



Tefillah - 053 Living A Life of Daas

'Daas' - To Understand Beyond Our Senses

אתה חונן לאדם דעת - We ask Hashem for *daas*, for understanding.

Man differentiates from other creations in that he is capable of thinking, which animals and inanimate objects cannot do. A Jew can become a "*bar daas*", someone capable of *daas*, mature understanding.

Is a non-Jew capable of *daas*? A non-Jew is not allowed to learn Torah. Thus, only a Jew can have *daas*.

A woman has "light" *daas* and therefore cannot properly understand the Torah; that is why women are exempt from learning Torah. *Daas* is thus mainly revealed by a man, who is obligated to learn Torah.

Is there a function of *daas* when we aren't learning Torah? Does the power of *daas* only apply to learning the Torah?

A woman has mitzvos, even though she doesn't learn Torah. There are three people who are exempt from the mitzvos - an insane person, an innately deaf person, and a minor. These people are exempt from all the mitzvos, because they have no *daas*. Thus, a person needs *daas* in order to keep the mitzvos, so *daas* is not all about being able to learn Torah. Our *daas* therefore serves a function beyond just learning Torah.

Rav Nissim Gaon, in his introduction to the Talmud, wrote that if *daas* (logic) requires us to perform certain mitzvos, a non-Jew must keep these mitzvos, even when they are not an obligation. *Daas* requires us to do certain things even if those acts are not *mitzvos*.

When we see or hear or smell something, and that is how we understand things, this is not yet *daas*. An insane person can also feel and hear things, but he is not called a "*bar daas*". So our senses do not make us into intelligent people; our senses do not provide us with *daas*.

Yet, our senses are rooted in our power of thought, according to the Vilna Gaon. Whenever we use our five senses, we must use our *daas* in how we understand things. Using our senses alone doesn't help us understand things; only when we use our power of *daas* do we understand things.

We must use our *daas* in **all** areas of our life! The more a person reveals his power of *daas*, his own senses deepen as well.

Becoming A 'Bar Daas'

A person can become a *bar daas*. This does not just mean that a person must be able to choose and decide. The real meaning of becoming a *bar daas* means to use our *daas* in what we sense. If we do so, we will apply our *daas* to all that we sense.

The Chazon Ish said that nothing is simple; everything is complex. This is because everything we encounter really requires *daas* to understand. All that we sense with any of our five senses really needs *daas* in order to understand it. When we use our *daas*, we reveal the depth in whatever we sense.

On a deeper level of this, there were Gedolim who were able to feel how Hashem was sending them a message through whatever they encountered; it was like hearing a *bas kol* (Heavenly voice) talking to them.

An animal can also hear things; what is the difference between a person's hearing and an animal's hearing? A person can hear depth in what he hears, while an animal just hears the audible sound. The difference between animal senses and human senses is, that a human can use his *daas* in his senses, and thus sense something else entirely in what he senses.

This is the depth behind the concept of *Daas Torah*. Those who have *Daas Torah* feel things through the lens of their *Daas*, so they can discern what they are sensing and see if it is in line with the Torah or not.

Controlling Our Senses

When we hear or see things, our senses are not in our control. When we walk in the street, we see things, and the sights can bother us and disturb us. When we walk onto a bus, we hear people saying all kinds of silly things, and it enters our ears. We cannot control what we sense, as Chazal say. When we don't try to gain control of our senses, all that enters us weakens our *daas* and disables it.

Our *daas* has the power to separate information. This is called *daas hamavdeles*.^[1] We can use our *daas* to take apart information in what we hear, for example. When we hear something, we can use our *daas* to analyze which information is true, and which is falsity.

In our generation, the sense of taste in particular is being used a lot. All kinds of new tastes keep coming out. It is like the party of Achashveirosh, in which people indulged in all kinds of tastes from all over the world. If a person just indulges in all these tastes without any control, he resembles a drunkard. If he is a bit spiritual, he'll save these good tastes for Shabbos and only taste good food to have *Oneg Shabbos*...

But if he is a more inner kind of person than this, he thinks a bit before he gives in to the senses; his *daas* is involved in his senses. He thinks, "What is this? What will it do for me? Will it strengthen me or harm me?" He gains control of himself before his senses overtake him. This is the power of using *daas*.

We can't go into all the details of every situation of how to apply this concept. The point should be very clear, though: if our senses are controlling us, we cannot live an inner kind of life. It ruins even people who learn Torah for three study sessions every day, who access their *daas*; the constant sensual experiences ruin whatever *daas* one gains from his learning.

Living A Life of Constant Daas

Daas is not just for when we learn Torah; it has to be active every second, whenever we go about life, and not just when we are learning.

If our *daas* isn't revealed more often our life – **and it is not enough for this to make use of our "daas" just while we are learning Torah** – we are surrounded by a very sensual kind of existence. All of the five senses will totally overtake us when we haven't developed our power of *daas*.

To live without *daas* – or to have *daas* only when are learning Torah – is a life that doesn't allow us to live an inner kind of life. If we reveal our *daas* and make it active all the time, we are protected from all the powerful senses that surround us.

Our world is mostly evil and partially good. Ever since Adam sinned, the world became a mix of good and evil. Our Rabbis wrote that nowadays, the world is mostly evil. Therefore, whatever we encounter through any of our senses is probably evil. When we see something, it's usually evil - unless we are looking at something clearly holy, such as the face of a tzaddik, or holy sites such as Kever Rochel and Me'aras HaMachpeilah.

Even when we hear words of Torah, we need to discern if we are hearing something true or not. For example, not all Torah being learned is truthful - sometimes a person is learning so he can prove others wrong.

The Level Above 'Daas'

However, in addition to making our *daas* more active, we also need to be aware of the following deeper point.

Our Rabbis write, "The purpose of knowledge is to realize that we do not really know anything.^[2]" Although we need to have *daas* and develop it and sharpen it, ultimately, we must also realize that we cannot really understand anything on this world due to our own *daas*.

So although we must certainly develop our ***daas*** – through learning the Torah and through doing the mitzvos, and through gaining control over our senses in all that we encounter – we must at the same time realize that we also *do not* understand things [this is called *temimus* \earnestness].

The following story illustrates this idea. Once Reb Chaim Soloveitchik zt"l asked Reb Baruch Ber Levovitz zt"l what he davens for in the blessing of **אתה חונן**. Reb Boruch Ber answered that he davens so that he should understand better the words of the Rambam. Reb Chaim responded, "I daven that I *shouldn't* be able to understand anything."

This story contains a deep point, and although we are very far from this level, we can learn something from it. This story really brings out the point of the concept of *daas*. On one hand, we need to always use our *daas* and sharpen it, but at the same time, we must also realize that we do not understand anything.

We need to always use our *daas* – both when we learn Torah and when we do the mitzvos, as well as to with all areas of our life – but at the same time, we must realize that we do not understand anything.

Temimus: Earnestness

This is because we are supposed to also have "*temimus*" (simple earnestness) towards Hashem, because we must realize that only Hashem guides us, for ultimately, we cannot depend on our own *daas*. "*You shall be "tamim" (simple) with Hashem.*"^[3]

This is really a contradiction we live with - we have to make use of two opposite abilities: our *daas*, which is our logic, and our *temimus*, which goes above our logic.

This is what we are meant to pray for when we daven, **אתה חונן לאדם דעת** – when our *daas* and our *temimus* are combined, we live the ideal kind of life.

[1] See **Getting To Know Your Thoughts:** Chapter 8, and **Utilizing Your Daas** Chapters 01 and 04.

[2] *sefer Bechinos Olam*

[3] For more on the concept of “*temimus*”, see **Bilvavi 4** Chapters 9-11 as well as **Bilvavi 9** Chapters 1-2.

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