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## Bilvavi Part 1 - Section 2 Belief in the Creator

### 44

We have so far clarified that a person's purpose and obligation in this world is to be close and attached to Hashem, and that this must be his sole aspiration in life. We shall now attempt to describe the way of life that a person must live in this world in order to reach a state of closeness and deveikus to Hashem.

We shall set forth simple ideas, which the reader might assume he already knows, but anyone who understands how to work on himself realizes that the main task of a person is to work on the simple and well-known things, as the Ramchal writes in the beginning of Mesillas Yesharim.

One point must be kept in mind as we progress. You must accept these ideas and fulfill them with simplicity. The more one accepts them with simplicity, the closer he will get to the truth, and to Hashem. But if a person adopts a critical approach and tries to argue the validity of each point, he will distance himself from the truth and from Hashem, chas veshalom.

You must understand that the secret of the inner life is simplicity of the soul, as it says, "My God, the soul you have placed in me is pure." Just as a child who is still innocent understands things in a simple way, so too the inner soul of a person, the pure element inside him, requires simple ideas. To awaken the element of truth in the soul, the pure element, one must employ the power of simplicity. This is the key point of the entire path with which we will progress, with the help of Hashem.

### 45

What is the point that every person needs to start working on? It is the clear and simple awareness that there is a Creator! It would seem to most people that this fact needs to be impressed only on someone who has not yet merited to enter the threshold of Judaism. You need to inform him and prove to him through various proofs that the world has a Creator. But people raised in a home with a long-standing tradition of emunah, who observe the Torah meticulously and are always immersed in Torah and mitzvos, would seemingly not need to be informed about the Creator. Don't they already know about Him? The basic assumption is that the fact that the Creator exists is not a point that needs to be worked on, because it is simple and clear. They believe that's one's avodah begins at a much higher point. However, this is an error. The fact is that every person must work on this simple point, the almost obvious fact - that the world has a Creator!

## 46

However, this notion persists in a person's mind: "What is lacking in my emunah? Must I learn the secrets of Providence and the ideas of the philosophers?" No, this is not our intent! We are speaking of very simple emunah - emunah that the world has a Creator. To understand why we must work on this, we will use a parable that will shed light on the subject and clarify it. A person won a twenty million dollar lottery. His thoughts are totally immersed in this new state. He thinks about it as he walks the street. He goes to sleep thinking about it. It is very difficult for him to disconnect from thinking about his good fortune and what to do with the money. In contrast, someone else, who didn't win the lottery, and merely heard the name of the winner, doesn't give it much thought. Let us consider the difference between the two. They both know clearly who won, but while the winner's thoughts are completely absorbed by the fact, the other person is not so affected. It does not grip his entire thoughts and feelings.

With this example, we can get a better understanding of the case with emunah. We all know that there is a Creator, but the question is, does this knowledge affect us like the winner of the lottery in our example, or like the one who did not win? Does the knowledge of the existence of the Creator grip one's mind and heart, or is it just a fact that one knows, but is not connected to at all times? We all know that there is a Creator, but how often do we think about that? To what extent are we attached to this thought? The belief that there is a Creator must be alive in one's mind and heart literally at all times. This is not merely a kind of general knowledge that serves as a background to life; it must be the driving force of a person's life every moment of every hour.

## 47

We wrote earlier that a person's goal and purpose should be to be close and attached to the Creator. In order to be close and attached to something, one must sense that the thing exists. If the entity to which a person wants to be close and attached is non-existent, how is he supposed to connect to it? To feel close and connected to Hashem, one must feel clearly that He exists. If a person tries to come close to Hashem before his heart feels that there is a Creator, he lacks a real awareness of His existence. He is trying to approach something whose existence he doesn't feel clearly in his heart. Therefore, the beginning of each Jew's avodah is to feel with all his heart that the world has a Creator, and only after that, to work on becoming close to Him.

## 48

There are three kinds of awareness: chochmah, binah, and da'as. Chochmah exists when one knows facts on a basic level. Binah exists when one understands them well. Da'as is present when one is connected to the matter and totally attached to it. It says, "And with da'as, the chambers will be filled" (Mishlei 24:4). That is to say, the chambers of the heart are filled with this knowledge, and he is totally engaged with it. That is full and complete da'as. When a person knows something, but it does not fill his heart and mind, he only has partial da'as of it. Complete da'as exists only when a person is connected and attached to the knowledge at all times, with every fiber of his soul and heart.

## 49

With regard to knowledge of the Creator, there are also the levels of chochmah, binah, and da'as. When a person knows there is a Creator, and it is clear to him that there is no other possibility, he has chochmah and binah. But da'as exists only when this knowledge grips his mind and heart. To recognize something with your soul, it is not enough to achieve chochmah and binah; you must possess da'as. The soul can only fully recognize something when the person is strongly bound to it and completely engaged in it.

This is a fundamental and powerful principle that our rabbis have written. A person who recognizes his Creator only with chochmah and binah, but does not think of Hashem at all times, is severely lacking in his soul's inner recognition of the Creator. He does not properly recognize the Creator in his heart and feelings, although he might have an intellectual awareness of Him. The rule is that someone who wants to truly recognize the Creator, to really know that the world has a Creator, must have his thoughts firmly attached and bound with the Creator, and only then will his soul recognize the Creator.

## 50

If so, someone who is looking for the truth must first establish clearly within himself the basic emunah that the world has a Creator. At first, he must clarify to himself that he intellectually knows about the Creator. He will have this faith established as a tradition from his parents and ancestors (but not through philosophical analysis, which our rabbis have discouraged). After a person has verified that he believes in the Creator absolutely, his avodah is to live with that fact at all times.

Obviously, a person can't suddenly begin to live with this thought in his mind every moment. The first step is to have a desire to live every moment with an awareness of the Creator in his heart. Practically speaking, working towards achieving this goal is done in stages, as will be described later. With Hashem's help, one will eventually be able to live all day with his heart constantly aware of the Creator. But before a person begins working on this, it must be clear to him that someone whose heart is constantly aware of the Creator is a totally different person to someone who does not live this way. It is not merely another level, but an entirely different kind of life. He is in a different world. There is life with the Creator, and there is an (illusory) life without the Creator. One who lives with the Creator leaves one world to enter a totally different world. This cannot adequately be described in writing. But when a person merits the attainment of this level, he will feel like an entirely new creation, similar to what the Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuvah (7:6-7) - that a penitent is not the same person at all as he was before.

## 51

Someone who constantly lives with the thought of the Creator in his mind, thinks of Him when he wakes up, when he washes his hands, when saying Birkas Hamazon, when he goes to sleep, and throughout the day. Even if he does not progress beyond this level (and Hashem should enable us all to progress further than this), this will change his whole life from one extreme to the other. He will have an inner sincerity and a deep sense of purpose. These will generate an inner strength which will permeate his entire spiritual composition. He will not be the same person any more! Even outsiders will sense that he has undergone some kind of change in his soul.

A person must understand and internalize the idea that the required foundation of life is for Hashem to be in one's mind and heart. This applies to every Jew, man or woman, with no difference whatsoever. In this way, one lives with the Creator, eats with the Creator, go to sleep thinking of the Creator, and so on. All of life must be filled with thoughts of the Creator. To achieve this, one does not need to be a genius or especially gifted. All that is needed is a small measure of sincerity in the heart with which to seek truth and to seek Hashem. This is the purpose of life. Since it is well-known and clear that the purpose of life is to be close and attached to the Creator, the first thing one must work on is to remember at all times that this world has a Creator.

## 52

There are no words to express the value of the wondrous treasure of thinking about the Creator. All the silver and gold in the world do not equal the value of this knowledge. It is a precious and

wondrous treasure with no equal. It is a treasure through which one can reach perfection, closeness to Hashem, and deveikus to Him. (That is to say, this kind of thought will enable one to properly fulfill the Torah and mitzvos.) If a person would know the greatness of this treasure, which is simply to live constantly with the thought that the world has a Creator, he would pursue it at all cost, ignoring the interests and vanities of this world. He would firmly attach himself to this thought at all times (except when learning Torah). But Hashem's will is that before a person toils to acquire this awareness, he cannot sense how wondrous it is, and how happy he will be when his soul acquires it. Hashem's will is that a person should toil with faith, and only afterwards will he experience what the passuk says, "Taste and see that Hashem is good" (Tehillim 34:9).

## 53

The Gr"a writes that the greatest pain a soul undergoes is when a person passes on to the next world and realizes what he could have achieved in this world, but didn't. This causes the soul terrible suffering. The difference between a person who reaches Gan Eden with the level of da'as described above and one who does not is like the difference between heaven and earth. One who has this deep knowledge and lives with it at all times has a higher place in Gan Eden because he is closer to Hashem. The inner essence of Gan Eden is closeness to Hashem. Therefore, the more a person thinks of Hashem and loves Him in the depths of his heart, the closer to Hashem will his place be in Gan Eden.

These concepts are so clear and obvious to anyone who recognizes the pnimius of life. But the yetzer hara causes a person to live superficially caught up with chitzonius, without understanding the greatness and depth of the insight that one must live with Hashem at all times. To the extent that knowledge of the Creator penetrates into deeper and deeper levels of the soul, until it fills the entire heart, the greater will his closeness to Hashem be in this world, in Gan Eden, and in the World to Come. The person will merit greater closeness to Hashem for all eternity. The opposite is also true, chas veshalom. If in the depth of one's heart, one is far from a connection to Hashem, engaged only in actions, but not in an inner connection, although he will certainly receive reward for all of his deeds, he will lose the primary aspect of the reward, which is "to delight in Hashem." You must understand that the whole point of life is to be connected and attached to Hashem in all the inner recesses of the heart, through Torah study and fulfillment of the 613 mitzvos.

## 54

As much as this point seems so simple and clear, so are people so far from realizing it. One can learn Torah most of the day, pursue many acts of kindness, and keep the mitzvos - the "minor" ones as carefully as the "major" ones - and yet, almost never think of Hashem and not realize with Whom he is involved. The Chazon Ish wrote at the end of a private letter of instruction that "the main thing is to remember before Whom you toil." A person might work hard, using a specific method and structured guidance, yet he has missed the main point if he does not remember before Whom he toils.

## 55

One might say to himself, "Do I not keep in mind before Whom I toil? Of course I do! It's clear to me that I toil before Hashem." To understand the error behind this line of reasoning, we will provide a parable: Someone is sitting at a table, and before him are various foods, such as meat, potatoes, and rice. He sees the food, but when he tries to eat from it, he is told that he has no permission to do so. When he tries again later, he is told, "What are you lacking? Why do you want to eat? You know there is food, and you see it, so what are you missing?" The obvious answer is that the knowledge that there is food and the sight of it are not satisfying. As long as a person only knows about the food, but it is still outside his body, he cannot be satisfied. Only when the food enters into the body

and is digested does one feel full.

This example will somewhat explain the point at hand. "The main thing is to know before Whom you toil." There is a kind of knowledge analogous to food that one sees but cannot consume. There is another kind of knowledge that enters the person, like food that enters the body. When the knowledge of "before Whom you toil" is just ordinary information, but is not constantly kept in mind, it is external to the person. One doesn't live with it and doesn't taste it. It is like food that you know exists but you don't eat. Information that one does not contemplate and live with is only intellectual, not knowledge of the heart, and the main point is missing.

Our main avodah is to ensure that the awareness "before Whom you toil" becomes an inner knowledge that defines our life. To become inner knowledge, it must be in the person's thoughts each hour of each day. That is remembering the basic fact that there is a Creator. Then, if your thoughts are fixed and attached to this idea at all times, the message will gradually seep into the heart. It will no longer be merely intellectual knowledge, but heart knowledge. When it becomes heart knowledge, one lives with it, and it sustains him, as it says, "The righteous man lives with his emunah" (Chavakuk 2:4). He receives vitality from his very emunah in the Creator. When the knowledge is only intellectual, it provides very little energy, but when it is in the heart, a person can draw vitality from the basic knowledge that there is a Creator.

## 56

The passuk says, "Taste and see that Hashem is good" (Tehillim 34:9). One must taste and see the goodness of Hashem, so to speak. How is this done? Is this food that can be tasted by the palate and felt in the throat? Clearly, intellectual ideas cannot be tasted, but when it is heart knowledge, the heart feels it, senses it, and "tastes" its sweet taste. Then, after "tasting" it, one appreciates the next stage of "and see." That is to say, the perception of the emunah after it has been "tasted" is completely different from before it was "tasted." One's whole emunah takes on an entirely different character. When the emunah changes from plain intellectual knowledge to palpable heart knowledge, it becomes an entirely different kind of emunah.

## 57

"Taste and see that Hashem is good." How do you taste that? Do you take it with a fork and put it in your mouth? One must taste it, but in a different way. You taste it with your heart and soul. The more a person thinks of the Creator, the closer he is to "Taste and see that Hashem is good." When one reaches the point where he thinks about it very often, he will be able to taste literally each moment this "good taste," and to delight in Hashem, even here in this world. But if a person merely knows the concept, but does not think about it often, it is only intellectual knowledge, which cannot provide an inner delight and taste. In which case the person will have wasted the opportunity to attain the experience of, "Taste and see that Hashem is good."

As is well known, the purpose of creation is so that Hashem can bestow goodness upon His creations. What is that destined goodness? "Taste and see that Hashem is good." As the Mesillas Yesharim says, "Anything else deemed good by people is vanity and deceptive emptiness." The only goodness in the world is closeness to the Creator; feeling Him in the depth of one's heart and tasting the sweetness. That is why the Torah is called "good," as it says, "a good acquisition" (Mishlei 4:2), because through it, one can "taste" Hashem, so to speak.

## 58

You must realize that this issue, namely, thinking about the Creator, is the foundation of the inner life

of the soul and the key to enter into a truly spiritual life. Life without this kind of thought is shallow. One must continue to learn Torah and observe the mitzvos, but "the main thing is to know before Whom you toil" at all times. In this way, one's Torah study will be the way it should be, and the mitzvos one fulfills will be as they should be. If one bears in mind constantly before Whom he toils, all his deeds will be done in the right way. With this key, one can unlock all the gates that block the way to closeness to Hashem. As a person penetrates more deeply into this frame of mind, he will sense more and more the state of, "Taste and see that Hashem is good." He will experience, "Then you shall delight in Hashem" (Yeshayahu 58:14), even here, in this world.

## 59

We will now try to make these ideas relevant to one's daily life. We will show how to live with simplicity with Hashem. As long as a person does not have a clear recognition that his whole life is only for the sake of seeking Hashem, finding Him, and becoming close to Him, this path will not be appealing to him, and he will not appreciate its true value. Only when a person thinks, understands, and feels in his heart that life is only for seeking and finding Hashem and becoming close to Him, will he accept these ideas in a correct way, relate to them appropriately, and understand that his whole life is dependent upon this matter.

Every path is fraught with difficulties, and generally speaking there are no short cuts. One must progress slowly, step by step. If a person senses and understands deep down that his entire life is only for the sake of seeking Hashem, he will not despair, even if there are obstacles and setbacks on the way. He realizes that ultimately there is no alternative and one must persevere and seek Hashem at all costs, because there is nothing else in life. This is all that life is about - seeking Hashem and becoming close to Him. Even if he has a setback, he will not entertain the idea of quitting and looking elsewhere, because it is absolutely clear to him that this is what life here is all about. Therefore, no failure will cause him to despair, and he will live with the conviction that, "A tzaddik falls seven times, and rises" (Mishlei 24:17).

The method that we will delineate is not a quick one; it takes a long time. If a person has a proper perspective, he initially prepares himself for an investment of many years, with the understanding that these years are given to him only for this purpose. But if a person takes this avodah as a secondary issue in life, then he will only keep at it for a short time. After a while, he will feel that he does not want to invest so much time in a secondary issue. He will want to return and invest his energy in his main endeavor which he imagines to be more important.

Therefore, the essential foundation for anyone who wants to embark on the path that will soon be described is the clear recognition that this is the essential path of life and this is why he is alive in this world, as we explained. Even if it will take many years, he will not see it as a waste of time. He will recognize that all the time allotted to him is for the sake of this avodah: the attainment of closeness to Hashem through the means of Torah and mitzvos.

## 60

We will expand upon this issue with real-life examples. A person wakes up in the morning. It takes a minute or two until his mind is settled. What should his first thought be when he wakes up? That he has to run to davening? That he didn't yet finish a task from on the previous day? That he has something important to take care of today? These thoughts and those like them should not be central to his mind. Some of them are pointless, while some are good and proper, but they are not the most important thought. What is the primary thought that should occupy one's mind when he awakens?

## 61

One's first thought on awakening should be that there is a Creator. One must start his day with the most basic and fundamental thought possible: that there is a Creator. If this fundamental principle is not firmly established in the soul in a way that the soul constantly feels it, one lacks a foundation for his avodah. This is the basis, and upon it, one must build the whole structure of his soul. With Hashem's help, this will be explained later in detail.

## 62

After a person properly remembers that there is a Creator, he should reflect with simplicity: "Who woke me up from my sleep? Who gives me the strength to wake up? You, Hashem!" Then he should speak to Hashem with simplicity, "You got me up, out of bed, and I thank You for that. Why did You wake me up? So that I can serve You properly. Therefore, I want to fill this day with Your service." When a person goes to the synagogue, what should he be thinking? "Before Whom am I going to daven? Before the Creator! I am going to speak with Him, to praise Him, to beseech Him," and so on. This is all built on one definite foundation: the awareness that there is a Creator.

## 63

This is the foundation and root of all of a person's avodah: the soul's capability to sense literally at all times that there is a Creator. It should not just be mental knowledge, but rather, one's life should be permeated by it, and his whole being should experience this simple and basic fact - the existence of the Creator. Throughout the day, a person must go around with the thought that there is a Creator. This is the simplest of thoughts, without any deep analysis. (For those who need deep study, there should be separate time devoted to that. But throughout the day, the main part of one's avodah should be to go with this simple thought, which will in fact become stronger and clearer as he delves into the subject during the designated time.) One must live with this simple thought in his mind, and gradually bring it to life in his heart. It is the simplest non-complicated thought, the very clear knowledge that there is a Creator.

This is the beginning of avodah for anyone who wishes to build a solid inner world. One must remember this simple thought throughout the day. At first, he should make external reminders to alert him approximately once an hour. After he has become accustomed to this, he should increase the rate to once in fifteen minutes, for example. Slowly, step after step, he should shorten the intervals until he thinks about the Creator every few minutes. He should not advance quickly, but in a concrete manner. Only after a person feels he has acquired a particular level, and the thought comes to him almost automatically, should he progress and shorten the time interval. The day will come when Hashem will grant him the privilege to bear in mind at all times that there is a Creator.

## 64

The essence of the method that we will be using is that through quiet and simple thought, repeated time and again, the "foreskin of the heart" (insensitivity to holiness) will be removed, and the heart will sense things properly.

We find a similar concept in the story about Rabbi Akiva who witnessed a rock that had been hallowed out by water (Avos DeRabbi Nassan 6:2). Let us consider this. The water descended as plain drops. The first drop was no different from the second, the third, and so on. The lesson here is that despite their simplicity, simple, recurring drops can break through a rock, in spite of their simplicity.

The same is true with a person's heart, which is called a "heart of stone" (Yechezkel 36:26). If a

person wants to break through his stone heart, he must repeat simple thoughts and simple words, again and again, a great many times, until stoniness of his heart disappears and he merits a heart of flesh, a heart that senses and recognizes its Creator.

When a person takes this simple idea - the thought that there is a Creator - and the simple statement that there is a Creator, and repeats them many times, he gains the ability to break through the barrier of his heart. The rock-like hardness of his heart will melt and his heart will truly recognize the Creator.

## 65

In order for a person to apply our advice in a well-structured manner, he must first acknowledge in his mind and his heart a simple and basic truth: The Ramchal writes in the beginning of Mesillas Yesharim, "When you look further into the matter, you will see that true perfection is none other than deveikus to Hashem. This is what David said: 'And as for me, closeness to Hashem is my good' (Tehillim 73:28). He also said, 'One thing I have requested from Hashem my entire life, that is what I seek: to sit in the house of Hashem all the days of my life and to visit His sanctuary' (ibid. 27:4). Only this is goodness, and anything else deemed good by people is vanity and deceptive emptiness."

You must understand this basic fundamental of life. The only thing one really has throughout his existence, in this world and the next, for all eternity, is Hashem! One must recognize Him, become close to Him, and cleave to Him, "and anything else deemed good by people is vanity and deceptive emptiness." Everything else is truly vanity. Except for awareness of the Creator, closeness and deveikus to Him, there is nothing else of value in any place or time. When a person understands this and contemplates it properly, he will absorb a basic and simple truth: One's entire involvement at all times must revolve around Hashem. His life must be lived in a way that Hashem is the center of everything in every situation, in every place and time. Hashem must be sought in each situation, every place, and at all times.

When one understands that the 613 mitzvos are (as the Zohar says), only forms of advice for achieving awareness of the Creator, and closeness and deveikus to Him, and that the Torah, which is the root of all the mitzvos, was given to us in order to attach us to the Creator, he will understand that during both sacred endeavors - the 613 mitzvos and secular ones - one must seek to become thereby closer to Hashem. That is to say, one must not put his entire focus only in their superficial elements, one must remember in all matters - whether physical or spiritual - it is essential to find a way to become thereby close and connected to Hashem.

## 66

When one thinks in this manner, he will be very close to the path we are promoting. Our entire method is devoted to connecting a person to Hashem in all places and all situations. If this basic awareness is lacking, it will be very difficult for a person to progress. But when one recognizes the truth - that his entire life is about searching how to become close to Hashem - he will be able to adopt the method described in this work.