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## Getting to Know Your Thoughts - 006 Higher & Lower Thought Modes

### ***Chochmah, Binah and Da'as***

In the previous chapter, we brought the words of the Vilna Gaon who lists five faculties of our mind.

There are others who describe our mind differently, and they instead break up the mind into three parts: *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. This is taken from the possuk about Betzalel, of whom it is written, "And I will fill him with the spirit of G-d, with *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*." We also ask in davening that Hashem "bestow upon us *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*."

This doesn't contradict the Vilna Gaon's description of our mind, who says that there are five parts to the mind. The Vilna Gaon is describing the lower part of our soul – the *nefesh habehamis*, the animalistic layer of our soul. He is also describing an animal's brain, which does not possess any *Da'as*. Only a person is called a *bar Da'as* (someone capable of *Da'as*). The Vilna Gaon lists the abilities of thought, memory, imagination, combination and protection – which are all abilities that an animal is capable of. But *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as* are exclusive to humans.

Sometimes we can find certain animals that have *Chochmah* and *Binah*, but never *Da'as*. A rooster is blessed with *Binah* to differentiate between night and day. But no animal is capable of *Da'as*; only a person can have *Da'as*.

We will now go through the faculties of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. Generally speaking, there are two methods how to understand these three parts to our mind. First we will give a little introduction that is the foundation of both methods, and after that with the help of Hashem, we will try to get down to the depth of these matters.

### ***Mochin D'Gadlus and Mochin D'Katnus***

A well-known concept brought in the works of our teachers is that in a person's mind, there are two different modes of thought. There is a higher mode of thought, which is called *Mochin D'Gadlus*, and there is a lower mode of thought, which is called *Mochin D'Katnus*. In each of them, a person is able to make use of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*.

To give a generic difference, *Mochin D'katnus* is a child's mind, who does not possess *Da'as*, while *Mochin D'Gadlus* is an adult's mind, who has *Da'as*. But such a definition of *Mochin D'Katnus* is really describing a much lower kind of thinking, the kind of thinking which the Vilna Gaon lists as one of the

seventy forces of the soul – abilities which exist even by animals.

*Mochin D’Katnus* of our discussion here is not that kind of primitive thinking. It is a lower mode of our thoughts, but it’s not that simple.

We are discussing a mature adult, who is a *bar Da’as*. The adult mind is comprised of three parts: *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as*. In these three abilities of our mind, we have times in which our mind is in a higher state (*Mochin D’Gadlus*) and times in which our mind enters a lower state (*Mochin D’Katnus*).

What is the difference between the two modes of thought?

A simple understanding of the difference is that *Mochin D’Katnus* is when a person’s understanding is simple without any depth to it, while *Mochin D’Gadlus* is to think with a more expanded kind of mind, such as being aware of conflicting opinions. This all true, but it doesn’t really bring out the concept. There is much more to it.

*Mochin D’Gadlus* and *Mochin D’Katnus* are really two totally different ways to think – they are two different systems of thought.

In the lower mode of thought, *Mochin D’Katnus*, we make use of *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as* as follows. *Chochmah* is what a person has learned from his teachers, *Binah* is when a person understands something else based upon the information, and *Da’as* is when a person decides to accept the information or not.

In the higher mode of thought, *Mochin D’Gadlus*, it is different. When a person uses *Chochmah* in the higher frame of mind, he sees something and sees the wisdom contained in it (like it is written, “*My heart sees much wisdom*”). When a person uses the higher *Binah*, he understands something based on what he sees, and when he uses the higher *Da’as*, he connects to the information; this does not involve deciding upon something, which is the lower kind of *Da’as*.

Connecting to the information, the higher kind of *Da’as*, is not the same thing as deciding, which is the lower kind of *Da’as*. A simple example of this is that a thirteen-year-old boy’s marriage is valid, but his marital union is invalid. This is really because a child lacks the power to connect – he is missing the higher kind of *Da’as*. In order to really be married, a person needs to be able to connect – the kind of *Da’as* that connects. “*And Adam knew Chavah.*”

These are two different uses of our *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as* – a higher mode, and a lower mode. Altogether we listed six different functions of our thinking (higher *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as*, and lower *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da’as*), and later we will add on another function of *Da’as*, which is called *Da’as d’havdalah* – the ability to separate information.

We will now attempt to understand these two modes of thought.

### ***The Higher and Lower Chochmah***

When a person is in the state of *mochin d’katnus*, the lower mode of thought, he uses his *Chochmah* to receive his way of thinking. He can’t think on his own, so from where does he know anything? From his teacher.

With *mochin d’katnus*, a person isn’t really thinking – he is just receiving his thinking. But with *mochin d’gadlus*, the person has matured into a state in which he is actually thinking.

Let's say a father is learning with his son; there are two ways how he can be teaching him. If he lowers himself to the level of his son and that is how he teaches him, this is the state of *mochin d'katnus*. But if the father raises the academic level of his son to his own level, he teaches him with *mochin d'gadlus*. Really, the point of teaching Torah to one's children is to bring him to a higher level of learning; the point is not that the father lowers himself to the level of his son.

The first kind of father only brings his son to the level of *mochin d'katnus*. The child never really thinks this way - he just receives knowledge. The second kind of father teaches his son and brings him to his very level; the son's learning will be *mochin d'gadlus*, because he sees the facts for himself.

We can compare this to a couple that leaves their family to go on a vacation to see the Swiss Alps. Their children, who were left home, have no idea what the Swiss Alps looks like, and they need their parents to describe it to them. The parents, though, don't have a need to tell about it for their own sake, because they don't have to - they were there already.

*Mochin d'gadlus* is to really see the information. When a person is actually in the wisdom, he sees it. When someone isn't in that place, he needs to be told of it in order to know about it - that is *mochin d'katnus* of *Chochmah*.

We have explained the higher *Chochmah* and the lower *Chochmah*, and the difference between them is vast. With the lower *Chochmah*, a person receives wisdom, but he isn't there. With the higher *Chochmah*, the person is actually there.

### **The Higher and Lower Binah**

Now we will describe lower *Binah* and higher *Binah*.

The lower kind of *Binah* is when a person understands something based on understanding another piece of information; he produces new information from what he has learned.

With *Chochmah*, a person just receives the actual information as it is; the *Binah* comes and produces from it new information.

In the higher kind of *Binah*, a person understands what he actually sees.

There is a big difference between lower *Binah* and higher *Binah*. In the lower *Binah*, a person is able to produce new information from what he understands, but he doesn't actually come into contact with the information. Only with the higher *Binah* does a person really get a feel on the information.

This is when a person is able to see or hear something and either agree with it or disagree with it; the lower *Binah* isn't capable of this.

Here is a big difference between the higher state of mind and the lower state of mind. In the lower state of mind, *Chochmah* is the knowledge that a person receives from his teachers, and it is unquestioned. "Whoever questions his teacher is like one who questions the *Shechinah*<sup>[1]</sup> [1]." The lower *Binah* is able to produce new information from the *Chochmah*, but it is basically expanding the already existing information - it isn't anything really new. In the lower state of mind, a person is just receiving information; he doesn't really get in touch with the information. He merely expands it; the *Chochmah* remains untouched, and all *Binah* is does is give it a picture.

In the higher mode of thought, it's the opposite: the *Binah* processes the information of the *Chochmah* and actually produces information from it. *Binah* is therefore considered by some to be a

higher power than *Chochmah*, because the *Chochmah* is only what a person sees and pictures, while *Binah* is the actual information he produces from what he has seen<sup>[2]</sup> [2].

### ***The Higher and Lower Da'as***

In the previous chapter we explained about two different abilities in our mind – to picture information, or to see it as intellectual knowledge. We learned that one must turn the picture into actual knowledge.

Now we will elaborate more on this concept. With the lower state of mind, a person first receives the knowledge on an intellectual level, and then he can give it a picture. But with the higher state of mind, a person receives the knowledge as a picture, and after that he intellectualizes it.

What this means is that in the lower mode of thought, although it seems as if the picture is coming before the knowledge, really the knowledge is preceding the picture. It just seems to be the other way around. In the higher mode of thought, though, it's not simply a picture – it is more of a mental kind of vision. This is known as “eyes of the intellect”<sup>[3]</sup> [3].

The difference between them comes to play as follows. In the lower mode of thought, *Chochmah* is what a person receives from his teachers, *Binah* is to picture that, and *Da'as* is to decide if the picture is correct or not. But in the higher mode of thought, *Chochmah* is to see the information, *Binah* is to understand the root of the information, and *Da'as* is to connect to the information. When a person uses the higher *Da'as*, he essentially connects to the *Chochmah*.

When a person is at the lower mode of thought, *Da'as* is simply to weigh out the information of the *Chochmah* and *Binah*, but there is no actual connection of the person to the information. It just spreads out the information more. Here, the person doesn't connect to the actual information – he just creates more information.

But in the higher mode of thought, a person really sees the information at its root. He understands it on his own, and thus he really connects to the information.

In the lower mode of thought, a person just hears the information, but he doesn't actually see it. He is able to understand what he hears and even add onto this, but his connection to it will be only to what he has formulated. He doesn't connect to the actual *Chochmah* he received – only to what he has produced from the information.

The higher mode of thought is when a person really sees the information, and thus he is able to really connect to it. We can see clearly that when people see something, they are able to connect to it better than when they just hear about it. When a person adds on his own understanding to what he actually sees, he is able to truly connect to the information.

This is the entire concept of the higher mode of thought, *mochin d'gadlus*. It is to actually live the *Chochmah*. The person sees the *Chochmah* – because he is there. He understands the root of the information, and he is thus able to connect to it in a deep way.

Someone who lives with the higher mode of thought has a whole different kind of thinking than one who is still at the lower mode of thought. When a person lives in the higher mode of thought, of him it can be said, “Say to wisdom, She is my sister”<sup>[4]</sup> [4].”

When a person connects to the information this way, he perceives the information as a very actual reality. He uses both a mental kind of vision as well as his own understanding, and from there he can come to have the higher *Da'as*, a total connection to the information.

When a person just sees the information but he doesn't understand it, he can only connect to it from his desires, which is a very low kind of recognition. "*The eye sees, the heart desires, and the rest of the body completes the act.*"<sup>[5]</sup> With desire, a person sees something, but there is no understanding involved. A person's desire isn't interested in understanding something – the desires just look for something tantalizing to the eyes to look at. When a person sees a picture with no understanding in it, he connects to it through his desire – which is a false kind of connection. But when a person has an understanding in what he has seen, he is able to truly connect to the information – this is the higher kind of *Da'as*.

"If the matter is as clear to you in the same way that you know that your sister is prohibited to you, you may say it, and if not, you may not say it."<sup>[6]</sup> When you are totally clear about what you know and see, you are able to connect to the knowledge.

In more simple words, the most perfect kind of mind we can achieve is to have a clear picture and a clear understanding of the knowledge. This enables a person to truly connect to the knowledge.

### **Real Pictures Vs. Imaginary Pictures**

With the higher *Da'as*, a person doesn't just see something as a picture, but he sees it as information. In this way, he is able to connect to the information. With the higher *Da'as*, a person also sees a picture, but he doesn't see it through his imagination; he is actually **there**.

There is a very big difference between seeing a picture through imagination to when a person actually sees the picture. Let us make this very clear.

With the lower mode of thought, the *Chochmah* is the knowledge that one receives from his teacher. The person receives a small kernel of thought, and from that the person is able to give it a more complete picture. How does a person do this? He compares one thing to another. When a person compares, he is really using imagination; *medameh*, which is to compare, also means imagination. When a person pictures information using his ability to compare this and that, he is forming a picture through his imagination.

But with the higher mode of thought, a person pictures reality, not an imagined picture.

This gives us a more subtle understanding to the concept we have been describing until now.

There are two ways to picture something in one's mind: through one's imagination, and through one's intellect. When it comes to physical sights, we all know what this is – sometimes we actually see something, and sometimes it was just in our imagination. Right now we are talking about how this can happen with our mind as well – there are things which we really see through our thoughts, and there are things which we aren't really thinking about, just imagining. This really brings out the difference between the higher and lower modes of thought.

When a person uses his imagination to picture something, he is only using the lower part of his soul (the *nefesh habehamis*), which only has in it the lower mode of thought (*mochin d'katnus*). Such abilities are found even in animals; the Vilna Gaon lists five abilities that are found in both people and animals, and two of these abilities are the abilities to think and imagine. Obviously, these are lower kinds of thoughts.

But a person can picture something through his actual power of vision contained in his soul; this is the higher mode of thought. When a person sees something this way, he sees the reality as it is.

These are both two very deep powers in our soul.

The Torah is described in the *possuk* as “black fire on white fire.” What this implies is that the Torah is really the source of all pictures in Creation.

Let us again stress the fact that we are speaking about the higher mode of thought, which is to see a real, existing picture. The lower mode of thought only sees an imaginary picture – the imagination is capable of coming up with all sorts of ideas that do not exist.

The imagination is made up of three abilities: *medameh* (imagination), *markiv* (combining different imaginative thoughts) and *shoimer* (protecting and retaining the imaginative thoughts). *Markiv* can come and combine two pictures that one has imagined in his mind, and it can also combine two different imagined ideas that do not exist at all. Both of these are abilities that our lower mode of thought uses.

But the higher mode of thoughts sees a picture by actually seeing it. It is a more intellectual kind of a picture. This kind of picturing is rooted in the Torah, the root of all intellect – which was given in “black fire on white fire.”

Of course, with the higher mode of thought a person can still see many different kinds of things, because there are many kinds of pictures. “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” Creation is full of many different pictures that are holy. But the root of all holy pictures is contained in the “black fire on white fire” of the Torah. Chazal say that seeing letters of the Torah makes one wise; there is a place in our soul in which we can actually see a holy kind of picture. This is the higher mode of thought in us.

There is an additional point which is very important to know. *Chochmah* and *Binah* are called “two friends that never separate from each other.” These two abilities are always connected.

This concept is only true with the higher mode of thought, and not in the lower mode of thought. In the lower mode of thought, a person doesn’t immediately understand what his teacher has taught him. But in the higher mode of thought, the person actually sees the knowledge, and thus he naturally thinks into it and understands it. In this way, the person lives the *Chochmah*.

That is why in the higher mode of thought, *Chochmah* and *Binah* are always connected to each other. In the higher state of mind, a person naturally understands the *Chochmah*; since he really sees it, he is naturally inclined to think into it and thus he comes to understand it. The *Chochmah* and the *Binah* here come simultaneously.

As we said before, this only applies to pictures that exist, not things that one imagines. Only through picturing something that exists can a person come to understand what he sees.

### ***Unifying Imagination With Intellect***

A person is called *adam*, which comes from the word *adameh* – “I will resemble”, which is referring to how we must strive to resemble the Creator. This is when we make use of our higher mode of thought. In the lower mode of thought, man is instead *medameh* – imagination.

In the higher mode of thought, a person is called *adameh*, because he resembles the Creator in that everything he pictures are for holiness.

We can see this very simply: a person can be sitting and imagining something, and afterwards he remembers that twenty years ago, he one time saw what he imagined, and it remained somewhere in his memory until now.

Really, it's not imagination, because it is something he actually saw one time, and it was retained in his mind (due to the mind's ability of *shoimer*). It just came to him through the imagination, but really it is a thought, because he actually saw it before. This kind of imagination is really the kind of imagination which we want to achieve more often – to imagine the facts.

We established that there are two ways to picture something – either through imagining it (which is through the lower mode of thought) or to see it through our actual intellect. **It is our mission now to unify these two abilities – we need to unify the imagination with our intellectual vision.**

### ***Fixing The Lower Mode Of Thought***

Let's say a person has succeeded in revealing his higher mode of thought. What happens to his lower mode of thought? Usually, it has been tucked away and has been pushed deep into the lowest point of the soul. We can see people who are very smart and mature, and they are far removed from imagination. Then the grandchildren come over to play – and the proud grandfather gets down onto the floor and plays with them. What happens when a person does this?

He knows that the child is living in imagination, so he wants to make him happy by getting involved in the child's imaginary world of playtime. He is well-meaning in doing so – he just wants to make his grandchild happy. But as soon as he plays with his grandchild, he returns back to his own inner child. He brings out his imagination again, which was long ago buried underneath him – and he returns to imagination.

Such a person hasn't really fixed yet his lower mode of thought. He has succeeded in overpowering it for a long time, by revealing his higher mode of thought – but we can compare this to a torch which blots out the light of a candle. When a torch is present, you can't see the light of a candle, but it's not because the candle is gone. If you blow out the torch, the candle will once again light up the room.

The point of what we are saying here is that many times, a person has indeed left his imagination, but it's only because he just buries it underneath him. It can always come back one day – it hasn't yet been removed.

We want to achieve something higher than this. What we want to do is fix the imagination totally, so that it doesn't come back again one day long after we have left it. In order to do this, we need to fix it up. We have to fix our lower mode of thought by using our higher mode of thought – in other words, we need to unify the imagination with a more intellectual kind of vision.

This is a description of an inner kind of life.

### ***Da'as - The Connecting Force***

*Da'as* is able to connect what is above to what is below.

About Betzalel, it is written, "And I will fill him with the spirit of G-d, with *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*." *Chochmah* is the knowledge, *Tevunah* is the imagination of the lower mode of thought, and *Da'as* is what connects the *Chochmah* and the *Tevunah*. There is *Da'as* which connects *Chochmah* and *Binah*, and there is also *Da'as* which connects *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*.

The higher *Da'as*, which connects *Chochmah* and *Binah*, is that a person sees and thinks into something on an intellectual level, and then he connects to it on a deep level. But then there is a lower kind of connection of the *Da'as*, and that is when the *Da'as* connects *Chochmah* with *Tevunah*. Here, the *Da'as* only connects the information only for the sake of leading to action, in the same way that Betzalel was blessed with special mental abilities to be able to do anything for the Mishkan. To

build the Mishkan, it was enough to use the lower kind of *Da'as* - which connects *Chochmah* and *Tevunah*.

There is a higher ability of picture, and there is a lower ability to picture. The lower ability to picture is rooted in imagination, and it uses the lower *Binah*. The possuk calls this "*Tevunah*."

The higher *Chochmah* is when a person pictures reality. It is an intellectual kind of vision. The lower *Binah*, which is called *Tevunah*, is imagination. The lower *Da'as* comes and connects the higher *Chochmah* and the *Tevunah* (which is the lower *Binah*), and turns the information into practical use.

The higher *Chochmah* is the real picture. This is the "black fire on white fire" of the Torah - a picture of what the reality is. *Tevunah* is imagination. If we want to make all this information practical in our life, we need to connect it all together.

If we just use imagination to do things, then we lower our power of *Binah* to mere actions. On the other hand, if we only use the higher power to picture, which is the higher *Chochmah*, this will be impossible to implement, because this earth we live on is called *adamah*, which has the same root as *medameh* - imagination. This shows us that we need to make use of our imagination also if we are to be practical.

How then can we get things done on this world, in a practical way? What we need to do is to shine our higher power to picture things onto the lower ability to picture things; we need to illuminate our *Tevunah* through our higher *Chochmah*. In this way, our imagination will receive a higher ability to picture things, and it will be able to affect our practical actions in a positive way.

### ***Our Mission - To Make Our Imagination Holy***

This concept is actually the secret that lies behind "holy imagination." The prophets were able to give envision a picture of Hashem. How did this work?

They would take the image they saw and give it a higher kind of picture. They did this by using the higher mode of thought - *mochin d'gadlus*.

When Hashem created man, He said, "Let us make man, in our image (*tzelem*) and in our form (*demus*)." This shows that a person has two ways to think: he has a *tzelem*, a form, which enables him to think in a higher mode; he also has a *demus* (image), which is the lower mode of thought - the imagination. A person when is born is naturally using *Tevunah*, and it is upon the person to "resemble Hashem" - *hevey domeh lo*. In other words, a person has to get his lower mode of thought to resemble the higher mode of thought - he has to get his simple imagination to have a real, intellectual kind of picture.

It is our mission here to combine these two abilities - the power to see something from our higher mode of thought, and the power to picture something from our lower mode of thought - and through this, we can solve our problem, the imagination. Through doing this, we can elevate our imagination and make it holy, and thus elevate ourselves from the level of *nefesh habehamis* (the animalistic part of our soul) to the higher part of ourselves.

### ***Above The Mind***

In order to complete the "picture" here, we will add on another step, which is higher. We will mention it, but we will not delve into this point.

Both modes of thought are somewhat materialistic and physical, but there is a higher power than this;



it is even higher than the higher mode of thought. This is an ability which is above the power to see something. It is beyond our mind's vision.

*"And wisdom is found in Ayin (nothing)"*<sup>[7]</sup>. The higher mode of thought uses our mental power of vision, but there is a deeper source to this. Our mental vision isn't the beginning. There is something that goes even above our mental vision. This is called *Ayin*.

We will not discuss *Ayin*, but in order to complete our discussion, we should at least know about it. To give somewhat of a description of it, we know that sometimes a person has to shut his eyes from seeing something bad. This is also an ability in our soul – the ability to withhold our vision. Even deeper than this is an ability in a person to shut his eyes simply for the sake of getting used to not seeing anything.

Here, a person doesn't see with his mind. There is a certain flow of information here that gets poured down to the person from above the mind; this was essentially the state of prophecy, in which the prophet saw a certain picture of the information. Another way how a person could see such a vision was through his intellect, and from the intellect a person can arrive at a picture of the information.

This is another discussion for itself: if the information is a picture coming from the intellect, or if the intellect is based on a picture. But we are not discussing this.

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[1] [8] Sanhedrin 110a

[2] [9] Eitz Chaim, Shaar 19.

[3] [10] Chovos HaLevovos

[4] [11] Mishlei 7: 4

[5] [12] Rashi, Bamidbar 15: 39

[6] [13] Shabbos 145b

[7] [14] Iyov 28: 13

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