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[Home](#) > Getting to Know Your Thoughts - 015 Guiding Your Imagination

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## Getting to Know Your Thoughts - 015 Guiding Your Imagination

### ***Two Kinds Of Imagination: Exaggerating Facts and Making Up New Information***

We mentioned so far that there are two kinds of evil imagination: imagination which comes from the male aspect of the soul, which is an evil usage of the power in the soul called “Yaakov,” and the imagination which comes from the feminine aspect of the soul, which is an evil usage of the power in the soul called “Leah.” The male aspect of the soul uses a kind of imagination which takes already existing information and exaggerates it, while the feminine aspect in the soul is responsible for a different kind of imagination: to come up with new concepts that do not exist.

We will explain this more in greater detail and then, with the help of Hashem, we can speak of the solution to both kinds of evil imagination, which is the goal we are leading to.

### ***What Esav Has Inherited To His Descendants***

The non-Jewish nations of the world, who descend from Esav, have inherited the second kind of evil imagination – “Leah.” This kind of evil imagination is how to guide their power of imagination.

This non-Torah method is something as follows (this isn’t always the exact scenario, but in every case the line of thinking is always the same): They tell a person, “Imagine that there is a light entering your body and that it is surrounding you. Now imagine that it has entered you. Now imagine that it is purging the evil inside you. Now imagine that the evil has been emptied from you.”

Where does this “light” come from?! It is being entirely imagined. The person is using his imagination to come up with absurd new ideas that do not exist.

There are even many books written about how to use this kind of imagination, but the point of all these books is the same: to get a person to imagine something which doesn’t exist and then “purify” the evil within him by “purging” it.

If they would tell him to look at a candle and imagine that its light is entering him and purifying him, that would be one thing. If that would be the case, then at least a person is taking something that exists and exaggerating it. But that is not what they do. They are telling people to imagine something which does not exist at all and to base their lives on this.

The non-Torah methods have unfortunately entered our society and are extinguishing the light of our

holy souls. People know that imagination can be useful and holy, and therefore they justify themselves: "What's wrong with doing this? Who says it's against the Torah?"

Even if such a practice would not be forbidden by the Torah (we won't get into the issue or not – that is a discussion for itself), it is detrimental to a Jew's soul, because it brings us down to a lower level. Everything that a Jew is supposed to do has basis to it, while the non-Torah kind of imagination is based on nothing but total imagination. Non-Jewish imagination-based therapy is lacking any solid basis whatsoever; it's all made up from nothing. Even if it's not actual idol worship (which it might indeed be), it still resembles idol worship, because it is creating some new entity that doesn't exist – which is the whole concept of idol worship.

It's clear and it's a given. There is no basis to permit one to use these non-Jewish therapies.

### ***Using The Power Of Imagination To Change Information***

Another kind of evil imagination is when a person exaggerates information. This power can be used for good or evil. How?

Superficially, to distort information in a holy way means to change something from bad to good, and to distort in an evil way is to change from good to bad. That is generally true.

But to be more precise, to change the information is essentially the same as *returning* the information to the way it was to begin with. We will explain how this is so.

If something has to be changed, then it was because something came and changed it from the way it was supposed to be, and it has to be restored to the way it was originally.

That is a Jew's power in using imagination for holiness. A non-Jew only uses imagination to make up new things. Even when a non-Jew is attempting to use imagination and distort the information, he doesn't restore it to the way it used to be, and he makes up something new. But a Jew has the power in his soul to use imagination simply to *restore* the information to the way it is supposed to be, and this is the holy way to "change" information – not to "*change*" it per se, but to restore it to the way it is supposed to be. The change to the information is not making up something new, but it is merely restoring it to what it is supposed to be like.

### ***The Torah Approach To Dealing With Desires And Lusts***

Let's say a person has a problem with lusts, and he goes to a secular therapist to get help. The therapist tells him: "Imagine that there is a light surrounding you; now imagine that it is entering you and purging you of your lust." There are people who say that they were helped by this and that they succeeded to some extent in weakening their desires. They call this therapy "self-subjugation". Even if it a person claims that it helps him somewhat, it does more harm to him than good. We will explain why.

Every person has some evil desires in himself. How can we fix the problem of desires? The superficial response would be to "get rid" of our desires, through the many different ways that people can do this. But the point of this thinking is, "I have an evil desire, so I have to uproot it."

The inner solution, however – which is the Torah solution – is to change our attitude about desire. Desire is an emotion in a person which has a root – Hashem Himself. "Hashem desired to dwell on the lower world." The soul of a person contains desires which are holy, like it is written (*Yeshayahu 26:9*), "*My soul desires You at night.*" Desire in essence is holy, but it can get "stolen" for the wrong reasons.

When a person has an evil desire for something improper, it is just desire being used in the wrong place. The desire in its essence is good, but since the person hasn't yet revealed its true use, the person only knows how to use the power of desire for evil. The desire is clothed by materialistic pursuits and has been stolen for selfish reasons. The *Yetzer hora*, who resides in a person's heart, steals one's desire and uses it for its own reasons. The materialistic pursuits of a person is thus only a garment of the desire, but the desire in essence is holy and G-dly.

How should a person deal with an evil desire that he has? He needs to remove the evil garments that are on top of it and reveal its essence, which is pure.

But the non-Torah approach is: "You have an improper desire? Come for therapy and we will help you get rid of your very power of desire." The non-Jewish approach is that desire is evil. But this is wrong! To take away the power of desire from a person is like taking the life out of a person! A non-Jew considers desire to be evil, because since he doesn't have a G-dly part in his soul (the *nefesh Elokus*), he cannot understand how desire can be holy. The only thing a non-Jew knows about desire is how it can be unhealthy, so of course the solution to a non-Jew is to eliminate the power of desire.

But the holy Jewish nation, which have Divine souls from Hashem, have a basic and necessary power to desire something. "*My soul desires You at night.*" By some this is more apparent and by others it is not, but every Jew's soul has the faculty of desire. It just has to be removed from the evil garments that are covering it. The way to do it is by removing the evil from it, which is by using desire for the right reasons - to desire a closeness with Hashem.

If a therapist wants to take away the power of desire from a person, he might be correct that the person has an evil desire, but by uprooting desire from the person, he is invalidating a basic need in a person.

### ***How To Use The Holy Imagination***

Now we will bring the Torah solution for dealing with the evil that resides in us. There is a way to use our imagination in a holy way and use it to rid ourselves from any evil.

To explain how this works, there is a G-dly light ("*ohr eloki*") that hovers above a Jew's head. This light is also present inside a person; the very existence of a person is a *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a portion of Hashem. This G-dly light in a person has the power to remove the evil in a person.

(If a person doesn't feel a need for this light, he cannot use his imagination for holiness.)

When we use our imagination in this way (to imagine the G-dly light in us), we aren't making up something new. The G-dly light is something that exists in us, and one can use his imagination to connect to it. Of course, there are other ways to receive this spiritual light - either through learning Torah or through doing the *mitzvos*. But one of the ways we can also have it is through utilizing our imagination.

So far we have mentioned one condition for imagination to be holy: it has to be something which already exists, not something which is being made up. Now we will add on another condition that one needs in order for imagination to be holy: we cannot base our lives on it. Therefore, if someone sits all day and practices holy imagination, he is actually using the evil kind of imagination inherited by Esav.

There are people today who don't learn any *mussar* and don't do any of the *Avodas Hashem* of our tradition, and instead they immerse themselves all day in holy imagination. But they are mistaken in this. Imagination can be a part of one's *Avodas Hashem*, but it cannot be everything, or else it becomes evil.

Unfortunately, in today's times, there are people who aren't learned in the Torah, and they have written volumes of imagination-based therapy which are really based on the evil kind of imagination. They even quote Torah sources for some of their ideas, but it is only because they know that Torah Jews want to see the sources for these ideas; they themselves aren't interested in coming onto the Torah for credibility. They aren't learned in the Torah and thus they do not know how to really use the imagination. If a person wants to find sources in the Torah, he can find sources for just about anything....he will fool himself and claim that there's a Torah source for it.

Someone showed me one of these books and I saw that it was written there: "Say a *possuk* before you do this...."

Saying a *possuk* cannot undo the improper use of imagination. It is not the way for a Jew, who has a loftier soul than the other nations of the world. If anyone thinks that this was the way of our ancestors, they are clearly mistaken, and they are contradicted from the very sources they rely on.

### ***Holy Imagination Must Be Used To Reveal Your Soul***

There is a fourth condition in order for imagination to be holy: when we use holy imagination, it should be that we are trying to reveal our *tzelem elokim* (G-dly image) within us.

The power of imagination is rooted in "*kedemuseinu*", which is one aspect in a person. But the other aspect of a person is "*betzalmeinu*", that man is created with a *tzelem elokim*. The "*kedemuseinu*" has to be able to reveal the "*betzalmeinu*"; or else we cannot use "*kedemuseinu*". If a person uses holy imagination but he doesn't do so with the intention of revealing his *tzelem elokim*, he is just trying to create something new, which is the evil kind of imagination. Our whole intention in using holy imagination is so that we can use it to reveal our soul.

Our soul contains both our good *middos* and our bad *middos*. The good *middos* are located in the higher part of our soul, while the bad *middos* are located in the lower, animalistic part of our soul.

Our happiness, for example, is contained in the innermost part of our soul; "*Splendor and joy in His place.*" When a person is depressed, and he goes to a therapist who doesn't use Torah-based therapy, what is he told? "Imagine that a light is entering you, and that the light is taking away the sadness from you, and that now you are happy..."

Can a "light" come and take away your sadness? Can it bring you happiness?! The non-Torah approach of imagination might be able to take away a person's sadness, but it definitely doesn't bring happiness. Happiness comes from the innermost part of the soul - which is only when one reveals Hashem from within himself.

The only "light" that you can use to bring you happiness is the light of the Creator. When a person uses this light (which we will see later how to use it), the sadness which comes from the animalistic part of the soul is removed, and this reveals the light of the Creator within a person, which brings happiness. But this kind of happiness is the happiness of "*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*" When a person's imagination comes from the Creator, it is the Creator who is enabling the imagination to be beneficial to him.

### ***Use Torah and Mitzvos To Get Rid Of The Evil Within You***

The whole power of holy imagination accomplishes this one thing: to remove what isn't part of one's *tzelem elokim* and in its place to reveal the *tzelem elokim*.

On one hand, a person is a *tzelem elokim*. On the other hand, a person is also "dirt from the ground".

We have in us two forces that contradict each other: our *tzelem elokim*, which is all the good in us, and our dirt which we come from, which is all the evil in us.

When a person uses imagination for holiness, what he is essentially accomplishing is to reveal use his imagination to reveal his *tzelem elokim* from within his "dirt". We will explain what this means.

In a person, there is his *tzelem elokim*, and then there is his aspect of "dirt". The imagination is in the point between these two forces, and it can come and shine the *tzelem elokim* onto our "dirt" - in other words, through using our soul, we can affect our own body, and we bring harmony between our *tzelem elokim* and our aspect of "dirt".

Before, we discussed how the power of thought can drop and become downgraded to the level of either imagination or emotions. We have said that the difference between imagination and emotions is that imagination comes up with something that really does not exist (like when a person wants a car, so he imagines that he has the car), while the emotions don't make up new information but instead exaggerates the information.

A person's imagination can either be used for evil, which is when one leads his life based on emotions - or it can be used in a holy way, which can actually revitalize a person.

Our dirt which we are made from in our body contains all our evil, while all our good is contained in our *tzelem elokim*. It is essentially Torah and mitzvos which shine the light of the *tzelem elokim* upon the animalistic part of our soul and onto our "dirt" in our body.

One of the ways to use our *tzelem elokim* is through using holy imagination. It is holy because it's not making up something new, but it is revealing your potential - you are using the *tzelem elokim* that exists within you and shining it onto the animalistic desires of your body.

Holy imagination is essentially to imagine your *tzelem elokim* and to imprint its power onto your imagination. The way to actually do this is for a person to imagine that this perfection exists in the innermost part of the soul (either he can imagine it as a G-dly light, or as one of the other terms mentioned in the *sefarim hakedoshim*), and that it is penetrating the evil within him.

This is the Torah approach to using the imagination, and anything other than this method is the secular, non-Torah approach which we cannot use.

### ***The Difference Between Holy and Unholy Imagination***

The *sefer Chovos HaTalmidim* speaks at length about the power of holy imagination. Some of the examples brought there are to imagine that one is in the *Beis Hamikdash* doing the *Avodah*, or that he is singing with the angels in Heaven.

The angels exist, so that is why one is permitted to imagine them. Why must a person use imagination for this, and why is a person allowed to imagine it? It is because a person has a hard time connecting to this reality. By imagining that it is really happening, like when he imagines that he is in Heaven and singing with angels, he is able to connect himself to this reality. That is the purpose of holy imagination - to help a person connect to reality which, without imagining it, he would have a hard time connecting to it.

People used to always make use of their imagination in a holy and constructive way. If a father had to miss his child's wedding (like if his flight got cancelled), what did he do? This was before they had recent technology. What did he do? He would imagine that he was there and feel like he was dancing with his son. This is a good kind of imagination, because he wasn't inventing anything new; he knew

his son is getting married right now, and he would use his imagination to connect himself to a reality taking place that he couldn't see with his own eyes.

If something exists, one can imagine that he is connecting himself to it. That is when imagination is holy.

There is a danger to this, however, and that is if a person imagines himself singing with the angels, he might try to actually come to picture the angels. If he imagines that he is singing with them, this is fine, but to picture the angels is already going too far.

But if let's say you were once by the Kosel and you want to feel like you're there, you can imagine that you are standing there, and there is nothing wrong with this kind of imagination. This is because you are connecting yourself to something that already happened in your experiences, and you are not making up something new.

### ***When Should A Person Use Imagination?***

Now we can, with the help of Hashem, speak about who may use his power of imagination.

After a person has learned Torah very in-depth, it is then that his mind is purified. Such a person is able to use his imagination in a holy way.

But in today's generation, it is unfortunately very common to have people who have not even learned any Torah, and these people attempt to use their imagination. Who knows what will become of these people? Their minds were already corrupted to begin with even before they began to use imagination techniques. When such people attempt to use their imagination, their imagination only leads them more and more downward. The result of this is that their minds are being led by their imagination within another imagination. In a way this helps such people somewhat, but the damage they cause themselves is much greater than whatever they gain.

We will give an example of this. Let's say a person has to go for anger management. He realizes that certain situations make him lose his temper. What should he really do?

He can imagine that very situation that always gets him angry, and imagine the whole scene unfolding itself again, but this time, he imagines that he is not getting angry.

This is a Torah-approved method that is sound and can work, because he is using the G-dly light within himself to hold back his anger. The G-dly light is something that exists in a person, and he can use his imagination to bring it out from within himself.

But if he goes to a secular psychologist, they will tell him something like: "Imagine the stressful scene, and imagine that you are there, but this time you are not getting angry, because you don't want to get angry. If you do this three times, then you will see that by the fourth time it happens, you are less angry."

There are indeed people who have been helped by this therapy, but they harm themselves more than what they have gained. Why? It is because they have used their imagination which comes from the lowest part in their soul (the *nefesh habehamis*). It is an animalistic way to help someone! Professionals train horses as well not to get angry in the circus and misbehave; people are using the same way they get animals to behave in order to get humans to behave! Even if a person controls his anger in this way, he has harmed his soul in the process, by treating his soul like an animal. He has treated his G-dly soul like a non-Jewish soul, which for sure does more harm than good.

The Torah approach to dealing with anger, however, is that a person must believe that there is a higher power within him that can overcome his tendencies to anger. When a person does this, he is essentially making use of the G-dly light within him. He can imagine the stressful scene unfolding itself again, but instead of getting angry this time, he imagines himself strengthening his *Eemunah* and not giving in to anger.

That is the holy usage of imagination.

### ***Practice This Before Your Difficult Situation Comes***

Let's make this very practical now: we will give an exercise to do.

Every time a person has a failure – like if he is sad, or if he is angry, or if he has an evil impulse – he should imagine for himself the very scene which arouses that negative emotion (whether it has already happened, or whether it is imagining a future event), and then he should imagine that the G-dly light within him is holding him back from giving in to the negative reaction.

*Chazal* say that when the Yetzer hora enters the scene, a person forgets all about his Yetzer Tov (Nedarim 32a). When evil is present, a person forgets about all the good within him. So how is a person supposed to fight evil? The answer is by preparing for it beforehand. When a person is calm and he isn't going through the test right this moment, he should now take the opportunity to imagine using the G-dly light within him to overcome his difficulty when it happens. Imagine the stressful situation; now imagine that you are overcoming it, because there is a G-dly light within you that can defeat the negative reaction.

Such imagination is holy, because it utilizes something that already exists within you; it is not making up something new.

The secular approach us that if a person imagines that he is happy even though he knows that he isn't, or that he imagines that he isn't going to get angry when really he does want to get angry. With this mentality, he's making something up new that doesn't exist, which is the evil, false imagination.

The Torah outlook on imagination, by contrast, is that a person should use imagination to reveal his already existing potential. (He can imagine that he's happy, not because he's trying to "make" himself happy, but because he's really happy deep down in his soul, and he just has to bring forth that inner happiness of the soul, using his imagination.)

A person will be able to accomplish a lot with this.

### ***Only Spend A Little Amount Of Time On This***

However, we must caution that this should be done for only a minimal amount of time. No one should base his entire life on holy imagination; if a person does, then he spends his whole life in his imagination. Such a person is missing the "*b'tzalmeinu*" (being in the image of Hashem) and only focusing on the "*kedemuseinu*" of imagination.

*Betzalmeinu* is when a person aspires to be like a *tzelem Elokim*, in the image of Hashem. *Kedemuseinu* is when a person uses his imagination. The third step of this is the end of the *possuk*, "*And He fashioned man out of the dust of the earth.*" This represents action, hinting to us that our holy imagination has to lead to acting upon it, or else it isn't holy.

When a person has all these three steps in the process, in their proper usage, and by not overdoing it, then he is living in a way that a Jew is supposed to live.

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