

Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh

48 WAYS TALKS



The Rav's classes appear on "Kol haLashon"

Torah Bank Service

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1 | Learning From Others - Unifying With The Jewish People

“Talmud”: Learning from Others

The Torah was given to all Jews – men, women and children. This shows us that all of us must prepare for the Torah – men, women, and children.

The *Mishnah* in *Avos* says that the Torah is acquired through 48 *kinyanim* (qualities). It is well-known that in the 49 says of *Sefiras HaOmer*, a person should prepare for the Torah by using each day of the *Omer* to work on acquiring each of the 48 qualities, so that by the time he gets to Day 49, he has hopefully reached all of the 48 qualities¹.

The first *kinyan* stated in the *Mishnah* that one needs for the Torah is “*Talmud*”, learning. The simple meaning of this is that one needs to learn the Torah diligently, in order to be able to acquire the Torah.

However, *sefer Midrash Shmuel* explains that “*talmud*” means for one to be eager to learn from all people, as the Sages state that a wise person is one who learns from everyone; and that he always be eager to learn more and more from others, to learn from others’ good deeds and *middos*. This, the *Midrash Shmuel* states, shows that he is thirsty to know more Torah, like one who is thirsty for more water.

According to his interpretation, the first *kinyan* that one needs to acquire the Torah is not just to simply learn the Torah, but to learn from all people. It means not only to learn Torah from other people, but to learn from their *middos* and actions.

Why We Should Learn From Others

Chazal say, “Who is wise? One who learns from all people.” Why did Hashem design the world this way that we have to learn from all people? Why don’t we just go learn by people who are reliable and knowledgeable? Why must we learn from all people?

On a simple level, this is because we must learn how to be humble, because it makes one lower himself to others. That is true, but that is not the root of the matter.

¹ Editor’s Note: Obviously, it cannot be reached perfectly, but each person on his own can strive as much as he can to acquire somewhat each of the 48 qualities necessary to acquire the Torah.

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When we stood at Sinai to receive the Torah, we were all *k'ish echad b'lev echad*, “like one man, with one heart.” In order to receive the Torah, a person’s soul has to be “*like one man, with one heart*”. We must be unified. But if each person is only for himself – for example, if each person only *davens* for his own spiritual growth, but not for others’ – he does not share one heart with his brethren, and he will not be able to receive the effect of the giving of the Torah. In order to be worthy of receiving the Torah, we must all be “*like one man, with one heart*.”

All 600,000 souls of the Jewish people are really interconnected, and each soul receives from the other. This is the power of *achdus* (unity) in Creation – the concept to be unified with others.

This is really the idea behind the first *kinyan* necessary in acquiring the Torah – to learn from others, because one has to become unified with Creation.

The Torah Is About Unity

When a person *davens*, he has his own personal requests. There are other parts of *davening* in which we *daven* not for ourselves, but for the Jewish people as a whole. *Tefillah* is both for ourselves and for others.

Tefillah can be private, but the Torah has no part in it which is private; the entire Torah is for all of the Jewish people.

That is why the Torah was given to us by Moshe *Rabbeinu* -- his soul was equal to all 600,000 souls in the nation. Moshe didn’t receive the Torah for himself – he received it all for the sake of the nation.

It is only when a person understands that his heart must be unified with others (“*b’lev echad*”) that he can really survive spiritually. This is the true way to prepare for the Torah – to realize what *achdus* (unity) of the Jewish people is. We must realize that we do not exist for ourselves, but only because of a greater whole – the entire Jewish people, every single soul.

We say in the silent prayer of the festivals, “*You chose us from all the nations.*” When Hashem chose us as the chosen nation, did He choose each Jew individually, or did He choose the Jewish nation as a whole? He chose us as a whole, not individually. This shows us that we are only deserving of receiving the Torah if we realize that we are part of a greater whole of the Jewish people, and that we do not deserve the Torah on our own.

Love and Trust In a Relationship

What connects the Jewish people together?

The power of *ahavah*, love, is the connecting force in Creation. A person has a *mitzvah* to “love every Jew, like himself”. That is one way how we connect to others: through *ahavas Yisrael*, the

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power to love other Jews. Another way we can connect to others is through the power of *imun*, which is called ‘trust’ – the ability to be trusting and loyal to another.

These are the two ways how we connect to others: through love (*ahavah*), and through trustworthiness (*imun*) towards others.

Loving another Jew “like yourself” is called the “great rule” of the entire Torah (as stated by the sage Rabbi Akiva). Why? It is because the whole essence of the Torah is to love another Jew. That is one kind of connection with others: love.

The other way to connect to another is by trusting him. This is a different kind of connection. When I trust someone else, that doesn’t necessarily mean that I love him, and if I love him, this doesn’t mean that I trust him. Business partners trust each other, but that doesn’t mean they love each other. They are mainly concerned for their own interests, and not for the other. So loyalty and trust is a different kind of connection to another than love.

In reality, we must be able to have both abilities, in order to truly create a sense of unity with another. A real bond is when I love the other person *and* I trust him and am loyal to him. If one of these elements is missing, it cannot be called a true bond.

If I love someone, I can easily overlook his faults by judging him favorably. But how do I trust someone when I don’t know anything about him? From where does the ability to trust come from? We will explain how.

There is no person who doesn’t have ups and downs in our relationship with Hashem. The whole issue is just *how connected we are* to Hashem. A person needs to develop a place in his soul which is *constantly* connected to Hashem, an ability of loyalty to Him, and then even when he has his ups and downs, he still remains connected with Hashem. That is the idea behind *imun*/loyalty in our relationship with Hashem.

When a person trusts another, even if the other wrongs him, he still maintains his trust in him. That is the whole idea of trust: it is loyalty. To illustrate, if a husband and wife are not loyal to each other, they end up getting divorced.

But Hashem loves us even when we sin against Him. That is true loyalty – He never separates from us. Just like a father cannot part from his child even when the child wrongs him, so does Hashem never disconnect from us even when we sin against Him.

How To Become Worthy of Receiving the Torah

These words might seem very far from us, but that is only because we are so far from the event of receiving the Torah.

Why is it that every year we must prepare ourselves again anew for the Torah? Why must we return to this level every year? It is because we have fallen from the level of receiving the Torah – we

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have become distant from the Torah. We need to return to our original source, the way we were when we accepted the Torah.

Why does receiving the Torah seem so far from us? It is indeed far, because we are far from the level of receiving it. But if we want to receive the Torah, we need to realize how important it is to love all Jews, and how this is essentially the way to prepare for the Torah. That was how we were at the time of the giving of the Torah – everyone was “*like one man, with one heart.*”

Let us explain this in an even simpler way. Imagine someone who is deathly ill, who is also having pain in his feet. Is he thinking about the pain in his foot? Of course not, because his life is in danger. He has a lot more to worry about than his foot.

We are also very sick – in that we have fallen from our level in Torah. We don't think about others, because we are focused on our general problem of being so far from the Torah. But it's still a sickness not to love others.

To prepare for the Torah, we need to love other Jews, and we also need to really believe that all Jews are like brothers. We need **both** love and trust with others if we are to really connect to others. Love without trust is not a real relationship, and trust without love is not either a real relationship.

We must realize that our connection to fellow Jews can never cease, and we must believe in this. If we have this belief, then we have trust in each other, and this completes our love with each other.

Learning Torah is not just a ‘private’ aspect in your life – it is something which belongs to the entire Jewish people. So if a person wants to receive the Torah, he must realize that the Torah is not his private gift – it is a gift for the entire Jewish people, who are his brethren.

Recognize this and believe in this, and then you will be connected in unity with the Jewish people. This will make you worthy of receiving the Torah.

In Conclusion

What do I want by telling you all this? This isn't *mussar*. I am just saying what life is about.

If someone converts to Judaism, what change does he undergo? He is totally changed; he has gone from non-Jew to Jew. His previous life is over, and he has begun a new life. He is like a newborn baby.

If one don't realize the *achdus* (unity) of the Jewish people, then he considers the Torah be something ‘private’ which he wants, and this will not be enough to qualify for ‘receiving’ the Torah.

Tefillah (prayer) is personal, but Torah is for everyone. Torah is about giving yourself over to it totally, to undergo a total change – just like someone who converts to Judaism.

This is a whole new attitude on life; it is not just another detail going in life. It is the very attitude to have *about* life.

Why don't we see that much "*Toras Emes*" (truthful Torah) in today's times? It is because most people do not have this awareness.

הַתּוֹרָה נִקְנִיט בְּשְׁנֵי עוֹת הָאֶזְנוֹן 02

2 / *Real Listening*

Listening Attentively

The second *kinyan* (acquisition) of the 48 *kinyanim* necessary to acquire the Torah that is listed by the *Mishnah* is "*shemiyas ha'ozen*", "listening with the ears".

Why is it necessary for the *Mishnah* to mention that we must listen with our "ears"? Isn't it enough just say "to listen"?

The *Tiferes Yisrael* explains that listening with the "ears" means to "listen attentively." Let us try to understand what it means to listen "attentively".

There is a concept that each of the 48 *kinyanim* actually includes all of the others; they are not just separate and random aspects from each other. A *kinyan* makes you acquire something; any of the 48 *kinyanim* are all-inclusive. Somehow, the quality of listening includes all the other qualities of the Torah; it is a *kinyan* that helps one acquire the Torah.

Listening At Har Sinai

These 48 *kinyanim* were also at Har Sinai, where the Torah was first acquired. Where do we find listening by Har Sinai? There were voices and thunder; the Sages say there were five kinds of sounds. The *Aseres Hadibros* (the Ten Commandments) were the voice of Hashem, and it could be heard from end of the world to the other. The voice of Hashem "did not stop", as the *posuk* says.

If this voice did not stop, why don't people hear it? The *Baal Shem Tov* said that it is because people aren't on the level they were at Har Sinai, and this is why they don't hear it.

The Jewish people said "*Naaseh*" (We will do) before they said "*Nishma*" (We will hear). They were ready to "do" before they "heard". They were ready to do the will of Hashem – and that was why they were able to hear the endless voice of Hashem. But when someone isn't ready to do the will of Hashem, he doesn't "do", so he doesn't come to "hear" either.

The *mitzvah* of remembering Har Sinai thus is not about remembering the past. It means to remember now what standing at Har Sinai was like – it must affect you now.

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If a person accepts the *mitzvos* first – he has “*Naaseh*”, and then he can come to “*Nishma*”, to hear.

Thus, in order to receive the Torah, a person has to first accept the yoke of the *mitzvos* – to be ready to do what Hashem wants and be able to “hear” Hashem’s will.

Accepting The Mitzvos Enables You To Hear Hashem’s Voice

Let us explain this even more clearly.

Why did Hashem make it that His voice was heard to the other one of the world? Why didn’t it suffice that just the Jewish people would hear His voice? The reason was to show that a person needs to always hear Hashem, wherever he is in the world, in every generation. It is a voice that resonates throughout all of history. Hashem’s voice can be found everywhere. If a person hears Hashem’s voice, everything is different.

When a person accepts the Torah – meaning, if he first accepts the *mitzvos* – he has the tools to be able to hear Hashem’s voice.

Why doesn’t a person hear Hashem’s voice? It is only because he isn’t at the inner state of hearing His voice. Hashem is always speaking to us, but we don’t always hear Him. All of Creation is His word; He spoke to us through the *Aseres Hadibros*.

Each thing in Creation is known in Hebrew as “*dovor*”, a “thing.” The word “*dovor*” is from the word “*medaber*” – speech. This shows us that everything speaks to us – the voice of Hashem speaks to us in everything, if we hear it.

Hearing Hashem’s Voice In Everything

The *kinyan* of “*shemiyas ha’ozen*”, listening, does not simply mean that a student has to listen to his *Rebbi* (teacher). It is to be able to listen to the “word of Hashem” - hearing Hashem in the words of the Torah.

A person finds something in the street; what does he do? If it has a *siman* (sign of identification), the *halachah* is that he must return it. Does he hear Hashem talking to him as well through the lost object? Does he hear Hashem’s voice in the object, telling him to return it? Everything has in it the word of Hashem, and we can hear Hashem talking to us in something. The question is, if we hear this voice.

That is why Torah requires “attentive listening,” as the *Tiferes Yisrael* writes. The Torah only speaks to someone who hears Hashem in everything.

All of Creation Is Saying Something

We will try to understand this even more.

How should we view our life? We know that anything we encounter in our life is not happenstance; everything is Divinely ordained.

Let's take look at our conversations, which is our *dibbur* (speech). Our force of *dibbur* is essentially what connects us to others. Can two people be friends with each other if they never talk to each other? No, they cannot. Only through talking can we connect to others.

Hashem created many people. Does He want us all to remain separate, or does He want us to connect with each other?

Hashem created people, who can talk, but He also created plants and rocks, inanimate objects. We know that Hashem created everything from the Torah. Why was it necessary for these things to come from the Torah? It is because really, everything in Creation is all one unit.

When a person walks by a mountain, does he ever think that he is connected to the mountain? Does he ever see himself as connected to the rest of Creation? Usually not. But really, all of Creation is one, and it all connects.

"*Shemiyas Ha'ozen*", to listen attentively, is to listen to everything that's going on in Creation. All of Creation speaks one thing alone: the word of Hashem. "*From the word of Hashem the heavens were made.*"

But just like every musical instrument sounds different, so does each thing in Creation sound different. Yet they are all saying one thing: the word of Hashem.

Listening Enables You To Connect

Why is "listening" listed as one of the 48 *kinyanim* of Torah? What is special about listening that you need it to acquire the Torah? You have to listen to anything if you want to learn about it; if you want to know science, you also have to listen to a science teacher. So what is the special quality of "listening" that you need for Torah?

'*Shemiyas ha'ozen*' is not just to listen better because you don't know something. It is to *connect* to a matter, through "listening" to it.

Chazal say that if a person has a worry in his heart, he should tell it to others. Imagine if we would tell a person to tell over his worries to a tape recorder, and the tape recorder will listen to him

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and record everything; would that satisfy him? No one would want this, because we need others to listen to us. Why do we want people to listen to us? Because we want connection with others. We want others to listen to us and connect to our feelings.

When a person really listens to others, he can really feel what they feel. Others' joy is his joy, and others' pain is his own.

Therefore, to "listen" does not just mean superficially to "listen". The deeper implication of "listening" is to *connect* to what we are hearing. People want their friends to listen to them because they want connection, not just because they want someone to listen.

Why did Hashem have to tell us the *Aseres Hadibros*? Don't we already see it written in the Torah? It is clearly because it is not enough to *know* what He wants. For that, we can just see His words written in the Torah. We needed to *hear* His voice, so we could *connect* to what Hashem said.

In order to really connect to someone else, you have to hear him talking. If two people read each other's writing, will that cause a connection? *Writing* to each other and *reading* each other's words doesn't form a connection! Only by *listening* to each other can people have a relationship.

(That is also the deep reason why a man is not allowed to hear a woman singing, because by hearing her voice in this pleasant way, he connects to her, which is forbidden.)

If we think about it, there is nothing inanimate in creation. Everything speaks to us! Everything says the word of Hashem. Thus, the concept that we must become connected to all of Creation is not a connection to bland, inanimate objects --because everything is really very alive. Everything speaks to us.

Understanding What A Relationship Is

What is the *kinyan* of "*shemiyas ha'ozen*" which we must acquire for the Torah? It means to connect to the Torah, out of a love to hear Hashem's word.

What connects a husband and wife to each other? Their physical desire for each other...or the *chibbah* (fondness) they have for each other? If their connection to each other is based on their physical desire for each other, this is not a real connection. But if they are connected to each other out of *love* for each other, this is connection.

The same can be applied to all other relationships as well (though it is not as intense as the husband and wife relationship). In all our connections we have people, we are either connected to others out of real love for them, or it is because we have some element of 'desire' for them, some kind of physical element of attraction, which is not a real love for another, and it is based on superficial circumstances. These are two completely different forces in the soul: love, and desire. Only through real love can we cherish our relationship with another. When our relationship with

another is coming from some desire for other person, and not out of a sense of love for him, it is not love, but desire.

Think about the following. When two people become friends, are they friends with each other because they have a 'desire' for each other's company (which is what many people would say), or is it because they really have a love for each other?

Connecting To The Torah Out of Love

Connecting to the Torah is only through *love* for it, not through a mere *desire* for it. We will explain why.

Why does a person listen to his child? He doesn't listen to his child because he loves to hear about what his child is talking about. If that would be the case, if his child doesn't keep him interested, he wouldn't care to listen. But a person loves to listen to his child talking, even if his child is saying nothing smart or noteworthy. Why? For one simple reason: because he loves to listen to his child. It is *chibbah*, fondness, a real love - it is not merely a *desire*.

Listening From Love Vs. Listening From Desire

All of us have two kinds of listening: listening to *what we like* to hear, and listening to the *voice* of the person talking to us.

The first kind of listening is coming from a place of desire in ourselves. We are listening to another because we are enjoying what he is saying; he is saying something interesting or enjoyable, so we listen. But the second kind of listening is a deeper kind of listening. It is to listen to another simply because we enjoy hearing his *voice*.

In the first ability of listening, a person is only interested in hearing what he likes listening to; if he doesn't like the topic, he doesn't listen. But there is another kind of listening a person can access: to listen to another's voice, for the sake of just hearing someone else's voice.

Enjoying The Sweetness of Another's Voice

It is written (in *Shir HaShirim*), "*Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet.*" There is a kind of deep listening in which we don't listen because of the words being said, but because the *voice* we are hearing is sweet to our ears.

With the first kind of listening, a person only listens to what he's interested in listening to. If it's not interesting, he doesn't listen. This kind of person, when he likes the topics being discussed in the

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page of *Gemara* in front of him, will learn it, but when he gets to a part in the *Gemara* that's uninteresting to him, he doesn't bother to exert himself in it. He only pays attention to what he's interested in...

If a person only likes to hear "words" that are interesting, he will not be able to raise children either. Such a person only likes to listen when there's something interesting to listen to; if his children don't interest him with what they like to talk about, he doesn't listen to them. In order to be able to raise children, a person needs to listen to his children simply because he loves to hear their voices; it's not about what they say.

If a person learns how to enjoy listening to just the voice of someone else, he will find that is able to really connect to others. If a person only connects to people when he likes what they say, he won't be able to connect and form relationships.

In marriage, if a husband and wife only listen to each other when there's something interesting to talk about, they will not be able to live together in harmony. In order to have a happy marriage, a husband and wife have to listen to each other just to enjoy the sweetness of the other's voice. Real listening is not to listen only when it's interesting to hear, but to listen to the other's *voice*, to find the voice of the other to be sweet to listen to. "*Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet.*"

This is a subtle point about our soul. Sometimes you hear things that aren't correct; not all the time do you hear things you like to hear about. Your friend or your wife says something that you know is wrong, or you disagree, or you hear something unpleasant. Does that mean that now you can't connect to them?! Listening to others is not about *what you like* about or not. It is about listening to *someone else's voice* and to enjoy the sweetness of it!

"*Shemiyas Ha'ozen*" thus includes two things: the ability to hear someone's words, and the ability to listen to someone's voice. We must be able to the "word of Hashem", as well as the "voice" of Hashem. The same applies for relationships – we should listen to other's words, and we should also listen to another's voice.

If a person only hears the words, but not the voice – he is missing a *chibbah* for the matter. He only hears the body of the words, not the soul of the words.

Sometimes we know what Hashem is telling us, and sometimes we don't know what He is telling us. But even when we don't know what He is telling us, we can still know what He wants – just by listening to His voice...

An Overhaul On Relationships

If a person lives this way, he will find himself making many friends. He will live in a world of *achdus* (unity).

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Instead of being friends with one person and not with another kind of person, he'll find himself making friends with even the loneliest and most anti-social kind of person. Instead of being so picky about who his friends are, he won't differentiate between personalities, because he has uncovered the ability of the soul to connect to others out of a true sense of *achdus*. He isn't going after his personal tastes – he wants to connect to everyone, because every voice is sweet for him to hear: “*Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet.*”

A person can go his whole life living in a cold, lonely world – or he can live in a world full of friendship and connection with others.

There are many lonely people in the world - and many of them did it to themselves. They don't know how to listen to others just for the sake of listening to another person's voice; they never learned how. They only listened to someone who is saying something enjoyable or interesting to listen to, so they never really connected to others; and that is why end up lonely and with no friends.

Unifying With The Jewish People

All 600,000 souls said at once “*Naaseh v'nishmah*”. How could they say it all at once? It was because they were all connected in unity. This is how you prepare for accepting the Torah at Har Sinai – it is all about unity.

The words here should first be heard on an intellectual level - and then they should become internalized into your life.

Inner Advice On How To Make Friends

If you learn how to really listen to others as we explained here, you are able to take even your greatest enemy in your life and turn him into your friend! That is the power of real listening.

This is a tried, tested, and proven method to form real friendships. With real listening, you can change another's heart from hating you into loving you! And an even greater gain than this is, that when you truly listen to others, you will find that if you had hated someone previously, through listening to other's voices and enjoying the sweetness of another's voice as you listen, your own heart can be changed from hatred to love, towards that other person whom you once hated!

So the advice is to get used to listening to others just for the sake of *hearing another person's voice*. It is not about enjoying the *words* that the other person is saying and the topics that other people are discussing in their conversations. Just listen to another's voice as he is talking, and allow yourself to enjoy a sweetness in hearing the voice of another, to find his voice sweet in your ears – as it is written, “*Let me hear you voice, for your voice is sweet.*”

3 / Talking Truthfully

Talking Words of Torah

The third *kinyan* to acquire Torah is “*arichas sefasayim*”, to enunciate Torah with one’s of lips. The simple meaning of this is that a person has to verbalize his learning. A person mainly connects to Hashem through his heart, and not through his mouth. Why, then, does the Mishnah list verbalization as a *kinyan* for Torah?

Chazal say that a person must verbalize his learning, and then the Torah is considered like “life” to him. A person has a *mitzvah* to speak in words of Torah – “*V’dibarta bam*”. Why does a person have a *mitzvah* to “speak” words of Torah? Isn’t it enough to think in learning? There is a discussion in *halachah* if a person gets the *mitzvah* of learning Torah just by thinking in learning; speaking words of Torah, then, is the main kind of learning. But why indeed is speaking words of Torah considered more important than thinking in it?

It is written, “*Kiss me with the kisses of Your mouth.*” What does this mean? It means that when we speak words of Torah, we are being “kissed” by the lips of Hashem, so to speak. The strongest relationship is a relationship with Hashem that is *peh el peh*, mouth to mouth. Thus, speaking in Torah with our mouths is like having a *peh el peh* relationship with Hashem. The *Tiferes Yisrael* says a novel concept: that if someone pronounces the words of Dovid *Hamelech* in Tehillim with concentration, it is as if Dovid *Hamelech* himself is teaching the person!

“*The lips of the righteous move in the grave.*” This is because when a person learns the words of a *tzaddik*, he is connecting to the *tzaddik* through his mouth, and that is why the lips of the righteous deceased ones move in the grave, when their words are studied and verbalized by those who learn them.

When a person speaks words of Torah, sometimes it can be a total connection to his learning, and sometimes it isn’t. Moshe *Rabbeinu* at first was hard of speech (“*aral sefasayim*”), but then later he was healed. Speech used to be his weakest point, but later, he merited the highest level of speech – he spoke *peh el peh* with Hashem. Let us try to make this matter practical.

Speaking Clearly

What exactly is the *kinyan* of “*arichas sefasayim*”?

There are two kinds of speech. One kind of speech is called *areivus* – “sweetness”, which is when a person has an easy time talking. The other kind of speech is called *arichus* – “lengthy” speech.

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What does it mean to have “lengthy” speech, *arichas sefasayim*? The *sefer Midrash Shmuel* says that “*arichus*” is when one speaks clearly. In order to learn Torah, a person has to speak words that are clear. That is *arichas sefasayim*.

But this sounds more like a **way** to learn Torah, not a way to **acquire** the Torah! Why is *arichas sefasayim* then considered a way to “acquire” the Torah?

It is because in order to speak clear words of Torah, your thoughts have to be clear in the first place. When a person isn’t so sure about something, he has a hard time explaining it clearly. When a person is sure and clear about what he’s learning, he can explain it clearly. So *arichas sefasayim* is not just about how to learn Torah – it is that a person should make sure he is clear in the first place.

One of the Sages said, “You see a clear world.” We need to gain clarity in matters of Torah, and then we will find that we can speak it out clearly to others.

Watching Your Mouth

On Shabbos, a person must also speak matters of holiness, and it is forbidden to speak mundane matters. During the week, a person can speak mundane matters, and this kind of speech has in it mixed words that aren’t holy, which takes away from the clarity of one’s speech. If a person only speaks holiness, he will be “*kissed with the kisses of Your mouth*”, but if he speaks mundane matters with the same mouth, such a mouth will not merit to be kissed by Hashem.

It is forbidden to speak *devarim betailim*, idle speech. Since one has to use his mouth to speak words of Torah, he must protect his mouth from speaking about mundane matters, because this will prevent his mouth from connecting to Hashem. It is not by chance that Hashem spoke with the Jewish people *peh-el-peh*. In order to receive Torah, you need to have a mouth connection with Hashem.

That is why *arichas sefasayim* is one of the 48 qualities to acquire the Torah. This is the depth of why it is forbidden to speak *lashon hora*. When a person speaks *lashon hora*, his very *lashon* (tongue) becomes evil. He ruins his mouth in speaking *lashon hora*; can the same mouth which spoke *lashon hora* come and speak now with Hashem in Tefillah...?

That is the depth of *arichas sefasayim*. It is to have a clean mouth.

Arichas sefasayim means both for a person to be clear about what he is learning (and thus he comes to explain it clearly), as well as for one to make sure his mouth is clean from improper speech.

Defining Idle Chatter

Maybe you will ask: if so, how is it possible to ever talk normally? If we have to avoid idle chatter, how can we ever have a normal conversation?? Are we angels?!

Of course we are human beings, and we have to have conversations. But we need to have the right kinds of conversations with others.

There are pointless conversations, which are called *divrei chullin* (mundane speech). Some conversations are *chullin*, and some are not. “*Chullin*” comes from the word “*chalal*” – “empty”. When a person speaks empty words -- conversations that have no value -- he is speaking *divrei chullin*.

On a deeper note, when a person speaks words that don't amount to anything – that is *divrei chullin*.

When a person speaks with another person and he connects to him, he fulfills the purpose of talking, because the purpose of talking is so we can connect to others. But when a person just chats with someone with no intention of forming a connection to him, such talking is *divrei chullin* – it is pointless talking.

Even if a person is saying *Tehillim*, if he isn't connecting to what he is saying, it can be said of him that he is just talking *divrei chullin*. If a person is saying in *Tehillim*, “*My soul yearns*” and he doesn't really yearn for Hashem, he is just saying words that don't amount to anything. He is speaking *divrei chullin*.

There are many kinds of evil talking. There is *lashon hora*, which causes strife between people. There are empty conversations with others, which is another kind of evil talking. Then there is another kind of pointless talking – when a person says words that don't amount to anything. If a person talks to Hashem but he doesn't mean what he says – he isn't connected to the words he is saying – such speech is also a kind of pointless talking.

The Ramban says to think before you talk, or else it will be *divrei chullin*. If someone doesn't think before he talks, his talking is empty.

So far, we have spoken about idle speech in relation to others, as well as in relation to Hashem when a person davens.

There is another example of pointless speech.

If a person tells his child, “I love you”, and he just says the words without any thought whatsoever, such talking can also be *divrei chullin* – if he's just saying it to his child so that the child will behave better. Saying “I love you” to your child has to come from your heart, or else it's meaningless. If you say it from your heart, it is a real kind of speech, but if you're just saying it to your child because you need him/her to do something for you, it's a pointless kind of speech.

When a person speaks, how is he aware of this? Is this because he knows that he has vocal chords? Are the words coming from careful thought, which come from his heart, or is just coming from the mouth?

Speaking words of Torah, or davening, or other holy matters are called *arichas sefasayim*, because here one is extending these words into his heart.

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Why must one verbalize his learning? Why isn't it enough to think in learning?

Man is called *nefesh chayah*, and *Targum Onkelos* says this means *ruach memalelah*, a “talking spirit”. The essence of a person's life is to talk, and talking connects us to life, because through talking to others, we connect to others and receive vitality. Only through talking out the words of Torah can you receive vitality from it.

Your Talking Must Stem From Your Heart

There is another kind of empty talking.

Chazal say that “Words that come from the heart enter the heart.” If a person speaks to another but the words don't enter the other, it must be that such talking is empty talking. Real talking is when it comes from the heart and enters another person's heart; otherwise, it is empty talking. If a person is speaking words of Torah and they really come from his heart, the words are full of life, and then they can enter someone else. If he is speaking words of Torah to another but his words aren't full of life, they don't come from the heart, and they will not be able to enter someone else's heart.

Our words of Torah have to be full of life; the Torah is called *Toras Chaim*, a “Torah of life”. If our words of Torah are not full of life to someone, then such talking resembles the chirping of birds, which isn't real talking.

The *kinyan* of *arichas sefasayim* thus includes that a person needs to have a source of vitality in his life. If your words are to be full of life, they have to be coming from a source of life in you.

Just like your mouth gives you more life when you eat and drink to keep yourself nourished, so is your mouth able to give life to others. Words that aren't full of life in them are not considered words, just empty talk.

There were a few *tzaddikim* who merited to die through *misas neshikah*, the “kiss of Hashem”. What is the “kiss of Hashem”? It is when the soul leaves the body, because it kisses and embraces the higher realm of spirituality.

But there is also a way to have a “life” of *neshikah* – when a person speaks words full of life, he merits to “kiss” the world of spirituality.

It is written, “*And one who speaks truth in his heart.*” This is when a person says something that is in line with his heart.

The Torah is called *Toras Emes* (Torah of truth), and it is also called *Toras Chaim*. When a person speaks truthfully, his words have life to them. But when a person speaks words that aren't truthful – his heart isn't connected to what he says – his words aren't either alive.

If a person gets used to talking more from his heart – to connect his heart to what he says and thinks – this is how a person can have the quality of *arichas sefasayim*.

Speaking Truthful Words

Some people are used to “lying for the sake of Heaven.” But this behavior, even when a person means to lie only for the sake of Heaven, is still a kind of speech which has no life in it. *Chazal* say that it is permitted to lie for the sake of peace, but if a person does this all the time, his speech is still missing life to it, because it isn’t the truth. It might be sometimes permitted to lie, but that still doesn’t make it the truth.

Arichas sefasayim is thus to connect your heart to what you say, not just to enunciate the words. It is to live what you say. That is why a person has a *mitzvah* to speak in words of Torah – it is because a person has to live the words of Torah he says.

4 / *Binas Halev - Building Yourself Through Torah*

"Binah" - A Usage of The Word "Binyan"/Structure

The *Mishnah* lists 48 *kinyanim* (ways of acquisition) to acquire the Torah. Just like you need to make a "*kinyan*" to acquire an item in order for it to be yours, so must you "acquire" the Torah which Hashem gave you. If you have to acquire something physically with a "*kinyan*" for it to be yours, surely something spiritual needs to be acquired with a "*kinyan*".

Let us try to understand one of these *kinyanim*; the *sefarim hakedoshim* state that through any one of these 48 *kinyanim*, you can acquire the whole Torah.

The fourth *kinyan* mentioned in the list of the 48 *kinyanim* in the *Mishnah* is called "*binas halev*" – "understanding of the heart". The word "*binah*" comes from the word *binyan*, to build. "*Binas halev*" is thus essentially to "build" the heart; let us explain this matter.

Enthusiasm Doesn't Build You

When a person gets married, he is happy. For how long is he happy for? Not for long. That feeling of happiness you had when you first got married never lasts – it doesn't build you. Marriage might help you build your home to have a "*bayis neeman b'yisrael*" – but it doesn't automatically build your soul.

In fact, all kinds of happiness that you know of never "build" you into a person. On Yom Tov we are happy as well, as we are commanded by the Torah to rejoice each Yom Tov - but this happiness does not last for the rest of the year. Happiness is a kind of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm does not build you, because enthusiasm doesn't last. Inspiration comes and goes.

In order to acquire the Torah, do we mainly need enthusiasm, or do we need the opposite of enthusiasm - to be *calm* for it? Enthusiasm is a kind of excitement, whereas being calm is not excitement; it is just to be calm, without any "excitement" involved. These are two different forces in our soul: enthusiasm (in Hebrew, "*hislahatus*"), and calmness (*menuchah*).

When we all said "*Naaseh v'nishmah*" ("We will do and we will hear"), did we do so out of enthusiasm, or out of calmness? If a superficial person reads the part of the Torah in which we accepted the Torah, he probably thinks that we did so out of "enthusiasm", in the same way someone rushes into a certain endeavor without thinking, because he's so excited. We all know that excitement dies down eventually. When people go into decisions with excitement and enthusiasm, after some time the enthusiasm goes away, and then the person regrets if afterwards.

In today's generation, there is an unfortunate phenomenon taking place, in which people sign a divorce agreement before they get married – why? Just in case the marriage doesn't work out and they have to get divorced, all financial matters will be worked out beforehand. Why do people make such stipulations to begin with? It is because the mentality of such people is to get married out of excitement, and they know good and well that excitement doesn't last. They are therefore prepared for a divorce long beforehand, because deep down they know that a marriage cannot survive based on how excited you are about your spouse.

This is also why *kaballos* (resolutions) that people make on Rosh HaShanah usually don't last. Often these resolutions to improve were made from excitement, and not from calmness. Decisions made of excitement eventually lose their excitement and thus they don't last.

If so, why will accepting the Torah on Shavuos last for us for the rest of the year? Why do we accept the Torah on Shavuos – why should it be different than any other resolution we make that usually doesn't last?

To know the answer, let us explain the following.

Torah Is Life!

Imagine if a non-Jew wants to convert, but he says, "If Judaism works out for me, then I'll stay, and if not, I'll go back to my old ways." But then it will be too late to go back, because he is still a Jew. You can't convert to Judaism based on conditions.

We know that a person can marry a woman based on a condition; if he tells her "You are betrothed to me based on such and such a condition", the marriage is valid according to the Torah only if the conditions are fulfilled.

Why is it that a person can't decide also that he will separate himself from the Torah if it doesn't work out for him? How were we able to say "*Naaseh V'Nishmah*"? The generation who left Egypt were given a choice to accept the Torah or not. Why couldn't they just say, "If the Torah works out for us, we accept it, but if not, we are not accepting it, retroactively." Why couldn't they make this condition?

The answer is because the Torah is called *Toras Chaim*, a "Torah of life". The Torah is life itself! Something which is life itself is something which you can't decide if you will separate from it or not if, even if it's hard. You can't separate yourself from something that is life itself. Every person wants to live, because that is the way people are.

Standing at Har Sinai, the Maharal writes, was when everyone understood clearly the recognition that without Torah, life is like death. It's not a "punishment" if you don't have the Torah – it's an absence of life. A person without the Torah in his life might seem to be physically alive, but inside himself, he is dead.

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Thus, although we were not commanded to accept the Torah and we had a choice, we still couldn't separate from it, because Torah is life. We drink water not because we choose to, but because we need it to stay alive, and we do it automatically without thinking too hard about it. When something is life to us, it doesn't make a difference if we are commanded to do it or not; we just do it, and we don't think about it. That is why we said "*Naaseh V'Nishmah*".

So we were very calm when we said *Naaseh V'Nishmah* and accepted the Torah – we didn't rush into this decision; we were utterly calm when we made it, because we recognized that we need it for our life.

When people are searching for Torah in their life, they feel like they are thirsting for life itself. They are thirsty for Torah no less than someone who is thirsty for water. They understand that Torah itself is life, and thus they yearn for it and thirst for it.

Even if someone would be told that he won't be punished in Gehinnom if he doesn't learn Torah and do the *mitzvos*, what would life look like if he wouldn't keep the Torah? Such a life, even if he never gets punished in Gehinnom, would still not be a life at all.

Body and Soul Together

Can a person live life without any inner meaning? Can he sleep well at night if there is no Torah in his life? If a person is not bothered by the lack of Torah in his life, it shows that he's not aware of his soul's desire for life.

We have a body in us and a soul in us. Our soul is an inner voice in us that tells us what the right thing is; when people don't hear their inner voice calling out to them, they ignore their soul, and instead live a life of the body.

(Of course, we are not saying that we must only focus on our spiritual needs and come to neglect our physical needs of our body. We should not ignore our body. Only Moshe *Rabbeinu* sanctified his body so much that he was so unaffected by the body's desires, but we are not Moshe *Rabbeinu's* level.)

If we know that we can't silence the body's desires, is it possible to silence the soul's desires? It is really impossible to silence the soul's desires. It is impossible to silence either the body or the soul. If someone tries to totally ignore either his body or soul, he is suffering internally. *Chazal* say that "the wicked are full of regrets", and the depth behind this statement is because the wicked ignore the voice of their soul and continue to sin, despite their regrets.

Why do we really want the Torah? Is it because otherwise we will get punished?! Such an answer is not the kind of attitude that they had at Har Sinai. If someone doesn't have the attitude that our ancestors had as they stood at Har Sinai, he is disconnected from the event of standing at Sinai, and he won't be able to receive the Torah anew each year when Shavuot comes. At Har Sinai, they

accepted the Torah because they listened to the voice of the soul inside them, which demanded Torah in order to live.

To accept the Torah is to essentially realize your soul's desire! We could not be forced to accept the Torah, because that would suffocate our body. But neither could we say "*Naaseh V'Nishmah*" impulsively, because that would have been ignoring the body. We need body and soul involved in order to have Torah. We have to listen to our soul's desire, but we must not totally ignore our body either; we need both our body and soul involved in order to calmly accept the Torah.

Aspirations Cannot Build You

Therefore, even when a person feels very enthusiastic to reach high levels in *Avodas Hashem* (service towards G-d), this alone will not help him be successful. A person needs to give **structure** to his *Avodas Hashem*. We can see this from the "ladder of growth" described in *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*: to begin with Torah, then to attain *zerizus* (alacrity), than *zehirus* (watchfulness), etc.

A person needs a sort of "ground" to stand up on in order to serve Hashem; he needs to have a solid and firm basis to stand upon before he places a ladder on it to ascend heavenward. You can't place a ladder anywhere unless you have ground to put it on.

The "ground" of the ladder is Torah. If you have a solid basis Torah in your life, you can place your ladder of growth on it - and only after that can you begin to climb all the levels of *Avodas Hashem*.

Only the Torah Builds You

The Torah is our very life, our very existence. Let us try to explain how it is.

Let's say you have an author who wrote many *sefarim* or books. Is there a connection between all his books? Is each book built upon its predecessor? Sometimes you can find ideas that are consistently expressed throughout an author's books, but there is usually no structure to all of his ideas. The books are not built upon each other; they are just random pieces of knowledge.

Torah, throughout all the generations, is not like that. It is constantly being built and developed based on whatever was known to the previous generations. There was first the *Aseres Hadibros* (the Ten Commandments), and then there was the rest of the *Chumash*, which was built upon that. Then came *Mishnayos* (Mishnah) which is built upon *Chumash*. *Gemara* (Talmud) is based on *Mishnayos*, and the words of the *Geonim* (scholars who lived a bit after the Talmud) are built upon the *Gemara*. The words of the *Rishonim* (early sages) are based on the words of the *Geonim*, and the words of the *Acharonim* (late sages) are built upon the *Rishonim*.

You can't write a *sefer* on Tractate *Zevachim*² even if you learned it very well, if you haven't learned Chumash, Mishnah, or *Gemara*, which came before it -- because there will be nothing for your ideas to be built upon.

The question is: Is your own soul built as well? We know that the words of Torah we learn are built upon the previous generations, but what about your own soul when it comes to learning the Torah? Are you building your soul as well through learning Torah?

A Life That Lacks Structure

Let's say a person discovers *sefer Mesillas Yescharim* one day, and he sees that it's a wonderful *sefer*, so he decides to spend his whole day learning it. Is there anything wrong with this? We know that there is reward for every word of Torah learned. If a person learns one word of *Targum Onkelos* the whole day, he gets reward for it. So why can't a person do this all day? What's wrong with this?

The answer is simple: because a person needs to truly **build** himself. If a person learns *Mesillas Yescharim* all day, it shows that he isn't built enough in his own life - and that is the reason why he's learning a *sefer* like *Mesillas Yescharim* all day. Did the author of *Mesillas Yescharim* himself [the Ramchal] sit and learn *sefer Mesillas Yescharim* all day? No, because he had built himself.

Can a person just learn a few *sefarim* and then write his own *sefer* from all that knowledge he sees? No, because he isn't built enough properly. If someone doesn't learn Torah in a way that builds him, he is not a true *Talmid Chochom* (Torah scholar). Torah has to build you; it has to be learned in the proper, structured way. It develops a person only when it is learned in a structured way.

Without being properly built, a person lacks stability in his life.

Real Questions Vs. Fake Questions

The stability we need in our life can only be Torah. But, we must know something important as well about this.

If a person learns a few words of *Gemara*, is that enough to build him?

A first grader doesn't understand the meaning of the word *Beraishis*. He knows that the word is made up of six letters, but if you ask him what it means, he will look at you like, "What do you want from me?" Yet there are adults also who don't really understand one word of *Gemara* they learn.

When a person asks a question on the *Gemara*, there are two kinds of questions one can have. One kind of question is a "good question". But other times a person has a question and he discovers

² The laws in the Talmud dealing with sacrifices during the Temple era

that that it's not really a question - it's just that he didn't know how to read the words properly in the first place.

One time someone came to me and asked me why he feels so unsuccessful in his learning. He told me that every time he asks a question on what he's learning, he discovers afterwards that it's never really a question; he asked me why this always happens to him.

I told him, "When you read a line of *Gemara*, just read the words. Don't think so much – just simply *read* what it says there."

Why am I telling you this story? It is because we have to understand that learning Torah has two parts to it. There is the actual exertion we put into it – *hasmadah* (diligence) and *yegiah* (effort). But this alone doesn't build you in life. If someone goes to *Daf Yomi* every day, it's a wonderful thing, but this alone will not build you! But if you try to understand what you learn and you analyze it in-depth, it is then that learning the *Gemara* will be able to properly build you.

If a person learns *Mussar*³ or *Chassidus*⁴ all day (or if he reads all day "*Shirei Kodesh*", holy poems composed throughout the generations) and he neglects the study of *Gemara* in-depth, and he's very happy in his life with this kind of learning, what is he missing? He is missing a properly built kind of life. There is no *binyan* (structure) to his life.

What's the difference between an adult who learns Torah and a child who is beginning to learn Chumash? Is it that an adult understands something a little better than a child does? That is not the difference. The difference is because an adult is supposed to really think into what he learns.

Yeshiva Has To Build You

This is *binah* ("understanding") – is to think into something, to reflect on something and to produce information from how you think.

Chazal say that "women are blessed with extra *binah*"; the deep explanation of this matter is that just as women give birth and produce a soul, they are able to give birth as well to new thoughts. This is the quality known as "*binah*". The words *binah* (understanding) and *binyan* (structure) are related; if you think into things and reflect, you have "*binah*" – and you will come to have a "*binyan*".

What is holding you up in your life? Some people are being held up by the fact that they learn in Yeshiva; they thrive on "being in Yeshiva". But anyone who is still in Yeshiva really can't know where he's holding in his life, and if he is really being held up by it. If a person is surviving in his life only because of Yeshiva, can that build you for life? The whole point of Yeshiva is to give you a structure in life that will build you for the rest of your life. If you don't have that, then the fact that you're in Yeshiva alone will not be enough for you to hold onto stability for the rest of your life.

³ Jewish books of self-discipline such as *Mesilas Yesharim*, *Shaarei Teshuvah*, *Chovos HaLevovos*, *Orchos Tzadikim*, etc.

⁴ Jewish works containing Hassidic thought, such as *Tanya*, *Meohr Einayim*, *Kedushas Levi*, *Beer Mayim Chaim*, *Pri Tzaddik*, *Noam Elimelech*, *Imrei Pinchas*, *Pri HaAretz*, etc.

The stability we need in life is something that will build us for the rest of our life. Just to rely on Yeshiva to build us will not be enough for us to have a lasting stability for life.

We have all gone through much in life, and life is still ahead of us, including our marriage and children. How are we to survive life? We need to be built properly so that we can go through life in the proper way and have something to always hold onto when we go through difficulty.

What can give us that stability? That stability is only the Torah that you learn. The words here alone cannot express enough this. If you have the Torah always in your life, you will be able to survive whatever you go through in life.

What is the lesson for life that you must take out from learning in Yeshiva? The *mitzvos* we do and the *zechus* we have now to sit and learn is not enough for our life, even though this is wonderful and commendable. What we must take out of Yeshiva is to learn how we build ourselves.

And how do we build ourselves? It will not happen if we learn superficially without understanding what we are learning. We have to make sure we are understanding what we are learning.

If we have understanding in our learning, we will have *binah*, and if we have “*binah*”, we will have “*binyan*” – we will be able to ‘build’ ourselves for the rest of our life from our learning.

Doubts and Confusion

Look around and see what’s going on in the world. The world is full of so many distractions. There are so many desires that people have, and that is one kind of distraction in life. But there is another kind of distraction that people have – the doubts and confusion that we have in regards to how we can serve Hashem. If we don’t have the stability of Torah, then our life will be very confusing and we will always feel lost.

One time one of my students came to me and said that he is very frustrated and unhappy in his life. I said to him, “What’s going on?”

He said, “I have all kinds of doubts going on.”

I said to him, “*Nu*, we all have doubts. Maybe we can sit and try to figure out how to get rid of what you’re doubtful about.”

He said to me something very surprising: “In the morning, I’m not sure if I should first go eat breakfast, or if I should first go the supermarket.”

I didn’t understand what the problem was. I said to him, “That’s your whole problem?”

He said to me, “Because I’m not sure about this, I think about it the whole day, and therefore I can’t enjoy my whole day.”

When I heard this, I realized that there are people who have developed severe emotional issues when it comes to being doubtful: because of one constant nagging doubt, a person can be doubtful the entire day just about one little thing he's not sure about, and he can hem and haw over it forever. It is then that I realized how bad being doubtful can get: there are doubts that a person can have which don't make any sense whatsoever, yet it plagues the person the entire day and doesn't let him concentrate and learn!

A person isn't sure if he should buy a certain apartment, and he can't decide. Sometimes it's really hard to come to a decision about these things. But at least a person has options to consider over here; it is a kind of doubt which makes sense. But there are kinds of doubts people can have which don't make any sense.

These are doubts which result from a lack of stability (“*yetzivut*”) in one's life.

When a person is not religious and he's thinking about becoming *frum*, he is often doubtful about if he should take the plunge or not. But someone who's already *frum* is much less likely to doubt *Yiddishkeit*, because he feels stable and secure in his life. This shows us how the power of stability (*yetzivut*) can keep us anchored, even as we go through hardship.

We all go through countless difficult situations in life. How are we to survive them? How can we acquire an ability to take care of all the doubts we encounter in our life? There are people who become *frum* and they keep switching their *Chassidus* all the time. One day the person is a Gerrer, and the next day he is a Bresslover. Why do people become so full of doubt in their life? How can a person find himself? What will give a person stability in his life?

If a person doesn't have what to hold onto, he is wandering around in his life very confused. He hears some inspiration here and there every once in a while, but that's it, and he's just back to the confusion afterwards. He never builds himself.

Of course, when a person learns Torah, he can also have doubts in his learning, but it's a different kind of a doubt. It's not a detrimental kind of doubt, because his soul has been built.

It's Not Enough To Hear These Words...

Do you understand what I am trying to tell from all of this? I am trying to tell you something that is true, but you need to actually overcome the problem I am describing, and experience it for yourself in your own life.

Chazal say that a person doesn't understand the words of his teacher until after forty years. Why does it take forty years? Rav Chaim Volozhiner said that his teacher, the Vilna *Gaon*, went into personal exile. After he returned, he regretted it. Rav Chaim Volozhiner asked him if he can go into exile as well. The Vilna *Gaon* answered him, “I did it and I regretted it.” Rav Chaim Volozhiner said, “I want to do it also and then regret it.”

This is a very deep answer. He was saying that he wanted to experience the matter for himself – it wasn't enough that he knew about it in his mind.

Thinking Into Our Learning

The only thing that can build you in life is this quality in the Mishnah called “*binas halev*” – “building” your heart. What does this really mean? It means to think into things as you are learning the Torah, to think about what you are learning. This helps you understand your learning, and in turn, it builds you. This is not when you read something in the *Gemara* and you quickly decide, “Ah, I understand it.” It is to really *think* into what you learn, as you learn.

Don't Be Dependent On Your Surroundings

How dependent are we on outside factors of the world? We are all affected by the world; we are not angels. But the question is, how much do we depend on our surroundings for support? If we build ourselves up properly through learning the Torah and trying to understand what we learn, we will have the stability for life. If not, we are dependent on other things for survival.

To give an example, a person has a friend who he is very close to, and they are both learning in Yeshiva together. One day, his friend gets engaged. He tells his friend happily, “I'm engaged!”

“*Mazal Tov!*” he answers – but deep down, he's cringing inside. He'd have to be an angel not to be. He's mixed with happiness and sadness inside. Why? Now that his friend is engaged, that means that his friend is moving out of his life – and he will be left all alone. If a person depends on others for survival, his whole stability in life comes from external factors that can fall away one day. When those factors fall away, a person falls apart. He doesn't really have stability in his life to keep him going. But if a person has a stability that comes from inside himself, he can survive life.

Of course, your friends can help you a lot in life. But don't base your life on your social surroundings. Friends come and go. One day a person is best friends with someone, and then someone new comes to yeshiva who makes the previous best friend seem uninteresting compared to the new one. It's not that the friendship is over; it is just the way people are. Friendships come and go; it's not personal. But the point is, you can't base your sense of stability in life from your friends.

Our life has to be truly based on learning Torah and thinking into what we learn.

In Conclusion

These are very simple words to anyone who has experienced these words. But they are words that must *build* us for the rest of our lives, or else they are just inspiration that comes and goes.

If we want to work on our *middos* and *davening*, this can only work if they have a firm basis – a life based on building ourselves through learning the Torah. It is not enough to simply *learn* the Torah; we have to *build* ourselves through it, by *thinking into the meaning* of what we learn as we learn, and in this way, we come to purify our souls through it.

תורה נקנית בשכלות הלב 05

5 / Connecting The Mind With The Heart

“Sichlus Halev” – Connecting The Details And Seeing The Whole Picture

The sixth *kinyan* to acquire the Torah is called “*sichlus halev*” – the “intellect of the heart.” The *Tiferes Yisrael* explains that this means that one has to be able to explain what he learns, when he is learning Torah. What exactly is this ability?

Many Details That Make Up One Picture

Let’s say a person sees a painting. What does he see in it? Does he see the number of trees and houses in it? That is not what he is focused on. He is focused on what all the details in the picture forms – the complete picture. What is the way that the painting of a person learning Torah is supposed to look? The Torah is supposed to build the structure of the person. A person has a brain, heart, hands and feet. When all the parts of the person are combined together, he is a complete person. Just like we understand this concerning the physical, so can we understand that a person without a structured soul is missing the way that his life is supposed to look like. When a person’s structure looks like the true design of life, he has a connection between his the body and soul.

The Torah is not just a bunch of random details. It is one connected unit. Let us try to explain this concept more. In *Sefiras HaOmer*, a person counts fifty days until Shavuot. Is counting the second day of the Omer just another separate detail in *Sefiras HaOmer*, or is it connected to the first day? It is connected to the first day. Many *Rishonim* write that each day of the Omer is considered all part of one mitzvah of *Sefiras HaOmer*. The Ramban even says that *Sefiras HaOmer* is the *Chol HaMoed* of Shavuot.

Sefiras HaOmer is not just 49 separate days – it is all one unit. They are connected through Shavuot, which makes them all into one. When a person learns Torah, he sees that there are many details. There are a vast amount of *chiddushim* (original Torah thoughts) that have been produced throughout the generations. The question is: Does a person look at all these details as just “details”, or does he see how they all connect into one unit?

Sichlus Halev – Connecting The Details

What is “*sichlus halev*”? We know that the *seichel* (intellect) is not the *lev* (heart). So what is the “*seichel*” of the “*lev*”? Furthermore we can ask, the *Mishnah* earlier listed the quality known as “*binas*” *halev* (understanding of the heart); what is this next *kinyan* that is called “*sichlus*” *halev*?

There are two abilities in a person: the ability to grasp general rules (*kelalim*), and the ability to grasp details (*peratim*). Both of these are necessary to prepare for the Torah.

Let's think: Is preparing for the Torah an intellectual matter, or is it a heart matter? It is both. Preparing for the Torah requires both our *seichel*/intellect and our *lev*/heart. These should not be two 'separate' subjects we are we strive to improve upon; rather, we should connect our mind and our heart as one. We need to have our heart connected to our mind, in order to be ready for Torah.

That is *sichlus halev* – it is the **connection** of our “intellect” to our “heart” – when we connect our mind with our heart.

The Difference Between Details and The General Whole

To give an example of the concept we are describing, when a person loves someone, does he love his personality, or does he love the person himself? If a person loves someone else for his personality, then it can be said that he loves various “details” (*peratim*) about the other. This isn't real love, because it is based on certain random details about the person.

But if a person loves his friend simply because he loves his friend – it can be said that he loves the “general rules” (*klal*) of his friend, and this is true love. That is *sichlus halev*; it is essentially when one's intellect is connected to his heart, because this enables one to connect details together and see the general picture. When a person just uses his heart alone and he doesn't make use of his intellect, he loves others just in an emotional way, and thus he only connects with his emotions to another person, which is shallow. But when a person's intellect and heart are connected together, he is able to love his friend for whom he really is - it is a love that comes from a mind and heart fused together.

There are two attitudes one can have when he views people. Either a person sees “details” alone – he sees people as separate entities. Such a person will love one kind of person, but he won't love a different kind of person. His love for others is based on personal taste, which is superficial. But if a person sees how all the details connect together – which is the exact idea of “*sichlus halev*” - he sees how he must love everyone equally. And that is exactly the *mitzvah* of *Ahavas Yisrael* (to love all Jews).

Ahavas Yisrael (love of the Jewish people) is called the “*klal gadol*” (great rule) of the Torah, because in order to truly love other Jews, you shouldn't see other Jews as “details” in your life, but as rather you should view every Jew as many parts of a whole. There are 600,000 souls in the Jewish people, but they are also all connected into one.

Preparing For The Torah: Seeing Each Jew As A Part of A Greater Whole

Since *sichlus halev* (to connect our intellect with our heart) is one of the 48 ways to acquire Torah, this shows us that the way to prepare for the Torah is through connecting the ‘details’ as part

of the 'whole'. The way to prepare for the Torah is to reveal how all of the 'parts' in the Jewish people are of one '*klal*' – parts of a general whole – and along with this, to view all of the details in Torah as being many parts that form one *klal*.

What indeed is the "*klal*" (rule) that unifies all of the details of Creation together? That "*klal*" is our common purpose on this world, which is that we all have to reveal Hashem upon the world. Unifying all the details of Torah and the Jewish people together essentially brings the revelation of Hashem onto the world. This fact - that we must reveal Hashem upon the world - is what binds every fact in Creation together.

We must reveal Hashem in every detail in Creation. That is "*sichlus halev*" – to connect our heart with our mind, to reveal the "*klal*" through every "*prat*". To see how all the details in our life are really all part of one whole.

Connecting Our Knowledge

Every person has so much knowledge. *Chazal* say that even wicked people are full of *mitzvos*. But that is only through the attitude of seeing details; the details aren't necessarily connected. A person can know a lot of information, but that doesn't mean he knows how to connect all the details together. Only through acquiring "*sichlus halev*" – to integrate our knowledge into our heart - can a person unify all the details of his knowledge together, and reveal the one *klal* that binds it all together: to reveal Hashem in Creation.

Let's say a person is learning Torah all day. He learns Chumash, *Gemara* and Halacha throughout the day; he is learning a lot details here, but what binds it all together? What is connecting all this knowledge together? If a person only considers the Torah to be a bunch of random details he learns and he doesn't see how the details really connect, such Torah is not the kind of Torah which was given at Har Sinai!

The Torah which was given at Sinai was a Torah of unity – as *Chazal* say, that each person stood together with one heart. If a person learns Torah but he can't explain it, he is lacking the quality of "*sichlus halev*". Hashem revealed Himself at Har Sinai, and He also revealed the *Aseres Hadibros*. Why did Hashem have to reveal Himself at Har Sinai? Why couldn't He just give it to Moshe to give to us? The explanation of this is because Hashem was showing us that He is only revealed through the Torah. A person has to realize that all our learning is to reveal Hashem.

There are six orders of *Mishnayos* and over sixty *Masechtos* of *Gemara*, but they all reveal one thing alone: Hashem. All of the Torah is a "*miksheb achas*" – "one piece." It is all one. The 248 limbs and 365 sinews in our body parallel our 248 negative commandments and 365 *mitzvos*. Our whole body reflects one thing – that we live our entire existence to fulfill the Torah.

Every part in the Torah we learn is like a preface to revealing Hashem. This is the attitude to have towards each part of Torah you learn.

Connecting To Torah and To Its Giver

The way to prepare for the Torah is to connect to the One who gave it. Some people are mistaken and think that since the main thing is to connect to Hashem, it is enough to just attempt closeness to Him without having to learn the Torah. But this is mistaken, because if Hashem gave us the Torah, this shows that the way to connect to Him is through the Torah.

But if a person takes the other extreme, and learns Torah without trying to develop a connection to Hashem through it, such learning is like the broken *Luchos* – it's a false form of Torah learning without Hashem in the picture.

The souls of the Jewish people left them when they heard Hashem's voice. If they wouldn't have been at that level of attachment to Hashem, they wouldn't have heard His voice in the first place, and their souls wouldn't have left them. This shows us that there has to first be a longing for Hashem, in order for the soul to experience His voice.

The Mind and Heart Connection

In order for one to be at the level in which his soul is leaving him out of longing for Hashem, he has to learn Torah, together with a desire to be close to Him through it. The mind and the heart must be connected.

Preparing for the Torah means that you have to be prepared to accept it. If a man wants to marry a woman, she has to accept the offer in order for the marriage to happen. If we are to receive the Torah, we need to be prepared to accept it.

"Sichlus halev" means to take all the details and connect it all into one: Hashem.

Striving Towards 'Lishmah'

The words here are really simple.

When a person only lives for himself and only for what he can get out of everything, then he learns Torah in this way also. He is all about *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motivations). But when a person learns Torah because he wants to connect to the One who is giving it, such a person has *lishmah* (pure desires) in his life.

May Hashem merit us to accept the Torah in a way that we will have *d'veykus* in Him - and not simply from a desire to take it all for ourselves.

6 / *Seriousness**Aimah: Seriousness*

One of the 48 *kinyanim* to acquire the Torah that the *Mishnah* lists, is called “*aimah*”, trepidation. What is behind the concept of “*aimah*” when it comes to learning Torah? *Rashi* says that this means that when one is serious-minded, which is the opposite of someone who has “*kalus rosh*” (lightheadedness). So the concept of “*aimah*” is the opposite of what it means to have “*kalus rosh*”. It is to have “*koived rosh*” – to be serious-minded.

A child by nature has “*kalus rosh*” – why? A child has no obligations. He doesn’t have real problems. That is why a child is lightheaded.

What brings a person to have “*kalus rosh*”? The *Chazon Ish* writes that one who looks at everything with a carefree attitude is living a life of “*kalus rosh*”. A person has to realize what his responsibilities are, and what life is about and what it demands of him.

A doctor knows he is responsible for other people’s lives, and therefore he is naturally serious about his job. The more responsibility you feel, the more serious you are about what you do.

Even if a person learns Torah and does all the *mitzvos*, if he’s immature about life, he will lead a life of “*kalus rosh*”. He has no “*koived rosh*”.

When a young child begins to learn a *masechta* of *Gemara*, does he feel responsibility to finish even one *perek* of *Gemara*? Usually not. But an adult who learns a *masechta* of *Gemara* is supposed to feel such a responsibility.

To Know What Life Is About

There is also a *masechta* called *Chaim*, “life”. We have responsibility to understand this “*masechta*.” A person must know what life is about – from beginning until end.

True life is when a person realizes the depth of what life is about. If someone is deeply connected to Hashem in his life, he usually doesn’t have to work on developing “*koived rosh*”, because his very attitude toward life gives him an automatic “*koived rosh*”.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* said that he isn’t writing anything new, but that his words are about matters which are often forgotten. This is because people forget the truth.

If someone has ever felt true closeness to Hashem, he knows what “life” is really about.

Being Close To Hashem: The Deepest ‘Sugya’

The words here are not “*mussar*”, and it is not either a “*shmuess*”! Being close to Hashem is not an intellectual matter; you can’t know what it is unless you actually learn about what it really means to be close to Hashem, in an in-depth way.

Being close to Hashem is not a mere intellectual knowledge, nor is it an enthusiastic feeling. It is a deep “*sugya*” to know in life, a *sugya* that has to be learned very in-depth, just you like you learn a *sugya* of *Gemara* in-depth.

There are “49 Gates of *Binah*” (Understanding), and only the 50th Gate was revealed to Moshe *Rabbeinu*. The *Ramban* says that this was the deepest knowledge possible about Hashem, and that it totally transcends the comprehension of human knowledge. The “50th Gate of *Binah*” is essentially the deepest point in one’s soul, which has a great perception of Hashem.

Knowing Hashem is, in fact, the deepest *sugya* there is. It needs to be learned about in-depth – it is the *masechta* (tractate) of “life” itself, so we can call it “*Masechta Chaim*”!

To really come to “know” Hashem, a person needs to access the deepest part of the soul. But a person can’t access this point in himself if he is full of impure desires.

Thus, “*aimah*”, which is to be “serious-minded”, is essentially for one to realize what life is about. It is to realize that life is about pursuing the knowledge of Hashem. It is to know about Hashem both in one’s mind and in one’s heart.

How Do We Get Close To Hashem...?

The words here are simple to anyone who already knows what this is, and they are very far from someone who doesn’t.

A life without closeness to Hashem is like death. As the *Gemara* says, “Either a friend or death.” The true ‘friend’ of a person is Hashem, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes.

This is *life* itself! Without it, “life” is just full of different things that bother us...and that’s it...

To *learn*, *daven* and do the *mitzvos*, we all know that it takes time. Being close to Hashem also takes time. How can we get closeness to Hashem? It takes time, and it doesn’t happen so fast.

It is hard to explain what it is. But it is a very simple matter for one who feels it already. In fact, if someone really feels what closeness to Hashem is, he is very surprised that we have to even speak about it. To him, it’s the simplest possible fact of our life.

7 | *Fear of Hashem**Lower "Yirah" and Higher "Yirah"*

When the Jewish people stood at Har Sinai, they grew afraid when they heard all the sounds that were taking place. Moshe told them, “*Do not be afraid; it is for this that you are being tested, to see if you will have all awe on your faces.*”

This sounds like a contradiction. Were they supposed to be afraid, or not?

The *Ramchal* says that there are three kinds of awe of Hashem, “*yirah*”: 1) *Yiras ha'onesh* (fear of punishment), 2) *Yiras haromemus* (fear of slighting Hashem’s honor), and 3) *Yiras cheit* (fear of sinning). “*Yiras cheit*” is the highest level of *yirah*.

Thus, Moshe was telling them not to have the lower kind of fear, which is to be afraid of being punished; and that instead, they should have the higher kinds of fear – *yiras “haromemus”* and “*yiras cheit*”.

There is a *mitzvah* to remember when we stood at Har Sinai. The point of remembering Har Sinai is to remember the kind of awe which we had then. It is a kind of remembering which helps a person remember that he must feel as if he is standing in front of Hashem.

'Yirah': To "See" Reality

What is the implication of “*yirah*”?

“*Yirah*” has the same letters as the word “*reiyah*” – to see. When a person has ‘*yirah*’, he really “sees”. When a person has ‘*yirah*’, he “sees” a matter in a very tangible way.

Why must a person have ‘*yirah*’? Furthermore, if a person has ‘*yirah*’ and he really comes to feel Hashem’s presence, won’t he die from this? Isn’t it written, “*For no man can see Me and live*”?

The *Ramchal* writes that only through *Yiras Hashem* (fear of Hashem) can a person have “*chochmah*” (wisdom). “*Yirah*” needs a *sefer* for itself to explain what it is.⁵

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that “a *chassid* (pious individual) can see through the ‘eyes of his intellect’. What does this mean? How do you see through the intellect? Is he describing a concept that’s one of the hidden parts of Torah?!

⁵ The *Rov* has given two series on the topic of *yirah* (fear of Hashem): *Maarachot B'Yiras Hashem* and *Sugyot B'Yiras Hashem*.

The concept means that a person “sees” Hashem in his heart. It is not the regular kind of seeing; you can’t see Hashem. So *yirah* doesn’t simply mean “fear”. Fearing Hashem is only the outer ‘garment’ of *yirah*. ‘*Yirah*’ is when one **sees** the truth, in a palpable sense.

With your physical eyes, you can only see your body. You can’t see your soul with your physical eyes. But your soul can see spiritual realities. In order to really learn Torah, you need to “see” it, through your soul. We have a pure soul within us – a *neshamah* - and we need to use it to learn Torah.

Thus, our intellect alone isn’t enough for learning the Torah. There are very bright non-Jews as well who learn Torah. What is the difference between then between a Jew who learns Torah than a non-Jew who learns Torah? The difference is that a Jew has a pure and Divine soul, a *neshamah*, and he can learn Torah through his soul, not through his regular intellect which even a non-Jew has.

But the only issue is, if a Jew is indeed learning Torah through his soul, through his *neshamah*.

So the concept of the *Chovos HaLevovos* of “seeing through the eyes of the intellect” is not referring to the regular intellect. It is really what the *Ramchal* writes (in *sefer Daas Tevunos*), that there is a higher intellect which guides the soul. This is the holy kind of intellect. This is “*yirah*”.

The Depth of Remembering Har Sinai

Remembering Har Sinai is not a matter of *Chassidus* (piety). It is one of the six *mitzvos* to remember every day – it is a *halacha*.

What is the difference between the Torah one learns after he dies and goes up to Heaven, to the Torah one learns down here on this earth? Is it the same learning? If it’s the same, why can’t a person just stay down here and learn here forever? It is clear to anyone that learning in heaven is a whole different kind of learning. Why? It is because there, the learning of the Torah is with total “*yirah*”.

What is the meaning of a “*Gadol*”? A “*Gadol*” who is someone who has “*yirah*”. Someone who has revealed his soul has the “eyes of the intellect” - and he has “*yirah*” in turn.

Someone who truly ‘remembers’ Har Sinai, is one who has *yirah* - he is able to “look every day at the words of Torah as if they are new.”

What To Aspire For In Our Learning

What should we aspire to in our learning? A superficial kind of aspiration is to aspire for more knowledge of Torah. But the inner kind of aspiration is to for one to wish that he merit a revelation of Hashem through his Torah learning. That is the true aspiration we should have in our Torah learning.

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The desire to have knowledge in the Torah is only a *tool* that we use in order to come to the real aspiration we need to have. The real aspiration to have in learning is to come to the recognition of *Hashem* through one's learning - the level that we had by Har Sinai. We need to return to the very state we were in when we stood at Har Sinai!

Lishmah

When a person merits this, his Torah learning will become more real to him.

A person has to give up all his extraneous desires in order to learn the Torah and aspire for a recognition of Hashem. That should be his sole desire.

If someone learns Torah "*lishmah*" (for the right reasons), he is at the level of standing at Har Sinai to receive the Torah. Learning Torah "*lishmah*" means that one learns Torah only to be able to come to recognize Hashem through it!

The more a person learns "*lishmah*" like this, the more Torah is revealed to him. Without "*lishmah*", even if one *davens* very well every day, he will not merit to have much success in his learning, even though he stands before Hashem every day in prayer. When a person lives with "*lishmah*", though, he always feels as if he is truly and always standing in front of Hashem - thus he will be successful.

The words here should change your whole attitude about how you can merit to "receive" the Torah. You must remember how you stood at Har Sinai – and the way you were at Har Sinai is the way to accept the Torah.

(I hope that none of you thought that this this was just another "*shmuess*.")

8 / Humility in Torah

Humility – To Go Anywhere For The Torah

One of the 48 *kinyanim* to acquire Torah is *anavah* (humility).

The *Midrash* says that Har Sinai merited to receive the Torah because of her humility. All of the mountains of the world claimed that they were each deserving of the Torah due to their unique greatness, while Sinai felt underserving of the Torah; she felt like a lowly rock that was nothing special. Because of this, Sinai merited that the Torah would be given on her, because Har Sinai was humble.

The Torah settles upon a place of humility, and we also know that Moshe *Rabbeinu* merited the Torah due to his humility. Why is humility so important to receive the Torah? Why is the trait of humility in particular the trait which Torah settles upon?

Chazal say that Torah is not found amongst the haughty, but only amongst the humble ones. Isn't that simple? Haughty people don't really have Torah in the first place, so isn't it obvious? But the deep understanding is as follows. The *Maharal* explains that a *baal gaavah* (haughty person) can't go everywhere, because there are many places that he feels beneath his dignity; but a humble person can go anywhere, because no place is beneath him to go to.

The depth of his words is that Torah is for everybody, all 600,000 souls of the Jewish people, and it is everywhere; it takes up all of Creation. (Of course, there are levels of souls. Each soul is different and thinks differently, as *Chazal* say. But in the general sense, Torah is for everybody). A haughty person is removed from Torah, because he is not ready to go anywhere for Torah – he doesn't consider the Torah to be found everywhere, and thus he is removed from Torah.

Only a person who understands that Torah is everywhere can be ready to accept the Torah. A *baal gaavah*, due to his sense of pride for himself, does not view Torah as being everywhere, because he's not ready to go anywhere for it. By contrast, a humble person will go anywhere for Torah. He understands that Torah is everywhere. Thus, humility is to have endless aspirations when it comes to learning Torah. One who is haughty doesn't have these aspirations, because he isn't willing to go everywhere for the Torah. We will explain more what this means.

Receiving An Endless Kind of Torah

The *Ohr HaChaim* wrote that *Chazal* (our holy Sages) were able to enact *takkanos* (announcements and restrictions) and Rabbinical *mitzvos* that were not given over at Sinai. They

based their words on the Torah and expanded upon the Torah. Therefore, every novel Torah thought which ever came into the world was already told to Moshe at Har Sinai. (Thus, whenever we discover a novel Torah thought (a *chiddush*), it's not really new knowledge, but rather a new angle of understanding in the words of our holy *Chazal*.)

Chazal say that what that when Hashem first created the world, He wanted to create it with “*middas hadin*” (the attribute of justice), but He saw that the world would not survive, so He included the “*middas harachamim*” (attribute of mercy) in Creation. The depth of this is that Hashem included *rachamim*, mercy, which represents our *Chazal* (our Sages), for our *Chazal* explained to us the Torah, which is a great form of mercy for us.

It is written, “*For from Tziyon comes forth Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.*” The depth of this is that the whole concept of ‘Jerusalem’ is to continue and expand upon the Torah – the “*middas harachamim*”, which is beyond the “*middas hadin*” (attribute of justice).

The “*middas harachamim*” is really the inner layer of the “*middas hadin*”. It is synonymous with the term “*lifnim mishuras hadin*” (to go ‘beyond the letter of the law’) - it is the “inside” of “*middas hadin*”.

The Torah which has been given to us has in it both “*middas hadin*” and “*middas harachamim*”. The “*middas hadin*” in Torah is represented by our *ameilus* (exertion) in Torah, whereas the “*middas harachamim*” in Torah represents the endlessness of Hashem – the *Ein Sof* - that the Torah has no end. This is the inner layer of learning Torah – connecting to the endlessness of Torah.

If a person only has *ameilus* (exertion) in his Torah learning, he limits himself to the “*middas hadin*” of the Torah. The Torah he receives from Hashem will only be a ‘limited’ kind of understanding, just like “*middas hadin*” is limited.

But if a person’s attitude toward Torah is that it contains “*middas harachamim*” – when it reaches for the unlimited, just like “*middas harachamim*” is unlimited - the Torah he receives will be on the higher and unlimited level. This is because he attaches to the endless continuum of the *middas harachamim* of Hashem. and there is no end to the “*middas harachamim*” of Hashem, so he will receive unlimited Torah.

In other words, when a person learns Torah out of a desire for connection to Hashem, he strives to connect to the Endless, and such Torah learning is an endless kind of Torah that is connected to the “*Ein Sof*” (Endlessness) of Hashem. When a person learns Torah in this way, he will receive an ‘endless’ kind of Torah, a Torah that is connected with the “*Ein Sof*” of Hashem.

To Have Aspirations For The Unlimited

But, in order to have this, a person must have “endless” aspirations - a person must have aspirations to overcome all the obstacles in the way of learning Torah.

There are two opposite abilities within us – an ability to be limited, to understand our limits, as well as an ability to be endless. We must know where our current level is; we must know our limits, and this is our ‘limited’ aspect. But we must also know to where we want to be headed towards; these are our aspirations, which is our ‘unlimited’ aspect.

If the aspirations of a person for spiritual progress are only limited aspirations, that means that a person doesn’t really want to have the endless connection to Hashem, because he is only limited in his aspirations. But if a person wants to have endless connection to Hashem, such a person is learning with real *d’veykus* (attachment) to Hashem.

A person shouldn’t have aspirations with the attitude that he is worthy for the Torah. We indeed were not worthy to receive the Torah; we were in the lowest levels of impurity, in the “49th level of impurity” which we descended to in Egypt.

So the introspection to make is not about “Who am I that I should receive the Torah?” Rather, the attitude should be that a person is well aware of his limits and his shortcomings, but that he can *still* receive the Torah from Hashem - because Hashem is endless, and He can give endless illuminations upon a person.

Hashem can give us the Torah even if we aren’t worthy – as long as we *believe*, with our *emunah*, that He can always give us the Torah, no matter our situation.

Emunah – Believe That Hashem Can Give Us Anything We Aspire For

Our *emunah* is thus the tool that we need to receive any spiritual benefits.

Why must we believe in *Moshiach*? He’s coming anyway, so why do we have to hope he will come? It is because through *emunah* (belief), we have the tool to receive Hashem’s spiritual sustenance. With *emunah*, we can enable anything to happen.

We must *believe* that we can merit to have the Torah, even if we are at a lowly level. We must *believe* that Hashem can give it to us no matter where we are at. That is our *emunah*.

But without *emunah*, a person only receives Torah in a very limited way, because he remains with just his human mind, and the mind is indeed very limited; there can be no greater loss than this.

May we merit from Hashem to truly *believe* that Hashem wants to give us the Torah, and that He wants us to accept it through the depth of our hearts. Through this *emunah*, may we should merit to receive an endless kind of Torah – and thereby connect to Hashem, who is Endless.

9 | The Happiness Of Learning Torah

The Happiness Of Learning

One of the 48 qualities of the Torah is “*simchah*” – happiness.

It is clear that *Chazal* were referring to happiness over the Torah and not any other happiness. What is the happiness we must have in the Torah?

We celebrate our joy over the Torah in the festival of *Simchas Torah*, in which we are happy over completing the Torah. But this is not what the quality of *simchah* which *Chazal* are referring to; *Chazal* were speaking about a quality we need to *get* to the Torah. This is a happiness in every detail and aspect in learning Torah, even before we have gotten to its completion.

What is this happiness?

“There Is No Happiness Like The Clarification Of Doubts”

The *Rema* (in *sefer Toras HaOlah*) writes that “There is no happiness like the clarification of doubts.” Why indeed is this the greatest happiness that exists? Why is getting rid of our doubts considered the epitome of happiness?

There is happiness between a husband and wife, as well as a *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov*; is this not as great as when a person clarifies a doubt? What is so joyous about getting rid of one’s doubts?

When it comes to *shidduchim* (finding a spouse), we can understand why this is such a great *simchah*, because it is a very happy feeling to finally find your life partner. Here we can understand why being clear of a doubt brings a person happiness; it feels like a relief. But in the regular case, why is getting rid of one’s doubts considered the greatest happiness? By *simchas Yom Tov*, is there a clarification of doubt?!

It is written, “*The laws of Hashem gladden the heart.*” The Torah only gladdens a person’s heart when he is in doubt about something as he is learning, and when he finally gains clarity, the learning is very enjoyable to him. But if someone doesn’t think enough into what he is learning about, his questions don’t bother him so much, so he doesn’t experience this great happiness of getting rid of his doubts.

This great happiness is only possible for one who thinks and reflects and encounters difficulties in his learning.

We can see many people who learn Torah, yet they don't look happy. Why don't they look happy? Doesn't the Torah gladden a person's heart? The answer to this is because they aren't thinking enough as they learn, so they don't experience the happiness of a doubt that goes away. Therefore, they never get to the happiness in learning the Torah.

Many times a person learning Torah for a long time feels that he isn't succeeding at learning. He thinks he is one of the people whom *Chazal* say "do not see blessing in their learning." Really the reason why a person doesn't see success in his learning is because he isn't deeply connected to learning, thus he is not learning Torah in the right way. He *knows* of Torah, but his *heart* isn't in it. The Torah isn't a life giving connection to him; it's just *knowledge* to him. When the Torah is just "*knowledge*" to a person, and he isn't *connected* to it with his *heart*, he is apt to disconnect from the Torah. But when a person is connected to the Torah with his heart – besides for with his mind – he won't be able to pull away from it, ever.

The Heart Sees The Wisdom of The Torah

It is written, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*" The wisest person of all, Shlomo *HaMelech*, states that it is only his "heart" which was able to connect to the wisdom he saw. Our *brain* can know a lot and it can perceive a lot of information, processing it intellectually, but it is only our *heart* which really understands the wisdom we come across in life and connects us to the facts we know.

It is the heart within us which "sees" wisdom. What is the different between when our eyes sees something, to when our heart sees something? To illustrate the difference, the *Gemara* says that "anyone who did not see the building of Hordes never saw beauty his whole life." When someone reads this *Gemara*, does he really see this beauty? He can imagine it, but he will never see it. But someone who saw it saw such beauty that when the Temple was destroyed, it bothered him, because he really knew how beautiful it was.

At the giving of the Torah, there was a great happiness. *Chazal* say that "The words of Torah should be to you as happy as they were at Har Sinai." What was this happiness? At Har Sinai, they were able to "see" the voice of Hashem. 'Seeing' the voice is not the same as 'hearing' a voice. *Hearing* a voice is a *mental* ability, whereas *seeing* a voice means to *connect* to it, with our *heart*.

The Balance Between Responsibility And Happiness

We were forced to accept the Torah, yet we also said "We will do" and "We will hear". *Tosafos*⁶ asks: Why did Hashem have to force us to accept the Torah, if we said that we will do and we will hear?

⁶ *Shabbos 88a*

There are many answers to this, but along the lines of our discussion, it is because we need two kinds of connection to the Torah. We need a responsibility toward the Torah – to accept the yoke of Torah. For this reason we were forced to accept the Torah. But we also need happiness in the Torah, and that is why we had to accept in our own; to show this.

Without responsibility, our happiness would be frivolity. But without happiness, it would be impossible to survive. Without happiness, it is impossible to learn Torah. This is not just another detail in our learning; it is not another nice quality to have. Without happiness in learning, a person won't be able to learn.

A Life Without A Heart

In order to reach this happiness, we need to live the right kind of life.

When a person is brain-dead, G-d forbid, he can still be considered alive, according to the Torah. But when a person's heart ceases to function, it's all over. The Torah defines the cessation of the heart as death. That is true with the physical, but this idea also has similar ramifications in the spiritual realm. In our own life, if a person lives without a "heart connection" to the Torah and to his *ruchniyus* (spirituality), his life is not considered to be a real "life".

To further illustrate, the feelings of love and happiness are in our heart; we must have those feelings, and without them, it's a deathlike kind of existence.

What Chinuch Looks Like Without The Heart

Since the first day a person enters *yeshiva* – all through the way through high school and *beis midrash*, and then to *kolel* – a person is taught more and more knowledge by his teachers. He is taught more and more – all the many *shittos* (opinions) of *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* that exist; his mind matures with the more knowledge he receives. But what about his [spiritual] heart? Does his heart mature as well....?

The mind of a person matures as he gets older, but the heart often remains the same since a person was a child! When a child is taught all the knowledge about the Torah, his heart often remains immature. Very often, in order to get a child to learn, he is offered more and more physical gratification in order to get him to want to learn. His heart is being more and more attached to materialism, and he is expected to grow in his mind through this way....

In fact, often this is the intention of the teachers in the *yeshiva*: that he should just focus on developing his mind, not his heart. The heart is sacrificed so that the mind can grow!

What results from this? A person gets older and he gets to ‘know’ more and more Torah, but his heart is still the same immature as when he was a child, and many times it can be even more immature than when he was a child.

The person at some point will feel a contradiction in his life, and deep down he will start thinking: “Everyone tells me that the main thing in life is Torah and *mitzvos*. I know this, and that is what I was always taught. But my heart feels differently. I *know* that the main thing is learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*. I *know* it very well. But I don’t *feel* this way!”

And he is not to blame. He was taught by a system of education in which they were well aware that his heart would be sacrificed in favor of developing his intellectual abilities. He was taught to just focus on his learning, and that the heart isn’t important....

A person in this way grows up feeling a contradiction in himself; at a certain point, he will feel the gnawing contradiction between his mind and his heart. He *knows* in his mind what’s important, but his *heart* feels differently. He *knows* a lot of *Gemara* with *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* and all the various opinions out there, but meanwhile, his heart continues to want many desires of This World. He doesn’t actually *feel* in his actual life the *ruchniyus* that he knows from what he has learned about in *yeshivah*.

Simple Feelings of the Heart

We are not implying, of course, that a person has to cut himself off totally from physical desires and to just eat bread and water. We are not speaking of high levels. We are speaking about simple feelings that a person needs to have – to feel that the Torah is our life, to feel a vitality from Shabbos and Yom Tov when it comes.

Many people don’t even have these simple feelings, and it is because they don’t consider these matters to be what gives them life. It is all because people are raised with a contradiction between the heart and the mind.

When people lose interest in learning Torah and in doing the *mitzvos* when they get older, the problem is not that people don’t feel a *cheishek* (enthusiasm) for *ruchniyus* (spirituality), nor does this problem begin with the fact that a person doesn’t feel like getting up on time in the morning to *daven*. Those are just the *results* of a larger problem inside himself that was never addressed beforehand.

The root of the problem is that people still have a heart of an infant, and they were never taught about how to connect their hearts to what they learn. The heart is still immature and hasn’t grown since the person was a child.

When The Heart Is More Dominant Than The Mind

Others have the opposite problem. Their hearts are very strong, but their intellect is not. It can get to the point that a person only listens to what his heart feels, so if one day he just feels like going off the *derech*, he will choose to listen to his feelings, over what he knows in his mind.

We can compare this to the following scenario. Imagine a person becomes a *Baal Teshuvah* and he wants to start learning. He comes to the *beis midrash* and he is told, “Figure out the difference between what Rav Chaim Brisker is saying to what Rav Shimon Shkop is saying.” He has no idea what to do. Why not? Isn’t he a smart and intelligent person? He is, but when it comes to Torah, his mind is the same as a child’s mind.

Anyone who has learned with *Baalei Teshuvah* knows what this is. Many *Baalei Teshuvah* indeed fall back to their old ways because of this; their heart is strong, but their minds are lacking. There is a contradiction between the mind and the heart.

The first kind of contradiction we mentioned – a strong mind with a weak heart – is a problem that most people have. Only few individuals who have worked very hard on themselves don’t have this problem.

Build Your Heart’s Connection To The Torah

If we build our heart, we will have a connection to the Torah through our heart, not just through our minds, and this will truly connect us the Torah.

Of course, no one is perfect. No one has a heart that is perfectly in line with what he knows in his mind. (If someone’s heart and mind is totally equal in strength, then he is probably one of the thirty six hidden *tzaddikim*). Our point here is that we just need to build our heart’s connection with the Torah.

May we merit that these words should change our heart, to grow higher and higher in our *ruchniyus*, and to connect to the Torah with our hearts. Through that, we can arrive at the great happiness that can be felt in learning the Torah.

*10 | Serving the Wise**The Importance of Shimush Chachamim/Serving The Wise*

The next of the 48 qualities listed in the Mishnah is “*shimush chachamim*” (serving the wise). What is *shimush chachamim* (serving the wise)?

The *Gemara*⁷ states that one is allowed to interrupt his Torah learning to greet a bride or escort the dead; *Tosafos* there states that even though learning Torah may be interrupted for such events, the *mitzvah* of “*shimush chachamim*” (serving one’s teacher) may never be interrupted.

Why indeed is “*shimush chachamim*” so important? Even if it is so important to acquire the Torah, how can it be more important than learning Torah itself?

To know the answer to this, we will need to think about what *shimush chachamim* is - and what its purpose is.

Elevating Creation

The *Mesillas Yescharim* writes that the more perfect a person makes himself, the more he elevates Creation; we see this from Yaakov *Avinu*, when the each of the twelve stones wanted him to put his head on them. This shows us what “*shimush chachamim*” is; it is because we are supposed to elevate Creation, and it is the *chachamim* (wise Torah sages) who elevate Creation. Thus, we must cling to *chachamim*.

Why must we learn from wise people? Don’t *Chazal* say that we must learn from all people, not just wise people? The simple answer to this is that wise people can teach us more than simple teach us, and therefore we must also seek to learn from wise people.

But the deeper answer is because after the Torah was given through Moshe *Rabbeinu*, we understand Torah only through the *chachamim* who teach it to us.

Shimush Chachamim – Clinging To Perfection

We are supposed to elevate Creation, as we quoted before from the *Mesillas Yescharim*. The reason why we are supposed to elevate Creation is part of how we become close to Hashem. Creation

⁷ Kesubos 17a

actually represents man; the Torah as well represents a picture of the perfect kind of man that can exist.

The *halachah* is that an animal of a *Kohen* is allowed to eat *terumah* (sanctified portions that may not be eaten by a non-*Kohen*). The depth of this is that all of Creation is really a part of man, and since the *Kohen* owns the animal, his holiness spreads to the animal, and thus the animal is allowed to eat *terumah*.

All of Creation is really a representation of man in his most perfect form (“*tzuras adam hashaleim*”). Before the first sin of Adam, man was perfect. After the sin, we sank to an animalistic level. When we stood at Har Sinai, we once again returned to the apex of human perfection. As we received the Torah in its pure holiness at Sinai, we were utterly perfect.

What is a ‘perfect’ person – an *adam hashaleim*? A superficial person thinks that it is to be physically perfect, to have no blemishes on the body. But the true definition of a “perfect” person is someone who reaches human perfection, *shleimus*.

“*Shimush chachamim*” is essentially about connecting ourselves to those people who are more perfected than us – the wise Torah scholars. The more perfected a person is, the closer he is to the level we were at the beginning of Creation and the level of when we stood at Sinai. For this reason, we must serve the wise, because in that way, we connect ourselves to perfection – and then we can receive perfection from them.

Therefore, we need specifically “*shimush chachamim*”, even though we are supposed to learn from all people as well. Why? It is because it is not enough to learn from all people in the general sense. We need to also learn from those who are more perfected, because only those who are perfected will impart to us the perfection that we need to acquire.

The Point of ‘Perfection’ Within Each Of Us

At Har Sinai, we had no *yetzer hora* (evil inclination); it left us. We were at a perfect level; at the perfect level, man doesn’t even have a *yetzer hora*, because he doesn’t even have a thought to commit any evil. He is utterly connected to the Creator that all he wants is to do the will of the Creator. He has no other possibilities. This is the perfected level of man, “*adam hashaleim*” – and we were at this level as we stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah.

We all said “*Naaseh V’Nishma*” (“We will do, and we will hear”) at Har Sinai, because all we wanted to do was listen to Hashem’s will. We had no other desire whatsoever. We were at perfection, and therefore, we had no other *retzonos* (desires) in us other than do the *ratzon* of Hashem.

But after we stood by Har Sinai, we once again fell from this level with the sin of the Golden Calf, and the *Luchos* (Tablets) were broken. When the first *Luchos* were broken, it ended the kind of perfected level we were at. However, every year when it comes Shavuot again, the special time of

standing at Har Sinai returns, and we have the chance to once again access the great spiritual level that is inherent in this time [to a certain extent].

Before the sin with the Golden Calf, there was a whole different kind of Torah – it was a Torah of before sin. After the sin, the second pair of *Luchos* we received was a Torah that came after the sin, and it was not as perfected as the Torah contained in the original set of *Luchos*.

We must prepare ourselves to receive the Torah of the first pair of *Luchos*, in which there was no sin yet. How do we return to the level of the first set of *Luchos*? How do we prepare ourselves to receive it?

Every person contains within himself depth upon depth. The *Maharal* writes that sin by a Jew is never part of his essence; it is rather *mikreh*, “happenstance”, and it only exists on the outer layer of man. Even if a Jew falls to a sin, the sin never becomes a part of his actual soul. We all have in us an inner point, an inner layer of our heart, which is never affected by evil; the *Sfas Emes* writes about this concept at length.

Our *avodah* to prepare for Shavuos is essentially about revealing our innermost point of the soul, the point in us which contains no evil. This is how we can receive the original Torah of the first set of *Luchos*, which was a Torah given in a world where there was no sin yet.

Believe In The Purity of Your Soul

The way we access this point is by having the *emunah* (belief) that we are always intrinsically pure. This is not intellectual knowledge, but rather, something we can firmly establish in our soul; let the knowledge about this matter penetrate into your heart.

Use your *emunah* and believe that there is place in your heart which is totally pure, and that this place in your heart can allow you to receive the perfected level of Torah that existed before any sin.

The *Gemara* says that “On Shabbos, everyone agrees that the Torah was given.” The depth of this matter is that Shabbos represents the innermost point of our soul which is unaffected by any evil or sin, and thus, the Torah was given on “*Shabbos*” – it is accessed by the innermost place in our soul which is unaffected by sin.

We must realize that there is a G-dly spark in us, and that this G-dly spark within each of us enables us to return to the level of Har Sinai and receive even the first set of *Luchos*, which was the perfected level of Torah.

Preparing For Shavuos

The 49 days of the *Omer* represent the “49 Gates of Understanding”. The 50th Gate of Understanding, the *Ramban* writes, is described as “knowing of G-dliness.”

49 · The 48 Ways

The 50th Gate of Understanding is above all the other 49, and it is the innermost point of our soul – to only know of Hashem. It is there that we can receive the perfect level of Torah, the Torah that was given in a world which did not sin yet.

We can use this innermost point in our soul – otherwise known as the “50th Gate of Understanding” within us – to prepare for the receiving of the Torah that comes each year on Shavuos.

The way we prepare for the Torah is by realizing that we have a G-dly spark in us; according to the amount that we recognize this, that is how much Torah will be revealed to us.

Each of us receives Torah “on our own level”; we are not all receiving the same exact level of Torah. And the way we can each receive Torah “on our own level” is by realizing that we have an inner, “G-dly spark” in us that is pure.

This is the inner *avodah* of preparing for Shavuos. After 49 days of counting the Omer, we reach the “50th day” – Shavuos. The first 49 days of the Omer represent the “49 Gates of *Binah*/Understanding), as is well-known; and Shavuos represents the “50th level of Understanding”. On the 50th day, Shavuos, we can come to the “50th Gate of Understanding”. This is the depth to why there is no more recitation of *Sefiras HaOmer* after 49 days – it is because the 50th day is on such a high level that it cannot be verbalized by the mouth at all.

May we merit to prepare our heart and purify it, so that we can properly receive the Torah, and to reveal the perfection of Torah in our souls – the kind of Torah that is “one” with Hashem and Yisrael.

// | Dikduk Chaveirim – Dealing With Opposite Thinking

Dikduk Chaveirim: Understanding Others

With the help of Hashem, we are approaching Shavuot, the day of the giving of the Torah.

One of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah, the *Mishnah* says, is through “*dikduk chaveirim*” – to examine the way of how our friends think when we learn Torah with others.

We will try to understand more what this concept is.

Chazal tell us that no two friends think alike. Every person has a different way of thinking. We all have a different and unique kind of *daas*; the Sages say, “Just as all faces are not equal, so are all *de’os* (opinions) not equal.”

The concept of *dikduk chaveirim* is that we have to get used to others’ thinking, besides for our own thinking. We need to come to understand how others think. It is for us to come out of how we are used to thinking, and come to understand an opposite view of how we are used to thinking.

This is a way of how to prepare for the Torah. Simply, this is because without a *chavrusa*, we can’t learn properly, because when we learn without a *chavrusa*, we are off-base and we make mistakes in learning the Torah.

The Power To Deal With Opposition

But the deeper understanding of *dikduk chaveirim* is as follows.

The Torah contains in it both positive and negative commandments. We must come to accept all of the Torah commandments – not just the positive commandments, but the negative commandments.

“*I am Hashem your G-d*”, the first commandment, represents all of the positive commandments. The second commandment, “*And you shall have no other gods before Me*”, was a negative commandment, and it is the root of all the negative commandments in the Torah.

In our soul, we have two powers. We have a power to accept the positive commandments, the *mitzvos*. But we also have a power to accept the negative commandments – to avoid the *aveiros*. The first power is known as the power of “*chiyuvi*”, to make use of positive concepts. The second power is called “*shelilah*” – to be able to deal with “negative” concepts.

What exactly is the power of “*shelilah*” in our soul? It is an ability in us to accept something that opposes us; to nullify ourselves. Just like we have to perform positive actions, so do we need to make use of the opposite power – to deal with something that negates us. We have an ability to deal with what opposes us, and the way we can do this is by nullifying ourselves to what opposes us.

The two root commandments of the Torah were “*I am Hashem your G-d*”, as well as “*And you shall have no other gods before Me.*” They are both equally important. On one hand, we have all the *mitzvos* to keep, and this is represented by the *mitzvah* of “*I am Hashem your G-d.*” At the same time, we also have to avoid negative actions, and this is represented by “*And you shall have no other gods before Me.*”

How do we keep the negative commandments? It is by **nullifying** ourselves [to the will of Hashem]; to nullify our pull towards materialistic desires of this world. When we nullify our desires more and more, we build our power of “*shelilah*” – we are able to deal with negativity.

But a deeper way to acquire the power of “*shelilah*” is through learning the Torah. The entire Torah is contained in the first two commandments, and therefore, we can acquire the power of “*shelilah*” (self-nullification) through learning the Torah.

Happiness When We Learn Torah

When a person learns Torah, he usually aspires to acquire more and more knowledge of Torah. But this leads to a problem: he never rejoices in what he has learned until then. He always wants more and more Torah – and he is never happy with what he has learned so far. The way to counter this imbalanced idealism is to **nullify** yourself. Realize how happy you can be by the fact that you’ve already been *zoche* to learn so much Torah.

The *Mishnah* says, “Who is happy? One who is happy with his lot.” The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that even in our *ruchniyus*/spirituality, we must be happy with our lot. Although we must have aspirations to grow more in our *ruchniyus*, we must also be very happy with what we have gained until now.

The Torah which you have learned so far has become a part of you! Realize this and be happy about this.

If we are happy with what we have gained thus far in our *ruchniyus*, why should we aspire to grow more? And if we need to do more, how can we be happy? But the answer to this is that we need both perspectives at once. On one hand, we need to be happy with our spiritual gains thus far, but at the same time, we must also aspire for more and more spiritual gains.

How do we come to terms with this paradox? How are we able to both be aspiring and content at the same time? If someone’s perfect, then he has nothing to aspire to. If he doesn’t know a thing in Torah, he has to aspire for more, so how can he be happy?! What does it mean that one has to be *someach b’chelko* in his learning?

The answer is: “*Hashem and the Torah are one.*”⁸ When a person learns Torah, he has to realize that Torah is “one” with Hashem; in other words, Hashem must be in the picture of his learning. A person can only be happy with learning Torah when he feels that Hashem through his learning.

At the same time, a person also has to feel that he needs to learn more Torah, and to realize that Torah is endless.

The Balance Between Aspirations and Inner Happiness

If a person only focuses on his happiness and he never aspires, he won't grow, yet if he learns a lot and he is never happy, he will never feel the happiness of learning. We need both perspectives at once in our learning – to be happy with our Torah learning, yet we still aspire for more growth.

The way to achieve this is by revealing the presence of Hashem in our learning.

For example, let's say a person has learned much of *Shas*. This won't be enough to make him happy with his Torah learning, because there is always more in Torah that he still hasn't learned yet. When a person only aspires to grow and he never reflects on what he has gained thus far, he will never be happy, no matter how much Torah he learns.

On one hand, the Torah is endless, and therefore we must keep aspiring to learn more and more Torah. On the other hand, because it is so endless, we must have some *bittul* – we must ‘nullify’ ourselves, and remain happy with whatever we have indeed learned thus far.

The way we prepare for Torah is not just through ‘learning’ the Torah on the intellectual level. It is to make a soul preparation for the Torah. The way we prepare for the Torah in our souls is to realize that we have a two-fold, paradoxical job to do: we must aspire to always learn more and more Torah, yet at the same time, we must be “happy with our lot” even in matters of our *ruchniyus*.

Dikduk Chaveirim: Getting Used To Contradictions In Life

This is the meaning behind *dikduk chaveirim*. When we get used to understanding others who think differently than us, it helps us deal with the concept of contradictions. Others' thinking contradicts how we think, and this helps us understand that our Torah learning contains a great contradiction – that on one hand, we aspire for more Torah, but at the same time, we are happy and content with our learning thus far. *Dikduk chaveirim* serves to get used to this contradictory concept – something that is necessary for our learning.

May we be *zoche* to prepare for the Torah in this way.

התורה נקנית בפילפול ותלמידים 12

12 | "Pilpul" – Learning To Get To The Truth

Discussing The Torah: Getting To The Truth

One of the 48 qualities to acquire the Torah is "*pilpul talmidim*" – for a teacher to discuss Torah with his students.

Why is it that "*pilpul*" is so necessary to acquire the Torah?

The Torah is called "*Toras Emes*" – the "Torah of truth". It was given to Moshe *Rabbeinu* at Har Sinai and passed on to his student, Yehoshua, who passed it on to the elders. Torah has to be given over in a *mesorah*, from teacher to student, because it is a "Torah of truth".

"Hashem's seal is truth", and He has placed his seal of truth on the Torah, which is *emes l'amitoh* - the perfect truth.

Searching For True Understanding, When We Learn Torah

When a person learns *Gemara*, what he is looking for in his learning? He must search for the **truth** in his learning.

We all understand that it is impossible to really understand the *Gemara* unless we exert ourselves to understand it. But the question is: what are we *searching* for as we learn? It is not enough for a person to simply try to 'understand' what the *Gemara* is saying and what the *Rishonim* are saying; that is certainly necessary, but it is not enough. A person has to be concerned about what the *truth* is in what he learns.

The Torah is called "*Toras Emes*". If a person doesn't seek to understand the truth in what he's learning, he is far from the true Torah, even if he works hard to understand it intellectually.

One's Torah learning is measured according to how much truth he seeks in his learning. Our soul must be searching for the truth in all that we learn. This is a way on how to view life.

Motivations In Learning

Some people learn because they want to know the *masechta* (tractate of *Gemara*), or because they want to learn for a certain amount of hours a day. Others want to learn the *Gemara* well so that they can feel like they know a part of Torah. These are all kinds of motivations that people have in

learning, but it isn't enough; one has to seek the truth in what he learns, or else he is very far from the Torah, no matter how much he learns.

Even if he finishes the *masechta* of what he's learning, he can still be very far from the Torah if he doesn't seek truth in his learning.

We must know our motivations in why we learn Torah. We aren't addressing people who learn for competition and honor. We are addressing even those who learn for better motivations, such as those who learn Torah because they want to really know it and be clear in it – that even this is not enough. A person has to undergo an internal clarification with himself and ask himself: “What is connecting me to the Torah? Why do I learn Torah...”

It is not enough for a person to know that we are *commanded* by Hashem to learn Torah. One has to know what *personally motivates* him to learn Torah. There is no one answer for all people - each person has his own personal reason of why he learns Torah.

But whatever the motivation one has in learning Torah, he should make sure that *seeking the truth* in our learning is mainly part of the equation.

The 'Torah of Truth'

When we read the words of the *Gemara* or the *Rishonim*, it is not enough to try and understand their words, or even to have *chiddushim*. We must get to the truth of each matter that we learn. The Torah is a “Torah of *emes* (truth)”!

When Moshe *Rabbeinu* broke the first set of *Luchos* after the sin of the Golden Calf, we lost the *Torah shel Emes*. In this original level of Torah, we didn't require *pilpul talmidim* (discussing it with students). Now we need *pilpul talmidim*, because since we have lost the true level of Torah, we need *pilpul talmidim* to get us back to the truth.

We can see this from the fact that there are so many ways to learn every *sugya*; there are multiple approaches to every *sugya*. This is all because we have lost the true level of Torah, which was contained in the original set of *Luchos*.

How To Seek The Truth In The Torah

What does it mean to search for the truth in Torah?

Here is an example. Let's say a person is learning the words of the *Ramban* on a *sugya* of *Gemara*. If he's simply trying to understand it – but he doesn't want to get to the truth – how does he feel afterwards? Does he feel complacent afterwards, or does he seek even afterwards to keep knowing more?

If he is really searching for the truth, he will not be satisfied even after he understands the words of the *Ramban*. He will demand for a more truthful understanding.

One of the *Gedolim* once said, “Who is arrogant enough to say that he understands what Abaye is saying in the *Gemara*, when Abaye himself didn’t even know what he was saying...?”

When we learn the *Gemara* and the *Rishonim*, we must realize that the Sages were way above us, and even when we understand their words, it’s only according to our limited comprehension. There is so much more to their words that we don’t understand. Our comprehension is so limited. And surely when it comes to learning *Chumash*, which was written by Hashem Himself, we don’t understand it! We don’t understand the true meaning. If someone thinks he understands, he’s totally conceited.

A person has to feel that there is always a more truthful way to understand what he is learning.

Examine Your Connection To The Torah

Let’s ask a simple question. It is now the year 5773. Compared to a year ago, do you feel more connected to the Torah? Do you think you understand the Torah better now than a year ago?

It can’t be, because Torah is called “an endless sea”. We should not ever think that we really understand it. It’s endless!

It’s not enough for a person that every year, he resolves that he will keep finishing *masechtos* (tractates). This is of course commendable, but the real question is: How much have you developed an inward kind of connection to your learning?

We must keep searching for the truth – more and more. We must always search for a more and more subtle understanding in whatever we learn in the Torah.

A person needs to therefore ask himself if his connection to the Torah has grown since a year ago. We must yearn to keep finding the truth of Torah and to keep refining it.

Thus, the concept of “*pilpul talmidim*” is not just a way for us to clarify what the Torah is saying. It exists so that we can get to the truth of the Torah.

We must know what our connection is to the Torah, and if we have changed since a year ago towards the Torah. And we must ask ourselves how we will prepare for the Torah.

May we be *zoche* to the coming of *Moshiach*, when we will hear the Torah directly from the mouth of Hashem.

13 | "Mikra" – Hearing Hashem's Call

Mikra: Hearing "Hashem's Call" - Through Our Torah Learning

One of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah is "Mikra". Simply, this means that we need to learn *Chumash*, as we know that our Sages say that one should split up his learning into three subjects: *Chumash*, *Mishnayos* and *Gemara*.

But the deeper definition of "Mikra" means "to call", as we find "*Vayikra Hashem el Moshe*" ("And Hashem called to Moshe"). In other words, Hashem calls to us so that we can heed His word.

When a person is learning Torah, he is reading about what Hashem is 'calling' him to do. It's like when you read a letter; you are reading what a person is trying to tell you through the letter.

When we learn Torah, do we have this perspective? Are we simply learning about the commandments of Hashem that we have to fulfill – or do we look at it as Hashem is *calling* to us to do something? Do we hear the 'call of Hashem' to us when we learn Torah? The Torah is not about history of the past. It is the guide that helps us live now, in the present moment. Every *possuk* in the Torah is calling to us and telling us what Hashem wants. The Hebrew word "*possuk*" is also known as "*mikra*" – it is a message and calling from Hashem to us. But not everyone who learns Torah hears Hashem calling to him through the Torah.

For example, a person is reading in the Torah the word "*Beraishis*", that in the beginning, Hashem created the world. Does he hear Hashem calling to him something through the word *Beraishis*? Or does he just view it as something that happened once in history.... When a person learns Torah – any *possuk* in the Torah – he must hear Hashem calling to him through the *possuk*! In order for a person to hear Hashem's call through the Torah, he first has to *believe* in the first place that Hashem is indeed calling to him through the Torah.

The Oral Torah is called Torah "*sheh-baal peh*", Torah of the "mouth". The Torah is really speaking to us. When we learn with a *chavrusa*, it's clear that someone is speaking to us; but when we learn Torah, we also have to understand that we are being spoken to. Hashem speaks to us through the Torah.

Including Hashem In Our Learning

The *Gemara* says, "Hashem sits and learns with the person [who learns Torah]." This is the concept we are describing: because Hashem is really calling out to us in the Torah when we learn it.

If a person learns Torah but he isn't aware that Hashem speaks to him through the Torah, then he's basically learning Torah with himself. He's not learning Torah with Hashem next to him. But when a person understands that Hashem calls to him through the Torah he learns, such Torah learning is being spent with Hashem.

Hashem Is Talking To "Me"

This is a deep matter, and it is only understood if we have "*avanta d'liba*" (understanding of the heart).⁹ When we learn Torah, we must feel that Hashem is speaking to us we are learning! The words of Torah we learn are how Hashem speaks to us!

Imagine if a *sefer* would come out written by Avraham *Avinu*, and it is about what Avraham *Avinu* has to tell us. We would all run to go buy it and see what it written there. Well, the *Torah* is what *Hashem* has to tell us! Why aren't people running to go hear what Hashem has to tell us...?

Usually when a person learns Torah, he learns it simply trying to understand what the commandments are. But the Torah is much more than that. It is Hashem talking to us.

This understanding greatly affects how we approach learning Torah, how we view it. It is an entirely different attitude to have towards learning Torah: *Hashem is speaking to us through the Torah*.

Hashem Is Calling To Me, Personally

Not only does Hashem speak to *us* through the Torah, in the collective sense, but He speaks to all of us on an *individual* level as well. A person has to feel as he is learning Torah that "Hashem is speaking to *me* as I am learning."

Not only does Hashem speak to all of us through the Torah, but he speaks to each person as an individual. Therefore, a person has to feel that Hashem is speaking to him – personally – through the Torah.

To illustrate what we mean, sometimes a person goes to a funeral and hears a very moving *hesped* (eulogy). He feels awakened and inspired from it. However, he doesn't always hear the *hesped* speaking to him on a personal level. Rather, he hears the inspiring words that are being delivered to the audience, and from that, he gets inspired; but he doesn't feel that the words are addressing him directly.

When a person learns Torah, it is not enough for a person to feel that Hashem is addressing the Jewish people in the general sense; rather, he has to feel that Hashem is speaking directly to him, on a *personal* level – he must feel that Hashem is speaking to "*Me*".

⁹ See Rashi to *Chagigah* 12b. For more on '*avanta d'liba*', see *Bilvavi Part 9 Chapter 1*.

When we stood at Har Sinai, Hashem didn't speak to us in the general sense. He wasn't addressing an audience. Rather, He was speaking to each of us *individually!*

That is how we must approach our learning. "*Mikra*" does mean simply for one to simply fulfill the *mitzvah* of "*Shnayim Mikra V'Echad Targum*" (to review the weekly *parshah*) - rather, it is to hear the "*mikra*" of each *posuk*: to hear Hashem calling to him.

This is a whole different kind of perspective to have. We must realize that Hashem speaks to all of us individually. He speaks to *you* through the Torah - not just to the Jewish people as a whole.

The Prerequisite Before Our Requests In Davening

This concept applies as well to when we *daven* and we ask things of Hashem. When we *daven*, we talk to Hashem, but we also have to realize that Hashem talks to us. If we don't hear what Hashem is telling us, then Hashem won't hear what we are asking of Him when we *daven*. Hashem acts with us in the same way we act towards Him; He reflects how we feel about Him.

The Torah of "Life" - Hearing Hashem's Call In Our Learning

The Torah is called *Toras Chaim*, a "Torah of life". Many people learn Torah and don't realize that it is a Torah of life; it is because they do not feel Hashem speaking to them through the Torah. To them, learning Torah doesn't go beyond simply 'learning' Torah, and they don't feel how Torah learning is a life-giving energy.

But learning Torah can really be a life-giving force to us - when we realize that Hashem speaks to us as we learn.

May we be *zoche* to receive the Torah, the kind of Torah that we received at Har Sinai – in which we all felt Hashem speaking to us.

14 | "Mishnah" - Accessing the Level of Being at Har Sinai

"Mishnah" - Reviewing Your Learning

One of the 48 *kinyanim* to acquire the Torah is called "Mishnah". On a simple level, this means that one has to learn the six orders of *Mishnayos*.

However, it also means that we must "review" what we learn; the word "Mishnah" comes from the word *shinun*, which is to repeat, or to review. *Chazal* learn from the possuk, "V'shi-non-tum li-vo-nec'ha" ("And you shall teach your children") that besides for learning Torah, we also have an obligation to review what we learn.

Chazal also say that we need to review our Torah learning so that "the words of Torah should be *"mechudadin b'picha"*, sharpened in your mouth", as opposed to when our learning feels to us like 'broken pieces' when we don't review it.

Through *shinun* – review of our learning – we can come to have "mechudadin" – a sharp and clear understanding of the material. The word "mechudadin" comes from the word "chad", which means "one." So through reviewing our learning - instead of having our learning in 'broken pieces' - we can get our learning to become one piece.

"Shinun" also comes from the word "Shnayim", which means "two." "Two" connotes pieces; when a person doesn't review, his learning is in pieces. A person has to have *shinun*/review in his learning in a way that he comes to have *chad*/one piece, as opposed to "Shnayim"/two pieces.

Chazal say that a person should not be like someone who is asked a question on his learning and he stutters over it – because he hasn't reviewed it and is therefore unclear of the material. Rather, one should review his learning, so that he will be able to answer questions on it. The learning should be "mechudadin b'picha", sharp in your mouth – it should be *chad* ("one") to you, as opposed to being in pieces.

Reaching Oneness

The deeper understanding, though, is as follows.

The entire Torah was told to Moshe at Sinai, even the Oral Torah. *Chazal* say that the Oral Torah went from Hashem's mouth and was carved into the *Lucho*s; in other words, the Oral Torah is part of the Written Torah.

One of the differences between the first and second *Luchos* was that the first *Luchos* directly from Hashem, and it contained both Written and Oral Torah. But the second *Luchos* only contained the Ten Commandments, and not the Oral Torah.

This is also the reason why the Oral Torah can have arguments in it [as *Chazal* reveal]. For this reason, it's possible for people not to have "*mechudadin b'picha*" when it comes to their learning; an example of this is that there were certain students of Shamai and Hillel who did not have enough *shimush* (mentoring) by their teachers, and therefore came to misinterpret the Torah.

At Har Sinai, we were all *chad*/one – we all stood as “one man, with one heart”. In order to prepare for the Torah, we all had to be “one”. Afterwards, with the sin with the Golden Calf, the unity was lost; people were killing each other. But at Har Sinai, though, we were all “one” – the perfected and ideal level of mankind.

“Hashem the Torah and Yisrael are one”. This tri-fold unity – Hashem, Torah and the Jewish people – was revealed at Har Sinai. The perfected level of mankind – stand at Sinai and receiving the Torah – is to be “one”; to be on the level in which all of the Torah is “one”, where is not split into broken pieces.

The way we prepare for the Torah is to become *chad* “one” with Hashem. [This is the deeper implication of “*Mishnah*” *mechudadin b'picha*]. Without aspiring to reach this oneness with Hashem, it can still be called Torah learning, but it's not called the “*giving*” of the Torah; it's not the perfected level of Torah which was at Har Sinai.

Shavuot – Access To Our Perfected State Of Before The Sin

Now we live after the sin with the Golden Calf, and we are missing that great level we were at when we stood at Sinai, in which we had no evil inclination. It was a level in which we transcended Creation. But when the time of the giving of the Torah comes each year, we must prepare for the kind of Torah that was given at Sinai – the kind of Torah that existed before there was any sin. It was a Torah in which we had complete unity.

Shavuot is the only remembrance we have of the exalted level of pre-sin. The other *Yomim Tovim* remember the exodus, but Shavuot is a remembrance of our state of pre-sin, and it is the only remembrance we have of this perfection we once had.

To prepare for Shavuot, it's not about learning Torah for more hours than we usually do, nor is it about staying up at night to learn. It's about preparing for the level of the pre-sin state, in which we were at a level above Creation.

Therefore, preparing for Shavuot is a much deeper kind of preparation than preparing for the other *Yomim Tovim* – is to prepare for the state of pre-sin.

Chazal say that when the Angel of Death came to take the life Dovid *HaMelech*, it couldn't kill him, because Dovid *HaMelech* was engrossed in learning Torah. It had to distract him from learning [by making noise] in order to take his life. Why is it then that people learn Torah, yet they can die in the middle of the learning? Why doesn't the Torah protect them from all harm? It is because when most people learn, it is the kind of Torah of the second *Luchos*, which came after the sin. When Dovid *HaMelech* learned, he was connected to the Torah of before sin, which was the perfected level of Torah. That was why his Torah learning made him invincible.

On each of the three festivals, there are special *mitzvos* to keep. Sukkos has the mitzvah of *sukkah* and the Four Species. Pesach has *matzah* and *maror*. Shavuos, though, has no *mitzvos*. Why not? How can it be the festival which is about the giving of the Torah doesn't contain any special *mitzvos*?

It is because Shavuos, the giving of the Torah, was a time in which the world reached perfection – and when the Torah was given, the world reached a state of complete good, in which there was no need for *mitzvos*.

Now we live after the sin of the Golden Calf, and ever since then, our Torah has fallen from the level of “Torah” to the level of “*mitzvos*”. We therefore have *mitzvos* to keep. But Shavuos comes from a higher realm, from a world higher than the world of *mitzvos*, and therefore, there are no unique *mitzvos* to keep due to Shavuos.

The Inner Light Contained On Shavuos: - A Jew Belongs In The Realm Of Torah Thought

It is possible for Shavuos to go by many times in a person's life - yet he never really gets in touch with this special festival.

The way to prepare for Shavuos is to make ourselves ‘one’ with Hashem. What does this mean?

Chazal state, “Yisrael was first in Hashem's thoughts.” The depth of this is that the essence of a Jew is *machshavah*/thought – not just to learn Torah, but to be involved in the thoughts of Hashem, which is Torah. *Ramchal* writes that “The way of the wise is to constantly think”. This is because the essence of a Jew is to be there, in that place, of true thought – the thoughts of Torah.

It's not that we have to ‘think’ more about our Torah learning – rather, it is to realize that our *entire essence as Jew* is to be that of *machshavah*/thought. (We cannot live in this perfected state completely, though, for we live after the sin).

We need to realize that the situation of today greatly contradicts the way things used to be. When a person learns Torah and he does not have trace of connection to the level of Har Sinai, he has nothing to do with standing at Har Sinai and receiving the Torah there. But if he at least makes sure to have some kind of connection to the level of standing at Har Sinai, then when he learns Torah, he has somewhat of a connection with the state of standing at Har Sinai.

The state of Har Sinai is for us to feel that Torah thought is our very essence as Jews. We need to reach this place in our soul in order to have a connection with the level we had when we were at Sinai.

Preparing for Shavuos is therefore not such a simple matter. It is not like preparing for the other *Yomim Tovim*. It is to realize that our very essence is our power of thought; to deeply realize the concept of “*Yisrael* were the first thought of Hashem”.

Of course, we cannot ‘live’ in such a world of perfection that we are describing, but we can definitely touch upon it and have a connection to it. In order to reach it, we need to remove the barriers on our soul that are holding us back from it. All of us heard the Torah at Har Sinai – not just a few individuals; so we all have the ability to access an inner place in our soul in which we can access the perfected level of being at Sinai.

The words here can open us at least a little to this deep place of our soul and how we can possibly reach it. But we definitely need *siyata d’shmaya* (Heavenly assistance) and exertion in learning in order to actually get there.

Although we live after the sin, we can believe with *emunah* that we are able to access somewhat the state of perfection.

In the future, the perfected level will once again be returned, but for now, we can at least have some access to that perfected state. It is available once every year – when Shavuos comes.

15 / Less Pleasure (1) - Getting Pleasure from Learning

Less Pleasure

There are 48 ways to acquire the Torah, which are also 48 ways of how we can *prepare* for the Torah. Let us study one of them: “less pleasure.”

The words of *Chazal* are well-known: “Eat bread dipped in salt and water in a cistern, and live a life of suffering.” Let us ask a very simple question. Are we meant to suffer on this world, or to enjoy our life?

On one hand, *Chazal* are saying that one needs to live a ‘life of suffering’. But can a person learn Torah like this? Can a person ever be happy if his life is full of pain...?

The *Mesillas Yescharim* writes in the beginning of the sefer, “A person was not created except to bask in the pleasure of Hashem.” This makes our question even stronger: we were created for pleasure! If so, why do *Chazal* say that one must live a life of suffering? Pleasure is not just for *Gan Eden* and *Olam HaBa* (the World To Come). The *Mesillas Yescharim* is telling us that even on this world, we were created to have pleasure.

Which makes our question even stronger.

What Is Real Pleasure?

Let us ask another question, a different question. Does anyone ever taste even a moment of true pleasure – “*oneg*”?

People who hear this wonder what “*oneg*” is; “What difference does it make to me if I have “*oneg*” or not? As long as my meals are good each day, that’s fine for me.”

People get their enjoyment from good food and all kinds of other physical desires of this world. When people lose interest in one kind of physical desire, they seek a new kind of physical pleasure, and they move on between pursuing different pleasures.

It is our very nature to seek pleasure. But how should we use our nature to seek our pleasure? We all need pleasure, and the only question is, *what kind of pleasure* we are having.

If someone tries to live without pleasure in his life, either this mean that he’s on a sublime level and he learns Torah totally *lishmah* (for pure motives) – or, it means that he’s living a very wrong

kind of life. It is impossible to live without pleasure! Anyone who does so is suffering, and not only that, he won't be able to live a life of Torah.

So what does it mean that we must live a 'life of suffering'?

Responsibility Vs. Pleasure

If a person has no pleasure in what he does, what will happen? He will lose interest, and he won't do it. If he's not enjoying his Torah learning, he won't learn Torah. If he's not in the mood of *davening Shacharis* in the morning, he won't *daven*.

But we know that a person has to *daven* and learn Torah, whether he's in the mood or not, because it is our obligation. This is one part of life: we have to do things even when we don't enjoy it. We are able to do things even without enjoyment, and we must be able to pull ourselves together and fulfill the Torah's obligations (i.e. learning and davening), even when we don't enjoy it.

But the other side of our life is our need for pleasure. We need to develop pleasure also, so that we won't lose interest in what we do. Someone who is level-headed will know where to get real pleasure from, so that he won't lose interest in the obligations of the Torah that are upon him.

So on one hand, we have to learn Torah and do all the *mitzvos* - whether we have pleasure in it or not. But at the same time, we need to uncover pleasure in life. And it has to be a constant kind of pleasure.

When There Is No Pleasure

When a person doesn't have pleasure in his Torah learning, he might be able to force himself to learn Torah for a few years, but then one day, he might suddenly decide to stop learning and seek a job.

Often a person will claim that he's doing it for *parnassah* (livelihood) reasons: "I have to support my family." But the real reason is because he had no source of real pleasure in his life; he had no pleasure in his Torah learning. Therefore, he looks for a job - hoping to find his pleasure there.

That's what happens to a person who lives without pleasure.

Real Pleasure – Forming A Deep Connection With Torah and Mitzvos

How indeed can we get real pleasure in our Torah learning and *mitzvos*? We all recognize what superficial pleasure is. A person enjoys good food, or from using any of his five senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, etc. But real pleasure is inner pleasure, pleasure that's *inside* yourself. The

Rambam says that all pleasure is found within the soul of man, not from anywhere on the outside. Real pleasure comes from being connected to Torah learning and to the *mitzvos*.

So a person has to be able to identify what he feels deeply connected to. We all have things we are connected to; we feel connected with our friends and family, etc. Make a list of whatever you feel deeply connected to on this world, in order of preference. This will help you get to know where you're mainly deriving pleasure from.

The more you are connected to something, the more pleasure you will have in it. The less you are connected to something, the less pleasure you have in it.

This world's pleasures are referred to by the *possuk* [in Mishlei], "*Stolen waters are sweet.*" But real pleasure, pleasure of our soul, is when we are truly *connected* to the pleasure, as opposed to a passing feeling.

What is "Oneg Shabbos"?

To give a clear example: We have a *mitzvah* to have *oneg Shabbos* (pleasure on Shabbos). What is *oneg Shabbos*? Does it mean to have good food?

We enjoy good food. But is that what '*oneg Shabbos*' is? If you would have that same good food on Sunday, it would be just as good. So what does the good food have to do with Shabbos..?

The true meaning of "*Oneg Shabbos*" is to enjoy "Shabbos" *itself*. Is there anyone who can say that he derives enjoyment on Shabbos just from the very fact that it is Shabbos?

Torah and *mitzvos* can be real pleasure to us. But sadly, a person can very well be living his life always learning Torah and always doing all the *mitzvos*, while having never experienced true pleasure in his Torah learning, in his *mitzvos*, in Shabbos.

Feeling Alive From Our Torah Learning

The Torah was given to us by Hashem, and we accepted it. The Torah was given on Shabbos, a time of *oneg*/pleasure. We received the Torah amidst pleasure.

Without this, we wouldn't be able to learn Torah our whole life, because we would be missing pleasure. We wouldn't be able to hold up that long.

Every person has connection in his life – to his parents, to his friends, with his family. The connection we need to have with Torah must be constant.

When a person is in *yeshivah*, he needs to ask himself each year (when it comes Shavuot time) if his connection to the Torah has grown deeper than those connections.

We miss our friends and family when we don't see them. Do we miss the Torah when we don't learn it? When it comes *Bein HaZemanim*, do we miss learning and wish we could be sitting and learning it as much as we do during *yeshiva*...?

If we are truly connected to the Torah, our pleasure in it will grow, and we will live a life of happiness.

When people aren't happy, it might be because of various problems: "I don't have a good *chavrusa*", etc. But one can still be happy in spite of his problems - if he feels a deep connection to Torah. And this does not mean that he's happy over the mere fact that he "sits and learns" the Torah. The happiness one must come to feel is: that he feels truly and ***deeply connected*** to the Torah.

This gives a person a constant source of vitality for his whole life, even when he goes through troubles. It fills him with a happiness that cannot be taken away by any problem.

The Secret of Being A 'Masmid'

How many hours a day does a person have to learn Torah for? Every moment, as the *Rambam* writes. What is the reason for this? If you tell anyone that you have to learn every second, he will look at you as if you're crazy; to learn Torah every second?! Sure, there are times of the day when we learn, but every second...? Torah learning is really "every second" because it is a soul kind of connection.

Our soul has to be connected to Torah learning, and then it will constantly find pleasure in it. We recognize that our body needs constant air in order to live, and that every second, we must breathe in or out. We all need to eat in order to live. Our soul also needs to be sustained. We need to feel our soul's hunger, and then we will seek to feed it, all the time, with Torah learning.

Know Your Personal Reason Of Why You Learn

Everyone here [in this audience] is *zoche* to be sitting and learning Torah. Why is each person sitting here and learning? Everyone has their own answer.

But a person needs to ask himself: "Why do I, personally, learn Torah?"

Of course, one has to learn Torah even when he's not in the mood, because Hashem commanded us to. But let's say Hashem wouldn't command you to learn Torah. Would you still learn Torah?

The *Avos* learned Torah even though Hashem didn't command them to. So there is more to Torah learning than just the fact that we are commanded by Hashem to learn Torah.

First one should clarify through the teachings of *Chazal* about all the reasons why we need to learn Torah: 1) Because Hashem commanded us to; because it will give us a great reward in *Olam HaBa*; 2) To refine our *middos*; 3) To know *halachah l'maaseh*, 4) To be saved from the evil inclination.

All of these reasons are true, but in addition to this, each person has to also find his personal reason of why he learns Torah. Even if we would be guaranteed to have *Olam HaBa* in the next world, be saved from my *yetzer hora*, etc. and have all these gains, he must ask himself: “Would I still learn Torah?”

If a person learns Torah, let's say, because it saves him from the *yetzer hora* – is that the only reason that he learns Torah? This should not be the only reason why a person learns Torah. A person needs to have pleasure in his learning, to feel that he gets his life from it.

Know why you *have* to learn – and after that, figure out why *you* learn. If you feel that you learn *only* because you have to, you need to uncover pleasure in your learning.

Replacing Unhealthy Pleasure With Real Pleasure

A person cannot survive life if he only lives a life of suffering for the Torah. If he takes the words of *Chazal* literally and only eats bread and water, can he live like this? Now that we have clarified that this isn't possible [unless a person really enjoys his learning and he can therefore handle pain] we can add on the following point.

People often become idealistic and try to work on giving up their physical desires (*taavos*). This is very common with *Baalei teshuvah*, who will immediately decide to give up all their physical desires right away - and then find themselves in trouble. It backfires. It doesn't work, because if you don't have a source of pleasure in your life, you won't be able to survive. If a person gives up his physical desires, he needs to uncover a source of pleasure from spirituality, or else his plan will backfire.

When a person goes to learn Torah, he must realize that he is going to receive his vitality.

This does not mean that one has to seek pleasure 24/7 in his learning and if he feels that he's not enjoying it, he shouldn't learn...*chas v'shalom!* What we mean is that one has to make sure that the general plan in his life is to have pleasure in Torah learning and *mitzvos*.

Deprivation Doesn't Work When You Don't Have Pleasure

In these days of preparing for Shavuot, we must also reflect about the following.

Another of the 48 *kinyanim* is “less sleep”. The *Rambam* says that we need 8 hours of sleep a night. The *Vilna Gaon*, though, would sleep for only 3-4 hours a night. Who do we follow – the view of the *Rambam*, or the view of the *Vilna Gaon*?

(Every person needs a different amount of sleep at night.)

The answer is that a person has to sleep according to the amount of clarity he will have in his learning the next day. If a person cuts back on some of his sleep because he wants to increase his time of Torah learning – as *Chazal* say that one should get less sleep over the Torah – if he cannot think clearly the next day when he learns, he is acting incorrectly. If any amount of sleep will take away from his clarity in learning the next day, he needs that amount of sleep.

Connecting to Torah doesn't mean "sitting and learning." Nor is it about "talking" in learning all the time. Of course, we must sit and learn and talk about learning, but it has to emanate from *a connection we feel* towards our learning.

Mind and Heart Connection To Torah

This is because we need to both feel an **emotional** connection to our learning, as well as to have a **clear mind** in our learning.

If a person sleeps less so he can get in more time of Torah learning - but he's not learning with enough clarity as a result of being tired, or he's not getting vitality from his learning - this is not called having a 'deep connection' with Torah. It's more important to make sure you feel deeply connected to learning than to put in more hours of learning and not get vitality from it.

So if getting more sleep will help you learn better, you should definitely get the right amount of sleep. When a person learns Torah with an unclear mind, he can't get vitality from it.

There were some *Gedolim* who slept little and were able to think clearly, but the majority of us cannot do this.

Preparing For Shavuos

We are approaching Shavuos. To prepare, we need to put in more time to learning, but more importantly, we have to make sure that our connection to learning is getting deeper. And when next year Shavuos comes (if *Moshiach* isn't here yet), we should feel an even deeper connection to the Torah.

To summarize: We need only minimal physical discomfort when it comes to learning, and we need mostly pleasure in our Torah learning.

May we be *zoche* to connect ourselves deeply to the Torah and doing the *mitzvos*, to find pleasure in it – and to live a life of pleasure and vitality from that.

16 / *Less Pleasure (2) - Find The Real Pleasure*

Less Pleasure: Get The Real Pleasure

The *Mishnah* in *Avos* (6:6) lists the 48 qualities to acquire the Torah; one of them is “less pleasure” (*mi'ut ta'anug*).

We were created for enjoyment¹⁰; the only question is what kind of enjoyment we seek. The *Mishnah* isn't saying that we can't enjoy life; we must enjoy life, but it is just that we must seek the right kind of enjoyment. That is the meaning of “less pleasure” – we must not indulge in the wrong kinds of pleasure.

Without some enjoyment in our life, life is not a life. But how do we get to real enjoyment in life? Is there anyone who doesn't want to experience real pleasure? We all want it. The question is how much we are willing to get it.

Let us try to explain the difference between true pleasure and false pleasure.

True Pleasure Vs. Temporary Gratification

There are two [Hebrew] words for ‘pleasure’: The word “*hana'ah*” – enjoyment - and the word *ta'anug*, which is “pleasure”. What is the difference between these two terms? (In America, maybe there's no difference...)

Real enjoyment, *taanug*, is when you feel **connected** to the pleasure. It is the kind of pleasure which you feel attached to. Fake pleasure, *hanaah*, is when you just have enjoyment, but you don't really feel a connection afterwards with whatever you enjoyed.

When you eat pizza or ice cream, is it *hana'ah* or *ta'anug*? The enjoyment lasts for only a few moments. You bite into it, you enjoy it, you swallow it – and it feels enjoyable. Then the pleasure is gone. That's not real pleasure; it's not *ta'anug*. It's just a passing feeling of enjoyment – *hana'ah*.

But when you have a deep kind of connection to something you're enjoying, your enjoyment will be a deeper kind of feeling. That is *ta'anug*.

When it comes to physical pleasures, people only enjoy them according to the amount that they are pulled after it. The pull only lasted for a few moments, and therefore, the enjoyment will also only last for a few moments.

¹⁰ As the *Mesillas Yesharim* states, “A person was not created except to bask in the pleasure of Hashem.”

So *ta'anug*/pleasure – real pleasure - is based on having a **connection** with the enjoyment. By contrast, *hana'ah*/enjoyment is a feeling of pleasure based on mere **pull** towards what you enjoyed.

The World Is Mostly Seeing Enjoyment, Not Pleasure

Let us reflect: Is most of our enjoyment a kind of *ta'anug*/real pleasure or a kind of *hana'ah*/enjoyment/fake pleasure?

Are we connected permanently to anything on this world? One day we will all leave this world; we leave our house, our car, and we go to the Next World. Even our families we leave. So we are not really connected to anything on this world – and therefore, we don't have any real enjoyment on this world.

Hana'ah is to be pulled after a physical desire. How long does it last? It happens very fast, and therefore, the enjoyment doesn't last. But *ta'anug* is to have real pleasure, and it is achieved only when we form a deep connection with the pleasure. Connection takes a long time to happen.

If you observe the world, you can see that people spend a lot of time looking for real pleasure, not for mere enjoyment. Enjoyment lasts for a very short time, and what people want is real pleasure, but they are searching and searching for it and they are not finding it. This is not by chance, because it takes a lot of time until you reach real, lasting pleasure.

The world is running after the fake kind of pleasure, which is *hana'ah*/enjoyment. Our inner, spiritual world is based on *ta'anug* – it is based on forming a connection with real pleasure. If a person seeks *hana'ah* and he doesn't seek *ta'anug*, he lives a superficial kind of life.

The Preface To Having Real Pleasure: Identify Your Self As A Soul

Most people are living a superficial kind of life, running after enjoyment, and they're not getting real pleasure. There are only a few people who are living an inner kind of life and being connected with real, lasting pleasure.

On our world we live on, we indeed cannot be connected with pleasure. But in our soul, we can be.

If someone likes a particular kind of food, and then he dies – does he continue to love it? He does. But it's not here anymore after he leaves the world. If a person wants real pleasure, he should make sure to seek things that are lasting, not things that are temporary.

As long as a person identifies himself as a body and not as a soul (and this is true even if he is aware intellectually that he has a soul, but in actuality, he identifies himself as a body), then the only pleasure he knows of is *hana'ah*/enjoyment – the fake kind of pleasure which doesn't last. Not only won't he find real pleasure, but his whole entire life will be spent on seeking fake pleasure.

If a person wants to have real *ta'anug*/pleasure, he must identify himself as a soul. Herein lays the difference between real pleasure and fake pleasure. The world is running after all kinds of physical gratification, and this is only *hana'ah*/enjoyment. As the world runs after *hana'ah*, they are actually running away from the real pleasure. People in the world identify themselves as a body, and therefore, they run after fake pleasure.

A Method To Open Yourself To Having Real Pleasure

To make this concept practical, we can all use the following exercise and think the following simple thought: What were we like before we were born?

People don't like to think about after death; it's unpleasant and it can make a person get depressed. But we can all think about what we were like before we were born.

Some people think that before they were born, "I didn't exist". But we as Jews believe that we were around before we were born. We don't remember what happened before we were born, but there is a very simple way how we can know what we were like: the way we are like now is the way we were like before we were born! Our physical body has grown and matured, but our soul is the same now as before we were born.

This is a subtle kind of idea to absorb. If a person doesn't know how to make a reflection like this, it is a sign that he identifies himself as a body. But if someone is able to think and reflect a little, he can discover that he is a soul – and therefore, he can realize that he was around before he was born, and he continues to exist even after he dies.

A person can then come to the following realization: Whatever we are connected to on this world does not last. We are instead looking for something that has been around earlier before the physical desires we seek. The reason for this is because our soul has been around before our body was around, and therefore, our soul inside us is really seeking something way before our body began to seek things.

To illustrate this, let's say a child grows up in a certain house, and one day his parents tell him that he's adopted. What does he do? He tries to search for his real parents. At first he thought that these are his parents, but now he finds out that these are not his real parents. He has parents that came before the ones he sees – and those are his real parents.

In the same way, our soul is really searching for something that was around way before our body. The body convinces a person not to think about before and after life, and that is how it distances us from *ta'anug*/real pleasure and to instead seek *hana'ah*/physical gratification. But if someone has developed a healthy soul, he can understand that his body has been pulling him away all this time from what he's *really* searching for.

A Deeper Method

Let's make this concept even more practical.

If a person shuts his eyes, he sees nothing. Does he feel that he is not around? He can understand that he is still here, even though he can't see. Then he shuts his ears as well and now he can't hear. Does he think he has stopped existing? He can take it further and now sit still, and again make this reflection: Do I still exist, even though I'm not seeing, hearing or moving?

Take this exercise a bit further and think (if you can do this): "What would I be like had I been born in a different country, and my skin color was different, and my nation is different? Would I be different, or is it just that I would look physically different than how I look in real life?"

Such thinking can help you begin to enter a different world. It will help you realize that you are a soul who always stays the same, and that you are not your body. These are not mere thoughts or ideas – this is a way of how you can begin to get in touch with your real self.

If someone does this kind of thinking on a regular basis – and not just consider this to be a nice idea that some speaker mentioned – by getting used to this kind of thinking, he will begin to identify his existence as a soul. If someone does this for tens of times, he will begin to recognize that he is a soul, and he will identify himself less a body.

This kind of thinking can help a person change his life completely! Such a perspective can help a person begin to seek real pleasure, and give up seeking enjoyment. He will begin to feel that the world we see in front of us is actually very strange – a world that runs after pleasure that cannot be found. Instead, a person will feel that he has discovered a whole new world inside himself which contains real pleasure.

When someone identifies himself as a soul and he really feels this way, he will look for different things in life than what he used to look for. While most people in the world are looking for money, honor, beauty, and all kinds of other desires, a person who identifies himself as a soul will look for things that are totally different than these things. He will realize that it is his body which is looking for all this physical gratification and that it is getting in the way of his soul's true search.

He will slowly begin to feel less pleasure from this world's desires, and his search for real pleasure will get stronger.

Searching For Hashem

Why is it that most people do not search for Hashem in their life, and even when they do look, they don't find Him in their life?

One of the main reasons is because most people are searching for *hana'ah*, which is fake pleasure, and not for *ta'anug*, which is real pleasure. Closeness to Hashem is a kind of *ta'anug*, and it not a feeling of *hana'ah*. Therefore, many people aren't interested in getting close to Hashem, because

since it doesn't involve *hana'ah* – only *ta'anug*, which they do not seek - it doesn't look interesting. They're pulled after the *hana'ah* of the body, and it is only those kinds of superficial pleasures they'd rather seek.

Finding Real Pleasure

How indeed can we reach true pleasure (*ta'anug*)?

Don't be concerned about getting the pleasure; if you do, you are seeking *hana'ah*/enjoyment, and you won't find *ta'anug* in *hana'ah*. Put aside your desire for enjoyment and instead seek the connection itself to the pleasure. In other words, seek to have a **connection with Hashem** and don't be concerned about how much pleasure you're getting out of it.

When you have the connection to the real pleasure – pleasure in the inner place of our soul, which is to seek closeness to Hashem - the pleasure will come as a result.

No matter what your situation is in life – whether you are single, married, widowed, orphaned – even after death, and even before you were born - there is only one thing we can always connect to. We can find it inside our souls: it is to be close to Hashem. This is a totally new way to live life.

Seek A Lasting Kind of Connection

Think about it. How many connections from your childhood are still around? Our friends from kindergarten – are they still our friends today? Our high school friends – are we still friends with them today? The house we grew up in as children – is it the same house that we live in today? Almost all of our connections we have formed on this world are gone. Even the few connections we did form that are still around are bound to disappear very soon.

This reflection shows us that we aren't connected to anything. We can then understand that our soul is searching for a kind of connection that will last.

There is only one thing that we can truly feel a connection with. We won't only be able to know of it –we will be able to feel it. It is a true and calm place inside our soul, and the more we connect to it, the more pleasure we will get from it: ***to be close to Hashem.***

This is the ***only*** true way that there is to get **real** pleasure in your life.

This is not an “idea” that you hear in an evening lecture. It is life! We can all decide if we will live a true kind of life. Will we remain in life like most of the world and living superficially as they live, or will we choose to enter the depth of life? Do we want to have a deep and constant connection with a lasting kind pleasure?

I hope that all of you here understood these words.

Q&A With The Rav

Q1: *Will wearing a black hat make our soul less superficial?*

A: A hat is placed on the head, so it can only help for someone who has something in his head. By many people, their hat contains more than their head!

Q2: *How can we know how much physical pleasure we need from this world?*

A: A very good question. The Ramchal asks this in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*, and he says that it depends on how much you need to give yourself *yishuv hadaas* (peace of mind), which each person needs to determine.

Q3: *Once I arrive at inner pleasure of the soul, does that mean I have it forever?*

A: There are deeper and deeper levels within it that you can keep discovering.

Q4: *What defines this inner pleasure? How can I know if I'm feeling it?*

A: When you eat and you have pleasure, can you explain what you are feeling? When you feel a love, are you able to describe what you are feeling? It cannot be described, but you feel it. So too, the inner world of our soul can be tangibly felt, but it cannot be described, defined, or conveyed. It is a kind of pleasure that you can consistently experience.

In simple words, the world we live in today is constantly pursuing pleasure in order to escape a feeling of loneliness. People are doing something else every second: looking to get married, wishing to own a dog, reading books – it's all a form of escaping the feeling of being alone. In truth, our soul is seeking a constant kind of pleasure, and it can be filled only when we live a life of the soul where we are attached with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Q5: *Is there a way to enjoy suffering?*

A: When a person is suffering, he can become closer to Hashem through the pain, and it is there that he has enjoyment. The actual suffering itself is not enjoyable, though. It is just a tool that can bring a person closer to Hashem. If someone has enjoyment in suffering itself, this is a deep form of melancholy. Suffering directly contradicts the soul, whereas pleasure drags our soul. Suffering awakens our soul to become dragged after the need for pleasure. One who enjoys suffering is trying to fight the nature of his soul, so this is not healthy.

Q6: *What can we tell people who are greatly suffering physically – can we tell them how to find inner pleasure of the soul, and in that way they can deal with the pain?*

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A: The power of “despair” (*yi'ush*) in the soul is the power to deal with suffering; to accept it and be at peace with it. Otherwise, a person will attempt to simply ‘run away’ from the pain, either physically or emotionally.

17 / Yishuv - A Settled Mind

Yishuv Hadaas

We are soon approaching the time in which we received the Torah; we must prepare ourselves for this. One of the ways we prepare for the Torah is through “*yishuv*” – otherwise known as *yishuv hadaas*, a “settled mind”. It means to have a life of tranquility. This doesn’t mean to sit at home and do nothing, of course, but to have a real and *inner* kind of tranquility. A tranquil kind of life – *yishuv hadaas* – can totally change a person’s life. How can a person reach *yishuv hadaas*?

Getting Back Our Minds

People are doing all sorts of actions a whole day. How much are we connected in our minds to the many actions that we do? Upon some reflection, we will find that most of our actions throughout the day have nothing to do with our mind. We simply do and do all sorts of things, but our mind isn’t necessarily connected to what we do.

In order to live a life with “*yishuv hadaas*” – a calm and tranquil life - we need to have “*daas*” (a mature mind) in the first place. A life without *daas* is a life in which people live in a superficial manner, never thinking about what they do. What is the concept of *yishuv hadaas*? There are two explanations to this. One meaning of it is to act calmly. Another explanation of *yishuv hadaas* [which is what we will focus on here] is when a person’s mind is present as he acts.

We will try to think here what a life of *yishuv hadaas* is (and we will go with the second approach, that *yishuv hadaas* is to a life with a mind). Here is a question: Every person has a mind. Do we use our mind just as a tool in order to get to something, or is our mind considered to be an actual part of our life? In other words: do we only consider this world to be a life of action and “getting things done”, or is there more to life than just getting things done? Do we ever consider the fact that life contains an inner kind of knowledge, an inner dimension, that needs to be explored?

A Life of Knowledge

There are really two ‘worlds’ in front of us. There is a world of physical action that we see with our eyes, and there is also a world of *daas* (‘knowledge’) in front of us, which we cannot see with our physical eyes. We must discover it and connect to it.

A life of *daas* ('knowledge') takes place within the person himself. A person could either look at this world through his physical senses, feeling superficially that "I'm happy," or he can actually *enter a world* of happiness within himself. The first way is a superficial kind of life - and the second way is the deeper, truer kind of life.

Awareness

We will give an example of it. If a person travels to Israel, let's say, is he aware that he has just moved from place to place? Yes, because he understands that he has undergone physical kind of movement. But let's say a person has gone from sad to happy. Does he feel this change taking place?

The soul of a person has many rooms to it – and they are called "*chadrei halev*" (rooms in the heart). A person really moves from one place in his heart to another! When a person isn't aware that he is able to leave one place inside himself and entering another place of himself, he is living is unaware of his internal world, and he lives a life of darkness.

We need to become aware of the internal layer of reality that is within us; we need to realize the many rooms that are inside our heart, our *chadrei lev*.

Mature Emotions

Do adults and children share the same happiness? If an adult still experiences a childish kind of happiness, can we call this a real happiness? A child doesn't have *daas*; his happiness isn't real. A child's happiness is a mere emotion that is missing a certain kind of mature understanding. But when a person matures and develops, he has to realize that there is more understanding to our emotions. We have to realize as we mature that happiness, for example, has to be a deeper experience to us than when we were happy as a child.

This idea is very hard to express in words, because it is a feeling that must be experienced. But we are trying to describe a certain kind of picture: that the feelings we have must be *entirely different* than from what we felt as children.

Most people, when they become adults, only see how they changed physically. They don't see how they changed emotionally, because most people are unaware of the internal world.

A Whole Different Kind of Life

I am trying to explain a totally different kind of a life than we know of, a total change in our perspective.

Many times people think that it is only their *middos* (character traits) which they have to change, but they don't realize that they must change their *entire understanding* towards life altogether.

To explain this concept a bit more (*chadrei halev*), all of us have inside us a kind of 'store', with many compartments and items inside it. But we are used to looking at ourselves as if we're standing *outside* the 'store', peering inside to see what's in there on the front shelf, but remaining outside of it.

"Pnimiyus": The Inner Dimension Inside Us

If we would only enter inside ourselves, we would realize a whole new world that we never knew existed.

People might have even seen others work hard at uncovering their *pnimiyus* (inner layer) in themselves, and they have therefore heard of this concept of "*pnimiyus*", but they still have no idea what this really entails.

We must realize that there is an entirely different kind of world, inside of us, that we need to enter. First, we must believe in this reality. It's not about coming to a *shiur* once a week; it's about building a new world within ourselves. The question is if we are really willing to invest in it, or to just come once a month to "hear a *shiur*"....

It is hard to express the concept we are describing. Some people have indeed begun to enter the inner world, but even those who haven't at least have heard this now, and they now will have the key to open it.

Restarting Our Lives To Live A Life of Inner Truth

We must start over our life!

Is the world today – in *Eretz Yisrael*, and certainly in America – is this the kind of world that Hashem wants us to live in?? Or does Hashem want something else from us? Is there a much deeper world than this world?

Besides for *Gan Eden* and *Olam HaBa*, which are spiritual realities, this current world *as well*, can be a more inner place for us to live in - if we choose to enter inward.

The life we are used to and see on this world is not a life that can bring us to *yishuv hadaas*. Something very troubling in America is that there are Jews – members of a holy nation - who are *davening* on the trains on the way to work. Can this be called a true kind of life, a life of *yishuv hadaas*?? Anyone who wants to live a life of truth can see that the life going on today here that we see is not the kind of life Hashem wants us to live.

In Conclusion

The words here are to awaken us to think about life, and to decide if we want to continue this life or start a new kind of life.

There are already people who are living in the inner dimension of this world, and they are truly connected to themselves and to Hashem. Each of us can do this as well.

I hope that you accept these words, not because I asked you to, but for the sake of yourselves. I hope that each of you reaches the proper decision and realizes, that there are changes that must be made in our life – but that they will be changes which will help us live in the proper way.

May we all merit to receive Torah in the exact way we received it at Har Sinai.

18 / Less Sleeping (1) Weakening Your Imagination

Imagination Takes Over When We Sleep

One of the 48 qualities we need for the Torah is “little sleep.” What does it mean to get little sleep? Simply speaking, a person has to lose sleep over the Torah. But there is a deeper meaning to this.

A person has the power of thought as well as the power of imagination. By day, we use our thought; by night, the imagination takes over when we sleep. *Chazal* are saying that we need to lessen our sleep at night in order to learn Torah – this means that we have to lessen what we do when we sleep, which is our imagination. We need to weaken our imagination.

The depth behind why we have to weaken our sleep in order to acquire the Torah is that we need to weaken our imagination, which is a kind of sleepiness.

Imagination Throughout The Day

When the Torah was given, we were given the power of the Torah, which is essentially the power of true thought. The power of true thought in a person is able to overcome our imagination.

All of the evil in the world has to do with imagination. When a person wants to sin, it is because his imagination has overcome his thoughts. *Chazal* actually call our imagination the *Yetzer hora* (see Sukkah 52b). Our entire desire to do evil comes from the imagination!

Everyone has both thought and imagination. By night, imagination takes over in our dreams, but during the day, we have both. Usually, we are not aware during the day if we are using our thought or imagination. Our thought and imagination keeps switching back and forth, but we aren't aware which is in use.

For example, in the last hour, how many of your passing thoughts were real thoughts, and how much was just your imagination?

We are constantly passing from thought to imagination. When we aren't aware of this, this is like the curse that came from eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which was a mixture of good and evil. We aren't aware which thoughts are real thoughts (which are good), and which thoughts are the evil imagination.

Such a kind of life – a lack of awareness – is a sleepy kind of life. If we are aware of our thoughts, then we are kind of asleep, even during the day. In a sense, most people can be compared to a

mentally ill person, of whom *Chazal* (*Chagigah* 4a) say has times in which he is sane and times when he isn't sane. This resembles the state of most people, who are sometimes thinking but sometimes just imagining.

This kind of life greatly damages us.

A child often exaggerates – why is this so? It is because children are prone to their imagination, which leads them to distort information. There are even adults who are in their imagination – and most people fool themselves and are convinced that they don't imagine things. But if a person is convinced that he never imagines, it shows how much he lacks an awareness of himself.

When the Torah was given, we left our mixed up state of mind and returned to the state before Adam's sin, in which good and evil were separate. After the sin of the Calf, we became mixed up again with good and evil. Now we must return to the state that we were like at the giving of the Torah, in which there was no evil mixed up into our good – in other words, when our thoughts were free of our imagination.

This is really the depth behind *Teshuvah* – to “return” – to return to our clarity. The way we can become clear is by thinking and paying attention to what's going on in our mind.

Paying Attention To Your Thoughts

If a person doesn't listen to his thoughts, his life is all mixed up. His life will just be a mixture of thought and imagination.

But if a person wants to become more aware, he should review what he has thought about in the last hour and see which thoughts were about reality, and which were just his daydreaming.

Let's say a person is dreaming about what's going on right now in Tzefas. Is this thought or imagination? Sometimes it can be thought, but usually it's just imagination. If a person is sitting and wondering what's going on in the world, this is imagination! Our thoughts pass so quickly to our imagination that we don't even realize we have entered our imagination. Our imagination takes over very suddenly, and we don't even realize.

Sometimes a person wonders, “How did I get into thinking about this?” It didn't just “fall” into his head. It is because the imagination took over, and the person wasn't aware of it.

Let's say a person is sitting on a bus and lost in thought. This is a typical conversation that goes on all the time:

“What are you thinking about?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“What do you mean, nothing? Your brain is working, so you had to have been thinking about something! What were you thinking?”

“Oh...yeah...”

“Yeah, what? What were you thinking?”

“Something...”

“Why’d you think about it?”

“I don’t know, I just started to think about it...”

Such a person, if he wants to become aware of what’s going on his mind, needs to retrace his thoughts and see how one thought led to another.

Even when a person is learning Torah his imagination can be at work. Let’s take a person sitting and listening to a *shiur*. Does he even listen for a half hour without spacing out? If a person says, “Yes, I do concentrate for more than a half hour,” he is obviously fooling himself and he is not aware of himself.

We must listen deeply to what’s going on in our mind. Take a minute or two and review what you just thought about. It’s hard to do this at first, because there is a lack of awareness. But a person can get used to listening to his thoughts and see how fast his thoughts wander to the imagination.

This is a way for a person to reach the depths of his soul. When a person is in his imagination, he doesn’t have the tools to gain from any of his *Avodas Hashem*. Imagination doesn’t let you be calm to understand anything, and it also affects the level of how well you grasp something; because if you’re only understanding something through your imagination and not through your real thoughts, then you aren’t really understanding it.

In order to stop your imagination from controlling you, you must get used to checking your thoughts and seeing which of them were real thought and which of them imagination was.

Although so far we have been discussing the problem of imagination in regards to being an impediment to learning Torah, which applies to men, imagination is a problem for all areas of life, because if we don’t do this then we will be disconnected from ourselves. The solution we are giving here is essentially how you can become connected to yourself.

Therefore, both men and women need to weaken their imagination through this solution – to get used to checking your thoughts.

Imagination is the Root Behind Bad Middos

Imagination is behind all that is evil. *Chazal* tell us that three evil traits remove a person from this world – jealousy, desire and honor. Really, the imagination in a person is what causes these three evil traits.

Let's take jealousy as an example. Why is a person jealous of another person? It's only because of imagination. Why should Reuven care about what Shimon has? It's only because Reuven imagines that he is supposed to have it. When a person is jealous, he leaves his world – "Jealousy, desire and honor take a person out of the world." It takes a person out of his world into his imagination!

The problematic situation caused by our imagination is a very broad problem that greatly affects the entire spectrum of one's soul. It's not a side issue – **it is the root issue of all our issues!**

Of course a person needs to work on his *middos*, but it will be much easier if a person uproots the bad *middos* from their source – by uprooting his imagination. We are used to working on branches of a problem, like each individual bad *middah* we discover in ourselves. But we often don't get to the root of our problem – and that root is imagination, which we must work on getting rid of.

How To Become More Aware

If a person wants to really enter *Avodas Hashem*, he should take two minutes a day and see where his thoughts wander to. He should see what led him to think about one thing to another; he should wonder, "How did I get into thinking about B when I was just thinking about A?" The more a person does this, he will discover something he was never aware of until now: often, our imagination takes something and compares it with another thing, tricking you into thinking that two different things are the same.

What happens when you notice your imagination? Use your *seichel* and see how your imagination has led you to compare things that are different and make them appear the same – and you will see how your comparisons were totally off-base. It was your imagination which led you to make an inaccurate comparison.

Fighting the Yetzer hora before it attacks

This is essentially the battle a person has with his *Yetzer hora*. The *Yetzer hora*, during the actual time of difficulty, makes a person forget about his *Yetzer Tov*. So how does a person fight the *Yetzer hora*? The battle starts before the difficulty. The battle takes place between one's thoughts and one's imagination. We must fight the *Yetzer hora* before it attacks – not when it attacks. We need to uproot its power when we are calm and thinking; it is then that we can separate our thoughts from the imagination.

Take some quiet time and review your thoughts: how did you get from A to B, and how are the two thoughts similar? The more you do this, the more you see how your imagination misled you to think how things are the same, and you will slowly weaken your imagination more and more if you practice this.

The inner way to prepare to accept the Torah is to check our thoughts and wonder: are we weakening our imagination?

Seeking Friendship Is Rooted In Imagination

Chazal say that “Every person was created individually.” Really, we are fine if we are alone and don’t seek friends. But it is a person’s imagination tricks him into thinking that he isn’t good by himself, and that he must seek friends.

The more you rid yourself of imagination, the less social needs you will have. Imagination makes a person want to be dependent on others for companionship. When a person rids himself of imagination, he will enjoy his own existence and actually crave solitude.

Why does a person want lots of friends? It is really because he isn’t connected to himself. His imagination causes him to compare himself to others and think, “Maybe I am like that person or like this person.” He wants something outside of himself and thus loves to always be around those who he feels are similar to him.

But when a person frees himself from the imagination, he is happy being on his own – not because he is lonely, but because he has discovered an inner world within himself. A person who discovers his inner world is not doing so out of a lack of love for other people; it is not because he doesn’t like people, but it is because he doesn’t need them to be happy.

This is not arrogance – it is rather a self-discovery. It is to realize your very worth; the more a person rids himself of imagination, the more he will enjoy being alone with himself, because he will realize his own self-worth.

When a person never seeks time alone for himself and only desires to be friends with others, he overdoes it, and he is around people too much. Although *Chazal* say that we should get along with people (*da’ato me’ureves im ha’beriyos*), that is only true for one who has reached the desired state to be in – to be clean of imagination.

We see that children love to play with friends. This need that children have comes from their imagination, which is very dominant in a child. What is the connection? Children view everyone else as similar to them, which is the work of the imagination; imagination convinces a person that someone or something else is similar. Because children think everyone else is similar, they befriend everyone. As a person gets older and matures, he sees that not everyone is the same, and he is able to pick and be choosy who his friends are.

The more a person cleanses himself from imagination, the less of a need he will feel to connect to others. He might have other reasons why he wants to connect to others, such as the need to love others or the need to bestow goodness upon others, but such needs are healthy, because they do not come from the imagination.

The Only One Who You Can Resemble

When you get rid of your imagination, you will see how less and less people are similar to you, and you will discover that there is only One who you can truly resemble – Hashem.

Maybe you will ask that this is a lack of *Ahavas Yisrael* (love of Jews) if one doesn't seek to be friends with everybody. But actually, having lots of friends is not the meaning of *Ahavas Yisrael*. It is just a tendency in a person to compare himself to others – which leads him to want to always connect superficially to others. When a person seeks friends, really it is because he loves himself and he loves to feel his own imagination working, when he has lots of friends. But really, in order to have *Ahavas Yisrael*, a person needs to discover himself.

We all need time to ourselves to quietly contemplate our thoughts. This will enable our power of thought to overpower our imagination. Otherwise, a person will just want to seek others' company since he compares himself to them, because his imagination controls him.

The more a person weakens his imagination, the less of a need a person has for friends. A child always seeks to make friends, because he is led by his imagination and always compares himself to others. But the stronger our power of thought becomes – the more times of quiet a person spends, in which he can sift out the imagination from the thoughts – the less of a need a person has to seek friends.

There are people who are very popular and are surrounded by lots of friends, but this doesn't necessarily mean they have *Ahavas Yisrael*. It is usually because these people are led by their imagination and seek to compare themselves to others, and thus they seek others' company. (Others don't seek friends for a different reason: simply because they are haughty. But we do not mean this. We are referring to one who wants to live an inner kind of life and enter the inner world of *Avodas Hashem*.)

This sounds very different from what we would think, but the truth is that only when we discover our true self and connect to our self can we really love others.

The less and less a person has to do with his imagination, the more he will seek a life of solitude, not needing others – because he is attached to closeness with Hashem. *Chazal* say *hevay domeh lo*, "You should resemble Hashem." The only one who you should try to resemble is Hashem.

A person must find how he can best resemble Hashem, not other people – and the truth is that there is no one who you can really resemble other than Hashem.

This is the inner way to prepare for the Torah and from that, to come to connect to the Creator.

19 / Less Sleeping (2) Using Our Intellect by Learning Torah

Less Sleep: Sharpening Our Mind

One of the 48 *kinyanim* to acquire Torah is “less sleep.” Simply, this is because we need to lose some sleep in order to learn Torah well.

But the deeper meaning is that even while we are awake, we are kind of asleep, since our mind doesn’t always work properly; so when *Chazal* say to lessen our sleep in order to acquire Torah, they were referring to how we must make sure that we should not become sleepy in our minds, and therefore, we need to sharpen our mind.

Do We Feel Affected From Learning Gemara?

When a person learns *Gemara*, when he learns the words of Abaye and Rava – do the words affect him? When people want to become affected, they learn *mussar sefarim*. But what about the *Gemara* we learn – does it affect us?

The Vilna *Gaon* wrote that when a person learns Torah, he doesn’t need any medication to be healed from illness. The point of what he said was that when a person has Torah, he doesn’t even need the remedy of *mussar*. When the *Mussar* movement began, there was a big argument throughout the *yeshivos* if the study of *Mussar* should be incorporated into the schedule of *yeshivah*. Some said that we don’t need *mussar*, because we have the *Gemara* to affect us.

There are people who complain that the *Gemara* doesn’t affect them, and that only *mussar* affects them. There are also those who go very extreme with such an argument, because they are a bit more emotional than others, and therefore they are following their heart’s emotions; they feel that learning *Gemara* has no effect on them, so they choose instead to learn *mussar* all day. Maybe they go to a *Daf Yomi shiur* at night to fulfill the *mitzvah* of “*Talmud Torah*”, and they learn some *halacha* every day also, but they choose not to learn *Gemara* at all. This is clearly very extreme behavior.

But even the others who don’t have this extreme problem will also need to ask themselves if learning *Gemara* is really affecting them.

Utilizing Our Intellect

It's possible that a person is learning *Gemara* the entire day, yet his *seichel* (intellect) isn't working.

A person who learns Torah a whole day – does his perspective on life and on the world change? Usually it does not. *Chazal* say that “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world” – the Torah is the way to view life. Yet, people often don't see the world through the lens of Torah. Even people learning the entire day usually don't have a more mature perspective on life than those who are working all day. It's because their *seichel*/intellect isn't being utilized enough.

The *Gemara* says that “If a person merits it, the Torah to him is like an elixir of life; if he doesn't merit, the Torah becomes like deadly poison to him.” The Vilna *Gaon* explains that the Torah is like watering a plant. If the plant starts out as a regular seed, it nourishes the person and helps him blossom into a beautiful tree. But if the person contains any poisonous weeds, the opposite will happen – it furthers the growth of his poisonous weeds.

There are people who are learning Torah for many years, all day, yet their soul remains unaffected. If their intellect would only be working properly, they would mature in life. People might know *Gemara* very well, but they don't always know what life is really about and how to live life correctly.

When we utilize our intellect, we see life through the lens of the holy intellect – through the intellect of Torah. Without making use of our intellect, it doesn't make a difference if one works for a living or if he learns Torah all day – his Torah learning won't affect him *at all*. Without utilizing the intellect, even if a person is immersed in learning Torah, his outlook on life is no better than someone who doesn't learn Torah at all.

On the other side of the extreme, when people feel that learning *Mussar* is unnecessary, it's because they view learning *Gemara* and learning *Mussar* as two separate things, and therefore they are disconnected.

To Naturally Think In Learning

What does it mean to use the intellect?

The question is if we are naturally thinking like the Torah or not, as a result of our learning. Is our intellect naturally working? That is the question.

We breathe in and out because it comes naturally to us, not because we have to think about it. What about our intellect – is it coming naturally to us? When we learn or when we say a *chaburah* (a short class delivered about a topic being learned in the *Gemara*), is it coming natural to us to use our intellect?

It's not enough to *learn* the Torah. It's possible a person is learning all day and even *thinking* in learning all day, yet it's only because he knows that it's a *mitzvah* to learn Torah and to fulfill *halacha*. But we are supposed to think as a nature. The Ramchal says that the "way of the wise is to always think wherever they are."

If we utilize the potential of our intellect, we see things differently. We look at something and we naturally think about what it is.

Utilizing our intellect is not about finishing *masechtos* (tractates of *Gemara*). It's about thinking more like the intellect of the Torah, and that this should come to us as a natural way to think.

When we have perspective of Torah *only* through *learning Gemara* (and never thinking about it when we aren't learning it), this is not what it means to be a true *Talmid Chochom*! Maybe such a person will know a lot of *Gemara*, but he's not a real *Talmid Chochom* yet. A real *Talmid Chochom* is someone who sees the world through the lens of Torah; someone who always thinks about everything in the world through the lens of Torah.

The barometer to measure this is: When you finish *first seder* in the morning, what are you thinking about as you leave the *beis midrash*? Are you naturally thinking about the *Gemara* – or do you have to force yourself to think about it...?

Of course, it's wonderful to get yourself to always think in learning, but you have to develop in yourself a kind of constant thinking about Torah that comes naturally to you, and not because it's "a *mitzvah* to always learn Torah."

The Rambam states that in essence, our holy *seichel*/intellect is always at work. The Ramchal also writes that our intellect is constantly "yearning". The Vilna *Gaon* calls it *cheifetz hasichli*, "the intellect that desires." Our intellect is a part of ourselves that naturally wants to think; that is the true level of our intellect – when we **naturally** think, and not because we have to pressure ourselves to do so.

What we are saying here is not an idea or a "nice *dvar Torah*" you hear...

What's the difference between the current generation and the previous generations, with regards to learning Torah? The new generation might know a lot of Torah (due to computers...) and have all kinds of new methods to improve memory, but it is very hard nowadays to find someone who is utilizing his intellect all the time. Someone can be learning Torah for a long time, yet he doesn't have any idea about what it means to be a *Talmid Chochom*.

What To Aspire For In Your Learning

What our aspirations in Torah? If we go around and ask this question, we will get different answers. One person answers: "To know the entire Talmud *Bavli* and *Yerushalmi* by heart." Another

person answers: “To know every *halacha*”. Another person answers: “To be clear in every *Gemara* we learn”.

But the real answer should be: To be able to think naturally about Torah, and to not have to force ourselves to think about Torah!

This only exists by a person who forms an inner connection to the Torah, and it is rarely found in today’s times. “Torah and Yisrael are one” – to always think in learning is to naturally think in learning, because we feel that we are one with it.

It’s possible that a person might learn Torah a whole day, yet he never even thinks once into what he is learning; he’s only learning because there happens to be a *sefer* in front of him.

The true way a *Talmid Chochom* looks is to make use of his intellect on a constant basis, and that is should come naturally to him. Torah learning is a constant *mitzvah*. It applies every second. Why? It is because we are meant to always use our intellect.

Some people are always learning Torah because they love to learn Torah; this is wonderful, and if only most people would be even like this. But the real, inner connection to have to Torah is to always think about it because it should be natural for us to always make use of our intellect.

When we make use of our intellect, our whole life will change. Otherwise, a person might always be learning Torah and constantly trying to produce *chiddushim*, but he never changes in his learning. He learns and learns and learns, but his learning never matures. (He remains complacent not only in his learning, but his situation of marital peace will also stay the same...) He doesn’t have what to talk about in learning, because he keeps learning the same words of the *Rashba* and the same *Ritva*; he finds nothing invigorating about what he learns...there’s nothing to talk about when he comes home...

“Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” The Torah is really a way for us to see the world; when we use our intellect in Torah, we can the world from it, which is a whole different perspective.

Chazal say that “The Torah protects a person even when he’s not learning it.” The depth of this is that even when he’s not learning, his intellect is still at work, and it will protect him even when an urge to sin enters him.

Why is it that people sin even when they are involved in learning Torah, and they often aren’t that different from those who don’t learn Torah at all? Why doesn’t their Torah learning help them avoid a sin? It is because they haven’t formed an inner connection to Torah, and therefore, their Torah learning is weak, and it doesn’t protect them from sin.

Immersing Our Minds In The Torah

When a person wants to prepare for Shavuos, it's not enough to learn about the great importance of Torah by learning holy *sefarim* such as *Nefesh HaChaim* (*Shaar Daled*) and *Maalos HaTorah* in order to prepare for Shavuos. It's not about inspiring yourself. We have to change our perspective towards Torah.

This was always true, but nowadays, it applies even more so. Nowadays, the world is full of filthy perspectives about life that come from the street. When a person leaves the *beis midrash* and walks through the street, what happens to him? If he did not deeply connect to the Torah as he was learning it, he will become affected by the influences of the street. But if he has formed an inner connection to Torah, then even when he's in the street, he won't lose his connection to Torah. Because he sees the world through a lens of Torah.

Simply speaking, one can attain this by always making sure to be immersed in a deep Torah thought, such as to be immersed in the words of Reb Chaim, Reb Boruch Ber, or Reb Shimon Shkop, on the *sugya* he's learning. But it doesn't even have to be limited to this; as long as a person forms an inner connection to the Torah he learn [as we described here], he will automatically remain connected to the Torah even as he walks through the street.

Of course, some people have this very hard, due to all sorts of difficulties and worries they have in life. We are not saying that it isn't hard. We are rather describing here the inner kind of life that exists.

To Become Truly Immersed In Learning Torah

When was the last time someone had a dream at night about a *chiddush* in Torah? We dream about what we think every day. If someone thinks every day about Torah, he will naturally dream about it. If a person fantasizes by day, he'll dream about that at night too – his various fantasies. We learn for so many hours a day; if so, why is it that most people aren't dreaming at night about Torah...?

If anyone makes a *cheshbon hanefesh* (soul-accounting), he will find that most of his day is not spent about really thinking into his learning.

(Of course, we have to strain our minds too when we try to learn Torah, and we do not mean to negate the simple and basic kind of exertion that one needs to have as he learns Torah. But what we mean is that a person usually doesn't *think* into his learning, and he's usually learning superficially, without thinking into it enough).

If a person wants to learn in a *beis midrash* all day, does he sit calmly the whole day in the *beis midrash*? He might be able to "sit and learn" all day, but often he feels anxious, wishing he could go out and talk on the phone. If he gets a phone call and he has to walk out of the *beis midrash* to

answer the phone, he often lingers in the phone a lot more than he has to, and he finds it hard to pull away from his phone and return to his learning.

People often have a very hard time concentrating all day as they sit in the *beis midrash*. Is there anyone here who gets a phone call in the middle of his learning, and is prepared to quickly hang up as soon as he can and return to his learning? If we naturally think in learning, the phone ringing will bother us, because it disturbs our thinking.

How can it be that it has become normal for people to bring cellphones into the *beis midrash* and answer it while they are learning...?!

Returning To The Way Things Used To Be Like

The whole way of learning Torah today looks totally different than how it used to look like.

How do we change? That's a different question. But one thing is for sure: there is a whole different way that learning can look like, which we do not see today.

There are two big deterrents that the current generation faces. One major deterrent getting in our way are our various problems and difficulties that can bog us down. The other kind of problem we face – which is much more threatening – is that the whole way of learning Torah today looks totally different than what it used to look like.

This applies to any *kolel* and *beis midrash*; it doesn't matter where you learn. This is a problem that affects every place of Torah in the world.

We need to return to the way that learning Torah used to look like. We do not mean to increase our amount of hours that we learn; that would be wonderful too, but it's not what we mean. We mean that the whole way we approach our learning has to change from the way it looks like now.

Utilizing Your Intellect: Uncovering Your Unique Way of Thinking

When a person learns Torah, he's learning what it says in the *Gemara*; what is written in the Torah. But two people do not understand Torah in the same exact way. *Chazal* tell us that each person has his own way of understanding things. This shows us that each person has his own part in Torah which he needs to uncover – his own way of thinking in Torah.

Each Jew has his own unique root thinking when it comes to Torah, which he must discover.¹¹ One can discover it through exerting himself in Torah, together with *davening* to Hashem for it.

¹¹ Refer to the author's Hebrew sefer *Da Es Machshavosecha* (דע את מחשבותיך), which has also been adapted into English as "Getting To Know Your Thoughts" at the Bilvavi website; refer to Chapters 02, 03, and 04.

We do not mean *chas v'shalom* for one to go overboard with this concept and become a *baal gaavah* (haughty person). A person should not uncover his unique way of thinking in order to increase his ego; this is surely not our intention here.

What we mean is that a person has to exert himself in Torah and uncover his unique way of thought in Torah. This has to be accompanied with *davening* to Hashem for it. A person has to try to get to his unique way of thinking in learning. (Again, let us emphasize that we do not mean for a person to become a *baal gaavah* with this!)

Exert yourself to clarify your own unique way of thinking in Torah. This is besides for the regular kind of exertion you need in learning to be clear in what you learn and to remember what you learn.

There are three kinds of *ameilus* (exertion) in learning we need to have – to try to understand the Torah, to try to remember it well, and to try to clarify the unique way in how you think. We are emphasizing here the third kind exertion in learning that we must uncover, which sharpens our intellect and helps us naturally think in learning all the time: to clarify the unique way of how *you* think when it comes to learning Torah.

We each received a special part in Torah at Har Sinai. Every year, we each receive a new role in Torah to fulfill.

May Hashem merit us to know our level – to be clear how we our learning differs from the previous generations; and from that, to yearn to connect to the way of learning in the previous generations - and from that, we may be *zoche* to truly connect to the Creator.

20 / Leave Business on the Side

Less Business

One of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah is to have “less business.” Simply speaking, this means that one has to learn more Torah in his life and only consider business as a side thing. That is true, but there is more to it.

Knowing The Inner Point

The Torah should be the center of one’s life, because there is supposed to be an “inner point” (*nekuda penimis*) in one’s life. Anyone who is used to learning *Sfas Emes* on the *parshah* can see what the “inner point” is. What is the “inner point”?

Every day, we go through countless emotions and thoughts. This makes our soul inside feel scattered. Just like the countries of the world are scattered all over the world, so is the soul scattered. When the “inner point” of the soul is concealed and we have never accessed it, our soul is scattered.

Business Can Scatter A Person

Business means “*sechorah*” in Hebrew, which comes from the word “*sechor*” – to travel for business purposes. If a person just travels and travels on business, and he has no inner point to connect all that goes on in his life, his soul is scattered, and he comes home to his house very scattered.

When people make business into the main part of their life, they have no joy or pleasure in life. When business is everything, there is no pleasure in life.

Uncover Your True Pleasure

How many people do you know have pleasure in their life? Rarely do people have any real pleasure. A person was really created for pleasure (as the *Mesillas Yesharim* states), yet people in the world are lacking pleasure. It is because people are missing the “inner point” in their life.

To try to illustrate what the inner point (*nekuda penimis*) is: What is the deepest experience you have in your life? That deepest experience you have is the source of your pleasure. You need to connect to that source of pleasure.

If a person doesn't have enjoyment in learning Torah, he has no pleasure in life. Even if a person forces himself every day to go to a *shiur*, if he doesn't have some enjoyment out of it, he isn't connected to any pleasure in his life. Although he is getting the *mitzvah* of learning Torah and he will get reward for it, he has no pleasure in his life, and this is not a good situation. People were really created for pleasure, for real pleasure - and we need to be connected to a real kind of pleasure.

Bursts of Pleasure Don't Last

Some people get their main pleasure out of life from helping people. There is a satisfying feeling in helping someone. But how much time of the day already can you spend trying to help people? These are only rare times. You can't get your pleasure in life from rare moments, where you feel bursts of pleasure; there must be a constant source of pleasure in your life in order for you to survive.

People also talk all day, yet they don't get pleasure out of their conversations. How can it be that people talk all day, yet they don't have enjoyment out of even *one* conversation...?

If people learn Torah and *daven* without any enjoyment, and their day isn't either filled with any enjoyment in it, how can they come home in a good mood and enjoy their family? Without pleasure throughout the day, a person can't enjoy his family either. If someone talks on the phone, eats supper and reads the newspaper at the same time – is it possible that he's having any enjoyment?! He isn't concentrated on any one thing, so it's not possible that he's having enjoyment.

Preparing For Gan Eden

Gan Eden (paradise/the Next World) will be spiritual pleasure. But in order to enjoy that spiritual pleasure, we need to first experience some spiritual pleasure already on this world. We don't suddenly transform in Gan Eden and learn how to have spiritual enjoyment. *Chazal* say that what a person enjoyed on this world, that is what he will enjoy in the next world.

It's not like there are better lecturers in Gan Eden that are more inspiring to listen to. In order to appreciate the pleasure of Gan Eden, which is spiritual pleasure, we need to first open up our spiritual pleasure already on this world. This perspective can change your whole life and fill it with vitality. How many people get up in the morning and are happy that they got up in the morning? It is hard to find such people. But there are happy people in the world, and you can be one of those people.

Deriving Pleasure From Spirituality

Hashem gave us the Torah. Why did He give us the Torah? It is because Hashem desires to bestow the world with goodness. Hashem gave us the gift of the Torah. If so, why don't people feel any gratitude to Hashem that He gave us the Torah? Maybe it is because people feel that they didn't get a gift...

The Torah is called “*tov*” – “good.” Does anyone feel that Torah is “good”?

Anyone who wants to feel more alive in his life needs to figure out from where he is deriving his enjoyment from in life. A life without pleasure – even if it is a life immersed in spirituality, with exertion in learning Torah – is still not a life! Although working hard is part of our life, we need pleasure in our life. And we need *real* pleasure.

Whether you work hard at your job, or even if you work hard at learning Torah – without enjoyment in life, life is not a life.

This entire generation is living without any sense of inner vitality (*chiyus*) in their life. Does this bother anyone? It's very bothersome if you think about it. The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that “a person was not created except to bask in the pleasure of Hashem.” But is anyone pursuing spiritual pleasure??

This is a very deep question you need to ask yourself in your life: From where are you getting your pleasure from?

Find Your Real Pleasure

There are many ways to serve Hashem, and each person has to find the way that is for him. But the common denominator between all people is that all people need to live in an inner kind of world and derive enjoyment from it.

The *Rambam* writes that pleasure is really found inside yourself.¹² But, this can only come if someone is connected to a spiritual kind of pleasure.

This perspective can change everything in your life – your marriage, the way you raise your children, the way you deal with others in the *shul* and *Beis Midrash* – everything!

May Hashem merit us to connect to the pleasure found in *ruchniyus* (spirituality).

¹² See *Getting To Know Your Soul, Part II, Chapter 3: Pleasure*.

21 | *Feeling Hashem In Your Learning*

Less 'Derech Eretz' – Less Involvement With the World

One of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah (and prepare for Shavuos) listed in the Mishnah (*Avos* 6:6) is called less “*derech erez*.” There are many explanations of this term; one of the commentaries translates this to mean to lessen our worldliness; that one shouldn’t hang around in the streets too much.

Torah and being on the street are two things that do not go together. That is simple to understand. But the deeper meaning of “less *derech erez*” is as follows.

The Power of “Alone” In The Soul

Rav Saadya *Gaon* wrote that there were three great revelations that took place at Har Sinai: Hashem revealed Himself, and He revealed the Torah, and the Jewish people were at complete unity with each other; they all had “one heart”.

Chazal say (in many places) that Torah can only be acquired when we are with people, and that a person should not learn Torah alone. One of the Sages said that he learned more from his friends and students than from himself.

On the other hand, though, there is concept that a person learns Torah from within himself - and he doesn’t need others for this kind of Torah learning.

There is a place in the depths of a person’s heart in which a person can learn Torah, secluded with Hashem, and draw forth Torah from there. It is hidden from view of any person.

It reflects the statement of *Chazal*, “*Liba l’pumei lo galya*,” “The heart is not revealed to the mouth.”¹³ – there are certain deep matters of our heart which aren’t able to be expressed in any way with others. The deep matters of the heart are an inner and private experience which takes place in one’s deep recesses of his soul.

The true bond with Hashem that a person can have is developed not through being with others, but through oneself, inside himself. In the depths of our heart, we can be with Hashem and learn Torah from that inner place.

¹³ A statement of the *Zohar*

Balancing Social Life and Secluded Life

So on one hand, we need others in order to learn Torah. On one hand, we must also acquire the ability to feel utterly alone with Hashem. It is a paradox, yet we must live with this paradox and utilize both of these opposite sides to our self.

Practically speaking, we need others in order to learn Torah properly. But the depth of our Torah learning is reached when we develop a strong relationship with Hashem in the innermost depths of our heart inside us.

The sefer *Mesillas Yesharim* says many times throughout the sefer that besides for learning Torah with other people, we also need to learn by ourselves sometimes.

There were some *Gedolim* who learned entirely by themselves, and they were always secluded. We are not saying that everyone do this, as it is very hard to implement. But the general concept is definitely true, that we also need **times of being alone** in order to truly learn the Torah.

The Chazon Ish once said that all of what he comprehended in his Torah learning was because he sat in a secluded room where he learned undisturbed. There is a place in a person in which “Hashem and Yisrael are one.” It cannot be expressed by mouth to anyone; “The heart is not revealed to the mouth.”

Why We Need Seclusion

Let’s say a person always learns in the *beis midrash* and with a *chavrusa*. On one hand, this is commendable, but if a person can only learn when he has a *chavrusa*, this is a disadvantage. A person has to be able to learn alone sometimes.

A person has to develop the power of being “alone”, the power of “*levad*” – just as Yaakov fought *levad* with the angel. In the inner place of our soul, we have a power to be “alone” with Hashem.

We each have two opposite abilities. On one hand, we must unify with the entire Jewish people, and that is why we need others to learn Torah with. We aren’t able to learn Torah if we only remain alone and totally reserved from others. But on the other hand, we also need to reveal our “alone” aspect and be able to learn alone sometimes. This is because it is only in that inner place of “alone” in our soul that we can truly find Hashem and His Torah.

This applies to our entire relationship with Hashem, and it applies specifically to how we approach Shavuot, the time in which we receive the Torah.

Moshe received the Torah where he was alone, and this shows us that the true depth of Torah is revealed to a person only when he is alone with Hashem and he feels the oneness with Him. Each person has a “Moshe *Rabbeinu*” as well within his own soul, in which he can learn Torah “alone” with Hashem.

The Two Preparations For Shavuos: Love For Others, and Love for Hashem

There are two sides to who we are. On one hand, we must be unified with all Jews, and for this reason, we need others to learn Torah with. But on the other side of the coin, we must be able to be secluded from every person and instead be “alone” with Hashem.

One way we prepare for the Torah is by having love for other Jews, because since we all had one heart when we received the Torah, we need to unify with the Jewish people in order to be worthy of receiving the Torah. We thus need to increase *ahavas Yisrael* in order to prepare for Shavuos.

But at the same time, we must also be able to disconnect from others and be totally “alone” with Hashem. Just as the Jewish people were alone with Hashem in the desert, so we must retreat to the “desert” in our own soul and feel alone with Hashem.

So in order to acquire the Torah, we need two things. We must love all Jews and unify with everyone, and we must also build a deep relationship with Hashem.

The first way represents how we must toil to receive the Torah. The second way represents a different way to receive the Torah – not through toil, but through serenity. When we feel serene with Hashem, we are close with Him, and that is the deeper way of how we can receive the Torah.

We Need Both Exertion and Serenity In The Torah

Ever since the *Luchos* were broken, we have had to toil over the Torah. We must toil in Torah or else we can't understand it. Anyone who thinks otherwise is a dreamer.

But we must also be aware that there was a Torah of the first *Luchos*, which was a Torah that didn't require exertion to understand. It was a Torah of total serenity, due to our unblemished relationship with Hashem that we had before the sin with the Calf.

In the end of the day, we need both exertion and serenity in the Torah. We have to toil over Torah, because we live after the sin with the Calf, in which we were given the second *Luchos*, which is a Torah that can only be acquired with exertion. But we also need serenity in the Torah, besides for working hard at it. We need serenity in the Torah because that is the truer kind of Torah that existed in the first *Luchos*, which we almost received.

Chochmah/Wisdom and Temimus/Simplicity

In our own soul, we have two abilities: *chochmah* (wisdom) and *temimus* (simplicity). On one hand, we intellectualize and analyze the Torah. But we can also reveal our other power – *temimus*, to be “simple” in our relationship with Hashem and detach from intellectualizing about the Torah so much.

We do not mean *chas v'shalom* to say that we should abandon *chochmah* and only have *temimus*. We need both abilities equally; it is two sides of the coin.

When a person has a difficulty with his learning, like if he has a question, what should he do? There are three general solutions. One way is to have more *ameilus/exertion*. The second way is *tefillah* - to daven to Hashem about it (The Chazon Ish would do this. The Kotzker *zt"l* once said that if one has the second way, *tefillah*, he won't need the first way!). The third way is *teshuvah* - to deepen your relationship with Hashem.

Now we can understand the following deep point as well.

The Deepest Form of Pleasure

It is written, “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” We were created to bask in the pleasure of Hashem. This is not an imaginary connection, but a deep relationship we can reach in our heart. And it results in a very pleasurable feeling.

Once I was speaking to Rav Dov Yaffa shlit”a, who told me that he was once by the Chazon Ish. He told me, “I saw that the Chazon Ish had a sense of pleasure over being able to recognize Hashem.”

When one exerts himself in Torah, he can come to eventually enjoy its sweetness, as a gift from all his efforts. That is one way to reach the sweetness of Torah learning.

But there is another way as well which can help you reach the sweetness of Torah learning, and it is a much deeper kind of pleasure. It is the kind of pleasure in which you won't even have to daven to Hashem to give you pleasure in Torah (which we daven for every day in the *Tefillah* of “*V'haarev Na*”). It is the pleasure in Torah learning that comes when a person forms a deep relationship with Hashem.

There are thus two aspects to preparing for Shavuos. The first thing we need to do is to increase the amount of time we learn and the quality of how we learn Torah. But the second way is to **reveal a new depth** in how we understand our Torah learning. The Torah contains endless depth; it is “*longer than the earth and wider than the sea.*” We can also reveal more and more depth to the Torah, and this is through connecting to Hashem more.

When a person only connects to learning Torah – without developing a relationship with Hashem – such a Torah is limited. He won't be connected to the *Ein Sof* (Endlessness) of Hashem; he will only have limited pleasure from the Torah. He will have to ask Hashem each day to have more sweetness in his learning...¹⁴

14 Editor's Note: Obviously, the Rov is not chas v'shalom suggesting that a person who reaches this level won't have to say the tefillah of “V'haarev Na” in the morning, as we are acquired according to Halacha to make this blessing every morning. Rather, the Rov means that inasmuch as we are always required to make the blessing of V'haarev Na in the morning, still, in concept,

But if a person uses the deep place in his soul to connect to Hashem through his Torah, he connects to an unlimited Torah, in which his pleasure in it will be unlimited. This is the meaning of “*maayan hamisgaber*” – it is unlimited Torah learning, because it is to be connected to the Unlimited: Hashem.

Bringing Hashem Into Our Torah Learning

If anyone seeks a truthful kind of life, he needs two things. We can't have one of these without the other.

We cannot only focus on our relationship with Hashem, because that will weaken our Torah learning. Yet if we only learn Torah and we never develop a relationship with Hashem, our learning will be sorely lacking, and we will be far away from the level of receiving the Torah at Har Sinai.

If one forms a relationship with Hashem and he also is connected to learning the Torah, he will have both sides of the coin – and he will receive unlimited pleasure in his Torah learning, a whole new kind of deeper pleasure.

The Revelation of Pesach, and the Revelation of Shavuos

On Pesach, Hashem took us out of Egypt. He did not take us out with an angel or with any messenger; He took us out Himself, in all His honor and glory. Pesach was the revelation of Hashem onto the world.

What then does Shavuos come to reveal? What more does Shavuos come to reveal to the world? It was the giving of the Torah – it revealed another aspect that hadn't been revealed until now: that *Torah* is only revealed when *Hashem* is truly revealed.

Pesach revealed Hashem, and Shavuos revealed His Torah. When we received the Torah, we had two aspects that were inseparable to us: we were close to Hashem through having the Torah, and we had Torah because we had closeness with Hashem.

After the sin with Golden Calf, the *Luchos* were broken. When the *Luchos* were broken, it became possible for a person to split the two aspects and miss the connection. Ever since the *Luchos* were broken, a person is able to make the mistake that either we can be close to Hashem and not have to learn Torah, or we can learn Torah and never develop a relationship with Hashem.

Either of these two ways to think is a mistake – a Torah of the “*broken Luchos*.” The true state of affairs is to realize that we are only close to Hashem if we connect to Torah learning, and we can only have true Torah learning when we are connected to Hashem simultaneously.

we are able to transcend the level of one who is in need of having to make this blessing in the morning, for he reaches a deeper kind of sweetness than the kind of sweetness we ask for in the blessing of V'haarev Na.

This is an amazing point if you reflect about it.

If a person only knows of exertion in learning Torah and he doesn't feel closeness with Hashem in his life, such exertion is a kind of concealment, a result of sinning with the Golden Calf. But if a person has Hashem in his life, his exertion in learning comes from the true level of Torah, a Torah that is attached with Hashem.

When a person feels Hashem and feels a deep love for Him all the time, his learning is totally different. He gets Torah directly from Hashem, and his enjoyment in it will be much deeper.

The Barometer

How can a person know if he has reached this connection?

The way one can know this is that if he goes through something bothersome, and he can immediately return his thought to focusing on his connection with Hashem, or if he can immediately return to thinking in learning.

If someone knows how to do either of these two things, it shows that he never leaves his connection with Hashem or with Torah, because even if he gets disturbed by something, he can immediately return to his connection a moment later.

When the Ten Commandments were being given, what were the Jewish people focusing on – on Hashem, or on His Torah? They were focused on *Hashem* Who was revealing the Torah to them. The Torah they then received was a Torah with Hashem.

Shavuos - Returning To Har Sinai Each Year

What we have described here is a concept that does not come easily to us. A person is therefore likely to conclude that it's too hard to reach.

To counter this argument, this is what you can think: The time when we stood at Har Sinai was the greatest time in history. It was the most elevated moment in Creation. It was greater than the *Beis HaMikdash*. As holy as the *Beis HaMikdash* was, the event of standing at Har Sinai to receive the Torah was even holier!

When Shavuos is coming, we must realize that the greatest time in history is returning to us, and that we need to prepare for it properly as we should.

If someone never reflects, then he just learns and *davens* as he's used to (*Baruch Hashem* that he at least learns and *davens*...). But if someone reflects, he can realize that preparing for Shavuos cannot be achieved with mere inspiration. In order to prepare for Shavuos, we need to undergo a major overhaul.

To prepare, we must reveal from within ourselves an inner point in our soul. The *Ramchal* writes (in *sefer Adir B'Marom*) that deep in our soul, there is a point that was unaffected by Adam's sin. It is there, that innermost point of our soul, which we can access – it is there that we can reach a deep relationship with Hashem when we learn Torah.

We are not perfect, but we must strive to be like our forefathers. *Chazal* say that “One is obligated to say, “When will my actions touch upon the level of the actions of my forefathers?” We cannot reach the perfect level that our ancestors were on as they stood at Sinai, yet *Chazal* tell us that we must aspire to reach their level.

Some commentators noticed that *Chazal* say that even if we can't reach the level of our forefathers, we can still “touch upon” their level – we can touch it somewhat, even if we can't reach it fully. At least we can “touch” their level – that much we *are* capable of.

How To Feel Hashem In Your Learning

The way we can do this is by connecting ourselves with Hashem more often throughout the day. If we make sure to always have a relationship with Hashem every day in our life, we should understand as well that this also applies to our Torah learning.

Chazal say, “One who sits and learns Torah, Hashem sits next to him and learns with him.” Hashem is really next to us as we learn, learning the Torah with us, but not everyone feels this; why not? This is because if a person doesn't feel Hashem in his day-to-day life, he doesn't feel Hashem in his learning either.

But we are able to feel Hashem with us when we learn Torah if we have already developed a relationship with Him from beforehand.

This does not mean that one should actually think about this while he is trying to learn Torah, because this will be detrimental and only weaken his mind as he tries to learn. Rather, what is meant here is that one can naturally feel Hashem with him as he learns, if he has already developed his relationship with Hashem throughout the course of his day-to-day life. He will then feel Hashem automatically in his learning as a direct result.

We must transform our life. This is how we prepare for the Torah. It is a life of true pleasure – it is a life of being with Hashem, *together* with His Torah.

May we be *zoche* to reach somewhat the level of our forefathers (even though we can't reach it perfectly) as they stood at Sinai, and to keep expanding upon that, until the souls of the entire Jewish people reach it in unison.

22 / Less Talking

Understanding The Holiness Of Our Power of Speech

One of the 48 *kinyanim* to acquire the Torah is “less talking” (*miut sichah*). This is not simply to talk less, but a power in our soul to control how we speak.

As the Ramban writes, one should think before he talks. When we think before we talk, it will deepen the quality of the words coming out of our mouth.

We all have the power to speak with Hashem. Most people aren't revealing this power, and are instead using their speech to have mundane conversations with others. When people don't value their power of speech and chat with others mindlessly, even when they talk to Hashem, they cannot talk to Hashem properly, because they have impaired their ability of speech.

The Sage Rav Shimon bar Yochai stated that had he been by *Har Sinai*, he would have asked Hashem to be created with two mouths – one mouth to speak holiness, and another mouth to speak about mundane things. He wanted a mouth that would only speak holiness.

When a person is used to idle chatter with others, he won't be able to talk to Hashem from the depths of his heart, even if he tries very hard to.

Since “less speech” is one of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah, let us try to understand the depth behind this matter well.

Two Kinds of Conversations We Have

Every day, we have to speak with others. But there are two kinds of people in the world. People who live superficially have emptier kinds of conversations, while those who live more internally have more meaningful kinds of conversations.

For example, if a man is a *Talmid Chochom*, or if a woman is a righteous person, and he/she is asked for the time, he/she doesn't just tell the person the time. The internal kind of person is thinking “I am telling this person the time, so that I can help him.” A superficial kind of person just tells a person the time, but an internal kind of person doesn't just tell him the time – he wants to bestow kindness towards another as he's telling him the time.

Another example is when we put our children to sleep, and we tell them “Good night.” Most people just say “Good night” without any meaning to it. An internal kind of person, when he says “Good night” to his child, does so with the intention that his child should really have a good night. He says “Good night” to his child with a true feeling of love for the child.

There is an amazing story with the Alter of Slobodka *zt”l*. One of his students saw the Alter *zt”l* standing on the street, saying “Good morning, good morning, good morning”. The student saw that no one was passing by, yet the Alter was saying “Good morning, good morning, good morning.”

The student, perplexed, went over to the Alter and asked him what is going on. The Alter answered him something that was so simple, yet so profound: “When we tell someone “Good morning”, we don’t have to see the person. If we see him and we smile at the person, that’s better. In my mind, I am passing by everyone and wishing them “Good morning”.”

How did the Alter *zt”l* reach such a high level? It was because when he said “Good morning” to others, he did out of a true desire that the person should have a good morning. He awakened his love for others.

We can give many more examples, but the lesson is always the same.

Examining Our Conversations

How many words a day do we say? We say thousands of words a day. Is there even one of these words that are truthful...?

How much are we talking from an inner place in ourselves?

On Yom Kippur, we daven *Shemoneh Esrei* five times a day. Most people are too tired by the time it comes *Neilah*, and they don’t have the energy to daven anymore and talk to Hashem. But if we would get used to talking more internally throughout the rest of the day, we would find it much easier to daven all day on Yom Kippur!

Let us return now to what we were discussing before, when a parent is putting his/her child to sleep, and tells the child, “Good night.” If it’s just being said in a mechanical way, the child will not feel the love. The child will only feel the love in the “Good night” if the parent is saying it from the heart, from a feeling of love for the child.

Redemption From Our Cellphones

In our days, the quality of speech isn’t being used properly. The *sefarim hakedoshim* say that the word “*Moshiach*” comes from the word *sichah*, talking. But in today’s times, perhaps we can say that “*Moshiach*” is called so because the power of *sichah* is in serious need of redemption, due to the way that the holy power of speech is so abused.

Imagine what our life would look like without a cellphone. We would be disconnected from the world and have utter quiet. Is anyone prepared for to live such a kind of life?

Anyone who understands the dismal situation going on today to our spirituality can understand that the ability of speech is in serious need of redemption. When *Moshiach* comes to redeem us, he is essentially coming to redeem us from our cellphones! That is perhaps why the word “*Moshiach*” comes from the word *sichah*/talking – because he will redeem us from all the talking we spend on cellphones.

It is clear that every single person needs to be redeemed from their cellphones. Everyone has a cellphone; is there anyone in America who doesn't have a cellphone?!

It is also clear that anyone who doesn't have a cellphone will be *zoche* to be redeemed by *Moshiach*.

It is not by chance that cellphones have taken over so much. It's part of the plan that Hashem for us to redeem us from the exile. Cellphones bring destruction; they cause much more bad than good. If someone disconnects from his cellphone, he will merit the redemption. (If someone knows how to use a cellphone only for good reasons and never for bad, then he's an absolutely purified person.)

We must be able to detach from all the talking we do with our cellphones and instead connect to the real kind of talking – to talk with Hashem.

15 Minutes A Day of No Phones On

To start, we should set aside 15 minutes every day in which we turn off our cellphones. You can do it Friday afternoon, when you're making Shabbos preparations. Look at your cellphone as an enemy that is trying to harm you from getting your Shabbos preparations done.

When you cut off from your cellphone, don't feel deprived at all. Feel that you've become free.

Reflecting About The Cons of Cellphones

Let's do the following reflection: What kind of lifestyle is better – a life with a cellphone, or a life without a cellphone? Wasn't life in previous Europe of a much higher quality, because they had no cellphones?

Although we are in the current modern generation, we must try to connect somewhat to the previous generations, and have a connection to the past way that life used to look like. We must try to connect ourselves in some way to the way that our *Avos* lived. Of course, it's impossible for us to connect totally to how they lived in the olden days, but we still need to have somewhat of a connection to the past. This will connect your soul to a clearer, purer world.

The current generation definitely has some gains to it that the previous generations didn't have. We are definitely making spiritual progress in certain ways that they didn't. But in general, the spiritual level of the generation is only going down more and more. Anyone who lives in this current generation will naturally go down with its low level, unless he makes sure he's growing – and to detach from the current generation. We need both methods – we must make sure we are growing, and we must also detach somewhat from the current generation.

We should make for ourselves a private kind of life in which we detach from this current generation, while at the same time living in this generation and growing from it.

Is there anyone who can say on himself that he grew spiritually because of his cellphone? Does anyone feel that he has grown better since the last five years? The world today looks totally different than even five years ago. How can we fall asleep at night from this? It should give us no rest. We should be afraid that we are only going down with the generation, and we should make sure that we are growing higher.

Cellphones became popular very instantly. As soon as they came out, everyone ran to buy them, thinking this was the best invention ever. It never dawned on us when we eagerly ran to buy them that it would bring us down so much with the generation. And the future situation of our spirituality is only getting worse.

We must develop a whole new kind of life, a life of holiness. Anyone who wants to live a true kind of life should make sure that he is constantly growing. We need to take upon ourselves resolutions to grow in order to counter the trend of spiritual descent in this generation. It must be the kind of resolution that will change our entire life. Even in previous generations, people had to take on resolutions to change their life. How much more so does it apply to our own generation, which is worse and getting worse.

Firstly, we need to grow, and secondly, we need to have some detachment from the current generation (by having times of quiet every day in which we sit in solitude, alone, reflecting on our relationship with Hashem). And we shouldn't feel any deprivation or fear at the fact that we are cutting ourselves from our cellphones; we should instead be aware that we will be giving ourselves a happier kind of life if we do it.

I hope that the people here listening to this understand the soul of the matter being said here. This [problem of abused speech – due to cellphones] - is not just another random problem going on in today's times; it is the essence of all the problems in this generation.

May we all be *zoche* to grow, every day, and to yearn for more a spiritual kind of life – and then we will be able to transform the reality of Hashem into the very reality that we live in our life. If someone doesn't value his power of speech and follows the trend of the generation, he won't be able to talk with Hashem. May we be *zoche* to *Moshiach*, who will redeem us and transform our power of speech to be able to talk to and connect with Hashem.

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: *How much time of the day do we need to set aside to detach from this generation?*

A: 15 minutes of the day is the bare minimum.

Q2: *What should we do about other gadgets besides for cellphones?*

A: Cellphones are only just one example; we used this example because it is the most common. In any situation, though, what you can do is to set aside time every day to be alone and detach from all gadgets. There are people though who set aside time for *hisbodedus* every day, but they also play with their phones while they are at it...

Q3: *How can we help people who find it hard to disconnect from cellphones, due to their strong pull towards physicality?*

A: There are two reasons why people are pulled toward physicality. One of the main reasons is because many people are born through an unholy conception, and this problem is very common nowadays, even amongst many of the *frum* “*Charedim*” (Ultra-Orthodox); this is the main source of the pull toward physicality. The other reason is due to the animalistic desires that we are all born with.

Q4: *How do you deal with a child who is having a hard time detaching from a gadget?*

A: The common denominator between all people is that all people have to detach from the current pull of the generation. Each child is different; work with the child on his own level – “*Chanoch l'naar al pi darco.*”

Q5: *What kind of talking do we have to detach from – forbidden conversations, or even from conversations about permitted topics?*

A: Even from permissible conversations we need to detach from, because too much talking in general also leads to problems. For example, people can develop a habit of lying, and this happens because people get used to talking so much and abusing the value of their speech.

Q6: *During the time of the day we detach from cellphones, what should you do if you have to pick up to help someone, like if your parents are calling you?*

A: Do you pick up your cellphone for your parents while you're davening Shemoneh Esrei? Do you pick up the phone for your parent at 2 A.M. when you're sleeping...?

Q7: *If we want to encourage someone who didn't hear this derasha, what can we tell him?*

A: Just tell him over the general concept here [**Ed.:** that we need to value our power of speech and detach somewhat from the world], and don't tell him about the practical application of this concept we discussed [**Ed.:** don't tell him about the cellphone part].

Q8: *What do you tell someone who's not interested in growing and improving?*

A: This is the question of all questions. I assume that you are not asking about yourself, but about someone in your own household. The only thing you can do is daven and cry to Hashem for that person.

Q9: *What can we tell Baalei teshuvah about this (since they might back off the derech if we tell them to make such drastic changes to their lifestyle)?*

A: This is a very sensitive topic.

In the last few years, a few *sefarim* came out in which people wrote that we have to have a connection to the world these days, and this is false.

People [erroneously] think that making someone into a *baal teshuvah* means to slowly make him into a *baal teshuvah* over the years. For example, to teach him about Judaism for 5 years, then to teach him how to daven for a few years, then to bring him to shul, then to show him how to daven. In this way, the *teshuvah* process is spread out over a long time, and the *baal teshuvah* is not given everything to work on all at once. People think that this is called "making someone into a *baal teshuvah*." However, according to the Torah, in order to become a real *baal teshuvah*, a person has to start keeping all of the *mitzvos* at once.

It is just that there are two areas – things he must do all at once, and things which he does not need to do all at once but rather to do it gradually and at his own pace. There are some things that a *baal teshuvah* has to do right away, while there are other things that must be done gradually. When it comes to the subject of abstaining from physicality, we aren't trying to tell someone that he has to immediately detach from physicality, because this will throw off. He will think that Judaism is about depriving yourself. Rather, when we teach this subject to *Baalei teshuvah* – that it is necessary to detach from the strong physicality of this world – he has to be taught that it is good and healthy for him to do so, and that he's not depriving himself at all.

A wise man once said, “We need *Moshiach* to be *mekarev* those very people who make others into *baalei teshuvah*...”

Q10: *When we are involved in kiruv with Baalei teshuvah, we are apt to feel that we ourselves aren't growing, because they bring down our level....*

A: When the *Baal Teshuvah* movement began, people tried to make a separate community for *Baalei teshuvah*, but it didn't work out. It ended up becoming like the difference between Orthodox and Reform. There is no one in the generation who can decide if it would be better to give *Baalei teshuvah* their own community, or to integrate *Baalei teshuvah* within the Orthodox communities. There are pros and cons to each approach.

The *Baalei Teshuvah* integrated into the Orthodox community exposed the Orthodox to become connected to the world, and in this way, the Orthodox communities had a drop in their level. We don't know what to do about this problem; but either way, it was definitely Divine Providence that such a thing happened.

Q11: *Is there such a thing as detaching too much from the world?*

A: Yes, it is definitely bad to detach when it is overdone. 15 minutes of detachment every day, though, is necessary for every person, and you don't need to be on a high level to do it. If someone can't detach for just 15 minutes, he has a spiritual illness in his soul! In general, whenever we work to improve ourselves, there is always a danger of overdoing something. We cannot pressure ourselves to beyond our current level. Most people need to improve only in small steps and cannot handle high jumps in their level. We should never take extreme changes to our behavior. Take on a small change, but one that will definitely make you feel that you are changing. Any change that makes you feel pressure about it (and you can't calm it) is not a healthy kind of change, and it will only be detrimental. This is a very subtle issue; we must always daven and cry about it to Hashem.

Q12: *Is there anything wrong with using a cellphone when shopping in a store?*

A: Not every conversation you have on a phone is bad. We are just saying that it is overdone a lot. A lot of times, people talk on a cellphone in public and people hear private conversations going on. This is a prime cause for the great breach in modesty in today's generation; people talk about private topics in public. A person is sitting on a bus and he hears the person in front of him talking on a cellphone about his credit card bills, the supper his wife will be making that day, and what he and his wife are fighting about....

Q13: *I feel that the Rav speaks very much from his heart. I am wondering what kind of mother the Rav had, who must have raised him so well to speak from his heart.*

A: If you visit her in Israel, she'll be very happy. She was actually in America 3 weeks ago.

Q14: *And does the Rav's mother allow visitors??*

A: I hope that you cling to the *middah* of Avraham *Avinu* [**Ed.:** *chessed*/kindness and hospitality].

23 / A Good Heart

"Lev Tov" – A Good Heart

One of the 48 qualities to acquire the Torah is *lev tov*, to have a “good heart.”

Our Sages reveal that the *gematria* (numerical value) of *lev* is 32 and *tov* equals 17, which together adds up to 48. This hints to us that until *Lag B’omer*, the 33rd day of the *Omer*, a person has a “*lev*” – he has the first “32” days of the *Omer*, but he doesn’t necessarily have the *lev tov*, a good heart. After Day 33, for the rest of the 17 days until Shavuos, a person has the unique opportunity to turn his heart good – to gain a “*lev tov*”.

What is a *lev tov*/good heart? Is there such a thing as a “bad” heart?

A friend in Hebrew is called “*reia*”. A similar word to “*reia*” (friend) is “*ra*” (evil). In other words, if a person has an ‘evil heart’ towards his friends, he cannot be a friend to them; he is only “*ra*” (evil) toward them. He will be selfish, and his motivations to have friendships are always about himself. But if his heart is ‘good’ towards others, he will be able to have friends.

The 24 students of Rabbi Akiva stopped dying by *Lag B’Omer*, because after *Lag B’Omer*, their hearts became good; they reached their ‘*lev tov*’. This shows us that from *Lag B’Omer* onward, our *avodah* is to acquire for ourselves a ‘*lev tov*’.

Having A “Lev Tov” In The Home

We have so far seen what an ‘evil heart’ is and what a ‘good heart’ is. Now we can understand the *avodah* before us now in these days – the *avodah* of acquiring a ‘*lev tov*’, a good heart.

Let’s say someone is the type to mistreat his friend; he does not have a ‘*lev tov*’ toward others. When he gets married and he has kids, he will act the same way with his spouse and children. He will mistreat them also, because he never developed a ‘*lev tov*’ toward others.

The children of such a person one day complain to him and say, “Daddy, you don’t love us!” The father replies in bewilderment, “What do you mean I don’t love you?! I do so much for you! I put so much money into you. I buy you so many things. Mommy and I both love you so much. Do you know how many times I got up for you in middle of the night and took care of you...?”

But the truth is that the father *doesn't* really love them! If the children claim that their father doesn't love them, it shows that he doesn't have a '*lev tov*' toward them all along!

It seems that the father loves his family, because he "does" so much for them and "gives" so much to them. But it can very well be that he doesn't act with a *lev tov* toward his household, and therefore, the children will feel unloved, no matter how much he "does" for them.

Why? It is because when push comes to shove, he loves only himself, and he puts himself before his own household. When a very troubling day comes, he will be tested of how much he really loves his family – and he will fail the test, because he never really loved them to begin with. He had no '*lev tov*' toward his children to begin with – he was selfish all along.

There are even people today who run away from their families, leaving their wife and children behind. Sometimes this is because a man falls in love with a woman who seems more attractive than his own wife. He fantasizes over her and wishes he could leave his own wife, because life looks a lot better with this new woman; he wants to go live life with his other woman and have his own private life with her.

How is it possible that a person can be so cruel to run away from his wife and five kids so that he can enjoy his own private life?! Even though he imagines that maybe life would be better if he goes to live with another woman he falls in love with, still, how can he do such a thing and leave his family behind?? How can he be so selfish to break apart his family??

The answer to this is because he was selfish all along! He had children, but he had them all for his own selfish needs. As soon as it becomes unpleasant for him to deal with his children, he throws them away (he wouldn't even care to throw them into the ocean). He doesn't care anymore about his family. He only had children because he thought it would be pleasant, but as soon as they become a bother him, he abandons them to go on and fulfill his selfish desires.

The Meaning of a 'Good Heart'

We know that Moshe *Rabbeinu* was willing to put himself in danger when he saved a Jew from Dasan and Aviram. In this merit, he became the leader of the Jewish people. He had the special trait of truly caring for others.

But we aren't talking about Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who was on the highest level possible. Is there any Jew living in this year, 2014, who is willing to truly sacrifice for another person??

The fact that a person has a lot of friends doesn't mean that he loves his friends; often, it is the opposite – when a person is popular and he has tons of "friends", often it can be that he really doesn't love any one of them!

There is a concept that a person has to be willing to even commit a sin and lose his share in the World To Come so that he can save his friend, if need be it. Of course, some people don't care to sin

in the first place, because they have no *yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven). But in essence, a person has to be willing to sin for another person and forfeit his reward, if he must. The Chazon Ish said that a true friend is someone who is willing to go to *Gehinnom* for his friend if he has to. And if he sins for his friend, he will indeed go to *Gehinnom* – yet he still has to be willing to do something for his friend, even if he knows for sure that he will end up in *Gehinnom* for sinning.

What's a good friend, a true friend? Is it someone who has a nice smile to others? No, that doesn't mean he's a true friend. A true friend is someone who is willing to suffer on behalf of his friend. The *mitzvah* to love other Jews it love them like yourself.

This is the true test of who a real friend is: someone who is willing to sacrifice for his friend.

The Mishnah in *Avos* says that the best quality to have is a "*lev tov*" – a 'good heart'. The best way to succeed in *chinuch* (child education) as well is to have a "*lev tov*" towards our family.

Analyzing The Motivations Behind Requests To Our Children

Why do people have children? There are all kinds of self-serving motives that people have. Some people have children because they want a child to say *Kaddish* for them after they die. Others have a child so that they can be honored and served.

When a father asks his child to *bentch*, the child will listen only if he feels that his father has a *lev* toward him, that the request is coming for the well-being of his child. Otherwise, the child does it grudgingly – because he doesn't feel a *lev tov* emanating in his father's request.

When we make requests of our children, is it emanating from our desire that they do it for their own good – or are we asking them to do things for us for our own good...?

Once there was a child did something improper. He had a great father who said, "I can't punish you now, because I'm angry at you. I don't want the punishment to be coming out of anger. I want it to come for your own good."

Parents often want their children to do what is good for "Me" [the parents]. A father often views his children as his slaves! Really, the father should train the child to do something because it's good for the *child* to do. One should tell his child, "Do it for *yourself* – not for me."

"Expectations" From Our Children

What do we want our children to be?

There are parents who want their child to attain prestigious positions in life: either to be a professor, or to become a lawyer, or to become a successful businessman in general. Others want their child to become a "Rosh Yeshiva", so that he will be very honored in his life...

Is there any parent who wants their child to become who he really is? Let's say the parents know for sure that the child is supposed to be a shoemaker, and this is what their child is meant to become in life. Would any parent let their child become a shoemaker...? Most parents would not come to terms with this. They don't do what's good for the child – they want from the child to do what's good for *them*.

Even worse, there are many parents who want their child to continue their business that they started. Who says this is appropriate for the child to do? Just because the father started a certain business that means that the child has to continue it? Often, the child is dragged into the family business when it's not good for him at all. Yet parents continue to put pressure on their children that they must continue the family business, and they tell them: "You have to. If you don't, you will embarrass us in the community; it's not good for your *shidduchim*, etc."

In the same way that a person loves himself and he wants to be who he really is – and not what he is forced to be – so should a person love his child. Love him and **let him be who he really is, not what you want him to be**. And being who you are means to be who *you* really are; let the child be who he really is, not what you want him to be.

"*Chinuch*" – child education – means to let your child be who he really is, and not what you want him to be.

Sometimes I ask my child to do things in the house, like to clean up his room. I tell him, "Clean up the room because I want you to be organized." Or I tell him, "Clean your room because it's good for you to clean your room." Either of these requests is a good way to make a request, because then the child hears the message that it's for his own good that he has to do a certain chore.

When you make requests of your children, don't ask him to do something because it's good for **you** that he do it, but ask him to do it because you know that it's good for him to do. And make that clear in your request to your child.

Raising Responsible Children

We are describing here a whole different kind of life we can live.

Parents must let their children be who they are supposed to be; this does not mean of course to just let the child live with no reproof whatsoever and that we should let him act like a wild monkey. What we mean here is that the child has to sense that his parents really want the best for him.

We do not mean that the parents are never allowed to tell their child about the difficulties of life and instead tell them that life is a utopia. Rather, it's the opposite: let them know good and well that life contains difficulties – and for that reason, they need to become responsible, so that they will be able to deal with the difficulties that life will bring one day.

Train your child to be responsible. Train your child that life is about being responsible for others. But first, teach your child to be responsible for *himself*. That is what it means to let the child be “himself”.

When someone works at a job that’s not “himself”, he can’t be happy. A person is only happy when he does things that are himself, not when he forces himself into a role he has to play. Be the same with your children.

I hope that these words here have affected your soul. After understanding the words here, decide what kind of life you want to live – what kind of home you want to have. I hope that all of us here merit to have true and holy *nachas*.

Questions & Answers With The Rav

Q: *Since the Rav says that we have to find “ourselves” first, how do we be our true self, in spite of society, which does not allow us to act like our true self?*

A: Good question. You can still be yourself to a certain degree, even if society doesn't allow you to.

Q: *If a person doesn't know himself well and what's good for himself, how can he know what is good for his child??*

A: Very good question. It depends on if he is working on himself or not. If a person is in the process of searching to find his true self, he's in a lot better of a situation than someone who isn't searching to find himself. It is not possible for us to know ourselves 100% but we need to try as much as we can to get to know our true self.

Q: *Can the Rav give examples of how we can apply the concept said here.*

A: Is this question being asked regarding your child or regarding yourself? (*Regarding myself*). Regarding yourself, you can work on this as follows. Let's say you go to Daf Yomi, and your friends are there; you decide that you will learn for an hour a day. But next door there is a shiur going on which you will find more suitable for you to do, but you don't know anyone there. What should you do? Naturally, you want to go to the shiur which you will enjoy more, where you won't have to deal with anyone and you will just be able to learn. (Many times a person knows convinces himself in his subconscious that he needs to do something which really isn't good for him...) What you should really do is go the Daf Yomi in which you will be able to have a lev tov toward others, even though it's not as enjoyable for you, because you'd rather to go the higher level shiur in the other beis midrash.

Q: *If let's say the child wants to go to shul wearing blue shirt, when everyone wears white shirts. Should we let the child be himself? Or should we oppose his behavior? Or should the father encourage the child by going himself to shul as well in a blue shirt...?*

A: It is impossible to give an answer to every possible issue that exists. But one rule that always applies is: Do you want the child to something because it's good for him to do, or because it's for your honor? Even if you get your child to wear a white shirt, he has to understand that he's doing it for his own good, and for his parents' honor.

24 | *Less Laughter - Avoiding Mockery*

“Less Laughter” – Avoiding The Negative Trait of Leitzanus/Mockery

One of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah is through “less laughter.”

In order to get something, we need to acquire it. We own a table by purchasing it with our own money. How do we acquire the Torah? One of the ways is through “less laughter” – we have to be serious, and we need to avoid being frivolous. Why is it that being frivolous prevents a person from acquiring the Torah? In order to know the answer, we need to make the following deep reflection.

“Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” The Torah is Hashem’s wisdom, and He used it to create the world. *“All of them You made with wisdom.”* Everything in Creation contains wisdom, since everything comes from Torah. So when a person laughs at something and makes light of something, he’s basically saying that there is no wisdom to be found in the thing he is making fun of. This is the depth of the negative trait of *leitzanus*, mockery.

It is not only the Torah which is wisdom. All of Creation contains wisdom, and therefore, a person shouldn’t be lightheaded with how he views anything in Creation.

Respect For Creation

Let’s say a person is walking in the street and he sees a cigarette butt on the ground. What does he think? Is there any wisdom to be found in such a thing? There is really wisdom in everything in Creation – in the smallest blade of grass, and even in a pile of garbage! This is because all of Creation is filled with the wisdom of Hashem.

The only reason why a person doesn’t view these things as wisdom is because he’s not seeing it through the lens of Torah. When a person sees Creation through the lens of Torah, he sees how everything was created by Hashem through the Torah, and therefore he sees wisdom in everything there is.

Respect For Your Self

The Chofetz Chaim ruled that it is prohibited for one to say *lashon hora* (gossip) about oneself. The depth behind this *halacha* is because it is forbidden for a person to belittle himself, for he was created in the image of Hashem (*b’tzelem elokim*).

When a person makes fun of himself and belittles himself – due to his various deficiencies and weaknesses that he recognizes in himself - then he is denying the fact that Hashem created him with these deficiencies; he is denying his *tzelem elokim*. If a person would feel that he is a *tzelem elokim*, created by Hashem – he wouldn't come to make fun of himself.

How To View The Other Nations of the World

It's not a good thing, then, when people have the habit of making fun of other people. People often like to make fun of people from other countries, but this is not a good trait. Belittling other people for the way they look and the way they act is denying that these people are a "*tzelem elokim*" (in the image of G-d).

Hashem created all the seventy nations of the world, and each of them has their nuances, and He created them all for His honor. "*All of it is called in My Name, I created it for My glory.*" Somehow, each creation of Hashem serves to increase His honor; we must be aware of this. All the nations of the world are all people who are created with a "*tzelem elokim*".

So before you make fun of them, remember Who created them.

Avoid The Trait of Mockery

We are describing here a whole different change in perspective to have in life.

Most of the conversations in the world today are frivolous and involve some kind of mocking of others. People are often poking fun at others, on a constant basis. This is really unrefined behavior that goes unnoticed and it has become acceptable, but it is really not acceptable. It comes from a lack of recognition that Hashem created this entire world. It is a form of *leitzanus* (mockery), an evil trait.

The trait of *leitzanus*/mockery is, in essence, the very antithesis to Torah! When a person is frivolous and he uses the power of speech in an idle way, this is the very opposite of Torah. Torah requires seriousness in order to learn it.

When a person grows used to making fun of people, even if he was always learning Torah and doing all the *mitzvos*, he grows more and more distant from the Torah, with the more he belittles others in Creation. The Torah requires trepidation and awe in order to learn Torah. Mockery makes us light-headed and takes away from our seriousness, which eventually has a detrimental effect on our seriousness towards learning.

Seriousness is called "*koived rosh*" in Hebrew – to have a "head" that "bears weight." The word '*rosh*' comes from the word '*raishis*', beginning. In other words, a person needs to see the 'beginning' of each thing in Creation, and this gives him a *rosh*/head. The beginning of each thing has a Source

who created it: Hashem. So when a person recognizes that it is Hashem Who created everything, he gains *koived rosh*, a sense of seriousness.

Answering In The Phone In Middle Of Learning

People attribute importance to things that aren't important, and this also comes from a result of having gotten used to the concept of *leitzanus*/mockery. When people get used to attributing importance to things that oppose Torah, those things will become more important to the person than his Torah learning.

For example, a person is learning Torah his phone rings, and he immediately jumps to answer it.

How can this be? Where does this lack of seriousness towards his learning comes from? Why are people so quick to interrupt their learning? It's all because the person is already used to idle things from beforehand, and he comes to think that unimportant matters are really important. Therefore, when the phone rings, he considers the phone to be more important than his learning.

Seeing All of Creation As Hashem's Wisdom

We will try to understand better this concept. Why did Hashem create the world? He created it all so that we can recognize Him. What is the main way of how we recognize Him? It is through the Torah. How do we recognize Him through the Torah? How do we use the *Gemara* to recognize Hashem? How do we recognize Hashem better through learning *Halacha*?

When a person is born, does he naturally recognize Hashem? He should, but he doesn't. Why not? Because he didn't see the truth. For this reason, he needs to learn Torah, and this helps him see the truth. Torah can return a person to the true way he can see Creation, and helps him recognize Hashem. Torah returns you to your true place – that is, if you are connected to the Torah that you learn. But if a person is not really connected to the Torah he learns, then even if he knows a lot of Torah and learns it a lot, the Torah will not return him to his true place.

Finding a *shidduch* (spouse) is called *hashavas aveidah* (retrieving a lost item). Learning Torah is also a kind of *hashavas aveidah* – the person is returning his lost self to his true place, the Torah. *Chazal* say that “Avraham Avinu learned Torah from himself”, and this shows us that a person can return to his true self when he recognizes his Creator.

When a person learns Torah, what is his perspective towards his learning? The audience here is currently learning *Maseches Pesachim* in this *yeshiva*. Let's say he is learning *Maseches Pesachim*, where he is learning about what the term “*kemach*”/flour is. He's learning about how a person can take flour and use it for the *mitzvah* of *matzah*. He takes something mundane in Creation and reveals the wisdom in it. In this way, he learns Torah in a way that it returns him to Hashem.

There are many *mitzvos* that involve seemingly mundane things. To give a few examples, we sanctify our ordinary clothing by avoiding *shaatnez*. We sanctify animals through the laws of *kashrus*. We take strings and make *tzitzis* out of it. We take our house, which is mundane, and sanctify it by placing a *mezuzah* on it. *The mezuzah* is not there just because we have a mitzvah to place it there. It sanctifies our entire house. Everything in Creation can be returned to Hashem. It is all from His wisdom.

Therefore, now we can understand why we shouldn't make fun of things in Creation. Everything in Creation contains wisdom; nothing is to be mocked. If a person is truly connected to Torah he learns, he has this seriousness, and he won't mock other people.

More Examples of Breaches In Seriousness

When people learn in a *beis midrash* and chat, how can they do this?! In front of the holy *aron kodesh*, to sit and chat about who knows what? And to talk on a cellphone in a *shul*, in middle of learning?!

This is only because a person *isn't connected to the Torah* he learns, and therefore he gets used to attributing importance to things that aren't important. He is living a kind of life that is a total antithesis to a true life of Torah.

A person is *davening* and then as soon as he finishes davening, he talks to someone... how can it be that a second after he finishes davening he is already chatting? It's for the same reason.

The Voice of Hashem Is Everywhere

Shavuot is coming. If we really want to gain from it, we must look at reality as it is, and not mock anything in Creation.

When a person talks, where does his voice go? Where is Hashem's voice? It continues ever since we heard His voice at Har Sinai; it was "a great voice, which does not stop." Where did the voice go? It went into the Luchos, according to *Chazal*. Hashem's voice carved into the Luchos and formed the words in it; therefore, the voice of Hashem continues, through the Torah.

How can it be that a person is able to learn Torah in a country that's not *Eretz Yisrael*? In *Eretz Yisrael*, we have the air which makes people wise, but how are people able to learn Torah in an impure country like America? The answer is that everything that Hashem created was through His wisdom. Everything was created from the Torah, and therefore, even in America a person can learn Torah.

The voice of Hashem is still continuing, and for this reason, we are able to accept the Torah anew each year. There is a voice of Hashem in everything we see – even in the floor. Everything was

created from Torah, but before the Torah was given, the Torah remained hidden and concealed. After the giving of the Torah, the Torah became revealed to Creation, and ever since then, each person has a mitzvah to learn Torah.

To work on this practically, when a person leaves the *beis midrash* and he's walking through the street, how does he view what he sees? He has to view it as all being the creation of Hashem.

Hashem gave us the Torah in the desert, not in *Yerushalayim*. Even though the main place of Torah is *Yerushalayim* – “*For from Zion comes forth Torah*” – Hashem chose to give it to us by Har Sinai, in middle of the desert. Why? There is no holiness by Har Sinai nowadays. The lesson was because even in the desert, there can be Torah. This is because the word of Hashem is found in everything, even in middle of the desert.

For this reason, even a person learning in a country outside *Eretz Yisrael* – even in a country like America – is able to learn Torah. Wherever we are, we can reveal Torah there. The Torah can be revealed everywhere, because Hashem's voice reaches everywhere in the world. All of Creation comes from Hashem, and we can reveal Hashem anywhere.

The *Gemara*, which is called Talmud *Bavli*, was written in Babylonia – the place where we were exiled to. This shows us that Torah can be revealed no matter where we are, even in the darkest places of exile.

Torah can be everywhere; it is not limited to any time or place. It is not either limited to any soul; even if you're tired at night and you don't feel like going to Daf HaYomi, you can still muster yourself and learn, not just because you have an obligation to learn Torah every day, but because Torah is not limited to certain situations. In any situation you are in, you are able to learn Torah.

When a person doesn't understand that the world was created by Hashem, he belittles things in Creation and doesn't see anything wrong with this kind of behavior. He doesn't see Creation as being Hashem's Creation.

When we learn Torah, we must understand that the Torah learning should fill our entire perspective on Creation, and not just when we are actually learning. Since the Torah fills the entire existence, we must see all of Creation through the lens of Torah, and realize that all of Creation is created by Hashem.

Why is it that people are able to interrupt their learning for a mere phone call? How can it be that a person picks up his phone in the *beis midrash*, in middle of a *shiur*, and disturb everyone else's learning?! It is because he isn't really connected to the Torah. If a person would really be connected to Torah, he would never be able to disconnect from it.

May we merit to recognize Hashem from our learning, and that our Torah learning should fill our entire perspective towards Creation.

25 / *Patience In Learning*

Erech Apayim – Slow To Anger

One of the 48 kinyanim is called “*erech apayim*”, to be slow to anger.

Why is this necessary to acquire the Torah? We understand that it’s a good middah not to get angry, but why must we need it to acquire the Torah?

After all, the Mishnah does not list any of the other bad middos such as *gaavah* (conceit) and *taavah* (lust). So why is it that we need this specific middah of “*erech apayim*”, as one of the ways that we need to acquire the Torah?

Chazal state, “Whoever gets angry, the Shechinah leaves him.” We learn from this Moshe Rabbeinu, who one time got angry – and because of this, he forgot a halachah. The Tiferes Yisrael says that Moshe Rabbeinu was born with a nature to get angry, but he merited to fix it. How did he fix his anger? Besides for the fact that he worked to overcome it, he attained it as a gift from Hashem.

Thus, we see that overcoming anger is a way to acquire the Torah.

Erech Apayim – To Be Patient In Our Learning

But there is a deeper way as well to understand “*erech apayim*” and why it is necessary to acquire the Torah with.

The word “*erech*” comes from the word *maarich*, to “lengthen.” This is an ability in our soul to be *maarich*, to continue and to lengthen something. What does this mean? It is written, “*The Torah is longer than the earth and wider than the sea*”. A person needs to attain the quality of “length” – he needs *erech apayim* – in order to acquire the Torah.

It is well-known that the Maharil Diskin would learn one page of *Gemara* for 40 days. This doesn’t mean that it took him 40 days to finish the *sugya*. It meant that he always continued to learn the same thing he was learning, constantly probing his understanding so he could understand it better and better. Instead of continuing onto the next page of *Gemara*, he continued to understand what he was currently learning, more and more.

When we learn a *sugya* and then we continue to the next *sugya*, why do we continue? Is it because the *Rosh Kolel* said we should...? Is it because we simply grow impatient? Is it because we want to gather more Torah knowledge?

The truth is that every *sugya* we learn in *Gemara* can take a lifetime to understand! Every *sugya* of Torah is eternal. (Practically speaking, we should not spend our whole life on one *sugya* of *Gemara*, but in concept, it is definitely possible).

The Torah is “longer than the sea” – this is not just because there is so much quantity in the Torah, but because there is no end to how much quality which the Torah can be learned with. The Sages themselves didn’t reach the perfect understanding of Torah, as much as they understood.

When we learn *Gemara*, there is no end to how much we can understand the words of the Sages – we should never think that we have reached the pinnacle of understanding.

The understanding we can have in Torah is unlimited. There can always be more and more levels to how good we understand it. The Torah is “longer than the earth” – this is the concept of *erech apayim*. It is for us to be *maarich*, to “lengthen” – to keep continuing to further our current understanding of something in Torah, as opposed to thinking that we have reached the perfect understanding of anything in Torah.

When we learn Torah, we must be aware that we are involving ourselves with an endless wisdom. If we perceive it as endless, then we connect with the endlessness of Hashem (the “*Ein Sof*”). If a person thinks he truly understands what he learns, his Torah learning is lacking a connection with Hashem, and it is incomplete.

Rav Chaim Vital says that one must have good *middos* as a prerequisite to learn Torah. “*Erech apayim*” is the *middah* which can help us understand that Torah is endless, so it is the main tool we can use for this.

But if a person doesn’t identify with the concept of *erech apayim*, he probably thinks that he understands perfectly what he learns – and then he won’t have the tool to truly understand the Torah. “*Erech apayim*” is the tool we can use to truly understand the Torah.

“Erech Apayim”: Patience

What is “*erech apayim*”? One meaning of it is simple: Don’t get angry at someone who wrongs you.

But the deeper meaning is that we have a power in our soul, “*erech apayim*”, which can help us understand that we must patiently accept others’ views when it comes to Torah. For example, when a person accepts that his *chavrusa* can be right, even though he sharply disagrees with him, this utilizes the quality of “*erech apayim*”.

We know that the 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer* are a way for us to rectify the sin of the students of Rabbi Akiva, who did not properly honor each other in Torah learning; the 24,000 students were killed out as a punishment for this. Although we have no comprehension of these great students who were killed, *Chazal* revealed to us that there was some infraction on their part when it came to

respecting others' opinions with regards to Torah, and because of this, they were severely judged and punished.

We can rectify the sin of Rabbi Akiva's students through using the trait of *erech apayim*. Simply, it means we shouldn't get angry – which is hard to do of course, and it merits a discussion for itself. But we aren't addressing that aspect of “*erech apayim*” right now. We are discussing a different aspect of *erech apayim*: to be patient and willing to accept the truth when others disagree with us in Torah.

It is to be able to continue in our understanding of Torah, and to never remain complacent with what we understand, because there always more ways to understand the Torah.

Practically Applying This

To make this practical: *erech apayim* is a power in our soul to accept the words of those who are wiser than us, even when their words don't make sense to us. To accept the words of a *posek* even when I don't understand what he's saying, even when he doesn't make sense.

It is not just to fix our *middos*; it is a way to prepare for the Torah.

Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel always had arguments. Moshe *Rabbeinu* heard it all by Har Sinai; he heard every chiddush by Sinai. How could Har Sinai, a place of peace, be the very place where Moshe *Rabbeinu* heard every last argument in Torah that will ever take place? This was due to the power of *erech apayim*, which Moshe *Rabbeinu* possessed.

Therefore, one can accept the words of his *chavrusa* through using his power of *erech apayim*. It is to understand that all views in Torah were said at Sinai, and therefore, what others say can also be true, even if I disagree with it. When someone learns Torah like this all the time, he is connected to the level we were at when we stood at Har Sinai – on a constant basis.

But when someone constantly disagrees with his *chavrusa* and he never prepares to accept that maybe he can be wrong, maybe he has a lot of Torah in his hands, but it's not the real and perfected kind of Torah he can be having – it's not the Torah we received at Har Sinai. It is rather the Torah of the broken *Luchos* – a Torah that doesn't last.

May we be *zoche* with the help of Hashem to connect to the level we were at Har Sinai and to continue that level to the rest of the year – to learn Torah in a peaceful manner, a Torah in which “truth and peace meet”.

פרקי אבות פרק ו' משנה ו'. 026 מכיר את מקומו

26 / Recognizing Your Place

Hashem - The "Place" of the World

One of the 48 *kinyanim* to acquire the Torah is to be "*makir es mekomo*", that one should "recognize his place."

Simply speaking, this means that one has to learn the part of the Torah that is meant for him to learn. If someone learns a part in Torah which isn't meant for him to learn, it will get in the way of acquiring the Torah.

But the deeper meaning is that one has to recognize the true "Place" of the world: Hashem. The *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* writes at length that Hashem is the only real "place" that exists; He is called *mekomo shel olam*, the "Place" of the world.

Where Are We As We Learn Torah?

Generally speaking, everything exists in three planes: in a place, in time, and in the soul. This is called the concept of "*Olam, Shanah and Nefesh*" (World/place, Year/time, and Soul/man).

Eretz Yisrael is the main place of our world. The time we are in is currently *Sefiras HaOmer*; on Yom Tov we make a blessing of "*shehechyanu*" that we have reached this time of Yom Tov. Place and Time are concepts we are familiar with. But when it comes to our soul, we are often unclear. Where is our soul?

When a person learns Torah, where is he? If he's learning in Israel, it appears that he's in Israel, and if he's learning in Lakewood, it appears to be that he's learning in Lakewood. But the truthful perspective is that he is found with Hashem as he learns Torah! When a person learns Torah, he is connected with Hashem.

Chazal say, "Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world".

When a person learns Torah and he knows where he really is – the place where he's truly at – he understands that he is really found with Hashem.

This is an amazing concept when you think about it. When we learn Torah, Hashem is learning with us, as *Chazal* state. We have to recognize that when we learn Torah, we are indeed together with Hashem.

When we learn Torah, we are essentially found in a plane that existed before the Torah – we are found with Hashem, Who looked into the Torah to create the world. When we learn Torah, we are found in a point that came *before* Torah – we are in the point of Before Creation, when there was only Hashem.

One of the Sages, Rava, was so immersed in learning that he didn't even notice his fingers bleeding. It wasn't just because he was immersed in learning and thus disconnected from his surroundings. When a person is immersed in learning, he is attached with Hashem, and that is why he doesn't pay attention to his surroundings.

When a person learns Torah, it is not just that he's immersed in learning and that he's not doing frivolous things, and therefore he doesn't know what's going on in the world. It is because when one learns Torah, he is found in a completely different realm. He is with Hashem.

This is a whole new perspective to have towards our learning.

We Are Where Are Thoughts Are

When a person is learning Torah, the question is: Where is he? A person is made up of a body and a soul. His body is found where his body is, but where is the person's soul? The Ramban says that a person is found where his **thoughts** are – what he's thinking about.

When a person goes to sleep at night, his intellect leaves him, and his power of imagination (*medameh*) takes over. When a person is having a dream, he doesn't just imagine it – he feels that he's really there in his dream. That's the power of imagination – it is a force in a person which makes a person feel as if he's actually there in that place of imagination. When it comes to imagination, we are familiar with this concept, that a person feels that he's actually *there*. But when it comes to our actual power of thought, our real and true power of thought – *machshavah* – we usually don't identify ourselves as being *there* in our thoughts.

We also have this power in our real mind as well to feel that we are actually found where our thoughts are. Most people do not feel that they are where their thoughts are, because they don't identify their power of thought as being real. They think that thought is imagination.

The truth is that when a person only knows of imagination, he identifies himself as being in a place of imagination, whenever he imagines something. But if a person knows how to identify himself as being found in the place where he thinks, he is indeed found where his thoughts are.

We were all at Har Sinai. Where are we now? It is possible for a person to access the time of standing at Har Sinai, and to actually feel that he is standing there, ready to receive the Torah again. Why is it that a person doesn't feel that he is standing at Har Sinai? It is because he identifies himself as a body, and not as a soul. If he would view himself as being a soul, he would be able to feel that his soul is returning to Har Sinai each Shavuos every year to receive the Torah.

It's possible a person is learning Torah all day and doing all the *mitzvos*, but he is only found where his body is at, because he only identifies himself as a body.

Our souls left us at Har Sinai. Where did they go to? Our souls left us and went to the place where our soul is connected to. Our soul is found in the place that we think about. When a person learns Torah, he is really found in that place of Torah he is learning about. The Rambam says that Torah is like a *mikveh* which purifies a person – a person enters it and becomes purified. Learning Torah is actually entering a *mikveh*!

The Chazon Ish stated, “The secret of holiness is to be constant.” When a person feels that he is truly found in a different place when he learns Torah, he is found in that consistency of Torah.

Learning Torah: Identify Yourself As Being In The Torah That You Learn

This is not inspiration, but a concept that change a person's entire approach towards learning, if he absorbs this well. A person might learn a lot of Torah, but that doesn't mean he's *there*. He has to identify himself as being there, in that area of Torah that he's learning about.

Rav Chaim of Brisk was oblivious to his surroundings as he learned. It was because he identified himself as a soul, not as a body. It wasn't simply because he was immersed in learning and thus disconnected from his surroundings. It was because he identified himself as being found where his thoughts are.

Where is a person's “I”? Where does a person feel that his “I” is located? How does a person identify himself? Is our “I” found in some part of our body? Is it found in our heart's feelings? Is it in our brain? Is it in our hands? A person has to take the time to reflect about this and locate where his “I” is actually found.

If a person makes such a reflection and comes to the conclusion that his “I” is found in his heart – he feels himself existing entirely in his emotions – then his entire sense of self-worth is limited to his emotions. He is off-based in his assessment of himself. When a person identifies himself with **thoughts**, though, he has *begun* to feel where his true self is.

A person has to reach a point in which feels that **Torah** is his where his true self is. When one learns Torah, he has to feel towards it, “*This* is where I am found.” Without this recognition, a person can learn Torah but he feels that he *is* his body, and that it is merely his *brain* which thinks about Torah and analyzes it intellectually. A person has to feel that his “I” is actually found where his thoughts are, and then he can begin to feel that Torah is his true place where he is found.

Preparing For Shavuot

Preparing for Shavuot is not just about learning more Torah. It is about changing how we approach learning Torah. We must know how to identify where our true self, to know that we are really found in the Torah we learn.

We all have various problems. How do we avoid getting distracting from our problems and remain focused on our Torah learning?

Right now I am here in Lakewood; the problems here don't bother me, because I do not live here. Nothing is of interest to me here, and therefore I have no reason to be bothered. But when I get back to my home in Israel, things bother me, because since that is where I am found, the things in that place can bother me. The place you identify your "I" with is what is of interest to you, to where you feel connected to.

To always "think in learning" is not just about learning how to concentrate always on Torah thoughts. It is about living in a world of thought, in the world of Torah thought. It is to identify our true "I" as being in the place that is Torah, to feel that Torah is your true place.

Practically Applying This Concept

Firstly, we need to get used to always thinking in learning, besides for when we actually learn. Have time during the day in which you think only in Torah. This can be for about 5-15 minutes; whatever you can handle. During this time, don't open a *sefer*, because the point is to see where your thoughts wander to when you're not actually learning.

Pay attention to where your thoughts wander to. You can slowly identify yourself as being found in thoughts, with the more and more you do this.

This will reveal your intellect and sharpen it to think clearer when it comes to your Torah learning. The more you come to actually feel that your true "I" is found where your thoughts are, the more sharpened your thoughts will become, and your power of thought will become holier and more pristine as you think of what you learn.

The Sages say, "One who recognizes his place is called a wise person." The way to reach wisdom (*chochmah*) is through recognizing where one's true place is. A person has to recognize that he is really found in a place of *chochmah*/wisdom – the Torah.

27 / Rejoicing In Your Portion of Torah

Cheilek \ Undivided Portion and Chalukah \ Divided Portion

To prepare for the Torah, the *Mishnah* in *Avos* lists 48 ways of how the Torah is acquired. One of these ways is *someiach b'chelko*, “to rejoice in one’s portion”. Each person has his own *cheilek* (portion), and he must also rejoice in it.

The word “*cheilek*” is related to the word *cholok*, “smooth”. It is also from the word *chalukah*, “a divided portion.” It can also imply a union of parts, when each person has a *cheilek* (portion) in one thing. The *Mishnah* in the beginning of Tractate Bava Basra discusses a case of partners who wish to make a divide between their property, which the *Gemara* explains as a split between their portions. First the partners each had their own *cheilek* (portion) in the property, but they did not make an actual divide yet, and afterwards they split their property, where it becomes a *chalukah*, a divided portion.

A division is called *machlokes*. In a *machlokes*, each person had his own *cheilek*, such as in a family where each of the children was allotted a portion to inherit, and later there is *machlokes* – a division of the portions.

Each person has his own *cheilek* (portion) in Torah. This has a root, as well a branch, to it. As explained above, a *cheilek* is a portion that is connected to a greater whole. When each person has a *cheilek*, the parts are all connected together, and it is just that each person has his own portion. That is the root. In the branches of the *cheilek*, each person’s *cheilek* is divided from the other.

The classic example of *chalukah* (divided portions) is when it comes to owning a portion in the land of *Eretz Yisrael*. The *Gemara* argues if the division of the land was allotted to the descendants of the 12 tribes who left Egypt, or to those who entered the land. The land of *Eretz Yisrael* therefore undergoes *chalukah*, a division of parts.

The *Gemara*¹⁵ has an argument if *Yerushalayim* is divided amongst the 12 tribes or not. According to one opinion, the *Beis HaMikdash* (which was in *Yerushalayim*) is divided between the portion of Yehudah and the portion of Binyamin. According to the other opinion, *Yerushalayim* cannot be divided.

On a deeper level, the argument can be explained in terms of two dimensions of *Eretz Yisrael*. The lower dimension of *Eretz Yisrael* can be divided, but in its inner dimension, it cannot be divided. The opinion that holds that *Yerushalayim* was split between Yehudah and Binyamin is speaking of the lower dimension of *Eretz Yisrael*, which can be divided. The opinion that holds that

15 Yoma 12a

Yerushalayim cannot be divided is speaking of the higher dimension of *Eretz Yisrael*, the root, which cannot be divided. Rather, everyone has a *cheilek* (portion) in it.

On a more subtle level, every inheritance as well contains this root and branch to it. In an inheritance, each of the children divide their portions. At first, each of the children have a portion, where there are no divisions yet. Later, when they are inheriting the assets and dividing it, their portions become split from each other.

A Jew's Portion in Gan Eden, In The Beis Midrash, and In Olam HaBa

One of the Sages had a prayer, שתשים בחלקנו בגן עדן, “That you place our portion in *Gan Eden*.”¹⁶ Everyone has a portion in *Gan Eden*. The *Gemara* says that if one is meritorious, he can take another's portion in *Gan Eden*. Each person has his own personal portion in *Gan Eden* (which he may lose due to his sins). But when one connects to the general portion in *Gan Eden* which each person has, he takes not only his portion but another's portion, because his portion is part of a greater whole which is more inclusive of the other parts.

The *Mishnah* says that one must be *someiach b'chelko*, to rejoice in one's portion. This is true both on a physical level, that one should be happy with his physical situation, as well as on a spiritual level, that one should rejoice that he is able to learn Torah in the *Beis Midrash*, as we say in the prayer, ששמת חלקינו מיושבי בית המדרש, ולא שמת חלקנו מיושבי קרנות, “That You have placed our portion amongst those who dwell in the house of study, and not amongst those who dwell in the marketplaces.”

But there is a deeper understanding of *someiach b'chelko*, as mentioned above: “Place our portion in *Gan Eden*.” Even more so, above *Gan Eden* is *Olam HaBa* (the World To Come), as the *Mishnah* in the end of Tractate *Sanhedrin* states: “Every Jew has a portion in the World To Come.” Every Jew has his own personal portion in the World To Come, a “room befitting his honor” which his own divided portion, but in addition to this, every Jew has a share in the World To Come which is connected to everyone else's.

The Root of Our Portion – The Torah

Each person has his portion in the *Beis Midrash*, in *Gan Eden*, and in *Olam HaBa*. Yet, there is a deeper portion than all of the above. The very root is our portion in the **Torah**, as we say, ותן חלקינו בתורתך, “And give us a portion in Your Torah.” The words of Torah are received on two levels – in the general sense, and in the individual sense.

¹⁶ *Berachos 17a*

When Hashem gave the Torah, He said the Ten Commandments, which became split into the 70 languages. Even in the Ten Commandments, there was first only one commandment (*Anochi Hashem*) which became split into ten. This represents two different aspects of Torah. There is the general part of the Torah, which everyone has a share in, and there is each person's private share in the Torah. The Sages state that there are 600,000 letters in the Torah, parallel to the 600,000 souls in the Jewish people, because each person has one letter in the Torah. This is in the individual portion that each person has in one part of the Torah, but there is also each person's share in the *Toras Hashem Temimah*, the complete level of Torah.

Torah study therefore has two parts to it. There is each person's individual portion in the Torah, as we ask, "*And give us a portion in Your Torah.*" Each person must aspire and pray to reach his private share in the Torah, which is his own personal obligation. But each person must also strive to connect to the general, complete Torah which the entire Jewish people has a share in.

It is written, "*For the portion of Hashem is His nation.*" Each person has his own private portion in a connection to Hashem, and each Jew as well can connect to the general connection to Hashem which is for the entire Jewish people, for they are Hashem's nation that He is more intimately connected with.

Finding Your Personal Share and General Share In The Torah

When preparing for the day of the giving of the Torah, in order to be *someach b'chelko* in the words of Torah, there are two parts to it which one needs. On one hand, a person needs to exert himself in reaching his own private portion in the Torah. When one reaches his soul root (*shoresh haneshamah*), he can merit his personal share in the Torah, which is his own, unique level of comprehension in the words of Torah. Along with this, time, one needs to also learn the parts of Torah which are not of his own personal share, by amassing much knowledge in Torah. Through these two aspects together, a person connects both to his personal share in the Torah and general share in the Torah that belongs to the Jewish people. If one only connects to the general Torah which belongs to the Jewish people (by amassing much Torah knowledge) but he never finds his own personal share in the Torah, although he will gain by nullifying himself to the general whole of the Jewish people, he has not yet found his true potential in the Torah, so even his self-nullification to the Jewish people will not be complete.

One needs these two aspects together: to reach his own personal share in the Torah which belongs to him and no one else, which requires study and exertion, and in addition, one needs to connect to the completed level of Torah, and this requires him to learn all the other parts of Torah and gather much knowledge in it.

From finding one's personal share in the Torah, one also connects to Hashem. From connecting to the general Torah that is for all of the Jewish people, one also connects to Hashem, just as the entire Jewish people heard Hashem at Har Sinai and answered, "*The voice that Hashem has spoken, we shall do*" – the complete connection to Hashem.

28 / Silence & Speech In Learning Torah

“One Who Makes A Fence For His Words” – Silence

We are near the day of the giving of the Torah. The *Mishnah* lists 48 ways of how the Torah is acquired. One of the ways is “One who makes a fence for his words”.

Rashi explains that this refers to a Torah student who brings proof to the words of his *rebbe* (Torah teacher), which helps others fulfill the words of their teacher.

An additional explanation of “one who makes a fence for his words” is, as the Sages state, “A fence for wisdom, is silence.” According to this explanation, the words of the holy Torah themselves are already a “fence” to the words of the Torah, by placing boundaries and definitions on matters. The concept of silence personifies this concept, for silence places a boundary on one’s speech.

Thus, part of acquiring the Torah is through silence. Besides for speaking the words of Torah, which is a *mitzvah* of “*And you shall speak in it*”, there is also an opposite concept, of knowing when to be silent in the words of Torah. In order to properly speak the words of Torah, one must also be able to do the opposite of speaking, which is silence.

Impaired Silence

There is impaired silence, and there is holy silence.

The Creation consists of four types of creations – the still objects [i.e. rocks], the growing organisms [plants], the live creatures [i.e. animals], and social beings [people].

When one falls from the level of “social being”, he is on the level of an animal. As the verse says, “*They were comparable to animals.*” Although animals can also produce various forms of speech, and the Sages state that it is possible to decipher the chirping of the birds, this is not the same level of speech of man. However, it is some degree of speech.

Even worse than the level of an animal is when person falls to the level of being like a mere growing organism, for it is written “*Man is like the tree of a field*”, and it is explained that man can fall to the level of existence of being like a mere tree. The Sages state that there is a “language of the trees”, so a tree has some level of speech.

But the worst level of existence is when man falls to the level of the still creations [i.e. rocks] which are not capable of any level of speech. Man can talk, animals and plants have some level of speech, but the still creations have no speech at all, so it is the lowest level of existence.

When one sleeps, it is a sixtieth of death, and one of the reasons is because a person does not talk while he is asleep, so it resembles death. Speech is a sign of life, whereas silence represents death. The kind of silence which represents death is the impaired level of silence, which is when one is silent when he should have spoken instead.

Holy Silence – Thinking of Words of Torah

In contrast to this, the holy silence that is necessary in order to acquire Torah is represented by the silencing of Creation, when Hashem said, “Enough” and He stopped the Creation. Hashem used the Ten Expressions to create the world, and then silenced the Creation. Shabbos is also a time when Hashem silences the Creation. That is the depth of why we are silent from mundane talk on Shabbos, and this is also the same depth of why “everyone agrees that on Shabbos the Torah was given”, because on Shabbos there were no more expressions to create the world, so it is a time of silence which is fitting for the Torah to be given.

Where do we find the holy kind of silence by the giving of the Torah? The Sages state that the entire Creation was silent by the giving of the Torah. The Gemara also says that when Moshe ascended to Heaven, “Why are You giving the Torah through me?” Hashem said to Moshe, “Be quiet! This is what has risen in My thoughts.” We see from this that there is a connection between the giving of the Torah and silence. Hashem wanted the Torah to be given through Moshe, and He also wanted it to be preceded with this silence.

From the fact that Hashem said, “Be quiet, this is what has risen in My thoughts”, we see that silence is associated with thought. This is the root of holy silence which is needed to acquire Torah. As discussed in *halachah*, there is an argument if one fulfills the *mitzvah* of Torah study only through speech, or if one also fulfills Torah study just through thinking about words of Torah. In actuality, when learning Torah, one needs to alternate back and forth between these two modes – speech of Torah, and thoughts of Torah, which is a “silence” from speaking of Torah. One needs to think about the words of Torah he is learning, then to speak of it, and then return to thinking of it, in a cycle. When one thinks Torah thoughts, he is being silent from speech, but this is not impaired silence, *chas v’shalom*. Rather, it is a silence which raises a person from the level of speech to the level of thought.

This is the depth of understanding the words of Torah, and this is the same depth of how silence is necessary to acquire the words of Torah. When one combines speech of Torah together with thoughts of Torah, this is the depth of what Torah study is about.

The Connection To The Level of Torah Before Creation

When one has these two aspects together, speech of Torah and thoughts of Torah, he is connected to the point that was before the Ten Expressions, which was before the Creation. Before

the Creation, there was a level of “Torah which preceded the world.” One connects to that level of Torah through the power of holy silence.

The Sages state that “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”. Thus, the Torah preceded the world. Through speech, we connect to the Torah that is after the creation of the world. Through silence, we connect to the point of before Creation [and to the level of Torah that was before Creation].

When one has the combination of speech of Torah and silence (thinking) of Torah, this is the depth of connecting to the Torah. Through silence (thinking) and speech of Torah together, this is where one finds *d'veykus* (attachment) to the Torah and to Hashem; to the revealed level of Torah as it is on this world, and to level of Torah before Creation. Therein is the deep revelation of “Hashem, the Torah and Yisrael are one” – in the actual sense.

29/ Bestowing Torah Upon Others

The Quality of “Do Not Attribute The Good To Yourself”

We are very soon approaching the day of the giving of the Torah. The *Mishnah* in *Avos* lists the 48 ways in which the Torah is acquired, and one of them is “One who does not attribute the good to himself.”

Elsewhere, there is a *Mishnah* in *Avos* that says, “Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai said: Do not attribute any of the good to yourself, for it is that you were created.” This trait, of “not attributing the good to yourself”, is not only a quality which one should have, but it is also listed specifically as one of the ways to acquire the Torah.

This needs understanding. Why is this necessary in order to acquire the Torah?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 93a) says that Nechemia did not merit to have a sefer of *Tanach* written in his name (instead, his *sefer* is regarded as a continuation of Sefer *Ezra*), because he attributed credit to himself. There are several other places in the Gemara as well where we see that one must not “attribute good” to himself.

There is a *Midrash* that when Moshe ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah, Moshe said to Hashem, “Why are You giving the Torah through me?” Hashem responded, “Be quiet! This is what has arisen in My thoughts.” It is explained that Moshe said this because he did not want to “attribute good” to himself. Thus, the giving of the Torah needed to come through Moshe’s refusal to contribute any credit for himself. That is the depth of why “not attributing good to oneself” is one of the ways to acquire the Torah - for even Moshe, who was worthy to give the Torah, did not attribute any credit to himself for giving the Torah.

“For It Is This That You Were Created” – To Bestow The “Good” of Torah Upon Others

What we still need to understand, though, is why indeed this is a necessary quality to acquire the Torah. What we see from the above that it was necessary to acquire the Torah, but what we need to understand is: Why?

The *Orchos Tzaddikim* (ch. 26) and the *Shaarei Teshuvah* explain that this quality of “not attributing credit to yourself” is that you should feel like you have done very little, in comparison to how much you could have done. As Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai says, “Do not attribute the good to yourself, for it is that you were created.” What is the deeper way to understand “For it is this that you were created”?

As is well-known, there are several reasons given for why Hashem created the world. One of the reasons is explained by the Ramchal, that Hashem has a desire to bestow good upon His creations, and in another place, the Ramchal describes it as “The law of goodness is that it bestows good.” This is the reason for Creation – it is because Hashem desires to bestow good on His creations.

What is it that is “good” for His creations? It is written, “*And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good.*” The Gemara explains that this “good” is Torah, for “There is no good except Torah, for it is written, “*A good purchase I gave to you, My Torah do not abandon.*” This that “there is no good except Torah” is connected with the “good” which Hashem bestows upon His creations.

This is the depth behind why Torah learning must be learned, and taught. One must learn the Torah, and also teach it to others. This is because since the Torah is called “good”, and Hashem wants to bestow good upon His creations, when one has the “good” of Torah he must also teach it to others, to bestow this “good” upon others.

Not Keeping The “Good” For Yourself – By Teaching Torah To Others

Now we can understand why “not attributing the good to yourself” is one of the ways of acquire the Torah. What does it mean not to attribute the good to yourself? From a simple understanding, it is a feeling, of not attributing any credit to yourself. But the *Ramchal* in *Mesillas Yesharim* explains that it means that one must teach Torah to others. If a person only learns Torah for himself and he never teaches is, he is taking the “good” of the Torah, for himself. Instead, a person must teach Torah to others, so that he isn’t keeping the “good” of Torah only for himself.

It is written, “*It is not good for man to be alone.*” When a person connects to Torah, he connects to the “good” which is the Torah – but if he remains in the state of “alone”, learning Torah only for himself, he cannot connect to the “good” of the Torah, for he is remaining in his state of being alone. A person must understand that the Torah is not only for him, but for everyone, and therefore he must teach it to others if he knows it. Hence, “Do not attribute the good to yourself, for it is this that you were created” – this means that one must teach Torah to others, and thus, “for it is this that you were created.” To the extent that one is not keeping the “good” of Torah for himself, by making sure to teach it to others – one reaches greater understanding in the Torah.

Torah Lishmah – Learning Torah For The Sake of Benefitting Others

However, this is on condition that one is teaching Torah *lishmah*,¹⁷ and not for any other ulterior intentions, such as seeking honor, etc.

¹⁷ The Rav has several shiurim which explain the levels of learning Torah lishmah. Refer to the shiurim of נפש.החיים.שער ד

If that condition is met, when one teaches Torah to others, he connects to the “good” of the Torah.

We are now in the days of preparing to receive the Torah, and one of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah is “not to attribute good to oneself” when it comes to Torah, which we have explained here to mean that one must not keep the “good” of Torah to himself. This is essentially the concept of learning Torah *lishmah*.

The Gemara says that meaning of a “*Toras Chessed*”, a Torah of kindness, is when one learns Torah and teaches it to others. When one learns Torah but he does not learn it *lishmah*, he is learning Torah only in order to receive benefits from it, for himself. Such a person will only learn Torah for himself and he does not teach it to others. Such Torah learning is not called *Toras Chessed*. When one learns Torah *lishmah*, he teaches it to others, because he is not only learning for himself. Such Torah learning is called *Toras Chessed*.

Thus, learning Torah in order to teach Torah to others and benefit them is called *Torah lishmah*. To the degree that one connects to the depth of teaching Torah to others, which is to learn Torah *lishmah*, one receives the abundant blessings of the Torah.

The Way To Prepare For Receiving The Torah

When one prepares for the day of the giving of the Torah, Shavuot, by simply reading and reviewing his Torah learning to himself, his Torah learning is not able to receive the abundant blessings of Torah. But if he is learning Torah in order to teach it others (assuming that his intentions are *lishmah*, and not if he is doing so out of various reasons that are not *lishmah*) – this is the true level of Torah, and accordingly, his comprehension in Torah will be greater.

One should consider himself merely as a “pipeline” through which the words of Torah flow through, to others, and that his existence is for the purpose of teaching Torah to others. That is the depth of how to receive the Torah. Without this understanding, one’s Torah learning is only on the level of the second set of the *Luchos*, and he is missing the level of the first set of *Luchos*, which represent Torah *lishmah*.

To the degree that one understands that bestowing Torah upon others is one of the fundamental ways of acquire Torah, that is how much abundant blessing of comprehension in the Torah he will receive.

30 / *Beloved****How One Becomes Beloved & Why Is Being Beloved One of the 48 Ways To Acquire Torah?***

We are soon approaching the day when the Torah was given to Yisrael. The *Mishnah* in *Avos* says that one of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah is by being “beloved” (*ahuv*). Later, the *Mishnah* counts the qualities of loving the Creator, loving others, and loving righteousness. But before these qualities, the *Mishnah* first lists the quality of being “beloved” – when one is loved by others.

How does a person become beloved to others? And why is this one of the ways to acquire the Torah? True, the Gemara says that if a person learns Torah and he sanctifies Hashem’s name in front of others, he makes Hashem beloved to others, for others see him and they say, “How beautiful are His deeds.” But why is it that this quality of being “beloved” specifically one of the ways in which the Torah is required?

Elsewhere, there is a *Mishnah* in *Avos* which teaches that “Anyone who learns Torah *lishmah* (for its own sake) and raises it and exalts it, he merits many things.” As is known, the *Nefesh HaChaim* (in Gate IV) explains at length what the meaning of Torah *lishmah* is, and cites the words of the *Rosh* in Tractate *Nedarim*, where the Gemara says that “One should speak of it (the Torah) *lishmah* – do not do anything for the sake of becoming exalted, and in the end, the honor will come”, and the *Rosh* explains that “to speak the words of Torah, *lishmah*, is to speak the words of Torah for the sake of the words of Torah themselves.”

To explain the depth of these words of the *Rosh*, we must know: What is the concept of *lishmah*, and what is the concept of *shelo lishmah*?

The Gemara says that one must learn Torah and *mitzvos* even without *lishmah*, because from *shelo lishmah*, comes *lishmah*.¹⁸ From this teaching of the Sages, we learn what the proper approach towards the spiritual should be: we should engage in it even *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motivations), which will eventually lead towards doing them *lishmah*. So the desirable form of Torah and *mitzvos* is *lishmah* (but which needs to be preceded with *shelo lishmah*). However, the ‘other side of the coin’ is not explained by the Sages: what our approach should be towards worldly matters. When we need to make use of this world, do we need to make use of it *lishmah*, or *shelo lishmah*?

Unlike Torah and *mitzvos*, when we deal with worldly matters, we need to use the approach of “*shelo lishmah*”. When we approach Torah and *mitzvos*, it should be with the intention of doing them *lishmah*, but it is just that from *shelo lishmah* we can arrive at *lishmah*.

18 *Pesachim* 50b

The definition of *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* appears to be as follows. *Lishmah* is that when I do something, I am doing it for the sake of the action that I am doing. *Shelo lishmah* is that I am doing something now for a different purpose; where I am using the current action as a means to get to a different goal.

The Sages state that This World resembles a hallway, and the Next World resembles a palace. This World is only a means to get to a greater end, just like a hallway. Thus, anything we use on This World is therefore meant to be used *shelo lishmah* – for another purpose, which is higher.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* states that a person was created to bask in the pleasure of connection with Hashem, and this is the true good, and whatever else people think is good is worthless. Therefore, explains the *Mesillas Yesharim*, everything on this world is only a means which we must use for peace of mind. The purpose of each thing on this world is to help our Torah and *mitzvos*. So we are meant to use everything on this world for another purpose, which is a higher purpose.

If one uses this world for the sake of simply using this world – for example, if he is jealous, desirous, and seeking honor – what he is really doing? He is using the power of *lishmah* in the wrong place. He is connecting to these actions for the sake of experiencing these actions. He will enjoy the pleasures of this world for the sake of enjoying the gross physical pleasure. He will want honor not because he recognizes the higher purpose of honor, but simply because he wants his own honor. This is the opposite of a true life. The true, inner life is to use this world only for a higher purpose, and not for the purpose of simply enjoying this world for its own sake.

Our soul has two layers in it – a power to act *lishmah*, and a power to act *shelo lishmah*. If you read the letters of the Chazon Ish, you can see much about this concept, and that this is how he mainly viewed life.

The Vilna *Gaon* lists 70 forces of the soul, but these are just the branches. The roots of the soul are either one of these two powers – *lishmah*, and *shelo lishmah*.

A false kind of life is when one uses both of these powers in the wrong place. He uses the power of *lishmah* for this world, by using this world for the sake of experiencing this world. He eats simply for the sake of eating, he sleeps in order to sleep, and he enjoys all pleasures on this world “*lishmah*” in the sense that he’s enjoying this world for its own sake and for no other purpose. But when it comes to learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*, instead of learning Torah *lishmah* and doing *mitzvos lishmah*, he acts *shelo lishmah*! He learns Torah in order to get honored, or to get rewarded, etc. One who lives habitually, without ever thinking and reflecting, will want to experience this world “*lishmah*” but he will relate to the spiritual with intentions that are “*shelo lishmah*”.

This is not just a thought. It is a deep understanding about the inner workings of the soul, which are subconsciously motivating a person. The more a person is a *baal avodah* (one who is consciously and actively involved with serving the Creator), the more he is aware of his intentions, if they are coming from *lishmah* or *shelo lishmah*.

In contrast to this, a true life is when a person uses this world *shelo lishmah* – for a different purpose than simply using this world, and instead making use of it for a higher purpose. He eats,

drinks and sleeps not just to stay healthy, and he enjoys it too (as we see from one of Shabbos), but he is not doing it for the sake of experiencing the physical enjoyment. He is doing these actions also so that he can have the energy to serve *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. He is using this world only so that he can take care of the needs of his body and “animal soul” (*nefesh habehaimis*), so that he will be physically and emotionally healthy, for the higher purpose of being able to serve the Creator. Thus, he is using this world “*shelo lishmah*” – he is not using the world for its own sake, but as a means to a greater end.

When it comes to Torah learning and *mitzvos*, though, one needs to make use of the power of *lishmah*. When doing *mitzvos*, he needs to be connected to the act of the *mitzvah* itself. When learning Torah, instead of learning it for honor or reward or even to go to the World To Come (which is a subtle level of *shelo lishmah*), he learns it *lishmah* – he learns Torah for its own sake. Understandably, he must do so with a higher sense of purpose: that it is the will of the Creator that he learn Torah and do *mitzvos*. In short, when one is learning Torah, he must do so for the sake of the Torah learning and not for any other purpose, and when he does *mitzvos*, he must do so only out of a connection to the *mitzvah*.

Lishmah Vs. Shelo Lishmah – An Issue of Centeredness

These two abilities of the soul, *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*, can also be understood on a deeper level. *Shelo lishmah* is really a confusion of motivations. The person who acts *shelo lishmah* is doing an act but his intention is for something else. It is like a person who is *davening* to Hashem but he is spacing out, so his mind and heart are elsewhere. He is split between several places. His body is in one place, his mind is in another place, and his heart is another. *Shelo lishmah* is therefore not just a thought, but a level of perception in the soul, in which a person splits himself, by doing one thing and intending for something else. This is the depth of a “world of disparity” in terms of the soul.

Lishmah is when a person’s actions and thoughts are intertwined, when his outer and inner layers are integrated. So *lishmah* is not just a thought. It is a result of purity of heart, of purifying one’s desires. But on a subtler level, as we are explaining here, *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* are about how centered one is when he does something. *Shelo lishmah* is when a person is mixed up: he does one thing, but his mind and heart are thinking or desiring something else. *Lishmah* is when a person’s inner forces (mind and heart) are integrated into what he is doing. This is the secret of *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity of those) which is experienced by those who learn Torah *lishmah*. When each of the soul’s forces is in its proper place, this is the deep state of *menuchas hanefesh*.

The Soul’s Exile – The Inevitable “Shelo Lishmah” On This World

There are two exiles in Creation. The simple level of the exile is the exile of the Jewish people amongst the nations: the exiles of Egypt, Babylonia, Media-Persia, Greece, Edom/Rome, Yishmael

(the Arab dominion) and Erev Rav (the Mixed Multitude) – this is the order of exiles as listed by the Vilna Gaon. But there is an additional exile which is deeper: the exile of the soul to the body. Our soul comes from Heaven, and its very descent into this world is exile for the soul.

The simple understanding of the soul's exile is because it came from above, and it came down to this world, a lowly place, so the soul is not found in its proper place. But exile is not only with regards to a place – it can also exist on a more conceptual level. The soul's exile to the body on this world is not simply a change of location for the soul. It is an exile to the soul because its very perception, which comes from a higher world, is now mixed with the way the body perceives reality. The fact that the soul inhabits the body is already a profound exile for the soul. This world is compared to darkness, but the soul comes from Heaven, a place of light where there is no darkness.

This World is like a hallway, meaning that our perception from the view of this world is like a hallway, and the Next World is like a palace, which is the higher and truer perception.

The *sefer Ruach Chaim* explains that a person must learn Torah and do *mitzvos shelo lishmah*, because it is impossible for a person to begin with *lishmah*. One must begin from *shelo lishmah* and aspire to reach *lishmah*. What is the depth of this? When we are found on this world, which is like a hallway, our primary motivation which we always start out with is *shelo lishmah*. This is the depth of the soul's exile – the fact that it must begin with *shelo lishmah* when learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*.

Beloved: The Power To Act Lishmah

One of the 48 ways in acquiring the Torah is to be “beloved”. What is the depth of this?

Consider the following. If a person gives a gift to someone, and his friend gives him back a gift in return, what are the intentions of these people? The first person gave the gift for some ulterior motivation, so even when the second person gives him a gift back, it isn't out of love. Why not? The main obstacle that prevents people from genuinely loving each other is because they are connecting to each other from a place of *shelo lishmah*. Therefore, when the first person gave a gift to his friend, it wasn't for the sake of fulfilling his friend's needs. It was for some ulterior motivation that the giver has.

Just as a person may be learning Torah *shelo lishmah* and he “uses” the Torah for various purposes (other than learning Torah for its own sake), so does he give a gift to others with intentions that are *shelo lishmah*. He acts towards Hashem with an intention to receive something in return, and he will act the same way with his friends. He will obviously not become beloved to others.

Who is a person that becomes beloved to others? It is when one serves Hashem for the sake of serving Hashem, and not to get something out of it. When he learns Torah, it is for the sake of learning Torah itself, *lishmah*. When he does the *mitzvos*, it is for the sake of doing the *mitzvah*. As a result, he will act with *lishmah* when it comes to his interpersonal relationships as well. When he does a nice thing for another person, he is doing it for that person's good, and not for his own good.

When one learns Torah and does the *mitzvos* and he is motivated by *lishmah*, his interpersonal relationships with others will also be *lishmah*, and such a person will be beloved to others. This is the quality of “beloved” which is one of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah. The ways to acquire the Torah are not the kinds of acquisition which we use to acquire something from the outside. The ways to acquire the Torah are really inner changes in one’s soul. When one changes his inner psyche, he becomes ready to receive the Torah.

The Two Root Powers We Received At Har Sinai

These words, understandably, cannot apply to every person [since each person is at a different spiritual level]. But we must understand that at Har Sinai, a higher root was revealed. There are 613 *mitzvos*, which branched out of the Ten Commandments. Rav Saadya Gaon says that all 613 *mitzvos* were contained in the Ten Commandments, and even more so, all Ten Commandments were contained in the first two commandments, of “*I am Hashem your G-d*” and “*You shall not have any other gods.*” From Hashem’s voice, we heard only these two commandments. The rest was through the voice of Moshe. Thus, the roots of the giving of the Torah were “*I am Hashem your G-d*” and “*You shall not have any other gods.*”

Throughout the days of the year, a person is involved with the 613 *mitzvos*, through exertion in Torah study about the 613 *mitzvos* in all their details. However, when it comes the time of the giving of the Torah, there is no involvement with the details of the 613 *mitzvos*. Rather, it is the revelation of their root. The giving of the Torah is the revelation of the roots of the *mitzvos*. There are only two roots – “*I am Hashem your G-d*” and “*You shall not have any other gods.*” The rest of the Torah is the “commentary” of these two root commandments.

On a deeper level, these two root commandments correspond to the two root powers of the soul, *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*, as we have been explaining here until now. “*I am Hashem your G-d*” represents *lishmah*, and “*You shall not have any other gods*” represents *shelo lishmah*.

In Conclusion

May the Creator give us the strength, together with all the Jewish people, to receive the Torah, and with the greatest depth – both in the collective unit of souls of the Jewish people, as well as in each individual soul. If one has exerted himself in Torah study in the year 5776, he will certainly receive the Torah on a higher level when it comes 5777. A higher level of Torah than the year before doesn’t only mean more Torah study (although that is also important); it is more about getting further and further into the depths of the Torah [through learning Torah *lishmah*]. When one learns Torah at this deeper level, he will have both greater quantity and greater quality in Torah.

May we all merit together with the rest of the Jewish people to receive the Torah, and merit to hear “*From Zion comes forth the Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.*”

התורה נקנית משנה ו פרק ו – אוהב את התוכחות

*037 / Loving Rebuke –
Encouraging Yourself With Your Unique Quality
[Divrei Chizuk Given in Mordy's Shteebel in Lakewood as a "Kiruv Kerovim" event]*

Rebuking Ourselves From Within

One of the 48 ways to acquire the Torah, the Mishnah (Avos 6:6) says, is to love *tochachah* - rebuke. Certainly most people do not love to get rebuked. The Gemara says that almost no one in the generation can handle rebuke, and likewise, almost no one in the generation is eligible to give it.

Simply we understand that “rebuke” is when a person does something forbidden, and someone else comes and rebukes him: “You did something that was *assur* (forbidden)” Or, “You did something that was inappropriate.” But there is also a way to get rebuke from within ourselves, without needing another person to come keep us on track.

Accessing Not-Yet-Utilized Potential

Tochachah is from the words *toch koach* – “within, there is power.” In the *Asher Yatzar* blessing we say that Hashem created every person with wisdom. So every person has wisdom within him, which he needs to bring to the fore. And, the Maharal says that a person is called *adam* from the word *adamah*, earth, just like we plant seeds in the earth and it produces plants and fruits, so does a person have potential which he needs to utilize.

So what is rebuke? It really means the clarity of knowing and being clear about “What powers do I have? What potential do I have which I haven’t yet utilized?”

So – this is how a person can rebuke himself [he can keep himself on track when he becomes aware of his abilities and he is making sure to try to use them], without needing others to come and set him back on track.

Steps 1-2

The first step one must know is: “What are my capabilities?” The second step, after that, is: “What abilities am I using and which abilities are still in my potential which I haven’t yet learned?”

The Importance of Knowing What Your Best Ability Is

First, a person must become very clear about the unique potential that Hashem has given him. Certainly Hashem gave each of us many different abilities. In order for a person to utilize his potential properly, one cannot do it all at once in one shot. What then is the proper way to do it?

Hashem gave each person one special quality among the many abilities that he has. It is unique, and no one else has it. That unique ability within each of us is the ability that we have to mainly be using more than any other ability. Certainly we need to try to use all our abilities as much as we can, but we must know what the main one is and make sure that we are mainly using it.

For example if you want to renovate your house. You can't do it all at once because it's too expensive, so you pick one part of the house to renovate first. Are you first going to renovate the storage space of your house? Or the garage? It makes most sense to begin renovating the house with the room that's more central to living, like the dining room or living room, or maybe the focal point of the house which you see right where you walk in. The point is that you first have to focus on the most important part of the house.

So it is with our abilities of our soul. We have many abilities and it's good to use all of them. But we need to prioritize. We must know what our greatest ability is, and we have to make sure that we are using it often.

How We Can Know What Our Best Ability Is

There are two ways how we can know it.

The first way to know it is, by seeing what value each ability has, and seeing which is the most valuable to you.

Every person grows up with a certain value system, so he places more value on one thing more than another. In some homes, the focus was on *chesed*. In other houses, the focus was *hakaras hatov* - to always say "thank you" and express gratitude. In other homes, the focus was *davening*. And understandably, there are homes where the main focus is on learning Torah. Certainly all of these ways are right - but the question is: What do you, personally, excel in? Where is your main strength?

Chazal say that no person is equal, we all have different faces, personalities, *middos*, and ways of thinking.¹⁹ A person has to know: What is currently my greatest unique ability? This shouldn't be determined by what you want to be, or what you wish you were, but by knowing: "What is actually my unique ability that I have right now?"

¹⁹ Talmud Bavli Berachos 58a

But there is a subtle point to understand here. Sometimes a person says, “My whole family focuses on a certain thing, so I have to focus on it too.” But that’s not necessarily your uniqueness, it’s just the way you grew up and the way you were raised. It’s not necessarily your main strength.

For example, in some homes where the father is a successful lawyer, and he may decide that his children should all become lawyers just like him. This happens many times. Just because the parent excels at a certain job - everyone in the family has to do that thing? Can we say that each of the children have the talent to become a lawyer just like their father? Perhaps this is what he was born into and this is what he hears about all day in his house, so maybe it should just stay that way with him too...? It is almost certain that at least one of the children has a different talent than the parents, and he will have to do something else that the parents didn’t do. The child has difficulty when he grows up and is now an adult pursuing a job, because he feels pressured to do the same thing his father did, when this is not for him at all to do, and there is really something else much more appropriate for him.

Each of our three *Avos* had their main quality which each of them excelled in. Avraham Avinu’s special trait was *chessed* - love and kindness, and Yitzchok Avinu’s special trait was *yirah*, strictness and fear of Hashem, and Yaakov Avinu’s main trait was diligence in Torah study. Avraham Avinu pursued kindness, he taught people about Hashem, and he hosted guests all the time. Imagine Yitzchok Avinu is seeing all this – what does he need to think? Does Yitzchok Avinu have to say, “I have to do the same exact thing that my father did - I also have to host guests all the time, I also have to pursue kindness, and I also have to convert people to believing in G-d, just like my great father did?” Clearly, Yitzchok Avinu was aware of how great his father was, but he also knew that he had his own *avodah* to do, his own personal share on this world, and it was very different than his father’s.

One of the Chassidic *Rebbes* was *niftar*, and his son went to go sit in his father’s seat. One of the older Chassidim there went over to him and said, “I knew a long time ago that you would do differently than what your father did.” He answered, “I am continuing exactly what my father did, I didn’t change anything. My father did his *avodah*, and I am doing mine. I am continuing his legacy of *avodah*, but I am doing it in my own way.” They said to him, “But you are doing different things that your father didn’t do.” He answered, “I am doing my *avodah*, and he had to do his.”

Yitzchok didn’t have to continue the exact *chessed* his father Avraham did, because that wasn’t his purpose on the world. Yitzchok Avinu had his own *avodah* to do which was very different from his father’s.

Every person grows up in a certain family where he is drawn after certain kinds of personalities and interests based on the environment he grew up in and which influenced him until today. If a person would be born into a different community or family, would he act the same way he acts now, or is he always a product of his environment? Most people when they grow up, they act according to the way they grew up in the society they were born into. So most people as adults are continuing how they grew up as children. Certainly everything is run by *Hashgachah Peratis* (Hashem’s Divine Providence) and Hashem’s Divine Providence arranges which home or environment a person is born

into, but each person is deciding if he wants to continue or not in the same exact way he grew with and was raised with.

Let us sharpen the concept. Let's say we have a *goy*, but he believes in Hashem and he's thinking of converting to become a Jew. Perhaps he should think to himself: "Why should I convert to the Jewish religion? If Hashem in His Divine Providence made me born as a *goy* and not a Jew, then why should I go against His plan and convert into Judaism?" But the answer to this is that the concept of Divine Providence doesn't mean that you must remain your entire life the way you were born. Divine Providence arranged for you to be born in a certain family and environment, to bring you to a point of free will where you will decide if you want to continue on that exact path or not.

There were many Gedolim who grew up in homes and environments that were very different from what they ended up becoming. Everyone has to believe that Hashem decided which home and environment he was born into, and every person must honor his parents with the greatest respect. But after one is doing that, he must think: What does Hashem want me to do with my life? Does he want me to just continue in the exact way I was born in or does He want me to utilize any potential I didn't use yet?

If a father is Rosh Yeshivah or a Rav, that doesn't mean that the child must think I have to become a Rosh Yeshivah or a Rav. Though it's true that the father is doing what Hashem wants from him, that doesn't mean that his son has to serve Hashem in the same exact way that his father did. Yitzchok Avinu was very different than his father, though he recognized that his father was the greatest in *chessed*, he knew what his *avodah* was and he knew that he had his own personal share on the world that was very different than his father's. Avraham made the prayer of *Shacharis* - and Yitzchok made the prayer of *Minchah*. It's not that Yitzchok was looking to take the easy route and take a more comfortable path than his father's, nor was he seeking to be different than his father. It is just that he was focused on revealing his unique potential.

This is the meaning of how "to love rebuke". It means that one has to know his own personal share, to know how much of his abilities he has so far utilized, and how he can continue to utilize his abilities better.

Therefore, every person - no matter what place or society or family he was born into - must know that Hashem decided that this is the best possible place for him to be born into, and he must also know that Hashem wants him to utilize his own unique potential.

How To See Results From All Our Efforts

The more that a person is *zocheh* to do his unique *avodah* and utilize his own potential, he will see the fruits of his efforts, as well as the fruits of those fruits. Just like seeds produce fruit, so too if a person is utilizing his unique potential, he will keep seeing the results of it.

Now we can say, with Hashem's help, a very clear definition. If a person sees that he has been working for many years at something and he sees no results from it or he's not seeing that much

success at it, it is very possible that the reason for this is because these aren't his real talents and capabilities. He's not using his true talents, and instead he's trying so hard to become talented and successful at something that's not really 'for him' to do. He's working so hard at something for so many years at something that's just not for him. No matter how much he works at it, he's not going to see that much results from it.

Rav Naftali Trop said that there are three types of fields mentioned in the Gemara – *ziburis*, *beinonis*, and *idyos* – the bad, so-so, and good kinds of fields. Simply speaking, there is poor quality soil and there is better quality soil. But the Gemara says that some kinds of plants grow better in the 'bad' kinds of fields, while some things grow better in the so-so fields, and some plants grow better in the high-quality soil. So really, there are certain seeds and produce that will grow better in the 'bad' fields. Based upon this, Rav Naftali Trop explained: Our problem is that we don't know which of our 'fields' – our capabilities – are which. We don't know if a certain ability is really our highest quality and we don't know what our weakest spot is, and we don't know which of our abilities we should be using more than others. They are all good abilities that we are given - just we don't know how to use them, we don't know which abilities are central to us personally, and which are not as needed.

If we would know what our best abilities are, everyone would be investing in their best abilities and then we would see a lot more results. When a person wants to work hard at everything he has heard about and what he wishes he could be, but he's not working according to his actual capabilities, that's the root that leads to failure. They're working from the outside, not from the inside.

Successful Chinuch (Child Education)

A common example of is that a person gets married and has all kinds of children, each with different personalities. Some people make a rule for their house, "This is what we do in our house." Hashem gave him 5 children, and he wants all of them to follow the same exact recipe and he wants to educate them all with the same exact method of *chinuch*.

Now we shall say a sharp statement about this: This is similar to what happened in Sodom. Chazal said about Sodom that if someone came to Sodom and he needed a bed to sleep in but he didn't fit the bed, if he was too tall they would cut him down to size until he fit the bed, and if he was too short they would stretch him out. The attitude of Sodom is when a person wants everyone to do exactly what he thinks needs to be done. Chazal in Avos discuss one who says, "What's for me is for me, and what is for you is for you", which is the trait of Sodom. There are many explanations what this means, but some explain it to mean that it's when a person says, "Everyone has to think exactly like how I think, everyone has to do the way I do."

It is written, "*Educate a child according to his path.*" So if a person has 5 children, he must know *at least* 5 ways of *chinuch* - he cannot only learn one approach of *chinuch* and apply it to all of them.

Often parents will say to a child, “Why are you doing that, if your brother doesn’t do that?” Or, “Our neighbor’s child doesn’t do that, so why are you doing this?” But Chazal say that every person is created unique.²⁰ Whether in regards to yourself, or with regards to how you deal with your family and children and others, you must be unique with yourself and serve Hashem according to your unique abilities and not according to what you heard and picked up, and you must see the uniqueness of each person and not try to make everyone fit the same mold.

This is how you need to raise your family - with this very attitude. In many cases, not being aware of this is what creates difficulty for so many children, and many of them struggle and abandon religion, all because they were told that they must to go in a certain way which wasn’t tailored to their souls and abilities.

A father has to tell his children: “We must all do the will of Hashem - completely. And we also must use our unique abilities that Hashem gave us.” Each of these factors is no less important than the other. In your unique way, that is how you must do the will of Hashem. A sensible father will tell his children, “You will make me proud of you, as long as you do Hashem’s will - even if you do very differently than me. I will be just as happy with you, as long as you do Hashem’s will, even if it’s totally not what I did.”

Avraham was very proud of Yitzchok, even though Yitzchok didn’t do what his father did and didn’t continue the exact legacy of his father. But if a person has a *chessed* organization, many times the children are pressured to do the same thing and the father tells the children “You will make me proud of you only if you do this too.” But Yitzchok didn’t pursue *chessed* like Avraham did, and he didn’t obligate himself out of gratitude to his father to do what his father did.

Klal Yisrael, Mitzvos – and Your Own Individuality

It’s very clear. Hashem created 600,000 souls in the Jewish people. When it comes to keeping the Torah and following the *halachah*, we all keep the same Torah and the same *halachah*, and there’s no uniqueness. We are all the same in that aspect. But when it comes to serving Hashem, each person has their unique way. Each person must wonder deeply: “What’s my unique share, what’s my unique way, what’s my unique power that Hashem gave me? How can I use it more?”

This is the inner way to utilize your potential, and to be happy, with your personal portion that you have been given.

May we be *zocheh* to receive a semblance of what we got at Har Sinai, and that each one of us should utilize our unique potential.

²⁰ Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 38a

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