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The Lesson from the Eitz HaDa'as: The Limits of Our Da'as

We have so far explained, with Hashem's help, the three main uses of the power of *da'as*, which are: "*havdalah*" (separating), *hachnaah* (deciding), and *chibbur* (connecting). Now we will explain the lower uses of our *da'as*.

The first time the Torah mentions *da'as* is by the "*Eitz HaDa'as Tov V'Ra*" (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil). When Chavah was tempted with the fruit of the *Eitz HaDa'as*, the Torah writes, "*And the woman saw that the tree was good for consumption, and that was desirable to the eyes, and that the tree was precious to understand.*"

There were three factors involved here: it was "good for consumption", it was "desirable to the eyes", and it was "precious to understand". Each of these three factors are a different facet of *da'as*. We will elaborate on each of these three aspects and how they apply to our own *da'as*, and the *avodah* that each of these three aspects implies.

(We are dealing with the *Eitz HaDa'as Tov V'Ra* [the *da'as* that was a mixture of good and evil] which contains the three kinds of *da'as* that we currently possess, and not the *Eitz HaDa'as Tov*, which was entirely holy).

The first point the possuk says about the *Eitz HaDa'as* was that "*The tree was good for consumption.*" What does this mean? How can you eat *da'as*? Also, Chavah saw that the "tree" was good to eat. What does this mean? Wasn't it the fruit that she wanted to eat?

The matter behind this is as follows. A tree is a root, while its fruit are what branches out from the root. To eat the "fruits" means to just experience the branches of the tree, which are spread out and separate. But to eat the tree "itself" means to experience the root of the tree – the actual tree. Chazal say that before the sin, the bark of a tree tasted like its fruit. The real taste was in the tree, which could not be eaten.

Thus, the essence of *da'as* itself cannot be "eaten"; only its "branches" can be tasted of. This is because there is a rule that the root of something is always hidden. To illustrate, the roots of a tree are underground and cannot be seen. This shows us that the "root" of a matter is supposed to be kept hidden.

The word "*eitz*" (tree) is from the word "*etzem*" (essence), which is from the word "*atzimah*", "closed", or hidden. This hints to us that the depth of the sin was that Adam and Chavah attempted to

go above their *da'as*: they wanted to taste of something that is supposed to be hidden. They wanted to get to the essence of things.

The Serpent told them that if they eat the fruit that they will be like Hashem. This was the depth of the temptation, and it was an evil desire. *Da'as*, by definition, is to reach the limits of where you are; when a person desires to go above this limit, such a desire is evil. *Da'as* cannot taste the essence of a matter; it can perceive until the essence, but it cannot reach the actual essence of a matter.

So when Chavah saw that the tree was good to eat, and she wanted to become like Hashem, she was attempting to use *da'as* to reach the essence, which cannot be done.

Good Da'as Is To Define Limits, Evil Da'as Is To Break Limits

The lesson we learn from this is that *da'as* is good when it helps a reach until his limits, and it becomes evil when a person is attempting to break his limits.

It is written, "*For no man shall see Me and live*" – the deeper meaning of this is that when a person wants to see Hashem through his *da'as*, the result is death, and that was the depth behind the curse of death.

Da'as represents limits. Hashem created the world with certain limits and boundaries. Limits are a force in creation; when a person wants to break the limits of creation, he resembles the sin of eating from the *Eitz haDa'as*, in which Adam and Chavah wanted to break their limits, so that they could go beyond human limits and enter the essence of things.

The Serpent is called "One who breaks the fences of the world"; the depth of the power of evil is that it attempts to break the rules that Hashem made. *Da'as* is evil when one is trying to break rules and limitations.

To give a deeper description of the concept, in the *Eitz HaDa'as Tov V'Ra*, there was "*da'as tov*" and "*da'as ra*" – good *da'as* and evil *da'as*. The "*da'as tov*" was the kind of *da'as* that allows a person to reach until his limits, while the "*da'as ra*" is when a person wishes to break the boundaries and go above them. So when Chavah desired to be like Hashem, it was not just a desire to be like Hashem - it is was, in essence, a desire to escape the rules.

The real kind of life, had they eaten from the *Eitz HaChaim*, would have been forever, because had they kept to the rules and only eaten from the *Eitz HaChaim*, they would have been fine. They would have merited the real kind of life, which is when the rules are kept. Instead, they desired to break their limits, so they ate from the *Eitz HaDa'as*, which they were told would break their limits.

They wanted to reach the unlimited, and the problem was, they were at the level of *da'as*, and one's *da'as* cannot break limits. If a person attempts to reach the unlimited through his *da'as*, this is evil. When a person lives within the rules, he is able to live properly.

Earlier, we described the concept of *havayah* (essence of a matter). The very *havayah* (essence) of each thing is really when it is kept to its boundaries. When boundaries are broken, a person cannot live properly. That was the depth of the curse of death; because they didn't want boundaries, death came to the world.

Now we can understand the depth of the ability of *da'as d'havdalah* which we addressed in the first chapter. Through using the power of *da'as d'havdalah*, a person is really able to keep to his limits.

What is "*da'as tov*" and "*da'as ra*" in our soul? *Da'as tov* is to seek to keep to the rules that are holy.

Da'as ra is the desire to break boundaries. Thus, trying to break boundaries through our *da'as* is called "*da'as ra*", evil *da'as*, and building boundaries from our *da'as* is called "*da'as tov*", good *da'as*.

Defining Limits of Everything

To be clearer, when a person wants to understand something, or how to get somewhere, or he would like to know something in general, part of the understanding is to know the limits and rules of something. Knowing the rules of something is not just another aspect of knowledge – it is the very definition of something. Everything is defined by its limits.

We see the limits of each thing by using our power of *da'as d'havdalah*. All of Creation is a tool to reach something, so everything has rules in how it is used. (The deeper essence of each thing is to see it as a revelation of Hashem. But we are addressing a more basic understanding of everything.)

If a person doesn't want something to have rules, that is called "*da'as ra*". Thus, the depth of the sin of the *Eitz HaDa'as* was that Adam and Chavah wasn't just that they wanted to break their limits. It was that they didn't realize that each thing has limits.

That was how Adam and Chavah desired to be like Hashem. It was because they didn't realize that the need to have rules. It wasn't just that they wanted to break rules – they didn't want to accept that there are rules. We are limited, and beyond the limits is Hashem, and that is why we need to have limits.

In every soul, there are two opposite abilities: The *Ein Sof* (Infinite) of Hashem is in our soul, but there are also limits in us. Our ability of *da'as* we have is essentially the tool which can hold all the spiritual light that we put into it. *Da'as* is thus the root of how we build our soul. Without *da'as*, there is no container in our soul to hold anything, and the light of the *Ein Sof* will then not be able to be contained in the person.

Therefore, a person must be aware that there are limits to each thing, and this in turn will further build his *da'as*. Through building one's *da'as*, a person is then able to become a container that will be able to hold onto the unlimited – the *ohr Ein Sof*, the Infinite Light of Hashem.

We see that when there are less limitations placed on people, there is chaos, and people come to fight with each other. There must be limitations placed on the abilities of our soul, or else each of the abilities in the soul will be in chaos, and when the soul of a person is in chaos, he gets into clashes with others, as a result of all the clashing inside himself.

Thus, nothing can exist without limits. The world needs limits, and the soul needs limits. To illustrate further, if a bottle holds 2 liters of water, and we don't know that the bottle can only hold 2 liters, any more water we try to put into it will not be able to go in. So we must know the limitations of something.

Da'as - The Key To Good Middos

"Good *middos*" are defined by keeping to the limits of each *middah*. For example, anger is not evil – it is only evil when it goes beyond its limits. *Middah* means "measured", because they are meant to be kept within their limits. *Da'as* is what enables *middos* to be kept to their limits. A "*bar da'as*", someone capable of *da'as*, essentially means someone who knows how to limit his abilities – when an ability in the soul needs to be used, and when it shouldn't be used.

Evil Da'as Is The Imagination

Now we can better know the difference between *da'as* and *dimyon* – the imagination, which we mentioned earlier.

The purpose of our *da'as* is to uproot our *dimyon*\imagination. The Sforno and the Vilna Gaon wrote that *Eitz HaDa'as Ra* (the evil in the *Eitz HaDa'as*) was essentially “*medameh*”, imagination. What is the connection with *medameh*\imagination and *da'as ra*\evil *da'as*? What do they have to do with each other? The answer is: *da'as* is about keeping to limits. *Da'as ra* is when *da'as* is used to break limits.

Thus, evil *da'as* is really the essence behind all *medameh*, imagination. The imagination in a person seeks to break limits. Imagination comes to compare and exaggerate, expanding something beyond its boundaries.

The inner essence of all holiness is called “*midas hishtavus*” (arriving at equilibrium)[\[1\]](#), and this is the holy way to use the desire to expand. This is also called the “*ohr Ein Sof*”, the Infinite Light of Hashem. But when the desire to expand is used for evil, it becomes *dimyon*\evil imagination, which seeks to break limits and rules of each thing.

The *Eitz HaD'aas Ra* was all about *medameh*, to imagine that the rules can be broken. Our “*da'as tov*” exists so that we can uproot *medameh*, and our “*da'as ra*” makes use of *medameh*\imagination and wants to break limits.

All evil in the world stems from the *Eitz HaDa'as Ra*, and since this is identified with *medameh*\evil imagination, the evil imagination is the root of all evil in the soul. Imagination is entirely the result of the desire to break limits. A person imagines what he can't do in reality. For example, a person wants to be in America, so he imagines he's there.

Imaginary Pleasure

Now we can understand the following. We mentioned it before and now we can understand it better.

Whenever a person has pleasure from evil, it always stems from imagination. When a person sins and he enjoys it, he doesn't enjoy the act itself; he enjoying a fantasy. It is written, “*Stolen waters are sweet*” – a person enjoys the feeling of the stolen pleasure, and what is stealing about? It is about breaking rules. So the pleasure in a sin is all about breaking rules.

When this power is used for holiness, it is the secret of true *oneg Shabbos*, in which a person can enjoy endless pleasure; as Chazal say, “Whoever has pleasure in Shabbos, merits a boundless inheritance.” The opposite of *oneg*\pleasure is *nega*\evil pleasure. When a person enjoys evil, his entire enjoyment is derived from the evil force of *nega*. The enjoyment of *nega* is essentially when a person has broken the rules, and that is the evil pleasure of the soul present in every act of sin. The breaking of the rules is the real feeling of the pleasure, and it is experienced through the garment of the imagination.

Now we can deeply understand what a person enjoys when he sins. The inner essence of the pleasure is the fact that he's breaking rules, and it is experienced through the imagination, which is like a garment that covers over the very essence of the evil pleasure.

There is good *taanug* and evil *taanug*. Developing our “*da'as tov*” establishes boundaries and uproots evil *medameh*.

(We are addressing evil *medameh*, not *medameh d'kedushah*\holy imagination. We do not want to uproot the *medameh* itself, for *medameh* can be used for holiness, as we know. We are trying to

uproot the evil use of *medameh* – the desire to break holy rules and limits).

What happens when a person connects to the *Eitz HaDa'as Ra* in his soul? It is when a person doesn't want rules, and that is what enables his evil imagination to get started. The *taanug* of *nega* (evil pleasure) is essentially the meaning behind the statement, "The Serpent breaks the fences of the world." The whole *tannug* in evil is when a person breaks rules.

Every person identifies with this: people love to break the rules. There is a certain *taanug* in it. To illustrate, when a child runs away from school, his pleasure is not just in the fact that he won't have the pressure of his studies anymore. The pleasure is in the very act of running away from school. He enjoys going free from his boundaries.

(When this power is channeled towards holiness, a person desires to connect to the *Ein Sof*, which is endless pleasure.)

Stopping Evil Imagination At Its Root

Thus, good *da'as* is about setting boundaries.

In one second, when a person forgets about limits and rules, he falls immediately into imagination! Chavah saw that "*the tree was good for consumption*" – as soon as she saw the tree and she forgot about her rules, she fell into her imagination. If a person would be aware of limits, he can't fall into imagination.

If a person wants to stop his imagination for evil, he might try to take apart his imaginative thoughts and weaken them in the attempt of trying to get rid of them; he tries to kill off each imaginative thought. This is a very difficult task, thus, it is not feasible to use.

We have to get to the root of the problem. One has to get out of his imagination entirely and return to boundaries.

Using Da'as D'Havdalah To See The Limits of Each Concept

In this way, a person is "*machria*" (decisive) in sorting out his imagination. Earlier, we spoke of *da'as d'hachraah*, but now we are returning to discuss *da'as d'havdalah*, and we will explain how it can lead to *hachraah* with regards to "deciding" not to listen to the imagination.

The role of *da'as d'havdalah* is to separate between the information that one's *chochmah* sees and the information that one's *binah* has compared. We already explained this earlier.

The lowest function of *da'as*, as we explained, is *havdalah* - to separate between *binah* (a real comparison) and *tevunah\dimyon* (imagination). One way to do this is by taking apart each *binah*-thought, such as by thinking: "Am I making a real comparison now to what I have seen in my *chochmah*, or is it just my imagination that is comparing?" This is what we described earlier. *Havdalah* is to see the similarities and the differences between A and B, and then to decide if they can really be compared.

Now we will take this further: we can use *da'as d'havdalah* to leave the vision of imagination entirely.

We can do this by returning to our *etzem* (essence), from the word *atzimas einayim*, the closing of the eyes. In other words, our imagination, which is a kind of vision (albeit mental), is what sways us. If we

leave the vision of the imagination, we return to the essence. Returning to the essence of something is how we leave imagination.

Thus, the way to use *da'as d'havdalah* to fix *medameh* is by realizing the boundaries of each thing, and this is how we return to the *etzem* essence of each thing, which is defined by its limits. So in each thing, realize what the limits are. The more you get used to seeing how each thing has limits, you escape evil imagination.

This is the depth of using *da'as d'havdalah*. Earlier we explained the simpler use of this power, which is to see differences and similarities between two thoughts. Now we are describing the deeper use of *da'as d'havdalah*: to realize the limits of each thing.

A Practical Way To Use Havdalah

It is hard to give a practical solution how to use this concept in defeating the imaginative thoughts of the *yetzer hora* when it comes to tempt you, because Chazal say that when the *yetzer hora* comes to a person and tempts him for evil, there is no *yetzer tov* present. So it will be very hard to summon forth this concept in your mind as actually you're being tempted by the *yetzer hora* do commit a sin.

I can give examples on how you can actualize this concept, but as for when you're actually being tempted, I cannot give an example that you can use to overpower the *yetzer hora*. Instead, you need to develop a kind of self-control already from before the difficulties comes. Here is an example of how you can do it (again, don't wait to work on this as you're being tempted, because then it will be pointless. Work on this before the *yetzer hora* comes to you).

We find that whenever the Gemara finds a contradiction, the Gemara asks, "What are we dealing with?" We see from this that a person should always ask himself what the limits are, when he encounters a contradiction. So we need to realize that our logic is only to be trusted in certain situations, thus we cannot always trust our thinking. This is how you can begin to see limits.

This is a solution that can help you attack the root of evil imagination. *Da'as d'havdalah* can take you out of mental "vision" (*re'iyah*) and enter you into a purely "intellectual" mode (*haskalah*) of your mind, and that is how you leave the view of the imagination.

Earlier, when we spoke of *da'as d'havdalah*, we addressed how to separate between two "visionary" kind of thoughts. You separate between what you actually saw and what you compared. But here we are describing the deeper use of *da'as d'havdalah*: by realizing the limits of something, you leave the mode of vision and you enter the realm of the intellectual, and this weakens the vision of your imagination.

To illustrate, we all look at the sky. Does it have an end? It seems to be endless. But Hashem created everything with limits, so nothing in Creation is endless. When a person looks at the ocean, does it have an end? It seems to be endless. Chazal describe the ocean as "an endless ocean", because when we look at it, it seems endless. But that's all based on our physical vision. It really does have an end, just, we can't see the end.

So our vision makes us see something endless, and that breeds evil imagination, the root of all problems. But when we seek the limitations and rules of each thing, we use our *da'as* properly - and that is how we escape evil imagination.

Da'as d'havdalah essentially serves to take one out of his mental vision (*re'iyah*) and into *hisbonenus*, reflection. This is the depth of *havdalah*: to separate between I **see** and what I **think**.

Chazal say, "A judge only sees what he sees"; there is physical vision, and there is mental vision (which comes from the heart). When you see the difference between what you see in front of you and what you think about what you see in front of you, and then you train your soul to differentiate between vision and intellect.

This is the depth of how *da'as d'havdalah* can fix your *medameh*. It takes you out of *Eitz HaDa'as Ra* - or evil *medameh* - and enters you into *Eitz HaDa'as Tov*. When you turn mental vision into intellect - and not intellect into mental vision - this is the root of fixing all problems in the soul. The root of all problems in the soul is when a person turns intellect\da'as into a mental vision. The root solution, then, is to turn mental vision into intellect.

Train yourself in that whatever you see, think about what its limits are; and then you will see through the *einei haseichel*, the "eyes of the intellect."[\[2\]](#)

Getting used to this uproots all *taavah* (evil desires) as well. Desire is a pull, and it is rooted in the element of water, which has a nature to pull. The pure intellect shows you the limits of something, which weakens the "pull" of the imagination on you. It takes you out of the "vision" you're seeing, and on a more general note, it helps you leave the mode of imagination entirely.

Defining Each Thing By Seeing Its Limits

This is a concept that affects our whole view on life as well.

"*Da'as tov*" is when we see the limits of things, and "*da'as ra*" is when a person wants to break limits, via the imagination. If we want to uproot the root of all inner evil in the soul - the *Eitz HaDa'as Ra*, or *medameh*, which seeks to expand past limits - we need to begin to see limits of each concept, and this will weaken the *da'as ra*, or our evil imagination, which is trying to get break rules.

The depth of a Torah scholar is not someone who gathers much knowledge about Torah. Rather, a true Torah scholar is always defining the concepts he learns about. Torah scholars are called "builders", and the depth behind this is that a true Torah scholar knows how to define the limits of each concept he comes across. He knows when and where something applies, when it doesn't. Anyone used to learning Torah in-depth identifies with the concept. A Torah scholar is someone whose entire life is spent on giving definitions to what he learns, and this is done by seeing the limits of each concept.

Thus, the good way to use *da'as* is to always seek to give definitions to something, which is by seeing the limits of each concept.

Again, we must repeat and emphasize that this advice is not something you can practically use to defeat the imaginative thoughts of the *yetzer hora* when it actually tempts you. Rather, it is a way to go about life, which gets you used to defining things, and with the more you get used to defining concepts, giving them their proper definitions and limits, it will greatly weaken the evil imagination (the "*Eitz HaDaas Ra*" in the soul) and prevent it from dominating in the first place.

When a person merits to weaken his evil imagination, this is the deeper meaning of "*And death will be swallowed up forever.*"

[1] A term mentioned in *Chovos HaLevovos*

[2] *Chovos HaLevovos*

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