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Living A Thinking Kind Of Life

In the previous chapters we have said that to live in a world of thought doesn't mean that we have to simply learn how to think, but that we need to live with thought. From there we can reach our inner source of thought, which our thoughts flow out from. We will continue, with the help of Hashem, and explain more parts to this discussion.

When a person learns Gemara, there are two parts to his learning. One is what he learns, and the other part is what he thinks. What is the difference?

What a person learns are the *sefarim* that he learns. When he gets up from the *sefer*, that is what he is thinking. What is he thinking as he goes away from his *sefer*?

If a person only learns but doesn't think, of him Chazal say, "The Torah is like torn pieces to him." When he is in front of the Gemara, he is only thinking because he is seeing the words, but when he isn't in front of his Gemara and he doesn't see the words, his thoughts wander around. Such a person learns sometimes, and sometimes he doesn't.

But the truth is that a person's learning shouldn't be limited to the time he is in learning in front of his Gemara. A person should always be thinking.

We will begin with the most simple part of how one can do this: first we will learn about how one can think more while he is in front of his Gemara, and then we will learn how to think even when we are not in front of the Gemara.

Part One: *Diyuk* - Knowing How To Read Gemara

When a person is learning, he has to read the Gemara and know exactly what he is reading. If he isn't exactly sure what he is reading, he will lack an understanding of the material.

If a child sits down to read a Gemara, he cannot read it because he can't pronounce the letters. Since he can't read the words, he cannot understand it either as a result. But even a grown, mature person who knows how to read a Gemara often just reads the Gemara and he doesn't know how to make a *diyuk* (to infer). *Diyuk* is not the same thing as reading the Gemara; it is more than reading, and it is very important.

How can a person do this? First, a person must read the Gemara slowly. He must pay attention to the words, and then he must repeat them a few times. Then, he should begin to pay attention to each word and each letter, and surely every new *Halacha* that he comes across within the Gemara. He will see that the smallest change in even a letter can turn around the whole meaning of a word. The more a person gets used to thinking into each word he learns, the more he will notice things that the simple eye never saw.

This is the first part of one's learning, which is really the basis of all our words here: to read the Gemara and examine each thing you learn about, and especially to infer what the words of Chazal and the *Rishonim* are. (When reading words of *Acharonim*, usually less *diyuk* is required).

Diyuk requires a slow reading of the Gemara, as well as to review it over and over again. Slowly as a person does this, he will begin to notice things he never noticed before.

Part Two: *Cheshbon* - Thinking In Learning

The second part of learning is *cheshbon* – to think about what one has learned. This can be done while one is in front of his Gemara but it doesn't have to be. Even after a person has closed his Gemara and is walking home, he is able to make a *cheshbon* of what he has just learned.

When a person makes a *cheshbon* of what he learned, he will be able to uncover two things: either he will realize that he didn't understand it the first time, or he will uncover contradictions and questions which were not dealt with by the commentaries. It is well-known that Reb Akiva Eiger used this

method, *cheshbon*, and from this he was able to uncover many great questions.

It is impossible for a person to think into all the details.

We will give a simple example from the world to explain what we mean with *cheshbon*.

Let's say Reuven tells Shimon that at 2:00 AM he was in a certain place and did something there, and that at 2:45 he was in another place and did something else. If Shimon makes a quick calculation he will see that it doesn't make sense, because the time distance between the two places doesn't allow it. Shimon tells Reuven, "That's impossible." Reuven, when he hears this, realizes his mistake and says, "Oh, I guess I just didn't pay attention to what I was saying. Really, it wasn't 2:45, but at 3:15." Shimon was able to catch Reuven's mistake, but not all people would notice such a thing.

People hear stories all the time that are full of contradictions, and they don't pay attention to this.

We have chosen this example before we have explained what it means to make a *cheshbon* in the *sugya*, because when a person learns a *sugya* it is obvious that he has to make a *cheshbon*, but when it comes to practical daily life people don't make use of their *cheshbon* enough. Many times if you add up all the information in the same newspaper you will find contradicting facts.

A person can make a *cheshbon* of the *sugya* both when he is in front of the Gemara and when he is away from the Gemara. This is the second part of learning - *cheshbon*.

Part Three: Sevarah - Using Your Logic

The third part of learning is *sevarah* - the logic in the *sugya*. There are people who learn a lot, and they think that "logic" means the first thoughts (*hashkafah rishonah*) that enters their mind when they begin to learn the *sugya*.

But a person has to try to come up with at least two possible reasons to explain something he learns. A person might discover that one of the possibilities can't be true, either because it argues with the Halacha in the Gemara, or because it goes against the *cheshbon* he made. But the point is that a person should come up with at least two possibilities. (Sometimes a person can come up with three, four, five or even more possibilities).

Think if it first makes sense, and then see if it is fitting in to what the Gemara is saying and if it fits into the *cheshbon* of the *sugya*.

(This is not referring to the “*two dinim*” method of the school of Brisk, in which a person has to differentiate between two different reasons. It is a more preliminary stage, in which a person has to come up with two different reasons for something,)

Sometimes a person can find the *diyuk* from the *sevarah*, and sometimes a person finds the *sevarah* from the *diyuk*; either a person is able to read the Gemara better because of the logic he has come up with, or the other way around: he sees what the logic is because he has read the Gemara properly.

In the first way, a person puts his logic into the words, and in the second way, he deduces his logic from the words. The second way is more reliable, because in the first way, the person might force his logic into what the words mean, but in the second way, it is more truthful because you can't force out a logic from the words; either the logic is coming from the meaning of the words or it's not.

So a person should always come up with two different possibilities that make sense, and when a person does this he will see as he learns a *sugya* that each of the Rishonim holds like one way or the other way.

As a person gets used to this, he will see that this entire way of thinking will change.

Thinking Into The Opposite

Included in this is that when you learn something, think of the opposite logic of it (*tzad hafoch*). When you have the *sevarah*, which is the straight logic in the *sugya* -- now think of what the opposite of the *sevarah* would be (When a person does this, he is really using the power of *Daas*, which we will discuss later).

In order to really know something, you have to know what the opposite of it means also. If you don't understand the other side of the coin, then you don't really understand what you're learning about either. So when you come up with a *sevarah*, now think: what is the opposite of that?

Sometimes it seems that there is no opposite way here to think, but anyone who is used to learning in-depth knows that there is always an opposite to everything. Something that reflects this concept is how Reb Meir would find forty-nine ways to purify something and forty-nine ways to say how it's

impure

Even if the opposite logic isn't true for practical reasons, there still exists an opposite logic. We don't mean to come up with ludicrous ideas that don't make any sense; just try to think of the opposite of the facts when you learn something.

In addition to this, a person has to think: what *chiddush* (novelty) is contained over here? Why isn't the original understanding correct, and what is the reason for the *chiddush*? After a person understands the *chiddush* he should have two ways how to explain the *chiddush*.

This is otherwise known as the power of "*daas*" in a person - to understand something as well its opposite. A person uses his *daas* to give structure to a concept based on two opposing ways how to build it. It is also known as *panim b'achor* (see Chapter Eleven).

This is the depth behind the statement of our Sages that the school of Hilel merited to be accepted over the ruling of the school of Shamai, because the school of Hilel would always quote the words of Shamai first before stating their own ruling. Hilel would first try to understand what the opposite of his thinking was, and thus his understanding was greater and more complete.

Whatever you learn, think what was before and after the *chiddush*. Now that you have realized what the *chiddush* is, try to think of the opposite of it. This applies especially when you encounter an argument in the Gemara; try to understand each view in the disagreement.

When you get used to thinking into the opposite of what makes sense to you, you will see that you even understand your own logic better now.

One time a *chassid* came to the Kotzker Rebbe and asked, "What am I supposed to think about all the time?"

The Kotzker asked him, "When you get up in the morning, what do you do first - eat or daven?"

The *chassid* said, "First I daven and then I eat."

The Kotzker replied, "Think why you don't do otherwise."

Of course, we know it is prohibited to eat before davening, but if someone wants to live a more inner kind of life, he tries to understand the opposite of what is true.

One has to be careful with this and not get too confused. But someone who is a *bar daas* (capable of understanding) knows that the point here is not to change how you act, but just to learn how to think more, when you think about the opposite.

For example, I came here now to say a *shiur*. I have to think: Maybe I shouldn't have come? I myself have to think why I should have come and then why I shouldn't have. Of course, this doesn't have to make me decide not to come! It is just that at first, I need to think about the other side of the coin.

Chiluk - Taking Apart Details

Another part of this is *chiluk* -- to take apart the details of a *sugya*, to see its *peratim* (details). Think of all the possibilities. Take apart the details of each thing you learn, and you will uncover a fantastic wisdom in each thing you learn.

For example, if you hear a story about how Reuven went somewhere and did something, think into the details that are in the story. You will discover many details when you think into the story.

Usually when a person just hears the story in a generic way, he doesn't think about the details that went on in the story. This is why sometimes you can ask a person about a story he once heard but he won't even remember that he heard it.

To explain this a bit more, usually when a person reviews a *shiur* on a tape, he understands it better than when he heard it the first time. Why?

There are many reasons for this, but the primary reason is because the first time a person hears something, he's digesting the information and he hasn't thought into it yet. Because of this, a person misses details the first time he heard the *shiur*, since he is busy digesting the information. When he reviews it a second time he can catch the details he missed, because now he is thinking into it and isn't so busy trying to digest it like the first time.

When a person learns, he should think: How many details are contained here? After a person gets used to this he will see that that there are many details in the *sugya* which he never noticed before.

For example, we know that water is cold and moist. Think: is it possible to have water which is cold but not moist? Is it the cold in the water that makes it moist, or is the moisture in water independent of the coldness?

We can give thousands of examples, but the point is to notice details; then, see how all the details connect. In this way you will be able to reveal a lot that you never paid attention to before.

Let's say you are learning *Mishnayos*. Read the *Mishnah*, and then pay attention to each word. Write down for yourself all the details. You will immediately realize many details you missed the first time, and you will see if these details are not just on the side, but the whole reason of the *Halacha*! You will see that the *Halacha* contained in the *Mishnah* is comprised of a few details which are like pieces of a puzzle, and that if one of them is missing it changes around the *Halacha*.

To give an even more detailed example of this, a person learns the first Mishna in *Bava Metzia* - "*Shnayim Ochazin B'tallis*", "Two people that are holding a garment...must split it." A person can take apart the details and think: How are they holding it? Will the *Halacha* be different if they are holding it in a different place? What about if it's three people holding it, instead of two...?

Of course, you will not get all the details right away; you need to go through the entire Gemara and you will then discover all the details contained in the *Mishnah*. But the point is to pay attention to details even as you learn a *Mishnah*.

Chochmah and Binah

There are two abilities in our mind: *Chochmah* (Wisdom) and *Binah* (Contemplation). *Chochmah* is to see the *klal* - the general whole of something. *Binah* is to contemplate each *prat* - to see the details.

These two abilities are dependent on each other. If a person would only have *Chochmah*, he would have a general idea of something but he has nothing to think about it. A person therefore also needs to have *Binah*, which can make a person uncover countless details.

The Torah is "longer than the land and wider than the sea"; the Torah has general information, such as the *Beraisa* of Rabbi Yishmael (which explains the logic of the Torah and Chazal), as well as countless details.

When a person learns and uncovers details, he begins to think: What would be the case if one of

these details wouldn't be here? What would happen if the details change? Thinking like this will make a person discover an endless wisdom.

The more a person sees details and combines them together, the more he will see the vast and wide wisdom of the Torah. A person who learns in this way the words of all our commentaries will reach an endless flow of thought from within himself.

Before, we spoke of how to reach the inner flow of thought. Now we have revealed another way to reach this inner flow.

Chazal say that there are two kinds of learning: One who is "Sinai" (a reference to Sinai, where we received the Torah), and one who "uproots mountains and crushes them". What is the difference? When a person uses *Chochmah*, he is aware of all the knowledge and information of a *sugya*; that is why he is called "Sinai". When a person uses his *Binah*, he takes apart each detail of a *sugya*. He is like the one who uproots mountains and crushes them, because he is always taking apart the details.

Two Superficial Methods To Help One Think More

Now we will return to our original point and understand it better.

Until now we have actually said things that are simple and nothing new to anyone who is used to learning Torah in-depth. But all of this really serves an introduction to our topic, which is living in a world of thought.

How can a person always live in a world of thought? People complain when they hear that they need to live in a world of thought: "I tried to make myself think, but all this thinking is making my head hurt! What am I supposed to think about all the time?!"

There are different methods that people have in order to help themselves think more, and they are superficial methods. We will mention them and see how it is superficial.

One method people have is to review word-by-word. If a person learned 18 chapters of *Mishnayos*, he can try to get to know it all by heart, word for word. This can give a person a quantity of thoughts to keep himself occupied with. The point of this is to get a person to review, either verbally or mentally, the words he has learned. That is one method.

Another way is to simply read and review, again and again, verbally or mentally, the content of what one has learned; there is no emphasis here on memorizing each word, unlike in the first way. This is called *shinun* – to repeat the Gemara’s *shakla v’tarya* (back-and-forth discussions).

Both of these methods make a person concentrate, and it is possible for a person to get used to this and have an easier time with it. But the disadvantage to both of these methods is that they don’t really get a person to think.

The first way, memorizing *Mishnayos* by heart and then repeating them word for word, doesn’t get a person to think at all. There are children who also can memorize *Mishnayos* yet they don’t have any understanding of what they are saying. It is more like a *segulah* (a charm) to enlighten one’s soul, and it is definitely good for the soul, but it won’t help for understanding. A person will just end up knowing what the words are and that’s it.

The second way, which is to review the general content, can make a person think a little, because a person needs to make use of his mind when he goes over the discussions in the Gemara.

The Inner Method To Think More:

Preparing Questions For Yourself

There is a more inner solution mentioned in the works of our wise Sages: that a person continues to think about the *sugya* even after he gets up from the Gemara. A person can prepare a question for himself to think about even when he’s not in front of his Gemara, and then think into it when he’s on the go.

We mean for a person to prepare an intriguing kind of question to think about when he is walking home. It can be more than one question. It is more recommended to prepare for yourself questions rather than to think of a *sevarah*, because questions make you think much more than a *sevarah* alone (unless a person has an affinity toward *sevarah*). Usually, questions make you think much more than when you think of a *sevarah*.

This gets a person used to always thinking with depth, wherever he is. A person should keep thinking about the *sugya* even when he’s not in front of his Gemara and keep taking apart all the details.

A person who gets used to this will discover that many times as he is walking in the street, he will suddenly come up with answers to his questions. He might want to take out a pen and paper and quickly write down his answer and use the pole as a surface to write on. (Passerby might think this

looks strange, but don't worry - there are people who do a lot of stranger things than this.) It is possible for a person to live this way!

Getting Used To Taking Apart Information

When a person gets used to taking apart information to uncover the details, he will be able to see that nothing is as simple as it would appear. Five lines of Gemara which appear to be a no-brainer to the undeveloped mind are viewed differently by someone who knows how to take apart details; he sees how it's not so simple.

Taking apart details makes our mind work. If someone is used to this, his whole life is a thinking kind of life.

Of course, there can always be disadvantages to such an inner kind of life, but right now we are talking about what is to be gained from this. It helps build the power of thought in a person. In this way a person is able to take a small piece of information and split it up into countless details.

Such a kind of life is like a paradise on this world! A person who has a thinking kind of life like this is cut off from materialism; he should be careful not to become so disconnected from this world. But we are saying that there is a tremendous gain for one to be cut off from this physical world (not to go overboard but to a certain extent).

Even in the physical world we can see how taking things apart are useful. When you're cleaning up the house and your spouse is thinking of throwing some things out, you might discover that although your broken cassette player should be discarded, you might enjoy first taking it apart just to see how it works inside.

There are people who love to take things apart and see what's going on the inside of something, and then they put it back together afterwards. This does not come from a destructive nature, but from a desire to see details.

Just like there can be a nature to take apart things in the physical world, so can a person develop a nature in which he takes apart a thought. When a person takes apart a thought, he will even be able to take apart physical things and see the thought that goes into it. There is nothing that can't be taken apart.

Such a life is like a paradise on this world, because like this a person always has what to think about, and nothing of this physical world seems more interesting than what he's thinking about right now.

Most people are pulled after materialistic desires not just because they are materialistic, but because they are empty from thought. There is a famous Chazal that says, "The pit is empty and it has no water – there is no water (Torah) in it, but there are snakes and scorpions in it." When a person is empty from thought, lusts overtake him (*Rambam, Hilchos Issurei Biah: 16*).

When a person always thinks – not because he is forced to do so, but because he has opened himself up – his evil passions decrease a lot, because he has an inner world for himself. He always has an inner source of thought.

Reviewing - Verbally Or Mentally

There is another way how a person can live in a world of thought. We mentioned it in the previous chapter and now we will elaborate on it.

The Ramchal writes (*in sefer Derech Eitz Chaim*) that the Torah is like a fiery coal, and that the more you think into it, the more you blow on the coal and ignite it more. What this means for us is that when you think into the Torah, you reveal hidden meanings in its words and bring them out to their potential, just like when you bring forth the fire from a coal by blowing on it.

There are two ways to bring out a thought in Torah to its potential. One way we have already spoken about, which is to get used to constant thought. This can be done either verbally or mentally.

There is a disadvantage to reviewing verbally, because there is less thinking involved. But when a person reviews something mentally, he thinks into it. Thinking into something reveals a thought to its potential; it's like blowing on a coal that has a tiny flame more and more until a large flame is produced.

When you think into things, you will see that what you originally thought was simple and small is actually much more than that.

To illustrate, the Chazon Ish wrote that he doesn't know of anything small and simple, because everything is big to him. This was not simply because he knew how to attribute importance to something small (which is also true); it is because everything can be enlarged into a more complex thought. Like this, a person uncovers the depth behind information, in addition to his collected knowledge.

The Second Inner Method: Reviewing Calmly

There is a second method to arrive at constant thought, and it is more subtle. This is not from contemplating something, but from reviewing.

When a person reads the Gemara, either verbally or mentally, he isn't thinking into it yet. He might come up with questions and answers as he is learning by reviewing it, and this is the way of learning; "There is no *Beis Midrash* that does not have a *chiddush*."

This kind of reviewing is simple; the person reviews by repeating the words he has learned, and by going over them, he remembers them better and better each time. The more you go over a thought, the better you remember it. There is an ability in the mind to protect one's thoughts and remember them, and this is done the more a person thinks about it.

But there is a deeper way to review. Usually when a person reviews simply for the sake of review, he is only using an outer kind of knowledge and applying it to his reviewing. But a person has in the innermost part of his soul a subtle ability to "run and retreat" back and forth (*rotzoi v'shov*). This is when a person reviews in a very calm manner; it gives the soul a new flow of thought.

For example, a person can take a short statement of Chazal, even a famous one, and go over it again and again, in a calm and quiet manner. The resulting enthusiasm from this can give a person a new kind of mind.

It is better to verbalize this, but you don't have to say it out loud. It's good for you to hear your own voice as you say it, but others don't have to hear your voice! This is like by Channah, of whom it is written, "*Only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.*"

When a person reaches an inner silence, and from reaching this place in himself he reviews a statement of Chazal in a calm and relaxed manner – not a fiery kind of enthusiasm, but more like a cool and collected state – he reaches an inner flow of thought. This is another way how a person can live in a world of thought.

This is unlike the first method we spoke about before; the previous method was about building our mind, while this method taps into the source our mind; this is what is written, "*Wisdom is found in nothingness.*"

This is for one to simply become connected to Hashem, and from there a person can develop his mind. This is a more inner way to develop our mind: to constantly review, in a calm and relaxed manner, the words of Chazal. This brings a person to reach a constant inner flow of thought.

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