

UNEDITED INTERNET VERSION
V5

SUCCOS TALKS

COLLECTION OF DRASHAS FROM THE
AUHTOR OF BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH

<http://bilvavi.net/sugya/succos>

1 Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres – Two Levels of Closeness With Hashem	5
The Inner Meaning Behind The Four Species and the Sukkah	5
Sukkos of Today and Sukkos of the Future	5
Shemini Atzeres – The D'veykus With Hashem Above All Spiritual Light	6
2 The Jew's Inner Self	7
Sukkah and the Four Species – The Dual Natures of Man	7
Our Actual Essence Vs. The Outer Layers of the Self	7
Only By Recognizing Our Self Can We Recognize Hashem	8
Summary	11
Reaching Our Point of Menuchah\Serenity	12
3 The Jew's New Perspective	13
Be Ready To Acquire A Whole New Perspective	13
The Inner Point Of Our Self Cannot Be Described	13
Man's Perception Is A Fantasy	14
Seeing Is Not Believing	14
The Secret	15
Wearing Your Soul's Garments And Removing Them	15
Detaching Sometimes From Our Soul's Garments	16
The Art of Detachment: The Secret of Reaching Our Essence	17
Utilizing Both Speech and Silence To Reach The Self	17
Silencing Your Garments	18
Only Jews Can Integrate These Two Abilities of Mankind	19
Integrating The Dual Natures Together	20
Connecting To The Depth of Reality Even Amongst The Realm of Action	21
Why It Is Difficult For People To Enter Inward	22
In Summary: Moving From The "I" To The Creator	22
4 The Jew's Inner Seal	24
The Seal of the Decree on Hoshanah Rabbah	24
Spiritual Light Needs A Container To Maintain It	24
Reaching The Collective "I"	25
The Four Stages of Revelation	26
Meriting The Coming Of Moshiach	27

The Revelation of Moshiach _____	27
Beyond Choosing _____	29
Incorporating The Reality of Hashem Into Life _____	30
Doing Hashem’s Will Even Though We Don’t Understand It _____	31
Self-Awareness and Feeling Your Existence _____	31
Reaching The Non-Ego State: Beginning With The “Yechidah” Level of The Soul _____	32
The Five Parts of The Soul Are All One Unit _____	34
Simchas Torah: Integrating Your “I” With Hashem _____	34
5 Lulav In Our Heart _____	36
Preface: The Torah Is Eternal, And Its Lessons Are Eternal _____	36
A “Stolen Lulav” _____	36
Copying Another Person’s Avodas Hashem _____	36
Copying Is Really Stealing! _____	37
A “Dry Lulav” _____	38
Acting By Rote _____	38
A Lulav Used For “Idol Worship” _____	39
A Person Has To Want What He Does _____	39
An Adult With A Childish Heart _____	40
“How Is Work Going...” _____	41
“How Was Your Yom Tov?” _____	42
Lulav From A “Condemned City” _____	42
Our Physical Heart and Our Spiritual Heart _____	42
A Lulav With Its Tip Chopped Off _____	43
We Must Have A Desire Human Perfection _____	44
We Aspire For Perfection Although We Cannot Reach It Through Our Human Efforts _____	45
There Are Levels To Perfection _____	45
Stages In Life _____	46
Realistic Aspirations _____	46
“I’m Realistic.” _____	47
A Lulav With Severed Leaves _____	47
Are We Connected To Our Mitzvos? _____	48
A Lulav With Spread Out Leaves _____	49
“They Seek Many Calculations” _____	49

Lulav of the Har HaBarzel _____	50
Designating Our Heart Towards Hashem _____	51
Having One Heart – Only One Desire _____	52
6 Separating From “Erev Rav” _____	53
Understanding The Depth Behind Hoshanah Rabbah _____	53
Gentiles and Sukkos _____	53
Hoshanos\Aravos and “Erev Rav” _____	55
Hoshanah Rabbah – The “Seal Within A Seal” _____	56
Banging The Hoshanos On The Ground _____	56
The Seal of Hoshanah Rabbah and The Seal of the Bris Kodesh _____	57
Hoshanah Rabbah: Rectifying The Gentile Nations of the World _____	58
Sukkos – The Connecting Point Between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur _____	58
Hoshanah Rabbah – Combining The Seal of Rosh HaShanah With The Seal of Yom Kippur _____	59
A Seal Within A Seal: The Point Of No Sin _____	60
The Aravos of Sukkos: Rectifying The Nations _____	60
‘Erev Rav’ Is Rectified Only Through Being Destroyed _____	61
The Depth of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah _____	62
7 Sefer Koheles – Everything Is “Hevel Havalim” _____	64
“Moed” – A “Meeting” With Hashem _____	64
Removing the Barriers _____	64
Before and After the Beis Hamikdash _____	65
8 The Joy of Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah _____	66
Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah: Two Different Aspects of Joy _____	66
Joy Within Nature and Joy Above Nature _____	66
Above Nature _____	66
Within The Struggles, and Above the Struggles _____	67
After Yom Tov Is Over _____	68
9 Internalizing Sukkos For the Rest of the Year _____	69
Carrying Over the Yom Tov into the Year _____	69
Accessing the State of Yom Tov Even During The Year _____	69
In Between Yomim Tovim _____	70
What We Learn From Yom Tov For The Rest of the Year _____	71

Yom Tov – Our Meeting With Hashem	72
Yom Tov- The Shechinah Within	72
Experience the Elation of Yom Tov and Then Seek To Maintain It	73
The Custom In Kelm of “Asiri Kodesh”	74
The Advice of the Ramchal	75
Make A Self Accounting	75
How To Avoid The Sleepiness of the Winter	76

1 | *Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres – Two Levels of Closeness With Hashem¹*

The Inner Meaning Behind The Four Species and the Sukkah

In the Yom Tov of Sukkos, the main *mitzvos* are to shake the four species and to sit in the *sukkah*. (Aside for the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, when we had the *mitzvah* of *nisuch hamayim*² in the *Beis Hamikdash* on Sukkos).

The *mitzvah* of the four species involves the concept of movement: we shake them and move them around. On a deep level, this act symbolizes how we want to “move” away from evil - and instead “move” ourselves closer to Hashem. By contrast, the *mitzvah* of sitting in the *sukkah* involves no movement at all; we sit in it, and don’t move at all. This symbolizes a different aspect of our *Avodas Hashem*: the point of “non-movement.”

In other words, there are two steps in our *Avodas Hashem*. In our *Avodas Hashem*, sometimes we have to “move” - and sometimes we don’t “move”.³

Sukkos of Today and Sukkos of the Future

There is a *halachah* on Sukkos that we have to sit specifically in the “shadow” (“*tzeil*”) of the *sukkah*. This is the *sukkah* of nowadays – we sit in the *sukkah*’s shadow, which symbolizes how Hashem’s radiance is concealed from us.

However, in the future, *Chazal* state that the *sukkah* will be made from the skin of the *leviathan* (whale) – it will be a *sukkah* of entirely spiritual light. The *Sukkah* of the future will be the perfect *sukkah*, in which “all passerby” (“*kol ha’ezerach*”) will be enveloped within it; a hint to this is that the word “*ezerach*”, “passerby”, is rooted in the word “*zerichah*”, “light.” This alludes to the *sukkah* of the future, which will be totally a spiritual light. The depth behind is because the *sukkah* is not just about dwelling “in the shadow” of the *sukkah*, but to dwell in the light of Hashem.

¹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/succos-0001-sukkos-shemini-atzeres-2-levels-closeness-hashem>

² The offering of the water libation

³ Editor’s Note: Refer to *Sukkos_07_The Jew’s Inner Self*.

(The Rov has been brief here in this fundamental concept; we will elaborate here to give more background. Generally speaking, the lower mode of *Avodas Hashem* involves “movement”, such as the six days of the week, when we move and work, representing the mundane. On Shabbos we don’t move, because we do not work; thus non-movement is always seen as the higher aspect of our *Avodas Hashem*.)

The concept of non-movement is also explained more in *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Shabbos Kodesh*, as well as in *sefer Da Es Hargoshosecha* (“Getting To Know Your Feelings”). This footnote does not nearly exhaust the topic; it is a very vast subject which the Rov frequently discusses, and the references we have given here are the main sources where the Rov discusses it at length. Refer also to the pdf of *Search For Serenity*, an adaptation of *sefer Da Es Menuchasecha*.

Dovid Hamelech says, “*Hashem is my light, and my salvation.*” *Chazal* expound on this verse that the words “*my light*” is referring to Rosh Hashanah, while the words “*my salvation*” is referring to Yom Kippur. Succos, which is the continuation of this, is the actual revelation of “*my light*”, Rosh Hashanah – it is entirely Hashem’s light.

It is only nowadays that the *sukkah* is like a “shadow”, because since there is evil in the world, the evil places a “shadow” on the “light” of Rosh Hashanah and dims it from its full effect. But in the future, there will be no more evil, and then Succos will no longer be a concept of “shadow”; it will rather be a concept of complete spiritual light.

Shemini Atzeres – The D’veykus With Hashem Above All Spiritual Light

Even higher than the level of Succos, though, is the level of *Shemini Atzeres*, which is the day of complete unity between Hashem and the Jewish people. It is a power that is above even the spiritual light revealed through Rosh Hashanah and Succos.⁴

Chazal say of this day that Hashem said, “Remain with me one more day”. This is the great desire of Hashem toward His people, and it was there even before Hashem created light on the first day; this great desire that He has to us returns on *Shemini Ateres*.

⁴ Editor’s Note: See sefer *Sifsei Chaim: Moadim (Vol. I)* who explains how the spirituality of *Shemini Atzeres* is deeper than the first days of Succos. On Succos, we have the mitzvah of *sukkah* and the four species, because we are given these tools on Succos to reach closeness to Hashem through them. However, *Shemini Atzeres* is a higher connection we have with Hashem, as it is the culmination of the entire *Yomim Nora'im*; thus, it doesn’t require us to sit in the *sukkah* or to shake the four species, because it is more of a direct connection with Hashem.

2 | *The Jew's Inner Self*⁵

Sukkah and the Four Species – The Dual Natures of Man

On Sukkos, we have two mitzvos: to sit in the sukkah, and to shake the Four Species. These two mitzvos represent the two sides of man. The Four Species, which we shake around and move, represent how man is always in movement. We are full of various *retzonos* (desires), and all of these desires are a kind of movement. The mitzvah of sitting in the sukkah represents a totally different side to us. In a sukkah, we don't move; we sit there.

Hashem is mainly called by two names. The lower name of Hashem is “*adonoy*” - He is our *adon*, our master. This refers to how we serve him with the mitzvos. The higher name of Hashem is the four-letter name of *havayah*, and this refers to the simple recognition of His existence. The two names of Hashem reflect the two sides of our life's mission. On one hand, we “move” constantly by doing all the mitzvos. This is how relate to Hashem as our Master, Whom we serve; that He is *adonoy*. But the inner essence to our life is that we recognize his existence and integrate our own existence as a part of Hashem. This is how we relate to Hashem with his higher name, *havayah*. It is the deeper part of our life.

The fact that Hashem exists is not just a fact about life, but it is something which we can connect ourselves to. The mitzvah of sitting in the Sukkah is entirely about this concept – to sit in Hashem's Presence, with no need to move around, and instead to connect to Hashem's Endlessness.

In this discussion, the intention is not merely to say a nice *dvar Torah* for Sukkos, but rather, to define the very essence of Sukkos: accessing our innermost point of our self – our point of non-movement – when we integrate with Hashem. It is also a concept that has ramifications to our entire life. It is the way how we can prepare for the future, when we will sit in the Sukkah made of the *leviathan* skin.

The depth of our Avodah on Sukkos is to combine the two sides of mankind and integrate them together: the Four Species, which represents our *mitzvos*\movement, and the mitzvah of sitting in the Sukkah, which represents our recognition of Hashem\ non-movement.

Our Actual Essence Vs. The Outer Layers of the Self

We will try to explain this as much as Hashem allows us to understand it.

The most complicating thing in the world is our self. Anything else we recognize are all superficial realities – such as our house, the block we live on, the country we live in, even the world;

⁵ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/succos-007-jews-inner-self>

it's all an external, superficial kind of recognition. If this is all a person knows of, then he lives a superficial kind of existence – he lives on the outside world. He is thinking all the time about things that are outside of himself. The clothing we wear is not either a part of who we are.

When a person begins to look for his inner essence, he is apt to think that he “is” what he “does.” He identifies himself based on his actions, his emotions, and his thoughts.

For example, a person has an affinity to do *chessed* (kindness), so he thinks of himself as a “good person” since he sees that he is drawn towards doing good things. When he has to reprimand his children sometimes, he feels horrible inside, because now he thinks he's a “bad person” by having to act cruel to them.

If a person is deeper, he knows that there is more to himself than the actions he does. He is aware of his thoughts – and he identifies himself based on what's going on in his mind. Yet this is erroneous as well, because a person is not his thoughts either.

Our actions, our emotions, and our thoughts are just outer layers that cover over our essence. They are like garments that clothe our soul.⁶ But there is more to who we are than our actions, emotions, and thoughts.

How can a person identify who he really is?

To be frank, there is almost no one who truly knows who he is, and there is almost no one as well who really recognizes Hashem. If a person doesn't know he really is, he can't either recognize Hashem!

There are many people who are searching to find Hashem. But, it is written “*From my flesh I see G-d*”⁷; in other words, we need to know who we are in order to be able to recognize Hashem.

Only By Recognizing Our Self Can We Recognize Hashem

We will expand more upon these words, because it is a very fundamental concept which needs to be understood well.

There is no person who has no self-knowledge of himself whatsoever; all of us know ourselves to a certain extent, besides for those who have become mentally ill (may G-d have mercy upon them). But the way we understand ourselves is superficial: we recognize ourselves based on the outer parts of our self, such as our actions, our conversations, our emotions, and our thoughts. These are outer layers to our soul – garments that cover over our actual soul – and therefore these factors are not a real way to identify ourselves.

⁶ See *Tanya* chapter 4, and *Tzidkas Hatzaddik* 263.

⁷ *Iyov* 19: 26

When a person only has a superficial understanding of himself, he will in turn have a superficial relationship towards G-d. It is written, “*From my flesh, I see G-d*”, so if a person doesn’t properly recognize his own “flesh”, his real self, he won’t come to really identify Hashem either. As a result, he will never form a deep bond with the Creator, because he doesn’t really conceptualize the Creator’s existence in the first place.

We can compare this to a person who wishes to grind flour but he has no home appliance to grind it with. The “I” in a person is a tool for one to recognize the Creator of the World, because “The Holy One and Yisrael are one”. If someone recognizes his own Yisrael, the Jew inside himself – his beginning, for Yisrael is called “the beginning” (see *Rashi Beraishis 1:1*), then he can come to recognize the beginning of his own beginning, which is the Creator; the Ultimate Beginning. But if a person never got to his own beginning, and he only knows of branches from his beginning – his various abilities – then not only is he missing a bond with the Creator, but he is missing his own Jew within. The essence of the Jew is that he is a Yisrael; thus, if a Jew does not recognize that he is Yisrael deep down in his soul, he is missing self-recognition.

How indeed can a Jew attain self-recognition? It is not written in any sefer\book in the entire world. A book is an outer entity, and thus it impossible for the actual “I” to be described in any book! If the “I” could be written about in a book, that would be releasing the “I” from its inner chamber out into the open world, and that itself is impossible.

The only one who can reveal the “I” is Hashem Himself. “*I am Hashem your G-d.*” The word *anochi* (I) stands for the words *ana nafshai kesavis yehavis*, “I Myself can write this.”⁸ In other words, the only one who can write about the “I” is Hashem. Hashem has given us the tool in how we can recognize Him: the more we recognize our self, the more we recognize Him. If we have only a superficial self-recognition, then our recognition of Hashem will also be superficial. If we recognize what our essence is, then we will be able to recognize the essence of Hashem.

The Torah begins with the letter *beis*, in the word *Beraishis*. The Ten Commandments began with the letter *aleph*, in the word “*Anochi.*” The depth of this is that Hashem reveals Himself in the letter *Aleph*, which is the beginning letter. If we come to our letter “*aleph*” in our soul – our point of beginning – then we will be able to come to the total level of *Aleph*, the Absolute One, the Absolute Beginning – the One who existed, exists and will always exist: the Creator. But if man doesn’t recognize who he is, then he won’t be able to recognize his Creator.

What is the most hidden thing in Creation? Hashem’s Name is never pronounced. Whenever the Name of *Havayah* is used in the Torah, we read it as “*Adonoy.*” The actual “I” of Hashem, even when it is written, is never read. And when we do read a name of Hashem, it is not written there. This is not only a fact about reading Torah. It a perspective to have on Creation, a perception of our soul.

There in inner kind of writing of our soul which cannot be read. If we could read it, we would be in the state of Moshiach’s times, which we are not in right now. When we all will be able to

8 *Yalkut Shimeoni: Shemos 20: 226*

pronounce the Name of *Havayah*, Moshiach will come. Nowadays, only a few individuals are allowed to use the Name of *Havayah*. Our Avodah is for us to reach the Name of *Havayah* of Hashem, which we do not currently recognize.

We usually relate to Hashem with the fact that we must do the mitzvos He commanded us with. However, there is an inner aspect to our relationship towards Hashem which we start out being unaware of, and we must discover it. It is the fact that we are not just servants of our Master, but rather, our whole existence is connected with Him.

That is the difference between the lower name of Hashem, *Adonoy*, and the higher name of Hashem, which is *Havayah*. The lower name, *Adonoy*, represents how we must do the mitzvos, for He is our Master. The name of *Adonoy* implies that our relationship with Him is dependent on the actions we do. The higher name, *Havayah*, reflects that we are all integrated with Hashem, regardless of what we do or not, because the connection is intrinsic. “A Jew who sins is still a Jew.”

The point of *havayah* – our true existence, in which we are integrated with Hashem – is the point that is hidden away deep in the soul. When we do the mitzvos, it builds the outer layers of our soul, but it doesn't build the point of *havayah* in the soul.

When a person performs a mitzvah, he is doing an action. The root of all action is the power of *ratzon* – the will. The will represents man's nature to always be in movement; *ratzon* comes from the word *ratz*, to “run”, to move. If a person considers his *ratzon* to be the deepest part of himself, he identifies himself with the power of movement, of action. He is at the level of the Four Species, which move in all six directions of the world – but he hasn't yet gotten to his own self. He hasn't yet gotten to the “Sukkah” inside himself – to the “Yisrael” inside him, his true “I.”

With a poor sense of self-recognition, even a person sitting in the Sukkah doesn't grasp what the concept of Sukkah is. Although it appears as if he's reached the point of non-movement, because he's sitting in the Sukkah – he's only there physically, but he doesn't see himself as being in the *tzeila d'meheimenusa*, the “shadow of faith” that the Sukkah is. He's doing all the mitzvos for His Master, but he hasn't yet reached *emunah* – the sukkah that is all about *emunah*, recognizing Hashem's existence.

Thus, there are essentially two stages in our bond with Hashem: first we become His loyal servants by doing all his mitzvos. At a later stage in life, we must eventually enter the second, inner stage, which is to recognize Him with our *emunah*. These two stages are represented by two great events that our people went through: the exodus of Egypt and the Giving of the Torah. By the exodus, we were released from Pharaoh's servitude and now we became *servants* of Hashem. By Sinai, Hashem revealed Himself with the giving of the Torah, and now we reached a new level: we *recognized* Hashem.

When Hashem revealed Himself by the Torah, He did not reveal Himself with His lower name, *Adonoy*, but rather with His higher name, *Havayah*. This shows us that the Torah is essentially the higher name of Hashem, *Havayah*.

For this reason, we never really begin to learn the actual Torah, because we are not connected to *Havayah*. And surely, we never finish it, for that reason. “*The Torah of Hashem is wholesome, it settles the soul.*” The Baal Shem Tov said that the Torah is wholesome and perfect because no one has ever begun to learn it and complete it. What is the meaning of his statement? No one ever begun to learn the Torah?! The meaning is that the Torah throughout the generations until the end of time is not yet the actual Name of Hashem to us, and this is the deep reason why the Name of Hashem is not allowed to be pronounced.

When a person recognizes his real essence, he merits to truly learn the Torah – the essence of the Torah. Through his learning, he can then come to recognize Hashem – not just the actions and middos of Hashem, but an actual recognition of Hashem Himself, so to speak, in the same way that he recognizes his own essence.

Only a person who feels his own essence can come to feel the reality of Hashem. Of course, anyone will claim that he can feel himself as existing, not just a Jew, but any non-Jew as well, and even animals, can feel they exist. But as we explained, most people never arrive at true self-recognition, and they only are aware of the outer layers to their existence.

Summary

To summarize: If we want to define the purpose of Creation, the definition is clear. The purpose of Creation is to recognize the reality of Hashem. The way to get there is through self-recognition. The self is the point in a person which never ceases, for Hashem and Yisrael are one; just as Hashem is eternal, so is a soul of Yisrael eternal. If a person views himself as an entity that can cease, then in turn he views his bond with Hashem with the same superficial perspective.

The soul of a Jew is a “piece of G-d from above”, and therefore, one can come to recognize Hashem through the recognition of himself. A Jew is the only nation on this world which is capable of feeling the inner self and thereby sense the Creator with just as much clarity.

This is the lesson of Sukkos: we have two mitzvos – to sit in the Sukkah and to shake the Four Species. We have both of these mitzvos because we are meant to integrate both of the lessons they represent together. The Four Species represents how we must move to do all the mitzvos, the actions through which we serve our Master with. The mitzvos are the way for us to get through to our **heart** and reveal it. “The heart is pulled after the actions.”⁹

What is it that we must reveal from our heart? It is not limited to the great exalted feelings of love and fear of Hashem. It is not about becoming awe-struck from elation. It is about reaching our essence, our “I.” The point of doing all the mitzvos is so that we can use all these actions to reach our I” and reveal it. In this way, we integrate *Adonoy* with *Havayah*.

⁹ *Sefer HaChinuch*, 16

The “I” can be reached in several ways. There is way to reach it directly, but only the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur knew the secret of how to do it. The other way is the way which we generally take, and that is through doing all the mitzvos so that we can get through to our essence and recognize the Creator as a result. But when we do the mitzvos, the focus should not be on the actions, but rather on the goal, which is to come to our essence.

Reaching Our Point of Menuchah\Serenity

Understandably, the words here are very deep, but they are the secret about life.

All of us want grow higher and elevate ourselves. Yet, this is still a superficial approach. It’s superficial because life is not just about feeling more elated. Elation is still a kind of movement, and as we explained, movement is only the outer layer of our existence. For this reason, there is almost no one who reaches what he wants in life, because a person keeps evading his main goal, in spite of his many aspirations to grow and become more elated in spirituality.

There is a well-known parable that illustrates this message. A man dreams that there is buried treasure underneath the bridge of his town, while in reality, there is buried treasure sitting underneath his house all along.

The lesson we can learn from this is that even when a person seeks spirituality, he might very well be running away from his real “treasure” all along. For example, if he thinks that Hashem is in Heaven, while he is merely on this lowly earth, then all he will know of is the mitzvos, and his entire life will be limited to performing superficial actions. The truth is that Hashem is found everywhere (Zohar III 225a) – He is found inside a person! Our Avodah is to uncover our true existence, and then we will find Hashem there.

Of course, it will require a lot of “movements” to get to that inner place in ourselves, but we must at least aspire to reach this point of serenity (*menucha*). When a person reaches menuchah in himself, Hashem is truly revealed, because menuchah represents Shabbos, the point of non-movement and a cessation from all labor. One who attains menuchah on this world can recognize the Creator, and he attains it no less than how all of us will eventually recognize Hashem in the future. But if someone never reaches the point of menuchah in himself, the “Shabbos” in himself – he will not come to the recognition of the One who created the world.

3 | *The Jew's New Perspective* ¹⁰

Be Ready To Acquire A Whole New Perspective

In the previous chapter, we began to describe how we have two layers to our self - our outer, superficial layers and our inner layer. The inner layer of our self is very hidden from us, and we must reveal it. We will now explain how we can reveal it.

Before we learn about how we can reveal something, we first need to know what it is that we are trying to reveal. After we conceptualize something, we can then attempt to reveal it.

When a Jew reflects about what he's missing in life, he likely thinks that he is missing certain good deeds and that he is lacking knowledge. If this is his approach, he thinks that it is his job to improve how he acts, and to add onto his knowledge. This is commendable, of course, but it won't help the person leave superficiality. He is still not improving his actual perception; he remains trapped in his limited perspective. Even if he improves how he acts, he never leaves his superficial perception of things. What a person really needs to do is to leave his perspective entirely and dig deeper into himself, where he can uncover a different and deeper perspective in how he views everything in life.

Each of us is searching to have a bond with Hashem. "*My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living Almighty.*" We all are trying to get there, and we all want it badly. But we need to first have a basic understanding of what it is that we should be wanting and searching for in the first place.

The Inner Point Of Our Self Cannot Be Described

We want to feel Hashem's existence in our heart. As we explained in the previous chapter, the name of *Havayah* represents the actual reality of Hashem, while the name of *Adonoy* (or *Adnus*) represents our relation to Him in performing the *mitzvos*. We also explained that the way to reach the reality of Hashem is through self-recognition – we can recognize Hashem from within ourselves.

What we need to know now is how we can come to perceive ourselves as *havayah* – to recognize our actual existence.

It is really impossible to define *havayah*. Let us explain why. If something can be understood, but it is very hard to grasp, we can give parables that help us describe what it is. But if there is a point which cannot be grasped at all, there is no way to try to explain it. For example, it is impossible to describe what an angel looks like. All we know about the angels is that our human senses cannot grasp them at all. Although we find that the angels are described sometimes as "light" and "fire", this

¹⁰ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/succos-008-jews-new-perspective>

still does not help us understand at all what an angel looks like. We aren't able to imagine them either.

The point is that if something is found in a different dimension than the one we are in, it is impossible to even try to describe it. That is why spiritual concepts cannot be described.

Man's Perception Is A Fantasy

Getting back to our discussion, we will begin with the following simple reflection. Look at the table and chair in front of you. It seems that we perceive what these objects are: They were made by a certain company, and we can do things with them like sit and eat on them. This is true. But can our senses feel the actual essence of a table or chair? If you think about it, the answer is a simple No.

There are six directions of our physical dimension (north, south, east, west, up, and down), and whenever we see an object, we are only seeing it as it moves among the directions. But we never see an actual object itself!

If someone doesn't reflect into this concept, he will regard this is philosophy. He cannot accept this, because he is unable to change his immature perspective from his youth, which seems to show us that an object is as it appears.

The truth is that we do not really perceive anything on this world! In the future we will express, "We were like dreamers." This current world will seem to us like a dream. When you're in a dream, nothing is real, even though you are seeing things.

Man is called *adam*, which comes from the word *dimayon*, imagination. This implies that man's entire perception is seen through the lens of imagination – we never really see something as it really is.

What results from this is that we have no understanding of the Creator, and nor do we understand the essence of people that we see. All we can grasp about anything is that we see movements going on, but we never truly grasp and sense what another entity is.

Seeing Is Not Believing

We cannot sense the existence of anything as long as we confined to using our human senses. A person who needs to sense something through using any of his five senses will not be able to understand the existence of something, the *havayah* of something.

A person might think that he needs to find the Creator, but he isn't aware that first he needs to reveal *havayah*. A person, before anything, must reveal the simple reality of this world!

There are a few individuals on this world who already grasp the true reality, because they have already revealed Hashem's existence in themselves. These rare individuals, they have a special *avodah*

of beginning from the ladder up and radiating that light downwards onto this earth. But generally speaking, our avodah is to work our way upwards, beginning from the bottom point – recognizing reality – and then working our way up to the uppermost point, which is to fully recognize the Creator.

This point must be very well understood: we do not see reality! We see movements of reality, but reality itself cannot be felt by any of the five senses.

The Secret

Recognizing reality – *hakaras hametzius* – is also known as “*Toras HaSod*”, the “Secret Parts of Torah.” People think that this is referring to learning the Zohar, the writings of the Arizal, the writings of the Reshash, etc. and seek to hear *shiurim* on these holy writings. But the truth is that if these secrets ever get taught, they are never understood, because a secret cannot be taught! A secret is a heart matter; it cannot be expressed to another person. The only way a person can do a heart transplant to another person is if he’s dead.

A secret is when a person grasps the true essence of something. If something can be seen with the human eye, you can try to explain it to another and help another person conceptualize it. But if something cannot be seen, there is no way to explain it to another. The secrets of Torah, *Toras HaSod*, are not a kind of knowledge that our intellect can process.

Even if a person knows the entire Zohar and writings of the Arizal by heart – backwards and forwards – it’s possible that he never even grasped even *one* of its secrets! And the truth is that there is only one secret, not many secrets. The only secret there is to know what true reality is.

When a person hears this, he might ask, “Who doesn’t know reality?!” But there is almost no one who truly knows what reality is! The true reality is hidden from us, no less hidden than how much the Creator is hidden from us. The Torah is a part of Hashem, so to speak; it is reality. Hashem looked into it to create the universe. In other words, Hashem created the world as a *havayah* – an existing reality – while we only see it through the lens of *adnus*, the lower perspective. Thus, the actual *havayah* existence of the world is really very hidden from us.

Wearing Your Soul’s Garments And Removing Them

We have explained what the problem is: we do not see true reality. Now we will enter more inward into the path we are describing. The path we are describing known as the perspective of “*levush*”, “garments” – to see everything as garments that cover over a deeper layer.

We all know that in the winter, we more clothing, while in the summer we wear less layers of clothing. This parable helps us understand our own soul: in our own soul, sometimes we wear garments, and sometimes we need to remove our garments. We wear our garments through keeping

the Torah and *mitzvos*, as we are commanded to. There are five garments – action, speech, thought, emotion and will. This is one side of the coin.

The other side of our avodah is that we “remove” our garments. We can understand this with the following parable: When a person gets a gift, sometimes it comes wrapped, and he has to unwrap all the layers until he gets to the gift inside. The lesson is: We were born with many wrappers on us! Our essence is covered over by many “wrappings.” When a gift is given without giftwrap, it’s not befitting. When it remains inside its wrapper though because the person never open it, it’s even worse – he never gets the gift at all. This shows us that it is necessary both to wrap a gift, as well as to unwrap it.

The same can be said of our soul. Our soul contains five garments which we were born with. Sometimes we need to use them, and sometimes we need to remove them. If a person remains his entire life only using his garments and never removing them at times, even if he only uses the garments for holy reasons, he has spent his whole life immersed in garments, and he never reached his true self. It’s like a precious gift that remains unopened, still in its wrapping paper. Even if the “wrapping paper” is very nice, it has to be opened at some point!

Sometimes we have to perform with our garments and make use of them, and sometimes we have to take a break from them.

Detaching Sometimes From Our Soul’s Garments

“For six days you shall labor, and on the seventh day you shall rest.” We know that there is a concept in the Torah of resting from physical action, but the same is true with regards to our deeper soul garments – speech, thought, emotion and will. Sometimes, we need to detach from these as well.

Just as physical action is viewed by us as an action, so is speech a kind of action. On Shabbos, we refrain from talking about weekday activities, so we have a concept of rest from speech as well.

Our emotions as well need to be silenced and withheld sometimes. We cannot always act merciful, for example, like when it comes to having mercy on a cruel person, which is forbidden. Shaul was punished for having mercy on Agag, the king of Amalek, and for being cruel to the city of Nov when he should have spared them. Sometimes a person has to act humble, and sometimes he has to be haughty (and the Baal Shem Tov explained that this is when views his haughtiness as a “garment” that he has to put on, which he can remove afterwards). There are other examples as well brought in *Chazal* as well in which we must detach from emotions.

Our thoughts also need to be silenced sometimes. We usually need to think, but sometimes we must stop our thoughts, like to refrain from thinking about Torah during *davening* or on Tisha B’Av.

Our *ratzon* also has to be silenced sometimes, because there are some desires we have which we need to get rid of, and there are some desires which we need to put on hold and return to them later.

The Art of Detachment: The Secret of Reaching Our Essence

What is so terrible if a person never learns how to detach from his soul garments? As long as he performs holy actions his whole life, why should it bother him if he can't detach sometimes?

On one hand, it is commendable if a person is always in any of his soul garments for holiness. But on the other hand, by always being involved in the garments, he never comes to recognize his essence, and he only knows of his garments.

If a person really wants to recognize himself, he needs two things. On one hand, he must adhere to the entire Torah and *mitzvos*; he must wear his garments as much as he is commanded to according to the Torah. But a person also has to learn to remove his garments sometimes, when the time calls for it – as long as it is within the guidelines of Torah.

Just as the Kohen Gadol would constantly go through a cycle on Yom Kippur of getting dressed, undressing, and getting dressed again, so is there a time and place for “wearing” our soul garments and for “removing” our soul garments. A person who knows when to use his abilities, and when to detach from them, is someone who will be able to reach his essence. If someone only knows how to use his soul abilities but he doesn't know how to detach sometimes from them, he won't be able to reach his essence.

One of the Sages said, “Just as I will receive reward for speaking, so will I receive reward for abstaining [from speech].”¹¹ We know what the reward is for doing the *mitzvos*; “the reward of a *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*.” But what is the concept of abstaining from actions, and what is its reward? The reward is: that the person merits to attain true *teshuvah* (to repent), by meriting a revelation of his true self – the soul in its pure form, with no garments attached. That is his reward. The Sages say that “There is no reward on this world”¹², and the reason for this is because the true reward is to merit a soul that has no garments attached; on this world, there is no such reward, because all of the 613 *mitzvos* we do on this world are garments.

If a person merits to be one of the special individuals who reveals his essence already on this world, he is living the Next World already on this world. It resembles the state of Adam before the sin. The word *mitzvah* comes from the word “*tzavta*”, “companion” – hinting to the reward for a *mitzvah*, which is that a person merits companionship with the Creator.

Utilizing Both Speech and Silence To Reach The Self

As a person lives on this world, sometimes he has to wear his soul garments, and sometimes he needs to take them off, and therefore it is impossible for one to constantly be in a state in which his inner self is revealed. The *mitzvos* of the Torah require us to make use of our soul garments; this is

¹¹ *Pesachim 22b*

¹² *Kidushin 39b*

one side of how we reveal Hashem, and it reflects our avodah of *adnus*, to relate to Hashem as our Master as we carry out all His commandments.

But the other side to our Avodah is to relate to Him with His name of *havayah*, and this reflects how the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur would pronounce the name of *havayah* (as well as how the *Kohanim* would pronounce it every day when they blessed the congregation in the *Beis HaMikdash*). Every person, in his own soul, has this power of the *Kohen Gadol* to “pronounce the name of *havayah*”, in which Hashem can be revealed to him, with no garments coming in between.

Let us now summarize this concept in clear and simple words: On one hand, we need to reveal the outer parts to our self, which are our actions, speech, thoughts, emotions and will. We need to find where we mostly identify our “I” with amongst these five layers to our personality. Simultaneously, we must also find our actual essence.

In order to reach the inner self, a person has to set aside time of the day in which he can reach his essence, by removing the layers of his soul. This is the secret behind the avodah known as “*hisbodedus*” (Jewish meditation).

There are people who try to practice meditation as a way to reach their inner self, but they think that *hisbodedus* is about speaking the entire time with Hashem. Even when they do attain quiet, it’s only because they run out of patience to speak with Hashem so much. They feel that every word spoken to Hashem during *hisbodedus* is precious, and therefore they opt to talk to Hashem the whole time. This is certainly truth to this point, but the problem is that when people only talk to Hashem during their time of *hisbodedus*, they actually lose their connection with Hashem in the process, because they are still involved with their self.

A bond with Hashem is not dependent on talking with Him. If a person was born as a mute, does he have no chance of becoming close to Hashem, since he can’t talk?! Of course not. In fact, a mute can probably form an even deeper kind of connection with Hashem, a more direct connection, since he doesn’t need the “garment” of talking to get to Him – he achieves it by forming an internal kind of connection with Him.

During the time of *hisbodedus*, a person needs to form a relationship with Hashem both through talking to Him as well as through learning how to be silent.

Silencing Your Garments

On one side of the coin, a person has to form a bond with Hashem through developing his motivations and maturing in his service towards Him. Simultaneously, a person also needs to learn how to negate his very will. During the time of *hisbodedus*, a person needs to increase his will for holiness, to think holy thoughts and to have holy feelings, as well as to increase holy speech and accepting upon himself to better his actions. This is one side of the action – improving the garments of the soul.

The inner side to *hisbodedus* is that a person needs to reach a point of silence. He should reach a state in which he doesn't do anything at all. He should also silence himself from any talking, and then calm his thoughts, emotions, and finally, his desires.

If a person succeeds in calming all of these layers, he will begin to feel his essence. Even if a person can't silence all five layers at once (action, speech, thought, emotion, and will), he can still begin to feel his inner self a little more with the more he silences some of the layers.

When a person totally silences all of these layers, he can come to reach a full revelation of his inner self. In order to fully reach the inner self, all five layers need to be silenced, and a partial inner silence won't suffice. The full revelation of the self can only be experienced when there is a total inner silence – when the actions, speech, emotions, thoughts, and will have all been quieted down.

It is difficult for a person to reach a total silence of all his five soul layers, and therefore we all understand that it can take a long time. “*The years of a man are seventy, and if he is strong, eighty years.*” Hashem gave us an average lifespan of 70-80 years specifically because He knew it would take us so long to get to our inner self! It can be called the “tractate” of our life. If a person doesn't reach a total inner silence and he only reaches a partial inner silence, he will still feel his inner self a bit, but it won't be nearly as strong as someone who has the complete inner silence.

This is the second stage in reaching one's inner self – by silencing the five garments of the soul: action, speech, thought, emotion, and will.

Only Jews Can Integrate These Two Abilities of Mankind

It is told of Reb Nachman of Bresslov that all the Torah which had been revealed to him was very novel, but whatever he didn't know was even more novel.

Many people toiled to try to understand this statement. The inner meaning of it is as follows.

Usually, we think that all we have to do is to do the *mitzvos* and not do the *aveiros*. This is true, but it is only one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is that we must learn how to reach an absolute inner silence; just like we must develop our five soul garments, so must we be able to silence them.

A Sukkah contains it both light (*ohr*) and shadow (*tzeil*). The shadow must not be bigger than the amount of sunlight in the Sukkah¹³, but the Sukkah still must have some of both. This shows us that we need to integrate both our “light” and “shadow” together – we need to make use of our soul abilities, as well as to detach sometimes from our soul abilities.

Chazal say that in the future, the non-Jews will request reward, so Hashem will make a condition with them that if they keep one easy *mitzvah*, the *mitzvah* of Sukkah, they will receive reward. The

¹³ *Sukkah 22a; see Orach Chaim 631.*

non-Jews will agree and they will go to sit in the Sukkah, but Hashem will make it hot on Sukkos, and they will get too uncomfortable and leave the Sukkah, kicking it down on the way out.

The depth behind this matter is that a non-Jew cannot integrate the dual nature of mankind together; they can understand that they need to do one or the other, but to incorporate both elements together is beyond them. For example, there are non-Jews who are very kind-hearted, and they feel that life is about loving and caring for others. There are non-Jews who are very generous, who give millions of dollars to charity. There are other non-Jews who also understand the need to be in solitude and get in touch with the inner self, and to feel that there is nothing in existence except for God.

Either of these non-Jewish groups are halfway correct. We have to be nice and care about others, and we also have to reach our inner self through solitude and come to recognize the Creator. But what a non-Jew cannot understand is that a person needs to do both. He must exemplify a benevolent being who helps others, as well as be in touch with his inner self. A non-Jew will understand either one of these facts about life, but he cannot incorporate both into his life simultaneously. A Jew has the power to integrate them both together.

Integrating The Dual Natures Together

We will explain more about how to integrate these dual natures of mankind.

We will use the following scenario to illustrate the concept at hand. What does it mean to “integrate” two different entities together?

Let’s say a person has twins, and he buys a double stroller to hold both of the babies. When he’s wheeling them around in the double stroller, are the two babies ‘integrated’ together? No, because are they are rather viewed as two babies in the same carriage. So this is not a good example of what it means to ‘integrate.’

What about a person who works, and he decides he will now start to do *chessed*? He splits his schedule so that he will have a few hours a day in which he works, and a few hours in which he does *chessed*. Does this mean that he is integrating his personal life with helping others? He’s simply rearranging his schedule. Although he has integrated more people into his life by giving more of his time to help them, he’s not simultaneously integrating others with his job, because he has different times for each of these activities.

An inner kind of integrating is when a person can simultaneously accomplish two different activities. We have begun to explain that on Sukkos, we have two *mitzvos* – the *mitzvah* of sitting in the Sukkah, the *mitzvah* of shaking the Four Species. The fact that we have these two *mitzvos* shows us that it is our *avodah* to integrate our two aspects in how we relate to Hashem – our lower aspect, *adnus* (reflected by how we must perform the *mitzvos*) and our higher aspect, *havayah* (our recognition of Hashem).

What does this mean? Does this mean that we split up Sukkos into two activities – part of the day we sit in the Sukkah, and part of the day we take the Four Species? That is only a superficial approach. The real definition of our avodah on Sukkos is to integrate the Four Species with the Sukkah - in other words, to perform the *mitzvos* upon a recognition of His existence.

As we explained before, there are non-Jews who understand what the concept of *havayah* is, and there are also non-Jews who understand that life is about performing actions to benefit others, but a non-Jew cannot integrate both systems at once in his life. Only a Jew knows how to come to perform properly based upon the recognition of Hashem's existence – a Jew can know how to connect these two pieces of knowledge together and see how they integrate.

Connecting To The Depth of Reality Even Amongst The Realm of Action

“The purpose of knowing about You [Hashem] is to realize that we do not know of You; however, all we can know is that You exist, and that is all that we can arrive at with our mental capabilities.”¹⁴ Our actions on this world must be connected to the *havayah*, the true reality. If not, then a person is only connected with Hashem when he has time for *hisbodedus*, but when he goes out in the world and takes care of his various chores, he disconnects totally from *havayah*. He views *havayah* and this world of action as two separate worlds that cannot be integrated.

But if a person learns how to integrate *havayah* into his daily actions, and vice versa, then he achieves a constant connection with the Creator.

A story is told about the philosopher Aristotle, who was once seen indulging on a plate of food. A student passed by and asked him, “Isn't it unbecoming for the great philosopher Aristotle to indulge on food like this?” Whereupon the philosopher responded, “When I eat, I am not Aristotle.” This is an example of an identity crisis – when someone cannot incorporate his wisdom into his daily life.

He viewed his wisdom as one thing, and his actions as a separate thing, and he did not see how they must become integrated.

The entire lesson of our holy Torah, the secret of our entire life's work in our service towards Hashem, is about revealing the reality of Hashem in all situations. “There is no place that is empty from Him.” We need to reveal Hashem's existence, but not only that – we need to incorporate His existence into the way we act. We must reveal Hashem through our own private *hisbodedus*, when we detach from our soul layers, as we explained.

And along with this, we need to reveal Him also during the times of the day in which we are actively using our soul garments. The reality of Hashem's existence must become manifested in how we act throughout the day.

¹⁴ Sefer “*Bechinas Olam*”, authored by Rav Yedaya HaPenini ben HaRav Avraham Badarshi

Why It Is Difficult For People To Enter Inward

When we understand this, we can now understand another thing: why most people have a hard time entering inward, even though they are really yearning to do so. People have honest and true aspirations for holiness; why are many people not succeeding in getting there? It is because there is a great lack of understanding about what *pnimiyus* (“inwardness”) is and how to enter it.

One reason for this is because we are found in a world of action, and we are not yet in touch with the deeper meaning to reality, *havayah*. The second reason why people don’t enter the inner world is because people don’t understand that the inner meaning of reality is something that can become manifest in how we act throughout the day as well.

Chazal say that in the future, the *mitzvos* will disappear.¹⁵ There are many explanations of this statement; the following explanation is the one that pertains to our discussion. The depth of this statement is that the *mitzvos* are only secondary to the inner meaning of reality, *havayah*, and in the future when *havayah* is totally revealed, the *mitzvos* will only be viewed as a spark of reality, and it will pale in comparison to the radiating light of *havayah*.

According to this explanation, it is not the actual *mitzvos* which will disappear in the future, but rather, a change of perspective. In our current state we view [initially] view *mitzvos* as actions to perform, and in the future, each *mitzvah* will appear to us a spark of reality. A *Lulav* will not just be an action we perform, but a spark of the great reality that has been revealed.

There is only one reality – Hashem, who is “One, and His Name is One.” Everything that we see on this world are only sparks of that one, single reality – which shines itself onto every place in Creation in many forms.

When we look around at the world, we see many people, and it appears that there is more than one reality going on. But through revealing the perspective of *havayah*, a person is able to view all the disparities as being many sparks that make up one single unit – the reality of the Creator. Nothing is apart from the reality of the Creator. “There is no place that is empty from Him.”

We live in a time of *hester panim* (concealment of Hashem’s radiance), we also have to view it with this perspective, that all *hester panim* is essentially a lack of understanding of reality. There is no such thing as becoming apart from the Creator.

In Summary: Moving From The “I” To The Creator

To summarize: In order for a person to truly recognize the Creator, to truly recognize the reality that exists, one first needs to understand what his own reality is. He must realize that whatever he has understood about himself until now was only a superficial sense of self-recognition, based on his senses and mind, which can only grasp movements of reality, not reality itself.

¹⁵ *Niddah 61b*

By detaching oneself from the five garments of the soul, one can recognize his essence, and from that, he can come to recognize the Creator. He can then deepen this recognition even further and reach an even higher point, which is to realize that there is really one true “I” that exists – the Creator, for there is nothing else besides Him.

So first, a person has to realize what he *isn't*. Then he can understand who he really *is*, and then he can recognize the Creator. The final stage is to recognize that there is only One “I” – the Creator; for all of Creation are merely emanations and sparks of His existence.

4 | *The Jew's Inner Seal*¹⁶

The Seal of the Decree on Hoshanah Rabbah

On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, the decree [for the new year] becomes sealed. It is well-known that the decree is written on Rosh HaShanah, and signed on Yom Kippur, but the *sefarim hakedoshim*¹⁷ reveal that on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, another signing of the decree takes place; it is called a “signature within the [first] signature.”

We find this concept in the *Gemara*,¹⁸ that normally one is not allowed to send certain foods with a non-Jew even if the foods are sealed, but if they are sealed within another seal, it is permissible. The Arizal borrows this concept with regards to *Hoshanah Rabbah*, that on *Hoshana Rabbah*, the decree is sealed within the first original seal of Yom Kippur.

There are many deep explanations of this concept, but we will use one approach to explain it.

Chazal say that “the seal of Hashem is truth.”¹⁹ *Chazal* elsewhere say that there is a special merit to a judge who gives a truthful judgment; this is called “*emes l’amito*”, complete truth.²⁰ Many of the commentaries discuss what the difference between “truth” (*emes*) and “complete truth” (*emes l’amito*) is. If something is already the truth, then how can there be such a thing as a complete truth? And if only the complete truth is the truth, then how can the ordinary level of truth be called truth at all?

Along the lines of our discussion, the answer is as follows: the original signature of Yom Kippur is the truth, while the signature within that, which takes place on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, is called “the complete truth.” The two signatures complement each other [and thus they are not a contradiction. Soon this will be explained].

Spiritual Light Needs A Container To Maintain It

First we need to reflect into these concepts – what *ohr* (spiritual light) is, and what a *kli* (container) is. With the help of Hashem, may we merit to understand this.

In Creation, there are many spiritual lights (*ohros*) and containers (*keilim*) to hold the light. For example, a challah is a kind of spiritual light, *ohr*, that is contained in a plate, which is the *kli* that

¹⁶ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/succos-009-jews-inner-seal>

¹⁷ *Shaar HaKavanos: Derushei Chag HaSukkos: Derush 6*

¹⁸ *Avodah Zarah 39a*

¹⁹ *Shabbos 55a*

²⁰ *Shabbos 10a*

holds the *ohr*. The root light of Creation is the Infinite Light of Hashem (the *ohr Ein Sof*), and all of Creation is the root container which holds all the endless light.

Every person, at his beginning stage, needs to find his own private *ohr*, his own light, and put it into his own *kli*, container. After that, the *avodah* is to reveal the Infinite Light of Hashem within that container. Containing the Infinite Light of Hashem is different than the first kind of container; the Infinite Light cannot go into a private kind of container, but rather a container that represents the collective whole of Creation.

In order to receive such a container, man has to come to the recognition that all of Creation are really one. The only thing that splits us apart are the many desires of mankind, our *retzonos*. So in order to see Creation as all one unit, man has to nullify his *retzonos*. If a person succeeds at that, he will be able to see how there are not “many” people in Creation, which reflects disparity, but rather, that all of Creation is one unit.

Reaching The Collective “I”

The way to nullify our *retzonos* is through removing the five garments of the soul [which was discussed in the previous chapter]. Here many people arrive at a concept which they find entirely new.

People think that one has to first find his true self and reveal it, and that this means finding your unique strengths which no one else has – to find your specialness and uniqueness. The Infinite Light of Hashem will not enter a person if he has this perspective. Each person is unique in his five soul garments, and in order to receive the Infinite Light of Hashem, these garments need to be removed; a person must learn how to not look at his uniqueness\ soul garments.

This is because from the deeper perspective of reality, *havayah*, we are all one, and no one is “unique” and apart from others. If a person wants to reach *havayah* and he is still searching to find his true self, it’s like trying to touch the sun by touching the rays entering through the window. In order to reach *havayah*, a person must come to the realization that he has no private existence of his own. From the viewpoint of our soul’s garments, it appears that there is disparity in Creation, but from the viewpoint of *havayah*, there is no separateness whatsoever in Creation.

When a person removes his soul garments, beginning from improving his actions (then speech, thought and emotion) and then he finally removes his innermost garment – his *ratzon*\will – he will come to receive a new kind of container: one that represents the collective whole of Creation.

In the first stage, when a person is working with his soul’s garments to remove them, he needs to form a container for himself which enables him to find his true self. He cannot enter the perspective of *havayah* yet, because he is still found within a perspective disparity, because he is searching to find his private self. After he bypasses all the garments by removing them, he has nullified the garments, and now he can be a container that represents the collective whole of Creation [as opposed to a ‘private’ container]. He can now enter *havayah*.

When a person gets past all the soul garments, he comes to discover his true self, but what he will discover is that his “I” is not a private kind of existence, but rather, that his “I” is part of a collective whole. He will then be able to an Infinite Light of Hashem, for he now has the container that can hold something collective.

It is reminiscent of the statement in *Chazal*, “It is a way of a man to go after a woman [in marriage]”²¹ – in other words, the spiritual light is drawn towards its container.

The Four Stages of Revelation

However, the revelation of Hashem’s light in a person doesn’t come to every person. To illustrate, it is man’s nature to seek the woman for marriage, but not if she is already married. As long as a person is still found within his private “I”, it is as if he is already “married” to another entity, and the spiritual light will not be drawn towards him.

But when a person reveals his “I” as being part of a collective whole, he has negated his private self, and he has emptied out his ego in order to make space in himself to receive the Infinite Light of Hashem (the light of the *Ein Sof*). That is his new “spouse”.

Emptying oneself of his private “I” will enable one to become a container that can hold the all-inclusive light of Hashem. He will realize that any spirituality that he sought for his own private motives feels to him like dirty clothing, unsuitable for a prince to wear, now that he has unified his once “private” soul with “collective” soul, with the Creator.

So the steps of one’s avodah are as follows. The first stage is for one to reveal his true self, which is by nullifying the five garments of the soul (action, then speech, then thought, then emotion, and then the will)²². After that, a person reveals his true “I”, and what he discovers is that the real “I” is not his ego, but rather, that he has no private self of his own anymore [he has transcended the ego]. He is now a container to receive the Infinite Light of Hashem; he has emptied himself of any previous spiritual light, which were all narrowed to his egoistic concerns. Now that he has been emptied, he is a container that can receive the Infinite Light.

Naturally, a person will imagine that he can receive the Infinite Light even if he hasn’t yet transcended the ego; but any attempts to get there will prove futile. Hashem says, “I am I who I am, and there is no God besides me.” This is not the regular kind of “I” which we understand; it is not a

²¹ *Kiddushin 2b*

²² *Editor’s Note: In the previous chapter, it was explained that the way to nullify the actions is by accepting upon oneself to better his actions. The way to nullify speech is by speaking with Hashem. The way to nullify thought is, for example, by refraining from Torah thoughts during davening. The way to nullify the emotions is by gaining control of our emotions (refer to *Getting To Know Your Feelings [Chapter 16]* of the author). The way to nullify the will is through getting rid of our various desires (for more specific guidance on how to do this, refer to the author’s *Getting To Know Your Soul and Getting To Know Your Soul*, and *Bilvavi Miskan Evneh, Part Four: Chapters 15-22*). Refer also to the author’s recent series on the topic of “hisbodedus” (meditation): *Getting To Know Your Individuality, Chapters 10 and onward*). Also refer to the author’s *Da Es Yichudecha (Getting To Know Your Inner World, Chapters 7-10)*.*

private kind of “I.” When Hashem says “I”, it is referring to the collective “I”, and not to the private “I” – and He is saying that there is no other “I” besides for “I”, the “I” of Hashem – the collective “I.”

A person who wishes to receive the light of the *Ein Sof* will naturally be afraid to let go of his ego. He is thinking, “What will happen to me if I do this? Will I lose my identity when I nullify myself?” This is because he does not identify himself beyond his five soul garments, so of course, he considers this to be a loss of his identity. He’ll be prepared to forego his soul garments as long as he thinks he’ll receive a new identity in its place, but he is not prepared to give his identity if he knows that he is not getting back a new identity in return, so he won’t be willing to do it.

Meriting The Coming Of Moshiach

It is written, “Behold, days are coming, so says my Master, Hashem; when I will throw away all hunger from the land, when there will be no hunger for bread and no thirst for water, nothing except to hear the word of Hashem.” Is the prophet saying that there will come a time in the future when there will be no more physical hunger and thirst? No. The prophet is talking about something spiritual – that in the future, people will not be concerned with their own spiritual “bread” and “water”, but instead people will want to hear the “word of Hashem” of the true reality, a dimension beyond any egoistic motivations.

When a person nullifies his soul garments, he will find that he desires a revelation of G-dliness upon the entire world, that it should fill every heart. This is the power to transcend our private “I” and enter into the collective.

Chazal say that “The son of David [a title for Moshiach] will not come until all coins (peratios) have been emptied from the wallet.” There is a well-known Chassidic explanation of this matter, heard from Eliyahu HaNavi, which understands the word “peratios” not as the simple context, which is “coins”, but rather as peratios, our “private” lives. In other words, Moshiach cannot come as long as there are people who only worry for their own selves. As long as there are people who only care about themselves and not about others, the great spiritual light of Moshiach will not be able to enter the world, because there is not yet a container that is fitting to hold it.

When a person’s “container” is too small, it cannot hold the great Infinite Light of Hashem. But when a person nullifies his private “I”, he becomes a container to hold the collective “I”, and then the Infinite Light can rest upon his container.

The Revelation of Moshiach

Thus, the avodah of a person is first to nullify the self and identify himself as part of the collective “I”, which can hold the light of the *Ein Sof*, and after that, to reveal the perspective of *havayah*.

On a deeper note, either of these stages cannot exist without each other; they must co-exist at the same time, or else they do not start. When the first stage is missing the second stage, then the first stage is still being done out of egoistic concerns. And although *havayah* exists, without revealing the true self, the understanding of *havayah* cannot shine.

Therefore, the correct approach is for one to remove himself from all movements, and then *havayah* is revealed as a direct result. When the movements are removed – and the root of all movement is *ratzon*\will – the reality of *havayah* is in turn revealed.

Many people do not get to their spiritual goals because they cannot identify themselves beyond their movements and soul garments. They aren't aware of *havayah*, that there is a deeper layer of reality and existence that goes beyond their soul garments.

There are people who want to return every Jew to teshuvah, but they are trapped in their limited perspective of how they view themselves. Although it's called "The *Baal Teshuvah* movement", it is missing the awareness to *havayah*, and it instead is focused on causing a spiritual "movement". The *Baal Teshuvah* movement cannot reveal *havayah*, because since it's all about creating a movement, it is already a degree of disparity. The goal which we need to have is one goal alone, one *havayah*. It is not about causing any movement, not in the personal sense and not in the communal sense.

We can now understand a statement of the Baal HaTanya, in the name of *Tikkunei HaZohar*²³: "If there will be any *tzaddik* who succeeds in returning another Jew to complete repentance, Moshiach would immediately come." There are explanations given to this matter, but along the lines of our discussion, it is as follows. If there is anyone in the world who arrives at an absolute understanding of *havayah*, that understanding would shine so strongly that the entire world would feel it, and then the world will be instantly ready for Moshiach.

Throughout the generations, there were always righteous individuals who reached *havayah* – as much as they tried to reach it. There was never yet anyone who reached it absolutely. Therefore, no *tzaddik* until now has been able to influence the entire world.

The one *tzaddik* who will be able to do is Moshiach, and he is the only one who will bring everyone back to *teshuvah*. But it will not be done in the simple sense like we understand, that all Jews will become *frum* again and keep Torah and mitzvos. The return to keeping all the mitzvos will become self-understood; people will realize it on their own. What Moshiach will do is return everyone to the viewpoint of *havayah*; this will give people a true self-recognition, that people will see that there is more to who they are than their various movements. No one will think of sinning, as a direct result.

This is what it means that Moshiach will return everyone to *teshuvah*; it will be an inner kind of *teshuvah*, and there will be no *teshuvah* greater than it.

²³ *Maamarei Admor HaZakein HaKetzarim*, p.403; *Tikkunei Zohar HaChadash: Noach: 145 with Peirush HaSulam*.

Beyond Choosing

The Sages revealed that if we merit it, Moshiach will come even before his time to come. If we don't merit, he will come at the time that he is destined to come at.²⁴

The redemption will not come due to our *bechirah* free will. When Moshiach comes, he will then get everyone to do *teshuvah* [whereupon it will be coming from our free will to choose the correct decisions].

If, however, we merit the arrival of Moshiach before his destined time, then we will have to choose on our own to do *teshuvah*, and Moshiach will not have to return us, because we will already be returned by the time he comes. But if we don't merit the early arrival of Moshiach, then it will be Moshiach who returns us. How?

There are two perceptions – *bechirah*, to choose with our free will, and *yediah*, to “know” clearly the truth without having to choose. As we live right now, *bechirah* is in the forefront, while *yediah* remains in the background. In the future, this will be turned around, and the light of *yediah* will shine and prevail over the understanding of our *bechirah*. Right now, we think that something we gain due to making the right decision is more praiseworthy than something we don't have to struggle to get. That is why we think that whatever we gain through our *bechirah* is more commendable than something which comes directly from Hashem without having to struggle for it, which is *yediah*.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* reveal that *Pesach Sheini* is more prominent than Pesach itself, because the *Pesach Sheini* was brought by those who were originally exempt from having to bring the *korbon pesach*, due to being ritually contaminated. Although they didn't have to bring the *korbon pesach* in the first place, they still wished to bring it, and therefore they brought the *Pesach Sheini* a month after Pesach. They chose to do so even though they could have walked away exempt. Understandably, those who brought the *Pesach Sheini* seem more virtuous than those who brought the original *korbon Pesach* on Pesach itself, for they were commanded so by the Torah.

This understanding, though, is only due to our current perspective. In the future, we will understand that Pesach itself is more prominent than *Pesach Sheini*, because we will realize that it is more praiseworthy to do Hashem's will than to choose to do so. *Yediah* will be more of a virtue than *bechirah*. It is reminiscent of the concept of *emunah* which great *tzaddikim* had, in which they were willing to serve Hashem as long as they knew they were doing Hashem's will.

This is the truthful level of serving Hashem – when one reaches the understanding that he all wants to do is be connected to Hashem, and as a direct result, he has no desire to deviate in the smallest way from Hashem's will. He doesn't even think of veering from Hashem's will, and he doesn't even want to, because he is totally attached with Hashem.

Furthermore, by a *tzaddik*, doing Hashem's will is his very pleasure in life. All he wants to do is remain and bask in the pleasure of Hashem's light, and he has no interest to descend to this physical world. But Hashem commands us to be on this world, for that is His will. The *tzaddik* does so,

²⁴ *Sanhedrin 98a*

submitting himself completely to Hashem's will, because he has *emunah*. He has *emunah* that if Hashem says to do it, I must do it, even though I have no pleasure in this.

This is the real praise of *tzaddikim*: they would rather remain in the spiritual realm and not have to deal with this world at all, but they descend from their pleasure in order to carry out Hashem's will. Moshe Rabbeinu is called "My servant"²⁵, because even though he was totally connected with Hashem, he was willing to descend from his perch and deal with the masses. He gave up his spiritual pleasure of basking with Hashem so that he can carry out Hashem's will and lead the people; that is the epitome of a "servant" of Hashem.

Incorporating The Reality of Hashem Into Life

The perspective of *havayah* [the deeper meaning of reality], is when a person uncovers a deeper part to reality that goes beyond doing the *mitzvos*. The higher and deeper meaning of reality, *havayah*, is all about basking in the reality of Hashem's existence, while the lower layer to reality, *adnus*, is about relating to Hashem as a Master, which requires us to do the *mitzvos*. So far, we have only explained what *adnus* is without *havayah* [when people are doing all the *mitzvos* and they are in touch with the various garments of the soul, but they are not connected to *havayah*].

[Now we will explain the other kind of problem – when there is *havayah* without *adnus*.] There are people who understand these concepts being described here, and they have worked on all of these concepts. They are connected to *havayah* – yet, they don't want to do the *mitzvos*! Such a person is basking in the great spiritual pleasure of *havayah*, but he neglects his aspect of *adnus*.

What a person needs to understand is that although *adnus*\doing the *mitzvos* is a lower plane than *havayah*, and although he is descending from the pleasure of *havayah* when he has to engage in *adnus*, still, this is exactly how he must serve Hashem. Our *avodah* is to integrate *havayah* and *adnus* together; we cannot remain with only our *adnus* and never reach *havayah*, but nor can we neglect our *adnus* if we have reached *havayah*.

A gentile doesn't understand that the two must be integrated. You can have a gentile who reaches an inner and spiritual kind of pleasure on this world, but then he wishes to totally disconnect from this world, and he cannot deal with reality on this world. The gentile is enjoying the spirituality so much that he won't give it up for anything.

Chazal say, "Greeting a guest is greater than greeting the *Shechinah*." This we learn from Avraham *Avinu*, who ran to go greet guests, even though Hashem was in middle of visiting him. The question on this is: How could Avraham *Avinu* leave the *Shechinah* and go greet these guests, who appeared to Avraham *Avinu* as lowly Arabs who served the dust of their feet? The *sefarim hakedoshim* answer that this act is precisely what revealed Avraham *Avinu*'s exalted level. Avraham *Avinu* was definitely giving up his enjoyment of being with the *Shechinah* to go and greet these guests; he was

²⁵ *Yehoshua* 1:2

willing to descend back to the physical and lowly earth and do Hashem's will and give up his great pleasure.

When a person sits in *hisbodedus*, he is surely more attached to Hashem than when he has to deal with the world. It is definitely more pleasurable to bask in closeness with Hashem than to have to go out to the world and do the *mitzvos*. This was Avraham's greatness, that he was willing to forego his great pleasure of closeness with Hashem, because he had *emunah* that it is Hashem's will to greet the guests.

Doing Hashem's Will Even Though We Don't Understand It

Thus, our avodah is to do whatever is required of us to do, for it is Hashem's will, even though we would have much more pleasure if we would simply bask in the knowledge of Hashem's existence all the time. Why does Hashem want it that way? For that, there is no answer. The *sefarim hakedoshim* write, "There is no reason for a *ratzon* (will)."

Even when we want things in our life, we don't know why we want them. A child asks his parents for money. Why does he want the money? So he can buy himself a candy. And why does he want the candy? Because it tastes good. And why does he want it to be tasty? We can keep probing further and further into why we want something, but there comes a certain point where we can't figure out what is causing us to want.

We don't know why it is that we want certain things. No reason can be given of why we want something. All we know is that if we get what we want, it is somehow good for us, because it will give us some pleasure. But we still don't know what is making us want certain things.

This is the meaning of "There is no meaning for a will." There are some desires we have in which we are of what is rooting them, but there is a root to all our desires which is unknown to us. How much more so does this apply to the *ratzon* of Hashem. Until a certain point, we can know what He wants, but at a certain point, we cannot know what His reason is. We have no comprehension of His root will.

Self-Awareness and Feeling Your Existence

We will now return to discussing how one can come too reach his inner self. It is clear that all people [and even some clever animals] can feel that they exist, and this can be done constantly. The only time that a person stops feeling his existence is if he goes through something stressful or if he's asleep. A person never feels another's existence as much as he feels himself as existing.

Feeling your existence, and being self-aware, are not the same thing. Sometimes a person is entire disconnected from self-awareness, such as if he's heavily involved with something that's noisy, or if he's in a very noisy place and he can't concentrate. There are always times in which we forget that we

exist; either it is because a person is involved with others, which is a good reason, or it is because he's self-absorbed in an evil thought, a bad reason.

No matter what the reason is, either way, we all have times in which we forget we exist. However, even in these moments, we can still feel that we exist, even though we have temporarily lost self-awareness. The only issue is whether is aware and attentive to reality or not.

We explained at length that we do not see *havayah* – the depth of reality - but rather sparks of *havayah*. It is therefore possible for a person for many people to look at the same thing yet see it from different perspectives. To illustrate, two people taste the same wine, and one of them says that it's horribly tasting, while another person considers it to be a fine wine. There is nothing in which any two people always see the same thing.

Thus, the perception of reality also depends on each person. Not everyone sees reality in the same way! When a person first hears this concept, this might sound very strange, but that is only because we think we know what reality is. When we begin to understand that whatever we see is only sparks of a deeper reality, and not reality *itself*, (*havayah*), we can then understand that what we think of as reality really depends on each person's particular mental capacity.

To illustrate what we mean, if a person would lose his sense of taste, he would feel as if he has lost a part of himself. His "I" is a spark of reality, and thus when he loses part of his "I", he feels that his entire reality has undergone a major change. Similarly, the *Gemara* says that a blind person is considered like a dead person.²⁶ This is because he has lost a certain part of his individuality if he cannot see. Of course, he knows that he hasn't lost his entire "I", even though he has never seen his "I" in the first place.

The truth is that now that he has become blind, he has a much greater chance of revealing his true self. But as far as the outer layers of his "I" goes, he has definitely lost a part of his "I".

Chazal state that sleep is a sixtieth of death²⁷; closing the eyes is a partial nullification of the "I", and this is true even when a person isn't actually asleep.

Reaching The Non-Ego State: Beginning With The "Yechidah" Level of The Soul

In the writings of the Arizal, it is brought that man [his soul] is comprised of five parts [beginning from highest to lowest]: *Yechidah*, *Chayah*, *Neshamah*, *Ruach*, and *Nefesh*. Below that are three layers [thought, speech and action], and below that is the physical body. When a person merits to reach his non-ego state and he identifies himself as part of a collective whole, he can only get there through accessing the deepest part of the soul, the "*Yechidah*."

²⁶ *Nedarim* 64b

²⁷ *Berachos* 57b

The lower levels of the soul cannot be used to get there, and therefore, Moshiach has not yet come. Moshiach can only come if there will be a *tzaddik* who reaches the non-ego state through all five layers of the soul – *Yechidah*, *Chayah*, *Neshamah*, *Ruach* and *Nefesh*; as well as the rest of the self, all the way down until the body. Even if a person reaches the collective *Yechidah*, if his body is still used only for his private purposes, he lives a contradiction. Just as the body and soul are opposites and they contradict each other, so does the private use of the body contradict the collective use of the soul.

In the current state of affairs, the *Yechidah* in each Jew is sustained from the one *tzaddik* in the generation who has reached the collective *Yechidah*. This *tzaddik* is affected in his entire being by the revelation of *Yechidah*, whereas the rest of the generation enjoys the rays of his *Yechidah*, but unlike that special *tzaddik*, they cannot enjoy it to its full extent, and therefore it doesn't affect every layer of their existence.

Not only that, but the *tzaddik* as well is somewhat harmed by the rest of the world's impurity, so his outer layers aren't as purified as his *Yechidah*. As for the rest of the world, their outer layers of their self are totally unaffected by the *Yechidah* of the *tzaddik*; [only their *Yechidah* is being sustained by the *Yechidah* of the *tzaddik*]. This is because most people never come into contact with their own *Yechidah*, and not as well with their own *Chayah* and *Neshamah*; in fact, even the *Ruach* is never reached by most people!

When most people come into contact with any spirituality, it remains outside of them, like a surrounding light, but it usually doesn't get absorbed into the person.

Therefore, even if a person reaches his non-ego state, the rest of his lower layers still feel ego-oriented, because the lower layers of a person's existence aren't able to have the perception of the *Yechidah*. So the *avodah* of a person is as follows.

First, a person should reveal his *Yechidah*. He should reach the point in which he feels himself as part of a collective whole, rather than as a private kind of existence [as explained previously in this chapter]. After that he can shine the light of that understanding onto the rest of his soul layers.

What we can notice from this is the following deep insight. It is impossible for a person to totally negate his sense of ego, because if he would, he wouldn't be aware of the self at all, and he wouldn't be able to begin becoming a part of the collective whole. When a person is working on himself to reach the collective state and leave his private state, there is obviously some attention being given to his private state, or else he would be perfect and there would be nothing to work with. So obviously, the collective aspect and the private aspect of a person must ultimately work together.

In summary: Man initially starts out by recognizing his private existence, and then he can transcend it by realizing that he is a part of a collective existence. If he gets to that point, he realizes that there is a higher part of himself that has reached a non-ego state, but there are still lower parts of himself which haven't gotten there yet. Then his *avodah* is to shine the light of that understanding upon the rest of his private existence.

The Five Parts of The Soul Are All One Unit

We will explain this now with even more clarity.

We need to define the concept that the soul has “five parts.” Don’t think that this is like a machine that has five gears going on inside of it. The soul is one complete unit, and its five layers are to be viewed as five levels of **perception**, towards the same thing.

To illustrate, the *halacha* is that when a person is informed that his father has died, he must say “*Baruch Dayan Emes*.” Yet, if he will inherit his father, he is also required to make the blessing of *Shebechiyanu*. If he will split the inheritance with other brothers, he makes a blessing of *HaTov V’Hamaitiv*.²⁸ How are we to understand this irony? At the very moment that a person must express profound sadness over his father’s death, he must also express a degree of joy over the fact that now he has inherited his father? How can our soul stand this contradiction?!

The answer is: There are different layers going on in the soul, and these “layers” are essentially different viewpoints on the same situation. The inner layers of the soul are less concerned about the ego and what it will gain, and it is the inner layers of the soul which express mourning over a deceased father. The outer layers of the soul, though, are thinking about the money, because the outer layers are ego-oriented. Because there is a part of his existence that is experiencing some joy, he must recite a blessing.

From this we can see the concept, that there can be one reality which is perceived through different viewpoints.

So if the *Yechidah* would be another “part” in the soul and it needs to be shined onto the other four lower “parts” of the soul, then it would mean that we have only have four parts to the soul, because the *Yechidah* nullifies itself to the Infinite Light, leaving us with the remaining four parts of the soul. But that is not the understanding, as we explained. The soul is one entity, and for this reason, the *Yechidah* is somewhat affected by the rest of the lower soul layers which haven’t been purified yet, which hampers the *Yechidah* from nullifying itself to the Infinite Light.

Only in the future, when the world receives its rectification, will all the layers in our soul connect to our *Yechidah*. Then, all of Creation will become integrated with the Creator, and the absolute unity will be achieved.

Simchas Torah: Integrating Your “I” With Hashem

The purpose of Creation is essentially that we all reach an absolute unity with the Creator. This is the reason why *Shemini Atzeres* comes after all the spiritual light and containers we have gotten from *Rosh HaShanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkos*, and *Hoshanah Rabbah*. In Eretz Yisrael, *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* are on the same day.

²⁸ *Orach Chaim* 223:2

The depth behind this is because the essence of *Simchas Torah* is that a person forgets about his ego. He takes his mind off the fact that he exists. [Therefore, it comes after all that we have built from Rosh HaShanah through *Hoshanah Rabbah*, so that we can now take our “I” and nullify it to Hashem].

“Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”; all of us are rooted in the Torah, because we were all hewn from there. On *Simchas Torah*, the depth of the joy is that on this day we can return our entire sense of existence to the original state of Before Creation, in which “I” did not exist at all.

So *Simchas Torah* is not merely a joy upon the fact that *learn* Torah; nor is it a joy upon the fact that we have *received* the Torah [that would be Shavuot]. It is a joy upon the fact that we have *finished* the Torah – and what does it mean to finish the Torah? It does not merely mean that someone finished the Torah from reading *Parshas Beraishis* until the end. It means that a person returns his existence to the Torah, that he identifies his point of origin in the *Torah*, from which he was indeed created from.

Everything was created from the Torah, and thus it is our avodah to return ourselves and to trace all of existence to the Torah. It is upon us to take our entire existence and return it to its root – the Torah that we are all created from.

That is how we “finish” the Torah – by returning our existence to the Torah, we “complete” the Torah.

The Torah begins with the letter *beis* and ends with the letter *lamed*, which forms the word *lev*, “heart.” This hints to us that the Torah is the heart of our existence. Just like the rest of the body is sustained by the heart and looks to the heart for support, so does our entire existence look to the Torah as the heart that sustains us.

5 | *Lulav In Our Heart*²⁹

Preface: The Torah Is Eternal, And Its Lessons Are Eternal

In *sefer Toldos*³⁰, it is brought many times a certain fundamental concept: whatever we find in the Torah is always applicable, no matter the time or place. Since the Torah is eternal, its lessons are not bound to any specific event or person; the lessons of the Torah are able to be applied to any soul, and we only need to learn how it can indeed apply to us in our situations.

Based on this fundamental concept, we can think into the laws of the *lulav* brought in the *Mishnah* in *Sukkah*³¹. Besides for how the laws of the *lulav* need to be carried out in the practical sense, these laws can teach us as well about our own *Avodas Hashem*.

A “Stolen Lulav”

The first law about *lulav* listed in the *Mishnah* is that a stolen *lulav* is disqualified to be used for the *mitzvah*. Simply speaking, the *Mishnah* is saying that a person does not fulfill the *mitzvah* of *lulav* with a stolen *lulav*.

But there is an inner meaning behind this as well, and in order to know it, we must understand what *lulav* is in an inner sense – the “*p’nimiyus*” (inner world) behind the *lulav*.

In the Zohar, it is stated that *lulav* comes from a combination of the words “*lo*” (“to him”) and “*lev*” (“heart”); this teaches that a person’s heart has to be “his” - a person needs to be in control of his heart.³² In other words, a person’s heart shouldn’t be swayed by the hearts of others – like when it comes to how we serve Hashem. The way we serve Hashem has to come from within us, an expression of our own individuality – and our *Avodas Hashem* should not be “stolen” from others.

In terms of our inner world, a stolen *lulav* means a stolen heart – and if our heart gets stolen by others, it is “disqualified”, just like a stolen *lulav* is disqualified. The soul of a person should not be “stolen.”

Let us explain what we mean.

Copying Another Person’s Avodas Hashem

²⁹ This chapter is adapted from the last chapter in *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Succos*.

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/succos-018-lulav-our-heart>

³⁰ A student of the Baal Shem Tov

³¹ *Sukkah*, 3:1.

³² This is stated openly as well in *Beraishis Rabbah* 34: 10.

Here is a question: There is a *minhag*³³ to shake the *lulav* in all four directions. When a person shakes *lulav* in the four directions, is he acting from within himself – or is he just copying what he sees other people doing?

There is a well-known story (with several versions) that once there was a *tzaddik* who would *daven* at the *kosel*, and when he came to certain parts of davening, he would move in a certain way. When he died, someone else took him over – and he would copy the movements of the *tzaddik* when he got to that part in davening. There was a *gadol* who would *daven* there in the *minyán* every day; but when he noticed that the new *baal tefillah* was copying the *tzaddik*'s movements, he stopped davening there.

The lesson from this story is that a person should not copy how another person serves Hashem.

Now let us think about our own situation. When we shake the *lulav*, it should be our own act of self-expression. But are we really doing it like that, or are we just moving our body when we do it – leaving our soul out of the equation?

We can compare this to a five year old child who comes to *shul*, and he wants to *daven*, but he doesn't know how. What does he do? He watches his older brother and imitates his body movements; when everyone stands, he stands, and when everyone sits, he sits. When they cover their eyes, he covers his eyes.

Acting like this resembles a stolen *lulav*. It's a stolen heart! When a person copies others' movements, and the movements are not his own – he is just being like a monkey, who can copy other people. When a person copies others' movements, his body may be moving – but his soul isn't.

Copying Is Really Stealing!

We can compare this to the following.

A person sees someone else on the street walking very fast, and he also begins to walk very fast. He catches up to him and is walking fast alongside him. Then, the first person reaches his house, walks inside, and shuts the door – while the second person is left standing on the street – after all, he can't walk into another person's house.

When we shake *lulav*, are we doing this from an inner place in ourselves, or are we just copying everyone else doing it?

During the rest of the year as well, a person subconsciously is copying other people's movements, and he isn't even aware of it. These movements are not his own. (Sometimes the person is aware of this, and sometimes he isn't). It's all just copying another person's body language. It seems as if there is nothing wrong with this; after all, he isn't copying anything that's bad. But when you think about it, to copy another person in any way is a form of stealing, and it has no value whatsoever in one's

³³ *custom*

personal *Avodas Hashem*. A person has to act from within himself – what he does has to come from his own self-expression. Otherwise, it resembles a stolen *lulav* – which is invalid for use.

A “Dry Lulav”

The Mishnah continues with another law: “A dry *lulav* is disqualified.” In the commentaries, there is a big discussion what is considered “dry”, but regarding us, we need to know what the inner implication of what a “dry *lulav*” is.

The *Talmud Yerushalmi*³⁴ states that a dry *lulav* is invalid because it is written, “*The dead do not praise Hashem.*” In other words, a dry *lulav* is considered to be like a dead *lulav*. “*The dead do not praise Hashem*” – but the live ones do. One must understand that shaking the *lulav* is a way to give praise to Hashem – a person praises the Creator for giving him the *mitzvah* of the four species.

On Yom Tov, there is a *mitzvah* to rejoice; “*And you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d*”. Although the possuk is describing the joy one had when he was in the *beis hamikdash*, it really applies to all *mitzvos*; all the *mitzvos* need to be done joyously. It is thus not enough just to take the four species and shake them; we find in *halachah* that the main time to shake them is by *halel*³⁵, because the main aspect of the *mitzvah* of the four species is to come to praise Hashem with them. “*The dead do not praise Hashem*”.

Acting By Rote

Thus, a person needs to ask himself the following. When he shakes the *lulav* as he says the words “*Hodu LaHashem, ki tov,*” does he truly feel gratitude to Hashem? If he does, his *lulav* is “alive” – and it’s valid for the *mitzvah*. But if he’s just saying the words and he doesn’t really mean it –as it is written, “*With his mouth and lips he honors Me, but his heart is far from me, and their fear toward me is like commandments learned by rote*”,³⁶ then his is among “the dead” who do not praise Hashem! Sure, a person can say the words of *halel*, but does he really feel a vitality in saying them? This is actually the ultimate question that sums up a person’s entire life.

Compare this to a person salivating over a delicious piece of food. When he’s eating, he feels a vitality in what he’s doing; he’s not just moving his body – he’s moving towards the food with vitality surging through his body. It’s enjoyable.

Now let’s go back to the person shaking *lulav* by *halel*. He’s moving, but is he feeling vitality from those movements? Is he doing it with *chiyus*? If he doesn’t feel a *chiyus* as he shakes *lulav*, he is like a dry *lulav*. His *lulav* might be alive and kosher for use of the *mitzvah*, but “*the dead do not praise*

³⁴ *Yerushalmi Sukkah 12b*

³⁵ *Sukkah 37b.*

³⁶ *Yeshayahu 29: 13*

Hashem.” The possuk here is coming to awaken a person that he shouldn’t be among those who are considered “dead” as they serve Hashem, those who don’t serve Hashem with *chiyus*.

It is not only the *lulav* that has to be alive, but the person holding it has to be “alive” as well! If a dry *lulav* is considered to be dead, surely a person has to be alive inside as he does the *mitzvah*. Nothing is more invalid than being dead – that’s why a dry *lulav* is invalid for the *mitzvah*.

A Lulav Used For “Idol Worship”

Let us continue with the help of Hashem and learn more of the inner dimension behind the *halachos* of *lulav*.

The Mishnah continues that a “*lulav of Asheirah* (a kind of idol worship) is disqualified for use of the *mitzvah*.” In our own heart as well, it’s possible for a person to resemble a *lulav* used for idol worship. As we brought from the Zohar, the word *lulav* comes from the word *lo* and *lev* – in other words, the heart of a person has to be “his”. Before, we said how this applies to shaking the *lulav* with *chiyus* – our hearts have to be in it. Now, we will deal with a different issue: the deep desires found in the heart of a person.

When you play the keys on a piano, it produces a harmonious sound. But if you pound on the keys, it sounds terrible. Our heart as well needs to produce the right sounds – in other words, what we say with our mouth has to match what’s on our heart.

When a person is sick, *rachmana litzlan*, he has a lot of *kavanah* when he davens *Refoeinu*. He is saying with his mouth what is true to his heart – he wants to be healed, and so he davens for this. But when a person davens *Hoshiva Shofteinu* (Return our judges), even if he is paying attention to the words he is saying, does he really desire in his heart that Hashem should return to us our judges?

This is the big question a person must ask himself: When I ask for something from Hashem, is that what I truly want in my heart? Or am I just saying it?

A Person Has To Want What He Does

Now we will explain how this applies to a “*lulav* used for idol worship.” The *Gemara* says, “A person should not hire himself for idol worship purposes, and he should not come to need people. What is idol worship? Anything which is strange to him.”³⁷ The *Gemara* there goes on to say that if someone had a prestigious job, such as a doctor, and now he needs money, he shouldn’t take the job of cleaning the streets to make money. If a doctor cleans the streets, the *Gemara* says, it’s like *avodah zarah* for him – it’s like idol worship, because he’s doing something that’s “strange” (*zarah*) for him to do. However, the *Gemara* says that it is permitted to take a job that’s beneath his dignity in order rather than become a beggar.

³⁷ *Bava Basra 110a*

When a person does something that isn't for him to do, his heart deep down is cringing at what he's doing. What he wants is contradicting what he's doing, and he suffers inside.

Now let's go back to a person doing a mitzvah: does he really want he's doing, or is it like a strange practice to him? Sure, his deeds seem to imply that he's serving Hashem. But what is he desiring in his heart? Is his heart filled with thoughts of holiness, with yearnings for Hashem and for His Torah and *mitzvos*? Or is his heart, *chas v'shalom*, so materialistic and affected by all kinds of negative influences?

When a person shakes *lulav* and he stirs his heart in the process, he increases the desires in his heart for holiness; but if he has negative desires in his heart, desires for strange things – then when he shakes *lulav*, it resembles a *lulav* used for idol worship. The shaking of the *lulav* will only increase the strange desires, and he will harm himself spiritually in the process. He resembles someone who shakes a *lulav* that's rotted and has a foul smell; as he shakes the *lulav*, the foul smell begins to fill the room. Instead of sanctifying himself through the *mitzvah*, he sinks lower into the impurity of his evil desires, *rachmana litzlan*.

An Adult With A Childish Heart

When a person has strange desires in his heart – desires that are not for *Avodas Hashem* – then when he shakes *lulav*, he's endangering himself and causing Heaven to examine his deeds. He's not having thoughts of gratitude to Hashem as he shakes *lulav*, and his heart is filled with various desires for other things.

We can compare this to a father who gives a treat to a child, and he tells the child, "You have to say thank you, and then I'll give it to you." The child, of course, says "Thank You", but it's without any true feeling of gratitude; he is thinking all about the treat. The father knows that the child doesn't mean it, and he'd rather not hear such a meaningless "Thank You"; the "Thank You" of the child does not increase the father's love toward him at all. It's an empty expression. But what can we expect from a child? We just hope from the child that he will mature one day, and that he will really want in his heart what he's doing and saying.

The same goes for an adult, who is mature on the outside – but inside, he's still like a child. A person can be a fully grown adult, yet he is still immature when it comes to *ruchniyus*. He must develop and mature his heart at some point. If he doesn't have a mature heart yet, he should still do as everyone else is doing; but he has to at least have a desire to mature. If he doesn't, then shaking the *lulav* awakens Heaven to judge him.

Thus, shaking the *lulav* only has meaning when one wants in his heart what he's doing and saying – when he's doing the *mitzvah* with *chiyus*. The *Gemara*³⁸ brings that in the Jerusalem of old, a person would leave his house holding the *lulav*, he would take it with him to *shul*, and he would hold it by *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei* ; and he would visit the sick or comfort the mourning as he

³⁸ *Sukkah 41b*

held his *lulav*. When he came to the *beis midrash* to learn, he would let his son or servant hold the *lulav* for him.”

Anyone who could take the *lulav* with him wherever he went obviously derived *chiyus* from the mitzvah of *lulav*. A person doesn't carry a sack of stones on his shoulder wherever he goes, because he doesn't get *chiyus* from this.

If the heart of a person wants other things than *Avodas Hashem*, the heart is getting *chiyus* from those other things, things that contradict holiness. Such a heart resembles a *lulav* used for idol worship – and it cannot get *chiyus* from the *lulav*.

“How Is Work Going...”

Let us reflect more into how far people can be from yearnings for holiness.

A person meets his friend in the street and asks him, “So, how's work going?”

His friend thinks that he is being asked about how he's doing financially. He answers, “Oh, *Baruch Hashem*; I'm making it by.” He never entertains a thought that maybe he was being asked about he's doing spiritually, how his *Avodas Hashem* is going...and why should he? After all, the main part of his life is his livelihood, his ambitions to make money, to pay his debts, to buy stuff for the house.

Now, if he would be getting his *chiyus* in life from *Avodas Hashem*, he would interpret his friend's question differently. He would hear a different question – and he would give a different answer. He would tell his friend about his successes – and his failures – in his *Avodas Hashem*.

Let's give another example. A person had a child who was sick, but *Baruch Hashem*, the child recovered. If someone meets him on the street and asks him, “What's new?” he is likely to answer about how his child got better, *Baruch Hashem*; he doesn't even think that maybe the person is asking how his *Avodas Hashem* is going. But who says that his friend was asking him about how his child is doing? Maybe he's asking him about how his spiritual situation is? A person hears what his heart is hearing – and his heart has *avodah zarah* dwelling in it. We don't mean real idol worship like they are still practicing today in India. We mean *avodah zarah* in the sense that “*avodah*” to the person doesn't mean “*Avodas Hashem*”, but how it's going at his workplace.

If someone's heart is clean from the strange desires, though, when he hears the word “*avodah*”, he hears it in terms of *Avodas Hashem*, not in terms of “work”.

Maybe he can tell the person, “Oh, you are asking about how my *Avodas Hashem* is going...?”

The asker might of course respond, “No, I'm not asking how your *Avodas Hashem* is going. I meant to ask how your *job* is going.”

Hopefully, the other person will respond – “Ah, you are referring to the curse placed on Adam – “*By the sweat of your brow you shall have to eat bread...*”

“How Was Your Yom Tov?”

A person has to pay attention to the whole orientation of the way he is living his life.

We can give another example of what we mean. A person is asked by his friend, “So, how was your Yom Tov?”

What does the person respond? “I went on this trip and that trip. I visited my parents and my in-laws; etc.” He never thinks that maybe he was being asked about how elated he felt from the Yom Tov, like if he fulfilled the *mitzvah* of rejoicing on Yom Tov.

Of course, we don’t mean that one shouldn’t visit his parents, and we do not mean to say that it is forbidden to plan any activities throughout *Chol HaMoed*. What we are trying to get at here is: how is a person going through his life - what is his attitude? Is a person living his life for *Avodas Hashem*? In the depths of a person’s heart, does he really value *Avodas Hashem*? Is it a priority by him?

As we said before, *Lulav* is a combination of the words *lo* (his) and *lev* (heart) – a person’s heart has to be involved in a life of *Avodas Hashem*; he has to have a real heart, and not a heart full of extraneous desires - not to have a heart that resembles idol worship.

Lulav From A “Condemned City”

The Mishnah continues that a *lulav* which comes from an *ir nidachas* (a city condemned to be burned, due to a majority population of idol worshippers) is invalid for use of the *mitzvah*. The previous case of the Mishnah also dealt with a *lulav* used for idol worship, but there is a difference. In the previous case of the Mishnah, a *lulav* of *Asheirah* idol worship, the problem was with the individual who holds the *lulav*. In the case of a *lulav* from a condemned city, the problem is with the general population as a whole.

This problem can be seen with the superficiality of the public. If the headlines on the newspapers say, “People are working hard”, it is always talking about jobs, and never about the “hard work” of *Avodas Hashem*.

Our Physical Heart and Our Spiritual Heart

To give an example of what we mean, let’s say we ask a person, “Is your heart okay?” the usual answer will be, “*Baruch Hashem*, I don’t get heart attacks.”

However, the question “Is your heart okay?” can have a whole new meaning to it than what we are used to.

In the right chamber of our heart is our *yetzer tov* (good inclination), and in the left chamber of our heart resides our *yetzer hora* (evil inclination).³⁹ So when someone asks another how his heart is, the real question should be: “What kind of struggles are taking place in your heart between good and evil?”

Of course, we are not suggesting that everyone respond in the like. But what we mean is that unfortunately, no one is asking about another person’s spiritual situation, about what’s really going on in his heart. People only ask each other “Is your heart okay?” only when something scary happens, like a heart attack. It is rare for a person to meet someone and ask him, “How much evil have you managed to expel from your heart? How much has your *yetzer tov* overpowered your *yetzer hora*?”

The Torah teaches us that “*the inclination of a man is evil from his youth.*” When a person becomes 20, or 40, or 60, or 80 years old – has his heart changed at all?? Where is his head at, where is his heart at? Has he even begun to be among “the righteous, whose hearts are in their control, in contrast to the wicked, who are controlled by their hearts”⁴⁰?

A Lulav With Its Tip Chopped Off

The next law in the Mishnah is that a *lulav* with a chopped off head\tip is invalid for the *mitzvah*. In the soul of a person, there can also be a “chopped off head” as well.

When the *lulav* grows on the date tree, its leaves are pointed upwards. Since it grows upwards, one has to shake the *lulav* with its tip pointed upwards, because the *halachah* is that the *lulav* has to be shaken in the way it is grown.⁴¹ If a person shakes the *lulav* and it is pointed downwards, he hasn’t fulfilled the *mitzvah*.

The *sefer Bikkurei Yaakov*⁴² asks the following interesting question: If a *lulav* grew in Eretz Yisrael, and its owner is holding it in a different country, must he hold it turn it upside down, so it can face Eretz Yisrael?

From the viewpoint of our inner world, it is simple why we cannot turn the *lulav* upside down. A person has to go upwards in *Avodas Hashem*, not downwards. All of the *mitzvos* are here to elevate a person. The inner reason why a *lulav* has to be shaken with its tip pointed upwards is because it has to be shaken “in the way it grows” – in other words, the *mitzvah* of *lulav* is to elevate a person upwards.

A *lulav* grows sharper as it grows more and more upwards. This hints to growth in *Avodas Hashem*, how one has to be like “*a tzaddik, who blossoms like a date tree.*” Everyone has some growth, but most people reach a certain point where they stop growing. A few rare individuals reach the

³⁹ Zohar, Terumah 162b; see Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 9.

⁴⁰ Beraishis Rabbah, 34: 10

⁴¹ Sukkah 45b

⁴² Bikkurei Yaakov, Hilchos Sukkah, 651.

sharpest, uppermost point. However, every person at least has to have an aspiration to get to the highest level.

There is a very big difference between those who aspire to get to the top to those who never aspire to get there. If someone doesn't have any desire whatsoever to aspire for the highest levels in *Avodas Hashem* – if he doesn't believe in himself at all that it's possible for him to get there – he resembles a *lulav* with a chopped off tip.

People with high aspirations are often dubbed “delusional” and “unrealistic”, but this is a mistake. There can be such a problem in which a person is delusion in *Avodas Hashem* and acts unrealistic, but when we say that one has to have high aspirations, we do not mean to be delusional. We mean for one **to know exactly at what level he is at, yet at the same time he is aware that he has a higher purpose than where he stands.** A person can always be growing spiritually – like “*a tzaddik, who blossoms like a date tree.*” A person can have his ups and downs, but he should always be moving toward his goal. One needs to have an ambition to get to the highest level he can reach in *Avodas Hashem*.

We do not know if we will indeed get to the highest level possible, and we know how difficult this will be. We can daven and cry to Hashem that we reach it.

If someone doesn't have high aspirations in *Avodas Hashem*, he resembles a *lulav* with a chopped off tip. He has no aspiration to get to the goal – so he won't get there.

There is a very big difference between someone who aspires to get to the top – even though he's far from it – to someone who has no aspiration whatsoever to get there.

We Must Have A Desire Human Perfection

When a person has no aspiration whatsoever for human perfection, this is really the greatest sin possible! He is going against the whole purpose of Creation in thinking so, because the purpose of Creation is so that people should perfect themselves. Thus, a person shouldn't feel broken-hearted if he's not perfect yet; one has to know that it takes a lot of work to get to perfection.

One can know that although he's not at perfection yet, he still believes that he can get there – he can definitely get there, with hard work. There is a hope that must always be alive in a person's heart: that it is possible for him to reach the greatest human perfection, because since we all believe firmly that the purpose of Creation is to perfect ourselves, it must be that it is possible for us to perfect ourselves.

When a person doesn't have aspirations, he harms himself a lot in another way than what we have said so far. Reb Yisrael Salanter said on himself: “I aspired to become like the Vilna Gaon – and therefore I became Reb Yisrael Salanter. If I would have aspired to become Reb Yisrael Salanter, I never would have become who I am today.” In other words, a person reaches much more perfection when he aspires for it, than when he doesn't aspire for it.

If a person is always saying, “I know that it’s impossible for me to reach the ultimate perfection”, such a statement ices him up inside from spiritual growth, like an evil Amalek within. It’s a lukewarm feeling toward *Yiddishkeit* – a lethargic attitude of “Hard enough just to be on an average level of *Yiddishkeit*.” Of course, we all know that not everyone can be *tzaddikim* – that’s reality – but when a person says “*I’ll never be a tzaddik*,” it’s a different story; he’s harming himself a lot by saying this! He’s denying the purpose of Creation, which is to come to human perfection.

The Ponovozher Rov zt”l had an idea once to open up a yeshivah for intellectually gifted students. The Chazon Ish did not agree with his idea, and he told him as follows: “Every person has to believe that he is an excellent student. If you open up a yeshiva that is exclusively for the best students, you are basically sending a message to boys who aren’t in this yeshiva that they are hopeless.”

We Aspire For Perfection Although We Cannot Reach It Through Our Human Efforts

Yet, there is a fundamental point to bear in mind with all this. We must know that we cannot ever achieve human perfection through our human efforts alone. The Mishnah in *Avos*⁴³ states, “The task is not upon you to finish, nor are you exempt from it.” A person has to do whatever he can to reach perfection, but to actually get there is a gift from the Creator. Of this, it is written, “*I toiled, (thus) I found.*”⁴⁴ After a person tries his hardest – then he can “find”; he receives the spiritual growth as a gift from Hashem. This is the way of the Torah – try your hardest, and then, you will “find.” But without trying, a person will definitely never “find.”

The *lulav* represents how we must try to reach the pinnacle of growth – from the way the leaves are designed, getting sharper and sharper upwards until they reach the highest, sharpest point. With a person’s own abilities, he cannot reach perfection, and therefore, perfection is not demanded of us. But what is demanded of us is that we must aspire for perfection – to try our hardest!

There are people who are very disoriented in their *Avodas Hashem*. They are trying to go way above their level in how they act, yet their aspirations are only to aim for a mediocre level.

There Are Levels To Perfection

One’s *Avodas Hashem* should be clear to him. On one hand, we need to aspire for the greatest perfection. On the other hand, we must not act too much above our current level. A person has to know that it is not considered being delusional to aspire for high levels; the higher levels are able to become realized. We do not know when those aspirations will finally be realized – we have been waiting for this for at least 5770 years, and we still haven’t reached our perfection yet. But in the

⁴³ *Avos* 2: 16

⁴⁴ *Megillah* 6b

end, we will get there. Our faith that we will get there is represented by how the *lulav* must have its tip intact.

One must also bear in mind that there are levels to perfection. A person can reach a certain level of perfection, and upon acquiring that, it is now upon him to aspire for even higher perfection.

Stages In Life

We can compare this to our life stages. When a person is a child, the perfection which he strives for is his *bar mitzvah*. Later on in life, he needs to reach higher perfection – a man is like “half a body” until he gets married. After he gets married, he needs to acquire more perfection by becoming a father to his children.

When it comes to *Avodas Hashem*, one has to strive for a certain area of perfection, and then upon reaching that, there is more. A person has to keep perfecting himself more and more until he reaches the greatest perfection – a total *d'veykus* (attachment) with Hashem. A person who does the *mitzvos* properly, who learns Torah in the way he should, whose entire heart is involved with serving Hashem – such a person will find the great connection to Hashem there. All other areas of perfection are only partial perfection in comparison to this.

Realistic Aspirations

Compare the difference between the weeks with the months of the year, and the months of the year with the year as a whole. A week is complete in and of itself, but when you compare it to the month, it is missing. A month is complete to itself, but in comparison to the year as a whole, it is missing. Each year is only a seventh of *shemittah*, and *shemittah* is only a seventh of *yovel*.

All areas of perfection we know of are only in partial areas, but we must aspire for the complete and ultimate perfection.

Many people think that someone with high aspirations is being delusional, and that he's a bit mentally unstable. After all, everyone knows that mentally ill people are disconnected from reality. Aspirations in *Avodas Hashem* indeed need to be done right; we need to avoid becoming disconnected from reality.

How can we avoid this problem?

A person has a two-fold job. On one hand, a person has to be fully aware of the level he is at, and he needs to be painfully honest with himself. He should be aware of his qualities – as well as his weak areas. He has to be aware that he is really very far from perfection. Yet, this shouldn't kill a person's hopes – not even for a moment. This is how the Torah tells us to reach perfection. A person can't reach perfection through his human efforts – “it is not upon you to complete the task.” One has to do his best, according to his ability. The rest is all a gift from Hashem.

Our human actions will never bring us to perfection, but we have to try our best, according to our ability – that is what we can do; Hashem does the rest (after we try our hardest).

“I’m Realistic.”

This point, because it is not understood by many, causes a lot of people to make a grave mistake. People slacken off from trying to perfect themselves, because they do not believe in having high aspirations. This really stems from a lack of belief in why we were created - and we were created to perfect ourselves.

Already at the beginning of time, man already slackened off from perfection. Had Adam not sinned, he would have gone straight into the ultimate Shabbos of Creation, and the greatest perfection of man would have been reached. But he failed the test, and ever since, the way to get back to our perfection has become very long. Yet, in the end we will get there again, and it will not happen later than the year 6,000. Man will then once again become perfected.

The aspiration to reach perfection is often not alive within most people. This is usually because people feel, “I’m very realistic.” People are painfully aware of their deficiencies – “*A heart knows the bitterness of its soul*”⁴⁵ – and therefore they give up on reaching that perfection, resembling a *lulav* whose tip has been chopped off. They are missing that ladder of growth which is “*footed on the earth, but its head reaches the heavens.*”⁴⁶

When a person is missing the aspiration for ultimate perfection, he is denying the purpose of why we were created. People excuse themselves by saying, “It’s enough if we just settle with who we are; we should just be happy the way we are.”⁴⁷ Although it is true that a happy person is one who is “happy with his lot⁴⁸,” that is only if someone really believes with *emunah* that he will indeed have everything in the end, and he trusts that Hashem will help him get there.

If one really has this trust in Hashem, it doesn’t matter to him what his current level is – and he is like a *lulav* with its tip intact.

A Lulav With Severed Leaves

The next *halachah* in the Mishnah is that a *lulav* with severed leaves is invalid. *Rashi* explains that the leaves have become separated from the spine, and there is nothing connecting them.

However, we can ask: What is the problem here? Just tie it together with something and it will be considered connected!

⁴⁵ *Mishlei 14: 10*

⁴⁶ *Beraishis 28:12*

⁴⁷ See *Mesillas Yesharim, chapter 4.*

⁴⁸ *Avos 4:1*

It must be, however, that since the leaves are separated from the spine, they can no longer be sustained by the nutrients of the spine. They might be able to survive independently without the spine of the *lulav*, but the Torah requires that the leaves of the *lulav* get its vitality from the spine.

In terms of our soul, this applies as follows.

Are We Connected To Our Mitzvos?

A person does many wonderful things, but he has to ask himself how connected he is to them. When a person does a *mitzvah*, does he feel like it's his very life – or is he just forcing himself to do the *mitzvah*?

When a person eats his food, he feels very connected to it. He knows he's getting vitality from the food. When a woman puts on perfume to go to a wedding, she feels very connected to her perfume and gets a vitality out of it. What about when a person puts on *tefillin*? Does he feel connected to the act?

Is *Tefillin* just being worn on us – or is the person wearing the *Tefillin*? If one is just wearing his *Tefillin* as a superficial act, he resembles a *lulav* whose leaves have been severed. He is doing everything he is supposed to do, but he's not getting vitality out of what he does.

You can have a person who does everything he is supposed to – he has all his “leaves” – but he is lacking a connection to what he does. *Chazal* refer to this problem as “His wisdom is more than his deeds.”⁴⁹ He might have been taught all the *mitzvos* or he has read about them in the sefarim, and he knows that one who doesn't do the *mitzvos* goes to Gehinnom...so he forces himself to do the *mitzvos*.

He never grows from the deeds he's performing.

We can compare this to a father who cares for his child's physical needs, feeding him and clothing him and buying him toys – but he doesn't feel a connection in his heart toward the child. He is missing the natural love and warmth that a father is supposed to have toward his child, and the child feels this.

It's easy to imagine what the child is going to look like – he will grow up very sad. Such a father, who gives everything his child needs physically – but not emotionally – gives to the child only because he is afraid of what will be after 120, when he stands in front of the Heavenly court.

He won't even be rewarded, though, for even what he has given to children – he neglected his children emotionally with the excuse that he gives to them all their physical needs, so all of his giving will be worthless when he comes to Heaven.

⁴⁹ *Avos* 3: 9

A Lulav With Spread Out Leaves

The next *halachah* in the Mishnah is that a *lulav* with spread out leaves is kosher, *b'dieved*; it is not invalid, but it's not the best thing either. It's not *mehudar*.⁵⁰ When the leaves of the *lulav* are spread out, they are pointing in all directions, and the leaves of the *lulav* are supposed to all point to one direction.

In terms of our soul, this applies as follows.

Sometimes a person is in general heading towards the right direction in life. He knows in general what his purpose in life is, why he lives – and he is beginning to steer himself in that direction. But slowly more and more, as he is actively pursuing this goal, he gets caught up in various deeds which deter him from the goal.

Let us give of a more specific example of what we mean. A person opens up a *chessed* organization – he is motivated to do kindness, to resemble Hashem who is kind and merciful. He truly had good intentions when he started the organization. The money begins to pour in, and he distributes the money to those in need. But as more and more money comes in, he slowly begins to feel, “What’s wrong if I make a little money here in the process....”

It’s a well-known fact. Many people who started *chessed* organizations ended up taking some of the donations for themselves; they couldn’t help it. They caved in due to the pressures they never dreamed it would entail, and decided to pocket some of the money from the donors. Some of these people even pocketed a little money here and there so that their daughter can go on her dream vacation. The person diverged from his original goal of doing *chessed* – due to all sorts of pressures, of course. Yet, in spite of all this corruption, those very same *chessed* organizations continue to exist – and people are happy that these organizations are still around to provide them with relief...

“They Seek Many Calculations”

How does one fix this “spread out *lulav*” in himself? The answer is as we continue the words of the Mishnah. Rabbi Yehudah says that it should be tied from the upper part. In actual *halachah*, we do not practice this; but let us understand Rabbi Yehuda’s solution to the spread out *lulav*.

The inner meaning behind Rabbi Yehuda’s words is that when it comes to one’s *Avodas Hashem*, a person has to take all his weaknesses and connect them all together, giving direction to them. Sometimes this is feasible, but sometimes the weaknesses have “spread out” so much that it cannot be fixed in the regular way, and the only solution is to start over again from scratch.

If a person started out something with good intentions, and he had an earnest desire for something worthy – but along the way, his personal interests swayed him a little – what he can do is attempt to return to the original, straight path which he set for himself. He should remember where

⁵⁰ Halachically “beautiful”

he came from – and to where he is going. He must not let other personal interests sway him from his goal.

The spine of the *lulav*, naturally, is straight. A person as well is created straight-minded, as the possuk says, “*G-d made man upright.*”⁵¹ But when the leaves of the *lulav* spread out, it resembles the end of the possuk: “*And they seek many calculations.*” The “many calculations” (*cheshbonos rabim*) in a person are his *negios* – his personal interests that sway him from the goal.

Yaakov *Avinu* was able to deal with Lavan and even act suave with him without getting affected by this. But not everyone can be like Yaakov *Avinu*. People have to lie sometimes to the government, and this presents a danger to our souls. (It is said of the Brisker Rov that he was against joining the Knesset, not because of the Satmar Rebbe’s reason, but because being on the government negatively affects the purity of one’s soul.)

Lulav of the Har HaBarzel⁵²

The next *halachah* in the Mishnah is that the *lulav* which grows on the *Har HaBarzel* is kosher. However, the *Gemara*⁵³ says that it depends on how the leaves grow. If the bottom leaf is covering a little bit of the leaf above it, it is kosher; but if the lower leaf does not come at all over the leaf above it, it is invalid, because then the leaves are totally disconnected.

Let us think about how this applies to our own soul.

The leaves of the spine on the *lulav* represent a person’s offspring – what comes out of a person. The leaves of the *lulav* don’t always stay united with each other, like we see in the case of the *lulav* of *Har HaBarzel*. A person’s children as well don’t always stay connected; we see that siblings live all over the world. When families are disconnected from each other, it resembles the *lulav* of the *Har HaBarzel* – which is invalid (in the case where the leaves are totally disconnected).

(In other words, whatever “results” from a person is ideally supposed to be connected – such as our *mitzvos*. Our *mitzvos* have to all become connected in one unit, not just as separate acts that we do.)

*Chazal*⁵⁴ state that even the emptiest Jew contains as much *mitzvos* in him as the amount of seeds in a pomegranate. There is a famous question on this *Chazal*: If even the most wicked Jews are full of *mitzvos*, why then are they considered “empty”? Even more so, the *Malbim*⁵⁵ points out that a pomegranate can contain 613 seeds, the amount of all the *mitzvos*. If even the worst Jew is full of the 613 *mitzvos*, why then are they called “empty”?

51 *Koheles* 7: 29

52 “Iron Mountain”, an area in Eretz Yisrael in which the *lulav* grew in an unusual shape.

53 *Sukkah* 32a

54 *Berachos* 57a

55 *Malbim, Shir HaShirim* 4: 13

Rov Dovid Povarsky zt”l⁵⁶ answered that in a pomegranate, all the seeds stand separate from each other, and that is why wicked people are called “empty”, even though they are full of *mitzvos*. There is no connection between all the *mitzvos* they do. They are not “one piece”.

Such people resemble the *lulav* of *Har HaBarzel*, whose leaves do not overlap each other – leaves that are disconnected from each other.

Designating Our Heart Towards Hashem

When we daven for rain on Sukkos, in the *Tefillas Geshem*, we mention how Yaakov *Avinu* was a “*yichad lev*” – one whose heart was designated totally for Hashem.

Let us ask ourselves: Is our heart dedicated toward Hashem?

The *Gemara*⁵⁷ says that if one sees a *lulav* in a dream, it is a sign that “he only has one heart, towards his Father in Heaven.” This hints to what we mentioned earlier, that *lulav* is a combination of the words *lo* and *lev*; that one’s heart has to be “his”, that he’s in control of his heart, directing it towards fulfilling the will of Hashem. If someone is in control of his heart’s desires, he is called someone who “only has one heart, towards his Father in Heaven.” But if someone is being controlled by the various passions of his heart, it cannot be said of him that he has only one heart towards his Father in Heaven.

Similarly, the *Gemara*⁵⁸ says that a *lulav* comes from a date tree, because “just as a date tree has only one heart, so does the Jewish people have only one heart, towards their Father in Heaven.”

There is a *Gemara*⁵⁹ that says that “before a person eats and drinks, he has two hearts; after he eats and drinks, he only has one heart.” Simply, this is because when a person hasn’t eaten yet, he is hungry and thus he is anxious. After he eats, he is calmer.⁶⁰ But we can give another explanation: the *Gemara* is referring to spiritual food and drink. Before a person “eats” and “drinks” spiritually, he has two hearts – his *yetzer hora* and his *yetzer tov* are fighting. After he is satisfied spiritually, the *yetzer hora* subsides, and the person remains with only one heart – a heart designated for Hashem.

The *yetzer hora*, who resides in the heart of a person, is essentially the various desires in a person that are extraneous. A person’s various *retzonos* (desires\passions) are responsible for causing a disconnect in one’s *mitzvos*, that they shouldn’t be all one unit. Instead of resembling a *lulav* of “*lo*” and “*lev*” together – “his heart” – he resembles a different meaning of “*lo lev*”: “no heart”!

When a person likes different things – he likes music, candies, trips, etc. – there is nothing binding together all these desires. They are just a bunch of random desires. But when a person has

⁵⁶ *Rosh Yeshivas Ponovozeh.*

⁵⁷ *Berachos 57a*

⁵⁸ *Sukkah 45b*

⁵⁹ *Bava Basra 12b*

⁶⁰ *Rabbeinu Gershon and Rashbam, ibid.*

only “one heart” – a heart devoted towards Hashem – he knows how to utilize everything he likes to bring him to one central point. He is like a *lulav* of “*lo* and “*lev*”, “his heart”, and not a *lulav* of *lo lev*, “no heart.”

The *Rokeiach* says a hint in the Torah how we see that *lulav* comes to unify all of a person’s desires for Hashem. The first letter of the Torah is *beis*. The last letter of the Torah is *lamed*. The first letter of *Navi* is a *vov*, and the last letter of *Navi* is *lamed*. This spells the word *lulav*. If so, *lulav* unifies the entire Torah (and *Navi*) together.

The same goes for someone who only has “one heart towards his Father in Heaven.” To him, all of the Torah is one piece.

Having One Heart – Only One Desire

We shake the *lulav* in four directions, as well as up and down. Why do we shake it up and down as well? We can compare this to someone building a structure, with four sides. Just having four walls will not be enough – he needs a roof and a floor as well. The roof and the floor are what connect the four walls together.

A *lulav* which grows on the *Har HaBarzel* represent a lack of connection between the *mitzvos*. Each leaf is separated from the one on top of it. It might be kosher, but we are supposed to have a *lulav* which is *mehudar* – a beautiful *lulav*. Only a beautiful *lulav*, which does not contain any of the deficiencies taught in this Mishnah, represents the revelation of the purpose of Creation. Hashem chose us and gave us the Torah; the first letter of the Torah is *beis*, and the last letter of the Torah is *lamed*. This spells the word *lev* – heart.

May it be the will of Hashem that He help us receive the Torah in the inner depths of our heart, that we merit to have only one heart – that our whole desire should be just one desire alone: to do the will of our Father in Heaven.⁶¹

⁶¹ To reveal your inner will, see *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. 4, Chapters 15-22.

6 | Separating From “Erev Rav”⁶²

Understanding The Depth Behind Hoshanah Rabbah

On Sukkos, we take four species⁶³, one of which is the *aravos*⁶⁴. The *aravos* serve two purposes. They are part of the four species, and they are also used as “*hoshanos*”⁶⁵ [the additional pair of willow branches that we take on the day of *Hoshanah Rabbah*]. On the seventh day of Sukkos, *Hoshanah Rabbah*, in the *Beis HaMikdash*, we would circle the *Mizbeiach* (Altar) seven times and then bang the *Hoshanos* on the side of the Altar. There is an argument in the *Gemara* if the *Hoshanos* were shaken along with the other Four Species or not. Sukkos is for 7 days. The 7th day of Sukkos, though, is different than the other days of Sukkos entirely; it is a day that is all about the *Aravos**Hoshanos*. We would circle the Altar for 7 times on the 7th day of Sukkos with the *hoshanos*, and it had special *halachos*.

The 7th day of the week is Shabbos, which comes after the 6 days of the week. Shabbos is from the word *shevisah*, to rest, and it is also called *yom hashvii*, the seventh day. We have Shabbos and we have the three festivals; Shavuos is one day, while Pesach and Sukkos both have a seventh day. What is the difference between the 7th of Pesach and the 7th of Sukkos, though? The 7th day of Pesach is a Yom Tov, whereas the 7th day of Sukkos is *Hoshanah Rabbah*, which is not a Yom Tov; as we see that we may perform work on *Hoshanah Rabbah*. It has some *halachos* similar to Yom Tov⁶⁶, but it does not have the status of an actual “Yom Tov”.

Shabbos is called “*shvii*” (the seventh), and it is also called “*zecher l’maaseh Beraishis*”, a remembrance of the act of Creation. Where else do we find the concept of “*shvii*” in time? We find a concept of *shvii* on Pesach and Sukkos, which each have 7 days of Yom Tov. But there is a difference: On Pesach, the seventh day is a Yom Tov, whereas the seventh day of Sukkos is not a festival like Shabbos or Yom Tov. The 7th day of Sukkos, *Hoshanah Rabbah*, therefore, reveals an entirely novel concept to us.

Gentiles and Sukkos

The *Gemara* states that a non-Jew who keeps Shabbos is liable to the death penalty⁶⁷. Shabbos is called the “inheritance of the Jewish people”, which the gentiles have no connection with, and

62 <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/succos-038-separating-erev-rav>

63 *Lulav* (palm branch), *esrog* (citron), *hadadim* (myrtle branches), and *aravos* (willow branches)

64 Willow branches; “*aravos*” is plural for “*aravah*”

65 On the seventh day of Sukkos, which is called *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we bang five *Aravos* on the ground after we recite *Halel* and *Hakafos*.

66 See *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim* 664 and *Mishnah Berurah* *ibid*.

67 *Chagigah* 13a

therefore, they have no right to keep it. But what about Yom Tov (the festivals”) - do the gentiles have connection with any of our festivals?

With Pesach and Shavuot, we see clearly that gentiles have no connection to these festivals. Pesach is about the redemption from Egypt, in which the Jewish people were made into the nation of Hashem, which clearly has nothing to do with gentiles. Shavuot is about the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people; it also has nothing to do with the gentiles. When it comes to the festival of Sukkos, however, we find that the gentiles do have some kind of connection with it.

1) First of all, the 70 *korbonos* brought on Sukkos are parallel to the 70 nations of the world, as the *Gemara* said. This was not merely to ward off the impurity of the nations. It shows us that they have some connection to Sukkos, because if they would have no connection to Sukkos, then there would be no need to have the 70 *korbonos* on Sukkos!

2) A second proof is that it is brought in the book of *Zechariah*⁶⁸ that gentiles in the future who brought *korbonos* will merit to rejoice in Yerushalayim. So we see that gentiles can have a connection with Sukkos.

3) Even more so, the *Gemara*⁶⁹ states that the gentiles will want reward in the future, and Hashem will give them an “easy *mitzvah*” – *sukkah* - which they won’t be able to keep. This hints to us that gentiles do have some connection with Sukkos. Hashem will allow the gentiles to enter the *sukkah* on Sukkos, so it must be that they do have some connection to it.

4) Our Sages state that each of the festivals are parallel to one of our *Avos*. Sukkos is parallel to Avraham *Avinu*, for Avraham had the Clouds of Glory, and the Sukkos are in remembrance to the Clouds of Glory. Sukkos is also parallel to Yaakov *Avinu*, who made Sukkos (huts) when he camped. Of Yaakov the possuk says, “*U’lmikeneihu, asah sukkos*”, that when he camped, he made *sukkos* huts for his family. The Sages state that the gentiles in the future will serve the Jewish people, so we see that they will connect with us. The *Gemara* states that the Jewish people are called *adam* (man), while gentiles are not called *adam*; if they are not *adam*, what are they? They are called “*miknehu*” (possessions), for in the future, they will become the possessions/servants of the Jewish people. The concept of *sukkah* is connected with the possuk “*U’lmikneihu, asah sukkos*”, thus, once again we see that there is some connection between *sukkah* and gentiles.

5) Furthermore, the Zohar says that the three guests who came to Avraham were told to wait under the “shade” of the tree, and this alludes to the “shade” of the *sukkah*, so again we see that gentiles have a connection with *sukkah*.

The question is, though: What do gentiles have to do with the *sukkah*?

When the guests came to Avraham *Avinu*, the Midrash says that they looked like “*aravayim*”, Arab nomads. The word *aravayim* is from the word “*aravah*”.

⁶⁸ One of the books of “*Trei Asar*” of the Prophets.

⁶⁹ *Avodah Zarah* 3a

From all the four species, the *aravah* is considered the least important [as the Sages compare the *esrog* and *lulav* and *hadasim* to the righteous, and the *aravos* are compared to the wicked]. Yet, although the *aravah* is the least prominent, it is still part of the Four Species; it can connect to the other species and become lifted together with them.

If gentiles have a connection with *sukkah*, it must mean that they also have a connection with the Four Species. This we can see from *Aravos*. *Aravos* have no taste and no smell, as *Chazal* say; they are parallel to the wicked people of the world. Yet, we take the *aravos* with the Four Species in one *agudah* bundle and we shake all of them together, so that the *aravos* can become rectified.

Thus, we see that the nations of the world (represented by the *aravos*) are able to connect themselves to the Jewish people.

Hoshanos\Aravos and “Erev Rav”

Sukkah is called “a remembrance of the redemption from Egypt”. When we left Egypt, the Torah says that “*Erev Rav*” (the Mixed Multitude) also came with us. The *Erev Rav* connects themselves to the Jewish people, who are called the *agudah achas* (one bundle). The *aravos* represent the *Erev Rav* souls who annex themselves onto the *agudah* (bundle) that is Yisrael.

The *Yom HaShvii* (seventh day) of Sukkos is called *Hoshanah Rabbah* – why is it called so? Why do we call it *Hoshanah Rabbah* specifically? The simple meaning of this is because we take many *hoshanos* on this day; we have a *ribuy* (plethora) of *hoshanos*, hence, it is called “*Hoshanah Rabbah*.”

However, the *Shulchan Aruch* states in the name of the *Rokeiach* that on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we remove the knot binding together the four species; normally, the Four Species must be tied together, but on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we remove the binding of the Four Species [which symbolizes a breach in our *agudah achas* – caused by the *Erev Rav* amidst us].

But what causes the disconnection from amongst ourselves in the first place? What causes the disparity amongst us that we need to bind ourselves together? The *Erev Rav*. The Sages state that *Erev Rav* married the women of the tribe of Shimeon; they mix with us, and this breaks up our unity.

There is the *Erev Rav*, and there is also a small group of Egyptian souls that converted, who are called “*Erev Zeir*” [whom Yosef circumcised]. The *aravos* of the first six days represent the *Erev Zeir*.⁷⁰ The *aravos* of *Hoshanah Rabbah* represent *Erev Rav*; for the word “*rav*” is the same concept as the word “*rabbah*” (they both mean “many”).

⁷⁰ Editor’s Note: It seems that the souls of “*Erev Zeir*” requires a lower kind of rectification, for they are not as evil as *Erev Rav*; for we only take two *Aravos* in the first six days. Whereas the *Erev Rav* souls require five *Hoshanos* to rectify them, which implies that it is harder to rectify them.

There are five groupings of *Erev Rav*⁷¹, and we take five *aravos* on *Hoshanah Rabbah*. It is because on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, a new mixture enters us: the *Erev Rav*. The *aravos* of *Hoshanah Rabbah* represent the mixture of the *Erev Rav*, who connect themselves to the Jewish people.

Hoshanah Rabbah – The “Seal Within A Seal”

Thus, *Hoshanah Rabbah* is called the “seal within a seal” (*chotam b'toch chotam*). On Rosh HaShanah, our decree is written, and on Yom Kippur, we are sealed. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are “sealed within a seal”, similar to the *halachah* that wine must be sealed within a seal [or else it becomes *yayin nesech*, wine which is suspected of being used by a gentile for idol worship].

Why isn't one seal enough, though? Why it is necessary for us to have to be sealed again within the seal?

“The seal of Hashem is truth”. There are levels of truth – *emes* (truth), and *emes l'amitah*, a more refined level of truth. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are within the seal [being that we were already sealed on Yom Kippur], but we are still not sealed from the *Erev Rav*, because the *Erev Rav* connects themselves to the Jewish people; they are amidst us, so it is not enough if we are merely sealed once. *Erev Rav* is within the bounds (*techum*) of the Jewish people; thus, one seal\chotam is not enough to be sealed from them.

Therefore, we need another “chotam” **within** the *chotam*. (*Chotam\techum* have the same letters). That is why we need *Hoshanah Rabbah* to save us from the influences of the five kinds of *Erev Rav*.

Banging The Hoshanos On The Ground

This is the deeper meaning of why we bang the *hoshanos* on the ground. Why do we bang the *hoshanos* on the ground? The simple understanding is that when we bang them on the ground, it causes the Heavenly sustenance to descend from Heaven down to this lowly earth.

But there is also a deeper understanding, as following.

The tree of Avraham *Avinu*, which came before the *sukkos* of Yaakov, is the root of the concept of *sukkah*. Avraham *Avinu* converted the gentiles who came to him; however, he did not convert everyone. *Chazal* state that the guests would first take shade under the tree outside his tent. If the tree allowed the guest under its shade, it was a sign that the guest was proper, and then Avraham would allow him to become converted; but if the tree did not take the guest under its shade, it was a sign that the person was not worthy.

We find two roots of trees in Creation - the root of the tree of the *Eitz HaChaim* (the Tree of Life), and the root of the tree of the *Eitz HaDaas* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil). By

⁷¹ *Tikkunei HaZohar* 41b

Avraham's guests, only those who were worthy were allowed by the tree to come under its leaves. Avraham's tree is parallel to the *Eitz HaChaim*. The guests who weren't worthy were rooted in the *Eitz HaDaas* (which is the root of the Erev Rav), thus, the "*Eitz HaChaim*" did not take them.

The tree of Avraham, which provided shade (for worthy guests), is reminiscent of a *sukkah*, which is called the "*tzeila d'hemunasa*" (to sit under "the shade of *emunah*") – otherwise known as the *Shechinah* (Hashem's Presence on this world); otherwise known as the "*Eitz HaChaim*".

On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we take five *aravos* and bang them on the ground, which is the earth – in other words, we take the "tree" and bang it on the earth, which alludes to the sin, for sin is associated with the element of earth and the curse of death.

Of a Torah scholar, it is written, "*And his leaves will not wither.*"⁷² The Torah scholar resembles a perfect tree, whose leaves do not wither; this is parallel to the *Eitz HaChaim*. When we bang the *hoshanos*, the leaves fall off, and this is parallel to the leaves of the *Eitz HaDaas*, whose leaves can wither.

The *Erev Rav* parallels the leaves of the *hoshanos* that that must be banged, so that the leaves fall off; this shows that we want to knock off the *Erev Rav* from amidst us.

Thus, the *aravos* that we take on the seventh day of Sukkos, so that we can bang *hoshanos* with them, have a special role which the *aravos* of the first six days aren't able to accomplish. The *aravos* of *Hoshanah Rabbah* which we bang contains the mystical power to separate the *Erev Rav* from us, who wish to latch onto us.

The *Erev Rav* is the root of all the nations of the world, which want to connect to us. Whereas the other nations of the world are given some degree of connection with us, the *Erev Rav* may not ever be allowed into our nation.

On Pesach, we left Egypt, and that was when the *Erev Rav* first came to mix with us. At Shavuot, right after we received the Torah, they mixed with us again to cause the sin of the Golden Calf. On Sukkos once again they come back once again to connect with us, but on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are given the power to separate them from amidst us.

Thus, when the *aravos* are banged on the ground on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we separate them from us by sending them down to the earth.

The Seal of Hoshanah Rabbah and The Seal of the Bris Kodesh

Hoshanah Rabbah is called a "*chotam b'toch chotam*", a seal within a sin. The *Bris Kodesh* (or *Bris Milah*) is also called "*chotam*", the sign that is stamped into our flesh, "*And on the covenant which You have sealed in our flesh*" [as we say in *Birchas HaMazon*].

⁷² *Tebillim 1*

Erev Rav mixed with Yisrael by marrying the women of Shimon, meaning, they attempt to connect with Yisrael through the *Bris Kodesh* [because marriage is called “*bris*”]. The fact that the *Erev Rav* connects to Yisrael through *Bris Kodesh* is what causes damage to our *Bris Kodesh*. On Hoshanah Rabbah, though, we have a “*chotam b'toch chotam*” – the seal within a seal - we seal ourselves from even the *Erev Rav*.

Hoshanah Rabbah: Rectifying The Gentile Nations of the World

Shabbos, besides for being called Shabbos, is also called *shvii*, the seventh day. The festivals which have seven days are Pesach and Sukkos. The 7th day of Pesach is called *shvii* because it's a Yom Tov, and also because it is called “*Shabbos hi lachem*”; it is forbidden from labor, just like Shabbos. It is a Yom Tov on the level of Shabbos. But the 7th day of Sukkos, *Hoshanah Rabbah*, which is also called Yom Tov, is not on the level of Shabbos, because it is permitted to work on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

What, indeed, is the difference? If a gentile keeps Shabbos, the *Gemara* says that he is liable to death. This shows us that a gentile has no connection with Shabbos. On Sukkos, however, there is a “seventh day” which is not Shabbos – *Hoshanah Rabbah* - which enables a gentile to connect to *Yisrael*. They can connect to us either for good purposes or for evil purposes.

Hoshanah Rabbah is thus the point in time that enable the gentiles of the world to come into the Jewish people and connect with us, whereupon they can be uplifted and rectified. The evil side of this, however, is the *Erev Rav* coming in. The holy side of this is the converts which Adam and Sarah converted.

So *Hoshanah Rabbah* contains both evil and good kinds of connection. The good part of it is the fact that gentiles have the opportunity to connect with the Jewish people and become rectified, but the evil side is that *Erev Rav* is coming in, who cannot be rectified and who must not be allowed entry.

Thus, on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we need to separate from the *Erev Rav* coming in to us through the many *hoshanos* that we bang. At the same time, it is the time which enables converts to come into the Jewish people; as we see that the souls of the converts can come under Avraham *Avinu's* tree, the “*Eitz HaChaim*”, and become rectified.

Herein lays the light of the redemption: Moshiach comes from converts, from Dovid, who is from Rus, a convert.

Sukkos – The Connecting Point Between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur

In the seventh month of Tishrei, we have Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos.

The world is judged four times a year – Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh HaShanah, and Sukkos. That is one revelation of Tishrei: Rosh HaShanah is the root day of judgment, and the three festivals are branches of the judgment of Rosh HaShanah.

Yom Kippur is about atonement, and it extends into Rosh Chodesh, which is called *moed*, and the Sages said that Rosh Chodesh is a time of *kaparah*, atonement, because on Rosh Chodesh the moon is lessened.

So we have two roots of judgment: Rosh HaShanah, the root judgment of the three festivals (which each have specific judgments), and Yom Kippur, which is the root of Rosh Chodesh.

Yom Kippur and Rosh Chodesh are both about atonement. On a more subtle note, however, there is *kaparah* also on Rosh Hashanah, as the shofar is blown to cover up sin from the Satan.

Even more so, however, it is Sukkos which connects Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. What is the connection? Rosh Hashanah is the time of judgment; therefore, Sukkos is related to Rosh HaShanah. Sukkos is the time of judgment over water. Sukkos is also a continuation of Yom Kippur, so it is a time of atonement: Yom Kippur was when we were atoned from the sin of the Golden Calf, which was caused by the *Erev Rav*. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are atoned from the *Erev Rav* - through banging the *hoshanos*.

Thus, Sukkos contains two different aspects: it is part of the three festivals and therefore it is a judgment, which makes it similar to Rosh HaShanah, but it is also a time of an atonement, similar to Yom Kippur; it is an atonement from *Erev Rav*, and it is the time to ward off the effects of the *Erev Rav*.

This is the depth behind the time of *simcha* (joy) that is Sukkos. There are ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which are about getting sealed for the judgment. Sukkos combines Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur together because Sukkos is a time of both judgment and atonement, which enables us to have *simcha*.

Thus, we have seen here another facet of understanding in the concept of the “*chotam b'toch chotam*” that is on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

Hoshanah Rabbah – Combining The Seal of Rosh HaShanah With The Seal of Yom Kippur

Another facet of understanding to the concept of “*chotam b'toch chotam*” is as follows: there is another *chatimah* taking place, even after we have been sealed on Yom Kippur.

On Rosh Hashanah, there is a *chatimah* (seal) on the *tzaddikim* (for a good year) and the wicked (for a bad year), and on Yom Kippur there is a *chatimah* on the *beinonim* (the average people). On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, though, there is a “*chotam b'toch chotam*” - meaning, the *chatimah* of Rosh Hashanah is combined with the *chatimah* of Yom Kippur.

On Rosh HaShanah, we sing, “*If we are like children, have mercy on us like a father on his children, if we are like servants, have mercy on us like a master on his servant*”. Either we are like a *ben* (child) to Hashem or we are like an “*eved*” (servant) to Hashem, but either way, we asked to be sealed. On Yom Kippur, we have either been sealed as a “*ben*” or as an “*eved*”.

When it comes *Hoshanah Rabbah*, there is a “*chotam b'toch chotam*” – meaning, the levels of “*ben*” and “*eved*” are combined, through the inner seal that takes place on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

A Seal Within A Seal: The Point Of No Sin

There is yet another facet of understanding to this concept of “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, as follows.

The *Gemara* says that Adam delayed his *Bris Milah*; he was born circumcised. The fact that he delayed his *Bris Milah* is linked to the sin. In other words, he only had one *chotam* on his flesh. A “*chotam b'toch chotam*” on his flesh would imply that when there is no possibility for evil.

There is *orlah* (foreskin) on the *Bris Kodesh*, which we remove, and there is also *orlah* on trees, which forbids the fruit of the first three years to be eaten. Connect this with the fact that there was a tree outside Avraham’s tent, which was like the *Eitz HaChaim*, which only allowed proper guests. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, when there is a “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, it represents the level in which it is not possible for there to be any damage to the *Bris*.

Thus, the “tree” which we see under in Sukkos – the *sukkah* - is not affected by *orlah*. An *esrog* is the only fruit which has the same taste as the bark, therefore it has no *orlah*. This refers to a tree which has no *orlah*, the tree of Avraham *Avinu*, the *Eitz HaChaim*, the *sukkah*.

The “*tzeil*” (shadow) of the *Eitz HaDaas* is the *tzeil* that symbolizes death, whereas the “*tzeil*” of the *Eitz HaChaim* is like the “*tzeil*” of *sukkah*. The *esrog* is a fruit which has no *orlah* - like the *Eitz HaChaim*.

The Aravos of Sukkos: Rectifying The Nations

Of the Four Species, it is the *esrog* which is a fruit. The *lulav* is not a fruit, but it bears fruit. The *hadasim* have a scent, while the *aravos* have no taste and no fruit. The Sages revealed that *aravos* represent the wicked, who have no Torah and no mitzvos, and that they are rectified through taking them together with the other species, which symbolizes that that they can have become connected to the Jewish people and become rectified.

On Sukkos, we are judged on the water. Water has no taste – which really means that it is above taste. We make a blessing of *shehakol* on water, which says that everything belongs to Hashem. Water symbolizes “everything”, that “everything” belongs to Hashem. Thus, when we are judged on Sukkos for the water, we are being judged for the *klal*, for the collective unit of things.

A gentile asked one of the Sages, “When is the entire world happy?” The Sage answered, “When it rains.” When it rains, the whole world is happy. On Sukkos we are judged on the water, and on Sukkos we have happiness; it is universal happiness, because the entire world needs water. Sukkos is a joy about water - and the *aravos* grow near the water. So the judgment on water is not just about *Klal Yisrael*; it is about the *klal* (collective unit) of the entire world.

Every day we make a blessing that we are not a gentile. A woman makes the blessing, “That You made me according to His will”. This alludes to the concept behind the *shehakol* blessing we make on water that everything is according to Hashem’s will.

Sukkos is the judgment on water. Rosh HaShanah is judgment over all the people in the world, Yom Kippur is an atonement only for the Jewish people, and Sukkos comes to connect Rosh HaShanah with Yom Kippur together, so that there can be an atonement for the rest of the world as well; thus, Sukkos is the concept of how converts can enter the Jewish people, that it is possible for the nations of the world to become elevated.

‘Erev Rav’ Is Rectified Only Through Being Destroyed

But there is *Erev Rav* too coming along with them, who also wish to connect with the Jewish people. We are not allowed to let them come in. Therefore, on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we bang the *hoshanos*, to nullify the *Erev Rav*, the root of the nations. The only way to rectify them is to destroy them, so we send them back to the “earth”, by banging them on the ground.

This is contrast with the rest of the nations of the world, whom we can accept, and these are rooted in the converts that Avraham took in. This is the depth of why the rest of the nations of the world can be atoned for on Sukkos.

On the last day of Sukkos, we bring 7 *korbonos*, parallel to the 7 root nations of the world, which each became 10 nations; that is how the 70 nations were formed. These 7 root nations can be allowed to convert. Thus, the 7th day of Sukkos, *Hoshanah Rabbah*, represents the idea of converting the 70 nations of the world and elevating them to holiness. This is another depth behind the “*chotam b’toch chotam*” on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

In contrast to Yom Kippur which atones only for *Klal Yisrael* and not the gentiles, Sukkos connects the gentiles to *Klal Yisrael*, so that they can be atoned for. The gentiles will go to the *Beis HaMikdash* in the future, as the possuk in *Zecharya* says, so we see that the nations will become rectified.

This is revealed through the concept of *Hoshanah Rabbah*, through the “*chotam b’toch chotam*”, which represents the point that is above all *cheit* (sin) - the point in time before there was even a possibility of sin: the point of before Creation. This is the original, pure light which can rectify the nations of the world in the future. Thus *Hoshanah Rabbah* represents that idea of rectifying the entire world.

But the *Erev Rav* cannot be rectified. They can only be rectified when we destroy them. And so, we bang the *hashanos* on the ground on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, to nullify the effect of the *Erev Rav*, to symbolize how their rectification will only lay in their destruction.

Sukkos thus reflects the concept of returning all of the nations [except *Erev Rav*] of the world to the perfected level of Creation before the *cheit* – and that is the pure point which rectifies them.

The Depth of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah

In the future, the gentiles will be rectified, as the verse in *Zecharyah* says. However, *Klal Yisrael* will still be more important than the gentiles, even when the gentiles are pure again.

This is the secret behind *Shemini Atzeres*. The *Midrash* states that on *Shemini Atzeres*, Hashem tells us to remain with Him for one more day. The deeper meaning of this is because on the 7th day of Sukkos, we have unified the gentiles with Yisrael, and when the 7 days are over, now comes the next level: *Shemini Atzeres*, which contains *Simchas Torah*.

There are two kinds of *simcha* (joy) found in the month of *Tishrei*. On Yom Kippur, we received the second pair of *Luchos*, which can be considered to be a degree of *Simchas Torah* to us. And we also have the actual *Simchas Torah* that is on *Shemini Atzeres*. So there are two kinds of *Simchas Torah* that we have.

What is the difference between the two kinds of *Simchas Torah*? The *Simchas Torah* that we have on Yom Kippur was that the second *Luchos* rectified the sin of the Golden Calf. But the *Simchas Torah* of *Shemini Atzeres* comes after *Hoshanah Rabbah*, after we have been sealed in the “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, which is the level that is beyond any possibility of sin.

The Sages said, “Praiseworthy is the one who never sinned” – this refers to the inner light, the original light that was around before Creation, the point in the soul in which there is no possibility of sin. The revelation of this point is on *Shemini Atzeres*, after we have the “*chotam b'toch chotam*” of *Hoshanah Rabbah*; it calls for a new kind of *Simchas Torah*, which we have on *Shemini Atzeres*.

The *simchah* that we have on *Simchas Torah* is called a “*simcha l'gomrah shel Torah*”, a joy upon completing the Torah. When we make a blessing in the morning to learn the Torah, we ask Hashem, “*V'haarev na*”, that Hashem should make the words of Torah sweet to us. The sweetness of Torah learning, which is called “*areivus*”, is especially what can counter the *Erev Rav*, the evil souls in Creation who wish to take us away from the Torah.

On *Simchas Torah*\ *Shemini Atzeres*, it is revealed the light in which there is no sin, thus, it is the time where we make a *simcha* over the completion of the Torah. After *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we can come to the level of *Simchas Torah*.

The *Shemini Atzeres* we have in today's times is a lower kind of “*shemini*”, for on the eighth day there is a *bris*, which removes *orlah*. But the perfect level of Sukkos [which will be in the future] is to

have a kind of *Shemini Atzeres* in which the concept of *shemini* is not about removing *orlah* - rather, it will be a level of “*shemini*” which reveals the “*gomrah shel Torah*”.

The “*shemini*” of the future will be about this. Concerning the future, it is written [in the Shabbos Zemiros] that *sasson* and *simcha* (joy and happiness) will remove all *yagon* and *anacha* (worry and groans). The word for being “joyous”, *sameich*, has the same letters as the word *chamesh*, which means “five”, because it will counter the “five” kinds of *Erev Rav*⁷³.

This will not just be *sasson*, a deep joy; it will be the original heavenly light, the light of *shmini* - which was around before Creation. The Sages revealed that Shabbos is really the eighth day, because there was a Shabbos that came before the world. This is not a Shabbos in the sense of resting from labor. The Shabbos that came before the world is like *Hoshanah Rabbah*, where there is no *shevisah* (rest) from *melachah* (labor). The root of this is before creation, in which there was no *melachah* yet. That power is what will rectify the entire world in the future.

Klal Yisrael is essentially that power that preceded the world. It is *Klal Yisrael* in the future will rectify all the other nations. Thus, we see that even though all the nations will be perfected in the future, the nation of *Yisrael* will still be above them.

The *Shemini Atzeres* of the future will reveal that even in the future, when there will be no possibility of sin, the nation of *Yisrael* is still above the nations. For on *Shemini Atzeres*, Hashem requests that *Yisrael* stay with Him for one more day after *Sukkos* ends, alone with Him. And when that perfected level of *Shemini Atzeres* comes in the future, it will be revealed the perfect level of “Hashem, the Torah, and *Yisrael*, are one.” That will be the perfected level of *simchah* on *Sukkos* which is followed by *Shemini Atzeres*.

⁷³ Refer to the shiur of *Amalek In-Depth*

7 | *Sefer Koheles – Everything Is “Hevel Havalim”*⁷⁴

“Moed” – A “Meeting” With Hashem

Yom Tov is called *moed*. *Moed* comes from the word *vaad*, which means “gathering” or “meeting.” Who are we meeting with? With Hashem! When a person makes up to meet with his friend, they make up that they will meet in a certain place. Where is the place that Hashem would meet us in? In the *Beis Hamikdash*. In the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*, there was a *mitzvah* three times a year to go up to the *Beis Hamikdash*. It was an eye-to-eye meeting with Hashem, just like when two friends meet each other and make eye contact.

Nowadays, we have no *Beis Hamikdash*. Where then can we meet with Hashem?

Yom Tov is our meeting with Hashem. It continues to exist, long after we no longer have a *Beis Hamikdash*.

Hashem is fully ready to meet us – He is everywhere. Nothing is holding Him back. The only thing that prevents a person from meeting with Hashem is his very *self*. If a person manages to remove the barrier holding him back – his very self – he would then be able to meet Hashem, wherever he is. *The Mesillas Yesharim*⁷⁵ writes that a person who is constantly connected with Hashem is considered to always be walking with Him, even as he lives here on this physical world.

When a person is always connected to Hashem in his life, even though he has no *Beis Hamikdash* to meet with Him, he himself has become like a *Beis Hamikdash* – and he can meet with Him.

Every Yom Tov has an inner power in it that enables a person to meet with Hashem. A person has to receive the inner point of each Yom Tov which will connect him with Hashem.

On Sukkos, what is that inner point of Yom Tov that can connect a person with Hashem?

Removing the Barriers

On Shabbos of *Chol HaMoed Sukkos*, *Chazal* established that we read the book of Koheles.⁷⁶ This is not a coincidence that we read Koheles specifically on Sukkos. There must be some connection between the book of Koheles and the theme of Sukkos; otherwise, why would *Chazal* establish that we read Koheles on Sukkos?

⁷⁴ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p.277 – 280.

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-5-277-succos-and-koheles>

⁷⁵ chapter 26

⁷⁶ Ecclesiasties

Shlomo Hamelech begins the book of Koheles with, “*Hevel havalim* (“futility of futilities”), so says Koheles; *hevel havalim*, everything is *hevel havalim*.” Rashi brings from *Chazal* the following: “Koheles is making an announcement and saying that all of Creation is futile; he says “*hevel*” seven times in the possuk, corresponding to the seven days of Creation.”

The commentators are perplexed: How could Shlomo HaMelech say such a thing?! How could he say that Hashem’s Creation is all futility and vanity?

The depth of the matter appears to be as follows. The world is called “*olam*”, from the word “*he’elam*” – “concealment.” This world really conceals Hashem from being revealed to us. The world – this world of *he’elam* – was created in seven days; in other words, there are seven levels of *he’elam*. A person’s job on this world is to remove all the *he’elam* – to remove all the barriers between him and Hashem – and come to reveal Hashem. All of a person’s avodah is essentially to show how all of creation is one big *he’elam*.

When a person comes to really feel that all of Creation is *hevel* - in that it conceals Hashem from us – he personally reveals Hashem in his life. He essentially enters the state of before Creation, in which there was no *he’elam* yet; he will be able to become constantly attached to Hashem as a result. Anything which deters a person from being attached with Hashem is a kind of *he’elam*. When a person manages to remove that barrier from upon himself – he views everything as *hevel*, since it’s all getting in the way of revealing Hashem onto the world – he will be able to always become attached to Hashem.

This is the inner point that one can reveal on Succos. This is the way how one meets with Hashem on the Yom Tov of Succos.

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt”l once said that it’s not enough for a person to read the book of Koheles written by Shlomo Hamelech; every single person has to write the words “*Hevel havalim...everything is hevel havalim*”, and these words have to be ingrained in one’s blood. A person has to feel clearly in his heart that this world is completely *hevel* – it leads us astray from Hashem. This is the Avodah of Succos: write your own personal *sefer* Koheles!

Before and After the Beis Hamikdash

When the *Beis Hamikdash* was around, a person had special Heavenly assistance to reach utter closeness with Hashem and get past all the barriers of this world. He would bring the *korbonos* (sacrifices) and eliminate the physical aspect of the animal, transforming the physical into the spiritual. He would reveal G-dliness in what was previously something totally physical, something that was a kind of *he’elam*.

Now that the *Beis Hamikdash* isn’t around, we have to accomplish this very same goal, but through the abilities of our soul. We need to eradicate the *he’elam* of this world and instead to come meet with the Creator of the world – the state of total attachment with Him that existed before creation, when there was no *he’elam* yet.

8 | *The Joy of Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah* ⁷⁷

Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah: Two Different Aspects of Joy

Shemini Atzeres is called by two names: *Shemini Atzeres*, and *Simchas Torah*. They represent two different kinds of joy.

One kind of joy is the joy of “*Atzeres*”. “*Atzeres*” means to “remain”. This is hinting to the *Midrash* that says that Hashem desired to remain with the Jewish people even after Sukkos ends, saying to them, “Remain with me one more day.”

What exactly is this joy? It is the joy that one can have just in being attached to Hashem, to simply feel with Him in a sense of companionship.

Simchas Torah offers a different kind of joy. It is the joy one has in being attached to the Torah, and thus we make a celebration that we have completed the Torah.

Joy Within Nature and Joy Above Nature

A *chosson* and *kallah*⁷⁸ have a certain joy; and it lasts for 7 days. The joy of *Shemini Atzeres* is a joy found on the “eighth day”, hinting to the fact that it is a joy that is connected with the number “8”

In other words, the regular kind of joy is represented by the number 7, whereas the higher joy is represented by the number 8. We always find how the number 7 corresponds with nature, such as that there are 7 days of the week. The joy of a *chosson* and *kallah*, which lasts for 7 days, represents the natural joy; the joy is that two natures are fusing together. Such joy is a joy within the bounds of nature.

But there is a higher kind of joy, the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*. It is a joy that is above nature, for “8” is above “7.” Let us explain what it is.

Above Nature

It is the custom that when we finish the Torah, we immediately begin with *Beraishis*. The reason behind this is because the Torah is unlimited and endless, and we want to show that it has no end.

⁷⁷ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*, Vol. V, p.284-286.

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-part-5-284-joy-shemini-atzeres-simchas-torah>

⁷⁸ groom and bride

The last letter of the Torah is ל, and the first letter of the Torah is א, which forms the word לב (heart). The heart is king of the body; a king is above his people. A king is allowed to break fences, and no one can protest him.⁷⁹ A king – or the heart of a person – is not bound to the regular rules.

This is the joy of *Simchas Torah*; it represents the heart of a person, which is above the regular limits, for it is “king” over the body. The joy of *Simchas Torah* is thus a joy that is above the natural kind of joy. It is the unlimited joy one can have in the Torah.

The same is true for the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*. Our *avodah* during the seven days of Sukkos is to realize how all of the world and nature is futile, to erase our attachment to this world (see the chapter before)⁸⁰.

After a person has hopefully nullified his attachment to this world – and there are seven traits inherent in nature⁸¹ – he is now able to connect totally to Hashem, a state of being that is essentially above nature; that is the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*.

Within The Struggles, and Above the Struggles

The word “*simcha*” (שמחה) comes from word *someach* (שמח), and if we rearrange the letters, we get the word *chamesh* (חמש). *Chamesh* can mean two different things:

It can mean the number “five.”

Chamesh is also from the word “*chamushim*”, which means “armies”; we find this when the Jewish people left Egypt, that they left in “armies.”⁸² Rashi states that these armies were unarmed with any weapons. From here we see that the word “*chamesh*” normally refers to weapons of war.

The words “*Simcha*” (שמח) and “*chamesh*” (חמש) have the same root letters (ח, מ, ש); there is a rule in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that whenever there is a root word⁸³, there are two opposite meanings to it. In our case, this will apply as follows.

שמח\ *Simcha* is when a person ends his wars, representing a level that is above nature. He has left the level of “*Seven times a righteous person falls and gets up*”, and he is above the regular ups and downs. He is above “seven” – and he is now on the level of “eight”. He no longer has the normal, natural struggles he used to deal with.

חמש\ *Chamesh* represents the lower kind of joy – when one is happy upon overcoming challenges. He wages war with the seven “nations” inside him – the seven primary bad *middos*. He still hasn’t completely overcome them yet – he’s still within the normal fights of nature, fighting with his natural abilities.

79 *Pesachim* 110a

80 Hence, we read *Kobeles* on Sukkos, which talks about how futile this physical world is.

81 the seven *middos*: chessed, gevurah, tiferes, etc.

82 *Shemos* 13: 18

83 *shoresh*

After Yom Tov Is Over

When *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is over, what does a person remain with? The higher joy of “8” reached on *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* has now gone; what does a person have left from Yom Tov?

Simcha is when a person is happy with something has become added onto his existence. We see that people don’t find happiness in the fact that they merely exist; people are naturally unhappy. (There is a kind of happiness that a person can have in just being happy with what he has, but no one is happy with their mere existence.) *Simcha* is only present when a person receives something, which adds on something to his existence.

If a person would take something he gets and make it a part of his essence, he would no longer be happy with what he has gotten, because now it’s part of who he is – and he needs something *more* than what he is in order to be happy.

Yet, this is actually our *avodah*: we need to take what we have gained so far, and make it into a part of our essence, even though this will no longer provide us with a feeling of *simcha*.

Our *avodah* on *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* is to find joy in Hashem and in His Torah – a joy that is above nature. After a person merits this joy, he has to take it and make it a part of who he is. One needs to feel a total connection with Hashem that transcends nature, and an attachment with Torah that transcends nature.

When a person takes the happiness of being attached to Hashem and the Torah (and this happiness can be reached on the Yom Tov) and he makes into a part of himself, the *simcha* goes away with this, because now there is nothing “more” to be happy about, for it is now part of the person.

For this reason, there is no *simcha* after Yom Tov ends. There can’t be. It is not because the great spirituality of Yom Tov has gone. It is because if we have succeeded in our *avodah* on Yom Tov, that means we have transformed the spirituality of Yom Tov into a part of our essence. It has gone from being something great that surrounded us into something that has been absorbed into our being.⁸⁴ With this attainment, our *simcha* has to go away with it, but the gain is far worth it.

What is the *avodah* now, as we start the rest of the year? It is now upon us to aspire for an even higher level than what we gained until now – and from there we will derive our next upgrade to our *simcha* next year.

⁸⁴ In the Hebrew sefer, the author calls this “going from the “*ohr makif*” (“surrounding light”) to an “*ohr penimi*” (inner light).

9 | *Internalizing Sukkos For the Rest of the Year*⁸⁵

Carrying Over the Yom Tov into the Year

In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of the Three Festivals (Sukkos, Pesach and Shavuos), we say, “And lift us, Hashem our G-d, the blessings of Your festival, for life and peace, happiness and gladdening.”

There are those who explain⁸⁶ this prayer to mean that we are asking Hashem to let the blessings of Yom Tov carry over into the rest of the year. “Blessing”, *berachah* in Hebrew, comes from word *beraicha* – a pool, connoting that we want Hashem to pool upon us His sustenance⁸⁷; in other words, we want to be affected by the special power of the Yom Tov for the rest of the year as well.

It is well-known that not only is Yom Tov an opportunity for immense holiness and growth, but even *Chol HaMoed* is a holy time; *Chazal* forbade certain activities on *Chol HaMoed* so that we can be free to rejoice in festivity and have time to learn Torah.⁸⁸

Having free time on *Chol HaMoed* is not simply meant to have free time – although that is certainly true in the simple sense; it is really because having this extra time on our hands give us the opportunity to have a calm and relaxed soul, so we can focus on more on serving the Creator and learning the Torah.

When a person is busy with various matters other than *Avodas Hashem* and learning Torah, his soul is less open to receive matters of holiness. But on Yom Tov, a person is able to learn how to acquire spirituality, *Avodas Hashem* and learning Torah – and all of this is because on Yom Tov we are disconnected from materialism. (It is not a total disconnection from materialism, only partial; as we see that certain labors are permitted on *Chol HaMoed*, in certain situations).

Yom Tov can show us that even after Yom Tov, our *Avodas Hashem* and our learning of the Torah should be from a disconnection from the material world, a disconnection from how the rest of the world thinks – and from this, we come to truly learn the Torah and have true *Avodas Hashem*.

Accessing the State of Yom Tov Even During The Year

Yom Tov is supposed to affect us and fuel us up with spiritual energy to last until the next Yom Tov. We need this burst of spirituality to keep us going. The days of Yom Tov are few, in

⁸⁵ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Sukkos, chap. 1.*

<http://www.bilvavi.net/english/droshos-after-holydays>

⁸⁶ *Bad Kodesh on Moadim* (Rav Baruch Dov Povarski), p.416. See also *Birchas Moadecha* (of Rav Margolin) on *Tishrei*.

⁸⁷ See *Rabbeinu Bachye, Parshas Eikev, 8:10.*

⁸⁸ *Yerushalmi Moed Kattan, 9a.*

comparison to the rest of the year which is much longer; if a person doesn't get affected by Yom Tov, he won't be able to acquire any matter of holiness during the rest of the year.

Let us think into how Yom Tov can affect our soul for the rest of the year.

On Yom Tov, a person is calm and relaxed from the busyness of the world. His mind is settled and he is a bit calmer than he is normally; each to his own level. On *Chol HaMoed*, we buy only food that we will need for Yom Tov, and not more than that. We are frugal and satisfied just with that amount of shopping. We also don't do any work on *Chol HaMoed* unless it will cause us to have a loss. Most stores are closed. Of course, a person might use the relaxation of *Chol HaMoed* for the wrong purposes and waste his time, *chas v'shalom*; but that is a different problem which we are not currently discussing.

It is impossible to live in Yom Tov during the year – that is, in the external sense. But in our inner world of the soul, we can live in a state of calmness that we have on Yom Tov, even when it's not Yom Tov – if we gain the proper kind of mind to do so.

When Yom Tov ends, we go back to our prospective jobs. Even a *Kolel avreich* has his jobs; life is full of responsibilities that surround us all day. Anyone who is married and has children has responsibilities to his family. He has to make sure that his wife and kids have a roof over their heads; that they have food, clothing, doctor visits, etc. That is one side of our life. But there is another side going on in our life – the fact that we are in between one Yom Tov and the next.

The Ramban writes that *Sefiras HaOmer* is like *Chol HaMoed*, and that Shavuot is like the *Shemini Atzeres* (of Pesach). By the same token, perhaps we can say also that the days in between Shavuot and Sukkos – and from Sukkos to Pesach – are like one big *Chol HaMoed*, the bridge that connects one Yom to another. There is a holiness we can gain from our “*Chol HaMoed*” year-round.

In Between Yomim Tovim

Perhaps we can say also that Yom Tov is like a Shabbos, while the rest of the year is like the six days of the week. We find that Pesach is called “Shabbos”,⁸⁹ and Yom Kippur is called “*Shabbos Shabboson*.”⁹⁰ This is because our whole essence is that we were redeemed from Egypt so that we could become a nation to receive the Torah, and we also know that every Yom Tov is *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim* – to remember our redemption from Egypt. Shabbos is also *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim*. If so, Yom Tov and Shabbos can be compared to each other. The rest of the year, by contrast, is like the six days of the week.

The six days of the week are blessed by Shabbos.⁹¹ Perhaps we can also say that the days in between each Yom Tov are sustained by the blessings of the Yom Tov. Just like we have a concept of

⁸⁹ *Menachos 65b*

⁹⁰ *Vayikra 16: 31*

⁹¹ *Zohar II, Yisro, 88a*

the afternoon⁹² and a concept of “*bein hashemashos*”⁹³ (twilight) – times “in between” that serve to connect different times – so can we say that the days in between Yomim Tovim are what connect the previous Yom Tov to the next Yom Tov. If so, the rest of the year is in a sense like a Yom Tov of its own; it is a certain time, a bridge between the Yomim Tovim.

What are the days of the rest of the year like? They are not like Yom Tov itself, but they resemble *Chol HaMoed* – the time which connects one part of Yom Tov to the next. *Chol HaMoed* is the lower level of Yom Tov, and so can we say that the rest of the year is a lower level of Yom Tov, serving to connect Yom Tov to another.

The *Gemara*⁹⁴ says that when Haman wanted to get the Jews in trouble, he pointed out to Achashveirosh that the Jews are always busy keeping Yom Tov; “today is Shabbos, today is Pesach.” This hints to the fact that the Jewish people are always in a “Yom Tov” – because the whole year is really like a Yom Tov! (Just that it is on a lower level than the actual Yom Tov.)

What We Learn From Yom Tov For The Rest of the Year

The Yomim Tovim given to us are not simply defined by their individual concepts they represent, but they are more than that: they reflect the level we are at during the time that the Yom Tov sets in. That is why we daven in *Shemoneh Esrei* of Yom Tov, “*You chose us from all the nations*”, and we also mention in the davening how Yom Tov is *zecher l’yetzias mitzrayim* – that only we, the Jewish people, merited to leave Egypt, while the other nations did not merit this special event. Yom Tov expresses how the Jewish people were formed into a nation, and how Hashem chose us as His nation.

The world stands on three pillars⁹⁵, and so does the Jewish people stand on three things – the three Yomim Tovim⁹⁶. The Yomim Tovim help the Jewish people survive for the rest of the year. There is much to learn from each aspect of Yom Tov.

For example, on *Chol HaMoed*, one is only allowed to purchase items that are necessary for Yom Tov.⁹⁷ We can learn two things from this. Firstly, we see that you only need to buy things for your house that you need right now, and not to shop for things you’ll only need in the future. Secondly, you have to be frugal and only buy things that you really need, not luxuries.

This is how someone lives throughout the rest of the year as well, when he has a deep connection in his soul with the Creator – he takes the lessons of Yom Tov with him for the rest of the year as well.

⁹² *Rashi, Shemos 12: 6*

⁹³ *Avos 5: 6*

⁹⁴ *Rashi, Megillah 13b*

⁹⁵ *Avos 1:2 and 1:17*

⁹⁶ *These are called Shalosh Regalim, the “Three Festivals”: Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos.*

⁹⁷ *Tur, Orach Chaim, 130.*

Yom Tov – Our Meeting With Hashem

Yom Tov is called *moed*, which comes from the word *vaad* (meeting). The place where we would meet with Hashem was the *Beis Hamikdash*, and from it a Jew would derive vitality from it for the rest of the year by visiting it three times a year. The *Shechinah* was there. Now that it is gone, we express our loss in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Yom Tov, “*And because of our sins, we have been exiled from our land, and we have been distanced from our earth.*”

What do we mean that we have been exiled from our land? We are able to stand in Eretz Yisrael today. How are we exiled from it?

Simply, it is because the incredible holiness of Eretz Yisrael, the holiness of the *Beis Hamikdash*, has gone away. There is a discussion if the land of Eretz Yisrael still maintains its sanctity even though we have no *Beis Hamikdash*.⁹⁸

But there is a deeper meaning behind the *tefillah* we are saying. We have been exiled and distanced from our land, in the sense that we are far from the great spiritual revelations that one would experience on Yom Tov by the *Beis Hamikdash*. That spiritual light would illuminate the entire Eretz Yisrael. Although this reality still continues to exist in our inner world, it isn't revealed out in the open in the world we see, and thus we are “exiled” from our land. So although a person can be in Eretz Yisrael today, he is still exiled from it – he is missing what Eretz Yisrael used to be like.

When a person went up to the *Beis Hamikdash* three times a year, he saw the *Shechinah*. What does this mean? It means that he revealed in his heart a deep connection with Hashem, an utter awareness of His existence. It was called “*aliyah l'regel*,” (ascending on Yom Tov) – going up to the *Beis Hamikdash*. It was an ascension in the sense that one who ascended spiritually from Yom Tov would stay at that high level, and he was able to maintain it and not to fall from it back to routine. This is the meaning of the possuk, “*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy place*”⁹⁹ – in other words, the possuk is praising the one who would gain from the holy spiritual elevation of Yom Tov and maintain his level throughout the rest of the year.

Yom Tov- The Shechinah Within

The Torah is eternal, and thus whatever it imparts is eternal. If there is such a concept of Yom Tov in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash* – when the *Shechinah* was revealed out in the open – then that concept, that point, continues to exist. We have no *Beis Hamikdash* today, but we still have Yom Tov, and we can have *aliyah l'regel* every Yom Tov, even nowadays. This is what we ask for in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Yom Tov: “*V'hasieinu es birkas moedecha*” – (“And carry over the blessings of Your festivals...”). Our avodah on Yom Tov is that we ask Hashem to let the holiness of Yom Tov

⁹⁸ See *Megillah 6a* and *Rambam Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 6: 16*

⁹⁹ *Tehillim 24:3*

carry into the rest of the year, in spite of the fact that our level of revelation isn't the same as it used to be.

It is written, *"And I will dwell amongst them."*¹⁰⁰ The *Alshich* explains that the possuk is saying that Hashem dwells in the heart of each Jew! In our own heart within us, we can still have *aliyah l'regel* three times a year, on Yom Tov¹⁰¹ – and see Hashem, so to speak; on our own level. We can access the *Shechinah* in our hearts, three times a year – each Yom Tov – and extend it to the rest of the year. But in order for this to happen, we need to know what Yom Tov really is.

If a person came to a stronger recognition of Hashem's existence on Yom Tov, then the Torah he learns during the rest of the year will become more internalized in his mind and heart, as a result. If someone is truly searching for Hashem, the Torah he learns will become the real Torah – *"For from Zion comes forth Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem."*¹⁰² The true Torah of Hashem becomes revealed to a person, in his heart, when he earnestly pursues Hashem.

Thus, the inner implication of Yom Tov is for one to connect to Hashem in his heart. What will result from this? *"For Hashem gives wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding."*¹⁰³

Experience the Elation of Yom Tov and Then Seek To Maintain It

If someone reaches this on Yom Tov, he has gained immensely; now it is his avodah to continue that growth into the rest of the year. This will fulfill the meaning of what we daven for on Yom Tov – *"And carry over the blessings of Your festivals..."*

But if a person didn't try to grow from Yom Tov in the way described here, and he didn't come to have a new feeling of a relationship with Hashem from the Yom Tov – then there is no point for him to wait to see if he will be inspired for the rest of the year. He hasn't invested in anything over Yom Tov, so he won't see any of the profits during the rest of the year. Only if a person is clear what he has gained from Yom Tov can he hope to maintain his inspiration for the rest of the year.

So first, a person has to make sure that he has gained from Yom Tov in the first place – before he seeks to let Yom Tov carry over into the rest of the year. Even if he has felt a small amount of recognition of Hashem over Yom Tov, at least he has gained somewhat, and he has now what to grow upon for the rest of the year.

On *Simchas Torah*, a person has to have at least felt a minimal amount of closeness towards the Torah. One has to feel the Yom Tov, to feel the *Simchas Torah*, to feel *Shemini Atzeres* – of which Hashem said, *"Remain with me one more day."*¹⁰⁴ He has to feel that it was hard to part from Hashem after such a period of closeness, just as Hashem finds it hard to leave us at the end of

¹⁰⁰ *Shemos 25: 8*

¹⁰¹ *Yom Tov here refers uniquely to the Three Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkos.*

¹⁰² *Yeshayahu 2:3*

¹⁰³ *Mishlei 2:6*

¹⁰⁴ *See Rashi, Vayikra 23: 36*

Sukkos. He has to have felt that he has the opportunity to feel the reality of Hashem for at least one more day.

The Custom In Kelm of “Asiri Kodesh”

Let us think into how we can hold onto our gains from Yom Tov for the rest of the year.

In Kelm, there was a custom called “*Asiri Kodesh*.”¹⁰⁵ Every ten days following Yom Kippur, people who lived in Kelm would make for themselves a mini Yom Kippur and check to see if they had kept to the resolutions they made last Yom Kippur.

They started this custom because they realized that most people are only able to hold onto their inspiration during *Yomim Noraim*, and a few are able to keep the inspiration going until after Sukkos, but not beyond that; *Asiri Kodesh* made a person do some introspection every ten days and ask himself if he was still keeping to his level he reached on *Yomim Noraim*.

We can learn from this something very important: how to hold onto our gains from Yom Tov. If we really want to have a good year, we need to see after *Yomim Noraim* and *Sukkos* if we are still feeling that closeness to Hashem we felt during these holy times. For every ten days that go by – or once a week, for those who are able to – we should set aside time and see if we’re keeping to the level we were on during those days.

“*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy place.*” This is not just a possuk, it is telling us the avodah we need to do throughout the year: we need to see where we are holding. We all know that Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos and Simchas Torah will once again be here next year, and that we will once again return to making resolutions, developing our will for spirituality, to have yearnings for spirituality, to dance again on *Simchas Torah*. We will do it all again next year – with the help of Hashem.

But are we losing all of this, *chas v’shalom*, as the year goes on – and then we are just beginning again from scratch next year? Are we going to start over again next year simply because we have lost all those yearnings?

The truth is that the reason why many people can’t keep their resolutions for the new year is because they don’t believe in themselves enough. They didn’t believe to begin with that they were able to keep to what they took upon themselves. But this is really a denial of the words of *Chazal*. If *Chazal* established that we daven in *Shemoneh Esrei* the *tefillah* of “*V’hasieinu*”,

it must be that it is definitely possible for us to keep to what we took upon ourselves for the coming year; even if we can’t keep to them as perfectly as we had hoped to, we can still keep to them on our own level.

¹⁰⁵ lit. “*Tenth Day Is Holy*”.

The Advice of the Ramchal

If someone doesn't seek advice on how he can keep to his resolutions, we all know that it will be pointless for him to try to keep to them. There is one single advice we have for this, from the *Ramchal*, (author of *Mesillas Yesharim*) in sefer *Derech Eitz Chaim*. He writes as follows¹⁰⁶:

“It is therefore a duty upon each person to reflect with himself. If he doesn't reflect and think, wisdom will not come after him...a person, for many years of his life, thinks a lot about his various responsibilities, which are only his temporary responsibilities. Why can't he think for an hour about the things that really matter, such as: Who am I? Why did I come onto this world? What does Hashem want from me? What will be with my end?

“This (an hour of self-introspection every day) is the greatest remedy once can have against his evil inclination. It is easy, yet it does so much. It bears much results. Every day, a person should reflect for at least an hour a day, and empty himself from the rest of his thoughts so that he can only think about just this (what he have said).

“And he should ask himself in his heart: “What did the forefathers do, whom Hashem found desirable? What did Moshe Rabbeinu do? What did Dovid HaMelech do? What did all the great leaders before me do?

“And he should realize in his mind how good it is to do this for all his life.”

What the *Ramchal* is saying is not just inspiration for Elul. It is something to think about the entire year. If we are really truthful with ourselves, and if we really want to gain from *Yomim Noraim* for the rest of the year – then we have to learn how we can protect what we have gained from *Yomim Noraim*.¹⁰⁷

Make A Self Accounting

The *Ramchal* has taught us that that the essential tool we need is to set aside time for self-introspection. It can be every ten days; once a week is even better, and if one can do it every day, that's the most preferable. During the time you set aside, make the following self-accounting: “On Rosh Hashanah, I reached a certain level. Have I succeeded in keeping to it? How much have I kept to it? If I haven't kept to it, what can I do to make sure I keep to it?”

Hashem has decreed on each person on Rosh Hashanah whatever has been decreed upon him. But it is upon us to make sure that we aren't among those who don't keep to their words. We all know that the coming year will have its full amount of responsibilities, challenges, and difficulties. It will definitely not be that simple to keep to the level we reached *Yomim Noraim* during the year. But we at least need to have a hope that we *can* succeed; of course, we cannot blindly trust ourselves that we will for sure see success, but we must try to at least be *eligible* for success.

¹⁰⁶ This has been loosely translated and is fairly literal to the text.

¹⁰⁷ See also *Kedushas Levi: Shavuos*, and also *Ramban: Emunah UBitachon*, chap. 19

What a person has to do is designate for himself times of quiet in which he can make a self-accounting. We must bring our life to a halt and think about the purpose of life. We must be truthful with ourselves, and remember what we said to Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. You can write down what you said this way you don't forget it; take out the paper and read it during this time of quiet you set aside for yourself. One has to see if he's really keeping to what he took upon himself, and if he sees that he isn't, he has to ask himself: "How will I face Hashem next Rosh Hashanah...?"

One should be aware that he has free will to decide if he will be among those who merit the blessings of Yom Tov for the rest of the year, or if *chas v'shalom* he will not be among those who merit it.

How To Avoid The Sleepiness of the Winter

Anyone who doesn't follow the *Ramchal's* advice can testify that he has never succeeding in keeping to his resolutions he made during *Yomim Noraim*. But if someone follows the *Ramchal's* advice and he sets aside time to think about what's important, he will definitely see results.

If someone sees a different piece of advice in another *sefer*, that's wonderful. But in Kelm, and in other places, they followed the *Ramchal's* advice, which is that one should set aside time to bring his life to a halt and see if he is keeping to his *Yomim Noraim* level.

We hope that those who are reading this feel that this advice is simple and true; it is the words of our great teachers, and nothing has been added here to their words. Anyone who is truthful with himself knows how necessary it is to make this self-accounting.

These words are not meant to be an inspiring lecture. Inspiration is for Elul and *Yomim Noraim*, and it doesn't last for the winter, when people get sleepy and lethargic. If we want to avoid becoming sleep-like to our spiritual situation during the winter, we need to make sure we are keeping to our level throughout the rest of the year. During *Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah*, a person is supposed to act above his normal level.¹⁰⁸ The rest of the year, however, we go back to our normal level. The high level of spirituality of *Yomim Noraim* has ended – each person, on whatever level he is at. But if we want to at least be on the true level we are supposed to be on, than we must take with us a point that we will have from the beginning of the year until its end.

May Hashem merit us that we should be able to set aside time to think about the purpose of life¹⁰⁹, and that we should maintain our level for the rest of the year – and that we shouldn't be among those who only wait for the next Elul to become inspired.

¹⁰⁸ *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim: 203*

¹⁰⁹ For more specific guidance on how to make a *cheshbon hanefesh*, see *Bilvavi Vol. IV, chapters 3-5*.