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Three Ways How We Use Our Thoughts

In the lower mode of thought (*Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*), the person thinks in order to be practical.

The higher mode of thought (*Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*) isn't about any action; it is all about thought. An example of this what the Gemara says that although a *ben sorer u'moreh* will never happen, we should learn it anyway and receive reward for learning about it. Usually, the rule is that "Learning Torah is great, for it brings one to action", but *ben sorer u'moreh* is the exception to this rule; here, a person learns about it even though it won't lead to anything practical.

Generally speaking, there are two reasons why a person thinks: either a person thinks in order to be practical, or a person thinks for the sake of thinking.

On a more subtle note, the higher mode of thought isn't practical because it's all about wisdom. It is not only about things that won't be practical, but it is about things that have nothing to do with action at all. An example of this would be the *korbonos* that were brought by Har Sinai; if we learn about this, we aren't learning about anything that is practical, and we would be learning it just for the sake of seeing the wisdom in it. There are also concepts which never happened and never will happen; to learn about such concepts is the higher mode of thought.

The middle level of thought involves the higher *Chochmah*, *Binah* and *Da'as*. These are thoughts about concepts that can happen but don't always happen, such as *ben sorer u'moreh*.

The lowest use of our thoughts is when we think only in order to do something. An example of this is what the Ramban writes, that when a person gets up from a *sefer*, he should think how he can apply this to his practical life.

These are the general three kinds of uses of our thoughts.

The Lower Thinking Is All About Actions

We will now expand upon this discussion.

People, since they were young, usually think only in order to do something. But really, to think just in order to fulfill an action doesn't really use a person's thoughts so much. A child does things quickly; it is not necessarily because he has *zerizus* (alacrity), but it is because since he doesn't yet know how to think, all he knows of is actions.

Children often live in their imagination. A child thinks often that he did something simply because he thought about it. Why? The simple understanding of this is that children have a high amount of fantasy in them; that is true, but along the lines of our discussion, it is because of something else: a child only thinks when he has to do something. In a child's mind, thought and action are synonymous. His whole thinking is on the level of actions, so if he thought that he did something, he believes that he really did it. Since a child never pauses to think, he thinks that he did anything he imagined.

As a person matures, he learns how to think and he doesn't act so fast. He becomes aware of his imagination, because he realizes that sometimes you have to stop and think before you do something. He is able to differentiate between what is a thought and what is a fantasy, and he knows that not every thought or fantasy can be translated into action.

This is because the mind has matured, and it is no longer bound to actions. When the mind of a person matures, he learns that there are thoughts which lead to practicality, and there are thoughts which don't. For this reason a person realizes that he has to pause a little before he does something and think before he does it, and that not every thought has to lead to acting upon it. A person discovers with this that there are two steps to thought - first comes the thought alone, and then comes the thought which leads to action (or not).

This is essentially the difference between an immature mind and a mature mind. A child, whose mind is immature, doesn't differentiate between thought and action; it is not because he is on a high level in which his actions have been elevated to the level of thought, but it is rather because his thinking isn't properly developed yet. As a person gets older and matures, he becomes aware that there are some thoughts which don't always lead to action - not always because it isn't practical to act upon,

but simply because it's a thought for the sake of thought alone.

The simple example of this is that when a person lives based upon his imagination, he thinks that he can do anything he imagines, like a little girl who sees a doll in the store and wants it so badly that she imagines she already has it. In the world of imagination, a person thinks that every thought needs to happen.

As a person matures, he realizes that he can't do everything he thinks and imagines, and that there are things which hold him back. He slowly learns that you have to think before you do something.

Thought Is Not Just A Tool To Get By With

Even as people mature, they still don't think enough. Although people learn that not every thought leads to an action, they're still thinking that thoughts are all about either action or no action. People usually view thoughts as a tool to know just "what to do" and "what not to do".

Many times we hear adults, who are mature, who react in such a way upon hearing a lofty concept: "Okay, so how is this practical?"

If the person doesn't see how it's practical, he says, "I'm not a philosopher; this doesn't interest me. What does this have to do with me? It's pointless...maybe there are people who love philosophy, but I'm not a philosophy lover."

Or maybe he thinks, "This stuff is for people who can't live in the real world, so they run away into their thoughts."

Sometimes this is true, and it is possible that a person is living in his mind all day because he'd rather not be on this world. But there is a place in our soul which is an ability to think simply for the sake of thinking.

We will give a simple example to explain what we are getting at. There are four elements in creation: fire, water, wind and earth. Fire burns, wind moves, water sustains and so forth. If a fire isn't causing something to burn, does that mean it doesn't exist? It exists, independent of what it does. Even if it's not performing its function, it still exists. If you have water in a cup which you're not going to drink, the water still exists.

The same can be said of our thoughts. When a person is still at the lower state of mind, he doesn't think for the sake of thinking, but only in order to get something done. At this level, a person considers his thoughts to be a mere tool to use, just like we need gas to cook; he knows that just like he needs to put on his shoes in the morning and get on a bus, so must he think in order to accomplish things.

A more spiritual kind of person considers thoughts to be a more pristine kind of tool he has, a spiritual kind of tool. But even such thinking is still only using the thoughts to get actions done. This attitude still will not help a person reach the true level of thought.

To summarize, there are three ways how we use our thoughts. One kind of thought is when we think into what we're doing. A second use of our thoughts is when we think in order to do something. A third use of our thoughts is when a person thinks only for the sake of thinking. Now we will sharpen this discussion.

The Lowest Level: Focusing On What You Are Doing

What we are getting at from all of this is that while a person is doing any action, the question is where his thoughts are. There are three possibilities. A) Is he thinking totally about what he is doing? B) Is he thinking about the purpose of what he is doing? C) Or are his thoughts a little above what he is doing, even as he does it?

There is an even lower level which we aren't discussing, and that is a person who never thinks at all. This is called *melumadah* (by rote), and it is also called *misasek* (unaware). We aren't discussing such a disconnection. We are discussing someone who does think while he does something, and the only issue is where his thoughts are.

A person who only has an immature, undeveloped kind of thinking gets too involved in what he does, and he doesn't think about why he is doing it. Such a person tends to act as soon as he thinks upon it.

Although it there is a holy power in the soul to be calm and to not think about what will be, this power can be used for evil when a person is at the immature state of mind.

A toddler doesn't think if tomorrow he will have to go back to playgroup, and he just does whatever his mother says to do. He doesn't think about tomorrow because he doesn't know what it means to worry; he doesn't go to work to earn a livelihood. This is not because the toddler has a high level of Bitachon – it is simply because a toddler doesn't ever think about what will be. A child only thinks about what he does now.

When a person gets older and matures, often his thinking remains the same of when he was a child – he only thinks about the future when he has to. There are even some people who never think at all about tomorrow, and such people keep buying things as long as they know there is money in their bank account. They only think about the present moment: “Now, I want something.” And what will be with tomorrow? “Hashem will help...”

When a person’s thinking is immature, he only thinks as he does something, but he never thinks as a way of planning ahead. He only knows how to focus on the present moment – he’ll only think for something that he to do with the present; beyond this moment, he simply doesn’t ever think about.

The Middle Level: Thinking About The Goal

When a person gets older and his mind is a bit more mature, he learns how to think ahead of time. He not only thinks as he does something, but he thinks before he does something and what will come of this.

But even if a person always thinks how he can make his thoughts practical, he never really makes use of his thoughts, because he is only living for this world of action. He only thinks in order “to do.” Such a person might do everything in order to get reward in the next world, but he still lives for this world of actions. Everything he does is all about what he will get out of it.

The Highest Level: Thinking For The Sake of Thinking

But when a person reaches the higher state of mind, *mochin d’gadlus*, a person is able to use his thoughts just for the sake of the thought, and not just to get something done.

This was the kind of mind that existed before the sin of Adam. The mind which we received from the evil *eitz haDa’as* was that now, people only think in order to do something.

Adam was cursed with labor. The depth of the curse was that when a person has to work, he only thinks in order to work, but he never thinks just to think. He only thinks when he has to, like when he has to take care of something that has to get done.

The simple meaning of the curse was that we were cursed with having to work to make a living, but the depth of the curse was that our mind became lowered to the level of action. After the sin of Adam, a person only thinks only if he should do something or if he shouldn’t.

But there is a higher state of mind which existed before the sin, in which a person simply thinks with no action involved. The Jewish people returned this level at the giving of the Torah, but then we fell from it once again by the sin of the Golden Calf.

The Perfect Way To Act

There are three levels whenever we do something.

One kind of person does an action, and as he does it, he is thinking totally into it. This is the lowest kind of thinking.

A second kind of person isn't that caught up in what he does. He thinks into what will come out of what he is doing, and in this way, he isn't totally into the physical act of what he's doing. That is the middle level.

The highest level is when a person's thoughts are connected to a point that is above what he does, even as he does it. Here, the thoughts are in the upper realms, while his actions are being done down here.

Really, all three kinds of thoughts need to be present when you do something. We are, after all, not living in a world above action – we live in a world that involves action. But when we do something, we should be having three kinds of thoughts going on: thinking about what you're doing, thinking about the goal of what you're doing, and thinking about above what you are doing – which is really to think about the reason behind why you're doing it. On a more subtle note, the last kind of thought means to be connected to the upper realms as you do something.

We are not simply coming to discuss three kinds of thoughts in our soul. We have a question which we must ask ourselves: What are we thinking about as we do anything?

When a person does a *mitzvah* and he is only focused on what he's doing, it's his own private *mitzvah*. That is the lowest level of thought.

The middle level of thought is when a person is aware of the purpose of the *mitzvah* as he does it. Such awareness enables a person to connect everything he does into one collective unit – he is

connecting all of Creation. Of him it can be said, “The *mitzvos* were not given except to connect all creations^[1].”

The highest level of thought is when a person’s thoughts are connected to a point that is above the action.

This is essentially the difference between the actions of a Torah scholar and an ignoramus. An ignoramus is called *am haaretz*, because he is on the “earth” – in other words, all he thinks about are about actions that have to do with the world. But a Torah scholar turns action into thought. He is above the actions, even as he does it.

These are the three kinds of thoughts that need to be present as we do something: to actually think about what you’re doing, to think about the goal of what you’re doing, and to think about the reasons and roots behind what you do (even if this doesn’t end up being actualized).

These three parts to our thoughts are all necessary. A person should not, Heaven forbid, only carry out the higher thoughts while not carrying out the lower thoughts.

The perfect kind of *mitzvah* a person can do is to have these three kinds of awareness as he does it. A *mitzvah* has to be done with all its requirements (*dikduk*) and for this reason, a person must be focused on what he does. If not, he doesn’t fulfill it. In addition to this, he must know what the definition of the *mitzvah* is, to know its many details. Finally, a person must know the root reason of the *mitzvah*.

These three kinds of awareness together are the perfect kind of action, especially when it comes to the *mitzvos* we do.

Wisdom Gives You Vitality If You Are Above The Thoughts

Another way of describing what we mean is as follows.

The thoughts are located in our brain, which is in our head. The actions we do are carried out by our hands.

When a person only thinks in order to do something, he is kind of lowering his head to a lower place in his body – his hands. It's like being without a head, because all he focuses on are his hands. We can compare this to Esav about whom it is said, "And the hands are the hands of Esav." Esav has no head, so to speak, (and this can also be why his head was cut off when he died.) Esav also embarrassed the first-born rights, because he didn't view it as anything practical that would help him in worldly affairs.

A person has a head, as well as the rest of his body. When all a person thinks about is action, he is like a person without a head. Someone without a head is dead. But when a person reaches the higher thoughts, his thoughts are above the rest of his body – and he is above that "death".

The higher thoughts are what is written in the possuk, "*Wisdom sustains its owner*^[2]." When a person has thought, he is sustained, but if he has lowered his thoughts to the level of thinking only for action, it is like death.

The higher thoughts are when a person makes sure that his thoughts are above what he does. Let us stress again that we do not mean, Heaven forbid, that a person's thoughts should **only** be above the actions. Of course not! What we mean is that a person still has thoughts even as he does something, and he is clearly focused on the goal of what he is doing – but he is **also** a little above the actions. A person who lives this way will be living in a world that is full of life.

When a person only thinks in order to get something to do, he is only living on this world of action, which is a world full of death. But when a person learns how to connect his thoughts to a point that is above the actions, he is above this world of action, and it is there that he can really experience what life is.

The Basics of Focusing

A fundamental rule is that a person should never think two things at the same time. When a person thinks two things at once, he is scattering his thoughts around.

If a person is still at the lower thoughts, *mochin d'katnus*, that is clear. You can't think two different thoughts at once about what you're doing – if a person does, he is totally disconnected.

But when a person thinks also before he does something and what the goal is, there is no concern of this, because this is not thinking two things at once – it rather a combination of action and thought. When a person thinks about why he is doing something, he is not thinking about two separate things – he is actually more focused on what he's doing.

At the beginning stage, a person is only at the lower thoughts, *mochin d'katnus*. A person has to first make sure before anything that he is only thinking about one thought at a time. Therefore, the very step one must take is to make sure he's really focused in what he's doing.

After this a person must learn how to think about the goal of what he's doing. The final step is to know the reasons behind what you do.

In different terms: there are thoughts about our goal, and there are also the reasons behind why we're doing it.

Two Kinds of Comparisons

Before we explained that there two different kinds of *Chochmah*, *Tevunah*, and *Da'as*.

In the lower thoughts, there is no *Binah*, just "*Tevunah*." There are two levels in this: higher *Tevunah*, and lower *Tevunah*. In lower level, a person has *Chochmah* and *Tevunah* only in order to do something, and his *Da'as* decides if he should do it or not. In the higher level, a person uses *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as* as a means to achieve something.

Now we can understand better the difference between the two kinds of *Tevunah*, which are two different ways how a person compares information.

What is the difference between the lower *Tevunah* and the higher *Tevunah*? The higher *Tevunah* is to see the intellectual information through making a comparison, while the lower *Tevunah* is to compare actions.

In the lower kind of *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*, a person thinks entirely about what to do. Thus, he only compares actions. But with the higher kinds of *Chochmah*, *Tevunah* and *Da'as*, a person compares the knowledge he received from his teacher to another kind of knowledge. (This also has to do with action, but the person is focused on the actual knowledge, not the action).

This is not only a different kind of *Tevunah*, it is also a different kind of *Chochmah*.

The lower kind of *Chochmah* is to receive how your teacher acts. How is a person receiving this

knowledge? When a person is at the lower level of thought, he only receives actions of his teachers – he sees how his *Rebbi* acts. He focuses more on the way and expression which his Rebbi gives it over in, not on the actual knowledge itself.

In an extreme case, a person will copy his teacher like a parrot and he just never thinks. If he sees his Rebbi going somewhere, he just follows him. It can get to the point that he is doing blind acts of loyalty, nothing that involves any thinking whatsoever.

But with the higher *Chochmah*, a person thinks into what his teacher does, and if he understands it, only then does he act like him.

We can give an example that brings out the difference between the two. Two people are listening to a *shiur* (Torah class). One closes his eyes and listens deeply, because he is focusing on the wisdom contained in the *shiur* of his rebbi. The other person looks at his *rebbi* giving the *shiur* and focuses on how his rebbi looks as he gives the *shiur*...such a person won't be able to hear the tape afterwards, because he needs to see his *rebbi* speaking; it is not enough for him that he is hearing the *shiur*.

The second kind of person never thinks. He is the type of person to want his *rebbi* to always explain to him exactly what to do in every situation, because he doesn't want to think on his own.

The first kind of person is using the higher thoughts, which is a mental kind of vision. These are called "eyes of the intellect." The second kind of person is at the lower thoughts – he only understands something when he pictures it very well.

The higher *Tevunah* is to compare knowledge, while the lower *Tevunah* is to compare pictures. With the lower thoughts, a person uses his *Da'as* just to compare the pictures.

The lower *Tevunah* is like giving a child two pictures and asking him to find the differences. The higher *Tevunah* is not like this; in the higher *Tevunah*, a person also compares, but he is comparing actual knowledge, such as comparing two similar *halachos* and trying to decide if they are the same or not.

To wrap up this discussion, in the higher thoughts, *Chochmah* is not just about what one has received from his teachers. It is to actually see from one's soul – and the soul can really see everything. The higher *Binah* is to see the whole general information as details upon details. The higher *Da'as* is to really connect to the *Chochmah* and *Binah* together. Higher than this is the kind of *Da'as* in which a person connects to the Creator.

[\[1\]](#) *Beraishis Rabbah 44:1*

[\[2\]](#) *Koheles 7: 12*

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