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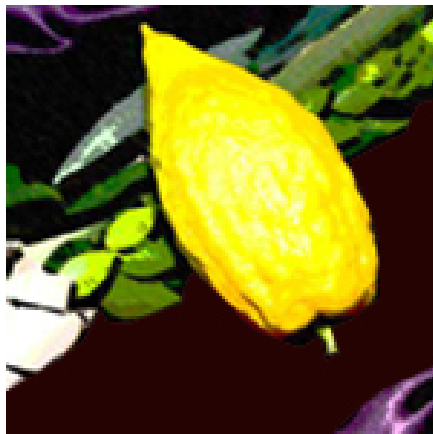
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SUCCOS TALKS

**COLLECTION OF DRASHAS FROM THE
AUTHOR OF BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH**

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

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SUCCOS

1 | *The Jew's Inner Self*¹

Sukkah and the Four Species – The Dual Natures of Man

On *Succos*, we have two mitzvos: to sit in the *succah*, 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 *succah* represents a totally different side to us. In a *succah*, 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 *Succah* 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 *Succos*, but rather, to define the very essence of *Succos*: 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 *Succah* made of the *leviathan* skin.

The depth of our *avodah* on *Succos* 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 *Succah*, 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;

¹ <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.² 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*”³; 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.

² See *Tanya* chapter 4, and *Tzidkas Hatzaddik* 263.

³ *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.”⁴ 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

⁴ *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 “*Succah*” inside himself – to the “Yisrael” inside him, his true “I.”

With a poor sense of self-recognition, even a person sitting in the *Succah* doesn’t grasp what the concept of *Succah* is. Although it appears as if he’s reached the point of non-movement, because he’s sitting in the *Succah* – he’s only there physically, but he doesn’t see himself as being in the *tzeila d’meheimenusa*, the “shadow of faith” that the *Succah* is. He’s doing all the mitzvos for His Master, but he hasn’t yet reached *emunah* – the *succah* 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 *Succos*: we have two mitzvos – to sit in the *Succah* 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.”⁵

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*.

⁵ *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.

2 | *The Jew's New Perspective* ⁶

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

⁶ <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].”⁷ 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”⁸, 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

⁷ *Pesachim 22b*

⁸ *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 Rebbi Nachman of Breslev 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 *Succah* contains it both light (*ohr*) and shadow (*tzeil*). The shadow must not be bigger than the amount of sunlight in the *Succah*⁹, but the *Succah* 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 *Succah*, they will receive reward. The

⁹ *Sukkah* 22a; see *Orach Chaim* 631.

non-Jews will agree and they will go to sit in the *Succah*, but Hashem will make it hot on *Succos*, and they will get too uncomfortable and leave the *Succah*, 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 *Succos*, we have two mitzvos – the mitzvah of sitting in the *Succah*, 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 *Succos* into two activities – part of the day we sit in the *Succah*, and part of the day we take the Four Species? That is only a superficial approach. The real definition of our *avodah* on *Succos* is to integrate the Four Species with the *Succah* - 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.”¹⁰ 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.

¹⁰ *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.¹¹ 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.

¹¹ *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.

3 | *The Jew's Inner Seal*¹²

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*¹³ 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*,¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵ *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.¹⁶ 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

¹² <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/succos-009-jews-inner-seal>

¹³ *Shaar HaKavanos: Derushei Chag HaSuccos: Derush 6*

¹⁴ *Avodah Zarah 39a*

¹⁵ *Shabbos 55a*

¹⁶ *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]”¹⁷ – 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)¹⁸. 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.

¹⁷ *Kiddushin 2b*

¹⁸ *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).*

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 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 HaZohar¹⁹: “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.

¹⁹ *Maamarei Admor HaZakein HaKetzarim*, p.403; *Tikkunei Zohar HaChadash: Noach: 145 with Peirush HaSulam*.

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.

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.²⁰

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.

²⁰ *Sanhedrin 98a*

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, 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”²¹, 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

²¹ *Yehoshua* 1:2

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 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.²² 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 death²³; closing the eyes is a partial nullification of the "I", and this is true even when a person isn't actually asleep.

²² *Nedarim* 64b

²³ *Berachos* 57b

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*.”

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 *Shehechyanu*. If he will split the inheritance with other brothers, he makes a blessing of *HaTov V'Hamaitiv*.²⁴ 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.

²⁴ *Orach Chaim* 223:2

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*, *Succos*, and *Hoshanah Rabbah*. In *Eretz Yisrael*, *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah* are on the same day.

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.

4 | *Lulav In Our Heart*²⁵

The Torah Is Eternal, And Its Lessons Are Eternal

The *Toldos Yaakov Yosef*²⁶ teaches a fundamental concept that, since the Torah is eternal its lessons are always applicable to every generation, no matter the time or place. The lessons of the Torah apply to all of us, and our job is to learn how to apply its wisdom to our own situations. Based upon this, let us explore the various laws of the *lulav* brought in the *Mishnah* in Tractate *Sukkah*²⁷.

A “Stolen Lulav”

In the *Mishnah* which explains the laws of *lulav*, the first *halachah* taught in the *Mishnah* is that a stolen *lulav* is disqualified for use of the *mitzvah*.

Upon face value, this teaches that a person does not fulfill the *mitzvah* of *lulav* with a stolen *lulav*. But there is a deeper meaning which can be uncovered through understanding the “*pnimiyus*” (inner world) behind the *lulav*.

The *Zohar*²⁸ teaches that *lulav* comes from a combination of the words “*lo*” (“to him”) and “*lev*” (“heart”), to show that “one’s heart [his spiritual heart] must be in his jurisdiction.” In other words, a person needs to be in control of his own heart.²⁹ In other words, a person’s heart should not be swayed by the hearts of others, especially in relation to our way of serving Hashem. Our service of Hashem has to come from within us, an expression of our own individuality, and we should not ‘steal’ our *Avodas Hashem* from others.

Thus, on an inner level, a stolen *lulav* refers to “a stolen heart.” Any service of Hashem that is not a true representation of our own individual selves is considered “disqualified,” just like a stolen *lulav* is disqualified, for the heart of a person [which we need to use in our service to Hashem] should be our own and not “stolen.”

Copying Another Person’s Avodas Hashem

²⁵ This chapter is adapted from the last chapter in *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Succos*.

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

²⁶ *hakdamah to sefer Toldos Yaakov Yosef* by one of the first and most dedicated disciples of the Baal Shem Tov

²⁷ *Mishnayos Sukkah*, 3:1 (*Talmud Bavli Sukkah* 29b)

²⁸ *Zohar I*: 267b; *Zohar II*: 271a

²⁹ *Beraishis Rabbah* 34: 10

There is a custom to shake the *lulav* in all four directions. But one needs to inspect himself: When shaking the *lulav* in all four directions, is he acting from within himself, or he is merely copying the way other people are doing it?

Once there was a *tzaddik* who would *daven* as a *baal tefillah* at the *Kosel*. At particular points in his *davening*, he would move a certain way. After this *baal tefillah* passed away, someone else took over his role and led the *davening*. The new *baal tefillah* copied the *tzaddik*'s same movements at the particular points in the service. However, a *gadol* who regularly *davened* at this *minyan* stopped doing so when he noticed that the new *baal tefillah* was copying the *tzaddik*'s movements.

This story teaches us that a person should not copy how another person serves Hashem. When we shake the *lulav*, we should not merely be copying another person's movements. Rather, our performance of the *mitzvah* should be our own act of self-expression. Does our shaking really reflect our own, unique soul – or are we just mimicking others?

Consider a five-year-old child who comes to *shul* and does not know how to *daven*. He may watch others and imitate their body movements. He stands when everyone stands, he sits when everyone sits. He covers his eyes when they cover their eyes. This mimicry resembles a stolen *lulav*. It's a stolen heart! If a person's *Avodas Hashem* is merely a reflection of others rather than personal and heartfelt, it is as if he is acting like a monkey who copies other people. Though his body may be moving, his heart and soul are not. Thus, his actions are not true.

Copying Is Really Stealing

Imagine one man walking quickly down the road. A second man notices this man's pace and also quickens his pace. He catches up to the first man, walking alongside him until the first man reaches his house, walks inside, and shuts the door. The second man is left standing on the street. He cannot follow the other man all the way into his own, private house.

When we shake *lulav*, the fundamental question is whether we are doing this *mitzvah* from an inner, personal place in ourselves, or are we just copying the external motions of everyone else? If so, eventually our imitation catches up with us and becomes worthless.

During the year, we often subconsciously copy other people's movements or body language. We may presume this is acceptable since we are not copying anything negative. However, upon reflection, one may realize that copying another person in any way is a form of stealing. And more importantly, it does not represent one's personal *Avodas Hashem*. When we serve Hashem, we have to give Hashem a service that came from us, not something that was copied from others. Thus, our service, such as waving the *lulav*, has to originate from our own individual soul. Otherwise, it resembles a stolen *lulav*, which is invalid for use.

A "Dry Lulav"

The next law of the *Mishnah*³⁰ relating to *lulav* is that “a dry *lulav* is disqualified” for the *mitzvah*. The commentaries discuss the meaning of the term “dry.” However, on a deeper level, as we explored above, we can also learn the implications of a “dry *lulav*” for our souls in our *Avodas Hashem*.

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. The *Talmud Yerushalmi*³¹ states that a dry *lulav* is invalid because it is written, “*The dead do not praise Hashem.*”³² In other words, a dry *lulav* is considered to be like a dead *lulav*. “*The dead do not praise Hashem,*” as opposed to the living who do praise Hashem.

On *Yom Tov*, there is a *mitzvah* to rejoice. “*And you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d.*”³³ Although this verse describes the joy standing in the *Beis Hamikdash*, this requirement of *simchah* applies to all of the *mitzvos*. All of the *mitzvos* need to be done with joy. A person is required to hold the four species when he recites *Hallel* and then shake them when he recites *Hodu L’Hashem Ki Tov*³⁴; one can certainly shake them already beforehand, upon making the *berachah* over the *lulav*³⁵, but the main time to shake the *lulav* is by *Hallel*,³⁶ since the main aspect of the *mitzvah* of the four species is to praise Hashem with them. When we experience true, authentic joy when performing this *mitzvah* from deep in our hearts, this gives us the life which in turn enables us to praise Hashem with feeling – in contrast to the verse, “*the dead do not praise Hashem.*”

Acting By Rote

When a person shakes the *lulav* as he says the words “*Hodu LaHashem, Ki Tov,*” he can ask himself whether he truly feels gratitude to Hashem. If he does, his *lulav* is “alive” and it’s “valid” for the *mitzvah*.

However, if he is just saying the words without concentration and meaning, it is like: “*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.*”³⁷ Such a person is [considered] among “the dead” who do not praise Hashem! It is one thing to utter the words of *Hallel*, but the question is whether one really feels a vitality in saying them? This is the ultimate question that sums up a person’s *mitzvah* performance and *Avodas Hashem*.

Consider a person salivating over a delicious piece of food. When he then eats this food, he feels a vitality and enjoyment. He’s not just chewing the food, he’s enjoying the experience.

³⁰ *Mishnayos Sukkah 3:1*

³¹ *Yerushalmi Sukkah 12b*

³² *Tehillim 115: 17*

³³ *Devarim 12: 18*

³⁴ *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim: 651: 8*

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ *Sukkah 37b.*

³⁷ *Yeshayahu 29: 13*

A person should also experience the same vitality (*chiyus*) and enjoyment from shaking *lulav* during *Hallel*. Is he merely going through the motions, or is he feeling vitality from those movements? Is he doing it with *chiyus*? If he does not feel a *chiyus* as he shakes *lulav*, he is like a “dry *lulav*.” His *lulav* might be technically kosher for use of the *mitzvah*, but his absence of *chiyus* means his performance is essentially dead, and “*the dead do not praise Hashem.*”

The level of dryness of the *lulav* is an analogy for the level of “dryness” of a person’s performance of this *mitzvah*. The performance of shaking the *lulav* has to be done with spirit, with life, with *chiyus* inside – otherwise, it is “invalid” for the *mitzvah*.

The *Gemara*³⁸ teaches that in Jerusalem it used to be common for people to leave their house holding the *lulav*, take it with them to *shul*, hold it while reciting *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei* and while visiting the sick or comforting the mourners. When he came to the *beis midrash* to learn, he would let his son or servant hold the *lulav* for him.” Anyone who took the *lulav* with him wherever he went obviously derived *chiyus* from the *mitzvah* of *lulav*. A person does not deliberately carry around a sack of stones wherever they go because the stones do not provide him with any *chiyus*. Analogously, shaking the *lulav* only has meaning when one is performing the *mitzvah* with *chiyus*.

A Lulav Used For “Idol Worship”

The Mishnah³⁹ also teaches that a “*lulav* of *Asheirah* (a kind of idol worship) is disqualified for use of the *mitzvah*.” What does this mean on an inner, deeper dimension?

As we brought from the Zohar, the word “*lulav*” comes from the words “*lo*” (to him) and “*lev*” (his heart), in other words, the heart of a person has to be “his.” This applies not only to avoiding copying others, but to the extent to which our words are heartfelt. Our words and speech have to reflect our hearts.

For instance, when one *davens* in *Shemoneh Esrei* for a person who is sick, *rachmana litzlan*, he generally has a lot of *kavannah* (concentration) when he davens the prayer of “*Refoeinu*” (Heal us). His words are heartfelt and represent his deep and honest desires for healing. In contrast, many of us may *daven* the blessing of “*Hoshiva Shofteinu*” (Return our Judges), without truly desiring, deep in our hearts, that Hashem will return our judges to us.

How does this apply to 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.”⁴⁰ The *Gemara* gives the example of someone who had a prestigious job, such as a doctor, and now he needs money. It teaches that the person should not take the job of cleaning the streets to make money. Such a job

³⁸ *Sukkah 41b*

³⁹ *Succos 32b*

⁴⁰ *Bava Basra 110a*

would be like *avodah zarah* for this person, like idol worship, because he's doing something that's "strange" (*zarah*) for him to do. However the *Gemara* does qualify this by saying that he is permitted to take a job that's beneath his dignity rather than become a beggar.

When a person does something that is not truly appropriate for him, his heart deep down is cringing. His actions contradict what his soul truly wants, and thus he suffers inside.

Are our hearts happy or are they cringing because the shaking of the *lulav* feels like a strange practice to us? On the surface, our deeds appear to be serving Hashem. But the question is whether our actions represent the true desires of our heart? Are our hearts filled with thoughts of holiness, with yearnings for Hashem and for His Torah and *mitzvos*? Or are our hearts, *chas v'shalom*, so materialistic and affected by all kinds of negative influences that they remain distant, recoiling from our holy actions?

In order for our *mitzvah* of *lulav* to be "valid," we must shake it with sincerity. By shaking the *lulav* with our whole heart, our *avodah* is valid and acceptable to Hashem. In contrast, if we have desires for strange things, then when we shake the *lulav*, it resembles a *lulav* used for idol worship. The shaking of the *lulav* becomes invalid and causes spiritual harm in the process. As he shakes the *lulav*, instead of sanctifying himself through the *mitzvah*, the contradiction between his actions and his heart's desire causes him to sink lower into the impurity of his evil desires, *Heaven* forbid.

An Adult With A Childish Heart

When a person has strange desires in his heart that are contrary to *Avodas Hashem*, shaking *lulav* can endanger himself and cause Heaven to examine his deeds.

The Torah teaches us that "*the inclination of a man is evil from his youth.*"⁴¹ When a person matures, does his heart change too? Does his head control his heart or vice versa? Has he begun to move towards "the righteous, whose hearts are in their control, in contrast to the wicked, who are controlled by their hearts?"⁴²

Consider a father who gives a treat to a child on the condition that he says "thank you." The child, of course, says "thank you" but without any true feeling of gratitude. In actuality, all he wants is the treat. Aware of the emptiness of the words, the father does not value the "thank you." However, since he is a child, the father hopes that he will mature one day to the point where his gratitude is genuine.

Yet, adults may be guilty of the same issue. Though mature on the outside, some people's internal *ruchniyus* has not matured and instead remains stunted. In order to grow, these people must continue to practice their external *avodah* but also have the desire to mature. If a person fails to work

⁴¹ *Beresihis* 8:21

⁴² *Bereishis Rabbah*, 34: 10

on increasing the genuineness of his internal *ruchniyus*, then shaking the *lulav* will awaken Heaven to judge him.

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

“How Is It Going...?”

A person’s words reveal his life’s orientation.

For instance, consider a common scenario these days. A person who meets his friend in the street and asks him, “So, how’s it going?” Presuming he is referring to his financial situation, his friend answers, “Oh, *Baruch Hashem*; I’m making it.” He never even entertains the thought that maybe he is being asked about his spiritual situation, that is, how his *Avodas Hashem* is going. His answer reveals his values and focus in life which is on livelihood, making money, paying his debts, and materialism.

In contrast, if he was not worshipping money, and instead was practicing and obtaining *chiyus* from pure *Avodas Hashem*, he would have interpreted his friend’s question differently. Being focused on *Avodas Hashem* himself, he would have presumed his friend was also referring to that subject. Thus, he likely would have told his friend about his successes and his failures in his *Avodas Hashem*.

Let’s explore another example. Consider a person with a sick child who *Baruch Hashem* subsequently recovers. If he was asked “What’s new?” he is likely to think immediately of his child’s health because that is the issue foremost on his mind. Thus, he answers about his child’s health. However, if his primary focus is not on his *Avodas Hashem*, then he is unlikely to answer his friend by describing his spiritual struggles and achievements.

Consider a third example revealing a person’s true orientation. One friend may ask another “So, how was your *Yom Tov*?” His friend may respond: “I went on this trip and that trip. I visited my parents and my in-laws, etc.” His answer reveals his true focus of the *chag*. In failing to interpret the question as an inquiry about his spiritual experience or his fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of rejoicing on *Yom Tov*, this person reveals his [personal] *avodah zarah*, that he worships his family and travels more than Hashem.

This is not a condemnation of such visits and trips during *Chol HaMoed*. Rather, it is to reveal his primary focus and priority in life. Is a person living his life for *Avodas Hashem*? In the depths of a person’s heart, does he really value *Avodas Hashem*? Is this his priority or not?

A person sees what he wants to see and a person hears his heart’s desires. A person’s answer to such general questions about their welfare reveals their true focus, values and priorities. In other words, where their *ratzon*, their desire, is strongest. By interpreting these questions as referring to their children, their work, their finances, their family etc., they reveal that these are their true

“*avodah*,” an *avodah* that is strange to Hashem. In contrast, someone whose heart and mind is constantly and primarily focused on Hashem would interpret such general questions about their welfare as referring to their spiritual welfare.

In summary, since *lulav* is a combination of the words *lo* (his) and *lev* (heart.), then performing the *mitzvah* of *lulav* reveals our true heart’s desires. In order to serve Hashem properly, a person’s heart has to be primarily focused on his *Avodas Hashem*. Valuing other things above *Avodas Hashem* constitutes “idol worship” on an inner level, and “invalidates” his *lulav* shaking.

Lulav From A “Condemned City”

The *Mishnah*⁴³ then teaches that a *lulav* 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*. In contrast to the previous *halachah* discussed above regarding a *lulav* of *Asheirah*/idol worship, this *halachah* refers to the public (as opposed to the individual).

Let’s consider a modern-day, practical example demonstrating public idol worship. Imagine a newspaper headline which reads “People are working hard.” Most people would interpret this statement as referring to physical and financial work. It is highly unlikely that many people would interpret this “hard work” as work of *Avodas Hashem*. Such a presumption serves to expose a mainstream focus on materialism and physical “work,” rather than a spiritual “work” of *Avodas Hashem*.

Our Physical Heart And Our Spiritual Heart

Let’s consider another hypothetical, contemporary scenario which reveals the Jewish mainstream’s current position. If a person were to ask another “Is your heart okay?” most people would presume that this question concerned their physical health and would answer “*Baruch Hashem*, I don’t get heart attacks, my heart is fine.”

However, a general reference to our “heart” could also refer to our spirituality, our *Avodas Hashem*. It is taught⁴⁴ that the right chamber of our heart houses our *yetzer tov* (good inclination) and the left chamber of our heart houses our *yetzer hora* (evil inclination).⁴⁵ Thus, this question about our “heart” could also be an inquiry about the struggles between good and evil taking place in our heart....

⁴³ *Sukkah* 32b

⁴⁴ *Sukkah* 29b

⁴⁵ *Zohar, Terumah* 162b; see *Tanya* chapter 9.

Unfortunately, in reality, most people are not inquiring about another's spiritual level. In fact, it would be rare for a person these days to ask another "How much evil have you managed to expel from your heart recently? How much has your *yetzer tov* overpowered your *yetzer hora*?"

A Lulav With Its Tip Chopped Off

The *Mishnah* teaches that a *lulav* with a severed tip is invalid for use. What is the deeper meaning of a *lulav* with a severed tip?

The *halachah* is that the *lulav* has to be shaken in the way it is grown.⁴⁶ The *lulav* grows on the date tree with its leaves pointing upwards. Thus one has to shake the *lulav* with its tip pointed upwards. Shaking the *lulav* with its leaves pointing downwards does not fulfil the *mitzvah*. In relation to our inner world, a person has to constantly strive to grow upwards rather than downwards in his *Avodas Hashem*. The *mitzvos* are performed in order to elevate a person. Just like a *lulav* has to be shaken with its tip pointed upwards ("in the way it grows") in order to be valid, similarly a person's *Avodas Hashem* must be growing upwards in order for it to be meaningful.

Interestingly, the leaves of a *lulav* grow sharper towards the tip. This natural growth process may also be used as a hint towards our *Avodas Hashem*. Everyone has some growth, but most people reach a certain point where they stop growing. A few rare individuals reach the sharpest, uppermost point. However, despite our current level, we should all be aspiring to reach our maximum potential, our personal best.

Regardless of results, there is a significant difference between those who do and do not aspire to reach the highest level of *Avodas Hashem*. Those who lack the drive and desire to achieve their highest possible level of *Avodas Hashem* (for reasons some of which will be discussed below) resemble a *lulav* with a severed tip.

People with high aspirations are often dubbed by others as "delusional" or "unrealistic." Admittedly, some people do delude themselves in their *Avodas Hashem* and act unrealistically as a result. However, though we must be authentic about our current level and capabilities, we must always be aware that our purpose in this world is to keep growing in order to perfect ourselves and reach our maximum potential.

A person can always be growing spiritually, like "*a righteous person, who blossoms like a date tree.*"⁴⁷ Though we will always experience ups and downs in life (as it is written, "*a righteous person falls seven times and rises*"⁴⁸), we should always be striving to move toward a higher point than our current position. One needs to have an ambition to reach the highest level he can reach in *Avodas Hashem* (This does not negate the difficulties involved and that we must *daven* and cry out to Hashem to

⁴⁶ *Sukkah* 45b

⁴⁷ *Tehillim* 92:12

⁴⁸ *Mishlei* 24:16

help us reach it). A *lulav* with a severed tip resembles a person who lacks ambition to reach his maximum potential in *Avodas Hashem*.

We Must Have A Desire [For] Human Perfection

The design and shape of a *lulav's* leaves represents how we must try to reach the pinnacle of growth. They grow higher and sharper until they reach the highest, sharpest point. However, some people are content with only achieving or stagnating at a mediocre level with regard to their *Avodas Hashem*.

The whole purpose of Creation is that people should perfect themselves. Since the Torah teaches us that the purpose of Creation is to perfect ourselves, it must be that it is possible for us to perfect ourselves. Thus, one of the greatest sins is when a person has no aspiration whatsoever for human perfection.

One reason a person may give up or fail to aspire higher is that he may feel broken-hearted if he is not perfect yet. If this is the case, we must remind ourselves that it takes the whole of one's life to reach perfection. Another reason one may fall into this trap of apathy is that one may falsely believe that they are not capable of being a *tzaddik* or that such extensive work is beyond them.

This hope and striving for perfection must always be alive in a person's heart. The lower the aspiration, the lower the achievement.

For instance, Reb Yisrael Salanter said about 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, focusing on an even greater level than is actually achievable right now can actually help us reach our own personal best.

By adopting the erroneous belief that it is impossible for one to reach the ultimate perfection, one ices himself up inside spiritually, like an evil force of "*Amalek*" within. This mentality that "It's hard enough just to be on an average level of *Yiddishkeit*" creates a lukewarm, lethargic feeling toward *Yiddishkeit*.

Though we must be aware that not everyone can reach the level of a *tzaddik*, adopting the apathetic attitude that "I'll never be a *tzaddik*" interferes with the ambition to strive to perfect ourselves and our world. Such an attitude contradicts the fundamental purpose of Creation.

The Ponovozher Rov *zt"l* once planned to open a yeshiva for intellectually gifted students. However, the Chazon Ish did not agree with his idea because, "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."

Aspire For Perfection, Daven For The Results

A fundamental point to bear in mind in our striving for perfection is that we cannot ever achieve any goal through human efforts alone. As the *Mishnah* in *Avos*⁴⁹ states, “The task is not upon you to finish, nor are you exempt from it.” While we must do whatever we can to reach perfection, achievement is a gift from the Creator. Of this, it is written, “*I toiled, (thus) I found.*”⁵⁰

We cannot reach perfection by ourselves alone, and thus Hashem does not demand us to be perfect. However, we must aspire for perfection, to try our hardest in order to reach it! After we try our hardest, we should step back and discover whether Hashem considers this to be the right path for us at this time. The Torah teaches us to try our hardest, and then to “find” what is actually best for us. Yet, without trying, a person will definitely never “find.”

Perfection Is Attained In Stages

One should be very clear in our goals for our own *Avodas Hashem*. On the one hand, we need to aspire for the greatest self-perfection. On the other hand, we must not act too much above our current level. It is not delusional to aspire for higher levels – it is crucial.

We never know when or if those aspirations will finally be realized. We have been waiting for this for at least 5770 years, and we still have not reached perfection yet. But in the end we must believe that we will get there. The *lulav*'s tip represents our faith that we will ultimately reach self-perfection. A *lulav* without a tip represents a person whose inner essence is lacking the drive to even aspire towards self-perfection.

However, self-perfection is attained in gradual, authentic stages. Each time a person reaches his goal, he can shift the bar slightly higher and only then endeavor to reach for this next higher spiritual level. Though the ultimate goal is to perfect himself and his world, he must carry this out one gradual step at a time.

These levels of perfection in *Avodas Hashem* can be compared to the stages and processes of our lives. For instance, when a person is a child, he strives for the perfection represented by his *bar mitzvah*. The next main life's goal may involve the higher aspiration of marriage – a man is like “half a body” until he gets married. After he gets married, he may aspire to become a father. However, it would be premature and untimely for a child under *bar-mitzvah* to aspire to get married or be a father.

Similarly, with *Avodas Hashem*, there are different stages in life. One should aspire to achieve the next consecutive goal after an attainment of their current level. A person must repeat this sequential order of achievement until he reaches his personal, greatest perfection, a total *d'veykus* (attachment)

⁴⁹ *Avos* 2: 16

⁵⁰ *Megillah* 6b

with Hashem. All other areas of perfection are only partial perfection in comparison to this highest achievement.

Realistic Aspirations

In life and in *Avodas Hashem* in particular, we have minor goals which are all self-contained. However, each of these goals is cumulative like steps on a staircase, and we must continue to aspire for the complete and ultimate perfection.

Consider increments of time. A week is complete in and of itself. However, when our goal becomes a month, then a week becomes an incomplete portion of this goal. Similarly, a month is a complete period of (approximately) four weeks. Yet, one month is but an incomplete portion of a whole year. And each year is only a seventh of *shemittah*, and *shemittah* is only a seventh of *yovel*.

Aspirations in *Avodas Hashem* are necessary. Yet they must be carried out incrementally. One problem with high aspirations is that those with unrealistic expectations may be presumed to be delusional, mentally unstable or disconnected from the tangible world. How can we avoid this problem? In our quest for spiritual perfection, we need to stay grounded and realistic by being aware of our limits, working gradually and knowing ourselves.

A person has a three-fold job. First, a person has to be fully aware of his actual level in *Avodas Hashem*. He needs to be painfully honest with himself as to where he is currently holding on a spiritual level. He should be aware of his Divinely given qualities, as well as weaknesses. He has to have no delusions about his current status and the distance between it and his ultimate potential.

Being thus grounded in reality, a person then has to believe that he is fully endowed to have a relationship with Hashem and serve Him in every moment to the maximum level possible for him to attain. He must do his best to achieve this goal. Finally, a person must have the awareness that only Hashem can bestow on him the gift of perfecting himself, and the acceptance and *emunah* that perfection can only come from Hashem.

The Restrictions Of Believing “I’m Realistic”

We must always be climbing the ladder of growth which is “*footed on the earth, but its head reaches the heavens.*”⁵¹ However, by mistakenly believing that high aspirations are delusional, many people slack off from trying to perfect themselves.

Other people may make a grave mistake of failing to achieve their potential due to their lack of awareness that we were created precisely to perfect ourselves. 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 since he failed the test, it has been man’s job to bring ourselves and the world

⁵¹ *Beraishis* 28:12

back to perfection. Though the road is long, Hashem has guaranteed that man will achieve this ultimate goal no later than the year 6,000.

Finally, there are those people who avoid reaching for perfection in themselves because they are painfully aware of their deficiencies. “*A heart knows the bitterness of its soul*”⁵². By avoiding to attempt to fulfill their maximum potential, a person is denying the purpose of why we were created. This negative focus encourages them to give up on reaching that perfection. In their despair, they resemble a *lulav* whose tip has been severed. Such people comfort themselves by arguing that “It’s enough if we are just settle with who we are. We should just be happy the way we are.”⁵³

It is true that a happy person is one who is “happy with his lot,”⁵⁴ but his contentment refers to someone who really believes with *emunah* that though he is not yet spiritually complete, Hashem has given him all the tools he needs to achieve his maximum potential. He knows he will indeed have everything in the end, and he trusts that Hashem will help him get there.

Ultimately, a *lulav* with its tip intact is represented only by those people who are both simultaneously aware of their current level and yet strive for their greatest spiritual heights because they have *emunah* that Hashem has endowed them with the ability to achieve perfection.

A Lulav With Severed Leaves

There is another *halachah* in the *Mishnah* that a *lulav* with severed leaves is invalid. *Rashi* explains that this refers to a *lulav* where the leaves have become separated from the spine so that there is nothing connecting the leaves to the source. Technically, the leaves could be tied to the spine or may even be able to survive independently without the spine. However, the *Gemara* learns from this that the Torah requires that the leaves of the *lulav* must obtain their nutrients and energy from the spine, in order for the *lulav* to be deemed valid for the *mitzvah*.

What is the deeper meaning behind this *halachah* and how can we apply it to our *Avodas Hashem*?

Are We Connected To Our Mitzvos?

Each of us may perform many admirable *mitzvos*. However, the question is whether they are connected to us? If so, what source is connecting us to these actions? Does a person feel that his *mitzvah* performance is his very life? Or is he just forcing himself to do the *mitzvah* and yet he remains detached from the action?

When we eat, we may feel very connected to our food because we realize we are obtaining vitality from the food. When a woman puts on perfume to go to a wedding, she may feel very connected to

⁵² *Mishlei 14: 10*

⁵³ See *Mesillas Yesharim*, chapter 4.

⁵⁴ *Avos 4:1*

her perfume and be energized by it. However, when a person puts on *tefillin*, does he feel connected to this act to the extent that it energizes us? 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. Though his actions may be technically perfect and follow the letter of the law, he lacks connection to the *mitzvos* because he is not being energized by them.

Chazal refer to this problem of disconnection as “His wisdom is more than his deeds.”⁵⁵ He might have been taught all the *mitzvos* or he has read about the *mitzvos* in the *sefarim*. He may perform the *mitzvos* out of fear to avoid punishment. However, he can never grow from the deeds he is performing because he is not being watered by them.

Performing the *mitzvos* in this way can be compared to a father who cares for his child’s physical needs (feeding him and clothing him and buying him toys) but who does not feel an emotional 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. Perhaps he gives physical nourishment to the child out of obligation, or fear of punishment for neglect. Naturally, the child feels this lack of love and may grow up stunted as a result. But more relevantly for our analogy, the father too misses out on the connection he could have had with the child, so he does not grow as a father. Thus, the father’s parenting is lacking because it does not include the vital element of emotional attachment and love.

A Lulav With Spread Out Leaves

The *Mishnah* teaches a *halachah* that a *lulav* with leaves that are spread out in different directions is kosher, but it is only considered kosher *b’dieved* (fulfilling the requirement after the fact but not in the optimal way). Though this type of *lulav* is not deemed invalid like the examples above, it is not the ideal, it is not “*mehudar* (aesthetically enhanced).” The leaves of the *lulav* are supposed to all point in one direction. However, when the leaves of the *lulav* are spread out, they are pointing in all directions.

Let’s explore how this can be applied to our soul. There are times when a person is generally heading towards the right direction in life. In general, he is aware of his life’s purpose and he has a good plan for steering himself in the right direction. However, though he starts off with a worthwhile goal and good intentions, as he is actively pursuing this goal he becomes caught up in various distractions which deter him from his ambition.

For instance, a person is motivated to emulate Hashem who is kind and merciful and so he opens up a *chessed* organization. When he starts the organization, his intentions are pure and his ambitions are real. As the money begins to pour in, he distributes it to the needy. But as the money accumulates, he slowly becomes tempted and begins to wonder “What’s wrong if I make a little profit in the process?” This hypothetical example is actually quite a common phenomenon. Though many people start *chessed* organizations with completely pure intentions, they ultimately dip into the

⁵⁵ *Avos* 3: 9

profits themselves. They may be tempted by unanticipated financial pressures or other factors that distract them from their original *chessed* goal.

“They Seek Many Calculations”

How do we fix this “spread out *lulav*” in ourselves?

According to this same *Mishnah*, Rabbi Yehudah says that spread out leaves of a *lulav* should be tied together from the upper part. (We do not practice this in actual *halachah*). Applying this solution to our *Avodas Hashem*, this may be interpreted to mean that a person has to take all his weaknesses, and connect them all together, giving them a united focus.

Though this may be feasible, on occasion one’s weaknesses have “spread out” so much that they cannot be fixed in the regular way. In this case, the only solution is to start over again from scratch. If we start an act with good intentions and have an earnest desire for something worthy, but then find ourselves being distracted from our goal along the way, we must try to return to the original, straight path. We should remind ourselves of where we come from and where we are going. We must try to prevent other interests and temptations swaying us away from our goal.

The spine of the *lulav* is naturally straight. Hashem created us as straight-minded people, as the *possuk* says, “G-d made man upright.”⁵⁶ A *lulav* which has grown with its leaves spread out resembles the end of the *possuk*, “And they seek many calculations.” The “many calculations” (*cheshbonos rabim*) in a person are his *negios*, his other personal interests or temptations that sway him from his original, straight path.

Yaakov *Avinu* was able to deal with Lavan the crook and yet stay honest and truthful. However, most of us are not on the level of Yaakov *Avinu*! Thus, we would find it difficult to withstand such temptations and distractions.

Being placed in compromising situations, such as in a situation where we feel required to lie (for instance, to the government) presents a danger to our souls. Our souls are pure and straight. Any act that encourages us to deviate from following the path of truth is risky. For instance, apparently the Brisker Rav was against joining the Knesset, not because of the ideological reasons of the Satmar Rebbe, but because he believed that being in the government would negatively affect the purity of his soul.

Lulav Of The Har Habarzel

The *Mishnah* then teaches the *halachah* that the *lulav* which grows on the *Har HaBarzel*⁵⁷ is kosher. The *Gemara*⁵⁸ clarifies that the validity of this type of *lulav* depends on how the leaves grow.

⁵⁶ *Koheles* 7: 29

⁵⁷ “Iron Mountain”, an area in Eretz Yisrael in which the *lulav* grew in an unusual shape.

Lulavim with the bottom leaf covering the next adjacent leaf are deemed kosher. However, *lulavim* with lower leaves that do not touch the next ones adjacent to them are deemed invalid. Let us explore how this teaching can be applied to our own soul.

The leaves of the spine on the *lulav* may represent a person's offspring, because leaves grow out from the spine like children are produced from a couple. However, like those *lulavim* of *Har HaBarzel* that have separated leaves, the leaves of the *lulav* do not always stay united with each other. Similarly, a person's children do not always stay connected. Often siblings and family members are spread out all over the world. Families that are disconnected from each other resemble the category of *lulavim* of the *Har HaBarzel* that the *Gemara* deems invalid, due to its separated leaves.

In other words, ideally, everything that emanates from a person is supposed to be connected. This concept also includes our *mitzvos* which all have to be connected to each other as well as to the source. Our *mitzvos* must be interrelated, not merely isolated, separate acts.

*Chazal*⁵⁹ state that even the emptiest Jew contains as many *mitzvos* as the amount of seeds in a pomegranate. And the *Malbim*⁶⁰ points out that a pomegranate can contain 613 seeds, which totals the amount of all the *mitzvos*. A famous question is posed as to how any Jew can be considered "empty," if they are full of *mitzvos*? According to Rov Dovid Povarsky *zt"l*,⁶¹ a pomegranate's seeds exist independently from each other. Though there are many seeds, many *mitzvos*, they are all meaningless if each act is disparate from each other.

These types of people resemble the *lulav* of *Har HaBarzel*, whose leaves do not overlap each other. Their actions are not "one piece" because they lack a fundamental unifying force behind them.

Designating Our Heart Towards Hashem

In the *Tefillas Geshem* (Prayer for Rain) of *Succos*, we refer to Yaakov *Avinu* as a "yichad lev" – one whose heart was designated totally for Hashem. The *Gemara*⁶² says that if one dreams about a *lulav*, it is a sign that "he only has one heart, towards his Father in Heaven." Similarly, the *Gemara*⁶³ says that a *lulav* comes from a date tree because "just as a date tree has only one heart, so do the Jewish people have only one heart, towards their Father in Heaven."

The *Rokeiach* teaches that the Torah hints 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 *Nevi'im* is a *vov*, and the last letter is a *lamed*. This spells the word *lulav*. Thus, *lulav* unifies the

58 *Sukkah* 32a

59 *Berachos* 57a

60 *Malbim, Shir HaShirim* 4: 13

61 *Rosh Yeshivas Ponovozeh*.

62 *Berachos* 57a

63 *Sukkah* 45b

entire Torah (including *Nevi'im*) together. Similarly, the actions of someone who only has “one heart towards his Father in Heaven” are unified and purposeful.

As we mentioned earlier, *lulav* is a combination of the words *lo* and *lev* which can be interpreted as one’s own heart or owning one’s true desires and actions. If someone is in control of his heart’s desires, he is considered someone with “one heart, towards his Father in Heaven.” In contrast, those whose hearts are controlled by other variables (various passions or other people) do not have only “one heart towards his Father in Heaven.” Rather, their hearts are governed by other variables and factors.

According to the *Gemara*,⁶⁴ “before a person eats and drinks, he has two hearts. After he eats and drinks, he only has one heart.” On a simple level, this may describe a hungry person as anxious whereas a satiated person feels physically calmer.⁶⁵ But on a deeper level, the *Gemara* may be referring to spiritual food and drink. Before a person “eats” and “drinks” spiritually, he has two hearts because essentially his *yetzer hora* and his *yetzer tov* are fighting and are thus not unified. However, once a person is satisfied spiritually, this means his *yetzer hora* has subsided, leaving the person with one, unified heart dedicated to Hashem.

One way of viewing the *yetzer hora* is as a person’s various extraneous desires that attempt to block him from carrying out Hashem’s will. Specifically, these *retzonos* (desires/passions) confuse a person, so that all his actions do not emanate from the same, single Divine source. When a person carries out different activities to please his *yetzer hara* (for instance, music, candies, trips, etc.), there is no unifying purpose binding together all these activities. Rather, they simply represent a bunch of disparate desires that are carried out on impulse. In contrast, a person constantly acting *l’sheim Shamayim*, (for the sake of Heaven) only has “one heart.” His actions and choices all emanate from one central point.

We shake the *lulav* in four directions, including 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. Four walls alone will not suffice. The house needs a roof and a floor as well. The roof and the floor connect the four walls together.

In summary, a *lulav* with separated leaves which grows on the *Har HaBarzel* represents a person who has a lack of connection between the *mitzvos*. Though this *lulav* may be technically kosher *b’dieved* (fulfilling the requirement after the fact but not in the optimal way), it is incomplete and thus fails to be *mehudar*, a beautiful *lulav*. So too with our *Avodas Hashem*. Only a beautiful and complete *avodah* which has no deficiencies, even *b’dieved*, is a proper representation of the revelation of the purpose of Creation.

Lulav Is One Heart – One Desire

⁶⁴ *Bava Basra 12b*

⁶⁵ *Rabbeinu Gershom and Rashbam, ibid.*

Hashem chose the Jewish people as **His** people. He gave us the Torah. The first letter of the Torah is *beis*, and the last letter of the Torah is *lamed*. Rearranging these letters spells the Hebrew 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 may merit to have only one, unified heart, and ultimately that our sole desire is to carry out the will of our Father in Heaven.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *To reveal your inner will, see Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Vol. 4, Chapters 15-22.*

5 | *In The Light*⁶⁷

The Inner Point of Succos: “Praiseworthy Is The One Who Did Not Sin”

“Praiseworthy is the one who did not sin, and one who sinned, shall repent and be atoned.”⁶⁸

Yom Kippur is a time of atonement for all sin, and then comes Succos, which reveals that the concept of “Praiseworthy is the one who did not sin”. On a deeper level, “Praiseworthy is the one who did not sin” is a point that is even in one who did sin, because in the innermost depths of the soul, there is a part of the soul which does not sin.

Thus, the depth of Succos is to reach this inner place in the soul of “Praiseworthy is the one who did not sin.”

Succos and The Keruvim: “Giluy Panim” – The Revelation of the “Face” of Hashem

The *Aron* (Ark) had a *kapores* (covering) on top of it, which served as an atonement (*kaparah*); thus the *kapores* symbolizes Yom Kippur, which atones. The *keruvim* (cherubim) atop the *kapores* had their wings spread in an upwards manner, thus the *keruvim* symbolize Succos, which we hint to in the prayer, ופרוס עלינו סוכת שלומיך, “*And spread upon us, the succah of Your perfection.*”⁶⁹

Succos comes after Yom Kippur, so it is like the *keruvim* atop the *kapores*. By the *keruvim*, each face was turned to the other, “like a man facing his brother”. Thus, Succos, which is symbolized by the *keruvim*, is about the concept of *giluy panim*, the “revelation of the “Face” (Countenance) of Hashem”.

The Depth of The Completion of Torah on Succos

“On the festival [of Succos], the world is judged on water.”⁷⁰ Besides for the simple meaning of this matter, that it is the time of the year when the world is judged for its water, the depth of this matter is because it is the time where the world goes back to being destroyed, as the world was destroyed by the waters of the Flood, when the world was judged with water. *Chazal* state, “He builds worlds, and destroys them” – and it is explained that the concept of destruction is always recurring throughout Creation, since Hashem is constantly building worlds and destroying them.

67 סוכות 051 – ברכת כהנים

68 Succos 53a; for more about “the point in the soul where there is no sin”, see Purim #032 – Understanding The Mitzvos of Purim

69 Tefillas Maariv

70 Rosh HaShanah 15b

Even after the world was destroyed through a Flood, there was the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, and there were the ten holy martyrs, which were all examples of the destruction that makes its appearance throughout the history of Creation. On Succos, where the world is judged on water, the depth of this matter is that it is a time where the world is supposed to return to being destroyed.

Thus at the end of Succos we celebrate “the completion of the Torah”, because if the Jewish people wouldn’t have received the Torah, the world would have returned to *tohu u’vohu*, nothingness; on Succos, the world should go back to being destroyed, it is being “judged with water” – but this destruction does not take place in the end, so we can then celebrate the completion of the Torah. The Torah is therefore “completed” on Succos, for on Succos the Torah has then fully descended onto this world, from the higher realms that it comes from.

Sitting In The Succah: Dwelling In The Holiness (Ain Od Milvado) That Fills Creation

There is a statement of *Chazal*, “*Ain Od Milvado*” (There is nothing besides Hashem) – even in the *chalal* (empty space) of the world”.⁷¹ Thus, in the *chalal*, in the entire space of this world, in between the higher and lower realms, there is *Ain Od Milvado*. Therefore, there is holiness that fills the entire *chalal* (space) of Creation. This idea is the depth of Succos: When one is in the *succah*, he is in the holiness of the *chalal*, in the very airspace that is in between the *succah*.

In a *succah*, there are the *defanos*/walls, *s’chach*, the *chalal*space in between, and the ground. *Chazal* say that “The name of Hashem dwells on the *succah*”⁷² – the holiness in the *succah* is that there is “*Ain Od Milvado*”, even in the *chalal*space of the world.” On Succos the world returns to destruction, where there is nothing but the *chalal*, empty space – and in the *chalal*, there is *Ain Od Milvado*.

Even the *chalal*airspace within the *succah* is holy. That is the novel concept that the *succah* reveals. It shows that there is no such thing as *hester panim* (concealment of Hashem’s radiance). It is like the *keruvim*, where there was *panim b’panim* (face-to-face), for the *keruvim* were face-to-face with each other; this reflects the concept that there is *giluy panim* (the revelation of the “Face”, or “Countenance” of Hashem) everywhere. After we have gone through the atonement of Yom Kippur, there can now be the revelation of *Ain Od Milvado* even where it seems like there is *hester panim* - and that is the revelation on Succos.

The Holiness Extends Into Even The Ground of The Succah

The holiness of the *succah* is not just in the *s’chach*/roof and in the *defanos*/walls, but even in the *chalal*airspace of the *succah*. Even more so, it extends into even the very ground of the *succah*. The

⁷¹ *Devarim Rabbah* 2, *Yalkut Shimeoni: Yisro* 270

⁷² *Yalkut Shimeoni: Re’ah*: 905

Gemara says that it is possible for the ground to be part of the walls of the *succah*. Thus, the *giluy panim* of Hashem extends into even the ground of the *succah*. Therefore, on the festival of Succos, it is revealed that even the ground itself can have the *panim* of Hashem.

The *mitzvah* of sitting in the *succah* is depicted as an extension of the holiness in *Eretz Yisrael*, according to the *sefarim hakedoshim*. The *Gemara* says that Adam's head was taken from *Eretz Yisrael* and the rest of his body came from the rest of the world.⁷³ The head, which houses the face, the "*panim*", is from *Eretz Yisrael*. The holiness of the *succah*, which is the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*, is thus the revelation of the level of "*panim*". Adam's sin caused death, which makes man go into the earth, which became ruined after the sin; but *Eretz Yisrael* is the rectified form of earth, for even the ground of *Eretz Yisrael* is holy; it is "the land which has the eyes of Hashem in it". That shows that even the ground itself can have the revelation of the *panim* of Hashem, and this is in the holiness of the *succah*, which the ground is a part of.

This is similar to the level of the giving of the Torah. For this reason, on Succos, there is a celebration in honor of completing the Torah (because Succos is connected to the giving of the Torah). By Har Sinai, Hashem spoke to the nation *panim b'panim*, face-to-face, and the impurity of the Serpent was removed from upon them at that time, so there was no death then, hence no more curse of man going back into the earth, and the depth of this is because at that time, it was revealed that even the ground can receive the *panim* of Hashem.

This is the depth of Succos. In earlier times, they used to kiss the dirt on the ground of the *succah*, and the depth behind this matter is because even the dirt of the *succah* has the revelation of the *panim* of Hashem in it. Such earth is not merely "*adamah*" which earth is normally called, but *adamah* earth that becomes *adameh l'elyon*, "I will resemble the One Above". It is the idea of *panim b'panim*, face-to-face with Hashem, the idea that the *giluy panim* (revelation of the "Face") of Hashem fills every possible place. There is a verse, "*Hashem is your shadow*", and the *Nefesh HaChaim* explains in the name of *Chazal* that just as a shadow is everywhere you go, so is Hashem everywhere you go. That is the "*tzeila d'mehemenusa*" (the "shade" or "shadow" of faith) that is Succos – it is a hint to how Hashem is the *tzeil/shadow*", which refers to the level of "*panim b'panim*", a return to the original plan of Creation, where the entire Creation is turned to face the *panim* of Hashem.

When such a dimension is revealed, a person is *medameh* ("resembling" and thereby emulating) to Hashem, and he becomes *domeh* (in the likeness of Hashem) to Hashem [elevated from the earth/*adamah* to *adameh l'elyon*].

"In The Shadow" of Hashem – On Succos A Person Can Feel Especially "Near" Hashem

The festival of Succos is called "*tzeila d'mehemenusa*" (in the shade/shadow of faith)⁷⁴, a term similar to the word "Betzael", which is from the words, "*b'tzeil Keil*" – "in the shadow of the

⁷³ *Sanhedrin 37b*

⁷⁴ *Zohar parshas Emor, 103a*

Almighty.” Thus, Succos is a time where a person can especially feel the “*tzeila d’mehemenusa*”, how he is in the “shade” of Hashem, how Hashem is near him like his own shadow. The time and place of Succos (the *succah* itself) has the power to bring a person to be near Hashem [“*etzlo Yisborach*”, “near” Hashem – from the word *aitzel*, “near”, and from the word “*atzilus*”, the highest spiritual dimension].

There are three festivals – Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos. On Pesach, the concept of *korban pesach* was how a person could become especially near Hashem, for the *korbon pesach* had to be *tzli* (roasted), which is from the word *aitzel*, near, a hint to being near Hashem. On Shavuos, we received the Torah, which is near Hashem. On Succos, we have the *succah*, which is called *tzeila d’mehemenusa*, a time and place where we can be especially near Hashem.

We explained that the depth of this is for a person to feel the “*panim b’panim*” of Hashem, where the *panim* of Hashem is revealed, through the *s’chach* and four *defanos*/walls of the *succah*, as well as through the airspace (*chalal*) in between the *succah*, and even in the ground of the *succah*. Thus, in all six directions of the *succah*, there is the *panim* of Hashem. That means that the revelation of the *panim* of Hashem is everywhere, in every place.

Even The Worst Sinners Can Feel Hashem On Succos

Even more so, the *succah* is called “*Succas Dovid HaNofeles*”, the “fallen *succah* of David.” This shows us that there is an aspect of *nefilas panim* (“fallen face”) in the *succah*. What is this *nefilas panim*? We find that Kayin had *nefilas panim*, when he was sad that Hashem didn’t accept his *korbon*, and Hashem said to him, “*Lamah naflu panecha*”, “Why has your face fallen”?

Chazal say that on Succos, “the entire *Klal Yisrael* is able to sit in one *succah*”, which includes even the souls who have *nefilas panim*, the souls who have fallen into “*She’ol*” (the most depraved depths of sin). That means that the revelation of the *panim* of Hashem can extend even into lowest level, which is called “*She’ol*”.

Why The Seven Ushpizin Come Down To The Succah

On Succos, the seven “shepherds”, the *Ushpizin*⁷⁵, descend into the earth.⁷⁶ Why do they come down?

In Heaven, there is Gan Eden and Gehinnom, which are separated from each other by a hairsbreadth. But on Succos, where even the wicked are atoned for by the four species, (for the *aravah* atones for those who do *aveiros*), there is a unique revelation taking place on this lowly world

⁷⁵ “*Ushpizin*” – lit. “Guests” – the seven righteous individuals who come to the *succah* (on alternating nights) are: Avraham, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and Dovid.

⁷⁶ *Zohar parshas Emor, 103b*

we dwell on, which does not take place in Heaven, which the seven *Ushpizin* are willing to descend to this earth for, in order to witness.

In Heaven, there is *giluy panim* (revelation of Hashem's radiance), but only in Gan Eden, and not in Gehinnom. In Gehinnom, there is *hester panim* (concealment of Hashem's radiance), which is called "*She'ol*". But on Succos, there is a revelation that even on this lowly realm, there can be *giluy panim* even in the ground, the lowliest plane of earth. This is a higher revelation than anything found in Heaven!

In Heaven there is a differentiation between the souls of the righteous and wicked, with Gan Eden and Gehinnom. But the seven "shepherds", the *Ushpizin*, desire for the righteous and wicked to be unified, because they want the entire Klal Yisrael to be unified. They come down here to this earth on Succos, because their deep desire is to see the entire Klal Yisrael unified.

Chazal say, "One shepherd, to all of them." On Succos, when "all of *Yisrael* can sit in one *succah*", when even the wicked are atoned for by the *aravos* in the *lulav*, the seven shepherds come here to this world not only to see the *tzaddikim*, but even the wicked. They come down here to this world even though there is a *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) here, which makes it painful for them to come down here. *Chazal* say that the souls have difficulty coming down here to this world, where there is an evil inclination – and this is referring to Succos, where the *tzaddikim* descend to this world, to the *succah*, in order to see the unified level of *Klal Yisrael*, where the righteous and the wicked are all united through the concept of the *succah*.

Furthermore, all of the souls in the world are all together on Succos, because Succos is a time of judgment over water, and this connects all souls together, because the rain is needed by everyone.

During the rest of the year, there is "*nefilas apayim*", which is also known as *tachanun* (supplication, where we cover our faces), which is a prayer that rectifies the souls who have fallen into the depths of sin, "*She'ol*" [However, this rectification does not connect everyone together all at once, because is *nefilas apayim*, the opposite of *giluy panim*].

But of Succos, where there is the revelation that there is *giluy panim* everywhere, it is said, "Praiseworthy is the one who did not sin, and if one sinned, he shall repent and be atoned." It is explained in many *sefarim hakedoshim* that Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur is the time of *teshuvah m'yirah* (repenting out of fear) and Succos is *teshuvah m'ahavah* (repenting out of love)⁷⁷, which is the higher level that returns everyone [and through the *teshuvah m'ahavah* on Succos, one can reach the point of "Praiseworthy is the one who did not sin".

Thus, on Succos, everyone is returned, and this is what is meant by the "*giluy panim*" of Hashem - which connects everyone together, all at once. For this revelation, the seven shepherds are willing to descend from Heaven onto this earth.

⁷⁷ *Imrei HaRim (Chiddushei HaRim): Succos*

Seventy “Faces” To Torah – The Revelation of Hashem In All Possible Angles

There are “70 faces” (facets of understanding) in Torah. The “70 faces” of Torah are parallel to the 70 *korbonos* brought on Succos. The end of Succos celebrates the “completion of Torah”, which includes both the Written Torah and Oral Torah; the depth of completing the Written Torah is to celebrate the “70 faces” to the Torah. The root of these 70 is in the 7 *Ushpizin*, which connects all Jews together, where all possibilities of all faces are all revealed, in the Torah; all “70 faces” to the Torah. There is then “*giluy panim*” in all possible angles. This awakens the light of the giving of the Torah, where there was “*giluy panim*”.

The Spiritual Light on Succos

Based upon the above, we can now understand the following deep, awesome insight.

Succos is called “*ohr makif*”, “enveloping light”.⁷⁸ Since *ohr makif* is so great that we cannot reach it and comprehend it, we need a *succah* to “shade” us from its powerful spiritual light, just like we need shade from the afternoon sun, when it is at its zenith. That is another reason why the *succah* is called “*tzeila d’mehemenusa*”, “in the shade, of faith”.

But there is also a deeper understanding to this, as follows.

Usually when light comes in from the outside, the light outside is bigger, and the light that comes inside is less. Only a little bit of light enters inside. But in the *sefarim hakedoshim*, there is totally opposite approach, a more inner understanding: The part of the light that enters inside is the “bigger” amount of light (and hence more important), whereas the part of the light that remains outside is “smaller” (and less important).

On Succos, where there is “*ohr makif*” (enveloping light), this is not like light that comes from the outside, where only a small part of light enters inside and the greater part of the light remains outside. Rather, since the depth of Succos is the point of “Praiseworthy is the one who did not sin”, which is a point that is in the depths of the *neshamah* - when this light found in the *pnim* (inside) of the *neshamah* is revealed, the light is so great that it extends outward.

That is the inner meaning of the “*tzeila d’mehemenusa*” of the *succah*. Paralleling this concept, the 7 *Ushpizin* are also not coming “in” to the *succah* from the “outside” - rather; they are on the inside of the *succah*, and their illumination extends outward from the *succah*.

That is also why the “70 faces” to the Torah (revealed on Succos, as explained earlier) are called 70 “*panim*”; the word “*panim*” is from the word “*poneh*”, to turn, and also from the word “*pnim*”, “inside” – which means that whatever is in the *pnim*/inside, can be revealed outward.

That is Succos: The festival of Succos is the “*pnim*”, the inner dimension, which is being revealed outward. Succos contains the “*pnim*” (innerness) or the *panim* (face), which is revealed outward -

⁷⁸ Arizal: *Shaar HaKavanos: derushei Chag HaSuccos, derush 3; further explained in Sfas Emes: Likutim: Succos, p.105*

like someone smiling at his friend, from deep within. That is the depth of Succos, and it is for this revelation that the seven *Ushpizin* are willing to descend from Heaven to!

In the upper realms, there is less inner light (*ohr penimi*) but more enveloping light (*ohr makif*). But since “truth sprouts from earth”, the perfected man can only come from this earth, there is light that comes from within man, and it can spread outward to those around oneself, where it becomes enveloping light.

This is the meaning of the concept of *tzeila d'mehemenusa*, and to this level, the seven *Ushpizin* come down from Heaven for, on Succos, which is like a crack in our dimension that allows all the heavenly light to shine.

The *succah* shields us from the light coming from within ourselves, not from the outside. It is not like the difficulty in looking at the sun. We make a *succah*, a *tzeila d'mehemenusa*, so that the light shouldn't spread past the *succah* into the surroundings and burn everyone from its high level of spiritual radiation.

There can be so much spiritual “light” coming from within, that it spreads outward. On Rosh HaShanah, this light is covered, but on Succos, the moon is full, so the light is full, and it spreads outward. So that the light shouldn't spread too far and burn everyone in its surroundings, we have the *succah* which contains it and thereby restricts this light into the *succah*.

The light of Succos reveals the level of “*panim*” [the *giluy panim*/revealed Countenance of Hashem] in all angles – above (represented by the *s'chach*), in all sides (represented by the walls of the *succah*), in between (the airspace of the *succah*), and below, (represented by the ground of the *succah*). When there is *giluy panim*, the spiritual light is coming from the inside. The light is not coming from the outside into the inside – rather, the light is coming from the inside, and spreading outward.

This revealed light in all six directions of the *succah* represents the concept that the *he'aras panim* (the radiant countenance) of Hashem can be found everywhere, in every possible angle of every dimension.

Hashem's Light Is Everywhere

In clearer and simpler terms, when a person sees Hashem in everything, he sees the *panim* (“Face”) of Hashem in everything, whether in light or in darkness, as it is written, “*To speak in the morning of your kindnesses, and of your faith at nights*”. It is to see Hashem in every place, even where there is darkness [difficulty].

Yaakov made *succos* (huts) to camp in, and *Chazal* teach that he made one *succah* for day and one *succah* for night. The *succah* he made at night represents “*your faith at nights*”, that even at nighttime, in darkness, there is the light of the *succah*.

The light of the *succah* is not light coming from the outside into the *succah*, but a light that comes from within the space of the *succah*. The *succah* itself is filled with light, its ground has *giluy panim* in it, and this light spreads outward.

The Depth of “Stay With Me, One More Day”

One can also return to this light on Simchas Torah, where we make a celebration in honor of “the completion of the Torah”.

Of the last day of Succos, Hashem says, “Stay with Me, one more day”.⁷⁹ The depth of this matter is that it is a day where when one can see that Hashem is found in all six directions – above, on all sides, in the space between, and even in the ground; when one realizes that there is nowhere else to go other than being near Hashem.

This is the meaning of “Stay with Me” – it does not mean simply that we will leave Hashem afterwards, but that we can reach the very depths of the festival of Succos, which is to be near Hashem and with Him; to be enveloped by Hashem (the concept of *ohr makif*, the “enveloping light), to feel surrounded by His *panim*/Face, so to speak.

The word “*succah*” is from the word *Yiskah* (the other name of Sarah), from the term “*sochob b’ruach hakodesh*”, “enveloped by the holy spirit”, which sees in all six directions. Succos reveals the idea that when we see nothing else around us in all six directions other than the Presence of Hashem, we are “staying” with Hashem Himself.

The Enveloping Light On Succos

That is the inner essence of Succos.

Just as we can understand that man wears clothing, and he is above his clothing, even though his clothing surrounds him, so too on Succos, if we reach the inner essence of Succos, we can reach the understanding that although the *succah* envelopes man, it is really the inner light which can spread outward from man and envelope him. Every day, we have the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, which surrounds a person, and this can remind us of this concept.

The root of this concept is when we stood by Har Sinai, where the mountain was suspended in the air above us and it surrounded us, where we were forced to accept the Torah. The Maharal explains that it was not simply that we were forced to accept the Torah. Rather, when the mountain was suspended in the air above us, the entire people had such clarity then, when they were trapped under the mountain, and this clarity enveloped them and enabled them to receive the light of Hashem’s Torah. That is Succos.

⁷⁹ *Rashi to Vayikra 23:36*

Throughout the year, especially on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, there is *kabalas ol malchus shomayim*, accepting the yoke of Heaven, upon us. On Succos, there is a different level: we are surrounded by the *succah*, which resembles being surrounded and enveloped by Har Sinai, when the mountain was suspended above us. Succos is an extension of this concept, where the mountain of Har Sinai is suspended above us – which, as it is clear to any sensible person, is really referring to the light of Torah, a light that constricts us to its place. The *succah* also constricts the light to its place, so that it shouldn't spread outward.

“Ain Od Milvado – Even In The Emptiest Space In The World”

When one reaches a palpable sense of *Ain Od Milvado* (“There is nothing besides for Him”), that Hashem is everywhere, even in the “*chalalo shel olam*”, “even in emptiest space in the world” – one can then reveal the truest level of “*panim*”, which is the *ohr panim* (the light of the Face/Countenance) of Hashem, which we express in the words, **כִּי בְאוֹר פְּנֵיךְ נָתַתָּ לָנוּ**, “*For in the light of Your Face, You gave to us, Hashem our G-d*”. That is the light of Succos!

The root of Succos is in the act of Creation, when Hashem made the heavens and the earth. We have Yom Kippur as a time of atonement, and afterwards we have Succos, where we return to a semblance of Hashem creating the world, which consists of the heavens and the earth. Succos is “*tzeila d'mehemenusa*”, similar to the word “Betzael”, who knew the secret of how to combine the letters of the heavens and earth. Building a *succah* is therefore a semblance of building the heavens and earth which Hashem made.

The Serpent told Adam and Chavah that man is a builder of universes. Although it was using this argument in order to convince them to sin, there was a kernel of truth to this argument, in that man has the power to build words, to build heaven and earth together - through building the *succah*.

The essence of Succos is that there is *Ain Od Milvado* within all of *chalal*space; as in the teaching of the Sages, “*Ain Od Milvado*, even in the empty space of the world”. There is “*Ain Od Milvado*” [or *giluy panim* of Hashem] even in the *chalal*space of the *succah*.

Therefore, the entire world is nothing but a giant amount of concealment (*hester*) that hides Hashem's light.⁸⁰ The *succah* conceals and constricts the light of Hashem; the *succah* itself is not the light of Hashem, it is just the “*tzeila d'mehemenusa*”, “the shadow of faith”, because, from a deep understanding, it is but a “shadow” of the light of Hashem, and not the light itself.

The *succah* conceals the *ohr*/light of Hashem, by keeping it contained in that space and not letting it spread past the walls of the *succah*. In that sense, it conceals Hashem's light, keeping it within the *succah* alone. In the future, the light will be allowed to spread everywhere.

⁸⁰ For further insight into this matter (and how to go beyond the view of “*hester panim*”), see Tefillah #0120 – Finding The Shechinah

In Conclusion

The more we merit, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to contemplate and recognize the meaning of “*Ain Od Milvado*” (There is nothing besides Him), we will merit the light of Succos to come from within our own inner light, and not from the outside. It will then spread outward, and then the spiritual light of Succos will become a light that envelopes all of the surroundings.

In the future, this light will extend into the rest of the world. That is the depth of why the gentiles in the future will kick the *succab*, because Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath then, which means on a deeper level that the light will spread into all of the surroundings, and it will be unrestrained [as the *Gemara* there says, the righteous will be healed by this light, whereas the wicked will suffer from it; hence, the gentiles will kick the *succab* in the future, because they will not want this light]. This will be the “new light of Zion” that will illuminate the world.⁸¹

⁸¹ For more on the topic of the “*obr panim*” of Hashem, see *Tefillah* #0166 – *Leaving The Disparate View*

6 | *Sefer Koheles – Everything Is “Hevel Havalim”*⁸²

“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*⁸³ 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 *Succos*, what is that inner point of *Yom Tov* that can connect a person with Hashem?

Removing the Barriers

On Shabbos of *Chol HaMoed Succos*, *Chazal* established that we read the book of Koheles.⁸⁴ This is not a coincidence that we read Koheles specifically on *Succos*. There must be some connection between the book of Koheles and the theme of *Succos*; otherwise, why would *Chazal* establish that we read Koheles on *Succos*?

⁸² 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>

⁸³ chapter 26

⁸⁴ 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* existed, 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.

*Vignettes from Bilvavi on Succos*⁸⁵

7 | *Sukkah of Nowadays & Future*⁸⁶

Sukkah - In The Merit of Avraham Avinu

The Sages state in the *Midrash* that because Avraham *Avinu* enabled his guests to sit under the shade of a tree and be shielded from the sun's heat, his descendants (the Jewish nation) merited the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, where we sit in the shadow of the *sukkah*. From these words of our Sages we see that the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* is rooted in Avraham *Avinu*.⁸⁷

If we reflect further into this, we find an additional connection between Avraham *Avinu* and *sukkah*. The Sages state that on the day that Avraham *Avinu* was ill from circumcision, Hashem removed the sun from its sheath, so that Avraham *Avinu* would not be disturbed by guests.⁸⁸

The concept of Hashem removing the sun from its sheath is found elsewhere as well. The Sages teach that in the future, the nations of the world will request that Hashem give them the *mitzvos* so that they can earn reward. Hashem will give them an easy *mitzvah*, the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* to the gentiles, and then He will take the sun out of its sheath, where the temperature will become so hot that the gentiles will kick the *sukkah* and run out of it.⁸⁹

Sukkah and The Sun's Shade

What is the connection between the sun being removed from its sheath, and *sukkah*?

In the future, the righteous will merit to dwell in a *sukkah* made of the leviathan skin, and the rest of the skin will be spread out over the walls of Yerushalayim, and its light will shine from one end of the world to the other.⁹⁰ From this we see that the *sukkah* of the future will be totally different than the *sukkah* we have nowadays. The *sukkah* of the future will be entirely light, whereas the *sukkah* we have today is required to have in it more shade than sunlight⁹¹. The *sukkah* of nowadays is all about

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86 Editor's Note: This translation is a summary of the original Hebrew derasha printed in sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh – Succos. The bulk of this adaptation has been taken from pages 10-14 and page 26 of Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh – Succos. The material of this derasha is esoteric, thus it was too difficult to adapt the entire derasha into English; here we have tried to present a summary which discusses the main highlights of the shiur.

87 Beraishis Rabbah 48:10

88 Rashi to Beraishis 18:1; Bava Metzia 86b

89 Avodah Zarah 3a; Tanchuma Shoftim 89

90 Bava Basra 75a

91 Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim 631

being in the shadow or shade (*tzeil*) of the *sukkah*, whereas the *sukkah* of the future will be entirely light, with no shadow.

Additionally, Rashi⁹² states that *sukkah* is from the word *s'chach*, the mat that covers the *sukkah*, which is a covering that is made to shield us in the *sukkah* from the sun.

Let us think into the depth of these concepts.

Sukkah of Nowadays: Dwelling In The 'Shadow' of Emunah

The words of the Zohar⁹³ are well-known: *sukkah* is called the *tzeila d'mehemenusa*, “the shadow of *emunah* (faith)”. There is *emunah*, and there is *tzeil ha'emunah*. The complete level of *emunah* is called *emunah*, whereas the incomplete level of *emunah* is called *tzeila d'meheimenusa*, or *tzeil emunah*. Thus, the *sukkah* of nowadays, which is called *tzeila d'meheimenusa*, represents a level of incomplete *emunah*, in contrast to the *sukkah* of the future, which will reflect the level of complete *emunah*.

Avraham *Avinu* was the first person to reveal *emunah* onto the world. Avraham is called “*Ezrachi*”, from the word *zerichah* (to shine), because he shined the light of *emunah* upon the world. Thus Avraham *Avinu* is the one who brought the *tzeila d'meheimenusa* onto the world, and that is why we were given the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* in Avraham *Avinu*'s merit.

The *sukkah* of nowadays requires us to sit in its shadow because in the current era, we are only able to enjoy a partial level of *emunah*, and not the complete level. We are only in the “shadow” of *emunah*, not in the *emunah* itself. Only in the future, where the complete level of *emunah* will be revealed, will there be no requirement of *tzeil*/shadow in the *sukkah*. That will be the *sukkah* of the leviathan, which will be a light that shines stronger than the sun – it will be the reality of *emunah* itself, and not merely in the “shadow” of *emunah*.

The Difference Between Emunah and 'In The Shadow' of Emunah

Now let us try to understand, with *siyata d'shmaya*, the difference between the levels of *tzeil emunah* and *emunah*.

Tzeil emunah is an offshoot of *emunah*, it is a partial revelation of *emunah*, but does not reveal actual *emunah* as it is. This is the level of *sukkah* we have nowadays, which is entirely about the *tzeil emunah*.

In contrast, the level of actual *emunah*, which will be revealed in the *sukkah* of the future, is described in the words of the Sages: “In the future, Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath,

⁹² Rashi to Sukkah 2a

⁹³ Zohar III Emor 103a

where the righteous will be healed from it, and the wicked will be judged from it”.⁹⁴ How will the righteous be healed, and how will the wicked be punished? The *Gemara* says that one who shames a Torah scholar cannot be healed⁹⁵; elsewhere, the *Gemara* says that ignoramuses will not be resurrected with the dead⁹⁶, and the *Gemara* there says that the only way for them to merit rectification is to attach themselves to Torah scholars. The *Yismach Moshe*⁹⁷ explains this in the name of the *Bach* that one who shames a Torah scholar cannot be healed in the sense that he will not be resurrected with the dead, and this is because one who has shamed a Torah scholar is missing *bittul* (self-nullification) to the Torah scholar; only through nullifying oneself to a Torah scholar can one merit resurrection in the future. In contrast, the righteous will be healed in the future from the sun’s rays, because they have nullified themselves [to Hashem].

Thus, *bittul* (self-nullification) is the key to recovery from all spiritual maladies. When the soul of a person is not nullified to its higher source, the abilities in the soul remain mixed and unsorted, and this is the root of all spiritual sickness. But when the soul nullifies itself to its higher source, all of the abilities in the soul are then nullified and returned to their root, where no sickness can take hold.

When Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath in the future, this can be understood on a deeper level as the revelation of the level of total *emunah*, which is above the level of being ‘in the shadow’ of *emunah*. There will be no more ‘shadow’. Each person will react differently to this revelation. The non-Jewish nations will kick the *sukkah*, as the *Gemara* says, and this includes all of the wicked people in the world; whereas the righteous will nullify themselves to its light.

When Yonah was spit out of the whale, Hashem caused the sun to beat down on him very hard, whereupon he fainted. Yonah said to Hashem that he would rather die than be exposed to this heat.⁹⁸ This can be understood on two different levels. Either it can be a cause for *mesirus nefesh* – giving up one’s soul to Hashem and being prepared to die for Hashem, which is a holy kind of death – or it can mean, *chas v’shalom*, an expression of rebellion towards Hashem, as Esav said, “Behold, I am going to die; for what do I need the firstborn rights for?”⁹⁹ – Esav ‘kicked’ at his firstborn status.

When the sun is taken out of its sheath, and there is no shade from the sun, either this will cause a person to nullify himself to Hashem, or it will cause him to kick and rebel, *chas v’shalom*. If one lived a life of *bittul* towards Hashem, he is more in touch with the great spiritual light of the future, and he will be able to achieve a greater level of *bittul* in the future, to the point that he will be able to totally nullify his existence to Hashem. In contrast, one who did not live a life of *bittul* towards Hashem during this current lifetime will not be able to survive the revelation of the future. It will be way above and beyond his perception, so he will kick at it.

⁹⁴ *Avodah Zarah 3b*

⁹⁵ *Shabbos 119b*

⁹⁶ *Kesubos 111b*

⁹⁷ *Yismach Moshe, parshas Ki Seitzei*

⁹⁸ *Yonah 4:8*

⁹⁹ *Beraishis 25:32*

When a great spiritual revelation is revealed to a person, either one of two reactions will ensue. Either the person will recognize its exaltedness and he will nullify himself to it, willing to give himself up for it; or he will oppose it and rebel and kick at it.

Based upon the above, we can now understand that righteous will be healed in the future from the sun being removed from its sheath, because since they were used to a life of *bittul*, they will receive a complete healing, whereas the wicked will be judged by this powerful revelation, because since they will not be able to handle its light, they will instead kick at it. They will kick at it because they will feel a tremendous contradiction in their souls, and this is the depth of the punishment that is called “*Kaf HaKela*”.

Our avodah In The Current Era

In the future there will be no more shade from the sun; there will be no more *tzeil*/shadow. Nowadays, however, the *avodah* of a person involves ‘shadow’. In other words, in our current era, the light of the future is currently hidden; any spiritual ‘light’ that we do have today is on a level of ‘*ohr ganuz*’ (the hidden light). In a similar context, Shabbos is referred to as ‘hidden’ treasure.¹⁰⁰ In the future, when it will be revealed “the day that is entirely Shabbos”, the Shabbos will no longer be a ‘hidden’ treasure, for it will be fully revealed.

Thus, the *sukkah* that we have nowadays is meant for us to reveal the spiritual light precisely through ‘shadow’. Here we learn a deep and profound concept. There are two aspects of our *avodah* – we have an *avodah* to reveal spiritual light onto the world through ‘shadow’, and we have a more inner aspect of our *avodah*, where we reveal spiritual light that has no shadow. The entire concept of shadow began after Creation, where Hashem created light and darkness and separated them. The heavens were created from the original light that was around before Creation.¹⁰¹ That original light of before Creation is the absolute level of Hashem’s oneness, and it will be revealed in the future.

But we also remember this original light on some level even in our current era. As an example, there is a *halacha* that when building a *sukkah*, we must first build the walls and only after that do we place the *s’chach*¹⁰²; the depth of this is that we first reveal a *sukkah* where there is entirely sunlight and no shadow, and after that we have a *sukkah* with *s’chach*, where there is sunlight and shadow.

In Conclusion

The *sukkah* of the future will essentially be a dwelling of the *Shechinah* (Hashem’s Presence) that will fill the entire world, where the entire Creation will achieve unity, bound together by the light of the *Shechinah*. This is the perfected *sukkah* which we hope, await, and long for. In the future, we will

¹⁰⁰ *Shabbos 10b*

¹⁰¹ *Pirkei D’Rebbi Eliezer 3, Nusach Teiman (mentioned in Moreh Nevuchim II: 26)*

¹⁰² *Rema: Orach Chaim: 635*

see how even all of the ‘darkness’ that we see in the world can really be attributed to a source of light, which is where darkness is created from.

It will not just be the ‘shadow’ of *emunah* – it will be *emunah* itself. It will be the *sukkah* that is *emunah* itself, and not just a ‘*tzeila d’meheimunsa*’ that it is nowadays. The *sukkah* of the future will be the *sukkah* were we will finally see how all ‘darkness’ really stems from ‘light’, for ultimately, light and darkness are originally one undivided creation. We will be able to see how darkness itself can be the light of *emunah*, which we cannot understand through human logic.

This will be the *sukkah shleimah*, the perfect *sukkah*, which we express in the words, “And spread upon us the *sukkah* of Your completion” (ופרוס עלינו סוכת שלומיך). May we merit from Hashem to have the light of the *sukkah* of the future to shine upon us, and to merit it on its complete level, may it come speedily in our days.

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos*¹⁰³**8 | The Revelation of “Ayin” Throughout The Days of Succos**¹⁰⁴***Yaakov Avinu Constructed Succos Unifying “Kayin” and “Hevel”***

The first time that the Torah mentions the concept of *Succos* is by Yaakov Avinu. When Yaakov Avinu camped, he made for himself “*Succos*”, huts; the Torah says “*And for his flock, he made Succos. Therefore, he named the place Succos*”. Although the simple meaning of this *possuk* in the Torah is also true, there is also an inner meaning of the *possuk*, as follows.

There is “flock”, and there is *Succos*. When Yaakov Avinu made *Succos* for his flock, he unified together the flock with *Succos*. The word in the Torah for “his flock” is **מִקְנֵהוּ** (“*mikneihu*”), from the word **קַיִן** (*Kayin*). The word “*Kayin*” is from the word *kinyan*, “acquisition”.

The *sukkah* is called a “temporary dwelling.” The Sages argued if *sukkah* must be a permanent dwelling or a temporary dwelling, and the *halachah* is like the opinion that *sukkah* is a temporary dwelling. It is also brought in *halachah* that the reason why we read the book of *Koheles* on *Shabbos Chol HaMoed Succos* is because *Koheles* tells us how vain this world is, which shows us how this world is only temporary. We find a hint to this from the names of the two brothers Kayin and Hevel. Hevel represents the theme of *Koheles*, which teaches us that this world is nothing but “*hevel havalim*”, “vanity of vanities”. The concept of *Succos* parallels Hevel/*Koheles*, whereas the concept of “*mikneihu*” parallels Kayin.

When Yaakov constructed *Succos* for his flock, he was essentially rectifying Kayin’s sin of murdering Hevel. There was a disparity formed between Kayin and Hevel, (and soon we will explain what it was), and Yaakov’s act of building the *sukkah* came to rectify that disparity. How? He made the *sukkah* for his flock, but in addition to this, his flock became integrated and enjoined with the *sukkah* that covered them. Thus, on an esoteric level, “Hevel” serves Kayin, and “Kayin” becomes integrated and enjoined with Hevel - and then Kayin and Hevel become unified.

Kayin/Yeish and Hevel/Ayin

Let us explain the roots of disparity that were formed between Kayin and Hevel.

It is explained in the writings of the Arizal that part of Adam’s soul was given to Kayin, and part of Adam’s soul was given to Hevel.¹⁰⁵ In terms of our soul and of our personal task on this world,

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104 This translation is a summary of a derasha printed in *sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh – Succos* (pages 27-38), and the bulk of it is taken from pages 27-30 and pages 37-38.

“*Kayin*” refers to our “acquisitions”, or the physical dimension, known as “*Yeish*”, which we can grab onto, perceive, and hold. “*Hevel*” is the exact opposite of “*Kayin*”: *Hevel* is all about seeing this physical dimension as complete nothingness, “*ayin*”. As Koheles said: “For it is all *hevel* (nothing; vain).”¹⁰⁶

From the perspective that “Everything is *hevel*” (or “*ayin*”) there is no difference between human and animal, because in relation to the reality of Hashem, everything in Creation is regarded as nothing. But from the perspective of *yeish*, there is a difference: a person is a person, and an animal is an animal; a person has *daas* (mental capabilities), whereas an animal has no *daas*. From the perspective of *yeish*, man is higher than animal. But Koheles says that since everything on this world is considered to be *hevel* (nothing), there is no difference between man and animal, for it is all *hevel*. From the perspective of *ayin* – or when *ayin* is revealed – everything is deemed as *hevel*.

Thus, “*Kayin*” is all about *yeish*, of tangible acquirements, of seeing reality at face value. If something cannot be tangibly sensed, from the perspective of *Kayin/Yeish* it is “*hevel*” – meaning, non-existent.

Something that is *hevel* cannot be tangibly felt. The exhale of air that leaves the body is called *hevel*. There are actually two levels of *hevel*. One kind of *hevel* relates to the worth of something: If it is important, if it is not so important, etc. This is the external use of the power of *hevel*. The inner use of *hevel* is when we are describing a concept that cannot be tangibly felt. Thus, there is a power of *hevel* that relates to This World, and there is a higher use of the power of *hevel*, which is transcendent

Hevel is essentially the power to turn everything in this physical dimension of *yeish*, into *ayin* (nothingness). In the lower use of this power, one dismisses the importance of something. By negating the worth of something, the *hevel* turns it from *yeish* into *ayin*. This use of *hevel* is used in the negative sense: to negate the worth of something. But in the higher use of the power of *hevel*, the use of *hevel* reveals the *ayin* in something, which is the true and inner view towards reality [when we uncover the inner dimension in this physical reality, which is that everything is really “nothing”, in relation to the reality of Hashem].

Yeish Vs. Ayin

Ayin needs to be contained in some kind of *kli* (receptacle). When a person is instead involved only with *Yeish*, he can only deal with that is tangible, and he cannot relate to the concept of *hevellayin*, so he will not be able to contain *ayin*.

105 Note from the Hebrew sefer: The concept of the souls of Kayin and Hevel is a deep and broad matter which is spread out and discussed throughout the writings of the Arizal, and it requires many introductions to explain it; and not every mind can understand the concepts. Refer to Sefer HaGilgulim, 21-23.

106 Koheles 3:19

When Kayin killed Hevel, the depth of this matter is because the perspective of “*yeish*” wishes to negate “*ayin*”. Kayin’s act of killing Hevel represents his perspective of *yeish*, which cannot accept the concept of *ayin*. The perspective of Kayin/*Yeish* doesn’t allow a person to listen to the inner voice of the soul which says that “everything is *hevel*”, and this is the depth of “killing *Hevel*”. A person kills “*Hevel*” on his own inner level when he refuses to listen to his soul’s call, which is constantly telling a person at all times: “Everything is *hevel*! *Ain Od Milvado* (There is nothing besides for Hashem)!!”

When one pushed away the inner voice in his soul and he chooses not to hear it, he is repeating the sin of Kayin, on a personal level. A person has physical acquisitions of this world, and he also has spiritual, otherworldly acquisitions. The most inner possession that a person has is his “I”. The soul is not willing to forego this dear “acquisition” – it is not willing to accept that even the “I” is *hevel*. A hint to this is that the word “I” in Hebrew is “*ani*”, which is the opposite arrangement of the letters in the word “*ayin*”. Thus, the “*ani*” of a person is the very antithesis to *ayin*.

Thus, when one considers his “I” to be an independent existence that is not subject to “*hevel*” – when one is unwilling to nullify his existence – this is a repeat of Kayin’s act of killing Hevel, on an inner level. The “Hevel” in our souls is essentially the inner voice of the soul that shows us how all of existence is really *hevel*; it tells us that all *yeish* must be turned into *ayin*. When one refuses to listen to this inner voice, this is “killing Hevel” on an inner level, for the person is refusing to nullify his *yeish* (physical existence) to *ayin*.

Adam HaRishon’s Choice

Earlier it was mentioned that the souls of Kayin and Hevel were originally part of Adam’s soul. The understanding of this is that Adam’s test was essentially that he was supposed to choose between which perspective to connect himself to: *yeish*, or *ayin*. Adam’s sin was essentially the decision to connect to *yeish*. In our current 6,000 year era, it is now our *avodah* to turn *yeish* into *ayin*. This entails a cleansing from our sins, along with suffering, which enables us to achieve *bittul*, self-nullification [which subsequently brings us into the realm of *ayin*].

Kayin received *yeish* that was in Adam’s soul, and Hevel received the *ayin* of Adam’s soul. The temptation to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* was essentially the very same warring forces between Kayin (*yeish*) and Hevel (*ayin*). Before Kayin and Hevel were born, they remained as inner forces inside Adam’s soul; when it came to Adam’s test, *yeish* (Kayin) prevailed over *ayin* (Hevel) when Adam gave into eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, and when it came to Kayin and Hevel, *yeish* prevailed over *ayin* when Kayin killed Hevel. Thus, the sin of Adam and the sin of Kayin were essentially the same sin.

Succos: The Connecting Point Between Yeish and Ayin

Ever since the sin of Adam, *yeish* has prevailed over *ayin*. Had Adam never sinned, the souls of Kayin and Hevel would have been integrated, and it would have been revealed how everything, both

yeish and *ayin*, are all *echad* (one unit) – the concept of “*Ain Od Milvado*”. Now that we live after the sin, the dimensions of *yeish* and *hevel* are separated and they cannot be integrated. But at the very roots and purpose of Creation, *yeish* and *ayin* are integrated into one, under the greater reality, of *Ain Od Milvado*.

The festival of *Succos*, though, is the point that reveals how *yeish* and *ayin* are integrated into one reality. *Succos* is connected with the word וְלִמְקַנְהוּ, which is from the word “*Kayin*”, and earlier it was explained that this was because the *sukkah* connects Kayin with Hevel; thus *sukkah* is the point where Kayin/*yeish* becomes enjoined and integrated with Hevel/*ayin*.

At their very roots, Kayin and Hevel are connected in one unit. A hint to this is where the Torah says, “*And they were in the field*”, which shows us that there is a point where Kayin and Hevel are connected together.

Tasting of Hashem

It is written, “*Taste and see that Hashem is good.*”¹⁰⁷ We can “taste” of Hashem, so to speak. Although Hashem is incomprehensible, we can still have a “taste” of Him. The *Mesillas Yesharim* states that “man was not created except to delight in Hashem and enjoy the radiance of His *Shechinah*.” After Adam sinned, we lost the spiritual pleasure, the *oneg*, of basking in Hashem’s Presence, and instead our sense for pleasure was replaced with evil and unspiritual pleasures. But at its very root, our power of taste (which was abused to sin with eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*) is the tool with which we can taste of Hashem.

When we “taste” the spiritual dimension, *ayin*, we lose our taste in *yeish*; when we taste of *bittul* (self-nullification), we lose our taste for the tangible and the comprehensible.

The true taste is experienced when we “taste” of the Creator. This is the depth behind the four species. In the four species, we bind together a species that has taste and no scent (*hadasim*), a species that has a scent and no taste (*lulav*), a species that has a taste and a scent (*esrog*), and a species that has no taste and no scent (*aravos*). All of these aspects become combined and integrated with each other, when we bind together the four species. The matter of *aravos* is troubling; if *aravos* have no taste and no scent, why do we take them? Why don’t we instead take only a species that has either taste or scent?

But this is not a question, because the understanding of the four species is totally different than this. The Baal Shem Tov explained that the absence of the taste and scent in the *aravos* is really an example of *ayin* – in other words, “*ayin*” is the taste and scent of the *aravos*.

This is the secret behind the *aravos*. As long as a person hasn’t yet connected himself to the point of *ayin*, then indeed, he will not find any taste or scent in the *aravos*. But when a person becomes connected to *ayin*, he will then find that *ayin* is the taste and scent of the *aravos*.

¹⁰⁷ *Tehillim 34:9*

And this is essentially what gives a person the ability to connect together the four species and integrate them.

Hoshanah Rabbah – The “Seal Within A Seal”: The Shattering of Limitations

There is a secret depth behind why we bang the *aravos/hoshanos* on the seventh day of *Succos* (*Hoshanah Rabbah*). It is really a matter which needs understanding: why do we set aside a special day on *Succos* to awaken mercy that we receive rain, and why do we specifically use the willow branch, which is the species that represents the wicked, who have no taste (Torah) and no scent (*mitzvos*)?

But the depth is as follows. The fact that the *aravos* have no taste and no scent is but the external aspect of the *aravos*. The inner dimension of *aravos* is that their absence of taste and scent is, itself, the very taste and scent of the *aravos*!

When we pray for mercy on our water on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are referring to the original waters that were created on the first day of Creation, where there was nothing but “*the spirit of G-d*” that hovered over the face of the waters.” The Sages say that the “spirit of G-d” here refers to “the spirit of Mashiach”.¹⁰⁸ These were the waters of the spiritual dimension (“*ayin*”) and not of the physical dimension (“*yeish*”). And it is precisely the *aravos* which awaken the original waters of Creation, for the *aravos* have no taste and no scent, thus they contain “nothingness”, which is the key to the spiritual dimension. Its nothingness, (“*ayin*”) is essentially its taste and its scent.

This is the secret that lies behind the words of the Arizal¹⁰⁹ that there is a *piska tava* (good message) given over on *Hoshanah Rabbah* which takes effect on *Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah*. The *piska tava* is essentially the external layer of the seal, whereas the seal that was signed on Yom Kippur is the inner seal. Together, the seal of *Hoshanah Rabbah* and the seal of Yom Kippur form the *chotam b'toch chotam*, the “seal within a seal”. The seal represents a boundary, a limit, for the word *chosam* is from the word *techum*, “boundary”. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, where the dimension of *ayin* is revealed, all boundaries become integrated with the limitless dimension.

Thus, the *chotam b'toch chotam* is essentially the point where boundaries are nullified. When the boundaries are nullified, when limitations are shattered, we can then taste and smell the dimension of *ayin* [which we cannot taste and smell with our physical senses]. And then we can merit a “*chasimah tovah*” – a “good signature”.

When we perceive the seal of Yom Kippur as a limitation that cannot be broken, that itself awakens judgment upon ourselves. But when our physical dimension (*yeish*) joins with the spiritual dimension (*ayin*), when our limited dimension merges with the limitless dimension, we are then able to truly have a “*piska tava*”.

¹⁰⁸ *Beraishis Rabbah* 2:4

¹⁰⁹ *Shaar HaKavanos: Succos, derush* 6

Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah: Two Dimensions Joining Each Other

This concept continues into *Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah*, of which “the end is contained in the beginning”¹¹⁰; the finishing of the Torah, which commences with beginning the Torah.

The finishing of the Torah represents our limited dimension. From this viewpoint, the Torah is referred to as “*Toras emes*”, “the Torah of truth”, and the “seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is truth” – which means that we are confined to certain limitations. But when we consider the concept of “the end is contained in the beginning” – the fact that as soon as we finish the Torah, we begin the Torah – this reveals to us the concept that the limitless dimension beyond our own time and space can pour into our own limited dimension. This point is known as “*emes l’amitah*”, the absolute level of truth – and this is the point that describes the “*chotam b’toch chotam*” of *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

The concept of the “*piska tava*”, which appears after the signature that was written and sealed during Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, is essentially the point that reveals the root of the *chotam b’toch chotam*; it is the point of *hiskalelus* (integrating) with Hashem.

The “seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is truth”; when we reveal the point of *emes l’amitah* (absolute truth), we see that there are levels to the truth, and that not all truth is the absolute truth. What is *emes/truth*, and what is *emes l’amitah/absolute truth*? The limited dimension we normally are contained in is a truthful dimension, but there is a more inner dimension that is beyond it, where there are no limitations; that is the *emes l’amitah*.

Thus, our limited dimension we are normally in is not the *emes l’amitah*, although it is certainly *emes*. The *emes l’amitah* is the point where the limitless dimension meets with our own limited dimension and it is shined upon it.

This is the secret of the “*chotam b’toch chotam*”. The “seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*”, which is essentially the *chotam b’toch chotam*, is the *emes l’amitah*. It is the point where the limitless dimension is revealed upon our own limited dimension, and this is how what the *chotam b’toch chotam* accomplishes. It shows us that our own limited world is ultimately a part of a higher, limitless dimension, which shows us that there is more to the truth that we see. It is because we really do not understand the truth at all, for all truth is ultimately bound up with Hashem, and “no thoughts can comprehend Him”.¹¹¹

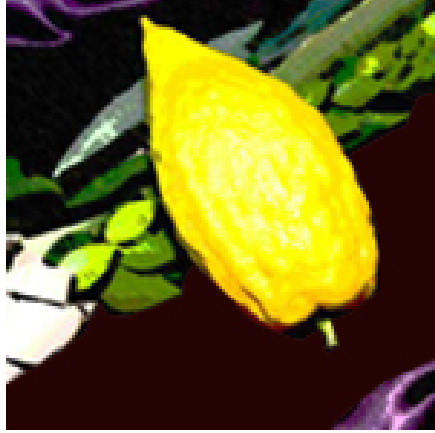
This is the depth that is behind these 22 days of *Tishrei* that spans Rosh HaShanah through *Shemini Atzeres*. Since Rosh HaShanah, we are being drawn closer to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*’s embrace¹¹². But Succos is the time where we actually become integrated (*miskalel*) in Hashem, for the *sukkah* is where we sit in the *tzeil* (shadow) of Hashem. It is the point of *ayin*, which we cannot grasp or comprehend in any way; it cannot be physically sensed.

¹¹⁰ *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:6

¹¹¹ *P’sach Eliyahu*

¹¹² *Arizal: Shaar HaKavanos: Yom Kippur, derush 4*

The secret of these days is that they reveal to us the concept of *hiskalelus* in Hashem, where we can see that everything is really *ayin* (nothingness), and as Shlomo HaMelech says in *Koheles*: “For everything is *hevel* (nothing).” And when *ayin* becomes integrated with the Creator, it is revealed the depth of “*Ain Od Milvado*” – that there is nothing besides for Hashem.



HOSHANNAH RABBAH

7 | Separating From “Erev Rav”¹¹³

Understanding The Depth Behind Hoshanah Rabbah

On *Succos*, we take four species¹¹⁴, one of which is the *aravos*¹¹⁵. The *aravos* serve two purposes. They are part of the four species, and they are also used as “*hoshanos*”¹¹⁶ [the additional pair of willow branches that we take on the day of *Hoshanah Rabbah*]. On the seventh day of *Succos*, *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. *Succos* is for 7 days. The 7th day of *Succos*, though, is different than the other days of *Succos* 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 *Succos* 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 *Succos* both have a seventh day. What is the difference between the 7th of Pesach and the 7th of *Succos*, though? The 7th day of Pesach is a *Yom Tov*, whereas the 7th day of *Succos* 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 Tov*¹¹⁷, 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 *Succos*, 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 *Succos* is not a festival like Shabbos or *Yom Tov*. The 7th day of *Succos*, *Hoshanah Rabbah*, therefore, reveals an entirely novel concept to us.

Gentiles and Succos

The *Gemara* states that a non-Jew who keeps Shabbos is liable to the death penalty¹¹⁸. Shabbos is called the “inheritance of the Jewish people”, which the gentiles have no connection with, and

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

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

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

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

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

118 *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 Shavuos, 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. Shavuos 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 *Succos*, however, we find that the gentiles do have some kind of connection with it.

1) First of all, the 70 *korbonos* brought on *Succos* 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 *Succos*, because if they would have no connection to *Succos*, then there would be no need to have the 70 *korbonos* on *Succos*!

2) A second proof is that it is brought in the book of *Zechariah*¹¹⁹ that gentiles in the future who brought *korbonos* will merit to rejoice in Yerushalayim. So we see that gentiles can have a connection with *Succos*.

3) Even more so, the *Gemara*¹²⁰ 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 *Succos*. Hashem will allow the gentiles to enter the *sukkah* on *Succos*, 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. *Succos* is parallel to Avraham *Avinu*, for Avraham had the Clouds of Glory, and the *Succos* are in remembrance to the Clouds of Glory. *Succos* is also parallel to Yaakov *Avinu*, who made *Succos* (huts) when he camped. Of Yaakov the possuk says, “*U’lmikeneihu, asah Succos*”, that when he camped, he made *Succos*/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 Succos*”, 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*”.

¹¹⁹ One of the books of “*Trei Asar*” of the Prophets.

¹²⁰ *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 *Succos* 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*.¹²¹ The *aravos* of *Hoshanah Rabbah* represent *Erev Rav*; for the word “*rav*” is the same concept as the word “*rabbah*” (they both mean “many”).

¹²¹ 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*¹²², 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 *Succos* 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

¹²² *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.*"¹²³ 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 *Succos*, 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 *Succos* 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 seal. 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*].

¹²³ *Tehillim 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 *Succos*. 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 *Succos*, *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 *Succos*, 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.

Succos – The Connecting Point Between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur

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

The world is judged four times a year – Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh HaShanah, and *Succos*. 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 *Succos* which connects Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. What is the connection? Rosh Hashanah is the time of judgment; therefore, *Succos* is related to Rosh HaShanah. *Succos* is the time of judgment over water. *Succos* 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, *Succos* 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 *Succos*. There are ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which are about getting sealed for the judgment. *Succos* combines Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur together because *Succos* 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 *Succos* – 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 Succos 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 *Succos*, 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 *Succos* 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 *Succos* we are judged on the water, and on *Succos* we have happiness; it is universal happiness, because the entire world needs water. *Succos* 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.

Succos 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 *Succos* 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, *Succos* 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 *Succos*.

On the last day of *Succos*, 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 *Succos*, *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, *Succos* 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.

Succos 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 *Succos*, 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 *Succos* [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*¹²⁴.

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 *Succos* 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 *Succos* which is followed by *Shemini Atzeres*.

¹²⁴ Refer to the *shiur of Amalek In-Depth*

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The Hoshanos Contains All Aspects of Torah

There are two different kinds of “*aravos*” (willow branches) that we take on Succos. We take *aravos* on the first six days of Succos, with the Four Species that we shake, and on the seventh day of Succos (“*Hoshanah Rabbah*”) we take another pair of *aravos*, which are called the “*hoshanos*”. In the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, they would encircle the Altar with these *aravos* and bang them on the side of the Altar.

The *Gemara* says that the custom of *hoshanos* in the *Beis HaMikdash* was either a *minhag neviim* (a custom of the prophets) or a *yesod neviim* (firmly established by the prophets). According to Rabbi Yochanan, *hoshanos* are a *halacha l'Moshe m'Sinai* (oral law received from Sinai which was not recorded in the written Torah), which was forgotten and later remembered. According to a third opinion in the *Gemara*, *hoshanos* are a *minhag neviim*.

The depth behind this argument is that *hoshanos* includes all the levels of the Torah – Biblical law, Oral law, Rabbinical law. The Sages weren't just arguing if *hoshanos* are a *halacha l'Moshe m'Sinai*, *minhag neviim* or *yesod neviim*. Rather, the depth of this matter is that the concept of the *hoshanos* “unifies” together all of the levels of the Torah – Torah law, *Halacha L'Moshe M'Sinai*, and *minhag neviim*.

Let us try to understand how the *aravos* [the *hoshanos*] “unify” together all the parts of Torah.

Yishmael Was Judged With Water: The Judgment of Hoshanah Rabbah On Water

The *Gemara* teaches that there are four times a year where the world is judged¹²⁶; on the festival [of Succos], there is a judgment on water. Where else do we find judgment with water? We find the world was judged with “a lot” of water, and times where there is judgment involving “a little” water. The world was judged with “a lot of water” by the Flood, where the world was sentenced to become filled with a lot of water. We also find an instance where someone was judged to have “a little” water: Yishmael. When Yishmael was sent out of Avraham's house into the desert, Avraham sent him with a little flask of water. In this sense, Yishmael was “judged” with “a little” water.

Sarah wanted to expel Yishmael from the home, when she realized that Yishmael was fooling around with Yitzchak and laughing with him. *Chazal* explain that Sarah foresaw that Yishmael would be the cause of making the Golden Calf. Yitzchak represents the concept of *tzechok*

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d'kedushah, holy laughter (as Yitzchak is from the word *tzechok*), whereas Yishmael is associated with *tzechok d'kilkul*, evil laughter.

Yishmael was the evil offspring of Avraham. Avraham represents the element of water, for Avraham epitomized kindness, and kindness is symbolized by water, which nourishes and sustains. Thus Yishmael is the “ruined water” who came from Avraham. Here we see further how Yishmael is further associated with water – the evil, impaired, ruined kind of water.

Avraham was afraid to send away Yishmael, but Hashem told him to listen to Sarah, telling him that only Yitzchak is the main son, and not Yishmael. Sarah saw through *ruach hakodesh* (and this is also the root of how there was *ruach hakodesh* by the *simchas beis hashoeivah* on Succos) that Yishmael would be a bad influence on Yitzchak, and Hashem agreed with her view on the matter, and told Avraham to listen to Sarah’s opinion on the matter. Since Sarah’s vision was the root of the *ruach hakodesh* on Succos, the time of Succos is when the world is judged with water, which Yishmael was judged with.

Chazal say that the verse “*And his leaves will not wither*” refers to Avraham Avinu, whose “leaves” did not wither – whose offspring remained righteous, including Yishmael. From here, we learn that Yishmael did *teshuvah* at the end of his life. Even though Avraham sent Yishmael away from his home, sending him away with only a little water that would not be enough to keep him alive, and even though Yishmael was expelled from the home because of his bad influence on Yitzchak, we see that Yishmael still did *teshuvah*.

On Succos, the world is judged with water, and this judgment is more specifically on Hoshanah Rabbah. On Rosh HaShanah, the judgment is “written”, on Yom Kippur it is “sealed”, and on Hoshanah Rabbah there is a *chotam b'toch chotam*, a “seal within a seal”. This is also hinted to by the *cheimas mayim* (jug of water) which Avraham sent with Yishmael, which stands for the acronym of “*chotam b'toch chotam*”.

The well-known time to do *teshuvah* is in between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, but there is also another time to do *teshuvah*, as explained by the *Arizal* and others: between Yom Kippur and Shemini Atzeres. The day immediately preceding Shemini Atzeres is Hoshanah Rabbah; thus, Hoshanah Rabbah is where the sealing takes place. Yishmael did *teshuvah* at the end of his life, and so is Hoshanah Rabbah the end of the year. Thus, Hoshanah Rabbah is the time that shows us that even Yishmael can do *teshuvah*.

This reveals a new facet to *teshuvah*. Clearly, the *teshuvah* of the Ten days of Repentance is a different level of *teshuvah* than the *teshuvah* of Hoshanah Rabbah. During the Ten Days of Repentance, it is a time of *teshuvah* uniquely for the Jewish people. Only the nation of Yisrael receives atonement on Yom Kippur, and not the other nations. But Hoshanah Rabbah is a day where we have increased *tefillah* (prayer), which is the trait of Yishmael, for Yishmael increasingly prayed with his mother Hagar in the desert to be saved; this is the *teshuvah* (and subsequent atonement) that the nations of the world can attain – through increased prayer.

Therefore, there is a concept that the gentiles can do *teshuvah*, which began with Yishmael, who did *teshuvah*. Yom Kippur is a time for *teshuvah* only for the nation of Yisrael, whereas *Hoshanah Rabbah* is a time of *teshuvah* for the nations of the world, symbolized by Yishmael's *teshuvah*.

Yishmael – The Root of the Erev Rav

Sarah saw that Yishmael was laughing with Yitzchak. *Chazal* explain that when Sarah saw Yishmael laughing and trying to be of bad influence to Yitzchak, she saw a vision of the future, where the “*Erev Rav*” (Mixed Multitude) will influence the Jewish nation to fashion the golden calf.

How did the *Erev Rav* mix with the Jewish people in the first place? *Chazal* state that the members of the *Erev Rav* married women of the tribe of Shimon. The word “Shimon” has the same root as the word “Yishmael” [because they are both from the term *shemiah*, to “hear”]. On the side of holiness, in the Jewish people, there was “Shimon”, and on the side of evil, there is “Yishmael”.

When Sarah saw Yishmael laughing with Yitzchak, she saw that the *Erev Rav* will come through the tribe of Shimon, the descendants of Yitzchak, because once Yishmael could mix with Yitzchak, she knew that it would produce a descendant with similarities to Yishmael.

Through Shimon, the *Erev Rav* was allowed to enter and influence the Jewish people, thus, Shimon was like a force of “Yishmael” within the Jewish people.

Teshuvah – Returning All of The Disconnected Parts To Hashem

What indeed is the connection between the concept of *shemiah*/hearing, with the concept of mixing in foreign influences? Hearing is *shemiah*, which can also mean to “gather”, to connect and unify people together. Yishmael did *teshuvah* at the end of his life, and Hashem also “heard” his prayers in the desert, “*b’asher hu sham*”, “for he is there” – these are both rooted in the same matter. The connection is, that when something becomes separated from its root, it can be returned to its root. That is the concept of *teshuvah*: returning the separated parts to their root.

The word “*teshuvah*” is from the words “*tashuv hei*”, “return to *hei* (Hashem)”, and the letter “*hei*” is also equal to the number 5, alluding to the 5 *aravos* that we take on Hoshanah Rabbah and bang them on the ground. That is the “*tashuv hei*” that is revealed on Hoshanah Rabbah.

On Yom Kippur, this concept is also revealed, with the 5 *tefillos* on Yom Kippur. On Hoshanah Rabbah, this concept is revealed through the 5 *aravos/hoshanos* we take, and this symbolizes the *teshuvah* of Yishmael, where Yishmael returns to his source. On Yom Kippur, the Jewish people returns to Hashem, through the 5 *tefillos* of Yom Kippur, and on Hoshanah Rabbah, through the 5 *hoshanos*, there is another kind of return to Hashem.

Hoshanah Rabbah Symbolizes a Deeper Mutual Connection in the Jewish People

During the first days of Succos, we take the Four Species together, in one *agudah* (cluster). Each of the four species symbolize four different kinds of Jews (those strong in Torah and in good deeds, those strong in Torah but not in good deeds, those strong in good deeds but not in Torah, and those who have neither Torah nor good deeds). What connects all Jews together? *Chazal* state that the *agudah* (cluster) binds all of the Four Species together. On Succos, all of the Jewish people become bound together, symbolized by the knot that binds together the *lulav*, *esrog*, *hadasim* and *aravos*; and it reveals the concept that all the Jewish people are in one “*agudah*”, one cluster, who all wish to do the will of Hashem with a complete heart.

Concerning Hoshanah Rabbah, though, it is brought in *Shulchan Aruch* that we take off the upper knot from the *lulav* on this day. What is the reason for this custom? The reason for this is because on Hoshanah Rabbah, we do not need the *agudah* to unify us all together.

On Hoshanah Rabbah, instead of taking the Four Species together, instead, we take only the *aravos*. Why do we replace the four species with only the *aravos*? We put aside the four species and take the *hoshanos*, according to one opinion; and according to another opinion, we shake the *aravah*. But in either case, on Hoshanah Rabbah we take the *aravos* alone. The deep understanding behind this is because it is really the *aravah* which unifies all of the Jewish people together.

The *aravah* reflects the concept of *areivim zeh l'zeh*, that the Jewish people are all mixed with each other; that there is a mutual unity between all of the Jewish people.

During the first six days of Succos, the unity of the Jewish people is expressed in taking all of the four species together, in one cluster. On Hoshanah Rabbah, the unity of the Jewish people is expressed through just the *aravos* alone, the *hoshanos*, which shows us that there is a deeper level of unity.

The Reason For Increased Prayers On Hoshanah Rabbah

What is this deeper unifying power that is contained in Hoshanah Rabbah? It is because on Hoshanah Rabbah, we are all united together, through the power of the *aravah/hoshanos* alone, which parallels the concept of *shemiah*/hearing, in the sense that Hashem is especially attentive to hearing our prayers on this day.

Thus, on Hoshanah Rabbah, we make sure to pray especially with fervor, with an audible voice, so that we can be “heard”. For this reason, on Hoshanah Rabbah, we have increased prayer. The increased prayers of Hoshanah Rabbah are because the One Who hears us all is unifying us all together. When Hashem listened to the voice of Yishmael praying, “*b’asher hu sham*”, “for he is there” – it shows that He “hears” all of the nations [when they pray to Him].

Hoshanah Rabbah Reveals a Unity Between All the Nations

This is another way to understand how the festival of Succos reveals a connection between all of the nations in the world [there are many other correlations as well]. This is how Succos unifies everyone together: the concept of Hashem listening to Yishmael, “*b’asher hu sham*”, when He heard his prayers, reflects the level of *teshuvah* on Hoshanah Rabbah, where all the nations of the world can return to their Source and thereby become unified again, under their Source, when they are all being heard together.

The fact that Yishmael did *teshuvah*, which is the concept of the unique level of *teshuvah* on Hoshanah Rabbah, reveals to us a new facet of understanding about Succos. It shows us that there is a deep dimension where the Jewish people, the nation of Yishmael, and the rest of the nations, can all become unified together.

Everyone in the world comes from Avraham *Avinu*, who epitomized kindness, who is symbolized by the element of water. Avraham sent Yishmael with a little jug of water. Sarah expelled Yishmael from the home because she foresaw that he would be of bad influence to Yitzchak. But Yishmael did *teshuvah*, and he returned to his root. This shows us that Succos is a time to have a unique revelation of *emunah*.

Hoshanah Rabbah Is Above the Level of Succos

There is a *Mishnah* in Tractate Succah which states that on Hoshanah Rabbah, we do not take away the *sukkah*, but we take away the utensils from inside the *succah*, to show that it is the final day of the festival. If there are no utensils in the *succah* to remove, the *Gemara* says that one should remove the *s’chach* of the *succah*, to remind himself that he will not be eating in the *succah* for the second days of Succos.

Thus, Hoshanah Rabbah reveals a level that is above the level of *succah*. During the first six days of Succos, we shake the *lulav* in the six directions, parallel to the six directions of the *succah*; and on Hoshanah Rabbah, we remove the knot on the *lulav* and we remove the *s’chach* from the *succah*, which symbolizes a new revelation, as follows.

Succos Represents the View of Sarah Imeinu, and Hoshanah Rabbah Represents the View of Avraham Avinu

We mentioned earlier that the concept of Succos is rooted in the *ruach hakodesh* of Sarah, who was called *Yiskah*, from the words “*sakah b’ruach hakodesh*”, she “saw through the holy spirit”, which is a hint to the word *succah*. Sarah told Avraham to expel Yishmael from the home, because she saw he will be of bad influence. But why didn’t Sarah foresee that he would do *teshuvah*? If she had *ruach hakodesh*, why couldn’t she see the end of Yishmael, which ended with *teshuvah*?

The answer to this is that her *ruach hakodesh* was showing her a lower dimension, which sees up to six dimensions, and therefore all she could see was the fact that Yishmael would be of bad influence to Yitzchak. Indeed, she was correct. But through the seventh day of Succos, which is above Succos/the six directions – the day of Hoshanah Rabbah, which reveals a seventh dimension that is above the normal six directions – there is a point where Yishmael returns to Avraham *Avinu*, where Yishmael does *teshuvah*.

This was the depth of why Avraham was afraid to send away Yishmael; he saw this deeper seventh dimension, where Yishmael will do *teshuvah*. Avraham's fear of sending away Yishmael was actually a sign that Yishmael would be returned to him. Hashem told Avraham to listen to Sarah, but that doesn't mean that Avraham was completely wrong. Both Avraham and Sarah were correct. Sarah's view towards Yishmael represents the level of the first six days of Succos, parallel to the normal six dimensions. Avraham's view towards Yishmael, his fear of sending him away, was actually a catalyst that helped Yishmael do *teshuvah*. Yishmael eventually influenced Hagar, when she became known as Keturah, whom Avraham remarried after she repented.

The Teshuvah of Yishmael Reflects the Teshuvah on Hoshanah Rabbah

This idea that Yishmael did *teshuvah* was enabled by the unique power of *teshuvah* that is on Hoshanah Rabbah. Yishmael returned to his root, Avraham *Avinu*, when his prayers were heard by Hashem.

That is the power of Hoshanah Rabbah, which reveals a new level of hearing/connection. What enables this connection? The descendants of *Yishmael* are called *aravim* (Arabs), from the word "*aravos*" – and as explained above, it is the *aravos/hoshanos* we take on the seventh day of Succos which reveals a power to unify. This is the point where the ruined offspring of Avraham *Avinu*, Yishmael, can be rectified and returned to the house of Avraham, to holiness.

Chazal state that the verse "*And his leaves will not wither*" refers to Avraham, whose offspring did not wither, for even the "leaf" that fell from him, Yishmael, did *teshuvah*.

We bang the *aravos* on Hoshanah Rabbah, until the leaves fall off (either totally, or mostly). With the regular *aravos* we take on Succos, which we do not bang, we want the leaves to stay. Yishmael represents the leaf that fell away from Avraham, for he was sent out of Avraham's home. The regular *aravos*, where we want the leaves stay, represents how Yishmael is the leaf that can still remain connected, even after it has become separated from its source. Yishmael will ultimately be returned to holiness, because he is still connected to Avraham, through his *teshuvah*.

The Depth of Banging the Hoshanos on the Ground and the Teshuvah of Yishmael

Even more so, we find that Yishmael did *teshuvah* at the end of his life, but this was after Avraham was *niftar*. Avraham was his source, his wellspring of "water", which enabled him to survive

in the desert. We bang the *hashanos* on the ground because only after Avraham went into the “ground”, when he was buried, did Yishmael do *teshuvah*. Yishmael did *teshuvah* and returned to his root only after Avraham left the world. Therefore, Yishmael’s return to holiness is only when the *hoshanos* are banged onto the ground. But why is this so? And why is the banging of the *hoshanos* considered to be the “*teshuvah*” of Yishmael?

Chazal say that Yishmael was circumcised when he was 13, therefore, he merited to dwell in *Eretz Yisrael*, especially in the final days. Yishmael is represented by the *aravah*, which are called *arvei nachal* (willows that grow by the stream). In a person’s body, the *nachal* (stream) is represented by the *Bris Kodesh* (his place of circumcision), for *Bris Kodesh* is a person’s source of life, his inner wellspring. Yishmael has a merit in the land of *Eretz Yisrael*, in its earth, because he only did *teshuvah* when Avraham died and went back to the “earth”; because Yishmael only merits *teshuvah* when he is banged on the “earth” through the *hoshanos*.

The fact that “*Yishmael*”/*aravos/hoshanos* is banged on the earth, by the time of *hoshanos*, is to show that he has a merit in the “earth” of *Eretz Yisrael*; Yishmael merits *Eretz Yisrael* because he was circumcised [soon, it will be explained the nature of Yishmael’s connection to *Eretz Yisrael* and why it is incomplete].

The Depth Behind The Differing Customs of How The Hoshanos Are Banged On The Ground

When banging the *aravos*, there are differing customs. The *Tur* says to bang it inside a “*kli*”/vessel, but the *Arizal* says to bang it on the ground without a *kli*/vessel. What is the deep meaning behind these two views?

Eretz Yisrael is called “*Eretz HaTzvi*”, “land of the deer”, because it is a land which will expand in the future, just a deer runs, which is a kind of expansion. Yishmael only merits *Eretz Yisrael* on a level of “*kli*”/vessel [an external connection to *Eretz Yisrael*], and therefore, Yishmael’s connection to *Eretz Yisrael* is only to the “*kli*” of *Eretz Yisrael*, which is limited, and not to the “*Eretz HaTzvi*” aspect of *Eretz Yisrael*, which is its eternal and unlimited aspect.

This is the deeper reason of why the *Tur* says that the *hoshanos* must be banged only in a *kli*/vessel, and not directly on the ground. Just as a *kli* is measured and thus limited, so is Yishmael’s share in *Eretz Yisrael* limited, for he is only connected to the “*kli*” aspect of *Eretz Yisrael*. For this reason, Yishmael only has temporary control over *Eretz Yisrael*, because Yishmael can only connect to the “*kli*” of *Eretz Yisrael*, its limited aspect, and not to its unlimited aspect, “*Eretz HaTzvi*” (which only the Jewish people received, through Yitzchak).

When Avraham remarried Hagar as Keturah, who was brought to him by Yishmael, what was Hagar now to Avraham? She was only a “*kli*” to him. Avraham did not continue through Yishmael, he continued only through Yitzchak, as Hashem said to him, “*For Yitzchok shall be called your offspring*”, and Yishmael was no longer regarded as the offspring of Avraham. Therefore, Hagar’s children were not a continuation, and even after she later married Avraham as Keturah, she was still

not a continuation to Avraham, so she was nothing more than a *kli* to Avraham. The *Gemara* says, “A woman does not consent to be betrothed by a man unless she first makes herself into a *kli* (“container”) to him”. But all she could be to him was a *kli*.

But Yitzchak, who was called the offspring of Avraham, unlike Yishmael who was expelled, is the eternal continuation of Avraham. Sarah, therefore, who bore Yitzchak, was therefore not just a *kli* to Avraham as any woman is to her husband, but a source of continuation for him, for she is the mother of Avraham’s continued descendants.

Thus, when we bang the *hoshanos* on the ground, according to the *Tur* that it must be banged within a *kli*, this reflects Yishmael, and according to the *Arizal* that it is banged directly on the ground, this reflects Yitzchak. Either of these opinions is true and holy. The *Tur*’s custom that *hoshanos* should only be banged within a *kli*/vessel, is referring to the lower level, “Yishmael”, who can only be a *kli*/vessel to the “ground” of *Eretz Yisrael*, its “limited” aspect, and not more than that. The *Arizal*’s custom is reflecting the higher level, “Yitzchak”, who has the intrinsic connection to *Eretz Yisrael*, to its unlimited and “expanded” aspect [which will be in the future, when it will expand], and that is why the *Arizal* says to bang the *hoshanos* directly on the ground, without being inside a *kli*/vessel.

We explained here that *aravos* on Hoshanah Rabbah represents a connection between Avraham and Yishmael. The Jewish people began with Avraham, and they also separated from Avraham, through the separation that occurred between Yitzchak and Yishmael. We have explained that on Hoshanah Rabbah, through the concept of the *hoshanos*, there is a return to this connection of Yishmael to Avraham, rooted in the fact that Yishmael did *teshuvah*.

On the other hand, on Hoshanah Rabbah, we also bang the *hoshanos* on the ground until the leaves fall off, to show that the nation Yisrael is ultimately separated from the nations.¹²⁷

Hoshanah Rabbah on Shabbos: A New Dimension of Teshuvah

Hoshanah Rabbah is called “*shvii shel chag*”, the seventh day of the festival of Succos, but is not just the seventh day of the festival. The Talmud [in *Sukkah 32b*] says that the *aravah* taken on Shabbos is called “*aravah shel shiva*”. The *lulav* is not taken on Shabbos, but the “*aravah shel shiva*” was taken on Shabbos, because we are not concerned that a person will carry it outside the *techum Shabbos* (boundary to carry within, on Shabbos). So on Hoshanah Rabbah it’s possible to have *aravos* without *lulav*, when it’s Shabbos.

This shows us that Shabbos reveals a concept of *aravos* without the *lulav*. In a regular Shabbos, there is *eruv techumin*, where one may only carry within the *techum*. But when Hoshanah Rabbah falls on Shabbos, the *aravah* may be taken and there is no reason to suspect it will be carried out of the *techum*, and the deeper understanding of this is because it is within its own *techum* (boundary),

¹²⁷ See the *derashah* of Succos 038 – *Hoshanos – Separating From Erev Rav*

like a *techum* within a *techum*, similar to the term “*chotam b'toch chotam*” (seal within a seal) which is Hoshanah Rabbah.

Hoshanah Rabbah, which is called the “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, “seal within a seal”, reveals a level where there is no reason to suspect that one will leave the *techum shabbos* with his *lulav*. This is the unique power of the “*aravah*” on Hoshanah Rabbah. When Hoshanah Rabbah falls on Shabbos, where *aravah* was practiced, it reveals a new facet to Shabbos. The seventh day of Succos, when it falls on Shabbos, reveals this new dimension on Shabbos.

The word “Shabbos”, besides for meaning rest, is also from the word “*teshuvah*”, “return”. When Hoshanah Rabbah falls on Shabbos, the *hoshanos* were taken on Shabbos because this is there is a special power of *teshuvah* on Hoshanah Rabbah, and in this level of *teshuvah*, there is no concern that a person will sin, and that is the depth of why he may take the *hoshanos* on Shabbos and there is no concern that he will carry outside the *techum*.

This level of *teshuvah* revealed on Hoshanah Rabbah, where there is not even a suspicion that a person will sin, is a reflection of the level of the *teshuvah* of Yishmael, and the return of the nations, where all the nations including Yishmael return to the house of Avraham where they come from; Avraham made converts from the nations, and this shows us that all the nations are unified under Avraham.

The Teshuvah of Hoshanah Rabbah: Returning To the Perfect Shabbos

The *teshuvah* of Hoshanah Rabbah is the time that is called “*chotam b'toch chotam*”, “seal within a seal”, where everything becomes “sealed”; it “seals” all that has come after Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos. What does it accomplish? It is a return to the Shabbos of *Olam HaBa* (the World To Come) which Adam never reached, because of the sin. It is a return, a “*teshuvah*”, to the Shabbos of *Olam HaBa*, had Adam never sinned, which would have been the complete “seventh” day of Creation. That perfected level of Shabbos is for the Jewish people as well as all the nations. A gentile who keeps Shabbos is liable to capital punishment, but that is only in the current level of Shabbos. In contrast, the future Shabbos will be kept by even the gentiles.

The Atonement on Hoshanah Rabbah: The Place Itself Atones

The *aravos/hoshanos* on Hoshanah Rabbah are banged on the ground, which is like a “return” to their place. The *hoshanos* remain in their place, and they are not shaken, in contrast to the Four Species, which are shaken. The Four Species are shaken and moved, in contrast to the *hoshanos*, which were placed on the side of the Altar, and the place itself beside the Altar atoned. Moving and shaking the Four Species, as well as encircling the Altar with the *hoshanos*, reflects a lower level of atonement, where the place itself does not atone. Placing the *hoshanos* on the side of the Altar, where

the place itself atones, reflects the higher level of atonement, which is the *teshuvah* of Hoshanah Rabbah.

The *teshuvah* of Hoshanah Rabbah reveals the *teshuvah* which began on Rosh Hoshanah. The *hoshanos* are not shaken like the *aravos* on the *lulav*; rather, they were placed on the side of the Altar, and they are like the “*aravah shel shiva*” that could be taken on Shabbos, the *aravos* of *teshuvah*, from the word *Shabbos*, and *teshuvah* returns one to his place. Thus the *hoshanos* were put on the side of the Altar and remained there, in place, to symbolize this idea.

There is a *halachah* on Motzei Yom Kippur to immediately start building the *succah*, to show that we are going into exile. The succah, and the first six days of Succos, is compared to the situation of exile. But this is from the perspective of the six thousand years we are in, which is the exile, represented by the six directions we shake *lulav* in, on the first six days of Succos. But Hoshanah Rabbah reveals the seventh dimension, which will be after these six thousand year years, where there is no exile, no six directions; where we remain in place, and the place itself atones, with no need to move from place. Thus, the six directions of Succos reflects the exile, which is an atonement achieved through movement; in exile, we move from place to place. But Hoshanah Rabbah is a deeper level of atonement, where the place itself atones, where there is no exile, and this is the *teshuvah*/return to the perfect Shabbos.

“B’Asher Hu Sham” – “For He Is There”

This idea, that on Hoshanah Rabbah, the very place itself atones – reflects the concept of “*b’asher hu sham*”, when Hashem judged Yishmael for being “there”, in a place where he was repenting. That is the power of the *aravah* on Hoshanah Rabbah – a new level of atonement for the Jewish people, where the place alone atones. This is a deep revelation about the atonement of Hoshanah Rabbah. The atonement of Yom Kippur is possible because the Satan has no permission on this day; the evil inclination has no control. On Hoshanah Rabbah, there is an evil inclination, but the place itself atones.

This is a higher level of atonement than on Yom Kippur. On Hoshanah Rabbah, there is a rectification even for the wicked, through the *aravah* of Hoshanah Rabbah, which represents the wicked. The *aravos* represent the Arabs – Yishmael - who was judged “*b’asher hu sham*”, for where he was, when Hashem accepted his *teshuvah*.

The word “Yishmael” is also from the word “*sham*”, “there”, alluding to how Hashem judged him in the place he was in - “*b’asher hu sham*”. There, in that place, he did earnest *teshuvah*; in spite of the fact that his descendants would later cause suffering to the Jewish people, Hashem accepted his *teshuvah*, because in that place where he did *teshuvah*, he was with Hashem, and Hashem looked at this “place” alone, which atoned for him. That is the unique atonement and *teshuvah* of “*b’asher hu sham*”, which is the very concept of the *teshuvah* available through *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

The Depth of Praying on Hoshanah Rabbah For Rain

This concept is also what enables us to pray for rain, on Hoshanah Rabbah.

On Hoshanah Rabbah, when we pray especially to receive rain, on a deeper level, we are praying from the level of “*b’asher hu sham*” – “there” – we are referring to the source of the waters, and not where the waters come to. If we are praying from the place where the waters descend to, which is here on this earth, then we are not deserving. But if we are praying to receive the waters from the source where they come from, “*sham*”, “there”, where the upper waters are, in Heaven – we are then deserving.

Since the *aravos* on Hoshanah Rabbah contains this special atoning power of “*b’asher hu sham*”, we are able to *daven* for rain on Hoshanah Rabbah. We are not *davening* on Succos for rain from the place we stand in on this world. If we would be, that would not be the level of *b’asher hu sham*, and we wouldn’t be deserving. Rather, we are asking for rain from where it comes from in Heaven, which is “*sham*” – there, not here.

[There are higher waters, which are rain of blessing, and lower waters, which are destructive rain]. On Succos, when the world is judged for water, this is not referring to the “lower waters”, but the “higher waters”. The “higher waters” we pray for on Succos are waters of blessing, unlike the “lower waters”, which are waters that bring destruction, of which *Chazal* say are cursed waters that ruin the festival. We are praying to receive the “higher waters”, which refers to the level of “*b’asher hu sham*”, for the higher waters are “*sham*” (there) in Heaven.

Praying From Our Soul’s Root – Our Point of Mutual Unity In The Jewish People

When we *daven* to Hashem, we *daven* with our mouths, from our lips. But there is also a deeper way to *daven*: when we *daven* from our “*shoresh haneshamah*”, the “root of all the [collective] soul” [from the point where the entire Jewish people are unified together].

The two *aravos* we take together with the *lulav* on Succos are parallel to the two lips; thus the level of Succos represents the normal level of prayer, where we *daven* from our lips. But there is a verse, “*With their lips they honor Me, but their hearts are far from Me.*” Therefore, praying with our lips alone is the incomplete level.

But on Hoshanah Rabbah, the *aravos* are all taken together, alluding to the unity of the Jewish people, “*areivim zeh l’zeh*”, for all Jewish souls are rooted in one unit. When we pray from this unified place, it is the level of “*b’asher hu sham*”, where our prayers are not coming from our lips, but from our unified essence, the root of all our souls. With such prayer, a person’s prayers may be answered by Hashem even before he calls out to Hashem, as in the verse, “*Before they call out, I answer.*”

This is the level of the higher unity, called “*areivus*”, revealed through the *aravos* of Hoshanah Rabbah. This is the depth of the connection between Hoshanah Rabbah and water, where we pray

for water, from its source, alluding to the concept of *b'asher hu sham*, “there”. This is the “seal within a seal” on Hoshanah Rabbah – it refers to the concept that Hashem judges us based upon the place we are in, “*b'asher hu sham*”, for being “there”, in our original, upper, heavenly source. There, in the source, everything is pure, clean, and good – thus when one is “there”, everything will be good.

The Rectifying “Waters” of Hoshanah Rabbah

Moshe was saved by water, which symbolizes the “higher waters” of Heaven that can save a person; unlike the “waters of strife” which prevented Moshe from entering the land. The waters that saved Moshe’s life alludes to the rectifying “waters” of Hoshanah Rabbah which can save a person, which is the “*sham*” (there) of “*b'asher hu sham*” – for a person to return to his upper, heavenly source, “there”. It is that place which reveals the highest level of atonement which seals the entire Jewish people for a good year.

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos*¹²⁸

9 | *The Shattering of Limitations*

Hoshanah Rabbah – The “Seal Within A Seal”: The Shattering of Limitations

There is a secret depth behind why we bang the *aravos/hoshanos* on the seventh day of *Succos* (*Hoshanah Rabbah*). It is really a matter which needs understanding: why do we set aside a special day on *Succos* to awaken mercy that we receive rain, and why do we specifically use the willow branch, which is the species that represents the wicked, who have no taste (Torah) and no scent (*mitzvos*)?

But the depth is as follows. The fact that the *aravos* have no taste and no scent is but the external aspect of the *aravos*. The inner dimension of *aravos* is that their absence of taste and scent is, itself, the very taste and scent of the *aravos*!

When we pray for mercy on our water on *Hoshanah Rabbah*, we are referring to the original waters that were created on the first day of Creation, where there was nothing but “*the spirit of G-d*” that hovered over the face of the waters.”

The Sages say that the “spirit of G-d” here refers to “the spirit of Mashiach”.¹²⁹ These were the waters of the spiritual dimension (“*ayin*”) and not of the physical dimension (“*yeish*”). And it is precisely the *aravos* which awaken the original waters of Creation, for the *aravos* have no taste and no scent, thus they contain “nothingness”, which is the key to the spiritual dimension. Its nothingness, (“*ayin*”) is essentially its taste and its scent.

This is the secret that lies behind the words of the Arizal¹³⁰ that there is a *piska tava* (good message) given over on *Hoshanah Rabbah* which takes effect on *Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah*. The *piska tava* is essentially the external layer of the seal, whereas the seal that was signed on Yom Kippur is the inner seal. Together, the seal of *Hoshanah Rabbah* and the seal of Yom Kippur form the *chotam b'toch chotam*, the “seal within a seal”.

The seal represents a boundary, a limit, for the word *chosam* is from the word *techum*, “boundary”. On *Hoshanah Rabbah*, where the dimension of *ayin* is revealed, all boundaries become integrated with the limitless dimension.

Thus, the *chotam b'toch chotam* is essentially the point where boundaries are nullified. When the boundaries are nullified, when limitations are shattered, we can then taste and smell the dimension of *ayin* [which we cannot taste and smell with our physical senses]. And then we can merit a “*chasimah tovah*” – a “good signature”.

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129 *Beraishis Rabbah* 2:4

130 *Shaar HaKavanos: Succos, derush* 6

When we perceive the seal of Yom Kippur as a limitation that cannot be broken, that itself awakens judgment upon ourselves. But when our physical dimension (*yeish*) joins with the spiritual dimension (*ayin*), when our limited dimension merges with the limitless dimension, we are then able to truly have a “*piska tava*”.

Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah: Two Dimensions Joining Each Other

This concept continues into *Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah*, of which “the end is contained in the beginning”¹³¹; the finishing of the Torah, which commences with beginning the Torah.

The finishing of the Torah represents our limited dimension. From this viewpoint, the Torah is referred to as “*Toras emes*”, “the Torah of truth”, and the “seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is truth” – which means that we are confined to certain limitations. But when we consider the concept of “the end is contained in the beginning” – the fact that as soon as we finish the Torah, we begin the Torah – this reveals to us the concept that the limitless dimension beyond our own time and space can pour into our own limited dimension. This point is known as “*emes l’amitah*”, the absolute level of truth – and this is the point that describes the “*chotam b’toch chotam*” of *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

The concept of the “*piska tava*”, which appears after the signature that was written and sealed during Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, is essentially the point that reveals the root of the *chotam b’toch chotam*; it is the point of *hiskalelus* (integrating) with Hashem.

The “seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is truth”; when we reveal the point of *emes l’amitah* (absolute truth), we see that there are levels to the truth, and that not all truth is the absolute truth. What is *emes/truth*, and what is *emes l’amitah/absolute truth*? The limited dimension we normally are contained in is a truthful dimension, but there is a more inner dimension that is beyond it, where there are no limitations; that is the *emes l’amitah*.

Thus, our limited dimension we are normally in is not the *emes l’amitah*, although it is certainly *emes*. The *emes l’amitah* is the point where the limitless dimension meets with our own limited dimension and it is shined upon it.

This is the secret of the “*chotam b’toch chotam*”. The “seal of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*”, which is essentially the *chotam b’toch chotam*, is the *emes l’amitah*. It is the point where the limitless dimension is revealed upon our own limited dimension, and this is how what the *chotam b’toch chotam* accomplishes. It shows us that our own limited world is ultimately a part of a higher, limitless dimension, which shows us that there is more to the truth that we see. It is because we really do not understand the truth at all, for all truth is ultimately bound up with Hashem, and “no thoughts can comprehend Him”.¹³²

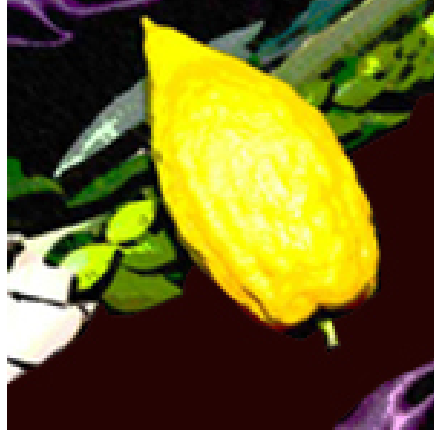
¹³¹ *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:6

¹³² *P’sach Eliyahu*

This is the depth that is behind these 22 days of *Tishrei* that spans Rosh HaShanah through *Shemini Atzeres*. Since Rosh HaShanah, we are being drawn closer to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* embrace¹³³. But Succos is the time where we actually become integrated (*miskalel*) in Hashem, for the *sukkah* is where we sit in the *tzeil* (shadow) of Hashem. It is the point of *ayin*, which we cannot grasp or comprehend in any way; it cannot be physically sensed.

The secret of these days is that they reveal to us the concept of *hiskalelus* in Hashem, where we can see that everything is really *ayin* (nothingness), and as Shlomo HaMelech says in *Kobehes*: “For everything is *hevel* (nothing).” And when *ayin* becomes integrated with the Creator, it is revealed the depth of “*Ain Od Milvado*” – that there is nothing besides for Hashem.

¹³³ Arizal: *Shaar HaKavanos: Yom Kippur, derush 4*



SHEMINI ATZERES
&
SIMCHAS TORAH

10 | Succos and Shemini Atzeres – Two Levels of Closeness With Hashem¹³⁴

The Inner Meaning Behind The Four Species and the Sukkah

In the *Yom Tov* of *Succos*, 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*¹³⁵ in the *Beis Hamikdash* on *Succos*).

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”.¹³⁶

Succos of Today and Succos of the Future

There is a *halachah* on *Succos* 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

¹³⁴ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/succos-0001-Succos-shemini-atzeres-2-levels-closeness-hashem>

¹³⁵ The offering of the water libation

¹³⁶ Editor’s Note: Refer to *Succos_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*.

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.

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*.¹³⁷

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*.

137 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.

11 | *The Joy of Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah*¹³⁸

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 *Succos* 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*¹³⁹ 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.

¹³⁸ 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>

¹³⁹ 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.¹⁴⁰ 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 *Succos* is to realize how all of the world and nature is futile, to erase our attachment to this world (see the chapter before)¹⁴¹.

After a person has hopefully nullified his attachment to this world – and there are seven traits inherent in nature¹⁴² – 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.”¹⁴³ 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 (ש, מ, ח); there is a rule in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that whenever there is a root word¹⁴⁴, 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

140 *Pesachim 110a*

141 Hence, we read *Koheles on Succos*, which talks about how futile this physical world is.

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

143 *Shemos 13: 18*

144 *shoresh*

completely overcome them yet – he’s still within the normal fights of nature, fighting with his natural abilities.

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.¹⁴⁵ 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.

¹⁴⁵ In the Hebrew sefer, the author calls this “going from the “*ohr makif*” (“surrounding light”) to an “*ohr penimi*” (inner light).

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos¹⁴⁶***12 | Alcoholism on Simchas Torah & What We Can Do About It*****The Increase of Alcohol In Our Times***

The truth is that we all have a need to drink [intoxicating beverages]. We see from the Torah and from the words of *Chazal* that we all have times in which we must drink. On *Yom Tov*, we have a *mitzvah* to drink a *reviis* of wine; on Pesach, we drink the Four Cups, and on Purim, we have a *mitzvah* to drink until we are totally intoxicated. These are the specific times of the year in which we drink alcoholic beverages.

In previous generations, when our ancestors lived in the colder countries of the world - such as Europe - they were very accustomed to drinking [to warm their bodies]. Therefore, because they were accustomed to drinking, many of us carry on their *minhag* to drink, and this also includes eating certain kinds of meat and fish that they ate. There all kinds of *minhagim* like this.

But in our times, the situation of drinking has gotten out of hand. Anyone familiar with the situation today is well aware of how the *minhag* to drink has become so extreme and abused.

Much of the drinking these days, especially in the last couple of years, has gotten way overboard, and it has nothing to do with keeping the *Halachah* of drinking on *Yom Tov* or with the *minhag* of our ancestors to drink alcoholic beverages. Unfortunately, *Simchas Torah* today has become like 'Purim' to many young people. People are spending tons of money so they can be able to drink alcohol at night.

It has become 'acceptable' for people to sit and drink together. The large variety of alcoholic beverages today is not only taking place in the far countries of the world such as Africa. It is even in the most *Chareidi* supermarkets! There are whole sections of the supermarket just for alcoholic beverages, and it is not being sold to people who need to have enough to drink "a *reviis* of wine" for Shabbos. It is being sold to many people who simply drink for the sake of drinking. It is a very painful reality.

We can all recognize people whose entire *Simchas Torah* is about getting drunk, and it has nothing to do with wanting to fulfill any *mitzvah*.

There is a kind of desire for drinking that stems from fire in the soul, in which a person seeks to drink because he is seized with a feeling of inner emptiness, but we aren't discussing this right now; we will discuss it later. We are discussing a desire for drinking that does not come from feeling a

¹⁴⁶ from *Fixing Your Water_010_Drinking Issues*

temporary emptiness, but rather a desire for drinking in which a person desires to drink on a regular and permanent basis.

Drinking has become a staple in his life to this kind of person. Such addictive drinking stems from “earth” (permanence) of-“water-of-water-of-water” (the desire to experience the pleasure of drinking),

This is a particular problem that has become dominant in our current generation, in which many people are feeling empty all the time, and not just every once a while; people are feeling empty on a regular basis and are seeking to relieve this emptiness they keep feeling.

There are a few people who are really immersed in Torah and in holiness and with good *middos*, but sadly, most people, even in the Torah world, feel an ongoing inner emptiness in their life. There is therefore a very big pursuit of physical gratification in this generation, and a desire to drink on a regular basis.

When a person pursues the desire for drinking on a regular basis, the person is really disconnecting from himself. Some people are only drinking because they are influenced by their surroundings that are into drinking, but most people who drink are drinking because they keep feeling an inner emptiness in their life.

In the previous chapter, when we addressed addictions, we mentioned the solution of pulling away in steps from the addiction. But that solution won't help so easily to stop addictive drinking.

The Solution: Building Our P'nimiyus (Inner Dimension)

The desire for drinking is affecting even people who keep Torah and mitzvos – that is, those whose Torah learning hasn't yet penetrated into their being. Therefore, they feel an inner emptiness from their life.

The addiction to drinking can therefore be present even in a boy in *Yeshiva* who is smart and brilliant in his Torah learning, because he can still feel very empty inside himself from having any real inner content. His heart might be empty, even though his brain works very well and he knows how to learn Torah very well.

Let us point out that the desire for addictive drinking has come into the Torah world from the outside world; it did not originate from within the Torah world. It has now recently entered the Torah world, and it is a painful reality that will be here until *Moshiach* comes.

When a *frum* person who learns Torah and keeps mitzvos is addicted to drinking, the problem will not be solved by simply trying to slowly pull away from the desire in steps (as it was explained in the previous chapter). This is because it doesn't solve the ongoing inner emptiness that he is feeling.

Since the source of the problem is that person feels empty in his life, we will to show him how can needs build his *pnimiyus* (inner world).

This is a vast subject, but generally speaking, building one's *pnimiyus* will involve three things. (1) He needs to exert his mind in Torah (which he is already doing, and he must keep doing that), (2) and he needs to be willing to really work on his *middos*, and (3) he needs to begin to put his heart into what he does.

We will not delve into this now, as it will get us off-topic, but this is the basic outline of the solution: the permanence of his addictive desire for drinking will get countered by building an inner kind of permanence in his life.

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos*¹⁴⁷**13 | Deep Joy On Simchas Torah*****The Joy of Simchas Torah***

On *Simchas Torah*, there is *simcha* over the completion of the Torah. But does everyone have the same happiness? If a person only has enthusiasm in his learning, but he doesn't use his brain much to think in-depth as he learns, he is not truly connected to his learning.

Compare this to someone who spent a year learning Torah in-depth, and now it comes *Simchas Torah*. Is his happiness a feeling of enthusiasm? It's much more profound; he is enjoying now the fruits of his efforts, a year well spent on learning Torah.

When someone knows how to dance and jump up and down by *Hakafos*, he can do the same each thing each year; it doesn't show that anything in his learning changed since a year ago. If he was so enthused from the Torah, why doesn't he continue to learn Torah as soon as they close the Aron? Why does he keep jumping...? If someone keeps jumping, it shows that his entire learning comes from enthusiasm, and not because he is so connected to his learning...

But a person who dances on *Simchas Torah* after a full year's worth of learning in-depth has a much more profound kind of happiness. He doesn't have to feel enthused, because he has a more inner kind of happiness. He's connected to his learning - so he's automatically happy towards his learning.

People want *simcha* (joy) and *chiyus* (vitality) in their *Avodas Hashem*. But often this is a desire for superficial *chiyus*. It is not being truthful.

Compare this to the difference between a baby versus someone getting married; or someone dancing on *Simchas Torah* who learned Torah during the year, versus someone who didn't learn Torah during the year. The difference between them is vast.

May we merit from Hashem to understand that *Avodas Hashem* become properly built, and that our feelings of enthusiasm, joy, and our other feelings are only built through the power of utilizing our intellect. Using our intellect is what gives us the power of subtle understanding, which helps us understand and develop profound feelings that last – as opposed to feelings that are temporary feelings of elation and excitement.¹⁴⁸

This is the true *simcha* we can have in our *Avodas Hashem*.

¹⁴⁷ from *Rosh Hashanah_025_Changing The Mind*

¹⁴⁸ To further develop this concept, see *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part 2, Chapters 1-9*.

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos*¹⁴⁹

14 | Before & After Simchas Torah

The Elevating Power of the Festivals

If a person is immersed in Torah during the rest of the year, the festivals can help a person raise the bar in his Torah learning.

It is not only Shavuot and Simchas Torah which gives a person a stronger power of learning Torah. The festival of *Succos* can also do it; when you read Koheles on *Succos*, you can realize how futile the world is (as Koheles says), and that in turn strengthens your desire for Torah learning. On Pesach, which is the time of our freedom, we can realize the statement of *Chazal* that “there is no free person except a person who learns Torah.” The festivals come to strengthen a point in you that’s already active. Rosh HaShanah and Purim can also accomplish it.

That is the sensible way to view the festivals, but most people have a different attitude about it. When we enter a high spiritual time, such as *Yomim Noraim*, we realize that it’s a higher level than our normal place, and can feel like an exile. It makes a person feel like he’s imprisoned from his regular routine.

So not only is it hard to deal with the “fall” after *Yomim Noraim* ends; it’s hard to enter in the first place, because it feels imprisoning, for we are entering higher levels.

Frustration On Simchas Torah (and afterwards)

Here is another simple example. On *Simchas Torah*, anyone who has learned a little Torah during the year will feel some joy on this day as he’s dancing by *Hakafos*. He feels elated after each *Hakafah*. But he’s feeling deep down, “Why can’t I love the Torah this much during the rest of the year as well?” He feels an inner contradiction in himself.

Others experience a different problem: they enjoy *Simchas Torah* and they rise to high levels of loving the Torah on this day, but the day after *Simchas Torah*, they find themselves back to routine, and they wonder where all their high levels went.

¹⁴⁹ from *Fixing Your Fire-Conceit.005.Knowing Your Capabilities*

Obviously, this frustration is not experienced by those who don't live an internal kind of life. Such a person doesn't even feel the changes, and he has no problem making the transition from *Simchas Torah* to the next day. But the more a person is sensitive to his inner spiritual world, the more he can feel the difficulty, of making the transition between the festivals to the normal routine of the year.

Lessening The Frustration

What, indeed, is the correct way to go about it? A person must be aware that before the festival, he will not feel as elevated, and that the festival will elevate him, and after the festival ends, he will go back to the regular routine of the year. In other words, he must know beforehand that it will be like this.

This is not because a person should simply despair from trying to acquire higher levels and to avoid the pain of the disappointment. It is because one must be aware that we simply cannot be on higher levels all the time. We can be aware that the elevation we feel on the festivals is temporary, and that it is not meant for the rest of the year to be on this level.

The point is to become aware that there's a part of ourselves that can jump to higher levels, but that doesn't mean we need to stay at those higher places we jump to. In this way, when the festivals end, instead of feeling a great fall from our level where we feel like we've fallen flat on the ground, we can fall away lightly from it, which will lessen the impact of the fall.

Before, During, and After

This concept is not only applicable with the festivals. It is an inner perspective towards living life, which applies to all aspects of spiritual growth.

Another application of it is when it comes to getting married. On the day of a person's wedding, he feels elated. The wedding is filled with holiness and aspiration. The next day, the newlywed returns to routine. But instead of feeling frustrated at this sudden transition, he should make himself aware from beforehand that there will be a point of "before" the wedding, and "after" the wedding, and the wedding itself.

Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven for 40 days, where he resembled an angel, and he did not touch food or drink, but then he came back down, where he continued to eat and drink. If a person were to try fasting 40 days, he would be a sinner, because he is endangering his life. Similarly, *Klal Yisrael* was told to abstain from marital relations for three days, to prepare to receive the Torah. These were high levels that a person normally cannot do.

One must be aware that the higher levels we can reach are only for the time being, but after that, we need to return to routine, and there is nothing wrong with this, for it is supposed to be this way.

*Vignettes From Bilvavi On Succos***15 | *The Avodah When Leaving The Succah*¹⁵⁰**

We have just left Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and *Succos*. On *Succos*, when a person takes the Four Species and he sat in the *sukkah*, if he feels even a little holiness, he could feel a connection to the Four Species and to the *sukkah*. It is hard to leave behind the *sukkah* and the four species. If someone didn't feel that it was hard to disconnect from it, he is simply not sensitive to the spiritual.

But if someone did feel that it was hard to part from the *sukkah* and from the four species, he now has an *avodah* to go deeper than this. He can be aware that "Although I have parted ways from the *succah* and from the Four Species, I am not parting ways from the presence of the *Shechinah* which had settled upon the *sukkah*!"

We cannot invalidate the difficulty in leaving behind the holy objects used in our performance of *mitzvos*. There is a well-known story about the Vilna Gaon on his deathbed, when he was holding tightly onto his *tzitzis* and he cried over how much he did not want to part from it. But it is this pain of disconnection which brings a person to the true perspective. A person leaves the *sukkah* and he will miss it, and he certainly needs to feel pained at leaving it. But we also know that the *Shechinah* comes to dwell on the *sukkah*, as the *Gemara* says; and a person can always remain connected to it.

This is the depth about life. When it comes to disconnecting from the materialism of this world, one needs to disconnect from it slowly and sensibly. It is painful for a person to detach from it, but that is man's *avodah*. He must eventually reach the point where it does not feel painful for him to be disconnected from This World, and that will be the root his spiritual success on this world.

The next stage in the *avodah* is to disconnect even from our connection to the spiritual, such as the example of leaving the *sukkah* behind. At first a person must certainly feel that it is painful to leave behind a *mitzvah*; he had been connected to it and now he is leaving it, so it should certainly feel painful. He must feel that he will miss the *sukkah* when he leaves it. But after he feels this pain, he must then realize that this pain can bring him to the more inner understanding: although he is leaving behind the *sukkah*, he is not becoming disconnected from the *Shechinah* that came to the *sukkah*.

This is only one example, but there are many more examples of this concept. When a person loses a parent, this is very hard and painful for him; he is aware of the loss. But along with the pain, he can come to understand who his real "Father" is – his eternal Father whom he will always have. He has then succeeded in using the parent-child relationship as a *moshol* (parable) to get to the *nimshal* (lesson).

150 from The Weekly Shmuess_007_Lech Lecha – Disconnecting

This deep way to live life enables a person to detach from the materialism of This World, from the view of the body, and to instead use the “tools” and “garments” which Hashem has given us, as a way to disconnect from everything else that is other than Hashem, Torah, and *Klal Yisrael*; so that we can channel the power of absolute connection towards a complete, true connection with Hashem.

16 | *Internalizing Succos For the Rest of the Year*¹⁵¹

Carrying Over the Yom Tov into the Year

In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of the Three Festivals (*Succos*, Pesach and Shavuot), 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 explain¹⁵² 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 sustenance¹⁵³; 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.¹⁵⁴

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 comparison

¹⁵¹ This chapter is adapted from *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh: Succos*, chap. 1.

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

¹⁵² *Bad Kodesh on Moadim* (Rav Baruch Dov Povarski), p.416. See also *Birchas Moadecha* (of Rav Margolin) on *Tishrei*.

¹⁵³ See *Rabbeinu Bachye*, *Parshas Eikev*, 8:10.

¹⁵⁴ *Yerushalmi Moed Kattan*, 9a.

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 *Succos* – and from *Succos* 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”,¹⁵⁵ and Yom Kippur is called “*Shabbos Shabboson*.”¹⁵⁶ 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.¹⁵⁷ 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

¹⁵⁵ *Menachos 65b*

¹⁵⁶ *Vayikra 16: 31*

¹⁵⁷ *Zohar II, Yisro, 88a*

the afternoon¹⁵⁸ and a concept of “*bein hashemashos*”¹⁵⁹ (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*¹⁶⁰ 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 the 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 pillars¹⁶¹, and so does the Jewish people stand on three things – the three Yomim Tovim¹⁶². 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*.¹⁶³ 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.

¹⁵⁸ Rashi, *Shemos* 12: 6

¹⁵⁹ *Avos* 5: 6

¹⁶⁰ Rashi, *Megillah* 13b

¹⁶¹ *Avos* 1:2 and 1:17

¹⁶² These are called *Shalosh Regalim*, the “Three Festivals”: Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos.

¹⁶³ 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*.¹⁶⁴

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*”¹⁶⁵ – 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*

¹⁶⁴ See Megillah 6a and Rambam Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 6: 16

¹⁶⁵ 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."*¹⁶⁶ 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 Tov*¹⁶⁷ – 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."*¹⁶⁸ 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."*¹⁶⁹

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."*¹⁷⁰ 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 *Succos*.

¹⁶⁶ *Shemos* 25: 8

¹⁶⁷ *Yom Tov* here refers uniquely to the Three Festivals of *Pesach*, *Shavuos* and *Succos*.

¹⁶⁸ *Yeshayahu* 2:3

¹⁶⁹ *Mishlei* 2:6

¹⁷⁰ See *Rashi*, *Vayikra* 23: 36

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*.”¹⁷¹ 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 *Succos*, 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 *Succos* 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, *Succos* 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.

¹⁷¹ 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 follows¹⁷²:

“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*.¹⁷³

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.

¹⁷² This has been loosely translated and is fairly literal to the text.

¹⁷³ 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.¹⁷⁴ 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 life¹⁷⁵, 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.

¹⁷⁴ *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim: 203*

¹⁷⁵ For more specific guidance on how to make a *cheshbon hanefesh*, see *Bilvavi Vol. IV, chapters 3-5*.