



Published on www.bilvavi.net

[Home](#) > Getting to Know Your Thoughts - 007 In & Above Thoughts

Getting to Know Your Thoughts - 007 In & Above Thoughts

Entering The Reality Of One's Thoughts

In the previous chapter, we learned that there is a higher *Chochmah* and a lower *Chochmah*. The lower *Chochmah* is the knowledge that one receives from his teacher, and the higher *Chochmah* is to actually see the knowledge; this is like what is written, "*My heart has seen much wisdom*".

But there is another fundamental difference between the higher and lower *Chochmah*.

The higher *Chochmah* is when a person really **enters** the information he is thinking about. The Baal Shem Tov says that when Hashem told Noach to enter the Ark, it was a hint that a person needs to enter into what he says and thinks.

When a person has a real, inner kind of thought, it's really a way of entering the thought. The thought surrounds his whole essence, and it is like he is found inside his thoughts.

If a person thinks something but he is elsewhere, he isn't really connected to the thoughts. "*With his mouth and lips he honors Me, but his heart is far from Me.*"²¹ It's possible that a person is talking about something, but his heart isn't into it; he isn't there. Not only can people be disconnected from what they say, but there is also disconnection from the thoughts – when people think of something, but they aren't really there.

The Ramban and the Baal Shem Tov both wrote that a person is entirely found where his thoughts are. This is because a person enters his thoughts, and that is why he is found there. The thoughts are like our home which contain our essence. Where we think is thus where we are.

This is only true when a person sees the reality. If a person doesn't see reality, he is merely thinking about it, but he doesn't enter his thoughts. A person who doesn't see the reality of thoughts isn't really in his thoughts, because he doesn't view his thoughts to be his real place.

The Vilna Gaon writes that there are five parts to our speech: *ratzon* (will), *machshavah* (real thought), *hirhur* (passing thought), *kol* (voice) and *dibbur* (speech). *Hirhur* is a passing thought that is not part of our real thoughts, which are *machshavah*.

Hirhur is when a person just happens to be thinking, but it isn't a real thought. It is a superficial kind of thought. Most of the thoughts of people are at this lower level of *hirhur*, and perhaps even at a level lower than this.

If a person learns Torah all day but he isn't connected to it - he doesn't think about it - his learning is not using his real thoughts, but instead just passing, fleeting thoughts (*hirhur*); he hasn't entered his thoughts when he learns.

A true thought is the kind of thought in which a person enters the matter; this is the most basic level of real thought. If the person isn't really in the thought, then it's just a passing thought that isn't real - *hirhur*.

The Disadvantage To Entering The Thoughts

There is an even higher definition to what a real thought is: when a person is really thinking, he is in a different place.

In the basic definition we have given until now, we find such a concept to be a bad thing to a person. "*From afar Hashem appears to me.*"^[2] When a person thinks about a level that is too lofty for him, he is far from there. Such thinking is *hirhur*.

But there is a higher definition to thoughts in which a person is in a different place, but not because of the above reason. We will explain what this is.

Any thought that a person thinks of has certain rules and boundaries. Thoughts are based upon reality. We can compare thoughts to clothing, which has to be the right size to wear. If a person tries to wear clothing that is too small on him, either he won't fit or into it, or it will tear if he wears it. Thoughts are limited in the same way; they have to fit the rules of reality.

If a person is really thinking and involved in it, he enters it, and as a result, he limits himself to what he's thinking. Even if he's thinking about something very lofty, if his soul is at a higher level than what he's thinking about, he limits himself to the thought. What happens with this? The person lowers the level of his soul.

When a person thinks about something that is way above his understanding, he also isn't in that place where his thinking. That is not what we are discussing. We are talking about thinking of something which a person does understand; entering these thoughts can sometimes lower the level of the soul's understanding.

We can compare this to someone who gets on a flight that will last for ten hours. During the ten hours, he is limited to the airplane's boundaries, and he can't leave it. Although an airplane can fly way above the ground, the person inside it is very limited, because he is confined to the plane for ten hours.

When we realize that our thoughts are very real and not just like birds that fly in the sky, which are only passing – and we enter them as well – we limit ourselves to our thoughts. In such a situation, most of our thoughts are not thoughts that come from our soul; these thoughts limit us to what we're thinking about.

When we become limited, this bothers our soul. Just like a person can have palpable *emunah* (faith), so can a person have palpable thoughts and feelings. When a person has palpable thoughts and he enters them, he limits himself to what he has entered, and this causes one's soul to be bothered by the fact that it is confined.

If a person doesn't anyway consider his thoughts to be palpable and real, he doesn't see how thoughts make him limited. But when a person knows what real thoughts are, he feels how confined he is to his thoughts, and he feels a need to escape the confinement. We can compare this to someone who can't wait to get out of prison. When the soul of a person is bigger than the thoughts, the soul feels confined, as if it's in a prison.

Two Kinds Of Thinking

What do we do about this problem? What is the true way to use our thoughts?

Generally speaking, there are two ways how to really use our thoughts. We will explain the first way.

There are five layers in our soul: the *Nefesh*, the *Ruach*, the *Neshamah*, the *Chayah*, and the *Yechidah*.^[3] The parts in our soul which we use to think are the *Neshamah* and the *Chayah*. Our *Nefesh* is what we use for actions, and our *Ruach* is the source of our feelings. Our *Neshamah* and *Chayah* are used to think. The lower mode of thinking is through our *Neshamah*, while the higher mode of thinking is through our *Chayah*.

We will not discuss here what our *Yechidah* is. The *Yechidah* is above our thoughts. We are speaking about our power of thought, which has two parts to it: our *Neshamah*, and our *Chayah*.

The lower kind of thinking, *Neshamah*, is when we limit ourselves to what we are thinking. The higher kind of thinking, *Chayah*, is when we are able to be outside of our thoughts – when we give ourselves a space where we can escape outward from the thoughts.

The General Picture and the Details

We will make this matter clear in more simple words.

In every thought, there is the thought itself, as well as the source of thought. We can compare this to a river or a stream, which also has a source from where it flows out from.

A person can enter the actual thoughts, but to try to enter the source of thought is like stuffing it up. If a person tries to enter the source of thoughts, he limits it, and it blocks up the source, similar to how a well gets stuffed.

The source of the thoughts should not become limited to what a person is thinking. When a person thinks, he should be like someone who is standing on the side of something and sees it from where he is standing.

There is a way to see something from its inside, as well as a way to see from outside of it. When a person sees from the outside, this can be from either one of two reasons: either he is so far from the matter, or because his above it. The ability in which a person sees above the thoughts should absolutely not become limited to what a person is thinking.

The kind of thoughts that a person must enter into totally are the lower thoughts, which are the thoughts of the *Neshamah*. Such thoughts require a total immersion on the person's part, just like how a person has to be totally in the *mikvah*.

But the inner thoughts, which are the source of the thoughts, are not thoughts which you enter – they are thoughts which you see from above. Entering them only harms this power in our mind.

We need both abilities of thought – the outer thoughts (which are to be inside the actual thoughts), and the inner thoughts (which are above the thoughts).

If a person only knows how to be above the thoughts, he won't understand what's going on inside the thoughts. We can compare this to taking a picture from an aerial view – such a picture doesn't get all the details; instead, he gets a general picture. By contrast, if someone only knows how to be in the thoughts but he doesn't know how to be above them, he sees the details better, but he doesn't get the full picture.

When someone acquires both abilities of thought, he can see every last detail (each according to his own level) and he also gets a general picture of what's going on.

Thus, the inner thoughts – the source of thought, which is above the thoughts – sees details, while the outer thoughts see the general picture. If a person totally enters into the inner thoughts, he loses the inner thoughts and instead only receives the outer thoughts; he loses his very source of thought in doing so.

This affects our learning as well. When a person learns, there are two abilities we need to make use of: one ability is to enter the thoughts, and the other ability we need to use is to be above it at the same time.

With learning Torah, we can see this on a daily basis. A person is thinking about the Gemara, and he comes across a difficulty. He stops for a moment to think, and he looks at the Gemara from outside, and then after thinking like this, he returns to entering into the thoughts contained in the Gemara.

When a person learns a *sugya* in *Gemara* and he doesn't understand the many details, he goes back to the beginning and reviews it from the beginning. Why? A person knows that by going back to the beginning, he can start fresh and get a new understanding.

This ability in a person is essentially to return to our inner source of thought. The source of the thoughts is capable of giving us a new understanding of a matter. When our soul returns to this higher place, a new flow of thought is revealed, and through this a person is able to understand that which he didn't understand until now.

If a person is learning the *sugya* and he feels very lost in all the details, he feels like he can't think anymore. What is the solution for this? He should return again to the beginning of the *sugya* and start from there. This will give him a more general view of the *sugya*, and from there he can start again fresh to think into it. Slowly, more and more, he can reach his innermost point of thinking.

But what happens usually? Most people, as soon as they go back to the beginning, immediately attempt to think very deeply into the details of the *sugya*. (Whatever details they don't think into is not because they are using the inner source of thought, but because they are simply lazy to think deeply.) When people do this, they are only thinking in order to enter deep into the thoughts - and they lose the ability to be above thought.

This is how many people learn: they think into the details, again and again. When they feel like they can't think anymore, they go back to the beginning and immediately think deeply again.

This is the kind of learning which is very common, even among those who have merited to learn with tremendous dedication. Even if people aren't totally aware that this how they are learning, it is still taking place.

Don't Lose The General Picture

There is a deeper solution which can help one understand the *sugya*, and that is for a person to leave his thinking alone.

This is a very subtle point in our soul, because usually when people choose not to think into something, they end up spacing out. In fact, this is what happens to most people - when they are learning, they are not really applying most of their thinking, and they are thinking about all kinds of thoughts that have nothing to do with the Gemara. Their thoughts wander to all kinds of areas. One second a person is learning the *Tosafos*, and a second later he's thinking about something else totally unrelated....

We don't mean to discuss the problem of thinking extraneous thoughts. We are describing a power in our soul to be above the thoughts for good - a kind of thought which surrounds one's essence. We are saying that as a person enters his thoughts, there is a part in his soul which at the same can be above the thoughts and have a whole different view.

This ability in the soul is very subtle, and it is dangerous for someone to use if he isn't there. If

someone isn't there, and he tries to use this ability, his thoughts will just wander to all kinds of wrong places.

But if a person does reach this ability to be above thought, the fact that he doesn't think will actually give his thoughts room to expand. With the first ability of thought – to be deeply immersed into the thoughts – the whole concept of it is to be totally in it, and to leave the thoughts here is essentially spacing out. But with the second ability of thought – being above the thoughts – the person is outside the thoughts, and he doesn't enter into the thoughts.

The ability to be above thoughts is found by every person, each to his own level. We will give an example.

There are people who, as soon as they begin to learn the *sugya* and they read one line of Gemara, they immediately begin to think in-depth. Then they proceed to read the next line of Gemara, seeing if it fits into what they just discussed – and they find that it doesn't fit in to what they just thought about. We aren't discussing this kind of mistake.

A more sensible person first learns the *sugya* on a basic level, and he doesn't get into any questions or answers he has. He gets the general picture of what is going on in the *sugya*, and after that he goes back to the beginning and now thinks into it. This is like what Chazal say, "Learn it and then explain it."^[4] He first amasses the general information and is aware that it is only the beginning, and only afterwards does he begin to think. He uses all the information in front of him as a tool to get to the details that he uncovers through his thinking.

This is the lower ability in the soul to amass information, and it is revealed by almost everyone. Everyone clearly recognizes what this is.

What happens when a person enters into the details? He has built the details upon the general information, but does he remain with the general view on the *sugya* (which is above the details)? Usually not; this makes a person lose his source of thought.

But there is a more inner method to learn which is more truthful. This is to use both abilities at the same time: a person at the same time can be on the outside and on the inside of the *sugya*.

To illustrate this idea, there was a story with the Baal HaTanya, that one time he was learning with his son, and a baby in the house started to cry. The Baal HaTanya heard the baby crying and ran to go take care of him, while his son was so immersed in learning that he didn't even hear the baby crying. When the Baal HaTanya returned, he gave his son rebuke for not noticing that the baby was crying; he told his son that such behavior comes from *mochin d'katnus*, an immature state of mind.

What lesson was he trying to teach him? What is wrong with being so immersed in learning?

The Baal HaTanya too was immersed in learning, but he wasn't too immersed. He was able to be a little above the thoughts also as he learned, and thus he was able to hear what's going on the outside. The Baal HaTanya therefore rebuked his son for being too immersed in learning, because he felt that if you don't hear a baby crying because you are learning, it must be that you have lost your inner source of thought by being too involved in your thoughts.

There are two abilities in us to think - thinking of our *Neshamah*, which is to enter into the details, and thinking of our *Chayah*, which is to remain above the thoughts, the general picture of the information. Most people would hear a baby crying as they're learning, because they're anyways not so immersed in thought. But even when a person is immersed in his thoughts, he has to still be aware of what's going on in his surroundings - not in the simple sense, but rather because he has to make sure he doesn't lose his source of thought, which sees everything from above.

When a person learns Torah, he must make sure that his thinking isn't being confined too much to what he's thinking about. His thinking has to also come from his inner source of thought, which is to be able to see the general view of the *sugya*, like he's on top of it and seeing it all from above. Although a person has to think into the details as well, at the same time one has to make sure that it isn't affecting his senses and his ability to be above the details.

The Difference Between Higher Chochmah and Lower Chochmah

This inner source of thought, seeing the general picture of the information, is the perfected kind of *Chochmah* which we spoke about in the beginning of this chapter.

We explained that the lower part of the mind uses lower *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*, while the higher part of our mind uses higher *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. Lower *Chochmah* is the knowledge one receives from his teachers. With lower *Chochmah*, a person doesn't uncover the information from within himself; he has not yet arrived at his inner source of thought. He only has what he has heard from his teacher, and in that he immerses himself.

But the higher *Chochmah*, which is to actually see the wisdom, comes from an inner source. "*Wisdom comes from ayin (nothingness).*" Since this is so, if a person constricts himself to what he is thinking, he loses his source of thought.

This is really the huge difference between lower *Chochmah* and higher *Chochmah*, and now what we spoke about in the beginning take on greater clarity.

Higher *Chochmah* sees the actual information. If a person constricts his higher *Chochmah* to what he's thinking, he loses the inner source of thought. Lower *Chochmah* does not come from the source of the thoughts, so it doesn't constrict the soul when a person is immersed in it.

Allowing The Thoughts To Expand

These two abilities - the inner thoughts and the outer thoughts - are supposed to give us a whole different way of living.

For example, there are people who always learn Torah whenever possible, but only from a *sefer*. Such a life limits a person to only think when he has a *sefer* in front of him. This is a total confinement to the soul.

There is a better way to learn, and that is if a person gets used to thinking even when there is no *sefer* in front of him (and even when he has a *sefer* in front of him, he should also learn to think outside the *sefer*), and then his thinking isn't limited to the words he sees in the *sefer*. But the person still has a disadvantage, because he is still using his memory to remember what he has learned, and this still limits his thinking to the words he saw. Even if he's not limiting himself to the actual words he read, he is still limited to whatever details he gathered until now.

But there is a deeper way to learn: a person should allow his thoughts to expand.

This method is dangerous for someone who isn't involved in learning Torah, which are deep thoughts. If a person doesn't think about matters that have to do with Torah, who knows where his thoughts will wander off to? But if a person lives deeply with the Torah and he wants to make sure his thinking isn't becoming limited, he has to allow his thoughts some space to expand.

When a person accesses this inner source of thought, he will slowly begin to see all the details more and more, in a whole different manner than before. The view from above the thoughts can shed a whole new light on the details.

Emotions Muddle The Thoughts

Sometimes, two friends meet each other by a wedding. If they are really close to each other, they might hug and kiss. What happens when they kiss?

They become so full of emotion, and as a result, each of them becomes so focused on the other that their thoughts become narrowed. It seems like a harmless act, and that they have merely lost their ability to think for few moments because they have become so emotional and filled with love for each other. But really they are each losing their ability to think properly when they do this. If a person reaches a situation in which he can't think properly, he loses his inner source of thought.

The same thing can happen if two people are learning with each other. They become enthusiastic in the learning with the "heat of Torah", and they feel intense closeness to each other as a result. But this closeness can actually limit each of their thinking and constrict their thoughts.

Of course, we have to "wage war" in learning Torah, but everything has its place and its rules. We must make sure that we never lose our source of thinking.

The Two Parts To The Neshamah

The book *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that part of our *Neshamah* resides in our brain, and part of it is on top of the brain. The main part of the *Neshamah* is on top of the brain - it is not inside the brain. The radiance that comes out of the *Neshamah* is what is found inside the brain.

A person is able to make use of the higher part of the *Neshamah*, which is above his mind, and use it to be able to see details. It is a much more inner kind of view on things, even though it is a view from the outside of the mind. It is not that the person is seeing it from the outside in the superficial sense. It is instead that a person can get a better view to what's going on the inside of the thoughts by viewing them from the outside.

Sometimes a person is learning and he comes to a question which he cannot answer. What can he do? He should leave the thoughts and go above the thoughts - the source of the thoughts.

Using Both Abilities At Once

All the time, we need to make use of both abilities at once – to be immersed in the thoughts, but to be outside of them at the same time. We need to be in the *sugya* as well as to be on the outside of the *sugya*.

“I have seen those who ascend, but they are few.”^[5] Those who truly grow high in their service to Hashem have in them a first floor and an upper floor, so to speak. A person through his thoughts is able to live in both at the same time.

Usually we think that those who “ascend” in service of Hashem are people who strive always to grow higher spiritually, and this is true. But there is more depth to it. Spiritual growth is really to use the two abilities of thought at the same time. On one hand, a person explores the details of something, but on the other hand a person can live in on an upper floor and see from above. These are two different ways to look at everything.

With these two abilities, a person is able to view the Jewish people as a general whole, as well as in detail. The balance between the two views depends with each person, but the point is that we have both of these abilities.

When a person lives like this, he will find that he doesn’t want to become limited to his private life.

For example, the world will last for six thousand years. Most people only think about their own private lives. How can a person think about the Jewish people as a whole, and about our six thousand year world?

On one hand, there is a well-known statement of the Vilna Gaon that when a person learns Torah, he must think that there is nothing else in his world except today, right now, and the page of Gemara he is looking at. This is really describing the lower power of thought in our soul, in which a person can become totally immersed in thought.

But on the other hand, there are higher thoughts which we must uncover. This is the meaning of realizing how this world will last for six thousand years – we must realize that besides for the page of Gemara in front of us, there is a six thousand year world – in other words, we should recognize that the Torah is very vast and goes beyond the current moment.

These are two opposite forces within us: higher thought and lower thought. If a person only uses the higher thoughts, he usually will lose the power of lower thought, which was what the Vilna Gaon described. A person who is truly involved in spiritual growth knows how to use both abilities.

This is essentially the two different kinds of *Chochmah* which we spoke about earlier: on one hand, a person is able to be very immersed in the details, but a second later he is able to live in the general view which is not detailed. These are two places in the soul. Even in the details, a person is able to find a place in the soul where he can see the details from the outside.

These two abilities need to be balanced, in life in general, and in learning the Torah. Each person is different in how much balance between them is needed.

When a person learns Torah, first he gathers together all the details. Sometimes we can find people who are very bright in their Torah knowledge, and they know how to connect together different parts of Torah, which at first glance seem to be unconnected. From where does this ability come from?

If a person only sees details, he only knows how to compare information. But when a person reaches the view from the inner source of thought, he can connect all the details in the Torah.

Living With the Inner Source of Thought

The words here are not close to home by many people, and this is because most people are not thinking enough about Torah thoughts. But know that the whole essence of the Torah life is to think in Torah.

If a person isn't involved in learning Torah and he attempts to become a more thinking person, he will fail.

But if a person takes his thinking and brings it into the world of Torah, he will eventually be able to uncover a new kind thinking – the inner source of thoughts, which is above the thoughts. These inner thoughts will penetrate into his regular thinking, and it will be like a revival of the dead. Just like Hashem will revive the dead in the future with dew, so is there a spiritual dew in our souls which can revive us – the thoughts of Torah.

Only through first thinking in Torah can it become possible for a person to build up his world of thought and uncover a constant inner source of thought.

Inner Silence

Now we will come to complete the picture of this discussion.

There is a concept known as “*klal, perat and kelal* – general rule, exception, and general rule.” First, there is a general rule that leads us to a specific thought, and from there we can arrive at a higher kind of general idea.

In our soul, a person can reach this when he finds within himself a place that is above thought. Chazal call this “a time of desolation”. It is a place in a person in which he reaches a total inner silence. From this inner silence a person is able to arrive at a greater view of something, and from there he can enter even more inward.

This is the goal of building up our minds. “*Wisdom is found in ayin (nothingness).*” *Ayin* is when there is “nothing” going on. On a more basic level, *ayin* is when a person first sees the general picture of something without the detail, just its basic rules. Even lower than this level is when a person goes into the details, all the way until the last detail.

To give the complete picture, the lowest level of our thoughts are the details; higher than this are the general, undetailed rules that our thoughts see, and higher than this is the point of *ayin* in the soul, which are the inner thoughts that are above thought. Higher than that point is *d’veykus* (attachment) in Hashem.

That is the complete structure to our minds – not just in the mind itself, but above the mind – all the way to the inner source of the mind.

Sensing The Reality Of One’s Thoughts

The concepts here can only work if a person aware of the world of thought in a palpable sense.

When a person has palpable thought, he lives with clarity of what he is thinking. This is when a person realizes that just like he can leave one room and enter into another, so are there different rooms in his thoughts in which he enters and leaves.

The description we have been describing until now is essentially about leaving one kind of thought in our minds and entering a different kind of thought, all the way until the place in our soul that is above

our thoughts. These are not merely intellectual discussions, but something which our thoughts can experience in a very real sense.

Rav Chaim Vital (in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*) points out that a person shouldn't disregard his various thoughts as nothing important, because thoughts are the way a person becomes close to Hashem. Thought is a palpable reality, and he even writes that there are birds that can become born through looking at an egg and thinking about it!

We need to absorb this concept: thought is something that is a very palpable reality. After knowing this, we can actually begin to see the movement of our thoughts.

It's two steps. First we need to realize that thoughts are a reality, and then we need to realize how to direct them and work with them. But just because we have the first step doesn't mean we have the second step. A person might know that he has a machine, but that doesn't mean he knows how it works.

It is absolutely necessary for us to consider thoughts a palpable reality if we are to understand any of the concepts here. Only after digesting this fact can we proceed to work on directing our thoughts.

Thoughts move. Just like a person has no rest if he wanders from place to place, so does constant thought disturb one's peace of mind. Our minds need some rest. What we have been describing until now is how to move our thoughts and how to bring them to rest as well. When we think into details, we rest the mind by thinking about the general, undetailed picture. When we think about the general picture, we rest the mind by not thinking at all, *ayin*. Finally, we put our *ayin* of the mind to rest when we connect to the Creator.

All of this is an inner language which cannot be expressed verbally to its full impact. These are heart matters, which cannot really be described by mouth. But these matters are absolutely real, no less real than the world we see. In fact, they are even more real than the physical world we see. When a person realizes this, he can use his thoughts to achieve utter calmness, and from there he can connect to Hashem.

[\[2\]](#) Yirmiyahu 31: 2

[\[3\]](#) Devorim Rabbah 2: 37

[\[4\]](#) Shabbos 63a

[\[5\]](#) Sukkah 45b

Source: <http://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-thoughts-007-above-thoughts>