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## Getting to Know Your Self - 000 Preface

Author's Preface (Specially written by the author for the English edition)

Your life's mission requires you to know your self as well as your Creator. The knowledge of the self is only an intermediate path for attaining knowledge of the Creator, which is the goal. ["knowledge of the Creator" refers to a palpable sense of Hashem's presence in your life as explained at length in "Building a Sanctuary in the Heart Part I and II".]

Which of these should come first? Logically, self-knowledge should precede knowledge of the Creator. Practically speaking, though, there is one approach that begins with self-knowledge, and another that begins with knowledge of the Creator, and each approach has its merits.

If one places self-knowledge before knowledge of the Creator, his method is sound and solid. On the other hand, as long as he is focused on acquiring self-knowledge, he lives without a relationship to his Creator, and his life lacks real inner vitality. In addition, there is a concern that he will spend his entire life on self-knowledge without ever attaining knowledge of the Creator, as we see with some people who engage in spiritual work. Furthermore, if one has already begun to attain a sense of his Creator - even if only occasionally and certainly if more so - his soul will demand greater and greater knowledge of the Creator, and he will not be capable of setting that goal aside for years until he manages to know himself well.

On the other hand, if one gives precedence to attaining knowledge of the Creator, he is akin to one who builds a second floor before having a ground floor. A common result is that he loses touch with reality, and does not properly relate to the world we see with our physical eyes. Not only will he never achieve genuine knowledge of the Creator, but since he lacks the stepping stone of self-awareness, he is liable to suffer from emotional instability. He lives with only heaven, not earth; with delusion, not reality.

For this reason, Da Es Atzmecha ("Getting to Know Your Self") is an important prelude to the Bilvavi books. When you think about who you are, you need to be able to filter out the outer layers that are not really part of "you." Otherwise, the "you" that you will try to connect to Hashem with will not be the real self. It will just be some false self-image that you have combined from various elements. Only after removing all the inner "noise" and the façade that taints your self-concept can you effectively commence with the work of making that true self closer to Hashem.

Hence, each approach has its advantages and disadvantages. Each person must understand these advantages and disadvantages and also have an adequate measure of self-knowledge in order to

sense which approach is most suited to his soul. One who truly seeks truth will be guided by the Master of Truth to choose which approach to adopt first and which later. Note that we said “first” and “later,” because self-perfection requires both self-knowledge and knowledge of the Creator.

One who chooses to start with self-knowledge should also devote a few minutes daily to attaining knowledge of the Creator; conversely, one who has chosen to start with knowledge of the Creator should also devote a few minutes daily to acquiring self-knowledge.

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**Source:** <http://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-self-000-preface>