

BUILDING A SANCTUARY IN THE HEART

Questions & Answers on Elul

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

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

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

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

Elul – Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li

The “I” That Connects To “My Beloved”

Elul אלוּל is an acronym for “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*”, אֲנִי לְדוּדִי, (וְדוּדִי לִי), (“I am to my Beloved, and me Beloved is to me”).

There is “*Dodi*” (“my Beloved”/Hashem) - and there is our “*ani*” (the “I”). But what exactly is that ‘*ani*’ that bonds with our ‘*Dodi*’?

Let us reflect on this. When Elul comes, every Jew feels somewhat inspired; we all feel some level of spiritual awakening. But is that inspiration on a level of “*ani*” (“I”)? There is no Jew in Elul who does not feel inspiration (as long as his soul contains a bit of holiness). Everyone feels some kind of awakening. But the question is, if this inspiration translates into the level of “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*.” Has the inspiration become a part of one's ‘*ani*’ - a part of his “I”?

Going Beyond Inspiration

The word for “inspiration” in Hebrew is “*hisorerus*”, which is from the word “*raua*”, “shaky”. This implies that all *hisorerus*/inspiration is a shaky foundation to build upon. Although inspiration is better than nothing at all, and it is certainly important, we cannot [only] build ourselves on inspiration. We need something more than inspiration in order to build ourselves. When we rely on inspiration to do it for us, we are on a shaky foundation. But if we make something a part of ourselves and we allow it to become our actual level, we are connected to it on an ongoing basis.

Inspiration to do something nice does not come from the deepest part of our existence (our *havayah*). If it would be a part of our essence, then it wouldn't be inspiration. “*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*” is describing the bond we can reach with Hashem in Elul which can only come from being in touch with our “*ani*”, with our “I”, our inner self. If it is not coming from one's ‘*ani*’, then there is no “*V'Dodi Li*” that follows.

Defining The “Ani” (Our “I”)

So what is the ‘*ani*’? Similarly, what exactly is the “*Li*” (“to me”) that is in the words “*Dodi Li*”?

It is definitely not referring to inspiration, as we explained above. It is much more than inspiration. Inspiration is wonderful, but it does not lead to “*Ani L'Dodi, V'Dodi Li*”. So we first must understand what the “*ani*” is.



We are used to assuming that our “*ani*” (our “I”, our self) should become dedicated to our *Dodi* (“My beloved”/Hashem), and that all we have to do is direct our *ani* to our *Dodi*; to become closer to Hashem. But it is more than that: our *avodah* begins with the getting in touch with our “*ani*” in the first place.

Rav Chaim Vital said that the “*ani*” of a person is not defined by his physical flesh, but by the *nefesh*, the spiritual life-force of man. (*Shaarei Kedushah* 1:1) Yet, there is even more depth to the “*ani*” of a person than this.

There are three letters contained in the word “*ani*” (אני) – the letters *aleph* (א) *nun* (נ) and *yud* (י). There is a rule taught by Sages [in the *sefarim hakedoshim*] that the letters of *Lashon HaKodesh* (the Hebrew alphabet) which describe a word are really the very essence of the thing being described. The “I” of the person is called “*ani*” in *Lashon HaKodesh*, which will mean that the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* are describing our very essence.

This “*ani*” of ours must become dedicated to our “*Dodi*”, but we first must know what the “*ani*” is. What is the “*ani*” in us? [Now the question has become clearer and deeper]: What does it mean that the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* form our actual essence?

Someone who doesn't like to think deeply will balk at this question. “What do you mean, “*Who am I?* I am who I *am!* That is who I *am.*” But if a person has never thought deeply about his *ani*/“I”, it means that he has never reached his “*ani*” yet - and he definitely won't be able to connect his “*ani*” with Hashem.

Returning to the original question: What is the significance that our “*ani*” consists of the letters *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud*?

The Concepts of Aleph, Yud, and Nun

The letter “*aleph*” represents beginnings; it is the source. *Aleph* is the first letter of the *Aleph Beis*, and Hashem created the world from the letter *Aleph*.

Where do the letters *nun* and *yud* come into the picture?

The Sages say that “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”. The Ramban says that “the Torah consists entirely of names of Hashem”. Although Hashem has many “names”, He has one name which is His main name: the four-letter name of *havayah*, which contain the letters *yud*, *hey*, *vav*, and *hey*. Within Hashem's name of *havayah*, the letter “*yud*” is the first and root letter; thus the letter *yud* represents a higher kind of beginning that precedes all.

The letter *nun* is equal in numerical value to the number 50, paralleling the concept of the “50 Gates of Understanding” which the world was created with.

At first these concepts will appear abstract the first time we hear them. We hope to explain these concepts more clearly as we continue. At this point, all we can understand is that these three letters of *aleph*, *nun*, and *yud* (and the concepts they represent) form our “*ani*”, our “I”; and when we have these three aspects integrated, we can then connect our “*ani*” to our “*Dodi*”, to Hashem. If we are missing the integration of these three aspects, there is no formation of our “*ani*” - and then there is no “*ani*” to connect with to our *Dodi*.

“Aleph” – Getting To The Root/Source of Things

We encounter many things each day. Do we ever look into the source of each thing we encounter? For example, when learning a *halacha*, does a person make sure to look up the source of the *halacha*? One kind of person learns the *halacha* because he wants to know what to do, but another person will not only learn the *halacha* to know it, he also looks into the source. He wants to understand it at its root. This is a power in the soul to search for the root of things, and it is a very deep power. One can keep looking further into the root of things, then into the root of that root, then into the preceding root, until he reaches the very Root itself.

Of course, if we ask any person what the

very source and root of each thing is, every person will say, “Hashem.” But is that perspective carried over into our own soul as well?

Everything is rooted in the Torah. Does a person see how something is rooted in the Torah? To give another example, does a person ever wonder what the source of the word “Elul” is? Where does it come from? **We speak of Elul, Elul, Elul – but what is the word “Elul” and what does it come from? Do we ever think of this?**

This is just one example, but there are many more examples as well, of this idea. The point is not to amass knowledge. The point is to uncover the source and root of the things we come across.

This puts us in touch with the power in our soul to see beginnings. This is a unique ability to the Jew's soul, called “*raishis*” (beginning; the power to see the beginning). The Sages state, “Yisrael is called “*raishis*” (the beginning)”, because a Jew's soul has the special ability to get to the “*raishis*”/beginning of things. A Jew has the ability to see the “*raishis*” of each thing – to see the root of each thing, and at its deeper level, it used to get to the very Root of all: Hashem. A Jew can get to the *raishis* of the *havayah* (essence) of each thing. The “*aleph*” of our “*ani*” is to get to the beginning of each thing, and then we have the power to connect to the Creator. This is one aspect of how our “*ani*” can connect to our “*Dodi*”.

“Yud” – Reflecting Into The Chochmah (Wisdom) Of Everything

The second aspect of our “*ani*” is the letter *yud*, which hints to the root of the four-letter name of Hashem. The letter *yud* represents the higher beginning of Creation – a beginning that came before the ‘beginning’ of Creation. We say how “*All of them You made with wisdom*” - Hashem created the world with His *chochmah* (wisdom); all of the creation stems from Hashem's *chochmah*/wisdom. The inner essence of each thing is thus the *chochmah*/wisdom of Hashem which empowers it.

The “*yud*” aspect of our “*ani*” is thus refer-

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ELUL- ANI L'DODI

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ring to searching for the *chochmah*/wisdom that is found in each thing we encounter. The creation in front of us is not simple; it is very complex and deep. (Editor's Note: Elsewhere, the Rav has quoted the statement of the Chazon Ish that "There is no such thing as something in Creation that is not complicated – everything in Creation is complex and deep.") You can see wisdom in each thing in Creation. If a person only sees what his eyes see, he only sees the superficial layer of what he is seeing. If he is seeing the G-dly wisdom in it, he is seeing its essence, its reality.

Thus, the second aspect of our "ani" is to think deeply into things. It essentially refers to our true *seichel* (intellect). This is not referring to normal level of human logic, which even the gentiles possess (and Chazal say that we can even trust this basic level wisdom found in the gentiles). It refers to a higher kind of *seichel* which comes from the Creator - a "G-dly" kind of intellect that is poured down into the soul.

To give an example of it, if a person eats bread every day, he should reflect on the concept of bread. He can think: Where does the Torah talk about bread? What is the purpose of bread according to the Torah? What is its concept? In this way, you gain doubly: you see its source in the Torah (which is the first aspect of our *ani*), and you also see the *chochmah* in it (the second aspect of our *ani*).

"Nun" – Expanding Upon Our Thoughts (Binah)

Now we will explain the third aspect of our "ani", which is the letter *nun*.

The letter *nun* is equal in numerical value to the number 50, corresponding to the "50 Gates of *Binah* (understanding)" that Hashem created the world with. *Binah* is the power we have to reflect deeper and expand upon our original thoughts, which gives us greater understanding [of the matter at hand].

Thus, in summary, our 'ani' is meant to look for the root of each thing in the Torah (this is the 'aleph' aspect of the 'ani'), it can see the G-dly wisdom found in each thing (this is the 'yud' aspect of the 'ani'), and it then reflects deeper into those thoughts (the 'nun' aspect of the 'ani').

This parallels the statement of the Sages that "Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one" – the "ani" of the

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Getting Along With Yourself First

Before marriage, people seek guidance for marriage, how to get along with a spouse. What about first learning how to get along with oneself? Shouldn't that come before learning how to get along with the spouse? Don't you first need to get along with yourself before you can learn how to get along with another?

People think that as long as they get the right shidduch and then everything will be fine. A person seeks a wife who will be pleasant to live with, someone who will make his life easier, someone who will help him. But this is all a fantasy. It doesn't happen in any home. Problems then occur in the marriage, and the person is bewildered how this could happen.

So we have to get to the root of this. The words here may be hard to accept, and perhaps you are looking for something different to hear, such as some practical tips to help your marriage.

Maybe you want each class to end off with a nice piece of practical advice, such as how you can calm down the yelling in the house and how you can make the house clean. Each person has his own idea of what he would like in his home. But we need to think truthfully. If a person is clear in the reason of why he is living on this world, he will be able to build a solid home upon that.

There are people who don't even know why they are living at all. A person has to make sure he knows why he is living, before he begins marriage. Building a successful marriage can only happen after a person is clear in the reason of why he is living.

So our first question we need to ask ourselves, before we work on our marriage, is: "For what reason are we living?" Whether we are 18 years old or before, or whether we are 90 years old, why are we living? If we know why we are living, we can see how marriage fits into the picture.

So let's ask ourselves this very simple question: For what do we live for?

The Answer

We "know" the answer: we were created to become close to Hashem. However, this takes hard work. It is *avodah*. It requires us to purify our entire being – our body, or soul, our middos, our speech, our thoughts. The goal is to reach closeness with Hashem, and the ways to get there is through a certain purification process, which spans all of our lifetime.

■ From the series דע את משפחתך.



Jew's soul (Yisrael) is a part of the Torah (by seeing how the source of each thing is in Torah), and the Torah is connected with Hashem.

Reaching Our "Ani"

Thus, when one reflects into the root of each thing and into the wisdom of each thing, he reaches his "ani". After reaching his "ani", he can then dedicate his "ani" to Hashem: "Ani L'Dodi, V'Dodi Li." How many people think they are already in touch with themselves, and they think that all they have to do is become closer to Hashem...? They are really missing their connection to their "ani" to begin with!

One's awareness towards his "ani" is usually very superficial, shallow, and shaky. When one tries to connect to "Dodi Li" when he hasn't yet reached his "ani", he will try to 'inspire' himself, but as we can all see, this inspiration does not last for very long. It usually lasts until a little bit after *Simchas Torah*, and then people quickly return to the routine of the year. In most instances, inspiration usually does not last. It is all because the person did not really use his "ani". If he would have, it would have become "Dodi li"; the person would have felt that Hashem's presence has become more permanent in his life.

"Ani L'Dodi" is not a perception that is reached through waking up one day and learning a *mussar sefer* or a *sefer on chassidus*, and to suddenly feel inspired and feel, "Ani L'Dodi." There is a structure that must precede it; it is only reached through a certain approach towards life from during the rest of the year. When a person has the proper approach during the rest of the year, he gains a holy intellect from this, which enables him to come to the understanding of "Ani L'Dodi", during Elul.

Removing Extraneous Desires From The Heart

In order to get to this understanding and live in this way, one needs to improve his spiritual heart. If one's heart is not pure and it is full of desires for This World and it contains unfixed *middos*, the heart will

block the true *da'as* (awareness) from the mind and it will prevent a person from accessing his higher intellect. (See the author's *sefer, Getting to Know Your Thoughts*)

Dovid HaMelech said, "My heart is empty within me." One must empty out the heart from all traces of evil, and then there is space in his heart to allow his *da'as* to settle there. The truth of Hashem's existence can then be internalized there. Then one can attain a bond with Hashem.

But if the heart remains unfixed, a person will continue to have desires that are for other things, and it will be like a "strange god" living inside the person. It will prevent his mind from having the clarity to see truth. One needs to uproot his desire for This World and the worldly desires which are not truthful. When one yearns instead for Hashem, this is "Ani L'Dodi".

Yearning for Hashem needs to be accomplished both through our mind (which contains our *neshamah*/Divine soul, also known as the power of "*seichel d'kedushah*", holy intellect), and through our heart (which contains our *Ruach*, the "G-dly spirit", contained within man). These two parts (the mind and the heart) comprise our true "ani" that enables us to reach "Dodi Li."

Why Inspiration Often Doesn't Last

Inspiration as well stems from our heart, but it first has to pass through the various desires that are in our heart, and if there are still unholy desires in our heart, the inspiration wanes. There are many desires in the heart, in quality and in their magnitude, so if a person feels awakened to desire something holy, it is quickly washed over by the many desires in the heart that contradict it. For this reason, inspiration is usually gone as soon as it appeared.

What was missing from the person? Did he not have a desire to improve? He surely had a holy desire; we aren't arguing with that. But the problem is that he didn't uproot the other many desires of his heart, so his one desire to improve didn't stand a chance, against all those many desires.

The days of Elul are called "*yemai ratzon*", "days of will". The simple meaning of this is that Elul is when Hashem's desire for the Jewish people is more revealed and He draws us closer to Him. But it is also because these are days where we can reveal one *ratzon* (will) alone: "Our desire to do Your will." The *Gemara* says that we all want to do Hashem's will, but the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) prevents us. So what, then, is our *avodah*? Our *avodah* is to get rid of the unholy desires in the heart.

Practically speaking, one cannot uproot all negative desires at once. They must be uprooted slowly and in steps.

Improving the Mind and the Heart

Our *avodah* in Elul is really two-fold. We need to gain a holy mind and a holy heart, and integrate them. We gain a holy mind by thinking into the source of each thing. One can keep probing into the source of each thing, more and more, until he discovers its beginning in the Torah.

We gain a holy heart by getting rid of our unholy desires. We cannot do it by simply trying to want the right thing, as many people think. This won't do much; at best we will be able to inspire ourselves for some time, and it will not last beyond Elul. It is of course a wonderful thing to desire holiness, but it will not be enough to implement change; we will also need to get rid of the other desires in ourselves, if we are to really change. This is because as long as the unholy desires remain in our heart, they prevent us from holding onto our holy desires.

Inspiration Vs. Lasting Change

The Ramban says that one must be able to turn inspiration into lasting change. From this we can see that inspiration itself is temporary and it doesn't have much value. It can definitely get a person started on the path towards change, but after inspiration goes away, it is very difficult and unrealistic for a person to keep it up. Often when a person is inspired he makes resolutions to change in certain areas, but soon after he is back to routine.

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Instead, a person needs to accept upon himself something that he can never veer from, long after the inspiration is over. If inspiration has caused a person to take upon himself an absolute change which he never reverses, then the inspiration has served its purpose. But if the inspiration is just something that came and went with time, such inspiration is not describing Elul.

Thus, the point of this time of inspiration is so that we can resolve to make *absolute changes* in our life; *decisions*, and not merely to feel spiritual awakening. It must cause a person to feel obligated to change and to accept himself a certain change that he will never veer from.

That change, as we explained, consists of two parts. We need to make use of our mind (holy intellect) and our heart for it. As we explained, these changes must be gradual and in steps. When we attempt to remove our unholy desires, this must not be done rapidly and in an extreme manner, but slowly and in steps. We must slowly eliminate each desire, one by one.

If this is what our inspiration in Elul leads us to, the changes are permanent; our mind and heart is changed. This enables us to truly build ourselves, to build our own inner worlds, to reach our true "*ani*", and it is that *ani* which can become the "*Ani L'Dodi, V'Dodi, Li*" ("I am to my Beloved – and my Beloved is to me").

■ Translated from the original hebrew audio shiur:
ראש חודש מהות 008 אלול א-נ-י לדודי

להלן רשימת השיעורים השבועיים שמופעים
ב"קול הלשון" שידור חי 073.295.1245
[USA 718.521.5231]»2»3»22

שיחת השבוע - מוצש"ק 22:45
ספר דעת תבונות - יום א' 12:00
עצלות - הדרכה מעשית - יום ד' 16:30
אנציקלופדיה - מחשבה - יום ד' 20:30

השיעורים השבועיים שמופעים
ב"קול הלשון" אבל לא בשידור חי

ספר מורה הפרישות ומדריך הפשיטות
דע את רעך - אהבת ישראל
עולמה של בת ישראל - חודשי לנשים
דע את גאולתך - חודשי לנשים
ספר עץ חיים למתחילים
ספר עץ חיים בקצרה
ספר עץ חיים בעיון

Don't Worry About Yourself

What Rabbi Akiva came to tell us is that a person shouldn't only worry about himself; he should worry about others. A person wouldn't want that the other should only worry about himself and not about him. This is what means to not do to others what you yourself wouldn't want done to you; just like you don't like it when another person only cares about himself and he doesn't care or worry about you, so should you be the same and not only worry about yourself.

Remove Your Ego

Elsewhere in the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva says, "And you shall love your fellow like yourself – this is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary." Loving other Jews is the entire Torah! Why? How can this be the entire Torah?!

The meaning of this statement is because loving the Jewish people doesn't mean that we shouldn't act cruel. We don't need our Sages to tell us that. Loving the Jewish people means to remove the barriers between ourselves and other Jews. And what is that barrier? The selfish ego, the "I" in a person, which allows a person to only care for himself. Our job is to nullify that ego, and then we will naturally come to love others.

To Love Others Like Yourself

There is a discussion in the Rishonim if the commandment of the Torah to love others "like yourself" is literal or not. The Ramban says that it is impossible to love others as much as you love yourself. Instead, he interprets that to love others "like" yourself means that a person should treat others the same way he would want to be treated. Others seem to disagree and interpret the Torah's commandment literally – that you must love another Jew just as much as you love yourself.

From a superficial perspective, it would seem that these two opinions contradict each other. One is saying that it is impossible to love others with the same love you have for yourself, and the other seems to be saying that it is indeed possible.

However, from a deeper, inner perspective, there is no contradiction; both opinions can be possible. How?

We are saying that if you only love yourself, you cannot love others. ■ From the series דע את עמך. To be continued.



Connecting with Your Child

It is up to the wisdom of the parents to get down to the soul of their child, and to understand the subtleties, of his soul; and to learn how to connect to the child's soul "in the child's language", so that the child will feel that his parent truly understands him and wants the very best for him.

A child who grows up receiving fatherly warmth, and motherly warmth, and who also has a deep, soul connection with his parents, who are there with him throughout his life, and who direct him in how to deal with the various challenges of life – slowly, his soul will become developed, throughout the years. At a certain point, he will be able to reach a level of maturity where he will feel like he has the abilities and energies to deal with most of the challenges of life. He may also reach a deeper level where he feels like Hashem is escorting him throughout life, and he will not be as dependent on his parents that much, consulting them only every so often.

It is upon us to understand that it is our responsibility to raise a child by building his soul already from a younger age. We need to bring a child to the point where not only is he doing what needs to be done, but that he can also deal with the difficulties of life, and that he can use his power to choose.

Most children who went off the *derech* were usually like their peers when it came to external action, but their souls were not built. When a difficulty came their way, they couldn't handle it, so they threw away their external behavior, and they are left emptied, both on an external level as well as on an internal level.

Parents must train a child already from a young age to be able to deal with small issues, and to teach them to decide on their own. Never should a parent decide for them. Teaching a child to make decisions enables a child to become responsible and to accept his own decisions, and slowly as time goes on, with assistance from Heaven, the child's soul becomes well-built. Initially, the parent needs to help the child decide, but the decision itself should still be allowed to come from the child.

These words are written from within the blood of a pained soul that feels the pain of the souls of Yisrael. May Hashem help that these words should only be of benefit to you. May Hashem merit all of you, without exception, to see a generation come from you that is upright and blessed, to bear children who are people of truth, whose souls have been built within them – along with an external layer to them that is truthful. From the *sefer* ספר דע את ילדך - נספח עמ' קצה-קצז

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Q & A ON ELUL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ANSWER: Most people have fantasies of the past and future; therefore, people don't live in the

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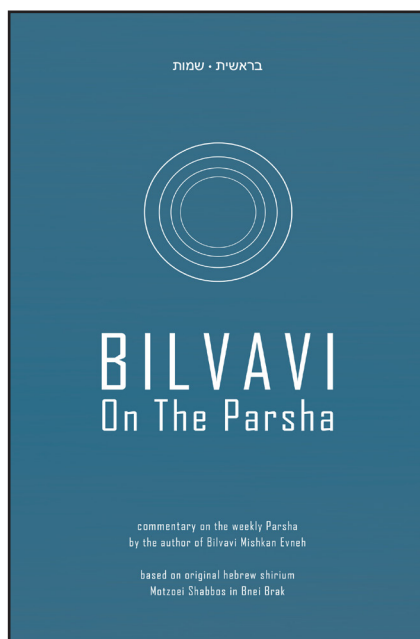
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Q & A ON ELUL

present state of renewal. The more we quiet our thoughts and imaginations regarding the past and the future, and we focus of the present, then the person removes most of the screens covering his thoughts. When we are in the present and a person sits quietly, we can utilize tasting a fruit or hearing a *niggun*, and sitting comfortably to try to feel Hashem; then we have the possibility to feel the place of renewal. All this must be with davening to Hashem, asking him to help him get there in a complete way.

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

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



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BEREISHIS & SHEMOS

Recognizing Reality

There is a reality, and there is a way to recognize a reality, and that is how the reality is revealed. If something is not recognized, it is not revealed, and it not considered to be existing. The *Leshem* writes that something can only exist only when it is revealed from potential state. If it is not revealed, it is not considered a reality.

The reality of Hashem therefore implies the *revelation* of Hashem. Recognizing reality is only through *emunah*. Only through *emunah* can we recognize a reality, whereas any other abilities of recognition, such as the physical senses and our abilities of *daas*/intellect and emotion, cannot recognize the intrinsic reality of something. All they can see is the “branches”, the results of a certain reality; but they cannot recognize the reality at its root. Only through *emunah* can a person recognize reality at its root.

The prophet Chavakuk said that the righteous person will live by his *emunah* (“And the righteous person shall live by his faith”), meaning that *emunah* is the only power which can recognize reality. If someone feels that this is not so, it really means he has never recognized a reality yet! A reality itself cannot be recognized except through *emunah*. The “movements” of reality can certainly be felt by other forms of recognition, but reality itself, its root, can only be felt only through *emunah*.

So, when the Rambam says that the first principle is to believe in the reality of the Creator, he means that only through *emunah*/believing can a person recognize this reality.

Using the Power to Believe

If a person does not use his power to believe, then he is being imaginative. But even more so, the only way to recognize a reality is to use the power of *emunah*. We have many other abilities of recognition as well, but those abilities cannot recognize reality itself, and if we can only recognize things through these abilities and never through our *emunah*, then it means we have never yet recognized a reality!

In fact, most people are not using *emunah* as their main source of recognition, and therefore, their recognition of reality is very minimal. One who does use his *emunah* as his main source of recognition is always living with reality, and therefore he will always be living with Hashem in front of him. ■ From the series *שלוש עשרה* הועיקרים. To be continued.



QUESTION: 1) *What is the proper relationship between intellect and emotion, [and] between the spiritual and the realm of action? How much emotion during the day needs to be expressed? How can it not hamper the functioning of the intellect?* 2) *Is it good to listen to soul-stirring songs which are calming? Or does it fool a person into feeling that closeness to Hashem can be achieved without hard work? Should a person who is more emotional refrain from it, because it will cause him to slacken off from Torah study and from pursuing his long-term goals, and the like? If it is a good thing, how much should one listen? Should a person set aside time for it, or can it be whenever he feels like it?* 3) *I would be happy if the Rav can refer me to any sefarim that discuss these topics.*

ANSWER: 1) The intellect must be active at almost all times, and calm emotions need to be active at almost all times. That is true for one who already has a revealed, clear faculty of intellect and emotion. If not, it will depend on his personal level, and even more so, in his soul root. Emotions need to be awakened as necessary, in order to pull away from one's bodily hold, but one should not excite himself too much, because this hampers the intellect. The same goes for the relationship between spirituality and action – it depends on his personal level. 2) Yes, one needs to be balanced through consistent and stable exertion. Each time, one should see if his connection to his intellect is strong, and see to it that he is not satisfied or serene through the good feeling of emotional excitement alone. One should have a set time when he listens to songs, and also at times when he feels the need in his soul. But it should be done with pauses in between, and with the awareness that it is only an external drive. 3) I do not know of an organized sefer on the topic.

QUESTION: *Chazal have spoken much on how to guide us in the matter of making self-accounting, especially after a person has experienced suffering, which Chazal describe how a person should make a self-accounting concerning why the suffering has come to the person. However, each person has a need for a deep soul-correction and a vast*

amount of knowledge of different perspectives on how to serve Hashem – that is, if we are speaking about an average person, and certainly the Sages were addressing the average kind of person. Each person is able to be blinded, though, by various factors which are preventing him from identifying the areas which he personally needs to repair. My question is: How can a person make a self-accounting of this kind, from an aspiration to make a purposeful kind of self-accounting, so that he can be directed towards the proper direction which will lead him to seek Hashem?

ANSWER: 1. He should seek advice from a person who understands him, who has no personal gain. 2. He should reflect if his suffering has anything to do with a personal weakness that he has. 3. He should go about fixing his greatest weakness. 4. He should accept his suffering with loving and with emunah (faith in G-d). 5. He should pray to G-d that he should merit to find the inner meaning to his suffering and its cause.

QUESTION: *What is the obligation of a person towards his mother-in-law if she has a very angry and shame-inducing personality, and she is usually screaming her whole life at her family? She is constantly getting angry when people around her don't do things for her. She expresses hatred and bad language at almost everyone around her. Is one obligated to "love" such a person? Is it permissible to speak with one's children about the danger of being around her? Is there is an obligation to pray for such a person when he/she is ill?*

ANSWER: Even towards her, there is an obligation to love her. We need to make a distinction between the person himself with his negative character traits, and to view the negative character as a "garment" upon the person. We should also daven, out of love, for such a person. As for speaking with the children about this, the matter must be weighed, to see all of the pros and the cons involved. One should then see if he can attain the gains involved, to the extent that he lessens the losses involved, as much as possible. He should then weigh out the options with "holy daas" to see if it is proper to do this or not, and how.

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