



PREPARING FOR ROSH HASHANAH

It is written, “Seek Hashem where He is found” [which the Sages expound upon to mean as referring to the Ten Days of Repentance in between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur].

When there is closeness between two people, is it possible that one of them is close to the other, while the other is not close?

Compare this to a tinted window, where you can see through one side of the window, while a person outside the window cannot see into it, because the outsider sees the opaque side of the window.

Hashem is close to us, and He is especially close to us during the Ten Days of Hashem, of which it is written, “Seek Hashem where He is found.” He is close to us, but are we close to Him? Just because He is close to us, that does not mean that we are close to Him. In order for us to become close to Him, there is a certain avodah we must do.

Returning to the example of the opaque window, if we want to be able to see through both sides of the window, we need to clear away the layer on the window that makes it tinted, so that will become a clear glass. We need to also make our window clear in our relationship with Hashem – we are on the side of the window that is opaque, and we need to remove the opaque layer so that it can become transparent, and to be able to see the closeness we have with Hashem.

These days are called Yemei Ratzon, Days of Will. Hashem wants to be close to us, but it is we who have to reveal a ratzon for closeness with Him.

How many retzonos does Hashem have? There are 613 mitzvos. Does that mean that He has 613 things he wants from us? It's really all 613 actions that are all about one will He has from us. Compare this to someone making a wedding. He has to order a hall, a caterer, a photographer, new clothes. Is it all a bunch of details? It's all about one thing alone: the wedding.

How many retzonos do we have? Hashem has one desire alone from us. When we get ourselves to want what He wants, we are beginning the correct path. Otherwise, there is only one side to the relationship – Hashem is always close to us, but we won't feel close to Him.

Does this mean that we should only want to be close to Hashem, and that we shouldn't want anything else other than this? Does anyone believe this is impossible?

Here is a simple question. If Hashem would come and tell us, “Follow Me into the desert, in a land that is unsowed” - would we agree to follow Hashem into the desert? I'm not talking about when we were enslaved in Egypt and Hashem would come to us and tell us that He's taking us out. I'm talking about if Hashem would ask us to leave the comfort of our homes and follow Him into the desert.

There are two kinds of exiles. In Egypt, we have exile with mortar and bricks. There is another kind of exile – when people are enslaved to their money and their materialistic comforts.

Physical labor is one kind of exile on a person. But if a person is tied down too much to a comfortable situation, that is also an exile. He can't leave his comfortable situation to go be with Hashem in the desert. He has various retzonos (desires) that he can't part from. How will the Yom HaDin help him change...?

On Rosh HaShanah, Hashem renews the world, because Rosh HaShanah was the birth of the world. We can become a new creation each year. Just like there is a new year, so can our soul become new. We can choose for ourselves a new life this year; we can begin again anew. And what does it mean to start a new beginning?

It means that a person should want one thing alone.

Let me explain a bit more. The Gemara says that you can acquire something for another person even without the other person's knowledge, because you are benefitting him. Can we take a non-Jew and turn him into a Jew, because it's good to become a Jew? The Gemara says that one cannot take a slave and convert him, because since he is used to being a slave, he is used to living an irresponsible life, so making him a Jew won't be a benefit for him. It's better for him to leave him as a non-Jew and do as he pleases, rather than become a Jew when he's full of desires that he can't part from. But if one owns a child who is a slave, then the master can convert him, because the child hasn't yet gotten used to a hedonistic life, and it will be a benefit for him to become a Jew.

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The concept of separating ourselves from desires – do we view that as an obligation, or as something that’s beneficial for us?

Here is a simple way of illustrating the concept. Hashem came to Shlomo HaMelech and asked him if he wants wisdom or wealth. What would we choose? We can’t have both. Would we choose to know all of Shas and be willing to remain poor – or would we choose to be wealthy, but we won’t know Shas?

When we prepare for Rosh HaShanah, it’s very simple how we must prepare. “We have only one heart, to our Father in Heaven.” We must get to a situation in which our true desire is – to be close to Hashem. A deeper way of understanding this is that our entire will should be for closeness to Hashem and to understand His Torah. Hashem knows what is going on in each person’s heart, and He knows if the person really wants this or not, or if he’s just saying that he wants it.

This is the avodah of the Y’mei HaRatzon, and this is how we prepare for Rosh HaShanah.

I’ll tell you a story. In Yerushalayim there lives a certain tzaddik; it’s not important to say who he is. One day an older bachelor came to him and told him he needs his shidduch. He asked him if he can do a certain segulah to get his shidduch. The tzaddik told him to say Tehillim and to do certain actions, and he told him, “When you do all these things, your level of ruchniyus will become higher, and then you merit your shidduch.” However, the bochor didn’t want to do it. The tzaddik asked him, “Why not?” The bochor replied, “Since I believe exactly what you are saying, I am aware that doing these things will make my level of ruchniyus become higher, and then I will lose my taavos (physical desires)!”

Another story. Once the Chofetz Chaim had a dream in which he became wealthy. The next day, he fasted. When asked why, he said, “Why did I dream of such a thing? If it’s a real dream that I have, I need to fast I order to nullify the dream. If it’s from something I merely imagined about during the day, it is not either good that I’m even imagining of becoming wealthy.”

Now let’s talk very practically. If we were given one wish on Rosh HaShanah - what would we ask for? This is how we prepare for Rosh HaShanah – if one is very clear about what he wants, that shows what his true level is. A person can fool himself, but no one can fool Hashem. Hashem knows what each person really wants deep down.

In certain Machzorim there are tefillos in which one can ask Hashem for Ruach HaKodesh, for wealthy, and for holy children. If a person is davening for Ruach HaKodesh, he is probably delusional. If one davens for good children, that’s wonderful. If someone davens for wealth, that really means he wants wealth more than good children!

We are preparing for Rosh HaShanah, each to his own. Sit down and think of what you want to daven for on Rosh HaShanah. What, practically speaking, do we want to daven for on Rosh HaShanah?

This is how you can determine what your true level is. If you really seek closeness with Hashem and His Torah, then your deepest wish on Rosh HaShanah will be to pray for that, and then you are truly preparing for Rosh HaShanah. If not, you need to learn how to nullify your desires and desire the truth.

All other speeches you will hear are just inspiration, and they do not bring a person to having a true and practical Avodah.

This shows you what you really desire in life, and it shows you if you really want to be close to Hashem and Torah or not. If a person comes to the conclusion that it’s not his greatest desire, then Rosh HaShanah will merely pass by, and Hashem will be close to the person, but the person himself will not be close to Hashem.

Examine yourself deeply and find out what you really, really want deep down. I hope that all of you merit to find how your deepest desire is really to be close to Hashem and to His Torah, and to truly want that.

If you really and truly want to be close to Hashem, you will get there. If you don’t, I hope that you merit to want it.

Q&A With the Rav on Serving Hashem & Learning Torah

(Editor’s Note: The following is a Q&A session with the Rav after this derashah, in which very fundamental questions were asked to the Rav about how to improve our Avodas Hashem, and how learning Torah comes into the equation. Many practical and important hashkofos were discussed here. The shiur was given to working B’nei Torah.)

Q1: What does Hashem want from us – to be here, or to be in Eretz Yisrael?

A: If I give you an answer, will you do it...? Eretz Yisrael! Specifically, in Yerushalayim, Ir HaKodesh.

Q2: How do we let go of the things from the past that are holding us back from improving?

A: If you can train yourself not to want those things, it won’t be a struggle anymore. “Nothing stands in the way of the will”, so why is it that people don’t get what they want? It is because they don’t really want! If someone really,

truly wants something, he will end up getting it. Not that it will be easy. But he will reach his ratzon. The reason why people don't achieve their ratzon is not because of things that hold them back – it is because they don't have such a strong ratzon. There are people who achieve their ratzon even though they have the same difficulties and obstacles. Why? Because their ratzon is stronger. So it all depends on one's ratzon.

Q5: If a person sees that he has desires in himself that are not about becoming closer to Hashem, and it's only a few days left to Rosh HaShanah, how do we practically work on nullifying those desires?

A: This is an excellent question. Every day, for three times a day, go against your will. It doesn't have to be big things. Just practice not giving into what you want, for three times a day. For example, if you want to eat a certain food you desire, instead of avoiding it entirely, just hold back from it a little bit. If you want to hear something improper, train yourself for half a minute a day not to listen. These are all small things. Do them each day, for three times a day, and do it for all 365 days of the year. It should be a resolution you make for the entire year, every day of the year. Slowly but surely as you get used to this, you will nullify your retzonos.

Q6: How can we know if we are really improving and keeping to our resolutions to better ourselves that we made on Rosh HaShanah – maybe we are just imagining our growth? What is the real way to make our resolutions last for the rest of the year?

A: It is a very good question. Usually, our resolutions do not last for long. This is the reality that happens with most people; we see this in ourselves and in others. The Ramban says (based on the possuk **אם תעירו ואם תתעוררו**)

אם תעירו ואם תתעוררו that hisorerus (inspiration) needs to be put into a cheifetz, a “lasting desire”. How do you make your inspiration last? The Ramchal says (in sefer Derech Eretz Chaim) that there is an easy piece of advice that bears great results: Every day, set aside an hour of your time and empty out all previous thoughts, and concentrate on the following: “What did the Avos do? What did Dovid HaMelech do?” Do nothing during this time of solitude, and just think about why you came onto the world. If you can't do it for an hour, do it for 30 minutes, and if you can't do 30 minutes, do it for 15 minutes. But it must be a set time in your schedule that you do every day. Don't go to sleep before you have reflected that day (for at least 15 minutes): “For what purpose do I live?” Accept upon yourself that you will do this every day.

If you want this resolution to last, accept upon yourself that if you miss it for a day, you will give 5000 dollars to tzedakah! (If 5000 dollars doesn't make you feel obligated, then it should be 10,000 dollars! Or 100,000 dollars!) The penalty you place upon yourself has to be to an amount that will bother you if you have to pay it, which will make you feel obligated to keep your resolution. In order for your resolution for this quiet reflection time every day to last, you need to accept yourself a penalty of a high amount of money, which makes you feel obligated to do it. Without accepting upon yourself a penalty, it's unlikely that you'll keep to the resolution, because you'll be tired sometimes and you won't feel like doing it. Therefore you should accept upon yourself to put 10 dollars (for example) in the pushka if you don't do the 15-minute Avodah; that will make you feel obligated.

I want you to understand that this is not advice just for you who are here. It is advice that I say to everyone, and

those who accepted it upon themselves saw success. Because when you're scared of having to donate a large amount of money, it is an incentive that helps you make sure to fulfill it every day.

Q8: What do we think about during the 15 minutes of quiet reflection time?

A: That's also a good question, but first, make sure you have the prerequisite: If you just have these 15-minutes a day of quiet time, even if you don't think anything, you've already accomplished a lot, because it's a big feat to be able to put a halt to the action of life. Not that it's everything; it's not everything. But you've already done a lot, if you manage to just have 15 minutes a day of time alone to yourself. We are usually bogged down from everyday life and we have no time alone to think, and only when it comes Erev Rosh HaShanah do we usually make personal reflection. If you have 15 minutes every day to yourself, you will see a change.

As for what to think during this time, think: “For what am I living for?” The more you get used to this, the more you will expand those thoughts. But the very first stage is to have this time alone and think to yourself “For what am I living for?” After realizing why you live, ask yourself, “Am I actually living my everyday life for that purpose? Am I heading towards the goal of life? If not, what can I do to change?” There's a lot to discuss after that, of course, but the basis for success is – and this is not my advice, but the Ramchal's advice – every day, have a set time in which you reflect to yourself. Just like you have three times every day that you daven, so can you have this set time every day to reflect to yourself about the purpose of life. It is a truthful method, and anyone who keeps to it sees success.

Q9: Instead of penalizing ourselves if we don't do the hisbodedus time every day, can we instead use a different

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method – to reward ourselves for doing it every day?

A: You want me to reward you? (Laughing in the audience). Who will reward you for doing it? You will pay yourself for doing it? I don't understand the question [please rephrase the question].

Q11: We have many things we want to daven for during Yomim Noraim. Is there any one tefillah that we should use as the basis and focus in our tefillos, for all of Rosh HaShanah, Aseres Yemei Teshuvah and Yom Kippur?

A: Daven to Hashem that you should be able to want only the will of Hashem.

Q12: If a person who works doesn't have much extra time throughout the day, and he only has 1 hour or 2 hours to himself, what should he learn as Yom Tov is approaching - should he devote his extra time to learning about the meaning of the coming Yom Tov [like if it's before Rosh HaShanah, should he learn about matters of Rosh HaShanah?], or should he instead learn Gemara and Halacha? And on a regular day as well, how should one split his learning?

A: Did you ever meet a businessman who never consulted with anyone for advice? Did you ever consult with someone and you only had one hour of your time? In other words – how much extra time do you really have? You for sure have more than 1 hour a day of extra time to yourself.

If you have 5 hours a day to yourself, there is a whole different answer to your question. 3 hours out of the 5 hours should definitely be spent on learning Gemara. If you have only 1 hour a day to yourself, you need to learn Halacha, otherwise you will remain an ignoramus and commit sins. If you have 3 hours a day of time to yourself, it's a different story.

I will give an answer assuming that you

have 3 hours a day to yourself. I am not saying that this answer will apply to all people, but I will give an answer assuming that a person has 3 hours a day to himself.

[First I will ask you:] Learning Gemara with iyun (in-depth) – is that something you can do?

Q13: It's possible, but the problem is that learning Gemara with iyun will take up too much of the 3 hours a day we have to ourselves.

A: Of what purpose does a person live? Why do we have 24 hours a day? It doesn't "take up your time". Work takes up your time, but learning Torah in-depth doesn't "take up your time". All of our time only exists so that we can use our time to learn Torah in-depth!

With working at a job, the more time you put in, the more money you make. Learning Torah doesn't work like that. Learning Torah is about forming a deep connection in your soul with it.

In order to gain a deep connection with the Torah, it won't happen without learning Torah in-depth. It's not a question of "how much time" to put in. When you love your child, does it have to do with how much time you put into your child? It has nothing to do with your time; it is a deep truth that you feel. ...

[To illustrate what I mean], I have a sister in America who got married when she was 33, and she gave birth to twins. My father lives in Eretz Yisrael, and he flew in to America for the bris. It's already 4 months since the bris, and he misses the babies so much already; he doesn't have money to pay for a trip to America to come in and see them again. But he misses them so much; he wishes he could see them. Physically, he doesn't see his baby grandchildren, but in his soul, he is deeply connected with them, because he longs to see them.

Q14: Why is Gemara in-depth the deepest kind of connection a person can have with Hashem? I feel closer to Hashem when I learn Mesillas Yeshtarim!

A: Is learning Mesillas Yeshtarim a connection with Hashem or with the Torah? (Hashem). We must love Hashem, but we must also love His Torah. There is ahavas Hashem (love of Hashem) and ahavas haTorah (love of the Torah). They are not two separate matters, though; they must become interconnected.

Q15: There are people who don't feel a deep connection with Hashem when they learn Gemara, and they only feel it when they learn sefarim that talk about Avodas Hashem. So what should they do when they have extra time to learn? [Should they learn Gemara, or should they learn about Avodas Hashem?]

A: When Rav Aharon Kotler zt"l first came to America, he had to convince parents to send their children to Yeshivos and learn Torah. They asked him, "What will come from our children? Will they become a Rav, a Rosh Yeshiva, a Dayan?" He told them, "Your child will become someone who learns Torah. That is what will come from him."

We need to change our perspective towards our life. Hashem gave us 24 hours a day so that we can devote our time to Him and to His Torah. There is a curse given to mankind called "parnassah" (having to earn a living), and we need to deal with that curse. But we must know what the essence of life is; we need to breathe what life actually is. Learning Torah is not something that takes up your time. It is your soul itself; it is a very deep connection.

Q16: It's hard for me to open up a Gemara, because it doesn't get me to feel close to Hashem. So how can I practically spend my time on learning Gemara? It is similar to the previous ques-

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tion, that people don't feel a bond with Hashem when they learn Gemara.

A: The sefarim bring a question: Who do you like more, your father or your mother? Hashem and the Torah are like our father and our mother, and to decide which of them we love more is like choosing if we love our father more or our mother more.

If someone feels like he's not enjoying his learning, I will tell you the following story. There were two people I met last week. One person came to me and told me that he had to leave Kolel in order to go to work. He told me, "I had no choice." I said to him, "Maybe it's true that you had no choice and you needed to go to work. But did you at least cry on the day you left behind the Gemara?"

I met another person here whom I hadn't seen in about 10 years. I said to him, "Nu, what's with you?" He said to me, "Baruch Hashem, I have become an expert in Shas." As I conversed with him, he mentioned to me that he's thinking about a certain business he is pursuing. I said to him, "If you know Shas, how can it be that you're thinking of going into business?!" He told me, "I learned all my years only for the sake of kavod (honor)."

If a person doesn't feel enjoyment in learning, did he ever cry about that, that he doesn't have feelings of enjoyment in his learning? The Gemara says that if a student didn't see success after 5 years of learning, it is sign that he's not seeing blessing in his learning. Did you try for 5 years to learn before you decided that you aren't enjoying learning?

Compare this to a person who loses his appetite for food, so he decides not to eat anymore. Should he stop eating just because he doesn't have an appetite...?

Q17: How does one learn with iyun (Gemara in-depth)?

A: What is your past? Did you learn in yeshiva? If you learned in yeshiva when you were younger, the way to learn with iyun is: Start from the Gemara, learn the Rishonim and the Acharonim, all the way until the latest Acharonim, and exert your mind in it.

I hope you don't think that I am someone who came down from Heaven to tell you unrealistic things. It is the truth, and it is l'maaseh (to be practiced). You just have to decide that this is what life is about, and that is what the entire issue revolves around.

Q18: Many people learn Gemara in-depth but they don't come to feel the closeness with Hashem that are described in these [Bilvavi] sefarim.

A: It is because those people only have Torah in their life, and no avodas Hashem. Torah without avodas Hashem doesn't lead to success, and neither does avodas Hashem without Torah. We need both – we need both our "father" and our "mother".

Is there anyone who has an easy time making a living? Well, why should Torah and Avodas Hashem come any easier to you? The Alter of Novhardok once said that if a person would try to establish a Yeshiva as much as when he tries to set up a living, he would be able to build 100 yeshivos. (He himself built many yeshivos.)

Torah and avodas Hashem doesn't come easy. But life is not easy. We have free will in how we will live our life and how we will use our energies. There is no such thing as anything successful that was easy. If a person uses his energies entirely for parnassah, he'll be wiped out by the time he opens up his Gemara. Not just with regards to having time for learning; he has used up all his soul's energies when it comes to work, so he won't be able to learn Torah properly.

But if one changes his perspective and

decides that he will mainly channel his energies towards learning, he will be able to exert himself properly in Torah. Man has the power to choose between a life that contains real vitality to it, or to live a "dead" kind of life; it is written, "I have placed before you life and death, and you shall choose life."

Q19: When it comes to making a living, I know how to set up a business and learn how to make it work. But when it comes to learning Torah in-depth, where do I begin? How should I devote my learning Torah time to learning with iyun, when I have very little basic knowledge of Torah and I haven't even gotten to the first step [just reading the Gemara and having a basic, simple understanding of it]?

A: Are you willing to pay someone to help you learn Gemara b'iyun?

Q20: Yes, I do have someone who teaches me how to learn iyun, but my chavrusa is way ahead of me; he understands it way better than me, and I see that he is enjoying his learning, but I don't have that enjoyment. Basically, there are people who are missing hadrachah (guidance) in learning, and they don't feel enjoyment and success in their learning.

A: If you will allow me, I will split up this question into different parts.

When it comes to "knowing how to learn", generally, if someone didn't learn in Yeshiva and he wants to know how to learn, he should hire an avreich to pay him and be his personal trainer to teach him to how learn.

After doing that, if someone wants to taste enjoyment in his learning, there is one secret he should know: besides for exerting ourselves in Torah, we must cry to Hashem for success. If you cry earnestly to Hashem, you are guaranteed success.

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A Sefer That Builds You - The Mesillas Yescharim

The faulty perspective, of viewing the soul as a disparate and unorganized conglomerate of abilities, is really rooted in the fact that the holy Torah begins in the highest worlds as a unified body of wisdom, but at the point where the Torah reaches our world, the Torah appears to us in a way that's disorganized.¹ Since the world was created from the Torah, the state of the Torah affects all creations of the world, so if Torah appears unorganized on our world, the creations will also feel unorganized about their own souls, and they will try to work on themselves with that perspective.

For example, many of our holy sefarim have several chapters in them, but the chapters do not build upon the other, and they can be read in any order, because each chapter is about a different topic, and there is no order given on how to work on the topics. There are holy sefarim with topics that are arranged in the order of the Aleph Beis, but this is not an order of what to work on first, second, and third. Even the sefarim which have in it chapters arranged in a specific order are mostly not explaining any one path that has the entire order of avodah in it.

But this is not the only way in which Torah is revealed on this world. The Torah at its intrinsic level is unified, and even in our physical world it remains in its absolute unity, so it is able to

1 For example, "There is no early or later [chronological order] in the Torah" (Talmud Bavli Pesachim 6b), and "There is no order to the Mishnah" (Talmud Bavli Bava Kamma 102a), and other such examples. This does not mean chas v'shalom that the Torah is disorganized, only the way in which it appears to us on this world of action. An added factor to this is the toll which the lengthy Exile and disparity has had on us. The sin of Adam also brought confusion to all of the worlds, affecting even the Torah. Chazal said that "The words of Torah are poor in one place and rich in another place", and that "The clear halachah and clear Mishnah cannot be found in any one place", etc. In the future, may it come speedily, the Torah will be revealed in its unified and complete form even on our world of action.

be revealed even on this world of action as one complete structure.

One of the well-known examples of this is the sefer Mesillas Yescharim, written by the Ramchal, who based the sefer on the words of Rebbi Pinchas ben Yair, cited many times in the Talmud, where a very specific order of steps is taught: Torah brings to watchfulness, which brings to alacrity, which brings to cleanliness, etc.²

This statement includes every part of avodas Hashem and it is also arranged in a very specific order of steps of how to work one's way upwards. The Ramchal lays out the principles and then breaks them all up into parts and how to attain them, as one complete structure. This sefer, besides for being very beneficial, is also teaching a person how to view his soul and avodah properly, showing us that the soul is not like a room full of parts that have been stuffed together with no order to them. And the same goes for one's avodah. The soul, as well as one's avodah, is one complete structure that includes many parts in it, which are unified and orderly. Every part of avodas Hashem is aligned exactly to the part of the soul that it corresponds to.

The Ramchal taught us that working with our internal world does not mean to work with many different separate parts, but to work with a unified and organized structure.³ This is an example

2 Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah 20a

3 (There is a fundamental difference between the way of avodah which the Ramchal lays out in Mesillas Yescharim, with the order that Rav Chaim Vital lays out in sefer Shaarei Kedushah (regarding the 4 elements).

The difference is that all souls are built with a general structure, and each soul individually also has its own unique structure to it. The general structure is equal to all souls, but the individual's structure is different with each person. The Mesillas Yescharim gives us general steps to work on, compatible with the general structure that is equal for all souls. It contains an avodah that is equal for almost everyone without exception. In order to succeed with the path of the Mesillas Yescharim, one has to make himself compatible with it, because the sefer is telling us what the order of avodah should be – but it is not explaining to us how a person can build

of how Torah is revealed on our world in a way that's unified and organized. That being the case, one's avodah is to acquire this perspective towards Creation in general and his soul specifically, and to know that this is the way we must view our soul and work with it.

The First Step – Planning With Thought

The process of building the soul has to be like anything else we wish to build: It must be done in a way that's organized and step by step. Just as the first step of building a physical structure requires thought and planning, so does the first step of building the internal world require thought and planning.

The previous chapter explained that there are people who wish to enter the internal world and

himself [which is a more elementary step]. In contrast to this, the sefer Shaarei Kedushah of Rav Chaim Vital arranges an order of avodah with very specific steps as per the personal structure of one's own soul [based on the 4 elements]. It is an avodah that plays out differently for each person. In order to succeed at this path, one has to recognize himself well and work according to his personal soul's structure.

The above has great ramifications. If a person takes only the general path (the Ramchal's Mesillas Yesharim), he may try to align himself with it but ignoring his personal soul in the process. His avodah will be off-mark and incomplete. This is one of the reasons why many people didn't succeed with this path, even though it is such a good, upright path. Yet if a person will only go in the way for his own personal soul (Rav Chaim Vital's Shaarei Kedushah), he will lose out on the step-by-step growth explained by the Mesillas Yesharim. Therefore, one's avodah is only when he recognizes his personal soul – by recognizing the 4 elements – and after that, he can work with the general steps explained in Mesillas Yesharim, in a way that's aligned with his personal soul.

The Ramchal didn't discuss the individual's path, because it was so clear to him that a person has to work with his personal abilities and not even try to do otherwise. Also, the Ramchal didn't discuss it because each tzaddik comes from a different soul-root and had a specific role on the world, each tzaddik being a part of the full picture [so it was not the Ramchal's role to reveal the individual's path].

they immediately look for “what to do”, which comes from a perspective of the world of action. Now we can see an additional reason for this mistaken attitude. It is because many are not aware that the internal world has to be built like a structure, and that first a person has to learn what the steps of building are, and only after that can it be built step by step. Because they are not aware of this, as soon as they discover the internal world they are looking for what to do.

In addition to this, many are not aware at all of the first step of building – which is thought, not action. From a superficial perspective, it seems to people that first we have to build something in the active sense, and all thinking is a means to know what to do. But the truth is that thought has to be the first step of building. Thought is one of the faculties of the soul, and just as action affects reality, so does thought affect reality. To a certain degree, thought affects reality even more than action does.⁴ Thought is a complete step as part of the steps of building, and it has to be the very first step in building anything. After we have properly built the stage of thought, we can then build additionally upon it.

First, one has to think what the purpose is – what kind of structure he is interested in building. Then he has to know what the steps of building it are, and what each step will entail, and how to implement it. Only at the end can he progress to the stage of doing actual work. The process is not only for the goal of knowing

⁴ *One of the reasons why this book does not begin with practical work but with the power of thought is, firstly, because we must know the goal. Only after that can we explain what has to be done practically, step after step. “The end of actions is first with thought.” For this reason, it is recommended to read this book from beginning until end, so that you get a clear picture of the entire process here, and only after that should you approach the stage of actually getting to work.*

what to do and how, rather the very thinking that comes before it has its effect and brings a person into the internal world.

If a person doesn't begin this stage of thinking, he will never be able to build his soul. He might succeed in gathering much knowledge and maybe he will even utilize a bit of this knowledge, but he won't be able to combine all the parts of the soul into one, organized structure. Many want to enter into the internal world but they don't see success. It is because they learned a number of concepts and try to work with them right away, without knowing the goal and without a clear understanding of the steps. The more a person understands the goal and the steps of avodah, the more accurate his practical avodah will be, and he will arrive at the proper place.

Clear Thinking

The ability of thought is the first step in building our soul only when it is clear and organized. When we build an apartment, all the floors must be stable and firm, especially the first floor, which the whole building stands upon. With a shaky first floor, the entire building can topple down. Since thought is the first stage of building our soul, it has to be a kind of thinking that's firm and lasting.

However, practically speaking, most of the time a person's thoughts are not firm and clear. The mind is constantly filled with all kinds of thoughts throughout the day, and most of these thoughts do not last, they go away as quickly as they came. For this reason, those thoughts cannot be the first step of building our soul. Furthermore, when a person learns concepts about the inner world and he doesn't find in it clear instructions of what to do, he says to himself, "I understand, I get the idea.

But there isn't much to do with this knowledge, and what's left for me to do is to proceed to the next step, and hopefully it will be practical." But with such an approach, the concepts cannot be the first step of building his soul. If he proceeds to the next stage before he can think clearly, he won't be able to build his soul.

Chazal call this a "miscarriage." Just like there can be a physical miscarriage, where a fetus returns to its eternal home before it has emerged into the physical world, so can there be a "miscarriage" in the internal world, which is when one has tried to carry out something before he has thought enough about it, or when he actualizes something without going through all the proper stages. The result is that he falls – whatever he will try to do will fail, since it cannot last the way it is right now.

Therefore, if a person wants to utilize thought as the first stage of building his soul, he will need to think of something he will try to attain, and keep connecting to it, until it becomes a part of him and it comes naturally to him. Just as there are many concepts in this world which are clear to us and which we are natural at, so can concepts in the inner world be clear to us and become a natural part of us. Just as it's clear to a person that he needs to eat and sleep, so should it be clear to him that the internal world must become one complete structure. Just as he won't try to live without eating or sleeping, so shouldn't he attempt to enter the internal world with a scattered, disparate perspective towards it.

It should be clear to you at this point that if someone will ask you, "What's the first thing to do when you start working with your soul?" The answer to tell him is, "To learn and internalize the concepts about the inner world, until it becomes natural for us to think about them.

[to be continued next week- Patience In Internalizing](#)