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Getting to Know Your **SERENITY**

THE GATEWAY TO DEVELOPING INNER PEACE

Adapted from the Hebrew version
of “Da Es Menuchasecha”
by the author of “Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh”

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Translator's Preface

“*Da Es Menuchasecha*” (Getting To Know Your Serenity).¹ is a companion volume to the popular books in the “*Da Es*” series, an exciting, deep, and practical approach to self-actualization, from the author of the acclaimed *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh* (Building A Sanctuary In The Heart).

It is a collection of *derashos* where the Rav spoke about the concept of *menuchas hanefesh*, “serenity of the soul”, otherwise known as inner peace, or peace of mind. The author firmly believes that a “scattered mind” is at the core of many of the problems in the generation today, and that living a calmer lifestyle is ultimately a prerequisite the spiritual growth, besides for the physical and emotional and mental benefits that it offers. There is no doubt that learning the chapters of this collection of *derashos* can help you lead a calmer lifestyle.

First the general concept of *menuchas hanefesh* is presented, explaining why it is so important, and then we are guided through developing *menuchas hanefesh* in the three general areas of our soul: action, emotion, and thought. The remaining chapters discuss deeper aspects of *menuchas hanefesh*, as well as how *menuchas hanefesh* can be integrated with the other aspects of our life.

For this new edition, we have updated the footnotes with several links to other *derashos* of the Rav given since the publication of this *sefer*, which are related to the topics discussed in these chapters and which offer further clarity of the concepts.

May the study of this *sefer* help us reach the calm place in ourselves where we can fully integrate with the Creator.

¹ Previously entitled “Discovering Your Inner Peace” and “Search For Serenity”

Author's Introduction

The concept of ***menuchas hanefesh*** – “serenity of the soul” – is a necessary power that we will need in order to build our soul. In the yeshiva of Kelm, there was a great emphasis on *menuchas hanefesh*, where they recognized the importance of it. It is perhaps the most important tool in all of a person’s *avodas Hashem*.

In our generation especially, the very lifestyle that people lead is often the opposite of *menuchas hanefesh*. The various new products that come out every day do not allow us to have inner peace. Although everything has pros and cons to it, it’s clear that most of the new things coming out each day prevent us from having a serene kind of life, when we acquire these new products.

Our forefathers lived lives of solitude, spending their time in the tents of Shem and Ever, far away from the material side of town (reported by our Sages to have been 500 *amos* away from civilization). This was what enabled them to have *menuchas hanefesh* and truly build and develop their souls. This *sefer* is written to enable our generation to draw ourselves closer, on some level, to the calm and peaceful kind of life that our *Avos* and teachers had. It attempts to depict what a life of *menuchas hanefesh* looks like - both in the inner sense and in the external sense.

01 | Finding Serenity In Our Current Situation

“Menuchas HaNefesh” - The Soul’s Serenity

Menuchas HaNefesh – “serenity of the soul” – is a concept mentioned in the Torah² by the blessing given to the tribe Yissacher, of whom it is said, “And he saw that serenity (*menuchah*) was good.”

Menuchah does not mean to be slothful or to be sleeplike. It is rather to be in touch with a root power in the soul.

Inner Menuchas HaNefesh

There are three inner kinds of *menuchas hanefesh* which the soul can reach. The soul can find serenity in the *Ein Sof* (Infinite) of Hashem, it can find *menuchah* in the *Shechinah* (Hashem’s Holy Presence), and it can find *menuchah* when one finds the root of his own soul, his *shoresh haneshamah*.

From all of these, the highest and most perfected kind of *menuchas hanefesh* a person can find is the *menuchah* in the *Ein Sof* (Infinite) of Hashem. This is because the ultimate serenity is to be above all possibility of movement, because movement contradicts the entire concept of *menuchah*; and since Hashem is above all of the movement of this world, connecting to the Infinite would give the soul the greatest possible serenity it can know of. This kind of *menuchah* is beyond this world, and it is only attainable through having absolute *emunah* [which, when accessed, would give the person the ability to transcend this world and connect one to this high dimension].

Lower than that level of *menuchah* is a kind of *menuchah* where a person connects to the root of all souls of the Jewish people, which is known as the “*Shechinah*”.

Lower than this level is where a person finds his own personal soul root, his “*shoresh haneshamah*”. We find this kind of *menuchah* in marriage, of which it is said, “*And each woman shall find her husband.*”³

The Lower Levels of Menuchah/Serenity

All of the above levels of *menuchah* are the “inner” kinds of *menuchah*. Lower than that on the spectrum we can find additional kinds of *menuchah*, which are closer to the physical body.

“*Menuchah*” has the same root as the word “*chein*” (favor), and the *Gemara* says that there are three things which find *chein/favor* to a person: “The *chein* of a wife to her husband, the *chein* of one’s hometown, and the *chein* of a bought item.”⁴ These three kinds of *chein* give some level of *menuchah* to a person and they are more physical in their nature. [There is also a fourth kind of *chein* which is more hidden, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter].

² Beraishis 49:15

³ Rus 1:9

⁴ Talmud Bavli, Sotah 47a

Why do these three things have *chein* to a person? The *Maharal*⁵ explains that all of these things involve some kind of feeling of connection. *Chein* is when a person connects to something, because there is a connection between the owner and what he buys, he wants to buy it. A husband and wife want to become connected to each other, thus they are able to get married. So *chein* is what connects two things together.

Chein and *menuchah* are interrelated concepts, and they share the same root letters. *Chein* is the *menuchah* which the physical body can delight in. Just like the soul can have *menuchah*, so does the body have *menuchah* in the things that have *chein* to a person, because it is a serene-like feeling of becoming connected to something.

Finding Your Root

The first kind of *chein* mentioned in the *Gemara* is, the *chein* of a person's home place. A person feels connected to where he comes from, because that is his root. The Sages state that Eretz Yisrael has a special *chein* to the Jewish people, from all of the lands of the earth, to the extent that if not for the *chein* of Eretz Yisrael, people would be very unhappy with their allotted portions of its land⁶.

Filling What You Are Missing

The second kind of *chein* which the *Gemara* mentions is, the *chein* of a wife upon her husband. Not only does a wife have *menuchah* when she finds a husband, but a husband also has a degree of *menuchah* when he finds her. Because she has *chein* to him, that is why he finds *menuchah* with her, and vice versa.

Here the *menuchah* is coming from the completion that they are feeling with each other, upon becoming connected to each other. When a man and woman come together in marriage, their physical bodies find *menuchah*, by being completed by the other. This is because when a person is missing something and he seeks to fulfill it, he doesn't have *menuchah*, whereas when a person fulfills what he needs, he is content and has *menuchah*.

Shabbos is the prime example of this kind of *menuchah*. On Shabbos, "the day of *menuchah*"⁷, we have *menuchah* because "all our work is done".⁸ Shabbos completes what we are lacking, it offers us a completion to the point that "all your work is done", and that is why it is the time of *menuchah*.

So far we have studied here two kinds of physical *menuchah*. The first kind of *menuchah* mentioned, the *menuchah* that one has in his home place, provides a person with serenity because that is where he finds his roots. The second kind of *menuchah*, the *chein* of a wife to her husband (and vice versa), gives a person *menuchah* because he finds what he's missing.

⁵ Maharal Chiddushei Aggados, *ibid*

⁶ Talmud Yerushalmi Yoma 4:31

⁷ Beraishis Rabbah 10:9

⁸ Yalkut Shimeoni Yisro 296

Gathering Together Your Parts

The third kind of *chein* mentioned in the *Gemara* is that of a bought item to its owner. Why is there *chein* between the buyer and his item?

To understand this deeply, when man was created, he was created perfect; after the sin, man's soul became spread out all over the earth, and our holy *sefarim* write that a person's financial assets are part of the makeup of the soul (*tzuras adam*). In every generation there are a few righteous individuals who merit to have all of their acquisitions in one place, but most people do not merit this, and their acquisitions are scattered. The money of a person is considered to be a part of his soul. This is why "Anyone who steals from someone else, it is considered as if he stole the person's soul".⁹ Thus, any bought item has *chein* to its buyer, because when a person buys something, his assets have become further unified into one place.

It seems that this kind of *menuchah* is the same as the first kind of *menuchah* (finding one's root), because when a person buys something his assets are gathered together and have found their root. In actuality, however, it is a different kind of *menuchah*. In the first kind of *menuchah*, a person has his roots (i.e., a home) come to him; but when a person buys something, his assets haven't come to him, and it is rather that they have become more gathered.

[To illustrate, there is rule that for everything in Creation, there are 'roots' and 'branches'. When branches are furthered from their root, the disconnection from their root reflects a lack of *menuchah* in the branches. When branches find their root, we can say that the branches have *menuchah*, because they have found their root. However], even when the branches haven't yet found their root, the fact that they are gathered together in one is a degree of *menuchah*.

As an example of this kind of *menuchah*, when the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt, or even when they were exiled to Bavel, although they were exile and they were furthered from their root (their home place, Eretz Yisrael), they at least had the *menuchah* of being gathered together into one unit. They were not in their true place, they were far from their roots, but they were still all together. This was some degree of *menuchah*. So even when isn't connected to a root, he can still have *menuchah* on some level, if his "parts" are gathered together.

If a person is an exceptional *tzaddik*, he merits to have his roots come to him. But most people have to go out and gather together their "parts" and then sort them all out. If a person's "parts" are scattered, he is like a person who puts his dining room table in the restroom. A person can own many things, but he will need to put them all in their proper place, or else he cannot be at peace with this. When each "part" of a person is in its proper place, he will have some *menuchah*.

How *Menuchah/Serenity* is attained through *Shalom/Peace*

We have explained this third kind of *menuchah* as the Maharal explains it [the *menuchah* of gathering together your parts], but there is another way to understand it as well, from the Alter of Kelm¹⁰: that this kind of *menuchah* is otherwise known as *shalom* (peace).

⁹ *Bava Kamma* 119a

¹⁰ *Chochmah U'Mussar*, Vol. II, Maamarim

When a person is scattered and his ‘branches’ have no ‘root’ to them, he cannot feel any *shalom* (peace) in his life. When everything in a person’s life is separated and there is no point unifying them together, he has no peace in this. “Peace” is only achieved when a person has a root that unifies all his many aspects.

The future redemption will be the situation where we totally find our roots, and all of our many parts and ‘branches’ will be connected to our root. That will be the total *menuchah*. Yet, even before the redemption, we can still have some degree of *menuchah* - even in this world, and even with *menuchah* of our physical body - when we have the “peace” of gathering together all of the parts of our life, in spite of the fact that we haven’t yet found our root.

An example of this kind of peace is what we find with the arguments between the schools of Hillel and Shamai, who constantly disagreed, yet they always respected each other. The students of Hillel always quoted the students Shamai first, out of respect for them, before arguing with them. Another example of peace is what the Talmud¹¹ says about a father and son, or teacher and student, who learn with each other and debate with each other. They begin as enemies, but eventually come to love each other. Each person is allowed to keep his own opinion, yet still be at peace with his opponent. This is the idea of peace.

Another example of peace is what we find by Aharon HaKohen, who would make peace between two people who were quarrelling. Instead of disproving each person, he let each person remain with his opinion, yet be at peace with each other. Peace doesn’t come and negate each person’s view; rather, each person is allowed to remain with his opinion, without ruining the peace between them.

Peace is called the “vessel which contains blessing”¹². Peace is only a “vessel”, not a root, yet it can be a tool for bringing things together. When something is unified under peace, it is at peace, even though it hasn’t been connected to its root.

Serenity on Shabbos and Serenity In The Six Days of the Week

There are essentially two different kinds of *menuchah* found on this world. The first one, as we mentioned, is in finding one’s root. The second type of *menuchah* is in making “peace” between one’s ‘branches’, even when there is no ‘root’ to unify them; when there is peace within the ‘branches’ themselves.

This is also the difference between the six days of the week and Shabbos. Shabbos is a “day of *menuchah*” for the entire world. Why? (Earlier we explained how Shabbos is *menuchah* for a person, but now we will explain why it is *menuchah* for the entire world as well). The reason for this is because Shabbos is the root of all creations. Shabbos is the “source of blessing” for all that is in Creation, and therefore the six days of the week are the “branches” of its root, Shabbos. The six days of the week ‘wait’ for its ‘root’, Shabbos, and on Shabbos it finds its root and then the six days of the week have *menuchah* in their root.

But the six days of the week can only have *menuchah* with itself when there is ‘peace’ within itself. The six days of the week represent the six different directions (north, south, east, west, up, and down), so they are six different ‘branches’ with no root. The only *menuchah* to be found in the six days of the week is when one can have access to “peace” within the six days of the week.

¹¹ Kiddushin 30b

¹² Uktzin 3:12

Shabbos, though, is the *menuchah* of finding one's root. This is similar to the *menuchah* that one has in connection to his home place, which is his root. Therefore, if a person hasn't yet merited to discover his own soul's root, he will only know of the *menuchah* that can be found in the six days of the week can, which is the *menuchah* of finding "peace" (*shalom*), and this is how the Alter of Kelm explained the *chein/menuchah* a person has when he buys an item.

Practically Applying These Concepts

Now that we have explained the concept of *menuchah* when one gathers his 'parts' together, let us learn of how to apply this practically in our life.

There are different many forces within our soul – many 'branches'. When a person knows how to use each ability of his soul properly, even if he hasn't yet revealed his soul's root (*shoresh haneshamah*) and he only knows of his soul's branches, he will be able to have *menuchah*, because he at least knows how to utilize his soul's abilities properly. But if a person doesn't know how to use his soul's abilities, he lives constantly with inner contradictions. One part of his soul opposes a different part of his soul, and this causes a person to feel an inner turmoil.

The classic example of a person who lacks *menuchas hanefesh* is someone whose thoughts often digress to either the future or the past, where he is never focused on the present moment. A person really needs to be in the here and now, but if he is thinking about the future, he is mixing the future into the present moment. When a person spaces out like this, there are inner forces in his soul that are at a contradiction with each other. This obviously prevents a person from having *menuchas hanefesh*.

Another lack of *menuchas hanefesh*, related to the above, is when a person's soul experiences contradicting emotions. In the soul, there are many forces that can oppose each other. A person's soul has feelings that expand, such as the feeling of happiness and enthusiasm, and feelings that contract, such as sadness and laziness. Each emotion has a rightful time when it should be used. When a person doesn't use each ability properly, there is clashing within the soul, and then there won't be any *menuchas hanefesh*.

For example, take the emotions of laziness, haughtiness and lust, which are normally detrimental. Each of these feelings has times where they can be used for holiness. A person needs to be "haughty" when it comes to believing in himself that he can reach high levels of *avodas Hashem*, as it written, "*And his heart was high in the ways of Hashem*". A person can use the trait of lust to have a great desire to connect himself to Hashem. But when a person uses the wrong emotion in the wrong place, there is an inner turmoil which doesn't allow him to have *menuchas hanefesh*.

The first example we discussed was a person who isn't present. He is either imagining about the past or the future. It is easy to understand why this is a lack of *menuchas hanefesh*. Any person, as long as he can think clearly, can catch his thoughts and realize that he isn't focusing on the present moment. But it's hard to be aware of what's going on inside one's soul, because the soul is hidden from us. And when a person doesn't understand his soul's abilities, he misuses them in the wrong place and in the wrong time – and this clashing of the soul's abilities is a lack of *menuchas hanefesh*.

Being Content In Your Current Situation

Earlier we brought from the *Gemara* that there are three kinds of *chein*, but there is also a fourth kind of “*chein*” we find [in addition to those three], which also shows us another kind of *menuchah* that exists.

The Sages state that Yosef found *chein* by others, even though he was imprisoned, for he was above the influence of the evil eye.¹³ We can see from this that a person can have *menuchah* even if he was “imprisoned”. When a person is released from prison, that is a kind of *menuchah* which is obvious, but even when a person is imprisoned, he can still find a degree of *menuchah*.

How can a person have *menuchah* if he is imprisoned? *Chazal* say that a bear has no *menuchah*.¹⁴, because even if it is in its rightful place, it still wanders around and it is never content. But this implies that if one does have *menuchah* in the place where he is currently found in, he can find *menuchah* right now where he is. This is a *menuchah* of being content with one’s current situation.

Yosef had *chein* to others even when he was in prison, because he was content with the situation; and since *chein* and *menuchah* bear the same root [as we explained before], this meant that he also had *menuchah* there. He was content there and he didn’t seek to escape it. When a person is in a predicament and he always wants to escape it, he will not have *menuchah*. However, if he is content with his situation, in spite of the fact that he knows he is in a predicament, he will have *menuchah* there.

There were two kinds of *menuchah* that the Jewish people experienced as a whole. One kind of *menuchah* was when we left Egypt to receive the Torah and settle in Eretz Yisrael. We had *menuchah* when we settled in Eretz Yisrael because we found our home place, our roots. But there was another kind of *menuchah* we had: when we were still in Egypt! Even during the Egyptian exile, where we hadn’t yet been freed from this great prison, we merited the revelation of Hashem in the land of Egypt, by the final plague, the death of the firstborn, where Hashem revealed His open Presence and proclaimed, “Behold, I am going out amidst Egypt.” The death of the firstborn was a certain kind of *menuchah* to us, showing us with clarity that Hashem is here, right now, amidst our exile.

Being that we know Hashem wants us to get out of this exile, and we are required every day to wait for Moshiach’s arrival, as we recited in the *Ani Maamin*, “Although he tarries, I still wait for him” - it would seem contradictory for us to feel *menuchah* in our current situation today, where we are in exile and we are longing for the future redemption. If we are able to have *menuchah* in our current situation because we know that Hashem is always with us, how do we reconcile this with the fact that we must long to come out of it and await the redemption?

The answer to this is that our soul contains two different kinds of *menuchah*. There is the *menuchah* of the perfect Shabbos, which is to find our soul’s root, the *Ein Sof* of Hashem. That is what we will have in the future, and it is that that we long for. However, there is still another kind of *menuchah* which is not as sublime as this, yet it can still give us some degree of *menuchah*, even in our current situation. This is the *menuchah* that is attainable with “the six days of the week”, as we explained about before – the ability to have some level of *menuchah* in spite of our current exile.

How can we have access to this kind of *menuchah*? It is when we are content with whatever situation we happen to be in. For example, if a Jew knows that he has must be exiled to Persia or Babylonia, exile, and he accepts this situation [as the will of Hashem], he accesses a level of *menuchah* where he is content with whatever situation Hashem has sent him.

¹³ Berachos 20a

¹⁴ Kiddushin 72a

These two kinds of *menuchah* (connecting to our root, and being content even before we have found our root) are really very deep abilities in our soul. We have an ability to get out of our situation and desire a more perfect one, while we also have an ability to be content in whatever situation we are in, from knowing that Hashem has put us into the situation for some purpose.

Three Levels of Being Content – Higher, Lower, and Intermediate

This particular idea of *menuchah*, where we feel content in our situation, has three levels to it.

The higher manifestation of it is transcendental, where we connected to the *Ein Sof* of Hashem in our current situation, through having complete *emunah*. [In the beginning of this chapter, we explained that this kind of *menuchah* is beyond this world, but it can be attained through having powerful and absolute *emunah*].

When it is brought down to a lower level, it is a power that is used for evil - when a person becomes so content with his situation that he acts sleeplike and lethargic.

But the middle level of it is an ability that every person can have: the ability to be content with your situation when we know that this is the place where Hashem desire us to currently be in.

02 | What A Life of Serenity Looks Like

Introduction

The deep source in the soul for complete *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity of the soul) is *emunah* (faith in Hashem). With complete *emunah*, a person truly believes that everything is from Hashem and that everything He does is for our good, and that would give a person complete serenity. If the truth of *emunah* would penetrate into all of the layers in our soul and body, we would have complete *menuchas hanefesh*. The problem is, however, that because our *emunah* often isn't strong enough, it does not reach into the more outer layers of the soul, and then there are parts inside us which are left without *menuchah*.

To illustrate, if a person would truly believe, with *complete emunah*, that his livelihood is decreed on Rosh HaShanah until next year's Rosh HaShanah, he wouldn't even want to make effort to make a living, because he is clearly aware that it is not up to his efforts. You can only want something if you think you can get it, but if you know for sure that you can't get it, you don't entertain the thought of trying to get it.

When a person knows for sure that he has a certain amount of livelihood that has been decreed for him, he knows that there is no point in trying to make more money than the amount that is supposed to be coming to him.

[So with complete *emunah*, a person would be able to truly be content and serene, with complete *menuchas hanefesh*, and he wouldn't have to worry about a thing]. The power of *emunah* can remove all of the obstacles that prevent *menuchas hanefesh*. However, that would only be true if we access *emunah* on a very deep level. There is almost no one who has complete *emunah* to the point that the *emunah* has penetrated all of the layers of his being. In the outer layers of our soul, where *emunah* hasn't yet reached, we have an *avodah*¹⁵ to quiet down the various anxieties that bother us.

Three Steps In Becoming More Serene

- 1) First, one should at least figure out what are the *root* issues that bother him.
- 2) Next, one should attempt to quell those anxieties [which we will speak about in the coming chapters].
- 3) After doing that, one should slowly start to work on quieting even his minor nuances, and to keep doing so until he feels calm inside.

Serenity vs. Sleepiness

When the soul becomes calmed, a person reveals an entirely new source of vitality in himself: from his *menuchah* (serenity).

Before reaching *menuchah*, a person might have viewed resting and relaxing merely as a way to recharge his batteries and have strength to perform his activities. With that mindset, sleeping on Shabbos is seen as a way to feel

¹⁵ spiritual task

refreshed for Sunday's work, and nothing deeper than that. Going to sleep at night is because if we don't go to sleep, we won't be able to get up the next day on time and be productive.

If that is our perspective towards *menuchah*, such *menuchah* is actually not *menuchah*, but sleepiness. It is not a *menuchah* that would bring us to what is called "*menuchas hanefesh*", and it wouldn't bring us to feel an inner kind of vitality.

By contrast, if a person truly learns how to calm his soul, he reveals an entirely new place in himself of *menuchah*, which is the opposite of anything to do with sleepiness. The Sages said that "sleep is a sixtieth of death". *Menuchas hanefesh* gives us a new source of vitality in our life; it gives us a new lead on life - whereas sleep is reminiscent of death. [So *menuchah* is clearly not the same thing as sleeping and resting, and furthermore, it is the very antithesis to anything to do with sleepiness].

Once a person tastes true *menuchas hanefesh*, he will want to strive constantly to get it, like a magnetic pull. Just like a hungry person wants to eat food and a thirsty person wants water, so will a person who feels what *menuchas hanefesh* is will long for it very much. A person who never experienced true *menuchas hanefesh*, though, wouldn't be interested in getting it.

If a person has never experienced *menuchas hanefesh* and one tries to explain to him that he needs *menuchas hanefesh*, it's like trying to describe color to someone who has been blind from birth. A person who has never seen light will not long that much to see it, because he cannot even conceptualize it. So too, a person who has never felt what *menuchas hanefesh* is; he will never long for it. The only *menuchah* he will ever know of is *menuchah* in the superficial sense, such as getting some rest or going on a vacation. He will not have an actual desire for *menuchah* itself. In his mentality, *menuchah* is just a way to get away from stress; it is not seen as *menuchah* itself.

Shabbos/Consistency/Serenity vs. Yom Tov/Renewal/Happiness

We have the times of Shabbos and the *moadim/Yomim Tovim* (the festivals), and in our own souls as well, we have abilities called "*Shabbos*" and "*Yom Tov*". Shabbos is a permanent, consistent event of the week which has been built into Creation by Hashem (*k'via v'kayma*).¹⁶ The festivals, however, were dependent on the sanctification of the new moon, which was determined by witnesses and *Beis Din*. We learn from this about the differing natures of Shabbos and Yom Tov, which are both contained in our personal soul: Shabbos, the time of our *menuchah*, is a time that does not need renewal, for it is consistent. Yom Tov, however, is not permanently in place as is Shabbos. It is empowered through renewal, through the new moon, and it offers us renewal. Furthermore, the festivals began with Pesach, where we left Egypt and we received a renewed status of becoming a people. The festivals are about renewal, as opposed to consistency. Yom Tov is the time of our *simchah*, our happiness. The power of *simchah* (happiness) in our soul is mainly reflective of Yom Tov, whereas the power of *menuchah* in our soul represents Shabbos (There is also *simchah* on Shabbos, but *simchah* is mainly connected with the concept of Yom Tov).

Simchah (happiness) is a kind of renewal to us. *Menuchah* (serenity) is different - it is drawn from consistency, as opposed to renewal. *Menuchah* is parallel to Shabbos, and Shabbos is permanently built into Creation, without being dependent on the new moon for renewal.

Thus it is Shabbos/*menuchah* where we can have the deepest connection to Hashem, Who "*was, is, and will always be*" – the ultimate Source of consistency. "*I am Hashem, and I do not change*" – it is the connection we have to

¹⁶ Chullin 101b

this consistent Source which gives us the greatest possible *menuchah*. In the Shabbos prayers we say, “*Your children will recognize and they will know, that from You is their menuchah [serenity]*.” The kind of *menuchah* that this verse is talking about is not referring to sleepiness, but to a *menuchah* that comes from the light of Hashem, from the Source of all life – so it is a *menuchah* that is very much alive and life-giving.

The *Zohar* says that “The holy Shabbos – from it, everything is blessed.”¹⁷ Everything in creation receives blessing from Shabbos, for it is the source of vitality to creation [which Hashem provides us with]. Shabbos is the source of all blessing because it contains *menuchah*, and *menuchah* is the source of our vitality. So this cannot be referring to sleepiness, *chas v’shalom*. Although sleep on Shabbos gives us pleasure, that is only coming from the lower and non-spiritual aspect of sleep. The real pleasure of rest on Shabbos stems from the inner *menuchah* which is present on Shabbos.

Taking Care of Our Serenity

Once a person has reached *menuchas hanefesh*, he will find that as soon as he experiences anything that will take him away from it, he will not want to engage in that action. Compare this to a person when a fly is buzzing around his head. He doesn’t look for reasons of why he should chase away the fly. He simply chases away the fly because it is a nuisance to him. Once a person feels what *menuchas hanefesh* is, he will naturally get away from the things that are bothering him.

Here is another example of a person who values his *menuchas hanefesh*. If he’s in middle of sleeping and suddenly the phone rings, he will not answer it. When one doesn’t care to be disturbed, it is really a sign that he does not value his *menuchas hanefesh*. He doesn’t mind this jolt in middle of his sleep, even though this really disturbs his inner peace deep down. He quickly jumps out of bed to go get the phone. But if one has decided that this is the time where he must get his sleep, he will make sure to unplug the phone if it rings in middle, and then go back to his sleep. He is aware that the phone disturbs his sleep and that if he is woken in his sleep he will not be able to have proper rest for the next day’s work.

Anyone who feels what *menuchas hanefesh* is will naturally avoid anything that creates a disturbance in him. (This of course does not include any actions that he is obligated in according to *halachah*, which he must do no matter what, even if he is bothered). He recognizes that the things which bother him are not suitable for him to be involved with. There are no given rules to this, being that the situation can change, and what bothered him one day might not bother him some time later if he were to do it.

To illustrate, a child is bothered by certain things, and when he becomes a teenager, different things bother him, and as an adult, those things don’t bother him anymore and now he is bothered by different things. So it is with our *menuchas hanefesh* – what bothered us one time might not be a bother for us at a different time.

It can also be compared to the following. When a person is in business, what will he get involved with and what will he avoid? He will only get involved with something that can be of profit. If it will cause him a monetary loss, he will avoid it. The same is true of *menuchas hanefesh*. Any action which takes away our *menuchas hanefesh* is an action that we need to avoid doing. Actions that let us remain with our *menuchas hanefesh*, by contrast, are actions that we may be involved with.

¹⁷ *Zohar Shemos* 63:2

Two Kinds of Disturbances

Maybe a person will react to this by saying, “Okay, so I will no longer do anything anymore that exerts me, because anything that I do will take away from my *menuchas hanefesh*.” With this attitude, a person might do away with all of his *avodas Hashem (chas v'shalom)*. Let us clarify the idea here.

This is what we are trying to get at: there are two types of acts that take away our *menuchas hanefesh* – actions that are complete disturbances to us, which make it very hard for us to get back our *menuchas hanefesh*, and actions that are only minimally bothersome, which temporarily takes away our *menuchas hanefesh* but which we can return to our *menuchas hanefesh* soon after doing them. It is only the first kind of action that we should want to avoid doing: actions that disturb us to the point that it will be very hard for us to get back our *menuchas hanefesh* afterwards. It is only those kinds of actions that we want to avoid in order to protect our *menuchas hanefesh*; if it will only temporarily take away your *menuchas hanefesh* and you can soon return to being calm afterwards, then by all means, do not refrain from doing such actions.

Compare this to the following. If a person was typing a manuscript for a book on his computer and his entire file gets erased, he has lost his entire work, whereas if he forgot to save only his previous work, he only loses his most recent work, and he still has most of his manuscript on file. In the first scenario, where a person has lost all of his work, he will have to start again from the beginning, and this will be a lot more difficult. In the second scenario, it is a lot easier for him to return to his work, because all he has to do is start from where he left off before his most recent work got erased. In the same vein, there are certain actions which take away a person’s *menuchas hanefesh* to the point that he would have to start again from scratch in order to get back his *menuchas hanefesh*, and there are other actions which allow a person to easily return to his *menuchas hanefesh* even after he has temporarily lost some of his *menuchas hanefesh*. [Ideally, we should want to avoid the first kind of action, not the second type.]

For example, the Rambam says that one must interrupt his Torah learning if he is presented with a *mitzvah* that cannot be accomplished by anyone but himself, but then he must immediately return to his learning.¹⁸ Sometimes when a person is doing a *mitzvah*, he loses his calm thinking a bit and he can’t think so clearly, but his mind is not frazzled, and he is still serene for the most part. It is not the same as when he is totally calm, but it is that not much of a disturbance, if he can immediately return to what he was doing before.

Compare this to a person who isn’t in a deep sleep and he gets woken up by something in middle of this sleep. Although he has been bothered, it is relatively minimal, and he can easily return to his sleep and still be able to fall into a deeper sleep than before. If a person will do a certain action that will totally take away his *menuchas hanefesh*, to the point that he would have to get back his *menuchas hanefesh* from complete scratch, he should consider that action to be forbidden to do. In addition to this, even if it is an action that doesn’t completely take away his *menuchas hanefesh* if he were to do it, and it will be a minor disturbance to him, he should avoid doing it if there is no pressing need to do this action. (The exceptions to this would be, of course, if it is a life-threatening situation, or if refraining from doing this action will insult another person).

Exciting Undertakings Can Ruin Menuchah

Even within one’s *avodas Hashem* one needs to avoid doing things that take away his *menuchas hanefesh*. If it is something that is obligatory according to the *halachah*, then we should not even consider how this will affect our

¹⁸ Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:4

menuchas hanefesh and we are obligated to do whatever *halachah* requires of us. But if we are dealing with an action that is non-obligatory, the measuring stick always has to be: If it weakens my *menuchas hanefesh*, it is not on my level to this action. If it doesn't weaken my *menuchas hanefesh*, I should do it, and this level is for me to do."

The Sages say to "run after a *mitzvah*."¹⁹ How do we know if we should run to a *mitzvah* or if we shouldn't? If we can maintain our equilibrium and calm thinking as we are running, then we should run to do the *mitzvah*, because then it is within our current level to do. But if running to do a certain *mitzvah* will cause us to lose our calmness, then running to do the *mitzvah* would be acting on a pious level that is above our current level, which isn't suitable at this point for us to do.

Another barometer that shows us if this is something we should be doing or not is, to know if we have the proper energies to do it or not. A person has to know that just as a person who can't make ends meet should not be opening up a money-lending organization to do *chesed*²⁰ and lending 1000 dollars to any person who comes to him, so do we need to measure if we are truly capable of doing certain acts of kindness or not for others. If someone doesn't have the energy to start doing *chesed* all day, he should not be doing it, because it will take him away totally from any serenity.

I once knew a wonderful person who diligently studied Torah all day, and he desired to become a big *baal chessed*. What did he do? He opened up a *gemach*²¹ which took up most of the time of the day. Soon after, he was getting many phone calls and he was busy trying to be both a big *masmid* and a big *baal chessed*. His wife got dragged into all of his *chesed* as well, and she had become a nervous wreck from all of it, trying to juggle her family's needs together with all of the *chesed*.

Their intentions were wonderful: doing kindness for people. But this couple was acting on a level that was way beyond their actual capabilities. Usually people do not consider what their capabilities and limitations are, and they will do "what has to be done", which is usually what they perceive or imagine has to be done.

The attitude usually is, "What difference does it make if I feel that this level is for me or not? A person must do the *mitzvos*, regardless of how he feels! After all, should a person only do the *mitzvos* only when he 'feels' that it is on his level to do? Doing kind acts for other people is like any of the other *mitzvos*, which I must do because I have to do them, regardless of how I feel."

It is true that we must do all of the *mitzvos* simply because Hashem has commanded us to do them and because we have to do it, and it is also true that we need to have *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) in doing the *mitzvos*; we certainly need to have *mesirus nefesh* in our Torah learning, in our *mitzvos*, and in doing *chesed* - but we must only do something if it is within our current level and capability. *Chazal* said, "Many tried to do like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and they were not successful."²² Why didn't those people succeed? It was because they were acting too beyond their current capabilities.

Once when I was young, I went to bake *matzos*. As is well-known, in a *matzah* factory, every possible stringency is observed – but you will not find that much *menuchas hanefesh* there. I was responsible for standing next to the oven to make sure that there was no possibility of *chametz*, and suddenly I saw that a person began to put something into the oven. I began to shout. My brother was there and he said to me, "What's more important – the *matzos*, or you?"

¹⁹ *Avos* 4:2

²⁰ *kindness*

²¹ *money-lending organizations*

²² *Berachos* 35b

My intentions were good, and it was for a *mitzvah*, but if a person is going to do a *mitzvah* that takes away all of his calmness, it is beyond him right now to do. Maybe we can consider it “*mesirus nefesh*” if he does it, because he is acting beyond his capabilities, and he’s giving over himself to Hashem, but it is not true *mesirus nefesh* if a person is not calm. *Mesirus nefesh* means to give away our own *daas* (mind) to Hashem, but that does not mean that we need to lose our minds as we do a *mitzvah* with *mesirus nefesh*! Any action that will cause a person to lose his *daas* takes away from his status as a sensible person, and then a person cannot act with genuine *mesirus nefesh* from there.

If we can act with *mesirus nefesh* as we are maintaining our *daas*, this is true *mesirus nefesh*, and this was the *mesirus nefesh* personified by our forefathers. But if a person has *mesirus nefesh* in a way that causes him to lose his calm thinking and his serenity, there is no presence of a “person” here to have *mesirus nefesh* and to hope to get anywhere with it.

Knowing What Makes You Anxious

The question before us now is: how can we know what we should be doing and what we shouldn’t be doing?

For a person who has never yet experienced *menuchas hanefesh*, it is hard to know this. But if one has even a little bit of *menuchas hanefesh*, there is a clear measuring stick for this: (1) One knows clearly that there are certain actions where he can maintain equilibrium, which he may do; (2) Certain actions which cause minor disturbances, which he may also do; and (3) Certain actions which completely take his equilibrium – which one should not be doing.

Similarly, the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that if a person wants to get to the desired goal of life, which is to become close to Hashem, he will only things that bring him closer to Hashem, and he will avoid anything that distances him from this closeness. And it works the same way in the physical side of life: we know what we like to eat and what we don’t like to eat; we eat what we like to eat, and if we don’t like it, we will not eat it.

The same is true for our *menuchas hanefesh*. Our soul is aware of what takes it away from feeling serene, and these are the actions that we will want to avoid doing and push away from us, like a fly that is buzzing around our head and disturbing us.

Living An Inner Life – A Life of Menuchas hanefesh

An inner, deeper kind of life is a life that is built upon *menuchas hanefesh*. After one is accessing his *menuchas hanefesh*, he will find an entirely new world opening up to him.

It will be no different than a person who was used to learning *Chumash* and now he begins to learn *Mishnayos*, or a person who was used to learning *Mishnayos* and then discovers *Gemara*, or a person who was used to learning just plain *Gemara* with Rashi and then he begins learning it with *Tosafos*, where he goes from superficial learning into in-depth learning. Through each of these steps, a new world is opened to the person. The same is true for our inner dimension: when a person begins to reach *menuchas hanefesh*, an entirely new world is opened to him.

Menuchas hanefesh Enables You To Derive Vitality From Your Existence

After a person reaches *menuchas hanefesh*, he can reach greater levels of closeness to Hashem. There are generally two ways of how attain greater recognition and closeness with Hashem: through recognizing what He does, by viewing the Creation and recognizing that it is all from the Creator; and through recognizing His very existence.

To understand the difference, we will give a parable to explain. Everyone knows clearly that he exists. He doesn't need proof for this. If we ask him, "How do you know you exist?" he will balk at the question. If someone comes and says, "I can prove to you I exist - I am a carpenter, and I build wooden objects. The fact that you see a wooden object that I produced is proof that I exist." He would clearly be regarded as a fool if he says this. The fact that we each exist is so clear that it doesn't need any proof. We recognize that we exist, simply because we exist. There is no room for any "why?" about this. We have a recognition of our existence which simply stems from the fact that we exist.

However, when it comes to recognizing other people, we usually do not recognize them because they exist, but from various superficial factors. We see a person in front of us and then we know he exists, because we see him. If we can't see another person, we can still know he exists if we see some things he has done, which tells us that he exists. We see that a chair moved from one corner of the room to the other. How did it move? Ah, someone must have been here, and he moved it. Yet, this is a superficial way to recognize the existence of others, because I am recognizing his existence based on external means: an action that he must have done.

So a person knows that he exists simply because he recognizes his existence, without any proof to this, whereas anything that is outside of ourselves is only perceived by us when we pick up on any external stimuli, which makes us aware that others exist.

Let's ask the following question. Does a person live with the knowledge that he exists? Does a person recognize himself as an existing entity? Usually, a person is recognizing only his superficial layers, and that is how he is aware of himself. He is aware that he has emotions, thoughts, a certain personality, but he does not gain any vitality from ever thinking that he *exists*. As a substitute, he recognizes virtues in himself, and that is what he lives from. A person's virtues, however, are not describing his actual essence.

Just like I can see virtues in myself, so can others see those virtues. If we reflect even deeper, we can discover that we are often recognizing ourselves in the same way that others perceive our existence, and that is where we get vitality from. Of course, we definitely recognize ourselves a lot better than how others see us. But this is still a shallow kind of self-recognition, because it is using the same kind of perception that others have towards us, so it is superficial. This is generally where people get their vitality from, though – a superficial kind of vitality. People are often getting their vitality from superficial factors such as excitement about something, or by the fact that they know that make a blessing each day of "that You did not make me a gentile" or (for a man), "that You did not make me a woman."

The very fact that a person exists is his true source for vitality. But when one does not have *menuchas hanefesh*, the knowledge that he exists will remain as intellectual knowledge to him, and perhaps regarded as very fundamental, but he will not actually derive vitality from it.

We have explained here two powers in the soul, which parallel the two abilities we spoke about in the beginning of this chapter: consistency and renewal. The "renewal" aspect in ourselves can only identify with the external and the superficial, that which is outside of us; whereas the "consistency" point in ourselves, which describes the point of our actual existence that is in ourselves, is the point in ourselves which can recognize something from its existence.

Seeing From Our Souls

If one only has a superficial recognition towards himself, that is also the way of how he will view others, and he will also have a very superficial recognition towards Hashem. He might be able to know that there is a Hashem when he looks at creation and he realizes that there is a Creator who created all of it, and this is of course a truth that he has come to, but it is entirely a recognition that is coming from the external layer of his soul, and not from the actual essence of the soul.

Only when a person reaches *menuchas hanefesh* does he reveal his true “I”, the unchanging aspect in oneself. Anything else that a person experiences other than his actual “I” are all subject to change, for they are all but “garments” that “I” must go through, and “garments” are always being switched, like clothing.²³

When a person reaches *menuchas hanefesh*, he is not living amidst any of the turbulences that are outside of his “I”, and instead he lives the actual “I” in himself. When one is living the “I” itself, he reveals a source of vitality that comes from the knowledge that he exists, as opposed to any other external aspects. When he receives this vitality contained in the depth of his being, he will live in a world that is entirely serene.

Tolerating Others’ Faults

There is a verse, “*Man is seen by the eyes, and G-d sees into the heart.*” When a person is living the “I”, in this deep place of serenity, instead of seeing how “*man is seen by the eyes*”, all he will see is how “*G-d sees into the heart.*” [In other words, he will be able to look past the faults of others, which is the superficial view of others, and instead he will see into the goodness that is in others, for he appreciates the existence of others and that is how he sees them – as follows.]

When one is living with the knowledge that he *exists* and he is gaining vitality from this, he will also find that he can better deal with others’ faults. Since he views others as existing people, not as mere personalities or feelings and thoughts, they become more than a mere collection of various faults and virtues to him. They become “existing” people with an inner essence in his eyes. He can then acknowledge that their faults are not who “they” really are, and that is how he will be more tolerant of others’ negative behavior.

For example, when we see someone lose his temper, the natural reaction is to think that such a person is “an angry person”, a “not good” person. This is really a superficial awareness to another’s existence. If we have *menuchas hanefesh*, we are aware that we are all pure souls, and we are just covered with a physical body and other “garments” that aren’t very fitting for the purity of the soul.

We will be able to view the person’s temper simply as a “garment” upon who he really is. And when we see someone who overeats, we won’t view him as a glutton who can’t control himself, but as a pure soul, whose his eating habit is viewed as a dirty “garment” on top of his pure soul; we are more focused on his existence as a soul, and then we are able to see past his faults.

This resembles how “*Hashem sees into the heart.*” The actual heart of a Jew is pure, but there are two “hearts” in us, one of which contains the *yetzer hora* (the evil inclination). One of the prophets said that there are “soiled garments” on top of the heart, which need to be removed.

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That is how one can see himself, when he focuses on his actual existence (his *havayah*). The thoughts and the emotions need to be viewed as garments that are atop the soul. Your main vitality needs to be derived from the knowledge that you simply have an existing *havayah*. You can also get vitality from your holy thoughts and feelings, and you also get vitality from the more outer layers of your being, but your main vitality needs to come from your existence.

A person like this will live serene and calm. When a person merits to recognize his actual “I”, he becomes serene. This *menuchah* does not merely come from removing all of the “noise”. It comes from revealing a new source of vitality in a person, where a person finds serenity from – the very “I” itself. That is where a person can connect to the essence of all life, to life itself, to his very *havayah*.

What concludes from these words is that there are two factors of self-recognition: recognizing oneself from one’s *havayah* (his very existence), and recognizing oneself based on *hispaalus* (reaction to external stimuli).

As long as a person doesn’t yet have *menuchah*, he will only be aware of from having *hispaalus*, from reacting to various outer means, from movements, from renewal, from thoughts and emotions, from knowing his virtues and faults. By contrast, one who has reached *menuchas hanefesh* can have self-recognition of himself that comes from his very self.

Beyond Self-Recognition

Yet, that is still not reaching our purpose in creation. We are meant to utilize these two factors of our self-recognition to deepen our awareness of the Creator.

One means of how we come to better “recognize” Hashem is through being amazed at His creation, which is *hispaalus*. We can analyze the wonders of Creation and realize that He is behind all of it; and we can see the renewal of Creation and be awed in wonder from it, attributing it all to Hashem.

This is also the mode of the festivals. The festivals are times of joy to us, and the renewal of our feelings which the joy that the festivals give us is a portal to recognizing the Creator. On Pesach, we can be awe at the redemption that took place. On Shavuos, we can be in awe when we remember the giving of the Torah. Each festival offers us a different vista of renewal, where we reflect into the unique mode of conduct of Hashem that was displayed during those events in our history. We can reach *hispaalus* from all of this and we gain a greater sense of recognizing the Creator.

Yet this all but the external means of how our soul gains recognition of the Creator. When a person reaches the truth on his own, recognizing that Hashem exists simply because He exists, and he has no doubt about His existence just like he doesn’t doubt his own existence, that is how we will relate to Hashem.

It is written, “*From my flesh, I see G-d.*”²⁴ There are two aspects to this. One can “see G-d” through the external actions of his soul and body, and one can “see G-d” by knowing that just as he clearly exists, so does Hashem exist.

The truth is that one who isn’t at that perception cannot understand how this kind of clear recognition is possible. A person who feels ‘apart’ from Hashem is not in touch with the concept of “The Blessed One and Yisrael are one”²⁵, thus he does not know where this recognition can come from in himself. He struggles with the concept

²⁴ Iyov 19:26

²⁵ Zohar

of Hashem's exists, no less than how one would struggle to understand how it could be that he exists. But when one recognizes the depth of his "I", his very existence, he can have the actual recognition towards Hashem.

In Summary

Every person has these two abilities, renewal and consistency. In every person, there is the essence of the soul, and there are garments atop the soul. The essence of the soul is the unchanging, constant *havayah* (existence) of a person, which is tied to Hashem, where "The Blessed One and Yisrael are one." That is where a person can become connected to the ever-constant reality of Hashem.

Firstly, a person needs to recognize these two abilities exist within him, to become aware of them. He should ask himself, "What are the factors that I recognize from my very existence, and what are the things I recognize through external means?"

On a deeper note, our *neshamah* recognizes the essence of our soul (our *havayah*), whereas our body can only be aware of the "garments" over the soul. Recognize what a body perception is and what a soul perception is. Recognize that all actions and feelings are not the actual "I" itself, but garments atop the "I." The "I" in us is permanent, unmoving, and unchanging. Identify anything which removes you from *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity) – the things which prevent you from having a conscious recognition of your "I". In anything you encounter, you can identify these two different aspects.

You can determine it as follows. If you meet someone and you aware that he has certain qualities, and you find him likeable because of these various good qualities you see in him, you will like him, and if you meet someone has possesses negative aspects in his personality, you will recoil from him. Either of these reactions is living in the mode of *hispaalus* [because you are recognizing others based on how you react, to their outer layers]. When we are more reactive towards others, although we will see good in others and we will be in awe from the good we see in others, we will also see the evil in others. We will be drawn towards those whom we can easily get along with and we will avoid from those who are harder to get along with.

But if you are in touch with your "I" on its deepest level, then you will also be able to appreciate the "I" of others, for ultimately, the deep place in our "I" recognizes that all of the Jewish people are one unit. That is where we can feel an absolute connection to all of the souls in the Jewish people. The inner place in our soul has the perspective of, "*He does not see sin in Yaakov, he does not see pointless exertion in Yisrael.*"²⁶ When one is in touch with his *havayah*, his reactions do not depend on circumstantial factors, because the "garments" do not concern him. The "garments" he sees in others may be dirtied, but he knows that it does not affect the *havayah* of others.

This is essentially how a person can come to the trait of "*ayin tovah*", having a "good eye", towards oneself and towards others. It can only be accomplished when one senses and feels the actual existence of others' souls, which enables a person to see beyond externalities [both of himself and of others].

So the true recognition of ourselves, and of others, and of how we recognize the reality of Hashem, is a recognition that must come from our very *havayah*. As long as a person hasn't gotten to that level of recognition, he is like an outsider towards himself, and he views others from the outside as well. He will also be 'outside' of Hashem. But when one recognizes the actual "I" as it is, he recognizes himself from his *havayah*, he recognizes others because he is aware that they each have a certain *havayah* (and this is what it means to have absolute *ahavas*

²⁶ Bilaam's praise about Klal Yisrael

Yisrael], and he has the absolute level of recognition of Hashem, from the place in of “The Blessed One and Yisrael are one” that is deep in his essence.

Avraham *Avinu* first recognized his Creator, as the Rambam explains, by analyzing creation. He searched the sky, the land, the moon, the stars, and wondered: Who created all of this? But in the end, his recognition of Hashem did not come because he saw Hashem or from comprehending Hashem. Rather, “Hashem showed him that there was an Owner”²⁷. What did this mean? Hashem showed Avraham his own *havayah*, the *menuchas hanefesh* that comes from recognizing the soul, which are both rooted in the same unit, and they are really one and the same.

When one does not recognize his “I”, he cannot have complete *menuchas hanefesh*, and he surely won’t be able to recognize his soul well. By contrast, one who recognizes the “I” can have *menuchas hanefesh*, and he can recognize the soul.

Until a person reaches that recognition, he is like a person who is groping in the dark, in a house full of glass shards - he will keep tripping on the glass and injuring himself. But when one has recognition of himself that comes from his soul, he is like a person carrying various tools and he knows what each of them is for, and he will know how to use them properly. He lives in a ‘clear world’²⁸. He sees things clearly. Just as he sees himself clearly, so will he see others clearly, and he will also be able to clearly see Hashem, and he will be of the *tzaddikim* in the future who will point to Hashem with his finger and say, “*This is my G-d that I hoped for.*”²⁹

27 *Nedarim* 32a

28 *Pesachim* 50a

29 *Yeshayahu* 25:9

03 | Serenity In Your Actions

We Need Serenity In Action, Feeling, and Thought

The soul, generally speaking, consists of three layers: action, feeling and thought. Having *menuchah*/ serenity means to have *menuchah* in all of these three layers of our life – serenity in the actions that we perform, serenity in our feelings, and serenity in our thoughts.

When it comes to serving the Creator, our holy “**actions**” are the deeds of the *mitzvos* that we perform; we need to perform the *mitzvos* with *menuchah*, with inner serenity, and then our *mitzvos* can become a “container” which can hold the spiritual light of these these holy acts.

Our **feelings** are holy when they are expressed in love and awe of Hashem, and when these holy feelings are given *menuchah*, these feelings can then become a “container” that can contain the spiritual light of the holiness that is created from these feelings.

Our **thoughts** are used for holiness when we think thoughts of Torah, and when these thoughts are given *menuchah*, the thoughts become a “container” as well to hold onto the spiritual light of the holiness of these thoughts (and the same is true for any other thoughts about holiness).³⁰

Serene Action

There are actions which stem from being in a state of *menuchas hanefesh*, from inner serenity of the soul, as well as actions that do not stem from a state of *menuchas hanefesh*. The classic example in the Torah of an action which did not stem from *menuchas hanefesh* is Yaakov’s rebuke to his son Reuven, who was criticized by his father for being “*pachaz k’mayim*”, “too quick, like water”, when he hastily moved his father’s bed out of Bilhah’s tent into his mother’s tent. Reuven surely intended this for the sake of Heaven, in defense of his mother’s honor; he was motivated by holiness. Even so, the Torah calls his action *pachaz k’mayim*, “too quick like water” – an action which did not stem from *menuchah*, but an impulsive kind of act that resembles rushing water. In contrast to this, both Noach and Shlomo *HaMelech* were called “*ish menuchah*”, “man of serenity”. Their actions must have stemmed from *menuchah*.

Internally Performed Action vs. Superficially Performed Action

What is the difference between a serene action and an action that is not serene? Simply speaking, a person who does something quickly and in a rushed manner is not acting with *menuchah*, whereas a person who acts slowly is acting with *menuchah*. However, this is only a superficial perspective, and it is not the truthful one.

³⁰ Editor’s Note: Other thoughts about holiness (besides for Torah thought) may include thoughts about emunah (faith in the Creator), thoughts of d’veykus in Hashem, thoughts of bitachon, etc.

The essential, conceptual difference between an act done with *menuchah* and an act done without *menuchah* is, that an act which is not done with *menuchah* stems from a power to superficially perform, whereas an act done with *menuchah* stems from the *pnimiyus* (the inner layer) of the soul.

We can see this clearly when it comes to speaking. *Chazal* state, “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart.”³¹ Words spoken from a superficial place in oneself, however, do not enter the heart of those listening. When speaking for the purposes of a *mitzvah* as well, we find that there is a way to speak from his heart, from his *pnimiyus* (from his innerness), and there is also a way of talking where a person speaks superficially, with a speech that is on the level of the chirping of the birds. *Chazal* state that the Torah learning of Doeg and Achitophel were only “from the lips and outward”,³² it was only external and superficial – their Torah learning did not stem from *pnimiyus*.

It is the same when it comes to action. Two people can be doing the same action, but one of them is doing it from a spiritual place in himself, from *menuchah*, whereas another person is doing it from an external and superficial place in himself, and not with *menuchah*. So if a person is acting from his *pnimiyus*, even if he is getting the action done very quickly, his action is more serene than a person who is performing slowly when that person is not acting from his *pnimiyus*! This is because an action performed superficially cannot be an action that emanates from *menuchah*, whereas an action that stems from one’s *pnimiyus* is an action that personifies *menuchah*.

The Importance of Acting Calm on a Basic Level

Yet, in spite of this, it is still very important to perform our actions very calmly, even when they are being performed from an external and superficial place in ourselves. This is because the external layer (the *chitzoniyus*) of something is always a “container” for its inner layer (the *pnimiyus*). If a person is acting in a chaotic and clearly rushed manner, there will be no *menuchah* at all. Even if a person hasn’t reached a state of *menuchas hanefesh*, he can still provide his actions with somewhat of a degree of *menuchah*, so that his actions become more serene and calm. The following are some examples of how one can more calmly on this most basic level.

1. Don’t do something quickly: For example, a person should make sure to do something patiently and slowly, and not in a rushed manner. Although this is not yet total *menuchah*, it is certainly the beginning of *menuchah*, so it is important.

2. Do One Thing At A Time: Additionally, even when you are only performing superficially, you should make sure to always do one thing at a time, and not do two things at once. Complete the action you started, before doing something else.

However, if you are acting from an inner place in yourself, this will not be of concern. This is because the inner place in yourself is a place of oneness, which does not become ‘fractured’ from doing two things at a time. This is unlike the external layer of the soul and any actions performed superficially (which stem from the external layers of the soul), where ‘fracturing’ can occur. Therefore, if one hasn’t yet connected to his inner, calm place of the soul, he will need to pay attention not to do things at once.

3. Finish what you start: An additional point, which is only a very external level of becoming serene, is that when a person performs any action, he should make sure to complete it. If he doesn’t complete the first action he

³¹ Sefer HaYashar: 13

³² Sanhedrin 106b

did, then starts a new action, then goes back to his original action, and then restarts the second action – he is setting himself up for a definite lack of calmness.

When a person starts something and doesn't finish it, that action cannot have any *menuchah* in it. The *menuchah*/serenity of anything is when that reaches its completed state. That is why if one starts doing something and he doesn't finish it, he will not derive any serenity from it. He will interrupt one action he has started, which is a lack of *menuchah*, and he will enter into another action from a state of lacking *menuchah*. All of the actions he subsequently performs will be like the first action, their "head" – and since "everything is dragged after the head",³³ all of these actions will lack *menuchah*.

4: Take breaks in between action: An additional step in becoming externally calm when doing any action is, to take breaks in between one action and another.

Chazal state that when Hashem taught the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu, He left a "space" in between each *parshah*, so that Moshe could reflect on what he had just learned. We can see the necessity of this as well when it comes to other things which require thought. Rav Tzadka zt"l once gave advice for concentrating properly when making a *berachah*: Every three words, a person should pause. He should say, "*Baruch Atah Hashem*", then pause, then "*Elokeinu Melech Ha'Olam*", then finish the rest of the blessing. As soon as he pauses, it is easier for him to think of what he is about to say, and such a *berachah* is said with more *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind).

These examples, which all involve thought and mental reflection, are also a lesson for how our actions need to be performed. When you finish doing a certain action, do not immediately begin another action right away, because one cannot pass from one state to another if there is no serenity in between. There must be a "space", a void of the action, in between one action and another.

When a person does many actions in subsequent succession of the other, he 'falls' into the action and his soul will become sort of 'trapped' in it, chained and shackled to whatever the action entails, unable to free itself from the action at hand. But when a person makes sure to take breaks in between one action and another – doing one thing and then pausing from doing anything, then doing another thing and then pausing again – he places his soul 'above' the action. Then his soul isn't imprisoned to the action that he is doing.

The Importance of Giving Space Between Your Actions

What essentially is this degree of *menuchah*/serenity, which comes from an absence and void (*hed'aer*/empty space) from doing anything?

All of Creation is built on a system of positives and negatives. There is doing and not doing, there is material and the non-material, there are positive commandments and negative commandments. It is the same when it comes to serenity – there is a serenity which stems from 'doing' in the active sense, and there is also a kind of serenity which stems from 'not doing', in the non-active sense.

Concerning Rus, the verse says that she found serenity in her home, in her marriage to her husband.³⁴ This was a serenity that stemmed from something active, from something that happened. But there is also a kind of serenity which is of a totally opposite nature than the above: where there is nothingness, a still silence, an absence and void of all action.

³³ *Eruvin 41a*

³⁴ *Rus 1:2*

When a person derives serenity from the completion of action, we can compare this to a person sleeping on a bed, who is lying on something, meaning that he finds relaxation and support on something tangible. But when a person derives serenity from the absence of action, this is like a person who rests because he feels free from a burden, free from any pressures. He is not resting from anything that *is* – rather, he is resting from something that is *not*.

These two kinds of serenity are contained in Shabbos. On Shabbos, we rest from the physical labors performed during the six days of the week, by abstaining from the 39 forbidden forms of work. Shabbos is “*as if all your work is done*” – that is one kind of rest: we rest from the actions, for we consider our actions to be *completed*. But there is also another kind of serenity on Shabbos: “*For in it, He rested*” – we abstain from the 39 forms of work on Shabbos in the sense of “I am simply not doing any work” on Shabbos; a serenity that comes from the *absence* of the action.

Separating Your Actions From “You”

The Chofetz Chaim, in the introduction to *Mishnah Berurah*, brings from the Zohar that when a person does mitzvos, he will merit in the future to be clothed in beautiful (spiritual) garments, and if a person learned Torah, he merits to dine with spiritual food and drink. The understanding of this is that every deed that a person does creates a “garment” for the soul. If it is an evil or sinful deed, he will be clothed by “soiled garments”, and if he performs an act of a *mitzvah*, he will wear honorable garments. Deeds create garments for the soul. They are not the essence of the soul itself – rather, they clothe the soul.

However, whenever a person does anything, he usually does not perceive his actions as just a “garment” for his soul. A person does not perceive his actions as some outer force causing his body to move. Usually, the action a person does causes his very soul to move as well. When a person moves his hand, foot, or lips, it is not only his body which is moving; his very soul is moving along with him. But the question is: is his physical action moving his soul only a little, or is it moving it entirely?

When a person lives very superficially, whenever he does anything, he is moving his very soul as well [for he doesn’t know how to separate what he does from his very essence]. Therefore, he will not be serene as he is active, because his very soul is moving, so he cannot be fully serene and calm. But an inner kind of person, amidst his action, is able to recognize that his actions are only a “garment” of the soul, and not the soul itself. Therefore, he is able to be serene even amidst his action. When one recognizes, with inner understanding, in a palpable sense, with a truthful sense, that “What I am doing is not who I am, and it is only a “garment” of my soul” – he will then be able to act from amidst a state of *menuchah*.

Such a person is able to perform any of his action from a place of serenity. When he goes out to work or go do something, he recognizes that “The action I am doing, is not “me” - he realizes that actions are only a garment of the soul, and not the soul itself.

Compare this to two people who are walking to get to the same place. One of them is walking quickly, and the other is walking slowly. They will both be walking the same amount of distance, and they will both get to the same destination, but the one walking quickly will arrive panting and out of breath, and the one walking there slowly will stroll in calmly. The first person, who is walking quickly, is stressing his soul in the process; his physical movements, which are not calm, will also cause him to have inner movements which are not calm. By contrast, the one walking slowly isn’t making his soul anxious when trying to get to his goal. That is why he remains calm throughout. Usually when people walk quickly, not only are they physically not calm, but on an inward level as well, they are not calm.

Yosef warned his brothers that when they are traveling back home, “Do not get anxious along the way.” When a person is going somewhere, he is moving, and he may be more reactive because of this, and this may lead to quicker anger, because anger is a kind of emotional reaction. But when the body is more relaxed and isn’t anxiously moving somewhere, a person is much less prone to anger.

The average person, when doing any action, is usually connected on an emotional level to the action he is doing. Not only is his body is moving, but his soul is moving as well, in the action. Besides for bringing his body into the action he’s doing, he has brought his soul into the action; his soul enters the action he’s doing, and when that is the case, there cannot be *menuchah*.

But there is a way for a person to act in a way where his soul doesn’t become connected to the action. *Chazal* say that although Aharon *HaKohen* lit the Menorah, he still “did not change.”³⁵ The lesson here is that he made sure not to become too overwhelmed during the act of the *mitzvah*, and remained calm.

The intention here does not mean that a person should act without any emotion or without any thought. If a person does not involve any of his soul in the action, he will be acting like a monkey. Rather, we simply mean that whenever a person performs any action, it should be coming from a more inner place in himself, and not from a place of emotional reactivity; one should act from deeper place in himself.

Staying “Above” What You Do

The Zohar³⁶ states that a Torah scholar is called “Shabbos”. The true Torah scholar is above the state of action, similar to Shabbos, a day of absence from labor; a Torah scholar is one who “merits to have his work done through others.” To understand this further, *Chazal* state that in the future, each Jew will have 2,800 servants.³⁷ The depth of this is that the Jewish nation is above work, thus their work is done for them [on the ideal level, which will be in the future]. Although we are currently in a world of action, as reflected in the verse, “Today is for doing”, we can still be somewhat above the plane of action, even within this current realm of action.

This is how the Baal Shem Tov explained the statement of one of the Sages, “I have seen those who ascend, but they are few”,³⁸ that those who “ascend” are like those who own a house with an attic, and they mainly dwell in the attic, only sometimes descending from it in order to take care of something, and then they go back up to their attic.

Action is a “garment” of the soul, and it is also a spiritual descent for the soul. When one needs to perform any physical action, the soul is in a prisonlike state, because the soul becomes chained and constricted into the deed. Hashem wants us to fulfill all of the 248 positive commandments, which require action, and indeed, this is for the purpose of chaining down the soul to His will: Put on *tefillin*, write the *Sefer Torah* in this specific way, put on your *tallis* exactly in this fashion, etc. Even more so, we find that Hashem Himself “descends”, by allowing His *Shechinah* (Presence) to dwell between the *Aron*. Even though Hashem is infinite and nothing can contain His entirety, He constricts His Presence, so to speak, by bringing his *Shechinah* between the *Aron*.

Hashem wants us, as well, to constrict ourselves within the actions of the *mitzvos*. However, He does not want us to live only in this constriction. Hashem wants of a person to be a *ben olam HaBa* (destined for the World To Come) even as a person lives within This World, in the sense that he places his “ladder footed on the earth, and its

³⁵ Yalkut Shimeoni Bamidbar: 719

³⁶ Zohar III 29a

³⁷ Shabbos 32b

³⁸ Bava Metzia 45a

head reaches the heavens.” A person is found here on This World, but he needs to place his head above, in the Heavens, outside of This World. One must be able to be above his actions and then return to doing them, in a cycle, for all of his life, until he eventually reaches the state of the “tomorrow” where he receives reward for all that he has done. But until then, when he is still in the “today”, he must constantly be footed on this earth, while making sure to place his head in the heavens.

Whenever one acts, he needs to act amidst serenity. He should not be entering his entire being into the act he is doing. Rather, he must allow himself to be inwardly involved in the action only up until a certain point. This is a very subtle matter of the soul, and it is impossible to say exactly how much you need to inwardly involved in what you are doing, and how much you shouldn’t be, and where to draw the line. Generally, the definition is that you should only allow yourself to be inwardly involved in the action you are doing if it will not be difficult to pause the action. If it will be too difficult to stop doing whatever you are doing, that is when you should stop.

Avoiding Over-Exertion of the Soul

When the Jews were enslaved in Egypt, the labor that they were enslaved with was particularly cruel, in that the men were given women’s labor and the women were given men’s labor. The Torah calls this “*avodas perach*”, “cruel labor”. The aim of the Egyptians was to take away one’s *menuchas hanefesh*, by making one do things that were not meant for him or her to do.

There are two kinds of “*avodas perach*”, “cruel labor”. The first kind of *avodas perach* is when people work too hard. If a person knows that he can only work 10 hours a day and he pushes himself to work 12 hours a day, he is putting a strain on his actual capacities and he will not be serene. It’s like if you try to continuously overwork a machine, which ruins it.

Another kind of *avodas perach* is, that even if a person isn’t overworking himself, he may still be placing a strain on himself by doing something that does not suit his personality and is not true to who he is. Such actions do not stem from an inner place in himself. For example, if a person can sing well and he uses his singing talents, he is singing from his innermost depths. However, if a person doesn’t have a talent for singing and he becomes a singer, he’s doing *avodas perach*, because he would only be singing from an external and superficial place in himself. *Avodas perach* is the antithesis to *menuchah* and doesn’t allow for it.

Going Beyond Your Comfort Zone vs. Only Doing What Suits Your Personality

Of course, every person must also do things that do not really suit his personality. But the issue is: What kind of actions does each person *mainly* need to be doing? It depends on what kind of action it is. There is:

Acting On An External Level [such actions do not provide serenity].

Acting On An Internal Level [this is the ideal level, which provides a person with serenity].

Acting On An Internal Level In The Wrong Place – this is a total antithesis to serenity.

The third kind of action listed above – acting on an internal level in the wrong place – is worse than acting externally and superficially. When a person is acting from an inner place in himself but not in the right place, not only does he lose out on an external level, but on an inner level as well, he will lose his serenity. This is because he is

subjugating his soul, his innerness, to an action that he shouldn't be doing. Such an act will totally uproot a person's serenity.

When one is merely performing a superficial, external act, although he is lacking inner depth to what he is doing, he is not damaging his innerness. But when he brings his own innerness into an act which is not meant for him to do, he will not only lose all of his serenity on an external level, but on an inner level as well, his serenity will be uprooted.

In any act a person does, there is always an external layer (*chitzoniyus*) and the inner layer (*pnimiyus*) to the action. A proper action is when the physical act matches one's personality, where one understands that the action is merely a "garment" of the soul. I must act from an inner place in myself, but I am aware that my action is only a "garment" of who I really am, and what I am doing is not actually who I *am*. This is the true way to act, in a way to act from your innerness which, at the same time, is not 'jolting' to your inner state. When this is the case, one's innerness is motivating his external movements, and it can remain in a serene state.

To summarize, acting with serenity can only take place if all of these factors are in place:

1. When you are doing one thing at a time.
2. When you are acting in an orderly manner.
3. When you finish what you start.
4. When you take breaks in between one action and other, and within every action as well.
5. When you are acting from an inner place in yourself.
6. When you are doing something that suits your particular soul.
7. When you aware that your actions are not "you", for they are only a "garment".

The Soul's "Garments" vs. The Soul's Actual Essence

There are "garments" atop the soul, and there is also the inner level of the soul, which is also known as the *tzuras adam*, the inner spiritual makeup of man. These are separate factors, and they should not be confused with each other. What we have explained here is that if one perceive his actions/movements as a part of his very inner spiritual makeup (my inner being), he will never be serene when doing such actions. In contrast to this, if I am aware that my actions are not my actual "I" and that they are only a "garment", I can then be serene from my "garments".

Compare this to a person walking in the street, and a wind comes his way. His *tzitzis* will sway lightly with the wind, but the wind will not move the person. But if the wind is very strong and turbulent, it will shake his entire body. In the same vein, when one perceives his actions as "Who I am", his soul will move a lot from these actions, so it will not be serene. By contrast, if a person has the perspective that my actions are not who "I" am, and they are merely a "garment" atop the "I", such actions will not move and shake his soul.

The average person, though, when doing any action, will think that the action *is* him. When a person moves his hand, he will usually feel that "I am moving", instead of viewing it as "My 'garment' is moving." And if, G-d forbid, his hand would be severed, he would feel like a part of himself has been removed, instead of viewing it as a 'garment' of his that has been removed. Rav Chaim Vital wrote that if a person is on a high spiritual level, he won't even his hand getting severed – he would just feel that a part of his *body* has been removed, but not that any of his actual *being* has been removed. There is your "you", your inner essence; and there is your body, your external layer, where your hands are.

Man was given the curse of death, after the sin of Adam HaRishon, where he was told: “*You are earth, and to earth you shall return.*”³⁹ The main part of the curse was actually not “*to earth you shall return*”, but the beginning of the curse: “*You are earth.*” Man was created with a *neshamah*, a Divine soul, and a *guf*, a physical body, and initially, man perceived himself as mainly a soul, viewing his body only as a garment atop the soul. The curse after the sin is that man now initially identifies his very “I” as “earth”, as the physical body, his external layer. If one would live with the perspective that my real “I” is my *neshamah*, he would be aware that it is only his physical body which gets buried in the grave, and that death only means that his “garment” is being put away – and that my “I” remains fully intact. But if one thinks that my very “I” is my physical body, then death will mean that it is my very “I” which is being put into the grave....

When one associates his actions with his very “I”, these actions all disappear after death, when the body is buried in the grave. But if a person lived life with the attitude that my “I” is my actual inner being, my soul, and not the actions which I do – he understands that it is only the body which dies, but that his “I” itself does not die at all.

³⁹ *Beraishis* 3:19

04 | Serenity In Your Emotions

Intense Emotions Are Inner Movements Which Jolt The Soul

One of the biggest factors which prevent serenity in the emotions are the “extreme inner movements” that a person may go through. Any emotion is really a movement of the soul. When the soul becomes overjoyed, it moves from one extreme to another. When a person is saddened, or feeling low, or feeling overly self-conscious, or any other intense emotion, the soul is really moving from one end to another.

The inner movements of the soul, caused by emotions, will always move to one extreme. If the emotion is not particularly intense, the soul can remain in its serene state. For example, if a person is at times happy and at times saddened, as long as he generally remains centered within his emotions and he doesn’t become extreme in the emotion, his soul can withstand the inner movement. But if the emotion is particularly intense, it feels jolting to the soul, and the soul will be taken out of its calm and serene state.

When “inner movements” are intense, they can jolt the serenity of the soul, whether it is an intense positive emotion being experienced, or whether it is an intense negative emotion being experienced.

An intense negative emotion can be compared to a car missing a tire on one of its sides. The car will move, but in a very shaky manner. An intense positive emotion can be compared to a table that has all its four legs, but one of the legs of the table is longer than the other three, which will cause the table to be slanted and then it won’t be a flat surface for placing things.

Any inner evil that is in the soul, any of the bad *middos* (character traits), prevent a person from being serene. And in the opposite sense, the greatest inner quality of character that one possesses is also a cause for a lack of serenity, because since it is not balanced when compared to the other good character traits of the person, it causes uneven inner movements.

Every Person Has His Best and Worst Character Trait

Every person has a particular strong quality which is positive, his main good *middah*. This is always countered by a certain negative *middah* that each person has. This is different with each person. Every person has a different best *middah* and a different worst *middah*, and that is the common denominator between all people.

Either of these factors prevents inner serenity. For example, although mercy is a good character trait, the *Gemara* says that “The lives of overly merciful people are not lives.”⁴⁰ Since he is so merciful, he is imbalanced in this regard, in relative comparison to all the other parts and qualities of his soul. He is extreme in the area of mercy, and this extremity causes intense inner movements, which doesn’t allow for serenity in his soul.

Negative character traits as well prevent the soul from being serene, and this is especially the case with anger. The Sages said that when one is angered, his soul leaves him. Anger is the antithesis to calmness and serenity, because it is a raging, chaotic emotion. Anger activates the element of “fire” in the soul. While the trait of conceit also stems

⁴⁰ Pesachim 113b

from the element of fire and also causes the soul to go through intense inner movements, it is not as jolting to the soul as anger. Anger totally shakes the soul. There are varying levels of anger, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* describes. But generally speaking, all forms of anger uproot the serenity of the soul.

When There Are Too Many Emotions At Once

An additional factor which prevents calm emotions is when there are too many emotions at once. If a person could write down all of the emotions he experiences in one hour, he could produce an entire pamphlet.

The soul feels many emotions. Sometimes these emotions are from an inner source, from an awakening to something, or from inner thoughts. At other times, they come from external factors, such as what a person sees, or hears, or from events that take place in one's surroundings. Every person goes through thousands of emotions a day. Sometimes the emotions are subtler and sharper and more intense, sometimes they last longer and sometimes they are shorter. Naturally, these emotions have no order they follow. What then happens with all of these emotions? They 'pile' on top of each other over the years, until the soul becomes a full 'storehouse' for all of these emotions.

It seems that the emotions we experienced yesterday are gone, because they were in the past, and the past isn't here anymore. But that is not so. Any of the emotions we have experienced have not gone away. They are found in the "storehouse" of emotions within the heart.

When the soul goes through more and more emotion, a person cannot be inwardly calm. It is a wonder that each person goes through countless emotions and they pile up inside of him, and he never gives any order to them. How can he have a healthy soul in this way?! It is a miracle that people can survive all of this! According to the laws of simple nature, a person should not be able to survive, from all of the many emotions that are coursing through him.

Rebbi Nachman of Breslev said. "Everyone says that forgetfulness is a negative trait, but I say that it is a very good quality." If people would remember everything they went through, they would not be able to survive. Our mind can forget, but inside our heart, where are feeling are, we do not forget. They remain there in our subconscious, on a subtle level. These subtle imprints of each emotion can keep piling on, however, becoming attached with other emotions, like thin strings which eventually become a thick rope.

Some people do not get that emotional in the first place, because they are immune to their own feelings, and it is like "the flesh of the dead cannot feel". They are callous to emotions, so they will not suffer that much from emotions. But the more emotional a person is, the more he inwardly suffers, from all of the emotions that continue to accumulate within him, which can eventually become a difficult, stressful situation for him.

Emotionally Sensitive People Are Lacking Inner Serenity

Let us explain what we mean. Most people are usually feeling emotions all the time, and it is just that they are experiencing their emotions only vaguely. Therefore, their emotions will usually not be of that much concern to them, unless they go through something turbulent. If you were to come and ask this kind of person, "What emotion are you feeling right now?", he will not even understand what you are asking. The only feelings he identifies with are external feelings such as if it's hot or cold, or if he's thirsty or hungry, etc.

But if a person is a bit more in touch with his inner world, he understands that his soul is always feeling some kind of emotion. Just as Creation is constantly moving and the world keeps revolving, so is the soul always feeling things. If a person doesn't identify with this, he has never found the world of emotion that exists within him.

With most people, the emotions are only "visited" at times. When people have a joyous celebration, or when someone insults them, or when someone angers them and the like, they will enter their emotions; but in the normal course of the day, when there is nothing particularly emotional that they encounter, they will not live with emotion in their life. If someone is a spiritual seeker of coming closer to Hashem, he will have feelings during prayer, and when he does *mitzvos*; each person on his own level. But he will still not necessarily know what it means to live with emotion, and he only "visits" his emotional world at times, but not a regular basis throughout the day.

But when a person lives the world of emotion within him, he is always having feelings. This does not mean that he feels emotions every single moment, because every person has times where they lose conscious mental focus. But he is a person who can always feel. He lives in the "world" of emotion. He does not only feel bodily sensations such as heat or cold, hunger or thirst, etc. Just as the average person can naturally feel his bodily sensations, so does a person living in the world of emotion naturally feel the feelings of the soul. He does not have to pause, prepare himself to feel, desire to feel, and then think of what he wants to feel. Rather, he is naturally found in the realm of emotion, he lives there, and therefore he can feel what is there, naturally and without having to exert himself for this.

When a person lives with emotion, of him it is said, "*An increase of knowledge, is an increase of pain.*"⁴¹ This means that the more one can feel emotions, the more inner pain he can feel. In This World, a person suffers many painful blows from emotions. Emotions leave wounds, enable disappointment, and leave behind other painful feelings which a non-emotional person will never feel, because he isn't found there. Emotions also enable a person to receive love, which is a very pleasant and invigorating feeling – but the amount of negative emotions we can feel on This World are much larger in proportion than the amount of pleasant emotions that we can feel. If a person only "visits" the emotions sometimes, he has a much easier time with emotions on this world. He simply passes through all of the feelings without ever feeling them, except for when he experiences extreme emotion, which is not often.

There is a statement of the Kotzker Rebbe, "It hurts, but it is worth it." The more we are having deeper feelings, the more pain we will encounter, but it is worthwhile, because our feelings provide us with *chiyus* (inner, spiritual vitality). All of the great servants of Hashem throughout the generations, without exception, were able to have a constant experience of the world of emotion. One who could not enter into such a state, of constant emotion, has never begun true inner *avodah*.

The Subtleties In The Emotions

The "world" of emotion – for who is found there – is a constantly active dimension, every moment. But there are levels of this experience.

We can compare this to the ability in people to see with their eyes. Do all people see with the same level of vision? Clearly, no. One person will see better than another. One person needs glasses with a higher prescription,

⁴¹ *Koheles 1:18*

another needs a lower prescription, [and another does not need glasses at all]. And if a person sees through a microscope, he can see the most subtle things that others cannot see at all.

It is the same when it comes to the world of emotion. The subtlety of the emotions are felt at different levels, depending on the person, and therefore some people can feel subtler things than others. One kind of person has a subtle perspective, and therefore he can feel more refined kinds of emotions. A person with a more coarse perspective will not be able to feel the emotions as they are, and therefore he will have a hard time understanding emotions. He will also have a hard time trying to manage them, and he surely won't be able to connect any of his emotions to its root.

In contrast to this, the subtler one's emotions are, the better he can enter the world of emotion. When a person can always feel things, he will also be able to feel contradicting feelings. Such a thing can only be felt by a person who lives this emotional world, who can easily identify when there is balance in an emotion, or when it is extreme and imbalanced. When he feels an extreme emotion, it will bother him no less than a person feeling a needle going into his skin. He also knows what calmer emotions are, and therefore when he feels a noisier kind of emotion, he feels how it removes a person from his calmness.

A person who only 'visits' his emotions at times will not be able to feel such a subtle thing as contradictions or imbalances within the emotions. Not only won't he notice the contradictions, but because he is not in touch with his emotions, he won't be able to notice even the sharper and more intense kinds of emotions. As a result, he will not notice that a certain emotion is more extreme than another kind of emotion.

How can a person come to recognize his world of emotion? They must be studied in the same way that you study anything else you want to understand. A person first learns about something as a small child, and understands a little about it. As he slowly gets older, he understands a bit more about the subject. After he understands a bit, he has questions, and he receives answers, and slowly he begins to absorb more and more about it. It is the same with trying to understand the world of emotion. Slowly a person can begin to recognize them, more and more. When he is recognizing the emotions more, he then needs to begin learning about what they are, and to continue learning about them.

Understanding The Emotions

The inner world of emotion in a person is very deep. There are many people who want to learn and fully understand the emotions, and they go to all sorts of places to learn about it. They don't understand that this kind of study cannot be learned from any outside source. Only if a person has already developed an ability from within himself can he be further guided about what he understands, through information from outside sources.

It is very common for people who have a more emotional kind of personality, who have anxiety from their emotions, to go seek advice from another person who does not understand much about the emotions, when the professional himself doesn't live the world of emotion and is therefore unable to understand the client. It is also common for people to read books or hear lectures from such people, who do not understand the emotional world, because they have never lived it. There is no way for this to succeed, because it is like trying to apply one language to another. There is a full "world of emotions" which needs to be understood, and it entails for a person to understand what each emotion is, what the root of each emotion is, and how all of the emotions can be given structure.

We will attempt here to explain this matter clearly, although they are really understood only through inner perception of the soul, rather than something that can be defined in words.

There are two kinds of feeling, which are of a totally different nature than each other. The simple kind of feeling we all recognize is an emotion we can feel, such as joy, sadness, pain, frustration, etc.

There is also a second kind of feeling: to feel the reality of something. For example, the *halachah* is that before a *kosher* animal can be slaughtered, the knife must first be inspected by the butcher for any nicks. He uses his fingernail for this, and “feels” if there is a nick on the knife or not. Is he feeling an emotion here, or is he feeling what the reality is? He is feeling the reality. Or, when a person is walking in the dark, and he is afraid of tripping over something because he can’t see. He tries to feel his way through the darkness. Is he feeling an emotion, or is he feeling what the reality is? Clearly, he is trying to feel reality.

If one does not live the emotional world, he will only feel emotions, not reality. Only one who lives the emotional world can feel reality. His feelings are always being used to feel what the reality is. Let us turn to the world of thought for a bit, in order to understand this. When your average simple person thinks of a thought, he views it as if it’s a ‘bird flying in the sky’, a quickly passing thing which doesn’t have any real meaning. But the truth is that thought is really a tangible reality. Rav Chaim Vital wrote⁴² that thoughts have the power to activate holiness. Clearly, thought is a real, existing force. The four elements of the soul are from physical material and therefore they are of a coarser nature, so their reality is not as refined. The emotions are a subtler kind of reality than the four elements, and an even subtler reality than this is the reality of thought.

Emotions are not the imagination. They are a reality no less than the table and chair in front of you. It is just that the table and chair are made of the physical elements of the earth, whereas the emotions exist on a subtler plane.

Let’s give another example in order to understand it better. There is a *mitzvah* of the Torah to put on *tefillin*, and there is also a *mitzvah* in the Torah to love another Jew like yourself. The *mitzvah* to put on *tefillin* is a *mitzvah* which involves reality, something we can tangibly feel. But what about the *mitzvah* to love another Jew? This is an emotional kind of *mitzvah*. But just as *tefillin* is an existing reality, so is love an absolutely existing reality. It is just that the reality of *tefillin* has physical properties we can see, for it is made from the physical elements of the earth, from animal skin, whereas the emotion of love is not physically tangible, for it is only tangibly felt in the emotional realm.

A person who is found in the “world” of emotion, when he feels something, is not able to simply go against his emotions. For him, it’s like trying to walk through a wall. To a person who lives the emotional world, emotions are an absolute reality, which cannot be ignored. Sometimes, of course, a person must overcome his emotions, just as a person may have to break through a wall, if he must. It’s easy for a non-emotional person to say to an emotional person, “You have a certain feeling about something? Just do the opposite of whatever you are feeling. What’s the issue?” These kinds of people will tend to belittle the emotions, because in their perspective, emotions are not an absolute reality. When a non-emotional kind of person sees a person living with emotion, he will tend to view the more emotional person as a person who lives with delusions.

Many people who try to enter inner *Avodas Hashem* err in this regard, of not understanding the reality of the emotions. They may view prayer and other emotional aspects of *avodah* as noting but “emotions” or “feelings”, but they do not attribute any reality to these feelings. This leads to spiritual failure, because a person cannot live all the time in an inspiring atmosphere when there is nothing substantial to it.

⁴² in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*

Serenity In Your Emotions: Finding Your Main Emotion

Menuchah (serenity) is also a kind of feeling – it is when one feels the reality of the root of all his emotions.

One who does not live the emotional realm will not be able to be serene on an emotional level, because he does not view feelings as reality. He will not see the branches of the feelings, or the roots, and therefore he is not able to connect his branching emotions to his root emotion, so he won't be able to find serenity from within his emotions, for he cannot get to their root.

In contrast to this, one who is found in the world of emotion is not able to disconnect from it. It is like trying to detach yourself from the ground while you are standing on it. He cannot separate from emotion. For him, this is more than an issue of losing his life-giving energy. It is his very root of life, his very survival. One who lives the emotional realm is not able to make himself “not feel” anything. If he would make himself “not feel” anything, he cannot live.

In the previous chapter, where we discussed about serene action, we explained that a person's actions cannot be calm and serene unless these actions are connected to his soul root [meaning that he is doing something which comes from an inner place in himself, which is suitable to his soul]. It is the same with serenity in the emotions. There will only be serenity in one's emotions if he connects the emotions to their root.

In one person, his main emotion will be love (*ahavah*). In another person, it will be reverence (*yirah*). In another, it will be a healthy sense of pride (*hispaarus*). There are seven root emotions, and a person's main emotion can be rooted in any of these seven.⁴³ Every person has one particular character trait which is the root of his own emotions. One needs to become clear of what the root of his emotions is. Then he needs to give order to his emotions, connecting all of the branching emotions with their root, which is in his primary emotion/most dominant character trait.

Serenity in the emotions consists of two parts. The first part of it is for one to find the root of his emotions. One can only have *menuchah* (serenity) when he finds his root, by knowing that what the root of his emotions is.⁴⁴ The second part of is to give order to all of the other branching emotions. Without managing all of these branching emotions, the ‘branches’ become entangled with each other and inner confusion is created, and a person will not be serene. This takes wisdom, rather than labor – to recognize the branching emotions, and to arrange them and give them structure.

A person needs to understand what each of his emotions is, and then he can connect them to their root. Each of his emotions needs to be taken apart and understood. He will then derive serenity from these developed emotions, after having given structure to them. This is only possible for a person who perceives the emotions as an existing reality. When they are viewed as real, one can take them apart, build them, and connect them.

If you ask the average person what his branching emotions are, and what his root emotion is, he will not be able to give you a clear answer. At times he will give you one answer, and another time he will say something else, or he will say, “I need to think about this.” But why should it be any different from seeing a tree? When you see a tree, it is clear that there are branches, and that there is a root underneath the tree, which all the branches stem from. But when it comes to one's own emotions, where there is also a root with its branches, there, for some reason it is not as clear....

⁴³ The seven emotions are: *ahavah\love*, *yirah\reverence*, *hispaarus\pride*, *netzach\victory*, *hodaah\admittance*, *hiskashrus\connection*, and *shiflus\lowliness*. Refer to the Rav's “Getting To Know Your Feelings” for an in-depth discussion on each of these seven root emotions.

⁴⁴ Refer to Chapter One

The reason for this, though, is simple. It is because the person only views his feelings as merely his “feelings”, as a confusing mixture in himself which he doesn’t understand, which he cannot tangibly relate to. If he sees a tangible object such as a tree, he can immediately see where the root is and where the branches are. But since he does not tangibly relate to the emotions, he does not see their root, or their branches.

How can one identify his root emotion, and how can he identify the branching emotions? Your main emotion is the one that you mostly experienced throughout the day. The branching emotions from this are the emotions you only experience at times. This is all clear and simple to anyone who is found in the emotional realm - and it is equally unclear to anyone who is not found there.

Obstacles That Prevent Emotional Serenity: Deeply Rooted Fears

However, there are some subtle things which can prevent emotional serenity, and they are much more troubling than any of the factors described until now. Sometimes a person may be sitting in his house, and he is suddenly seized by a sudden fear. I am not speaking of a panic attack, where a person’s entire body is shaking and he begins pacing all over the place. I am talking about a simpler kind of fear, which a person may suddenly feel, and the person asks himself: “What am I afraid of? Where is this fear coming from?”

There are many possible reasons for this kind of fear.

The fear might be genuine, and it may stem from his sins. The *Gemara* says on the verse “*They feared sin in Zion*” that fear can be caused by one’s sins.⁴⁵ When a person has committed sins, although he may not consciously see anything that made him afraid, his *mazal* (astrological sign) may see it, so the root of his soul can feel the fear created from these sins he has committed. The person may not consciously be aware of what is making him afraid, but this is the inner reason of the fear.

Another source of sudden fear, or any other sudden feeling, is when there are sudden flashes of fear that pass through one’s thoughts, which he is not consciously aware of. These fearful thoughts pass through his mind so quickly and they are quickly forgotten, but although the thoughts have gone, the imprint of the fear still remains in his soul. The person will be able to feel a certain fear, but he doesn’t identify it as a result of any previous thought he had, because the thought happened too quickly.

Other times, a person may feel the fear only a subconscious level, where only his *mazal* is seeing it. There are people who are sensitive to feeling very subtle things, and they can feel things that are above the dimension of This World. They are able to feel a bit of what their *mazal* can see. There may be a decree in Heaven, and their souls can feel that something is amiss, but they do not understand what they are feeling. Others can feel even more than this – they are able to get premonitions of something that has just happened in the world.

All of these factors can create subtle disturbances in one’s feelings. What is the way to deal with them? We can only say what to do about some of them, but not all of them.

If a person’s fears stem from his sins: The first thing for him to do is to do *teshuva*, from the depths of the heart. Since the entire reason for the fear was his sins, doing *teshuva* will calm him. When one does *teshuva* from the depths of his heart, he is forgiven immediately in Heaven. Although the *Gemara* says that there are four conditions for repentance (abandoning the sin, regret, confessing the sin, and resolving not to sin again), the main

⁴⁵ Berachos 60a

pardoning of his sin takes place immediately when he repents. While repenting, he will be able to feel that his soul has stopped being afraid. Anyone who tries it will be able to feel how it calms the soul. On a subtler level, this helps not only for sins, but also because repenting causes the soul to return to its root, and this brings *menuchah*/serenity to the soul.

If the fear is stemming from a quickly passing thought: One should try to review his thoughts, and to think about what he thought about right before he got the fear. He should keep taking apart his thoughts, one after the other, and when he gets used to becoming consciously aware of his thoughts, in many cases, he will be able to remember the fearful thought. In most cases, the fearful thought was a fantasy about something. Once he recognizes the thought as the work of the imagination, he can then be calmed.

However, if the fear stems from what one's *mazal* is seeing, he will suffer from this, and it seems that there is nothing he can do about it. He does not understand where the fearful feeling is coming from, so he does know how he can deal with it. The advice for this is to be prepared to have *mesirus nefesh*, to give up his soul, in sanctification of Hashem's Name. In that way, his soul will be calmed to some level.

The Way To Attain Emotional Serenity – By Connecting To The World of Thought

However, in spite of the gain of living the “world” of emotion, if a person only *lives* in the emotional realm, his life will not be a life. The world of emotion is chaotic and intense. A person who feels it can feel everything taking place in reality, and since we currently live in a world which is “mostly evil and only minimally good”, and “There is no day that is not more cursed than the day before it” as the Sages state, a very feeling person can sharply feel what this means. Every corner he turns, there are problems.

For example, if Reuven is a more sensitive kind of person, who feels emotions more intensely, and he meets Shimon, who has a more cool and detached personality, or if he meets any person with unsavory character, Reuven may be able to feel very acutely if Shimon has any hatred towards him, or if he is jealous of him, etc. Reuven can feel the reality of these emotions as if a knife is being plunged into his heart.

If a person would fully feel the reality that takes place in our world today, he would immediately feel so fatigued from all of this that they would faint. The fact that people aren't fainting is a sign that they don't feel. The souls in our generation are called the souls of *ikvesa d'meshicha*, “the heels of Mashiach”, and as our Sages explain, the souls in our generation are like the “heel”, in the sense that the heel does not feel. The Sages in the times of the *Gemara* said of this generation, “May it come and I should not see it.” They did not want to see the reality of our world today. Why? Because if they would see it, they wouldn't be able to live in such a world. The Sages in the times of the Mishnah and *Gemara* would not be able to withstand the reality of today's generation, because their higher spiritual sensitivity would not be able to handle it. If a person would truly feel what is taking place today, he wouldn't be able to live through it.

People who are living today in the “world” of emotion are usually either one of the following. Either they become totally insane from all of their anguish, or, as a survival tactic, they develop an inner resistance to all of their emotions, so that they detach from their own emotions. Understandably, this is not the proper way. The true way to handle the “world” of our emotions is only when we connect our world of emotion with our world of thought. When the emotions become connected to thought, a person can rise from the world of emotion to the world of thought, which contains the cold, logical world of the rational intellect.

If one has the ability to rise from emotion to thought, as soon as he reaches a point where he cannot handle his emotions, he immediately return to the world of thought. Perhaps it is fitting here to quote the verse, “*If not for*

*Your Torah my delight, I would go insane in my suffering.*⁴⁶ If a person only lives in his emotional realm, he will go lost there. The advice is: “*Your Torah my delight*” – to enter into thought. Thought is a higher point in the soul than the emotions. When a person is deeply thinking, he does not ‘feel’ anything good or bad, because he is deeply immersed in the abstract realm of the intellect. When one is immersed in the intellect, he will not feel emotional suffering.

However, one should not solely live in the realm of his intellect. When a person who lives too much with his intellect, and never with his emotions, this will close his heart from having feelings. The heart must be left opened, so that it can always be able to feel emotions. Our point here is that sometimes, when the situation is appropriate, a person needs to rise from his heart/feelings to his intellect/thoughts.

If a person only lives in his thoughts, he essentially lives in delusions. This is because thought is the highest level of the soul, so if one only spends time in his thoughts and never with his emotions, he is living on a plane that is way above his current level. To a certain extent, he is somewhat insane (may Hashem have mercy on him), because he does not realize the truth about his situation, for he has become delusional.

On the other hand, one needs a heart that is alive and burning with feelings, but only to the extent that he can handle. If his heart can no longer contain the feelings he is encountering, he needs to rise to a place in himself (the world of thought), which is higher than the world of emotion. A person who only lives in his emotional world will never be serene – not on This World, and not in the Next. He surely won’t be serene as he lives on This World, because of the heartbreak he will constantly be encountering from the painful reality in our world today. This will not allow him to be serene either in his current lifetime or in the Next World.

Thus, the depth of our serenity cannot come from our emotions, but from thought, which is the point above our emotions.

In Summary

To summarize the points of this chapter, *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity) in our emotions is only possible when all of these factors are in place:

1. When a person lives the “world of emotion” as an existing reality.
2. When a person realizes what his root emotion is, which is by recognizing the most common emotion he experiences throughout the course of the day.
3. When he gives order and structure to all of his other “branching” emotions.
4. When he can switch back and forth between his emotions and thoughts, when appropriate. If he feels like he cannot handle his emotions right now, he should get involved with his thoughts. The logical thinking process of the intellect may be “cold” – but it is a holy kind of “cold”.

⁴⁶ Tehillim 119:99

In Conclusion: The Menuchas hanefesh of our Gedolim

The *Gedolim* of the Jewish people listen every day to everyone's problems. As soon as they feel that they cannot handle all of the suffering and pain they are hearing about, they retreat to a place inside themselves which is "a world that is entirely good" – to the world of thought, to the holy Torah.

Moshe Rabbeinu would go out of Pharoah's palace each day, to see the suffering of his brethren, and to bear the burden with them. But at the point where his heart could not handle any more of this emotional pain, he became the "Moshe" who personifies the power of *daas* (understanding), a "world that is entirely good". This holy ability of *daas* is also called the *daas* of the *Torah*, and there, all is "good".

We find in the Torah the names of wicked people, such as Pharoah, Amalek, and Bilaam, but these words of the Torah still have holiness to them, for they are words of the Torah, and the Torah is entirely good. It is only in the reality on This World that Bilaam, Amalek, and Pharoah are evil. When a person feels all the bitterness that comes from "Bilaam", or from the "Amalek" that is in every generation, the advice for this is to return to the "Torah" aspect of Amalek – and there he can be serene....

05 | Serenity In Your Thoughts

Serene Thoughts – Through Focus

The third factor of *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity of the soul) is when our thoughts are serene. There is an external way to focus with the thoughts, and there is also an inner way to focus with the thoughts, which can contribute to this serenity.

Inner focus is when a person connects to the root of his thoughts. In the root, a person finds serenity. **External focus** is even when a person is not connected to the root of his thoughts: when he can remain focused in his mind on one topic. When one is thinking about many things at once, his thoughts are spread apart, and he will not be serene in any one thing he thinks about. That is the value of focusing the thoughts to concentrate on one topic, and not to involve the mind with any other subjects at the same time.

Usually, our thoughts tend to ‘run away’ to a certain place, to a certain point that intrigues the mind, causing a person to abandon the present moment, and involving his mind with either fantasizing about the past, or about the future. And sometimes, a person has fantasies which are not about either the past or the future. When a person leaves his true thinking and he enters into imaginative thought, he loses focus in his thoughts, and with this, he loses any serene thought.

As mentioned, external focus is to think about one thing at a time. For one who has a strong ability of inner thought, it is much easier to remain focused on one thought at a time, because he is connected to a single root thought in his mind, and when one is connected to the root of his thoughts, it is difficult for him to disconnect from there. But if one is not connected to his root thought, it is difficult for him to focus on any one thought in particular, because he has no inner thought to connect to. Why is he thinking about whatever he’s thinking about? It is because he has decided to think about a certain topic, but after he decides to think about it, other thoughts come and uproot him from his first thought.

Methods For Increasing External Focus

There are several ways to increase the mind’s power of external focus.

- 1) Rav Chaim Friedlander zt”l suggested that a person should **train himself for a few minutes a day to concentrate on one single thought**, and during that time, he should not let his thoughts wander to any other topic other than what he has started to think about.
- 2) An additional method is to **weaken the imagination**. This is because most of the time it is a person’s imagination which uproots his thinking. In turn, by weakening the imagination, one can focus better with his thoughts.

However, imagination is not the sole reason that a person loses focus in his thoughts. For example, a person may be learning a *possuk* in *Chumash*, and then he is reminded when learning the *possuk* about something else, and then that other thought reminds him of another topic. This is not the imagination, for he is using his actual power of

thought. It is just he is not staying focused on the topic at hand. (On a subtle level, although it is not fantasy, it is a form of imagination, because he has compared one topic to another, which is a use of the imagination).

Therefore, our question is: How can person remain focused in his thoughts, and to avoid thinking about anything else, even when it is not necessarily imagination?

There are two ways to force away thoughts you don't want:

1) Hesech HaDaas / Taking Your Mind Off It - One way is to simply “**take your mind off**” the thought that has entered your mind (*hesech hadaas*).

However, this will be very difficult to do if the thought is particularly strong. It is hard to take your mind off such a thought and return to the first thought, which is far less interesting than the new thought which has just entered your mind. The method of *hesech hadaas* is therefore only practical if the new thought isn't more interesting to you than your first thought, because then you will find it easy to ignore the new thought and return to your previous thought.

2) Nullifying Your Will To Think This Thought – The deeper advice for eliminating unwanted thoughts is to nullify your **will** to think about the new thought that entered your mind. This is because whenever you think about something, you wanted to think about it, at least to some level. If you would not want something at all, you would never think about it.

If you are thinking about something which you do not need to think about, you can totally erase your will to think about it. But if it is a thought which you do need to think about, but now is not the right time to think about, you can still erase your will to think about this thought right now.

Giving up your will about something is one of the most difficult things to do. However, sometimes, it is easy. For example, if you really wanted to buy a certain item, and then someone comes and tells you that there is something wrong with the item you wanted to purchase, you will instantly lose interest in the item. But if there is nothing in particular that would motivate you to give up your desire for this item, it is very difficult to stop wanting it. It is a situation of “I want, but I know that I'm not supposed to want it. I want *not* to want it – but the fact is that I do want it.” In this case, a person cannot simply nullify his will, because he really does desire what he wants, and he can't convince himself otherwise.

On the other hand, if someone continuously works on giving up his will, he will be able to easily let go of desiring something that he wanted. It is like taking a cup, quickly rinsing it out, and cleaning out the inside of the cup within a few seconds. In the same way, one can gain an ability in which he can quickly decide that he does not want what he desired.

But this can only work for a very self-disciplined person, who has worked on nullifying his will on a continual basis. He is able to calm his thoughts when they come to him and remain focused. He is annoyed by any bothersome thoughts which take him away from his focus, and this will enable him easily give up his will to think about it now. By nullifying the will, to some extent, this is taking away the issue at its root. It will not uproot all of a person's desires, but it will at least uproot the particular desire at hand.

So far, we have discussed external focus, and the truth is, that even this is difficult to attain. It is also impossible to acquire this ability completely.

Internal Focus – Finding Your Root Thought

The other method to acquire serenity in the thoughts is through **inner focus**. This inner work, and on one hand, it is even more difficult to attain than external focus, but on the other hand, it is more practical to attain.

Compare this to a person who wants to uproot a tree. Either he can uproot the tree from its root, or he can chop each of the branches off separately. It is much easier to chop each of the branches separately, but it will also take him more time, because he has to remove all of the many branches. On the other hand, while it is more difficult to uproot the tree, it is only one act, and then he is finished removing the tree. When it comes to inner work, there are always two ways. Either we can use an external method, or we can use an inner method. The inner method is like working with the root, which may be more difficult but is immediately effective once we are successful in it. The external method is like working with branches, which may be easier, but which will take us longer time to get to our goal.

The inner method of acquiring focus in our thoughts is by connecting to the root thought. It is there where our thoughts can find true serenity. What is the root of our thoughts?

A Man Finds Serenity In His Thoughts Through Torah Learning

For men (of the Jewish nation), the root of all thought is the **Torah**. Women, who are not commanded to learn Torah, will need to find a different root thought [which we will later explain]. Right now, we will discuss a man's root thought, which can only be Torah.

Hashem has given the Torah to the Jewish nation. In the Torah, there are 600,000 letters, parallel to the 600,000 souls of the Jewish people. There is no Jew who does not have a portion in the Torah. When one reaches his unique portion in the Torah, his thoughts find serenity there. When one hasn't yet reached it, his thoughts will never reach their true source of serenity. Although his thoughts will not necessarily be scattered all over the place and he has somewhat of a control over his thinking process, he will never reach serenity in his thoughts, until he connects to the root of all his thoughts, which is his personal portion in the Torah.

The Alter of Kelm once wrote to a person who had sent him a letter, “From your letter, I can tell that you are not connected enough to learning Torah. If you would connect yourself to the study of Torah, you would have *menuchas hanefesh*, but from your letter it is apparent that you do not have *menuchas hanefesh*.”

Even if a person is already connected to studying Torah, if he is not connected to his “personal portion” in the Torah, he will not have genuine *menuchas hanefesh*. True *menuchas hanefesh* is only reached when a person connects to the root of all wisdom, to the root of the Torah which each person has on his own unique and individual level.

The Torah is “*longer than the land, and wider than the sea.*” There are four parts to the Torah, called “***PaRDeS***” – which stands for *peshat* (simple meaning of Torah), *derush* (homiletic interpretations), *remez* (hints, allegories, numerical values), and *sod* (the secret, mystical understanding of the Torah). In each of these parts of Torah as well, there are many paths, of how to learn the Torah. For example, the *pshat* level of Torah may be learned in one manner, or in another manner – there is *iyun* (in-depth learning), and there is *bekiyus* (cursory learning). Within *iyun* itself, there are the different methods of *pilpul*, and of learning the Torah with deep logic and ways of thinking - and with “70 facets of understanding”.

One must connect to the holy Torah, in the style of learning that is applicable to his own way of thinking. It will not suffice to reach it by having learned in a certain yeshivah, or in the manner of learning he is used to because he

grew up in a certain place, where it is only acceptable to learn and think a certain way. Rather, his way of learning must come from within himself, “From himself, he learned Torah”, which comes from his exertion to reach the portion of Torah that is uniquely his.

Serenity of Thought For All Men & Women Via Acquiring An Original Way of Thinking

There is also a more universal way of acquiring serenity in the thoughts, which can apply to both men and women.

The closer a person is to the world of thought, the more he/she has a unique style of thinking. The average person, when learning the words of our Sages and our *sefarim*, can see that there are many ways of thinking. The Maharal’s *sefarim* are all a certain way of thinking, while the Ramchal has a different way of thinking. Rav Shamshon Refael Hirsh had a certain way of thinking, and Reb Yisrael Salanter has another way of thinking. The *sefarim* of *Chassidus* are a whole different way of thinking, and so forth.

This is not only when it comes to Torah learning. Any person needs to have his own way of thinking. You can have a person who always has an opinion about every event that happens in the world, but he is thinking about it only on a superficial level. He doesn’t have a specific style of thinking for each event that he considers, because he has never developed his own way of thinking. But a person needs a specific style of thinking. One must know how he thinks, how he develops his thoughts about something, and then when he analyzes any event, he should be able to stick to his way of thinking.

The Deeper Solution – Think One Thought Throughout The Day

There is also another way, which is deeper. There is a truthful and inner kind of serenity which can be gained in one’s thoughts, by thinking about one thought, throughout the course of the day.

The first time you hear about this, it may sound too difficult. How can person think about one thought for the entire day? Is he an angel? (Maybe he’s a *seraph*?) Of course a person cannot remain focused on one thought throughout the entire day. But a person can try living with one thought at the forefront of his mind, and he can keep returning to that thought, throughout the day.

He can choose one particular thought, which will become his main thought for the day. With this thought he should get up in the morning, and with this thought he should go to sleep with at night. Whenever he needs to think about something else, whether it is his Torah learning or something he needs to take care of in the home, or about his livelihood and work, or whatever he needs to think about – he can think about it, but when he is done thinking about it, he should immediately return to his “main” thought of the day.

In the laws of learning Torah, one may interrupt his learning in order to fulfill a *mitzvah*, and sometimes he is even obligated to interrupt his learning, but he must immediately return to his Torah learning.⁴⁷ It is the same when thinking of one thought throughout the day. This is your primary thought of the day, and you may interrupt it in order to learn Torah, or to make livelihood, or to take care of anything else you need to do, but then you immediately return to your primary thought, and that is where you allow your mind to “rest”.

⁴⁷ Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:4

What is the nature of this primary thought that one should keep returning to throughout the day? It should not just be any random thought, but an inner kind of thought, which is closer to your soul root. Man was created with wisdom. Therefore, every person has a point of wisdom from which he was created from. When one reaches that point of thought from which he was created from, his root – there, he finds serenity.

In order to reach this inner kind of thought, one needs to divest himself from all of the “garments” of the soul. If a person asks: “How can I know what my primary thought is?” The answer to his question is: “In order to know it, one would have to be a prophet!” This is not a question that can be answered. But when one peels all of the layers atop his soul, he can eventually reach his innermost point of the soul. When he reaches it, he will know that this is where his unique portion is. When any person reaches a point that is closer to his soul root, he can recognize it very well, knowing that it is connected with his essence.

One who understands the words here can recognize this matter very clearly. It can be compared to a person who comes home to rest after a weary day of traveling on the road. When he falls onto his pillow, he feels physically relaxed. It is the same when a person finds his root thought. When he returns to that thought, he feels serenity in it, and he can clearly feel that he has returned to his true place.

As an intermediate stage, one can try going for a certain period of time thinking about a certain thought, even if it is not particularly connected to his soul, for the purpose of simply training himself to this idea of returning to a thought. It is called *shoresh l'zman*, “adapting a temporary root”. It is like renting an apartment. Although you don't own the apartment, you are there for a long time, and for now, this apartment is the place you keep returning to. That is why practicing the idea of returning to a thought can provide a person with a degree of serenity – since he knows that he can keep returning to this place, he can have some serenity from it. Although it is not total *menuchah*/serenity, it is certainly a degree of it.

In Summary

Serenity in one's thoughts is attained through the following factors:

External Focus – To concentrate on one thought at a time.

Inner Focus – By connecting to a specific style of thinking, and furthermore, to find your primary thought which is linked with your personal soul. This can also be worked upon in an elementary stage of remaining focused on one thought throughout the day and returning to it whenever possible, even if the thought isn't connected with your essence; you can keep changing what the main thought will be, as time goes on, and according to your current level. After you have gotten used to this, you should then try to reach your primary thought that is linked with your personal soul, and to remain focused throughout the day on that thought (whenever possible), and there is where your will find your true serenity.

The Ability To Be Deeply Serene In Your Thoughts

Usually, whenever a person sees or hears anything, he does not have serenity, because he is leaving his inner state. Any of the physical senses, such as seeing, hearing, and sometimes even smelling something, remove a person from what he was thinking about, placing him in a different ‘world’ – a world that is not his, which causes him to lose the focus of his thoughts.

The more a person enters inward, he can be amongst other people, yet he is apart from them, deeply immersed and concentrated in thought. The more a person rises from the realm of action and into the realm of emotion, and even more so, from emotion to thought – the more he receives within himself an inner world, which disconnects him on some level from everything happening around him.

Rav Elya Lopian zt”l said that when he is talking to an entire crowd of people, he doesn’t even see one of them. This stemmed from a deep ability of inner focus that he had. This was not simply because he was concentrating on the words he was saying, but because he was inwardly connected and focused on a thought. The eyes can be turned outward, but when he turns his focus inward, his eyes and ears will not see or hear anything happening outside.

Usually, when one is amongst others, he is pulled after his senses, and he will lose any inner serenity he may have inside of him. When one’s conscious focus is turned outward, his serenity is uprooted. But when one reaches his root thought, all of his energies can be turned inwardly, to his root, instead of being turned outward. Even if he is temporarily distracted by some outside stimuli, he can easily return inward. A person has a natural fondness for his inner point, for the primary thought that is connected to the essence of his soul, and therefore he can easily gravitate back towards it.

Living a life of inner serenity is like living in an “ark of Noach” amidst this world we are found in. One can be surrounded by throngs of people, yet he is really living in a “home” inside of himself. He can even have a “home” within that very “home”. Just as the sons of Korach reside on a space on top of Gehinnom where they don’t have to endure the punishments of Gehinnom, so can a person form an inner place in himself to reside in, an inner space within this world, where he can be separated from everyone else on this world, even as he lives amongst all of the creations. That place is called *menuchah*/serenity. Of that inner place, we refer to in the *Shabbos Minchah* prayers: “A serenity of love and dedication, a serenity of truth and faith, a serenity of peace and tranquility.”

It may appear to others that such a person is not paying attention to his surroundings, but the truth is that such a person is living in a different world within this world. Of course, one needs to be careful not to become self-absorbed, because we do not live here on this world for ourselves, and we were created to help others.⁴⁸ Yet, if a person only lives for others, he has no self, so he will not be able to really ever give of himself to others. That is why on one hand, a person needs to develop a solid inner world of his own, where he can be separate from the rest of the world, and at the same time, he should also have times where he turns his view outward to the rest of the world so that he can bear the burden of others and help them.

In Conclusion

To conclude, we have explained [in these last three chapters] how one can act from an inner place in himself. It is when you are performing an action from deep feeling and from deep thought. When these three aspects are combined (action, feeling and thought), it becomes like a triple-knotted rope which does not break easily. When one is connected in all the parts of his soul to the action he is doing, such action is an action of *menuchah*, serenity.

⁴⁸ *Ruach Chaim: hakdamah*

06 | Obstacles That Prevent Serenity

Learning About Our Soul

The more one is having consistent inner vitality (*chiyus*), the more he will be able to feel subtler things. When a person is living with the ongoing renewal of Creation, he will be able to feel things that are transpiring every moment. He will be able to gain a more inclusive view on things, where he sees a matter from its beginning until its end – resembling the *Mishnah* in *Avos*, “From where do you come from, and to where are you going?”

If we reflect, there is a beginning and end of the history of the world. The world began with the first day of Creation (and on a deeper note, it really began before that), and the end is after this current 6,000 year period, where there will be 1000 years of desolation.⁴⁹ Our world is a total of 7000 years, and it is explained elsewhere that there is a total of 10,000 years. It is all one continuous path, from beginning until end.

If one is unaware that there is a certain path which history is taking, and he learns about the exile we had in Egypt and how we left it, he wonders: Why did we have to go through exile? But if he looks at the earlier *parshiyos* in the Torah, he learns that Avraham *Avinu* asked Hashem for a sign that his descendants will survive, and then Hashem said to him that his descendants will be strangers in Egypt; and then he sees the roots of the matter. Going back earlier, one can discover an even earlier root of the exile with the sin of Adam, which caused the need for exile in the first place. So a person can get further and further into the root.

The Chofetz Chaim would give a parable about this. A guest comes to *daven* in the *shul*, and he sees that the *gabbai* is giving out the *aliyos* (calling up people to make a blessing by the reading of the Torah), to people in the *shul* who are each *davening* in different directions of the *shul*. The guest wonders: Why is the *gabbai* calling up these people specifically? Wouldn't it make more sense to call up others? He turns to someone next to him and asks him about the preferences of the *aliyos*. The person says to him: “You are here for one day, and you want to know the answers to all of the questions you have?! If you would live here for a few weeks, you would understand what the *gabbai* is following a certain order. One week he must give an *aliyah* to a certain *Kohen* and *Levi* and to some others, and the next week he has to give to others in the shul. That is why he had to skip some people this week for *aliyos*.”

The lesson from this is about our own soul. One may know various details about his soul, but he doesn't see what the roots are and he doesn't see how they all connect. He might encounter major details about his soul, but he may still have many emotional difficulties. The fact that he knows a little bit here and a little bit there about his soul doesn't help him enough. However, when a person sees each part of his soul, by learning about part of the soul step by step, he can see what the source of his soul's forces are. In order to see in this way, one must be able to feel it.

⁴⁹ Rosh HaShanah 31a

External and Internal Vision

There are two ways to see. One way is with a superficial vision, with what our eyes see at face value, and another way to see is through inner vision, to see the inside of something.

We are not discussing the deep layers of the soul (the *neshamah*), only its outer layers. But even within the outer layers of the soul, there is an external layer and an inner layer. When a person sees something, either he can see the outer part of it, or he can see the inner part of it. What does it mean to see the outer part of something external or the inner part of something external? When a person reacts in wonder to something, he is only using external vision to see it. When a person uses a quiet place in his soul to see, an unchanging view which doesn't require any emotional excitement or renewal about anything, he can then see the internal in the external.

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

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

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

Seeing The Inside From the Outside

In order to understand the human soul, a person requires two things: He has to really know the information about it, and he needs to understand how it works.

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

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

incorrect. One who wants to trust him will follow his directions and reach the middle of the maze, but one who doesn't feel like trusting him will just follow his eyes and he will certainly remain lost, and he will not find the middle of the maze."

Someone who is still in the "garden-maze" only sees part of the picture. Someone who has already been through it sees it all from above. The lesson from this is that there are two ways to see something. There is a superficial way of seeing something, which is only a partial view. The second way to see something is to use an inner kind of vision, which sees the whole picture from above.

When a person reacts in wonder to what he sees, he is only seeing from one part of his soul, and his understanding of what he is seeing will only be superficial, a partial understanding. But when a person lives with an inner silence in his soul, he can see everything, without getting overly amazed at what he sees. He sees all the details and doesn't get caught up in the minutiae.

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

A Quiet, Calm View

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

When a person reacts on an emotional level about his discoveries, he becomes too caught up in some interesting observation that he sees. This causes him to divert his attention and become mesmerized by a particular detail. However, when a person has an inner calmness, he isn't pulled after something interesting and he is able to stand tranquilly, taking in the full view of what's before him. He is then able to probe into the depths of a matter.

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

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

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

On the other hand, when a person gets his vitality from a more consistent and unchanging point which doesn't involve excitement, he can move back and forth from what's exciting and what isn't, with ease. A person who

doesn't require an exciting occurrence to feel alive has the ability to see things in greater depth. He can see all the details, both in the Torah and in the human soul. This gives a person an entirely new experience of life that is above the many confusions of life.

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

Chazal say that "A prisoner cannot release himself from his jail."⁵⁰ A prisoner, even if he is on a very great spiritual level, cannot free himself from jail. When a person lives his life based on excitement, it's as if he's in a jail, because he is being controlled by his emotions and gets pulled after them. He can't help himself. The only way for him to be saved is to be helped by another person who isn't a prisoner, who is outside of the prison, who can release him. Even if the helper doesn't have the entire picture and he doesn't know everything there is to know, at least he has the advantage of not being trapped by his own emotions, and therefore he will be able to help himself and others.

Seeing Yourself From Above

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

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

*Chazal*⁵¹ reported that one of the Sages had this type of experience and came back saying, "I see a clear world." When a person sees from this deep place in his soul, he can see everything from above, with total clarity. He can understand the soul and how it works without getting fazed by its many complex details, and he can experience the soul in a calm and unmoving manner.

Why Therapy Doesn't Always Help

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

⁵⁰ Berachos 5a

⁵¹ Pesachim 50a

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

All problems, physical or spiritual, are really because people don't understand their souls. A lack of information about the human soul causes a lot of inner contradictions and frustration. Hashem indeed wants us to have problems and He hides knowledge about our soul, so that we will have to work hard in our *avodas Hashem*. In the future, though, there will be total clarity. *Chazal*⁵² say that "Today is for action, and tomorrow is for the reward." In today's times we have no clarity and we have to work very hard at our *avodas Hashem*. In the future, we will have clarity in our *avodas Hashem* and we won't have to work hard at it.

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

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

The Obstacles That Prevent Inner Silence/Serenity

There are many reasons why a person doesn't have this inner silence.

1: Inner Imbalances In The Personality - The first cause that prevents inner calmness is, when a person hasn't yet fixed his personal greatest shortcoming. Each of us has a certain unique quality, and each of us as well has a certain shortcoming. The *avodah* of every person is to figure out his root quality, as well as his root weakness.⁵³

Man contains the four elements of fire, wind, water and earth. In each person, one of these elements is more dominant, and this subsequently causes a person to be drawn towards one of the elements. If a person knows which element he is particularly drawn towards, he can then be led towards knowing his strongest quality as well as his main weakness.⁵⁴

⁵² Eruvin 22a

⁵³ sefer *Daas Torah* (of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l) parshas Bamidbar.

⁵⁴ How does one figure out his most dominant element? Elsewhere, the Rav recommended keeping a notebook and writing down how you acted when you felt like you down and uninspired. When you feel uninspired to grow, what do you usually do to fill the void? Do you (1) Mainly become sad and melancholy (earth)? (2) Pursue some physical desire (water)? (3) Chat with others (wind)? (4) Or do you become angry at others (fire)? In order to know this well, the Rav recommends keeping a notebook for a few months and then looking back at it after a while, so you can see the general pattern of your behaviors. Then you will know what your most dominant element is, and then the avodah is to balance out that element with its opposite. For example, if you are too dominated by earth, you need to develop more of your element of wind, which balances out your earth. If you are too dominated by fire, you need earth to stave the fire; for sources from the Rav, refer to

(1) Getting To Know Your Soul

(2) 08_נַחֲשָׁן_נְאָעֵת

It is clear why each of these factors prevent *menuchas hanefesh*. Clearly, a person's greatest weakness does not let him lead a serene life, when this weakness is never treated. It continues to fester and worsen with time, if a person doesn't work on himself to improve it; and this unresolved issue will not enable a person to be stabilized.

For example, if a person has a problem with overeating, not only does he have a problem of overeating, which is very unhealthy, but he also will not be able to have *menuchas hanefesh*. Every time he overeats, he becomes anxious and impulsive. Until the moment he sees food, he is calm, and the moment he saw the food, he is driven out of his calm state, in order to fulfill the cravings. He will lose all of his calmness as he does so.

Yet it is not only the main weakness in a person which prevents him from *menuchas hanefesh*. Even a person's greatest quality can take away his *menuchas hanefesh*, when it is imbalanced. In fact, a person's greatest quality might end up becoming his own downfall, when he does not know how to give it some balance.

Someone told me that he was involved with a person who was very aspiring and spiritual, who had great spiritual strength and capability. He possessed much talent, he had an influential personality, and he was able to speak in a very inspiring way to others when he spoke in public. But because he was on such a higher plane than others, he couldn't relate to them in simple, mundane matters. It was "beneath him" to talk to his congregants about daily chatter. Therefore, he wasn't able to influence them the way he could have. He was too lofty to relate to others in practical, daily life. Here we see an example of how someone's positive qualities can also be detrimental to him.

A person might possess a wonderful quality, but if this quality does not receive enough balance through the others abilities of the soul, it will overkill. It causes a person to lose equilibrium. So while it can be a wonderful quality in and of itself to possess, on the flip side, it can also take away a person's calmness.

2: Anxious Desires - Another factor which can cause a person to lose stability in his soul is, when he suffers from desires that he hasn't yet attained.

The word *ratzon* (will) comes from the word *ratz*, "to run", because a person's *retzonos* make him "run" out of his core, so to speak. When we want something, it's like running out of our minds! We need to quiet our desires in order to feel at peace inside.

If a person were to have no *ratzon* at all, he would have complete *menuchah* [theoretically speaking; for we ultimately do have *retzonos*]. When people hear of this concept, of detaching from *ratzon*, it usually sounds to them like a form of depression. Indeed, if a person has stopped wanting anything at all because he has become deeply melancholy, then it is depression, and it is not healthy. But we have a deeper power in ourselves to detach from wanting things. It is what the Sages describe as, "Nullify your will before His will."⁵⁵

It is hard to say such a thing like this, but this is reality: even a spiritual *ratzon* can take away a person from having *menuchas hanefesh*. This happens when it is an imbalanced kind of *ratzon*. For example, sometimes young people can be very idealistic, and they have great spiritual ambition, but in many cases, they fall apart one day and they feel broken. Why does this happen? It is when they lacked balance in their *ratzon*. They might have been very

(3) Fixing Your Fire_Conceit_012_Individuality

strong in a particular area, and their intense drive in that area wasn't given enough balance, which leads them towards an eventual failure.

3: Rapid Movement - Until now we mentioned two inner causes that prevent *menuchas hanefesh*, which are problems that can develop in one's soul. Now we will speak of more external factors that prevent *menuchas hanefesh*. So far, we have listed two causes that prevent *menuchas hanefesh*: inner imbalances in the personality, and anxious desires. A third reason that can prevent *menuchas hanefesh* is: fast physical movements. When people move too rapidly, it causes them to lose their *menuchas hanefesh*. The other extreme is when a person moves too slowly, which causes him to act sleepy and lethargic.

The Sages said to run to do a *mitzvah*⁵⁶, but when should one run to a *mitzvah* and when shouldn't he run? Only if he can maintain his equilibrium while he is running, should he run to do the *mitzvah*. If he loses composure while running, he is acting above his current level, and this will cause him to lose *menuchas hanefesh*.

Any physical movement shakes the soul somewhat. Our hands stay where they are unless we move them, and without physical movement, it is only our Divine *neshamah* within us which is calmly guiding the movements of our *nefesh* [lower soul]. Whenever a person has physical movement, he is also moving his *nefesh* with it; if the movements are light, it won't cause the soul to lose its serenity, but if the movements are rapid and rushed, the soul deep down is feeling unease with this, for it feels that it has been removed from its unmoving and serene place.

4: Too Much Emotion - An additional cause for losing *menuchas hanefesh* is because of *hispaalus* (emotional wonder). There is no person who doesn't become emotionally moved sometimes. But the issue is what is causing to react, how much we are reacting emotionally, and for how long we are remaining in this state of feeling emotionally "moved" by something. When it is too high, we may feel very emotional, but we are not calm and serene. As long as a person has not yet calmed his high emotions and reactions to something, he cannot come to have *menuchas hanefesh*.

Many people are very earnest in their *avodas Hashem* but they lack *menuchas hanefesh*, because even though they are continuously involved in how to best serve Hashem, they are always feeling amazed at so many things, causing a certain disconnection. This is a lack of inner calmness. A person with such a nature may become easily amazed by an enjoyable *dvar Torah* he hears, or even from hearing something mundane.

Once I was in a *shul*, and there was someone going around collecting *tzedakah*. A person approached him and warmly gave him some money, with both of his hands. The collector looked confident that his donor was giving him a large amount of money. In reality, the person didn't even give him one dollar. But the person giving the money looked so emotional when he gave it that the collector thought for sure there is a substantial amount of money being given to him. There was nothing here except an emotional way of giving a few coins, and it was because the giver had a more emotional kind of personality.

Surely there is a gain to being very emotional, but usually, this kind of person is very far from true and inner *avodas Hashem*, and they are even disconnected somewhat from themselves. Emotion is certainly of value, and it is a wonderful quality, but it cannot become a way of life. A person should not always be so reactive. Compare it to a house that keeps moving. Can anyone live inside such a house?

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

A very wonderful, earnest and G-d fearing individual asked me how he can really grow and serve Hashem as best as possible. I asked him what he does. He told me that in the morning he is a *Rebbi*, in the afternoon he is a *Mashgiach*, and at night he is a *Rov*. In addition to this, he is involved with his shul during Friday and Shabbos so he can answer all their *halachic* queries. I told him, “The fact that you do not go insane is already a miracle. You have nowhere to fit your *Avodas Hashem* into!” When there is so much pressure upon the soul, the soul becomes blocked, and it will not be able to feel anything. It surely will not be serene.

There is also a problem if a person thinks too much. If a person is straining his mind too much, he loses all serenity in his thoughts, whether he is having too much worldly thoughts, or even if they are thoughts about Torah, if he is overexerting his mind too much. Sometimes, a person strains his mind so much to the point that his thoughts cannot be serene or calm. Even when thinking holy thoughts, or thoughts of Torah, one should think only according to his mental capacities. Just like no one would think of teaching *Zohar*, *Arizal*, and *Reshash* to his 3-year old child, so should a mature adult make sure not to strain his mind too much.

One must bear the yoke of the Torah, by exerting himself in it.⁵⁷ This includes physical exertion, as well as mental exertion. However, it must not be a kind of exertion that causes a person to lose his serenity. If a person is exerting himself in Torah study and as a result he loses his clarity to think, this is not true exertion in Torah. Only when a person remains with his *daas* (understanding), when he can retain his ability to weight out his thoughts and to be serene in his mind, does he have genuine exertion in Torah. But if his exertion in Torah causes him to lose his ability to weigh out his thoughts properly, or even if he is simply losing serenity in his mind, this is not the desired kind of exertion in Torah learning.

6: Noise - Finally, it should be noted that even noises can take away our *menuchas hanefesh*. This is true both about physical noises, as well as more ‘inner’ noises. Loud, physical noises don’t let us think calmly. A more ‘inner’ kind of noise is when we are around someone who isn’t calm, who is far from being serene, and surely this is the case when talking to someone who is very anxious and nervous. Talking to another person is a form of connection to him, and when a person talks to an anxious person who has no *menuchas hanefesh*, he connects to him and receives all of the lack of calmness that prevents *menuchas hanefesh*.

Find Out What Is Destroying Your Inner Peace

Anyone who has a little bit of *menuchas hanefesh* is able to know what removes his *menuchas hanefesh*. One can get to know which of the above factors greatly remove him from *menuchas hanefesh*, and then he can go about weakening these factors.

Most people, in the beginning of their way [when beginning to improve in their *Avodas Hashem*], are lacking *menuchas hanefesh* either because of an unfixed personal weakness that is majorly getting in their way, or because of unfulfilled wants that make them anxious. An additional percentage of people are not serene because they were born

⁵⁷ *Beraishis Rabbah* 98:12

with a more emotional nature and therefore they are more prone to *hispaalus* (emotional reactions), which doesn't allow them to be inwardly calm.

Each person clarify to himself what is taking away his *menuchas hanefesh*, and after discovering what the main reason is, he can then go about quieting it.

07 | Serenity From The Void & From The Infinite

Serenity From “Void” (Nothingness)

Until now we spoke about *menuchah* (serenity) in the ‘pro-active’ sense: as a way to gain serene action, serene feelings, and serene thoughts. When we apply *menuchah*/serenity to our actions, emotions, and thoughts, we are doing so in order to gain actions, emotions, and thoughts that are more serene. But along with this, we also need a different kind *menuchah* which is ‘inactive’.

Menuchah is either about becoming more connected to a root, or it is about a void of all action [where it is just serene quietness of non-action]. These are two different types of *menuchah*/serenity.

The word “Shabbos” is from the word “*shov*”, to “return”, because on Shabbos there is a kind of serenity where Creation returns to its root. This is describing the first kind of *menuchah* we have spoken about thus far, where serenity is used as a way to become more connected to our root. But Shabbos is also from the word *shvisah*, “rest”, to abstain from labor. This is a different aspect of the *menuchah* of Shabbos [and it serves as a different source for serenity: when there is an absence of action].

There is a way for us to draw *menuchah* from an empty space in the soul (the “*chalal*”, the “void”, or “empty space”). The Sages mention this concept of “*chalal*” (void) in several places. The *Midrash* states that Hashem took Avraham *Avinu* out of the “*chalal*” of the world and showed him the secrets of Creation.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the Sages state, “*Ain Od Milvado* (there is nothing besides for Him) - even in the *chalalo shel olam*” (even in the empty space of the world).⁵⁹

The concept of this “empty space” in the universe, in terms of the human soul, is that there is a place of serenity deep in the soul, where a person can feel nothingness, where everything in Creation has been emptied of its content.

Just like we can derive serenity from connecting to our root, so can we derive serenity from simple silence. During the blessings of the *Shabbos Shemoneh Esrei* of *Minchah*, we describe several kinds of *menuchah* that exist, and one of them is, “*menuchas hashkei*”, “a serenity of silence”. This silence is drawn from the “empty space” in the soul, which provides a person with a deep source of serenity.

If one only has serenity from this empty space but he does not have the serenity of being connected to his root, this is exactly the methods of “serenity” which the gentile worlds try to attain, and it is evil. The souls of the Jewish people need to access two different source of serenity. One source of serenity is to become connected to our root, which we express in serene actions, serene feelings, and serene thoughts; and even more so, when we attain serenity from our connection with the Infinite. Along with this we also need to access a different source of serenity: the calming nothingness of an empty space. We need this “double” recipe in order to attain our *menuchah*.

⁵⁸ *Beraishis Rabbah* 14:42

⁵⁹ *Devarim Rabbah* 2:27

Chazal said that the commandments of Hashem of “Remember the Shabbos” and “Guard the Shabbos” were uttered in one statement.⁶⁰ “Remembering” the Shabbos is a positive act we take in order to observe Shabbos, whereas “guarding” the Shabbos represents a negation that we do in order to preserve Shabbos: we abstain from work. ‘Remembering’ and ‘guarding’ the Shabbos were both said in one statement, and they are both aspects of Shabbos, and the *menuchah* that is Shabbos is contained in both of these aspects. They are integrated with each other and we can’t have one of these without the other.

There is a deep power in the soul where one can feel “nothingness”. Although we live in a world that is populated by many creations, and we do not live in a deserted place such as the ocean or the desert, but in civilization, we are still able to access a deep place in our soul which can feel how Creation is empty, and to feel as if there is absolutely nothing in Creation.

The Danger of Accessing The Emptiness

However, there is great danger contained in this serenity that can be derived from feeling the nothingness in Creation. When a person feels nothingness, when he is in touch with this place in his soul that feels the deep empty space, he is vulnerable to all the different kinds of evil and impure forces, which are drawn towards emptiness.

The Torah writes that when Yosef was thrown into the pit, “the pit was empty, and there was no water in it”, and the Sages state, “There was no water in it, but it implies that there were snakes and scorpions in it” [which alludes to this concept of how impure forces are drawn towards emptiness]. In a similar vein, Rav Nachman of Breslov said that if a person enters the “empty space” of Creation [in his soul], he is in danger of becoming open to all of the many heretical questions that may enter his head, which are drawn towards the empty space; and he might not be able to come out of those questions.

Therefore, if someone is not connected enough to his root, entering this empty and serene space is dangerous.

On the other hand, this empty space in the soul is also a source of complete serenity, when it is entered correctly. When a person feels the nothingness in Creation, there are no outer stimuli that can pull him away from there, because he doesn’t feel it. He can receive complete serenity from there and then he can better connect to his root. In that vast inner space, a person does not see anything with his physical eyes, and if he cannot see anything, his heart cannot desire anything, because the heart only desires something that the eyes see; thus he cannot be pulled after anything improper once he properly connects to this space.

Three Kinds of Serenity in the World and in the Soul

Chazal say that when Hashem created the world, He first had to create an empty space (*chala*) in order to make way for creation, and then He filled the empty space with all of creation. At first, Hashem allowed His Presence to fill the entire existence. Then in order to create the universe, He left some empty space which He made Himself not fill, so to speak. This empty space was then filled to become the universe. Although all this took place at the beginning of Creation, there is an ability in our soul to feel this as well.

⁶⁰ Rosh HaShanah 27a

In addition, a person's soul can feel Hashem's existence. One's soul can sense how His existence fills all that there is and that there is nothing besides Him. In this, a person can find a total and complete *menuchas hanefesh*. When a person utilizes this part of his soul correctly, he experiences what is called "*Ain Od Milvado*" – "There is Nothing Besides Hashem". This is the correct kind of nothingness a person needs to experience. It is when one realizes that there is truly nothing in the universe except for Hashem. This is also known as having *menuchah* in the *EinSof* (Endlessness) of Hashem. If a person only has the first kind of *menuchas hanefesh* – calm actions, feelings and thoughts – he is missing the other kinds of *menuchas hanefesh*, which is to feel the *menuchah* that comes from the *chalal* in one's soul, as well as the *menuchah* which comes from the *EinSof* of Hashem.

If a person only has *menuchah* of the *chalal* in his soul, he is living an impure kind of existence. And if a person only has *menuchah* in the *EinSof*, he is missing the other two kinds of *menuchas hanefesh*. A person needs to all have three kinds of *menuchas hanefesh*.

In Summary

In summation, there are altogether three parts to *menuchah*/serenity:

1. *Menuchah*/serenity within Creation - which is found in serene actions, serene feelings, and serene thoughts.
2. *Menuchah*/serenity that comes from the "empty space" (*chalal*) in our soul, and
3. *Menuchah*/serenity in the *EinSof*(the Infinite) of Hashem.

There is a big difference between the first and second kinds of *menuchah*, with the third kind of *menuchah*. The first level mentioned, the *menuchah* that is attained from within the soul of man - through actions, feelings, and thoughts - is a different experience of serenity for each person, for some people will only be serene from one action and not another; from one emotion and not a different emotion; and from a certain thought as opposed to the other. But the *menuchah* in the *EinSof*(the Infinite) is the same for each person, for of this it is said, "All of them will point with their finger and say, "This is Hashem that we awaited, and He has saved us" – we can all equally recognize that we have only have "One" Father in Heaven, the Creator, Blessed Is He.

Shabbos Contains All Three Kinds of Menuchah

Shabbos contains all these three kinds of *menuchah*. Shabbos is a day of physical rest, which is the first level of *menuchah* mentioned. It is also the *menuchah* in the "void", because we don't do anything on Shabbos. It also contains the third kind of *menuchah* in the *EinSof*, because Shabbos is called "the Name of Hashem." We say in the *Tefillah* of *Shabbos Minchah*, "And from You comes their rest." The first two kinds of *menuchah* are not yet the total *menuchah* a person can reach, because they involved movement, and anything that has movement cannot be considered total *menuchas hanefesh*.

When a person has calm actions, feelings and thoughts, he has calm movements. Even drawing *menuchah* from the "chalal" (empty space) in one's soul has some movement, because one needs to create a space within oneself in order to have it. This is a type of movement (albeit subtle). But the third kind of *menuchah*, the *menuchah* in the

EinSof, is the most perfect kind of *menuchah*, because it comes from the deepest place in one's soul, where there is no movement. This is the ability to utterly feel Hashem's existence in the depths of one's soul. That is where true *menuchah* is found.

Shabbos of Today vs. Shabbos of the Future

The Shabbos of nowadays is called *m'ein olam haba*, a “semblance” of the World To Come. The *menuchah* of Shabbos we can have nowadays is “As if all your work is done.”⁶¹ This is a *menuchah* within this world of movement, of action. It is similar to the World To Come, but it is not yet the actual level of the World To Come. It is not the total level of *menuchah*; it is not the total level of Shabbos.

A created being is not able to live the total level of *menuchah* in which there is no movement. This is not the will of Hashem, for we are found in a world of movement, and we must serve Him through our movements. Only in the Shabbos of future, which will be “a day that is entirely Shabbos and serenity for all of eternity”, will we have the total level of *menuchah* in which there is no movement at all, the truly complete and perfect level of *menuchah*.

Just as the purpose of the six days of the week is Shabbos, so is *menuchah*/serenity the purpose of our soul. This is the basis for our entire inner *avodah* (work) of our soul, because it is the ultimate goal of everything.

⁶¹ *Mechilta Shemos* 20:8

08 | Serenity Throughout The Five Layers of the Soul

Introduction

The soul's serenity is divided between the five parts of the soul, which are called: the *Nefesh*, the *Ruach*, the *Neshamah*, the *Chayah*, and the *Yechidah*.

Lower Serenity (Rooted in The Element of Earth) and Higher Serenity (Rooted in the Three Active Elements)

As a general outline, there are two levels of *menuchas hanefesh*:

(1) From the soul's element of earth, where a person simply rests.

(2) From the three active elements in the soul, which are fire, wind, and water, which provide a person with a sense of orderliness, and he is thereby serene. For example, when a person travels from one place to another place and he doesn't know the way, he is not calm as he is traveling. Once he recognizes the path, he naturally will be serene when he is going there. Although he is not travelling and not resting, he can still have a degree of serenity even as he's moving, because he has order, clarity and direction in his movements. When he is not clouded by doubts, he can have serenity even within his movements.

Menuchah of the “Nefesh” level of the Soul: Becoming A “Container” To Receive Spiritual Light

The simplest level of *menuchah*/serenity [with regards to the five levels of the soul], which is at the lowest level of the soul, is the *menuchah* of the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul. The word “*Nefesh*” is associated with rest, as we say on Shabbos, “*Vayinafash*” – “And He rested.” Shabbos is the rest from the six days of the week, which are days of action, and Shabbos is the rest from all of this action. During the six days of the week, our soul undergoes exertion from all of the action. Shabbos is when we can receive *menuchah*, serenity, by desisting from all of this action.

Menuchah (serenity) is spiritual light, and Shabbos is our “container” that can receive and hold onto this light. When spiritual light has no container to receive it, it has nothing where it can settle upon. Compare it to a person who has an object with no place to put it. When there is nowhere to place the object upon, he will have to keep moving with it, until he finds somewhere to put it. He cannot have *menuchah* until then. When he finds a place to put the object in, now there can be *menuchah*.

This is also a deeper understanding of the words of *Chazal*, “Anyone whose wisdom is greater than his actions, his wisdom will not last.”⁶² The depth of this is that when a person's wisdom is matched by a corresponding level of actions, his wisdom can settled upon his soul, and then it can have *menuchah*. Such a person will have the “container” to receive the light of his own Torah wisdom. But if his wisdom isn't being matched with a corresponding level of action, his Torah wisdom does not settle upon his soul, because he has no “container” to receive the light.

⁶² Avos 3:17

It is possible to see people who know a lot of Torah, but they don't have any *menuchah*. The deeper reason for this is because they do not have the "container" in themselves to receive the Torah wisdom that is in their mind. The soul is serene only when it has a container to receive the spiritual light descending into it. When this container is missing, the soul cannot be serene. *Menuchas hanefesh* is therefore about being a container that can receive spiritual light.

Menuchah on the "Ruach" level of the Soul: Being Above Your Actions

Ruach means wind, which personifies movement. The wind can move in any of the six directions of the world: east, west, north, south, above, and below. The winds of the world move within the four directions of the world, and the *Gemara* says that "the northern wind escorts all of the winds".⁶³ The inner "wind" in a person's soul can also move in any of the six directions, and there is also a "northern wind" which accompanies each movement of the soul.

The northern wind, the *ruach tzefonis*, is from the word *tzafun*, hidden. The "northern wind" is really a hint to the "hidden" light that is designated for use of the World To Come. On a personal level, when one is not making use of the "northern wind" in his own soul, all of his movements will lack *menuchah* in them.

Of Yehoshua it is said, "*A man who contains spirit*" – which is the term "*ruach*". This meant that he knew how to lead the nation according to each person's personal *ruach*/direction.⁶⁴ Each person has his own direction he wants to go in. A person in the south wants to move northward, and a person in the north wants to go southward. How is it possible to make peace between all of these differing directions? If there is a "northern wind" escorting each of these directions, any of the movements of the soul will be serene. Without it, the soul cannot have *menuchah*.

When a person speaks, or whenever he moves, if the "hidden" and very inner parts of his soul are exposed outward, he will lose his serenity. This is like the verse, "*All of his spirit, is released by the fool.*" The person who is called a "fool", when he is angered, will release outward all of what is inside him, and then he will be emptied. Whatever was stored in his inner recesses of the soul has now gone out, so he is left with nothing inside himself.

The northern wind escorts every wind, every movement; but how is it revealed? It is not openly revealed. It remains hidden. Although it escorts every wind and movement, it will never be revealed as the northern wind. In an eastern wind, it will appear as the eastern wind, and in a southern or western wind, it will appear as the southern or western wind. So even when it is being revealed, it still remains hidden – a *ruach tzefonis*, a "hidden" wind.

Chazal define this concept as, "*Liba l'puma lo galya*" - "The heart cannot be revealed by the mouth."⁶⁵ In whatever level a person is on, he should always leave some of his innerness inside himself, and he should not reveal it outward. When you remain with some of your innerness still hidden inside you, you retain your serenity. But if a person releases outward everything that is inside him, he becomes unending movement, and he cannot be inwardly serene from all of these unending movements.

Chazal state that Hashem is called *satim v'galya*, "concealed yet revealed."⁶⁶ The Torah is also called "concealed yet revealed." Anything revealed is subject to exile, for the word for revelation, "*giluy*", is from the word "*galus*." Whenever anything is revealed outward, it may become spread apart by any of the four winds of the earth. But if

⁶³ *Gittin* 31b

⁶⁴ *Sifrei Bamidbar*: 140

⁶⁵ *Midrash Tehillim* 9

⁶⁶ *Zohar Beraishis* 39b

something is kept hidden, it does not become exiled. The evil inclination wants to expose everything that is hidden, and that is a deeper reason of why one of its names is “*Tzefuni*”, “hidden one”.⁶⁷

This is *menuchah* on “*Ruach*” level of the soul: In whatever you do, make sure to leave a “space” for yourself, amidst the action. In that way, you are connected to the revealed aspect of the action as well as to the hidden, concealed aspect in the action. Every action contains a revealed aspect as well as hidden aspect. In terms of the four elements, it is the element of earth which enables serenity, and this is connected with the fact that the earth is also covered, so the earth is associated with modesty. The wind, however, blows at the earth and exposes it, by moving it and overturning its dirt from the underground, exposing the dirt to the surface.

Thus, if I release all of my “wind” – if I use up all of my energy (whether in speech or in any action or movement), I have lost serenity. In anything you do, remain connected to a part in the action which has not been actualized from its potential state. If you act with all of your energy, you cannot be serene.

To illustrate, on Shabbos Kodesh, where one it is forbidden to leave the *techum* (the boundary) and to carry from a public domain to a private domain, and vice versa, it is still permissible for one to carry within a private domain and to walk as much as he wants in it. Even in a public domain, it is only forbidden by the Torah to carry while walking more than four cubits, but if it is less than four cubits of walking while carrying something, this is permissible by Torah law (but prohibited on a Rabbinical level). We can see from this that as long as one stays within one confined space (of four cubits), one may move within it on Shabbos, because it is not considered going out from his place. Although he is moving, he is not leaving his own space – he is not leaving “himself”, so to speak. There is also a concept of speaking within oneself, which is like moving within oneself. When one is ‘moving’ within himself but he is still staying within himself, he retains the hidden parts of himself, which are meant to be kept hidden.

Of death, it is written, “*And the spirit returns to G-d, Who gave her*”.⁶⁸ The soul finds it solace, its *menuchah*, at death. What is the *menuchah* that it finds there? It returns to the place where it can be kept hidden. If a person during his lifetime was already connected to a hidden place in himself, at death, he can connect better to it. But if he became too immersed in action during his lifetime and he did not keep any of his innerness hidden in himself, he will not know of the “hidden light for the *tzaddikim*”. His soul cannot find solace in returning to its hidden Source.

There is a big difference between the *menuchah* on the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul with the *menuchah* of the higher levels of the soul. In the “*Nefesh*” level of the soul, *menuchah* can only come from an end. In the higher levels of the soul, *menuchah* is found even at the beginning of something. But in the “*Ruach*” level of the soul, one can receive *menuchah* even while moving and performing his actions, by staying connected to his innerness even in the midst of leaving it in order to do something. He receives serenity precisely from leaving his inner state in order to do something, because he is still holding onto some of his innerness and making sure not to be totally emptied from his inner state. This is where his serenity is coming from, and in that way, his serenity is coming from a beginning, not an end.

⁶⁷ *Succah* 52a

⁶⁸ *Koheles* 12:7

Menuchah on the “Neshamah” level of the Soul: Contemplating How To Connect Together Details To Their Source

The “*Neshamah*” level of the soul is about developing the power of deep thought. When a person only uses his power of thought sometimes, he is not found at this level. Only when one is consistently involved with deeply developed thinking is he at the “*Neshamah*” level of the soul.

The *menuchah* on the level of “*Neshamah*” is when one is reflecting, in his thoughts, from a place of serenity. Torah scholars are called “builders”,⁶⁹ because they are consistently using their power to reflect. The word for “reflection”, “*hisbonenus*”, is from the same root as the word *binyan*, “building” (developing), and the word *binah*, “contemplation.” All of these terms bear the same root. Betzalel was filled with wisdom in order to build the structure of the *Mishkan*, for he was blessed with the abilities of *chochmah*/wisdom, *tevunah*/understanding and *daas*/knowledge for this. The serenity of the *neshamah*, which is through mental reflection, is when one contemplates from his beginning point – “From have I come?” – and from there, he becomes serene.

Hisbonenus, reflection, is used in order to combine together different parts into one structure. It is from the word *binah*, which is from the word *binyan* – to build. If something is already complete, there is no need to build it. I can only build something when it is divided into parts. Usually, when building something, the person first identifies different parts that are scattered from each other, and then he attempts to connect them together. But when Torah scholars use their ability of “building”, it is a deeper power to build. They are building from a serene place in themselves.

Compare this to building a physical structure. First a space is cleared, in order to build anything on top of it. Without first this clearing this space, there is no place to build upon. First we need to remove all the rocks and stones from the place, and then we can build upon that place. Thus, the first thing I must do when trying to build something is to first create an empty space. The place must first be “serene”, and upon that, I can build there. The idea here is that in order to combine together parts and build them into one structure, it needs to be based on a place that can hold the structure – and that clearing of space is essentially the “*menuchah*”, the serenity, which must precede what I want to build.

When building a structure, I turn the stones of this house from moving objects into unmoving property. The stones become firmly attached to the ground and thus they become a part of the ground. Thus, when building a structure, I am connecting together different parts and nullifying it all to the ground underneath it. Here is the question: Where I am building from? Am I building from separated parts, or am I building from combined parts? If my attitude is that I am building from separated parts that I have attached to the ground, I have essentially begun to build the structure from the ground. But if my attitude is that I have built the structure from anything that is apart and separated from the ground, I have essentially built it from stones, not from the ground.

In other words, if the goal of building the structure is not only for the purpose of combining together separate parts, but for the purpose of forming one structure from it, I am building it from a serene mindset. When building a house, there is the place in the ground we can build it in, and there are the stones that are needed in order to build it. The foundation of the house in the ground was always one single place, whereas the stones are scattered from each other, and we must connect them together. If I build the house from the ground, I am building it from amidst serenity, from one place. But if I am building the house from the stones, I am building it from separated parts – from a place where there is no serenity, because there is no oneness binding them together.

⁶⁹ Berachos 64a

Thus, if my attitude is that I am connecting together various details, and that is how I seek to build something from it, I am building it from a place of separation. But if my intention is to connect together all of the parts to a root, I have begun to build from a place of oneness, which is serene.

The inner implication of *hisbonenus* is thus to connect a detail to its root, not because I want to unify together all of the details, but because I want to connect all of the details to their source. In contrast to this, the more superficial attitude of building through contemplation is that I am trying to build something new.

We can give an example of this idea from the way a person needs to mentally reflect while learning Torah. Sometimes a person has produced a certain fundamental concept while learning the words of the *Gemara*, and he is searching through the words of *Chazal* which can be further explained through his novelty. In another instance, a person may have seven questions on the words of the Rambam, and he is looking for one fundamental answer which can take care of all of them.

What is the difference between these two kinds of questions? The issue is, if he is transitioning from a place of oneness to a place of separation, or from a place of separation to a place of oneness. In the instance where he has begun from seven questions, he has begun from seven separate parts, and he wishes to connect them together. But in the instance where he has begun from one fundamental and he wants to further build upon it, his aim is to connect together all of the details into one.

This subtle difference of approach will also be expressed in different ways, depending on one's level. One kind of person will start with one fundamental point in the *Gemara* he is learning, and although there are many details in the section of the *Gemara* he is learning, he will attempt to expose his initial understanding throughout all of the details he sees. Another kind of person will begin from a more superficial approach, first seeing all of the details and then gathering them all together, and slowly he gains clarity of the details and then he begins to 'connect the dots' together.

In different terminology, these different approaches are called *binah* and *tevunah*. Using the power of *tevunah*, one begins from the details and eventually connects them all together into one. Using *binah* [which is deeper], a person begins from a place of oneness and then sees all of the details through that one point, connecting together all of the details into one point.

We can now understand how *menuchah* on the "Nefesh" level of the soul differs from the *menuchah* on the "Neshamah" level of the soul. When I begin from details and I end with connecting them all together as one, I can only be serene at the end, when all of the details are unified into one point. This is the *menuchah*/serenity on the "Nefesh" level of the soul. But if I connect together all the details with the initial understanding that they are all one point, I can derive *menuchah*/serenity already at the beginning – this is the "Neshamah" level of *menuchah*.

Most people have not yet revealed their "Neshamah" level of the soul, and therefore they have not yet uncovered this deep use of *hisbonenus*. They would rather first see all the details when they learn and only after that to come up with a fundamental concept that will connect them all. They want to add onto their knowledge more and more, but they don't know how to build upon their knowledge.

The *Neshamah* is entirely about making deep use of the intellect (*seichel*). It is not about using our intellect on an external level, which a gentile can also do. It is rather a holy use of the *seichel*/intellect, the holy use of *chochmah*/wisdom, and the holy use of *binah*/understanding. It is to think from a place of oneness, and from there, to connect together details, to this one source.

It can be understood like a magnet. A magnet is one object, but everything that passes near it is drawn towards it and becomes connected to it. The magnet does not simply connect together different parts that become attached to it - rather, each of the parts are drawn towards it.

(The concept we have explained here is also known as *mochin d'gadlus* (the higher level of the mind).

Menuchah on the “Chayah” level of the soul: Accessing Your Inner Source of Wisdom, Through Self-Nullification

The “*Chayah*” level of the soul is the inner source of the soul where all of one’s information is flowing out from. It would seem that by its very nature, this inner source is the total antithesis to *menuchah*, because since it is always flowing with information, a person cannot be calm at this point of the soul. For example, there are people who are always coming up with ideas, and since information is always flowing through them, they are never serene.

There is a holy source in the soul where one’s wisdom flows from. It is known as the *maayan shel chochmah*, the “wellspring of wisdom” in the soul. *Chazal* state that one who learns Torah *lismah* becomes like a *maayan hamisgaber*, a mighty wellspring. His Torah *chiddushim* flow from the inner source of wisdom in the soul, because he is connected to it. The source of wisdom is called *ayin*, “nothingness”, as it is written, “*Wisdom, from where is it found?*” The verse is saying that the source of the wisdom is *m’ayin*, “from where?” - from nothing, *ayin*. When one’s thoughts are flowing from this source of *ayin*, he can keep producing new thoughts. It is really coming from the Infinite, which is a constant, unending source of wisdom for the soul.

It would seem that this point in the soul does not allow for serenity, because it is unceasing. Indeed, we can all see that people who keep producing new ideas, with information always flowing through their minds, have no serenity at all. How, then, can serenity come from the inner source of wisdom in the soul?

As we explained earlier, there is a concept of orderly movement. While movement is the very opposite of serenity, there can be a degree of serenity even within movement, such as when the movements are orderly. This is most apparent in the serenity that stems from the element of earth in the soul, which is totally unmoving. But even in the active elements of the soul (fire, wind and water), there can also be serene kinds of movement, if there is orderliness within the movements.

On a deeper note, there is another level of serenity found from this part of the soul. In the Chayah level of the soul, there is *menuchah* found in the orderliness of this inner source, but there is also *menuchah* because the source of the soul’s wisdom is *ayin*, which is reached through self-nullification (*bittul*).

In order for a person to reach this inner, unceasing source of wisdom, he needs to feel nullified to the source of the wisdom. If I place the emphasis on the fact that the source of all my wisdom is “*ayin*”, nothingness, I am living the state of serenity that comes from self-nullification. Man is a moving being, and when I nullify myself and all of my movements, I can then have serenity from all of this movement; from that nullified state, where I am nothing, I can then receive wisdom from there. One needs to regress back and forth between these two states, of nullifying himself and then receiving more wisdom, then nullifying oneself again, and repeating the cycle.

Thus, *menuchah*/serenity is through being nullified to something. As we declare of the *chometz* before Pesach, “Let it be nullified like the dust of the earth” – when it is nullified and it becomes like the dust, one can then be serene.

Menuchah on the “Yechidah” level of the soul: “Ain Od Milvado”

The complete level of *menuchah* is found in the place of the soul that is called the “*Yechidah*”. When one recognizes “*Ain Od Milvado*”, that “There is nothing besides for Hashem”, this is the truest form of *menuchah* attainable in Creation.

One of questions which our Sages wondered was: How do we reconcile the concept of *Ain Od Milvado*, with the reality that there are existing creations on this world? In essence, this was really the same issue of *yediah* (the fact that Hashem knows everything) versus *bechirah* (free will). If Hashem already knows what a person will do, what then does it mean that man has free will? And the same question can be asked the other way around.

The answer to this is that through the concept of our *emunah*, we can see that both perspectives are correct. We simply do not understand how indeed this is not a contradiction, but we can believe that there is no contradiction. When one believes with absolute *emunah* in the concept of *Ain Od Milvado*, he can have complete *menuchah* from this as well.

The “*Yechidah*” level of the soul believes perfectly in the concept of *Ain Od Milvado*, in its simple meaning (*k’peshuto*).⁷⁰ This is not something we can understand through our intellect. The “*Yechidah*” part of our soul is above any intellectual comprehension and logical reasoning. It is essentially the power of *emunah* in our soul, to have a palpable faith [in the Creator]. Through the power of *emunah*, one can believe in the two concepts together: There is *Ain Od Milvado*, and there is also all of the existing creations. This requires your *emunah*, your belief in this, rather than some high level of intellectual understanding. Your power of *emunah* can recognize a reality which your intellect cannot.⁷¹

When one reaches this place in the depths of his soul where he can believe in *Ain Od Milvado*, there is no greater level of *menuchah*/serenity. This is what we say in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Shabbos Minchah*, “For from You comes their serenity.” The complete level of *menuchah* is to recognize *Ain Od Milvado*, in the simplest sense. It is also called *Olam HaBa*, the World to Come – and the “day that is entirely Shabbos and eternal serenity.” In this place of the soul, the soul is deeply serene.

A person who lives in that place is able to keep beginning from this place of *Ain Od Milvado* in the simple sense and to then go back into the state of the created beings. He lives the constant renewal of Creation, for his lives the meaning of *Ain Od Milvado* as it is, in the state of “Before Creation”, and from there, he goes back to the state of Creation.

This is also the secret of the weekdays and Shabbos. One can begin from Shabbos, then he goes back into the six days of the week, and then returns to Shabbos, and he keeps repeating the cycle. This is the perfect level of *menuchah* for a Jew’s soul to reach.

⁷⁰ see *Nefesh HaChaim*: Gate III, which brings differing views if “*Ain Od Milvado*” is to be understood *k’peshuto* (simply) or not.

⁷¹ Editor’s Note: Elsewhere, the Rav has also quoted the statement of Rav Dessler (in sefer *Michtav M’Eliyahu*) that best describes this point: “At the point where *seichel* (intellect) ends, that is where *emunah* (faith) begins.”

09 | Serenity Amidst Suffering

Can A Person Have Pain and Serenity At The Same Time?

The Torah compares Yissocher, the tribe who merited Torah scholars as descendants, to a donkey. Just like a donkey endures its load and rests wherever it is, so do Yissocher's descendants have these two attributes. They have serenity, *menuchah*, and they also have the ability of *savlanus*, enduring pain.

How does a person maintain serenity, while at the same time enduring pain? Either he's feeling serene, or he is in pain. How can he have both at the same time?

A person is comprised of a body and a soul, and the body and the soul want different things. The soul desires the spiritual, while the body wants physical comfort and enjoyment. When only the soul gets its needs met, the body is enduring pain at this, and when the body finds serenity, the soul does not feel serenity with it. Their needs contradict each other. Thus, whenever there is serenity, we can also find pain, and wherever we find pain, we can also find serenity.

Two Different Reactions To Suffering

The Hebrew word “*saval*” can either mean pain and suffering, and it can also mean to “bear” a load. When a person is suffering, there are two different ways of how he may take to it. If he kicks at the suffering, he will indeed suffer pain, from the suffering. But if he accepts it lovingly, he will be able to “bear” the suffering upon him, like carrying a load upon his shoulders.

In the first way of dealing with suffering mentioned – kicking at the suffering – a double force of contradiction will be created between the soul and the body, greatly magnifying the difference between them. Thus, there is no person further from *menuchah* (serenity) than a person who is kicking at his suffering. But when a person accepts the suffering and is willing to bear and endure it, a closeness is created between his body and soul. His soul rejoices in the suffering, and his body is enduring it.

When a person is willing to endure the suffering, he harmonizes his body with his soul, and he is very close to *menuchah*. The soul finds *menuchah* in the very suffering, and even the body finds a way to endure the pain without kicking at it, and the person draws himself closer to receiving *menuchah*.

Chazal state that when one rejoices in suffering, of him it is said, “*And those who love Him are like the sun going out in its strength.*”⁷² What is the connection? It can be explained with a different statement of *Chazal*: “In the future,⁷³ Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath”. The meaning of this statement is that just as a person has a soul within a body, so is the sun within a sheath, which is like its ‘body’. In the future, Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath, so that the sun’s sheath will not prevent the sun’s full light, and then the sun’s light will be in its full

⁷² see Shabbos 88b

⁷³ Nedarim 8b

strength. In the same way, when a person who rejoices with suffering, his soul leaves the ‘sheath’ of the body, as it were, and then there is no longer a divide between the body and the soul.

Yaakov Avinu’s blessing of *menuchah* that is attributed to Yissocher, which is the *menuchah* of a Torah scholar, is called “*And he saw that tranquility was good.*” This is the soul’s serenity, the Divine light that comes from attaching to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, which comes from connecting to the Torah. The soul wants the true serenity, it wants holiness, the connection to the spiritual, to a “world that is entirely good”.

But this connection to the spiritual is painful to the body. The body wants to eat, drink, and enjoy the sensual pleasures of This World. Even so, however, the body is capable of joining with the soul, where it will have to endure pain with this. In this way, the body does not kick at the suffering. Instead, it ‘bends over its shoulder’ to bear the burden of spirituality it will be carrying. It is like a person bearing a package on his shoulders, who endures the burden, instead of kicking at it.

The Torah is thus saying that since the soul sees that *menuchah* is good, it wants this *menuchah*, and therefore if he kicks at the suffering of the body which comes along with this, he will not have *menuchah*. Therefore, the blessing of Yissocher is that he does not kick at the suffering, and instead “*bends his shoulder to endure*” – he is willing to bear the suffering and endure it, like a person who willingly carries a load.

The Soul Suffers With The Body’s Suffering

If we reflect a bit more, we can discover that there is no person who does not have suffering. Suffering consists of two factors: The smaller part of the suffering is the physical aspect of the suffering, which the body feels; and the more difficult part of the suffering is the fact that it takes a person out of his routine.

First let’s consider the more external aspects of physical suffering. When a person has to take care of a physical issue he is having, he gets tossed around from place to place, from being in the hospital and etc., and all of this takes him out of his routine. Even if he is able to keep up his external routine of life, he is inwardly consumed by his suffering and he is bothered by it. This totally removes him from his inner world. This is “suffering of the soul”, which is seven times harder than physical suffering of the body.

When a person cannot endure the pain of suffering, he cannot be serene in the midst of suffering. Every person on some level has an inward dimension that goes beyond his body (unless he is living life on the level of an animal), and physical suffering removes him entirely from the inner world he knows of in himself, and in some cases, his mind does not stay sane.

This difficulty with physical suffering is the inner aspect of the suffering, and it is harder for a person to deal with. Physical suffering takes its toll on the body, but the body can generally be healed from its wounds. As for the soul’s suffering during this time, most people do not have the inner reserves to heal it.

The Power of Silence To Relieve Pain

The power to endure suffering of the soul is: silence.

Suffering of the soul is the main factor which motivates a person to talk about his pain and suffering to others. The *Gemara* says, “Accept suffering with silence.”⁷⁴ Silence is thus the way to “rectify” suffering. The simple understanding of this is that a person shouldn’t have complaints against Hashem for sending him this suffering, and that he should just be silent and accept it with love.

There is a deeper aspect to this power of silence. When a person is having physical pain, usually the pain is not that alarming. It is not causing him to jump all over the place in agony. What does he do? He starts to talk about it and complain about it. What happens when he talks about his pain? The more he talks about it, the less serene he becomes, from the suffering.

The Sages state that one should be silent as a response to any insults or strife. When a person is silent, he connects himself to a state of nullification. The world was created entirely through Hashem’s expressions. The “word of Hashem” is what upkeeps the existence of the world.⁷⁵ This began with the Ten Expressions, and later, with the Ten Commandments. Thus, the upkeep of the world is through speech. But when we want to nullify something instead of allowing it exist, what is the way? Through silence. If I want to nullify something, I must silence it.

Thus, talking about one’s pain and suffering actually makes it worse, because speech allows for something to sustain. If I am continuing to sustain my suffering by talking about it, I will continue to suffer. But when a person is silent about his suffering, the silence itself nullifies the suffering. The very nature of suffering is that it demands for a person to talk about it, yet a person can overcome this drive and silence himself – and this silence is exactly what can take away the suffering.

The Depth Behind Speech and Silence

The depth behind this is because if I want to nullify anything, I need to nullify the “word” behind it which is empowering it. This is surely the case when something is particularly fueled by words, such as a heated argument and fight, which by very nature demands that I lash out at the other person with words. Suffering especially makes a person want to talk about it. If you go and visit a sick person, he may want to talk to you about everything that he is going through. But if he would be silent, he would actually alleviate his suffering.

Each thing in Creation first exists as a potential force, which can then become actualized from its potential state. What activates the potential of each thing? In the physical world, it is action which actualizes the potential of something. Wood can be built into a table; the action of carving the wood actualizes the potential of the wood, by turning it into a table. But in the spiritual realm, the force that actualizes the potential of something is the power of speech. All of Creation became actualized from its potential state through speech (the word of Hashem). That is

⁷⁴ Berachos 62a

⁷⁵ Chullin 89a

why the *mitzvos* we do on this “world of action” are executed by means of action, whereas Torah learning, which is entirely spiritual, is through speech.

When the soul is suffering along with the body’s physical pain, I make the suffering much worse, because I am turning the suffering from its potential state into an actualized state. But if I am silent about the suffering, I return the suffering to its root. When it returns to its root, the suffering leaves. It can no longer be activated, because it can longer continue to exist [for I have returned it to its root].

The Menuchah of Shabbos - Silence

Shabbos Kodesh is when Hashem brought *menuchah* into the world. *Chazal* state, “What was the word missing? *Menuchah* (serenity). Shabbos came, and *menuchah* came to the world.”⁷⁶ Let us reflect into this. The world was created with Hashem’s Ten Expressions. Wasn’t *menuchah* already a part of these Ten Expressions?

In the aforementioned words of the *Midrash*, the Sages explain what the Ten Expression were, and the last of these expressions was “Let us make man”, which happened on the sixth day of Creation. This implies that *menuchah*, which only came on Shabbos, was not part of the Expressions of Hashem in creating the world. The concept of *menuchah* was created from a “silence” of Hashem – from a negation of Hashem’s speech, from what He did not say – from Hashem’s silence, so to speak. Thus, when Shabbos came, there were no more Expressions. There was now *menuchah*. The silence itself was the *menuchah*. Shabbos is the day when Hashem “rested” from creating the world – implying a silence.

On a personal level as well, when the soul is silent, there is *menuchah*. When a person is suffering and he wishes to talk about it, but he restrains himself from talking about it, at first, this will feel like suffering to him. But after he gets used to this, he acquires for himself the power of silence, and there he will attain *menuchah*.

Usually when we think of what *menuchah* (serenity) is, we will think that it means physical rest. But from Shabbos, we can see a different perspective towards *menuchah*. On Shabbos, there is a *halachah* that one should not speak mundane, weekday talk. It is a time to be silent from the kind of speech that one expresses during the six days of the week. The Sages found it difficult even to permit greeting others on Shabbos.⁷⁷ On Shabbos, the mode to adapt is silence. What did Hashem create Shabbos from? When He rested from creating the world through His Ten Expressions, He created Shabbos. Thus, Shabbos came as a result from resting from speech; from *menuchah*.

The *menuchah* of Shabbos, from an external and superficial perspective, appears to be a rest from physical work. In the inner sense, it is a rest from speech. Resting from work is the lower level of the *menuchah* of Shabbos, while resting from [mundane] speech is the higher level of the *menuchah*.

Speech comes natural to us, for Hashem created the world with speech. But when Hashem entered Shabbos into the world, where *menuchah* came, there was now a new ability that came into the world – silence.

⁷⁶ *Beraishis Rabbah* 10:9

⁷⁷ *Yerushalmi Shabbos* 16:3

It is written, “*My soul leaves at His word.*”⁷⁸ When a person speaks, “*I pour out my soul*” - one speaks from his soul - and this causes his soul to exit him.

Of Shabbos, it is said, “*Vay, avdah nefesh*” – “Woe, the soul is lost”, and the Sages state that this is said when Shabbos leaves [*Motzei Shabbos*],⁷⁹ where a person can feel that his “extra soul” from Shabbos has now gone away, and he decries this loss. What is the “extra soul” that comes to a person on Shabbos? *Rashi*⁸⁰ states that it is for consuming more food and drink, but this is what the body receives from it, not what the soul receives. The “extra soul” gives the soul the power of silence. During the week, the soul is attached with action, and on Shabbos, it receives the “extra soul” – the power of silence. When the “extra soul” goes lost on *Motzei Shabbos*, a person begins to speak again: “*Vay, avdah nefesh*” – bemoaning his loss of the extra soul.

On Shabbos he had been silent, and now he is talking again. Since the “extra soul” has now gone, he has lost the silence, and he begins to decry his loss. For if a person would still be found on the level of Shabbos even at this time, he would have the power to be silent amidst this pain. Thus, he is not simply bemoaning his loss since he has lost his “extra soul”. Even if he would lose the “extra soul”, he would be able to accept this suffering with silence. Now that he has lost it, he begins to speak about his loss, for he has lost the *menuchah*....

How Silence Allows For Serenity

What happens when a person begins to talk? There is a verse, “*My soul leaves at His word*”⁸¹ – when one speaks, his soul exits him, and the person descends from the realm of speech into the world of action. He loses parts of his soul, which have gone outward, through his speech. When one has released his inner forces of the soul through speech, the forces of the soul are shaken and the person cannot have *menuchah*. But when a person is silent, all of the forces in the soul return to their source. There, the person can receive *menuchah*.

The depth of why there is *menuchah* from silence is not because the lips aren’t moving. It is rather because all of the forces in the soul are concentrated into one place, and they are not being spread apart through speech. When one is found in the serenity of silence, he can feel a loss of serenity when he talks and how the parts of his soul are exiting him.

At Har Sinai, Hashem spoke in one voice, which divided into 70 languages. In its raw state, this initial voice was one voice alone. Once it was expressed outward, it spread into 70 languages. Thus, when one is silent, he receives a matter as it is in its root, where it is one. When one leaves silence in order to talk, he can talk in any of the 70 languages. Silence is thus the root of the speech before it divides into any other sounds.

Hashem created the world with Ten Expressions, but when Hashem was silent from these verbal expressions, there was only one silent expression, and this was how “Shabbos came, *menuchah* came.” Whereas there were ten verbal expressions used to create the world, there was only one silence.

⁷⁸ *Shir HaShirim* 5:6

⁷⁹ *Beitzah* 16a

⁸⁰ *ibid*

⁸¹ *Shir HaShirim* 5:6

Chazal state that Hashem could have created the world in one expression.⁸² Meaning, the entire Creation existed in potential in one single expression, and only in the active sense was it created through ten expressions. This one power that can contain the entire Creation is essentially silence. Silence is the entirety of Creation at its very root. When Hashem was silent, so to speak, on Shabbos, *menuchah* came to the world. The world was created through Ten Expressions, and silence returns everything to one expression, to the place of oneness where the entire Creation stems from – the place where *menuchah* is found.

When we take a statement and we divide it into ten expressions, the statement has become separated and scattered. This represents the antithesis to *menuchah*. Thus during the six days of the week, there cannot be *menuchah*, for it was created through the Ten Expressions. Only on Shabbos, which was created from one single power - the silence of Hashem, so to speak – was there *menuchah*. That is why Shabbos, the time where there is *menuchah*, is called “*raza d'echad*”, the “secret of oneness.”⁸³

Silence Brings Inner Serenity Through Unifying The Soul

Each of us has many different forces in our soul. The Vilna Gaon counts 70 forces of the soul.⁸⁴ How, then, is it possible for a person to have *menuchah*, if he has so much going on inside himself?!

We find that at the giving of the Torah, the voice of Hashem split into 70 languages. This also means that everything divides into 70 parts. In the soul, there are thus 70 parts, and each of these 70 forces in the soul heard the voice of Hashem on its own level. The 70 sounds which came from the one voice of Hashem were not just a parallel to the 70 nations of the world. Rather, they were also a parallel to the 70 forces of the soul, for each part of the soul hears Divine sound according to its own level.

As long as a person lives only within his 70 forces of the soul, it is not possible for him to have *menuchah*. But through silence, a person can reach a point that unifies together all of the parts of the soul, returning all of these forces to a single root. There a person can receive serenity. As explained above, speech causes the inner forces of the soul to go outward, whereas silence returns everything inward – which allows for *menuchah*.

The Sages state that Hashem told Moshe, “Be silent. This is what has risen in My thoughts.”⁸⁵ When a person reaches the place in the soul that is called “silence”, he is connected to a higher plane, to the plane of Hashem’s thoughts, and that is where *menuchah* is. Thus when a person leaves silence and he enters into the realm of speech, he cannot be in this place of *menuchah*.

⁸² *Avos* 5:1

⁸³ *Zohar* II 135a

⁸⁴ *Gra Yeshayahu* 11:1

⁸⁵ *Menachos* 29b

The Inner Essence of Man Is Speech

A person is called “*adam*” (man), and also “*medaber*”, a “social being.” Man is a creature that is personified by his ability to speak. However, the birds also chirp, and there is also a concept of “conversations of the trees” as well as “conversations of birds”. Why then is only man called *medaber*, if he is not the only creature capable of speech?

The meaning of this is because man is the only being who can control his speech. In order to control speech, however, the ability of silence is required. If a creature can talk but it cannot stop its talking, it is trapped within its ability to talk. In order for any creature to be serene – in order for a creature to be a true *medaber* – it needs to be able to control its ability to speak, so that it can be above its speech and control the speech according to its wish. This is only capable by man, not by any other creation. Man can control his ability of speech – he can be above his power of speech and control it as he wishes, speaking only when he needs to. Thus, in order to truly use the power of speech, one needs the serenity (*menuchah*) of being above speech, so that he can control it.

At Har Sinai, Hashem revealed the Ten Commandments, which was speech, and He also revealed the power of silence, for the Sages state that the entire world was silent when Hashem spoke.⁸⁶ Hashem spoke, the world was silent, and then Hashem spoke again, and the cycle repeated. The very first commandment was preceded with a silence. The way we all stood at Har Sinai is the root design of the perfected state of man. The *menuchah* which was revealed at the giving of the Torah was a revelation of Hashem’s word, but on a deeper level, it was the silence at the giving of the Torah which is the root of all inner *menuchas hanefesh* for the soul.

⁸⁶ *Shemos Rabbah*: 29

10 | Serenity Through The Quiet

Holiness Is Found In Silence

It is written, “*For not in a noise is Hashem [found] and not in a wind, but in a silent, subtle sound.*”⁸⁷ If a person wants to find *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, if one wishes to find *menuchah* (serenity) on This World, he must find a quiet place, where he can discover this “silent, subtle sound” (*kol demamah dakah*). If a person wants to live an internal kind of life, he needs to become attuned to subtlety. In contrast to this, the coarser and more materialistic that a person is, the more he lives in the noise of this world. The more spiritual he is, the more he lives with quieter sounds in his life – and thus he is closer to finding true, inner *menuchah*.

Our holy forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and our leaders Moshe and Dovid, were all shepherds of the sheep, dwelling outside of civilization. Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam, in *sefer HaMaspik L’Ovdei Hashem*, writes that they chose to be shepherds because they wanted a life of quiet, where the sounds of the animals were far less noisy than the voices of people.

When a person leaves a place of noise and finds in his soul a connection to silence, a new world opens within him. If a person is used to noise and his soul is connected with all of this noise, even when he has peace and quiet, he will seek the noise he is used to, and he will intentionally try to dispel the silence - he can’t handle the quiet. But when one’s soul connects with the quiet, when he encounters noise he will run away from it.

The Quiet – A Tool To Reach Serenity

One must leave his soul’s connection to noise, and find an inner connection and a desire for the quiet. When a person loves the quiet, this is the strongest tool for attaining *menuchah*, serenity. In order for a person to connect with inner quiet, though, he first needs to make sure that he has external quiet, by removing any loud stimuli from his immediate surroundings. When the external noise is removed, he can then reach inner quiet.

Here are some examples of external stimuli which can aid a person in finding quiet:

- (1) When choosing where to live, one should try to live in the quietest place he can find.
- (2) One needs to avoid all of the loud gadgets and pieces of technology, which totally do not allow for a quiet kind of life. The cellphone which accompanies us wherever we go does not allow us to ever have quiet. This is not only true when the phone is ringing – the mere fact that it can go off any second is already creating a situation which does not allow for the quiet.
- (3) If a person works for a living, he should work in a quieter kind of job, with a quiet atmosphere.
- (4) A person should be friends with those who have a quieter kind of life, and not with friends who love noise.
- (5) A person shouldn’t buy loud items for his house. Even the design of his house should not be “loud” – it should not be painted with a loud kind of color, for example, which draws a person towards the noise and less towards the quiet.

⁸⁷ *Melachim I: 1:19*

- (6) When a person encounters loud people, this can cause him to leave his inner silence. Therefore a person who values the quiet should make sure before he goes anywhere if he's going to a loud place or not, and if there will be friends there who are so loud that he cannot retain his inner silence, etc.
- (7) The *Tiferes Yisrael*⁸⁸ writes that a person should even learn Torah in a quiet place, because the mind and the memory work better in a quieter place. Although there is also a benefit to learn Torah amongst others, for it is written "*The glory of the king is among the majority of people*", usually, being around many people removes a person from his inner silence, due to the noise.

Thus, wherever we go and whatever we encounter, we need to look for the 'quietest route' to take. Although this is only external and physical quiet, it is still very important to have.

Times of Quiet

Besides for the above, a person should also get used to having time every day where he can sit quietly. **We are not referring here to “hisbodedus” of doing teshuvah, or of “hisbodedus” with Hashem.** The point here is something else entirely. **A person simply needs times of quiet every day, where he can silence his soul.**

In the Yeshiva of Radin, the yeshiva students would take a walk every day for a half hour in the gardens outside the city. This was not *hisbodedus*. It was simply making time for peace and quiet for the purpose of calming the soul.

In every person, there are actions, speech, feelings and thoughts. All of these layers of the soul need to be calmed. During this time of quieting, he shouldn't **do** anything, and he shouldn't **talk** either. He is just with himself, alone. As much as he can, he should try to also quiet his **feelings** and **thoughts**. He will not be able to totally silence his feelings and thoughts during this short amount of time, but as much as he can, he should try to quiet them and become calm. It may be helpful for this to think calming thoughts, and to avoid intense kinds of thoughts. He may also make use of the imagination, by imagining to himself something that is calming and relaxing. But if he does so, he should be careful not to get carried away with his imagination. There is a very fine line between constructive imagination, which is useful, and fantasy, which distorts reality.

Quieting is not just another 'detail' we hear about. It is a way to traverse life. It is an attitude of staying away from anything you don't need to involve yourself with, and when you do have to involve yourself in something, you should seek the quietest route possible.

Quieting Helps a Person Reveal Himself

When a person chooses for to live a quieter kind of life for himself, of a love for the quiet, he begins to reveal his true self. We can compare this to the contrast between a rushing river and a calm pond. When there is a rushing river, you can't see what's underneath the water. But when the water is calm and unmoving, it becomes clear and you can see all the way down to the bottom of it. When a person is always found in the noisy part of life, he doesn't live and experience his true self, and he will only live what is outside of him. Once a person leaves behind all of the noise and he enters into quietness, he reveals "Who I really am".

⁸⁸ *Tiferes Yisrael: Avos 1:15*

Some people who are afraid of discovering who they really are, because they do not want to see the truth about themselves, so they are uncomfortable with the quiet and they leave it and go back into the noise of life. But if a person truly seeks the purpose of life, he desires true serenity, so he will love the quiet and crave it, for it affords him the opportunity to get in touch with himself and attain true self-recognition.

Tzaddikim Draw All Their Inner Peace from Silence

Through quieting, a person gets used to a new approach to living life, where his entire way of living is derived from this quiet. He will not simply enjoy the physical, outer quiet, but an inner kind of quiet. He will find vitality in this quiet, just as how the entire Creation was at the giving of the Torah at Sinai.⁸⁹

If a person only views quieting as a mere tool to gain spiritual vitality, it will certainly provide him with spiritual energy, but it is not the complete level. When one views it as his very life-giving vitality which he needs, he will not only be energized by the quiet – he will feel like his life is in danger when he enters into noise.

A *tzaddik* (righteous, G-d fearing Jew) is found totally in this quiet, and receives his life-giving vitality from a quiet, calm source inside himself. He also receives clarity from this source.

When one lives in this quiet and he has to leave it in order to enter a loud place, it feels like to him as if parts of his body are being severed, because he is being uprooted from his source of vitality. It is like plucking a plant from the earth, or taking a fish out of the water. When a person identifies the quiet as his source of vitality and he is then removed from it, he feels like he is being uprooted from the source where he gets his life-giving energy from.

Serenity From The Quiet

Based on the above, quieting contains two kinds of *menuchah* (serenity).

There is a serenity gained from the very quiet itself. It works both ways - there is serenity in the quiet, and a quieting that comes from the serenity. On a subtler note, the quiet is one's very root, and therefore a person becomes serene when he returns to there. Serenity is a result of returning to one's root. When one identifies the quiet as his soul's root, he finds serenity in the quiet.

An additional aspect of serenity from the quiet is the clarity that is gained from the quiet. It provides a person with a sense of organization, and this results in serenity. When one is disorganized, he cannot have serenity. In the yeshiva of Kelm, the main emphasis was placed on acquiring *menuchas hanefesh*, and therefore they were very strict when it came to external orderliness and timeliness, because when there is a lack of orderliness, a person cannot have *menuchah*. A person who lives with the quiet and gains clarity and calmness from this quiet has a more orderly thinking process, in contrast to a person who thinks amidst noise, whose will difficulty organizing his thoughts.

⁸⁹ Yalkut Shimeoni Chavakuk 563

Using The Quiet To Reveal Hashem

When a person is found in the quiet, it there that he can reveal his true self. The stage after that, if he is more spiritual, is to reveal that which is beyond the quiet – *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* – as it is written in the verse, “*For not in a wind is Hashem found...and not in a noise is Hashem found...but in a silent, subtle sound.*”

The true, inner source of life-giving vitality is found in the point beyond the quiet – when a person uses the quiet to derive his vitality from Hashem, in His glory and in His very being. The “garment” to nurse forth this vitality is through the quiet. If a person can only derive vitality from the quiet and not from Hashem, this is the way of souls who are not of the Jewish people. When one can derive vitality from Hashem - using the quiet as a garment for this – this is the ideal way of how a Jew’s soul is properly built.

If a person is not uncovering a deeper feeling of Hashem’s Presence even when he is in the quiet, this may be as a result of sins, or from coarse materialism, or from unfixed negative character traits.

Balancing Our Life Between The Noise and The Quiet

However, all that we have explained here about the gains of the quiet are only one side of the coin. Just as Hashem desires us to have this quiet, so is it His will for us to sometimes have noise. It is not the way of the Torah for a person to choose a quiet kind of life which has no noise in it. The *avodah* of a Jew is to achieve a balance between the quiet and noise.

It is not the will of Hashem for us to become loners, who live in total quiet and seclusion from others. A person is obligated to connect with others. He must pray with a quorum of ten men, and he must endure all of the noise that comes along with this. It is just that he needs to have a balance between his inner silence and all of the outer noise, by making sure that all of the noise isn’t uprooting his inner silence. One needs to view his inner silence as the main part of his life, with the noisy parts of his life as a “garment” – meaning that the noise should not be uprooting him from his connection to the quiet, which is the true *menuchah*.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Further details of the concept of “quieting” were later discussed in the derashah of the Rav in 5778, of *Derashos_0116_Everything You Need To Know About Inner Silence*

11 | A Deeper Look at the Menuchah of Shabbos

Two Levels of Responsibility

Usually, when a person feels obligated to do something, this takes away from his *menuchas hanefesh*. When a person isn't responsible, he can relax, but when he is responsible and he must take action over something, he loses his calmness.

There are two terms in Hebrew for the word "obligation": *chayav*, and *chav*.

The word "*chayav*" is associated with being responsible to pay for damages, such as what we find throughout the *Gemara*, when one is "*chayav* (obligated) to pay." This hints that the term "*chayav*" refers to a kind of obligation where the one carrying it out loses his *menuchah* (serenity).

But there is another kind of obligation, "*chav*", which allows one to keep his inner serenity; this is what we find in the *halachah* that one must pay with the choicest kind of land in order to pay back someone.⁹¹ Since the term "*chav*" is associated with the "choicest" kind of land, it shows that there is a kind of obligation which causes pleasantness.

A person's responsibilities either take away or give him an inner peace. A regular kind of obligation, a "*chiyuv*", takes a person out of his *menuchah*, but when it is "*chav*", it is an obligation which is calming to perform.

"Chiyuv" (Obligation) vs. Chibbah (Fondness)

The words "*chav*" and "*chayav*" are both rooted in the root word of "*choiv*." The word "*choiv*" can also mean hidden ("*machvoi*"). The word "*choiv*" can also mean *chibbah*, which means "fondness". The Maharal⁹² explains that there is a difference between *ahavah*, (love) and *chibbah* (fondness) – *ahavah* is in the open, but *chibbah* is a hidden kind of love. Thus, the term "*choiv*", from the word "*chibbah*", connotes a hidden kind of love.

What this means for us is, that on a superficial level, a "*choiv*" is just a responsibility placed upon us; but if we have an inner perspective towards a "*choiv*", it is really "*chibbah*" for us. The Maharal explains with this that the inner "*chibbah*" contained in every responsibility can actually provide us with an inner serenity (*menuchah*).

This inner serenity is hinted to in the words of the *Gemara*: "I have a precious gift in My treasury, and Shabbos is its name; go and inform the nation of Yisrael about it."⁹³ Shabbos, the root of *menuchah*, is hidden in Hashem's treasury; it is not out in the open.

We find that *simchah* (happiness) is when the happiness is revealed out in the open, whereas *oneg* (pleasure) and *menuchah* (calmness) are inner kinds of happiness that are kept hidden. When there is *ahavah*/love, there is resulting *simchah*/happiness, and when there is *chibbah*/fondness, there is resulting *menuchah*/serenity/

⁹¹ Mishnah, Bava Kamma 1:1

⁹² Derech Chaim: Avos 3:14

⁹³ Shabbos 10b

There are kinds of obligations which are just like a “*chiyuv*”/obligation to us; we feel *chayav*/obliged to do it, but this takes away our *menuchah*/serenity. But there is a kind of obligation which is a “*chav*” to us in the sense of *chibbah*/fondness – when carrying out an obligation on this level, there is an accompanying serenity.

We find that the *Talmud Bavli* always uses the word “*chayav*”, and this is because the scholars in Bavli were more aggressive with each other in their arguments. But the *Talmud Yerushalmi* always uses the word “*chav*”, a softer terminology, because they argued with each other in a more pleasant manner.⁹⁴ *Yerushalayim* is also called “*menuchah*”.

Thus, either our obligations are causing us to have an attitude of “*chiyuv*” (obligation) towards it, which is not accompanied with a feeling of *menuchah*/serenity – or, carrying out our obligations may be in the sense of *chibbah*, of being fond towards them, which is accompanied by *menuchah*.

Shabbos Vs. The Six Days Of The Week

The six days of the week represent the six different directions: above, below, in front, behind, right, and left. The six different directions deter one’s *menuchah*, but Shabbos is called the “*rozo d’echad*”, the “secret of oneness”, for it has only “one” plane to it. The evil of the universe disappears on Shabbos and it retreats to the lowest abyss in Creation, and we are left with only one “side” on Shabbos – the side of good in the universe.

Menuchah/serenity comes from *chibbah*/fondness, an expression of love, because love is essentially to be “one” with another. When there is only “one”, there are no two sides.

The depth of the concept of *chibbah*/fondness is found in Shabbos. Shabbos is both associated with *chibbah* as well as with *menuchah*. Shabbos is called the “hidden gift”, and that is how we see it is associated with *chibbah*. In Shabbos, *menuchah* and *chibbah* are both found.

During the six days the week, when people work “*For six days you shall labor*”, there are all kinds of work to be done: plowing, planting, harvesting. But of Shabbos, the Sages said, “When Shabbos comes, *menuchah* comes to the world.”⁹⁵

When I desist from doing anything, I am equal to everyone else in the world; all people on Shabbos are one in that we all do not do any work. But during the week, each person has his own job with all their various details, and we are all different during the week because of this. Shabbos thus gives the world a unity, a oneness, because we are all equal on this day. There is only one side; everything boils down to “one” on this day. This is the *menuchah* that Shabbos brings.

The Two Kinds of Menuchah On Shabbos

On Shabbos, the *menuchah* that a person can have is either from having *menuchah* in Hashem, or it is coming from the very fact that it is Shabbos.

There is a *menuchah* which a person can have just in Hashem; “*That we recognize and know that from You comes their menuchah* (rest).” Then there is another kind of *menuchah* on Shabbos: the fact that a person rests on Shabbos

⁹⁴ Sanhedrin 24a

⁹⁵ Beraishis Rabbah 10:9

and does nothing. Shabbos itself is *menuchah*. These are two kinds of *menuchah* – *menuchah* in Hashem, and *menuchah* in Shabbos itself. The *menuchah* in Shabbos itself is the bridge that is between Hashem and the Jewish people.

Chazal state that Shabbos said to Hashem, “All the days of the week have a match, and only I do not have a match.”⁹⁶ Hashem responded, “The Jewish people are your match.” This resembles the *menuchah* between a husband and wife.

The *menuchah* in Shabbos itself is a *menuchah* that comes to us from a connection to Hashem. It is *menuchah* in our ultimate root; it is Hashem’s *menuchah* being shined upon us.

When I rest on Shabbos and then enter the six days the week, I can then reveal Hashem during the week. When a person connects to Hashem through resting on Shabbos from work, he comes into the week with a whole different perspective – he sees Who is behind everything even during the week. He sees how even the six days of the week are really only one-sided.

This is how Shabbos brings *menuchah* during the week. What is this *menuchah*? This is when a person only sees one side in front of him. Through Shabbos, a person sees how the week is also all one side, because they are all Hashem’s handiwork – they are really all one.

Each day of the week we say, “Today is the first day of the week of Shabbos”, and so forth. The depth behind this is that each day of the week, we must reveal how it is a revelation of Hashem – and this is how we can achieve *menuchah* even during the week.

The other kind of *menuchah* on Shabbos we have, which is having *menuchah* from Hashem Himself, is a *menuchah* that is above this. It has nothing to do with any actions of Hashem whatsoever. It is simply because *menuchah* because Shabbos is called a “precious gift”. It is all about the connection between the giver of the gift (Hashem) and the recipient of the gift (us).

Shabbos – “Desire Of All Desires”

By *Shalosh Seudos* (the third meal of Shabbos), we describe Shabbos as “*raava d’raavan*” – “Desire of all desires.” The climax of Shabbos is during this time; it is during this time that the revelation of Shabbos is at its zenith. This is the apex of the *menuchah*. All of Shabbos is *menuchah*, but this is the most apparent by *Shalosh Seudos*.

Action and Above Action

Chazal say that a Torah scholar has no *menuchah*, not in this world and not in the next.⁹⁷ But we also know that a Torah scholar is especially blessed with serenity, for it is written, “And he saw that serenity was good”, which is referring to a Torah scholar. How are we to answer this contradiction?

The answer to this is that there are two kinds of *menuchah* – a higher kind of *menuchah*, and a lower kind of *menuchah*. A Torah scholar is blessed with the lower kind of *menuchah*, which is that he can stay where he is. This

⁹⁶ Pesikta Rabbasi 23

⁹⁷ Berachos 64a

involves some action; it is a *menuchah* within the realm of action. In that sense, he does not have complete *menuchah* on this world.

But the higher kind of *menuchah* is like how one is not allowed to leave the *techum* (boundaries) of where one lives on Shabbos: “*No man shall go out from his place.*”⁹⁸ This is a *menuchah* which is above the realm of our actions – it is a very inner place. It is the perfect kind of *menuchah*, and it is above Creation. Shabbos was created before the world – it came even before the “beginning” of Creation.

There is also an intermediate level in between these two levels of *menuchah*: silence. When Hashem created the universe, He first removed Himself from it in order to have space to create it, so to speak. He first had to create an empty space from which to create the universe from. This empty space was like a “silence” from action, and it is the source for another kind of *menuchah* – a *menuchah* which comes from inner silence, which is rooted in the “empty space” of Creation (this was discussed in Chapter Six).

In Summary of the Three Kinds of Menuchah

To summarize, there are three kinds of *menuchah*.

There is a *menuchah* which is recognizing how everything is Hashem’s handiwork. There is a second kind of *menuchah*, which comes from connecting totally to the *Ein Sof* of Hashem; this is a kind of *menuchah* that is above all movement and action that we know of. There is a third kind of *menuchah*, which comes from silence – when a person does nothing. These are three levels of *menuchah*.

The *menuchah* that is within the bounds of Creation is when we recognize how everything is all Hashem’s work, and we see how everything is all one side. Above this is *menuchah* from the *chalal* (empty space), which is when a person realizes that everything is empty; this gives a person a total silence, which gives one *menuchah*. Above this is a *menuchah* above all movements – the absolute connection with Hashem.

⁹⁸ *Shemos* 16:29

12 | Serenity From Consistency

Don't Wait For Yom Tov

When the *Yomim Tovim* (Jewish festivals) arrive, any Jew can feel *chiyus* (vitality) from it, which they do not usually feel during the winter months of the year. A person looks forward to Yom Tov so that he can feel more alive from it - whereas the rest of the year seems boring. Indeed, our holy *sefarim* call the winter a "time for sleep."

It is surely important to look forward to Yom Tov, but we must realize that there is a different attitude we can have. There is a way for us to derive even more vitality from the ordinary days of the year than from Yom Tov!

Of course, Yom Tov is the holiest time of the year, both from a *halachic* viewpoint and from an emotional viewpoint. Yet, there is a rule, which our holy *sefarim* teach, which states "Everything is contained in its opposite". This means that if Yom Tov is holier than the rest of the year, then there is a way to see how the rest of the year can be holier than Yom Tov.

If a person only feels vitality from Yom Tov, he only feels alive sometimes. He feels elated on Shabbos and Yom Tov, but daily life is boring to him. However, if a person learns how to derive vitality from the rest of the year, he can always feel alive.

After Yom Tov Ends

There is a concept that a person can carry over the holiness of Yom Tov to the rest of the year as well. Indeed, this is what we ask for in the Yom Tov prayer, "*And lift us, Hashem our G-d, with the blessings of Your festivals.*" We are asking that Hashem should carry over the holiness of Yom Tov into the rest of the year as well. However, the reality is that most people do not succeed in doing this except for a short amount of time.

The holiness of Yom Tov can actually be an impediment to one's growth in his avodas Hashem. This is similar to what *Chazal* say about the change of a woman's menstrual period, which is preceded by stomachaches⁹⁹. All changes, even changes for the good, are somewhat harmful. Even when a person becomes more spiritual, he is in danger, because he has gone through a change. All changes are dangerous to a person!

For example, the sons of Yaakov were afraid that if their father found out that Yosef was still alive that he would die from the good news. Why were they afraid of this? Could anything have been better for their father to hear?? It is because an extreme emotion is harmful, even if it is about something good.

When Yom Tov comes, a non-feeling person doesn't feel any changes from the Yom Tov. But a person who takes Yom Tov seriously and prepares for it, who is more of a feeling kind of person, is someone who receives vitality and elation from it. When Yom Tov is over, he is apt to fall from his plateau.

⁹⁹ *Kesubos* 110b

If a person falls from a chair, it hurts. If a person falls from a table, it hurts even more, and if he falls from a higher place than this, the pain increases. The same goes for spirituality. When a person reaches a spiritual high, his fall will be harder when he falls. Although Yom Tov is holy, a person's soul can't always handle the holiness and he falls soon after.

If we want to gain from Yom Tov, we first need to feel alive from the ordinary days of the year and see what is contained in them, then we will be able to receive the holiness of Yom Tov without losing it afterwards.

Emotionally Charged Inspiration vs. Unchanging Stability

Every person's soul has two, opposite abilities: the ability to become emotionally inspired and to become spiritually uplifted, to grow higher, to have a strong will to ascend (this is all called *hispaalus*/emotion) – as well as the ability to remain stabilized in place and to be calm (*yetzivus*/stability and *sheket*/quiet).

These are two opposite forces in one's soul. Usually, when a person uses one of these abilities he loses the other. For example, when a person feels spiritual growth, he is apt to lose his inner quiet, whereas when a person feels at peace with himself, he becomes complacent and doesn't strive for growth.

When a person has growth, this is a form of excitement, so he often loses his inner calm. He might be happy, but he isn't calm and quiet inside himself. On the other hand, if a person feels very calm and quiet and at peace, he often becomes lethargic and doesn't seek to improve himself and grow higher. (As for a person who doesn't know how to calm himself down, there is advice which can help for this such as thinking about the ocean waves, etc.). A person has the power of inner calm, but if it doesn't come from a deep place in his soul, this power just makes a person sleepy and lethargic.

There is a story about Rav Shmuel Wosner shlit"a, that depicts calmness. One time he went to the Chazon Ish to ask him something. When he came, he found the Chazon Ish with closed eyes. He seemed to be sleeping. Rav Wosner stood there and waited until the Chazon Ish opened his eyes. Suddenly, the Chazon Ish opened his eyes and asked, "Why didn't you ask your question?" Rav Wosner responded, "I saw the Rov was sleeping..." The Chazon Ish answered, "No. I was not sleeping."

Why did the Chazon Ish look like he was sleeping? It could be because of his great connection he felt with Hashem. However, a simpler understanding of his behavior is that his soul was very calm, yet this did not make him sleepy.

The Calm Place In The Soul

When a person is only calm in a superficial way, he becomes lethargic. From a superficial perspective, a person is able to fall asleep when he is less busy, thus calmer. But the inner perspective of this power is that a person is calm when he reaches an inner silence. Just like Creation was silent during the giving of the Torah, so does a person have within his soul the power to have a deep silence. This is not a sleepiness, but a quietness that calms down one's excitement.

A person is only excited by something he doesn't usually have. When a person sees a new kind of food he has never tasted before, he gets excited, and if he is a more materialistic kind of person, he is even more excited. But if he eats it again and again, he loses passion for it. When a person has something on a constant basis, he doesn't get excited from it. If we have something consistently, we wouldn't need new things to get us excited.

Consistency and Renewal

Hashem is unchanging. He "was, will be, and will always be." He is constant and never changes. Hashem renews creation every day, but He Himself is never renewed. In terms of our personal soul, we need to learn how to develop a power in our soul that is constantly in existence and doesn't require us to change. This is the depth of life, to live in a silence that stays the same and doesn't get renewed.

There are people who misuse this power of the soul and become lethargic. However, others know how to connect to this power from an inner silence in their soul.

A more internal kind of person knows how to derive vitality from the regular days of the year, no less than what they get from Yom Tov. It's like eating and drinking; we need both in order to survive. Our soul needs Yom Tov, but it also needs the rest of the year.

We have two opposite powers in our soul - one is the ability to find renewal, and the other power in the soul is the ability to live without renewal. If a person only gets his vitality from renewal, he needs new things to feel alive. He feels alive from Yom Tov and from buying new clothes, because now he has something he didn't have yesterday, vitality. There is, however, another source of vitality a person can have. This foundation is Hashem, Who is unchanging – the very source of life.

The Need For Renewal Comes From Being Superficial

A superficial kind of person always looks for new things. There are people who are always exchanging their items for a new one, because they need new things to live. If a person is only connected to renewal, he isn't connected to Hashem, Who is consistent and never changes.

The Jewish people are compared to the moon, which is renewed every thirty days. However, this was a curse that came to the moon after it was created, for before Creation, the plan was for the moon to remain consistently of equal size to the sun.¹⁰⁰ When a person derives vitality from consistency, and he doesn't need renewal to survive, he is connected to the state that existed before Creation, which is the more desirable state to be in.

The Dangers To Both Ways

¹⁰⁰ Chullin 60b

Each Yom Tov, a person derives a renewed inner vitality. However, there is another source of vitality: when a person feels vitality from an unchanging consistency, which does not involve anything new. Without this kind of vitality, a person might gain from Yom Tov, only to fall from his level after Yom Tov is over. In between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, he is growing spiritually, but after Yom Kippur, he stops growing.

If a person accesses the inner silence in his soul, he is able to derive vitality from the consistent reality of Hashem. Yom Tov becomes another kind of vitality to him, but he doesn't depend on it, because he already has vitality. Such a person feels alive during the year, so he doesn't need Yom Tov to revive him. But when someone doesn't feel alive during the year, he feels kind of dead, and he needs Yom Tov to bring him back to life.

However, there is also a danger to someone who gets his vitality from consistency. It is possible that for him when Yom Tov comes, he might derive so much vitality from the renewed feeling of Yom Tov that he will lose his vitality from consistency. Therefore, a person must learn how to balance these two abilities. This takes a lot of wisdom.

Feeling the Constant Changes

Practically speaking, we always live with renewal. Every person goes through changes in life, some big and some small. The entire Creation is moving every second as well. We are always changing to some extent. All of Creation is like one big noise.

If a person doesn't know how to connect to the power of consistency, he will suffer from changes. This can be compared to a tree that gets blown by the wind. If there is a firm root, the tree will be able to withstand strong winds. If we have consistency and we don't need renewal in order to live, we are connected to a firm root to withstand changes.

We usually don't feel our constant changes, but when something extreme happens, like a happy or sad occasion, we feel a change. When a person gets vitality from changes, his life becomes extreme. Such people aren't satisfied with just having food. Rather, they need something exotic in their food, and they need new things to feel like they're alive. Such people seek changes that become more and more extreme, because the regular things that they are used to become boring. They seek new things and look for a change to their routine, and the more they seek vitality, the more extreme the things become that they seek.

Others have the opposite problem by being too grounded. They never seek anything new, not because they feel alive from a consistent lifestyle, rather, because they are lethargic and devoid of life.

If a person is balanced, he derives vitality from consistency and from changes that are small or big. A person can only derive vitality from changes when he mainly derives his vitality from the ordinary days of the year, which are without renewal.

If a person isn't balanced and never derives vitality from changes, he has lost his sense of feeling alive. He slowly begins to become lethargic and disconnected from everything around him.

Sometimes a person becomes so lethargic that he begins to feel an inner emptiness and he is filled with all kinds of terrible thoughts that he can't escape. He might try to find himself and go to strange places in the world to do this, and this is all because he doesn't understand how life works. As soon as he encounters a problem, he is full of inner turmoil.

See Life As One Continuous Path

A person needs to be aware that life is one continuous path! If a person falls asleep in middle of a *shiur* that he cannot understand it is because he doesn't see how all the details connect. A person can't wake up in the middle of his life and try to understand where he went wrong. One needs to see how every experience in his life up until this very moment is all part of a big picture.

If a person would know himself well and understand that all his experiences in life are all part of one big picture, he wouldn't have problems.

For example, there are people who complain that their children misbehave. Such people think that if not for this problem, everything else is alright. But really, a child who misbehaves is not just having a behavior problem. If a person looks deeper, he will see that there is more behind the problem. The problem isn't that the child is misbehaving. That's just part of the picture. If a person doesn't know what causes the child to want to misbehave, he cannot solve his child's misbehavior.

A person needs to become aware of what's going around him, in his life, in order to deal with any problem. He needs to look what happened before the problem and see what caused it. Otherwise, a person will be very shocked every time he has a problem, because it will feel sudden.

In order to understand life, a person needs to see how life is one continuous path. To do this, a person needs to pay attention to what's happening. A person can only pay attention to his life when he is living life, when he is experiencing it. To illustrate, a waiter pays attention to those seated at the table, because his job depends on this; if a person realizes that his life depends on this, he will pay attention to what's going on.

When a person experiences life and pays attention to everything that's going on, he won't fall apart as soon as he encounters a problem, because he will know how to deal with it. However, if a person isn't paying attention, he will not know how to deal with problems.

13 | Serenity From Nullifying Desires

“It is Our Will To See Our King”

The event of standing at Har Sinai is where we received the ability to have *menuchah* (serenity), for the Torah was given on Shabbos, when *menuchah* came to the world.¹⁰¹ On Shabbos, we refrain from running and mundane talk. The event of standing at Sinai, which was on Shabbos, including all of the roots of *menuchah*.

When we stood at Sinai, this included two aspects. Firstly, we received the Torah. Secondly, Hashem revealed Himself to us. The *menuchah* we experienced at the giving of the Torah thus contained these two aspects; the Torah, and the revelation of Hashem.

These two aspects also represent Torah learning and *tefillah* (prayer). The giving of the Torah is our Torah, and the revelation of Hashem to us at Har Sinai represents *tefillah*, as we stand before Hashem in prayer.

At Har Sinai, we uttered “*Retzoinenu liros es Malkeinu*”, “It is our will to see our King.” We desired to see Hashem, and indeed we merited this at Har Sinai. What did this mean? Is the desire to see our King (Hashem) like another kind of desire a person has? Is this just another desire that a person has along with his many other desires? Certainly not.

If a person has any desire other than to see Hashem, he cannot see Hashem. In order to see Hashem, a person needs a “*lev tahor*” – a “pure heart”. The heart of a person needs to be purified of any extraneous desires, if a person wants to see Hashem. This was what we had at Har Sinai.

Chazal say that when we stood at Har Sinai to receive the Torah, the spirit of impurity that came from Adam’s sin left us, enabling us to have a pure heart.

A “pure heart” has only one desire: “It is our will to do Your will.” The essence of the Jewish people really desires only to do the will of Hashem and nothing else. It is only the “yeast in the sourdough (a reference to the evil inclination) which prevents us”. At Har Sinai, the evil inclination was erased, and fifty days later we reached the state of “We only have one heart, to our Father in Heaven”, and we experienced extraordinary levels.

Just like a person’s feet can run, so can a person’s heart ‘run’ – when a person is chasing after various, extraneous desires of his heart which are. When a person runs with his feet, his body is running. When a person’s heart runs, he is inwardly running. What does it mean to “run” with one’s heart? The heart of a person runs when it desires something. Desire, which is *ratzon*, comes from the word *ratz*, to run. When a person has a desire, he runs out of his inner essence to his outer desires.

¹⁰¹ *Beraishis Rabbah* 10:9

Purifying Our Heart From Its Many Desires

Chazal state that the heart has the gift of special understanding, called “*binah*”.¹⁰² *Chazal* also state that the world was created with fifty gates of *binah* (understanding).¹⁰³ This means that the heart has many levels of understanding. Every person has fifty “rooms” in his heart, and each room has its own “gate”.

How can a person access the rooms inside his heart? If a person has a “pure heart” – if he only has one desire, to do Hashem’s will – he is in the innermost chamber of his heart. But the more desires a person has, the more he leaves his inner rooms in his heart and remains in the outer rooms.

It is written, “*And I will dwell amongst them.*” Hashem is found in every person. It is also written, “*The rock of my heart and my portion, G-d.*” Hashem is found in the innermost chamber of our heart. If a person accesses his innermost chamber in his heart, he will find Hashem there. However, if a person has other desires, he runs away from Hashem in his heart.

When Hashem revealed Himself to us at Har Sinai, He entered our innermost chamber in our hearts, because our hearts only had one desire, to do Hashem’s will. This was what enabled us to receive the Torah.

When a person *davens*, he stands in front of Hashem, and the only way to stand in front of Hashem is for a person to enter his innermost chamber of his heart. A person often finds it hard to concentrate during *davening* – why? It is because since there are fifty rooms in a person’ heart, he has to pass by all the rooms in order to get to the innermost room, which is where Hashem is.

When a person *davens*, he must bring his heart into the *davening*. The problem is that a person’s heart has fifty rooms in it and each room has its many desires. This makes a person think about the many desires he has while he *davens*, because he’s trying to get by all the rooms!

But if a person has *menuchas hanefesh* by separating from all of his many desires, he can easily get by all these rooms in his heart when he *davens*. He knows how to take his mind off worldly matters and connect to his innermost point, where he can find Hashem. But if a person doesn’t have *menuchas hanefesh*, his thoughts wander from place to place. Then he is all mixed up and he can’t focus.

We need to clean out our heart, just like a person cleans up his house. Dovid HaMelech said, “*My heart is empty within me*”. He also said, “*I place Hashem opposite me always.*” The first forty-nine rooms in his heart were first emptied out of its content in order to get to the fiftieth room, which is where Hashem is. This is the meaning of the words of the *Rema* in the beginning of *Shulchan Aruch*, that a person must always see himself as if he’s sitting in the King’s palace.

When a person brings things into his house, his house becomes more noisy and cramped. The same can be said of a person’s desires. The more desires a person has, desires which have nothing to do with wanting to do what Hashem wants, the more cramped his heart will become.

¹⁰² *P’sach Eliyahu*

¹⁰³ *Rosh HaShanah* 21b

When you stuff a car with too much luggage, it doesn't move as fast, because it is too heavy. The more desires a person has, the heavier his heart is, and he cannot be dedicated to Hashem. We need to empty out our heart from its many desires so that we can get a "*libo lashamayim*", a "heart directed toward the heavens."

A person is able to feel this. When a person has many extra desires, his heart feels heavy, and the more a person eliminates these extra desires, the lighter his heart feels on him and he can connect to the Creator. When a person has all sorts of desires in life, he is constantly running away from the innermost point in his heart. He runs away from his *menuchas hanefesh*.

Remembering Har Sinai

One of the six constant *mitzvos* we have is to always remember the day we stood at Har Sinai. What does this to mean? Does this mean that we have to remember history?

It is not just to remember, but to feel as if we are actually there today. Just like we have to remember leaving Egypt as if it's actually happening now, so must we remember when we stood at Har Sinai, as if it's happening now. In order for a person to feel this way, he has to purify his heart.

At Har Sinai, Hashem spoke to us and we all heard His voice. It was a "*great voice, which did not stop*".¹⁰⁴ *Chazal* state¹⁰⁵ that the voice of Hashem can be heard every day. *Chazal*¹⁰⁶ also say that every day a *bas kol* (voice of Heaven) goes out from Har Sinai and says, "Woe to the people who disgrace the Torah; return, wayward children." The Baal Shem Tov said that this *bas kol* tells people to have thoughts of *teshuva* and feel the disgrace of the Torah. The heart of a person is able to hear this *bas kol*, as well as to hear the actual voice of Hashem.

Hashem resides in a person's heart and tells a person what to do, and we need to listen to our heart. Only a person with a pure heart can hear Hashem's voice in his heart.

How To Hear Hashem's Voice

How can we really merit to receive the Torah and hear Hashem talking to us from the innermost chamber of our heart?

The Ramban says that when a person is in doubt about something and he wants to know how the Torah views his situation, he should nullify his desires and see two options in front of him. When a person reaches his innermost point in his heart and sees the two options in front of him, he sees clearly the light of the Torah and sees what the Torah wants of him. If a person really wants to know what Hashem wants, he needs to water down his issues until he arrives at just two options in front of him.

Our holy *sefarim* also revealed to us another way out of doubt. When a person has a question and he has no one to ask, he should check his thoughts. He should see what his original thoughts were and then do the opposite. Why?

¹⁰⁴ Devarim 5:18

¹⁰⁵ Targum Onkelos *ibid*

¹⁰⁶ Avos 6:2

It is because a person's first thoughts are always from the *yetzer hora* (Evil Inclination), and the second thoughts are from a person's *yetzer tov* (Good Inclination). A person's *yetzer hora* was in him since the time he was born, while the *yetzer tov* comes later, when he is thirteen. Since a person's *yetzer hora* has been around in him for longer, he usually thinks more like his *yetzer hora*, so his first thoughts about something are usually the wrong thing to do.

In order for a person to know what's right, he has to access the innermost point in himself, a place that is above his first thoughts, which come from his *yetzer hora*.

How can a person reach this innermost point? All of us have had a point in time when we learned Torah and did not have a *yetzer hora*. This was when we were in our mother's womb, before we were born. A baby in his mother's womb is taught Torah by an angel. We need to return to this kind of situation.

How do we go back to our mother's womb? If a person lives only in this world, he only has worldly interests. But when a person lived inside his mother before he was born, all he had was one desire, holiness. Once a person enters this world he has desires that come from his *Yetzer hora* and the Torah he learns is amidst all these various desires.

A person needs to return to the state when he was inside his mother - in other words, he has to be prepared to give up all worldly desires.

Be Prepared To Give Up All Worldly Desires

Let us ask ourselves a question. If Hashem would give us the choice to stay inside our mother's womb and remain with all our Torah knowledge – or to be born and experience this world with all its desires – what would we choose?

If a person isn't ready to give up this world's desires, he really wants this world. He'd rather have this world and its pleasures than to be in his mother's womb and know the whole Torah. The fact that a person wants this world's lifestyle is what holds a person back from reaching his innermost point in his heart. The only way for a person to really have the Torah is if he doesn't want this world's desires.

There were *Gedolim* who had great wealth, such as Rabbi, who always had the finest foods on his table.¹⁰⁷ Yet the same Rabbi proclaimed that he did not enjoy anything of this world.¹⁰⁸ Rabbi was not connected to this world's pleasures - all he wanted was Torah.

Chazal say that when the Torah was being given, our souls left us with each commandment. After the first commandment, why did the Jewish people agree to hear the rest, when they knew that their souls would leave them each time? They knew that their souls would leave them, yet this did not hold them back from wanting the Torah.

If Hashem would come to us today and tell us that in two minutes we will receive the Torah, but that our souls will leave us, would we want it? If a person is ready for this, this shows that he is eligible to receive the Torah, but if he isn't ready, he won't have the Torah.

¹⁰⁷ *Gittin* 59a

¹⁰⁸ *Kesubos* 104a

If a person really wants to have the Torah, if he really wants to have the true *menuchas hanefesh*, he must be prepared to give up all worldly desires in order to become connected to the truth, which is Hashem and His Torah.

There are people who will read this and think that this is too harsh and that these words are beyond us. The truth is there were some members of the Jewish people at Har Sinai that felt the same way. They thought that the Torah was only for Moshe Rabbeinu. But these were members of the *Erev Rav* (the “Mixed Multitude”) and these very same people were the ones who made the Golden Calf.

But we, the souls of the Jewish people who stood at Har Sinai, only wanted what Hashem wants. Now we have a *yetzer hora*, which gets in the way of what we really want. Hence, most people think that they really don’t want the Torah....

When a person has so many things he wants, he is scattered, and he cannot have *menuchas hanefesh*. However, if a person has only one desire, which is the desire to only want what Hashem wants, he has *menuchas hanefesh*.

14 | Serenity From Stability of Emunah & Learning Torah

The Torah Is The Source of The Soul's Stability

The *Gemara*¹⁰⁹ relates how a person noticed Rava sitting and learning Torah, and he was so immersed in his learning that he didn't realize his fingers were bleeding. An ignorant person saw him and mocked him, and said to him: "You are an impulsive nation. When Hashem asked you if you want the Torah, you said, "*Naaseh*", ("We will do"), before you said "*Nishmah*" ("We will hear"). Rava answered him, "We go with Hashem with a wholesome heart."

The outsider who saw Rava learning Torah with such concentration thought that Rava must serenity, but really the opposite was true. Learning the Torah comes from *menuchas hanefesh*, from being serene, from trusting in Hashem that all that He commands us to do is for our own good.

*Chazal*¹¹⁰ state that before the Torah was given, the world was in disarray. After the Torah came into the world and we accepted it peacefully, the world became stable. Thus the Torah provides stability in the world. The Torah was also given on Shabbos,¹¹¹ because Shabbos is the day of *menuchah*, and hence the stability provided by learning the Torah gives a person *menuchah*.

The Elements That Bring Stability – Earth and Water

The world is made up of the four elements: fire, wind, water and earth. Which of the elements prevent a person from *menuchas hanefesh*? The elements of fire and wind, by nature, are not calm. Fire constantly seeks to rise. The emotion of anger, which is rooted in fire, is the antithesis of being calm. The element of wind also cannot bring *menuchah*, because wind is always moving.

Clearly, the elements which are calmer and more serene are water and earth. Water by nature is calm and unmoving (if not for the wind blowing it, it would be still). Earth is the most serene element, for it does not move at all. It is also the epitome of stability, for the earth provides a person with stable ground to walk on, unlike water, which one cannot stand on.

However, the earth can also be a negative source of serenity. If a person is too connected to his element of earth, he becomes sleepy and lethargic. To illustrate, a person in jail is quite stabilized, but this type of stability does not cause him to have *menuchas hanefesh*.

The element of earth stabilizes only the body, not the soul. A soul that is too attached to its earth becomes sleep-like and lethargic. Water, on the other hand, has an advantage. It brings growth, by giving nutrients to the earth. Water takes the earth and lifts it up by giving it growth.

¹⁰⁹ *Shabbos* 88a

¹¹⁰ *Beraishis Rabbah* 10:9

¹¹¹ *Shabbos* 86b

A person is made up of a body and a soul. The soul is called a *nishmas chaim*, a soul of life. The body was taken from the earth. *Menuchas hanefesh* comes from the element of water, while *menuchah* of the body comes from earth. When a person dies, his body is buried in the earth, where his body finds *menuchah*. Water gives *menuchah* to the soul and makes the soul grow. Earth gives the wrong kind of *menuchah*, which is sleepiness – a “sixtieth of death”.

Emunah Balances Our Stability and Growth

When we received the Torah, which elements of our soul did we make use of? The Torah preceded Creation, so it is above all of the elements. The Torah existed even before Creation; Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. The *menuchas hanefesh* that came to the world when the Torah was given was not associated with any of the elements of fire, water, wind or earth. It was a new kind of *menuchah*, and it is above the four elements.

This new kind of *menuchah* essentially came from our *emunah*, from our trust in Hashem when He gave us the Torah. *Emunah* is the power to be reliant on another. With the giving of the Torah, we used this power to rely on Hashem and be confident that we were being taken care of. This is the deep source of *menuchas hanefesh*, above any of the serenity or stability provided by any of the physical elements in Creation.

If a person only draws his stability from the element of water – from his ability to have spiritual growth - he cannot be totally stable, because the growth doesn't necessarily provide him with serenity. If a person gets his stability from the stability that is earth-based, he might have stability and serenity, but he will become complacent, for he will lack the ability of growth.

The Torah is called “*Toras Chaim*”, a living Torah. It involves growth and life, and it is also the source of our stability. The Torah is thus the fusion of stability and growth. But this stability is only through having the *emunah* that our Torah is our source of stability - through *emunah*, we can lean on the Torah for support and rely on Hashem.

When we said “*Naaseh*” and “*Nishmah*”, we received both of these abilities, the ability to grow and the ability to be stable. Before the Torah was given, the earth was not stable. After the Torah was given the earth became a stable place. Now that the Torah was given, people had something to lean on. Not only did the Torah bring stability to the world, but it also provided the world with possibilities for endless growth. If not for the Torah, people would have been limited to this world alone. Now that we have the Torah, a person's growth can be connected to the Torah. Through the Torah, a person can reach a connection with the *Ein Sof* (the infinite) of Hashem, Who is the source of the Torah. This is similar to the elements of earth and water combined– stability together with growth. In actuality, it is only possible through the highest “element” that is above all of the four elements in physical Creation: *emunah*.

Chazal say that, “All paths are considered dangerous.”¹¹² The Kotzker Rebbe zt”l said that this applies as well to *avodas Hashem*. All ways in *avodas Hashem* can make a person grow, but they all contain a danger. The exception to this is the path of learning Torah, of which it is written, “*Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are*

¹¹² *Yerushalmi Berachos* 4:6

peaceful." The only way to really grow, that isn't dangerous for a person, is through learning the Torah, so the safest path to take in *avodas Hashem*: the "way of the Torah".

We Need *Menuchas hanefesh* In Order To Learn Torah

Now we can really understand why Rava didn't notice his fingers bleeding while he was learning Torah. It wasn't because he wasn't paying attention. Rather, it was because he was utterly calm from learning the Torah and he wasn't bothered that his fingers were bleeding.

We can compare this to a groom standing under his wedding canopy. Imagine if the groom under his wedding canopy gets a cut and is bleeding. Will he interrupt the ceremony to go run out and get a bandage? He certainly will not. Since he is so immersed in his joy, he doesn't care that he's bleeding.

Rava had genuine inner peace when he learned. Even though he felt his fingers bleeding, it didn't bother him, because he had reached *menuchas hanefesh*.

Stabilizing Our Growth

When the Torah was given to us, we were also given the *menuchas hanefesh* to learn it. If Hashem would have given it to us without *menuchas hanefesh*, we wouldn't have been able to learn it. The *menuchas hanefesh* we received at that time is what enables us to learn the Torah. Without it, we cannot learn the Torah.

*Chazal*¹¹³ say that in order to learn *Gemara*, one needs a clear mind. A person gets a clear mind through learning the Torah. Had the Torah been given during the six days of the week, we wouldn't have this clarity when we learn it. However, since it was given on Shabbos, the day of *menuchah*, it gives us a clear mind when we learn it.

Only Torah Can Stabilize Us

All of us go through shaky times in our life. In order to survive these times, we need something to hold on to and keep us stable.

When a child is playing and he gets hit by another child, he runs to his father or mother for a hug. When a person gets shaken up, he runs to his source of *menuchah*. A child identifies his source of *menuchah* as his parents, so he runs to it for stability when he's shaken up. As a person matures, he finds *menuchah* in his thoughts and feelings. He no longer runs to his parents, who provided him with protecting his physical well-being. Now, he needs more emotional fortification, which his parents cannot fully provide him with.

If a person goes through a relatively easy difficulty, he can calm himself down. What should a person do, though, when he goes through a very stressful time? Where can a person run to? There is no way for a person to deny his need for *menuchah*. Hashem created the world with six days and then a seventh day for rest. Creation is

¹¹³ Megillah 28a

designed in a way that we need *menuchah* in order to carry on. Just like we need *menuchah* in certain times of our life, so too, we need *menuchah* in our souls. Where can we find a source of *menuchah* for our souls?

Some people find serenity by finding a place to “settled down” in. They find a community they like and live there, and they get their inner support from this. Another kind of person will find a place to be in where he can get this feeling of serenity of settling down. He may feel a sense of stability from this, but then he may become complacent there, and he will stop growing. Why does he stop growing? It is because he has limited himself to that place, placing a constraint on his soul.

What is the way for a person to grow endlessly, while remaining with a constant sense of stability in himself at the same time? From a superficial perspective, there is no such place. There is an end to everything in Creation. A person lives on average for 70 years or a bit longer and then his life ends. He builds a house and eventually the house will be sold, or it will be inherited. He does not own his house forever. If a person is a bit sensible, he knows that everything has its limitations, even when he is at the very start of something.

The Alter of Slobodka established the yeshiva in Slobodka, and after 20 years of being there, for various reasons, due to several incidents, he had to leave. What was his response? He said, “I had the *zechus* (the merit) to serve this place for 20 years. Master of the world, Hashem, I am thankful to you for the 20 years which You have given me this *zechus*, of guiding people to the truthful way and to help them.” Usually, though, when a person begins anything, he tends to think that it will be forever. I try to tell people whom I am involved with, at the very start, that they should understand that eventually there will be an end to what we are doing, and I ask of them that just as we are beginning with joy, so should we able to end it one day with joy.

Most things we know of are quickly gone, and some things last a bit longer, and some things can even last for generations, but even that is not a long amount of time.

Decide To Be Connected To The Torah

However, there is one power which Hashem has given us, which is constant and forever: the holy Torah. The Torah existed for two thousand years before Creation, and it is eternal. The true stability that a person can have is only through connecting to the Torah. This is not a bland kind of stability, but a stability that can give a person unlimited growth.

Usually we find something that grows may lack stability; for example, a tree grows high, only to become bent over. But of man, it is written, “*G-d made man upright.*”¹¹⁴ The power of a person to become “upright” is only through the holy Torah!

The Torah, in its purity, provides a person with both stability and growth. We see what gives a person the ability to withstand the stormy difficulties of life: only a true, inner connection to the Torah. This is only if a person derives his vitality in life from the Torah and is inwardly connected to it.

¹¹⁴ *Koheles* 7:29

Dovid HaMelech said he is “*like an infant nursing from his mother.*”¹¹⁵ *Chazal* explain this to mean that just like an infant doesn’t feel himself traveling when his mother travels, because he feels at peace in his mother’s arms, so did Dovid HaMelech feel stable and secure with Hashem, like a baby in its mother’s arms. The Torah provides a person with stability to survive life’s troubles, but we need to actually connect ourselves to this stability. The fact that the Torah is stable doesn’t mean we are connected to it – we have to actually connect to it.

Only The Torah Will Give You Menuchah

If a person really wants a strong connection to the Torah, it’s not enough to sit and learn Torah all day. That is also included in this, but to be connected to the Torah means that one has a very deep connection to the Torah, from the depths of his soul. A person needs to make a *bris* (covenant) with the Torah, to decide that he will be truly dedicated to it.

When it is clear to a person that that the only thing that enables the world to survive is the Torah, not just as an intellectual fact, but internalized in the heart, only then is it considered that a person is making a *bris* with the Torah. The moment a person makes a *bris* with the Torah, he forges a connection to it. Then he will have *menuchah*. From that moment on, a person will have a definite source of stability in his life. This will give him *menuchah*.

If a person hasn’t yet made a *bris* with the Torah, his own soul isn’t stable and he doesn’t have any inner peace.

This *bris* that a person has to make with the Torah doesn’t depend on if your friends know about it or not. It can be a private connection that you forge with the Torah. Every person has the choice to do this, and it is between him and his Creator. It is not a matter between a man and his friend. A person must decide: Am I connected to the Torah forever - or only some of the time....?

A true connection to learning Torah gives a person *menuchah*. This *menuchah* is the greatest quality one can reach. Shabbos Kodesh is essentially this *menuchah*, for *Chazal* state that “When Shabbos comes, *menuchah* comes to the world.”¹¹⁶

Many people want to have fun and look for all kinds of pleasure on this world. People will look for something new that captures their senses so that they can add an additional form of pleasure to their life. This is a terrible mistake. Shabbos Kodesh is called *menuchah* (serenity), and is also called *oneg* (pleasure), implying that the true pleasure is found in *menuchah*, not in any of the new things that are produced with each passing generation.

If anyone has felt true *menuchah* even once in his life, and the sheer pleasure that is found in it, he is someone who is able to forge a commitment to learning the Torah, and to find his *menuchah* in it.

¹¹⁵ *Tehillim 131:2*

¹¹⁶ *Beraishis Rabbah 10:9*

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Standing At Har Sinai Today

One of the six constant *mitzvos* we have every day is to remember when we stood at Har Sinai. This *mitzvah* is that we should feel as if we are actually standing there – that we have never left it.

How can we always feel as if we are standing at Har Sinai?

It is written, “*By the word of Hashem they journeyed, and by the word of Hashem they rested.*” When a person acts in his life based upon Hashem’s word, it is considered as if he is still there at Har Sinai, as if he never left it. How can a person always remain in the same place? Rav Chaim Shmulevitz said that the Jewish people are like “*an infant in its mother’s lap*”, as Dovid HaMelech said. When the mother is holding her baby, she can go from place to place, but the baby remains in the same place, in its mother’s arms. A person can go from place to place, but if he remembers always that he travels according to the “word of Hashem”, it is regarded as if he is staying in the same place.

Although we had many travels in the desert, from Sinai to the land of Eretz Yisrael, and then we had the exiles of Bavel/Babylonia, Media-Persia, Yavan/Greece, Edom/Rome, and the exile of Yishmael – throughout all of these exiles, when we remember that we are traveling by the “word of Hashem”, we are not moving to any of these places. Only when a person runs his life according to his own mind, and according to Hashem’s will, is he found in all of these many places. But when a person lives his life through clear emunah that Hashem is in charge of everything, and that no one can do a thing without approval from Heaven, he lives his life entirely with the “word of Hashem”. A person who lives this way is standing now at Har Sinai, in that very same place, and it is regarded as if he has never left it.

The Torah was given at Har Sinai. Every year we can return there anew and receive the Torah again. Our Sages teach that everything that happens in a place, also happens in time itself, as well as in our very soul. Just as the Torah was given at Har Sinai, so is the Torah in our soul, and so is there a giving of the Torah every time of the year, on Shavuos.

The giving of the Torah still goes on in our souls. The time of the giving of the Torah takes place every year on Shavuos. The place where this happens is at Har Sinai, which we continue to remember every day.

The fact that we remember standing at Har Sinai every day is what enables us to have *menuchah*. We need *menuchah* in order to learn Torah.

Living By The Word Of Hashem

Chazal say that learning Torah requires a clear mind.¹¹⁷ This is only when a person lives with, “*By the word of Hashem they journeyed, and by the word of Hashem they rested.*” If a person wants to have the clear mind to learn Torah, he needs to always live with Hashem in every part of his life.

The Baal Shem Tov said that just like the Jewish people went through forty-two encampments, so does every person go through forty-two encampments in his own life. The only difference between our generation and the previous generations is that the previous generations lived “*By the word of Hashem*”, while in today’s times we have not revealed this ability.

Today, we are being tested with, “*Follow Me into the desert, in a land that is unsown.*” We are being tested to see if we will live by, and follow, Hashem’s word.

Exert The Body, Not The Soul

We are not the generation of the desert. We don’t have the Manna, the Well of Miriam, or the Clouds of Glory. We are instead bombarded with the challenges of life and making a living. How are we supposed to have *menuchas hanefesh*? Our very life takes us away from *menuchas hanefesh*! What are we supposed to do?

We will have to dig very deep inside ourselves to find *menuchas hanefesh* and realize that our difficulties in life don’t have to ruin our peace of mind. Life is physically challenging, but this doesn’t have to affect our souls.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that although man was cursed with having to work by the sweat of his brow, a person’s livelihood still doesn’t depend on his efforts. Most people think that their efforts are what bring their livelihood, because Hashem decreed that people have to work to make a living. Therefore, one may think, more work brings more livelihood from Hashem. This is not true. The fact that man was cursed with having to work is a penalty placed on mankind, and it has nothing to do with bringing a person his livelihood. A person’s livelihood is determined by Hashem, regardless of a person’s efforts.

The depth of the *Mesillas Yesharim*’s words is that when a person makes effort, it is only his body undergoing exertion, not his soul. A person’s soul is calm and knows that nothing depends on the body’s efforts. One who doesn’t have this belief and exerts his soul as well, does not have *menuchas hanefesh*, and he will not understand the Torah. We can compare this to someone dancing at a wedding. When a person dances very enthusiastically, he is exerting his body, not his soul. The fact that a person doesn’t stress his soul when he dances is actually what enables him to have strength to dance.

So too, the same attitude should be applied to how a person views his efforts to earn a livelihood. If a person believes that whatever he is supposed to earn is from Hashem and not from his efforts, he is only exerting his body, not his soul, and he will be able to have *menuchas hanefesh*.

After the sin of Adam, no one can have *menuchah* in his body. Anyone who thinks that he can live a steady life of comfort is living in a dream-like state, for the *Mesillas Yesharim* says that “This physical world was not given for

¹¹⁷ Megillah 28a

relaxation, but to toil and work hard.” However, just because a person has to strain his body in this world does not mean that he must strain his soul. When a person is happy to do something, he can strain his body to get it, but his soul should stay relaxed. When a person does something he doesn’t like to do, he is straining both his body and soul.

Menuchas hanefesh At Work

If a person works to make a living because he understands that going to work is a penalty placed on mankind because of Adam’s sin, he has *menuchas hanefesh*, and is also able to learn Torah properly. But if a person works and he is missing *emunah*, he strains his soul in the process and he will not have *menuchah*. This world was not created for physical relaxation, but our soul must be relaxed. If our soul isn’t relaxed, we cannot have *menuchas hanefesh*. Then we won’t be able to learn Torah properly.

Exertion In Torah Learning Should Not Stress Your Soul

In the same way one may exert his body and not his soul while earning a livelihood, one should learn Torah. Although we must have *ameilus* (exertion) in learning Torah, for “A person must kill himself in the tents of Torah”,¹¹⁸ we must know what this means.

We must not strain our soul when we learn Torah, nor must we “kill” our soul in the process. Rather, we need to “kill” our body with physical exertion, so that we can reveal our soul. The way to learn Torah is by applying all of our physical energies of the body in learning Torah. We also need to lose sleep over it and work very hard to get it. But if a person’s exertion in learning Torah is somehow taking away his *menuchas hanefesh* [if he is exerting his physical or mental energy to the point that he is anxious and he does not feel calm and serene from this type of studying], he will not be able to learn Torah properly.

The Vilna Gaon wrote that a person shouldn’t pressure his child to learn Torah, and that instead, a person should push his child lightly (*b’nachas*) to learn Torah, and this is how Torah is acquired. This is the same Vilna Gaon whose exertion in Torah learning was unparalleled. How can this be? It is because a person needs physical exertion in learning Torah, but a person must also make sure that he is remaining with his *menuchas hanefesh*.

If a person learns Torah, but he is exerting and straining his soul in the process, he isn’t happy when he learns and cannot really receive the true Torah. In order to receive it, the words of Torah have to be “as happy as they were when they were given at Sinai” and a person must have a calm, serene soul for this.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah

¹¹⁹ For more about the connection between *menuchas hanefesh* and learning Torah, refer to the derasha of The Weekly Shmuess (Bilvavi On The Parshah)_012_Vayishlach_Serenity Amidst The War of Life