



The Time for Fixing

Guide for Shovavim

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PART 1

***PRACTICAL
AVODAH
OF SHOAVAVIM***

1 | The Essence of Shovavim— Guarding Our Loyalty To Hashem

Bris Kodesh: Guarding Our “Temimus” With Hashem

These days, the days of “*Shovavim*”, are days to fix the damage done to one’s “*Bris Kodesh*” (the “Holy Covenant”). There are many facets to how to rectify the *Bris*; we will say one point, with the help of Hashem, which can apply to all of us.

The concept of a *bris*, a covenant, is when two people form a treaty with each other. They make a *bris* together to ensure that they will be loyal to each other, that they will remain connected with each other in loyalty.

Bris Kodesh implies two things. There is an outer layer to it, and an inner layer to it. The outer layer to *Bris Kodesh* is, that one is not allowed to *chas v’shalom* do the physical action of violating the *Bris*.² The inner aspect of *Bris Kodesh* is to keep the treaty of the *Bris* – to remain loyal to the one whom we made the treaty with.

There is a *bris* between Hashem and the Jewish people. Hashem said to Avraham, “*Walk before Me and be wholesome.*” This defines the *bris* – that we must remain with our *temimus*, our wholesome loyalty to Hashem.

A baby is given a *bris* (circumcision) when he is just eight days old; he has no *daas* (awareness). This is to show that our *bris* (covenant) with Hashem represents how we must always have ***temimus*** (earnest, loyal relationship) with Hashem.

The concept of ***temimus*** is thus to simply go with Hashem’s will, even when we lack the understanding of our *daas* (logical mind).

1 The weeks of Parshas Shemos through Parshas Mishpatim; the word “Shovavim” stands for Shemos, Veira, Bo, Beshalach, Yisro and Mishpatim.

2 This is referring to the sin of spilling one’s sperm; the severity of this prohibition is brought in Shulchan Aruch: Even HaEzer, siman 22.

The Depth of Damaging The 'Bris'

What does it mean to “damage the *bris*”? It is really a loss of a person’s *temimus* (earnestness, or loyalty) towards Hashem. When one foregoes his *temimus* with Hashem, that is essentially how he is lead to damaging his *Bris* with Hashem.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that we all have an “*avodah temimah*”, a “wholesome service” to Hashem which we must perform. What is the meaning of ‘*avodah temimah*? The word “*temimah*” means can mean “perfect”, as we find that a *korbon* (sacrifice) has to be *tamim* (perfect, with no blemishes); but it can also mean like what we find by Yaakov Avinu, that he was an “*ish tam*”, a “wholesome man”. Yaakov epitomized the quality of *temimus* (wholesomeness) by constantly learning in the tents (“*yoishev ohalim*”); he was always “with” Hashem as he sat and learned in the tents of Torah.

When a person doesn’t have a relationship of *temimus* with Hashem, then he will only be connected to Hashem at certain times. His relationship with Hashem changes and fluctuates, depending on his situation. When his *daas* is working properly, he’ll get along with Hashem; but when his *daas* weakens, his relationship with Hashem suffers.

How Temimus Affects One’s Torah Learning

Why indeed was Yaakov Avinu called an “*ish tam*”? If it’s because he was learning Torah all day, why does that show that he had *temimus*? After all, a person might be learning Torah all day, but only because he desires *daas* (knowledge), not *temimus* (an earnest relationship with Hashem). So how do we know that Yaakov is an *ish tam*, just because he “sat in the tents” of Torah all day?

The answer is that the reason that he went to go learn Torah in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever for 14 years, in order to prepare for living with his father-in-law, Lavan. That kind of learning showed that he had *temimus*. So **because** he was in *ish tam* in the first place, that was why he was able to be a *yoishev ohalim* and sit and learn Torah.

Thus, we see that having *temimus* (an earnest, loyal relationship with Hashem) is the root that enables a person to really learn Torah properly. The quality of our Torah learning is thus affected according to how much *temimus* we have.

By a *bris*, we say, “Just as you entered the *bris*, so will you enter Torah, *chuppah*, and good deeds.” The connection is that if a person makes sure to keep his *bris*, which is to maintain his *temimus* in his relationship with Hashem, he will come to merit Torah. The *temimus* that a person has will have a direct effect on his learning.

Thus, one's *temimus* and one's *bris* are two interrelated matters. When a person loses his *temimus* towards Hashem, he damages his *bris* with Hashem; and the same is true vice versa – if one damages his *bris*, it's a reflection that he is missing *temimus* towards Hashem. When a person damages the *Bris Kodesh*, the main part of the damage is that he has lost his loyal connection with Hashem. The only reason why a person wouldn't be careful not to damage his *bris* with Hashem is because he doesn't care about having *temimus* towards Hashem.

Learning Torah With Temimus

This is the question one needs to ask himself: When a person is learning Torah, where are his first thoughts coming from? Are they coming from a desire for *daas* [which is to simply 'know' more Torah, for purely intellectual reasons, and nothing to do with wanting to connect to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* Torah) or do his thoughts of Torah stem from his *temimus*?

Our initial thoughts, when we learn Torah, are ideally supposed to be stemming from our place of *temimus* in our selves. [We can desire to know the Torah, of course, but the very initial desire for knowledge of Torah is supposed to come from our desire for *temimus*, not for *daas*. Because the Torah is not merely an intellectual pursuit; it is our relationship with Hashem.]

Klal Yisrael first said “*Naaseh*” (We will do) before they said “*Nishmah*” (We will hear), because in order to learn the Torah, we first had to accept that we will fulfill the Torah. We had *temimus*, and through that, we were able to accept to the Torah. We do not first try to understand and then do; first, we decide that we will do, and then, we try to understand. So we see from here that our *temimus* has to come before our *daas*.

But when a person would rather just “know” the Torah and he doesn't first decide that he will accept it, he is really forfeiting his relationship with Hashem through his learning of the Torah! This is called damaging the *bris*! The person is neglecting his relationship with Hashem through the Torah! He's only interested in *daas* - he has lost his *temimus*. All he cares for is *daas*, not *temimus*...

Getting Back Our Temimus

The Ramban says that Avraham was punished that his descendants would have to endure the Egyptian exile, because he asked Hashem for a sign that they will inherit the land. We cannot understand Avraham Avinu, of course, but according to his level, there was some breach in his *temimus* with Hashem, and for this he was punished. In other words: when we lose our *temimus*,

that is what invites the Egyptian exile. We rectified this sin when we left Egypt and received the Torah, when we said *Naaseh* before *Nishmah* – we got our ***temimus*** back.

In the weeks of *Shovavim*, it is a time to fix the sin of damaging the *bris*. There is a superficial layer and inner layer to everything that goes on, and the same is true with *Shovavim*. The superficial layer of *Shovavim* is to carry out the practical ways of improvement that we are advised to do so we can avoid damaging the *bris*, and some of these practices are brought in *Halacha* as well. Each person has his own respective methods in how to repair the sin, and they are all holy methods.

But the inner point of *Shovavim* is so that we should get back our ***temimus*** with Hashem.

The depth of the Egyptian exile was that they fell into the 49th Gate of Impurity, as the *Ohr HaChaim* writes; had they fallen into the *Shaar HaNun*, the 50th Gate of Impurity, they wouldn't have been able to come out of it. What exactly is the 50th Gate of Impurity? Why can't a person be redeemed from it if he falls into it? The 50th Gate of Impurity is when a person totally loses his ***temimus*** – when he has lost his entire earnest yearning to have a relationship with Hashem. That is the ultimate worst level a person can ever sink to.

By contrast, the 50th Gate of Holiness is when a person has complete ***temimus***, however, even Moshe Rabbeinu didn't merit it. Moshe merited the 49th level of Understanding, but he wasn't granted the 50th Gate of Understanding. Why not? Because the 50th Gate of Understanding has nothing to do with understanding. The first 49 Gates of Understanding are all within the grasp of one's *daas*, but the 50th Gate of Understanding has nothing to do with *daas*, for it is above *daas*. It is all about *emunah****temimus***, which is a whole different plane than even the highest understandings of *daas*\human comprehension.

The Torah was only given to us when we said “*Naaseh*” before we said “*Nishmah*” – when we first have ***temimus*** before anything else.

Shemiras HaBris In The 21st Century

There is no generation that has as many difficulties when it comes to keeping the *Bris Kodesh* as in today's generation.

But, for every difficulty, Hashem creates an equally powerful force that is good which can counter all the evil. The Ramban says that we are already in the 50th Gate of Impurity, and that there is no way to get out of it – unless we have the power of Torah, which can take us out of even the lowest levels. The power of Torah can take us out our current exile, which is the 50th Gate of Impurity.

We are in the 50th Gate of Impurity! This is what our early Rabbis have already written about. But, to counter this, we also have the power now to tap into the 50th Gate of Holiness, which has appeared on the scene now to assist us in our immense struggles. The “50th Gate of Holiness” is really the power of *temimus*.

We have to first be concerned about *temimus* in the Torah, before we are concerned with “knowing” the Torah - just as Klal Yisrael first said “*Naaseh*” before they said “*Nishmah*”.

We have to return to the way we were when we received the Torah at Har Sinai, our pure state, which was when we had *temimus*. Without returning to our *temimus*, our *bris* with Hashem will remain damaged.

Today’s generation has it the hardest when it comes to *Bris Kodesh*, because we are living amidst the 50th Gate of Impurity, the lowest possible level. The previous generations did not go through what we are going through when it comes to this. It is not only the amount of difficulties that have grown with this; the very kinds of difficulties we go through with this have never been faced before by the previous generations. The only way to uproot this impurity is through accessing our power to have *temimus*.

People are sitting and trying to come up with all kinds of logical solutions of how to solve the problems today we face with guarding the *Bris Kodesh*. But the truth is: we can’t make any logical calculations to solve it! There’s no logic to it. The problems we face today to our holiness defy all logic; we cannot solve them with our human logic at all. It is a problem that cannot be solved through using the power of our *daas*. The only way to solve it is if we use the power that is above *daas*: our *temimus*.

The words here are matters that are rooted in the very roots of Creation.

May Hashem merit us to understand the depth of our difficult test we face; and to understand the depth behind the solution to our difficulties; and that we should merit to come to our perfection on this world.

2 | *What Shovavim Is All About*

These days of “*Shovavim*” are just like every other “*sugya*” (section of *Gemara*) that we should try to understand. When we learn a *sugya* of *Gemara*, we try to understand it, and we feel satisfied when we do understand it. But when we learn matters of our *sefarim hakedoshim*, we often don’t understand what’s going on, and we are left with a feeling of not being satisfied. We “know” about these matters, but they just don’t feel right.

Let us learn about the *sugya* of these days of “*Shovavim*” - what it’s about.

The root of the matters of “*Shovavim*” is found in the *Gemara* in *Eruvin 18b*. The *Gemara* there says that after the sin, Adam separated from Chavah for 130 years, and during that time, demons and evil spirits came onto the world. The *Gemara* says that the reason for this was because there was sperm that exited his body – by accident, of course – and because of this, demons and evil spirits were created.

There is much to discuss about this *Gemara*, but what applies to us is as follows. Why did sperm exit Adam’s body? Simply speaking, it wasn’t his fault. This is the simple understanding, and it is true. But the deeper understanding of this is that after the sin, his thoughts became negatively affected. Because his thoughts weren’t as pure as they used to be, some of his sperm was able to exit him.

The *Gemara* (*Kesubos 44a*) says that one should not entertain lewd thoughts during the day, because then he will experience nocturnal emission at night by accident. What happens to a person in middle of his sleep is not in his control; that is not what the person is doing wrong. What the person did wrong was that he had the evil thoughts in the first place.

As soon as Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, he was now able to think about evil. The very fact that a person can think about evil greatly damages our mind. When a person has sinful thoughts during the day – for example, if he has lustful thoughts about someone else’s wife, which is called “thinking about a world that isn’t his” – it is a sign about what’s going on inside himself. Sinful thoughts reveal what’s going on in a person’s inside.

When a person’s thoughts aren’t thinking enough about Torah, they wander to all sorts of places – and eventually, the thoughts will begin to think about sinful topics.

In Kelm, during *Shovavim*, the Yeshivah accepted upon themselves that they would learn Torah for many hours on end, consecutively and without interruption, to atone for the sins of *Shovavim*. The depth of this matter wasn’t just so that they should endure some physical suffering by learning without interruption. It was because by learning for many consecutive hours, they would be able to gain total control over their thoughts – and this rectifies the sins of *Shovavim*.

The more a person learns how to train his thoughts and concentrate on Torah learning, he will be in control of his mind, and he will then entertain less and less sinful thoughts.

Baruch Hashem, in our generation, people are starting to improve. Many people are involved in *Shemiras HaLashon* (guarding our speech) and this helps also to fix *Shemiras HaBris* (guarding our holiness). But we can also learn to learn how to build our thoughts, and to protect the holiness of our thoughts.

Besides for “talking in learning”, a person needs to “think” in learning as well. Thinking in learning is a higher level than talking in learning.

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt”l* once said that “nothing comes from a *masmid*.” What does this mean? It means that it’s not enough to “sit and learn” all day; a person has to build his mind to think Torah. One’s mind has to always be thinking about Torah.

People think that they have to work on not having any *bittul* Torah during *Shovavim*. But it’s unrealistic for any person to never to have *bittul* Torah. Can anyone say he never wastes time from learning? Is anyone like the Vilna Gaon, who never wasted a moment in learning?!

Rather, the *tikkun* that we need is to **think** more in learning. When a person leaves the *Beis Midrash* – what is he thinking?

The inner essence of *Shovavim* is to become aware of what we are thinking. If we become aware of our thinking, we will see where our thoughts go to.

The *sefer* *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that when a person has sinful thoughts, his soul leaves him...

Ever since the sin of Adam, our thoughts are able to wander from place to place, to places where they shouldn’t think about. Our true power of thought is called *chochmah* – the kind of thought that gives us *chiyus/vitality*.

There are people who know a lot of Torah, but their actual thoughts are found outside of Torah.

The way to fix the *Bris Kodesh*, during the days of *Shovavim*, is to purify our thoughts – to always think about Torah-related thoughts.

Of course, we have many things that bog us down in life. We have a family to take care; we have jobs, and we have all sorts of things that don’t let us concentrate on Torah. But even if we aren’t actually sitting and learning the Torah, our thoughts can still remain focused on Torah [which we will soon explain how]. Hashem wants us to guard our thoughts, to keep them protected.

When we have to stop learning Torah to take care of something, the next time we go back to learning, it should be that we are returning to the very same thought we left off with.

When our thoughts are always thinking about Torah-related topics, our thoughts will be protected from wandering to thinking about areas they shouldn't enter.

Once a person asked Rav Shach *zt"l* about how he can rectify the sin of not guarding the *Bris Kodesh*. Rav Shach responded, "I never heard of such a thing (of damaging the *Bris*)."

What did this story mean? Since Rav Shach never stopped thinking in learning damaging the *Bris* was unthinkable! He never had a problem with *Bris Kodesh* because his mind was always protected from thinking any sinful thoughts – he was always thinking in learning.

Our *avodah* is to learn how to gain focus in our thoughts, to train ourselves to always think in learning. This is a deep *avodah* – and the entire structure of our soul depends on it!

Don't try to "fight" the unwanted thoughts. People who are always trying to fight their unwanted thoughts end up suffering from a mental illness. Instead, calmly gain control of your thoughts. The way you can do this is by always returning to the previous thought in Torah you left off with.

Our main task during *Shovavim* is not to involve ourselves in "*segulos*" (charms), although "*segulos*" certainly have a source in *Chazal*. *Segulos* are not the point of *Shovavim*. What we need to develop is the holiness of each Jew, and this depends on guarding the holiness of our thoughts. We can do this by training ourselves to always think in learning – on a constant, continuous basis.

Even "*shemiras einayim*" – guarding our eyes - is not the goal; guarding our eyes is only the external part of our *avodah*. Although it is certainly true that we must guard our eyes – as the *Gemara* says, that one should avoid a path in which he will see improper sights – that is just the external part. The inner part of the job is to guard our thoughts. Guarding our thoughts – *kedushas hamachshavah* – is the essence of *kedushas Yisrael* (the holiness of the Jewish people).

May we merit from Hashem to build our mind properly – to learn Torah both verbally and mentally, and then our thoughts will be guarded, which will protect our *Bris Kodesh*. And through that, we will merit the coming of *Moshiach*, Amen.

3 | *Exertion and Serenity In Torah Learning*

Torah in Eretz Yisrael vs. Torah in Egypt

The first of Yaakov's sons to descend to Egypt was Yosef *HaTzaddik*. Yosef epitomized the *middah* of "*Shemiras HaBris*" - guarding the *Bris Kodesh* (the Holy Covenant). The entire descent to Egypt was meant to fix the damage of Adam's sin, which was a damage to the *Bris Kodesh*; thus Yosef was the first to descend, so that the correction for Adam's sin could begin.

In Egypt, the labor was with *choimer* and *levainim* – “mortar and bricks.” Besides for the simple meaning of this, there was an inner kind of “mortar and bricks” going on [which we will explain].

“Hashem, Yisrael and the Torah are one.” We are one with the Torah; thus, the Torah was exiled with us in Egypt. The Torah which Yaakov learned in *Eretz Yisrael* was one kind of Torah, and it was not the same kind of Torah which the Jews were learning in Egypt. The Torah was in exile – but it wasn't the same Torah. What was the difference between the Torah learned in *Eretz Yisrael* and the Torah learned in Egypt?

It has to do with the *choimer* and *levainim* that the people had to do difficult labor (*avoda koshoh*) with. The cruel labor going on in Egypt wasn't just in the physical sense – it was that they had a hard time perceiving the Torah. It was a Torah that required great *ameilus* (exertion) to understand. At Sinai, the spirit of impurity was removed from us, and we received a new kind of understanding in Torah. But in Egypt, we had “bricks and mortar” – in other words, it was very difficult to learn Torah there.

External and Internal Layers to Learning Torah

There is an external and internal layer to learning Torah. The external layer to our learning is the kind of Torah we have during this exile; it is the Torah which requires great difficulty to understand. But the Torah which we will receive in the future will be a Torah of total *menuchah* (serenity). It won't be so hard to understand.

“Everyone agrees that on Shabbos, the Torah was given.” This hints that the Torah we received at Har Sinai, was a Torah of total *menuchah* – a Torah that represents Shabbos.

Egypt was the root of all our exiles. Egypt is still going on today – we still have *avodah koshoh*, difficult labor, in learning Torah. We see this hinted to from the fact that many *mitzvos* we do are *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim* (to remember the exodus from Egypt), and this is not simply to remember Egypt – it is because it is still our *avodah* today to leave Egypt! We have to continuously leave Egypt. It is not about remembering the past – it is about the present. The redemption from Egypt wasn't complete, and we have to complete it, by doing the *mitzvos* that are *zecher l'yetzias mitrayim*.

Since we didn't totally leave Egypt yet, we still have *avodah koshoh*. However, on the other hand, we aren't totally in Egypt either, because we did receive the Torah at Sinai. So we have within us two forces at once. On one hand, we have both kinds of Torah – the Torah of exile, and the Torah of the future (which we received at Sinai). The Torah of exile needs *avodah koshoh* to acquire it, while the Torah of the future is a Torah acquired through *menuchah*.

If a person doesn't exert himself in Torah, he will not understand Torah. That is clear. But on the other hand, we need *menuchah* as well in learning Torah; “*And he saw that menuchah (rest) was good.*” Therefore, we cannot look at Torah learning as just exertion. We need to also gain *menuchah* in our Torah learning.

The *menuchah* in Torah is the inner point of the Torah which our soul needs to yearn for. We are now in exile, and we cannot have total *menuchah* yet. But Shabbos is a resemblance of the World To Come; Shabbos can give us a glimpse of *menuchah*.

The concept of exile is to have Torah learning that only involves exertion, with no *menuchah*. The concept of redemption is that Torah learning will be through *menuchah*. As it is written of Yissocher [the tribe who is blessed with Torah scholars]: “*And he saw that menuchah was good.*”

We do not mean, *chas v'shalom*, that one should slacken off from his learning; the intention here is that we need *menuchah* in the Torah – we need to *connect* to our Torah learning.

If we truly connect to Torah, the Torah will to us reveal her secrets; the Torah is called the *aishes chayil* of the Jewish people, because just as a wife reveals her secrets to her husband, so does the Torah reveal to us its secrets – when we connect to it.

The exertion in Torah learning we have should not just be about exertion for the sake of exertion. True exertion in learning is to learn Torah with dedication, to learn it will all our energy – to become one with the Torah - and then we can become like a *maayan hamisgaber* (a “mighty wellspring”) in Torah. We can only become a *maayan hamisgaber* when we exert ourselves in learning with all our strength, with *mesirus nefesh* (sacrificing) for the Torah.

Yes, we must “kill ourselves over the Torah” as the Rambam writes but eventually, we must come to the point in which we have *menuchah* in the Torah.

The days of Shovavim are days that are meant to fix the damage done to the *Bris Kodesh*. These are days which we can essentially complete our redemption from Egypt – to totally leave it. But first, we must realize what our exile is, and then we can know how to get out of it.

Had Adam never damaged the *Bris Kodesh*, our thoughts would always be pure, and we would never have sinful thoughts. We wouldn't need to exert ourselves in Torah learning, because our soul would be so connected to Torah that we wouldn't need to try so hard to get involved in it.

“Hashem, Yisrael and the Torah are one.” We need to feel as if we are one with the Torah, and when we feel one with the Torah, our thoughts will be purified. We will then be able to become a *maayan hamisgaber* in our Torah learning.

When our comprehension in learning is concealed from us, it is because our thoughts aren't being guarded. All of us experience hardship in learning for this reason – Adam damaged the *Bris Kodesh*, and ever since then, our thoughts have become affected, and we can't understand the Torah fully. But we can return to the kind of Torah that we received at Har Sinai, in which we were able to fully understand the Torah.

(If we don't exert ourselves in Torah, we won't understand it).

What does it mean to do *teshuvah* [during *Shovavim*]? It means that we must return to the inner point of Torah, to reach *menuchah* in learning Torah.

The Maharal says that Torah is spread all over the place, since we are in exile. A person has to learn a *sugya* in one *masechta* (tractate) and then he has to learn a different *sugya* in another *masechta*, in order to complete his understanding. That is the Torah of this exile – the Torah is spread out everywhere, and it isn't concentrated into any one place.

We should exert ourselves in learning, but at the same time, we need to aspire for *menuchah* in our Torah learning. (This does not mean laziness, as we said.)

Shabbos – A Glimpse of Menuchah

Besides for physical exertion in learning, we need to realize the depth of our exile – that the Torah is in exile. Because the Torah is in exile, that is why we need to exert ourselves so much to understand it. We need to taste the *menuchah* of Torah – and we can taste it through Shabbos. If we properly experience Shabbos, which is a resemblance of the World to Come, then we will have some understanding of *menuchah*.

We need to connect to the *menuchah* of Shabbos. If we connect to the *menuchah* of Shabbos, we will gain the “Torah that was given on Shabbos” – a Torah of total *menuchah*. And when we gain that *menuchah*, we will become a *maayan hamisgaber*.

The Barometer

If a person wants to see if he's leaving the Egyptian exile, he should see how connected he feels toward the Torah.

If a person truly dedicates his mind towards learning Torah, as much as his energy allows him to – then he essentially leaves this exile, and he enters into the inner point of Torah – the *menuchah* of Torah.

May we merit from Hashem to exert ourselves fully in our Torah learning – with all our energy – and from that, we should reach the *menuchah* found in Torah.

4 | *Purifying Our Thoughts*

Exile of Our Thoughts

As we are nearing the end of the days of *Shovavim* we can reflect a little on our *avodah* during these days.

We went through exile, and we await redemption. What exactly is it that happened to us in *galus*/exile? And what is the *geulah*/redemption really about?

A person is comprised of a body and soul. Our eyes see, and our soul can also see. We need to learn how we can see through our soul. An animal only sees through its body. But we as people can see through our soul, if we learn how.

Our eyes saw that when we went into exile there was a physical enslavement, which could be seen with our physical eyes. But what did our soul see then?

The Sages state the Egyptians had devious thoughts to bring harm upon the Jewish people. In this statement lies the spiritual description of the exile which we will try to understand.

The physical exile was the “bricks and mortar”, but the spiritual aspect of the exile was that the Egyptians had evil thoughts of doing evil. The deeper meaning of this is that it was an exile upon our power of thought. Their evil thoughts placed an exile on our holy power of thought.

What happened as a result of this exile to our thoughts? We know that after the exodus, the Jewish people came to *Har Sinai* to receive the Torah, and their souls flew out of their bodies. When this happened, they essentially left all the influences of ‘Egypt’ in their souls. They left their enslaved power of thought - so that they could go receive the holy *chochmah* (wisdom) of the Torah. *That* was essentially the redemption.

They had difficult labor, and that was the physical exile. They didn’t feel confident in Moshe - that was their spiritual exile. The impurity of Pharaoh had been upon them when they were in Egypt, and that was really why they didn’t believe in being redeemed. When they left Egypt, they left behind this impurity as well, becoming instead the “servants of Hashem”. They were released from the evil thoughts that dampened their faith in Egypt.

Exile of the Thoughts - Today

We will now try to understand how this practically applies to our soul.

The great level we reached when we stood at Har Sinai didn’t last. After the sin with the Golden Calf, the people fell from their great spiritual plateau. Thus, in a sense, we didn’t have a complete redemption from Egypt.

Do we have the ‘bricks and mortar’ today that we were enslaved with in Egypt? From an inner perspective, yes, because in the time we live in, we are exiled to our thoughts. **When a person thinks about This World and he has desires for it - this is exile of the thoughts.**

Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained the statement of Chazal that “Torah and *derech erez*³ together are good for protecting a person from sin.” This sounds simply like it keeps a person from being bored, but the deeper meaning is that even during the time of one’s involvement with matters of *derech erez*, there should be Torah. So even one who is involved with ‘bricks and mortar’ (labor/work) can still think about Torah, matters of holiness, and Hashem.

The question to ask ourselves is: When one is taking care of his various physical matters, where are his thoughts focused on? What is he thinking about?

The Avodah of the Days of “Shovavim”

The days of “*Shovavim*” are a period of gaining holiness of thought. One has to protect his eyes and his heart from straying after lewd thoughts, as we know but it is more than that. That’s only the superficial part. The point of all this is really about **preventing your thoughts from thinking about things you don’t need to think about.**

We are all in the “bricks and mortar” of This World; we have no choice, because we are inevitably involved with This World, so we have physical labor. But where are our thoughts? What are our thoughts focusing on...?

If our thoughts are only about This World, then we lose our connection to the spiritual. But if we make sure that our thoughts and feelings are connected to the spiritual even as we have to do our physical matters, then we are still connected with the spiritual dimension of our *ruchniyus*. And this will be true even as we are taking care of our down-to-earth physical needs.

The more a person is connected all the time to the holiness of his power of thought, his thoughts can connect him to his place Above - even as his body is doing something purely physical.

Beginning the Day with a Pure Thought

Now let’s make this concept practical.

A person gets up in the morning – what does he do? He says, “*Modeh Ani*”. However, one needs to think into the words before he says it.

3 In this context, “derech erez” translates as “work”. In other contexts, derech Eretz refers to proper behavior, or it can refer to marital relations.

How can person think? His hands are still unclean, because he hasn't yet washed his hands. What should he think about? Should it be about the fact that he is about to say the words...?

Thought must precede speech, as the Ramban says. When a person slept, he didn't think, because imagination takes over when we sleep, as the Vilna *Gaon* taught. When a person gets up in the morning, he has a hard time thinking – why? Because his mind has been dulled the entire night by imagination. What should he do about this? He should think of something **true** and **pure**.

If the beginning of the day begins with true thought, then a person leaves the “exile” he is in, even though he's involved with a world of action. And the more **true** that the thought is, the more a person can penetrate into his heart.

One who is not aware of this concept lives with either action alone or speech alone. He only thinks before doing an action or before he speaks. But such a life does not really use the power of thought that much. When our power of thought is only used to think before we do something about what we will do or what we will speak, our mind isn't used enough, and what will happen? Imagination will take over.

But when a person wakes up in the morning and he awakens a true thought within himself (a thought about something truthful), he essentially leaves the “exile” to his thoughts.

What should a person think about when he gets up in the morning? It can be a **thought about the purpose of life**, or it can be a **thought about Hashem**, or it can be about **fear of Hashem or love of Hashem**. The day should then continue with thinking about this thought that you woke up with.

For this **half a minute of a day** that you think, it can carry over into the rest of the day. With a little bit of thinking a truthful thought, you can connect the whole day with that thought.

This does not mean to keep thinking the same thought over and over again throughout the day. It is rather to **keep reminding yourself of the first thought you began the day with**: the thought that preceded all the actions of the day.

In Conclusion

Although there are many forms of *avodah* during *Shovavim*, we have stressed that the depth behind utilizing these days of *Shovavim* is, at its core, about sanctifying our power of thought

What does a person remain with from this world? What does he take with him? He only takes with him his holy **feelings** and his holy **thoughts**. When a person connects himself to holy thought, this is the meaning of the term of our Sages, “One who is a *Ben Olam HaBa*” (one who will merit the World to Come). We are found in the “world of action” which is only from our body's view. From the view of our soul, however, we are found in our thoughts.

Thought is an inner matter. One who connects to thought is connected to an inner world even as he is on this physical World.

When a person damages the *Bris Kodesh*, the inner problem is that he has damaged his faculty of thought. The way to rectify it is to return to the holiness of thought.

Yaakov *Avinu* called Reuven “*reishis oni*,” (first of my offspring), for it was his very first seed; the Sages state that Yaakov did not see *keri* (emissions) in his entire life; the depth of this is that we have a power of *reishis*, to return to our beginning source, that the *reishis* (beginning) of our thoughts can be holy.

In this way, we can connect the entire day with the first thought we began the day with. Understandably, it needs to be done slowly and in steps, and patiently. This will connect a person to the power of holy thought and in turn purify the thoughts.

This is the root method and the depth behind the days of *Shovavim*.

5 | *Illness & Purifying The Body* ⁴

Illness – Physical Weakness And An Opportunity For Spiritual Greatness

In *Parshas Vayechi*, the brothers informed Yosef, “Behold, your father is ill.”

The *Gemara* says that before Yaakov *Avinu*'s times, there was no such thing yet as *choli* (illness). *Tosafos*⁵ asks that we do find that there were people who became ill who lived before Yaakov *Avinu*, and *Tosafos* differentiates between an illness that had never been around before with illnesses that were already known. But the first time that the Torah mentions illness is with regards to Yaakov *Avinu*.

The lower connotation of the word “*choli*”, illness, hints to *chullin* (mundane) and *chalal* (void), something incomplete and imperfect. But illness has also has a spiritual implication. *Chazal* say that the *Shechinah*⁶ resides above the head of one who is bedridden from illness.

When a person is ill, there are two parts to the illness. One part of it is that it weakens the body. This is a “void” that happens to the body, which weakens it and doesn't allow it to perform as it should. The other part of illness, on the other hand, is that it brings the *Shechinah* with it, which hovers above the head of the one who is ill.

To understand it better, there is no person who doesn't go through illness, and the only issue is what kind of illness he will go through. There are all kinds of illnesses. No one goes through this world without becoming sick. Let us understand that if a person is always living with Hashem in every situation, and he always wonders of how he can serve Hashem in any situation, he reflects about illness and he wonders how he can serve Hashem when he is ill. There is a unique *Avodas Hashem* upon a person when he is ill, and this is what is meant by the words of the verse, “Behold, your father is ill.”

We will analyze the roots of this.

The Body and The Soul

Man is comprised of a *neshamah* (soul) and a *guf* (body). The body conceals the soul. The body is from the earth, whereas the soul is the spirit of life breathed into the body from Hashem. The material and physical makeup of the body, which is formed from the element of earth, conceals the soul.

⁴ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/weekly-shmuess-014-vayechi-illness-purifying-body-shovavim>

⁵ *Tosafos Bava Basra 16a*

⁶ *Hashem's Presence*

The soul is more clearly revealed in a person's speech, for man is called "*nefesh chayah*" (a living soul), and *Targum Onkelos* translates this as "*ruach memalelah*", "a talking spirit". Man is called a *medaber*, a "social creature", due to his unique ability of speech, which is an expression of the soul. The soul is concealed by the body, but through speech, the soul is revealed outward. Speech is just for the means of speech, then, but a way to reveal the soul. The soul cannot come forth from any of the other parts of the body. The only place in the body where the soul can escape from is the mouth, through the power of speech.

Even more so, there is also the power of thought, where the light of the *neshamah* resides, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes. It remains inside the mind, though, and it does not come outward. But the Raavad writes that the brain is connected to the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Therefore, on a deeper level, the four senses of sight, hearing, smell, and speech are revelations of the soul, which is contained in the brain and which comes outward through the senses. That is the power contained in the light of the soul contained in the brain.

So the body conceals the soul, but the soul can be revealed through the holes of the face, which include the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. There are additional holes in the body, in the lower sections of the body, but those holes are connected with the sin of Adam, so they became damaged and they cannot be a means to reveal the soul. If not for the sin of Adam, those places in the body would also be places where the soul can be revealed outward from the body (this includes the ability of reproduction). But although this is all true in concept, the body conceals the soul from being revealed.

A person, ever since he is born, is naturally dominated by the body, and his soul is hidden, and this is how he grows up. He connects himself with pursuits of materialism, and this furthers the dominance of the body and conceals his soul even more. By contrast, the more a person has exertion in Torah and performance of mitzvos and he truly does the will of the Creator, his soul becomes more revealed. It is mainly revealed through his power of thought, which can extend to the eyes, ears, nose and mouth; and in his heart. The mind (which is connected to the senses) and heart are the main places where the soul is revealed.

Illness And How It Affects One Who Lives A "Body" Existence

When a person does not work to reveal his soul, and he is instead living a materialistic life, where he is not connected to the spiritual - or even if he tries to reveal his soul but he has only reached a very minimal revelation of it - what will happen to him when he becomes ill? His body weakens, and since it was his body that had been dominating him all along and his soul had not been accessed, he has nothing to hold onto. He had been living only through his body, and now his body is inactive, and his soul, which he had never revealed until now, is surely much harder to reach now, because he has no strength.

When a person is ill, even the little spirituality that he may have had until now will weaken. He is in bed all day and he can't learn Torah or do *mitzvos*. The Rambam says that a person is obligated to

learn Torah even if he is ill, but usually a person cannot concentrate on his learning while he is bedridden from illness. He might be able to learn superficially, but he won't be able to learn with depth. When a person is ill, his Torah learning suffers.

Illness causes a person to be distanced from whatever spiritual level had been on beforehand. With the more ill he becomes, the less spiritual work he can do. That is the usual scenario of what happens to most people when they are ill, which they are familiar with.

The Higher Way To Experience Illness

But there is a higher way to go through illness. *Chazal* say that “the *Shechinah* resides above the head of one who is bedridden from illness”. How indeed is there a revelation of *Shechinah* to one who is ill?

If a person has begun to reveal the light of his soul, and he exerts himself in Torah study and in the performance of *mitzvos* and in doing the will of Hashem, this enables the light of the soul to shine more and more upon the body, purifying his thoughts, eyes, ears, and speech. But the body still prevents the light of the soul from being shined completely. When the body is weakened [such as in a time of illness], on one hand, the person has the disadvantage of not being able to learn Torah and do *mitzvos* as much, for he is bedridden. But on the other hand, he has a unique *avodah* now. The body, which had been preventing the light of his soul from being revealed, has now been weakened - and now the soul can be more revealed. That is the meaning of how the *Shechinah* is above the head of an ill person.

If a person lives a totally “body” kind of existence and his soul is almost completely concealed from him, becoming ill will only be a further descent into the physical trappings of the body, as we explained. His soul hadn't been active before the illness, and now that he is ill, the body, which had been his central point, now becomes weak, and he has no spirituality to hold onto. This is also because even the revealed amount of spirituality in his life had only been minimal, and little spirituality that he did have until now will not be enough to keep him going as he is ill.

But if one merited, on his own level and to a certain degree, to penetrate into his soul, and to enable its light to be shined onto the body – illness will be an opportunity for him to get further past his body. Until now his body had been preventing him from totally accessing the soul, and now that the body is weakened through illness, the body cannot fight the soul as much, and the soul can then shine. The result will be, “The *Shechinah* is above the head of an ill person” – he will see more of a revelation of his soul.

As we mentioned before, it is very possible that the physical suffering of his body is preventing him from serving Hashem as he would like to, so it is very hard to actively serve Hashem when one is ill. But there can be more *d'veykus* (attachment) to Hashem that one can merit as he physically suffers through the illness. This seems like two contradictory forces taking place at once, but it can be understood as it has been explained here.

A person can reach a greater recognition of the Creator when he is ill. The clarity of the mind is weaker then, but the connection to the depths of Torah and to Hashem that he had until now will intensify, as he goes through the illness. His connection to Hashem and Torah that he has formed until now can become more clearly revealed - and this is the *Shechinah* that comes to the ill person. As we emphasized, this will only be true for one who has indeed begun to reveal the light of his soul, before the illness arrives.

This is a deep way to view illness: When one is ill, on one hand, he feels confined to his bed and that he cannot serve Hashem as much, but on the other hand, it is also an opportunity to reach higher spiritual levels, for the weakening of the body can enable the soul to shine more clearly, and this enables a person to discover companionship with Hashem.

Aging

Another point connected to the topic of illness is the topic of aging. Rabbeinu Yonah says that until the age of 35, a person is more energetic and aspiring, and after 35, a person is already at the other half of his life, which is heading closer to the time where he will leave the world. This is a very clear way to view life.

The older a person becomes, the weaker his body becomes (in most cases). How is old age supposed to look like?

Chazal say that “the older that the unlearned become, the more their *daas* (wise mind) is weakened, [whereas the older a Torah scholar becomes, the more refined his *daas* becomes”]. This is along the lines of what we have been explaining until now, with regards to illness. If a person did not reveal any of his soul yet, illness only makes his spiritual situation worse. When he gets older, his body weakens, so his main resource of strength is gone. It is like the statement, “What difference does it make to me if it is halfway killed or entirely killed?”⁷ As he draws closer to the end of his life, he gets weaker, and even the spiritual idealism which he had when he was younger now becomes weaker, because it all had been performed from his body alone, which is now weak.

But if a person merited on his own level to reveal the light of his soul, the weakening of the body as he gets older will be an opportunity for him to enable the soul to get past the body.

As long as one has revealed the light of his soul to some extent, before old age arrives - and surely if he had been revealing it more and more - the period of old age will only serve to continue the revelation of the soul.⁸ His physical energy will be less, and he won't be able to actively serve Hashem as much, but at the same time, with the more he is physically weakened, the more his *neshamah* will shine.

⁷ *Talmud Bavli: Bava Kamma 65a*

⁸ See also *Tefillah #0108 – Balance In Your Avodas Hashem*

The simple reason for this is because he is continuing to exert himself in serving Hashem in spite of his physical limitations, but the deeper understanding of this is because Hashem designed it this way, that old age weakens the body and in turn reveals the soul more.

Had Adam never eaten from the *Eitz HaDaas*, he would have lived forever, and it would have been a different story; there would be no such thing as death and aging. But now that Adam did eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* and death was decreed upon man, not only is there death, but there is a slow process of death, which involves aging. Although death was a form of destruction that came to the world, where man's body returns to earth, it is also a form of rectification, because when a person becomes older and his body weakens, his soul is able to shine better.

This is the meaning of how "Torah scholars, as they age, their *daas* becomes refined." Their *daas* doesn't just get better if they exert themselves in Torah and in *Avodas Hashem*; that is a separate matter. Their *daas* gets better because their body weakens, and then the light of the *neshamah* is more revealed.

The difference is most apparent at the time of death itself. A person who lived his life only through his body alone, without having accessed the light of his soul, will have nothing to hold onto at death. There is no more body, and his soul is out of reach. But when one ages like a Torah scholar, his soul becomes more and more revealed as he gets older and his body weakens. At death, the body will be gone, and he will be left with the soul in its fully revealed state: "The soul You have placed in me is pure."

Shovavim – A Time To Purify The Body

We are now entering the days of *Shovavim*⁹, a time for a person to fix his personal deficiencies. To be brief about this topic, the *sefarim hakedoshim* prescribe different fasts, which atone for the sins that need to be rectified during the weeks of *Shovavim*. But in the later generations, and in our generation especially, most people do not have the physical energy to fast. The alternative in our times for fasting is Torah study, which can atone like fasting, for Torah study weakens the body.

This is the custom of many today: to replace fasting with Torah study, and especially to learn Torah with more concentration, as practiced in Kelm and in other places.

Based upon the discussion here, we can now have a little more of an understanding of this matter.

If a person is living entirely through his body, he would need to purify his body in order to weaken its hold upon him. When one is too attached to his body, and all that he lives and feels is his body, even if he exerts himself in Torah study and in mitzvos and he tries to do the will of Hashem, he is still living his life through his body, and he needs to go through a purification process, in order to weaken the body's hold upon him.

⁹ Editor's Note: "Shovavim" stands for the weeks spanning Parshas Shemos, Va'eira, Bo, Beshalach, Yisro, and Mishpatim (and in some years, it extends to Parshas Terumah and Tetzaveh).

Obviously, one needs to go about it very sensibly, and he must receive individual guidance on how to go about purifying the body. But one must come to a point in which the body does not have such a strong hold on him.

That is one part of the purification process that is needed. It is especially applicable to teenagers and adolescents, and also with even adults who are still heavily attached to their body's hold: the body's hold on them must become weakened, to a certain extent. How to do it exactly is a matter which a person needs individual guidance for, and each person must follow his own teachers for this. But the common denominator in all situations is that there must be some weakening of the body's hold.

In childhood, the body is dominant and the soul is almost completely hidden. As a person gets older, he connects more outward, and he becomes more attached with the materialism of This World, which further strengthens the body's hold upon him and makes it almost impossible to reach the soul. He might be a person who exerts himself in Torah study, he does the *mitzvos*, and he does the will of Hashem – and in spite of this, he is still attached to the hold of materialism, and it even continues to get stronger. This is because it is only natural for a person to want to connect more and more to materialism of This World, and when a person follows this natural orientation, that is what will happen.

For this reason, there is a need for us to purify the body, such as lessening our intake of food. There is the concept of “*Taanis HaRaavad*”, the fast prescribed by Rabbi Avraham ben David, in which one takes pauses as he eats, or, to leave over a little bit of food on his plate (which is a higher level). The point is that we need to weaken the body's hold somewhat, so that we are not being controlled completely by the urges of the body. That is the first step of our *avodah* of purifying our body, during *Shovavim*.

After that, when the body has become somewhat purified and the soul is beginning to become more revealed, comes the second step of our *avodah*: To try to access the soul more, while at the same making sure to weaken the body's hold even more than before. In order to reveal the light of the soul more, one needs to concentrate deeply on the words of the Gemara he is learning, along with weakening his attachment to his body and to the materialism of This World.

If a person has not purified his body at all, even if he learns Torah and he concentrates on his learning as everyone else does, he is still attached to materialism, and materialism will have a hold on him just as much as before. If he exerts himself in Torah learning in order to weaken the hold of materialism upon him, this will purify the body. But if he is just learning Torah habitually and he has no intentions of purifying his body through it, it will do almost nothing to purify him, and materialism will still have a hold on him, and his *neshamah* will not be able to come through.

At some point, any person, if he truly seeks Hashem, must be able to weaken the hold of his body from upon him, and as emphasized, it should be done sensibly and with individual guidance.

Once the body and the pull towards materialism is weakened, a person's *avodah* becomes deeper. The *avodah* then is to increase the light of the soul, through concentrating deeply on the words of

Torah one is learning, which awakens and reveals the light of the *neshamah*; at the same time, one must make sure to weaken the hold of physicality on him. Then a person's physicality will continue to weaken, and the light of the soul will continue to increase.

Going About This Sensibly

This is a very subtle path, which must be tread very carefully.

Weakening the body's physicality can imply two different things – one of which is commendable, and another connotation that is detrimental. Weakening one's connection to the body's physicality and to the materialism of This World is something we want to accomplish, but **weakening our physical energy itself is something that we must be careful to avoid**. Of this it is said, “Break the barrel and save its wine” – when we are “breaking” the body's hold, we must do so very carefully, so that we don't damage our physical health in the process, because then we cannot serve Hashem properly.

Unfortunately, many have failed in this area. On one side of the spectrum are those who have left the world having never purified their body, who have never revealed the light of the soul; and on the other extreme are those who have overcome their physicality, but in extreme ways, which weakened their physical health, and then they were depleted of physical energy and they couldn't serve Hashem properly after that.

Therefore, as we said, fasting and lessening our intake of food is a subtle path to tread. On one hand, one needs to lessen the hold of physicality upon him, but at the same time, one needs to make sure it is not extreme. We are not souls living in Gan Eden now. Our souls are currently inside a physical body which is on This World. We need exertion in Torah study with a healthy body, or else we cannot properly do the *mitzvos*; we won't be able to do *chessed*, and other *mitzvos*, with no physical energy.

So it is a very sensitive issue to know how much one needs to weaken his physicality. The basic outline of it is that we need to weaken our physicality to the extent that our connection to This World becomes lessened, while at the same being able to maintain our physical health and energy, so that our performance of *mitzvos* and spiritual growth isn't being damaged.

The more a person lives internally, the more he can derive *chiyus* (energy) from the holy Torah that he learns (for the Torah is called “*chochmah*” (wisdom), from the words “*koach mah*”, and “*koach*” is energy); and from the light of the *neshamah*, just as “the Aron lifted its carriers”. Many people tried to be like this [to get all of their energy from Torah and from the light of their *neshamah*], and they were not successful, but in any case, one must make sure that lessening his connection to physicality and to This World is not weakening his health, to the point that he does not have the strength to serve Hashem, *chas v'shalom*.

That is the common denominator for all people, no matter what level a person is on. As emphasized, each person needs to weaken his physicality on the level he is on, so it will apply differently with each person.

How The Shechinah Can Be Revealed During Illness

Now we can understand that which is said in this week's *parshah*, that the brothers informed Yosef, "Behold, your father is ill", from which *Chazal* learn that the *Shechinah* resides by the bedside of the ill. The *Shechinah* is with an ill person to the extent that he has traversed the path described here, especially the last point that we explained. If one has lived a life in which he has weakened his connection to the body and the pull towards materialism, as well as weakening the body's hold from upon him to a certain extent, he will live a life in which the weakening of his body will result in an increase of the light of the soul. When illness arrives, it will not make him descend into emptiness, but the opposite: "the *Shechinah* is above the head of the ill." The reality of Hashem's Presence will become more revealed to him, as well as the light of his *neshamah*.¹⁰

These words are subtle and they are about a sensitive matter, which needs to be carefully traversed. Many have erred when it comes to this matter, and there are those who have damaged themselves physically, *rachmana litzlan*, from improper guidance of how to weaken the body.

This is especially the case with teenagers and adolescents, who tried to weaken their body without using any common sense. (Often it was because their intentions were not pure, and therefore they didn't receive proper *siyata d'shmaya* (heavenly assistance) to succeed in it). In some cases, this resulted in becoming deathly ill, *rachmana litzlan*; either through losing all or most of their physical strength, or a loss of their mental abilities, or a loss of motivation. Whatever the result, it is always because there was a lack of understanding of how to properly weaken the body.

Exact guidance cannot be given here on how much one needs to weaken the body's physicality. Here we explained how it works, what the "*derech hayesharah*" (right path) is that a person needs to take, what the will from Creator really is from a person. Hashem doesn't want a person to weaken his body to the extent that he doesn't have the strength to serve the Creator.

This is the "*derech hayesharah*", the straight and sensible path, which enables one to weaken his physicality and at the same time reveal the light of the soul. When one breaks the hold of the body from upon him, he will age like a Torah scholar, whose *daas* mind increases with the older and physically weaker that he becomes.

¹⁰ The Rav has also spoken about illness in the following *derashos*:

Derashos #081 – *Chizuk For One With An Illness*;

Search For Serenity #009 – *Coping With Suffering*;

Tefillah #039 – *When We Get Sick*;

Tefillah #070 – *Hashem Is Our Doctor*

6 | *Self-Purification Through Torah Study*¹¹

The Mitzvah To Remember Standing At Har Sinai – An Ongoing Revelation

In *Parashas Yisro*, we learn about the giving of the Torah, which is one of the six constant *mitzvos* we have every day: “Remember the day in which you stood at Horeb.”

The Torah was given in front of all the people, and we have a power to remember it, to continue the past into the present and future. It was not just something that happened in the past, but something which has bearings on the present, of “It shall be to your eyes like new, each day, as if you have received it from Har Sinai.” There are other such expressions in Chazal which depict our power to remember the giving of the Torah, and this shows us that it is not just a remembrance of history, but a remembrance which awakens something in the present, in resemblance of the past.

“It Is Our Will To See The King” – Through The “Eyes of The Intellect”

Rashi says that when the people stood at Har Sinai, they requested of Moshe, רצונו לראות את מלכינו “It is our will to see our King.” In other words, the inner core of the giving of the Torah, the spiritual light present then, was this desire of “Our will to see our King.” This was only possible at Har Sinai, but after that, we can no longer have this revelation of “Our will to see our King.”

However, our Sages teach explicitly that there is some continuation of this revelation. The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that one has an obligation to recognize the Creator in various ways, and one these ways is יראהו בעין שכלו, “to see Him through the eyes of the intellect.” Similar to when we stood at Sinai, where we desired to see our King, every generation has a *mitzvah* to remember the event of standing at Sinai and to continue the revelation of “It is our desire to see our King” – through the ability of the “eyes of the intellect.”

We cannot see Hashem, because “No man can see me and live”, but in the depths of our *seichel* (higher intellect), we can “see” Hashem through these “eyes of the intellect”. What does it mean, though, to see Him through the eyes of the intellect?

Obviously, we have no comprehension of what this means. Most people cannot relate to it at all. People think of the *seichel* as the power to learn the Torah with in-depth analysis, and those who exert themselves in Torah study can know what this is, but to “see Him, through eyes of the intellect” is basically a complete secret, which is hidden from almost all people.

¹¹ שיחת השבוע 019 – יתרו – שובבים – בנין כח מחשבה

The Two Parts of our Seichel (Intellect)

There is a part of *seichel* which is in our brain, which is the human logic (*seichel enoshi*) that we are familiar with. Within the *seichel*, however, is the “light of the *neshamah* (Divine soul).” Rays of the *neshamah* are present inside the brain. When a person is only making use of the lower part of his *seichel*, the human logic, he is only able to understand things that he can logically comprehend, and he can use that very same ability when learning Torah. But when a person exerts himself in Torah, he can reach the higher part of the *seichel* - the light of the *neshamah*, contained inside his *seichel*.

Exertion In Torah: Physical, Verbal and Mental

One part our exertion in learning Torah is to have **physical exertion** in learning. For example, Chazal say that Torah scholars lose sleep as they diligently learn Torah, and that one needs to “vomit the milk nursed from his mother” in order to acquire Torah [in other words, one needs to get rid of his false notions in order to learn Torah, which puts him through some physical suffering in order to learn Torah.] Chazal also say that one must be like an ox carrying a load, or a donkey carrying a package, and to bear the yoke of Torah. There is physical exertion in Torah learning which weakens the body somewhat, and this is one part of exertion in learning Torah.

There is also another kind of exertion in Torah, which is inner. This is the **mental exertion** which one needs to go through, in order to learn Torah.

In between these two levels is **verbal exertion** – a person also needs to speak words of Torah constantly (“*And you shall speak in it*”), and to avoid idle chatter; and he needs to sharpen the words of Torah in his mouth by making sure that he knows what he’s learning, so that if he is asked a question, he will be able to respond clearly. For this reason, one needs to review his learning (“*And you shall review it*”).

The higher part of exertion in learning Torah - the mental exertion - uses the **brain**. It also includes the **heart**. The main part of mental exertion in learning Torah, however, is with our brain.

The first step we need to do, when we begin exerting ourselves in learning Torah, is to exert the physical body. The second step is to exert our speech; to constantly speak of Torah. But the main part of exertion in Torah is to exert the brain, to always think about words of Torah.

When having mental exertion over Torah, where we are training ourselves to constantly think of Torah, we must be able to think about Torah wherever we go, except if we are in a place that has a foul odor, and other places where it is forbidden to think about Torah. But even more than getting used to thinking words of Torah, one needs to exert his mind over it by remaining focused in his thoughts and by concentrating deeply with his mind, over words of Torah. This uses the mind’s analytical abilities (*cheshbon*\calculation), as well as other abilities of the mind, which a person needs in order to have exertion in his Torah learning.

The verbal part of the exertion in Torah, however, does not reveal that much intellectual depth. It is rather a way to attach one’s emotions, by connecting himself to the words of Torah he is learning, via the means of speech. However, verbal exertion (speaking words of Torah) is still

counted as a part of exertion in Torah learning. The main exertion over Torah lies in exerting the mind, where a person needs to train his mind to become more concentrated on his Torah studies, and to learn how to subjugate his mind to exertion in Torah.

If a person is only exerting himself in Torah physically, by losing sleep over it and learning even when he's tired, or if he is only having verbal exertion in learning, by making sure to always speak about Torah with others, as long as he hasn't yet exerted his mind over it, his mind doesn't become purified. He will still get a *mitzvah* for learning Torah, and he is certainly considered to be exerting himself over Torah, but his mind will not yet get purified from this. Only when a person is exerting his thoughts over Torah, to think into the depth of the words of Torah he is learning, and to subjugate all of his mental abilities to think about Torah, both in quantity and in quality – and it is mainly about the **quality** – only then, is the mind purified through Torah study.

When one has purified his thoughts through mental exertion in his Torah learning, this purifies his entire *seichel* intellect, it elevates the lower level of the intellect which is called the *seichel enoshi* (human logic) which he was born with, and with the more he continues this, the more his *seichel enoshi* is purified. As the Chazon Ish writes, at first when a person begins to learn Torah, there is only exertion, and there is not yet pleasure. But after a person continues to exert himself in Torah, “a new gate becomes opened to him, where the intellect can revel in an endless bliss.”

The opening of that “new gate” which the Chazon Ish describes is essentially when the lower intellect of the person has become purified, through exerting his mind over Torah (besides for the physical and verbal exertion in Torah, which a person also needs to start with, as we explained above). As a person gets used to exerting his thoughts over his Torah learning, slowly with time, his mind becomes purified. He has to use **all** of his mental energies in order to have the “new gate” opened to him, whereupon his intellect will receive endless bliss when he thinks about Torah – he must make sure that he is using his mind to its full extent.

Shovavim – A Time To Purify The Mind, Through Torah Learning

The days which we are in now, the period of “*Shovavim*” (and now we are in its final week¹²), lasts for 42 days, and it is pointed out in our sefarim hakedoshim that “42” is equal in *gematria* to the word **בב**, alluding to the *mitzvah* of **וּדְבַרְתָּ בּוֹ**, “*And you shall speak in it*”, which shows us that *Shovavim* is a particular time to strengthen the area of speaking words of Torah.

In Kelm, however, they did not stress “speech” in Torah during *Shovavim*, and they were instead focused on improving the area of “thought” in Torah. The reason for this is because the sins which we are trying to rectify during *Shovavim* are related to the brain, for all lustful desires begin in the brain and then get sent out to the rest of the body. Therefore, the main area that needs to be

12 Editor's Note: In a year when Parashas Terumah and Tetzaveh are not together, Shovavim lasts from Parashas Shemos through Parashas Mishpatim. During the years that Parshas Terumah-Tetzaveh are together, Shovavim extends until the end of the week of Tetzaveh.

rectified during *Shovavim* is the brain, which we accomplish through learning how to have concentrated thought on Torah study, which in turn exerts the brain.

Training the mind to concentrate on one Torah thought alone, is difficult work. It takes a lot of exertion of the mind. At first one needs to train himself to get used to it in small amounts; he can try concentrating on a Torah thought for 20 seconds, and then he should slowly try to increase his amount of concentration. He should do it slowly and patiently, and not try to jump levels too fast. He just needs to train his mind to concentrating on one thing alone. This is how a person builds his area of thought.

The sins related to *Bris Kodesh* cause a person's thoughts to become trapped in the liquid of the brain, which spreads out to the rest of the body and becomes scattered. The rectification of this is to learn how to concentrate, which builds the power of thought in one's brain, and this returns each thought to its root, so that the thoughts are no longer scattered. We have explained here that in order to achieve this rectification, one needs to first train his mind to concentrate on just one Torah thought, and then to slowly increase the amount of the concentration, with time.

Concentration of the Mind and Concentration of the Heart

Usually people experience difficulty concentrating on one thought. People have a hard time concentrating as they are exerting themselves in Torah study, but they mainly experience concentration problems during *davening*, where their thoughts are floating around, like birds in the sky who can fly to any of the four directions.

Even when people do succeed in remaining focused while they are *davening*, most of the time it is not because they have learned the art of focusing their thoughts, but because their **heart** wants something very badly which they are *davening* for, and when the heart is very passionate about something, it can cause the brain to concentrate. This is not an ability to focus mentally with one's thoughts – it is rather because when a person wants something very badly, he will be very focused on getting it, and that gets his mind to concentrate on what he wants.

When a person is *davening* with passion, when he is pouring out his heart before Hashem as he prays for what he wants badly, he is really using his *ratzon* (will). The *ratzon* of a person (each on his own level) can get the mind to concentrate on whatever he wants. This comes from the heart's desire, and it is not stemming from mental concentration.

When a person is learning Torah and having exertion in it, his mental concentration in it is surely improved with the more that he has a passion and a *ratzon* to learn Torah. Just as a person can get his brain to concentrate while he is *davening*, because his heart desires something badly, so can a person mentally concentrate on what he's learning when he has a passion and a love for learning Torah. The *ratzon* of a person to learn Torah, in order to fulfill Hashem's will that he learn Torah, can cause a person to have more mental concentration on his learning. However, as we are

explaining, this is a different kind of concentration; it does not stem from the brain\mind, but from the heart.

The main way to build concentration in one's Torah learning is not just through having a passion and a will to learn Torah, but from training the mind to concentrate on a Torah thought. Slowly as a person gets used to thinking into one Torah thought at a time, with time, his power of thought becomes developed.

In different terms, the **external** part of building the power of thought is to get used to concentrating on one Torah thought, and the **inner** part of the building the power of thought is to have a will, a passion, and a love for learning Torah. The inner part, of attaining mental concentration via a passionate will, is attained through a passionate *davening*, along with a passion in one's Torah learning.

When a person trains his mind to think and reflect into a Torah thought, when he takes a certain Torah thought he is learning and he trains himself to think into all of its angles of understanding, to all of the possible outcomes that result from this understanding, the general view and the details of it – slowly as a person gets used to this, the mind is built, via the mental concentration in Torah.

The more a person improves his mental concentration, the more he builds his mind, and the power of thought contained in it. It doesn't mean that he is finished, but it is still a major part of his development in his Torah learning.

One needs to train his mind to think and concentrate into one thing alone, **patiently** but also **firmly**. This will feel like a contradiction; how do you do it slowly and patiently, but also firmly, at the same time? In spite of this contradiction, herein lays the key to success.

As we explained until now, building the power of thought includes two parts. One part of it is through having a passionate heart, which activates the *ratzon*\will; and the other part of it is to train the mind to think and concentrate about one Torah thought, and this includes trying to uncover all angles of understanding in a certain Torah thought.

Attaining A "Yearning Intellect"

When a person gets used to deeply analyzing a Torah thought and he's trying to uncover all of the possible angles of understanding in it, he causes the intellect itself to yearn for more Torah knowledge.

Both the heart and the intellect can have a yearning. We are familiar with the yearnings of the heart – these can include both the materialistic desires for This World, and on a spiritual level, the yearnings that a person has when he is *davening*. But our intellect can also yearn; the Ramchal in *Derech Hashem* calls it "*seichel hamishtokek*", "an intellect that longs". The more a person is utilizing his intellect for Torah, his intellect will yearn for more and more wisdom of the Torah. Herein lays the deep connection that one can form with his Torah learning.

Connecting To The Torah Through Utilizing Both The Mind and The Heart

A person forms a connection to Torah in two different ways – through the heart, and through the mind.

The heart becomes attached to Torah when one has a passion, will, and a love for learning Torah; this can be worked upon through the area of *davening*, and through other areas as well, which awaken the spiritual yearnings of the heart.

The mind becomes attached to Torah when one trains his thoughts to think and concentrate about a certain Torah thought, and as a person perseveres with this, the mind slowly becomes attached to the words of Torah he is learning. As we mentioned, one also needs to analyze deeply what he is learning, trying to cover different angles of understanding in it, seeing it in general terms and in detailed terms, exhausting the topic as much as he can.

As we have been emphasizing here, the main exertion in learning Torah is when we utilize the potential of our intellect, by exerting our minds in it. Some people were born with very gifted mental abilities, so it comes naturally to them; but even if someone was not born with particularly gifted mental abilities, after exerting his mind in Torah, he utilizes the potential of his intellect, and he reveals the “yearning intellect”.

The Ramchal calls it the “*seichel hamishtokek*” (the “yearning intellect”), but the Vilna Gaon calls it “*cheifetz hasichli*”, “desire of the intellect.” When a person reveals this *cheifetz hasichli* [or *seichel hamishtokek*], his mind becomes connected to Torah, in its yearning and longing for more and more of its wisdom. Then the words of Torah he is learning become connected with his own intellect, and they become unified into one piece; his intellect then harmonizes with the Torah’s thinking.

The True Meaning of A Torah Scholar

This is the true meaning of a Torah scholar, whose thoughts become Torah thoughts. His mind is always thinking about Torah, his mind becomes more purified and subtle and refined as he continues like this, and his own soul becomes purified along with this. The mind becomes refined and it harmonizes with the words of Torah he learns, when he traverses all the steps that we explained until now [which included physical exertion in learning, verbal exertion in learning, focused concentration on a Torah thought, passion for learning, and analyzing all the possible angles of understanding in a Torah thought].

This integration of the mind with the Torah causes the *seichel enoshi*, the human logic, which is the lower part of the *seichel* intellect, to become aligned with the Torah’s holy wisdom. His own logical thinking patterns will become subservient to the Torah’s thinking. That is why a true Torah scholar attains the level that is called “*Daas Torah*”, for his very *daas* (mind) has become integrated and aligned with the Torah’s thinking -his mind thinks like the Torah.

When one reaches that level, his thoughts will always be found in Torah, but he won't even have to exert his thoughts anymore in order to do this. Instead, his thoughts are always thinking about Torah because his very mind has harmonized with the Torah. Of course, there is always more exertion needed in order to acquire Torah. A person will always need to deepen his understanding about whatever he is learning in the Torah, and to connect his thoughts even further to the Torah, and to exhaust all of his mental abilities, in his exertion over Torah study.

The Sensible Way To Go About The Process of Exertion In Torah

However, one needs to go about this entire process very sensibly. One cannot begin with the final state, which is to exhaust all of your mental abilities in Torah. It is dangerous to do so, and it may harm the brain, because a person will be straining it too much when he tries to jump levels.

There have been people who tried to heavily strain their minds in Torah, and they harmed themselves in the process; they can't think normally afterwards. They can't even think about Torah all the time. This is because they tried to skip all of the previous levels of exertion that we explained until now, and they attempted to jump to the final level. "Many did like Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, but were not successful." Not only won't a person succeed if he tries to some of the levels here, but he will damage his mind, *chas v'shalom*.

But if a person goes about this process sensibly, along with *davening* from an earnest and pure heart to reach all of these levels, and he works his upwards through the levels here that we have laid out [beginning from the more basic levels of exertion, to the deeper levels of exertion], he will eventually reach the level in which his mind is naturally thinking about Torah. Only after his mind is naturally thinking about Torah, should he attempt to exhaust all of his mental abilities in Torah. Then the "new gate" will be opened to him, where "his intellect will revel in endless bliss."

In order to reach that revelation, one needs to go through a certain process that refines the mind, and at the final step, one needs to have traversed the level in which he is exhausting all of his mental energies over Torah. However, as we have emphasized here, a person needs to first reveal the *cheifetz hasichli* (or the *seichel hamishtokek*), the level in which mind is yearning for more and more Torah wisdom.

If a person has not yet revealed the *cheifetz hasichli*, and he tries to exhaust all his mental abilities over Torah, he is essentially forcing his mind to attain a level that is above his current level, because he doesn't have the mental capacity at that point to think so heavily. It will go against his nature and it will strain him too much.

But when he has revealed a yearning for more Torah – both through a *ratzon* for Torah, through the *cheifetz hasichli* *seichel hamishtokek* – he will then be able to go against his nature, because he is then having *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) over Torah. He is completely devoting his mind to the Torah which his intellect is yearning for, and he is giving all of his thinking towards exertion in

Torah. Only then does he have an *avodah* to exhaust all of his mental abilities over Torah, because then he will be at the appropriate level of doing so.

This is the depth of the *tikkun* (rectification) that lies in the days of *Shovavim*. As mentioned briefly in the beginning, the main *tikkun* accomplished in these days of *Shovavim* is to build the power of thought.

Attaining Recognition of The Creator Through “Eyes of The Intellect”

Based upon the above, we can now understand the following.

We began with a question: When the Jewish people stood at Har Sinai, they requested “It is our desire to see our King.” This was not only a level for Har Sinai, for the *Chovos HaLevovos* says that every generation has an *avodah* to remember standing at Har Sinai, where we had this desire to see our King; we can attain it through “eyes of the intellect”. We asked: what does it mean to “see” Hashem through the “eyes of the intellect”?

When people don’t understand these words of the *Chovos HaLevovos*, they interpret “eyes of the intellect” to mean reflecting into the Creator’s ways, of the kindnesses He does for His creations. Although this is true, that is not what the *Chovos HaLevovos* is implying with “eyes of the intellect.”

The *Chovos HaLevovos* means that in order to “recognize the Creator”, one needs to penetrate into his intellect, and then he will be able to recognize Hashem, “in the hidden depths of the heart.” When the heart becomes opened, a person then discovers Hashem’s Presence which resides in the heart of each Jew.

There are different ways to reach “recognition of the Creator”. One way is through reaching the depth of the heart. When a person merits “*A good heart G-d had created me with, and a proper spirit He has renewed within me*”, he merits an opened heart, a revelation of the depths of the heart, and there he will find the Creator, Who dwells in the heart of each Jew. But there is also another way to attain “recognition of the Creator”, and this is the “eyes of the intellect”.

There are well-known words of the Rambam, in the final three chapters of *Moreh Nevuchim*¹³, describes *d’veykus* (attachment) to Hashem, through using the power of thought in the mind. But what kind of thought and intellect is the Rambam describing? The Rambam isn’t talking about a person who has an undeveloped mind, who will think about words of Torah and about Hashem in the same way that he thinks of mundane things. The Rambam is talking about a person who has traversed all of the steps described until now, where a person has learned how to utilize the potential of his intellect, to the point that his mind has harmonized with the Torah’s thinking; and he is also giving his entire minds towards the Torah and exhausting all of his mental energies over Torah. Only then does a new gate become opened to a person, where the intellect revels in endless bliss, and his lower intellect (human logic) becomes refined and purified; his mind then harmonizes with the

¹³ *Moreh Nevuchim* 51, 52, 53

Torah, and the light of the *neshamah* begins to illuminate his brain. That is the “eyes of the intellect”. Thus, “recognition of the Creator” is not only attained through reaching the deep feelings contained in the heart. It also requires “eyes of the intellect” - which was the level of standing at Har Sinai.

In Conclusion

To conclude and summarize these words, we must first know that each and every one of us, each Jewish soul, stood at Har Sinai, where we had a “desire to see our King”. Ever since then, this desire has become ingrained deep in our souls, where it is hidden. To reach this place in our soul is a long, arduous task. But we must aspire to get there, throughout our life. *“The end of the actions, is first with thought”* – we must know to where we are directing our lives towards. To where we must we want to direct our life towards? To recognize the Creator, from deep in our heart, where His Presence dwells. This means to have a simple and palpable sense that the Creator is in front of you, for His Presence fills all of reality.

And along with this, we also need to direct our life towards reaching a purification of the mind, to purify our thoughts through the light of the Torah, by exerting our minds in Torah, as we have explained about at length here. Through exertion in Torah, the mind becomes subservient to the Torah’s thinking, and this purifies the mind; it enables the light of the *neshamah* contained in the brain to be shined upon the mind and purify it. This is the meaning of how “It is our desire to see Our King”, and how this revelation is attained through the “eyes of the intellect.”

You might think that this is too high of a level to reach, and for this reason, the process has been laid out here very carefully, beginning from the lower levels and slowly towards the higher levels, to help you get to the innermost level, slowly and sensibly. Each person on his own level can reach some of these levels, and if someone reaches all of them, this is wonderful and praiseworthy. But even if a person cannot reach all of the levels described here, he is not exempt from trying to reach any of these levels at all. One must aspire and know to where he needs to get to, and work his way upwards, as presented here.

In summary, one needs to begin by awakening a yearning in his heart for Torah. Then he should put his mind to work over Torah, first on a superficial level by getting used to concentrating on one Torah thought at a time, and then on an inner level by deepening his understanding of each Torah thought, trying to cover all its angles, and slowly as a person gets used to this, he utilizes the potential of his intellect, and his mind begins to harmonize with the Torah’s thinking; finally, after that, a person needs to exhaust all his mental abilities over his Torah learning and give all of his thoughts to it. Then he reaches the depth of the reality of life.

As long as a person stood at Har Sinai, his soul yearns for all of this. It is ingrained in him, it lies deep within him to do it, and of this it can be said, *“Remember the day where you stood before Hashem your G-d, in Horeb”* – “remember” the depths of that revelation which each Jew had then – specifically, the revelation of the Presence of the Creator: “It is our desire to see Our King.”

PART 2

***DEEPER ASPECTS
OF SHOAVAVIM***

7 | *Repairing Our Thoughts*

Introduction to “Shovavim”

The holy *sefarim*¹⁴ describe the days of “*Shovavim*” (Parshas *Shemos* through Parshas *Mishpatim*) as days of *teshuvah* (repentance), based on the possuk, **שובו בנים שובבים**, “Return, wayward sons”, and that the main sin which we need to focus our *teshuvah* on during these days is to rectify the sin of *keri* (spilling human seed).

We need to know what the root of the spiritual light is that exists during this time, what exactly it means to damage the *Bris*, and how it is rectified.

In many places, the custom during these days is to recite *Selichos* (prayer supplications) and to perform various *tikkunim* (soul rectifications) for the public.

The ancient scholars who taught the inner parts of the Torah¹⁵ established five ways to rectify the sin of spilling seed, and each of them are based on the five different causes that can lead a person to the sin. The five causes that bring about this sin are: 1) Thoughts, 2) Desire to gaze at another woman¹⁶, 3) Desire for homosexual behavior¹⁷, 4) Wasted spittle¹⁸, 5) One who deliberately delays circumcision¹⁹.

In these coming chapters, we will not delve that in-depth into the esoteric concepts here; rather, we will see the homiletic statements of our Sages about these matters.

We will begin, with the help of Hashem, with the first path of rectification of the sin, which is to rectify the thoughts.

Rectifying the Thoughts: Returning To the “Beginning”

The power of thought is described as the “beginning point” of man. To illustrate the concept, the first thing Hashem did to create the world was that He thought about it. The beginning of a matter is always with thought, thus, thought is seen as the beginning point. Thought is the first kernel of wisdom that allows for the wisdom to become expanded further and further.

¹⁴ Arizal: *shaar ruach hakodesh: tikkun 27*; further discussed in *Levush, Magen Avraham, Beer Heitiv, and Pri Megadim to Orach Chaim: 685*

¹⁵ Rav Chaim Vital in *Shaar Ruach HaKodesh (Arizal), ibid.*

¹⁶ This will be discussed b'ezras Hashem in *Shovavaim #005 – Repairing Lust*

¹⁷ See *Shovavim #04, Shovavim Today*

¹⁸ *Shovavim #003*

¹⁹ *Shovavim #006*

Since the purpose of Creation is to reveal the sovereignty of Hashem, “the end of action is first with thought”, therefore, the end of Creation, which will be the purpose, is somewhat reflected in the beginning point of Creation. So the concept of thought, which is the beginning point of Creation, is actually a reflection of the purpose of Creation.

Before the conception of the Jewish people, the Torah describes the 70 nations who descended from Esav. Although the Jewish people are called *raishis*, “the beginning,” they were still preceded by the 70 nations. What is the meaning of this? It is because the 70 nations of the world are a different kind of beginning. They are another kind of tool which brings about the revelation of Hashem. We see this from the fact that in the future, Hashem will first reveal Himself to all the nations, “*And His Kingdom will reign over all jurisdictions*”, and after that, the Jewish people will then become the tool that will reveal the purpose of Creation. The purpose of Creation is the revelation of Hashem’s Presence upon the world, and when His sovereignty will be revealed, that will be the tool that brings it about.

Thus, there are different tools which Hashem has set into motion that will reveal the purpose of Creation. Even the gentile nations of the world will be a key factor in the process; this is actually the deeper meaning behind why Esav’s head is buried with the Avos. It is a hint to the fact that the beginning of the nations is really good at its root. The nations of the world have a good beginning, because they will be the first stage in the revelation of Hashem upon the world; it is just that their end will not be lofty as their beginning was. Their dominion will come to an end, and that is why only Esav’s head is buried with the Avos, because only the “head” of Esav is worthy. The Jewish people, by contrast, have both a beginning and an end which will reveal Hashem upon the world.

When one’s thoughts are damaged through sinful thinking, that essentially means that the “beginning” point in a person is damaged. This has several aspects to it. One aspect of our thoughts is that our thoughts are meant to remain inside us; our thoughts are private, and they are supposed to be kept private. To illustrate, we don’t know what others are thinking; the reason for this is to show us that thoughts are supposed to be kept private. When thoughts do need to become revealed, they must be revealed in a proper way, because in essence, they are really meant to be kept private.

Thus, we have a two-fold avodah in protecting our power of thought: We need to keep them private, and in addition, when we do reveal them, they need to be revealed properly.

The Root of Damaging the Bris: Feeling Completely Independent

The root of a person’s downfall is when he thinks he is perfect. “Esav” is called so because he was *asuy*, already “made”, meaning, he was born “complete”; the inner meaning of this is that he thought he was complete, and that is the depth of his ruination. When a person thinks he is complete, he denies the fact that he needs others in order to be completed. Because he thinks he is perfect, he doesn’t feel a need to connect with others. This is really the depth behind damaging the *Bris*: when a person thinks that he does not need to receive from others. When a person is unmarried, he can understand well what it means to feel lacking; he knows that he needs to be completed by another.

Although we find that the Sage Ben Azai did not marry, because he desired learning Torah alone and didn't feel the need to be completed by a woman, still, although he reasoned well, we know that his path is not meant for us to take, for the Sages recount that when he was shown Heavenly revelations as a result of his spiritual level, he could not survive the revelations, and he died out of shock.

After Adam sinned, before Kayin and Hevel were even conceived, it is brought in the holy sefarim²⁰ that droplets of *keri* left his body; and for the 130 years that he was separated from Chavah after the sin, demons were formed from those droplets. Why was he punished? It was because he blamed Chavah for the sin; “*This woman you gave me, it is she who gave me from the tree that I ate.*” When he said this, the deeper implication of this was that he was basically saying that he doesn't need her, *chas v'shalom*, for he was declaring that woman is detrimental to man. So he thought he doesn't need her to complete him, and that he is better off without her.

This leads us the way to how we can fix the sin of spilling seed. When one feels incomplete, and he is aware that he needs to receive from others in order to become complete, he has fixed the sin at its root. Perfection is not achieved by feeling perfect about yourself and not needing others; rather, it is achieved precisely when one realizes he is incomplete without another to help him reach perfection.

The Deeper Implication of Misusing the Thought Process

Within the power of thought, there are three kinds of thoughts: *Chochmah*, *Binah*, and *Daas*. *Chochmah* is the knowledge that one learns from his teachers. *Binah* is to reflect on the words of the *Chochmah* and thereby expand upon them. *Daas* is to connect the information that the *Chochmah* imparts and the information that the *Binah* imparts, bringing them to their potential. *Daas* reflects the concept that *Chochmah* needs *Binah* in order to become complete.

Thus, when a person has sinful thoughts, he has misused his *daas*, because he thinks he doesn't need others in order to be complete.

The external part of the rectification for the sin is to feel lacking without another, but the inner layer of the solution is for a person to realize that he needs to become a tool that reveals beginnings. Soon, we will explain what this means.

The truth is that the concept of damaging the *Bris* was already existent as soon as Chavah's body was separated from Adam's; this already reflected a kind of separation between man and woman, in which man thinks that he doesn't need woman for completion. Once Adam became separated from her, the idea of damaging the *Bris* became possible. It was the idea that it is possible for husband to be complete without his wife.

²⁰ *Shaar HaPesukim, Yechezkel*

When one damages his thoughts, it is not only that he has misused his mental powers of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Daas*. The thoughts are damaged even when one has extraneous thoughts – when he lets his thoughts turn outward to think about things that he doesn't need to think about. Just like the eyes are supposed to be controlled and they should not be turned outward that much, so is there a concept that the thoughts of a person not turn outward.

Repenting Over the Shame Caused By Sin

According to the Kamarna Rebbe, the 50th Gate of Impurity, which is the lowest level, is the sin of heresy, and it is created through the sin of damaging the *Bris*. This shows us how the *Bris* is damaged - but it also shows us at the same time how it can be repaired.

We can ask: Why is spilling seed considered to be the lowest level of impurity? Why can't it just be viewed like any other desire that a person has?

The deep reason is as follows. Before the sin, Adam and Chavah were unclothed, yet they were not ashamed in their nakedness. As soon as they sinned, they realized they were naked and they grew ashamed; this shows us that the entire concept of shame began after the sin. Before the sin, there was no concept of shame. Why? It is because shame is when a person is concerned of what others think about himself; what is a person is ashamed of? He is ashamed of how he appears outwardly to others, but he is not concerned of how he appears inwardly to others. Before the sin, Adam and Chavah were so pure that they were only concerned of how they looked internally, not outwardly. After the sin, they became concerned with externalities, therefore, they were ashamed of how they appear outwardly to others.

So the pure state of mankind is to be concerned with who he really is deep down, and not to be concerned of how he appears outwardly to others. Thus, the way to repair the sin is by returning to the original state of Adam, in there was no shame yet; meaning, for a person to be concerned about his internal state, to keep his thoughts private as they are meant to be, and not to reveal them outwardly, not to think into things that he shouldn't think about.

Thus, it's not enough for a person to simply be ashamed about damaging the *Bris*. Although shame over a sin normally atones for all sins, the sin of damaging the *Bris* requires a higher kind of *teshuvah*, and shame alone is not enough to rectify it, for it was the sin that brought about shame to the world; the sin requires more than just shame and repentance, then, to rectify. What really needs to be rectified is the very fact that we are ashamed! Because if not for the sin in the first place, we would never know what shame is.

Of course, this does not mean *chas v'shalom* that one should harden himself and not feel bad after he sins. It means that a person has to reach an inner place in himself in which he returns to the state of before the sin, in which there was no shame yet, because then, when man was entirely pure, he was not concerned of anything external or outward!

When a person's thoughts think about things that he shouldn't think about, he is turning his thoughts outward, and this can lead *chas v'shalom* to eventually damaging the *Bris*. Our avodah during *Shovavim* is to return to our source, that even our power of *teshuvah* should be returned to its source.

During the Ten Days of Repentance, we say in Selichos that “*If one's heart understands and he repents, he will be healed*”, meaning, if one is ashamed because of his sins and he repents, his *teshuvah* is valid. However, the *teshuvah* we do during *Shovavim* is a different concept of *teshuvah* than the usual kind of *teshuvah*. *Shovavim* comes after the Ten Days of Repentance, because the sin of damaging the *Bris* needs its own rectification and thus it cannot be covered by repenting during the Ten Days of Repentance. It is because *teshuvah* alone does not rectify damaging the *Bris* [as the Zohar states].

But that doesn't mean that a person shouldn't feel ashamed about damaging the *Bris*. Of course a person should feel ashamed and do *teshuvah* about it! But it is just that after he does that, he should then do a deeper kind of *teshuvah* – he should do *teshuvah* over the very fact that he has shame as a result of the sin; he should do *teshuvah* over the fact that he allowed his thoughts to be turned outward, that he allowed himself to be involved with the external and left the inner world of his thoughts.

Of course, now that we live after the sin, our initial nature is to seek what's outside of us. But our avodah is to return ourselves to the original state of mankind before the sin, and to describe this in deeper terms, it's referring to the power of ***emunah***. *Emunah* helps a person stay in his proper place, where he will never feel a desire to go outward from himself.

Thus, the first way to rectify the sin of damaging the *Bris* (spilling human seed) is through rectifying our thoughts, and this means to return our thoughts to their source – that we should keep our thoughts inward, and not let them roam outward.

Private (Intimate) Matters Should Be Kept Private

The *Chida*²¹ and others write that if someone reveals secrets to others when he wasn't supposed to, he will end up sinning with damaging the *Bris*. This is because he turned outwardly when he should have remained inward. A secret should only be revealed to one who is modest, because he will know how to protect the secret.

When a person lets his thoughts roam around to explore thoughts that are forbidden or extraneous, that is the first root of what leads to damaging the *Bris*. But it also includes not to speak about private matters with others.

²¹ *Avodas HaKodesh: Tziporen HaShamir: 7: 113*

“Matters of the heart are not revealed to the mouth”²², meaning, inner and private matters should not be revealed outwardly by the mouth to others. When a *Bris* [the covenant of marriage between man and woman] remains private between them and it is not spoken about to others, it remains as a protected covenant, as long as it is not spoken about through the mouth [to others].

This is what it means to have *Kedushas HaBris*, to keep the holiness of the *Bris Kodesh*: to protect the private nature of the *Bris* [the covenant of marriage between husband and wife]. Holiness means to conduct one’s private affairs in a hidden manner, in a dark room, privately, and it should be kept hidden and protected - never spoken about with others.

This is the first rectification of repairing the *Bris Kodesh*. May Hashem help us be able to act upon it practically.²³

²² *Koheles Rabbah 12:1*

²³ *Editor’s Summary: In the beginning of the chapter, it was stated that we have a two-fold avodah in repairing our damaged thoughts. The first part is to protect our private thoughts; this includes two aspects, 1) Not to think about forbidden things, which are obvious; 2) Not to reveal our private matters to others. Included in this is that when we do need to reveal our thoughts to others, they must be revealed properly; matters of privacy should only be revealed to someone who is modest who won’t tell it to others.*

8 | *Repairing Homosexual Behavior*

Introduction: The Sin of Spilling Seed and Fixing it through Emunah

The root of all *mitzvos* is *emunah* (to have faith in Hashem). *Emunah* alone contains the key to everything, as it is written, “*A righteous person shall live by his faith.*”²⁴ *Emunah* fixes all problems - and all sins.

The sin of spilling seed (wasting one’s seed) can be compared to the following parable.

Let’s say a person gives money to a pauper, and before it gets to the pauper’s hand, the money falls to the ground. The donor gave, but there was no one to receive it. When a man spills his seed, it is like giving something away, with nothing to receive it. The man’s seed is being given away, and there is no wife there to receive it from him.

But if a person gains the power of *emunah*, a person can become a container to receive all that has been lost, retroactively, and in this way, he rectifies the sin of spilling his seed.

In all of Creation, there exist Heavenly illuminations (*oros*) as well as containers to receive them (*keilim*). The illuminations need to go into the containers in order for a person to receive any Heavenly sustenance, so they need to be connected together. The point that connects them together is *daas* (higher, spiritual understanding that a human being can reach), and this is the usual case in how a person receives any Heavenly illuminations, for *daas* is always known as the ‘connecting’ force in Creation. That is the first level of how one receives Heavenly sustenance: with the more he gains *daas*.

When a person grows spiritually, he can reach a level in which he doesn’t even need *daas* to receive the illuminations, because he can go even above his *daas*. Going above one’s *daas* is that one attains the quality of *bittul*, to be totally nullified to Hashem. When a person feels completely nullified to Hashem, he is unified and integrated with Him. This is the second, higher level of one receives Heavenly illuminations, and it is called *lo yeda*, “no *daas*” [because it is the level which is beyond one’s *daas*.]

There is an even higher level than this well that a person can reach, an even higher plane that exists that is even beyond the sublime level of *lo yeda*. It is called “*lo yoda elyon*”, the “higher level of above *daas*”. On such a level, a person doesn’t even need a container to receive Heavenly illuminations, because here the person has reached a level in which the illuminations are able to reach the person directly. When a person reaches such a level, he is able to fix all his sins – even the sin of spilling

²⁴ *Chavakuk 2:4; see Talmud Bavli, Makkos 24a*

seed, which is known in the *sefarim hakedoshim* as the root of all sins. If a person commits the sin of spilling his seed, *chas v'shalom* (G-d forbid), what is going on as this happens? There is something being given away from the person, but there is no one to receive it from him; there is no container that it can enter. His sperm goes to waste.

But if a person truly gains the ability of *emunah*, a person can acquire a container that receives all the lost sperm – **retroactively**.

This is a way to do *Teshuvah* for all of one's sins: through acquiring *emunah*. And in particular, *emunah* rectifies the sin of spilling seed, for *emunah* makes one into a spiritual container that can receive all Heavenly illumination, whereupon he can receive everything that was lost until now.

However, the Sages say that one is not allowed to purposely sin *chas v'shalom* and say, "I will sin and repent later."

9 | *The Sin of Homose*ual Behavior and How to Repair It*²⁵

All Sins Are Rooted In Adam's sin

This chapter deals with the sin of the rectification for one who engaged in homose*ual behavior. First we will look into the roots of this sin in order to understand how to fix it, together with Heavenly assistance.

As is well-known, the root of all sins lies in Adam's sin, when he ate from the Tree of Knowledge. The sin of homose*ual behavior is no different than other sins, in that it is rooted in Adam's sin. However, it is clear that we cannot totally learn how to fix this sin from the case of Adam, in which there was only one man in the world (and hence no one for him to engage in homose*ual behavior with). We are only speaking of the depth behind the sin, which we can still learn from the story of Adam, in spite of the fact that he had no man whom he felt a lust for. But there is still one very practical point to be learned from this discussion which we will discuss soon, with the help of Hashem.

Four Instances In the Torah of Homose*ual Behavior

[To give a brief summary of what is to come: In the Torah, there are four instances of homose*ual behavior: Cham, Potifar, the city of Sodom, and Amalek.]

The first man recorded in the Torah who had a sexual lust for another man was Cham, the son of Noach. It is written²⁶ “*And Cham, father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness.*” The Sages have two opinions of what this means²⁷: According to one opinion, Cham castrated his father so that his father wouldn't be able to have children, and according to the second opinion, Cham engaged in conjugal relations with his father Noach, who was drunk and asleep.

²⁵ *The translation here is an **adaptation** from a shiur given during the days of Shovavim, and it is printed in Sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh on Chanukah (p.158-172). This is a chapter that deals with sensitive material and thus, it should be used very sensitively. Much of the material of the original Hebrew chapter has been omitted due to the heavy and esoteric nature of this material. In the translation, the material has been adapted in a way that offers clarity; we have done our utmost not to add anything to the original text of the author, and there are times where the material was repeated and reviewed within the text, for the sake of clarity. Any editor's notes, not from the author, have been added in brackets within the text.*

²⁶ Beraishis 9:20

²⁷ see Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 70a

The second instance in the Torah of homose*ual behavior was by the city of Sodom, who demanded that Lot give away his guests.²⁸ The Sages²⁹ explain that they wanted to rape his guests; Lot instead tried to appease them by agreeing to give away his daughters to be raped, but they refused, because they wanted men to rape.

The third instance of homose*ual behavior in the Torah was by Potifar, who had a desire for Yosef.³⁰

Finally, there is a fourth instance of homose*ual behavior recorded in the Torah. It is written regarding the cursed nation of Amalek, “*They attacked you on the way.*” Rashi³¹ explains this to mean that Amalek acted homose*ual with the Jewish nation.

These four instances of homose*ual behavior are four different lessons about homose*ual behavior. As we will see, there are four different causes why a man would wish to act homose*ual with another man, and each of these causes can show us a different solution to the problem.

The Homose*ual Behavior of Cham: Selfishness

First we will examine the first kind of homose*ual behavior: Cham, who committed a homose*ual act with his father, Noach, according to one opinion in the Sages.

Before Hashem brought the Flood, there was a big problem in the world: adultery. The generation was so lustful that even the animals were mating with opposite species; this corruption angered Hashem to bring the Flood and destroy the world.

After the Flood, Cham started a new trend: to mate with one’s own gender. Cham brought about an entirely new kind of corruption: to lust after your own gender. He introduced to the world that a man can have a desire for another man.

The natural way of the world is that a man needs a woman to mate with, and a woman needs to receive from a man. The man is the giver, and the woman is the receiver. This is the way Hashem designed the world. But when a man mates with another man, there is no one to receive what he has to offer.

Slavery represents this idea. A slave cannot own anything; anything he acquires goes to his master. He cannot receive anything, and he cannot own a legal wife. He is man without a woman.

²⁸ *Beraishis 19:5*

²⁹ *see Midrash Rabbah 50:5*

³⁰ *see Talmud Bavli, Sotah 13b*

³¹ *Devorim 25:18*

When a man has no one to give to and no one to receive what he has to offer, he is all alone. Hashem created the world for man and woman to get married and merge into one being; when a man has no wife, he is all by himself. (This is also the depth behind why Amalek acted homose*ual with the Jewish people, because Amalek's aim was to create a separateness and lack of unity in Creation; Amalek was therefore homose*ual in order to wreak havoc on Creation.)

Slaves are suspected of homose*ual behavior.³² Children as well are a target for being molested.³³ There is a similarity between slaves and children, and this will help us understand the root of this kind of homose*ual behavior.

Slaves do as they please, so it is understandable that they are suspected of being homose*ual.³⁴ But why are children a common target of homose*ual behavior? The answer is because both slaves and children share one thing in common: they lack a connection to another person, and this is the root of their homose*ual behavior. How do we see this?

We know that a child's conjugal act under the age of nine years is not regarded as anything binding³⁵ (see). Simply speaking, a child isn't mature enough physically and therefore his attempt at conjugal actions are not regarded as being a conjugal act. But it is more than that; he is not a *bar daas* (mature). To be a *bar daas* essentially means that one has the power to form connections; *daas* always refers to connection, as it is written, "*And Adam knew Chavah.*" A child's conjugal act cannot form any connection; he is alone and he cannot have a wife, because he isn't emotionally capable of such a connection. That is why children can be associated with homose*ual behavior, because they are all by themselves and cannot have a wife.

So children are more susceptible to become a victim of homose*ual behavior because they are by themselves, and slaves are suspected of homose*ual behavior because they have no one to receive from them. They are both associated with homose*ual behavior because they are both alone.

This is the root of Cham's homose*ual behavior towards his father Noach. His act of intimacy with his father is not about causing a connection, but rather from his own selfish desire to take pleasure. He was all about disparity, and in this way he resembles Amalek, the root of disparity in Creation.

The Homose*ual Behavior of Potifar: Perverting Creation

The second kind of homose*ual behavior we find is by Potifar, who had a desire to have physical relations with Yosef. Yosef was the overseer of Egypt and was sustaining it. He was being like a man,

³² *Talmud Bavli, Berachos 45a*

³³ *Talmud Bavli, Gittin 57b*

³⁴ *see Talmud Bavli, Kesubos 11a*

³⁵ *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 69b*

being a giver, by taking care of Egypt. The deep reason why Potifar desired him was because he wanted to turn Yosef into a taker. Potifar essentially was trying to go against the design of Creation. Because he desired to only take pleasure, and not give pleasure – as we can see from the fact that he desired Yosef - he was punished by Hashem with castration; since he didn't want to give, he was punished that he cannot have children and that he cannot sustain others.

How do we see that Potifar was trying to turn Yosef into a taker?

In a marriage between a man and a woman, there is a giver and a receiver. In their marital union, the man gives the enjoyment, and the woman receives the enjoyment. The real pleasure is enjoyed by the woman, who receives the pleasure from her husband.) However, most of the time, the husband isn't motivated entirely by giving, and he also wants to take a little of the pleasure, so he ends up enjoying it also. He also has some degree of taking. But even if this is his level, at least he has some motivation to give pleasure also. If the man does not desire to give pleasure to his wife and he instead only wants to take, he becomes a taker; both the man and the woman are then takers.

This is unlike the person who lusts after a man. A man lusting after another man only wants to take pleasure, and he doesn't wish to give it. There is no pleasure to the man whom he has relations with.³⁶ Only the person who commits the homose*ual act receives pleasure, but he cannot give it to his partner.

This shows us that another cause for homose*ual behavior can be because the man wishes to defy his nature of being a man - which is to be a giver, and not a taker - and thus he is attempting to switch around the way things are supposed to be. He perverts Creation in trying to go against the way Hashem designed it. A man is supposed to be a giver, not be a taker. The man who does the homose*ual act is therefore not being masculine - he is acting feminine, for he is trying to just receive pleasure, which is the woman's role.

The Homose*ual Behavior of Sodom: Haughtiness

The third kind of homose*ual behavior we find is by the city of Sodom. (Sodom wanted Lot's guests to be homose*ual with them; Sodom's homose*ual behavior has to do with their other evil ways. Sodom was against being kind, because they didn't want to have to need others. That was essentially their root of why they also had homose*ual behaviors.)

This kind of homose*ual behavior contains the key reason to all homose*ual behavior.

Before Adam was created, he was alone. This put into all of us the ability to be "alone"; it is an ability that can be used for good or bad. The power of being "alone" is used for evil, in the act of

³⁶ see *Talmud Bavli, Kereisos 3a*

homose*uality. When a person is a *baal gaavah* (extremely conceited), he also misuses the power of being “alone” for his own evil, egotistical purposes.

Homose*ual Behavior in the Era Preceding Moshiach

Rav Nachman of Breslov writes that the most impure evil that exists – the “50th Gate of Impurity” – is the sin of homose*ual behavior, and the root of homose*ual behavior is caused by the trait of *gaavah* – haughtiness, or arrogance, or conceit.³⁷ In the beginning state of Creation, Adam was alone; there was only man with no woman. This was the power of “alone” that was holy and good.³⁸ Since the rule is that Hashem created equally opposing forces of evil for all holiness that there is, there is also an evil kind of “alone” that exists, in which man feels that he doesn’t need woman.

At the beginning of Creation, this power of being “alone” was in its holy form. Now, when we are in the period of *ikvesa d’meshicha* (the footsteps of *Moshiach*), the light of the beginning of Creation returns, but it has returned in an evil form. Our *avodah* during the Final Days is to use that original light of Creation, the power to be “alone”, and return it back to its holy root. When a man’s nature to be alone without a woman is misunderstood, it can become translated into a desire for homose*ual behavior.

Thus, a homose*ual’s problem is because he wants to remain alone, and this is rooted in a deep haughtiness that has become so dominant in his life. He wants to be completely “independent” and not have to need anyone else in his life. That is the root of the whole problem.

The solution to the problem, then, is that he to learn how to return the power of being “alone” to its root, which is good. There is nothing wrong, in essence, with the wish that a man has to be alone. The need to be alone is actually the root state of mankind, for Adam was first created alone. But when the wish to be alone is used for evil, it can be the root of why a man lusts after another man; he wishes to be alone from the true union of man and woman, by seeking out men whom he can indulge with in and get pleasure from, yet not have to be responsible for them to give to them. He is using the power of “alone” for evil. The way to rectify this is by returning to the good kind of “alone.”

37 Sefer HaMiddos: Gaavah

38 In Da Es Atzmecha\“Getting To Know Your Self” in which the Rav explains the well-known power of being “alone”, the power to have hisbodeus (solitude) and feel totally alone with Hashem, which can solve so many problems and stress. The Rav warns, however, that although the power of being “alone” is the strongest ability that we possess, and that it is really man’s nature to be alone, it can still be used for evil, such as when a person becomes self-absorbed and haughty towards others, since he feels like he doesn’t need others anyway. In this chapter, the Rav is saying that an even more evil abuse of the power to be “alone” is when it is misunderstood by a man to be alone from real relationships, which will lead to his homosexual behavior.

When a man chooses to be alone and thus he does not get married – or if he is married, but he lacks a true connection with his own wife – if he looks very deep into himself, he can discover that the root of his problem is that he is really being haughty. He is full of *gaavah*/haughtiness, and in fixing his *gaavah*, the problem of wishing to be independent on others, will be treated at its root.

When a man and woman achieve a connection in their marital union and he gives pleasure to her, by knowing that he needs her because he need someone to give to, not only does he give to her and fulfill his role as a man, but he realizes that deep down he is dependent on her, because if not for her, he would have no one whom he could really give to. And if he can't give to anyone, he is abandoning his role as a man, for it is his role to be a giver.

When this is his understanding towards marital relations with his wife, the man essentially fulfills what he lacks: that he needs another person in his life, and he cannot be alone.

But when a man chooses to be homose*ual, it's all because deep down he is haughty, because he doesn't feel that he is lacking. Thus, he wishes to be independent of others, because he feels like he doesn't need anybody else, and that is the root of his mistake. He needs to correct this erroneous belief at its root and realize that he needs a wife in order to be complete, and that will solve his homose*ual tendencies.

Thus, the solution for a homose*ual person is to feel that he is missing something in his life. If a man wants to be homose*ual, it must be that he is missing what it means to be together with another person whom he can give pleasure to. (Thus, to be together with another man defeats this purpose, because the other person doesn't receive any real pleasure from the union, as we brought before from the words of Chazal.³⁹)

Summary

Altogether, we have found three reasons for homose*ual behavior. One cause is because a person doesn't want to give pleasure and he only wants to take pleasure; therefore, he engages in a relationship in which only he enjoys and takes pleasure, and there is no one to receive his pleasure. (The solution for such homose*ual behavior is to become the giver of pleasure, and not to be a taker of pleasure).

Another cause for homose*ual behavior is that a person wants to switch around the way the world is supposed to be; he wants to defy the laws of nature that Hashem created the world with. In other words, he doesn't want his role as a man – he doesn't act masculine, because he'd rather be more feminine (by being a taker).

³⁹ *Rashi in Kerisos 3a*

[Although this sounds similar to the first cause, it is not the same thing. In the first cause of homose*ual behavior, the root of the problem is because the person would rather be a taker of pleasure than a giver of pleasure. The second cause, though, also involves this factor of wanting to be a taker, but it is rooted in the fact that the man would be rather be more feminine than masculine.]

A third cause for homose*ual behavior is that a person wants to remain alone, because he feels like he doesn't need anybody. He is too independent. It can get to the point that a person is so conceited with himself that he thinks of himself as sort of like a G-d, which was the problem that Pharoah developed, as well as many other people throughout history.

[The solution for this, as was mentioned, is that if he is single, he needs to get married, so that he can realize that he is an incomplete being by himself. And if one is already married, he needs to feel like he needs his wife, because if not for her than he has no one whom he can give to; this will help him become more connected to his wife and thus lose his homose*ual tendencies as a result].

10 | *Repairing Lust*

In this chapter we will deal with the fourth cause for the sin of damaging the *Bris*: having lustful thoughts towards women. We will mainly discuss one who has thoughts about another married woman – beginning from why a person has lustful thoughts in the first place, and ending up at what leads a person to actually sin with another woman, *chas v'shalom*.

The first person in history who told us how to act upon our thoughts was the Snake. Our Sages⁴⁰ ask: Why was the Snake so cunning towards Adam and Chavah? Why did it seek to pounce upon them? It was because it saw them during marital relations, and then it desired Chavah. It wanted to marry Chavah and therefore it wanted to kill Adam. Here is the first time in Creation in which thought and planning was involved.

The Sages state the Snake came upon her and violated her. This created a certain connection between woman and snake. The Zohar draws a correlation between the name of the Snake and the name of Chavah, because snake is called “*chavya*” in *Lashon HaKodesh*, similar to the name Chavah.

Ever since the Snake desired Chavah and came upon her, an evil desire entered all of mankind, to lust after another woman. The Snake represents evil, and the desire to have relations with a married woman is the epitome of evil – and it was the Snake who placed this evil desire in mankind.

What caused the Snake to desire Chavah? The Midrash states that the Snake saw them openly having marital relations, and then its desire for Chavah was formed. So the root of the Snake’s evil began with straying after its eyes. Then it spoke with Chavah, which brought the evil to a whole new level; it was now able to convince her and sway her. Finally, it was able to come upon her and commit an intimate act with her. So there were three stages – sight, speech, and action.

There was actually a level that came before the sight: it had devious thoughts. In this chapter, we will not address how the power of thought is rectified, because it was already discussed. Here we will discuss the three stages that came after the Snake’s thoughts: its sight of Chavah, its speech with Chavah, and its action with Chavah.

The Snake was punished measure for measure with each of these aspects. It used to be the leader of all the animals; after it sinned, it was no longer the leader of the animals, and this was a level of taking away its power of sight, for now it could not be other overseer of the all the animals. Before the sin, it was able to stand erect and see all it wanted, and now it has to slither on the ground where it cannot see well.

It spoke with Chavah, and therefore its power of speech was taken away. It committed an act with Chavah by contaminating her, which contributed to the birth of Kayin from her, and it was punished with an unusual kind of birth which others animals do not have to go through; a snake

⁴⁰ *Beraishis Rabbah 18:6*

takes seven years to survive from conception until birth, whereas other animals give birth soon after conception.

A woman as well bears three distinctions which are parallel to the Snake's three aspects of sin. There is a statement of our Sages, "A woman is only for beauty", as well as "A woman is only for having children." There is also a statement, "A woman is only for a home." So a woman has three distinct aspects to her – beauty, childbearing, and being a "home".⁴¹

The beauty of a woman reflects the sin of the Snake when it saw Chavah and thus desired her. The home that is a woman reflects the speech of the Snake with her, because the power of speech is called the "home" of the thoughts. [Later we will hopefully explain what this is]. The action that the Snake did with Chavah, which was to procreate with her, is reflected in the fact that women bear children.

We already mentioned that there are some connections that still remain between the Snake and woman. Chavah's name is similar to the Aramaic word for snake – "*chavya*". We also find that both the snake and a woman are called "enemies" of a man.⁴²

Now we will explain the aspect of speech/home in a woman. A woman can either be seen as a person connected to her husband, or she is seen as the one who bears children. This is the deeper meaning of the statement of one of the Sages, "it is enough that our wives raise our children and save us from sin."⁴³ The two abilities of a woman are the fact that she raises children and the fact that she is connected to her husband and thus protects him from sinning. In between these two roles of a wife, we find a third role, a middle point between her two roles: the fact that she is called the home. This is parallel to the aspect of speech in the Snake's sin with Chavah, for speech is called the home to the thoughts.

Before we explain the middle role of woman, which is the fact she is called the home, we first should be aware that there is an even higher level of connection between man and woman than being connected through speech: through their power of sight.

It is forbidden for a man to betroth a woman unless he has first seen her⁴⁴; during marital relations, man and woman must be facing each other, and this implies that they must unite through being able to see each other. When they see each other, it is not just that they are seeing each other – they are connecting with each other, through seeing each other. When they make eye contact with each other, it is a form of intimacy with each other, and it is even more intimate than when they

⁴¹ *Kesubos 59b*

⁴² *Beraishis Rabbah 54a*

⁴³ *Yevamos 63a*

⁴⁴ *Kiddushin 41a*

speak with each other. To illustrate the concept, there is a kind of bird which conceives as soon it is merely viewed by its mate.⁴⁵

Thus, when a man thinks about a forbidden woman to him, he is already connecting with her in a forbidden way, and this is besides for the fact that such thoughts can lead to lustful thoughts and damaging the *Bris*. When the Snake saw Chavah, it already connected with her. Its sight of her led to speaking with her and to acting with her, but its connection to her began with the sense of sight.

Now we will speak about the connection of speech between man and woman. Chazal warn a man not to speak with another married woman. So connection can be caused by speech, and speech can be intimate. There are also two kinds of intimacy: through speech, and through kissing. The Snake saw Adam and Chavah during intimacy and therefore it connected with Chavah though just seeing her, and it also spoke with her, which was another aspect of the evil connection it had with her.

The sin caused a need for man and woman to become united through a home. The root of the Snake's sin began when it saw them during intimacy, when they had no home of their own. So the entire concept of modesty resulted from the sin.

Before the sin, connection could be achieved just through speech alone; there was no need for a home then. Now that we are after a sin, we need a home, and intimacy must be done privately, in the home, with modesty. For this reason, the Sages forbid intimacy outdoors⁴⁶.

Now we will reflect into the aspect of sight in the Snake's sin – it caught sight of her and that is why it wanted to sin. This is reflected in the fact that women are for beauty.

Woman is called *nekaivah*, which is from the word *nekev*, “hole”, implying deficiency. If you think about it deeply, all beauty is a result of something that was missing. When two opposite colors unite, you get a beautiful result. When *chessed* and *gevurah* come together, the result is *tiferes*, beauty. Beauty is always something that sticks out and is noticed, because it bears a contrast with something else, and that is why it looks beautiful; it's about noticing difference. For example, a wall that's painted with just one color doesn't look beautiful; but when you see a wall painted with a few colors, you see the contrast of the colors, and it looks beautiful. With colors especially, you can see this concept: each color is missing pigment of the other colors, and that is what makes each color distinct. Beauty is the result of seeing differences; or from seeing deficiencies beforehand.

Beauty that results from deficiencies contains it both an external aspect and an internal aspect. The inner aspect of it is as follows. All of Creation is lacking, whereas Hashem is the only One who is not lacking. Thus, the beauty of Creation is the fact that although we are deficient, perfection can still be revealed in it – when Hashem will be revealed in this imperfect Creation.

45 Footnote from the Hebrew sefer: Sefer Yitav Panim of the Satmar Rebbe (Rav Yekusiel Teitelbaum zt"l) brings such a thing, but I have not found an earlier source for this; perhaps it is referring to the ostrich (bas yaanah), who can hatch an egg just by looking at it.

46 Sanhedrin 46a, Rambam Hilchos Issuri Biah 21:14

The external aspect of it is because a woman is created from a hole, and therefore she is a reminder to man that he is lacking without her. Since a man feels lacking without her, he has a desire to look at her.

When a person feels lacking and therefore he looks to fill what he lacks – through watching women – it appears to him as if he’s feeding what he lacks, but in reality, it’s like drinking salty water. The mere desire in a person to turn outward of himself is already a deficiency.

What a person really needs to do is to restrain his desire to see outward, and in its place, to instead yearn for the revelation of the Creator, so that his sense of incompleteness will be filled. The whole reason why man was created deficient in the first place is to show him that he needs to reveal Hashem in his life.

Thus, the desire in a man to stare at another woman really comes from a desire in the soul to be completed by the *Shechinah* (Hashem’s Presence), just it is being channeled in the wrong direction. The way to rectify this yearning is, that besides for shutting one’s eyes from seeing improper sights, he needs to channel his yearning for completion and use it to yearn for the revelation of Hashem, and that will fix what he’s missing in his life.

The act of adultery might seem like a form of connection with another, but it never lasts. It always becomes shaky and then it is gone. It is like the buildings of Pison and Ramses, which were all uprooted.

The home, which unites man and woman, is how a true and lasting connection is achieved. When there is connection, pleasure and enjoyment always follow with it. The Snake, which tried to connect with Chavah by speaking to her, didn’t receive any enjoyment in the connection, because it was not a real and lasting connection. This is the depth of why one who speaks gossip has no tangible enjoyment from his act⁴⁷; although he a gossip is using the power of speech, his speech is not forming any connection with others.

When one has lustful thoughts about another woman, the deeper problem is because he has a misunderstanding about what real connection is. A real connection between man and woman is a lasting connection, which is only through the home. When there it is another person’s wife, he is not connected to her through any home, thus, if he happens to have a connection with her, it’s only temporary; it won’t survive.

Chazal say that when one divorces his first wife, the Altar cries⁴⁸. Although the Sages permit giving a divorce for even trivial matters such as when she purposely burns the food or when he finds another to be better than her, these are situations in which they have already become so far apart from each other that they are already having such petty disputes.

A husband must realize that the connection with his wife is a permanent kind of connection, which should not ever become erased. Just as the *Shechinah* came to settle permanently upon the *Beis*

47 *Taanis 8a*

48 *Gittin 90a*

HaMikdash, so do a man and woman, when they merit to have *Shechinah* between them, merit a home which is permanent with each other.

Before the sin, Adam and Chavah were connected to each other just through the *Shechinah* alone; they didn't need a home. After the sin, they lost the *Shechinah*, and now the way that husband and wife connect is only in the home. Therefore, one must view his wife as being a permanent connection, his home, and not as a connection that he 'happens' to have. If a husband does not view his connection with his wife as being a permanent one, this is a degree of thinking about another woman.

Right now, when we live after the sin, we need the home in order to have connection between husband and wife. Therefore, *Shechinah* can only come to the home when there is love between them. In the future, when we will return to the level of before the sin, the *Shechinah* alone will be enough to connect man and women together, and this will be the eternal *Shechinah*.

11 | *Internalizing Shovavim*

We have been explaining the different ways how to rectify the sins of *Shovavim*, with the help of Hashem.⁴⁹ However, we have only learned about it on a purely intellectual level, and now we have to act upon these matters as well. We must “learn in order to act.”⁵⁰

There are many well-known methods of how a person achieves a *tikkun* (soul rectification) on damaging the *Bris Kodesh*.⁵¹ There are various intentions one can have and recite (“*kavanos*”); there are methods of fasting, of giving *tzedakah*, of increasing one’s Torah learning, of abstaining from various desires, etc. Each method of *tikkun* has its proper time and place when it should be used, as is written in *Koheles*⁵²: “*Everything in its time.*”

However, upon a deep understanding, we should know that there are two paths [in how we improve in our service to Hashem.] One path is to work with time, and the other path is to work with our soul. The first method is that a person serves Hashem based on certain times of the year; he utilizes the *Yomim Tovim* as his plan to serve Hashem. But this is an incorrect approach, and of him, it cannot really be said “*He who sanctifies Yisrael and the times.*” We sanctify time through Yom Tov, but it is not because we are dependent on the times of *Yomim Tovim* to be able to serve Hashem; rather, it is because we are above time, and therefore, we are able to sanctify time. Our souls are above time.

When a person plans out his *Avodas Hashem* (serving the Creator, through self-improvement) according to certain “times” of the year [*Yomim Tovim*], he is actually lowering his soul in the process, because time is at a lower plane than our soul. [On an even more subtle note, he becomes lowered than time as well, because when he is dependent on certain times in order to serve Hashem better, he becomes a receiver of time, and then his growth will only be limited to those times].

The inner way to serve Hashem is to work with our soul. If a person doesn’t work with his soul, then what will happen is that when it comes Rosh HaShanah, he will work to better himself on a certain point, and then he will work on something else after Rosh HaShanah. Then he will work on

49 This short segment is the conclusion of five classes given by the author on the topic of “*Shovavim*”, based on *Aneinu L’Reshash*: they consist of the audio classes *Shovavim* 002, 003, 004, 005 and 006. The author gave different methods of *tikkun* (soul rectification) for each of the five sins that need to be repaired during *Shovavim* (the weeks from parshas *Shemos* through *Mishpatim*). The five sins (listed by the *Reshash*) are: sinful thoughts, adultery, homos-uality (this particular audio class has been adapted into English for the *Bilvavi* website, under the title “*Shovavim Today*”), wasted spittle, and prolonging one’s *bris*.

50 *Kiddushin* 40b

51 “*Damaging the bris*”, *p’gam bris*, is the sin of spilling one’s sperm, *chas v’shalom*.

52 *Koheles* 3:1

a different point when it comes Sukkos, and then when it comes Chanukah, he will work on another point. Then comes *Shovavim* and he will try to now work on another point, and then when it comes Purim, he will try working on a different point, etc. To make things even more detrimental, the 30 days before each Yom Tov are already a time to begin working on the points of the upcoming Yom Tov, and often this coincides with other points he's trying to work on. It then will get very confusing, as a person will be working to improve on different points at once.

We must realize that we cannot serve Hashem based on certain times of the year. That is a downfall to our souls. (On a deep note, before the sin, Adam was above time, and after he sinned, he fell to the level of time). The various special times of the year [*Yomim Tovim*, and other auspicious times] are to be viewed as a bridge between our soul and our body – in other words, the special times of the year might be higher than our physical body, but they are still lower than our soul.

If a person doesn't work with his soul and only is focused on his body, then his *Avodas Hashem* will be dependent on certain auspicious times of the year. But if he uses the inner approach, which is to work with his soul, then he goes above time, and he won't be dependent on time in order to better his service to Hashem. Therefore, it is not possible to give a plan for what to work on for each week of the month: "This week we will work on this point of our *Avodas Hashem*, and next week we will work to improve on another point in our *Avodas Hashem*..." [It doesn't work]. You can't try to reach a certain *tikkun* for your soul one week and then try working on a different *tikkun* the next week; and surely this is true with regards to how we serve Hashem on a daily basis, that we cannot work on *tikkun* today and on a different *tikkun* the next day. [*Avodas Hashem* doesn't work like that.]

Avodas Hashem really means to have a general plan. That plan is: Torah brings us to become more careful in keeping the mitzvos, and being careful will bring us to be more enthusiastic about mitzvos, etc.⁵³ When we learn about how to improve in this way, we must incorporate what we are learning into how we serve Hashem. But as we said, we cannot serve Hashem based on the auspicious times of the year, as we cannot jump around working on one point to the next.

Therefore, since the main way of serving Hashem is when we work with our soul, all souls are different, and there is thus no one method of *tikkun* which applies to all people. The purpose of these classes on *Shovavim* was so that each of us can take out lessons from it that apply to us on our own personal level; that from the knowledge contained here, each person should figure out which of the information should be carried out practically in his life. As the Sages say, "A wise person understands from his own."⁵⁴

If a person just reads these *tikkunim* on *Shovavim* we have presented, without trying to figure out which of this can apply to him on a practical level, then maybe he'll get reward for learning this as Torah...but that's it.

53 The author is referring to learning *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*, which gives us a step-by-step plan for growth: Torah, zehirus, zerizus, nekiyus, etc.

54 *Chagigah* 11b

May Hashem grant us that we should each merit to perfect ourselves on this world, that we should remove all the impurity from upon us and reveal our *neshamah*, which will in turn reveal Hashem within ourselves.

12 | *Satisfied From Within* ⁵⁵

“Kol”: Revealing Your Ability to Have “Everything” In You

It is written, “*And Moshe said, so said Hashem, at about midnight, I will go out, in the midst of Egypt.*” Why did Hashem have to come precisely at midnight? The word for midnight is “*chatzos*”, from the word “*chatzi*”, halfway, which implies something partial and thus incomplete. The opposite of something partial is when it is complete: when it is *kol*, “everything”. Yaakov Avinu possessed the quality called *kol*, of feeling that he had everything, for he said, “*I have everything.*” [He felt complete from within himself].

[To further illustrate this concept], the six days of the week were each “partial”, for on each day, more of the Creation was created. It represents the concept of *chatzos*, for it was partial, half. But Shabbos represents the concept of *kol*, when “everything” is here. Hashem “finished” the Creation on Shabbos, for Creation was complete then; everything was now complete. Shabbos is the revelation of the concept of *koll*/everything.

Hashem Coming Into Egypt: The Revelation of “Everything” Within The “Confines”

The redemption from Egypt thus came about through the final plague, which was the death to the firstborns. It came in the midnight; the reason for this is because was that the “partial” was being nullified, and in its place, “everything” was revealed. “*At about midnight, I will go out in the midst of Egypt*” - The “I” of Hashem was revealed then – and that is *kol*, everything.

It is precisely within the Egypt that the “I” of Hashem went out, to show that even within the worst confines, “everything” can be revealed and banish away all the incompleteness. The confines of Egypt represent the limitations placed on us; when we are limited, we cannot be complete. With the plague of the death of the firstborn, however, it was revealed that even within the limitations, perfection and completeness can be revealed: the perfection of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. It was revealed then that all of the limitations and confines on us are only external; in the inner dimension, there is only *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who is *kol* – everything.

The Ultimate Rectification for Damaging the ‘Yesod’

בלבבי משכן אבנה זה – עמ' רלה-רלו (מאמר נא) 55

The *sefarim hakedoshim* revealed that the reason why we had to endure the Egyptian exile was to rectify the 130 years after Adam's sin, in which he separated from Chavah; during that time, [sperm left his body]⁵⁶, and thus his trait of *Yesod* ("foundation": guarding your personal holiness) was damaged; and *Yesod* is also known as *kol* - everything, so we needed to get back our aspect of "*kol*."

The rectification began with Yosef *HaTzaddik* when he first went down to Egypt, and he was tested in the area of *Yesod* (guarding his personal holiness.) At the end of the exile of Egypt, the aspect of *Yesod/Kol* everything was once again revealed in its pure and complete form.

Thus, the death of the firstborn was an end to the "*chatzos*", to the "partial" level of man in which man is limited and confined; and in its place came the revelation of the level of *kol*, "everything", the perfected level of man [when man realizes that he contains in himself 'everything' he needs]. The end to the exile of Egypt was now completely realized, and the Jewish people could now be redeemed.

The trait of *Yesod* (guarding one's personal holiness) is referred to in the statement of *Chazal* about the desires of one's evil inclination, that "There is a small organ in a man's body. If you satisfy it, you starve it; if you starve it, you satisfy it."⁵⁷ The deeper understanding of *Chazal's* words is as follows: "Starving" the male organ is really a revelation of one's *Yesod*, for man's *Yesod* is parallel to the concept of "*Kol*", "everything." Because when a person realizes he has everything inside of him, he knows that he lacks for nothing [and thus he will not be seeking anything outside of himself, so he will not seek to satisfy his male drives].⁵⁸

In other words, "starving" your physical lusts doesn't mean that you force yourself to simply "starve" it. Rather, it means to reveal your aspect of "completion" within yourself; to realize that you lack for nothing. Because your *Yesod* implies that you really contain everything you need inside of yourself - for *Yesod*, by its very essence, is your "all-inclusive" aspect.

Understand this well.

56 *Erwin 18b*

57 *Sukkah 52a*

58 *The Rav* speaks more about this topic in his commentary to *Mesillas Yesharim* in the chapter about *perishus* (abstinence), which has been adapted into English in the file of *Mesillas Yesharim* – "Sanctifying Marital Relations".

13 | *Teshuvah For The Sin of Damaging The Bris*⁵⁹

Teshuvah For The Sin of Damaging The Holy Covenant

The *Zohar* states that there is no *teshuvah* for one who damages the Holy Covenant. Elsewhere, the *Zohar* states that *teshuvah* can rectify this sin. This apparent contradiction is resolved by the Sages, who explained that there are two levels of *teshuvah* – “lower *teshuvah*”, which is on the level of *chochmah* (wisdom), and “higher *teshuvah*”, which is on the level of *binah* (“understanding”). It is explained that the words of the *Zohar* that *teshuvah* doesn’t help for this sin is only referring to “lower *teshuvah*”, but if one does “higher *teshuvah*” - on the level of *binah* - it can rectify the sin.⁶⁰ Let us understand the depth to this.

Yosef’s sin was in damaging the Holy Covenant, of which it is said that there is no *teshuvah* for. Here we can see the point where “Mashiach ben Yosef” and “Mashiach ben Dovid” will integrate with each other: In the level of “Yosef” (and, by extension, Mashiach ben Yosef), there is *teshuvah* for all sins, except for the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant. But if there is no *teshuvah* for this sin, what is the higher *teshuvah* that can atone for this sin, as the *Zohar* mentions?

The “higher *teshuvah*” that helps for the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant is when the point beyond *teshuvah* is accessed. Within the realm of *teshuvah*, one who damages the Holy Covenant cannot rectify this sin, because he has created disparity, through separating his seed and causing it to become scattered throughout the world, and he cannot return all of the branches to their root. But when one reveals the point where disparity isn’t possible, where it is retroactively revealed that there was never a disparity at all – for there is nothing that exists other than the unity of Hashem – in this point, the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant can be rectified.

Within the “49 Gates of Understanding”, there is sin, and there is also *teshuvah* for sin. But in the “50th Gate”, there is no possibility of sin, and hence no need for *teshuvah*. The “49 gates of understanding” are parallel to Yosef, or Mashiach ben Yosef, who represents *chochmah*\wisdom, where there can be sin, and which requires *teshuvah* to fix.

But it is really impossible to do *teshuvah*, from the perspective of This World alone. For this reason, *teshuvah* had to precede Creation, for *teshuvah* is really a power that comes from above the limits of Creation. If *teshuvah* preceded the world, that means it is impossible within our world to reach *teshuvah*, for it is of a higher dimension entirely. So we must reveal the point where there is no necessity for *teshuvah*.

⁵⁹ from *Yom Kippur_03_Teshuvah and Beyond*

⁶⁰ Editor’s Note: The *sefer Keser Rosh* (a student of the Vilna Gaon) explains that through learning in-depth Torah study, one does “*teshuvah* on the level of *binah*” and rectifies the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant.

This is the meaning of how *teshuvah* “preceded” the world. As long as a person tries to reach complete *teshuvah* within this world, he will never reach it, because *teshuvah* is a point that is above this Creation, and hence unattainable as we are on this world. Therefore, how do reach *teshuvah*? Only through connecting to the point that precedes the Creation. When one is connected to there, where “No thought can grasp Him”, he can then understand that there is no necessity for *teshuvah*, because there is no sin there.

“*Teshuvah* preceded the world” – when a person progresses throughout *teshuvah*, he may finally reach the 49th gate, the final gate within the realm of *teshuvah*, and there he will find that he cannot rectify every sin, for the sin of damaging the Holy Covenant cannot be rectified. What, then, is *teshuvah*? It means to access the point that precedes the world, to connect oneself to this point – and that, itself, is *teshuvah*!!!

Thus, *teshuvah* does not mean simply to “return” [from sin], but to connect oneself to the point that precedes Creation, where there is no possibility of sin.