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## Bilvavi Part 6 - Chapter 07 Lishmah Part Two

### ***“Shelo Lishmah Leads to Lishmah”***

In the previous chapter we quoted Chazal that “A person should always learn Torah and do mitzvos even *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motives), because from *shelo lishmah*, he will come to act *lishmah* (pure motives).”

From here we learn that *shelo lishmah* and *lishmah* have to be integrated, and they are not two separate concepts. They go hand in hand with each other. In order to understand how they connect, we need to first reflect about the very concepts of *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*.

Chazal say that a person should “always” act *shelo lishmah*; the word “always”, *l’olam* in Hebrew, has the same root letters as the word *he’elam*, which means “hidden”. This alludes to the fact that *shelo lishmah* conceals our true purpose, which is to utterly sense Hashem’s existence. As long as a person is still involved with *shelo lishmah*, his very existence conceals him from revealing Hashem in his life. *Lishmah* is about revealing Hashem, while *shelo lishmah*, which is a human being by essence, conceals Hashem from the person.

### ***A Human Is “Shelo Lishmah” By Essence***

On a more subtle point, it’s not truthful enough to say that a person serves Hashem originally *shelo lishmah*. It is much more than that; a person by essence is *shelo lishmah*! Our very existence is to act *shelo lishmah*.

*Shelo lishmah* is not a matter that one thinks about. If *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* was something I can think about, then I can just “think” to act *lishmah*; but it’s not a thought. It is our very essence as

human beings to be *shelo lishmah*. The “I” in a person allows for *shelo lishmah* and conceals Hashem from being revealed.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner explained that “a person should always act *shelo lishmah*”, that it is impossible for a person not to begin with *shelo lishmah*. This is because the very existence of a person makes one act *shelo lishmah*, and there is no away to avoid this.

If we absorb this, then instead of looking at the concept of *shelo lishmah* with disdain, we can see that it is a required human weakness. It is not to be looked down upon. Our mission is to eventually negate our *shelo lishmah* and become integrated with Hashem, so *shelo lishmah* serves a purpose: it helps us reach *lishmah*.

When we describe what the “essence” of a person is here, we are **not** referring here to the deepest point in the soul, which is the selfless part in us that is the *cheilek eloka mimaal*, a “piece of Hashem.” There are different meanings of the “essence” of a human being, as we will explain.

### Three Kinds of Existence

We explained that *lishmah* is when we reveal Hashem into our life, and *shelo lishmah* is when we still live within our ego and Hashem is concealed from our life. *Shelo lishmah* is actually always describing the “lower” level, depending on the situation. *Lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* are different with each person, because what is a higher level for one person is a lower level to another person.

To be general, there are three different dimensions of existence (“*havayah*” in Hebrew.) -we can exist on three different kinds of planes. There is the physical world, and the spiritual world - and beyond that, Hashem Himself. The physical world is the world we see in front of us, and it is the lowest kind of existence. The spiritual world includes all the upper realms above the physical world, including angels and souls. Higher than that is Hashem - His actual existence and reality.

This has applications to our own soul as well. We can want three different kinds of desires: a desire for physicality, a desire for spirituality (which is not necessarily a desire to be close to Hashem as we will see), and a desire that comes from the deepest place in our soul (called “*Yechidah*”) which seeks to become integrated with Hashem. This deep desire in our soul already recognizes that it is one with Hashem, and thus its sole yearning is to always remain integrated with Him.

These are the three general desires that a person can have: material desires, spiritual desires (but not yet necessarily focused on bonding with Hashem), and the desire to become integrated with Hashem.

This deep desire is in the possuk (Tehillim 73:25), “Who do I have in heaven, and when I am with You, I do not desire this earth.” A person is not meant to search for the physical, and his search does not end with the spiritual either; the real search of a person is for Hashem Himself, to become close to Him. (This is written as well in *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chapter 16.)

### **Three Levels of *Shelo Lishmah***

The same can be applied to *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah*. If a person has desires for the physical, this is clearly *shelo lishmah*, because he doesn't have any pure motivations yet. But even if he desires spirituality, this is still *shelo lishmah*, because it is not yet the deeper motivation, which is to strive for a bond with Hashem.

Just like the body conceals the soul, so can “spirituality” also be hampering one's connection with Hashem! This is when a person wants more “spirituality” in his life, but “Hashem” is not necessarily in his picture.

We have learned so far that there are two levels of *shelo lishmah*. One is simply *shelo lishmah*, like when a person has material desires (and in this there are levels too. There is a simple desire for materialism, as well as deeper desires such as the desire for honor and glory, which is also materialistic). Then there is a higher kind of *shelo lishmah*, and this is when a person wants spiritual levels, such as a desire for *ruach hakodesh* and heavenly revelations.

There is also a third kind of *shelo lishmah*, and it is the highest kind of *shelo lishmah*. This is when a person has the will to become attached to Hashem, but for ulterior motivations. Even the desire to become close to Hashem can be *shelo lishmah*, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes (Chapter 19).

### **Closeness to Hashem for Ulterior Motivations (*Shelo Lishmah*)**

The first two levels of *shelo lishmah* are more or less clear to us. We all recognize what it means for a person to have desires for materialistic reasons, as well as desires for spirituality that aren't about connecting to the *Ein Sof* (Infinity) of Hashem. We understand that these desires are *shelo lishmah*. But the third kind of *shelo lishmah* – a desire to connect with Hashem, but for ulterior motivations – is hard to recognize as ever being *shelo lishmah*.

But it means as follows. Why does a person strive to be close to Hashem? It is because (as is written in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*) the greatest pleasure that exists is “to bask in the pleasure of Hashem and enjoy His radiance.” If so, a person can want to be close to Hashem, but he's only in it

because of the sheer enjoyment of it; he wants to receive pleasure, and he's not yet focused on recognizing the reality of Hashem. As long as a person still wants to be a receiver, it is still *shelo lishmah*. It's a very subtle kind of *shelo lishmah*.

So altogether, there are three kinds of *shelo lishmah*.

### **Lishmah - Focused Only On Hashem**

Now we need to understand: What is *lishmah*, which is a higher desire than any of the above?

It would seem to imply that *lishmah* is to want to be close to Hashem, without any thought of trying to receive pleasure from this. But what we still need to know is, what would bring about that desire in us? What can we do to motivate ourselves in the first place to have a motivation that is entirely pure?

The truth is that it can indeed be spurred on by *shelo lishmah*, as follows: a person recognizes that human perfection is only achieved by being close to Hashem, and since the person has a desire to become perfected, he wants to connect himself to perfection and integrate with it. If so, we can see that even the desire to become integrated with Hashem can still be coming from a subtle kind of *gaavah* (haughtiness) in a person, and so there is really a fourth kind of *shelo lishmah*.

What, then, is the perfect kind of *lishmah*?

*Lishmah* is that a person can have a will to integrate with Hashem **without any reason!**

How can a person know if such a desire is coming from an entirely pure motive, or if it is perhaps coming from his *gaavah*, or a desire for spiritual pleasure? How are we able to know where our motivations are coming from?

The answer is called "the secret of *hishtavus* (nullification)". If Hashem would come to a person and ask him if he is ready to give up his soul level and exchange his soul for a lower level soul, would the person be willing to accept that? If the person is truly willing to become close to Hashem, then he is able to nullify himself to the will of the Hashem, who (for some unbeknownst reason) wants now that he should receive a lower level soul. If it's about "what Hashem wants", and not what "I" want - *that* is the true litmus test of what the real motivations in the person are.

If a person is ready for this, this shows that he truly wants to become close to Hashem, because his

main concern is about fulfilling the will of Hashem.

A person must thus clarify to himself why he wants to become close to Hashem: is it coming from my *shelo lishmah*, or from my *lishmah*? If it is coming from any desire for some personal gain, it is *shelo lishmah*, but if it is coming from a desire to do the will of Hashem, then it is coming from *lishmah*. There are many kinds of personal reasons why a person would want to become close to Hashem, and we mentioned four different possibilities. There are other personal motivations as well besides for what we mentioned, but these are the general four personal kinds of *shelo lishmah* that can exist.

*Shelo lishmah* is all about one's "I", the focus on personal interests. *Lishmah* is all about revealing Hashem in a person's life. When a person removes his "I", Hashem can then be revealed in his life.

Now that we have explained what *shelo lishmah* is, we need to understand how *shelo lishmah* can lead to *lishmah*. How does *lishmah* result from *shelo lishmah*?

### **The Self Is Expressed In The Emotions and In The Thoughts**

There are two implications of the "I", a person's self. One part of a person worries for himself in an emotional way, and another part in a person is his mind, the *da'as*, which is also called the "I" of a person ("*I stand between Hashem and between them.*")

To explain this a bit more, there are two expressions of the "I". A person loves himself and does things for himself, which is a result of his "I". This is how the "I" is expressed - through emotions: a person worries for himself, either because he loves himself or because he fears for his safety.

The fact that a person does things for his own survival doesn't yet define a person's self, only the actions that result from the self. For example, a person can still act kind to another person, so we see that it's possible to act when it's not for himself. We can never define an act of a person as being all about *lishmah* or all about *shelo lishmah* - because there are always two possibilities. So when it comes to our emotions\ *middos*, there can be *shelo lishmah* involved, or *lishmah* involved.

But higher than our emotional aspect is a deeper part of our self, and this is our mind. The mind is also called one's "I", as is written, "*I stand between Hashem and between them.*" A person is called a "*bar daas*" - someone capable of a thinking mind; and his very *daas* is identified as the actual "I."

So if we are trying to define how the process works of leaving *shelo lishmah* and entering *lishmah*, it

must be that there are two ways how one must leave his "I." We have already clarified that *shelo lishmah* is one's "I", and *lishmah* is to nullify the "I." If so, we have to nullify our "I" in two ways – both our emotional aspect (*middos*) and our mental aspect (*daas*) – if we are to leave our *shelo lishmah* and reach *lishmah*.

### **The Lesson from Parah Adumah**

We can find a concept that brings out the idea of nullifying the **emotional aspect** of one's self, from the law of *parah adumah*. When a *Kohen* uses the *parah adumah* (red heifer) to purify those who have become contaminated from a corpse, he purifies the person who comes to him as he sprinkles him with the blood, and the *Kohen* himself becomes contaminated in the process. Here we see the concept that a person is willing to do something to help someone else yet give up himself in the process.

We can also see from *parah adumah* how a person can nullify the **mental part** of himself, to nullify his very *daas*. This is because Shlomo HaMelech said of *parah adumah* that it is the only *mitzvah* which his great wisdom didn't allow him to understand: "*I said [to myself] that I will try to understand it, but its matter far from me.*"

### **"It Is Better Had Man Not Been Created"**

The Sages say (Eruvin 13b), "It is better had man not been created, but now that he has been created, he should examine his deeds."

What's the point in telling this to us? What happened already happened; we exist now, so why should we know that it would have been better for us had we not been created?

Chazal are telling us, though, an inner revelation about people: We must begin serving Hashem from a lower path and ascend to the higher path (*m'lisata l'eila*). First a person begins to learn Torah and do mitzvos *shelo lishmah*, and from *shelo lishmah* a person arrives at *lishmah*. That is the way to go from the "lower" path to the "higher" path. There is another path, though, and that is when a person works his way downward, beginning from the upper path (*m'leila l'sata*). This is when a person begins with *lishmah* and shines its light upon *shelo lishmah* - by beginning with selfless closeness to Hashem, which is *lishmah*, and ending up by perfecting our "I", which reflects *shelo lishmah*.

If so, when Chazal say, "It is better had man not been created," they are revealing to us that that there is a way for a person to begin serving Hashem from the point of "it is better had man not been

created” – to begin with total selflessness.

Of course, the simple meaning of Chazal still remains true (that *shelo lishmah* is the beginning, which leads to *lishmah*). But there is also an opposite approach contained in their words which is no less true, that “it is better had man not been created.” This is when a person begins from selflessness - when all he is concerned about is revealing the reality of Hashem in his life; and his *shelo lishmah* is just like a garment upon his *lishmah*.

## **The Mission of the “End of Days” Era**

We still need to understand, though, how this does not contradict the words of the *Nefesh HaChaim*, who wrote that a person is “always” *shelo lishmah*, and that every person has to start with *shelo lishmah* in order to reach *lishmah*. How we can say the opposite of this, that there is a way to begin with *lishmah*?

However, herein lies the secret to our inner mission. Until the end of this 6,000 year period we are in, we must start with *shelo lishmah*. We are headed towards the end of this era, which will be the true “*olam*” (world), and it will serve as a *he’elam*, (concealment) of this current world. As we head towards that “*olam*”, it can be said of us that we are “*l’olam*” – towards that world.

We are thus currently in “*l’olam*”, and not yet in “*olam*.” Of *l’olam*, our current state, the Mishnah in *Avos* states that “A person, *l’olam* (should always) learn Torah and do mitzvos *shelo lishmah*, because from *shelo lishmah* will come *lishmah*.”

The current state of affairs is thus to begin with *shelo lishmah*. However, at the very same time, if we reveal already now the light of the future Redemption – of which Hashem said, “*For My Sake, I will do it*” – then Hashem is revealed in our life, and the “*I*” in us becomes nullified; the *lishmah* in us is then revealed.

In previous generations, they were far from the redemption, and their Avodas Hashem did not permit them to begin with *lishmah*, because the light of the Redemption wasn’t yet close by. They were deeply hit by the exile, and the light of the Redemption was very hidden from them. Thus, they were not allowed to serve Hashem starting from *lishmah*, and they had to start with *shelo lishmah*.

But in our current era, which is the End of Days (*acharis hayomim*), the light of Moshiach has already begun to ignite, as the *sefarim hakedoshim* have written about long before. If so, our Avodah now is the opposite, and we can begin from the point of “*Better had man not been created*” – the point of

selflessness in us, the point of *lishmah*. We can begin our Avodah by recognizing the truth of Hashem's existence and to radiate that light downwards, shining it onto our *shelo lishmah*.

To summarize, we have two forms of Avodas Hashem. One way is to go upwards starting from the lower point, which is called *m'lisata l'eila* (from the bottom up), and this is the main Avodas Hashem of this 6,000 year era. A second way is to start from the higher point and bring it downwards, *m'leila l'sata* - from the point of selflessness, the point of *lishmah* that we can radiate downwards onto our *shelo lishmah*.

We can use both aspects at the same time - on one hand, we are living in this current 6000 year era, but on the other hand, the light of Moshiach has begun to shine, so we can utilize the higher point at the same time.

The ability to serve Hashem selflessly has begun to take form as the Redemption draws closer - its light is able to be accessed by us, even in our times.

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