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## Ellul - 021 Ascending Through Thought

During these 40 days [from Elul until Yom Kippur, as our Sages tell us], Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah. The Vilna Gaon says that he ascended there using his power of thought (*machshavah*).

Our Avodah is often compared Jacob's ladder, which is "footed in earth, and its head reaches the heavens". During these 40 days of Elul, we are especially closer to reaching the head of the ladder that is in the heavens. During the rest of the year we are footed on earth and our head is also in Heaven, but during Elul, we are much more drawn towards reaching the head of our ladder which is in Heaven. The head of our ladder represents the head, which we use to think with.

We have a power to do actions and a power to talk, but these are the lower functions of the soul. The power of thought is our innermost power of our soul. The "head of the ladder in the Heavens" is comprised of two parts – connecting ourselves to the great light that is the Torah, and a more inner mission: that our very life become a life of constant thought.

A life of thought is to live an inner kind of life, not to think like the rest of the world, but to think from within yourself.

It's possible that a person learns Torah his whole life but he's not in the realm of thought. To live an inner life means to be found in a life of thought.

Our senses are always darting around. We hear and we see things in our surroundings. Our yetzer hora is powerful from birth. But our power of thought, when accessed, can transform the way we live. With thought, we can divest ourselves from the outside world and enter inward. A life of thought is not just to think all the time. It means to attach your soul to what you are thinking about. Most thoughts are coming from either one of the five senses, and these are not deep and inner thoughts. The inner thoughts are thoughts that come from our own inner world, thoughts that are unaffected by the outside world.

Before the creation of the world, the Jewish people were already thought about by Hashem in order to create Am Yisroel. The meaning of this is that our essence is to think. We can reach a kind of thinking in which our thoughts are unaffected by our senses. Moshe didn't eat or drink in Heaven; the depth of this is that he was unaffected by surroundings, and that is why he was able to think clearly in Heaven. When a person only knows how to experience the surroundings and take it in, he lives a sensual kind of existence, and he only experiences the outside world. He never experiences his own inner world of thought. Leaving the outside world is how you can enter inward.

Of course, it is impossible to be completely disassociated from the world. However, anyone who cares about his soul realizes that the world today is in the lowest depths. We must go into hiding into ourselves and get away from the terrible surroundings, until the spiritual danger passes. There is not only suffering today in health, livelihood, children, and marriage. The main problem in today's world is that people aren't living a life of doing Hashem's will. Most people today are living carefree and totally unrestrained. Our soul can feel pain from all this, from how bad the surroundings are today.

Life is like a passing dream; before we know it, life ends. But even more so, our actual life spent on this world is really unbearable, from all that goes on. It's like when you smell a dead body; you can't bear the smell for that long. So too, your soul can recoil from the life of this current depraved world in order to once again breathe the clear air that your soul longs for.

The main thing is not just to avoid evil, but to do good. Life is not just about running away from what's bad. You need a good place you can run away to, a place in yourself, which is entirely good, pure and holy. Every Jew's soul has that inner place to retreat to.

During the rest of the year, we also aspire for greatness, but during Elul, we are closer to reaching the top of the ladder. It's not enough to know intellectually about how bad the world is. You need to actually build a place in yourself to run to. Besides for running away from the evil of the world and being disgusted by its emptiness and impurity that's so unbecoming for a Jew's soul, you need a place to run to where you can live properly. It's like a place where you can get your fresh air back.

Learning the Torah, which connects us to Hashem, is not just a mitzvah to learn Torah. It is to enter inward, and you can feel there a desire for life. Just like our body wants to breathe, so can our soul feel a will to breathe the inner meaning of life, and it can feel its longing to connect itself to Hashem, the Source of all life. So you need to realize that there is a place of life in yourself where you can run away to and escape the life of this world. It is a place in yourself where you can draw forth life; where you feel a longing for real life.

These days are days in which go more inward, but these are also days in which we can realize that life is there. It's not enough to go inward. We must realize that we can find life there, that it's a place where we can get life from. Without this recognition, even if a person lives inwardly, he will feel like he is imprisoned inside himself.

Not only should your body be in the *beis midrash* - your soul should feel connected to Heaven; through the thoughts of your mind and heart, you should feel connected to the wisdom of Hashem that is the Torah. So just being in the *beis midrash* is not enough; of course, being in the *beis midrash* certainly helps you, because it is a tool to help you enter inward into yourself and feel connected with Heaven; but the *beis midrash* is only a tool to help you get there; it doesn't work automatically. So as you are in the *beis midrash*, you need to actually feel that you are connected in your soul to the top of the ladder that is in Heaven.

As we live in the era preceding Moshiach, the inner kind of life is very much missing from the world. But if someone truly searches to really serve Hashem, he can be like one of those who followed Moshe out of the camp, when Moshe pitched his tent outside the camp.

The more a person feels clearly a demand for real life, he can realize that it comes from the inner wellsprings of one's soul, where he can live in. Living like this will weaken the effects of the evil surroundings on oneself. It will also bring the light of Hashem to radiate outwards onto the rest of the world. Through this, is connected all the time to the depth of the Torah and dwells in the light of Hashem.

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