning behind this is because “*chalal*” is really representing an *avodah* in and of itself. It is an *avodah* to realize that **everything which we have said here is like the “*chalal*”.**

We will explain what we mean.

The stage of Before Creation (to be above our “I”) is the perfected state which we can access (total integration with Hashem), and the stage of After Creation (to work within our “I”) is our current state, but there is also a middle stage in between. This is represented by the *chalal* – and it is when we nullify our “I” and negate our existence.

However, this is begging for a question. If a person does not have an existence of his own, then who is here to serve Hashem?! The answer to this is the concept of *chalal*: we are able to access a state in which there are no Creations, and there is just an “empty space”. In other words, we can access a state in which there is no sense of “I”, a state of nothingness.

Thus, there are really two realities going on at once: *adam kadmon*, in which a person works with his “I”; this is the lower form of our existence, termed “*Neshamos*.” The higher form of existence, *Elokus*, is essentially *chalal* – when a person negates his “I.”

Now we can see that *yoisher\hadragah* is the same concept as *adam kadmon\neshamos*, while *iggulim\hishtavus* is the same concept as *chala\elokus*.

The Fiftieth Gate

The Redemption is the secret meaning of what is called “Fiftieth Gate” (*Sha’ar HaNun*). If a person sinks to the Fiftieth Gate of Impurity, it is brought in the holy *sefarim* that he is beyond *teshuvah*. Yet, it is precisely when the Jewish people sink so low that they will finally be redeemed. This is not a coincidence. It is precisely in the lowest impurity that a person can reveal that Hashem is really everywhere, even where it seems He cannot be found. Since we are all integrated with Hashem at our root, the fiftieth gate actually reveals that there is no need for *teshuvah* – that to be “beyond” *teshuvah* doesn’t mean we are hopeless, but rather the opposite: because we are integrated with Hashem, it’s as if we don’t need *teshuvah*.

This sefer has come to explain the *avodah* of *chalal*, which is essentially the concept of nullifying our “I.” Through “denying” our “I”, we use the Fiftieth Gate of Holiness to rectify its evil counterpart, the Fiftieth Gate of Impurity, which is for a person to deny Hashem.

The light of *Moshiach* is thus essentially for us to use the Fiftieth Gate of Holiness; it is all one point, and because it is only one single point, it is impossible for us to grasp onto, just like you can’t hold onto a dot. We cannot *understand* it, since we cannot grasp onto it. It is like the *chalal* – an empty space, which cannot be grasped.

The evil usage of *chalal* is for a person to deny basic tenets of faith, but the holy usage of *chalal* is for a person to go above his “I”, to go above *adam kadmon*.

13 - Leaving Inner “Egypt” & Experiencing True Redemption¹⁴

Exile of Our “Da’as”

The Egyptian exile was an exile of our *Da’as* (our mind). This we can see from what Hashem told Avraham Avinu, that “you will surely know (“*yodua teida*”) that your offspring will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs...”

The Egyptian exile was an exile of our *da’as*, and its redemption was a redemption to our *da’as*. From the double usage of the word *da’as* in the *possuk* (*yodua teida*) we can see that there are two kinds of exiles that both involve an exile to our *da’as*. Let us reflect what these two kinds of *da’as* are.

The Baal Shem Tov explains that these two kinds of *da’as* are a “masculine” kind of *da’as* and a “feminine” kind of *da’as*. The redemption from Egypt was a feminine kind of *da’as*, and the future redemption will be a masculine kind of *da’as*. What does he mean?

The way to understand his statement is as follows. In a person, there are two components: feelings and vision. (An example of “vision” is that a person is obligated on the night of Pesach to see himself leaving Egypt”).

The feminine kind of *da’as* is the feelings, and the masculine kind of *da’as* is vision. Egypt was an exile to our feelings – our feminine aspect of *da’as*. Its redemption was a redemption as well to our feminine *da’as*. But the future redemption will involve our masculine kind of *da’as*, which is our vision. “*For with an eye and an eye we will see the return of Hashem to Zion.*”

It is well-known that the final redemption is also contained in the first redemption. The redemption from Egypt is the root of the final redemption. In terms of our soul, we must know what these two different kinds of redemption are.

Our Mind Is Still In Exile

There are two “kings” that reside in a person: the mind and the heart. The mind’s vision is limited and we need to learn how to expand it.

The Zohar always uses an expression of *ta chazi*, “come and see”, while the Gemara always uses an expression of *ta shema*, “come and hear.” When a person hears, he hears the feelings, but when a person sees, he doesn’t use his feelings, just his limited vision. The abilities of feeling and vision are two distinct forces in the soul, and each of them needs to be removed from what’s stuffing them up. Our mind’s vision is prevented by being too narrow-sighted, while our heart’s feelings can be stuffed with *timtum halev* (spiritual “blockage”).

In the Egyptian exile, our heart was in exile. There was a redemption to this, so our feelings were redeemed with this. But our mind still hasn’t been totally redeemed. Our feelings of the soul, such as *ahavah* (love), *yirah* (fear), *hispaarus* (pride), etc. were redeemed in Egypt, but our mind’s vision – in other words, our inner vision, the ability to see holiness – is still concealed in an exile.

¹⁴ Adapted from *Sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh on Pesach* מדרות גאולת הנפש פסח – בלבבי

The *Avodah* of the Egyptian exile was to recognize Hashem’s goodness and to come to have feelings for Him, such as love and fear of Hashem. But what is the *Avodah* of the final exile?

We must expand our minds in order to know this.

The Secret of the Redemption: “Unity”

In the writings of the Arizal it is brought that on the night of Pesach, it is a time of “*gadlus hamochin*” (a higher state of mind). What is the higher state of mind, and what is the lower state of mind?

Simply speaking, it means that sometimes our mind is more or less clear. But the more truthful outlook is that *gadlus hamochin* is a straight way of thinking – “*G-d made man upright*” (*Koheles 7:29*) – it is a straight kind of vision, and in it lies a person’s mind.

In the redemption of Egypt, anyone who didn’t merit to leave Egypt perished. The wicked perished in the plague of darkness. Everyone else who left Egypt all left as one collective unit – there was *achdus* (unity) of the entire nation at the redemption. At this redemption, the entire Jewish people were united to follow Hashem into the desert, experience the splitting of the sea and the giving of the Torah. At all of these events, all 600,000 souls of the Jewish people were all present.

The inner way to look at reality is to see everything as one. From an inner perspective, a person sees how many details are really all one collective unit. The secret that brings on a redemption is to be united into one unit. For example, the entire Jewish people in Egypt did not change their names, language, or dress.

Thus, the redemption is all about *achdus* – unity. There is a redemption that will take place to the Jewish people as a whole. There is also a personal redemption to each person that will take place, a redemption to each person’s soul. This is to redeem our mind. To redeem our mind, we must acquire an inner perspective on things – a perspective of *achdus*, to be able to see how many details connect and are all one.

Before, we mentioned that we have two different component in us: the feelings, which are in our heart, and our vision, which is in our mind. Our mind, which is otherwise known as the masculine kind of *daas*, has an advantage over the heart in that it can see how many details connect into one. Our mind is capable of seeing *achdus*.

The second *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred). The future redemption will be the opposite of this; it will be a unity of the world. The secret to the redemption is *achdus*.

When a person acquires the inner perspective – the way to see unity in many details – this is the secret to the redemption. The secret to the current exile is contained in the Egyptian exile. By understanding what the Egyptian exile was, we can learn about our own redemption from the current exile, because the root of all redemption is the redemption from Egypt.

What Is This “Unity”?

What is this secret of *achdus* \ unity of the final redemption, which is contained in the Egyptian exile?

We say in the *Haggaddah*, “*And G-d took us out of Egypt, not through an angel or through a seraph or through a messenger, but G-d Himself, in His Honor.*”

There is a concept that everything which takes place in the world also takes place in time, and everything that takes place in time also takes place in our soul. In our own soul, there can be a redemption by Hashem Himself.

On the night of Pesach, there is a revelation of G-dliness in every person's soul! "*Not through an angel or a seraph or a messenger, but G-d himself.*" As long as a person doesn't block this revelation from happening, it becomes revealed in one's soul on the night of Pesach: a personal redemption that takes place in the soul.

When a person still has an egotistical "I", he is separate from others. But when there is a revelation of G-dliness in the soul, a secret of "oneness" (*rozo d'echad*) is revealed in the soul.

If a person looks at another person according to the other's opinions about life, then he is apart from others. *Chazal* say that "*Just like all faces are different, so are all minds different.*" But when a person looks at another person's soul with a deep perspective, he sees G-dliness in another Jew's soul. He sees "Hashem Himself" that resides in the deepest point in every Jew's soul. (This deepest point is called "*Yechidah*".) When a person has this perspective, he has an outlook of *achdus* toward every Jew and he unifies every soul into one unit.

This revelation that takes place in the soul on the night of Pesach is the root of the future redemption.

Thus, on the night of Pesach we have an additional *Avodah* upon us. Besides for the well-known *Avodah* that we must connect ourselves to leaving Egypt now, there is another *Avodah* – to reveal the root of the future redemption. We must recognize what the redemption is and connect to it.

The Root of the Future Redemption – Nullifying Your Ego

The power of the future redemption is essentially the ability to leave the selfish "I" in a person. As long as a person is still egotistical, there is a divide between a person and Hashem. When a person still has his ego, he has only his *daas*, and each person's *daas* is different...this is the depth of *Chazal* that "Just as all faces are different, so are all minds different." A person's self-absorption prevents the revelation of *achdus*.

We need to acquire the higher *daas*. This is called "*Keil de'os* (G-d of knowledge", an expression used by the *Rambam*). This is not regular *daas* of a person; it is a higher kind of *daas* that is hidden from us. It is the kind of *daas* which unifies the many varying opinions of people, the many different kind of *daas* that everyone has.

In the redemption from Egypt, even though it was a redemption to our *daas*, it was only a redemption to each person's private *daas*. We are still different toward each other, because we each have our own opinions. It wasn't yet a total redemption.

There are two ways how we can see this. First of all, Moshe *Rabbeinu* was afraid that the people wouldn't be worthy of being redeemed, because of the wicked individuals present. This was already a lapse in the unity of the Jewish people. In addition to this, even when they were redeemed, the *Erev Rav* ("Mixed Multitude", Egyptian non-Jews who escaped Egypt together with the Jewish people) came with them, which affected the unity of the Jewish people.

The future redemption, though, will be a total redemption to our *daas*. It will be a nullification of our *daas* and in its place a revelation of the higher *Daas*, the *Daas* of the Creator. The revelation of Hashem by the redemption will be a revelation of the *achdus* of the Jewish people.

This we have two missions on Pesach: we must feel as if we are leaving Egypt now, to receive a new vitality in our feelings. But this isn't enough. Even with renewed feelings, our perspective can still be very limited. Feelings without

a developed mind can be imbalanced; feelings aren't everything. Some people are so zealous that they go overboard with their zealousness. We must realize that our feelings are only a garment on our soul – feelings aren't everything, and we shouldn't get caught up in them.

Our feelings alone aren't everything – they need to be fused with an expanded mind.

For example, the *mitzvah* of *Ahavas Yisrael* is really going on wicked people as well. One of the four sons is a wicked son; we must still love him as a son, even though he is wicked. In the future redemption, all the dispersed members of our people will be gathered together, even the wicked members. Although in Egypt, “had the wicked son been there, he wouldn't have been redeemed”, still, in the future redemption, which is a more complete redemption, the wicked will be included.

This kind of feeling is a feeling expanded by the mind. This is the *gadlus hamochin* contained on Pesach.

“Now we are slaves, Next Year we will be free”

We need both kinds of redemption: the past redemption of Egypt (which we already experienced), and the future redemption. These are two different kinds of redemption.

The previous redemption, the redemption from Egypt, is a light that we must return to each year on Pesach. The future redemption is something else: we must draw it closer to us and extend it upon us even now.

In the beginning of the *Hagaddah*, we say “Now we are slaves, Next year we will be free.” These are the beginning words of the *Hagaddah*, and they are the preface to what is upon us on the night of Pesach.

In these words we mention two things. We mention the “bread of suffering” which our ancestors ate in Egypt, yet we also mention the future redemption – “Next year we will be free.” This is not just a yearning for the redemption (which is also a wonderful thing to aspire to), but it is a connection to the redemption.

If we only consider the light of the redemption to be a thing of the past, then the purpose of the festival remains concealed.

The redemption hasn't yet come. Thus, the *Avodah* we have on this Pesach is to awaken in us the inner meaning of the redemption – the higher aspect of the redemption, not the lower aspect of the redemption. We need both aspects, but the point is that we need the higher aspect of the redemption as well.

Inspiration Lasts Only If We Expand Our Mind

Upon understanding these words, we can look at the inner depth of the *Avodah* upon us, in a new light. There is a deep point hidden here.

Every year, the holy Jewish people want to be awakened and inspired. People hear inspiring lectures – each to his own. Everyone wants to awaken in his soul a feel for the holiness of the Yom Tov. But we must know that many times we just have “inspiration” (*hisorerus*) and after some time, our inspiration wanes and we just go back to usual.

What is the mistake that people are making? It has to do with what we have been saying until now: feelings, without the mind to guide them, are only half the equation. Even if we redeem our “feelings” and we are full of renewed feelings for holiness, without expanding our **mind** the feelings won't last. It's only “half” the redemption.

If all we do is open up our feelings, without expanding our mind – then we only have the first kind of redemption, a redemption from Egypt. We will be missing our current redemption.

With just feelings and no mind, the inspiration we get doesn't last. We will be able to connect to the redemption from Egypt with our renewed feelings of love and fear of Hashem, but after that our inspiration will go away, and we will just be left with the remaining exiles that came after Egypt....

In order for our inspiration to last, we need an expanded mind. On the night of Pesach, one is obligated to “see” himself as if he's leaving Egypt. What does it mean to “see” yourself leaving Egypt? Are we supposed to become deluded by our imagination?! We can understand that all our souls were there one time in Egypt, but why must we see ourselves actually leaving Egypt now?

The answer to this is part of our discussion. The other part of our redemption is to redeem our power of vision in the mind. We need to be able to “see.”

This *halachah*, that one must see himself leaving Egypt, contains the higher aspect of the redemption: to redeem one's vision of the mind.

The depth of this is that if a person hasn't nullified his ego and he doesn't integrate himself with the Jewish people, then he doesn't know how to “see.” He doesn't have a vision of *achdus*. His redemption has nothing to do with Hashem – it's all about redeeming himself. When a person remains absorbed in himself, he might have wonderful feelings for *Avodas Hashem*, but he actually might be on a very lowly level. Reb Yisrael Salanter's words are famous – a person can be so afraid of the *yom hadin* (day of judgment), yet he damages others when they see a scowl on his face.

When a person only seeks to have great feelings in *Avodas Hashem*, it doesn't mean yet that he is pure. It's possible that he is self-absorbed in himself as he seeks to gain high levels in *Avodas Hashem*. He is so self-absorbed about his personal growth that he doesn't even see one person next to him! Even when such a person tells about the story of the exodus to his household, he's wrapped up in his own self as he seeks high levels to be on. Such a person is sorely mistaken in the purpose of the festival.

When a person doesn't realize that the main part of the redemption is to be redeemed from one's selfish ego, he is missing the whole redemption. He might love and fear Hashem and have all the great feelings that one can reach, but it's all another way of being self-absorbed. This is not a true redemption. The true redemption to have on Pesach is when one nullifies his self and integrates into the Jewish people, as a part of a whole.

When one considers the redemption of Pesach to be about himself, he only redeems “himself.” We cannot call this a redemption. The purpose of the redemption is that all should recognize Hashem; it is about revealing Hashem, not about revealing one's “I.”

The way to redeem yourself on Pesach is actually be nullifying yourself. When a person is locked up in a jail, he desires to escape it – he wants his “I” to escape it. His escape from it will just be all about how he worries for himself. But the depth to the redemption is to leave your very self and forget about yourself.

This is really the depth of *Ahavas Yisrael*, which is the secret of the final redemption. *Ahavas Yisrael* is really when your soul has a redemption – when you leave yourself! In other words, there is a kind of personal redemption in which you leave your inner imprisonment, and then there is another kind of redemption – when you leave your “I”. This is when you leave your ego for the sake of integrating with the rest of the Jewish people.

Thus, the beginning of redemption is to redeem our feelings. We need to first leave the materialism – the “bricks and mortar” – and enter the world of spirituality. The second part of our redemption, which is the purpose, is to reach our masculine kind of *daas* – the revelation of unity on the world; in other words, to nullify your “I.”

Hashem should merit all of the Jewish people that we all integrate with each other and from there, to integrate in unison with the Creator, who is really only One who exists.

14 - How You Can Leave the Exile¹⁵

Hashem is called the *makomo shel olam*, “Place”, of the world. This world is His; it is His place. Hashem is our true “place” where we need to be connected to. We have no other “place” that we belong. We have to leave our connection to the giant mixture of good and evil in this world and instead connect ourselves to Hashem. If one is connected to Hashem wherever he is, he is out of this exile, because he is in his true place.

If someone wants to leave the exile, he can do it even now. The time for the end of the exile hasn't come yet, but in our soul, we can leave the exile! We can leave the exile, right now, in our own soul – if we make sure to always be connected to Hashem, wherever we are.

These are not ideas; this is rather a great revelation to anyone who truly seeks to grow spiritually.

This is how we can gain *daas* – by connecting ourselves to Hashem, wherever we are.

¹⁵ Adapted from the audio file “From Exile to Redemption” 018 בין המצרים

*15 - Two Stages of Moshiach 's Arrival*¹⁶

There is a dispute in the words of our *sefarim hakedoshim* about the order of events concerning *Moshiach* 's era. Some of the *sefarim hakedoshim* say that first there will be the war of *Gog* and *Magog*, and after that *Moshiach* will come; others say that first *Moshiach* will come, and after that will be the war with *Gog* and *Magog*.

Both of these views are correct, for “their words and their words are the words of the living G-d”¹⁷; [let us try to understand the two different views and how they can both be correct].

The explanation of the matter is that there are two layers going on over here – an external layer (*chitzoniyus*), and an internal layer (*pnimiyus*).¹⁸ In the internal layer to reality, *Moshiach* is slowly being developed as the generations go on, but we aren't able to [physically] see this internal *Moshiach* taking place. The external *Moshiach* will therefore come “*pisom*”, “suddenly”, [as the *possuk* says] because since we aren't able to see how *Moshiach* is developing throughout time, it will appear very sudden when he comes.

But the truth is that there is an internal *Moshiach* that is constantly developing; if someone is connected to the inner layer of reality (*pnimiyus*), than to him, *Moshiach* will **not** feel “sudden” **at all** when he arrives [on the physical world because he already identifies with *Moshiach* from his internal world].

[This is how we reconcile both opinions in the *sefarim hakedoshim* about the order of events]: First *Moshiach* will come in the internal sense, and then there will be the war with *Gog* and *Magog* [in the world]. But on the external layer of things, *Moshiach* will only come after the war of *Gog* and *Magog*. [Therefore, both views are correct, and they are each coming from a different angle. The first opinion is coming focusing on the external layer to reality, while the second opinion is looking at it from the inner layer of reality].

Gog and *Magog* [together] have the numerical value in Hebrew as 70. This is because they represent the 70 nations. After they are destroyed – the roots of all evil – the external [physical] *Moshiach* will then be **fully** revealed.

¹⁶ מספר בלבבי משכן אבנה זה (עמ' שסח) – "משיח וגוג ומגוג – מה יקדם

¹⁷ Gittin 7b

¹⁸ See *Chovos HaLevovos: Hakdamah that everything in Creation contains two layers to it, a chitzoniyus (external layer) and a pnimiyus (inner layer)*.

16 - Leaving The Disparate View¹⁹

The He'aras Panim (Illuminating Countenance) of Hashem

פניך באור פניך (ביחד) כולנו כאחד – “Bless us, our Father, all as one (together), in the light of Your countenance.” We ask Hashem in the blessing of *Sim Shalom* that we should merit His *he'aras panim*, His illuminating countenance; as the Torah writes, **יאיר ה' פניו אליך** – “Hashem will shine His face towards you.”

Rashi writes that the concept of “*he'aras panim*” is when Hashem shows us a “*panim sochakos*”, a ‘friendly’ face. In the words of our Sages, we find different meanings of “*he'aras panim*”: it can mean to give us “*me'ohr einayim*” (radiant eyes), or it can mean “*Torah ohr*” (a Torah of light), or it can mean *yeshuah* (salvation), as well as other meanings.

More importantly, the word “*panim*” (face) is from the word “*p'nim*” (inside). The face of a person reveals what's going on in his inner essence. Man's body contains an inner essence: his *neshamah* (Divine soul), his spiritual energy and life-force, which is rooted in the above and connected to G-d; “*cheilek eloka mimaal*”, “a portion of G-d above”. The soul is hidden and concealed from sight, but the face of man reveals that there is an inner essence within him: a soul. The face is the seat of the eyes, nose, ears, and mouth. The soul's light can be detected through the parts of the face.

“*Panim*” is also from the word “*poneh*”, to turn. When one wants to turn to another, he looks at his face. On an inner level, when one's *p'nim* (inwardness) is turned outward, this is the evil use of “*panim*”. When one's *p'nim* is turned outwards, the person loses his inner world as a result²⁰. But when the power of “*panim*” is used for holiness, one is “*poneh*” to Hashem, as in the term “*panim b'panim*” (face to face).

But what does it mean to bask in the “*ohr panim*” (the light of the Face) of Hashem, as we say here in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*? It is because the essence of each thing in Creation is its *p'nim* - that is Hashem's reality. That is His *ohr panim*.

The Sages state that the “*ohr panim*” of Hashem refers to Torah, which is called “*Torah Ohr*”. It is because Torah is the *p'nim* (inner essence) of Creation. “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world” – this doesn't just mean that Hashem looked into the Torah as a mere blueprint to create the world, like a person who looks at a mountain so that he can paint it. It means that the Torah is the *p'nim*, the inner essence, of Creation.

Just as man contains body and a soul, so is there a body and a soul of this world. The “body” of this world is the physical layer of Creation that we see with our physical eyes. The “soul” of the world is the holy Torah; the Torah is called the “*neshamah haKelali*”, the collective soul, of the entire Creation.

¹⁹ Adapted from the audio file of Tefillah.0166

²⁰ See Fixing Your Wind_006_Smiling

When a person only has a superficial lens on reality, all he sees is the physical world in front of him. But if a person merits the *he'aras panim* of Hashem, he is able to see the *p'nim* of each thing that he comes across. This is all a revelation of *he'aras panim* of Hashem.

Oneness

But as we mentioned earlier, “*panim*” also means to be “*poneh*”, to turn. When one turns to inappropriate places, his “*panim*” is turning to this “*alma d'piruda*”, this “world of disparity”. This is the total opposite of the idea of the *Sim Shalom* blessing, where we pray for *shalom* in the world, to have a unified world. When each person in the world is being *poneh* towards the various directions of this world, this is all a form of *pirud* (disparity).

At the root, Creation is all one. The *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer* states that Hashem was One before creation and He will again be One at the end of creation, but now we are in between the beginning and the end, which is this world, the “*alma d'piruda*”.

In order for there to be *shalom* in the world, we must understand how the beginning of Creation looked and how its end must look, and which direction it is currently heading towards. When we don't reflect about the beginning and end of Creation [the oneness of Hashem], then the middle point which we are in is *alma d'piruda*. But if we do reflect on the root of Creation, we can realize that “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”, and the Torah's ways are ways of *shalom*, which means that the essence of Creation is the oneness of Hashem. The Torah is entirely “names of Hashem”, and His name is One, thus the Torah is all His oneness.

When we think about the *p'nim* of Creation – its essence – we see the root. The root of Creation is the oneness of Hashem.

To say this all in simpler language, when we look around at the world, we see “many” people and families. But the more a person views the *p'nim* of Creation, he is aware that there is only root to Creation, and that there are many branches which stem from that one root. The many people we see in the world and the many details that comprise this world are like scattered fruits, which have grown from one tree trunk. That one trunk is: Hashem's oneness (*Echad*).

The Depth of Shalom\Peace

Now we can understand a greater depth in the blessing of *Sim Shalom*. The concept of *shalom* is not just about promoting peace in the world and getting along with people. *Shalom* is rather a deep perspective towards how we view life. It certainly *results* in acting peaceful towards others, but the root of *shalom* is its perspective: to see a unified world. *Shalom* is the deep point in the soul which is found in each Jew's soul, but it is usually hidden and concealed, and it needs to be brought out from its hidden state.

First one should contemplate this concept on an intellectual level, and then he should seek to internalize it: All the many creations we see on this world are but branches of one root. This is the core of the concept of *shalom*: all of Creation, at its root, is all one. The *p'nim* (essence) of Creation is one: “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”.

Seeing A Unified World

We see a world in front of us in which each person is going about doing his own thing, living his own life. Although it appears that people bond with each other and have dealings and associations with each other, upon some reflection, we know this that these connections are all pseudo and superficial. If a person sells something to a customer, did they bond with each other? Just because people are dealing with each other doesn't mean that they are joining with each other and connecting to each other. It seems that we live in a very divided world, and we do not see a unified Creation. So it does not seem that there is a oneness binding together all of Creation.

But if we remind ourselves of the deep concept that Creation is unified at its root, we can change our perspective towards this. The Ramchal elaborates on this concept in *sefer Daas Tevunos*. Although each person on this world is acting for himself, somehow, this is all leading to the goal of Creation which Hashem has planned, in which it will be revealed that Hashem's name is one.

The Ramchal goes even further with this concept: the revelation of Hashem's oneness upon the world won't just be a mere announcement to the world that He is one. Rather, it means that we will realize how everything since the beginning of time has served to reveal Hashem's oneness.

In summary, the superficial view towards Creation is that one day in the future, it will be revealed that Hashem is one, but that right now, the world is not like that. We see a world in front of us which is self-serving, where people sin, where people do not have pure intentions in their acts, and how there are only a few people who live truthfully. Hashem will remove all evil from the world in the future, and then the world will change, and it seems that from that point on, Hashem's name will be revealed upon the world. But the Ramchal tells us that the true perspective is totally different than this. When Hashem's name will be revealed in the future, that will mean that it will be revealed *retroactively* how every act of creation was a part in revealing Hashem's oneness upon the world.

Changing Our View

It is impossible for us to understand how every single act in Creation serves a part in revealing Hashem's name upon the world, because it is above our level of comprehension right now. But we can have *emunah* in the words of our Sages, who stated this concept. Although it seems to us that the world is not heading in the direction of revealing Hashem's name, in the future it will be revealed to us how it was all worth it. Right now, though, we cannot understand it.

Being aware of this concept can change one's entire perspective towards life. We see many things which don't seem to have a point. It doesn't seem to us how everything that people do is somehow going to reveal Hashem's name upon the world. But when we have just have *emunah* in the concept that the Ramchal taught (even though we can't understand it), we can view the entire world as all "one piece". It will all serve to reveal Hashem's name.

So it seems that each person is being "*poneh*" in his own direction, and the entire world is being *poneh* in different directions. But when we have the view that comes from the "*p'nim*" (inner essence) of Creation, we will instead see a world which is all heading towards one direction. It does not look that way at all to us, but the deep perspective towards Creation is, that it is. We cannot understand it right now, but we can absorb this fact of our *emunah*.

Redemption of the Soul

If a person internalizes this concept, he has essentially left the "*alma d'piruda*". This is the secret known as "*geulas nefesh*" (redemption of the soul).

Galus, exile, is basically a situation of experiencing *alma d'piruda*. By contrast, the *geulah*, the redemption, is when the exiles are gathered from all four corners of the world; our Sages wrote that besides for the general redemption which will come to the public, so is there a private redemption which each person can experience. This is based on the verse, "*My soul is close to her redemption.*"²¹ When is our soul in exile, and when it is it redeemed from exile? When one lives in the viewpoint of *alma d'piruda*, our soul is in exile; when one has the perspective of *achdus* (the unity of Creation), he has been redeemed already from the exile.

(Of course, even after one merits this, he must still await the general redemption of the world. This is because redemption is still needed on the collective level, and our physical bodies will also need to experience the redemption.)

The more a person lives in a viewpoint of *alma d'piruda* within himself, he is found in exile. The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes of a negative trait called "*pizur hanefesh*", scattering of the soul. When the Jewish people are scattered all over the world, they are in exile; when one is scattered inside himself, he is in an inner exile. *Pizur hanefesh* affects a person on two levels. It is a lack of orderliness in the soul, which scatters the abilities of the soul and causes inner turmoil. Here we are not addressing this. The other effect of *pizur hanefesh* is that it affects one's *da'as*, his *p'nim*.

The more superficial a person is, he can only see what his physical eyes see, and all he sees is *alma d'piruda*. It is certainly true that there is an *alma d'piruda* in front of our eyes, because we see a world in which each person is living his own life, and we usually don't see true bonding and connection between people; the connections that we see are often superficial. But when a person merits to penetrate past this perspective and he sees the *p'nim* of Creation, he sees the *he'aras panim* of Hashem being shined upon him.

This is not mere knowledge to him, but the way he sees reality. He sees a creation which has only one root. He sees all the disparity in Creation as a temporary situation, for the *alma d'piruda* we are currently in is only a stage that we

²¹ *Tebillim* 69:19

must traverse between the beginning and end of Creation. In the words of our Sages, the beginning of Creation is Shabbos, where Hashem is One; the middle of Creation is the six days of the week, where we have left that oneness and we enter into disparity, and the end of Creation is where we go back to Shabbos, where we enter Hashem's oneness again.

When one lives only on the level of the “world of action”, or even if he lives in the world of emotion and feeling, he will not be able to grapple with this concept. But when a person lives the concepts that we are taught about by our Sages, which are called “*hilchos de'os*”, he lives in a realm higher than action and emotion: the realm of *da'as*. The power of our *da'as* can grasp the concept that the root of Creation is all one, as a palpable knowledge, and not just as intellectual information. It is felt as a palpable reality. To illustrate, someone traveling from Jerusalem to Tzefat doesn't just know that he's traveling from Jerusalem to Tzefat. He feels the reality of this.

Absorbing the perspective that all of Creation is heading towards the revelation of Hashem's oneness is a redemption of the soul. Again, this is not an intellectual perception, but a perspective that comes from our *daas*: to have the perspective of *achdus* towards Creation.

“*My soul is close to her redemption*” implies that the soul can have a redemption. Although our physical body is still in exile, as well as the external layers of our soul, there can still be a point in our soul which experiences redemption. The Ramchal and others write that one who has merited a personal “Moshiach” within his soul is the one who can truly await the general redemption to the world.

We Are In A Dream

Thus, the prayer of *Sim Shalom* is not simply a request for peace in the world, but a prayer for the revelation of the perspective of *achdus* upon the world, in which all people will see that all of Creation is one root.

The *alma d'piruda* that we see in the world is only the temporary situation which conceals and covers over the one root that binds together all of Creation. In fact, it is even explained in the works of our teachers that the entire concept of “*alma d'piruda*” is all “*medameh*”, an “imagined” reality, which conceals from us the *achdus* of Creation. It is all an illusion. This is hinted to in the verse, “*Then, we were like dreamers.*”²² In the future, the current time we live will all feel like a dream. A person who deeply realizes this already now is one who has reached the inner redemption!

In Conclusion

There is a unique kind of request in the blessing of *Sim Shalom* which doesn't appear in any of the other blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*: **עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲמָךְ** – “upon us, and upon all of Yisrael Your nation.” It is more all-inclusive. It is asking Hashem that peace fill the entire reality. All of the *Shemoneh Esrei* is pointing towards this concept.

²² *Tebillim* 126:1

The purpose of Creation is that each individual should come to recognize the oneness of Hashem. The many places which we find ourselves in are all but a path that leads us towards one thing alone: the revelation of Hashem's oneness.

This is the meaning behind the words, **ברכנו אבינו כולנו, ביחד, באור פניך**; [we want the *he'aras panim* of Hashem to dwell upon of all of us in Creation, **together**; this is the *achdus* that will unify together the entire Creation].²³

²³ For more on the perspective of “*achdus*”, (the unity of Creation), see Bilvavi Part 8, Chapter 1

17 - Through The Ups and Downs²⁴

The Ups and Downs of Our History

יְתַבְרַךְ שִׁמְךָ מְלִכֵנו תָּמִיד לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד – “May Your Name be blessed, our King, constantly, and forever.” We pray here that the Name of Hashem become constant and forever.

Hashem created the world in a way that we are always going through ups and downs. The world is like this in general, and on a more specific level, this process affects *Klal Yisrael*. Thus every Jew has times of spiritual ascent and times of descent.

There were two times in history when we reached the apex of perfection, but they didn't last for long. One time was when we stood at Har Sinai and we received the Torah, where we were cleansed from the effects of the Snake on mankind that had entered us since Adam's sin. From the time of Shavuot until the sin of the Golden Calf, we were on a perfected level. Another time where we had spiritual elevation, although not as perfect as the level of standing at Har Sinai, was the time when the Beis HaMikdash was built, where we had the *Shechinah* amongst us. But it didn't last for more than 420 years. It was destroyed due to the three cardinal sins which were rampant then.

So although we had our times of elevation, it did not last forever. We were not able to exalt the name of Hashem “constantly and forever” as we say here in *Shemoneh Esrei*. Only in the future will Hashem's name be exalted forever. In our current times, Amalek is still present, and its evil does not allow Hashem's name to be forever. Until the future, we have to go through an ongoing cycle of spiritual ups and downs.

In times of spiritual ascent, a person feels inspired and he is able to exalt Hashem's name, and when a person is going through a period of descent, he will not always have the strength to exalt Hashem's name, *chas v'shalom*. This is true on the general scale of *Klal Yisrael*, as well as on a personal scale, of each soul in *Klal Yisrael*.

Upward Movement and Downward Movement

There is also a deeper way to understand it.

Creation consists of movements – there is either upward movement (*aliyah*), or there is downward movement (*yeridah*). When one has yearnings for *d'veykus* in Hashem and he is of the *bnei aliyah* (those who ascend spiritually), he wishes to attach himself to his Source. This is the ‘upward’ kind of movement in Creation. The other kind of movement in Creation is downward movement. It can be a kind of movement that causes rectification, or it can be a movement that is detrimental to the person.

²⁴ Adapted from the audio file of *Tefillah.0161*

We find a kind of downward movement that rectifies. The Sages said that Hashem desired to have a dwelling on this world. This is a ‘descent’ on Hashem’s part, because He is descending from Heaven to come onto this lowly world. This kind of descent, obviously, is a rectifying kind of descent.

Thus, man has a personal *avodah* to reveal Hashem through desiring to ascend, higher and higher in spiritual attainments, until he can finally reach the most desired level, which is to reach Hashem Himself. But a person also has an *avodah* to sometimes ‘descend’, in order to resemble Hashem’s holy attribute of descending.

An example of this is that a *rebbe* must descend from his level in order to teach his student, and a father must descend from his level in order to teach his son. Similarly, Chazal say that it is greater for one to greet guests than to greet the *Shechinah*, and we learn this from Avraham Avinu, who left the *Shechinah* in order to be run after guests. This is a kind of descent from one’s level in which one resembles Hashem’s own nature to descend from His loftiness and dwell on this world.

‘Nefilah’: Times of Falling

But there is also ‘descent’ which does not rectify others. This is a kind of descent in which a person falls from his level, and it is not resembling Hashem’s nature of holy descent. Most of the time in which a person falls from his level, it is a kind of *yeridah* (descent) that is a *nefilah* (fall).

However, we must know that *yeridah* at its root is holy. It is just that it doesn’t always manifest itself in our life for holiness. But we can definitely turn a *yeridah* into a period of holiness. Therefore, one must know that when he is going through a *yeridah*, it is also a time where he can also “exalt Hashem’s name”.

During a time of ascent, one feels exalted and thus it is easier to exalt Hashem’s name. He is pulled after Hashem like a magnet after a magnet, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes. When we go through a period of descent, where we are not inspired like this, we must understand that the very concept of descent is not a bad thing in essence.

We all recognize many times in our life in which we are going through a *yeridah*. But they can be times where we reveal Hashem’s name through them. If we were to only exalt Hashem’s name during times of spiritual ascent, then it would not be a ‘constant’ exaltation of Hashem’s name, for it would only be limited to times where we are ascending. But if we exalt Hashem’s name even as we are going through a descent, that shows that we are *always* exalting Hashem’s name, and this fulfills the meaning of **יתרומם ותינשא שמך תמיד לעולם ועד**.

When You Are In A ‘Yeridah’ (Time of Spiritual Descent)

This issue is, however: What is the *avodah* of a person when he finds himself in a *yeridah*?

Obviously, the first thing he has to do is to see how he can come out of it. He needs to muster the strength and pull himself together, doing what he can to come out of it. That part is obvious. But what we want to know is, in

addition to knowing that we need to come out of a *yeridah*, now that we *are* going through a *yeridah*, the question is: what to do in this situation.

What is the *avodah* of a person when he's going through a *yeridah*, and he's trying to come out of it but he sees that he can't? He doesn't have the *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind) to pull himself out, or it's because the external situation is not allowing it. What now should he do?

One part of the *avodah*, as is well-known, is to hold onto certain points from his period of growth, that he can still keep to, so that he will be able to look towards growth and come out of the *yeridah*. In order to rise above his situation, he would need a lot of *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind) and *menuchas hanefesh* (inner serenity). He doesn't have this, so he needs to find certain areas that he still keeps growing in, even as he's going through a *yeridah*.

In this way, Hashem's name is 'constantly' exalted. It is easy to exalt Hashem's name when we are full of inspiration and we are like a fire that keeps ascending to Heaven; when we are like "*a constant fire that burns on the Altar, it does not extinguish.*" Fire is "*aisb*", which has the same letters as the word *yeiush* (despair); when a person falls from his level, he might *chas v'shalom* fall into despair, where his inner fire is extinguished.

But when a person understands that our *avodah* consists of ups and downs, and that we can reveal Hashem even through times of descent, it becomes easier to survive the dismal periods. The main part of our *avodah* is of course when we ascend higher and higher to Hashem and we are serving Him as we are supposed to, but when the times of descent do arrive, they are also important times in our *avodah* of revealing Hashem.

Rabbeinu Tam²⁵ wrote that even in times of descent, we can hold onto certain points of our growth, which will make us feel positive and thus be enabled to get by the dismal period. This way, he won't fall any more than he's already falling. Here we've described a different facet of understanding to the concept of Rabbeinu Tam: in addition to doing what he can to come out of his *yeridah*, one can know that he needs to serve Hashem precisely in his state of *yeridah*. It is not just about preventing any further descent from his level. It is about serving Hashem even as a person is amidst a *yeridah*.

This is what truly exalts Hashem's name. In this way, he raises the situation of his *yeridah* and exalts Hashem's name there. The *yeridah* becomes 'exalted' in this way, as it enables the person to exalt Hashem's name even as he's going through the *yeridah*. Not only does he look to reveal Hashem in his situation; he exalts the situation from what it used to be.

One has to discern the areas of *yeridah* in his life. It is easy for us to discern if we are going through a major *yeridah*, but there are also small areas of *yeridah*, which can be manifest even as a person is in a state of general spiritual ascent.

²⁵ *Sefer HaYashar* (authored by Rabbeinu Tam); see also *Alei Shur*, Vol. I, p.34

In Summary

In summary, the avodah of a person of surviving a *yeridah* really begins before the person goes through a *yeridah*. The first thing one must figure out is how a *yeridah* can be a situation of growth. This needs to be done while one is in a time of growth, and he must not wait until he falls in order to think about this. He must strive to avoid a situation of *yeridah*, of course.

But after one finds himself in a situation of *yeridah*, he must see how he can come out of it, seeing what he can do to do about it, and if there's any possibility of pulling himself out of it, as much as the situation allows.

But in addition to this, he must also turn it into a holy kind of *yeridah*, according to the perspective that was explained here: he must understand that a time of *yeridah* is also a time in which we can exalt Hashem's name.

The Deep Perspective: Transforming 'Yeridah' Into 'Aliyah'

This third, deeper point is implying that even as a person is in a *yeridah*, he can understand that it is really not a *yeridah*. If a person thinks he is in a *yeridah*, he will keep falling. If he views himself as someone who is 'falling', then he is losing all his power to ascend. But when one understands how this *avodah* works - that *yeridah* can also be a way to grow and ascend - then even as he's in a *yeridah*, he can turn it into a period of ascent! In this way, he becomes a "*constant fire that burns on the Altar*", which keeps ascending.

When a person is in a *yeridah* and he's simply trying to 'fife' the situation as best as he can, although he might succeed, the problem is with his attitude. He is in a *yeridah* and he's trying to oppose the entire situation, so his soul will not feel the energy to help him. It might succeed, and indeed there are those with great inner strength who succeed like this, but for most people who do not have this kind of resilience, this approach will not work.

The inner perspective is not to try to 'fife' the situation of a *yeridah*. Rather, you can understand that you are in a *yeridah*, but that the *yeridah* itself can be a situation of *aliyah* (ascent) for you.

In Conclusion

Acquiring this perspective enables a person to reach a level of inner redemption to his soul; "*My soul is close to her redemption.*"

In the future, when Amalek will be erased, Hashem's name will be revealed on this world, for there will be no more *yeridos* anymore. There will only be constant and eternal ascension. As we live now, where Amalek is still present, the Sages say that Hashem's name is incomplete and His Throne is incomplete; so His name cannot be fully revealed on this world in our current state. But if a person learns how to serve his Creator both through his ups and downs, he can exalt Hashem's name in either situation – "תמיד לעולם ועד".

Even if one were to descend to the lowest possible levels, to the depths of *She'ol* (the abysses of spiritual impurity), he can still reveal Hashem there and thereby cause Hashem's name to be exalted there, and in this way, he is exalting Hashem's name precisely in this lowly world. He will merit to be of the *b'nei aliyah* (those who ascend spiritually)²⁶, of whom there are few of.

18 – To Yearn For A Pure World²⁷

Introduction

In the end of the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, we say **ונאמן אתה להחיות מתים** “And You are trustworthy to revive the dead.” Throughout this blessing, we mention five times how Hashem revives the dead.

The Sages say that the Torah already alludes in a few places that there will be a resurrection of the dead in the future, and that if someone doesn't believe that there is a source in the Torah for it, he is a heretic. This is true even if he firmly believes in the concept of the resurrection! If he fully believes in the future resurrection, but he doesn't believe that there is a source in the Torah for it, he is a heretic [and he doesn't merit to get revived in the future].

Why is this so? Why is it so necessary for a person to believe that the resurrection of the dead has a source in the Torah? We are not talking about a person who doesn't believe in the concept of resurrection. We are talking about a person who does believe, just, he denies that the Torah alludes to it. Why is such a person considered a non-believer in the future resurrection?

It must be that a person who doesn't believe that there is a source in the Torah for the resurrection is missing the main part of the belief. Let us try to understand why.

A Damaged World

When Adam sinned by eating from the Forbidden Tree, the Sages tell us that the entire world was damaged. Not only did Adam and Chavah damage their spiritual level, but the entire world was never the same again. The world we see today is not the same world that existed before the sin; it is a lower form of existence. Mankind was cursed with death as a result of the sin. In the future, when there will be a resurrection of the dead, the world will achieve its rectification, and the sin of Adam will be fixed. The future resurrection will not just be that the dead become revived back to life; it will be a rectification of the entire world, which is currently damaged from Adam's sin, and it will restore the world back to its original, pure form.

When Adam sinned, the entire Creation was ruined. However, there was one thing that remained pure. The Nefesh HaChaim writes that the Torah remained unaffected by the sin, because Torah can never become impure. *“The Torah of Hashem is perfect, it settles the soul.”*

We did not yet merit the coming of Moshiach and the future resurrection of the dead. All we have is our belief in it. But in actuality, it has not yet happened. How are we able to believe in it? From where do we derive the strength to believe in the resurrection?

²⁷ Adapted from the audio file of *Tefillah.045*

Our soul has a yearning to live in a world of complete good, in which there is no sin; a world of the future resurrection, in which “*all death will be swallowed up forever.*” In the world we live in, we are sullied with sin. The sins increase all the time. But we must awaken our soul’s deep yearning to live in a world in which there is no sin, which was the pure state that existed before Adam ate from the Forbidden Tree. Our soul yearns to live in a pure kind of world. “*My soul thirsts for You.*”

Living In A Pure World: Connecting To Our Torah Learning

How do we cure our soul’s thirst? There is only one thing that can cure it, because there is one thing we still have left that remained pure and unaffected by the sin: the Torah. This is the meaning of what we say in Selichos, “*We have nothing remaining except for this Torah.*” If someone does not feel his soul’s thirst to live in a pure kind of world, then he is unaware of it, and thus he won’t seek to fill it. Even when he learns Torah, his Torah learning will not be able to satisfy his soul, because he does not seek to live in a world in which there is no sin.

We must believe that there will be a future resurrection of the dead, but that is only one side of the coin. On the other side of the coin, we also have to access it somewhat even now, before the actual time of the resurrection has come. How can we have access somehow to the resurrection of the dead? It is by learning the Torah and connecting to it in a deep way.

If a person wants to know if he’s really connected with the concept of the resurrection, he should make the following reflection: he should ask himself if he has this yearning to live in a pure world in which there is no sin. And after that, he needs to ask himself if he is indeed filling that thirst – if he feels that his yearning for purity has been satisfied through learning Torah.

Connecting To The Redemption

The time of the redemption has not yet come; we do not yet have Moshiach, the Beis HaMikdash, and the resurrection of the dead. But although we haven’t yet merited the revealed redemption, we can still have a degree of redemption in our own souls – as it is written, “*My soul is close to her redemption.*” Before we merit the general redemption that will come to the masses, we need to first experience our own inner redemption. The light of the redemption can be experienced by anyone who truly yearns for the redemption, as the Ramchal writes, especially now that we are nearing the redemption, and thus its light is shining and more readily accessed.

Of course, even if we experience an inner redemption in our soul when we yearn for redemption, this is not like the complete redemption that will come to the masses. But we still need to have a connection with redemption even now, before the actual redemption has come. We need to live the deep part of our soul, which yearns to connect to a pure world in which there is no sin.

These are not your average words which you come across. This is a description of a connection that we should live with – to be connected, in our souls, to a pure world. It is to dwell in an inner world that is nothing like the world

we see and recognize. If someone becomes used to living in this deep place in his soul, he is living the future resurrection already.

The Sage Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair lists the revival of the dead as the highest rung in the ladder of spiritual perfection. This shows us that the revival of the dead is not just that the dead will be brought back to life. The revival of the dead is really an understanding, in which a person connects himself to the world of the future revival, in which there will be no sin.

The Connection Between Resurrection and Torah

Now we can understand why someone who doesn't believe that resurrection of the dead has a source in Torah forfeits his share in the Next World. It is because such a person is not connected with the concept of resurrection – he doesn't yearn to live in a pure world.

Thus, to believe in the future resurrection is not just because the Torah requires us to believe in it. It is to connect ourselves to that perception of the future, in which our Torah learning will be completely pure, because we will dwell in a pure world. That is the depth of why one needs to believe that the resurrection has a source in the Torah.

The Month of Nissan: A Time of Renewal

The month of Nissan is known in the *sefarim hakedoshim* as the month of renewal. It is the time in which Hashem renews Creation. It is a time to begin again anew.

The root of Creation was the Torah, for Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world. Thus, learning the Torah is where we can derive the power to begin, again - anew.

The time of renewal is in the month of Nissan; and in our soul, we renew ourselves by returning to a new beginning – to return to our beginning, our pure state in which there was no sin. We need to thus reveal our soul's yearning to live in a pure world.

We need to dig deep into ourselves and remove all the dirt that's covering over our soul, and to identify with a pure world deep inside ourselves in which where there is no sin. We can then begin to feel, with utter clarity, that we are like strangers on this earth, that this earth is not our real place.

The whole reality we live in is right now a reality of sin, a ruined state of Creation. As long as a person thinks that this world is the real place he lives in, he can live in all kinds of places in the world. But when a person realizes that he wishes instead to live in a pure world that is a much better place than this one, he sees how much this world contradicts the reality that his soul knows about. (On a deeper note, he will be able to sense that even Gan Eden can contradict the soul's idea about reality, because *even Gan Eden* is not yet the pure kind of world that our soul wants....!)

In Conclusion

In these weeks of the month of Nissan, it is time of renewal. The week of *Parshas HaChodesh* in particular is a time of renewal, but we must understand that these weeks are not about a mere superficial reading of the four *parshiyos*; we need to actually reveal the power of renewal that is inherent in these weeks.

May Hashem merit us to reveal this place in our soul – our soul's yearning to live in a world in which there is no sin.

19 - Knowing Our Soul²⁸

Redeem Your Soul From Its Exile

We will attempt here to clarify who we are, what our soul is.

In these *parshiyos*, we are learning about the exile of Egypt and the redemption from Egypt. The women as well were part of the exile and they played a crucial role in the redemption from Egypt.

There is a concept in the *sefarim hakedoshim* known as “*Olam, Shanah, Nefesh*” (World, Time and Soul), which is that everything which takes place in a place in the world also takes place in the sphere of time, and anything we find it time also takes place in our soul. Therefore, just as there is an exile that takes place in the world with our physical body, so is there an exile in our soul. And just as there is redemption to our physical bodies, so is there redemption that takes place in our soul.

When we were exiled in Egypt, not only was our body in exile, but our soul was in exile as well.

The exile of our soul consists of two aspects. One part of this is that we are distracted by our physical needs and thus unable to attend to our soul’s needs; this put our soul into exile. This is represented by the cruel labor which the Jews were enslaved to in Egypt – because they were exiled in the physical sense, there was no time to focus on their soul needs.

But there is a deeper aspect to our soul’s exile as well: when we are confused about what our soul is. To illustrate, the Jews in Egypt faced a spiritual struggle with their goals, because they saw the behavior of the Egyptians, and this made them compare themselves with Egyptians and learn be somewhat affected by their behavior. Chazal praised the generation for not adapting the names, style of dress, and manner of speech from the Egyptians, but other than these things, the Jewish people were negatively affected by the impurity of Egypt.

Galus is also related to the world *galgal*, circle, because *galus* is a cycle, for we have gone through exile as a reoccurring cycle. The physical aspect of exile represents the concept of *galgal*. *Galus* is also the opposite of the concept called “*giluy*”, revelation. This hints to us that *galus* conceals from us having a *giluy* of our true soul.

The *galus* causes us our soul to become enslaved, because it conceals our soul from us. Most people recognize the exile of their soul in the sense that they are very tied down to the world, but those who have begun to search for Hashem in their life recognize a deeper kind of exile in their soul. They come across confusion about what their soul is, and this is the deeper kind of exile to our soul.

First we will explain this concept on an intellectual level, but after learning about this, we must then seek to internalize it, as it is written, “*And you will know today, and you will return the matter to your heart.*” We will discuss here the difference between secular wisdom about our psyche, with the Torah’s wisdom on the psyche.

²⁸ Adapted from the audio file of *Derashos.0101*

The Problem With Modern Psychology

The view of secular psychology – specifically Western psychology - views the body as the main thing, with the soul only being secondary to consider. The soul is definitely considered by secular psychology to be an existing entity, but it is only viewed by them as an additional factor in a person that can contribute to one's mental health; but the main focus of psychology is always about the physical body. Jews who live among the nations of the world have unfortunately adapted the secular approach, viewing their souls as only secondary in their life, and they consider themselves mainly as a body.

People are drawn after psychology, and it seems like a good thing, because in this way people are detaching from physical pursuit, and often people consider it to be beneficial to teach others about the knowledge of psychology and therapy. There are people who consider it to be an act of *chessed* for their community to become a psychologist and treat others with this field of practice.

But the problem is that Jews who are learning secular psychology are viewing their existence as being mainly a body, with the soul being only secondary. While the study of psychology can help a person leave his attachment to physicality – which helps a person leave his enslavement to this physical world - it puts a person into an even deeper kind of exile of the soul: confusion about what his very soul is.

If we can realize how this is a problem, we have already left one stage of the exile to our soul, and we will be able to begin our soul's redemption.

Knowing Our Soul – Through the Torah's Perspective

After realizing that secular psychology isn't a path for a Jew to take, comes the next stage: to recognize the soul. The more a person understands his soul, the more redemption he will have in his soul; he will have *giluy*, revelation. The less a person understands his soul, the more he is in *galus*, exile.

Why should we want to know our soul? First of all, in order to use our soul, we need to know how it works, and this will enter us into a truly pleasurable and satisfying kind of life. Secondly, by knowing what our soul is, the better we can deal with the difficulties and complexities of life. These are both understandable reasons to anyone, on any level.

But there is a third reason why we must know our soul, and this is harder for people to grasp. The Gemara says that a person's head was created from Eretz Yisrael, while the rest of the body was created from Bavel. Eretz Yisrael represents wisdom, as we know that "the air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise." A person's head is either in Eretz Yisrael, or he is living in "Bavel" – from the word *bilbul* (confusion). Most people are living life only through the prism of their body – they are living in "Bavel", and therefore they have *bilbul*, confusion.

Someone who is living an inner kind of life already identifies with everything we are saying here; he understands that the world we see is a world of superficiality and confusion. Anyone who isn't living an inner kind of life isn't aware that there is a whole different world than the one we see in front of us, a world which we can enter that is an entirely spiritual dimension.

To summarize, there are three reasons why we need to understand our soul. First of all, because we need real pleasure in life, and this is only reached through knowing our soul. The second reason is because knowing our soul helps us deal with our problems in life. The third reason is the deeper reason, because we need to attain clarity in our life, to live in a clear world – an "*olam barur*", a world of clarity.

Finally, there is an even deeper reason why we need to know our soul: because in order to become close to Hashem, we need to first know our soul.

The Three Ways Of How We Become Close To Hashem

How can we come to Hashem and be close to Him? To give a general description, there are two basic parts to this, and then we will discuss the third part, which is deeper.

One part of it is through keeping the *mitzvos* of the Torah; we are “believers, the sons of believers”, and therefore we know and believe in the Torah, which helps us become close to Hashem. This involves the use of our intellectual mind; by connecting to Hashem through the Torah and mitzvos, we have an intellectual connection with Hashem.

The second way of how we get close to Hashem does not involved our intellect, but it is rather to involve our emotions and feelings. By getting used to sensing the reality of Hashem, we can feel Him, in an experiential way, as a very real feeling.

Understandably, there are levels to how much we can feel Hashem. When someone is in pain, he can find that he can push deeper into his soul and arrive at a greater sense of Hashem.

The first way to know Hashem – through knowing of Him intellectually, which is accomplished through the study of Torah and observing His *mitzvos* - is called “*emunah yedidah*”, an intellectual faith in Hashem. The second way is that we sense the reality of Hashem as a real, palpable feeling.

There is a third, deeper way of attaining closeness to Hashem: by attaining clarity in life, to live in a “clear world”, the perspective from our soul. So the more we are clearer about our soul, the closer we can become to Hashem, and we are then able to connect to Hashem from *within* ourselves.

The third way is what we are coming here to discuss. It is about living in an inner world of clarity. When a person lives in the inner world of clarity, he gains the other two levels as well – he knows about Hashem intellectually, and he also senses Him as a feeling.

We have described here thus far the general reasons why a person must know his soul.

Modern Psychology Is an Incomplete Picture of a Jew's Soul

We must distance ourselves from the study of secular psychology. People want to know what is wrong with learning psychology, and what is so terrible if we learn psychology. We have explained before the three reasons why a Jew must know his soul; none of these three reasons can be accomplished through secular psychology. Secular psychology is an incomplete understanding of the soul, because it doesn't grasp the holiness of a Jew's soul.

For example: depression. Secular psychology uses a general approach of explaining to the person how he can get out of his depression. But the picture is still incomplete, because they don't tell you how you can build and develop a plan for happiness. Escaping depression might solve the actual depression at hand, but it won't give the person happiness. Secular psychology doesn't have the complete picture of things; they've only gotten some of the facts.

That is just one example. But the same thing is true with regards to all negative emotions, anxiety, social disorders, etc. - the knowledge of secular psychology merely removes the symptoms of a problem, but it does not get

down to the root of the problem. It doesn't help us attain the redemption of our soul, and it instead puts our soul into an even deeper exile than before, when we try to learn about our soul using modern psychology.

How sad is it that a Jew can read a non-Jewish book with a title like "How To Have A Happy Life." Now, if the book would be called "How To Deal With Depression" or "How To Get Rid of Anxiety", that's not so bad if a Jew reads it, because at least he is understanding that the book won't take care of **all** his problems, and he's just looking to get rid of one particular problem. But to read a book on "How To Have A Happy Life" is truly sad for a Jew to read, because then the Jew is thinking that a non-Jew can help him lead a happy life in general – something that is impossible, as a Jew contains a holy soul that a non-Jew does not have.

May Hashem merit each of us to truly know our soul – from working hard to understand it, and together with *davening* to Hashem for this; and through that, we will merit to become close to Hashem. May each of us merit to leave our exile of the soul and the redemption of our soul, and that each of us should reveal our soul's abilities.

20 - Tzedakah and Redemption²⁹

The Depth Behind Tzedakah

In the blessing of the *Sim Shalom*, after we ask for *ahavas chessed* (loving kindness), we ask for *tzedakah* (charity).

The simple understanding of *tzedakah* is that it is a *mitzvah* for one to give of his money to the poor. But there is far more depth to the matter of *tzedakah*.

Of Avraham Avinu, it is written that because he believed in Hashem, he merited “*tzedakah*” from Hashem. This “*tzedakah*” which Avraham Avinu merited shows us what the depth of *tzedakah* is, for it is obviously not referring to the transferal of any money to Avraham Avinu. The outer layer of *tzedakah* is to give money to another, but the essence of *tzedakah* goes far deeper than the act of giving away money.

The Gemara says that the redemption will come in the merit of *tzedakah*, based on the verse, “*Zion will be redeemed with charity.*”³⁰ The simple understanding of this is that there is much *tzedakah* and *chessed* in our times, and this is bringing closer the redemption, and it will eventually redeem Jerusalem, where we will see the redemption. But there is more depth to it this matter.

Tzedakah: Giving Away The Self

What is the “I” of a person? What is a person’s essence? The innermost aspect of oneself is the *neshamah*, and atop that is the physical body. The outermost layer of a person are his acquisitions that he has acquired on this world. But what is a person’s “I”? Where is the “I” of a person located?

There is no one answer to this question, because there are many levels to this answer. It depends upon how one is experiencing his own existence. *Tzedakah* is essentially about giving away one’s “I”. When one gives money to another, he is giving away his acquisitions, but not necessarily his “I”. But this is only the superficial aspect of *tzedakah*. The point of *tzedakah* is to give away *yourself*, to another. Just like money is part of the person until he gives it away, and this is called *tzedakah* when he gives it, so can a person give his own “I” to another [when he gives *tzedakah*].

Tzedakah: Hashem’s Money

Simply speaking, a person has a *mitzvah* to give his money to one who is in need. Logically speaking we would say that it is Reuven’s money until he decides to give it away to Shimon. But the Sages tell us the exact opposite. Really

²⁹ Adapted from *Tefillah.0169*

³⁰ *Bava Basra 10a*

it is Shimon's money that happens to be in the Reuven's possession, for Hashem has given this money to Reuven so that he can be the messenger who will give it to Shimon.

The *Gemara* says that the reason why Hashem made poor people is so that they can merit us to have *mitzvos* when we give to them. Contrary to what we would think, it is the *collectors* are doing us the favor – it is not *we* who are doing them the favor. When we give *tzedakah*, we have the opportunity to give away that which is not really ours, because Hashem has only given us this money so that we can give it to others, and we are but His messengers to support His children.

Tzedakah: "I Am But A Tool of Hashem"

There is yet even greater depth to how should view *tzedakah*.

Tzedakah reveals the entire essence of man's purpose on this world of everything. Reuven is giving Shimon that which is really supposed to go to Shimon – thus, the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* serves as a revelation of the concept that we do not exist for ourselves.³¹ This defines our entire purpose on this world. *Tzedakah* reveals that my money is not my own, for I do not exist for myself. It is entirely Hashem's *shefa* (Heavenly sustenance) coming to the world, and I am but a mere tool to contain His *shefa*. (This is explained in sefer *Nefesh HaChaim*).

This helps us understand not only how to approach the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, but it shows us that our entire stay on this world is temporary, and that we are not here for ourselves. *Tzedakah* reveals that all of man's actions are nothing but a path that reveals Hashem; man is a tool to bring down Hashem's light onto the world.

Giving Away The Self: Nullifying My Existence To Hashem

The most external layer of a person is his possessions, and this is definitely not a part of the "I". The physical body is also not a part of our "I" (as Rav Chaim Vital explains). What, then, is our "I"?

Generally speaking, our spiritual essence, our *neshamah* (soul), is our "I". But there are three parts to the Jew's soul: the *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshamah*. The *nefesh* is called "*nefesh b'gufa*", the minimal spiritual energy that keeps the body going. This is not where our "I" is, though. The Vilna Gaon says that the essence of man is located in the *ruach*, which is also the point of *bechirah* (free will).

When one chooses evil, his "I" has chosen evil, and when one chooses good, his "I" has chosen good. When a person feels that "I" am in charge of things, this really stems from a deeply rooted *gaavah* (conceit), When man thinks he is in control and that things are entirely up to him, this is entirely stemming from ego, and from the viewpoint of the ego, man has the free will to choose between good or evil.

³¹ See the introduction to sefer *Nefesh HaChaim*: "Man was not created for himself, only in order to help others."

The Sages state that “everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven”. The only thing we are in charge of on this world is to have *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven). A person is given the choice to follow the way of the Torah or, *chas v’shalom*, the opposite.

The “I” in a person makes him think that he is his own existence. He is aware that it is he who chooses, and that everything depends on his decisions, and therefore he often doesn’t see Hashem in the picture. He attributes all strength to himself, as in the verse, “*The strength and might of my hands.*” The “I” makes a person think that he doesn’t need Hashem to get by in life.

This is the danger that we are faced on this world. In the future there will be no more *bechirah*, for it is written of the future that it will be “*days in which I have no desire.*” Now we are currently in a time of *bechirah* and therefore we are experiencing our “I” mainly through our *bechirah* (or *ruach*), but in the future, where we will be in World To Come, the “I” of a person will look different. The “I” will graduate from the level of *ruach* to the level of *neshamah*. It will be a situation of complete *bittul* (nullification) to Hashem.

The Opportunity Of Tzedakah

Tzedakah is what enables a person to touch upon the level of *bittul* (nullifying the self) and to overcome the ego. It is not just about giving away your money to others. It is because our “I” is but a tool of Hashem, for we do not exist for ourselves.

Hashem has chosen to reveal Himself on this world through the selfless acts of man, which causes man to nullify his ego and give away his existence for Hashem. *Tzedakah* is therefore touching upon the great spiritual light of the future, where all of our existence will be nullified to Hashem, where man will totally realize that he did not exist for himself and that he was nothing but a tool to reveal Hashem.

We cannot merit this level fully in our times, but we can merit a resemblance of it. A person can get a glimpse of *Olam HaBa* on this world, when he realizes he is entirely a tool to reveal Hashem. This level will be fully realized in the future when we are actually in *Olam HaBa*, but even in our current times we can merit a glimpse of this level and attain it partially.

Our main *avodah* of this world is, “A stubborn person is successful”, as the Vilna Gaon says. One must indeed feel very strongly the famous words of Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya: “The matter is not dependent on me.”³² We are here on this world to mainly use our *bechirah*, to stubbornly pursue the right choices and to try as hard as we can. This inevitably causes us to feel that our “I” is in charge of our decisions, but that is our *avodah* of the current reality we are in, where our “I” is not yet perfected.

Only in the future where our “I” become perfected and we will have no more ego, and we will realize then that we are nothing except a tool to reveal Hashem. But even though we are not yet in the future, we can still touch upon it, when we have the deep understanding towards *tzedakah*.

³² *Avodah Zarah 17a*

Thus, the depth of *tzedakah* is to give away oneself. The outer act of *tzedakah* is to give away money, but this is a merely giving away a branch of the “I”, not the “I” itself. The inner essence of *tzedakah* is that when I give away money, I am giving up my “I.”

It is written, “*My son, give your heart to me.*” Hashem wants to give ourselves away to Him – that is the entire essence of what He wants from us. *Tzedakah* enables us to can give all that we have of ourselves, for Hashem.

Tzedakah and The Redemption

This is the depth of *tzedakah* which is said about Avraham Avinu. Avraham Avinu merited to have *tzedakah* from Hashem because he reached the level of selflessness, out of his total *emunah* and devotion to Hashem.

Chazal say that *tzedakah* will bring the redemption.³³ There is also a statement of Chazal (at the end of *Tractate Makkos*) that one will merit the redemption only if he has *emunah*. These two statements of Chazal bear a direct connection. The depth behind *tzedakah* stems from the depth behind having *emunah*, and *emunah* is essentially about nullifying the “I”, to give away one’s existence for Hashem. And when one has that power to give up his self to Hashem, he is touching upon the level we will be on at the redemption. Thus *emunah* and *tzedakah* are the two related concepts connected with the redemption.

To illustrate, Reuven can give away all of his possessions to Shimon if he is loyal to Shimeon, loves him, and trusts him completely. So too, we can gave away our “I” entirely to Hashem, whom we have *emunah* in. “*In Your hand, I place my spirit.*” When a person gives away his “I” to Hashem, he then gains a new “I” in place, which will feel like a resemblance of *Olam HaBa* on this world. It is a new “I” because the person realizes that he gave away his “I” to Hashem completely. When one has *emunah* in Hashem, it means that he gives away his whole existence for him.

This is the meaning of the statement of the Sages, “Mashiach ben David will not come until all of the *peratios* (coins) are used up from the wallet.” Simply this Gemara means that the redemption will not come until all money has been given to *tzedakah*, but the word “*peratios*” can also mean “private aspects” - when all people give away their private existence away to Hashem, the redemption will come, where we will all be nullified to Hashem.

The redemption of the masses didn’t happen yet, but each person can merit his own private redemption in his soul, through *tzedakah*. How? Through giving away his “I”. Chazal say that one should choose to give away his *bechirah* to Hashem. This enables a person to serve Hashem entirely through *bittul*, for he has nullified himself entirely to Hashem.

In Conclusion

כי באור פניך נתת לנו וכו' וצדקה - In *Sim Shalom*, the concept of *tzedakah* is mentioned in connection with the concept of the “*ohr panim*” of Hashem, because *tzedakah* is about giving away oneself to Hashem, and this enables a

33 *Bava Basra 10a*

person to totally feel Hashem's existence, for it removes the barriers created by the ego. The person who gives away himself for Hashem – through being aware of the deep perspective towards *tzedakah* – merits to dwell in the *ohr panim* of Hashem.

Man is either using his “I” on this world to choose to do the *mitzvos* and to make the right decisions, or he is choosing evil. But when one merits to go above his “I”, though exercising more and more *bittul* to Hashem, he has less and less traces of the “I”. With the less of an “I” he has, the more he enters what is called “the light of the redemption”.

The more a person realizes that he is nothing but a tool of Hashem, he is closer and closer to meriting the private redemption of the soul, and when each person in *Klal Yisrael* merits it, this will be the general redemption that will come to all of the world, because both the private redemption and the general redemption are about have no existence of our own, for we are nullified to Hashem.

May it be revealed the time where “*A new light shall shine forth on Zion,*” when the complete light of Hashem upon His creation.

21 – Redemption Within Exile³⁴

Exile – A Time of Hester Panim (Concealment)

In the blessing of **תקע בשופר**, we ask Hashem to take us out of exile. Let us reflect into what the concept of exile is. What is exile, and what is the redemption from the exile that we ask for?

The Maharal says that **גלות** *galus* (exile) and **גאולה** *geulah* (redemption) both contain the letters of the word **גל**, which means to “reveal”, because both *galus* and *geulah* are situations that reveal Hashem. Let us think into this concept.

The redemption will not just be about gathering in all the exiles back to the land of Israel. It is not either about leaving the jurisdiction of the nations. It will be about truly **recognizing** Hashem, as it is written, “*And the world will become filled with the knowledge of Hashem.*” So the concept *galus*, exile, essentially means that we are exiled from that revelation – it is the revelation of Hashem which is currently in exile.

We can now understand what the depth of exile is. The more revelation of Hashem we recognize, the more we are in touch with the redemption, and the more concealment we feel, the more exiled we will feel.

We live currently in a time of *hester panim* (concealment of Hashem’s countenance). There are two facets to *hester panim*. There is a general state of *hester panim* going on in Creation, and there is also a private *hester panim* that each person experiences in his life.

However, the more a person recognizes Hashem in his life, the less *hester panim* he will have on a personal level. Chazal say that “Whoever mourns the *Beis HaMikdash*, will merit in its rebuilding.” In other words, a person can merit his own personal redemption, when he connects with Hashem.

But when a person does not recognize Hashem in his life, when the reality of Hashem is very hidden from him, his life is confusing and dark. His soul is in exile. **That** is exile – when there is a *hester* (concealment) upon the *giluy* (revelation of Hashem).

Seeing Revelation Amidst The Concealment

What, then, is our avodah?

Exile is all about concealment. It is a situation of *hester panim*, in which there is *hester* upon the *giluy* – in which the revelation Hashem’s Presence is being concealed. Yet, there is no Jew who is completely removed from Hashem’s Presence. Hashem is present in every person. Ever since we all stood at Har Sinai, we all merited to have Hashem revealed in each of us, to some extent. But if a person doesn’t live with Hashem in his life – every day - he lives a life

³⁴ Adapted from the audio file of Tefillah.088

of complete exile. It is written “*My soul is close to her redemption*” – we can all live a life in which we can enter the redemption, even though we have not yet merited the redemption yet.

Every day that goes by, we can see Hashem in our life. In this way, we experience some redemption in our life. Each person needs to see how Hashem is revealed in his life. If a day goes by and a person didn't feel how Hashem was revealed his life – either because he didn't mentally reflect, or because he didn't feel it in his heart, then even if he learns Torah and does mitzvos, he hasn't utilized his daily fully. Besides for the fact that the Jewish people will get out of exile, each of us on a personal level needs to have our own redemption, and we need it every day. Every day, we need to find how Hashem is revealed in our life.

We need to be aware of the purpose of Creation which we were created for – not just intellectually – but to actually be heading in that direction, no less than a person traveling from Bnei Brak to Yerushalayim who knows where he is going. We must be aware to where we are heading towards in life. A day in which we don't reflect about Hashem is day that is unutilized, and it's like we haven't gotten anywhere. Of course, learning Torah and doing mitzvos gives us a little push, but not much, unless we are feeling Hashem in our life on a daily basis.

Chazal say that each day is more cursed than the one before it. As time goes on, the spiritual level of the generations decrease. The *hester panim* increases more and more. But amidst all the *hester*, we can still feel a revelation of Hashem in our life. There is no such thing as a situation of total *hester panim*. Even when Hashem has to show wrath, Chazal say that He mitigates the extent of His wrath. In any situation which the generation is, in any of our personal situations in which we suffer – both physically and spiritually - in which things seems bleak and difficult, in which we see *hester panim*, we should always know that it is still Hashem, Who at the same time shows us that He is with us.

The Practical Avodah We Need To Work On

So there are two parts to our avodah in exile. One part of our avodah is to reflect on the miracles we see from time to time; to discover *giluy* even amidst the *hester*. But another part of our avodah is to take all the *hester panim* we see and try to find how Hashem is with us even amidst the greatest situations of *hester panim*. First we need to see how Hashem is revealed in our life in the more obvious situations, and then we need to keep working on this until we see how Hashem is revealed even in less obvious situations. If we keep working on this, we can uncover Hashem's Presence even amongst situations of total *hester panim*.

Reflections

We should reflect upon the following. Each day, many sins are being committed – all over the world, and in Eretz Yisrael as well. All of the sins going on in Creation are a massive *hester panim*. So many people aren't even *frum* at all. It seems that Hashem should totally abandon us, due to all of this. And even those who keep Torah and mitzvos don't always keep it so well. That should only add to all the *hester panim*. All the *hester panim* going on in Creation – the fact that so many Jews don't do mitzvos, and all the sins that are going on – this causes pain to anyone who

sees a little beyond himself and whose heart is a little open to spirituality. There are only a few individuals in the world who are really doing Hashem's will. Can there be any greater *hester panim* than this?

Yet, one can reflect into this and see, that although there is much *hester*, there is also much *giluy*. Hashem continues to reveal His presence in our life in many situations.

This is a deep perspective to have on Creation. Just like when a person learns Gemara he gains a mature perspective on learning as the years go on, so can one's perspective on Creation become more mature, if he lives an inner kind of life.

See how much Torah and how much good is going on, both in yourself and in the world, and this will help you see how there is still *giluy* amidst all the *hester*. You can notice the *hester*, but you should see the *giluy* too. See the *hester* and the *giluy* going on in Creation at once.

There are many Jews who have already returned to Israel, but to focus on this fact is just being superficial. This is not yet the depth of the redemption. Each of us merits redemption according to the amount that we felt Hashem's Presence with us in our life amidst the exile.

May we merit to connect our souls to Hashem and to his Torah, to see revelation amongst the concealment – and to merit a true ingathering of all the exiles, a redemption of our soul.

22 – Leaving The Confusion³⁵

Exile – Being Dependent On The Nations

In the blessing of *תקע בשופר*, we ask Hashem *ושא נס לקבץ גלוייתינו*. The word *נס* means to “uplift”; we are asking Hashem that we be taken out of exile, to be “uplifted” from the nations we are surrounded by.

When we are in exile, we are like a fetus in its mother’s womb, dependent on the nations for our survival. Exile is not just in the other countries; it is in Eretz Yisrael as well. As long as the Jewish people depend on other nations for survival, that is exile. In Eretz Yisrael, the Erev Rav rules. When people get supported by the Erev Rav, their Torah learning is being nourished by Erev Rav, and this is part of the exile.

Thus, we ask Hashem to raise us out of this situation – *ושא נס לקבץ גלוייתונו*.

The Inner Aspect of the Exile: Confusion

But the deeper meaning is that even in our own souls, we are exiled to the nations. How do we see this?

The Torah is vast, and its details are endless. It is wider than the sea and longer than the earth. But a person can get drowned in all the details! He sees so many details, and wonders where the root is. He loses sight of what priority is.

The first aspect of our exile is clear: we are among the nations, and thus we depend on them for survival. We depend on them physically, like a fetus in its mother. For this reason, all the non-Jewish influences have entered even the world of those who keep Torah and mitzvos. Everything – our food and clothing, etc. – all comes from them. And their ways of thinking have entered us too. That’s one part of our exile.

But there is a second, deeper aspect to the exile going on: there is a great lack of clarity going on today.

If a person lives with Hashem in his life, then all his Torah and mitzvos are connected and unified into one direction. Such a person sees how all the details connect.

But when a person loses his central goal in life, which is to live with Hashem in his life – then even if he does many mitzvos, he can lose his sense of priorities in life.

For example, a person learns *Agadta* (homiletic teachings of Chazal) and get very confused: What is the most important thing to do in life? In one place, it seems like Chazal are saying that giving *tzedakah* is the most important thing. In another Gemara, you can find a Chazal that guarding our speech is the most important thing a Jew should do. Another Gemara seems to imply that doing *chesed* is the greatest priority in life. Different statements of Chazal seem to emphasize one particular mitzvah over another, and it gets so confusing.

³⁵ Adapted from the audio file of *Tefillah.087*

The depth of our exile is that we can be involved with many details of the Torah and mitzvos, but lost in all of them, with nothing connecting all the details together.

Even in Eretz Yisrael, we are mixed with other nations and susceptible to their influences. The root of this is because even within our own ranks, we are confused, because we are missing the one link that connects all our details together [the fact that life is about becoming close to Hashem through doing the mitzvos].

With your physical eyes, you can see clearly that we are mixed with the other nations of the world. But if you use your inner sight, you can see that the confusion and mixing up is really taking place in each of us. People are constantly getting influenced by the world, on a constant basis, and lose their *yishuv hadaas* to think about their priorities.

Regain Your Central Priority In Life

To counter all the inner confusion of our priorities in life, a person has to always think about Hashem. When he says *Modeh Ani* and when he says *Baruch Attah Hashem*, he has to think for a moment about Hashem. Thinking like this will get a person to connect all the actions he does throughout the day and keep him aware of his main priority in life.

When a person is confused inside himself, he suffers from *pizur hanefesh* (scattering of the soul), a term described in *Chovos HaLevovos*. Most people nowadays are living with *pizur hanefesh*. People lack inner unity to their souls, and this is the root behind all the confusion going on. A person has to reveal a point of “oneness” in his life that will bind all of what he does together into one unit, and then he will leave all the confusion. By reminding ourselves of the goal that binds all that we do in life – the primary goal in our life, which is to come to recognize Hashem – we will then have the point that connects all details together.

In order to merit the redemption, where we will be gathered in from all the exiles, we need to clear up our own inner confusion that we have inside ourselves. A person might do all the mitzvos very religiously, yet he never even realizes that life is about recognizing Hashem, Who is the One who commanded us with all these mitzvos!

So when we ask Hashem to gather us in from all the exiles – **וְשֵׂא נָס לְקַבֵּץ גְּלוּתֵינוּ** - we are not just asking that Hashem redeem the Jewish people in the general sense and bring us all back together again. We are asking Hashem that He merit each of us to have our own personal redemption, that each of us should leave our own personal inner confusion. A person has to realize that he needs to uplift himself and go beyond all the confusion. We can then merit to be nourished not from the “Erev Rav” that heads this exile, but to be nourished directly by the sustenance of Hashem.

We must make the recognition of Hashem into the central priority in our life, and then we will be uplifted from all our negative surroundings.